

**Oral History Number 121 - 01**

**Interviewer: Stephanie Ambrose-Tubbs**

**Interviewee: Dorothy Bruner Floerchinger**

**Date: May 9, 1984**

Stephanie Ambrose-Tubbs: I'm interviewing Dorothy Bruner Floerchinger. And this is May 9<sup>th</sup>, 1984. The first question I'll ask is where did your family come from originally?

Dorothy Bruner Floerchinger: Well, I'm kind of a duke's mixture as far as nationality is concerned. We thought that my father's father's family was all German, but the great-great grandmother we found out was a French woman of the refugees during the Middle Ages from France. The first great-great-grandmother to come to the United States was one of these French people by the name of Pasteur. My father's mother's family were Harding's: a very old American family. They always said they were an American-Dutch family. I haven't had an opportunity to do much tracing into the background of them, but my mother's father was right from England. Her mother's family was from Scotland. That's the kind of a duke's mixture I am.

SAT: Why did your family come to Montana?

DBF: Come to Montana?

SAT: To Montana, yeah.

DBF: We were living in Idaho and there was a population explosion that had been settled early in the 70s and 80s in Idaho. They all had large families and there was no longer enough land. When homesteading was opened up in Montana they came. There was about a hundred immigrant cars came from the one little community where I lived.

SAT: So that would be by rail, then?

DBF: No, I mean yes, by rail. They started about 1908 was the earliest to about 1915 was the most (unintelligible).

SAT: Did you ever hear how much it cost them to get here? To get to Montana?

DBF: There were ... they were so anxious for people to come in and homestead that the railroads gave them quite reductions in the amount of freight. But my father had an unusual experience was that we had ... of course in those days we farmed with horses and he had all these beautiful work horses. He wanted to bring them along and then a whole car load of them. He planned to drive them over the Lolo Trail. That was before there was a highway through the old Indian trail, the one that Lewis and Clark traveled. He started out too late - a week too late - and, like Lewis and Clark, was caught up in the mountains. He had to turn around and go back into Idaho. Then he did have to hire a car and ship the horses here along with another car that held all of our household goods, machinery, and so forth. We knew we were coming to a land without fruit trees and so my mother had, that whole summer, had canned. We had about a thousand quarts of cans of fruit.

SAT: So that made it a little bit easier.

DBF: Yes. Because Idaho was a beautiful fruit country.

SAT: What about ... did she bring flowers or anything like that?

DBF: Yes. We brought ... she had such a beautiful rose garden. She brought these roses, but we arrived too late to plant them. They even sped them in. We never had an opportunity to plant them. They died.

SAT: Where did your family settle once they came to Montana?

DBF: In the west end of what is now Pondera County. It was Toole County then. Up in the old area of Dupuyer which is the oldest town in what is now Pondera County. Dupuyer was an old cattle town and ... what was it, Jimmy Grant, the grandson of Richard Grant, lived there and was established in the 1870s. This was a very old area. The east of there, out on the prairies, had never been settled, but up close to the mountains had been.

SAT: Were there mostly other homesteading families around there? Or was it cattle?

DBF: Well that had been . . . no, that had been cattle. The people that came in the early days didn't settle out on the prairies because of the water situation. Closer to the mountains there was wood and water usage. There had been a lot of establishments. Any land that ... a lot of this land had been controlled by big cattle companies, but it wasn't officially theirs. When the surveys were made, it was opened up for homesteading. My father bought over a relinquishment on some of the homestead land.

SAT: Did your mother file on a homestead of her own so that they could...

DBF: Oh no she couldn't because we ... see the father and we ... already there was six of us children.

SAT: How big was the homestead that he filed on?

DBF: I ... the piece that we got just east of Dupuyer wasn't as large as the allowed. Three hundred and twenty acres was the amount. A few years later my Dad got an additional, I can't remember, sixty acres or something up at the base of the mountains. An additional homestead it was called to make up the additional acreage.

SAT: How many people were in your family?

DBF: In my immediate family, there were six of us children. I was the oldest. I have five younger brothers.

SAT: But did you have any aunts or uncles living with you? Or grandmas?

DBF: No, my grandmother came out later and lived with us. She died there and is buried at Dupuyer. This is one of the things in my family that marked how people moving west ... her first husband, my grandfather, my English grandfather came to America because of his health. He had worked in the cotton mills as a young boy and young man and had lung conditions because of it. They brought him to America, to an English colony in Iowa in the early days. Before the Civil War. He died a few months before my mother was born. My grandma was pregnant when grandpa died. He's buried in a little town in Iowa. Five years later, she married Mr. Lee. His wife had died and left him with a family. They moved to Nebraska. Mr. Lee is buried in Nebraska and grandma's buried up on the little hill at Dupuyer. So that's ...

SAT: They traveled a long way. What type of education did you and your brothers and sisters have?

DBF: I graduated from high school and I wanted to be a teacher so badly. The first year after I graduated from high school was the first year it was required by law that you have a year of . a quarter of normal training before you taught. Before that you could go right from high school into teaching. Those were very hard times. In 1919, we had the most terrible drought that Montana has ever known. The seed didn't even sprout in the ground or the grass get green in the spring. There just simply was no money for me to go to normal school, although the county was paying the tuition for teachers to go to normal school. But then I didn't have the money for board and room, you see.

The new ... this was just a new county and the county superintendent that had just been appointed had been my history teacher. She was short of teachers and she petitioned the state superintendent, May Trumper, for a special permit for myself and for one of my classmates, for a special permit. We got them. I taught that year on a special permit and took the examination. Now then you could take examinations and I got a second grade certificate. The next summer, I did go to normal and I took another examination and got my first grade certificate. Then the next

summer, I went to normal again. My fourth year of teaching, I knew I was going to be married so I didn't go back.

SAT: Would you teach in like a one-room schoolhouse or...?

DBF: My first two years was a country school. I went out there and the man who was secretary of the school board was a man that later became my husband. The next year, I taught the third and fourth grade in Valier. Then I knew I was going to be married and I taught a year at Dupuyer. I taught all the grades there. That was the worst year I had because I had too many pupils for.

SAT: It was too hard?

DBF: Uh huh.

SAT: Would you stay with families around the town or did you have your own house to live in when you were teaching?

DBF: When I taught my first . . . the first two years I taught out in the country, I boarded with a family. They didn't work having teacherage yet. In fact, the family that I boarded with was my future husband's sister. When I taught in Valier, I had brothers in high school. We rented a house and we lived together in this house. When I taught at Dupuyer, I stayed with my parents.

SAT: How much would you get paid as a teacher in those days?

DBF: You wouldn't believe how little it was, but it seemed like a fortune in those days. That's . . . the first school was \$120/month. I can't remember what I got in Valier, but I'm sure it was less than two hundred. And I don't remember what I got at Dupuyer but.

SAT: Was that enough to live on?

DBF: Oh yeah.

SAT: And stock some away?

DBF: . . . because you would . . . you paid board for thirty, forty dollars at the most.

SAT: Would the county buy your books for you or did you have to provide your own books for yourself? Like teaching and stuff.

DBF: Well they . . . when I went to school, the families provided their own books, but when I was teaching, the school provided them.

SAT: When did you get married?

DBF: In 1924.

SAT: And then you set up your own.

DBF: In the same area that I had gone to teach the first time. We were on the farm for forty-five years and then we retired. Then my son ran the farm and my husband died . . . lived two year longer and he passed away. He's been gone ... twelve years ago.

SAT: So he was a homesteader too? Or a rancher?

DBF: Yes, he was a farmer. But, like I said, we became involved in community things. We were, most of . . . it seems like the thing was to work hard and buy land and buy land. My husband had had land before we were married and he lost it in those awfully hard times. He was reluctant to buy land unless he could pay for it immediately.

SAT: Right.

DBF: So we got involved and then, as we had children and so forth ... we just never ... we owned only a small amount of land, but we were always involved, doing thing and going places. There were two things that really enriched my life and opened up the doors: one was the fact that we became involved in the Farmer's Union. It had the first continuing adult education program in the State of Montana. Then we had a minister, a Rev. McCorkle, whose biography I've written. He always encouraged us to be involved. The Farmer's Union was always saying, farmers, if they want things better, then they must work for them. They suggested . . . was always saying, "Well, you go to that committee and so forth." So, one time, our state president sent me over here to the University. I spoke at a seven state Family Life conference. All these ... these would lead to other things and other things and so that we became involved all over the nation. That was the enriching part.

SAT: So did you quit teaching once you got married?

DBF: Yes, oh yes. In those days, they didn't hire anyone who was married and besides, in those times, keeping a home and your children was a full-time job because I didn't even have electricity until my children were in high school.

SAT: That would be the pattern then for most of the women with teaching and ...

DBF: Oh yes.

SAT: So with this Farmer's Union organization, were you and your husband officers in the Farmer's Union or.

DBF: I was always in the teaching department. We had an education department. We always thought that information was a basis; we must know. I was always in the education department and my husband worked in the cooperative department. He was a member, a charter member, of many cooperatives. There was the legislative department and he was involved in that. I can remember one time when there was somebody that wanted to make it very difficult for farmers to organize a cooperative, which is just a partnership of people is all a cooperative is. They was

going to pass a law limiting what they could do. The word came out to us. About a thousand farmers marched down to Helena and that law didn't get passed.

SAT: So that was one thing you and your husband did as kind of a community thing. I know you said that there was a Conrad Women's Club?

DBF: Oh yes. That was a city group. That was the prestige group that I didn't belong to until my kids were in high school.

SAT: Oh I see. And you were in Dupuyer so...

DBF: Only when I was a child. I never was around there very much after because I had to leave to go to high school. There weren't any busses or anything. You couldn't stay at home unless you lived close to town because your transportation was up to you. Well I was about fifteen miles from a high school. Well that was.

SAT: Horse and buggy?

DBF: You couldn't... so I had to leave home as soon as I was out of high school. Then in the summertime, I'd work and in the wintertime time, I'd work. I started teaching or going to school, so I never was . never lived at Dupuyer anymore until the year I went back to teach there.

SAT: Where was your husband's farm? Was that in Conrad?

DBF: East of Conrad. No we were east of Conrad about seventeen miles.

SAT: You said that the Conrad Women's Club, you really didn't get involved in that until your children were in.

DBF: No, not until the children were in high school. We would . we bought a little house in town. My first two boys, they were, stayed with this Rev. McCorkle in the wintertime. When my

daughter was ready, then we bought a little house in town. I would stay in there in the wintertime with them. That year the ... Second World War was going. My son was a junior in high school, ready for his senior year and he was drafted. When he should have been . . . when his class graduated, he was in the South Pacific. He didn't have an opportunity to graduate. He didn't get a chance to finish his high school until after he was married and moved to Utah. He took the equivalency through Weber College down in Utah. But the others all graduated from Conrad High School, the other four children we had. My second son was going to Bozeman to college and he joined the Air Force and was in England. He married an English girl over there and brought her home. She's my beloved daughter-in-law. They live in, near Conrad. My third child was a daughter. She and my next son went to Havre to college and graduated up there in two years. She became a teacher. Bill came over here to the University and graduated over here.

SAT: So most of your children went on to college then.

DBF: Yeah. My daughter Edna went to Rocky Mountain College in Billings for a year. Then she got interested in nursing and she started practical nursing. Then she was married. She lives in California now; she is a practical nurse with special training in rehabilitation and alcoholism. They sent her to Salt Lake for special training and she works with alcoholics and works with crippled people, especially young people who had been in accidents. You can take some young person who has the world ahead of them and then, all at once, they're crippled and can't do anything and they just wait to die. She gives them a purpose in life. She's been trained to do that.

SAT: With that Women's Club, I know you mentioned that they started a library?

DBF: Yes. This is kind of unique. When Conrad was just getting started, the irrigation project which had been started by the famous Conrad family, they had sold out in 1908 to some rich millionaires. They sold their property in what is now Pondera County for a million dollars. They went on to continue to expand and continue the irrigation project now which at that time was the largest irrigation project in the state of Montana. They ... the railroad that had gone through there had been a little narrow gauge railroad built from Lethbridge to Great Falls. One of the Conrad's had been involved from this side and a Gault (?) from some title people from Canada

and the other. The Great Northern had bought this railroad. When it straightened it out, it missed the little old trading post of Pondera. Then a new town that was built up, they named it after W.G. Conrad. Then the homesteading was just starting out on the prairies in 1908 and 9. People would write and said "What's the opportunities for schools if I come out?" There weren't any schools and there weren't any churches. There were some of these very first early settlers and the engineer for the Conrad's said to these women, "Will you start a ladies aid or something so I can say to these people that there's cultural opportunities?" They got together and they organized the Conrad Improvement Association.

SAT: And they're the ones that developed the library?

DBF: No, I don't think that until later ... There was library service came in through the state woman's club. There wasn't an established library. One of the funniest articles that I've ever read was in one of these early Conrad papers. This man is telling how little it would cost to buy these books in contrast to some of the ways people spend money for other things. Anyway, there was a, even in 1905 ... Conrad wasn't made a town until 1908 or '9 or '10, somewhere along in there. Yet they were promoting libraries in 1905, you see? We've always had a background of cultural things. One of the other things that astounds me was that a doctor came. He had been - just a young man - he had been trained at Mailbrothers (?). He brought a little x-ray machine that he just carried like a suitcase. This was only ten years after they had been invented. This little town of Conrad, little wide spot on the road, had an x-ray machine.

SAT: With the doctor in town . what happened before the doctor came? How would women deliver babies and things like that?

DBF: Even after the doctor came most babies were just delivered at home with the help of a midwife.

SAT: Would she stay with the family while the woman was recovering? Or would she.

DBF: Oh yes. Or other members of the family or so forth.

SAT: Later on, did people start going to hospitals to have their babies? Or did that.

DBF: Yes, much later on. When I was having my babies, I went to the hospital.

SAT: Would that be in Conrad or did you have to go to.

DBF: No, like I say, this Dr. Powers that came with a . they started a hospital and I can't remember, 1906, '07, somewhere, it's in this book here. They started a little ... it just looks like a little house. There wasn't any running water. Water was brought in in barrels yet. They had ... the bedpans they took out and emptied in an outside toilet. It was that primitive. But they had this little hospital to take care of people. Later on, they built another wing, and another wing, and another wing. A few years ago, it wasn't built to meet standards and so the county met and we built a two million dollar hospital ... But we've always had ... they had that service since before it was even a town.

SAT: Do you remember any major flu epidemics or anything?

DBF: Oh yes. You betcha. I remember the flu epidemic of World War I.

SAT: And what was that?

DBF: It was a ... I don't know; I can't tell you. But I was in the ... it was a deadly thing. Now, my family never got it. I was going to high school in Valier when it happened and they just sent everybody home. The people that . there were so many men that worked on ranches or sheepherders or men without homes. They turned the school into a hospital and the teachers and so forth were the nurses to take care of these. But if it's to strike you hard ... our mailman that went from Dupuyer to Valier, went in one day and said, "You know, I sure don't feel good." He drove back to Dupuyer and the next morning he was dead.

SAT: Wow. So it was real fast.

DBF: It just really killed them. There was so many thousands of men in the army camps. I talked to one boy that was in a camp down in Texas and he said the coffins are stacked like cargo waiting to be shipped out. It just struck and it just ... I had my first teaching job as a result of that. One our teachers just never got well after it. She didn't come back to teach and they were short of a teacher. I was a senior in high school and so I was substitute teacher for the eighth grade. They gave me credit and time off from my senior work to teach, be in charge of the eighth grade. I can't remember how long: six weeks or something.

SAT: Would they quarantine the houses of people with the flu?

DBF: I can't tell you for sure.

SAT: But you mention that the teachers were sort of the nurses when they converted the school. Did you do that?

DBF: No. They sent me out to Dupuyer. They sent me home. I was a student, you see. But they . it was especially deadly for young, pregnant women. I just know so many children who were left orphaned because their mothers died because of the flu. It was especially deadly for a young pregnant woman.

SAT: I know they had something called bed fever then. Or.

DBF: What?

SAT: Bed fever. Or sick bed fever. And I think what they were talking about was after women had given birth that they .

DBF: Well, that was an infection that you get because they ... there wasn't too much knowledge about infections that might happen. I know when my second boy was born the doctor wouldn't let me go to the hospital because there had been a couple women die at the hospital because they

had gotten this infection. I think it was similar to staph or something, following their childbirth. They didn't have any idea about.

## **END OF SIDE ONE**

DBF: ... things like that, to kill any germs that would be around. And then (break in tape) I kind of think they had to have a license to be this for that time.

SAT: What about things ... I know a lot of the homesteaders had their own cures.

DBF: Their own what?

SAT: Their own cures. For diseases, like they would but poultices.

DBF: Oh yeah. Those things came down through families. Some people cooked onions and put the hot packs of onions in your throat and things like that. These were things that came down through families. Depends where the families came from and so forth.

SAT: What about, did they ever ... did women ever talk about birth control in those days?

DBF: No. You didn't even talk about birth. It was a no-no subject. And sex, my gosh!

SAT: They just wouldn't talk about it.

DBF: This is a . . . the thing was, I was so mad at my mother one time. I was eighteen years old. I was in my senior year and she and I went over to visit a neighbor woman. This woman started to talk about another lady that just had a miscarriage. And mother said, "Dorothy, you go out and wait in the car." Or in the buggy. It was a horse and buggy; it wasn't a car. When I came out, I was so mad and I said, "Mom, if it was too nasty for me to hear, it was too nasty for you to talk about."

SAT: You were eighteen then?

DBF: Yeah. But it was a no-no. A mother was a glorified person but to get . . . to become a mother was a nasty thing.

SAT: Was there much incidence of unwed mothers? On the...

DBF: If there was, nobody ever heard about it. It was the worst sin. It was worse than murder, as far as sin was. It was an unacceptable sin. Absolutely.

SAT: There would never be any cause for something like an abortion then? There wouldn't be any.

DBF: If there was, it was done in secret. Probably, many people died as an effect of it. I'm sure there were, but nice people just weren't involved.

SAT: How about community things like picnics and parades. Did Conrad have some of those things?

DBF: Yes. Now Conrad ... this came later, in the '30s, which for me is not too long ago. The Whoop Up Trail, which was a famous trail from Fort Benton to Fort MacLeod up in Canada, on the old freight trail. "Whoop Up" is kind of an ear-catching name. Every spring, the Lions Club has Whoop Up Days. They have a rodeo and parades and the whole community is a part of this. It's a fun time.

Beginning in the 1964, the Woman's Club put on something at night and I was responsible for some of the pageants that we wrote. That's one of the areas of my interest that I developed through Burt Hansen, who used to be over here at the University. Did you ever hear of Burt Hansen? Burt Hansen was from the University of Montana and he was in on the ground floor of something called social drama. Instead of people just getting up and talking about something, you acted it out. He promoted this among people to express ideas. We had him at Farmer's

Union camp one winter. Not at camp - that's in the summertime. In the wintertime, we had this school and we had Burt Hansen with us for a whole week teaching us social drama. We'd work out these things. I became interested in this because the first pageant I ever wrote, believe it or not, I was in when I was a senior in high school. My English teacher encouraged me to write a pageant for our class day exercises. We always had two days at the time of graduation. Class day when we ... it was kind of a fun day. We had all things like the history of the class, the future, all these things, and I had this pageant. It's published in our annual. I've got the little old annual. My first pageant is in there. This was something that was always of an interest to me. When I had an opportunity under Burt Hansen I got interested in it. I wrote four or five for the Farmer's Union. I can't remember, for their state conventions. The first one another lady and I did together. It was cantata of original music of Farmer's Union people. They were all produced in the civic center down in Great Falls.

Then, after I was in Conrad, the Lions Club said to the Woman's Club, "Why don't you do something Friday and Saturday night so that we'll have something for all these visitors to do except go to the bar?" So we were talking and I said, "Well, why don't we produce a play or a pageant?" They'd never heard of pageants or social dramas. They formed a committee and I wrote . with their help, we wrote this pageant. We produced it and we filled the schoolhouse, our big gymnasium, for two nights on that. In fact, there's pictures in this book about some of it. I produced several for them. I did one for the fiftieth anniversary of the Presbyterian Church and this was one. Turn that off and I'll find some of this here...

## **BREAK IN TAPE**

DBF: One year I did one it was called "The Daughter of the Sheepherder and the Son of a Cowpoke" or a takeoff on Juliet and...

SAT: Romeo and Juliet?

DBF: Romeo and Juliet. There was ... we had a big wagon over on this side with a sheepherder and his daughter and over on this side was a wagon from a . . . on a round-up. Then all these things went on, square-dancing and so forth. It was all local talent.

SAT: What about ... what would you do for, say, Christmas? What kind of things would you do around Christmas?

DBF: Depends on how much money there was around. We always had a Christmas tree, but when the children were little and times are so very hard, maybe their toys would be just homemade things. Of course ... but toward the end, now after our children were married and they all came home with their families, we would have a stack a gifts you couldn't put in a pick-up around there. We'd just have a ball around the table or in my living room. There'd just be piles and piles of things depending what the times were.

SAT: How about the 4<sup>th</sup> of July? I know that was big...

DBF: Oh yes. Often there would be parades and things. We always had picnics and things. We never lacked for anything to do. We didn't have TV and to sit down. We made our own fun.

SAT: At the picnics would you have local people that could play instruments or were they making music?

DBF: Not too much. There were games and racing and so forth. The men played horseshoe and the women sit around and talk and watch the kids and so forth. Sometimes, we might go up to mountains and stay all night. A whole group of us.

I'll never forget the first time, when I was about fifteen. Makes me think. This was the first time I ever wore overalls. My father was a very precise man; girls didn't wear overhauls. It wasn't nice. A family of ... there were five families that drove up to the mountains. We were about twenty miles from the mountains and we camped right up in Dupuyer Canyon. The big high cliff right on both sides of us. No one had tents. We just didn't have that, but we did have tarps that

you put over things. That night, we made a great big community bed. There would be a mother, little girls, their mama and their daddy and little boys, then another little family, then a dad and a mommy, and this here and clear down the line like that. During the night, it rained and we pulled the tarps up over our heads. It rained and it was raining down on top of us. When we woke up in the morning, I looked out over the top and here was a rainbow right against one of these cliffs. It was so beautiful. But two of my girlfriends were girls that had come from Spokane. They were in there and they were going to wear some ... you'd call them blue jeans today. We didn't call them that in those days. I said, "Dad, can I?" and oh, he just had a fit. Finally, mother said, "Well, you better let her do it. The other girls are going to do it." So Dad said, "Well, she can wear them up there but she takes them off when she gets home." When we got home, here were the hired men. Dad stood between me and the hired men and they got me in the house to get these overalls off. (laughing)

SAT: (laughing) He didn't want the hired men to see you in pants.

DBF: To see me with pants on. But we had very rigid standards.

SAT: When you went horseback riding, did you wear.

DBF: We had a big divided, big skirt.

SAT: Oh, I see.

DBF: I learned to ride before I went to school on an old gentle horse. I rode up to the day I was married. Before the week I was married. And I've never been on one since. I just lived on one, but after I was married my husband had a car and wherever we went... and he didn't ... we went together in our car. Then I had children and so forth and it just never was any reason to ride. I just never been on and I lived on one before.

SAT: Did you ever remember seeing women on side-saddles?

DBF: Oh yes, the first saddle I ever rode was side. That was after . . . when I was just little, tiny - five and six, seven years old. By the time I was ten or eleven, I was required to ride a side saddle. Over in Idaho. But I never rode one in Montana.

SAT: Let's see what else I have here. Do you remember if there were special parts of the town where there would be specifically Irish people or Swedish people? In other words, ethnic neighborhoods? Where those.

DBF: I lived in small towns where that isn't true, but you find that more in cities, where people come together. I know that my grandfather, he was third generation, from Germany. He never learned to speak English until he was nine-years-old, back in Iowa, because they lived in German communities. But the West, they were all mixed up. Everybody come and mixed up.

SAT: You talked about the Farmer's Union. What about the movement called The Grange?

DBF: The Grange was older than the Farmer's Union. It started out also more of an active organization to change laws helping farmers, but it became more conservative and became more of just a community group for entertainment and so forth. These organizations all grew out of a protest of farmers because farmers still are the only business people who do not have any control over what they receive for their products. Now if you go into a store or go to a doctor, he sets the price, doesn't he. But a farmer says, "What will you give me?"

SAT: Right.

DBF: Right now, we are at the mercy of the stock market. You take General Mills' stock is on the market and it goes up every day, but the price of a car never changes. They set the price of the car. The farmer's product on that goes up and down every day. Today, a farmer is selling his stuff for half of what it costs to produce it as a result of it. All of these things . . . much of the Western movement came about because farmers were being kept bankrupt all the time by this kind of a policy. And out of this group, these protest groups.

SAT: The Grange was just one of them.

DBF: It was one of them, but it became more conservative. So did the Farmer's Union. I mean, it isn't the ... but when I say ... We were called radicals and everything else, but we weren't. We were only asking for the same rights that other people had.

Like we said, the basis of it was education. We thought that rural children should have the same quality of education as a kid that lived in town. So one summer at camp, our theme was education. What do schools need? How should it be supported? I know we had the president of Eastern Montana College come out and talk to us about basic needs of education. He gave a talk either right before or after dinner, but he couldn't leave until about supper time. He sat there and listened to us and he stayed for four days! He said, "I've never heard anything like this in my life!" He said, "The only place you hear people discussing subjects on the level that you people are discussing them are at universities!" So he stayed with us four days. In fact, many people on our staff were our university people. Over here at the university here, we had the Farm Labor Institute which was financed and promoted by the Farmer's Union and the labor unions. These are the common people. The economy of America is never stable until the middle-class of people have money to spend. So if you don't protect the rights of those people ... this is what it has always has been is to take the rights away from those people and this is what we worked for.

The greatest compliment I think I ever received in my life was once when I spoke over here at the Farm Labor Institute to this group of people, adults and so forth. I was to speak on the Farmer's Union education because labor leaders were trying to get something like this among their people to inform their members so they could be more active members as citizens. Know more of what they were voting for and so forth and what to work for and so forth. I had worked for weeks on this speech I was supposed to give. I wanted to give a very professional talk. I got over here and Dr. Cransill from Bozeman, who I'd worked with for a long time, said, "Dorothy, I want you to be sure and talk about how you prevent prejudice among your young people. And talk about Grace Walker." Grace Walker was a Negro woman whose father had been a slave. She came from the National Recreation Association and we had her at our Farmer's Union camp for our young people, our high-school aged young people. They just loved her. They couldn't be

hateful of Negro people after knowing Grace. But would you believe it, I got up in front of that group and talked to them, and forgot all about my prepared talk. And when I got through, Dr. Edmund Freeman, who was head of the English department over at the University said, "Mrs. Floerchinger, would you tell your story to a convocation of students?" He scared me to death. I said, "(gasp) I couldn't! I just couldn't!" (laughter) I could talk to a bunch of (unintelligible) but I consider that one of the biggest compliments I ever had.

SAT: There were just a few more things. One thing I wanted to ask about: what was your average ... what kind of work did the woman on the homestead have to do?

DBF: You did everything and you did it the hard way.

SAT: Because there was no electricity?

DBF: No electricity. And to be sure that your family was fed, you produced most of your food. I can remember a Thanksgiving dinner that I had one year and it had everything, with turkey and pumpkin and everything. I had spent thirty-eight cents for some celery and a can of cranberries. The rest of it we produced. The flour had been ... was even the wheat that we had taken to town and had ground. And a big garden. I had chickens, I had turkeys.

SAT: You also had to do the sewing for the family, right?

DBF: Oh yes. My boys never had bought shirts until they got big enough that there was . I could buy a shirt for as much as what it cost me for the material.

SAT: And what about, let's see, canning?

DBF: Can? I canned, as my family got bigger, six to eight hundred quarts of fruits, vegetables, meat, and jellies. In the summertime, we went down on the river and picked chokecherries, wild currents, buffalo berries, and sorbus berries. That's where our jams and jellies came from.

SAT: Would you, let's see ... you'd have to do the wash, of course.

DBF: Oh yeah. For a while I did it on the board and then we had a washing machine where you pulled the . . . did it by the hand. Then my husband hooked up a stationary engine outside, ran a pipe in, and turned the wheel on washing machine. So I had one of the very first automatic washing machines in the neighborhood.

SAT: What about changes that you've noticed in Conrad over the years: what are some of the more prominent changes?

DBF: Well, I don't know. Of course, as we were smaller, we knew more people. I used to could say that I knew nearly everyone in Conrad, but now so many different groups have come in and I don't know them anymore. I'm retired now. I'm busy with my own group. Some are related to my family in some way. So I'm not ... there's just a lot of strange people in town anymore.

SAT: What about the change in . . . is there oil in Conrad?

DBF: Oh yes. The oil is just ... oil was discovered in Pondera County in 1927. There was a real boom there for it then. They still are drilling a little bit all the time. Just this last four or five years, they've discovered quite a gas area out by Ledger. There's not much publicity on it but there's a gas line that comes into the main stream from Ledger. Enough coming in that they have two big pumping stations between there and the line up at Valier.

SAT: Then electricity must have brought about a change.

DBF: Well, the electricity that did the most for us was the REAs [Rural Electric Association], for the rural people. That was a cooperative and it was . . . Nobody gave us anything, except that we had low interest. We were paying back what we borrowed from the government for this. Now don't let anybody every tell you. We were able to produce in addition so many other things that the REAs raised not only the standard of the farm living, but raised the businesses in town.

It contributed to all the business. Think of the refrigerators that the man in the store in town sold and all of the other electrical things. The REAs really built the economy in our town.

SAT: Can you remember any old stories that stick out in your mind that people or your family might have told you over the years that stick out?

DBF: The other night I spoke to the honor society. I told them, "You know, someday I'm going to write this all down and I'm going to call it 'Standing on the Edge of History'." I said, "My grandmother told me about knowing Kit Carson." I said, "I wasn't very interested at that time." And I said, "I'm sorry, I wish I had gotten more details." Afterwards, when I became more interested in history, I wondered, "How could have grandmother known Kit Carson?" Because she grew up in Iowa. It certainly was a pioneer state, but I can't find anything in history where Kit Carson was too involved there. My grandma told me she also was married . her sister was married to a grandson of Daniel Boone's. Daniel Boone and his family had moved to the state of Missouri. He had many grandsons up and down the Missouri River and around there. So, I was corresponding with a man in Iowa about history, historical things. I do this; I have correspondence with people all over I've never met. I told him about I wondered why my grandmother could have known Kit Carson and then told him about this relationship with Daniel Boone. He said, "Well, Kit Carson was also a grandson." Another thing was that my grandfather moved to Idaho in 1884 which was only a few years after the Chief Joseph Wars. They lived right on the edge of the Nez Perce Reservation and my Dad saw Chief Joseph. One Fourth of July, he was at Lapwai, Fort Lapwai, with his own people. Now whether they sneaked him down from the Colville or not ... see they wouldn't let Chief Joseph live with his own people.

SAT: Right.

DBF: But they either sneaked him down or was given permission. My father saw him: Chief Joseph. A tired, discouraged old man. And then, I think . and another thing I showed them the other night: I have a tiny little Bible, all that's left of it, the middle of it's been eaten out by mice and stuff, the front pages are gone. My mother gave it to me. Her stepfather was a Lee, who was a second cousin of Robert E. Lee. Her stepfather came to Iowa before the Civil War and they

brought this little Bible with them. According to the note in this Bible, they don't know when it was published, but it was being used when George Washington was seventeen years old. When I was a girl ... my mother had always cared for it very carefully and on the edges of it were autographs. One of the autographs that I could remember was Light-Horse Henry Lee, who was a companion of George Washington's. Now his autograph was on the edge of that page. But there's only one of them that you can read any more on this. These are some of the things that, historical things, that have touched my life. I grew up hearing these stories. My father read to us and they told stories. Like I said, we didn't have TV and things. So we were entertained in other ways. My father always craved knowledge and wanted us to know. We just heard many things.

SAT: Well, I thank you for your time.

DBF: Oh, I love to talk about the old days.

SAT: Yeah, maybe...

**END OF TAPE**