

Maureen and Mike

Mansfield Library

UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

Archives and Special Collections

Mansfield Library, University of Montana

Missoula MT 59812-9936

Email: library.archives@umontana.edu

Telephone: (406) 243-2053

This transcript represents the nearly verbatim record of an unrehearsed interview. Please bear in mind that you are reading the spoken word rather than the written word.

Oral History Number: 120-020a

Interviewee: George Vogt

Interviewer: Mary Bielenberg

Date of Interview: September 1984

Project: Bitterroot Historical Society Oral History Project

George Vogt: My grandfather was born in 1832 in the Munich area of Bavaria. He stowed away when he was 20 years old in 1852 and came on a freighter to New York City. Then he spent about 10 or 12 or 14 years in Michigan, in the mines there. He said the longest days of his life were in New York City, because they couldn't understand his German and they couldn't understand his English, so he left there soon and came to Michigan. He was there several years and then he took his time...about ten years later, landed in Philipsburg, Montana and worked in the mines there.

He married a lady that he met in Michigan, by the name of Katherine Gatz. In Philipsburg, they had three children born: my father, George, William, and Katherine. When Katherine was born, her mother passed away, so my grandpa was left with three small children, real small. Dad was born was born in '77, 1877. Granddad took the tiny baby back to his wife's sister, who lived in Three Rivers, Michigan, and she was raised there. I remember she came and visited us; I think it was in 1914. She married a gentleman that was a pattern maker, by the name of Fred Peterson. Granddad...

Mary Bielenberg: And your grandfather's name was Andy?

GV: Grandpa's name was Andrew William, yes, Andrew William Vogt. He came to Missoula from Philipsburg and had a dairy across the river from Milltown in East Missoula. He carried the milk across the river in a flat bottom boat. He was afraid that he would lose his children going back and forth in that boat in the Clark Fork, so he left there and came up to Bitterroot in '86, 1886. He went to Sula. The Babbitt Family, (unintelligible) Babbitt, who was postmaster in Victor, his parents had started a claim for a ranch and granddad bought the homestead ranch from them for \$200 in 1886. He moved up there in 1887.

MB: How many acres was it?

GV: It was 160 acres.

MB: One hundred-sixty acres.

GV: Yes. Granddad then moved back to Philipsburg in the winter and made enough money in the mines to buy another cow. In 1887, I think it was '87, I heard my father tell, they went all over the Sula Basin cutting hay. They finally got enough hay so they could...Those were the first cattle they ever knew that had wintered in the Sula Basin. That was the beginning of our ranch.

MB: I wanted to ask you, who were his neighbors at that time? Were there any others up there?

GV: Yes, the Sherrills. The house where the Jake Wetzsteon family lived most of their time in Sula was built by Scott Sherrill. Scott passed away. I don't just what year, but before my time. There were two other brothers, Tom and Buck Sherrill, who—both of them—were in the Battle of the Big Hole. Mr. and Mrs. Scott Sherrill had two sons, Theo Sherrill and Archie Sherrill. They sold their place to the Jake Wetzsteon Family and moved over to the mouth of Reimel (?) Creek. They had a farm over there.

MB: Your father...your grandfather continued to buy more land, did he?

GV: Granddad didn't buy much more land. My dad took a timber claim up just north of where our buildings are in Sula. My dad...they farmed that and raised hay on it and pasture. Then they would rent. They rented all the time until...it would have been in 1939, and then we started buying a little more land.

MB: How would your grandfather get into town? About that time, I don't think there was a Hamilton. He would probably go to Grantsdale.

GV: In those days, the only mail that they would get would be once a month. The families in Sula would give the postman a dollar a month. Each time they'd give him a dollar a month. They'd bring the mail to Sula once a month from Como. They would ride down on horseback and get it. They'd come to town about a twice a year. They'd ford the river. I believe Granddad told me one time: seven times they'd ford the East Fork or the Bitterroot River coming into Hamilton. They'd get a grubstake and it would last them for about six months. I remember the fruit we had. They'd get a box or two of apples in the fall, or maybe three or four boxes of apples. We'd have dried peaches, dried fruit, and dried apples. Then we'd have to buy flour, buy 50-pound sacks, maybe about ten sacks of flour. A couple of sacks, 100-pound sacks of sugar, and staples, some cans. Mother would can, my goodness, I remember she would can chicken, can fish, and can beef.

MB: Everything she could before winter?

GV: Oh my.

MB: Where did your father go to school when he was growing up?

GV: Granddad or, yes, my...

MB: Your father was George?

GV: My father was George and Dad went to school in Grantsdale and Corvallis, mostly, and some in Missoula. There was a three room schoolhouse in Missoula I've heard them tell of. Both my father and his sister, Lillian, would go to school in Missoula or Grantsdale or Corvallis.

MB: They would board out there?

GV: My granddad would pay for Lillian's board and room. Dad would have to work, do chores, for his board. Either way, they'd get along.

MB: Did they go during the winter or was it just spring and fall?

GV: I just don't know just when. I remember Clarence Goff, who had the place where Johnny Walsh lives on the Corvallis-Stevensville Road, was a classmate. Mr. Strange, Bill Strange's father, was a classmate of my father's, and Alex Chapin. I remember him naming several of his old classmates who lived here in the valley a long time.

MB: How many cattle did your grandfather build up? How many cows on the ranch? Do you have any idea?

GV: I don't know how many cattle because, I remember, when I was quite small, the cattle would look about more like some of the modern herds. We had reds, we had roans, we had white faces, and we had some black mixed, not Angus in those days, Holsteins. They were soon conglomerated (?) with the herd.

MB: He didn't go into milk herds at all?

GV: No. The dairy farming has always been a very minor operation of the Vogts. We used to milk...seven, or eight, or ten cows, separate the milk, feed some pigs, sell them off, butcher the pigs, and sell the cream. At one time I remember I used to come to Sula and Hamilton and pick up cream twice a week.

MB: I see. With a buckboard?

GV: A good-sized truck.

MB: In a truck.

GV: This was...

MB: Later on.

GV: ...later on, yes.

MB: I wanted to ask you, where did your father meet your mother and who was she?

GV: My grandfather married a lady by the name of Emma Christmas.

MB: Was she in the valley at the time?

GV: In Missoula. He met her in Missoula, I believe...Am I right about this? I think so. They lived in Sula, yes, and she was an aunt of my mother's. My mother's maiden name was Maude Crooks, Maude Josephine Crooks. She came to Sula to visit her aunt and got married to my father. She taught school up there a year. This is when the courting must have taken place.

MB: Where was the little school?

GV: In those days, the school was just on the fence line just south of the Sula Clubhouse. Later, they moved it over to where the present building is. It's dilapidated now, but that's where I went to school for eight years.

MB: You were in a one room schoolhouse?

GV: One room schoolhouse. They built on. I remember the year they built a cloak room on the west end, so we had...then we had a bell tower, and cloak room, and now we were deluxe.

MB: (Laughs)

GV: I remember we used to change off being janitors at the Sula School. We would get \$5 a month for sweeping out each night, carrying in the wood, and having fresh water in for the pump, in the water pump.

MB: Was Sula kind of an interesting little village in that people were quite close? Did they get together very much...?

GV: Wonderful, wonderful neighbors. Granddad, I told you, went back to Philipsburg to work in the winters. In the winter of 1887 and 1888, that winter, he was working in Philipsburg in the mines. This small gentleman came to him and said, "Do you have any idea where we might find some land to prove up on on the Homestead Act?" Granddad said, "Yes, there's a little basin over in the south end of the Bitterroot Valley." When Granddad got over here in spring of 1888, here was Grandpa Wetzsteon, and with him there was John, Will, Charlie, Albert, Jacob, Frank, George, Ed, Henry, Mary, Lizzy, Elizabeth, and a stepson, William Frame (?). They all had, in fact, all of them had homesteads by the time he got here.

MB: It was all of those families?

GV: So the Sula Basin was well taken care of. They didn't all prove up on the homesteads. Some of them of bought homestead rights or something similar to the way Granddad got his land. That was the...they came in '88, which was just two years after Grandpa Vogt. All that... when we had threshing to do, everybody pitched in and helped. When you were branding cattle, all of them would come and help and then you'd help the neighbors. It was this way with all the projects.

I remember that's the way they built the roads up there. They didn't ask the county to come build roads. They had buckboards on wagons and teams of horses and they would go haul this dirt and gravel and rock and build those roads. Those roads that goes east through Sula Basin used to be just be a mud hole. They hauled big rock in there first, and then gravel; built it up from there. Now it's a pretty good road.

MB: I bet it is!

GV: That was the way it was done, you bet.

MB: Did your grandfather ever talk about there being any Indians around the area when he came?

GV: No, but I heard my father say that the Indians used to come back up there, after they were asked to go to the Flathead, to hunt in the fall. Granddad would...or Dad would say that the old straight Indian blood lines, with the long hair and the braids, were the most honest people he ever dealt with. I know Mr. Spaulding that had the store here in Hamilton said that he could always trust those people. When they got to know more of us, their credit wasn't quite so good.

MB: Did the Indians come into the valley in a special time of the year every year?

GV: They used to. When I was about high school age, which was about in the early '20s, 1920 to '25 we'll say, they used to come each year up to Medicine Tree and have a powwow. They would come up there and spend the week and worship under the Medicine Tree and this sort of thing. It was quite a celebration for them. They'd bring quite a delegation, several wagons.

MB: They didn't have travel (?) at that time? They didn't have horses? They didn't come up on horseback, did they?

GV: Yes, horseback and wagons.

MB: I see. It seems to me, when I was a child growing up in Missoula (unintelligible), they would come in the spring to pick the bitterroot. Did they ever come down in the Bitterroot Valley and get it I wonder?

GV: I don't know about that. I just don't know.

MB: I remember they pitched their tipis and...

GV: Oh yes, they would up there (?). It was quite a celebration. I remember one time I walked down to the Tree. I was in high school at that time and a little bit interested in Indian history. Here was this older Indian man sitting right under Medicine Tree. He said, "If you would like to see something interesting, come with me." We walked down, seemed to me west, on the road, ended up back up on the rock above the tree, and we could see the profile of three different faces on that rock: one profile facing the rock and two facing away from the rock. It was kind of interesting.

MB: I'll say. It probably had quite a significance for the Indians, too.

GV: Yes. Something else that might be of interest...Of course we were pretty isolated up there. I don't when it was...I just barely remember when we got out first telephone. It was a single wire, telephone wire. It was a rural line, of course, which was pretty much the Forest Service and the community people. They attached us long distance to the Bell system in Darby, so we always had long distance telephone. Later, it was a two wire system. I remember when Josephine and I went to Grantsdale (?)...I don't know just how many there were on that one circuit. I'm sure there were at least 18 on that one circuit.

MB: It was busy? (Laughs)

GV: That's right. Whenever you needed the phone in a hurry, all you'd say was, "May I please have the phone? It's an emergency." They'd hang up and you could call your party. Everybody had a different ring.

MB: When did the electricity come out there? Earlier?

GV: No, much later.

MB: Josephine says after the war.

GV: Yes, after the war, which means 1940...

MB: After the Second World War?

GV: The Second World War. Up until then, we had a Delco system in our basement of the house. Our old house burned in December of '23. The house now that's on the ranch was built in '26. That house has been there for almost 60 years. Up until then it was either candles, kerosene lamps, or gas lamps.

MB: When did you...where did you go to high school?

GV: There were five of us boys that were in school that were here at the Hamilton high school all at the same time. We'd come in. They'd bring us down some evening usually and we'd go to school till after school was out Friday. Then they'd pick us up and take us back to the ranch. Then it was done the next week.

MB: With whom did you live? Did you live in private homes?

GV: We lived in private homes. I remember, I think the first two or three years, we got board and room for \$20 a month and, after that, it was \$25 I think for our senior year. They were four Wetzsteon boys, Edgar, Paul, Fred, and Raymond, and myself. We graduated here at what's now the Jefferson Building.

MB: Were you an only child, George?

GV: No, I had a sister that was older than I. She passed away in, I believe, it was '44.

MB: From high school, where did you go to school?

GV: I finished high school when I was only 17. I'm sure my folks were right. They thought I was too immature to go into college and I'm sure they were right. I think this is true of most boys. If they would wait another year before they start school in the first place, they'd be better off. But I went to Bozeman, and finished in Bozeman in 1929.

MB: You were part of basketball?

GV: No, not that good...I lettered in...I could never letter in basketball. I lettered in football and track.

MB: You did?

GV: For three years in Bozeman, yes. Then, I got a job up in for Libby, I remember, for \$1400 a year, teaching and coaching. In the summer of 1930, I went to Pullman to school in the summers of 1931 and 1932. I went to Stanford University and finished my pre-med down there. I had the idea that I maybe wanted to go into medicine. I remember the admissions officer said, "Are you sure George that you're dedicated to medicine?" and I said, "No, I've been bitten by the athletic bug and I enjoy coaching and teaching too much." So I never did go into medical school. He said, "Maybe if you coach two more years, you'll be glad to go to medical school."

MB: (Laughs)

GV: But I didn't. I enjoyed coaching very much, still did when I retired.

MB: Where did you meet your wife?

GV: Josephine and I were both teaching and coaching in Lewistown, Montana

MB: And her name was...

GV: Josephine McGlumphy, yes. She was born in Illinois and her father and mother came to...a dry land farm north of Sand Springs, Montana, if you know where Sand Springs is. It's way east of Lewistown. It's in Garfield County. She graduated from high school in Sumatra, graduated from university, and started teaching school at Colstrip. She came up to Lewistown and we were married in 1939 and went to the ranch. My dad's health failed and we went to the ranch in '39.

MB: Then you were really involved in ranching for quite a while?

GV: Seventeen years, yes. Margo and Steve were at the high school living with my mother. She was in (unintelligible). It was too much for her, really, to help the kids, I think. At least we used that as an excuse, and I applied for a job and got it. Then one of the teachers resigned. Mr. Cooper was superintendent and he asked Josephine if she'd fill in until he could get somebody else. Well, he did never get anybody else.

MB: (Laughs) Of course not. She's too good!

GV: (Laughs) She enjoyed it very much.

MB: This was in Stevensville.

GV: That was here.

MB: This was here?

GV: That was here in Hamilton, yes.

MB: I thought you taught in Stevensville?

GV: We did. We taught at Stevensville for 10 years before we retired and enjoyed it very much. I think after you have your own children and they're gone, you do a better job teaching. You're firm—gentle but firm—and you're so anxious to be thorough that they understand what you're teaching. Josephine taught...her love I think was world history, and that's one reason she enjoyed our trip to Greece so much. I went back to junior high. I'd always taught high school. I said...I'd never want to teach anything except either junior high or seniors because, those seniors, they're ready to do things for you. The junior high youngsters at that age need help

more than any other group. I think you just have to show them you love them and they appreciate it. They like to be disciplined, if you're fair with them.

MB: You really enjoyed your work?

GV: Very very much.

MB: In looking back over those years, over those early years that you spent in Sula, do you have any memories that come to mind that are exciting, or interesting, or laughable: things that you won't forget that you talk about?

GV: I...I think so. I remember, during that flu epidemic, we were out of school for so long. I remember saying to my parents at that time, "I don't see any sense in going on to school from here. I think I've got enough education." My mother and father wouldn't stand for that and I was always grateful.

My granddad, I remember it was...it was before I could remember, but on his 75th birthday, the community went together and brought him a black cane with a gold head on it and an engraving telling of his 75th birthday. I think that would have had to have been in...he was born in '32, so it had to be 1907. Granddad was always so proud of that. He'd sit around and roll that cane so everyone could see that gold head on that cane. It was (unintelligible).

MB: What happened to it?

GV: It got burned when our house burned in 1923. The cane was, of course, lost. Granddad's mind was sharp up until the day he died.

MB: Did you remember him?

GV: Very well. He didn't pass away until about March, 1921. I remember very well. I was down here in high school, freshman year of high school, when he left. Everybody loved him blindly to death. The last years...his wife passed away in 1919. My mother's father was with us and he passed away in 1918. So I had three grandparents in my house.

MB: Yes, you did. That must have been interesting.

GV: Yes. Granddad would fight to see who could get to the churner, who could carry up...go get another bucket of water, and who could carry another armful of wood. They spoiled me by keeping wood blocks floating (?) in the water buckets. Feed the chickens and gather the eggs. They were right up there all the time.

MB: Did any of them ever go over into the Big Hole? Was that ever part of your ranching life at all?

GV: It wasn't a part of our ranching life, but I read where...William Wetzsteon, he used to take eggs. All the neighbors would have these eggs and he would pack those eggs over into the...buy them up and take them to over in the Big Hole and resell them, I believe.

MB: I see.

GV: I remember the first year Josephine and I were at the ranch was in 1939 and my mother and father had about 100 head of...a flock of about 100 chickens. We gathered the eggs and fed these chickens and beamed the eggs and took them down to the Sula Store for applying on our grocery bill. We got nine cents a dozen and we said it's not worth the wear and tear.

MB: No.

GV: So we quit.

MB: Just madness

GV: Nine cents a dozen, but everything was dirt cheap in 1939 of course.

MB: Did you have help come and help at the ranch?

GV: Yes.

MB: How much do you think they were paid?

GV: I remember in 1931 a fellow came to the ranch—this was before we went out there—and said to my father, "Do you need help with the ranch?" Dad said, "I can't afford any help." He said, "If you would just give me board and room and (unintelligible), I'll stay and help feed the cattle this winter." That's what he got. I'm sure a little more than that because my dad wasn't that close. When Josephine and I first went out there through the winter months, we could get help for a dollar a day and board and room.

MB: I see. This was in the '30s?

GV: Yes. I remember the first year we were there, we paid our hay men...the teamsters got a dollar and half a day and the stackers got \$2 a day.

MB: Your average day was around...?

GV: The teamsters would get up quite early and take care of their team. We couldn't get in the field because the heavy dew was way early. We'd probably get in eight hours in the field.

MB: How many cattle did you end up with? How many do you have on your place right now?

GV: We still keep about 300 cows, a little over 300, right now.

MB: How many acres do you have working for you?

GV: We have about 500 acres of hay land. We have at least about five sections from the state and then we have a grazing permit from the Forest Service and the open range from the first of June to the first of October. That's the way we...

MB: You've really increased the original ranch by quite a bit.

GV: We're trying to get along. Our ranch now...we have pasture land of...about 900 acres of pasture land.

MB: In talking about your grandfather, when did he become a citizen?

GV: I don't know just what year he became a citizen, but I remember at one time we were going through some old papers that we found in the file. We found that Granddad had applied for citizenship and gave his birth the Kingdom of Bavaria, before it was part of Germany, and he was applying for citizenship in the Montana Territory before it had become a state.

MB: That was before 18... '78? When was the...?

(unidentified woman's voice in background)

GV: 1889 Montana was a state.

MB: You were talking earlier about...when we were talking about whether or not you had electricity. I wondered how you had refrigeration. You said they used to cut ice?

GV: We used to cut ice over south of the schoolhouse in East Fork, yes. We'd cut ice with an ice saw, a regular ice saw, and cut these blocks about 18 inches square. The ice very often was 18 inches to two feet thick. We'd pull this block up a ramp, up a plank, onto a sled, and haul them home, then pack snow and ice between the blocks and sawdust around the outside. In the summer, we'd dig up this ice and wash it off. By the time this was done, half of it was gone, but at least it gave us an ice box to kind of keep the milk cold and the butter firm. It was better than a broken (unintelligible).

MB: Right. I appreciate so much your giving us this interview. I know it will be interesting for people who are doing research and who would like to have the personal touch. Thank you very much.

GV: I was happy to help, if it's interesting to people.

[End of Interview.]