

**Oral History 171-01**

**Life of Romeo Richard**

**Interviewer: Jerry J. Richard**

**Interviewee: Romeo Richard**

**August 31, 1983**

Jerry J. Richard: This side of this cassette tape is a total devotion to the life of Romeo Richard. He will be 96 this fall. The date is Tuesday August 31, 1983. This cassette was also recorded live at his residence in Wolf Point. Your narrator for this cassette is Jerry J Richard.

. . . 1887. That will be 96 years this fall. October the 17<sup>th</sup>. Did your folks move out here? To Wolf Point?

Romeo Richard: Yeah.

JR: When did you come out here to Riverside?

RR: I came out to Riverside in 1909 and I got half a section of land for \$10. Half a section - at Glasgow - on a Sunday. And we were seven in that bunch. We all settled at the same place, side-by-side.

JR: Right where the house is now?

RR: Yeah. The first thing I built was a building for my brother-in-law. I built him a barn, a house. I built mine in 1938 - an old round-roof barn. The house was the same way, a two story house that I built myself. When I came down here all I had to start out was \$60. That's all the money I had. I started to work with my neighbor. He was a sheep rancher. I worked for him for about 2 or 3 years. I made enough so I could rebuild my building big for the family. What time did I build the church? '25 or '26.

JR: That was the Riverside Church?

RR: Yeah. I built that with my father-in-law.

JR: What was his name?

RR: Tankard Richard(?). I gave eight acres of land: four for the church, four for the cemetery. I gave them that for free. The only one that . . . The rest is all gone.

JR: You farmed on the Riverside there until when? Until you moved into town?

RR: Yeah.

JR: When did you move into town?

RR: In 1945 I moved to town. I kept my farm until my boy could take my place.

JR: That was Lawrence.

RR: Yeah, Lawrence.

JR: What were your mom and dad's names?

RR: My dad's name was Pete Richards. My mother's name was Leonie Richards.

[pause, indistinct voices in the background]

I came down to spend all my life in Montana!

JR: Who did you marry? Juliet?

RR: When did I marry?

JR: Yeah, what year?

RR: I was 21 when I got married. I got married to my third cousin, Juliet. I married her. Then, in 1909, we moved to Montana.

JR: You moved from Milroy (?), North Dakota?

RR: Yeah, and we've been here since.

JR: Then, you're the settlers in Montana for the Richards family.

RR: Yeah.

JR: How many kids did you have?

RR: I have to count them! I had two boys - the oldest child and then the last one in the family. And I had five girls. They're all living except one. Germaine went three years ago.

JR: You've lived here in Wolf Point since 1945?

RR: Yeah.

JR: You live here with Jane and Rita.

RR: They are the only two that aren't married. They both take care of me. That's why I'm living today! I have somebody to take care of me. Another thing, when I came to Wolf Point I worked on that big church.

JR: What sort of things did you do when you were a kid? What were some of the most exciting things? The fun things?

RR: I didn't have any high school. Although, I did go to school many times. I remember one time, I had a question I had to write for the teacher. I know I couldn't write it. Instead, I went in the ditch and had my lunch. I spent the whole day in the ditch on account of that. I didn't go to school that day. At night, when the kids came by I got out of the ditch and walked back home with them.

JR: Did you walk back and forth to school?

RR: Yeah. We walked to school. A mile and a half.

For a time, I had a big dog that I broke. I made myself a little cart and hooked it to the dog. Everyday we went a mile and a half to get to school. I had that dog for about three years. I broke another dog before I got rid of it and I had a team. A big dog and a small dog on either side.

When I was going to school I had two friends. We called them Naro and Peetoo . Every night I stopped over there and spent about an hour with them. When they came home they had to clean the barn. They had broken a steer to haul the manure on the stone boat. They had another calf that wasn't broken. I said, "Why don't we hook up the one that's broken and the other one that isn't broken to the mower?" Their old folks were out to town and hadn't come back yet. So we hooked them up. In the back of the house they had a garden. Their old man had tobacco all along the edge of the garden. After we hooked those calves up to the mower, we put it in gear. When they heard that noise they got scared. Boy they went. We had each one on a rope, but we couldn't hold them. They went about three hundred feet and they carried that mower to beat the band. They cut all the tobacco the old man had in the garden and then they hit a tree and stopped. We had to unhook them. We left the mower there and the two calves got loose. They ran away. That's one thing that happened and I remember that just like today. That's what we'd do! The one that was broken, he started when the motor started - "d-r-r-r". The other one got scared and then they both went.

JR: They took off!

RR: Oh yeah - we couldn't hold it. And then they hit the tree and of course everything just stopped. That's one thing we had done. I wasn't very old either.

JR: How did you plant your crop?

RR: Here?

JR: Yeah, when you farmed here.

RR: That was in 1910. I had only five acres. I had only three horses and a plow. I brought my seed from home.

JR: You had your own seed? From your folks?

RR: Yeah I had my own seed. I planted two acres with my horses. I had feed for the horses. I started with three horses - that's all I had. But I started with new machines. I had a new mower, a new rake, a new binder. I brought that with me.

JR: Can you remember any of the prices you paid back then?

RR: I got the mower for \$35. The rake was not quite \$30.

JR: About what year was this? 1909?

RR: No, that was in 1908 when I bought all that.

JR: How did you harvest your crops?

RR: I don't totally remember. We had a new binder - we still have it. They had a threshing machine running around the country. We finally got one.

JR: Was it horse-drawn?

RR: Yeah. For the first crop, I had 500 bushels. It sure grew well. I was sure glad. I don't remember how much we owed on it, but I remember we harvested 500 bushels. That was wheat.

JR: You grew wheat? Was that spring wheat? Winter wheat?

RR: The second year we were down here, I had a neighbor that had a steam engine. He broke my land and I helped him to load the coal. He broke 18 acres. He pulled five plows. He broke all of that in one shot. I went over to his place and we did the same thing. I hauled the coal for the steam engine.

JR: The steam engine for the tractor?

RR: Yeah and he broke all of that land. I had a cheap job going. We got together quite a bit. He was a carpenter and I was one too. We worked together many times.

JR: Did you build a lot of buildings around Riverside?

RR: Yeah. I built two barns myself. Leo Richard's barn and mine. I built both myself. I cut it myself.

JR: You cut the lumber and everything?

RR: Yeah. I cut the lumber myself. I made myself the barn. [The next couple of sentences are indistinct as they fade in and out of the background noise.]

JR: What were the summers and the winters like? Were they hard just like this year?

RR: Two years when we were down there it wasn't freezing at all during the winter time. It would rain and the water would run on the prairie. The storm would last about an hour. It was that way for about three years. Light winters and light summers. On my house I could see cracks coming in because [the wood] went from being wet to dry so much. The first year I put on some extra boards. The second year I put tar paper on the top of that before I put on more siding. I didn't have the money to build a strong one the first time. That's the way it was for about five years. No winter.

JR: You've had some hard winters though.

RR: Yeah. After that, when the winters did start in, it was tough. We had storms just like we had in North Dakota. Big storms, snow storms, very cold. It was freezing every night. But it wasn't as bad as North Dakota. North Dakota is a flat valley. The air gets heavy. Over here, the hills cut it down. Another thing, I went to my rancher. Every fall, he butchered a steer. He would give me a quarter of the steer. The way we kept it was, we would hang it up outside on the corner of the house. We would leave it out there and it would never spoil.

JR: It was cold enough that it wouldn't spoil?

RR: The meat wouldn't spoil. The air was so pure. That would keep the meat. We would keep the meat three weeks or more. We would just go down and cut a piece and take it inside. It was good until the last piece.

JR: How did you butcher your swine? Your pigs?

RR: I never had any pigs. Just chickens. We had all kinds of chickens. We got our own eggs. I had one cow.

JR: Was that a milk cow?

RR: Yeah, it was a milk cow. It was a good one.

JR: You made your own milk and you made your own butter.

RR: Yeah. I made my own butter. Fall, every year, I would go to town and bring back five hundred to ten hundred pounds of flour for the winter. Sometimes for all year round. We had our flour right in the house. It was 22 miles to go to town and we walked along the road all winter hauling grain.

JR: Did you have a horse-drawn wagon?

RR: Yeah, I had three horses and a new wagon. Everything was new then.

JR: What year did you get your first automobile? Your first truck?

RR: When Chevy first came to town, it had one running gear. I was the first one to buy the car with one running gear. There was no cab. I took just the engine and the frame. That cost me five hundred some dollars. It wasn't quite six hundred. I came home and made myself a box - a 50 bushel box - to haul my grain. I was the first one to run the car in the country. It was the first car to come out of the town. I got one.

JR: Do you know what year it was?

RR: That was in 1918.

Jane: 1928.

JR: 1928 Jane says.

RR: '28? No it was in '26. It was in '26 when it first came out.

JR: What model was it?

RR: Chevy. It was just a frame. The year after that, each of the neighbors got a truck. They all got the same thing. They all hauled with a small pick-up. A little truck. I had that truck for many years.

JR: I'm told that back then they cut ice from the river. Did they use that for refrigeration?

RR: I made myself a cooler, an ice house. I put that in the ground right alongside the garage. That was my cooler. I would fill that up with six or seven chunks of ice and it would keep all summer. After that I built a cistern. I made my own cistern from plaster in the shape of a jug. It never cracked. I used just three coats of plaster and it held about 300 or 400 gallons. Quite a bit of water. We used that all year round.

JR: You would use that for water. Would you use a pump?

RR: Yeah. First I used a bucket because I didn't have a pump. Pretty soon I had to put a pump in. I built thirteen cisterns.

JR: Around Riverside?

RR: Yeah. They were twelve feet in the ground and eight feet in diameter. Big ones. I built thirteen of them. We had three schools. I built their cisterns so they had water for the kids. I was the one that put that in there.

JR: Which school was that?

RR: One was Pilger(?) School. Another one was our school around here, Sunnyside. And then west of here there was another one. I don't remember the name. That's the one along the river. I don't remember the name, but I know the people very well. I put a cistern in there too.

JR: It's the one close to town here - up by Wolf Point.

RR: I built thirteen of them. I made one for my neighbor. I dug a cistern for them and put in the plaster.

JR: That's a lot of digging. You dug that all by hand?

RR: All by hand. For some of them, I plastered and they had dug the hole themselves. But I had to finish the inside of it the way I wanted it. They were everywhere from seven to eight feet across to five feet in the bottom. Set like a jug. On the top where it closes in, it is about two or three feet across. They all filled that hole up with water.

JR: And they still use those today.

[Side one over]

RR: . . . the windmill in the country.

JR: It was what now? The first windmill? It's still standing on the farm.

RR: I got it from Sears-Roebuck.

JR: What did you use it for?

RR: Pumping water. Then, I didn't have to pump it by hand anymore. I quit that.

JR: How many livestock did you have?

RR: In those days I had six horses, three cows, and two or three sheep. That's all I had.

JR: And all of the chickens.

RR: Yeah and all of the chickens. I had a big chicken coop.

JR: The one right behind the barn?

RR: It was dug six feet in the ground. And the door was facing west.

JR: That's on the side of the hill then.

RR: Yeah. That's on the side of the hill.

JR: The south side - or on the east side.

RR: The house I built was right in the middle of the field. I built my house in that place. I moved my house on top of the hill, facing westward.

JR: Where the old place is now?

RR: I wasn't satisfied so I built where the granary is. I put the house there. I settled there and that's where I stayed. I built the house there, the big house that I built three years after we moved.

JR: That's the two-storey house that's standing right now?

RR: Yeah.

JR: You had three houses then.

RR: Yeah, that was in 1908.

JR: The first house you had was down at the bottom of the valley.

RR: Yeah, I took the other one all apart and used it to build the new one. That house cost me a little more than \$2,000, all finished the way it is now. The barn was \$200.

JR: \$200. That's your own cut and build.

RR: That's what I paid for it. I took the old barn down and took the roof. The roof is all that's left of the old barn. We had the big barn for the six horses and the cows. I had the horse stalls on the inside. It was pretty big. I put all of that lumber in the new barn.

JR: That has a hayloft in it, doesn't it? Did you put hay upstairs in the barn?

(Woman's voice from background): Did you put hay upstairs in the barn? You did.

RR: Sure, I put all of the hay up there. I had 20 tons.

JR: How did you put it up there?

RR: I had a fork and a sling. The sling is still there. The truck is there anyway. I never filled that up by hand.

[woman's voice in background, indistinct]

RR: \$25-\$30 a head. We've got the whole thing set up there: the cable and the rope and the sling. Hook up one and set a horse on the rope and he pulled a big chunk.

JR: That was all loose.

RR: Yes. 20 tons.

JR: But it was all loose hay, right?

RR: Yes, that was all loose hay. Prairie hay too.

JR: They didn't have any bailers then.

RR: No, I had only one mower and a rake.

It's a kind of funny story, but it's true. I went down to see my girl once. It was Sunday night. I fixed myself up to go. There was a cow trail. I followed that trail as a short cut. About halfway, I saw something in the grass. I didn't pay any attention - I just kept going. I realized suddenly that it was a skunk facing me! I was too close, I couldn't stop and so I had to ride over the skunk. That was the last step I made. I had just gotten out there and I had to go back home. I didn't get to see my girl that night. I had to go back home to clean up.

Another time, I was with a bunch of boys. I crossed the river.

JR: The Missouri?

RR: No, not the Missouri - the Red River.

JR: Redwater?

RR: No, not the Redwater. The Red River, we called it. There was a bridge there and there was grass that went over my head on each side of the bridge. The bridge didn't have any guard. I was at the head, leading the boys. All at once, my back gear came unscrewed. I didn't have any brake at all. I was about 40 feet from the bridge. I had to drive off to the side into the grass. The other boys were able to stop because they had good brakes. That's one time I had a darn good scare. We never hit the bridge that we were driving to. It was a narrow bridge with no guard on it. I remember that as if it was yesterday.

Another Sunday, I went to a party about three miles from home. Coming back at night, a neighbor had tied their cat along the road. The darn cat was sleeping. I came over there. When he saw me, he got up and came across the road. I hit the cat! I broke my bike. I had to walk home. That was a tough ride. That's what happened that night. I remember that as if it was yesterday. I twisted my handlebar. There were many things I did when I was a young boy and I never forget them. You can't forget a thing like that!

I was training a dog with a cart. I had a small black dog. I had that dog to go to get the mail. The mail was three miles away. Finally, I got another big dog. I called him rover. He was a little over two feet high. He was a big one. I trained that one too. One Saturday night I was going to go to town. We had to hook Rover on the cart. By the time I hitched him up - it took a little while -

we had moved a granary. We put it on a block so it was over two feet high. By the time I hooked up my dog, the neighbor had come. He had two little dogs. When he went by, I had just finished hooking up my dog. I stepped on the cart and I said, "Rover, hit it". Instead of following the road he went across under the granary. He broke the two tugs. They were made with suspenders. He broke right through that and went right through the lot. He went to fight on the road. I hit my face on the wall of the granary and I had a bleeding nose! There I was! That was the last time I hooked up the damn dog. He was too strong. I didn't have time to lead him up to the road; he went clear across under the granary. There I was - bang! I never broke a dog after that.

Now when I come down here . . . What was the name of the oldest boy?

JR: Philip?

RR: Yeah, Philip. He had two goats to haul a cart. He would lead them just like team horses. He would haul all kinds of stuff with those two darn goats. They were well broke. One Sunday he came to church with them, just across the garden. He hooked up the goats to show the people what he could do. As soon as he got done, his two boys stepped on the cart and they took to the road and they went. They were going down the road and they made a big turn to come back. When they came back, instead of going to the church he turned right into his house. They stayed there because they didn't want to go any more. Philip was there with two boys. He wanted to take them down to the church, but the goats they wouldn't go. They just lay down and they wouldn't get up. Both of them! We took a picture of that, just for fun. That was the last break. Philip was proud of those two goats. But goats have a head too! They say, "We won't, we won't!"

I was [tape cuts off momentarily]

I then learned to dance the waltz, but I never learned just a square dance.

JR: Did you play?

RR: No, I didn't play those days. I play the violin, but I learned to play that after I got here. I played the mouth organ, though.

Unidentified woman's voice in background: And the violin? When did you get that?

RR: I played lots of that.

Woman's voice: After you got home?

RR: No, I didn't have a violin in those days. I learned to play the violin after I came down here. The first one cost me three and a half.

JR: \$3.50?

RR: Yeah, it was in great shape. It was a darn good one. That's the one I sold to Frank Lemure(?). When he died, he was playing that one. That one there, his father Richard had that.

JR: The one you have now?

RR: The one I have now. I got it from great-grandpa. That's why it's so old. It's over 300 years old. I tried to tune it up the other day, but I can't tune it up any more.

[plays harmonica]

[indistinguishable voices in the background, harmonic plays over them]

Woman's voice: That's good now!

RR: I can't blow no more!

[plays harmonica, voices in background]

[clapping]

Woman's voice: You're pooped?!

RR: B-b-b-b-b

Woman's voice: Haha - that was very good!

RR: No!

JR: No?!

RR: I didn't play what I wanted on that. I got the wrong . . .

JR: Can you play that one?

[laughter]

RR: Those are out of tune! The hole's plugged.

[plays harmonica]

That's not what I want! I want a single one - that's a double. I can't play on the bass.

They said they had nothing left. They sold it to me for \$22.

(Woman's voice): No, \$30!

RR: It's a sin - selling a thing like that.

I was going to take it back, but they wouldn't take it back.

JR: You played well!

RR: But if I had a single one, with two octaves, then I could play something! I've never forgotten it. This is just a certain thing I can play.