

Maureen and Mike

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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: 120-002b
Interviewee: Margaret Woolaghan Nelson
Interviewer: May Vallance
Date of Interview: circa 1978
Project: Bitterroot Historical Society Oral History Project

May Vallance: Good morning, Margaret. Would you tell us a little bit about the history of your family and about the Fairview school?

Margaret Nelson: Well, in a way, I think my early childhood was not unusual or different than most other people that grew up at that time. We had lived in Butte where my father had been working, and his health was very poor so we decided to move to the Bitterroot and leased a farm down, well, near...I don't know whether anyone knows where Jonas Johnson (?) used to live. We lived there, and we moved into a little cabin, a log cabin, that hadn't been occupied for some time. This is one of the things that still is in my memory: the whole ceiling and the walls were covered with cheesecloth. The ceiling were covered with this cheesecloth and spider webs were everywhere, and of course, we had lamps. My mother lit a lamp, went to carry it from one room to another, and all the spider webs caught on fire in the ceiling. Of course, everybody was excited, but anyway all that burned was the spider webs. That, to me is something that stayed in my mind, and I was about five years old at that time. So anyway, eventually the house that was being built was finished and we moved into that, and there we lived until after my father passed away.

MV: Did he have some particular illness?

MN: Well, today I think we'd call it silicosis. Probably called it miner's consumption at that time, probably that black lung disease. He passed away, and of course, all his family—his seven sisters and two brothers lived in Butte and his mother—so he was to be buried in Butte.

Another thing that sticks in my mind is the morning we had to go to Butte on the train. Got up early that morning when we were leaving for Butte, and our neighbor Jonas Johnson took us down with his horse and buggy to Tucker Spur (?). We flagged down the train which was the custom in those days, that old passenger train dark as pitch and cold as Hades, and here up on top of a telephone pole was a cat, meowing pitifully—cold and lonely and afraid to come down. I'll always remember that. I've never seen the cat since so I guess he got down. Anyway, then we got on the train and went to Butte and attended my father's funeral and came back. At that time, my mother was pregnant with my youngest sister, Catherine (?). She still wanted to live in the Bitterroot, so she bought a small farm on the corner near Bear Creek. There we lived. We also moved into a log cabin there down along the Fred Burr Creek—where Fred Burr and Bear Creek joined. There my sister Catherine was born.

Well, I remember that night. It was very moonlight, and some neighbor was with Mother so us older children were ushered outside during this birthing problem. I can remember just another

moonlight night, beautiful. Of course, we didn't know what was going on. Children never knew then about babies that were coming until we came into the house and we had a new baby sister. So then, later, my mother built a house on that corner, and from there I went to school: walked to...what was the name? Fairview?

MV: Yes, Fairview.

MN: The Fairview school was...I don't know whether it was two miles or a mile and a half on top of a hill. The Blairs (?) lived next to us, and their two boys and us two girls went to school there, but I was going on eight years old at that time. I couldn't go to school until my sister Elizabeth was old enough to go to school, too. So there we went to school, and we had a man teacher, a Mr. Gall (?). I don't know whether I was exceptional or whatever happened, all I remember was reading, and I read everything. As fast as I could read through the readers, he promoted me to another grade. Of course, that didn't hurt my feelings. I just thought that was great, but I had never learned anything about the things that kids in the second grade even learn today. So then, sold the farm and moved to Hamilton. Here, I was ready for the fourth grade, and wasn't a fourth grade student at all. So my teacher Miss Lupton (?) suggested I go back to the third grade, so then I began to learn a bit about history and geography and all the things that I should have learned while I was in the first grade only didn't. From there on after we moved to Hamilton, why, I went along from there and got along fine. What else?

MV: Do you remember any incidences at school or some of the children that went to school? Did the Thrailkills go at that time?

MN: Yes, it was Byron Thrailkill. There was the upper grades. There was Lina Vizantiner (?). her daughter lives here in Hamilton and...oh dear. There was a Blackie, Willy Blackie (?), I think, and some of the Sestop (?) family. Oh, I can't remember all of them. The Blair (?) boys and myself and my sister. I think there was about eight or ten of us all together in school from 1st to the 8th grade. Of course, the schoolhouse was heated by a big old wood stove in the center of the school, kept us all nice and warm. In the spring before the snow was hardly off the ground, we'd go down and play in the field below the hill. Went barefoot one day and waded, and I couldn't get my stockings back on because my feet were so wet, so I had to go back into the school with just my shoes on which I got scolded for. I never did let my mother know that I had been wading in the icy water in the spring.

MV: Do you recall anything about a track that came down from a lumber mill and a car that was loaded with lumber, and it went under its own power down to the railroad track? Do you remember anything about that?

MN: No, never heard of it.

MV: You've never heard of that.

MN: Now, the Thrail...no, let's see, what was the name. There was a sawmill up in the timber, above our place. I can't think of the people's names. Still some of the families still live here, but I can't...Van Blarkens (?).

MV: Van Blarkens.

MN: Van Blarkens had a sawmill up there. I know we went up there to get the Christmas tree. My father was so weak, he sat in the buggy and Mother got out and cut down the tree. Of course, we ran around in the snow and thought we were helping her which, I don't think we could have very much, but got the Christmas tree up there near this mill. That was the Van Blarken mill.

After that, then mother sold the farm, and we moved to Hamilton. As I say, I was supposed to be in the fourth grade, but I wasn't able to do the work, so I was in the third grade.

MV: Yeah, and you went to the Old Washington School.

MN: The Old Washington School, and Miss Lupton, bless her heart, she was a teacher then and taught for so many years.

MV: Well, I certainly appreciate your telling of this, of your answers and your family history, and it will be very valuable information now and in the years to come.

[Break in audio]

This concludes Margaret Woolaghan Nelson's report on the Fairview School north of Woodside.

[End of Interview]