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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: 120-011c
Interviewee: Byron Thraikill and Mabel White Thraikill
Interviewer: May Vallance
Date of Interview: circa 1978
Project: Bitterroot Historical Society Oral History Project

May Vallance: Good afternoon. Would you please tell us your name and what you know about this Fairplay School that was up on top of the hill between Woodside and Victor?

Byron Thraikill: That was Fairview school.

MV: Fairview. Yes.

BT: Well, do you want my mother and dad's name first?

MV: That'd be fine.

BT: Do you want that first?

MV: Yes.

BT: My father was Jacob Thraikill. My mother was Eliza Annie Thraikill. I was born on April the 3rd of 1895 and my first year of school was in 1901. As I remembered, I think that—wasn't her [the teacher's] name Hannah Keeling?

MV: No, her mother's name wasn't Anna, but I have a recording that tells what her name was. But the last name was Keeling.

BT: Keeling. Anyway, I think maybe she must have been my first teacher, then. I don't remember anything in that particular picture.

MV: You have a picture there that was taken inside, which is very interesting, and it shows the double desks. That was when you were in first grade. Then you have another picture there. Would you tell us about that one?

BT: Well, this here one was taken, I would say, in the third or the fourth grade. Would you want the [names of] ones that I know in this particular picture?

MV: Why don't you take this one you had when you had a picnic, and tell us about this one of the picnic?

BT: All right, I'll see what...This is my nephew here. See, my mother raised my nephew, and we were just like brothers.

MV: That's interesting.

BT: That was about the—

Mabel Thraikill: He might be dead.

BT: —fourth or the fifth grade, I don't remember just when it was. The bunch here, the first one over here is young Catless. (?) I don't remember what his first name was, we used to always call him Fido. I don't know where we got that name. Then there was Willie Blackie and Lester Johnson, Hazel Miner, Earl Dow, John Catless, Mabel Johnson, Jesse Johnson, Anna Burns, and myself, Edith Nafis, and Theebee Thamander, May Thamander, Clarence Dowd, Minnie Sestock, Annie Sestock, Mary Burns, and a girl which I don't know, and Henry Catless, Rose Sestock, and Bessie Sestock, and our teacher, which was Sadie Whitney.

MV: She was from up the West Fork.

BT: Yes.

MV: What is that there, that's in back of you there? There's a building or something in back. Could you explain what it was?

BT: No, there's no building back there.

MV: Didn't you say there was something about a tramway?

BT: Well, it's a railroad track.

MV: All right, tell us about it.

BT: Well, that, up Fred Burr Canyon, there was a sawmill. MacDonald and somebody had this sawmill up there, and they [unintelligible] have cars on this narrow gauge railroad, and they would load the lumber up at the mill and then just turn it loose and it would come in come all the way down to Tupper's spur (?). They may had to pull it, maybe a couple hundred yards or so, but then they unloaded the lumber and put it on the car from there.

MV: On the train.

BT: On the train. Then they would have to pull those back up to the sawmill by horse, those lumber cars.

MV: How often? Once a day, did they send a load down?

BT: Yes, just about once a day is about all they'd do it.

MV: Well, that's very interesting because I've never known of a railroad track there or anything. I don't recall going over. I remember going to Missoula along about 1913 or '14 in an old Model T car, but I don't remember...

BT: Well, this was before that.

MV: Yes. Do you remember anything about what happened in the school? Did you have any social events, did you have any box socials or anything like that?

BT: Picnics was all we had, mostly.

[radio or T.V. in background becomes too loud to hear speakers]

MV: No box socials?

BT: Well, we had them, but I was too young [unintelligible].

MV: You didn't pay any attention to them.

BT: Any attention to them. The only thing I can remember which is very interesting when I think about it, is when I was going to school down there about the fourth grade or fifth grade maybe, Mr. Hynman (?) was our teacher from Victor. That was before he was married, of course. We went home for vacation for Christmas. We went back to school, and Mr. Hynman said, "Well, I got the mumps so we won't be able to have school for a few days." He was staying down at Jonas Johnson's right at the foot of the hill there and he invited us all in to listen to him play the mandolin, so we'd all get the mumps. So we did. All the kids on that side of the hill went to him to listen to him play the mandolin. Well, we all had the mumps. We were ready to go back to school before he was ready to. I was always thinking about that, if anything like that happened today.

MV: They'd be very unhappy, I'm telling you. You were lucky that you didn't have a hard case of the mumps.

BT: I didn't have. It was very easy. Those days, of course, we had everything like the mumps and the measles and chicken pox.

MV: No antibiotics at all, or I don't mean antibiotics, but nothing to prevent of having them like they have now. They have so many shots now. Mostly just picnics. Did they make home ice cream for the picnics?

BT: Oh, yes.

MV: Did you have baseball games and so forth?

BT: Yes, I think we did.

[T.V. or radio gets loud again]

MV: There must have been a barn there because Anne Keeling would relate that they put the horse in the barn.

BT: We didn't have any barn up there at that time.

MV: You didn't?

BT: Not when I went to school.

MV: I see. Well, she was only 3 years old, so she didn't remember too well. She has it in her story, which is perfectly all right. Is there anything else that you might tell us about?

BT: Well, I don't know of anything else unless you want me to name these—oh, I named these, didn't I?

MV: Yes.

MT: You can tell about the time you got the watermelons from [unintelligible]. Did you tell her about that? Wasn't that up at Fairview?

BT: This is Mabel Johnson; I didn't mention her.

MV: You said her name, yes.

BT: Did I?

MV: Well, you're all perfectly good kids and you didn't throw spitballs or anything like that in school.

BT: No. She mentioning about the watermelon. That is quite interesting. As far as I can remember, a Malloy had a watermelon patch at the back of the schoolhouse, up about a quarter of a mile, I guess. The fall of the year, one of the kids told the teacher that Mr. Malloy said that we could go up and help ourselves with the watermelons. So the teacher, he even took us all up there to get watermelons. We got up there and the first thing we know is somebody took a shot in the air. He ran us out of there. They hadn't done that at home.

MV: Is that the Mr. Malloy that later was up Hughes Creek? West Fork?

BT: I don't know where Spike went to from here. Spike Malloy was one of the same family, yes. I think that's the same one. That is his father.

MV: Well, I appreciate everything that you've told, and especially about that railroad track coming down from the mountains because I don't think very many people realize. I don't know whether they realized if there was even a mill up Fred Burr. All of these things are very important to the history and I think they do relate to the school, and I appreciate very much you telling this because I think this is going to be very valuable to the people and the younger generations as they come along in the Bitterroot. Thank you ever so much.

BT: You're entirely welcome.

MV: Mabel, would you tell us your name and your family name and about the school that you went to?

MT: My name was Mabel White and then I married Byron Thrailkill in 1916. But I started to school at Canyon Creek. It was over in western Hamilton. The first school we had was an old building, a wooden building. There was quite a few of us. My first teacher was Lou Pond. I can't remember what her name was after she married. I had two sisters and two brothers that went to school at same time I did.

MV: How long did you go to school in this wooden building?

MT: I was about in the fourth grade when they put up the new brick building. It's still over there.

MV: Was it a two-story building that they put up?

MT: No, it was one story at first and then they finally put the second story on. We used to have basket socials, and I can remember distinctly one time, I was just a little kid, about 7, 8 years old, and his name was Rick Daniels, and I was thinking his first name was Barney but I'm not sure about that. Anyway, he was determined to buy my basket, and he paid four dollars for it. Oh, was I proud because he said that I was his girl and, of course, he was a man, old man, middle-aged anyway. Anyway, then when I was about in about the fifth grade, we had three teachers in one season. The first teacher's name was Bartlett, and he was an Irishman. Every time before he'd let us out for recess or noon, he'd say, "Well, we'll have to have an Irish story before we let out school." So, then he'd tell us an Irish story.

MV: Do you remember any of the stories?

MT: Oh, yes. I remember one especially. These two Irishmen were going through the country, and they came to this this wheat field and they thought it was the ocean. The wind was blowing and the wheat was swishing back and forth so they thought it was the ocean. So they decided to take a swim. This one guy got up on top of a post and jumped off, and of course, when he hit the ground it just about broke his head back into his body. He said, "Oh, Pat, Pat, steer a little to the left. I hit a sandbar."

Well, anyway, there were lots of stories he told but that was one that stuck in my mind. Then the second teacher we had, name was Harris. He was a very nice guy, but for some reason or other, I don't know, they claimed they didn't pass—they had to take a test in the middle of the year and they didn't pass it. Whether that was true or not, I don't know. Then, our third teacher was a fellow by the name of Healy. He was really a wonderful teacher. He wouldn't stand for any foolishness but he did everything he could to make the kids happy. He had a— what do you call that, always have in the fall that the all the schools participate? Well, anyway, we had this contest with Hamilton. Of course, the Canyon Creek won.

MV: What kind of a contest was it?

MT: There was running and jumping and all that sort of...you know, the same as—

MV: Like we have a track meet.

MT: Yes, a track meet. That's what it was. The girls had a May pole, and we have this big pole in the schoolyard and they fastened all these long streamers to it and then we danced and sang "Come, Oh Come with Me" and "Round the May Pole." Of course, some of it wasn't very straight, but that was okay. [laughs]. Well, then we had basket socials ourselves and we always had Christmas programs. I remember one time when my sister was only about 3 years old, she could just talk good, and they found out that she could say "The Night Before Christmas." So they stood her up in front and nearly scared her to death and she spoke [recited] "The Night Before Christmas."

MV: At 3 years old.

MT: She was about 3 years old. Possibly a little more, I can't remember, but she was 3 years younger than I, so I imagine she was about 3. What do I say next?

MV: Did you have literary societies or anything like that?

MT: No, we didn't, not there. I went to school until I was through the seventh grade, and then my folks moved on a dryland ranch up east of Corvallis. They had a little school up there called Dominic and that's where I got my eighth grade.

MV: Was it Dominic?

MT: Dominic, yes.

MV: How interesting.

MT: Our teacher was, um, oh gee, she was from Corvallis, or her folks were. What the dickens was her name? I had it just a minute ago. Anyway, she—

MV: Do you recall who else went to Dominic?

MT: The Smith kids: there was Bill Smith and Zola Smith and Zeta Smith. Zola Smith is now—she was married to the Treece (?) boy that just died here a year or so ago. Then there was two or three smaller ones: Myrna and Murphy.

MV: Were Browns up there when you were there?

MT: Browns?

MV: Yes.

MT: No.

MV: No, they must have come later.

MT: Yes.

MV: Do you remember who was on the school board up there then?

MT: Well, old Charlie Smith mostly ran it. [laughs]

MV: He did? Who else was on it?

MT: I don't remember who else was. A fellow by the name of Gables, I think was one of them.

BT: You had all the Jenkins up there, too, didn't you?

MT: Oh, yes, there were a lot of Jenkinses up there. It was Vernon and Bill and the girl, the only girl they had, Cora Mae. She was younger than I. I don't think Mr. [Oscar] Jenkins was on school board, though. I don't remember who else was. Anyways, Smith tried to run the school. I remember definitely one time we decided we'd have a play. We decided we'd have Cinderella [laughs]. Of course, it was just wonderful because we really ran it ourselves. I mean, we were director and everything. Then one Thanksgiving, we had [The Courtship of] Miles Standish. We

played Miles Standish. I remember I was Pricilla. Bill Jenkins was that man that played the part of the—

MV: Alden.

MT: Alden, John Alden. William Smith was [the part of] John Smith. Of course, he stuttered and we really had quite a time, but the kids tease me about when I had to say, “Why don't you speak for yourself, John?” They got a big kick out of that and they teased me about it for a long time. Well then, they only had eight months of school down there, so I went to Corvallis for the ninth month so I could get through the eighth grade and took the state examination down there.

MV: Where did you have to go to take your examinations? Did someone come right there and your teacher give it to you?

MT: Oh, no. For physiology and geography, we had to come clear to Hamilton to take the state's examination.

MV: That was when you were in seventh grade.

MT: No, that was when I was in eighth grade, but it was in the middle of the term that we had to take those state's examinations. Then, when I was going to start to high school, the state examination we had to take down there we took at Corvallis. Then I went to Corvallis High School for two years, the first year and the second year. In my second year, we had the first girls' basketball team that they ever had in the valley. We won all the games we played. We beat Hamilton and Darby and we even beat the Missoula University girls. Of course, we were very proud of ourselves. That was the two Cross girls, Lily and Helen, Clara Bowler, she was Clarrie Schultz at that time, and Violet Hay, and Dorothy Sheldon, and myself. Mabel Lockwood was a substitute, but she never did play a game. Let me see, oh, Beatrice Morgan was a sub. Miss Rockwell, our English teacher, was our chaperone, and W.S. Bailey (?), our principal, was our coach. He was the one that decided that we could beat the Missoula University girls, so he challenged them, and they came up and we beat them. We beat Stevensville, too.

MV: I can very well remember that because I was a freshman then, and we lived way over on the west side so that I couldn't play very often, but I used to stay with Violet Hay and practice with you. I recall one time that you played with the boys so that you would be good and strong so you could beat the Lumberjacks in Darby and the girls up there that were so rough and tumble. I remember that you were playing Darby one time—this was later when Bethel Gaimon was your coach. Do you remember?

MT: No. She was never our coach.

MV: That must have been the next year after you left. They'd have their personal fous and they didn't have anybody to put in, then she saw me. She said, "May, go. Only four minutes." I thought that she meant I had to go down those four flights of stairs to the basement, get in a suit, and get back up there in four minutes, and I certainly tore around. I couldn't find any shoes except Lillian Cross and they were about three sizes too big for me, and I come rushing up, and she said, "Now, guard them careful. That's all you have to do. If we just hold them for four minutes. Now, don't let them make a basket." We won the game. I can definitely remember you. I always thought that you were such a lady. You all seemed so precise [unintelligible; radio / TV too loud] I can see you walking up and down the aisle. As I recall, you had a blue serge skirt with a shirtwaist of some kind of other. I remember Miss Rockwell. Wasn't she a doll?

MT: Oh, she certainly was.

[Talking over each other]

MV: But she was very nice. Now do you recall—

[Break in audio]

MT: I thought we'd start talking. At the end of the year they did a big party for us. They were very proud of us because we were the champions. I think Helen Beryl and Sarah Bowler and I-

[Break in audio]

After I graduated, you might say, from the from the sophomore class, then I met Byron Thraikill and of course, we got married.

MV: Well, I certainly appreciate all of this. It's been very interesting, and I've been trying to find someone that went to the Dominic school that would tell about this, and of course, the Canyon Creek School was very interesting and I thank you ever so much.

MT: [unintelligible]

MV: This concludes the interview with Byron Thraikill who attended the Fairview School, district number 10, and his wife Mabel White Thraikill, who attended Canyon Creek School, district 18, and Dominic School, district number 30.

[End of Interview]