

Maureen and Mike

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The following transcript was provided to Archives and Special Collections by [The Gathering: Collected Oral Histories of the Irish in Montana](#) with its associated audio recording.

**Oral History Number: 435-040**

**Interviewee: Kathleen "Kay" Schweitzer**

**Interviewer: James Hamel**

**Date of Interview: January 23, 2011**

**Project: The Gathering – Collected Oral Histories of the Irish in Montana**

James Hamel: Good morning.

Kathleen Schweitzer: Good morning, Jim.

JH: Today we are completing a video and interview for The Gathering Project about people of Irish descent in Montana. It is Wednesday, January the 23rd, 2011, and we are at The Waterford which is located in Helena, Montana. This is where Kay Schweitzer lives. She is the descendant of Irish immigrants and we are going to learn about Kay and her family and what she did in Montana. So, Kay I would like you to state your name for our historical record, spell your first name please if you would and your last name.

KS: My first name Kathleen, K-A-T-H-L-E-E-N and my second name is Schweitzer, S-C-H-W-E-I-T-Z-E-R.

JH: Is it alright if I call you Kay?

KS: Fine, that's what I go by.

JH: Kay, they want me to ask you this for the historical record. When were you born?

KS: I was born on September 24<sup>th</sup>, 1927.

JH: Where were you born?

KS: I was born on the old homestead farmhouse.

JH: And where was that?

KS: That was five miles north of Box Elder on the bench.

JH: Now is Box Elder near the Canadian border?

KS: No. Box Elder is probably 150 miles from the Canadian border.

JH: Where would you reference it in Montana? What county maybe?

KS: In Hill County. Hill County was where I was born and Hill County is located probably in the middle of the state, central.

JH: Your parents were Irish immigrants?

KS: Yes they were.

JH: What was their name?

KS: My dad's name was Michael Patrick McKernen and do you want to know when he came over?

JH: Sure.

KS: He came over in 1875---he was born in 1875 and came over in 1906.

JH: Were he and your mother married in Ireland?

KS: No. They didn't know each other in Ireland.

JH: Okay. They married in Montana?

KS: They married in Havre, Montana yes.

JH: Havre is up on the high line?

KS: Yes, Havre is up on the high line.

JH: What was your mother's name?

KS: My mother's name was Hannah Friel.

JH: Could you spell the last name for me please?

KS: The last name?

JH: Yes.

KS: F-R-I-E-L.

JH: And might she have come from Donegal, Ireland?

KS: Yeah, she came from Donegal, that's where she was born.

JH: A lot of Friel's up there in Donegal?

KS: That's what I've heard. When we went over there we went to Mass with the Friel's and that church was full of Friel's.

JH: All right now, were you the first born? Where do you fit in, in the chain of children of your parents?

KS: I was the fourth one born.

JH: How many children did your parents have?

KS: They had five. My brother was the first one born and he was born on St. Patrick's Day and they called him Michael Patrick McKernan.

JH: It fits well. And how about the next sibling?

KS: My sister, Mary, was born November 3<sup>rd</sup> and really I don't know the year right now.

JH: Okay, the next one?

KS: The next one was Nora and she was born on November 3<sup>rd</sup> too, only three years later.

JH: And they you come along.

KS: Yes.

JH: And then---

KS: Then my sister, Patty.

JH: And she was the last of the children?

KS: She was the last one born.

JH: Are any of them living?

KS: My sister Nora and Patty are living.

JH: And where do they live?

KS: My sister Patty lives in Rudyard and Nora lives in Havre.

JH: Ruyard, Montana?

KS: Ruyard, Montana, both in Montana.

JH: Havre, up on the high line?

KS: Yes.

JH: Now as long as we are on this subject, where did you grow up in Montana?

KS: I grew up in---I was born in Box Elder five miles north of Box Elder and I grew up in Box Elder.

JH: Did you go to the Box Elder schools?

KS: Part time we did.

JH: In other words---would you help at the ranch?

KS: Yes, yeah, we were in the middle of World War II, my brother had to go to the service and so us girls had to take over the ranch. My folks weren't really well to be able to do much.

JH: Did you do manual work?

KS: Oh, for sure.

JH: Tell me a little about the manual work.

KS: The manual work---well it was milking cows that's for sure, driving tractor---

JH: Did you have to shovel the barns?

KS: Oh yeah, for sure, yeah and also helping with the harvest, putting the wheat in the granaries. It was a lot of hard work and we lived up to it.

JH: Where there any favorite family foods that maybe your parents brought from Ireland, recipes or anything like that?

KS: Potatoes fixed any which way there was.

JH: All right. Now you grew up on the ranch, at some point you must have met a young man you liked.

KS: Well, I guess I did alright. My older sister, Mary and her husband took us to a dance in Rudyard. And that was my sister, Patty and I. And they left us there and we didn't know anybody. Well, unknown to us there was two young men that had just got home from the service that were childhood friends and they come and asked us to dance. So we danced and we partied together and we both became engaged and we had a double wedding in the St. Jude's Church in Havre where my folks were married.

JH: You said St. Jude's Church?

KS: St. Jude's Church, yes.

JH: When were you married?

KS: I'm not sure on that, but it was in the fall and it was after harvest.

JH: Okay, now what was your husband's name?

KS: My husband's name was Adam Schweitzer and he didn't have a middle name.

JH: Alright and children came along didn't they?

KS: Oh yes.

JH: And how many children did you have?

KS: We had six children. Five boys and one daughter.

JH: Now would you tell me the names of the children and maybe just a little bit about them?

KS: Okay.

JH: In order of their birth. We'll start with the oldest.

KS: Okay, our oldest son was Darwin and he was born June 22<sup>nd</sup> and right now I can't come up with the year. I should have though---1947 he was born.

JH: All right, we'll hear Darwin's name again on this, but please go on with your next child.

KS: And then it Warren and he was born June 9<sup>th</sup>, 1949 and they have one daughter and she is studying medicine. She graduated from Harvard and is going on to another New York College.

JH: Now, say that I didn't quite hear the name of the second child, would you say it again for the record?

KS: Warren, W-A-R-R-E-N.

JH: Okay, and would you go on now to your next child?

KS: Mike. He was born February 21, 1954 and he is a doctor over in Billings and also he went back to college and got his degree in Hospital Management so he is one of the managers of the big hospital in Billings, St. Vincent's.

JH: Okay, next please?

KS: The next one is Brian, everybody kind of knows about Brian. He was born September 4<sup>th</sup>, 1955.

JH: And then he works for the people of the State of Montana doesn't he?

KS: Yes that's what he does and I hope he is doing a good job.

JH: Oh, I'm sure he is. Is he at work right now? (Laughing).

KS: Probably so. I hope he doesn't come here.

JH: No, I don't think he will be here today, because he's busy---I hope and he works in the Capitol doesn't he?

KS: Yes he does work in the Capitol.

JH: And what does he do?

KS: He's the Governor of Montana.

JH: And this is his second term?

KS: This is his second term.

JH: And he can't have another term because they can only have two terms.

KS: That's right.

JH: Alright, would you please go on.

KS: Then we have Walter and Walter was born January 30<sup>th</sup>, 1962 and he bought the Schweitzer home ranch and he is running that ranch and also has a job on the side.

JH: Okay and I think he has worked down here in Helena for a while too and now who's next?

KS: Our daughter Mary. She was born on St. Patrick's Day in 1965 and she was the last one, so we named her---I always said if I had a girl I'd name her Mary so she was named Mary and Adam said "oh, she looks just like grandma" and his grandma's name was Francis so we called her Mary Francis Patricia.

JH: Alright. Now, your children were born in hospitals?

KS: Yes they were.

JH: But you weren't.

KS: No, that's right. I was born during thrashing season. My dad had to have the thrashing machine moved to the neighbor's place because my mother couldn't cook for the crew if she was having a baby, so they stopped probably just a week or 10 days and mother had me and I then they went back to thrashing again.

JH: So they had to stop thrashing waiting for your arrival?

KS: That's right.

JH: You held up the whole ranch. (Laughing).

KS: Whole ranch (laughing), I was important.

JH: Alright, I can see that. Now, what I'd like to do now is shift a little bit. You and Adam got a ranch didn't you?

KS: That's right.

JH: Where was that ranch?

KS: Well when we first got married we moved into the Schweitzer homestead ranch and that was 25 miles north of Rudyard just where the Milk River comes in out of Canada.

JH: And ultimately did you ranch on that ranch for awhile?

KS: Yes, we had---we were raising grain and cattle and if you don't mind I'd like tell you a story about the cattle.

JH: About the Simmentals?



KS: No this is the Herefords.

JH: Herefords, alright well please tell us.

KS: Okay. My husband was very interested in cattle and he was always reading cattle magazines and pointing out to me what kind of bull we should buy to breed our cattle. So come time for a bull sale in Havre, we went to it and Adam was walking around making notes of which bull he was going to buy and I kept saying "Adam, that's the bull you want. That's the one you been showing me." He said "oh, we can't buy that bull. It's the Higgin's brother's bull and they always get top of the market. We just have to settle for something else." So the sale came on and we found out that good 'ol (word unintelligible) Domino was down the line; that was the name of the bull. Because he had hurt his foot when he got off the trailer so he didn't judge too good. So when he came in Adam started bidding on him and when the bid was closed and he had the bull, that was all the money we had. We drove home and couldn't even buy a can of pop 'cause we had no more money.

JH: Was the bull a good investment?

KS: Oh, wonderful, yeah we had commercial cattle that time and later we bought some registered cattle and he changed our whole herd.

JH: Now, well stop there on this subject, but we're going to come back to it. What I'd like to do, since we've brought you forward into your married life and ranch and we know of the children you had over the years. I want to talk a little bit about your parents.

KS: Okay.

JH: You've already identified them, but let's say them again for the record.

KS: My dad, Michael Patrick McKernen and my mother, Hannah Friel.

JH: And he was called Irish---?

KS: Irish Mike.

JH: How'd he get that name?

KS: He was Irish Mike (laughing).

JH: Was that a name he had in Ireland or---?

KS: No, I don't think so. When he got settled in the homestead there he was very active in local affairs and national affairs. One of the first things he did when he got settled in Box Elder was to build a Catholic Church. We didn't have any place to worship---he didn't or his family, so he took Father (word unintelligible) all around the country in his buggy and horse raising money from Big Sandy to Chester to the whole territory and they did raise enough money to build that Catholic Church and that Catholic Church is still there thriving and has a good group a people that attend.

JH: So he brought his Irish Catholic faith to Montana.

KS: That's right.

JH: And kept it going.

KS: That's right.

JH: What did he do in Ireland before he came to America.

KS: My dad come through---his certificate shows that he was an engineer. My dad had a pretty good education and his family had creameries in Ireland and so he probably worked in the creamery. And he was a great bicycle rider. He won bicycle races in Ireland.

JH: Oh, now for the record, a creamery would be like a dairy, I guess.

KS: No, a creamery would be like making the cream into butter or ice cream---something like that.

JH: So the finished product.

KS: Finished product, yes.

JH: Okay, and how about your---where did you father---do you know where he entered the United States?

KS: He came through Ellis Island, both of them did.

JH: Your father came over by ship?

KS: Yes, that's right.

JH: Where did he grow up?

KS: He grew up in Ireland in Cookstown, Ireland, County Tyrone.

JH: Was he proud of County Tyrone?

KS: Oh, you can bet on it. When he was about 16 years old he got his arm in a thrashing machine and they had to put a new joint in there, completely new and the doctors here in the United States when they looked at it, they couldn't believe that they had that ability at that time. So his one arm was shorter than the other and strangely enough we talk about it to my sisters and none of us ever noticed that he had one arm shorter than the other. We just thought he was---

JH: That's the way it was.

KS: Yes.

JH: How about your mom? We've identified her as possibly from up in Donegal.

KS: Yes.

JH: What was her background in Ireland?

KS: Well she came over here when she was quite young. And she came---their uncle Hughey [sp] who was from Spokane who was in the railroad and in the shipping business paid their way to come over here and also got them a job at the Spokane Hospital. But she wasn't planning on coming over. Her sister Bridgett was the one that was to come and was all ready to come. And so a week before, no she wasn't going to go, she had a boyfriend, so my mother took her place. And she was only 15 or 16 years old.

JH: So her mother and your mother came over together? Is that right?

KS: No it would be her sister. Her sister Mary Hull [sp] who was from Chester.

JH: So the two sisters came over together.

KS: Yeah, that's right.

JH: How old was your mother when she came over, do you have any idea?

KS: You know, it's been tossed around among the family, but as far I we can figure out she was 15 or 16. She was just a child yet.

JH: Quite a trip. To sail across the Atlantic Ocean to Ellis Island.

KS: That's right.

JH: And then she went to Spokane?

KS: Yes, it was nice that they had things set up for 'em.

JH: Do you know if your parents spoke any Gaelic?

KS: They claimed they did, but I'm not sure. I never thought my dad or my mother had a brogue until I talked to them on the telephone.

JH: How old would you say Irish Mike and your mom were when they were married? How old do you think they were?

KS: My dad was---well he was born---my dad was probably 35 and my mother was 10 years younger.

JH: So 25 roughly.

KS: Yeah.

JH: Did your dad have a lot of experience in ranching or did he sort of gain it in Montana?

KS: No I don't think he did, but from what I can figure out he had money enough to get things done for himself. And remember he was a cripple, he had just arm to use and so the homestead house that I remember was a three bedroom---no a three-room house with a beautiful porch, a screened in porch which we lived in all summer long and if he didn't have money, you know, he hired carpenters to do all this so he had his own money.

JH: He did a lot of things up there besides build a church and ranch.

KS: Oh yes, he became very active in building the Tiber Dam which is now called Lake Elway. This was supposed to be a dam for irrigation and that is a big dam. It is over 30-40 miles long. It came off of the Marias River and at least 10 miles wide. And so he, at that time, had a good old Model T Ford and he drove that Model T Ford all around getting petitions signed, having meetings, giving speeches and he would send them to Burton K. Wheeler who he seemed to have known, but I don't think he actually did. And so Burton K. Wheeler would send letters back to him saying "Irish Mike, Box Elder, Montana."

JH: Now Burton K. Wheeler was a U.S. Senator.

KS: That's right, yeah. A very important man in Washington D.C.

JH: Now for the record, we are going to spell Tiber. Is it T-I-B-E-R?

KS: T-I-B-E-R.

JH: And Lake Elwell is E-L-W-E-L-L.

KS: That's right.

JH: How did the lake get the name Elwell?

KS: The name was named Elwell after a judge in Havre that worked really hard getting that dam built too.

JH: What was the original plan for that dam?

KS: The original plan for that dam was irrigation and that's what my dad was interested in. That whole area should have been flooded with water for irrigation, but instead of that it was the recreation called Lake Elway and it stayed that way for many years until just recently they--- Rocky Boy Reservation group organized a way to put in a big pipeline. And that pipeline is 36", a huge pipeline and that pipeline will take water from Tiber or Elway Lake down through Box Elder, Rocky Boy, Big Sandy, all of the towns along the high line and they'll be able to have all the---right now it's difficult to get water on the high line. They got to haul it and so now they'll have clean water for their drinking, water for their gardens, for yards, for trees and bushes and it'll make Montana look a little like Ireland and this is what my dad wanted.

JH: So he really got going some things that would help the dry land in central Montana.

KS: Yes, dry land in central Montana and good ground, but no water.

JH: You must have known a little bit about cattle growing up on the ranch.

KS: Yeah, but I became educated on better cattle married to Adam.

JH: So I want to go back a little bit to your parents. Did they ever talk to you about the trip across the ocean?

KS: You know they didn't. My sisters and I talk about this and if they did we didn't pay any attention.

JH: Did they have any Irish songs?

KS: Songs? Oh yeah, my dad was a great storyteller and he had a real good voice.

JH: Any favorite songs you can remember?

KS: Well I suppose, right now I can't remember any of them. But we had music.

JH: Did anybody play an instrument?

KS: Well I learned to play the violin.

JH: That's a pretty tough one.

KS: I wasn't good, but I learned because my dad wanted me to. And then I was in the band and I played the horn in the band, the Box Elder band and then we had twirling lessons, leaders, twirling lessons, baton twirling.

JH: Baton twirling?

KS: Yeah, and I got to be pretty good at that so I was the drum major then, leader of the band.

JH: Did you wear a uniform?

KS: Oh yeah, I've got pictures of myself in that.

JH: In uniform?

KS: Well we had short skirts and big hats and boots.

JH: With tassels on them?

KS: That's right.

JH: White boots?

KS: That's right.

JH: Oh, I get the picture now.

KS: I thought I was pretty good.

JH: And you must have been hot stuff (laughing) in high school huh?

KS: I wouldn't say that.

JH: Oh, okay, but people---your classmates certainly knew you.

KS: Oh yes, for sure. It was a small school.

JH: What high school was that?

KS: It was the Box Elder High School.

JH: And how many were in your class, your graduating class?

KS: Eight.

JH: Eight and how many would you say were in the whole school?

KS: Probably about 25 or 30 of us, a small school. Can I tell you something about going to Box Elder school?

JH: You sure can.

KS: I always defended somebody that people were giving a bad time to. And so we had a black boy going to school in our grade and he got into a fire and was burned up on the side of his face and everybody picked on him including the teachers. And I always defended him and so we were later---many years later at a Box Elder reunion and I was sitting there and I looked up and I saw that man---grown up man and I said to my husband, Adam, "why do I do all that, he don't even remember me. He couldn't care less." So pretty soon this man come walking over to our table and he said "are you Kathleen McKernan?" I said yes. He said "I want to thank you for everything you did to protect me when we were going to school."

JH: That's wonderful.

KS: It made me happy.

JH: You know, I thought of something we should do for this record. I don't think we spelled McKernan. Could you spell it for me?

KS: M-c-K-E-R-N-A-N.

JH: Do you know anything about the origin of the name McKernan?

KS: No, really and dad didn't have a lot of family back in Ireland. My mother of course had the Friel's and all the family, but we did meet the family that was there and they've been over to meet us.

JH: So you've been back to Ireland.

KS: Oh yes.

JH: When was the first time you went back?

KS: The first time we went back was probably about 20 years ago. And I didn't go back other times.

JH: Did you ever have the opportunity to go back to Ireland with your parents?

KS: No. My mother went back to Ireland, but my dad didn't really want to go back. He didn't like what was going on there at the time.

JH: There was the Irish drive for freedom.

KS: That's right.

JH: And the controversy over that and of course the British had the Black and Tans.

KS: That's right.

JH: Did your father ever talk about that?

KS: Well, he was a historian and he was quite well educated and he did talk about that, but we didn't listen too much. But he certainly was aware of everything that was going on there.

JH: So he kept up on Irish events?

KS: That's right.

JH: And now your parents aren't living?

KS: No, they are both gone. My dad lived to be 100 though.

JH: 100 years young, wow.

KS: Yes.

JH: Where did he pass away?

KS: He passed away at my older sister's house---actually he was at my older sister's house and then we traded taking care of him so he was at our ranch in Geyser when he passed away.

JH: In Montana.



KS: I was taking care of him. Yes.

JH: And he lived to be 100 years old?

KS: Yes.

JH: Do you remember when he died?

KS: Right now I can't come up with the date. But I certainly remember because I was home alone and it was a blizzard out there.

JH: How about your mother?

KS: My mother passed away in a Great Falls Hospital and she was about, I think around 68 when she passed away and she had diabetes and had to do surgery on her legs.

JH: So your father was probably---she was 10 years younger. So he was probably 78 when his wife passed away.

KS: That's right.

JH: Well at this point, Kay, I think we'll take a moment's break and we will be back. Thank you for everything so far, but we want to do more.

KS: Thank you Jim.

JH: Well, Kay we've learned a little bit about you, but you know there's always something anecdotal. Some little side story that might have been in the papers, who knows. I understand that you got some experience shall we say moving apples as a young girl. Do you want to tell me about that please?

KS: Moving apples. That would be the story about going to the conventions and having us be able to get all the free apples.

JH: You sort of borrowed some I guess from the convention.

KS: You know I honestly don't know what you're talking about.

JH: Well, was there a convention, some sort of a political convention and they had apples and things and you went up and got some of those apples?

KS: Yes I'm sure. We always did, yes. Because you know things were tough on the farm at that time and we didn't have a lot of things that we had to buy. We had to potatoes sure; we had meat sure, but not very many apples.

JH: So when these conventions came you could go sort of grab an apple at the table now and then.

KS: Or two.

JH: Or two. Did they write an article about that in the local paper?

KS: You know I don't remember, but they probably did.

JH: Okay, well we'll shift from that and the apples. Now I'd like to talk about your life. Your parents are from Ireland. They get into ranching, you marry Adam and you raise a family. I'd like to talk about your experiences on the cattle ranch.

KS: Okay that'll be fine.

JH: And eventually you and Adam got your own ranch separate from the one that your parents had.

KS: That's right.

JH: Where was that ranch?

KS: It was in Judith Basin County, between Great Falls and Lewistown.

JH: And you raised cattle on the ranch.

KS: Yes, cattle and grain and hay.

JH: Okay. Did you get into breeding cattle?

KS: Yes we did. When we moved to the Judith Basin my husband's dream was always to raise registered stock. By registered stock I mean there's cattle that are every bit as good, but they do not have the pedigree. They're not full bloods and so we bought a small herd of full-blood Herefords and bred from there. And so the first bull that we ever showed---we got a chance to show a bull in Lewistown, Montana and the first bull that my husband ever led into an arena or I ever groomed was Grand Champion of that sale.

JH: Tell me something about grooming a bull? How do you groom a bull?

KS: Well, things like everything else changes over history, but on a Hereford bull, we left their hair as long as could be because at that time people were raising short compact cattle and of course the longer the hair the more compact they looked. And of course you brushed on the hair and you trained them to lead and those are the kind of things that I was in charge of.

JH: How many head of cattle did you have on the ranch, say at the beginning?

KS: Well when we moved into Judith Basin we had about 100 head.

JH: And was that enough to make a living on?

KS: Oh no. We had grain and hay and other things for sale.

JH: And you mentioned your husband was interested in cattle and pure bred.

KS: Yes, full bloods.

JH: Full bloods. Well we better clean this up for the record. Now a pure bred is a certain percentage?

KS: Yes. You start out with the half and the three-quarter and you get to a 7/8 and a 7/8 is a pure bred. But you can never become a full blood animal from a pure bred.

JH: Because they're not full blooded.

KS: They're not pure.

JH: They're mixed still.

KS: That's right.

JH: No matter how small the mix is, they're still a mix.

KS: Yes.

JH: And did you and your husband get into breeding a different type of cattle.

KS: Yes. We bred Herefords and Adam was very interested in a form of (word unintelligible). At that time people just bought bulls and threw them out with their cattle and didn't pay too much attention to birth weights and yearling weights. But my husband always kept those records. He weighed the cattle to make sure and at that time pure bred cattle of any which kind were raising the compact cattle and the calves were only weaned off in the fall at 300, 400 or maybe 500 pounds. And we always felt that wasn't good enough. So Adam became very

involved and formed a (word unintelligible) organization and at one time he organized a load of cattle to go to Humbolt, Iowa and when all these cattle were fed together to prove that the different bulls did produce different cattle. And as time went on people started accepting the bigger cattle, liking the 600, 700, 800 pounds they weaned off at. And when you wean off calves at 600, 700, 800 pounds you can put them directly in a feed lot finish them out and slaughter them in a year and one-half, where those little compact cattle took two years to do the same job.

JH: So basically he got into breeding cattle that got bigger faster.

KS: That's right. And the whole country changed that way. Instead of the compact cattle they started all growing bigger cattle.

JH: I'd like you to tell me a little bit about how you got into bigger cattle, what the name of the breed was and I think it entailed a trip back to Ireland.

KS: Yes. I'm glad you asked that question. We sent our son, Darwin, back to Ireland to buy cattle. Now see the reason why these Simmental were in Ireland was that you couldn't get the certificate to bring the cattle from Switzerland or Germany or France and so the Irish people were smart enough where they got the cattle to come into Ireland and then they could sell the calves. So when Darwin went over there he bought the baby calves right on their mothers. And he had to leave them there for a whole year to clear all the tests that they had to run. So by the time they got to our place, our ranch, they were a year old. And he bought seven head of females and three bulls and two of the bulls didn't clear the health so we ended up with one bull which we were happy for. We didn't want to pay for any more than one bull and the heifers.

JH: Did that bull have a name?

KS: Yeah, Irish Red Knight.

JH: K-N-I-G-H-T?

KS: K-N-I-G-H-T. Right.

JH: Now for the record I'm just going to spell Simmental and you tell me if I got it right. I understand from you that they were raised in the alpine regions of Europe.

KS: That's right.

JH: Then we get them over to Ireland as you just described and Simmental is spelled S-I-M-M-E-N-T-A-L.

KS: That's right. You got it.

JH: Okay, now tell me what happened when you get this Irish Red Knight, big bull---was he a big bull?

KS: Oh, for sure.

JH: Do we have a picture of him here?

KS: Oh yes.

JH: Well let's take one minute pause and let's get him in the picture. Now Kay, we're back on the record here and we have a picture of Irish Red Knight for our record and is Irish Red Knight a full blood?

KS: Irish Red Knight was a full-blood Simmental.

JH: Okay. I think I need to learn about the Simmentals a little bit from you. So let's go back a bit before you get big Irish Red Knight and tell me about that please.

KS: Well me and my husband was interested in (word unintelligible) bigger cattle. We needed to find one and so he was looking towards Europe to see those animals, the Simmental animal and others and in the meantime he met a man by the name of Travis Smith from Canada and he also was on the same feeling as Adam was. And so he had gone to Europe and he did find, after looking at all the cattle over there, he did find this Simmental bull named Parisian and he brought him over into Canada and collected semen out of him and so then we could buy semen. And so my husband, Adam, bought 20 straws of semen and then he had to go to the A.I. school to learn how to inseminate the cattle. And so it was quite late in the fall by the time the semen arrived so the cattle---we had to save over 20 or 30 head of cattle to breed to this bull. So we used the semen and the calves were born in November of that year, 1968 if I remember right and he was---they were the first Simmental calves to be born in the United States and Canada and when the story got out our phones just rang off the hook. People wanted to know more about that bull. At the same time everything changed, everybody wanted to raise bigger cattle so we answered the questions and then come summer time they drove from Canada and all over the United States to look at these calves and of course they fit what we wanted. So then Adam decided after we had the Simmental calf---oh, one guy from Texas come up and wanted to buy the whole works. But we didn't sell 'em. And so we decided to have a sale, sell some of our Hereford cattle and some of the Simmental calves. So we advertised this sale, Hereford's and then we added Simmental down here, very small, because we still didn't know what we had in hand. And the phone started ringing off the hook, everybody asking about those Simmental calves. And so the next ad we put out, it was big print, SIMMENTAL and so the day of the sale which was---

JH: 1970 maybe?

KS: Yeah. The day of the sale we had our cattle of course all moved into Great Falls into the sale yards and the sale owner of the yards came out in the noon news and said "my yards are full from every state in the union and Canada" and he couldn't understand what was going on here. So the Simmental cattle did sell really good in that sale and we were really proud and it started the Simmental all over the United States and Canada. People went home and ordered Simmental semen and bred their cattle. That was the beginning of the Simmental and of course when those calves were born they were just half cross. So we raised those half cross for a few years and decided what we really need to do is have full bloods, 100% full bloods. So that's when we sent our son, Darwin, to Ireland to buy these cattle.

JH: Now when you say half cross, were they half crossed with Herefords?

KS: Or they could be---ours was half crossed with Herefords. Many people had the half and three-quarter cross with Charolais or Black Angus or all the other breeds too.

JH: So you and your husband were the first to bring Simmentals to the United States of America and Canada.

KS: Our ranch is known as the birth place of Simmental in the United States and Canada. And two years ago they decided to promote that and they called it 40 Years and Counting. And so the national magazine of Simmental called us and they wrote the story about our ranch so that they could have it in the Simmental (word unintelligible).

JH: Is the Simmental magazine called The Register?

KS: That's right.

JH: In fact there is a Simmental museum in Bozeman isn't there?

KS: There perhaps is, yes.

JH: And you were in that museum?

KS: Our calf. It's in the national office, hanging in the national office. It's a painting that I had done and donated it to the Simmental. Are you looking for the magazine?

JH: Yes I am.

KS: Get The Register off the table.

JH: And I understand that that museum, that place in Bozeman is in Montana because you and your husband were the first ones to bring them into America.

KS: That's right.

JH: And in fact we have a copy of The Register right here and I want you to hold it up and show it on camera so we can get that on camera. And now I think we can find the article about you in it. I'd like you to hold up that article and that's a picture on the left side there or right as you look at it, of you and your husband, Adam.

KS: Yeah. And there's a picture of Irish Red Knight and the first calf.

JH: The first calf there is black and white---it looks like.

KS: It's brown and white.

JH: Brown and white and there's Irish Red Knight right there.

KS: That's right.

JH: And the article is entitled 40 Years and Counting, The first in the series of articles marking the 40th anniversary of the American Simmental Association.

KS: That's right.

JH: A lot of this is about you and your husband and how that breed got here.

KS: Yes it was about my husband and myself on the Simmental breed.

JH: So right now as I look at you on February 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2011 and we're talking about what we got from Ireland---we got your parents, we got you and your family and brothers and sisters and we got all of your children and the other children because your parents came over from Ireland.

KS: That's right.

JH: You are the daughter of these Irish immigrants who came to Montana, started ranching and now we have also from Ireland, but through you, a whole breed of cattle.

KS: Irish cattle.

JH: They are bigger and stronger.

KS: That's right.

JH: And in fact I think you told me earlier not on tape, but I'd like you to tell me about it---you used to take those cattle to shows now and then.

KS: That's right. We started showing the cattle and started wining and so we showed in almost every big show in the United States and Canada. And then we sold them into a foreign market. I'd like to tell you about the Montana bull.

JH: Sure.

KS: When he was born I really kind of liked that bull and I watched him grow up and he was a big, thick bull. So I said to myself, I was in charge of the records, I'm going to name him Montana and maybe we'll sell to a foreign country. And sure enough we got a chance to sell him to a foreign country. And so in order to get him there we put him on a truck and he was shipped to Florida by truck. And when he got to Florida we had decided to put him on a plane. So to keep him still while we were in flight they build a box for him. And when they went to put it on the plane it wouldn't fit because it was too high, so they had to redo the box and hunker the bull down to get him on the plane. So they got him to Argentina, Buenos Aries, Argentina and we sold him to this man and he showed him shortly after that and in the first show he won Grand Champion bull in Buenos Aries and my son Brian has been to Argentina and he has seen his name still in bull books being used by the Argentine people.

JH: So we have Ireland, Montana to Argentina, Buenos Aries.

KS: That's right.

JH: Any other shows where you showed your bulls?

KS: We showed our bulls and heifers in Canada and many times we had the top selling animal because we had some of the first bull-blood Simmentals to be there. And we showed them in Alberta, Canada and Regina. We showed in North Dakota, several eastern places and we showed in the Denver Stock Show, always in the Denver Stock Show.

JH: How was that Denver Stock Show? Did you meet anybody interesting at it?

KS: Oh for sure. I was there at the show and I always was looking for a super bull to breed these cattle we had, a special super bull. And so I looked down the aisle and I saw that bull standing out there so I went down to look at it. There was a lady there brushing around the floor to make things nice and she said "Hi Kay, how are you?" And so we chatted for some time. And finally I said, "You know I really can't remember who you are." Oh, she said, "I'm Peggy Rockefeller."

JH: And she's related to the Rockefeller? She is a Rockefeller.



KS: Oh yes, from New York. And at that time when the Simmental cattle came in, it was mostly women that were running it and so Peggy Rockefeller for a hobby or whatever took on running a herd of cattle. She even went as far as to do A.I. herself and embryo transplanting.

JH: And for the record A.I. is artificial insemination.

KS: Artificial insemination right.

JH: Did you show any of them at the Cow Palace in San Francisco?

KS: Oh yes. We took our bull, Progress, to the Cow Palace in San Francisco, actually to tell the truth we didn't take him. We were showing in Billings and my son, Darwin, had his Angus string over there and he of course was winning and we were winning too. And so Darwin said "say, I'm going to the Cow Palace and let me take the Simmental back to Idaho with me and I'll take him to the Cow Palace and show him. So that all was arranged and so we flew out to take part of the Cow Palace and we had Grand Champion Simmental bull and he had Grand Champion Angus bull and so we were walking around looking at all the cattle that were there and we were the only real farmers that were there, ranchers or farmers. The rest of them were wineries or banks or whatever. And we beat 'em all, we were proud.

JH: I think Irish Red Knight and maybe some of your other bulls---I know one of them were so big---2000 pounds or more and when you get photographed with them, he was so tall, he was as tall as you were and your husband almost.

KS: That's right. I have a picture on our file showing the first show that we showed in a Hereford bull. And my husband is standing behind it and that bull only comes up a little over his waist.

JH: Well you know, we might be able to get that on camera and I see him right here, so I'm going to bring this over to you and the cameraman is going to put this on camera so that we can see. You point out the Hereford to me, Kay, if you would and then you point out the big one.

KS: This is the Hereford and these cattle were raised 35 years apart and at that time there---he was a big Hereford at that time. And that's the size of him, he weighed 1000 pounds. Now 35 years later we showed this Simmental at the Cow Palace in San Francisco and this is how tall he was. That was 1000 pounds more. And that's what this is all about. It's money that you make off these cattle not what they look like. We showed champions all the way around here, but this is what we actually accomplished. Change in the looks and the size of the cattle and I used to think its bucks in the pocket that count.

JH: Well you're right. If they're not in your pocket, you're not going to do anything with 'em. So now you and your late husband were in ranching for some---how many years was it---nearly 50?

KS: 50 years I think we were raising cattle.

JH: Any regrets?

KS: No. My memories go back to all the different shows. Our final show that we showed in was in Dallas, Texas and we had a Grand Champion bull there and as the show went on the Reserve Champion was from a herd in Canada that had bought cattle from us and this bull was a son of one of ours. And he showed a champion female---we just brought bulls down there--- and then we did bring a young heifer calf that we were going to sell in the sale and it was the top selling heifer that day. So we had champion bull, the friend that was showing our cattle had champions too and then we had the top selling female and she sold to an Australian breeder who had bought from us before. We were---at that time we were collecting embryos and selling them in the world market. We sold them into Europe and to Australia and to New Zealand. And he bought that heifer and he paid \$45,000 for it, but it was actually only \$27,000 American money.

JH: So in a sense you and your husband were instrumental in introducing the Simmental cattle to Australia, through him?

KS: They had Simmental cattle at that time. But ours were better.

JH: All right, great. Well Kay , as you look back on your life and times, is there anything of your Irish heritage or your upbringing that you would want to share with the people who come to see this after it's all done, which it about is.

KS: Well, my family were close, always together. My brother was in the service, I could tell about when my brother went into the service, war hadn't been declared by the United States, but it was coming. And when my brother left my mother went to her bedroom and I claim that she was there for a month, but my sister said no way, it was a week or so. It upset her so. He was at Schofield barracks when the Japanese struck.

JH: So he was there December the 7<sup>th</sup> at Pearl Harbor?

KS: Yes that's right. And he was at Schofield barracks just like they show in the movie in church and then were told to go back to your barracks. And he likes to claim that he was the first one that shot at a Japanese. He was there and he grabbed his gun and started shooting at then the guys around him said "hey Mike, you can't. We haven't got the rights" and he said "they're shooting at us and I'm shooting at them". (Laughing). I think that probably---we don't know if that was all true or not.

JH: I see you have on your wall in Celtic knots and circles, the proclamation that was given to the Governor every St. Patrick's Day in the rotunda.

KS: Thank you.

JH: And that is right over there and we are going to take a minute and we are going to get a picture of that.

KS: Okay. And it was Mr. Jim Hamel who donated that to the capitol and it was given to me.

JH: I want to thank you for this walk through your very inspiring life.

KS: Thank you.

JH: And when you think about America it is kind of amazing how this McKernen gal in front of me---the daughter of Irish immigrants has had quite a life in Montana and actually everywhere and given a lot to Montana.

KS: Thank you.

JH: Including your efforts and the Governor and I've heard people refer to you as one of the real Cattle Queens of Montana.

KS: Thank you.

JH: Did you ever---one last silly question---did you ever have a car with big cattle horns on the hood?

KS: No. And to be honest with you we were cattle people, but we didn't really want our children to be cowboys. So our children didn't wear cowboy hats or boots. The only time they put them on was when they got on the horse to go out and move the cattle and then throw their tennis shoes in the corner.

JH: Well they did move cattle and get on horses didn't they?

KS: Yes.

JH: Well it's been a wonderful experience and on behalf of The Gathering project and the University of Montana and the Montana Historical Society I want to thank you for the privilege of interviewing you. I want to thank Brandon Woodward [sp] working with his Bachelor's degree in Fine Arts from the University of Montana for filming this. I hope you enjoyed it.

KS: And I want to thank you, Jim Hamel [sp], for getting this together and I want to thank the Irish people in Ireland for allowing us to buy their cattle and do so good with them and I hope someday they will find this out.

JH: Well they will, believe me now they will. Thank you very much, Kay. It's just getting to be almost lunchtime here so we will conclude here. God bless you.

KS: Thank you.

[End of Interview]