

Montana Tech.

Oral History Report

submitted to:
Mr. Harrington
Montana History 323

By:

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Viola Hebert, interviewed by
Jean Pentecost, April 28, 1991. Butte
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Life on a ranch in central Montana during the 1920's and early 1930's.

Questions.

- 1) What was life like growing up on a ranch?
- 2) How was Christmas celebrated compared to now?
- 3) What did you do in case of emergencies?
- 4) What kind of chores did you do.
- 5) What kind of entertainment?
- 6) How did you preserve your food?
- 7) How far from the nearest town?
- 8) Did you feel isolated?

Summary Report

Life on a ranch in central Montana during the 1920's and early 1930's.

Ranch life was a memorable experience. We rode horse back 6 miles to school. When weather made it impossible to travel, we spent school months in a small community. Traveling back to the ranch on weekends. We owned a Model T, but it was open and cold, and didn't travel well in snow. So most of our commuting was done by horse and sleigh. We were sure to bring extra blankets and quilts.

We used wood for heating our home. We lived in a wooded area and had easy access to it. There was no running water, so it had to be hauled in. Our daily chores consisted of hauling the wood and water, but also of feeding the chickens and collecting their eggs.

Holidays, like Christmas, was much more fun than today. It was not commercialized. It was very family oriented and gifts were usually hand made. When gifts were bought, they

were usually ordered from a catalog, because winter months made travel difficult and we lived about 8 miles from town.

We were lucky that we never encountered any emergencies while on the ranch. In case of sickness, we relied on home remedies. We had no antibiotics then, so if we had a contagious disease the county would quarantine our home. It would be monitored by the county Doctor, who usually traveled by horseback. (Doctors did make house calls then)

Summer was a fun time. We would ride horses, pick wild berries, trap gophers, woodchucks, and magpies. The county had a bounty on the animals we trapped. They would pay us five cents for gopher tails, ten cents for woodchuck tails, one cent for magpie eggs and three cents for magpie legs. This is how we would get our spending money.

My dad did prospecting for gold and silver in the Moccasin mountains. He used the old sluice box

and found some good size nuggets. He would get really excited when he found, what he called color. Where he use to prospect is now the ghost town of Kendall.

We raised most of the food we needed. Some of it was canned or it was stored in a root cellar. During butchering season, what meat wasn't used right away, was also canned in jars. In winter it wasn't necessary to preserve the meat because it stayed frozen outside. My dad also built a spring house. The cold water from the mountains ran through it keeping our milk, cream, and butter cool during summer months. We were very conservative, even for bathing and washing clothes, we would collect rain water by placing barrels under the eaves of the house.

As far as being isolated, everybody was. We would make an effort to get together. Sometimes just to visit or to play cards. There were barn dances and festivals. The big festival of the year was a Bohemian festival that

took place right after harvest and lasted for 3 days straight. If you got tired, you would sit down and close your eyes for a few minutes, then get up and start dancing again.

On doing this report I found that even though life was hard on a ranch, they had a sense of togetherness and a care-free life style. They didn't have the types of stress that are common today. It's a time in history that I envy.