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UTAH STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
AND
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FULLERTON
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM
Southeastern Utah Project

INTERVIEWEES: FORD AND IDA WEBER

INTERVIEWER: Suzanne Simon

SUBJECT: Early Hanksville Cattle Industry

DATE: July 9, 1971

SS: This is an interview with Ida M. Weber and Ford Weber for the Utah State Historical Society and California State College, Fullerton, Oral History Program, Southeastern Utah Project by Suzanne Simon in Hanksville, Utah at the Webers' home on July 9, 1971 at 10:00 a. m.

Mrs. Weber, you said that you were a granddaughter of the first Ebenezer Hanks who came in here and settled.

IW: Yes.

SS: And what were your parents' names?

IW: My mother's name was Nellie Mac Dougal and my father's name was Dennis Burdell Newcombe. My mother was the first child born in Hanksville.

SS: When was that--what year?

IW: 1884, April 18th.

SS: Did your parents, Mr. Weber, come quite early?

FW: I think they came along about 1900. They were not among the first settlers over here.

IW: They came before 1900, because you were born here.

FW: I think my grandparents, the Stoddards, came prior to that. They were ahead of my own parents. I couldn't tell

it's kind; and that may be the reason why they have fenced it and taken care of it.

IW: He did most of the mason work on this old church building over here, except for the west end, I think. It was up to the square. It stood there [unfinished] for several years. Finally, another fellow came along who they hired to finish it.

SS: Did he do any of the buildings down at Giles?

FW: No, I don't think so. I may have heard him say he did.

SS: We went out this morning to try and see if we could see anything down there. There was just one stone building that we saw. I wasn't dressed to go hiking out across the river bottom; and, besides that, the deer flies or something nearly ate me up when I got out of the car. Somebody told us that there were some stone buildings there. That's why I wondered.

IW: Did that belong to the Abbott's?

FW: No, that was on the roadside. That is the old rock building right along the highway there.

SS: Yes, it's real close.

FW: My father came to this country with the people who had the [gold] dredge on the Colorado River, which is kind of historical. He came in here with those people. That is how he happened to get into this country. He was sort of a foreman over the freight. They built roads to get down to where the dredge was put in.

IW: There is a book about the dredge from the University of Utah. I have a copy of it.

SS: He worked handling the freight?

FW: My father was a sort of an overseer over the teams and the freight. The way I understand it, he arranged to have the freight brought in and he hired the teamsters.

SS: There was actually quite a large crew of men down there working on that dredge, wasn't there?

FW: There must have been. They did quite a lot of roadwork for those days with what means they had [to work with]. They must have either spent quite a lot of time or there was quite a force.

IW: Edna Ekker. She is Robinson now. She was Mrs. Cornelius Ekker. My mother's sister lived in Green River and I stayed with her some after that. In fact, my folks moved over there for two or three winters and put some of the kids in school. We used to go over and stay all winter.

SS: How many brothers and sisters did you have, Mrs. Weber?

IW: Three brothers and four sisters. There were eight of us in the family.

SS: How about your family, Mr. Weber?

FW: There were five of us, three boys and two girls.

SS: Are any of your brothers and sisters still in this area?

FW: Yes, in this area. One of them lives in Price and one is up here in Bicknell. Both sisters are dead.

SS: How about your brothers and sisters, Mrs. Weber?

IW: They're all living.

SS: All living in this area or how many are still here?

W: There are three of them in town, two of them in Green River, one in Bicknell, and one out in Roosevelt.

SS: It sounds as though your families are fairly close to you. Let me ask, while we're talking about this, how many children did you have?

FW: Four daughters.

SS: Are they nearby?

FW: They're more scattered than our own brothers and sisters. We have one girl who lives here, one in Bicknell, one in Salt Lake, and one in Idaho Falls. As time went on and the roads got better, so that access in and out of here was better, people began to scatter more. There were more people and more different ways to go. We were more or less fenced in, in our day. You married within your circle. We couldn't get out of it unless we walked, so we stayed here. (laughter)

IW: There were a few people coming and going.

FW: I think I made the statement that I have lived longer in Hanksville than any person living. I'm not the oldest,

SS: Yes, that is funny. It looks like the more timesavers we have, the less time we have.

IW: When we used to pass cars on the desert, we usually knew who was coming. We would stop and they would stop, too, and talk a minute. Now we hardly know who we're passing, and they pass so fast.

FW: If you've never lived in a little out-of-the-way community like this, it is hard to realize how people got along as well as they did. They worked together. For an example, if a fellow was going somewhere, he would find out what his neighbor needed. If he could help him while he was gone, he did. Even after we had cars, for the first few years, there weren't any of us who would think of leaving town without finding out if we could do something for one of our neighbors while we were gone. We got along that way, but now we don't do it anymore. I know that cars have gotten to be such a common thing; and you just don't pay any attention. When you get ready to go, you just go. Nobody knows where you're going and when you're coming back. And they don't care.

SS: I was raised in a town that was a little bit larger than this, but it was a farming community and still is. It is not a big town by any means. I guess maybe there are 2,000 people there. Everyone knew everyone. I think you kind of got into the habit of doing things together. If somebody's in trouble, you help them out and enjoy times together.

FW: That was your entertainment. If you didn't, there was nothing else. You made your recreation. As strange as it may seem, we had better times then and we felt better. People were sociable. It seems like people just don't have the time for people any more.

SS: You talked about making your own recreation when you were growing up. As long as we're talking about comparing times, and the things you did for entertainment, how was it for your children when they were growing up?

FW: It was similar, but that was in the days when the roads were improved and there were more or less automobiles throughout the country. Maybe there were not so many locally owned, but they would travel in those days. They had opportunities to go to different places. Of course, all our children had to leave here to go to high school. They didn't have to rely so much on their own for recreation. There were things to go to. They may have been in different towns around the country, but then they could go.

would get the job. He would ride through here to Green River in a day and to Hite in the same time. When the man who turned out later to be my brother-in-law was a young fellow, he did that. He stretched his age a little and got that job. He rode the mail for years.

If we had anybody now who would ride a horse from here to Hite in a day, he would be in the paper and so would the horse's picture. That was a common everyday occurrence then. One day they would go down and the next day they would come back. That was carried on for years. All of us did it in those days and thought nothing about it. We were so anxious to get to do it.

SS: You must have had some pretty sturdy, good horses. What kind of stock were they?

FW: They were no particular breed, I don't think. They were just ordinary--what we called saddle horses. Some of them were like horses today. They were a little better than most. The breed of them didn't seem to necessarily mean much. Some of them were those little Indian ponies. They were a good deal smaller than they are today. It is sixty-five miles from here to Hite, the way the trail would go. It was further than that by wagon road, but by going horseback, we could make a few shortcuts that we wouldn't be able to do with a wagon. I don't want to do that today; and there is no one else who does. If he did, it would be a story like you see in one of Butch Cassidy's books.

SS: Probably what would happen if you tried to use the roadway that there is there now, you would get run over by a car. Did the trail that goes down to Hite follow the highway that is here now?

FW: In a general direction, yes. But, like I say, there were places where we could make shortcuts that we wouldn't be able to do with a wagon. It is pretty well the same course. There are exceptions. We used to go down what was called Trachyte Canyon in place of North Wash. They didn't have a wagon road down the Trachyte Canyon. You would cut across to get down that canyon, which made it a little closer, I think. I'm not too sure even about that. But, anyway, that is the way the mail trail went.

SS: Was there good water along the way or did you have to carry it?

FW: There was water in these canyons. There was a ranch out here about seventeen miles away where you could get drinking water. There was a trail that went by it. Water wasn't a consideration.

IW: Even over around Ferron and Price they would bring in their sheep in the winter.

FW: Then after the Taylor Grazing Law became effective, the land was sort of divided up among the stockmen who were located in the area. The purpose of it was to keep transients out. We had several fairly large outfits in this country. Of course, they got their first holdings, which they still have. It has sort of been handed down. I bought a little ranch from some of those outfits. It was not so long after we were married, was it? We still have it. We still run a few cattle there.

IW: It was in the 1930s. I don't know what year.

SS: You said you were married in 1925?

FW: Yes.

SS: Then, I imagine you must have had quite a struggle like everybody else. You were trying to get established not long before the Depression. Was this particular area hard hit by the Depression? Did people suffer?

FW: Yes. Actually, it wasn't any worse in comparison than anywhere else. The only thing was, there were so few jobs. They were jobs that didn't demand very high wages. Farming and stockraising have been the poorest wages throughout history. For that reason, it was pretty tough going.

We might mention when our girls became old enough to go to high school--of course, that was a little later on--the oldest daughter was a year ahead of the other one in high school. Then, the next year, they were both in high school and had to leave.

IW: They were two years apart.

FW: The year that they were both in high school together, I was working for forty-five dollars a month during that Depression. Even at that, I was getting more than some of them, because I had been on the job for a long while.

IW: The boys up here at the 3-C camp only got thirty dollars.

FW: It was a higher wage than what was paid for working with livestock.

SS: What did the average cowboy get paid?

FW: During that particular time that I mentioned, the average wage was about thirty or thirty-five dollars. Ten

SS: When you would go out, would you have maybe a partner with you and would you just live with the sheep? How long would you be gone away from home then?

FW: Ordinarily we would be within a day's ride of home. In some areas, like in the country that we call "Under the Ledge," which is a country down next to the Colorado River--

SS: Where is that? I have heard people talk about going "under the ledge" with the sheep and I didn't know what it meant.

FW: "Under the Ledge" is a big area by the Colorado River beyond this flat desert country here. It's out east of the Dirty Devil River, between the Dirty Devil River and the Colorado River. Those boys, from up around Price, or what we call Sanpete, Ferron, Castle Dale and that country--it wasn't common for them to come down in the fall and stay until the sheep went back in the spring. It wasn't uncommon either---a good many of them did it. They would come down and stay right here all winter with those sheep and go back in the spring.

IW: They would haul in supplies and put them down there in a tin granary that my father had. The camp mover would come to town and get their supplies.

FW: They would bring the supplies in and one of the men from the herd would meet a truck or wagon every thirty days and get his supplies. When we fellows that worked with the sheep around here were here during the wintertime, we would be able to get home, oh, probably once a month. During the summer, of course, when we were out, we would usually take turns. One of us would be able to come home on the fourth of July and the other on the Twenty-fourth. But we were pretty well tied down. It was a good deal different than the way we work nowadays, with a five day week and an eight hour day.

SS: Did you prefer working with the cattle or the sheep?

FW: As far as the work is concerned, I would rather work with the cattle. The sheep pay a little more money. For that reason, I guess I liked the sheep better.

SS: Do you think the sheep hurt this country?

FW: I wouldn't hardly know how to answer that. Something has hurt it terribly because we don't have anywhere near the livestock here that we used to have. Actually, I think it is a climatic condition rather than grazing it off--drought. We all realized that our country was wide open; everybody

SS: How about losing cattle or sheep to rustlers? This looks like such big country to me. If somebody did want to come and make off with a few now and then, it looks like it would be awfully hard to catch them.

FW: You never know, someone might miss a few cattle or a critter every now and then. It wouldn't necessarily mean that somebody got off with it, and it doesn't necessarily mean that it went any other way either. It could have gone that way. Generally speaking, I think that there is very little rustling in this country. It is nothing in comparison with what we have on the farms. They go right on the farms and in the yards and on summer ranges and take the livestock. You read about it all the time. I knew one person in particular who was killed rustling cattle.

I would say we have very little of it. As far as I know, we don't have any, but I wouldn't be surprised. It is pretty near a sure thing that now and then that would be the case with missing animals. We have about as many kinds of people that travel this road as there is anywhere else. I would say up to now that it has been so very little, if any, that it wouldn't be a big worry.

IW: They've had a few killed by cars on the highway, but they're getting some of the roads fenced now. Mr. Hyde over at Center Cattle lost quite a few. He said he lost fifty or sixty.

FW: Quite a number.

IW: They have lost a lot without a fence there.

SS: It is a real problem when you have open range and cars traveling at the speeds they do now.

FW: Yes, it is actually hard to avoid an accident of that kind. In fact, it is just about out of the question, especially at night.

SS: A good way to avoid it, but the way people won't do, is to slow down.

FW: In some cases you don't have time, especially at night. You're driving along and you don't just stop at sixty miles an hour.

IW: We hit one coming down above the Blue Valley Dugway area. Just all of a sudden this white bull came out in front of us. He couldn't turn out because there was a ravine on each side. We hit it, but it didn't kill the bull. It just smashed our car a little.

FW: We have an auction yard in Salina and one in Richfield where we usually go. But we have also gone to Grand Junction quite a lot. In recent years, we've gone to Salina or Richfield.

SS: Do you trail them in or do you haul them?

FW: Truck them.

SS: What breeds seem to do well in this country?

FW: They run Hereford cattle mostly in this country. I think other breeds would probably do equally as well, but that seems to have been the trend throughout the years. Lately there have been some that run these Black Angus cattle. They seem to do about as well. As far as I know, they all get along about the same.

SS: Have you had trouble with wild horses and cattle mixing in with your good stock?

FW: That might have been the case years ago with horses. It is possible that some have lost some horses that they were using on account of wild horses. They would mix in with them and then stray away. But we don't have wild horses any more. There used to be an awful lot of wild horses in this country; but since the Bureau of Land Management has taken over, they've gotten rid of them.

SS: Were they just a nuisance, or were they of any value?

FW: There were some usable animals. We would catch them and use them all right, but there was just so awful many of them that they were just taking over the country.

SS: Did they just have a hunt and kill them off?

FW: They chased them. The big riding clubs finally wound up cleaning them up. They go a long ways now to see two wild horses. You could get forty men out of Springville or anywhere else to come out here now if you tell them about two wild horses. That is a big deal now for the riding clubs. When they first started to chase them, I think the ranchers and the stockmen wanted to get rid of them, too. They would catch what they could and take them out. I guess some of them were killed, but not too many. They would catch them and take them somewhere.

SS: I guess there was a market for them.

FW: You can get a little something out of them almost any time. They were hard to catch.

SS: In your own dealings with the various government agencies, have you been happy with what they were trying to do?

FW: I guess, in a sense, a person would have to appreciate what is being done for the betterment of this country and especially for the multiple use. From a livestock standpoint, there are a good many of us who are used to the country and have run livestock here all our lives. There are some of the things that we don't go along with, but then that is to be expected. I might say I don't see any necessity in saving this for "pete." Let him get his when the time comes. Of course, that is not the program.

I think we have to say it's an improvement. Now that the roads provide such easy access to the country, if it wasn't under government control, they would tromp us to death out here. They can come and go so easily now. I even go out of here in the summer when I can. We don't think anything about loading up here and going to Park City in the summer and then back, and so on. In the days when we had a trail, things like that didn't happen. For that reason, there would have to be an awful restriction on the country or there wouldn't be too much of it. Everybody would want it.

[Tape Interruption]

FW: If you want to turn off our youth today, just tell them what you used to do. They don't want to hear that. They're not interested in what you've done. They're interested in what is going to happen and their way of life.

SS: We've gone along all this time thinking that if history did anything, then it helps explain what happened in the past so that we can live better in the future. I hope that this is going to be the way people are going to look at it.

FW: I don't recall anything that would be of any value.

SS: Let's just talk about the life of the community. I imagine, as we said before, people have been pretty close living here and facing the same struggles. When one of you had a really bad winter, you all had a really bad winter.

FW: Yes, so to speak. People relied on one another and they helped one another.

SS: Can you think of any examples where things happened and then the community pitched in and helped somebody out?

livestock and have a certain amount of commensurary property in order to get your permit. You take care of what your permit would call for.

SS: Do these various government land agencies that you work with try to cooperate among themselves, so that you don't have to suddenly get a herd of cattle off of one area and the next area is not open? Is that a problem?

FW: No, they work pretty much with us. Of course, like we've mentioned before, sometimes we would have a restriction that we could hardly see the necessity of. After all, there would be no such thing as satisfying everybody. What would suit me may not suit you at all. They have to have some regulations and abide by them. They've got to be reasonable. They are. I think these government agencies are all right. Some individual might at times think that it was terrible, but that would probably be his personal ideas.

SS: I can't think of any other questions right now. Is there anything that you would like to add?

FW: I can't think of anything that would be of interest. You have a pretty good picture of the early days here.

SS: I thank you so much for taking the time to sit down and talk to me.

FW: That is quite all right, if it would be any benefit to anybody. It is just talk.

SS: Thanks.

[End of Interview]

