

## The Second Generation

### Mirl Hunter Ralphs and Blanche Cook Ralphs by Barbara Christensen and Max Ralphs

Mirl Hunter Ralphs was the fifth son of Parley Pratt Ralphs and Anna Marie (better known as Hannah) Hansen. He was born February 24, 1893, in Ferron, Emery County, Utah.

Blanche Cook was born April 2, 1895 to James Hyrum and Emilie Alder Cook. She was the youngest of 9 children. Mirl and Blanche were married April 12, 1916 in Castle Dale, and later sealed in the Manti Temple 20 July 1921.

Mirl and his brother Leon each purchased 40 acres on the Rochester Flat. Mirl would go to the farm during the week and fend for himself, coming to Ferron only on the weekends. In the spring of 1920, Mirl moved his wife Blanche and their first child, Barbara, into the new log house on the Rochester homestead. The logs were chinked with adobe clay, and the roof was covered with a foot of dirt. It was heated with a big heat-o-rola coal stove in the living room, and a wood cook stove in the kitchen. Rocks were heated in the winter and placed in the bottom of the beds for warmth.

There was no indoor plumbing and the outhouse was quite a ways off. On dark nights and cold mornings, the bed pot was used. For their bath, a large #3 wash tub was filled with water and placed on the stove to heat. When the water was warm, each took their turn bathing.

Mondays were wash day. A fire was built outside and the big wash tubs were filled with water and placed on the fires to heat. One tub contained soap that the clothes were washed in. The clothes were then scrubbed on a scrub board to get out stains, then rinsed in a clean tub of water. Bluing was placed in the rinse water of the whites to keep them nice and white.

Their refrigerator in the summer consisted of a good sized wooden box wrapped with burlap and hung on the north side of the house. A bucket with small holes punched in the bottom hung above it to drip water on the burlap and keep it wet. Evaporation kept it cool so that cream and other perishables could be kept during the summer.

Water was hauled from the canal in two big wooden barrels. The barrels were filled from the ditch at night so the mud and sediment would settle to the bottom by morning, making the water usable. During the winter, the water didn't run out to the end of the ditch, so Mirl took the barrels on a wooden sled into Rochester to get water. When there was snow on the ground, they would melt it to supplement the water. In later years, a cistern was dug and plastered, under the direction of George Funk. It was filled in the late fall before the water in the ditch froze. It also had to be done when the water was clear because there was no way of settling or purifying it.

Wood was gathered for cooking and heating from the Reef east of Rochester. Mirl would place a wood rack on the wagon (12 feet long by 4 feet wide) with stakes for sides. Pinion was gathered for heating, while cedar was used for kindling. Mirl would take his saddle horse and lead a light draft horse with harness and tugs to pull trees and logs into a central spot. Max and Barbara would bring the wagon. By the time they arrived, Mirl would almost have enough piled up for a load. The old dugway leading up out of Dry Wash was steep, and coming down with a full load of wood was perilous. They would lock the rear wheels with log chains, and tie a heavy

log on back as a drag, but it was still almost more than the horses could do to hold back the loaded wagon.

Two wagon loads of coal were hauled from the Petty mine south of Emery to supplement the wood each winter. One load of lump coal was used for the heat-o-rola and a load of crushed coal was used for the cook stove.

During the Depression, there was very little money. The Public Works Program allowed the farmers and their families to work on community projects to earn a little money. One project was graveling the Lower Road (or buss route). This was done with teams and wagons. Another program to reduce the excessive numbers of cattle that had no value at that time, was to just shoot the animals, cut off their ears and turn the ears in for payment (\$12 for a pair).

Mirl always kept 6-10 milk cows. The milk was separated and the skim milk fed to the calves and pigs. The cream was sold fresh or Blanch made it into butter. The separator set in one corner of the kitchen and was turned by hand to separate the milk from the cream. The old wooden churn had to be soaked in water before it was used to swell the wood so it wouldn't leak. Later, milk was sold to the creamery and picked up daily. Cecil Burdelson ran the creamery on the corner in the middle of town where Neil Rasmussen's garage stands.

Mirl had 30 to 50 head of range cows. All the permittees on the South Side Allotment wintered on the Rochester Flat. Mr. Moore sold the forage on Company lands for fall and winter feed. If the snow got deep, they would have to bring the cattle in to feed them. There were no fences on the flat. By spring, it was a constant job pushing the cattle back up into the hills and out of the crops. They went on the Mountain the first of May and stayed until Thanksgiving. In June, the families would go up for a week and gather and brand the calves. When Leon sold his farm, Mirl bought his cattle giving him 70 to 80 head. He also moved Leon's house to his farm and used it as a grainery.

Mirl loved good horses. He had some of the best riding and racing horses in the County. One of his first good horses was a palomino Hamiltonian mare. His favorite was a bay thoroughbred mare called Ellen, out of a Remount Stud Sailing Bee, kept by Sam Akins in Orangeville.

Harvest time was a busy time. Threshing crews would go around to all the farms and thresh grain. The first thresher was powered by a big steam engine fired with coal. One man tended the fire that heated water to generate the steam that ran the engine. Two men pitched the bundles of grain into the thresher, one man tended the workings, and the farmer sacked and moved the grain away. Mirl bought 1/4 interest in the first belt-driven thresher that was driven off the PTO of a tractor. The other partners were Jess, Reed and Chad Conover and William Behling. The threshing crew always looked forward to coming to the Ralphs. Blanch got the girls up while it was still dark to get breakfast ready for the crew. After breakfast, they would barely get the dishes washed before they had to start preparing dinner. Blanch was well known for her fried chicken. It was a favorite of the crew because they knew they wouldn't find any feathers in it at Blanch's table.

Haying was an important event to put up reserve feed for winter and for drought years. The hay was cut with a horse drawn mower that could cover 5 acres in a day. The dump rake came the following day and piled the hay into small piles. Then came the pitchers, two stout men to pitch the hay on the wagon, and a boy to tramp it. The horses were trained to stay between the

rows and stop and go on command. At the stack, the wagon was unloaded by a Jackson fork on a derrick.

For a cash crop, they raised alfalfa and clover seed. These were thrashed by the thrasher using smaller screens. They raised potatoes for their own use and sold the excess. Potatoes, carrots and cabbage were grown and stored in the root cellar for use throughout the year.

After the first crop of hay was put up, the Ralphs family would pack the big grub box, throw their bedding in the wagon and go to mountains for a week, along with many of the other farmers in town. The men would work to build and repair the dam and the kids had a fun vacation.

In 1940, Mirl and Blanch moved back into Ferron and purchased Hyrum Cook's lot on the hill. They had a mining house moved down from Morhand. Mirl still traveled to the farm to tend the livestock and cultivate the fields.

Mirl loved to work with the soil and was proud of his livestock. He was honest, kind, and patient with a good sense of humor. He enjoyed raising a beautiful vegetable garden and was generous in sharing with others.

Mirl had been one of the Seven Presidents of Seventies in the Stake and was a High Priest at the time of his death, August 14, 1968. He had also been Presiding Elder at the L.D.S. Rochester Branch for nine years, 1931-1940.