

Voices from the Past

The Community of Wilford, Fremont
County, Idaho

By Oliver Kingsbury Meservy

May 23, 1968

Tape # 19

Oral Interview conducted by Harold Forbush

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Harold Forbush: Through the facilities of the Upper Snake River Valley Historical Society, the taped interview that follows, originally done on reel-to-reel tape is now placed on a C-90 cassette this seventh day of April, 1984.

HF: Oral History of the Upper Snake River Valley. Today it's a real privilege and an opportunity for me to invite to my office here at Rexburg Mr. Oliver Kingsbury Meservy of the community of Wilford, Wilford Ward, and Fremont County, Idaho. This being the 23rd day of May 1968 and he will tell us the background of the Wilford Ward and give much other information pertaining to the early historical data of the Upper Snake River Valley. I say it's a real privilege and an opportunity because this man is in his 91st year. He's lived a long time. He's lived a full and abundant life, a life filled with service as an elected official of his county and as a servant in many, many categories of his church, the LDS Church, and as a school teacher and I presume a farmer, and in so many, many categories. Indeed, Mr. Meservy is an outstanding man who has lived and served his community so well so many years. So it's a real privilege to welcome him to prepare this tape, and I'm going to ask him a question or two and I'm sure that those questions will illicit from him data which he could give us from his own recollections and reminiscences and also from data that he has reduced to writing that he might present it in a more chronological manner. So Mr. Meservy I'm going to ask you first to state your full name and where you now reside. I'll just hold it here.

Oliver Meservy: My name is Oliver Kingsbury Meservy and I reside in Wilford Creek in Fremont County, Idaho.

HF: And when were you born and where?

OM: I was born in North Ogden, Weber County, Utah October 8, 1877.

HF: And your parents, will you kindly state the name of your father and your mother and from whence they come, which country and where'd they come from.

OM: My father's name is Joseph Robert Meservy and he came from the Isle of Jersey, English Channel and came to Utah in 1851. He was born in 1842. He married Mary Ophelia Kingsbury my mother who was born at Salt Lake City, Utah in 1852. She was ten years younger than my father.

HF: Now your Grandfather was one of the early settlers of Franklin I understand.

OM: Yes, he settled in Franklin in 1860.

HF: Now from Franklin your father moved to what places?

OM: He moved over into Bear Lake. He lived in two or three places over there. And then he went down to Brigham City and then they moved to Upper Utah, north of Weber County.

HF: What motivated your father and mother and your grandparents to come up into Idaho and about what time was this.

OM: In 1885, George Davis, James Meservey and others from Upper Utah moved up to Wilford, Idaho and they wanted my father to come up there and put up a mill and things of that kind. Now my father was a school teacher and a farmer and he could make anything. He's a good carpenter. He built houses in Ogden and he made his own blacksmith shop [inaudible] and things of that kind. He made his own [inaudible] and he made his own harness and horses and made his own shoes to wear and they wanted him up in the neighborhood. He was well educated and one of the smartest men they had.

HF: And he brought you and others with him in 1887 into the valley.

OM: He brought me with him and there was a man by the name of Nelson Noraby from Wilford came up also. And we put up a saw mill up east of Wilford towards that hill and we used a machine to grind into grain, not flour but grain. Chopper, it was called a chopper. We would grind grain into flour but not white though. And we stayed there grandma's mill was by the north branch of the Wilford Canal, water power, the turbine water. In the spring of 1888 my father brought all the family, the whole family moved up to Logan and we built a grist mill.

HF: Where did your father actually homestead in Wilford?

OM: Well, it was the south half of the northeast corner and the north half of the southeast corner, section 24.

HF: Well that's a real legal description alright, that's quite amazing there. There won't be one out of a thousand that could do that Brother Meservey. Well now at the time that your father came up here first in 1887 and then when he brought his family in 1888, there were quite a few people already living in Wilford. Who were some of these people?

OM: Well there was George Harris, William Mayors, William Hobbs and Isaac Park and there was two families of Jones's and there was Gretege Thumb, George Lee Black, and there was Harold P. Henniger and there was three families of Pinncock's, Johnsons, and Byingtons and different others.

HF: And from which area had they come?

OM: They came from Utah.

HF: The Logan area, Cache Valley?

OM: Well there were some that came from Cache Valley and some of them came from down in Weber in Davis County, Utah and other places in Utah.

HF: Now as a young boy when you came up here in 1887 what impression of the area do you recall as a young boy? Now this means that you'll have to go back and try to think just what conditions were like when you first saw the Wilford area.

OM: Well their buildings were log buildings and they were not very large and most of them were dirt roofs. They put boards put onto the roof and put dirt on it and some of them they merely put branches of trees and straw and dirt for a roof so that they would run the water off. And most of them had dirt floors of the buildings of that time until they had saw mill and then the saw mill sawed flooring and of course these boards were used then for flooring so that they weren't very handsome buildings. But later, as soon as they get the lumber, they began building with boards. After awhile they would get so they would clean those boards.

HF: Did there seem to be quite an abundance of trees in the area, now evergreens as well as say cottonwoods and quaking aspens of those kinds?

OM: There were no trees in Wilford at all. We brought up some trees, we got up some cuttings and poplar trees and there were some other trees, I can't think of the name right now, lamborghini trees and a few others. We brought up cuttings off of those and planted them and started quite a string of trees. And people began to do the same, started to plant trees. The country wasn't well aligned on things from the north fork of Snake River over to the Teton there. There was just the bare and drawn and they were just a few acres of land broken up because they got into the water ditches out and hadn't gotten very much water yet.

HF: Now at the time you arrived in 1887-1888 had there been a branch, organization of the church established there?

OM: Yes. There was a branch started in May 20th 1883; there was a branch organized with James A. Pincock as presiding Priest in the Bannock Ward addressment.

HF: Well now Brother Meservy I understand that you have prepared a few notes that pertain to the early days, conditions of Wilford, and maybe you would like to read some of those and I think this would be really fine. So we'll just ask you to read some of the notes that you've prepared on Wilford.

OM: Wilford was pioneered in the spring of 1883. Sunday May 20, 1883 James A. Pincock, John A. Gardner, Harold P. Henninger and others with Glenard W. Hardy counsel to presiding with Bishop Connor from Salt Lake were camped on the meadow of the Teton River southeast of the present residence of Virgil Willard and about two miles east of the East Asian peasant town site. They wanted to name this new settlement after him but he declined saying there is once named Hardy, which was hardest place he knew. And they asked him what the W stood for in his name and he answered, "Wilford." So they named this settlement after his middle name Wilford. Wilford Woodruff visited it a few years later and he thought they named it after him but they hadn't.

Early Conditions

Provisions and supplies had to be hauled from Cache Valley by horse and team and there were no bridges over any of the rivers or streams or else shipped to Market Lake, now Roberts, by railroad which was 32 miles distance and then hauled from there here. The snow fell so deep during winter that the people had to go on snow shoes to visit neighbors or to go to Rexburg 12 miles away. Deer, elk, and antelope, and fish were abundant. Bears were also visitors at some residences. While fruits comprised haws, chokecherries, service berries, currents, gooseberries and some strawberries along the Teton River. At the only flour mill in the valley John Far Meservy installed a saw mill and grain copper in 1887 and in 1888 a flour mill during custom work. In 1889, the Rexburg flour mill, Samuel J. Johnson and Wilford being the miller, burned down and the Meservy mill was run by water power at the north branch of the Wilford Canal at the hill just east of Wilford was the only flour mill this side of Cache Valley. They ran it day and night to furnish the bread and life of the people as far south as Rigby and all north and east and people camped here while waiting for their grist to be ground. As men in three counties, Wilford was in Oneida County, Idaho until January 13, 1885 when Bingham County was created with Blackfoot as county seat, but on March 4, 1893 it became part of the new Fremont County, has been in four stakes. Rexburg was headquarters of Bannock Ward belonging to Cache Valley Stake and Wilford was a branch of that ward until February 4, 1884 when Bannock Ward became Bannock Stake with headquarters at Rexburg. Years later Bannock Stake was organized at Pocatello and our stake name was changed from Bannock to Fremont Stake in 1896. And on January 10, 1909, Wilford became part of the new Yellowstone Stake.

Post Office Name Changed

During the anti-Mormon crusade in Idaho the name of the Post Office here was changed to Barrett Post Office in Rexburg to Kaintuck Post Office and the Mormons were not allowed to vote. Later the name of the Post Office was changed back to Wilford when our franchise was restored. In June 1906 the Post Office was discontinued and RFD #1 of St. Anthony served the settlement. O. K. Meservy was the last post master and the first, that's myself, and the first RFD carrier.

Town Site Surveyed

May 9th and 10th 1884, the town sites were surveyed by several engineer Andrew S. Anderson and on November 15, William T. Brower had erected the first house on it. John H. Brower and John Burrow quickly followed suit. The first deciding officer in the Fall of 1883 at the conference of Rexburg, James H. Pinncock was installed as presiding Priest of the Wilford Branch, the first Sabbath meeting being held at his residence the next Sunday.

Second Presiding Priest

Though the Teton River being impassible at times, George David Black, Grandfather of Warren, who lived north of the river was on June 9 was set apart as presiding officer, made a ward and given a Bishop. Saturday, September 6, 1884, Thomas Sassin Smith, who had been head of the Lost River Company was set apart Bishop of the Wilford Ward by Apostle John W. Taylor at Rexburg, Idaho. He chose his counselors Richard Funk, and John J. Brower and his son Jesse L. Smith as ward clerk. Since then Wilford has had 15 Bishops namely: George Davis, Ruben Belnap, George A. Pinncock, Nathaniel W. Long, Charles E. Murray, William D. Holla, Roy Arm, James T. Birch, Earl Rummel, Rumen Rummel, Daniel Rummel, John Hikes, Virgil Willard, and Lowell Birch. Five of these were Bishops and I was ward clerk under them.

First Meeting House Built

In 1886 a long meeting house, 44 by 22 feet. The largest then in the state was built on lot one, block 37 of the town site. The first day schools were taught Wednesday, March 25, 1885, by Wendy Moore Jack.

Auxiliary Organization

In May 1884, the first Sunday school was organized with William J. Pratt as superintendent there being 16 pupils, he being set apart June 15 at Rexburg. The Y.M.I.A was organized Tuesday November 11, 1884 with Joseph H. Brower as President. The Y.L.M.I.A. was organized about this time. Primary may have been next spring. In the spring of 1885, stake officers met with and completed all the ward organizations. At that meeting the Relief Society was organized and Alicia Brower later, Marisa Wilson home as President, Alice Pratt and Annie Funk, counselors and Eliza Birch, Parley Birch's mother, secretary. And there's no Sunday school. May 27, 1894 the East Wilford Sunday School was organized with Nelson B. Russ as superintendent, there being twelve officers and 49 people. May 29, 1898, the North Wilford Sunday school was organized with Frederick Stemson as superintendent. And when the St. Anthony Ward was organized it was transferred to St. Anthony and a one and a half mile strip north part of Wilford Ward was made part of the ward. St. Anthony had a Sunday School organized May 3, 1896 on the north side of the river with Ernest Gramwell as superintendent. When the ward was organized at St. Anthony the chapel was built well south in south St. Anthony west of the present highway.

Branches of the ward

Sunday, February 3, 1889 Bishop George Davis and Joseph R. Meservy organized the Fall River branch, now Chester Ward, of the ward with Thomas Brown as presiding elder and Elijah Hathaway as Sunday School superintendent. Part of this branch and another part of Wilford Ward were later made into the Twin Groves Branch. It's Sunday School being organized November 12, 1893 with George Albert Davis as Superintendent and main man. Later it became Twin Groves Ward. The Springville Branch, now Marysville Ward, of the Wilford Ward was organized by Stake President Thomas E. Ricks and others. The Sunday School was organized on July 9, 1890 with Thomas W. Whittle as

superintendent, James H. Wilson, formally of Salmon, being set apart as presiding elder Friday, July 18, 1890. And the office changed from the post office was established there, Mary Baker was appointed Post Mistress and officers named Marysville, instead of Springville. Black Springs in Ashton or west of Ashton Ward were so named because George D. Black of Wilford kept his cattle there.

Stone Chapels

The rock chapel was erected from Wilford in 1904 at a cost of 4,000 dollars and was dedicated by Mark Austin after it was fully paid for. The new meeting house, recreation home now used, work was begun on this building June 16, 1952 and completed in August 1953 at a cost of approximately 110,000 dollars, including landscaping. Contributions have been taken for the past nine years. The population at the conclusion of this structure was 387, that's the ward population, and the ward comprised about 20 square miles with a population of 526, at least part of it not being Mormons and it's never been a village, and it's never organized as a town.

HF: Now in your writing materials you mentioned that Mark Austin had dedicated this rock church of Wilford in 1904, I think. Who was this Mark Austin? Can you give us a little information about him?

OM: He was a man that came up here when they located the sugar factory and started Sugar City. They built it and he was in charge of the sugar factory and all its business. And later he was chosen as a counselor to the president of the stake in Rexburg and that's when he dedicated the building.

HF: I see. I've heard the name Mark Austin and I've quite often wondered about him and his church relationship and also his connection with the sugar factory. Well now, as I understand it, there was a time when they thought that maybe Wilford should be the county seat of Fremont County. Can you give us a little data about that background and who made the decision that it was to be over at St. Anthony rather than in Wilford?

OM: When Fremont County was formed many people in St. Anthony wanted the county seat and the people in Rexburg wanted the county seat. Of course, the people in Rexburg and that south part of the county could out vote the people in the north part so St. Anthony wouldn't get it that way, but the legislature, they looked at the maps of the town sites and see Rexburg, Wilford, St. Anthony. Wilford had a town site one mile squared as it was larger than the others and they would make it the county seat. But it happened that Dan Moon we called him, who was an outsider came from back east around Michigan, he had started St. Anthony and established a store and put a bridge across the river there and they wanted St. Anthony to be county seat. Well Moon had filed a contest against the Wilford town site claiming that it had not been properly proven up on. And course it would take some time for that to be decided by the Supreme Court of the United States and consequently they couldn't make it county seat. So St. Anthony finally said we will give you the county officers to start with, if you'll give us the county seat. And the Rexburg representatives said "Alright, we'll get it when the next election comes and we

will give it to you then.” So, St. Anthony was given it. When the time come that they could vote on the county seat, Rexburg campaigned and they didn’t win and went on to the next time Rexburg tried again and they lost that because a lot of settlers had been coming in and going north, locating up in Ashton and out at Dubois at present north, everywhere north point of the country until Rexburg didn’t get the right vote and she lost and it’s been in St. Anthony ever since.

HF: If I understand correctly Fremont County was established in 1893 and it remained Fremont County until about 1909 or ‘10 along in there, I’m not sure of my dates. It was later than that; maybe about 1914 when Madison County was established.

OM: Fremont County was started March 4, 1893.

HF: And now this embraced an area of which now embraces about five counties so it was quite a tremendous area with St. Anthony as the county seat. During this period, of course, St. Anthony being a thriving little community and Wilford and Rexburg all there in the same county you can see where they would want to abide for the position of county seat. This is very interesting. Now Brother Meservy turning our attention to another field activity in which you have a background, that of teaching. Over the years of your life I understand that you have rendered tremendous service in teaching in the Sunday Schools and in the M.I.A., held other teaching positions and so on. Well now you came by this rather naturally didn’t you? Wasn’t your father quite a teacher?

OM: Yes my father was a regular teacher and could do anything and I understood more than anyone else I ever met. I went to school when I had to after they got to making the Mormons attend district schools, but I never taught a district school.

HF: Your father did though?

OM: Yeah.

HF: What did he teach?

OM: He taught at the regular schools in Utah and then he didn’t teach district schools in Idaho.

HF: Now you mentioned that you took a course, a normal course over at the Ricks Academy. Just what did this involve and what years were you over in the academy?

OM: I was just there during ‘94 and ‘95. I took a normal course and of course I took some other studies. I took Algebra which I had already studied for and I took different things in the Church, different courses. And I was secretary of their agricultural class that was held once a week. And I was one of the teachers of the school when I was called to teach there in ‘96 and I was one who had to help get up the programs for entertainment for college and for the benefit of the college and different places and also to collect for the benefit of the academy. Will Witsen and I visited to two or three wards and then and

tried to get students enrolled and also one of President Rick's boy and I, we lived at Salem, north Salem and wards and we took animals as well as money and different kinds of donations that could be sold and turned into cash to help out the needs of the institution.

HF: Now the institution had been created through the Church and Thomas E. Ricks just a few years before. Maybe you could give us a little history there on the academy.

OM: The Bannock Stake Academy was started at Rexburg, Idaho on September 1888 by Stake President Thomas E. Ricks, he and Jacob Spori as principal. In 1888 the Mormons in Idaho were disfranchised and any one of their creed could not vote or hold civil office. Even the school trustee had to be a non-Mormon and non-Mormon teachers were hired to teach and those were of the kind who would endeavor to impress ideas on the student's minds against the Mormon Church or its doctrines. In Wilford precinct Charles Powell was the only school trustee at this time as there was no district school house. He rented his residence as a school house and hired his wife as a school teacher and himself as janitor and received pay for the fuel to heat the house and the only pupil in the school was a girl who was living with them. The Mormons had to pay taxes that schools might be held but while conditions were so severe against them they would hold a school in their meeting house or else where and engage a teacher of their own faith. And the families who sent children pay in wheat, flour, wheat or potatoes what they could to the teacher and some families paid nothing. My father taught during the winter of 1890 and 1891. Finally circumstances occurred that they had to send their children to the district school or be punished for not obeying the law, and they sent them. The name of Wilford Post Office was changed to Barrie and the Rexburg Post Office to Kaintuck until the people could get them changed back which they did when they regained their citizenship. Dr. Karl G. Maeser, head of the Brigham Young College of Provo, Utah, revised the Church Sunday School work by rearranging classes and outlining lessons for each and inaugurating the Sunday School normal course of training for teachers and conductors. In the course of this was had in the Ricks Academy. And it should have been called Ricksburg, but it was called Rexburg because Rex in Latin means King, so it's Kingsburg.

HF: In this connection you had trained a group of young people over in the Wilford Ward when Brother Maeser came up and was very much impressed with your capacity as a teacher. Why don't you tell us a little about that experience?

OM: July 30, 1898 I conducted the lesson exercise of the Wilford Sunday School Second Intermediate Department in the Bannock Sunday School Conference at Rexburg, Idaho. Dr. Karl G. Maeser was present and he said to Professor Cole that it was the best he had ever heard at a Sunday School Conference and he had been practically all over the church. The newspaper published at Rexburg in giving an account of the conference and the class registration stated, "The exercises rendered by departments were on a whole very creditable. That rendered by Wilford's school under the intuition of O. K. Meservy was exceptionally good."

HF: Now going back just a little bit at the time that you and your family first came to Idaho into this Snake River Country in 1887 and '88, there was a man that had lived here for some little while, a white man, by the name of Richard Leigh. Did you ever know him?

OM: I did.

HF: Now you say you knew him. Now why don't you tell us when you first met him, if you can recall, what your impression was and what your impressions were and any material you have about Richard Leigh or Beaver Dick as they called him? Why don't you present that to us Brother Meservy?

OM: Well I visited his place and we used to hold Sunday School outings up at his place on the river bend and I've been in his house and talked with him. And I'll read you a little I wrote here about him. His account of him is given in the history of Wilford that's put out by Sister Johnson and parts of that where he got his name Beaver Dick are not right. I was acquainted with Richard Leigh, generally know as Beaver Dick. One day in 1895 while I was in his house conversing with him, he was sitting in the north end of the room and I was sitting in the south of it, I said how did you get to be called Beaver Dick? He explained to me that Dick was the nickname for Richard and he was known as Dick Leigh and that having lost his front teeth, his "I" teeth showed on each side of his mouth. As he was talking to his mother-in-law she noted that his teeth looked like a beavers and she said you are now Beaver Dick. It was customary that when an Indian gave a man a name he was to be known by that name so her name for him became generally recognized. Although he was a good beaver trapper and hunter that was not the cause for him receiving the name Beaver. The story that he met Brigham Young when Brigham was on his way to Utah and that Brigham gave him this name is wrong. Brigham led the people to Utah in 1847 and it wasn't until 1848 that Beaver Dick went into the Mexican War. In his letter to Dr. Penrose, Beaver Dick says, "I was born on January 9th in 1831 in the city of Manchester, England, come with my sister to Philadelphia, United States of America when I was seven years old. I went for the Mexican War in 1848, attached to Company E ten months." He was not in the Mormon Battalion in the war with Mexico as they went in '47 by way of Arizona to California, while he came to Idaho after ten months in Texas or Mexico. I take this statement to me personally as being correct. While Dick and I were talking after he had told he got his title, his little daughter Rose came into the door on the east side of the room with a live bull snake. She had the string tied around its neck and the other end of the string was tied to a short stick. She had hold of the stick with her right hand and held it up til the snakes head was even with the side of her face. Its tail was dragging on the floor. She started toward me and her father said, "Don't take that snake over to Mr. Meservy. Take it back out doors." And she did. His daughter Emma was very strong and active. One winter when a deer had gotten into a deep snow drift about 20 rods east of their house, she took a rope and lassoed and captured it. One day when the Sunday School was having an outing at their place she picked up William Cherry, a young man bigger than she was and threw him over her shoulder and threatened to throw him into the river just for fun and scared him. The river at that time was almost

to run over its banks. When Beaver Dick died, Jefferson Black conducted the funeral there and he was buried up on the hill north and a little east of the residence.

HF: The interview with O. K. Meservy will be continued on side two. Side two the interview with O. K. Meservy and the tape will be concluded.

OM: ...His will was that she should have it as long as she didn't marry.

HF: Now Richard Leigh, as I understand it, had lost his first wife and their children in the smallpox. This was his wife Jenny. And then later on he married another Indian girl and it was this second wife that you knew wasn't it? Can you describe Richard Leigh and his Indian wife to me, to us, their size, appearance?

OM: Well Richard Leigh was just ordinary size; he wasn't fleshy. And he had blues eyes and a light complexion. And his wife, Jenny, and the family that had died down west of Rexburg of smallpox, and of course he was single after that, but one time he met an Indian family at Fort Hall and he was there during the birth of a little girl and he assisted them. He probably saved the mother's wife. And they told him that he could have her for a wife. And he said no he wouldn't wait that long. He wouldn't keep her, but he was willing to help them out and do what he could for them. Well it happened that she was one of the Sioux Indians. And later on when he is gone quite a few years she got older, why she met up with him again and they finally got married. And he called her Sue on account of her tribe. Then it happened before that her mother was there had been baptized by a Mormon elder who had been on a mission. And they were members of the Mormon Church; Leigh never the joined the Church. But he use to on the river and fish and his main occupation was taking tourists around up in the mountains and up in Jackson's Hole and over in Yellowstone Park. That was his main business. But it happened you'd might say that Theodore Roosevelt, Teddy we called him, was sent out to Yellowstone Park by his father well before he was married, his boy, because he had an ailment he thought was consumption. And he got better in the [inaudible] course and he was acquainted with Dick. And Dick brought him to his house there once. He said one time that he gave Dick's oldest daughter, Emma, a spanking because of something she'd done of his to [inaudible] the place where he put off. But he made her a present after that, I don't remember just now off hand just what the present was, but he made her a present and she said she was desiring the punishment she got and she felt a lot of pity.

HF: Was his wife, Sue, a typical Indian with long black hair and black eyes, and so on?

OM: She was very typical and her mother –and she'd come down and visit the people in Wilford a whole lot.

HF: Did they often attend church?

OM: Well they attended church a time or two there in Wilford, that's all. The Black's folks took them there when they were visiting them. They'd go down to the Black's very often.

HF: Did they have on the ranch horses and things like this gathered around them, a pack of dogs, and so on? Usually the Indians do.

OM: Why I don't remember them having a pack of dogs, but I know they had horses to ride around. And I know one time that Dick was up next to the Teton peak one night and he got anger at his wife and he told her and the children to go home. And they started out on foot on the west of the Teton peak up there and after they'd been gone nearly all night, why he got to thinking that something might happen to them, and he had not a gun there, so he strikes out to see and he overtakes them just a short distance above their residence. They were nearly home when he overtook them.

HF: Now he was quite an individual. I'd imagine the number of the settlers had gotten acquainted with him over the years by going up to his place and he had acquired quite a reputation in the area as a guide, you say?

OM: Yes, nearly everybody in Wilford knew him, a lot of people. And then the tourists that came to go with him in the summer, why of course knew him. And they would visit sometimes taking to go to town in order to get something and people would see him.

HF: Now where is his burial place there in Wilford?

OM: It's on the hill, on [inaudible] just above the [inaudible]. It was [inaudible].

HF: Has it been fixed up so that a nice place prepared for his burial?

OM: Well, I don't like to tell you what I know about that because it really was different [inaudible]. But he was buried on the hill just down northeast of the house up there. At it happened that after his wife lost the place and other people got it that the ground was plowed there. And the little fence around the grave was placed nearly a quarter of a mile on the east end of the property on the hill. And it's there where the people go to celebrate and honour him. They go up there and honour him.

HF: In the early days of Wilford of course one of the big problems was to get the water, available water, out onto the [inaudible] land. And I am assuming that as a youth having gone up there in 1887 a lot of this work yet remained to be done. Perhaps you can tell us some of the development, some of the names of the canals and how they were developed? Where they got their water? And the procedure in determining where the canals were to be located so they could get the maximum benefit from the waters?

OM: The canals in those days were surveyed and then they followed the level of the land as much as possible which made the canals quite crooked, going back and forth around from where the hills crooked and when they had to they'd cross a hollow and they'd make a levee and in some acute places they'd make cuts. But when logs and levees were made it was a hard job with a little scrapper to pull that dirt way up high and carried it along – they'd go along that levee, near the whole length of the levee, you see and then

down again so as not to drive anymore dirt down again, as it went down the hill. When you bring a scrapper full up and dump it, if the turn went down again you might [inaudible] get that much down. It'd go right on to the end of the levee and then come down around, make a turn that way you'd make these high levees. And the Fall River Canal had to enlarge it and they had to make a dam across Fall River. And I've been on those occasions there was the Chester Canal. It was gone out up there. And there's other canals that got little ones for people who live along the rivers. And there's a Salem Canal that's got down North Fork and then down to Salem. That was gotten about northeast to Wilford. And the Twin Groves was taken out of North Fork. Fall River was taken out of Fall River. The Enterprise Canal was taken out of Fall River. And the Wilford Canal was taken out of the Teton River. The East Teton Canal was part of Fall River and was combed across the Teton Canyon. And the Enterprise Canal of course they had to come down across the canyon of the Teton River about two and a half miles northeast of Newdale. And then they emptied their water at the end of the canal into Moody Creek, and of course that helps the people out in Moody. And there's not enough water up there. There's different times we've tried to get reservoirs. We tried to get a reservoir made up on Beckler River and Beckler Meadows just at the west stage of the national park up there. And many people against us, they fought us. We'd been ahead at the American Falls reservoir, if we had gotten that out. But Senator Dubois, our senator, instead of helping us now get that, he fought it because we already had a reservoir on the south part up in Jackson's Hole. He said that's one of the best in the country. When the reservoir was nearly empty why they just flood the walls of it and that'd spoil anything. He wouldn't agree to having any more. Well he got a senator from Massachusetts and the two came out here and worked against that. Then they went back and told the members of congress, different ones, that there were two Mormons out west of the park there that wanted to destroy the beauty of the park, the lake reservoir on back to the meadows. And then they had little speeches printed and they sent them out so that the tourists in Yellowstone Park would get it. They had different ones stand on little places and they'd [inaudible] them off to the tourists in the park so that they'd have the whole [inaudible] against us. So we didn't get them.

HF: I've heard of this Dubois before, Fred T. Dubois. And I suppose in many ways he was quite an opponent for the Mormon people. Now I suppose this is somewhat true. The canals once they were developed enabled the pioneers and the farmers to bring into productive, I presume, added crops and certainly increased the productivity of given crops. What were some of the crops that were early developed and raised in the Wilford area? And have there been additional crops grown after it was learned that they could be grown?

OM: Well they tried to grow the crops they'd grown in Utah and in the southern part of Idaho. And there wasn't too much difference in some of the years, but wheat was the main crop for food. There was wheat, oats and barley and some corn, but not big crops of corn just garden corn. And there wasn't much fruit raised here for quite a number of years. And we had brought up a starter fruit from upper Utah and we gave parts off from that to different people. We'd sell them branches and roots and sprouts and things off of fruit bushes and fruit trees and things of that kind so as to – the country got built up faster.

Of course the people in Rexburg, now of course they'd get those things from their acquaintances and relatives down in Utah. But people up around this way around St. Anthony and Wilford and Twin Groves and up towards Fall River and what not and some in the basin got them from [inaudible]. We sold them to [inaudible].

HF: Now did they start producing beets at a rather early date up there after they got the factory going here in Sugar City? Did they ever produce beets up there in that area?

OM: Yes they produced beets all over the country up here for a number of years. And they seemed to raise some pretty good. We've been raising 'em until the last few years here in Newdale. And the ground at Newdale produces very good beets, but the potatoes harvest in more money, than raising potatoes than raising sugar beets. And for that reason the sugar beets have kind of gone out of business. And the people didn't raise so many of them because they had to fertilize the ground for it and then they had to have a certain way of digging them and topping them and loading them in the trucks and hauling them down to Sugar City and having them weighed and so forth. But the potato business took the place of the sugar beets and the factory quit.

HF: Now with reference to the dairy industry, cattle, livestock industry, did this get off on an early start and a good start?

OM: Yes they raised cattle and sold them for beef usually. Another thing that I didn't say they raised peas. There were seed companies came here and at one time we had a dozen seed companies at St. Anthony, just north of Wilford. And everybody raised seed peas and they'd make more money raising them than they could raising grain or raising hay. So they were raising seed peas. I had seed peas one year and the water in the river failed because there wasn't enough for all the canals and they shut some of them off. The canal I was watering with was shut off and I was trying to get water and run water on my place. I was in the field in July and the sun was shining bright and it was about one o'clock and I faced the south, leaned my shovel against my chest, I raised my hands up to heaven and said, "Oh where is the god of Jacob?" And I said it like Joseph Smith said, "Where Lord God, where art thou?" [inaudible] hiding place when he was in the jail in Missouri. And Elijah said when he went back to the Missouri River and took the cloak of Elijah and said, "Where is the god of Elijah?" and smote the water and it divided so he could cross. Well I asked him to spare my crop for me as I couldn't save it for me. And he spoke very plain and distinctly, "I will water your crops." And I answered, "Even so Father, let it not only rain but let it storm over the mountains and into the streams and let the river, even the north fork of the Snake River raise three feet to make water for all the canal so all will be blessed." And it was done. The river raised and they had a contract to put the second bridge laid across the river there. And they had to take and fill in a bend in the river south of the canal that's north of the bridge now. And they had about 1,000 loads of gravel in there and it washed most of it out. And outside of that in the Birch Canal they had tightened their dam and had washed around the end of it and it cost them about 100 dollars to fix that. And outside of that it did no damage and the waters continued through the season and we didn't have to have anybody measuring the water and shutting down the canals anymore that year.

HF: Well that was a very faith-promoting incident I'm sure in your life. You know I ask this question to a pioneer who settled up in the Driggs country, up in the Teton Basin, if the conditions of raising crops had changed much since the settlers first moved in realizing that in the very early days frost was a tremendous problem to the productivity of these crops. And he seemed to feel that the Lord had tempered the elements and with the country becoming more and more populated the temperatures, the normal temperatures, seemed to have arisen to that extent whereby they could raise these crops. How do you feel about this Brother Merservy?

OM: Well I feel that way too. Now I remember when the water in the canal would freeze up very rapidly and it didn't seem like it took any time at all until we could skate over it. And I remember one winter during the whole month of February the thermometer was hardly a few degrees below zero. And I use to walk out without an overcoat and without overshoes. In those days we tied gunnysacks around our feet and ankles and we could go through the snow that way. We use to have to drive our cows in the wintertime to the river to water them. People didn't have water in their wells like they do now a days. And I know when we got to diving wells there were places where we'd find water, maybe down 20 or 30 feet there'd be a stream of water. I located water that way for a number of people for wells. I'd take a stick, a parted stick, and hold the ends in my hands and the part would turn down over where there was a stream of water due the electricity in the stream. The electricity in the system would go through and point down and from where I first felt the pull to where it went straight down would be the depth of it. So I could tell how far down it went and that way we located the water and the depths of it. My father didn't believe in that and he wanted to test me out at times. I located a well for him that way and when we got down the stream, the stream wasn't deep. It was only about two inches deep on a hard pan. And so he says well we'll cut through that hard pan and of course the water went. The water went with it when we cut through. And he made a tub-like barrel out of metal, galvanized down there, and then cemented around the edges of it with a hard pan and it filled up with water. Then we just took a 20 gallon barrel and went down there and had some horses pulling it through, pulling the water up, had a valve in the bottom right barrel which would raise when you got water and a handle up at the top you'd pull that, let the water run out in a trough. It was a fine well then. And I went up in Teton Basin after some coal, to Brother Moore's coal mine, and he says over on that next hill there according to the lay of the country there should be a coal mine. But he says, "I can't locate it. I may dig a hundred holes and not hit. I'd wish you'd locate it for me." And I took the parted stick and located it for him so that he didn't have to dig only one hole. So it turned for three different things for me. It turned for water. It turned for coal. And it turned for silver. My father had a silver spoon, a large spoon, that was given to him when he was born by his grandparents, no not grandparents – what do you call those sacred parents that they had?

HF: God....

OM: Godfather and godmother. Yeah, his godparents. And he lost that and couldn't find it and I happened to be fooling around in the house with it one time and over the kitchen

stove and on each side of the pipe of the stove, the stovepipe, there were little holes where you go down to get the soot out, right set underneath. And it turned over one of them. Come to find out down in there was that silver spoon. And some of the kids had dropped it through the little opening at the top. Well then he thought that was just an accident that I'd happened to find it. So he got 22 diapers and wrapped them up, folded them up, and in one of these he put the spoon. And he put them around in a circle and had me come locate that spoon. And the second one I went to the stick broke. And he says go give me another stick and so he gave me another one and he says now go on. It went round and round and never turned into any of them and got back to that one again and it turned down. I opened it up and the spoon was there.

HF: That's very interesting. You call those what the divining rod?

OM: Yeah sometimes. But I can take short club bar and hold it [inaudible] and get as far as electricity gets it. And I can't wear a watch because it magnetizes it and it stops.

HF: Well now as we come to a close of this interview on the community of Wilford I'd like to have you make some comments on your years as a public servant, as a probate judge and also as a justice of the peace and then we'll close up by asking you something about your church service. When were you probate judge and what years? What were some of the experiences you had in that public office for Fremont County?

OM: I was probate judge from January 1939 to January 1949 and I have been county assessor three different terms years before. And during my campaigning for being re-elected there's never been as much pike in the campaign as what there was in that time when I ran for county assessor. Why the governor of Idaho, Governor Moore, he told me one time after the primary election, the day they got some kind of returns from it, he says, "I will canvas every house." Now he was governor of the state of Idaho and he was a republican and I was republican, but the county republican officers of the county had asked me beforehand if I would what they told me to do. And I says, "I'll do what I thinks right. And I'll take advice but I won't promise to do what you tell me to do unless I think it's right." Well that was sufficient. They fought me as hard as they could all the time. Though I was a republican they told the officers of the Republican Party, and there was about a dozen men that fought me all the time. And they told so many lies on me and that part of the county you see won't accept it at all. So we had some real battles. And they published all kinds of lies in the newspapers about me. When I was assessor they said I wasn't competent, couldn't do that kind of work and wasn't fit for it and so on. And there happened to be an officer of the stake that had been around investigating, looking after the records of the county assessors and seeing what they'd collected and what they'd done and all that sort of thing. And so I had him write me a little statement when he was there that my record was alright and that published. And he happened to be in the hotel ready to take a train to go and a fellow stepped in there and was telling him about my records, that I wasn't competent to makes such records and then he went out and this man says to him, he says, "What that man said isn't true. I've examined all the records in the state of Idaho and Mr. Meservey's record is one of the best there is in the state." Well you see that was something. Well that was published in the newspaper too.

And the man that was the successor before me he was a fighting to because he was county clerk and he was fighting me. And the county commissioners they were fighting me because they were republicans. And the republican authorities they were fighting me. Well so they never had such a campaign before or since that I know of in the history of the county that they had with me and yet there's time when it's made known to me that I would be elected by inspiration. And I'd be elected and well...

HF: Who was your opponent in 1947 or '48? Who was your opponent in 1948, the last term you served?

OM: Oh I can't remember. I can't remember all of them. But I've got them in my history here. I can give it to you out of my history.

HF: Oh that would be quite fine. You were Justice of the Peace for many, many years too, weren't you?

OM: Yes I was Justice of the Peace for 40 years.

HF: In the Wilford precinct?

OM: Yes in the Wilford precinct. But now, you see, they appoint them; they don't elect them.

HF: That's right. Well now you worked probably with a lot of, a number of, lawyers in the area too, haven't you?

OM: Yes.

HF: As probate judge and also Justice of the Peace you've had occasion to observe lawyers coming before you, to lead cases and to argue their cases and so on?

OM: Yes, I was road supervisor when they had cases. I had one case go to the Supreme Court when I was road supervisor [inaudible] and different things. And while they were questioning me about it the county attorney and the man he had helping him instead of listening while the other side was questioning me they went off by themselves. And I told the judge I didn't think some of those questions were right. He says, "I don't either but your attorneys ain't saying anything." And finally this fella asked me, he says, "Well do you know what a road?" And I said, "Yes." He says, "What is it?" I says, "A road is a place on earth travelers by vehicles, drawn by horses or otherwise." Well they adjourned the court for an hour or so, why the clerk was running around telling all of the attorneys my answer. And one lawyer came to me and says, "You beat Webster on that." And they never was afraid of me getting bothered at all by any questions that they could ask me.

HF: Were you always quite impressed with Frank Miller as an attorney?

OM: Frank Miller was pretty apt; a pretty apt attorney. And now one time when Miller was talking with two other attorneys and I came along and they had been talking on a certain manner and he says, "Let's ask Mr. Meservey about that. He knows more about it than us all." So that was quite a recommend.

HF: How about the Sole brothers or boys?

OM: Well they were good.

HF: Whose they? Which ones were they?

OM: Henry Sole, he was good. And now there was two others. There's one, one went to Washington out in the state of Washington and one went somewhere else, but I can't remember the names. I can't remember names of all the – I would have to look in the records and see them.

HF: Well...

OM: But I had other public offices so that – now during the time that I was probate judge during the world war there was land there couldn't anybody buy, sell, nor use exclusive without getting permission from me. And there were times that they couldn't borrow any money from the government places without getting permission from me.

HF: Well Brother Meservey you served your church quite extensively. Why don't you make a few comments about your service as a clerk and also in the bishopric and in the stake capacity and some of those things?

OM: Well when I was ordained ward – when I was ordained a teacher rather, had been a deacon, when I was ordained a teacher I was assigned to visit about one-third of the ward and I was given a companion that went with me once and I went all the rest the time alone. It took all day on horseback to make my visits. I succeeded in getting three or four families that were not taking any stock in the ward or to do their duty and some of them have been put in the Sunday School, superintendents even, things like that. So I did a good work that way. And then as I got older and as an elder I labored in the Elders Quorum and I was secretary of the Mutual and I was secretary of the Melchizedek Priesthood in the ward and secretary of everything that happened to come along they could put me in. And I was ward clerk under five bishops and two those bishops had me do all the financial work that was done. I received all the tithing and receipted for it, made all the tithing reports, sent it all into headquarters, received all the ward maintenance money, all the other funds reported on all of them. Had that under Bishop S. W. Orem and under Bishop Charles E. Murray. They gave me 75 dollars a year for doing that part that they should be doing. I had work in the stakes so that I was secretary in the Sunday School work and I worked in the other organizations in the stake and I assisted an ordaining 25 seventies one day in the stake. I had something to do with missionary work in the stake and I was in charge of the genealogical work in the ward and the stake. I had charge of those things and I don't know – I was called upon to preach and visit the

different wards and stakes until everybody seemed to be acquainted with me in those parts all the way from Marysville down to Egin.

HF: So you've really had a long service, haven't you, in the church?

OM: Like I was telling you, like I said before I was counting up how many, out of my history here at one time, just to see how many positions as agents – I was agents for different companies – and correspondents for newspapers and things of that kind, different positions I'd held during my life and I got up to 150 of them. And that was only taken up to 1940. And there would be since then there are other that I didn't have so I figured about 200 different kinds of work I had done. I cast myself as a farmer, a miller, a water master here in Wilford and Twin Groves, and a farmer's friend. And I was acquainted with all these different kinds of works – secretary for three different companies. So I just figured that there wouldn't be any other man in the county that had been in the many positions as I have.

HF: With the great number of years that you have lived in the area it appears to me that you could be called Mr. Wilford right now or something like this. It's really remarkable.

OM: Or Yellowstone Stake.

HF: Or Mr. Yellowstone Stake or something, Mr. Fremont County.

OM: I made the first [inaudible] reports of the stake although I wasn't stake clerk then. You see when the stake was organized they wanted someone to make a report of the last year of the stake for the stake to have. And of course I was in the other stake. So I was called to do that and I went down to Rexburg with the stake clerk down there compiled the reports of all the organizations that would be in the stake for the past year. And then when it came time to make the first report after they organization of the stake the stake clerk, although he was bookkeeper for a [inaudible] establishment and he went up to Driggs and the clerk from the bank, came to me and says "If you make out that report I'll give you 75 dollars." And during the first year I made the reports for different branches and wards and bishoprics [inaudible]. I did all that before I'd come into you see. [inaudible] my kids are all smart. My oldest son served 15 years as the stake Sunday School secretary.

HF: Is that right?

OM: [Inaudible] I taught the priesthood classes more than anybody else in the ward; did more years [inaudible].

HF: Well that's really wonderful. I want to make this comment just before we close that I've enjoyed this tape and the material on it I'm sure is the nature that will be entertaining to others to listen to. Coming from a man in his 91st year I think this is really, really remarkable.

HF: This concludes the tape and the interview with O. K. Mersery a very, very remarkable man, meticulous, anxious to be faithful and steadfast in the Church and in his community. And truly a man who....