Voices from the Past

History of Mud Lake

Interviewees: Mildred Jackson Staley & Joe Hartwell

June 2, 1982

Tape #26

Oral Tape by Harold Forbush

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Harold Forbush: Interview with Mildred Staley and Joe Hartwell on June 2, 1982, by Harold Forbush on their views of the history of Mud Lake in Jefferson County.

HF: It is a real opportunity for me to be in the home of Mrs. Mildred Staley, S-T-A-L-E-Y. Her husband is—what’s his first name?

Mildred Staley: Roy.

HF: Roy. Mr. and Mrs. Roy and Mildred Staley. She has invited Mr. Joe—

Joe Hartwell: Hartwell.

HF: Hartwell, H-A-R-T-W-E-L-L, to be here present with us as we cover the subject of this particular interview. It’s the afternoon of Saturday the 5th day of June, 1982. Just six years after the bursting of the Teton Dam, which is maybe somewhat of a coincidence that brings us out here today. I first would like to ask you, Mrs. Staley, a little something about your own personal background. First of all, why don’t you state your full name, that includes your married name, and your occupation and your present residence.

MS: I’m Mildred Rose Jackson Staley. I was born here in 1918 and I always said the community grew up around me because there wasn’t much out here when I was born. My mother was one of the early school teachers and my father was one of the early settlers out here. I’ve lived in Mud Lake practically all of my life.

HF: You’re somewhat of a writer, are you not?

MS: Yes, I am.

HF: That would be your occupation?

MS: That’s my real occupation. I’m a news correspondent and I’ve been working on a history of the Mud Lake area since I was in High School, really. I started collecting material for it. I have quite a bit of background on it.

HF: Now you’re maiden name is Jackson?

MS: Yes.

HF: And your parents were early settlers?

MS: Yes.

HF: What was your father’s name?

MS: Earl Jackson.
HF: Is he a farmer?

MS: Yes, he was. His father had been a miner in Butte, Montana, and when they started settling out here, he was old enough that he had to retire. He heard of the Mud Lake area through Bill Owsley and Jim Abbott and came out here and he settled next to the lake. The Staley’s also came out here and they settled next to the lake.

HF: Now this was your husband’s people?

MS: Yes.

HF: Now Mr. Hartwell, what about your background? First of all what is your residence, your occupation and something about your personal background.

Joe Hartwell: I live in Monteview, Idaho. I am in the cattle business and general farming. I have been here since the 5th day of October, 1918.

HF: And that was the date of your birth?

JH: No, no. I was born in 1907.

HF: Oh okay, you go back. I see. Well that’s–You are kind of an old timer!

JH: I am 75 years old. (Laughs)

HF: You know, your voice certainly doesn’t suggest this. In fact, your voice, to me, suggests that you would be, oh, a good 20 years younger than 75. Well, that’s interesting. Now people, we’re here to cover a subject matter and I would like to focus, if I can, as much as possible on that subject, and that is Mud Lake. It’s a descriptive term isn’t it?

JH: Yes, it is.

HF: Why do they call it Mud Lake?

MS: There are several reasons for it as I have found. No one can say for sure, but different people had different ideas. M. D. Beal, when he wrote, he said–oh may I read what I have written here?

HF: Alright.

JH: It’s a little bit of background: “There seems to be no definite time when the name became officially Mud Lake although it was referred to as the muddy lake by some members of Brigham Young’s party in 1857.” There are also conflicting stories of how it got its name. Beal said, “In the middle of a desert of lava beds, sand dunes and an occasional crater is the remnant of an ancient lake. Mud Lake is a large, shallow sheet of murky water. If the waters were not naturally cloudy they would become so by the
churning given by thousands of wild mud hens, ducks and geese.” The late Judson Henry Stoddard of Parker, a rider for a large cattle company, felt it was named Mud Lake because when the cattle watered there, the first few cattle to reach the lake got water, the rest only mud. Early settlers insisted the name was the only appropriate one because the almost continual wind kept the water always muddy.

HF: Now in size, how much area are we talking about? Do either one of you have any way to describe the size?

JH: I wouldn’t know the size of Mud Lake.

MS: Let’s see. The Carey Act had quite a bit to do with development here, but the Mud Lake had practically dried up. When they began to irrigate on the Egen Bench country in 1895, Mud Lake started to grow again. It was an ancient lake and it had practically dried up. A government survey in 1889 showed that it covered 2,000 acres, and it had been practically dry before that. The entire area was popular with stockmen for pasture. In 1901, Horace Jacket and his son, Frank, came to Mud Lake and they were the first white men to settle in the area. They had brought some sheep with them and chose the place because there was so much grass there. When they came the lake was dry. Frank said, “And when we came up here there was no Mud Lake and no Camas Creek.” They were able to get a little water from the shallow holes they dug in the ground, but as it was not too clean, they drained the juice from cans of tomatoes to use as drinking water. They built a dugout to live in, but that was so damp they had to put boards down to walk on. In the years immediately following their arrival the lake started to come up as the irrigation on the Egen Bench continued.

HF: Now Egen Bench would be what direction from here?

JH: Northeast.

HF: Northeast, about how many miles, Mr. Hartwell?

JH: I would presume it’s in the neighborhood of 50 miles.

HF: Fifty miles from here?

JH: Yes.

HF: Now the lake bed itself, it has been suggested here, 2,000 acres?

MS: That was in the 1800’s, but it dried up after that and then it has spread out again.

HF: But its drainage, is it not, for the Camas Creek?

JH: Yes.
MS: Camas Creek and…

JH: Beaver Creek and…

MS: Medicine Lodge.

JH: Medicine Lodge drain into Mud Lake.

HF: Now Birch Creek doesn’t, does it?

JH: No.

HF: But those three and then the effects of the irrigation over in the Egen Bench, apparently, area all have an effect in bringing water and causing it to surface over here in this depression?

JH: That is correct.

HF: Now, when it reaches its maximum amount of water, and I suppose that’s true right now, is it not?

JH: It’s about its peak now.

MS: Well, it hasn’t got as high as it does other times. Walt Spellman says that he doubts if it will reach more than the seven foot level now and he would like to have nine feet in it.

HF: Now when you say seven foot or nine foot level, is that depth?

MS: Yes.

HF: That’s depth. Okay now, you have commented that the Reclamation Department or the Carey Act had developed the area for irrigation purposes by excavating canals. Is that so?

MS: They didn’t start the Carey Act out here until after the first settlers. The first settlers were not affected by the Carey Act, they filed on water. For instance, Horace Jacket made a water filing in 1906; but he filed on some springs that he saw coming up, and the dried up again so his filing was never proved upon.

HF: As far as history then, that perhaps is a priority date, an early priority, of 1906.

MS: There was water in the lake because Earnest Bowerly, in 1907, filed on a water right which still exists there out of Camas Creek. He filed directly on the water out of Camas Creek, and that is the oldest filing in the lake.
HF: Now is it your understanding then that the early pioneers, early settlers, they didn’t necessarily rely on any water coming from the lake? There was none there. Is that–

MS: Oh, the early settlers had to use water from the lake, but they got it by gravity flow.

HF: Okay so there was water, the early settlers did find water in that depression, in that lake?

JH: Yes, I’d say that’s correct.

MS: You see in 1901 it was dry. That’s when Jacket’s first came out here and it was dry at that time.

HF: So the early settlers didn’t antedate 1900.

MS: No.

HF: They were after 1900?

MS: I don’t know of anyone who settled out here in 1900.

JH: Yes, I don’t know that anyone was here before 1900, no.

HF: When would you say, Mr. Hartwell, the greatest number, or the main settlement of the Mud Lake area occurred?

JH: Well, when we came here in 1918, it was very small. It’s grown to its size since that time. It was very small when we came here.

HF: And there weren’t too many settlers here at that time?

JH: No, there were very few settlers around Mud Lake.

HF: Do you know anything about the ethnic background of the early settlers, who they were, where had they come from? Were they Germans, or Swedes, or what?

MS: There was one bunch of Mormons who came through here. The Staley’s were among those who had been down in Mexico and were run out by the revolution and they came up here. That was a group of Mexicans.

HF: Some of Poncho Villa’s, chased by him?

MS: Yes, they were chased out by him. There were quite a few Swedes who settled out here and they were mostly in one location.

JH: They were around Jefferson, the Jefferson area.
HF: Now that would be shown by the name of Schulberg…

JH: Jerenberg, Nordstrom, Jackson.

MS: Jackson wasn’t—

HF: That’s really an English name.

MS: Yes. My father used to say that the Jackson’s were the dividing line. There were Swedes to the north of us and Mormons to the south of us. (Laughs)

JH: That’s right.

HF: When did your father settle?

MS: He came out here in 1912.

HF: About ’12. And so maybe the Mormons and the Swedes settled on each side of him, cause 1912 would be kind of early, wouldn’t it?

MS: No. See, there were quite a few. By 1908 over on the—transportation was poor in those days. People had to travel by foot or horseback, so each little cluster was kind of separate. There was quite a collection over on the east side of the lake.

JH: Jackets and Barleys.

MS: There was a John Sidley, a William Owlsley, Gardner and Louisa Pease, June Hicks, Jim Potter, Barney Barnard.

JH: Joe Potter.

MS: Yeah and all—Joe actually came up. Jim was his uncle and Joe lived with him for awhile. These were the ones on the south and then there were the Lakes, who were among the earliest ones that I don’t have much on. But each little group was kind of separate. There was one little group on the east side. Then there was group on the south side of the lake, and there was this group over here.

JH: On the northwest side.

MS: On the west side. Then there were others out toward Monteview who weren’t really that involved with the lake.

HF: Now did these little groups, segments, sort of come together and form maybe a town site or a community?
MS: It was a separate community for each little group.
HF: For each one. I see.
MS: They had schools and post offices and things for each little group.
JH: They gradually put their efforts together to form canal irrigation companies.
HF: Now Owsley is a name after which there’s a large canal built.
JH: Yes.
HF: Is that correct?
MS: Yes.
HF: Now would that be, where, on the east side?
MS: That’s on the east side, yes.
HF: A diversion was made then from the lake taking water to the farmers of that particular area.
MS: Now, Owsley, when they started the Owsley Canal Company, he did that—let me read what I have here on this, it’s easier for me to read it, to make sure I’m correct. “In 1908 John Sidley, William Owsley, Gardner and Louisa Pease, June Hicks, James Potter and Barney Barnard all filed on land just south of the lake. These were the first filings in that area. There were actually only a few miles from the earlier settlers. The lack of roads, as well as the rough uncleared land and their slow transportation, made them feel very isolated. Their filings were not on the Carey Act land, but as the government grant had been approved, Owsley, Sidley, and Barnard, and also a Mr. Peterson was in with them for a while, they began work on a canal for their project. They did take some land for the first Carey Act work out here. They made several starts on different unsuccessful routes and finally a state engineer helped them lay out the one that they finally developed. This canal was the first really large business venture in the area. It was built the hard way with Fresnos and provided employment for a number of people.

HF: Was that quite a lengthy canal? The Owsley?
MS: Yes.
HF: It was. It’s many miles? And it brought water from the lake to the farmlands, to the south of the lake?
MS: Yes.
HF: Mainly to the south of the lake. Now, how about to the east or to the west? Were there other canals excavated?

MS: There was another—the Jefferson Canal Company was started up here. Now this William Owsley also had a filing west of the lake and he had a little private canal through here. The Jefferson (Canal Company), I don’t believe was on the Carey Act, was it?

JH: No.

MS: It was private.

HF: Now to both of you, were there canals excavated that proved to be really a fiasco? They were dug, excavated, never used.

JH: Yes there was.

MS: Definitely.

HF: Now why was that? What do we have as a background of historical significance for this?

JH: As far as I know, they just started too big a project and couldn’t carry it out, couldn’t develop as large a project as they started. It fell apart, went broke and then the Owsley Canal Company was developed later and in part of the original filings.

MS: Also, partly is was the fact that because the lake fluctuates, as the lake kept growing and growing, people thought it was just going to keep on growing. They thought there was just going to be an endless supply of water there.

JH: Yes, yes. That’s true too.

HF: So part of it was because of failure of a resource or the water supply.

JH: Yes, right. Yes the water supply resources.

HF: Now was this done primarily from government help or from the resources of the community? These big canals.

JH: Basically the resources of the community, I think.

MS: The people kept on—Now the one that started—Here’s what I have about the Jefferson Canal Company. Let me read just a little bit of background here.

MS: Let’s see. Should I name the names of the farmers who had land here? Do you want that?

HF: I think this would be helpful. This would be good.

MS: “As the lake continued to grow in size it attracted more attention. William Kirk filed on a place southwest of the lake which is presently owned by Lavera Park [Now I wrote this several years ago]. He was a Civil War veteran, and he was able to prove up on it with a very short residence and soon left the community. Tim Kearny, George Hex Monroe, Keith Scaley Birchum, George and Frank Lake, Isabelle Smith, and George Lufkin, also a Civil War veteran, took up claims near Kirk’s place. Also, Merritt Staley, Roy Patton and (Mr.) Patton filed on claims by the lake, but they were flooded out before they were able to prove upon them. All of these farms were water by gravity. The owners built dikes to control the lake and ditches to carry the water to their land. At about the same time, John Hansen, Felic Jim Abbot, Charles Nordstrom, and Eric Palmgrim filed on land on the far west side of the lake. By this time the growth and development of the Mud Lake area was becoming so well known, that John Hansen sold his farm near Idaho Falls [which is now across the highway from the Skyline development] in order to file on land in Mud Lake. He also built a fine two story log house on his place. At that time it was quite a mansion. Hansen, Abbott, and Nordstrom built the Hansen reservoir, the first small irrigation project in order to prolong their irrigating season. They were soon followed by Peter Ashenfelder, Charles Kilge, Newton Hughes, Louis Frussey, Thomas Jackson, and Alex Mitchell. All of these farms were watered by gravity flow. For a few years all of the early settlers felt they had really found the land of milk and honey. However, in 1914, the first settlers began to realize that it’s possible to get too much of a good thing. When their low dikes failed to hold back the rising water of the lake, the flood in Mud Lake wasn’t violent, rather it was deceptively mild and gradual with a relentless increase of water. As the water first came to the top of the small dikes, farmers went out with shovels to build up the low places. Then as the water oozed over the tops of the first dikes, neighboring farmers hastily built new dikes to save their farms and one after the other, lost the battle with the water. Bowerleys lost their battle early–now Bowerleys were the ones with the first filing there. From 1912 to 1918, they spent the summers running a dry farm near Dubois returning to their homestead in the winter so they could be there enough to prove up on it. Owsley, Sidley, Bernard, and Potter built shovel dikes to try to hold their land, but they too lost out. The Owsley’s and Potter’s took up claims at a safer distance [See, they had claims by the lake and then they took these other ones down on the other side here]. The Sidley’s, whose place was higher, was surrounded by water for several years on what became known as Sidley’s Island. They, too, finally had to take up a claim farther from the lake on the present Lavera Park place. During this time the work on the Owsley-Carey Land and Irrigation Company canal was continuing. William Owsley, for whom it was named, had become discouraged and sold his interest to his partners. As the lake continued to spread out, the Kirk place was flooded and Mrs. Smith, the Lakes and Pattons were flooded out and left the country permanently. Monroe and Birchum built a shovel dike on the present Chively place and held their land for some time. Palmgrim was then able to continue farming his place. His
neighbors: Abbots, Nordstroms, and Hansens, had backed …” Anytime I’m saying too much here stop me.

HF: Well I think what we get is an impression or the impression I get is that here we had a water resource that changed. It was variable. The farmers couldn’t rely on that water resource being at a permanent level. It was either low or it was high.

JH: That’s right.

HF: Because of that variableness, they couldn’t foresee just how high they had to build their dikes to keep out the water from invading their lands or not to have them too high so they could get water to put onto their grounds. I guess that has been the problem.

JH: Yes it has.

HF: Now you have indicated, Mrs. Staley, that a lot of them were forced to leave their homesteads. In this modern day have homesteads been re-taken up and are they being utilized?

MS: Oh yes. Now they have gone in and diked around the lake so they can control it better. In fact they are able to--

HF: Have they used cement and so on like this? Have they used sprinkler systems in some instances?

MS: There are a lot sprinkler systems out here, but the dike itself, I was told once, that it’s the longest earth-filled dike in the state. They call it an earth-filled dam actually, and it is built completely with dirt.

HF: Does it parallel the shoreline or something or is just this--?

JH: Yes, it does.

MS: The dike forms the shoreline.

HF: It forms the shoreline of the lake.

MS: Yes.

HF: Now I’ve heard that now, or in the past, the beaches of the lake have just really been beautiful and lovely, and it’s a good playground.

MS: Yes.

HF: This maybe doesn’t exist now?
MS: When the water is low enough there are still lovely–

JH: Beaches.

MS: You see the sand out there and it looks like the pictures around the ocean or something, nice, sloping, gentle sandy beach.

HF: Somebody commented that it almost paralleled Waikiki Beach in the Hawaiian Islands. (Laughs) Maybe that’s somewhat more of an exaggeration. Well now has the lake provided and has it been a food resource in fish, wildlife, etc?

JH: There’s some fish here all right, however, the supply has never been large enough to supply the communities or things like that, but there has been a lot of fishing done from the shores of the lake, you know, and boats and so forth.

MS: The earliest settlers used a lot of fish and they also used a lot of birds. In fact, ducks and waterfowl–

JH: Oh yes, yes.

HF: Waterfowl. So it was a natural habitat then?

JH: Food supply.

HF: Somebody commented that the main variety was perch. Is this so?

MS: They used to have beautiful, big trout.


HF: How about today?

JH: There are a lot of fish in the lake yet.

MS: They get so many trash fish in there now. They plant trout but the trash fish just kill them out.

HF: I see.

JH: There are a lot of trash fish in the lake all right, but then there’s still good fishing in Mud Lake. The government, or state, restocks it from time to time. Camas Creek and Mud Lake.

MS: Every so often they go in and poison all of the fish in the lake and then they restock it with trout. They never can get rid of all the trash fish.
HF: Now in the last many years, say thirty or forty years, as long as you have lived in this area, there has always been water in that lake?

JH: Yes.

HF: Both winter and summer?

MS: During the 30’s there was a time when it got pretty low.

JH: It got pretty low there at times but there has been water there all the time. It got really low.

HF: We have a little establishment here, through which we passed as we came out to your place, called Mud Lake Community or a little town site. Tell me what you know about the town site. When did the settlers form that?

MS: That was formed accidentally. The community has been known as Mud Lake ever since, well since Brigham Young’s time it was Mud Lake and that has always been the community. And each little—there was Hamer, Montevideo, Terreton, Spring Lake and Lakeview and they had schools for all these places. Owsley was the name of the first post office out here. They had the post offices in the little groups. Finally, Pete Kuharski started a very successful store at Montevideo and so many people wanted him to move down where it would be more centrally located. He came and bought corner of the Spealman farm and he set his store so that it was kitty-cornered so that it wouldn’t be facing in any one direction and he wanted people to know that it was to serve the whole community. He called it the Mud Lake Merc. Then gradually a few people bought a little location around there and put up another business. It began that people would speak of, instead of saying “Going to the store,” since there was more than one place there, they would say “Go up to Mud Lake.” When the town became incorporated it was just naturally named Mud Lake.

HF: How do you spell this man’s name?


HF: Probably Polish.

MS: Yes.

JH: Yes, Kuharski; he was Polish.

HF: Very Polish; it sounds like it. When did he do this? Mrs. Staley, you have the date of the founding of this little community?

MS: Well, 1935 was when they built the first store there. I forgot to get when it was incorporated, when it became a town, but they built the Mud Lake Merc there, and his
son Steve took over the Monteview store. Then after that he built the Oasis Bar and Café that is still up there near the store. And another son Stanley–

HF: Is that in the–

MS: That’s right there at Mud Lake.

HF: At Mud Lake. So right now then you had the Oasis. It was a kind of a bar/café type of establishment?

MS: His son, Stanley, operated the store for a while, and then they sold it from there. Pete went on and built the first service station. That’s the Gerard service station now. That was the first service station we’d ever had in this area. Then it was after that, that people started putting in other things. But to follow out the way Kuharski’s, the kind of builders they were, when they sold the service station, the store, and the Oasis then he moved down the street a little ways and built a motel there. I guess motel is what it is. They’ve just built everything around the Mud Lake area, which was started from the things the Kuharski’s started out.

HF: It’s primarily the largest community, I suppose, in this area, isn’t it?

MS: Yes, but one interesting thing about it, it is the largest incorporated city in the whole area, and it’s the only one with no post office.

HF: That is kind of interesting. Mud Lake did not come from an early beginning, ’35 was not early, but you had a number of other communities that had sprung up, and lived out their existence, and died away, and are now ghost towns in the area.

MS: Camas and Hamer were the only towns. The others were not towns. There was a Terreton store. There was a Monteview store. There were the post offices, and there were the schools, but there were no communities around them.

HF: Tell me a little about Camas. That’s had quite a history. Joe, why don’t you tell us about it?

JH: We came there on the eighth day of April, 1916. We moved into Camas. But Camas had pretty well faded down; however there was a hardware, blacksmith shop, and post office and two different grocery stores, general merchandise stores in Camas when we came there in 1916. But Camas had been a lot bigger than it was then.

HF: Now had the railroad kind of been responsible for the arising of that little community?

JH: Well, I presume yes, to a degree. There was a lot of ore hauled out of Gilmore to Camas and loaded on the railroad at Camas and before that time. There had been a lot of ore hauled out of Gilmore.
HF: Now Camas is on the main line on up to Butte?

JH: Yes, between Butte and Pocatello.

HF: Butte and Pocatello.

JH: Yes.

MS: Now it is my understanding that at one time they thought that Camas was going to be set up as the railroad center. That’s what people expected that to be.

JH: Yes it was. There was talk about having some railroad yards started there.

MS: They thought they would have the railroad yards there and then when the railroad yards were put in Pocatello, why, that finished Camas.

JH: Took it away.

HF: Didn’t Eagle Rock aspire to that position at one time, for the railroad yards?

JH: I presume they did.

HF: Then suddenly something happened, and everything was taken to Pocatello.

JH: Yes.

MS: But one interesting thing that a lot of people don’t realize, there was a good sized town at Roberts before there was anything at Eagle Rock. Roberts was an older settlement.

HF: And at that time it was referred to as Market Lake.

MS: Yes.

JH: Yes.

HF: Now how far would Market Lake, or Roberts, be from, we’ll say Camas?

MS: Goodness, I don’t know.

JH: I suppose 20 miles.

HF: Around 20 miles?

HF: Now Camas, of course, would be to the north.

JH: Yes.

HF: And Roberts, or Market Lake, is right on the railroad but to the south about 20, 25 miles?

JH: Yes.

HF: Now Hamer, you mentioned another community or town called Hamer. Now that wouldn’t have been on the railroad though, would it?

JH: Yes it was.

HF: Oh is it?

JH: It is right on the railroad. There is a depot and everything at Hamer, and it was there when we came in ’16. That’s six miles below Camas.

HF: Six miles south?

JH: South of Camas.

HF: Oh, well that’s interesting. Now, Camas on the north, then Hamer, then Market Lake.

JH: Yes.

HF: And those would all be within Jefferson County?

HF: Yes, they’re all in Jefferson County.

HF: All in Jefferson County, when Jefferson County was formed in about 1913 or 1914 I think is when the County became settled.

MS: I’ve got the date, but I’ll tell you something rather interesting that I found in getting history. If you look at a map it’s quite ridiculous because here’s a little corner of Jefferson County that looks like it belongs in Bonneville County and that’s where Rigby is and that’s the county seat for this whole big county. There was some politics involved with that. Also, one reason the people out here, my dad was one who went around with petitions and really worked to get people to vote to have Rigby as the county seat; because at that time they were dividing counties so rapidly that the people out here, a lot of them felt they were going to divide the county again, and naturally Market Lake was the logical place for a county seat. But the people who lived out here wanted to keep Market Lake for the county seat for the new county. So they all worked to get Rigby as the county seat.
HF: That is interesting. I know there was a tremendous struggle in Madison County. Well of course prior to Madison County in 1893 when Fremont County was organized, these two communities, St. Anthony and Rexburg, were really contending to be the county seat of this huge county, but St. Anthony won out. I don’t know why because at the time Rexburg was larger. But St. Anthony won out.

MS: Maybe there was some funny little background like that back then.

HF: In that area. Well Jefferson County, West Jefferson is a big area, is it not?

JH: Yes it is.

HF: Now, we’ve talked about the communities of Hamer and you still refer to the community of Hamer, I suppose, don’t you?

JH: It’s still in Jefferson County.

HF: And it’s still in Jefferson County. You refer to the community of Mud Lake, don’t you?

MS: That’s an incorporated city.

HF: Yeah. And to the community of Monteview. Now Monteview is on further north, isn’t it?

JH: Yes, it is.

HF: It was the last of these three communities to be kind of settled and really farmed and so forth. Isn’t this so?

JH: More or less correct, that’s right.

MS: There was a lot of settlement in Monteview at about the same time as there was here, but they were hoping to get a water project through, that they thought they would get the water brought down from the Snake River through there. And then that project they thought that they would get government funds to put a water project there. When they lost that, it went down to the southern part of the state, around American Falls wasn’t it? That project went instead of going up here? And so a lot of those people moved out. By about 1916, I think all of Monteview had been settled on at one time. And then people just—there was no way they could dry farm and no water for them, and they had to move out.

JH: They expected the project called the Dubois Project to come in there in those early days and then that fell apart and then Monteview drifted southward.
HF: Here into the Mud Lake area?

JH: Well, into Jefferson County.

HF: I see. Now what’s caused Monteview to flourish in the last 15 or 25 years?

MS: Underground water.

JH: Wells, underground water supply.

HF: In other words, they seem to have a natural aquifer of water, and they have developed wells. Are those artesian wells?

JH: Not artesian, they pump all that water. It’s all pumped.

HF: But there is a place in this area, Jefferson artesian. Artesian wells.

MS: The Jefferson that’s also over around the Hamer area they had artesian water over there that was–Something interesting that I learned, the artesian flow, when they dig those wells and it’s artesian water, then when the lake fills up, the water stops flowing because there is so much pressure on the land that the water doesn’t flow there. That is, it drops down then the water comes up as artesian wells again.

HF: What are those wells called now? You refer to them as what?

JH: Owsley wells.

HF: Owsley wells? Is there such called Jefferson artesian wells?

JH: There are Jefferson wells, but they’re not artesian. There was at one time when they first built them the water was, but since more wells have gone on throughout the community, why, they have stopped flowing and now they pump them.

HF: Now where were the Owsley wells?

JH: North of Mud Lake.

HF: They’re in the Mud Lake District?

JH: Yes the Mud Lake District.

HF: Are the Jefferson artesian or wells in the same general area?

JH: Well, they’re north and west of the Owsley wells. The Jefferson wells are north and west of the Owsley wells, several miles.
HF: I see.

MS: But they’re only a few miles apart.

JH: Yes, they’re only actually a few miles, 5-6 miles apart.

HF: Now, sprinkler irrigation has become quite predominant, I suppose, in the Monteview area?

JH: Oh yes, very much so.

HF: Is that somewhat true in the, so called, Mud Lake area?

JH: Well, to a degree, yes.

HF: How about the Hamer area?

MS: That’s almost entirely sprinkler because it’s so much lava that they can’t level that land. In this area, around here, they do a lot of laser beam leveling, and with that type of leveling they can flood irrigate very economically. But up in the Hamer area that wasn’t developed until they–

(Side two of tape)

HF: This is side two, continuing the interview with Mildred Staley and Joe Hartwell of the Mud Lake area, Jefferson, west Jefferson county on this fifth day of June, 1982. We’ve talked about these little communities, the towns, early towns of Camas, Hamer, and subsequently the town of Mud Lake. You had mentioned that there were other little settlements a long time before Mud Lake where they had maybe a little post office, a school, and so forth. Why don’t you name some of those early settlements? Terreton, I guess would be one.

MS: Terreton was one of the last that was developed. Before they had a school even at Hamer, I believe, they had one at what became known as West Hamer. They called it the Morning Glory School. They let the oldest lady in the community name it and that was the name she chose for it. But people called it the West Hamer School. That was about 1910, I believe, wasn’t it?

JH: Something like that.

MS: Then there were schools developed at Hamer. And which were the other ones around there? Camas had one of the early schools.

JH: Camas. Yes Camas had an early school. And then they had another one they called West Hamer that was–
MS: Well, that was the Morning Glory school that became West Hamer.

JH: Probably so.

MS: The two that you mentioned that they discontinued; I’ve got that written down and my mind has gone blank. They had one at Montevi view and it–would you turn it off for just a jiffy and I’ll–

HF: Now talking about early schools in the various communities, early communities, you might comment, and read materials, whatever you have.

MS: Okay, “The first school at Camas was established in 1892. There were eight students in the school. Cynthia Parker Stoddard was one of the first students, and later her daughter, Mrs. Kenneth Groom, taught all eight grades in 1933 and ’34. That was the last year there was a school at Camas because transportation was so poor; they all had to travel by foot or horseback and so they each had separate schools. There was a group of settlers west of Camas. They joined forces and they built a large, log building. That was at the time when it was growing so fast in the Monteview area. They were able to hold classes in that school in 1912. They didn’t have a name for it at that time. Shortly after they had this building completed, they decided they wanted to establish a post office. The adults held a public meeting to decide on a name of the new post office. They narrowed the selection down to Mountain View or Lincoln. They weren’t sure which one they wanted, so they went to school and let the students choose which one it would be and they chose Mountain View. But when they sent in to apply for that name for their post office, there was already a name similar to that, so the post office department changed it to Monteview. That’s how the community of Monteview got its name.

HF: And that was about 1912?

MS: 1912 Yes. But also about 1912 there was a school built six miles west of the present town of Hamer. That was the one of the oldest resident was given the privilege of naming it and she called it the Morning Glory School. People thought that was a little too fancy, and so it became known as West Hamer.

JH: A lot of people called it Scodie School too.

MS: Yes. It was Mrs. Scodie was the one who named it. There were two other early schools near there. One was Centerville.

JH: I went to school at Centerville.

MS: That was located northwest of Hamer. Woodrow, which was east of Camas. By 1913 there were settlers moving to the west side of the lake. They wanted a school. So they had a small, one room log building down on what is now the headquarters of the Mud Lake Wildlife Management area. That was called the Level School because the first post office here was named Level. The ground was so level that they chose that name:
Level; and that was called the Level School at first. But this was about the time that the lake started to come up, and later on they were flooded out and had to move to a different location. They chose three men to serve as trustees. One of them wasn’t married and some of the parents objected to having a bachelor serving as a trustee so they had to replace Joe Potter as the trustee because he wasn’t married at that time. In 1914, there was a one-room, frame school built at Hamer and there hadn’t been any schools at Hamer at first; but one west of Hamer and, well, there were schools on all sides of it but none at Hamer itself until 1914. There were twelve students that went to school that first year at Hamer. In 1916, they built a two-room brick building at Hamer and then they combined the West Hamer and Centerville schools with Hamer School, and Woodrow was consolidated with Camas. During that time there had been a change in the population of the Monteview area. A lot of the early settlers had been disillusioned and had to move away, and they didn’t need that large log building anymore, so they took the small building that they used as a teacherage they called it at that time, for teachers to live in. That was one way to encourage teachers to come up to this area was to furnish them a house to live in. They moved that down south of where the original was.

JH: Right where A.V. Ball’s house sits now.

MS: Oh, it is where his house sits? I had understood it was his sheep sheds.

JH: His sheep sheds is where it is.

MS: At A.V. Ball’s place. Later they moved it further south. You may be more exact on how the schools were around the Monteview area.

JH: They called that the New Monteview School when they moved it down there, they called it the New Monteview School. Then they moved it down to right across the road from where we are right now. They had a school there.

MS: Now which one was called the Spring Lake School? There was a Spring Lake School out there.

JH: That, to start with, was where we are now. They called that Spring Lake School. Then later when they consolidated the schools they called it the New Monteview School.

HF: How about the churches in the early days? Does that pretty well finish the schools, Mrs…? Oh, you go ahead, then. Alright, go ahead.

MS: No. There are quite a few more schools. The people were not having enough water up there, they started having too much water down on the south end, here near the lake. By 1915, they had to move this first little level schoolhouse building. They moved it west over on the Jernburg farm, and it was known as the Jernburg School for a while instead of the Level school.

HF: As a matter of fact, Mrs. Jernburg was a school teacher, wasn’t she?
MS: She taught later, Mrs. Jernburg was quite a bit later. In 1916 that’s when the first schools were built by the school district was 1916. All these others had been built by the people themselves. In 1916 the school district built three one-room schools to use in the area. People laughed about it, they said they couldn’t be called “little red school houses” because they were blue buildings. So they were little blue schools. One of the three was known as the Owsley School. They had a post office named Owsley and they had that right there where the fair building is now where they have this Owsley School. And I have a special interest in that because my mother taught there, but she just taught until Christmas and then during Christmas vacation she and my dad got married. It was—what is it about ten miles from where they lived up there, and that was just too far. No one could think of expecting her to travel that far back and forth to teach, so they closed the school and it was never reopened. She was the only teacher in the Owsley School. But they also had one that they put down here for the Level School at that time. Now I understood that the other one was put in the Monteview area and was known as the Wagner School. Is that right?

JH: Yes, it was south of where we live. I went to school there, too.

HF: Now these would be real small, you know, three or four.

MS: One-room schools.

HF: I guess they would go from the first to the eighth grades.

MS: Oh yes.

JH: There were eight children went to school there the fall of 1918 when we had started school.

HF: Representing all eight grades, pretty much?

JH: Pretty much, yeah.

MS: This is one little story that I thought was cute was how the Wagner School got its name. When people in the Monteview area evidently didn’t object to having a bachelor as a school trustee, and Tom Wagner lived near there and he was clerk of the school of board at that time. When he got an application from Florence Mitchell to teach there, he said, “Well, if she could cook, she could have the job.” And she could cook, so she got the job. He told everyone that was his teacher. So that became known as the Wagner School.

JH: And he married her later on.

HF: That’s interesting.
MS: That was something. The fact that for a long time the farmers out here said that they didn’t let any school teachers get away. In fact, I think we have a larger proportion of school teachers in this area than they have in most places because that was the main single women they had. The young fellows around here bragged that they weren’t letting any of the school teachers get away. They married and settled down to live in this area.

HF: That is something special.

MS: It wasn’t until 1918 that there were enough people south, in what is now the Terreton area, that they decided they had to have a school there. The first little Terreton School was a small, log building on the west side of the second Owsley Canal. That’s down near the Terreton store. There wasn’t any bridge across there so the students had to—even though some of them lived close to the school, they go a long way to get to where there was a bridge so they could cross this canal and get down to where the school was. In 1920, they abandoned that one and they built the first one-room frame house up near where the present Terreton School is. In 1923, they decided they still needed another school because there was too much difference, so they built the Lake View School which is east of the Terreton School down on the place that Larry Lee lives now. As far as I know that was the list of the different schools they had out here.

JH: That school soon faded out, and they moved the kids up to Terreton.

HF: Well now, to this day, 50 or 60 years later, the Terreton area has become quite a central place for, of course, the high school and I suppose the elementary schools.

JH: Churches and everything.

HF: Churches and everything are pretty much there.

JH: Yes.

HF: How about the early churches? Do either one of you have some information about the early churches?

JH: Churches were the church/school house for a long time.

MS: The first LDS churches were held in the homes. The first Mormon people would go around, collect their neighbors and meet in the homes. Then after that they were held in the schools. Everything was held in the schoolhouse. Those were the only public buildings.

HF: But the LDS people were somewhat of a minority out in this area, were they not?

MS: Oh, no.

JH: No, they were in the majority.
HF: Have they always been in the majority?

MS: Oh, yes.

JS: Yes.

HF: From the very earliest time, settlement?

JH: Wasn’t, maybe, the very earliest settlers who came in here probably weren’t–

MS: As far as I know.

JH: –Latter-day Saint, but they soon, the Latter-day Saints, arrived and outgrew the rest of them.

MS: I think that–

JH: One of the very earliest people who came in here came out of Butte and the Butte mines.

MS: That’s the ones up in this area. They were not, that’s what I said, my dad said that–Well my grandfather came from the mines. He wasn’t one of the Swedes, but there were a number of Swedes who settled in here.

HF: What other churches were represented in the early days?

MS: They had a Mennonite Church out in the Monteview area. I believe that it was a Mennonite group that was responsible for that first log building, as I understand it.

JH: Seems like that’s kind of the way I remember it too, but that soon faded away.

HF: Now in Mud Lake area did you just have the Mormons, the Mormon Church?

MS: For a long time, that was the only church because I know my parents were strictly non-LDS but still they allowed me, because there was no other Sunday school or any place to go, they allowed me to go to the Mormon Church.

HF: Now at a later date there must have been established a Catholic Church?

MS: That was established after.

HF: Quite a long time after.

JH: Quite a long time afterwards, yes.
MS: Quite a long time afterward. John and I both were in on the start of the Community Church. At first it was not the Community Baptist Church, it was a community church for all faiths. And that met in the Level School for a while, then in the community hall for a while, and then in what they called the ‘Old Blacksmith Shop,’ that had been used for a blacksmith’s shop for a while, and finally they built the Community Church that was later made into the Community Baptist Church, the one that started it was set up for people of all faiths; it was called the Community Church.

JH: And that’s now where the Baptist Church is now.

MS: Then they had the Catholic Church later, but there are very few Catholic people in the area.

HF: If you were going to evaluate the pioneer period, say from 1907 to 1930, what names should we remember for heritage, persons who were–

JH: Monteview, Level and Terreton.

MS: I think he means, you mean the people, don’t you?

HF: I mean people.

JH: Oh people.

HF: Yeah, the people who really contributed a lot to the development: economically, religiously, culturally, whatever. Come up with a few names that really should be remembered as we talk about these communities of Mud Lake, Monteview, Hamer, and so forth.

MS: We’ve already mentioned the Hawskeys, who were not the earliest settlers, and the Owseys, who, Owseley was one who had a lot to do with it. And then the list of names that I gave you, the people in the canal companies, the Keller’s, and the Schulbergs, and the Hartfelds, and the Jacksons, and the Staley’s, and the Jernburgs.

JH: And there was another of family people that was prominent around Monteview right there in the early stages of that was Wilsons, Jack Wilson.

MS: Yes.

JH: He tried to reach out and put his arms around a big area of country, and couldn’t hold on to it. He finally just pushed himself out the backdoor. He was a land-promoter and what-have-you.

HF: Were there real estate, like you say land-promoter, real estate people that really did a lot to induce people to come up into this country?
JH: Well, I don’t know any real estate outfits was that, but there were–

MS: Matkins was.

JH: Matkins was very prominent in that area. And then Jack Wilson in Monteview, then the Jerenbergs and Nordstroms in Level, that’s this area right here. Then Matkins was prominent in Terreton, too. George Greene, then Matkins.

MS: Here’s something I think is quite interesting. Another big, though unsuccessful, project was built–now I had been mentioning the first and the second Owlseys–by Ross J. Comstock, who was the president of the First National Bank of Rexburg. He had studied the conditions in the Mud Lake area and decided that if the farmers on the Egen Bench country would empty their surplus water in the sink south of Ashton, it would come up in Mud Lake. He invested all of his money, much of the bank’s money, and that of any other persons who were willing to trust his judgment, in a project which he hoped would utilize this water. He built a drainage canal south of Ashton. Then he built the huge Comstock Canal on the west side of Mud Lake with horse-drawn Fresnos. He encouraged many settlers to file on ground that he expected to be able to water with the extra water from the lake. But his timing was bad. In 1920, the post-war depression was at its height and there had just been a crop failure that sent prices soaring. A dry period was sending the water level of the lake down instead of coming up as he expected. Farmers were going broke even under better conditions. And those with earlier rights had first call on the available water. The canal which he had built with such high hopes was never used, and the settlers he had encouraged to come up lost everything they owned. They accused him of being a crook; they didn’t stop to consider the fact that he too had lost everything he owned in that venture. The bank also went broke at that time, partially because of his heavy investment in the unsuccessful project. I thought that was something of interest. We still have remnants of the Comstock Canal out here.

JH: Post office way out there by Harry [inaudible]

HF: Just abandoned. Just is out there.

JH: Built a big canal way out on the desert out in there and they never did put water in it.

MS: And another group of promoters; now the information that I have is that this group didn’t have any intention of trying to back up their promises. Comstock did. He was sincere, he just had bad luck. But there was a group of promoters, several, that were just trying to get people out here so they could make money, moving the mob, and one was the North Lake Canal Company from Utah. They hired a dredge to build the huge North Lake canal. They encouraged a lot of people to file on land and buy water stock from them, but when the crops needed water, the promoters said well, they’d furnish the canal; the farmers would have to get the water. They didn’t even try to get water for them. The one thing that they did do was to get electricity throughout there. They put the electric power-line out there.
HF: Is that through the REA?

MS: Oh no, that was long be–

HF: This was a long, long time before the REA.

MS: Yes, that was before anybody ever thought of REA.

JH: Went through here and back out into this country over here.

HF: How did they generate their power? Their electricity?

MS: They brought the electricity in. At that time it was not called Utah Power and Light, it was…oh shoot, I’ve got it written down somewhere, it was a different name anyway that they had.

HF: Okay, so this was a predecessor to the Utah Power and Light.

JH: Yes.

MS: Yes.

HF: Which could have been very well as early as 1910, or so.

MS: It was 1917, I believe, when it went through.

JH: Yeah, something like that.

HF: I see.

MS: But to show this North Lake Canal project, the bottom of the canal was higher than the lake was. So they certainly were not planning on trying to get it, they just got the people out here.

HF: Well now, Mildred, is there such a thing as a North Lake?

MS: Yes.

HF: Besides the Mud Lake?

JH: Yeah.

HF: There is a North Lake?
JH: Yeah, it’s gone dry now, but there was a very prominent lake on the north side of this Butte. It was north of Mud Lake, it was plumb separate and there was no inlet or no outlet to this North Lake.

HF: And it was north of the Mud Lake?

JH: North of the Mud Lake, yeah.

HF: Mud Lake. But it was separated by Butte?

JH: Yeah.

HF: I see. What fed that lake?

JH: It was fed by underground water. There was no inlet or no outlet to it. Just a body of water; stayed in there.

HF: How large?

JH: Oh it was probably 320 acres or something like that.

HF: I see. Probably an old extinct volcano or something.

JH: Yes, that’s what. It’s in the volcano area there.

MS: Well as I understand it, this whole area was an ancient lake-bed, all through here.

HF: Probably something akin to Lake Bonneville, or was it probably–

JH: Well, there’s shells and stuff around [inaudible] that indicate that someday there’d been a lake bottom here.

HF: Now do we have any history, any recorded history, of any person observing, like Russell, who came here into this country–what’s his name? The old pioneer, the old explorer? About 1830, 1835? Is there anything to suggest that this whole area was just green and waving grass, buffalo grass, etc.?

MS: Yes. There is. I have something–my memory isn’t good enough to just come out, glad I have these things. I’ll read them, the first of what I have here. “Most of Idaho as a state was, because of the poor distribution of its water, considered a barren and desolate land. Now Washington Irving, in 1811, referring to Idaho said, ‘It is a land where no man permanently resides. A vast, uninhabited solitude with desert tracks that must ever defy cultivation.’” That was in 1811 that Washington Irving said that. But evidently the first recorded mention of Mud Lake itself is in a report by John Cloter, who in 1908 told of a small lake that seemed to sink away in the fall, and enormous herds of buffalo feeding in the large, grassy areas. It was also mentioned by Captain Bonneville in 1832, and
Osborne Russell in 1835 who referred to Camas Lake as it was known at that time. The next time we find a record of it was in 1853 when the United States government ordered Isaac I. Stevens, then governor of Washington Territory, to locate a right-of-way for a railroad to Salt Lake City. The task was assigned to Lieutenant John Mullen, who reported that during his search, he and his party, with Indian guides, crossed the continental divide, followed Medicine Lodge Creek to the Sinks, then went east to Camas Creek, which they followed to Camas Lake—and that evidently was Mud Lake—Then in April of 1855, a group of 27 Mormon missionaries, who were sent by Brigham Young to establish a mission at Lemhi, bypassed Mud Lake—the Camas Lake area. The men and the beasts really suffered severely from the long, dry trip. Two years later when Brigham Young and a group of 141 people visited the Lemhi mission, they did not make the same mistake. They recorded stopping at Lava Lake—and that was later Market Lake—and a Desert Lake—that was another name they used for Mud Lake. At that time, the people also referred to it as “the muddy lake.” While there were few early written reports of this region, it was well known by early trappers and hunters because of the abundance of game; in fact old-timers report that it was known as the market basket of the plains, as the meat supply could always be replenished here. Deer, buffalo, antelope, and wild chickens were always available. During much of the year, ducks and geese were so abundant that the huge flocks darkened the sky in a way that is impossible to describe to people who have never seen them.

HF: I wonder if at that point, though, they’re referring to Market Lake rather than Mud Lake.

MS: Well Mud Lake was included with that.

HF: I see, of the general area.

MS: When I was a kid, I can remember picking up buffalo skulls and buffalo corpse all over. So there were a lot of–

JH: Oh yes, and buffalo carcasses, we eat them in the country.

HF: What’s the distance in miles between, say, Market Lake–may have to ask you this in a different way–Market Lake and Mud Lake?

JH: 30 miles, maybe.

MS: 25 or 30. There’s a big lava ridge between the two areas.

HF: Between the two.

JH: There’s definitely buffalo carcasses, many of them, I run on to many of them, over the deserts around here.

HF: Did you people grow up with tales about treasures being buried in Mud Lake?
MS: Oh (Laughs).

JH: There is definitely a treasure in this area, and I found it myself because I run on horses on the desert, and I found it. And I’ve looked for it time and again and I can’t go back to it. I know in the general area where it is. And it’s described by—I read about it in a magazine years ago. And I saw it, myself, I know it’s there.

HF: What was it?

JH: It’s gold ore. It’s a vein of gold ore.

HF: Not placed there, but it’s there?

JH: No, no, it’s there, it’s a vein of ore.

MS: It’s—Oh you mean a vein of ore? I thought you meant some of the—

JH: It’s just an outcropping of it.

HF: Of gold.

HF: Just two spots of it.

MS: But there were three different robberies where they hid treasure, the buried treasure.

JH: Yes. I don’t know anything about that.

HF: In Mud Lake?

MS: Yes. The one that I grew up with was described, the people who robbed the stagecoach had to bury it in a hurry and they buried it by a square rock. So when I was growing up, anytime anyone found a square rock, they excavated around it. There were a lot of holes dug looking for that.

HF: I think Mel Wildey tells about after the War, Second World War, he went out there and he’s dug around there with his metal detector. Or maybe I’m thinking of something…

MS: Mel Nielsen is the one who has really gone all out.

JH: He says there’s a treasure in Mud Lake if they can find it.

HF: Mel Nelsen.

JH: Nielsen.
HF: Mel Nielsen.

MS: I was quite confused when I was a kid trying to straighten out the story because I heard different versions. But it turned out there are three distinct different robberies. One was a stagecoach coming through from Virginia City, and one was—let’s see. Anyway, there were three different distinct ones and I don’t know the details on any of them, but I’ve heard enough about it to know that there were three different times that there was a robbery. Gold was supposed to be buried out here somewhere.

JH: That’s over on moss Camas creek, in there.

HF: Now as we close, as a person who has been familiar with the area, Mr. Hartwell, are there some items that you think should be mentioned in this tape when we talk about the history of the Mud Lake area? Have we skipped over anything? I probably have a lot of things.

JH: Well, I don’t know. I think generally we’ve had a pretty fair coverage. Don’t you, Mildred?

MS: Yes, I do. One thing that I think should be mentioned is the fact that people out here have been, they aren’t asking the government to help them; was a rule people wanted to do things for themselves. For instance, Joe was one that was responsible—the kids had a long ways to go and when they started consolidating the schools and they had to go on buses, at first people would get together and just take turns taking up a kettle of hot soup or something. And then we got busy, and we raised the money, we put up a lunch room for our kids so they could have hot lunch at school, and Joe was one of the people who worked on that. As the community developed, we’ve got our own fire department. We raised the money for it; we didn’t ask other people for it. We got our own EMT; we raised the money for our own ambulance. That’s what makes people irritated, after we get all those things, then the people over in Rigby say: “Well, we’ve got them out here so the commune needs to put something like that in for them.” And that’s what makes so much friction out here.

JH: I found myself on the lunch board when the old, original Level schoolhouse burnt down down there. They’d moved it down there for a lunch room and I was on the lunch board with two women. They were scared to death when the lunch room got on fire, and burnt to the ground. The school board phoned me and said, “Joe, we’ll guarantee you the insurance out of that building. That’s the only thing we can do to help.” I talked the community out of the lunch room that’s our present day lunch room right down there right now. I built it with community donations and I talked to them.

MS: He went door-to-door.

JH: I went door-to-door, talked people out of enough money to build the lunch room that is present-day lunch room at Terreton now.
MS: Then we had to turn it over to the school district because—

JH: We gave it to the school district later on.

HF: This is evidence this whole community, then, or all these communities, are very self-reliant.

JH: That’s right.

HF: They’ve had to, well they’ve just shift for themselves, haven’t they?

JH: That’s right.

HF: Now, you know, I am amazed every time I come out here, the county administration has a real big county to work with; putting up roads, and maintaining those roads surely must be a costly thing.

JH: That’s right.

HF: What did you do in the early days? Make your own roads, I guess you had to.

MS: Certainly did.

JH: Make your own roads. Start out across the community and we followed one another’s tracks.

MS: Then when one road got too full of ruts, they just move over and make another one.

JH: Move over to the side and make another one.

MS: It was sandy enough out here that I grew up knowing that you don’t go any place without a shovel to dig yourself out of the sand in the summer, and the snow in the winter.

JH: That’s right.

HF: By and large, though, your winters aren’t as severe out here as they are on further to the east, in the Rexburg/Rigby area. A little less snow.

JH: Possibly so, that’s probably a little more snow area. Heavier snow area.

MS: We haven’t had as severe winters for quite a while as we used to. I can remember when I was a kid, year after year, when we’d have a blizzard and the snow would freeze. I enjoyed it because I hated opening gates and in the winter you didn’t have to open the gates, you’d just ride over the top of the fences.
HF: (Laughs) I suppose this is true. Well, ethnically, would you say that the people who settled out here then had their origin, pretty much, from the United States? They were English people.

MS: Oh, no, there were a lot of people. There were German groups that came out here. There were quite a few of the Polish people who came out here. And there were a number of the Swedish people who came out here, and Danish people, and most of them, of course, settled in little groups together. It seemed like most–

JH: They’ve intermarried now until it’s–

MS: Until they’re all mixed up. But there were a number of different groups represented out here.

HF: Have you had Orientals out here very much? Japanese or Chinese?

JH: No. Not very many, no.

HF: Almost nil, I guess. But you have had, in more recent years, a number of the Hispanic people come out here—the Mexican people.

MS: Oh yes.

JH: Yes, we’ve quite a few Mexicans out here in very recent years.

HF: And they have established residence now, pretty much? Right year round?

MS: A number of them.

JH: Well, some of them. Yes, there’s some staying in the area, there’s others that go back and forth to Mexico. Just come here in the summer-time.

HF: Yeah.

MS: And as far as saying that they beat white men out of jobs, I don’t think that’s very often true, because most of the jobs they take are the ones that it’s almost impossible for farmers to get someone to come in a do that kind of work. So they are important.

HF: Now, I know that I have neighbors there in Rexburg that farm out here in Hamer and Terreton, and things like this, and I suppose that’s true. There’s been quite a few—they live up there and over there and yet farm out here.

JH: That’s right.

HF: Quite a lot of that going on.
JH: Yes, there’s a lot of beating other areas that have interests here.

MS: And in recent years–

HF: More land and open country out here to be settled.

JH: Yes, that’s right. There’s late settlement in this area.

MS: In recent years we’ve had quite a number of people from California, in particular, moving in here and buying land. And a number of farmers have sold out who really didn’t intend to sell out. Someone would come along and keep asking them how much they would take for their place, and they’d set a price–

JH: Offer big prices, they thought it was big prices but turned out it wasn’t.

MS: The farmer would say something so high that they didn’t think there was any chance, they thought that would discourage them and put an end to it. And they’d find themselves without a farm because they’d set a price way above what they expected to get. They sold out unintentionally.

HF: Well now, I’ve done quite a lot of work in checking in the, say, the Clementsville area, between the Rexburg bench and on up into the Teton Basin. There was a time in the ‘30s, in the ‘20s and ‘30s, where virtually every 160 had been occupied and it was a homestead. Was that somewhat true out here?

JH: Quite a bit so, yes. People who homesteaded didn’t necessarily develop it.

MS: Between 1912 and 1915 or ‘16, practically of all the land out here was homesteaded.

HF: 160 acres. But now they’ve moved off, I guess? Or it’s been taken up and individuals own several thousand acres?

MS: Some people who were more far-sighted bought some of this land. I believe Father Barksdale said he bought some for—was it 10¢ an acre, or 50¢ an acre?

JH: Yes, been all kinds of land for all kinds of prices. You know.

MS: Then he sold it for several hundred dollars and he thought he was doing well, now that same land sells for a thousand dollars an acre.

HF: Now is the land soil texture different in different communities? Let’s compare, for example, the Mud Lake area. What kind of soil do you have here in Mud Lake as compared to maybe what you have over in Hamer?

JH: Well there’s sand and clay.
MS: You don’t have to go that far. Right here on our place, we are on a sandy place. Our son’s house, which is 300 feet from here, is in a very clay-y spot. So the soil mixture is varied, but in Monteview they have a larger proportion of clay, I believe.

JH: Yeah, there’s clay and sand, streaks of sand.

MS: And in the Hamer area, they have more rocks. In this area here, how many—I think there’s places where they go 300 feet to bedrock, isn’t it here?

JH: Something like that, yeah.

HF: It’s really well covered.

JH: Oh yes.

MS: Where in the Hamer area and part of Monteview were rocks are closer to the surface.

HF: Suggesting that over eons of time, soil deposit has been laid down in this lake-bed area. So it’s really deep. Now, when you’re away from the lake, do you have to go very far down to get some water?

JH: Places you do, places you don’t. The water runs, seems to run in veins and it’s higher in some areas than it is in others.

MS: Also, there are different—you can get shallow water in some places 12 or 14 feet from the surface. And then if you start drilling a well, you might have to go two or 300 feet down below it. You used to have a lot of the shallow. They’d just dig a well by hand and put a board casing around it. And those were quite shallow.

HF: Shallow wells. And they used that, of course, for culinary water. In the Monteview area, what does the average depth that the farmers are having to go down to get the water?

JH: Well, I wouldn’t know what to tell you for an average depth. There’s a wide variation of depths in the water.

HF: Oh is there?

JH: Yes.

HF: To reach that so-called aquifer?

JH: Yes.
HF: Maybe, 500 feet do you think?

JH: Yeah, well there is places they’ve gone down that much. But then there’s a lot of that have gone down 300 feet; through 20, 30 to 300 feet.

MS: The water seems to run in just separate streams underground. There’s just little streams of different depths. If they test the water, they can quite often tell the difference. There’ll be maybe two farmers close together. One will have soft water, and one hard water. And they can tell that one is in a different–

JH: Different vein of water all-together from the other.

HF: Now, is there a bird life refuge right close here?

JH: Yes. It’s right here.

MS: Right next door to us.

HF: Is it? What do they call–what is it referred to?

MS: That’s the Mud Lake Wildlife Management Area. And then they have the North Lake Wildlife Management Area. And then they have the Federal Camas Wildlife Management Area.

JH: That’s the ward livestock headquarters.

HF: They still have one down there at Roberts, don’t they?

MS: Yes.

JH: Yes they do.

HF: It was referred to as the Market Lake Wildlife Refuge. And I suppose all of this, well some of them are managed by the Idaho Fish and Game, and some by the Federal, I guess, aren’t they.

MS: The Camas Wildlife Management Area is federal. The others are state.

JH: That’s right.

HF: In the one right here, next door to you, the Mud Lake–

JH: That’s state.

HF: It’s state and it features, I suppose, a lot of ducks and geese, etc.
JH: Sure.

HF: I want to really thank you, Mildred Staley and Joe Hartwell for the opportunity of being in your home this afternoon for this interview.