

Oral History of :  
Jessie Nelson

Collected by: Jessica Taylor

U.S Studies 6<sup>th</sup> hour  
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The Oral History of  
Jessie Nelson

This is the oral history of my great-grandmother Jessie. My grandmother just passed recently. She was born December 15<sup>th</sup> 1893, in Loa, Utah. She died just before her birthday in Phoenix, Arizona. She is buried in Ferron, Utah, next to her husband, Jesse.

Tell me about your schedules...

“Well, we had a definite schedule every year. The spring was planting, the summer was growing, the fall was harvesting and the winter was getting by.”

With the fall, Every August you would do your canning, harvesting, freezing, etc, tell me about that...

Jessie “We would get in our covered wagons every fall and go down to Fruita (Wayne county), for one week. The men would pick the peaches and

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keep the fires going while the women would boil the jars and peel the fruit. We would take a big tub, fill it with hay, and take the jars in that. We did our canning there and didn't wait to get the fruit home because it would spoil."

Tell me about the peddlers that came around every year...

"Well, the peddlers would bring the pears around (later in the fall) because it was too late to go down and get them because of all the harvesting. While the rest of the men would go up on the mountain and spend a week across from Fish Lake and they would pick raspberries. Then we would make jellies, jam, and fresh raspberry pies. "

Tell about making cheese...

"We made cheese in Antelope (also in Wayne county) just south of Loa by Bolder mountain. My family had a ranch out there. It was a public domain. Then grandmother Blackburn would take a load cheese to Richfield to sell to make money. Besides having all the cheese that we would use."

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Did you make the cheese often?

“Well, I wasn’t allowed to go and make cheese there, but I did make cheese at home my father taught me how. It is a long process. You get rennet tablets and you have to have cheese coloring and you put it in the milk, and it has to be the exact temperature. I used a thermometer, but everyone else just knew, it was like an instinct. Then they would put the rennet in and the covering on and wait until it went into a clabor form and then when the sway began to come, they would cut it in all directions so that it would after is would set up, they would cut it in all fine cubs, then they hoy would come up and you would dip that off . Then we would ladle they whey off. After we had went through the process, we would put them into cheese cloths to dry. When they were partially dry, the men would take it and put it in a press and push the remaining hoy out. Then we would put it out to cure. If you wanted strong cheese, you let it cure for a long time. You cured it for how strong the cheese you wanted.”

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Tell me about the move that the church sent out.

“The church sent out groups of people to settle the areas of Utah that hadn’t been settled. The Blackburns were sent to Beaver county, and the Maxfields were sent to Wayne county. The Blackburns had a lot of cattle, so they would put them up on the mountain with the antelope. During the spring and then back to Beaver in the fall.

Grandmother Blackburn moved to Ferron and lived in her log house. That is when dad started going with mother. He was five years older than her. He always said that she made the best doughnuts. The best way to make doughnuts was to cut a long piece of dough and twist it. They called these screwcakes. I don’t know why it changed.”

Can you tell me a little about your parent’s courtship...

“They were up to fish lake for a week of fun and games. He went to come along, saw her with a bunch of girls, then he came up to her and said ‘Do you

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like chicken? Take a wing' (she giggles) She took his arm and never let it loose. They were really close and loved each other a lot.

Why don't you tell me about how you met grandpa Jesse and tell about your courtship...

“Well, the first time that I saw him, I was in the sixth grade in Ferron, under Fred Killpack's school. We had to go to the brick building to get a drink with a bucket and dipper. I went over and had my drink and he stood there by me, he was just ahead of me. And when I got to drinking, he had stayed his mouth with water and while I was drinking, he squirted me. And I came back to furious that Jesse Nelson had squirted me with a mouthful of water. Ruth Hansen says 'Shhh. That is Mildred's big brother'. I was good friends with Ruth from when we were back in Presbyterian church. We were just good pals. I was up there half the time with Jesse there teasing us, and then he went away to school at Logan and I went to Castle Dale and all at once, he started writing to me and umm... then he came down from Logan for Christmas and he expected to date me. Well, I had gone up with Mildred to her house. Both her and I had a temporary boyfriends, and I had Henry and was his first

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name? I can't remember, but he was a Henry, and we went up to her place and here he was home for Christmas and here I was with a date for the dance then the next night, (at Christmas we had a dance every night) he didn't take me, but when he got to the dance, he said 'I didn't know that you had a date' So for a few dances I didn't have a date because I wouldn't date Henry and he knew why. He knew that I liked Jesse. He wasn't too upset because he was just a temporary guy. So from then on, Jesse understood and we dated."

How long did you date before he proposed?

"Oh, a couple of years I guess. Because he was away to school and I was away to school and he come home at Christmas and we had that incident. I don't think it was more than a few years because we got married just a couple of my teaching years, but we knew we would get married."

What was his method of proposal? Was it comical? Did he say anything memorable?

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“No, he wasn’t funny and didn’t crack any jokes or anything, but he said ‘well, our folks are expecting us to get married in June’ because I was teaching in Cleveland and we couldn’t get married until I was out of school for the year. We had talked about getting married and our parents knew it. Then he said, ‘well, I would like to fool them.’ So, I came home for the weekend, he came and picked me up in his buggy and we got married in Castle Dale while I was still teaching in Cleveland, so here I was in Cleveland and he was at home in Ferron until I got home for the summer. Everyone was surprised.”

Then you had a baby..

“ Well, not for a while, but I lost the first baby. It was a boy. We were married the sixth of February and our baby was born the next February the second. And umm...it died. I don’t know why. I fell.”

Was he premature?



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“No! Not really.”

Was he stillborn?

“Uh-huh. Well, I had fallen down and slipped on the ice and made him come when he was supposed to because I was a little late, but he was quite a large boy. I was chased by a cow.”

Then you had my grandma Fred?

“Yea. She was premature. She weighed five pounds with all of her clothes on.

She sure was a little thing. She has thrived hasn't she? (she laughs) The neighbor twins were born at the same time and when they were nine months old, all of them weighed nineteen pounds. So, she did alright. She kept up with them. In fact, I think that she was ahead of them when they went to school.”

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What can you tell me about Grandpa's sheriff days? How did he get picked and things like that?

“Well, he was hauling hay in the field from the meadow, and here come Uncle Oscar and Nelson and they set out there and talked. And umm...everything has to go on schedule and I had to have dinner at the exact time and everything was precise timing, and umm...they sat there and talked and talked. Then he came in and looked kinda foolish and said ‘Do you know what that long conversation was about?’ and I said that I had no idea and he said ‘they want me to run for sheriff on the Republican ticket. Should I?’ I shrugged my shoulders and asked him what he wanted to do, and he said that maybe he should get on with the hay. Then the show was over and let's get on with the hay. He won by a landslide. This one time this guy tried to buy him out. Ol' Les Cox came and talked to him about the bootleggers. Les sold the alcohol to the bootleggers and he wanted some leeway. Jesse wouldn't cooperate and ol' Les Cox tried to beat him another way. He tried smuggling it up the mountain, but he wasn't successful. Jesse caught him.”

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What were some of his adventures?

“Well first thing he had to do was reprehend a guy who stole horses over in Elmo. He came around the bend to see the guy in the corral to saddle up and get away that went on the road at the other end. He went across the pond and headed him off. I guess that guy felt shagrimmed that he had been cartered. Then once, they had a chase with some bootleggers. Him and the deputy went after them on their horses. They chased them down and had them cornered up with their guns. The bootleggers finally went away with them. After they had them all pinned up in the jails, then Jesse said to his deputy ‘I am sure glad that you were there because I didn’t have any bullets in my gun.’ The deputy looked surprised and said ‘I didn’t have any bullets either!’ (she laughs) I am glad that it all worked out.”

Do you remember the years he was sheriff?

“The last year being the sheriff was thirty six. That is all I can remember, you’ll have to look for yourself.”

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Did he die while he was the sheriff?

“No, that was after. He wasn’t sheriff when he died.”

Tell me how you built your home...

“well, we lived in that log cabin, you know, and one winter we lived with grandma one winter so he could do chores for her, it wasn’t the happiest occasion, but it was in the house next to where we built ours. That is where Rulin lives now. In the meantime, we built the log house. You wouldn’t remember the log house, I had it torn down before you.”

How did you get that property?

“His mother gave it to us. It was forty acres. He had it a long time before the other forty he had twenty so he could get his permit. Then he had forty acres of meadow hay and forty acres of field.”

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Did you have a house planned and then you built it from the plan?

“Yea, we set all winter sending for the prehouses, you know, and when we got them, we didn’t like them and instead we drew our own plans. We ordered out of the Sears catalog. We had one of the first arch doorways in town. After that, it became a trend. We started digging the basement one summer, and he started hauling the bricks and shingles in Price with a hay rack. He had three hundred dollars worth of shingles and other things for the house. We made the adobe bricks for the house.”

How do you make adobe bricks?

“Well, they have a mill that grinds the blue clay, that was moved by a horse and it went round and round and then it went out into the molds. Then they dried it, then dunked, and dried some more. I can’t remember if we put straw in it or not, but that old clay makes some pretty solid bricks and walls. I think there was three farms (slab of mold) in each stick of mold. We lay them up

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just like regular bricks and we mold them together with some kind of clay.

But with the brick they had lime and sand.”

What was the depression like?

“Well, it didn't hit Emery county like it did everywhere else. We were not that advanced and so we didn't get anything like the stock market here. If you wanted to play, you had to go further away, and you were lucky to ever get to Price. It was hard, but if you would have moved here, you would know that it was hard all the time. This land is hard to tame and in the beginning almost impossible to live on. If you would have came here before and during the depression, I don't think you would have seen a true difference.

Can you tell us a little of summary of your life?

Well, I will say that I have lived a good but very hard life. I lived from the day that covered wagons moved everyone about, to the day that people were driving automobiles. Those automobiles were something. At first they were

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dirty, and no one in Emery county wanted one (or could they afford one) they took up space that people could have their horses on, and they were loud and messy. We thought that if you went over thirty miles per hour, then you wouldn't be able to breathe because it would smash your chest. It doesn't. I lived from the time of wells, to water in the houses. I lived from outhouses to flushing toilets (but I never got one. Someone put it in the house after I moved out. I thought they were a waste.) I lived from walking across the plains to the walking on the moon. This is an amazing era. So many new things have happened that an old woman can't keep up anymore, but I am trying."