COFFEE AT THE FORD SCHOOLHOUSE

July 17, 2025

Attendees:

Lois Walker	Melissa Cloud
Larry Wilson	Karen McDonough
Jack & Sue McFarland	Steve & Sandi Kelly
Ryan Powell, USFS	Del & Linda Coolidge
Tom & Betsy Holycross	Bernie & Vickie Wiedmann
Dick Pfaff	Rayna Eyster and son
Ed Neneman	Malcolm Cooke
Bonnie Hankey	Jim Rittenburg
Rob & Trish Rego	Merc gal

Lois Walker: First I'd like to thank everyone who helped get ready for this session. Ryan Powell came from the Forest Service with his crew and helped clear this area and built the benches for folks to sit on. Lorna Rittenburg weed whipped, as well, especially the path down from the road, knowing that it needed to be wider. Tom Holycross and Dick Pfaff helped clear this area, and Jack and Sue McFarland helped set up and brought us coffee and goodies.

There is a long, storied history associated with this building. I'm going to circulate a notebook that I put together, with old photos of the schoolhouse, as well as pictures of the current restoration efforts. The story of this school starts in 1917, when North Forkers and the school district, which in those days was the Valentine School District, district number 19, started looking for a location for a school to serve children who lived in the upper North Fork.

There had been other schools in the valley. The first ones were located on Big Prairie, starting in 1913. School was held in a log cabin for a while, then there was a fire and the cabin got dragged over onto, I believe, the Schoenberger property. After that school was held in a tent for a while. But Arne Boveng insists that they were in a tent first, then in the log cabin, and then back in a tent again. At any rate, the first school was held on Big Prairie, because there were still more homesteaders on that side of the river.

The Park was already the park, dating from 1910, but eventually more people started homesteading on this side of the river. So homesteaders built another school, along what is now the driveway back to Sal Gurreri's and Ted Ramon's places. Larry took me by there the other day to see the location where it was. That was called the Red Meadow School, but the school district also called it the Prairie View School, because you could look down Red Meadow Creek drainage and out to Big Prairie. That was built in about 1916, but it was only used for a short period, until they built the next school, which was the Polebridge School.

Locals called it the Polebridge School, but the school district called it the Forest Glen School. It was across the road from the Charlie Wise cabin, what is today Square Peg Ranch. In fact, they even used some of the logs from the Red Meadow School to help build that school, which opened in 1918. We have a lot more information about that school.

But that was still an impossibly long way for children who lived above Trail Creek to come to school, so parents argued that they really needed a school further north. Harry and Lena Holcomb volunteered this piece of property, which was part of their homestead. I'm presuming that homesteaders built this school, the same way they had others. I've never heard any different.

The building was constructed in 1918, and school started in the fall of 1918. Ella Weide, who had been the teacher out on Big Prairie, was assigned as the first teacher. Interestingly, Ella was one of only a few women who filed on their own homesteads in the North Fork.

As I mentioned, this was part of the Valentine School District. It's interesting that there actually were state guidelines for single room schoolhouses. These were developed by a man named Plew. They called for a bank of windows on one side of the building, because cross-lighting was supposedly harmful to vision. He said that the windows should be to the left of the students, because most students were right-handed. And he recommended that they seat the boys closest to the windows, because they needed more light in order to be educated better. But, as Larry pointed out, it was also handy because if there had been windows on the other side then every time a vehicle came up the road the kids would want to run over and see who it was. But actually it was because there were construction standards.

Interestingly, the river was much further away from the school in those days. And, of course, there was no well, so the students had to go to the river to get water for their daily needs.

So, what was life like at this school? From all the records I have, there were never more than six, seven, or eight children here. Sometimes there were only three or four. I have a list of the teachers. They never seemed to stay more than a year or two—three at the outside. They lodged either with the Holcombs or with Mary Maude Brayton's parents on Tepee Flats.

You can imagine, the teacher had to light the stove every morning and get ready for classes. What's interesting is that the school had a very active PTA [Parent Teacher Association]. And sometimes there were even members of the board who didn't have kids in the school. But education of these children was the foremost priority. The PTA would have regular fundraisers. They bought dishes for the school lunches, because these children had hot lunches every day. They built a root cellar, because there was a big school garden and they could store the food there. Ford Station got its name because people forded the river there, and there was what they called a flying machine. The PTA bought a rope to stretch across the river, and you would pull yourself across in a small car.

In most of the photos of the school you see an ancillary building behind it. It was commonly called the barn, because kids who rode their horses to school would put them in the barn, but it was also where they cooked their hot lunches, which the kids took turns preparing. They all learned how to cook. You know, these kids didn't just get book learning at the school. They learned lots of practical skills—everything that homesteading children would need up here.

In the notebook that's going around, you'll see one photograph of the interior of the school. We know that there was a blackboard on the west wall. The window that is there now wasn't there at the time—the Rockwells added that. Next to the blackboard was an organ. There was a lot of music in the North Fork. Many people played instruments, and some of the kids played the organ. But there's also reference to a piano—that the PTA had raised money to finish paying off the piano. I don't know if that refers to the same instrument or not. The wood stove was in the southwest corner of the building. We'll learn later about a fire associated with the stove. They also had a grafonola and records to play. And they could use that during dances, if they didn't have a live band.

This school was built during World War I, of course. World War I was still raging in Europe, and there were a number of North Forkers who served during the war. There was a fellow named Robert Drummond who regularly sent letters home to the school kids and sent artifacts, which

were proudly displayed. There was a 75mm shell, a German helmet, a German machine gun belt, a German soldier's canteen, and a military newspaper from the front. The teacher at the time wrote, "We certainly appreciate the remembrance of our boys' and girls' school interests by those of our number in Uncle Sam's service" from "homesteaders who have gone over the pond to do their bit."

So, the children had their own very successful war garden, as many people did. Some of the food was used for their hot lunches. In 1919, they raised carrots, rutabagas, cauliflower, beets, onions, radishes, turnips, lettuce, cabbage, parsley, peas, and potatoes. They had an active School Garden Club, an Alfalfa Club, and a Pig Club. Fred Holcomb and Homer Haines each planted an acre of alfalfa that they farmed at their places.

There was what was known as the County Club, maybe sort of like a 4H. A Mr. Kauffman came up and visited the school regularly. He gave lectures about things like raising alfalfa, and he helped the kids with their planting efforts.

But I think the important thing to remember is that the community had built this structure, and it was not just a school. This was Sondreson Hall early—everything happened at the schoolhouse. Miss Weide, bless her heart, was very good about sending regular news about the school to the local newspaper, *The Columbian.* That's the only way I know most of this stuff.

I'll read from some of the entries that she sent.

The school opened in the fall of 1918. In October, they had a dance. In November they had a Thanksgiving program that the students gave. They had what they called the Upper North Fork School orchestra. That was Frank Wurtz on the violin, Eddie Brewster's mother on guitar, and Miss Weide on mandolin. They raised $16.50 for the PTA. Then in December they had a Christmas Eve oyster dinner. Why did they have oyster dinners? They were very popular. Does anyone know why? They had the dinner, then a student program and a dance, with the same "school orchestra." Then they had a New Year's Eve "patrons' program," which they said was a howling success.

Betsy Holycross: Do we know if those were oysters or Rocky Mountain oysters?

Lois: One wonders. But you see many references to serving an oyster supper. [I'll need to do more research on this.] In 1919, in January someone donated new desks and seats to the school, "adding greatly to the comfort of the children and the beauty of the room." In February, a Mr. A.F. Johnson donated curtains to the school, to be used for the cupboard where they had the hot lunch program and the book case. They were both made by 4th grade boys in their manual training class. In February they also had a masked ball and valentine box dinner, where the ladies would make dinners and they would auction them. There were 43 people who attended the ball. You can see that the building is not very big. They must have danced outside or something, because there's just not room for a large crowd. But this was in February!

They had a St. Patrick's Day dance in March. In April they had one of several Hard Times Dances. Harvey DeFord's wife won the prize for the tackiest dressed grown up. Everyone enjoyed April Fool jokes. Then Miss Weide put on a fancy Easter dinner for the children. But the newspaper also noted that "the Upper North Fork school children have just recovered from smallpox and are all able to resume school studies again."

In May they had a big picnic and an Arbor Day celebration at the school, which included clearing an acre around the school and building a four-pole fence around the grounds, followed by a picnic and dance in the evening. They served "camp fried fish" that had been caught in the moonlight the previous evening, as well as cake and ice cream served as the midnight lunch.

In July, the PTA planned to host a special dance in honor of Ralph Thayer, who had just returned from France, but it was postponed due to the tragic fire at the Wurtz cabin and the death of two of their children, so they held the dance later.

In October they had a dance at the school and a lecture by Mr. Kauffman from the County Club who had just been to Yellowstone Park and had pictures for the kids. Over 50 people attended. In November they had another oyster supper and a dance. Then they had a Leap Year Dance and a midnight dinner in December.

In January 1920, they had another Hard Times dance. The announcement said, "Anyone dressed in their Sunday togs will be fined by the Kangaroo Court. Prizes will be given to the tackiest dressed gentleman and lady." In February they had another dance at the school on the 21st and welcomed a brand new teacher, Miss Carney, who had just come in from Illinois.

They had a dance in March, and in April they had a basket social that raised $192. In 1920! I didn't know homesteaders had that kind of money. The funds were used to finish paying for the piano and to buy Victrola records, as well as equipment for the school playground. In this field to the south, actually beyond the tree line, they had a playground. There were swings and teetertotters. I don't know if they had a slide, but they had play equipment for the kids.

In May, Miss Carney, who had just arrived, married George DeFord, who was a ranger in the Park at the time, and of course she stopped teaching. That fall they had another new teacher, Mrs. Cross, and they held a dance in her honor in November. This losing a teacher to marriage happened again in 1928, when Ruth Dinwiddie—Mid Connelly's mother—showed up to be the teacher that fall. In February of 1929 she married Austin Weikert. It turns out Austin was the one who drove her north from the station with his horse and wagon when she arrived on the train. They got to know each other, then they met again at the Christmas party at the Holcomb place. Less than two months later they were married in Whitefish.

So, this school operated from 1918 to 1922. In 1923, the Valentine School District, for whatever reason, decided to close this school and the Polebridge school. They removed everything from the schools except for the desks and moved everything to the new schoolhouse at Half Moon. Needless to say, the parents were not happy.

Interestingly, the next year, in 1924, the Polebridge School burned down. We presume that it was arson. Some people said that it might have been Ralph Thayer's wife, Dode, who had been known to complain about noise from the school, but school wasn't in session then, and the building was mostly empty.

In the meantime, Miss Weide held a summer school session in her cabin over the summer of 1925. And the parents of the North Fork children continually harangued the school district until finally, in 1927, one of the pictures in that book that is going around shows the old Wurtz cabin, which had been fixed up, was then used as the upper North Fork school from 1927 to 1932.

For those of you who don't know about the Wurtzes, they had a devastating fire on their property in 1919, while they were building a new and larger cabin. Two of their small children died in the

fire. Ella never really got over it. So, in 1922 they and their oldest daughter moved to Washington, where Frank worked in the coal mines and they had three more children.

They didn't return to the North Fork until 1932, when their former cabin was being used as a school. It's interesting that according to the newspaper in 1921 they had remodeled their cabin so that it could be used as the school. Why, I wonder? They already had a building. Gary Haverlandt, their grandson, claims that when they came back they were shocked to find that school was being held in their cabin and they were upset about it. I don't think that's true, because they had already thought about the kids going to school there. Ella Wurtz's father, Archibald Hanes, had helped work on the road up here and was killed in a dynamite blast. He had a cabin across the road from the Wurtzes, so they moved into that cabin and told the teacher to go ahead and finish the school year where they were.

The next year, then, the school reopened in this building, and it had to serve as the school for the entire North Fork. The Polebridge school was gone, and there was no school on Big Prairie anymore. But again, there were only seven or eight kids who attended.

While school was being held at the Wurtz cabin, there were still dances occasionally, but I don't known which building they held them in. At least one dance was held at the A.G. Vance cabin near Polebridge to raise money for things the school needed. In September 1929 there was a basket social at the Holcomb cabin. Ladies were asked to prepare baskets that would feed three people.

In January 1930 students put on a play at the Holcomb home, and in March there was a surprise dance for another new teacher, Miss Elsie Mero, at the Holcombs. In May 1931 there was a dance at Matt and Mata Brill's home, at Kintla Ranch. Felicia Holter was the teacher at that time. Larry will talk more about her later.

After the school returned to this building, Naomi Hoiland remembers attending school with her grandmother, Ruth Coan, who was teacher around 1940-42. She wasn't even old enough for kindergarten, but her grandmother had to take her to school with her. One day they looked out the windows and there was a bucket brigade stretching from the river to the schoolhouse. The homestead men had come, and they were bringing water up the bank. It turned out there was a fire on the roof, caused by embers from the wood stove, but the teacher and kids weren't aware of it yet. Ryan Powell, when he talks to us about the restoration, can explain that you can still see the results of the fire. Later owners had put a dropped ceiling in the cabin, but when the restorers went up into the attic, sure enough they could see all of the charred boards, thus validating Naomi's story.

But we don't have a lot of information about those days, because subsequent teachers weren't sending regular news to the newspaper. Sometimes if someone was writing a weekly column in the paper, they would mention happenings at the school.

So, this school finally closed in 1942. There were only two students left, and the school district said they weren't going to support the school any longer. The building sat vacant until 1950, when George and Ruby Rockwell, from Milford, Ohio, purchased the cabin. They were the ones who then added onto the back of the building, the hallway that housed the bathroom with a tub and a toilet, and the small bedroom that really wasn't much bigger than the bed.

According to the newspaper, the Rockwells purchased the cabin from Ralph and Esther Day. Esther was the Holcomb daughter. She married a fellow named Chapman and had her daughter

Nonie. He died, and then she married Ralph Day, who was our mail carrier for many years. But she evidently sold this place to the Rockwells on behalf of her parents.

At home I have a ledger of all of the North Fork Improvement Association (NFIA) members. The Rockwells last show up in the ledger in 1962, so I assume that it was in 1962 that they sold to Bob and Micki Funk. The Funks owned it until Bob sold it to the Forest Service for creation of the Wild and Scenic River Corridor, in about 1990.

The bottom line is how incredibly dedicated the North Forkers were to educating their children. It was a real community affair and a fascinating story. As part of my efforts to document the history of the school I brought Naomi Hoiland over and interviewed her. I brought Ray Hart over and interviewed him, and then I interviewed Jack McFarland, who was married to the Funks' daughter Stephanie and was involved in clearing the property when it was sold to the Forest Service.

Today, Larry Wilson is going to talk to us about his memories of the school. His parents bought Kintla Ranch from the Brills in 1947, when he was 10. So, he knew subsequent owners who lived her, as well as one of the teachers, Felicia Holter, who came back to visit years later. Then Jack is going to tell us more about Bob and Micki Funk and their family, what they did to improve the property and how it ended up being sold to the Forest Service. And then Ryan Powell, who is the Heritage Manager for the Forest, will tell us about current restoration efforts and future plans for the schoolhouse.

Linda Coolidge: Can I ask you a question? Our property down on the Loop Road, when the cabin burned and Del's parents gave the property to us it had a half-acre easement on it for a school. We could never figure that out. It's the corner where you drive into our place. We had a heck of a time with the county, getting that settled. And when you look at the map, it still says that there is an easement for a schoolhouse there. Do you know what that would be about?

Lois: You're not talking about the location of the Polebridge schoolhouse, which was on Hazen Lawson's property?

Linda: No, on the Loop Road itself. That road used to go through to Glacier Drive, of course, and our property was the last property before the Forest Service started, and on that corner, which would be the northeast corner, is this easement.

Lois: Isn't that where the Hensen store was, at that intersection?

Linda: No, that was further east.

Lois: No, I'm sorry I don't know. And it wasn't state land at any time, that it might have been dedicated for a school.

Linda: No. I just found it interesting. And when we went to the county and said that we wanted it taken off, they said no, that it was deeded for a school. I guess we're going to have a school in our driveway.

Lois: Larry, do you know when it stopped being School District 19 and this area came under School District 6, like it is today?

Larry Wilson: After World War II. Columbia took over the Half Moon School at that point, as well.

Betsy: Where was the Half Moon school?

Larry: It was by the mill, and it was closed.

Betsy: You said that when the school district closed this school in 1923 the kids could go to the Half Moon school.

Lois: I don't think any of the kids went to that school. It was too far away.

Larry: Some of the families moved to town, so that their kids could go to school there.

Lois: Yes, the Holcombs moved to town eventually, so that their son could go to high school. And then he was tragically killed. He was 18 years old. He was walking out to their barn in the middle of a thunderstorm. Lightning struck a tree, which fell on him and killed him. It was a real tragedy.

Okay, Larry. It's all yours!

Larry: Contrary to rumor, I did not go to school here. However, I did know one of the teachers—well, several of them, actually. But Felicia Holter was here in the 1930s. In the mid-1970s she was quite elderly, and she ran into a gal who had been a waitress at Kintla Ranch. They wanted to come up here and see it, but their kids wouldn't allow them to drive. So, they waited until after dark and stole the car. They came up here and slept in the car one night. The next day they came into my cabin, and we spent two wonderful days taking them down to Kintla Ranch, bringing them down here to look at the school, etc. About noon on the second day their kids showed up, and they were in trouble, but they said they didn't care. They were old enough to drive.

The thing that we don't think about is how difficult it was to go to school. When you talk to people like Felicia Holter, who stayed up with the Shermans on Tepee Flats, she said that she snowshoed here every morning and started the fire before the kids showed up for school, then snowshoed home at night. Sometimes she even rolled out blankets and stayed here overnight when it was real cold. But it was an interesting time, I'm sure.

When Lois said it was like Sondreson Hall of the 1920s and 1930s, that's pretty accurate. People expended a lot of effort to get to social events. Many square dances were held in the Holcomb house, and if you ever go in there it's a very small living room. Harry even killed a black bear in the living room one time.

Lois: Where did they park all their horses and wagons when they came to these events.

Larry: Mostly they walked, or they rode their horses and just tied them up. There was a barn here at the school, but it wasn't very big. They rode horses to things. When I rode horseback to Sondreson Hall in 1955, people were amazed. But I was hired as a caretaker at Kintla Ranch. My parents had sold it, and I was the caretaker along with another teenager. All we had for transport was horses. So, we rode to the hall for dances and meetings. We used to pick huckleberries and sell them for $9 a gallon, which was $3 over the price in town. We thought we were really ripping people off. We made a little extra money that way, and we rented out the cabins. You should have seen two teenagers trying to wash the sheets.

When I came here as a young person, the only people here were the Rockwells, and the fence still stood. It ran between here and the main road and around the cabin. And he had neat little signs about every ten feet on the fence. They just said, "Stay out. Property of USPC." Of course, he was trying to make people think it was a government thing, but what it stood for was "United

States Private Citizen." Apparently, he did not sell to Dan Waltz. But when the Rockwells left, Dan and his wife lived here. He had been a major during World War II. He would go fly fishing on the river wearing his suntan shirt with his major's oak leaves on it. He got into a big argument with my dad, who really didn't like that. He thought it was improper. Dan said, "Well, when you outrank me, then you can tell me to." Dad said, "Well, I was a full colonel." So, he did outrank Dan Waltz, and he quit wearing the oak leaves after that.

I am convinced that the Forest Service made a mistake in reducing this complex to just this original building. Because for so long Rockwell's buildings out the back, and the barn, and building that the Funks bought and brought here for use as Bob's office, stood on this site. And it's a shame to see all of that history gone. Because it was more than a school, always. And it's a shame that there's a window on the far side. Rockwells put that in. The teachers complained that every time a car or a horse and wagon came up the road, the kids wanted to run and see who it was, because it was really rare back then. Now, I'm a counter. I count all the cars I meet on the road. Yesterday I drove up here and met 97 cars, from Blankenship Road to my driveway. When I was a boy, if you saw 20 cars you wondered what was going on. Plus, we have a big difference today. Our cars are air conditioned, they're tight, and you can drive up and down. In the 1940s and 1950s, if you drove up here, there was dust in the car. I don't care what you did. They were loose and they leaked, and they didn't drive as fast, and the road was rougher and dustier than it is today. So, we're really not much like the homesteaders.

Lois: When did it become a two-lane road, instead of a one-lane road?

Larry: It became a two-lane starting in 1954 with the pine beetle epidemic, and there were 100 loads of logs going out of here every day.

Lois: Now that's dust!

Larry: Yes, you had to stop and back up sometimes, because the logging trucks couldn't. That's when they improved the road and made it a two-lane road. They widened it, raised it, and they've raised it again since then. There was a scaling station right up here at the Whale Creek Road. Tom Reynolds was a scaler, so he could walk up on that big scaling station and scale the logs without climbing on the truck.

Lois: Where was the Sondreson mill?

Larry: Sondreson's mill was a portable mill. I think the last place he had it was just across the border in Canada. It was there because the logs that came out of Canada had to be processed in order to come into the United States. He basically made cants [sawn on two sides] for a while and then turned it into a 2"x4" mill.

Jack McFarland: Didn't they oil the road at some point?

Larry: Yes, the loggers used to oil the road every year. If you think the dust control is bad, that oil was *really* bad, for like two weeks at a time, before it dried up or was carried off on your car.

Karen McDonough: Loyd and Ruth Sondreson were very good friends of ours, of my parents. We actually have one of their cabins that they used as a bunkhouse. When they dismantled their logging operation at the border they gave us two of them. But the Edwards family didn't take care of theirs, and my dad took the board and batten off and covered it. It had a flat roof; it was about the size of a single car garage. We use ours all the time. We have a propane refrigerator in it and another bed. We call it our bunkhouse. After my parents got our place cleared off for our

trailer, Loyd was the one who backed the trailer up to the site. It wasn't an easy job, but he used his heavy equipment to put the trailer where it sits now.

Lois: Loyd and Ruth were both pilots, were they not?

Karen: Yes, they were. They did fly-ins all the time. And she was a clogger. She would fly all over. She came to St. Louis for clogging sometimes and would come visit my parents.

Larry: You might have had the cabin that Charlie Wise lived in.

Karen: I don't remember that history, whether they told my parents that or not.

Larry: Charlie Wise, of course, lost his family. His daughter swallowed a button or something. He carried her into town, and she died. When he came back, his wife had died of the flu. His homestead is now Square Peg Ranch. After that he moved to Canada full-time. He trapped and prospected and did all kinds of things. People used to follow him to try to find out where he was getting his gold. But he wasn't getting it up here. He confessed later that he was getting gold in payment for smuggling Chinese into the United States. He said, "I never had a gold pan in my hand." But he had gold that he sold every spring at the bank in Columbia Falls.

He was living as a caretaker for Loyd Sondreson at the border. The flood of 1948 took out the bridge across the river, and they just had a plank across. Joe McDougall and his wife Blanche came up to bring him groceries. Charlie was helping them, and he had a heart attack and died on the bank of the river. I came up with a couple of my students the next morning. Of course, in Canada you don't move bodies around. They had just covered Charlie's body with a blanket. We stood there looking at it and thought, "Gosh, that looks like it could be a person." One of the boys lifted the blanket up and, sure enough, it was Charlie with a fly on his forehead. The Mounties finally came, and they had to inspect everything and see that it was an accidental death, then took him out. Charlie Wise was quite a character. He really made early NFIA parties a party. He brought whiskey, and when I was ten years old he gave me my first drink of whiskey. You had to go outside—you couldn't drink in the hall at the time. We do that a little bit now. But he was always free with his whiskey and shared it. My mother didn't like him.

Lois: That's how Loyd Sondreson got in trouble, wasn't it?

Larry: Yes, Loyd would drink Charlie's whiskey, and then Ruth would whup him. I remember at Kintla Ranch one time she threw him into the back of the pickup. And he didn't protest.

Lois: Speaking of dust, the son of Ted Ross, who owned the store, was badly injured once. He was driving down the North Fork Road behind a logging truck. It was very dusty. He was just a teenager, maybe not really paying attention. But the truck stopped, and he didn't realize it. He plowed into the back of the truck and totaled the car. His parents weren't happy.

Larry: I almost ran into the back of John Frederick in his green bus once. It was snowing hard, and his windshield wipers quit, so he stopped right in the middle of the road to clean off the windshield.

Lois: Alright. Now Jack will continue the story of the schoolhouse when Bob and Micki Funk owned it.

Jack: There's a big gap between where he left off and the stories I can tell you. Melissa Cloud here will keep me honest, to the extent she can even remember when we were that young. This place was gorgeous. It was called Funk Hollow in the 1970s, when I was a teenager. The road

was cleared. This whole area was fenced, although they never had horses. There was the barn which they had converted into a guest cabin. I don't know what all they did to the place, versus what Doc Rockwell did.

Larry: I don't either.

Jack: When they first came up, according to my understanding, they rented from Doc for many years. And I understand that they might have started to come up here before the girls were born. Andrea would have been born in 1960 and Stephanie in 1963. In those days, they were living in Nashville where Funk and Ray Hart were teaching at Vanderbilt. I don't remember how Bob first came up here, but he rented the place for the summer and then told Ray about it. There was a period of time when Ray came up and rented it.

Lois: What Ray said was that Bob was offered a Guggenheim Fellowship in Germany in 1964. He told Ray he could come up and use the cabin. Ray said 1965 was the first year that he and Fern and the boys came. I asked him when he bought the property that had belonged to Ralph and Esther Day. He said that it was when Ralph was very ill and they needed the money for his medical expenses. Well, Ralph died in 1966, so I'm thinking that if Ray came in 1965 he bought that property soon thereafter and moved over there.

Larry: I've always wondered about this property. The story has been that this was part of Harry Holcomb's homestead, but I'm not so sure. Because the property that became Doug "Pigpen" Barnes' place was the Barkley homestead, and this would more logically be part of the Barkley place, where Ralph and Esther lived, where Ray Hart now lives. I'm not sure either.

Lois: The last year that I have George and Ruby Rockwell on the NFIA roster of members is 1962. So, they came in 1950 and they left in 1962. I think you're right that Bob Funk rented it for awhile and then eventually bought it from them.

Larry: Rockwell must have rented to Dan and Ann Waltz, as well.

Jack: And there was some in between time, because my understanding of the story is that Bob and Ray both bought the Day place. Then there was some approach to dividing it. By the time I start to have real memories, which was when I was old enough to notice girls, they were coming to the Hall, and you can imagine cute young girls in ponytails and braids. So, the barn was converted into a guest cabin. There was a massive, beautiful garden. I thought it was fun to hear all the references to gardens, because Ray was really into gardening and the Elliotts were really into gardening, too, weren't you?

Melissa: We were.

Jack: A lot of North Forkers, just from necessity, all had big gardens. You didn't go to town for produce. This one was noticeable, as was Ray's, because the road ran right past here.

Larry: I still have daffodils that came from here after it became Forest Service property. They weren't taking care of them at all.

Jack: I can imagine that. There's a great picture in Lois's notebook from 1974. It gives you a sense, because you're looking from over there at the cabin and the barn.

Lois: And this concrete slab here was the threshold to the barn, right?

Jack: Yes. Originally it had just a dirt floor, when it was in use as a barn. Then somebody installed a floor. Behind it was what they called the light plant. We all called them light plants when we were kids, which you guys today would know as generators. You would turn the light plant on at night to produce lights in the house. His light plant and a little machine shop were a little bit over there, with little wires running over to provide electricity to the cabin. Then somebody—it might have been Bob—built a playhouse for the girls over by the river. And then there was a log cabin, and I don't know where it came from, that he used as a study or office. I don't know who built it. I know that we gave it to Lynn and Phil Jones after the property was sold to the Forest Service, and it burned in the Wedge Canyon fire.

When I was a young man, there was a big porch along the front of the cabin and a well pump and a big wash basin. We still have the wash basin. It was kind of a delightful area to hang out. And the two trees that were beside the cabin, which were already pretty big by 1974, were there. This was just a great place to be. I have to believe that between 1964 and 1997 or so the river just kept moving back and forth, but in the 1970s it was way the heck over there, and there was a big picnic area and a fire pit we would walk down to. I imagine in 1964 it got pushed there, then in 1995 it came back. When it did, that was when the bank washed out and all the buildings that Bob had along here were then close to the edge.

You're right, there were never very many cars. But Micki grew all this rhubarb. Do you guys remember the rhubarb? I think every North Forker came and got some. They just kept this beautifully trimmed, and the fence was still there. You would mostly drive directly down here from the road, but the driveway out to Ford Station was still there.

The Funks got lots of free work days from the young men who liked to hang out here to see the girls. Bob would say, "While you're here . . ." The water that ran through here came out of Tepee Creek. We would go up in the spring, and Bob had a big barrel with wire over it to keep the float out. We would put the barrel into the creek, and he had miles of PVC pipe that came down from there, ran down the driveway, and supplied the bathroom. But they didn't drink it. They drank the water out of the well, which had a hand pump. That was the drinking water. But they watered the garden with the creek water, and they used it for the bathroom. Then in the fall we would go up and take the barrel out and drain the water out of the PVC pipe. It was not a huge process, but it took a couple of days, finding all the pieces and putting them back together.

There as a fort behind the cabin, back there in the trees. It was well enough hidden that you could do some serious kissing over there. And the outhouse was there. There were a lot of goings-on here. It's funny, because Lois printed out these *Hungry Horse News* references for me. I was like, "Oh yes, that's right. I remember that."

When the Funks were in Europe on the fellowship, that's when Andrea became diabetic. She just got sick, I don't remember with what, and then boom, she was diabetic out of nowhere. After that was when they really started to spend summers here. By then she was six or seven. She would go to a camp in Oregon, just outside of Portland, for almost four weeks out of every summer. It was a diabetic camp.

There was a project that they started to do. Those of you who have been to our place know that we have the old carriage house from the Mercantile. It was a three-sided structure that accommodated three carriages. Ed Neneman knows a lot about this, since he helped so much. At some point it had been disassembled and stacked in a big pile at the Merc after they weren't using it anymore. Bob bought those logs and decided he was going to create basically a big

living room area, connected to the front of the cabin. In exchange for hanging out with the girls, you could come and help lay the foundation. Then Micki would serve lunch, and you might get a few minutes in the fort with Andrea. So, we dug it out and put the cinder blocks in and laid a foundation for having a great big fireplace on the west end of the building. I didn't help put the logs up. I just helped with the digging and such. I have no idea how he put the logs up, but it was toward the end of the 1970s that Bob and Micki broke up and Bob started dating Charlene, who he later married. When that happened, all the activity here basically stopped. By 1977 or 1978, all that kind of vibrancy was gone. The girls would still come up with their dad, but the addition to the cabin never went anywhere. It was fully erected. The front was wide open, with the three sides but no fireplace, and it had a little loft. And basically the packrats invaded.

The cabin sat here, somewhat unused, for a number of years. What I can tell you about the last part of that history is that Stephanie and I started dating again in 1990. At that point, Bob was talking about selling, and there was some dispute about the property line with the Forest Service. Bob's property went down such that the road going into Ford Station went over his land. The Forest Service said, "But wait; your driveway comes over our land." I guess there was a bit of a pissing contest. I don't know exactly what happened, but Bob was moving to California and wanted some money. He talked the girls into agreeing that he could sell the place, which was something that he and Micki had agreed would never happen. The property was to go to the girls as part of the divorce settlement.

The girls finally agreed, and I think by the time Steph and I got married a couple of years later, at least she was massively regretting that decision. I said, "Okay, I'll try to get it back." I'm trying to think of the woman I worked with [Deb Manley; later Starling, now Mucklow]. She was head of the Forest Service at the time. I wrote her a letter and went to meet her. I said, "This whole thing never should have happened. We'd like to buy it back." She said, "Good luck with that. The chances of you getting the property back are close to zip, zilch, nada. But I'll make you a deal. If you agree to remove all of the cabins that are here and clean the property up, you can take the carriage house, because it's not historic." I said, "We'd like to take the barn." She said, "Too late, it went to the Jewel Basin," and sure enough, it was gone. Which is really sad. Why they would pick up a historic structure that was as old as the schoolhouse and integral to its history, and then move it when they were trying revive the history of the school, is beyond me. The generator shed, the playhouse, and none of the other structures were original. So, we spent a very long time coming down here, disassembling and moving the carriage house. Ed helped trailer all the logs to our place, where we put it back up. It's not necessarily "historic," but it has been preserved and it's there.

That's how we left the property. We piled up all the old stuff, and the Forest Service came and burned it. I don't remember who skidded the old study up to Lynn and Phil Jones's place. Melissa spent a lot of time here. I don't know if she wants to chime in.

Melissa: I wasn't kissing the girls, Jack.

Jack: If you were older than we were, you were hanging out with Karen McDonough and the Sweets and the Hart boys. We'd go to the square dances, and they were outside smoking and drinking under the bridge. We weren't old enough for that. We were more behaved. We were inside dancing, not outside drinking. But Bracken and Morgan Hart, Melissa, the Sweets, the McNeil sons.

Tom Holycross: The big pile of shake shingles, handmade, that were piled over here for a long time, many years. Does anybody know where they came from?

Jack: They came off the roof of the carriage house. That's where we put them. I know, because as I took them off, we would pile them up and I learned a lesson about what happens when you step on a bare roof with just felt and a lot of needles on it. When I hit the ground, I was up here by myself. They had created a beautiful rock patio here, and people had been coming and taking the rocks. Luckily, in the exact spot that I hit they had removed all the rocks, so when I hit I didn't break anything. I knocked the wind out of myself, though. I just slipped right off the roof, and I said, "Okay, I'm not doing that again."

I even have a tool I used. I don't remember where it came from. And, by the way, I have these signs, and I even bought a license plate for my car at one point, that say USOC for U.S. Ordinary Citizen. That's what was on the front door, "Property USOC." I think it was quite clever.

Bernie Wiedmann: What's not clear to me is how did the Forest Service come into possession of this private property?

Jack: They bought it from Bob.

Lois: Bob was good friends with the Craighead brothers who helped get the Wild & Scenic River Act passed in 1968. I think he appreciated their mission, so he sold it to become part of the Wild & Scenic River Corridor.

Betsy Holycross: There were several million dollars appropriated to the Forest Service for buying property along the corridor.

Larry: Yes, they bought the Walt Hammer place at Placer Point, they bought all of Kintla Ranch which had three miles of riverfront. They spent a lot of money. They bought all up and down the river. And they tried to tell you what you could build on it, too, but that mostly failed.

Jack: Can I add my two cents to all that? The money that was appropriated was to protect the river corridor. But they translated that into "buy the land." If they had stopped trying to buy and own everything and had bought easements, they could have protected the river from one end to the other. But they ran out of money, because they wanted to buy it all, and they spent millions of dollars from the Dick and Barbara Lawrence property down, until they ran out of money. To this day we'd have much less development on the river.

Larry: Yes, I think they paid $2 million for Kintla Ranch.

Melissa: How much did this place sell for?

Jack: Like $50,000. It wasn't much.

Melissa: For how much acreage?

Jack: Only six or seven acres or so. I think the fort was maybe off of their land.

Ed Neneman: Doesn't the property line run through here somewhere?

Jack: I don't know. They had all of those flags, but I mostly noticed the flags along here. It's hard to believe a homestead would have a boundary that was short of the river. If you were going to homestead along the river, your boundary would be the river.

Larry: Yes, that's why they put their homesteads there.

Lois: But they were bought according to quarter sections or sections, which wouldn't align with the creeks or rivers. Although they could build their cabins near the waterways, so they'd have water.

Now we'll turn the discussion over to Ryan from the Forest Service for the more recent history.

Ryan: Another break in the timeline. There was a break in use of the facility from the late 1970s, it sounds like, through basically when I showed up in 2018. [We had been working with Ryan's predecessor for a year or so before that.] So, we're looking at another 50 years or so of no occupation besides packrats.

First off, I want to say thank you to Lois for being willing to engage in these sessions and keeping the history alive in the North Fork and tracking down all that history and information. It was very critical in persuading us to be a proper caretaker of this place. There are certain folks in the Forest Service who do appreciate the history and don't want to see things go away or be repurposed, and I'm one of those people.

I showed up on the Flathead Forest in 2018. We met Lois shortly after that, and she started working on us, talking about the history of the North Fork and how people were interested.

Lois: Yes, haranguing them. Yes, it's your property, but it's part of our community. Why aren't you taking care of it?

Ryan: Nobody had done anything since the Forest Service acquired it in the 1990s. It was very overgrown. I would say dangerous.

Lois: Yes, the windows had been knocked out and it had been vandalized.

Ryan: Yes, I would say it was dangerous. It had changed a lot over the years. But the core building was here, and we decided that the significance of this site, as a school, although there's a lot of other history to it, was the main character of the place that we would like to preserve. We went ahead and proceeded to submit a National Register nomination, which places it on a list of nationally significant sites. To gain that kind of recognition it has to be more than just someone's private cabin that they use in the summer. As a schoolhouse, it functioned in a bigger picture than just one family.

To pursue the National Register nomination, we knew we wanted to save it from crumbling into the ground. Packrats, trees, fires—it was really just a matter of time before it disappeared. Lois knew that, so she imparted a lot of wisdom to the Forest Service and pressure, and Larry did, as well. We appreciate that. That's what it takes. It takes a champion to really push people to act. It comes down to—do you have the capacity, do you have the money to put into this place. We don't have dances anymore to raise funds for it. We could now.

Larry: I tend to agree that it's better that we're saving this than doing nothing. When it's restored as a school, I don't know what the heck we're going to do with it. You won't be able to get five people in there configured as a school, unless they sit down. We certainly won't have 50 people coming for a dance. We have Sondreson Hall for that now.

Ryan: No, but we could have 20 people gathered together out here like we do today.

Larry: That's a possibility, that things will happen out here. And maybe we can store some archives in there.

Lois: Nooo! No archives without climate control!

Ryan: Copies. Copies of archives!

Lois: People have been stepping up to offer furnishings for the school. Terry Atha has donated an old potbelly stove. He had to get it out of his house, so it's temporarily stored over at the Wurtz property.

Larry: I think the Hoilands had two desks.

Lois: Yes, the Hoilands have a couple of old school desks. Ray Hart said he has an old school desk or two somewhere. I talked to his son Morgan, and he said, "Yes, I remember those desks, but I have no idea where they are now. I'll have to look."

Tom Holycross: What are the ultimate plans for this property and building?

Ryan: That's something that's been discussed a little bit. We're still working on developing a solid property plan for this place. You know, in the recent past a lot of our cabins have become public rental facilities, and that helps fund their preservation. But having the Ford Station cabin so close by, it doesn't make sense to have this as a public rental. We think it has a little bit of a different character. And with a public rental comes a lot of obstacles, like a bathroom. How are we going to get a new toilet out here this close to the river? It's not going to happen. It probably can't be grandfathered in. The old drain that was in the bathroom, I've been scared to even look down that pipe. I don't know where it goes. Does it go to a tank underneath the ground? Was there some kind of septic system?

Larry: When the Rockwells were here, the road came straight down the hill here. I don't know who put in the other road that came through the meadow from Ford Station.

Jack: That was original.

Larry: It would seem to me that that road should be reopened. It's not safe for all of us parked out there along the road.

Ryan: Good point. That's part of our working with the North Fork Landowners Association to figure out what's the right use for this place once we get it where we want it. I would say we're probably half way, and it has taken a lot longer than I would like.

Larry: You are going to put the front porch back on, aren't you?

Ryan: We are going to put the front porch back on. We have detailed notes on that.

Lois: And you'll put the new floor in this summer?

Ryan: Yes, we'll put the floor in this summer. We'll replace the spandrel log on the south side of the building. Our emphasis has been on reclaiming the site, getting rid of a lot of the dangerous fills and tearing down the additions that had been inhabited by packrats for 40 years. It was not a fun task. It was very dirty. But we're making headway, and you guys can go in there and see it today. We're going to keep working on it. What are we going to do with it in the future? We're probably not going to make it a rental. We're going to have to use it in conjunction with the North Forkers.

Tom: Do you have funding available for maintaining the structure?

Ryan: No, not besides going out and searching for grants. Rentals generate their own funding, but this, even though it's a heritage property and an archeological site to us, it's not generating any money. Our program is as strapped as any other program in the Forest Service, especially right now.

Tom: Call your local representative.

Lois: I think it should continue to be an educational facility, whether it's for classes associated with the Glacier Institute or other agencies, so that we can have events and educational classes that preserve that part of its legacy. We could auction off basket lunches!

Ryan: That's kind of the idea. Preserve that history; be able to provide that history to the public. One of our ideas is to not actually reopen the road, but to make a trail that comes from the parking areas over at the Ford cabin. That way we could have an interpretive sign that says, "You can walk this way about a half mile and experience this cool, historic school."

Larry: I can tell you that you reach an age where a half mile walk is too far.

Lois: But the interpretation of this site is kind of tied to the interpretation of Ford Station. I think we should piggyback on that, so that the school isn't isolated the way it used to be. For years it was just isolated and could attract the wrong type of attention.

Ryan: I don't know that we can open it up to the extent that you could drive here again. But at least people can access it.

Larry: If somebody has a bulldozer, I can put a road in there in an hour and a half.

Ryan: Yes, we could, too. But part of the Wild & Scenic River Corridor legislation may hamstring us in what we can develop here. But history is actually incorporated into that, so preserving the history is something that is encouraged.

Lois: We have opened up the doors so you can look inside. It does have a little aroma of packrat.

Larry: Anybody who lives on the North Fork should know that aroma.

Lois: The gals from the historic preservation team out of Missoula who were working on it when we began—what great people—named one of the packrats. They named her Lucy, and we all knew her. You'd go in and she'd be sitting on the chimney and would kind of look at you. She was cute. But one day we came in and Lucy was laying dead in the middle in the floor. We don't know what happened to her. But she was like a pet.

Betsy: That's really special when you name your packrat.

Lois: She and her ancestors had been coming into the schoolhouse for generations!

Betsy: Thank you, Lois! That was awesome!

Lois: And thanks to Rob Rego for taping this whole session, and we will transcribe it.