

INTERVIEW WITH DR. RAY L. HART

Conducted at Ford Schoolhouse, June 8, 2019

Interviewers: Lois Walker, North Fork Historian
Jack Poppen, USFS Historic Preservation Specialist

Lois: The carriage house that sat in front of the schoolhouse when the Funk family owned it, that came from Polebridge?

Ray: Yes, it was down at the store [now the Polebridge Mercantile].

Lois: Kind of to the right of the store? I think they used to store wood in it, or something?

Ray: Yes, exactly.

Lois: There's a piece of concrete here [directly in front of the door to the school]. What was that?

Ray: That's was going to be under the fireplace.

Lois: How much did Bob Funk get done on it? [It was a three-sided structure at Polebridge]

Ray: He had all the walls up and he had a roof on it. He just had plywood over the windows. I don't think he ever got glass in the windows.

I'm surprised the pump . . .

Lois: Yes, tell us where the well was and about the hand pump. Is there still a casing, perhaps?

Ray: That's it there. [The square piece of concrete with a pipe near the front porch] There was a hand pump. Loyd Sondreson dug this well, blasted it. It wasn't very deep. Another source of water was from Tepee Creek. They had a plastic pipe laid up Tepee Creek so that they had water for gardening. They didn't drink it. They thought it might have giardia in it, and it probably did. So, they only drank the pump water.

Lois: Was the pump on the porch right next to the building?

Ray: No, it's always been out here.

Lois: Just about where it is now, okay. Where was their garden?

Ray: The garden was out there [pointing beyond where the carriage house was].

Lois: Kind of in front of where that big spruce tree is?

Ray: Yes.

Lois: Was he very successful with his garden?

Ray: Yes, well it was Micki. She was successful with the garden. And, of course, the pole fence was out there, with sweet peas growing along it.

Lois: That was the original fence that was constructed around the school, and it was still standing?

Ray: Yes, that's correct.

Lois: Did it come right through here [to the west of the building], or was it further out?

Ray: It wasn't very far out.

Lois: How far did they have everything—the vegetation—cleared away from the building?

Ray: Actually, all that out there was a meadow.

Jack: Really?

Ray: Yes, down to just this side of the creek. They had a total of about eight or nine acres here, most of it in that area.

Lois: How did they drive in, and where did they park?

Ray: Out here [pointing to the west side of the building]. That was one area. There was a driveway that came down from the main road. But there was also a road going north and south [south of the building] that went right through there.

Lois: In between the big spruce and the big aspen tree?

Ray: Yes, or to the left of the big spruce tree. There was a road there that tied into the turnoff to Ford Station.

Lois: Before you go over the creek?

Ray: Yes, that's correct. It was before the bridge over the creek. And you'd just drive down that road. That was the safest way, because you didn't have a drop like you do over here.

Lois: I'm assuming the height of the road has just continued to build up over the years? It didn't used to be that high.

Ray: Yes.

Lois: Larry [Wilson] seems to think that the original North Fork Road came between the schoolhouse and the outhouse, that it actually came much closer to the schoolhouse.

Ray: Not really. It came either to the left of that spruce tree, or to the right of it. It basically came here to the yard. You had basically level ground after you left the North Fork Road, up to and to the side of the cabin. You see, the land extended way out there. I'd say the "beach" was at least halfway out into where the river is now. It was 150 yards of soil.

Lois: In the schoolhouse days, I'm told, the river was actually on the other side of what we would call that island out there. Was the island there back then, and the river split around it?

Ray: I don't remember there being an island. I remember a high place out there, but it was only obvious late in the summer, after the runoff and when there wasn't much water in the river.

There were many, many big trees out here along the river, which was out in the middle of where the river is now. It was a long ways out there.

Lois: The building that stood here? [southeast of the cabin]

Ray: That was the girls' bedroom [the Funk daughters Andrea and Stephanie].

Lois: It had been a barn at one time, I'm told?

Ray: I didn't know that. It was really the best building on the property. It was smaller than the schoolhouse, about half the size. But it was very well built. That's the one that you said the Forest Service disassembled and moved to some other location.

Lois: Yes, down to Jewel Basin. Do you have any idea who built that building? It was a log structure, right?

Ray: Yes, it was log, and it was about a story and a half. I think there was a sleeping loft on the second level, and there were bunk beds down below. It was a very, very nice little cabin.

Lois: I have an early picture of it. I think they were using it when they were using the school in the late 1920s or early 1930s.



Ford Schoolhouse and adjacent barn, ca 1930s. (Courtesy Esther Day)

Ray: It probably was a supply room or something for the school. I don't know. It could have housed a little kitchen or something.

Lois: That's true. They could have used that to cook their hot lunches.

Ray: [Standing on the east side of the school] Bob's study was basically out there where those aspens are. It was an old Forest Service bunk house, I think, on sled runners so that you could move it from site to site.

Lois: Was it a log structure?

Ray: No, it was frame, not log.

Lois: Any idea where he got it?

Ray: From the Forest Service, at an auction, I suspect. There were several such up here that performed the functions that RVs do today, abandoned RVs or trailer houses, we used to call them.

Lois: But the river wasn't as close?

Ray: The river was not as close. There were trees along the edge of the river, way out there. For my kids, of course, it was a real hike to get to the beach. There was a sandy beach down there.

Lois: Was there really? There certainly isn't today. In fact, we lost another tree to the river this winter.

Ray: Yes, right in here there was a path down to the river. There were big trees all along the river bank.

This sure looks different without the bedroom and the bath in between.

Lois: Yes, it does. And Jack has taken the windows out on the east side. He's going to take them down to Missoula and restore them. Do you know anything about this piece of drain pipe [at the southeast corner of the building].

Ray: I suspect that it went to a septic tank or something. The kitchen sink, as I remember, was under that window there.

Lois: Yes, it was.

Ray: It probably came over and connected to this. That's a guess. I don't think I've ever seen that pipe before.

Lois: Under the old bathroom there's a concrete slab, and we're wondering if there isn't some sort of tank under there. But I do wonder where the gray water went.

Ray: The gray water must have gone here, that's my guess. But I don't remember a flush john in this building.

Lois: Well, we took a toilet out. Who knows when it was added. There was a tub with tiled walls, and a sink with medicine cabinet. All the modern conveniences.

There are the beams that formed the foundation where the bunkroom was.

Ray: That's wood?

Lois: Yes. But here is the concrete pad where the bathroom sat.

Ray: Yes, I remember that.

Lois: There are two pipes coming up, one for the toilet and the other for the bathtub.

Ray: Okay. So, I guess the septic tank has to be somewhere out there [toward the river].

Lois: It's amazing how good the back of the building looks.

Ray: Yes. Well, it's been protected.

Lois: The metal roof and the cinder blocks that Funk put under it have really saved this structure.

Ray: Yes. Bob did the cinder blocks, did he?

Lois: I believe he did. In one of Frank Evans' columns [in the *Hungry Horse News*] he talks about him jacking up the cabin.

Ray: [Going in the back door of the school] These logs were hewn inside, at least some of them.

Lois: I'm assuming Harry Holcomb had a lot to do with that, and maybe Ralph Thayer.

Ray: Yes.

Lois: You know, there were people who sat on the school committee, the PTA [Parent-Teacher Association] essentially, who didn't even have children, but they all came and helped out.

Ray: Yes. I don't think Frank Wurtz, who hewed all the inside of his cabin, I don't think they had any kids.

Lois: Yes, they did. They had Louise, who is Gary Haverlandt's mother. Then they had the two babies who were killed in the fire. Then they moved to Washington State and had three more children.

Ray: My goodness.

Lois: They came back here in about 1929, I think.

Ray: That was a hulky stove.

Lois: What kind of stove did the Funks have, and where was it?

Ray: It was a metal stove. It was over here [in the southeast corner of the room], and the pipe went in on the left side. What I'm marveling at is, I think where the stovepipe goes in, it really doesn't have a foundation below it. Isn't that a wood storage place cabinet under it?

Jack: It is.

Ray: I never saw a chimney like that.

Lois: When we look at the old pictures of the school, there's just a stovepipe above the roof, but now there's a concrete block chimney. I don't know whether the Rockwells built that, or the Funks.

Ray: And what is holding the chimney up? It's just built on that wood frame.

Jack: Yes, it's built on that cribbing.

Ray: That's not very safe, I don't imagine.

Jack: No, it's not.

Ray: You've got a wood base under a hot rock.

Jack: Yes, under a lot of concrete.

Lois: Did the Funks have any artifacts or any remnants from the school still in the building, as decoration?

Ray: None that I know of. All I know is there was a picture of the original school. It used to hang in this building. I just found it down here one day and took it. I gave it to Stephanie, then she gave it back to me when she came out here. I've still got it.

Lois: Why don't you have a seat, and I'll ask you more questions.

Jack: Watch your footing here. It's kind of slick.

Ray: To tell you the truth, I don't know that I was even inside the bedroom. There's the old outhouse over there.

Lois: Jack McFarland told me that they had a double bed in there, and then a set of bunkbeds for the girls originally. But that room was hardly big enough to hold all that.

Ray: I remember only the double bed. Lordy, how this land has changed. The river was way out there.

Lois: Kind of where the east channel is today?

Ray: Where all those trees are [in the channel], that was the river. It's amazing that this floor is still here.

Lois: Where there was a rug over it, the floor's still in pretty good shape. Once we get the dirt up on the rest of it, it's not bad.

Ray: Yes. The sink, I guess, was over there.

Lois: Yes, the cook stove [range] was against the south wall.

Ray: The sink was here, and the heating stove was over there.

Lois: They just had a gas cookstove? She didn't use a wood cookstove?

Ray: You could cook on the heating stove.

Lois: How did they have this room furnished?

Ray: There were a sofa or two along the east wall beneath the windows. The dining table was in the northwest corner of the room, about here, with the chairs around it. There were occasional easy chairs. It was a comfortable room. How big is this? Is it about 20 feet long?

Jack: It's just shy of 20 feet wide and 30 feet long.

Ray: That's a good-sized room.

Lois: Can you believe they used to have dances in here when it was the schoolhouse? I don't know how they could have done it.

Ray: I don't either. I don't remember any dances here.

Lois: They would have Thanksgiving here and Christmas. They'd have a Hard Times Dance, a Valentine's Dance, an Arbor Day celebration. Every month there was something here.

Ray: Of course, there were just very few people up here then. And very few children of grade school age.

Lois: Do you know what year Dr. Funk bought it from the Rockwells?

Ray: The Rockwells would have bought it in the late 1940s, I think. Bob was a native of Indiana and went to college there. His college roommate was from Kalispell. At the end of his freshman or sophomore year, Bob was called in by the school doctor. The doctor asked him what he was going to be doing that summer. He said, "I'll have to work, of course, to go to school next year." Like all of us in those days, he was poor and had to work his way through school. He said, "I can't take the summer off, because I've got to work." The doctor said, "Well, you may be dead by then, because you've just worked yourself down to the nubbin." So, he went home and told his roommate what the doctor had said, and his roommate said, "Come with me out to Montana. We can't get a job, but at least we can live off the land." So, he came out, and they came into the Park and fished and shot game and so on, and lived for the summer. He wandered over to the North Fork and met the old doc who had bought this place.

Lois: George and Ruby Rockwell.

Ray: That's right. I've still got his bag of fly-tying materials.

Lois: You do? That would make a great exhibit item some day.

Ray: Yes, if I can find it. Anyway, he got hooked on the North Fork. I'm trying to figure the year. Bob and I were close in age. He was a year or two older than I. I went to college in 1943, when I was 14, I guess. So, it would have been about 1943.

Lois: Was he in the service during World War II?

Ray: I don't think so.

Lois: I wondered, after he eventually bought it from the Rockwells, were they still around? Did they still come to the North Fork?

Ray: They were from Padre Island, Texas. They were just here in the summers.

Lois: I only have a couple of pictures of them, and they were of an age back then. They looked to be maybe in their 50s.

Ray: Yes. Then Bob and I were colleagues together. We were on the faculty at Drew University. After I went for my graduate degree at Yale I went to Drew in New Jersey in 1956. Bob

came in 1957. He had been teaching at Harvard and Emory [University in Atlanta]. He joined me in 1957. And then we moved on to Vanderbilt, which is where he had done his PhD. I went first to Vanderbilt and opened a job for him. In 1964 or 1965, he got a Guggenheim Fellowship to Germany. That's when he and Micki and the girls offered us this cabin. We first came out in the summer of 1965.

Lois: Had he been coming out pretty much every summer?

Ray: Every summer, every summer.

Lois: I did send a long email to Stephanie last night, letting her know again that we would like to see some family albums, and I need to talk with her a little more about her dad and about the years that they were here as kids.

Ray: You asked when the Rockwells must have bought, and I'm trying to reconstruct the dates. I would say it was in the mid-1940s. They probably didn't own it much longer than 10 or 12 years.

Lois: I have an old ledger from the North Fork Improvement Association. They don't show up as members of the NFIA until 1952. That doesn't mean they weren't here before that. [They were associate members in 1952 and regular members in 1953. George was president of the NFIA in 1952 and 1953, then vice president in 1956 and again in 1959.]

Ray: You talked about dances in this place. I can understand that they did.

Lois: You could do line dances in here, I suppose.

Ray: Before Sondreson Hall was built in 1952-1953, all of the dances were held at the McFarland Ranch in Big Prairie. Indeed, meetings of the NFIA were held there, too.

Lois: Jack McFarland was the first president of the organization and helped form it. And the Blocks, Walter and Ethyle. They used to have meetings at their place up near Trail Creek before the Hall was built.

Ray: Yes. The Kinsolvings own the Block place now. [Actually, Bud Block's daughter and her husband still own part of the property, and some is listed under the Block Family Trust.]

Lois: And once Orville and Helen Foreman came, I think they had events at their place.

Ray: They were wonderful people.

Lois: Yes, I wish I had known them.

Ray: They were city slickers, but they really adapted up here.

Lois: For an attorney, he did pretty good. Did you know Ann and Dan Waltz?

Ray: Yes.

Lois: I've been told that they lived here in the schoolhouse for a while. I don't know if that was after the Rockwells or before?

Ray: They were down at Polebridge by the time I knew them. They were on the Loop Road, which goes down to the river.

Lois: Down near Vance Lodge?

Ray: Yes, exactly.

Lois: So, as far we know, the Rockwells were the ones who put the two rooms on the back of the schoolhouse, the bathroom and the bunk room.

Ray: Okay.

Lois: And the barn was existing, but the Funks converted it into a bunkhouse for the girls. Then they planned to convert the carriage house that they moved up from Polebridge.

Ray: Yes, the carriage house was a late development. It was in the last five years that the Funks owned the place.

Lois: In the late 1980s?

Ray: Yes. He traded something for it, down at the store. Cal and Dottie Oien, who owned the store, we were all very close.

Lois: I know very little about the Oiens. Nobody has any pictures of them.

Ray: They were wonderful people.

Lois: I wish I had more stuff on them.

Ray: In fact, I taught Cal's nephew, David Oien, at the University of Montana. I performed the marriage ceremony for him and his wife.

Lois: Up here?

Ray: No, on a big wheat ranch out from Conrad.

Lois: Well, I need to come and talk to you about them. The Rockwells had some sort of a light plant, obviously. Do you know where that was?

Ray: Yes, it was a generator in a shed out there. The damn thing didn't work half of the time, and I wore out the road down to Loyd Sondreson's. Loyd saved my life constantly. He and Fred Boss, the mail man. We had an impossible car for this road. It was an old 1948 Chevrolet that may have had three or four inches of clearance under it. I'd blow two tires a week, and Fred would take them to town and get them patched and bring them back up, and would bring me up groceries and that sort of thing. Fred would do anything for you.

Lois: Was this a gasoline generator? Diesel? Propane?

Ray: I think it was a gas and oil mixture. Two cycle.

Lois: To what extent did they use electricity in here? We see light fixtures and such.

Ray: Not very much. I don't think they had a battery. There was a rope pull on the thing. I don't think there was any way to store the electricity.

Lois: They just turned the thing on when they needed it?

Ray: Yes. We tried to.

Lois: That was pretty common.

Ray: We mostly used coal oil lamps.

Lois: I'm assuming they didn't have sort of water storage tank or cistern? Or a hot water heater?

Ray: I don't think there was. They used a bucket shower, as I recall. Everybody did. Either that or a sponge and a dishpan.

Lois: Many folks just brought the big galvanized tub in on a Saturday night and filled it up. So, it wasn't a very deep well. We know that. They had a hand pump. Do you remember Bob Funk jacking the cabin up and putting the new sill logs under it?

Ray: Yes, but I can't remember when he did that. But they had lived in it a long time when he did that.

Lois: And when did he buy it from the Rockwells? Was it in 1962, or around then?

Ray: That sounds about right.

Lois: I need to go the county plat room and trace it.

Ray: I remember him coming and talking to me about buying it. I thought it was the silliest thing I'd ever heard of. I asked him how big it was, how many acres, how much he had to pay for an acre, and so on. It was something like a couple of thousand dollars for less than ten acres and a log cabin. I asked, "How long will it take to pay out?" He said, "What do you mean?" I said, "What will it earn a year?" And he said, "Nothing." I said, "It sounds like two fools meet—the guy who bought it in the first place and you for buying it off of him." But he ignored me and bought it, thank goodness.

Lois: What led you to buy the Ralph and Esther Day place?

Ray: Because I came up here one summer and I came every summer since. I loved it.

Lois: It's addictive, you're right.

Ray: You see, this was basically a closed community when I came up here. There was nothing for sale. Nothing. People took a long time to look you over before they decided they wanted you.

Lois: Why were Ralph and Esther selling?

Ray: Ralph was in very poor health. He was in his last days. They had to sell, because they had to have money to take care of Ralph.

Lois: The gate that you've just built, the archway over your driveway, the Days had one similar, did they not?

Ray: I never saw pictures of that.

Lois: I have a picture of the two of them standing in front of that gate. I'll send it to you.

Ray: Okay. I've never seen it.

Lois: I thought maybe you were emulating it.

Ray: No, I found old postcards in the cabin addressed to Ralph and Esther Day, Belton, Montana, which is West Glacier now.

Lois: We've also been told that the Rockwells had a series of small storage buildings out there near the meadow.

Ray: Well, I bought 40 acres. The Days had 80 acres, but to meet their expenses they first had to sell the south 40. They sold it to whoever it was. Then when those people got tired of it, they put it on the market and it was bought by Esther's brother, one of the Holcomb boys who had wanted to get out of the North Fork and became a house painter down in the valley. When his parents died, he decided he wanted to have a place up here. So, he bought it.

Lois: Just south of your field there's a driveway that goes up into the woods. Is that what you're calling the south 40?

Ray: Yes, that's it.

Lois: Do they still own it today?

Ray: No, I don't know who owns it now. I think two gay partners owned it, the last I knew, but there's a water problem up there. They've never been able to lift water up from the lower level, the river well.

Lois: I can look that up on the county database. [David & Lynn Evans of Anza, CA] When Jack McFarland said when the Forest Service wanted them to get all the buildings off the property and clean it up, they did, and Phil and Lynn Jones up on Tepee Flats took one of the buildings and put it on their property.

Ray: That was Bob's study. It was lost in one of the fires.

Lois: Yes, it burned in the 2003 Wedge Canyon Fire.

Ray: You're right. I said I didn't remember what happened to that building, but now you remind me. That's where it went.

Lois: The Funks didn't have a root cellar or an ice house or a cold building of any sort?

Ray: No, they were never here in the winter.

Lois: How did Micki feel about all this?

Ray: She loved it. She and the girls—that's why I'm so pissed that Bob didn't leave it to them.

Lois: Well, there's always you, Uncle Ray.

Ray: Well, I tell them they've always got a place to stay at my place.

Lois: You know, to actually to own property here, and maintain it, and pay taxes and insurance on it, sometimes you're just better off renting a place for a month or so.

Tell me about interaction between your two boys and their two girls. What kinds of activities did they do?

Ray: Well, they were always involved in activities at the Hall, mostly square dances.

Lois: Yes, I know they had youth dances sometimes.

Ray: All the kids learned to dance and have fellowship, as we used to say, with each other. So, it was a very tight community, which was exacerbated by the "community cattle herd." Do you know about that?

Lois: No.

Ray: Well, Loyd and Ruth Sondreson were the ringleaders.

Lois: They didn't have any children, right?

Ray: No, they didn't have any children. And they would have been wonderful parents. Norwegian, from North Dakota, both of them. Well, Loyd would go down to the cattle ring in the valley, the auctions, and we would buy yearling calves in May and bring them up here. There would be 60 or 70 head, I would say.

Lois: Holy cow!

Ray: All the families that wanted to participate. Fern and I would buy eight of ten out of the "community herd." The boys in the group, the sons, would be charged with keeping up with these cows over the summer. With the free range laws, they could go anywhere, which they did, and they became wild cattle, to tell the truth. We had an old bell cow to lead them, and they would just take off. We had fences at our place, and we would pen them up for a week or so, just to get them used to home, then we'd turn them out in the community herd. They usually would wander up Whale Creek, so by the end of the summer they'd be 12 or 15 miles up Whale Creek. The guys had to check on them once a week to make sure they were still in the country, then they'd go round them up and walk them back, which would take a full day.

Lois: How did Morgan and Bracken [the Hart sons] like that?

Ray: Well, it was a good way to get them home and be out with the boys. They didn't like the haying season. At the end of the summer, Roy Cooper would mow all the meadow up here, then they'd bale the hay, and the boys had to go out and buck bales.

Lois: That's hard work.

Ray: At the end of the summer, we'd get all the cows and corral them down at Loyd and Ruth's. Loyd would hay them and grain them so they would put on weight. That was called "watering stock." You'd fatten them up just before you sold them. Anyway, with the wonderful grass up here, those calves would double their weight between May and October, then we'd sell them off.

Lois: Did they truck them down valley?

Ray: We'd always keep two to put in the freezer at the packing plant.

Lois: You were teaching in Missoula by that time?

Ray: I was teaching in Missoula by then, although I was all over the country, because I was a consultant to the New York system, and I was running national offices of my learned society, and so on. But I was basically in Missoula. I had three full-time jobs for four years.

Lois: What years were you at the university?

Ray: From 1969 to 1989. In 1989 I went to Boston University.

Lois: Did you and the Funks float the river? Fish? Hunt in the fall?

Ray: Yes.

Lois: Play cards?

Ray: No.

Lois: We found a playing card in one of the additions. I hope we saved that. Playing cards was a popular pastime in the North Fork.

Jack: I think those all got saved, yes.

Ray: I have never played any games. I don't know how to, except Monopoly.

Lois: Roy Cooper and the Sonnenbergs and that crowd south of Polebridge, pinochle was their game of choice. They called that area Pinochleville.

Ray: Yes. And Bud and Eunice James. Their daughter is Pamela. Yes, there was a whole circle of card players, and dominoes. The winters were long, you know, and there was practically no road up here, just one lane and it was rutted with grass in the middle. When you met a logging truck, you just backed up, because the logging trucks never stopped.

Lois: Did you have a radio in your car? I know the truckers were supposed to radio their locations, each mile.

Ray: No, we only had the old crank phones. There was one at Ford Station. Walt Hammer kept the line open up to his place. I can remember when the rangers would come up from Ford when I'd get a call from somebody. They'd take me down the Ford and I'd talk and come back up.

Lois: This was the old Forest Service line.

Ray: Yes. Of course, we had no email or anything like that.

Lois: Hardly any mail, period.

Ray: Yes, exactly.

Lois: Did you have a mail bag? Of course, you probably didn't get mail in the summer.

Ray: Yes, I did have.

Lois: You had to have two bags, right? One to go to town and one for the mail man to deliver the mail in.

Ray: Yes. They were sacks.

Lois: Some of them were pretty elaborate, I understand. The ladies would decorate them.

Ray: The mail carrier was your contact with the outside world.

Lois: So, Fred Boss. Then you had Virgil Lane?

Ray: I didn't know him. I knew from Fred Boss forward.

Lois: Ben Ringo.

Ray: Ted Ross owned the store [Polebridge Mercantile] when I came here. Then Cal and Dottie Oien, then Bob and Betty Olson.

Lois: The Olsons are still at the Veterans Home, you know. I went and interviewed them last summer. She's not with us mentally, but he's still as sharp as a tack. They're in their 90s.

Ray: They bought the place on Hay Creek after they sold the store.

Lois: Right. I had a nice talk with them and also with Wally Donaldson. I didn't realize that he was Finley Arnett's grandson, so he told me all about Finley Arnett and the cattle drives up here when he was a kid.

Ray: Is this boring the hell out of you, Jack?

Jack: Oh, no. This is good info.

Lois: I told you yesterday, Jack was up here hand sanding the ceiling, if you can imagine.

Ray: Is there any way you can fix it permanently so that the packrats don't get in?

Jack: Yes, we'll get it pretty darned tight. The goal is to not shovel any more packrat poop, so I'm hoping to get it buttoned up.

Ray: They're a damned nuisance.

Jack: Yes, they are.

Lois: I'm looking for as many pictures as I can find, and maybe some artifacts, so we can put some displays up on the walls. It would be nice to find some old desks, the kind they used to have in here, and some blackboards.

Ray: Somewhere, I've got some desks with inkwells and all that. Not the ones that were here, but that I grew up with. I remember the old penmanship lessons we used to have to take.

Well, I've got lots of memories of this place.

Lois: You were here from 1965 until when? What year did you buy the Day place?

Ray: I bought in 1967. It took me that long. You see, there were two signs of acceptance up here. Do you speak any German?

Lois: *Ein bißchen* [a little].

Ray: The Germans have two words, *Gemeinde* [community] and a *Gesellschaft* [society, company]. This was a *Gemeinde*, not a *Gesellschaft*. That means it was closed to anybody that they didn't like. There were two signs of acceptance. One was if, at the Hall on Saturday night, one of the old homesteaders invited you out to his 1952 pick-up truck and gave you a drag on his Jim Beam bottle. That meant you were getting okay. But the real test was when they'd tell you about some land that you might be able to buy. That meant you were in.

Lois: What structures were on your land when you bought it?

Ray: Just the ones down along the road.

Lois: That was where Ralph and Esther lived? I always got the impression that they weren't real fancy or anything, just basic cabins.

Ray: Like everybody up here. The fanciest place up here was the Block place. They had big barns, and they had Walt Hammer build them a big house, which he never finished. But they had steam tractors. They had a half section up there, and they farmed it. They were the only ones that made a real living up here, except for Harry and Lena [Holcomb].

Lois: Did you know Dan Block very well, and his wife Gerane?

Ray: Dan was a professor like me, at the college in Dillon. He's not alive is he?

Lois: He's gone, but she is still living, and I would love to interview her, because she's the last living original member of the NFIA in 1947. She and Louise Wilson, Larry's mother, but we lost her last year. I've asked Terry Atha, who knows the Block family pretty well, if he can't find out how to get in touch with Gerane, and we'll go down and talk with her.

Ray: I used to be close to Dan. I never met his father, Walter.

Lois: They came from Iowa or Illinois. They all came out together. Bud wasn't married to Zelda yet, but I think maybe Dan and Gerane were already married. Ethyle Block, Walter's wife, was the first secretary of the NFIA.

Ray: I've always regretted the name change from North Fork Improvement Association to North Fork Landowners Association.

Lois: The word Improvement can be such a loaded word. Semantics.

Ray: Well, it guess it doesn't matter. It's the same reality.

Lois: Well, if we can keep people engaged. We had some volunteers here helping with the work on the schoolhouse. I was glad to see them turn out.

Ray: The reason I liked the Improvement Association was because it didn't have the name Landowners in it. I think everybody who lives up here ought to be able to vote whether they own land or not. It's an old argument. There was an argument in the founding of the Republic. People like Jefferson and Washington and Ben Franklin and Alexander Hamilton wanted no one to be a citizen if they didn't own land. That was a way to keep slaves out and immigrants and other riffraff. I don't think that's America.

Lois: Anything else you want to share with us. This is a beautiful view from here.

Ray: Yes. When the trees were all smaller and you could see the mountains, it was beautiful. The fires have done some good in that respect—you've got better views now than we ever did before.

Lois: Well, Jack has taken out all the windows and numbered them. He's going to take them down to Missoula, and they'll get all the lead-based paint off of them and restore them and put them back in. This window [over the kitchen sink] is not original to the schoolhouse. There was no window on the west side of the building, so we'll probably log that one up.

Ray: I guess they painted this to get light in the schoolroom.

Lois: And the fact that it had a low ceiling.

Ray: Well, all cabins did. I remember talking to Esther, because in the winter up here basically you had an igloo. The houses were simply covered up. When we would come up in the winter at Christmas, we'd come out and spend the first day getting snow out from the windows so we could see outside. I asked Esther, "Why do you have these low ceilings and you can't see out?" She said, "We always figured if you wanted light, you'd just go outside. Houses were to stay warm in." That's the only reason you had a house.

Lois: They did spend 80 percent of their time outside.

Jack: That's right.

Lois: Jack, so you have any other questions for Ray?

Jack: He answered them all right away, actually.

Lois: Well, Ray, thanks for talking with us. You've given us some wonderful information.