MY GRANDMOTHER
ANNIE BLAKESLEY

By
Deborah Johnson

Wyoming History
June, 1983
Frank and Bettie Jones met in Westcliff, Colorado, after coming there with separate colonies—Frank with an English colony and Bettie with a German colony. Frank was born in England and came to America at about age seven, but Bettie was born in America. Ten miles south of Westcliff in a log house on December 25, 1900, Frank and Bettie had their first child—a baby girl whom they named Annie Emily Jones. Annie was delivered by a midwife, her Grandmother, Sara Jones. (Her Grandfather, John Jones, lived there also.) On March 17, 1901, Annie was baptized into the Lutheran Church in Westcliff.

Frank Jones left for Wyoming in a covered wagon with a four-horse team and two extra horses to find a new place to settle. Annie believed he wanted to leave Colorado because of the hard winters. He also liked to ramble. She does not know what led him to the Big Horn Basin. Because Frank could not read or write, the family never heard from him and did not know where he was. He had been in Wyoming a long time when he sent for his family in 1907.

Bettie left Westcliff with her three little girls: Annie, Viola and Myrtle, on the train. Grandma and Grandpa Jones were there to kiss them good-bye and they never saw each other again. They stopped in Loveland, Colorado, for about a week to visit their Aunt Edith (Frank's sister.) Annie can remember crossing the Colorado Canyon bridges and seeing the canyon way down there.

Annie was a small girl with no toys to amuse herself on the train, so she would push the little button by the windows to call the conductor. She was amused when he came to see who needed help and found no one. Her mother finally caught her and slapped her hands. There were not many people on the train.

They rode the train along the east side of the Big Horn Mountains until they arrived in Taluka, Montana. Frank was there to meet them and they spent one night in Taluka before riding a train to Basin, Wyoming. At Basin, they crossed the
Big Horn River on a large ferry boat. Annie remembers sitting up on the wagon going across the river, laughing. Their little mare pawed and jumped all the way across. They then crossed the badlands and arrived at their new home on Shell Creek, tired and hungry.

The new home was a three-room house with a cement floor. They were not used to anything fancy. They had told Annie about an apple orchard and, not knowing what an orchard was, she looked all over for it!

Annie started school at age eight in an old log cabin with a dirt roof that belonged to Al Kershner. She had to walk a long way to school through sagebrush. She was afraid because there were a lot of coyotes. There were some men building a water pipeline so she would try to be ready in time to go along with the men.

Annie found school to be a lot of fun and she really liked her first teacher, Mrs. Baker. There were about ten kids in the class. Annie hated history, but liked physiology, and there was arithmetic, spelling and reading. This little school house is now at the Trail Town in Cody, Wyoming.

A new school house was built (near the present-day 5-Sisters Restaurant.) Annie remembers it being a small but neat log building. A large blackboard was across the front, the teacher's desk was in front and the children had double desks. The coal stove was on one side in the middle. There were nice windows on each side, a porch on the front and a coal shed out in the back.

Annie was not very big but she worked as the janitor of the school for awhile. She went early in the morning to start the fire and cleaned after school. It was fun and she got paid a little. The Jones were very poor and they used her money to buy cattle feed.

School kids packed a cold lunch to take to school and drank water. Annie often walked home with other kids, and they played on a big red hill. One cold day when walking home, a girl (Maud Kershner) was throwing water at the kids. The teacher told her
to stop and she called the teacher an "old bonehead." The girl was expelled from school.

When Annie was through the eighth grade she had to take a final exam along with one boy (Cashus Boylan.) They had to go to where the superintendent was for the exam. Annie rode an old crippled horse and the boy rode a mule. They both passed the test.

Annie did not have many toys. She did have a doll that had a China head. Some kid smashed the doll's head with a hammer and about broke Annie's heart. Annie's mother gave her little blocks of wood that she colored ears and eyes on and played like they were horses. She also got eggs from the henhouse to play with.

She played like they were animals and scooted them around in the dirt. Groups of kids played kick-the-can and steal sticks. In steal sticks, there was a line with teams on each side. Sticks were placed on the line and a child would run up, grab a stick and try to get away with it while being chased by a member of the opposite team. There was much fighting and arguing in this game. The children had to do a lot of work at home which occupied much of their time. Annie remembers going on cattle drives taking cows up the canyon trail to pasture.

Annie remembers her father going back to Colorado to get the rest of their horses. He trailed them back to Shell Creek. He had been gone for a long time and one day they saw his favorite white mare, Lena, and were excited about his return.

Annie's dad went to Basin for supplies by team and wagon. The trip in would take a whole day and he would be gone about a week. The children hated for him to go because they had to work harder to get all the chores done. He made this trip about once a month.

One time Annie's dad came home from Basin and had a big story to tell her mother. He said he ran into something funny in Basin. He did not know what it was but thought they called it an "automobile." "The thing is going to have wheels, be steered by a man, going to run on a road and looks like a bug," he said. "It has eyes on the front."
Annie was sick many times as a child, but never went to a doctor. Her mother had home remedies to take care of most things. For a sore throat, sulfur powder was blown into the throat. It would choke them and they did not like it. Soap and sugar, or the white of an egg, was put on slivers.

Tragedy struck the Jones household two times. Annie's little sister died. There was no mortuary and she was kept at home. She was bathed in some kind of alcohol to prevent her from turning black. Coins were put on her eyes to keep them shut. She was dressed in a pretty dress and the funeral was held in the Shell Community Church with a woman preacher in charge. She was buried in a purchased casket in the Shell cemetery. Annie thought this was around 1910.

Also, Annie had an eleven-year-old brother who was killed. Her father and Stephan had just trailed some cattle to Greybull to be shipped to Omaha. It was Stephan's birthday and he was out riding a horse. The horse bucked and spun suddenly, and Stephen fell off and got his foot caught in a strap. Stephan was drug across a field and up a hill. They had a nice funeral for him in the Shell Church.

The Jones' water supply was a beautiful spring. It was always ice cold but very hard water. It was carried to the house in buckets. Tubs were set out to catch soft rain water which would be used for washing.

Holidays and birthdays were not celebrated much. Few presents were received because they had no money. Presents were usually clothing or something the whole family could use, such as a sled or wagon. Annie's mother usually made her a birthday cake which was often white with coconut on it. Christmas was usually quiet and a nice dinner was provided, usually with no company. They were always satisfied.

Frank Jones rented some of his place to a young man named Harold Blakesley. Harold had been in the service and had worked in Worland, Basin and Greybull, and now he was farming on Shell Creek. This is where Annie met Harold.
Harold and Annie were married June 21, 1921, at the Jones ranch. Mrs. Jones did not want Annie to marry Harold. Annie got her own flowers and wore a navy blue taffeta dress with white slippers. The matron of honor was Annie's sister, Viola, and the best man was Harold's brother, Roy. Reverend Ferry performed the ceremony and they received lots of gifts from friends. After the wedding, Harold, Annie, Viola and Roy went to a movie in Greybull.

Harold and Annie lived near Jones' farming and their first child was born there—a son named Alfred. Sharecropping would not support two families so Harold got a job working for Mr. Ewen and they moved over to his ranch.

Annie had four more babies: Charles, Lee, Harriett and Larry. They were born at her home where the doctor came. When Harriett was born and Alfred first heard her crying, he said, "Oh, my God, don't tell me we got more bumb lambs!"

About prohibition, Annie said it fed a lot of hungry kids. She and Harold did not have much money, and making and selling beer was a way to get more. She was always afraid the law would come so one day when some men came and asked her for some beer, she said they did not have any. Just then, her son stuck his head out and said, "What we do have is so wild you wouldn't want it!" One time Harold had a lot of booze on hand and they saw someone coming, so they moved it all out into the hayfield. It was the law and they searched through everything but the hayfield! One night, on their way to a dance, they heard that the law was going to be at the dance so they unloaded the booze into some sagebrush. When they came back it was gone and they never did know who took it.

When disciplining of the children was necessary, Annie and Harold both handled it. But, Annie says it was very rarely necessary. The children were kept so busy they did not have time to get into trouble. There was never any trouble—the children knew it was "work to eat." Each child had his own chores to do before and after coming in from the field. Some of the chores were caring for hogs, chickens, bumb lambs, feeder calves and carrying in wood and coal for the stove.
The children did not have many toys, but what they did have they invented. They made a one-sit-down ski with two 2 x 4s and a barrel stay and stilts (the higher the better). Also they would take a shingle from the garage roof, cut it into one-inch strips, tie a strip on a string, tie the string on a stick and whirl it in the air. That made a lot of noise. Slingshots and darts were other popular homemade items.

Annie had a very busy life as a housewife and mother. Harvest time was especially a busy time because they hired a lot of men to help and she had to cook three big meals a day. She got up early to get breakfast so the men could be in the field by 7 a.m. A favorite breakfast was hot biscuits with gravy, bacon, eggs, coffee, milk and sometimes fruit. The boys had milked the cows and Annie had to put the milk through the hand-operated separator. After washing the separator and dishes, she fed her turkeys. At times, she had 200 turkeys. The turkeys were fed corn, wheat, commercial food and clabbered milk.

Annie always had the meals on time, and with all the other housework and canning she was always busy. She made bread, jelly, jam, canned fruit, vegetables, meat and sauerkraut, and made sausage, bacon, headcheese, bacon rinds and butter. The meat was smoked and the sausage was preserved in a big crock by alternating layers of sausage and lard, which was then kept in the root cellar. The children helped to make sauerkraut by using a homemade stomper to crush the cabbage. It was then put by the stove to ferment, which smelled badly, then put into jars. Annie raised a lot of potatoes in her garden.

Picking of wild berries was a planned fun outing, usually on a Sunday. Several families would get together, take a picnic lunch, iced tea, and kool-aid, and go. They picked chokecherries, gooseberries, and buffaloberries for making jelly.

The Blakesleys did not have electricity but Annie had a few hand-powered machines to help her. She had the separator, pump on the cistern, churn and washing machine. The washing machine had a big handle with two wheels on it in a wooden tub.
A big wheel turned a small wheel which turned an agitator. It had a hand-operated wringer.

Harold raised corn, wheat, barley and beans. Machinery used in the field consisted of a horse-powered plow, harrow, marker, planter and bean puller. The planter, or grain drill, had two big wheels, a V-shaped box to hold the seeds with an auger attached to the wheels. The turning wheels turned the auger which made an orderly distribution of seeds. The driver sat on the back which balanced the machine to take the load off the horses' work collars. Four rows could be planted at a time, and it took a lot of men to pile the beans to dry, then load and haul them to the thrasher, sack them and sew up the 100-pound burlap sacks. They raised pinto and northern beans for eating and for seed. The beans were marketed in Basin where, Annie thinks, they got about ten cents a pound. The money was used to pay rent and for machinery payments. About 1940, Harold bought a Case combination bean and grain thrashing machine.

There was a lot of community spirit at harvest time. The men moved from place to place thrashing. The women who could went along to help with food. Women who could not go sent food. Some boys did not start school in the fall until the thrashing was done. Men worked in the field from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Annie and Harold went into Greybull about once a week to sell their products and buy groceries and supplies. They sold eggs and cream for cash to spend. They butchered their turkeys to sell at the Co-op. The turkeys were graded and they used this money to buy clothes. They also sold their bumm lambs. They traded grain for coal, flour, bran and cracked wheat cereal.

Annie handled the little cash they had, but Harold handled the main finances. He felt he was the head of the household, and finances were his job. Annie never wrote a check until after he was dead.

In the late 1930s, there was an epidemic of Scarlet Fever. Harold, Lee and Harriett had it. Harold was in so much pain he
often went to Thermopolis to take mineral baths. It was very hard to keep Lee, who was around thirteen years old, quiet and resting so they bought him a pony to ride to occupy his time all summer.

Harold and Annie always felt that only if necessary did one work on Sunday. They rarely went to church but the children did go to Sunday school some and to Vacation Bible School. They rode horseback to the Shell Community Church.

On the Fourth of July, there was always a community celebration. The whole family attended a picnic in Shell. The long table was filled with food that everyone had brought. There were races and games for the kids, and horse races. They had some fireworks.

Sometimes they went to rodeos in Meeteetse and County Fairs in Powell, Basin and Worland. In rodeos, then, they rode buffalos.

Winter-time entertainment consisted of parties every Saturday night. A sled was filled with straw and covered with canvas. Rocks were heated on the kitchen stove and the kids were bundled up and loaded on to the sled. They carried a kerosene lantern for light and arrived at the party about 11 p.m. There was always plenty of food and they danced all night. Music was provided by violin, banjo, guitar, harp or harmonica, and popular dances were the square dance, waltz and two-step.

The depression did not effect Annie much except in buying clothing. They had all their own food. She believes the depression brought people closer together and made them more inventive. Harold made himself a unique buzz-saw for cutting firewood. He put a 4-Star engine on a Model T frame. He had no welder—only hot coals and a chisel.

Annie never voted when she was younger. She does remember her first time ever listening to election returns on the radio. They were invited to Ed Howe's to listen to his Bulldog radio with a horn. He only had one set of earphones so only one person could listen at a time. It was the election of 1928 when Herbert Hoover won. Annie is a registered Republican, but votes for the man not the party.
World War II effected Annie some. She had two sons and a brother join the military. At home it was hard to find hired help. A lot changed and they were taught to work harder with less. Gas, tires and sugar were rationed. She had a ration card that was punched with each purchase. She said she learned to ration herself and got by pretty well.

Annie's most memorable time was one night when she and Harold went to a dance in Greybull with Ed and Lily Rech. The kids went to the show. They were too early for the dance so they went and had one glass of wine. That was too much for Annie! Lily and Annie went for a walk over to the bowling alley, with Annie laughing all the way. They held each other up and Annie thought everything was funny. They did get to the dance and had a wonderful time.

Because of Harold's rheumatism caused by the Scarlet Fever, he was forced to quit farming. They bought a large house in Greybull where they rented out sleeping rooms. Harold died in 1954 of cancer.

Annie loved her kids and animals, and could not think of anything she disliked. She knew the work had to be done and she went at it enjoying it. In 1979, she sold her big house and moved to the Pioneer Home in Thermopolis, Wyoming, where she is still very happy.

As for the future, Annie says something has to change. She believes we should trust in the Lord and let the 23rd Psalm be our guide.
NAME: Annie Blakesley

PRESENT ADDRESS: Box 74 E, Wyo. Pioneer Home, Thermopolis, WY

1. Present profession or occupation:

2. Occupations followed in the past (give dates):
   Housewife and Mother, Landlady

3. Date of birth: Dec. 25, 1900   Place of birth: Westcliffe, Colo.

4. Date of moving to Wyoming: 1907

5. Full name of parents (give mother's maiden name)
   Frank & Bettie Jones

6. Names of brothers and sisters (and to whom married):
   Myrtle Good
   Jack Jones

7. Schools attended (give dates):
   near Shell, WY 1909 - 1915

8. Places of residence in Wyoming (give dates):
   Shell, WY - 1907 - 1946   Thermopolis, WY - 1979 -
   Greybull, WY - 1946 - 1979

9. Military service (dates, awards, area served, rank, etc.):

10. Political offices held (give dates):

11. Political affiliation: Republican

12. Religious affiliation: Lutheran

13. Marriage (spouse's name, date and place of marriage):
    married Harold Blakesley - June 21, 1921 near Shell, WY

14. Children (names, dates of birth, grandchildren, etc.):
    Alfred - Feb. 25, 1922   - 6 children - Farmington, N.M.
    Charles - Feb. 11, 1923   - 3 children - Greybull, WY
    Lee - Aug. 9, 1925   - 6 children - Worland, WY
    Harriet - June 14, 1928   - 2 children - Billings, MT
    Harry - Sept. 4, 1922   - 2 children - Billings, MT

15. List of clubs and societies of which you are a member:
    American Legion Auxiliary
    Rebecca Lodge