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PROJECT TITLE: Sweetwater County Wyoming Migration Stories

NARRATOR: Ella McMurry

ADDRESS: Eden, Wyoming

INTERVIEWER: Marcia Hensley

ADDRESS: P.O. Box 180, Farson, WY 82932

DATE OF INTERVIEW: 2/29/92

LENGTH: 1 hour

OTHER PERSONS PRESENT: Vern McMurry (Ella's husband)

DESCRIPTION OF INTERVIEW AND SETTING:
The interview was conducted in the kitchen of the McMurry home near Eden, Wyoming on a Saturday afternoon. Their home is on their ranch which they are still actively working. It is a comfortable home with all the modern conveniences, but is not pretentious. I had made an appointment to interview Ella, but since her husband Vern was right there in the room, it seemed rude to leave him out and I was sure he would have some valuable insights to add. Both Ella and Vern are mentally sharp. They were less willing to discuss their feelings than younger narrators I have interviewed, possibly because their generation was less open about feelings, possible because they seem to be rather matter-of-fact, practical folks. It also occurred to me that the fact that Vern was there may have inhibited Ella's comments. I felt that I had to talk too much during the interview to encourage their comments. I had difficulty keeping the interview "on track". Several times during the interview we just began having a conversation when they would turn the tables and ask me questions.

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Ella recalls feelings about experience of coming West planned to stay a year or two and move on didn't think of herself as adventuresome to make move previous teaching assignments had prepared her for experience could be independent here

Ella's impression of the the Eden Valley then people very nice (esp. Wellingtons where she lived) people more interested in schools than in other places she had taught her classes -taught 4 grades, 18-20 students never locked doors invited people in to eat -like salesmen

Reasons for staying in Eden Valley she married her husband owned 160 acres here

Ella and Vern meet and marry Ella hadn't thought about marrying when she came Ella recalls meeting Vern several months after she arrived Vern recalls their meeting at a dance a week after she came Vern always interested in "schoolmarm" -thought she would be smart enough to take care of his business, while he did the work Ella thoughts on marrying a rancher it was all new she thought it was the hardest hardship no one else had anything either had dances and meetings at community hall married after knowing each other two years Ella wanted to teach two years at Eden school

Ella's adjustment from city to small community transition was easy had lived in other small Wyoming towns learned to ride horses in Glendo other places (Muddy Gap) had to share her room she got used to "not having everything perfect"

The decision that Eden Valley would be her permanent home she decided after she had family ideal place to raise family how small school was good- involvement in activities, sports considered moving once when they were ready to retire place didn't sell couldn't think of place they'd rather go bought more land instead
Why they prefer living on the ranch
Vern: freedom, although tied down to chores
Ella: defines freedom as being your own boss
Vern: in his blood
early schooling in Colorado
worked on ranches since he was 20
like outdoors, mountains, punching cows, and moving sheep
was 30 when he bought Eden Valley land

Why Vern came to Eden Valley
laid off from job in Casper
saw ads for Eden Valley in Casper paper
came out, bought land (80 acres)
lost the first land, then leased, finally bought again
now owns 1154 acres & just put in sprinkler system

Greeley, Colorado
both from there, but didn't meet until Eden Valley

Response to land
Ella: her visiting aunt -should have let Indians keep it
Ella likes: clean, fresh air, outdoors
Vern: high altitude, limited crops, best for raising stock
Ella: they were a success here because they kept buying more land
Vern: they were a success here because they kept buying cattle
recalls how he lost his first place

When they ran a dairy
did well -eventually sold, not making money
10 dairies in Eden Valley at one time
then 4 dairies

How things have changed
no TY then
people were more honest

Vern's schooling
finished 8th grade
went to Agricultural school in Colorado
father encouraged him
biggest factor in his ranching success

Factors that made them a success
they had skills (Vern's experience and education at Ag college
Ella's training as teacher)

adaptability
Vern always consulted his wife, and she advised him
Ella kept the books, was close w/money
Vern was more prone to speculate
Her conservative money management "saved his skin" many times
358 Considered retirement (from Dairy)
not making money
considered leaving valley
started stock operation instead

374 Changes in the community- different sort of people, not as honest
most original settlers gone

380 Tape is gibberish (too fast)

397 Qualities a person who lives out here should have
not a quitter
self sufficient

420 to end tape is jibberish (too fast)

-------------SIDE TWO --------------

001 Reasons they like living in Eden Valley
avoid troubles of big cities
safer here
have always lived where they could see mountains
horses

Ella asks me about my teaching
Ella's teaching
always wanted to teach just one grade - never did
likes children
their 20 great grandchildren
always attended sports events in valley

070 What stands out as best part of lifetime in Eden Valley
Ella: Schools, church, being outdoors, being your own boss,
didn't get rich, but had plenty, were satisfied

081 Vern: the drive to accumulate, to accomplish his goals
his recent physical problems

098 Vern: Importance of managing money
    schools should teach youth to manage money
Ella was good at that - had to hold him back from spending
should put money away, not spend it all
takes 60,000 a year to run his ranch if careful
they were good partners (Ella frugal, he drive to go ahead)

138 Future of ranching
    young people today probably couldn't do what they did
    unless they had money or another job
    they wouldn't want to start again [now]
PROJECT TITLE: Sweetwater County Wyoming Migration Stories

NARRATOR: Ella McMurry

ADDRESS: Eden, Wyoming

INTERVIEWER: Marcia Hensley

ADDRESS: P.O. Box 180 Farson, Wyoming 82932

DATE OF INTERVIEW: February 29, 1992 LENGTH: 1 hour

OTHER PERSONS PRESENT: Vern McMurry (Ella's husband)

DESCRIPTION OF INTERVIEW SETTING: The interview took place in the kitchen of the McMurry ranch house outside of Eden, Wyoming on a Saturday afternoon. The original appointment was to interview Ella, but since her husband was present, it seemed appropriate to include him in the interview process. Both Ella and Vern were lively and helpful narrators. However, I found they were less willing to discuss their feelings than other narrators I have interviewed. This may have been because they didn't know me well, because people of their generation tend to be less open about feelings, or because they seem to be rather matter-of-fact practical folks. I felt the interview often got off track and that I had to do too much talking in my attempt to draw them out.

002-103 Ella's Migration

In 1928 Ella McMurry and her friend Jean Johnson came to the Eden Valley school to teach. They wanted to teach together. Ella had taught several places in Wyoming previous to this assignment. She had trained at the Colorado Normal school in Greeley but was not qualified to teach in her home city, Denver. Compared to other places she had taught, she liked the Eden Valley best. They were building a new school and the people were more interested in the schools than in other places she taught. She recalls that she and Jean had planned only to stay a year or two, then move somewhere else. She didn't think of herself as doing anything daring at the time. Her previous teaching experiences had prepared her for the experience. She taught 4 grades, about 18-20 pupils. People never locked their doors and opened their homes to strangers. She mentions the Wellington family who owned land where the Eden Bar is now as being especially nice to her.

104-170 Settling In

The deciding factor in Ella's staying in the Eden Valley was the fact that she married Vern McMurry, a rancher who owned 160 acres in the valley. Ella says she hadn't thought about marrying when she came. She remembered being in
Eden several months before she met Vern. Vern, however, asserted that they met at a dance one week after she arrived. Vern admits that he had always been interested in marrying a schoolmarm because he thought a schoolmarm would be smart enough to help him take care of ranch business while he did the work. Ella found life on the ranch all new and sometimes very hard. But it wasn't so bad because no one else had anything either and they had good times at dances and meetings at the community hall. They didn't marry for two years because Ella wanted to teach for two years before marrying. She found the transition from city to small community to be easy because she had lived in small Wyoming towns before where she had learned to ride a horse and through the various living arrangements in these places she got used to "not having everything perfect."

174-229 Eden Valley becomes permanent home

After she and Vern had a family they made the commitment to Eden Valley as their permanent home. They felt it was an ideal place to raise a family. Their four children were very involved in school activities and sports. They only considered moving away one time. This was when they were ready to retire from the dairy business. However, no one wanted to buy the place and they couldn't think of a place they wanted to move to. Instead of moving, they bought more land. They like living on a ranch because of the freedom of the lifestyle. Ranching chores can tie you down, but you can usually find someone to help out if you want to leave for awhile. Ella defined freedom as "being your own boss." Vern spoke of ranching "being in his blood" and told how he had started working on other people's ranches in Colorado when he was about 20 years old. He decided then that he liked all the outdoor work involved with ranching - punching cows, moving sheep, being in the mountains.

230-254 Vern's Migration

Vern came to the Eden Valley in 1928 also. He had been laid off from his job in Casper and had seen ads for the Eden Valley in the Casper paper. He had a friend who lived in the area so he came out to see. He bought 80 acres. He lost that first land, but leased land for awhile, then bought again. Now he owns 1,154 acres and just put in sprinkler system. He was also from Greeley, Colorado. However, he and Ella did not know each other until coming to the Eden Valley.

255-281 Response to the land

Ella likes the clean, fresh air and outdoor life, but she recalled an aunt visiting from Portland who commented that she couldn't understand why we wanted to take such land away from Indians. Vern likes the high altitude although he commented that crops you can grow are limited and that it is best for raising stock. They were able to succeed in the Eden Valley because they kept buying more land and cattle. Vern talks in more detail about how he lost his first place through being too trusting.
281-319 The time when they had the dairy

The dairy did well. Eden Valley had 10 dairies at one time, then only 4. They sold because they were not making money. In those times there was no television and people were more honest.

320-end of side one Why they were successful

Vern had gone only to 8th grade, but his father encouraged him to go to agricultural school. Vern feels that this was the biggest factor in his ranching success. Ella's training as a teacher gave her useful skills. She kept the books for the ranch and sometimes did substitute teaching after they had their family. Ella believes their adaptability has been a major factor in their success. When they considered retiring after going out of the dairy business, they started a stock operation instead. Vern always consulted his wife on business matters, and she advised him. Usually he was eager to spend and she was "close with money." Vern says she "saved his skin" many times. They have seen the community change. Not many of the families who started with them are here now. To succeed in this area you can't be a quitter, and you have to be able to be self-sufficient.

--------------------------------------------------------SIDE TWO--------------------------------------------------------

001-069 Why they like living in Eden Valley

By living here they have avoided the troubles of big cities. It is safer here. They can't imagine living where you couldn't see the mountains. Here we talked about Vern's horses for awhile (something else they like about living here maybe). Ella comments again on how she liked to teach here and how she always liked children. They now have 20 great grand children and take delight in them when they visit.

070-138 Outstanding features of a lifetime in the Eden Valley

Ella mentions the schools, church, outdoor life, and being your own boss as the best things about her life here. She said that they didn't get rich, but they always had plenty. For Vern, the thing that stands out is the freedom he had to pursue his dream, to accomplish his goals. He talks of how his recent physical problems have slowed him down. Vern stresses how important money management has been to their success and expresses concern that young people today are not learning how to be smart managers of money. He and Ella made good business partners because she was frugal and he had the drive to go ahead -- they balanced each other. Both Ella and Vern feel that young people today couldn't do what they did unless they had money to begin with or another job. Ella and Vern wouldn't want to be starting out again in the Eden Valley now.
FOLLOW UP INTERVIEW (not recorded) April 11, 1992

In this interview, I asked Ella and Vern questions that I had neglected to ask in the first interview.

Ella's was born on January 12, 1904 in Brighton, Colorado. Her father had lived in Colorado all his life and was a dirt contractor. Her maiden name was Jones.

Vern was born on May 2, 1898 in Mt. Hope, Kansas. He came to Colorado with his family on the train when he was 4 years old (1902). His father was a farmer in the Greeley area. Vern went to school through the 8th grade, although later he went to agricultural school at the university in Greeley. He joined the army in WW I. He worked in the refinery at Casper for five years, prior to moving to Eden, Wyoming.

Ella's friend who came to Eden with her was Jean Johnson. She also married a rancher in Eden. Her married name was Joslin. They lived in Eden until they retired and moved to Rock Springs. Jean passed away in 1991.