

Idaho Panhandle Oral History Project  
Interview with Henry Kottkey  
October 22, 1979  
Burke Road, Wallace  
Interviewed by David Barton  
Questionnaire Information

HK = Henry Kottkey  
DB = David Barton

Tape 10, Side 1

HK: ...In community affairs, you see.  
DB: But the important thing is the kind of things that you did do, and I understand you've been working in the Forest Service. Well, let me start out by asking you when was your date of birth?  
HK: 1910. August 19, 1910.  
DB: And where were you born?  
HK: Wallace.  
DB: Wallace? So you are a home-town person?  
HK: Hm-hm. I have a very interesting birth. I was born one day before the Fire of 1910. And when they evacuated the Providence Hospital they put my mother and I in a box car on some straw, kind of. And they went over the hill to Montana and one of those bridges up there was on fire when the train was going over.  
DB: Were they not sure whether you could make it or not over the train?  
HK: Well, yea. I suppose they were a little bit concerned, but they did, they did evacuate quite a few people, from here at Providence Hospital; they had patients. And I happened to be one day old; and they went over the bridge...I don't know whether it was the S bridge or whether it was one of the other bridges was on fire, when the train went through. My first bath outside the hospital was on a railroad siding over somewhere around St. Regis.  
Ha-he-ha. In the rain. Yeah...  
DB: Well, how much timber did that affect around here, the 1910 fire?  
HK: Well, that's something that you would have to get actually from, from something that has been written up. Elers Koch wrote a story of the 1910 Fire, gives the acreage and the amount of timber that was burned. To me now, those would just be figures that I couldn't remember.  
DB: When you were a boy?  
HK: In the millions of boards of feet.  
DB: When you were a boy how did it affect Wallace? Was a lot of Wallace burned out?  
HK: Well, yes. Quite a bit of Wallace was burned out in the 1910 Fire. The whole east end of Wallace.  
DB: How long did it take them to rebuild?

HK: Well, for years you could ride down into Wallace, coming from this direction, here, and look up on the hill, and the trees up there were like standing toothpicks--snags that have been burned in the Fire. Well, along about 1930, the root rot in these snags started tipping over, in the meantime during the Depression years there was a lot of people on the hillside south of Wallace that were getting their wood off the hillside. And you could see right where their skid trails went right almost to the top of the mountain. And, they were skidding it down...the kids, and one thing and another, young people...were skidding it down by hand clear from the top of the mountain. And you could see it; it kind of fanned out, and the snags were disappearing. But in the '30s, as I say, the root rot in there caused a lot of 'em to tip over and they were on the ground and from what was a toothpick forest it turned into a young stand; almost all green timber coming up behind the town of Wallace. And you could look at that south hillside now, and you don't see a snag. Clear to the top of the mountain. All young stuff in there.

DB: What were the people using the wood for?

HK: Firewood. You see, during the Depression there was an awful lot of firewood used, for heating purposes.

DB: Hm-hm. Well, when did your folks come to the Panhandle area?

HK: I don't really know. Ahm. I think my dad came here about 1900 or so, in the...I think it was about 1904 that he married, and started a family here. He was a ranger during the, during the Fire of 1910. Which is a historic point in this area--the 1910 Fire, you know.

DB: What station was he at?

HK: He was at Falcon. On the St. Joe. Falcon Ranger Station on the St. Joe.

DB: Where is that?

HK: Loop Creek.

DB: In relation to this area, where would that be?

HK: South of Wallace here about...

XM: It's on the Milwaukee.

HK: Yea. The Milwaukee went right by his station there. The Milwaukee was under construction, at that time. Went right back of the ranger station there.

DB: What did he do before he came to Idaho, and did...became a ranger?

HK: Well, he had...he was an immigrant. He came here as a youth of 14 under one of those deals where someone in the country has to be responsible for you. And he worked down on a farm in Wisconsin, and then when he got a little older, why he drifted into Minnesota and he worked at the winter logging camps in there, and then the harvest--wheat harvest, and gradually worked west until he was in this area.

DB: What country did he come from?  
XM: Germany.  
DB: Aha. Where was your first house, when you were born in Wallace--I know you said you moved out to Montana when you were a day old, but when you came back?  
HK: Well, at that time they were living at right near that junction, near the foundry, near the Providence Hospital, just as you start up the Burke Road. And then about 1914, why he built a home here, in Burke Canyon--right across the valley from me, right here now. He built a home there then.  
DB: What kind of house was it?  
HK: Well, it was one of those that develop. He. You start with about two or three rooms and then you add on to it, as the six or eight kids come along. So it came...eventually wound up in a two story home.  
DB: What did the original structure look like, you remember?  
HK: Well, it would have been a...I don't remember, but I know that it would have been basically about 30 feet long and 14 feet wide, in two rooms.  
DB: And what were the two rooms used for?  
HK: Well, I suppose it would have to have been a kitchen...well, a kitchen...well, a kitchen and a living room. And, ah...two bedrooms.  
DB: Were the bedrooms upstairs?  
HK: Yes.  
DB: Was that a common style of house here in Wallace, in the early days?  
HK: Yes.  
DB: Was there a name for this neighborhood in this area?  
HK: Well, it was always called the Burke Canyon.  
DB: Burke Canyon, I see. What kinds of people lived here, like what kind of jobs did they do, and what kind of ethnic groups were...?  
HK: Well, I have to think back. It was a very, very wide mixture. German, Swede, Irish, part of the people that lived here were working in the mines, my dad was a teamster for a lumber company, the next-door neighbor was a...ran a bus service, and the next one a carpenter--so you see it was a widely mixed..  
DB: When did your father become a teamster?  
HK: Well, he was a teamster even from his younger years. Actually when he worked in the harvest and stuff in Minnesota, and in the Dakotas--he was a teamster. He was a teamster when he came here for two different lumber companies.  
DB: Do you remember the names of the companies?  
HK: Anderson Lumber Company, the first one; and Wallace Lumber Company the next one.  
HK: Up to, about the time that teams went out in this part of the country.  
DB: When was that?

HK: Well, I...you...dates don't...  
DB: Well, like decades, would it have been in the '30s or in the '20s?  
HK: Let's see, I am trying to think. I used to have to go down on Sundays and feed his team for him, and I was just a kid, 10, 12 years old, so I'd say, that they pretty much went out in the early '20s. See, used to be an awful lot of teams used in this area. On ore hauls, and for the lumber companies, stuff like that. They had a big livery stable here. The mail and passenger service to places like Prichard and Murray, at that time was by, by horse and carriage, and horse and sled in the winter time.  
DB: Where was the big livery, here in town?  
HK: That was Sutherland's Livery, right about in the center of town. It's long, long, gone now.  
DB: What did the wagons look like, that they used to carry the ore with, and the lumber?  
HK: Well, they were box type, box type deals on the ore. And ah...  
DB: Did they have wooden tires?  
HK: No, no. No, steel rimmed. Wooden wheels with steel rims. Yea.  
DB: Did many of your relatives live around the Wallace area?  
HK; Quite a few, yes. Quite a few. My mother's two sisters lived here; their families lived here. There were a lot of, naturally, a lot of cousins involved.  
DB: Was your mother also from Germany?  
HK: No she's, she was Swiss. French speaking Swiss.  
DB: And was she an immigrant also?  
HK: Yes. They came from Switzerland, they lived in Iowa, for a while, before they came out here.  
DB: Which of your family members are still left in the Wallace area?  
HK: Of the older group, do you mean?  
DB: Aha. Of the older group, right.  
HK: Well, there are none. Both of there sisters are gone, she's gone now.  
DB: And your wife, do you have any children?  
HK: Me?  
DB: Aha.  
HK: I have, a son living in Osborn, and working for the Forest Service. And a son in Lewiston, teaching school in Lewiston.  
DB: Were your parents ever involved in homesteading, did they do any homesteading?  
HK: No.  
DB: Did you ever hear stories of what was involved in homesteading in these parts?  
HK: Only what I read.

DB: Back in the old days, in the kitchen--you say there were two rooms--what kind of heating system and cooking did you have in the kitchen?

HK: Well, always a wood stove--range. And, of course, the Saturday night bath was in the big tub of warm water. On the middle of the kitchen floor.

DB: Where would you put the tub when you were done with it?

HK: Oh, we always had a woodshed, for the wood, you know. And, a big galvanized tub would be back out there. It would just be one of those big laundry tubs. Was I...am I saying anything, Muriel that shouldn't be said?

XF: No. That's all right. Ha-ha.

HK: Ha-ha-ha.

DB: Ha-ha-ha.

HK: This is the way a lot of people lived in those days, I tell you. No great fancy bathtubs, your Saturday night bath was in a big old round laundry tub.

XF: With the boiler on the stove to keep the hot water going.

DB: How about the living room, how was that laid out?

HK: Well, it would be pretty...I don't think there's too much departure from what we would have today, you know. There would be a lounge of some sort.

XF: You had a nice living-dining room with a hall made in between.

HK: Aha.

DB: And, around the house was there, did everybody have a shed or a barn or anything like that?

HK: Everybody had, in those days, had a woodshed.

XF: Woodshed.

DB: What were they made out of?

HK: Well, they would be a frame structure, out of wood. And, most people had rabbits, or chickens, or both. And, a large part of the...most of the people had...ran a garden along with it, in those days.

DB: What was planted in the garden?

HK: Everything. Cabbage, carrots, Swiss chard...

XF: Potatoes.

HK: Potatoes.

DB: Would corn grow out here?

HK: Hm-hm. Corn only if you have an extended season. Like this year, corn did all right.

DB: How about tomatoes?

HK: And tomatoes are kind of borderline proposition. People planted tomatoes, but quite often they had to pick them green and ripen them in the house.

DB: Where did your water come from?

HK: In those days we had...they were wells. There is always a certain amount of drainage from, from the mountains, hillsides, and you had to go down, oh...anywhere from 14 to 20 feet and you'd have eight feet of standing water.

DB: What kind of wells would it be?

HK: They'd be wooden cased. Generally they used tamarack because as long as it was wet all the time it would last forever.

DB: How about root cellars, did people have those?

HK: Yes.

DB: What would that typical root cellar look like?

HK: Well, some of them had root cellar in the hillside, it was completely surrounded except for the entrance, surrounded by dirt. And others, had 'em excavated in to the ground.

DB: Would they have wooden doors?

HK: Yea. Wooden doors.

DB: Did people have fences or hedges around their properties, in the old days?

HK: Yes. Fences were a regular thing. Practically everybody fenced their yard. Probably because of the garden factor. And, I think fences were more common then, than they are today. Very much more.

DB: Were people's yards in grass or in dirt in those old days?

HK: Well, mostly, mostly the yards were kind of half way divided. They'd have a garden area, and they'd have some lawn area.

DB: How about city water, when did that come in?

HK: There you get me again on dates. I just...I dug the ditch for the city water across our property out there, so I must have been...I must have been...around 18 years old, when I did that. So that would make it about 1928, we got our city water up the canyon here.

DB: Were did people take their garbage?

HK: Most of it was burned or buried. Somewhere on the property.

DB: How many houses would you say, were in this neighborhood--in Burke Canyon, back in, when you were growing up?

HK: It was practically, I would say, almost the same as it is today.

DB: So, about 30?

HK: There are a few more trailer houses now, and oh...probably, somewhere in the neighborhood...

DB: 30 to 50?

HK: Yea. In this...in this area.

XF: But this is just one area. Burke Canyon runs clear to the end of...

HK: It starts, from...if you're talking about a one mile stretch from down here near this side of the edge of the town, to up here at the turn, then, I'd say it hasn't changed a great deal. It's pretty much...some...most of the places were in there. But there has been an addition of trailer houses.

DB: Did families around here, in Burke Canyon area ever work on co-operative projects, did they ever have any, you know, house raisings or church raisings, or anything like that, you can think of.

HK: Not that I know of, no.  
XF: We had a baseball team. Ha-ha. Didn't you.  
HK: Well, every community had...had a little baseball team. Burke Canyon kids played the River Street Rats or something of that sort.  
DB: Were there any people that had special skills, around here, like blacksmiths; was there a blacksmith in Burke Canyon? Where was the closest blacksmith back in those days?  
HK: Well, we had a regular blacksmith's shop right in the town of Wallace. Horseshoeing and blacksmithing. At the time that the livery stable was in operation and all of these dray companies, and transfer outfits, and then there, you see they burned quite a little bit of coal in this area, and ah...this was all delivered by teams, so we had a blacksmith shop right in town.  
DB: Was that associated with the livery, was it next door to the livery?  
HK: No. It was a private...separate effort.  
DB: Where was it located at?  
HK: I was located on...let's see...between Fifth and Sixth on Pine Street.  
DB: Did many people go to church, back in the old days?  
HK: You're in a field that I don't know much about, I didn't go myself.  
XF: He did though.  
HK: But I think it probably...we always had a number, quite a number of...every, practically every denomination was represented here in Wallace. Even, way back, in the early days.  
DB: What about schools, was there one school for the community? When you were growing up?  
HK: Yes.  
DB: Where was that?  
HK: Wallace Public school. No!  
XF: Burke had a High School.  
HK: Yes, of course, Burke had a high school. We also had a Catholic School. They had a Catholic school and the Wallace public schools; it was right in Wallace.  
DB: Do you remember the address of the Wallace public school--general area?  
HK: It was in the western part of the town.  
XF: Do you want a cup of coffee?  
DB: No. ...Ah...on Third and River Street.  
DB: Back in the old days, did you buy many things at the store? Or what kinds of things would you buy at the store?  
HK: Pretty much the same as is available today. Probably not as many of these...ah...ready packaged meals. But, I think probably...with...a large family, and with their own garden, it was probably just a few of the...and having...we raised rabbits, and we raised chickens. Why, you know you

can see, just...and mother-baked bread. We made sauerkraut in the Wintertime. There was a heck of a lot less stuff you'd buy at the store.

DB: Was there a store around the canyon area, a general store?

HK: No. Not until later years. Then they'd have a little store up here in Woodland Park, but most of your stores were right in, right in the town of Wallace.

DB: Where would you go...I mean where would your father go to buy groceries?

HK: Well, it was, what they call, the United Stores. And, House and King were the earliest. And then Morrow's.

DB: Did they sell just about anything you could get today?

HK: Yea. All except some of your, you know things that have come out in more recent years.

DB: Did your family ever butcher your own meat?

HK: Only chickens and rabbits. We didn't raise anything bigger than that.

DB: What were some of the standard meals that you used to have in the old days?

HK: Well, generally, generally, there was mush for breakfast.

DB: Is that oatmeal mush?

HK: Oatmeal mush. Sometimes, corn meal, and then, like on Sunday we might have a pork shoulder roast cooked in sauerkraut.

DB: Sounds good.

HK: Yea. Boy I tell ya', mother'd go down the cellar and come up with a dishpan full of sauerkraut, set it on the kitchen table there, and then all the kids would be dipping into it until she was ready to cook. Ha. Eating that raw sauerkraut. We had things, that you know...I don't know, probably some people have never eaten. We had...she'd bake bread, and some of the dough left in excess of the number of loaves she's gonna make, she'd save some of that and make, what we called, stretchers. This bread dough dipped...thrown into a hot frying pan full of hot grease, it'd bubble right up and they'd be real airy, and sprinkle a little sugar on them when they're cold. Us kids always looked forward to the stretchers. That was bread dough with sugar on it.

DB: So that would be something for a special treat?

HK: Ya, that would be pretty much so. Yea.

DB: Did you ever...you always had sugar around here, didn't you?

HK: Yes. For ice cream, for ice cream, mother would go to town to do a little shopping in the Wintertime, us kids would go to town to do a little shopping in the Wintertime, us kids would get condensed canned milk and go out and dip in some good clean snow, and stir it up and make ice cream. Ha-ha-ha.

DB: Back in the old days what kind of clothing did people wear, for work clothes?



HK: Well, you saw more wool. Wool trousers, and they wore heavy mackinaws--the men. But I think it was pretty much overalls, mackinaws, it was things like that. And the women, of course, longer skirts, dresses.

DB: Did the women make clothing?

HK: Yes quite often.

DB: Would they make the mackinaws?

HK: And the mother's coat quite often was made over into a jacket or a blazer, for one of the kids. Ya, they did a lot...quite a little bit of sewing.

DB: What was a typical day like, what time would you wake up.

HK: Well, I suppose, that it would be governed more or less by the...by the father's work day. Which ordinarily would be about, from seven until five o'clock, probably. Or a little after five before he'd get home. Then, if there are any children in the family they'd...ah...they'd have to be in school by eight o'clock, and home by about four.

DB: What kind of occupations have you done?

HK: Well, I been most...I had several odd jobs in, in the very last few years of the '20s. And during the early days of the Depression, in the 1930s, but after that I became established with the Forest Service. And I worked from about, seasonally for about five or six years with the Forest Service. And then up until 1967, which if I had worked that year, would have been 40 Summers. For the, for the United States Forest Service. I retired from the Forest Service in 1967.

DB: What did you do in the Wintertime?

HK: We worked right through. There was always timber to be marked and stuff like that, in the Wintertime. And then a lot of the work that you didn't have time for in the Summer--records and stuff like that, keeping, and checking the scale books, that could be delegated to the worst days of the Winter.

DB: Did you do the same kind of work when you were working the first few years, as you did in the later years; or how did that change?

HK: Well, no. I worked, you know, as from a laborer up to a manager or supervisor, or foreman...whatever you want to call it.

DB: Starting with the laborer, what kinds of work would they do?

HK: That first year that I worked, I worked as a trail construction laborer. We were building rails by Hardsley and brushing by hand, and the treadwork being done by a horse--a horse-drawn plow.

DB: You said treadwork? What is that...?

HK: That's trail tread. The area that you walk on.

DB: So these were all footpaths that you were doing?

HK: Yes, foot paths.

DB: What other kinds of work would...?

HK: Then, of course, my...I...all during the 39 Summers that I worked for 'em I was involved in fire control work. And largely, from the mid-1930s until the time that I retired I was a Fire Control Officer.

DB: What would you do as a fire contr...?

HK: But I worked in every, in every part of the Fôrest Service, endeavor. From trail construction, and road construction, and telephone line construction and building construction, fire cont...

(END OF TAPE 10; Side 1)