

FAMILY HISTORY - CYRIL AND MARY KEARL  
Chapter Four - Preston and the farm in Nibley, Utah.

To build enthusiasm for our move to Preston, Dad told us all the great things that we would find in the big city of Preston with its 5,000 people. Our house would have a central heating system. We would have a hot air furnace which we would only stoke twice a day. All of the rooms would be warm. The movies would have sound and there would be comedies, and cartoons. (The movie house in Paris still showed silent films with printed sub-titles.)



412. Main street, Preston, about 1940. Looking north. An old Will Rogers movie is on at the Isis.

Preston was a poor place to prepare for a struggle with the twentieth century, but a delightful place to spend a childhood. It was a small farm community with almost no manufacturing and only a few businesses that supplied the commercial needs of the farms in the northern end of Cache Valley. The county had a warmer climate and more acreage that could grow crops. Like most early Mormon towns nearly all of the families in town were descendants of the early settlers and were related to one another. Ezra T. Benson, Ezra Taft's Benson's grandfather, had been assigned as the Apostle responsible for Cache Valley by Brigham Young and with Peter Maughan had been responsible for the settlement of the valley. The Eames, Hendricks, Merrills, and Daines were the early settlers and socially prominent families in the town. For many years after we moved to Preston we rented the houses we lived in. The first house we lived in, we rented from the Eames and lived there for two years.



The Eames House. The first house we lived in while we were in Preston.

We then lived in two other rented houses until Dad built a very nice home at 176 E. Onieda Street where we lived for about ten years (1932 to 1942) until we moved to Michigan. Our family did much of the construction work on the house. I remember nailing the shingles on it's very steep roof.

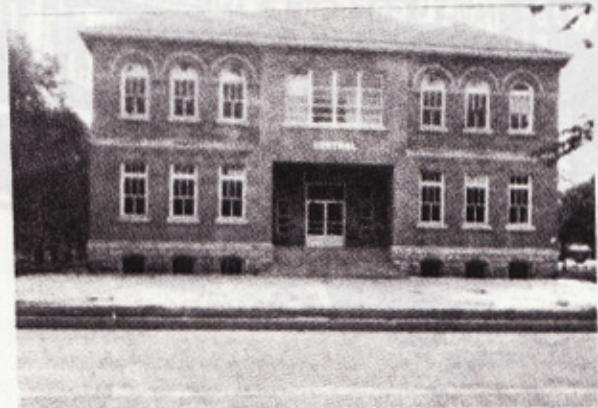


The very nice house that Dad built at 176 Onieda St. in Preston, Id.

My father earned \$250.00/month. There were only four or five men in Preston who made more than that. People didn't make much then but most things were not very expensive. Five dollars would buy all the groceries a big family like ours could eat in a week.

In that small community, our family considered intellectual. Bry in particular. He was a fine debater, public speaker and writer. From the age of 12 until he was 18 he was the local correspondent for the Salt Lake Tribune. He was paid 15 cents /inch for each article that they printed. Each night he would send a large envelope to the Tribune in Salt Lake City by train. He wrote dozens of articles for each one that was accepted.

I lived in Preston from the time I was seven years old until I was nineteen. I always thought of it as my "hometown". There was a nostalgia about it, the recognition of old familiar places and things. It was a place of firsts. For me: The first car, the first date, the first job.

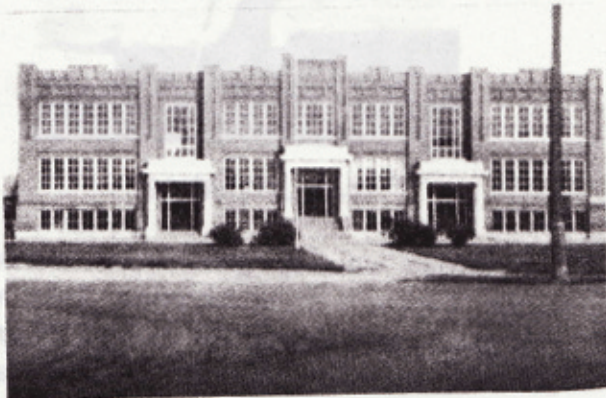


The Central Grade School where I went for my first four grades.

I went to the Central Grade School from the 2nd to the 4th grade. One of my fond memories was when my father would go into the hills in the early spring to visit sheepmen during the lambing season. He would come to the school and take my brother, Russ, and I out of school for the day to go with him. It was great fun to roam through the hills following the sheep trails.

One of the highlights of these 3

years was when I won a book for reading the most books in my grade. I loved and cherished books and spent many an afternoon in the Carnegie Library (the public library) reading.



The Jefferson School where I went to grades five through nine.

I went to the Jefferson School from the fifth to the ninth grade and then to Preston Senior High, graduating in 1941. It was always assumed that we children would go to college. Not to go to college would have been unthinkable. My parent's were both well educated for their day, there was an abundance of books in our home and Mother read to us children very often which probably caused us to have a college education as one of our high priority goals. Today Social Scientists talk as if this were a new discovery important to a child's upbringing. My parents knew this in the 1930's. A new book for Christmas each year was a tradition in our family.

I was not much of an athlete. I was president of my sophomore class. I debated in High School but wasn't really very good at it. A door-to-door salesman came to our town selling violin lessons at bargain prices. For a trivial sum, he told my parents, he would rent me a violin and enroll me in his music school. Mother was naive enough to think I could become a

musician. I played in the Orchestra but wasn't very good at that either. My best subjects in High School were mathematics and science. I wanted to be an Engineer. I really wanted to be an Aeronautical Engineer but they didn't teach Aeronautical Engineering in Utah and by the time I got to Michigan I had started down the Mechanical Engineering path. I used my extra money to buy model airplanes kits and magazines that told about flying in WW I.



The old Onieda Academy Building where I went to Preston High School.

Social clubs were not permitted in High School but we had an un-official one. It was called the Fads Club. It's sole function was entertainment, about all we did was hold dances in neighboring communities. Since it was not democratic and had no goals it was not very popular with the school administration nor the community. Often we would get one of our Dads to let us take his car and would drive to one of the neighboring communities where we were not known and find some new girls our ages to impress. Our favorite places included Malad, Idaho one

of the taverns up Cub River or to a swimming pool at Downey, Idaho. In a way we too had our revolt against the system, the establishment, not ideological but against authority.



Me in High School.

Shortly after he graduated from college, my father purchased an 80 acre farm in Nibley, Utah, at 2955 S, 800 E Logan, Utah. There is a plant there now, Weathershield, that makes windows and doors. He considered this a form of economic security and a potential source of retirement income. When he retired he wanted no part of farming. The farm was hard work and it's income probably paid the mortgage, the hired hand, and little else.

It was a good farm, irrigated, but it required lots of hand labor to plant, cultivate, and harvest the crops grown on it. In those days an 80 acre farm was large when there were few farm machines

to help with the work.



Russ irrigating.

Dad usually planted 14 acres of sugar beets, 5 acres of peas. They were the good cash crops. He had 20 in grain, 20 or so in alfalfa, and 20 in pasture for the cattle we kept. The big field of peas were very much like the varieties grown in gardens today. When the peas had formed in their pods, we would mow all the vines down to the ground, load them on a wagon and take them to the "viner".



Our farm - Spence, Dad and me in a field of grain. Our barn is in the background.

The pea vinery was a big open shed where the vines would go through a tumbling and shaking operation that would dislodge the little peas out of the pods and screen and separate them from the vines. We would get paid for the pounds of shelled peas we delivered to the "viner". All this work was done at

night so the peas wouldn't get hot and spoil. For a kid it was kind of fun; to the older fellows it was just hard work because the peas were heavy and the night work was done after a pretty good day's work was exhausting.



A view of our farm from the barnyard.

Another exciting time was threshing grain. Wheat, barley, and oats are all grains used for human or animal feed. First, the grain was cut, then when pretty dry, it was tied into a bundle about 10" in diameter. It was then put into a "shock" or a little tepee, or piled in a round stack. It would stay there until the threshing machine was able to get to our farm. Usually there were only two threshers in the area so it would take a month to get to all the farms. The thresher was a big machine, run by a gas engine, about 8' high, 8' wide and 20' long. The bundles of dry grain stocks would be thrown into the machine where they were torn apart and shaken until the straw and grain separated from each other. The grain would drop to the bottom and fall into bins to be collected in gunny sacks. Many farmers lost fingers in threshing machines. My Uncle John lost one of his. Having separated the grain, the straw was blown out a big pipe into a golden yellow pile to be used as bedding for livestock. It took a crew of about 20 persons, usually neighbors and

sometime migrants farm workers, to run the whole operation and it was a very exciting event. The women cooked enormous amounts of food for the threshing crew. The straw had chaff with it and it would get between your clothing and skin. You would itch for days after the threshing was done. It was fun but itchy. Today "combines" do this task in a fraction of the time it took back then.



Mary at an irrigation ditch on the farm. She was no farmer!

My mother and we children would live and work on the farm during the summers. Some weekends Dad would come and do the irrigating. I remember one night when I was helping him that he told me that life was like irrigating. You watered the hard spots first and the easy ones took care of themselves and I should do the hard jobs first because the easy ones would take care of themselves.

I'm sure that it was a real trying time for my Mom, because we were really just camping for three months each year. Our living quarters were two rooms. Dad had a hired man, Lamont Leishman, who with his wife, Sarah, and two daughters Ranae and Maureen stayed there for the entire year. The hired hand and his family had the front rooms and we used the back two rooms (a kitchen and a bedroom). Mom and Phyllis (and Dad, when

he came on weekends) had the bedroom and we boys slept on the screen porch or on beds in a big white walled tent on our lawn. One thing I don't recall is mother being troubled with her sons wanting to go out much at night. I think we were all too tired by nightfall.



Russell's son Jimmy and Edward playing in the sand box at the farm. The granary and the barn are in the background.

A normal day on the farm started at 6:00 when we got up and went out and did the chores, fed the livestock, milked the cows and harnessed the horses. We'd then go in for breakfast at about 8 a.m. By 9 a.m. we'd go out to work in the fields; thinning or weeding beets, hauling hay, fixing fences, watering crops or, hauling peas. This lasted until noon when we would go down to a swimming hole in the Logan River and swim for a half hour. We'd eat lunch at 12:30 and would return to the fields at about 1:30 p.m.

We'd work through the afternoon and be back to the house at about 5:30. Then we'd unharness the horses, feed all the livestock, milk cows, feed the calves and

go back to the house for supper by about 8:00 p.m. We might get in a neighborhood game of "kick the can" or "run sheepie, run" but usually we'd go to bed and go to sleep the moment our head hit the pillow. Tired, sweaty, weary men and boys.



Russ, Jimmy, and Phyllis on the farm.

It really was a long day but the work was always varied and as a small boy it didn't seem too bad. I'll bet Del, Spence and LaMont didn't think it was much fun. It was an interesting time in my life and I learned a lot during it. One thing I knew, was that I didn't want to be a farmer. But this was a unique opportunity to work with animals, machinery, and most of all with my family.

Harvesting hay was a job that lasted all summer. A good hay field produced three crops so it was a job from June through September. Alfalfa grows about 24-30" high. The older fellows would hitch a team of horses to a sickle bar mower and go around and around the field mowing the hay down in 5' swaths. A day or so later they'd take one horse and with a rake gather it into long rows. Then we'd go down the long, wide rows and fold it over with pitch forks into "bunches" that took the shape of a book but about

12" high and 4' in diameter. Then we'd take an open wagon about 6' wide and 16' long (it was open except for a front and rear frame which was about 5" high) attach a team of horses to the wagon and go load the hay. The older fellows would spear the "bunches" of hay with a pitch fork and lay them upside down on the wagon. They'd keep piling it up and we kids would tromp it to make a dense big cube out of the load (it would fork off better if it was real densely packed). When the load was as high as they could throw the bunches, we'd drive to the barn and with another big fork load it into the top of the barn for use during the winter as cattle feed. This was miserable, dusty, hot work. Especially if the field had thistles (weeds with thorny stickers). We'd usually be barefooted and wore no shirts. We went all summer wearing only trousers. We'd get brown as Indians and had feet tough enough to run on a gravel road. Anyway, if the guys on the ground were having a bad day they could (and did) pelt us hay full of thistles and unless they warned us it was bad news.



Putting up hay.

A snake in the forkful of hay was always exciting. The load, when full was 10 feet high and kind of scary to ride on. Occasionally a load tipped over on it's

side when we went through a deep ditch and the wagon leaned over too far.



The farm viewed from the cattle shed.

I recall one day Delmar and Spence got in a big argument and were running after each other with pitch forks. I don't recall who was after whom but Lamont had to stop the fight. Another time Bry fell off the load and was pretty banged up.

I suffered badly from dust and pollen allergies (a legacy I've give to my children) for which I later took de-sensitizing shots. Because of these allergies I spent much of the summer in real misery. Often my eyes were swollen and irritated. Sometimes I would have large patches of rash. My Mother finally refused to let them work me on these kind of jobs and I rode the derrick horse all the time, a job usually given to a girl.

Spence was riding Queen one day and got "charlie horses" in both legs (muscle cramps) at the same time. I recall how he rode her into an irrigation ditch nearby and rolled off onto the ground in agony. It was really quite funny to everyone but him. No one dared laugh. Bry got so sun-burned one summer that he was in bed real ill for a week or so. He had one great big blister and later one huge scab over his entire back.

Our farm was equipped with an out-house. Complete with Sears Roebuck catalog for "wiping". It always had an incredible aroma. I was always happy to get back to Preston and an indoor toilet in the fall.

Summers were full of pleasant adventures. We would swim in the canal which ran through our property or in the Logan River. This was the chance to sneak a smoke and feel big. We used to build rafts from railroad ties and float down the canal. We would dam the canal at the railroad culvert to make a swimming hole until the railroad maintenance men would pass by and tear it out. Delmar would often drive us to a bend in the Logan River, where we'd skinny dip on a hot day. Del was an exceptionally good swimmer and most of us younger kids learned from him. When he thought we were big enough he threw us in the water and we soon learned. When we were in Preston we'd go to an irrigation reservoir (Blackers) at the east end of town. A boy was a man when he could swim the 300 yards across the reservoir.



The barn on our farm.

The barn was a wonderful place to play. The derrick rope was used as a Tarzan swing and I still have an ugly 3" scar on one knee where I hit a post in the barn. The Doctor used 5 stitches to

close the cut and gave me no anaesthesia while he sewed up the cut. Very few people ever saw the inside of a hospital. They were expensive, not many people had insurance and few could afford it. When you were ill you just remained at home and your Mother nursed you. Sulfa or Anti-biotic to prevent infection had not been discovered.



Mother, Dad, and I in a field of beets.

We always grew sugar beets and thinning and hoeing was another terrible job. It was done with a hoe that had a 12" long handle. We'd bend over head down and fanny up and shuffle down the row. It was difficult to stand straight at the end of the day.

Thinning usually lasted about two weeks and weeding the same. Weeding wasn't as bad. This was done with a long handled hoe, but done in the hot summer months of July and August.

Mother would pay us for all the beet thinning and weeding at a very much reduced rate from the normal, but still we could earn a dollar or so and we were being paid for work that we had to do anyway. Mother would walk out to the fields between meals and help the child who was having trouble keeping up with



the others. She'd sometimes bring some of the delicious Rootbeer she made using Hires Rootbeer extract or maybe just a pitcher of cold water. She kept a very account of how much each child had earned.



The Beet Harvest.

Every couple of weeks we'd go home to Preston for the weekend and she'd pay us what we had earned doing work on the farm. The dollar or two we'd earned would be a fortune. We'd have a big Saturday night. Movies then cost 10 cents and a box of popcorn a nickel. We almost always went to the Saturday afternoon movie, often earning our ticket by delivering hand bills around town.

We'd go to church on Sunday and then back to Logan and the farm on Monday. It was great when September came and we'd move back to Preston and start school.

During the summer months we would herd cattle on the Union Pacific Railroad right-of-way to supplement our own pasture. It was a lazy job. I read many books while herding those cattle. The only requirement was to keep them from straying and to get them off the right-of-way when the afternoon train passed. We would often lay large nails on

the track for the train to roll flat and then we'd take hours filing them into knives. It's a wonder we didn't derail the trains since we'd use the largest nails that we could find. The engineers got to know us and would wave, sometimes throw us candy, and would blow the train whistle when they passed. To little boys imprisoned on lonely farms in dull backward towns those whistles spoke of distant worlds where life was better.



Mother and Phyllis in a patch of sugar beets.

Mother grew a small patch of strawberries each summer which we'd pick and sell from door to door in Logan. We'd go to the rich people up on the hill by the temple first. She'd sell a case for \$1.00 and make \$100.00 each summer. It was her "mad" money for the winter months.

When Mother and Dad died we sold the farm. Our 80 acre farm brought \$85,000 from a factory that makes doors and windows now own it. I always feel sad when I drive by it. The memories of the good times we had there rush back and I have forgotten the hard work and the aches and pains.