

Joe Riordan

Interview, June 5, 1998

Originally, my family had a place at Sunnyside, about sixty five miles south of Ely. Some of our closest neighbors were the Sharps. The Sharps had a place in the next valley to the west, near Blue Eagle. Once or twice a month, one of the Sharps would ride over the mountain to our place to get their mail - stay all night, and then ride home the next day.

My Dad and Uncles rode a lot for the old Adams and McGill outfit. My Uncle Jim Riordan had the first place just below Lund. The house and most of the old outbuildings are still standing. Will James worked for my Uncle Jim for a while, not long before he was caught steeling cattle from the Swallow outfit.

My family moved to Mound Valley in 1926 or 27. There had been several years of drought in Nye County. My Dad wanted to move farther north where there was better feed. He sold all of his cattle but about 100 head of yearling heifers which were brought north. We had a hard time getting those heifers to eat hay that first winter - they didn't know what hay was.

I was nine or ten years old at the time. I don't remember everything, but I do remember the sheep. For most of my young life there would be from six to ten bands of 1000 to 1500 sheep going through Mound Valley every day for three weeks in the spring. Then they would taper off and there would only be a band or two a day going through for a couple of more weeks. They took all the early spring feed at that time - what they didn't take, they took in the fall on their way south.

It took a lot of horses and men to put up all the hay that was put up in Elko County at that time. I made the comment to George Ogilvie and Archie Dewar one time that I estimated, that during the height of the "haying era", there would be 1500 men looking for work on the streets of Elko just before the 4th of July. We were all three serving on the County Commission at the time. Both of these men were quite a bit older than I and I respected their opinions - they agreed. Most of the ranches started haying right after the 4th at that time and you could be back in Elko a few days after the 4th and the men would ^{be} nearly all gone.

Most of those old hay hands were good men - some were well educated. Many of them would come back to the same ranches, year after year. A good part of them were raised on farms in the mid-west or back east. Many were displaced during the great depression when their parents or grandparent lost their places or nearly lost their places. Most were poor. Many drank too much and they would get from place to place riding the rails, but nearly all of them had a routine. They'd do seasonal work in California and Nevada and when fall would come they'd be in Washington or Oregon picking apples or some other fruit. Many of them worked from the east coast to the west coast planting or harvesting. Without them, the country would not have been able to carry on its agriculture as it did. I'm grateful that they were there for us at that time. We couldn't have put up our hay without them.