

## Tape 1 Side A Teresa Harris

*Zach Day recording. In the room with me is Dennis Kuhnel, part of the forest service; Candice Orten, undergraduate from the University of Nebraska Lincoln; Chris Rowe, working for the forest service; Dr. Matthew Douglass, professor at the University of Nebraska Lincoln; Zach Day, graduate student at the University of Nebraska Lincoln; and Teresa Harris, part of the forest service. We are doing an oral history interview on Teresa's history on homesteading in the area. It's a part of the artifact roadshow project, and we seek to gain as much knowledge as we can about the area and those who have more knowledge than those who are studying it. So thank you for participating in this important project that seeks to honor our nation's heritage by preserving knowledge about the history of homesteading on the great plains and the foundation of the USDA forest service national grasslands system. The history of homesteading and the national grasslands system are tales that are inexorably intertwined. The goal of this project is to unearth and preserve information that demonstrates the relationship between these two stories. The primary objective of this research is to obtain local knowledge. I will now ask a series of questions meant to informally guide this interview. The interview will be limited to approximately one hour. At the conclusion of my questions, please feel free to add any additional information you have on homesteading or the national grasslands system.*

[ZD]: (First, please just explain who you are and your history in the area.)

[TH]: My name is Teresa Harris, also known as Terri. I grew up in a family ranch in southeastern Montana, and I eventually landed here working on the Buffalo Gap National Grasslands as a range management specialist. So I deal a lot with the ranchers who have permits for livestock grazing on the national grasslands, and have become aware of some of the homesteading sites out here.

[ZD]: (Alright... Do you know about any homesteading histories on the grasslands or the surrounding areas? In answering this, please provide the source of the information.)

[TH]: ...I have been trained in the past as a para heritage professional, and helped do some work - field work - and came across artifacts and so forth. And, with one of those, I actually went to the courthouse and looked to see who had homesteaded there, and if it was a person of significance, and so forth. So, that's some of how I'm aware of it; sometimes when I'm out with permittees, they'll say - for example, the Cruz family down in Conata Basin will point out 'this is where my grandparents homesteaded, this is where my dad grew up. There isn't a whole lot left here but this is the area'. That kind of thing. So I know kind of some generalities about various homesteads. Also the people who have lived here for several generations, a lot of them - their families homesteaded out here and then things didn't go so well in the thirties, so then through the resettlement administration, they're homesteaded land was bought back by the government, became part of the land utilization projects, which eventually became the national grasslands administered by the forest service. So I think they were... that took place in 1960 when the national grasslands became a part of the forest service, administered by the forest service. So a lot of these people that have grown up out here or have family heritage here - even though it's public land - still think of it as theirs. So that sometimes makes our management a little interesting. So there's that sense of propriety and I don't think it's in any way, like, 'this is my land, stay the heck off'. There's a

little bit of that. People – for a long time, the national grasslands were kind of the stepchild of the forest service. It was basically for livestock grazing, and then once multiple use land management came along... steadily there's been more interest in how the grasslands are used. So, I think sometimes people find it – who have always lived here – 'why would anyone else care about this land or what goes on out here'. Is that kind of what you're looking for? Close enough?

[ZD]: (Yeah... Do you have any specific knowledge of people's recollections of the period of time around the formation of the grasslands?)

[TH]: ...I have bits and pieces, but I don't have a nice succinct history of one certain location. ...I think I'd mentioned to you earlier, I met a young woman – her name is Star Redbow – and her grandparents, it's either her grandparents or her great grandparents, were involved in the old town of Canata. And Canata is what Canata Basin is named after. It's down off Highway 44, and the old town side of Canata was quite a thriving place. We actually have in our land status book of who owns what land, all the little blocks that were plotted out for the town of Canata. But Star Redbow told me that her - she has both Native American heritage and Caucasian heritage - and on her Caucasian side of the family, she had one of her probably great grandparents I think came from Scotland, but one of them was involved in the hotel and the other one in a store, and they married. And I think that was her grandmother, and then her grandmother married someone from the reservation. So again, I know little bits and pieces of information like that, and I could point you to people that know more specifics. Over in the Imlay area, Tony Kuternah (sp?), who I'm hoping you get to interview, is 99 years old. And Tony was born in the family cabin down near Imlay, and it's interesting - when he goes to get his driver's license, he doesn't have a birth certificate because he was born in the family cabin. And so his family came here – his heritage is Czechoslovakian – and he was born there, bachelor, has lived down there his whole life, lives in a separate house now. And his family's cabin has actually been listed on the national register of historic places. So, he has some great history to go along with that.

[ZD]: (...Is there any other information related to the homestead era that you would like to share? Anything in general?)

[TH]: ...I think that there's a lot of it – I think that now's the time to really grab onto that information. I sat down yesterday with a list of all the grazing permittees that we have now, and was trying to come up with a list of people that would be good for you to interview – to kind of call and invite – for you to interview about the history of homesteading here. And we've almost lost an entire generation of people there. There's fewer people left to interview, so I think now is the time to really seek out and gather that information. There were several people that I thought 'oh this fella would be so good' and in the past 10, 15 years, a lot of those people have passed on. And I know they've shared the stories with family members, but there's nothing quite like getting the first hand information. ...I do have one other story I want to share. A fellow that's worked here in the past for us, and also he's been a volunteer, his mother grew up down in the interior area, and they were very very poor, and the railroad went through there. And he said his mother recalls, she and her sister would go along behind the train and pick up the coal that kind of fell off the train, and take it home for them to use to heat and cook with in their house - their coal stove. And then the railroad fellows kind of got acquainted with them, and would purposefully drop extra things there. And he also said that if the train hit a deer, the deer would often be found hung up underneath a railroad trestle or a bridge that someone could come and take it and use it. So that, like I said, I just have interesting little tidbits like that that I've heard from various people.

[ZD]: (...In your experience, or in the stories that you've heard, did people ever talk about artifact locations that they knew about, or other information associated with Native American history?)

[TH]: ...Not that I can think of specifically here. People used to pull out, you know 'this was my mom's old doll' or something like that. But I haven't heard a lot of specifics. My mind goes back to where I grew up in southeastern Montana, there was a rock structure that we were told was an eagle trap. I mean, you know, things like – I remember that more so from my own growing up here. I can't think of everything specifically, but probably after you turn the tape off, tonight I'll come up with something.

[ZD]: (...I think that's it.)

[TH]: Well thank you for taking the time to interview me.

[ZD]: (Thank you for your time.)

[TH]: Thank you for asking me. Thank you, Dennis.