

Joe Johndreau

*Alright, so my name is Chris Rowe. I'm here with Candice Horton and Zach Day, interviewing Joe Johndreau about his artifact collection that he brought in for the road show today, June 6<sup>th</sup>, 2015.*

[CR]: (So Joe, you said it's your grandparents' collection? Where are they from?)

[JJ]: My grandfather was born in Omaha, Nebraska, but they moved out to my family's ranch, south of Gordon, when he was about nine or ten. So that would have been about 1923, '24 maybe.

[CR]: (Okay, alright. So was it under the Homestead Act or...?)

[JJ]: No, they actually bought – I don't know the for sures about it – but it was always kind of my impression that they bought several homesteads that were abandoned. I don't know who they bought 'em from or how that all worked out but... but yeah.

[CR]: (So they were ranching then?)

[JJ]: Yeah, my great granddad bought the place.

[CR]: (Okay so... how did they come into this collection? Were they – did they find it on the ranch, or?)

[JJ]: As best I know, they came from the ranch but – let's see, my granddad passed away when I was six, so everything I ever heard about this was before I turned six. But no, he kind of just casually mentioned that when he was younger... it was not uncommon after a wind storm or a rainstorm or after the changing of the seasons – just moving cows or if you were out doing anything, you could find stone-points commonly. And the reason he was kind of talking about it was because he'd noticed that we weren't finding points as commonly as they used to. And I didn't ever, at any time, seen anyone pick up a point. But it was kind of an interest as a kid to hear this and just kind of wonder about what it was he was talking about.

[CR]: (Sure, absolutely. So... did he – did he just kind of pick them up as just 'This is obviously something cool' or did he have like an interest in archaeology specifically.)

[JJ]: He liked anything that was kind of a harbinger of days gone by, just in general. He was kind of a quiet person who just liked peacefulness and looking back – and that's kind of a guess just going from his personality. He never got into the why's or anything. He didn't have – to the best of my knowledge, he didn't have any books that I ever saw on paleontology, points, or anything like that. So yeah, it'd be tough for me to...

[CR]: (Sure, that's just fine. Let's see if there's anything else.)

[CH]: (Did he collect anything else, other than projectile points that he found.)

[JJ]: You know, there were – they had a lot of that kind of stuff. Like, they had old cigar boxes full of cotton balls, full of birds' eggs that would have been blown out... ya know, no Nebraskan ever throws

away anything. That's a little piece of history right there. So... it would be hard to say what was collected and what was just kept.

[CR]: (Okay.)

[JJ]: Ya know, because nothing was ever catalogued or anything like that but... Yeah, I can say that everything my family has ever owned is still there, in some manner or fashion.

[CR]: (They still own the property?)

[JJ]: Yeah.

[CR]: (Okay. And so... who lives there now?)

[JJ]: My father lives there now.

[CR]: (Your father. Did he continue any collecting or...?)

[JJ]: No, he's never been interested in anything like that... yeah, as far as many just a passive interest in like 'Oh, there's a point', but he wouldn't actively go after things.

[CR]: (Absolutely. Okay. And so... you said your grandpa did it mainly when he was ranching, so he didn't really travel around looking for stuff?)

[JJ]: Not to the best – no, I don't think so. And, there again – and this is a little bit of a different subject, but UNL had a paleontologist crew, I think in the 30s, out there digging up primarily like mammoth fossils and stuff. And he had talked a lot about – not a lot, but commonly talked about that, just as an interest. He remembered that as something interesting. And he would have probably been – what would that be, his 20s because that was in the 30s. But the only reason I know about that is I've seen the black and white pictures and I remember him talking about those paleontologists out there for I think a few weeks. Or maybe even longer, digging up things out of the hillsides. So he had an interest in that kind of stuff, but back then people just didn't appreciate it, I don't think, like we do now.

[CR]: (Okay. Excellent. Any other questions?)

[ZD]: (I think as far as the artifacts go, that will probably cover it. And then, you said you had a – you wanted to talk about the schoolhouse.)

[JJ]: If it fits in what we're talking about.

[ZD]: (We've got homesteading stuff, and that works perfectly fine.)

[JJ]: Sure. So yeah, back when – I went to kindergarten in 1979, and that was – the name of the school was Mount Hope District 62, and it was about eight miles south of Gordon, Nebraska off Highway 27. And... there wasn't – it was normal back then, and there were a number of old country schools – we used to go together for different holidays out into the Sandhills and see other little schools. And I think our biggest year, when we felt like we really hit the big time and had a little swagger, I was in 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> grade, we had 13 kids K-8, and we had to have a teacher's helper, and so that was like we'd arrived. Because, you know, if there was only like five or eight kids in the school, it was just the teacher. I never had more than two people in my grade, it was a girl and I, and her parents divorced probably the mid-80s, so she would live with her mom for a while and her dad for a while so it depended whether I had

anyone in my class or not. And then from probably part of 6<sup>th</sup> grade and then more as I got older – 7<sup>th</sup> grade and 8<sup>th</sup> grade, just because I wanted to, not because I had to, like I'd ride a horse to school. That wasn't unique at all. It was just kind of something you did. And it was- every fall it was something to expect – like every summer, skunks would dig under the school in the summertime and make a den and... so that was like one of the – you know you were in the upper echelon of grades – like 7<sup>th</sup> grader or 8<sup>th</sup> grader because they would typically get to bring a shotgun and some traps to the school, and they'd trap the skunks out from under the school before school and they'd – and again, it wasn't even unique, that was like a chore for the older kids to do, to trap out the skunks and... And I tell that to people now and they look at me like I lost my mind, but yeah, I mean that was just part of the deal. I was – I think I was the first class to have running water because I helped my granddad and my dad take the outhouses away when I was a little kid before I went to school. And we actually still have one of the outhouses at a picnic spot where I grew up. But... I remember the mothers all showing me it was this big deal that there was a water heater and a toilet, and I was a little kid, like we had one of these at home, it's not a big deal, but because the school wasn't associated with running water, that was still something to kind of show the kids.

[CR]: (Okay, so how did that work? Having multiple grades all in one classroom? Was that how it worked?)

[JJ]: It was in one room – there would be multiple grades in one room. It was just, you know – if you don't know any better, it's not that interesting. She would – the teacher would just call grades kind of in order. I don't remember – I think it was like she would call a grade and they maybe needed a few more minutes to finish what they were doing and she'd just call the next grade. And up by her desk, there was this old – early on, it was an old wooden kind of a stereotypical teacher's desk and then later on they got her a metal desk. But... there were these two plastic chairs next to her desk and – no class ever had more than, I don't think any class ever had more than two kids, maybe once in a while we had three in a grade – and so she'd call a grade up and you'd just sit there in those chairs and she would address that class, absolutely face to face because you were so close. And there was a green board behind her chair, so anything you had to write, you'd write up on the green board. And that was a big deal because the earlier generation had the old blackboard. So that was like the smart boards now, but you know, it was a green board instead of a blackboard, that people still talked about with kind of a... a sense of pride, the school had a green board. So yeah, they'd just call us up and when the lesson was done, you'd just go back to your desk and finish up and then she'd call the next grade up. And it was just an old, and old rectangle of a building with an added on porch on the one end with three windows on the north side and three windows on the south side. And I'm sure no insulation because it was cold in the wintertime. And there was an old propane – it was a heater, it wasn't a furnace, it didn't have any fan – so if you were absolutely positively standing next to the heater, it was warm, but away from there it'd be cold, because there was no circulation of air. So it was hot, hot, hot in the summer and cold, cold, cold in the winter.

[CR]: (Would you be able to tell us perhaps right when – around when the school was built?)

[JJ]: Oh boy, my – I think my grandfather went to it. I think it was living – I think it was standing there in the 20s when he went to school. I wish I had known – in fact, I've kind of done some casual searching just to see if there's any history maybe in the Nebraska Board of Education records, there might be, but

it was... it was an old school when I was a little kid and I've never met anyone that didn't ever refer to it as an old school. So yeah, when it was built, I wouldn't be able to guess.

[CR]: (Sure.)

[ZD]: (I think that about covers it.)

[JJ]: Okay.

[ZD]: (Thank you for your time and all of the information you shared with us.)

[JJ]: Yeah, yeah, yeah. It was interesting to hear – like I said, I never – I always took it for granted because everybody did things that way, until you get out and about and realize that nobody did.

[CR]: (Well that's why we want to record these unique stories and... so we can share the knowledge.)

[JJ]: Sure.