

Ranching Carol Davis

Carol Davis is interviewed by her granddaughter, Faith Tonne. At the end of the interview, several more minutes of continued conversation have been included.

Carol: I'm Carol Ruth Vallentine Davis, and my birth year is 1935.

Faith: Do you understand that you are being recorded right now and that what you say will be published on the Ashland City Library web page?

Carol: Yes.

Faith: OK. When did your family first move to Clark County? It's all right to get it from the book.

Carol: I wrote that down, I think I did. Let's see, Elvira Jane Fox, my great-great grandmother, made first payment on 80 acres in Lexington Township in October of 1887.

Faith: That's a long time ago. Why did they come here?

Carol: Well, for various reasons, most of them had been in farming and simply decided to try elsewhere.

Faith: And there was land to have here, right? Are you the first, second, third, fourth, fifth, which generation?

Carol: Well, let's see. Great-great, would have been what? The fifth generation, I believe.

Faith: So Mom would be sixth and then I would be seven.

Carol: I believe that's right.

Faith: You are the fifth generation. Wow.

Carol: Now, see, both sides of my family were here approximately the same time. Let's see, I have down that John Major Vallentine homesteaded in 1885, so that would have been even two years before.

Faith: But he didn't ranch or anything?

Carol: Most of them did not really ranch. They had some animals, but they also farmed.

Faith: So more farmer than rancher, yes.

Carol: Yes, probably.

Faith: What kind of crops did your family run?

Carol: Well, let's see crops. When I looked it up in our family history book, it said the crops-- kaffir was one. Alfalfa was one thing that they grew, millet and wheat, were all crops.

Faith: Did they have any livestock at all that they would deal with?

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Carol: Yes, my great-grandfather Vallentine had cattle. The Fox family had more chickens, hogs, horses, and of course, most families had some of all of that. The Vallentine side, I remember they raised chickens commercially. So they had several buildings, the brooder house and the chicken house.

Faith: Where was that?

Carol: That was out on the old farm. It would have been next to where the Lexington Community Building is now.

Faith: Oh, OK. And wasn't there a fire there that destroyed most of the other stuff around it or what happened to those buildings?

Carol: The house did burn, but the rest of the buildings simply were not kept up and finally were just destroyed so that they went back into farmland.

Faith: Well, you got to use it for what you got to use it for. Do you have any family stories about the Dirty Thirties?

Carol: I just remember my mother talking about, how they could go to bed at night and get up in the morning and have layers of dirt on everything. It was just a constant battle. A lot of people had some respiratory problems that were caused by breathing, by all of it. It was a very difficult time for them.

Faith: Did you have to interact with it at all or you were born a little bit later?

Carol: Yes, I think I was born a little bit later, more toward the end of the Depression.

Faith: I remember one story that you told me, it was a while ago, so I don't remember if it was about you or not. But you said that your mom had to make your underwear out of old flour sacks. And so the company made the flour sacks more pretty and softer so that they could be used as clothing that way.

Carol: And she made lots of things. She even made shirts for the guys, for my brother and my dad.

Faith: Out of just the flour sacks?

Carol: Right. You could get them in various prints or colors. You know, they were made of fairly decent material so that they could be used like that.

Faith: Recycling could learn something from that.

Carol: Right.

Faith: Did the Depression affect the farm very much?

Carol: Oh, yes. There just wasn't much income and farmers did just a little bit of anything they could to survive. Of course, they were able to grow a lot of their own food and their own animals, which in some ways was good for them. But I remember my dad said the one thing he hated most about farming was dairy farming. And he got to the point where he had to have dairy cattle to get milk and then he sold cream.

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Faith: Were you ever asked to help raise crops or help with the animals?

Carol: Oh, I was very little, so I didn't do much. I can remember feeding the chickens, and spreading grain out for them, and pulling weeds in the garden.

Faith: So it was almost like having that garden, you could feed yourselves by having that even though you couldn't really sell it and make a profit.

Carol: Right, and I do remember they used to sell eggs at times and that sort of thing. My grandfather, even, I remember he had a big-- oh, it must be at least five acres, of watermelon.

Faith: Oh wow.

Carol: And he sold watermelon.

Faith: That would be fun. Were there ever any records of what happened to the farm during World War One?

Carol: World War One. Well, that would have been primarily when my grandfather was still... I don't even remember for sure as to when my parents were married, I think it would have been after World War One, though.

Faith: What about World War Two?

Carol: World War Two, I remember at least the end of it. I was about six.

Faith: Wow. And did it affect the farm at all?

Carol: Well. Farmers were exempt from military service because they supplied food. And that was a big deal. I remember probably one of the biggest things with World War Two was the rationing of things, a lot of things, gas, tires. I remember, things like sugar were rationed.

Faith: Lots of the foods were when you guys had the farms, did a lot of what you grew go to the military?

Carol: No, because most of ours was wheat, of course, some would have gone to the military.

Faith: So the land you grew up on, was there any particular topography that stood out to you? I know that big old sinkhole has become more interesting as of late, but was that there when you were out on the farm?

Carol: No, it was pretty much just a little lower. It was kind of the downhill curve of the land. There was not a hole.

Faith: OK, so we kind of already covered this question, but your family did purchase the land, the farmland in 1887, right?

Carol: Well, they homesteaded and there were certain payments they made to the government, both sides of the family homesteaded.

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Faith: On that land wow. How has your role in the community changed since you were itty bitty?

Carol: Well, of course when I was small, Lexington was a very vibrant community. There were lots of people, lots of families. They did lots of things together, had a church, and of course a school. I went to that grade school all eight years of my grade school. But little by little, it's declined Oh, it would be much less than half of what it used to be as far as numbers of people and families.

Faith: Do you think that it changed when you came to Ashland for high school?

Carol: Well, yes and no. Of course, my parents did not come to Ashland, then. I stayed with an aunt and went to school here, her family had just moved in from Lexington.

Faith: Did your family hire outside help?

Carol: About the only outside help would have been in summer, often Dad had one or two guys that he would hire. Sometimes it would be a neighbor, but I can remember there were always men who would appear in town and different farmers would come in and then hire them.

Faith: Almost like commercial farming of old. And how were they paid when they came out and worked on the farm?

Carol: Oh, just by cash. Just by cash.

Faith: Oh, so as for our current operation, that question is for ranchers mostly, but to what extent is farming now a part of your land? How much are you involved with the what goes on with the farm?

Carol: Well, of course I'm involved very little now. It's all rented. A neighbor from an old Lexington family runs our farm and it works out very well.

Faith: Is any of your land used for livestock?

Carol: It was up until the last year. But it's not much anymore, right now, it's mostly just cropland.

Faith: OK, this question says, "What percentage of income comes from either," so I would assume... It's an interesting question. Do you feel you have a large percentage of income or how much income comes from the farmland that you rent out?

Carol: Now, you're talking about overall income, or are you talking about difference between income on animals and income on crops?

Faith: What percentage of your ground is used for crops versus used for livestock or what percentage of income comes from either?

Carol: Now the income would be almost 100 percent from crops, but it used to be oh, probably maybe third, two thirds, animal to crop.

Faith: How do you think ranching has changed in the last 100 years?

Carol: Well, ranching and farming, in my way of thinking, is almost completely changed because of so many things. I can even remember when my grandfather still used his horses for some things.

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Faith: Now it's all...

Carol: Now it's completely different. When you think about the crops, they always used to keep their own seed for replanting the next fall, and so much of it is hybrid now. All of the gadgets to the add to soil. And again, back in when I was just a kid, you cleaned out the barn for fertilizer and that was about it.

Faith: So you brought up hybridization. Do you think that has been beneficial to farmers and ranchers or more of a hindrance to have the hybridization?

Carol: Well, you would have to buy seed every year, of course. And it's the seed companies who are choosing the pricing and so forth. But the amount of bushelage that is harvested has increased a lot, so it goes both ways.

Faith: Has your fencing changed? When you rent it out, is your fencing for the cattle? Did that ever change?

Carol: Oh, not in any major way. I wouldn't say. I mean, there is a change. It always used to be that fence posts were wood. Tree stumps. And of course, now they do use more metal posts and that sort of thing.

Faith: They're pretty tough. Do you have any memories of disasters or tragedies that ever happened on the farm?

Carol: On our farm? No, not anything major.

Faith: That's good, no anybody getting trampled by a horse or broken bones?

Carol: No, I don't remember anybody ever being seriously injured that way.

Faith: That's pretty lucky. That's good. And you said that there was a school. Was that anywhere close to your farm?

Carol: I believe it would have been about three miles from our house. As I say, it was only about a quarter of a mile from my grandfather's house.

Faith: So how did you get to school?

Carol: Well, there were years, particularly my first years, when they did have a bus and we were picked up and brought home. But then when my brother was in high school, I would go to grandma's and then walk to school.

Faith: So a pretty good mile. How old were you when you walked?

Carol: Well, as I said, it would only be about a quarter of a mile. It was not very far. They could watch me as I walked to school.

Faith: Well, that's good. OK. Looking back, what is the smartest thing you ever did, investing in the farm.

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Carol: The smartest thing? Well, I think so far, probably the smartest thing would be that we have kept the land. We didn't sell when we no longer lived on it. The value has gone up tremendously. When one quarter of land that I remember, my dad, I believe, paid \$100 an acre for and now could possibly be worth \$1,000 an acre.

Faith: Wow. So have you had, people who have neighboring land, have they ever approached you and tried to get you to sell them the land as well?

Carol: We have had a couple ask if we were interested, but we weren't.

Faith: And they were polite about it. Would you change anything about the old farm? Or done anything differently?

Carol: Oh, I don't know that there would be anything particularly that I would do different.

Faith: And the last question is, are you preparing another generation to run your operation?

Carol: Are you interested in being a farmer?

Faith: That's a funny question to ask in this interview right now. I don't know. I mean, I'm definitely interested about learning.

Carol: Farming has changed so much that I don't know. It's a little bit hard to encourage younger people to get involved anymore.

Faith: Like you said, those big corporate people that set up rules and set up prices there.

Carol: And there's government intervention there, too. And we still have the weather to put up with.

Faith: True. Got to gamble with God. Are there any closing thoughts that you'd like to add to this interview?

Carol: No, not particularly, except to say, I have very good memories of growing up on a farm and being a farm girl. It is still there. You can take the gal out of the farm, but you can't take the farm out of the gal.

Faith: Right. This has been Faith Tonne, the Ashland City Library Director Assistant interviewing Mrs. Carol Ruth Vallentine Davis and the date is December 2, 2020.

Continued Conversation:

Carol: My dad said you almost had to have both animals and crops because there were going to be years when one or the other would not come through and then you had to rely on the other. So if the crops failed, he probably still had animals to sell.

Faith: And you said that it was your dad who had about 50 head of cattle?

Carol: Yes, it was my dad. That's what he usually tried to run.

Faith: OK, I just wanted to add that on there and then what did you say about the fruit trees?

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Carol: Well, both sides of my family had fruit trees. I know one of them had apple, peach and cherry trees.

Faith: My goodness.

Carol: And again, they tried to produce enough to feed their families.

Faith: So they didn't really have a huge orchard, it was just mostly to supplement themselves.

Carol: It was not a big orchard, but it would be a number of trees. You know, of course, in many ways that was not really reliable because of the problem with frost in this area.

Faith: And the deer always eating the bark off.

Carol: And if one got frosted, another one would not. It would be a different type. So if the peaches got frosted, maybe the apples would not and they'd produce.

Faith: So how would you... I'm just curious just for me now. But how did you guys get through the winter months, because if you didn't go to town very often, you'd have to store up most of your food, right?

Carol: Yes. But of course, again, it was food we had produced. I can remember Mom did lots of canning. She canned vegetables, particularly tomatoes. We had a cellar, and I can remember when there would be bushels and bushels of potatoes that were down there.

Faith: You guys grew potatoes?

Carol: Oh, yes. And they lasted all winter and they would not freeze down in the cellar, but they were cold enough that they kept quite well. And the canned fruit went down there, too.

Faith: You'd have to be able to keep it pretty dry down there.

Carol: Yes, it was usually dry.