

Interviewer Today is October 4, 2019. We are speaking with Charlie Mosshart, local farmer/rancher.

Charlie, do you know when your family first came to Clark County?

Charlie My mother's family came in the spring of 1909. They came from Missouri.

Interviewer Do you know why they came here?

Charlie Cheap land.

Interviewer What did the land cost then?

Charlie I'm thinking it cost five to ten dollars an acre and that's with a set of improvements on it. They could've stopped in Pratt County, but the land cost 20 to 30 dollars an acre there. They should have stopped.

Interviewer You said 1909. Did they establish a farm that first year?

Charlie They bought a farm that had a house and barn on it.

Interviewer Were they running cattle when they first came?

Charlie They brought some cattle with them. My granddad came with his wife's folks. When they came, my granddad had a milk cow, a pregnant sow, two bred mares and a pregnant wife.

Interviewer Do you know what kind of cattle he ran when he first came?

Charlie I'm gonna say it was probably a dairy cross cow of some kind.

Interviewer But he had a milk cow.

Charlie Does that make you the third generation to to be in Clark County?

Interviewer Yeah.

Interviewer When your family first came, what was their traditional role? Were they farming? Just farming/ranching. Did they become merchants? What did they do?

Charlie No, they were basically farmers. They had some livestock. Horses were draft-type horses. You didn't ride draft horses. If you didn't take the wagon to town, you walked.

Charlie Did he did this because the horses worked so hard?

Charlie No, it's a good way to mess up a good work horse it to ride him. That was my granddad's theory.

Interviewer Okay. By the time you came along, were they riding horses?

Charlie Yeah. He had a horse. I can remember his last team of draft horses. Yeah. After he was here several years, he usually had a horse he could ride.

Interviewer Do you know when they started running cattle?

Charlie They brought cows with them.

Interviewer You're saying milk cows.

Charlie I think his in-laws brought some milk cows, but he probably bought some beef stock after they got here because it was cheaper here than where they come from. Well, they came from 50 miles from Kansas City, so a cow was worth more there than she was in western Kansas.

Interviewer Did they ever run sheep or goats?

Charlie No.

Interviewer Do you know what kind of crops they raised?

Charlie Kaffir corn, is what they called it. It is similar to milo, only different. You know. I think in good conditions it got a lot taller. Then they raised wheat.

Interviewer What was kaffir corn used for?

Charlie Usually for fodder but sometimes it would make grain to where you could harvest the grain.

Interviewer How would you harvest it?

Charlie Cut the top off with a knife.

Interviewer And throw it in a wagon? Or did you shock it?

Charlie Well, you could bind it and shock it and then top the bundles. Some of it was just hand-cut off the stocks with a knife.

Interviewer It sounds like work.

Charlie It would have been. The first year my granddad was here, he plowed 40 acres with a sod plow, and the people that owned it gave him whatever he could raise on it the first year. He planted kaffir corn. He didn't have a planter. He took a half gallon syrup bucket and poked a hole in it. He strung a wire through it and every third round around the field, he would hang this on the back of his plow as it rolled down the furrow. About every foot it would drop down two or three seeds. He would make sure he stepped on the seeds and then the next round, the plow covered it up. That was his first crop.

Interviewer Describe a sod plow.

Charlie Oh, it's a one-bottom walking plow, only it's got a short share on it and it's got long rods come back three or feet to make the sod torn over good.

Interviewer Would it be self-scouring?

Charlie If you took good care of it.

Interviewer Would it have a rolling coulter?

Charlie No.

Interviewer Are there any other stories that you can tell about your family's early experiences?

Charlie Well, you know, back then you paid property taxes on all your livestock and whatever machinery you had. My granddad, they lived 17 miles from Ashland in Clark County. And he done his chores one morning and he walked to Ashland and paid his taxes. Cost him a quarter for a bed that night. Cost him a dime for breakfast the next morning and he walked home. What.

Interviewer What did his taxes cost?

Charlie I've never heard that. I don't know, but part of the house that he stayed in is still here. It's that one over there (points west across Main Street in Ashland).

Interviewer The white one?

Charlie No, the blue one. (Blue house currently owned by Duane and Gina Palmberg, right north of the Baptist Church).

Interviewer Really!

Charlie That house was here in 1890.

Interviewer Thinking about your ground that you farm and run cattle on. Is there any particular topography that stands out? Is it real smooth? Is it hilly? Do you have big canyons?

Charlie Oh, I guess you'd call it rolling ground. Part of part it is kind of steep, part of it is flat. Most of the farm ground has terraces on it.

Interviewer Do you have any running water?

Charlie Occasionally.

Interviewer So do you run rural water or do you have windmills?

Charlie We have windmills. We have no rural water.

Interviewer Has your family's role in this community changed by your generation? Or your son's generation. What's changed about what you do?

Charlie Oh dear.

Interviewer Have you ever held a job as well as farming and ranching?

Charlie Yes, I've had a job.

Interviewer What did you do? And what do you do?

Charlie Well, I was... I had a welding job early on. Then I was an independent trucker for several years, and I mean independent, too. Even today I have some outside income. I pump some oil wells.

Interviewer I seem to remember you helped run a restaurant for a while.

Charlie That was a hobby, had to be a hobby. Didn't make no money.

Interviewer Back to your family. Did you ever hire outside help to help with your farming ranching operations?

Charlie Very rarely.

Interviewer Did you hire custom cutters or did you cut your own wheat?

Charlie Both.

Interviewer When you hired outside help, were they paid cash money, in kind. How did you pay people who helped you?

Charlie What do you mean, would a check count for cash money?

Interviewer Yes.

Charlie OK. They were paid with money.

Interviewer We've heard about folks that paid by giving you half a beef, or were giving you things instead of just money, if that's what they could afford.

Charlie Not really.

Interviewer Okay. Sir, I forgot to ask. When were you born? The year.

Charlie 1947.

Interviewer About your current operation, to what extent is farming part of what you do now?

Charlie I suppose three fourths.

Interviewer Do you raise crops to feed your cattle?

Charlie Yeah, we raise hay.

Interviewer You run wheat pasture?

Charlie Occasionally, when you can get around the joint grass. You can't get it planted in time to get a lot of pasture because of the joint grass.

Interviewer Are you doing no till these days? Are you still traditional farming?

Charlie We do no till on about a third of it.

Interviewer Would you call it no till or minimum till; do you run cattle on that ground?

Charlie Some. We use some chemical in place of tillage, occasionally. I guess you could call it minimum till. Sometimes it seems like it's more than minimum.

Interviewer OK. This is kind of a "tell me what you think". How do you think ranching and how we run cattle has changed in the last hundred years? For instance, do you use a four wheeler instead of a horse now?

Charlie Yeah.

Interviewer Are you a "cake box cowboy"?

Charlie I guess you could say that, yes.

Interviewer Do horses play any part?

Charlie Occasionally.

Interviewer I don't think you ride, so do you have to hire or do you have family come? How do you do that?

Charlie I get down on my knees and beg.

Interviewer Well, surely offering to pay would bring them! You hire your nephew?

Charlie You just threaten them that they're messing with their inheritance.

Interviewer Well, your son doesn't ride horses either, does he? So you have to get your nephew? OK. What is how you handle cattle different than what your grandpa did?

Charlie Oh. Well, my granddad, up until about the time I was born, cattle were driven everywhere they went. They weren't hauled anywhere. You drove them to the stockyards and they got on a train. He usually never had enough cattle. He couldn't afford to make up a carload where he could send them, he had to sell them to a local buyer of some sort.

Interviewer Did he ever drive cattle to Dodge himself.

Interviewer So he sold to a jackpot?

Charlie Well, he sold to a local trader, I guess you'd say. Well, there's a story goes along with that. This should have been in the early thirties when it was really dry.

They sold all their... I think he kept her three milk cows and a bull and they drove everything else to Ashland. That was the closest auction. And it had been dry, this was along in August. They drove their cattle to Ashland and they sold them. And they had to swim the horses across the draws to get home that evening.

They went ahead and they raised some feed had he had lots of feed for his cows and horses.

Interviewer OK. If I ask again how ranching has changed in the last hundred years, do you still work cattle the way your grandpa did?

Charlie No. They didn't work their calves on the cows, it was just... You know, they just manually threw them down and did what they had to do to them. I presume, no bigger operations than they had, if they had to do something to a bigger animal, they would put it on a rope and tie it to a post and go from there.

Interviewer Do you have working pens now?

Charlie Oh yes.

Interviewer When were they were built?

Charlie Oh, what I've got now was built in the last two years! The rest of them burned to the ground.

Interviewer Are your current pens metal or wood?

Charlie Oh yes, mostly metal.

Interviewer That's a big change sir. Is there anything else that you can think of that you know has changed in the last hundred years in the way that you handle your livestock?

Charlie Well, a hundred years ago most animals that were put on feed for slaughter were three-year olds before they were put on feed. That was... You didn't know that, did you?

Interviewer I didn't.

Charlie Yeah and even... When I was a little kid, a lot of the steers were two-year olds when they went on feed. You know, they'd be weighing 10 or 11 hundred pounds then. And the cattle have got... Over the last hundred years cattle have went from big to little to big again.

Interviewer I seem to remember in the early 70s they wanted short-legged marshmallows. I remember that.

Charlie Well, that was nothing like what they had in the 50's. They were really short then.

Interviewer Do you run a specific breed now?

Charlie No.

Interviewer Do you breed your own cattle? Do you run cows?

Charlie Yeah.

Interviewer You do run cow/calf and you don't try to go for any specific breed.

Charlie No.

Interviewer Do you have any family stories of disasters not the fire?

Charlie Well, I told you about my grandpa driving the cattle to Ashland and it rained before they got home. There were several hailstorms where it wiped out a wheat crop after it had headed it out. One of my mother's uncles, in the thirties, he had considerable funds in the Sitka Bank and they caused him to go bankrupt and lose his farm.

Interviewer I didn't know that bank failed.

Charlie Yes. He thought he had \$50,000 in the bank and he woke up one morning and he didn't have nothing. It broke the man's spirit. He was never able to do much again.

Interviewer OK, you have one brother, Sam. Do you farm with Sam or are you completely separate?

Charlie No, we're together and separate too. Most of it's together.

Interviewer When you are thinking about the next generation, how are you trying to prepare your sons to keep farming. Are either of them interested? I mean your son and Sam's. Are they interested in continuing farming/ranching? Your son has a good job. Is he interested in coming back to farming?

Charlie No, he's really not interested. He's not interested. No, he wants to... They want to retain ownership of the property. I'm not sure what they... I guess when I'm dead and gone, it's up to them what they do.

Interviewer Have you tried to teach them what it will take to keep the ground?

Charlie Yeah, they're capable of doing that.

Interviewer Okay. Going back. When you think about taking care of your cattle, what changes have you made in how you feed them and how you doctor them from the time your grandpa was doing it.

Charlie Well, where the feedyard is, I use a tractor to feed with, I don't manually... One of the big things that's changed is the eradication of screw worms.

Interviewer I've only ever seen one screw worm cow in my life. What did it do to cattle when that was a problem?

Charlie During fly time, the screw worms... any place the skin was... it didn't have to be broken, just chapped and the screw worm flies, the flies could lay eggs on that spot and therefore create a maggot that would eat live flesh. They could eat plumb through a cow. Not the first generation of screw worms, but they would hatch and lay eggs and make a fly to lay eggs and they would just keep it infested.

Interviewer And even if it didn't kill her, she didn't gain any weight.

Charlie Yeah.

Interviewer And she'd have trouble keeping a calf.

Charlie Yeah. If you had calves born in fly weather, you had to treat the navels.

Interviewer What did you treat them with?

Charlie I think they called it "Smear 62" or something like that that Franklin Laboratories sold.

Interviewer Was it blue?

Charlie No, it wasn't blue it was just kind of a clear gel, as I recall.

Interviewer How did you deal with the screw worms, if you had a cow that had them?

Charlie You had to put that Smear 62 on it.

Interviewer And it would kill the screw worm in the flesh.

Charlie It would kill the screw worm and you'd keep it applying it and it would keep the flies away to where they wouldn't lay eggs in it and infest it.

Interviewer So you would be constantly having to catch this cow and throwing her or putting her in the chute to doctor her?

Charlie Yea, and you know, a wire cut or getting a horn knocked loose, was a opening for those screw worms.

Interviewer Do you remember about what time, what year, they started being able to doctor screw worms?

Charlie I don't know when that was, it was before my time, they had a treatment for them and it would have been in the early middle 50's when they started releasing sterile male screw worm flies on the Mexican border. And they still continue that program today. They moved that line south somewhere; I think it's Panama now where they release those sterile male flies. That creates a barrier that keeps flies from coming north of that line and multiplying. You get on down into South America and Africa and there are still screw worms.

Interviewer OK.

Charlie You didn't know that?

Interviewer No. It's not something I've had to deal with.

Charlie Occasionally there'll be a tourist from this country that goes to Africa or South America and they'll have an open wound somewhere and they'll get screw worms and they won't realize what they got when they get home and the doctors don't know what they got until they get to digging around and they find this maggot in there eating on them.

Interviewer You'd think that would be horrifically painful.

Charlie It would be.

Interviewer Okay. Are there any other changes that have happened that you know of? Your grandpa had to rope her or tie her to a post. And now, what do you do?

Charlie Well, most people have a chute of some kind. Or you can catch one and mobilize it and do whatever procedure you need to do.

Interviewer If you now have metal working pens, do you have the curved alley? Did you do that?

Charlie I don't have a one at this time; I may someday.

Interviewer Why would you think that was a positive thing to have?

Charlie It depends on how it is set up. Some set ups aren't positive.

Interviewer Why?

Charlie Partly of it is because of bad design and part of it is the people who are trying to use them. Even though they call a cow dumb animal, which they are. There are some people ain't any smarter than a cow.

Interviewer I'm assuming the whole point of this is to keep the cow as calm as possible when you're having to interact with her and she doesn't like it anyway.

Charlie Yeah.

Interviewer When you look back at your farming/ranching operation, what is the smartest thing you ever did? I know. How do you choose just one? But what was something you did that worked?

Charlie Oh boy. I can't come up with any one thing that's any more intelligent than what other people do.

Interviewer How did you come up with intelligent things to do? Were you watching what other people were doing and trying it?

Charlie Sometimes you would watch what other people would do. Sometimes you figure out what works for you. Sometimes it depends on how much blood, sweat and tears you want to invest!

Interviewer Is there something in your operation that if you could go back and change it, you would.

Charlie Yeah, I would have started running sheep a lot sooner and had a lot more of them.

Interviewer Why?

Charlie There's more money in the sheep. There's more work, but there's more money.

Interviewer How did you get started with sheep?

Charlie By accident, my brother had some and he thought I ought to have them and I bought them.

Interviewer Were you raising them for wool or meat?

Charlie Both.

Interviewer I thought the meat sheep didn't produce the good wool.

Charlie They don't. But the sheep that have good wool don't produce a good carcass.

Interviewer Are you still able to sell? Because I thought Dodge shut down their sheep auction.

Charlie They don't have a sheep auction anymore at Dodge City. I think Hutchinson is the closest auction.

Interviewer So you aren't running sheep anymore.

Charlie No.

Interviewer But they actually made money. When did you quit running sheep?

Charlie The Starbuck Fire scorched everything. The facilities, the sheep, everything was gone. I was seventy years old, and I'm not gonna start over.

Interviewer Were you hauling them to Hutch at that time then?

Charlie No, the auction was still in Dodge City, and I was in Dodge at the sheep auction when the Starbuck Fire came along, and those were the highest priced lambs I ever sold in my life.

Interviewer I'm glad you went out with a bang! Is there anything that you would like to tell other people about ranching south of Dodge City that you wish people understood or knew?

Charlie Most people that are still there have a pretty good handle on what they're doing. It's changed quite a bit in the last 30 years.

Interviewer In what way?

Charlie Thirty years ago, probably less than a third of the grass was cow/calf operations. It was stocker feeders. In the last 30 years, that's changed. It's probably 75 or 80 percent cow/calf.

Interviewer Why?

Charlie The stocker deal, the calves get... The weaning weights are bigger and you don't have the opportunity there to put enough weight on them before they go to the feedyard. That's a lot of it.

Interviewer So farming practices really don't have much to do with that. It's more the difference in the type of cattle you're raising.

Charlie That has a lot to do with it.

Interviewer How much longer do you hope to keep farming?

Charlie I suppose as long as I'm physically able and probably two years after that.

Interviewer Is there anything else you would like to have on this tape?

Charlie Mosshart

Charlie Not really. You know most of my family that's been involved in farming, ranching and livestock. Most of them was involved up to within a couple months of their death. They quit because they couldn't get around to see it no more.

Interviewer Do you enjoy it?

Charlie I must.

Interviewer Sir, thank you very much for taking the time to talk with us.