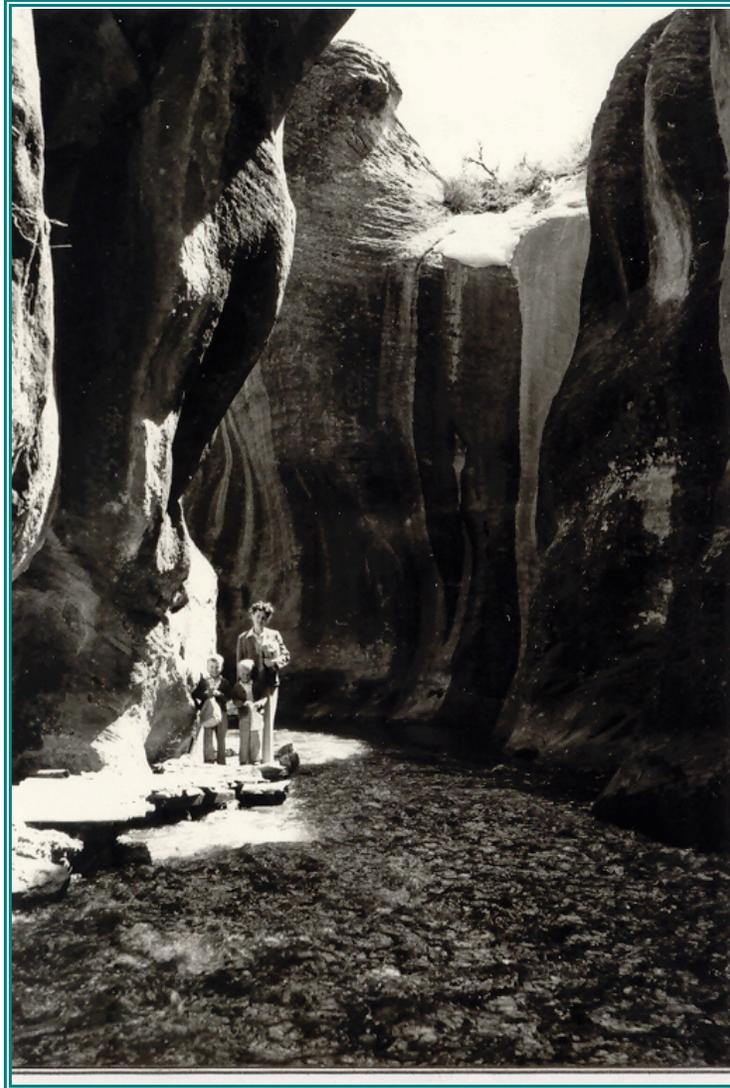


# UPHILL - BOTH WAYS<sup>©</sup>



Volume 7 - Vernal, Utah 1946-51

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January 01, 2002<sup>©</sup>

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## Introduction

Dad is now back from the war, we are now out of the garage in Naples, and in our own house on the 2 acre farm south of Vernal. This volume is a heavily illustrated view of what it was like to be a little kid on that little farm outside of a little town, between the ages of 5 and 9. Remember to think of this era -Naples and Vernal- as the time I lived and grew up on a farm. Real country farm. I am a farm boy, still. Oh, there is a heavy patina of education and so on, but if you rub deeply enough, you find a red neck. I am a farm boy first of all. Understand that and you will understand some of the things about me that are otherwise confusing. I find in my politics in particular that I am a redneck. For example, my favorite photo on Yahoo.com of the aftermath of 9/11 was the image of a forest-green, late model pickup truck with darkened windows. On the front was a single word in bold black, "REVENGE". Yep, I get it. My politics are pretty basic and visceral. My country, right or wrong, thank you, and as they said during the Viet Nam War about the USA, "Love it - or Leave it!"

You will come away from reading this volume with a deeper sense of the quality of my childhood than you would have imagined possible. The internet is what made it possible. Not since Gutenberg's invention of moveable type has there been a millennial shift in technology that provided such profound different possibilities to 'everyman' to access more information. You and I have benefitted enormously. This kind of production would not have been possible 10 years ago.

Let me say more about the images included. [Try and stop me.] I have inserted an enormous number of bits and pieces of 1940's Americana. The purpose of throwing so many images at you is to try to create a broad sense of the social, political, economic and social climate I lived in. Little kids are blasted with a bewildering array of data streams that they generally ignore because they are incomprehensible. But many of these streams flow through these little brains and lay down sediment that is incorporated into the foundation of the world view that little kid is constructing. One of the most obvious data streams is advertising, a critical part of the engine of US prosperity and life. I've thrown in a large number of advertisements from the Internet, always citing the URL in the caption to (1) protect me from a copyright action and (2) allow you to access the sites because there are vast numbers of other relevant images that I simply cannot include in this thing which has grown too large already. Madison Avenue, for better or worse, has been a substantial portion of the framework of our daily American lives as you know from your own childhoods when you were bombarded by ads for "Star Wars" gear, "Care

Bears", candies, toys, etc.

These images provide you a rich visual representation of the things that I describe in words. Pictures are indeed worth a thousand words, more actually, because the total impact of a photo cannot be equaled by a description of the same thing, regardless of the length of the description. As I flip through this volume, just looking at the pictures, I personally feel a sense of nostalgia, of familiarity, a sense of "Ah ha! I'd forgotten that!" I hope that you have a comparable experience.

The range of the images is extravagant and posed a problem about where to insert them. Sometimes they fit neatly into a personal anecdote, other times they are simply inserted at what seems to be an appropriate -or opportune, not the same thing- point. There are images of governmental matters, pictures of the farm and things on it, school report cards and school pictures, ads, movies, songs, toys, movie stars, soaps, foods and so on are intended to provide to you. On the one hand, I could have chosen to just drop individual items randomly throughout the text trying thereby to create the atmosphere in which I lived, where these things did pop up here and there, randomly, disjointedly. On the other hand, I could collect sets of like images and insert them as groups with some commentary about each. Ultimately, I have used both treatments.

Several collections of images do show up because I feared that the random placement of so many images might distract you from the stories of my life, which after all, is the point of this exercise. For example, rather than scatter 18 comic strip characters randomly through the text, I corral them into a single table, colored images of the characters in the right column with brief comments about them in the same row in the left column. In this instance, the use of a table with rows and columns had the added advantage of creating the same visual sense of comic strips created by several frames in a row. Other collection are made just to spare you the disorientation that would come if each image were thrown at you randomly.

Happy reading.

## Vernal, Utah

**W**elcome to Vernal where I did 4 years. On a 2 acre farm. We, i.e. mom, Dickie and I, have just finished the lengthy stay in Grandpa Merrell's garage out in Naples - see the map for locations. Dad is through doing things for WW II and has decided he should come home and live with his wife and children after all. An imminently

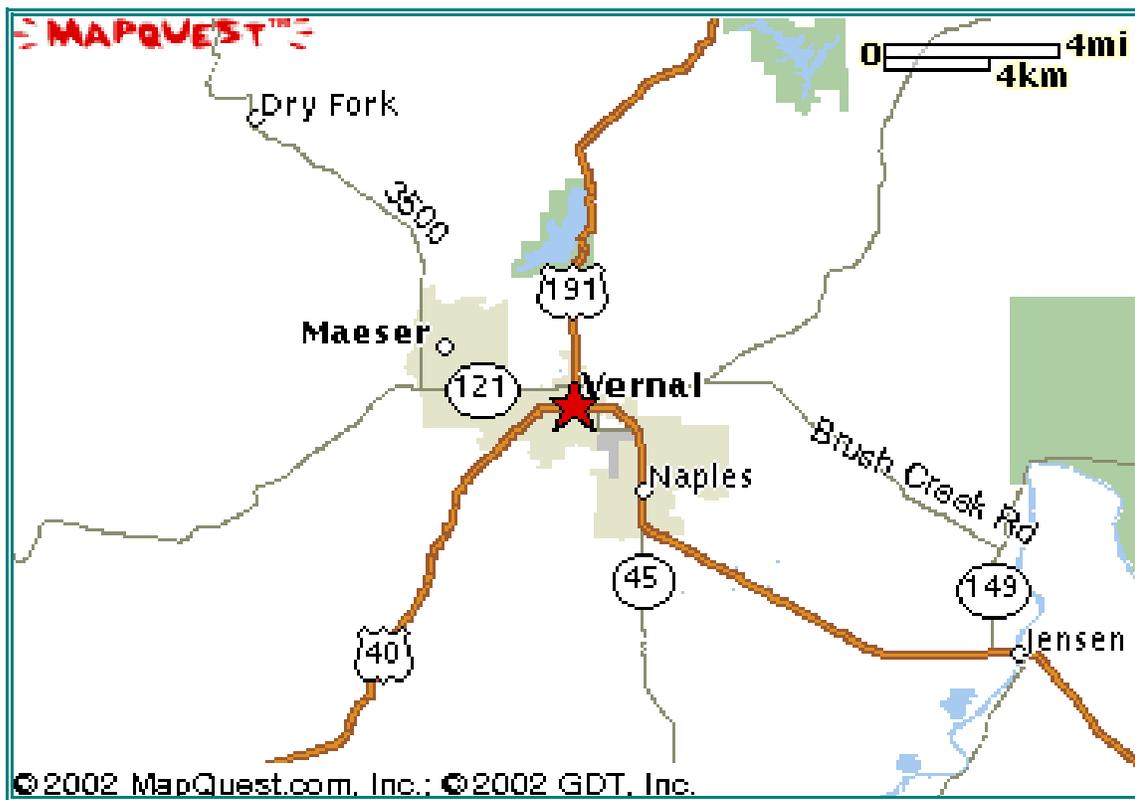


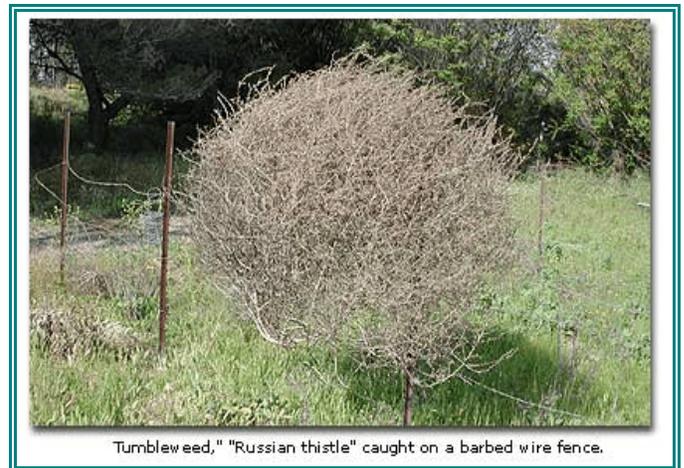
Figure 2 Vernal, Utah

sensible thing for him to do, though there were consequences of his absence and his return that I mentioned in Volume 1 which will be mentioned again below as they arise. Mom said that after dad came home, the four of us stayed several more months in Naples in the 2-room garage. During that time, dad and mom scrounged up enough cash to get a mortgage -probably offering their first-born as security- to buy the old Ashton Place out on the south west side of Vernal, located in the map above near the tip of the bottom left point of the red star in the center of Vernal. Lately mom told me that they actually made a very small down payment. Perhaps it was a consequence of the wartime economy. Dad wasn't a veteran so didn't have access to the GI Bill

that soldiers had, but the whole economy was abnormal as a result of the war effort so perhaps banks were more creative in making loans. Just to get a stream of income from land that other wise yielded nothing.

Vernal could have been the topic of a Willa Cather book like *My Antónia*. I visualized Vernal when I read that book, and subsequently persuaded dad to read it - no mean task- which he did and with comparable results. He loved it. The principal family in the book was Slavic rather than Scandinavian, but the use of ethnic terms like "square heads" was familiar. My dad talked about Swedes as "square heads". For him "swedes" were rutabagas. Vernal is a small farming town with its share of Scandinavians, located and isolated in the Uintah Basin in the northeast corner of the state of Utah, adjacent to Wyoming to the north and Colorado to the east - though I didn't know that at the time. Too busy with local explorations. The Colorado state line is about 40 miles distant from the town.

The basin is hot and dry in the summer and bitterly cold in the winter. Few trees except for the willows and cottonwoods and always along creeks and streams. Sagebrush and rabbit brush, with tumbleweeds abound. This pesky plant was the subject of a song I loved to hear on the scratchy old radio, "Tumbling Tumbleweeds". It was sung by Roy



Tumbleweed, "Russian thistle" caught on a barbed wire fence.

Figure 3

<http://www.desertusa.com/mag01/may/papr/tweed.html>

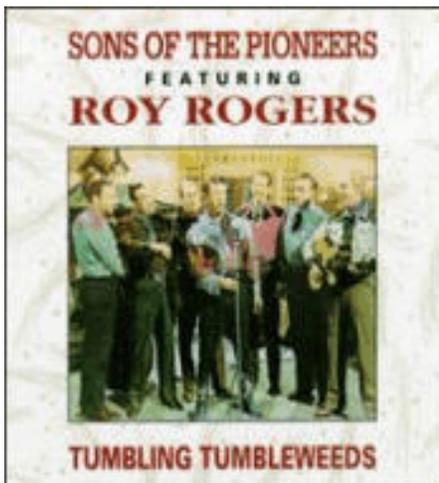


Figure 4

<http://www.desertusa.com/mag01/may/papr/tweed.html>

Rogers and the Sons of the Pioneers, something

else I understood something about. I've ordered the song on a CD for you because you need to listen to it about now to get a flavor for what radio entertainment was like. It's on CD now but not much better quality than I remember. All the songs are familiar and you need to hear them to feel what I felt when I was a little kid there in that dry valley on this small dry farm. "Cool Clear Water" is on this CD as well.

I just received it today. Brings backs the sense of the time. The music that came from the small scratchy

radio -the one I pointed out in Volume 1 in a photo of the baby in the apartment- was much inferior in quality to any modern transistor radio. It was all we had so was appreciated for what it was - free music we could capture from the air at home on the farm. Part of the problem with the quality of the music from the radio was that the records of the era were 78 rpm, with better quality than the original Edison wax recordings but not as good as the 45 rpms that came into vogue in the early '50's and the 33 rpm's that followed. Another problem with the quality of the music from the radio was the quality of the transmissions of the little radio station. The final problem with quality involved the quality of the 3 inch speaker in the radio. It was small and was generations old compared to what you know.

These old radios were built around vacuum tubes, something you've not experienced. You live in the era of transistors and integrated circuits and microelectronics. But these radios relied on enormously large tubes of glass with things inside that performed the necessary tasks to be radios. This is what the inside looked like, the size of a loaf of bread - not the tiny thing you hold in one hand in stick in your shirt pocket.



Figure 5 <http://www.surplussales.com/Audio.html>

The only radio station that we could pull in regularly was the local station that is still alive in Vernal, though greatly improved, was KVEL. Its fare was naturally country-oriented and I remember a few of the songs I heard, one of the most memorable starting with a verse I am still unable to locate:

**"Oh, I won't go huntin' with you Jake, but I'll go chasin' women.  
Now put those hounds back in the pen and quit yur silly grinnin'."**

Haven't a clue who sung it, nor did I comprehend what I was hearing, but it was representative of what we listened to. In our house, listening to the radio was actually a controlled activity that was measured out sort of like a reward by mom. We couldn't just go up and turn it on. We needed permission which was not always forthcoming. The only valid reason I can think of was a valid reason -if it was the reason- the cost of electricity. These tube radios did draw a lot of power.

Speaking of "could pull in regularly", there is a phenomenon that you kids never really were bothered by when you listened to the radio. Because all of your radios

were modern, and were FM. This phenomenon is the diurnal fluctuation of the ionosphere above the earth. I obviously didn't know that technical term in Vernal. But I did know that during the day when I turned the tuning knob from one side across to the other, KVEL came in loud and clear but hardly any other stations could be picked up. In the evening, usually after our bed time, the same exercise would produce many hollow-sounding bits and pieces of mysterious broadcasts. Totally different experience. What happens is that the ionosphere layer above the earth works like a mirror for radio waves, reflecting some of them back to earth. The key to the difference between day and night reception is the fact that the ionosphere moves up or down, depending on the time of day. In turn, radio waves were reflected at a different angle so more were somehow available to our tiny set in the evening. A remarkable variety of sounds, screeches, scrapes, ticks, hums, pumping-sounds, hisses and so on were heard. I don't know today what they resulted from but were entertaining in their own right. A measure of our desperation for entertainment I suppose.

The Uintah valley is bordered on the north by the high Uintah mountains which are unsettled even today because of their ruggedness and difficult access. Deer hunters, hikers and campers go there. The Uintah Basin contains various towns, most of them small. Vernal is the largest and is naturally the county seat. US Highway 40 runs through the town to SLC in the west and Denver in the east, but there never was a railroad into the Basin. As noted in Volume 3, the Uintah Railroad for hauling gilsonite almost made it to Vernal. There were several reasons that the rails were not extended from that dry desert into the center of the Uintah Valley: First, the population was simply too small to merit that expense because the quantity of freight that they required for their daily upkeep was comparatively small, and second, there were no industries or mines that to ship sufficient freight to make the line profitable. So Vernal didn't have a railroad then and doesn't today.

This map places Vernal in a wider region. The largest cities around Vernal, the red star, are Salt Lake City 180 miles to the west and Denver out east. US Highway 40 runs through Vernal and connects SLC and Denver though it isn't shown in this map. The only towns near Vernal are small, Gusher, Ioka, Naples, Rangeley and so on. We were a bunch of farmers isolated and independent out of necessity.

Naples, which is located a few miles southeast of Vernal is described in Volume 3,

where I spent my early childhood in the safe harbor that Jim and Marie -and Dickie and I- returned to when the cash ran out, or when they wanted respite from Alaska. A few miles further east of Naples is the town of Jensen. The name "Jensen" had nothing to do with our family. Remember that dad, his dad, and his grand-dad were sole male survivors and that the grand-dad was the emigrant from Denmark who parked himself down there in the central desert. It puzzled me as a child to hear a town with my last name but no one remarked about it so I kept my question to my self - actually, I don't think I could have framed a question of any kind. I was simply puzzled that my name was on that tiny town of half a dozen buildings that sat on the west bank of the Greenriver at the west end of what seemed to be an enormous bridge. This is the bridge that we crossed over when we went into the mysterious east desert that we rarely traveled. Just on the east end of the bridge a small road turned south along the river. That's where we went to swim, the four of us, the last summer we were together in Vernal..

Note on the first map above the road just west of Jensen that takes off from US 40 and heads north up to the pale green block of real estate. That green block is the Dinosaur National Monument that is bordered on the south by the Greenriver. That road is the one we took many times to go to Split Mountain Gorge, or to go to

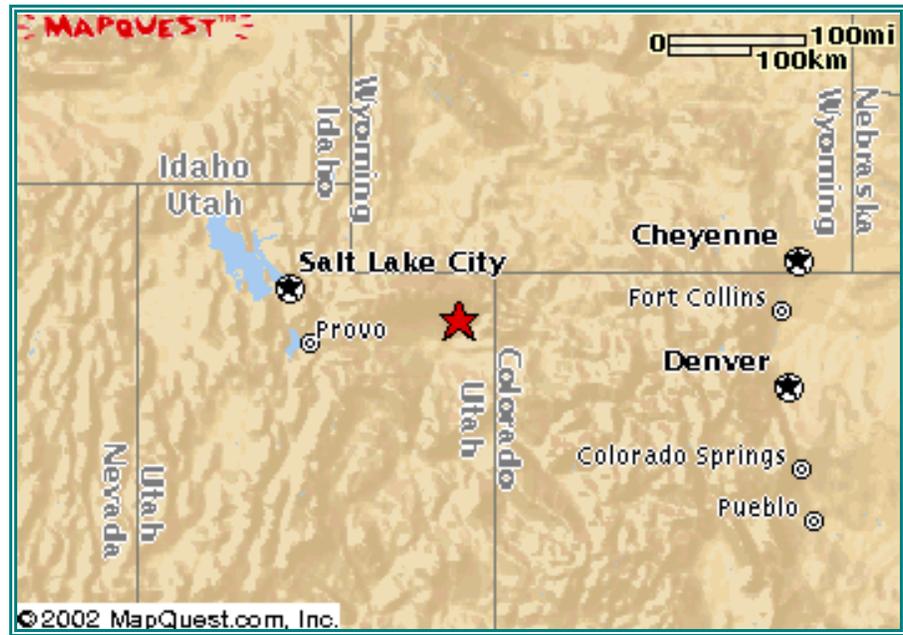


Figure 6 Utah - Colorado line

the quarry where we hunted for sandstone concretions, or to picnic and hike around in the desert. On one of those walks with dad and uncle Ted [Mabel's husband, one of the nicest men I have had the good fortune of knowing in this life, who always treated me courteously and with consideration, a rarity amongst my uncles.] I found a sizeable fragment of remarkable rock. It was a curved-ish slab composed of a variety of minerals, powdery, different than other rocks with fascinating iridescent colors. I proudly took it to school for show-and-tell in third grade to be admired by my friends because I had personally found it out there in the desert. The other point about the road to the Quarry is that the road to the Sunshine Ranch of Volume One takes off to the west a few miles north of Jensen. I can't tell exactly in Figure 2 where the turn off was. I do know that it was short time after we turned north on the road to the Quarry. We then turned left again -west- to get to the Sunshine which was another short time down the road. I suppose the Sunshine Ranch doesn't exist any more.

Out there in the east desert during a hike, perhaps deer or rabbit hunting, dad and Uncle Ted found a pair of Ute metates [grind stones] that were sitting upside down on a narrow promontory. Just looked to the inexperienced eye like a pair of rough rocks. They knew, however, turned them over and saw that they were corn grinders. Indians in that region at least left them in place for use during the next year when the tribe returned during its annual circuit through the desert. The stones were too heavy to transport on foot or horseback. The abundant local sandstone in each camp location provided raw material to make new ones at each location. I have both of the metates today, one of them sitting on the front porch in Portland. Neighbor kids considered stealing it here shortly after we moved in. I could tell one morning that it had been moved far from its original position. Not something a cat or dog would do. Its weight probably discouraged them. They certainly had no clue what it was and they couldn't fence it for drug money. Tsk tsk such a time I live in.



Figure 7 <http://rocknfish.com/Metate2.jpg>

The blue streak in Figure 1 that runs north and south through Jensen is the Greenriver. It bounds the southern edge of the Dinosaur National Monument which turns out to be classic example of a government boondoggle. Apparently, when I was a kid there in Vernal, I lived in a state of grace. For the simple undeserved reason that the Quarry which is filled with dinosaur bones was also the headquarters of the governmental entity named "Dinosaur National Monument". Novel idea, isn't it. Have the center of attraction also be in the center of the park. It was appropriate. Don't need no college degree to figure that one out. So in the 'olden days', the Dinosaur National Monument headquarters was the quarry itself, located just north of Jensen and east of Vernal. In Utah. Note - "Utah".

Sometime in the 1960's as near as I recall, the senators from Utah and Colorado, mental giants both, got into a horse trade. Colorado would give something desirable to Utah if in return the State of Utah would sort of give up the 'ownership' of the "headquarters" of the Dinosaur National Monument to State of Colorado. We won't tell the locals about that for a while, you know. Obviously, these rocket scientists couldn't move the quarry over the river into Colorado, though I don't doubt they mutually considered it for a while. Probably even did a test run of the idea with the Army Corps of Engineers. In any event, Utah's senator eventually stupidly agreed to the trade. It may not have been stupid economically to agree to the trade, but it sure was stupid otherwise to agree to move the monument "headquarters" - a term that suddenly became an abstract concept divorced from the reality that the bones in a cliff with a museum built over it WAS the monument. The bones should have been HQ. The miracle of semantics. As miraculous as the science of statistics.

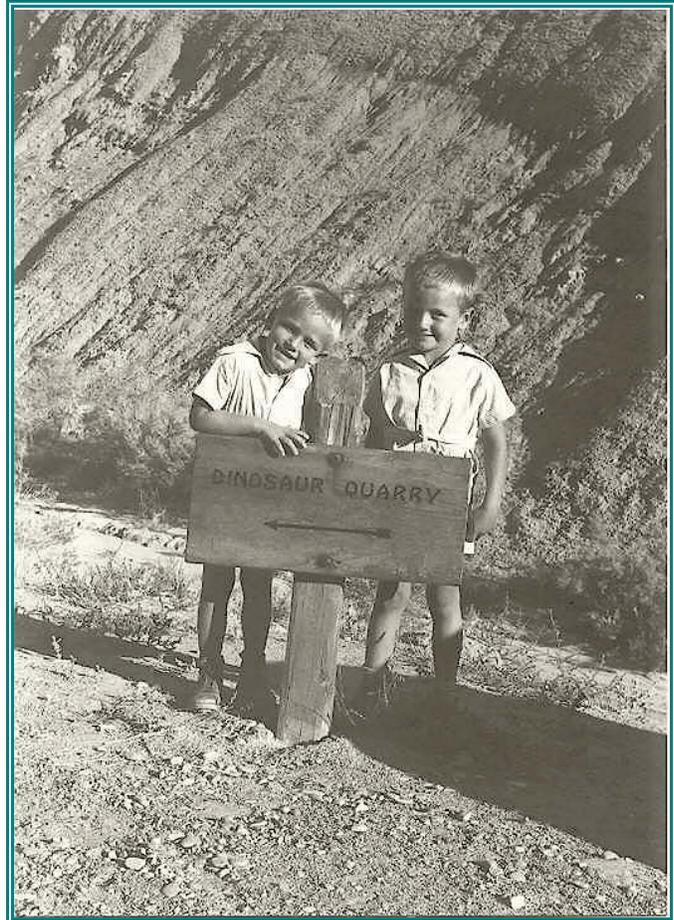


Figure 8 Dickie and Ronnie in Dinosaur Quarry

So. Today if you drive in either direction on US 40 hunting for the Dinosaur National Monument Headquarters, and follow the signs on the road, you will end up in the state of Colorado some 30 miles east of the actual quarry. At which time a benign mindless automaton looking remarkably like a human being in a uniform will tell you, "Oh, to see the quarry itself, you need to follow US 40 to blah blah..." as if it was entirely rational for the focus of the park, the thing it is named for, to be located in another state. And as if it was your own fault for being so stupid as to drive all the way over into Colorado when everyone and god knows the quarry is over there in the western sagebrush, overrun with rabbits about as smart as these park rangers. I just love bureaucrats. I am as bigoted as they are stupid. Grrr....

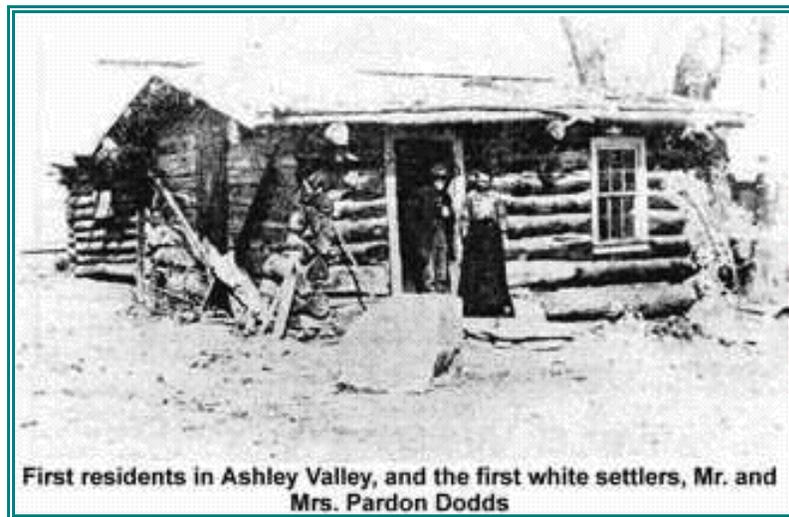
## History of Vernal

**T**he City of Vernal has a website with this snapshot of itself:

"The location of the City of Vernal was first looked upon in 1776 by The Escalante Expedition. The Expedition was composed of ten men looking for a more direct route to Monterey, California. There is no further record of any white man visiting the area until 1825 when General Ashley came through leaving his name on both Creek and Valley.

In 1876 Pardon Dodds and family built the first known cabin in Ashley Valley.

The Ashley Valley had several names before the present name of City, such as The Bench, because of its location away from the creek and lack of trees. The first people believed to live in the actual Vernal area were the Hatch family, during which time the city was called Jericho, then Hatchtown, then Ashley Center, and finally Vernal. "



<<http://www.vernalcity.org/about/history.html>>

Mrs. Dodd's log cabin, built the year before grandpa Merrell was born further

north in Paradise in Cache County, looked much like the one on our farm. With two differences: ours was larger and it was raised off the ground. It had a porch two steps above ground-level. Mrs. Dodd's cabin was likely still standing when grandpa's oldest child Harold was born in 1903 in Jensen. FYI, he's still alive in 2002 so you better watch out or you'll live to be 100. His eyesight is bad but he goes fishing every week and walks down the road to see his brothers. I wasn't told this but imagine that the log cabin on the Ashton place was the original home for the homesteaders, and that it vacated when the "new" house -the one I lived in- was constructed. Henceforth, the log cabin was relegated to the status of grainery and general storehouse.

### Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid

**H**ere's a better photo of Butch Cassidy and his Gang who hung out in the

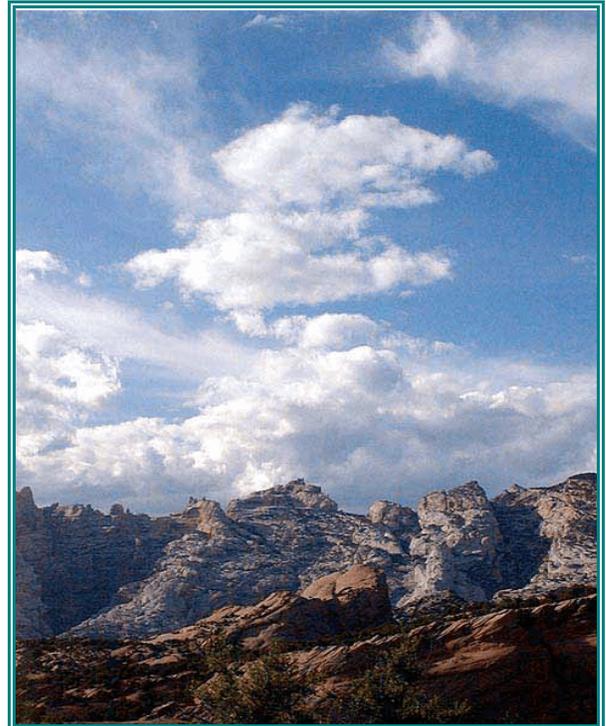


**Figure 10 Butch Cassidy and his Gang**

<http://www.hvra.com.ar/hvra/jpgs/bc+sk-04.jpg>

Vernal region. Grandpa Merrell said he personally saw the man and that he knew where Butch hung out. He claimed that Butch and his gang liked to hole up in one of the box canyons on the south side of Split Mountain where you all spent an afternoon in the "Split Mountain Gorge". A box canyon is a canyon that is only open on one end, a sort of cul de sac cut into a mountain. The advantage of a box canyon as a hideout for persons suitably outfitted with weapons and substantial supplies of food and water for themselves and their livestock is that it's pretty hard to get behind them and blast them out. And to go in after someone holed up in a box canyon through the front door is sort of like suicidal walk into an ambush. Butch and Co. Easily guarded the entrance and made it nearly impossible for anyone to get at him from above. Grandpa said that there was an old lady who lived alone in an adjacent box canyon.

You kids actually saw the canyon -one of those cuts in the mountain in the background of this image- from a distance the night we camped overnight above the Green River in the dry relentless wind with grandma and grandpa Jensen in their motor home when they took us out to see the "Jensen Quarry". You slept that night about where the photographer of this image was standing when he took this picture. There were actually three of these box canyons on the south side of the mountain.



**Figure 11 Split Mountain**  
<http://www.nps.gov/dino/slides/1.jpg>

Figure 12 is a wider view of the area. The canyon Butch holed up in is located in the right third of the photo, where you see three parallel splits in the mountain. This appears to have been taken on US 40 on the way out of Naples toward Jensen. The view is actually not a great deal different than the one we had looking east from the Ashton place. This was taken closer to the mountains than we were but the view is familiar. The view of Split Mountain from our farm was across green empty fields like this.

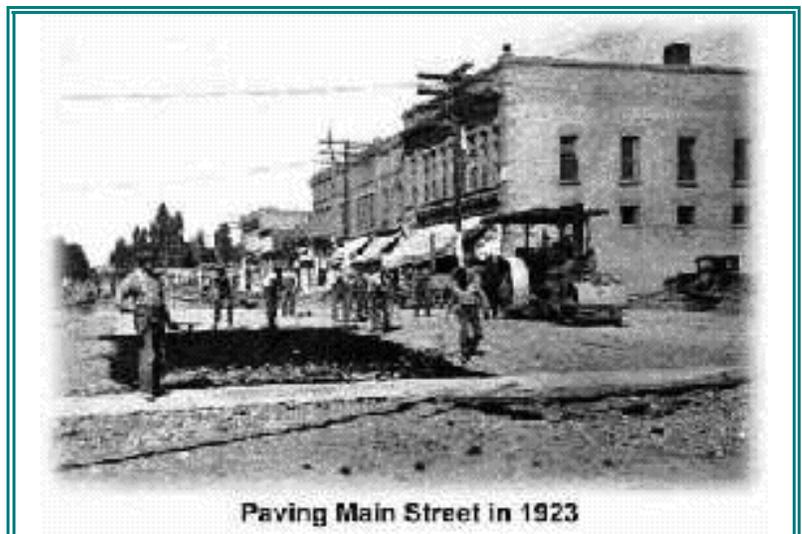


**Figure 12 Split mountain from the west**  
<http://www.soarwest.com/images/fs4/tfvac898vernal2.jpg>

## Mainstreet Vernal

Vernal's Mainstreet runs nearly east and west on the compass and was eventually incorporated into US 40. This 1924 photo shows the exact "center" of town on Main Street. The store on the right behind the steam roller became J. C. Pennys where mom worked for a short time before we went to Seward. The Vernal web site says of this photo:

*"In 1898 the Vernal City Council decided to experiment*



**Figure 13** <http://www.vernalcity.org/>

*with asphalt. In August, twenty tons were placed on Vernal Streets and sidewalks for a cost of \$125. By 1924 an eighteen foot wide strip of asphalt was laid eight blocks from the center of town to Fifth West and then south to the Tabernacle”.*

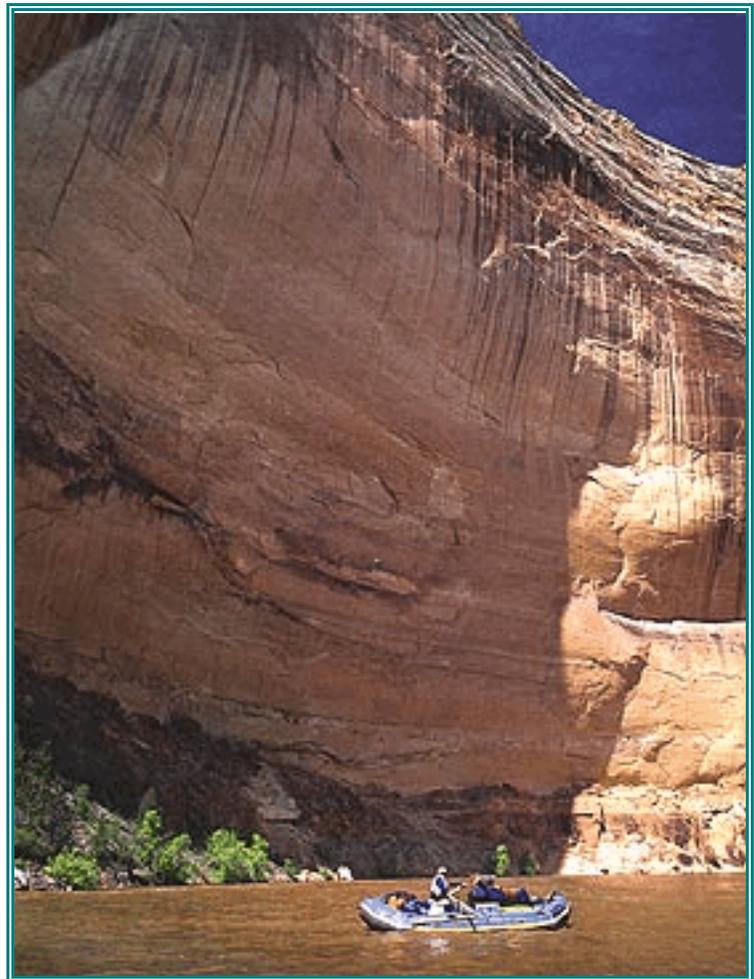
The Tabernacle referred to here shows up below somewhere as an orangish sandstone building with a cupola. You all visited it on that trip with Gma and Gpa Jensen in about 1984. If you can unearth the maroon photo album from 5111, you will find a photo of yourself on the steps of the Tabernacle. When I came along 19 years after the above photo was taken, the streets were paved in both directions.

## Yampa and Greenriver River Runners

One of the prominent families in the region was the Hatch family that settled the area early.

Seems that original settlers always have a leg up on those who follow, what with grabbing and holding the prime land and resources for parsimonious handling and extravagant sale prices later. The Hatches were prominent in my era and owned among other things oil-related businesses. Uncle Grant was involved in another of their business, one of the ancestors of what had blossomed into a major form of recreation in the west.

The Hatches took advantage of some of the remarkable local scenery. This image shows a quiet stretch of the Yampa in a small modern float boat, with spectacular overhanging sandstone cliffs. You all saw this dramatic type of canyon on that trip with Gma and Gpa when we visited Echo Canyon by the Dinosaur Quarry. The



**Figure 14 Rafting on the Yampa**

[http://www.riverjourneys.com/resources/utyampraft\\_lg.jpg](http://www.riverjourneys.com/resources/utyampraft_lg.jpg)

5111 maroon photo album has a lot of photos of you kids there - one of Tom with his body straight leaning impossibly sideways because he had worked his feet into the mud. Also some shots of the marvelous mud swallow nests. Spectacular real estate that rapids only emphasized apparently, though I don't know how they had time to look at it.

Hatch's first step to develop this rafting business was to purchase a few of the enormous bridge pontoons after WW II had ended. Remember that I moved to the Ashton Place only a year after WW II ended. There was an enormous amount of "war surplus " of every kind being unloaded across the county. Grandpa Jensen loved it. He would go to the auctions and spend hours hunting for whatever was there that he needed that he didn't know he needed. It influenced many enterprises for a long time. Who would have guessed that the Army Corps of Engineers materiel would hatch -haha- a new business in Vernal as in river running.

These pontoons were large, long, and narrow. They were outfitted by Hatch to run rapids on the Green

River, the Yampa and the Colorado. This image from the Korean War gives you a sense of the size and strength of these floats. I saw them and was mystified at their size. Tanks were driven across the bridge in this photo an hour after it was finished so they certainly stood up the task of floating a few people and a couple hundred pounds of gear down a river. After the rafts were outfitted for river running, people could



Figure 15 <http://www.army.mil/cmh-pg/photos/Korea/kwengln/42-5-118.jpg>

buy an excursion through the Yampa or the Green River. Grant signed up to be trained as one of the guides. I don't remember any particular story, but I was impressed and got goose bumps when he described his near-misses roaring down the river, crashing through enormous rapids in narrow canyons with vertical stone walls. I was simultaneous fascinated and horrified.

Anyway, Vernal is a little town out there in the eastern Utah desert in the

Uintah Basin. The town map looks like this map today in Figure 15:

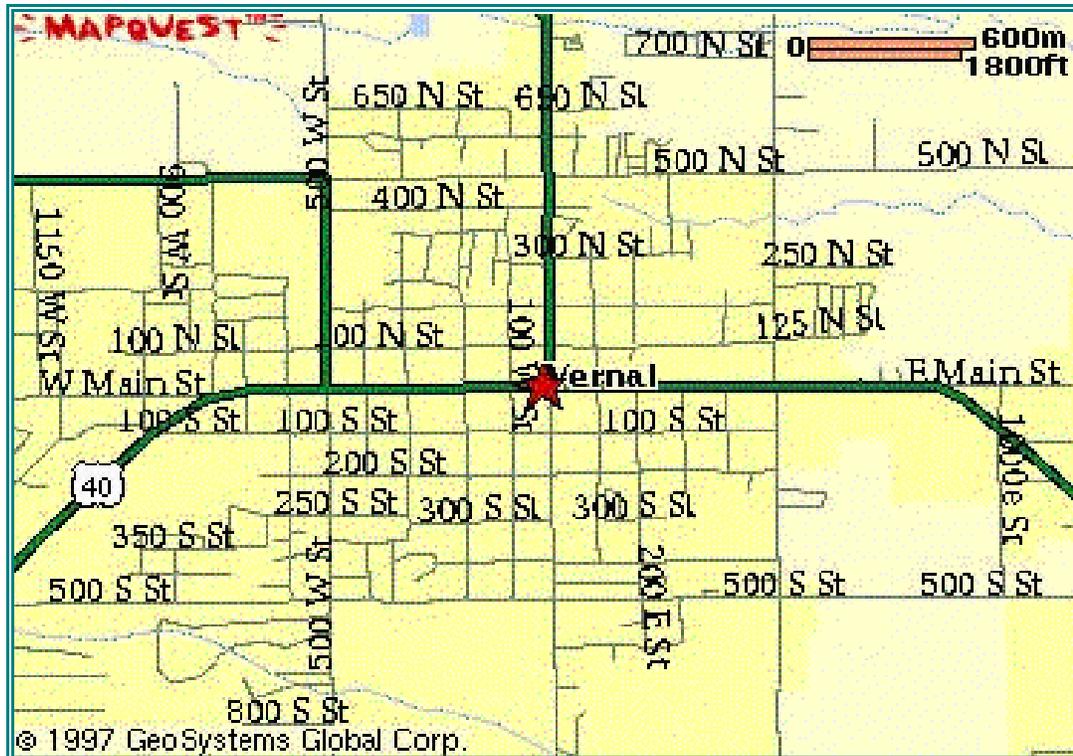


Figure 16 Map of Vernal, Utah <http://www.vernalcity.org/>

Central Elementary School is probably situated about 300 S. St. and the north-south street in the center as near as I can figure from this map and a 60 year old brain. Only the former is reliable. The Ashley Valley Market was probably located about 100 S. St. and 500 W. St. We used to walk there with mom to buy groceries before we got a car, a jaunt of about half a mile. Each way. The Ashton Place was probably around 800 S St. 500W.

### The Ashton Place

As I said above, I don't know how mom and dad raised enough money to put a down payment down on this two acre farm that was out on the west side of Vernal. They were so poor. Did they actually manage to save money from his Honolulu days, or did he work and save money after he returned? The latter is possible since we lived with grandpa and grandma so there was no rent, plus we probably ate for free. She says that she didn't work to earn money so I guess she didn't, but I harbor the suspicion that she did. Don't ask me to defend that suspicion because I can not. In any event, mom could save a penny forever if it suited her purposes so she is the one who probably made it happen. Dad is the lousiest

businessman I ever met.

The worst example of his poor businessmanship involved a 38 acre piece of desert land that he owned outside of Roosevelt. Somehow in 1953 -I specifically remember the event- he got on the trail of a 38 acre piece of land a few miles east of the town. This land was owned by an absentee landlord apparently, who didn't care about the land. I say that because I specifically remember that dad bought the land for \$2.00 an acre which represented the back taxes. Since the government doesn't pay taxes on the land it owns, then this land was owned by someone who should pay taxes. Who didn't. So dad anted up \$76.00 in 1953 -while we were frantically exploring the desert, hungry for dryness after the grey rainyness of sea-bound Seward- and got title to 38 acres of dry desert land. I don't remember the story why 2 acres were missing from this plot but it was interesting.

Whatever, that was a substantial sum of money but let's put the sum into context: in a few weeks, this same man blew basically our entire grub stake in Seattle on our way back to Seward over the grueling Alcan Highway. No sense, no perspective. Marie loved the man apparently and enabled his dysfunction. Dad spent \$600 lousy dollars out of his wallet, basically all of our remaining money, on picture frame molding that he "needed" in Seward to frame the pictures he was painting. We had hardly any money left over - except for gas. We were allowed to eat one watermelon jam sandwich every 6 hours for the last 3 days until we got back into Seward. I was famished by the time we arrived home. The man was incompetent as a businessman. But back to the story.....

This 38 acres contained two lovely small plateaus on it, the larger one being named Mobley Peak - I'm not sure of the spelling but remember its name and clearly remember the route to go out on it several times. I was proud. We owned this large piece of land. My dad bought it! The most interesting attribute of this piece of land was a kind of grass that had already gone to seed when we arrived. What was interesting about it was the fact that the 6 inch stems were hollow and inflated like long narrow balloons, pointed at each end. That was new to me. We tramped around this land several times before we returned. He drug some friends or relatives out there with him to look it over and give him their approval, which provided us the chance to explore the dang place. And we did with enthusiasm. So odd to find that the dry desolate parched desert could be a place of interest. It was, however, and Seward after two years had become boring with its lush vegetation and marvelous ocean. We loved this exploration in sage brush and rabbit brush and sand and sand stone and lizards and rabbits out there.

What dad finally did with this piece of land years was driven by his cupidity -

look it up- and his lack of impulse control. He is famous for both traits in my private book. The time came in the 1970's when he decided he wanted to take his Indian paintings on a road trip to show them off and earn thousands of dollars. He had decided that he was about to become an important Indian portraitist. [He had extravagantly invested \$600 in a self-serving, inaccurate brochure based in part on his imagined contribution that I was going to make from anthropology to his creations.] The only way he could take this trip was to get a large, i.e. LARGE, van that he would outfit with elaborate custom-built storage racks. So what did he do? He hunted in the classified ads until he found some poor schmuck who had a large used Dodge van. He contacted the man and arranged to go out and drive the dang thing. He concluded scientifically that this was precisely the van he needed for his enterprise of finally becoming famous. Fatuousity to the max. [Look it up - "fatuous".]. And what did he use for specie? [Look it up} This 38 acres of land.

THIRTY - EIGHT ACRES OF LAND for a damn beat up old green slightly scratched Dodge van. The man was astounded. He protested, "Are you sure you want to do this?" I was astounded. I am still astounded. I would have taken out a \$6,000 loan to buy the land from him just to preserve it for you kids. What in the name of Jesus would lead a man to trade 38 acres of land for an old van? What?! Absolutely no money sense. So I conclude that it was Mom who made the Ashton Place Purchase happen. He was constitutionally unable to do that. They got a mortgage from the Bank of Vernal, the same bank that was willing to give her a job in 1945 if she divorced dad. If you forget that detail, go back to Volume 3 and read some more. It's there. Grandpa and Grandma Merrell made the contact and arranged for a Teller's job for mom if she needed to support herself after divorcing James Alvin. He loved gma Merrell, but she wasn't that sure of him obviously.

Interestingly, Mom is totally unfamiliar with this story today. I probed her memory various ways and she has absolutely no remembrance of the land or the reason for the trade. Which surprises me. I have crystal clear memories of trips out to the land in 1953, of the Uranium boom that drove people in that era to buy up worthless land, and of visiting it with dad. Perhaps she never made those trips with us, so has no factual memory to dredge up. Nor does she remember anything about the trials of the trip with this forsaken green Dodge van down through the south when a front rotor failed and they were held up in New Orleans -or some such city- for days while the repair shop located a replacement somewhere in the US. She remembers none of it. Is that the result of her stroke? Or is it the result of the need to protect her psyche from one more painful remembrance of the stupidity of you know who. I sure don't know. But whatever, it was stupid, typical James A

Jensen business sense. If you do those same stupid things, you can rationalize them by saying that you inherited his business ability.

In the city map, there are many roads that weren't there when I was a kid. Progress and all that. Mom and dad got a mortgage from the Bank of Vernal. She said the price of the two-acre place was on the order of 5 thousand dollars and that the bank did not require a large down payment like is needed today - which is only 10% today. That's probably why they could arrange the mortgage after dad had been back for only a few months. The farm was probably the residue of a homestead created by a hardy pioneer willing to wager his strength and determination against a climate unwilling to grant much of a harvest. 14 inches of precipitation isn't much water to raise crops and the winters were bitterly cold.

At the time we lived on it, the Ashton Place sat in miles and miles of pastures or farm lands, nearly isolated. The only trees on our side of the road other than the cottonwoods along the ditches on our own property were at least a quarter of a mile north or south of us. There were trees around the Watkins' place that was directly across the road from us, and around the house just south of them. We didn't know the family in that house which was strange under the circumstances. It was odd to not know who lived across the street, sort of spooky to a little kid. I don't recall seeing people moving about the place though I must have seen them sometime while I played in the big yard. To the north of us, there were no houses at all until you got into town which would have been about 200 S. St. Several hundred yards north of our house was the gulch lined with Buffalo Berry trees, willows and marsh grasses clinging to the narrow stream of water. That's where you found bull frogs, not in the marsh or irrigation canal and ditches. Between that creek and our place on our side of the road, there were just fields. Across the road on the north side of John Watkins' place there was the small Conoco tank farm and on the north side of the tank farm was a marsh that extended about half way up to the creek - "crik" as it was called in the local dialect.

To the south of our house on our side of the road, there were pastures for most of a mile all the way down to the Robert's home, a large two-story house. The field south of our place was farmed by Mr. Johnson who used horse-drawn implements the first year or so that we lived there, a hay rake and sickle bar pulled by wet horse-smelling horses that stood patiently at the end of a row in the hot sun occasionally tossing their heads and snorting. While he sat, he pulled his handkerchief from his hind pocket, shook out the bits of hay, and swiped at the sweat pouring down his neck from under his straw hat before turning the patient horse and going back the way they came. We couldn't see the Roberts' house to the

south through the trees that were about half way between our houses because there was a large silage pit about the center with tallish sides and some trees. The Roberts family lived so far away that we didn't have much contact with those kids even though there were several about our age. They are the ones who had a fawn that became a pest at our place.

Across the road about a quarter mile south of our place was the Cooper Dairy. Two Cooper brothers owned and ran this place, and lived on the property with their families in two separate houses. I don't remember the names of any of the kids but they were the only ones close enough for us to see on a regular basis. It is interesting to look back today and see how geography itself dictated who our 'friends' were and the frequency of our contact with them. We spent a lot of time alone, being too little to have permission to wander freely on the road. We managed to get into a world of trouble on one of our excursions to one of the Cooper houses. I'll tell you about it later. It has to do with powdered sugar and graham crackers and mom.

We liked to visit the tiny tank farm across the road. It had 3 tanks and a paved lot for a huge tanker with hissing air brakes to park on while it emptied its load into the tanks. Later, a smaller tank truck came to the yard to fill up for local deliveries. We'd go over to the yard out of curiosity when the driver was filling this truck because there wasn't much else going on in the neighborhood. Indeed, the term "neighborhood" is too fancy for the farm country we were sitting in. This visit to the tank farm was the highlight of the week. This truck had a heavy chain hanging from the back of the frame. It dragged on the ground to bleed off static electricity, the theory being that this prevented explosions. I suspect today that that was really an advertising gimmick to get people to buy the chain. Tankers today don't have them.

We got to know the driver whose name was "Duane", as I recall, a nice man that we saw frequently in the summer. He looked like Uncle Grant, reddish wavy hair, and wore a green and black striped short-sleeved Conoco shirt with the logo on his shirt pocket. He was probably bored, too, so talked to us whenever we were allowed to wander over. You always got permission to cross the road, on the pain of something awful. No kidding. It was. Just try it one day and see what happens. You won't make that mistake again I can guarantee you. Duane always told us to be careful to not breathe the gas fumes because they would make us sick. I didn't understand that but believed him - just because he was bigger than me, an "adult". I did like the smell of gas and he could probably see that, hence the warnings. The tanker was built in compartments from front to back, probably three of them. On the top of the tank were the individual lids for each compartment. Duane would put on his leather gloves, climb up on top of the tanker, open one of the lids, swing the fill pipe from the

storage tank over it and turn on the flow of gas. While he stood up there, he'd talk to us down on the ground. We could see the waves of gas fumes flowing out of the tank, and could stand in it to smell it.

On the next page is a map I drew a long time ago, like about 35 years ago, clear back in April 1966 while I was in the Amazon basin trying to figure out what I was about. Still don't know - don't you get too anxious to understand this life, please. Might disappoint yourself. I started writing a personal history -as I had started to do several times before- and managed to get 62 pages written before moving on to something else. The small, yellow, red and black plaid journal is in my things for your use later. The urge to write was partially a response to the boredom and loneliness of being out there without friends or family, speaking a foreign language, buried in an indifferent at best and hostile at worst culture that didn't have room for foreigners or a red-headed woman. They thought she was my sister and coveted her. The experience is a remarkable one, but like all adventures, it was pretty crappy while it was going on. I have had an urge my whole life to "tell my story" which now is pouring out on you. Thanks to Tom again for providing the setting in which the seed could grow. This is a great soporific I expect.

In any event, I managed to write regularly for a month or so and I'm surprised today at some of the things I said. Some things remind me of facts I had forgotten, but things that surprise me are ones that simply can not be true. That obviously surprises me because it would seem to a reasonable person that what was set down 35 years ago would be more accurate than what I remember today. But that is not so in several instances. I have found solid evidence to the contrary in some cases, or I simply know that I was wrong at the time. Why, I wonder, was I so far off base in memories at that time? Why did I write things that I know today are incorrect? I don't recall that I was stressed. I can't guess what was going on but it makes me very nervous about pronouncing that what I "clearly" remember today as being true as being the final word. Who knows. This is another example of the sort of thing I talked about earlier, the slipperiness of "Truth". I am no less committed to speaking truth today than I was back then, yet my memories from the two eras are contradictory. There is no way to resolve the differences. Fortunately, the discrepancies don't alter the general outline or texture of the experience of me.

### My Maps of the Ashton Place

As you are reading this volume about things I did on the farm, remember to refer back to this map of the property. Virtually everything you see in that diagram is

discussed in some manner below. It was the universe I lived in at that time, the one I expanded inside of and explored, where I tested limits and wondered about things I found. I obviously went other places but this little farm was where my consciousness really developed and flowered, such a rich

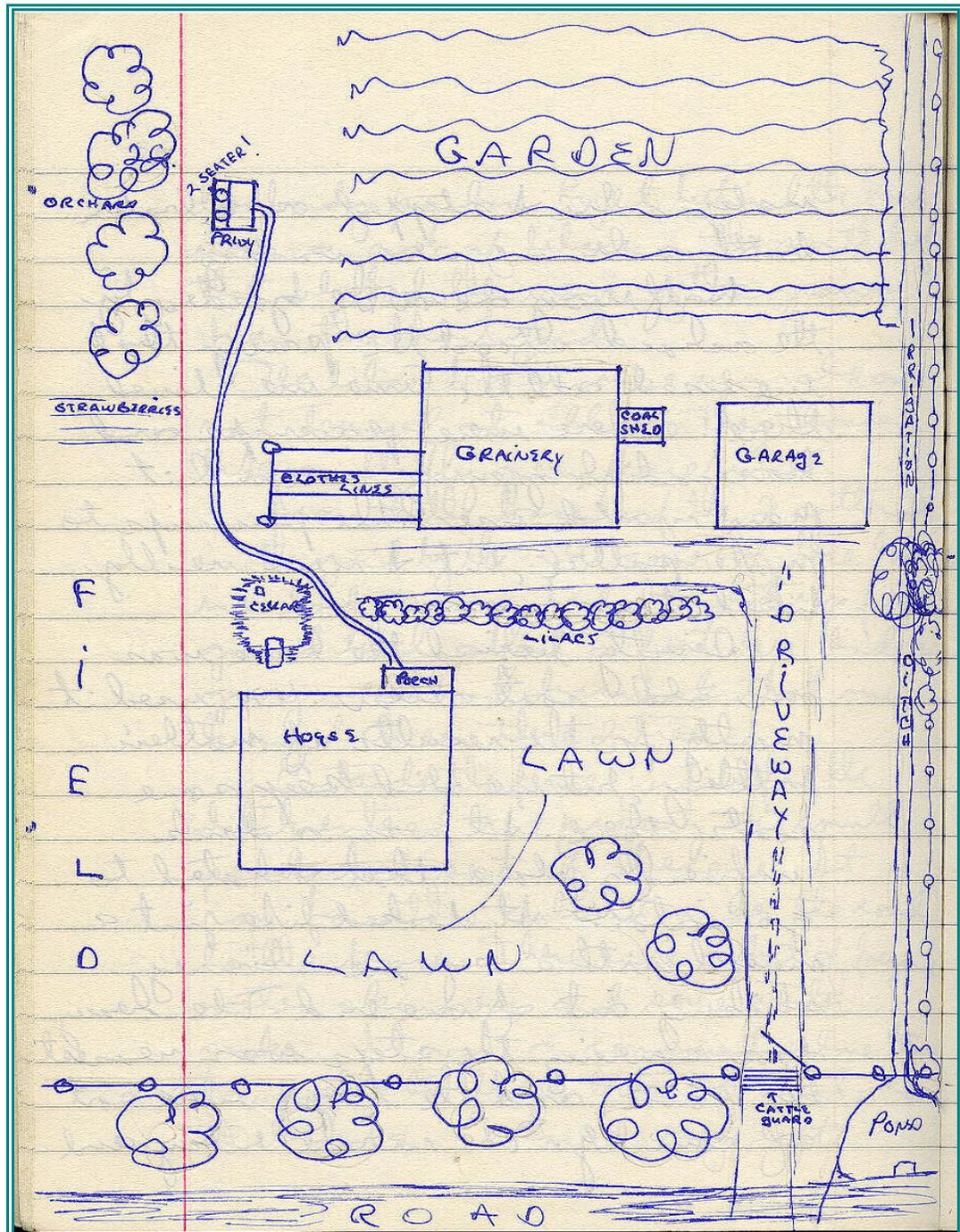


Figure 17 Map of Front quarter of Ashton Place

little place to become a human being with all of the freedom that a small farm affords, with a wealth of things to see and explore and experience. A small stream in the form of irrigation canal across the road and a ditch on the south [right side of map], wildlife in the form of rabbits, skunks, frogs, snakes and insects, a variety of trees, fields, berries, and buildings. Life in a city or town does not offer the kinds of odd opportunities that are part of a farm life, some of which were sort of mystical.

Why, for example, was there a collection of half a dozen horse and cow skeletons lying on the other side of the barb wire fence at the east end of our property? They were so old that the flesh was long gone and the bones didn't smell. They were bleached white by years in the weather and sun. The surface of the bones were porous, indicated how long they had laid out exposed. Skulls of horses and cows with enormous teeth offered the challenge of extracting them. Different kinds of teeth. Probably affected Dickie's view of his place in the universe? The difficult questions were: why had these animals died? And why were the skeletons thrown right there, just over the fence, in a pile? That sort of mystery won't happen in town.

## House

**B**y today's standards, our house was not large. This floor plan was also drawn

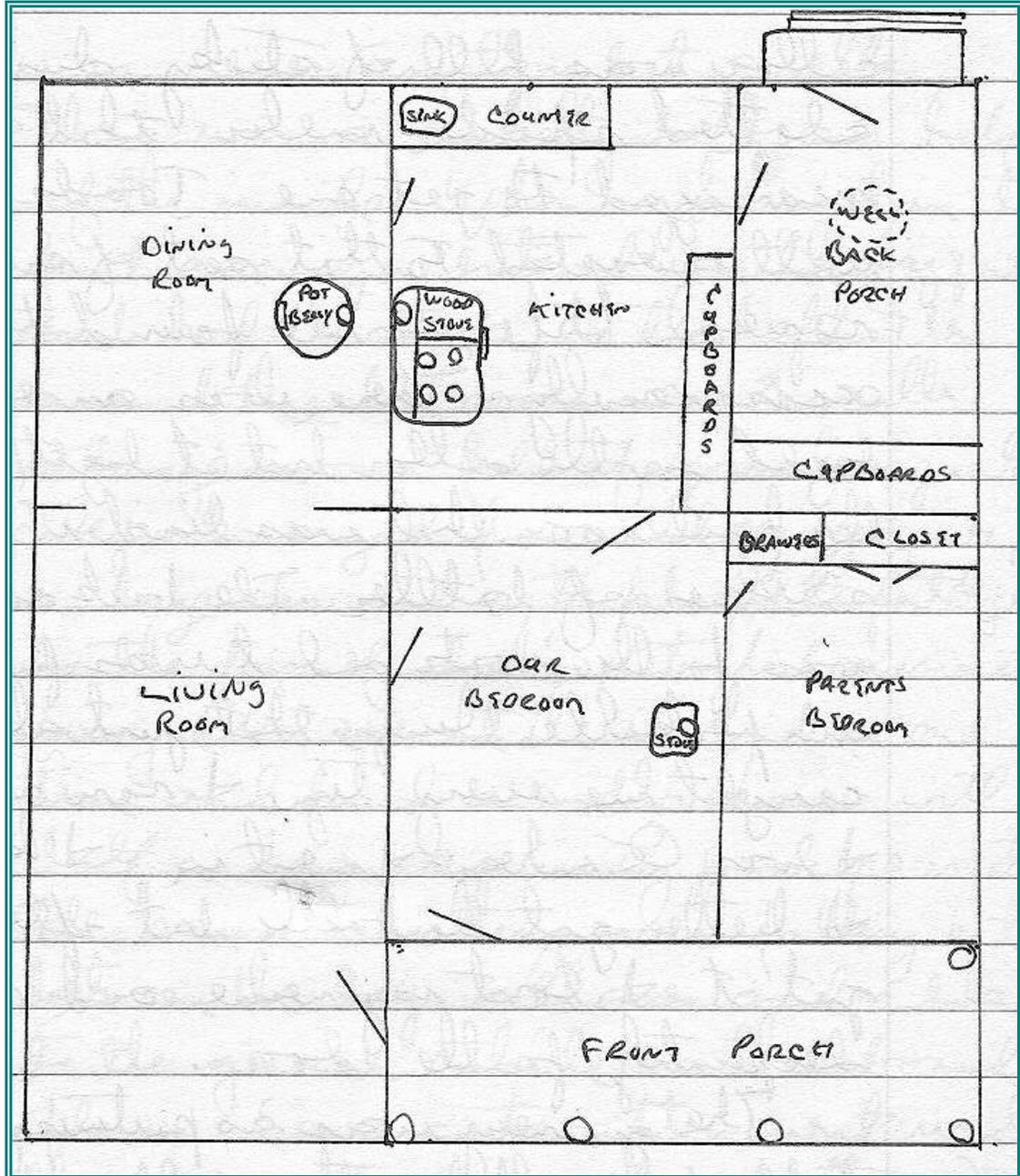


Figure 18 Floor plan of Ashton Place

down there in the Amazon basin many years ago. There were two bed rooms, a living room, a dining room, a kitchen and an enclosed unheated back porch. Probably about

800-900 square feet. To this little kid, it seemed enormous at the time when compared to the two-room garage we had been living in. I was particularly impressed with the height of the living and dining rooms in this house, probably because mom was too. There was a crown molding around the room a foot or so below the ceiling and that added to the sense of space. It was as tall as a tree. I was proud of the height of those rooms which were so tall. When other kids came to the house I swelled with pride at having such tall rooms for them to see. If mom let us go in those rooms. They were treated like "parlors". Nora Watkins had a real "parlor" and no one went into it except for visitors or the clergy or politicians -not much different it turns out- with a huge stuffed buffalo head hanging over the door across from a black horse-hair couch sitting below long mirror.

The only photo I can find of the Ashton place was taken of mom and Dickie. I think mom was modeling one of dresses she and dad made when they had their 'custom made hand-painted wearing apparel' business. The painted image shows her wearing the dress over her legs. The vines on the house are Virginia creeper, a plant with lovely leaves which harbors all sorts of critturs. The windows on the left are the living room. Under the porch roof are the windows of our own bedroom.

I visited the Ashton house with you kids in the mid-80's with Gma and Gpa Jensen - just so that you could personally see where we had lived. I don't know whether it meant anything to you at the time, or whether you even remember it now. That was probably a long boring ride for you I fear, one of the kind I remember taking so often, and it is hard for a kid to be excited when s/he's bored, I know. If



I had that maroon photo album from 5111, I would have scanned in a couple of shots of your kids and of places in Vernal that are germane to this story. I hope you find it and can locate the pictures that fit in this volume. What surprised me about Vernal on that visit was that it had shrunk during the intervening years. Just like the central intersection of Vernal had earlier for me. As a kid on the farm, I marveled at the gigantic buildings on the four corners of the intersection when I visited mom while she worked at JC Pennys. But all things are relative.

When I went out to Vernal with cousin Lyle in 1960, things had changed. That was the summer I lived with Uncle Carl in SLC and worked for him on the foundation of the Singer Sewing Company offices on Foothill Boulevard. I had a bedroom in the basement of Carl's house next to Lyle's bedroom. We were about the same age so were good friends although I couldn't get him interested in attending the Bergman movie festival that lasted most of the summer. He thought those black and white movies in a foreign language with English sentences along the bottom were weird at best and stupid at worst. That summer shows up in detail latter. I'm just giving you a thumbnail so you understand why I was with Lyle in Utah that summer. He and I borrowed Carl's hot '59 Plymouth, against his better judgment, and drove out to Vernal to spend the Fourth of July weekend. It had this amazing push-button transmission to the left of the steering column and no shifting lever. That was the summer before I went to BYU. When we got to Vernal, I searched for the large buildings in the center of town that were sort of the center of my compass for the town.

I was puzzled at what I saw, and was troubled that the entire set of tall buildings that were so vivid in my imagination would have all been replaced in those years. It didn't seem far fetched that one or another of them could have burned down and been replaced but all of them? Not likely. It was only after some thought that I realized that the buildings I was seeing were the same ones I had seen back then. That was one of the biggest shocks of my life. My frame of reference had shifted from that of a little kid on a little farm looking at the se two story buildings, the tallest ones in his town, to the perspective of a teenager from the metropolis of Boston with real sky scrapers. I was depressed that the town was so tiny. 2 story buildings. Vernal turned out to be a two-bit cow town after all. That was how I felt. It was many years before I owned it properly as my home.

## Depression

Those years on the Ashton place were at the tail end of the depression. Our lives were simple and unadorned, out of necessity, reflecting the harsh economic realities that only began to subside as WW II ended and the effects of the extraordinary industrial explosion began to permeate the nation. No luxuries there. We didn't have much and our parents didn't think to live any differently than they had during the



Figure 1 An urban "Hooverville"

<http://www.vw.cc.va.us/vwhansd/HIS122/Hooverville.jpg>

depression. Most people lived the same way. All of our relatives who also lived on farms lived the same way we did. It never occurred to me to wonder about it.

I mention the depression again to remind you of its impact on my life. It continued in the Vernal era of my life. It was there like a source of radiation, powerful, omni-present and unavoidable. All economic aspects of our lives took it into account, not consciously but, nonetheless. We saw the news paper and news reels at the beginning of movies and were aware of the poverty that persisted in the country. "Hoovervilles" shown above in Figure 19 which existed in cities epitomized this poverty and the make-shift existence that was forced on people as a result of the loss of everything they owned. Out in the country where we were, there wasn't even enough resources to build Hoovervilles. We were poor but didn't know it and were relieved that we had a place to live and a job for dad and food on the table. Or perhaps, in the country there was no need to construct them. I don't know.

As my awareness of things matured in Central Elementary School, I perceived that city folks had it different than we did out there on that little farm. In school I

heard class mates talk about what they did at home. About what they had. That was probably intentional and it had the desired effect on poor kids like me from the outlying farms. After school when I walked past their homes on my way back to the farm, I was aware of a gulf between me and them. I looked out the corner of my eye enviously at their beautifully painted houses, and their nice cars, dads who wore suits and ties to work. And felt ashamed of my own place in the world, my unkempt farm lawn and dirt driveway with a ditch running along it, not even a sidewalk along the road.

I saw these kids run along the clean sidewalks, along the streets that were paved with curbs and gutters, marked regularly with trees on some streets. They turned into the concrete walkways across their neatly manicured lawns, bordered with beautiful flowers, into the sparkling clean doorways with the luxuries they had. Their homes were freshly painted and modern. Bathrooms. With bath tubs. Nice beds. No honey bucket, no need to sit with their bum exposed to the cold, no smell of the outhouse with pesky flies. Running water. Running hot water. Central heating. No coal shed, no coal dust, no carrying coal, no ash heap, no need to take out the ashes. Uniform heat in all rooms. Nice furniture. Garages. With concrete floors. No electrical wires stapled to the walls. Fancy light switches. Carpets and throw rugs. Man alive, that was heaven. I knew my place then.

### Outbuildings on the Ashton Place

Our primitive 5-room farm house didn't have plumbing of any kind. The only pipe in the house ran from a pump on the kitchen counter down into a well under the back porch where we got our water. We had a privy which meant that we had to use a honey bucket -during the night because no one was going to go outside of the house in the dark -there were no outdoor lights- and run all that way out to the privy and back. The house didn't have central heating. I didn't even know what that was for years. It was heated by 3 different coal-burning stoves - a "heater" in the bedrooms, a potbelly stove in the diningroom which was kept closed off during the winter to save coal, and a large cast-iron cook stove in the kitchen.

The house had been built before electricity was available, but it had been brought into the house before we moved in. The evidence of this was simple. Bare wires were stapled across and up walls to light sockets that swung from a large ring in the ceiling. Some of the lights were turned on by twisting bulky ceramic switches fastened to the walls near doorways, others were turned on by feeling in the air by the doorway for a string fastened to a nail there. The other end was tied to the chain of tiny round balls extending from a light socket hanging down in the middle of

the room from the ceiling. When you pulled the string the socket was turned on and swung back and forth making moving shadows on the ceiling and walls. Sort of made you dizzy to see it. You had to be careful to not let go quickly of the chain else it would fly up in the air and get hooked on something whereupon you got into trouble - and couldn't reach it.

The house had a covered porch on the front that extended across about half of the front. It was outfitted with three pillars and was painted in an ancient paint with its own peculiar smell and texture, weathered and aged, oxydizing in a patina of thick dust. I was fascinated by the brush streaks and sagging strips of heavy paint. The door on the north end of the porch lead into the living room, the house proper. It was fancy being outfitted with a large oval glass window with a bevel all around. When you stood at that door, on your right side was another door that entered the first bedroom. It was a plain door, and had a transom over it that was constructed with leaded glass. This small window opened into the bed room and theoretically would increase the ventilation in the room and indeed mom tried it when the summer became too hot to bear. It didn't make any difference however, because there was no breeze to take advantage of that opening. It was hot.

She did have an electric fan that she turned on in the hotter days of summer but not often because of the cost of the electricity. This rickety fan had a black woven cloth cover over the electric wires, and rotated slowly as it stirred the hot air. It was then that I heard the astonishing news about bats, the little mouse-like creatures with wings that were astonishing anyway. These creatures were reported to have such skillful hearing that they could tell how fast the fan blades turned and as a result could actually fly through the spinning blades without being minced. Today, I don't think that's true but at the time I believed it and wanted badly to see it happen, but the critturs wouldn't oblige me with such a display.

The front bedroom was assigned to Dick and me, and the back one, which was smaller than ours, was mom's and dad's. Dick and I shared a double bed for some time. Then mom and dad bought army surplus beds with springs and mattresses from an army surplus sale in Salt Lake - probably at the old Remington Arms plant where army surplus sales went on for year. For your information, these army surplus sales were actually sales of army surplus, not some crap manufactured in Taiwan and stamped "Army Surplus." This stuff was GI Issue and lasted forever. For example, I still have in a closet the GI Issue



Figure 20

<http://users.apex2000.net/jrc/>

mosquito net that I used when we made our odyssey down the Yukon River in 1956, as new and solid as it was 50 years ago.

I have a vague recollection of waiting for dad to come home that day. We had been told what he was going to try to do and looked forward to the evidence. He had promised to get us new beds, but were already experienced enough to understand the effect of dollars and cents and to understand that promised based on this stuff might just have to be broken, regardless of how we felt about it. He came back with them, late in the evening and we thought we had it made. We couldn't wait to climb into those new beds. Individual beds. No more tossing and turning and bumping into brother. Freedom to lay however we wanted to lay on the bed. The head board and foot board were impressive - gray curved steel pipes, looking sort of like hospital beds in reality but we had it made compared to what we had been sleeping in. Our bedroom didn't have a closet in it so there was an armoire, though we didn't use that fancy name for it. Mom's bedroom had the only closet in the house, a built-in closet and a small set of built-in drawers.

The attic was just a space above the house without insulation. This obviously meant that the heat we created with coal in the kitchen just went up into the attic and then out the roof about as fast as we put it in, an uneconomical way to heat a house, especially in the bitter cold winters of Vernal. Heating the outdoors. So dad bought a bale or two of some sort of insulation material.

In the evening over a week or two after he got home from work, he worked at insulating the attic by artificial light. He put a tall ladder up on the east side of the house to get through an opening in the attic wall. The insulation was itchy and irritating so we were threatened to stay away from that side of the house while dad carried it up the ladder and spread it in the attic. I don't think it was fiberglass but it was fiber of some kind and itched like crazy when it got on your sweaty dirty skin. We stayed away from the stuff. I wasn't able to tell that the insulation made any difference. I had expected that it would actually make the house warmer than it had been before. Conservation of energy wasn't something I understood, so the house was still colder than I liked. The cost of coal and the severity of the coldness were such that we didn't even heat the living and dining rooms most of the winter. Only on special occasions like Christmas were they opened up and heated. Too expensive to use generally. This meant that we lived in two small bedrooms and the kitchen for most of the winter. Consequently if mom ever heated the front rooms while we were home from school in the winter, those days always seemed like holidays, celebrations and we reveled in being allowed to go into the warm front rooms, running around and playing.

## Water pump in the Kitchen

All of our water came from a pump on the kitchen counter from a well dug under the back porch. Cooking, drinking, washing dishes, washing clothes, bathing. There were no spigots around the outside of the house for watering the lawn, no garden hoses. Those were totally unfamiliar things. The only pipe in the whole house ran from beneath the hand pump on the kitchen counter down into the well. The only way the lawn got any water was in the form of irrigation from the ditch but that was rare. Putting water on the lawn was diverting it from the garden and since we could eat the garden but not the lawn, the lawn just suffered. A bucket always sat on the kitchen counter under the lip of the pump. When the water in the bucket got low, we'd pump the handle. I liked to do that. It was sort of magic that this thing would produce water if the handle was moved up and down. Such a simple gesture to produce the richness of water, a richness appreciated in that desert climate.

I have to insert a perhaps offensive vignette here that it is reflective of both the general lack of water as well as the nature of little kids. Many times when I went out to the privy in the summer -not the winter- to do "Number 2", I sat there and deposited a set of dry round little berries. At the time I didn't know what that meant. Indeed, I didn't even wonder about it because that was how it was though it was curious to be performing like a sheep instead of a human being. Turns out the longer stool sits in the colon, particularly when the individual isn't drinking water, the more water is sucked out of the stool by the colon. That is its primary purpose and it pursues it incessantly. Just give it a chance and it'll show you how well it can work. Well, we proved that in the laboratory of our hot dry farm when we didn't take time to go into the house to get a drink of water. That was a waste of time. In those setting, our byproducts were comparable to those of sheep and deers and rabbits, and for the same reasons. Water wasn't pressed on us like it is today. Soda pop? Humph. Fruit juice? Not. Moms left us to our own devices, knowing that when we got thirsty, we'd appear in the kitchen and get a drink from the well using the dipper in the water



Figure 21 Hand pump  
<http://www.boshart.com/handpump.jpg>

bucket.

The pump had an idiosyncrasy. If it wasn't used for a few days, it wouldn't produce water when the handle was pumped. There would be a sort of dry sucking sound as the handle went up and down but no water came out. In that case, mom or dad would pour some water from the bucket into the top of the pump around the narrow rod you see in this image. That was called "Priming the pump". It restored a seal that was lost somehow when the pump sat unused. Priming the pump always worked again so we didn't worry about having water when we needed it, but we learned that one NEVER emptied the water bucket because we would have to go to the neighbors to get water if the pump lost its seal. Lots of small details to learn about living out there on the farm.

A long handled dipper was used to get water from the bucket. It was held in place by the hook on the end of the long handle. The hook caught the edge of the bucket while the bowl floated on the surface of the water. The bucket wasn't ever covered so the gritty dust that blew around the house would fall into it but we paid no need. We used the dipper to get drinks or to get water for cooking. We shared germs I guess because we didn't worry about even wiping off the dipper. That courtesy wasn't extended to neighbors however so we did have a modicum of understanding of the theory of the bacterial genesis of infection. Neighbors were conspicuously handed a "tumbler", not a "glass", with water in it if they needed a drink. I wasn't quite sure of the background for this ritual. But mom made me a true believer after one or two lapses. She was persuasive.

There was a small sink at the end of the counter opposite from the water pump. When Mom had to wash dishes, she set a dishpan down into that little sink. Since there was no running water, she'd have to heat water in a teakettle on the stove. That might require her to stoke the stove a bit to get it hot. She'd take the poker, remove a stove lid and rummage around to stir the coals. After the water was hot, she'd pour it from the steaming teakettle into the dishpan. This boiling water was tempered with cold water from the bucket to get a temperature she could put her hands in. If the water became too cold while she was doing dishes, she'd go get the teakettle and pour more water into the dishpan. As she washed dishes, she'd hold them to the side of the dishpan over the sink and pour clear water from the bucket over them to rinse off the soap. Odd, today, to think that it was actually a sort of luxury for us to have the sink that had a simple drain. It meant that we didn't have to lift the dishpan, and carry it out the kitchen through the covered porch to the steps out back to throw the water out like some people did. We had the luxury of just turning it upside down in the sink at which point the water would drain

outside by itself. It's all relative isn't it.

The pipe that ran from the drain of the sink simply stuck a foot and a half through the wall so the dirty water just fell onto the ground. This waste water sat there creating a nasty smelling puddle that persisted through most of the year, though it obviously froze in the winter. Foul smelling place it was in the summer, harboring flies and bacteria though we didn't worry much about any of that stuff like people would today - except for the pesky flies. Dad would dig a small trench into the ground every so often to lead the water out of the puddle. Most of the time.

### Bread, Milk and Onions for Dinner

Dad had just ridden his bicycle home ~5miles home from his job as a machinist at LT Payton's Machine Shop on the east end of Highway 40 as it passed through Vernal on its way to Denver. In those days horses were still used but there was a stigma to using them in public that I didn't realize affected dad. In the Leamington Volume (#2) he tells that he was too embarrassed to ride into Leamington with his mom when she hitched horses to the wagon to go to town. His words are that he "just wasn't able" to do that. He didn't elaborate because he was still embarrassed about her hitching the horses up and his unwillingness to accompany her, but his meaning was clear. He was too proud to do that when other people were driving around in luxurious automobiles. So I understand in 2002 better than I did previously why we didn't have any horses at all on our Vernal property, why dad didn't use them for anything. Plus I understand now the inveterate war that he carried on with Gen, spoiling his love of horses.

In the center of the tiny kitchen hung a bare bulb at the end of a long electrical wire that was stapled up the wall and across to the center of the ceiling. It was turned on by pulling on a long string that ran from the light socket and was fastened onto the wall near to the door. We sat around a small wooden table that was filled half of the small kitchen. We didn't use place mats, indeed I never heard of the things, nor did we use tablecloths. Too much work to launder by hand, so she bought a piece of oil cloth that she kept on the table to catch spills. She just wiped it off after each meal.

Supper was a pile of thickly sliced home-made bread that mom baked for as long as we lived in Vernal. It sat on a plate in the center of the small table, the center of our meal, along side a pitcher of milk from the neighbor's dairy herd or grandpa's cow, sparsely supplemented by a salt shaker, soup bowls and spoons at each place, a dish of radishes or cut up yellow onions. Desert was and a quart of home-canned peaches or pears. They were delicious. Sometimes we had some something

else to liven up the meal, some chow-chow [a type of corn relish mom and her sisters made at our home in the fall in the galvanized tubs that were used to do the washing. That gives you an idea about how much they bottled.] or pickles.

After saying grace -sometimes kneeling on the floor by our chairs with dad telling one of us to "be mouth"- we'd break up the hard bread -hard by commercial bread standards especially if it was a couple of days old- into our bowl. I chuckle today when some yuppie says something cool about "breaking bread", as if they had a clue. Then we'd pour fresh-from-the-cow milk with clots of cream over it. We could have glasses of milk too<sup>[1]</sup>, if we wanted. It was unpasteurized but was usually from cows that had been vaccinated against bovine TB. I think that was a health department requirement that cows be vaccinated, though I'm not sure all cows actually were. In terms of the cleanliness of the milk, we weren't bothered by the fact that the milking was done out in a corral, a messy place with dirt, and manure of all kinds, twigs, bits of straw and hay, bird droppings every where. It wasn't possible to have really sterile milk from the corral. But I had no clue about "sterile". That was a fancy word that was not part of our vocabulary out there. The most we strived for was comparative cleanliness, not sterility.

The reality was that just before a milker milked a cow, he washed it's sides and udder with a bucket of soap and water in an attempt to keep the milk more or less clean by keeping stuff from falling into the bucket. There were nonetheless usually bits and pieces of straw or whatever in the milk. It was impossible to prevent that from happening with cows covered in corral stuff. After the cow had been milked, the bucket was carried back to the house. The milk was then strained by being poured out of the galvanized milk bucket through a clean dishtowel held tightly over the top. To me, that cleaned the milk and I didn't worry any more. Funny, isn't it. As long as the small chunks of dry manure and bits of straw and dirt were strained out so I couldn't see things floating in the milk, I was satisfied that the milk was "clean". Ha. After the milk had been strained, it was poured straight into large bottles and pitchers that we kept in our icebox.

After pouring milk on our broken bread, we'd first pour out a small pile of salt

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<sup>1</sup> Note the plural - glasses. Why, you ask, during tough times could we drink any amount of milk we wanted? Because there was a dairy down the road, because milk spoiled quickly and because when cows are producing, they produce prodigious quantities of milk and since waste was a cardinal sin, we disposed of as much food as we could. Excess milk was given to the hogs - "slopping the hogs" is what feeding them is called, with buckets of kitchen waste and milk. To this day, nothing satisfies my thirst like cold milk. With a peanut butter sandwich I can drink a quart of milk and feel unsatisfied.

directly on the table by our bowls and pass the shaker to the next person. Then we'd take up a wedge of onion, dip it into the salt and bite it off to eat with the bread and milk. Which always dripped off our chins from the too large spoons we ate with -or more likely our poor manners. When we were finished, we'd have one or two halves of a pear or peach in our unwashed bowls. It didn't matter that they weren't washed. They were clean and we ourselves had just poured the milk into them and eaten out of them. That was supper many times. Little talk that I remember. Eating was serious business. Many meals without any meat. Now listen to me: those dinners were as satisfying as any I have had in my life. Perhaps more so because I had a deep need that was satisfied this way. To this day I don't feel a need for variety, no boredom at the same meal every day. I could eat the same thing days on end.

### Grandpa Merrell and his popcorn

**E**ven though we lived several miles away from Grandpa Merrell, we saw mom's family often. There was a herd of them over in Naples so we could always find someone to talk to if we went over there. I don't remember whether we made daily visits, or went over several times a week or less but whatever it was, it seemed often. Grandpa loved popcorn. He made it whenever he had a "hankering" for it which was mostly in the winter as I recall.

In those days on the farm, people grew their own popcorn and dried it in the fall for use during the winter. They didn't shuck it. Instead, the ears they were going to use for popcorn had the husks pulled backward like a pony tail and tied so that they could be hung up to dry. I remember the homegrown popcorn and I remember the startling new-fangled cleaned shelled popcorn called "Jolly Time" that started to appear just then. I remember when we bought some of this new stuff in Vernal. It came in a can, not a bag or sack. When it was opened, the kernels were clean, no wispy husks or broken kernels. It was sort of magical to be able to find the stuff this way in the store. Such extravagance. The container was made of a pressed fiberboard that was rigid like metal. The interesting part about the packaging was the lid. It was made of stamped metal but it was removed by pulling on a heavily waxed string like the one in Lifesavers. It was embedded around the top of the can between the sides and the lid and tore the paper wrapper that had been applied over the fiber can and caused the lid to come off. "Jolly Time" was available in this blue can or in a red can, the blue being yellow



Figure 22  
<http://theimaginaryworld.com/hj10.jpg>

corn and the red being white.

We were used to the old way. If Grandpa grew enough corn, he would dry it in a corn crib for feeding his hogs.

There were various styles for these storage sheds and I saw both of these in Vernal. The problem with the one on the right is that rodents help themselves to the stuff. When grandpa wanted popcorn, he'd grab a couple of the special ears he had dried for the purpose, shell them in his hand, and then pop the dried kernels.



Figure 23  
[http://www.springvalleyinc.org/currency/corn\\_crib.jpg](http://www.springvalleyinc.org/currency/corn_crib.jpg)



Figure 24 Corn Crib  
<http://www.refocus-now.co.uk/images/corncrib.jpg>

The field corn stored in these cribs did not produce uniformly large fluffy kernels like you are used to today, especially in movie theatres. That's why JollyTime Popcorn was an instant hit. When grandpa or his appointee fired up the kettle to make popcorn with the home-grown product, the results were pretty sad by the standard you are used to. Making popcorn was a substantial project. You didn't just throw some oil and popcorn in an electric pop corn popper that you plugged in. No, the first step was the shell the corn and then clean it, a tedious task. Then you fired up the stove to get it hot. This was the same process regardless of the reason you needed a hot stove. You took one of the stove lids off, stirred the coals with a poker and threw in some more chunks of coal from the coal box or coal scuttle sitting by the stove. After a flame had started

from the coals, you put the stove lid back on and watched it to see that it didn't go out. If you needed to hurry the fire, you could increase the draft by adjusting the front door or the draft itself, or possible the damper in the stove pipe above the stove. You can see this was not a trivial process like turning a knob on your electric stove. You had to really want to get a hot stove and you really had to know how to do it. Finally the stove was hot enough so you put some sort of a pan on the coal stove to do the popping.



Figure 25 Stove-top popper

Grandpa liked a cast iron skillet -obviously with a lid- or a black metal popper

on a long handle like the one above. The advantage of the skillet was that he could cook the corn in fat or butter. He'd drop some butter into it with a handful of popcorn and then shove the skillet back and forth on top of the stove to more or less stir the kernels inside of the pan to keep them from burning on one side. That's hard work. Iron skillets weigh five or six pounds and create a lot of friction on the top of the stove, so if you're going to really agitate the kernels to keep them moving, you have to work hard to move the skillet fast enough. After a while, depending on how hot the stove was, a popping sound indicated that he was about to get his popcorn. There was rarely the cascade of popping sounds that you are used to in your own poppers but he'd get enough kernels to satisfy his taste.

He'd pull the skillet off the stove, remove the lid, pour the results into a bowl and pour some melted butter on it and shake some salt over it. What he had was a mixture of about a fourth "old maids" the kernels that had not popped at all, along with popped kernels of various sizes. Turns out that the term "old maid" can be construed as a suggestive term that refers to females of the specie in a derogatory fashion. Many of the kernels that were popper were pretty dark, almost burned while others were just right, this variation stemming from the unequal stirring that resulted from trying to push a heavy skillet quickly across a stove top. He'd sift through the mixture with his finger pulling out those that met his standard. He'd share so we got to eat some too. The "old maids" were actually my favorite. I liked the crunchiness of the barely cooked, unexpanded kernels. I didn't understand why these unpopped kernels were called "old maids", women who had not married.

## Icebox

When we moved to the Ashton Place, we had a real "ice"box, one that was used real ice to cool foods. It was a contraption that stands out in memory for various reasons, the most memorable being the peculiar, powerful, odd odor it produced. This smell was an amalgam compounded of moldy wood, decayed food and the smells of food from the table put there to cool so that they could be used the next day. Iceboxes pre-dated true refrigerators like you are familiar with. True refrigerators use electric compressors to cool and are so cold that they create ice. Ice boxes don't make ice because they never achieve a freezing temperature, so you couldn't ever store ice cream in an ice box. We didn't get a real refrigerator, often called a "Frigidaire", for several years. Our icebox sat outside on the back porch outside the back door.

These things and were build like wooden cupboards. They were constructed with several compartments for storing food and drink and one large compartment to

hold the blocks of ice. The food compartments opened through narrow slits onto the ice compartment through channels in their walls. The ice block cooled everything in the wooden compartments to a great extent but nothing like a real refrigerator. It was not able to actually freeze anything. It just cooled food cool enough that it didn't spoil overnight, but it didn't do much else. As the block of ice shrunk, water draining out of a drain constructed for the purpose, its ability to cool food also decreased. These iceboxes looked more like odd cupboards than anything we think of today as an icebox, i.e. a refrigerator.

This one is about the size of the one that we kept on the back steps. The block of ice was put behind the "cupboard" door on the top left. This door was kept closed all the time because the ice melted faster when warm air touched it. The coolness from the ice spread throughout the compartments through narrow channels that allowed the cool air to flow freely. The coolest place in the icebox was on the bottom shelves. Mom stored left overs in our ice box until the next day when she would use them for dinner. They wouldn't last long in the temperature of an ice box that was no where as cool as you are used to seeing in your electrical "fridges". The pan underneath the ice box collected the water the flowed out as the ice block melted.



**Figure 26 Icebox**

<http://www.Indianahistory.org/programming/emlepyle/icebox.jpg>

One of the reasons an ice box didn't keep a low temperature is the quality of the insulation. There was no such thing as Styrofoam or fiberglass insulation so it was difficult to maintain a low temperature.

The icebox was a favorite place for our white cat to sleep. She would jump up onto the top and lie there in the sun, resting against the porch wall that radiated heat onto her. About head high for us kids. I stood there in the spring, leaning on the warm ice box, enjoying the warm sun on my neck while I petted the white cat

sprawled out enjoying the sun and purring softly.

We didn't bother with the ice box in the winter, only the summer. The outside temperature in the winter was cooler than that achieved inside the ice box so we just set food outside of the house on the covered porch where it would freeze. In the summer, ice was brought out to the house weekly by the iceman. The ice was from the Calder creamery and was harvested during the winter from their lake and stored in icehouses under mounds of sawdust to sell during the summer. The ice man drove a big truck and wore a long black rubber apron. He'd check with mom to see what size block was wanted and then he'd lug the blocks of ice from his truck to the back porch. I don't remember he parked his truck but he obviously drove up or dirt driveway some



Figure 27

distance so he didn't have to carry the ice farther than necessary. He always wore the black rubber apron affair to protect himself from the cold ice and water and used ice tongs like these that were so heavy that I could hardly lift them.

One of the interesting things I've discovered in this journey back into time involves the intense anxiety I feel even today when someone -anyone- opens a refrigerator door and leaves it open while s/he does something on the counter. It makes me nuts. I want to walk over and slam the door, quickly, and I understand now why that is. The amount of time that an icebox door was left open affected the length of time that a block of ice lasted. Since we could only afford to get ice once a week, I was always "encouraged" to hurry whenever I got something out of or put something into the icebox. If the block didn't last all week, food would spoil. Hurry. Always hurry! Hurry up! The tone of the encouragement was less than pleasant. So I learned an irrational lesson that is hardwired into my nervous system: you must always hurry up when you are doing anything in something that cools food. It doesn't matter whether it's an ice box or an electric refrigerator. I feel an intense, irrational anxiety when a refrigerator door is opened that is out of proportion to what's going on. My wife stands with the door open, carefully pouring water out of a pitcher, then sitting the glass on the counter before she returns the pitcher to the refrigerator and I feel great anxiety - for no reason. Do you remember hearing me grouse when you kept the fridge door open while you did something like pour a glass of milk? Now you understand part of the reason that I was irritable about it. And I

understand now how unreasonable I was in my grouching. It was burned into me however. Sad that we develop this sort of irrational response to our world isn't it.

Sometimes we were allowed to chip pieces of ice off the block to put in a drink of water. To get these chips, we used an icepick like this one. The surprising thing about an ice pick is that the amount of force needed to make chips was miniscule. If you stabbed directly into the block of ice, the block just absorbed the energy and a small hole was made. But if you tapped lightly at an angle on a corner of the block, chips would fly off. Disproportionate cause and effect it seemed to me.



Figure 28 [www.fragpipe.com/~shade/](http://www.fragpipe.com/~shade/)

## Meat

Another example of the effect of the depression, as well as the effect of WW II -which are blended together and hard to separate- involves meat for the table. Dad didn't raise any kind of cattle, chickens or hogs and I've wondered today why not. Didn't he want to deal with farm animals or chickens? I'll have to ask mom. Later: as noted above, I have figured it out myself.

To get meat for us dad occasionally hunted rabbits and every fall he went deer hunting. Not for sport but for meat. Some uncles and dad would go out and harvest tubs full of rabbits. I remember seeing them out on our front yard with a wash tub full of dead rabbits, wearing rubber gloves while they skinned and gutted them because of the risk of tularemeia. The nice thing about tularemeia is that it is killed by cooking so we could safely eat this meat after it was cooked.

We were actually luckier than city people in regards to meat because we could get wild game and our relatives had farm animals and fowl that they shared with us. Beef, pig, chicken. Dad got a deer each fall. We ate fish if we got fresh trout but that was about all the fish that found its way onto our table. Those options didn't exist for people who lived in the city without country relatives.

The whole notion of spoilage is interesting when comparing what is done in a home today to what was done back then in those circumstances. Today if a piece of meat has begun to smell funny, it probably ends up in the garbage, perhaps a rational thing to do. But I think that we are over-sensitive about health risks today. Just look at the stupidity about cyclamates and asbestos. Back in that era when you didn't have much, you made dang sure that there was no way to salvage an errant piece of meat before you trashed it. Adding a bunch of onion or garlic to "tainted" meat that wasn't too far gone killed the bad flavor and thorough cooking killed any organisms so

the meat was preserved and we ate it. We did that in Brazil too. An entire oxen was salvaged this way after it was secured in a closed room overnight before it had properly cooled. No one suffered from the large dose of garlic that was applied. Indeed, people loved it.

When the ham got the green layer on it from hanging on the icy cold porch during the winter, mom would cut or scrape the green layer off. The next slice she cut off would be thoroughly cooked to be sure anything was killed. We saw the green piece that was discarded but weren't bothered by its presence. Because mom and dad weren't. That was just how meat was sometimes in the winter. A ham was suspended on a stout string from a nail out in the unheated porch and pulled down for a slice as needed. In fact, dad like meat that had aged before it was eaten to "make it taste better." That was especially true of game birds like ducks or geese, though not apparently so true of pheasant. My palate wasn't able to discriminate the difference but mom and dad said it was so, so it was. In the same manner, the grayish white scummy mold that grew on apple sauce or apple butter did not mean the whole jar had to be discarded. Mom would just lift out and discard the affected portion plus a little extra to be sure she got it and we'd eat the rest. As long as there wasn't a bad flavor it was fine.

The spoilage that was deadly serious was in bottled vegetables. Every bottle that we brought in from the root cellar out back of the house -a root cellar like those you saw in "Wizard of Oz"-was carefully examined by mom before she opened it. The first clue was the lid. If it showed evidence of pressure inside the bottle she immediately slowed down and checked it out. The tell-tale sign she watched for was a bulging lid that should have been depressed. We needed the food but we didn't need botulism. *Clostridium botulinum* is the fancy name for the nasty anaerobic bugs that grows enthusiastically in improperly canned food and kill a person who eats it. Potent stuff. Something like a pound of it distributed in the water system of New York City could kill off the entire population. Mom didn't know that fact probably but she did know of experiences in the community that people died from eating 'tainted' home-canned foods. So a raised lid on a jar of beans was pretty much a sign that it was going to be discarded, not even given to the hogs.

We had plenty of pork, such a sophisticated sounding name for such a basic food. Thank the Norman Invasion of England centuries ago for the fine sounding Norman words used today for Anglo-Saxon words - beef for cow, pork for pig, venison for deer, veal for calf, etc. There were actually a lot of four letter words that fell out of favor -chuckle.

## Deer hunting and Venison

Some years we only had the one deer that dad shot, but some years mom got a tag and got her deer as well. The Fish and Game sold metal tags that had to be affixed to the horns of any deer that was shot. Dad hunted with a World War II army surplus Enfield 30.06 that he refurbished when he worked as a gunsmith. Mom used a little lever action 30.30 that I used in Alaska on a mountain goat hunt, where I got "deer fever" and couldn't bring myself to pull the trigger on that gorgeous crittur we had stalked for an hour and a half in loose shale. Nope, not me.

Deer hunting season starts in October when cold starts in the mountains. That forces deer down from their summer range into valleys where forage is not yet covered with much snow. A deer is always gutted on the spot. This is necessary to preserve the quality and flavor of the meat. The digestive juices in the stomach and the lining of the esophagus will leak through their linings into the surrounding meat. The result is funny-tasting meat which is tossed out because it's "spoiled". It is probably still OK to eat in terms of human digestion but the taste is bad so custom dictated discarding it. Good custom therefore dictated gutting the animal right away. However, those who understood that leakage from the esophagus is what made neck meat taste bad will excise the esophagus. The preserves the meat for a roast.

When the gutted carcass is brought back to the house it is hung up to age a bit. With the hide still on, the animal is hoisted up with a rope that is placed through cuts below the "knee" on each hind leg. Heavy sticks are also placed into the abdominal cavity to keep it open so it would cool. The removal of the hide is called flensing and is done with a special knife blade that is medium length and highly curved, far more than you imagine. An Eskimo Ulu is a perfect flensing knife. This is because the knife blade that is nearly a perfect half-circle is pushed and turned in an arc between the hide and the body of the deer. This splits the fascia, the silvery multi-layered membrane that joins the hide to the muscles. Its function in life is to hold the hide on but to allow it to sit loosely on the muscles. Splitting this membrane frees the hide without damage to the meat. The sound of flensing and the smell are distinctive. Deer are musky smelling, not unpleasant but definitely gamey and not something the squeamish stomach will like the first time. Dad flensed the deer in the evening after he came home from work, so it was cold and dark.

After the hide is removed, the butchering really started. The carcass is cut into quarters with a saw, axe and sharp knives to make manageable pieces. Then the leg of each quarter was divided at the knee. These smaller chunks are divided into roasts, steaks or whatever dad wanted. The cuts probably didn't much resemble the

sophisticated cuts of a butcher but they sufficed to get the meat into manageable pieces. Some people rented a commercial locker in town so would roll the roasts and steaks in butcher paper -that's why it's called butcher paper- and take it to the locker. I think we did that with some of the meat, but we also bottled some.

The meat for bottling was cut into small pieces. Mom had a pile of these pieces on the kitchen table and stoked the coal stove for plenty of heat. She fried the meat in a couple of iron skillets while us kids kneeled under the kitchen table to stay out of the way. This was a small kitchen that was half filled with the kitchen table and that stove. From under the table we were close enough that when she felt like it, she could easily hand us bits and pieces of fried venison.

I remember the sense of security and well-being of those times. The house was warm while cold winds, sometimes snow-laden, whipped around outside. Vernal winters can be bitter. But Mom was cooking and feeding us. In her company, we were safe. Sounds odd perhaps that we felt as secure but we did. To understand that, imagine what it was like, a mom and two little kids on a small farm out in the country, isolated from neighbors, with few resources. Enjoying the heat of the stove. Heat was comforting, and mom was taking care of us. We were safe.

After she had finished frying the meat, she loaded it into quart jars, carefully sticking the pieces in so the jars were completely filled. A bit of salt was dropped in and each jar was filled with water up to the shoulder, leaving enough head room that they didn't explode during the cooking. She sealed the jars with canning lids, and rings that she heated in a water bath to soften the rubber seal. Mom and dad had decided that the extra cost of a large home pressure cooker was worth it because it provided more positive seals so food didn't spoil as frequently which also meant it wasn't dangerous to eat. The thing paid for itself. Her large canner, the envy of women who used the traditional water bath method which is slower and messier, held 7 quarts at a time. Since she bottled several hundred jars some years, it took a long long time over a hot stove. The jokes about slaving over a hot stove have a basis in fact and history. Women did stand for hours each day over the hot stove.

Given the limited financial resources of mom's family and our own family, deer season was a godsend, free meat on the hoof, just waiting to be taken. So those who were old enough to buy a "deer tag" did so. Here's part of the tribe with deer, all bucks. Five of the six got their deer.



Some seasons

does could be taken but not apparently in this year. The third man from the left in the back is Grandpa Merrell, to his left is Leo and to Leo's left is Harold. The other three kids are grandsons. The second from the left looks like one of Ross's two older sons. The camping gear on the left means they spent some days out there in the dry desert hunting.

This "deer tag" was mandatory. Game wardens were stationed along roads leading out of deer territory to check all vehicles to see if all deer had deer tags. If a tag wasn't permanently affixed to the horns, there was a serious penalty. I don't know what it was but do know it was severe enough to get everyone's attention. None of this group hunted without tags and didn't try to reuse them. Of course, I don't know whether or not they poached deer and entertain the possibility because of their impecunious state but that would have been done discreetly any time of the year. The deer tag was provided to the hunter when he bought his license to hunt. It was a long narrow flexible metal band that had some device permanently attached to one end of the strip. The other end of the strip was wrapped around the horn and inserted into the device on the other end and pulled taut. At the point the band was securely locked in place and could only be cut off. That meant the tags could not be used again, the point of the locking mechanism.

Mom's family went out in large groups to hunt. All of the men started paying attention to where they saw deer in the fall in anticipation of the opening of deer season. They needed the meat for the winter and tried to locate a population of deer where they could all get one with minimal time and effort.

### Garage and Gate

The garage was located at the east end of the driveway that came off the road from town. It was about one car wide. There was a large gate at the entry off the road. It could be closed to protect the yard from cows or whatever needed to be excluded. This gate was huge. It extended from one side of the wide drive to the other and was constructed of 2 x 12's, which probably were true 2 x 12's, not the baby things sold today. It hung on two ponderous hinges and because of its size, swung deliberately and slowly. To stabilize the gate itself and to help balance it on the hinges, an enormous board was placed diagonally across the gate. It extended several feet past the top hinge. At the top end of this diagonal a large cement block had been poured as a counter-weight. We were told to not ride the gate when we opened or closed it. I didn't understand the reason for not riding it. It was enormous and my little weight couldn't harm it, I thought. The problem, of course, is that even 50 pounds placed on the end of a gate this long would create enough pressure over time to deform it. We bootlegged rides now and then, sort of excusing our illegal behavior by lamely rationalizing that the gate "needed to be watched" while it was opened or closed, or some such excuse. Little kids can be as dishonest about their motives as adults. We rode the gate because it was just fun

When we moved into the place, Mr. Ashton had gotten an agreement from mom and dad that he could continue to use the garage for storage. We were not told what was stored in the garage and this arrangement lasted several years for his convenience. The garage had a single door that swung in a big arc to the south side under an old cotton wood tree that had a swing hanging from a low branch. The garage was constructed of 2 x 4's and was covered with a skin of heavy corrugated sheet metal that was rusted in places.

The door was secured by a large padlock that we did not have a key for because it was Mr. Ashton's. This bugged dad. He wanted to know what was inside. Either Mr. Ashton didn't tell him -because it was really none of dad's business- or he didn't believe what Mr. Ashton said. One bright sunny day -the kind we mostly had in summers- dad got a pry bar and went to work. Being naturally discreet, and seasoned to the work, he did this investigation on the back side of the garage. It wasn't visible from the road. In his mind his objective was probably pretty modest,

just take off one piece of the sheet metal so's he could see what actually was inside, not too much of a big deal. Just take a look to see what was really in there. Curiosity and cats thing.

I remember the itch to look inside the garage but all I remember is seeing him work to remove the sheet metal. After he satisfied his curiosity, he re-nailed the sheet back in place so it wasn't evident that he had done what he did. That's a nice thing about heavy metal sheets with permanent holes. In his mind, that was the end of it. He had satisfied his curiosity and did it without creating any damage. But he had forgotten that two little kids observed the whole process.

On another fine sunny day, Mr. Ashton came out to the place to get into his stuff in the garage. At some point while he and dad were talking, one of us kids decided to share the experience with Mr. Ashton. This kid -Dickie or me- volunteered the fact that not too long ago dad even took a sheet of metal off the back so we could sort of peek inside. I don't know what repercussions there were, but that particular kid didn't impress his dad that day.

## Grainery

There was a row of lilacs across the back side of the house. The dirt driveway turned north in front of the garage between the house and grainery. The lilacs lined the house-side of this one-car wide dirt road. On the south side of the grainery was a coal shed, a sort of lean-to, that had been added later to store the ton or so of coal that we relied on for heat and cooking and hot water for laundry and weekly baths. The coal was hauled out to our place in a big truck with a bed that lifted to spill the coal out the back end. Dad ordered the cheaper grades of coal, lignite or bituminous. Not as good as the better burning anthracite which was also more expensive. The bituminous or lignite was sometimes tinged brown and made lots of clinkers, but it provided heat. When you didn't have the money for anthracite, this was what you burned. "Poor folk have poor ways."

The grainery was constructed of logs that were probably 10 or 12 inches in diameter. They obviously had been hauled out of the Uintah's because there were no large evergreens in the valley. I suppose it's possible that the early settlers could have logged off the large evergreens in the valley, but I doubt that. The dry desert conditions in the flatland were not conducive to growing large pines or spruces. To prepare the logs for the grainery after they had been hauled by horses out of the mountains, they were dressed first. This meant they were skinned to remove the bark and flatten the knots where branches had been cut off, using an adze or axe or draw knife. The ends of the logs were trued and then notches were cut near each

end, one on the top and one on the bottom like Lincoln Logs. This made them nest together when they were stacked up to build the walls. Even with well groomed logs, there are crack between the logs that let the wind blow through and allowed heat to escape. So the space was chinked on each side. The chinking was made out of mud and straw. The straw held the mud together. Perhaps some outfits used cement in the mix but the chinking in our log cabin was obviously made without cement. It was soft enough that I could scrape it with my thumbnail and could break strips in half that fell out of a crack. When the chinking was properly applied on the inside and the outside, the logs were airtight.

The problem with chinking is that it doesn't bond to the wood. If one is lucky, the chinking doesn't have a clay in it like betonite. Betonite is astounding stuff because it absorbs something like 10 times its volume in water, but its bad business in chinking. The problem is that when it dries out, it shrinks back to a fraction of the volume it created when filled with water so falls out of the cracks in short order. Good chinking dries in place and seals the cracks. But any chinking weathers over time and falls out, one small piece at a time.

Since no one had lived in our log cabin for years -probably because the "new" house had been built and occupied- the chinking wasn't maintained so it was falling out all around the grainery. The big people in our house insisted that we shouldn't pull it out, but it was a temptation that was probably not resisted too strenuously by a couple of little boys in the neighborhood. When a foot-long strip of chinking has loosened from the crack and was hanging outward a few inches, held in place by a couple of straws, the temptation to see just how much pressure those straws would resist was pretty great. Dad unfortunately was training scientists who understood experimentation.

This image from a government site shows what the chinking looked like when it was in good repair. Ours log cabin didn't look quite like this because these

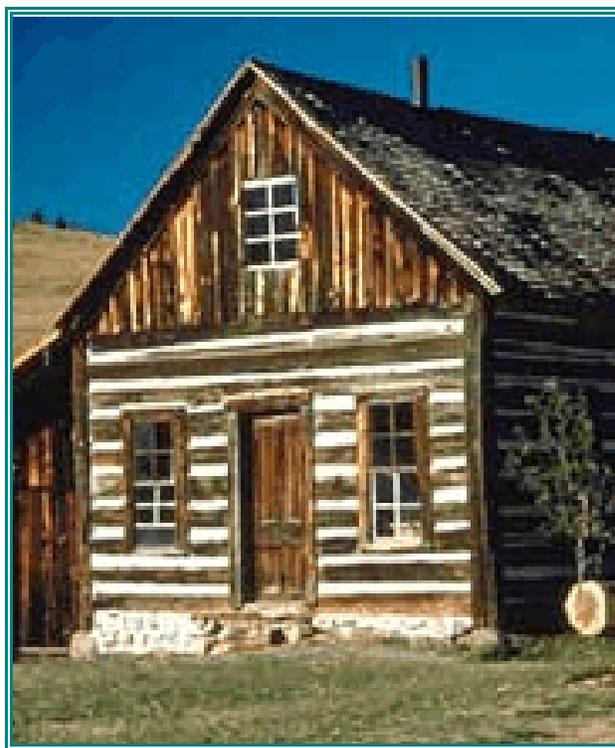


Figure 30 Log cabin chinking  
<http://www2.cr.nps.gov/tps/briefs/brief26.htm>

logs were squared off so they would make a more or less flat wall. In addition, our log cabin had chunks of chinking missing in many places.

The design of our own log cabin was unusual. It was constructed such that the north half of the cabin was actually one and a half stories tall. When you stepped through the front door, you entered an atriumy sort of space that stretched up forever to this four foot tall kid. It was dramatic. There were no buildings in town even that had such a tall room. At least that I was familiar with. On that east wall straight across from the entrance there was a loft for sleeping that was accessed by a stairway sort of thing. A sort of dreamy space up there with a cliff-like downward view. Straight across from the door, there was a staircase that went up to the loft. Neither the stairs nor the loft had no a railing to keep you from falling. The honor system obviously. You were trusted not to fall or jump. We obviously were not allowed to go up the stairway which didn't have railings either, but it wasn't difficult to restrain ourselves. We were afraid of falling so obeyed that injunction. The area up there was probably a bedroom space though I don't think I ever heard it discussed and don't remember ever going up to see. As you stepped into the main high room, there was a doorway in the wall on the right side. This led to a small hall that opened onto at least two more bedrooms and a small storage room or two. The southern half the grainery was a single story with several bedrooms and storage spaces. Beneath the grainery was a crawl space about 2 feet high that was open along the entire east side. We chased cats into that crawl space and ventured back there in search of riches and robbers. The porch on the front of the grainery was the place where cousin Ruthie met her demise 2 years after we moved to Alaska. I'll tell you more about it later.

The grainery was used during our reign as a storage space. We never spent the night in it, indeed, it never occurred to us to do that. I don't think it ever occurred to me to want to spend a night out there and that interests me today. Do you remember how badly you kids wanted to spend a night in the rental house we purchased, at your mom's insistence, over on Christine Street? You kids were relentless in your determination that we spend a night there. When I was a kid I had none of those compulsions. Understand, please, that I'm not making a value judgment about either of us; I'm just making the point that when I inherited a second house, I was not moved to go out there and sleep in it. Perhaps it was the smell of mouse droppings and fertilizer? In any event, the grainery was just a dusty dirty place that reeked of mouse droppings and urine, plus a variety of other incompatible smells like fertilizer and axle grease and kerosene. The back bedrooms -I call them bedrooms today but at the time I didn't know that was what they were because I didn't

understand that it had been a home at one time- were filled with bags of fertilizer. The great room held all kinds of junk and boxes. We were free to go and play there but we were cautioned to stay away from the fertilizer in the back room and whatever insecticides were there. We didn't know what those bags of funny smelling chemicals were, just that they could hurt us. They all smelled bad and were powders or granules, so were easily identified and avoided.

One of the things we played with in the grainery was an old car radio that had buttons to push to change the station, a new-fangled device actually. It was from a car and was broken, but it was fascinating. The front cover was missing so I could see the little trolley car affair fastened to a string that wound around large wheels on each side. Along the path the trolley moved there was a set of metal fingers that could be pulled out a short distance. When they were pulled out, they stopped the trolley when it moved along its path in response to a button being pushed down. I was fascinated by mechanical things and always wanted to take them apart "to see how they worked", not that I would actually understand. So I investigated this old radio, and in the process managed to mash one of my fingers, the inevitable price of investigation and exploration. But I did not complain to mom. My experience with her when I was hurt as a result of my own stupidity was sufficient to make me sit on the back porch and cry quietly, holding the damaged part until it stopped hurting. I never told her about injuries I could get over by myself that way. Easier on the nervous system.

Just inside and on the north side of the entry way there was a sturdy wooden box filled with fossil mastodon ivory that dad brought back from Alaska a few months before I was born. I learned in 2002 that one of the reasons that dad stayed behind in Seward when mom had already come out to Naples, was to be able to go up to Fairbanks to buy this particular box full of fossil ivory. Exactly how he would have done things. Mom still has the box in Provo in 2002. It's illegal today to traffic in fossil ivory without some sort of permit. The Antiquities Act sets forth the rules. There were no such rules when he bought the ivory, not that he would have obeyed them anyway. Some of the ivory has tool marks that prove the ivory was soft enough to be shaped and cut with wood chisels before it air hardened. Over the first 14 years of my life in Vernal and Seward, I remember that Dad used a small blue electric hand drill to make jewelry for mom, flowers and arrowheads that he glued to clips. He was a true romantic, although he hid it well. One spring day as I stepped into the grainery, I heard some small unfamiliar noises that seemed to be coming from the vicinity of this box of ivory so I investigated. Inside the box, beneath a layer of cotton padding I found a litter of micelets. Little pink erasers without hair,

squirming and wiggling, eyes not yet opened. Fascinating sight that I ran to the house to describe for mom's benefit. She was not impressed but she didn't tell me to do anything about them either.

Sometime back in the 1970's dad reported that he had been contacted by a man who lived in the midwest about this fossil ivory. Dad didn't know him and didn't know how the man found out about the stuff. This made him nervous, an understandable reaction after his exposure to the idiocy of bureaucracies that had forced him to return the Hawaiian skull to the Bureau of Ethnology. This was before the days of the internet so it was very strange for a person you didn't know to contact you about anything. Dad was afraid that if he responded that someone would order him to send all in of his ivory. It turned out that the man was building a cross bow and wanted a small piece of ivory so dad sold him a small chunk of ivory for a big piece of change. Money could change his morals in an instant I fear.

The grainery had a crawl space that was open on the east side. We'd crawl back into it and occasionally found toads, dry skinned, slow-moving critters that couldn't jump very high, especially when compared to the sleek muscular leopard frogs in the marsh or irrigation canal. Feral cats that roamed the back half of the property sometimes dropped a litter of kittens in the crawl space. We knew that because the mother would hang around there. These cats were truly feral so you couldn't catch them and if you got too close they would arch their backs, hiss and snarl, ready to swat, looking scary. One time we crawled back in and found a litter of kittens that were so new that their eyes weren't open. We ran to tell mom. Mom told us that if we handled the kittens the mother might move them. We couldn't restrain ourselves in spite of her instruction, and really didn't understand the truth of her advice. We handled the kittens just a tiny bit because they were so loveable. So momma cat moved them just a tiny bit. The next day they were gone and we never found them again. These feral cats usually hung out in the orchard.

### Ruthie Burned Herself up on the Grainery Step

**T**he grainery behind the house was the original house. It was taller than the one we lived in. When we moved to Alaska, mom and dad rented the property to Mable and Ted. I don't know the particulars of the arrangements but mom and dad probably felt better about leaving the property there knowing that relatives occupied it. The odd thing today is to realize that to this day I do not know when mom and dad actually sold the Ashton Place.

At that time, Mable and Ted had two children, Tommie and Ruth. Ruth was Dickie's age. Before our family moved to Seward, the four of us played together

whenever Mabel brought them out to our place, or whenever we went to theirs in Vernal. At the time this disaster occurred, we were living in Seward, around 1952. We received one of those frightening mid-night long distance calls in Seward. We did have phones in Seward - party lines where more than two homes could be on a line at a time. Mabel explained to mom what had happened, based on the evidence she had.

Note something that may surprise you. Today, long distance calls mean nothing in particular to you. You grew up with the phone as an extension of your moods. All of you call each other as often as you wish, any time of the day, without great concern for cost, or -here's the real point- for the content of the call. You call each other long distance if you just want to say "hello", to check in since you haven't spoken with each other for a day or week or two. That is totally different than in these early years of phone service, when connections were terrible with raspy grating sounds that were often louder than the voices. When a long distance call came in, often as not during the night to get the best rate, it was an occasion for anxiety and concern. No one paid the price to make long distance calls unless s/he had something important -very important, nay literally "life-and-death"- to say. Not even weddings or births merited such extravagance in those days. There were no congratulatory calls about graduations or promotions for people in my situation. No calls on Mother's day. No calls for Easter or Christmas. None. The only long distance calls made by people like us were about life and death, injury and serious, very serious, illness.

I vividly remember one such call coming into Vernal. Mom was taking her Saturday night bath in the wash tub in the kitchen. After one of us answered the phone and heard the raspy static that made the speech almost unintelligible, and got the message, "May I speak to Marie?" the kid who took the call frantically banged on the kitchen door, yelling, "Mom, its long distance! Come quick!" And she did. She got out of the tub and went to the phone in the dining room, the only phone in the house - none of these extravagances of extensions around the house. Indeed, I had never heard of more than one phone in the house until I moved to Boston when I was 14. What a stupid thing. This event with mom running scantily clad from the kitchen



Figure 31 Tommy in 1951

was indelibly marked in my mind for at least two reasons: First, by the unusualness of her appearing outside of the kitchen in a towel, something she never did, and second, by the gravity of the call, the seriousness of the content. Judging from her face and words and the conversation that followed later with dad about what she had heard, I knew the call was one of those major things that probably should be written on a tablet of stone for succeeding generations.

So when Mabel called mom in Seward during the night, we automatically knew it was about something monumental, disastrous. It was. Mabel called to report two things: First, Ruthie had accidentally started a fire that burned our grainery down. Second, Mabel reported that she was dead as a result of being burned in the fire. There was nothing that mom could do that far away, not even attend the funeral which would take place before she could even get out to Vernal, even if she had had the inclination AND the money to take the trip. That was a thing about Alaska at the time: it was not a simple mid-morning flight of 3 or 4 hours away to get somewhere. To travel "stateside" was to undertake a trip that was days long, using different kinds of transportation.

What happened according to Mabel's report was that Ruthie had been playing with a gallon jug of kerosene on the front step of the grainery and had started a fire. I remembered that particular glass gallon jug because I was powerfully instructed about it when I lived there to leave that particular bottle alone. On pain of death, if not worse. I obeyed the order, but I didn't realize how prophetic the instructions were about what would happen if I messed around with that bottle.

I always harbored two different sentiments about Ruthie burning herself up. On the one hand, Ruthie was a nice cousin that I really liked, and whom I'd never get to see again, though I didn't really comprehend 'death', so I felt bad for her. But on the other hand, it was her own fault for disobeying in which case she sort of deserved what she got. Kid's opinions don't have too much gray. It was my opinion - reinforced by mom- that Mabel let her kids get away with things that were 'wrong'. Turns out that in this instance at least, mom was right. However, inside of me, I sort of liked Mabel's generally nicer approach to kids.

Ruth was about 7 and was using the kerosene to start a small fire that she had laid on the wooden front step. No understanding of the risk of mixing flammable substances. A wooden step is obviously not a good place to set a fire in the first place, so what happened was probably going to happen one way or another. Ruthie took the lid off the gallon jug and poured some of the kerosene onto the little pile of wood and paper that was to be her fire. The problem was that while she was pouring out the kerosene, some of it ran down her hands and dress onto the porch. Then

when she lighted the match with one of the kitchen matches, the fire followed the stream of kerosene. Up her leg into her kerosene-soaked dress. She turned into a fireball. Mabel said she saw that happen from the kitchen window. She heard Ruthie scream and rushed out of the house past the lilac bushes to Ruthie to try and put the fire out. By the time she got there, Ruthie was so badly burned that she died a day or so later in the tiny Vernal hospital where I had two surgeries. By the time the fire department arrived at the house, more than a mile from the fire station, all the firemen could do was watch the logs finish burning and protect the garage and house from burning as well. They must have done a good job, or else the coal shed was empty because the garage did not burn.