

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

JESSIE MAY BURNETT FRANSE

September 26, 1972

Redlake Community, N. M.

By Mrs. John Burroughs

For Eastern New Mexico University Library

- BURROUGHS: This is Mrs. John Burroughs. The day is September 26, 1972. I am sitting here with Mrs. Walter Franse in her very attractive home under which large elm trees are hovering over the roof. It is a homelike place out on the edge of the city where they have lived a long time. Good afternoon Mrs. Franse. Thank you for letting me come. Let's talk about old times. Will you state your full name. Your given name.
- FRANSE: Jessie May Burnett.
- BURROUGHS: Can you tell me something about your grandparents?
- FRANSE: My grandmother on my mother's side came to visit us several times in New Mexico during 1909 until 1919.
- BURROUGHS: Were you already here in 1909?
- FRANSE: I came in 1908.
- BURROUGHS: You did? How old were you?
- FRANSE: I was ten.

BURROUGHS: Well then, your grandmother probably stayed back in the other part of the country while your parents came out here. Who were your parents?

FRANSE: Mr. and Mrs. Charlie Burnett.

BURROUGHS: Where did you settle?

FRANSE: Ten miles east of Elida. We left Kansas February 14, 1908. My father had previously filed on a quarter section in December 1907.

BURROUGHS: Out here?

FRANSE: Yes.

BURROUGHS: Then he went back to get the family?

FRANSE: We had a sale and we came by train. Our belongings came in a boxcar.

BURROUGHS: Did you sell everything?

FRANSE: Yes.

BURROUGHS: All of your stock and most all of your equipment?

FRANSE: We had just enough to get by. A team and I don't remember how many head of cattle. Just enough to furnish the family.

BURROUGHS: And they came in the boxcar?

FRANSE: Yes, and we came on the passenger train.

BURROUGHS: You were lucky to have a train in that kind of weather, if it was February, instead of traveling by covered wagon.

FRANSE: We had a little trouble up in the Panhandle, a snow drift. Another train had to come out of Amarillo and meet us. We had to walk a short distance. We were several hours late coming into Elida.

BURROUGHS: You took the cattle out of the boxcar?

FRANSE: No, the boxcar was several days getting here. The first week we stayed in a hotel.

BURROUGHS: What was the name of that hotel?

FRANSE: The Camel Hotel.

BURROUGHS: Here in Portales?

FRANSE: No, in Elida.

BURROUGHS: Oh, yes, I have heard of that little place down in Elida.

FRANSE: When the boxcar came, we rented a small house. We lived in it while my father went out on the claim and built a two room house. My mother had moved from a six room house with many closets, pantries, back and front porch. She had brought way too much furniture for a two room house.

BURROUGHS: It was hard to part with those cherished belongings, wasn't it?

FRANSE: Yes it was. Like our carpet and velvet sofas. This little two room house, the sand blew in. The longer it dried out, then the cracks began to show.

BURROUGHS: How many lived in the two room house?

FRANSE: My mother and father and three of us children.

BURROUGHS: So that was six. Can you describe those rooms? Did you all sleep in the same room and then live, eat, and cook in the other?

FRANSE: It was 14 feet wide and 28 feet long. There was a folding bed in the kitchen. My little sister was four years old and she slept with my parents. My little brother and I slept in the kitchen in the folding bed. Just as soon as we got out of bed it was made up and...

BURROUGHS: Folded out of the way. You would have to or you wouldn't have room to get around the table.

FRANSE: It was pretty crowded, but we didn't live crowded that way very long. My father soon added another room. Somebody left and he bought the house and added it on.

BURROUGHS: He just moved that house and added it to yours. That was north of Elida?

FRANSE: East. Due east.

BURROUGHS: On 160 acres. Let's talk about your mother's furniture. What did she do with it if she brought it and didn't have room to place it in the two room house?

FRANSE: Well, to the best of my recollection, it was really crowded. She had to leave her organ. She was awfully disappointed on leaving her organ because it was a wedding present. She brought a full bedroom suit of cherrywood, and this sofa, it was red. And what we called a table that had a little square down here...

BURROUGHS: A big pedestal table?

FRANSE: Yes. In the kitchen I can only remember this folding bed and a stove.

BURROUGHS: What kind of stove was that?

FRANSE: It was a coal burning stove.

BURROUGHS: You didn't burn cowchips then?

FRANSE: Oh, yes. But having come from a place where there was plenty of fuel, my father was most unusual about fuel. We didn't burn very many cowchips, but I did later in life.

BURROUGHS: When was that then?

FRANSE: After I married.

BURROUGHS: We won't get to that quite yet. What were the names and ages of your brothers and sisters?

FRANSE: I was ten, my brother, Art, was seven, and my sister was four, Caroline. They are both dead now.

BURROUGHS: You are the only one that is left.

FRANSE: My brother, Dave, he was born out here. My mother came to New Mexico for her health, asthma. She had five sons and one daughter.

BURROUGHS: What were those boys names?

FRANSE: The oldest one was Charles Horace, David, who lives here in the valley, Waldo, Russel, and Kenneth. And my sister Dolly, who lives in Kansas. She was the youngest of the six.

BURROUGHS: So you had a big family even after you came here. Your mother must have improved in health.

FRANSE: Yes. In 1924, four of my brothers died within two weeks time.

BURROUGHS: Oh, Mrs. Franse. What was that? Influenza?

FRANSE: Measles, and an infection of the throat, and complications of the measles. Diphtheria may have come in.

BURROUGHS: Were they real young?

FRANSE: Their ages ranged from 6 to 16.

BURROUGHS: And you lost four of them?

FRANSE: They are buried out at Mt. Zion.

BURROUGHS: What a tragedy. Were the doctors able to come and treat them?

FRANSE: They were too sick by the time doctors... There were two different diseases in school and they had them both. They had taken the measles last. They were run down when they had taken the measles. Then they ran into complications.

BURROUGHS: What time of year was that?

FRANSE: It was the last of February and the first of March.

BURROUGHS: Just a bad time. Some other families suffered loss of children in those early days for that very reason, they just didn't have medical help soon enough.

FRANSE: They didn't have these antibiotics.

BURROUGHS: That was not until the 1940's that we had antibiotics in quantity. That is a very sad incident in your early recollections, I know. Where did you go to school?

FRANSE: My first year of school was in Elida. I was eleven. Then I had the privilege of going back to my home state to finish the seventh and eighth grade.

BURROUGHS: In Kansas?

FRANSE: Yes, in Kansas. Then I came back and went to school in Elida as a Freshman. I came back after that didn't prove too satisfactory because my mother needed me so bad. I came back and went to school at a little schoolhouse called Lakeside.

BURROUGHS: Yes, a little community school. I think the county had quite a number of those small schools at that time. You were then in about the ninth or tenth grade? Was it a one room school?

FRANSE: Yes, a one room school.

BURROUGHS: Who was your teacher?

FRANSE: I had Mrs. Shavers, who is the wife of Mr. Ed Shavers that runs this motel out on the Lovington Highway. I have forgotten her first name. And Mr. Paxton. I have forgotten his first name, too.

BURROUGHS: So you went there for a while until you stopped and helped your mother. What kind of work did you do to help your mother?

FRANSE: I did cooking and housework. My younger sister, Caroline, worked with my father with the sheep. My father had sheep.

BURROUGHS: Sheep instead of cattle. What did your mother do then?

FRANSE: It took us both to do the cooking because we cooked for the hands.

BURROUGHS: How many?

FRANSE: Oh, from two to three sheep herders. Around the clock. They stayed, they had little bunk houses and we fed them.

BURROUGHS: So they didn't come just at meals. They came at odd times to be fed.

FRANSE: No, they ate their breakfast, dinner, and supper with the family.

BURROUGHS: What did you serve them besides beans and cornbread?

FRANSE: Well, my mother didn't cook very many beans because we hadn't eaten beans in Kansas. She cooked like she did back there. Our father bought groceries in large quantities and we ate lots of dried fruit, and typical of Eastern people, we ate a lot of potatoes. She was a real good bread maker. She made fresh bread all of the time.

BURROUGHS: Did she keep the sourdough starter?

FRANSE: Yes, she did.

BURROUGHS: Would you describe that and tell how it was used?

FRANSE: You save the starter and put it in a clean jar, about a half cup. Sometimes hers was so lively it would push the lid, run over.

BURROUGHS: What was in the starter?

FRANSE: You started the starter with a cake of yeast and potato water and some sugar. Oh, we hated to run out of starter. You would borrow it from neighbors. I went and borrowed some for mother and then took some of hers. I am not bragging, but she was an exceptionally good cook.

BURROUGHS: For the benefit of some students, girl students, who might listen to this in later years, let's talk about that starter. How much did it take out of a cup to put into say four cups of flour?

FRANSE: How much starter did it take? This half of a cup would make several loaves of bread. You start it at night and you use lukewarm water and your starter and make it a thick dough with some sugar and beat it and in the morning if it wasn't in a large container, it would be all over the cabinet. Then you sifted your flour in a dishpan, according to how many loaves you want to make, and put this yeast in and your salt. Don't ever put your salt in till the last thing. Salt keeps it from rising, unless it is in with more flour. Then you made it as stiff as you wanted it. Kneading bread is a big thing.

BURROUGHS: Yes, that is what makes the texture lighter. Then she would take some of that...

FRANSE: The next morning before she poured it all into the flour, she would save her starter. I know, I did most of the dishwashing and I had to wash that jar.

BURROUGHS: That was hard work, wasn't it, to get all of that sticky part out? Then she would make a little fresh starter or save part of that and...

FRANSE: She would take it out the next morning after it had raised up, and it would be all full of bubbles and smell so good.

BURROUGHS: It smelled yeasty, didn't it? Well, that is interesting and it is an art that people now don't follow, they just don't know anything about these sourdough starters.

FRANSE: It had the best smell and when you put the starter in the jar, you put, I guess, about three tablespoons full of sugar. To the best of my memory.

BURROUGHS: That made it rise up real fast.

FRANSE: But if it was dead, it wouldn't rise and the bread wasn't any good either.

BURROUGHS: What would kill the yeast?

FRANSE: Too cold or too hot, or letting it go too long. It had to be used regular.

BURROUGHS: You had to bake fresh bread every day then, didn't you?

FRANSE: Yes. Well, I think mother, every other day.

BURROUGHS: With that many men, I would think that you would need it. What kind of meat did you have?

FRANSE: Well, my father was an expert with pork, and we ate lots of pork. And he bought bacon, and we ate lots of salmon. Mother could fix it so many different ways.

BURROUGHS: That is the first time I have ever heard anybody mention eating any fish out here. It has always been beef.

FRANSE: She fixed it scalloped or more like a...when anything rises way up...

BURROUGHS: A souffle?

FRANSE: Yes, she fixed it that way, and then she made it into patties.

Then she had a way of fixing it, she would put it on a platter, and slice two or three big, white onions on top of it, and put salt and pepper and a little bit of vinegar. Us children just loved it. Can you imagine a child eating that this day?

BURROUGHS: No, I surely can't.

FRANSE: Well, we loved it and other things we didn't care for that children probably...

BURROUGHS: It is just what you are used to. Well, that is an interesting sideline.

FRANSE: I believe I can truthfully say that she was the first one in our community that cooked macaroni. She had cooked it in Kansas and she fixed it many different ways.

BURROUGHS: You could buy that here in the stores? After she had begun cooking it, did others take it up?

FRANSE: Yes, they did.

BURROUGHS: Well, that's interesting. I think the old time folks used to pass their recipes around, and exchange dishes.

FRANSE: Oh, yes.

BURROUGHS: That was a part of the pastime.

FRANSE: The first year we were out here, my mother had to cook for well drillers. We got a nice 160 acres of land but no water on it, and I know a great deal of my father's money that he had brought with him went to trying to get a well. And she had to cook for these two men. They ate dinner and supper with us.

BURROUGHS: How long did they search for a well site?

FRANSE: Off and on. I don't know how many dry holes they had.

BURROUGHS: You paid them then, whether they struck water or not?

FRANSE: Yes.

BURROUGHS: How much did you pay them?

FRANSE: Oh, I couldn't answer that correctly.

BURROUGHS: Somebody mentioned about a dollar a foot, the depth of the hole.

FRANSE: The power was by horses. The horses pulled a lever of some kind that caused the drill...

BURROUGHS: Like a sorgam, molasses mill, it went around and around.

FRANSE: Yes. We got only a very weak well on this quarter section and the horses wouldn't even drink it.

BURROUGHS: What was the matter?

FRANSE: It was too bitter, too much...

BURROUGHS: Too much alkali, I guess.

FRANSE: It wasn't long till my father bought a place with a well on it. In his second year out here, he started buying sheep. He still owned his farm in Kansas, and my mother hoped that she would get to where we could go back to this farm. He put a mortgage on it and I well remember how sad she was. He bought four hundred ewes and from 1910 until 1922, we had sheep.

BURROUGHS: How many sheep? How large a flock?

FRANSE: I would say at the most, fifteen-hundred head.

BURROUGHS: And there was enough grass and everything down there?

FRANSE: Yes, there was for a while. But there came these droughts and just first one thing and another in life. In 1922, he lost his sheep.

BURROUGHS: Where did he get water for them?

FRANSE: He bought places.

BURROUGHS: That was the place where...

FRANSE: He was real lucky in securing land pretty reasonable at first, and that gave him...he enjoyed livestock so much and this was the first sheep he had tried to raise. He did so well that he got over enthused and went in too much. He had a wonderful living for my mother, if he would have quit when my mother told him to.

BURROUGHS: Yes, but men don't usually do that, do they? They always want to make just a little bit more.

FRANSE: And then his health failed. And after this happened, my father lost his four boys, and my father was never well again.

BURROUGHS: Did you lose sheep and cattle in 1918 and 1919 when everyone... the blizzard...

FRANSE: That was a very hard winter, 1918, because in November, it snowed and there wasn't a bite of grass for them up until spring. They had to be fed. He had several head of cattle then, and I know they had to be fed too.

BURROUGHS: How did you get the feed?

FRANSE: We went to Elida and bought cake and hay. The roads were frozen and the horses had to be shod. I remember my husband helped.

BURROUGHS: How long did the snow stay on the ground?

FRANSE: It stayed on from November till the last of February.

BURROUGHS: Your house heating..were you able to get enough coal to last through the winter?

FRANSE: There wasn't very much coal. That was after I married. I married in 1916.

BURROUGHS: 1916. You were pretty young when you married, weren't you?

FRANSE: Well, I was past 19. Just past 19. I believe by then my mother and father had oil burners and we did too. But we still had a time getting enough fuel.

BURROUGHS: Tell me about your marriage. Who was your husband? Who is your husband?

FRANSE: Walter Franse.

BURROUGHS: Where did you meet him?

FRANSE: I met him when I was 16. We went together almost four years.

BURROUGHS: Did you meet him at a country dance, or at church?

FRANSE: No, I met him at church. He nor I either one dance. If I had my life to live over, that is one of the first things I would do, would be learn to dance.

BURROUGHS: It is fun, isn't it?

FRANSE: I know it is. Anyway, we married in 1916, in Portales. In 1966 we celebrated our fiftith wedding anniversary.

BURROUGHS: That is wonderful. And that was six years ago, you are going on the next fifty.

FRANSE: Tell him we won't have any more anniversaries.

BURROUGHS: Where did you live when you first married? Was it close to your parents place?

FRANSE: Three miles east. We lived where Joe Gammill now lives. He lives on our place.

BURROUGHS: Was that a homestead claim that you lived out?

FRANSE: No, it had already been proved up. My father traded my husband on a half section. It had to be proved up on and he traded it to my father. My father bought this one that was already deeded and they traded. Walter went ahead then because he could still