

# 84-Year-Old Loyd Rupe Recalls Early Days Ranching, in Harpster Area, Working for Forest

Lloyd Rupe 84, has the distinction of being the oldest continuously living person in the Harpster area.

Rupe can be found at "Rupe's Roost," at home on the Grangeville side of Harpster.

Three children were born to the family when Rupe's family was living in Kentucky. They were all girls, Sarah, Lew and Ida. Rupe's mother contracted the "chills" so Rupe's family moved to Missouri, where Rupe was born.

He was born in Chillicothe, Missouri, in June 17, 1892.

When Rupe was three years old, the family moved to Garfield, Washington.

The Rupes came to Idaho in a covered wagon. The mud was deep, Rupe recalled. The teams had to all pull together while some furniture was discarded.

His father came to Chesley, near Reuben to homestead, near Craig's Mountain.

Bands of wild horses were

remembered by Rupe, who also said large yellow pine timber in the area was four to five feet in thickness.

In 1902 the family bought a homestead in Harpster, when Rupe was 10 years old.

Rupe can remember his father driving 125 head of cattle to Blacktail Mountain. His father bought a ranch two-and-one-half miles from Harpster, where Rupe lived for 48 years.

The family cleaned the ground with a "grubbing hoe and team," Rupe said.

Roads in those days were mostly trails. Rupe packed in most of the items for the ranch operations, including a hay rake and mowing machinery. Rupe said the items were disassembled and then packed in.

Haying machine wheels were packed on the side of the mule.

This experience in packing gave Rupe a job for life.

Rupe remembers when Indian bands would travel through the ranch, on their way hunting.

He remembers one squaw in particular, who thought a lot of the children. Rupe said she was invited to stay the night, and slept on the floor.

In the morning, in appreciation, she went out and picked moss and made moss pudding. However, Rupe said no-one except the squaw would touch it.

Rupe married and the couple had several children. Rupe said the children would ride a horse to school.

One child at one time never returned home, and Rupe went out to look for her, finding her crying halfway down the mountainside.

In winter children would have to drag themselves through the deep snow to school.

In Harpster, Rupe remembers the H.C. Oliver Store and Feed, which was a grocery store.

Also, the O.C. Lapp Store, which was a grocery store, Tom Surridge's Feed Barn, the Clark and O'Bannon Store, a grocery, and another feed barn. "Owl" Russell and George Renner ran a saloon. The city of Stites at that time was filled with freighters who would go to Elk City, Rupe recalls. They would come from Lewiston, through Stites, to Harpster and Elk City.

An individual named Fagan ran a blacksmith shop and Mrs. McDougall ran a large hotel, a two-story building.

Doc Bucy, ran a drugstore. Rupe also recalls the first railroad train to come into Grangeville.

He recalls all the little towns around Reubens, saying that "Reubens killed all the little towns there."

Reubens was built where the railroad came through the area.

Some of the towns he listed were Melrose, Gifford, Pine City, Chesley, Westlake, Morrow Town, Forest, Woodside, Ilo, at one time called Chicago, Bemon, and Lookout. Woodside was four miles south of Winchester.

All these little towns arose when the Indian reservation was opened for settlement in 1885, he said.

In the old days when a

person became sick, the doctor came to the patient not the other way around, Rupe reflected.

The doctor would come down the old Harpster grade from Grangeville and if it was night, the doctor would have a lantern on the dashboard of his horse-drawn rig.

The doctor would feel the pulse, check the heart, and take medicine from his bag, fold it up in paper squares, taking as much as the doctor felt the patient needed, and give the person the medicine.

"The 'older generation' which was here when Rupe arrived, are all dead now, and he reflected that only "two or three of us are left." The next generation is in its 40's, Rupe said.

In talking about the old days, Rupe recalls work methods. When he once hauled wheat he was up at 2 a.m., he said, with a four-horse team. He would work all day, using a lantern if he had to work at night. The wagon would go to Grangeville and back, which would be an all-day trip up the old hill route to Grangeville, which is different than the Harpster grade.

Rupe recalls the age of stearn on the farm and terms it the "most faithful, truthful power to my notion."

Rupe spent 16 seasons in the harvest, spending one year threshing until Thanksgiving when bundles of wheat were frozen stiff.

Entertainment in the early days consisted of pie socials, literary meetings, dances, spelling bees, taffy pulling and masquerade dances.

Rupe recalled that "We'd never go home until broad daylight."

"They would never butcher beef on the ranch but at three or four years of age would sell the cattle.

They would raise hogs for meat.

They would receive about \$25 per head for the cattle they sold, recalls Rupe.

The ranchers in that area would go together, sending 50-100 head to market at one time.

The ranchers could out

cattle on the forest reserve for 10 cents a head in those days, recalls Rupe.

When he worked for someone else, wages were at \$1 per day.

Stages and mail by buggy or hack was also another remembrance of Rupe.

Mail at one time was packed by packhorse from Stites to Harpster.

The stage to Elk City would follow the high divide, Rupe recalls.

The stages would leave Stites, and arrive in Clearwater, traveling to the Switchback, Corral Hill, Mountain House, Newsome, Mud Springs, and finally arriving at Elk City.

Along the way, boarding houses would put up the weary passengers at the stage stops.

In the wintertime, horses would don eight-sided snowshoes, approximately nine-inches wide, Rupe said.

The snow at Mountain House would be 20-feet deep in winter. If a horse wandered off the packed road, an individual might have to dig down all night to get the horse out, and perhaps have to kill him if unsuccessful.

About the stage line, Rupe recalls that approximately 40 head of horses along the route was necessary to run the stage line to Elk City. He said Oly Johnson, and Gertrude Maxwell's father were two individuals involved in the business. The teams would travel about three to four miles per hour.

Rupe remembers Border Days. He and his wife rode in to get married in 1912, the first border days. He has seen every one of them since.

Rupe also packed for the forest service, in 1911 and 12. At Hoodoo Lake a cabin was standing, and Rupe helped put in a floor by whipsawing the lumber in the area. The hand-powered method would yield about four boards per day, he said.

They would drag logs in with a lariat looped around the saddle horns.

Rupe recalls a journey packing to Hamilton, Montana, where he finally came out to the green grass and trains of the "city" and

explained, "I couldn't believe I was in another world."

He also drilled with a hand drill, to open up a trail. Major Fenn was forest service supervisor at that time, and sent a man in to get the workers out, saying it was going to snow.

It snowed six inches before the men got out, and Rupe said they stopped and killed a mountain goat while leaving.

Talking about the "old timers," Rupe said, "Those people were the nicest old homesteaders you ever met in your life, but you didn't want to step on their toes."

On the prairie, every 160 acres sported a family. Now, Rupe said, the prairie farms are owned by just a few.

Mud in the spring breakups on the road to Elk City would cause the road to be planked, with lumber one foot to 18 inches in diameter and 12 feet wide.

In 1949 Rupe turned over the ranch to his son, who later sold the property.

It is now owned by Frank Scott.

Rupe also sheared sheep for 20 seasons.

Rupe recalls the first autos in Grangeville, which were chain-drive affairs, which he said came into the area about 1917.

Rupe has seen various forms of transportation from pack horses, wagons, hacks, saddle horses, cars, airplanes, and has also "heard of them going to the moon."

Rupe "cowboyed" for Herb Brown at McComas meadows from 1949 until 1962 when he retired.

Now 84, he remembers the board sidewalks of Grangeville with the feed barns, hitching racks, and old well in back of the Alexander and Freidenrich Co., where the city of Grangeville obtained its water.

The mud was so deep a person would easily become stuck in Main Street.

When a person was traveling across the prairie a person would always bring along a crowbar to dig the mud he called "dobe" off the wheels of wagons.

WITH HIS COLLECTION of violins, Loyd Rupe is pictured here at "Rupe's Roost" just prior to his 84th birthday. —Free Press Photo

