Mrs. Beal Tells Story of Early Days In Valley Where Anaconda Now Stands

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ALONG narrow prairie of pale bunch grass, irregularly parted by two black ruts served as a wagon road and was huddled close on one side by splendid forests of pine and on the other side by thick groups of willows, is the 51-year-old picture of the valley in which Anaconda was built as recalled by Mrs. Margaret M. Beal, who observed her seventy-sixth birthday at her home in that city recently.

In memory of a birthday celebrated half a century ago in a small ranch home that was situated one mile west of the present city, Mrs. Beal entertained many of her 22 grandchildren and 16 great grandchildren and friends at an old-time party. Despite her age, Mrs. Beal was as active as a debutant hostess in receiving and entertaining her guests.

Comforts in Contrast

But unlike the party held 50 years ago, the guests occupied comfortable chairs instead of empty canned goods boxes, and they were served refreshments purchased at a downtown store and prepared in a modern kitchen, in as much interest as she arranged for her first birthday to be observed in the Deer Lodge valley.

The section of the valley In which Anaconda is now located was an extensive sheep ranch owned by a Mr. Sigsby, who lived at Butte, then a small mining camp. Sigsby had several hundred head of sheep, that grazed during the short summer months on the ground now covered with pavement, brick buildings and dwelling houses.

The winters were long with severe storms. “I remember the temperature being as low as 46 degrees below zero,” Mrs. Beal said, as she poked the fire in her kitchen range. “You couldn’t get out of doors without gathering frost on your eyelashes. The snow drifted to the tops of the high fences near the house and above the window sills.” Sometimes the sheep were caught in an early winter storm, while feeding in the valley, the pioneer woman stated. Many of them would die from the cold before they could be headed into the narrow gulch north of the city, since then called Sheep gulch, she stated.

The entrance to the west valley was then called a canyon. It was heavily wooded and served as the home of hundreds of deer, mountain goat, elk and mountain lion. “From the doorstep I could often see the animals on the hillsides,” Mrs. Beal said. “Because deer, elk and the larger animals were so abundant we did not bother with the smaller game,” she added.

Fish Abundant

A short distance from her home or only a few minutes’ walk was the clear, fresh and beautiful Warm Springs creek. Large groups of willows lined the creek for the entire

length of the valley. The creek was full of trout, Mrs. Beal said, "and it required only a short time to fill a pan with a splendid catch."

During the spring months, prospectors would pass through the valley and disappear id the canyon for many months.

They came from Butte with their pack trains of mining equipment and grub in search of gold in the distant mountains. Sometimes these men would stop at the Beal ranch and purchase butter. Other visitors Into the valley were few. Occasionally a Flathead Indian that had ventured over the western divide to hunt in Deer Lodge valley, would stop at the Beal ranch to barter game or fish for butter and condiments.

Mrs. Beal's closest neighbor 50 years ago was Alexander Glover, who lived with his wife and small family, one mile east of the Beal ranch, in a log cabin which still stands in Washoe park. The cabin, which is one of the oldest buildings still standing in Deen Lodge valley, is at present used as a watchman's shack. In the eastern part of the valley, near the present site of the acid plant, lived the pioneer Vinyard family. Mrs. Theresa Vin-yard, who also remembers when the valley was a sheep ranch, now resides in Anaconda. She is 86 years of age. The two pioneer women reside within a few blocks of each other.

Recalls Old Ranches

West of the old Beal home could be found two of the oldest ranches in the county, the P. Levengood stock ranch and the J. Stucky place. The Levingood ranch is remembered today as the Day ranch.

The ranchers sold hay in Butte and drove their stock to Helena and other pities. Both products were very much in-demand at the time. Mrs. Beal can remember when butter sold at $1 a pound and eggs at the same price per dozen. During the early years of her residence in the valley, Mrs. Beal furnished such small products to the Barker boys, who operated a lumber mill in a gulch southwest of the present city. The lumber was marketed in Butte, where it was in great demand for constructing homes for the increasing population.

Laying aside an electric iron to attend a modern coffee percolator, the pioneer woman told of some of the discomforts of her time compared to the present day. "We had no magazines and often no newspapers in the early days," she said. "The first paper that we subscribed to was The Northwest, published at that time in Deer Lodge. We received our mail from the postoffice at Warm Springs. The few ranchers in the valley took turns In driving the long distance for the mail."

The first schoolhouse in that part of the valley was built near the Beal home, above the present ball park, which at that time was a potato patch. Six pupils were enrolled in the school. The ranchers secured the services of Miss Netty Rogan, a 16-year-old girl from Butte. The schoolhouse later burned down.

"A shopping trip in those times meant a stay of a day or two in Butte," Mrs. Beal explained. "The trip was so long that the ranchers were forced to remain in Butte all night. Shoes and other clothes were high priced."

In the late fall the families in the valley would haul the winter provisions from Butte to the ranch homes. The rough roads during the winter months were seldom passable. "The winter months may have been long, but they passed quickly for we had our work to do," Mrs. Beal stated. "I did not mind the weather then at all for I was young."

Speaking of youth, Mrs. Beal's eyes gaily sparkled and she asked the reporter if Lindbergh, the Lone Eagle, was not the most perfect boy. "I would like to take a trip with him," she said with a happy smile.

She also urged the reporter as he left the small, comfortable home, not to forget that she expected to live to elect the next democratic president, at least. "I don't know who it will be but I will help to put him in office."

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