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Oral history interview with Lula Cutting

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**LULA CUTTING
INTERVIEWED BY UNKNOWN
EWU Women's Oral History Project
EWU 984-0094-21
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INTERVIEWER: Okay. I'm having conversation with Mrs. Lula Cutting of Cheney.

CUTTING: I am one of a family of eight children of Lee and Ida Johnson, who came from Richill, Missouri in 1903 and settled near Spokane on what is now Geiger Field of the Geiger air force base. While there, we were being educated in a small, country school, which was also on Geiger Field, but in 1909 they thought of Coulee Dam and irrigating the desert country had become uppermost in my father's mind, so we moved. He moved his family to what is now Moses Lake. In going to Moses Lake, to make that trip, he had a little covered wagon and he took several horses and several cows with him and we went over this, about ninety miles, in that manner more for the fun of it, then 'cause we had to, and established ourselves on a small homestead north of Moses Lake city, now, it wasn't anything then, but the lake. From there I was being a high-schooled student. There was no high school so the teacher at the small country school tutored me in my high school studies, because she didn't want to see some of us older students, you might say, not without education. So she had several of us until we almost graduated, but we never got to where we got a certificate. In the meantime, much activity was in the Moses Lake country because of the plans and agitation or publicity on Coulee Dam which would irrigate all that dessert. My father had become very enthusiastic about that and took his family over there and we all helped to build our house there, in the mean time, there were many young men and young families, as well as us. Of course, being several girls in my family, we had lots of those. So in the meantime I marry one of them and go to Ephrata, which is now the county seat at Grant County, to be married. Traveled across the sage brush with a horse and buggy, believe it or not, and then we returned to live on a homestead that my husband had taken up in the meantime a few years. Then the World War II came on and he wished to work in the commissary over at the shipyard in Seattle, so we moved there.

INTERVIEWER: What did he do there?

CUTTING: Well he ran, they called them commissaries, the store. All the supplies and everything went through his hands as in charge of the store, in connection with the shipyard, you see. Here he's just a storekeeper, I guess you would call him, but his real trade was well-drilling. He had helped to drill wells in the Moses Lake country, the Ritzville country, the Odessa country and in the long run, he had acquired three machines, so he had crews of men working on that. So when we came back from Seattle, we again moved up to Geiger Field on a small place that my parents still owned up there and lived there part of a year until I came down to Cheney to find a place to live and to school my little boy who was just starting school.

INTERVIEWER: This was in 1918 or 19?

CUTTING: This was 19 and 20, when I came down to Cheney. At that time they had an electric train that came in to Cheney for transportation of the students to the State Normal School.

INTERVIEWER: When was the college built, do you remember?

CUTTING: Well the college opened in 1896 as the State Normal School and when we moved down here it was still a Normal School in 19 and 20 and I found a place to live, which is the home I'm living in now, after fifty-five years. My son went on to school here in Cheney and was a high honor student and went to Pullman on a scholarship as an athlete and was taken sick there and that's where we lost him. But, in the meantime, we had established ourselves in Cheney and my husband had given up his well-drilling work in the Moses Lake country and come to Cheney and was working in the National Biscuit Company Flour Mill. At that time it was the F.M. Martin Flour Mill, run by Governor C.D. Martin, the son. Mr. Cutting worked there for twenty-five years, until retirement.

INTERVIEWER: What was his job there?

CUTTING: His job was a feed-packer. Now feed-packing in those days was when the feed came down the spouts, in the mill, into gunny sacks, and they had to have men tying, sewing them and tying them very fast and he got so he could sew a sack in minutes time. He worked at that work, until the National Biscuit Company bought this Flour Mill and converted into other types of machinery and they used, then, paper sacks for their flour and had to sew them on the machine, which he became very capable of doing. From that they would cart those sacks of flour to a boxcar on the railroad, right outside the Mill, that was part of his job, to do that, and he stayed there. In the meantime our son had grown up and was in high school. We had a daughter eight years younger than our son and she was also educated in Cheney. But my son, Archie Jr. went through this school as an athlete and head of the Boys Federation and he was a promised leader in coaching and athletics when he had a scholarship to go to Pullman and Washington State College, as it was called then. Now it's the Washington State University. He was beginning his second year when he was taken sick I know we lost him there. Our daughter Margerie, who is now Margerie Sexton and lives in Spokane Valley, went through the college here, for three years, she was a singer, a speech major and a P.E. minor. She decided during the second World War that she wanted to be a business woman, so she went in to Spokane and went to Kinman University, in Spokane, which trained them in business procedures. They were giving them three months courses at one time. Before she had finished that she was employed in John W. Grand Bookstore and then from after two years there she transferred to Sears & Roebuck and was in the credit department as one of the book-keepers, when she married. Now she lives in Spokane Valley and has raised three step-children and has a daughter of her own, Debbie Lou, which we named after me, more or less, and she's now an eighth grader. Now that's enough of that side. Now during my time here in Cheney, I became very active in the Campfire girls. They were trying to organize many of our young folks into groups. They needed leaders and also needed someone to lead the leaders.

INTERVIEWER: When was this?

CUTTING: Now this was 1932.

INTERVIEWER: Before we get up to 1932, I wanted to ask you, for one thing, the mill that your husband worked in, was it always in the same place?

CUTTING: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: It wasn't as near the size of the present mill was it?

CUTTING: No, and we have pictures in our museum showing a little small mill that was run by this Martin family. Frank M. Martin was the old father who started the mill and he developed it was about a third as big as it is right now. Then his son, Clarence D. Martin, who became governor of the State of Washington in the 1930's, I think his last year was 1932, became the owner and manger of it. C.D. Martin had been born right here in Cheney.

INTERVIEWER: Did you know him?

CUTTING: Yes, very well. So none of his sons, however, cared for the milling company, so when he became Governor, and actually had to leave the mill in charge of other people. The head book-keeper was Bettie Borley, who really, was almost the manager of it, since the Governor had to be away so long. But then it was sold to the National Biscuit Company, oh probably eight-teen years ago, I guess, something like that. Because Mr. Cutting was still working there when the National Biscuit Company...

INTERVIEWER: Oh, is that right?

CUTTING: Yes. When he retired at sixty-five, he had helped establish the Union for Laborers in the mill because they had no Union here at that time and often the mill men would go back to work in the morning and find they had no job. It was kind of at the whim of whoever was managing it. You see, and now it has a strong union, in which he was given credit for having helped establish and work at all the time that he was there. He also saw some developments in the management and remodeling the mill or things of that sort. In the meantime now, to go back to my activity. I managed the Campfire Girls Organization until we had six groups in Cheney and organized BlueBirds, which were the little gals and I was a guardian and a leader, simply because I seemed to have more time to do it and was able to get other mothers to help as leaders. We began to acquire some fame in the nation and had many of the National Xaviers come and visit us in Cheney. But we always were associated with Spokane with the Campfire Girls. I stayed with that for fifteen years, until 1947. Of course, during all this time I was going to college and doing some dressmaking and just having fun doing things in the community because I just don't believe living in a community without knowing something about your community. I knew quite a bit about the development and saw them paving the streets and laying the sidewalk and enlarging several of the business houses and they also built what is Fisher Junior High now, which was a new high school, while we were here and I was instrumental in electioneering to get that school built.

INTERVIEWER: When was that built?

CUTTING: That was 1929. At the time of 1929, when all of this was going on, I was a worthy matron of the Order of the Eastern Star, which was a lady lodge in Cheney and the women's section or division, you might say, of the Masonic Lodge, which is very strong in Cheney. Then from that I got mixed up in our local newspaper because I sort of like to write and they needed some reporters during WWII and most of the men had gone off to war again. So I began acting as social reporter or taking any kind of news that came my way and it proved to be very interesting and very stimulating and I think I've been at that since 1945, somewhere in there. I'm still doing it, even when I was ill all last winter. They'd come to my bedside and I'd scribble off the news. All my visitors told me news.

INTERVIEWER: Newspaper work really is fun.

CUTTING: Yeah, it was fun and I really was able to just kind of a gossipy way of writing up a column as I write, so I'm still at that.

INTERVIEWER: You studied a little bit of journalism while you went to Eastern didn't you?

CUTTING: No, but I was very good at English, what we called English and grammar, and I studied that. But, my main going to what is now Eastern, at that time, parts of the time it was the Normal School. Then I took other courses in the summer, or whenever I had time, after it became the Eastern Washington State College. I believe it was another name. But Governor Martin was instrumental in granting degrees to the Normal School during his terms in the 1930's. They were very eager to keep their students up to date because the college was losing so many to the war and everything that they encouraged all housewives to take special courses and to go to school and we just had a real ball and a real opportunity which we couldn't pass up so I took many things. I didn't really try to take a dedicated course, you might say, although I had my transcript. Then I never got far enough to get a degree because I wasn't striving for that. I was just taking these things I was interested in.

INTERVIEWER: What were some of the classes you took?

CUTTING: Well, one was woodwork and my house testifies to the fact that I made bookcases, cedar chests and stools and repaired chairs.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, that's great!

CUTTING: And then the other was home-ec. I learned to serve formal meals, teas, receptions. Then I, being a formal dress-maker, I took dressmaking and took hat-making and took all types of stitchery in that department.

INTERVIEWER: Where was home-making when you took it? Was it in Hargreaves Hall?

CUTTING: Oh no, we didn't have Hargreaves then, we didn't build that until way up in 1940 something.

INTERVIEWER: Was it in Showalter then?

CUTTING: It was all in Showalter Hall and where I did the woodwork and the industrial arts, I should call it, was the manual arts building, which is over near Martin Hall, now. It's just a smaller building because they have a big Martin Hall, the industrial hall; I guess it's called, where they do their woodwork. They had a small building beside Monroe Hall that was called the Manual Arts room and many we housewives went up there and did woodwork and arts and industrial arts and all sorts of things and I took my little girl with me, who was about five years old and several others. They had a sand pen in one corner of the room and during our class period, why they'd be over there, because we had no Kindergarten, no babysitting or no nurseries in Cheney that time, they hadn't been established.

INTERVIEWER: Was someone there to supervise the children while you were in classes?

CUTTING: Oh, we could leave our woodwork and go over and bop them occasionally if we needed to. No, usually we would arrange our studies so we might have two periods at a time and that wasn't too long and we walked everywhere, even though some of us had cars. We would, I would just walk from here up to the college to classes.

INTERVIEWER: Were there residence halls on campus then?

CUTTING: Monroe Hall, Showalter Hall and Senior Hall and now all the rest had been built since. Showalter hall is the administration building and it was built there when the

college grounds was given to Cheney by Benjamin P. Cheney. The first eight acres in that center he gave as a gift to always be a teacher's college, if it ever was used for anything else, then it reverted to the estate. So, naturally, we had much interested in that and an old training school that we call it, was built right beside Showalter Hall and one time, Showalter Hall burned about 1914. They had to transfer all the college classes over to this old training school and it was three stories high, made of good solid, brick. It had many warn places in the floor and we had oil lamps hanging on each side of the hall and I have one of those up in our museum. Cheney Historical Museum, here today.

INTERVIEWER: Was the training hall, was that a temporary thing or is that where Showalter is now?

CUTTING: No no. Showalter is all by itself and Training Hall is where the parking area is now.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, I see. So they rebuilt Showalter Hall after the burning?

CUTTING: Oh, yes. Right away, it was rebuilt, you see. We have a number of pictures in demolishing what was left. There was a very high, steeple-like chimney; I guess you would call it, because they had to heat it with stoves and many of our, local people in Cheney hauled in wood from the woods out south of Cheney to keep that going, whenever they got short of fuel. But it was there longer than Showalter Hall, in a way, because Showalter Hall was built, you know, more as a show place. But they did have all of the college classes in Showalter Hall and the Residence Hall and Monroe Hall were built and dedicated by Bertha Monroe, I believe was her name. Senior Hall was being finished in 1920 when we came here and Sutton Hall, for the boys, was built in 19 and 35, after the governor, I don't mean the governor, after our senator William J. Sutton became senator, it was built for him. Then the new training school was built, which is now Martin Hall, and it was dedicated to Governor C.D. Martin and it was the first six grades for the little folks. The campus school it is now, you see. Now it is a classroom and a new campus school has built and built on to the west side of it.

INTERVIEWER: Did many students come in from Spokane on the electric train?

CUTTING: Yes, that's the reason they had to build it.

INTERVIEWER: Was it largely Spokane students?

CUTTING: Well, as far as we knew. Now it's kind of like today, people, since we have a magic bus coming from Spokane. At this time, many of the students would come from outlying districts around Spokane and leave their transportation or else live in Spokane and come out on the electric train and it was three big coaches and sometimes as high as five coaches. The depot is where our present nursing home is now.

INTERVIEWER: What was the bus fair from Spokane to Cheney? I mean the train fair, excuse me.

CUTTING: Oh, somebody asked me about that the other day. We've got it at the museum. It seems to me it was, oh, around sixty-five cents round trip or something like that. It was run by electricity, you know.

INTERVIEWER: The train didn't go through Medical Lake did it?

CUTTING: There was a ranch line that went to Medical Lake and The Y was out there at Four Lakes and one branch came to Cheney and one went to Medical Lake because Medical Lake was a health center at that time. The Lake was beneficial for certain skin diseases and things of that sort.

INTERVIEWER: That's what I understand.

CUTTING: Yes and as a girl, when I was living on Geiger Field, we young folks often would go, there was a stop on this electric train about a mile from our place and we'd go out there and get on that train and go to Medical Lake and have an all-day picnic and they had boating on Silver Lake, near by. Not on Medical Lake, but Silver Lake. They had old Camp Comfort at Medical Lake, which they had built up as a recreation. You not only could dance in it, you can have different meetings in it and they had a lot of these little machines that you could look through, kind of like field glasses, those lens, to see a show, those five cent shows. They had those all established up in Medical Lake.

INTERVIEWER: This is when you were younger now. This is earlier days now that you're referring to. How long did the Camp Comfort, was Camp Comfort still operating when you were raising your family in Cheney?

CUTTING: Yes, Camp Comfort didn't go out of existence until the Lake seemed to lose it's power as a medical water, then it went into disrepair and kind of got swampy and was unkempt, so they finally demolished all of that and now it's been filled in and there's homes built where Camp Comfort used to be. It used to be quite a park for lots of organizations went to have a picnic. Also, it was a meeting place for many different functions because at that time, you see, Cheney didn't have their parks developed like we have now and we didn't have an extra school room or extra halls or things of that sort to accommodate. What's the time? Can you see my clock?

INTERVIEWER: It's five minutes after eleven, according to me. Are you out of time?

CUTTING: Well, almost out of time. Now I think to close off, I might say that I have been living alone here in Cheney since 1960, when my husband died. My daughter has raised her step-children and I had them most of the time, helping to raise them. One of them is going out here to college and he has become one of the executives for Safeway stores through some of his training out here at our college, so that's our pride and I'm still active on the newspaper in many organizations, so I think I should bid you goodbye with that. That's enough to hold you.

INTERVIEWER: Well, if you don't mind I'd like to come back and ask you some more questions at another time.

CUTTING: Well, I think it can be done.

INTERVIEWER: Thank You.