

# EWING FAMILY NEWS

Descendants of William Alexander Ewing

## The quiet one ... Ray Alexander Ewing

*Many thanks to the family of Ray and Gwen for their input and help with information and photos for this story.*

-- Butch

On November 9, 1904, American voters soundly elected Theodore Roosevelt to his first full term as U.S. President. He had been elevated to the presidency three years earlier when William McKinley died of infection from wounds received at the hand of an assassin.

At the 1904 World's Fair in St. Louis, iced tea and ice cream cones were introduced for the first time to help cool off attendees in the sweltering heat. The United States, which then had 45 states, was busy expanding its influence in the Caribbean, Central America and the south Pacific. Economic activity in the country was booming as European immigrants streamed into Ellis Island looking for a new life in this land of opportunity. The U.S. was definitely on the move.

Meanwhile, a young couple in Kansas was also on the move. Ira

Ewing and Salome Coxley had married in January, 1901, and started out living in an old log cabin, working for a neighbor. By spring of 1905, they had moved to a dilapidated old house near the southern border of Marshall County, where Ira was farming for "shares" with Charley Fea. The young couple's first child, Frank, was going on three years old and their second, another boy (Elmer), had died at birth. Salome was now pregnant with her third child.



Nellie, Ray and Frank Ewing

In a journal of that time period, Ira recorded crops harvested, chores done, and money received, borrowed or spent... but no mention of the fact that on November 9, 1905, (one year after the election of Teddy Roosevelt) another son, Ray Alexander Ewing, had been born. Ira's entry for that day showed him building a crib... presumably a corn crib... with a neighbor. On Sunday, November 19th, he entered, "Took Carrie Scott home. Paid her \$7.00. Borrowed \$2.00 from Mrs. Coxley." It was customary to hire someone to help with housework for the obligatory 10-day bed rest that followed childbirth.

Entries on the 23rd, 24th and 25th show Ira enlisting the help of Charley Fea and a neighbor to do some badly needed repairs on the old house, and then on the 26th : "They finished house. I put things back to place and cleaned out room. Salome, Frank and Ray came home." Salome had been staying with her parents for the birth and the recovery time that followed.

Ira and Salome moved again in 1907, to a farm they rented from Mrs. Reynolds, a short distance from the Coxleys. That's where their first daughter, Nellie, was born in 1908, and where the young family stayed until Ira was forced into treatment at the State

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Hospital in Topeka for his depression in the fall of 1908. Salome and the children moved in with her parents.

Upon his release in late 1909, Ira moved his family into the home of his ailing father, who died a few months later. Ira bought his father's homestead from his siblings and began to establish himself in farming.

Ray grew up on the Ewing homestead, starting his education at the nearby Pleasant Valley school. Being the second oldest child in his family, he learned to work as soon as he was big enough to do chores, an ethic that would last his lifetime.

The family was on the move again in 1917, when tough times found Ira unable to make expenses and the homestead was forfeited to the bank. They rented an old farm house (the family called it the "Hopkins place") near the Reserville school which Ray and his siblings attended when they weren't working for their uncle Dean Coxley or helping a neighbor.... anything to bring in a meager living for the family.

1919 brought another move for the family, about a mile north of Reserville school, to a farm that Dean Coxley had bought, adjoining his existing land. There were now eight children in the Ewing family and it was not uncommon for the older boys to be living away from home while working wherever they could.

The family continued to struggle, and in early 1922, Ira was once again forced into medical incarceration at Topeka. The turmoil and hardship were further compounded in June of that same year when Salome died from

complications of her tenth childbirth. The eight Ewing children, devastated by the loss of their mother, continued to live on their uncle's farm... the older children caring for the younger... for the next year and a half until they were dragged into court and made wards of the county, separated, and doled out to families that would accept them.

Being above the court's age limit for adoption, Ray chose to stay with his uncle Dean Coxley, where he had worked much of his teen years. In the spring of 1924 he went to Marysville where he worked a short time with older brother Frank, on a paving crew laying brick streets. He also spent some time working for the railroad as a cook and tried his hand at any other job he could find. Eventually he went back to farm-

Ray Ewing,  
early 1920's



ing, taking a job on a 700+ acre farm/ranch in southern Marshall County at the junction of the Big Blue and the Black Vermillion rivers, owned by the Edwards family. That was a move that brought profound change to Ray's life.

The Edwards ranch was a large-scale operation by 1920's standards. Sam Edwards, second-generation owner of the ranch lived in Blue Rapids and day-to-day operation of the ranch was the responsibility of W.J. Williams, a Welsh immigrant who had brought his family to Marshall County in 1909. Among the Williams children was a daughter



just two years younger than Ray. Gwendolyn Williams caught Ray's eye and captured his fancy.

### Home Beautiful

As a trade promotion, designed to bring people to town and create interest in new building materials and furnishings, a group of progressive businessmen in Marysville decided to build and furnish a special "show house". Led by James Montgomery, manager of the local lumber yard, the project would be called "Home Beautiful". The project was promoted heavily throughout the region from the start of construction and was to culminate with a week-long Open House in April, 1927. On the last day of the Open House there would be a wedding held at the house. As the completion date neared, a couple had not yet been chosen for the wedding.

James Montgomery was visiting in Barrett at a relative's store, telling of his unsuccessful search for a couple. Gwilym Williams, a customer in the store, mentioned that his sister, Gwen, was planning to marry Ray Ewing at the Methodist parsonage in Frankfort soon. Bingo! Hurried changes in their plans found Ray and Gwen exchanging wedding vows on the



Gwen and Ray - 1927



Photo of Ray in his wheat field, taken in 1941 by someone from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Manhattan office.

porch of Home Beautiful in Marysville on the evening of April 25, 1927, witnessed by a crowd estimated to number 1,000 or more.

After the excitement of the wedding and the celebration that followed, Ray and Gwen settled into a daily life of hard work, living in one of the small houses on the Edwards ranch.

Almost all of the work was intensive hand-labor, especially at harvest time. The corn that grew so well in the rich Blue River valley was taken from the fields by men on foot who broke each ear of corn from the stalks, stripping the husks and throwing it into a horse-drawn wagon beside them. One ear at a time in a continuous stream of fluid motion until the wagon was full... and then they had to take it to the barn and unload it one scoop shovel-full at a time. On a long day a good man might bring in as much as 100 bushels, and many couldn't reach that goal. During one season, Ray logged a string of 30 successive days of 100-bushel

production.

In addition to the normal work on the ranch, Ray also learned the techniques used in butchering and meat-cutting, skills that his father-in-law had brought with him from Wales. Not only did Ray learn the skills, he became very good at them and they would serve him well in the future.

### The Family Grows

Ray and Gwen's first child, a daughter, was stillborn. They named the baby Joy Ann and buried her in the Coxley family plot in Frankfort cemetery.

In November, 1930, Gwen was pregnant with their second child, due in mid-December. Ray, busy with fall harvest, was hitching a team of horses to an implement when something spooked the horses, causing them to bolt with Ray tangled in the lines and dragging in the dirt. After a short run, the team halted at an obstacle but the damage had already been

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**Late 1950's - (front) Ray, Gwen and Jerry  
(back) Betty, Nancy and Laura**

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done. Ray was taken to Frankfort, unconscious, with severe head injuries and a broken arm. Doctors performed make-shift surgery to relieve pressure on his brain and chose not to deal with his broken arm for a few days; they wanted to be sure he survived the head injuries first. Fortunately, he did, but his arm would be somewhat crooked the rest of his life. Meanwhile Gwen was stressed enough by the accident that she went into early labor. Their daughter, Betty Rae, was born on Ray's 25th birthday.

Ray and Gwen remained on the Edwards ranch until 1934, when they moved a short distance down the road to a small farm on the bank of the Black Vermillion river. The family refers to that place as "the little house by the bridge", due to it's close proximity to the river bridge. Soon to also be dubbed "The Stump

Patch", most of the farm was river bottom woodlands. Trees had to be removed and the stumps blasted with dynamite, then pulled by teams of horses, to create farm fields. But drought the first year and floods the second year meant that it was the third year before a crop could actually be harvested from the fields. Meanwhile, income had to be gotten from butchering and other activities. Fish from the river provided food and hunting provided food as well as pelts for sale. While they lived in "the little house by the bridge", a second daughter, Nancy, was born into Ray and Gwen's family.

In 1941 Ray bought the Llewelyn Jones farm just a quarter mile south of the "Stump Patch". The 160-acre farm had a two-story "modern" house with indoor plumbing, a large barn and nice farm buildings. Shortly after the move, Ray and Gwen's family grew again with the addition of a

son, Jerry.

In spite of the war that was raging in Europe and the South Pacific, the next few years went pretty well for Ray and his family. The Blue Valley's fertile soil produced good crops most years while milk, cream and eggs helped to provide cash for Saturday evenings in Irving where the week's needs could be bought.

Ray was a member of the Masons while Gwen was active in the Eastern Star and the Jolly Workers club. They attended the Methodist church in Bigelow and were involved in the church's activities. Many Sunday afternoons were spent at family gatherings in Frankfort at the Coxley home, where the kids could play in the park across the street while the adults played cards after dinner.

A few months after World War II ended, a third daughter was added to the Ewing family when Laura Jane was born.

### **Things Change**

By the late 1930's there was much discussion about plans to build a dam on the Big Blue river above Manhattan. Flood waters had plagued the area since the days of territorial Kansas, especially in Manhattan and further downstream as far as Kansas City. Studies were done, proposals were made and Congress even approved some of the ideas. In 1944 the Pick-Sloan Plan was approved in Congress, authorizing dams throughout the Missouri River basin to ease the flooding issues. By the late 1940's local opposition groups were mounting campaigns to stop the construction, but not making much progress.

Seeing that he would have no choice, Ray sold his Blue Valley land and bought a 240-acre farm nearly 30 miles away, northeast



of Vermillion on Highway 9 at the eastern edge of Marshall County. The previous owner had named it "The Highland View Farm" and the name adorned the front of the two-story white barn on the place. Ray and his family moved to the Vermillion farm in 1948.

In addition to raising hogs and chickens, 10 to 15 dairy cows were milked... by hand the first few years, until milking machines could be installed. A large garden provided fresh vegetables for consumption or canning and when the garden yielded more melons or pumpkins than they could use, Ray and Gwen would pile the excess outside the Vermillion bank for the community to enjoy.

Being active in the community, Ray served on the school board, township board, town council and the election board, as well as the church administrative board.



1949 --  
Ray and Gwen

Gwen maintained her active role in the Eastern Star and was a member of the local Loyal Workers club.

When farming didn't provide the income that the family needed, Ray did custom butchering for individuals in the area and Gwen cleaned houses and sold eggs, milk and cream to supplement their needs.

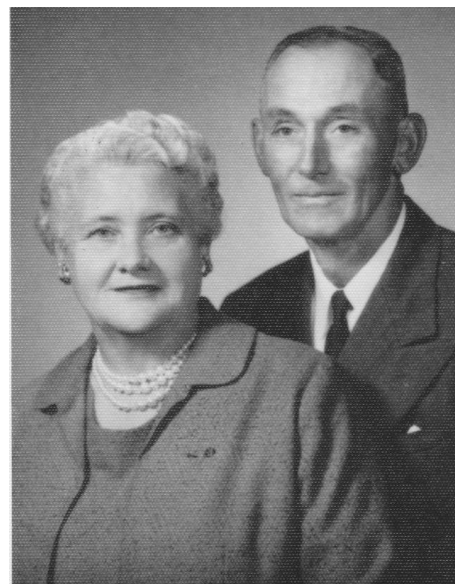
Farming was always a hard way to make a living, but by the late 1950's it was even tougher. Ray started doing more butchering, and took jobs working at locker plants in Beattie and Seneca. In 1964 he sold the farm and bought a home in Vermillion. Butchering and meat cutting became his full-time job. When that job ended, sometime in the 1980's, Ray worked as day-labor for farmers in the Vermillion area. He continued that until he was well into his 80's, when his and Gwen's health both began to decline.

### The Quiet One

Ray was always "a man of few words", choosing instead to let his actions speak for him whenever possible. Mild mannered and respectful of others, Ray's hard work and cooperative nature served him well. When the kids were small, a certain look or the point of a finger from their father was often enough to guide their actions. Example was used instead of physical discipline, and if words were spoken, they were taken seriously.

Jerry relates the story that

Ray at Beattie locker plant,  
where he worked as a  
butcher and meat cutter.



Gwen and Ray - 1967

shortly after starting college he wanted to quit school and go home. No discussion was had on the Friday evening trip with his parents back to the farm, but very early the next morning he was awakened by his father. That day and the next were spent doing every dirty or inglorious job on the farm, from cleaning barns to

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Wishing all  
a joyous and  
blessed



Butch Ewing  
900 N. Lakeview  
Derby, KS 67037

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working hogs to fixing fence and repairing equipment. On Sunday afternoon, Ray asked his son, "What is it going to be, the farm or school?" Three hours later, Jerry was back at school.

Ray's patience was always evident, especially when fishing with his family. He'd pick his spot and cast his line waiting for the fish to bite, while other members of the party would be constantly moving from spot to spot. Invariably, Ray would be the one

with the largest catch.

Although he worked hard all his life, Ray always enjoyed time spent with family, and especially playing cards (usually pitch) and pitching horseshoes.

#### **The Later Years**

Ray and Gwen moved to the Elm Street Apartments in Frankfort in 1994, where they celebrated their 70th wedding anniversary in 1997. Later that year they moved to the Frankfort Care Home due to health changes. Gwen passed away in February, 1998. Ray was transferred to the



**Ray always  
had a winning  
smile**

Westmoreland Care Home after being hospitalized and lived there until he died in March, 2004, at the age of 98.

**2001 -  
The Ewing  
brothers  
(from left):  
Frank, Ray,  
Eldon and For-  
rest**

