

Oral History - Meezie Keys

Interviewed by Bob Hult

July 15, 2002

Okay, today is July 15, 2002 and my name is Bob Hult and we are in the Bailey Library and I'm interviewing Meezie Keyes and we're going to talk about her experience in Park County.



Meezie, where were you born?

I was born in Canon City. I'm one of the few people who can say I'm a native of Colorado.

So you spent your whole life in - -well, you haven't spent your whole in Colorado because you traveled to other states.

Right, but I've spent a good - - the biggest part of my life in Colorado.

Okay.

It's the best state there is!

Alright! What brought you into Park County and when?

Came in to Park County in 1946 and the story is rather interesting in that we went to a dude ranch up in Estes Park, Sprague's Lodge, and we loved it so much we thought, "Why don't we do something like this?" My husband was a lawyer in Chicago and I thought Chicago was a pretty miserable place to live (laughter) and wanted to get back to Colorado so we looked around one summer, the summer of '45 - the first time we could get out after the war and looked around for ranches. We went down to Pete Smythe's at Estabrook out of Bailey and talked to him for awhile. Pete Smythe and my husband and Ernie Keyes were roommates at Colorado College so they were good friends and then we went to a travel show in Chicago, then the dude ranches had a booth there. I was looking that over and thought it was pretty good and Pete Smythe showed up and my husband had a good old reunion with Pete Smythe and he said, "Oh, we'd sure like to have a ranch like yours, Pete."

Pete was also doing real estate in the winter, as most dude ranchers have to do something in the winter to make a living, and so he said, "I know of one that's tied up in an estate. Why don't come out and see it." So Ernie said, "Alright,

I'll be out next weekend." At that point, trains ran overnight between Denver and Chicago and so it was easy to come to Denver and he came out the next weekend and after he back to Chicago, he said, "Oh, this is just a really nice place! You'll like this I'm sure." I said, "I don't care if it's a chicken coop. Get me to Colorado! Get me back to Colorado!"

BH You really were impressed! Now you had been to Colorado just one time before, in Estes Park?

We had been to just one dude ranch there, but my mother-in-law lived - - was born in Central City so we went to Central City a quite a few times.

Ah, okay. So you had some family ties into Colorado. Okay.

So he - - Quigg Newton had the place and was taking care of the estate of James Newton. James Newton was a partner of Boettcher, Boettcher Investments, and he had died during the war and they didn't do anything until - - 'cause Quigg Newton in the service so after he got back from the service, they were trying settle the estate and had to sell off some of the property. The had lunch with Quigg; he was mayor of Denver at that point, and Pete and Ernie and Quigg Newton all had lunch together and they just hit it off fine because Quigg Newton was going to Yale law School at the same time my husband went to Harvard Law School, so they were just kinds of in the same league and they could talk well and all.

Right.

So he came back to Chicago and he wrote him a ridiculous offer of way, way lower than they were asking and they weren't asking a lot and Quigg called him on the phone and said, "You can have the place," he said, "We only used it, " - - it was about ten years old, I think - "We only used it two or three weekends a year and it was built to be used and I'd like to see somebody have it that could use it."

Now what did it consist of at that time?

Well, the main lodge was there with eight bedrooms, seven bathrooms, (laughter)

Oh, my goodness. Okay.

And then there was a second building that was where the caretaker stayed I think and there was bedrooms upstairs and a living room downstairs and a kitchen and then attached to it was a barn and hay loft.

What was it called at that time?

It was just called James Newton's mountain home, I suppose.

So it was a private residence - it wasn't a dude ranch at that time.

No, no.

It was just a private piece of property that wasn't a working ranch?

No, it was a mountain home, I'd say.

Okay. A big home on it!

Yeah. I think they did a lot of entertaining. He was a good friend of Louise Porter's and Louise sold him the land. That was Louise Coors Porter and she had the Sullivan Homestead; she bought that and she sold Newton 25 acres of the upper part of it.

So that's what it consisted of – 25 acres plus the buildings?

Uh-huh.

Okay.

And so then we said, "Well, what about the furniture?" and he said, "Well, you can just have the furniture, most of it was made for there anyway. It was made in the building, so you can have the furniture." And they left sheets and mattresses and dishes and silverware, and (laughter)

BH Do you recall what you were actually able to purchase it for?

\$35,000.

Wow (laughter).

Can you believe that?

That's amazing!

That's what happened in 1946, you know.

Exactly. So now you're living Chicago and you bought this ranch; 25-acre ranch with a series of buildings on it.

We sold most of our furniture; of course, Chicago furniture, we didn't need it anyway and put what we needed and two small children that were five and two, two little girls, in the car; had a little tiny trailer on the back with the children's clothes and things in it, and started for Colorado. We were going to Greeley where Ernie's mother was and about five miles out of Greeley, the trailer turned over, broke loose and went out into a field (laughter) and we were out there at night, picking clothes up out of the field (laughter) trying to get them back in!

The next day, we got them loaded up and went on up to the ranch and it was quite an experience. We had another couple who had been raised in the Greeley area that went with us from Chicago Heights and he'd just come back from the war; he'd just come back from the service. And was just discharged and they were both school-teachers and they thought this sounded like a good idea, they'd come out here, too with us to help us. We got there, we didn't know how to turn the water on, we didn't know how to do anything, but it hadn't been used for four years during the war so, but things were all in working order and all. First we lived down in the caretaker's house...

There was no caretaker there, of course.

No, nobody was there and we lived down there and cooked off of a coal stove and when outside dipped the water out of the stream and brought it in...

Now for the purposes of the tape, where is the property located?

That's just down in front of the lodge is another building down there.

Okay, but from Bailey, how many miles west of Bailey are you?

Alright, we're out of Grant; Grant I think is 15 miles from Bailey and then the ranch is four miles up that road, which is now the Guanella Pass Road.

Okay, so it's four miles off of 285, north of the - - off of 285. IS it right on Guanella pass Road?

Yes.

Okay, good.

It's four miles up. So here we were, trying to figure out how to get the water in the place and we couldn't - - we finally walked up the gulley and found a reservoir! Well, we couldn't find how to - - there's something that was closed in the reservoir that the water didn't come in and we were fishing around in the reservoir trying to see where a pipe was that we could open and while we were doing this, my husband said, "I've got to go back to Chicago in a couple a days and finish up my law cases." And I looked at him and said, "You're going to leave?" and he said, "Yes! Didn't I tell you? I have to go back and finish up those law cases, but I'll print some folder and give them out to travel agents in Chicago and open up in a month," and he left! So there I was, with two babies and another couple and starting a business that I didn't have any idea of what it was going to do or what it was all about - I didn't know how to run a dude ranch; I'd just been on one for a week was all. (laughter)

What time of year was this?

This was in June.

Okay.

And after the war, things were hard to get you know. You still couldn't get metal things and some paper, toilet paper was hard to get, so I ...

Was this '46 or '47?

'46.

So '46, okay.

But we found a lot of little places; we found a little store in Como. Didn't know that things were scarce and we could buy toilet paper and things in there that you couldn't any place else and so we'd go to Como and practically buy them out!

How about the store in Bailey?

The store in Bailey had some of the things we needed, but not as much as Como. Como has - - still had high-heeled lace shoes and the old, old shoes.

Oh, my gosh.

And they had rice in big barrels and oatmeal in big barrels and things and it was a really interesting store.

Truly a central store.

Yes, it was really great. Then I had to get horses and I was the only one of us that knew anything about ranches, but I was a tomboy when I grew up and my father's patients in Canon used to invite me up to their ranches. So I learned to ride a horse at five years old and I learned to sit on calves while they branded them when I was eight (laughter) so I was truly a tomboy.

In Chicago! That must have been interesting.

That's maybe why I didn't like Chicago! So I had to go over to South Park and rent some horses with saddles and then we had to shoe them and horse shoes were scarce. So I would go to this store in Morrison; I charged in there and I said, "I want a dozen # ones and ten # twos, and blah, blah and the man said, "Wait a minute!" And at that point you better make friends with a person before you ask them what you wanted.

I'm sure.

And he said, "Where are you from and what do you do?" and I thought, "Uh-oh, that's right -Chicago is always in a hurry. I'm back here where you have to slow down and make friends first." So I'd stand and talk to him awhile and finally they'd give me the shoes I wanted and I'd go over to buy hay in South Park and I'd say, "I want two tons of hay," and they didn't pay any attention to me; they could sell their hay to anybody. They didn't know me so I thought, "Oh yeah, I remember now; you're supposed to take your cowboy boot and you kick in the dust awhile and then you ask how the cows are doing..."

Right. (laughter)

Then you ask about the hay crops and then you get real friendly with them and pretty soon, you bring up the idea that you'd like to have some hay. And by then, if they think they like you well enough, they'll sell you some hay but otherwise, they won't!

And that's the way you do business down here.

And that's the way you did business.

Did the property come with horses or cattle?

No, they hadn't anything.

Nothing. So you were acquiring horse at that point.

Mm-hmm (affirmative). I rented them the first year and after that, we bought them. And then we decided we just had to have a lot of animals, too so we got some milk cows and my husband didn't know how to milk a cow, either. I did because I'd been on these ranches so ...

How long had he - - he went back to Chicago; was he there a long time?

Oh, he was there - I think - six weeks.

So the first six weeks you were there by yourself, trying to figure this all out.

Yeah, and he was sending guests to us and we didn't know what to do with them! (laughter).

So you were getting guests right off the bat.

Yeah, right off the bat because see, people couldn't travel during the war.

Right.

So that was the first year that you could really get out and travel and get gasoline for cars...

Right.

And get on trains that weren't taken up by the troops and all.

Yeah, Barbara mentioned that from the Glen Isle. She said right after the war, business really picked up because of all this pent-up need to get out and enjoy life again.

Right.

And gasoline was more available and so people could get out and do things so yeah, their business picked up. That makes lots of sense.

It was a good time to start a business because everybody wanted a vacation.

Right.

So some way, we managed to get a little bit of help. We got a wrangler and his wife and some kind of a cook – oh! The cook! She started paddling around in her bare feet and wasn't very clean and we had to fire her right away (laughter). This other couple that came with us, she had been a Home Ec. teacher so she had to do the cooking and took over. We started out and they came and I don't know that any that first year returned, that was probably pretty rough and rugged (laughter). But by a couple of years later, from '48, we had quite a few coming back every year.

Did you husband intend to maintain his law practice out here, or did he...

Well, he hadn't thought about it, but there hadn't been a lawyer in the County for four years because of the war and so the minute he hit the county, they appointed him everything they could think of. They appointed him Deputy District Attorney and they appointed him County Attorney and gave him an office in Fairplay to set up an office in Fairplay in the County building in the old courthouse.

Which is now the library.

Yes, the old courthouse.

Okay.

I think they didn't even have a bathroom; they had an outhouse out at the side and at that point, it was the oldest operating courthouse in the state.

And there's that old jail outside also.

And the jail outside and it was also known as the courthouse where “the Court never adjourned.” That story was that the man had murdered somebody and they had a trial and the judge dismissed him and the townspeople were so mad, that they - - they put a rope on the judge’s desk and a rope on the attorney’s desk and said, “You’re next,” and hung the man out of the window of the courthouse.

Really! They actually had a lynching?

Uh-huh.

This in what year would you say?

I don’t know, but it would be in the Fairplay Archives.

This is something after your husband had ...

No, not when he was there this was earlier. This is the story of the courthouse and the courthouse - - so the judge hadn’t closed the case so it was known as the “courthouse where the case was never closed,” and it had a reputation for that. Of course, the judge and the lawyer promptly left town as soon as they saw the ropes (laughter).

Yup. Mm-hmm.

And that was it! But it was very interesting place – well, so he set up offices in Fairplay and I was still up there along because he was going every morning to Fairplay...

That’s not a short trip. That’s what, 40 miles.

And driving back every night. We didn’t have any telephone at the ranch and we didn’t have - - we weren’t on electricity; we had a big Delco plant, a big generator.

Yes.

That we had to go out and turn on every night and turn it off. I think it was - - they said there were only three that big in the state of Colorado that was supposed to be really something to have this big generator, but we had a big house to put lights on, too.

Yeah, I guess so! It ran on gasoline then?

It ran on gasoline, yes. And so my husband was gone and opened up and tried to run a dude ranch and it was very interesting – believe me, it was very interesting!

This is what – called Tumbling River Ranch?

Tumbling River Ranch. The way it got its name was as Pete was taking him up there, the stream, Geneva Creek, runs right along the edge of the road and he said, “What’s the name of this stream?” and Pete said, “Tumbling Creek.” Well, Pete was wrong. Tumbling Creek is on Mt. Evans, but Ernie thought “Tumbling” sounded pretty good, but “River” sounded better with “ranch,” so we named it Tumbling River Ranch. It was interesting because sometimes things would happen along that area and when ...a lumberman got drunk and drowned in the stream down there and they said drowned in Grant, in Tumbling River. And of

course, that wasn't it at all – it was Geneva Creek, but we named it Tumbling River Ranch.

Was that person a guest at your ...

No, that was an old logging man.

Oh, okay.

Overhold... George Overhold had logging up Callahan Gulch there, which is just a mile below us I think.

Below, okay.

The cabin was down there, but then they went clear up on top the mountain and logged around Callahan Meadows up there on top.

Mm-hmm.

We had some interesting experiences with that, too but they had some pretty interesting characters. They were going to lunch one of the men one day down in Grant! We had to go down and stop that.

There isn't a whole lot of Grant right now; there's a few little stores...

Grant has been the same the last fifty years; it hasn't changed.

Pretty much the same it's always been.

It's always been.

Okay, just a few stores along the side of the highway and that's been about it.

The Platte River Inn was really the place in Grant, the jumping place.

Okay.

It was run by Johnny Moore most of the time and everybody loved Johnny; he was a really fine man and they all liked him very much. We didn't have a telephone and so I'd get my calls at the bar at the Platte River Inn and I'd go in and - - oh, and the town at first, when we first went up there, was named Olava.

Grant was called Olava?

It was really funny, because there was one building and on one side was a Post Office and the other side was a store, the General Store and over the store it said, "Grant, Colorado – Elevation (I think it's) 8,000." And on the other side in the Post Office, was a big sign that said, "Olava, Colorado – elevation 8,000." It's all in one building. So when we go down to Denver to establish credit, they'd say, "What's your address?" "Well, my address is Olava, but the town is Grant," and they say, "How do you do this?" And they'd have to call the manager and they'd all get excited, so when people telephoned, they had to telephone Grant, but if you wrote a letter, you had to send it Olava.

Do you know the origin of how that ever happened?

The story that we heard was that there wasn't a Post Office for awhile and when they decided to - - when they petitioned to have a Post Office, the man that was appointed Post Master had a girlfriend named Olava so he named the Post Office Olava.

(Laughter.)

I think Grant had something to do with the telephone line - - the telegraph lines that went through.

Interesting.

I don't know that he slept there, but there may be a story that Grant slept there, too. (laughter).

I have no idea. It's been there a long time apparently.

After many years of this confusion of Olava and Grant - oh, I'd say three years maybe - we got really fed up with it, so we had everybody who got their mail there sign a petition and my husband said, "Petition Attorney General of the United States to change that Post Office name to Grant, Colorado," which he did.

So on New Year's Eve, we made a sign saying, "Grant Post Office, - New Year's Eve" - that was our big thing to do - went down and tore down the Olava sign and put up the Grand Post Office sign. (laughter).

So when was that- probably late forties then I'm guessing?

Yes, probably around '50.

About 1950.

Probably in there, yeah.

So you had this hotel that was actually a dude ranch that was - - you're getting people to come ...

Yes.

And you have a series of cabins or are they all in the main house, or ...

Well, we just had the lodge to begin with, so we couldn't take more than ten or twelve people but then the first year, this man that was with us built a cabin - a very nice cabin - and he built all the furniture in it, too...and built a nice log cabin. And then we ... decided to - - I think we moved into the basement of the lodge - - the garages, that's it - we moved into the garage so we could use that building that had been the caretaker's.

Okay.

MK So we could use it for guests.

You had a good business going early at that point.

Yeah, we had a few people coming in and in 1948 that building burned to the ground. We had little pot-belly stove in it to heat the water and the boy - the chore-boy that was supposed to keep the little stove going, fired it up and didn't

go back and turn it down and it heated the whole side of the building up. We didn't have a telephone; we had to drive to Grant to call the Fire Department. By the time they got up there, it was pretty well gone. About all they could do was put the water on the trees around it to not set the trees on fire. IT ended up with nothing but a chimney left. In '48, we'd just gotten there, we were deeply in debt, and I thought it as the end of the world!

Ah, that must have been disappointing.

Just the end of the world. We'd never recover from that, but we did and I had a baby that year – Lynn – and I remember - - and we were living in that building; now at that point, we were living in that building and she was in the buggy and we pushed the buggy out of the fire and into the driveway and the wrangler went up and grabbed the saddles out of the tack room and the guests came - - it was interesting! It was right at noon, I think on a Sunday, and we sent word up to the kitchen that the building was on fire; the guests all came running down and they started pulling things out of the building. One girl said, "I pulled that whole trunk out! I don't know how I ever did that. I didn't know I could lift a trunk like that." And people did amazing things that they couldn't believe later that they had done trying to save something. But we didn't save much of anything out of that building and had to start over, building.

What time of year was that that the fire happened?

I think the fire was in the middle of the summer; probably the middle of July.

So right in the middle of your season.

Mm-hmm.

What did you do in the winter months? You were there - - you got there in '46 - you were just starting out really, so you had the winter of '46, '47.

What did you do during that wintertime?

Well, struggled. We borrowed money to live on.

It's got to be cold up there.

Yes, it was cold and the - - my youngest daughter - - there was a one-room schoolhouse in Grant then and my youngest daughter being five, I wanted her to have somebody to play with, so Mrs.- oh, what was her name? Where Rhonda lives... I can't remember her name right now teacher anyway there at the one-room school told me I could bring her down and she could sit in the classes so she could be with other children.

Now you had two children at that point. One was born in '41 and the other one was born in '44. So you had a very young child when you came out here, like three years old?

Two. Five and two.

Five and two. So they were right there with you and then they started going to that school when they became five or six?

Five. She went there three years I think – first, second, third grade and kindergarten, just now and then to kindergarten and the Overhold's lived up in Webster; he was the logging man and they had I don't know – eight or nine kids. They had a lot of kids and that was the most of the kids that were in the school were Overhold's.

Really! The whole family was there.

A cute little story is we'd gotten a dog from the pound, because every ranch has to have a dog and two weeks after we got her, she had six pups. So we thought it would be a good experience for these children to see the dog having pups and so the daughter that was in kindergarten went to school the next day and said, "Oh, our dog had pups yesterday and all she did was just lie there and they just popped out and they just kept popping out." And of course the Overhold boys, the teenagers, just are roaring at all this experience she was telling them about having pups.

I'm sure! Gosh, what a different experience though for them after having been in Chicago all their life, especially your older daughter.

In a very nice neighborhood of you know, young couples getting started up in Wilmette and Kennelworth Gardens is where it was...

Wow.

And here we were in a one-room schoolhouse. Then after the third grade and before - - I guess it was before Sherry started to school, why, they did away with the one-room schoolhouses and so they had to bus to which is now the Id-Ra-Ha- Je building, that school building...

Oh, okay, just up the road here.

Up here that school building. They had to bus over here which was a long ride.

How did they get from your ranch down to say, Grant, where they could pick up the bus?

We had to drive them down.

So you drove them down every day.

Drove them down. Most of the time in the Jeeps and we'd take them down in the Jeep and I'd drive along and say, "See the deer over there?" and they'd get so mad because I could spot the deer before they could and we loved it when there was a fresh snow because we could see the animal tracks in the road in the fresh snow.

Sure.

The road - - the County plowed the road after the kids started to school, they plowed it up to our gate and then they turned around and went back, but the first year, they didn't plow it because nobody'd been up there in the winter and so my husband built an A-frame to put on the front of the Jeep and he plowed it himself

down to Grant and back. That road is quite a controversial road right now, you know.

Oh yes, it still is, yes.

And I thought, "I really should give him the history of it sometime," because when we went up, it was a two-way - - no, it was just went up to - - no, went on up to Duck Lake because Mrs. Porter had built up a big home up at Duck Lake, but it was only one-car width.

*End of Side A
Side B*

BH The road you mentioned, the road from the ranch down to 285 only had four turn-outs that you had available to allow another car to go by.

Yes.

And that was it during that period of time.

That was it.

So...

Then after the children started to school, well, the County did come up with the plow, but only to our gate and turned around at the gate and went back down.

They didn't go all the way to Georgetown until months later then?

The road wasn't completed to Georgetown until about '53.

Ah, Okay.

There was no road over there at all. They just went up to Duck Lake and from our place up to Duck Lake was pretty much a Jeep - - a Willys Jeep road.

Yeah, that was rough.

Yes, it was rough and you had to take the Jeep to get to Duck Lake.

Were there other people living above you then?

Nobody.

That was it.

Well, no, where we're living now, that hundred and sixty acres there - - two cabins - - they divided that in '48 we could have bought that 160 acres for \$4,000 and but we didn't have enough money to do that! In '52, we bought half of it; we bought 80 acres up there for \$8,000.

Wow. Was that connected with your property or was it separated?

Yes.

So it continuous.

Well, no, it's - its National Forest in between.

Oh, okay.

And we bought that land up there, the 80 acres, mostly to pasture horses. It was good grassland in Geneva Park, so we bought it for horse pasture; had two homestead cabins on it and barns and out buildings and so forth and that where we're living now. You could go up to Duck Lake and several people lived up there while we were there – one man was interesting; he would stop in on his way down and sometimes, sometimes they would ski down and leave the car at our place and then go on from there and then they'd snow-shoe back up.

Huh! Gosh.

To get in and out of Duck Lake. This one fellow one time, we had he and his wife for dinner one night and the next day I happened to be over in Fairplay and I was looking my husband up and he walked out of the building, the courthouse, with this Archie, and I said, - - and then they put him in jail! And I went over later said, "Why are you putting Archie in jail? We just had them for dinner guests last night." And they said, "They caught him cattle rustling," one of Jess Fitzsimmons' COWS.

Really.

Jess Fitzsimmons had his cattle up there and I guess Jess rode in the snow until he found the carcass – found a carcass – and then he found these tracks and they went up to the house at Duck lake and there was a hide and the beef, so they put him in jail. So you know, you never know what your neighbors were going to do next! (laughter).

This was still going on before 1950?

Oh yes, this was in 19...

Now was your husband acting as a defense attorney or is he still doing County Attorney work or ...

He was County Attorney and Deputy District Attorney.

But he didn't have a practice here per se...

Yes, he had a practice, too.

Oh really!

Oh yes.

Besides having the two branches...

He was the only lawyer and a lot of time, he couldn't make it home through South Park of course in the winter in the blizzards and we didn't have a telephone so he couldn't let me know he couldn't make it; he just turned around and go back to his office. He had a blanket and a pillow and he'd sleep in his office and if he didn't show up, I just figured that's what he was doing!

Right.

And so I'd go down and stoke up the furnace – we had a coal furnace – and I 'd stoke up this big old coal furnace and put the kids to bed and that was it.

Now were you living in the main house at that point?

The winters we did, yes.

The winters. How did you heat something that big?

Well, with coal – it was coal.

And the furnace was capable of doing that?

Yeah and we finally got one that fed itself, but we used to have to shovel it. We shoveled the coal in.

I remember my grandparents had a home that was coal-fired and it had a stoker on it that automatically fed coal into the thing but before that, he had to shovel.

That's exactly what we did.

What did you do all winter?

Most of the winter, you tried to - - you wrote to people and did publicity and advertising.

Ah, okay.

But everybody as I said, had dude ranches. They had winter jobs and my husband also was a broker, real estate broker, and he was of course, the bar – reciprocal – is that what you call it from Illinois?

Reciprocal.

Reciprocal, so he was in the bar here of course, so he was going to Fairplay and I was trying - - I did an awful lot of typewriting; an awful lot of typewriting. (laughter). I typed all the - - personally typed all the letters to the guests – that wrote in and in the spring, you're spending most of your time hiring staff; we used to do that, and we hired college students.

Oh, okay.

You didn't have that much trouble, because a lot of kids want to work on dude ranches and you'd several hundred to sort through that you could choose from.

And you were able to get mail throughout the winter? They always delivered mail or did you have to come down to Grant to get your mail?

Oh, we had to get mail in Grant always; it never was delivered and we'd have to go to Grant. I'd go down to get the mail and then I'd ask Johnny if I had any phone calls and he say, "Yes, call such and such a number in Chicago," and at that time, they had the crank phones and it was somebody – Nettie or somebody was in the Bailey office. You'd say, "Hello, Nettie, this is Meezie- I've got to call such and such a number in Chicago," and she'd hook you up to it and you'd talk to her for awhile, and that was fun (Laughterz). And then I'd get the mail and I'd take it back over to the bar while I made my phone calls and I called the bar my "downtown office."

Yup, that's what it was!

So I'd be opening the mail and making phone call in the Platte River Inn so it was quite a thing. (laughter)

Is it called that now, or is it called something else.

Yeah, I think it's still Platte River Inn, but Cindy's Restaurant – I think she's a daughter or something that she put her name in there.

That's changed a lot then.

Oh yes, it has. It used to be good; we used to have great dances down there and fans and things.

Really! That was another one of the questions I would ask you. What did you do for fun?

Oh yeah, we had a lot of fun down there for the dances and we'd have dances in Bailey in that - - called Harold's Garage; it's kind of across the highway from Moore Lumber, down in that hole?

Oh yes, right.

We had great dances in there and on Saturday night, everybody would go. Pete would come with his guests from Ester - - I think his is called - -what was the name of his ranch? Can't remember. Anyway, he would come with his guests from his ranch and I'd bring my guests down from my ranch and we all - - and then all the local people were there and we'd all get in there and everybody'd bring their children, too! And they'd just go to sleep on the chairs around the edge.

Did you have a band or...

Bands, we had good bands and almost every Saturday night there was a fight... and some people went just for the fight, I think.

Okay.

Doc Bell was the sheriff that has the Bell Oil, you know?

Yes.

And he had the Bell O'Well and he would come to the dances; he was always at the dances and he'd wear a coat! And he danced fast and I'd be dancing with Doc and I'd say, "Doc, you're getting so hot, why don't you take your coat off?" and he'd say, "See, I can't," here was his gun right here (gesturing). Somebody'd start a fight invariably they'd start a fight inside and Doc would make them go outdoors to fight. Well, then the rest of the fellas would all go - - want to go out and pretty soon it would pretty much be a free-for-all; they were having a great time, Friday night there and the women were kind of standing in the doorway watching and the band kept playing – it never quit and nobody was dancing while they were fighting; the band kept on playing! (laughter).

This would be through summer? How about in the winter, would they still do it in the winter?

No, they just did it in the summer when tourists were here and all and nobody got too drunk because they had to walk all the way to the Bailey Hotel to the bar and that's where the Crow's Foot is now...

Okay, that was the Bailey Hotel?

That was the Bailey Hotel and they would have to walk down the street to the bar and then walk back up and you couldn't take liquor in, so nobody too much out of line (laughter) but they liked to fight!

Sounds that way.

They had great fights!

I understand there was a dance hall above the market, food market that's in Bailey now? The second floor had a dance hall up there also.

Oh yes, that was later I think. I think it was later.

I don't know, not the same period?

'Cause our danced down there mostly and ... and we had to go to Denver for all - - for most all of our supplies because we had to buy a lot, you know.

Sure, oh absolutely.

And we went to the wholesale houses and it was one day a week just to get food up there.

Yes.

To hit all the wholesale houses.

What did you do now - - you didn't have refrigeration?

yes, we did from the generator and we had a refrigerator and you couldn't open it in the daytime because you could only open it when the generator was going.

Oh, okay. I know you didn't run a generator 24 hours a day.

No, no we just turned it on at night and we turned it off at night when we thought everybody was in bed, we'd turn off the generator; we'd blink it so they'd know we were going to turn it off and then we had a flashlight by every bed and so if you got up in the night, you used the flashlight. (laughter).

(inaudible) prior to 1950? Or do you think it was into the early 1950's?

Oh no, we didn't get probably ... didn't get electricity in there until '60 sometime.

Really!

We finally got electricity, got them to put - - which - - I can't remember which one we got first. I think we got the electricity in first; we got them to put the poles in and got electricity and then we worked on the telephone company to string their wires on the electric pole, see.

Mm-hmm.

And that was quite a job too, but we finally got that in and then we were on a party line.

Oh, I'm sure.

And the lady at the - - Mrs. Canliff at the Grant Store listened in on every conversation! (laughter) and you knew it and we had one wrangler that said, "Don't say anything important, there's a nosy old lady listening in on this phone," and she'd click it down. (laughter).

That was in the '50s or 60s before you actually had phone and electricity up there. So you had to run a generator all the way up that time.

Yeah, we ran a generator a long time.

I guess.

You know, you wonder how you can run a business without electricity and telephone.

Right.

And our story was that we finally got all that in at the ranch, but thirty years later we decided to retire and we sold the ranch and we went up to these homestead cabins at what we called the Upper Eight and we started all over, with no telephone and no electricity! (laughter)

Oh my gosh.

I guess we knew how to do it by then because we'd already done it.

Yeah, I guess doing it all over again.

Yeah, and we have a telephone now but we still don't have electricity.

Really. And we run everything on propane in the cabin.

And you live there year 'round?

No, no, we just live there in the summers.

Okay. Where do you go in the winter?

We live in Montrose, Colorado.

Okay, so that's where you're going.

Yeah, in Montrose.

So you're here, what? From May ...

Well, we usually come up into June until September.

Okay, that would be pretty tough to be up there in winter.

Oh yes, it's rough because it's only five miles from the Continental Divide so you get that wind right off of the snow of course.

And normally you probably get a lot of snow the past few years, it's been very dry.

Yes, but it's 10,200 feet up at Geneva Park and it's 9,000 or nine something - 9,200 I think down at the ranch, but well, the ranch kept growing every year and we grew with it and we kept building cabins every year. I think we - - let's see, we ended up with - -and we built a rec hall and then we had big dances, square dances in that and ping pong tables and pop machines and all that... and then we built a swimming pool and we built a swimming pool, let's see - - '48, '58 in '58 we built a swimming pool. We wanted to build it while our children were young so they could enjoy it, too.

Sure.

And it was quite an undertaking because where we decided to put the pool was some underground water.

Oh, really.

And they'd start to dig and then they'd get into this big muddy hole and Eddie Niger was doing the building and he was so funny 'cause he was a dare-devil on a big machine; he'd just take it anyplace and he'd get it stuck down there and we'd have to get trucks and everything and chains and pull him out. Finally, we told him that he had to wait until - - I think we had him wait until the ground froze in the fall so he could get in there and get this hold dug! And then the next springs, when we were going to put it in, they got it ready to put in the cement and ...Dick Vale and Ed Bell were doing the work; Ed Bell was running Santa Maria and Dick Vale was his best carpenter and they were doing the work and my husband called the high school and said, "We're going to pour cement today," and all the - - he got every cement mixer in the county up there and he called the high school and said, "Send all your high school boys up; we need them today," and they did! They sent all the high school boys up and they all mixed cement that day and they got it poured in one day.

In 1958.

Uh-huh, in '58.

Now where was the high school at that point?

The high school was - - I don't remember when - - when was that high school built? I was on the school board when we built that high school.... And it was when the tunnel came in; the tunnel is ...

Mmm, the early sixties then, isn't it?

Early sixties?

Yeah, I think so.

We built that tunnel...

It's the Roberts Tunnel.

Yeah, and it was one through twelve then, the building was, but we had to build it because we all these tunnel workers here and they weren't tax-payers but we had to educate their children and that was a problem. So my husband worked out a contract with the contractors of the tunnel, they had to pay so much per year for every child that's father was working in the tunnel, so there's where we got the money to buy a school. To build a school.

Well, it makes sense.

And so that's when we built one through twelve.

But most of those people who worked on the tunnel, they were just renting? So they weren't...

They lived in trailers.

So they weren't paying property taxes.

No, they came up in trailers and lived in trailers.

Yeah. It seems like Park County has always had a revenue problem. It always - - it's never had enough money to do what they need to do.

Yeah, that's true, that's true. But I can remember in one - - used to be I knew everybody in the county when there was about what - 1,400 people; you knew everybody. We belonged to the Cattlemen's Association and I belonged to the Women's Cattlemen Association so I'd get to know the people down around Hartsel and Lake George and we'd have meeting down there and so on and course, I knew everybody in the canyon - everybody in the canyon you knew. And we helped build the - - I was one of the presidents' of the Women's Club and I helped build the Community Center down there.

Okay.

And I always said that Ava Thompson built that Community Center with angel food cakes. She'd put little notices in the Denver post and the Rocky Mountain News that she'd send anybody an angel food cake that would donate to the Community Center up here.

Where was that located?

It's right there - - that in Shawnee.

Oh, it's the one in Shawnee.

The one in Shawnee.

The one that's in dispute right now because the county wants to sell it off.

Uh-huh.

And that's turned into a big can of worms.

Yeah.

Ever since I was - - built what period then?

Oh, I can't remember - - probably fifties I'd say, in the fifties.

In the fifties. So it's been a county building for that length of time.

Yeah, and she would - - she would bake these cakes and people'd send her money and we build the Community Center with her angel food cakes. And she ran a hotel then in - - that hotel in Shawnee.

Mm-hmm.

And served meals and people would drive up from Denver - a lot of them on Sundays - to eat Ava Thompson's meals. They were great!

Her husband is here? (tape paused and restarted). Okay, so at that time we build the Shawnee secti - - or the Shawnee Recreation Center or Community Center I guess it was called at that time.

Mm-hmm.

And that was in the fifties time frame, you think?

I think it was in the fifties, yes.

And all this time, the dude ranch was continuing to grow?

Mm-hmm.

How many guests would you typically have in a summer?

Well, we would have probably around 35 to 40. Then in 1965. we bought Mrs. Porter's place. She was the oldest child of the original Adolph Coors and she had two mountain places; she had this one half a miles down the road from us and also one up at Duck Lake and she built them both to entertain Denver society and...she had sold the Duck Lake one about the time we bought the Newton place. She sold the Duck - - up at Duck Lake, but the other one, she still entertained Denver society and she didn't have much help; she just had a chauffeur and she was character! I could do two hours on her. (laughter).

Okay.

She was a matriarch of the family and expected everybody to lick her boots and I wouldn't, so we clashed several times.

I see!

But I'd go to some of her society parties and they were wild! They - - all these people came up with chauffeurs and the chauffeurs stood in the back yard with the cars and the State Patrol lived above from Grant to the party.

Okay.

And she'd have - - she had a big circular place - - fountain and she'd have a couple of bartenders there and then she'd do the cooking. For some reason, she thought she was one of the five best cooks in Colorado and so she did all her own cooking...

Wow.

And she'd cook for days before these parties and it was interesting, because everybody I know - - one time, she invited me for twelve. Well, I knew they drank for at least two hours so I didn't go down until about quarter of two.

This is below your property or higher?

It's half a mile below.

Below, okay.

And I'd go down at two and they were still drinking, but pretty soon, they'd stop and go to eat. Well, she'd have big tables and she has a huge kitchen; she'd have these big tables and the first time - - it was all salads, so you'd get your salad and sit down and then she'd go up and go to bed! She was tired!

She's got all those guests!

So she'd go to bed and the chauffeur would pour champagne around, all over, and then you would get up and go in and get main courses and she'd have you know - hams and turkeys and roasts and pig and all this stuff and you'd get those and she was still up there resting. He was still pouring champagne and then finally, after everybody kind of settled down and was very full, she'd show up and start serving after-dinner drinks.

Socializing.

And the Denver society was very interesting. There'd be people from the - - there'd be princes and ambassadors, all kinds of interesting people there and I could stay as long as I wanted because I didn't have far to go home (laughter).

Yeah.

But it was interesting. Anyway, we built up the business until at the end, when we had the lower - - we called the Porter place the "Lower Ranch" and we called up in Geneva Park the "Upper Eighty." When we had that building too, we could take, well - - if we had groups that where four or five would sleep in one room, we could take up to 75 people.

So you actually bought this place from this lady.

Yes - - well, no. She wouldn't sell it to us 'cause I had some spiffs with her but she gave it to Regis College for a tax write-off.

Oh, okay.

And Father Ryan at Regis College and they had to have caretakers there and the caretakers would walk off in the winter and the pipes would freeze and they had more problems. They used it as a retreat sort of and the priests would come up and retreat; they said, "We're not supposed to like you. Why aren't we supposed to like you?" (laughter) And we said, "We don't know," but they finally after she died - she died in about three years after she left up there - after she died, why, Regis wanted to get rid of it of course and the story of that is that she had a big buffalo head on the stairwell and she always said, "now, someday I want you to have this buffalo head. I think you'd like this big buffalo head," It's supposed to

be the last buffalo killed in the Lost Park area, which was the last wild one in the country - - in the state. But then when she gave the place to Father Ryan, she didn't give me the buffalo.

So I happened to know the caretakers one year real well, it was Anna Fields and she one of the Lamping group and you know - - you've heard of the Lampings and so I said, "You know, Anna, I'd sure like to have that buffalo head. Why don't you tell Father Ryan you don't want to dust it anymore and see if I can have it," and a couple of days later, she said, "You can come up and get the buffalo head," so I went up - - over and it was in heavy plaster.

I can imagine.

It wasn't just light-weight. It took about two or three guys to lift it off the wall. We took it up in the lodge at the ranch, they have a circular - - it's a circular stairway that goes up seven levels.

Oh my.

The top level has a cocktail lounge and then the master bedroom off that, which was of course the Newton's bedroom. So we took this up here and we put a big railroad spike in the wall - - not a railroad - a bridge spike and hung this head on it right over the couch. If it had fallen it would have killed everybody on the couch! But that night my husband came home from Fairplay from the office and I said, "Oh come on upstairs, I've got something I want to show you," and we went up there and I said, "See?" and he said, "What do you want that thing for?" (laughter) And I said, "Well, just not everybody has buffalo heads and I thought it was really kind of nice to have a buffalo head," and he said, "Well, where'd you get it?" and I said, "I got it down at Mrs. Porter's," and he looked at me and he said, "You stole that from me." I said, "What do you mean?" and he said "I bought that place today," and I didn't even know he was going to buy it! I didn't have any idea he was going to buy it and he bought it that day.

I'll be darned.

So there we were and I was kind of unhappy because I was getting tired to add - - I don't know, it's about twelve more rooms to have to take care of AND ...

So he bought it from Regis then.

he bought it from Regis for \$38,000.

What year was that roughly?

That was in '65.

'65... and it was how many acres?

Ah, I don't know how many are in that - there's probably another 25 or 40 - - 30.

And a house.

And a big, huge house and a smaller house over here that was the Sullivan original cabin and big barn; some nights we got so full and our old guests would

come back that we couldn't take – chase them away and we'd go up and sleep in the barn down at Mrs. Porter's up in the hay, my husband and I. I thought that that's kind of nice; I could get away from everything.

You've been a tomboy all your life!

(Laughter) yes, I went on pack trips. I always went on all the overnight pack trips. I just loved to sleep out on the ground and so a lot of them I took myself and one time, I took a Continental Divide trip for a week and we rode from here to - it was five days - we rode from the ranch to Hoosier Pass...

Oh my.

On the tops of the Continental Divide.

What a trip.

And I headed that one out and then after we sold the ranch, I organized pack trips, too for I think the - - we took one, or once we went to Australia and rode on the Snowy River, the Snowy River horse for a week and I took - - I rode all the wilderness areas - - well, not all of them, but about all that this outfitter would take and four of five of them here in Colorado twice after we sold the ranch. Kept riding.

What made you sell - - what finally made you decide to sell off?

Well, my husband's health was getting bad. He got to the place where a crisis bothered him too much and we had crises all the time. Every day was a crisis and it got to where he couldn't handle it and so we felt we'd better sell and I didn't really want to; in fact, I almost didn't sign the papers. I almost walked out of the lawyer's office and wouldn't sign the papers. But we'd done it 30 years and then the ski area came in see, in '63 and we ran all year round then. We took skiers.

Skiers where?

At Geneva Basin.

Oh, there was a ski area there?

Oh yeah, Geneva Basin and we worked, took care of the people who built it and we took care of the ski patrol and the instructors all stayed there and we had the only accommodations for it. And United airlines put out special folders from Atlantic City - - no, New Orleans. They used to bring New Orleans charter planes out and they'd stay with us and ski at Geneva Basin.

Wow.

And they had these folders that said "Ski Geneva Basin – Stay at Tumbling River Ranch" and they'd bring out charter planes full and the railroads were awfully good to us in the beginning.

Yeah.

They did a lot of publicity and talked up dude ranches a lot and brought a lot of business to all the dude ranches.

So they'd bring them into Denver and then you had to like a bus or something that would take them (inaudible).

No, we'd go down and pick them up.

You'd pick them up yourself.

Wed go down and pick them up and I picked up people at the train station for years and then at the airport and they'd come up and bring them up.

Do you remember when you opened say in '47, '48, hat did you do charge for a week?

We started at \$75 a week.

A week. Per person.

And that included meals and horses and all the entertainment.

Huh.

Now it's \$2,0000 a week.

Yeah.

Today it's \$2,000 a week at Tumbling River.

Progress. Now somebody bought it and had maintained it as a dude ranch?

Yes, Jim and Mary Dale Gordon bought it in '75 and it's one of the better dude ranches. They were good owners – they had some problems in the County but they're good dude ranch runners and some people who sold their ranches that we - - had to take them back, but we haven't and now the younger ones are running it. Megan the daughter, and her husband, Scott Dugan.

Did they buy the lower property also?

Oh yes.

So they bought both the ranch and the lower ones that you earlier. And then you moved up to the higher eighty I guess, where the ...

Upper Eighty.

Upper Eighty and then you...

But we'd sold 15 of that so it's really 65 now (laughter).

Yup.

But it was fun and at the end, we were taking - - well, we were taking around 65 guests; 65, 70; we had a over 35, 38 staff, so we were feeding a hundred people a meal.

Well, you've got a great career there. It's a fantastic facility.

And we were running 85...

Tape ends