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Oral History Collection

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Adams, Celesta

April 8, 1987

Interviewed by Irene Francis

IF: This is part of an oral history taping series. The subject of this tape is Celesta Adams. The date today is April 8, 1987. Ok, we can begin our talk. Celesta, give me your full name and your maiden name.

CA: Celesta Lois Kidder Adams, and I was born January 27, 1907 in Martin, Kansas.

IF: Can you tell me some of your background, your parents?

CA: My father came to western Kansas in 1876 and my grandfather had been an Indian scout out in Ft. Kearny, Nebraska. My grandmother on my mother's side was a schoolteacher all her life and she taught out in both Nebraska and Kansas. My brother, Roy Kidder, homesteaded on the Divide in 1926 and had his farm there for many years. My parents moved to the Valley in 1932 and moved on to the place where Velda McIntosh now lives. Her brother, Dr. Harold E. Kidder, the University of West Virginia, went to the Canda school.

IF: Celeste, I'd like to ask how you and your husband came to the Valley.

CA: Lee and I came up to visit my brother on the Divide. We were having a complete crop failure at Crowley, due to drought, and the Valley was so pretty, we decided that we'd love to live in the Valley. Three days later, we went home with a three-year lease on the place where Mary and Harry Kattnig now live. We firsted with the Cass Langes, the parents of William and August Lange and Ann Rankin, and they were instrumental in helping us to get our lease. Because of the drought, we were pretty well broke and if it hadn't been for the Cass Langes, I don't know how in the world we would ever have survived our first year in the Valley. They were putting up hay at the time we visited with them and Mr. Lange got back up on the stack after he had come down and talked to us a little bit and had forgotten his pitchfork. He called down in German to have his fork thrown up to him and Lee, understanding German, handed him his fork. He said, 'you understand Dutch,' and Lee said, 'yes, my mother didn't speak English until she was 15 years old, and he said, 'ok, now what do you want to know?' He came down and spent several hours visiting with us about the place and giving us directions on the place.

IF: Celeste, you were talking about your husband speaking German and his mother also speaking German in the home, tell me some of his background.

CA: His grandfather served in the German army and came over here as an immigrant as a young man. They located in Indiana and later moved to Garden City, Kansas where they made their home for, until the family passed away. Lee was the last descendent of the Goldamer family.

IF: What was that last name?

CA: Godamer. GOLDAMER. When they came from Germany, it was Goldhammer, the grandfather, it was GOLDHAMMER. Well, they dropped one m and one h and just made it Goldamer.

IF: Celesta, you told about your husband and you coming to the Valley. Did you have any children at that time in your life?

CA: We had our three daughters, Alfa Jean, Eva and Shirley, who later became Alfa Jean Coleman, Eva Adams and Shirley Landoff. Alfa Jean's children are Linda Elliot, Dr. Gary Coleman, Peggy Rafferty and Dr. Dale Coleman. Eva's children are Joanie Betzald and Kurt Rockburn and Shirley's children are Roxy Lee Hopkins and Brian Randolph. The Elliot children are David, Robert, Brenda and Tammy. The Rafferty children are Eric, Shane and Wendy. The Hopkins children are Melissa and William, and the Betzald children are Gillian and Travis.

IF: Celesta, you said when you came out here was about 1931 and that was the Depression time, so I'd like you to tell us a little about your life in that area.

CA: It was something. We lived through the Depression.

IF: Right (laughing)

CA: We ourselves didn't believe in the PWA or the WPA, whichever, but we did loan one of our teams to a man who was on the WPA because he could draw more wages as a teamster than he could as a regular laborer and of course, that's also when the government started handing out large free food baskets and so on to the needy. We traded milk and eggs for the food in the boxes that they weren't used to eating such a citrus fruits and so on, and at that time, we bartered a lot. If you had something your neighbor could use, well, he traded you anything that you needed for what you had in surplus. We hired a man for \$30 a month and this was not a ten-hour day. This was from daylight until dark and we would give him milk and eggs besides his regular wages. We sold eggs at 10 cents per dozen and we sold butterfat at 12 cents per pound to the cheese factory which is now the Westcliffe Milk Products in Westcliffe.

IF: Tell me a little about what the WPA did in this area when it was going?

CA: They mostly worked on bridges and roads. In fact, they almost put in Highway 96 down the Hardscrabble. Some of the work is still noticeable on the Hardscrabble.

IF: We were talking about life here in the Depression and maybe you could tell me some things about how this affected the town of Westcliffe and Silver Cliff and the area around it.

CA: There were a number of stores, four grocery stores, two dry good stores, feed stores and so on. Westcliffe was quite a thriving town at that time. But in 1937, the bank closed because the government had demanded they make a charge on all checking accounts and Mr. Beardsley, George Beardsley, refused to put in a charge on checking accounts. He said he'd rather close his father's bank than to charge people for cashing checks. So, the bank was closed in '37.

IF: Did it affect any other businesses, do you know?

CA: Not particularly, I don't think. They were sort of in the habit of bartering the deal with the ranchers in the Valley and I think businesses more or less went ahead as usual.

IF: Tell me a little bit about some of the businesses or buildings that were in the town at that time and about the railroad.

CA: A number of the buildings still stand, the Thunderbunk store, the Beeman Hardware store, the bank building, the theater, and of course, the railroad. The railroad was still in and in the winter, the echo from the whistle of the old steam engine would echo and echo from one end of the Valley to the other. It was wonderful to listen to the echo of the steam engine on the railroad, and of course, we ship out peas and lettuce and produce of this kind on the railroad during the early '30s.

IF: Did you raise any of these things?

CA: Yes, we did. We raised carrots and peas and lettuce and they were shipped to New York-

IF: To restaurants and stores?

CA: Yeah, yes, they were shipped fresh in cars and they were packed in ice and shipped to New York mainly.

IF: Did they move any of the cars for shipping cattle at all at that time?

CA: Oh yes! Yes, there were, in the fall, when the cattle went out, lots of times, there would be a full trainload of cattle and hogs, hay, all kinds of produce that had been raised in the Valley and of course, some of the people in the Valley also finished the mines around Canon City and Florence with hay and grain for the mules that they worked in the mines.

IF: Now when did the trucking come up to the Valley? Was there also trucking at that time?

CA: Some, yes, but of course, it was after the railroad went out before trucking really came in in the Valley because until the railroad went out, why, it was much cheaper to send any kind of produce out by rail than it was to truck it out and the roads of course were very poor. In fact, Highway 96, a lot of places there was only a one-way road. There was no passing on Highway 96 at that time.

IF: Now, why did the railroad go out?

CA: Because mainly, they were going to have to rebuild the trestle at Texas Creek. It was wooden and the government demanded that it be made into a steel structure and they couldn't afford to put it in for the income from the Valley. They didn't take into consideration that things going out from the Valley, some of them went as far as New York. They took only the income from Westcliffe to Texas Creek and it was not sufficient to build the new tresses and they offered to build the tresses if the county would return their taxes for a period of three years. But a number of the school districts in the county figured that they couldn't afford to be without the railroad income so they wouldn't agree to refund the taxes for a period of three years and consequently, they took the railroad out.

IF: Now we talking about the railroad, I'd like you to tell me about anything you know about the railroad started and of course, that was instrumental in beginning of Westcliffe. So, could you tell me about how the railroad began?

CA: Yes, William Bell was an Englishman and quite a well to do man and he wanted to bring the railroad

into Silver Cliff, but they asked him too large a fee and since he owned the land for Westcliffe now stands and where my house is, he gave the land for the town of Westcliffe and brought the railroad into Westcliffe, first a narrow gauge down Grape Creek and then changed that to the railroad from Texas Creek which was a regular gauge railroad. This had been in but they had a trestle, wooden trestle, bringing the railroad in from Texas Creek and the government condemned it and they demanded they put in a steel trestle, and they said they couldn't afford to do this unless the county, Custer County, would repay them their taxes for a period of three years. The county didn't feel they could do this and so consequently, in 1937, they took the railroad out. They brought the engine in with flatcars and as they went out, they pulled the rails behind and there was no longer a railroad into Westcliffe.

IF: I'd like to know a little bit about the education at that time. Your children, what schools did they attend?

CA: They attended the Westcliffe school to start with and then they moved into the Willow district and they finished, all three of them, finished schooling in the Willow district. Gerald Burns was one of their teachers and Dorothy Parker that still writes for the Canon City Record was another of their teachers that lived here in the Valley.

IF: Did they graduate from the brick high school that was here?

CA: Yes, yes, they all three graduated from the old Custer County high school, the old brick building.

IF: That's before they tore that down-

CA: Uh huh, before the schools consolidated.

IF: Now, let's talk a little bit about the second World War that came after the Depression. How did that affect the ranches or the people of the Valley? Were they very much affected by this?

CA: Not too much affected because they were all very independent and consequently, were pretty well able to take care of themselves. Of course, we all, any food that we had to buy, covered by Food stamps. We had to have food stamps in order to buy certain foods and also you know if you buy shoes. There were some of the young men that were deferred from Army service because they were farmers.

IF: Tell me a little bit about the recreation in Westcliffe. What did young people do at this time, or what were some of the things that were available in the Westcliffe Area?

CA: We mainly made our own recreation, such as parties in different peoples' homes and of course square dancing, we did a lot. We had turkey shoots, all sorts of things of this sort. There was a hall over what is now Grandma's House where dances were held for many, many years and also roller skating was held there. We had pool halls.

IF: Where was the pool hall?

CA: The pool hall mainly was in where, on the north side of Main Street-

IF: What is now the movie theater?

CA: No, no, it was, where, oh, the Thornton Hardware Store is now. There was a pool hall in there and

also one where the mortuary was. Me and the girls always liked to go in there and play pool. That was one of their pastimes and we had card parties and so on, and lots of just, just neighborhood get togethers and dinners. Lou Cindaby's had dinners, like at the Willows school district. We used to have a good many Sunday dinners and celebration dinners.

IF: You mentioned turkey shoot, was that given by an organization or did an individual do that?

CA: Mostly individuals, and some of them raised their turkeys and then had a regular turkey shoot. Some of them played cards and awarded turkeys. They called it a turkey shoot but they played cards and won turkeys by playing cards.

IF: Oh, I see, huh. How about electricity in the area? When you moved in, was there electricity in the ranch that you moved into?

CA: Oh, no, no we didn't get electricity in the Valley until, I believe, it was 1944, and Lee was one of the charter members of the Sangre de Cristo Electrical Association, worked very hard at getting easements and so on over the Valley in order to get electricity in and our dairy was the first place in the Valley to have electricity when their line came past our dairy. We already had our milking machines and everything on hand, ready to start milking. So, they energized our dairy and we had electricity for almost a month before other ranches were wired and ready to have their electricity.

IF: Did you have to run your own lines?

CA: Sangre de Cristo run the lines in. Of course, I had to have our ranches wired ourselves. But they run the lines all in and then we just hooked on, and my, it was nice, the first night we threw that switch and had electricity! We were all lit up! And we did, they finished us for electricity in order for us to show our house and our dairy barns and everything. With electricity, our yard light and all was energized and the Sangre de Cristo furnished us free electricity until their other people on the line were wired ready. So, we had about a month that we showed our places.

IF: How about your telephone? Did you have to bring in your own lines for telephone?

CA: No, the telephone lines were in here when we came in. Now, for many years, when we moved into the Willow district, the property now owned by Bob Hallenda, our telephone was the last telephone in the Willow district. Anywhere from there on up always came to our house to use the telephone. They knew the house was never locked and many times, we would be gone and come home and have a note and some money on the dining room table saying, 'had to call Canon City, or had to make a long-distance call' and sign the name to it and this is the way the telephone were used in the Valley.

IF: Well, I just really thank you for telling us all of this history. Then, I'm the, to look at it said something about when you were going to retire or what you did after you retired, so why don't you tell me about that?

CA: I am not retired and I don't ever expect to retire (laughing).

IF: That's great. I just really feel like Celesta is one of the strong pillars in our community and I hope that the young people that listen to this tape will realize what life has been in the Wet Mountain Valley and what they themselves have to do to survive in this area of beauty and just a real wonderful place to live.

Thank you!

End of recording.