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Cody, Myrtle

1986

Interviewed by Irene Francis & Debbie Hood

Unidentified speaker: This tape is a tape taken in Westcliffe, Colorado in 1986. Myrtle Cody and Irene Francis are speaking together and we will be talking about the German colony, about the French colony and there's a correction. When Myrtle says it's 1776, and I repeat it, the date is really 1876.

IF: Ok and what year did they come, do you know?

MC: I think it's 1776.

IF: Ok, 1776. And do you know how they came to come here, were they, did they come to do ranching or for ranching. Did they come right from France?

MC: Canada.

IF: Was your mother born here?

MC: Yes.

IF: In the valley.

MC: Yes.

IF: Do you remember what year that was that she was born?

MC: 1891.

IF: 1891, so the French colony was here for a little while. For about 10 or 12 years before they came? Before she was born?

MC: Her father, her grandmother came with a brother and her young son. I'm not sure his age. He stayed a few years and then was a young man of course, and he went to Canada, back to Canada.

IF: uh huh.

MC: And stayed a couple years and brought back his bride from there.

IF: Do you know where they settled in the valley when they came, about what area in the valley?

MC: Yes, it's just south of Mike Lange's home.

IF: The present home now is Mike Lange's.

MC: Yes.

IF: Ok and that's where they first came and settled. Do you remember how many were in the colony?  
How many?

MC: No, I don't.

IF: You remember that the grandmother came-

MC: Yes.

IF: And she just had the son and her brother. OK. Now your mother is married to, was married, her first marriage, was to Canute. What was your father's name?

MC: John.

IF: John Canute. Ok and the Canute family came with the German colony.

MC: Yes, and they settled which is a spot in Colfax, they called it Blumenau.

IF: They called it Blumenau?

MC: Mm hum.

IF: And now the place that's called Blumenau is out where Rosita, but they called that Blumenau? OK.

MC: I think so.

IF: Tell me about your father's parents.

MC: Well, the mother came with the English colony and it was known as the Alcobine? place at that time but it, I think it belongs to Ralph Austin now.

IF: I see.

MC: So, my father's name was John also and he married Lizzie Davis. They were with the English colony. Davis was with the English colony. My grandmother was English and my grandfather was German.

IF: Oh! Is that where you get your red hair? (laughing) How about, what year, was your father born here then?

MC: Oh yes.

IF: Your father was born here.

MC: He had a sister over at Inkey? and he was the first son and there were four boys.

IF: Four boys in the Canute family.

MC: Well, there were two that died, two little babies that died.

IF: Uh huh.

MC: Four brothers and only a sister.

IF: Now, did they, were they cattle ranchers or were they farmers or did they raise sheep or-

MC: No, cattle and some farming.

IF: Farming. Did they raise their own crops and sell some?

MC: Oh yes, in the later years but not at first. They just were surviving you know, just surviving with a few cows and a garden, hay there, horses with the hay they raised [unintelligible] just lived simply.

IF: When you were a child, what area did you lived in?

MC: Well, it was, it was only, well, it was really in the field. They, my grandma had a house, my great grandma had a house just in the field out where I lived when I was small. I was born, I don't know, where Susie Loafman lives now.

IF: I see, that area.

MC: Yes, and my folks moved into where, uh, on the place, it was a cattle place at that time. It's very near Mike Lange's, just joins Mike Lange's.

IF: Uh huh. Now when you were growing up at home, was there a midwife or doctors or anything?

MC: There was a doctor.

IF: Do you know his name?

MC: Baldwin.

IF: Baldwin.

MC: Mike Baldwin.

IF: OK.

MC: Because my brother-in-law, my brother was born at this Callen? Place which it was called at that time. And we're only 18 months apart.

IF: OH, ok and, now what year were you born in? [pause] You don't want to tell me, ok (laughing) Ok that'll remain a secret. That wasn't fair, was it? OK, you went to school out here, didn't you?

MC: Yes.

IF: Yes, what school did you go to?

MC: I went to the Canute school.

IF: Canute school! I've heard that in-

MC: It was just about half a mile from where the house, where we lived and after we went for a little

while, why, we walked, my brother finally went also, why we would walk, back and forth you know. But of course, my mom took us but I went to that school through the third grade.

IF: Mm huh.

MC: And German students were in that school about that time.

IF: Do you know-

MC: About ten.

IF: Ten. Do you remember your teacher, who taught school?

MC: Esther Miller.

IF: Oh.

MC: And we loved her so, that we'd write sweet notes to her.

IF: Ah. Kids do that still today sometime, don't they? And so then, after that, what school did you go to?

MC: We went to Hillside and went to Greenleaf school and we stayed there through the fourth, fifth, fourth and fifth and sixth grade. Then we moved back to the Scholfield place, just across the road from the property I own now.

IF: Uh huh.

MC: And went to the adobe school. I thought we could, I was sad to take the sixth grade over again because we moved schools.

IF: And so, the other teacher didn't think you were-

MC: [unintelligible] There were several families that moved from Hillside to this community and we all had to go to the sixth grade over again and so we did sixth, seventh and eighth at the adobe school.

IF: Do you remember who your teacher was then?

MC: Uh-

IF: Tell me the name of your teacher in the adobe school.

MC: Miss Lloyd.

IF: Lloyd.

MC: She taught for three years and for about three months a cousin, a second cousin of mine, Elvira Canute taught, but Vista Baldy [unintelligible] took over and she taught till I graduated from eighth grade.

IF: Oh, and when you graduated, tell me, did they have, uh, did you dress up as a, I mean, now in the school, it's no big thing to grad-they don't graduate from the eighth grade. They go right on but did you dress up and have a commencement ceremony?

MC: Yes, we did. There were just two girls graduate, Dorothy Wagner, Dorothy Frank and myself who graduated that year from that school. And my mother, the times were rather hard, my mother took her wedding dress, which was white taffeta and dyed it a light blue and made my dress.

IF: How nice.

MC: And Dorothy Wagner had a pink, and we sang together, for the exercise, Let me call you sweetheart.

IF: Oh, what, and weren't you into one year of school at the high school in Westcliffe?

MC: Yes.

IF: Tell us about those days, what it was like, how you got to school and what did young people do in that time? To have fun? Tell me about the good times when you were children at home and what that was like.

MC: My father was very dedicated to the 4<sup>th</sup> of July. When the 4<sup>th</sup> of July came around, we would have a great big cake and he would freeze ice cream by hand [unintelligible] he'd make lunch and he always bought some firecrackers for my brother and I but he wouldn't allow us to strike the matches. He would do it for us and he had as much fun as we did. He would put a tin can on top of some firecrackers kind of fly up and the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, there was always a big dance in town. So, we'd all go to the dance.

IF: Where would they have that dance? Do you remember where it was held?

MC: It was held in the Canda Hall.

IF: Isn't that where Grandma's House is now?

MC: Grandma's house upstairs. Beautiful floor, beautiful floor and we would sit and watch our books and dance and when we got sleepy, they'd put us on the stage and cover us with a coat and let us sleep till the dance was over. And that and New Year dance and they used to have an Election dance when they would have an election, they would hear the returns at the dance so everybody went there, stayed until the returns came in. So, people really had fun with people. Everyone was-

IF: The families got together-

MC: Very much. We would over to my grandma, mom's mother's practically every Sunday, have dinner there, and of course, after grandmother got older, why then they would start coming to my mother's house. Family was [phone rings] During those days, the only recreation people had was to go to these dances about four time a year and visit, visit families and relatives. That was our entertainment, all the good time we had. My father worked very, very hard. He had heart trouble from the time he was nine years old but he completely ignored it and worked just like anybody else all of his life and we raised hay which we baled but the kind of baler we had at that time was powered by a team of horses and horses would go around in a circle all day long and we'd pull the plunger and push the hay in and my father would fork the hay into the feeder. He did all that.

IF: Seemed heavy.

MC: Very hard work and they had these heavy blocks to separate the bales and then in the wintertime we had two hired men and my father and they would have war horses on wagons and they would haul that

hay to the train. We had a train at that time and they would load the hay into those cars, freight cars, and, each day until all of the hay we could sell would be taken care of.

IF: Where did they take that hay to? Do you know, do you have an idea?

MC: Seems to me it was Kansas, it was shipped to Kansas, because our-

IF: Was this hay up here really rich for-

MC: It's called wild hay. It was not alfalfa. It was Timothy, clover and whatever grew in the fields. I think they called it wild hay.

IF: Uh huh. Did you and your brother help in the fields?

MC: Not at that time. We were too young.

IF: Uh huh.

MC: So, when I was eight years old, we moved to Hillside which nine miles north of Westcliffe and my father had to work very hard there too. They hauled hay to the train tracks there. That was at Verdemont. That was a station-

IF: Verdemont Road? There was a station?

MC: They would stop there for these cars which would be loaded with hay. And so, we were there three or four years and we had a large amount of hay to put up on that place and grain. My father raised grain on these other places too, lots and lots of grain which was a lot of work to plow and plant and harvest, which was lots of work. Also, and we raised potatoes, we had lots of potatoes for our own use at that time.

IF: But then you sold some also? Did you sell some also or not?

MC: Not at that time. So, at Hillside, my, we had much much grain and much much hay and some of the excitements, or something you might call it, we had a big straw stack of straw and my brother and I, by that time we were 11 and 12, so we thought we could play with matches.

IF: Oh.

MC: So, after school, we would walk home from the school, that was the Greenleaf school, we would walk home. So, we had a few matches and we'd go along the creek and we'd put little hay and burn that, and of course, all we did was burn that and that was the end of it. So, we got real brave one day and we thought we'd make a little hut, straw stack, after we had a little hole and a straw stack, why we thought we'd just have a little fire in it. We had no more than lit the match than that fire just went zip right up to the top of that straw stack and in no time, it was complete flames and my father wasn't home that day. He was in town, and I was, that was the most frightened I've ever been in my life. I was froze to the spot. I couldn't even move and my brother was so afraid that he just run and hid and finally, I had to tell my mom and she called my father but it was, we didn't have an automobile at that time, so he didn't have a way of getting back in a hurry. So, she called the next neighbor and he came with a plow and plowed all around. We had hay in that same corral and he plowed all around that so that the fire wouldn't catch on to the hay. The hay completely, and that taught us, we never played with matches after that. Every child has

to learn some way about the matches.

IF: Yes.

MC: So that was something. On the Hillside, when we lived there, there were currant bushes, currants and chokecherry, just oodles and oodles of them. And my mother would make so much jelly out of them and we'd pick and we'd pick and my brother would say, I'm tired. I don't want to pick any more. She'd find a nice branch for him. Look how many there are here, and he'd pick some more and, in the hayfield, it was close, pretty close to the mountains, the upper hind of the hayfield was, and we could hear a mountain lion in the evenings in a pasture right at the upper end of the field and the, I will recognize a lion's voice all the rest of my voice, just by hearing those cries.

IF: Did he ever get into any of your animals?

MC: No, it was a mother and she would cry for her young ones and that was the first rattlesnake I saw too, was at that place. We were raking hay and it was in, my mother was raking and the snake was, got caught in the hay when she was raking but I heard it rattle and I've always remembered the sound of that.

IF: Did she kill it? Or did it go away? She killed it. Oh. Tell me when you started to school, and you went to high school for one year, then your dad died.

MC: Yes.

IF: And you had to quit school and tell me about the times you helped your mom with the ranch

MC: Yes, we had to quit school, my brother and I to help momma make a living and work and the times were hard.

IF: This was during the Depression years.

MC: Yes, during the Depression and she did mighty well. We would raise, we had a hog and we would raise babies and we would trade those for apples from people in Canon or fruit that we could have, and then at that time, my father had homesteaded he called Blizzarding Country, south end of this valley.

IF: Yes.

MC: And we had a homestead there and we raised potatoes, so my mom-

IF: But you'd never go there in the wintertime, right? Just a summer pasture-

MC: Pasture area and potatoes. So, my mother continued to raised potatoes. We hired a man that lived a mile from us to help and would take, raise the potatoes and bring them home, and then we would sell potatoes.

IF: Would you put those on the train too? Or take those down to Canon?

MC: No, we would just trade to people who would come with their produce here. We would trade potatoes for them to take back.

IF: Were the mines going at that time?

MC: No, the mines were going when my mother was young but not when I was young.

IF: I see, tell me when your mom got her land after dad died, she took the insurance money?

MC: Yes, she sold, my father always wanted a hundred head of cattle which he did have when he died. He died of a massive heart attack. We were at school and I felt so uneasy all day and so we started home and when we came by one of the ranches before we got there, why the man came running out, and said, your father's dead and we kept saying, we don't believe that's true. That spring we had many acres of grain to plant and my father was plowing and drilling grain and so on, and he just had one small patch yet to do and he told my mother, I don't believe I'll go to the field this afternoon. I don't feel too good and she said, ok why don't you lie down and rest. So right after lunch, he went to bed and my mother was cleaning the cupboards and she kept thinking, I'll just let him sleep a little longer, and a little longer and when she went into the room, he was, she found him dead. Just sudden, very sudden, massive heart attack.

IF: Now where's your dad buried?

MC: He's buried in the Catholic cemetery because he was a Lutheran, his folks were all Lutheran, but my mother was Catholic and when he married my mother, he joined the Catholic faith and he's buried at the Catholic cemetery.

IF: Tell me a little bit about the Catholic church because, how it started in this area, do you remember any of that or did your mom tell you?

MC: I don't remember any of that, not that early, myself, but I heard momma's folks speak about my mother's grandmother that folks would meet there for services.

IF: In your grandmother's house?

MC: Yes, my great grandmother.

IF: and so, would the priest come up or-

MC: I doubt it. I doubt if there was a priest. They just would probably get together.

IF: Oh, how wonderful, just get together in your home. Now where did they build the first Catholic church that was here?

MC: Well, my mother has told that it was in Silver Cliff and she was just a little girl and she stayed with an aunt and went to school and I don't know how many years it was at that spot. I have no idea but when I came along and was baptized, why it had been moved, I don't think too long before that. It had been moved from Silver Cliff to a spot south part of Westcliffe, on the outskirts. I was baptized there and so was my brother. Then they moved it to Westcliffe, the spot where it is now. And I was confirmed after it was moved and so was my brother.

IF: Now I want to ask you a little bit more about your family. Your mother was a widow and you and your brother helped her on the ranch. So, I know she remarried. How long was your mom a widow and how did that come about that she remarried and who is your stepdad?



MC: After my mother bought half of a ranch with my father's insurance money, we needed a house on it and so she and my brother took the wagon and horses. The one horse liked to run away too. They would go to Rosita. My mother bought a house and they tore it apart, my brother and she, and hauled all that lumber to the spot and her brothers and a carpenter built a house and then we lived for nine years.

Momma was a widow and we had good times, though, especially through our church. There were a group of young folks, all of us about the same age, there were about 15 of us and we would meet at the homes and just have parties, and our mother would be there and we'd have, we'd always have refreshments and we'd play games and first we would have a meeting though and we were very busy trying to make money to buy chairs and so on to have a meeting room above the church.

IF: Oh, for the young people, oh how nice.

MC: And we called it the Count Fraternity.

IF: Count Fraternity?

MC: Count Fraternity. We called it that and the priest at that time would come out for the meetings and I remember decorating for every time I had it. It was always decorated for some special season of the year.

IF: Do you remember the name of the priest?

MC: Father Justin.

IF: Justin. Where did he come from? Canon?

MC: The Abbey in Canon. The priest that baptized us was Father Birkmeier. Of course, the Abbey did send different ones, just for the Sunday services at times, because we didn't have a permanent priest in those days. But that group, I must say that there is only one out of that group that dropped out of church. All the rest were very devout Christians.

IF: Wonderful.

MC: And still are. I still want all the young people in our church to be able to have a young society like we had.

IF: They don't have at this time, do they?

MC: They tried last year and they came back to it. For a long time, there weren't enough children to make it worthwhile, but now there are again.

IF: That's great. Now tell me how your mother met your stepfather.

MC: At that time, there was an abbot's lodge in the mountains with a beautiful hall and there were dances held there and of course, my mother and my brother and I would attend those dances and Ray Vickerman was cooking at the Alpine Lodge which wasn't very far from there. And he would attend the dances also so that's where my mother and he danced together and became friends and they went together a couple years before they were married and we lived just across the road from my mom's brother and at that time, of course, I was a young lady at that time, I had a gentleman friend. He was working for my uncle and his name was Fred Squire and he and my brother wanted to play some trick on him so they tied his car to a

tree.

IF: He didn't know it.

MC: They had a lot of fun over that, but. We like him though. We liked this man very much so they were married and I remember remarking, oh goodie, goodie, I won't have to milk the cow anymore.

IF: That's how you viewed it, huh?

MC: He was real nice though. I remember one time when I asked-

IF: So, you were a young lady at that time so it was, you could go to dances with your mom and her companion as well as you and your brother.

MC: Yes, it was very very nice because all six of us would be at the same dances at the same time. I had a boyfriend at that time and my brother, well, he was kind of choosy. He didn't have a steady, but he had girlfriends.

IF: Do you remember about the wedding?

MC: Oh, my yes! Yes, she had, the wedding was performed at the ranch house where we were living and her sister and her husband were bridesmaid and groom's man and we had the house all decorated up. We just had a real nice wedding take place right there at the home, and took all kinds of pictures, lots and lots of pictures.

IF: Then Ray moved into her ranch and helped her ranch.

MC: At that time, yes, he did.

IF: And he had cattle and

MC: Yes, we were, my brother and I were really thrilled because we felt momma had somebody to kind of take care of her and he was so nice to get along with. He was, he treated us just like we were his own children. He was so good to us. So then about the next year or two after that, why, my brother approached me one day and he said, I'm going to get married and he wanted my friend Ida and I to be witnesses so he didn't want my mom to know it though. He didn't want anybody to know it so we sneaked off and he was married in Canon City by a minister, I don't even remember the denomination or anything. And we all stayed, he stayed in Canon that night, and we came back and by, that was March 7<sup>th</sup> and April the 25<sup>th</sup> was my wedding date. And my mom had said many times, that that was pretty hard on her to do both of us in one year. And I moved to Pueblo and my brother went to Wallace, Idaho and worked in the mines and about a year after that, they had a little girl, Betty Ann. Another year and they moved back to the valley and they stayed with my mom and stepfather for oh, two or three years, and then he bought a home near the mountains which is his home yet today.

IF: And he raised sheep.

MC: He did have sheep but he sold those about two years ago. They were so much work and he bought cattle instead. He did have some cattle but now he just cattle and he was the last sheep man in Custer County.

IF: How many, at one point, how many sheep did he have? Did he have a good herd at one point?

MC: I would 100 or 200, but they're really difficult to take care of, oh my, that shearing sheep is just so difficult and so much work. They worked so hard with that and when the little babies are born, they have to be right there and mark the little one according to the mother, and make sure they have the right one because they won't raise some other's little ones. You have to be right there and sometimes they have difficult births too and they would have to stay up, change off, stay up at night to take care of those sheep.

IF: So then, how long were your mom and Ray Vickerman married before he passed away?

MC: They were married about 21 years and he was a wonderful stepfather. He was really grand.

IF: You mentioned before that you were married right after your mother was married.

MC: Yes, my boyfriend was Fred Squire for several years. Then I must go back to when I was 12 years old to tell you about the man I married. It was when we were living at Hillside and we would go to the school programs at Christmas time and the dances there that I would see this young boy. He was about my age and he was very shy and he had a cousin a little older than he and the cousin would come and sit by me and talk to me and he would, told me years afterward that he kept wishing that he were the boy that was sitting beside me and he had told me that I was the only girl he ever wanted to marry from the time he was that age but was always too bashful to make the start to ask to date, me for dates. So, we went to more and more dances at Hillside and when his sister, Esther, was married, and she married Palman Cook, we went to their chivarie dance and-

IF: Tell me what chiverie dance is.

MC: Well, it is a, it's just a dance that they give a wedding couple that they just really have a chiverie time before the dance.

IF: Before they're married.

MC: No, after they were married.

IF: They'd go to house where they were going to be-

MC: They went to the mother's house and it was quite a dance and of course, so that night, he came and sat by me and kind of talked, we talked and had such a good time, just talking to each other. So, he asked me when we went to go home. He said, can I walk you out to the car? We had just gotten a new Chevy car, old fashioned Chevy car, and my daddy was so proud of it that he walked me to the car and he kissed me on the cheek. So, he never forgot, he never forgot me but he just was too bashful, so I had some other boyfriends in between all of that and, but I thought he broke up with all of them, and I didn't have any at this particular point, and so he was working in the hard rock mines with his brothers at Central City, CO and he was lonely and he decided to write to me. I was so thrilled. He wrote and said, I love you.

IF: Just like that, what a romance.

MC: So, I was so thrilled of course I wrote back cause I had always liked him. I wanted to go with him before he ever went to Central City but he was just too bashful to say anything so he came to visit from

there and he brought a ring. It was silver with a blue stone and he asked if he could slip that ring on my finger and of course I was thrilled about that. That wasn't really our engagement ring but I always [unintelligible].

IF: He was still working in the mines.

MC: He was still working. I didn't see him but we corresponded for a number of years that way.

IF: What kind of mines were they, hard rock, was it coal mine or silver?

MC: No, I don't know whether it was silver or lead or gold or what it was but I always wanted to go to Central City but I haven't gotten there yet. So finally, his family moved back to Hillside and then he was working at Alma, CO, another mine. I didn't see him very often but whenever he came, I saw him. So, it was on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July was our, our first date was on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July and we went to a picnic where all his folks were and oh, we just had a real grand time. That 4<sup>th</sup> of July, they were six couples of us that went swimming at Wellsville. It was a swimming pool between Salida and Westcliffe and it was that night, we all went to the dance. We were engaged for two years and so one day my boyfriend said to me, when are we going to get married. It's just now or never. And I decided right then I better, it better be now. And I told my mother, she was just awfully shocked. So, she got busy and prepared for our wedding and we had the wedding at my mom's house. Father Fabian officiated and we had all the relatives and a very nice wedding. I can still remember him putting that ring on my finger. We went to his sister's at Rocky Ford for our honeymoon and started to live in Pueblo and we worked, my husband worked for the racing dog kennels for five years. Then we moved back to Westcliffe.

Unidentified speaker: Please turn this tape over to learn more about the Cody and the Canute family as read from the Reflections book that was published by the Custer County Women's Club for the bicentennial and centennial of 1976 in Custer County, CO.

End of recording.

Note: The rest of the tape was not transcribed as it was copied from the above book, which is available at WCCLD.