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Summary of Oral History Interview with John Comstock

No date

Interviewed by Irene Francis

John Comstock recounts his family's history and settlement in Wet Mountain Valley, Colorado. His grandfather, Frank Kennicott, originally from Chicago, came to the valley in the 1870s, acquiring land through pre-emption. His mother, born in 1872, was one of the first white children born in the valley, and her mother's death led to the establishment of the Ula Cemetery.

Comstock's father, originally from Kansas, met his mother while working for her family. After marriage, they lived in Shoshone, Colorado, before moving to New Mexico, where his father sought treatment for tuberculosis. John was born in Delta, Colorado, in 1905. Following his father's death in 1912, his mother returned with the family to their ranch in Colorado.

John grew up working on the ranch and later attended Colorado State University, graduating in 1929. He returned to manage half the ranch before going into partnership with Ed Rogers in 1936. The ranch primarily focused on cattle, though early attempts were made to grow vegetables and dairy farming was prominent for a time. He described the transition from open-range cattle ranching to fenced land, the failure of dry farming, and the shift back to grazing cattle as the mainstay of the local economy.

John also reflected on his early education in a one-room schoolhouse, his experiences at college, and the changes in ranching practices over the years. He witnessed the decline of small farms and the increasing fragmentation of the valley into smaller properties for newcomers seeking a rural lifestyle.

His interview provides a rich historical account of ranching life, the challenges of the early settlers, and the evolution of the Wet Mountain Valley community.

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