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Summary of Oral History Interview with Fritz and Marie Erps

September 16, 1986

Interviewed by Irene Francis

Fritz and Marie Erps shared their experiences living and working near the Cloverdale Mine in Wet Mountain Valley. The mine, active from the late 1930s to the mid-1940s, primarily sought gold and copper. Workers used dynamite and rail carts to extract minerals, though it is unclear how much ore was successfully removed. The mine was powered by a water-driven electric motor linked to a nearby power plant.

Marie described life at the mining camp, where families stayed during the summer. She and her children lived in a boarding house while her husband worked underground. Supplies were transported by truck, but the rough roads often required repairs. Some miners attempted to live there year-round, using sleds for winter travel. The mine eventually ceased operations due to financial difficulties and labor shortages caused by World War II.

The Erps also recalled the natural beauty of the area, including beaver dams, abundant fish, and wildlife such as deer and groundhogs. Birds, including camp robbers (Steller's Jays), were common visitors. The family used kerosene lamps and a wood-burning cookstove, sourcing water from a natural spring.

Marie shared stories of her family's history, including their German heritage and settlement in Wet Mountain Valley. Her parents were part of the early colony that homesteaded in the area. Her father initially co-owned a saloon in Westcliffe before turning to mining. Despite years in the industry, he never struck it rich but made a living working at the Geyser Mine.

The interview concluded with Marie playing piano, demonstrating the community's enduring connection to music and storytelling.

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