

West Custer County Library District Local History Collection
Oral History Collection

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Eikelman, Alma Voss

October 1980

Introduced by Irene Francis; interviewed by Deborah Hood

IF: "Recollections of yesterday, an oral history of Custer County." This collection was compiled by the residents of the Wet Mountain Valley in conversations with Deborah Hood. The following conversation took place in October of 1980 with Alma Voss Eikelman, who is my grandmother by marriage.

DH: Will you tell me how old you are, just for the record, on this tape?

AE: Yes, I'm 81 years old.

DH: And your birthday was September 23rd, wasn't it? Where were you born?

AE: Up in the foothills.

DH: To the south and west of town[unintelligible] Ah, did the place where you were born have a name? Was it called by someone's name?

AE: No, they had no name. It was just our home was all. Lived in a log cabin and that cabin we were born in is still out there.

DH: How far out is it?

AE: Oh, about two and a half miles west of the [unintelligible]

DH: Pretty far out then.

AE: Yes, mm hmm. About 12 miles from town.

DH: Were you able to get to town much as a girl?

AE: And when we did come to town, it was in the lumber wagon. (laughing) No, I tell you in those days, we didn't travel very much, couldn't afford it, so we just stayed home. They went, but us kids didn't. Long as we kids were all home, I don't know how long that was, I don't remember when the biggest part of them left. We all were nine or ten years old when we left up there, I know. (laughing) No, the folks most did it that [unintelligible]

DH: Working [unintelligible] What did you bake?

AE: Oh, all kinds of vegetables, a little hay, not much of anything, potatoes.

DH: Did you raise enough to get by on?

AE: There was no sale for anything in those days. You'd just raise it and fed it to your stock yourself. I remember my dad one year tried to raise peanuts (laughing)

DH: How did it work?

AE: They grewed, too.

DH: They did [unintelligible]

AE.: Yes, they did.

DH: For heaven's sakes.

AE: They grew just like potatoes. I'd like to go up there again sometime. We only had two bedrooms, one upstairs and one downstairs and [unintelligible] was all in one. I don't know where in the world they all slept but-

DH: And how many of you kids were there?

AE: Eight.

DH: You and seven brothers? How did you feel being the only girl?

AE: I didn't think anything about it because that's my brother and mine would never go and do anything-I'm not going if Donna don't go. That's why I want coveralls all the time.

DH: [unintelligible]

AE: Mm hmm. One time Albert disappeared and they couldn't find him. They hunted for him a half a day and they never crawled in the doghouse. (laughing)

DH: In the doghouse?

AE: Pop thought we were great kids when we were at home. Auggie, I don't remember where all the brothers went when we left up there. They all worked out and went home. A lot happened to them.

DH: Were most of your brothers all between you and Albert?

AE: Albert and I was the youngest.

DH: Oh, you were beside Able.

AE: Able come along 11 years after that. Able was 11 years younger than I am. He was just a little kid when we were grown already.

DH: I see that. My goodness! Could you give me a list of the names of your older brothers[unintelligible]

AE: Huh[unintelligible]

DH: Can you tell me who your older brothers were?

AE: Carl, and Walter, Henry, Willie, and Arnold and then Albert and I.

DH: And then Able, the very last one.

AE: Able was born in 1911. The rest of us were born in the 18-, Carl was born in 1891. Walter was born in 1892. Henry 1894 and then Arnold and I come along in 1899. We were all in the '90s, all but Able.

DH: For heaven's sakes. You've seen a lot of changes in your lifetime, haven't you?

AE: I've seen a lot of kids, young people, say, 'oh, you're not that old.' I've been [unintelligible] any younger. (laughing)

DH: Yeah, the time you live, you don't have to be very old to remember a lot of different things happening.

AE: No, but what is the difference though, I mean, your folks would never stop long enough to explain anything to us. We just went on from day to day. If they'd come, that's the way we took them. We never set down that we did with our parents. They didn't have time for that.

DH: Nor even ten people [unintelligible] I wouldn't imagine you did.

AE: No.

DH: Now are we [unintelligible] as a farmer or manager or did he do other things[unintelligible]

AE: No [unintelligible] was sitting on the ranch all their lives. From one farm to the other [unintelligible] they did the same thing.

DH: And were they all in the Valley? All of them lived here?

AE: After dad came from Germany, he stayed right here.

DH: What part of Germany did he come from; do you know?

AE: It's in that book (loud noise) in here, May brought, might need the clock.

DH: Do you have any idea what it is?

AE: [unintelligible]

DH: You want to read through it [unintelligible]

AE: Read it [unintelligible]

DH: Mm hmm. Out loud.

AE: (laughing) Herman Voss, a longtime resident of Custer County, was born in Leibach, Germany,
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January 11, 1861, and nine years later in 1879, he came to America with his parents, residing in Toledo, OH for one month. Then, the family came to Denver, CO where they remained for one month, after which time, they came to Custer County where Mr. Voss had lived for the rest of his life. In 1878, he was confirmed in the Lutheran church by Rev. Herschman. On October 11, 1890, he was united in holy wedlock with Miss Emma Oelrich. This union was blessed with nine children, one of which, a girl, died in infancy and his son Henry died a number of years ago. The last six years Mr. Voss was, had resided in Silver Cliff. Mr. Voss has been tanning[unintelligible] in the last few years and was confined to his home in Silver Cliff for the past month, growing weaker all the time. On Monday evening, August the 16th at six o'clock, he breathed his last. Mr. Voss died at the age of 76, seven months and five days. He leaves to mourn his beloved wife Mrs. Emma Voss, one daughter, Mrs. Oscar Eikelman of Westcliffe, six sons, Otto of Westcliffe, Ward, Silver Cliff, William Voss of Westcliffe, Albert Voss of Manauwa at Grand Junction and Able Voss of the Margroles, one sister, Se\ a Robinson Ward and two brothers, Charles Voss of Gunnison and Albert Voss of Grand Junction, 25 grandchildren and four great-grandchildren, plus a large host of friends.

DH: That's a sad thing to read, but he lived a very full life, didn't he?

AE: (laughing)

DH: And what year was that?

AE: 1937.

DH: 1937.

AE: [unintelligible] he was a great guy.

DH: And you were 38, 37, so you were married and had your own family (loud noise). It says in the obituary your mother's maiden name was Oelrich?

AE: Mm hmm.

DH: Can you spell that?

AE: OELRICH.

DH: And am I correct in remembering that her family came with the German colony?

AE: I don't know whether she come over with the German colony or not. They must have just come as far as Chicago because they had, the Oelrich's only had the two kids that are not in our church book, and we figured from that Carl and my mother was born in Chicago.

DH: Oh, I see.

AE: They came from Chicago, stayed, I mean, if the [unintelligible] I don't know, I think they did.

DH: Yeah.

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AE: I don't really the [unintelligible] at any [unintelligible] when they came from there, they evidently had the [unintelligible]

DH: Uh huh.

AE: No, I never did know much about them people.

DH: I see. Didn't really have time, did you?

AE: Guess not. They were sure not the mixing kind.

DH: Oh [unintelligible]

AE: Oh no. None of them German colony people were. They just were all for themselves.

DH: Where did most of them live? Most of them lived out to the south of town, didn't they

AE: Most of the German ones that came in [unintelligible] lived up on the [unintelligible] those hills. They was all down below with all the Willows and they said that they couldn't have moved it or anything there because they couldn't get any land, so they were all having to stay up higher, up towards the mountains.

DH: Oh, I see. [unintelligible]

AE: I don't know who in the world told me that. I just heard about that here not long ago. I think it was [unintelligible] somebody told me, I don't know who it was though. No, I don't know anything about (background noise) I can tell you about them. I know they were meaner than the devil. (laughter) Albert and I just hated to go to their house. We were just scared to death of Paul Oelrich. She had a clubfoot and was all crippled. He would over in the car.

DH: Now, would that have been your uncle and his wife?

AE: No.

DH: Or your grandparents?

AE: Grandparents' son, he was our uncle, my mother's brother.

DH: And where'd he go to live?

AE: Do you know where Chet Hager lives?

DH: Mm hmm.

AE: That was their home, and from their home on, the other horse people that come in, they lived further up and further south yet.

DH: Oh, I see.

AE: See, and then there was a German couple they called it Kraschin Koolachs[unintelligible] They come in about the same time that Oelrich did. And their home was where Lynn and Wilma live now.

DH: [unintelligible]

AE: Mm hmm.

DJ: I see. Huh. I'm surprised. I didn't realize that so many of the people lived out as far to the west as they did. I just wasn't picturing the Valley itself quite that way, I guess.

AE: No, but they said they're going up north. I guess we've met them cross figured out or not or from somewhere. I asked one time how come that that people didn't homestead down in the Valley. They said it was up at Willows. They had to stay up closer. Their moms were there and lard[unintelligible]

DH: Do you know who actually began to create a Willows [unintelligible] How was it when you were a girl? Was it cleared yet?

AE: I don't know who cleared that out, whether they finally died in early years or whatever colonists, or if the new people come in, they probably cleared their own land. That's the way I'd look at it anyway.

DH: How do you remember the Valley looking when you were a girl?

AE: It looks different than it does now, only that the houses where people lived in my time, they're all dead and gone, and there's all new people, and the buildings are all there yet. But the people that I knew, they're not there anymore. [unintelligible] Of course, his girl has gotten a lot bigger.

DH: Yes.

AE: But they seen the Valley [unintelligible] then, cause all the houses that were there when I was a kid that I can remember are still all there, even more [unintelligible] when all the old bachelors and all them lived.

DH: Out to the west?

AE: Yeah. You hear a lot of times and go through those darn houses just to see who was living there now, who lived there when we were kids! (laughing) No, I didn't think that Ernest Georges' place were all garden beds now. The first people came from France, all of-

DH: Oh, France-

AE: The people, their old man was French, Mansard. Yeah, and they settled there where Horton lives now. And the [unintelligible] there were just that came here with Lou Jordan [unintelligible] He was on the [unintelligible] That was his home, homeplace. I remember him.

DH: Did he want his homestead back?

AE: I don't know how he done, I mean, he is. I didn't know what he done when Yelsin lived here before,
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just like a killing [unintelligible]

DH: Yeah.

AE: They were killing in all the time I ever known, so when [unintelligible] I wouldn't know. Watching this old alley hasn't changed much, only there's a lot more people coming in. And this farm's different, in my time, each farmer like my folks [unintelligible] just had, you know, a small tract of land and he put up [unintelligible] down cattle and whatnot. My [unintelligible] no one owns the whole Valley, and that they all the hay. That's the only difference. (laughing) Yeah, as far as this alley goes, it's still the same old alley. Course their farmers exchange a lot more.

DH: [unintelligible] in what way?

AE: in, more of it falls out. When I was a kid, we used to have ice that thick around the 20th of September.

DH: Walk on [unintelligible]

AE: Yes, sir.

DH: Well, of course you aren't just-

AE: We were 10, 11 years old when we, well, we were seniors down on the home place where Al Cook lives now, and we'd always have to fill the horse trough and two tubs full of water the night before and mom would make homemade ice cream for us the next day, and many a time, we broke ice that thick and here we had pat ice left.

DH: Oh, yes [unintelligible]

AE: That's the only difference I can tell. And their education is different. They farm different than they, you know, they-

DH: They still [unintelligible]

AE: [unintelligible]

DH: That's really something all after this long.

AE: Oh, take all the trees and all that stuff, it's gotten a lot more trees in the Valley than-I don't remember too many trees being in the Valley when we first moved down here. It's all the same to me. Town has changed because my God, we had two, three stores and butcher shops and puff, promise now and got one before. (laughing) I'd give anything to somebody else and move in here and open a store.

DH: It wouldn't-

AE: [unintelligible] We really need a combination of stores.

DH: Well, you don't know now, what was the name for the [unintelligible] for people here in town? Were

there some mines still?

AE: Mm hmm. They were still mining and they bring butter to east of town, butter for 20 cents a pound, eggs for ten cents a dozen, 15.

DH: And you're in the town sold these. Did you sell [unintelligible]

AE: Oh, I know they didn't customers, some old ladies in Silver Cliff, not Westcliffe, and then she took some [unintelligible] and that's about all. But that's all that that stuff was in those times.

DH: Meat wasn't coming from out of town.

AE: Oh, no! It really doesn't [unintelligible] buy barbecue for \$10 bill now (laughing) No sir, you wouldn't be like, you need a farmer's [unintelligible] scratching. We used to go to school and take the syrup bread in our lunch.

DH: So, you come with shortbread?

AE: Yes, white homemade bread with syrup on it.

DH: And that's all you had for lunch?

AE: [unintelligible] cookie, sometimes we'd have an apple, but not very often.

DH: Would you [unintelligible] an apple [unintelligible] Most people have crabapples.

AE: No, there weren't even any crabapples [unintelligible] now my uncle lived out there, forgot where, Sam [unintelligible] and he had two crabapple trees at that time and that was about, oh heck, 60 years ago. And we was just little girl then. And there's still crabapples that [unintelligible] got up what they call [unintelligible] place. But they weren't there earlier years, not when I was a girl. I don't think there was even gooseberries then. (laughing) [unintelligible] tree.

DH: No [unintelligible] I'm hearing some [unintelligible] because-

AE: Eight-mile acres, it started later. [unintelligible]

DH: I'll bet you did. (laughing)

AE: I didn't, Oscar, he was the one that couldn't [unintelligible] you know, pigs [unintelligible] said the hell with you, so he took the kids and went up among [unintelligible] We got strawberries for our friends, we had raspberries, too.

DH: Oh.

AE: He earned it [unintelligible]

DH: Who was it?

AE: That old man Hoffman. You know where Velda McIntosh lives?

DH: Mm hmm.

AE: [unintelligible]

DH: Oh, that must be-

AE: Those [unintelligible] they're all dead now. Enough to know that they all died. [unintelligible] he was meaner than hell. [unintelligible]

DH: Oh.

AE: But I looked at him and daddy did really well [unintelligible]

DH: [unintelligible]

AE: There might have been gooseberry bushes up there, my folks' pasture, but we never did pick any if there was. [unintelligible] way up there where we lived, we'd pack hot rocks in the wagon and wrap them up in gunnysack to put where our feet were, when we'd go to church and back again.

DH: How long a drive was it?

AE: Oh, you know where Nerbacks live?

DH: Mm hmm.

AE: IT was still about a mile and a half, it's up there, it's out west, southwest and Nordyke.

DH: How long did it take you to get to town?

AE: I don't know that we ever come to town from up here. (laughing) I don't remember if I did.

DH: Well [unintelligible]

AE: Oh, go to church [unintelligible]

DH: Mm hmm.

AE: Oh, I imagine it took about an hour to drive that far with a team of horses.

DH: That's why I think they came, a pretty good long [unintelligible] isn't it?

AE: But them were the days, oh like Christmastime like that, make it sometime when it snowed and sometimes it wasn't. Oh, they had that old camel down at Crescent St. and had the lights and that (laughing)

DH: [unintelligible] did you ever know of anyone outside that brought the camel down [unintelligible] street[unintelligible]

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AE: Never have.

DH: [unintelligible] wasn't it?

AE: [unintelligible] Christmas trees now.

DH: Oh, [unintelligible] up on the mountain [unintelligible]

AE: [unintelligible] but you can't anymore.

DH: No.

AE: [unintelligible] least of all, worthy, not even your own place.

DH: [unintelligible]

AE: That's what happens by all these outsiders coming in here and they're so dang crooked, Carl says he knows them people wouldn't have it from here. They are [unintelligible] and he'd go up there with them, admit they can't find any wood. But I don't think they're needed. I wouldn't like any place else. I been here too darn long. (laughter)

DH: He couldn't do it none of your friends would stand and go with him [unintelligible]

AE: Mm mm. No, just ignorant of how, [unintelligible] as long as the lord will let me. (laughter)
[unintelligible]

DH: [unintelligible] where did your family come from?

AE: You mean the Eidelman's. They came from Germany.

DH: Did they?

AE: His dad was a typical German carpenter.

DH: A carpenter!

AE: I can show you something that he made.

DH: Ok.

We left the kitchen table for a minute. Grandma took me into the dining room and showed me a lovely ornately carved little shelf that he had made.

AE: Kind of setting up in [unintelligible] upstairs out there [unintelligible]

DH: Yeah[unintelligible]

AE: Grandpa. He made that for Jack and Wanda for Christmas.

DH: [unintelligible]

AE: This one. [unintelligible]

DH: Yeah.

AE: [unintelligible]

DH: The girls that grandma is referring to are my sisters in law. The cabinet that she talks about is a miniature of a complete kitchen cupboard work area that used to be seen in many, many old-time kitchens. The cupboards, the small counter, the places for dishes and pots and pans below all was done to scale. The one she talks about that it looks like is sitting in grandma's kitchen and it, of course, is a full size. Grandma then continued talking about grandpa Oscar.

AE: No, he was more mountain climbing and hunting as far as that goes. But then he farmed along the lines, he did most of the farming. (laughing)

DH: Well, he must have been a good nanny. He wouldn't [unintelligible]

AE: He was out in the field, day in and day out.

DH: And you had four girls. No boys.

AE: [unintelligible] work outside. Two summers he even hired a cook. [unintelligible] You couldn't hire any help then. There wasn't nobody that wanted to work. [unintelligible] Tear my old woolen sheets, passing the guard, take care of the sickle, harness my team and run away with the whole machine. [unintelligible]

DH: Where did you live then?

AE: Huh?

DH: Where did you live?

AE: [unintelligible] part of the time and then after we were all together, we lived down on route [unintelligible] is now.

DH: Mm hmm.

AE: We lived there in the 40s. Then we moved back from there in '38. Then we lived up on grandma's place [unintelligible] until '42. Then I just got dang sick and tired of farming and I said, this is it. I'm not going to farm no more. We came home from Grand Junction first part of October with a load of kindling, peaches and stuff. We used to go over there and can some 300 quarts of peaches and tomatoes and go home in the pickup. That was gas rationing, and sugar rationing. (laughter) [unintelligible] My uncle had a one room cabin and [unintelligible] and that's where we canned all our fruit. [unintelligible] young women nowadays.

DH: I don't think you could find any that would.

AE: Oscar wasn't 'going to know why is it I don't give a darn. I said you can stay up here as long as you want. I'm going to town and find me a job. For 25 years, I think [unintelligible] I worked up till 1960. Then I had to quit working when I had one of those pensions, you get social security. My father'd be up there yet.

DH: What year did you come to town?

AE: 1942.

DH: '42.

AE: And we lived up there in the house where Rose Vickerman lives now until '49. Then, from there, we moved where the [unintelligible] school is now. Then we lived till '53, and then we moved in the old Miller house and then we would come down here [unintelligible] in '69, the year we had the big snow. We started moving the 27th of September, we come down here and laid the rug. We were half down here and half up in the other house yet. Oscar and I went down laying rug. We looked outside, mommy, it's awful damn funny, it was snowing in the morning, was raining like a bugger and started getting colder and by the time we got up the next morning, it was snowing like the devil. [unintelligible] We was snowed in. We never got down here [unintelligible] 10th of October. We come down here, it snowed backwards, [unintelligible] up my house was when I got the [unintelligible] now. That's why the snow may come from that side of the house.

DH: Was it cold when it [unintelligible] by

AE: [unintelligible][unintelligible]

DH: No, I bet not.

AE: No sir, I would wash maybe three, four different peoples' laundry in the morning before I [unintelligible] and I come home for lunch and take the laundry in to dry and when I come back that night, I'd work and I'd wash them up. And I'd iron at night.

DH: That was a hard job, wasn't it?

AE: You're not a kidding.

DH: Did you have any time for washing the sheets or they were all hand.

AE: Same old [unintelligible] No, I washed by hand when we were out in the valley. Go out on the ranch until it was 1939 when I got my first Maytag. Then I got, one of the first ones they put out. I washed for my whole family and all the hired men on the boards, sometimes all day long.

DH: [unintelligible] hired men [unintelligible]

AE: Oh, it was one or two [unintelligible] family you know, lettuce and all that kind of stuff.

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DH: Oh, you-

AE: We had lettuce and we had cabbage and we had cauliflower and we raised peas, we raised peas by the acre. One year we had 25 acres of peas ready to pick and we had 17 Mexicans come in that morning, went home [unintelligible] and that was it. We [unintelligible] darn near every year. One year we'd plant that whole darn patch and the cabbage and cauliflower, you couldn't give it away. Almost every we sold our pigs then that you buy pork chops for now. You couldn't give pigs away in those years. [unintelligible] but you would try anything and try to make a go of it. Then we raised turkeys one year but that didn't work either, all them [unintelligible] Then you drove miles one time where you get where Pueblo starts now before you even got into Pueblo. [unintelligible] It's a great life if you don't weaken (laughing).

DH: It's a great life if you don't weaken. I think that phrase sums up the feelings of a lot of the people that I talked with in this collection. This concludes the tape. I would like to thank Grandma Eikelman for her help in preparing this collection.

End of recording.