

West Custer County Library District Local History Collection
Oral History Collection

LP2009.013.97

Hibbs, Helen

1-19-1999

Interviewed by unidentified interviewer

UI: This tape is part of an oral history taping series. It has been made for the Westcliffe Schoolhouse Museum. The subject of this tape is Helen Hibbs.

HH: The teacher said, Mr. Blodgett says (he was superintendent then) if you will take kindergarten, he says, I can have 1st grade, and I would like to have 1st grade. And that was just three days a week, you know, so then I taught kindergarten for a couple of years.

UI: Oh, I see. And you are a native of Colorado?

HH: Yes.

UI: Where were you born?

HH: In Alamosa.

UI: And where was Mr. Hibbs born?

HH: He was born in Mitchellville, Iowa.

UI: What is your birthdate?

HH: October the 24th.

UI: What year?

HH: 1915.

UI: What was your father's name?

HH: My father's name was Albert. Albert Francis Chase.

UI: And your mother's name?

HH: Hilda Hotz. She had come from Germany when she was five years old.

UI: Spell the last name.

HH: Hotz. She had come with her parents. She was from Iowa too and she was five years old.

UI: And what is Arthur's father?

HH: Walter.

1 Hibbs

UI: His mother?

HH: Pearl, I think her name was Clara Pearl.

UI: You know what her maiden name was?

HH: McCrane. Spelled McCrane.

UI: And was their home in Iowa?

HH: Yes, for a long time. She was a down [unintelligible] girl, I think. She was a down [unintelligible] and Art's father was from Iowa, from Mitchellville.

UI: When, what time did your mother come over from Germany? Came with her parents?

HH: Yes, she came with her parents. I don't know the year.

UI: I always wonder why they came over.

HH: You know, I don't know. For economic reasons or, I really don't know

UI: Uh huh.

HH: You know. Now Hotz was her stepfather. She said she lost her father. Her name was Hilda Beck and her father was killed by lightning, and her mother remarried. Then they came over and-she says she remembers well. They first landed in Philadelphia. They had cousins there and I don't know how come they moved to Iowa but that's where they was.

UI: Were they farmers or-

HH: No. No, they weren't farmers. He was a carpenter, I think. She had a little sister.

UI: Now, Arthur's occupation was what?

HH: Well, at one time, he mined in the Creede. He was a hard rock miner. It was in Ala-, Colorado anyway. He grew up.

UI: This is your husband? [unintelligible]

HH: Mm hmm.

UI: Was that after he was teaching or-

HH: Yes, that was before. I didn't know him then.

UI: When did he go into service then?

HH: About 1940, and he was older. He was in his 30s then. So, he enlisted and because of his age, they put him, he was already highlighted to fly and so they gave him instructions, you know, they, more instructions, sent him to school and then he was an instructor all throughout the war. He was a flight

instructor. And he taught Navy cadets, Army cadets. He just [unintelligible] the book.

UI: What was his brother's name?

HH: Ashley.

UI: That was here in Colorado?

HH: That was here in Colorado. They were stationed at Pueblo, and Sterling at one time. And Grand Junction when the war was over, in Grand Junction. No, no, he never left the States. He always wanted to fight that Hun, for some reason. But he never did. They kept him on as an instructor all through the war. The last ones he had were Navy cadets. This was the first training on planes.

UI: When did he learn to fly?

HH: 1938 or 39, I think. He said they used to drive to Alamosa every week and Creede. They both flew.

UI: And when did he get into the tv and radio?

HH: Well, after the service, he went to Salida. Well, his brother went to Salida first. We stayed in Grand Junction for a while. His brother went to Salida and he called Art, and he said, Art, there are just hundreds of people here who want to fly. I can't handle them all, why don't you come over and start a flying school? So, they, Art and he laid out the airport in Salida. It's the same airport. And of course, Creede. But they laid out the airport and they taught students. Then, they branched out. They went to Saguache and they came here, and I remember they, and they had several students here. So, then finally, Art just decided to move here. He liked it. We came over and the first time he and Ashley came, they came in a little Piper Cub and landed on the highway, on Highway 69 and everyone in town came out, you know.

UI: I bet they did.

HH: Uh huh. So, then we came here. Art decided, you know. He loved this little town. He said, I want to get some little place where I can make a living and have fun too, you know, because he had muscular atrophy, the same thing as Lou Gehrig's disease. I didn't know it at the time, but he said. He knew he was going to get into something, you know, and that's why he bought this place. When it was up for sale, I could have a little store and then, when he wasn't flying in Salida, he worked in a jewelry store and watch-

IR: So, you had a jewelry store here.

HH: Yes, so we had, we bought this place and had a little jewelry store. We didn't have much jewelry, you know, there wasn't much of that, but he did fix a lot of watches. Even people from Pueblo brought him watches. He did fix a lot of watches.

UI: Yeah?

HH: Yeah, he did. He really did. He [unintelligible] watches, all kinds, you know. He made, and then they decided to, well then, they flew in the morning, you know, just when it was nice. Art and he, they had ground school and everything here. Art took some classes in navigation and this thing, and Ashley did too.

UI: With the airport-

HH: Yes, Art laid out-

UI: Come on, come on in, Ilene.

HH: Art and Ashley laid out the airport. Art laid out the surfacing and he had, it was a good one, he said it was the best.

UI: Uh huh.

HH: But then-

UI: It was an [unintelligible]

HH: Oh yes, uh huh. And then, he had that until they sold the land. They had-they could have been extended for-they had already extended several times. Anyway, he had a price and they had as many as 50 people. And Ashley would come down to help him, Ashley, with the ground school. [unintelligible] They got private licenses and some commercial, some commercial. [unintelligible] well, he started in-we were married in '43 and well, at that time, he was flying. He was out of the service in June '43. Anyway, his students and he built the airport.

UI: Is that the reason they had to move it because the land sold or-

HH: Well, the county sold the land. They decided to trade land out there.

UI: Right.

HH: Uh huh. I don't know why they wanted it out there but they did. And so, they can't get it back. They wanted it back several times but they sold it.

UI: Better aeronautically than where they are now.

HH: Well, I figured it was, I mean, cause he did, and it was approved.

UI: Would there be room in this area to expand?

HH: There would have, yes, that's true[unintelligible] And I think Art gave the county or somebody \$900 for the hangar space, you know, for, he built the hangar. Everybody helped him. He gave \$900 for the space where the hangar was. And then, when he wasn't flying, why, he worked on watches. We sold a little jewelry.

UI: What time did he get into the [unintelligible]

HH: In '53. Then, he found, he learned to fix watches with his left hand, you know, and then, he found he could no longer do that. He said, well, it was just about the time halogen came in, you know, getting popular. And he said, he always was electronically inclined too, so that's what he decided to do. He said, I have to get television in here. I'm going to have television. That's when he put in the translator, it was '53.

UI: Did the county take it over?

HH: We gave it to the county in [unintelligible] three or four years ago. Well, Art said, I don't know how else to do it, and he said, if you will promise to keep the television going, he said, I got the television here, and I want it to continue and they promised that they would-cause I don't want anything to do with it anymore and he gave them all of it.

UI: Tell about what you told me about the, when you first installed that, about, not the subscribers, but-\$10 a year, you said?

HH: Yes, I must have spent thousands and thousands of off hours up there, just thousands and thousands of hours, and there was a man here, Joe Beck. He was a retired rancher and he loved, he just loved Art. Anyway, without old Joe Beck, he bought a meter and he tested everywhere, all over the valley, where he could get a signal, in the springs, and that was the best place up on, well it's called Higg's Hill now. I don't know who named it that.

UI: So that's where your husband actually started the-

HH: Yes, he built all that, uh huh. So, then he contacted something, we bought the translator. Then, he asked viewers to pay \$10 a year and they got about half. About half would pay. We'd advertise, once in a while, he'd turn it off. And then he would put something on there like [unintelligible] turned off until more paid. But they never did. He just kept it off. So then [unintelligible] he said, I don't know anyone who would do it. I know he talked to-

UI: No stations like in Colorado Springs or Pueblo offered to help?

HH: No, they didn't. I think he could have later. He was one of the first ones. In fact, he was appointed to Gov. McNichols that was, got permission from Gov. McNichols to put up one of the first translators in the state or in-he was really a pioneer. He really was, really remarkable man, just remarkable.

[unintelligible]

UI: How do you think the curriculum matches then with today?

HH: Well, we didn't have nearly as much, I don't think.

[unintelligible]

HH: Well, I don't know, but I'm sure much more, oh world views, and things like that.

UI: You taught music?

HH: Yes, I taught music in my grade.

UI: Each teacher did that?

HH: I think, yes. Let's see, I taught, I traded, when we were over here, I traded the music and Art [unintelligible] taught art and I taught music. So, we traded and I did for a while up here too. But just in the primary grades. But just in the first three grades.

UI: How about recreation? How did you handle that?

HH: In the little school, it was an awful lot. We just, you know, we only had the first three grades. There

were just three of them. [unintelligible] and myself were the last teachers over there and oh, we had, we, it was a lot of fun, you know, just played games and then they loved to play and I don't there was a child ever got out of, especially a boy, out of that school, did you notice around the building there's a little ledge around that south, about that wide, that little ledge. Every child who walked that ledge before they left the third grade, the boys especially.

UI: Oh dear.

HH: Every day.

UI: They do that today.

HH: Do they?

UI: I've seen people come and their parents would be there picnicking in the park and they'll all come over here and walk that ledge [unintelligible]

HH: And this Bud Pickett, he was just this master at it. He could go around faster than anyone I believe. He had the record of going around the fastest of anybody. And we always had a whole lot of picnics,

cookouts or something, you know, it was fun for just the first three grades because they didn't have all of that, you know, anything else to think about. There was no discipline problem whatsoever.

UI: Were the parents involved a lot in the school?

HH: Well, just of their own accord. They wanted to be, yes. We just had all kinds of parent support, anything you wanted to do, picnics, anything, they loved to do that.

UI: Who was the superintendent then?

HH: Mary Hill.

[unintelligible]

HH: I can't remember, probably [unintelligible] wasn't that time. He was much later. It's just on the tip of my tongue. Benny would know.

UI: Was there also a principal? Or was that-

HH: No, I don't think even the high school over here. I came, it was right after consolidation and they had the first three grades over there and 4th, 5th and 6th and 7th and 8th went up to Silver Cliff in that old school under consolidation. And then the high school was in that old building.

UI: So, the superintendent was just over all of them-

HH: Over all of it, yes. I don't think there was a principal for several years. [unintelligible]

UI: Were you here during, you weren't here during the Depression.

HH: No, oh no, we didn't come till '46.

UI: Was the economy better then?

HH: Well, it seemed to me it was better [unintelligible] Art all he said was, well, that's one reason we used to drive up here and they'd fly. He said, I come up to see somebody, you know, to ask them about[unintelligible] everybody would be fishing. They all had a nice car sitting around but no one would be at home. They were all fishing. He said, that's the kind of a place I want, you know. It seemed like they all had nice car but it was ranching. It was ranching they'd eat grain, or sprayed almost every [unintelligible] in the valley, you know, because they grew much grain, wheat, barley-

UI: But they don't do that anymore.

HH: No, they don't do that anymore. No, he sprayed.

UI: What's the reason they don't do that?

HH: I didn't know. It was just, I don't know. It just, you know, changes. But all the ranches were beautiful and then it was farmland too, see, because they-a lot of grain, yes.

UI: Did they have cattle like they do now?

HH: They had cattle, yes. They had cattle, but they also raised all the mown hay and grain and they planted-

UI: What was it that he was spraying for, insects?

HH: No, no, he sprayed for weeds, pesticide. He sprayed insecticide just for weeds. And willows, the creeks were just lined with willows, and he would spray the willows with 24B and that would kill them. The fields would be beautiful, just kill the weeds. He was one of the first ones into spraying business, too

UI: Did he spray until-

HH: Yes, he had to quit long before his brother, yes, he got so he couldn't handle the airplane. I don't remember when that was. It was '59 we lost our last airplane. Big snow, can't get in the hangar, and what he didn't spray after that. His brother continued to spray for a long time.

UI: That snow got so heavy, I mean, snow gets so heavy on the roof-crushed it and went through-

HH: Art said he knew that that was going to happen that night but there was nothing he could do, you know.

[unintelligible]

HH: Yes, cars were covered and show, theater building caved in. Ft. Carson came in at that time. They helped the ranchers. They did help.

UI: How long was the town immobilized?

HH: Oh, I don't think very long.

UI: There wasn't very much equipment down here to help at that time.

HH: Not really, oh no, no, no, it was a little county. But when we came here, there was a drug store and

there were, there was the Gamble store and two other hardware stores and there were three grocery stores and one in Silver Cliff.

UI: Do you know the name of those grocery stores? Did Candas have the Piggly Wiggly then?

HH: Piggly Wiggly, uh huh. Candas had a Piggly Wiggly.

UI: Was Marion's store still here?

HH: Yeah, uh huh, Marion's was here. And then, a few years later, why Kochs came, Milo Koch was his name. He was here for years and years.

UI: That's not the same Koch that has the-

HH: No, I don't believe, no, no. Uh uh.

UI: Where was his-

HH: Where Martin & Tope is.

UI: You know if they built that-

HH: The building was there.

UI: What was by the Village Shop? It was the same?

HH: Uh, the Gamble store. The Gambles, I believe, was there when we came.

UI: Who were the people?

HH: Their name was Tomsick.

UI: Was that Bill and [unintelligible] Tomsick?

HH: Yes, Gary would be their grandson. No, Hunderburke, Hunderburke.

UI: How about Eddie, where was your store?

HH: Eddie's store was down on 2nd St., where that Golden Corners is, are, you know, that empty building, at one time. It wasn't [unintelligible] was on the corner.

UI: When you came to this area, did Art open that jewelry store right away too or just-

HH: No, he opened up the jewelry store right away. He had worked in the jewelry store as a watch repairman in Salida when he wasn't flying and it was, first, it was just a little place about this big in Fred, the old hotel there, if you remember that old hotel, you probably weren't here then.

UI: Was it the hotel here on Main St. that burned down?

HH: Um hmm, the Luthion. Fred came the same time we did, the very same time, May 1st. We spent our first month up here, I think, working on the house. There was a little building, a little room, it was about

as big, well, where that clock is, up to here. That was all the bigger it was and anyway, that's where we had it. And in '50, we bought this place. That was '46 and then in '50 we thought we had a chance to buy this, not, he planned that we could just live here too, you know.

UI: Was this a store, your living quarters-

HH: No, an old couple lived here. Their name was Laycroft, and they lived here. He was, oh a kind of promoter. He promoted [unintelligible] mine and he was kind of a mining promoter, and I was always interested in mining, just loved to prospect and things like that.

UI: And at that point in time, the mining was Bull Domingo, they were still [unintelligible]

HH: There was a lot of talk of that, but he never did, you know, I think, yeah, they were promoting it anyway [unintelligible] a wheelchair it turned out, but anyway, he was promoting, but he was quite an old man, and they had partitioned this off, and he'd seen they were all high, like Allen's store, and it was during, when you couldn't buy anything during the war, you know-

UI: You couldn't get wood?

HH: You couldn't get wood or anything, so really, we never did anything except just paint, and it looks awful now. It really needs stream line, but you know, Art, he had this debilitating disease and you know, it progressed very slowly. They can't understand how it progresses slowly but it did, you know, just one day, he'd have to do something, next day he couldn't, till the time he died, he could do nothing, his eyes were getting bad, he couldn't do a thing. He had a wheelchair and then he could drive the [unintelligible]

UI: What is it that he had?

HH: It was called progressive spinal muscular atrophy, see, the muscular atrophy.

UI: Helen, you played the organ in the Catholic church?

HH: Yes.

UI: What year did you start playing the organ?

HH: About 1947.

UI: Did they have a choir again?

HH: Yes, they had a choir.

UI: And they have one now?

HH: Well, we only practice for Christmas and Easter. The rest is just congregational singing on Sunday. They'd sing at Easter, or something special like first holy communion, confirmation.

UI: Then you'd just all gather together?

HH: We gather together.

UI: Who directs your choir?

HH: Aubrey Kramer.

UI: And who was directing at [unintelligible]

HH: Well, nobody particularly, I don't think. I think Catherine Bly, and I think her sister, Mrs. Degree played the organ.

UI: Was Latin used in the church when you first came here?

HH: Yes.

UI: For the masses?

HH: Yes.

UI: And it's not now.

HH: No.

UI: And who was the priest when you came here?

HH: Well, several priests were sent from the Abbey at first.

UI: They didn't live here?

HH: No, they didn't live here. They were from Holy Cross Abbey in Canon City and they would come down every Sunday or for special occasions like weddings and funerals. Never was the same one.

UI: They had a parsonage though, didn't they?

HH: Yes, they had a parsonage. You could come down on Saturday and stay there, stay overnight. And then Father James came long after that, in '48, I don't know exactly, wasn't long after we were here that he came.

UI: Well, Helen, we really thank you for talking with us.

HH: Thank you.

UI: This will help children to realize what life was like way back when. Thank you so much.

End of recording.