

LP2009.013.104

Summary of Oral History Interview with Leona Laura Hood

Leona Laura Hood (née Eickelman) was a lifelong resident of the Wet Mountain Valley. She came from a pioneer family, with her grandmother, Molly Smoots, being the first white woman born in the valley. Her father, Oscar Eickelman, was a carpenter, while her mother, Alma Voss, descended from the German Colony settlers. Leona grew up on a ranch before moving to town in seventh grade when her father shifted to carpentry.

Leona attended one-room schoolhouses, including Canda School and the Adobe School. She recalled long walks to school, sometimes in deep snow, and the excitement of getting woolen ski pants for winter. In high school, she studied math, physics, English, and home economics. After graduation, she worked at The Pines resort, later becoming a telephone operator in Westcliffe and Pueblo.

During World War II, she experienced rationing, particularly for sugar, gas, and shoes. She described the early days of margarine, which came in a white block with a yellow dye packet that had to be mixed by hand. She remembered trains transporting farm goods and Mexican laborers from Gardner coming to pick peas.

Leona married at age 20 at Hope Lutheran Church and moved to a farm near Pueblo, where she and her husband lived without running water or indoor plumbing. Over the years, they had children and remained active in the community. She was deeply involved in 4-H, helping raise and show livestock at fairs, and her grandchildren competed at state and stock show levels.

She reflected on the changes in Custer County, lamenting increased development and the loss of ranching traditions. She recalled a time when the valley had multiple grocery stores, hardware stores, and a bustling hotel. She also described early forms of entertainment, including picnics, church dances, and simple childhood games like jacks and Red Rover.

Her interview provides a rich account of pioneer heritage, rural education, and the evolving landscape of Custer County.

This summary created with ChatGPT.