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**Summary of Oral History Interview with Mary Kiesler, Angelica Brassie Kempton, and Dorothy Parker**  
July 30, 1991

Interviewed by Irene Francis

Mary Kiesler and Angelica Brassie Kempton shared their personal histories and experiences growing up in Colorado, particularly in Trinidad, Wetmore, and Custer County. Angelica was born in Aguilar, Colorado, in 1905 but spent part of her childhood in Europe before returning to Trinidad at the age of seven. Her family endured hardships, including a devastating typhoid epidemic in 1914 that claimed the lives of her parents and two siblings. Left orphaned, Angelica and her surviving brothers were separated and moved between relatives until they could reunite in Florence.

Despite financial struggles, Angelica pursued an education, attending school in Wetmore before taking the teacher's examination in Cañon City at age 17. With only two years of high school, she passed the test and was offered a teaching position at the Augusta school, largely due to the influence of her future husband, Mel Brassier, who was on the school board.

Angelica recounted meeting Mel through her love of horses and his role in establishing the Keating Post Office at their ranch. Life on the ranch was challenging, particularly in winter, when heavy snowstorms made travel nearly impossible. In one harrowing incident, she and Mel had to transport a casket by wagon through deep snow for a neighbor's funeral.

She also described her experiences teaching in remote one-room schoolhouses, walking miles to school, chopping wood, hauling water, and preparing lesson plans. After marrying Mel, she continued teaching until the harsh winters forced her to stop. Following her husband's death in 1938, Angelica managed the ranch alone with her two daughters, enduring wartime hardships and working for the Triple A program, which supported soil conservation and agricultural land management.

Mary Kiesler, an Italian immigrant, recounted her early struggles with learning English. As a child in Vineland, Colorado, she was sent home from school daily because she could not speak English until her father hired a private tutor. Determined to become a teacher, she attended Western State College in Gunnison, funding her education through barter arrangements involving her family's produce.

Mary's teaching career began at Augusta School, where she taught in a granary for three months before a schoolhouse was built. She later taught at Beck School and Canda School, recalling the hardships of winter travel, including walking miles home through deep snow and taking shelter in haystacks during blizzards.

Both women shared stories of community resilience, school inspections, and social life in rural Colorado. They reflected on the decline of small schools, the impact of mechanization on ranching, and the cultural shifts in Custer County. Their oral histories provide a rich portrait of early 20th-century rural education, pioneer hardships, and the determination required to survive in the Wet Mountain Valley.

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