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Kettle, Bet and Ruth Stinemeyer
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Essay written by Bet Kettle about ranching in the Wet Mountain Valley, followed by a newspaper article by Ruth Stinemeyer

The following recitation was written by Bet Kettle. It is a commentary on the ranchers in the community, the early families, and the history of cattlemen as recorded for the Wet Mountain Valley.

Most of the early cattlemen in the Wet Mountain Valley were never truly cattlemen, not in the romantic image of a Charlie Goodknight or Oliver Loving, a dashing John Chisholm or even frock-coated, Bible-toting J.W. Iliff.

The factory worker Germans at Colfax and the trade-descended English at Ula didn't begin as cattlemen. They evolved. In the beginning, they brought cattle, true, and sheep and hogs and chickens and everything else that would keep them alive in the cold, high, inhospitable valley. They wore work boots and shoes and were settlers. They had come to stay, not follow the wandering herds, as itinerant cowboys or pot of gold prospectors. The cattle of the settlers were the oxen that pulled their wagons, and the milk cows, tied behind. The only beef cattle on the ranges were the half wild or all wild natives, the wooly longhorns punched out of Texas. It didn't take long, though, for the settlers to learn that there was just one sure crop in the valley's short growing season, grass and hay, the thick, dull, unimposing buffalo grass that nothing but the plow could kill and the tall, lovely grey-headed timothy and waving tracy redtop that made the world's finish fodder were there waiting to be harvested in the only way feasible, by livestock.

So, where the Utes had run their ponies and Charlie Goodnight pastured his summer steers, they started building the cow herds to graze the dry lands and irrigating the meadows to increase the fields of the bountiful native hay.

In the decade beginning about 1868, the men who would become Custer County's leading stockmen began building their homesteads and fencing their meadows. The names on the old deeds and patents read Beckwith, Lopan, Schoolfield, Chattam, Lamb, Bauman, Smith, Myer, numerous Bakers and a little herd of Kettles. These were the independents as the faltering German colony sputtered out of existence, the names of Vahldick, Entz, Kattnig, Eikelman, Kastendick and many more were added to the roster of stock growers.

In this long bunch, probably no two men were closer to the Marlboro image of the cattlemen than John Myer and Elton Beckwith. No two were less alike. Myer is nearly untraceable but he ran a great many cattle on a great deal of country. He gave his address as Rosita, recorded brands in Pueblo, Horatio, Fremont and Custer Counties, raised mules for the mines, ran sheep with Mexican herders and was

known as a shrewd hard trader. His cattle grazed the east hills of the Black Mountain to Hardscrabble Park and on south from the divide to the upper Horatio. He bought up a lot of real estate when the open range days ran out and built an imposing home place above Gardner. The J.M. headquarters was as fine as the Beckwith mansion. But if the man himself ever got arrested, thrown out of a saloon or shot at, it was never recorded.

Elton Beckwith, on the other hand, became a community pillar. Born in Main in 1847, he was educated at Cambridge, spent four years as sea, and in 1866, founded a prosperous flour and grain business in Philadelphia. That he sold and moved on to Denver to set up as a livestock trader, an order buyer of horses for the army. In 1870, he joined his brother Edwin in the valley and jumped into the beef business. By 1880, the Beckwith brothers were running 1300 head of mother cows and calves, as many longhorn yearling steers on summer pasture and over 200 head of horses. Elton was a born cattleman. Described as a fine roper, his great delight was running wild, mossy horns through the tall timber catching and tying and then turning the old snuffies loose, just so he could run them again the next year.

In a time of good riders, he was unmatched as a horseman and as a cattle breeder, he must have been doubly blessed by the lord himself as the Beckwith cow herd was unusually fertile. So much so, that the neighbors began calling the annual spring and fall roundups a bit earlier each year so that they could get their own calves branded before the Beckwith mothers multiplied. 100% calf crows are still considered quite unusual. Be that as it may, Elton Beckwith was an intriguing man, well bred, handsome with compelling eyes and great charm. He was a natural leader of both the cattlemen and the community.

He served a term in the state senate, Republican, of course, and could have returned at will, but elected for the country life instead. His home, which still stands, is not really a mansion but it is a fine specimen of country Victorian home and a valley landmark with red roofs and all.

Mrs. Beckwith lacked her husband's easy charm and never really took well to country life and plain people of the valley. She was in fact somewhat of a snob and few were comfortable in her fine home, if invited at all. The Beckwith's, along with the valley's lesser mortals, had their share of troubles. Their only daughter rocked the Victorian community when she ran off with a Catholic priest and brother and partner, Edwin, had troubles of his own as well.

Not much is known of these other Beckwith except that he came to the valley a year ahead of his brother, settled on the Waverly place and started the cow herd with Texas cattle. Edwin never married, had no children to run off with priests or otherwise. No one bothered to write his biography or elect him to anything and even valley gossip is shy of his name. He lived his last years in the mental condition politely called deranged. The cowboys said he was plumb loco.

After the death of the senator, Mrs. Beckwith left the valley behind and lived out her lonely days as a semi-recluse at the Brown Palace Hotel. She asked not to be returned to Ula upon her death.

Elton and Edwin Beckwith lie today beneath the grandest stones in Ula Cemetery, as in life together and alone. There were many, many others of course whose lives are just as fascinating. Will Kettle, the staunch little son of an English farmer, who became a cobbler before he became a cattleman. He too

served in the state legislature. He wasn't too much on chasing wild eyed longhorns but he was a mean man in a foot race, taking on all comers, clear up to his 80th birthday. His great granddaughters run on today's track team.

The Drapers, at Wetmore, who are among the very first to run the longhorns in Hardscrabble Park, and were and still are, noted for their fine horses.

Tom Bauman and his son, also Tom, and Uncle T. Witcher who sent large herds across the Arkansas from Hillside and the old Hayden country and had high old times chasing up with wrestlers and other artists of the running ian.

The mining booms of the same era were what brought the many thousands to Custer County and the valley. They were the ready markets for the ranchers' beef and the grain and hay used to feed the mules and the work horses of the mines. But long after the great Bull Domingo and Bassick's played out, the stockmen of the valley continue on their slow, rural ways, maintaining the county economy, supporting the schools and churches, buildings and roads, improving the land they had taken from the Ute.

In this generation, the 60s, 70s and 80s have brought in the next flux of new people, the land developers, the spectacular ski promoters, environmentalists, Mother Earthers and hundreds more who have time and money for things called leisure and recreation.

There was a time when our forefathers fussed a nod over the antics of the wealthy visitors who brought their servants and fine polo ponies, imported booze and picnic baskets to this glorious new playpen, high in the mountains. They also brought a commodity often in short supply, money and history repeats itself.

The following reading is taken from Pueblo Paper, May 23, 1977. It is from an interview of Ruth Stinemeyer and it is written by Georgina Brown and it is the history of Wet Mountain Valley.

The scenic Wet Mountain Valley is replete with fascinating history of early colonies, ranches, farms, its brief mining glory, ghost towns and the robust characters who more than a century ago trekked through the rugged country to settle in the lush valley with its lakes and streams and spectacular backdrop of the towering Sangre de Cristos. None understands better the real-life drama of this area than Ruth Stinemeyer of Canon City. The place is in her blood as well it should be for it is in 1879 that her grandfather, Samuel C. Stinemeyer, came to Silver Cliff, attracted by the boom that was at its peak in this mountain town. With him were his wife and three-year-old son Edwin Hughes Stinemeyer. Stinemeyer had come west two years earlier from Philadelphia, representing a large barber firm. In 1891, the Stinemeyer family moved to Canon City where Edwin was graduated from South Canon High in the old Alcott school on 4th St. in 1894. He received his law degree from Ann Arbor, Michigan, returning to Canon City in 1900 to begin his practice. His wife was Ann Flynn, daughter of a pioneer miner in Central City.

While Edwin was to have an illustrious career during the following years, he was perhaps best known as an outstanding water attorney. Among other things, he was attorney for the Beaver Park Water District. His daughter, however, believed the greatest contribution of his many dedicated years was his defense in the famous Murrus case which set the wheels turning for abolition of the outmoded justice of the peace

system. “My father was always the defender of the little man,” she says.

Stinemeyer was reappointed County Attorney for Custer County many times and practiced in Canon City for 65 years, until in his 80s. At one time, in 1915, he was District Attorney for Fremont County and on different occasions, was Fremont County Attorney. He died in 1967, shortly before his 91st birthday.

Residents refer to the 50 x 10-mile Wet Mountain Valley endearingly as ‘the Valley,’ like talking to a beloved person.

‘Colorado for Citizen and Traveler’ a rare handbook written in 1873 that Miss Stinemeyer found in her extensive research, gives us physical description. It is a fertile and attractive and has a population of 900 people as well as schoolhouses, churches, two stores, one saw mill, one churn factory and a blacksmithy shop. Three settlements, listing post offices and population were Colfax, 125, Rosita, 20, and Ula, 75. At the time, the total population of Fremont County, which then included Custer, was 3000. Total valuation was $675,000.

Canon City, incorporated in 1872, and founded in 1859, was the county seat. Many fine books appear in the 1870s depicting life in the Valley. It was in the early 1800s that this Valley was discovered. However, it was not until after the Civil War that economist depression became a factor in furthering Westward migration from the states. In part, railroad brochures widely circulated in the East excited individuals seeking a new life and attracted highly individualistic immigrants. Development of the land and cattle industry, rather than mining, was objective at the offset. Many came for health reasons, to the high dry climate, believed to be a cure for tuberculosis.

It was popular during this period for colonies to be formed. Carl Wolstein, descended of a noble Persian family, led a group of 300 Germans from Chicago who settled near Colfax in the central part of the Valley. Wolstein was a skilled map maker, writer and artist and Ula, known as Britain’s paradise, the second sons of wealthy families arrived. Many were well educated and it was George Sweetland who brought with him several thousand books. He is credited with establishing the first circulating library in the Valley.

The Episcopal Church also was started in Ula. English customs brought with these early settlers. They raised beautiful horses for racing, a sport they dearly loved and stopped everything for their traditional morning and afternoon tea breaks.

Ula was located in the northern part of the Valley at the head of Grape Creek and the northern and eastern section fruit and vegetables are still raised near Hillside. At the same time, German and English colonies arrived, French and Mormons were colonized in nearby settlements. Several attempts in the early 60s were made to locate mines in the Wet Mountain Valley. This industry developed about 1871 when Daniel Baker, a prospector, picked up Galena specimens near the Senator mine close to Rosita. A colorful character, Richard Erwin, is credited with furthering mining of silver, the most valuable metal found. The first ore was shipped out in the spring of 1873 from the Senator. Other important mines were the Pocohontas, Humboldt, and Virginia in the Hardscrabble mining district. The Rosita stake spurred construction of the first smelter in Canon City where businessmen yearned to capture the trade from the San Juan and Leadville mines.

Politics and mining played a prominent part in the separation of Fremont County to form Custer County. The division of Fremont and formed Custer was passed by both houses of the Colorado legislature on March 9, 1877. After a bitter contest, Rosita was chosen by electors as seat of Custer County. The election was upheld with a favorable discussion by the Colorado Supreme Court in 1884. However, in 1886, voters switched the county seat to Silver Cliff, a short 1.5 miles from Westcliffe. The 1893 silver crash ended Silver Cliff's brief glory and the town dwindled rapidly with many people moving out the Westcliffe.

In 1928, Custer County residents voted to make Westcliffe their government seat and the following year, built their courthouse there. The first Custer County officers appointed by Gov. Roth were T.W. Hall, Reginald Sweetman and H.E. Custer. They were commissioners. J.A. Davis, treasurer, W.F. Grody, Clerk, W.T. Black, Sheriff, Dr. J. Hogg, Superintendent of Schools and George S. Adams, Judge. Although hopes ran high that the railroad would come to Silver Cliff, it went to Westcliffe instead.

Miss Stinemeyer believes this was because of General William Jackson Palmer's influence.

In 1880, a disastrous fire wiped out Rosita. Loss was estimated at $130,000. Like Silver Cliff, it also became a ghost town. Before retiring and returning to Canon City to live in the family home at 703 College, Miss Stinemeyer taught in the old Wilson Junior High in Canon City.

There's some pictures along with this article. One is of Rosita. The caption under it says 'now a ghost town in the Wet Mountain Valley.' Rosita once was the center of the valley's mining boom. The first ore was shipped out in the spring of 1873 from the Senator Mine in Rosita. The town later had a brief glory as the county seat of newly formed Custer County which was divided off from Fremont County.'

Also, a picture of some men in uniform with guns and the caption under that says 'colonists, a very rare photograph owned by Ruth Stinemeyer shows German colonists after their arrival from the East at Ft. Wallace, Kansas. They were provided with army ambulances which transported them to Pueblo, then to Canon City, from where they journeyed to the Wet Mountain Valley to establish a colony.'

There's also a picture of Mrs. Ruth Stinemeyer. The caption under that says 'In her blood. The valley is in his blood.' Says 'Ruth Stinemeyer may live in Canon City, but she feels she has the Wet Mountain Valley in her blood. Her grandfather, Samuel C. Stinemeyer,' and then there's a picture of two men at the bottom of that picture below right came to Silver Cliff in 1879 during the mining boom where her father, the late Edwin Hughes Myer, below left, spent his childhood there before going to an illustrious law career.'"