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### **Summary of Oral History Interview with Avesta Vahldick McGonegal**

Avesta Vahldick McGonegal was interviewed on October 22, 1985, about her family's history in Custer County and Fremont County, Colorado. She shared memories of her German immigrant ancestry, her early childhood, her family's migration, and the impact of historical events such as World War I and the Great Depression on German Americans in the region.

### **Family Background and Migration**

Avesta was born into the Vahldick family, with her father, George Charles Vahldick, born in Hillside, Custer County, in 1873. Her grandparents had come from Germany as part of the German Colony settlers in the Wet Mountain Valley. Her mother's family, the Laws, traced their origins to England and Virginia before settling in Colorado.

When Avesta was four years old, in 1908, her family moved from Hillside to Fremont County, traveling by horse and freight wagon. They settled in a large eight-room house near Four Mile Creek. She recalled watching her mother and aunt repaper the entire house using homemade flour paste, and she was given scraps of wallpaper to "help."

### **Growing Up in Colorado**

Avesta attended school in Canon City, including Washington School, which was later replaced by the courthouse. She recalled the old telephone system, where calls were made by crank and numbers included color-coded lines. Her family relied on home remedies for illnesses, including turpentine for wounds and mustard plasters for colds.

During World War I, German Americans faced discrimination, and her father, who spoke some German, stopped using the language after the Ku Klux Klan began painting crosses on German families' lawns in Rocky Ford. The fear of violence led them to avoid any association with Germany. However, in Custer County, where many settlers were of German descent, there seemed to be less prejudice.

### **Work and Teaching Career**

Avesta became a teacher, initially taking an examination in La Junta to qualify, as college tuition was unaffordable during the economic downturn of the 1920s. She taught in various one-room schoolhouses, including Junkins Park and Adobe School near Westcliffe. Junkins Park, a summer school in the mountains, paid \$80 per month, including an additional \$5 for janitorial duties. She later earned her bachelor's degree from Western State College in Gunnison.

During the Great Depression, she experienced financial struggles but managed to continue teaching. Her family relied on homegrown food and careful financial management. Later, she transitioned to welfare work and child services, working in Otero County before returning to teaching.

### **Community and Historical Events**

Avesta vividly remembered events such as the 1914 coal miners' strike, when militia forces were stationed at the fairgrounds in Canon City. She also recalled the 1921 Pueblo flood and the impact of the Great Depression, during which her husband and father-in-law worked for the WPA (Works Progress Administration) and the timber industry.

### **Reflections on Change**

Avesta reflected on the transformation of the Wet Mountain Valley and Fremont County over the decades. She lamented the decline of small farming and mining communities and the loss of traditional ways of life. She also spoke of the importance of family gatherings, childhood games, and the influence of Methodist, Lutheran, and Christian churches in their lives.

Her oral history provides a rich account of pioneer resilience, rural education, and the experiences of German American settlers in Colorado.

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*This summary created with ChatGPT.*