

West Custer County Library District Local History Collection
Oral History Collection

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Miller, Carl and Bessie

May 18, 1990

Interviewed by Irene Francis

Summary

The transcript is a conversation between Irene Francis (IF), Project Director, Ara Weimer, collecting genealogy, and Mr. and Mrs. Carl Miller, conducted on May 18, 1990, in Canon City, CO. Carl Miller shares details about his birth, education at Beck school, and growing up in the Westcliffe-Silver Cliff area. Bessie Miller discusses her schooling experiences, including attending the adobe school and the Lutheran school in town. The Millers also touch on topics like teachers, schooling conditions, and family history, including Bessie's grandmother being the first white child born in Custer County and interactions with Native Americans in the area.

The conversation continues with Bessie Miller discussing home remedies her family used, including turpentine mixed with animal grease for colds. Carl Miller talks about his family's musical background, including playing in a German Oompah-pah band and later transitioning to playing popular music from the radio. They also discuss their marriage, Carl's agricultural deferment during World War II, their farming activities, and the decline of the railroad in the area. Bessie shares her experiences after graduating from 8th grade, including working various jobs and babysitting.

The transcript continues with Carl Miller recalling his experiences with the railroad, including riding the train to Denver for a spelling contest. Mentions her post-graduation activities, which mainly involved working odd jobs and babysitting.

In this continuation of the transcript, Carl and Bessie Miller share insights into the history of the area, their personal experiences growing up, and local traditions. Carl discusses the challenges of early transportation routes, the presence of Native American communities in the region, and the development of agricultural land by homesteaders. Bessie reminisces about her childhood experiences without modern amenities like electricity and indoor plumbing.

They also discuss local businesses in Westcliffe and Silver Cliff, including memories of ice cream parlors, drug stores, and pool halls. The conversation touches on social gatherings, such as dances and shivarees, which were common forms of entertainment in the community. Carl reflects on his experiences as a musician, playing for various events and dances, and the sense of community that accompanied these gatherings.

Additionally, the transcript includes a written account by Annetta Miller about the flooding and geological changes in the area, particularly an event known as the Wieders at Cut Hill. Bessie shares her work experiences, including employment at a resort where she assisted with cooking, cleaning, and entertaining guests.

Overall, the transcript provides a rich glimpse into the history, daily life, and cultural traditions of the Westcliffe and Silver Cliff area as remembered by Carl and Bessie Miller.