

TRANSCRIPT: KATHERINE RECTOR

Q (By Julie Jones-Eddy) This is Julie Jones-Eddy, visiting this afternoon with Mrs. Katherine Rector in her home in Meeker, Colorado, June 2nd, 1984, for the project, "Women in Northwestern Colorado, 1890 to 1940."

Good afternoon, Mrs. Rector. I am very glad to be here in your home.

One of the first questions that we'll start with has something to do with your mother. Did your mother live in your area early? When did your mother come here?

A. I'm not sure.

Q Do you remember stories she told you about--

A. She used to live on the Mesa before she and my dad were married.

Q Is the Mesa around here somewhere?

A. Yes, right.

Q Did she live on a ranch before she married?

A. I imagine. I don't think they owned a ranch.

Q Just lived on one?

A. Uh-huh.

Q Then she met your father?

A. Yes.

Q What did your father do?

A. Well, he came here to farm. He had been a gold miner.

Q Where did he do his gold mining?

A. Oh, Georgetown, and Red Cliff, and up in that area.

Q So he came here before he married to settle down, and--

A. He come here in 1882.

Q. Okay. Do you remember any--did your mother ever tell you stories about what life was like here before you were born?

A. Well, not much, 'cause I was kind of a second family and by that time, I expect it was a lot different than it was with the first--

Q. When she first got married?

A. Right.

Q. When you were a little girl, do you have any favorite memories that you think of perhaps as your first childhood memory? Something that happened?

A. Well, about the first thing I can remember, I was rolling down the stairs. I was rolling apples down the stairs, and pretty quick I went down there too.

Q. Oh, you did?

A. I was just small, but I do remember that when I was not very old. I hit every step.

Q. Where did you spend most of your childhood, in town or on a ranch?

A. On the ranch. I lived on the ranch for 73 years.

Q. Where was the ranch?

A. Up at Miller Creek.

Q. In Miller Creek?

A. Uh-huh, up the river.

Q. So as a child you lived there, and then after you married--

A. I still lived there.

Q. You still lived there? Did your husband start to ranch in that area?

A. Uh-huh, he helped Dad.

Q. Oh, he helped your father. So you stayed right in the same place all that time?

A. Uh-huh.

Q. Do you remember when you were a child growing up that you had responsibilities or chores to do every day?

A. I--my dad and mother separated when I was twelve years old, and I said I can't remember being a kid very much--I was a housewife, forever and ever.

Q. You took over all those chores?

A. Yeah.

Q. What were some of the--what did you do? What were some of those things you had to do?

A. Well, just keep house.

Q. What did you do to do that? Did you have a washing machine?

A. No, of course not! That scrubboard around the corner there is the one I used.

Q. That's what you used?

A. Right. Yeah, we didn't have no washing machine, oh, electric one, I never had an electric washing machine til--oh, it was gas, I should say, til '38.

Q. 1938?

A. Uh-huh.

Q. Was it difficult washing the clothes in the winter time?

A. Yes, it was.

Q. What did you do? Tell me how you did that?

A. Well, just get a tub of water and the scrubboard, and washed.

Q. What did you do to get the clothes dry? How did you dry them in the winter?

A. You just--well, you either hung them outside or some of them, maybe, you'd hang inside. But lots of things will sort of freeze dry. But they didn't have no other way of drying.

Q. So when they were frozen dry, what did you do with them to soften them up?

A. Well, they just, when they dried they were soft. But it takes quite a while for them to dry, that's for sure.

Q. When there was a lot of snow up there, you still hung the clothes outside, sometimes?

A. Uh-huh, right. Hmmm. Sounds impossible!

Q. Sounds impossible--you're right. Did you have brothers?

A. I had two brothers. I didn't know my older brother much, because he was gone, but I had a younger brother.

Q. Did your brothers have as many or more chores than you did at home to help out?

A. Well, I don't know much about that older brother, because like I say, he was, you know--

Q. Yes, gone.

A. He was a lot older than I was, but my younger brother, he wasn't very good help.

Q. He wasn't very good help, huh? Was he supposed to work outside, and he just didn't do it?

A. Well, when there was anything to do, he was usually elsewhere.

Q. He was gone, huh?

A. Right.

Q. Did you mind the chores that you had to do? Were there other things that you would rather have done around the ranch than worked in the house?

A. Well, I worked in the field. I worked everywhere. I had the whole thing!

Q. What did you do when you worked outside?

A. Oh, worked in the hay field, milked cows, and anything there was to do.

Q. How often did you get to come to town, or see other people?

A. Oh, we didn't come to town, you know, very often. I think in earlier years that they come to town more than we did through that period of time. And then, of course, later on, we had a car.

Q. So you could come?

A. But--oh, I remember my younger sister and I used to come to town horseback.

Q. How far was it?

A. It was twelve miles.

Q. You probably didn't come much in the winter time, then?

A. No, right. No, we didn't.

Q. Did you see neighbors often?

A. Yeah, there was quite a few kids went to school there and we had a bunch of cousins that lived next door, and we were together a lot.

Q. Together a lot?

A. Part of them was, you know, about like us in ages.

Q. So you went to a country school?

A. Right. It was right across the road from where--

Q. From your ranch?

A. Uh-huh, yeah.

Q. I've heard from other people that the teachers in those country schools lived with different families. Did you ever have a teacher live with you?

A. I think so, but not that I remember, it was earlier, maybe others did. But when some of the teachers lived in the school house. I don't know how they kept from freezing their hind leg off, but they did.

Q. There was one stove in the school, I suppose, wasn't there?

A. Uh-huh, great old big heater.

Q. So was there a little bedroom off to the side?

A. No, huh-uh. She just fixed up something in the corner there.

Q. And just lived there?

A. Uh-huh, right.

Q. Did you go to school during the summer, or during the winter?

A. The winter. Some places had summer school, but we didn't. And I remember the year that the flu was real bad, we didn't have school.

Q. No school--in 1918, I think that was.

A. I was so frightened.

Q. They just didn't have school at all?

A. No. They didn't have the school. But we always had year-round school. I think it was probably eight months, and then a lot of time--oh, they had a little money and whatever, it was for a nine-month period.

Q. Oh, I see. Did you go to high school there too?

A. I never went but one year to high school, and I went in Idaho. It was after my dad and mother separated, and my younger sister and I went out there for the school term, and that's as long as we stayed. And I never went to school here, because--well, now they have a bus, but then you, oh, perhaps, maybe you had some relatives in town that you stayed with, or something of that type, but I never went on to high school, only the one year.

Q. So when you were finished with school, then you just stayed on the ranch and did the work?

A. Uh-huh.

Q. Did your father ever remarry then?

A. No.

Q. That was up to you to do all those things?

A. He would--he lived there til he died. And we took care of him. There was no hospitals or nothing. We just took care of him at home.

Q. Was he ill with something?

A. He'd had a stroke. They say, you know, any more you can't take care of them like that, but you can if you have to.

Q. If there isn't anything else.

A. Right. That's for sure. No, we didn't have no hospital here til '49, I think it was. And he died in '42.

Q. Do you remember when people in the family did get sick with various things, were there some home remedies that you knew about to use to help them get better? Or did you have a doctor come each time?

A. No, huh-uh. We had the doctor out there for Daddy. And, of course, when my kids were born, we had a doctor. That one time, he just as well stayed in town, because he didn't get there! [laughter]

Q. He didn't get there in time, huh? No?

A. Well, but--oh, you had lots of different things they gave you, old home remedies.

Q. Could you explain some of those?

A. Oh, some of them. Well, I know they said they used to give them kerosene. And then you had the mustard plaster, they put on your chest and--ohhhhh We had different kinds of teas that they gave them for different things. Tea leaves were supposed to be a good poltice.

Q. Oh, to put on a wound, you mean?

A. Well, or like if you have eye problems they use those tea leaves as poltices, you know.

Q. Oh, they did?

A. They had--oh, like the sun had bothered them, or I think they called it sunblindness, you know. And they would put those tea leaves on them, and they--pink eye, they used, you know, that was supposed to be very good. I remember my dad used to take this Harlum oil and it was in a little bitty bottle. Well, I've got a little bottle out here. About that big around, and about that long. And he'd put drops of it in sugar, and it was supposed to be good for the kidneys.

Q. What kind of oil?

A. Harlum.

Q. Harlum?

A. H-a-r-l-u-m, I think.

Q. Uh-huh. And where did he get that?

A. Well, from the drug store.

Q. From the drug store?

A. And back then, all those druggists would, you know, give you--you could get something from them for something that you had wrong with you, if you'd battered yourself up, or a cut or anything, they usually had something on the shelf that you could get to ease it.

Q Do you remember any accidents or any sort of emergencies on the ranch, things that happened to people where, you know, if you couldn't get to town or whatever, you just had to deal with that the best you could?

A Well, I remember my brother falling off the haystack, and ran an iron bar through his leg, and the doctor operated on him on the kitchen table.

Q Did it turn out all right?

A Yeah. Of course, he's not here now, but it wasn't anything with his leg. Oh, I think he was goofing off, probably, and fell off the side of the stack, and that stacker was fastened down with these rods, there were some back here and some on this end of it, and then when that hay went up, you know, it would hold that til it would be sturdy, and he fell off of that stack, and that run through his leg.

Q Did you have to just pull him off the iron bar to get him to the house, I suppose?

A As I remember, I know I was there. I wasn't--I was smaller, then, course, see, he was eight years older than I. He was eight years old when I was born. And by the time I was any size, he was pretty good--you know.

Q Yeah, yeah.

A But he had quite a whack.

Q Yes. I'll bet that was very--

A Yes. I'm sure it hurt, awfully bad. But he got along fine.

Q Did he get better?

A Yeah, yeah, it healed up before too long.

Q When you were a teenager, do you just remember working hard, or were there any hobbies or things that you enjoyed doing just for yourself?

A Oh, we always fished quite a bit, back in those years.

Q With the other--

A Well, my sister and I, a lot of the time, my younger sister.

Q Do you remember planning things, or having a good time when you were a young child--what you did?

A Oh, we had, well, there was quite a few kids in school there, and we had--oh, a lot of fun. At the school house, they had, oh, lots of dances.

Q Where did you meet your husband?

A Well, I met him when he was working on the ditch up there, when they was cleaning the Miller Creek ditch in the spring, and he was--oh, my older sister--I think you seen her the other day--Mrs. Parks.

Q Nellie Parks, uh-huh, yes. That's your older sister?

A Uh-huh.

Q I didn't know that.

A Yeah. Well, that ditch went through that place they had leased, and that was where I met him in the beginning. They did a lot of that ditch cleaning then by hand, with shovels, or whatever.

Q So that's what he was doing?

A Yeah, right, there was a bunch of, you know, guys from town, young guys, that was working on the ditch.

Q How long was it from the time you met him til the time you married?

A Oh, let's see. From about one spring to the next. It was in the spring when that was, a little later in the spring, and we were married in January.

Q What did you do during that time when you--what we think of now as dating? What did you do when you saw him?

A Well, we didn't go an awful lot. I remember, one time

he took this friend and my younger sister and I to town, and we got back up the river part way and the car broke down, and it was cold. We about froze to death. We had to walk home. And by the time we got home, we were about to freeze to death.

We wore dresses, and of course, you had your knees, you know--

Q Short dresses?

A Got cold. Well, they weren't extra short, but they still didn't do much for your knees.

Q Where did you get married?

A Here in Meeker, at my cousin's house.

Q At the house?

A Uh-huh.

Q Did you take a honeymoon?

A No. Ralph was working at the Moffat tunnel, and he went back up there, and I went up in a couple of weeks or so later.

Q Where did you live when you went there?

A Oh, they had a lot of little throwed-up houses, and where they were, you know just about like one was right on top of each other--you could hear each other talk. I could hear you and you could hear me.

But they weren't very warm, that was for sure. They had, well, like I say, they had just throwed them up, you know, and then it was for rent.

Q So you had a stove in there?

A Uh-huh.

Q Which you kept burning all the time, probably?

A Right. Lots of snow.

Q. Lots of snow?

A. Uh-huh. See, it was real close to Fraser. We've seen over 50 below, you know. We were cold.

Q. Did you have to just wear a lot of clothes all the time?

A. I did. I wasn't there only a piece of the year. I said, in all the years up at the ranch, there has never been a year that I was gone, other than since I moved here. I just-- I've been gone pieces of a year, and that's the way it was when I was up to the tunnel.

Q. Was that the first time that you had traveled really outside of northwestern Colorado?

A. No. See, when we went to Idaho, that was when I was younger.

Q. That's right. School, uh-huh. When you went to Idaho, how did you get there, on a train?

A. Uh-huh.

Q. Where did you catch the train?

A. Over to Rifle.

Q. How did you get from here to Rifle?

A. Oh, Sis and George, I think, took us over in the car. And then we got on the train.

Q. Do you remember when they first had cars around Meeker area, in the spring or the winter, was it impossible to use them because there were no roads?

A. Well, they didn't work too good. But they had, you know, a few, earlier.

Q. Did you use your horses still mostly in the--

A. Yes. Well, we didn't have a car. Dad never had a car. We did ourselves later on, but Dad never owned a car.

Q. So when you came to town, you had to come on the horse or a buggy?

A. They had sleds through the winter, and summer time, you had buggies, or horseback.

Q. When you were--oh, before you met your husband, about seventeen years old, or something like that, what did you think you would do in your life? Did you expect to get married, or--

A. I don't think I--

Q. Just didn't think about it?

A. I was too busy.

Q. You were too busy? Working.

A. Right.

Q. Do you have some favorite memories of your life with your husband? Are there some special times you think about?

A. Oh, we had lots of good times picnicking, and he liked to hunt. I went along, too.

Q. Oh, you went along hunting?

A. Uh-huh.

Q. Did you camp outside?

A. No. We'd just hunt from the ranch.

Q. Right there at the ranch?

A. Uh-huh, yes.

Q. Because you were on the ranch, did that mean that you couldn't participate in women's club activities, and things like that?

A. Well, probably not as much. In earlier years, I never belonged. I did in later years, but I got so I didn't that much. Of course, I said it seemed like that was the worst day of the year, and especially if I was supposed to be hostess. Something--

some disaster took place, and I just suffered, because I was supposed to be in town, and here I was stranded up the river. So I just gave up.

Q. Can you give me an example of a disaster?

A. Well, for instance, the car just wouldn't go, and that's a disaster, when you've got twelve miles to do.

Q. Sure. Sure. How many children did you have?

A. Two.

Q. Two.

A. And our youngest daughter died when she was 29, left three little kids.

Q. What did she die of?

A. She had a blood clot, the next morning after surgery.

Q. And the other child was a son?

A. No. Two daughters.

Q. Did your other--

A. There were eight years difference. And the oldest one left yesterday for Alaska. They lived up there for about twenty years.

Q. When you had these children, and you gave birth to the children, were you up on the ranch, or did you come to town?

A. No, they were both born up there.

Q. Did you have any difficulty with the births?

A. Not really.

Q. No?

A. The second one was worse than the first one. They say not, but I don't agree with it.

Q. You don't agree with that?

A. No, I sure don't.

Q. Of the women that you knew, were any of them concerned about having children, because sometimes women did have difficulty, and things happened to them? Or did they just accept it as something that--

A. Well, I think most of them accepted it. Some of them might have been, you know, really upset, and I'm sure they were, that they, you know, had to be up like that.

Q. Did you know of any who had their children on the ranches who had some real problems with giving birth alone like that?

A. Well, Sis's oldest was a long time being born, and she was probably injured.

Q. Uh-huh. I think she mentioned that.

A. Right, probably. And, of course, she only lived a few--til probably about two.

And that was probably--if she'd been in a hospital, it probably wouldn't have happened, you know.

Q. Sure. You had some help.

A. Right.

Q. When you were growing up as a little girl, did you know anything about having children, or having periods, or any of those things that happen to women, or did they just come along and surprise you?

A. They just come along and surprised me. Mother wasn't very talkative that way. That was for sure.

Q. Didn't say much about that?

A. No, she sure didn't.

Q. Was it hard to figure out what was going on, or was it--you didn't have much trouble with that?

A. Well, I imagine it was not too bad, because you had these other kids about your same age.

Q. So you could compare notes?

A. Yeah. Something like that.

Q. Yeah.

A. See, I had those cousins that were about my age, that lived next door.

Q. So they were someone to talk to?

A. Right.

Q. When you had your daughters, did you have some thoughts about what you would like for their lives, in light of what your experiences had been? Did you have some hopes for them?

A. Well, yes, I'm sure I did. Our youngest daughter was sick an awful lot. She had rheumatic fever when she was small and she had a bad time. Then she seemed to have gotten--you know, out of it, but then we lost her then after all.

Q. Did they know that she had rheumatic fever at the time?

A. Not earlier, but then they finally did.

Q. What sort of treatment did they prescribe for that?

A. Well, she was St. Joseph's, and they had her several place,s but she--well, I know she used to take some--oh, iron tablets, or medicine. That was supposed to--well, you know, she was quite frail, and that was supposed to have built her up.

Q. I see. Could you sort of describe a typical day's activities on the ranch when you--after you'd had your children, or when they were very young? Maybe a day in the summer--what would your day be like, or a day in the winter? What time did you get up? What did you do?

A. Well, we probably got up by 7:30 in the winter, in the summer, you maybe got up earlier, depending on what you was doing. If you was doing things in the fields, or working like

that, you'd had to get up that early. If you weren't, you wouldn't have got up that early. And the same way with winter. I used to help feed sometimes, which took a little while.

Q. How did you get out to the sheep and cattle in the winter to feed them? Was that hard?

A. Well, we used to--we had the sled and the horses, and then later on we had a jeep, which we--

Q. Took the feed out to them that way?

A. Right.

Q. Did you spend one whole day washing, and then one whole day ironing, and baking, and those different things?

A. No, not really. It wasn't part of no day's job. Anyway, but I said that was one thing I really thought was great when they had that electric iron, because with other irons, I, as I told you, I worked in the hay field, and with the electric iron, you could iron a few pieces of clothes when you didn't have much time, but by the time you got the stove hot and the irons hot, and everything, you was all out of time, so then you didn't get no ironing done.

Q. Didn't get any ironing done, huh?

Who are the people that you felt were most important in your life, who influenced you the most?

A. Oh, . . .

Q. Your father, perhaps?

A. Well, he was--my dad was real good. I had, you know, a lot of happy memories of my dad. I don't with my mother, because I felt bad, you know, because she went off and left us.

Q. Was she just not suited to ranch life, and she wanted--

A. Well, she lived on it a lot of years, but I don't know. I don't know.

Q. You never saw her again then?

A. Uh-huh, yeah. She came, finally came back here, and

she died here.

But like I say, I have, you know, a lot of good memories of my dad. Even if I was his hired man.

Q. Even what?

A. Even if I was his hired man.

Q. Yes, you were his hired man, that's right.

What are the things in your life that you feel happiest about, the things that are most satisfying?

A. Well, I really enjoyed it up at the ranch.

Q. You liked living that life?

A. Yeah, I do. But I guess I won't be doing it any more, doesn't sort of seem. But I did, you know, I enjoyed it while it lasted.

Q. You liked that?

A. Uh-huh.

Q. Who has that ranch now?

A. Well, we still have it, but I don't live up there any more, because--I said I run out of steam. When old lady farmers run out of steam, they have to move to town.

Q. That's right. Is there someone in the family who runs the ranch now?

A. No, not really. It's leased out, but my daughter has a home up there right across the river. It was on land that was with the ranch. And then my--her son has a home there.

Q. Oh, he does?

A. Uh-huh.

Q. So there'll be someone from your family in that area for awhile?

A. Yes. They'll be back in three or four months. After

going to Alaska.

And of course, the grandson, he's up there now.

Q. Are there any times in your life that were very disappointing? Can you think of anything that was just a real disappointment?

A. Well, I--losing my youngest sister was real bad, because we were--you know, pretty close, about the same age, there was two years difference.

Q. How old was she?

A. When she died?

Q. Yes.

A. Fifty-something.

Q. Oh, she was older then--it wasn't when you were children?

A. No, no, no. It was later. But she had cancer of the pancreas and that's what she died from.

Q. Were the children of the daughter that you lost, are those children--did they grow up here?

A. Uh-huh. They still live here.

Q. They still live here? That's good.

A. They're, oh, 21 and around there, and older. The girls are younger.

Q. Is there anything that you can think of that you wished that you had been able to do in your life, but you just, for some reason, were not able to?

A. Ummm . . . Yes. Ralph and I always thought it would be so nice to just go camping, just, you know, for quite awhile. And, of course, he died and we never did get to, and you can't go off camping by yourself. Not very well.

Q. No.

A. That was one thing.

Q. Did you travel, except for the trip to Idaho, did you travel outside of northwestern Colorado very much?

A. Well, I've been to Alaska six times, flying up and back, and I went up and down the highway once. And that was a nice trip. I don't like to fly. I ain't afraid to any more, but I just don't like it.

Q. Well, after you got out of northwestern Colorado, and saw some other areas, perhaps even your trip to Idaho, did you think northwestern Colorado was a little different from most places, or was it an advantage to live here, or a disadvantage?

A. Oh, I think it's nice here. I said, I always figured that, you know, your summers was so nice you'd forget you had winter. Well, I think, really, oh, well, not job-wise, or something like that, Meeker ain't that hot, but, otherwise it's okay.

Q. It's quiet, not too many people.

A. Right.

Q. Have you been in many cities?

A. No, not really. I've been up to, you know, Fairbanks, and it's pretty fair size.

Q. Did you go over to Denver, ever much?

A. I've been in there a time or two or more with the plane, and then I've come home by bus from Denver. And then we've been there a few times when we've got to hospitals and one thing and another.

Q. Uh-huh. It's a very different part of Colorado, isn't it?

A. Yeah. It's a noisy place.

Q. This is very much quieter, isn't it?

A. Oh, yes. It surely is.

Q. Okay.

A. My dad had a place leased up at Marvine Creek. And the

way things are nowadays, can you imagine a-traveling that far in a buggy or a lumber wagon to farm?

Q How far are we talking about? Miles?

A Well, what would it be--thirty miles?

Q Thirty miles, maybe? So he went back and forth each day?

A No.

Q No?

A But they didn't--they just wouldn't if they didn't have a car.

Q Have to have a car?

A Oh, yeah.

Q Then it seems like the snow in the winter would cause so many--

A Well, I don't think he stayed up there in the winter. But he farmed up there.

Q Up there in the summer?

A That was a long, long time ago. Used to go to Sleepy Cat and pick raspberries.

Q What did you do with them? Did you can them?

A Yeah. We got a whole--Dad had a thing he made with a gunny sack, and he had three pockets here, and three back here, and you picked in these jars. You picked them berries in them jars, and that's the way he took them home.

Q Oh, he put the jars in the little apron kind of thing?

A Uh-huh, right. And that's what he--that's the way he carried it along with him to pick in.

Q Oh, I see. So you had a lot of raspberries then, didn't you?

A. Yeah, and he had quite an invention, because most of us wouldn't think about--

Q. Doing it that way?

A. We'd probably get a bucket, and then we'd drop the bucket and spill all the raspberries.

Q. Or if you punched them or pushed them, they would get all squishy, wouldn't they?

A. Right.

Q. So he put them in glass jars.

A. Oh, they were good. There were so many of them up in Alaska, in places. Oh, you could live on them for a month. Along the side of the highways, you know, where they'd rebuilt these roads. And underneath them, it was just as tender, just like a rug. They'd fall off, and they were just as clean and nice as--you know--you'd picked them off of a bush.

Q. Did you grow--did you have to come to town for food, or did you just grow and can most of whatever you needed for food?

A. Well, we canned a lot of it. I was talking the other day about--oh, any more, the younger people, when they cook vegetables, they have them kind of crispy, and us older folks don't go for them, because we weren't raised that way, because when you canned them, or cooked them, well, cooked them on the stove, they were soft.

Q. Not crispy?

A. Huh-uh. And the younger kids like them crispy. 'Cause I know at the Center, when they have something that is kind of firm, you know, they don't think that much of it.

Q. The older people don't like that?

A. No. They like it soft.

Q. The meat that you ate--did you--did your father or your husband get that during hunting season, and that's what you had always, or--

A. Well, we raised quite a lot of pigs, and of course, you raised chickens, we probably had turkeys, and then you snitched one of those deer.

Q. Oh, you snitched a deer out of season?

A. If it hadn't been for those deer, half the people in the county would have starved to death. That's the truth!

Q. Really?

A. Older people, in the older--

Q. Generation?

A. Yeah. That's the truth.

Q. Well, it's a big country, and there probably weren't very many game wardens.

A. No, not in those days.

Q. Well, Mrs. Rector, I have enjoyed our visit very, very much, and I thank you for all the things you have told me.

A. Well, I hope it's okay.

Q. Oh, it's just fine, and I've appreciated your stories a great deal. Thank you.

A. You're welcome.