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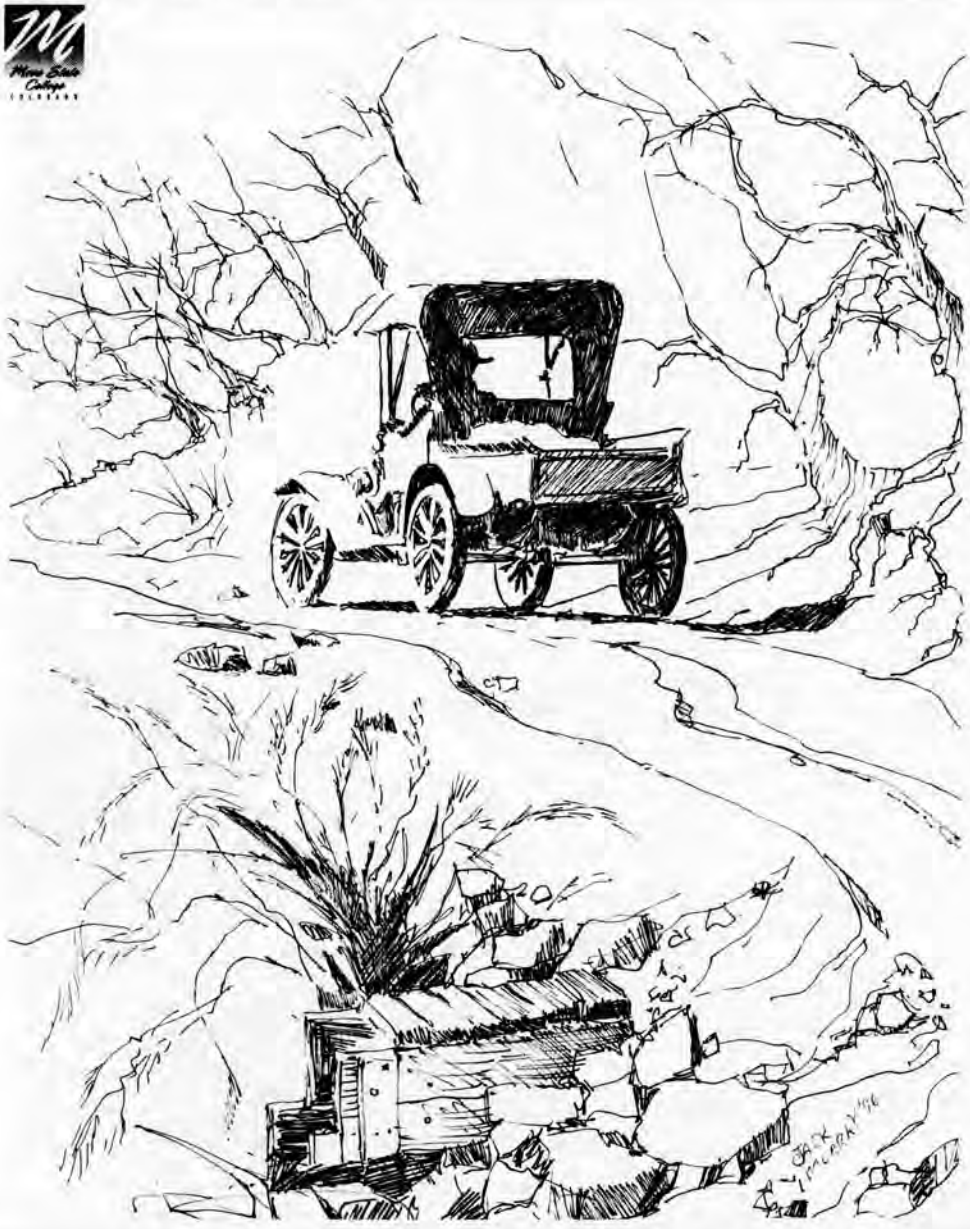

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JOURNAL OF THE WESTERN SLOPE

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THE COVER: The drawing is by John H. "Jack" Murray, a Firefighter/Paramedic, who has served the Grand Junction Fire Department for the past fifteen years. Mr. Murray has been interested in art since childhood. He moved to western Colorado from California at the age of thirteen.

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Photo courtesy U.S. Forest Service, Collbran, CO

Working on the Lands End Road

Lands End Road
by Kathy Lindley

In 1933 the Lands End Road near Grand Junction, Colorado, was constructed from Highway 50 to the summit of Grand Mesa. The creation of this road was but a small part of the enormous span of United States history. Nationally, political and economic developments led to projects affecting not only Grand Mesa, but also nearby Grand Junction. This local history provides rich information which supplements many eras in American history.

After World War One and during the Great Depression, President Franklin D. Roosevelt enacted the New Deal to help improve economic conditions. The New Deal provided several programs in which people could work for sustenance. One such program was the Civilian Conservation Corps, or the CCC. Unemployed, unmarried men were enlisted to work on conservation and resource-development projects such as soil conservation, flood control, and protection of forests and wildlife. Those individuals who enrolled were provided with food, lodging, a small monthly salary and other necessities. In 1935, twenty-six hundred CCC camps were formed which had an enrollment of 500,000 men serving. The CCC program was abolished in 1942.[1]

Under Captain Thomas J. Sheehan, the first Colorado CCC headquarters was established in Grand Junction on August 1, 1935. The CCC had been actively completing projects in Colorado for some time, and setting up a district in Colorado was important because of the central location. It also had the advantages of a pleasant climate and the availability of a railroad.

Many of the CCC members who worked in Colorado came from outside areas like Texas or Oklahoma, and coming to Colorado provided the CCC workers with plenty of job opportunities. They laid the concrete floor of the Grand Valley Canal, as well as building many bridges around the Grand Junction area.[2] In addition, the CCC also built a number of roads and trails around the Grand Junction area. The National Monument Road and many of the Monument's trails were built in part by the CCC workers. However, the CCC in Colorado was in competition with the Works Progress Administration for projects.[3]

The WPA was another program formed under the New Deal, and it was similar in structure to the CCC. The major difference between the two was the fact that the WPA did more community work. They built several housing subdivisions in the Grand Junction area, while also building trails for the National Forest Service.[4] The WPA consisted of employees who ranged in age from twenty to forty. In fact, the WPA offered the wives of the workers employment as cooks. In contrast, the CCC only employed young workers ranging in age from eighteen to twenty-one. Women were not hired.[5] According to Nathan Robb, who worked in 1932 on the Lands End Road, "the CCC was a bunch of kids. They had no family, and they came from everywhere. They were Roosevelt's boys that he was preparing for the military."[6]

The members of the WPA, and many of the community members, felt that the WPA was a superior group to the CCC boys. The WPA did more work for the community, and they hired more people that were out of work, not just the young boys. One of the biggest jobs that the WPA and the CCC started was the building of the Lands End Road and the Shelter House on the Grand Mesa during 1933.[7]

Prior to the building of the Lands End Road, the area was widely known as the Miller Trail. The Miller Trail was a carved cattle trail that ranchers used to drive their cattle onto Grand Mesa for grazing. It started at the base of Kannah Creek, on the Grand Junction side, and ended at Whitewater Point on the top of the Grand Mesa.. The trail was steep and narrow, and left no room for mistakes. Observers of the Miller Trail often commented how the path was littered with the bones of cows that did not make it up the trail. Ray Peck, a Forest Supervisor, recalls a time when thirty head of cattle were lost on that trail in only one day.[8]

Ranchers were not the only individuals interested in the Lands End region. At one point in 1929, four gentlemen looked at the grassy area that the cattle had mowed down and decided it would be a fantastic spot for a golf course. These individuals had the golf course planned down to the last putting hole. In fact, they advertised in all the local newspapers to visit the "World's

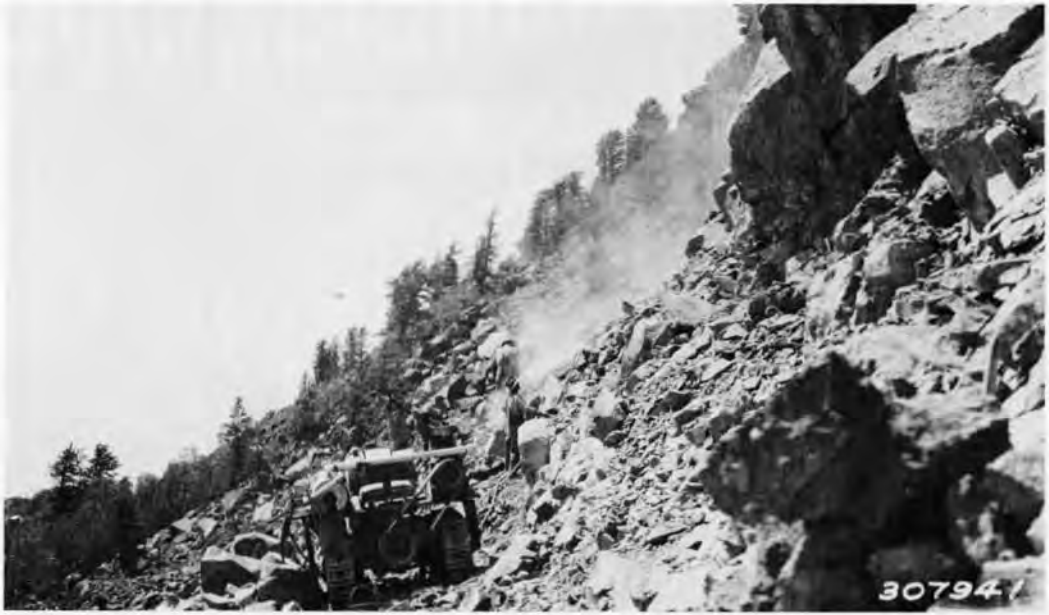

Photo courtesy U.S. Forest Service, Collbran, CO

Working on the Lands End Road.

Highest Golf Course." Unfortunately, in October the stock market crashed, ending the great planned golf course.[9]

Plans to build the Lands End Road had actually existed for many years. In 1922, Ray Peck had asked John Burgess to estimate how much it would cost to build a road descending down the west side of the Grand Mesa. Burgess's figures estimated the road to cost at least $141,000. That figure was enough to scare anyone from starting the Lands End Road. For ten years the project remained dormant until the formation of the WPA and the CCC programs.[10]

Shortly after the WPA and the CCC programs were enacted, the Forest Service could hire the CCC and WPA workers for cheaper wages: most CCC and WPA employees would work for $20 a month and a place to stay. With that kind of a bargain price for labor, the Forest Service decided to start the building of the Lands End Road.[11]

In 1932 J. P. Reddrick and C. J. Stall plotted the points of the Lands End Road. The project was to begin at the North Fork of the Kannah Creek Valley. The one provision that Reddrick had to keep in mind was the fact that Grand Junction received most of its city water from the south side drainage in Kannah Creek. If they interfered with the water system, it would ruin the water supply to Grand Junction, so they had to keep the road construction on the north side of Kannah Creek. The problems this stipulation created were enormous. The north side of Kannah Creek was mostly hard rock formation, which meant using dynamite to blast out a road.[12]

The actual construction of the Lands End Road started in 1933. Kenneth Bulick started surveying at the bottom of Kannah Creek, marking the area with yellow and red flags until he reached the top of Whitewater Point. Following Bulick, Reddrick made sketches of the surveyed area. He plotted every switchback that was needed as the road was constructed. After the final sketch was completed, he then gathered the workers to start building the road. Reddrick employed nearly one hundred CCC workers for this project.[13]

The CCC camp was based at the bottom of Grand Mesa at a park called Wild Rose. The other camp was located at the top of Grand Mesa at a point near the Whitewater overlook. On the job, these men did numerous tasks like hauling rocks out of the way and clearing timber, because there were no horses or machinery available to do any of the heavy work. The CCC worked on the Lands End Road for approximately one month. After that time, the workers left, and where they went, no one exactly knows. It was rumored that they left to finish the Monument Road, but it has never been confirmed. Many individuals still believe that the CCC members were the ones who built the Lands End Road but, in actuality, they had little to do with the construction of this road.[14]

Photo courtesy U.S. Forest Service, Collbran, CO

Workers with steam shovel on Lands End Road.

After the CCC left, many of the WPA workers moved into the CCC camps to help the Forest Service finish the job. Robb, who was not a WPA member, worked with many of the WPA workers on the road. He once commented that he was glad to work with the boys from the WPA because they were older and more experienced at doing the kind of work that was required of them. In fact, at age twenty–one, Robb was the youngest member of the working crew.[15]

The members on the working crew needed to be experienced in the areas of rock blasting and working the few caterpillars they were able to obtain. All of the members had to have some knowledge of how to build a road. Robb remembered having to put old, cut–down tree logs on the road, and then they had to cover them with dirt in order to make the road stay in place.[16] Another worker, Creed Miracle, recalled using old lumber to fill in the hollowed spots. The top half of the road was the trickiest because of the lava rock beds. Many times the workers went over to the nearby Dangler's Saw Mill to get the logs that they needed. Creed remembered filling in one spot along the road with nearly a dozen rotten logs. If the holes were not filled in with something other than dirt, then the road would slide away every time.[17]

The Lands End Road was started in 1933. Building the road was a relatively fast job, and there were no reported deaths or major accidents. Ironically, there was one unmarked grave along the Lands End Road. It became known as the "Lone Grave" on Grand Mesa.[18] It was rumored that a CCC worker, Indian, cowboy, or some scavenger died along the Lands End Road construction site, and that Robb and the rest of the crew gave the loner a proper burial.[19]

While the road was in the process of being built, many individuals traveled up the portion of the finished road to see the unmarked grave. Curious, many of the tourists would ask the crew what happened to the man or who was the man in the grave. The story that Robb and the crew told varied every time. Some of the stories included the tragic tale of the cowboy who broke his leg, forcing the crew to shoot him. Another story was that an Indian had shot the loner in the back with a poisonous arrow. Yet another story was told about two crew boys who engaged in a fight, and one split the other's head open with a pick. All of these stories were told with a straight face, and an occasional tear.[20]

People who had heard these stories were shocked, and many went back to the city of Grand Junction and demanded that the "loner" be brought back to Grand Junction for a proper burial. The sheriff handed the problem over to Ray Peck, who was the supervisor, and Peck ordered the boys to keep quiet over the episode of the lone grave. They were ordered not to tell the visitors anything more about the decorated mound.[21]

Sixty years later, Robb finally told the truth. He said that the large tractors

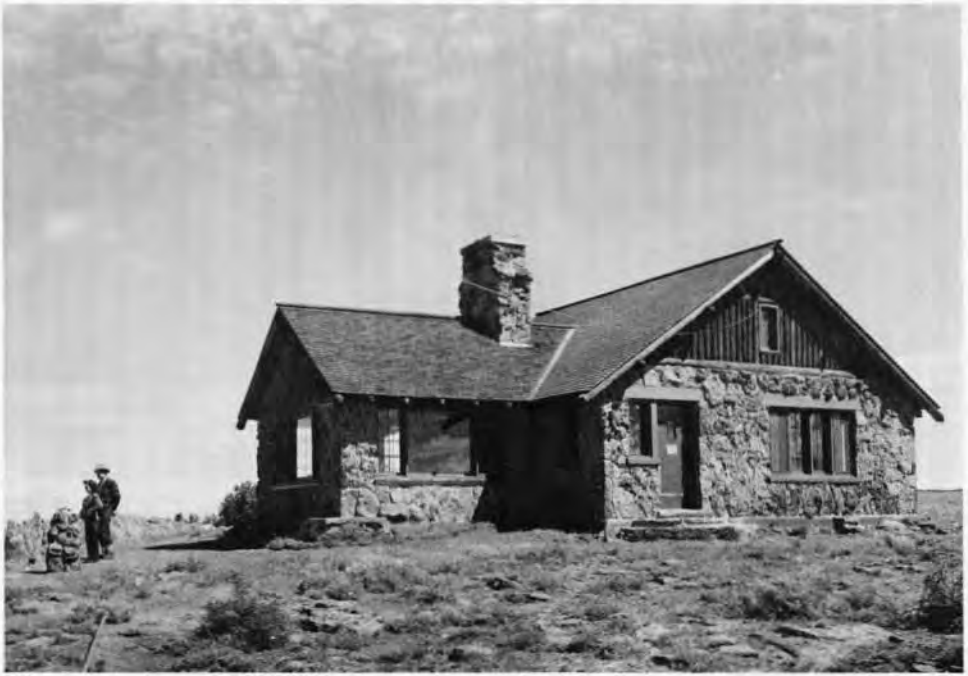

Photo courtesy U.S. Forest Service, Collbran, CO

Lands End Shelter House and observatory, circa 1948.

ed on the project needed to have the dirt dug out from underneath them. Quite often, the tractors would build up mounds of dirt around their bases, and one of these mounds looked identical to a grave. In fact, it looked so much like a grave that Robb and the crew put a rock wall around the mound of dirt. They even made a cross at the head of the lone stranger and laid fresh flowers on top of the grave. They then circulated the many stories of the loner that had died. The truth of the matter is the fact that nobody is laid in the unmarked grave.[22]

This type of joking was typical of the men who worked on the Lands End Road. Even though they worked in the hard times of the Depression, the men who built the road managed to have a good time. They worked hard to complete the road in the daytime, but during the nights and during the weekends, most of the workers played around. They used one of Dangler's cabins on weekend nights to hold dances,[23] and often went out fishing or hunting. Actually, they were not supposed to be hunting or fishing, but they did so anyway.

Another activity that many of the workers did to pass the time was to go on long walks. Nate Robb would walk to the rim and spend some time at Whitewater Point to enjoy the overlook. Once he threw a Coke can into the river, and within a few seconds, the can came flying back over the rim. At first he did not know what to think. It was exceptionally eerie being the only one up there when this mysterious thing happened. He later found out that Whitewater Point had prevailing winds that blew in the opposite direction, causing the water in the river and anything else to fly back over the rim.

Despite all the fun and games, the Lands End crew completed the road in one year.[24] Many of the WPA workers left this area and started new jobs elsewhere. A few workers from the WPA, like Creed Miracle, quit his road construction job and started working for the Forest Service. In 1936, the WPA workers were employed to start working on the Lands End Observatory, or the Shelter House, as it was called back then. The Shelter House was a building masterpiece. The men who designed the architecture for this building must have had a good time when they constructed the plans. They chose to fit together convex curves with concave curves, and acute angles to obtuse angles. It was a true piece of artwork, even though they went against the norm from an architectural viewpoint.[25]

The building of the rock formation inside the observatory was supervised by a man named Ingals. Ingals and his men would go down to the rock wall under the Shelter House and collect pieces of rock for the walls inside the house. The magnificent moss rock architecture can still be seen today. In addition to the Shelter House, the same architectural style can be seen in the outdoor restrooms below. Many observers never knew the restrooms existed and quite often had to race to the restrooms at the end of Lands End Road, near the highway.[26]

When the building was finished, Roger and Bessie Blouch moved into the observatory for the summer of 1936. At that point the observatory became

known as the Concession House. Bessie and her husband sold groceries, candy, pop, and film to the tourists who stopped there. Since many tourists visited the observatory, it made their business a lucrative one.[27] Besides the unique architecture, the observatory offered tourists an incredible view from the overlook. Looking over the Lands End rim was a spectacle of beauty. An individual could see for miles and enjoy breath taking scenery, not to mention the ever popular chipmunks. The fattest, furriest chipmunks would greet the tourists in search of handouts. This enjoyable moment by the tourists was a nice escape from the Great Depression.[28]

The presence of the chipmunks had a negative side, however, in forcing people to keep their dogs leashed. If they were allowed to run free, dogs often chased the furry little creatures over the edge of the rim, and fell to their deaths. It was not good business for the tourists to view this episode occur. Some people were so affected that they would climb down the thirty to three hundred foot drops to retrieve the bodies of their dogs.[29]

The building of the Lands End Road proved to be more beneficial than just putting men to work during the Depression. When the Lands End Road and Shelter House had been completed, the revenue generated from the tourism helped to rejuvenate the extinguished funds of the Forest Service. This economic boom helped to fund other projects on the top of Grand Mesa. The road also provided another route that many ranchers and timber cutters could use as a way to reach the Lands End area.[30]

It can be argued today that the building of this road was not a great idea. At first, thousands of cars used the Lands End Road. In fact, by 1940 the Lands End Road was used as a race track. Many of the racers were tired of racing up Pikes Peak and wanted something different. The curving switchbacks were a welcome sight to many of the race car drivers and by the end of 1940, two races called the Lands End Hill Climb Race had occurred. The winner was Louis Unser, a relative to the Unser brothers who rose to fame in the Indianapolis race. The Lands End Hill Climb Race would not resume for another forty years.[31]

Other than for tourists, the Lands End Road was not much traveled after the beginning of World War II. The logging trucks no longer used the Lands End Road because it was too hazardous, and the ranch companies preferred to use roads on the other side to haul cattle. Traveling up the paved highway was a safer route for both industries. Lands End Road was hardly ever used except for an occasional jaunt to remember the good times and to remember the effects of the Great Depression.[32]

The Lands End Road and the Observatory still stand as a monument to represent the industrious labor of the men and women who survived the Great Depression. The names of many of the people who worked in these camps are unknown, and many of the workers have passed away leaving no records of their work behind them.

Photo courtesy U.S. Forest Service

Lands End Road.

NOTES

[1]Robert S. McElvaine, *The Great Depression* (Times Books Inc.: New York, 1984), 7.
[2]Museum of Western Colorado, "Colorado and the CCC" (Press of the Western North Pacific Union: Denver, 1982), 55.
[3]Nathan Robb, interview by author, Tape recording, Grand Junction, Colorado, 13 October 1994.
[4]Forest Service Files, (Collbran, Colorado: 1935).
[5]Robb interview.
[6]Ibid.
[7]Ibid.
[8]Delta County *Independent*, 26 October 1986 (Hereinafter, *Independent*).
[9]Ibid.
[10]Forest Service Files, (Delta, Colorado) 1922.
[11]Ibid.
[12]*Independent*, 26 October 1986.
[13]F.S.Files, Delta.
[14]Creed Miracle, interview by author, Tape recording, Grand Junction, Colorado, 5 October, 1994.
[15]Robb interview.
[16]Ibid.
[17]Miracle interview.
[18]F.S. Files, Delta.
[19]Nathan Robb, "The Lonesome Grave" (personal paper, 1988).
[20]Ibid.
[21]Ibid.
[22]Ibid.
[23]Ibid.
[24]Nathan Robb, (audio tape of the Lands End Road Construction) 1990.
[25]Creed Miracle, (audio tape of CCC/WPA buildings) 1990.
[26]Miracle tape.
[27]*Independent*, 26 October 1986.
[28]F.S. Files, Delta.
[29]*Independent*, 26 October 1986.
[30]F.S. Files, Collbran.
[31]*Independent*, 26 October 1986.
[32]F.S. Files, Collbran.

Photo courtesy Dean Harris

Dean Harris and Walter Wilson Harris in Arkansas, 1934.

Sights on the West Coast But Home in Grand Junction

by Robyn Pride Guerrie

Editor's Introduction: The following article tells how two families found their way to the Grand Valley during the Great Depression. In addition to being interesting reading and good social history, the accounts reflect what most likely was a common pattern during hard times—families traveling to the West Coast, stopping in the Grand Valley, and staying there. Two factors made Grand Junction a natural stopover: it was on a major thoroughfare to California, and during harvest season a family could stop, find work, and make a bit of money. What follows are case studies of two of those families who decided to make the Grand Valley their home. The stories have special significance to the author, Robyn Pride Guerrie, because both families are related to her.

Dean Harris's family left Arkansas because of the Great Depression, and ended up in Grand Junction, Colorado. Their original destination was the West Coast, but they ran out of money. They were able to get work in the Grand Valley, so they thought they could make a go of it here.

Other families headed to the West Coast because of the Depression, but never quite made it there either. Al Deloy Fetter also came to the Grand Valley because of the Depression. His family left Kansas in search of a better life. The two family stories—the Harris' and the Fetter's—are similar. My uncle Harold, Dean Harris' son, married Al Fetter's daughter, Elizabeth. Both men ended up

in Grand Junction because of the Depression. Neither family had intentions of making their home in the Grand Valley, but since they had little money, they stayed for the peach harvest. Both families planned to earn some money before continuing their journey. Harold and Elizabeth Harris still live in Grand Junction, and when their second son was born they named him Jacob Dean Deloy Harris to honor both grandfathers.

Dean was born Harold Dean Harris on October 8, 1921, on a sixty-acre farm in northwestern Arkansas, just two miles from the Missouri state line, near a little town named Pea Ridge in Benton County. It is near the Pea Ridge Battlefield where one of the major battles took place during the Civil War.

Dean's father, Walter Newton Harris, was a carpenter who also farmed and raised cattle. Walter's wife, Mary Ann Wilson Harris, was a homemaker and schoolteacher. She was not a college graduate because, in those days, an eighth grade education was the equivalent of finishing high school today and prospective teachers needed only to pass the required test to be certified. With that in mind, Mary Ann took some classes at the University of Arkansas to help ensure her certification. Walter and Mary Ann Harris had six children, four boys and two girls: Dean, Virgil (who died at two years of age), Edwin Earl, Walter Wilson, Letha Mary and Jessie Winona. The family lived a happy life and got along well. Then the Depression came.

Like other farmers in the area, the Harris family planted crops and, for four to six years, waited for rains that rarely came. Crops died, pasture for the cattle disappeared, and ponds dried up. Making a living in such circumstances was impossible.

Things on the political scene seemed to offer little hope. As president, Herbert Hoover had done almost nothing to alleviate the depression. The Democratic candidate Franklin Delano Roosevelt promised that if he were elected, things would improve. But despite such rhetoric, the droughts continued, people panicked and withdrew their money from banks. Roosevelt declared a "bank holiday" to prevent "runs" on banks, but it failed to save most banks, and those who had left their money in banks lost their savings.

For the Harris family the pressing problem was finding money for things like planting crops, buying those few essential household items, and making the mortgage payment on their farm. Like many others, they had a Federal Land Bank loan. The annual payments were twelve dollars a year, a sum that the family worked together to raise. Letha had moved to Wichita, Kansas and found work there that paid about twelve dollars a week. She often made the yearly payment to save the family farm.

Photo courtesy Dean Harris

Mary Harris and Dean Harris at their home in Arkansas, 1934.

Edwin also helped the family. In the fall, he and the neighbor boys would often pile into a Model T truck and head west to find employment—mostly helping farmers harvest their crops. Typically these trips took them to the Grand Valley for picking peaches, into Idaho for potato harvest, and then to Washington for apple picking. About the end of November they would return home.

In July of 1936 Edwin talked of the yearly trip west. This year his seventeen–year–old brother Walter Wilson would accompany him. Such plans upset their mother, Mary Ann, and she decided that it would be best for the whole family to go west together. She figured that the family could handle anything as long as they were all together. Her plan was a simple one: sell everything and move west. Her husband Walter dissented: this was home, and moving meant leaving behind his own family—a mother, four sisters and a brother.

In the end, Mary Ann prevailed, and the family planned a public auction for July 29, 1936. About the only things they kept were those things necessary for the trip, like bedding, cooking utensils, clothing, and Walter Harris's carpenter tools, which might make it possible for him to make some money along the way. The sale of cattle, horses, and all their household goods brought about six hundred dollars. Two hundred dollars of that went for the purchase of a 1929 Chrysler four door sedan. That left them with about four hundred dollars to begin a new life in the West. Then they left for Oregon. Walter and Mary Ann each took half of the money, so if the bank roll were lost, not all the money would be gone.

On the first day of travel, they made it to Wichita, Kansas, a distance of about three hundred miles. The Harris family parked at the edge of town, and their daughter Letha came to inspect them. After looking them over, she decided that they did not look as bad as she might have imagined, so Letha asked the lady she boarded with if her family could sleep in the front yard. The lady agreed, and the Harris family slept there. Supper that first night consisted of five–cent hamburgers.

The next day brought three hundred more miles of travel, taking them into western Kansas where they slept in a field under a large tree. On the third day they entered Colorado, where they found rain. Deciding that they needed a tarp to protect their bedding from the rain, Walter Harris found a hardware store in Rocky Ford, and bought a tarp. Back at the car, he realized that he had lost his money after paying for the item. He returned to the hardware store to search for the money, but failed to find it. The family would have to continue to Oregon with Mary Ann's two hundred dollars. That night heavy rains forced them to rent a cabin near Leadville.

At noon of the fourth day on the road, they reached Grand Junction. Walter found a grocery store, purchased a loaf of bread and cottage cheese, and took the family to the Grand Avenue bridge where the family sat and ate lunch. Because Edwin had found work here in previous years, the family drove around looking for a job picking peaches. That night the Harrises stayed in the Cedar Lawn motel. The next day when Edwin drove out of the motel grounds, he ran over the end of a culvert and cut a gaping hole in a tire. This bit of bad luck settled the issue about whether or not to stay in Grand Junction. The family would have to find work and buy a new tire. When the replacement tire was on the automobile, they went in search of a camping place and employment.

The Harrises found an empty shed with only three sides and a dirt floor on North Avenue near 28 1/2 Road. The woman who owned it agreed to let the family camp there until after the peach harvest. As Dean looked at the quarters, he thought that things here were not an improvement over Arkansas. When nighttime came, the Harrises went into an adjacent field and took some freshly cut alfalfa to lay their bedding on.

Edwin found work for the entire family on East Orchard Mesa. Edwin and Walter Wilson picked peaches, Mrs. Harris and Jessie packed, Mr. Harris made boxes, and Dean stamped and put lids on them. The pay was four-and-a-half cents a bushel for picking, one-and-a-half cents for packing a twenty pound lug, and Dean and his father earned about twenty-five cents an hour. In the month of August, each family member made between twenty and thirty dollars. Camping in the shed and cooking meals over an open fire kept expenses low. When peach season ended, the family was in much better shape financially than they had been when they arrived in the Grand Valley.

With harvest over, the Harrises needed to decide on their next move. It was about time for school to start, and Mary Ann wanted her children to be educated. Walter Wilson (a senior) and Dean (a freshman) were both a bit reluctant to enter school. Back home in Pea Ridge, schooling was often cut short by the fact that the district frequently ran out of money and closed school after six or seven months. Despite the young men's possible embarrassment about educational deficiencies,they enrolled in Fruitvale High School. Oregon would just have to wait.

Schooling did prove difficult. Walter Wilson learned that he could not graduate without two years of foreign language. His mother tried to convince the administrators that Walter Wilson should be an exception to that rule, but the administrators would not budge. As a result, Walter Wilson quit school, went to find work, but returned in November. On the other hand, Dean did very well at Fruitvale. Eventually, he became student body president, graduated

in the spring of 1940, and enrolled at Ross Business College.

The decision to stay in the Grand Valley meant finding a suitable place to spend the winter. The house they found rented for thirty dollars a month. Raising that sum meant that everyone had to work and watch expenditures. Walter's carpentry skills brought periodic employment and Mary Ann earned money by staying with elderly people, a job that paid a dollar for a twenty-four hour stint. Walter Wilson picked tomatoes and worked at a dairy, milking cows for fifteen dollars a week. Food took some of the money. Milk cost eight cents a quart, bread ten cents a loaf, and hamburger ran fifteen cents a pound.

For a time things went well, but then family emergencies arose. Edwin needed an appendectomy that winter, and Mary Ann required one the next summer. Then an automobile hit Walter, and he was laid up for the winter. Despite the problems, the family managed to survive, and eventually improve their situation.

Walter, with the help of his son Edwin, began to build small homes to sell. The first one, built on a quarter-acre lot, sold for $1,200. The second one brought $1,800. The third was larger and carried a $3,300 price tag. They ended up keeping this house located at Melody and North Avenue and making the monthly mortgage payment of $18. Looking back at this a number of years later, Dean commented: "Yea, we were looking pretty good by then and people didn't think of us as hicks from Arkansas anymore."

In 1940, the year that Dean graduated from high school, the Harrises traded their place at Melody and North Avenue for five acres with a house on it. (The new location was near the present location of Wal Mart on North Avenue). In the eyes of the family, this trade was a Godsend because with a little acreage, they were much more self-sufficient. Now they could plant a garden, and get a milk cow, hogs and chickens. This was particularly comforting because Walter was now sixty years old, and had had a slight stroke.

The family had managed to survive the Depression. As with most Grand Valley families, the next major historical event to impact the family was World War II. Dean graduated from Ross Business College, but did not use his education as planned because he served his country from October 22, 1942, until February 6, 1946. During that time, he was on fourteen air bases in fourteen different states. After the war, he returned to Grand Junction and found work at J.C. Penney's as a salesman. While working there, Dean met Genevieve Maupin, whom he married on November 22, 1948. He remained in the reserves, and when the Korean conflict erupted, Dean was called into active service. He returned to Grand Junction in November of 1951, and once again he was broke and did not have a job.

Photo courtesy Elizabeth Harris

Goldy and Dewey Fetter with son Ervin and a nephew.

Dean and Genevieve Harris worked to accumulate property and raise a family. Four children—Genna, Ken, Harold, and Roger—were born between 1950 and 1960. Dean and Genevieve started several businesses, including a drive-in restaurant and several appliance stores, and then sold them. At age fifty-seven Dean turned his attention to real estate, buying and selling property. He devoted his energies to this for thirty years, and then sold fifteen properties because maintenance of them and the stress of being a landlord became too much for a man of his age. Dean and Genevieve kept only two pieces of property, their home and a business building on Main Street. The agent, who helped Dean Harris liquidate, informed him that he had not fared badly for being from Arkansas.

For his part, Dean Harris is thankful that he is still living, and that he will be able to die in Colorado. His comment concerning his original plan when leaving Arkansas: "Sorry, Oregon, it was your loss and Colorado's gain."

The Fetter's story was a bit different than that of the Harris family. Dewey Fetter worked at a variety of things—for the railroads, renting a farm and running a dairy on it, hauling construction materials, farming, making and selling homebrew (interrupted when Federal agents arrested him), and riding the rails to Kansas where he got a job hauling wheat. Dewey married Goldy Irene Gregg.

In 1931 Dewey landed a job on the Dutch Cassidy place in Two Buttes, Colorado. His family, including his son Al, went there to live. Farming in that part of the state at this time was difficult.

Drought and wind combined to create dust storms. Huge dark clouds rose from the ground and extended high into the sky. It was always very quiet when they hit, and then the wind, dust and darkness would arrive together. People ran for shelter. Sometimes the storms lasted a few hours, and others lasted for days. Once a storm held for a week, and the Red Cross handed out small masks so people could cover their faces, but the masks did not help a great deal. Goldy put wet towels and rags around the doors and windows in an effort to keep some of the dirt out of the house. It did not work well—the towels soon became strips of mud.

Then there were grasshoppers. Al Fetter remembers standing in the street in Two Buttes one early summer day and watching the grasshoppers arrive: "It was like a cloud stretching in both directions as far as we could see, and moving in our direction. There was nothing we could do but watch. Soon we were completely engulfed in a sea of grasshoppers. They ate everything in sight, down to the bare ground, and then kept moving on in great waves."

In years when the grasshoppers did not eat everything, the jack-rabbits

Photo courtesy Elizabeth Harris

The Fetter family in 1952. Al is standing, second from the left; Goldy and Dewey are standing beside him.

did. To combat them, the farmers organized jack-rabbit drives. To impound the animals, the men would build a large V–shaped corner of fence. Then everyone would get in a big line and gradually work toward the corner, herding the animals in front of them. Rabbits that had the courage to turn back were shot. Once the people and the rabbits reached the fence, the men clubbed the trapped rabbits by the hundreds. Some of the carcasses were taken home for food. After all, "A jack-rabbit in the stew pot was better than nothing at all." Those not eaten by humans were sometimes used for chicken feed.

Under such conditions, no one could make a living, and the job at Dutch Cassidy's place ended. Without money and work, the Fetters family did what they could to survive. They moved into a "dugout," which was simply a hole dug into the side of a hill. Boards held back the dirt on the back and sides of the dwelling, and the boarding across the front allowed for a door and a window. The interior consisted of two small rooms. Furniture consisted of wooden orange crates, and Al's mother made curtains from flour sacks. The children slept on straw and their parents slept on the floor.

Al Fetters remembers that growing up in such conditions was a bit difficult. Food was scarce. Someone gave the family a pig to raise, but it ran away before it was big enough to butcher. Also, finding clothing and keeping it clean was something of a challenge.

Mrs. Fetters made much of the family's clothing from flour sacks. New clothing and shoes always went to the largest child. When that child outgrew them, the "hand-me-downs" went to the younger siblings. Shoes were always something of a problem. Because they were expensive, when school was out the children always hung up their shoes and went barefoot for the summer.

Washing clothes was a big operation. First, they started a fire in the kitchen stove and the boys began to haul water. Once the water was heated, clothes went into the wash tub where the laundress applied lots of lye soap and rubbed the dirty laundry against a washboard. When the clothing was clean, it was wrung out by hand or with a mechanical wringer if one were available. Then the laundry went outside where it was hung on a line to dry. In winter the laundry often froze stiff and had to be brought in and put behind the stove to dry. An approaching dust storm meant that everyone had to scurry outside and get the laundry off the line before the dust arrived.

Despite the odds against them, Dewey Fetter was able to build up a small dairy herd. However, making a living with them was impossible, and in 1936 Dewey decided to sell his cows and leave eastern Colorado. Selling the livestock brought only $300. A New Deal measure was in place to raise the price of livestock by decreasing the supply of animals by killing animals and destroying the carcasses. This program did nothing to help the Fetter family or to raise the price for the animals they sold.

In the fall of 1936, the Fetter family headed for the West Coast. They arrived in the Grand Valley just as the peach harvest was getting underway. The prospects of getting work looked good here, so Dewey took the stock rack off the truck, parked it beside the Colorado River, put a tarp over it, and called it "home." Their closest neighbors were pigs crowded into great pens. The smell was potent.

The family was able to work through the peach harvest. When peach picking ended, the family had to make plans for the winter. They moved into a small cabin on 17th and Chipeta owned by Mrs. Gingra, then into a house beside the irrigation canal on North Avenue, and finally back into the cabin at Mrs. Gingra's place.

While living there the family figured out a way to own their own place. Mrs. Fetter got a job caring for property which belonged to the Onan family. In exchange for her work, she received title to two lots of land on 16th Street. Dewey purchased a small barn for forty dollars, backed his truck inside the structure, jacked it up, braced it on the truck box, and moved it to the property on 16th Street. It took some work, but the family remodeled the barn into a house which would be their home for many years.

For many years, Dewey hauled coal from neighboring mines and sold it to customers in town. This required hard work and long hours, but he made a living from it. There was little need for coal in the summer, so the family moved to a small farm on north 15th Street for a year where they raised tomatoes, cucumbers, and had a large grape arbor. Three work horses drew their farm machinery. One market for their produce was the construction crews at Camp Pando in Leadville. Because of the elevation, crops like tomatoes would not grow there, so the workers were glad to have the Fetter family supply them.

The Fetter family moved to several places in Grand Junction over the years, but they always seemed to end up back at the house on 16th Street. The reason for this was pretty clear to Al: "My mother loved the place so much because it was the first home she ever had that was really hers. All of her life, she moved from one place to another. But here, in this one small house, she had an anchor. She had a home of her own. It was mom's home, that was enough. And that is reason enough to stay in Grand Junction."

Al Fetter, who graduated from Grand Junction High School in 1949, received a Bachelor of Arts and a Master of Arts from the University of Wyoming. He returned to Grand Junction in the fall of 1958 and began a career of coaching and teaching in the public schools. He spent a total of twenty–eight years working for District Fifty-one. Al served as principal of Central High School for seventeen years.

In 1938, a marriage brought the Fetter and Harris families together. Harold Harris (the third son of Dean Harris) married Elizabeth Fetter (daughter of Al Fetter). Harold's sister, Genna Pride, is Robyn Pride Guerrie's stepmother.

Photo courtesy Hazel Harris & Merle Noland

Lee Trujillo on a hunting expedition near Paonia, circa 1895.

Tales of Black Mesa
by Merle Noland

When I was young, we had little money and sometimes little to eat. This was a time before television, and although some people had radios, many did not because electricity was just reaching many parts of the Western Slope. Families found ways to "make their own fun," because money was very scarce during the Great Depression. Fishing and hunting were common, although both were illegal without licenses. Another common pastime was listening to stories told by someone with the "gift of gab," and it seemed that nearly every family had such a character. While a youngster growing up on Black Mesa I listened to many stories, and, if I had known what I do now, I would have documented many more because those that were not written down will be lost forever.

My grandfather, Lee Trujillo, was a natural story teller, and I heard the stories that follow from him. Lee was born in New Mexico about 1880. He was baptized Leon Noland. At about age two, he was left with an uncle in the North Fork Valley of the Gunnison River. The uncle who raised him was named Jos Trujillo, and Lee adopted that name. As a child, I listened to his stories for hour after hour. He enjoyed telling stories and had a seemingly inexhaustible supply of them. Often when riding on horseback, Lee would say: "This reminds me of the time that...", and begin one of his tales. Listening to the man was pure pleasure. Lee may have originally heard some of the stories from Henry Roberts of Paonia. Lee Trujillo passed away in 1956, and with his death much

of the folklore of the Western Slope was lost.

The characters in these stories were actual persons who lived near Black Mesa during the Great Depression. Most of the stories featured a game warden named Ott Peterson whose district was the Gunnison area, and included Black Mesa. Everyone agreed that Ott was honest—but they also agreed that he was devious, unkind, sneaky, and personified a lot of other unpleasant characteristics. The first story about Ott and his brother indicates what people said about Ott Peterson.

Ott Peterson and His Brother Go Fishing

For several days, Ott planned a fishing trip, and, as he prepared to go, his brother appeared for a visit. Well, Ott did not want to cancel his fishing trip, so he invited his brother to go along. Ott's brother had not planned on going fishing, and had neither a license or fishing equipment. Anyway, Ott took his brother down on the Gunnison River.

Ott fished for two hours and his luck was terrible. He had not gotten even a nibble and was getting a little annoyed. Ott had to answer an imperative call of nature, so he asked his brother to hold his pole while he went to the bathroom behind a bush.

Well, lo and behold, while Ott was gone, his brother caught a fish. Ott returned, and his brother was as proud of catching the fish as he could be. The brother told Ott that Ott had caught a fish while he was gone. Well Ott said that his brother had caught it. The brother said no because it was Ott's pole and he was just holding it for Ott. Ott replied: "You was just supposed to hold it, and not catch a fish!" The brother could not convince Ott that the fish belonged to the owner of the pole.

Then Ott asked his brother to see his fishing license. The brother replied that he did not have a license because he had not intended to fish. The brother argued some more that the fish belong to Ott—not him. After some more heated words, Ott ticketed his brother for fishing without a license, and dragged him into court in Gunnison. The judge fined Ott's brother five dollars, figured it was worth more as a joke, and giggled as they left the court.

Ott's brother did not visit for a long time afterwards. When he finally did return, he was not very friendly, and would not go fishing with Ott Peterson again under any circumstances.

Shorty Edwards and Billy the Kid

Shorty had a sawmill on top of Black Mesa in what was called Mill Gulch. Edwards was a popular and kind man. Kids, as well as the men who

worked for him, liked him. After a day of work, Shorty often found a log to sit on, and would tell stories to the kids who gathered around him.

A favorite tale was that he had been an old time gunslinger, and he could demonstrate moves that seemed to support his claim. Shorty claimed that he and Billy the Kid had been good friends, and that they had ordered a set of matched pistols with pearl handles. The only difference in the weapons was they had different designs carved into the grips. Shorty had chosen the one with a steer's head. To support this, Shorty would sometimes bring out a fancy pistol and show it off. Sure enough, it had an engraving of a steer's head!

Shorty said that he and Billy had done lots of things together, but that Billy was mean. Billy, according to Shorty, was unpredictable and would turn on people like a rattlesnake. But, unlike a rattlesnake, Bill would strike without warning and would even shoot people in the back. Shorty knew that if he continued to stick around Billy that the day would come when he would either have to kill Billy the Kid or be killed himself. For this reason Shorty said he moved from New Mexico to Colorado.

Shorty Edwards and Ott Peterson

The best known story about Ott Peterson was the one about Shorty Edwards and his sawmill. There are several versions of this story, but the following is one I heard from several different people.

During the Depression, money was very hard to come by. When Shorty had money he paid his men in cash, but when he lacked funds, he paid in lumber instead of cash. Many homes in the Hotchkiss, Paonia, and Crawford were built from such lumber.

Another thing about the sawmill crew was that they often "harvested" wild game, which they called "government beef." Deer, elk, rabbits, and blue grouse from Black Mesa fed many families during the Depression. Shorty's crew worked in an area where game—blue grouse, in particular—was plentiful, and they killed "government beef" and distributed it to families needing food.

Most game wardens realized that the people were having a hard time feeding their families, and paid little attention to poaching. Often men would drive down the main streets of towns, with a deer or elk carcass sticking out of a pickup truck. The food was all eaten, because the unwritten rule was that in a time when people were hungry, no one could waste wild meat.

Ott Peterson, however, refused to look the other way when it came to killing animals, particularly if Shorty was involved. He and Shorty had a long string of run–ins, and Ott swore he was going to stick Shorty with some charge and send him off to jail. Shorty, in turn, told Ott that if he showed up, he had

better have legal charges, or Shorty would kill him.

Every once in a while, Ott would try to search Shorty's sawmill, and Shorty would refuse to allow this without a search warrant. The game warden said he did not need a search warrant because the sawmill was located on government property. Shorty maintained that because he had a permit for logging and a sawmill and because he had built all the buildings himself, that he had property rights and could not be searched without a warrant.

Ott Peterson knew that the loggers were killing game, and he could not stand it. He solicited the assistance of a couple of other game wardens who were not happy about becoming involved in this affair. Ott did not bother to get a search warrant. He approached Shorty's sawmill from the back and on horseback to take the camp by surprise. The wardens arrived just after quitting time, so nearly everyone was in cabins cleaning up, cooking or eating supper.

Ott knew which cabin was Shorty's, and he rode directly to it. He hollered that he planned to search the camp, whereupon Shorty appeared and began arguing with Ott. While they exchanged heated words, it seemed that every woman in camp had to go to the bathroom. What Ott did not realize was that under their dresses, every woman carried wild game which they dumped into the privy holes.

Shorty and Ott's argument became more and more angry, and Shorty finally reached inside his cabin door and grabbed a loaded thirty-thirty rifle which always stood there. Seeing this, Ott bailed off his horse, ran toward the sawmill, and hid behind the boiler. Shorty was right behind him. Ott maneuvered round and round the boiler, stopping only to peek out to try to locate Shorty. Every time the warden's head appeared, Shorty would bounce a bullet off the boiler close to Ott's head. The other two game wardens knew that what Shorty was doing was wrong, but they did not want to get involved for fear that Shorty would start shooting at them too.

This battle, where Shorty shot and Ott ducked, continued for about fifteen or twenty minutes. Finally Shorty's son Harry worked himself around behind his dad, jumped on him, and yelled to the other two wardens to come and help. He told Ott to stay put. Harry and the two wardens finally subdued Shorty, and Harry allowed the wardens to take Shorty to Gunnison for trial.

Shorty went before a county judge for refusing to let Ott search his camp and then trying to kill him. The judge figured out the situation pretty well, verbally reprimanded Shorty, but sentenced him to only a few days in jail for shooting at Ott. The judge dismissed the other charges. Shorty told the judge that he would shoot on sight if Ott appeared at the sawmill. The judge warned that that would be considered murder. Shorty replied that he did not care.

After this, the judge turned to Ott and told him that if he ever went near the sawmill that he would not blame Shorty if he did shoot him. The judge ordered Ott to stay away from the sawmill. If a game warden were to go there, it would be someone else, and that person must have a search warrant.

Ott never went near the sawmill again, and Shorty did not try to shoot anyone else. Wardens did occasionally come by and search the camp at the sawmill, but not without warning. Every time the wardens appeared, for some strange reason there was always a procession of women to the outhouses.

Ott Peterson and Rancher Brown

For many years, Rancher Brown had a ranch on the Cimmaron. On one side of his house stood a mountain and on the other side were open meadows. Ott Peterson knew that the rancher had been poaching game, but had not been able to catch him. Ott decided to catch Brown, one way or another, and he devised a plan.

Ott packed equipment and enough food to last for two weeks, put this into the back of his pickup, and attached a trailer with two horses. He traveled by pickup as far as possible without being detected, then took the horses from the trailer and loaded the supplies on them. Ott then circled around and situated himself on the top of a hill where he could observe the ranch.

The purpose of all of this was to spy on activities at the Brown place and to locate the ranch's "coolers." These were places built in the dark timber where the sun did not reach. They were built off the ground, had floors, and were screened with a fine screen to keep the bugs out. Often there were large crocks inside to cure meat. The only other way to keep food cool in those days was to cut ice and store it in sawdust in an insulated shed. Refrigerators were not available, and in the mountains, electricity was not available either.

Ott spent day after day patiently looking through fieldglasses watching everybody's movements at the Brown ranch. He knew that people there were killing and eating wild game, and he wanted to catch someone there with the goods. But after two weeks of spying, Ott still lacked solid evidence. His own supplies were gone, and he had to go to town for more. So Ott packed up and decided to ride by the rancher's home.

His timing was great because he approached the ranch in late afternoon. In those days, anyone, no matter who they were, was invited to stay, eat, and spend the night. This custom was particularly strong in places in the West where ranches and towns were far apart.

Because of this, Ott was invited in, and he sat down at the dinner table. He was hungry and loaded his plate with generous slices of roast meat. While

he ate, Ott carried on a pleasant conversation with Mr. and Mrs. Brown. Pretty soon, something started dawning on Ott—he was eating elk roast! Ott finished supper and walked out the door with the rancher. On the front porch, he told Brown that he would have to write a ticket and take him into Gunnison to appear in court.

Brown asked what the ticket was for. Ott said that Brown had served him elk roast. Brown said that the meat was beef, not elk. Ott insisted that it was elk. To prove his point in court, Ott said that he was going to confiscate the remainder of the roast as evidence. After arguing for a time, the rancher told Ott to take what was left of the roast, and Ott went back in the house to get it. The roast had disappeared from the table. Ott asked Mrs. Brown where the rest of the roast was, and she said that it was all gone. Then Ott spotted two big collie cow dogs who were very happy because their stomachs were full. Mrs. Brown smiled and told the game warden that their dogs always ate table scraps. Ott yelled that they had eaten the evidence!

Frustrated because he had been outsmarted, Ott desperately wanted to find some evidence to convict Brown, so he asked to see the rancher's cooler. Brown took him to the cooler which contained nothing but a little bacon. Ott searched everywhere but couldn't find a shred of elk meat. The warden said that he knew the rancher had a bunch of elk meat stashed somewhere, and he had better confess. Brown said that they never ate elk and that they were preparing to go to town to buy meat because their supply was so low.

Ott thought to himself that there was another day coming, and next time he would not let the evidence slip away. In the future, he would pack more supplies and wait longer on the hill. Of course, the rancher was laughing to himself all the while, because Brown had known Ott was spying on the ranch from the moment he had taken up his "secret" position. Ott had lost this campaign, and he most likely would lose the next one with Brown.

Ott Peterson and Henry Roberts

Henry Roberts owned a fruit ranch in Paonia. Henry was about fifty years old and was a kindly person, but, if he took a notion to do so, he could be ornery. He dearly loved to fish, and about the middle of July one year, he decided to go to Taylor Reservoir near Gunnison. He gathered supplies, and loaded them and a boat into his pickup. Henry traveled over Kebler Pass, on to Crested Butte, and to Almont. When he arrived at Taylor Reservoir, he backed up to the edge of the water and started unloading. Guess who appeared—Ott Peterson.

Henry did not like Ott on general principle, but the fact that he had

appeared where and when he did really steamed the would–be fisherman. Ott approached Henry and asked what he was doing.

Henry replied: "Unloading my boat, what does it look like?"

Ott asked: "Going fishing?"

Henry said: "Might, if I want to."

Ott responded: "Well, I want to see your fishing license."

Henry said: "I am not fishing yet, and I don't have to show my license until I am fishing."

Ott responded: "Well, you are going fishing, aren't you?"

Henry retorted: "I don't know, I may just go boating."

About this time, Ott realized that Henry Roberts was unloading tackle, and asked: "If you're not planning to go fishing, why are you taking fishing equipment?"

Henry said: "I might want to fish while I am out on the lake."

Ott responded: "I want to see your fishing license if you are going to take fishing equipment with you."

Henry stated: "I am not fishing now, and I don't have to show you my license until I am fishing!"

Again, Ott told Henry that he knew that he was going fishing and wanted to see a license. Henry did not respond, shoved out with his boat into the lake, and rowed to a place close to a steep bank. Ott watched while Henry lowered an anchor, rigged his pole, and began fishing. Then Ott walked around to the bank where Henry Roberts fished and yelled for Henry to come to shore and show his fishing license. Henry said that he was busy fishing and did not want to be bothered.

Ott responded: "I'll go get a boat and row out to where you are fishing. Then you will have to show me your license."

Henry said: "I don't like to be disturbed while I am fishing, and if you come out here, bother me, and scare the fish, I will use an oar to bat you between the ears."

The warden knew Henry Roberts well enough to know that his was no idle threat, so he told Henry that he would wait until he returned to shore. Henry told Ott that he did not care what he did; in fact, he could go to the Devil for all he cared.

So Ott went to his pickup and sat in it for a while, then he sat on the bank, then he walked around—all the while getting more and more impatient. When noon came, Henry found his lunch and a thermos of coffee among the things he had packed in the boat. He ate with relish, knowing that Ott did not have anything to eat or drink.

Henry yelled to Ott: "Why don't you go to town and get something to eat?"

Ott replied: "Yeh, if I go to get lunch, you will pack up and leave."

Henry said: "You know, I just might do that."

After this, Ott sat around, walked around, and fumed all the while. Henry remained in the boat fishing and having a jolly good time. By the time the sun began to set and it became cool, Henry had a mess of fish, so he rowed to the shore near his pickup and landed the boat. Ott was there and demanded to see a fishing license. Henry calmly reached into his pocket and pulled out his fishing license, and handed it to Ott.

Ott inspected it, handed it back to Henry, and demanded: "Why didn't you just show it to me to start with?"

Henry said: "Didn't want to."

The warden responded disgustedly: "You caused me to sit here and waste the whole day!"

Ott drove away in a cloud of dust, and Henry smiled, loaded his boat, and headed home.

The Englishman and the Bears

The Englishman was an avid sportsman who moved to the United States so he could hunt and fish. He moved to Paonia and immediately attracted attention because he only weighed about a hundred and twenty–five pounds soaking wet and talked differently than the natives. Because he was different, the locals made him the butt of jokes—but the Englishman could dish out harassment as well as he could take it.

The Englishman always gave animals a sporting chance. So if an animal were standing, the Englishman would spook it and shoot while it ran. Despite this, the Englishman always returned from hunting with game.

If there was anything that the Englishman liked, it was a challenge. Knowing this, several of the men in Paonia decided to hoodwink the Englishman. They told him that the people of Paonia were planning a zoo and that they wanted him to help capture a bear cub for it. The pranksters told the Englishman that because it was in the middle of January and the weather was cold, that the bears were in hibernation. This made bear capturing easy. All they had to do was go into a bear den and rope a cub.

The local men knew about a den near Kebler Pass where bears hibernated, so they got plenty of strong rope, piled into their pickups, and stopped to get the Englishman. They drove into the mountains as far as possible, then hiked a

Photo courtesy Hazel Harris & Merle Noland

Lee Trujillo at his house in Hotchkiss, circa 1950.

short distance to the den. When they reached their destination, they said that someone had to go into the den, tie up a cub, and then signal for the others to pull the animal out. The locals had decided among themselves that it would be the Englishman who would enter the den.

The men discussed the situation, and decided that the person to go after the cub would have to be small and agile, qualities which fit the Englishman. The men had assumed that the Englishman would refuse to do this. Their purpose was to embarrass the Englishman by having him back out of the deal, and then telling everyone in Paonia that he was less brave and less of a sportsman than he claimed to be. However the Englishman said that this sounded like a jolly good plan to him, and that he would be glad to enter the cave. The others tried to discourage him with off-handed remarks, but it did not work.

The Englishman grabbed a rope, a light, and crawled into the den. When he got to the place where the bears were, he saw that the cave was filled with bears—there was one to the left, another one behind that one, a couple more further back, a couple of yearlings, and two cubs. The closest bear was the biggest one; it weighed about six hundred pounds. Very gingerly the Englishman tied the rope around one of the big fellow's feet.

Then the Englishman carefully backed up to the rear of the den and extinguished the light, then he jerked the rope twice. This was the signal for the men to begin pulling on the rope. The rope tightened, and the Englishman stayed where he was until he could see the bear skidding out of the mouth of the cave. The bear was starting to come to life. After the bear was out of the den, the Englishman left too.

When he exited, he found a safe place to watch. What he saw were lots of men hiding behind trees, and a very angry bear running through the woods dragging a rope. The men from Paonia did not have much to say to each other or the Englishman on the return trip home.

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