

## **SUMMARY OF TAPE B109 INTERVIEWS WITH GERTRUDE AND HUBERT BLAKESLEE**

**June 19, 1979**

**Interviewer: Connie Fahnestock**

Gertrude and Hubert's grandfathers were homesteaders in the Evergreen area. Hubert's grandfather, John West, aged 21, traveled west from Ohio shortly after discharge from the Union Army in 1867. He came initially to prospect for gold, but was unsuccessful. After homesteading, he returned to Piqua, Ohio, to marry Mary Rochford. At the time of the interview, Gertrude and Hubert were living in the original house that John West built. John and Mary West had two children, John West, Jr., and Jenny.

Jenny West married Hubert's father, Hubert Jason Blakeslee. The young couple was living in Denver in 1903 when Hubert was born. They later moved back to Evergreen and built a house down Giant Gulch canyon, a mile from the original West homestead. Hubert had two sisters and one brother. He remembers the day his younger brother was born in the house in Giant Gulch. When he was a young boy, he spent a lot of time staying with his grandparents in the old homestead. His parents bought the old home in 1924, following the death of Hubert's grandmother (1917) and grandfather (1910).

Gertrude grew up in the second home that her grandfather, William Simmons, built following his marriage to Mary Kinney. Hubert remembered Gertrude's home being featured in the *Saturday Evening Post* as The Lone Peak Ranch. William and Mary had five children, four girls and one boy. The boy, also named William, was Gertrude's father. Gertrude's father married Elma Osbourne. Elma was from Golden. They lived on the ranch with Mary. The ranch had 360 acres. Gertrude had one sister and two brothers, Arthur and Walter.

The Simmons' property adjoined the Blakeslee's. While the grandmothers were cordial, there was an ongoing feud between Hubert and Gertrude's grandfathers. While the reason was unclear to Gertrude and Hubert, the grandfathers constructed a line fence "quarrelsome lane" between the two properties. Hubert reminisced about being taken to the Simmons' ranch to see the new baby (Gertrude) when he was about six years old. Gertrude attended school in Evergreen.

Hubert went to a log school house in Buffalo Park for five years, then attended school in Indian Hills through seventh grade. After seventh grade, his father decided that Hubert should work on the ranch. His father had 80 acres, and made a living selling cattle and potatoes. Hubert's first memory of a trip to Denver was a trip with his father to sell potatoes. It was a perilous trip with bad roads and ice. Hubert also saw his first movie and vaudeville show on that trip.

A disagreement with his father caused Hubert to run away from home when he was 15. He made a living picking up jobs. In South Park he worked in hay fields driving a

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mowing hay rake and living in the bunkhouse with other young men who would ride the Denver South Park and Pacific train from Denver during the season. He also worked around Pine, building roads for Jefferson County.

The native hay, “broom grass”, had been planted by homesteaders including Hubert’s grandfather. It was sturdy, nutritious, prolific hay that spread all over the area. Hubert’s grandfather and father also raised oats to be sold for feed for horses. Every rancher had horses, and there was a ready market in the teamsters in Evergreen who hauled lumber to Morrison.

Hubert’s grandfather and father usually had less than 50 head of cattle. They would keep some for eating and sell some to cattle buyers. Hubert said that the cattle buyers were mostly Jews from Denver who would buy cattle from ranchers, then take them to Denver for auction at the stockyards. Many farmers also turned to dairy cattle for the cream that they could sell to the Wilson’s creamery in Evergreen.

Hubert worked on several ranches after he left home. In Douglas County, near Sedalia, he milked cows, hayed, filled silos with corn, and lived in the farmhouse with his employers. He remembers that cattlemen at the time were happy getting 6 cents a pound for cattle. A big cattle round-up was held every fall in October. When Hubert was 20 and married, he participated in his one and only round-up. It was a for four or five ranches, and covered an area from Buffalo, west and north to North Park, east to Sedalia, and south to Woodland Park. The round-up took a little over two months to complete. The men slept in a barn and a cook house would provide food. Once the cattle had been rounded up and pastured in a fence below Deckers, they would brand, de-horn, castrate, and vaccinate the cattle for black leg disease. Strays would be claimed by the hired men like Hubert. All the cattle would then be taken to a railroad station midway between Sedalia and Littleton for shipment to the stockyards in Denver.

Hubert also rode in his first rodeo when he was 20, winning 2<sup>nd</sup> prize in bronco riding. He then rode the local county fair circuit for a few years. For awhile he had a job as a horse breaker for the Denver Union Stockyards.

Gertrude talked about the chores performed by young girls on ranches of that era. She was proud that she was a good milker, and continued until about 1970. Girls also cleaned, cooked, washed, baked bread and canned fruit, jelly and preserves. Food was kept in a well house, where a stream of water went through the cellar. The stone well house was by the ranch house. Four or five tons of potatoes were also stored there, some of which were not sold, but used for seed potato planting.

