

TAPE B-102, SIDES A, B
SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW WITH HELEN BROMFIELD
March 22, 1977
Interviewer: Sandy Crain

On March 22, 1977, Helen Phipps Bromfield (Mrs. Donald) reminisced about her divorced mother's purchase and construction of Greystone Camp on 600 acres in Upper Bear Creek Canyon, commenting on photographs as the interview proceeded. The occasion was the collection of information for a planned exhibition at Hiwan Homestead Museum. Mrs. Bromfield's parents, Genevieve Chandler Phipps and U.S. Senator Lawrence Phipps, were divorced some 10 or 12 years before construction began on Greystone in late summer, 1915. Senator Phipps, who soon remarried, lived in Denver, as did Genevieve. Helen was fifteen and her sister, Dorothy (Mrs. Van Holt Garrett), seventeen years old when construction began. Between six months in her father's custody and time spent at boarding school between 1912 and 1918, and her marriage two years later, Helen did not spend much time at Greystone. She and Dorothy inherited the house jointly when Mrs. Phipps died in 1931, but they did not reside there. High taxes and maintenance costs led to the sale of the house, which became a guest ranch.

Helen's mother Genevieve Phipps was beautiful, hard working, and resourceful. An urban denizen most of her life, she had occupied a series of rented houses and hotels in Denver with her two daughters when she decided to settle in the mountains. So she hired Maurice Biscoe, a Denver architect whose house at 1460 High Street she had rented. Although she never had built a house before, she supervised construction of the new house and took up residence with her daughters in tents whose wooden floors were covered in oriental rugs. Mrs. Phipps' maid had her own tent and the workmen, hard to find with World War I looming, had a large tent. Another tent sheltered a cook shack.

The house was built of stone unlike the log houses erected by other local gentry. Mrs. Phipps modeled Greystone, consisting of a main residence, guesthouse, servants' house, swimming pool, pump house and icehouse on Adirondack camps she had known in the east. Accordingly, she called it Greystone *Camp*, not ranch. The owner's insistence that no trees be felled for the project complicated construction. When she and the architect discovered that the finished house had no service staircase at the back and insufficient space for a basement heater, stairs were erected outside the house and a space blasted beneath to hold a furnace. A Delco generator provided electricity. Greystone had fireplaces made of moss rock assembled by workers under the supervision of general contractor Jock (John) Spence, who also built Camp Neosho. Local laborers had never worked with moss rock, and admired it so much that they competed for the best rocks.

Intended for year-round living, Greystone was furnished like a town house. The living room had richly colored velvet and cashmere furnishings and silk lampshades made by the Phipps daughters with the help of a seamstress from May D and F in Denver.

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Mrs. Phipps' many attempts at self-sufficiency generally failed. She kept chickens and six cows for milk and butter, but had no one who could milk cows. The raising of thirty-six German Shepherd dogs plus rabbits for dog food foundered on anti-German feeling.

During the First World War, Mrs. Phipps hired Alcock, an Englishman to plant a kitchen garden. The project failed when city dwellers balked at paying the high transportation costs of Greystone's fresh produce.

At first, there was no road between Greystone and Upper Bear Creek Canyon road so Genevieve herself staked out a road from the Canyon to Greystone. To avoid "the twisters," Genevieve had her furniture along with new pieces from the Denver and Fisher's stores, transported over Lookout Mountain, but a truck rolled over and lost its load of furniture. Genevieve finally bought a Dodge truck and trailer to haul supplies.

Genevieve Phipps had parties and luncheons for her and her daughters' friends. Helen named two guests, a mining engineer, Barry Armestad, and Sam Newhouse.

Side B of the tape begins with Helen Bromfield's reminiscences of the Douglas family of Camp Neosho (now Hiwan Homestead), particularly Dr. (Mrs.) Josepha Douglas and the child of her later years, Eric. Helen thought that Dr. Douglas, who spent most of her time in bed, was a hypochondriac. She insisted that Eric was sickly when, according to Helen, he was a "healthy animal kid." With his father, Canon Charles Douglas, an Episcopal priest, frequently traveling, Eric grew without much parental supervision. The Scottish housekeeper, Isabel Kidd, raised him. Camp Neosho was an Episcopal Church Retreat, and Mrs. Kidd presided over the open house kept by the Douglasses. Eric knew few young people. He never learned the social graces: he would track horse manure into the Greystone living room and still wearing spurs, leap onto a velvet sofa.

At first Dorothy's friend only, Eric grew closer to Helen after each married. A talented pianist and composer as well as a writer, painter and collector of Native American art, Eric "pledged his soul" to purchase Indian art for the small Denver Art Museum. When the bank denied further loans, Helen helped him.

The interview concluded with Helen Bromfield's comments on family photos.

p. 3, Summary of Interview with Helen Bromfield

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