

Tape #1011; Interview with Ralph Clinton Miller, August 16, 1971.

What is your full name? Ralph Clinton Miller. When were you born? March 13, 1897. And this is 1971....well, I can't add very well... Makes me 74 years old. (Laughter) And your family was the founding family of Lafayette? That's right....my grandparents, yeah. Lafayette Miller? Yeah, Lafayette and Mary E. Miller, that's Lafayette's wife, Mary E. Miller, my grandmother. They came in an oxen cart, didn't they? Yeah, they came across the plains in an ox wagon, by ox team. Of course, there was a whole caravan of them, you know. They came by ox trains in those times. They didn't come one by one. They had to organize and have a whole train for protection, you know. Did they go out and hire somebody to guide them? Well, I think they more or less had a scout, maybe. I think, too, maybe some of them on the train had been west before and they knew the route, you know. They just went back east to visit or something? No, they came from the east out here. Yeah, they came out here....well, I suppose you'd call them pioneers.. What kind of house did they build once they got here? How's that? What kind of house? What kind of what? Buildings... Houses? Oh. At that time they just kind of built log huts for the time being, until they got settled and all. Then they eventually got lumber some place. I suppose they probably set saw mills up, maybe up in the hills, you know, and sawed lumber. But they had log huts at that time. Oh, later on in years somebody knew how to make brick or block. Most of them were sod houses, a lot were, you know, sod houses. That's where they cut up the grass... Yeah, the grass and the clay together and kind of wet....oh, not too wet, but wet enough so it would stick together, you know. And I think they plastered it with mud on the inside of the houses, on these sod houses, you know.. They were warm in the winter and cool in the summer, I think. I never lived in one but I just presumed they were. It sounds like that would be plenty of insulation. Yeah. They probably wouldn't have but one window and one door, I don't suppose, in the whole thing, you know.

Could you tell us a little bit about your family? My own personal family or....? Oh, just what you can remember from Lafayette Miller down, I suppose. Well, of course, I remember my grandmother....my grandfather, Lafayette Miller, he died a young man. He died when he was 41. That was before my time. I've got those dates. Have you got those dates at all? No. Jessie, can you find that Bible so we can look up those dates for this boy? This was to my dad and mother from Mary E. Miller. Presented to George and Bernie. When did she present that? Does that say 1894....is that what it says. That's what it says. It says "Christmas, 1894". Well, that's when my grandmother gave it to my mother and dad. Beautiful color. Yeah. It's been in the family a long time. I had one something like this of the history of Colorado, the towns, and so forth. I had it lifted from me, boy. Someday maybe I'll get it back. I know where it is. It's farther over then this, isn't it, grandma? Now then, do you want to copy these dates down, son? No, we can put it on the tape and then I'll copy it down later. Well, do you want to call it off on your tape? I can't see it good enough to read it. This is to certify that George I. Miller of Lafayette, Colorado, and Mary B. Hake of Coal Creek, Colorado, (Coal Creek---that used to be Superior, Colo.) were united by me in holy matrimony at Coal Creek, Boulder County, Colorado, on the tenth day of October in the year of our Lord, 1893, in the presence of Mr. W. C. Hake and Mrs. W. C. Hake (that's Grandma Hake, yeah). Signed, Charles M. Campbell. That evidently was the minister, I'd imagine. You see, the Hakes, my mother's folks, were English and my dad's folks were Pennsylvania Dutch. Well, now, you've got that page, haven't you? Right. Let's see....Family records. Name: George I. Miller, Rock Creek, place of birth; Mary B. Miller, Coal Creek; (that was my mother and father) Frank Hake Miller, Willow Glen; (yeah, Frank was born down on the ranch, down on the old Miller ranch.) That's what they called Willow Glen? Yeah, we used to have all kinds of willow trees down there, my boy, all over that place down there, around the barnyard, etc. Ralph Clinton Miller, Lafayette. Um, huh, I was born right over there on Cleveland Street. You know

where Mr. Steele lives? That used to be Grandma Miller's home. That's where I was born. Let's see, William Lafayette Miller (that's my younger brother) Coal Creek; Let's see, Ralph C. Miller, Lafayette, Colorado, Helen B. Miller, Burton, Washington; two children: Ralph Clinton Miller, Longmont, and Robert George Miller, Lafayette.

Um huh, that's our two boys, see. Now, this is the next thing you'll want to read. To certify that George I. Miller was initiated in the Lafayette Lodge No...ah....

(91, I imagine) yeah, I think so, it looks like that....located at Lafayette, Colorado, on the 16th day of December, 1892. (That was the Odd Fellows Lodge.) He received the first, or pink, degree on December 30, 1892, and the second, or blue, degree on January 20, 1893, and the third, or scarlet, degree on February 10, 1893. That's when my dad joined the Odd Fellows Lodge. It was really flourishing then, too, I know that in 1903 they built their large hall. Now, let's see....born 1840, died May 28, 1878, age 38; Mary, born 1842, and died 1921. The first one must be Lafayette Miller. Yeah, that would be Lafayette Miller. He was only....I believe the folks said, only 40 or 41 or something like that. Let's see. Yeah, he died when he was 38. Yeah, I know he died a young man. We got them off the tombstones up there, didn't we, Jessie? He didn't live to see Lafayette grow then, did he?

No. No. Grandma Miller founded the town, Mary E. Miller. Now I don't know whether this is anything interesting or not. George I. Miller was born April 15, (that's the obituary we had for dad, I think) 1869, at Rock Creek, which is now known as the Goodhue Ranch, four miles south of Lafayette, died February 11, 1929, in St. Luke's Hospital at Denver, age 59, 9 months, 27 days. Mr. Miller was the son of Lafayette and Mary E. Miller. The townsite of Lafayette was granted by his mother, Mary E. Miller and the name of Lafayette was given to the town in the memory of his father, Lafayette Miller. Mr. Miller insisted in laying out the townsite and its early upbuilding. Maybe it's referring to Mrs. Miller, it says Mr, but... That means Mrs., I'm sure. That would be a typographical error, I would say. Mr. Miller attended the Central High School in Boulder. On October 10, 1893, he was united in marriage with Mary B. Hake of Superior, Colorado, later

making their home on the farm south of Lafayette where he resided at the time of his death. Mr. Miller was a member of the Methodist Church and was active in fraternal and social affairs. He was a member of the Lafayette Fire Department and a member of its hose team in 1899. He has been an active member in the Lafayette Lodge No. 91 of the IOOF for more than 28 years and a past noble grand. (what is that?) Past noble grand of the Odd Fellows Lodge. He was also a member of the Welcome Rebecca Lodge No. 72. (Was that a fraternal organization?) That was the ladies branch of the Odd Fellows Lodge: the Rebeccas, see. Mr. Miller has always been active in the upbuilding of this county and state. He assisted in creating irrigation projects which made the land of this county valuable. He was part owner of the Plant Lake which, in the erection of this lake, brought the Northern Colorado Power Company to Lafayette and the first electric lights to the northern part of this state. Mr. Miller has always been a very respected citizen. His many acts of kindness and deeds of charity will live after him. He is survived by his widow, sons Frank, Ralph, and William, three grandchildren, all of Lafayette, one brother James P. Miller of Dallas, Texas. Was that the same J. P. Miller who was a lawyer? Yep, that's the guy. Who was that written by? Now that I just don't know. It might be out of the paper. It doesn't have any markings on it. No. Now, some of the family...somebody has wrote that....somebody who knew the family.

My dad tried to get the farmers around in this locality interested in going up above Boulder, or Eldorado Springs on South Boulder Creek and put in a dam which would insure this whole valley with plenty of irrigation water and they made fun of him at that time. You see what happened years later? Denver goes up there and puts in a big dam and we've got no water rights here at all--- Denver's got it all. Well, that's the way things go. Yep. Yep. But I remember that. I was old enough then to know what they was up to, you know, and it wouldn't

have cost these farmers....the people around, if they was interested in water... it wouldn't have cost them more than a 2% bond issue on the whole country. It would have been a very, very small bondage, you know. Of course, \$150,000 at that time ain't nothing like \$10-15,000,000,000. today. But they let it get away from them. There was sure water. They had plenty of water but how long would it last. That's what they were thinking. Father was thinking ahead, see.

Did you go to school in Lafayette? Yeah. I quit school in 1914, second year of high school. That was just after the old Lafayette Bank failed. It was during the 5-year coal strike we had here---from 1910 to 1915. When the bank failure come us boys had to quite school and help on the farm, help on the ranch. Yeah. I had two years of high school and Frank had one year at the university. And later William, he got one year at Fort Collins.

Could you tell us a little bit about the strike? Well, we lived out on the ranch. I know it was terrible. They came out on strike in 1910. That's when the Union first got the miners all organized. They tried to get a contract with the Rocky Mountain Fuel Company, you see, Rocky Mountain Fuel owned all these mines around this valley at that time. It was all controlled by Rocky Mountain Fuel. Of course, the Rocky Mountain Fuel wouldn't talk with them so the Union came out on strike. They the coal companies put up big towers with search lights on them and machine guns up in each tower at every mine around the country. They had quite a lot of gun fire at times, here. There wasn't too many killed but there was a lot of people hurt. Not only by gun fire but by being beat up, you know, fists, etc. But that strike went on for 5 years. It broke the union, it broke the companies, you might say it broke the whole country. What were the miners demanding? Three dollars and ten cents a day, I think. And the company wouldn't give in? No. They were getting a little less than that at that time. But it seems to me that's what they were demanding---\$3.10 a day. It might have been a few cents more, but the Company wouldn't do it. But they all went broke--the mines, the union, the people. That's what broke the Lafayette bank. They stood

behind the union then and carried them...big loans on their homes. It finally came to an issue and the bank had to pay and they couldn't pay. They had all this property so it just broke everybody. Then everybody started leaving Lafayette? Yeah. They had no other choice. They had to seek work some place else, you know. The Company brought in lots of "scab" labor, but it didn't get them any place, I don't think. There are a few of those fellows....I think some of the older men are still around here, especially some of those Greek fellows. There are two or three of them around here who came in during the strike. But otherwise all the rest of them are all gone, moved out, died off, you know.

At one time here, gee, how many mines did we have? Did you ever stop to count? I think there was at least 20 that I know of. Let's see...there was the old Strathmore, the Simpson, the Cannon, the Blue Ribbon, the Standard, the Capitol, the Blue Goose, the Black Diamond, the one up where the power plant lake was....what did they call it?...Power Plant, I think. Then there was the Heckley One and Heckley Two, the Monarch, the Industrial, that one right in Louisville... what was it called? It was a big boy. There was another one down on the creek... the Haywood. There was one out here where Piersons live now. What was the name of that mine, right out here just north of town? Ed Pierson lives out there now. The old dump is there. Oh, my goodness..... Well, it will come to you. Well, there was at least 20 or 25 big working mines at that time. There was two or three trains of coal went out of here every day.

Did you ever work in the mines? Yeah, just a couple of years is all. Three years, I guess. But that was later, that was after the depression. That was along in the late thirties. But Frank worked in the mines quite a little while. My Uncle Tom, Tom Miller, he was a stationary engineer. He was killed in the old Strathmore. I think I told you that before. I don't know, I've never been down in a coal mine... Haven't you? It's quite a treat, boy. I'd rather

work below than I would on top. What kind of tools did you use? After you get used to it, it's...it's different. Yeah, I've laid tracks, helped timber, dug sumps for water, and...I didn't dig very much coal, but I've laid lots of track, lots of timber work. Can you describe some of the machines and the tools used for digging out the coal? No. I was around it some, but I never used any of the cutting machines, loading machines, and all that. No. That was other guys' work. But it was quite fascinating to see one of those cutting machines work.. It would be...oh, maybe a room as wide as this and the coal would be anywhere from 5 feet to 15 feet high. It would cut that bottom clear across right down next to the ground, then it would cut the side walls. Then if they can they'd cut it across the top or else they'd cut it through the middle and drill holes in it at different intervals. They'd put in shots and shoot it and that whole works will come down. It would come down sometimes in a big chunk and sometimes it would come down all broken up, you know. It was quite interesting, boy.

How about the works on the top? Well, that was loading chucks, flat cars, and box cars, depending on what kind of coal. Flat cars, that's where you loaded slack and box cars was for lump coal and nut coal, they would call it. That was a bigger coal, but the flat cars took all the slack and like that. Sometimes, mine run, in the flat cars, that would be your slack, lump coal, and all that would be loaded together, see. It depended on where it was going. But the lump coal at that time was all loaded on box cars. They were careful about it, see, because if people wanted coal, they wanted lump coal...they didn't want slack when they got it. But today they sell slack coal. Would you believe it, the power plant up here at Valmont gets 45 cars of slack coal a day from Hannah, Wyoming? That's how much coal they use a day---45 cars. That's ground up into powder that's blown into their furnaces up there. Have you ever been up there? Yes. Did you ever look through the hole in the big furnace where the coal dust

is being blown in there? It's really bright and hot. You bet your life! Well, that's how much coal they use there a day. Boy! How much coal did the old Plant Lake Power Plant use? Oh, let's see...it seems to me like it used maybe 5 or 6 cars a day, because it wasn't a very big outfit at that time, you know. I believe 5 or 6 cars a day is what they used to push up there.

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out here through to Broomfield through Louisville to Boulder and those two trains would pass in Boulder. The one that went this way would go back through Superior and back to Denver, the other one would go back through Louisville and back to Denver. They would meet in Denver and they'd run...it seems to me like they had one run every hour into Boulder. Overhead..... Yeah, overhead trolley. You've seen pictures of these electric trolley cars, haven't you? That's what it was. We used to call it the "old interurban". I've rode it many and many a time. We used to have a little bob-tail train that ran from Lafayette to Louisville to meet the interurban a couple of times a day. I used to drive my horse and buggy up to Louisville and leave it at the livery stable, catch the interurban and go into Denver to a show, they had a late interurban that left Denver at 11:00 and we'd get into Louisville at midnight, then we'd go get our horse and buggy and drive home. A lot of people did that, didn't they? Oh, did they! Everybody in the country did at that time. That's the only way you had of going, boy. Did that line extend to Greeley or not? No. Well, the old CB&Q, the old Burlington that line went down through Erie into Longmont like it does yet today. A lot of people went on excursion trains. Yeah. Well, they used to have an excursion that...oh, they'd come to Lafayette and pick up people, and Louisville and go to Boulder. They had a narrow gauge at Boulder. They'd go from Boulder up to

Glacier Lake. That's Glacier Lake 'way up above Boulder. I don't know whether you've ever been there or not. Have you? They had an old narrow gauge...the grade is still up there. I was up there, oh, it's been about three years ago. We drove part way on that old narrow gauge grade. They've taken out the track, though. Oh, yeah, they've pulled the tracks all out now. But they used to have excursions, too, on the Burlington up to Lyons, up to that...what was that?...Meadow Park there on the southwest part of Lyons. I think it is. Then they used to have excursions on the interurban. You'd go to Denver, you know, to the different parks and the different shows, etc. About that Meadow Park in Lyons, I think there's a... Yeah. Well, the thing about it. You see, we were up there a week ago---my brother and sister-in-law were here from Washington. They used to live up around the Longmont country so we went up to Longmont and then we went up to Lyons and went through the old park there. It's just like it was 50 years ago. They've never improved it or a darn thing. It's just the same old thing. Perhaps that's best. It could be a nice park today if they would just...if somebody would just spend a little and put some good roads through the park and paths and toilet facilities and.....you know. There's some nice swimming up there in that creek, I think. Yeah, that's on the south fork of the St. Vrain. The north fork comes in on the north side of Lyons and they join right there in Lyons, the two forks, you know.

They used to have a stage line through Lafayette, didn't they? Yeah, but that was before my time, boy. Yeah, my grandparents, when they had the old Goodhue Ranch, that's where the stage coach used to come out from Denver and that was the stop. My Grandmother Miller, she would feed them there and they would change horses there. Then it seems like they went from there, the stage line went either to Berthoud or Loveland. That was the next stop, see. About 20 or 30 mile stops, I thing, was the limit on stage coaches in those days. That's how they got the mail, too? Yeah.

What was the old Post Office like? Well, the first one, as I recall, it seems to me like it used to be across the street... You know where Ham's store is now.....there was a building on the corner.....I think that was old Joe Brown had the shoe shop in there. It seems to me like the Post Office was two doors next east. I won't say positive. Then in later years the Post Office moved across the street on Main Street....oh, I believe along right in there where Vic's barber shop is. That's quite a ways back. That's when I was living on the ranch, you know, when I was a boy. And now that you remember now, old Fritz Miller had a bakery shop.....I believe he was right next to the Post Office, across the street from Ham's, you know, east. I remember old Fritz so plain. I was a kid..... The old Rocky Mountain Company store was across the street there where Gambles' store is now, you know. The old Lafayette Bank was there on the corner. The Smith's Drug Store was cate-corner across, well, across the street from Ham's. That was the old Smith's Drug Store, years ago.... years ago.

Do you remember any of the ^CKundle family? Oh, just old Ben, that's all. He's in a home in Longmont now. No, Ben was about the only one I knew. I knew old Ben real well. He was with Bermont and VanDerBurg for years and years. He was a clerk there. He was there for a long, long time. He was a real popular fellow. Yes, he was. I think old Ben's mind is pretty clear even yet today, isn't it? I know somebody was telling Jessie and me just two or three days ago his daughter said to him, "Dad, maybe we'd better take you home for a few days." "No," he said, "I'm pretty well contented. I think this is where I'd better stay." I think he tried to go into business once... What? ...with Mr. Moon----a butcher shop, I believe. The Moons? Yeah, the Moons, they had a butcher shop years ago. Walt Moon, now Walt Moon, that is Billy Moon's dad, also Albert's father. Now he lives in that house on the next corner south from the library. That was the old Walt Moon house.

Do you remember the old Congregational Church? Yeah. We were trying to get some information on that---when it was built, etc. Can you help me? Well, my grandmother built it and when she built it, I don't know. That's 'way back in the early 1900's. It could have been in the late 1800's, too, now. I rather think it was the late 1800's. My grandmother built that church, the Congregational Church itself. She supported it, paid for a minister there for a long, long time. Then when the strike came along, the union men, the scabs, and all, they more or less kind of squeezed here out, I guess you would say.

Could you tell us something about the ranch? Well, that's where I was raised, you might say. My father went there in about 1903 or 1904, I think. It was right after my ...his brother was killed in the Strathmore Mine. He was running the ranch then and working at the mine, too, then Tom was killed and my dad went to the ranch and took the ranch over. We were there clear up to 1929. What were the bounds of the original ranch, the homestead? Well, there was 320 acres at that time on the ranch---160 acres went into Lafayette. That went clear over to Oak Street? No, to Baseline. And down to the Mill? Yeah, um hum. Yeah. That 320 acres reached down to the Louisville Road, that was the section line, see. Then it went east, I suppose, a half mile. Well, it was 320 acres, see. Yeah, 160 went here into Lafayette and the other 160 was the ranch. Then my dad bought another 320 south of the place so that made 300 and some acres in the old Miller ranch.

What part of town was actually plotted out at first? Well, from the highway down here to....I suppose, down here to the mill and the railroad tracks, you know, and to Baseline. The lots didn't go any further than Cleveland, did they? No, they went clear down. They were just scarce. That is, they weren't very heavily populated. Of course, eventually the south part of town, Cleveland on south to Emma Street.....Emma Street at one time, during the strike and after the strike, Emma Street was pretty near all Bohemians----Bohunks, we called them.

They were a good class of people. We had a few Italians---not too many---nothing like Louisville has. But we had lots of Bohemians. And Greeks? Yeah, Greeks came in as scab labor during the strike time. When did the Mexican population come into Lafayette? Oh, they came in after the strike....years later. The Great Western Sugar Company had a lot to do with that, bringing in Mexican labor. We used to raise lots of sugar beets around this district at one time, you know. Oh, we had a beet dump here. Do you remember the beet dump? We had the beet dump down here and...yeah, we raised lots of beets around Lafayette, south and west and north....lots of beets. We raised beets, the Harmons raised beets, the Thomas boys, Schofield's, we all raised beets around here at one time. But the Sugar Company was responsible for bringing the Mexicans in for beet labor. Yeah. Was there any particular year they came more than usual? Only more in the spring-time when there would be thinning---that was hand work---thinning and hoeing and blocking and all that, you know. That's when the beet work was, especially thinning. At that time we had to plant beets with a solid row. Today they've got beet planters, they can plant beets and sometimes they'll get two plants, but most of the time they'll only get one plant, But them days we had a solid row of beets and a man had to go through and block them, he'd chop out just the width of the hoe, you know, then a guy'd come back in on his hands and knees and clean out all the beets but leave the healthy beets. They'd try to leave them about 6 inches apart. That's when they had labor come. Now they've done away with all that, see. It's all mechanical now. They've got better planters and they've got mechanical blockers, too, now. Mechanical toppers, diggers, loaders....that used to be all hand work. We had to pull them with horses, pull one row at a time. Now they pull two rows and top them at the same time, elevate the beets up into a bin, then they are elevated into a wagon, then hauled to a beet dump. We used to top them in the field, we had to shovel them on the wagon, shovel them

off at the beet dump after you had weighed them, pile them. That's all been eliminated. But that's where our Mexican population came from, I would say. Some of them are good and some of the are not so good. They were saying last week, they picked up a bunch of wetbacks up here in town. They slip over, you know, those wetbacks. They're from Old Mexico. Yeah, someone told me that the sheriff came over and got 8 or 10 of them.