

(Beginning Tape 4: Oral History by Ralph Clinton Miller)

Well, they came here by wagon train from Pennsylvania.

Did they have any kids with them then? I don't think so.. They had them all after they got here to this Coal Creek area.

How many kids did they have? Oh, let me see, there was Tom, Charles, G.P., Frank, George, Mae, that would be seven wouldn't it? Yeah, six boys and a girl.

Did any of the kids die when they were children? Yeah, Frank died when he was a young boy. What? I didn't get you. (woman) You said Frank. Well, there was a boy named Frank. (woman) Oh. They had a boy named Frank. And their daughter Mae, she died when she was 21 with diptheria.

Did all the kids stay around here in local life? Well, yeah, up until they were married and had families of their own. Charles, then he moved to California. He was in the furniture business out there. Tom had his own ranch for awhile, then he was killed at the Stratmore Mine. He had his head cut off at the Stratmore Mine. They let the cage down. The engineers at that time used to have to step over to the shaft and holler "Look out below!" when the stage was coming. He stepped over there and as he put his head over, well, the cage came down and cut his head off. G. P., he was in the old Lafayette Bank here. That was years ago. That was the bank that used to be up on the corner next to Gambles, see, they've took it down. But it was done away with during the big strike or shortly after the big strike but that's what collapsed this whole country around here was that five year coal strike.

Which one was your father? George, He was in the mercantile business for quite awhile, then he took over the ranch after Tom was killed, so then my dad took over the ranch down there.

After your grandmother gave some of the land to the town...(Mr. Miller: This half section here where the town stands.)...yeah...How much did they keep? Well, I think at that time we had just about the full section. They deeded this half section about, oh, now let's see, maybe there was 160 acres here where the town is. They kept that 160 down there. But they deeded this to the town, laid the town out and the streets and all. My grandmother planted all these trees in Lafayette--all these

elm trees. A lot of the original stock is here yet.

Where did they get the trees? Oh, I suppose they got them from the east or somewhere, you know. That ain't the Chinese elm, that's the old..the old elm, the good tree, you know. There's one of the still there in the corner of my yard, well, it's in that lot on the corner. That's one of the original elm trees. But they are all over town just like that. They are getting pretty big and rottey today.

Who blocked out the city? I think grandmother had it blocked out. I think she had a, I think she got the surveyor and had it blocked out and laid out, lots and all.

How old are these trees now? Oh, let's see. I imagine that some of these trees are right at one hundred years old. Yeah, I really believe so.

About how many people lived in this area after they blocked out the city? Oh, there wasn't too many. There was...oh, there was quite a few, too. But then they started building homes, you know, and coal was struck---the old Simpson and the old Cannon, the Stratmore--and they had to start building houses here in town. It was a kind of tent city before that, you know. (interviewer) Oh, yes, my grandfather told me someting about those. (Mr. Miller) I don't remember them myself. Oh, I remember some of the buildings that there was a tent on top and it was built up with wainscoting or something up , oh, I suppose, two or three feet high. They had a wood floor in them I imagine.

What year did your grandmother deed the city? Oh, I would imagine--they came here in about '69--I think the town was deeded over in the late '70's or real early '80's. It was a-way back there. My grandfather died when he was a young man, about 41 years old when he died. And grandmother took over things. That's when coal was struck, along about that time. Then things really boomed for quite a few years.

Did your grandmother own the mineral rights to the property? Yep..yep, I've still got some of them in my name yet today.

She leased them out (Nope) or sold them? No, I've still got them.

All the ones she had? Yeah, oh, yeah.

There's some still in the outside boundaries, aren't there? Oh, yeah, those were all out. Of course, the Simpson Mine and all, they used to... the Union Pacific had so much of this stuff, you know. Up where the school is, that was Union Pacific land and it was written in the lease that the coal would never be removed under the schools, which I don't think it ever has been because that up there never settled like the rest of the town did, you know, that is, ground and all. You see, Union Pacific had every other section. The government gave the Union Pacific every other section that they'd put the railroads through and all. That's how the Union Pacific acquired all the land.

Then your grandmother owned all the shafts and things around here? Hmm?

The town, all these shafts that undermine it, just under the town, then she owned these? Yes, they got a royalty off of it. Yeah, They got a royalty off of that and the Stratmore. You see, the Stratmores originally owned our property. It was a good many years, but the coal was close to the surface. That's what made all this country sink so bad. Coal came up until it was only about 30 or 40 feet from the surface, you know. Maybe you recall just about three or four years ago, just up on the west side of the highway, when one or two of them houses, the surface all dropped out of sight and they had to pin them up. Well, it was from the old Stratmore workings. And there was out at the ranch when I was a kid, they was mining the Stratmore, you could feel it very easily when they would shoot the coal down below. That's how close the coal was to the surface. Why, it would just shake the liver out of things on top. They finally had to quit working they got so close to the surface they couldn't work it--there was so much water they had to leave it alone.

Do you know any more of your family history you could tell us? Oh, no, I don't think too much. I know when my grandparents first came to this country they stopped up there just this side of Longmont. There used to be a school there. It used to be the old Burlington School. That's what Longmont was years ago--it was Burlington. Then it was moved farther north and then called Longmont. And the folks left there and came down and had a stage coach out south you know where Stearns

dairy used to be. They had a stage coach there. That was--the stage would come out from Denver, from Sand Creek, to there and stop. I suppose they'd lay over night and they'd leave there and go on to St. Vrain or go up about Berthoud or Loveland for the next stop. How often did the stage come through? Oh, I think either once or twice a week. Maybe it wasn't quite that often. They had the stage coach there and all, for that was the station there for quite a long time. That's where my dad was born, out there at the old Goodhue ranch. I remember my grandmother telling once about the military, the cavalry, came through. They stayed over night. I don't suppose there was too big a troop. They was on their way north. I remember her telling us that she stayed at the kitchen range and baked a hundred pies for the militia men--a dollar a pie, as fast as she could get them baked. She'd use a hundred dollars a sack. I remember that so plain, she used to tell about it.

How about the mail. Did it come by stage coach? I rather believe it did at that time. The mail wasn't very regular, you know, once a week, once every two weeks, I just don't recall. I had a book here that had a lot of the history of Colorado, but it got away from me. I know where it went, but I don't know how to go about it to get it. But it had a lot of that history of Colorado, of Lafayette, of Boulder, and surrounding country, you know. But I don't have it, and I can't get it.

Did they have any mail service before the first post office? I don't think so. Now, you know, we used to have a little bob-tail train that ran between Lafayette and Louisville and it carried the mail, but they'd have to have a post office here of some kind to take care of it, you know.

Do you know the folks in those days had a few Indian scares. You know, there were quite a lot of Indians at that time. There was ten thousand here east and south out in the bluffs down by Coal Creek and Sand Creek. When they got an Indian scare they'd have to pick up and go to Sand Creek--that's where the fort was. They'd go down there, stay two or three days until things had quieted down, and then they'd come on home, you know. Did the Indians actually--? No, they never molested them too much but they used to come to the ranch occasionally, the Indians used to come up there and they would want flour and they would give the Indians corn meal. The

Indians would do nothing but take it out and dump it on the ground. They "no want". They wanted white flour, they wanted white flour; they didn't want corn meal. They were getting particular even in those days.

Where was the ranch house? Well, you know, you've been down by there, you know where the barn is, it was just east of the barn about 150 yards back up in the lot there. It was all torn down since I left the ranch. I used it for a grainery for a good many years-- That was the old original farm home. They had two or three good wells down there--good wells. But since they've all dried up or they've filled them us or both, maybe.

Was this a farming area or all cattle raising or what? Oh, they farmed and cattled and raised horses. My Grandfather Miller had two butcher shops at that time-- one in Erie and one in Boulder. Now, where they killed the beef, I don't know, but I presume down here or in Erie, or maybe in Boulder, I don't know. They had livestock and horses--plenty of them at that time. They used to have the wheat ground into flour up to (I don't know whether you ever heard of it or not) the white chalk district, that's in there west and just a little north of the Davidsons (you know where the Davidson Grange Hall is out northwest here?) that's where they used to take the wheat to have it ground into flour in the early days. Somebody had a little flour mill run on a water wheel on Boulder Creek--had the wheel down in Boulder Creek to turn the wheel, you know.

Where did most of the water from this area come from? South Boulder up in Eldorado Springs Canyon. That's where it all came from at one time. When the town was just real young, did they have a pipe line or something? Well, later on they did but I think at that time it was practically all wells here in town. Yeah, I think it was all wells at that time. Did they ever have to haul any water in by wagon? Yeah, two or three used to have water tanks and haul water around to houses and charge--what was it?--5¢ a 3-gallon pail full or something like that. I know we had an old artesian oil well down on the ranch years ago, had artesian water on that for years and there were two or three different ones used to haul that artesian water up hereto town for drinking water. They sold it for a long, long time at so much

bucket or so much a can full, I just don't remember how much. No, it was just wells at that time with old hand pumps and buckets. Who owned the artesian well? Well, it was on the old ranch. How far did they have to dig down to get to that? They went down about three thousand feet and then they lost the casings--they couldn't ever ...???..... they claimed. What did they use for drilling? Oh, they used, did they use a steam engine or what--I forget what they used for power. I had 700 feet of that casing pulled--I had to give the fellow half of it for pulling it and I got half of it but the casings broke off at 700 feet down.

With all these mines around here.... Oh, there is plenty of coal around here. You know, there is another big vein on below this one and there is plenty of coal here yet today. Some day there may be use for it. You told me what kind of coal it was.. It was soft coal. The coal in the Superior district was a harder coal, but this through here was a soft coal.

The last time I talked to you you mentioned it was popular to bury your relatives at home in your back yard. Well, I remember my grandparents one of their family out there on the ranch. It was there for a long, long time and then he finally took it up and took it up to Boulder at the Columbia Cemetery. It was buried there on the ranch for years. Which one of them it was, I don't know. It was possibly one of the Footes, but I really don't know..

They used to have a lot of milk routes around here, didn't they? Yeah, yeah, my Uncle Charles, he had one of the first milk routes in Lafayette. He had a dairy, bought a route, had a number of them since, retired about thirty years ago. During the depression, he sold milk for 4¢ a quart, believe it or not. I know, my Grandfather McDaniels said he did that once when he was younger. And there were many around town at the same time? ? ? ? Yeah, yeah, there was Judites, Hepfors, Kneebones, Roots, oh, there was a number of them.

What kind of animals did they have around here before people started killing them off a lot? Buffalo, antelopes. What small game? There used to be a lot of buffalo. I remember my grandparents tell about--Grandpa Foote used to leave the ranch with his horse and go down across Rock Creek or Coal Creek and out across the

prairie and get an antelope or buffalo in just no time.. There were a lot of jack rabbits when I was a boy. There are a few of them today. My grandfather mentioned when he was just a boy they went trapping all the time for small animals. Yeah, they used to do a lot of trapping out on Coal Creek and Rock Creek over toward Louisville and over toward Erie, you know. They got a lot of muskrats down there.

How many different railroads did they have? Oh, there was the C & S and the Burlington. The C & S ran between Lafayette and Louisville and to Boulder, you know. The Burlington came off from Broomfield and came up the spur that we have now. That was the Burlington route. I guess it still is. That was the only two railroads. I thought there was a Union Pacific railroad. It was out in the Erie district. Oh. It came across from Brighton, came across to Erie, and from Erie they had a branch line to Boulder. This is how they got the deeds to the sections? Yeah, I suppose. I know they owned some land behind the school, the cemetery, and the park. Yeah. Yeah, well, that where the Kneebones used to be--that was Union Pacific land. They used to rent it from the Union Pacific to file it. Then I believe it still is unless they've sold it which I hardly believe that they have.

Someone mentioned to me that there was a spur or something on the railroad running across Baseline, uh, it's before the mill or about in the middle of that block. I can't remember the name of it or who owned it. Well, the Burlington had spurs down there. They had a spur into the old Standard Mine, you know, and the Capital and the Blue Ribbon that used to be out on the hill and the Columbine. They they had all kinds of spurs? Oh, yeah. Yeah, they had a spur into every mine at one time, you know. But that was Burlington. This is C & S up this way. Then the C & S was the same way up here at the different mines. The C & S used to have a spur into the old Public Service plant that used to be up at Platt Lake. You remember that old pilot plant that used to be up there? Oh, yeah, I wanted to ask you about that. When did they build that, I can't remember. Well, now, that's just all right. About 1907, I believe. My folks owned that lake up there at that time, you know. The Public Service enlarged the lake for which they got a half interest

in the lake and the other half went to my folks and the rest of them that was interested in it for irrigation purposes. The Public Service would pump that water into the plant for steam, use it, then it would go back into the lake after they were through using it for steam power, you know. How long was that in operation? Well, I believe they closed out in the last 30's or early 40's. Then they built the Valmont Plant. Have you got any dope on that at all? It was closed down just shortly after the Valmont Plant started operation. It ran up there for a long, long time. Were you surprised? I believe over 30 years. Yeah, I was surprised--this little Lafayette, Boulder, as far north as Longmont; it supplied quite a big territory at that time. Nowadays they are all hooked up all over the United States --Public Service and all these--they're all hooked up together so that if they have a break down at some place then they can hook in another one to help take it over.

The Simpson Mine now... The Simpson Mine at one time furnished electricity for Lafayette. That was the first electricity they had was from the Simpson Mine. It was all DC? Yeah. I know the first electricity we had on the farm came from the Simpson Mine. That's been quite a while ago. But that was the first electricity that Lafayette had.

Did they have any dairies around here real close? Oh, just little local dairies, that's all. Small ones? Yeah, just small dairies. Oh, just on the farm type? Yeah. One time we had a cheese manufacturer and they bought nearly all its milk up from the farmers.

I was told there was a lot of doctors in town, Like Dr. Porter and some of the others. I don't know. There was Dr. Porter and Dr. Graydon and Dr. Bingham, Dr. McCormick. It seems like there was another one or two but I can't remember. Of course, Dr. Bixley used to come up here a lot. He had about as many patients in Lafayette as he did in Erie and around. Those are the ones I specifically remember.

What was the first school? Right up here--the old grade school that burned down. I thought they had one on Simpson at one time, uh, something they were using for a school, probably just a house or something. Oh, they might have used some of the houses or something for a while but the old grade school that burned down,

I went to school there. They had a little, what you call a "white school house" out two miles south of what we called ^(Ricker's) Richard's corner. That's where my dad and them went to school. They called it Coal Creek school at that time. But that's where they went and all there was here--we came up here. Julia Harmon and them, they had to go to the little country school out south there. Untill they got the district all united some came in here and part went out there and some of them went into Louisville. Those farther west they had to go to Louisville. Those country schools, did they, .?.. Yeah, they are obsolete today.

When did they incorporate the town? That I couldn't tell you. Of course, at that time I was a boy out on the farm, you know. One of the Millers, I know, was the first mayor. He was mayor for a long time. Well, that could have been G.P. or Tom. Which, I don't know. Well, I think it is written down somewhere.

Who brought the first paper in? I wouldn't know. Was it very big? No. Oh, bigger than the Lafayette Leader today. The Lafayette Leader today, that's the berries. They had a lot more news then? Oh, yeah. Yeah. They had a good paper at one time--good paper. Did this just go to Lafayette or did it go to other towns? Oh, I suppose a lot of them were mailed out, probably, you know. But it was mostly a Lafayette paper, I think. Did Louisville and Boulder have their own papers? I think so. I know Boulder did and I'm pretty sure Louisville did, But Lafayette did. They had a good paper years ago.

Who built the first church? Well, now, I know Grandmother Miller built the Congregational Church. She built that herself. Just awhile back Julia Harmon's mother had some of the funds from the old Congregational Church, she'd kept it in savings for years, she turned it over to Julia, and here just lately Julia went and got it--something over \$800--and Julia had her two brothers turn it over to the town for recreational purposes for the kids here in town. That was the old Congregational Church funds. They weren't too big at that time but they had been accumulating for 50 years and it amounted to over \$800 when Julia turned it over to the town.

I was told there was a nice little park on Baseline about where the shoe shop is now and they had a bandstand made out of tree limbs and things like that so that it was kind of an umbrella-type thing and they had fun up there. I don't recollect anything like that.

That's all I can think of to ask you, but if you want to talk that's fine.

I listened to you yesterday. The old Lafayette jail... Oh, yeah. Now, you know where Alderson's store is over on Main Street. Well, you go a block and a half south, of course, it's an alley now, but at that time there was a street that went down to the old C & S depot, I don't suppose you ever remember the old C & S depot,. Well, it's up on Simpson, it was moved up and turned into a dwelling, the old C & S depot. But anyway, there was a short street down to the depot; of course, that's all houses built in there now. McAlister Lumber Co. had a big lumber yard in there--that would be right across the alley west--no, the alley is west as you come east across the street. Right on that corner that's where the old Lafayette jail was, an old red brick jail. One cell? I believe. Maybe it was two cell. I know they had a steel door on it and they had the windows all barred up. Us kids used to go down by to see if they had anybody in it, because that was the Lafayette jail for years and years clear up until after the strike was over. The old jail--Everett West lives on the corner next to Mrs. Alderson, you know where...well, Everett West lives on that corner and just on the back of his lot south, that's where the old jail was--the old Lafayette jail. The old McAlister Lumber Co. they had a real big lumber yard in there at one time--had a railroad spur in there--a big lumber yard, And Otis Street they had one up there where Lee ^{Co. Re} ~~Mokey~~ is now. We had two lumber yards here in Lafayette at one time.

The old depot that I remember, the one on Simpson, which railroad did that belong to? That was the C & S--Colorado & Southern. The one down below was the Burlington--the C B & Q. You see, we had two depots here at that time. The one by the jail and the one down on Simpson. Yeah, down--you know where the old depot used to be down here on the Burlington. Your grandpa, didn't he work on the railroad a lot? He got his twenty years in. Well, he knows where the old depot was down there.

He was probably there working on the railroad when (Jessie, who was the depot agent down on the Burlington for so long? Used to live down where G.W. lives.--Jamieson--Jamieson, yeah) he probably worked there when Jamieson did. Yeah, you bet you.

One of the buildings he owns in the back there used to be a tool shed or something for the railroad. Either it set there or he moved it up there, I'm not sure which, but we figured it out one time--it's over a hundred years old. Yeah, I don't doubt that. This house right here is crawling up towards the hundred mark. I never thought before but that would be right about the time of statehood--1876. That was about the time the town was incorporated and all. Actually a lot of the building are--this is some of the first buildings in here and over on Simpson Street and Cleveland Street. Of course, Simpson was practically all store buildings at one time. It was in 1902 when Main Street all burned out. They had a lot of fires back then. Yeah. It was mighty fortunate here just last summer that it didn't go again when Gambles had that fire. If they'd had a little wind that night it would have taken that whole block as sure as the world.

Could you tell a little bit about the big strike? What it did to this town?

It raised hell with this town--the whole country. Of course, we on the ranch, we didn't have any trouble with what they called "scabs" and the union. We got along with both sides because we were on the ranch. My dad did as much business with coal companies selling them mules and feed and all as he did with union men. He worked union men on the farm. We were perfectly neutral. That was good. That's what busted the old Lafayette Bank was the strike. It lasted so long and the union men had nothing coming in--they had to mortgage their homes, the bank took the mortgages that couldn't be paid and the bank couldn't meet their obligations, so consequently, the bank failed. It surely did. Many union men lost their property, the coal companies lost as much or more. Did they ever try to bring in cheap labor? Oh, yeah, the companies brought in scab labor. You bet you. That's what the big shooting matches were about several different times. You bet you, boy. Yeah, the companies put up big search lights on the Simpson, up on the tipples, so they could scan the whole country and up on the Eckley Mines they put big search lights. The union men used

to get over in our ditch, over in towards Platte Lake by the Eckley Mines and when they'd flash that search light around the union men had high powered rifles and practically every night they'd shoot it out for them. Kind of expensive. It was. I know down there on the ranch once, us boys we used to sleep upstairs on the north side and several nights my dad would come upstairs and move us boys out of the upstairs windows and take us downstairs. The bullets used to whiz over that ranch quite often, I tell you. It's a wonder there wasn't more killed. There was more killed after that strike than--there was more killed during the Wombly strike than the big coal strike up here. The Wombly strike down at the Columbine, you know, they killed 67 out there at one time, I think. I didn't hear about that. Well, your granddads probably know as much or more about that than I do because I was on the ranch, you know. Yeah, that Wombly strike, it was wicked there for a while but it didn't last too long, I don't think. Of course, it was with the IWW, I don't know what their affiliation was with labor. It couldn't have been too much, I don't think. What caused that one? Well, the IWW. What about, I don't know. I don't know. What caused the big coal strike? Well, the union and the company just couldn't seem to get together. The union wanted a little more wages, you know. At that time, top wages, I think, was \$3.10 a day. What was it, an 8 or 10 or 12 hour day? That was top wages at that time, big wages they thought. That was when the union struck for more wages and better working conditions. Working conditions weren't too good you know, in those days. We had an awful lot of gasey mines, wet mines, because over the years the miners had to change those conditions alot. And we're going to have to change them more, health-wise. Yeah, your granddad could probably tell you a little about the Wombly strike. Of course, I think he was working on the railroad at that time probably. Maybe he wasn't. I'll talk to him about that Yeah. Yeah, they called it the Wombly strike.

Well, I thank you for your help. Well, all right. I hope I did you some boy. It won't be the last time I come. Won't it? No. Well.

'End of interview with Ralph Miller.)