



RECOLLECTIONS OF LITTLE VALLEY

**Compiled by
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I was asked to prepare a summary of, as I recall, the history of Little Valley and Estes Park as I knew it from the time we first came here. We showed up in the early 60's. We bought our place in '66 and retired from the Air Force in '69. So that gives you an idea of where we came from. When we first came here, Estes Park was a tourist town but only for the summer primarily. Population was less than 2000 people and half of those were the kids that went to the school. And incidentally the school in the early 60's was what is now the municipal building. What is now Bond Park is where the municipal building was and also the jail and the library and all that was in Bond Park at the time. The town wasn't very big as you can figure and the only industry really was the dude ranches or the guest ranches and all the people that owned the cabins. The season lasted for 100 days from Memorial Day to Labor Day and that was about it. The rest of the winter time the streets were folded up and the town just went dormant until the following spring.

When you came down the road from Lyons and you turned off on Fish Creek Road right there that used to be a restaurant there where the Landmark Motel is now. Charlie Jameson and his wife bought it in the early 70's and had a survey made. A market analysis showed the restaurant wouldn't make it so they turned it into the Landmark Motel. And that's the way that went. Coming on down Fish Creek Road, it was not paved. It was gravel and it had a whole lot of curves in it at the time. As a matter of fact it wasn't used so much and grass actually grew up in the middle of its various lanes because there wasn't very much traffic.

When you come to where that little office is sitting on the right side of the road, that was to be Paul Van Horn's hobby shop and there wasn't supposed to be any traffic there.

You come on down the road to just before where you turn into Little Valley. That's the Sweet property and I understand he used to be Governor Sweet who was the governor back in the 30's. As I recall he had a section in there where the Uplands is now and they kept it in the family until the taxes got too high and they finally decided they'd have to sell off part of it and they did and that turned into the Uplands.

You turn off the road and come up to Little Valley Road. It was a curvy little road and just before you came to the Vessy property which is the first house on the right, there used to be a fence there that Muriel MacGregor maintained and that was part of the MacGregor property. She had roughly half a section in there. Maybe it was only a quarter of a section which is now Centennial Hills. Where there was no gate, she would keep the cows from getting out by taking the skin off of one of the recently killed steers and putting it on the road. The cattle wouldn't walk across, so it acted like a cattle guard.

Muriel brought her black cattle in there - we called them the black elk, the slow elk - she'd bring them up every summer, several hundred of them, and they'd be there all summer long and then she'd have a great big trail drive and with a bunch of volunteers and they'd get them back to the MacGregor ranch on the other side of the Stanley Hotel. But that was always a real exciting event. All the would-be cowboys would bring their horses out and help Muriel move the cattle twice a year and that was always looked forward to.

The road at that time was not maintained well at all. The only ones that maintained the road - I did it and Cecil Henry - we were the only two that maintained the road for most all of the 70's. We had snowplows on our pickup trucks and we maintained the road the best we could. We've had quite a spring this year. Just after you turn off Fish Creek Road there was a spring there but back in the olden days there were several of them. I remember one right before you get to the Little Valley gate. I recall one time this spring popped out and a tractor came through and the water was almost up to the ceiling - up to the top of the thing because the hole was so big, so the springs are not something new. We had them back in the old days.

After you get on up into Little Valley, the road turns to the left which we call Jacob's turnoff. Going back in there, the Cheley camp people had operations back in there so did the YMCA. Bob Bigler bought a property way back at the end in there. It's another two miles past Ed Lewis' place and there used to be a mine back in there. I don't know if it ever produced anything. It was a very popular place to hunt back in those days. When October and November came along, all along the road you'd see ten or twelve hunters scattered along. Every 100 yards there would be a hunter out there and a lot of game was killed of course.

MacGregor property came all the way up to the Little Valley gate and Muriel was still around when we showed up and she was a spinster. I understand she was engaged once but at any rate she stayed a spinster and some people said she was eccentric. She used to carry baby calves in the back of her car and this kind of thing but she was a delightful lady and she was very nice. She went

way back as far as history goes since her father was the one who basically developed Little Valley. And she maintained the property as best she could until she passed on and then it got sold into Centennial Hills. Incidentally, part of the movie *Centennial* which was produced in the early 80's, was filmed where 3333 Little Valley Drive is.

Carriage Hills was just getting developed. Wendell Harding was the developer of that and the Carriage Hills lots were all two acres or better. They sold for \$3000 each and I just thought it was a terrible price to pay - \$1500 an acre. All the lot sizes were two acres. When we came in the early 60's, there were less than 20 houses. Maybe there were a dozen in all of Carriage Hills.

Incidentally Leo Weber was our president during one of the periods back then and he built the first gate decoration. He actually had an overhead for awhile. Later that came down and we had Chief's Landscaping put up the marker that we have at the present time. The only ones that were living here when we first came were the Henrys, who were the Jacob brothers' nephew and Johnny Bufkin and the Marshalls. That is where Bud Scarborough lives now. Just those three houses were the only ones. It was real quiet and real peaceful. There wasn't much traffic on the road and the only industry that was going on was the lumbering industry that the Jacob brothers started way back in the old days. Incidentally the Jacob brothers were the ones who developed the road that goes back into Pierson Park. It wasn't the Forest Service. They put the road in there and they maintained this road and it was nip and tuck for a long time. As a matter of fact up on top where the Jacob brothers did a lot of their lumbering, there are still some big piles of the slabs that they cut off the trees and there were some huge big piles where the slabs were. As a matter of fact after

50 years or so those slabs still look good because they only get wet on the top.

Incidentally where Dr. Miller lived there was one of those big slab piles there in his yard back in the old days. I don't know what is there now but lumbering was the only industry that we had and the Jacob brothers were the ones that started all this and developed the whole area in the first place. They sold it to the Hessler family in the early 60's and they in turn caused the Little Valley development to get up and get going. Well we know who was in the first filing. Then they had the second filing and it went on from there.

Estes Valley has had several exciting things going on. Back in the early 70's we had a terrible infestation of the mountain pine beetle and it really raised havoc with the ponderosa trees. They just killed trees by the hundreds of thousands, all along the whole eastern slope. We even had helicopters coming in here and flying over and spraying. We did that for two or three years and some of the local people were unhappy because the spraying did not discriminate between which insects were killed. So after the third year we stopped using the helicopter and just used a tank sprayer on the back of a pickup. We used Sevin to spray and that killed the beetles to a great degree. However, they are still around and let's just hope we never have another infestation like we did before.

Following the beetle infestation, the spruce budworm came along and it killed the spruce and the fir and the other trees that hadn't been killed by the mountain pine beetle. We sprayed them with the same kind of spray except that it could be diluted quite a bit and the spruce budworm wasn't near the problem of the mountain pine beetle.

When we first came up here we used to see grouse quite often. They were a funny little bird. They were called the Fool's Hen because they were so stupid. People could kill them by throwing a rock at them and a lot of miners back in the old days maintained life and limb supposedly by killing grouse which were so easy to pick off.

One of the celebrities we had up here once was Glenn Yarborough. Maybe some of you old timers remember him. He sang and played the guitar. He was on TV. He had the house way up there on top. He had it built. He was a very nice man. He was in the sailing world and traveled around the world in a sail boat. I don't know what happened to him but he's been gone now for quite awhile.

The next thing I'd like to bring up are the weddings we used to have up here - on the top toward Pierson Park - back to the west. There's a real nice smooth place up there. Several weddings were held up there, very picturesque, overlooking the whole valley. The view is magnificent.

Back in the old days the hunters would come in the fall. There were lots and lots of hunters up here. There were a lot more deer here than elk when we came here. We also had raccoons

We had lots of coyotes, of course, and as far as the little guys, we had birds like you wouldn't believe. We just don't see any at all now. We had lots of black squirrels called the Abert's squirrel. Some of them were solid black and some were gray. They were very nice and they could be trained to come and eat out of your hand. Now

the only time you see an Abert's squirrel is when he has been squished on the road where somebody's run over them. We had Clark's nutcracker which is a big bird. We had a lot of gray jays. We had many, many more blue jays or Stellar jays. We had flycatchers. We always had lots of hummers and everybody fed the hummers in those days. We weren't as environmentally conscious as we are now. We are not supposed to feed them now. We used to have big flocks of rosy finches. They'd come down. We also had a banded neck dove - it's a big dove, almost as big as a pigeon but it had a band around its neck. We'd have them a couple of times during the winter time. We also had porcupines quite often. And going up to the St. Francis church area, we used to have badgers up there. We'd see them out there sunning themselves. We also had a lot more ticks in the springtime than we do nowadays.

Where the Moak's middle lot is, there used to be a wood factory over there. They made clocks. We bought that over there and had the factory shut down. They've moved into town someplace. Where the Moaks were, we used to have a lot of llamas. The Boudreaux had llamas and that was kind of interesting

When the Hesslers had the property they made some unique improvements. They had a community fish pond up on the very top going on up towards Pierson Park. They made a little dam and they stocked it with trout and all of us that were interested could go up there. We'd go up there two or three times a week, take our picnic lunch, and go up there and catch fish and then we'd eat and party and stay up there until after dark and just have a real nice time.

Another thing the Hesslers did after they came, after the first filing, they came up with a water system. Up on the back of our property, which is now the Scarboroughs, they had a big round water tank - wooden water tank. I'd say it was about 14 to 15 feet in diameter. About 5 feet high and it had a top on it. Then it had a line coming down to Little Valley which is down below Michael Bryant's place. They had a pump with a float on it and they'd pump the water from the creek here which came through Bryant's yard or the Henry's yard and they'd pump it back up to the tank up there. Then, in theory, it was supposed to be gravity from there downhill. It would go back down to the Remigios and Holmgrens and all those people down below. Those people that built those houses and planned that water worked their rear end off but they never did get the water because it constantly leaked. Several years later somebody came along and wanted to make a hot tub out of it so I sold the thing and that was the end of the water system. It was pretty primitive back in the old days.

The road now that we have coming into Little Valley is just beyond belief as to how good it is compared with what it used to be. It was just horrible. It started off as just a 16 foot wide road and then it gradually got wider and wider and wider and nobody ever did anything to it. Cecil Henry and I plowed it and that's about all that got done to it. The road went up on into the park and they had some terrible battles with the Forest Service as to where the boundary is in that SE corner of the Little Valley subdivision and by and large the Forest Service won out. We used to have a gate on that and we kept the gate locked and we passed the key to the Forest Service people. The gate got torn down several times and it was nip and tuck for quite awhile but the good things we enjoy now certainly did not exist 25 or 30 years ago.

Back in the old days Cheley Camp's riders came right up through Little Valley and they worked their way up to Pierson Park and they have a gentleman's agreement by which they could transit the area. But now there are so many of them, I have mixed emotions about it. The Cheley Camp people have always been nice people, nice kids there and out of all the generations there, there has never been any negative or gossip or bad press about them and the way they run their operation. My grandson went there one year and he enjoyed it, but he did not go back. Cheley Camp people have been there for a long time and they are kind of an institution in the Estes Valley.

Going back a little bit, the Jacob brothers when they first came back in the 30's or whenever it was, they had this lumbering operation and they used to move their lumber around and they had this old mule named Joe. Joe was gone by the time we came around but Joe's shed which was up on top is still there. It is kind of getting beat up and people have come and stripped boards off it but that little shed was the place Joe's feed and tack were kept. As a matter of fact, several years after the Jacobs had moved on we went up there and found the old sled that had been used to haul the lumber. It was a primitive old sled. It has steel runners and I fixed it up and drug it down behind my Jeep and it's parked out here in my backyard now. It's not much but still, it's a genuine antique because it was practical and it was used to move the lumber out.

That's all I can think of at the present time. I've enjoyed visiting with you people and hopefully this will give you some idea of what it was like 30 years ago.

THE STORY OF THE LITTLE VALLEY FIRE

Shared at the LVOA Annual Meeting - July 11, 1999

The most excitement we've ever had in Little Valley that I know of, and we've been here since the early 60's, is when we had a fire at the Bufkin' house. The Bufkins are next to where the Moaks are, across from us and just before you get to the Horn's house. There are two or three little cabins up there. Bufkins came here way back in the old days when the Henrys were here and the Marshalls were here and that was all the houses. They built this little cabin and Johnny came up here to die. He came here from Mississippi with his crutches. With the weather and the climate and all, it worked out for Johnny. He had friends from Texas come up and they came up every year for three or four years. They rented out Johnny's guest house during the Christmas holiday period. There always was a lot of snow up here in those days and they had a real nice time. One year in the late 70's, when they left, they took all the ashes out of the fireplace and put them in a bucket and took them down the hill about 100 yards. They left on Sunday and on Monday night after they left, Bob Deckker got a phone call. Bob Deckker at that time was not the mayor. He got a call as the assistant fire marshall saying, "I see a glow up in Little Valley up toward the sky." This lady couldn't sleep. It was 2:30 in the morning. She lived up on the east side of Prospect Mountain. She just happened to be looking out the window and she saw this glow over in our area. She felt reluctant about calling this in. She wasn't sure really what it was but just to play it cool, she called Bob Deckker and Bob jumped in his jeep, came up the road and just before St. Francis Way,

he sees this great big glow in the sky and the flame was shooting up 100 feet in the air so he calls on the radio (I'm telling you all this to assure you that the municipality's fire department system does work) and they relayed the information and Bob came on up. He saw Johnny's house and these huge big flames. So he came up to our house because he knew we lived there. He said, "Burt, John's house is on fire" and flames were shooting way up in the air. The wind was blowing terribly hard that night, even worse than in the Mary's Lake area. The wind had caught those ashes and resurrected those coals after two days and blew these glowing coals up the hill. Johnny had a huge wood pile about 20 feet from his house - big piles of wood, slash, this kind of thing, a bunch of junk and stuff. And that's what caught on fire - the woodpile. It caught on fire like a blowtorch but instead of going toward the house, they went straight up in the air. It was only 10 feet from John's house but the flames were going straight up. And I'd say in only 10 minutes - I'd hardly had time to get my clothes on - and here comes the fire team. Remember it's below zero weather. There's still snow on the ground. Here they come. The whole string of them. All the water had to come out of tanks. They put the fire out in less than 15 minutes and Johnny's house wasn't hurt at all. The Lord was with everybody that night.

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