



Douglas County History Research Center Oral Histories

Oral History Interview with
Elizabeth “Bette” Saunders
Conducted on May 6, 1993, recorded in Castle Rock, Colorado.
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Castle Rock Historical Society Oral History Project

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Douglas County Libraries

SUMMARY: Bette Saunders was born and grew up on a ranch in Cherry Valley, Colorado. Her parents were Theodora Noyes and David Gilbert. David was on the Douglas County, Colorado, Board of Commissioners and was also Mayor of Castle Rock, Colorado, in 1948 and died while in that office. As a young man David Gilbert played on the Wheat Ridge semi-professional baseball team. He also served on the Douglas County, Colorado, School Board. He raised feeder cattle and dairy cows, corn and alfalfa, hay, pigs, and potatoes on a 770 acre ranch southeast of Castle Rock, Colorado. Mrs. Saunders’ mother, Theodora Noyes Gilbert, was born in Douglas County, Colorado, and was a precinct committee woman. The Gilberts were married on January 21, 1910. Mrs. Saunders’ grandfather, Myron M. Noyes was a cattle rancher in the Greenland, Colorado area, he also worked for the Union Pacific Railroad. Her grandmother came to Douglas County from Pennsylvania in the 1880’s, her grandparents were married in February of 1882.

There are three tapes included in this oral history, made at different times and covering various topics. The third tape in the series covers Mrs. Saunders’ memories of school in Castle Rock; the end of WWII; childhood memories of discipline; the 1937 cyclone; the City Park donated by O’Brien; the Castle Rock Star and Star Lighting; the blizzard of 1946; the Douglas County, Colorado, Fair; the 1932 election and the death of Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

Note: The transcript of this oral history is as accurate as possible. All text in brackets is not part of the oral history. It has been added for clarification purposes.

OBERLIN: Culture!

SAUNDERS: Culture! Yes! [*laughter*] And uh, as I said, these were just little bitty flashbacks.

OBERLIN: Now apparently they had Chautauqua's down at Palmer Lake. Did you ever go there?

SAUNDERS: Yes and up at -- No. And up at Boulder. Cause there's Chautauqua park up there and it was a wooden building. I don't know if it's still there or not. And they traveled I guess all over the United States. But every now and then I'll pick up an old -- read an obituary or something, about some old star or old singer and it said they got their start on the Chautauqua circuit. And that's about it, that I can remember. Brief, though it is.

OBERLIN: What do we have today that, that uh compares to the Chautauqua.

SAUNDERS: Well, for culture I don't think we have anything. Maybe, some of the good plays that come to the Denver Auditorium. The -- what used to be the auditorium. Cause there again, I can remember going into the ballet -- as I said, they were going to give me culture, if it killed 'em. They, I got taken to the ballet even after, long after Ben and I were married. As long as the ballet came to Denver, we used to go. And when there was a real good concert or something, momma would browbeat dad into taking us.

OBERLIN: Well I do wonder, like in Castle Rock that we don't have, we don't really have much like that. We do have arts and crafts show, we of course have the fairs but --

SAUNDERS: Well I suppose maybe, they bring some of the country and western singers, and some of the good singers in for the country fair. They're only here one night.

OBERLIN: Maybe we should revive the Chautauqua, Bette --

SAUNDERS: Probably now people'd think it was corny now. [*laughter*] They couldn't stand going -- learning all these crazy kid things that we did.

OBERLIN: So it was educational as well as entertainment apparently.

SAUNDERS: Yes, yes. And as I said, it wasn't trash that they put it on. It was what was classical of that day. And I, way back in the deepest reaches of my memory, the first ballet dancer I heard of was Ann Pavlova and I think that my Aunt Cora took me to see her. Somewhere in Denver, either momma took me or -- As I said, they were going to instill a little culture in me if it was the last thing they did.

OBERLIN: All right, tell us a little about, of your memories of star lighting. I think you had some information on the building of the star.

SAUNDERS: Well, the star was built in, originally in 1936 and it was built by the volunteer fire department and my husband, Ben Saunders, was one of the firemen and helped build it. And they had to carry all of the equipment, up the rock on their backs. And they had to use hand tools because they had no power equipment to build it. And I guess it was turned on the first time, Christmas 1936. And -- those firemen took a lot of pride in it. But I, there were actually no star lighting ceremonies at that time that I remember. They came later on. I would say -- sometime maybe in the late fifties. That they would actually have a ceremony on the courthouse lawn and then light the star. But there, I can remember the firemen used to have a -- uh -- carnival or they'd have something downtown. Oh, we used to go, it was bitter cold. And they may have turned the star on that night, after it was over with. I cannot remember that. But Ben always seemed to kinda take a lot of pride in the fact that he helped build the star. And, what I remember especially about it is, would have been the Christmas of -- well it must have been the Christmas of [19]36 because I was living with my grandmother at that time. And I worked, as a waitress at the hotel up on the corner. It was the old M and M restaurant. And I worked for Ida and Lucy Lambert. And the town used to turn the street lights off at midnight so they wouldn't have to pay electricity. And I would, always had to carry a flashlight but after they lit the star it gave me enough light that I just had to walk that one block. I didn't have to have to have my flashlight on. That's one of the most vivid memories.

OBERLIN: It's interesting. Bette, this M and M restaurant was that on the corner of Fourth and Wilcox?

SAUNDERS: Yes. It's where Cousins bar and the shoe repair place is. And at that time it was, it was widely known as a, well I suppose know they'd even call it a four-star restaurant and people would come from Denver and Colorado Springs and Pueblo on Sundays to eat there because it had such wonderful steaks. And -- I don't know when it suffered it's demise.

OBERLIN: Do you know who owned that, at that time?

SAUNDERS: I don't know who owned the building, but I do know that Ida and Lucy Lambert, and there was a hotel in conjunction with it upstairs and at that time, where the apartments are now, there was a dance hall. And they used to have dances frequently there. But Ida, as I said, Ida and Lucy Lambert ran it. And they, lived, there were living quarters in the back and Ida was the cook. And Ida had, I guess served her cooks apprenticeship cooking for lumber camps up in Oregon and Washington. Well, she was our hired girl too when my brother was born in 1918. So I've known the Lamberts all my life, practically.

OBERLIN: Are they still living?

SAUNDERS: No. Ida and Lucy both are gone. In fact, all of the brothers and sisters are gone now, the Lamberts. There is a couple of sister-in-laws still alive. One lives in Wellington and the other one, Viola, is out at the nursing home.

OBERLIN: One other question I wanted to ask you on the star lighting, do you know where the idea came from?

SAUNDERS: I have no idea. I think, probably, the firemen came up with the idea of building the star, -- and there again I don't know if there's any of those old firemen left that helped build it or not. And somewhere in my archives and I will run on it someday is a picture of all of the members of the fire department at that time and I think I can name practically everyone of them. But as I said I'll have to just wait until it surfaces. I'll have to do that, I looked for it awhile back and couldn't find it, cause I wanted to be prepared.

OBERLIN: In fact it would be a good idea to, if you find it to put the names on the back.

SAUNDERS: Well I intend to, that's why I want it, and I wanted, because I know Bickey Briscoe is in there and Ben and, ah, well George Tripplet, and, well practically and Mr. Tuggle. Anybody that was on the fire department is in that picture. And I just saw it last summer and I thought I could put my hands right on it, nope it isn't there.

OBERLIN: Were these volunteers?

SAUNDERS: Yes, definitely,

OBERLIN: Now, Bette, tell us something about the blizzard of 1946.

SAUNDERS: Well, Ben was driving the milk truck for Castle Rock Transfer and he got up that morning to leave and he had to over Wolfensburger hill and pick up milk along West Plum Creek. It was snowing but not bad and it kept getting worse and worse and worse and by the time he got over to Harold Duran's place he was stalled in the milk truck and they couldn't get it out and he stayed there with the milk truck and, finally, of course they had to end up dumping the milk, and, as near as I can remember he was snowed in over there for, well, lets say a week, it seems to me it was ten days but surely it couldn't be that, it couldn't have been that long before the snow plows could get out and get the roads open. And it, practically paralyzed the town -- you -- if you went anywhere you had to go on foot because we had no vehicles. I think we had one little road grader that would, maybe, I'm not even sure we had that to clean the streets at that time. And I, also, remember that it was election time and I was on the election board and I had to wade in snow up to my knees over to the courthouse to get the election supplies and people did, by then, were beginning to move around, some of the younger people had jeeps and they would go out and get people and bring them in to vote. Turn out was very poor, because people just couldn't get out and get to it, and I have been told, but I have no proof, that up in the mountain dis -- precincts that they couldn't get any supplies up to them and that they used school

tablets for ballots. But there again, as I said, this is only hearsay, I have no proof of that. But they always did say that it was the -- it was a turning point in the county administration. Up until that time it had been solid democrat, and then, the republicans had the jeeps and they got out and worked and got their people in.

OBERLIN: Now is this a local election or a national election?

SAUNDERS: No, it was a, I don't [19]36 or [19]46?

OBERLIN: [19]46?

SAUNDERS: I don't know if it was presidential or just -- the state, but it was the general election in November and there again I'd have, I have no idea what the date was. I don't even know if I've got any pictures. Somewhere I've got some pictures but they were taken after we could get out and move around a little bit. The cars were just completely covered and, of course, there was no I-25 then as it is now and roads were closed to Colorado Springs and roads were closed to Denver. And the town ran out of milk and bread, I think, finally, they got trains through. And that is the blizzard that Eva Sobey froze to death in. She had worked in Denver and she'd ride the train back and forth and she came home at night and thought that she could walk home. Now, at this time, the old Santa Fe bridge had been washed out so she had to work, walk north of the Santa Fe Depot to Wolfensburger Road and then into town. And, her house was the little house down thereabout where uh -- Louie Block's apartment is and she had two children, a little boy and little girl, well I guess they maybe were, might have been teenagers at that time. But, she got bogged down and froze to death. They found her later on somewhere between the Santa Fe Depot and Wolfensburger road. So that, I remember that and there may have been more but that is the one I remember vividly.

OBERLIN: So this was a major, would you consider this a major catastrophe for the county?

SAUNDERS: Well, I think so, because at that time, see, this was right after the war. And, we had no equipment as they have it nowadays. And as I said few of these people that had army surplus jeeps to get around a little bit.

OBERLIN: How would you compare this to uh -- to the flood of 1965, in terms of damage, of the catastrophic, ah, proportions?

SAUNDERS: Well, there wasn't the damage that there was in the flood. In fact, it was, the snow stayed on all winter. And we had one of the most beautiful, lush springs in history. And everywhere we went, the wildflowers and the trees were just thick, and people came up here from Oklahoma and Texas and saw all this gorgeous pasture land and came up and bought up the country fast as they could. Cause they thought, oh, this was paradise. They didn't know we had droughts up here. They found out the hard way. But I don't remember any actual damage -- like buildings caving in or anything like that. It just stopped us dead in our tracks. In fact, yeah, the

trains were comin', getting through, and I think that's how they finally got bread and milk out, they shipped it out on the train.

OBERLIN: So how wide-spread was this blizzard?

SAUNDERS: I don't know. I think it was pretty-well statewide. And then we had another bad one in 1949. And I can remember that. They had to haul, get hay out, to take hay out to the cattle out on the prairie. And I think that was worse out east than it was right around here, and dump it out of airplanes because they couldn't get out to the pastures to feed their cattle, but we weren't quite so paralyzed by then. And now they have all this big power equipment that they can get in and clean things out with, we don't know how lucky we are.

OBERLIN: Or unlucky as the case may be. [*laughter*]

SAUNDERS: What?

OBERLIN: I said, or unlucky as the case may be. [*laughter*]

SAUNDERS: Well, that's right too. So --

OBERLIN: So we talked a little, Bette, about uh -- apparently you did, the town had what they called buffalo barbecues?

SAUNDERS: Well, the barbecue was put on during the fair. Now I think it was the last day of the fair. And the -- head-honcho of the barbequ'in of the buffalo was Roy Brown who was sheriff in Elbert County, for years and years and years. And I have never eaten such delicious barbecue in my life, and it was done in a pit -- somehow. And they cooked potatoes with it, in, and I don't know if we paid for it or it was free or what. You don't think about those things when you're that age. But I can remember goin' to it and eatin' this delicious barbecue and these oh, these yummy potatoes that were cooked in with it. And I think there may have been coleslaw or beans with it, those I don't remember. I was greatly impressed by the buffalo and the potatoes, I know that. But it was put on during the fair time.

OBERLIN: Well, tell us about the fairs and how they compare with fairs today.

SAUNDERS: Well I don't think there's, about the only change in the fairs is the people that take part [*laughter*]. I think they are pretty much the same because we use, well in some ways they are, have changed. Because at that time, we used to always have the fancy horse shows as part of the fair, I don't think they have that anymore. But they had the buckin' broncos. They had the steer wrestling. They had the bull riding. They had the horse races. They had relay races. They had fancy trick riders. And it was a highlight in our -- what do I want to say, in our county. But

at that time it was later then it is now, because they always closed schools and so people could bring stuff. And our school always had a display they sent, and they had a carnival they set up. I can remember as a little bitty girl riding the Ferris wheel and I hated Ferris wheels the rest of my life. And they had merry-go-rounds, and the usual carnival things out in back. And, as I -- now they've got nice grandstands and nice barns. And, as I said, I don't think it's changed a whole lot because there is county-wide interest in it. And it's a big thing -- still a big thing for the county, but they didn't have parades, I can remember, until after Ben and I moved here, we moved to this corner in 1950. And then they began to have the parades and the marching, the school bands and things like that, to get attention. But I used to go and enjoyed it, but anymore I've seen so many of 'em, it's just -- oh, we used -- oh, they used to have wonderful flower exhibits and, ah, sewing exhibits. There was a contest put on for the best dress-maker in, and of course the best embroidery and the best canned peaches, and the best angel food cake, and there was 4-H Club exhibits. And, as I said, the flowers -- one year I took gladiolas, and oh they were gorgeous. Great big long things and I took a display and I won a blue ribbon and the judge said his only regret was that he didn't have a purple ribbon to give it, because they were the most beautiful 'glads' he had ever seen.

OBERLIN: They are a glamorous flower, aren't they.

SAUNDERS: And we raised them out here in our back yard and they, those things the tops of 'em were almost six feet tall. And I even remember the, ah -- I think the name of them was "fire truck red" and I have never seen them since. And I wouldn't even bother taken them but my friend, neighbor across the street, Mrs. Rand, Clara Rand, talked me into taking 'em. She even furnished a big basket that I took. But even when I was a little girl, a kid, a teenager, I guess I was, we lived out on the ranch, I can remember my mother bring'n petunias and bring'n bachelor buttons and things. I can't remember if we won prizes but I can remember and they' d have cucumbers and -- carrots and -- don't remember tomatoes, but I know people brought their stuff, potatoes -- in -- as I said, then it was, it must have been in the end of September. Then it began to be, it would freeze too early, so they moved it up so that they weren't so apt, people's stuff wasn't so apt to freeze before they could display it at the fair.

OBERLIN: Did they have special entertainment like they do now, where they bring special musical groups, or to perform?

SAUNDERS: I, I don't recall any. I just don't recall.

OBERLIN: I think that's a later addition.

SAUNDERS: I think that is too. I have no idea. I was amazed one time to see that Moe Bandy, or somebody was coming, because they didn't used to have people like that out here.

OBERLIN: Moe Bandy, [*laughter*] who's that Bette?

SAUNDERS: Oh, I don't know, some western singer, I just happened to hear the younger generation talkin' about Moe Bandy, and then when I see he is coming out here. And I think

Roberta Lynn come one time, Loretta Lynn I mean. Seems to me. I don't go to 'em anymore, I can't stand the dust and stuff gives me asthma and hay fever so bad that I think I stopped goin' before Ben passed away, he'd go out and go to them. But I said I can't go out and walk through those. Oh they had horse barns, prizes for horses, prizes for pigs, I can't remember sheep, they weren't quite as popular then. And cattle -- can't remember, Winklers used to win a lot of prizes for their cattle. And or course, we had to take all of that in, chickens, rabbits -- but now, as I say, all the hay and the dust and the stuff would always give my hay fever and asthma so bad that I finally had to just quit goin'. And I couldn't even tell you the last time I went to the fair.

OBERLIN: My favorite at fairs is food, like cotton candy, stupid things like that.

SAUNDERS: Oh, they had cotton candy -- I can't remember any, I remember cotton candy but, and I think, yeah they had hot-dogs and --

OBERLIN: Corn on the cob?

SAUNDERS: -- hamburgers, I can't remember that.

OBERLIN: Maybe not out here.

SAUNDERS: I don't know.

OBERLIN: You know, I am Ohio, an Ohio person so --

SAUNDERS: I can't remember, I can remember hot-dogs and cotton candy but I can't remember -- oh, and they had one thing I remember was for a quarter you could get your picture taken. Pretty horrible pictures but --

OBERLIN: Yeah, I have a few of those in my scrapbook. *[laughter]*

SAUNDERS: -- so have I. You just reminded me I found one the other day, I took of Bill Whittier's, she's Bill Fauver now, she and I'd taken at the fair, boy we thought we were some pumpkin's **[unclear]** too, that must have been about 1928.

OBERLIN: Bette you made an interesting statement earlier about 1946 being a period where the county became republican where, formerly, it had been democratic. I'm interested in that.

SAUNDERS: Well -- it went democratic when Roosevelt went in. No, I don't know when that was -- but I might do a little quick research here and tell ya. Franklin Roosevelt, 1933, so it must

have been 1932 that the county went democratic. Practically everybody in the court house was a democrat. And, I think we had at that time two democratic county commissioners and one republican. And I'm trying to rem -- Bobby Jones was elected treasurer. -- oh I can't remember -- who the assessor was. Charlie Prescott was the county clerk and he stayed for years and years. In fact I helped, remember helping campaign for Charlie Prescott. We'd go out in the country and, I wasn't old enough to vote, I don't think at that time. But I could help put up hand bills and show the candidates where people lived and help 'em campaign. And Mr. Shellabarger, Shellabarger, was that Hugh Shellabarger? I think it was. He may have been the assessor at that time and Flo Hiers's dad was -- he was assessor or treasurer at one time long in there, but I can't remember which. And I don't know if that's when he was ousted or not.

OBERLIN: Do you know his first name, Bette?

SAUNDERS: Fred Bean -- and um -- after the election, after the democrats were in, my dad was a county commissioner and Underwood Jewell, I believe, was the other one that went in. I can't remember who the third one was. Oh, Lou Higby! No? I think dad defeated Lou Higby. I can't remember. Anyway -- I had a boyfriend at that time. Well I, retract that statement, he wasn't a boyfriend. Anyway he invited me out to dinner and a show and on the way to the show we'd have to take it pretty easy because, of, he had left his billfold at home. Later on I found out he was a bit of a tightwad. But anyway we went to the show and we went out and had a sandwich and on the way home, he proceeded to want me to intercede with my father if my father was elected would he give him a job on the county. And I guess you know that's the last I saw of that boyfriend. So then I found out through these rallies and things, Underwood Jewell had a son Elwood, so Elwood and I teamed up, we figured that we were safe that way we didn't either one of us want anything from the county. *[laughter]*

OBERLIN: Do we get the name of the other man you were talking about?

SAUNDERS: Oh -- his dad, which one?

OBERLIN: The one you said you went out with and he wanted to, he didn't have a billfold and he --

SAUNDERS: I rather not give his name, he might hear this someday.

OBERLIN: All right.

SAUNDERS: He's still alive *[laughter]* and I met him at a kind of a reunion out at Spring Valley about four years ago. I'd just rather leave him nameless. But Harold King and I used to laugh, years later you can laugh at it, at that time I was angry about it. But Harold King used to like to tease me about that. Well *[sirens in background]* must be going for coffee. So, are we about at the end of this tape or are we just get goin' good?

OBERLIN: We've got about ten minutes yet. Where were you when you heard about President Roosevelt's death?

SAUNDERS: Oh, well during the war, I worked for the Rio Grande Railroad, as a telegraph operator. But there was such a shortage of help that they put a lot of young women out to work as telegraph operators and -- we had, what was then known, as the manual block system so a lot of us didn't stay in training long enough to hardly learn the engine from the caboose and I had been working at, I think I'd been working down at ah -- oh boy -- Butte, down between Fountain and Pueblo and I had bid a job up at Larkspur. And I was having a layover or maybe somebody bumped me, I guess somebody bumped me and I off home for a few days and they loaned me to the Santa Fe Railroad to work out at Tomah which was south of Castle Rock between Castle Rock and Larkspur, in a little, well we just run the signals, there was actually no depot there but we had to have these signals to regulate the traffic on the railroad, and I was on the job and I had a radio and that's how I heard it. The day I was working for the railroad. And then, of course, when I came home, and in there in my grandmother's archives is a paper, Roosevelt died. And it was in April, I remember that, in the spring. And that's about all I can remember and then of course bringin' the funeral train back to, of course, we had no television then. We had the radio and we kept track of what all was goin' on and what's the ceremonies and things on the radio and the newspapers, of course. And, by then my mother and father were living in Castle Rock and I was staying with them, living with them there and working, driving back and forth to work. Tomah -- and I don't know how long, I may have worked there a month, I can't remember that, how long I worked. But I filled in until they got a new operator or the operator had his vacation or something. But that's about all I can remember of Roosevelt.

OBERLIN: Well Li and I were in Chicago at the time, he was in the Navy and stationed there. And that night we had tickets to go to a concert, ah, in downtown Chicago, and they played Strauss's 'Death and Transfiguration' and I've never been in such moving, ah, spent such a moving evening. It was really very tragic, very sad, ah, wonderful.

SAUNDERS: Ah, now, you jogged my memory again, I remember that Ben was home on, must have been on leave, from the Navy -- and his brother, Bob, was home on leave at the same time and why they came, maybe they brought me lunch, I don't know why, but they came out to Tomah to see me, or check on me or something, and, ah, my brother-in-law was a dedicated republican and he made some unkind remarks about Roosevelt and I fired back a few at him. Ben and Bob were both home on leave at that time and I'd forgotten about them coming out there. And that's, I'd said that's all I can remember. And I do remember it snowed on Easter Sunday that year.

OBERLIN: How do you remember that?

SAUNDERS: Cause Wilma and I were going to church and we had new hats and it snowed and we couldn't go. [*laughter*] Why, I don't know. These things just go through my mind like a fast movie film.

END OF SIDE A, TAPE 1

[There is several minutes of silence before the interview resumes]

OBERLIN: Tell us a little bit about eighth grade graduation ceremonies, Bette if you would please.

SAUNDERS: Well, when I was in school for years and years, they had eighth grade graduation exercises. The whole county. And they had a -- contest and an old man by the name of Hiram Mosley years and years before in the early 1900's sometimes, sometime had started this, by giving a prize for the best essay or the best speech or whatever. And I think there was a first, second and third and I don't know if it was for, some for girls and some for boys. That I've forgotten but I think it was -- but they had this, had it in the auditorium of the old, old Wilcox, where the high school was. And it was in the afternoon and everybody came. Grandma's and grandpa's and aunts and uncles and parents and cousins. Then they, they gave the graduates gave their speeches or whatever they had and uh -- they were awarded their diplomas and graduated from the eighth grade and then they announced the winners of the contest and I think five dollars was -- number one prize, and two and a half was second and I don't know, maybe you just got a ribbon for the third. A man by the name of Hiram Mosley started it and this, it went on, I supposed they ran out of Hiram Mosley's money and I don't know who gave the prizes. But I graduated from the eighth grade in 1929 and I won second place. The gal that won first place gave a humorous comedy and mine was not humorous. It was -- more dramatic and it had to do with World War I. And somewhere in my archives I even had the speech that I gave but all -- er the recitation I guess I'd say. All of the little girls had nice, fancy, frilly dresses, most of 'em white. And it was a big thing until -- I would say, I think my niece Joyce is one of the last ones that graduated from the eighth grade in 19 -- 60. Then they started the junior high because she was one of the first ones, her class was one of the first ones to graduate from the new high school. Now the high school that I went to, was a small brick building, small brick -- lava rock building. Then in 1937, as I believe it was a WPA project, is when they remodeled it and added on the gymnasium. When I was in school the gymnasium served, the auditorium served as the gymnasium, the local theater -- for movies, it served for everything. Graduation exercises.

OBERLIN: Ours too.

SAUNDERS: And then they, as I said, in [19]37, [19]36, [19]37, along in there they added this gymnasium on the north and rooms on the south and a new front and remodeled the whole thing. They put sloping seats in the auditorium. And after that, in fact I -- no Joyce graduated out from the new high school, in 1964 and that was one of the first classes to go through the new high school but we used to -- as I said it was a big thing. And, I can't, it seems to me that the night after eighth grade graduation there was a dance. Maybe it was senior graduation. Maybe seniors graduated that night. I -- all those programs are out at the library now so I can't look 'em up. But eighth grade graduation used to be a big deal in the county. And then our high school graduation was -- pretty big deal too. And we got, of course they gave, they didn't give near as many, what do they call 'em?

OBERLIN: Awards or diplomas?

SAUNDERS: Oh the grants, -- when they win a --

OBERLIN: Scholarship.

SAUNDERS: Scholarship! I don't think there were very many at that time but uh -- we always had a, well we had a sneak day. A big deal. On our senior sneak day we went up to Red Rocks. Took a picnic lunch and went up to Red Rocks and then we went into Downtown Denver and went to the theater and we had made arrangements beforehand and the theater let us attend this show for ten cents a piece because, it was a class thing. And I can even remember the name of the movie we went to!

OBERLIN: Yeah, tell us, tell us what it is!

SAUNDERS: Well, I have heard two pronunciations. One was Cynara and the other was Cinera. And this would have been in 1933 and that old movie was on this winter and I had to watch it. And out of, I remembered one scene, the name and one scene. The name of the movie came from a poem, and I don't know now who it was but the words were, I have been true to thee Cynara after my own fashion, or words to that effect. And it stuck in my mind. But we, and then we did, we'd have a junior or the junior/senior banquet. The juniors put on the banquet for the seniors. And the first year when I was a junior we put on our banquet at the Argonaut hotel in downtown Denver and after the banquet. Well to begin with the -- we decorated the banquet room, the juniors did. And we had little programs and menus and things. And uh -- we tried to carry out the seniors colors and their theme and things. And the hotel furnished us a room for we girls all to put our fancy dresses on and after the banquet we all piled in to cars and I suppose there was a lot of datin'. Some of 'em dated. Some of 'em didn't. We all went out to Elitches and danced. We had no senior prom. That's as near to a senior prom as we had. Then when I graduated from high school in 1933, oh -- to go back. We used to always have what they called Class Day. Early, in April. Now that was the beginning of summer and I think that's the time the junior class put on their play. I don't, and then maybe the juniors put it on at the -- graduation but they would have a play on Class Day. And then there was always a big play the night of eighth grade graduation. They would have a, I guess the seniors put that one on. And I think the eighth, it seemed to me they gave the eighth grade students passes so they could go to the play for free. And -- then to go back to 1933, we had our banquet at the Blakeland Inn. Which is the, on South Santa Fe Drive now. It's where, between 470 -- is and the railroad tracks that cross over the highway. Along on that curve was Blakeland Inn and it was quite a noted nightclub and banquets and they had an orchestra there and dancing. And I think we had our banquet there and then the orchestra played and we danced afterwards and we came home and that was, then we graduated and that was the end. That was during the depression, we were lucky to have that. But -- to go back again to -- the end of the war in 1945. I loved to dance. And -- I had a friend. He wasn't a boyfriend. He was a friend. He loved to dance, and his girlfriend didn't like to dance and my boyfriend didn't like to dance. So when he got out of the army he came to visit me and -- I was living with my parents and he stayed with us and three nights in a row, Ralph and I hit every nightclub from Colorado Springs to Boulder. -- I remember that, I think it's the Navajo Hogan in Colorado Springs. Blakeland, the Rainbow Ballroom, I can't remember the ones out north. On, North Federal. But I danced until my feet were blistered. I thought I've gotta get a

lifetime of dancing done because I won't be doing it anymore after I get married. [laughter] So -- I hate to have my grasshopper mind do that to you but it does. [laughter]

OBERLIN: Well in this graduation night, did you -- did you go with a boy?

SAUNDERS: No. I didn't have very many -- boyfriends in high school. I guess they didn't like me. I was too outspoken. Oh I had some, but nobod -- I never went steady with anybody like a lot of 'em did. And when we went to these dances and things. The girls would go together. A whole bunch of two, three carloads of girls would go together and two, three carloads of boys. We had no dates, we had no corsages. The nearest I come to a corsage, was my brother stole a tulip out of the neighbor ladies lawn for me to wear. [laughter] So maybe there were some of the -- course realize this was the depression. Maybe some of the more affluent girls did have corsages. I can't remember that. But we always had pretty dresses. And I remember my graduation dress cost the whole sum of five dollars which at that time was an expensive dress. Bought at the Denver Dry Goods downtown. And uh -- as I said, there were no proms, there were no tuxes, there were none of the fancy limousines and the things they go in for now.

OBERLIN: You know Bette, that uh -- Doctor Alexander's, actually his second wife was Bessie Shaw, who apparently was a Cañon City person. Her father, we have been told, was a minister. And I understand your grandmother was a good friend of hers.

SAUNDERS: Well I, of course I never, I never knew her except as Aunt Bessie. And all I have are things my grandmother and mother told me and she was a very close friend of my grandmothers. And maybe because the reason is when Doctor Alexander first came to Castle Rock and opened up his office, I don't know, maybe he lived in the back of the office but he boarded with my grandmother. And my mother tells, she can remember when she was a little girl of grandma fryin' steak for grandpa and Doctor Alexander to have for supper that night. And then I guess he married Bessie and Bessie and my grandmother became very dear friends. And -- as I said, I never ever knew her because she passed away before I was born. But I still have in my possession two items that were given to my grandmother and we always referred to them as 'those came from Aunt Bessie'. And -- I don't even know, I don't think grandma even had any pictures of her to my knowledge.

OBERLIN: I'd certainly like to get a hold of a picture.

SAUNDERS: But that's and I remember, Doctor Alexander had a beautiful singing voice. And I think he used to sing at various things around town. These are things my grandmother told about him. And then -- I guess after he got married they lived, at first I'm thinking where Pete Burgess lives but there again I'm not sure.

OBERLIN: Yes he did live there for a couple years.

SAUNDERS: And then the house across the street. And I presume they must have had that built themselves. The Alexander's or do you know?

OBERLIN: The stone --

SAUNDERS: Where you live.

OBERLIN: No, Benjamin Hammar built that house in 1887. Doctor Alexander bought it in 1902 according to our records.

SAUNDERS: Oh well -- well I do know then that he lived over there and as I said, then my next recollections are of Nina, his -- other wife after Aunt Bessie died and I don't even remember when that happened or anything. As I said, she passed away before I was born. And -- I always had the feeling, I don't know. That -- my grandmother just had a little hard feelings toward Doctor A after -- afterwards. I don't know, I don't know why. But I, it's just something that I felt. Nothing was ever said but I just, could sense this feeling of -- little resentment in my mother and my grandmother. And I, I don't know why.

OBERLIN: They maybe felt he was in some way responsible for her, her death.

SAUNDERS: They may have felt that. I've heard rumors that he was a philanderer. Maybe they knew that. I don't know. And it, that age you don't go around asking questions because you'd be termed Meddlesome Mattie and lord knows I got called out enough when I was growing up.

OBERLIN: In looking back Bette, how do your early years look to you?

SAUNDERS: Well I, I think I had a very happy, normal, childhood. When I was naughty I got punished. Now they probably call it child abuse. My mother could commit more child abuse with one look from her eyes than she ever could with her hand. All she had to do was just peer over her glasses at me and I was squelched.

OBERLIN: How were you punished generally? What were the methods used.

SAUNDERS: Well if my dad had to spank us he'd go back somewhere else and cry about it. And so I'd do anything, anything to keep from making my dad cry for spanking me. And even when he spanked my brother, because my brother had pushed me into an irrigation ditch and I darned near drowned I cried because daddy spanked Donnie, or Jack, little Jack. He's the one that pushed me in the irrigation ditch. And I cried and cried because he spanked him. But that was it. We just get a few swats on the fannie and then we were let go and then daddy would go off somewhere and cry. And like I said, when we kids found that out we tried not to make daddy cry. But my mother as I said, one look -- Oh! She had another -- habit. *[laughter]* We had an old coal and wood stove. And my brother Donald, four years younger than I, you know, sibling rivalry. We would be bickering and squabbling and grandma, momma would pick up the lid lifter and whack-whack-whack-whack on the top of the stove. My mother broke more lid lifters whacking at my brother and I. Thank God they only cost twenty-five cents a piece in those days.

[laughter] But we -- and every now and then my mother would say "I'm just so mad at your father! Believe you me! I'm just gonna leave your father!". And my brother and I'd look at each other and wink. And later on my mother asked me, "Did it ever upset you when I said I was going to leave daddy?" And I said "Heavens No! We knew you didn't mean it anyway!" But -- when I look at what happens now, in families I think I had an unusually happy, safe childhood. I may not have been given everything but I was given plenty of love.

OBERLIN: Yeah, I think that shows in -- your personality.

SAUNDERS: And even -- even my grandmother. She was a strict disciplinarian. And I lived with her off and on, well through four years of high school I stayed with my grandmother. And then after I graduated from high school and grandma became frail and somebody had to stay with her I lived with her. But there were certain rules and I knew. I abided by them. But there again. She would never raise a hand. All it would take would be a look or a word. And that took care of that. And I knew, if grandma said be home at nine o'clock. Grandma meant nine! She didn't mean nine o'two or nine o'five. She meant nine o'clock. And more than once I scurried, we had a curfew that rang. And all the kids had to be home. And I'd hear the curfew start and I would sprint for home so I could be home by the time the curfew quit ringing cause there would be grandma standing at the door waiting for me.

OBERLIN: Was this the, from the fire department?

SAUNDERS: Yes there was a tower down here on Third and the alley. There was a little fire house there and there was a tower there with a bell in it. And they used to ring that bell and later on they put a tower -- a metal tower up and put a siren on that could be heard. That was later on in 1937 that I remember the tower, the demise of the tower. My brother was sick. My grandmother had passed away and my brother was sick and I was still staying in my grandmother's house. My mother and dad were out on the ranch and my brother, came in here for some reason and he was sick so he stayed here because there were doctors close by. And momma was there and I could hear, there was this roar and I couldn't figure out what it was. And I stepped out on the front porch of grandma's house and looked up the street just in time to see the cyclone take the tower and twist it and turn it upside down and that was the end of the fire siren for a while.

OBERLIN: So what was the date, do you remember the cyclone hit the city?

SAUNDERS: Well it was the -- end of May or the first part of June because my grandmother had died the -- let me see here, the fifth of May. Oh dear -- Well I had it. I think my grandmother died the 5th of May of [19]37 and my brother died June the 4th so it had to be between there sometime.

OBERLIN: So it was around 1936, 1937?

SAUNDERS: [19]37. It was the summer of, I would say during May of 1937 that this cyclone came through town and it came up what is now Fifth Street and I have pictures in there and it took the garage and left the car sittin' there and uh tore shingles off of the roof and then it went across the street and up Jerry Street on the west side of the courthouse, rippin' out trees along and then it cut across and took the fire tower. It took the balcony, or the front porch off of the Owens House. It skipped across and took the coal shed's out over at what is now -- was at that time I think somebody's lumber yard. Oh dear, I can't remember the name. Was it -- Chamberlains? Or -- I think Chamberlains were gone but anyway it's par -- over there back of the Feed Store. There were sheds that had coal houses, coal in them. It took those out then it skipped on up Second Street and up, took up, out big trees up there and then on up over the hill. And I don't know what happened to it then. Oh, it took a corner out of across on the south side of the street from the Masonic Hall was this filling station, or a garage and it took a corner out of that and then it hopped up and took the fire tower out. And later on I went out with my camera and roamed all over town and took pictures of all the damage. What had happened.

OBERLIN: So you have those pictures?

SAUNDERS: Uh-huh, yeah. I've got 'em in my photograph album.

OBERLIN: Now you mention that it took the balcony off of the Owen's house so I wondered, you know when that was taken down.

SAUNDERS: Well, it tore the -- it was a porch for the first, it would be just the north part of the building. You know it's kinda 'L' shaped and in that north part of the building was this porch. And -- there was a doorway, there's a window there now with a curved top and that at one time was a door and it came out on to the top of this porch. And it, I've got the picture. I was thinking it took some trees out before. But there is the porch just hanging there, it tore it off. And it was sometime after that, then when the Burt family I think owned it and probably it was after that that they stuccoed it. Covered up the frame building and they left the balcony off and they closed the porch balcony. But see, after that I went back to the ranch and didn't live in town so things that were happening in town I missed out on for a few years.

OBERLIN: Well Bette we've heard that that building was once a stone building.

SAUNDERS: No way!

OBERLIN: Yes, I wondered about that.

SAUNDERS: No way! Never as long as I can remember and I walked up this -- Perry Street a good many years to visit Mrs. Leonard that lived in this house and to my knowledge it was always clapboard. And even the old pictures show it clapboard and that picture that I've got shows that it's a frame building. And I think somebody got a little confused when they said that it was stuccoed, or I mean that it was stone and stuccoed over because it wasn't.

OBERLIN: Okay, that's good to know. I'd love to see those pictures of that. All right Bette, we have anything else we want to chat about here, we've a few minutes left?

SAUNDERS: Well -- I can remember things that, some of the stories my mother told how the kids used to get out in the streets and play in the evening after supper. They'd play kick the can and --

OBERLIN: I was just going to say, did you ever play kick-the-can?

SAUNDERS: Oh yeah! I played kick-the-can, anti-over, last couple out and momma said they used to get out and play those and then when they'd turn the street lights on they had to go home. They had gas lights then. And it was, not natural gas. They had their own, I have no idea where it was. But I can vaguely remember my mother, grandmother having gas lights in her house since I was a little, just vaguely. I can see the fixtures. I don't even know that she lit them then. So I have no idea how long they had gas. But uh -- then my mother, they -- course out back of my grandfathers and grandmothers house they had the barn. And my mother had, what they would probably call the corvette of today. She had a sur -- little surrey with the fringe on top. She was quite the lady about town in her little -- horse and buggy, horse and surrey and take her girlfriends for rides. And back down where Khaki's is, there used to be a park. And we used to have picnics down in there. There were a lot of big old willow trees down in there and every summer the gypsies used to come to town and would camp down there. But believe you me when the gypsies came to town, everybody locked the doors. And we kids stayed away from the park. And I can also vaguely remember. I can't remember the name of the people. But they would bring their fresh produce into town and come up through the streets, calling that there was fresh produce and I remember grandma going out and buying -- I don't remember but she'd go out and buy from 'em.

OBERLIN: Bette was this park the O'Brien park? Is that called O'Brien park?

SAUNDERS: I don't know that it ever had a name. We just called it the park, as far as I know.

OBERLIN: I've heard that the O'Briens donated some park land back of their property. That's why I'm asking.

SAUNDERS: Well it could be. But we always, well it's down at the parkin place and we'd be down there. I know -- we used to meet friends, later on from east Cherry that moved into Englewood and they'd come out and we'd meet 'em here and then we'd all go down there and have a get together in the park and have a picnic. It was nice down there. And I, one of my friends said that when she and her family moved out here from Kansas they came out here in horse and wagon, covered -- now this was not in the 1800's, this was in, sometime in the late maybe the late 1918, along in there but they came out and they parked, camped out down there until they could find jobs and find a place to live. So it was, and I -- I said, I think that probably maybe were the, maybe that's where the old Indians used to come and camp and maybe that's

where the -- trappers and the hunters and early pioneers that came through here camped down there.

OBERLIN: Well it could be running right to the west there.

SAUNDERS: And I was always sorry when it disappeared but -- I guess they call it progress. Maybe, I don't know. I can't even remember when it disappeared.

OBERLIN: I have heard, and you know how it is when you hear of things, that that property was donated to the city for a park by the O'Brien family and that the city later sold it -- because they needed money. That that, you know, that property really belonged to the citizens.

SAUNDERS: Yes, I have heard it too time and time again. And I have no idea. I have no proof, but it like you say it's just rumor that it had been donated. And not only from the O'Briens but from Mrs. Longworth and Gladys Ritter who's property went down over there too. I supposed the city was desperate and maybe they did. I don't know. I can't prove any of it. It's just pure say and gossip.

OBERLIN: Bette, did you know -- uh you're a little younger than Bickey Briscoe but have you any memories of him, as say you're both growing up.

SAUNDERS: No, because they lived on a ranch just south of town about where, out where about where Wal-mart sits now. And I don't remember Bickey. He was my brother-in-law Jim's age. And I can remember Bickey's -- older brother John Briscoe and his wife Alma. I can remember Bickey's sister, Mary Briscoe that eventually married Henry Enderud. She was a nurse -- but Bickey, myself the only recollection I can have of Bickey is during World War II and I have no idea where he was stationed but he used to ride the -- he could ride the streamliner to Castle Rock but they were not allowed to stop here but they would slow down until it just barely moved and then Bickey could hop off. But now I never saw him hop off but I've heard that's what he did when he'd get the chance to come home from leave. And I, as I said, I don't know where he was stationed or anything about that. But I can remember Bicko, Bickey around town in his uniform during the war. And uh -- as I say, his -- he was my brother-in-law Jim's age so -- I didn't pay too much attention to his older ones. Now Bob and Ben were more my age. Ben and I are just a few months apart and Bob was about a year and a half older. But Bickey, and then seemed to me Bickey worked for the bank. That must have been before the war. And I remember him in the bank. But that's about the only recollections I have of Bickey.

OBERLIN: Do you know anything about the uh -- O'Brien clay pits or any of the clay mines that were around this, the city.

SAUNDERS: Well, I can remember the old clay mines. And of course we didn't go near 'em in those days. And I can remember the old brick plant that was out just across from Olmer Mehmen's where the the park is now. I can remember the big old metal buildings there and the -- smokestack and the, they were making bricks. And I knew people like the Clewhines [*sp?*] and the Whisenhunts that mined the clay and hauled it to the brick company. And there used to

be a little railroad track that went up there so they could ship the bricks out. And -- these again are just more or less pictures that flash into my mind because when we came in from Lake Gulch we came in and came down what is Oman Road and made a sharp left turn and went right by the brick plant.

OBERLIN: I just heard of Oman road the other day from Mary Middleton. I don't know where it is. I mean, I know about where it is but --

SAUNDERS: Oh it's, it's just a little -- between South Street and Lake Gulch Road. They took out that sharp corner and made uh Gilbert Street run on out and become Lake Gulch Road. And there again, I have no idea when that happened but along in there is then when they stayed on the west side, east side of Seller's Gulch because it used to turn right about Ditmar's gate there was a bridge and the Lake Gulch Road turned and crossed Seller's Gulch there. And then went down the east side and I guess there was another bridge down -- I can't remember another bridge, oh yeah down by the Palm place. Is that the Palm place? And then there was another one. So the see shortening that, takin' that corner out eliminated two bridges and straightening the road out. But I can remember coming in that old dirt road a good many years in the Model T. -- and speaking of Model T's. You know they had problems if the gas tank was low going up hill. And a lot of people backup the hill but we didn't. If we were low on gas, why my dad would get out and blow in the gas tank a while. *[laughter]* Pretty soon we'd take off up Dougway and we had a hired girl and she said, well she was going back to Minnesota and tell 'em out in Colorado they drive on hot air. *[laughter]*

OBERLIN: Is this a true story Bette?

SAUNDERS: Yes this is a true story! True story. And I can remember, because you see we got gasoline delivered out there. The farmer's did in big fifty gallon, they'd come out and we'd get fifty gallons. I don't know how many, daddy probably had two hundred gallons of gasoline out there, well maybe -- let's say a hundred. Two fifty gallon drums because we could get it cheaper and of course out in the country you didn't run into town to the filling station every time the gas tank was low. So he wouldn't buy gas in town. He'd fill it up at home but we'd be low and he'd get out and that was in our Model T sedan. That wasn't in the Model T -- touring car we had first. So this had to be before 1928 that we went up Dougway hill on hot air. *[laughter]*

OBERLIN: Oh Bette you're a wonderful story teller and the Castle Rock Historical Society is grateful to you. Our friend, our member for giving your time so generously to our Oral History Program. And most of all for your amazing memory. Thanks Bette.

SAUNDERS: Well, thank you. I just -- I hope people appreciate it --

OBERLIN: I'm sure they will.

SAUNDERS: -- because my niece says I talk too much. The only reason I talk too much is I got a lot to say.

OBERLIN: We're grateful for it.

END OF INTERVIEW