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THE PEOPLE OF ASPEN AND THE ROARING FORK VALLEY:

A HISTORY OF THE FAMILIES AND DAILY LIFE
OF MINERS AND RANCHERS, 1879-1960

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For the Aspen Historical Society

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PREFACE

In the process of researching this report I found myself getting more and more attached to the history of this valley. Many people helped foster this relationship, and they all deserve thanks. Lisa and Vera generously spent their time helping me discover the information nestled in the Aspen Historical Society archives, and Jody and Georges' enthusiasm for the whole project seemed to affect everyone in the dungeon. Sherry proved herself invaluable in accomplishing some of the more practical aspects of this project, and Rick Newton's success in getting the barn in shape gives me confidence that my report will be put to use in some constructive way. I would like to thank Geri Vagneur for her role in the oral history project, and for her help in setting up appropriate interviews. I would finally like to thank Ruth Whyte for sponsoring the Roaring Fork Research Scholarship, for taking such an active interest in my work, and for housing me all summer.

INTRODUCTION

Aspen was born a mining camp. People flocked there from all over the world to make money off of Aspen's silver, but Aspen has always been about much more than miners and entrepreneurs. These people needed services, and many wanted families. Mary Ballou spent 1852 in a mining camp, and her life consisted of cleaning dirt floors, cooking constantly, raising chickens, feeding large groups of miners three times a day, and chasing the hogs from her kitchen around the clock. She said "I would not advise any lady to come out here and suffer the toil and fatigue that I have suffered for the sake of a little gold" ¹ Women like Mary Ballou added their perspectives and made themselves significant members of mining communities all over the American West, including Aspen. Miners valued women as wives as well as cooks and prostitutes, and men often left town or even the country to bring spouses back and start a family. Although a minority at first, women and children played an important role in the quality of life in Aspen. This life of Aspenites outside the mines, not to mention the life of miners outside their work role, needs more exploration.

Besides the daily life of the miners and their families, the daily life of Aspen area ranchers and their families also needs more

¹Mary Ballou, "I Hear the Hogs in My Kitchen: A Woman's View of the Gold Rush", from Christiane Fischer, ed., Let Them Speak For Themselves: Women in the American West, 1849-1900 (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1977), 44.

exploration. As early as February of 1882 the Aspen Times printed: "It needs only a sight of the fine vegetables and grain, and a taste of the excellent beef to satisfy one that we have a grand agricultural and grazing county in connection with our rich mines."² The people who took advantage of these farming and ranching opportunities did so with zeal, as one said: "There is plenty of room yet -- Come one, come all! And join us in improving this valley of Paradise."³ Farmers and ranchers have been in the valley ever since. Their way of life differed significantly from that of the people in town, but ranchers stayed when most others left and their labors helped Aspen to survive the quiet years from about 1900 through the 1950s.⁴ For each of those reasons we need to understand more about the ranchers.

I have put certain limitations on my work, due to the expansive nature of historical research, and the research that has already been done about Aspen and the Holden/Marolt site. I will not discuss the process of mining itself or try to compile a history of mining in Aspen. Neither will I deal with the Holden site in particular. Rather, I will discuss miners in terms of their life outside the mines. In terms of ranching, I will leave a detailed history of

²Aspen Times, Feb. 25, 1882.

³Aspen Times, Feb. 25, 1882.

⁴ Throughout the text, I will characterize the periodization of Aspen as follows: Aspen's mining years went from 1879 to 1893. Even though mining continued after 1893, it was of a different nature and smaller scale. Aspen's mining boom years were from 1887 to 1893, since the railroads came to Aspen in 1887 and greatly increased mining profits. The quiet years refer to those years after 1893 when most miners left, and go until the early 1950s, when Aspen grew as a cultural and ski center.

ranching and an account of who-owned-which-land-when to someone else.

I will concentrate instead on the daily life of the working people of Aspen and the Roaring Fork Valley -- their backgrounds, their family histories, and their relationships with each other. I hope that this will help provide individual examples to illustrate a more complete picture of who mined and ranched around Aspen. I will also concentrate on the home life of these people. I hope to flesh out what it was like to live in Aspen or on a ranch by studying the household economy, ethnic traditions, and how each family member helped accomplish the jobs and chores necessary for their survival. Through a discussion of these topics I hope to point out the varied and significant roles women and children played both in Aspen and in the Roaring Fork Valley. In the meantime I also hope to suggest how daily life changed during the quiet years after 1893, and how mining and ranching people fit together economically as well as socially.

A NOTE ON SOURCES

Discovering what it was like to live during Aspen's mining years requires some imaginative research. The most prolific source, newspapers, tend to discuss mostly members of the upper class, as editors generally consider them to be more newsworthy. I found myself concentrating not on the society column or letters to the editor, but on advertisements and the want ads. Working class

women provided even less documentation than men, because newspapers direct their ads to either the majority (single men), or to the upper class, who had money to spend. Working class people tended not to write letters or diaries, nor are they around for us to interview at will. As a result, I relied on information about mining life and people primarily from the papers, the census, and in written documents like letters and diaries. Documents that pertain to other mining communities similar to Aspen also shed light on what it would have been like to live in mining Aspen.

Researching ranching posed almost the opposite problem, as I concentrated on interviews and oral histories to compile data. These types of sources provide colorful and interesting pictures of ranching life, yet the reader must understand how dangerous making generalizations from these sources can be. People often see their past through lenses of nostalgia or idealization that discolor reality. Census data from outside Aspen City would balance these oral histories nicely, however that remains on the "to do" list. Having mentioned these source limitations, I will continue on my way.

MINING AND ASPEN 1879-1945

Introduction

Living in Aspen from its inception as a mining town in 1879 and through the quiet years resembled life in any community, in its diversity and complexity. To the casual observer of Aspen, mining and the important people of the town took precedence above all else. Mining concerns and news of the upper class dominated the early newspapers, as indeed they dominate most historians' and tourists' thoughts about early Aspen. The upper class and their mining endeavors were perhaps the most well-publicized aspects of Aspen's community. The upper class fostered Aspen's fame and brought on cultural institutions, but they did not make up the whole. Early newspapers show that common concerns of the town and its inhabitants were more mundane. They struggled to control the by-products of their mining town, like fire, garbage, and miners.

Once the mines started rolling, the papers passed over the bulk of Aspen's people and the everyday lives they led. These working people came from all over the world, to work in the mines or in Aspen's service sector. Many went home to families at night. Some of these working people were women, and children also contributed time and energy to the family's economy. These people made up the hidden backbone that supported Aspen's more visible mining society. Some of them stayed through the quiet years, supporting a much

smaller society that would grow to become more famous for its tourist attractions than they imagined.

PART ONE: THE VISIBLE ASPEN

Mining

From when its first white settlers arrived in 1879, and until the Panic of 1893, Aspen's mining business grew and flourished. The introduction of a smelter in 1883 and two railroads in 1887, accelerated Aspen's growth and established its significance as a mining community. The Panic of 1893 and the demonetization of silver, however, called a halt to that growth.¹ According to Albert "Bede" Harris, the 1893 panic ended all hope of converting the Holden Lixiviation plant, built in 1891 to mill silver ore, to any usefulness.² "Red" Rowland's father, who worked as a steam engineer, lost his job in 1893 and had to work the steam furnaces in town buildings instead.³ David Hyman wrote that "every business failed except those that were branches of large eastern concerns," which presumably had more stable economic bases.⁴

¹For more information about Aspen's mining history during the boom years, see Malcolm Rohrbough, Aspen: The History of a Silver Mining Town, 1879-1893 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), and Albert G. Harris, "Aspen's Mills, Concentrators, Smelters, Sampling Works, and Their Economic Impact," 1975, Aspen, tape recording C-4, Aspen Historical Society, Aspen, CO (hereafter referred to as AHS). For more information about the Holden Lixiviation works, see Lysa Wegmen-French, "The History of the Holden-Marolt Site in Aspen, CO: the Holden Lixiviation Works, Farming and Ranching, and the Marolt Ranch, 1879-1986," 1990, AHS.

²(Harris, "Aspen's Mills", 1975)

³Red Rowland, interviewed by Elli Fox, 12 February 1987, tape recording, AHS.

⁴David Hyman, Romance of a Mining Adventure (Denver, 1918), 80-81.

Despite the exodus of miners in 1893 to places like Cripple Creek where booms were still happening, the business of mining went on in Aspen. Hildur Anderson pointed out that it took time for the price of silver to decline, and that large-scale layoffs began between 1895-1896. Her father mined until 1910.⁵ In the meantime, miners found especially profitable ore in the Smuggler, Durant, and Aspen mines in 1894, and pulled the biggest silver nugget ever found from the Smuggler mine. It was 93% pure silver, and weighed 2,350 pounds. After miners depleted this ore, mining in the area declined. Many mines flooded with ground water, and by 1908 only the Smuggler functioned. In 1908 the Smuggler interests consolidated to keep going, and the Molly Mill reopened for awhile, but County Judge Flynn disposed of the mill buildings one by one for non-payment of taxes.⁶ The 1908 Aspen Daily Times included a scant daily "mines and mining" section that listed the prices of silver, lead, spelter, and copper. They contained no other mining news unless silver prices changed drastically or if a mine was going to reopen. In 1910 the Smuggler mine could not pay its taxes.

Although the situation looked bleak, "In 1910 the primary concern of the people of Aspen and foremost in their minds was the reactivation of the Aspen mines."⁷ Some people stayed in Aspen to mine on a smaller scale, and they were hopeful about increasing silver prices. On October 17 two deep sea divers arrived to fix the pumps and unwater the Free Silver Mine. After a week of work in

⁵Hildur Anderson, interviewed 19 October 1973, tape recording, AHS.

⁶(Harris, "Aspen's Mills," 1975)

⁷Jim Markalunas, "Aspen, the Quiet Years, 1910-1930," p. 11, AHS.

pitch black water, the divers got the pumps started on November 27. They lasted until December 24th. The citizens kept their faith, though, forming the Hope Mining, Milling, and Leasing Company in 1911, along with organizing the Crystal City Boosters Association.⁸ By 1913 leasing companies controlled most mining, because they could organize the necessary financial backing. Mineral output was twice that of 1912, and the Hope Company was working on a tunnel into Richmond Hill.⁹ By 1916 life was looking even better, as the war in Europe and the motion picture industry pushed the price of silver up to a ten year high of 77¢ an oz.¹⁰

The price of silver later declined, however, and by the twenties there was very little mine activity. One Aspen miner, Charles Grover, pointed out that old mining centers like Ashcroft were dead because the price of silver was so low that miners needed almost pure ore to earn any money.¹¹ Aspen did not lack resources; the market simply made it unprofitable for miners to exploit them. People were still poking around the Durant Tunnel, Grover said, but the Smuggler closed in about 1925. Miners were not making money, they were only existing. In the twenties and thirties most people leased mines. Frank Garrish said that people could lease the land, pay the company who owned it a 10-15% royalty, and keep the rest minus any charges. He said "Nine times out of ten it worked out

⁸Markalunas, 19.

⁹Markalunas, 70-71.

¹⁰Both factors increased the price of silver because belligerent countries needed silver to help pay for the war, and the movie industry used silver to process their film.

¹¹Charles E. Grover, interviewed by the author and Ruth Whyte, 1 July 1991, Aspen, tape recording, AHS.

pretty good."¹² In fact, he and Joe Manual took a lease near the halfway station at Little Nell, and did all their work with hand tools. At one point, probably between 1910 and 1920, the Kobey's leased the Enterprise Mine up by Taylor Pass. Violet Lavey's husband worked there, and the Lavey's spent three summers at the Enterprise Mine.¹³

Mining during the thirties seemed slow. According to Bede Harris, the Hunter Creek Mill was the last one in operation, and it closed in the early thirties.¹⁴ Sam Stapleton said that the Midnight Mine was the only thing going on at the time, with about 25 people working there.¹⁵ Red Rowland was one of those 25, driving the mule that hauled the ore out. Since there was no electricity, he used a light so the mule could see.¹⁶ The Grover family owned some shares of the Midnight Mine, because Charles' grandfather had a stake in it. Charles remembered going up there one winter and getting stranded for the weekend. He stayed in the bunkhouse with the miners, and played with his brother on the dump. His Aunt Molly was the cook, and they ate potatoes, eggs, and pancakes with the miners for breakfast.¹⁷ Charles came back to Aspen and the Midnight Mine in 1934, to work with his father and uncle. The zinc component out of the mine paid for expenses, so any lead and silver they found was all profit. The three men used royalty money from the mine to finance a

¹²Frank Garrish, Maxine Lavey, and Violet Lavey, n.d., tape recording C-8, AHS.

¹³(Garrish, Lavey, and Lavey)

¹⁴(Harris, 1975)

¹⁵Sam Stapleton, interviewed by George Madsen and Lou Roess, 27 May, 1991, tape recording, AHS.

¹⁶(Rowland, 1987)

¹⁷(Grover, 1991)

new tunnel, but despite their efforts, the Midnight Mine closed down for good in 1945.¹⁸ After 1945 people in Aspen increasingly turned to alpine skiing and the Paepcke's cultural events for financial gain. Mining was out.

Although mining declined after 1893 and finally ended in 1945, mines and mining have always been an important part of life in Aspen. During the years from 1879-1893 especially, mining was the most visible and central aspect of Aspen life. Mines brought people to Aspen, and as a community Aspen faced problems and needs that went beyond silver ore. The needs and issues presented by the newspaper show Aspen as a community with a range of problems larger than mining -- a range of problems that grew as Aspen's population grew.

Aspen Life As Seen Through the Aspen Times

During the early years of Aspen's development in the 1880s, the Aspen Times showed a community concerned with providing miners, prospectors, and entrepreneurs with the services and organization that they needed in order to function. In 1881 the first paper published, the Aspen Times, featured articles explaining how to stake a claim, how to get a mineral patent, and how to succeed as a miner in general. It also published an ongoing list of current mine claims. Advertisements demonstrated the variety of services

¹⁸I don't know exactly why the mine closed then, but it was probably due to recruitment for WWII and the subsequent labor shortage.

miners and prospectors might need in 1881: saloons with billiards, wine, liquor, and cigars; grocery, supply, hardware, and dry goods stores; surveyors and assayers; livery stables and lumber yards; general merchants; bankers; hotels and bakeries; and restaurants. An ongoing barrage of letters to the editor also demonstrated the priority Aspenites set on receiving their mail on a regular basis, and on having good roads to the mines and Leadville. Slow mails and bad roads were a constant complaint.

Besides needing these services to help them live and mine, Aspenites also needed services to protect their growing community. The Aspen Times published every city ordinance passed, and in the spring of 1881 quite a few of them reflected the quality of Aspen life. In June a city ordinance established the office of Fire Warden, and delineated specific regulations about houses and stoves, gunpowder, stovepipes, and oil. Also in June, the city established a town physician and Board of Health, described their duties, and explained how to contain contagious diseases. Both of these ordinances point to problems Aspenites had to deal with on a regular basis.

Other city ordinances point to more colorful side effects of mine communities, namely garbage and misbehavior. Both were a direct result of miners living together in close quarters. Fines in Aspen ranged from \$5 per day for allowing drains, sewers, or privies to become foul or nauseous; \$10-50 for depositing dead animals within one half mile of town; \$10-100 for depositing them in a stream or ditch within one mile of town; and \$5-100 for selling

putrid meat or rotten vegetables.¹⁹ Sewage, garbage, and rotting food were an aromatic part of the early Aspen landscape. A city ordinance describing offenses against public morals and decency points not only to the types of entertainment prevalent in mining towns and their pitfalls, but also to the community's concerns about them. For example, while there was no fine for prostitution itself, there were numerous fines for bringing it to the public eye.

Prostitution was an accepted part of most mining town life, as long as no one advocated it openly. In Aspen, fines ranged from \$10-100 for having any relation to a house of ill-fame, for hiring a prostitute as a waitress or bartender, and for nudity, lewd dress, obscenity, or indecent exposure. Fines were from \$25-100 for keeping a house with lewd or disorderly dancers. The city charged lesser fines for the sale of alcohol to a minor or habitual drunk, vandalism, con schemes, drunk and disorderly conduct, and animal abuse.²⁰ Given the level of fines, the city fathers saw alcohol as a lesser evil than prostitution. Aspen did not punish people for getting drunk or visiting a prostitute, but it punished people who did those things too publicly. Victorian societal ideals did not mesh with the realities of Aspen; a fault few Aspenites wanted to advertize.

The issue of garbage also haunted Aspen. There was a malaria epidemic in the fall of 1883, and the paper listed the three biggest contributing problems: every back yard was full of rotting matter; there were over 100 vacant buildings surrounded by trash; and most houses had overflowing cesspools. These ordinances and articles

¹⁹"City Ordinance - Nuisances" Aspen Times 11 June, 1881.

²⁰"City Ordinance - Misdemeanors Article 1" Aspen Times 21 May, 1881.

point to some of the more practical problems surrounding a mining community, even though it seems mining concerns took precedence over cleanliness in Aspen. From 1881-1884 the Aspen Times demonstrated the all-pervasive concern with the mines; politics and mining dominated the front pages as usual.

By 1887 the paper switched from a weekly to a daily, and contained more advertisements about services miners might have wanted that were not directly related to mining. Instead, the paper advertized services that would improve peoples' quality of life. For example, ads for "Where to Bathe" direct the reader to Dave Knutz's Barbershop and Bath rooms. By 1889, when the population of Aspen was booming along with the mines, the Aspen Daily Times contained more advertisements than ever before. Most of the news revolved around the mines, of course. By 1891 ads had grown to take up entire half pages, and concerned themselves with selling medicines and tonics and clothes. These ads reflected the changing population in Aspen -- class distinctions grew along with the population, as did the number of women in town. More and different people meant businesses had more and different markets. More and different people also meant that living in Aspen was a different experience in 1889 than it was in 1881. This image of an increasingly complex community continued in the Aspen Times through 1896, three years after the demonetization of silver.

By 1908, however, the people left in Aspen were experiencing slow times. Most entrepreneurs and laborers had left for better opportunities, leaving a middle class population of people who stayed because they liked Aspen. The Aspen Daily Times published a

list of real estate offered for sale for delinquent taxes. The list took up seven pages.²¹ Another indication of Aspen's decline was the reemergence of a local gossip column like they published in the early 1880s, demonstrating that once again, everyone in Aspen probably knew everyone else. The nature of Aspen had changed, because after 1893 most of the miners left for other boom towns, and the people who stayed were more family-oriented. Mining became less of a priority, and the people in Aspen lived quieter lives. They had other concerns besides mining now. On September 23, 1918, Louise Berg wrote in her diary: "Pickles! And snow! The first of the year -- I hope winter has not come to stay!"²² Besides the weather and canning, Aspen people were occupied with the emergence of the first automobiles at about this time. Dr. Lert had the first one, and Ed Cooper had the second. Kids and grown-ups would run to look at the cars, and dogs and horses would run the other way.²³

In winter and spring, transportation around Aspen was always a concern, and 1928 was no different. Dr. McFadden, a chiropractor, put an announcement in the paper one spring saying "I will not be in Aspen again until the roads are passable."²⁴ Aspenites probably did not raise an eyebrow at this, since he probably had few customers in those quiet years. The Aspen Daily Times returned to weekly status, and filled its pages with small town news items. The front page of January 27, 1928 included the school honor roll, local activities, two columns "About the City," and an article about Aspen boosters.

²¹"Delinquent Tax List" Aspen Daily Times 24 November, 1908.

²²Louise Berg, diary 1914-1918, AHS.

²³Lorna Van Loon and Mary Vagneur, interview, n.d., tape recording C-10, AHS.

²⁴"Announcement," 9 March, 1928.

Editors also included fiction, household information, sports, jokes, and articles for women and children. Aspen was definitely a family community.

During the depression Aspen men tried to get jobs on road crews, and some worked for the CCC on government trails in the summer. Some mined a little, and others worked on the tunnel in Lincoln Gulch.²⁵ In 1934 the Aspen Times contained hardly any ads, their lodge directory that had once taken up three columns listed only two, and the paper was lighter to carry than ever before. Local news and information dominated the pages, including information about the tax sale of real estate. One front page in 1934 contained articles on: the Elks Dance, Pitkin County High School News, Camp Fire Girl activities, "At the Churches," Congressional issues, railroad improvements, Woody Creek School News, and a skating party. Very little had changed by 1945, as the front page still included school news, news of a dance at Owl Creek School House, and "News About You and Your Friends."²⁶ In 1945, however, there were also articles about the war -- ration information and "Our Boys and Girls in the Service" -- and an article that would foreshadow Aspen's future: "Visiting Skiers Enjoy Aspen Mountains."

The Aspen Times shows how life in Aspen changed over the years, and how family issues became more important as mining declined and the population changed. The most visible set of people in the papers was the upper class. In Aspen, social and economic classes divided society, but probably not during its early settlement

²⁵(Stapleton, 1991)

²⁶front page Aspen Times, 1 March, 1945.

when most Aspenites were single male prospectors. After the 1890s the entrepreneurs and laborers left Aspen, leaving a more homogeneous community. The Aspen Times illustrates the emergence of class and social divisions as Aspen's population grew in the 1880s. The upper class played a visible role in Aspen life, and it is important to distinguish them from the working people of Aspen.

High Society and Class Divisions, 1879-1890s

When white people first arrived in Aspen in 1879, they were all bent on the same thing: finding silver. They also faced similar problems and setbacks centering around the weather. They all lived in log huts or tents, and were all trying to stake their claims. For these reasons, Robert Bartlett described Aspen as being born with one social class.²⁷ Eastern capitalists like Henry Gillespie and B. Clark Wheeler represented the second wave of settlers, moving to Aspen after the first set of prospectors. Louise Berg characterized early Aspen as mostly educated people from good families, who built good, permanent homes. This sounds like an ideal situation, and could be a function of Louise Berg's nostalgic feelings towards her home. At any rate, it could not last. As prospectors drew attention to Aspen, often in an attempt to attract entrepreneurs and get them to spend their money in Aspen, more people arrived and class divisions grew. The growth of the female population probably also

²⁷Robert Bartlett, "The Early History of Aspen" (MA Thesis, ?, 1951) AHS, 51.

contributed to increasing class divisions. Entrepreneurs' wives probably did not associate with Aspen prostitutes, even though they were united by their gender. Paula Petrik said that women in the mining town of Helena, Montana helped create social divisions by hosting parties and choosing who to invite to social functions. As wives, upper class women were visible signs of their husbands' wealth and position, and acted according to Eastern standards of class.²⁸ Given the social activities of some Aspen women described in the Aspen Times, this seems to be the case in Aspen, as well.

The wives of Aspen tradespeople and entrepreneurs entertained visibly, and they increasingly did so according to Victorian standards of society and womanhood. Miners' wives probably did not have this luxury, and if they did, the Aspen Times did not publicize it. One manifestation of Victorian society was the formal visit. From the early papers of 1881, the personal section documented the activities of Aspen women visiting one another in town, and in neighboring towns like Leadville. Occasionally the paper would note if a wife or a couple were leaving the region altogether to visit friends or family. Another manifestation of Victorian society was putting on and going to elaborate parties. Mrs. B.F. Ingersoll's 40th birthday party, as described in 1881, included wine, special food, dancing, and the music of stringed instruments. Every guest gave her a gift, and the representative of the Times who was present, printed the names of each person invited.²⁹ In

²⁸Paula Petrik, No Step Backward: Women and Family on the Rocky Mountain Mining Frontier, Helena, Montana, 1865-1900, (Helena: Montana Historical Society P7), 62.

²⁹Aspen Times, 8 October, 1881.

December of the same year, the paper announced that most of the ladies of Aspen would receive their friends on Monday (New Year's), and included a list of names and the residences where they would be receiving. The fact that Aspen was a mining town did not keep its ladies from having a social life.

Some women, however, disapproved of Victorian social rituals, and the Aspen Times provided a forum for them. In December of 1881 the paper published a response of people who felt excluded from the paper's coverage of social activities. The editors suggested that interested parties keep the paper informed of their activities, if they wanted to be mentioned in print. In June of 1882, the Aspen Times published the first "Home Column," primarily as a forum for women's concerns. The first letter brought the existence of social divisions to the foreground, as the author pleaded for women to unite and not discriminate between each other. She quoted: "I was a stranger, and you took me not in."³⁰ The following week another woman continued along the same lines, attacking the Victorian tradition of calling on only certain neighbors depending on their class. She called these traditions and pretenses "false, silly, ridiculous, and foolish," and stressed the importance of genuine feelings of neighborliness.³¹ Once again in August, the Home Column included a letter that protested snobbery due to birth, class, nationality, or profession. An article the preceding May defended the *honor and integrity of the miners against the prejudice of the higher*

³⁰"Home Column," , 17 June 1882.

³¹"Home Column," , 24 June, 1882.

class.³² All these letters objecting to snobbery and class prejudice show that some people noticed social divisions and tried to rise above them. The letters also show that these divisions existed and were an obvious problem in Aspen.

The Aspen Times continued to illustrate the daily lives of the upper class in its pages, especially during the early 1880s. Ladies with nothing else to do unashamedly came by to visit the Times office and got their names printed in the paper on a regular basis in 1881. The paper covered different parties people had in detail, but to call them parties would be pedestrian. In May of 1881 the paper announced the first "soirée dansante" of the season, to be given by Messrs. H.B. Goodwin and Frank Pearce. According to the paper, "the ladies are striving to look their best."³³ Apparently the men dressed up as well, for the paper published in June of that year that "Perry has ordered a white vest, cut with gores and hemstitched in the back, for the coming dance." Unlike capitalists and wealthy tradespeople, miners and laborers would be hard pressed to sport this kind of clothing.

The paper also described the functions themselves; who attended, what people were wearing, and any interesting harmless gossip. One account of a "Grande Soirée Dansante" at the Clarendon took up two entire columns. In 1882 the paper mentioned: a church social, a fireman's ball, various private parties, and children's birthday parties. Accounts of Aspen's high society continued through 1887, and the personals mentioned people's comings and goings

³²see Aspen Times, "Home Column" 5 August 1882, and article 20 May 1882.

³³Aspen Times, 28 May, 1881.

through town. In 1891 the Aspen Times featured an entire society column, describing various different parties and visits, noting people who returned to town, and announcing the upcoming Kensington Tea and a sleighing party. In May and June the Society Column described two weddings in detail, including a list of wedding gifts and who gave them.

In addition to recounting upper class social life, newspapers also described the taste of the upper class by pointing out what clothes and hairstyles were in fashion, and suggesting what people should buy. Advertisements showed what goods had a market, and some ads were geared especially to the wealthier people. As early as 1882 it was possible for an Aspenite to order a piano or an organ from New York. In 1887 the Aspen Times printed a notice "To the Ladies" that the paper had just received an "elegant" line of fall designs in visiting cards.³⁴ In the City Business Directory of 1889, quite a few businesses made their profit primarily off the upper class. For example, in Aspen there were two venders of china, glassware, and greenware; eight stores selling cigars, confections, and fruits; six stores selling "gents furnishings,;" seventeen dressmakers; four milliners; four jewelers; one florist; three music teachers; and one dancing school. Businesses like these only survive when the population provides a market for their goods. The upper class, then, was definitely a part of Aspen society in the early years. Who else would need jewelers and a dancing school? Class divisions probably decreased after 1893, as many of Aspen's

³⁴Aspen Times 4 August, 1887.

entrepreneurs lost their money. After that, Aspen lost its boom characteristics and the pace of daily life slowed.

Although some women and their social activities marked class lines visibly, often those same women fulfilled other roles in the community as well. Women and men who believed in the Victorian ideals of womanhood saw women as responsible for fostering morality and "civilized" traits both in their family and within their community.³⁵ Community organizations provided an opportunity for women to accomplish these goals, and the Home Column of the Aspen Times provided the forum for some women's special concerns.

Visible Women in Aspen: Keepers of Morality and Civilization

In her studies of women in Helena, Montana, Paula Petrik found middle- and upper class women to be a conservative influence, because of their concern with fostering a traditional Victorian family and family values. Nineteenth-century women tended to promote, therefore, the education and moral behavior of the town.³⁶ Thomas Kimmell found the same thing true for Aspen. He said "Urbanization changed Aspen from an unregulated male mining camp into a more morally restrictive, family-dominated community."³⁷ He implied that when women arrived in Aspen, moral concerns rose in importance. One woman supported this idea by her letter in the

³⁵For a discussion of how domesticity characterized the lives of women on the plains and the prairie, see Glenda Riley, The Female Frontier: A Comparative View of Women on the Prairie and the Plains (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1988).

³⁶Petrik, 63.

³⁷Thomas Kimmell, "A History of A Rocky Mountain Silver Mining Camp: Aspen, CO, 1879-1910" (BA thesis, Harvard College, 1975), 55.

Home Column of August 1882. She complained bitterly about ditches running loose, men at dances with alcohol on their breath, vulgar and profane language, young men who stare, bad manners in church, and tobacco spit on the church floor.³⁸

Middle- and upper class women generally used two channels to help improve Aspen's people and society: the church, and various community organizations. Women commonly put on fund raising functions for their particular church, usually including supper, entertainment, and maybe games. They also took an interest in Sunday school, the first of which was founded by Mrs. Gillespie in 1880. By 1886 six denominations had established churches in Aspen, and enrollment was increasing.

Women sought to develop the culture and morals of Aspen through other organizations as well. Mrs. Gillespie established the literary society as well as the Sunday school upon her arrival in 1880. By 1882 men held the positions of President and Secretary, but Mrs. Gillespie was Treasurer. That winter they planned to put out a paper, and to entertain the public with music. The Ladies' Aid Society also formed early, and continued to be active at least through World War Two. In 1881 they helped raise money for the church by putting on a Christmas program with the Sunday school students, and they made woolen goods for each child.³⁹ In 1882 they planned "an entertainment of musical and literary character." At least one other group also fostered the arts in Aspen, as the Drama

³⁸"Home Column," Aspen Times 12 August, 1882.

³⁹Aspen Times 31 December, 1881.

club began in December of 1882 and performed plays they had ordered from Boston.

Middle- and upper class Aspen women joined other organizations throughout the years, like the Women's Christian Temperance Union, which operated a night school in 1887; different church organizations like St. Mary's Guild; and the Women's Assembly of the Knights of Labor, which held socials and dances in 1891. In 1896 the lodge directory in the Aspen Times listed the Women's Relief Corps, the Ladies of the G.A.R., and the Populist Women's Club, as well as the WCTU. 1901 marked the first year of the Women's Home Missionary Society, which raised money for charity and included talks about people of other cultures and regions in their meetings.⁴⁰ Some women joined the Women's Civic Improvement Club, and in 1914 helped initiate May 26 as town clean-up day.⁴¹ By 1928 other organizations were active, for example: the Women's Literary Club; American Legion Ladies; and still the Ladies of G.A.R.. The Ladies' Aid Society and the Literary Club continued through 1934. In 1937 Chapter A.R. of the P.E.O. celebrated its twentieth birthday in Aspen, and was still going strong in 1949.

This diverse collection of women's organizations is historically important because women at the time thought these organizations were worth establishing for either themselves, the community, or both. Not all of Aspen's female population took part in these organizations. The visible women who were active in the community and got their names in the paper were the women who

⁴⁰see book of minutes in AHS.

⁴¹Markalunas, 83.

could afford the time and effort to do so. The women who formed and joined these organizations were primarily from the middle and upper classes, because only those women had the time to participate, and the inclination to foster Victorian ideas of education and morality. In a western mining town such as Aspen, most women had their work cut out for them to simply run a household. Even if they wanted to, they could not afford the leisure of following the Victorian image of womanhood. In fact, the letters complaining about class divisions, and another demanding respect and responsibility for women in their own financial matters, demonstrate that not all women could be or wanted to be the ideal Victorian woman.

The working people of Aspen had little choice about joining social organizations. These men and women concentrated on earning enough money to live. The newspapers overlooked them except in advertisements for beer halls, baths, and in want ads. They arrived in Aspen from points around the globe, living near their fellow countrymen and women, and often speaking in their native tongue. These men and women could not conform to Victorian ideals, as they worked hard both in the home out. The elite helped make Aspen with their money and Victorian ideals; the working people helped make Aspen with their labor.

PART TWO: INVISIBLE ASPEN

The Miners 1879-1900

By far the largest segment of Aspen's population from 1879 to 1893 consisted of miners. Their work took up most of their time, but miners also lived outside of the mines. In the beginning years of Aspen's existence, there were no rooming houses; groups of single men would live and cook together in two to three room houses. They avoided using tents because tents were too cold. These men kept furnishings to a bare minimum, and tried to save as much money as they could. Rent cost about \$2.50 a month, pay ranged from \$1.50 to \$2.00 a day, and they spent about 20¢ a day on food, so they could save a considerable amount.⁴² As Aspen grew, boarding houses offered men room and board, and the miners' daily wage rose to \$3.⁴³ Eventually the population of miners in Aspen changed character, because wage-earning miners replaced prospectors. In 1885 Aspen boasted of 650 miners, in 1891 there were 1,767 miners, and by 1893 the population of wage-earning miners was up to 2,500.⁴⁴ According to Rohrbough, starting in 1883 this new population became distinct from the earlier population of prospectors and miners. Aspen developed into a town with a working class.

⁴²Albert "Bede" Harris, interviewed 14 and 21 August and 1 September, 1964. Notes, AHS.

⁴³Rohrbough, 194.

⁴⁴Rohrbough, 160, 193.

As a working class, these miners tended to live behind the scenes of the visible Aspen, but they were perhaps more important to Aspen than the upper classes who dominated Aspen's public image. Because these people worked and lived less publicly than others, students of Aspen's history might overlook who they were. One aspect of the working class identity that contributed to the identity of Aspen itself was the diversity of ethnicity and race. Not all of the working class was white, many spoke different languages, many kept ethnic traditions going in their families, and relations between and among these different groups were not always simple or smooth.

Ethnic Diversity in Mining Aspen

In terms of skin color, most of Aspen was white. In 1885 the census listed 32 black people, and 12 mulattos. Altogether, they made up 1% of Aspen's population. These people of color generally held service jobs. One of the few mentions of them was in an early newspaper laundry ad: "Mr. Pearce's Africans can change soiled clothes to garments as white as snow."⁴⁵ Also, in the 1889 city directory one woman was listed as a colored laundress. This small population apparently identified with each other as a group, because in 1881 the Aspen Times announced that the "colored people, headed by Brother Jones," had weekly prayer meetings on Deane Street.⁴⁶ This announcement did not run in the paper regularly, but it testifies

⁴⁵Aspen Times, 23 April 1881.

⁴⁶Aspen Times, 28 May, 1881.

to the presence of a small black community in early Aspen, and also to the fact that some of these people were literate.

White Aspenites kept the population of Chinese to zero. The 1881 Aspen Times makes mention twice of the Chinese in Leadville, and of their allegedly undesirable characteristics. The paper described them as "surly, treacherous, and careless, and indifferent workmen."⁴⁷ A month later an article appeared in the Aspen Times from the Buena Vista Herald opposing the Chinese. Because they retained their dress and customs and returned home instead of adopting American ways, white Coloradans saw them as draining the country of its precious metals. Chinese made some Americans angry because they accepted American money for their work, but did not embrace American language and culture. The article supported prohibiting Chinese immigration. Apparently the Aspen Times felt the same way, and the townspeople must have agreed, because they never allowed any Chinese to settle in Aspen, at least during its mining years.⁴⁸ Other groups of people hardly represented in Aspen were Chicanos and Spaniards. The 1885 census listed an Aspen residence for only one person born in Mexico, and one person born in Spain.

The total of foreign-born people living in Aspen during 1885 was 1,014 out of 4,432 total population, or 23% foreign born. Most of these people came from Northern Europe. The largest group of immigrants came from Ireland, making up 4.7% of Aspen's population with 209 people. The next most populous groups were Germans with

⁴⁷Aspen Times, 30 April, 1881.

⁴⁸see Rohrbough, 132-133.

180 people, Canadians with 169 people, 132 English, 60 Scottish, and 56 Swedes.⁴⁹

By the year 1900 the foreign-born population made up 29% of Aspen's population. Its composition changed, though, with more people coming from Italy, Austria, and Sweden, and a smaller percentage of people from Ireland and Scotland.⁵⁰ This change in population reflected the general trends in immigration to America. Primarily Irish and Germans came to America during the mid-1800s, and Southeastern Europeans came during the later 1880s.

This foreign-born population played a large role in the life of Aspen. Not only are they visible in the statistics, but they come to light in the newspaper, and particularly through the remembrances of Aspenites. According to Rohrbough, the Germans were the most visible ethnic group in 1885 Aspen even though the Irish were larger in number, because the Germans formed social clubs together and had a more distinctive language and culture than the Irish.⁵¹ German immigrants also usually had more money and education than Irish immigrants. An ad in the Aspen Times suggests, however, that the Irish population was large enough to deserve special attention from local businesses. Phil Carbary, who sold magazines and papers, advertised the fact that one could purchase "Irish World" at his establishment.⁵²

Bede Harris remembered that most of the miners were foreign-born, and that during the late 1880s and 1890s most of them were

⁴⁹Pitkin County Census, 1885.

⁵⁰Kimmell, 58-59.

⁵¹Rohrbough, 132.

⁵²Aspen Times, 4 June, 1881.

Cornishmen. He also noted that some Swedish migrated to Aspen, for example the Andersons, the Nelson brothers, the Mobecks, the Johnsons, the Swansons, and the Eriksons.⁵³ After 1905, Harris remembered that many Austrians and Italians came to Aspen and settled in the east end of town. He said once in a while a Greek or a Swiss came to settle, and sometimes a Frenchman. This group of immigrants, however, came to Aspen ultimately to farm, and only mined in order to earn money to buy a ranch. The town of Aspen reflected its ethnic diversity through its settlement and segregated communities. The east side of town consisted mainly of immigrants -- Austrians, Italians, English, and Swedes. Both Charles Grover and Elizabeth Oblock Sinclair remember growing up in this Aspen -- Charles on the west side and Elizabeth, whose family came from Slovenia, on the east.⁵⁴

Although most of the immigrants adopted American customs and the English language relatively quickly, many also kept up particular ethnic traditions at home or associated closely with others who had similar backgrounds. According to Bede Harris, although practically all of the immigrants were single men, they rarely married local Aspen women. They sent instead for their girlfriend or wife to join them. The men who shared houses in early Aspen were generally from the same area; for example, six or seven Italians would share a house and live on macaroni and save their

⁵³(Albert Harris, 1964)

⁵⁴(Grover, 1991), and Bob and Elizabeth Oblock Sinclair, interviewed by the author, 9 July, 1991, Aspen, AHS.

money. Italians, Irish, and Scots usually rented houses on Lakeview Street.⁵⁵

Swedes kept some of their traditions as well, for example eating special dishes on Christmas. According to Hildur Hoaglund Anderson, there were lots of young Swedish men and women in early Aspen, and they held dances and parties together. Her mother and father met at one of these functions and married in 1892.⁵⁶ Another important immigrant group in Aspen consisted of Austrians, or more specifically, Slovenians. Elizabeth Oblock Sinclair remembers eating ethnic foods at home, like sauerkraut, goulash, a sweet bread called poticia, and crofi, or doughnuts. Since these immigrant groups kept their ethnic traditions alive, ethnic diversity became a unifying characteristic of Aspen life, while at the same time different traditions and backgrounds kept each group distinct within Aspen society.

The differences among immigrant groups and between immigrants and American-born Aspenites did not always lead to conflicts. Bede Harris noted that foreigners were given equal treatment, as long as they could do the work.⁵⁷ One would hope this was true. He said no one group was especially dominant, because roughly equal numbers of miners came from different countries. They all worked together for the community.⁵⁸ The men of English background, like Canadians and Cornishmen, got along especially

⁵⁵(Albert Harris, 1964)

⁵⁶Hildur Anderson, interviewed by Ramona Markafunas, 18 January 1979, Aspen, tape recording, AHS.

⁵⁷It would be interesting to find out if a miner's pay differed according to his ethnic background.

⁵⁸(Albert Harris, 1964)

well together in the mines, in part because they shared the same language. According to the Trentazes, Italians had a harder time getting work at the mines, so they sometimes referred to themselves as French or Swiss.⁵⁹ People from the Aosta Valley in Italy could do this, because they came from northern Italy and spoke a French dialect.

Although I have found no record of any physical conflict between ethnic groups, their relations with each other were not always smooth. For example, sometimes men of different nationalities would fight if they worked on the same shift in the mines. Working underground in close quarters had a way of bringing out differences and conflicts. This happened especially between Austrians and Italians during World War One. Bede Harris noted that a smart foreman would keep the Italians on one shift and the Austrians on another.⁶⁰ Differences occurred outside of the mines as well. People of different nationalities chose not to mix socially, and as in the rest of America at the time, older immigrants like the Irish and Germans looked down on newer immigrants like the Austrians and Italians.⁶¹ The settlement of Aspen demonstrates the existence of social differences, because the primarily immigrant East End had a separate solidarity and identity from the more affluent and American West End. Children coped with these ethnic differences in their daily lives, as many immigrant children attended the Lincoln School in the West End, and all Aspen children

⁵⁹Arthur and Amelia Trentaz, interviewed by George Madsen and Judy Gertler, 10 July 1991, Aspen, tape recording, AHS.

⁶⁰(Albert Harris, 1964)

⁶¹(Grover, 1991)

went to the same high school. Occasionally Anglo parents discouraged their children from playing with immigrant children, and some students felt left out of school discussions of Protestantism because of their Catholic background.⁶²

Although the large immigrant population of Aspen often fades from the popular view of Aspen, these people contributed significantly to Aspen's life. Their jobs, traditions, family lives, and interactions with each other and the community helped Aspen economically, and contributed to the complexity of Aspen's character. Another group of people who contributed economically to Aspen, and who historians usually overlook, are working women.

Working Women in Aspen 1879-1896

Many women worked outside the home, especially if they needed the money. Businesswomen and working women were often invisible for just that reason -- they were not of the upper class. Women mostly worked in the service sector, where they earned money through jobs that society deemed appropriate for women. They played an important role in western mining towns, generally because there were so few women that the miners valued women's work highly. Women provided services that miners either could not or would rather not provide for themselves.

During the early years of most mining towns, the largest class of working women were prostitutes. Although I did not run across

⁶²(Grover, 1991, and Sinclair, 1991)

much discussion of prostitution in Aspen, it did exist. The city ordinance about public morals and decency attested to their presence, and Rohrbough found that four women identified themselves as prostitutes in the 1885 census. Prostitutes often lied about their occupation to census takers, and they were generally discreet about their work, so historians need to dig into town records to find out about them.⁶³ The Aspen Times wrote about one incident involving a prostitute in 1885: Eva Clark was arrested for pushing a man around and behaving in an unladylike manner.⁶⁴

Paula Petrik's study of women in the mining town of Helena, Montana sheds some light on what prostitution was probably like Aspen. In Helena, prostitutes made up the largest class of working women until 1900. Petrik said prostitutes helped increase the boundaries of womanhood for themselves because of their activities in the public sphere. She describes early prostitutes as woman capitalists who knew business and the law. Because the earlier prostitutes ran their businesses actively, and engaged in lawsuits knowledgeably, they publicized the fact that women were capable of functioning in the public sphere. Petrik says the middle class women of Helena could exercise more freedom in public because the prostitutes paved the way for them.⁶⁵

In Aspen, many women exercised their freedom to work and to become businesswomen, though usually on a small scale. Of course in the early 1880s the population of Aspen consisted almost entirely

⁶³see Paula Petrik, No Step Backward for an in-depth study of prostitution in a mining town. Her methodology could also be applied to a study of prostitution in Aspen.

⁶⁴Aspen Times, 14 May, 1885.

⁶⁵Petrik, 58.

of men, and single men made up the largest group of people in Aspen for quite awhile.⁶⁶ By 1885, however, women made up 27% of the population, or 1,193 compared to 3,239 men.⁶⁷ Of those women, 430 were listed as either being a housewife or keeping house, 16 were dressmakers, 12 were seamstresses, 24 were servants, and one was a governess.⁶⁸ Paula Petrik noted, however, that "keeping house" often meant taking in boarders as well as caring for a family. In Helena during 1870, 20% of the town's women took in boarders, and the percentage rose to 27% in 1880.⁶⁹ Boarding extra people was no easy task, and some women acknowledged that fact by going into it as a business.

The jobs that women could hold and still stay within the bounds of accepted behavior usually related to their work at home and their supposed concern for morals and education. In the 1889 Aspen City Directory, the business section listed quite a few businesswomen. Of the 25 boardinghouses listed women ran 18. Women also ran 23 of the 27 establishments offering furnished rooms. All 17 of the dressmakers were women, half of the four milliners were women, four of the nine stenographers were women, as were two of the three music teachers.⁷⁰ Of all the businesses women were listed as running, none seemed dominated by either single or married women. The 1893 directory listed women as

⁶⁶Single men were the largest group at least through 1885, and probably through 1893. After mining began to decline, the population of Aspen was probably more family oriented.

⁶⁷Pitkin County Census, 1885, AHS.

⁶⁸Rohrbough, 130. - from 1885 census.

⁶⁹Petrik, 60.

⁷⁰Aspen City Directory, 1889, AHS.

running the same types of businesses as in 1889. There were 16 fewer women listed than in 1889, but the directory listed fewer businesses in general, so probably the same proportion of women ran their own businesses. Of course this account neglected all those women working for wages, like waitresses and servants. Mrs. Harper, a black woman whose occupation was listed in the directory but not in the business section, ran a laundry on 213 West Main. Housewives of the lower classes probably also took in laundry, in addition to their normal duties.

The Aspen Times as well as the directory provides evidence of businesswomen in Aspen. In 1881, its first year, the newspaper portrayed businesswomen respectfully and as having business acumen comparable to that of men. Some women, usually of the upper class, achieved positions of power. Mrs. Gillespie, for example, became the superintendent of public schools in December of 1881, and Mrs. Garretson was appointed postmistress of Texas Creek in the same month. These two women held power in Aspen, though it was limited. Women who ran their own businesses were probably heads of their household, because most women ran businesses to earn money rather than for fun or to hold a position of power. The Aspen Times mentioned businesswomen every once in a while, and treated them like intelligent businesspeople. One advertisement in June of 1881 said that Mrs. Adair's on Cooper Avenue offered day board at reasonable rates, and also read: "This lady sets as fine a table as can be found in the city."⁷¹ The next

⁷¹Aspen Times, 4 June 1881.

month, the paper announced that Miss Cook from Denver had reached Aspen, and that "This lady will embark on the millinery business here."⁷² Although complimentary, the editors of the paper discussed women's businesses in terms of typically female characteristics. When the Florentine Restaurant opened in July of 1881 under the management of two "ladies," the editors noted that it provided the finest food in town, it was neat, and they complimented the managers on their "obliging manners." On the other hand, these characteristics are important to anyone running a restaurant, be they male or female. That point underscores the fact that women's businesses were usually an extension of their traditional role -- like cooking, cleaning, or making clothes. Businesswomen needed to manage finances, employees, and advertising, but the public rarely acknowledged these tasks. Nineteenth-century Americans generally expected women to be domestic, whether they stayed in the house or not.

Women who did not run or own their own businesses often had limited opportunities to work in Aspen anyway. Wage-earning women, like businesswomen, had job opportunities limited to traditional female labor. An Irish woman called Ute Mary came to Aspen at the request of James McClure. He wanted her to work at the Clarendon Hotel, but before it was built she helped the miners by sewing, nursing, and washing.⁷³ The men in Aspen appreciated the work that women like Ute Mary did because women were in such

⁷²*Aspen Times*, 2 July 1881.

⁷³Louise Berg, interviewed by George Madsen, 6 October 1964, tape recording T-1, AHS.

short supply. As a result, finding a wife was important to many men in Aspen. McLaughlin brought women to Aspen to wait tables at the Clarendon by the stage load, but they married off so fast that he had to keep sending for more.⁷⁴

Although both married and single women ran their own businesses, women who worked in the service sector were mostly single, albeit temporarily. The Aspen Times advertised for "girls wanted" on numerous occasions through 1896. Most ads were for positions doing general housework. One ad in 1896 read: "wanted - Girl; Must be good cook; good wages. Corner First and Francis."⁷⁵ Other ads recorded the need for women to sing and play piano at a beer hall, to work as a cashier at an office, to work for a laundress, to become an apprentice dressmaker, to cook, and to take over a miners' boardinghouse. Other ads show that single immigrant women coming into Aspen actively sought work. In July of 1889 two Swedish women were looking for work at a hotel or restaurant, and in 1891 a German woman advertised her services for housework. Most of the want ads were for jobs a woman could fill, which shows that Aspen did have an active population of working women and adequate opportunities for them. Apparently men found jobs through other avenues than the newspaper.

Some businesswomen, too, were vocal in the Aspen Times. These women entered the public sphere in order to further their business interests. That is, they publicized the financial aspects of

⁷⁴Henry Staats, "In the Early Days," in Frank Wentworth, Aspen on the Roaring Fork, 3rd ed. reprinted by AHS, Silverton, CO: Sundance Publishing Ltd., 1976, p. 50.

⁷⁵Aspen Times, 2 July 1896.

their business instead of subordinating it to a domestic role. One notice in 1889 read: "All persons indebted to Mrs. Mary Newton are notified to pay her promptly, as she has sold her business."⁷⁶ She was definitely in charge of her own finances. Another ad described a two-for-one sale at Mrs. K. Rhines' fashionable millinery, and two years later Madame Schohn used the paper to ask her customers to *hold off on their hat orders until she returned from the East with her new goods*. Madame Schohn not only went on her own business trips for her millinery shop, she also ran a hairdressing and manicure parlor, and a dressmaking department. Mrs. John Atkinson ran her business on a much smaller scale, as she sold flowers to the public.

One curious note in the paper pointed to women getting involved in the business of mining. It read: "Ladies are requested to call and get valuable information in regard to mining stock at Conner and Gentry's Mining and Stock Exchange."⁷⁷ This could mean that women invested in Aspen mining, or that Conner and Gentry thought they wanted to, or that Conner and Gentry thought that women should know what their husbands were doing. At any rate, the idea that women should be involved in mining at all points to expanded opportunities for women in Aspen.

Though a minority, some women in Aspen were quite active in the business world, though they remained in typically female businesses. Working women in Aspen advertised their work and their businesses, and they provided valuable and popular services. In these respects they were hardly invisible, though their economic

⁷⁶Aspen Times, 27 July 1889.

⁷⁷Aspen Times, 15 May 1891.

power was restricted by the idea that women should always be domestic. They are invisible, rather, in most professional and local histories of mining towns. Besides fulfilling business and wage-earning roles outside the family, women within the family unit performed many valuable functions in Aspen. Men valued women as wives for their emotional as well as their economic support, and the family had significance both as a social and an economic unit in Aspen.

Families and Marriage

Lillian Schlissel described the frontier family as a bulwark against disorder, and as "an autonomous frontier institution providing a range of social services."⁷⁸ The family was a secure relationship amidst the bustling activity of a western mining town. The family as unit and the women within that unit allowed the head of the household at least, a degree of independence and support that single men lacked.

The changing sex ratio of Aspen demonstrates the increasing presence of women and families. In its earliest years, Aspen residents consisted overwhelmingly of single men who were prospecting. In 1885 single men over the age of 18 made up 41% of the population. Miners remained the largest group of workers in Aspen until 1893, but as supporting businesses and the community as a whole grew, more women joined the community and more men

⁷⁸Lillian Schlissel, "Family on the Western Frontier," in Lillian Schlissel, Vicki Ruiz, and Janice Monk, eds., Western Women: Their Land, Their Lives, Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1988, p. 88.

married. Men who decided to settle in Aspen also often sent for their wives or went back East to get a wife. According to Thomas Kimmell, the female population of Aspen increased steadily from 1885 to 1910. In 1885 women made up 26% of Aspen's population, in 1890 they made up 36%, they were 42% of the population in 1900, and 45% in 1910.⁷⁹

People living in early 1880s Aspen seemed to value marriage and the corresponding change in daily life, and the population of single women probably remained low. In an 1881 May issue of the Aspen Times one notice read: "One of Aspen's young men is about to leave this miserable single life and take unto himself a helpmeet. The worst feature of this is that it will break the set, as Aspen has only four marriageable ladies."⁸⁰ Men thus valued women for their role as a helpmeet, and Lillian Schlissel would agree that women and the family provided valuable services to mining men. Violet Lavey said that married miners who stayed at the mines around Aspen went to town to see their wives on Saturday morning and came back on Sunday. She said that was how they got their clothes washed.⁸¹

People in Aspen tended to value marriage, but often the population of western mining towns moved around a lot. Consequently, 7% of Aspen's population in 1885 listed themselves as married, but did not list a spouse as present. Of this 7%, 279 were men and 32 were women.⁸² Many men left their spouses at home when they came to mine in Aspen, and then sent for them or went to

⁷⁹Kimmell. 43, from the Pitkin County and United States Census.

⁸⁰Aspen Times, 28 May 1881.

⁸¹(Garrish, Lavey, and Lavey)

⁸²Pitkin County Census, 1885, AHS.

get them later. Louise Berg described a traditional celebration called a "shivaree," when the Aspen community celebrated the return of the couple to town. It consisted of lots of people making lots of noise around the couple's house, until the couple came out and treated the crowd to oranges and nuts and cigars for the men.⁸³ The Aspen Times kept up with the changing population, noting when men returned to town with their wives and children. About ten men brought families to town in the summer of 1881.⁸⁴

The presence of 32 married women with no spouses in Aspen during 1885 takes a little more explaining. Paula Petrik pointed out the frequency of husbands abandoning wives in mining towns. Women sometimes waited long periods of time before filing for divorce. These 32 Aspen women were most likely left by their husbands.⁸⁵ On the whole, though, families were part of Aspen during its mining years and after, and they were important to the community as consumers.

Notices in the paper show that mule trains brought scarce goods into Aspen for merchants to sell to families. Oil cloths for tables and floors, calicos and muslins, towels, table cloths, doormats, and carpets were all available for sale during 1881.⁸⁶ The newspaper also announced the arrival of ladies', misses', and childrens' shoes at Webbers in 1881, demonstrating the presence and economic significance of families in early Aspen.

⁸³(Berg, 1964)

⁸⁴see Aspen Times 25 June and 16 July 1881.

⁸⁵It would be interesting to research these women's stories in more depth - the Pitkin County divorce records might shed some light on their situations.

⁸⁶see Aspen Times 4 June 1881.

In the 1885 Pitkin County Census, 24% of Aspen's population consisted of married people. Of those 528 couples, 343 of them lived with their children. An accurate count of families is impossible, because children might have grown and moved away, or girls might have married and changed their names. So while 185 couples had no children listed, they may well have had children. In addition, my count of families does not include the widows, divorced people, or married people with no spouses who raised children.

Of these 1885 Aspen families, parents ranged in age from their 20s to their 70s. Some Aspen residents did indeed bring their families with them, and may have done so quite early in Aspen's history. Older parents may also have followed their children to Aspen. The census shows that these families who settled in Aspen had settled in many other places previously. Their childrens' birthplaces often spanned the United States and even parts of Europe. Smaller families were more common than large ones in Aspen, as 185 couples listed no children, 156 listed one child, 94 listed two, 43 listed three, 25 couples had four children, 15 couples had five, and seven couples listed having six children. Only one family listed having seven children, one had eight, and one family had eleven children. The prevalence of small families might have been a result of infant mortality.

The 1885 census, unlike the federal census of 1900, does not list how many children these couples had that did not survive. One mining couple who lived in Aspen during the early 1900s, the Oblocks, had ten children, but only five survived to adulthood. The

other five died of pneumonia when they were very young.⁸⁷ Two families in the 1885 census listed their youngest child as "baby," perhaps waiting to name it until it survived at least a year.

The number of families in Aspen probably grew as the community grew. In Helena, Montana, by 1870 one third of the population lived in family households, and by 1880 it had grown to 62% of the population.⁸⁸

Although families played a large role in determining the quality of Aspen life, and they were a large portion of the population in 1885, most people were not married. 41% of Aspen's population in 1885 consisted of single males over 18 years old. Only 3% of the population were single women over 18. Besides children and couples, the rest of the population was either widowed, divorced, or married without a spouse. Since prospecting and mining were the main attractions of Aspen, it makes sense that males dominated the single population. It also makes sense that 279 men listed themselves as married people with no spouses, while only 32 women described themselves that way. There were actually six more divorced women in Aspen than men, and while there were 79 widowed men, there were 80 widowed women. Possibly men chose to remarry after divorce more than women did, or perhaps, as some historians have argued, the freedom of the West encouraged women to divorce more readily. The high number of widowed women in Aspen was probably a result of husbands dying in mining accidents.

⁸⁷(Sinclair, 1991)

⁸⁸Petrik, 5, 10.

Children made up another aspect of Aspen's family population. Generally, children stayed with their mothers if couples split up or the fathers died, though they did not always stay with fathers if the mothers died. In this instance, fathers probably sent their children to relatives for care. Of those people married without spouses, 16% of the women cared for their children, while only 3% of the men did. Of those widowed, 48% of the women had children with them, compared to 19% of the men. (One should note that sometimes older children cared for their widowed parents.) Finally, 35% of Aspen's divorced women cared for children, while none of the divorced men did.⁸⁹ Young people under the age of 18 years made up 20% of Aspen's population in 1885. Most of them came to Aspen with their families, siblings, or in some instances, with friends. Single women also came to Aspen with siblings or friends. Thirty people between the ages of 15 and 18, however, seemed to have no family. They were a small portion of the population (3%), but it would be interesting to find out what brought them to Aspen and what they did there.

Population and family statistics can show, in a kind of faceless way, who was in Aspen and what Aspen families looked like, but they cannot describe daily life experiences. To understand that, one must turn to the stories of people who lived in western mining towns.

Daily Home Life

⁸⁹Pitkin County Census, 1885.

The daily home life of men, women, and children in Aspen consisted of work and play, regardless of class. Women and children had responsibilities around the house that contributed to the family economy while the husband was at work. Middle- and working class families especially had to work to keep their heads above water in a mining town. Children also had to go to school, and everyone took a little time to have fun.

Keeping House

For middle and working class women in a mining town, keeping house meant a lot more work than it did for most eastern working class women. Tasks like washing clothes took on a new meaning. Rachel Haskell wrote a diary of her experiences in Nevada, and one of her entries read:

*Swept and dusted house prior to beginning the great domestic dread of the household; washing. Made bread and washed, back ached. Thought I should not attempt to do this another week . . .*⁹⁰

Another woman in a Nevada mining town described washing laundry as more than she bargained for. She vowed not to do it again, and instead sent her laundry 200 miles to Reno on the train. It took two days to get there and three weeks before it came back.⁹¹ She also

⁹⁰Rachel Haskell, "A Literate Woman in the Mines: The Diary of Rachel Haskell," in Christiane Fischer, *Let Them Speak For Themselves*, p. 65.

⁹¹Mrs. Hugh Brown, *A Lady in Boomtown: Miners and Manners on the Nevada Frontier*, Palo Alto CA: American West Publishing Co., 1968, p. 53.

hated washing windows because she saw it as a source of humiliation, but came to understand that all women washed windows. She said: "Gradually I learned it was not the doing of menial labor that was declass , but the not doing it."⁹² These middle class Nevada women articulated lessons that Aspen middle class women also learned: that mining towns lacked the household facilities of most eastern towns, and that the accepted domestic chores of women in mining towns included tasks they would have avoided in the East.

Keeping house in Aspen meant working hard. Bede Harris talked about Jenny Adair, after whom Widow's Gulch was named. She was widowed in 1888, and ran a sawmill in that gulch. He said:

She would cook a whole quarter of beef at a time in her large cookstove, cutting off at each meal the done parts for the sawmill workers, leaving it in the oven to cook some more, whilst the bulldogs got the remnants. She had a couple of cows at the sawmill, and was known for watering down the milk she served her workers.⁹³

Jenny Adair had her work cut out for her, providing for all her workers as well as herself. Apparently she did so with some business acumen, or stinginess, depending on one's perspective.

Mrs. Ivana Rudolf Oblock also had her work cut out for her. She married a miner in 1906, and bore ten children, of whom only five survived childhood. She took care of her family in Aspen's East End, and provided them with most of their food herself. She grew a huge

⁹²Brown, 54.

⁹³(Albert Harris, 1964)

garden which provided all the vegetables for the family, she raised over a hundred sacks of potatoes each year, she grew enough cabbage to make two barrels of sauerkraut and still sell some, she got milk and cream from her milk cows and made butter, and she also raised pigs and chickens. She accomplished all this in addition to her everyday cooking, cleaning, and caring for children.⁹⁴

Yet another task most women in Aspen undertook annually was canning. Even women without families canned for themselves, and noted the work this process entailed. Louise Berg noted in her 1915 diary that she spent her half day vacation in September canning peaches and plums, a process which she and her friend had begun days earlier. She wrote: "Agnes and I are putting up fruit today. It is hot work but we will enjoy our peaches this winter."⁹⁵

Besides taking in boarders, middle- and working class women in mining towns sometimes extended their jobs at home by working at (but never in) the mines. Violet Lavey, for example, worked at the Little Annie mine for about three winters in the early 1900s. She cooked for about twenty miners, and got all her supplies by wagon from Alma. Her work began each day at about 5 am, when she got up to cook on her wood stove and make a big breakfast for the miners of ham, bacon, eggs, pancakes, etc.. For lunch she usually made beef and potatoes, pie, doughnuts, and gallons of coffee. After all that, she cooked dinner. A boy hauled in the water she needed, and cut firewood for her stove. She said women got paid pretty well, and the miners were very nice to her. Violet admitted that the work she did

⁹⁴(Sinclair, 1991)

⁹⁵Louise Berg, 18 September 1915, diary, 1914-1918, AHS.

at the Little Annie was difficult -- she was young and used to cooking, but it was hard to cook for so many.⁹⁶

Given the wide range and difficulty of these jobs women accomplished at home and at the mines, especially without modern conveniences like washing machines and refrigeration, one can imagine their fatigue. Children lifted some of the burden by doing daily tasks at home.

Children's Jobs

Children living in Aspen not only contributed to the household economy, sometimes they contributed to their parents' work outside the home. In a mining town atmosphere, children's contributions to the household and beyond were often necessary for the family's survival.

Usually children's chores at home consisted of menial tasks around the house. Charles Grover said that he, like kids today, avoided his chores as much as possible. He was responsible for bringing coal and wood in to heat the house, and for shoveling snow off the walk if it was not too deep. He did these same chores for his grandmother, who lived down the street. Since his grandmother had three cows, he also went there to get bread and milk for his family. He remembered seeing coyotes running through town on their way to Red Mountain during one of these trips at night.⁹⁷

⁹⁶(Garrish, Lavey, and Lavey)

⁹⁷(Grover, 1991)

Charles Grover grew up in Aspen's West End, where the tradespeople and higher class people lived, but children in the East End dealt with similar responsibilities. Elizabeth Oblock and her siblings carried wood for their family, and worked in their mother's garden. When they were older they picked up odd jobs to earn money for a bike or skis. During World War II Elizabeth collected scrap metal from old mining tunnels and dumps. She earned almost enough money for a bike this way.⁹⁸

Other children helped out at their parents' place of work as well as at home. Frank Garrish worked at a bakery when he was nine years old.⁹⁹ When he was old enough, Frank helped his father who mined in the Smuggler. Frank spent weekends during the school year shoveling ore down a chute into railroad cars bound for Leadville.¹⁰⁰ Louise Berg helped her parents by working at home and by working at their store while she was a student. Her diary from 1901 noted that she worked in the store on a regular basis, she grew sweet peas, and she cleaned the house frequently. Louise Berg worked so hard for her family partly because both of her parents were sick, and so they could not work full-time. She had time to play with her friends and go for walks in addition to studying for school and attending Sunday School.

Many children and young people also worked outside the home to earn money, as Elizabeth Oblock did. In the winter Charles Grover earned money by cutting Christmas trees on Aspen Mountain and

⁹⁸(Sinclair, 1991)

⁹⁹It was not clear to me whether or not this bakery was a family business.

¹⁰⁰(Garrish, Lavey, and Lavey)

selling them in town. He earned 25¢ for a small tree, and 50¢ for a larger one. In the summer, most Aspen kids who wanted a job went to the ranches and farms along the valley. Red Rowland even walked or hopped the train to Cozy Point to work on the ranches during the school year. He earned \$1 plus room and board. During the summer he worked on a 640 acre homestead.¹⁰¹ After he was 17 years old, Red worked grading the road over Independence Pass. Charles Grover also got a job on a farm during the summer; he worked for Mrs. White who ran a dairy. His job was to take the cows out to graze each morning, and bring them home at night. He earned 25¢ a day. Besides helping at home and earning extra money, children and teenagers in Aspen had one more obligation, namely school.

School

The first public school in Aspen began in September of 1881¹⁰². It met five days a week, from 9am to noon, and 1:15pm until 4pm, with two 15 minute recesses. Children from ages 6-21 could attend, although attendance was not required. Each child had to bring their own books, and be clean and healthy. A tardy student needed to bring an excuse.¹⁰³

In the fall of 1882 school met in the new two-story four-room house for the first time. Student attendance rose from 24 in the fall

¹⁰¹Red and Peggy Rowland, n.d., tape recording, AHS.

¹⁰²See the AHS archives for a more complete history of schools in Aspen. I will concentrate on children's experiences, rather than on a history of Aspen schools.

¹⁰³Bartlett, 60.

of 1881 to 69 in 1882, and by 1884 there were 175 students in Aspen.¹⁰⁴ In 1906 Julia Berg noted that the high school had 125 pupils, and that the freshman class of 63 was the largest one ever.¹⁰⁵ This increase in students reflects the family orientation of the population during the quiet years, and the fact that children from the surrounding ranches attended high school in Aspen. In the mid-1930s, Milton Connor noted that there were from 135-150 kids in school.¹⁰⁶ This drop off reflects the changing population in Aspen as mining and the economy in general declined.

At its peak, Aspen had a number of schools. In the East End were the Lincoln and Garfield Schools, and the Washington School was in the West End. There was also a Catholic school at St. Mary's, and the high school. Not all were always open, though. Elizabeth Oblock Sinclair remembered that all the children from Aspen's East End had to walk back and forth to the Washington School, because it was the only one open.

Students in Aspen worried about their classwork the same way most students do. Debating in front of peers, for instance, will always be traumatic. Julia Berg wrote in her 1906 diary: "Was on debate at High School before the assembly room. Subject, Resolved that Marius did more for Rome than Sulla." (Julia argued the affirmative and won six to four.) Like some students today, Julia had trouble with math. In 1903 she wrote in her diary: "Went to school and took arithmetic examination. Worked from nine until one

¹⁰⁴Aspen Times , 22 November 1884.

¹⁰⁵Julia Berg, diary, 1906, AHS.

¹⁰⁶(Milton Connor)

o'clock. Very hard. Do not think I passed it." Julia ended up in summer school taking arithmetic and algebra.

Children and teenagers going to school in Aspen dealt with many of the same issues that young people deal with today, like performing in front of their peers, and getting good grades. Most young people made time for fun outside of chores and school, and Aspen provided its residents with different options for entertainment.

Entertainment, 1881-1950

Aspen was growing fast during its mining boom years, and people in the town developed ways for miners and the rest of the population to entertain themselves. The upper class socialized mostly with themselves at parties and meetings. Middle- and lower class Aspenites made use of other entertainment.

One option for the middle- and lower classes advertised in the 1881 Aspen Times was Dick Taggart's skating rink. According to the paper, this was popular and crowded night after night. Every once in a while there was a church social; one in December of 1881 put on a program of all female performers. The fire companies also put on dances that seemed to have a wide attendance. On holidays people often entertained one another. In 1881 all business halted for the day and the paper listed who entertained whom. Another option on the holidays was to go out for dinner. Mrs. Taney cooked a Christmas dinner at the Clarendon in 1881 that would fill up any group of miners. The menu included oyster soup, venison and elk, turkey with

cranberry sauce, beef, pork with apple sauce, elk roast, boiled ham, fricasseed chicken, chicken pie, giblets, kidney stew, potatoes, mashed turnips, corn tomatoes, green apple pie, coconut pie, cranberry pie, cornstarch pudding with cream sauce, plum pudding with brandy sauce, grapes, pears, apples, candy, and coffee or tea.¹⁰⁷

Another option for entertainment in Aspen was to do something outside, either alone or with friends or family. An activity that remains popular in Aspen is fishing. The Aspen Times put an ad in its pages about fly-hooks for trout fishermen as early as 1881.¹⁰⁸ In 1887 the same paper wrote that "those popular \$1.50 fish poles are in stock." Milton Connor remembered fishing in the 1920s, and Elizabeth and Matt Oblock caught so many fish on a regular basis that they were overjoyed to find a Texan who would take the fish off their hands.¹⁰⁹ Fishing conditions changed over time, but even today the Roaring Fork is a popular river.

When Julia Berg was fourteen years old her primary form of entertainment in the spring and summer was walking around Aspen looking for wild flowers. She walked on Aspen Mountain, on Red Butte, to the old cemetery, and up Hunter Creek and the Roaring Fork. She also liked to go for bicycle rides, to fish, and to play Parcheesi with her friends.¹¹⁰

Middle- and working class people gathered in town sometimes. The Crystal City Club opened on the third floor of the Elks building

¹⁰⁷Aspen Times, 31 December 1881.

¹⁰⁸Aspen Times, 13 August 1881.

¹⁰⁹(Milton Connor, and Sinclair, 1991)

¹¹⁰Julia Berg, diary, 1903.

for "all the young fellas in town," and it boasted of a pool table and a reading room.¹¹¹ The Isis Theater opened in 1915, and the Women's Civic Group opened what would be a very popular place with songs and vaudeville skits.¹¹² Another option for fun was to get out of town. Bede Harris said that train trips to Glenwood were common, but that was about as far away as anyone went from home. Or one could go up to Woods Lake to fish, but that meant taking the train, and arranging for a team to meet you and take you the three and a half hours up to the lake.¹¹³ Unlike the middle- and working classes, the elite of Aspen did travel -- sometimes all over the world.

Charles Grover described Aspen in the 1920s as a quiet town with little activity going on except dances. In the summer when he was young he made bark boats and sailed them in dammed up ditches with friends from his neighborhood.¹¹⁴ Frank Garrish used to get up early when the circus came to town on the Midland and watch them unload. He would stay with the circus all day -- he didn't even eat - - and help them water the elephants.¹¹⁵

In the 1920s and 1930s people also went fishing, hiking, and sledding. They had people over for dinner or for a small party, and they went to the Saturday night dances in town. Sometimes women who cooked at the mines would get together and have a party.

The two most popular activities in Aspen, however, seemed to be celebrating the Fourth of July and playing baseball. The Aspen

¹¹¹Bede Harris, n.d., tape recording, C-22, AHS.

¹¹²Markalunas, 107.

¹¹³Bede Harris, n.d., tape recording, C-25, AHS.

¹¹⁴(Grover, 1991)

¹¹⁵(Garrish and Lavey, 1973)

Times published an editorial in 1881 about how the town ought to celebrate the Fourth of July that year. It seems people had been too busy mining and prospecting to do so before. Aspen's celebration began the night before with whiskey and noise (which the paper did not suggest), but the main event on the fourth was a horse race. Mr. Taney put up his gray pony against Mr. Sam Creston's bay. It was a good race, but short -- only 300 yards -- so Creston's horse won. After that a dozen men competed in a 100 yard foot race, which preceded an impromptu race between Mr. and Mrs. Tudor. This was the biggest gathering yet in Aspen, and all had a good time.¹¹⁶

By 1896 the Fourth of July celebration had grown and the Aspen Times featured a full page ad for it. It began with a daybreak salute, followed by a parade with prizes for the best costumes. The afternoon was full of contests: a rock drilling contest, bicycle races, running, wheelbarrow, and sack races, and the highlight of the day, a baseball game between Aspen and Denver. The evening ended with fireworks, of course.

Baseball proved to be Aspen's most serious fun. In 1881, the paper noted that Tibbet's House Baseball Club was practicing every night, and that it would soon challenge the Ute City boys.¹¹⁷ Games went on all summer, and the paper often published the team rosters as well as the highlights of the game. Teams appeared from within Aspen, from surrounding towns like Ashcroft and Independence, as well as from places farther away like Glenwood, Leadville, and Denver. The sport of baseball remained popular in Aspen for quite a

¹¹⁶Aspen Times, 2 July and 9 July 1881.

¹¹⁷Aspen Times, 4 June 1881.

few years; in 1889 the paper still published team rosters, but adult baseball declined with the departure of people after 1893. Bede Harris remembered that children used to play where the music tent is now, on teams like the Roundhouse Gang, the West End Kids, the East End, or the Hill team, which was from the south side of town.¹¹⁸ Activities like baseball games and Fourth of July celebrations pulled Aspen together as a community, and leisure activities in general allowed residents and their families to relax after their daily work.

Conclusion

From its settlement by white people in 1879 through the quiet years, Aspen was more than a town of men working in the mines. Rather, Aspen residents were diverse in terms of class, gender, ethnicity and race, marital status, and in the economic roles they fulfilled. The visible upper class residents dominated the Aspen Times' social columns with their parties, they spent their money in Aspen, and they fostered Victorian values like education and morality within the community. Middle- and working class people acted as tradespeople, miners, and laborers, and enjoyed themselves both in town and outside when they were not working. The middle- and working class residents of Aspen were mostly but not totally white, they came from a wide variety of countries, and they retained their traditions and ethnic diversity. These working people also accomplished a diverse set of jobs. In addition to the men

¹¹⁸(Bede Harris, C-22)

prospecting, mining, and providing services in Aspen, women were working at home, feeding their families, sometimes earning wages, and even running their own businesses. Women and men in Aspen were either single, married, widowed, or married but separated from their spouse, and they sometimes cared for children and sometimes not. When working people did have children, the children contributed to the family economy. The people of Aspen had different amounts of money, they came from different places, and they were of different colors. They had different kinds of families, they filled different economic roles, and they had fun in different ways from one another. Aspen was born a mining camp, but it was really much more.

FARMING AND RANCHING IN THE ROARING FORK VALLEY, 1879-1960

Introduction

Despite Aspen's reputation first as a mining town and now as a playground for the rich and famous, farming and ranching influenced the character of the town and the Roaring Fork Valley since the arrival of white settlers. As soon as the first prospectors reached Aspen in 1879 they created a demand for local food production. Although the farmers and ranchers lived down the valley from Aspen, they often first settled in Aspen, they sold their produce in Aspen, they bought supplies in Aspen, and their children attended high school in Aspen. Accordingly, the farmers and ranchers contributed to Aspen's economy.

Farmers and ranchers also influenced Aspen's society, but to a lesser degree. In fact, the farmers and ranchers of the Roaring Fork Valley led rather isolated lives when compared to those of Aspenites. Although farming and mining were both extractive industries, farming and ranching required a wider range of labor than mining: from cutting hay to repairing machinery, and from irrigating fields to caring for calves. Farmers and ranchers led very different daily lives than did the people in Aspen. Daily life revolved around the ranch, because the ranch was both a workplace and a home. Consequently, the household economy was inextricably entwined with the family economy, and family members contributed more directly to the family economy than they would in a mining town.

Women and men usually performed different duties on a ranch or farm, but these gender roles were more flexible than those of Aspen families.

The people who settled in the Roaring Fork Valley were both farmers and ranchers. Typically, they raised cattle, potatoes, and hay. Some people began farming until they could buy livestock, and some ranchers raised sheep rather than cattle. Roaring Fork Valley ranchers were like farmers because most of their land went towards raising crops. They fed their cattle hay in the winter, and grazed them in the mountains on forest service land in the summer. These ranchers were not open-range ranchers; they were more like farmers who raised cattle. I will use the terms "farmer" and "rancher" interchangeably, since the same person could be characterized as a farmer when harvesting potatoes, and as a rancher when herding cattle.

In addition to the process of farming and ranching, this section will explore the diversity of people who ranched, the relationship between family members within the household economy, the flexibility of gender roles on the ranch, and the relationship between the ranchers and the townspeople of Aspen. I have divided this section into three parts: who farmed and ranched in the valley; what their ranches looked like; and how farming and ranching families lived.

Part One: Who Ranched in the Roaring Fork Valley

The people who ranched in the Roaring Fork valley were a diverse lot. They came from different backgrounds, different countries, and they were not all men.¹

Often ranchers came to the valley for reasons other than ranching. Many started off as miners, and ended up ranching after they tired of the miner's life. Most welcomed the change. Hugh Chisolm's father, for instance, came to Colorado in the 1890s and mined in Cripple Creek, Leadville, and Aspen. Then he journeyed to the Klondike and stayed for two years, returning with enough money to buy a ranch in Snowmass. He lived on that ranch for 50 years.² Other miners turned to ranching after the Panic of 1893 made mining less profitable. Hildur Anderson's uncle John bought a ranch on Brush Creek after 1893. Hildur's father had work in the mines until 1910, and then he rented John's ranch and eventually bought it. By this time John had moved with his wife to farm in Kansas. For some miners, then, ranching was a way to earn a livelihood and still stay in the Aspen area after the Panic of 1893 and the demonetization of silver.

Other ranchers came to the valley with the desire to ranch, but without the necessary funds. As a result, some ranchers held other jobs first, in order to make enough money to begin ranching. Severin

¹For a more specific account and description of who ranched in the valley, see the article on family histories in the AHS archives.

²Hugh Chisolm, interview, n.d., tape recording C-12, AHS.

Trentaz began by mining as did Carl Hoaglund. Jeremie Vagneur hired himself out in order to earn money, and Jens Christiansen worked on Jack Brenton's ranch until he could buy his own. Jens worked for Jack for six years earning \$1 a day, and finally bought the Brenton ranch in 1925.³ Being their own boss and living on a ranch was appealing to these men.

Like the population of miners in Aspen, the valley ranchers represented a wide range of nationalities. The ethnicity of these ranchers comes to light through family customs and languages. Occasionally ethnic differences caused some tension through the presence of language barriers and national rivalry.

Immigrants dropped some of their ethnic customs after leaving their native country. Since many immigrants came to Leadville before they arrived in Aspen, most had shed some of their traditions before they got to Aspen. Usually some traditions remained in immigrant families, though. Art Trentaz's parents were from Italy, and Art remembered that the Italians and Yugoslavians would get 500-600lbs of grapes and make their own Zinfandel and Muscatel. The Trentaz family made root beer, and they made wine out of dandelions, raisins, and oranges.⁴

Hildur Anderson noted that Swedes came to the Hoaglund ranch for parties in the summer, and sometimes in the winter for coffee and cake on their way to the top of the divide and the home of Ole and Britte Anderson. Hildur's mother would spend six weeks

³Mary Eshbaugh Hayes, "History Handed Down - Jens Christiansen Shares His Life With Another Generation," Aspen Times, 21 May 1988.

⁴(Trentaz, 1991)

preparing for one of these summer parties, cooking 40 different dishes, plus breads and cakes and cookies. Her mother also kept up the Swedish custom of bringing coffee and goodies to the men in the fields every afternoon - giving her occasion to run into a coyote one frightening day. Skis and snowshoes also accompanied Swedes to Aspen, and Hildur remembered trying to ski with Ole and Greta Anderson one day in 1920.⁵

The ethnic backgrounds of Aspen area ranchers served as a means of unifying groups of people from the same country, yet people came from so many different places that their backgrounds also hindered their interaction with the community as a whole. Some ranch wives, for example, might have felt uncomfortable socializing with other women who were coping with similar chores and difficulties, because they spoke a different language. Unless neighbors were of the same background, this would serve to make the isolation of ranch life all the greater.⁶

Some immigrants learned to speak English upon their arrival to America; others used only their native language; and still others used English when necessary and spoke their own language at home. Art Trentaz's parents learned to speak English, but he learned the French dialect that his parents spoke in northern Italy and he can still speak it today. In fact, Art could speak that and nothing else when he began the first grade. Neither could Auzel Gerbaz. He too, spoke the French dialect of the Aosta Valley in Italy, but not a word

⁵Hildur Anderson, interviewed by Ramona Markalunas, 18 January 1979, tape recording, AHS.

⁶It would be interesting to find out exactly where Roaring Fork Valley ranchers came from, and how many emigrated to the U.S. from which countries.

of English. School proved to be a difficult experience for both of them, especially at first. Agnes Jurich McLaren's family spoke English at home, but her Yugoslavian father had been in America for fifteen years before he married, and her Italian mother had been here for five years.

Many of the ranchers in the valley from Aspen to Glenwood were from the Aosta Valley in Italy; like the Vagneurs, the Gerbazes, and the Trentazes. The Roaring Fork Valley was geographically like the Aosta Valley, so these Italians could use their traditional farming techniques, and they chose to settle. They wrote home and encouraged others to come to the Roaring Fork Valley, too. People from other countries also chose to settle in the valley. Jens Christiansen and his Aunt Kate Lindvig came from Denmark, Sam Stapleton's father was from Ireland, Elizabeth Oblock Sinclair's parents were from Slovenia (later part of Yugoslavia), and the Marolts were also from Slovenia. Others came from different parts of America. The ranching community then, was at least as diverse as Aspen was.

Diversity often hindered the development of a community feeling, but any ethnic rivalries within the ranching community were neither documented nor concrete. A few ranching people, usually second or third generation immigrants, noted that they were not conscious of their ethnic background and did not limit their social lives accordingly. They did, however, see ethnic divisions in Aspen itself, manifested primarily in clusters of people living near one another, and in the East End/West End dichotomy. Other ranching people noted that the Italians, the Yugoslavians, and the English did

not always get along as well as they could have. Jens Christiansen pointed out that "There were Italian farmers down valley - they would buy Aspen houses and tear them down for lumber. They used them for sheds and barns on their ranches."⁷ He mentioned Italian farmers as a group which shows they had some group identity, even if he saw them as a group tearing down houses they should have left standing.

Ethnic differences also appeared in church. Aspen had only one Catholic Church, which both Italians and Yugoslavians used. In Leadville, this situation led the Italians to build another church and to leave the old one to the Yugoslavians.⁸ That never happened in Aspen, but similar feelings were probably floating around the rafters.

People of different ethnicities farmed and ranched in the Roaring Fork Valley, and so did people of different genders. The Homestead Act of 1862 allowed women to apply for land just as men could, provided they were at least twenty-one years old, and either single, divorced, widowed, or head of a household. Katherine Harris found that in Northeastern Colorado, 10-12% of homestead claimants were women, and that percentage rose to 18% after 1900. Their success rate was almost equal to that of men, about 50%.⁹ According to another author, the percentage of women homesteaders throughout the West was probably about 10%.¹⁰ Like single men,

⁷"History Handed Down."

⁸(Trentaz, 1991)

⁹Katherine Harris, "Women and Families on Northeastern Colorado Homesteads, 1873-1920," (Ph.D. diss., University of Colorado, 1983), iv.

¹⁰Sherry L. Smith, "Single Women Homesteaders: The Perplexing Case of Elinore Pruitt Stewart," The Western Historical Quarterly, 22 (May 1991): 164. To find out the

single women rarely homesteaded alone. Rather, they worked with siblings, cousins, or friends.

Elinore Pruitt Stewart had quite a rosy view of homesteading that women near Aspen might have shared. She was a laundress in Denver before she made her claim (which adjoined that of her future husband, making her less independent than she seems) in Wyoming. She wrote:

. . . any woman who can stand her own company, can see the beauty of the sunset, loves growing things, and is willing to put in as much time at careful labor as she does over the washtub, will certainly succeed; will have independence, plenty to eat all the time, and a home of her own in the end.¹¹

Mrs. Stewart's views on homesteading were probably a little more optimistic than what most women experienced, partly because she published her letters for a public audience, and partly because she married her neighbor one week after making her claim. She was not truly a single woman homesteader. She does show, however, that a woman could and did prove up on a claim and see it as a positive experience.

The Roaring Fork Valley boasted at least one woman rancher: Kate Lindvig, or the Cattle Queen. She was born in 1865, in Jutland, Denmark, to a farming family with nine children. She came to

percentage of women homesteaders in Pitkin County, one should check with the census office, or look at the tract books in the General Land Office.

¹¹Elinore Pruitt Stewart, Letters of a Woman Homesteader (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1914), 215.

America when she was twenty-five years old, using her college money to follow her sweetheart to Nebraska. For some reason she chose to go to Colorado on her own, and arrived in Aspen in 1891. Like most male ranchers, Kate began working in Aspen at something else. She worked as a cook to save money, and then opened a boardinghouse on East Hopkins, where she made up to 400 bag lunches a day for the miners. In 1893 she received a homestead in the upper Snowmass valley in payment for a board bill, and from then on the Cattle Queen was in business. She bought the neighboring Tandy place in 1898, the Pennell ranch in 1915, and she also homesteaded herself at the Snowmass Falls Ranch.¹²

Because she was alone, Lindvig got help on the ranch from out of work miners and tradesmen. In return for their work, she gave them room and board. She had a man to build cabins, one who helped hay, one who irrigated, and one who butchered meat. They all lived in the bunkhouse. Lindvig had a forest service permit to graze 80 head of Hereford cattle, but rather than shipping them to market, she had two head butchered each week and sold the meat in town. She also sold butter and eggs in town, taking her goods in on a sled or wagon. In 1925 she expanded her business to include guest cabins, and offered horses to ride as well as meals. Kate Lindvig remained single despite marriage proposals, and seemed to revel in her freedom. She took long walks often -- sometimes she went sixteen miles to the Snowmass store.

¹²Mary Eshbaugh Hayes, "Kate: The Cattle Queen of Snowmass," The Aspen Times, 31 July 1975.

The personality and business success of the Cattle Queen demonstrates the fact that women could be successful ranchers and homesteaders in Pitkin County. Charles Grover remembered that Kate Lindvig was a particularly tough bargainer at his father's store. He said that his father would raise the prices of everything in his store when he saw her coming, so by the time they had finished haggling, he had sold her goods at the regular price.¹³ Women ranchers and homesteaders eventually declined in numbers, because ranching and farming developed into a big business. Women less often than men had the capital to purchase all the equipment necessary to run a ranch or farm.

Farming and ranching in Pitkin County, then, were not limited to American-born males. The gender and background of those who farmed and ranched made each ranch a different place, and meant that the ranching family experience differed up and down the valley. In addition, each ranch differed in its size, equipment, and products.

Part Two: Ranches -- Their Function and Physical Set-Up

An Overview of Ranching 1879-1960

Ranching was important to Aspen soon after white settlers arrived in 1879. It depended on mining for a market, but ranching continued on long after the Panic of 1893 and through the 1950s. Once farmers and ranchers established themselves in the valley and

¹³(Grover, 1991)

the railroad allowed them access to more distant markets, most of them sold hay, grain, cattle, and potatoes.¹⁴ In Aspen's early years, farmers supplied the town with as many crops and as much produce as they could. The miners were dependent on the farmers for food, because of Aspen's isolation. Consumers paid a high price for food shipped to Aspen, especially before 1887 when the railroads came to Aspen. Ranchers even killed elk and deer and sold them for good money in town. Henry Staats and his neighbor fished the Roaring Fork and sold trout in Aspen for 50¢-\$1.00 per pound. They used the money to buy flour.¹⁵ Farmers also supplied the local markets with fresh eggs.

One of most important crops for Aspen in its mining years was hay. Miners were dependent upon mules and jack trains to pack ore to Leadville, and so hay to feed them was a necessity. Hay sold for as much as \$120 a ton, but the usual price was \$30-40 a ton. Fred Light boasted of getting \$100 a ton for his hay once. Aspenites could purchase hay at a number of places, like J.D. Best and Company, the Aspen Livery, Sale, and Feed Stables, and through Samuel Monk, a forwarding and commission merchant and wholesale dealer in hay, grain, flour, feed, and groceries. Hildur Anderson remembered that farmers often sold hay to the grocery man and the lumber man in return for credit on their bills. Her father sold hay to Mr. Courtney who owned the livery stable in town, among other people. When the railroads arrived in Aspen farmers expanded their markets, but they

¹⁴See Lysa Wegman-French, The Holden-Marolt Site for an in-depth look at specific breeds of cattle and types of produce sold.

¹⁵Staats, in Wentworth, 50.

still sold goods in Aspen. Sam Stapleton remembered selling lots of hay to miner teams as well as loading sheep and cattle on trains to sell in Denver.

Another crop farmers grew in the mining years was grain. In 1887 Jeremie Vagneur planted 20 acres of oats by hand because the teamsters hauling ore out of Aspen needed them so badly.¹⁶ Farmers in the valley also grew potatoes successfully. In the early years farmers sold their potatoes just in Aspen, but later they shipped their potatoes out on the railroad. There was a warehouse and sorting place in Carbondale. George and Allen Vagneur, ranching in the '40s and '50s, sold their seed potatoes to ranchers in Eagle, Montrose, Gypsum, and New Castle.

People who farmed in the Roaring Fork Valley were usually ranchers, too. Cattle and sometimes hogs provided the family with meat, as many butchered their own beef and some sent it to processing plants in Rifle and Glenwood. Ranchers usually sold their cattle, though. In the early days they sold it to local meat markets in Aspen, like George F. Newell and Company. In the 1920s, ranchers used their beef to barter with local merchants for supplies they could not get from the ranch. Ranchers also shipped their cattle on the railroad to sell outside of Aspen. Sometimes a buyer came to the ranch, or sometimes a rancher would sell his cattle to a brokerage company who sold them in turn. A rancher could also sell his cattle to a slaughterhouse in Denver, or he could sell them to other farmers who would fatten the cattle up in Nebraska, Kansas, or

¹⁶Mary Eshbaugh Hayes, "George Vagneur Talks About Ranching," Aspen Times, 12 May 1977, 5-A.

Eastern Colorado and then resell them. No matter who he sold them to, a rancher would have to ship his cattle on railroad cars from Woody Creek to Denver. The market in Aspen was too small to justify ranching financially. Since Western Slope cattle rode through the Moffat Tunnel, they would get sooty faces. Elizabeth Sinclair said that buyers would look for black faces on the cattle because that meant they had been raised on good high ranges. Oftentimes ranchers would ride on the caboose of the cattle train so they could oversee the selling of their cattle in Denver.¹⁷

In addition to all this seasonal fresh produce and beef, ranchers also got fresh dairy products from their milk cows. They marketed these products too. An ad in the Aspen Times in 1881 noted that Foster and Dreyfus' Milk Ranch had fresh milk every day. Hildur Hoaglund Anderson's family sold butter, eggs, and sometimes buttermilk and cream. They had customers all over town, and the family delivered dairy products to them every Saturday. The money from sales went towards buying little extras at the drugstore or clothes. After 1887 many ranch wives sold their extra cream in Glenwood Springs. After making their own butter, they would put the extra cream in a can and put it on the down valley train in Snowmass. They received their empty can and a check on the return train.¹⁸

One would think that with all these different goods to sell, ranchers would have a ready supply of cash. This was not the case. Often the prices of their beef or produce were too small to make a

¹⁷It took 24 hours to get to Denver, and apparently the trip was quite a party.

¹⁸(McLaren, 1991)

good profit. Moreover, most ranchers had to live on credit in order to supply their ranch and family with goods until the fall, when they sold their cattle. With luck they could clear up all their bills after the fall sales.

Ranching Through the Aspen Times 1881-1945

Although their cash flow was minimal, ranching and farming were indeed significant to the Aspen community. The Aspen Times demonstrated at least the editors' attitudes towards ranching, as well as ranching's growth and development over the years. The Aspen Times treated the ranchers with mannered respect in its pages, as a personal notice in 1881 read: "Mr. J.W. Curtis came in from his farm Thursday. He is the gentlemanly proprietor of the Lake Ranch."¹⁹

The Aspen Times in 1882 published letters and articles that showed unrestrained enthusiasm for ranching and farming in the Roaring Fork Valley. Of course boosterism merited at least enthusiasm, if not exaggeration. In January of 1882 the first letter about ranching appeared. It said that ranchers down the valley thought the whole valley would eventually be used for farming and pasture lands, as they could be irrigated cheaply and made very productive, especially for potatoes and sheep. In February the paper said there were already 30-40 ranches and farms between Aspen and the Grand (Colorado) River. The future looked bright for Pitkin

¹⁹Aspen Times, 14 May 1881.

County, because farmers that had been successful with vegetables the year before were optimistic about the potential for growing cereals. One man wrote: "It is my opinion that we can raise nearly everything successfully that is produced in the vicinity of Denver. I am satisfied the soil is superior to that of the Platte or Arkansas Valleys."²⁰ By this time ranchmen and squatters were taking up the land in the valley.

Boosterism continued in the spring, and Aspen residents looked forward to when local farmers could supply Pitkin County. One article advised studying the art of irrigation, and another spoke of a plan to build a road down along the river. The first would increase production, and the second would make it easier for farmers to sell their produce. Most farmers did use irrigation ditches to bring water to their crops. Spring of 1882 also marked the rise in social importance of the ranchers, as a column entitled "The Valley" appeared, discussing the comings and goings of people down valley of Aspen. In July the first "Ranch and Garden" column appeared, containing helpful hints and articles about farming. The Red Mountain irrigation ditch was nearing completion, and the paper said there were 150 ranches between Aspen and the Grand.²¹ Ranching issues continued to appear in the paper through fall of 1883, although mining still clearly dominated the pages. In the spring of 1883 the ranch column reappeared, noting that eight men and four teams were working on the Green Meadow Ditch; that almost 200

²⁰Aspen Times, 25 February 1882.

²¹Aspen Times, 1 July 1882.

tons of hay from the valley were sold in Aspen last season; and that people had taken up all the available ranch land in the vicinity.²²

By 1891 international, state, or mining news dominated the papers. Aspen's mining years were at their peak. The paper did mention the cattle market prices, demonstrating that ranchers were making use of the railroads to ship their cattle to market and selling their goods outside of Aspen. By 1908 the editors were still not publishing ranch or farm articles, but they included people visiting ranches and ranchers coming to town in "local briefs." At this time mining was in decline, and Aspen was entering its quiet years. Ranches continued to grow, despite their lack of coverage in the paper, as noted by Thomas Kimmell. He wrote that the acreage of Pitkin County farmland grew by 42% from 1890-1910. In 1880 there were only two farming claims. In 1890 Pitkin County had 26,796 acres of land in farmland, which grew to 35,363 acres in 1900, and to 45,286 acres in 1910.²³ Kimmell also noted that the number of farms increased more than 42%, because the size of farms decreased over the years.

During World War One the farmers and ranchers kept farming and ranching, and the government helped farmers, albeit minimally, by allowing them more sugar to do their canning. The Depression did not affect Roaring Fork Valley farmers as much as it did others. Farmers and ranchers had food to feed themselves, but no extra cash. As a result, they would take some beef or other crops into town and

²²Aspen Times, 7 April 1883.

²³Kimmell, 96. His footnotes do not accompany the AHS copy of his thesis, so I do not know how he arrived at these figures.

trade them for goods they needed. World War Two was difficult for ranchers, because the labor force diminished just when demands on production increased. Farmers and ranchers were exempt from the draft, but they lost most of their hired labor. Most farmers and ranchers in the valley grew potatoes, which are a labor-intensive crop. To accommodate these farmers, schools in Aspen closed during the potato harvest so that the school children could work in the fields. Gas rationing was another problem during the war, as most farmers had mechanized to some degree. Arthur Trentaz said that they had enough gas to run the ranch, but no extra. In the Woody Creek column of the Aspen Times in 1945, the editors noted the comings and goings of some familiar families, like the Vagneurs, the Gerbazes, the Natals, the Durouxes, the Trentazes, and the Cerises. After World War Two, Aspen grew as a cultural and ski center. Property taxes and the price of labor went up, leaving only a few families ranching. Most sold their land by 1960, because ranching and farming in the Roaring Fork Valley was no longer profitable.

Ranch Areas and Size

The size and physical characteristics of farms and ranches differed over time as well as from ranch to ranch. According to Hildur Anderson, early ranches were more like farms because most people had some cattle, but they concentrated on growing crops to sell locally. She said the farms were just large enough to earn money to pay the bills and to raise a family. Different people in the valley had different sizes and kinds of ranches. Jack Brenton owned

one of the large ranches in the area, on which he raised cattle, horses, and show animals that he took to the Denver Stock Show and even further East.²⁴ Charlie Jacobs and Henry Staats owned the first ranches in the valley, according to Henry Staats.²⁵ Sam Stapleton's grandfather homesteaded in 1881 on 320 acres where the airport is now. Later he bought up some more homesteads around him.²⁶ One hundred sixty acres was the standard size for a farm under the 1862 Homestead Act, but other laws enabled farmers and ranchers to acquire more public land, and people were free to purchase private lands as well.

Agnes Jurich McLaren's father homesteaded 160 acres on East Sopris Creek in 1922, but he found it more profitable to pay rent and work other people's land instead. In 1929 he tenant farmed on the Williams ranch, which is now Windstar in Snowmass. He raised potatoes and hay, and paid Mr. Williams a part of his profit every year.

After farmers and ranchers expanded their markets beyond Aspen, they also expanded their ranches. Mechanization of farm equipment also allowed people to farm more land than ever before. Still, ranches varied in size. For example, the McLean ranch consisted of 300-400 acres, divided between two brothers, and Jens Christiansen's ranch on Owl Creek was 640 acres. The Trentaz ranch bordered forest service land, and went from Woody Creek by the Natal and Stranahan ranch over to the Stein ranch. The Gerbaz

²⁴(Anderson, 1979)

²⁵Staats, in Wentworth, 49.

²⁶(Stapleton, 1991)

property was near both railroads, and Auzel used to buy tickets on the Rio Grande to mile post 391, where his ranch was.

People who raised large numbers of cattle tended to have more land than others. Ben Vagneur's ranch was about 1200 acres, and he had up to 350 head of cattle. He raised hay on 200 acres, grain on 60 acres, and potatoes on about 25 acres.²⁷ The Sinclair ranch was also 1200 acres, which they acquired by purchasing two ranches. One was part of the old Carroll place, and one was the Roberts place. The Sinclairs owned two opposite corners of the Owl Creek four corners, and Mr. Melton owned the other two.²⁸ Roaring Fork Valley ranchers, then, worked ranches of different sorts and sizes.

Ranch Buildings

Ranch buildings varied in size and number from ranch to ranch, though they served common purposes. Farmers and ranchers needed buildings for their families, their equipment, and their livestock. These buildings were rarely elaborate. The house on the McLaren homestead was log with two stories. It had a kitchen, a bedroom, and an upstairs bedroom. There was no running water, and the house was heated with a wood and a coal stove. The kids all slept in a lean-to. Aside from the house, the McLarens also had a log barn with stalls, hay storage, and a place for harnesses. The bunkhouse also served as storage space, and it housed the blacksmith shop. Other

²⁷Bernice Vagneur Morrison, interviewed by the author, 17 July 1991, Aspen, tape recording, AHS.

²⁸(Sinclair, 1991)

necessary buildings were the chicken house, the corral, the potato cellar, and the outhouse. They had a building with a stream running through it to keep things cool, although it was not cold enough to keep meat fresh.²⁹

Bede Harris described his childhood house as heated by a "big old kitchen range" and a base burner that ran on hard coal. "We didn't have any heat in the bedrooms, of course."³⁰ His family had a potato cellar as well, as did Bernice Vagneur Morrison's. The house her parents moved into was that of her grandparents, Jeremie and Stephanie. It had two stories and two rooms, and it housed at least two generations of Vagneurs. Ben and his wife built an addition and installed indoor plumbing when his parents left the ranch. The Vagneur ranch had buildings appropriate for its scale of operations. Along with the house and horse barn, there was also a house for the hired man, a granary with an elevator, a small sawmill for ranch use, an ice house, and a big machine shed. The house, granary, and house for the hired man are at Anderson ranch today. Although the size and number of buildings varied from ranch to ranch, they were all built to house ranchers and the tools of their trade.

Ranch Equipment

Equipment and machinery helped determine the efficiency and success of ranches, so most ranchers were sure to own appropriate tools. Although they were not rich, ranchers saw it as in their best

²⁹(McLaren, 1991)

³⁰(Harris, C-25)

interest to spend what they did have on machines that would increase their production. Ranchers in the Roaring Fork Valley began by growing hay and some produce, and then branched out to grain, potatoes, and cattle. Their machinery reflected their crops, and it also reflected the impact of mechanization. According to the Aspen Times, Mr. Fred Light and his partner bought the first mowing machine in the valley for their ranch on Sopris Creek. The year was 1882, and Mr. Light's goal was to cut 160 tons of hay that season.³¹ According to Henry Staats, he had the first mowing machine in the valley.³² At any rate, they were both horse-drawn. Mr. Staats also said that he used a hand-baler, then he hauled his hay across all the different creeks between his ranch and Aspen on a wagon.

Threshing machines arrived on the scene in the early 1880s, and they also relied on horse power. Jens Christiansen said that he used to have to shoe all the horses. He could only quit blacksmithing when tractors came along. The five Vagneur brothers eventually bought a steam engine to run their thresher, and to run their plow. Steam engines came into wide use during the 1880s and through the 1890s, although they were not necessarily self-propelling. Some farmers had to tow their steam engines with horses along with the thresher. The Trentazes also had a threshing machine, which was not common. Even in the mid twentieth-century, the Sinclairs did not own their own thresher, nor did many other ranchers. Instead, threshing was a community project. One thresher would move up the valley ranch by ranch with a core of workers, while neighbors

³¹Aspen Times, 15 July 1882.

³²Staats, in Wentworth, 49.

provided most of the labor. By 1910 almost all threshers had internal combustion engines. Even after combustion engines took the place of horse power and other ranchers began using combines, those in the Roaring Fork Valley had to keep threshing. Grain has to be evenly ripe for a combine to work, and since the growing season is so short, farmers had to keep using threshers.

Engines did help in a lot of other ways. Auzel Gerbaz said that the Burt brothers and the Williams brothers were the first ones in the area to get tractors, but Arthur Trentaz said that the Gerbaz brothers and the Trentazes owned the first two tractors in Pitkin County. The Gerbazes had a John Deere, and the Trentazes had a 1020 McCormick. Not all Roaring Fork Valley ranchers could afford to buy the newest machinery; the smaller ranchers made do with older equipment. The first combustion engine tractor was put into use in 1895, but tractors were neither reliable nor popular until 1910. Tractors were useful in most aspects of haying, and in 1928 the Aspen Times noted that potato growers had adopted tractor and gas engine potato diggers rapidly that season.

Another labor-saving device some ranchers used was the baler. The Sinclairs got a Minneapolis Molene in 1915 and were one of the first in the valley to try one. They had so many problems with it though, that Bob came home one day wanting to set it on fire. Mike Marolt had the same baler and the same problems, and apparently he was as frustrated as Bob Sinclair. Labor-saving equipment did not always ease the strain of ranching.

Besides farm equipment and machinery, the automobile also made ranch life easier. Isolation from town and friends was almost

a defining characteristic of valley ranches. Auzel Gerbaz said that quite a few farmers had cars by 1917 and that they were a good way to get to Aspen, but they still had to use a team and a wagon if they wanted to haul anything.³³ Cars also tended to freeze up in the winter, they got flat tires on a regular basis, and they were often unable to navigate the roads in winter or spring.

Generally, ranchers and farmers in the Roaring Fork Valley saw mechanization as a good thing. They invested in labor-saving machinery because it allowed more work to be done in less time.

Part Three: The Nuts and Bolts of Life on a Ranch

Crops and Livestock

After the early stage of farming when they grew crops specifically for the Aspen market, farmers became ranchers as well, branching out and raising sheep and cattle as well as potatoes for market. The Stapletons had both sheep and cattle, while the Gerbazes had cattle first, and sold them to go into the sheep business after 1943. The Vagneurs raised mainly cattle and potatoes. In addition, each ranch family raised food for themselves and for their livestock. People in the Roaring Fork Valley not only ranched cattle and farmed potatoes, they also raised chickens, pigs,

³³(Gerbaz, 1969)

vegetables, dairy products, grain, and hay. Every family member was responsible in some way for crops and livestock.

Cattle

Cows calved in the spring, usually by April first, so the calves were strong when they went up to their summer range. Most ranchers sold cows that calved too late. Elizabeth and Bob Sinclair remembered calving as their favorite job on the ranch. They watched and took care of the cows, although other ranchers left everything up to the cows themselves. The Sinclairs had healthy calves because they fed the cows vitamins and pellets, and they gave each newborn calf a pill to fight off diseases.

During June or early July, the cattle moved off ranch pasture and up to summer range. Each rancher had specific grazing rights on different areas of public land for a certain number of cattle. The government charged the rancher a fee for each head of cattle, and grazing rights generally went along with a ranch if it was sold. The chore of moving the cattle up was a favorite among ranch families. It took less than a day to get the cattle up by herding them on horseback. The Sinclairs had to take their cattle across Castle Creek Bridge to get their cattle to Castle Creek grazing land, but they only had to open their gates to let the cattle go up Brush Creek, where they also had grazing rights. Jens Christiansen and the Copley's also ran their cattle on these ranges, while the Vagneurs had their summer range up Woody Creek. Usually the ranchers put one hired hand in charge of supervising the cattle for the summer,

and he made sure none got hurt and moved them to better grazing once in a while.

At the end of the summer, ranchers brought the cattle back down. Sometimes the cattle would simply follow an old cow that knew the way, because by then the ranch pasture looked more appetizing than the forest service land. Since more than one rancher used each range, brands were important to help sort out cattle in the fall. The Trentaz brand was 2 quarter circle bar, the Cullet brand was FCI, Ben Vagneur's brand was quarter circle B, and the three Sinclair brands were D over Z, 3J, and P/S. After choosing which cattle to sell, the ranchers drove them down Woody Creek Road to the cattle chutes, herded them into pens, and loaded them on railroad cars bound for Denver.

In the winter, the remaining cattle stayed on the ranch pastures. Feeding livestock in the winter was quite a chore. No matter what the weather or temperature someone had to do it every day. Feeding cattle in the winter meant hooking up a team to a hay rack, going through the snow to the hay stack in the field, opening the stack by throwing off the snow on top, loading the wagon with hay, driving to the cattle pasture, and throwing the hay into rows. Most ranchers used sleds for this; the Vagneurs used a feed sled, which was a low, flat-bedded wagon with wide runners. In the spring the cycle began anew with calving.

Horses and Milk Cows

Horses were an invaluable part of ranching. Workhorses pulled wagons, mowers, threshers, and other farm machinery, and they also pulled goods and people to town. Saddle horses were equally important, as they enabled people to herd cattle, travel around the ranch and the summer range, and attend school. Ben Vagneur had up to thirteen work horses on his ranch, and three to four saddle horses. One saddle horse transported all three daughters back and forth to Woody Creek school. Other ranches probably had fewer horses, as the Vagneur's ranch was large in comparison. Most ranchers had a corral and a barn to house their horses.

Ranchers also housed and fed milk cows. Having milk cows on the ranch was the only way to provide a family with milk, cream, and butter on a regular basis. Some families even made cheese. Often the milk cows produced more milk than the family could consume, so women sold cream and/or butter for some extra cash.

Hay and Haying

Hay was important to ranchers because early Aspenites needed it to feed their mules. But the ranchers also needed hay to feed their own horses, milk cows, and cattle. After mining in Aspen declined, most ranchers kept rather than sold their hay and began to raise more cattle. Raising more cattle meant feeding more cattle over the winter, so ranchers had to grow even more hay. The Sinclairs had one quarter of their land planted in hay. Generally ranchers planted Timothy and some Alfalfa on land that was relatively flat. Hugh Chisolm and Mr. Hoaglund both planted Timothy

and Alfalfa. Mr. Chisolm said his Timothy was the best in the country, growing four feet high.³⁴

After mowing the fields with a horse-drawn mower, ranchers used horses and a hay rake to put the hay into rows. It cured in the rows for three to four days, after which someone using a buckler and stacker picked up the hay, elevated it, and finally dumped it onto a stack in the field. Then someone rounded off the stacks so the snow fell off in the winter and only penetrated three to four inches. The hay cured while in the stack. Haying was especially tricky in the Aspen area because the weather often refused to cooperate and ranchers ran the risk of getting their curing hay rained on. Hildur Anderson's family baled the best of their hay with a horse-powered baler. Ranchers threw the hay into the hopper, poked it into the baler, and as it came out the chute they put wires on it. As the bales came out of the press each bale had to be moved out of the way. Some ranchers got their legs broken in balers, and Hildur Anderson's father had a characteristic limp.³⁵ Haying was the biggest job for ranchers in the summer. It was hard work, and given the worries about the weather involved, it was often their least favorite job as well.

Grain

Hay would feed the cattle all winter, but other livestock needed grain. Ranchers planted some of their land in grain

³⁴(Chisolm, C-12)

³⁵(Hildur Anderson, 1979)

accordingly. They grew oats to feed the horses, and barley for chickens and pigs. Some ranchers grew wheat as well, and then brought it to a mill to be made into flour.

The most labor-intensive aspect of growing grain was threshing. Since ranchers rarely owned their own threshers, they called on their neighbors for help. During threshing season, the ranchers in the Roaring Fork Valley formed a tightly knit community. Ranchers who did own threshing machines started down valley and worked their way up with a barebones crew from ranch to ranch. *Surrounding neighbors donated their labor for the days it took to thresh each ranch near them, and their neighbors reciprocated in turn. Children helped wherever they could. The wives got together and fed the whole lot of them lunch and dinner. Threshing was important to every rancher who grew grain, and Bernice Vagneur Morrison remembered that her mother "brought out all the good stuff for the threshers."*³⁶

Threshing grain was a complicated and labor-intensive process, especially without the use of tractors and combines. Horse-drawn threshers gave way to those pulled by tractors, but the short growing season in the valley made combines ineffective because the grain ripened unevenly. The initial step to harvesting grain consisted of cutting the grain, putting it in bundles, and then setting the bundles up together like teepees for it to finish ripening. When the threshing machine was in operation, men picked up the bundles and loaded them onto a wagon, from which other men tossed

³⁶(Bernice Vagneur Morrison, 1991)

the bundles into the thresher. Grain came out of the other end of the thresher, where another person directed the spout and so put the grain into sacks. Bernice Vagneur Morrison did this job when she helped her father. Finally, other men loaded the grain from the sacks up a grain elevator and into the ranch granary for storage. Grain elevators were helpful because they enabled ranchers to store their grain up high, so they could get grain by simply opening a chute.

Different grains were stored in different bins within each ranch's granary. Oats and barley went to feeding livestock, and the ranchers who grew wheat took it to the mill in Rifle or Glenwood. Hugh Chisolm's mother used ten 100 pound sacks of flour for baking. Some ranchers also sold their grain, though they kept enough to feed their own livestock.

Potatoes

Besides cattle, the major source of income for farmers in the Roaring Fork Valley was potatoes. "Everybody raised potatoes," said Sam Stapleton.³⁷ Potatoes were a major crop for most farmers from Aspen to Glenwood Springs. Auzel Gerbaz said that potatoes grew so well in the valley because the soil was so good, and because the ground protects potatoes from freezing. The red soil in the Carbondale area is especially good for potatoes, because they grow with a smoother, better-looking skin in red soil, and so are more valuable. Valley ranchers grew Russet Burbanks, Red McClures, and

³⁷(Sam Stapleton, 1991)

Russet Rurals, as did the Trentazes. The McLaren's grew mostly Burbanks.

Of all the ranchers' crops and livestock, potatoes were the most work. In the spring, ranchers sorted their potatoes and cut them up for seed. A horse and plough went up and down the field in rows, and someone would drop the seeds behind the plough. When the plough went up the next row, the seeds from the first would be covered with soil. Later on, ranchers like the McLarens used a horse-drawn planting machine. These machines deposited and covered seed potatoes, but still required close supervision. After planting, the potatoes needed cultivation and weeding. In the fall after the vines froze and the potatoes stopped growing, ranchers began the back-breaking labor of harvesting.

A team of horses would pull a potato digger behind them, which brought both potatoes and dirt to the surface. Both went over a screen, and the potatoes fell on top. People followed the digger and picked up the potatoes, putting them in baskets. From the baskets they went into 100 pound sacks, two baskets for each sack. Someone then lifted the sacks onto a hay wagon headed for the potato cellar. People loaded the sacks down a chute to the cellar, where they stayed until someone sorted them by size and took out the bad ones. After re-sacking them by size, ranchers hauled their potatoes by wagon from there to a local train spur, where the potatoes went to Denver or the East. An inspector checked the potatoes after they were loaded onto the cars, to make sure there were not too many imperfect ones. Ranchers sold their potatoes to buyers or less often on consignment, and later to truckers.

The whole harvesting process took place usually in October, and lasted about three weeks. The task was so labor-intensive that schools let children out for two weeks during World War Two so they could help harvest when farm labor was scarce. The children and teenagers got paid room and board, and between five and seven and a half cents per sack. They stayed in a bunkhouse or in the main house sometimes, and brought gossip and laughter with them. Bernice Vagneur Morrison characterized these times as pajama parties.³⁸ Even before the war labor was scarce, so Art Trentaz took to hiring hobos from Carbondale as pickers. They stayed until they had had enough meals, and then Art would have to find some more hobos.³⁹

Potato prices fluctuated widely. In the late 1920s, Agnes Jurich McLaren said a rancher would be lucky to get 25¢ per sack. Hildur Anderson said that some people made some good money - that the price at one time was \$4 per sack.⁴⁰ Her father got caught by the market, though, and by the time he shipped his potatoes East on consignment as a last ditch effort, their price did not even pay for shipping. Prices were by no means static, which made growing potatoes a bit of a gamble. The front page of the Aspen Times in February of 1934 read: "Potato Mart Booms; Many Cars to Ship," and "Local Spud Prices Increase Rapidly during Last Six Weeks." At that point prices were up by one third, as number one (best quality) Burbanks brought \$1.25 per hundred, and number one McClures brought \$1.50. A year ago the prices were 35¢.⁴¹ At other times

³⁸(Bernice Vagneur Morrison, 1991)

³⁹(Trentaz, 1991)

⁴⁰I do not know when the price was \$4 per sack.

⁴¹Aspen Times, 8 February 1934.

during the Depression prices got so low that the government bought potatoes that the ranchers could not sell for 25¢ per hundred. So even though the Roaring Fork Valley had good soil for raising potatoes, it was a risky business and few ranchers got rich by it.

Water and Irrigation

Water is obviously neither a crop nor livestock, but its manipulation was essential to ranchers raising either, and ranchers spent a significant amount of their time and energy on irrigation. An article and a letter in the Aspen Times in May of 1891 both stressed the importance of irrigation in the Roaring Fork Valley.⁴² Farmers built and/or maintained irrigation ditches so they could raise hay and grain.

Ranchers in the valley used flood irrigation until the advent of the sprinkler. Flood irrigation depended on the presence of ditches running through and around their fields. In order to irrigate a field, ranchers would dam up a ditch, allowing its water to escape across their field. A few hours later, they would dam up a different section of ditch to irrigate a different field. It was important to keep changing the water flow, as water left on for more than twelve hours did more damage than good.⁴³ Irrigation was also better done early in the morning. Elizabeth Oblock Sinclair helped her husband and hired man with the irrigation. She said she was in charge of irrigating the old Roberts place, and she could do it in a couple of

⁴²Aspen Times, 23 May 1891.

⁴³"George Vagneur," Hayes.

days.⁴⁴ Other ranches took longer, for example Hildur Anderson said it took up to two weeks to irrigate their ranch on Brush Creek.

In order to irrigate ranchers needed the legal right to use the water, and they needed the mechanisms to bring the water near their fields. Water rights were very important to any rancher in the American West, and the Roaring Fork Valley was no different. Farmers could buy and sell water rights, but they usually came with the ranch land. The value of a ranch depended on the water rights that went with it. Ranchers also had to legally document any improvements or enlargements they made on ditches in order to use the additional water that came with improved flow.

When they could not use existing ditches, ranchers built their own. On the Starwood ranch, water was relatively scarce. The Trentazes had to restore the Red Mountain Ditch and build the Trentaz Ditch in order to farm the land profitably. Art Trentaz's father built his ditch by hand, with a shovel and a sixteen foot board he used to survey. Sometimes he walked six miles one way to get to where he was working. Jeremie Vagneur had an easier time. He was in charge of constructing the Salvation Ditch in 1903 that would bring water to McLain Flats. He used horse teams, scrapers, and dynamite in addition to picks and shovels. The ditch came out to be eighteen miles long, and every rancher in the area had some stock in it.

If a rancher did have ditches running near his property, he still needed to keep them clean and running. On Brush Creek and probably

⁴⁴(Sinclair, 1991)

most other creeks, every rancher who used water from a ditch helped clean it in the spring.

Drinking water posed different problems. Since the ditch water was too dirty, most people got their drinking water from a spring or creek. Ranchers filled tanks for their cattle, and carried their own drinking water as well. The Trentazes got water from a spring on McLain Flats and hauled it in cream jars by horse to their Starwood ranch. Later they built a cistern that filled from Hunter Creek. The Hoaglund family had a barrel that they filled in Brush Creek and hauled by horse and sled up to their house. Getting a full barrel in the winter was difficult because of the ice.

The difficulty with which ranch families got water determined certain aspects of family life. Baths were fewer and farther between than they are for children today, and water conservation was a part of life. Agnes Jurich McLaren took a bath every Saturday night when she was young, after having to heat up the bath water in a tub on the stove. Her mother used the old bath water to scrub the kitchen floor, and then used it to water her sweet peas. Ranch families eventually got running water and indoor plumbing, but they got it much later than people in Aspen did. It was difficult to keep house in a mining town like Aspen; it was worse to keep house on a farm in the Roaring Fork Valley.

Working on a Ranch

Living on a ranch meant working on a ranch. With all the different crops and animals to take care of, everyone was busy. Men, women, children, and hired men all contributed to running the ranch. The family and occasional employees became an economic unit as well as a social unit, and gender roles within that unit were more flexible on the ranch than they were, for example, in Aspen.

Families

The family as a group pulled together to create a family economy on Roaring Fork Valley ranches. Every family member had to pitch in for the ranch to succeed. Most ranch families could provide themselves with labor and some of their own food; ranchers did their own machine maintenance and repair; and mothers practiced folk medicine so medical bills were few. Although taxes were low, there were still bills to pay. Groceries were the biggest bill according to Hildur Anderson, since gardens and animals did not fulfill every dietary need. Ranchers saved a significant amount of money by using their children's help on the ranch instead of hiring extra workers.

Women and children helped in the house and on the ranch, but the men of the family did a majority of the ranch and farm work. Work changed on ranches along with the seasons. In the spring, ranchers tended to calving, and summer meant putting up hay and grain and threshing. Bringing the cattle in from the range, selecting cattle to sell, and shipping them out were fall jobs, and in the winter ranchers fed their cattle and repaired everything that had

broken the year before. Usually these jobs overlapped some. Ranchers also hunted regularly in order to help put food on the table. Agnes Jurich McLaren described a typical day for her father as follows: he got up at 2 or 3am to irrigate, since it was better for the fields to irrigate at night, and he would put a kettle of oatmeal on the back of the stove to have with coffee for breakfast. He came back to the house at about 6am for breakfast, after which he would milk the cows, attend to the crops, fix fences, and do whatever else he needed to do that time of year.⁴⁵

Mowing and baling hay were two of the least favorite summer jobs for the Sinclairs.⁴⁶ Winter chores were not always fun, either. Hildur Anderson noted that her sister's day book from January 1918 said it had been especially cold and snowy for a long time. Her father and uncle fed the cattle and went to town to get the kitchen cabinet anyway. Mother washed clothes.⁴⁷ No matter what the weather or how onerous the chores were, someone always had to do them.

On the Trentaz ranch Art, his father, and his brother Nino did most of the work. Nino was in charge of irrigation and cattle, while Art was in charge of machinery and cattle. They had 250 head at one time, which was a large herd. The three Trentaz men not only raised crops and cattle, they also built all the buildings on their ranch. They got logs from sawmills, except for one house where they used round logs they had cut themselves. With one carpentry book to help

⁴⁵(McLaren, 1991)

⁴⁶(Sinclair, 1991)

⁴⁷Hildur Anderson reminisces, March 1979, tape recording, AHS.

them, they built a cow barn, a cattle shed, and two homes.⁴⁸ Even while they were building, the Trentazes kept up with their ranch work. They did hire a man to help them fence, but not on a permanent basis. Given the fact that the Trentaz ranch was about 1000 acres and that they fenced it all, no wonder they hired a man to help.

Fences on western ranches were only made of white boards in the movies. Really, they were all barbed wire, and barbed wire demanded attention. Snow slides and Elk caused periodic damage, and extra fencing had to be put up to protect the cattle from the poisonous larkspur that grew especially on Larkspur Mountain. In addition to fixing fences, ranchers had to work hard to keep weeds from taking over their fields and pastures.

Hired Help

Some ranchers needed to hire help on a permanent basis. Usually ranchers hired help if their ranches were large, or if they did not have enough mature male relatives living with them to help. Ben Vagneur had up to two families living on the ranch, plus two single men, and some seasonal laborers like potato pickers. He had a large ranch. The families lived in their own houses, and the single men lived in a bunk house and ate with the Vagneurs. The Sinclairs usually had one hired man, who lived with his family on the Sinclair ranch. In the 1950s he was paid \$250-300 a month, plus the

⁴⁸(Trentaz, 1991)

Sinclairs provided him and his family with a house, utilities, meat, milk, and eggs. They said that he was better off than they were, because he got a regular monthly check, while the ranchers made do with whatever was left. When Red Rowland worked on ranches in about the 1920s, he worked part time and got paid \$1 a day plus room and board. He said it was a great life, but he had to work hard and do things like plant, cut, bale, and stack hay, irrigate, and thresh grain.⁴⁹ In the 1930s Sam Stapleton worked his ranch with three older brothers plus hired help. In 1940 though, only he and one brother worked the ranch. Hired labor declined drastically with the onset of World War Two.

Children

Children provided a steady source of labor for ranch families, and they worked both on the ranch and at home. There was no clear division of labor by gender for children as there was for adults. Katherine Harris wrote that muted gender roles were a result of the isolation of farms and ranches, and that children on ranches bore responsibilities and enjoyed large amounts of freedom regardless of their gender.⁵⁰ Eliot West wrote that children of both genders worked outside because they could do outside jobs successfully as children. Only when adolescence hit did parents try to enforce

⁴⁹(Rowland, 1987)

⁵⁰Harris, 226, 211.

traditional gender roles.⁵¹ Evidence from Roaring Fork Valley ranchers supports these ideas.

Hildur Anderson said that children worked on the farm in the mornings and evenings during the winter, and in the summer when they were out of school they worked alongside everyone else. Hugh Chisolm had seven brothers and sisters, and he said they all pitched in together. They rode horses to school, and when they got home they chopped wood, hauled coal, cleaned out the cow barn, and did other necessary chores. Hugh said he did not think it was too hard -- he got used to it. Sam Stapleton helped on the ranch in the summer by living up at their sheep camp for three months, and the McLaren children helped clear land for cultivation by pulling up sagebrush and moving rocks into piles. Children helped in the house as well as on the ranch. Besides taking care of her horse, Agnes Jurich McLaren made her bed and helped with the dishes, cooking, and washing. Hildur Anderson said that in the Hoaglund family, it was the children's job to bring in wood to heat the house for the evening and night.

Girls who grew up on ranches seemed to enjoy being outside and working on the ranch as much if not more than helping out in the house. Katherine Harris noted that boys and girls did the same tasks for awhile, under the male role model of their father. Women remembering their childhood in the Roaring Fork Valley seemed to support this and sometimes referred to themselves as tomboys. Agnes "Jerry" McLaren cast herself in this role. She said that her

⁵¹Eliot West, Growing Up With the Country: Childhood on the Far Western Frontier (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1989).

favorite activity was camping with her father on high mountain lakes, and that "I was his right hand girl - I probably should have been a boy." She did everything a boy would do, like riding and fishing, and never wanted to play house. Bernice "Bernie" Vagneur Morrison also thought of herself as a tomboy. She said that she wanted to wear men's clothes, ride her horse, and work in the fields, and that her parents went along with her choices. She raked hay on McLain Flats day after day behind a team of horses in the summer, and whenever she had free time she rode her horse to the flats and looked at the Elk Mountain Range. Her favorite activity on the ranch was cow punching, and when she was ten years old, she helped her brother drive the cattle up to their summer range. These women demonstrated the flexibility of gender roles for children on the ranch. As they got older, or when they became the only woman on the ranch, these women had to give up some of their flexibility and take charge of the household.

Women

Women on ranches did a lot of work. They saw themselves as partaking in a joint venture with their husbands, and they contributed a significant amount of labor both inside the house and out. Gender roles were relatively flexible in that women worked outside them when necessary, but men rarely ventured into the female realm of chores. Katherine Harris wrote that homesteading wives increased the scope of their activities, and that homesteading also "served as a catalyst for increasing their responsibilities and

power, within the family and the community."⁵² Even though the Roaring Fork Valley is a different environment than Northeastern Colorado, this is an interesting thesis to keep in mind when examining the lives of ranch women near Aspen.

Ranch women took charge of the house. They cooked and cleaned and cared for children, which made for a lot of work when modern conveniences had yet to appear. Being in charge of food also meant tending a garden and making butter. Agnes Jurich McLaren described the daily life of her mother as getting up early and baking bread, washing clothes, gardening, cooking, and caring for the kids. Bernice Vagneur Morrison described her mother as doing all those jobs, plus cooking for the hired men, making cheese, sewing everyone's clothes, canning meat, fruit, and vegetables, raising chickens for eggs and to fry in the summer, and even lending a hand on the ranch if necessary.

These jobs take on added significance when one realizes that cooking meant considerably more than it means today - it meant gardening, butchering, using a wood stove, and doing dishes by hand three times a day. Making cheese was also hard work. Grandmother Vagneur taught Bernice's mother how to make hard cheese the way they did in Italy. It involved adding a rennet tablet to warm milk which became curd, and then straining it and pressing it and then storing the cheese in a cool place. Ranch women also had to can all the fruit, vegetables, and meat they wanted to store, since they had no access to refrigeration. Amelia Trentaz learned how to can beef

⁵²Harris, 257.

and chicken from her mother. Some families cured their own ham and beef as well.

Washing clothes became significantly easier with mechanization. Before there were washing machines though, ranch women coped with this complicated and labor-intensive chore regularly. Hildur Anderson's mother washed on Mondays, and it was a many-step process. First she carried in wood and got a fire going in the cook stove, then she carried water in to fill the boiler on the stove, and set up tubs for washing. She washed all the clothes on a washboard and then rinsed them, and she boiled the white clothes on the stove. After all that, the clothes went on the line. In the winter they froze instantly and had to be left for a couple of days before bringing them into the house -- the sun and wind did dry them a little. When the clothes were dry, women ironed them all, because wash-and-wear fabrics had yet to appear. This meant heating up the stove again, because the only way to heat up the iron was to put it on the stove. Mrs. Hoaglund used from three to five irons so one would always be ready and hot. Washing clothes was, understandably, a chore to which few women looked forward. Because ranch women had to haul water farther, washing clothes was a little more difficult on a ranch than in town.

Ranch women also had jobs outside the house. These jobs usually related to food in some way. Arthur Trentaz's mother milked the cows, tended a big garden, and raised chickens. Ranch women almost always tended a big garden to feed their family, and they canned whatever was left for the winter. Women also usually raised chickens, both for their eggs and for frying in the summer. Some

even raised geese, ducks, or turkeys. Even if the women did not milk the cows, they were always in charge of making butter from the cream.

These different food sources provided ranch families with fresh produce, dairy products, and eggs. Women also coped with the surplus. Some women like Mrs. Hoaglund sold eggs in town to rid themselves of extra and to make a little money, but those living farther from town seemed to keep their eggs for family use. The most common products ranch women sold were cream and butter. Agnes Jurich McLaren's mother sold cream to the local creamery for her "chicken money." Chicken money paid for baby chickens that ranch women annually raised over the summer and used for fryers. Many ranch women sold their cream. They would put their cream in five or ten gallon jars and then put the jars on the train headed down valley. The return train brought their empty jars and a check for each woman.

Hildur Anderson's mother used all her extra cream for butter, which she sold in Aspen. Making butter was not an easy task. After milking the cows, ranch women separated the cream from the milk with a separator. Mrs. Hoaglund churned her cream to butter on Thursdays and Fridays, making 40 pounds of butter at a time. Then she separated the butter from the buttermilk, and worked and washed the butter over and over again until all of the buttermilk was out. She put some salt in for flavor, pounded it into forms, and finally wrapped each form in paper. The family delivered the butter and eggs to Aspen on Saturdays. That took two to three hours, and then the Hoaglunds bought their groceries and drove the hour and a

half it took to get home. This trip was difficult under the best circumstances, and especially tough in the winter. These ranch women joined the ranks of businesswomen when they sold their dairy products and produce, and they contributed to the family economy on a regular basis.

Ranch women also contributed to the family economy by working on the ranch itself. Sam Stapleton's mother lived at their sheep camp -- where the divide parking lot is -- and cooked for the help at the ranch from June to September. Hildur Anderson usually helped drive the cattle farther up the summer range. Burnt Mountain and Sam's Knob were as familiar to her then as they are to skiers now. Elizabeth Oblock Sinclair irrigated part of their ranch in addition to working at the house and selling her cream, and she also drove a tractor. She raked hay so the men could bale it, and she also drove the tractor when they baled so they could stack the bales on her sled. Elizabeth Sinclair did all this despite the fact that she hated tractors and haying.

While ranch women primarily worked in and around the house, their job of feeding the family led them to the garden, the hen house, and even to Aspen, where women sold their surplus. Women also worked in the fields -- sometimes regularly. Ranch women worked outside Victorian gender roles because they accomplished such a variety of tasks. They did not break away from traditional roles completely however, because men still labored primarily in the fields, and women's labor still centered on domestic tasks like feeding and caring for their family.

Neighbors

Along with the family and hired help, neighbors provided an essential labor force on ranches. Neighboring women came to help with childbirth. Given the quantity and significance of the jobs women were responsible for, this neighborly help proved essential.

Neighbors were also indispensable during the summer, when ranchers' cattle roamed on the summer range. Ranchers with the same range either took turns watching the cattle and moving them to new grass, or they hired a cowpuncher to look after the all cattle. The Vagneurs belonged to the Woody Creek Cattlemen's Association, an organization which hired a man to look after the members' cattle. This cowpuncher came down from the range once or twice during the summer and visited each rancher, getting good meals and telling the ranchers how their cattle were doing.

Neighbors were most important during threshing time. Surrounding neighbors would stop their own work and be part of the threshing crew. It took two or three days to thresh for one ranch, at which point all the men would move to the next one and thresh there. While the men were putting in long days in the fields, the wives were preparing giant meals for them. Huge breakfasts and lunches prepared by a group of women for men helping each other in the fields conjur up images of a colonial house raising.

Although ranches were isolated from one another by distance and difficult travel, and ranch families seldom had time to visit each other, the ranchers on the Roaring Fork Valley were indeed part of a community. They identified with each other because they

performed similar chores and had similar daily lives. They worked together on occasion, and they dealt with similar problems.

Ranch Problems and Lack of Conveniences

Weather, Transportation, and Sickness

Two problems that ranchers could do little about were weather and sickness. Because ranches were isolated from town, bad weather made traveling to Aspen virtually impossible. Hildur Anderson's sister remembered 1918 as a particularly harsh winter, and in April her day book read: "Mud O'Blessed Mud. Mud, mud, mud."⁵³ Despite the weather, farmers and ranchers still had to do chores. Cold periods meant that ranchers had to feed their horses and livestock more grain and hay, but otherwise ranches functioned normally. Going to town was so important to the Hoaglund girls that they went to great lengths to get to the Easter dance one year. The roads were impassable because of deep and slushy snow, so the sisters walked nine miles to town, leaving at 3am because the snow was frozen then and they could walk on the crust. They stayed with friends in town to rest until the dance. After the dance, the girls took the train to Woody Creek, hitched a ride with a rancher to his ranch, and rode the rest of the way home on horseback.⁵⁴

Ranchers in the early 1900s also worked to overcome transportation difficulties if someone was sick or hurt. Usually

⁵³(Hildur Anderson, March 1979)

⁵⁴(Hildur Anderson, March 1979)

ranch wives used home remedies and common sense to doctor their families, but sometimes that was not enough. If someone was sick, Agnes Jurich McLaren said that her father would ride fast to the next farm for help, and then go get the doctor in either Aspen or Basalt. It took three or four hours for the doctor to arrive in his buggy.⁵⁵ Bad weather and isolation from town made traveling and being sick more difficult for the Roaring Fork ranchers than for the people in Aspen.

Plumbing

Ranchers and their families also functioned without modern day conveniences like plumbing, electricity, refrigeration, and telephones. Ben Vagneur's ranch was one of the first to get indoor plumbing, probably in the 1920s or so. The Trentazes got plumbing in the 1950s, and the McLarens did not get it until the 1960s. (Agnes Jurich McLaren's father was opposed to mechanization of any kind.) Living without indoor plumbing meant using outhouses, and carrying water inside for anything one might need. Some ranches got running water before they had a plumbing system. Even with running water, taking a bath was a big process. Families like the Trentazes heated their bath water on the kitchen stove and bathed in a tub. Twice a week was the normal schedule for bathing, and if the family had to carry their water to the house, wives often re-used the bath water for scrubbing floors or watering their garden.

⁵⁵(McLaren, 1991)

Telephones

Telephones first appeared in the ranching community during the first years of the twentieth century. Auzel Gerbaz's father first installed one in 1904, but their phone service was very different from that of today. Hildur Anderson described the workings of the Brush Creek Phone Company.⁵⁶ The Brush Creek Phone Company owned its own poles over what is now Highway 82 and the whole community helped maintain them; the Mountain Bell system owned the rest.

Each family had a phone number, and there were ten to twelve phones connected to each line. That meant that phone numbers consisted of a three digit line number first, and then a two digit number that told the operator which phone to ring. Each family had a different ring, for example the Hoaglund's phone number was 198-12. 198 was the line, and the 12 meant that the Hoaglund's ring was one long and two short rings. The combination of long and short rings told the people on the line who should answer. Of course anyone who wanted to could pick up the phone and listen to anyone else on the line, so the neighbors generally knew just about everything each family did. That turned out to be a good thing if someone was in trouble, but it was also a source of frustration. The operator used a special ring for everyone to pick up in case she needed to convey some information to everyone at once. In order to make a call, ranch

⁵⁶(Hildur Anderson reminisces, February 1979)

families would talk to the operator at "Central" and tell her the number they wanted to call. She connected the number first, and then rang it. Telephone service changed ranchers' lives, because they no longer had to travel in order to communicate with each other or with people in town.

Electricity

Until the 1940s, ranchers also lived without electricity. Ranches in the Roaring Fork Valley did not have electricity until the federal Rural Electrification Association helped finance it. According to one source, one out of ten American farms had electricity before the REA in 1935. By 1941, four out of ten farms had electric power.⁵⁷ Aspen area ranches got electricity from REA in the 1940s. Before REA, a few ranchers generated their own power. In 1938 Hildur and Bill Anderson used a generator to run Bill's sheep shearing plant, and later to light up part of the house. Ben Vagneur had an electric plant that charged up batteries. His daughter Bernice remembered that they used to turn on the electric lights on Mondays to read the funnies. On other days they used kerosene lamps or Coleman lanterns.

In the 1940s, the government helped all the ranchers get electricity through the REA and the Holy Cross Association. People helped put up poles and string wires, and some people are still served by Holy Cross today. Before electricity, women especially

⁵⁷Susan Ware, Holdings Their Own: American Women in the 1930s (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982), 9.

had to spend a lot more time doing chores. Washing clothes by hand, drying them on the line, and heating irons on a wood stove were long and tiresome tasks. Keeping food cold without the help of refrigeration was difficult, especially in the summer. People usually had a little house with a stream running through it that kept food cool, but food still spoiled after a little while. Fruits, vegetables, and meat all got canned by ranch wives, and they also cured meat by putting it in brine. Accordingly, fried chicken was a special summer treat for Ben Vagneur's family.

Although many ranchers were satisfied with the status quo, Bernice Vagneur Morrison's mother and probably many other ranch wives were elated about the prospects of REA and refrigeration. Mrs. Vagneur worked hard to convince other ranchers that the REA would be a good thing, and she succeeded. The Gerbazes were the last ones on the list for REA, and they got electricity in the 1940s along with the rest of the Roaring Fork Valley ranchers.

Isolation

Another kind of inconvenience that characterized ranch life was isolation. Because ranches were isolated from Aspen and the roads were often bad, ranchers and their families went to town only occasionally. Ranches functioned as social and economic entities that were close to self-sufficient.

When ranchers did go to town, they usually went for a specific social event like the Easter dance, for economic reasons, or for both.

The Hoaglund's drove one and a half hours to town every Saturday, for instance, to deliver their eggs and butter. Hildur remembered that the merchants in town put up the early equivalent to a parking lot -- they put up a shed to accommodate riding horses, and teams with wagons or buggies. The shed held about twenty horses, and was located across from the old post office on Galena St., south of Cooper Ave. When the post office moved one block north, so did the shed. People could leave their animals under shelter, and even feed them if they had brought grain. The ranchers appreciated it, especially during dances at Armory Hall.

Most ranchers came to town less often than the Hoaglund's. Agnes Jurich McLaren's family, for instance, only went into Aspen once or twice a year to buy supplies and equipment they needed. They bought flour, sugar, salt, pepper, and coffee from the Snowmass store that was closer to their ranch, and where they had a charge account. Ben Vagneur's family similarly did their regular business with the Woody Creek Store. When they were low on cash, Ben Vagneur sometimes made a deal with a butcher in Aspen to trade a beef for groceries. Bernice remembered their occasional winter trips to Aspen when they delivered beef to town. She thought they always sounded like a lot more fun than they were. They hitched the horses up to the feed sled, put bales of hay in to ride on, and wore all the clothes they could because of the bitter cold. They drove the sled across McLain Flats, down the Slaughterhouse hill, and up the hill to Aspen. After conducting their business, the Vagneurs had to return as soon as they could to get home before it was too dark.

Even after the advent of the automobile, ranchers often resorted to using teams and wagons in order to reach Aspen over the bad roads. The Trentazes had a car in 1922 and later a 1926 Ford, but they still only came to Aspen once a week for mail. After Bernice Vagneur married in 1946, she only went to Aspen once or twice a month until her kids went to high school. Even through the mid-1900s then, isolation characterized ranch life in the Roaring Fork Valley. Ranch families operated on the household level and on the local community level (Woody Creek, Brush Creek, etc.). Aspen was significant mainly as a commercial center that ranchers needed to visit only occasionally. Ranch children interacted with their local communities first, and only came to Aspen on a regular basis when they attended high school.

School

Rural School

Each local ranch community, defined by a central creek, had its own school where one teacher taught grades one through eight to about a dozen students. School lasted from eight or nine o'clock until four, and students ranged in age from five to nineteen or twenty years old. Capitol Creek, Brush Creek, Woody Creek, and Owl Creek all had their own schools. Usually the teachers were young women who boarded with one of the ranch families. The schools themselves were one room, heated by a stove. Hildur Anderson went to school in Brush Creek, and remembered that the stove did not

always work. If the teacher could not get a fire going, the room filled with smoke and sometimes the teacher had to send her students home.⁵⁸ On cold days, students moved their desks closer to the stove to keep warm. Rural schools also had two privies, one for girls and one for boys. In the winter, children had to break trails to them in the fresh snow. Hildur also remembered that yellow jackets usually made nests under the seats during the summer, and that children usually got stung before men took the nests out. Honeybees lived in the walls of the Brush Creek schoolhouse, and sometimes people would take the boards down to get honey.⁵⁹

For many children, getting to school was a bigger problem than dealing with cold and bees. Auzel Gerbaz and his brother rode horses the two miles to school like most children did, until a teacher boarded with them who had gotten bucked off and did not like to ride. She paid the boys to walk with her to school -- unbeknownst to Auzel's parents.⁶⁰ Bernice Vagneur started school at Woody Creek in 1933. She rode a horse to school as did her two sisters. They rode the same horse with one saddle, which the oldest got to use. Going home each day was an adventure because the horse wanted to get to his barn and dinner. They had to walk all the way except for the last stretch, when the oldest sister let the reins go and they galloped "like a house afire."⁶¹ Agnes Jurich McLaren also rode to school, starting when she was five. She rode up a hill and over a mesa to get to Capitol Creek School, and when the snow was deep her father

⁵⁸(Hildur Anderson, March 1979)

⁵⁹(Hildur Anderson, March 1979)

⁶⁰(Auzel Gerbaz, 1973)

⁶¹(Bernice Vagneur Morrison, 1991)

would break the trail with work horses so her pony could get through.⁶² Hugh Chisolm also rode to Capitol Creek School. Amelia Trentaz lived only a mile away from school, so she usually walked. On really snowy days her father would give the children a ride in the sleigh. Sam Stapleton walked to Owl Creek unless it was too snowy, and then he also used a sled to get there. Walking and riding to school could get quite miserable in the dark or in bad weather.

The school day usually began at eight o'clock, so children had to get up early, especially if they lived far from school. Agnes Jurich McLaren got up at 6:00am and left the house at 7:00 in order to get to school by 8:00. Students who rode to school first put their horses in the barn, put halters on them, tied them up, and loosened the cinches on the saddles. Since the horses did not get any food or water during the school day, students had to be careful getting on before the horse headed for home.

Usually the teacher taught between eight and fifteen students, of all different grade levels. Hildur Anderson taught in the Snowmass area in 1925, and stayed with the Reed family. She rode to school as did the students, and her first duty was to make sure the children got off their horses safely and tied their horses up in the shed. Then she started a fire if it was winter, because the students were often cold when they arrived. At 9:00 am Hildur rang the school bell, and she began class by reading stories to the children in a circle. After that they studied specific subjects. Since each student was at a different level, Hildur had to teach them

⁶²(Agnes McLaren, 1991)

all individually. She got her students to do things outside as much as possible in the fall and spring, and Sam Stapleton remembered playing games like kick the can and hide and seek at school. At 4:00 the children would get back on their horses and head home. In the winter they traveled to and from school in the dark.

Children often got in trouble, and so teachers disciplined them. Auzel Gerbaz had trouble in school because he could not speak English when he began, and he did not seem to get along well with his teachers. He had one male schoolmaster who used a ruler to hit disobedient students' fingers, and another who used a strap. Agnes Jurich McLaren got into trouble because she used to beat up other girls. Her punishment was to sit underneath the teacher's desk.

Rural schools stayed in operation until 1950. Only then did the rural school districts consolidate and provide bus service for their students to Aspen. Until then or until they went to high school in Aspen, ranch children primarily interacted with their families and their familiar ranch communities.

High School in Aspen

Entrance into the ninth grade meant going to high school in Aspen. For many ranch children, this was the first time they had ever interacted with people besides their family and neighbors. Going to school in Aspen lessened the isolation ranch children had grown up with, and put them in social situations that were both fun and difficult. This jump was a shock to most ranch teenagers because as soon as they began attending high school, they also began

living in Aspen. Most of the ranches were too far away for students to commute to and from, so they either batched with other students or boarded in Aspen. On Fridays they went home, and came back to town Sunday night.

Hildur Hoaglund Anderson lived in town during the week with people her parents found for her. In 1924 when she was a senior, Hildur stayed with Mrs. Ritchie. She rode the same horse home that the rural teacher boarding at her house rode into town on Fridays. That meant that Hildur had to wait for the horse and teacher to get to town before she could leave. It was dark then, and it took about two hours to ride the ten miles home. She did not enjoy riding past the cemetery. Sometimes her brother or neighbors would ride to meet her, and she usually got home by ten or eleven o'clock.⁶³

Agnes Jurich McLaren and other girls like Elizabeth Oblock Sinclair lived with Mrs. Chitwood while they went to school. They all lived on the top floor, where the Cantina restaurant is now. Agnes worked for her room and board by cleaning -- work she described as harder than the work she did at home -- and was not very happy there. For a while she rode back and forth between home and school, which she could do more easily than others because she lived only three miles from town. Another place where lots of students lived was on the third floor of the Jerome Hotel. That was where Bernice Vagneur Morrison stayed during her senior year. She described it as fun because lots of her friends were there, but she missed living with her sisters who had graduated. Before her senior

⁶³(Hildur Anderson, March 1979)

year Bernice stayed with her sister in an apartment above the Sardy Mortuary. Hugh Chisolm's family went so far as to buy a house in town. He and his siblings who went to school stayed there, and sometimes his mother did, too. His father took provisions to the house from the ranch, which was about a three hour trip. His mother kept moving back and forth, because she had younger children still at the ranch.

Living in town provided ranch children with a social life like they had never had before. Sometimes it was difficult for them to adjust and integrate themselves into Aspen life. Elizabeth Oblock Sinclair grew up in Aspen, but she noticed that it was difficult for the ranch children to go to high school in town, because they were used to ranch life. These teenagers straddled the differences between rural and urban life. Agnes Jurich McLaren never liked living in town, because other teenagers treated her badly and as a farm girl. Moving into established social cliques as an adolescent coming from a different background could be difficult, indeed. Bernice Vagneur Morrison noticed it too, but it did not seem to bother her for long. She said being from a ranch hindered young peoples' social lives, because town and ranch children did not meet until high school, and because some ranch students were not used to speaking English all the time. That made life tense, but Bernice also said that going to school in Aspen was great. She met lots of people, and used to hang out at the soda fountain of the Hotel Jerome and "do what teenagers do."⁶⁴ Football games, school plays, and other

⁶⁴(Bernice Vagneur Morrison, 1991)

festivities made living in town exciting and new for some students. Other teenagers chose living and working on the ranch over school in Aspen. Art Trentaz had only gone to high school for two years before he had to quit and work on his father's ranch. The ranch was six miles away from town, and he figured he had had enough schooling.

Ranch Recreation

The social scene in Aspen was a big change for ranch teenagers, partly because life on the surrounding ranches had its own social world. The ranch community's kind of entertainment centered around the family and neighbors rather than around Aspen.

Neighbors

Because ranches were usually far away from one another and from town, ranchers had no convenient gathering place. Besides their family, the closest people ranchers could turn to were their neighbors. Neighbors provided each other with an important support system and a limited social life. Ranchers generally knew this and appreciated it. Hildur Anderson said, perhaps with a bit of nostalgia, that her neighbors were not close in miles but they were close in other ways. They were kind and considerate, and Hildur respected them. She said her mother always kept a kettle on the stove so there would be coffee for anyone who stopped by.

Besides being friendly, neighbors could also help provide a source of entertainment. Hildur used to climb into the top of her neighbors the Hearsts' barn and watch the pigeons fly around. Mrs. Hearst fed Hildur cookies and told her stories. Hildur also used to ride to her neighbors at the Eriksons' ranch and visit with them. If the Eriksons were going to Aspen, they would ride along with the Hoaglunds, and would sometimes stay at the Hoaglunds' for a couple of days on their way home.

A more serious aspect of neighbors and the ranch social scene involved neighbors helping one another in times of need. Women used to stay at home to have their children, and the doctor would come to the house. Neighbor women would also come to help, providing moral as well as physical support. In Hildur's mother's case, neighbors were very important, as the doctor arrived on the scene at the same time Hildur did. The Hoaglunds and their neighbors also looked out for a mean old bachelor that lived in a shack below the Andersons. They all brought him food and watched over him despite his ill-temper, and when the Kearns brothers found him sick once, they helped get him to the hospital. Neither the bachelor nor his neighbors particularly enjoyed their relationship, but the bachelor received food and care, and the neighbors felt good about fulfilling their neighborly obligations.

Though not always, ranching neighbors tended to be close friends as well as a support group. Often ranchers would get together and socialize. The Hoaglunds spent their Sundays doing only the necessary chores, and then they would either visit neighbors for dinner (lunch), or they would have people over to their house. The

Trentazes got together with their neighbors on the weekends to play cards. The parents played poker, and the children played other games. Picnics were another favorite activity to do with neighbors, where people fished, pitched horseshoes, and socialized in general. Of course these events were usually limited to the summer time, and even then it was difficult for ranchers to leave their work. Bernice Vagneur Morrison said that her family only visited their best friends once or twice a year, but they went on picnics with themselves or their neighbors more often. Finally, neighbors were a good source of playmates for children. Hildur went to the Hearst's to play, and Agnes Jurich McLaren rode up to her neighbor's ranch to play hide and seek with their kids.

Family

On most ranches, families concentrated on chores and ranch work. When they did take time for fun, they did so together. In the summer families would go for picnics almost anywhere. Sometimes picnics included playing horseshoes or dancing. In the winter, families like the Hoaglunds went for sleigh rides and had taffy-pulls. Hildur also described going on tally-hos in the winter. This entailed hitching up a team of horses to a big hay rack, piling everyone on the sleigh, and riding from house to house, or to a specific house where there were refreshments. Singing, laughing, and roughhousing in the snow were an integral part of the whole trip.

Dances

Dances within the ranching community provided fun for everyone. They happened at the rural schoolhouses, typically after a program put on by the students for a holiday or graduation. Families came by sleigh with big rocks from the oven keeping their feet warm, and they brought food for later. For the school program children either sang songs or acted out a play that they had been working on for their parents. Bed sheets hanging from wire made curtains for the stage, and on-lookers sat in desks. After the program ended, people moved the stage, desks, and curtains to make room for the dancing.

Anybody who could play an instrument played, and people young and old danced. They danced the two-step, fast one-steps, polkas, the Virginia Reel, and they square danced. Agnes Jurich McLaren learned how to do the two-step with her father. At Brush Creek, Hildur's cousin played the trumpet, the clarinet, or the accordion, and his wife played the organ. At Woody Creek Rene Doroux played the accordion, Jess Bogue played the fiddle, and his wife Prue played the piano. If anyone else wanted to play they did, and the identity of the musicians depended on who showed up. The dancing went until all hours of the morning, but at midnight everyone stopped for a pot luck dinner of cakes, coffee, and sandwiches. After dinner, sometimes people with special talents would entertain the group. Hildur remembered the poetry of Jake Hatch especially, because he would put people's names and their embarrassing moments into his poems. Dancing continued long after the children had fallen asleep, and some families returned to their ranches as late as four in the

morning. The night Hildur graduated from the eighth grade, she played the organ for the dance with a high school senior on the violin. Hildur was twelve years old, and she pumped and played the organ loud and fast until five am. When the dancing ended, families would drive their horses and wagons back to their ranch, and begin daily chores as if they had been sleeping all night.

Bigger dances were held at Odd Fellows Hall in Basalt and the Armory Hall in Aspen. Those dances usually had more fancy music than the schools, with more violins and less accordions. They were also held more often -- every Saturday night.

Events in Town

Besides going to the Saturday dances, ranchers went into Aspen for other social events. As early as 1908 ranchers came into town to attend a farmer's picnic. Ranchers from Brush, Woody, Sopris, Maroon, and Capitol Creeks all showed up. Ranchers came into town oftentimes to see the horse races, a show, movies at the Isis Theater, or a basketball game. They also came to attend special events like the St. Patrick's Dinner at St. Mary's or the Fourth of July parade. The frequency of their trips to town depended on the road conditions and how far they had to travel.

Children's Entertainment

Children attended dances and picnics with the neighbors, but they were responsible for entertaining themselves from day to day.

Since there were few children near the Hoaglund ranch, Hildur's first friends were animals. She watched and played with dogs, cats, chickens, cattle, and horses.

In the summer she spent a long time taming and getting on a particular mare in the field. Hildur would put some oats on the ground, and as the horse ate, she would sit on the mare's head, sliding onto her back when she raised her head from the grain. Then Hildur took to visiting the neighbors on her horse. Other ranch children did much the same thing through 4-H. Amelia Trentaz participated in 4-H as a child, and went on to teach it as an adult. Sam Stapleton spent his summers catching chipmunks, riding horses into the hills with a picnic lunch, and he began hunting when he was about fourteen years old. Bernice Vagneur Morrison spent her free time riding her horse and looking at the scenery. Jens Christiansen used to go camping -- even for a week at a time, and Hugh Chisolm once caught a six pound rainbow out of the Roaring Fork River. Ranch children played outside mostly, and many played on their own, since other children were too far away.

In the winter it was more difficult for young people to go riding and camping. Bernice Vagneur Morrison played board games and card games with her family in the winter, but her favorite activity was reading. Young people also went skiing, even before Aspen was famous for it. They skied on the hills behind their ranches, sometimes with skis their families had brought to Aspen from Sweden. Not only did young people on ranches work outside, they played outside whenever they had the chance. Riding, camping,

hunting, and fishing allowed ranch children more opportunity for independence in their play than town children usually enjoyed.

Conclusion - Ranchers' View of Their Lives

In 1882 the Aspen Times wrote that farmers in Pitkin County were embarking on the "ancient and honorable employment of agriculture." They also said that farmers did not make money as fast as some miners, but it was a surer thing.⁶⁵ Both of those sentiments have stayed with us. The myth of the happy yeoman farmer continues in literature, and the reality of slow and scant profits lives on with farmers and ranchers today. In fact, farming and ranching included risks based on weather and crop prices, and farmers were not always happy.

The Sinclairs, Auzel Gerbaz, Agnes Jurich McLaren, Hildur Anderson, and George Vagneur all agreed on two points: ranching was a great life, it was healthy and good for raising children, but it was also virtually impossible to make a profit. These people would probably also agree that ranching demanded a lot of work they were not always excited about doing. Now, with the prices of land, taxes, fuel, machinery, and labor so high, ranchers in the Roaring Fork Valley simply could not succeed. The growing season is too short to get a worthwhile yield, and so ranchers sold most of their land by the 1960s. Both Agnes Jurich McLaren and Bernice Vagneur Morrison said they would not go back to ranching life if they could, even

⁶⁵Aspen Times, 24 June 1882.

though they each had good years ranching. Amelia Trentaz discouraged her son from ranching because it meant a lot of hard work for not much in return. One nineteenth-century rancher described his life in terms applicable to ranchers to this day:

I stuck to the ranch for the next two years, fishing and hauling hay, having a good time and a hard time and a hell of a time all the time.⁶⁶

⁶⁶Staats, from Wentworth, 49.

THE MAROLT RANCH

The Marolt ranch fits into the larger picture of ranching on the Roaring Fork Valley. The family, their ranch, their jobs, division of labor, and daily life all relate to this larger context. Descriptions of the Marolt ranch and their lives will in fact illustrate points made above, and provide additional examples of typical ranch work and life near Aspen.

[Please see Lysa Wegman-French's "The Holden-Marolt Site" pages 110-122 for a complete family history of the Marolts, and for a detailed description of how they obtained their ranch, a description of the ranch and its buildings, and a description of their cattle, crops, equipment, and other aspects of their ranch life.]

The Marolts illustrate the ethnic diversity of the ranchers, since Frank and Francis Marolt came to Aspen from Slovenia, and Opal Peterson, who married their son Mike, was the daughter of two immigrants from Sweden. As a family, the Marolts kept up certain ethnic traditions, mostly through their cooking.

The ranch itself, its buildings, and the way in which the Marolts utilized them all correspond to the other ranches and ranchers discussed above. The Marolts grew hay, grain, potatoes, and vegetables for the family as did other ranchers, and they also had horses, pigs, chickens, and cattle, which they sold. Mike Marolt even had the same kind of baler as Bob Sinclair, and felt the same animosity towards its erratic behavior.

The Marolts also dealt with the same isolation as other ranchers, and combatted it similarly. They went on picnics with neighbors, visited other ranchers, and amused themselves with whatever was handy. Mike and Opal's children, for example, used to build forts, go camping, and play in the granary and irrigation ditches. The division of labor on the Marolt ranch also corresponds to that of other ranchers. Children were responsible for chores like feeding animals and doing dishes, and they helped on the ranch in the summer. Mike's wife Opal and his mother before her both grew vegetable gardens, raised chickens, milked the cows, made butter, and raised children. Opal also sold eggs and milk to help with the family budget.

Finally, Opal Marolt expressed her view of ranching that coincided with that of many other ranchers. She said: "Between hogs and cattle and potatoes, you survive, right?"⁶⁷

⁶⁷Opal Peterson Marolt, interviewed by Lysa Wegman-French, 13 July 1990, Boulder, tape recording, AHS.

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