

Canon City, CO  
April 17, 1995

A WORD OF EXPLANATION:

Story - At The Edge Of The Canyon - photos

The cover photo is looking northwest from the Indian Fort ridge. In the foreground of the canyon is the 40 acres Linda and I bought from Dr. Harold Smith in 1989. It was a 40 acre homestead claim in 1889 by a Joseph Martin to lay claim to the natural access trail to the river for livestock water. I'd never heard of a Joseph Martin before. I have found no reliable record of when the land was transferred to a later owner. Donley and Cooper were shown as owners in the 1920's.

In the distance the rock house can be seen. The windmill is hidden by one of the pine trees.

The waterfall photo was taken just after 2" of marble size hail. The rock ledge at lower left in the photo still glistens from the freshly melted hail. This waterfall (near stairs) used to flow quite regularly back in the 30's when all rangelands were overgrazed. Now that range conditions are much improved it seldom flows. It used to be quite a sight after a heavy rain.

This occasion, July 1993, was the first time Linda or Mark had seen it flow. We were caught there by the unexpected hail storm. I know of no other waterfall of this height anywhere in the Saint Charles canyon. We've not measured the height, but I would guess it at about 60 feet.

Roy E. Roper

Attach to Story, "At the Edge of the Canyon"



**ELIZABETH A. (BAYES) ROPER, Ca. 1880**



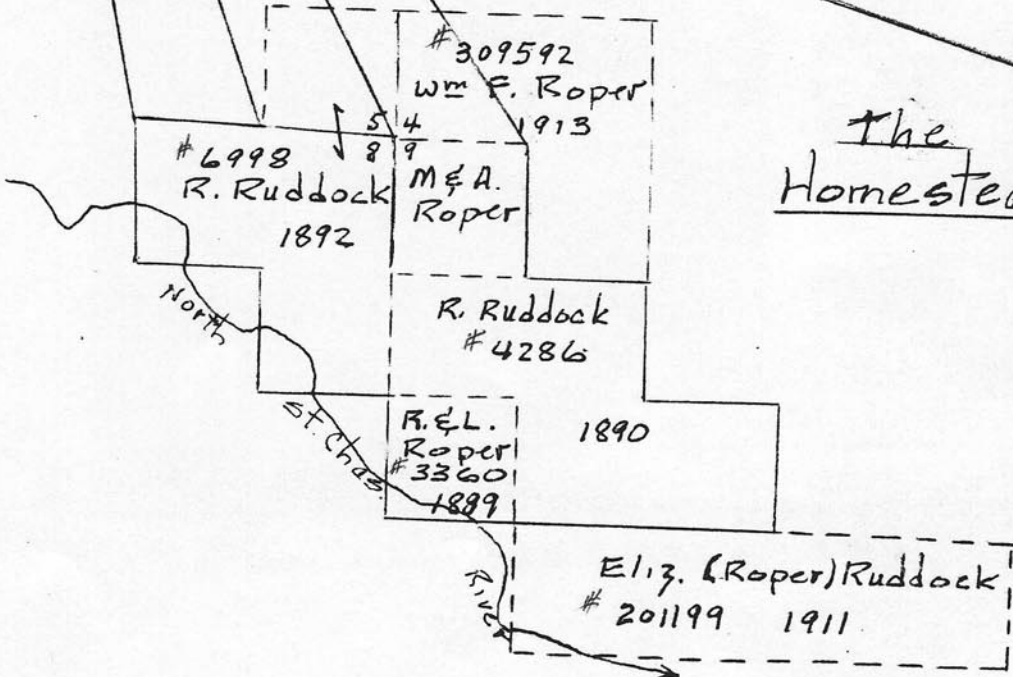
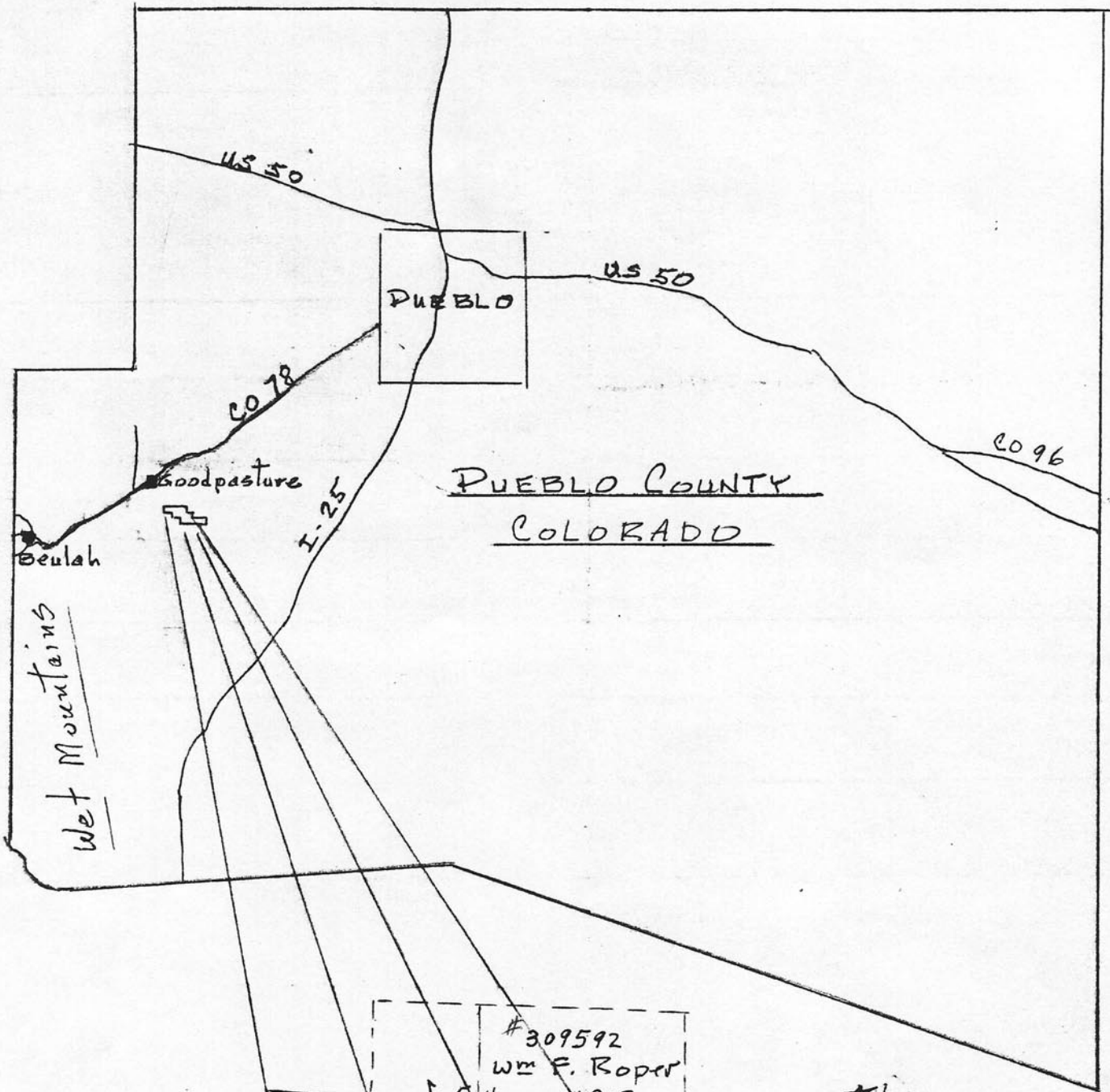
**THE ROCK HOUSE, Ca. 1930**



The North St. Charles River



The canyon garden and Table Rock was nestled next to the St. Charles River.

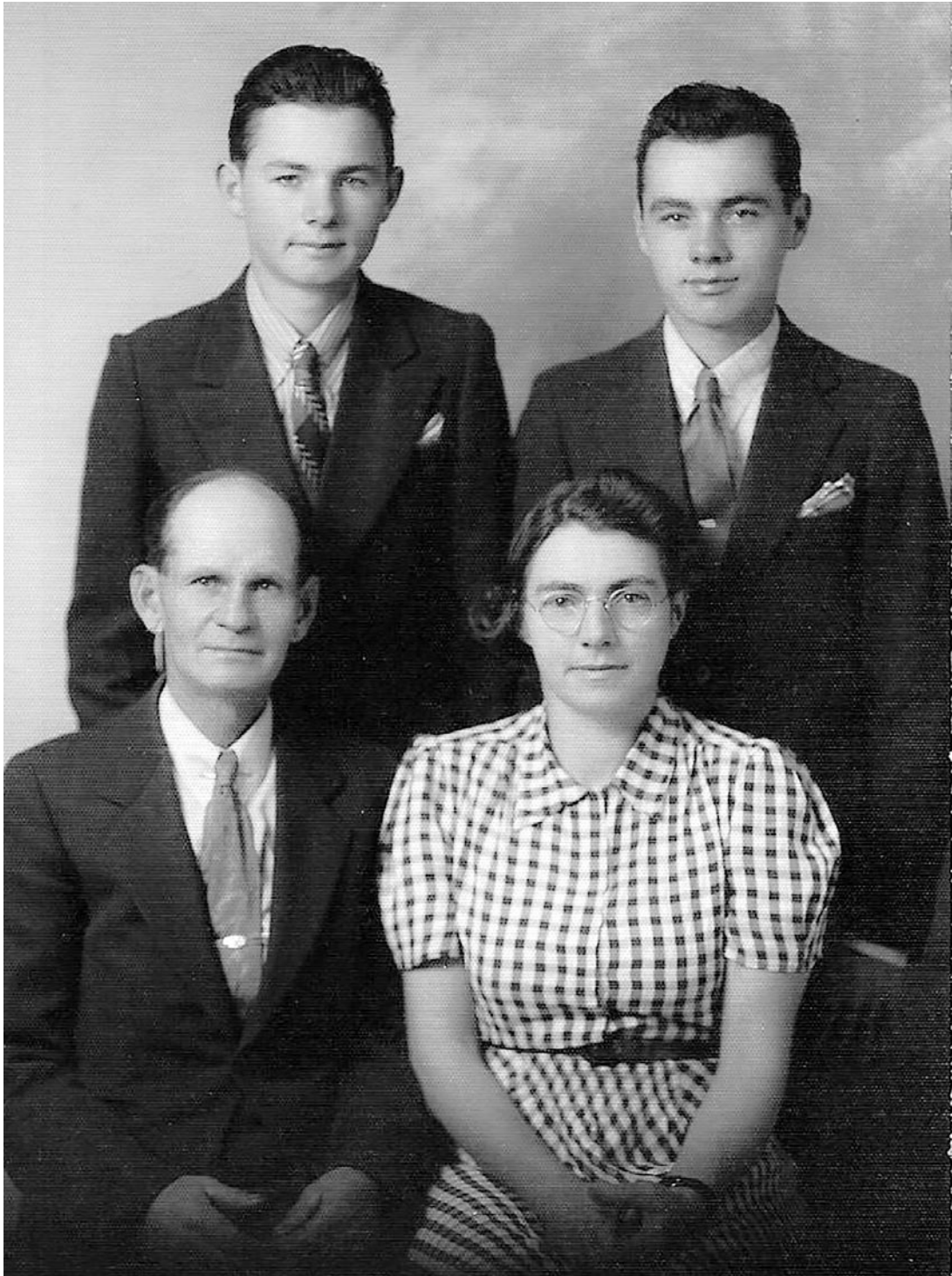


T 23 S

R 67 W



Roy and brother Melvin at Goodpasture in 1928, the Goodpasture Methodist Church Building in background.  
*Photo by Edna Simonson Roper, Courtesy Roy & Linda Roper - Roper Family*



William and Ethel Roper pose for a family portrait with sons, Roy and Melvin.

# **AT THE EDGE OF THE CANYON**

**EARLY YEARS ON THE ROPER RANCH**

**BY ROY ROPER  
1995**



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## MY EARLY YEARS ON THE ROPER RANCH

### Chapter 1

Several of my children and grandchildren have often asked me what it was like to grow up out in the country during the 1930's. Therefore, I put down here some of the experiences I recall from my "growing-up years", from my birth until I left the place of my birth.

Most of my readers may know I was born on the Ruddock-Roper place, 2 1/2 miles south of Goodpasture in Pueblo Co. CO. The legal description is SE4,SE4 Sec 8; T23S-R67W of the 6th Prin. Meridian. The land was homesteaded by Richard Ruddock about 1887 and proved up on Aug. 16, 1892. My great grandmother, Eliz. Roper, married Richard Ruddock in 1890. The land has been handed down to later generations in the years since. Mel & I received the title in 1946, just after I returned from World War II.

I was born March 20, 1925 in the wood frame house my father had built in 1918. The house was located about 200 ft. north of the edge of the North St. Charles canyon. My parents, William and Ethel Roper moved to the new house sometime in 1924. They were married Dec. 19, 1922.

I think my birth did not leave much of an impression on my father, who at that time was apparently not much interested in children, especially babies. My father kept a daily diary in those days. Years later I came across his old diaries so looked up his entry for 3/20/25, my birthdate. He had written, "Worked at building fence up on the buttes. New baby." He did not even bother to note other information such as the sex of the baby, nor a name for the the baby.

Our family continued to live at the small ranch for 19 years, from 1924 until my entry into the Service for WW II in early Nov. 1943. Mel had enlisted in the Navy a year earlier. We did move temporarily to Pueblo in 1940-42 where Mel and I completed high school at Central High School.

I tried to farm the land one last time during the summer of 1943, as I had a farm draft deferment. However, it was a dry summer and all I harvested were a few sacks of pinto beans which I pulled and piled by hand. I sold the 900 lbs of beans in Canon City for \$45 just a few days before entering the US Navy on November 3rd.

Early years on the ranch in my memory were a mix of youthful fun and hard times. The Great Depression had started with the Stock Market crash of Oct. 29, 1929. You have probably read the story. For us the years 1931 through 1936 seemed to be the worst. These were the start of the "Dirty Thirties" as drought and dust storms became more frequent. Depression, lack of income and crop failures were a constant worry for my parents. My father told me years later that for many months during those years he never even attempted to carry a purse or billfold as he had no money. Early in 1933 the new Franklin D. Roosevelt Admin. started some relief employment for men in need of work. Most were public works type of jobs such as on roads and public buildings, even a local sawmill. Dad Roper



was fortunate to get such work for several years. The wages were quite low, but enough to buy groceries and clothing. Violent spring wind storms scoured our fields of remaining topsoil and blow dust piled up over the field fences. The ceilings in some rural farm houses came loose due to the weight of the blow dust in the attics.

By 1934 the range grass on our ranch was dead or dying due to the lack of moisture. There were only a few live plants among the rocks in the gullies. We had no grass and no hay for the cattle. A number of our cattle became so thin and weak that they could not get back up after lying down. We tried to strengthen them with extra feed, but some did not survive. After the grass was gone our cattle ate all the oak leaves - supposedly poisonous to cattle. Then they grubbed out the yucca plant roots and ate them, spewing foam, like soap suds, from their mouths. After the yucca was gone the cattle turned to eating cactus, thorns and all. Dad Roper then managed to buy a kerosene flame burner to burn off the cactus thorns. The cattle came to depend on burned cactus and they would come running when they heard him start up the burner of a morning. This was about 1935-36.

Our salvation was the garden in the canyon where we were able to raise our own vegetables - after the squirrels, rabbits and porcupines got their share. We ate them too.

During those drought years we lost cattle to starvation. But my great Uncle Lee at Goodpasture lost many more. Carcasses of dead cattle seemed to be everywhere. Mel and I heard there was a market for bones. We worked most of one winter (1935) collecting and piling the dry bones. We then persuaded Grandfather Opp to haul the trailer load of bones to Pueblo to sell. Our profit was very little, about \$3, as I recall.

These were the years also when we gathered and burned cow chips for fuel. There was no money to buy coal even though coal was plentiful and cheap at Florence and Canon City. The cow chips burned good, but were dusty and produced a large amount of ashes.

On one occasion our family (with Uncle Eddie) butchered an older cow for beef. Mel and I begged for the fresh cow hide to sell at a leather company in Pueblo. The hide sale brought us only one dollar.

Everything was low in cost but few people had any money to buy with. The folks often tried to make grocery money by selling eggs and a bit of cream when we had it. Eggs often brought only .08-.10 cents a dozen.

Once they sold two crates of live chickens for .08 cents per pound. We also raised and sold squash and pumpkins as much as we could. Grocery stores in those days bought such farm produce. But, prices were low.

We had no close neighbors, of course. Nights were dark. Not even one light from a neighbors farmstead, compared to the many lights we see there now at night.

Among our few luxuries was a radio, when it worked, (we first had a 3 tube Crossley), and a gasoline lamp, when we could keep the cutworm moths from flying through the fragile mantles. Kerosene was .10 -.12 cents a gallon and we used kerosene lamps for many years. Evening reading was not much fun with the kerosene lamps.

In 1937 Dad Roper managed to save enough money to buy a 6 volt wind-charger. Mel and I helped out with a few dollars we had saved. Zenith windchargers were a new development, and worked really well. We could now get some good from the annoying everlasting wind. What a change! We now had dependable power to charge the radio battery. Dad even rigged up a single electric bulb from an auto headlight. We felt we were just as modern as the folks in town.

Compared to today's youth we children had almost nothing. We wore cast-off clothing from the Salvation Army store or whatever my grandmother could find among her friends in Canon City. We had no TV, no sports equipment, and not many store bought toys. But, we had the canyon! Most of our spare time was spent in the canyon, winter and summer. We learned to swim in the small river, and we knew where most of the bird's nests and animal dens were. Many visitors wondered that we had not been killed by a fall while rock climbing. But we were not afraid. I can remember only a few times when we had a close call while climbing. A lot of our toys were home made, such as stilts and sling shots or beanies, as we called them. We made many of these with a forked stick, rubber strands cut from old inner tubes, and a pouch cut from an old shoe. What fun it was to shoot rocks at targets in the canyon.

Every fall my father hoped to lay in some food supplies for winter, such as 100 lbs pinto beans, 100 lbs rice and 100 lbs of sugar. We ground our own yellow corn for cornmeal. Quite often all we had for supper was cornmeal mush and milk. The left over mush was then sliced and fried for breakfast. I liked the fried mush better than the mush and milk.

Meat supplies in the summer were scarce since we had no refrigeration. In early summer we often ate rabbit, either our own or wild cottontails we hunted. We also hunted and trapped squirrels and prairie dogs. These were good eating. By mid-summer some of the young frying chickens could be used. We felt the game birds such as mourning doves, quail and the domestic pigeons gone wild, were our friends and never did them any harm. The pigeons mentioned here took up residence in the canyon wall (east of the garden) before 1930. The flock survived there over the many years until about 1990, when we saw them no more. I think the lack of grain crops led to their extinction. Doves, too are not now as numerous as when we lived there and grain crops were grown.

Our domestic water supply was mostly from the concrete underground cistern near the barn. The barn roof served as the rain/snow collector. My father used to get so annoyed with the many English sparrows which liked to perch on the roof. Of course all the water had to be hand carried in buckets the 150-200' to the house - largely a boys chore.

When the cistern ran dry all our water then had to be hauled up out of the canyon on the cable tramway hoist. There it was stored in barrels. Dad Roper taught Mel and I to operate the hoist. It was rather fun to do this, allowing the empty 10 gal. bucket to zoom 200 ft. down to the bottom. If it was handled just right the bucket would tip over in the river to get a nearly full bucket. If not, we might get only a partially full bucket. Then we had to manually push the idler pulley in to tighten the belt, advance the engine throttle and the windlass then took over to wind the hoist rope on the drum to pull the full bucket to the top. Fortunately, we seldom had to hoist water in the winter time. Several of the more well-to-do folks in the community had a cistern just outside the kitchen with a pipe connecting to a hand pitcher pump at the kitchen sink - a really "modern convenience", water in the house.

Livestock water too, was scarce. When our earthen ponds went dry Dad R. often bailed water by hand from the old hand dug well (near bath tubs). This water was salty and poor quality for the cattle. Sometimes there was enough water to last awhile in the gully waterhole just south of our present picnic spot. Or, we often had to drive them down one of the trails into the canyon to water everyday. This was another boy's chore.

Every spring Mel and I could hardly wait until warm weather when we could go barefoot. Until about age 12 our summer attire was usually only a pair of cut-off pants with suspenders - no underwear. Going barefoot seemed so natural. But, stubbed toes and cactus thorns were a common hazard too. We often had a sore toe wrapped in a bandage. Our feet became very tough and calloused. Visitors could hardly believe we roamed the canyon bare footed.

Winters were too long it seemed. Our frame ranch house had no insulation in the walls or ceiling. Sometimes the wet dish cloth would be frozen of a cold winter morning. In winter most of our time was spent in one room, the kitchen. There was not enough money for fuel to heat all rooms. On very special occasions the big coal heater was fired up. Smelly cobs from the pig pen furnished a part of the fuel. It was always a kid's chore to go get what cobs could be found at the pig pens. We almost never had enough wood or coal to be generous with the use of it.

Mel and I attended elementary school at Cedar Grove, Dist. 37. Cedar Grove school was a typical one room school of that day. There was one teacher most times for all eight grades. Enrollment was small during the 30's, 8 - 12 students. We usually walked the 2 1/2 miles from the ranch to school. Sometimes we would get a ride half way if the folks happened to be going up to Goodpasture. Our walking to school left a worn trail across the grassland visible from year to year. We walked Indian file, changing the lead frequently to break trail in new snow. Winters at school were cold too. Sometimes the teacher would let us pull our desks up close to the huge coal heater. The school board usually provided a token amount of sports equipment at the beginning of the year; a new soft ball, bat and maybe two ball gloves. All were worn out by early winter. Recess games were marbles, blackman, run-

sheep-run, auntie over, and the swings - if they were not broken. In the late 30's the teacher's salary was up to about \$75 per month, good wages for those days. Out of this she had to pay room and board with a local family or drive out from Pueblo. Some students rode horses to school. There was a long horse shed south of the school house where the horses stood patiently tied until school ended for the day.

Keeping fresh food from spoiling in the heat of summer was a challenge. The more fortunate farm folk had a spring house where they could keep milk, eggs, butter and cooked meat. Some even had a rock lined dug well where they lowered these items in a bucket to cooler depths. We had neither. But Grandfather Opp was skillful at constructing coolers. I've not seen one since I left the ranch. The evaporative cooler was made with a wood frame of 1X2 lumber. It had shelves and legs and was about the size of a small refrigerator. Clean burlap sacks were split and stretched over the outside of the open wood frame then tacked into place. A sheet iron water tank was made to fit into the open top. Finally, old socks were used to extend down into the water tank a few inches and up over the top and down to the burlap sides. Water was pulled by evaporation out of the tank, and through the socks to keep the burlap sides damp all the time, thus cooling the interior of the box. The coolers worked really well, though rather primitive by today's standards. Filling the water tank daily was a kid's job. We used the coolers for several years. Finally, in about 1937 we obtained a used ice box. For several years we harvested ice off the Donley pond, (now Mel and Anna's 40 ac.). The ice was packed in saw dust in the old rock house. What a luxury it was to have ice, and even ice cream in summer!

Roads and Transportation - Another experience I'll not soon forget about life on the ranch was our road into the place. Maybe we didn't have the worst road in the community, but it was close! Though we lived only 2 1/2 miles south of the highway at Goodpasture, we had not much of a road - only two ruts across the grass prairie, the same kind of road used by the wagons of the homesteaders. When one rut got too deep, traffic simply moved over enough to make a new rut. In some places the roadway was a series of old rut scars as much as 25' wide. Summer rains made the road slippery and terrified our visitors if they got caught at our place during a sudden rain. Winter snow was the worst problem, especially if the wind drifted snow crusted over as it often did. Sometimes we were snow bound for several days because there was no way to keep the road open. Meantime our mail accumulated in our mailbox at Goodpasture. Our autos were Model T Fords until 1937 so not powerful enough to pull through much snow. In 1937 Dad Roper bought a used 1929 Model A roadster. It had much more power but was still not a match for the snow drifts. Sometimes the use of the horses and wagon was the only way to get to Goodpasture and to the mailbox. After the snows melted the mud seemed to last forever. Even the County roads were often impassable with mud. In those days the County roads had little or no gravel base.

By 1939 Mel and I were teenagers and old enough to take some off-farm

employment, whenever it was available. One summer we worked for a week cutting corn by hand for our near neighbor, Geo. Asher. We used short handled hoes. It was another dry year with the corn short and sparse. Our wages were "a dollar a day and your dinner". The spring of 1940 was cool and rainy. Weeds flourished. Grandfather Opp had a brush scythe which he fixed up for our use. We stayed with him frequently in Beulah that summer and found a lot of weed cutting jobs using the scythe and hand rakes. This was mostly for the "summer people" who lived in Pueblo but had summer cabins in Beulah. In those years before air conditioning a summer cabin in cool Beulah was much desired by those in Pueblo who could afford it. Our weed cutting wages were better, at .25 cents per hour. We now earned enough to buy our own clothes. Blue jeans from Montgomery Wards were .79 cents a pair. Chambrey shirts were about .49 cents each. The summers of 1941-42 we found men's work. We had hit the "big time". There had been more moisture and a good wheat crop. Some of the neighbors did not yet have combine harvesters. They still had the old style grain binders so needed labor to shock wheat and also on the threshing crews a few weeks later. Wages were even better, about \$3 per day. We liked working with grown up men and enjoyed the big harvest crew dinners of generous helpings of fried chicken, potatoes and gravy.

#### Some Additional Recollections

THE STAIRS - No story of the Roper Ranch would be complete without an account of the stairway into the St. Chas. canyon. This unique stairway was usually the thing most first time visitors asked to see. They had heard of it from someone else.

Access into the canyon near our home was blocked by the vertical sandstone cliffs. Only the west trail provided an access. In the 1920's several crude ladders were constructed at the stairs site probably by Richard Ruddock. Later my father built an improved three piece ladder. By the early 30's it too was getting weathered and shaky. The beginning of our canyon garden about 1935 gave need for a better stairway since vegetables and other items could not be easily carried up the old steep ladder. A person had to hold on with one hand.

In the fall of 1936 Dad Roper began to make plans for a better stairway. Our grandfather, William Opp, helped with the plans and construction. In Jan. 1937 Dad started the work by drilling holes for anchor bolts in the vertical rock face, all in a uniform straight line. He made a rope sling to suspend himself in mid air while drilling the holes. By late spring the new stairway was completed. It was beautiful. A total of 58 steps in one entire staircase 40' long from top to bottom and bolted to the vertical rock cliff. The steps were about 3' wide. We could easily carry loads without having to hold on to the railing.

We used the stairway a lot, almost every day it seemed, as we were in and out of the canyon frequently. Mel and I used it the most. Time and weathering took its toll however, and by the mid 1950's the stairs were beginning to fall apart. Now, all that is left of "A stairway to the stars" is the one weathered timber bolted to the canyon wall.

## EARLY YEARS ON THE ROPER RANCH - Chapter 2

### Some Additional Recollections - Continued

#### ED ROPER - THE VILLAGE BLACKSMITH

During the 1930's the leading business at Goodpasture was Ed Roper's blacksmith shop. Uncle Eddie, my father's only brother, was the blacksmith. He was a kindly, though not a large man as one might expect of a blacksmith. But, he had strength enough to wield a hammer hour after hour sharpening plow shares and other such work. His most used tool was a short-handled 8 lb. hammer, the edges worn off from the many hours of work at the anvil. Whenever we heard the ringing of the anvil we knew Uncle Eddie was at work. Mel and I often took turns turning the handle of his forge blower to make the coal fire hotter. He would have to caution us about not turning it too fast. Uncle Eddie was a skillful workman and highly respected in the community. Many of his tools such as tongs, he had made himself. They would be valued antique tools today. Everything in the shop ran by hand labor except a tempermental gas engine to power an air compressor.

The blacksmith shop always smelled of horse manure as Uncle Eddie did a lot of horse shoeing in the summer, mostly for the people in Beulah. The blacksmith shop was also a place where many of the community menfolk stopped by to visit a spell. There were no Coke or candy machines as we might expect today. Maybe only a bucket of slightly warm water. I can well remember my great Uncle Lee Roper often coming across the road from his ranch home "just to visit awhile". My grandfather, William Opp, also lived there for several years in one of the side rooms of the shop building. We always found lots of activity at the blacksmith shop.

Out in back there was a large assortment of used farm equipment of various kinds. This was the spare parts and materials storage area and a fun place for boys to play. Sadly, many of Uncle Eddie's customers never got around to paying him for work he'd done for them on credit. Some were too poor to pay, and, he was hesitant to press folks for payment. In late summer 1943 Uncle Eddie closed the shop after 22 years work there. He and Aunt Marie then moved in to Pueblo. He asked that I clean the tools out of the shop and make use of any I wanted. I cleaned out everything of value and then locked the sliding door for the last time. The blacksmith tools were later all stolen out of our ranch house.

THE COUNTRY TELEPHONE LINE - A mix of convenience and frustration was our country telephone line. But, at least there was no monthly charge. This single 14 ga. wire connected us with the Goodpasture blacksmith shop and most of the neighbors east of us in the Water Barrel Flats area. These rural telephones operated with a hand cranked magneto generator to energize the ring in a series of long and short rings. Each ranch had a different ring. I think our ring was two longs and three shorts. After the ring the receiver was lifted and two large dry cell batteries served to energize the speaking circuit. People sometimes "listened in"

on someone else's call. The line often grounded out during wet weather. We had two nice old telephones, both of which were stolen out of the ranch house after we moved away.

I think my last call on that telephone line was on July 6, 1946. I was working for Ray Miller on the Sisson place SE of our place also along the St. Chas. canyon. It was wheat harvest time. At noon that day I had a call from Helen Youngren at Goodpasture (the big lake place) to tell me of the death in Pueblo of my beloved grandfather, William Opp. The phone line fell into disrepair sometime later as more people left the land and no one bothered to maintain the line as we had done.

**BUTCHERING DAY** - Our winter meat was mostly pork and beef. I much preferred the beef. Butchering of large animals like beef and pork had to wait until cold weather. This was to be sure the animal heat could be quickly chilled out overnight. Otherwise the meat would spoil. The onset of a winter storm was always considered to be a good day to butcher and, as a boy, I couldn't understand why. (See above) Preparations for hog butchering started with heating a half barrel of water over an outdoor fire until the water was scalding hot. The hog was then killed and hauled or dragged to the barrel site. A hole was usually dug in the ground to allow the barrel to rest on a slant, about a 45' angle. Then everybody grabbed the hog's legs to lower the hog into the hot water, first one end and then the other. After a few minutes the hog hair would begin to "slip" or come loose when pulled. The hog was then pulled out of the barrel and everyone pitched in to scrape the hair off, using disk shaped home made hog scrapers.

The expression "a good scald" probably came from this operation. If the water was not really hot a poor scald would result and the hog hair would not scrape off very well.

Sometimes a neighbor would help with hog butchering. For his help he was usually given the hog's head and some fresh liver. Surprisingly quite a bit of food can be had from a good sized hog's head, including two jowl bacons, the tongue and brains. Other small bits of the head meat was cooked down into a spiced boiled mixture called "head cheese". There was usually enough natural gelatin to make it set up when cooled. It was usually sliced and eaten cold. I liked it then, and still do.

Pork was a popular meat for the farm people. Young porkers could be raised in 6-8 months. Lard was a chief ingredient for most farm cooking. Then too, pork meat could be preserved more easily than beef. Bacon and hams were salted or smoked and most everything else was ground into home-made sausage. Earlier in the 30's we ate a lot of salt pork, or salt side as it was called. This was bacon slabs heavily coated with a granular salt mixture. To prepare salt side as food the meat was thick sliced then parboiled with water in a fry pan so as to remove most of the salt. Then it was fried. But, it still tasted salty. Sometimes the hams were soaked in a salt brine. In the mid 1930's the Morton Salt Co. developed their "smoked sugar cure" preservative. This salt mixture had a much better smoked flavor. It also included a hypodermic needle to pump a liquid "sugar cure" into the center of the hams where meat often spoiled first. The Morton products were quite popular on the farms up

until about the coming of the rental cold storage lockers (early 1940's) which were the predecessors of home freezers of today.

Most farm recipes included lard just as they call for cooking oil today. The lard sold in stores was smooth and snowy white. But, most lard off the farm was a grainy gray color. Rendering out the lard was saved for a mild winter day when it could be done out of doors. A small fire was built under a large black cast iron pot containing the raw lard in cut up chunks. It usually required several hours to cook down the raw lard into hot grease with the pork cracklings floating on top. After cooling a bit the hot grease was strained through dish cloths then poured into 1 - 2 gallon crocks for storage in a cool place. This lard then was the supply for the next 6 - 8 months. We especially liked to eat the dried pork cracklings.

Soap making was also done out of doors as described above. However, to make soap a strong lye solution was added to the hot lard. After the mixture cooled it formed a solid scum several inches thick on top. This was the soap. It was cut into cubes like bars of soap and was then ready to use. I can remember soap being made only two or three times. The home made soap was generally used only for laundry, as it was too strong for face washing or bathing.

ROCK; THE UNIVERSAL BUILDING MATERIAL - All homesteaders had need of building materials. Settlers along the foothills were perhaps fortunate to have access to ledges of sandstone rock for building. The rock was usually free. All that was needed was the labor and sweat to lift, haul or carry it. Our old rock house was made of local rock (and mud) by Richard Ruddock about the year 1890. We think he lived in a dug out nearby from 1887 until 1890.

Dad Roper used a lot of rock too. He lined the hand dug well (near the bath tubs) with rock. Some appear too large for him to have lifted. It seemed he was always lifting and carrying a rock for some purpose or another. His hands often bore the cuts and bruises from lifting rock.

THE STRAW MATTRESS - From about 1930 to 1934 Mel and I slept together on a single or 3/4 size bed with open iron springs. Our mattress was a blue and white striped straw tick. In the fall our parents would hope to find a freshly threshed straw stack. There they would empty out the old straw and refill with fresh clean straw. Of course the straw tended to get lumpy after a time. Then it would need to be shaken up to smooth out the lumps.

THE CANYON GARDEN - Most all of you have heard stories of our vegetable garden down in the St. Chas. canyon. This was my father's idea, started about 1935. And it was quite successful. Irrigation water was pumped from the river using a one cylinder gas engine with large flywheels. Vegetables grew really well in the sandy loam soil. We raised quite a variety of produce, even celery. Watermelons did real well. One especially large watermelon weighed 46 lbs.

In the fall before frost we usually piled all the left over melons and



covered them with the vines. One year (1938-39?) a number of the young men from Beulah found out about our large pile of watermelons. Since we had no plans to use them, Dad gave them permission to have an evening watermelon feast there in the garden. They built a large bonfire and consumed the melons with a lot of burps, belches and laughter. We watched their party from the top of the canyon. Mom Roper also planted flowers in the canyon garden. Until a few years ago Oriental poppies, rhubarb, and asparagus plants remained. Vinca Minor still covers the hillside south of the old garden area, even after 60 years. Any fruit we ate was usually home canned peaches or plums. In summer Mel and I scoured the canyon for wild goose berries and choke cherries. They were generally quite small in the dry years, and we hardly ever found enough to make a pie. By late summer apples could be picked free off the ground at orchards in Beulah. These were the "wind falls" and almost always wormy. In some years we stored apples in the cistern near the rock house.

THE FIRST LANDUSERS - The word landusers seems more apt than landowners since ownership of the land was fought over almost constantly by the native American Indians even before the coming of the white settlers. The mountain tribes, mostly Utes, were frequently at war with the plains Indians of the Apache and Arapahoe tribes. In fact the fortification of our own "Indian Fort" as we call it, just southeast of the ranch on the canyon ridge, shows rock walls built and readied for defense against attack from all sides. We don't know when these visitors were there, but before 1860 and maybe much earlier in the 1700's perhaps. Most of the Indian evidence we've found was along the St. Chas. canyon. A rather large rock shelter was dug out south of Cedar Grove by some of our neighbors. In it they found a human burial and other artifacts. These Indians, probably Utes, appear to have been nomadic hunters who did not stay long in one camp. They may have returned from year to year. Mel and I were much interested in Indian lore during our teen years. We examined every possible rock shelter in the canyon for charcoal, any evidence of use and for rock paintings. We found a few shelters and dug out some, finding mostly broken charred rock, scraps of bones, yucca strands twisted together, and even some corn and a few beads. But, it appeared these shelters were of only temporary use. We probably dug out 3-4 shelters, all we could find.

The small cliff dwelling mid-way down the canyon wall (west of the ranch house site) appears to have been the hiding place for perhaps one family. Dad Roper told of being in the ruin in earlier years and seeing a rock wall 1-2 ft. high along the outer edge, and of the dried mud showing the imprint of a human hand. Most of the wall was later vandalized, pushed off into the canyon by we don't know who. A nice yucca mat was also dug out by a visiting "professor". I remember seeing it. I was age 7-8. We frequently found arrowheads along the canyon and also in the wind-blown fields. Also found were manos and matates, some rather crude. We assume they were used to grind mostly acorns or juniper berries as the Indians here did not appear to raise corn as did the Anasazis in SW Colo.

Nearly all the matates were of sandstone. Once Mel and I decided we

would roast corn and grind it on the matates for eating "just like the Indians". We did this and mixed the ground corn with milk as cereal. But, we found our cereal also contained a lot of sand and grit. One time was enough for that!

Nearly all the Indian dwelling sites were close to water, either near an easy trail into the canyon or along the side draws where water pocketed from rain and snow. We found a number of tepee rings. These are a circle of rocks where the rocks were used to hold down the hides at the bottom of the tepee. Tepee ring locations on the ranch are these:

3-4 rings near draw, west end of the place.

3-4 rings near the west trail into the canyon.

8-10 rings below the east pond and near the east trail.

I have a collection of 50 or so arrowheads or broken points, a few crude axes and hammers and also several nice manos and matates. Mel has most of the other artifacts we found of bone, yucca and beads. We found no pottery except a few shards. It would be interesting to know more of what our early inhabitants were really like in those much earlier days.

CROPS GROWN- The farmland we had was of rather shallow soil. Most of it should never have been plowed but left in native grass. The topsoil was only 7-8 inches thick. High winds during the dry years blew away the best topsoil and down to the clay subsoil. Drifts of "blow dirt" were on the east side of every field, some to the top of the fences. By the time our families came to the area (1885), most of the better farmland had already been taken up by earlier homesteaders. This included the Waterbarrel Flats east of us, so named because all domestic water had to be hauled by horse and wagon in water barrels. The nearest water for those folks was the St. Chas. River at Burnt Mill, a ten mile trip, five miles each way.

Dad Roper raised mostly corn and forage crops for the cattle, such as milo and black amber cane, a forage sorghum. Dad did not have a good grain drill so we could not raise good wheat. The corn was either picked by hand out of the field or was shucked out of the large stack after we built the stacker. Ear corn was saved for chicken feed and pig feed. The corn fodder was then used for winter feed for our cow herd of 15-18 animals.

Dad had an old Fordson tractor to do the plowing. We used our team of horses to do the harrowing, planting and cultivating.

Most years we had a patch of squash, watermelons, and cantaloupe in the field north of the rock house. Sometimes we had a fair crop. Though the fruits were small, they always had a good sweet flavor. Hand hoeing the weeds was essential as rain was usually scarce.

THE TOOLS OF THE TRADE - Here is a listing of the farm tools Dad Roper had and used to coax crop production from our land. About 70 acres was cultivated on seven fields.

The Fordson tractor - A rather ancient 4 cylinder tractor built about the mid 1920's. It had rather low power compared to newer tractors our neighbors had or were getting. The name Fordson referred to Henry Ford & Son (Edsel?). This old tractor was hard to start, as

most were. Just before I left our ranch in Nov. 1943 to enter the Navy, I drove the tractor with grain binder over to the Sisson place where they could look after it. We sort of hid it back in the trees out of site of vandals. There it remained until about 1955 when Mel took it all apart to sell for scrap.

Other tractor implements were a two bottom plow and a tandem disc. The grain binder was pulled by either the tractor or three horses. All other implements were horse drawn as follows:

- 3 Sections of spike tooth harrow.
- 1 - Corn planter, two row.
- 1 - Corn cultivator, one row.
- 1 - Sulky plow, one moldboard, (a riding plow)
- 2 - Walking plows. One nice small one was used for the canyon garden. We tried to hide it, but it too was stolen as was even the gas engine we had left in the canyon.
- 1 - One lister or middle breaker. Worked like a walking plow.
- 1 - Go-devil. One row. Used to cultivate listed corn up to 12" high.
- 1 - 5' mower, For mowing hay. Quite a load for two horses.
- 1 - Dump rake, For raking hay into windrows.
- 1 - Corn Sled (A separate story)
- 1 - Slip, Purpose for this was to haul soil, held about 1/4 cy. This implement is the only one we still have.
- 1 - Lumber wagon. I still have one front wheel, Others were stolen.
- 1 - Low wheeled wagon w/hay rack. Home made from old auto parts.
- 2 - Light weight horses, sometimes three horses.
- 1 - The Mormon stacker. It was all home made, even the bolts, slings, and other parts. It worked quite well, however.

Except for spring plowing, most of the farm work was done by the horses or by man power. Crop yields were a sometime thing. Destructive hail storms were a common occurrence, even during the dry years. One such hail storm occurred in 1930 when I was only age five. The hail stones were over 2" in diameter, "tennis ball" hail they call it now days. The hail left dents in our corrugated steel barn roof. We had a patch of nice watermelons, nearly mature but not quite ripe. I remember how the melons all had large holes in them from the hail. As a small boy I was so disappointed for the loss of the melons. I don't remember about other things, but I'm sure all our other crops were hailed out as well.

Grasshoppers always seemed worse during a dry year. About the year 1938 hordes of migratory grasshoppers appeared. We had never seen any like them. They were an unusual mottled gray color and much larger than the native hoppers. At first, before they grew wings, they walked, always westward. Toward evening we could see them falling off the edge of the canyon (near the pigeon roosts), like drops of water. This resembled a march of lemmings falling off cliffs into the sea. Later, as the hoppers grew wings they flew, always westward. We could see many of them, though they did not darken the sun as some stories I have read of other grass-plagues. The next year we had no migratory grasshoppers.

WHAT CREATED THE CANYON? - Many times first time visitors at our place were astonished at the size of the canyon. Their next questions were, "what created the canyon?" Some suggested a huge crack suddenly appeared in the earths' crust, or maybe an earthquake opened up the canyon. Of course my parents did not have an answer. In those earlier years none of us thought to look at the stream worn gravels and granite rocks between our house and the canyon rim.

Only later as I learned more of geology, how the mountains were formed and viewed the aerial photos did I realize that the small North Saint Charles river once flowed right where our house stood. Indeed, the remnants of old stream gravels are evident just below the old rock house. This was a gravelly curve in the river where it encountered an up-thrust fault just east of our ranch house.

The river could not flow through, but had to turn southeastward along the fault where it finally found an opening at the south end of the Indian Fort ridge. There it broke through the fault to continue its' course eastward. Downward cutting erosion by the river thus created the canyon we see today. I would liked to have seen the landscape in those early years.

The canyon is about 150 feet deep where we lived, but it becomes deeper, as much as 200 feet deep, toward the Indian Fort ridge. I have seen many flood caused changes in the river channel even in my brief lifetime. One such flood toppled the huge rock which served to anchor the tramway cable where we used to draw water from the river. The river continues to cut the canyon deeper using the granite gravels from the Beulah area as effective rasps and files.

ROOT BEER - A joyful remembrance I have is of the infrequent times we had homemade root beer. Since we never ever had soft drinks as are common today, we longed for a special treat. Root beer was it!

We were not able to make root beer until Dad R. bought a used bottle capper. Soon after, the folks located enough bottles, and metal bottle caps were available in the grocery stores.

The root beer was mostly a combination of Hire's root juice extract, sugar and water. As I remember, a batch would fill about 20 bottles. After bottling the root beer had to age for a time, a week or more, so the carbonation fizz could build up. We could hardly wait! Even though we had no ice to pour it over, the root beer was really a treat. However, we found it best not to shake a bottle before opening.

One day Mom Roper was hand carrying noon lunch to Dad in the east fields. It was a warm day. She had a bottle of root beer in one hand, holding it by the neck. Suddenly, the bottle exploded and she was left holding only the neck. We all had a good laugh out of that experience.

## EARLY YEARS ON THE ROPER RANCH - Chapter 3

### Some Additional Recollections - Continued

THE CORN SLED - As I noted earlier when describing our Roper farm equipment, the corn sled was a contraption deserving of a separate story all its' own.

I have no idea whoever came up with the plans for this homemade forage harvester. Corn sleds were in fairly common use in our community during the 1930's. True, a few farmers had manufactured horse drawn one row corn binders. But, these required two strong horses and they cut only one row. In contrast a corn sled cut two rows and needed only one horse. Two men rode the sled catching corn or forage as the sled was pulled along between the rows by the one horse.

The sled was made of wood - runners and platform all in one unit. It was shaped like a small A - frame snow plow, about two feet wide in front and five feet wide at the rear. Some sleds had small wheels front and back to hold the sled higher off the ground. Old cross cut saw blades about four feet long were mounted on the beveled A-portion with the smooth side of the saw blade set to the front as a sharpened cutting edge.

A low bench was mounted on the rear where the two men sat while catching the forage stalks as the sled was pulled along.

After catching a good arm load of corn or forage the horse was stopped with a "whoa". Then the two operators stepped off the sled and added their arm loads of corn to a shock behind or beside the sled. Usually 10-12 rows were cut to make a shock row. Later a twine tie was tied around the large shocks to keep wind from blowing them over.

It was important to have a gentle horse that would not move ahead unexpectedly, because the saw blade cutters were a constant danger to the workers. Some men had suffered serious tendon and leg cuts from an unexpected horse movement as they got off and on the sleds. My grandfather, William Opp, even made up a safety mechanism to shield the sharp blades when the workers stepped off the sled. It worked too. The horse often wanted to eat fresh corn tops along the way which made for a jerky movement. Sometimes he was fitted with a nose bag to "keep his attention on the job".

Dad Roper made several corn sleds. His last one was an improved model. Several of the neighbors borrowed it after our corn was cut, and by the time it finally came home the 2X6 wood runners were nearly worn out. My experience on the corn sled was brief. I cut my finger on the saw blades after only one or two rounds.

OSHA, (the Occupational Safety and Health Admin.) would not have approved of our home-made corn sleds.

TURKEYS, GRASSHOPPERS & COYOTES - For several years during the mid 30's my mother raised turkeys. The eggs were hatched out at our place under chicken setting hens. Mother turkeys carried the instinct to hide their nests, so we always had to keep a close watch of them to find their

nests in the gulch east of the ranch house. We usually had a flock of 35-40 turkeys. As the young turkeys grew in size they needed more feed. Turkeys love to eat grasshoppers, and we always had plenty of hoppers out around the fields. It was Mel's and my job daily to herd the turkeys out to where they could catch and get their fill of hoppers, usually about two hours every day. Early each morning the turkeys were anxious to get out of their pen and head to the fields. Our presence as herders was necessary to keep coyotes from attacking the flock. This happened one day when the turkeys got out and to the fields before we knew of it. Coyotes killed 6-7 young turkeys that one time.

On another occasion a bob cat attempted to get into the turkey pen at night. The frightened turkeys woke us up and we had to get them back into their pen. The next morning we found the gobbler was gone and had supposed him to be the bob cat's victim. But, we discovered that in all the fright he had flown down into the canyon. We all helped to drive him to the bottom of the stairs, and he hopped back up the stairs to the top again.

We found many snakes while herding the turkeys, usually bull snakes or rattle snakes. Turkeys are quick and alert to spot snakes of any sort. They would gather in a circle around the snake all the while uttering cries of alarm. Our turkey herding duties usually lasted through June, July and August.

HOME COOKING - Most of the food in those days was home prepared, of course. Store bought cakes, cookies, and the like we did not have. As I've already mentioned, we ate a lot of cottontail rabbits, also a fair number of squirrels and prairie dogs during the summer. Mom and Dad Roper once even dressed and cooked a porcupine. I didn't think it tasted so bad, but it was the first and last one we had. Mel and I often talked of eating a rattle snake, but we never got around to it.

I've already mentioned our use of the meat animals' tongues and brains. We also made use of the pig tails, pigs feet, ox tails and hearts as food items. We once prepared pig ears too, but found it too difficult to get all the bristles removed. Chicken feet were used quite often and made good soup. The skin came off the chickens feet easily if the water used to scald with was hot enough. Modern day young people are dismayed with the thought of eating such items, but we had no qualms about it and thought it good food.

In early summer we gathered a lot of young lamb's quarters weeds to use as cooked greens, like spinach. They were good. Watercress from down along the river was also a spicy change in salads.

For some reason Dad Roper never planted sweet corn so our summer corn was mostly field corn, and we ate a lot of it. Any corn grown down in the canyon garden was quickly eaten by porcupines and squirrels.

Most bread was either biscuits or home made bread using a starter like sour dough. My mother had a starter she kept in potato water. Mel and I especially liked fried bread made from the left over bread dough. Store bought light bread was becoming popular by about 1935. But, many

of the men-folk in the country were not impressed with the new store bread. One of our neighbors once remarked, "that new fangled light bread has no food value to it. It's just like opening your mouth and letting the moon shine in!"

Pinto beans with salt pork were frequently on our menu. Quite often our supper meal was beans and bread. The beans were even better after my mother got a pressure cooker and the beans could be cooked in 15 minutes instead of several hours as was needed in earlier years.

Much of our food was fried. Nearly all the meat was fried, as was also most of the potatoes, using generous amounts of lard as the cooking oil. We seldom had any roast meat as the stove oven was undependable. I never even really knew what broiled meat was like until after I was married and we had a gas stove with a broiler in our apartment at Eagle.

Most country cooking during the 30's was done on old fashioned coal and wood cook stoves. Our's was certainly old and did not draw well enough to make a good cooking heat. This was typical of many women's stoves. When the fire was not hot enough the cook simply took off the stove lid and placed the pot or pan directly over the fire. This resulted in the pans having black smoke and soot on the bottoms. All such pans had to be washed last and even then the dish towels became blackened. Later in the 30's cook stoves became more modern. Lucky was the farm wife whose husband could buy her a new coal cook stove - one with a hot water reservoir on the side, an oven thermometer, a nice warming oven above the stove with two fold down pan holders and perhaps even a bit of blue enamel and chrome finish! This does not describe our old stove. Still, it was useable. In summer we often used a two burner kerosene stove so as to keep the house cooler.

COME TO BREAKFAST - During the mid 1930's dry breakfast cereal started becoming popular. The first I remember was corn flakes and puffed wheat. As a boy I thought the new dry cereal much better than the old oatmeal we always had to eat. Of course cost was of concern to Dad Roper, too. But, he maintained that a bowl of hot oatmeal would last a working man until noon, whereas the dry cereal would not. And, I have found that he was certainly correct. A bowl of oatmeal is much more nourishing than a bowl of most any kind of dry cereal.

HOMINY MAKING - Another home grown and home made food we had was hominy. Hominy was made from corn grain, either yellow corn or white corn. First the cleaned grain was soaked in water for a day or two or until the kernels were swollen and plump. Water was then drained off and the soaked corn immersed in a strong lye and water solution. After several minutes the lye acted to loosen the hard outer hull of each kernel. After stirring, the hulls began to float to the top. The hulls were then skimmed off and the corn, now hominy, was rinsed several times to remove any remaining lye. It was, and is, a bland food, but I liked it boiled or fried with butter. Hominy grits are still a popular southern food.

PET ANIMALS - All children like pets. And, Mel and I did too. Along with the usual farm dogs and cats we added others. We once had a pet chicken that would hop up on my shoulder when I crouched down. Then she would contentedly ride there as I walked around. She also liked to sit on our bare feet. One spring a neighbor gave us a half dead newly hatched duckling. We nursed it back to health and named it "Donald". That first summer we would take Donald with us, inside our shirts, most every day to the river where we and the duck enjoyed a swim. The following spring Donald laid an egg on Easter Sunday. Though we tried, we found that wild rabbits and squirrels could not be made into pets. They soon died if kept in a cage. Probably most of you have heard the story of our finding a buzzard nest in a canyon cave with several eggs in it. Mel took one egg home and placed under a setting hen along with the chicken eggs. In a few days the buzzard egg hatched. Out came a creamy white buzzard chick which stank like carrion. Mom Roper then insisted that the buzzard chick be taken directly back to it's home nest.

Other common wild animals of the canyon included bob cat (seldom seen), skunks, weasels, (which would kill chickens if they could get to them), rock squirrels, chipmunks, cottontails, porcupines, beaver, muskrat, raccoon, coyotes, and badgers. I've probably missed a few. We seldom saw a deer until about 1941, and there were no wild turkeys then either. Only in recent years have these become more numerous - as well as occasional evidence of bear and mountain lion in the canyon.

SICKNESS AND HEALTH - Life in the country required that every member of the family stay as healthy as possible. Our nearest doctors were in Pueblo, though in earlier days there was a country doctor at Beulah. Dr. Harry Crawford from Beulah assisted at my birth there at the ranch, and also at Mel's birth over on the Beulah road, Sept. 30, 1923. During my years at the ranch we saw a doctor or dentist only if there was a real need. Dad Roper hardly ever visited a doctor even though he should have. There was no money for regular physical examinations. As many country folk did, we used a lot of home remedies. Turpentine and lard followed by hot flannel pads for chest colds. Mustard plasters, Epsom salts, and horehound cough syrup made from wild horehound plants. Poultices were commonly used to draw out infection and inflammation from cuts and punctures. The poultice was believed to have a sucking action to draw poisons out of a wound. Every family had a favorite poultice recipe - many were home concocted. Flaxseed poultices were a favorite. Others included flour, mustard, or whatever they thought might work. I once had a soap and sugar poultice applied overnight to treat an imbedded thorn of several days. It worked. The thorn popped out under pressure after the poultice was taken off.

Dad did his best to doctor our sick animals. Then they either got well or died. Not once was a veterinarian ever called to treat a sick animal. There was not enough money to pay a Vet. Bloat was a common occurrence if one of the cattle got into certain green feed crops or alfalfa at the wrong time. A bloated animal some-



times died unless the bloated condition could be relieved. I can remember Dad Roper using a kitchen butcher knife to "stick" a bloated yearling and hearing the intestinal gas hissing out as the calf ran around in the corral. It was a primitive operation. The knife was plunged directly into the cow's mid section where the bloat pressure seemed most obvious. I can't remember of one dying after being stuck, but it was risky. Professional Vets use a trocar surgical instrument for the same purpose, I've heard.

THE FIRST ELECTRICITY - Modern living finally came to our community in 1941. This was when electric service began under the Rural Electric Admin, commonly called REA. Work toward signing up customers and line installation had started about 1938. We too could have signed up, but Dad felt he could not afford the cost. The minimum charge was \$3.00 per month. Many folk of that day thought of electricity as being good only for lights, not realizing the many other uses for it. I recall hearing a neighbor, Bernard Hanratty, talking about REA at the blacksmith shop one day. "They want me to sign up for that new electric service," he said. "But, they said it would cost \$3.00 a month. So, I told them I can buy a lot of kerosene for \$3.00." He was thinking of the kerosene for lamps. Kerosene was costing about .15 cents a gallon.

Perhaps it was just as well that we did not get electricity, as we left the ranch for good within two years.

BED BUGS AS BED FELLOWS - A thing not commonly talked about in the country was bed bugs. Perhaps out of pride, I think most folk were reluctant to admit they had bed bugs. But, in fact most did have them. There was really very little they could do to be rid of them. Like cockroaches, once they became established they were there to stay. We had bed bugs too. I never ever remember feeling them bite. But, Dad Roper was much disturbed by them. Every 3-4 months we would have a bed bug "round up". Dad would fill his blow torch with gasoline. After taking off all the bedding we would find where the bed bugs were hiding, in the folds and corners of mattress, bed and springs, even along the base boards, anywhere they could hide. Dad would use the unlighted blow torch to squirt a fine stream of gasoline on the bugs and their eggs. This killed them instantly. But, in a few months it was all to do over again.

After the end of World War II, news came out about the new miracle insecticide called DDT, and how it had been used in Europe to rid the prisoner of war camps of human lice. It was certainly effective, (though later found to be a danger to other wildlife in the food chain). Dad was really excited about getting something that would eliminate bed bugs. He went to a store in Pueblo to buy the new DDT. They told him what they had was the 5% formula, the most commonly used strength. Dad then told the sales person he didn't want 5% DDT, he wanted 100%! Of course 100% was not available. So, he took the 5% solution and finally, after a lifetime, got rid of his bed bugs.

A HOUSE CALLED HOME - The wood frame house I was born in wasn't fancy. Everything about the house indicated a lack of enough money to do what was needed. The house measured 26 X 28 ft. or 728 square feet, really a very small house by today's standards. It contained only three rooms, the kitchen, one bedroom, and a larger room as combination living room and bedroom where Mel and I slept. The pyramid roof style was an economy measure too. Dad said that a gable roof would have required more siding. The house was built first and then a foundation of local rock put under it later. A sort of "cart before the horse" kind of construction. But, it saved some initial time.

The ceiling was of wainscoting, a grooved wood material popular during the 1920's. Only the kitchen ceiling was ever painted. For many years the wood floors and door trim remained unpainted. The plaster walls were occasionally painted with Kalsomine, a low cost sort of whitewash with color added. A cheap linoleum covered the kitchen floor. Other rooms had a few home-made throw rugs. Mel and I undressed for bed by candle light. My, how cold the floor was in winter! We often heated an iron or rock to put at our feet when we went to bed.

We did have a rather "modern" sink where water from hand washing could drain outside through a pipe. In some rural homes wash water was simply thrown out the back door into the yard.

Near the kitchen cabinet sat the slop bucket where all garbage refuse and dishwater was emptied. It was carried to the hog pen every morning. Folks in those days believed soapy water was beneficial for pigs as a means of killing intestinal worms. And, we were short of water anyway.

We had no overstuffed furniture of any sort. A couple of plain wooden rocking chairs were the "comfortable" chairs. I still have the round oak dining room table, the only remnant left of our furniture of those years.

We lived close to nature too. A rattlesnake under the outhouse floor created a stir one time. Another summer evening a large bullsnake crawled into the living room through a crack in the screen door. He gave my mother quite a scare when she found him in the partially darkened room. Scorpions were common neighbors and often found their way into the house.

After sitting empty for about ten years the old house began to show a rather run down condition. We knew we'd probably never live there again. So, when a neighbor offered to buy the house we decided it best to sell. The house sold for \$750 and was moved away in 1954 to its' present location near the Beulah highway. It is close by the house where Mel was born.

Only the pyramid roof identifies it as the house we once called home.

## EARLY YEARS ON THE ROPER RANCH - Chapter 4

### Additional Recollections - Continued

WASH DAY - Down through the years perhaps no other housekeeping chore has held as much frustration and concern as has doing the laundry, especially for the women folk. Here are some remembrances of how it was handled at our home in the 30's.

Since wash day was an all day affair, plans were made a few days ahead, hoping to choose a warm sunny day when clothes could be hung out to dry. As one might expect, wash days were not frequent in the winter. Some farm women tried to target wash day for the traditional every Monday. Most did not, due to weather, lack of water, and the like. At our home wash day was often put off until it just had to be done.

Soon after breakfast the work began. Everything was done in the kitchen. Mel and I were called upon to help and we did. First a good fire in the cook stove was needed. Fuel; wood, cobs, chips, whatever available, had to be brought in. Next, about 6-8 buckets of water were hand carried from the cistern at the barn. The copper wash boiler was then set on the stove and filled with water. The next item was to bring into the kitchen a wringer apparatus which had folding sides where wash tubs could be set while the hand operated wringer was operated between the tubs. All very handy, really.

The first hot water from the boiler was then poured into one of the wash tubs for the wash operation. Then the boiler was re-filled to heat water for boiling of white clothes, dish towels, etc. The idea was to "boil" the dirt out in soapy water. Previous to this one boy had been set to work shaving bar soap (sometimes homemade) into small chips to add to the boiler.

Other soiled clothing was now put into the wash tub with hot water and the main washing operation began with a wash board. Later we acquired a cone shaped metal plunger like a plumbers' helper to plunge up and down among the clothes. It really worked pretty well. This too, was a boys' job - in addition to turning the wringer.

With each succeeding tub of wash the water became a bit more gray. By afternoon the last of the clothes went in. These were the denim work clothes that had been soaking all morning. The final wash water was a blue-gray color. It had been used over and over many times.

Earlier in my youth my parents had acquired a very old mechanical washing machine, of sorts. It had a wooden agitator and a complex gear set up. There was a rather large flywheel on the side with a handle to turn the wheel - by hand, of course. Dad Roper even moved it down to the engine house by the canyon edge so as to use the cable hoist engine to provide power for the washer through the line shaft. It worked reluctantly for a time, but was later given up when the agitator wore out.

About the time we left the ranch we obtained a much used Maytag washer powered by a small putt-putt gasoline engine. These gasoline powered washers were developed earlier in the 1930's and were dependable. They were real nice for those who could afford the cost. The Maytag machine

had a flexible exhaust hose that had to be put outside through a doorway, leaving the screendoor with a 2-3 inch gap. House flies too, enjoyed this extra opening. One lady recently told me that the vibration of the Maytag engine caused the porch to fall off at their farm home!

Other related wash day tasks included making starch as needed and putting bluing in the white clothes rinse water to act as a bleach. All-solar (sunshine) driers were used. Some folks had to hang their clothes on shrubbery or fences. We were more fortunate. We had a nice smooth galvanized wire on which to hang the clothes. Of course in winter they often had to freeze dry or be hung on furniture in the house. Most farm women were glad when wash day was over!

Clothes ironing early in my youth was all by use of sad irons which were heated on the cook stove. Usually several were heating while one was in use. Later, about 1938-39, we obtained a used gasoline iron. They had already been in general use for several years. The gasoline iron was rather cumbersome, but cute in a way, with the small fuel tank located at the rear. The iron worked much like a small gasoline camp stove or gasoline lantern. It had a generator tube section with a very small jet hole to expel the vaporized gas. Leaded gasoline would plug the jet orifice, so we had to buy unleaded gas especially for the iron as well as for the gasoline lamps. Still, the gasoline iron was a big improvement.

Our house keepers of today are indeed fortunate to have automatic washers and driers for the laundry. What a load of drudgery these modern machines have removed from day-to-day housekeeping. Another big change has been the use of wash and wear, no-iron fabrics. Recently another older lady told me she rather missed the chore of at least some clothes to iron. "Ironing clothes", she said, "gave me time to think".

A REAL LIVE "HOT DOG" - Sometimes farm dogs would develop the habit of hunting for and eating every chicken egg they could find. This is how we discouraged a dog's desire to eat fresh eggs. A hole was carefully punched in both ends of a fresh egg. The contents were then blown out by holding one end to our mouth. Hot chili pepper was then stirred into the egg contents which was then put back into the egg shell with a small funnel. After the end holes had been taped closed the egg was placed out in the yard where the dog could find it. A dog usually ate an egg with one gulp. After a few moments most dogs drank their water dish dry. One dog was even seen crawling along in a half crouch trying to rub his stomach on the grass. After this most dogs were cured of eating eggs.

RICHARD J. RUDDOCK - Who was the man who started the small land holding I refer to here as the Ruddock-Roper ranch? Here are some bits of information, as much as I have been able to find about him. Records show a Richard Ruddock was born 18 Dec. 1833, in Yorkshire, England. Our Richard was also said to have been born in England in 1844. Very possibly these two are the same man with errors in the reported birth dates. Richard emigrated to the USA, we believe in 1876, to Allegheny County,

PA. Records show that he became a US citizen at Pittsburgh, PA in 1880. He was commonly known as Dick Ruddock.

Dick came west and found work in the coal mines at nearby Rockvale, CO (Fremont County). There he made application for a livestock brand on Jan 21, 1886. He had probably already filed on his first homestead, #4286 in 1885. The livestock brand indicates that he had plans to raise cattle. This first homestead is our east pasture, the land we used to call the Easton place. In the 1920's it was owned by a man named A. P. Easton. I have found that an A. P. Easton also lived at Rockvale at the same time that Ruddock did. I believe Ruddock and Easton were friends or knew each other.

Also living at Rockvale in 1885 was James Ruddock, age 37, with a wife and three children. James was from England and his wife was from Wales. I suspect James and Richard may have been brothers.

Dick's first homestead was patented to him 14 May 1890. We have never found evidence of a dwelling, though there is the remains of a rock chicken house he built below our two east ponds.

Dick's second homestead #6998, (my birthplace), was probably filed on in 1887. It was patented to him 16 April 1892. We believe he built the rock house on this, his second homestead, around 1889-1890. A sunken depression NW of the rock house, we think, may have been the location of his earlier "dug out" residence. Only a few wood timber fragments still remained by the 1930's. I am sure Dad Roper could have told us much of this story had we taken the interest to ask of him.

Dick married a widow woman, Elizabeth Ann Roper, my great grandmother, on 16 April 1890. She was living at Goodpasture. Dick was either five or 16 years younger than Elizabeth, depending on the conflict of his birthdate records.

A third homestead was taken up by Richard, #201199, in 1906 along the canyon south of his first homestead. It was a mile long and 1/4 mile wide and may have been one of the last pieces of available homestead land in the vicinity. (1906 was the same year Dad Roper filed on his homestead north and east of Ruddock's first two homesteads).

Title to this third homestead was granted to Richard's widow in 1911, a year after his death. It is presently divided up into 40 acre tracts. The last homestead, #201199, had a few outbuildings also. Foundation stones for the 14 X 14 foot claim house remain, as well as evidence of a small cistern and cellar some distance away, and other remnants just east of the Indian Fort ridge.

Richard died at the rock house in 1910 at the age of 66 years, probably of kidney and urinary infection, according to Dad Roper. After his death Dad Roper "laid him out" on an overturned wagon box in the yard. He washed, shaved, and dressed him for burial. His funeral was held there at the rock house and he was buried in the Beulah cemetery. His grave remained unmarked for 82 years until three years ago. Richard's wife, Elizabeth, died in 1916 and she is buried beside him in Beulah.

ELIZABETH ANN (Bayes) ROPER, RUDDOCK - My father's "Grandma Ruddock" was

born in 1828 in Pittsylvania County, Virginia. The family must have had some wealth as they owned slaves. Eliz. had at least two older sisters, Sarah and Mary Jane. Elizabeth's mother, also named Elizabeth, with her three daughters and a slave named "Austin" moved from Virginia to St. Charles Co, MO, Ca 1845. Elizabeth Ann married John James Roper in 1849, and a year later Mary Jane married Lucas Stanford Roper, brother of John James.

Both of the families moved to Harrison County in NW Missouri in the early 1850's. Several children were born to both families there. They farmed for a living. In Jan. 1858 Lucas sold all his land to John James and moved back to St. Chas. Co. By 1870 John J. and Elizabeth were also back in St. Charles County, where again they farmed near O'Fallon, MO

The dreaded disease Tuberculosis swept through Elizabeth's family in the early 1880's. Within a few short years five of her nine children and possibly also her husband died of the disease. In 1885 the remaining family members decided to come to Colorado in hopes the drier climate would help to relieve the tuberculosis. Two more children and Francis' wife died of TB shortly after coming to Colorado. By 1893 only Elizabeth and her two sons, Francis and Lee remained of the original family. Elizabeth and her remaining sons settled in Pueblo County, homesteading in the Goodpasture community. Between 1886 and 1906 nine homesteads were taken up near Goodpasture by Roper family members.

Elizabeth was living at Goodpasture in 1890 when she married Richard Ruddock. After their marriage she moved to Richard's nearly new rock house down by the St. Charles canyon. They continued to live there until his death in 1910. She was becoming elderly, age 82 in 1910.

My father recalled that one day during her later years his grandmother was walking along the edge of the canyon west of the rock house. Having failing eyesight, she walked too close to the edge and would have fallen over into the canyon had her leg not caught in a rock crevice just a few feet down. Fortunately her cries for help brought someone to her rescue in time. Dad Roper showed us the site of this near tragedy at the rim of the canyon where he had filled the crevice with rock. In 1905 Dick deeded the "home place" HS #6998 to Elizabeth. We think he did this so he could then file on his third homestead #201199 in 1906, which he did.

In 1910 Elizabeth then deeded HS #6998 to her son, Francis Marion, my grandfather. This marked the land title change from Ruddock to Roper. We do not know how much longer Elizabeth lived at the rock house, but perhaps for a time. Records show that she sold HS #201199 in Feb. 1913 to the Hassler family, and a year later sold the first homestead #4286 to Thomas Easton. Her income was from the sale of the land. We have no record of the amount the land sold for. However, my father told me once that average 160 acre homesteads in those days sold for only \$200 to \$250, depending on the amount of improvements. Land was cheap.

By 1915 Elizabeth had moved back to Goodpasture to live out her remaining years with her son, Lee. On March 12, 1915 she conveyed the rest of the

horses and cattle from the Ruddock estate to Lee in exchange for his support of her. And, so ended the Ruddock era of land ownership. My father, William Roper, was very devoted to his "Grandma Ruddock". He spoke fondly of her many times during my youth. Her personality and life had a large influence upon him. She died 10 June 1916.

In 1915 Thomas Easton sold HS #4286 to A.P. Easton, perhaps his brother or son. An A.P. Easton had also lived at Rockvale when Ruddock lived there and they may have known each other. In the early 1930's taxes on this land remained unpaid. Uncle Eddie Roper then paid the taxes and received a tax deed for the land in 1934. Then in 1951 he deeded this original Ruddock homestead to Mel and I for a nominal sum of \$200. The land has remained in our family ever since along with 120 acres of the second Ruddock homestead #6998.

THE ROCK HOUSE - Probably the most durable and lasting of anything Richard Ruddock built in his lifetime was the rock house. We believe he built the rock house about 1889-1890, or about the same time he courted and married the widow, Elizabeth Ann Roper from Goodpasture. Perhaps their soon marriage in 1890 was his reason to build the house. Richard Ruddock was not a skilled rock worker. However, he did his best with the materials at hand, and apparently but little money.

I've often wondered how he found enough rock to build the walls. No doubt he must have scoured all the nearby rock outcrops for his building stone. His work progress must have been rather slow in that he had to attend to other farm work as well as collect rock and work at building the house.

The house measures 12 X 16 feet outside. The walls are 15-18" thick, making the living area only about 135 square feet at the most. This included kitchen, dining room, living room and bedroom all in one room!

A loft overhead served as a sort of spare bedroom with access from a gable door on the west end. Here Minnie Russ had her bedroom during many of the years she lived with her grandmother. Minnie's mother, Mary Jane (Roper) Russ had died of tuberculosis in 1887 only a year after she came to Colorado with her mother. Minnie was raised by her grandmother, Elizabeth Ruddock. We have no record of whatever happened to her father, Riley Russ.

As a boy, Dad Roper also slept in the loft quite often during times he stayed with his grandmother.

The fireplace on the south wall may have furnished some heat, but later a stove was set in the SW corner probably for cooking. The wood floor was of rough 1" lumber planks, nearly as I can remember from the remnants still there is the 30's. The walls inside were smoothed up fairly well and painted with whitewash. A window on the west and another on the south provided some light. The original door was probably on the southeast side.

Roofing was of 1" board and batten type rough lumber. A cistern for domestic water was located a bit east of the house. The cistern was well constructed and about seven feet deep and six feet in diameter. It

appears to have been too far from the house to catch water from the roof as was usually the case, so very likely all water had to be hauled in barrels and emptied into the cistern for later use.

It is surprising the rock house lasted as well as it has. The major building weakness was that no concrete mortar was used. The rock walls, though thick, were all laid up with only mud as a mortar material. As the roof began to fail, about 1940, rain and snow began to dissolve the mud and so weakened the walls. Even so, the house lasted pretty well for a period of 50 years. Since then it has steadily deteriorated.

The old rock house was indeed an important part of the history of the Ruddock-Roper ranch.

WHY THE HOMESTEADS FAILED - Our parents experience of trying to make a living on our land was typical of many of our neighbors. True, the drought and depression years had made things worse. But, even during the good years the 160 acre homesteads were too small. The writers of the original Homestead Act assumed that most any farmer could make a living on 160 acres. However, this idea was based on mid-western climates of much higher rainfall and deeper more fertile soils. Land such as ours was not suited to farming but rather to grazing. And, we now know that a land unit of several thousand acres is needed as a livestock unit to provide a living for a family in our area. After the 1930's many of the small homesteads were sold to neighbors who wanted to stay on and increase the amount of land they owned. Our ranch of two homesteads, and still in the original family is a relic of days gone by. There are not many left such as ours.

On our Ruddock-Roper ranch the income from grazing presently more than covers the operation expenses, but we know the land will never really provide a family income as was once hoped by our parents. We retain ownership of this land perhaps mostly because of sentiment and nostalgia. And, indeed for me it continues to be a place of special remembrance. Someday in future years it will be sold to someone else. But, I hope that day comes after I am gone.

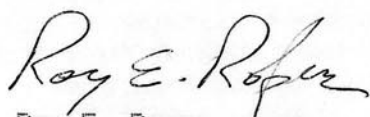
A CONCLUSION - There are perhaps many other things I could relate about my growing up years at our ranch. This is only a sample. By today's standards our life during those years would have been classed as underprivileged, disadvantaged, and poverty stricken. And perhaps it was. But, I didn't really feel disadvantaged, except that we hardly ever had any money. We, as youngsters, learned not to ask for many things. There was no money for unnecessary things. Our family life was much like many of our neighbors. Some had more than we and others had less. Times were hard.



Looking back to those days 65 years ago it seems strange that we got by as well as we did. We had no modern conveniences such as we take for granted today. No electricity, with all it does for us, no central heating, indoor plumbing or even carpets on the floors,

Visitors were always a welcome change for our life there at the edge of the canyon. Not many visitors came in winter. They were afraid of our road! Still, we had a rather modern life style compared to the homesteaders who came to the area in earlier years. And, maybe that is why we didn't complain very much.

Though at times we would have liked to have had more, we learned to "make do" with what we had. I would not wish to trade places with my parents as they struggled through those uncertain times. They did their best.



Roy E. Roper  
Canon City, CO  
April, 1995

Photos -

Front Cover - Roy Roper, 1986

Elizabeth Roper - Family Collection

The Rock House - from Ruth Roper Eden

William Roper Family - Studio photo

The Canyon Garden - Doris Opp Blair

The Roper Ranch House - Ethel Roper

The Ranch Site In Spring - Roy Roper

The Waterfall - Linda Roper