

# REMINISCENCE OF KATHERINE ELLIS SANDELIN

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**CHARLES SANDELIN AND FAMILY WITH THE HANGS AT THEIR HOME IN NORTH PARK,  
COLORADO, HEADED FOR THE LOST GOLD MINE ON GORE PASS IN 1904 OR 1905.**

We visited Katherine and her husband John Sandelin at their lovely old fashioned ranch home eight miles north of Steamboat Springs on the Elk River. Their home is right at the mouth of Big Creek, where Big Creek empties into the Elk River. Their ranch is known as the "Big Creek Reserve."

Mrs. Sandelin showed us the skin of a wolverine which one of her sons sent to her from Alaska. She went on to tell us about one of the old trappers, Frank Ding, of this area that she remembered as a girl.

"Maybe your dad would remember 'Old Ding.' He was a one-armed man. I remember we used to see him often walking up the creek behind the house, and he was always watching the water. I don't know if he was watching for fish, or for signs of mink or beaver. Anyway, he always watched the water. His little frame house is still there in town, along Yampa Street, where all that country road equipment sets. He spent a lot of time in the hills and had trapping cabins in different places."

Yes, we know some of those old cabins, and

where others were that are gone now. We knew that Mrs. Sandelin's father, Jack Ellis, was a prominent early cattleman of this area. We asked her when her father came here.

"He came to Yampa in 1886, and then here in the 90's, maybe about '94 or something like that. He homesteaded up near the Fetcher Ranch, it is now part of the Elk River Grazing Association Ranch. To get to his place we used to go in through the Association place, right where those old barns used to be, Dad's place was right down by the river. It was on the east side of the river right across from those bluffs. There's nothing there now. Sometimes we'd go through Mrs. Brown's place and go right down the river bank to get to his homestead.

"Dad ran lots of cattle here. At one time he had about five thousand head in the Hahn's Peak Basin. It was all open range then. Remember the old German assayer who lived at the Peak? He lived by himself, the only person at the Peak during his last years. That was Herman Maler He worked for Dad. He ran the chuck wagon.

"George Long was Dad's foreman. He worked for the Two Bars later. They trailed the cattle to Wolcott to ship, that was the closest place there was a railroad. It was one hundred miles.

"Dad and Jim Norvell were in on a lot of deals together. Dad sold one ranch over there in that place was known as the Bacon Ranch, right at the foot of the Flat Tops, Dad had some other ranches over that way. He had a horse ranch at Toponas and another cow ranch in Egeria Park. He'd summer stuff up here and trail everything out for the winter. He'd winter stuff over there at the foot of the Flat Tops?"

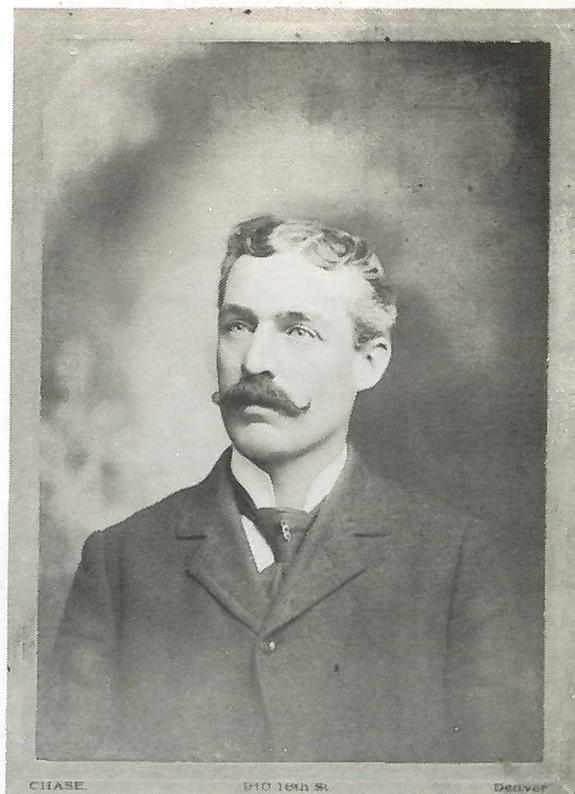
We asked if her dad came here with cattle, "Well, I don't know, he was so young. He was seventeen when he came to Yampa. He came here from Denver. Before that he was in Pueblo, he went to school in Pueblo. Then he came to Denver where he went into a wholesale fish and oyster business with his brother.

"Denver was just a little one horse town then. Dad used to stand up in his little horse drawn delivery wagon and go around to the stores and places where the fish were sold. He got lots of shipping orders too, orders that were shipped to other towns. Then his brother died when he was just twenty one of Bright's disease. So Dad took off. He'd been on his own since he was just a little fellow; his father died when Dad was just twelve. He'd always wanted to work on a cattle ranch. By then he was seventeen, so he came to Yampa and worked for Jim Adams who was an old timer up there, a big cattle man.

"You know the old surveyor Wessels who used to be here? He married a daughter (Myrtella) of Adams. Well, it was her father that Dad worked for. His place was right there under the bluffs at Yampa, in that sort of little cove. There's a cabin camp there now. Adams had another daughter, she married Billy Wier. We knew all those folks.

Didn't your Dad do a lot of freighting here, we asked?

"Yes, he did, he built a freight road by himself,



**JOHN M. ELLIS, KNOWN AS JACK ELLIS.**

from Hahn's Peak to Hog Park, known as the Ellis Trail. There was a big railroad tie camp in Hog Park. Everything was done with horses, and Dad supplied all the horse feed (hay and grain) for that camp, and all the meat. Grover Campbell drove teams for Dad on that job.

"Grover and Isabell were Neal Powell's grandparents. Isabelle is still living, she was a McFee. Mrs. Fred Follett was her sister."

We know where the Ellis Trail is but where did they use the ties, we asked?

"They were building the Laramie, Hahn's Peak, and Pacific Railroad. That's the railroad from Laramie to North Park. They gave up on building the railroad to Hahn's Peak and on west."

What year would that have been?

"I don't know how long that tie camp was operated. I think it was about 1905 maybe a couple of years on each side of 1905.

"In 1905 Edward Taylor appointed my dad to keep an eye out for forest fires. Dad did this while watching cattle. This was about two years before the Routt National Forest was formed." If your Dad had a lot of horses did you drive or ride much?

"Yes, I rode quite a lot with Dad. He wintered horses at Marshall Peavy's quite a few times, and I helped him move them. Dad had a lot of driving horses that he also used to mow with."

Your father was really one of the "Old Timers" here, your mother was from one of Routt County's pioneer families too, wasn't she?

"Yes, she was a Keller, Her father was W.A. Keller. Granddad Keller brought his family to Elk River several years before my Dad came to



**CHARLES SANDELIN AND WIFE AT CRIPPLE CREEK, COLORADO IN 1892.**

Routt County. He was the first man with a family on Elk River. The Crawfords were the only family in Steamboat, and of course, we knew them well."

Was your mother born here?

"No, Granddad lost his wife in Pennsylvania and he had four little kids all under ten years old, and he decided to come to Colorado. He came to Leadville first, he thought he would like mining country, and a little later, he went back and got his family. They were farmers in Pennsylvania.

"He brought his family out to Leadville, and they were there about two years, and Granddad decided he wanted to get out of the mines and farm. The mines didn't appeal to him. So he came out to Craig and filed a claim. He went back to Leadville for his family, but before he got back to Craig, someone who had been to Craig told him that someone had taken his claim. So, he came back to Steamboat Springs and went up the Elk River. There weren't any bridges then.

"I don't know how many times he crossed the rivers. Wherever they crossed the rivers, someone would go across on a saddle horse first and tie ropes. They would tie ropes on all the kids and on the lead horse. then they would swim the team and wagon across.

"My mother's name was Ivy. Ivy May Keller. Everyone called her May. She was known as May Keller, but her name was Ivy May. She was the third child, the oldest was a boy, Ad.

"My Granddad came here in the eighties.

Right after the Meeker Massacre. In 1882, I think, as near as I can figure it. The Massacre was in 1879, and he came here right after that. I have a book in here with his address on it, Hahn's Peak, and the date was 1882. And I have some letters that are postmarked in 1882. Of course, the post office was at Hahn's Peak.

"The first winter that they were here they didn't have a cabin. Some miners had built a cabin there at Glen Eden, you know right there by the bridge. Well, right down on the water below the bridge on the north bank there was a little log cabin. Now those miners told my Granddad he could use that cabin for the winter. It didn't have a wood floor, just dirt, and Granddad spent that first winter there with his four little children.

"The children were Ad, of course, you know that was Ruth Wheeler's father, his full name was Samuel Adrian but he was known as Ad, then Dora, who married Billy McKinley, who was one time County Treasurer at Hahn's Peak, and he had a ranch on the Elk River right at the mouth of Spring Creek. It was right across from your ranch, and then he had a ranch north of Hayden. Dora and Billy McKinley were married about 1900. My mother was next. She and Dad were married about 1899, I think. Anyway they were married about a year after Granddad died. Maud was the youngest. She never married. That was the Keller bunch.

"When Granddad died, he had been outside for supplies and took ill on the return trip. It was



**KATHERINE AS A YOUNG GIRL.**

reported that it might have been from typhoid fever, but it might have been something like the flu or pneumonia. Well, anyway, he stopped at the Crawfords in Steamboat, and they took care of him for about a week. Then he came on home to the ranch. But he got worse again and Aunt Maud took a horse and went to Steamboat for a doctor. She went through the Elk River Canyon because that was much shorter than following the road which went through Fly Gulch. There wasn't a road through the Canyon at that time. Dr. Jefferson was the doctor in Steamboat then, or maybe Dr. Kernahan. They might have both been here at the time.

"The Crawfords were wonderful people; they were just like grandparents to me. Of course, all my own grandparents were dead before I was born."

We wondered about the Crawford's ages at the time.

"Their own family was about the age of my mother, and my aunts. Lulie was their oldest. She was older. She was the first school teacher here. Later, she married Mr. Pritchett. Logan was next, he was about the age of Aunt Dora, and John was the same age as Mother. Then Mary, that was Mrs. King, she was the youngest, and about the age of Maud.

"Granddad Killer built the first nice ranch house on Elk River. Before that there were just

log cabins. The house is still there, and that's where I was born. Some old timers still call that the Jack Ellis place. The Pattons were on the place a long time, and later Mike Mosher, so now it's usually called the Mosher Place."

Did you have brothers and sisters?

"Two sisters. The oldest Margaret, never married, she's dead now. My younger sister is Mrs. Leo Lujan of Denver."

Mrs. Sandelin went on to reminisce about relationships between her family and the Crawfords and some of the other pioneer families of the area.

"Speaking of Sheriff Nieman," she said, "you know his daughter was Leslie Yount who still lives in Steamboat. Well, it was Sheriff Nieman who captured the outlaws Lant and Tracy in Brown's Park, and jailed them in Hahn's Peak. The story of Lant and Tracy would make another whole book by itself.

Harry Tracy and David Lant were escaped convicts from a Utah Penitentiary who had been jailed for murder, cattle rustling.

This incident is written in a chapter "A Brown's Park Necktie Party" in "Where The Old West Stayed Young."

But anyway, after the outlaws broke jail at the Peak and then were recaptured by Sheriff Nieman at Sidney. This Harry Tracev said, well, I have a friend at Hahn's Peak anyway.

When questioned as to who his friend was, he said it was Mrs. Billy McKinley, the treasurer's wife, and that was my aunt Dora. Tracy said that when he and Lant made their getaway, that Aunt Dora seen them but hadn't given the alarm.

"Aunt Dora said that actually she had been outside shoveling snow during the night, but that she certainly hadn't seen the outlaws escape."

Katherine then told us about her husband's family, the Sandelins.



**JOHN AND KATHERINE AT THEIR HOME ON THE BIG CREEK RESERVE.**

"John's father, that was Charles Sandelin, brought his family to Steamboat in 1907. Charles came to this country from Finland when he was just a young man, before he was married.

"Finland was under Russia then, and Charlie's older brother John, had served in the Russian Army. When John returned from the army he told his brother, I'd get out now if I were you, and not do service in the Russian Army, and that's just what Charlie did. So, he came to America. But Charlie had already put in some time driving horses for the Czar. He was quite a horseman, and he had driven teams for the Czar on trips.

"When Charlie first came to this country, he came to Denver and worked on the crews that were hauling rock for the foundation of the state capitol building. Then he went to Cripple Creek, Central City, Leadville, and all over, anyplace there was a gold rush. He hit it rich sometimes, too, but he always put it right back into mining and lost it."

Was he married before he came to Colorado?

"No he was married in Colorado. Grandmother Sandelin (her name was Johanna Radstrom) came to this country from Sweden by herself when she was just sixteen years old. She came out to Nebraska, which was quite a Swedish settlement and went to school there.

"When she was about eighteen years old she came to Denver and went to work for the Senator Tabors. That's when she met Charlie.

"She took care of Baby Doe and her baby, little Silver Dollar Tabor. It's funny how they capitalized on that Silver Dollar name. Grandmother Sandelin didn't even know that the baby had a name. Tabors just called the baby, 'Baby.'"

"Tabors wanted her to go back to Sweden for them, go to Lappland (she'd been to Lappland before) to get some reindeer for them. She didn't go back for them, but she did go back later on, on her own.

"Before she went back to Sweden, she got married. Right when she got married, she sold her hair to Baby Doe. Her hair grew real fast. She spoke with a real broken accent. 'She said, Vell, sell my hair to Baby Doe, I can grow some more.' In those days, they made lots of things out of hair. Grandfather Sandelin had a round braided watch chain made out of Grandmother Sandlin's hair, with a gold cap on each end.

"Before Grandmother Sandelin went back to Sweden, the Silver Panic came. That's what ruined Tabor. But Grandmother Sandelin went back to Sweden on her own. Gus was born in Sweden, he was a year or two old before Grandmother Sandelin brought him back to this country."

We asked about other children in the family. "After Gus (his name was Carl Gustav) there was Hazel. That was Hazel Cramer who lived in Hayden. She died about nine years ago. The next one was Leroy who is about six years younger than Gus. He lives in Denver. Then the youngest of the family was my husband, John. John is sixteen years younger than Gus, ten



**JOHN AND KATHERINE AT THE TIME OF THEIR MARRIAGE.**

years younger than Leroy."

Was John born here?

"Yes, he was born in Steamboat in a house as you go around the hill going out to Strawberry Park, right there about by the Rammuno's house. The house is still there, but it has been remodeled, cut down so it doesn't look the same.

"By the way, in those days that wasn't Strawberry Park, it was known as Shadager Park. There was an old man who lived out there named Shadager and everyone called it Shadager Park or Shadager's Park. Then when Remington's started growing strawberries out there, all their neighbors started growing strawberries too, and we had the the big "Strawberry Boom". Of course, it has been Strawberry Park ever since. During the strawberry boom years, Steamboat had a big celebration every summer, rodeo and everything and called it Strawberry Days. That was before they had the fourth of July rodeos at Steamboat."

Did your husband, John, grow up in Steamboat?



**KATHERINE AND HER OLD TIME STOVE.**

"Really he grew up on the family ranch out by Elk Mountain. That's the ranch where Carl, or Gus as everyone calls him, still lives. The first year the family was here they lived on a place south of Elk River, sort of at the north west edge of Deer Mountain behind the Hitchens place, but that was before it was the Hitchens Place. Logan Crawford lived there then. The next year they brought Joe Critchfield's homestead in Fly Gulch where Gus lives now. That was before John was born, so that's where he grew up.

"Dad, John, went through grade school at Fly Gulch, then he went to high school in Steamboat.

"Do you know that only stone house by Butcher Knife Creek that's in town? Well, right there beside that house is where Dad spent a whole winter to go to school, living in a tent house. That's just a canvas tent with board walls up part way and board floor. Can you imagine living around here all winter in a tent? Education meant an awful lot to people back then."

How long have you and John lived here on Big Creek Reserve Ranch? An who lived on this place before you did?

"We have lived here for thirty two years. Slim Yount lived on this place before us. He grew potatoes here. All these fields were in potatoes, even across the river. Before Younts, the

Pierces lived here. Mr. Pierce's son was married to a Kinney girl, one of Dean Look's aunts. He's the one that had this house built. Mr. Hanks built it for him in 1912. The first one here was Antone Jacobs. He cleared all this ground, it was all just willow's, so thick you couldn't ride a horse through."

Where were you born and where did you grow up and go to school?

On Elk River known to many as the Jack Ellis ranch. About the time I started school in Steamboat my father sold most of his ranch holding, and discontinued his partnership in Ellis and Cox branch of the Denver Live Stock Commission House.

"We lived in Steamboat after that time. I attended elementary school and high school there. In high school I did considerable art work and drawing. I was class illustrator and cartoonist.

"I used to ski a lot also. One time four girls and myself wanted some excitement and fun, so we entered the Steamboat Ski Carnival's first & only diamond hitch race with bathing suits and fur neck pieces. The race was judged on time and costume, then. The girl in a bathing suit on the horse was a good rider and had fast horse - we won some prizes. Jack Stehley, manager of J.C. Penny Co. store, gave each of us five girls a winter cap and a pair of pink panties. This race was shown by Fox News of the Day on the movie screen.

"Several years I entered the ladies cross country race, and all street ski events for women in the Ski Carnival. I also had a group of underclass girls I instructed in skiing. We used to ski-jor behind automobiles on the highway. Highways were left with enough snow so you could get a good fast ride. It beat anything they have now for fun on skis.

"After high school I attended nurses school at St. Lukes in Denver. I helped Doctor Willet from time to time in the hospital. I also would go to people's homes to care for patients when Doctor needed me.

"John and I were married in Steamboat in 1933. We ran a filling station on the north east corner of 11th and Lincoln Ave. Soon we acquired the other three corner lots, which we bought for taxes, to keep competition from coming across the street from our station. Then we built the Royal Rest Motel which later became the Nordic Lodge. We ran the filling station for about ten years. John started the Yampa Valley Co-op with the help of local ranchers.

Five children were born while we lived in Steamboat, Norman, Chuck, Truman, then the twins, Jeannie and Fred. Marie our youngest, was born after we moved to the ranch. We had bought the ranch in 1941 but did not move there until John returned from his service in the U.S. Navy.

"At that time there weren't any buildings on the place except a falling down log barn, an old

potato cellar, and a house in bad condition. There was much work to be done on the place. Most of the land was not even fenced. We cleared fields much like true pioneers, cutting and burning brush, draining beaver runs, leveling it off and planting hay and grass. We were still feeling the war, as building material and anything for John to work with on the ranch was nearly impossible to get. One could not buy cloth yardage, not to mention a thousand other items. Our dear neighbor, Polly McDermott, gave me three yards of blue seersucker to make my little girls some much needed garmets, and I thought I had been given a gold mine. My sister-in-law came one day and said, have you seen the new Montgomery Ward Catalog? They have a few bolts of yard goods advertised, the first for several years. People had to do without many things, and I believe those times will come again.

"We feel that God has been very kind to us and blessed us in many ways - one is that people our age are a link between the pioneer times and now days. We can remember Steamboat with board side walks and the town herd of cows, being driven out of city limits for the days pasturing, being returned in evening at milking time. This is only one of the many things of life now gone in Steamboat.

"We raised our children on the ranch. I have always considered the home and family my main interest. I find this has been a full time job, that I am proud and happy to have the opportunity to fill, and be called mom and grandma by many."

