

Interview with Zella Robinson Brink and Richard (Rick) Robinson

May 12, 2011



Zella Robinson Brink and Rick Robinson in front of the original Robinson cabin, now owned by the Red Feather Historical Society, relocated to Red Feather Lakes in 1995 from the Shambhala Mountain Center property on CR 68C (Boy Scout Road)

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**Interview with Richard (Rick) Robinson and
Zella Robinson Brink
May 12, 2011, at Red Feather Lakes Library
Red Feather Lakes, Colorado**

Interview and transcription by Linda Bell

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Interviewer: Today is Thursday, May 12, 2011, and I am at the Red Feather Lakes Library to interview Rick Robinson and Zella Robinson Brink; they are uncle and niece. We're going to be talking about the Robinson family who came to Northern Colorado in 1882 – almost 130 years ago. Dayton Robinson came first and then his mother and other family members followed.

Dayton Robinson Arrives and Prospers in Colorado

Rick: The family came from Watertown, New York.

Zella: I actually heard that Dayton had some respiratory problems.

Rick: He had TB. He was trying to get to a drier climate.

Zella: I never heard why they came to this area, or Manhattan, other than that the mining just started up.*

Rick: Grandpa Robinson, he did a lot of assessment work on mining claims. He did some saw-milling, raised some cattle.

Zella: A little bit of everything just to survive.

Rick: As far back as I can remember the family's main interest was in ranching and saw-milling. My dad did saw-milling. I don't know whether my grandfather did any or not. My grandfather was Dayton and my father was Elbert.

* First gold strike at Manhattan was in August 1886.

Zella: The same is true for me, my dad is Richard's brother Charlie – there was another brother, Dayton, and a daughter, Garnet, of Elbert's children. Then there was another son who had been killed in an accident, about the age of 16 I believe. His name was Rodney.

Rick: He got hit by a truck up by Chambers Lake. They were moving cows and the truck hit his horse. We were running cattle at Chambers Lake at that time, in the summer. The rest of the year they were on our ranch, or down on the Poudre.

Zella: That had to be back in 1947, that he was killed.

Rick: 1946 – he was 15 or 16.

Zella: Was there another sister beside Inez? (Elbert's sister, Richard's aunt)

Rick: Yeah, Margie.

Zella: I never heard much about her.

Rick: I guess I don't know much about her either, as far as that goes. That was my dad's sister.

Zella: How many in your family are still in this area, Richard?

Rick: I've got 10 grandkids and 5 of them are here. I've got one great-grandkid, is all.

Zella: Then there is Beverly's family... and Russell's family.

Rick: My niece and nephew, LeRoy and Dixie, they've got a slew of kids amongst them.

Zella: I have a half-brother and he is older. His dad was killed in World War II. He is like five years older. He's in Denver, his name is Tom.

Zella: The family has stayed fairly concentrated and close-by.

Rick: Half of my grandkids are in Dallas.

Rick: (Audrey and I) have four children; a daughter and a son in Dallas, Texas, and two sons here – Doug and Steve.

Zella: My daughter is in Fort Collins. She lives off Manhattan Street. It isn't a very long street, but

Zella: There's Garnet's family – one in Wyoming, one in Texas and two here in Colorado. A few of them scattered around, but right here there's probably 15 of them anyway, that's a guess. They all have ties to this area though, even the ones who have left the state.

Rick: Too poor to leave.... (laughter)

Zella: Or not brave enough, I'm not sure which.

Rick: Besides ranching, like I said, my grandfather did assessment work. He had to do a \$100 worth of work on a mining claim every year to hold it. They could stake a claim, but they had to do what they called assessment work. People all over had mining claims around Manhattan and they'd hire someone to go up there and do the hundred dollars worth of work. If you go to Manhattan there are potholes everywhere because they could go up there and dig a hole. But the family never hit it rich. Then there was uranium prospecting during the uranium boom.

Zella: That was in the 1950s.

Zella: The (Robinson) family acquired a lot of land. But not enough to run more than about a couple hundred head, maybe. The hay meadows weren't really big enough to put up enough feed for more than that. And then they had range permits which were right out the backside of the land, but you could only get in there from June 15 'til the middle of September, and by that time your hay meadows were hayed.

Rick: We never had land like Roberts, Clarence (Currie) or Brackenbury, or others.

Zella: We were bigger....

Rick: Oh, I doubt that.

Zella: Oh really, we were about the same? That was Ben's place, or was it the brothers, Ben and Jess Scott, both?

Rick: We only had a small part of the Boy Scout (Ranch). This was mostly George Weaver's place, pretty much about the whole of it. We had registered Herefords and Angus, mostly Angus when we sold the place.

Zella: (Yes) most of the Boy Scouts was Weaver's, just a small part of land on the most northwest of the property was part of the Elbert Robinson Ranch.

Zella: The cattle that are raised there – any of the high mountain diseases we see a lot in cattle – it would pretty much weed itself out because they wouldn't live past a certain age, so genetics took care of it. We rarely brought any cattle in.

Rick: I mostly chased after construction machinery (in my work).

Zella: You were in the Korean War, right?

Rick: Yeah. Then I worked for a guy named Ed Pennington, then I worked over here at Fox Acres for 20 years. Before that I dug some wells, did some logging, kept getting older....

Zella: I started out running a dude string down on the Poudre, east of the Rustic. I was there for about 12 years. Then I had my daughter and I decided I needed a real job that would keep me going. I applied to the university and got a permanent position, classified personnel is what it is called. I've worked at the university for 33 years now in Animal Reproduction. That's what it was when I started, now it's Biomedical Sciences. It's actually under the umbrella of the veterinary school but it's still just animal reproduction and biophysics – that type of thing. What I primarily do is work at the bovine embryo transfer unit, doing embryo transfer. I don't have any cattle, but I have a herd of mules. I have four head now. My daughter assumed two and I had two. Brink is a married name. That's an old family name not from here but from eastern Kansas.

Interviewer: In listening to you talk, I realize that there is so much intermarriage with other old families in the area. Audrey Robinson (Rick's wife) was saying she is part of the Flowers family and related to Marion Monroe

Zella: He's my cousin. My Aunt Garnet, Richard's sister, married a Monroe.

Rick: Those Monroes were from Kansas.

Zella: We're related to the Goodells by Ermine's marriage to Clark Goodell. Ermine was Amanda Robinson's daughter. (From Stan Case's *The Poudre: A Photo History*, 1995, p. 192.) What were the Gueswels – I know the Gueswels were around forever and ever?

Rick: They're a relation to Audrey.

Zella: I know Louie and Frank (Gueswel), didn't they grow up with you guys?

Rick: They were up there a few years. I went to school with Huffman Gueswel's kids, Wayne and Everett. Wayne went and worked for the US Fish and Game. Wayne's brother was around Fort Collins, I think he was with the fire department.

Elkhorn School

Zella: The Elkhorn School originally started in Manhattan. The picture in here (Stan Case's *The Poudre: A Photo History*, 1995, p. 195) – the kids in school, that was the Elkhorn School, but it was the Manhattan School at that time, when the picture was taken. Then it moved to right where the Manhattan (Creek) crosses the 68C Road. It was in there – you (Richard) went to school in it when it was there. It was down the road about a quarter of a mile from Goodell corner east on 68 C.

Rick: It was right there where you cross the crick, across from the sawmill.

Zella: It hasn't been torn down, it's been moved – so now, it's down there where the old Robsinson cabin came from (on the Shambhala Mountain Center property). I went to school in that school.

Rick: My kids went there for a while.

Zella: And you (Richard) went to school there when it was at the upper place, and my granddad went to school when it was in Manhattan. So that old building has a huge amount of history for us.

Rick: When it was nice I used to ride my horse to school and when it wasn't nice my dad usually took me in the pickup.

Zella: I can remember going to school in a snowstorm being pulled on a sled behind a cat (International “crawler”) – and I think you were running it.

Rick: Yeah, probably. (Laughter)

Zella: We thought we had a snow day.

Zella: It was a one room school; we had eight grades in it.

Rick: And an outhouse out back.

Zella: We packed water in and we brought our own sack lunches. The teacher started the fire. When I was real little I remember a teacher living in the school. There was a little curtain that cornered off her area and we weren't allowed behind it. I think it was just for a little while because the cabin where she was living burned down or something and she needed a place to live temporarily. The first teacher I really remember was Mary Webb. And Bob Webb was there. They lived up at the fox farm – I can remember them living there. That's the Monroe place now. When did they take fox out of that country?

Rick: Forties, fifties maybe.

Zella: They were there then. It wasn't nearly as big as this one over here (in Red Feather Lakes). It was right across (the road) from the school and where our cabin was.

Rick: They were there when I was going to school. I can't actually remember any of my teachers' names. They were mostly old maids. There was Miss. Cell, she was pretty much it. She was staying there.

Zella: Stan Case mentions in his book a teacher that lived with the Goodells that married one of his uncles. Her name was Ellie ... something. (Ellie was Alice Billington, who later married R.Lee Case, Stan Case's uncle; from Stan Case's *The Poudre: A Photo History*, p. 193.) She was at the Elkhorn. The Poudre school was Eggers and it was way down, almost to the Pingree Park Road. Why it was that far down ... because there weren't many people from down there. I think some of them ... the road didn't get pushed through the Poudre until ...

Rick: Sometime in the 20s I think, probably.

Zella: All the workers that built the dams, like Chambers and the other big dams in there, all came through this area, over the Pingree Hill.

Rick: My school was one through eight. All the kids were from other ranch people. The Ubanks and the Gueswells, the Bensons and the Robinsons – I think that was probably about it.

Zella: Here's the picture of the school when it was in Manhattan in Stan Case's book. It's got a picture of my granddad (p. 195) and the Goodell kids, the Robinsons.

Land Deals, Place Names, and Attachments to the Land

Rick: One of the Goodells – Francis, who married a gal whose name was Frances, they lived at what is (now) the bottom of Horsetooth and they fought to the last dog to keep that dam from going in. They literally had to just throw them out (of Stout, CO).

Zella: I worked, when I first started at the university, with a fellow who – when he was going to college – actually roomed with (those Goodells). He stayed there and did all their chores for them just to have a place to live while he was going to college. Talk about a small world – and he came from northern Idaho and came to CSU.

Rick: Was he there when the fight (to save Stout) was going on?

Zella: Probably. In fact, he used to go visit them at the rest home for the last few years they were around.

Zella: The Robinsons didn't own the land transferred to the Forest Service – that was later.

Rick: Some guy by the name of Don Pavel, he traded it for land over by Climax.

Zella: Climax Molybdenum basically bought it and traded with the Forest Service for land in Climax. They did the same thing with the Indian Meadows Ranch – the same thing happened to them. Indian Meadows Ranch is the old Street Place (named for the Street family) and actually it goes from basically ...

Rick: Indian Meadows went from Rustic east to a half mile beyond Indian Meadows resort.

Zella: It was at Rustic ... anyway, it was in the Poudre Canyon. That's the reason that is Forest Service land in there now. It was sold to Climax Mel and Climax traded it for land over to the Forest Service. That place on the Poudre was in 1976, because that's when we had to move off that place where we were running our dude horses. This ranch used to go for about four miles down the river from the Rustic and is now called "Hombre's Ranch Wild Fishing Area" – there is a DOW sign there.

Rick: I suspect the land up here was traded before that.

Zella: Probably in the early '70s.

Rick: Right there on the Elkhorn, the house we had was the Batterson (Billy Batterson) place. That place isn't still standing.

Zella: He was Solomon's son. Billy was his son, right? They had homesteaded the place up there (on Gordon Creek). (His) place was right there where the Elkhorn crosses CR 68C.

Zella: (There's an old log structure) on the old Ayers place, along the Elkhorn (on the Forest Service land north of the new Elkhorn parking area.)

Rick: I don't think it's anything more than a barn.

Zella: It is a barn.

Rick: I used to put hay in it. I don't know (who built it). It's been there as long as I can remember.

Zella: Most of those places have the name of whoever had it last. The Ayers place is all I know it by. Then there's one up from there that's called the Van Sant, and it had a cabin on it. The Forest Service, I think, went in there and tore it down.

Zella: I don't live in a Robinson house, but I don't know what house it is. My dad had it since 1952.

Rick: Theoretically it was Lady Moon's.

Zella: She owned that ground and that cabin. It was a fishing cabin or something she had for hired help or guests or something like that. It was just a cabin when it was built. My dad spent quite a bit of time trying to get it insulated enough you could survive in it. I've done a little bit more to it, but not near enough. It's off the Boy Scout Road (CR 68C) – (which) is the Log Cabin Road, as far as I'm concerned. I'd rather see it be the Log Cabin Road instead of the Boy Scout Road.

Rick: It's across from the old saw mill (current location of Elkhorn Lumber).

Zella: The main Lady Moon house was just down the hill from me, but it's burned down. It (caught) from a chimney fire, in the mid-80s maybe. Jerry Franklin and his wife had just moved up to the upper place, but someone else was living in the (old place). Someone just came in and stoked fires to keep the pipes from freezing and it went up in smoke. When I was a kid I always heard that's where Lady Moon lived. It was said she had a still somewhere in the area. During the flu epidemic of 1918 I heard she gave whiskey to some who they said would not have lived through the epidemic without it.

Rick: My brother Dayton lived there for a while.

Zella: (Where I live) was on the old Lady Moon place but it was also where my granddad had ownership at one time too.

Rick: My dad owned all of that ranch at one time – him and the bank.

Zella: (Gene) Barker had the Lady Moon at one time. Then Carl DeWitt owned part of it.

Rick: He had most of it at one time. He moved up here from Lamar.

Rick: When did the cheat grass arrive? We've had cheat grass here since about 1900 – my dad said it came in from Montana with the sheep. The seeds were in the wool. *

Zella: The sawmill used to belong to Rick's brother (Dayton), and now belongs to my cousin, Rick's nephew – Russell.

Rick: What Russell has in the way of land is about it on that side of the road.

* From subsequent phone interview with Rick on June 15, 2011.

Russell gets his timber from anywhere he can. He's been doing lot of business for people bringing him (mountain pine bark beetle killed) logs off of their places, and cutting them into boards. He has been buying some loads coming in out of Walden.

* * * *

Rick: Manhattan Creek comes along (from) up above Manhattan.

Zella: It comes down through Goodell Corner and follows the road (CR68C) all the way down to just below the Shambhala Mountain Center and then it cuts off away from the road and comes into the Elkhorn Creek above the Boy Scouts.

Rick: If you start at the Pot Belly on the high road across to the Poudre, going south, the first crick you get to is the Elkhorn and the second one is the Swamp Crick, and the third one is Manhattan.

Zella: When Clarence Currie had all that land (Glacier View Meadows) he used to bring his cattle out of Bennett Crick which is south of the Poudre and then up the Elkhorn back to his ranch. I helped him move cows several times in there, up through the school section.

Rick: I went to sleep one time at 60 miles an hour, down there by Denver. My nose never sat in the center of my face after that. I was staying in Denver at Lowrey Air Force Base and was driving back to Fort Collins in the afternoons.

Rick: Why was Manhattan named Manhattan? It must have been a New Yorker or an Englishman that stopped there. Manhattan was never incorporated.

Zella: I have a Red Feather Lakes address but it used to be Livermore. I have old letters that my dad got from the service that have "Log Cabin," and that's all it was. Log Cabin, Colorado. Rural Route, Log Cabin. I can remember getting mail like twice a week and in the wintertime they had those canvass bags and they just threw the bags in this open box, and everything for this road was put in that mailbag. Whoever got to the mailbag first down there would bring it back up the hill and handed it out to whoever was (there). Stan Case talks about it in this book (*The Poudre: A Photo History*). (Ben Scott) had this hauling business or freighting business and they'd haul anything.

Rick: They run the stage when they was building that tunnel. Then they'd run it with Stanley Steamers and Model-T Fords.

Zella: Yeah. It was the only way they could pull that hill. And the "Barrel Turn" on Pingree, the reason that was there is so you could stop and fill your water back up.

Rick: There was a barrel there which would fill up with water. (Stanley Steamers) didn't hold enough water to get up the hill because they used steam. It was fueled by a kerosene burner that heated the water.

Zella: If you turned it over, you had to shut all the lines off and kill the fire, or you'd really have a problem.

Rick: They claim those things will run at 90 miles an hour.

Zella: They had a lot of power.

Special Memories of Manhattan and the Curiously Missing Elk

Rick: The winter of '49 is was a classic. We got a big snowstorm about the 1st of December and it didn't get above 20 degrees for 6 weeks. Lots and lots of 20 below nights. I was 19 at the time. It was terrible out on the flats. They lost thousands and thousands of cattle.

Zella: We fished when we were children – get out of the house and go fishing on the Elkhorn Creek right behind the house, a little over a quarter mile over the hill to the north. We'd get small trout. Rode horses. Every time Dayton had a horse saddled I was either running beside him beggin' to go or he brought one with him when he came by the house or I'd ride double with him.

Rick: I figured horses were poor transportation when I was awfully young. I switched to gasoline.

Zella: I remember a lot of elk horns in piles and stuff. Do you remember seeing many elk when you were a kid up there, Rick?

Rick: No, there just wasn't any, but there had to have been some because out in front of the house were two big piles of elk horns.

Zella: Yeah, I can remember those. And they lined that fence with ... and those are big racks. We don't even see those kinds of big racks these days. There were an awful lot of working people up on the ditch – when they were building those ditches for Chambers Lake and they ran ditches clear through what's now the Rawahs to collect water to dump into Chambers. There was a lot of people up there workin' and I bet you most of that meat that they ate was from hunting. Isn't that what (Jacob) Flowers did?

Rick: There were a few elk in Cherokee Park and there were a few elk up on Crystal Mountain. Once in a great while you'd see an elk rack where (a hunter) brought one back, but the elk never hung out here.

Zella: When those ditches were being built it was in the 1880s and they were probably using (elk) as their main source of meat. You wouldn't drive the cattle up here and slaughter them up there. That was the only way they had to transport them up there and it was closer to kill them up there. There were no restrictions on them. When I was a kid it wasn't uncommon to have a two or three deer license. I don't know whether they were trying to thin them out or what the story was.

Rick: You could buy three licenses. They pretty well thinned them out. There was like 500 head of deer wintered there at the fish ponds, on the Poudre, by the hatchery. Every day you'd go down on the Poudre there would be a place out on the ice where the coyotes were running deer out on the ice and they would fall down, then they'd get `em.

Zella: You see that up there on the college lake at the end of Rampart Road, where they run them out on the ice. Bad choice, don't go on the ice. (Laughter)



Robinson Addendum Number 1
Audrey Monroe Robinson, May 12, 2011
Transcribed by Linda Bell

Would you like to know how all the entanglements between the Monroes and the Robinsons took place?

My dad, Carroll Monroe, bought a little snag horse, and his name was Kerawanza. He went back to Kansas and wanted to move his mother and his siblings out here to Colorado because his dad had left the family. Richard's sister ended up marrying one of dad's brothers. That was Ken and Garnett (Robinson) Monroe. Monroe was my maiden name. My cousins, Ken's and Garnet's kids – when in 1955 Rick and I met and got married – they became my nephews.

In 1954 we came out to visit with the Robinsons because daddy worked for the Robinsons at the ranch. Daddy came here from Kansas, but I never lived in Kansas. He met my mom, married her and gave me the name of Monroe.

My great aunt Bernie Gueswel and my grandmother Audrey were sisters, their maiden name was Kerns. Aunt Bernie and Uncle Huff had a cabin at Gueswel Gulch. Ken, my dad's brother, and Garnet Monroe (Rick Robinson's sister) decided they wanted to introduce my mom to Carroll Monroe, who was Ken's brother. When Carroll met me he wanted him to adopt me. So they invited us to a neighborhood picnic – I was just two years old. That's how the Gueswels got in touch with the Robinsons.

I was born in the Salvation Army Home in Denver. My mother was violated, and so my grandmother made him marry mother because he was 46 and she was 16. Mother took me home and got a divorce from my biological father and then met daddy. I didn't know he wasn't my biological daddy until I was 18 and I was married. He was a prince of a guy. At this point, Marion and I are the only senior Monroes up here. So that's a part of my family history.



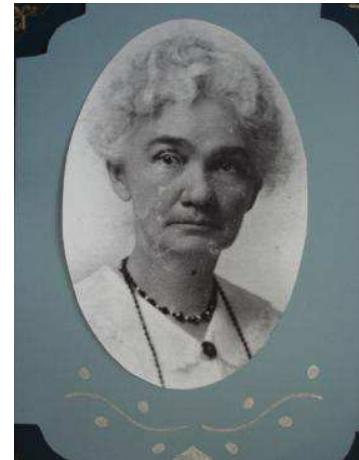
Audrey Monroe Robinson

Robinson Addendum Number 2

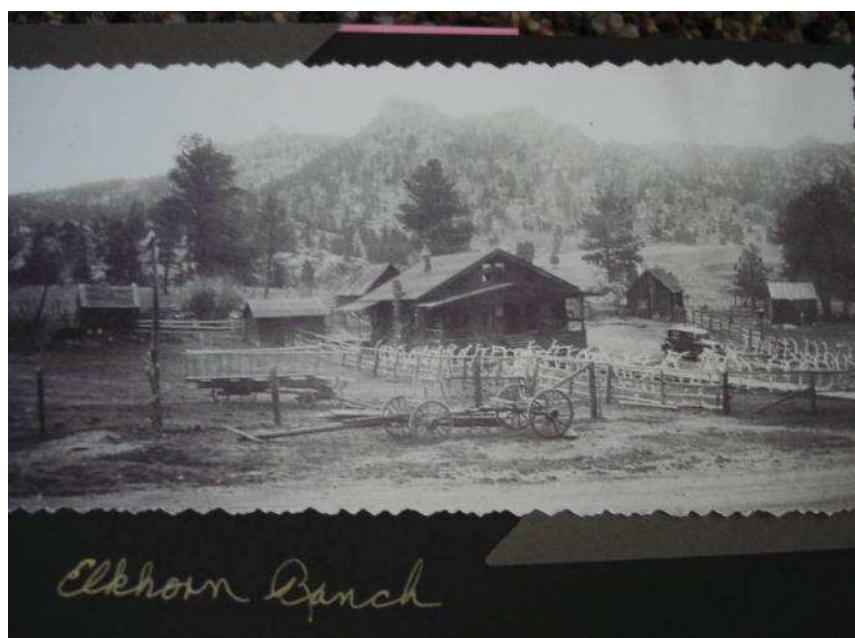
Family Photo Album



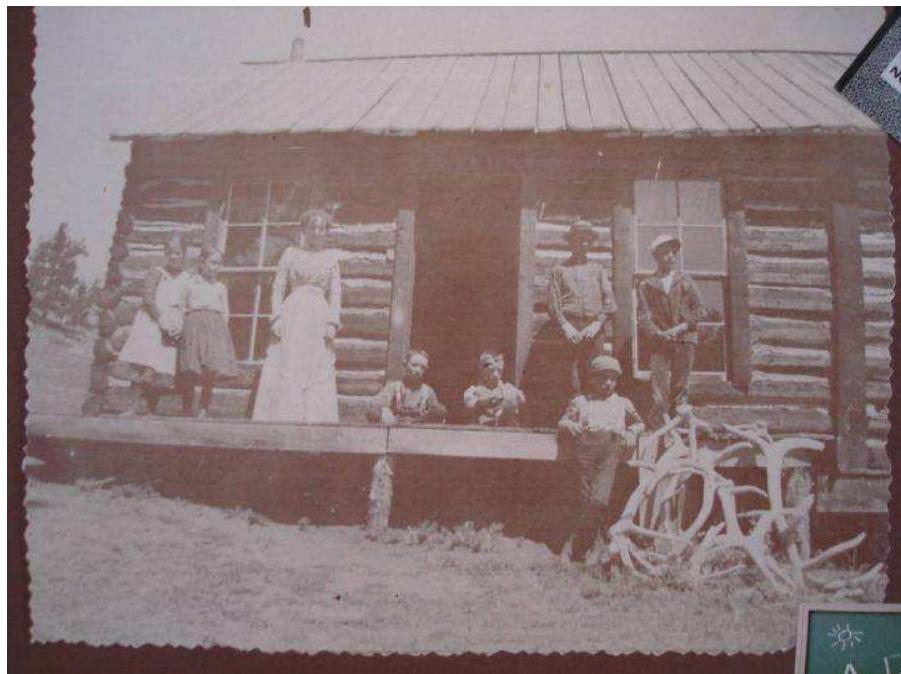
Photograph of Dayton Robinson taken while still in New York, prior to 1882



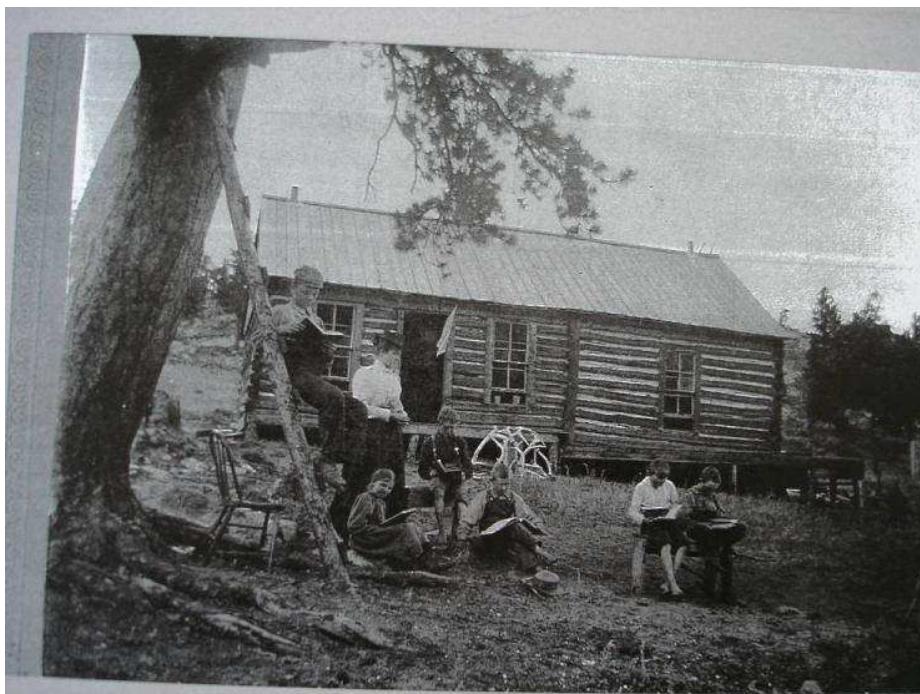
Jennie Robinson, Dayton's wife



Elkhorn Creek Ranch, c1930, when home to Elbert and Zella Robinson. Originally built by Billy Batterson, the main house was eventually relocated across the road and burned down in 1980s.



Elkhorn School c1903, the teacher is Mildred (Minnie) Faust, pupils from left: Mildred Goodell, Inez Robinson, Harry Goodell and Elbert Robinson (in front of the door), Ray Williams, an unidentified boy, and Francis Goodell next to the elk horns.



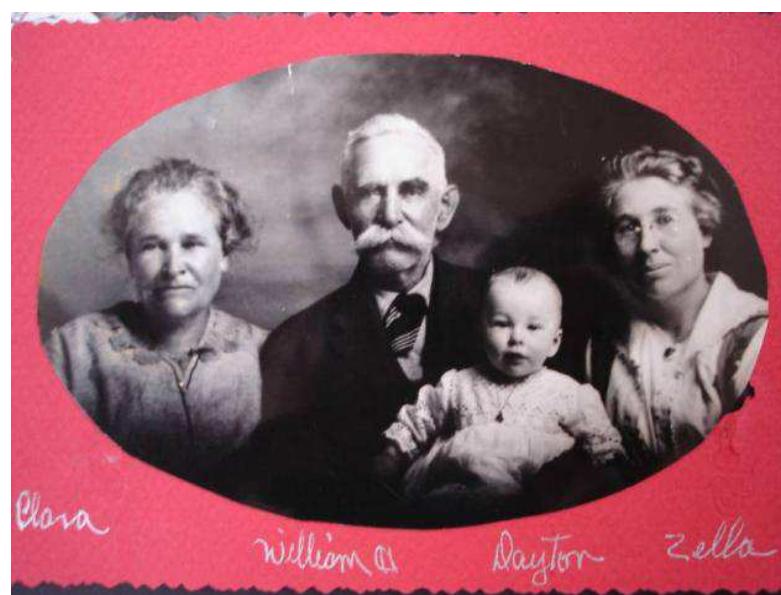
Another view of the Elkhorn School about the same time.



Elbert and Zella Williams Robinson, at the time of their marriage, November 1913



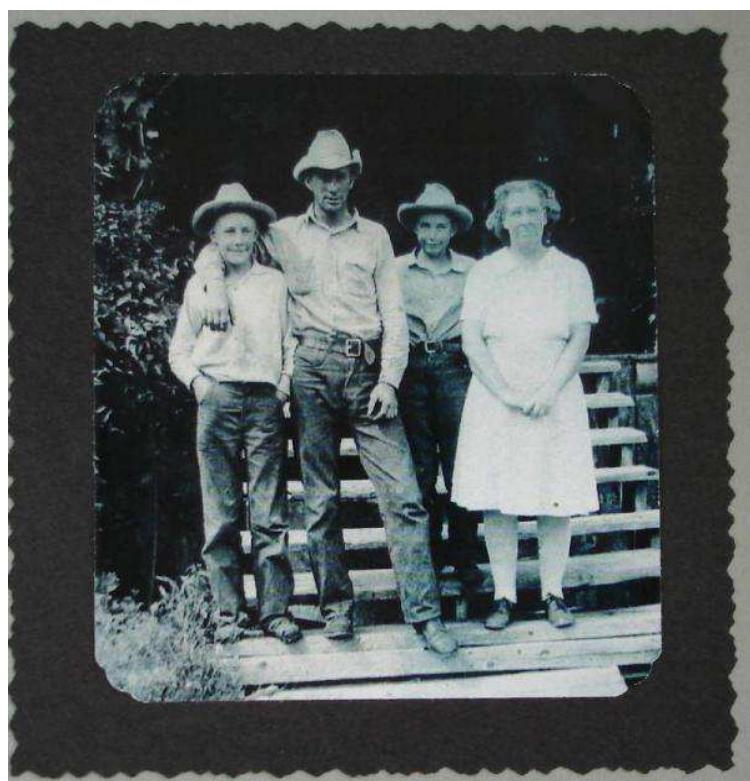
Wesley William Williams and Clara Shaffer Williams, Rick's maternal grandparents at the time of their marriage, 1885, Benton Ridge, OH



Zella Williams Robinson (Mrs. Elbert Robinson) on right with parents, Clara and William, and her first-born son, Dayton Robinson



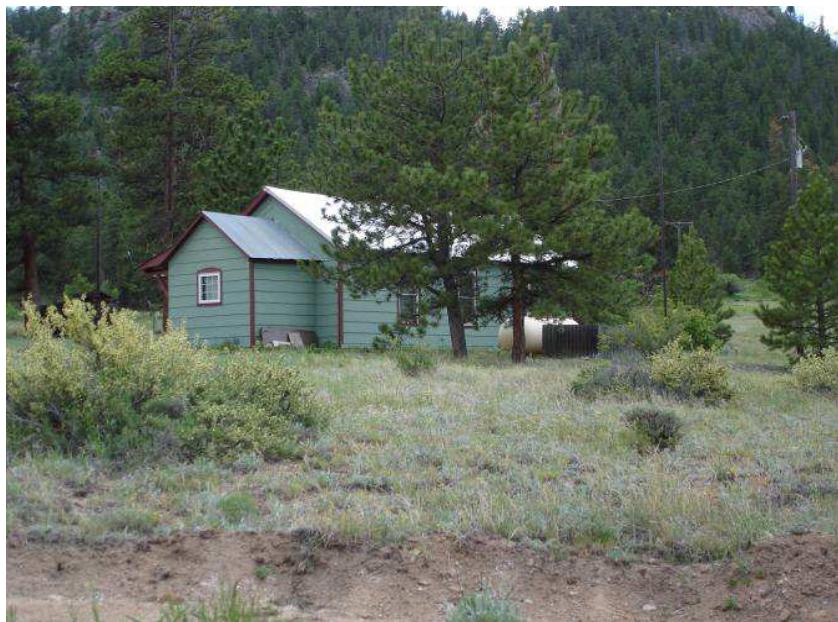
A young Richard (Rick) (left) with his older brother Dayton on the Elkhorn Ranch



Zella Robinson, right, with sons (left to right) Richard, Dayton, Rodney, c. 1942



Rich and Audrey Robinson family c1990



Old Elkhorn School, July 2011, along CR68C on the Shambhala Mountain Center property

Robinson Addendum Number 3

References to the Robinson Family in local history publications

Memoirs and history books about the area have featured the Robinson family many times. Here are some references for further reading:

- 1) *Among These Hills: A History of Livermore, Colorado (A Centennial Publication of The Livermore Woman's Club, 1896-1996)* by the Livermore Woman's Club History Committee, 1995. "The saga of the Robinson spread along the Elkhorn", pp. 197-199.
- 2) *Among These Hills: A History of Livermore, Colorado Revised Second Edition* by The Livermore Woman's Club, 2009. "The saga of the Robinson spread along the Elkhorn", pp. 236-238.
- 3) *Larimer County Stockgrowers Association 1884 – 1956; By-laws and History of the Association, Brands of the Members, a Brief History of the Ranches, a Map of Larimer County showing Location of Operation Headquarters of the Association Members*, 1956. "The Elkhorn District No. 53", pp. 93-94; Robinson JN brand, p. 107.
- 4) *Memoirs of an Old Timer* by Wesley Swan, c1975. "The history of Elkhorn, and the boom town of Manhattan, which was a gold camp in the late eighties and early nineties", pp. 22-23; "Elkhorn District School # 53", pp. 74-76.
- 5) *The Poudre: A Photo History* by Stanley R. Case, published by Stanley Case, 1995. "The Robinson Ranches" and "Goodell Corner; The Clark Goodell Homestead", pp. 192- 195.
- 6) *Ranch Histories of Livermore and Vicinity, 1884-1956; A Reprinting of the Larimer County Stockgrowers Assn.* by the Livermore Woman's Club, 1993. "Elkhorn District No. 53", pp. 93-98; Robinson brand, p. 107.
- 7) *Ranch Histories of Livermore and Vicinity 1884 – 1956*, a reprinting of the Larimer County Stockgrowers Association by the Livermore Woman's Club, 2003. Clay Robinson, A.J.Robinson, p. 20; Robinson family, pp. 96-99; Robinson and Goodell Ranches, 102; Robinson brand, 115.
- 8) *Those Crazy Pioneers; With the Life and Times of Lady Moon & Vignettes of History* by Lafi Miller, 2000. "Manhattan, Colorado", pp. 92-93.