

This is Gwen Perschbacher, and I'm interviewing Franklin Thompson at their home at 304 Pinon Drive, Poncha Springs, Colorado. And we're at the home of Franklin and Virginia Thompson. And I'm going to have Franklin tell you about the family, what part of his family first came to this area.

**FRANKLIN THOMPSON:** My grandfather Frank Churcher came from Michigan and went to the mines of Monarch and ran a cable car. And ah, he was a very strong man so he did two men's work and got two men's pay. My grandmother, she came from Iowa. I think it was Boone Iowa. And they met and married in Salida. My grandfather then, after working in the mines for awhile came to Salida and called his friend Mr. Haight, back in Michigan to come here, and they started a furniture and undertaking business.

**GWEN PERSCHBACHER:** And how did they spell that other?

**FRANKLIN THOMPSON: H A I G T.** And, ah, they ran that for years. My grandmother and grandfather had four children. Two boys, who passed away with the sicknesses in those days. And two girls, who lived a long, healthy, prosperous life. My mother Nina Lorraine Churcher married my father who was a chemist, a graduate of the Colorado School of Mines and came eventually to the, to become a superintendent of the smelter in Salida. And my Aunt, Ruth Churcher Yeager, she married a prominent undertaker from Denver and lived to be 97 years old. Now, I was born to Arthur and Nina in 1918, just a few months before WW I ended. I was born in Salida. And we stayed there until the Smelter was closed down, for about three years, and then moved to Denver. And I had a very interesting life, all over the world, you might say. And one of the interesting things in my particular life was, it was just the other day; fifty years in the Sertoma Club, service to mankind. I was with the Denver club for years and then I've been 25 years in the Salida Sertoma Club. We do hearing and speech, helping people in the area that

need help. Many other things, like the flag, putting out the flags on national holidays, and also the street breakfast prior to the Fib Ark and many other times to obtain money to help these people. Now, ....(( **Huge gap here, don't know if tape wasn't working or he made a long pause – please check**)) but some of the things that are, I find are interesting over the years; When I came back up here, because we had, after my Grandmother passed away in Denver, we had to come back because of property we owned, and Bob, Bill Rush, that was our attorney at that time he took us to Buena Vista to the Court House. The Court House was in Buena Vista at the time, when I was about nine years old. And ah then later, of course, it moved to Salida, where it is now. The ah, some of the worst things that happened, people allowed in the Salida area, allowed the trains to be removed from Marshall Pass, and from Salida also to up over Monarch Pass, which could be just like the Durango to Silverton trains which are very prosperous. Salida is about the same size as when I was born. But, it's a great retirement community, but the children ah are happy here when their young and brought up but they don't have too much of a chance to make a good living in the area when they grow up. So one of the possibilities that they have is to go to, leave the community to go to a bigger city to make a good living. So that is a problem. But it's a wonderful place to live. The fact that they have schools and hospitals, a hospital now. There were two hospitals here when I was born. But, the doctors, Kirkland, who brought me into this world and Dr. **Cochems**, were the two main doctors in those days. My father and Dr. Cochems used to go duck hunting down in the San Luis Valley, shoot ducks. One day they were betting a cigar on who got the most and they counted up with 25 apiece. Dr. Cochems was quite a well known physician that live here in Salida. And then of course in those days Poncha Springs was much larger than it is today. But the fires ruined of the hotels and some of the houses in those days. It was pretty bad.

**GWEN PERSCHBACHER:** Were you here at that time when the fires took place?

**FRANKLIN THOMPSON:** No probably not. I, I don't remember anything about that, of course. I, I do remember some things, like going to Mrs. Harriett Alexander's house for cookies. But, and things like that. But one of the, in those days, old time Salida had a lot going for it. They had the Salida Granite Corporation, and there were several other small ones. And ah they had ah other businesses that were pretty good. And they have been extinct now.

**GP:** Where was your grandfather's mortuary located?

**FT:** Ah, on First, First street, there, not far from "F" Street. And ah, Mr. Haight put that cupola up on the mountain, where the big "S" is now, you know. He put, he put the money up for that I believe. And ah my grandfather was in the, either a director or instrumental in the First National Bank, which the ah **Preston's (?)** were good friend of ours, where he was the President and Vice, and the Vice President, ah his brother was Vice President in Denver at the First National Bank. And ah, there was ah, my grandfather was also the Director of the Salida Granite Corporation. And we, being in the stone business, there used to be carloads of granite there. We also used to get carloads from mule, marble, near Redstone.

**GP:** And where was that business located?

**FT:** That was in Denver. Near Cherry Creek at Sherman and Speer Blvd. And ah.....

**GP:** But the granite company, here in Salida that he was director of?

**FT:** It was right there where, ah \_\_\_\_\_(?) took over the big shed.

**GP:** On 5<sup>th</sup> Street?

**FT:** I believe that's right. It's still there, being used as a lumber yard.

**GP:** Is the building that the mortuary was in, is it still standing?

**FT:** I think so. It's changed a lot. There was a sign still on one of the buildings downtown, now.

**GP:** I was thinking I had seen that name, H A I G H T.

**FT:** That's right, and ah, and ah there used to..... Oh, my grandfather was also Fire Chief of Salida. I have a ribbon showing that, when he passed away they gave him for being, and then pictures. Pictures, I've had pictures in the articles and pictures in the magazines or books that have been printed. And ah, my Dad put a, climbed up to the top of that 365 foot smelter, put a dollar, cemented a dollar up there on the top when they built that.

**GP:** Was your father here then during the building of the smelter?

**FT:** Yes, oh yes. He was superintendent of it. Before and after, and when it was closed by the Ohio Smelting Company.

**GP:** The Ohio Smelting Company?

**FT:** That was, there's another name to that but I can't recall it right now. Other things that, ... Oh one, one interesting thing that I had in my life, I did a lot of ah bird hunting and used to go out East of Denver to a place called Hudson, Colorado, where there was a restaurant called the

Pepper Pod. The man that owned it was named Sam Howard. I got to talking with him one day and I said I was born in Salida, and he says, well I was born in Howard and he said, my Grandfather started that town. So, that was interesting.

**GP:** How long ago was that?

**FT:** That I ran into him? Oh, that must have been 30 years ago. When we lived in Denver, we used to go out East hunting, my son and I.

**GP:** Did you visit your grandparents, when you're parents weren't here, did you them in Salida?

**FT:** My grandfather died one year before I was born. He died in 1917. My grandmother came to Denver with us.

**GP:** Oh, I see.

**FT:** The manager of the Smelter, Max **Schott** (?) went to Climax and was principally responsible for their making a lot of money, and he, he retired from there. He wanted my Father to go with him, but my Mother wasn't too well after the war there. She had the bad flu. A great many people passed away, and there's markers in Fairview Cemetery where I have lots and my Grandfather's buried and my Grandmother. And ah so she, Dad didn't go to Climax he went to Denver and opened up a stone business. Monuments and markers and all kinds of marble table tops and that type of thing.

**GP:** Well, it's a small world, I went to the **Map Shop School** (?) for a short time in Climax.

**FT:** Well, for heaven's sake. Well, ah my wife's sister taught school up there in Climax and Leadville, and in Salida, Buena Vista and many places around, and finally went to Cali... or to Alaska where she taught some of the Indians and others and retired up there and is still living there in ah Kena. That's basically what I know about Salida until we came back here. And that was a, we were just traveling around 26 or 7 years ago looking for someplace to retire. We went all over, Wyoming, Colorado, New Mexico, just around and just happened to come here and stop at the Jim **Epps** (?) Monarch ah Motel and happened to see that this place was for sale. Came out, bought it, like the quietness, which, this is what used to be called **Rosedale** (?) My Mother said they'd come out here for picnics.

**GP:** Poncha Springs was called Rosedale?

**FT:** No, just this road here.

**GP:** Oh, just this area.

**FT:** This area here on Poncha, ah, ah Pinon Blvd. And ah they'd picnic in through here, and ah the ladies used to come here, even when, when we first come here, they'd get the rose, ah rosehips for ah tea and jelly.

**GP:** Oh yeah.

**FT:** And another thing that Mother used to talk about, that I didn't know, but they used to go skating on **Isher Wood's Pond** (?). Now I'm not sure just where that was. But, ah, my Grandfather used to take them up to the North Fork to go fishing and camping. Fact, he was a great fisherman. He ah, he used to go down underneath the bridge, that his, by the way his, he

was one of the principle builders of the bridge. His name is one of the five people on the plaque there on the First St. Bridge right now. And he'd go down on the river there and in about 10-15 minutes catch a limit of trout, fly fishing.

**GP:** Now this was your Mother's father right?

**FT:** Mmm huh. My father's father came from Illinois to around Pueblo, one of the ranches in the area, became Commissioner of Pueblo County. Raised cattle, had a farm back there someplace.

**GP:** Now you mentioned, awhile back about Harriett Alexander, having cookies there. Can you tell me a little bit about your relationship with her?

**FT:** Just, she was a friend of my Mother's and my, my Grandmother's. That's all. There was a, oh this, Frank Lloyd was a member of the Salida Granite Company and he used to send me a telegram every Christmas.

**GP:** Is that the Lloyd that live on "F" St?

**FT:** Yes, he, he bought our house at 846 "F". And ah my Grandmother sold it to him after my Grandfather passed away. Let's see.....

**GP:** Did you go to school at all in Salida?

**FT:** No, I was just 3 years old. I didn't ah I went to school in Denver. Colorado University, Denver University for 3 years after Colorado. Douglas Aircraft, 4 years, and Army 2 years,

infantry. Then private businesses.

**GP:** Yeah, You said you lived all over the world.

**FT:** Well, lived in California, we'd go to Hawaii, you know, every year.

**GP:** And what ah, why did you go there, was it just, had you been there before as an Army person and liked it?

**FT:** No, I wasn't there. Just ah went there, loved it, still do. Hope to go this.....

**GP:** This winter?

**FT:** Yeah, I'd like to go for awhile.

**GP:** Well, tell me about ah when you met Virginia.

**FT:** We met in ah, in Denver. Actually we went together some when we were both going to Denver University. I waited until she graduated. When I was out in California and she was, had traveled to take her Mother back to Pennsylvania and New York and I convinced her to come to be married in Los Angeles.

**GP:** I take it she came?

**FT:** Oh, yes, sixty years ago.



**GP:** You've been married sixty years.

**FT:** Mmmm. We will be in January.

**GP:** A good long time.

**FT:** Yes, indeed. Happy.

**GP:** Well, tell me a little bit about ah when you came back to Salida, how you found things. Ah, the businesses and the businesses that were here when you came back.

**FT:** Well, of course they lost a lot of the railroad. The railroads were big when I was born. The granite company was big. The lumber company was big. They were just starting, I think, thinking about skiing. And ah, course the fishing and boating has always been good in Salida. And the hunting of course, around here fantastic, still is, always has been.

**GP:** Have you always done a lot of hunting and fishing?

**FT:** Bird hunting and, and fishing, lots. Fly fishing. My son Arthur he loves fishing and hunting; skiing, he's a skiing instructor and a tennis professional. I played a lot of tennis. In fact, we went to the National's three times, as father and son. We won some and lost some, but we got beaten by the big boys.

**GP:** Ah, when was he born? Was he born in Denver?

**FT:** He was born in Denver in .....1946 or '47; '47. He still wins a lot of tennis tournaments.

Got more trophies. We went to ah, our great, ah Step-grandson's wedding in Avon a month ago at the ah **Red Scarlet** (?) Never been to such a fancy place.

**GP:** You were telling me a little bit about ah the railroad and a little bit about ah Dr. Cochems and Dr. Kirkman, did you personally know them or?

**FT:** Well, Dr. Kirkman brought me into this world, Dr. Koppens was also a very good friend of my Father's. However, I don't, and we used to see his wife and Niece. His Niece lived in Denver about a block from where we lived, and ah her, her sons. And ah Dr. Kirkman's son, I went to parties with him, in Denver there. He, ah he went to Denver, like I did. A lot of the, it's amazing how you run around with people from Salida. When we were in California, when we got married my folks were out there, and people from Salida were, "well, hello, hello", you know. It's amazing how they traveled from a little place like Salida, Poncha Springs and goes to all over the world, really.

**GP:** And a lot of them end up coming back.

**FT:** Oh yeah, sure. Well, it's a lovely place to retire. And ah, especially with, it's not the place to make a living, except those lucky ones that have a good business that make it, make one. It really is a fine place to live. Good climate. We need a little more moisture. Always.

**GP:** Right. Well Frank, tell me a little bit about your schooling. I know it was in Denver, but can you tell me a little bit about what sticks out in your mind about your going to school, grade school, start with grade school.

**FT:** Well, I didn't like school when I first went. Until I got, oh I don't know, I think, ah oh I

don't know, just school was, ah sports was more, I was more interested in sports than I was the school, until, until I got to Jr. High and then came Algebra, and there was one...I was second best Algebra student. But then, from then on, school was fun. I, I did alright. I went to ah CU (Colorado University) and played around too much. And went to DU (Denver University) for three years and joined the Beta Fraternity and ah did well and had fun. I was on the tennis team. Worked at the same time. I worked at ah job the whole time I was going to college at Denver. Then I went to California and worked as a tooling engineer at Douglas Aircraft. In the Infantry for two years. And then, oh around, ah different little businesses. Some profitable, some not profitable. You don't win 'em all.

**GP:** Well, were, were those businesses you started.

**FT:** Some of 'em. Ah, we ah we built an automobile. My partner was a genius and better. We built five cars. One of them was in \_\_\_\_\_(?) on display. They paid us \$50,000 in those days for the prototype. But we never do any, really good on it. And ah then I was in the toy business, and we ah did alright, but no great.... Then, I went with, went with my Father's business, went with him and we did pretty well.

**GP:** Now, that was ah mortician business?

**FT:** No. That was monument markers. Small kinds of stone; marble table tops and flagstone. We did a lot of ah lettering, engraving, and things in parks for the **Cranford**, (?) George Cranford, showing the mountain range in the park and ah different things like that. Then I retired. No. Then I was in the banking business for a little bit. That's what I retired from.

**GP:** From banking? What bank?

**FT:** East Denver Bank. Now it's East Denver. Used to be Colfax National. I was a PR man and Director of Marketing. That was interesting business. That was fun.

**GP:** Sounds like you had a quite a career in a lot of different things.

**FT:** Well, a lot of different things is right. Well it's, it's kinda fun to diversify. And ah then to come back up and go fishing and hunting and resting and walking, and you don't have to go far to fly fish around here.

**GP:** No you don't.

**FT:** But then times go by.

**GP:** Well is there anything else that you'd, any people in Salida or business that you'd like to tell me about?

**FT:** Oh, oh yeah. I used to go to the "Old Goats" in Denver. And ah Bill Burton was down there. He was one of the principal starters of that. And I went with some friends. We went to \_\_\_\_\_ there and then when I came up here I was a member of the "Old Goats". And went up with, Harold **Costner** (?) always wanted to go with me. And ah, we had a lot of fun in "Old Goats". We brought a bunch of goats to Mt. Shavano and around in here.

**GP:** For people that don't know what the "Old Goats" are do you want to tell us about that?

**FT:** Their white, their goats, like mountain goats. And we thought that was something to be

behind, and to help them. We had a, every year we had a Colorado School, State University man that would watch the goats and tell us all about them. And ah, the ah, so we, they would go up, we even had a balloon ascent up there in this place where ah, **Elmo Bevington** (?) had a pond there and we'd go fishing. And some of us would go from Friday night to Sunday.

**GP:** Now is that what we call the ah Bevington Ranch?

**FT:** Yes, uh huh.

**GP:** Where is that located?

**FT:** Well, that's almost, past the, I forget the turnoff. But you go up Monarch road and about half way up you turn off past the ah Little, Little River, North Fork and ah you go on up there several miles and there's a meadow. And that's where we'd park our campers and tents. It was ah, it was interesting. Most of the Salida, most, well they were all over the world, there was one fellow from England. And they were a lot of them from Denver and Colorado Springs, Pueblo. And ah, we'd ah have ah catered food, very good and reasonable. And we'd fish at (**Admiral?**) Elmo Bevington's place there, and he'd allow one fish to be caught. And the biggest one was 10 pounds.

And ah, we ah, let's see, oh we'd have campfires and singing and then there'd be prayers and ah talk about the next year and about the "old goats" how many there were and how they were increasing and so forth.

**GP:** So it was kind of a combination of fun and, and education.

**FT:** Oh yeah. Oh yes. It was a fun deal. It's still going. I don't go as often anymore, but.....

**GP:** Do you know what year it was started?

**FT:** Ohhh, I forgot. But it must've been 30 some years ago. Because when I was in Denver that was when I first started going to the "Wadi". "Wadi, being just a water hole for the, for the goats. Oh, and one thing about them, there was no, no woman, no children, and something else...I forgot, but.....

**GP:** Maybe dogs?

**FT:** Yeah, no pets. But we'd have this big campfire at night and it was real fun. Ah, do you have any other questions?

**GP:** Well, do you have anything else you'd like to tell me?

**FT:** Well, let's see. Of course certain things pop up you know, but..... Not off hand. Oh, we.. let's see. Oh, Salida is not much bigger now than it was when I was born, as far as population goes. But, Poncha Springs was ah is, is smaller than it was when I was born. We had quite a bit of activity around here until the fires. And then of course that's where the hot springs was, and still is.

**GP:** Do you remember it at all when ah people came out here to swim?

**FT:** Well, they still do sometimes. Er, the Boy Scouts do up there. But, ah no I don't remember. Course not, not when I was up here, except after I moved. Helen **Nachtrieb(?)** used to take, handle the Boy, the Cub Scouts. Oh she used to have, even race. She was quite a woman.

**GP:** Well, tell me a little bit about Helen.

**FT:** Oh. She was a lovely, lovely lady. We would chat and have parties. She was a good cook. She was ah very ah popular. She was good for the community. Caring and Sharing she took care of for years. And ah, she was an excellent neighbor. Miss her.

**GP:** I bet you do. I was going to ask you Frank, you lived at 846 "F", right?

**FT:** Well, yeah, for a little bit.

**GP:** And did you live, live anyplace in Salida?

**FT:** We lived at, ah my folks lived at the smelter.

**GP:** Oh, they had a house out there?

**FT:** They had a house there; the superintendents house. Now I don't remember that though, I was too young. I just remember it being out there, that's all. The house at 847 "F" was my grandfather's and grandmother's home, actually. And ah I think the reason I was there was because Mother had the, ah we both had the flu. We were amazing we lived, because so many, many people that, that was a terrible, terrible year for the flu. Let's see.....

**GP:** Well, let's see if I have anything else here that ah..... Well, tell me a little bit about your parents, what they were like. Were they like strict?

**FT:** No, they weren't strict. We got along fine. Ah, my father was a very intelligent mathematician and chemist. My Mother was, Mother was an intelligent gal and she got along. She was very talented. Sang. She went back to New York, was asked to, by Julliard to stay and be an instructor there. But she didn't want to. She want back with my Aunt to Fire Island to visit ah, ah Gene Fowler the writer, you've heard of him. They were very good friends of My Aunt, Mrs. Yeager. And ah they went there, spent a couple three weeks, I think, I've forgotten. I got letters from her.

But no, they were, they were fine. They didn't have trouble with me, much. I mean, not like some parents have trouble. That's one thing that it's nice to being children up in this area. I think it's a better area than the big cities. But they have to learn to get out in the big city to make the money after they've got out of school. That's a tough deal there, in that regard.

**GP:** I was going to ask you about your Aunt, Mrs. Yeager; did they live here in Salida?

**FT:** Oh, no. Only when she was a girl.

**GP:** A girl. Uh huh. But she grew up here?

**FT:** Oh yes. Mother and, and Ruth ah lived here. Mother was an athlete. A tremendous athlete. She was the best runner in the bunch and a high jumper.

**GP:** So they had girl athletics then when she was young.

**FT:** My grandfather wouldn't let her go to the, the, big meets.

**GP:** Oh really.



**FT:** Well, he thought it was, wasn't ladylike. And ah he was a big, strong, very strong. He was, ah he was a coupler for the, for awhile, on the ah fire department before he became chief. .And quick but you'd have to be. (**Not sure about the previous sentence**). But, ah, yeah, she ah, she, she went to Denver. You see my Uncle who had a big mortuary in Denver. He built a big one right there across the street from my Father's place of business.

**GP:** Oh my, and where was that?

**FT:** 600 Sherman. Sherman and Speer Blvd. Yeah..... Oh, that's another thing, I, I did a lot of real estate. And that was definitely,... yeah I put in a restaurant down there later, when I, when I moved my memorial business and so forth. And, ah a good sized restaurant.

**GP:** Did you run the restaurant?

**FT:** No. No. I, I just had the property and real estate, different real estate deals. But ah, well, you can't do everything.

**GP:** Well you, you made a good try at it.

**FT:** Well, I don't know about that. You try on some things and you win some and you lose some.

**GP:** Well Frank, I really thank you for ..... go ahead.

**FT:** Well, I was going to say one thing. I was born here. At the same time, I'm, I was talking to

Harold **Thonof** one time, and he, he and I were born just almost the same time. And another one that was born is, ah, ..... (Asked wife a question) Virginia, what's the fellows name that, ah Italian fellow that I ah, he's, he's still... Art, Art.....

**GP:** Ferraro?

**VIRGINIA THOMPSON:** Same time as what?

**FT:** Art Ferraro and I were born at the same time about.

**VIRGINIA THOMPSON:** Oh, Art, Art Post.

**GP:** Oh, Art Post. Well, ah were you born in the hospital?

**FT:** I think so. I don't remember that.

**GP:** You don't know which one, right?

**FT:** Well, it was the one that ah, ah not the Rio Grand, the other.

**GP:** Ah, Red Cross?

**FT:** Well, now wait a minute. I guess it was, I don't know, whichever....There was quite a few between Kirkman and, and ah, and Koppens. And I, I was born in, ... Kirkman was the doctor, so I was born in his hospital. Probably. I think that's sufficient.

**GP:** Alright, well, thank you very much. I appreciate it.

**FT:** Well, you're welcome. I hope it helps you.

**GP:** Well, I know we have a lot of history that we wouldn't have without it.

**FT:** Well, there's people that were here, and I'm sure they have certain memories of the time.  
Thank you coming.

**GP:** You're welcome.

