

The Appel Family - then 'til now.

by Sharon Wandell



Henry, Bill and Calla Appel.



Calla & Bill Appel

When my parents would go snowmobiling, they would leave my sister, brother, and me with my great grandmother, Calla Bell Appel. She would tell us stories. We would go out to the ranch and she would feed everybody a big dinner. I can remember her typing to compose a story of memories that she wished to write down to give to the Pilot, Steamboat's newspaper. She loved to be outside and go up behind her house to pick wild flowers. She would make us lunches and we'd go on picnics. These are the memories that I have of her when I was small. Now I don't see her as much anymore. She's ninety-one and lives in the nursing home in Steamboat Springs. She has told me so many stories, and now it is my turn to share them, along with those of other generations in my family.

Calla Bell Reed (Appel) was born September 10, 1888, in Egeria Park, south of Toponas, Colorado. She was one of three children. They went to school in a log building in that area. "I went to school in Toponas and everyone rode their horses. We had to go to school in the summer time. The school schedule was different then because of winter conditions. We started the school year in April and ended in December. I went to Toponas 'til the eighth grade. After I graduated from the eighth grade, I came to Steamboat to go to high school. I lived part time with the Burroughs and part time with my great aunt and uncle, Mr. and Mrs. Preston King. Our little log school in Egeria Park was also a community center. The minister would come and preach, traveling men came to sell their goods, elections were held there, and of course

we had school too. A man bought the land and later burned the school, that made me very sad."

I asked her what they did for entertainment. "There were lots of dances and neighborhood doings. We had a Christmas party one time and everyone in the neighborhood came. We went and got a big Christmas tree and put loads of popcorn and apples on it.

"When I was a kid everyone skied. We never got to the store to buy skis, so we made them. Dad would take a long board and cut it into the shape of a ski, then stick one end into the boiler, and after the wood was soft he would pull it out and put some kind of weight on the end of the ski to make it bend. He would nail a leather strap on it to put your foot through, and then you were ready to go. I used to have the best time skiing.

**Calla Appel with
great-grandchildren.**



**Left to right - Sharon, Steve
and Barbara Wandell.**

"During the summer we loved to fish. Every Sunday my mom would take us kids fishing up in Toponas since there were so many creeks up that way. We never got a chance to buy fishing poles, so we had to use what nature had to give. We would use willows for poles and grasshoppers for bait. The biggest fish I ever caught was 12 inches long. Of course, I never did fish much; I would usually just sit and look at the scenery. Every Sunday night we would get together and have a big fish fry and what wasn't ate up then, mom would salt down and keep in the cellar. Mom and dad nearly lived off deer, but I never went hunting, I just couldn't shoot a gun. We had a small garden and mom grew everything she could. She would also go on wild gooseberry and raspberry hunts. One day when mom went up there in those hills, there was a bear eating all her berries. She dropped her new coat and made



“They loved to go fishing”

a run for the house! Dad thought it was the most funny thing to remember her running from that bear, but dad was a funny man anyway. Oh, but my mom would make the best jelly and jams.”

According to Gram, life was more strenuous then. “I tell you the winters were a lot harder back then. The poor horses had a job. They just had to keep the roads open as much as possible. Back then we never did have snow plows so the horses had to do it all. My dad would always help the mail carrier when he went through, since we lived close to the road. When the mail carrier was late, dad would always be out there looking for him. We rode horses all over. Yeah, we’d just climb up on one and go to town or just anywhere. We rode them to school almost everyday. In those days you had to cut wood, carry wood, take care of the horses, milk the cows, and help with the housework.”

An exciting and memorable day for Calla Appel was when the railroad went through. “It went right through our property in Toponas, so we invited everyone to come see the first train go through. It was located on a little hill, and there we all were lined up to see it.”

After high school graduation, Gram worked in Yampa at the telephone office. She had to stay in Yampa because they couldn’t go back and forth. She was a telephone operator for probably two years. “Later I took my teacher’s exam and taught school out in the Twenty Mile area, ‘til I got married. I substituted for one year and the

next year I taught a full term. In 1912, I taught in the Eddy School which was then located about where the Kelton, Stonebrink, and Appel places corner. In later years I used to go back to that school and remember everything we did.

It was while she was teaching and boarding out in the Twenty Mile area that she met Henry Appel. He was born in Springfield, Illinois, on the 24th of June, 1880. He attended school there only until seventh grade. When his father became crippled, he quit school and went to work in a grocery store. He moved to Denver and continued working in a grocery store there. Then he and his brother-in-law, James Dighton, decided to buy teams, wagons and supplies and come to Routt County. “He homesteaded in Twenty Mile Park in 1901. That area was called the Jason homesteads and that is where the present Appel ranch is located. Henry Appel played at dances around the Steamboat area. Harmonica and guitar were his specialties and Steamboat’s old Cabin Hotel was where he was found most frequently on Saturday nights.

“Henry played at one of our high school dances; I never dreamed that later I would marry him! I was boarding with Henry’s sister and brother-in-law out on Twenty Mile, and she



“They came to Routt County by wagon”

introduced me and Henry. We were married in 1913 in Toponas, and afterwards they had a shivaree for us. A shivaree in our community happens about a week after the young couple is married. Friends and neighbors come to their house after the newlyweds have gone to bed and start banging pots and pans or most anything that will make noise to wake them up. Then they would take them down some place and have a dance and eat and just have a all around good time.



The Appel Ranch

"We lived out on Twenty Mile where Henry had built up a nice ranch and we raised cattle, hogs, wheat and barley." They lived there together for twenty-six years until 1939 when Henry Appel died. Calla Appel continued to live on the ranch until 1974 when she moved to the nursing home in Steamboat. Their one child, Bill Appel, is now running the ranch on the Appel homestead.

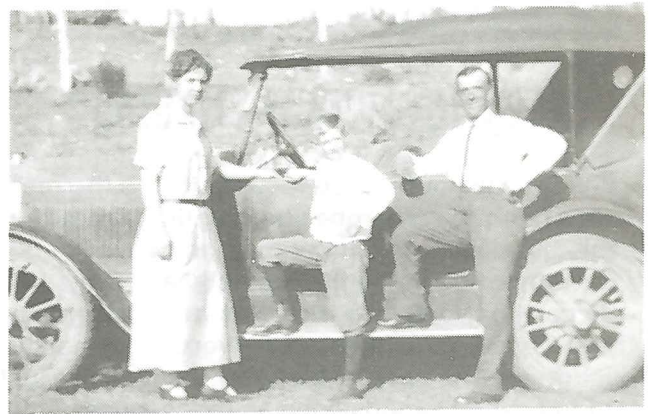
My grandfather, Bill Reed Appel, was born on the ranch on May 14, 1914, and that starts the next chapter of my story. I asked him what he remembers best about his childhood. "My parents treated me very well. I was really busy helping my folks. We had to milk the cows, chop the wood, carry water, feed the calves and hogs, and harness the horses by lantern light in the winter so we could feed the cattle as soon as the sun came up.



Going to town with the family was a big occasion. Bill's mother had dressed him up for the trip, but he fell into the swamp. The picture shows the results.

"Probably the highlight of my childhood was going to grade school in the summer, especially playing all of the outdoor games. I remember too when I was 4 years old that my parents bought a 1918 Scripsbooth car. We also raised Collies. Most everyone around the country wanted puppies. We enjoyed raising them, and we always had quite a few around."

Were times better or worse for you then? "Well it's hard to say because we had our ups and downs, we had good years and bad years. A whole lot depended on the weather like it does now." I asked him what it was like during the Depression. "There was probably as much or more net profit. I don't believe the losses were as great, we didn't get anything for our stuff, but it didn't cost us very much either. In fact in 1933, we got by on \$2.00 for groceries each time we shopped, and a lot of our other food was in the vegetable cellar. Our expenses were very little. Then we didn't make any money and we can't make any now, so it's about the same."



Bill Appel and his parents with their Scripsbooth car.

On October 12th, 1940, my grandfather, Bill Appel, married Marianne Stender. She was born in Bergenhusen, Germany, August 20th, 1922. She had come to the United States with her parents when she was four years old. She told me about that experience. "I think my family left Germany for economic reasons. My dad had just been sort of a hired man, and they thought they could have a better life over here. For a while they thought about going to Russia, but they decided to come over here. The trip took from ten to twelve days. The trip was uneventful and none of us got sick on the way over. The ship landed in New York City, and we saw the Statue of Liberty. We came to Routt County by railroad.

"My father had worked for a man by the name of Thames in Germany. He had an uncle that lived in Routt County by the name of John Thames who owned the 7M Ranch. When my parents decided to come to the United States,

they had to have a sponsor in this country. So the German relative contacted John Thames and that is why we came to Routt County. When we first got here my dad worked for him, and my mother cooked for the ranch hands. We were paid thirty dollars a month and that was top wages.

"I never had a desire to return to Germany, but when I was eight years old my mother got homesick and wanted to go back. We got as far as Iowa and stopped to visit some relatives and after they started talking about Germany, we decided that the United States was just as good, and came back to Steamboat. We moved out to the Stender place which is out on Twenty Mile Road next to the Appel Ranch.

"Times were rather hard as far as work is concerned, but maybe not a whole lot different from what it is now. My parents treated me very strict, but it was for my own good. Together my family and I went fishing a lot. We would go fishing all day to Diamond Park and places like that. We would take our breakfast and eat, fish, then eat again, fish, then eat and come home. But there were other responsibilities for a young girl." This would be the first time my grandmother had gone to school. She went to the Eddy School which was a typical country school where one teacher taught all grades. "The first year I had to learn how to speak English along with other learning. We also rode our horses back and forth to school. The year I started school they changed to winter school like they have now. For the first time, we started school in September and ended in May. When the weather was nice we would take lunches up to a big rock behind the school. I thought school work was hard, and I went through the eighth grade. Now I don't think I could pass the third grade."

Bill Appel had attended the same school and was in his last year of school when my grandmother started. "The first time Bill saw me I was five years old and pushing a sled up the hill. He thought I was as wide as I was tall." Bill Appel and Marianne Stender continued to live as neighbors and were married in 1940. According to my grandfather, "Mom caught me during leap year. She lived right across the fence and I didn't keep the fences up very good. We had gone together for about eight or ten months before we were married. We were married down at the Stender house with just relatives and the Congregational minister, Reverend Dodd.

Grandmother added, "Bill is eight years older than I am -- he waited until I grew up to marry me. Dating then was about what it is nowadays, except we had to get home early. About every summer Saturday night we got to go to dances at Cow creek, and in the winter time we would have

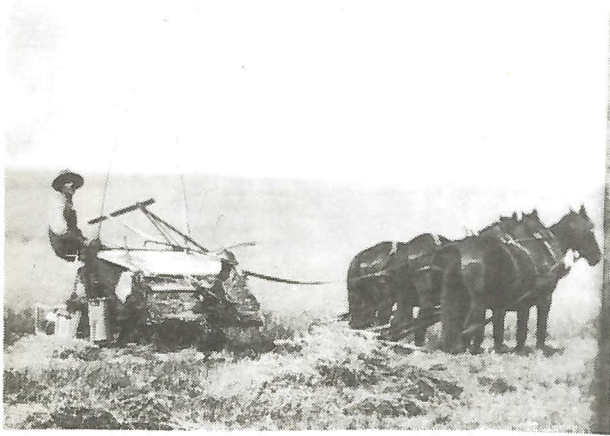


Bill and Marianne's wedding day.

card parties at different homes—mostly pitch and pinochle.

"There was a period when times were hard. We never had that much spending money, but then it never took very much either. The shows weren't very expensive and then we would have picnics and things like that. A lot of movies that I went to when I was young were soundless. They didn't really all have sound until I was in high school, otherwise it was written out on the screen. The first movie I can remember was Laurel and Hardy. Rin Tin Tin was another great favorite. We couldn't get to church very often. We were lucky if we got to town twice during the winter and then in the summer time we were busy. They did have ministers that came around and held church services at the school at various times and we went to them. When we went to town it was over the divide.

"We had eight children. It wasn't always easy to raise them and I remember the time when our two youngest daughters became "painters". Debbie and Marlene decided that they would change the feed truck's color. They found some yellow paint and generously started dobbing it. It had yellow hand prints and spots all over it. It still does to this day. We all enjoyed our life on the ranch and everyone worked hard. Ranching was considerably harder physically then, than it is now, but I don't think it was as hard mentally. More work was done by hand and not so much by machinery like now. We both worked long hours every day. We liked living in the country. My goal was to build up the ranch and carry on with the family operation. Two years after we were married, I purchased the adjoining Stender ranch and added it onto the family ranch. That made us a total of 2,166 acres. It was fascinating and interesting to have some of my own property and my own income. We managed to improve the ranch by getting a lot more trees growing. About the time we were married, our best income was



Henry Appel at work.

hogs. We used to have somewhere around a hundred hogs and then disease put us out of the business, and that's how we got our start in the sheep business. We got some bum lambs from Andy McDermott and that helped us into the sheep business. Also we got some from my parents, the Stenders. We only had a small flock of about two hundred ewes and about a hundred head of cattle. We also had about four hundred acres of grain making it just a diversified farm and ranch setup.

"We had lots of enjoyable times when we were on the ranch, especially in the early 40's when we were first married. We used to make a lot of trips to Denver with livestock. We would run late into the night getting there, then the next day would be a busy day shopping, and we'd drive back the next night to the ranch. The economy was probably the best in those years that we have seen. About 20 years ago, we decided to move to town. We live in town and work in the country, and find it enjoyable. Town and country people work close together any more, in fact a lot of city people work out in the country and a lot of country people work in the city."

Before I left my grandparents I asked them their philosophy of life. "Our parents taught us that honesty is the best policy, and that you have to have kindness, and friendship to get along. With these valuable things, we managed to run a ranch operation, raise a family, serve our community, have good health, and still have a little security." There are still things in life that they wanted to do but haven't had time for. My grandfather wanted to be an aviator, railroad engineer, or a construction worker. My grandmother wanted to be a skater, but has never had a pair of skates on. But they both concluded that they have had a satisfying life and they will settle for what they are. "We are also very proud to say that four generations of the family have

attended the Steamboat Springs High School and there are more to come." My grandfather has served on many interesting committees and boards, relating to community affairs and farm problems. "I have served on the boards to build the Co-op, Methodist Church, and Routt County Memorial Hospital, and have found all of them to be quite fascinating."

I asked my grandparents some feelings about life. "Life is great, it has its problems and pleasures, but it's always been that way. People are not much different now than they used to be. There is a little more tension because of the fast gait that people have with the increase in population and fast means of travel. People do not seem to work in harmony as much now. We think that young people are great and there's not a big difference in them. They're just like we used to be. I'd hate to give them advice, maybe it's the young people that could give me the advice!"



Calla Appel is a member of Farmers Union and a home demonstration club. She has been a member for over 50 years and often rode on horseback no matter what the weather and therefore never missed a meeting.