

THELMA KITE RECALLS GOOD OL' DAYS

Longtime resident remembers meeting Ing 'Doc' Hay

By Angel Carpenter
Blue Mountain Eagle

Thelma Kite's mother, Clara Miller, served as mid-wife for several relatives, and when she gave birth to Thelma July 23, 1923, Clara instructed her sister in the birth.

Thelma's father, Steve Miller Sr., died of a heart attack earlier that year near the family home in Drewsey. Clara then moved to the Pine Creek area between John Day and Prairie City.

Thelma said a landmark helps her remember where she was born.

"A big rock came off the mountain and landed in our yard," she said.

Memories from her early years in Grant County flood back into the mind of Kite, who is 96.

Kite lived most of her life in John Day and now lives at the Blue Mountain Care Center in Prairie City.

She said there was a regular community in Pine Creek in those early days, and she would walk 3 miles to Marysville School located near Dog Creek.

A few years ago, she told a boy how far she used to walk to school as a young girl, and he couldn't believe it.

"In those days, you had to," she said.

Her brother Steve eventually bought her a roan mare to ride to school, which she named Roany.

When Kite was 8 or 9, she attended grade school on Canton Street in John Day in the winter months, staying with her aunt in town.

It was "a big, tall, white schoolhouse in John Day," she said. "It was two stories tall and had a big slide down one side. In case of fire, we was to go down the slide to the outside."

Near the school was the Kam Wah Chung store where the Chinese herbalist and pulsologist Ing "Doc" Hay visited patients.

Her stepfather Ed Chandler would go to see Hay when Thelma was a little girl, and she'd hide behind his leg, she said.

"They'd try to talk to me and bring me candy (Hershey's Kisses)," Kite said of Hay and others. "My uncle



Thelma Miller at age 3 1/2 helps feed the hens at her family's Pine Creek home between John Day and Prairie City.



Thelma Miller, age 22, is on her way to work in John Day in 1945.



The Eagle/Angel Carpenter
Thelma Kite

would tease me and say, 'The Chinese were trying to give you kisses.'"

She noted that Hay didn't use a stethoscope.

"I had ear problems ... and he checked my arms all the way up here," she said, pointing to her middle upper arm.

She recalled drinking an herbal tea and having her ailment improve.

"John Day was so different in them days," she reminisced.

She started her first job at age 14, working at Benson Hotel and Cafe in John



A photo of downtown John Day shows the Benson Bros. business where Thelma Kite once worked, Chester's Market and John Day Pharmacy during a cattle drive.

Day. Owners of the business, established in 1919, included brothers Jack and Cliff Benson.

Kite remembered with good humor one mishap that had her falling with stacked dishes.

A man was showing his decorated boots to a friend, and after tripping over his foot, Kite recalls spilling a

small pitcher of cream down the customer's fancy boot.

The restaurant, located on East Main Street where The Floor Store is today, also had a fountain that included sundaes, milk shakes, malted milks, thirst quenchers (such as root beer floats), phosphates and specials, including banana splits and sky high sundaes.

Neighboring businesses in 1937 included Chester's Market and John Day Pharmacy.

Kite said visitors could park horses and wagons in back while they shopped or had a meal.

Canyon City resident Walt Gentis, Kite's son, said back then most people who lived in town owned cars,

and others who lived in more rural spots without adequate roads still used horses and wagons.

Later, the Bensons' business became Benson Shoes, and Kite also worked there.

Cliff Benson died in a car crash in 1964 on an icy road east of Bend. He'd been serving as John Day's mayor at the time.

Jack Benson continued to run the business, and Kite said she enjoyed working for him.

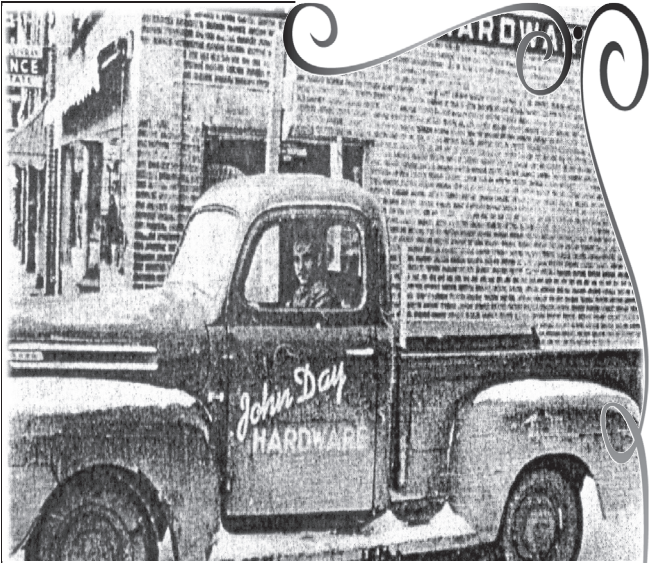
Thelma married Melvin Kite in 1966.

He had served two years in the Army just prior to their marriage, and Thelma recalls dancing the jitterbug with him.

When they met, Thelma had three boys, Steve and Walter, and she had another son Terry who previously died in a car accident, and Melvin had one boy, Jerry.

Over the years, Thelma enjoyed making crafts such as wood carvings, wreaths and flower arrangements.

She still attends the luncheons at the Prairie City Senior Center where she enjoys sharing stories of the good ol' days.



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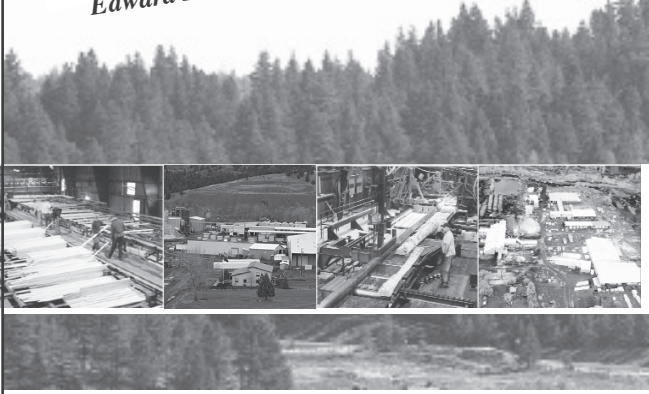
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