

Editor's Note: This account of an interview with Ray Adair was submitted by Marilyn Gilmore. We are extremely grateful for Marilyn's permission to publish this account.

RYE, COLORADO: FORTY-FIVE YEARS AGO

One autumn day in 1943, Ray Adair was riding at Jamaica Race Track in Long Island, New York. After the last race, a steward came up to Ray and told him a man wanted to meet him in the clubhouse before he left the track. The man's name was Conyers ("Connie") Stewart. He told Ray he had a thoroughbred horse ranch in Littleton, Colorado and he asked Ray to quit the rest of the meets on the east coast and come out to Colorado to ride his horses in the newly opened Centennial Race Track near Littleton. Even though Ray was favorably impressed with Mr. Stewart, he said thanks but no-thanks, inasmuch as he was at the time leading rider at many of the eastern tracks.

The next time Ray saw Connie Stewart was in 1964. Ray had retired from the racetrack by then and moved to Rye, Colorado. His wife had recently died, leaving Ray to care for their two children, Rayette (12 yrs old) and Ray (11 yrs old). They moved into a cabin at Wilson's Hotel & Cabins on Main Street, now known as Rye Motel.

Ray knew that Stewart had sold his horse ranch in Littleton and was operating a Thoroughbred breeding and training facility a few miles to the east of Rye. He went out there one day asking about a job and was offered the position of manager. Ray worked there for the next four years.

Stewart had gone into partnership with a local cattle rancher by the name of Holland Duell, Sr. Duell owned most of the land in what would eventually become Colorado City. He ran Hereford cattle on the land but what he really wanted to do was raise Thoroughbred race horses. Toward that end, he went in with Stewart and between them - Duell with the money and Stewart with the expertise - created Stewart Thoroughbreds at its current location.

In 1964, Rye was smaller than it is today population-wise but had more commercial enterprises. There was a combination drugstore/beer bar/roller rink/restaurant in the buildings now occupied by Kirkland Construction. Petersen's Creamery was located just east of Boulder Avenue on Petersen Road. On the southeast corner of Main

and Boulder was Medill's Grocery. The U.S. Post Office was located across Main Street where the Church of Christ is located now.

In the late spring of 1965, after many days of hard rain, the Greenhorn Creek flooded. At least a foot of mud and water washed into all the cabins at Wilson's Hotel. Flood waters took out every bridge from Rye Park down past where I-25 would eventually be built along old Highway 85/87. Ray was at work at Stewart's when the creek jumped its banks and could not get back up to Rye to look after his kids. Luckily, Ray's sister, Virginia, was visiting from Window Rock, Arizona, and took care of them until the high water subsided and the road was able to be repaired. It took the county and state crews many days to put everything back the way it was.

At the time, the Colorado City area was sparsely populated and was not known by that name, or any name for that matter. The few buildings that existed were as follows:

1. A two-story wooden building near where the present day laundromat is located. The ground floor contained a mercantile. On the second floor were rooms for rent. Sometime in the 1990s, this building was moved about a mile away on the south side of Highway 165, where it was demolished shortly thereafter in a violent wind storm. *[Editor's Note: This matches the description of the original "Crow Mercantile Building" moved by the Historical Society to about ¼ mile East of the current True Value Hardware store for use as a Masonic Lodge Hall and museum.]*

2. Holland Duell, Sr's house on Highway 165 across from the present-day medical center. It is still occupied by a Duell family member.

3. A small white frame house on Highway 165 across from where Loaf & Jug is presently located. This house was also owned by Duell and was occupied by his ranch foreman, Posse Villa, and Villa's family.

4. A nine-hole golf course, built by Holland Duell, Sr.

5. Montoya's, a small café where Days Inn is now. There were two gas pumps out front, the old fashioned kind with glass on the top, which provided the only gas to highway travelers between Walsenburg and Pueblo.