

Dancing at Lingshire

Back in the 1970s and early 1980s, the Museum collected a number of oral histories with people in the county. These histories were done on the leading technology of the time – cassette tapes. However, cassette tapes are not a great long-term storage device; they get old and brittle and they break easily.

A few years ago with a grant from the Broadwater Community Foundation, the museum digitized the oral histories and they are now stored on a USB device and on CDs. During the digitization process, I got to listen to all of the oral histories and they were fascinating.

When I was in high school here in Townsend, Mae Sweeney worked in the high school office. I remember Mae as being a really, nice lady that was well liked by everyone. Of course, as teenagers we were totally involved in ourselves and really didn't think about the teachers, janitors and office personnel. Had I really been paying attention I would have realized that Mae was in her late sixties/early seventies. She was 71 when I graduated in 1970; I never even thought about the fact that Mae was born in the 1800s.

Mae Sweeney's oral history was a hidden treasure – her stories gave a view into a totally different Broadwater County than the one I grew up in.

Mae's family lived in the Confederate Gulch area and Mae attended the Johnson Schoolhouse. They ranched and farmed in the area and her oral history was full of great stories of ranch life with horse drawn equipment and going to school in a one room schoolhouse.

But my favorite section of Mae's histories was her memories of going to dances in the area: Townsend, Cave Gulch and Winston were all places her family went for social events and dancing. Now a trip from Confederate Gulch to Winston is a long drive; then it was much shorter – just a quick trip over the river on the Winston Bridge.

One dance she mentioned really drew my attention. Mae's family went to a dance in Lingshire. I had never even heard of Lingshire! I didn't expect to find anything

but I did a Google search for Lingshire; and up it came in Google Maps. It was a small town in northwest Meagher County.

Mae's family went to some kind of social event in Lingshire and stayed for a dance that evening. At that time there were few if any automobiles in Broadwater/Meagher county. The roughly 40-mile trip up Confederate Gulch and over the mountain to Lingshire was made by horse drawn wagon.

Mae didn't say for certain whether they spent the night in there or came back that same night. I can't even imagine making that trip back at night; but whether they spent the night or not what a trip to make to go to a dance!

The Broadwater County Museum has resumed doing oral histories. To listen to these oral histories visit our County Museum – it is well worth the time.