

## Sunny Knoll Hosted Horse Elite

By Kathy Jordan

In the 1920s through the 1940s, Grand Junction's elite "horsey set" had its own riding stables-- Sunny Knoll.

The horse ranch was owned by the Biggs and Kurtz families, who for years dominated the Grand Junction social scene. It was located on Orchard Mesa west of 27 Road at the foot of Spy Glass Ridge.

I recently had the pleasure of visiting with sister and brother, Alice Hutton Lehman and Gordon Hutton, who spent many years on the ranch.

In 1927 Alice's father, Harley Hutton, became the ranch manager. At the time the Hutton family was living at Fifth and Pitkin. When Hutton moved the family to the ranch in 1932, Alice said that she and her sister, Mae, "cried and cried because my father took us out of the city into the country, and we didn't want to be way out there in the sticks. Turned out to be the happiest days of my life and the most beautiful place I had ever seen in my life."

From her description, the ranch must have been a beautiful place. She said the stables were "L" shaped; there were a saddle room, a long row of mangers to feed the horses and a large barn. A rail fence surrounded the property, and each fence post had a large wooden cap—a decorative square topper.

The Hutton family lived in a large two-story house, built as the manager's residence. The grounds around the house were well-maintained and had numerous fruit trees centered by a grape arbor. Alice recalled that upstairs there were three bedrooms, her mother's sewing room, and two large summer sleeping porches where the kids were allowed to roller skate in the winter..

There were 40 to 50 horses stabled there, but not all of them belonged to the Biggs and Kurtz families. Several Grand Junction friends who enjoyed horseback riding boarded their horses there.

Saturdays and Sundays were the days for the "horsey set" to visit the ranch. Included in the riding circle were Dr. E.H. and Blanche Munro, Dr. Herman Graves, Bud Buthorn, whose family owned the Hotel La Court, Dick Williams, who operated an abstract office, and, of course, Biggs and Kurtz family members.

Gordon said that on the weekends there was always a row of luxury cars, such as Lincolns and Cadillacs, parked at the horse stables.

The most interesting couple, at least to me, was Vanna Harris and Welby Schrader, who had no pretense to Grand Junction's "society." Vanna was a well-known madam whose business was in

the 500 block of South Ave. Schrader, the son of early-day Mesa County Sheriff Charles Schrader, was a railroad conductor who owned a great deal of property which is now a part of the Colorado National Monument and a portion of the present Monument Valley Subdivision.

When people came out to ride they always wore the correct attire-- riding pants, knee-high boots, riding crops and proper hats, much as though they were going on a fox hunt.

Sunny Knoll also had a well-done skeet trap, complete with a wooden walkway to go from one station to another.

The Biggses had a summer home at the Norrie Colony on the Frying Pan River north of Basalt. Norrie had been a railroad camp for the Colorado Midland Railroad in the late 1880's, and Clyde Biggs helped transform it into a summer colony where a few other Grand Junction residents had summer homes.

The Biggses would ship most of the horses by boxcar to Basalt then ride and lead them up to Norrie for the summer. Gordon said that he and his brothers would ride a lead horse with a string of four or more horses to the loading area by the Fifth Street viaduct next to the site of the old Van Gundy wrecking yard.

The Biggses would also take the Hutton's cat, Norrie, with them for the summer.

In the late 1940s the Biggs and Kurtz families sold the ranch to Harley Hutton. The Biggses continued to board their horses there, and former County Commissioner Jack Wadlow moved the big white barn and stables to his place in Whitewater.

When Hutton retired from the horse stable business he divided the land among several Hutton family members, some of whom still live there today.