

Interview with Sylvia Hilliard

Copeland, Kansas 67835



Interview conducted on November 19, 2018

ORAL HISTORY PROFILE

First Name: **SYLVIA** Middle: **___** Last: **HILLIARD** Maiden: **FEUERS**

Physical Address: **213 HAROLD ST.**

Mailing Address: **P O BOX 96**

City: **COPELAND** State: **KS** Zip: **67837-0096**

Telephone: **620-668-5488** E-mail:

Place of Birth: **COPELAND** Birthdate: **AUGUST 29, 1917**

Race/Ethnicity (optional) **CAUCASIAN** Gender: **FEMALE**

Occupation: **RETIRED RESTAURANT OWNER/OPERATOR**



FAMILY HISTORY

Father's Name: **WILLIAM CHRISTIAN FEUERS**

Father's Birthdate:

Father's Birthplace:

Father's Occupation:
BLACKSMITH/ REPAIRMAN

Mother's Name: **GESINA SOPHIA CATHERINE AHRENS**

Mother's Birthdate: **FEB. 26, ___**

Mother's Birthplace:

Mother's Occupation:

Brothers/Birthdates/Birthplaces:

Sisters/Birthdates/Birthplaces

GEORGE CHRISTIAN FEUERS

STELLA FEUERS

WARNER FEUERS

VILLA FEUERS

BENJAMIN FEUERS

MARGARET CATHERINE FEUERS

ANNA FEUERS

INDIVIDUAL HISTORY

Spouse's Name: **CLIFFORD N. HILLIARD**

Spouse's Birthdate: **MAY 31, 1910**

Spouse's Birthplace: **MANISTEE, MICHIGAN**

Spouse's Occupation: **RESTAURANT
OWNER/OPERATOR**

Children/Birthdates/Birthplaces:

**LARRY DUANE
JANUARY 30, 1945**

INTERVIEWER: **LYNNE HEWES**

DATE: **NOVEMBER 19, 2018**

ORAL HISTORY RELEASE FORM

I hereby agree to a video/audio recording and/or photographic and/or written

documentation of the interview between LYNNE HEWES

and SYLVIA HILLIARD on NOVEMBER 19, 2018. I understand that I will receive a personal copy of this interview.

I agree to the following conditions, unless specifically noted as a restriction:

- 1) I give my permission for all recordings, photographs, and written records to be used for educational and scholarly purposes, including publications and exhibits.
- 2) When the material is used, proper acknowledgement shall be made of the interviewee/donor.
- 3) The material gathered may be placed in the collections of the Cimarron City Library and the Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas for use by researchers.
- 4) The Kansas State Historical Society may include information about this interview and possibly portions of the transcript and/or excerpts of the interview on their web site www.kshs.org. I give my permission for this use. yes no

If yes, the Kansas State Historical Society may include my address. may **not** include my address in the database on their web site.

- 5) If a researcher wishes to use the information gathered for other than educational and scholarly purposes, he/she may do so may **not** do so without further permission.

Restrictions:

Name: SYLVIA C. HILLIARD

Address P O BOX 96, COPELAND, KS 67837

Phone Number 620-668-5488

Signature _____ Date 11/19/18

Interviewer Signature _____ Date 11/19/18

INTERVIEW
YEAR

SYLVIA HILLIARD
2018



CIMARRON CITY LIBRARY ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

NAME: Sylvia Hilliard
DATE: November 19, 2018
PLACE: 213 Harold St, Copeland KS

INTERVIEWER: Lynne Hewes
PROJECT SERIES: Cimarron City Library Oral History for Gray County
FUNDING: This project is funded in part

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION: Mrs. Sylvia (Feuers) Hilliard was 101 years old at the time of this interview. She was born on August 29, 1917, at home in Copeland, Kansas, the youngest of eight children. She married Clifford N. Hilliard a few months after graduating high school in December of 1935. Cliff was seven years older. The couple lived in Ashland, Kansas, for seven years. Cliff was drafted into the Army in December 1942 and went to Fort Warren, Wyoming, for basic training. He received an honorable discharge for medical reasons in August of 1943, after which time, the couple resided in Copeland, Kansas. In May of 1944, the Hilliards moved to Dodge City where they remained until 1946 when they returned to Copeland and opened the C&S Café, which they ran until August of 1978. In 1981, Mr. Hilliard had a stroke and Sylvia cared for him until his death in 1993. From 1993 until 2003, she baked cookies for the Joy Club, a club for youth at her church. In 1999, she began a nearly two-decade career writing a column for the *Montezuma Press*.

SUBJECTS DISCUSSED: Early Copeland life, Great Depression, Dust Bowl, Copeland schools

COMMENTS ON INTERVIEW: Mrs. Hilliard was interviewed at her home on a cold day. The background noise is created from a heater required to keep the room at a suitable temperature for Mrs. Hilliard.

SOUND RECORDINGS: Digital **LENGTH OF INTERVIEW: 39:03**

RESTRICTIONS ON USE: None **TRANSCRIPT: 10 pages**

ORAL HISTORY
SYLVIA C. HILLIARD
Interview Date: November 19, 2018

Interviewer: Lynne E. Hewes (LEH)
Interviewee: Sylvia C. Hilliard (SCH)

November 19, 2018

(LEH) – This is Lynne Hewes. I'm about to interview Sylvia Hilliard, who lives in Copeland, Kansas. Today is November the 19^t, 2018. Sylvia, you are 101 years old. How many of those years have you lived in Copeland?

(SCH) Well, let's see. About 91 years. I got married in 1935 in December, and we lived in Ashland, Kansas, for seven years from 1935 until 1942 when my husband Cliff was drafted to the Army for World War II. He left in December of 1942, for basic training at Fort Warren, Wyoming. [*Francis E. Warren Air Force Base*], and then after – probably eight months--he was given honorable discharge from the service in 1943. That was because of health problems. We spent the next six months in Copeland, Kansas.

In May of 1944, we moved to Dodge City, Kansas. He was employed at Roberts Tractor and Implement Company there, and we were there until 1946 when we returned to Copeland, Kansas. We began a new business, which was the restaurant business.

(LEH) What was the name of the restaurant?

(SCH) We called the restaurant C & S Café for both our names. It was in the building now that is our American Legion building. We operated there from March until December, and in December we bought property and had a new building built for our café.

(LEH) Where was that?

(SCH) It is just south of where the restaurant is now, where Gary's insurance building is. That's what's in there now. We continued to operate until August 1, 1978. So it was 31 and one-half years in our business.

(LEH) That's a long time. Were you cooking?

(SCH) Oh, yes, I did everything. Cooked and waited counter, made pies. I didn't wash too many dishes. My husband washed a lot of dishes. He was the fry cook and it was – we did both. We had a fountain and we served malts and milkshakes, sundaes and sodas. Our drinks were mixed, hand-mixed with syrup and carbonated water. It wasn't bottles and stuff.

(LEH) I am sorry I never got to go to your restaurant.

(SCH) Well, it was a small one. Seating capacity was 18 stools in kind of a horseshoe manner. They were around a counter. We didn't have any booths or tables. It was real compact.

(LEH) What was your favorite dish?

(SCH) Well, we prepared roast beef and roast pork every day. I don't know if we served chicken fried steak every day. We made other meals, too. I made lots of pies. Apple and cherry and coconut cream and raisin cream and pumpkin, custard and . . .

(LEH) Did you get tired?

(SCH) Well, I never thought about it. I knew I had to do it. I got physically tired. I just never stopped to think about it. I was weary, but I don't think I ever got weary physically. Mentally – Well, the whole community was one big happy family when we ran the café, and I think it is a lot that way today, too. She has a bigger turnover of people now than what we had. No, to be really honest, I don't think I ever really got tired of it.

(LEH) Were you raising children during this time, too?

(SCH) Well, we had one son who was born in 1945 when we lived in Dodge. In 1947, he got real sick, and when we got him to the hospital, his little appendix had ruptured. He didn't make it. So, in fact – this may startle people – we had our living quarters in the back of the café.

(LEH) What time did you open and what time did you close?

(SCH) Well, I was usually up around 5:30 and put the roasts on to bake, and we opened at 7:00 for breakfast. The first five years, we were open on Sunday too, and then it became that we couldn't get help really that much on Sunday. We closed, but then sometimes we'd open at 4:00 or 3:00 and just serve drinks and stuff. We did that for awhile.

(LEH) When did you close that?

(SCH) We moved to the house here in 1978 and a year or maybe two years later, we sold our restaurant building. Then in 1981, my husband had a stroke, so we lived a quiet life until 1993 when he passed away. Then, after that, I was here by myself.

The Christian Church had a little thing going for children on Wednesday evening – or afternoons. They called it the Joy Club. They served cookies and drinks and so the ladies were having a hard time getting it started. They couldn't find anyone to bake cookies for them, so I said, "Let me bake cookies for you." I didn't have anything to do. That was my really enjoyable project for ten years. I baked cookies for ten years for the Joy Club. So that was a really enjoyable part of my life.

(LEH) At some time, you started writing for the *Montezuma Press*.

(SCH) Yes, but not until 1999, I started writing for the *Press*. I had three careers in my 101 years. It kept me busy and I really enjoyed everything I did. Of course, there were ups and downs always in whatever you do.

(LEH) Now, when you were going to school – you went all the way through school in Copeland schools. You were a teenager during the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl. What was that like living in Western Kansas at that time?

(SCH) Well, you just did with what you had. You couldn't gain much because there was just no money. The dirt was terrible. But we survived, of course. A lot of people from Copeland left because they had to go find a way to make a living. You couldn't farm. The ones who stuck it out, survived it, you know, they did okay. My dad was a blacksmith. He had a repair shop here in Copeland and he could fix anything. So there was no way we were going to leave.

Of course, we – mother tried to grow stuff as much as she could and was able to can a few things. We didn't have a lot of everything, but we didn't go hungry. The government at that time sent in packages with staples like flour and sugar and coffee and dry beans.

(LEH) Was there a name for that program?

(SCH) I can't remember, but it might have been from the Red Cross or not. The gentleman who ran our grocery store, Mr. Alexander -- Well, this is sort of funny, but it's not funny. My dad was such a proud man, he wasn't going to accept it. Mr. Alexander brought it to the house and told my mother, "Just don't say anything about this. You just use it because it's for everybody. It's not for just certain people. It's from the government and it's free. It's for everybody."

(LEH) I've heard a lot of stories, but not about that. When you graduated from high school, that was 1935? In the middle of the Dust Bowl?

(SCH) It was beginning to wind down by that time.

(LEH) You married not too long after graduation?

(SCH) Yes. We eloped! He was working in Ashland. He'd taken a job with a gentlemen there in Ashland, and he was at home over the weekend, and he was supposed to return on Monday. In fact, I had gone back to the high school for some courses after I had graduated. He just came to the high school, and then we just went to Meade and got married.

(LEH) Had he gone to high school with you? Is that how you knew him?

(SCH) No, he was here – His family moved here in 1912, the Hilliard family. He was two years old when they moved here. Then, in 1925, they moved to Iola, Kansas. For some reason, Mr. Hilliard wanted to move back to eastern Kansas. I never did understand that, but it was his choice. So, they went back there and my husband graduated from high school in Iola. He was seven years older than me, but we had a good marriage.

(LEH) In the Depression, what did you do when you dated? What did you do for fun?

(SCH) Oh, a lot of times we just walked around in the evening. Sometimes, we'd go to a movie in Dodge City if we could find a car to take us. A bunch of us would get together. We had church programs. We had what we called Christian Endeavor, and that was every Sunday evening. Young people would go to different houses and have a program. So that was fun. I met him there. They'd moved back to Copeland in 1930 after he'd graduated in 1929, and then we just were a young group together.

(LEH) What changes have you seen in Copeland over the years? In businesses? On Main Street?

(SCH) Well, when we moved back to Copeland from Dodge in '46, the Alexander store was still on the corner and then there was a hardware store, Johnson Hardware Store, and then there was a bowling alley – well, not a bowling alley. I guess you'd call it a pool hall. *[laughter]* Anyway, it was a recreational place where they could go play pool and dominos. Mostly men went and a few woman. But, anyway, my husband worked there before we were married. And, he also worked for store hauling ice before we were married. Stebbins Grocery Store was still here and then it closed. I can't remember what year it closed.



At one time, there were three grocery stores and four or five filling stations,, and a little trailer camp and then they had a – oh, houses built for railroad workers connected to the railroad. I don't remember how many rooms were in that. There were two lumber yards and one insurance office. And a bank. We finally got a bank. It was a pretty lively little town.

(LEH) And then the school was that big brick building built in the 1920s? I taught for about five years at the high school in the 1980s. There was a stage I know because we put on plays.

(SCH) When I was a freshman in high school the senior class put on a so called *Daddy Long Legs*. They had to have some help from some of the other classes because they needed some orphan children. I was one of the orphan children. Funny little humor thing about it was that my sister who was just a little bit older than I – she was the matron of the school. So I can still picture this. We were silly. Whenever she'd go to scold me, we would giggle. We like to never got that scene down. I'd look at her and we'd both just burst out laughing. The teacher was very unhappy with us for a few times, but, believe it or not, when it came down to it, we kept it straight that night. That's one of the fun things I remember about my high school.

(LEH) Now girls didn't play sports in high school in those times, did they?

(SCH) No, no. They didn't, but you know, it was strange, my older sister played. They had a girls' basketball team when she was in high school. She graduated in the early '20s or late '20s. I guess they just cut it out. There was no football in my years. Maybe they cut it out because of the Depression.

Now another strange experience during the cooling down of the Depression -- when I was a senior, we had what you called Senior Day. Class was dismissed for the day, so we decided we'd go to the fish hatchery near Pratt. During our traveling over there, the wind and the dust came up, and I and two other girls and another teacher were with the superintendent in his car. We had to take cars because we didn't have any buses.

(LEH) How many were in your senior class? Do you remember?

(SCH) There were 11. So we were traveling there and as we made a turn-off.... it was pretty dusty and we just got over a railroad track, and, *SWOOSH*, a train went by. Nobody said a word. I don't think we realized -- us girls -- I don't think we realized how close it was. He drove over and stopped. He was just shaking all over. We had to sit there for a little bit so he could get his... The Lord was with us that day. That was another experience from my high school that I've never forgotten. I didn't realize at the time until I thought about it and I saw him shaking so badly. There were three of us in the back seat and we just sat there. No one said a word. I never did ask the other girls if they really realized what had happened or not.

(LEH) In the article that the *Montezuma Press* printed when you decided to retire from there, you told a story about your sister learning to drive. Do you want to talk about that?

(SCH) Well, I think I have the picture of it over there. The car was a Maxwell, but on the back of that picture, it says something different.

(LEH) It says, "old Kensell car" and then it says "Maxwell with curtains and no windows."

(SCH) Well, I put that on there because that's what I remember it was. I don't know where my dad got that. Somebody must have been coming through the country and needed money, so they bought it. I don't remember what they did with it either. It is the first car I remember being in, so . . . I can't remember if you cranked it, but back then, you had to crank it with a crank. It had a battery in it, but no key.

(LEH) What happened with your sister then? Who had to crank the car?

(SCH) Well, she would have had to. I remember that I was in the car and we were bouncing all over the pasture. The curtains were flapping in the windows. This picture may have been taking at a different time. The curtains had straps that fastened, so you could put them up or bring them down. It was pretty fascinating for me.

I don't remember now how old I was. My sister was quite a bit older than I was. I was number eight and she was number three out of eight. I was born in a home in Copeland. My family came from Missouri.

(LEH) Were you born in a hospital?

(SCH) No, I was born in a home in 1917. There was a doctor here, but maybe out of his home. A lot of babies were born at home.

(LEH) Times have changed since your school days in Copeland. How is it different today?

(SCH) It is much, much different from when I went to school. We had mainly the four basic lessons of arithmetic, reading and writing....

(LEH) Science?

(SCH) No, we studied geography. And everybody had to do penmanship and spelling. We did have spelling matches. We'd go to Cimarron for our spelling matches. I did receive a certificate in Cimarron for spelling and one for penmanship when I was in grade school. I don't think we had it in high school. They boys had basketball and football – no, basketball and baseball. They played baseball in the spring until school was out. But they didn't have – base- ... no, pardon me. They didn't have football here until, I think, in 1936 after I graduated.

(LEH) And Copeland played eight-man football, if I remember correctly.

(SCH) Yes. They did for awhile. We merged with Montezuma, I think, in 1991. The junior high is here and each has our own kindergarten and through fifth grade. And the high school is in Montezuma. It's been a good way to do it. Our high school was down so low, they couldn't afford to – They were just going to close it, but they got together with Montezuma and their enrollment had gone way down too, so they merged on that, and it has just worked out great ever since.

(LEH) Is there anything else that we haven't talked about that you'd like to talk about?

(SCH) Well, there was one really bad snow storm that Copeland had. I think it was in 1956. Snow was so deep it was clear above the rooftops. We had a blizzard for three days. My husband had gone to Hutchinson for some basketball tournament with a friend. It missed Hutchinson, so he didn't get to see it until he got home. It was deep enough that there was a semi parked in front of Nelson Implement Company's place, and all you could see of it was the exhaust pipe. It was just all that was sticking up. It was completely covered.

(LEH) Was this when you were running the restaurant?

(SCH) Yes. My waitress that would come in after school, I just kept them with me. The next morning, the people who got stranded here – If the people that took them in didn't feed them. Families just took them in. A few like the gentleman that was on that truck found a place on Main Street in a house. They came to the café and I served them. I served them. They all took part in scraping the walk and making sure the café was

open. That was the deepest snow I've ever witnessed in Copeland. They could walk from one building to another because the snow was everywhere. It took awhile to melt, but they hauled it out of the street so they could get the cars in.

(LEH) If you could give advice to young people growing nowadays, what kind of advice would you give?

(SCH) I have to think on that one. I didn't raise any children, so I have no idea what parents have to go through. The thing that carried me through the tough times is that Proverb: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, lean not to your own understanding, and always follow Him. He will direct your path." That's been my scripture all my life.

I really think that I would say for them to learn about the Lord and to follow Him. That's the main thing. And just to be honest with everybody and be honest with themselves. Don't tell lies or go to the point where they steal and, you know, lose control of what they do. Be courteous and kind and forgiving – all those good things.

(LEH) I hear those good things about you, so I believe you've lived that.

(SCH) I have tried to do that for a good number of years. Sometimes it is pretty difficult, but other times, it isn't.