

## National Elk Refuge News

*Refuge Hosts Special Visitor to Miller House – August 2, 2016*



*This historic photo, now in the National Elk Refuge photo archives, is captioned, “Almer P. Nelson, manager of the National Elk Refuge, keeps an alert for the first migrating elk.” Date unrecorded.*

Most visitors to the Refuge’s historic Miller House come to hear stories: tales of homesteading, facts about Jackson Hole history, and anecdotes about early years on the National Elk Refuge. One guest last month, however, was there to tell stories, while Refuge staff and family listened with rapt attention and peppered her with questions about her childhood.

Alma Hardy, now a resident of Kentucky, lived in the Miller House from 1926–1942. Hardy’s father, Almer P. Nelson, served as Refuge Manager from 1923–1956,

occupying the now-historic home with his family during his tenure. Of the ten managers in the Refuge’s 104-year history, Nelson’s 32 years of leadership was the longest.

Hardy returned to her childhood home again last month with her three daughters and eleven other family members to celebrate her 90<sup>th</sup> birthday. Hardy’s birthday wish was to visit her childhood home one more time to enjoy the mountains, the Miller House, and the childhood memories she cherishes. Their visiting group

of 14 family members spanned four generations.

Outdoor Recreation Planner Lori Iverson first met Hardy in 2006, spending time with her and listening to her descriptions of the interior home. “We were scheduled to rehabilitate the inside of the house in 2007, shortly after opening it up to the public during the summers,” Iverson explained. “However, we had no images of what it looked like in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.” Hardy’s memories filled that gap, Iverson explained.



*A photo from Alma Hardy's first birthday.*

Despite going back nine decades now, Hardy's memories are far from lacking. During her 2006 visit, she described in detail what had been in each of the rooms when she was growing up. Two of the rooms now open to the public were wallpapered with period-piece patterns during the rehabilitation, based on Hardy's recollection that "everything was wallpapered, even the ceilings." She added to the description of the wallpaper by whispering, "It was the only thing Mommy and Daddy every argued about."

A month after her visit in 2006, Alma sent Iverson a 10-page, handwritten letter full of stories. In it, she talked about other structures on the property, former guests to the house, and summer assistants living on the ranch. She also included stories of how she spent her time, noting, "I was such a lucky little girl to have such a magical place for a playground." Her mother allowed her to roam at will, requiring only "I wear a bright color so she could spot me."

Her letter included descriptions of looking for arrowheads, hiking on the butte, riding horses, and once even smoking a package of cigarettes she found on the road "to the regret of the ones who got sick." She ended her letter by saying, "You'll never know how much I appreciate being allowed to 'go home again,' if only for a couple of hours."

Now, almost ten years after penning the letter, Hardy returned to the Miller House for another visit. Refuge staff set up chairs outside for Hardy and her family, served refreshments, and delighted in one more visit from the spry lady whose eyes sparkle when she talks about her early life on the Refuge. Her visit lasted over two hours, with most of it spent sharing memories and giving details about her family's history in the area. She spoke at length of her grandfather's move to the valley in 1902 when her father, Almer, was five years old. She also walked through the Miller House, room by room, describing

what each one had been used for and who had occupied the space. Even her 5-year-old great granddaughter listened with curiosity to the details of her descriptions.

Many of the family members recorded Hardy's conversations as she spoke, capturing her memories and details of their heritage. During her two-week stay, Hardy also visited the Jackson Hole Historical Society & Museum, where staff also took the opportunity to record some of her stories. Hardy appreciates capturing recorded family history. She explained, "My mother died when I was 19, and there were so many things I never had a chance to ask her."

Hardy summed up her recent visit to the Jackson Hole valley by saying, "It couldn't have been any better." She added that visiting the Refuge was the most important part. As for the next visit: "Oh, maybe when I'm 100," she said with a chuckle.



*Grandson-in-law, Kyle Davidson, records a conversation on his iPhone, capturing the memories Hardy shared during her visit to the Miller House.*