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# THE JUST FAMILY HISTORY

## Historic Just Ranch SNOW MOUNTAIN RANCH



Based on information by Cherie (Rants) Lowenberg (Granddaughter of Della M. Just)  
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The site of Snow Mountain Ranch, YMCA of the Rockies, was originally home to Carl and Della Just and their family. As immigrants from Austria, Carl and his father, Karl Just, Sr., came to the United States in 1885 and in 1893 established their homestead in Colorado on the present ranch site. Under the Homestead Act of the 1850s, each person was allowed to homestead 160 acres. Together, father and son began a new life on 320 acres in the beautiful Pole Creek Valley. Over the years the ranch was expanded to include nearly 3,000 acres. The YMCA purchased the land from Della Just in 1965, and since that time, thousands of people have had the opportunity to enjoy this beautiful location.

Della was one of five children of the pioneer Lehman family. As a two year old in 1880, she traveled with her family by covered wagon pulled by oxen, to Middle Park over the Rollins Pass route. The family settled on the South Fork of the Grand River (now the Colorado River), and operated one of the first guest ranches in the area. The ranch also served as a stage-stop on the road from Empire to Grand Lake, Lulu City and other area mining towns. The Lehman Ranch site was covered by water in the late 1940s when Lake Granby was developed.



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Della Lehman met Carl Just while he was working for her father, and they were married in 1898. They lived in the one room homestead cabin that is preserved and restored on the ranch today. In 1899 they moved into a newly built ranch house, and as their family grew over the years, house expansion followed.

Carl and Della Just had eight children, six boys and two girls. The oldest was born in 1899, the youngest in 1918. Seven children, except the youngest, were born at home without a doctor in attendance, with mother and babies all faring well.



Carl died during the flu epidemic in June 1918, leaving Della to raise and provide for eight children and manage the ranch on her own. Other tragic events followed. Her brother died of influenza two days after her husband, and her oldest son, Henry, died in March 1919. That same year her father, Henry Lehman, died of natural causes.

Carl's father lived in the original homestead cabin until his death in 1924 at the age of 82. Della and her children provided for his care when he was no longer able to work. Following the death of Carl, Jr., Della and her children continued the essential work of clearing the land in preparation for the cultivation of a hay crop. The Just children had increased responsibilities in order to keep the ranch in operation as their source of livelihood, and to maintain their way of life.

A work schedule was followed each week, from which there was little deviation:

**Monday:** Washday. Buckets of water were carried from the spring below the house to be



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heated on the stove. Washing was done by hand in the kitchen, using washboards and big tubs. Clothes were then hung out on the clothesline to dry, winter and summer.

**Tuesday:** Ironing Day. A hot wood fire was kept going in the stove to heat the flat irons. Ironing usually took 3 to 4 hours each week.

**Wednesday:** Churning Day. Fifty pounds of butter was churned by hand in a wooden barrel, then molded, printed and individually wrapped in one pound bars.

**Thursday:** Town Day. Each week Della went to Tabernash, a bustling town where the railroad roundhouse was located, to sell butter, cream, cottage cheese and eggs. This trip was made winter and summer, regardless of cold temperatures, deep snow, runaway teams, and other mishaps on the way. She used a team and sled for transportation in winter and a horse and buggy in the summer. Della sold the products door to door.

Although the roundtrip was about 10 miles and took one to two hours each way, the sales were important to supplement the family's income. The trips had a secondary importance, however, as it provided an opportunity for Della to pick up the mail, visit with friends and neighbors, and catch up on local news. The whole family eagerly awaited reports of her experiences.

**Friday, Saturday and Sunday:** Although no activities were designated for these three days, there was enough work to keep everyone busy with a variety of chores. Ranch life required the Just family be on duty twenty-four hours a day. Rarely was there the luxury of a day off.

Daily chores included cleaning barns, mending fences, repairing equipment, feeding stock, and milking cows twice a day. Milk was separated for cream and butter. Carrying water from the spring was necessary to use for drinking, cooking, and bathing. Firewood was chopped and stacked and used for cooking, baking and heating. Kerosene lamps were used in the house for lighting, and lanterns were carried to the barns to illuminate work there.

Every summer a garden was planted which provided fresh produce for the Just family's table. Carrots, onions, potatoes, turnips, and beets were raised during the short growing season. Lettuce was raised and sold commercially for several years. The meat supply was







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from butchered cattle, sheep, hogs, chickens, and rabbits raised on the ranch. A smokehouse was used for preserving meat, and there was a large root cellar for additional storage. Hunting for deer and elk supplemented the domestic meat sources and fishing in Pole Creek brought in strings of tasty trout. The Justs picked raspberries, chokecherries, huckleberries, and Oregon grapes for jams and jellies which were enjoyed throughout the winter.

The hay crop was essential to feed the livestock in the winter. The hay season began in mid-August and concluded the middle to end of September. Teams of horses were used to pull the hay rakes and mowers until 1939 when tractors and hay bailers came into use. The Just children provided the manpower for the hay crew. The family had 250 acres in hay, which produced about 200 tons of hay per season.



In 1849, laws governed water usage by Colorado homesteaders. Due to low rainfall in the mountains, an irrigation system was necessary. At this time, water usage was regulated in Pole Creek, and so the Justs' filed for usage with the Water Court. The credo was "first in time, first in line". Whoever filed for usage first would have precedence over those who followed. After usage was granted, the landowners had to dig ditches and begin putting water to use. Each claimant was allowed four years to "prove up" his claim. The earliest filing on record in Grand County was in 1878. The Lehman and Just ditch was filed for in 1883, and thereafter eight ditches were legally acquired by the Justs' between 1892 and 1943.

The Just children were educated at the Skunk Creek School, a small rural school three miles east in the Pole Creek Valley - between the ranch and the town of Tabernash. The school, which housed first through eighth grades, was in session from April to November. There was no school during the winter months because the snow was too deep to allow travel. The teachers in District 21 were single women who boarded with families who lived near the school. The Just children rode horses to school carrying their lunches in a gunnysack, with a sack of hay tied on the saddle for the horse's lunch. Ella Just Rants remembers that the highest student population during her years of attendance was twelve. For many years, the Just siblings made up the entire student body. It was important to Della that all of her children get an education. Both Carl and Della in turn



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were members of the District 21 school board.

For entertainment, the Just children played cards or board games, went fishing, picked berries or skied on homemade skis. Medical care was scarce in Grand County during the years that Della was raising her family. If a doctor was close, he or she would go to the ranch to attend patients. Most of the time injured people were taken by wagon or sled to the doctor's office. However, Della often was the only one to attend to her children's illnesses, bruises, cuts, broken bones and concussions.

Around 1925, Della purchased a Model T Ford at a cost of \$600. It was a great improvement over the previous mode of transportation provided exclusively by horses. The Just teens traveled to rodeos and dances in the nearby towns. The weekly dances in Granby and Kremmling were a great source of enjoyment for everyone. The revelers danced until the early hours, and when time for morning chores came around, they were distracted from their lack of sleep by shared memories of the previous evening's fun.

The Just children gradually married and moved out on their own, some to their own ranches. Alfred lived at the east end of Pole Creek Valley about two miles southwest of Tabernash. The older daughter, Olga Daxton, lived with her family on nearby Ranch Creek, and Ella Rants lived in Granby. Walter and Arthur moved to other parts of Colorado and Harold lived in Montana for many years. Rudy remained on the ranch his entire life. He married Clarabel Hughes in 1964, and they lived on the ranch after its sale to the YMCA, until his death in 1989. Rudy and Clarabel raised sheep, chickens and rabbits, and enjoyed conversing with YMCA visitors. Through their friendliness and willingness to share stories about their lives, Rudy and Clarabel helped people catch a glimpse of rural life on the ranch in days past.

Della Just died in 1969 at the age of 90, having lived on the Pole Creek homestead for 70 years. She never remarried after Carl's death. She was respected and admired by her family, friends and neighbors who recognized her steadfastness, determination, and courage. She successfully raised a large family and operated a ranching business in the face of many adversities. She cooked, cleaned, hunted, rode horses and worked on the hay crews in addition to helping friends, neighbors and strangers. With hard work, determination, and good management, Della carried on the dream Carl Just had started. The ground that YMCA guests walk on today is a testament to a contribution that the Just family made in shaping this part of the Colorado high country.



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# THE JUST FAMILY TREE

