

White Grass Heritage Project “Sharing the Legacy”

INTERVIEWEE: Carole (C) Hofley, owner of the White Grass Barn

INTERVIEWER: Carole’s daughter-in-law, Celeste (Cel) Hofley

LOCATION: Detroit, Michigan Area

DATE: Spring 2019

Transcribed by Julie Greene in 2021

Note: This transcript has undergone minor edits, e.g., false starts and some minor text were removed to make it more “reader friendly”. Carole’s complete interview transcript is below.

Cel: Carole, what does White Grass mean to you?

C: Well, I think we saved an historic building, historic barn, and preserved a little bit of Jackson Hole history.

Cel: What was the first memory that you have about hearing about the barn? When did you first hear about it?

C: I heard about it from Jack Huyler, who told me that the barn had been dismantled and moved from White Grass and was now down at Bondurant, Wyoming and the owner would like to sell it.

Cel: You had mentioned to me that you had met him (Jack) at a photo session?

C: Yes, we were getting ready to have our pictures taken at St. John’s Episcopal Church for the church directory and H of (Hofley) and H of (Huyler) were back to back entries in the membership directory. Jack came down the hallway in his big black cowboy hat and said, “I heard you are looking for a barn”.

Cel: Were you and Norm looking for a barn?

C: Not really. Jack always had lots of charm and certainly peaked our interest about looking into it further.

Cel: So, you did. You went home and thought seriously about it.

C: (1:41) We had no horses on our property. We were just out of the construction phase; completed our home in 1995 in South Wilson. So, we really weren’t interested in jumping into building barns or outbuildings at the time. We really didn’t have any interest in keeping horses on the property but the beautiful pictures of the White Grass barn that I would run across at the Historical Society were always so special.

Cel: You mentioned in our earlier conversation, that you had seen the site where the barn stood before you ever came to know that the logs were available to purchase. Is that right?

C: Yes, that is correct. I went up to White Grass many times with Sheila Bricher-Wade from the State Historic Preservation Board. We looked at the dismal conditions at the White Grass, the deteriorating buildings and walked the perimeter where the barn once stood. I knew it had been taken down but really didn’t know much more. Then shortly after that, we heard that the barn was on the

Park's demolition list to be destroyed. That is where Jon Gerster, who is a naturalist working at the Park, stepped in and was determined to save that old barn (1997).

Note: Related Oral Histories by Bricher-Wade and Gerster and photos of the White Grass Barn are available at [www.whitegrass.org](http://www.whitegrass.org) under Collections/Oral Histories/Western Center for Historical Preservation/Gerster & Cavicchioni - Post 1985 and Collections/Photos/The Barn.

Cel: He (Gerster) is the one that purchased the barn for a dollar?

C: He purchased it for a dollar. No one bid against Jon and he had bought a barn before he knew it. Then, he and several volunteer friends started the daunting task of dismantling that huge barn. They had no professional equipment and were doing it all with ropes, taking coffee cans full of nails and bolts. It was quite an amazing project that they undertook.

Cel: (4:00) Talk about the obstacles that you faced once you decided to raise the barn back on your property. Any obstacles in moving or reconstructing it? (Reconstructed 1998-99.)

C: Well, we had to contact somebody who would move all those logs. We had never seen any of these pieces and Kelam McKie's name, who is an excellent log builder in Jackson Hole, was recommended by different people saying that he would be the man for the job. Kelam is an interesting man. He is a Scot and is very direct and to the point. He wondered about what kind of a project he was getting into but he was game. We hired him and he had a big, long semi-truck and went to Bondurant and got into that back country and the Hoback Ranches. Hel loaded all those logs, doors and windows and artifacts and just junk that had been taken out of the barn.

Cel: (5:23) Then it came to be that it was all placed on your property.

C: Well, he couldn't believe that I wanted all these things but I said, historically, I think we need to sort through them before we start abandoning pieces of history so please move everything back. That is what he did.

Cel: Was there anything different in how you had to rebuild? Was there anything structurally different in how you had to rebuild it?

C: Yes, because the county required earthquake standards; they were enforced for any building. So, the barn could not be restructured as it originally was. We had to shore up and have additional large logs in the superstructure. We put it on an excellent pored foundation and all that had to be taken into account before we could get the building permit. We had to actually go through a national building permit process. Mitch Blake, a local architect, used the original photographs from the original barn as a guide, counting the number of the logs in order to restore the barn with its gabled roof and cupola. We realized that we were out of code. So, we had to go through a zoning process and get a variance, which was unanimously approved by the planning commission. Then, we were able to start the reconstruction.

Barn reconstruction photos, next page...



*Logs were transported from storage after the Hofleys purchased them from Jon Gerster. Photo courtesy of Carole Hofley.*



*Building a concrete foundation according to local code. Photo courtesy of Carole Hofley.*



*Reassembling White Grass Barn using many original barn logs. Photo courtesy of Carole Hofley.*



*Bottom Logs reassembled. Photo courtesy of Carole Hofley.*



*Replicating the White Grass gabled roof line and cupola. Photo courtesy of Carole Hofley.*



*Rebuilt Barn using as much original material as possible including hand forged door hinges. Photo courtesy of Carole Hofley.*

Cel: Tell me about the moment you were first able to open the newly reconstructed barn to all those people who had once known it and used it.

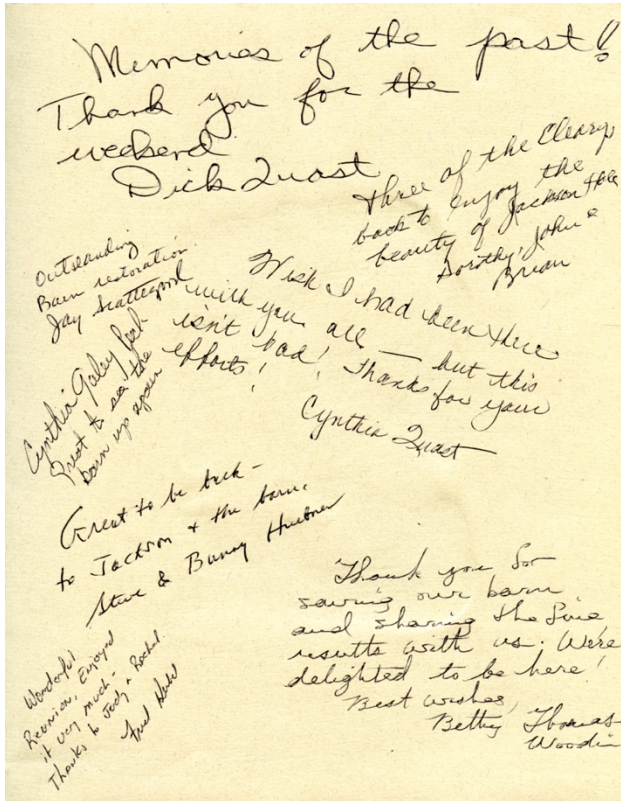
C: (7:22) Well, it was an interesting story how word travels that the barn was back in Teton County. I would say the key player was Judy Schmitt, who talked with me and is a friend from church. We talked about the reunions that they would like to have. There were a lot of White Grassers who visited Jackson in the summer and how much fun if we could do this (have the reunion in the reconstructed barn). We put together a plan with Rachael Trahern to have a reunion in 2000. We would have the reunion down at the newly reconstructed barn.



*Rachel Trahern and Carole Hofley in the barn at White Grass Reunion, 2000. Photo courtesy of Carole Hofley.*

Cel: What is the memory of the White Grass barn that persists for you? What is the happiest memory in your life with it?

C: I think meeting all those White Grassers and the people who worked up there and stayed there. It was really a contagious atmosphere at that first reunion. Norm and I thoroughly enjoyed hearing all the stories and sharing all their wonderful memories and their fondness for Frank Galey, whom we never met but felt really close to in some respects just by getting to know all these wonderful people.



Notes to the Hofleys by 2000 Reunion attendees. Photo courtesy of Carole Hofley



White Grass Reunion 2000 participants in front of the White Grass Main Cabin prior to rehabilitation. Photo courtesy of Carole Hofley.



*Inside the White Grass Barn at Reunion White Grass 2011 hosted by Norm and Carole Hofley. Photo courtesy of Brian Cleary.*

Cel: It is a beautiful story just for me knowing you, as your daughter-in-law, and your love for antiques and history and preservation. Is there anything you would want to say to your future great grandchildren or a legacy you would like to leave behind on how we regard the importance of historic structures?

C: I think we had to appreciate what little is left sometime and, if you can be a part of saving it, I think it is wonderful. A love for history is a basis for those actions. I think what is happening in downtown Jackson, with the historic block where Cafe Genevieve is, that is just great to see younger people start rallying around the flag. We have lost so many historic buildings in Jackson and on the different dude ranches, but there is hope; there is light at the end of the tunnel. My inspiration has always been Bob Righter and Sherry Smith, local historians, who have carried the banner through the years and never gave up. They tried to work with the park service and we've accomplished a great deal. We really have.

Cel: (10:25) I have learned so much from you through the years of getting to know this region and through your eyes, I have a new found appreciation for all the pioneers that came out and started life in this valley. It is beautiful. Thanks for telling me about it.

C: You are welcome.

Interview ends.

These items once hung on the wall of the Hofleys reconstructed White Grass Barn.



(L) H Quarter Circle B, White Grass Brand; (R) Display created by former Cabin Girl, Sharon Griffin, made with items from the White Grass Barn. It won a blue ribbon at the Teton County Fair, circa 1992. Items displayed include: names of horses; door latch; barbed wire; numbers that hung next to wall mounted saddle racks for organizing corresponding numbered saddles, blankets, and bridles; beer cans; a horseshoe; and a small wooden box for holding chalk with the brand up front. Sharon Griffin has written a book called, *Letters from a Cabin Girl* which appears in its entirety at [www.whitegrass.org](http://www.whitegrass.org) under Collections/Documents/Ranch Memorabilia. Griffin gifted this display to the Hofleys who in turn gifted it to White Grass where it is on display in the rehabilitated Main Cabin. Photo courtesy of R. Butterbaugh.



*This plaque also hung in the reconstructed White Grass Barn. Photo courtesy of R. Butterbaugh.*



*A fun plaque that once hung in the reconstructed White Grass Barn. Photo courtesy of R. Butterbaugh.*