

Speaker 1: Hi, this is Beth Smith on January 11th, and I'm down here at the service and level art antiques and fine framing, and I'm going to talk to Jack Chivvis about some history in Salida. How are you doing, Jack?

Speaker 2: I'm good.

Speaker 1: Good. Talk.

Speaker 2: Okay. My name is Jack Chivvis, and I first came to the area in 1975 when I was 22 years old, and my buddy and I came here looking to buy some rural mountain property.

Speaker 1: Where'd you come from?

Speaker 2: We came from Las Vegas, Nevada. That's where I was living, although I had grown up in Denver as a boy and lived in Lakewood and Aurora and had camped in the Chalk Creek area and fished as a boy with my dad. I was familiar with some parts of Colorado, only I was, left Colorado when I was about 10 years old and moved to Nevada. I always wanted to move back.

[00:01:00]

Anyway, as a young man, I decided I wanted to try and move back here, and a friend and I came and we bought some mountain property from Fred Lowry, who's still a prominent name here in town and got to know the Lowry family very well. The piece of property we bought was north of Cotopaxi up in Gribbles Park. For five years, I went back and forth between Salida, or this area, and Las Vegas. Then, in 1980, I moved into downtown Salida and went to work for an antique dealer downtown and immediately fell in love with the historic part of downtown.

[00:02:00]

For the last 25 years, I've pretty much lived downtown. Had my business downtown. I've gotten to know the buildings and the people and the history pretty well over those years. I have some great memories of when I first came to town. One of the first memories of coming into downtown Salida, I came into town and went to the hardware store to buy some stove pipe. I went into Jack Cady's hardware store and Jack Cady was really an interesting guy. He didn't show a lot of emotion but was very good about helping you. He would actually take a light bulb out of it's package and test it to make sure it was good before he sold it to you.

[00:03:00]

Anyway, my first memory of Jack Cady was that I bought a bunch of stovepipe from him. I went to pick it up, and he grabbed it, and I didn't understand why he was grabbing it. He was going to carry it out to the truck for me because I had another package. I was just so amazed that in this small town, someone would still carry something out to the car for you. Over the years until his death, I patronized Cady's hardware store a lot. He could tell you the history of every nut and bolt. If you came in looking for some piece of unusual hardware, he could tell you the whole history of that piece of hardware, when they quit making it and all that. He was really an interesting guy.

[00:04:00] Never showed a lot of emotion. Didn't smile too much but was very helpful and just treated everybody the same. I thought that was really great. Tom Bruenich was one of the first guys I met in town as well as Fred Lowry. Tom Bruenich used to work for Len Marrs at the United Farm Agency. They're who we bought our property from who's still around. Another character downtown who was really well known and lived to be almost 100 years old was Theodore Argys. Theodore Argys had a grocery store downtown for years. His son, Ted Argys, who's still alive, also ran that grocery store just across the street.

[00:05:00] On North F street here, and Theodore Argus was really a neat old, Greek guy, and everybody would see him walking around. He was always doing something, and every year on his birthday, they would ask him what he attributed his long livelihood to, and he always said it was the garlic. He ate a lot of garlic. I think he lived to nearly 100. He had had that business downtown, the Argys Mercantile grocery store, which was a little Greek grocery store. He also had a car ... used to bring cars into town. I had started my antique store in the alley off of F street between 1st and Sackett.

He had brought one of the first cars to town, I think, in 1911, he told me. It was some kind of an old car that he would bring them in to that garage and sell cars. I have a lot of great memories of some of the old timers downtown. There was another fellow named John Blamey, who was one of the old timers who used to come around and sell me antiques. John Blamey had grown up in Leadville and, as a boy, used to walk the railroad tracks picking up lumps of coal. Then, he would go down to one of the streets where all the prostitutes were in Leadville and sell buckets of coal.

[00:06:00] Then, later in his life, he had known Baby Doe Tabor and actually had brought coal to her before her death. She, I guess, died in 1935. One of the most colorful characters downtown for many years was Mae Prunty, and May and her husband, Neil, ran Neil's Café, and I believe they bought it in the late 30s and she ran it. Neal died in 1966, and she continued to run the restaurant by herself, which is right next door to us, which is now Mama D's.

[00:07:00] She ran it up until the mid 80s, I believe, when she retired. She didn't die until the mid 90s sometime. Maybe late 90s. She lived to be quite old. Lived in the back here, but Mae, I remember one of the first times coming into Neil's Café. He used to have a little horseshoe counter in there. Then, there was a window to the kitchen in the back where the cook was. Mae would be serving everybody at the counter, and everybody would be sitting on stools. It was like an old time diner. The stools were really close together, so if you sat down at the counter, the person next to you was right there. You were bumping elbows with them while you were eating.

For some reason, the way they made it, it was very compact. Mae would be in there more or less orchestrating one conversation with eight or ten people sitting at the counter at one time. It was very fascinating to me because there

[00:08:00] would be an old retired railroader, maybe myself, a young long haired hippy type guy, somebody who had grown up in Salida and several others, and one conversation would get started. Everybody was so close, and more or less facing each other, and facing Mae, that we would get one conversation going. I remember lunch in there was only about a dollar or a dollar and a half, two dollars, something like that. It was very inexpensive. It was just like stepping back into time.

[00:09:00] In fact, I've often said that Salida, in the late 70s, early 80s was like walking back into the 1950s. It still had all the old time stores. Anyway, Neil's Café was certainly one of those throwbacks. Another throwback to that time was Tuttle's trading post. Tuttle's trading post was an old time sporting goods store. Just a classic old times sporting goods store with a couple of ancient guys in there working. All kinds of mounted heads on the wall. Racks and racks of fishing poles and creels and all that kind of ... guns behind the cases and stuff.

[00:10:00] They even had this wallpaper in the back that had little cowboys and stuff on it. Great big sign out in front with a huge cutout of a fish. Just a classic old time sporting good store. There was actually a lot of the older stores back then. There was the Salida Men's shop, which you would walk into. It had been there since the 50s, but still looked just like the 50s, had a big neon sign on it up on the corner of 1st and F. In all these little shelves, up and down both sides, very nice little neat shelves, were very neat little stacks of Pendleton shirts and Levi's and socks and everything, just like the old time department stores. You just don't see that anymore, all these little wooden shelves.

Speaker 1: Who owned that store?

Speaker 2: I don't remember who owned the Salida Men's Store. Just up the street from that, there was Donahue's Jewelers, the Mode-o-Day, a couple of dress shops, the old Crews Beggs store was still going at that time. In fact, the Crews Beggs store didn't close until a few years ago. It was a classic, old time department store. There was really only three Crews Begg's stores. There was one started in Leadville. They started one in Salida, and there was one in Pueblo. It was owned by a family. Another interesting shop was Sharp's Style Shop, with Edith Sharp ran for, I forget, 30 or 40 years.

[00:11:00] She had a shop downtown, which was a dress shop. She was a cantankerous old gal. I'm not sure if she's still alive or not.

Speaker 1: I don't know.

Speaker 2: The Victoria Tab, there really wasn't any what we have now in Salida as far as coffee shops and such like that. There was just the home bakery. It was really the only what you might call a coffee shop. Back then, they didn't really have the coffee shops like we have now. Then, we had Luigi's café. Neil's café, and I really think that was all the restaurants there were downtown at that time. A lot more stores and barber shops. There was a western auto, and a Wards.

[00:12:00] Gamble's, of course, has been there forever, Patterson's hardware, lots of the old time stores were still around with of course old people running them. A lot of the people that were running the stores had been running them for 30 or 40 years.

It was quite interesting moving downtown and to that environment. Of course, but at that time, very few of the buildings were painted and fixed up. A lot of them were still run down or only painted white. It wasn't until Chris Byars came to town in the mid 70s that he started convincing some of the building owners to start putting nice paint jobs on some of the old buildings. I still remember in the 80s, they were still tearing down buildings in downtown Salida before we had any historic protections for the buildings. There was a whole row of really nice buildings right in front of where the Pueblo Bank and Trust is that were torn down.

[00:13:00] I remember seeing those get torn down. Came to work one day in the mid 80s and saw the old railroad depot getting torn down after just a few of us had voiced some interest in it. There had been some talk around town of maybe saving it or use it for something. The city got into a tit for tat with the railroad. They wanted to tear down the old railroad bridge, and it had their utilities on it going to the building. The city didn't want them to tear down it, because it was historic. They wanted to move their utilities over to the F street bridge. Anyway, they got mad over all that, I guess, and tore down the depot and torn down the bridge and abandoned the right of way, of course, which allowed the city to come in and buy the right of way.

[00:14:00] That's our Salida Trail now. They pulled out the bridge. That is where the boat ramp is now. At that time, also along the river, nothing was fixed up along the river. People look at the river now, and there's the white water park. At that time, there was just steep banks to the river. Nobody went down there, except at FIBArk. At the Steam plant was still a switching station with all kinds of electrical transformers. It wasn't until I think the late 80s that the power company took all that stuff out of there and sold the building to a group.

[00:15:00] It became the Steam plant. What else downtown? Oh, the Victoria Tavern. Everybody is well aware. The Victoria Tavern is well known, but at that time, in the late 70s, early 80s, the Victoria was just an old sleazy bar run by an 80 year old lady. That's where all the old timers hung out. The upstairs of the Victoria was old, very old retired railroad men who had no families and nowhere else to go. They lived in rooms in the Palace (Hotel) and in the Victoria. It wasn't until the early 80s that ... I can't think of his name. Bob Pasquale bought the Victorian, fixed it up, and made it into the rock and roll bar that it is now.

[00:16:00] The Office Bar was before that over on 1st street. It was the first bar that catered to the younger crowd in town. It would have rock and roll bands on weekends. Then, you had Dooley's bar, which was up the street here. It was another old time bar. Across from it was the Main Bar. Up on the corner was the main liquor store. There used to be four or five liquor stores downtown then. At

one point, we had none, now we have two again. There was a lot more of the old neon signs back then too. When I first came to town, there was still a lot of the old neon signs.

[00:17:00] One by one, as these old businesses went out, they were taking down the neon signs. Myself and another guy ended up salvaging quite a few of them. Actually, my collection of neon signs I just sold. They're going to be displayed soon at the Windmill restaurant. I have the old Wagner's sign, Luigi's, and a few others that were taken down. Some of the big neon cans that the neon signs were on, I actually, a friend of mine who helped me take some of them down, he took them to Los Angeles. He had a neon business, and some of them actually appeared in the 'Batman Returns' movie.

Little pieces of Salida going out in different directions. A lot has changed. A lot has stayed the same downtown, but a lot really has changed. The mix of businesses, the restaurants that we have now. Of course, we didn't have hardly any restaurants. There was more bars. A lot more different dress shops and barber shops and things like that back then. The buildings, of course, are relative, have been fixed up quite a bit over the years and painted. There really wasn't the fancy paint jobs back then. Everything was just either painted one color, red, white or black, or something like that.

[00:18:00] Even around town, there were no, when I first came to town, none of the three, four color Victorian paint jobs on any of the nice homes. They were just painted white. All the trim was just painted white. Now, as you drive around town, you see a lot more of the-

Speaker 1: They're all prettier now.

Speaker 2: Yeah.

Speaker 1: Now, you're selling antiques now. Did you ever do anything else than that?

Speaker 2: Yeah, I did. When I first came to town, like I said, I worked for an antique dealer over on 1st street, who had a large antique shop. At that time, there were seven antique stores downtown. I actually opened one myself. I opened my first shop in 1981, but I also had to have another job, like so many Salidans do. I went to work as a raft guide on the Arkansas River in 1981. Was a full time raft guide every summer for about 15 years. I, of course, was always interested in FIBArk and kayaking and rafting.

[00:19:00]

It's interesting that the kayak festival is such an old festival here, and yet, the rafting really didn't get cranked up like we know it now until the 1980s. There was always a little bit of kayaking going on, but some of the ... back in the mid 70s, there was probably only two or three rafting companies in the whole valley. By 1980, there was like 25 or 30 rafting companies. Of course, rafting is very big now. Kayaking is even bigger. The whole sport of kayaking has changed immensely with the smaller play boats.

[00:20:00] Back then, the boats were much longer, very long, skinny, fiber glass boats. Now, all the boats are plastic and very short. Of course, we now have the kayak play park and all the young people that kayak now like to get in the waves and do what they call freestyle kayaking where they stay in one spot and do all the flips and twirls. That's all very new. That wasn't at all back then. The only time you'd see kayakers was during FIBArk and maybe a few during the summer.

[00:21:00] Now, we have hundreds and hundreds of kayakers every year come to this area. Of course, the Arkansas River is a world class white water river. People really realize that now. Back then, kayaking and the rafting really didn't get big until the 1980s, and then it really took off. Even though Salida and Colorado went into a recession, a pretty bad recession in the mid to late 80s when Climax closed, the quarry closed, a lot of things just really went downhill in the mid 80s. Of course, Salida was really hard hit when Climax closed. There was approximately 500 people that left town within a couple year period.

[00:22:00] I remember driving up and down some of the main streets like G or E street and every third house was for sale. Almost every other house was for sale at one time. A lot of the buildings downtown were empty. About that time, Walmart came. I don't know why a Walmart came towards the later 80s, and then that sort of was the death knell for all the old mom and pop businesses. Within a couple of years, almost all the old mom and pop businesses had closed except for Crews Beggs, Gamble's, Lallier's. All the other old mom and pop businesses closed

The rafting really was the only bright spot during the 80s because ... whoops. It was growing so much during the 80s while everything else was really on the down slide. It was really one of the better jobs for young people around here was working as a raft guide on the river.

Speaker 1: Did you belong to any organizations in town?

[00:23:00] Speaker 2: Yeah. Linda and I got involved in a lot of different things in Salida over the years. Linda was on the Steam plant committee from the very beginning for the first few years. We were both involved in High Country Fine Arts and were in some of the big musicals, plays, and stuff. Dinner theater. Of course, I've played music around Salida all through those years. There's always been variety shows and fund raisers and different types of things. I've pretty much probably played music in every spot there is to play music in Salida from the Lamplighter to the Victoria, the Steam Plant, First street café, the Elks Club, the Senior Center. You name it. The old folk's home. I've played music almost everywhere in this town over the years.

Speaker 1: When were you and Linda married?

Speaker 2: I met Linda, I started my antique shop in the alley over here next to the Capricorn Sports in 1981, and unbeknownst to me, Linda had started her

[00:24:00] framing business at almost the same time in an upstairs apartment on 1st street. About a year later, I moved my antique shop over to the Sherman Hotel, which I had bought with a partner and was on the corner of 1st and G. Linda was across the street. That's kind of when we got to know each other. We ended up getting married in, I think, in 1984. We moved both of our shops back over to the alley over here by the Capricorn. Then, in 1985, we combined our businesses and bought this building here on the corner of F and Sackett. 148 North F street.

[00:25:00] We've been on this corner since 1985. We've seen a lot happen downtown in that time. A lot of change. It seems like in Salida, some things never change, or some things always stay the same. Then, all of the sudden, there's a burst of change. One thing about Salida that has always ... I've always said to almost everybody I've talked to about Salida is that Salida is probably the friendliest place I've ever lived. Not that I've lived a lot of places. I grew up in Las Vegas for the most part. I went to art school in California. Lived in Oregon for a while. Lived in Oklahoma for a short while. I've done enough traveling around that it always amazed me that Salida was one of the most friendly places and continues to be.

[00:26:00] You can't hardly walk down the street without waving at somebody or saying hi. As a kid growing up in the suburbs in most of my life, I've really enjoyed living in the small town. Knowing people of all ages. That's the other thing about Salida. I have friends from eight to eighty and every age in between. That's something that you don't get growing up other places. You tend to only hang out with people your own age.

Speaker 1: How do you like living in the National historic district?

Speaker 2: Well, we just recently moved out of the historic district. It was tough actually. There was some real challenges living down here. We liked living right downtown for 15 years across the street in our other building. Although, the noise and living amongst a lot of bars was a challenge. A certain stigma. There used to be a stigma about North F street, which is pretty much gone now. It used to be that this was lower F street, North F street. Nobody said North F street. Nobody used the word historic. It was lower F street. It's where the bars were in the old days. It's where the prostitutes were over here on Sackett street. There was a stigma about this end of town.

[00:27:00] A lot of people didn't come down here and when people did come down here, it was to get drunk, make a lot of noise, throw their beer bottles around. There wasn't a lot of respect for the historic nature of the town. The word historic was never even used in Salida until the late 80s. Nobody even used that word in advertising or even in conversation. Salida was not a historic town. It was just an old town.

Speaker 1: What do you think had brought about the change?

Speaker 2:  
[00:28:00] It's been a slow, gradual change. Even people like us who just started using the word historic in our advertising. A gradual awareness that Salida really had one of the best collections of late 19th century buildings in the state and was really very well preserved due to such a long, slow decline with the railroading and the mining. People around here never had the money to fix these buildings up. Otherwise, they would have probably stuccoed most of them or torn most of them down and built new buildings. Because of that, I think that's really why there are so many buildings left.

Where was I going with that? What did you ask me again?

Speaker 1: You're doing great.

Speaker 2:  
[00:29:00] It's been a challenge. Now, there's a great awareness of the historic, even ... of course, a lot of the old timers are gone now. A lot of the people that really didn't give a hoot about these old buildings have left, and over the last 25 years, a great deal of new people have moved to the area and have come here for the recreation or the attraction to the quaintness of a historic mountain town with the history and all that. There's a lot more people that are interested in the history, interested in the old buildings. I'm finding that more and more every day and realizing that it is something that should be preserved.

Although, there are still people that would just assume, stucco over, their brick house and really don't think that there's much value to historic structures. That's all changing. It's just a matter of time.

Speaker 1: Now, up there, the next block, you have a museum, haven't you?

[00:30:00]

Speaker 2: Yeah. A couple of years ago, we own the building at 121 North F street, which was originally a saloon and then became the Perry Brother's Tailor Shop for many years. We bought it from Pete Perry, who is now gone. It was a building built in 1890 or 91. We lived upstairs for 15 years, and I had my workshop downstairs. Then, about three or four years ago, I took a sizable collection of stuff that I had collected, a lot of Salida memorabilia, and set up the downstairs like an old time general store museum and thought that I could make a little money off the tourists.

[00:31:00] I was also doing walking tours. Unfortunately, I didn't really have the time to be there. We're really not so touristy that I could afford to be there and make much money showing off the museum. That didn't really work. Then, I was only open by appointment. Not enough interest. Although, the people that did see the museum really liked it, there just isn't enough people. Generally speaking, museums aren't money making deals anyway.

Anyway, we bought a house, and we've moved out of the building. We're going to put the building up for sale. We just are ready to move on and do something else different now. It's really a great, old building. I am going to be keeping all

the important pieces of my Salida collection. Someday, I imagine I'll probably just will it to the museum here in town since I can't take it with me.

[00:32:00] Anyway, I have one of the biggest collections of Salida memorabilia in town. I think Linda and Darwin Hibbs might have a little bit more or maybe some better, different stuff. Of course, our Salida museum, of course, has the best collection. What I have is I have a collection of Salida advertising and store memorabilia that is quite extensive and old photos and things. I'm sure I'll get them cataloged well before I'm ready to go so that the next ... When they do go into the museum at some point, people will be able to understand what they are and how rare and key they are to some of the history downtown.

[00:33:00] I have wooden signs that are 100 years old. I have old calendars, bottles, tins, tokens, photographs, literally hundreds of items that came from Salida businesses or pertained to Salida history. Documents. Anyway, just stuff that I collected over the years as an antique dealer. I didn't really think that I should put it in my antique shop and sell it and have it be scattered to the four winds. I thought I'll just keep it, and I would always stick that stuff back. That's what that is.

Speaker 1: Yeah, you have a wonderful display over there. How about this building that you're in now? What's the history behind it?

Speaker 2: This was a newer building. It was built about 1904, and it was originally the Daniel Martin Saloon. Of course, everything on this end of town was either saloons, hotels, or whore houses, cigar stores, things like that.

Speaker 1: Dealing mostly with the railroad.

[00:34:00]

Speaker 2: Right, because of course, in the old days, all of the activity centered at the railroad depot when you had numerous trains coming every day and people getting on and off the trains coming to town. That was the principle mode of transportation back then. Everything happened down here. I can only imagine how lively it was on this end of town in the olden days.

[00:35:00] Anyway, this building actually had a room in the back where they had card games and gambling going on, was a saloon in the front ... During prohibition, which came to Colorado in 1916, all of the bars had to close. I think the gambling kept on in the back rooms. This became a pool hall and was a pool hall for many years. Then, when Neil's café came along, Mae and Neil bought it and became part of their operation. They had the pool hall and the restaurant. They actually had holes in the wall. There was one of the holes. It's been bricked up right there, where they used to be able to pass sandwiches and food through to the people that were gambling in the back room here.

Speaker 1: Good thought.

Speaker 2: At least, that's the story.

Speaker 1: Yeah.

Speaker 2: Anyway, it's a brick building. I think this was really the working man saloon. The Victoria across the street is the fancier, nicer hotel saloon. People need to realize too, also, that Salida was always a working man's town. It was in no way could you compare it to some of the boom towns like Aspen or Cripple Creek or ones that just had all the millionaires, people becoming rich overnight who were building elaborate buildings and elaborate houses. Salida was always just the railroad working man's town.

[00:36:00]

Salida, although very stable over the years economically, didn't have the boom and bust cycles that so many of the mountain towns had. We had a little bit of a boom. Of course, we suffered through the depression like everybody in the 1930s and then had a little boom during World War II with all the troop trains going through. In fact, Mae and Neil used to be open. The railroad paid them to be open 24 hours a day for the trains coming through during World War II.

[00:37:00]

Then, during the 50s, Salida started slipping into a very long, slow decline. I think that's actually when the city fathers and some of the businessmen in town started really looking towards tourism as an alternative to the old type of businesses such as railroading, mining, and agriculture, which were the only other things going on. Of course, all the mining was really pretty much over by then. Little bit going on here and there. We had the big limestone quarry was still going up on Monarch Pass, because they needed it for the CFNI Steel plant-

Speaker 1: In Pueblo.

Speaker 2: -in Pueblo. In the 50s, of course, they started really trying to promote Salida and had come up with the Follow the Hearts to Salida campaign. During the 50s, they really pushed that hard to try and get more people to come here to fish, to recreate. That's really when people, after World War II, people really ... it was good times across America. People really had more time to get out, see the country, hunt, and fish, and vacation. That's when the tourism thing ... Throughout the west, people started really trying to promote their particular areas with tourism. Salida was no different.

[00:38:00]

The fishing, of course, has always been pretty good. The mountains have always been beautiful.

Speaker 1: Are you a hunter or a fisher?

Speaker 2: No, not really. Done a little bit of all that, but I'm not avid as a hunter or a fisherman. I'm more of a hiker, outdoor recreationist, hiker, skier, rafter, history buff.

Speaker 1: History buff. That's important.

Speaker 2: I don't know what else I could talk about.

[00:39:00]

Speaker 1: Well now, the hospital is not so far down there. Do you remember flu epidemics or things like that that laid Salida low?

Speaker 2: Only stuff I've read in the history books about the big flu epidemic of 1918 of course, which hit the whole country. No, I don't really know much about that. I've really, over the years, just living downtown, I've really mostly been interested and fascinated with the history of the buildings and the businesses and the merchants that were here. As a collector and an antique dealer, I actually specialized in what they call advertising memorabilia and country store collectibles and became pretty expert on those items such as all the old signs and tins and products of the day. I always was fascinated with what the old stores were like and which buildings had which kinds of stores in them and how they did. That kind of thing. That's probably where most of my expertise lies as far as Salida history goes. Then, just what I've picked up through the books and things over the years.

[00:40:00]

Speaker 1: Well, that's good. You've done a good talk for this afternoon. I appreciate you helping us. Thank you very much.

Speaker 2: All right.