

Katherine Ramus and The Blue Jay Inn

By Milly Roeder

The Blue Jay Inn in Buffalo Creek is waiting for a new life. It is closed since the big flood in 1996 spilled muddy waters up to the windows above the porch railing. Its dedicated owner of almost 60 years, Katherine Davis Ramus died on March 6, 2006 at 94 years old. Friends and neighbors, trustees and historians, preservationists and grant administrators are contemplating how to revive the historic wooden inn.

When summer heat plagued the people of the plains, many fled as vacationers or weekend visitors to the cooler ranges of the foothills of the Rocky Mountains. One of their favorite places was the Blue Jay Inn in the valley of Buffalo Creek. Katherine Davis was born July 24, 1911, in North Newton, Kansas. When she was about ten years old, her teacher friend suggested exploring the refreshing mountains in Colorado. The Davis family rented a "very tiny" cabin in which to spend summers in Buffalo Creek when school was out in their hometown of Topeka, Kansas. Before moving to Denver, Katherine received degrees in English and music from Washburn College, and later taught school in Fallen, Kansas.

Childhood Summers in Buffalo

In the kids' paradise of Buffalo Creek, Katherine and her brothers first hiked north around the river bend behind Green's store. The way home made them into true "mountaineers." Together with friends they climbed Cathedral Spires, Mount Evans or Pikes Peak, or waded up and down the Creek, the namesake of their town. They played in Mr. Green's store until he scared the boisterous bunch with his big broom to go play in the station house. In the morning, the

Early Blue Jay Inn sign; the latest sign was broken by the flood of 1996 and found in pieces near Buffalo Creek.

All photos courtesy of the Jim and Ann Enix collection.





A view of the Blue Jay Inn after 1948 shows the inn from across County Highway 126 with a new shingle and flag pole. Buffalo Creek runs through the valley at right.

children collected the mail from the incoming train for the many families and single ladies summering in the valley. They ran in the opposite direction in the afternoon, in time for the train to Denver to take outgoing mail to the post office, all for five cents or a candy per day per customer. After the whistle stopped blowing in 1938, Katherine Ramus habitually listened for the familiar sound in the morning, inviting her to go for her mail.

At night, the children gathered at the porch of a friend's house to sing and tell stories. Each year, the night of the full August moon, they went on their favorite "moonlight hike," well prepared for a picnic the next morning. Because there were no picture postcards of the area to send back home, Katherine's mother had photo postcards printed which the "Davis three" peddled in the neighborhood. The cards "became very popular with the members of the Girls' Friendly Society at the Blue Jay."¹ Miss Ayer, the stern housemother, allowed the kids to come to the porch and sell their postcards in little brown bags only on Fridays, lest someone think she was running an improper enterprise. Sometimes, next door neighbor Fred Searway took the kids in his big Cadillac on exciting expeditions to Cheesman Dam and Wellington Lake.²

The automobile had ominously begun to rival

the former Colorado and Southern Railroad in the 1930s. By 1938, the railroad had lost its importance and was dismantled. The whistle ceased blowing, and business in the valley began to falter. The tracks were replaced by a dirt road on the railroad bed. Interstate 70 and skiing drew tourists away from the valley through Eisenhower tunnel at the Continental Divide to the western slope in the mid 70s.

Across the street from the Davis cabin in Buffalo Creek on Highway 126, prosperity left the Blue Jay Inn, too, which sat waiting for new owners and a new life. It took until 1947, when Katherine and her mother, Lizetta Davis, purchased the two-story inn.

The Origins of the Inn

At the outset, the inn provided shelter and food for miners and lumbermen. Owner Joseph Bailey played with the idea of starting a summer resort and built the Buffalo hotel in 1886. John L. Jerome acquired the hotel in 1900 and renamed it "The Blue Jay Inn." He remodeled it by moving a second building to the property. He linked it with the first one to form an "L." When the roof overhangs did not allow the two buildings to be pushed together closely, the easiest solution was to build four little steps which they framed and enclosed. Jerome then added the porch with

green shingles to the front and north side. Later, guests at the inn discovered that the northern porch was often too cold to sit there, even on the hottest summer days. "Alex Sirois is said to have hand-carved the stair rail and post in the lobby."³ Jerome ran it for a few years until the Girls' Friendly Society, sponsored by the Episcopal Church, took over in 1907. They operated it as a summer retreat for working girls, students, and church workers until 1947.⁴ Good neighbor Fred Searway looked after the buildings. Principled Florence Ayer, the strict matron from Boston watched over the young house guests, who stayed at the inn for \$7.00 a week.

To make life easier, a generator was set up to provide the complex with electricity. Hoping to protect the girls from inappropriate influences, Miss Ayer turned it and thus the lights off at 9 o'clock at night. It is whispered that young visitors found close-by trees and open windows to access one or the other young lady under moon light. Several weddings may have taken place between girls staying in the resort and young men from the vicinity. Many other girls later returned for an occasional visit at the inn.

To prepare the inn for business, Katherine and her mother brought most of the furniture for the hotel from the Davis' home in Denver and added store-bought beds, chairs and wash stands. They installed new water lines, snaked electric wires along the beams for lights, and replaced the old ice cooling system in the thick-walled store room with modern, kilowatt-fed refrigeration. From now on, ice no longer had to be cut and carried from the ice pond on the river below the house.

The Blue Jay Inn opened a year later, in 1948, with 48 dinner reservations and 24 plates. A shingle out front welcomed guests to stay for dinner or overnight, and they were always greeted "with a great big smile and 'hello, come in and welcome!'" Local friends and neighborhood volunteers helped eagerly with cooking and dish-washing.

As innkeeper, and true to that older generation, Katherine's motto for her young workers required to "Do it right the first time." To which neighbor and friend Jim Enix added, "You don't have the time to do it twice."⁵ She demanded freshly washed and ironed bed sheets and other linens to be folded flawlessly and stashed into

the exact drawers marked with the sizes of the sheets. She would show only once how to set the tables. The water glasses had to sparkle when placed next to the plates. Katherine would not tolerate any slam-closed door that would startle her guests while they were relishing their dinners. The big old brass latches on the wall refrigerators also had to be shut softly.⁶ Ann Enix remembered how the teacher in Katherine emerged and have her correct someone using bad spelling or grammar. Katherine Davis Ramus was the soul of the Blue Jay Inn for more than 50 years. One summer day she showed how caring she could be. A boy from the neighborhood got into trouble tubing down Buffalo Creek and got caught in debris near the bridge. Grownups carried the boy to his home, where his mother and sister, a nurse dressed his wounds. Katherine came running down to the creek to help and went all the way to the house to see that the boy was all right.

Her neighbor Vicki Porter once pictured herself, "standing at the back screen door, hearing and smelling the coffee perking while listening to the sounds of the kitchen bustling with energy." She imagined another neighbor, "Celeste Baker sitting with both elbows on the enamel table and nibbling on coffee cake" fresh from the oven.⁷ Out of the enormous roaster in her famous kitchen Katherine served dinner guests fried chicken with scalloped potatoes.

Katherine
(Davis) Ramus,
October 1950



That caused *Ford Times* in the 1950s, to rate the Blue Jay third best hotel in Colorado right after the Brown Palace and the Broadmoor. The magazine *Map of Famous Restaurants* praised it as one of the best in the country.⁸

“After Mrs. Davis’ demise, the full management was put in Mrs. Ramus’ hands. She has the *savoir faire* of one who has been trained to meet the public and provide for vacationing wants and



Katherine Ramus enjoying punch and cookies with her friends. (2001)

eliminating the woes,” wrote Edna Ryan.⁹

In 1941, Fred Searway built the “blue cabin” for Charles Ramus, an art history professor at the University of Denver,¹⁰ who added many personal touches himself. He bought materials for less than \$1,000; and, like his fishing records, entered every item in a notebook. The first years, Charles lived alone in the cabin and had an occasional meal at the Blue Jay Inn, once it had opened.

Charles F. Ramus and Katherine Davis got married in 1950. Living in

Denver during the winter, they rarely missed a hockey game by their preferred team. Katherine worked as a slide art librarian at the University of Denver. In her home, boxes lined the walls with books about knitting, crocheting, quilting and embroidery she wanted to sell to women in the region from her yellow wood-paneled Nash Rambler. She drove to every fair and bazaar that offered information on her specialties; and she sold books out of her small gift and book store at the inn.

In the summer, they enjoyed the blue cabin together or went hiking in the vicinity. While at the inn on hot afternoons, Katherine offered her

guests delicious homemade lemonade on the porch. Charles usually sat on the porch, greeting arriving guests. He took them on fishing excursions and showed them how to tie flies, an art he had acquired as a boy vacationing on the Platte near Foxton. For 23 years, he kept records of the days, stream conditions, weather, flies used, strikes, and releases of 13,420 trout he caught. Besides teaching and editing a collection of cartoons about 19th century French parliamentarians by sculptor Honoré Daumier, he taught a couple of fishing classes at DU. After Charles’ death of cancer in 1979, Katherine did not enter the cabin for nine years.

Guests at the Blue Jay Inn came from Denver and the plains. They stayed after having spent an afternoon or weekend on the river or of hiking in the surrounding mountains.

Ladies may have enjoyed a stroll on the shore of the river. Boys may have explored catching fish or crawdads and throw skipping stones with their dads, big brothers or Charles Ramus. Girls may have twisted flowers for fragrant wreaths to adorn themselves. They also may have brought fascinating creatures from their excursions. There must have been a swing somewhere on which to create a cool breeze when gliding back and forth.

Visitors and neighbors completed the day in the pleasant dining room with a delectable dinner prepared by the ladies of the house. Big platters and bowls filled with the products of Katherine’s recipe collection waited on the side board, accompanied by refreshing beverages.

To retreat to the parlor for stimulating after dinner conversations, guests first passed by the only telephone of the house in its wooden booth. Its shrill ringing dictated a run from the kitchen through the dining room up the four steps to the booth each time a merchant announced his coming with an order of fresh produce or a helper regretting not being able to come to work this busy night. One fine day, Katherine got the better of it, and ordered a second phone installed in the kitchen.

The owners’ love of art still reflects from paintings on the walls. An impressive handcrafted wooden railing safely guided the guests to the bedrooms on the upper floor. While day visitors left with the last train back to the city, others stayed for the night upstairs to leave early next morning or remain for another day or week.

Time went on. In 1974, the Blue Jay was listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Then, a sudden flash-flood in July 1996 followed the Buffalo Creek wildfire of May 18 and rushed down Sand Draw. It surged through houses and ripped out a garage, spilled across the porch of the inn and above the railing, and rammed down the boxes of blooming petunias. It left mud streaks on the window panes. The waters seeped into the house and licked at many boxes rim-filled with books. It washed away the shingle outside that had invited travelers to the Blue Jay Inn.

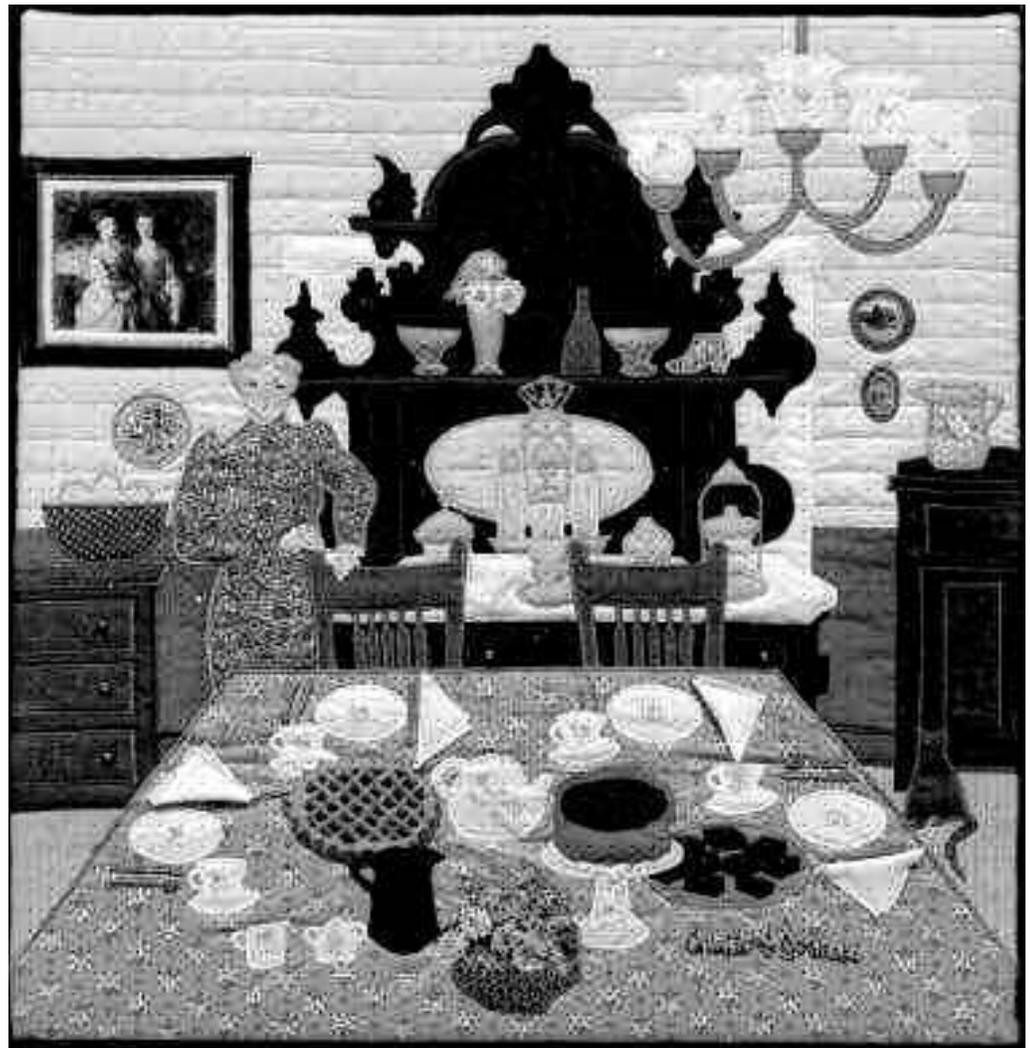
The Blue Jay Inn ceased to serve guests in 1998. In 2001, friends of the DAR (Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution, Denver chapter) honored Katherine for having been an active member of the DAR for over 60 years. That same summer, her friends celebrated her 90th birthday at the inn. The last event held at the Blue Jay Inn, an afternoon tea reception, observed the 100th anniversary of the little Chapel in the Hills (a landmark of the Jefferson County Preservation Program). Although natural disasters struck the community of Buffalo Creek and forced her to close the Blue Jay Inn, Katherine, its owner, hostess, cook and soul stayed at the inn to summer until 2001.

The brush under the tall trees that kept sunshine from entering the veranda has now been cut. Rainwater is finding its way through the roof into the house. Old age and diminishing strength denied Katherine the ability to maintain and



Above: Afternoon tea at the Blue Jay Inn celebrating Katherine Ramus' 90th birthday, with antique sideboard in the background.

Below: Noted artist of appliqué tapestries, Arlette Gosieski, created this scene depicting Katherine Ramus at afternoon tea at the Blue Jay Inn. (All rights reserved.)

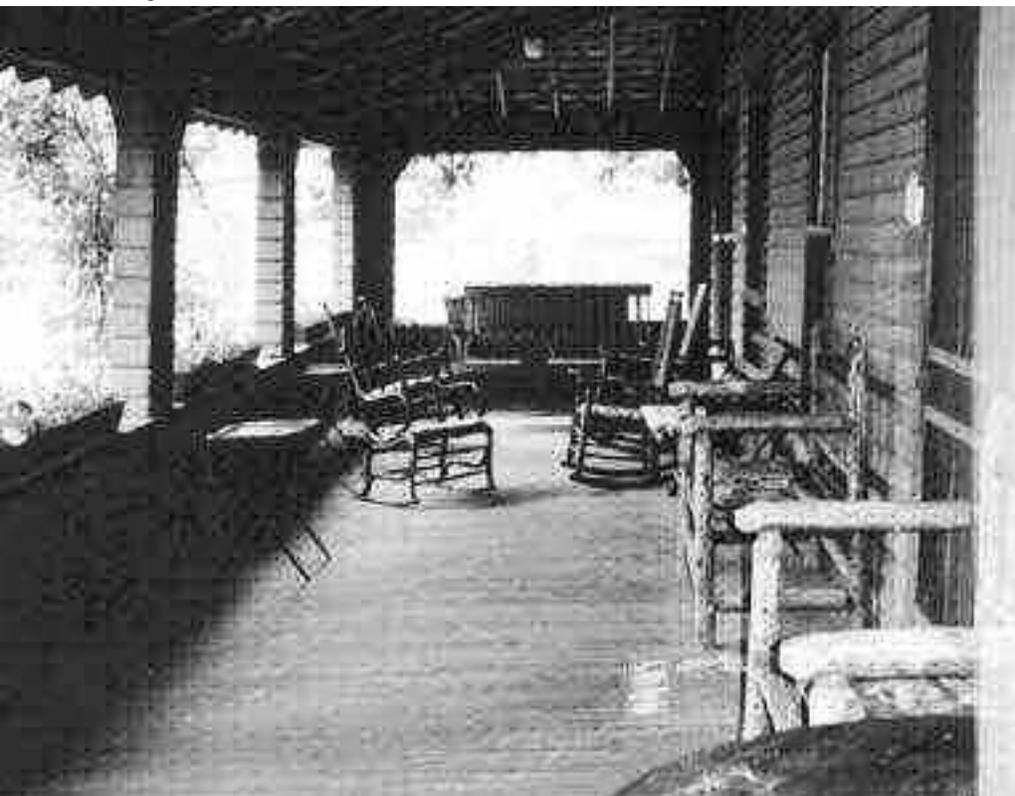


repair the inn. She passed away March 6, 2006. Katherine was interred in the cemetery of The Little Chapel in the Hills in Buffalo Creek, where her life was celebrated on July 22, 2006.

True, Katherine Ramus may be gone; may her good spirit, metaphorically speaking, keep an eye on the hotel, its kitchen and its dining room, and the craft books. The words of marketing specialist John Montgomery, "...with a little work we could serve a meal there tonight," combined with creativity and energy point to a new long term treasure.

For now, Ann and Jim Enix, Katherine's longtime dedicated friends and trustees of the inn, are looking for matching funds to a grant of \$29,590.00 by the State Historical Fund for a structural assessment and plans for restoration. At the time of writing, a market study is planned to determine the involvement of the community and to find an interesting alternative

The front porch where Charles Ramus introduced guests to the art of fly fishing and Katherine offered cool lemonade on hot summer afternoons.



reuse. To imagine many happy weddings and family reunions, yes, and company retreats, too.

Endnotes

- ¹ Ramus, Katherine Davis, *The Olden Days, Buffalo Beginnings and through the years, The People and Places of Buffalo Creek, Colorado*, Book Two, edited by Dorothy Lombard, published 1995
- ² Ramus, *ibid.*
- ³ Ramus, *ibid.*
- ⁴ Ryan, Edna, Sirois, *Narrative History of Buffalo Creek and Buffalo Park, Colorado*, Denver, Colorado: Claridge Printing Company, May 27, 1960
- ⁵ Ann and Jim Enix, interview, March 13, 2006
- ⁶ Porter, Vicki Aisner, Email correspondence, 3-8-2006
- ⁷ Porter, *ibid.*
- ⁸ Ramus, *ibid.*
- ⁹ Ryan, Edna Sirois, *Narrative History of Buffalo Creek and Buffalo Park, Jefferson County, Denver, Colorado*: Claridge Printing Company, 1960
- ¹⁰ Culver, Virginia, Blue Jay Inn owner area "history book," *The Denver Post*, March 10, 2006



Golden Chateau

By Richard Gardner

The Golden Chateau is one of the few remaining historic dance halls in Jefferson County. It was first built in 1926 by Ben H. Tilley as the central field-stone portion of the present building as the dance floor, known as the Golden Pheasant Club. It served as a dance floor and included a counter serving soft drinks, ice cream, candies, cigars, cigarettes and light lunches.

It was a popular attraction from the start, managed by hall manager Ted Topping with Agnes Bowe's six-piece house band "Snappy Dragon." The place was available to couples per dance, for entire evenings, or rental by local clubs, and it quickly became a popular social center for the surrounding region. It was renowned as having one of the best dance floors in Colorado, and drew patrons from as far as Lowry Air Force Base. Among its early fundraisers was one by the Golden Fire Department to build the new Loveland Fire Station in 1927, still standing at 9th and East Streets in Golden.