

Palisade Historical Society
Oral and Video History Project
Interview

Oral History # 009

Date: 1/28/2011

Place Davis home in Palisade

Length 50:27

Interviewees Samuel Harry "Barney" Davis

Phone: 464-7325

Ruth Marie Rowley Davis

Interviewer Bill Beckwith

Phone: 464-7337

Videographer: Ralph Branch

NOTE: This is an informal information gathering session which Bill Beckwith conducted with Barney and Ruth Davis to complete biographical information forms in preparation for their oral history video records, though more formal interviews were never done.

As this session was informal, Bill interjected his own memories of historical interest. These are noted at the end of this document, following the summary of information provided by Barney and Ruth Davis.

Families:

Barney was born as Samuel Harry Davis on August 28, 1922 on the family peach ranch on G 4/10 Road in Palisade, Colorado and was a life-long resident of Palisade. He got his nickname "Barney" from a racecar driver of the day, but he claims that he never drove as fast as did the racecar driver.

Barney's father, Harry B. Davis, was born in Ransom, Illinois. He was a house painter by trade and sometimes painted houses and businesses in exchange for groceries, coal, etc. He was also a wood grainer/engraver, creating beautiful wood surfaces for items, such as tabletops. Barney's mother was Florence Emma McKay, also born in Ransom, Illinois. (*Harry and Florence moved to Palisade and owned the peach orchard on G 4/10 Road before Barney was born.*) Barney's father passed away in Palisade in 1944 while Barney was overseas during World War II.

Barney's maternal grandfather was John McKay. John had a brother named Art McKay.

Barney's spouse was Ruth Marie Rowley Davis, born May 30, 1926 in Palisade. Her father was Gene Rowley. Ruth described him as "unproductive" whereas, her mother was a hard worker.

Ruth's grandfather was Fred Rowley, who owned the Palisade Coal Mine. Barney described Fred as "a sedate old man, who rode his bicycle to town to the bank every day and then out to the mine." Ruth's grandmother paid for her to take piano lessons, and Ruth promised her grandmother that when she learned to play well enough, she would play for church. Ruth played the piano at the Christian Church up until the time she and Barney were married.

Barney and Ruth were married in 1946 at the Christian Church in Palisade. Two months later, (*in December 1946*), the church burned. Leslie Hall was an active member of the church and a builder, so he helped build the new brick church that replaced the one that burned.

Before their marriage, Barney went to the First Baptist Church, while Ruth attended the Christian Church. They did not want to upset anyone on either side of the family, so they decided become members of the Methodist Church. They were married by Revered Robothom at the Methodist Church

Barney and Ruth had three children:

Jane Ann Davis McFarland, who currently lives in Palisade.

Douglas Harry Davis, who was killed in a motor vehicle accident when he was sixteen years old.

Dina Lynn Davis Fitzpatrick, who lives in Anchorage, Alaska. She has also lived in South America and Africa.

Doug's tragic death naturally had an immense impact on the Davis family. Ruth recalled on the day of the accident, they were on their way to Delta, Colorado, taking Jane Ann and a friend to a cheerleading event. Doug and Dina were supposed to come later with others to meet them in Delta. Just before they reached Delta, they were stopped and told Doug had been in a serious accident.

Schools:

As life-long Palisade residents, Barney and Ruth both attended Palisade schools and graduated from Palisade High School. After high school, Barney went to Mesa College for about three weeks before deciding to join the military.

Ruth was a cheerleader in high school and active in music. She was also Homecoming Queen one year. She and two other girls were in a trio that sang at churches and meetings of various organizations in town. Other members of the trio were Doris Taylor and _____. Ruth did not go to college because she had to work, and it was too difficult for her to work and go to school at the same time.

Ruth said she and Barney did not date in high school. She said that she "couldn't stand him back then" and recalls that he was very popular with the girls.

Military Service:

Barney enlisted with the US Navy on September 22, 1942 in Grand Junction, Colorado. He went to Boot Camp in San Diego, California. After Boot Camp, he was in Submarine Repair Unit #134 stationed on the USS_____, a submarine tender. Barney attained the rank of Musician Second Class and was a member of the Seventh Fleet Flag Band, which entertained the troops and played for parades, funerals, and other functions that required music. Barney was honorably discharged from the Navy three years, three months, and 10 days after his induction (*which would have been in early January 1946*).

Life in Palisade:

Upon his father's death, Barney inherited the peach orchard property on G 4/10 Road west of town. He and Ruth raised peaches there for 50 years, and Barney worked in construction for 15 years, just to keep the ranch going and to put food on the table when there was insufficient income from the peach orchard. He used to work for "two bits an hour."

After graduating from high school, Ruth worked as a clerk at the Palisade Insectary (*which was operated by the Colorado State Department of Agriculture in Palisade*). She worked as a secretary to sheriffs Reese and Williams in the (*Mesa County*) Sheriff's Department for twenty years until she retired. Since she was older, some of the deputies called her "Grannie." Ruth also worked for a short time at the drug store in Palisade.

In 1951, Ruth and Barney acquired another peach orchard from Tidwell's for \$7,000 on the north side of G 4/10 Road where Bliss Drive is currently located. They sold the land to Dr. (*Chester*) Bliss in 1953 for \$5,000, just to get rid of it.

Barney's father had thirty acres of pears out at Bridges' Switch (*approximately two miles west of Palisade*). His two older sisters, Jessie and Elizabeth, were born there. His father acquired the property from John W. Hoar (sp?). John wanted to "tram" coal off the mountain down to his place, but that never worked out, so he sold the place to Barney's father. As the story goes, one day when the new minister in town was driving by in his horse-drawn buggy, he said hello to Barney's sister and asked her where her father was. She told him that he was up at the whorehouse (meaning Hoar house). The minister went on down the road and never came back!

Community Involvement:

Barney and Ruth were active in the Palisade community. Barney was a member of the Palisade Masonic Lodge #125 for fifty years and was the Master in 1943 and again in 1961. When asked about his hobbies, Barney replied that he was always too busy working to have a hobby.

Ruth volunteered at the Migrant Center (*Hospitality Center/Child and Migrant Services*) and was the recipient of the Citizen of the Year Award in recognition of her service to that organization. She was also active in Eastern Star and played piano for their meetings. She dropped out when Doug was killed.

Bill Beckwith's pertinent comments during the interview:

Barney and Bill talked briefly about Barney working with Tom McCall, a local contractor, on Bill's apartment (*on West First Street where Varaison Vineyards and Winery is now located*). Harry Herman and Glen Davies also worked with them a lot. Bill said Varaison converted the main floor of the house into a tasting room and dining room space.

Bill's father bought a school bus from his brother-in-law, Ed Freemyer. Bill's parents started the school bus route between Cameo and Palisade. At first, Bill's mother drove an open bed truck (*to transport students*) when she was in high school, and then they got the school bus. Bill has a picture of his dad with the bus. Later, they got a new bus that had "Palisade School District No. 19" printed on the side of it. This was before they consolidated with the Grand Junction school district. They would park the bus at Bennett Motors and walk to Cutter's Shoe Shop to get the gossip. The Millemans and the Beckwiths played cards and the men hunted together. Bea Voorhees would rig music up in the mortuary garage where Ruth's class would dance at night.

Bill remembers when Phyllis (*Bill's brother, Ed Beckwith's wife, Phyllis Hampton Beckwith*) came back from nurses' training, she worked for Dr. Weidlein. She helped deliver many babies in Palisade. Barney said Phyllis helped with the birth of their daughter, Jane Ann. Ruth said Phyllis stayed with them two nights, and they credit Phyllis with Jane Ann being a healthy baby. Barney said, "If it hadn't been for Phyllis, Jane Ann wouldn't have made it."

Bill remembers Priscilla's (*Priscilla Bowman Walker*) grandfather, George Bowman, frequently walked past his house on his way to town. If Bill was outside playing, he could smell Mr. Bowman's pipe before he saw him, so he would watch for him to walk down the road.

Tidwell's wife was the daughter of John Bradshaw, who built the house Bill Beckwith's family lived in on West First Street - now Varaison Winery.