

Palisade Historical Society
Oral and Video History Project
Interview

Oral and Video History #20

Date: 4/1/2016

Place: History Center, 311 South Main Street, Palisade

Length: 1:13:44

Interviewee Jack Webb

Interviewer Charlene Weidner

Videographer Gary Hines

The Webb Family:

Jack was born in 1926. His mother was Anna Uhanna Hansen. She was born in Iowa City, Iowa on 3/13/1903. She was second wife of Roy Webb, who divorced his first wife. Jack's oldest brother, Richard, was a step brother from the first marriage. He was born in Iowa. Jack's other siblings were, June, Helen, Winona, Dixie, Lila Lee, and Larry.

Grandparents Niels Frederik "Fred" Hansen & Olena Marie Hansen were from Denmark. They immigrated to Iowa, moved to Sedgwick County, Colorado, then to Fruita. They homesteaded on 17 Road, where they had cattle. The grandmother raised Olena, as she was born when her mother was sick and passed away.

His other grandparents were Hulbert Oliver "Fred" Webb, and Ida Mae Winn Webb. He was 50 and she was 16 when they were married. He had been in the Civil War. They were married in a town north of where they lived in Iowa. They had four children, and she did not remarry after he passed away. She died in Grand Junction.

The Webb family lived in the Hunter community near 22 1/2 Road, north of J Road. *(There was a Hunter School and Hunter School District)*

Jack married Merle Ingram 10/28/1952. She passed away in 1993. Merle was raised by her grandmother as her mother passed away soon after she was born. Jack and Merle have two daughters, Maura, who lives in Grand Junction, and Theresa, who lives in Salt Lake City. Jack moved his family back to Palisade in 1969 so they could attend one high school all four years.

In World War II, Merle's father moved from Mesa where he owned a dairy, to Ogden, Utah where he worked for the Navy, and remarried another music teacher. When they both died, Merle went to Ogden and managed their property until Jack retired.

Jack's father, Roy, did farming and day work until June's husband, Harold Kissell, who was Superintendent of the Cameo Mine convinced Roy to work at the mine.

Jack attended several schools:

Jack started school at age five when the family lived in Garmesa - north of Fruita/Loma. Mrs. Klapwick was the school teacher. Fruita would furnish a teacher if there were students, so he was

enrolled in the first grade to ensure a teacher for the first through 8th grade school, though he was barely there for the year. She rode a horse from Fruita.

Sometime after 1929, the Roy Webb family moved to Palisade, where Jack attended school. In the 8th grade, he was voted cheerleader, although he wasn't one very long. There were three more boys than girls in the class, so he won by three votes. Mrs. Wiebelt, told him to lead the class in a cheer. Being shy, it didn't work out well. So Doris Taylor took his place.

In 1940, the Webb family moved to Cameo where Jack attended the 9th and 10th grades. He went to Palisade High School in the 11th grade. He loved history, which was the next to the last class. Study hall was the last class of the day. He wanted to continue studying history in study hall, so he sat at the front of Mrs. Wiebelt's classroom to avoid the five disruptive boys at the back of the classroom. However, when one of the boys threw an eraser that hit Jack in the back of the head, Jack retaliated by throwing the eraser back. "Who retaliates gets caught." Mrs. Wiebelt only saw Jack's effort and sent him to Principal Day's office. Jack's punishment was to help the janitor sweep the floors after school every night. That meant he would have to walk several miles home to Cameo, so that was the end of his education.

Jack's family lived in Garmesa, Palisade, and Cameo

When the Webbs lived in Garmesa, located on the Mesa County/Garfield County border north of Loma, Jack went into the coal mine with his father. The Webbs lived in Mr. Bunninger's house, and his father ran cows, but did not work at the Bunninger mine.

Jack's father was a day worker. He only had an 8th grade education. If a dairy needed a milker, he would milk cows, and when a farmer needed someone to irrigate the orchard, he'd do that for wages. He was paid per cow, or by the day, or job. The move to Palisade was helped by the Palisade First Baptist Church. They lived in the last house going up the hill on the right side of Bower Avenue. Jack got a teddy bear for Christmas that year. Dr. Weidlein lived down the hill. Jack remembers protestors with signs at the Doctor's house, but not what they were protesting. Jack's sisters thought perhaps Dr. Weidlein was being criticized for performing abortions.

Bower Avenue is Jack's favorite place. The family also lived on the other side of Bower, and in Mrs. Waite's apartments on the west side of Bower between 3rd and 2nd. After he was married, he bought a house on the northwest corner of 3rd Street and Bower Avenue. He remembers the ice house on Bower.

The Roy Webb family moved to a house near the greenhouses on North River Road which was owned by Ray Pryor. Pryor owned a butcher shop in Palisade, and lived on 12th Street in Grand Junction. Jack's father was hired to run the orchard. Jack was five or six when his father noticed the pickers in the orchards would have to walk back to the house to get drinking water from the well when they were thirsty. So, his father suggested it would be better if someone took a water bag out to the pickers so they wouldn't have to stop picking to get a drink of water. Jack was that someone. He received a watch as payment for hauling water. It haunts him that people would take advantage that way. He still has the watch, as a family member saved it.

Later, the Webb family moved to the *R. H. Bancroft* place on East Orchard Mesa. They were the first ones to live in the "pocket" just at the top of the hill.

In 1940, Roy Webb began work as an underground miner at the Cameo Mine and they moved to Cameo. Jack's sister, June, married Harold Kissell who worked at the mine and got Roy a job. The Denver & Rio Grande Railroad bought most of the coal from the Cameo Mine. World War II increased rail traffic and meant more coal - and coal miners - were needed.

Cameo was a small town and much different than where the family had previously been living at the Bancroft place on East Orchard Mesa.

Cameo School

The Cameo School had 10 grades in two rooms. One was for students in the 1st through 8th grades; the big room was 9th and 10th grade students. Ruth Rigg taught the lower grades, and her husband, Joe Rigg, taught the older students. Jack thought he was "as smart as the smartest girls in the class." Because Joe also worked a night shift in the mine, he would give homework and pick up assignments at 9:00 in the morning and then leave, *presumably to catch some sleep*. So, Jack and the five students in his class would sit outside on the front steps in nice weather and do their homework to hand in the next day.

You could go to Palisade schools, but getting there was a challenge. There was a school bus which mothers, would drive over the suspension bridge connecting Cameo to the Highway. "It was hippy hoppity" and Jack wasn't interested in that.

Life in Cameo

When the family moved to Cameo, they lived in a house which had been built as a boarding house. It was the first time Jack had a room to himself, and there was "plenty of room."

His friends decided to have a "Dick Tracy" Club. There had to be "good guys" and "mean guys" so the group voted who would be good and who would be bad, and split. The "bad guys" robbed the Cameo Mercantile, which was also the Post Office, by bending bars on the basement windows and crawling in. Though they had in mind only stealing candy bars and cigarettes, there was mail there as well. Because they "broke into the Post Office," Mesa County Sheriff Lumley was involved and gave they boys a "talking to." Jack was scared they would be sent to prison.

When the group of boys got older and braver, the group decided to blow up the big split rock near Cameo, known as the "Witches Head." They stole four cases of dynamite and a short fuse cord from the remote Cameo powder houses over a period of several months. Though the miners mostly used electric detonators by then, the boys knew how to use fuses to detonate the dynamite. When the day came, they lit the fuse and ran downhill, underneath the split rock. Fortunately, no one was hurt, the explosion just made a big noise, though their fathers were waiting for them at the bottom of the hill with willow sticks in their hands.

The Government Highline Canal belonged to Jack and his friends

The Grand Valley Water Users and ditch riders were very restrictive about letting people swim in the Government Highline Canal which runs through Cameo. Jack and his friends however,

thought the canal really belonged to them! They liked to swim near the Cameo Bridge and siphon. The ditch rider warned them to stay away, so the boys were not kind when he stopped to pick up the mail at the Cameo Post office. He would find one or two flat tires on his vehicle. Jimmy Dexter also learned to loosen valve stems enough so the tires would go flat later, at night.

There were two "chicken rocks" in Cameo. One was behind the school and actually shaped like a hen laying eggs. It was taken out when Public Service Co. replaced the buildings in Cameo with a coal-fired electric power plant *in 1957*. The second "chicken rock" was near Tunnel #2 of the Government Highline Canal below Cameo. Jack and his friends had to dive off the rock into the canal, or be called "chicken." This required swimming all the way through the (*1,655 foot long*) Tunnel #2 to get back out of the canal, however. They often ate lunch with "our girls" there.

Jack enlisted in the Marine Corps

After the eraser throwing incident and subsequent punishment at Palisade High School, Jack went to the Marine Corps. Recruiter in Grand Junction. He found they weren't taking 16 year olds that month, so the recruiter listed Jack's age as 17, so he became a Marine! Jack trained in San Diego, and was shipped to the Marine Base at Pearl Harbor which included a Naval prison. His duties, from 1942 until 1945, included guarding the dry docks at Pearl Harbor and going by a landing boat to atolls and tiny remote islands where Japanese were setting up weather stations. As accurate weather information was crucial for the Japanese pilots, the U.S. Marines would capture any Japanese soldiers setting up weather facilities on the atolls and take them to the prison at Pearl Harbor. They also destroyed any facilities constructed on the uninhabited islands. Jack rose to the rank of Corporal as a 19 year old, and "got to see all the Hawaiian Islands."

Jack remembers his first day in the Marines when he changed out of civilian clothes, leaving them next to his duffel bag. He then walked, naked, to the warehouse across the street to pick up his Marine Corp. clothing. He came outside again and saw a Marine going through Jack's civilian clothing. Thinking the man was trying to steal his wallet or money, Jack ran after him, still naked. The next morning at drills, Jack's name was called and he was marched to the beach and told to fill his pockets with sand. The pockets were sewn shut, and Jack was forced to wear the heavy, sand-filled pants all through boot camp.

Jack's Career after the Military

After Jack was discharged in 1945, he was invited to his Cousin Bill's wedding. Jack didn't want to go, and instead, was driving around Grand Junction looking for girls when he came across a group coming out of a restaurant. It turned out to be the wedding party and his brother-in-law, Harold Kissell, said Jack should go to the dance. He pushed a woman in the car and also got in. The woman was Merle Ingram, the music teacher who became Jack's wife.

As foreman at the Cameo mine, Harold also got Jack a job there. He joined the United Mine Workers Union which held meetings above the Pool Hall (*The Livery on Main Street*) in Palisade. Jack became Secretary- Treasurer of the Union.

Jack was working at Cameo when he and Merle were married, but she didn't like him working there because it was dirty and dangerous. When Mother Nature put coal in layers, the water would bring down sandy rock or in some places, slate, to cover it. Coal veins go up and down.

The Cameo Mine used a shaker conveyor with long, cupped pans hooked together, rather than a belt conveyor. There was also a "duck bill" which scooped under the conveyor to get the coal out. When the layers of dirt were thin slate, wooden pillars were needed to hold up the rock and dirt. However, the timbers have to be removed for the swivel-armed shaker which leaves piles of "bug dust" next to it. Jack was taking out a timber for the "duck bill" and shoveling the dirt when there was a cave-in. Fortunately, he was next to a pile of "bug dust" which saved his life. His arm and leg were broken, and, as only aspirin and band aids were allowed inside the mine, he was in considerable pain. He was strapped into a wire basket, like a stretcher, and taken on the motor driven, 10-coal car train more than a mile and a half to the mine entrance. They took him to the bath house to wait for an ambulance. There were no ambulances in Cameo or Palisade, just Harold Voorhees' (*the undertaker*) hearse which took him to St. Mary's Hospital in Grand Junction. Jack said he has "already had his hearse ride."

When he was able to work again, Jack went back the mine. Harold Kissell waited until there was a job opening for a motorman, so Jack didn't have to shovel any more.

During the Uranium booms, construction was good. Jack got jobs building eight or 10 houses in Grand Junction. Merle enrolled him in a Grand Junction trade school operated by the Carpenters' Union. "He started getting educated." Projects Jack worked on included a fish hatchery by Hotchkiss, and the dining rooms at Rangely Community College. He also worked for little contractors, including Childs Construction in Palisade, to build smaller projects, including school buildings in Glenwood Springs, courthouse rooms, and an 11-sided school in Carbondale. The school project involved pouring an elaborate set of concrete stairs. Jack stayed up half the night on site to keep kids from messing up the concrete. He arrived at the school again the next morning to find the principal yelling at him for not staying all night. There it was, in fifth-grade handwriting, "God Bless America" scrawled in the concrete. The family moved for different projects until 1969 when they moved to Palisade so his daughters could go all four years to one high school.

As he worked for bigger companies, Jack learned more. He worked for a contractor to build a fish hatchery in Salt Lake City. It did not win the competitive bid, but Jack was able to find work and keep the girls in school in Palisade.

Jack eventually became a successful design engineer. As soon as Maura and Terri were out of High School, Jack applied for a job with Morrison Knudsen, which was headquartered in Boise, Idaho. He also worked for H. K. Ferguson, a Cleveland firm. He was a construction manager, starting from the ground up. His biggest project was a \$35 million stealth bomber system in White Sands, New Mexico. His design involved changing angles on the bomber so the reflected radar signals would create false readings. It was tested underground.

Merle was in Ogden when she passed away, and Jack retired from Morrison Knudsen and settled in Grand Junction where he and Maura's husband bought a house together. Merle was a music teacher and had a contract at Montrose before they were married. After the contract was over, she was a substitute music teacher. They always had music in the home, though it was not one of his talents or interests. Jack didn't have "much hobbies" because there was always work to do.

Palisade Memories

Jack has a Naeve Brothers Garage calendar and toothpick holder. Morey and Dean Naeve operated the garage at the end of 2nd street. Dean and Jack were in the same class. The Naeve family lived next door. Once, Jack went to the garage and pumped his own gas because there was no one at the garage. He went next door, and found the Naeve family was having a wedding! A younger brother (*Billy, had been killed in a sawmill accident in Oregon*) and died at a young age.

There was no theater in Cameo, so they saw movies at the Elberta Theater in Palisade. After seeing a movie, however, it was a long way to walk home. There was a 9 p.m. mail train with two or three passenger cars that stopped in Palisade. It would stop in Cameo if there was a passenger. So, Jack and his friends would pool their money for one \$.10 ticket. The others would "ride the rods" hanging onto to rail car underneath or wherever. Once in a while, the train wouldn't stop in Cameo, so everyone would have to walk back from DeBeque, the next stop.

Bill Benson's family owned a furniture store next to the Elberta Theater in the Hugus Building. They lived at *154 East First Street*. Jack and Bill were the same age. When there wasn't enough money for movie tickets, they would go to the attic of the furniture store and take off the ceiling screen so they could see the movie on the Elberta screen next door.

Jack respected Dr. Weidlein

Dr. Weidlein also had an office on the top floor of the Hugus Building. When the Webb family lived at the Bancroft's on East Orchard Mesa, they came down with scarlet fever and were quarantined. They couldn't go to school or anywhere. Dr. Weidlein would bring the family groceries. Dr. Weidlein was paid by the miners - \$.25 or \$.50 per paycheck, to take care of the miners and their families in Cameo. He would make rounds once a week.

Jack remembers the Joe Louis vs. Max Schmeling fight in 1936 which Louis won. Jack and his father walked to town to listen to the fight on the radio. They sat on the sidewalk near the still-empty lot where Jordan's Inn burned in 1915 listening to the fight on a radio in front of *Joseph Smith's* tailor shop on the west side of Main Street.

Sex Education from their teachers:

Jack and Dean Naeve, who lived on 4th Street, used to hunt brass and copper at the Town's landfill - located between Morey's Garage and the Troyer House *on North River Road* to sell to Mr. Davenport (*store replaced by the Post Office on 3rd and Kluge*). They had not been successful walking along the River Bank towards Dean's house. Then they noticed the 5th grade teacher, and Mr. Woods, the 4th grade teacher ducking under the 4th Street Bridge to Vineland, so the boys crawled up on the bridge. They had a perfectly good view of what the couple was doing below. Jack said he got better grades in school after that. "Palisade had a lot of education."

Summary by Priscilla Walker - 4/9/2016

The text in *italics* is not part of the original transcript and is added for clarification.