Palisade Historical Society
Oral and Video History Project
Interview

Oral History # _OH-48 #1 and OH-48 #2_____ Date: _04/08/1977 and 04/22/1977

Place _Palisade, Colorado_____ Length: _____

Interviewee __Levi Allison Clark_____ Phone: _____

Interviewer __Alice Sonda_____ Phone: _____

This is a summary of transcriptions of two oral history cassette tapes from the Museums of Western Colorado/Mesa County Historical Society.

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

Tape #1 – 04/08/1977

Levi was born near Humboldt, Kansas on September 25, 1889. His father was James Allison Clark, and his mother was Phoebe Jane Clark. Levi came to Colorado on March 6th in the year he was eleven years old (*1900*). Levi's father had been a farmer in Kansas, and he liked to raise fruit. When James was a young man, the railroad to the west had not been there for very many years, so excursions with special rates were offered for people to go out and see the new country. James traveled all over the west, specifically in New Mexico, Arizona, and Colorado and visited the fruit districts. James worked in the lumber industry until he was 22 years old. In those days, the children worked and gave their money to their parents to help with the family. When James turned 22, he went to Iowa and was working there on a farm when some of the men made arrangements to take a trip to Oregon. They traveled in wagons and gave James a job driving one of the teams. In those days, there were no roads to speak of – just trails. At night, they always had to guard the horses so they would not be stolen.

When Levi's family came to Colorado, they settled on some land on what is now known as Highway 6 & 24, where the Clark Trailer Court is now located. James built part of the house in the spring of 1900. He brought some of the lumber for the house from Kansas, shipping it in an "immigrant car." (*Immigrant cars were an inexpensive means of rail transportation of the day, usually having plain seats or benches and minimal facilities.*) The floors of the house were of hardwood boards four to five inches wide. The native lumber was a soft pine and not as suitable for some building. Other items, such as shingles, were shipped in, as well. The main part of the house consisted of four rooms, two rooms upstairs and two rooms downstairs. The rooms measured about 14 ft. x 14 ft., or 12 ft. x 14 ft. The kitchen and living room were downstairs.

At the time, Levi had one brother, James, four years older, and one sister, Bertha, eight years younger. His younger brother, Harry, was born in the Clark's Palisade home in October 1900. Levi's mother, Phoebe, did not like living here, as she was accustomed to living in a small farmhouse surrounded with cottonwood trees for shade. Here, there were no shade trees, and

they lived in a "homestead shanty" until the house was built. It was hot and dusty, and the wind blew every day. Their first summer there was exceptionally warm. Levi recalls they kept a thermometer on the shady side of the cabin, which registered 106 to 110 degrees every day for over six weeks.

Drinking water was hauled from the river in wooden barrels. That fall, James built a cistern, which was filled with water. Everyone depended on cisterns for water. After the spring runoff when the water cleared up, they bailed water from the irrigation ditches into the cisterns. It was filtered through gravel or sand to remove larger particles and trash. The house was heated with a coal stove, and they had an old-fashioned woodstove in the living room. They used both coal and wood for cooking.

Levi did not go to school until the next fall after they arrived in Palisade, so he missed a year of school. He attended school in Palisade in a two-room building that *later became* the Jordan Apartments (*at Kluge and 4th Street)*. This was just a grade school. Levi remembers Beulah Van Beuren was one of his teachers. Levi liked all of his teachers and liked going to school. Levi had gone to school in a little one-room schoolhouse when they lived in Kansas on what they called Onion Creek, which he supposed was named after the wild onions that grew around the schoolhouse. This was near the Neosho River, which Levi recalled had timber growing on both sides.

Since there were no trees on the place in Palisade, James got all of their trees from a nursery. He set out most of these trees himself – several varieties of peaches, about two and a half acres of sweet cherries, and five acres with alternating rows of apples and pears. Eventually, they pulled out the apple and pear trees because they did not do well. The only irrigation ditch in the area at the time was the Price Ditch (*on the north side of the river*). Without an irrigation ditch, they had to haul water from the river in barrels and use a bucket to water the little trees to keep them alive. Later, they were able to get more water via an irrigation ditch.

The land was raw and had to be leveled. The 22-acre plot James bought was mostly sandy ground, covered by short brush and prickly pear cactus. Greasewood grew on the north end of the property. This was flat ground, and one could see how over thousands of years, sediment washed down from the mountains. The sand was anywhere from three or four inches to a foot and a half deep. It was hard ground, and the gravel lay just beneath the sand close to the surface. All of this land was on what would become Highway 6 & 24, although it used to be called A Street. This was before there was any town at all, and it was just a roadway.

Levi thought his father paid $55 per acre for the land. On top of that, he had to pay for water, which cost $25 - $30 per acre for water rights. He paid cash for the land when he bought it in the latter part of the '80's (*1880's*). Then he went back home (*to Kansas*) to prepare for the move west. He had to sell off his livestock and rent the farm, which took considerable time. He came back out to Colorado on an immigrant car ahead of Levi's mother and the children. An immigrant car is a large railroad boxcar, on which you could haul your livestock, furniture, and sacks of feed. James had a team of good horses, a shorthorn milk cow, three or four dozen chickens, and three or four shoats (*young, weaned pigs*), which were raised to be butchered.

Levi came to Colorado later on a passenger train with his mother. There were no sleeping cars, and you had to stay in the seat you were assigned day and night. He recalls this became rather tiresome, especially for a youngster. When they arrived, it was a new adventure. James was staying with a man by the name of J. L. Oliver, who had a young orchard and some livestock near Palisade. In particular, Levi remembered Mr. Oliver's team of short, squatty horses called broncos. He used them as a work team. They grew alfalfa for feed, and James had brought some wild hay from Kansas, which the horses all liked, too. James' team weighed about 1500 pounds each, much larger than the local broncos, and they were quite the oddity for people in this area.

Levi's parents belonged to the Baptist Church for many years and then went to the Methodist Church, where they remained until they passed away. In the interview, Levi referred to his father being taken advantage of by preachers or deacons of the Baptist Church, which led to the family changing churches.

The first year they were living on the land, James set out a little over 500 trees, mostly peaches he bought from the Starks Brothers nursery. There were problems with the trees, as the varieties were not true to what was advertised. James had to bud the trees again himself, in order to get the desired variety, so there was a loss of several years' harvest and income.

The ground leveling had to be done with a team of horses, using what they called a "Mormon scraper," which striped the dirt from the high places and put it in the low places. They also created a grade so the irrigation water would run in one direction. Levi learned to irrigate as a youngster, although the sandy soil was a challenge, getting the water to go where it was needed. He learned to use small rocks along with the sandy soil to dam the ditches to regulate the water flow.

Levi talked about his father working as a young man in Oregon. They drove a team from Iowa to Oregon and worked for a large cattle company, which was owned by foreign capital (mainly British). They drove large herds of cattle from Oregon to the nearest railhead in Nebraska. Sometimes it was necessary to herd the cattle at night to keep the cougars from killing them. The cattle would become lame from being driven so far, and the calves would get weak, so they picked up the weaker cattle and hauled them in a freight wagon for a few days until they got stronger. Even at that, sometimes the company lost as much as 80% of the herd. The horses suffered, as well, having to live off of what grass they found as they were traveling, rather than having adequate feed. The cattle company did not supply feed such as grain for the horses, so they would get down to skin and bones. When the cowboys got the cattle to the railhead, they were paid. Many received an entire year's pay at once. The cowboys earned around six to eight dollars per month, plus board and a place to bunk. When the cowboys got paid, they rolled the bills (*currency*) up in a red bandana and tied it around their lower legs. After a day or two, most of the cowboys were broke again, losing their money to gambling, getting drunk, or getting robbed, sometimes by the "girls." (*Probably he refers to prostitutes*).

Here in the Grand Valley, farmers had to depend entirely on irrigation water, so good water and water rights were essential. The water came out of the Grand River, which is now called the Colorado River. (*Congress changed the name of the Grand River to the Colorado River in 1921, in order to better identify it by its location and source.*) Fruit growers were often plagued with

harsh winter weather, which sometimes damaged the fruit trees, and spring frosts killed part of the fruit crop. In a general way, the weather in the area has changed over the last sixty years or so, and it seemed to Levi, peaches bloom about two weeks later than they used to.

End of Side 1 of Tape 1
(*The transcript resumes in what appears to be the middle of a conversation about Levi's father being a cowboy.*)

After cowboying for a few years, Levi's father and another man went to Kansas, where they worked for a farmer by the month. After a few years, his father bought eighty acres of his own and a short time later was able to buy an additional eighty acres. Then a few years later, he married Levi's mother. She was 18 years old at the time, and he was 30 years old.

Living in Palisade, Levi and his friends took trips into the mountains and climbed the palisades. The boys usually had to help the girls climb. During high school, he met his future wife, Hazel Bess Hoffman. Hazel came from Kansas, but after they met in high school, Hazel's family sold out here and moved to Yampa, Colorado, at 8,000 feet elevation. Levi finished high school *graduating with the class of 1909,* after which time he helped his father in the peach growing business until Levi and Hazel were married in Yampa on Thanksgiving Day, 1911. Levi recalls that the snow in Yampa was knee-deep. At the time of their marriage, Hazel was 20 years old and Levi was 21.

Levi and Hazel had three sons. One son, *L. George,* was born in 1912 and another, *James A.* in 1914. Hazel's health was not good and they had no more children for thirteen years. Hazel wanted a girl, but they had another boy, *Warren E, born in 1927.* Their oldest and youngest sons are still alive and live near Palisade. Their middle son passed away at the age of 61 on September 6th just over a year before this interview took place.

Levi never lived in the town of Palisade until he moved to the nursing home. He lived at his parents' place, a two-story house on Highway 6 & 24 where Clark's Trailer Court is located. After Levi and Hazel were married, they lived in Vineland for the next eleven years. Levi's father talked him into buying the old family home, so they moved back there in 1922, where they lived until Hazel passed away. Levi was getting crippled and unable to take care of the place, so he decided to move to the nursing home in Palisade.

The Clarks grew mostly peaches but had some cherries and apricots. They shipped their peaches in 18- or 20-pound boxes, rather than in bushel baskets. For a number of years, Levi's father got between fifty and eighty-five cents per box for their peaches. This was paid by the (*fruit growers'*) association after expenses were deducted. In the several years after Levi was married, from about 1912 through 1915, prices dropped considerably, so the more peaches you raised and shipped, the more money you lost. During those years, prices were around 15-17 cents per box. Sometimes, rather than getting money for the peaches, they got a bill for the freight.

To begin with, they did not have any growers' associations. They shipped what little they had by express rail to towns in Colorado. Then as they got bigger crops, they shipped their fruit further east in railcar lots. By then, a million and a half bushels was considered a normal crop, but the

poor prices of fruit broke many of the fruit growers, so they left or pulled out their orchards. The same thing happened to the apple and pear growers further down in the valley. *(Uncontrolled damage from coddling moth also wiped out apple orchards in Fruita.)* It cost so much to spray the fruit for insects, many of them went bankrupt or pulled the trees out and tried to grow other crops to eke out a living. Some just found other work.

The most commonly used sprays back in those days were arsenate of lead and a lime and sulfur spray. Farmers used other, newer products as they were developed. Levi recalled that much of the apple market in the United States went to England. He tells of someone in England getting poisoned, and they thought this came from the arsenate spray on the apples. After that, they had to wash the spray off the fruit before shipping it.

They tried to grow as many varieties of peaches as possible, so the fruit did not all ripen at the same time. That way, a family could nearly take care of the harvest without hiring much extra help. At one time, Levi's father had over fifty varieties of peaches on his twenty acres. Later the number of varieties was reduced, and the focus was on growing varieties that would withstand shipping. They had peaches starting to ripen by July 4th, and the last to ripen was a Bilous October Late, which was a white, freestone peach that ripened in October.

In later years when fewer varieties were grown, it was necessary to hire help to harvest the crop. They hired other ranchers in the valley who did not grow fruit, and some people came from the surrounding area, like Plateau Valley, to help. It was not long before this was insufficient, so they hired transient workers (hobos) who heard about harvest and rode freight trains into the area in great numbers. The growers provided bed and board to these workers during harvest time. All of that has changed now, and getting labor to harvest the crops is always a problem.

Many growers had to find other work in the wintertime, in order to make a living. Levi pruned orchards for other growers, worked on building new irrigation ditches, and worked in a blacksmith shop, where he was paid 15 or 20 cents an hour, and on construction jobs. He also worked in the coal mines. At one time, Levi bought a team (*of horses*) and worked them on construction jobs. One year, he went to Routt County and hauled lumber, pulp, and ties down to the nearby coal mines. Often, they were unable to use wagons in the winter and instead used sleighs in the snow.

In those days, Levi worked at just about any job he could find, in order to make a living. There were people who looked down on those who worked for companies or public works, saying such work was beneath them. No work was "beneath" Levi, and he always had some money coming in. He began investing in other orchards, sometimes seeing opportunities others did not see. Sometimes others would question Levi's judgment, but in time, he had four orchards (40 acres total) which was considered a lot in those days. There were good years and bad years, but Levi did not borrow money and relied on the money he made from his crops in order to acquire more acreage.

End of Tape 1, Side 2

Tape #2, Side #1 – 04/22/1977

In 1921, an Act of Congress changed the name of the Grand River to the Colorado River. The origin of the Grand River is Grand Lake, and the Grand River ran down to the junction with the Gunnison River (*in Grand Junction*). From there on, it was known as the Colorado River. This Act changed the Grand River portion of the river to the Colorado River, so the entire river now has one name, running from Grand Lake to the ocean.

When Levi was a youngster at the end of the 1800s, (he was born in 1889), tomatoes were not considered to be edible unless they were cooked. He and his brother, *James*, who was four years older lived on a farm. Like other farms, they had milk cows and pasture down along the river or "crick" called Muddy Run. Levi and his brother would get some salt, which they would put in a red bandana, and then they would cautiously go down between the grape arbor and the weeds and shrubbery to the garden. There they picked a few tomatoes and ate them where no one could see. They never got sick from eating the raw tomatoes. Tomatoes were cooked and canned (*preserved*) in earthen or metal jars, to keep them from exposure to light, and the jars were sealed with sealing wax to make them airtight.

Levi's brother, James Henry Clark, was not physically strong, so people thought he would not be able to do heavy work. Instead, he went to Fort Collins, where he got a college education. Levi's parents badly wanted James to be a fruit grower, and they gave him a small orchard. He was married to a school teacher and they had two daughters, but things did not work out so they separated. James was more inclined to do small, detailed work with his hands, and was never successful at farming. Levi talked about his brother getting fresh mussel shells from the river where they lived in Kansas and using a grindstone and file to shape them into small crosses and hearts. Levi recalls at one time when he was a very small boy, his father had a phrenologist come in to examine his brother. The examination consisted of feeling the bumps on your head and was supposed to tell you what was naturally good for you. The phrenologist said James would be good at making tin ware or doing other things that require fine, accurate detail. They told Levi he would be a good ranch foreman. (*Phrenology is an old, now defunct study of the structure of the skull to determine a person's character and mental capacity.)*

Levi's sister, Bertha Edna Clark, was eight years younger than Levi and was the only girl in the family. She was a healthy girl with blond hair and red cheeks – the picture of health. After high school in Palisade, she went to college in Greeley and Gunnison to get a teaching degree. She taught school for a year in a schoolhouse somewhere in the western part of Mesa County. Levi could not recall the name of the school. Then the second year in 1918-19, she got a job teaching school at Collbran. This was the year the *Spanish* influenza epidemic struck. Bertha caught the flu and passed away in February 1919. Bertha never married. Getting a teacher's certificate took time, so she could not get married and have a family at the same time while she was completing her education. Bertha is buried in the Palisade Cemetery along with her parents and two brothers. A niece is also buried in the family plot.

The doctors did not know a lot about the flu, and they had no cure for it. People did not die of the flu – they died from pneumonia. According to Levi, the healthier you were, the more likely you were to get pneumonia and die. The flu epidemic was worldwide, and soldiers in the war died by

the thousands. There was a doctor in Palisade at the time – Dr. Brown. St. Mary's Hospital was in Grand Junction on the east end of Colorado Avenue. It was a small set-up at the time.

Levi had another brother, Harry Earl Clark, who was born in Palisade in October 1900. Harry raised fruit here in the valley but died at a young age from alcoholism. There were not many bars or saloons in Palisade. In the pioneer country, a saloon was one of the very first things to be built just as soon as there was a general store, or even before! There was usually some sort of gambling hall, maybe in a basement or in some shanty. Churches came along later.

In the early days, there was one general store in Palisade (*run by two men, brothers-in-law, Spitler and Songer)* which carried necessary things and some edibles. For anything else, you had to go to Grand Junction. Lumber was a scarce item, except for pine, but all of it had to be shipped in from other places. There were sawmills out around in the mountains where you could get pine – rough-sawn boards in 4-, 6-, and 12-inch widths. Shingles and many other items came from elsewhere via rail. The railroad came to Palisade in 1890, and narrow-gauge came to Grand Junction, Delta and Montrose in the fall of 1882. The reason the narrow gauge railroad came into those areas earlier was because of the mining industry – gold, silver and other minerals. The mail came via the railroad. Every so often along the track would be a depot and a water tank for the steam engines. They could not go long distances without using water. There was a pump and water tank in Palisade, where the engines took on water.

There was rarely a need to go anywhere other than Palisade and Grand Junction, as these two places had about everything one would need. Grand Junction was the county seat, so official, legal business was taken care of there. People attended celebrations in Glenwood Springs for Strawberry Days, and they had the hot springs pool and baths there. For two or three dollars you could get a roundtrip ticket to ride the train to Glenwood Springs to enjoy the day. The young people especially liked going to the hot springs, as there were pools of different temperatures.

As a youngster, Levi fished in the Grand (*Colorado*) River. He recalled that the fish here were larger than the ones that lived in the little creek that ran through their place in Kansas. Here in Colorado in the early days, there were no worms to begin with. If you heavily fertilized the ground in the spring, you could get grub worms for bait. Levi recalled a boy who lived in town and raised grub worms, selling them at six for a nickel. Levi bought worms from him and got a chalk line and some hooks to fish with. He tied one end of the line to a cottonwood tree and put a rock on the other end and threw it out into the water. Later he came back and had caught two big suckers, over twenty inches long. They were full of bones but he liked the taste of sucker meat even better than trout in the springtime. You had to know how to handle them and pick out the bones. Even then, you had to be careful of bones with every bite you took.

When Levi got a little older, he went up on the mountain (*Grand Mesa*) to fish and hunt. The lakes were stocked with trout, and some had native fish. When white people first came to the area, Mesa Lakes was known as Fish Lake. You could catch natives and rainbow trout, and later other varieties were stocked in the lakes. The native trout had different markings than the rainbow trout, with a reddish streak down each side and black spots all over. They did not have as many bones as the river fish, and because they lived in colder water they had a better taste.

Levi recalled in the early days there were no roads up to the lakes, so you had to go by horseback or maybe with a team of horses on the running gears of a wagon. There were trails up to the lakes, so dams could be built and the lakes could hold more water. Workers had to pull light machinery up the trails without horses to construct the dams. The dams were built gradually as they were needed. Ranchers built the dams to contain water collected from the melting snow. It ran down through headgates and irrigation ditches and was used to grow hay and other crops below.

Most of the animals on the mountain were deer, but there were a lot of coyotes, wolves, both black and brown bear, and a few grizzlies. The grizzly bears were eventually killed out because they were so ferocious.

End of Side 1, Tape #2

Levi and others hunted mainly for deer, although they were not as plentiful then as they are nowadays. There were very few elk back then. Later on, laws were enacted to protect the wildlife, so the herds gradually got built back up. Even after the laws were passed, ranchers still killed the game, since it was their main source of meat. Levi recalls only a few times when he saw bighorn sheep, mainly on their winter ranges around Glenwood Springs. Their numbers decreased as they lost habitat with more people moving into the area. This is similar to what happened when the white man came west and took over territory where the buffalo lived, resulting in their near extinction. Buffalo are now raised like cattle in a tame state, so there are more of them now. Levi used a "deer gun," a 30-30 rifle, to hunt deer, although there were still some black powder guns in use at the time. The 30-30 was quite accurate, although much of the accuracy depends on the shooter, not the gun.

Levi recalled there was an Indian School south of Grand Junction where they now have a mental home. (*He refers to what was called the Teller Institute, operated by the Federal government. It closed in 1911 and the Native American students were returned to the reservations. The land was turned over to the State, where a decade later, the State Home for Mental Defectives was built. It was renamed the State Home and Training School several years later and is now known as the Grand Junction Regional Center. This facility is located on the Riverside Parkway, formerly D Road, and 28 Road.*) At the time, it was a school for Ute Indians and was quite a large school. (*Indian children from other tribes were also sent to the Teller Institute.*) The Indian children, both male and female, came from the reservations where they were relocated in 1883. Many of the students came from Utah, but lacking local funds to educate the Indian children, they were sent to the Indian School in Grand Junction.

Levi tells of his father's younger days when he lived in Washington and Oregon. In those times, there were Indians on the reservations and very few white men in the country. The young Indian men went out on rampages and bloodthirsty adventures, killing and scalping people. Most of the white people in these areas were cattlemen and miners, and there were very few homesteads. If the young Indians went off the reservation and attacked women and children, the men banded together to hunt them down and kill them. The prevailing attitude toward Native American people at the time was reflected by the now offensive adage, "the only good Indian was a dead

Indian." According to Levi, his father treated Indian people well, as long as they behaved themselves.

There were no Indian families in Palisade to Levi's knowledge, although some of the boys (*presumably from the Teller Institute*) hired out to work in the fields and orchards. Levi had one Indian friend, Juan Kisto, when he was a teenager. Some of the white girls found him quite attractive, but he would never marry any of them. Eventually, Juan married an Indian girl, and the last Levi heard of him, he was living in the Denver area and owned a wholesale plumbing business.

The earliest industries in the Grand Valley were farming, gardening, and fruit. Fruit growing became the main industry, but as more people moved into the area, other industries developed. In Plateau Valley and Unaweep Canyon, people irrigated the land and raised sheep and cattle. At one time, there were quite a few sawmills in the area, so you could get rough-sawn boards. Gradually, the mining industry developed so coal became available, which was easier to use for heating than wood. One industry built upon another, and the railroad came in, creating markets for shipping goods in and out of the valley.

At first, the fruit industry was good, although it had its ups and downs. At one time, Fruita was great fruit country – that is how it got its name. Now, there is no fruit there, and everything has been converted to general farming and raising livestock. Levi said the fruit industry went into decline when prices dropped and the growers could no longer make any money at producing fruit. Many growers went out of business, pulled out their trees, and went to general farming or other pursuits. At one time, the upper end of the valley shipped a million and a half bushels of peaches every fall. Now, they're way, way down for a number of reasons. The prices for fruit was the main reason. *(and the winter kill in 1962-63 which wiped out most fruit trees in Palisade.)*

According to Levi, the town of Palisade pretty much ran itself in the early days. Later, there was a town board and a mayor. Political parties over the years have changed their names. There were Whigs and Tories before the Republicans and Democrats. When the two-party system came into being, it was much different than it is now. They stole planks from each other's platforms to call their own and attacked President Taft. Politics always was corrupt and still is.

Levi thought President Taft was a good man and good President. When Levi was in high school, President Taft visited the Grand Valley. He was a large, heavy man. Palisade had what they called Palisade Day, and they always had a Peach Queen. Levi was on the ball team, and they went down to play the Grand Junction High School Team. The Palisade team won the game by a score of 12 to 2. He remembers President Taft sitting on the platform and Levi knew the Peach Queen. There were some musical solos and the main soloist was Jack Watson, a minister's son who was wild as a hare! One of the songs they sang was "When You Wore a Tulip and I Wore a Big Red Rose."

Levi thought Taft was a fairly good President for businessmen, but not so much for farmers. Of course, it was that way with all of the Presidents. It seemed there were different laws for farmers than what they had for industrial businessmen. In the old days, all you needed to get into the

farming business was a team of horses, a harrow, and a plow. Nowadays, it takes a great deal of money to start up a farming business, having to buy expensive equipment, as well as the land on which to grow your crops. One of the only remaining ways to get into farming is through inheritance. It seemed to Levi that people took advantage of the farmer, partly because of his lack of formal education. The general public has not come to realize their very existence and livelihood depend on the man who grows their food.

End of Tape 2, Side 2. Six minutes of blank tape left on Side 2.

According to the 1930 Census, Levi and Hazel's children were L. George Clark, born 1913, James A. Clark, born 1914, and Warren E. Clark, born 1927.

Summary written by Gary Hines for the Palisade Historical Society, 02/18/2016