

Palisade Historical Society
Oral and Video History Project
Interview

Oral History # 24

Date: 1989-90

Place: Grand Junction, Colorado

Length: 00:46:49

Interviewee Mary Kathryn Aspinall White

Phone: N/A

Interviewer None

Phone: N/A

Wayne Aspinall is considered one of Palisade's most famous citizens, primarily because of his service in Congress. The subject of this Oral History, Mary Aspinall White, was Wayne's sister. She passed away on October 13, 2004. According to Mary's granddaughter, Stephanie Sangberg, Mary recorded her own oral history on cassette tape sometime around 1989 or 1990, most likely at her home in Grand Junction, Colorado. The original cassette tapes were converted to digital format.

The audio files for this transcript consist of 13 tracks in mp3 format, which are summarized individually here. Mary is the speaker on the recording, and it seems she is reading from a prepared statement. Some parts herein are direct quotations, and the balance is a summary of her spoken words. Words in *italics* were added by this writer for purposes of clarification.

Background (from Wikipedia) - Wayne Norviel Aspinall (April 3, 1896 – October 9, 1983) was a lawyer and politician from Colorado. He is largely known for his tenure in the United States House of Representatives, serving as a Democrat from 1949–1973 from Colorado's Fourth District. Aspinall became known for his direction of the House Interior and Insular Affairs Committee, of which he was the chairman from 1959–1973. Aspinall focused the majority of his efforts on western land and water issues.

Track 1 – Length 00:03:45

Mary's father, Mack Aspinall, was born September 11, 1872, in Carey, Ohio. His parents were William and Amanda Jane Dickinson Aspinall. His formal schooling was limited, but he wrote well, was good in mathematics, and read a lot. As a boy, he worked in the woolen mills from which he developed asthma, later resulting in other allergies. Coming to the dry Colorado climate helped.

Mary's mother, Jessie Edna Norviel, was born in Union County, Ohio on January 6, 1875. Her parents were Lewis and Elnora Townsend Norviel. Jessie's mother died when she was young, so her father married Ella J. Seaton. Ella was the grandmother Mary knew and loved. She was always happy and is remembered for her sense of humor.

Jessie and Mack were married on July 4, 1895, in Logan County, Ohio. They lived on a farm near Jessie's father until coming to Colorado. Because of complications after their son Ralph's birth, Jessie suffered ill health. Because of the cold, dampness, and prevalence of tuberculosis, she needed a drier climate. The move to Colorado prolonged her life, but she remained frail and was never truly well.

The family first settled in Wray, Colorado, having moved to Colorado in an immigrant car which carried household goods and animals together. As far as Mary knew, they did not have any animals with them.

In Wray, they soon heard of a valley in western Colorado where fruit orchards were being planted. Mack left Jessie and the two boys, Wayne and Ralph, to visit the Grand Valley and decided it would be a good place to live. Back in Wray, the boys were ill with scarlet fever, and because of quarantine, they could not move right away.

The Aspinall family moved to Palisade in 1904. It was desert country, so it took time and work to plant an orchard. Mack became a fruit farmer, nursery man, and carpenter, as well as a respected member of community. He was honest, hardworking, and fun. He loved to fish, especially on Grand Mesa, but he also fished in the river. Mack died on July 28, 1947, while returning with Mary's stepmother and her son from a few days at his cabin on Grand Mesa.

Back in Ohio, Jessie was a member of the Friends (Quaker) Church, and later when they settled in Palisade, the family became members of the Palisade Methodist Church.

Track 2 – Length 00:04:16

In the fall of 1919, Mary and her mother, Jessie, went to Ohio for a seven-week visit with the family. Visits back east had to be during the colder months when there was less work to be done in the orchards. As they were preparing to return to Colorado, Jessie caught a cold, which turned into pneumonia and pleurisy. She did not recover and died November 30, 1919, at her father's home near East Liberty, Ohio. Mary's parents are buried in the family plot in the Middleburg Cemetery in Ohio. They were returned to the rolling green hills they so loved.

Mary's oldest brother, Wayne Norviel Aspinall, was born April 3, 1896, near East Liberty, Union County, Ohio. He was eight years old when the family moved to Palisade. He was born to be a public servant and followed Grandpa Norviel's footsteps. He became a teacher and statesman and had a successful career, knowing he had made a difference. Mary and her husband, Leonard, and their children, James and Darrel, had a memorable visit with Wayne in Washington D.C. Wayne died October 9, 1983, and is buried in the Orchard Mesa Cemetery in Grand Junction, Colorado.

Ralph Dickinson Aspinall was born on July 30, 1897, near East Liberty, Ohio. He was seven years old when he came to Palisade. He had a gentler, happier disposition than Wayne and was well liked. Their mother was especially close to Ralph. He quit school when he was a senior in high school to become a fruit grower. Another ambition was to be a cattleman in the Collbran, Colorado area, but that was not to be. Ralph was a member of the fruit growers' association, working to promote the industry, and was an active member of the Orchard Mesa community. He died during peach harvest on August 25, 1969, and is buried in the Orchard Mesa Cemetery, Grand Junction, Colorado.

Mary was born on a cold wintry day on January 13, 1909. At the time, her grandparents William and Amanda Aspinall lived nearby. Her grandmother was a willing helper in her first care. They did not stay long in Palisade because the mountains seemed to close in on them, so they returned to a farm in Ohio. The Norviel family came to visit only once. Mary's Uncle Dick, who was a year younger than Mary, visited twice, most recently in 1983.

Track 3 – Length 00:03:15

Roy Aspinall, Mary's father's brother, bought his new bride to Palisade. She cried for two days and nights, so they returned home. Uncle Roy came again for another visit in 1945 or 1946, arriving in a plane his son-in-law owned. Then they flew on to Montana to see Mack and Roy's sister. The plane crashed in a wheat field along the way – it was demolished but they were not hurt.

A tent and a shack were the first home of the Aspinall family, located on a 10-acre tract in the Mount Lincoln District, about 1 ½ miles west of Palisade on First Street. They built a cistern for water and a two-story house became their home. A new house was built around 1916. At the time her father was building it, he stored lumber close by. In a strong windstorm one night, they thought their old house would be blown over, so the boards were used to stabilize the building. Mother was excited about their new house – it had kitchen cabinets and room for an indoor bath. Her death came long before the bathroom was ever installed. She looked forward to having a lawn and flowers, but the first efforts were necessarily put to planting orchards. The addition of the Government Highline Canal was a great help to the Valley.

Mary's mother loved music, played piano by ear, and had a good singing voice. Mary's father gave her mother a second-hand piano, so her mother played, she and Ralph sang together, and her father was a great whistler. Mary and Wayne were a good audience. They also had a mouth harp. Because her mother was not well, Mary was tended frequently by the boys. Mary was Wayne's sounding board for his law and political ambitions. Wayne often felt he was not understood, and their father thought he should settle for the life of a peach grower. Her father and Wayne were partners in a peach orchard on Orchard Mesa - a means to an end for Wayne, and a source of pride for her father. Wayne was an adept box maker, peach packer, and boss of the packing shed at harvest time.

Track 4 – Length 00:05:19

It was a struggle for Wayne to get his education. He attended the University of Denver and law school, ranked high in his class, and was a member of Beta Theta Pi, an honorary scholastic fraternity. He married his school days sweetheart, Julia Edith Kuns. She took on duties of managing the family and offered Wayne unwavering loyalty and support as he pursued and finished his education.

Ralph and Mary were particularly close – he was always understanding, gentle, and fun. He married Martha Woodburn upon returning from service in the Army near the time of their mother's death. Martha died a short time after they were married, leaving their daughter, Edna Jane, at less than two years of age. Mary was old enough to become Ralph's companion in his sadness. She, Ralph, Edna Jane, and their father lived together for a time. Mrs. Muntz was their housekeeper. Mary developed a close, lifelong bond with Edna Jane. Later, Ralph married Anna Muhr, and they became successful and respected fruit growers and members of the Orchard Mesa community.

Wayne and Ralph were both in the service during World War I. Wayne was in the Air Force and trained at Waco, Texas, while Ralph was in the Infantry in Kansas or Nebraska. Wayne returned to the service in World War II, serving in England and France. Ralph's death in 1969 and Wayne's in 1983 left empty places in Mary's life, but they left behind families who were also close friends.

Mary shared some of her early memories:

- Although she was quite young, she remembered the tears shed at the sinking of the Titanic.
- Mary remembered Wednesday night prayer meetings, particularly as Mrs. Hutchinson was saved every week. Mary thought church was boring, but it was nice to see people dressed up, and she made friends at church.
- Mary sometimes got into trouble exploring the orchards alone and remembered how the switch hurt her legs when they found her. She would sometime return muddy from playing in the irrigation ditches.
- A cousin of her father, whose last name was Valentine, came to visit from the East, bringing a girl about Mary's age. Gayle had pretty clothes and patent leather shoes, which she was wearing one day when Mary took her wading in the irrigation ditch – not a good idea.
- The shade from vines growing over the cistern kept the water cool, and they made a great playhouse. Mary remembered cleaning and whitewashing the cistern every spring, waiting for the water to clear, and making charcoal filters to clean the water. She remembered the pump and carrying buckets of water into the house.
- Her favorite dessert was white layer cake, but her father and Ralph were partial to vinegar pie, a custard-like dessert.
- Grandpa Norviel always sent maple sugar and maple syrup for them to enjoy at Christmas time.

Track 5 – Length 00:03:06

The refrigerator was a homemade cooler, which was set under a shade tree. It consisted of a frame with shelves, covered with burlap. A galvanized pan sitting atop the frame was filled with water, which seeped over the edge to keep the burlap wet. It kept the food cool but there were no ice cubes.

They had a treehouse in that same shade tree. Large nails were driven into the tree trunk for steps. One time, Mary caught her arm on a nail and tripped. She still has the scar. That was the end of the tree house.

Pet dogs did not seem to last long, as they usually sucked eggs or killed the chickens. The cats had funny, crooked tails. They were not allowed in the house, so in their hurry to get out, they often caught their tails in the screen door. Most of their pets were lambs, calves, and piglets, which would grow up and become food.

Butchering day was memorable. First, the pigs were shot, then scalded in a large iron vat, and the skin was scraped. Lard was made when the meat was cut up, and there was liver, heart, and cracklings from the lard for more immediate use. Mary's father had a smokehouse where he cured hams and pork shoulders. The pork tenderloins were choice, and they also made sausage.

They sold their butter to regular customers in town. It was sweet and clean. After churning, the butter was pressed in a one-pound mold with a design on the top.

There was work to be done year 'round. Ladders were used to prune the trees in winter, although some preferred stilts, since they made the work go quicker. Mary learned to make boxes for packing fruit as soon as she was big enough to reach the bench by standing on a picking box. The boxes were stored in a

loft in the shed until harvest time. It was tricky throwing the boxes through a hole in the floor to the catcher below, so they could be stacked in rows to the ceiling in preparation for packing fruit during harvest. Mary sorted and packed peaches, even after she was married. The extra money came in handy. Early spring brought on worries, as the crop could be lost in a hard freeze.

Track 6 – Length 00:03:37

Wire baskets were kept under each of the fruit trees. Oiled waste, kindling, and coal were placed in the baskets. When they were lit, they created smoke. (*Here, Mary is referring to the practice of smudging in the orchards to raise the air temperature during cold snaps in the spring to prevent the tender fruit blossoms from freezing.*) The entire valley was smoky during this time. Peaches, apricots, and cherries were grown around Palisade, while pears and apples were the dominant fruit crops in the Lower Valley.

People wore their clothes longer in the early days because wash day was such a chore. Mary first learned to iron handkerchiefs and dishtowels, later graduating to more complex work. Ironing was a hot job in the summer with the flat irons they used, so the arrival of electric irons was much appreciated.

Mary's best friend as a child was Leo Lloyd. They played together for about an hour three times per week. Leo wanted to be a doctor, so they "operated" on a variety of things, first hypnotizing their victims. Leo became a doctor practicing in the Durango area. He and Mary still keep in touch with each other. Mary wanted to become a nurse, but her father thought otherwise. She went to Greeley State Teachers' College (*also known as Colorado State Teachers College and now known as the University of Northern Colorado*) for two years to become a teacher.

Wayne took Mary for her first day of school at Mt. Lincoln School. They walked the mile from home to school but sometimes got a ride in a wagon if it was stormy. Mary's first grade teacher was Mrs. Wright. She was a sweet lady.

Leo (Skinny), Fat Griffith, and Mary competed for top grades in school. Tests almost made Mary sick, but her father expected good grades, and she had to be as good as Leo and Fat. The school was the center of the community, where meetings, plays, and parties were held. When Wayne graduated from Mt. Lincoln High School, Mary got to present him with a watch from the family.

Mary shared some Christmas memories. Once a package arrived from Grandpa and Grandma Norviel. Mary thought it might be a big doll she had wanted so much. The next morning, under the Christmas tree lit with candles, Mary found a doll buggy from her parents, the big doll she wanted, and a range and utensil set. These provided many hours of playtime for her.

Mary wanted a bicycle and recalled a neighbor girl had outgrown hers, so with a new paint job, the bike was like brand new to her. She and Leo, who got a bicycle about the same time, had great fun riding around the neighborhood. Both bikes met a tragic end, though – Leo wrecked his on gravel one day as they rode home from school.

Track 7 – Length 00:04:41

Mary's Uncle Melvin Norviel and his family moved to Palisade from Ohio. They had lost one daughter from tuberculosis and another was quite ill, living only a short time. Uncle Melvin's family lived with the Aspinalls for a while until they could get a place of their own. Mary recalled one day when Uncle Melvin decided to go for a bike ride. The bicycle frame was not strong enough to hold him, so it broke and could not be repaired.

One Christmas when Wayne came home on furlough during WW I, Julia came from her family's home in Nebraska. Julia gave Mary a doll and had made clothes for it. Mary cherished her special relationship with Julia.

Mary and her mother visited family in Ohio in the winter once every three or four years. The train ride was long - people were tired and hungry, there was poor ventilation, and along with the motion of the train, Mary sometimes felt ill from the trip. Arriving at their destination, Uncle A. C. Elliott met them at the station and took them home, where her Aunt Jenny had breakfast waiting. Mary recalled having fried mush with maple syrup.

The two-story house had a big kitchen and a music room with a piano and harpsicord. Bathrooms were a luxury in those days, but they had one. Grandpa Norviel would arrive to take them to the farm, supplying blankets and warm bricks for the trip. Grandma Norviel was tall and slender. She had beautiful, dark hair and often wore a black velvet ribbon around her neck. She had a good disposition, a keen sense of humor, and managed her household well.

The two-story farmhouse had a big kitchen with a pump, a dining room, a sitting room, and a parlor on the first floor. There was a large wood room adjoining the kitchen – it held not only wood but hides drying from the boys' trapping of mainly skunks and muskrats. Needless to say, the room had quite an odor! A veranda on three sides of the house provided plenty of room for swings and chairs. The bedrooms upstairs had feather beds, which kept you warm in winter, but they were damp and cold from the high humidity. A modern heater in the sitting room had a glass front so you could see the fire, and it was big enough to bank the fire to hold overnight. Coal had to be hauled long distance and was expensive. Chamber pots were for night use, and there was an outhouse with a good supply of catalogs at the end of the path. Water came from a deep well, pumped by a windmill. Minerals in the water turned utensils bright orange overnight. There was a stone springhouse with a stream running through it. The springhouse kept butter and milk cold and sweet. There was a barn with a hay loft, animals, chickens, and a wood rail fence.

Track 8 – Length 00:03:26

The small family farm consisted of an orchard, wood lot, and farmland. The area is now used as an experimental tract by companies for testing motors.

Mary's Grandpa Norviel never seemed to work – he had boys to do this. His interests were in politics and community affairs. He chewed tobacco, had a shiny brass spittoon, and was known to enjoy cigars. The grandmother Mary loved was Grandpa Norviel's second wife. His first wife, who was mother to

Mary's mother and her Uncle Melvin, died early. Growing up, Mary had uncles and aunts her age to play with. Mary spoke of other relatives—Donna, Georgia, Dick, and John.

On a visit to Ohio, Mary's mother became ill as they were preparing to return to Palisade. After her mother's death, she and her father were caught in the nationwide railroad strike while returning to Palisade. They spent a long time in the Chicago train station. Not knowing when a train might be called, they were hesitant to leave the station, but on a Sunday, they finally went to a picture show, which was against her father's staunch principles.

Track 9 – Length 00:02:33

Finally, they were able to get underway on their journey back to Palisade. Since the train had no diner, they stopped at a Harvey House for breakfast. Her father ordered a big breakfast, and since Mary did not know if they had enough money to pay for it, she pretended not to be hungry, even though her father urged her to eat. Later, she found out the meal was the same price, no matter how much you ate.

Grandfather and Grandmother Aspinall lived on a farm near Middleburg, Ohio. One of Mary's memories was going to the chicken house for eggs and encountering chicken lice, which got all over her. After that, she had to have a good scrubbing. Later they moved into a small home in Middleburg. The town pump was on the corner, and since Mary did not like the water on the farm, she enjoyed getting a good drink from it. Her grandfather was known as Uncle Billy to everyone in town. The townspeople were kind to him after her grandmother's death. He had palsy, or Parkinson's disease, and at that time, there was little treatment for it. Uncle Roy and Aunt Daisy were close by and saw to his care. Mary and her father returned to Ohio one other time when she was a junior in high school.

Track 10 – Length 00:03:36

Mary fondly remembered special times with her father. Grand Junction was far enough away from Mt. Lincoln that they could not go more than once or twice a year. There was the fair in the summer, with Indians, including Chipeta, in full dress, and sometimes Mary got to go to town at Christmas time. Her father especially enjoyed the circus and watching them unload the animals in preparation for the parade. One of Mary's most memorable times was seeing Madam Pavlova and her troop perform at the Opera House. Tickets were ten dollars.

Mary went to school at Mt. Lincoln School from first through eighth grade. She completed second and third grades and seventh and eighth grades in one year each, so she was sixteen years old when she graduated from high school. She went to Palisade High School for two years, but then the Mt. Lincoln District bought a school bus and transported the high school students to Grand Junction High School. The bus came early to pick them up and left right at closing time for the return trip to Mt. Lincoln. Mary maintained good grades and graduated with her class of 114 students. Commencement ceremonies were held at the Avalon Theater at 7th and Main Streets in Grand Junction. In the fall after graduation, Mary entered Greeley State Teacher's College.

After Mary's mother died, her father married Rena Thacker. Her daughter, Hazel, became part of the family, and the two developed a close friendship. At the time of the recording, Mary still visited Hazel and her husband.

Track 11 – Length 00:04:04

Leaving home in the fall and not returning until spring, along with few letters and phone calls, Mary was homesick. She and three other girls shared a basement apartment in Greeley. Her total expenses for the school year were less than \$500, which included everything. Mary spent her first Christmas away from home in Denver with Wayne and his friends. It was a lonely time for her, but she persevered.

Mary holds a Life Certificate (*the equivalent of today's Teacher's Certificate*) from Greeley but is doubtful she could manage a class of first graders at this point in her life. She taught school for one year on the Eastern Slope, followed by a year in Clifton. After two years of teaching, her homemaking instincts took over.

One evening soon after arriving home from her first year of teaching, Mary went with Ralph and Anna to a dance at the Orchard Mesa Community Hall. There, she met Leonard White. They dated throughout the year and were married May 24, 1930, in Glenwood Springs, Colorado. They took a honeymoon trip to Salt Lake City, Utah. Mary recalled the beautiful party their family gave them to celebrate their fiftieth wedding anniversary. Leonard and Mary were married for 54 years.

Mary's husband, Leonard Lawson White was born in Manassa, Colorado on November 3, 1904. He was the son of James William White (August 26, 1878 – 1967) and Eva Cordelia Early White (September 6, 1881 – 1913). Leonard's brother, Lee White, was born September 24, 1903 and died October 30, 1986. Leonard and Lee were the best of friends throughout life. They had two sisters who died at an early age – Artis Cleo (August 9, 1900 – 1902) and Vera Mae (June 29, 1906 – 1910).

Leonard's mother died when he was nine years old in Grand Junction. After her death, Leonard and Lee lived with their grandmothers in the San Luis Valley until their father brought them back to Grand Junction. Their father did custom thrashing. Leonard's father then married Myrtle Buchanan Peterson, so his stepsister, Helen, and half-sisters Beverly and Shirley made up the family.

Lee and Leonard graduated from Ross Business College in Grand Junction. Leonard worked for the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad, beginning in 1924 as a clerk in the master mechanic's office, and then transferring to train service in 1937, where he worked as a brakeman and then as a conductor. He retired March 30, 1970.

Track 12 – Length 00:03:41

After they were married, Mary and Leonard lived in apartments between June and December 1930. Mary had enough money for a down payment of \$450 on a house, so by Christmas, they were in their own home on North 12th Street. They lived there for 18 years. The boys enjoyed playing in the large yard.

Walter Lee White was born March 18, 1931; Darrel A. White was born March 11, 1940; and Leonard James White was born December 25, 1943.

Mary and Leonard sold the house on North 12th Street and bought lots on Houston Avenue, along with a home at 1310 Houston. This was to be Grand Junction's first subdivision, but in the beginning, sagebrush was the most common shrub. Leonard thought they should invest in a duplex as a safety measure in case something happened to him. Mary could return to teaching, and the rental income from the duplex would cover the mortgage. They bought a duplex on North 6th Street in the Bronson Subdivision and lived in half of it for a short time until they could build a new home, which Leonard designed, at 1325 Houston. After Leonard retired, he took over work on keeping up the duplex, but they soon sold it so they could better enjoy retirement.

In retirement, Mary and Leonard traveled and pursued outdoor recreation, including camping, jeeping, and boating. They bought a boat and spent time at Lake Powell, as well as Lake Mead and Lake Havasu. They took a trip to Alaska and enjoyed spending part of their winters in southern Arizona. One memorable trip was when they drove to Nova Scotia to see the fall colors. At the time of this recording, Mary was approaching 81 years of age.

Track 13 – Length 00:01:30

Mary shared some final thoughts. She is now the matriarch of her family and said, "I am in pretty good shape for the shape I am in." She has had good friends along the way. She views each day as a blessing, as she continues to live independently for the most part in her own home. She is proud of her three sons and their families, as was their father.

She has seen the development of modern conveniences to make our lives better and easier, like the telephone, radio, television, and worldwide communication. She noted the advancement from horse and buggy to airplanes and the space age. For her, this is a glimpse into the peaceful world she hopes for all people. Mary has had her share of problems, sorrows, and joys like anyone else, and she expressed her love for her children and grandchildren.

Transcribed for the Palisade Historical Society by Gary Hines, September 2020