

Palisade Historical Society
Oral and Video History Project
Interview

Oral History # 19

Date: 03/30/2016

Place Palisade Historical Society History Center

311 S. Main St., Palisade, CO

Length: 27:35

Interviewee Ida Louise McKay Shrum

Phone:

Interviewer Charlene Weidner

Phone

Videographer: Gary Hines

This is a summary of an oral history interview, which is preserved on DVD. A copy of the DVD is available at the History Center.

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

Family:

Ida's grandparents were John and Ida Belle McKay and Gustav and Jennie Haggbloom. The Haggblooms had twelve children. Ida's father was Clarence McKay. His nickname was "Curly". He was born in 1895 in Ransom, Illinois. He worked for Fred Bower at the Bower Garage in Palisade. He died in 1964 in Meeker, Colorado. Ida's mother was Hazel Haggbloom McKay, born 3/16/1898 in Leadville, Colorado and died in 1956 in Grand Junction, Colorado.

Ida was born on 3/22/1931 at the McKay home on Brentwood Drive in Palisade, Colorado. She had a sister, Phyllis McKay Wagner, who was eight years older.

Ida married Marvin Morris Shrum on 9/25/1948 at the Methodist Church in Palisade. Marvin was born 1/29/1928 in Cordell, Oklahoma and died on his birthday, 1/29/2013, in Clifton, Colorado. Ida and Marvin had two children, Daryl Shrum, born 11/22/1952 currently living in Clifton, and Kirk Shrum, born 4/27/1961 currently living in San Francisco, California.

At the beginning of the interview, Ida read a prepared written account of her family history and stories, entitled "The Swede and His Bride." The following is an approximate transcription of her story:

My grandparents came into this valley from Leadville, Colorado in 1906. Gustav Haggbloom was born in Sweden in 1853 and came to the United States at the age of 17. He met and married Jane Jennie Aller in 1876 in Pennsylvania. Jennie was born in 1860. Jennie and her brother, Walter, were orphaned during the Civil War. The newlyweds came to Denver, Colorado in 1877, one year after Colorado became a State. In 1879, they moved to Leadville, Colorado. I often wondered, how did they travel? by train? or by wagon? They were so brave to travel the mountains high in God's untouchable beauty.

Gus went to work in the silver mines in Leadville, and he and Jennie established their home there. They lived across the street from an Irish family with twelve children. The gypsies would come into the area. The Irish woman would put her husband and children in the house and sit on the porch, gun in hand. The gypsies tied up Jennie one time and stole money and many items. One time, Jennie was visiting the Irish home at suppertime. The Irish woman noticed one of the children was missing. Jennie made the remark, "How would you know if one was missing since you have so many?" This angered the lady, and she said, "You, too, will have many children."

Gus and Jennie had twelve children. Their firstborn son was Clyde. As a young man, he joined the Merchant Marines and traveled to many countries. On one trip, they were docked at San Diego. The Captain ordered them to start up the boilers. The crew reported that the boilers had become too hot. He replied, "Do as I ordered!" They went below and the ship exploded, killing all. There is a monument in the bay in San Diego listing their names.

One child, Irene, had seizures so severe she had to be held down to feed. Jennie was hanging clothes with Irene near. An old prospector came out of the mountains and said, "What's wrong with her?" Jennie replied, "A seizure." The mountain man said that when he came back, he would bring some mountain herbs. Later he returned, Jennie gave Irene the herbs, and the seizures stopped.

Gus had his eye put out in the Little Johnny Mine, so he bought the L. W. Johnson Saloon and Brothel. He was shrewd – he didn't drink heavily, so he gambled and won many games when others became drunk and lost due to it.

Gus' brother, Albert, came from Sweden. Albert said he wouldn't marry an American woman. He saved his money and brought a Swedish girl over. His plan worked very well until the Swedish girl took his money and ran off with a traveling salesman. A lesson well-learned!

Gus' cousin, Otto, was living with Gus and Jennie. He ventured to town one evening, and when he returned he had been severely beaten. Jennie did not speak Swedish, but when Gus came home and went into Otto's room he returned laughing. Otto, speaking no English and being friendly, walked up to some man and put his hand out to shake it. His first English words were, "Son-of-a-bitch!" A lesson well-learned.

Once, a woman knocked on Jennie's door crying. She thought Mr. Haggbloom had won a diamond ring from her husband in a poker game. Gus was asleep and Jennie crept in and found the ring. The woman identified it, and Jennie gave her back the ring. Later Gus got up and said, "Jennie, I thought I won a large diamond ring. Have the children been in my room?" Jennie replied, "No, I haven't seen it." I wonder if she ever told him the truth.

The school was on Chicken Hill. When they went to school, they discovered so many children spoke so many different languages, which caused chaos for the children and the teacher.

As you walked by the taverns, small change and silver dust would be swept into the street, and those who were down on their luck gathered it.

The Haggblooms traded at Haw (*Horace*) and Augusta Tabor's Country Store and Post Office. Haw Tabor grubstaked a couple of prospectors, who struck a rich vein. Haw bought them out and became vastly wealthy. He met Baby Doe at a brothel and divorced Augusta. He married Baby Doe and Augusta got a large settlement from the divorce court. Haw and Baby Doe entertained many celebrities and royalty. The silver stock market fell, and they became penniless. Before he died, Haw told Baby Doe not to sell the mine, and she lived at the mine shack. She would return baskets of food from the church and wore gunny sacks wrapped around her feet. She died in that mine shack.

Gus realized that, due to the silver market, he needed to move. He had heard of the wonderful Grand Valley. Gus and his brother-in-law, Walter Aller, formed a partnership. Walter and Louise Aller moved to Palisade in 1890. Walter filed for acreage under the Homestead Act. They built their small home, cleared the acreage, and planted peach trees. Gus had his large home built next to Walt's and came to Palisade in 1906, bringing his wife and five children. Due to the altitude and the climate, they had lost six of their children. These homes are still standing, Allers at 670 35 Road, and Haggblooms at 674 35 Road. The homes have been kept in good repair.

Their oldest daughter, Cora, was engaged to be married but contracted influenza, died, and is buried in the Palisade Cemetery. Their eldest son, Ernest, married Florence Ferguson in Palisade. Florence's brothers ran a gang between Wyoming and New Mexico. They would stop at the Haggbloom's home to rest and feed their horses. Gus came into the house to find all of the Fergusons sitting around the dining room table eating, while Jennie was eating in the kitchen. He asked her why she was in the kitchen, and she said they would not let her eat with them. Gus cleared the gang off his property. Guess you don't mess with that Swede!

The three youngest children, Irene, Hazel, and Louis attended Mt. Lincoln School. In their teens, they skated the canal, where Clifton and Palisade teens met. They built bonfires, ate snacks, and sang.

Gus made some home brew and had it stored in the cellar. Jennie had her church friends in for tea and Bible study. All of a sudden, they heard loud popping sounds. Jennie knew exactly what it was and called Gus to do something about it. He opened the cellar door, where beer bottles were exploding and glass was flying everywhere. He just shut the door and quietly disappeared into the barn.

The children all grew up and married. Gus and Jennie lived there until 1924 when their health failed. Then, they sold the property and moved to Guthrie Center, Iowa to live with their daughter, Irene. They died and were buried there.

Footnote: As I wrote this, I thought of the terrible hardships they had overcome. Only in America could this happen where a 17-year-old Swedish immigrant and a Civil War orphan could live the American Dream.

Ida remembers the German prisoners of war who were working on her father's property. They were very good-looking and worked well. One night her father took a load of peaches to the platform for shipping. An American soldier was there. He was very drunk and fell between the platform and the railroad tracks. The Germans picked up the soldier and leaned him up against a post, placing his gun beside him. Some of them spoke English. Someone asked why they didn't run away, and they said they were perfectly happy to be where they were. After the Germans left the McKay peach orchard, they went to work at Gus Epeneter's orchard. Gus called Ida's father, asking him why the prisoners refused to work. Curly had no explanation because the Germans had worked well for him. Ida suspects the German prisoners thought Gus was Jewish, so they would not work for him. The prisoners were moved to another orchard.

During peach harvest, which lasted about three weeks, migrant workers came in to help with the harvest. Some were illiterate, and Ida recalled that one woman had never slept in a bed – just on a pallet on the floor. One day, Ida's mother went into town to the laundromat. She had forgotten something, so she called the house. One of the women answered the phone and just kept repeating that she had never used the telephone. Ida was amazed that the Mexicans came there and lived among them. There was never any trouble, and no one was afraid of them. They set up tents for the migrant workers to live in. Ida remembers the Mexican women splashing water on the ground and stomping the ground until it was as hard as a floor. They were immaculately clean. Ida said her mother was a racist and gave the Mexicans the old outdoor toilet to use. The women came to Mrs. McKay and offered to keep the better outdoor toilet clean if they were allowed to use it. The women kept their promise, and the toilet was kept cleaner than it had ever had been. Ida visited the Mexican immigrants' tents frequently, where she came to love Mexican food.

During peach thinning season, Ida's father took one crew of Mexican workers to the orchard, and Ida took a second crew. She would work as fast as she could to get her work done ahead of the other workers so she could get to the canal to wash off the peach fuzz. One of her jobs during peach harvest was to clean out the fuzz bin on the peach grader. She would put the fuzz in bushel baskets and then ran to the canal to wash it off. The only baths they took during the summer were in the canal. Ida's father built a ladder to make it easier to get into the canal. She recalls one time when there was a snake in the water with them. Her mother jumped out of the water, leaving Ida with the snake.

Growing up was a wonderful time for Ida. She never felt afraid. Often, she walked the two miles into town to play with other children. They played kick-the-can and tag, running in and out of sheds and buildings. Then she would walk back home in the dark. No one locked their doors, and it was a peaceful, safe place to live. If you did anything wrong, your parents knew about it even before you got home!

Ida remembers family gatherings at her Aunt Jessie's home, especially around Memorial Day. The band played, and they decorated the graves. There were always lots of relatives around. She

remembers her uncles piling their plates high with food, and the tradition was to stick a piece of celery up into the pile of mashed potatoes on their plates. Ida said she finally got to eat at “the big table” when she got married.

Ida attended school in Palisade until 1948 when she married. She attended Rangely High School in her senior year but returned to Palisade to graduate with her class in 1949, per her mother’s request. Mrs. (*Jeanie*) Milleman, who taught math at Palisade High School for many years, made a big impression on Ida. She taught Ida, as well as all 13 of her cousins. Mrs. Milleman had a unique way of maintaining order in her classroom. All she had to do was walk into the room or merely look at the class and it was immediately quiet.

Ida always worked in the family orchard when she was growing up, and when there was nothing to do, she would help other growers with their orchards. They picked cherries and apricots, even though the main crop was peaches. In the spring, they applied “tanglefoot,” a heated, sticky substance, around the trunks of the peach trees. This prevented cutworms from coming up into the trees and causing damage. Brush (*from pruning the trees*) had to be taken out of the orchard, and the irrigation had to be started. There was always something to do around the farm. In the wintertime, Ida’s father made boxes for shipping peaches. When Ida came home from school, she stacked the boxes. Working in the orchard with her father taught Ida to love working outdoors.

Ida was born in the McKay family home on the east side of Brentwood Drive, just before you go down the hill into the Grand Valley Canal area. The house was built by her grandfather in 1906. To the north of them was the Kester property, which was her Aunt Jess’ and Uncle John’s place. The Harry Clark (Jaime Clark’s grandfather) family lived across the street.

Ida remembers a man named Mr. McGinness, who owned a barber shop. He had a big keg of ginger snaps there. Ida thought it odd there would be a big jar of ginger snaps in a barber shop. She and her friends sometimes went to the fountain in the drugstore, where they would ask to have a little bit of each flavoring put into their drinks. Ida has fond memories of growing up in Palisade and thought they had a good live there.

Ida met her future husband, Marvin Shrum, at a dance at the East Orchard Mesa Community Hall. This was during World War II when Marvin was in the Navy. Ida was only thirteen years old, but she told her mother she was going to marry Marvin. At the time he was going with Carol McCoy from Palisade. Carol had a younger sister, Wilma, so Ida and Wilma sometimes took Carol’s letters to Marvin to the train station to put in the mail. Ida hinted that this was the means she used to “get rid of her competition.” The first date Ida had with Marvin was for a dance where the girls asked the boys. Marvin was living in Grand Junction at the time, but Ida asked him to the dance. Ida was proud of a pretty remodeled formal dress she acquired to wear to the dance. As they were dancing, she discovered that the stays at the waistline were coming out, so she spent much of the time during the dance in the bathroom trying to fix her dress. Marvin ended up marrying her anyway!

Marvin and Ida moved to Rangely, where he worked in the refinery for seven years. Then he transferred down to the Gilsonite Refinery (*which was near Fruita, Colorado*), where he worked for another seven years. After that, Marvin started his own business – a service station. At one

time, they owned five service stations. Marvin and Ida eventually started Shrum's Automotive Services in Grand Junction. Some of their best friends were Monica and Ed Swim. The Shrums and Swims formed a partnership, which worked out wonderfully for both families. Ed has passed away, and the Swim's son, Sam, is now owner of Shrum's Automotive. Ida takes her car there for service and is never charged because Sam feels he owes all of his success today to the two families.

Ida managed one of the first self-service stations in Grand Junction, Phillips Petroleum which was located on First Street. At the time, no one thought a self-service gas station would be successful, but it was, and Ida managed it for six years.

Ida and Marvin raised their two sons on 19 Road in Fruita and in Grand Junction. They were involved in sports with the boys, especially when their son, Daryl, was on the Grand Junction High School football team.

Marvin and Ida were always active members in the Messiah Lutheran Church. Marvin was involved in golfing and Ida enjoys oil painting.

Summary by Gary Hines 04/04/2016