

Palisade Historical Society
Oral and Video History Project
Interview

Oral History #0014

Date: 9/23/2012

Place: The History Center, 311 South Main St., Palisade

Length: 35:36

Interviewees: Arthur Keswick and Kathryn Wells Keswick

Phone: 408-223-0724

Interviewer: Priscilla Walker and Kathryn's niece, Nancy Morrison

Summary reviewed - November 2013

Arthur's family

Arthur's mother was born in Palisade and she married a man in California. They had seven sons and she died right after the seventh son was born. Since the father could not take care of all the sons, the three youngest were farmed out to other members of the family. Arthur came to live with his maternal grandparents, **Anthony and Mary Fidel**, when he was three years old. They raised him, and Arthur went by his grandparent's last name until he was a senior in High School when he turned 18 and had to register for the draft.

Art's grandfather was a coal miner and land speculator and was into everything. If he could make a buck he would try. He worked in the coal mines and peach orchards. The family has records showing Anthony had water rights in the valley for the Fidel ditch which he donated to the Grand Valley Canal.

The Fidel place was five miles from Palisade on East Orchard Mesa and his grandfather didn't drive, so it was hard for Art to be involved in after school activities. He did play football his senior year at Palisade High School and graduated in 1943.

Friendships were important. Arthur spent a lot of time with Paul Huber, Bob Rice, Paul McElvain, and Dean Aspinall. They worked in the orchards thinning, spraying, and harvesting, and on Grand Mesa at Paul Rice's cabin and fishing. Art thinks he had a good life. He was glad he was raised in a good place.

Arthur enlisted in the Army right after he graduated from high school and was stationed in the Pacific in **World War II**. He saw action in the islands south of Japan as they were preparing to invade Japan. Fortunately, Japan surrendered before he was sent in for the big push. He came back from the service and met his soul mate, Kathryn Wells.

Kathryn and Arthur did not know each other until after the war. She lived in Loma before coming to Palisade her sophomore year. She knew Arthur's brother, Henry Keswick, as a classmate. Henry came to Palisade with his parents, John and Marion Fidel, to look after Arthur's grandfather because they could no longer defer Art from military service in 1943.

Kathryn's Family

The Wells grandparents came to Palisade in 1904 and the Begg grandparent came in 1906. Robert Saunders, grandmother Begg's brother, is buried in the Palisade Cemetery. The Wells grandparents, Newman and Nancy Wells, are also buried in the Palisade Cemetery. Four families traded land back and forth in the area now known as Riverbend Park. The families included Robert Saunders, Newman Wells, James Begg, and Arthur's grandfather, Anthony Fidel. Newman Wells also started the Church of God located in Clifton.

The Begg side of the family was restless and homesteaded property in Collbran. They kept property in the Grand Valley, The Saunders side of the family stayed in the Valley. Roe Saunders, Robert's brother, was a Mesa County Commissioner. Tom was a mail carrier in the Loma area and Maude Baker, their sister, taught school at Loma.

Kathryn's parents lived in the rock house on Brentwood when they were first married in 1912. Her father, William Newman Wells, worked on the Government Highline Canal, and during this time, they were living in a tent.

Kathryn had three brothers and two sisters. She says it was like there were three families because of the age differences. The oldest brother, William Lionel, was 14 years older than Kathryn. He was the only child for six years, then Harold and Nancy were born close together. Seven years later, Kathryn, Myrtle, and Roscoe. Kathy felt she was the oldest of the younger group of children.

Larry Clark remembered William Newman Wells - "Gabby" - could drive a four horse team. There was a broken down orchard hoopie on the Clark's property that Larry and Roscoe Wells got running. Then Larry's father decided he would sell it.

Life in Palisade

In Kathryn's class, there were five students who competed in everything. These included Henry Keswick, Gus Epeneter, Phyllis Klensman, Janice Hampton, and herself. Because of the war, the school was short of science teachers. A history teacher filled in as the physics teacher, so everyone learned together.

Kathryn and her sister, Myrtle, thinned peaches. They both learned to walk on stilts - much easier than dragging a ladder around. Kathryn packed pears at the platform for school money.

It was hard to get help for the peach harvests during World War II. German Prisoners were brought to pick the crops. One time, two or three of the prisoners were missing when it was time to get back on the bus. They were found at the canal washing off the peach fuzz. She remembers them as very handsome men. There were CCC Camps around Fruita, Loma, and the one at Riverbend Park.

Art and Kathryn's Life

Arthur and Kathryn met when Art returned home from the service. It was a blind date arranged by Janice Hampton and Paul Huber. They decided to play tennis - Kathryn never played before, and she did not play afterward.

Bart Wilding, Art's army buddy, came to town, so about five of Art's close friends decided to celebrate Paul's getting out of the service. They were stopped by the town marshal. He kept them until he felt Art could safely drive back to East Orchard Mesa.

Art and Kathryn were married in the spring of 1947 and planned to make a living raising peaches. But this was not to be. While eating breakfast one morning in June, trying to decide what to do, it started to hail. In five minutes, the crop was ruined.

Art decided to transfer to the University of Colorado. He got a degree in business, graduating in 1951. He was hired by the Atomic Energy Department - and worked there until 1957. Art ended up working for Martin Marietta in Denver until 1965 when a lay off brought them to San Jose, CA with Lockheed. During this time, Kathryn was busy rearing four boys, Curt, Chris, Paul, and Pete. All are doing well, Curt is an Optometrist, the others chose engineering degrees.

As of November 2013, Art and Kathryn have been married 66 years!!