

Palisade Historical Society
 Oral and Video History Project
 Interview

Mesa County Oral History # OH-295

Date: 11/29/1979

Place 106 West First Street

Length: 58 min.

Palisade, Colorado

Interviewee Mr. Lee A. Toothaker

Phone: 464-5988

Interviewer Len Haseman

Phone: 245-5645

This is a summary of a handwritten Tape Index, which contains notes from an interview with Lee A. Toothaker on November 29, 1979 conducted by the Mesa County Oral History Project. The interview was recorded on one cassette tape. This digital rendition of the Tape Index follows the original format as closely as possible, in order to preserve the document as it was originally created. Syntax and spelling errors were corrected and abbreviations were spelled out, as possible. The original document can be viewed at the Museums of Western Colorado library.

(Clarifications and comments from other sources appear in parentheses and italics and are not a part of the original document.)

Tape 1, Side 1

Time		Subjects Covered	Names & Places
Counter	Minutes		
0-5	0.5	<i>Introduction</i>	
5-186	18.1	<i>Background & Schooling:</i> Born in Delphos, Iowa, Ringgold County on 8/31/1884. Father was Benjamin Wesley Toothaker. He came with Mother from Ottumwa, Iowa, bought 40 acres of land and added additional acres up to 260 acres. Lee had four sisters, no brothers. Lee's father taught school at first in Ellrica School District, until he had enough land to support the family. Crops were corn and oats. He had two fine Percheron mares and raised and sold colts. With World War I, the Army's demand was for mules. Mares appreciated services by Percheron stallions but hated male jackasses and would have killed them if they could get at them. Family was proud of colts and mules. Sold milk, butter, horses. Had hard times but did not know it. Lee started grade school in Iowa. He never went to high school, but his oldest sister went to Mt. Aire, Iowa High School. This is the highest point in Iowa. She lived with their grandparents. His aunt died of tuberculosis and his sister shared a bedroom with her.	

Time		Subjects Covered	Names & Places
Counter	Minutes		
186-278	9.2	<p>Lee's father sold the farm and moved to Chillicothe, Missouri. Lee decided he wanted more schooling but had no high school education. His father had attended Kirksville, Missouri Normal College, and Lee spent five years there to cover the lack of high school and finish a degree as a teacher. Lee met the president of the school, John R Kirk, in the hallway one day. He had good teachers, but it was not a sophisticated school. If a pupil wanted schooling, Kirk saw that he got it.</p> <p>(Lee repeated the story of breeding Percheron mares to raise mules and building a chute for mares so the jacks could service them.)</p> <p><i>Farming in Colorado:</i> Lee moved from Missouri to Lincoln, Nebraska and then to Montana. There, he met a school teacher who was also Superintendent of Schools. He married her in 1911 and moved that same year to Palisade, Colorado. Lee's father had bought 3 ½ acres of orchard land. He could not support a family on 3 ½ acres, so after inheriting it from his father, he bought more land until he had 70 acres, all in peaches. At first he hired African American pickers from Arkansas but hired local people after that. He planted 30 acres of peaches under the point of Mount Garfield. It was beautiful young growth, but when the trees were five years old, they died. Lee had Colorado State University check the orchard, and with a soil test by the U.S. Farm Bureau Research Station in Albuquerque, they found the soil had a very high salt content. Peach trees are especially vulnerable to salt. Alternate crops proposed by Albuquerque were apples and pears, but he was urged to plant alfalfa. He did so and had a magnificent crop, so he went into the cattle business. He bought cows at ranch auctions and ended up with fifty cows, plus a lot of calves.</p>	<p>Palisade, Colorado</p> <p>Peach tree blight</p> <p>Alfalfa and cattle</p>

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Counter	Minutes		
278-317	3.9	<p>Lee got a farm hand from (<i>Junction City,</i>) Kansas, who had no knowledge of peaches. His name was Dale Ferguson (<i>who visited his Great Aunts and Uncles, Jeannie and Charles Cutter, and Margaret and John Cutter living here. Dale and Betty Ferguson moved to Palisade in 1949.</i>) Dale is now the biggest fruit grower in the Valley. Dale was a good worker, a good man, and a good leader.</p> <p>He was also close to Fred Powell, who is now at La Villa Grande Care Center (and was interviewed by this interviewer).</p>	<p>Dale Ferguson</p> <p>Cross Orchard Ranch</p>
317-332	1.5	<p><i>Cross Orchard Ranch:</i> Lee knew of Cross Orchard Ranch, located west of Clifton. He never knew Mr. Cross personally.</p>	<p>Harry Younger</p>
332-450		<p><i>Marketing Crop:</i> Much fruit was marketed through cooperatives and brokers. Lee never joined (<i>a cooperative</i>). He knew Harry Younger, who let him market fruit. They shipped out forty railcars of peaches one year, loaded out at a siding beside the refrigeration plant in Palisade. Younger was a fine Christian gentleman and was dependable. At the time, most fruit brokers took advantage of the growers.</p> <p>From his experience as manager of a YMCA in Montana, Lee knew a bit about business and ethics. He trained his own tree pruners. Ben Sipes taught him how to prune peach trees, basically a common sense approach to leave buds for next year's crop.</p>	<p>Ben Sipes</p>

Tape 1, Side 2

Time		Subjects Covered	Names & Places
Counter	Minutes		
0-60	6.0	<p>The alfalfa crop at the point of Mount Garfield was very successful. He bought a manure spreader, mowers, balers, etc. He had up to 100 tons of hay per year. He sold the hay and bought cows. Lee made good money from the hay and cattle operation. Auctioneer Bill Schult tipped him on which cattle to buy.</p> <p>Originally, they shipped cattle by rail, but later they used trucks. A big truck would carry fifty head of cattle.</p> <p>Lee's wife was Ruby Simpson. She was Superintendent of Schools in Carbon County, Montana. They had no natural children. Dr. Cary in Grand Junction adopted a child and recommended that they do the same. Lee and Ruby adopted a baby girl in 1920 and three years later adopted a baby boy.</p>	<p>Bill Schult(z)</p> <p>Rail vs. Truck</p> <p>Ruby Simpson</p> <p>Dr. Cary</p>
60-113	5.3	<p>Lee's son is now in the automobile business in Bridgeton, New Jersey, and his daughter is married and lives in Denver with two children and a grandchild. At the time of this interview, Ruby had passed away.</p>	
113-210	9.7	<p><i>More on Fruit Growing:</i></p> <p>There are two fruit growers associations in the valley, and they compete with each other. Brokers played one against the other, and the farmers were not getting a fair profit. They worked into the Farmers' Union and local farmers' associations.</p> <p>Once peaches were shipped by rail, but now they use trucks, which can carry five times more than a railcar.</p> <p>Lee never raised apples, pears, cherries, or apricots. The Codling moth almost wiped out the apples in the Valley, but new sprays can now control this pest.</p> <p>Lee sold orchards to Dale Ferguson, John Vail, and Allen Jones. Mentions Sunset Orchard Company. Dale Ferguson is a scientific and practical operator. Carrol Wade's son now manages the orchard operation.</p>	<p>Fruit Growers Associations</p> <p>Farmers' Union</p> <p>Codling moth</p> <p>Sunset Orchard Co.</p>

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210-444	23.4	<p><i>Miscellaneous:</i> New housing developments are wiping out orchards. Cross Orchard Ranch west of Clifton was all apples. The Codling moth wiped them out. Parathion spray controls the moths.</p> <p>Met Fred Powell soon after arrival. Good man. Persuaded Fred to take over as manager of (<i>Grand Junction or Co-op</i>) Fruit Growers' Association.</p> <p>Signed release form.</p> <p>Lee tells a story of a white boy raised as an Indian by Crow tribe – abandoned there as a baby.</p>	<p>Cross Orchard</p> <p>Fred Powell</p> <p>White boy raised by Indians</p>

Summary by Gary Hines – 10/20/2015

Reviewed and edited by _____ (name) _____ (date)