

Palisade Historical Society
Oral and Video History Project
Interview

Oral History # 25

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Interviewee: Ada Maxine Lundgren Clark Allen

Interviewer: Rachel Gabel (Fencepost Magazine)

Telephone Interview on 3/8/2022 by Charlene Weidner

This is a summary of an audio recording of an interview Rachael Gabel did with Maxine Lundgren Clark Allen for Fencepost Magazine. For purposes of clarification, the summary also includes some information from a Westworld Magazine article on Maxine, entitled *Women in Agriculture: She Fights for Peaches* by Linda Post, dated May 27, 1979. Additional information was gathered by Charlene Weidner via a telephone interview on March 8, 2022.

Ada Maxine Lundgren was named after the midwife who helped in the home birth in Lamar, CO. on December 7, 1934. Her parents, Robert and Susannah Lundgren, grew up in Scranton, Kansas, a coal mining town outside of Topeka. Robert Lundgren met his future wife Susannah Eklund while she was working in the grocery store in Scranton. Both were children of Swedish immigrants. Maxine and her three siblings, Wilma, Robert, and Larry grew up in the area around Lamar, CO on the Eastern Plains where her family farmed. In her early years she was around a variety of people, including those of Japanese descent who were detained in Amache, a nearby internment camp during World War II. Also, there was a camp of German war prisoners in the area. Maxine got along well with people from both cultures, as well as her own. Although she was quite young at the time, she recalled her father grew sugar beets, where he and her brothers worked in the fields after school along side Japanese and German people. Near the town of Granada was the Koen Ranch, owned by white people but employing Mexican workers. The Mexican students were segregated into their own classrooms so they could be taught English.

At the end of the war, the camps were closed. Maxine's father, employed by the Federal Land Bank, worked at getting land seized by the US Government for the camps returned to the farmers who owned the land before the war. Some were still in the area and got their land back, but others had moved on. After the war, the Japanese people were examined closely to see if their loyalties were with America or if they remained with Japan. This had considerable bearing on whether they remained or returned to their home country.

When Maxine was 12 years old, the family moved to Ridgway, CO because her father always wanted to live in the mountains and own a big ranch. They had a 1200-acre ranch where they lived for about two years, but because of her father's heart condition, the altitude was too high for him. Maxine finished 8th grade in Ridgway, after which the family moved to the warmer climate and lower elevation of Palisade, CO in 1949.

The family had a small 4-acre orchard, which Maxine's mother and father took care of themselves. Although the Mountain Lion (aka Co-op) and United Fruit Growers' Association were in Palisade, Maxine's parents chose not to send their peaches to the fruit cooperatives. Instead, they sold the peaches right at the orchard located at 3810 G 2/10 Road in Vineland. People came by to buy ripe fruit, and they had a small peach packing shed in their barn.

Maxine attended PHS graduating in 1952. She was a popular student, making the honor roll, and was active as a cheerleader and a majorette. She was a homecoming attendant in 1950 and was the 1951 homecoming queen. She married James Larry Clark (known as Larry to most people) when they were both 18 years old, just out of high school. Larry was a 4th generation peach grower, his great-grandfather (*James Clark*) having started peach orchards in the Palisade area when he settled here around 1900.

Larry and Maxine then had their own orchard and sent their peaches to the Co-op for sale and shipment. She recalled German prisoners working in the orchards and living in a camp located in what now is Riverbend Park in Palisade. They had three sons, Steven born in 1956, Bruce born in 1959, and Dennis born in 1962. Dennis now owns over 100 acres of peaches and Steven retired from working a smaller acreage. Bruce moved to Washington State to work as a veterinarian and has recently returned to the Grand Valley. She is proud of her progeny which also includes 8 grandchildren and 14 great grandchildren.

Maxine and Larry were hard workers. She kept a large house with a yard and flower gardens. In the early years outside work was needed to support the family. Maxine recalls she and Larry worked as baby chick sexers for the Grand Hatchery in Grand Junction. Larry was trained in Iowa and taught Maxine how to use the small tool which lit up upon insertion to help determine a future rooster vs pullet. Maxine recalls educating groups of school children visiting the hatchery to watch them determine the sex of many chickens.

Theirs was one of the biggest fruit orchards in the Valley, growing cherries, peaches, and pears which were sold at their fruit stand on the property. They also operated a large packing shed with about 40 workers during harvest season. Maxine recalled frequently shortening and hemming pants for the Mexican and black men who came to work the harvest, because the pants were always too long to fit them well. The family orchards are still owned by the Clark family and thriving east of Colorado River near Palisade. The house, built in 1900, had a large sleeping room upstairs to accommodate the workers during harvest and a dining room on the first floor. Maxine has pleasant memories of harvest time with workers from all different backgrounds working and playing together. Oftentimes, there were basketball games outdoors and card games in the evening after the day's work was done.

During their active years as peach growers, Maxine was heavily involved in representing peach growers to various trade organizations. She worked locally and throughout the United States at jobs rarely held by women in those days (the early 1970s). Maxine was elected national coordinator of the National Peach Partners organization in 1979. The NPP is the women's division of the National Peach Council, and she served on the board of directors for the National Peach Council. She was the Western Slope's only member of American Agri-Women, a national

organization of about 5,000 women at that time. Traveling around the country, she raised awareness of the challenges of growing peaches, particularly focusing on labor issues. Maxine worked for a time as the public relations person for the Farmer's Union and with the Agriculture Departments in Colorado, Utah, and New Mexico. In addition, she modeled clothing and was a representative for Beeline Fashions for nine years.

Larry supported Maxine in her efforts because it brought their peach operation some publicity, but he preferred to remain on the land tending to the orchard. Maxine, on the other hand, enjoyed travelling, meeting a variety of people, and effectively representing the growers. Nevertheless, she remained involved in decisions that needed to be made regarding their own orchard. For example, she encouraged expanding the variety of peaches they grew to include earlier crops, to spread out the harvest beyond the narrower timeframe of growing only the Standard Elberta peaches.

Another memory Maxine has is when their packing shed burned in the spring before the Co-op burned. Son, Steve, and his wife lived next to it and the building was connected by a gas line. Their neighbor, Lorin Anderson, got them out safely. It was suspected arson, as a gas can was found near the building, but the perpetrator was never punished.

For their 20th Anniversary, Larry and Maxine took their sons on a trip to California. It was the first time they had taken a real vacation with their children. The differences between Maxine and Larry eventually lead to their divorce after 32 years of marriage. Maxine moved to Grand Junction and was a realtor from 1986 into the 1990's. She worked for Bray and Co., Gale and Co Realtors, and Century 21Real Estate.

She returned to Palisade and married Larry Allen in 2006. They continue to reside in Palisade.

Overall, Maxine said she feels like she has lived a full and interesting life, both as a peach grower and as an advocate for the peach industry.

Summary by Charlene Weidner & Gary Hines 04/27/2022