JOURNAL OF THE WESTERN SLOPE

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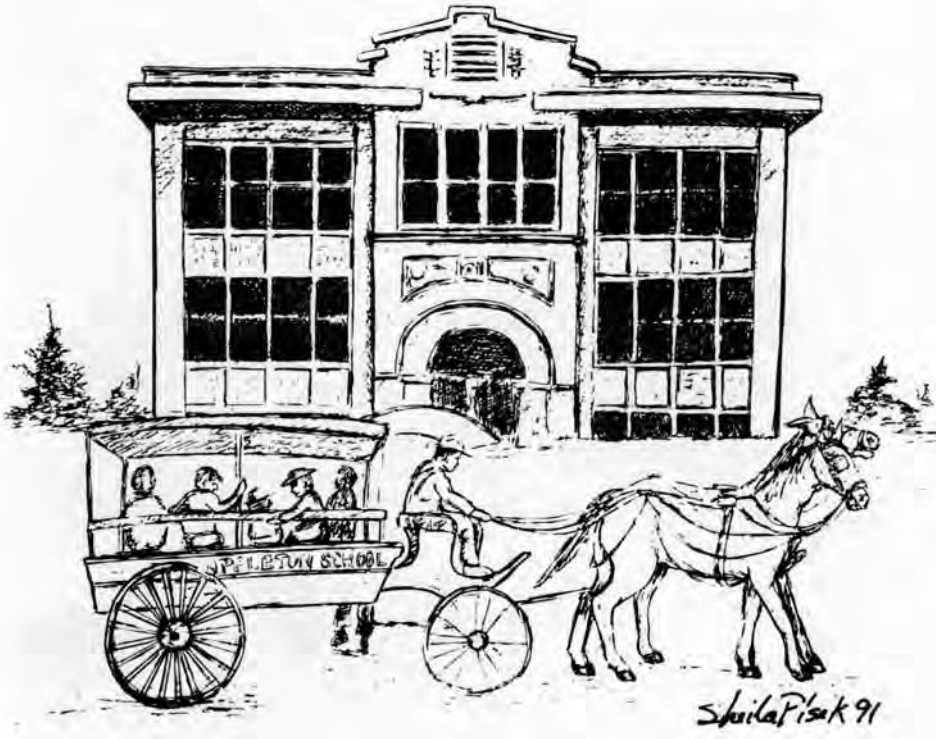
MESA STATE COLLEGE



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GUIDELINES FOR CONTRIBUTIONS: The purpose of ***JOURNAL OF THE WESTERN SLOPE*** is to encourage the scholarly study of Colorado's Western Slope. The primary goal is to preserve and record its history; however, articles on anthropology, economics, government, natural history, and sociology will be considered. Authorship is open to anyone who wishes to submit original and scholarly material about the Western Slope. The editors encourage letters of inquiry from prospective authors. Complete instructions to contributors to the Journal may be secured by inquiry to: Mesa State College, ***JOURNAL OF THE WESTERN SLOPE,*** P.O. Box 2647, Grand Junction, CO 81502.

JOURNAL OF THE WESTERN SLOPE

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THE COVER: Sheila Plsek has been a resident of the Grand Valley since 1968. A graphic artist at KLB Printing, she enjoys drawing and painting in her spare time.

Contents

Introduction

The series of short articles which compose this issue of the Journal of the Western Slope *grew out of a friendship that developed between Gertrude G. Rader who lived in Fruita and the late Leonard L. Haseman and his wife "Vi" Haseman who still lives in Grand Junction. While delivering meals for the Gray Gourmet program, the Hasemans made the acquaintance of Gertrude G. Rader. When Leonard Haseman began conducting interviews for the Mesa County Oral History program in 1978, he was a retired colonel from the United States Army. Colonel Haseman was a decorated veteran of World War II and a well-educated man. He receivd a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Missouri, a Bachelor of Science in civil engineering from the United States Military Academy at West Point, a Masters Degree in civil engineering from Cornell University, and did postgraduate work in mathematics at Columbia University. He taught calculus at West Point for several years.*

It is easy to understand why Colonel Haseman found Gertrude Rader's remembrances fascinating. Her parents, John and Minnie Geiger, were early settlers on Kannah Creek who used the Homestead Act to get a hundred and sixty acres of land. Born Gertrude Geiger at Kannah Creek on March 5, 1901, she attended the school there, but left home for Grand Junction at age fourteen because Kannah Creek did not have a high school. In Grand Junction, Gertrude Geiger worked for her room and board so she could continue her education. An evening job at St. Mary's Hospital (then located at Ninth Street and Colorado Avenue) paid twenty-five cents an hour, enough for her to purchase schoolbooks and other necessities.

After graduation from Grand Junction High School, Gertrude Geiger attended summer sessions at Western State College. This education launched a teaching career which began in Whitewater in 1919, included experience in Loma, Hunter, Rhone, and the Grand Valley's District 51, and ended in 1976 as an instructor in the Adult Education program at Mesa College. She married Arthur Rader in 1921 and raised two children named Minnie and John. Gertrude Rader served on the Loma Ditch and Lateral Board, the American Legion Auxiliary, the Gray Gourmet, reported

news from the Loma and Hunter areas for the Daily Sentinel, *and wrote for the* Mesa County Mail *and the* Fruita Times. *She now lives in the Grand Villa retirement center in Grand Junction.*

The stories which Colonel Haseman heard from Gertrude Rader prompted him to rework some of the information into vignettes about the social history and folklore of the Western Slope. The editors have grouped the material by themes, edited the material with an eye to keeping its original flavor, and added explanatory footnotes where needed. Some selections contain strong opinions, and the editors urge those with different points of view to respond with their own articles.

The editors appreciate the time that Janet Mease devoted to this manuscript. We also thank the staff at the Mesa County Library for permission to use this material from its fine Oral History Collection.

Community Development and Historical Events

by Gertrude Rader

Fruita

When the town of Fruita was established, a clause in the incorporation papers stated that Negroes would not be allowed in the town after an hour past sundown. As far as I remember, Charley Glass was the first Negro allowed to break that rule. Mr. Glass was a well known cow puncher in Utah and Western Colorado. He was said to be part Indian.

One afternoon in the fall of 1930, I was getting the horse and buggy ready to collect my children at Loma School. Cattle drives were almost a daily affair in those days so it was dangerous for little children to be out on the road.

Claude Taylor, a local cattleman, rode into the yard in a hurry and asked to use the telephone to call Dr. J.S. Orr and the Fruita Hospital. One of his cowhands had been bucked into the railroad fence and was badly cut. Mr. Taylor insisted that I use our old Model T to take the injured man into Fruita. I could not crank the car so he started it and left it running in the yard. After he grabbed my table cloth for a bandage, he took off. An inexperienced driver, I followed as best I could through the herds of cattle on a muddy road.

The injured man was Charley Glass. I tried to get one of the men to drive the car, but they were working short-handed, and the mountain-raised cattle were frightened of the nearby trains and automobiles. Glass had used his hands to hold his badly cut leg and then touched his face and head. He was covered with blood. Taylor told me that the doctor and nurse would be waiting and I need not go into the hospital.

Going back to the Model T, I found that the cattle were going even slower. I was not an experienced driver. I was nervous about my children getting out of school and not being at home to meet them. Glass kept saying: "You're doing fine, lady! Don't be nervous. Don't be afraid. We'll get there." I hoped someone would take care of my green broke horse and my saddle. That horse had never seen a train before.

Glass was in the back seat and every time he stopped talking I feared he had died. No rear-view mirrors! After what seemed hours I got him to the hospital. Dr. Orr and nurse Mary Stout were waiting but they told me I would have to get Glass out of town before sunset. I shouted: "Tell Claude Taylor!" I left to meet my kids who were just getting to the highway from school. I checked back every day for eleven days and Glass was still in the hospital. Cleaning the blood out of that old Ford was not my idea of a good time, but I finally got it done.

Several years later a car loaded with Negro people was involved in an accident at Rhone School. *The Daily Sentinel* asked me to go to the scene. At the hospital, again the question came up about Negro people spending the night in Fruita. I asked Dr. Orr if he remembered the incident involving Charley Glass, and he asked: "When?" I told him my son was born in 1924 and that it was during his first year in school that Glass had been injured. I believe that set the date of Glass's overnight stay in 1930. Dr. Orr looked very disgusted with me and said: "If you never had had children, you wouldn't know dates," and he walked away. The Negroes were admitted some time afterward.

Early Loma

The town of Loma sits a few miles west of Fruita. About 1916, the progressive village contained the following: two grocery stores, a Denver and Rio Grande depot with passenger service twice a day, a hotel, a pool hall, a blacksmith shop, a lumber yard, a canning factory, a sugar beet office, a livery stable, a beet dump, a dipping vat where railroad ties and fence posts were treated, a doctor, a city reservoir, a school with grades through the sophomore year, Methodist and Presbyterian churches, a post office, scales for weighing heavy loads and the Vernon and Reed Investment Company. Later the town obtained an airplane landing field where Gary Western now is located, a uranium-vanadium refinery and a fire station.

Loma also supported quite an active social life. There were a Literary Society, Lady's Aid Society, Missionary Society, a Book Review Club, the P.T.A., Community Singers, a Welcoming Committee, a Bible Study

Group, several hobby and card clubs, and a W.C.T.U. (Women's Christian Temperance Union).

Despite the apparently respectable nature of Loma, the surrounding area did possess a shadier side. The high trail out of Horsethief Canyon south of Loma was a notorious location in the last part of the nineteenth century. Rustlers took livestock stolen in Colorado up over the trail into Utah where they exchanged the herd for stolen Utah livestock. The route is treacherous. After one starts up the trail there is no turning back. Furthermore, low hanging overlays forced people to walk because there was not enough clearance for a person mounted on horseback.

In 1921 the Sugar Company mules went up over the trail. I was one of the group who volunteered to go up after them. That was a day I will never forget, going up over the High Trail with a long, heavy, full riding habit. The narrow trail was built on a steep slope up the side of the mountain, with the Colorado River below. Rocks knocked loose by the horses' feet fell straight down into the river and the bones of dead animals dotted the hill below the trail. I have forgotten how many miles it was, single file all the way. However, we found the mules. After that they got out again and one got killed on the Rimrock Trail at Loma.

Whitewater

When automobiles and trucks became common, the little village of Whitewater, located twelve miles south of Grand Junction, began to get smaller. There was a time in the first quarter of this century when Whitewater was a good sized livestock and mineral shipping center. Large stock yards adjoined the D&RG railroad and ranchers herded animals to Whitewater from Unaweep Canyon, Purdy and Reeder Mesas, Kannah Creek, and sometimes from Bridgeport.

The town supported an inn, a rooming house, a hotel and Bert Error's big barn for sleeping accommodations. The D&RG also maintained two railroad houses there: a large one for the track foreman and his family, and a small one for D&RG track workers. In addition there was a blacksmith shop, a school that taught through the sophomore year, a rail depot, a post office that handled the Star Route in the Unaweep area and the R.F.D. (Rural Free Delivery) up over Kannah Creek, Purdy, and Reeder Mesas; a cemetery that diminished as bodies were moved, two general stores that sold everything from dynamite to drugs, a large baseball diamond, railroad and bus passenger service, a water station where drinking water could be bought for ten cents a barrel, and a community church. A telephone office supplied

service for the whole area. At one time Mrs. Ruby Burford, the operator, was a California guest on the *This Is Your Life* radio program.

Men were required to pay their poll tax with either money or manual labor on the roads before they could vote. When I first started to school my dad mentioned he would be by the school working out his poll tax. When he came by I told other kids: "That is my poppa and he is working out his POLECAT!" I thought I was saying it correctly, but I never heard the last of that as long as I attended school there.

Post Offices

Fruita Post Office

According to history written in 1882 the post office consisted of a tree down by the Colorado River where passers-by brought mail and took mail to be sent on its way. This area was part of Gunnison County at that time.

The next place recorded as a mail delivery site was in a cabin down near the river. Mrs. Rose Veach was postmaster. People called it "Mesa" and the post office consisted of a large coffee shipping crate in the Veach home.

The second building that housed the Fruita post office was west of Fruita about two miles and was a counter in the home of S.G. Lane in 1884. They called it "Fairview." However, it was moved back to Fruita in late 1884 and the name of "Fruita" became permanent. This post office was about a block north of the present post office. The people of Fruita watched with great interest as the city built the present Post Office in 1961. This first official Fruita Post Office was dedicated in 1962 with J. Chester Warren as the postmaster.

Too many places housed the post office over the years. Also, too many people served as postmaster, some for very short periods of time. Many were women.

When Fruita and Cleveland were not one town, but rivals, it is recorded that Ben Keifer and assistants took the Fruita Post Office during the night to Cleveland, where they owned property. The Fruita Post Office remained in Cleveland for about a year before the government ordered it to be returned to Fruita permanently.

Both Fruita and Cleveland grew and soon became one town. The Fruita main street still lies in the Cleveland section.

Over the years, citizens have petitioned for house-to-house mail delivery. In 1920 the city was refused an application due to the number of board walks and cinder paths. The town did not have enough "safe

sidewalks." Today Aspen Avenue, the main street in Fruita, has house-to-house delivery as the rural carrier goes on his route out into the rural areas. The rest of the citizens in Fruita pick up their mail at the post office.

Whitewater Post Office

Originally, James Page opened post office services for Whitewater in the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad station in 1886. Page served for twenty-one years before Winnie Penniston took over the position when the post office was moved to a local general store. George Peugh served as the third postmaster and Ruth Learn Morris stepped in as postmaster when the office was officially dedicated in its own building.

Early this century, a Star Route from Whitewater to Gateway delivered the mail twice a month. Later this became a weekly service. The route service employed horse power. Often, in the winter they used a sleigh with two horses hitched in trail. The Star Route manager often rode the lead horse.

A large box was placed in front of the Mike Holland farm, next to the Pride School. A hit and miss system was used to deliver mail. People who happened to be going past would take mail from there or other cities. Near the close of each school day the school teacher would send an older pupil to bring the mail to her desk and she would give out the mail to be taken home by the pupils. Often she would read post cards aloud.

After a period of years, and after many petitions had been signed and sent, the government started a rural delivery route about the year 1911. The route carrier was Leslie Stevens. The route extended twenty-four miles with an average of two boxes per mile; later it was extended to thirty miles. A mail carrier, using a horse and buggy, delivered the mail in boxes. After Stevens, Gus Nagle and then John Davis serviced the route. At the end of World War I, a native of Whitewater, Ben Wright, took over the position. In 1921 he and another Whitewater native, Joe Snyder, exchanged routes and Snyder served for nearly forty years. Rot Grossman took over from Snyder and served as mail carrier until Whitewater's first official post office building was dedicated in 1964.

Cattlemen-Sheepmen Wars

Cattlemen and sheepmen wars erupted before I was born and continued for years afterwards. We had a few head of each, cattle and sheep, but the hostilities affected everyone. No one walked to a home

after dark and knocked; they stayed a good distance away and shouted: "Hello, the house, I come as a friend." One sheepherder was shot to death; others shot or tied up, and sheep were dynamited and driven over the cliffs of the Gunnison River Canyon in the area between Delta and Grand Junction.

Sheep herders would let their sheep drink up the farmer's winter supply and when little water was left in the reservoirs the horses would not drink it. In retaliation, sheep were poisoned and allowed to lie wherever they fell. If the sheepmen skinned them, they would hang the pelts on the farmer's fence and the cattlemen would rip the fence out. Dogs and horses were shot. Sheep raisers and wool growers posted rewards of thousands of dollars for convictions, and many people came through the area posing as agents to try and collect the fees.

Bridgeport Orchard

John and Frank Moore owned a large fruit orchard between Delta and Whitewater. They bought one of the first peach sorters and defuzzers in the country. The area also contained a former Indian arrowhead chipping ground and several natural caves with Indian writing and painting. These, together with the beautiful natural surroundings, caused many workers to return each year for the peach harvest and to hunt arrowheads or just take walks in the evenings. The Moores employed about seventy people during the peak of harvest.

The house the women packers and cooks occupied sat near the irrigation intake from the river and there was always water in the intake reservoir. The women got in the habit of going there for their regular evening bath. They did not go in the nude, but neither did they have regular bathing suits. This nightly trip to the river had been going on for a week or so before some of the men found the clothing and decided to sit down beside it. The women stayed around the bend thinking the men would soon leave, but they did not. It was almost dark and the cool evening breeze had started up when one of the cooks, a larger woman, spotted an old wash tub. Holding it in front of her, she approached the men. "I'm going to tell you men just what I think," she said. Before she could continue one of the men interrupted her and said: "I know what you think," he said, "you think there is a bottom in that tub but there ain't." After a good laugh the men left.

That outstanding orchard is gone now. The Indian writings and drawings have become faded and dim. Few arrowheads can be found

there any more. The old swinging bridge still crosses the river and there is now a road along the river. Formerly the railroad was the only means of transportation to the area.

John Otto

John Otto's name will always be part of the history of Western Colorado, because he is considered the "Father of the Colorado National Monument."

He was well educated, the son of a German Evangelical Lutheran minister, and had spent much of his early life in the Chicago suburbs, and had worked as a miner in California before coming to Colorado around 1902. He worked as a miner in Eagle, Leadville, Arkansas Junction, and on a farm in Grand County before coming to Mesa County in 1907. Here he worked with a crew building a gas line between Fruita and Grand Junction.

At one time he had written letters that persons in Governor Peabody's office had viewed as threatening. They asked Otto to come to the Governor's office. Otto probably knew more about mine safety, working conditions, and a miner's life than the Governor or any of his staff. Otto had taken an active interest in an earlier mine labor strike and had made several suggestions for a settlement. On Otto's arrival, that office had him promptly arrested. According to newspaper reports, one condition of his release was that he never go east of Broadway in Denver. It is believed that he kept this promise.

Otto could talk to almost anyone on any subject. He found time to take an interest in school children's rock projects. He was well liked and appreciated by the children and their teachers.

While working as a powder monkey on the gas line between Fruita and Grand Junction, Otto explored the 550 foot Independence Monument and the other monoliths and rock cliffs in the area that is now the Colorado National Monument. Because of an over-riding desire to climb the Independence Monument, he hand drilled into the rock and set metal rods up the side of the monolith to provide a ladder for climbing. Otto had to maintain a precarious balance as he worked his way up. The last lap at the top proved to be the most dangerous due to erosion of the top formation.

He called himself a "dollar-a-year" government man, but must have had some other income. Rather than loaning him surveying equipment, my father, J.V. Geiger, went with Otto a few times and did the surveying for his roads. Otto joked about splitting his dollar-a-year pay with my dad.

(Courtesy of Museum of Western Colorado Collections Picture #6)

John Otto

John Otto personally built the first road to the top of the Monument, a narrow, twisting, one-way route with about fifty-four switchbacks. One can still find it near the present east entrance road to the Monument. Now it is used only as a foot trail for those who wish to hike to the Monument's crest. During the 1930s, the government established a Civilian Conservation Corps camp on the Monument and appropriated $50,000 to support the camp and built the western access road south of Fruita. Several of the men employed there died in rock slides; the exact number is unknown.

The Redlands Company owned much of the agricultural land on the Redlands. Otto was a frequent noontime visitor in the company's dining room, always with the idea of promoting the National Monument concept by getting more people interested and involved.

John Otto was keenly observant. Once he arrived at the R.T. Anderson Fruit packing shed at the foot of the Grand Mesa about ten

minutes before noon and was invited to have dinner. His conversation at the table concerned the need for roads to be built to the top of the Grand Mesa and to the top of the Bookcliffs. The road to the top of the Grand Mesa was built just a few years later. How much he had to do with it, I do not know. There were six of us working at the packing tables. When we returned to work after dinner each of us found a new peach box slide in our bins. Otto had written and signed a complimentary statement identifying each of us. The one married lady received the message: "Congratulations to the lucky man who placed the wedding band on your hand." He mentioned something about where each of us sat at the table, something we had said, or the color of our hair. Few people were that observant, and few would have taken the time to leave a message. He was about fifty then, and seemed so old to us teenagers.

Otto was a prolific letter writer, and most of his letters to my dad contained original poetry. The war between the cattlemen and sheepmen with its shootings and killings of herders and animals concerned Otto. He stated in one poem that even rattlesnakes in the Colorado National Monument were given protection to live. Otto's poem about a sheepherder's death near the road between Whitewater and Delta upset some of the cattlemen. In it, Otto wrote that owls sat on the cross marking the grave, calling out into the night: "Who did it? Who? Who? Who did it?" The sheep people offered a reward of several thousand dollars to find the killer. Otto may have been interested in collecting the reward – many people were.

He referred to the Colorado National Monument as "history in the stone carved over centuries by the wind and rain." Otto said the Ute Indians called the Monument "The Garden of Eden." He listed the two balanced rocks as two of the world's greatest amazements.

I think it is safe to say that John Otto's marriage to Miss Beatrice Farnham of Boston, on June 20, 1911, received more publicity than any other wedding ever held in this part of Colorado. Newspaper clippings about the event came to my parents from friends and relatives in Williamsport, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, several cities in California, Salt Lake City, Salmon, Idaho, and a mining town in Arizona. The *Denver Post* wrote the longest copy.

There were signficiant differences among the articles. We assumed that Beatrice Otto had written some of the articles and that John Otto had written others. One of the differences in the stories was how long they had known each other. Some indicated that it was a short romance that started when they were both camping in the Monument area, but one quoted her as saying they had known each other for several years

(Courtesy of Museum of Western Colorado, General Collections)

The wedding party of John Otto and Beatrice Farnham in 1911. Reverend Hatch of Fruita officiated.

and that: "Our trails had crossed many times in the glorious West: we have met in many states under many conditions." Another time, one paper quoted Mrs. Otto as saying: "I have known Mr. Otto for many years and consider him one of the truly great men of the United States." A news article quoted her: "We both recognized traits in each other that have deepened our admiration year by year."

Mrs. Otto was the daughter of a wealthy, high society, and ultra-fashionable family in Boston. She studied art in Boston and then went to San Francisco to continue her education in art.

Articles published after the wedding of John and Beatrice Otto listed his age as forty-two, and hers as thirty-five. She was six feet tall, beautiful, and dark haired. Beatrice Otto wore a white satin wedding dress brought from her home in Boston. She wore her grandmother's wedding veil that was over seventy years old. The altar was made of stone. The couple stood inside a grotto formed of two over-lapping hearts, built by John Otto and outlined with white pebbles he had collected. Otto had objected to the part of the vows that required women to "love, honor, and obey" their husbands. He was quoted as saying: "She can't do that — and most women lie when they say they will." She was a strict Episcopalian and he was an Evangelical Lutheran. Nonetheless, he gave permission to observe the traditional Episcopalian vows. Some newspaper articles stated that they climbed to the top of

Independence Monument following the ceremony, but most guests discount this bit of rumor.

Otto gave his new bride a donkey to ride through the Monument and into Utah on their two week wedding trip. On their return, they made arrangements for the dedication of the Monument as the Colorado State Monument – a dream come true for John Otto.

Mrs. Otto enjoyed painting scenery, Indians, cowboys, and animals; and she had camped and painted in what is now Colorado National Monument a short time before she and Otto married. She had two pet projects. One was painting and the other was carving part of the Declaration of Independence into the hard sandstone of the Monument. She succeeded in carving most of the last paragraph and a few of the signers' names. This is still preserved somewhere in the Monument.

She lived on the Monument only about three months after their marriage. She had planned a project called "New Ideas on a Sane Life." Beatrice planned to feature open air living, the discarding of corsets, hair nets, hair rats, powder and other forms of makeup. She stated: "Tan is an asset for both men and women; it betokens health, and health is wealth." Beatrice Otto is quoted as saying: "Natural life has made the Western girl more self-reliant than others. Marriage today is becoming a mockery, not founded on love except in exceptional cases. The West is freer from loveless marriages than the East, where money is deemed more important than love." She hoped to use her family's money to support a colony of women until the project became self-sustaining.

However, she did not get her colony started, and her own marriage did not last. She left the area and returned to Boston in August of 1911, although this did not become known locally until March of 1912. At her request, John Otto obtained a divorce in Grand Junction on February 2, 1914, charging desertion. Beatrice remarried several months later to Dallas Benson, foreman of a cattle ranch in Kansas where she was painting pictures of livestock and cowboys.

Otto is said to have shown no resentment over their divorce. He is quoted as saying: "She was not at fault. She was a professional artist, an elegant cook, and a good and sweet companion. But she just couldn't stand the dizzy heights in the Monument." She said: "I tried to live his way, but even a cabin or a tent was an encumbrance. He wanted to live in the open."

The papers wrote little news about John Otto after the Great Depression started. He died of natural causes in Yrukia, California at the age of 81.

WPA and CCC

During the Works Progress Administration and the Civilian Conservation Corps eras, some of the school age boys in the programs attended Fruita High School, while my children also attended. On Mothers' Day each of the young men had the right to ask some local woman to a Mothers' Day dinner at the camp. One young man asked me to go and bring my family. I especially liked the potato salad and asked for the recipe. The cook seemed delighted and brought it to me. It read about like this: "300 pounds of small potatoes boiled in their jackets, 60 dozen hard boiled eggs, two gallons of fresh onions cut fine, two gallons of celery cut fine, two gallons of carrots grated, one gallon of vinegar and five gallons of salad dressing. Salt and paprika to taste." I never made it!

The Fruita Library Building was a W.P.A. project. They built it for a museum. Locals called it the "Rock-a-Day" projct because it progressed so slowly. The W.P.A. asked every rock collector they knew to give a few rocks. We gave. The day the W.P.A. dedicated the building, the man in charge asked Phillip Griebel, Charley Kirkendal and me to stand, then he said: "I want to thank these three old fossils for the fossils they contributed." I wasn't even 40! If I had been in the back seats I would have thumbed my nose at him.

People did not donate their antiques to fill the museum as had been hoped, so the town used the building for various programs. The Fruita *Times* published from there. It has been a branch of Mesa County Library for a long time.

Water and the Building of the Highline Canal

Kannah Creek and Kannah Creek Water

During the first decade of this century the city of Grand Junction and Kannah Creek farmers fought a legal battle over water. Grand Junction's growth made more water necessary, and the farmers needed more water to raise crops to feed the people.

Grand Junction offered to pay for the added water, but it offered too little for the farmers to accept. The farmers hired a lawyer from Denver since they felt a Grand Junction lawyer might "sell them down the drain."

In my opinion, the farmers would have been far better off if they had accepted the offer by the city. Before the case was settled most of them had spent more money on lawyer fees and room and board than they got from the settlement. If the farmers knew in advance that they would be in Grand Junction for several days, some boy would

ride to town with them and then lead the horses back as far as Pride School. There he turned the horses loose and they would return to their proper homes. At the end of the week someone took the horses back to Grand Junction so the farmers could ride home. There was an additional, immeasurable loss to the farmers and ranchers from lost production on farms and ranches due to their absences.

The Denver lawyer spent two weekends as a guest in my parents' home. One time the farmers took him to the top of Grand Mesa — one of his first rides on a horse. He had never seen a live chicken, cow or calf, colt or pigs. He seemed very happy during his stay with us except for the lack of a bathroom. He did not consider a full irrigation ditch as "running water."

Some of the area deeds and water certificates had the creek spelled as Kannah Creek; others had it as Khannah Creek. The farmers paid the lawyer based on the number of hours he presided in the court room. When spelling and source of the creek name came up for discussion in court, the farmers objected by saying it was not important. But the court permitted it and the lawyer got his pay. That is the only part of the trial record that I have ever seen in print after more than 70 years. The farmers were unhappy about the outcome of the trial and the payments received from the city. Because of the judgement, Whitewater people had to begin looking for new sources of water. Very little could be raised on the farms or ranches without water. Some people sold and moved away; many tried dry land farming and failed.

Men came through the area with forked sticks and claimed they could locate underground running water. They were known as dowsers and would perform their search for a year.

School District 11 decided to have a well drilled on the public school grounds, and they hired a dowser to locate a promising site. Water was found in abundance but when the school district sent water samples to Fort Collins to be analyzed the report showed it to contain too much alkali to be used for humans or livestock and the well had to be capped. In the meantime, the dowser had been paid and had long since departed.

Perhaps some of the new water companies were formed before the water dispute arose, but others, consisting of neighboring farmers and groups of relatives, were formed later to build reservoirs on the top of the Grand Mesa. As I understood it, they could not buy the land on Grand Mesa but they could lease it for ninety-nine years with an option to renew.

One of the reservoirs was built in an old volcano crater. The water from that reservoir was analyzed for several successive years before it could be turned into the Kannah Creek stream. They always found

it to be pure. Each farmer owned reservoir shares for the amount of summer water he would need. The reservoirs had to be filled as the snow melted in the spring, and a designated amount of water had to be allowed to run down the creek at all times.

The Grand Junction intake for city water was built at the foot of Grand Mesa. A man drove to the top of the Grand Mesa to turn on the proper inches of flow water for the farms. The whole system was and is complicated and expensive, but most farmers and ranchers had no other way of surviving.

Over the years some of the farmers and ranchers have sold their water rights to Grand Junction. The reservoirs are still used and only a few times in the past seventy years have they not been filled for summer use.

Grand Mesa is well named. It truly is "grand."

The Highline Canal

By provision of an Act of Congress on June 17, 1902, the U.S. Department of Interior through its Bureau of Reclamation established the Grand Valley Water Users' Association. In turn, the Association created the Highline Canal, which now serves 30,000 acres directly or indirectly.

Old timers say they dug the canal with oats, as workers employed horse power for most of the construction. The horses grazed wherever forage was available and workhands housed them in large tent barns to protect them from winter cold and summer heat.

As early as 1902 some of the initial survey work was underway and the Bureau of Reclamation was busy perfecting its designs and plans. By 1905 the Grand Valley Water Users' Association was organized and incorporated. Its title has never been changed. In 1908 the engineers completed the primary surveys and in 1909 the U.S. Government and the Association signed a contract to build the Highline Canal. There was pressure in Washington for other Colorado irrigation projects but money was not readily available. The Bureau of Reclamation worked with the local association and by early 1912 construction had begun.

The construction of a canal project of this size would be a major undertaking even with today's modern equipment. Engineers, however, built the Highline Canal with a single drag line, horse-drawn wheeled scrapers, three horse-drawn dump wagons and logs for the dragline to crawl on. Man power moved the logs; men picked up the logs behind and carried them forward as the drag line moved. With only this equipment, progress was slow.

(Museum of Western Colorado, Grand Valley Water Users Association Collection 80.115 #33)

Typical unirrigated land in the Grand Valley prior to the construction of the Highline Canal

(Museum of Western Colorado, General Collections F830/395)

The Freeman Place, shown in 1913, was built in 1908. One of the first dwellings in the Appleton area, the owners were awaiting completion of the Highline Canal. The children slept in the tent behind the house.

The old fashioned wheelbarrow played an important part in the construction of the canal, along with common irrigation shovels, square nosed shovels and pitchforks. Workers mixed concrete in the wheelbarrows and transported the mixture to the necessary area, especially around flumes, drops and headgates. They used old wooden barrels to hold water. These barrels had to be kept full at night because the dry air would shrink the staves and render the barrels useless the next day. Laborers often wrapped the barrels in layers of burlap and kept the burlap wet.

The work crews also put their drinking water in barrels, with a cloth over the top held in place by a hoop from another barrel. Wet burlap kept the water cool enough for drinking, though some old timers said that the water was hot enough that they made coffee with water straight from the barrel. This practice worried a good many people. Typhoid fever was a dreaded disease that required a long time for recovery. Many people would not drink unboiled water.

It is over fifty miles from the dam on the Colorado River above Palisade to the end of the canal west of Mack. This includes a tunnel from the dam through the Bookcliff Range to the vicinity of what now is Walker Field. In addition to the Lower Valley area, the canal also serves the Palisade Irrigation District and the Grand Junction and Orchard Mesa District. This is approximately 7,000 acres.

Many problems besides money kept the project from speedy development. A "prairie dog town" on the right-of-way provided many unexpected leaks. Hardpan made it necessary to revise the route as it was too difficult to get through with the available equipment. Shale layers caused trouble when they occurred at a siphon. These formations would settle and lower the siphon. A large siphon at the Mack Wash settled so much that workers used heavy railroad jacks from the D&RG Railroad to get it back in place and prop it up. Later they replaced the siphon completely. The siphon in the New Liberty area crossed over the road and, during winter runs of water, the leakage caused huge icicles to form from the siphon to the ground — it is an unusual and often photographed sight.

A warehouse and dipping vat were built on the D&RG right-of-way about a mile east of Loma for treating railroad ties as well as piling and other lumber used for the canal. These structures were still there as late as 1926. (To me the land still smells of creosote — or do I just have a good imagination?)

The first delivery of water through the Highline proceeded only as far as construction had been completed to see whether the canal would function. Engineers conducted this test in 1915. Each year since

then careful records have been kept both on the progress of construction and the delivery of water through the system. Laborers dug the canal in phases, and, because transportation was not nearly as good then as it is today, the overseers had construction camps built along the canal. Two of the camps are still in use today as ditch rider's headquarters, Camp #5 in the Appleton District and Camp #7 at Loma.

As construction progressed and more water was turned into the canal, the number of farmers in the Valley increased. Most of the new farms raised hay for the horses working the canal. By 1916 there was a limited increase in acreage ready for cultivation; and in 1917, the water ran as far as Camp #7 near Loma. That same year, the government held a public homestead drawing and settlers came from many states to start farming on virgin land. In 1918 another homestead drawing was held and there have been several since then. Today an excess of 1,000 households are served by the canal. About 500 households are classifed as farms; the others are suburban homes with small acreage.

During construction of the Highline Canal, teachers sometimes dismissed school early and took students on field trips to see the steam shovels, pile drivers, flume construction, drops and headgates, and siphon and spillway construction. Many Grand Junction boys made frequent trips by bicycle after school and on weekends to visit the project. Excursions on the interurban (electric trolley between Grand Junction and Fruita) were common. If a person wished to go further west as construction progressed, they would often ride the interurban to Fruita, catch the stage line to Mack and then rent a horse and carriage to visit and inspect the project.

The project cost about $1,800,000 to construct but repayments with interest to the government over the years have amounted to approximately $3,843,500. A balance may still be due.

Fruit was a good crop at the time of the canal construction. Even before the ditchriders turned the water into the canal, some homesteaders had planted orchards. One unmarried woman hauled water from the Grand Valley Irrigation Ditch (in no way related to the Highline Canal) several miles away. She hauled it in two barrels hand dipped from the ditch and then poured it by hand into small trenches she had dug around each tree. She kept the trees alive for over two years before she got water from the canal, but it was an all day occupation. By the time she completed the first round of watering, it was time to start over again.

When the canal made additional water available, new crops like beans appeared in the area. Unfortunately, the prairie dog population seemed to harvest beans as rapidly as they came into bloom. The first

strawberry clover in western Colorado was used on the canal banks. It spread rapidly and protected the banks from wind and storm erosion.

Hordes of grasshoppers and locusts soon infested the dry land above the canal and often invaded the fields in swarms. Some farm families countered these swarms by raising turkeys and herding them much like sheep in the canyons. The farmers set up tents with roosts underneath to shelter the turkeys during the hottest parts of the day and at night. Usually the turkeys were cared for by two or three shifts of herders, one or two people on each shift. Many considered this more of a job for women than men, but the entire family usually joined in. The turkeys ate other food as well, especially grain. They drank from containers rather than from the flowing canals because they were so dumb they fell in and drowned if allowed near the water. Turkey raising began to fade about the time of World War II. So many insect poisons had been introduced by then that the farmers feared the insects would poison the turkeys.

Many farmers not drawing directly on the Highline Canal have benefitted from its construction. Waste water and excess water routinely are removed and recycled for other crops. The Bureau of Reclamation operated the canal until 1948 when they turned it over to a board of directors composed of farmer-users.

Water is so vital to the Grand Valley that the history of any town in the Grand Valley can be traced to the development of irrigation projects. The settlement of the Loma area occurred mostly in four spurts, all keyed in part to the availability of irrigation water. The first, later incorporated under the name of the "Fruita Cleveland Land Co.," occurred when Grand Valley irrigation water flowed down the Keifer Extension Carrying Ditch. The Verner Z. Reed Investment Co. aided the second period of expansion when it brought in an entire new settlement from Denver. The third period followed new land under the Grand Valley Water Users Canal. The fourth was the government resettlement project during the Depression in the early 1930 years.

Irrigation systems brought "wars" over irrigation water. Some of the men had to spend the night at the headgates to prevent others from stealing water or to keep the beavers from constructing dams. Often they discovered that beavers were the ones blocking irrigation ditches rather than some upstream farmer who was stealing water.

Farmers improvised do-it-yourself equipment to clean moss and other debris from the smaller ditches. We often used a large forked limb from a cottonwood tree. With a wagon hitched to each arm of the fork and a team or single horse on each bank, and with one or

two people riding the stem of the fork, we could clean ditches at a fair rate.

In time, the banks and the doctors took possession of many of the rented farms. Few of the renters understood irrigation – they called a shovel an "idiot stick." They didn't know how to take care of farm machinery and they had to borrow almost everything they used. Nevertheless, most of them made good neighbors.

The so-called "Moving Mountain" put the canal out of operation for many months and cost over $1,000,000 to correct. This landshift in the Books Range about two and one-half miles upstream from Palisade occurred in 1950. The shut-down of the canal created a panic in the Grand Valley. Without irrigation water crops could not be planted, and the danger to all livestock was serious. By mid-May, however, water once again flowed in the canal, because engineers had fashioned a "dog-leg" by-pass tunnel through the solid stone of the Bookcliff Range. Although farmers and ranchers lacked a full head of water they had a successful season, even with a late start. The Grand Valley Water Users' Association became nationally known overnight. Representatives from such magazines as *Readers' Digest, Time, Life* and others swarmed to Colorado West to get the story of the "Moving Mountain."

In 1951 workers cemented the tunnel above Palisade and they built or improved flumes and siphons. Each year requires considerable maintenance work to keep the canal in operation. Due to the rolling hills much of the canal either needed banks built up or hills had to be cut through to maintain the gradient of the canal. Workers found fossils and petrified wood in the underlying sandstone and shale. In cutting through one hill they found large adobe balls measuring twenty to twenty-four inches in diameter. When a scraper blade broke one open, the men found beautiful crystals inside, leading to considerable excitement because they believed they had found diamonds.

In this article I have avoided naming individuals involved with the canal construction and use. There were so many that it would be impossible to name all of them. Also, I realize that I have not limited myself merely to the canal itself. The builders' and users' lives have been so closely related to the canal and its use – almost like body and mind – that it is not possible to separate them.

Education

Grand Junction

Grand Junction had problems with its schools almost as long as the city has existed. Married women did not want their husbands to serve at school board meetings. According to history the wives had said: "A married man has no business fooling away his time with schoolmarms." Thus there were two slates of candidates (one of married men and another of bachelors) for each board election. Wives of the married candidates campaigned for the election of single men. All those elected to the first board were single: H.E. Stroud, O.D. Russell, and W.M. McKelvey. The election was in Dr. Stroud's office.

The original one-room school house consised of a picket cabin near the corner of Fifth Street and Colorado Avenue. Miss Nannie Blain was the teacher. She, with the help of her female pupils, organized a Sunday school, made poster invitations and took them to all the business houses. These businesses consisted of four general stores, a bakery, a drug store, two blacksmith shops, one barber shop, three hotels with restaurants, and seven saloons. Miss Blain later said: "That was the only time I had occasion to enter a saloon." Many of the businesses had blankets hung for doors. The barber shop had such a coarse blanket for a door that the glue would not stick to it. Miss Blain told of the hush that fell on each place as she entered; no one spoke to her and she spoke to no one – except as Miss Blain wrote: "Our worthy townsman, N.N. Smith recovered his voice sufficiently enough to say, 'I have something for ladies as well as men'" and, with that, he handed her a box of candy. The next Sunday, the owners closed the saloons and other businesses and they attended Sunday school regularly. J.A. Hall was the first Sunday school superintendent.

The thick roof of adobe and the dirt floor kept the school building cool. It was customary to wet the floor down just before each session. One day the president of the school board dug a little trench and wet the floor more than usual because school was to start up the following week and he thought the moisture would keep the school cool for the first few days. Miss Blain wrote: "The ground became soft, the roof support poles spread apart, and the heavy roof of earth fell in."

Hunter School

Some of the early day teachers at the schools were Elizabeth Hunter, Maude Innes, Cora Nesbitt and Bessie Cox. These teachers may have been from the Fruita School.

(Museum of Western Colorado, Earlynne Barcus Collection 1989.104)

Fruita's first brick schoolhouse built in 1887. The building faced Aspen Avenue and was on the same lot as Central Elementary.

The Hunter area constructed and opened its first school in 1896. It had one room. James B. Hunter was president of the school board. His mother, Margaret Stuart Hunter, and S.M. Cox were the other two directors. A discussion of the name of the school ensued with Mr. Cox making a motion that the school be named "New Hope." Mr. Hunter remarked: "Look at the bright, young folks here. If that doesn't represent New Hope, I don't know what would." The motion received a second, and the vote was favorable. But few people ever heard that name because everyone called it the "Hunter School."

The Hunters, a well known pioneer family, had come by wagon from Florida after the Civil War. The father was deceased. Mrs. Margaret Hunter and two sons, James and Will, had stopped many places on their trip to Colorado while she taught school. They stayed in some places longer than others. When they arrived in the district, however, James Hunter reportedly said: "This is a little bit of heaven here on earth." Lucille Hunter Mahannah, daughter of James Hunter, was one of the early day pupils in the first Hunter School and later served fourteen years as County Superintendent of Mesa County schools.

A new school was built, about half a mile south of the first Hunter School, on the corner of 20 and J Roads. It had three classrooms and a kitchen and dining room. It was built in the early part of this century and was discontinued soon after the formation of District 51. After the school reorganization, students from the Hunter School traveled by bus to Fruita Junior High School and Fruita Elementary School. Miss Anna McGinley, who had been first head teacher at Hunter for twenty-four years, joined the staff at Fruita Elementary School.

The district held eighth grade graduation exercises each spring at the school for pupils going into high school in Fruita. The school and the school building were the center of most activities in the area.

Garmesa Schools

Garmesa, so called because it sat partly in Garfield County and partly in Mesa County, became a community in itself. The Garmesa School began in the fall of 1905 and discontinued in 1910. The area could not provide enough students to satisfy the school law. The Quaker Oats Company supported this first school and they had a special building built for it.

Mabyl Righdenour, now Mrs. Will Chapman, taught at Garmesa in 1916-17. The unofficial school house was not located on public property but everyone continued to call it the Garmesa School.

(Museum of Western Colorado, Hazel Guerrie Collection)

Faster than walking, students share rides to the Garmesa School in 1916-17.

The second Garmesa School opened in 1927 as part of the Fruita school system. The enrollment numbered between sixteen and eighteen pupils. Classes were held in a log and adobe building that had originally been a private home. The interior partitions were removed to provide a single large room. The structure had no cloak rooms and no book cases, but lots of books on shelves. According to the teacher, all discarded books from the Fruita school system found their way to Garmesa School. Sometimes no two students had duplicate books although they attended the same class. Pages were missing or unreadable, and many had been water soaked. As elsewhere in the Grand Valley, several copies of a given book might be needed to complete a single assignment.

Teachers and Teaching

The licensing regulations for school teachers early in this century were different from those that exist today. There was no educational requirement, so anyone who could pass the Teacher's Exam was licensed to teach. The county school superintendent gave this two-day exam twice a year, in March and August. Each candidate drew a number from a box and no names appeared on the test papers. Teachers' certificates were issued for one, two or three years, depending on test scores and experience.

Elementary teachers earned from $50 to $75 per month; a few may have made a little more. School lasted eight months for elementary grades and nine months for high school. It was an eight- and four-year system: eight years of grade school taught by one teacher, and four years of high school. Classes started at nine in the morning and lasted until four in the afternoon. There were no hot lunches nor school buses. Instructors wrote arithmetic and spelling lessons on the chalkboard – a wall painted black. Teachers did their own janitorial work. Teachers arrived at school early enough to start a wood and coal fire to heat the building, though sometimes a custodian would start the fire for her. The teacher carried in the bucket of drinking water. Water was dipped from a cistern in a lard bucket and carried to a glass water jug called a cooler. Pupils washed their hands in a common basin and dried their hands on scraps each had brought from home to serve as a towel. Instructors also swept the floors and prepared the lesson sheets for the next day before their day's work ended. If the teacher did not live within walking distance of the school, she usually rode a horse because the roads were so poor.

Some schools provided room and board for the teacher at one of the local families' homes, for one dollar a day. Other teachers lived

and ate in local hotels. Where a teacher lived often determined community reaction to her. If she lived with a family, she seemed to be considered part of the family and was treated as such. When she stayed at a hotel the community called on her to perform more activities.

If someone had a sickness at home, the teacher was often asked to come and assist. It was not unusual for a teacher to be called to help the local doctor at a childbirth, to help stitch up cuts, or help put on plaster casts. I helped with three births and years later had two of these children as students. I administered ether to one lad who fell on a toy horn and cut his tongue badly. I helped the doctor sew it up and helped stitch up the knee of a boy who had cut it in a fall on the ice. I also calculated the amount of hay in stacks, the proper settings for irrigation head gates, and wrote contracts for buying and selling cattle. Other teachers living in private homes seldom were asked to perform such tasks.

Teachers were responsible for raising funds for the annual Christmas treats. To do this, they usually held a pie social or a box lunch social. The women in the community either decorated a box and filled it with supper for two, or baked a pie and ate it with whomever bought it at the auction. For Christmas the young people would make new sacks at a school sewing party and at a second party would fill the cloth containers with treats, usually an orange or apple, a large popcorn ball, a handful of hard candy and some unshelled nuts. These treat sacks were for the children and the older family members who could not attend the Christmas program. One had to be very careful not to miss anyone. A large wooden bucket of hard candy cost only one dollar in 1919. Deciding who got the wooden bucket was always a problem because everyone wanted it.

In those days people needed little to make their own fun. With two pounds of sugar (a dime's worth in those days), a little chocolate, and milk, we could all go to the hotel kitchen and make fudge. A dime's worth of popcorn and butter and a big iron skillet produced a lot of popcorn. With a few ingredients we could make candy and have a taffy pull. Very often on Friday evenings we would have a community sing. A farmer would hitch a team to a hay rack with bales of hay or straw for seats around the outside and a few hot rocks in the middle to keep our feet warm. We would bundle up in lap robes and drive miles out into the country singing all the way and back. Sometimes we would have supper at one of the homes we visited. I remember in 1921 when we went to one home for a sing, the lady wanted to serve refreshments but the minister told her we could sing better on an empty stomach

— we would eat later. After we finished our sing and she started to serve she said to me, "You folks might just as well have ate." We had not sung very loudly. Churches had a birthday dinner once a month to honor all the people born that month. Everyone brought a covered dish and the family of one of the honored guests brought the cake and candles.

Preachers, their wives, and teachers were always under the scrutiny of local people who criticized them for doing things that others in the community were free to do. One Sunday afternoon about eighteen of us, including three married couples and the student preacher, went coasting in the hills near Loma. We returned together to the hotel to warm up. A large fireplace extended all across one end of the lobby. There were not enough chairs for all of us to sit down and our feet were very wet, so the married couples lay down and put their feet to the fire. The rest of the group joined them, the men all on one side and the women on the other, with the married couples in the middle. None of us said or did anything that could have caused any of the self-appointed neighborhood saints any concern. But the next day, two members of the school board called on the teachers, and church members visited the preacher and his wife. All expressed surprise and disapproval of our conduct. None of the other young folks in the group had any such visitors.

Before the late 1930s when electricity came to the area, parents brought lamps from their homes to light the school houses during evening meetings. A few times lamp salesmen would bring "Aladdin lamps" or "New York lamps" to light the schools, just to display their products.

I was often younger than some of my pupils, since the older boys generally attended school only during the winter months and worked on the family farm during the summer. They never posed a discpline problem, mostly because they wanted more schooling, especially reading and arithmetic. Although the teacher could administer discpline, a sharp whack on the back was all that was necessary. Most pupils wanted to cooperate and learn. And, too, parents took an active concern in their progress and cooperated with the teachers. In turn, the teachers cooperated with the parents. If the pupils rode horses to school, the parents often wrote the teacher to request she see that the children fed and watered the horses at noon and that they tightened the saddle cinches before starting home.

No place I stayed as a teacher had indoor toilets or heated bathrooms or bedrooms. At night I would take a pitcher of hot water to my room to fill a hot water bag and often in the morning the

(Museum of Western Colorado, Grand Valley Water Users Association Collection 80.115 #87)

Appleton School, built in 1911, still serves as an elementary school. In 1925, a four-year high school curriculum was added.

remaining water in the pitcher was frozen. At school I kept a roll of news print paper, and, when youngsters arrived wet at school, I gave them several layers of the paper to put between their bodies and their wet clothes to pick up some of the water and help keep them warm.

There was one stipulation in the teacher's contract that I am sure every teacher broke. The contract required teachers to be in their rooms by nine o'clock every night except Friday and Saturday. If we went to a movie or some meeting, it was usually about ten before we could be back to our rooms. No one ever criticized me for this.

School affairs were held throughout the year to raise money to buy such things as chalk, construction paper, balls, and jump ropes. Sometimes school districts were so in debt that teachers were not given paychecks. Each month teachers received warrants but often could not cash them for several months — sometimes nine months! I usually asked the school board to hold mine since the warrants drew interest of about three percent; however, if I needed money, I sold them to one of the local banks at a discount. If I borrowed money to live on until my warrant was good, my parents' signature had to be on the loan. I resented that! At some time during a term each family usually invited a teacher home for a meal and sometimes for a weekend. That made it all the more important that a teacher remember the family of each pupil with a Christmas card. (But postage was only two cents then!)

School houses became a center for community and recreational life. They were places of worship (people even conducted funerals at the school), dance halls, election booths, places for community meetings and places to practice and present plays. Locals would usually put on at least one play each year. Everyone enjoyed the practice rehearsals and the final play. In many cases the school board had to insure the schools as dance halls because insurance companies would not pay if the school burned within twenty-four hours of a dance. Some of the overly pious parents took a dim view of their children attending school in a building insured as a dance hall.

The arrival of radio and television made pupils better informed on a wide variety of subjects than they were in the early days. Increased emphasis on sports has taken much of the time formerly reserved for basic school studies. However, even back then we had considerable competition among country schools. About mid-afternoon on Fridays, pupils from nearby schools would often get together for a "spell down," arithmetic contest, or an athletic event. Spelling was oral, arithmetic done at the chalk boards, and, weather permitting, there might be a baseball game or indoor wrestling contest. These were excellent ways

(Museum of Western Colorado, Grand Valley Water Users Association Collection 80.115 #155)
The Appleton Consolidated School with a school wagon and students bustles with activity.

to mingle with and inspire the students, even though it meant extra work for both teachers and parents who had to provide transportation.

In those days holidays were marked on the calendars with red numbers. The children loved these red-letter days and the teacher would have a special lesson to explain the history and background events that made for such days.

Even as today, school books were expensive and country schools usually had to get along with used, hand-me-down books from bigger schools. We rarely had a complete set of texts for all the pupils. Pupils treasured their books and took good care of them and a new book was a treasure. Often pupils would swap books among schools to make up workable sets. Oh! How we could have used a Xerox machine!

A school requirement in those days, one that I think should be started again, was that each pupil memorize at least one poem each month and recite it in class. It was a good memory exercise, it introduced pupils to poetry, and it taught public speaking.

Once or twice each term the county superintendent of schools would visit each school. He would monitor class work, check the teacher's grade and record book, and listen to problems or school needs and try to find solutions.

Social History

Ute Indians as Neighbors

The Ute Indians came through the area from Ouray and Montrose to spend the winter in Utah and returned in the spring. We all looked forward to these events between 1907 and 1920. Dear old Chipeta and her brother Chief McCook headed the group. There were probably twelve to fifteen wagons with many poor horses tied behind. The Utes covered the animals with tarpaulin, rugs, burlap bags, animal skins — anything they had. They camped about ten days near the government cabins on Kannah Creek about a block from the Pride School.

On their spring return, they usually spent only one night there. I realize now that they were a hungry group. They picked rose hips from the wild roses, cedar berries and other wild berries or fruit, dug many kinds of roots, fished in the creek and trapped rabbits and prairie dogs using tin cans that they cut twice across the bottom and bent the tips up. The Indians then placed the cans in the burrows at night and, when the small animal tried to come out in the morning, it caught its head in the can. I never heard the Indians apologize to the animal before they killed it for food, but one of them told me that they did. They hung their decorated articles on the fence to sell. Young women took care of the children. They would spread a blanket on the ground and seat the youngsters facing out around the edge and give each child something to play with — a stick, a grasshopper, or such. The Indians of school age attended the Indian school in Grand Junction which is now the Regional Center.

My granddad came to the area in a wagon train and always said that the mosquitoes caused more trouble than the Indians. He believed: "Treat an Indian right and you have a friend but God pity you if he is your enemy."

The Loma Presbyterian Church was located to honor Chipeta, queen of the Ute Indians. Some renegade Indians had stolen some white girls and were fleeing with them into Utah. They had been gone from the Montrose area a day or more before Chipeta knew of it. With a few Indian braves, Chipeta took shortcuts and caught the renegades where the church later was built. The girls were released to Chipeta. Sixty or more years ago parishioners told that story at the convening of the Presbyteria. A Denver and Rio Grande porter also retold the story, and above Palisade he would point out the high, sheer trail down the front of the mountains that Chipeta took to gain time in overtaking the Indians.

(Museum of Western Colorado, Earlynne Barcus Collection 1989 #155)
Indians pose for a postcard portrait near Dragon.

Come As You Are Parties

Soon after the Lower Valley Hospital Association was formed in 1946, a club at Loma and an organization in Fruita began sponsoring "come as you are" parties. These parties had one basic rule: invited guests had to come just as they were dressed when they received the invitaiton, or pay a fine for each change they made. If they refused to come they were assessed a one dollar fine during a time when dollar bills were scarce. People could refuse, without fine, if they had attended at least three of the past four parties. Rules allowed the hostess to serve only two things as refreshments and twenty-five cents was collected from each person present.

My first invitation came when my husband and I were clearing weeds and moss from our ditches. I was riding the ditcher and was drenched to the skin and coated with layers of mud. I stopped outside to remove my wet shoes and stockings before entering the house. Neighbor women had been sitting in a car by the highway watching, and they arrived at our house just as I had removed one shoe and stocking. I had to pay a fine to remove the others. I went to the party but refused to enter the hostess' home so wet and muddy. We all had fun.

Later I evened the score against the five of them. About ten days later I picked up this same group before five o'clock in the morning. I hammered on their doors and shouted, "Help! Help!" When they came

to their doors I said: "Help the Fund Drive." I insisted they accompany me, in their night clothes and bare footed, to the Bellis house. Mrs. Bellis had been the driver of the car when they picked me up. We were a wild looking gang, although most of the women had paid a fine to slip on a robe. Mrs. Bellis was up — it was almost six o'clock — but she was not looking her best. She put a pan of eggs on to boil and served hard boiled eggs and salt for refreshments. We were all back home soon after seven to do our morning farm chores.

When the parties first started, the women made an effort to serve fresh cookies, cake, sandwiches, and such, but later the refreshments got to be just for fun. One lady had begun making crab apple jelly, so she served a half ripe crab apple and a half green apple to each of us as her two allowed servings. Another ran to the ditch bank, pulled a quantity of fresh wild mint, poured water over it, and then served mint tea with sugar. When it proved to be too strong, she brought ice and water, but was fined for serving more than two things. Another lady took her callers out to the gooseberry bushes and invited them to pick their own refreshment! One husband swore that if those "old hens" came to his home he would serve them a handful of wheat and corn. Everyone in the Lower Valley must have helped with the fund raising and had fun doing it.

I doubt if there was anyone in the Lower Valley that didn't help with the fund raising and didn't have fun doing it.

Recreation

People made their own fun. We skated and danced in the winter and worked hard and swam in the summer. Picnics were a common event. Yard dancing in the summertime to a hand cranked, big horned phonograph was popular. We usually square danced or danced the Virginia Reel.

Schools were usually not more than six miles from another school because parents had to furnish transportation or the youngsters "rode shank horses" which was slang for walking. Spelling bees or spelldowns and arithmetic matches were popular. Sometimes the pupils competed against the adults. I don't know why we called one a "bee" and the other a "match." The educational get-together might be on Friday afternoons after the last recess — schools stayed in session until 4 p.m., or they might be on an evening or Sunday afternoon.

Men pitched horseshoes or split wood for the school as contests; the boys played ball or went swimming in the irrigation ditches.

Early day recreation usually involved work accomplishment. People did not get together just for fun — it was usually to accomplish a task

like corn picking, house raising, threshing, hay or fruit harvesting, filling the ice house, or branding and dehorning cattle.

Men and women exchanged work. Our school copy books carried many worthwhile sayings. One was: "Many hands make light work." If the men were exchanging work the wives and children often went along, and they usually outnumbered the men. Sometimes the women cut and sewed carpet rags during the afternoon, sometimes they tied comforters, worked on quilts, or did mending.

It seemed as if a new family never felt as if they belonged in the community until neighbors called on them to help or to loan something. Women welcomed their new neighbors by asking the wife to bathe a new baby, by offering houseplant slips, by inviting her to make blocks for friendship quilts or by asking her for a recipe for something she brought to a picnic.

At apple harvest everyone took apples home; at butchering time everyone got meat. It usually worked out because the neighbors returned meat when they butchered, except for one man, who always came to help butcher and would say: "When I butcher, I'll give you meat." This continued a year or more, but when the farmers asked him when and what he planned to butcher he replied: "I don't know yet, I don't have any livestock."

Leap Year

Leap year was the women's year to propose to the men. At the dances the girls and women had to ask for the dance and pay the fiddler. (We seldom had more than a fiddler and a piano player.) When women saw a man and wife they considered not well matched, some "catty" woman would be sure to remark: "I'll bet that was a leap year marriage."

Fall Fish Fry

Politics and red ants killed the Fall Fish Fry held for many years at Horsethief Canyon. Farmers went to the river on a Saturday and with either four or six boats they hung nets betwen each pair of boats, catching hundreds of large fish. The smaller ones escaped through the holes in the nets. They kept the fish alive in vats of water overnight, then early Sunday they were dressed by the members of the Loma Community Club, and the men fried them. The women brought the rest of the picnic dinner and soft drinks. It was hard work but we had a day of fun until the office seekers from all over the state started to swarm over the place. Republicans swore, Democrats cussed, and the Loma community decided it was not worthwhile. No more fish fries!

It was bad enough having to clean the fish without having all the hot air!

Watermelons

Mr. and Mrs. Robert Shrofshire, known as Uncle Bob and Aunt Myra, raised watermelons for seed. They harvested the seed in a most delightful way. The Shrofshires invited everyone from Whitewater, Kannah Creek, and Reeder and Purdy Mesas to their farm on a Saturday shortly before a killing frost. Teams hitched to big hay wagons were part of the transportation to their Whitewater Creek ranch. Uncle Bob required only that we spit the seeds into the numerous containers placed around the yard and to "visit one of the 'little houses'" just before leaving for home. Uncle Bob would give a melon to anyone who would save the seeds for him. If they did not save the seeds they never got another melon to take home. (Uncle Bob had a wonderful memory about melon takers and seed returners.)

Family Cookouts

When anyone remarked that they had been "eating out" almost every evening it did not mean they had gone to a restaurant. It meant the women had fixed food that could be carried outdoors and eaten on a table made from planks laid across two sawhorses. "Eating out" usually called for a "mosquito fire" which consisted of a fire made from debris collected around the yard; then when it was good and hot someone smothered it with green weeds pulled for the occasion. The smoke was dense but it kept the mosquitoes at a distance. People used "eating out" as one way of keeping the house cool by not having a fire inside.

As a family or with friends, I believe we had a more entertaining meal than if we had eaten inside. Granddad knew about the stars and told us interesting things about them. Dad recalled events that had happened when he came west with a surveying crew from Pennsylvania. We had "comb music" which consisted of covering a comb with tissue paper and humming through it. It made my lips tingle. Several of the group had harmonicas. We called them mouth organs. Granddad led us in singing such songs as "My Sweet Nellie Gray," "Tramp,Tramp, Tramp, the Boys Are Marching," "When You and I Were Young, Maggie," "Old Black Joe," "Silver Threads among the Gold," and "In the Garden." Dad often said it was not much music but it was cheerful.

Dad often set up his surveying instrument on Sunday afternoons so we could look through it, but we could not touch it. Back in those

days of the open range, we often watched the bulls fight. We could even see the bulls bat their eyes. It was rather frightening to feel that close to an angry bull. We had lots of interesting reactions from people watching a bull fight. While watching her first bull fight, one new school teacher became so frightened that she fell down and began to yell: "Let's get out of here!" The bulls weren't even close.

Strawhouses

As late as 1922 in the Loma-Highline area, many people still lived in baled straw houses. If farmers built sod houses, they used mostly plowed sod cut into two-foot squares. In both cases they used wood only for door and window frames, and for doors.

I have been in many of them, and they were comfortable and functional. Some had adobe roofs held up by tree trunks and timber slabs; some had willow roofs covered with mud. Many had hard packed dirt floors with straw mixed in it. Others covered the packed earth with black tar building paper. Windows often lacked glass, but they did have muslin in the frames to let in light and air, and keep out the cold. The wives made the buildings homier by improvising quilts, blankets, canvas, or burlap as room dividers.

These families used what we called a "wick" for light. Not really a candle, this "wick" consisted of a dish of fat with a lighted wick. It gave about as much light as a match and smelled like hell.

Women had babies in this type of house – and they thrived and became good citizens. We do not need to go back to our ancestors to find pioneers.

Cemeteries of the Lower Valley

The death of an individual required a burial ceremony. Some were interred in the Elmwood Cemetery and some in the Catholic Cemetery a mile north of Fruita. As early as 1881 Fruita had designated a burial ground, but in 1897 the grounds were plotted and designated as cemeteries of the Lower Valley.

Many U.S. servicemen are buried in these cemeteries, including men from both sides of the Civil War. There are graves of veterans from the Spanish-American War, World War I, World War II, the Korean conflict and from battles in Vietnam. Many of these men were killed in combat and later reburied here. There are about two hundred servicemen's graves in the Elmwood Cemetery. The Cemetery Board designated one section for the bodies of servicemen, identified by their low government headstones.

William Pabor, founder of Fruita, is buried in the south section. He has a rock marker with a plaque. At one time, the family made the markers for their loved ones out of wood or rock. When marble was located in the canyon north of Palisade, people began to use it to mark grave sites, as well as to rip-rap the river banks upstream.

For many years custom required the graves be topped with rounded mounds of dirt but in 1926 these were leveled and sunken graves filled in. The caretaker then brought irrigation water to the site and seeded the area to grass and flowers. A flag pole was erected, seats and benches were built, and the cemetery was adopted as a community project. Two or three times each year, before Memorial Day, the community sponsored work projects to clean up the cemetery, with a big twenty-five cent dinner served to the volunteers. Proceeds from the dinner went to the Cemetery Auxiliary.

I do not remember how or why Colorado received six European birch trees; but the Elmwood Cemetery received the one given to Mesa County. This was something very special. About twenty years after the tree was planted and had grown and prospered, the caretakers notified the Cemetery Board that the American flag had whipped into the tree in a storm and damaged it so badly that the tree had to be cut down. Not so! The servicemen of the community dug up the entire foundation for the flag pole so that the tree would be saved. Today the cemetery is a Mesa County project.

For years the Highpoint Club in Fruita attempted to find out the favorite hardy flower or shrub of each person buried during the year. Then, with the next spring, they would set out these favorite plants in memory of each of these persons.

In February 1932 many towns throughout the country had a contest for community beautification in honor of the two hundredth birthday of George Washington. The Lower Valley entered Fruita in the contest. The contestants planted many trees and shrubs in what is now Circular Park, in both of the cemeteries, and in the city park. Circular Park had been square up to that time, with hitching posts around it, and a horse watering trough on the east side. Many residents expressed a great deal of dissatisfaction about the cutting of many large trees in the Square and the removal of the water trough.

At the Elmwood Cemetery they planted evergreens and many shrubs and hardy bulbs and flowers. During one clean-up day the beautification committee loaded two wagons with debris from the cemetery. One was filled with old broken bottles, dead limbs, cans, and dead grass; and the other with iris, orange lilies, lemon lilies, daylilies and a few tulip bulbs that had been raked up. The men dumped the

cans and broken bottles and the women covered them with the roots and bulbs that had been discarded as the cemetery rows had been straightened. The committee did all this about ten days before the judges came to look over the gardens and cemeteries honoring George Washington.

Would you believe it? The buds and bulbs had all opened up. The dump was beautiful! The judges placed it first in "sunken garden beauty." Women who had planned, spent their time and worked so hard to make their sunken garden entries beautiful were disgusted by the judges' decision and protested. Old timers in the area still laugh about the Elmwood Dump getting the first prize. (It only lasted about one spring.)

There are small cemeteries at Appleton, Loma, Rhone and on the Highline. Many families buried their very small children on their own property. Local people most frequently selected an area outside by the side of the rose bush or just outside the parents' bedroom window for such burials.

Funerals

If a community did not have a church, area residents often held funerals at the family home, or even at times at the school house before the coming of automobiles. Local carpenters often made the caskets; and women who had known and loved the deceased decorated the casket inside and out.

The family called an undertaker if they wanted someone else to prepare the body, or if the burial would not be within forty-eight hours of the death. Custom demanded that everyone dress in black but younger children would wear white.

Relatives never left the corpse unattended. Usually two people sat nearby. Small coins (one cent) were placed on the eyelids to hold the eye shut. Sometimes the family kept the coins as keepsakes.

Lumber wagons, spring wagons or fruit wagons were used to haul the casket to the cemetery. People considered it an honor to be asked to provide the wagon. If the horses were allowed to go faster than a walk, people expressed their shock at the hurried and disrespectful pace.

Friends or relatives of the deceased usually opened and dug the grave. Most cemeteries were uncared-for plots of ground and each family was responsible for family grave care. Everyone regarded Memorial Days as a time for a family gathering at the cemetery and the family left no grave without some flowers.

Births

I must have been twenty-four years old before I knew people who had been born in a hospital. It seemed to be a mark of superiority for both the mother and the child. In those days, people considered hospitals a place to die, not to be born.

Summer Cooling

Farmers' wives were always looking for ways to keep the home cool during hot summers. One method employed the fireless cooker, a large iron Dutch oven with a tight lid. The wife put the noon meal — usually a meat and a variety of home grown vegetables — on to cook in this pot while she cooked breakfast. It cooked on the stove or in the oven until she took it out into the yard where a pit had been prepared. The wife also removed the ashes from the breakfast fire. She then dumped half of the hot ashes into the pit, set the Dutch oven in on them, placed the lid on tight and poured the remainder of the ashes on top of the oven, and covered all with a large rock slab. It kept right on cooking until mealtime.

Women also hung towels wrung out of water in several places about the rooms as another room cooler. Hand fans were always available at homes, church and meeting places.

Family Washing

Doing the family washing did not start with the sorting of the clothes — it began with filling at least three wooden barrels with ditch water the night before so the dirt and trash could settle. Next morning we dipped the water out carefully so as not to rile up the mud on the sides and bottom of the barrel. The distance water had to be carried depended on which ditch had water running in it that day. We heated the water on top of the cook stove, then added lye to bring the alkali and other undesirable elements to the top in a foam. This we removed with a cream skimmer. If a family had a hand-turned washer, everyone took turns working it. If not a machine, women often put the clothes in a tub set on the floor and used a clothes "stomper" which was a large plunger affair. Some housewives had their youngsters stomp the clothing in tubs of water, but mostly they used the washboard.

Lye soap was so hard on the hands that women used mutton tallow or goose grease for their lotion. After we got electricity and got a washing machine and a pump, we used soft rain water collected in cisterns, or went to a laundromat where two dimes did the job for many years. But, like everything else, it is much costlier now.

(Museum of Western Colorado, Anna Beck Collection F878 #24)

Putting up hay on the Weckel farm c. 1909.

(Museum of Western Colorado, Anna Beck Collections F878 #28)

Putting up corn on the Weckel farm c. 1909.

Food Shopping

My parents, John and Minnie Geiger, and I believe most of the other families in the Whitewater areas only went to Grand Junction for shopping twice a year. People made a trip early in November to get Christmas gifts, a five-gallon wooden bucket of hard candy for one dollar, ammunition, and food. The second trip was during late March to get seeds, school materials, ammunition, food, and coal oil for the lamps. Other supplies that people usually bought were: coffee, tea, white flour, soda, baking powder, salt, pepper, spices, canning necessities, oatmeal, rice, crackers, toilet soap, lye to make laundry soap, solder to mend anything that leaked, and yarn for mother to knit our stockings, socks, scarves, sweaters and mittens.

We kept bees so we had honey for much of our sweets. We made cider vinegar, and ground grain for whole wheat bread and cereal, corn bread and mush for our light bread starter. We had root crops in the pit silo, apples and pears by the bushel in the cellar, our own meat, lard, milk, butter, cottage cheese, cheese, chickens and eggs, wild game, and all kinds of fruits, juices, vegetables, cabbage, squash, onions. We canned and dried many fruits and vegetables.

Electricity

Electricity came to the Lower Valley in about 1937 and made a big change in living for farm families. Women used electric washing machines instead of the washboards or hand-turned washing machines. They also acquired electric irons, refrigerators, cooking stoves, lights, milking machines, shop tools, and rug cleaners – no more having the rugs on the clothes line and beating the dust out of them for hours at a time. No more having a fire in the cook stove most of the day to cook a pot of beans and ham; no more pumping the bellows for your husband or father working in the shop with a welder; no more taking a lamp or lantern to the evening entertainment at school or church; and no more running to the cistern to get a bucket of water. The electric blanket or electric hot pad did away with the hot water bottle or a hot stone on cold nights in a cold bed. Doing the ironing no longer required the person to wear a wet towel around her head to keep the perspiration from running into her eyes, or heating flat irons on the kitchen stove. This list of changes brought by electricity could go on and on.

Men kept asking: "What are women going to do to spend their time?" That did not create a problem. When people would brag about all the work saving that electricity did, someone was apt to remark: "But you still put your pants on – one leg at a time."

Around 1904, my granddad and father attended a Mountain Telephone meeting at Pride's School on Kannah Creek, and talked on a wire as far away as Grand Junction. It was unbelievable. About six families, including ours, in our area got telephones. People we had never heard of came to use it or we got calls from people we did not know who expected us to pass messages on. The telephone operator rang a single long ring for everyone to answer when she received news of a death, accident, fire, dance or a big flock of sheep moving through.

Dad's Advice

When Dad had to go away on a surveying job and thought Mother might need to hire help for the harvest, he usually said: "Don't hire a man who has a dog or a horse or who smokes. A man with a dog fills his plate so half is left for his dog; the horse owner can't turn his horse out on the range so he dips into the chicken food to give the horse grain; and the smoker spends too much time rolling cigarettes and there is danger of fires."

Travel Time

My grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Veider and family, came in a wagon train headed for the California gold rush. They left from Florence, Colorado (between Pueblo and Canon City), and it took them over two years to get as far as Whitewater. Grandma died there and my grandfather remained. There were few bridges and the wagons were watertight. They unhitched the wagons and swam the team across the creek or river, then hitched the wagon by the tongue or double-trees to pull it across with ropes. They hitched other teams on the near shore to the back of the wagon to keep it from washing downstream.

I boarded a charted bus in Florence about thirty-five years ago at about 7:00 a.m. and it arrived in Grand Junction twenty minutes after 11:00 that same morning. Coming back from Denver by plane not long ago, the airline routed us over Florence and the stewardess told the names of the towns below as we flew over. It took less than twenty minutes to land in Grand Junction. Years earlier, this same trip had taken two years for my grandparents. Some difference!

Train Wreck

In 1909, Mr. and Mrs. Staup and family sold their farm in Whitewater and moved to Gypsum to run a family business. They came to stay a few days with my parents. They had purchased their train tickets in advance. On the day of their departure, while driving from Kannah Creek to Whitewater, we encountered a terrific rain storm.

The Whitewater ditch filled to over-flowing and washed the bridge away just as we got there. There was no other way across so we sat in the rain and watched the train go by within a hundred yards of us.

That evening as we all sat around the supper table a long ring came on the telephone. This was the usual signal for an alarm or disaster announcement. The operator announced that Mr. and Mrs. Staup, with daughters Rae and Myrtle and sons Wellis and Lewis, had all been killed in a train wreck near Glenwood Springs, they and many others. We were stunned.

Dad said: "Each of us shall say a thankful prayer that this announcement isn't so – each in his own way." Mother said: "First let me call the operator and have her announce that the Staups are here with us and safe, so others can pray too."

The passenger list had been checked by the train crew after the wreck. They considered anyone not alive and present to be dead. The crew had not deleted the Staups from the passenger list when they did not show up to board at Whitewater.

"Latch String"

"Come in – the latch string is out" may not mean a great deal to the generations born since the days when people used latch strings to lock doors. There was a heavy wooden bar put across the outside doors, on the inside of the house. The bar rested in a frame on the side of the door frame and on the door. A heavy buckskin lace (like a leather shoelace) was fastened securely to the bar. A hole just large enough for the buckskin lace to go through went through the door and hung down outside. When anyone pulled the string, it lifted the bar above the frame and the door could be opened. Many of the hinges used were made of buckskin. They might be a foot wide. They had to be heavy enough to hold the door up in place. People often made their doors out of heavy lumber split logs. If the family pulled in the latch string, there was no way to lift the bar and the door was considered locked. Sometimes they used buckskin to pull the door open – one on each side of the door.

Moral Codes

Vaccinations have done away with many of the diseases we had as children and have closed "pest houses" that communities used for contagious diseases like smallpox and diphtheria. The "pest house" in Grand Junction was located across the Colorado River bridge away from the city. Anyone taken there always seemed to carry the brand of having been confined in the pest

(Museum of Western Colorado, Grand Valley Water Users Association Collection 80.115 #234)
Idyllic farm scene of the period.

house. ("Look at her trying to put on airs, and her having spent two months in the pest house.")

People also frowned upon divorces. When the community learned that a teacher had been divorced and had taken back her maiden name, the school board fired her. I only knew two divorced women before 1922.

Grasshoppers

In the early part of this century, grasshoppers presented a real problem. Poisons could not be used because most of the crops where the hoppers thrived were to be used to feed livestock.

Early one spring a young man came through the country selling "grasshopper baths." It was a canvas bag opened the full length of the neck yoke of the mowing machine or hay rake. After it was fastened to the machine the farmer would fill the bag about half full of water. As the horses went through the fields the grasshopers flew up into the contraption and drowned. It worked fine; thousands of hoppers were drowned and the bag had to be emptied quite often. The hoppers were then used for chicken feed. The chickens loved them; but about the third day, eggs began to get scarce. The hens became listless and a few died with too full, over-stuffed crops.

By the end of the first week funeral services were in order for the many piles of dead hoppers. They smelled worse than a dead horse. They were no longer used for chicken food so farmers buried them in the ditch banks in the fields. So much for the "good old days."

Russian Thistles or Tumbleweeds

Did you believe that Russian thistles had always been native to the U.S.? People who have been around for eighty years or more can remember when this plant was brought here from Russia as a fodder for sheep. It was about 1910 when pupils at Pride School and the livestock on the open range in that area first saw Russian thistles. They were huge round dry weeds blowing in the spring wind. I am serious when I estimate they stood three feet tall and the largest measured up to twelve feet in circumference. The teachers allowed the students to watch from the windows as four of them went blowing across the playground. None of us knew then what they were or how heavy they would be. These racing, tumbling weeds spooked the livestock, especially the horses. Some of the cattle ran too, but not like the horses did.

Local newspapers carried articles about the tumbleweed and several months later the national school paper, *Current Events*, printed an article about why and how this plant was brought to the U.S., and that Russian thistles had been found in virtually every state in the union within just a few years after they first were introduced to this country.

Later in the summer after we first sighted them, the plants came up thick and green and we could easily see the trail each tumbleweed had tumbled. Livestock on the range devoured them but the thistle proved a mixed blessing. In the cultivated fields they were a nuisance.

Gypsy Bands

Someone could write about the gypsy bands that used to travel through western Colorado, usually in the autumn around fruit harvest. They came in covered wagons drawn by poor horses. They would steal anything not nailed down. They wanted to "bless" money so it would grow, but few people would let them do the blessing after one trial. The women and girls wore full skirts with many hidden pockets in the folds. You could watch them walk into a grocery store (always in a group), and when they left they had so many articles hidden that the doors were scarcely wide enough.

One of their favorite camping places was along Highway 6 & 50 and 14 Road. They always came to our house to borrow a bucket of water, but that wasn't all they took.

One time the group left in the night leaving behind a feeble old man and woman, who were asleep in a tamarack thicket. We furnished the couple with breakfast and dinner but towards evening I called Sheriff Charley Lumley and reported the case. The old woman sat there all day crying as loudly as possible and shouting, "Oh! Joe! Joe!" Lumley came and got them and their one dirty blanket.

Only the children and women came to the house begging for help. One small girl told us her mother was a widow with a new baby. Her father had died seven years before. If they still travel through here now, they may have a different mode of tranportation, but I will bet they have not changed their nature.

Bedbugs

What a horrible subject to discusss! They were the bane of every housewife's life until World War II. A home could be free of the blood-sucking pests one day and almost overnight be overrun by them. They could be found in such unlikely places as books from the library, school books, the mail, on people's clothing in a public meeting place, the railroad depot or bus station, friends' homes — almost everywhere.

It was difficult to find a pest-free house to rent. One time we looked at ten houses and all showed evidence of bedbugs. To keep them off the beds, people often set the bed legs in cans of water, but the pests could climb the walls and drop from the ceilings. If you purchased used furniture or baby carriages, it was wise to give them a boiling water bath in the yard before admitting them to the house.

Salesmen ran ads guaranteeing their product would kill the bugs. My granddad spent a quarter (which was real money then) to get a sure cure. He got two small blocks of wood, with instructions to place the bedbug on one block and mash it with the other! Another ad guaranteed to kill if directions were followed. The package contained a white substance that looked very much like salt but no one offered to taste it. The instructions said to mix it with boiling water and use it on the infested area while still boiling.

The last bedbugs I saw were in a tourist cabin in Craig. I called the manager in the middle of the night and he helped us to move to another cabin. He refused our money if we would leave without telling anyone. Some twenty years ago on the bulletin board in Fort Collins was this notice: "Five dollars for three live bedbugs." As far as I know, no one collected.

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