

FIRST DRAFT

# The backstory of the community of Clifton and its bright future

If you lived in Clifton in the first half of the 20th century, you would have visited the Hornbaker store.

"In Clifton, the Hornbaker store was big," said Lawrence Wild, who was born near Clifton in 1928 and spent most of his school years there. "But Mr. Hornbaker was a crabby old man. We used to play tricks on him. We'd call him at 2 in the morning to wake him up."



BOB SILBERNAGEL

Despite such pranks, the Hornbakers were a respected family in early Clifton, along with the Gardners, Barrs and Clymers. Newspaper stories frequently told of members of those families gathering for holiday feasts or summer picnics. Wild's sister, Alice, married into the Gardner clan.

There was a sense of community in Clifton in those days, and into the 1960s, when Jesse Dodd was growing up there. A descendant of the Gardner family, Dodd recalled community-wide baseball games at a vacant lot on Gardner Avenue.

The Hornbaker Store was gone by then, but there were other retailers, most notably Pond's store, where Dodd bought penny candy.

Throughout the early 20th century, churches were important community facilities, often used for social gatherings and meetings of civic organizations. Fruit farms dotted the area, and Clifton was a major shipping point for peaches, apples and pears.

In the 21st century, the Mesa County Commissioners hope to re-establish a stronger sense of community in Clifton with the new community center and campus next to Rocky Mountain Elementary School.

In January, the commissioners approved a \$1.4 million contract for design and engineering services for the campus, which is to include a new community hall, an early childhood education center and a childhood training center.

Additionally, the Mesa County Libraries' Board of Trustees is in negotiations with the county to build its new Clifton library on the campus.

Clifton has never been an incorporated municipality, but it has been a Mesa County community for a long time.

The earliest newspaper reference I found for Clifton was from August of 1891: "Clifton is the name of a new station about seven miles east of Grand Junction on the Rio Grande Junction Railway."

The railroad stop earned several newspaper mentions, including this one in 1895: "It is reported on good authority that Clifton is to have a new railroad depot and station early next spring ... already there has been some inquiry for town lots."

In 1897, The Daily Sentinel reported that the first train car of fruit was shipped from Clifton. That same year, an association of Clifton-area fruit growers was formed.

By 1900, Abner G. Mann was named postmaster for Clifton and opened a general store. A 1901 article in the Grand Junction News described Mann's Clifton jobs as "postmaster, store-keep-



Thompson's (Hornbaker's) Store

PALISADE HISTORICAL SOCIETY, COURTESY OF BILL ELLICOTT

The Hornbaker Store building, circa early 1950s, after it had been sold and renamed Thompson's.

er, justice of the peace, and farmer."

Real estate advertisements from the first few years of the 20th century touted parcels of land near Clifton as some of the best agricultural properties in the state.

But it was in 1904-1905 that things began to change significantly. J.E. Hornbaker moved from Kansas and opened his store in Clifton, just north of the railroad tracks on what is now Second Street.

In 1905, the first lumber yard was opened. Later there would be a drug store, and two different fruit-packing sheds on either side of the tracks.

Also in 1905, W.S. Gardner moved to Clifton from Palisade, after emigrating from Kansas the year before.

Gardner "bought a peach orchard in the middle of Clifton," recalled his daughter, Maybelle Gardner Clymer, who was 13 when the family moved to Colorado. "Dad had a house built in Clifton without my mom knowing about it." That house was on what is now Gardner Avenue.

In addition to being a fruit farmer, W.S. Gardner had dairy cows. He bought and sold orchard land and other property. He had an interest in a local coal mine. And he became a director of the First State Bank of Clifton, which was located where the Triple Tree Tavern now sits.

In 1907, the first school was opened, for grades 1 through 8. It was where the current Clifton Elementary School sits. From 1941 to 1946, Clifton High School also operated in a separate building on the same site.

Maybelle Gardner Clymer met her husband, Fred Clymer, at the Hornbaker Store in 1914. He was a clerk in the store and she was a young teacher who had recently returned from Idaho.

She and Fred began dating, and they were married the following year. This despite the fact that Fred Clymer had been chased up a tree by W.S. Gardner's bull and had suffered rib injuries in the process.

That bull must have been a terror. In 1915, the Sentinel reported that another man had "narrowly escaped an attack from the bull owned by W.S. Gardner."

By 1919, W.S. Gardner and his friend, W.H. Barr, had purchased a controlling interest in the Clifton bank. The same year, Gardner's son, D.L. "Dore" Gardner, was listed as one of the di-



PALISADE HISTORICAL SOCIETY, COURTESY OF LOIS PETERSON

The Clifton School as it appeared in 1933-1934. It was located where Clifton Elementary School now sits.



PALISADE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Looking north on Clifton's main commercial street in the early 1900s. First Bank of Clifton is in the last building on the left. Hornbaker store is not in this shot. It was located farther south, adjacent to the railroad tracks.



PALISADE HISTORICAL SOCIETY, COURTESY OF MATT DARLING

The Clifton railroad depot in the early 1900s. Clifton's main commercial area is to the left, behind the depot.

rectors of the bank. Like his father, D.L. Gardner owned fruit orchards and was involved in other business ventures.

Trips to the top of Mount Garfield were regular social activities for Clifton folks. Both Dodd and Wild recalled hiking to the top of the prominent local mountain. Maybelle Clymer said when she and Fred were dating, they rode horseback to the top, although the exact route is unclear.

Lawrence Wild recalled that he and his friends frequently crossed Highline Canal to explore the desert north of Clifton or to climb Mount Garfield. They often crossed on a couple of wooden planks placed as a makeshift bridge. Wild received the nickname "Supe," short for Superman, because he carried one of his friends across on his back.

By 1940, when Wild was 12 years old, J.E. Hornbaker had been operating his Clifton store for 35 years, and he was seeking re-election as a member of the state Legislature from Colorado. But he was defeated that year. Hornbaker sold his

store in 1947, and by the early 1950s, it was known as Thompson's Grocery.

Wild, who lived about two miles east of Clifton, graduated from Clifton High School in 1946. Then he joined the military.

"When I went in the Army, that was the first experience I had with running water, indoor plumbing or riding a train," he said.

During the 1960s, Jesse Dodd lived with his family on Collyer Avenue. He had to cross the tracks to attend Clifton Elementary, but frequently stopped at Pond's store, just north of the tracks, for a quarter's worth of candy.

Dodd attended high school in Palisade, where his grandfather, Jasper Dodd, had a fruit orchard.

Sources: Author interviews with Larry Wild, Jesse Dodd; email conversation with Janet Rowland; Maybelle Gardner Clymer oral history online at Mesa County Libraries, [www.mesa.marmot.org](http://www.mesa.marmot.org); historic newspapers at [www.newspapers.com](http://www.newspapers.com).

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## ASU hires 1st female police chief

TUCSON, Ariz. — University of Arizona officials have hired the school's first female police chief.

Paula Balafas will begin her new job early next month, officials said. She succeeds Brian Seastone, who retired in August after 41 years with the campus police department. Balafas was among four finalists for the Arizona job after a national search.

She has more than 32 years of experience serving municipal and higher education communities. Balafas began her career working with the Denver Sheriff's Department as a deputy. She was a patrol officer and a detective before she was promoted to sergeant.

— Associated Press

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