

FIRST DRAFT

Hard work, adventure marked dairy near Palisade in the 1930s

One day in 1940, Gerald Clark accompanied his father to Rifle to purchase hay for the family dairy in Palisade. With the truck loaded, Gerald's father, Chester, told Gerald to drive the vehicle home.

He did so, but at the railroad underpass in De Beque, the wide load of hay became stuck, and the truck died.

With traffic backed up in both directions on the state highway, Gerald grabbed a set of tools and did some emergency mechanic work

BOB SILBERNAGEL



A load of loose hay on a truck destined for the Clark Dairy in the 1930s. The cab of the truck is nearly covered with hay. Gerald Clark is the young boy standing on the bumper of the truck, before he was old enough to drive it. Chester Clark is standing next to him. Others are not identified.



BOB SILBERNAGEL/Special to the Sentinel
Gerald Clark shows a bottling funnel that was used to fill bottles of milk at the Clark Dairy.

and start cleaning out the corrals with a fork."

The cow manure was sold as fertilizer to local peach orchards and to others, he added.

Sometimes, Gerald would join his sisters, who delivered the bottled milk to residents around Palisade, using an early version of a Chevrolet Suburban.

Gerald said he attended grade school in Palisade, but rarely had time for friends, much less to join in social or athletic activities. He did not attend high school.

Clark Dairy had pasture for the cows near the barn and other buildings. Gerald recalled fondly that all of the Jersey cows knew their names.

He could call them by name if they hadn't come in for their milking. In the barn, they each went to their own stanchion.

But most of the crops the family raised were grown in Clifton, on the land where Central High School now sits.

Those crops included corn for silage to feed the cows, as well as vegetables such as tomatoes to sell. Gerald calculated he once hiked 22 miles in a day, walking behind a horse-drawn cultivator in the tomato patch.

However, hay for the dairy cows was purchased outside the valley.

"There wasn't a lot of hay in the valley back then," he recalled. "So, at first, Dad went up to Mesa with a team to get hay."

The loose hay had to be stacked onto the wagon

by hand.

Later, Chester Clark began using trucks to haul the loose hay, which was still loaded by hand. The Palisade Tribune took note of that development in January, 1933.

"Palisideans were privileged to see the modern method of handling loose hay Friday," the paper said. "Chester Clark, proprietor of the Clark Dairy, had A.N. Tillman move thirteen tons [of] alfalfa hay in three loads from Mesa to Palisade on his big Chevrolet truck."

The newspaper added that "the first load hauled weighed 9,100 pounds and had the appearance of a whole stack of hay moving down Main Street."

Chester Clark soon purchased a truck of his own for hauling hay.

Seven-year-old Gerald was not yet ready to drive the hay truck in 1933, although he remembered sitting on his father's lap at about that age, steering a truck and learning to use the pedals.

In addition to his dairy duties, by the late 1930s, Gerald was working with another young man,

leveling fields for farmers using horse-drawn Fresno scrapers, which could be notoriously dangerous if they hit a rock or the operator allowed it to dig too deeply.

By the time he was 14, and driving truckloads of hay from Rifle to Palisade on his own, Gerald Clark was skilled enough to remove one end of the fuel line from his truck, blow out the clogged line, and get the truck running

again.

Two years later, the Clarks were out of the dairy business.

Low milk prices, established by the federal government under emergency war legislation, made it impossible to make money in the dairy business,

Gerald said.

The Clarks weren't the only ones to quit. News stories from around the country showed that large numbers of dairy farmers began getting out of the business about that time.

A local story said 200 Mesa County dairy cows had been sold in the last two months of 1942, and the county extension service was warning of an impending milk shortage.

After the Palisade dairy farm was sold, Gerald Clark raised and sold crops for several years on the family's Clifton property and on some leased land nearby. He met his wife, Eloise, who lived in the area.

By 1953, he had purchased his 220-acre farm on 20 Road, between Grand Junction and Fruita. He and Eloise raised sugar beets, cattle and four daughters.

"Those girls were all good tractor drivers," he said.

Gerald also did custom farming and had the first three-row, self-propelled corn chopper in the valley.

Now his grandsons operate the farm. Eloise died in 2012, and Gerald married his second wife, Trela, four years later. He remains active and eager to talk about his life in agriculture.

Sources: Author interview with Gerald Clark. Old editions of The Palisade Tribune at www.coloradohistoricnewspapers.org.

*b
Bob Silbernagel's email is bobsilbernagel@gmail.com.*

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Trucker convicted in fiery fatal pileup

BY THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

GOLDEN — A truck driver accused of causing a fiery pileup that killed four people and injured six others on a Colorado highway has been convicted of vehicular homicide and other charges.

Rogel Lazaro Aguilera Mederos, 25, was convicted by a Jefferson County jury on Friday in connection with the April 2019 crash on Interstate 70 west of Denver, The Denver Post reported.

Aguilera Mederos testified that the brakes on his semitrailer failed before he plowed into vehicles that had slowed because of another wreck in the Denver suburb of Lakewood.

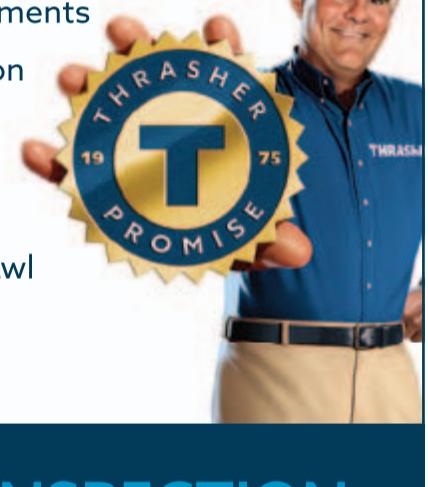
Prosecutors argued he could have used one of several runaway ramps as his truck barreled down from the mountains. The chain-reaction wreck ruptured gas tanks, causing flames that consumed several vehicles and melted parts of the highway just after it descended from the mountains west of Denver.

The Daily Sentinel (ISSN 1445-8962)
Printed editions published Wednesday thru Sunday, electronic editions published every morning at 734 S. Seventh Street, Grand Junction, CO 81501. Periodical Postage paid at Grand Junction, CO.
Carrier home delivery prices: 13 weeks - \$65.00, 26 weeks - \$130.00, 52 weeks - \$260.00.
Weekend delivery packages: Wednesday thru Sunday - \$244.40, Friday thru Sunday - \$197.60, Saturday & Sunday - \$163.80, Sunday only - \$163.80.
Weekend delivery "deluxe" delivery includes the following date in 2021: 11/25/2021. If you are an e-edition subscriber for 11/25/2021, you will not receive a printed paper.
Single Copy: \$1.00 daily and \$2.00 Sunday.
Mail (USPS): \$30.00 per week, \$1,560 per year. "POSTMASTER: Send address changes to: The Daily Sentinel, 734 S. Seventh Street, Grand Junction, CO 81501."

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