

VOICES FROM THE PAST

CLEMENTSVILLE

By Silas Clements

Tape #494

Oral Tape by Tony Clements

Oral Tape by David Christensen

Transcribed by Louis Clements

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Upper Snake River Valley Historical Society

INTRODUCTION

The Library of the Upper Snake River Historical Society in the Teton Flood Museum contains over 600 video, cassette, and reel-to-reel tapes. These oral interviews have been gathered to over the past years from individuals throughout the Snake River Valley. I had the opportunity to catalogue this collection over the past couple of years and was amazed at the information containing therein.

I decided that it was unfair to the public to have all of this historical information on a tape and only available to a few who had the time to come to the library and listen to them. The library does provide a service in which copies of the tapes can be made, and during the past few years, many have come in and obtained a copy of a particular tape. The collection has a lot of family stories, some pioneer experiences, a few individual reminiscences of particular parts of history, and some recorded individuals have a personal knowledge of a historical event.

I spent a lot of time trying to come up with a name for this series of stories that would describe the overall text of the message contained herein. Since they are transcribed from the actual voices of those who experienced the history the name, Voices From The Past seemed appropriate. The oral history in this volume of Voices From The Past has been taken from the interviewer with it being recorded on tape. Since Idaho's history is so young in year, the oral history becomes greater in importance. Eyewitness accounts rank high in reliability of the truth of events, although the reliability suffers as they interviewee ages or the time between the event and the interview grows. As the age of some of the cassette is progressing into the time period of deterioration of tapes, all are currently (2002) being copied onto audio discs (CD's) for preservation.

I have selected this event as one that occurred in Eastern Idaho which was experienced by the person or persons being interviewed. There was such a vast amount of information available in the library; I had to reserve many of the tapes for inclusion in future volumes. The tapes are being transcribed in order of importance according to my thinking.

Transcribing from a tape to written word is a new experience for me. I have done this on a very small scale before but to attempt to put the contents of a conversation down on a paper requires a great amount of concentration. I have taken the liberty of editing out the many "a's" that occur in an interview as well as other conversational comments. Then comes the problem of the book a challenge from the point of view of making a correct transcription and yet an interesting story. I have made a few editorial changes in view of this problem.

I would like thank the many people who have taken the time to arrange for the oral recording of an individuals story. The information obtained in this manner is, in many cases, not available from any other source. One of the pioneers of oral history in Eastern Idaho is Harold Forbush. Despite the handicap of being blind, he travels around the whole Snake River Valley visiting with people and taping their responses. He began his career of taping while living Teton Valley and serving as the prosecuting attorney there.

His lifetime interest in history got him started and since then he has been a major contributor to the collection of stories in the library. He continued his oral history recording after moving to Rexburg. After retiring from being Madison Counties' magistrate, he moved to Idaho Falls for a time and now has returned to Rexburg to continue as occasional taping session. He is to be congratulated for his lifetime commitment to the preservation of Idaho's history.

There are many others who have done some taping including several Madison High School students. Most of the student tapes are not of the same sound quality as the professional oral history collector, but the stories they have gathered over the years have provided a special look at the Depression, war experiences, farming experience, and many other subjects which can't be found anywhere else. Many thanks to them.

There are some tapes in which the interviewer did not identify themselves. These unknown records have provided several stories which have helped make up the overall history of the Snake River Valley and I thank them even if I cannot acknowledge them personally.

I hope that as you read the following stories you will be inspired to keep a record of your own either in written or tape form so that your opinion of what has happened in the world or in your life can be preserved. Many think their life has been insignificant and others would not want the years and find each other to have its own contribution to my knowledge of what has happened. Idaho is an exciting place to live and is full of stories which are unique to our area. Share them with others.

Louis J. Clements.

Upper Snake River Valley Historical Society

(Tony Clements and David Christensen interview Silas Clements about Clementsville east of Newdale.)

Tony Clement: Could you tell us about when you first went up there?

Silas Clements: Ok, in about 1910, the state opened this ground up there at what is called Clementsville. It's now in Teton County. They opened it for homesteaders. My grandfather and five boys, my dad was the oldest in the family, they went up there and each took 160 acres and homesteaded. On doing this, this ground was all covered with sagebrush. You had to get the sagebrush off of it, pile it up, and burn it. Then plow the ground and get it ready to plant your grain. About when they grew up there was grain, oats, and barley. Course it took a lot of work to clear the sagebrush off. They didn't do it all at one time because five boys and grandpa meant six places. That was quite a lot of area right there. This is why they called it Clementsville because grandfather and his boys all settled right there. Digging this sagebrush out with a team and plows was kind of a hard situation. So to finish it off, a group of them got together and sure did pool their money and bought a great big tractor. Now this was a hope tractor. There were two crawler tractors on the back, with tracks on the back and one great big wheel on the front. The name of the tractor was Hope. They took that up to Clementsville. They had what they call a disc plow. That worked out very good for digging the sagebrush out. They got quite a few acres a day with that thing. When they got theirs all cleaned out they went over to the other homesteaders to help, homesteaders who were near by them. They did it for them too because this tractor made quite a thing there. That was the first tractor to come up into that country. Course, that was back in the early days. I think that tractor came up there in about 1911 or '12. Now I was born in 1909 at Hibbard. Course I went up there as a babe. I didn't know all there was to know about that but I do know when I was six years old this big plow had a platform on it. Of course, it was getting pretty well worn out. It needed an awful lot of overhauling. My dad had me ride on the back of that with a short pitch fork handle, just a pitch for handle. He was plowing and I would poke the weeds through this plow so it wouldn't pop up. Course, that was quite interesting for me as a kid. But anyway, getting back to the early homesteaders. There's quite a lot of them that homestead up in there around about this place they called Clementsville and Canyon Creek. To begin with there was a store, post office, and school at Canyon Creek. My older brother, who was four years older than me and some other kids around there, they attended school maybe one year or two down at Canyon Creek. That's about five miles away. So then we got enough homesteaders to build a school at Clementsville. Now this school is still standing. Whenever you want to see that, you go up to what they call Clementsville now. That's where Bott's have a big farm right there. That's where the store used to be and it's just one mile south of that place. Where Bott is now, that was my dad's farm. Course, the store was across the road south. Anyway the school was one mile south and we used it in the summer when the folks were using the horses. We used to have to walk to school. The reason we had school in the summer was that the snow would get so deep up there in the winter, and the wind blew, we just couldn't get to the school. We would go to school early in the spring, the summer, and the fall. We had a little space

of time in the summer that we were out but quite a number of winters we just couldn't get to school. The sleighs and horses couldn't make it. There was no way of pushing snow off like we got today. That's the way school was. Course, I was up there a year ago and took pictures of the old school. It's still standing. The blackboards were on the wall. It was kind of interesting to me because it seemed to me like when I was a kid that school house was three times the size that it is now. I guess I was a kid and it just looked so small now. But it was kind of interesting to go there and see the old pot bellied stove that used to be there that heated the building. It's still there but it is kind of torn down. They've used parts of it for something else.

Brian: How many kids were in the school?

SC: As I remember, the largest number of school kids that were there were twenty. Course, that's quite a small group.

Brian: What ages were they?

SC: From six years old until they got out of the eighth grade. One teacher taught all of us. We sat in different spots and she taught the whole works. I went there for three years, first to the fourth. I remember, I started in the fourth grade in the fall and then we moved out. It went on for years. It had a lot of different teachers. They even built two rooms on the back of the school for the school teacher to live right there. They had a horse barn out of the back of the school. When we rode our horses there, those who rode to school, we could put our horses in this barn and then we would come out and come on home. This continued on for, oh, I think it's been up to twenty years since it was closed down. Henry Nelson was the last school trustee. He farmed up there. He's the one who finally decided to close it and bus them all into Driggs. So then they closed the school down. So many people lived down here in the Valley; there weren't enough kids there to hold school. So, that's the reason it was closed. I think you have to have about seven or eight kids or so to pay for a teacher. It might be more than that, I'm not sure. Now you might want to know a little bit about the farming conditions. They had to plow the ground, harrow it, and then you could drill it. When it came time to harvest, why you used to have to hook horses on this big combine. The Clements brothers and my dad worked together in this harvesting because we pooled our money and bought a big harvester. Now this harvester had a twenty-seven foot cut. It took twenty-seven head of horses to pull it. They'd have three spans of six and then three horses out in front. The cut was twenty-seven feet wide. Now the thing of it is with this harvester, they never had an engine on it to pull it. Now they have an engine on there harvesters that run all the machinery but this harvester was quite a big one. It had big wheels on the back with big cleats on. It was what they called ground powered. These big cleats would dig in the dirt and these wheels would furnish the power to run all this machinery. You understand what I mean? It was quite interesting. Now my dad, he was the oldest boy in the family. He kind of looked after the machinery. Of course, they had to have a fellow to sew sacks and one to run the wheel to make sure if the ground wasn't too level they had to keep raising and lowering the cutter bar or you'd miss some heads and not get it all. They had a man drive it. Up over the first set of six horses they had a big ladder. It stuck out over, it kind of went by the heads of

the first horses, the first span of six. There's where the driver sat. Now you only had two lines and that was the two lines up on the three head of horses that led the bunch. All the others were tied to the next ones double trees, their halters were. Of course, when he had to turn he had to be pretty careful and not turn too quickly or it would kind of crumple up the outfit. It was interesting to me. We had a fellow, a young fellow; he was probably twenty years old. He was driving the horses. It was always my fun to want to ride up on this ladder with him. It was quite a seat and there was room enough for him and me too. He always had a box of rocks there to throw at the slow horses. Course, that's what I like to do, is throw rocks. I would get up there whenever I could and ride with him so I could throw those rocks at the slow horses. Course, they had big brakes on this combine so if you went down a slope you might want to stop or you might go a little faster than you wanted to and these brakes were handy. Anyway they had this big tractor. When it wasn't busy doing custom work for somebody else why they used that quite a bit. It would pull the combine by itself. They made quite a little money doing custom plowing, sagebrush, and that stuff. So that's why they used the horses. Of course, each man when it come noon, each man would get off and take care of his six horses. It didn't amount to too much work one would think. It took a lot of hay and grain to feed those horses. I remember one winter, I don't know what happened to the combine, but it didn't work. We used some headers. These headers were pulled by six horses. It would go along and just cut the heads off the grain and this header would elevate it up into what we would call a header box. Then we would take it and stack it in stacks. Then we would have a big steam thrashing machine come in and, later on, thrash these stacks out. One day it was so late in the fall before we got all the farms cut and stacked, so they had this thrashing machine come in. Why, it snowed. The snow drifts up there, the steam engine. There was a fellow by the name of Hall. He had come up in there with the steam engine and the steam engine couldn't go through the drifts. So my dad took this tractor with two crawlers on the back. He couldn't go through front wards so he would turn around and back through the drift. That thing just took through that snow like; he backed through a few times and then hooked onto the steam engine and helped it through to the stacks. Then the thrashing took place in the wintertime. They then had to haul the grain in. Everybody had sacks then. They put it in sacks. They didn't dump it in a big truck like they do now. It was all sacks. They would stack it up. Later on we would haul it to Newdale or Tetonia in the sleighs. That was an all day job hauling wheat all winter long. I remember the folks leaving there. I don't know just what year it was but they came out with a report in a farm magazine that Newdale shipped more grain out of there in one year than any other shipping place in the United States because there were so many farms right there. So they would haul it in from many points around the area. I'd come with my dad down to Newdale in a sleigh loaded with wheat. I'd have to stay there all night and then come back the next day. As you go up through Newdale, on the south side, there is a great big barn up there. It doesn't look so big now as it did as a kid. That's where we slept. There were no motels or anything right there at Newdale so we'd bring our own bedding. We'd put the horses in the barn over there, it didn't cost so much to keep the horses there. Then we'd go up there in the loft and roll out your bedding. You'd think that was awful cold. But you know there was probably twenty other horses below in the bottom of that barn. The heat from those horses, it just amazes me how warm it was up there. The next day we would rise early. There was a café there. We had a good supper

and breakfast and then we'd head back home. In those days, you know where Canyon Creek is? You just go across the bridge now. Back then you had to go way down in that canyon and cross the creek and then way back up the other side out of there. When you went down it from the other side loaded in the sleigh, you'd throw a chain around the runner on the sleigh. It would keep the sleigh from pushing the horses down that dugway very fast. You wanted to go slow. Then we'd take it off and go up the other side. Usually when they got to the bottom they'd take and put an extra team on so they would have more horses to pull that load up out of that canyon. Then they'd bring them all back down to bring up the next one. Then it would be on down to Newdale. So it took quite a little time to go down through and out of that canyon. That's why it took so long. Course, you could jog the horses going down the hill but it was slow going up. It was always three to four farmers who would go together so they could help one another out if they needed to. They all took a shovel. Course, I helped to shovel by keeping the snow from around the sleigh. We did it this was until about 1930. Then we came across the bridge. We didn't have to go down into the canyon. Anyways, let's see; is there any question you want to ask about that?

Brian: How many acres a day would you get done?

SC: Well, I was pretty small, but I don't think they'd cut over then acres, something like that. It was pretty slow. See that being new ground, right out of the sagebrush, it yielded pretty good. I imagine it would get twenty-five bushel per acre. Later on they had to go into deeper drill and it harvest a better yield. I was so small. But I do know this. They planted barley, maybe it was oats, I don't remember, one or the other. They build up the ground for wheat. I remember when they run that sack sewer he was kept so busy that he could hardly keep up with sewing sacks fast enough. These sacks would hold about a hundred and twenty pounds. Course it would be lighter with oats or barely. On this combine they had a chute that could hold about six sacks. They would pull this lever up and the end gate would come up and it would hold the first sack and the next one until they had six sacks in there. Then they'd pull the lever along and it would slide out of this. So when they went to pick it up with the wagon afterward, why you'd have six sacks altogether, see. Instead of dumping one out, why you could pull and load six sacks on the wagon and then go to the next one. So that made it pretty handy.

Brian: Did you sew the sacks right on...?

Silas: Sewed the sacks right on the machine. Then you put it over on the scoop and it would go down there until you had six sacks on it. There's another little story I'll have to tell you that was amusing to me. See I was quite small, six to eight years old, when all this happened. My Uncle ran the header. See, he stood up there and run this reel to raise and lower the cutter bar. He was supposed to make sure he got all the heads. In them days the sage hens were quite thick. Every once in a while you'd come along and a bunch of them would fly up. You'd always carry a shotgun right there with you. He'd grab that gun and shoot those sage hens. Then he wanted me to go pick up the dead ones. So I'd scoot down the chute. If it was loaded I could run down the sacks. But when I got back, if it wasn't loaded, I had to walk along there and carry these sage hens until the sacks got in

the chute so I could walk on top of them. I could walk up the sacks. I couldn't go up the chute empty. It was too slick. It was like these chutes you have in the parks. Why, it was the same thing. Course, we kids used this in the summer time to scoot down anyway. As kids we had lots of fun scooting down that. But anyway I would bring these sage hens. I would get quite a lot of them. Course, this one uncle of mine, he liked to be around having fun with somebody. One time I was up there just about the top of that chute with those chickens. You know, it seems like, I was so small and I thought they must weigh ten pounds apiece. I think they really probably weighed about two and a half pounds. But I was small, see, and it seemed like they weighted a lot. I got pretty near the top and he reached over and pulled the lever and us and the sacks all went down. So then I had to, I told him what I thought about it too. I got big enough that I could tell him that. So I gathered up my chickens and waited until the sacks got in there again and then I hustled back up. But he had to do that once just for fun I guess. Anyway those were some of the experiences I had. Do you have anything else? All of the water, for all these horses. We had to haul water. We had to haul it clear from Canyon Creek or from over to the Basin. Then they finally got some wells. It was called the Humphrey Well. That was about three miles away. But the other was four or five down to Canyon Creek. When you had a tank on a wagon it took about four head of horses to pull this full of water. I know I and my brother, we hauled one year, during thrashing time like that. He was four years older than me. He'd run the horses and I'd pull the brake. I was too young to drive that many horses. When we'd get to the Humphrey Well, you could just drive under there and dip it out of the cistern. When you went to the creek, you had to back right up to the creek with horses. You could stand on a platform that had been built to dip it in. Later on the Clements boys, they bought them an area in the hills there. They built them a cistern. There was a spring there and this big cistern would fill up with water. You could drive in and fill up from below it. It would just run in out of a pipe. That was pretty handy. It sure saved a lot of bucket throwing. But that hauling the water was quite a job. As I remember I only did that one year with my brother. Then we hauled for the thrashing machine that year also. They paid us for doing it. We thought we were pretty big kids, I'll tell yeah.

Brian: How often did you have to go get the water?

SC: We just went everyday. It took a tank a day, whether it was the steam engine or this group of horses. Somebody had to go everyday for the horses and then for the use of the house. Course there was about; somebody sometimes took a barrel of water in a buggy to haul to their house. During thrashing time, to keep up, I know it took a load of water everyday to those horses. Course, the thrashing machine was a steam engine. We had to have water for that too.

Brian: How many gallons of water could the wagon carry?

SC: Oh, I imagine it would be fifteen to eighteen hundred gallons. It was made of wood. Then they had clamps on it. It was tongue and groove to start with then they would tighten the clamps around it. This would hold it tight. You had to keep moisture in they or it would dry out. The wood would smell and keep it right tight. In the winter time I

remember my dad built a tin receptacle. He would shovel the snow in there and it would melt. Is there anything else you want to know?

Brian: I think we have about covered everything.

TC: We're about at the end of the tape anyway. Thank you a lot.

(This ends the taped interview. This interview was an individual assignment for Tony and Brian's U.S. History Class at Madison High School.)