

CLAY MONSON: "PLEASANT VALLEY - MY MOTHER NAMED IT."

By
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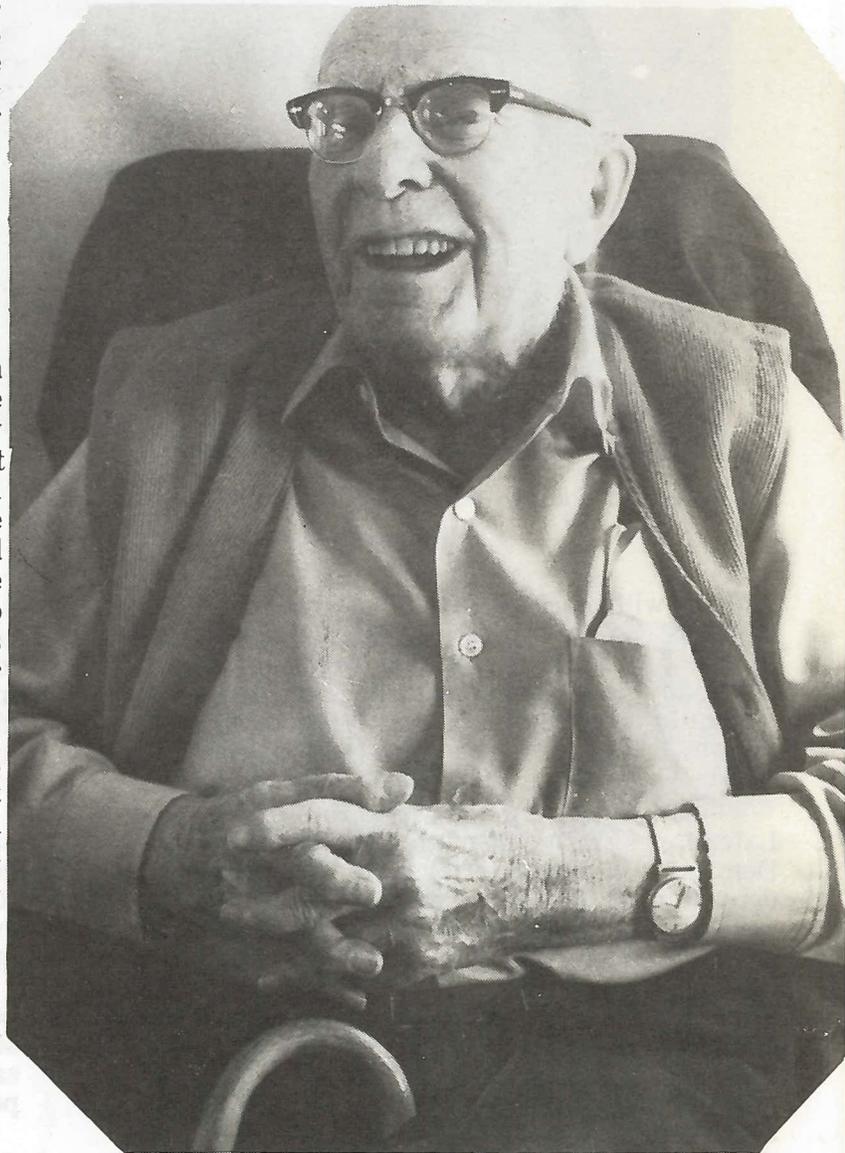
CLAY MONSON,

He's probably the oldest man in Steamboat Springs, but what people don't realize is that his spirit is still young. That pretty much describes Clay Monson, one of Steamboat's most valuable pieces of history. He's been here for over ninety years, and he takes pride when he talks of Pleasant Valley. "My mother named it," he said, "and it breaks my heart to think that it might all go under water." He had tears in his eyes as we talked about the Catamount Lake project that has been proposed, covering most of Pleasant Valley, and hurting Clay Monson more than anything.

Clay Monson was born on May 23, 1884, in California. "When my folks first came up here from Denver," he stated, "they thought that they would settle in Middle Park. But my father didn't like the looks of Middle Park, and he had met a man from Routt County named Mr. Nichols. He came from Pleasant Valley. It wasn't called anything then. And he told my father that there was all kinds of land to be settled over there. So my father went over there, and he liked the looks of Pleasant Valley very much, and he took up our homestead there.

"And then there was a man named Billy West, and he had come to Colorado with my father's family, and he, my father, and another man built our first house. During that time, my mother and us kids were in another little cabin. Well, that fall, the first of September, we moved into that house.

"You know where the roads fork going from Oak Creek to Pleasant Valley. Well, there's a creek up there called Grouse Creek, and up that Grouse Creek, there was an old school house built in 1891. There was no school at Sidney then, and the only other school was the one between Yampa and Steamboat. That school on Grouse Creek was the first one that I attended. We only had three months of school, but we had quite a few students. There were about twenty. They came from up on Yellow Jacket Pass, and some of them were from Pleasant Valley. Well, that school continued, but I just went there that



year and the next, then I went to Steamboat. The school isn't there any more, but I think that part of the old teacher's house is though. The teacher lived right next to the school on a little hill out there, but I think that it has been all torn down by now. I haven't been out there for about three years.

"And then in 1886, my father leased pretty much the whole thing of Strawberry Park. It was called Schedeger Park then. It was named after an old homesteader that used to live up there. They never started calling it Strawberry Park until they started growing all those strawberries up there. Well, we ranched there, and at one time we had two little mules that would pull us in a wagon to school. It was three miles to walk, and sometimes in the winter we had to ski. The teacher always liked me, though, so she kept me in at recess. I guess that's why she kept me in.

"We had the first high school here in 1901. That is the first graduating class. There were only three students in that first class because there had been a lot of drop-outs. Well, those three students were: James Broveck, Marie Niece, and Mary Crawford. I was in the next graduating class, and there were seven of us. I'm the only one living out of that class.

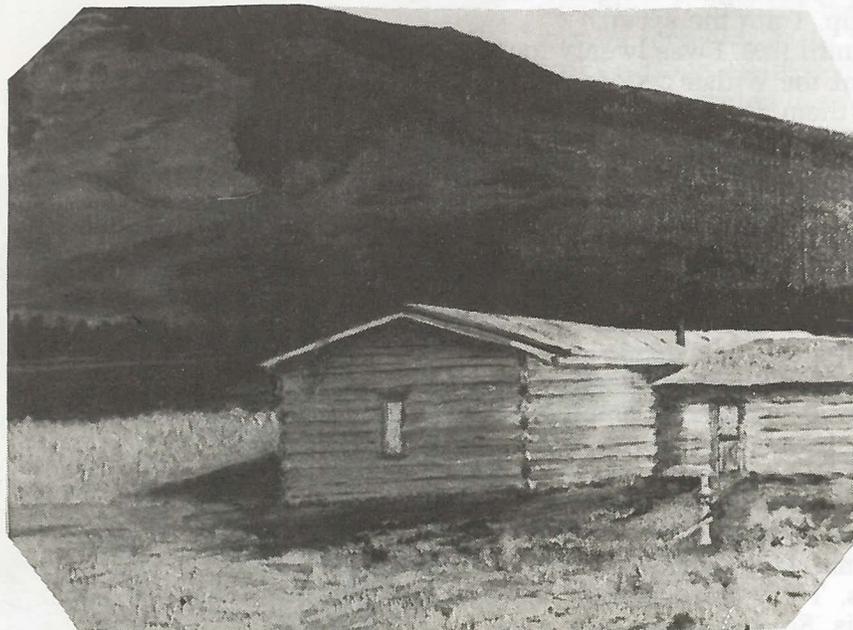
"The high school was a frame building that used to stand where the junior high is today. The junior high wasn't built until 1916. Well, the high school building burned down in 1910. Burned to the ground in December, 1910. They never knew what started it, but in those days, the school was heated by big stoves, and they think that they might have left too much wood in one of them, and it got too hot. It broke out in the night, and it got too far going before they knew what started it. That was the school that I went to."

As I listened to Clay tell his story, I could tell that kids now a days have it much easier than

they did then. It was a different time, though, and a different land, and it is foreign to us today. It was a land to be remembered. Entertainment for kids of that day was almost out of the question, and as for school dances.... "Well, how we come to have school dances, it might interest you, there were some of the boys, and they had gotten a club organized and were giving wild dances in a little building up town. It was where the courthouse is today. Anyway, they were having those wild dances, and in many cases, there were no grown ups there at all. So the school made them a proposition. If they would give up that club, they could have their dances in the school gym. Well, they all gave up that club. It was getting a little out of hand anyway. No grown ups were allowed there at all. And, in all due respect to kids, they do get a little out of hand when there are no grown ups around. I don't suppose they do now, but they used to."

Going away to college was not something that most young men just out of high school in Steamboat did back then, but Clay had definite feelings about continuing his education. "Well, the first years after I graduated, I went to Missouri to go to school there. And while I was there, I took three courses that I never took here. Those courses were: Latin, zoology, and trigonometry I never used any of it. Also while I was there, I went to night school. And at that night school I took: Shorthand, business, bookkeeping, and typing. During that time, my mother passed away. I didn't come home at the time because it would have taken too long. I had to go to Denver by rail, and then over to Steamboat in a stagecoach. So, I came home the next spring.

"That summer, me, my father went to California in a wagon, and it took us forty-five days. We sure had fun that winter! My brother



+Sidney was an old town located 11 miles from Steamboat on Route 131.

The Monson's First Homestead in Pleasant Valley.

and I played a lot of winter baseball in a little town called Wheaton, California, but then my father came down with appendicitis, so we decided that we had better get to work. My brother got a job on a farm, and I got a job in a mine working for two and a half dollars a day. Well, I worked there for fourteen days, and at the end of that time, they only gave me fourteen days and at the end of that time the people there only gave me fourteen dollars. Well, I said that I thought I was getting two and a half dollars a day. They said that they charged a dollar fifty for room and board. Boy! Did I get skimmed! I quit!

"Next I got a job on a farm plowing dirt with six mules. It was a dirt farm. Well, I worked there until the next spring, then we sold all gear, and came back to Colorado. My father had survived his illness. We came to Wolcott by rail, then to Steamboat in stagecoach. The stage had started coming to Wolcott in 1899. Previously it had gone to Hot Sulphur Springs, then relayed over to Steamboat. When the train started coming down the Grand River, now the Colorado, that's when the stage started coming to Steamboat. That coach next to the Exon Station, (now behind the Pioneer Museum) was one of the first three stages that started coming here."

"Well, one summer, my father got me a job hauling freight from Wolcott to Steamboat, and I could keep all that I could make. Well, I was getting thirty dollars a week. One time I did a very foolish thing. I was given six dollars to get lunch and dinner with while I was off on a job, and they were having a baseball game somewhere, I can't remember the place, but I bet five dollars on it and lost it. That left me with only one dollar. Well, I had to eat lunch, and I had some places where I could get credit, but I still had to eat dinner. That night I ate some old bread and some syrup. I ate the syrup.

"I wasn't married until 1908. I was twenty-four then. I was working at the Wither's store at the time. I worked for them for five years as a bookkeeper and a clerk, and that's when I got married. My wife's name was Louise, and she was the daughter of the man who owned the powerplant. By the way, the first lights came to Steamboat in 1901, and it was owned by a man named Sledley. E. H. Sledley, and he owned it for three years, then he sold it to another man.

"I worked for the Wither's for five more years, then I went to work for a wholesale company for another five years. I was away from home most of the time, so I came back and went to work for a firm called Hugo and Company. They had stores all over the place. Well, I worked for them for two years as a bookkeeper, and five years as a general manager. Well, they finally went out of business. Their building was right where the Ski Haus is. So, I went to work for a

feed and coal business in Denver, but the feed business finally went to the ground. They did fine until they invented the car. So I came back and went to work for the New York Life Insurance Company, and I worked with them until 1939, then I went to Missouri and did some traveling.

"Well, I got so tired of being away from home so much of the time that I came back and bought a filling station. I ran that for five years, then I ran the Doxol Station. By that time I was getting a little slow, so I went to work part time for F.M. Light and Sons, and also for the Home Furnishings Company. I worked until I was seventy-eight, then I got disgusted and retired. 'Don't ever retire! It's great to take a little vacation now and then, but hang on to something. I would be working now if I could still see. Hang on to something. Even if it gets a little tiresome....'"

For a man who complains of being out of touch as much as Clay Monson does, I was surprised at how well he could explain his feelings about the ski area, "Well, I love skiing, in fact, I had a pair before I was three. But they're going to extremes. Just like they're going to extremes in everything. They're running all the sports at the same time now, and I love sports, but I'd like to see them quit once in a while. But no, they've got to have them all going at the same time now. And the prices to go see some of those things are going clear out of reason! It won't be long before people will stop supporting those things. I understand that some of these things cost over ten dollars to go and see now."

As for the dam project, I can understand how Clay Monson and others must feel. His mother named that valley, he is proud of it, and he has seen a lot of changes in the area. For those like Clay Monson who have gone from the covered wagon to the space age, it must be hard to face up to such "progress."

