

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

East Palestine, Ohio

Personal Experience

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CLIFTON HARRIS

Interviewed

by

Stephan Casi

on

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CLIFTON V HARRIS

Clifton Harris was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania on May 30, 1894. His family moved to a farm on Unity Milrock Road, which is now Brookdale Avenue. After attending the Unity School through the eighth grade, Mr. Harris joined his father on the farm.

In 1911, Mr. Harris got his first job working at McGraw Tire Company in East Palestine. Because he disliked factory work, Mr. Harris left McGraw's and in 1916 was hired as a mailman with a rural route. From 1916 to 1932, he delivered mail with a horse and buggy. His pay the first year was \$96.00 a month, but he furnished all his own equipment. In 1918 to 1920, Mr. Harris helped build the road which leads from East Palestine to Pennsylvania. While Mr. Harris was working for the post office, he continued to work on the farm. The farm never seemed to bring that much money to him, but he enjoyed the work. During his years on the farm, he sold milk, butter, hogs, turkeys, grain, sheep and beef.

In 1959, Mr. Harris retired after 41 years of service with the US Postal Service. He and his wife Mary now reside at 500 Sugar Camp Drive, East Palestine. They sold their farm in 1977 to the Grim Welding Company. He and his wife are members of the East Palestine Lutheran Church. Mr. Harris keeps busy by reading his collection of books.

C This is an interview with Mr Clifton Harris for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on East Palestine, by Stephan Casi, on May 29, 1979.

Tell us a little bit about your family and when they came to the East Palestine area.

H Well, that was in 1896, and we located on the place my father bought My grandparents owned it before that

C Where was it located?

H Well, it was called Unity Milrock Road at that time, and now it is Brookdale Avenue

C Were there any houses out there at that time?

H Yes, there was a greenhouse near us, and there were houses, but not close like they are today

C What did your dad do for a living?

H He worked in a steel mill before we came to the farm.

C What brought him to the East Palestine area?

H He just wanted to get in the country, I believe I am not sure

C Were you born in East Palestine?

H No, I was born in Pittsburgh I was two in May and they moved to the farm in October of the same year, 1896

C. When you were growing up on the farm, what are some of the things that sort of stand out in your mind? As a boy, was there a lot of hard work?

H I did hard work, for one thing, after I was big enough to work, or old enough I was about fourteen Before that, you just play around, I guess, up at the creek, and one thing or another When I was fourteen, I was cutting grain with a binder I was doing work like that

C Did your dad sell his farm products to stores in this area?

H Yes. At that time, he sold little things we had, like hay and eggs, and butter It

was so much different than it is today

C: But was he able to make a living?

H Yes, it seemed that way

C Were there any other children besides yourself?

H Yes I had three brothers and three sisters

C. So there was plenty of help out on the farm

H Oh, yes, that is right They are all gone now, except one sister and myself

C As a boy growing up on a farm, what were some of the things you enjoyed doing? What did you do for fun, or entertainment?

H We played ball or horseshoes When we got big enough, we went down the creek a good bit of the time There were no parks or nothing to go to, like they have today. We had to make our own entertainment

C. How about school? What do you remember about going to school in the East Palestine area?

H I went to school at Unity I went up to the eighth grade, and that is all the schooling I had

C Did you walk to school?

H Yes We were approximately a half a mile from the school house

C How many students were in the Unity school then?

H Sometimes there were about 32 to 35.

C All in one room?

H One room

C Do you remember some of the teachers you had?

H Oh, yes. Well, there was George Somon, who was my first teacher, Milo Mitchell, Bernadette Clapperty, Alice McDevitt, Benjamin Schmidt

- C What do you remember about going to school? Do you remember the subjects, and were the teachers strict? Did you have to really work?
- H Well, yes I did, and I had a pretty good discipline, if I remember right
- C You learn quite a bit, even though you only went for eight years
- H That is right That is all the schooling I had
- C What about your life with your family? As a family, what did you do for fun? Also, what about clothing and things like that? Did you go downtown every once in a while?
- H Yes, about every week we went to town
- C. What were some of the things you bought? What were some of the stores that you went to?
- H That is kind of a long time. There were so many stores there The Rodgers and Erling was a grocery store then, and the hardware store was Frazier's and Dave Smith There were two hardware stores, and there were clothing stores Skerballs had a clothing store
- C You did not have to buy too much food, did you?
- H No Of course we went down the cellar in the smoke house in those days [Laughter]
- C How did you get downtown?
- H: Horse and buggy
- C How long did it take you to get downtown from up on Brookdale where you lived?
- H Oh, probably half an hour or less with a horse
- C All dirt roads?
- H: Yes There was no pavement around here, only a little bit on Main Street
- C. Where did everybody leave their horses when they came downtown?
- H They just tied them on the streets on big railings along there They tied them

right there

C· Do you remember doing things with your family, like going on any picnics, or anything like that?

H Well, yes I do not know if we went to picnics, but mostly the fair over here

C How often did they have the fair in East Palestine? Was it once a year they had it?

H· Once a year, yes

C How many days did it last?

H· Oh, I think it was three days, I believe they had it

C What were some of the things that you did at the fair?

H Well, as far as what we did -- just watch the races, and watch the things that went on. They had different shows, and carnivals, and things on the fair ground That is about what the entertainment was there at that time.

C Did your family go to church up near Unity?

H Well, we went to the Cove Church It was out on Springfield Road at that time

C. Does anything stand out in your mind about church in those days? Something that you think is different with the churches then as opposed to today?

H I do not know It was a country church, so I do not know what I could say about that There was also a church up there in the little town of Unity You know where Unity is There was a church in there at that time It has been torn down and moved

C What was the reason that you had to stop going to school in the eighth grade?

H Well, I had to go to work.

C You had to go to work with your dad?

H Yes. There was not too many that went to high school back at that time Was not very many.

- C When you got to eighth grade, you had to help out with your family So was it a full-time job working with your dad on the farm?
- H Well, just as farming went, yes We were around here all the time
- C When did you get your first job?
- H Well, my first job, really, I worked in the rubber works down here one winter, the winter of 1911 and 1912.
- C That was McGraw's?
- H Yes, McGraw And I started on the regular route in 1916 March 16, 1916
- C That was when you started on your postal route?
- H Yes
- C Why was it that you left McGraw's Tire? Just did not care for it?
- H I did not like factory work, and I got blood poisoning in my finger in there
- C You got the rural route in 1916 Tell me, where was this route located? Can you tell me a little bit about it?
- H From East Palestine, it went to the northwestern section of the country The post office was on East Rebecca Street at that time My route went north and northwest of East Palestine, mostly It finished up on the south end of town There was about 25 miles of it It was all dirt road
- C When did you start? What was a typical day, from what time to what time?
- H Well, from about eight o'clock, probably until four or five, according to how the roads were and so on
- C What do you remember about delivering the mail? Did you deliver it in a car?
- H No, drove a horse at that time [It] turned to a motor route in 1932
- C. It was not until 1932 that it was a motor route?
- H But I drove a car the summer before that, and the roads were good The route

was lengthened from 25 miles to a 52 mile route in 1932

C They figured you could cover more territory with a car

H On account of the Depression, everybody that was eligible for retirement had to retire. Then there were two routes out of town before that, and the other man was eligible for retirement. They threw it all on one route.

C When you first got the job as rural route deliverer, could you tell me how much you got paid when you got your first job there?

H. \$96 00 a month

C That does not seem too bad

H [You] furnished your own equipment, though. [Laughter]

C You furnished your own equipment. So you had to feed the horses, and take care of your own wagon.

H Take my own horse with me

C Tell me about how you kept the mail on the wagon. Did you have a special method?

H Well, we had leather pouches then, and the mail was not so heavy like it is today.

C And there was not that much mail like there is today?

H No

C Not so much advertising

H No. There were no parcels to amount to anything. And then that got heavy. The parcel post business got heavy, and I guess it is down pretty bad now. I do not know for sure. These here delivery trucks, United Parcel trucks and so on, do it.

C Who was your post master?

H Jerry Wilkinson, at that time

- C How many post masters did you work for?
- H Oh, Jerry, Roy Southern, Harry Finks, Paul Smith, and Harry Andrews, while I was there
- C So you started in 1916, and about 1918 the war starts How did you get out of the war?
- H Well, I figured I was not paying anything, so I started the other work. I quit the post office For a couple of years, I was out of there They drew by lottery number that time, and I came up to leave in the month of September of 1918 The flu broke out Not everybody that was called went on account of the flu, and before that was over, the war ended.
- C So you may have gone if the war had lasted a little longer
- H Or if the flu would not have broken out
- C You did not get the flu. You were pretty lucky I heard East Palestine was hit very badly
- H I was not with the post office then I was out here working on this road that goes to Pennsylvania when the war ended They started to put that through in 1918 [because] there was not road into Pennsylvania
- C The route if you followed Taggart Street out?
- H. Yes That road was not out there You had to come up here and go clear around and then they started that road
- C So you went back to the post office after working a couple of years building a road
- H Yes, I was away, then I came back
- C Had you married yet?
- H No, I was not married until 1928 I married late
- C So you went back to the post office Had things changed much there since the war?
- H Not noticeably so, yet

- C Did you have any friends or relatives that went off to the war?
- H Oh, I had nephews
- C Do you remember anything different about East Palestine during the war? How about the farms? Did the farmers make a little more money during the war? Did things pick up for them?
- H The price of stuff raised a little more. Wheat was up for \$3.60 a bushel, maybe more. I can recall it going that high. And everything else was cheap in a way before that, and then food and stuff started to raise.
- C Do you remember any changes taking place in the 1920's that you can remember? Think about prohibition in East Palestine. Did prohibition affect East Palestine?
- H Well, I do not know if it did in a way. I do not know if it did. There was no distillery or anything here to slow the thing down or nothing.
- C So everything went pretty well in the 1920's, and you worked at the post office?
- H Yes.
- C And you were still living on the farm on Brookdale?
- H Yes.
- C Then you mentioned in 1928 you got married.
- H Yes. We stayed there at the farm, and we kept going along, and then I got married in 1928 and we moved out there. I took over the place then. Dad was pretty old.
- C Where was your wife from, Mr. Harris?
- H She was from down here on West Martin Street.
- C She did not mind moving out to the farm?
- H No, she really came from a farm herself before that, and just moved in, in 1923, from down in Pennsylvania.
- C. How did you find time to work on the farm, and also deliver mail?

- H After I was married, we had a man there, like I said. One man was there with me for about ten or eleven years, and one for about fourteen.
- C So he helped out quite a bit. You had somebody helping you?
- H Yes, but things were mostly done with horses up until about 1940. I had an old tractor, a Model-T Ford, back in the early 1930's. It was not too successful.
- C Was it quite expensive, farm equipment, back in those days?
- H [Laughter] Nothing like it is now, but the equipment was nothing like it is today, either. Balers and combines and cutters, silo fillers, and so on. That was pretty near all done by hand.
- C What was the first type of farm equipment that you bought that was really modern? Was that tractor you bought, that Model-T tractor?
- H I bought a rubber-tired one in 1940. That was when the modern farm machinery started to come out.
- C When the war started.
- H That was when the tractors started to be of some success, and of some use, after they put rubber on them, they would make things different.
- C When you started with the farm, and the postal route, what were some of the things that you raised on your farm?
- H Hogs and cattle, mostly. Dairy herd. Not a great big one like I have now.
- C How many head did you have?
- H Just about fifteen cows we milked. I tried to keep that. Sometimes we had more than that.
- C You milked all by hand, right?
- H Yes.
- C. What time did you have to get up in the morning?
- H Oh, I would get up about five or half past.

C. Did someone come and pick up the milk from you?

H Yes. A truck came there

C Who were some of the people you sold milk to, back in the 1920s and 1930s?

H Hay's Dairy up there on North Market Street

C It is not there anymore, is it?

H No And then we sold to Pittsburgh for quite a while, and Petersburg.

C Yes Was there much money in farming when you first started?

H No

C Did you ever feel like, "What the heck am I doing this for?"

H Yes, I have, many times. Too much running around in a circle

C Yes Do you remember some of the prices you got for your milk and your hogs?

H No Like I was telling you, milk was as low as \$1 85 a hundred, and hogs, 3 cents and a quarter a pound one foot

C So you could not even always break even, could you, after feeding them?

H People lived different than they do today, too

C Right So, you are living out on the farm for a few years Now we are going to see if we can find out what the Depression was like When do you start to feel the Depression in East Palestine on your farm? About 1931, 1932?

H Well, I would say around 1931 It hit in 1929

C How did the Depression affect you and your family, especially as a farmer? What do you remember?

H Well, I know you could get help very cheap, if you needed it But you did not get much for what you sold, or done

C People probably come to you asking for work.

H Social security and unemployment were not set up, and all that They had nothing. They had to go on their own

C Did you have to sell some of your things, some of your animals? Did you think about not growing some things during the Depression, because you could not make any money on it? Did you raise animals and grow crops right up through the Depression?

H Yes, we did We sold milk and kept the dairy going

C How about the rural postal route? Was that still going pretty good? Were you working five days a week, six days a week?

H Six days a week

C Did you ever get any time off during the Depression?

H We had our vacation time, fifteen days a year

C But you really never lost any time as far as work?

H No

C You were lucky

H Yes, I was

C Some people had lost their jobs and everything

H Some did not have a cent coming from any direction

C Did the government ever lower your wages during the Depression?

H They did, yes.

C Do you remember what you were making during the Depression?

H No, I cannot tell you that

C It was more than the \$96 00 you go paid?

H Yes, but we got a ten percent cut All the postal employees that were around in 1932, I believe

- C But you certainly must have felt fortunate to be still working, when you saw so many people without a job.
- H Yes, people begging you for work.
- C Do you remember some people in town really suffering because of the Depression? Did people in East Palestine survive pretty well through all this?
- H Yes, they did They put gardens out here Had a big garden up here, and had one in the south of town They had different tiers.
- C People worked on them together.
- H Yes
- C Did you ever sell fruits and vegetables at all?
- H Not to speak of [We sold] a few strawberries or potatoes or something, when we had them We mostly depended on the milk, on the cattle
- C So in the 1930s, things were pretty good for you. Had you had any children yet, Mr Harris?
- H No, we had no children.
- C Oh, you had no children Are you still living out on Brookdale in the 1930s?
- H Oh, yes
- C Tell me some of the places you would go to buy your feed in those days Or maybe you could tell me a little bit about what it was like if you needed help from a veterinarian Where would you go?
- H Well, there was a veterinarian here in East Palestine as far back as I can remember Dr Rodgers was our first one We have Dr Rhodes up here now He has been here for awhile. There was a Dr Pitts here
- C They used to come out any time you needed them? Were they pretty good?
- H Yes, that is right.
- C Was it expensive to get a veterinarian in those days?

- G Well, no, not in proportion We did not think it was.
- C It was worth it, I guess, to save an animal How about the feed mill? What do you remember about buying seed and things?
- H Well, back when we first moved out here, we went to New Waterford for the feed mill There was a water-powered mill there at that time
- C What was the name of that mill? Do you remember?
- H Scott's Sam Scott's There was never any flour mill here in town there was a feed mill, as there is today. A feed and grind and other things, but they made flour up here at New Waterford and everything
- C Did your family used to take some of their things to New Waterford to have it ground up?
- H Oh, yes They would take wheat and trade it for flour They would give you so much flour for so much wheat They do not do that anymore There is no flour made There was a mill in Columbiana, and one at Petersburg, and New Waterford in the earlier days. Everything has gotten big now
- C In the feed mill in town, did you ever use to bring some of your things?
- H Oh, yes We done grind it down here, after the feed mill come down here and ground and mixed feed We came here after that
- C You came out of the 1930s in pretty good shape, and you really did not feel the effects of the Depression that much?
- H Well, no I was working, I had my job, and lots of people did not have any work, and money was so scarce
- C Did you have a big garden? Did your wife do a lot of canning?
- H Oh, yes To tell the truth, we are eating canned stuff yet from the farm, and it is good, too! It kept
- C Well, we get toward the end of the 1930s when there is a war going on in Europe and by 1941, America is ready to get involved What do you remember about the farm during the war? What changes do you remember taking place, as far as selling some more products, and so on?

H I cannot say that I remember anything in particular that is different. It just went on about the same. Prices and everything commenced to going up then a little bit, labor and all. The time in 1946, everybody about had a factory job and things had changed so much, and nobody seemed to want to work on the farm no more. They were paying a lot more in the factories. That is when we sold the cattle and everything, in 1946.

C did you continue with your farming a little bit?

H Well, not too much. I rented the place. Well, I did not rent it, but the neighbor pastured it and used it some. In 1946 until about 1950, then they wanted to strip it, and the coal strippers came in and we stripped part of the place.

C Did they put it back the way they were supposed to?

H They put it back some, but not like it was.

C Was there a lot of coal up there on your property?

H We had a four foot vein there. A vein ran right through my property. There was not a great acreage to it, but it turned out lots of coal.

C What coal company was it?

H It was Sunnyside.

C Were they located here in East Palestine?

H Down on Route 51 here in Pennsylvania. They are not there no more.

C I guess a lot of farmers did allow strippers to come in, did they not?

H Oh, yes. Oh, an acre of coal brought in a lot of money, more than an acre of farming would. Now that all changed, they have got to put the land back, near as it was. Most places, they put it back better, I guess.

C Do you remember any changes in your postal route in the 1940s? Was it 1932 you got an automobile?

H Yes, 1932. Well, I drove one in the summertime before that, but then it was officially turned over as a motor route in 1932.

C. Did you keep the car at home, or was it kept down at the post office?

H No, I kept it at home We had our own car then

C Did you have to supply your own cars?

H Yes They would give us ten cents a mile

C Do you remember what you were paying for gas back in those days?

H Gas? No, I cannot, exactly Gas was not so cheap back in the early days, either It ran around thirty cents, at least

C But you were making out okay, and the money they paid you helped out a little bit

H Oh, yes, that is right

C What was the first car you used on your route?

H A 1914 Ford

C [It was] very different from today's cars

H I saw a picture of one here on the television the other night [It] had all old red dash, and a brass radiator

C During the war, did work pick up for the post office?

H Yes, it did The mail commenced to getting heavier and heavier all the time

C Did you still have the same route?

H Yes, until 1959 Then when I quit them, they put this miler route on and the rural carrier took the part out in the country more, and this here man takes it Well this was not in here then too much in 1959 Like up the Unity Road and all, the edge of town, he takes it now And I had all that before

C What do you remember about when they built the new post office? What year was that?

H 1937 That was when we moved up there, 1937.

C The built that with WPA money, I guess, did they not?

H Indeed, I do not know I do not know how that went

C There is a lot more room now to work It was improved. Was the post office a pretty good living in the 1940s? You could not complain about what you were making?

H Not too much, no. It did not pay in proportion It is nothing like it is today

C Did you get to really know some of your customers that you had on your route? Did you know them pretty well?

H Oh yes, yes I did. Lots of them

C After delivering to them for quite a number of years, you get to know them very well?

H That is right

C In the 1940's, you were still working, right?

H I worked on a rural route until 1969

C All the years you worked in the post office, you really never missed any work, did you? I mean, you were never really laid off, were you?

H No

C And you said you started back to work in about 1918, right? Was it 1918 or 1919?

H Yes, sometime I think in November of 1918

C And then you just kept going right on to 1959 It is hard to believe you never really missed any work, got laid off

H Well, that kind of work is regular The mail goes on everyday

C Right So, what do you remember about some changes in the postal service, in the 1940s in East Palestine? What were some of the big changes that come to your mind? Is there anything that is really different?

H No, it seemed to go on just the same

- C The big change was in 1932 when you got a car, I guess
- H Yes, for my part Because, as I said, I used a car a good long while before that, through the summer But then it was officially a motor route after 1932
- C And how about the 1950s? Were there any changes?
- H Well, the route was getting built up and, you know, the people, houses and patrons [There were] many houses put up and then in 1959, when I quit, it was divided again
- C The fact that you were a farmer brings me to the question about the grange Was there a grange here in the East Palestine area? If so, did you belong? What were some of the things that the grange did? What was the purpose for you?
- H Well, yes, I belonged to the grange But that was probably as early as 1914 or 1915 when it started I am not a member of the grange no more They built a hall up there They are north of East Palestine It has a pretty good membership yet.
- C What did you used to do? What was the purpose of the grange?
- H Well, they would have a certain amount of entertainment there I do not know if I can tell you much else
- C It was just where the farmers got together?
- H Got together to meet, yes [They would] talk things over Social order
- C The fact that you lived outside of town, more or less in the country, did it create any hardships for you? Did you ever wish you lived closer to town?
- H No, no I never did, while we was out there I never had any reason to wish that It was not but a few minutes to come to town, if we had to come for anything Even in the horse and buggy days, [it was] about a half an hour and we could be in town, probably less
- C How about the police and the fire department here in East Palestine? Did you ever have to use them for any reason? What do you remember about the police department or the fire department?

H We had to call the fire department when a stack of grain caught fire one time from a spark from the thrashing motor engine. They was out there twelve minutes after we called. They saved things for us. That was the only time we had occasion to call them. The police department, I never remember calling the police department at all.

C No? You do not remember any crime out there around the farm or anything?

H No, crime or anything.

C You mentioned also that, beside cows, you also had hogs. You had a few other animals too, as a farmer?

H Oh, I have had sheep, I have had turkeys.

C But it was not too profitable to raise turkeys or sheep?

H Turkey business [was] pretty good at first, but it soon got in the hands of the big producers. So it fell away.

C And the sheep?

H We had sheep right after part of the place was stripped. I got pneumonia one fall and could not get out and we got rid of the sheep. So that ended that.

C You retired in 1959?

H Yes, from the rural service.

C Oh, but you continued working?

H Yes, for my place. I was there, yet.

C Right, up at the farm.

H Yes.

C So your affiliation with the post office ended in 1959.

H October of 1959.

C And then you got your pension from the government, but you kept working on the farm?

H Yes

C Were you still raising some animals after your retirement, or did you slow down?

H Well, yes, I slowed down. After I stripped the place, I fenced it and I got some sheep, to kind of keep things cleaned up and so on. And that was around in the early 1960's 1962.

C When you look back over the years you worked in the post office and as a farmer, were there any changes you would have liked to have seen take place? Let us say as a farmer first. What changes would you like to have seen in the area of farming during the period you lived in the East Palestine area? If you could have made some changes in farming, to make it easier for you and the farmer, what would you have done?

H Well, actually, I do not know what to say about that. I really do not. Things just started to change, and they changed so rapidly, and you could not keep up with them, when it did come.

C When you look at farming today, do you wish you were in farming again?

H No

C Do you think it is harder for the farmer today to make money than it was years ago?

H Well, I do not know if it is harder, but it takes better management, and it takes a terrible lot of capital to farm today, which they did not use much of back in my early days. There was hardly any money. Things were run entirely different. It has got to be such a big thing anymore. Everything is big farms and so on. The little places are done.

C You said you had 76 acres out there?

C How about the post office route? Looking back on that, did you wish there were some changes made in the postal service that were not made?

H. [Laughter] I guess I have many times, kind of provoked in the way things were, but I cannot recall now just what they might have been. I really cannot.

C How about the East Palestine area in general? If there are any things that you wished were different about East Palestine, what might they be?

H It has been a pretty good neighborhood, and so on, taking the town into consideration, too So I do not know what I could say about that

C So you really have no regrets about anything?

H No, I have no regrets.

C I want to thank you, Mr Harris, for letting me talk to you today. I have enjoyed it

H You are welcome

End of Interview