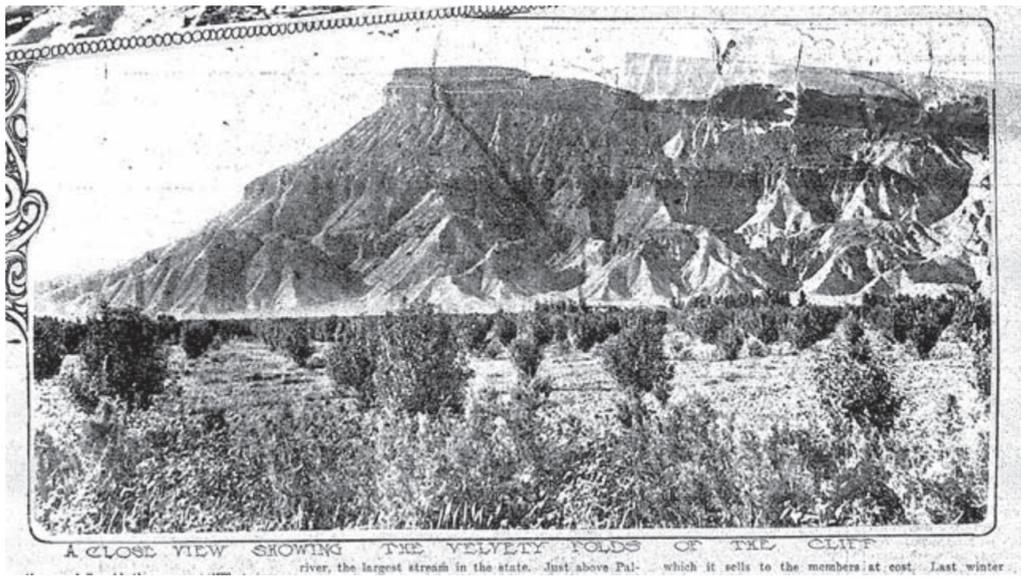


# FIRST DRAFT



PHOTOS SPECIAL TO THE SENTINEL

A 1909 feature story in The Denver Post discussed the peach industry in Palisade.

## Palisade: A \$2 million mountain and peach trees worth fortunes

As you bite into a juicy Palisade peach this summer, consider what sets this peach country apart from other locales.

It's a place where a single peach tree is worth more than an entire acre of wheat, a Denver newspaper wrote, and the Book Cliffs to the north are worth at least \$2 million "in cold cash" for the radiant heat they provide to peach growers.

Exactly how The Denver Post arrived at those dollar figures is not clear. The paper made those proclamations nearly 110 years ago, in the spring of 1909.

The article had more than a little home-state hyperbole, describing the irrigated orchard land around Palisade as "the most productive agricultural land in the United States."

But it's basic premise — that the Book Cliffs from Mount Garfield east to the mouth of De Beque Canyon provide important radiant heat to the orchards in the area — is correct. However, that's only part of the story, said Horst Caspari, head of the viticulture program for Colorado State University's Western Colorado Research Center.

Equally important to the radiant heat from the cliffs are the breezes that flow out of De Beque Canyon into the valley like water flowing in the Colorado River, Caspari said. The breezes, which help stave off freezing temperatures, disperse as the valley opens up to the west.

The combination of radiant heat from the cliffs and the valuable breezes can mean a difference of a few critical degrees in temperature on a frosty night in the spring when peach trees and grapevines are blooming, he said. The temperature difference between Palisade and the Lower Valley can be as much as 20 degrees.

And of course, none of it would matter if there weren't irrigation water to keep the trees watered.

As for the 1909 claim that a single peach tree was worth

more than an acre of wheat, that's not true today. But it's not far off the mark.

Using numbers I found on a Kansas wheat tracking site, and from a 2013 Western Colorado Research Center document called "The Cost of Growing Peaches in Western Colorado," I calculated it would take just over six peach trees in Palisade to provide the same amount of gross revenue as an average acre of Kansas wheat field — about \$211.

However, the comparison is based on 2018 wheat prices, but 2013 peach prices. Peach prices have increased since then, Caspari said.

The 1909 article described the irrigated lands around Palisade as "the famous home of the Elberta peach, and the Jonathan apple, and the Royal Duke cherry and the Clifton cantaloupe, and sundry other gustatory aristocrats."

It added, "Eleven years ago, this stretch of orchards and prosperous homes lay desert." The first irrigation water for the orchard lands at the east end of the valley arrived in the mid-1890s, courtesy of the Mount Lincoln Ditch, which later became the Price Ditch.

Before irrigation water, land in the Palisade area could have been purchased for \$50 an acre, the 1909 article said. "Now it sells, by the acre, and half acre, and quarter acre, for from \$2,500 to \$4,500 an acre, and is hard to get at that."

Although those prices seem high for Palisade's early history, there is separate corroboration for them. Sidney Jocknick, who lived in western Colorado before statehood, published a book in 1913 called "Early Days on the Western Slope of Colorado."

Jocknick touted "the beauties of Palisade, with her magnificent landscape of peach orchards, which have no rival on earth and which sell from \$1,000 to \$4,000 per acre."

Irrigated orchard land near Palisade now sells for 10 times that amount or more.

The town of Palisade was incorporated in 1904, just five years before the laudatory article in The Denver Post. But there would have been little to entice people to Palisade if it weren't for irrigation water.



Development on that important resource began in 1890 with work on the Mount Lincoln Ditch.

The ditch was owned by several private companies that installed electric pumps to pull the water out of the river. They also began work on a second canal, known originally as Ditch No. 2. It later became known as the Stub Ditch.

But financial problems threatened the ditches. So, in 1904, the Palisade Irrigation District was created by landowners within the district to purchase the Price Ditch from its private owners, assume its debts and make repairs to the canal.

The Mesa County Irrigation District was formed in early 1906 and assumed ownership and operation of the Stub Ditch.

However, there wasn't enough water for the ditches in dry years. So, even as The Denver Post proclaimed the wonders of Palisade's orchards, the two irrigation districts were working together to build a diversion dam across the entire Colorado River.

Construction on the dam began in January 1910 and was completed in December of that year, providing a more stable source of water to the two irrigation districts.

It wasn't until 1915 that the Government Highline Canal began delivering water to many more acres of land around Palisade and west beyond Fruita.

Under a contract with the Orchard Mesa Irrigation District, the Highline Canal system and the Grand Valley Water Users Association also began supplying water to thousands of acres of orchard lands on Orchard Mesa.

Even so, there were tough times for the first peach growers, the 1909 Denver Post reported. Many growers dropped out. But the persistent ones remained, people like a former newspaper editor named J.S. Oliver, "who didn't know any better than to hang on."

"When the ditch caved in and no water came down for the trees, he hauled water in barrels from the river and saved his young trees. Now he is worth a quarter of a million dollars and spends his winters in Europe."

Sources: "A Cliff that absorbs sunshine and turns it into gold," *The Denver Post*, March, 1909, provided by Wanda Beebe; "The Cost of Growing Peaches in Western Colorado," by Ron Sharp, Horst Caspari and Amaya Atucha, Western Colorado Research Center; "Peaches and Politics in Palisade, Colorado," by Paul H. Bardell, Jr.; Horst Caspari; [ksu.wheat.com/growers/10-year-average-kansas-wheat-production](http://ksu.wheat.com/growers/10-year-average-kansas-wheat-production).

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BOB SILBERNAGEL

## BLOTTER

COMPILED BY SENTINEL STAFF

### Assault with bat alleged

A woman suspected of hitting a man in the head with a bat has been released from jail on a personal recognizance bond.

Kendell Larson, 38, was arrested by Fruita police last week after they responded to a report of an assault on Sargent Circle.

According to the affidavit for her arrest, Larson allegedly struck the man with a bat after taking his cellphone away from him and demanding the pass code. The man had been on a business trip out of town and is in a relationship with her, Fruita police said in the affidavit for her arrest. Larson accused him of cheating on her and became enraged when he declined to let her go through his phone, according to the affidavit.

After shattering the phone's screen, Larson allegedly threatened to kill the man, picked up a child's baseball bat and started swinging at him, eventually hitting him in the back of the head and causing injury.

She fled the residence after the incident but later returned and was arrested for alleged second-degree assault with a deadly weapon causing injury, felony menacing, domestic violence and criminal mischief.

Mesa County Judge Craig Henderson issued a personal recognizance bond to Larson on Friday.

**According to the Grand Junction Police Department:**

■ A vehicle worth less than \$20,000 was reported stolen July 9.

### GETTING IT RIGHT

"Getting it right" appears as needed to correct erroneous information that has appeared in The Daily Sentinel's news columns, to add details that should not have been omitted from a story or to correct typographical errors that changed the meaning of the story.

In an article on Page One on Sunday, the list of newspapers that have cut the number of days of print publication should not have included the Greeley Tribune.

The Mesa County Sheriff's Office did not release blotter information on Sunday.

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