Warm Valley Historical Project
Interview with Paul Moss
Interviewed by Sharon Kahin and Sara Wiles
Spring 1992

SK: Paul, this is a project about what it was like at the boarding schools, and Sara said you went to St. Stevens. You went to St. Stevens to go to school?

PM: Yes. I went there. I was born there. I was born I was born there. My mother and dad stayed there. I stayed there until my mother died. My dad continued to work there. I stayed there and I worked. I worked in the little garden. I got a job weeding. I was a little kid. I didn't know the difference between a plant and a weed. I just went ahead and pulled everything. [laughter] After that, I went up on the hill where there was a row of gardens, and I was growing up there and learning gardening. They was different because—watching mom go down to the barn, get a horse and I learned everything there. Gardening, raise flowers, different things.

SK: You learned those things when you were in school?

PM: Learned how to raise watermelons, squash, corn, pumpkins—everything. I remember all of that. It's been a long time. 1929 I think I stayed there. I stayed there even when my school, or boys building burned down. January 20, 1928. We build a church. When boys building burn down across there, we build that. But the—from St. Francis, South Dakota, came over to use the architect. All the [big laborers come]. A dollar an hour—the wages, or so. It was more in those days. Everything was cheap, you know. Even when—we still get dollar a day. Billion days, a billion dollars, they used to say. Now, what did you want? You wanted me to tell you my—

SK: What was it like to go to St. Stevens when you were very young? Tell us what it was like when you first went to St. Stevens, to school. How old were you?

PM: Five years old.

SK: And did you board there?

PM: Well, yes, I board there. It was a boarding school, at that time. It's an old building attached to the church. A. J. [Kittle], Father Kittle's office was right at the corner. The boys building was attached to it. This facing west. His office was over here. Upstairs was the dormitory. And the class room was down here—down at the bottom. The girls building was just beyond that South wing. At that time, when I was a young boy, we were restricted from talking to girls. They had a high wall fence. About this high. No talk to girls. Can't talk to them. We were restricted. We talked to them. We had a detail of all the boys that would go down to the barn—with the horses. I remember those horses I worked with too, as I grew up.

Bi11 Captain Joe, and a few others I broke. We had a Mission bull. We called him Sam. Mission was self supporting. I helped Mission raise garden. And I went home and got the lard. We got our own lard. We had our own bread. Make our own bread. My sisters would make the bread. Our own milk. Dairy herd. And our own beef cattle. We would get beef. Plus, every two weeks—it depends on the need. And hams you know. We had our own ham and bacon. We were self supporting. We had a cellar. We built a cellar there for potatoes. In the fall, we picked potatoes. We had our own potato cellar. Vegetables. We put vegetables—put them in [sand], carrots, and keep them fresh. We done a lot of things there. In the wintertime. At that time there, during the, there were no refrigeration, like we have here. Those refrigerators. Those ice boxes and so forth. In the wintertime, we took our horses—the horses had to have spiked horse shoes so they wouldn't slip. And then we had an ice cutter. We went down the river there. There was a deep place there and we would cut ice. On wagons, we would haul ice. We cut it this way. We didn't have them [chinkers]. Chink of ice—blocks. We cut a channel. A slide. The blocks would come down there. We have these hooks and would come up and load them on the wagon. Take them to the ice house. In the ice house, we built a place where we had hooks to hang up our hams and pork and things like the—keep them there. Keep them fresh. It was just a room, about this big, with hooks all around. But it was big cabin. We would get the sawdust from our own yard. We cut wood in the winter. We hauled wood, trees, logs, from the Big Wind River aways over there. There's a place there where my former wife had land. We sawed trees for the Mission. We used to—well, I'm getting ahead of myself here. When we hauled this ice, we had a big long chute about that wide, down to the wagon. And then they had a chute going into the building. Then we had sawdust. Put some on the floor. Then we got some in sacks. Threw them up there. We had ice all planted around that icebox, inside. We had to chink one our two blocks to fill in. We would chink with these—just like shovels, but they had sharp edges. Then we would go on to the next one. Put some more sawdust over them and then put another layer of ice in there. When we got through, way up there, until we can't get any more in there. We got all we can and threw some on the side. When it was enough, then we shut up. Then they come in down through that ice box. They had a manhole up there. Walk down. Get in the icehouse through there. It was all full, keeping refrigerated our hams—. We had a smoking hole in the building. They would smoke hams and bacon out there. We had our own lard. Had our own bacon. Had our own beef. When I was in town—I say I would be able to work with him too, because my brother went off to school. So, all of them would see that they were building a boys school. A self supporting school—St. Stevens. We raised potatoes. We had potato picking in the fall. We had our own cellar. We would fill that up with everything. Hay, oats. In the summer, while I was working there, we would raise garden. Produce, to sell. People from Lander--from all around, came in and bought vegetables. Scores. We had a brother named Perry. Brother Perry. We raised any kind of garden stuff. Ground almonds.

SK: Peanuts?

PM: We raised every kind of flowers. We had our own sweet peas and corn. Different kind of food. I forget what they call those big flowers. Every kind. Had rhubarb in there. I had to get on my knees. He gave me a paring knife, sharpened. I had to cut those weeds. Then I would go on to more corn, carrots, and turnips. I cultivated with a horse. I know how to handle horses at that time. St. Stevens was self supporting at that time. We didn't go into town to buy anything. But whatever we need, like—we had our own flour. Everything was done right there at the school. Our own milk. Our own eggs. We had a lot of turkeys too. In the fall, wintertime, we got several orders. People wanted orders. We would dress them out. We would get a knife with opener. Put a weight to them. Then we would cut them with a knife and bleed them. Bleed them down. While they were warm, we would cut thier wing and start plucking. We know how to do, clean the turkeys and get them ready for market.

SK: Oh, you sold the turkeys?

PM: We sold turkeys. We raised turkeys. We raised chickens. All that stuff, I learned how to do at school. It was a self supporting school. Had cattle. Had a graze across the river there. Right where that housing is across south of Riverton, just a little west there. It was their area. They kept their cattle out there. My dad used to herd the cattle up to Trout Creek. Took them over there. He was their cowboy at one time. I was up there with him when I was a little boy. I would go fishing in the Trout Creek. We saw some

SK: St. Stevens cattle gent up to Trout Creek?

PM: Yes. St. Stevens had cattle up here. My dad was a cowboy for them over there. St. Stevens cattle. They raised them around the Trout Creek area. A long time ago. They had their own horses there. They had one horse there—we called him Tommy. He would run races too. He was a good one. My dad finally got it. They give it to him. In those days, we travel with wagons. No car. Later on, when Father Mac came—Father Mac. He went to Wisconsin. He went to Wisconsin and met some Indians that were speaking the same language that I am. Algonquin. That's where we came from. Arapahoes, different ones broke away from there and came around. We talk the same. A little bit different here and there. Then they came on. You want me to go on? I'll take you clear on down south.

SK: What kind of clothes did you wear at St. Stevens? Did they make clothes for you, or what kind of clothes did they have for you there?

PM: Going to school, my dad was elected as a disciplinarian. When the new kids come, he get clippers. Take everything off. They take everything off, but save their braids. They had little pig tails—the little boys. Some of them were just bushy headed [with little tie around]. We all had , they took all their hair off. And they put kerosene on their head. That was the custom at that time. Just to kill anything that was on their head. Might be lice or mites. But they cut it clear off. No more braids. You either had to have a flat ton or whatever. Just plain, short

hair. A lot of the folks cut the braids off their hair and saved them. When you grow up—grow old—you show them to your grandchildren. Some of them wanted to keep their braids. They show it to their children—grandchildren. Keepsakes. The conditions at St. Stevens at that time were strict. They would be heavier. Understand we had to go on calisthenics—boys, I don't know about the girls. They just do all the wash and laundry—sewing. Whatever they had to do. Sewing, laundry, or help in the bakery. In the wintertime they ran in lard and stuff. Stuff like that. They took care of house cleaning in their department. We take care of our own, over here. Each one of them had a detail to do. Some of them went to the barn. They cleaned out the shit, you know, and take it out to the garden spot and dump it. All the boys there prepared for summer. Manuaring stuff down. All that is year around work. Then we would go out and fix fences, clean ditches, burn the weeds in all them ditches. For us kids, we liked to have pets. When we burned ditches, we would catch mice. We could take them home, take them to school, dig big hole and put a mice in there. Keep them for pets [laughter]. Wintertime, when we were going to go home, women, before, would come and bring us some lunch. We would eat in the room. In the new building. After we built that new building there. Our teacher, who was a German—Mr. Muller they called him. He spoke German fluently. He was very smart. Smart teacher. We were mischievous. There was a big blackboard across the room there. He would write down there whatever we had to do. Compositions. He would be writing and in the meantime, we would be chewing paper. [laughter] We throw it away—splot! We would pretend to be writing and he would say, "Who threw that!" Nobody answer. We did all crazy things. We had small tacks. Sharp tacks. We would put them on his chair. He would come and sit down. Oh, he shot right out [laughter]. We were full of mischief.

SK: Did you get punished?

PM: Yes. If we got caught. Never caught us though. One boy—my cousin—was bent down for calisthenics. My cousin let it [roar]. I don't know where he got canvas, but when the teacher bent over, he would tear it. [laughter] He would straighten up and look around. "We didn't see anything." We didn't tell on nobody. He didn't rip his pants. It was just that canvas. He would straighten up. Next day—this time, for some reason, he did. "I know what you guys are doing. You're tearing a rag up back there." But sure enough; he really did tear it. At noontime he met with the priest. Walking around with his shirt tail hanging out. [laughter] The priest would say, "Hey Mr. Muller. You better change your pants." "What!" [laughter] We did a lot of tricks like that. We were full of mischief.

SK: What was your father's job? You said your father was the disciplinarian?

PM: Yes. Alonzo Moss.

SK: What was his job? What did he do?

PM: Disciplinarian. He would watch the kids over. Make sure they were doing things

right. He takes care of us. In the playroom, or details. Sweep sidewalks. Some of them went down to the barn and worked with the horses. Some with the cattle. Some with the cows. Some with the pigs. Some with the chickens. Some with the turkeys. Some of them were detailed in the cellar serving potatoes. St. Stevens was self-supporting. It was all organized at that time. That was before I went off to school. I stayed there and learned how to do the work in Mission. Worked with the priest--sister. Did everything. Worked in the garden. Raised watermelons. I know how to raise watermelons–different kinds. Squash, corn, The sisters canned the corn. Indians wouldn't like to eat sometimes—except dry meat. We got that from home.

SK: But they tried to give you what you liked? They tried to give you the kind of food Indians liked?

PM: Well, whatever we raised. Beef, chicken, turkey—

[End of side 1]

PM: At that time, at my stay at St. Stevens. I stayed there. I was raised there during 1929. I helped build the church. Build the boys building. This was all in the Liberty time. I worked up at the alter. I fixed that—. There weren't no real [comradness], but this brother from St. Francis teach it. We worked for a dollar a day. St. Stevens didn't pay me very much, but that was enough. It was more in those days.

SK: Were you a student when you were payed to work there?

PM: I worked with the Mission the same time I worked with the architects; but my pay still stayed the same.

SK: How old were you when you were working with the building?

PM: 1928. I was sixteen years old.

SK: Were you still taking classes at the Mission too? Were you still going to classes at the Mission, or were you just working at the Mission?

PM: I stayed at the Mission all my life. Like I said before—I was born and raised there. Until my mother died. Then we stayed there a little longer [than a week], then my dad moved out. Then we stayed with [Wards]. My aunt, my uncle, Ben Ward, and Polly Ward. But I stayed there. I stayed there at the Mission. 1929. '28 went to school. I signed up. I told H. [A.] Kittle, Father Kittle, "I grant to go to school. I want to leave. My mothers gone. My dads gone. I don't think I want to stay. I want to go." "Where would you want to go?" "Indian school—[Genoa], Nebraska." They signed me up. A few other kids went. My first year I went there, Evelyn Brown—[Felder] now—Shoshone—Seneca in there. St. Clair. So I went there. I learned what I wanted to learn.

SK: Did you learn a trade?

PM: Yes. Maintenance. Little carpentry, little plumbing, little masonry. Small amount of electricity. I have my old encyclopedia downstairs for electricity. I do these things around here. I got a job here—housing. Do all the houses here. So, I moved out. Doing a maintenance job over there for summer vacation. I stayed there awhile. Do all the work over there. Girls—. I didn't want to go girl—. They bore you over there. Whole bunch of them would come over to the room where I am working. Didn't want to go over there; but I had to go over there. Detail over there. During my time there, there was a music teacher. [Web Seager]. "Who can sing?" They picked me out. I was a singer. They picked me out and they—guitar. I sit on the floor a long time with a guitar and sing. But I [didn't want that]. I quit. I went back to my job. I don't want to sing with a guitar. I'd rather drum. When I was in school over here at St. Stevens—boys school—I learned quite a bit. Respect. Teachers, good people. But we had fun with our—outside. Every time they would show a movie inside, a few of us boys—we'd sneak out. We would get rocks. We would put under the saddle. Rocks. Then, old people, young people. Young people had high life horses. Old people had slow ones. We would trade them. [laughter] We'd trade them. After show, we would run upstairs and look on. At that time, this guy would get on this horse. We had a rodeo out there. [laughter] "What's wrong with these horses? They never bucked before." Old people got on their wagons. Back wheels were higher. Front wheels were smaller. We'd trade them around. The big wheels were in the front—small wheels in the back. [laughter] Old people would ask, "Whats the matter? Feels like we're going uphill." "What's the matter? Our horses got all lively after the show." The young folks got on their horses. They had to whip them horses. They were just walking along. We did a lot of mischief like that. Before they got home, they found that their wagon wheels had been changed. Big wheels in the front and the little wheels in the back. They tried to make us tell who done that. "Well, there are a lot of outsiders come over and bother," we told him. We got out of it that way. Sisters too. They can't do much about it. They just got after us here and there. They tried to make us sing in the choir. At [Christmas], you would sing. On Easter, the boys and girls sing real good. Father Kittle—my Easter. We told each other boys. Girls sing real good. Sopranos and stuff like that. But us, we're only going to sing real loud. There wouldn't be no tune to it but its going to be loud. No bass or baritone—anything like that. When it was time to sing, we just let it go. The priest saying mass would turn around and look up. We sang real loud. 01d people turned around and thought, "Whats going on up their. Those boys singing. Never heard anything like it before." [laughter] We'd drown out the girls. They quit us. "No more. Too crazy. You just let the girls and sisters sing." There was a lot of mischief in the school at that time. We done some things then that no ordinary school would do. Like this one here. We just did it because we liked to laugh. Outsiders would come in. We would put the blame on them. We were innocent until we got caught. But its the outside boys who always did it. They talk about basketball here. I told them, "Yes. I'll play." There were no rules. No. On the whistle, we would jump. If you got a hold of the ball, you would take it and run

with it. There weren't no dribbling in those days. You would run over there and then over there. Throw it down there and then you would run with it. No rules. We would go from end to end. You would go and take it and run over there. There used to somebody just a little bit faster than you. By time you got to that brick wall, they'd push you. [laughter] You got a bleeding nose. Start fighting. You had fist fights. They said it was a good game. Outsiders would come in and fight. There was a little circle there. Go ahead and fight. Bleeding. Best ball game we ever had. [laughter] Now, you can't do nothing. Touch some one, "Technical!" "Personal!" Baseball. One boys nose got flattened out. Didn't want to wear a mask. Track. Them boys at that time could run! Real good runners. We chased the horses. Run over there. See a jackrabbit—chase him. Run over the sage brush if you're sure footed. When I was at school—St. Stevens, working there—I got paid five dollars. I learned to rivet for St. Stevens. That old—down over there, where Susquehanna used to be. The track. I run to town, bought myself what I need, and run back. I told Father Kittle that I had just got back from town. "Huh-uh," he says, "I [won't hear it]." I bought something. I was a good boy. I—four—. My time—my oldtimers said to me, "Run from here, take a bath, come back."

SK: To Thermopolis ?

PM: Yes. They go to Thermopolis—take a bath. Then they run back through [Mexican Pass], down—meyer this way. They took a rest, over night, and then ran back. They used to tell us, "You boys, you think you're—. You just go about fifty feet—fifty yards—you start coughing," they said. Their is just meat and soup. That's all. No canned stuff. They take can stuff and throw it away. They take bacon, throw it away. They take the heels of the shoes and knock the heels off.

SK: These were old time runners?

PM: Yes.

SK: How old were they when they would do that?

PM: Was just good young men. Good young men. Some from Carlaise. [Scottbury, Bruce, ]. Jim Thorpe. Southern Arapahoe. John—. They wouldn't eat canned stuff. No smoking. You know, one night, what we do at the—to get—. [Short section inaudible over background noise]. Two times. Thirty-five and thirty-eight. I'm going to tell you a story of what happened years back during the Second World War. [Ralph Piper]—he's the one that took that wheel before at [Norman]. [He put something in a ball, so it would roll quick]. That summer, people [were always there] were [sitting] across the river, down that way a ways. Second day of vacation All them old people at—. And they [all paint it] like they do. No—. One time, there weren't no 100 Sun Dances. There were eight here. Maybe nine on this side. That's all. Real serious visitors would come. They all stand in that pit. Sometimes the headman—. With a— in his head. You seen it. He was wearing it. Summer came. People see flags of every nation all around the walls. Flags of every nation. Upstairs. Up there in the [crowd], there were more. More flags up

there. All the men were—. My dad was in there. —people dance. [He bless me] and I dance. He came around and told people not to watch me too long. They announced it. Told me to get out there and start dancing. I went out and started dancing and he come around—he put his hand over mom. So [Hailstone]—put that in his mouth and chewed on it. First time—it was just like ice, water running down. I danced all afternoon. They just changed drummers. I danced all afternoon—. All that evening to about midnight. Then I quit. I didn't want to go on dancing till next day. —next day—last day. That sun came back up. —kept going. My place, they give me the third pole on this side. Then the fourth one. The one that's got that—you know. My positions were that side, west side. Third one. They gave me that. That's my place there. The songs were given to me. Twelve songs. That's what I use in there. —were given to me. Arapaho song. No Shoshone song, no Crow song, no— song, no Ute songs. Straight Arapaho. When it's Arapaho Sun Dance. But now they sing anything. [laughter] I even heard—. They told me to go ahead, bring us slow ones too. So I did. I gave them some new songs. All those times that I been at St. Stevens I learned a lot of things there too; but when I went to Genoa, Nebraska, I learned different things that—Indians do in Omaha. Sac and Fox. Winnebegos. I learned what they do. They showed me. —way. Corn Dance. Seneca Indians—they were around there down—. I was talking with one over there—. He was the one that told me about that Trail of Tears from—. The soldiers were ruthless. Whether it's the government or the soldiers themselves—brought those people south—different tribes. They came—all them different tribes. Seneca, Chickasaw—different kinds. Clear down Southeast Oklahoma there on down—Arkansas. The Trail of Tears. The soldiers bayonet women who were sick and throw them in the river. Babies who were sick—they bayonet them and throw them in the river. People couldn't fight back. They were disarmed. That's why they call it the Trail of Tears. They come from Florida on up to Oklahoma. It was supposed to nave been an Indian nation, but the Cheyenne and Arapaho were driven down that way. The other Arapahos and Cheyenne broke away. That's why we have Southern Arapaho, Southern Cheyenne. Northern Arapaho, Northern Cheyenne up in Montana. This Seneca was telling me, "Go up that hill. There's a book there. Read all about it." So I went up there. Great big volume told all about it. It's just something that we thought would never happen to people like that. —who to blame. It was the Army doing that under the authority of the United States Government. They could have been sued for that atrocity—how they treated the people. It was terrible how they bayoneted them babies—throw them in the river. Run their sabers through women—sick. Even the women that were pregnant were killed. Both of them. Men were helpless. They were disarmed. They were tied. That's why they call it the Trail of Tears. I read that. One Seneca Indian told me all about it.

SK: He told you at Genoa?

PM: Muskogee.
[End of Tape]