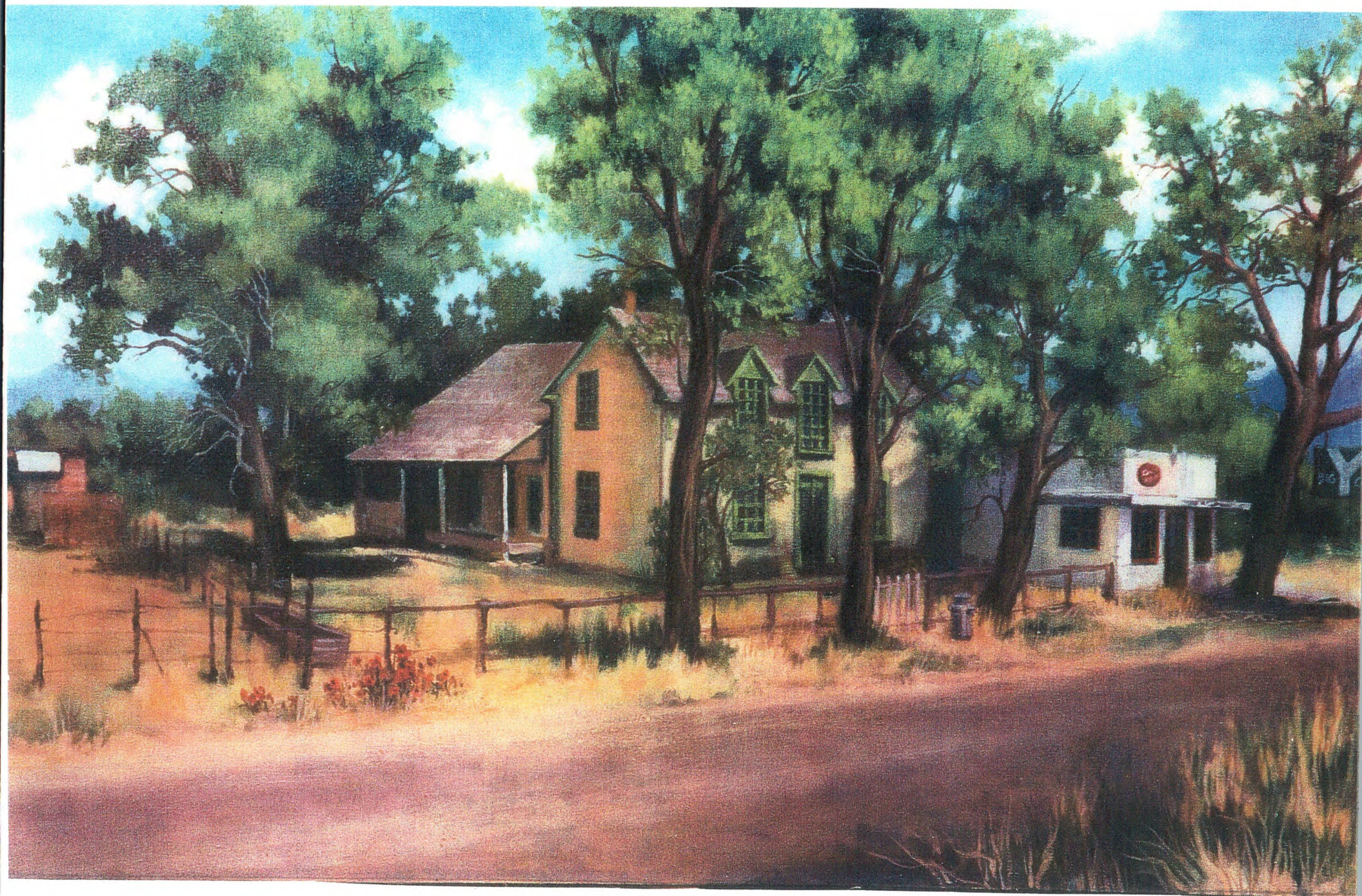




AAGARD-ANDERSON HOME IN LEVAN, UTAH

AAGARD-ANDERSON HOME

By Ronald B. Anderson

The Aagard-Anderson home was built in Levan, Utah Territory by Danish pioneers Niels and Sorena (Sorensen) Aagard. They both met on the same ship while immigrating to America in 1859 after joining The Church Of Jesus Christ Of Latter Day Saints. They married in 1861. The home is located at the northwest corner of the intersection of Main Street and Highway 91. It was built in about 1870 (could have been as late as 1876) after Niels and Sorena were released from the Dixie Mission in 1869 due to Niels' health problems resulting from the hot climate of southern Utah. The present site of Levan was founded and surveyed in December 1867 and the first settlers arrived in 1868.

Family history alleges that Brigham Young occasionally visited the home when in route to southern Utah and that church meetings were held in the house prior to the construction of the Levan ward chapel. This information is clarified somewhat when the following facts are considered. In 1874 Niels was called to be a director of the Levan Branch of the United Order. Then in July of 1877 Niels was called home from a mission to Nebraska which began in 1876 to be the first bishop of the newly created Levan Ward (previously a branch). At this time the Levan saints were meeting in a small 24' X 36' adobe building which was constructed in 1869. A Relief Society Hall was later built and dedicated in 1885 which was then used for the majority of all church meetings. The Levan ward chapel would not be constructed and completed until 1904 (as inscribed on the front of the building) and then dedicated in 1909. Since no room in the Aagard house exceeded the size of the adobe building, it is improbable that ward meetings were held in the house. However, supporting functions such as fireside type meetings, funeral viewings, etc. were held in Bishop Aagard's home in addition to Relief Society gatherings and meetings since Sorena was the Relief Society President.

Concerning Brigham Young's visits to the home during trips to southern Utah, it is unlikely that he ever stayed or slept in the home since he usually stopped at the residence of the local presiding church authority. Due to age related poor health, Brigham Young made few trips to southern Utah after about 1875. He died on August 29, 1877 shortly after making his last trip to southern Utah to preside over the general conference of the church which was held that year in St. George in conjunction with the dedication of the St. George Temple in April of 1877. This was three to four months prior to Niels call to serve as bishop in July of 1877. Since Niels did not hold any major church leadership role until 1874, and then not the presiding authority in Levan, it is most probable that Brigham Young's visits to the home were brief. However, many Church leaders within the time of presidents John Taylor and Wilford Woodruff visited the home while Niels was the bishop (15 years).

Because Sorena was unable to have children, she gave her consent to Niels to take a second wife. Niels subsequently met and married Boletta Rasmussen in 1877 who left her fiancé to marry Niels. Boletta emigrated from Denmark this same year. A second small two room home was eventually built for Boletta across the road to the south of the first Aagard home. According to a previous agreement, the first two of Boletta's children were to be raised as Sorena's. Mary Aagard was the second child of five born to Boletta in 1881 and was born in the first Aagard house (Sorena, Mary, Niels, James, Sonnie). She was the second born but the first to live and subsequently she and her brother Niels Jr. were counted as the first two and were partly raised by Sorena in the large house. This plural marriage became in conflict with the 1882 Edmunds-Tucker Act and resulted in the imprisonment of Niels in 1889 for 50 days. Niels Aagard died in 1892. Boletta died in 1910 and Sorena (Mof) in 1927.

Mary married James Anderson from Fountain Green, Utah in 1899 after meeting at Brigham Young Academy. She was 18 and he was 25. They moved in with Sorena and began to farm the main portion (2/3rds) of the Aagard farm still owned by Sorena (the remaining 1/3rd was owned by Boletta). Nine children were born in the house to James and Mary between 1900 and 1921 (Annie, Edna, James, Clarence, Evan, Lewis, Lucile, Rulon, Elden). In 1904 James was called on a three year mission to Norway leaving Mary to run the farm with three small children.

In 1923 Mary's youngest brother's (Sonnie's) wife died in Lovell, Wyoming where they were living at the time. Upon relocation to Levan, James and Mary invited Sonnie's family of seven children into their home until they could become re-established. This resulted in eighteen people living in the house (Evan died in 1917 and Annie married in 1920) for the next nine months. During this time Mary baked nine loaves of bread each day plus all of the washing and meal preparation, etc. that was required to care for both large families.

In the mid 1930's Mary built the small restaurant to the east of the home which was known as the "Big Y Cafe" named after the junction of highways 89 and 91 but referred to by family members as "the stand". The building had a small dining room having a service counter and six to eight stools on the east with two booths on the west. A juke box was on the north wall. The kitchen was in the rear with a basement for storage. No restroom was available. Basic dinners, hamburgers, malts, and cold drinks, etc. were served. The hamburgers were 15 cents and if you couldn't pay and were in need they were free. Most who accepted free hamburgers usually paid at a later time, and for some, years later.

When James suffered a stroke in 1955 the property was sold after approximately 85 years of family ownership and history at this location (Please refer to the recorded family history for additional information). James died in 1957 and Mary in 1969.

The land on which the house was built consisted of one-half block, or 2.1 acres (Levan blocks are 26 rods square) which also contained the corrals, pig pens, barn, chicken coops, granary, wood shed, hay stacks, hay derrick and an orchard. The total size of the farm including properties outside this half block amounted to 190 acres where alfalfa, wheat, oats and barley were raised. All of the farm implements, plows, mowers, rakes, even the thrashing machine were horse drawn. James's draft horses were always large "work plugs" usually black Belgians. The home in the picture is facing south. The trees lining the streets are black locusts. The trees on the east lawn were black walnuts with a raspberry patch to the north of them. Immediately north of the house was a vegetable garden. Wood was cut at one time by a 24" saw powered by a Model T Ford engine. The water trough illustrated in the picture was supplied by a plumbed tap. A large veranda above the south porch which also provided outside access for the upstairs rooms existed at one time but was later removed due to age related structural problems.

The inside of the house on the first floor consisted of a large living room in the east center part of the house. The east door to this room was used as the main entrance. In the southeast corner was a parlor which was Sorena's room. A doorway once connected the living room and parlor, but was later filled-in. The south outside entry door in the picture opened into the parlor, but was infrequently used. In the southwest corner was a large bedroom connected by a door on the east wall to the parlor and a door to the living room on the north. West of the living room was the kitchen, complete with a wood fired cook stove which was also used for heating and storing hot water in an adjacent tank. Between the large bedroom and the kitchen was a hall space leading to the stairs that was converted to an indoor bathroom in 1946 which was the "talk of the town". Until the bathroom was installed, the only indoor plumbing involved the kitchen sink. No other halls were in the house. Access between rooms was made by walking from one room into another. North of the kitchen was a small pantry containing dishes, food storage and a milk separator. Under the floor of the pantry was a small fruit and vegetable cellar. To the west of the kitchen on the outside porch was a laundry room which at one time contained a washing machine with a foot powered agitator and a hand wringer (no need for exercise spas in those days thank you). And finally in the northeast corner of the home was another first floor bedroom. The south second level consisted of two bedrooms and a space for a large rug loom. In the north second level was a large unfinished attic used for storage. All major rooms with the exception of the northeast bedroom had a wood stove. Generally only the stove in the living room and the kitchen cook stove were used for heating. Candles and coal oil lamps were first used for lighting, then a pressurized gas plumbed system and finally in about the late twenties electric lights were installed. The exterior walls of the home are of brick construction and were covered with stucco in the late 1930's.

This picture was painted by Ruth Brimhall in about 1980 from a series of photographs and a verbal description provided by the writer.

The house in this story once belonged to Neils Jensen Aagard

A small town's challenge: Elderly man living in a decaying house

Aging » A man, 91, wants to die in his house as community debates how to help.

By JIM DALRYMPLE II

The Salt Lake Tribune

Levan » Mike Royce ducks beneath the eave of a sagging porch, shielding a steaming box of takeout food from melting snow and saber-like icicles. Just before he shakes open the thin door — he doesn't knock — he nods toward a plastic-covered window.

"That's the condemnation notice," he says, pointing to a blurry square taped to the plastic. "Someone spray-painted over it."

Inside, he's greeted by the smell of dust and rotting leather. Cobwebs thick as rope drape the walls. Royce steps through a low, narrow doorway framed



LEAH HOGSTEN | The Salt Lake Tribune

Levan resident Mike Royce enters the home of Klarence Meldrum, 91, in December to check on his health and bring food. The town has been helping Meldrum, who lives alone in a condemned house.

in decaying wood and leans toward the mountain of blankets on a soiled bed.

"Hello, Klarence," he says in a near shout. The only reply is a

hacking cough.

Royce is one of a rotating group of Levan residents who bring one meal a day to

Please see LEVAN MAN, A5

Levan man

» Continued from A1

91-year-old Klarence Meldrum. As far as they know, it's all Meldrum eats. The bottled water, coffee and Pepsi they deliver is all he drinks. And he never leaves his home — a crumbling adobe structure just off the highway that passersby sometimes mistake for an abandoned building. Royce isn't sure how often, if ever, Meldrum leaves his bed.

By all accounts, Meldrum has always been a recluse. After returning from World War II — where according to Royce, Meldrum was a B-17 tailgunner — Meldrum kept to himself. He never married or had children and gradually holed up in the small corner home he inherited from his family. He collects Social Security, though Royce said he lives pretty much without spending any money at all.

But as Meldrum nears the end of his life, his situation has worsened, forcing a community to grapple with issues stemming from his age and the squalor in which he lives. Their response was forming a voluntary support group to care for one of their own. But Meldrum's living conditions continue to spawn controversy and questions with no easy answers.

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A dire situation » Community members describe Meldrum's living conditions as "dire," "appalling," and "horrible."

"He's basically homeless in place," Royce said.

The wood of his living room floor is soft, with gaps between the boards. One wall of his kitchen is deeply warped, a wave crested by dangling insulation. Towers

of soiled books — *Rise of the Romans*, *Ancient Iraq*, *Search for Significance* — pack the living room. A greasy black film — described by one neighbor as "fungus" — covers everything.

Royce warned against looking in the bathroom. "It'll gross you out. There's no running water." Its low ceiling is festooned with spider webs. Buckets of dark liquid stagnate in the bathtub.

"It's cold, so the smell isn't as bad," Royce said. In the summer, he describes the odor as "ripe."

According to Royce, Meldrum uses a bucket for liquid waste. In the past, he used the non-functioning toilet for solid waste, then waited for it to become dry before shoveling it away with a pie tin. Royce — who in the past used a hazmat suit to go into the bathroom — replaced the tin with a leaf bag to make disposal easier.

“ We do care about Klarence. We’ve all said that when he passes away, when he dies, we want to be able look back at what we’ve done for him.”

MIKE ROYCE | *Levan resident*



PHOTOS BY LEAH HOGSTEN | *The Salt Lake Tribune*

Levan resident Mike Royce talks with Klarence Meldrum, lying in his bed. Royce and other community members take turns visiting Meldrum to check on his status and bring him food. The community has rallied around the 91-year-old.

Bad as the conditions are, Royce said Meldrum has been living more or less the same way for decades. Bathing, hygiene and socializing with other people were never high priorities. Now, Royce says, Meldrum just wants to die the way he has lived.

“He wants to die in his own house,” Royce said. “And he doesn’t want to go anywhere.”

■ ■ ■

Rights and responsibilities » But the prospect of letting Meldrum die in squalor doesn’t sit well with everyone, including part-time Levan resident Dennis Gardner. In early 2012, Gardner was among those delivering meals to the home. As the weather warmed, he helped replace Meldrum’s blankets, which he said disintegrated as they were peeled off the bed.

In August, Gardner helped orchestrate a trip to the Veterans Affairs Hospital in Salt Lake City. At some point during the visit, Meldrum slipped away and hospital workers lost track of him, according to Royce. Everyone panicked. The hospital went on lockdown. Later, someone found Meldrum on the other side of the building, rattling doors as he tried to get out.

Despite his resistance, Meldrum was given physical and mental exams, Gardner said. Though he was reportedly described as “cantankerous” and physically dirty, Gardner said doctors ultimately determined he was mentally competent and could make decisions for himself.

“They found he was sound of mind,” Gardner recalled.

Representatives for the VA Hospital declined to comment on the case, citing patient confidentiality laws.

Other attempts to get help for Meldrum have met similar resistance, with Meldrum “swearing” and “bawling and screaming” that he doesn’t want to go anywhere, according to Royce. As a result, many in the community feel they are respecting his wishes by leaving him in his home.

“If a person wants to, they have a right to die at home,” said Jerry Clark, another member of the group who delivers Meldrum’s meals.

Meldrum’s niece, Rosalie Hooks, agrees. Hooks lives in southern Utah County and is Meldrum’s closest relative. Hooks said she sees Meldrum weekly and that he has chosen his living conditions.

“I know his conditions aren’t the best, but he has the right if he wants to go live under a bridge,” Hooks said.

Gardner disagrees. Shortly before leaving Levan for the winter he helped locate nearby rental housing and suggested moving Meldrum there. But nothing happened.

“It just seems that even though they’re feeding him and they’ve got some heat in there, I don’t think that really equals taking care of his comfort and well-being,” Gardner said. “I think it just keeps him alive. I treat my pets a lot better than that.”

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The government’s role » Representatives for Adult Protective Services would not comment on Meldrum’s situation, but Royce said a caseworker has been involved. But as long as Meldrum is mentally competent, he has the right to make his own decisions. “We wish there was a win-win answer to this,” Royce



The Levan home of Klarence Meldrum has been condemned, it has no running water and its only heat source is one of two electric portable heaters that keep the house at 60 to 65 degrees.

said, "but we're not about to take away all of his civil rights."

Speaking generally, Utah Department of Human Services spokeswoman Elizabeth Sollis said authorities are required to respect the wishes of adults who are intellectually capable. Sollis said that if her department receives a report of a vulnerable adult, authorities can step in with various forms of aid. But if a person refuses help, the government's hands are tied.

"Ultimately if they have capacity, and they don't want us to help, then we have to respect that," Sollis said.

For nearly a quarter of a century before he became home-bound, Meldrum spent his afternoons at Lisa's Kitchen in Nephi. It's a western-themed joint with framed pictures of moose and deer on the walls. Every day, said owner Lisa King, Meldrum sat at the middle of the counter, listening and watching but rarely talking.

King mostly fed Meldrum for free. In the beginning, she handed him a "mistake plate," claiming she couldn't give it to her paying customers. Then she started making mistakes every day. In recent years, a group from Levan collected money and gave it to King to help cover the costs.

When Meldrum's lunches at Lisa's ended — first, Royce said his car broke down and then he became too unkempt to go inside — the community stepped in.

That process has continued with the delivery of Meldrum's meals, even as the controversy about how to help him won't die.

"We do have some community pride," Royce said. "We do care about Klarence. We've all said that when he passes away, when he dies, we want to be able look back at what we've done for him."

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KLARENCE MELDRUM

By Bart Agard 03-17-13

Meldrum has not always lived this low-line lifestyle. Klarence's family owned and operated a sizeable ranch about seven miles south of Levan by the name of Salt Creek Ranch, named after the canyon above—from which they got irrigation water, by the name of Little Salt Creek. There is still a salt spring several miles up this canyon which flows year around, leaving a generous white covering of salt—pure as salt comes—where the spring water evaporates.

This ranch was a state of the art operation for its time. Not only was it the host for several families, but it also provided summer jobs for some young adults from Levan—the neighboring community. There were at least three houses and a red brick building that I think was intended for a schoolhouse. They had a several acre orchard, a big barn, and sheds and grainerys to store at least part of what was produced. They raised pigs, cows, and lots of big work horses, as that was how farm work was done at that time.

Klarence had at least one brother named Bob and at least one sister named Dora Jean. These three kids (and maybe more) were born and raised on this very prosperous Salt Creek Ranch.

As a young man, Garn Tunbridge (my uncle on my mother's side) dated Dora Jean. When Garn was drafted into the Army in World War II, he and Dora Jean were intending on getting married when he returned. As fate sometimes happens, this was not to be—as Garn was killed in action, shortly before the war ended. Dora Jean went on to marry Ted Anderson from Sanpete County. They raised a fine, big family in Levan.

Brothers, Bob and Klarence were both in this World War II (I think). I have been told that Klarence was quite a lady's man in his years before the war, being from a prominent family with stylish clothes and a good dancer. Something happened to Klarence in that service to his country. As I first knew him, he would constantly nod his head and he mumbled to himself, much of the time. He seemed to be quite nervous. People said these conditions were symptoms of "shell shock". As a lot of young men came home from this service duty, they brought with them a couple of bad habits—cigarette smoking and alcoholism.

Somewhere along about this time (early forties), the Salt Creek Ranch seemed to be in a downward spiral. It stayed in decline until the ranch was finally sold in about 1960. Bob and Klarence stayed with this ranch as their means of income. Both of the brothers were said to be well-read and smart men, who must not have used the best common sense.

Bob was married to a beautiful woman named Delia. They had two or three children. Delia loved Bob a great deal. However, Bob and Klarence were constantly

in a state of drunkenness. It was said that one or both of these brothers would drive a tractor to Gunnison for a gallon of wine (25 miles). Delia put up with this situation until their children were teenagers. Finally, it got unbearable for a family situation. Delia filed for a divorce.

Somewhere along the line, Mother Meldrum and Klarence bought a small café and a large house in Levan—moving there so Mother Meldrum could support herself and Klarence by running this café.

Bob finally drank himself to death and later Klarence sobered up. After Mother Meldrum and Klarence moved to town and the ranch was sold, Klarence did little to support himself. There was about a forty-year period that Klarence held the undisputed title of the town bum.

Somewhere after year 2000, he got a little Social Security coming with the help of Levan Town members. It couldn't have been much as he had been self-employed at the ranch. He also got a job at N.R.P. for a couple of years. There they could put him on a crew where others could pack him somewhat, duty-wise. Here he could also take a shower—which he did only on rare occasion. Even N.R.P. couldn't put up with Klarence forever. He either quit or was layed off in a few years.

I have a hard time believing Klarence in his mid and later years was alright mentally and capable of making his own decisions. He has had forty some years of bumming, some of which could have been spent piping water into his house, fixing a bathroom, maintaining a heating system, so he could do for himself, somewhat, even at age 90.

I understand that Klarence has been bad sick and getting bed sores to the point that he was taken to a care center in Nephi, where good, bad, or ugly, his needs have been taken care of. He is now cleaned and fed, with a warm place to bed down. He is unable to get up and do for himself a bunch. Sometimes we have to take what is best for us, even though we don't like it. However much time Klarence has left, he can spend it with as much comfort as possible.

THE HOUSE AND CAFÉ

The house under condemnation where Klarence has survived has not always been in this state of ruin. In about 1869, Niels Jensen Aagard and his wife, Sorena K. Sorensen Aagard moved to Levan from Sanpete County. On 117 North Main, Niels started construction of this house in mention. At that time period, church brethren in good standing were called upon to take a second wife, or more if the need arose. Knowing these possibilities, a view from the south surely indicates this grand, two-story house with two doors and two windows on the second floor would only need stairs to each upper door and you have accommodation for two wives under the same roof.

In 1877, Niels was set apart to be Levan's first bishop. On December 29, 1877, Niels took a second wife. However, these two wives did not get along and the second wife lived across the street in a small adobe house and even out on the farm north of Levan.

Years passed and Niels Aagard's generation passed on, with this grand house going to one of his daughters, Mary Aagard Anderson and husband, Jim. They raised a nice big family in that house. A small café turned up on the South-East corner of this lot. Mary ran the café there for some years. As the years passed, the Anderson kids moved away and Jim and Mary both died.

This is where Mother Meldrum enters the picture with son, Klarence in tow. She turned this café into a Dairy Queen and ran it until she died. I believe this was the beginning of the real decline for this once grand house with Klarence in charge. With both men and houses, when there is nothing—no upkeep on either. Both turn to ruin. Mold and mildew are the name of the game.

As for the house, it seems to be beyond repair. It has housed a couple of large families and provided shelter for Mother Meldrum and Klarence. Someday it may very well be bulldozed down. From dust thou art and to dust thou shalt return. Maybe a shopping center will find home on that property or even a care center for the elderly.



THE AAGARD-ANDERSON HOME IN LEVAN, UTAH AS IT LOOKS FROM ACROSS THE HIGHWAY TO THE SOUTH. THIS PICTURE WAS TAKEN IN APRIL 2013. ANYTHING LEFT TO ITSELF WILL GO DOWN HILL.