

HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #124 - Side A

Subject: Tressa Baker

Place: Burns, Oregon

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Interviewer: James Baker

Release Form: No

JAMES BAKER: ... What's the first thing you have on your list there?

TRESSA BAKER: Well, I happened to think about a trip we took. We used to, of course there was schools ... nine months here in town. Well, we lived out in the country, and they'd be three months in the spring maybe, and three in the fall was all the school there was. My people wanted to take me to Albany to put me in school. So, we had to go with the team, and we went down by Silver Lake and across to Eugene. And there right in the buggy with the camping outfit, and I rode a horse, all the way from here to Albany. So that was quite a little trip.

JAMES BAKER: Yes, it was. That's a long ride.

TRESSA: Yes, it was.

JAMES: How many days, that four days do you think?

TRESSA: It was longer than that, with the team every day, you know, they couldn't make over 20 or maybe 30 miles a day. So, it took us several days. I can't remember now how long.

JAMES: Yeah, that would be quite a trip. Was this to go to High School, did I understand it right, you were going to go to High School in Albany?

TRESSA: Well, I went one year and then we came back out here, and foolishly I got married.

JAMES: Oh, foolishly! Didn't go to school anymore, you're a drop out.

TRESSA: Yes, I'm a drop out.

JAMES: Your whole family went to Albany; did they stay there while you were in school?

TRESSA: Well just Grandma and I. My grandmother raised me, and she went with me and stayed, and my father came back out here.

JAMES: He was ranching?

TRESSA: Yes. ... Over at Buck Creek, it's about 60 miles from here, there was a post office, I don't know whether there is any there yet, but it was called Fife. Everyone wondered about why it was called Fife. And Tom Balfour was a Scotsman who came right from Scotland over here, and he had the first post office. So, he named it Fife, from Scotland.

JAMES: I see. Were there any other names that were peculiar like that that people don't know about?

TRESSA: Well, I don't think of any.

JAMES: Okay. Let me try and think of some. How about Burns itself?

TRESSA: Well, it was a Scotsman who named it for Bobby Burns, the poet.

JAMES: Oh, I see. How about Catlow Valley?

TRESSA: Well, there was people by the name of Catlow, I think, came there first. So many places were named after families.

JAMES: Is there a family named Drewsey?

TRESSA: There is Drewitts.

JAMES: Drewitts.

TRESSA: I think probably, because the Drewitts lived at Drewsey and raised a family there.

JAMES: How about Princeton?

TRESSA: Oh, I don't have any idea.

JAMES: Well, let me take another shot at it. Sunset Valley?

TRESSA: Sunset, I don't know why they called it that, just a big valley and no shade of any kind. The mountain there, I don't know why it's called that; it's called Dog Mountain.

JAMES: Yeah. Well, it used to be a pup, and maybe when it got bigger it was called dog. Well, let's see. I don't know how far to take this. What about Crane? Does that ring any bells?

TRESSA: ...

JAMES: I heard the Malheur is French for "bad times".

TRESSA: Oh, I never had heard, thought it was probably an Indian name. So many of the names around are Indian.

JAMES: Oh, what are some of them?

TRESSA: So, I really --- I don't know. Of course, I couldn't think of anything right now.

JAMES: Yeah. Well, Hines of course is because of the mill.

TRESSA: Yes, Hines is the Hines Company.

JAMES: Seneca?

TRESSA: That was maybe named after the Seneca Indians.

JAMES: And then there is Silvies Creek.

TRESSA: Silvies Valley is between here and Seneca, this river that runs there, it heads up about Seneca, and it is the Silvies River.

JAMES: I can't think of any more places. So, maybe we ought to go on.

TRESSA: That's the way with me. If I was just sitting here alone sometime it would come to me, some of them. Then I wondered if you would be interested in the way we got our groceries?

JAMES: Yes.

TRESSA: We were so far from town and couldn't come to town just every few days after things. So, in the spring when they had the sheep sheared, they hauled the wool to The Dalles, and the men would take the six-horse teams, and I don't know how many big sacks of wool, and haul them down to The Dalles. And then they would buy a year's supply of groceries and come back. I put them down here. I don't know, we got more than 100 pounds, but our sugar came in 100-pound sacks, and flour, it used to come in barrels. I don't remember it in the barrels, but four sacks of flour was a barrel.

JAMES: Is that anywhere close to a hogshead?

TRESSA: It isn't as large, I don't think.

JAMES: I see.

TRESSA: We had, over at the ranch where my grandmother and I stayed one year, they had what they said was a flour barrel, and it was a good-sized barrel, but not as large as a hoghead. And not as well made, it was more just a loose-staved barrel. And dried fruit, we always got boxes of different kinds of dried fruit, 25 pounds to a box. There was very little fresh fruit raised here, a few apple orchards. And beans, we'd get beans in 100-pound sacks. And syrup came in 5 gallons, they called it jackets, a round tin can with a kind of plywood jacket over the outside of it, I guess the reason they called it jackets, but they were in five gallons. And pickles we always got those in 5-gallon kegs. And that's the way we got everything, just in big quantities. What they planned would last a year, because if it didn't, they had to come clear to town to get things.

JAMES: You'd want to plan ahead.

TRESSA: Yes, had to learn to plan ahead.

JAMES: What kind of food would come from the ranch itself, vegetables, for example?

TRESSA: We had hardy vegetables, of course. It is pretty frosty here, any time of the year you are liable to have a frost. But all hardy vegetables: potatoes, and onions, and lettuce, and carrots and all those things we raised. And had a cellar to put them in, dugout cellars in the ground.

JAMES: Yeah, underground. When you were a child what would be your favorite dish? If your mother would cook up something really fantastic, really special?

TRESSA: I really don't know. I think a child is generally so hungry, they don't pay attention.

JAMES: Were there any candies, or anything like that?

TRESSA: We made our candy. Of course, when my father always took a load of wool out and got our groceries, and he always brought back oranges, and lemons, and store candy and things like that for a treat. We were quite fond of brown sugar fudge, and he always would get 100-pound sack of brown sugar, and we made that up into candy generally.

JAMES: Oh, I bet that was good. I was going to ask you if you pulled taffy too?

TRESSA: Yes, we used to make lots of taffy. Of course, the neighbors were generally pretty good

that way. If we run out of things, why once in a while someone would go to town, and they would always see what the neighbors needed and try to bring it back.

JAMES: Oh, sure, if you could do it.

TRESSA: But we always tried to get enough to last until the next year. The stage, our mail used to come once a week, and the stage went with teams, they'd go from here over to Buck Creek where we lived, stay all night, and then go on to Paulina, and then the team came from Prineville and met them there.

JAMES: I see.

TRESSA: And so finally they got to coming twice a week, and we thought it was wonderful, anybody get mail twice a week.

And we had Sunday school on Sundays; all the neighbors would get together some place. In the winter at the schoolhouse, in the summer there were a big grove of trees and we used to have picnics and go there and have Sunday school. And then there would be a traveling minister go through once in a while from Burns or Prineville and have services.

JAMES: Were there any local ministers in this time?

TRESSA: The one that was out there, his name was Gibson, and he was from Burns, this was his home, but he used to come out there.

And entertainment we had too, of course, there was no picture shows or those things in those days, it was mostly dancing. Old-fashioned dances, like the minuet, and waltzes, and schottische, and all those things. If there was a schoolhouse close enough, why they would dance in the schoolhouse. Then they passed a ruling they couldn't dance in schoolhouses. But over where we lived all the cowboys got in and built the schoolhouse if they'd let them dance there.

JAMES: They had to make a trade then?

TRESSA: Yes. And we'd have violin music, and sometimes an accordion.

JAMES: Do you remember anybody who was a musician, who played for these dances?

TRESSA: Well, this lady next to me here, is Zelma Baker, she was my husband's cousin. His

uncle, Doug Baker, he traveled for miles here around to different places and played the violin for dances.

JAMES: I see. He played Red Wing and ---

TRESSA: No, that was before their time. I don't really remember the tunes they played; they played some lively old tunes.

JAMES: Were there any square dances?

TRESSA: Yes, we did lots of square dancing.

JAMES: Really. And square dance caller ---

TRESSA: Yes, there was generally someone in the neighborhood, and he'd call.

JAMES: Do you remember any names here, anybody who did that?

TRESSA: Well, I think Jim Street used to call quite a lot, and Frank Dibble, I think he was a caller.

JAMES: Is that Gibble or Dibble?

TRESSA: Dibble.

JAMES: Dibble.

TRESSA: D I B B L E.

JAMES: What made one square dance caller better than another one?

TRESSA: Well, some of them knew more different figures to call, and had a better voice for calling. That was all the difference, I think. They used to, I think they do some here in town yet, have a square dance in the wintertime. There is some club that does. My daughter's husband, he was quite a good caller, and he used to call for dances here around town.

JAMES: If a caller had a new step, and he called it out, could everyone pick it up? Could most people pick it up even if they didn't know it?

TRESSA: Most of the people could, they'd show them and in just a little while why they could pick it up and go on.

Then this apartment house that is right across the street here, right behind it, I think it's still there unless they tore it down in the last year or two, is a stone cellar there. There used to be a big

two-story house there. And that was the first post office in Burns, was in that house. The house has been moved away.

JAMES: I see. They didn't have a building separate for the post office; it was in this guy's house.

TRESSA: In this home.

JAMES: I see. Who was in this home?

TRESSA: Mrs. Whiting, W H I T I N G.

JAMES: Whiting, a familiar name, I've heard it a few times.

TRESSA: She was head of the family, and she had several boys and a couple of girls.

JAMES: I see. Did we ever talk about where your parents were from before they came to ---?

TRESSA: Well, my parents, my father was born in Ohio, but they came out here when he was quite small. And my mother was born in Virginia City, Nevada. They all ended up in Butte, Montana, and that's where I was born.

JAMES: Oh, I see. Were they looking for gold?

TRESSA: Well, my mother's father was working in the gold mines. They, I don't know whether it was the picks or what they had, but anyway they had to have diamond points set in them to make it hard enough to break the rock. And he was a diamond setter, and they went from one mining place to another, and he'd get a job setting the diamond points. My father was always more of a rancher, he liked stock and ranching.

JAMES: Why did he prefer ranching?

TRESSA: I don't know, never thought much about it, just a rancher.

JAMES: I wonder if it was the style of the life, or if it was being close to animals?

TRESSA: Well, I think it was the animals. Now my husband was a rancher, a stockman, and with him it was just the animals. He just loved the cattle.

JAMES: I see. I'm glad to know that. What were your parents looking for when they came to this area? There were no mines here for your father.

TRESSA: Well, my father wasn't interested in mines. My grandfather is the one that was. He

always lived at Butte, Montana after he went there. My father just came out here and settled on the ranch. You know, going from here to Bend, the Gap Ranch they call it.

JAMES: Yes.

TRESSA: That was my father's homestead. And then my grandmother, she took up a homestead over on Buck Creek, that was about 25 or 30 miles from there. My father always did like the stock, and to work with them.

JAMES: And he homesteaded the Gap Ranch? It grew pretty big out of the homestead?

TRESSA: Yes, he sold it. He didn't keep it too long. He sold it to Bill Brown.

JAMES: I see. I heard some interesting things about Bill Brown, he used to only eat raisins, is that right?

TRESSA: Well, no, that's going a little too far, maybe. You said raisins?

JAMES: Yeah, raisins.

TRESSA: Well, I know this is so, because he'd stick a pocketful of raisins out when he was out on the range, you know, and eat them along. And he didn't remember, and he'd put some strychnine in that pocket, he was poisoning coyotes around. So, he ate some raisins that made him terribly sick, but it didn't kill him. He said he knew as soon as he ate them, he remembered that he had put strychnine in that pocket. So, he just got enough to make him real sick. When I first remember Bill, he had a big, long black beard. And then he got quite religious, and he said well he didn't think he should wear a beard, that the priest didn't, so he shaved that off and was always smooth shaved after that. But he started from just nothing nearly and he got a band of sheep, and he'd keep adding to it until they said he had what they call two bands of sheep. He did his own herding for years and years, and he got very wealthy.

JAMES: That's a pretty lonely life, isn't it?

TRESSA: Yes, out in the hills and tending to sheep.

JAMES: Cattle ranching, I think, would be more interesting.

TRESSA: Yes.

JAMES: How many head of cattle do you think was the most your father had?

TRESSA: Oh, I don't think that he ever had over probably 100 head at a time. He didn't run a big outfit. But some of them did. There are more now that run big outfits. They buy up a lot of land and run lots of cattle. But they don't do it like they used to.

JAMES: Yeah, that's for sure. What's the most obvious difference that comes to your mind?

TRESSA: Well, they used to get on a horse and ride after cattle, tend to them, and go out on the range and see about them, and bring them in. But now if they want to go from one pasture to another, they load them all in a truck.

JAMES: You mean they load the horse on the truck?

TRESSA: No, the cattle.

JAMES: Load the cattle on the truck.

TRESSA: Uh huh. My son that lives up the river, he has about 25 miles above their place on up the river, and they used to always take their horses and go up there and ride and see about the cattle and come back and gather them in with the horses. But now they load their horses in the truck and take them to the other place, and then they get on and gather up the cattle and load them on the truck and take them where they want them. So, they don't do it the hard way now.

JAMES: They don't do it the hard way. And they sure have lots more money now.

TRESSA: Yes.

JAMES: Somebody told me that you couldn't even get started unless you had \$100,000.

TRESSA: Well, I don't suppose.

JAMES: I mean I don't know quite that much about the modern techniques, but that seemed pretty high to me.

TRESSA: Yes. But most of them now don't want to start out with a few head like they always used to, you know, and build it up. They want to get them right now.

JAMES: Yeah, right now. One thing that I have been trying to track down is stories about Tebo. Stories that Tebo used to tell.

TRESSA: Well, I've always heard of Tebo, but I've never heard too much about the stories about him.

JAMES: Yeah. Were there many Mexicans working in this area?

TRESSA: There used to be quite a lot.

JAMES: There used to be.

TRESSA: Yes.

JAMES: More than just on the Pete French ranch?

TRESSA: I know when we first came here; there was quite a lot of Mexicans.

JAMES: Were they running horses?

TRESSA: They mostly worked for other people. There was a Hardin and Riley outfit; they had lots of cattle, a big outfit. They were from California. And they hired lots of Mexicans.

JAMES: Well, they would bring them up from California then. Oh, I see.

TRESSA: And pasture them here. Another funny little incident. I don't know whether I ought to tell you. There was another Mexican, Chino, and he worked down at the Double O. And one time my aunt was down there visiting, and all the men and the company and everybody, they had big, long tables and they'd all eat together, you know, and everything. And everyone thought Chino was all right, and they'd treat him just like everyone else. And there was one woman came down there to visit, and she'd sit down close to Chino, and she'd pull her dress over and get over as far from him as she could. And she just drank hot water; she didn't drink coffee or anything. And Chino says, "That woman thinks she's damn smart, she drink water with a spoon, and eat beans with a fork." (Laughter) Chino would dip up his beans on his knife, you know, and he thought that was all foolishness to eat beans with a fork.

JAMES: Yeah. I bet things were pretty wild at those tables. Reaching across, grabbing stuff, forking it off, forking a whole ham. Well, let's see now. What can you remember about the Indians in this area?

TRESSA: Well, when I was just a little girl, it wasn't too long after the Indian War. The Indians

used to come through, and they'd come by our place, and they were always wanting to trade for something. They'd go up the creek above our place and build their bath houses, and put the stones inside and heat the stones and throw water on them, and get in there in the steam, and take a steam bath.

JAMES: I see.

TRESSA: And then they'd run out and jump in the creek in the cold water.

JAMES: Wow.

TRESSA: Well, I think they're serving lunch to us.

JAMES: Well, I'll just finish up then. I'm just about --- can I get that up for you. I'm just about to the end of my rope, or the end of my tape I should say. I wanted to know before I went if that was a hot spring, or if they boiled water and put in it?

TRESSA: No, they just dipped the cold water, and threw it on the rocks and that made the steam.

JAMES: I see. That made the steam come up. Okay.

TRESSA: I don't remember there, but they said they had quite a smallpox scare, and the Indians they got the smallpox, and of course they didn't know about not jumping in this cold water, and lots of them died. They'd steam all right, but then they'd jump in the cold water.

JAMES: And that would hurt them with smallpox?

TRESSA: And that would drive the smallpox back, and lots of them died.

JAMES: Oh. So that, jumping in the cold water with the smallpox was just fatal. I see. Isn't that something, I didn't know that.

TRESSA: Yes.

JAMES: Very peculiar.

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