

HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #137 -Sides A & B

Subject: Victor Cleveland

Place:

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Interviewer: James Baker

JAMES BAKER: You started off about your father coming out here as a kid because there was no opportunity in Arkansas?

VICTOR CLEVELAND: No, there wasn't. He came out here and he was in this country and worked around here, oh, out here at the Double O Ranch for a year or two, and he got acquainted with mother, she was teaching school over there. So then they was married and they run the Company ranches for the Hanley Company and the PLS Company. And they worked at that about 6 years, and then they went over to the Drewsey side and he bought a little ranch there and he was there a year or two, and then he come back and worked again here for the Company for a while. Then they went over and bought the home place and we was there, I was there sixty years, I guess. He bought the ranch in 1908 and then he had to go back to work for a couple of years, he went to Nevada and worked for the PLS Company there, and then he came back in 1910. Then we left there, my wife and I, in '68. About sixty years that we owned the ranch. At the time when he came here, why working on those ranches, he only got \$1.00 a day and his board. And then they went to work for the Company, why he got \$50.00 a month, and of course mother done the cooking and the housework, sometimes five to sometimes twenty men to cook for. In them days you packed your water into the house and you

packed it out so they had running water, anyway. They had no bathrooms in them days, of course. You had your out-house to go to.

JAMES: What kind of work did you dad do for the Company?

VICTOR: Well, he just, light work. He'd be the, well they called them ranch boss, you know. One time he took a bunch of cattle to the railroad down here at Vale for handling. I guess he had 1000-1500 head they moved down there to sell them. And he did a little buckarooing around, but that's the only time that he ever fooled with that kind of work.

JAMES: What was his first name?

VICTOR: Tom.

JAMES: What was your mother's maiden name?

VICTOR: McKennon. They was one of the old pioneers, you know. She came here; she said she was five years old, so I guess it would have been about 1894-95. She was twenty years older than I am. She came three years sooner than my dad. He come in '98.

JAMES: Did he ever mention fellows by the name of Tebo and Chino?

VICTOR: Oh, yes. I remember them myself. I was just a kid. Chino was a buckaroo boss and Tebo, he rode. I see Tebo's picture down there yesterday at Frenchglen. And there was more of them Mexicans there, too, at that time.

JAMES: Did you ever see Tebo's pet fish?

VICTOR: No, I never seen that. He was a great old fellow.

JAMES: He used to be a pretty good storyteller?

VICTOR: Yeah, and he could tell the doggonedest stories.

JAMES: What kind of work did you do?

VICTOR: Well, I never done any at all until after I got the ranch over there, and then I

done it all. Of course I was just a kid when we was on them Company ranches, ranch work and running stock. We first went over there, we started running cattle. We decided we'd quit them. We did keep a few head all right, but we went to running sheep. So we run them for about twenty-five years, and we sold out in '41. We'd went through the doggone depression, which was a hard one.

JAMES: Did you feel the depression up here?

VICTOR: Boy, oh boy, we felt it, you bet! We sold lambs for four cents a pound, and wool for nine cents. You bet you felt it. Well ... during the depression years --- the worst was three or four years of it, anyway we wound up \$17,000 in debt in just that time. It's quite a little money today, all right, but it was a lot of money then. And when you had to go to paying a debt off and other expenses were high besides, well it was bad. I know a few men in this country that worked for their board, and by golly --- \$10-\$15 a month during the depression --- especially in the wintertime. They got WPA work, and that helped a whole lot, you know, especially with families. It was hard. Of course we got this inflation now, but there's lots of money a going --- you can get a little of it. But when there ain't no money moving you don't get none, that's all.

JAMES: Who were your neighbors up there in Drewsey? Let's start with the first ones.

VICTOR: Our first neighbors in there --- oh, there was Gearharts, and Davises, and Johnson's, and Jim Anderson, and Jettises --- Jacobses, Landings, and then you get on down in the country, why we had the Moffets --- they lived down there, and some of their off-spring yet. And of course there is offspring of the others too. But they are scattered out pretty well. And Cappses, they was there too. And one of the boys --- we finally wound up with his ranch. He lives here in town now, Jim Capps. That was right in the neighborhood where we lived. You get on down --- you see that Drewsey country, it's

right on down that Malheur River, and it strings out down there clear to Drewsey. And of course, it runs off in the canyon.

JAMES: They tell me that Drewsey used to be known as "Gouge Eye" because there were so many fights.

VICTOR: Yes, that used to be quite a town to fight. I used to go to dances there and pretty near every dance night, that would be every two or three weeks, there would be one, maybe three, four, five fights --- something doing all the time.

JAMES: Did you go to school with those kids --- the Andersons, Johnson's, etc.?

VICTOR: Yes, at that time of course --- they've got these schools that are left now, why they are consolidated, they'll bus them in. Well at that time we just had --- in that neighborhood they had a school there, it was about a mile from the ranch, I'd walk to school all the time. What little education I got it was in that school. The folks --- when I got older --- they wanted me to go to high school, but I was always thinking about something else, so I didn't want to go to school. I'm sorry that I didn't, although I guess I've done all right. An education is nice to have.

JAMES: To be a drop out didn't hurt you any.

VICTOR: It's a good thing to have ---

JAMES: Somebody told me that it went from "Gouge Eye" to "Drowsy", because it went from a fighting town to a sleeping town.

VICTOR: No, I don't think so, I don't know about this but I read some of it --- seems as though this here --- that Drewsey --- there was some fellow's sweetheart's name --- the girl's name was Drewsey. I read about it too, and I can't tell you what book it's in, one of these of Harney County, and that's what it said in that book.

JAMES: Is that picture over there a picture of you on your place?

VICTOR: Yeah, that was back up in the hill pastures there. That was the year I sold out. We was gathering cattle and you get up there where you can see cattle back behind there.

JAMES: How big a ranch did you have?

VICTOR: We had a little over 9,000 acres deeded land there. We put up about four hundred tons of hay, and we could pasture our cattle. We had reserve rights for four months for 175 head of cows and calves. The other time we had to stay on our own land, our own pasture.

JAMES: Pretty hard work up there, pretty hard life?

VICTOR: Yes, ranching, if you do the job, why it's a hard job any time. You haven't got any time to play around. A man should be a going at night as well as daytime. My wife and I we've been married about thirty-eight years, I guess, and we had our honeymoon last summer. By god, that's true. Kind of late. She's all crippled up, and I'm not much better, but we had a nice trip. Some friends we had, why they took us down on the coast and we went down into Crescent City, and went on down into the Redwoods a little, then came up along the coast to Astoria and into Washington, and back on the ferry down below there, crossed back over.

JAMES: Did they have dances in the school up in Drewsey?

VICTOR: Well no, now they have a community hall, a nice hall ---they built it there. I guess it's been twelve years ago. It's just an awful nice building there and they have all recreations, and even the funerals. They have large funerals over there. Whenever anyone dies there, why they are not like they are here. There's only one thing will keep a man from going to that funeral, and that's just because he has something to see to, or to do, or be sick. They have two churches there, but they're not large enough, so they have

it in that Community Hall. And they have dances there, and play basketball. It's a nice hall. It was started by donation --- well, they didn't have quite enough funds, so they got it on the taxation then to finish it up. It's a nice hall. And the community over there --- they usually have a play every winter. They had one just here last week. They put on good plays, too.

JAMES: Do you remember any characters out in that country when you were a kid?

VICTOR: Well no. Well, it was the two years when we was back in Nevada --- my dad had bought the ranch in 1908 --- they had a fellow in there, he come through and stole a bunch of horses. They took them horses off up above the --- coming across the mountain towards Silvies Valley with them. Well, this here neighbor over there, one of the neighbors, they knew this fellow was going with them horses all right, and they formed a Vigilante Committee. So they did kill him all right, up in the hills. They said when they went up there, some of them telling about it, why he seemed always asleep, his horses grazing around, a bunch of horses, and he was asleep. And they slipped up and shot him. But there was some of them, I have an idea, had stole as many horses as he had, and they was just jealous, I suspect, that's all. And that's about the only one, I guess --- Of course I never knew them, but I'd heard them talk about it so much. Of course several of them was bootlegging moonshine around there at the time of prohibition, there was quite a lot of them.

JAMES: Did they make pretty good whiskey up there?

VICTOR: Yeah, one or two of them made good whiskey. They said it had a good effect. And you'd go to them dances, why there would be one or two of them fellows around and you could spot them all right. You'd hardly ever see them a dancing, they was standing out around the front door with them long overcoats on, you now. All you had to do was to

get him; he'd have his whiskey right there.

JAMES: He wouldn't keep it in his coat, would he?

VICTOR: No, he used that coat, I guess, the pockets to pack the bottles in, was what it was for. I don't know.

JAMES: How much did you spend for a bottle of whiskey then?

VICTOR: I don't know. I have an idea he probably got \$4.00 or \$5.00 a quart for it. In fact I was never much of a drinking man. I guess I was too stingy.

JAMES: Pretty good music up there for those dances?

VICTOR: Yes they did, by golly, we had good times too. We'd get there before sundown, of course you had to go a horseback or buggy and team, but you'd get there, and there was pretty near all of them. You'd hardly ever find a house but what there was a musician or two in them. By gosh they could play a fiddle or a guitar or something. They had good music. You'd go to them dances sometimes and get there before dark, and if there happened to be a few there they'd go to dancing --- and have breakfast the next morning. And the women would always bring lunches, of course, for midnight supper. We'd have some for breakfast, and sometimes have a lunch or dinner before we started home. Dance, by golly, yes! Lots of good drills. There wasn't none of this here --- the girl standing over here and the boy over here looking at one another and jumping up and down. By god, we danced, that's all. Good times.

JAMES: Did they have a floor manager?

VICTOR: Yes, there would be a floor manager, and he'd announce every dance before it started. If it would be a waltz or a quadrille, or a two-step --- whatever was going to come, why he'd announce it. He'd get around among the crowds and someone that wasn't acquainted --- outsiders would come in --- why he'd take him around and introduce him to

the girls. And of course, as far as introductions was concerned, if a man behaved himself, why he didn't need no introduction. He'd just go up and ask a girl if she wanted to dance.

JAMES: Even if she was married?

VICTOR: Yes, it didn't make no difference. And the boys --- you got acquainted in no time.

JAMES: Do you remember any time that a floor manager stopped the dance and ended it?

VICTOR: Well no, usually if they just didn't get tired and have to quit, because somebody got a fighting or something. Of course that was his job, to keep them fights out of the hall. They got outside; they could fight as much as they wanted to. Them dances --- a lot of times they was broken up all right by them fights, people would start going home.

JAMES: Did they take the kids to the dances too? What did the kids do while the older folks were dancing?

VICTOR: Sleep. They'd just put them down in some quilts around the stove, and if they was some place where there was an ante-room, why they'd put them back in there. Put them to sleep and cover them up. Of course now the kids, you know, while they were eating midnight supper, the kids would be out playing on the floor, when there was nobody dancing. Lots of times between dances the kids would be out there. But them kids, when they got six or eight years old, why they'd learn to dance, and they'd just dance right along with you. They'd dance with bigger women or bigger men, it didn't make no difference. And the men, they'd go and get those little girls, and the boys go and ask some woman old enough to be his grandmother, and she'd get right up and dance. You hardly ever seen them refuse, very seldom.

JAMES: You were mentioning a couple of people in that area, like Anderson. And I

talked to a guy by the name of I. M. C. Anderson. Did you ever ---

VICTOR: I've known him ever since I was that high, yeah. My dad worked for Jim Anderson, his dad, when Compton was seven years old. At that time the folks --- Compton's mother had all the kids and was over in Monument, they lived over there. Jim, he'd rented the ranch out and went over there and went in the store business. I don't think he done too good there, so --- anyway, the family was over there, and dad and mother they was a working on the ranch for old Jim, Compton's dad. I was a year old. Dad pitched hay there for him. Yes, Compton and his wife was here just --- well, they been here the last two Decoration Days. Come and stay with us, stay overnight. And we got a letter from them Christmas time. There was him and two other brothers, and he had six sisters.

JAMES: Do you know how this Calamity Creek got it's name?

VICTOR: They tell me --- up above our place --- see we lived on Wolf Creek, and Calamity Creek intersected just about a mile below our place. Calamity Creek came from --- well, from a westerly direction, and Wolf Creek run north. Well they said back here on Calamity in the early days, why there was a bunch of horses got marooned up in there in the wintertime and they all died on the flat up there. And they called that flat "Dead Horse Basin". It was, I expect, 15-20 acres of it there. Anyway, they said those horses just all died there in that flat. So this little flat was on Calamity Creek, and that's how it got it's name.

JAMES: There wasn't too many sheep run up in that part of the country, was there?

VICTOR: Well, yes. At that time when we first went there, there was lots of sheep in there. They wouldn't --- they wasn't actually running that country all the time, they'd take them on the desert and winter them, and bring them back in there and summer them. At

that time there wasn't, it was just all outside range, you might say. They'd formed the Forest Reserve Law, all right, I guess about 1905 or '06. But even at that, why it wasn't fenced. Well when they didn't have too much restriction, they'd just bring in the sheep anyway. At that time they didn't have no BLM or --- it first started off as Taylor Land, is what they called it. It was a public domain, you know, it wasn't deeded land. Well they could go on that anywhere they wanted to, and so, all was fenced was the meadows you might say. Well thunder, they'd just come with them sheep back in there and take them back south in the winter, out on the desert, you know. Some of them would go to Ontario country and feed hay down in there. Yes, there was quite a lot of sheep. Now there isn't any left. Mike O'Toole's boys --- Pat, he wound up with the ranch, and he just sold his sheep two years ago, and that was the last sheep there was in there. There was quite a few sheep, especially in the summer, they'd come in. The Basques and the Irish, they'd bring sheep up in there. And then Bill Allen was quite a sheep man, and he had a partner by the name of Huffman, and they run a lot of sheep on the desert, and then they'd come back in there. And Bill told me that he was tending camp one year, and he said they took fourteen bands, 1000 or 1200 to a band, and they took them sheep and went clear to the north side of Strawberry Mountain with them. Started to get wintertime by the time they got them fed out, and they turned around and he went back to the desert. He told me he tended them fourteen bands alone, moved them, but I don't know. If he did, it took a lot of moving, but he said he did.

JAMES: He like to walk?

VICTOR: No, he'd have a horse and his pack string, pack the camps on. They usually had five or six packhorses.

JAMES: That O'Toole sounds like an Irishman.

VICTOR: He was. He come here when he was a boy. And he was the last sheep man over in there. Pat's dad, he run three bands, I think, most of the time, ewes and lambs. I guess when we was there, when we was running sheep, I guess there was more men running sheep, wintering them, taking care of them in that country at that time than there ever was before or after. There was Drex Williams, him and Lou Sitz, a brother-in-law of his; they had two or three bands between them. Pat Conley, he had three or four bands. Four, I think, he usually run. Now he owned this layout that Mike O'Toole had bought out, he was still running it, you see. And then there was Bill and Jim McEwen, why they run, of course, in the Riverside country, down in there. But they had allotments up there in the forest with us, and they'd bring two or three bands up there in the summer. Of course they went back in the winter. And then ... Lillard and Joe, why they had a band of ewes, they lived about twelve miles below us, and then we had our band. And then there was another --- Ralph Chambers, he had a band of sheep too in there at that time. And I guess that's about all that is, that kept their sheep there.

JAMES: I'm really surprised at the way that the Irish and the Basques moved, keeping their sheep from Idaho up here around the Steens.

VICTOR: All over the country, yes. You see there was a lot of them never owned any land, and that is what brought on the Taylor or BLM Act. Because they got to crowding people so much. They'd just come in and eat them out of house and home. We all didn't like the Taylor Act, all right, or BLM, but it was a protection. If they hadn't of done it --- and there was lots of trouble before that. War between cattle and sheep, and that stopped it all.

JAMES: Anything like that up in Drewsey area?

VICTOR: Yes. Before we went there up there in that country in 1910, why I've heard

them tell about Bill Hanley here, he had about eight hundred head of steers turned loose up on the country above our place one summer. And he put a man up there to kind of "line-ride" them to see that they didn't go all over the country, which they did, a lot of them. And by golly, they said some of the neighbors went in there one night and shot his camp all up, and run him out of there in his underwear. The fellow was herding these cattle, and Hanley had to get Dave Craddock up here in Silvies Valley to go over in there and gather them cattle up. That fellow came out of there with his under clothes on, and that was enough for him. And he wouldn't go back to camp at all. That's what I've heard, and I guess it's true. ... Hanley steers. And I guess they never tried that any more. At that time there was no fences and cattle would run --- horses there --- there was more horses then on that range. Well I wouldn't say more, but there was a lot of horses. And there is cattle running there today. And we had lots of feed too. Of course we had more snow in the winter, and more rain in the summer than now. They talk about the shortage of grass they got --- they need to put some moisture on it, that's all. The grass is there if they could just get the moisture. You can take these dry years and it looks like there isn't any feed and --- there won't be probably. Next year if we happen to get, which we do get once in a while, a lot of snow and good rain, boy there's a lot of grass. Of course they've got more sagebrush than they used to have. Before my time, I've heard them tell about it, and I can remember when we went over there, there wasn't near the sagebrush and undergrowth there is now. They say the Indians would set that all afire. That was before the country got settled up much. Well, they'd be back in there in the mountains, and in the fall they'd set the fire when they started to go to ... for the winter. And that kept all that underbrush burned off. The grass would grow, you see. Now, why a lot of it has just crowded out, there is so much moisture used up with that brush the grass couldn't grow.

JAMES: It surprises me to hear that the Indians were doing that kind of burning in order to get better grass.

VICTOR: Well, they didn't. No, they said they were just doing it for fun, they liked to see a fire, they said. As far as the grass, they didn't care, you know. They didn't run no stock. Of course they lived off the deer and antelope, etc. I was a grown man; I was twenty years old before I ever saw a fire over there protected or put out. There would be a little fire, maybe a thunderstorm would come up and start a fire, and nobody would ever go to the doggone fire. As I say, there was no underbrush and there wasn't all this pine needles and stuff under them trees. The fire would go quick. It would go through there and they didn't have all these here jack pine that's growed up, keep them killed out. Most of it was nice big timber, and it would go through quick. It might burn out a cat's paw in a tree or something, might be a pocket of pitch, but it would go out itself. Now they've got to fight the fire now. There will be piles of needles and bark a foot deep under those trees --- slow burn. Sometimes you'll think you've got the fire out, and in a week or so it will break out again. Got to smoldering down on the ground, get to burning them old roots, you know, find a little air hole or something.

JAMES: Do you like the scenery up in that part of the country?

VICTOR: Yes, it's pretty country. It isn't very big country, what I mean the cultivated land; it's mostly all hay now. It always was, more or less. It used to be before --- until they got all this mechanized machinery and one thing, and automobiles, a man, if he wanted to, he could raise a little patch of grain, which we used to do a lot, too. If they had any grain to spare outside of feeding their horses or something, why you'd take that load of grain and pay off your grocery bill at the store. Pretty good, you bet, it worked fine. There was these little towns --- and at these towns they'd have these stage stations, and they had to

feed grain to the horses. And livery stables, they always fed grain. Freighters, they had them freight teams around at them towns. Everything was hauled in, in freight wagons --- six and eight, bigger teams than that too. Three and four wagons, usually three.

JAMES: How has that land changed since your dad first was up there?

VICTOR: Well, it's changed quite a bit all right. At the time when we went there, there would be --- it hasn't changed so much only it's getting, well, more bought up. There is one or two owns everything, you know.

JAMES: That's a big change, isn't it?

VICTOR: Yes, it is. Now in that neighborhood, I can remember my mother was school clerk in that district there where we lived, and there was about thirty kids enrolled there in that school a year or two before we moved there. When I went to school, one year there was nineteen of us kids there going to school in that little district. And now there ain't a kid, not a kid going to that school. And there wouldn't be --- to bus them out of there --- there isn't a child up in that neighborhood.

JAMES: What with over-crowding every place else, that's really something.

VICTOR: I guess --- they just --- selling out, buying out.

JAMES: What do the big landowners do with that land up there?

VICTOR: They run calves on it, run cattle. It's got so any more that, if you've got a ranch that you can't support 350 or 400 head of cows on, why you've just got a big expense. You've got to work for wages someplace else to pay expenses. The price they've got this land, this stock, these cattle especially, it's so doggone high. And your machinery is so high, taxes high, you just can't do it, that's all. And even if you've got a set up where you can run 350 head of cows, I'd hate awful to try to pay it out nowadays. It's going to cost you \$250,000-\$300,000 to start in with, and I'd be an old man by the time you got that

paid out. I think I run as economical a business as a man could, and I know the last few years we didn't come out much ahead of the hounds. We'd make a little money, but not very much. If we'd a had to paid it out of debt during this here high prices --- Of course you've got one thing about the machinery, you can do your work with a whole lot less men, all right. But that machinery is so high priced, and depreciation, and the machinery runs so fast, it's wore out and short-lived.

JAMES: And it keeps people out of work.

VICTOR: Yes.

JAMES: It's a big change.

VICTOR: I don't know. Of course I don't want to go back to the old days. They speak about "good old days," but I tell you people were better contented in that time. They didn't know no better, I guess. We wasn't a striving to get ahead so much, we all of course wanted to be ahead, but we kind of considered the other fellow a little bit too.

JAMES: A little bit stronger feeling of neighborliness.

VICTOR: Yes, there was a stronger tie between people. They had more consideration. Them older people, they kind of treated people like they wanted to be treated themselves. And they didn't have so much trouble. Of course once in a while you found a "hog". But he wasn't very popular because of that disposition.

JAMES: I like what you said. If you haven't got friends and neighbors, you haven't got anything.

VICTOR: If you can't do a man some good, why you ain't much good in the world, that's all. My dad always told me, "Son, treat a man like you want to be treated, you won't have much trouble." And I found that out. I've had very little trouble in my life, no lawsuits, and very few hard feelings, very few.

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