

HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #154 - Sides A/B

Subject: Hubert Wenzel

Place: Burns, Oregon

Date: March 10, 1972

Interviewer: James Baker

(Note: This is more of a summary of what is on this tape in places, rather than the actual conversation. Some of it is actual conversation though.)

HUBERT WENZEL: There was a great big barn out of that sagebrush, and we had walls about that wide, and we'd just place that brush off to one side and another and tamped it down until you had a wall pretty near as high as that. We had a barn there about close to forty feet long. Usually we'd make twelve foot wide and then we put a little roof on top of it. We'd get some old poles and get some screen wire or chicken wire on top of that and then put that fine sagebrush on top --- and boy that was warm --- it was just like a cellar in there. We kept a milk cow and horses in there and we had a little old chicken house that was dug in the bank out there --- it was so cold out --- poor devils darn near froze all their toes off.

But water was a problem down there in them days. We had a well on the place all right enough, but it was about 150 feet deep. The --- only about ten inches across at least and we had to put a pipe to pull into that now --- the water only came to about twelve feet from the top and a little old --- only about that big around, and pump and pump and just a little stream coming out. We had a windmill on the place too, but you couldn't always depend on the wind. Sometimes it would blow and it would blow so hard you'd think it was going to blow the darn windmill down and you'd shut it off again and get out and

pump and pump and pump.

We had quite a few horses and some cattle there. Them poor old homesteaders had a tough go. And cold, them winters! Them winters we always did have 25, 30, 35 below and the winter of 1924, '25 it got down to 46 below. Geez, I don't see how people lived in them houses then, they were just a single boards and on the outside we had tar paper on it and some lath to keep the paper from blowing off. And we'd have a bucket of water in the kitchen in the sink close to the stove, and the next morning there'd be an inch and a half of ice on the damn thing.

We raised some grain; I mean hay out there. All I planted then mostly was just rye because that was the only --- if you could get your rye planted in the fall and start coming up and have any rain at all, you might make a crop next year. But if you planted rye in the spring and you worked the soil all up and take the top moisture off and you sow it and sometimes the grain would come up and sometimes it wouldn't. Too dry again.

We used to catch a lot of rabbits. They paid a bounty on jackrabbits then, five cents. And we'd chase after them in the wintertime and wouldn't make enough out of their bounties to live on.

And then early in the fall we used to trap coyotes. We done pretty good on that. They was paying us, oh, \$7, \$8, \$9 sometimes \$10 a piece for them, and we'd usually start about October, November, and December, and the last part of December it was kind of hard to catch them because your ground started freezing up. Couldn't catch them, oh once in awhile you'd catch them, but put them around an old dried, dead carcass and cover them over with sagebrush and leaves and that stuff so ---

JAMES BAKER: It would probably be hard to catch them when the ground was frozen.

HUBERT: Your traps freeze. See your coyote can --- you have to put them underground, then you cover them up with a little canvas over the jaws that way, then cover them up

with dirt, because an open trap, a coyote would never go into it, never would. They'd go around it every time. And by covering it all up and making it look just as natural as possible out there. Maybe you think he'd make a certain pass, maybe you think he would go around this brush or that one and just set some sets in there, blind sets we used to call them. Maybe find an old carcass of a horse dried up, just put about and the first thing you know, by golly, you catch them. You catch some of the big old devils. I remember one I caught one old female --- god, I don't know how old she was; she must have been eight or ten, maybe older. She had been in traps three different times because she had three feet that was cut off by traps. She only had one sound front feet, and two hind feet was clipped off here and there. You know when they catch them in them traps and then they get numb and they chew them feet off. And she only had one sound foot, and she was fat, by golly, just as fat. And I caught her with that one sound foot, and you take a coyote female out there, we've caught a lot, and lot of them things, and when they have pups, when they're over the pup season their little breasts kind of dry up and you can hardly see any little tits. And that one had old long tit things on her that long --- just like an old female dog. So she was an old one. We used to go out there every fall.

We worked at the mill when it started in the summertime. But after we left Catlow Valley there, then we come out here to Burns and rented a farm out there about where the Indian Camp is now. We was on it for three years, and heck, we couldn't get nothing for the hay so we put a lot of alfalfa in, and we sold our horses and stuff, and then Mother, she moved to town here. And then we went working on the ranches in the summertime with the haying in them days, and then early in the spring we'd all get a job working for the sheep men, lambing.

JAMES: What kind of work would you do?

HUBERT: When they're lambing, they're lambing outside in the wind and we'd watch

these little lambs all the time and try to keep them together all the time, because they start a running around and --- So they always try to keep them separate for about three or four days, and then you put four or five in a bunch, and in three or four days maybe a bigger bunch, and then add to that bunch a little after that. And then we used to go out in the evenings, in them days there was a lot of sheep, and there were a lot of coyotes. So in the evenings we would kind of round the sheep up and make a flag out of a willow sticks and a cheese cloth about that square, and make a white flag, and we used to set them up in little points and they were supposed to keep the coyotes away.

JAMES: Did it work?

HUBERT: It worked all right, because they could see something flitting, but if they were hungry, they'd get in there.

And in the summertime we'd go out haying and then after they started the mill over here, then we started working in the mill. And a fellow by the name of Herrick, the first one that started it from Idaho.

JAMES: Did you know him?

HUBERT: I seen the old fellow in person just once, but then a fellow, working man don't get a chance to see old --- He was all right to work for, so finally he just had the stick and steel mill about two-thirds completed then, and he had a little old dry ... sitting back there, and he sold it, sold it to Hines, from Chicago, a big outfit, they had a lot of money. And so they went and built that mill, and we worked there one whole summer. We could have worked for steady a lot of times. When fall come, you could smell that fall air, and damn it we'd quit. We'd take our old packs and pickups, a little Model-A or Model-T pickups, and go back to the old cattle ... and trap coyotes in the winter. And heck, by the time the year was over with, and the way them fellows worked, they wasn't making so much. We were just about as much ahead as they were, and we were outside where we enjoyed

ourselves.

SIDE B

HUBERT: ... When I worked at the P Ranch with that fellow, oh god, they kept me busy feeding the hogs, and butchering the hogs, and oh I'd pack in the wood and the water. Help in the kitchen, wash dishes, and then cut wood, feed the pigs, and milk the cows, and god I never did get through with my work.

So I wrangled my cows in from the pasture there. So Judd one time said, "I got a horse down there, I wish you'd heal his back up a little bit. He said you can use it for a wrangle horse." So I went out there and the horse had two great big sores right on his, we used to call kidney sores from the saddle. It just all depended on how you'd sit on the horse, rubbed him. I said, "Okay, I'll take him." And I washed that all out and put some salve on there, some greasy stuff that they used to use. And I just rode him around there, and bring the cows in all the time, and by golly that old horse made up ... a really nice little horse too. I healed them sores plum up ... So Judd said, "I want to use your horse," on some certain drive he wanted to take. I said, "All right." And by god he brought that horseback and the next day I looked at him and he just sat on ... and broke them darn sores both loose again on both sides. Doggone it, I bawled him out. "Gee whiz it took me all this time to heal it up and now you just, one day riding ---" ... Maybe he had something wrong with his saddle, for all I know. They are kind of hard to heal up, especially pretty good sized sores, that way; they just keep a running.

JAMES: Was Tebo working there? He was probably working there before you were.

HUBERT: Yeah, he was up there. He was up there living in that homestead at the P Ranch.

JAMES: Did you ever talk to him much?

HUBERT: Oh god yes. I used to talk a lot to him.

JAMES: What did he say?

HUBERT: He used to be quite a blow bag; well that's what he always did do. And he didn't have nothing to do, because Pete French made a will one time and Tebo was supposed to stay on that place as long as he lived. Don't charge him for board or nothing. So Tebo had to have some kind of a hobby, so he got a couple of old horses, and they were supposed to be racehorses. They wasn't bad looking little horses. He'd carry them horses ... he'd carry them and feed them grain, and then he'd ... I don't think he ever rode them. Maybe somebody at some time. But he thought the world of

--- And that's all he done. Oh once in awhile he'd pack a little wood into the bunkhouse. And then he'd sit right next to the stove. He had a sack of bullduram in his lap down there, package of brown papers, and he'd roll one cigarette and he'd light that up. Light him the next one, and the first thing you know it would be gone, just barely gone, ... he'd roll another one. Done all day long that way. And he could tell the darndest yarns. He said one time I went fishing down at the ... he said, along the creek. And he said it was a pretty good place down there. And so he caught a fish. Oh he said it was a pretty good sized one, oh it measured about that long ... Said I threwed the fish on the bank, so I walked a little bit further and this fish just kept a jumping and following me up all the time. He said I finally got to a log where I was going to go across the creek ... a little ways, and he said I walked across that log, and here the old fish just kept on that log there about half way, off that log, and he fell in the water and drown, he said. (Laughter) Oh, he could tell the darndest. One time he went out from the Blitzen, ... He said I threwed a rock down there, a big boulder, a big round rock. I shoved it off the rim rocks there, and he said that rock just kept going down and up, down and up, and down and up, and kept a going wearing on, and the first thing you know the last time I seen it was just a little marble.

(Laughter) Talking about a housekeeper ... we used to have down there to haul wood from Jack Mountain over there. And some of those roads are pretty darn steep ... the rocks out. ... six head of horses on the wagon, to pull up that hill, ... way up above down there ... Said that's how steep the darn hill was. Oh he could tell them. One thing he got the best of most of them. ... used to call Dog Mountain, up the valley up here. He said see that Dog Mountain up there? Said, yep. He said when I come up there that was only a pup. ... But he never missed a rodeo. Whenever they had a fair in the fall --- oh he finally did bring his horses up. Somebody must have rode them a little bit ... I don't know whether his horses ever won any races or not, but he thought the world of them. He'd stay there all the way through, and sometimes three or four days, and get him a little place out --- he must have got a little cash from ... He'd take in all the shows up there. Then he'd come back and talk about the pretty horses, and all the parades, nice bucking horses. Well there used to be several old timers telling me this. There was Tebo, and there was another one --- see Tebo was a skinny ... real dark, he was a Mexican. ... quite a bit like an Indian, but then ... he wasn't very big. Then they had another fellow by the name of Chino. He was a great big old buckaroo, come with Pete French ... too. And he was a big fellow, and boy that fellow could ride. And talk about lassoing --- One time I helped him ... he wouldn't try to lasso anymore. He'd catch them, and then you had to lasso them yourself ... We'd bring the horses single file out there, through that gate from one corral to another, and you'd tell him which horse you wanted to get, and ... and he'd catch that doggone horse every time on the front feet. Both front feet, every shot, he'd never miss them. He'd catch them up high and pull them tight, and get a hold of them, and flip them over. ... tie them up and brand them or whatever he'd do with them. Oh that fellow was good. He was a part nigger and part Mexican, I believe. He had a little kinky hair. He was kind of ... Then there was Wetzel's, ... Witzel he got shot in that

... when he was working for Pete French. I ... JAMES: I heard one about Tebo, maybe Tebo used to tell it. It goes that there was a pulling contest, and he got hooked up to this team, but it was a pretty strong team, and it pulled the skin right off his back. (Laughter) Somebody slapped some sheep hides on his back and they grewed.

HUBERT: And they grewed there ...

JAMES: And that spring he sheared them off and sold them for fifty-four cents a pound.

HUBERT: Well that was pretty good wasn't it?

JAMES: Yeah, that was about eight cents more than anybody else was getting for the wool on ...

HUBERT: He was telling about, one time about ... buckaroos and stuff were riding for work, ... Wagontire country ... He said ... some of these wild horses are awful hard to get to ... Pretty soon he spotted a horse up ... He said you know what I found up there, he said there is a petrified horse sitting up there, with petrified grass in his mouth. (Laughter) ... never got up to him. Oh he used to tell ...

JAMES: There was a fishing story he used to tell that Johnny Crow told me. It had to do with a big fish that he hooked in the river, and he couldn't get him turned around. So he had to back it down to Malheur Lake before he could land it.

HUBERT: He must have got it out of the canal ... used to have pretty good-sized fish on that canal there. Wasn't quite that big though. Well then he'd get in an argument sometimes with somebody. Used to be real friendly with Pat Donegan, he was an Irishman, he ... worked for the P Ranch for a few years too. But he was ... blacksmith there. And old Tebo and old Pat they'd get together sometimes, and god they'd argue. Neither one of them didn't know what they was arguing about. Pat, he worked there so long he thought he owned that ... And old Tebo was going to make ... than he ever did down there, and he had more rights than Pat ever had down there. They'd go around and



around and around. But smoking cigarettes, ... He'd smoke a package of that bullduram ... he'd go to work and light it up, and he wouldn't take over half a dozen, maybe a dozen puffs off them, throw it in the can and he'd roll another one, all day long. I don't know what he did at night.

JAMES: I guess he was quite a duck hunter. I hear he got this fishing line and put some bait on the end of it and slipped it up with some ... and threw it out in the lake and a duck swallowed it and went right to him. And another duck swallowed it and went right through him. And by the morning he had a whole string of ducks.

HUBERT: A string of ducks ...

JAMES: Just haul it in.

HUBERT: Just drag it in and put the rope ... See them horses carved up there?

JAMES: Yeah.

HUBERT: My brother done that. That's the kind of horses he used to run.

JAMES: Oh, those big heads?

HUBERT: Yeah. And skin and bones.

JAMES: Yeah, they're pretty thin all right.

HUBERT: They had a hard winter. He did a lot of carving ...

JAMES: Were there many fellows that carved? Or was your brother pretty unique in that?

HUBERT: He was pretty good on that. Here I'll show you a few of them. ...

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