

HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #193 - Side A

Subject: Jim Harris

Place:

Date:

Interviewer: Betty Otley

BETTY OTLEY: Jim, what's your name?

JIM HARRIS: That's it.

BETTY: Jim Harris.

JIM: Yeah.

BETTY: And when were you born?

JIM: In 1882.

BETTY: And was that at Paisley?

JIM: At Paisley, Oregon.

BETTY: And when did you come to Burns?

JIM: In 1885.

BETTY: Uh huh. And there was your father and mother, and how many sisters?

JIM: Three sisters and two brothers.

BETTY: And two brothers.

JIM: Yeah. They were just building up Burns. We went there to see the, the town was Egan. It was out there between Burns and where the sawmill is now. And there was, I remember two stores there when we went there. There was N. Brown and Son, Sons, Leon, and I can't think of the other name. The old gentleman just came, Mr. Brown, in the summertime, he'd come up. He lived in California.

And then there was, when we first went there, Stenger, Pete Stenger, big horseman had a store. And then there was a Jew come there, Durkheimer. And shortly after that why Stenger went out of the store and Durkheimer ran it for years.

I remember when, I don't know whether Welcomes --- seems to me Welcomes were there, or came about the same time we did, the Welcome family. They were quite prominent. He was a saddle maker. In those days no buckaroos, they called them, they all either had a J. C. Welcome saddle, or a Nelson saddle. Nelson's were made I believe in Sacramento, or down in that country, but introduced in there by those Mexicans that Pete French and those folks, recently. Then I remember the Racine Hotel. Now as far as my memory goes I don't know whether they were there when we came there, but they were there as far as I can remember.

And I remember when Maggie Levens was married, or Maggie married Hank Levens, Maggie Welcome. I always thought she looked like an angel; I was just a little kid.

We homesteaded down at, below Burns and lived in a sod house. We were there when the Lux and Miller, PLS Company ... built a line fence across Harney Valley. That was the first barbwire ever in that country. The settlers down below there, well there were Daltons, McGees, oh I can't remember all of them. But they come to Burns after they built that fence. They had to go out by Wright's Point about 25 --- they had an old fellow they shipped in, they had two of them, gunmen from Texas. They used to ride that fence.

My brother and I used to go down and visit with one of them old Bill Brown --- and he was quite friendly, he used to visit with us. He always had an old gun here, and wore boots. He always had a ... knife out of his boot tops, boot top. And one night the settlers all got together and they cut every wire between every post in that fourteen-mile fence, and, by the settlers down below. And they had them fenced out from Burns, and this old

Bill come down --- he was up town a few days after that and he was quite a drinking man. He was there in a saloon, and he was telling that these fellows that cut the fence they were cowards and afraid to show up, and so forth. He kept drinking, and he had his gun laying on the bar. There was a little fellow there that lived down below, can't think what his name was, but I knew him. And he got to drinking there and laid his gun down. This little fellow said, "Oh I cut the fence, and started to shoot." He hit him four or five times right in the breast, killed him dead. That's the first dead man I ever saw, and they had him laid down up there on the saloon floor. And that was old Bill Brown, but he never talked about it. And 25 years after that I was camped up Long Valley and a fellow camped there, they had a nice gear wagon, ... Burns. They were big hardware dealers. And I went over and asked him, "Burns?" And he said, "Yes". And I told him where I was, and he remembered my father. And he said, "You remember the fellow that killed Bill Brown?" I said, "Yes." He said ... he was an old man then. Yeah. We lived down more in town, and they ... Byrd ... he is one of the Byrds, he was a little younger than Julian, his older --- must have been three or four years older than I was. But we lived down there, and ... come by and said a couple fellows got, killed one another up the street. It was only four or five blocks up here. So we went up there, my brother and I. I guess I was five or six years old, but I remember just real well. These fellows they got into a fight over a girl, and I knew the girl, she lived up the river there. Well I knew of her as a kid.

But anyway, they agreed, they went out of the saloon, it sat back off of the road a ways, or a walk, it was really a trail out in front, going down in front of that, the street. And one of them flipped the other with a handkerchief. But they agreed to that. When he caught the handkerchief they started to shoot, and they killed one another. They were laying there, and I know their names, their names, one of them their name was Mace, and the other's name was Bland, Nason Bland, and they let us kids go up there and look at

those dead men, you know. And I just thought--- old Tex Silvan run the saloon there at that time.

Those Indian Camps out there, the first year we were at Burns now, or the second year, I heard the folks tell about, I was just a kid, a little kid then, a darn small kid. But whether I remember that, or whether it just from the folks talking about it --- we lived over, well I'd say on the way out there toward the hot springs, that is the south part of where Burns is now. And the Indians were back on the hill. And there were some Indians visiting there, and I think they were Warm Springs, but I'm not sure. They had a big war dance, a big pow wow. And it just seems to me that I remember. I know we went up there looking, watching. Now whether I remember that from actually seeing it, or from what the folks saw. I remember those Indians down there, big war dance up there, and parading around. But they didn't do anything about it. They were protesting because they wouldn't let them hunt over in the Diamond, right over where your folks are. Pete French, you know, run them out of there and that's what they were protesting.

The Indians those days, you know, nobody thought much of an Indian. It hadn't been too long since they killed that Smyth, Rye Smyth's father and brother over there in Diamond, you know. And old Scarface Charlie was there; at Burns he was quite a prominent among Indians. And that's where he got that name, you know, pulled up and shot him, hit him there in the cheek, you know, and he had a scarface clear across there. He was there, and old Louie.

Louie was the chief, head of the Indians there. He was the smartest Indian there was up in there. They were, Scarface Charlie I think was chief of Louie ... We used to go up there. Maybe that's what your mother was referring to, because there was Fred Racine and Frank Goodman, Fred Racine was, his mother was, Mary Racine run the hotel. And we were boys together and played a lot together and both of us had horses

when we were real small. And then there was another boy, Frank Goodman; his folks lived at Hot Springs. ... out there where the sawmill is now. And he had horses.

And we used to put in a lot of time up there at the, with these Indians, and we were friendly with them. Most everybody else's kids there would throw rocks at them and things like that. But us kids were always friendly with them, traded horses with them even when we were kids, 10, 11 years old. Well the Indians always kind of, they always liked us. And we'd go up there and pack up, we'd pack up and go someplace ever --- whip sticks in the summertime and then put a big pack on a horse and then they'd put a pack loose on top of them and tie it on. And they'd take a stick, oh about a foot long, and they'd put a couple straps then on each side and it would pop. And they would give those papoose kids a stick, you know, and they could hit the pack. That's the way they would amuse themselves.

But I'll never forget they had an old pinto horse and he'd broken a bone apparently, years before, in his hind leg. And every time he'd stick, that bone would kind of push out, you could see it, always lame, and they always packed that horse. And there were several other old kinds, and I know Fred Racine and I were up there when they were packing up, they were going off hunting or some place. And we asked Scarface Charlie, he seemed to be the big shot around there, why they always packed that horse and they had about a hundred they trailed along all the time, fat horses. Oh, he said, "We like um fat horse, keep them fat all the time, pretty horse." (Laughter) They packed the poor ones and the old ones they liked fat horses. ...

... and his wife, whenever they would get there, and Jake Welcome, those are the only two that I remember well as a kid. You see, that was a long while ago. See that was over 70, that was over 75 years ago. Well that's quite a long while in human life, you know.

But I remember I think people told me about folks, I heard them tell about it, you know. But some things I remember distinctly. The white geese used to settle down there on the flat below our house in the fall. They'd be, as I remember, an acre just solid, the geese settled down in there, come in there and feed on that grass in the fall.

And there was a fellow by the name of Gray lived up above us, he had an old horse. He'd go down in there, and that horse was well trained, he didn't have a thing on, rope or nothing else. And he'd get back of that horse, and that horse would feed right around, and feed right up to those doggone geese and he'd get right in behind them. He had an old ten gauge muzzle loading shotgun, because he showed us kids how he loaded it, load with powder and the shot in there and hammer it in, you know. And I remember it wasn't over a quarter of a mile, I don't believe, from our house, we could see the flame out there and going up. Because he come by early and he said he was going out there and kill these geese. Told us how to go do it, and we were watching him. And got right up below these geese, and he shot twice with this old shotgun.

And my brother and I went out there to help him catch these geese. And he killed 22 geese with those two shots. And he was selling the feathers now, way back in those days; it must have been ... for goose down and feathers.

And he caught a bunch of those, what we used to call tule hogs, I guess there are no more are there, over there? Used to be hogs down in the tules, you know, a lot of them. We called them tule hogs, they were hogs that the farmers had brought in there and they turned them out on that camas and tule in the summer, you know, and then they'd round them up. They were just earmarked. Well they never got all of them, and in just a few years they go wild, you know.

And the neighbors used to go down there and catch those darn pigs. And this fellow had a bunch of those pigs up there, and I guess that's probably all they had to feed

them, I don't know, but he was feeding these hogs these geese, you know, the flesh of the geese. I remember that well, now they didn't tell me that, I remember it because I remember going down there chasing these geese that he had crippled and even killed, yeah.

BETTY: Okay, Jim, it's on.

JIM: When we first come to Burns, well the first families I kind of remember well were the Byrds. And the Byrd family and my folks came from Virginia. My folks knew the Byrds in Virginia, and we were some relation of that third or fourth cousins of the Byrds. They ran the newspaper there, you know, the Times, Mr. Byrd started that. We always called him Daddy Byrd. We knew them; the families were quite friendly always, our family and theirs.

They had a little church there, no minister, when I was a kid there. They had four saloons, and there was about three or four women in town that impressed Christianity. It was Mrs. Reed, Mrs. Jameson, and my mother, and there was two or three others, I don't remember. But they had Sunday school and mother used to take us over there. The church was a ... it wasn't over twenty feet square, a little church. I don't know when it was built, or what caused it to be built because there was no minister. These old ladies took us over there to church. And I know my mother told me, whether then or later, there was only two men in Burns that professed Christianity. They was protestant Christians, they may have been some Catholics, I think probably one or two, and some Jews there. But I remember those, the old fellows.

The Jamesons, ... wasn't a Christian, but his wife was. She was related to the Reeds, those Reeds, there was three or four boys and I went to school with them. And they were all quite religious except for ... Jameson, he was quite a character.

The first minister they had there, they had an old preacher, he came over from

Prineville. His long black beard --- and that's the first minister I had ever heard, seen, and he sure preached hell fire and brimstone. Baptized fifteen or twenty down at the hot springs, that was down where the mill is now. And that was the first baptismal ceremony that was ever in the country, in Harney County. And they came from way out around Diamond, in there, where it took them a day or two to get to town to see this baptismal ceremony. They baptized, oh there were several of them that he converted. Several of them I think were gamblers and bartenders. But I don't think any of them stayed in that religion too long ... Went back to their old ways of doing business.

The first school I ever went to was up, someplace; it was the north part of town. It wasn't far, it was down over the hill from where that pioneer's meeting is, I think, up in there. And the teacher, a man, I think they had two teachers if I remember --- but I remember Mr. Beckley well, he was a man teacher. And I think we went to school when we was five years old. And then there was Lena Harkey. And the Harkeys lived over there across the river, a mile from town, maybe not that far. And one of these Harkey girls taught there. And I remember Lena, but --- I first went to school to Mr. Beckley.

They had a blackboard there, and he asked me if I had the ABC's there on the blackboard. And I knew, my sister had taught me the ABC's, older sister. And I remember that well. But that was out --- And then the next school I remember was down south of the main business part there in town. And they had, Mr. Dillard was the next schoolteacher, and a Mrs. Worthington she came from the east there and married a carpenter there, his name was Al Worthington. And those were the next teachers I remember.

But I do remember, and I don't know, now it seems that may have been before Mr. Dillard, that Mr. Beckley taught there because they used to whip us with a rawhide whip, it was really a riding whip. And they generally told them the night before they was going to



whip them the next morning.

But they --- Mr. Beckley, he was a big husky fellow. And those two Harkey boys, they were older boys; they were older than I, Dan and Harry. And he told ... he was going to whip the next boy or something. But anyway he understood he was going to be whipped. Because when they come to town they come across the river and they brought a club. I remember that well, it was about three feet long, a willow they'd cut about two inches in diameter, and they left it out in the hall where we left our hats. And when Mr. Beckley lined these kids up to whip them, he started to whipping Dan Harkey, and Harry got this club. Well instead of going, hitting him with it, he threw it at him and he hit his brother, he hit Dan. But anyway, I guess Beckley just knocked them both down, he was a big husky fellow. But that's the only way he could handle them. And Mr. Harkey, after that he was, I remember I saw him, he was going to whip Beckley for whipping his boys. I remember Mr. Beckley told him, he said, "Why Dan you can't whip me." But ---

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