

HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #233AA - Side A (Middle)

Subject: Elmer Dunn, Big Loop

Place:

Date: July 7, 1978

Interviewer: Nel Bosch

Release Form: No

NEL BOSCH: And for a little while, we're going to visit about the big loop. Tell me, where were you born? What year, if it wouldn't be embarrassing.

ELMER DUNN: 1909.

NEL: 1909. Well you're two years younger than my mom.

ELMER: Two years younger. (Laughter) She's too old.

NEL: Oh, she's too old. (Laughter)

ELMER: Both of us.

NEL: You --- where did you first buckaroo, where'd you first buckaroo, job?

ELMER: Well I can't remember. (Laughter)

NEL: Oh now, it's not that far back.

ELMER: Well my ---

NEL: You just grew up with it, huh?

ELMER: --- my grandmother always claimed that they let me to ride a horse before they learned me to walk.

MAN: That's right.

NEL: Figures.

ELMER: Well I don't know from my people, was where I first buckarood, naturally.

NEL: Yeah, that's just something you were born to practically. Well you learned to rope just about the time you learned to ride too, didn't you?

ELMER: Well, wasn't very far after that.

NEL: Uh huh. Do you remember some of these old timers that we've talked about? Chino and Chappo ---

ELMER: Chino, Chappo, Augustine Gilbert, well I don't know. Dave Cole, and all them fellows. Ross Dollarhide.

NEL: Uh huh.

ELMER: Roy Clark, and all them people I knew.

NEL: Uh huh. Did you learn from them, or was it just something that --- to rope?

ELMER: Well, my father was a pretty good roper.

NEL: Uh huh. Yeah.

ELMER: He came here in the '80's, you know, this country.

NEL: Uh huh.

ELMER: It was all around me, that's all there was, I had to learn. (Laughter)

NEL: Well now, when you first started out, now maybe you're going to have to dig back a little bit. Did you start with a shorter rope, and then work up to a long rope?

ELMER: Well, naturally.

NEL: --- as you got better.

ELMER: A little old kid can't handle as much rope as a grown man can.

NEL: Yeah, true.

ELMER: And he couldn't handle his horse as well either, so he was kind of at a disadvantage.

NEL: Yeah, just a matter of learning, and as you got older with more practice ---

ELMER: You have to, you kind of work up to it by degrees, yes.

NEL: Well why do you think the big loop developed around this area?

ELMER: Well, it was in the early days, there was no corrals, and very few fences. You just bunched a bunch of cattle out here on a rim rock, or a dry lakebed, held them, and with calves, and --- That's ah --- and that was California, Mexican style, you know, to start with. Pete French's old Mexicans come in here, that was Chino--Joaquin "Chino" Berdugo, and Chappo, Tebo, Luterio, and Augustine, all them fellows.

NEL: Yeah. Well they came ---

ELMER: Juan Redon, I don't know when he came in here. But he was a long rope man and I mean a long rope, too.

NEL: Yeah.

ELMER: You bet.

NEL: Well what was the average length rope that they used?

ELMER: Oh, anywhere from 60 to 80 feet. It was --- I don't ---

in this letter you said 75 and a 100, they was 75. But a 100-foot rope, I don't know if I ever saw one, in that ---

NEL: (Laughter) I ---

ELMER: I might have.

NEL: You'd have a dally ... to hold it on your saddle in the coil.

ELMER: Well, you couldn't hold it in your hand, when you brought it in.

NEL: Uh huh.

ELMER: --- unless it was awful small.

NEL: Yeah, that wasn't much point.

ELMER: Little bit dangerous too.

NEL: Yeah.

ELMER: You know what I mean. Some --- you rope a horse, somebody's horse fall over, get away, and you rope him, you was going to break it.

NEL: Yeah. Well, did you throw the rope differently? I mean like if you were roping a cow or a calf, or a horse, was there a different technique in throwing?

ELMER: Oh, yes.

NEL: Oh. Well what would be the difference?

ELMER: Well these short rope boys, they got to get right up and throw it right down right at him. And just kind of whip it down.

NEL: Uh huh.

ELMER: And the other way, you just throw it way up there and it

just sailed out there --- You got a calf or a cow, or whatever you --- Oh yes, there was quite a difference.

NEL: Excuse me; I've been hanging onto that cough for a while.

ELMER: Pardon.

NEL: I was hanging onto that cough, I didn't want to cough into that tape ... tape recorder I just got. My grandson sneezed into it, it sounded like the whole building was coming apart. (Laughter) Do you remember anything particular about any of these old fellows you were talking about? Any of the old funny things that happened --- or ---

ELMER: Oh, yes.

NEL: --- a lot of interesting things.

ELMER: Old Tebo he was quite a storyteller, you know.

NEL: Oh, I've heard Tebo's stories.

ELMER: And Tebo Ortego.

NEL: Uh huh.

ELMER: Yeah, he told lots of stories. Some of them was pretty hard for even a greenhorn to swallow. (Laughter)

NEL: Well did he expect you to believe them?

ELMER: I don't really think so, no. He just liked to hear his own voice, I think.

NEL: Yeah, kind of like a liars club today, sort of. Yeah.

ELMER: Then there was Chapel; he was a little short fellow, black. Some said he was Yaqui Indian than he was Mexican. I don't know. But ---

NEL: Well, do you remember Juan Redon?

ELMER: I never saw Juan Redon but once, that I can remember.

NEL: Uh huh. He was a pretty old fellow then. You were just a youngster.

ELMER: He was on the other side of the mountain, and I was on this side.

NEL: Uh huh. Yeah. But you were mostly around Frenchglen? And

---

ELMER: Frenchglen and the Island Ranch, you know.

NEL: Uh huh.

ELMER: Out on the desert.

NEL: Uh huh. Yeah. Well you knew quite a few of the old timers then?

ELMER: Pardon.

NEL: You knew quite a few of the old timers then, the old owners?

ELMER: Oh yes. Yes.

NEL: Did you ever work for the Company?

ELMER: Well, in later years.

NEL: Uh huh.

ELMER: But I knew ... Clark and people like that.

NEL: Uh huh. Well you had your own place out there, didn't you?

ELMER: Yes, my folks had a ranch there.

NEL: Uh huh.

ELMER: I remember Tom Allen, and all them people, you know. I was pretty small when Tom Allen was down there. But --- and I

remember ... Johnny Wade, and them fellows.

NEL: Uh huh. Do you remember Luke Kendall?

ELMER: Oh yes. I remember Kendall.

NEL: I think one of his favorite stories was about roping a hog out there in the tules.

ELMER: They did that.

NEL: Uh huh.

ELMER: They did that.

NEL: Sounds like it might be kind of fun.

ELMER: Called a hog roping day, and they'd go out there and catch all the hogs we could.

NEL: Yeah.

ELMER: Then old Fred Brown, he was a champion hog roper.  
(Laughter)

NEL: Would they slaughter them and cure them or just ---

ELMER: Pardon.

NEL: Would they slaughter and cure them, or just play with them?

ELMER: Well no, they'd put them up and fatten them, and butcher them. And give them to the rancher, the neighbors, anybody.

NEL: But it was just kind of a Sunday fun day, in other words, when they'd have ---

ELMER: Well yes, it was both fun and profit.

NEL: Yeah.

ELMER: Yeah, they did that.

NEL: Well where did the hogs get started down there, just kind of

escapes or ---

ELMER: What?

NEL: How did the hogs get started down there, just kind of ---

ELMER: Well they --- some people brought some in here from California, and they got away, I guess.

NEL: Uh huh.

ELMER: Just ---

NEL: Just liked them ... yeah, uh huh. Yeah.

ELMER: Just like mustang horses.

NEL: Yeah, some of our quote, unquote, wild horses. Yeah.

ELMER: You bet.

NEL: Well, do you remember any, oh just funny incidents that happened or interesting things that maybe, you know, you'd like to share with us?

ELMER: Well, I can't think of one right now. I'm not a very good storyteller.

NEL: Oh well, you don't have to be. It's just mostly memory and what happened that we're interested in. If you're throwing up-wind say, with one of these long ropes, would you kind of have to watch in which direction the wind is blowing to make a catch, or ---

ELMER: Well, the riata didn't catch near the wind that a sea grass or nylon does.

NEL: Uh huh.

ELMER: You could throw them farther in the wind. But --- the



wind bothers anyway.

NEL: Oh yeah.

ELMER: --- with any kind of a rope.

NEL: Well your riata is a rawhide, and heavier than the sea grass or nylon.

ELMER: Well yes, heavier.

NEL: Uh huh.

ELMER: And it's got more life to it.

NEL: Uh huh. Well someone was saying that they would braid weights into these things.

ELMER: Oh yes.

NEL: Would they?

ELMER: Yes. Some of them braided core in it, and some of them loaded it with shot.

NEL: Uh huh.

ELMER: Yeah.

NEL: This would keep your loop open as well as get your distance too?

ELMER: Well then it would give it a little more weight.

NEL: Uh huh. I could see where you'd need a little more weight on a throw with a 60-foot rope.

ELMER: They was --- and a lot of them they'd, if they wanted to put some weight in it, rawhide rope, they'd grease it with kidney fat, you know.

NEL: Oh.

ELMER: And that --- it would help.

NEL: Would it make it stiffer or ---

ELMER: No, no.

NEL: Just the weight.

ELMER: No. It was just weight, but a lot of them didn't like to grease the riata too much because it had a tendency to rot it.

NEL: Yeah, I bet it would. Uh huh.

ELMER: Grease your rope and then drag it for five miles across the meadow, and rub all you could off of it. (Laughter)

b1