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HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #2 Side A

Subject: Cecil Bennett

Place: Bennett Home, Burns, Oregon

Date: June 1974

Interviewer: Pauline Braymen

Release Form: No

This interview was given a few days before Cecil Bennett presided as president of the Harney County Pioneer Association's annual Pioneer Day Celebration in Burns. The place of the interview was the Bennett home in Burns.

CECIL BENNETT: This is Cecil Bennett. I am going to give you a short resume, as near as I can remember, of the Bennett family. First one that was connected with the Bennett family that moved into Harney County was Tom Potter, who settled in the Potter Swamp area and proved up on it later. Tom settled there in about the middle of the seventies, or early part, or middle of the seventies, in there someplace. In 1883, Tom Potter went back to Missouri where he was married and married a cousin of my father's. That fall, in October, my father William M. Bennett, and my mother Ida Belle Bennett, and my sister Katie Bennett, came out to Oregon.

And to that family was borned seven boys besides my sister. My oldest brother Albert Bennett died in infancy. My folks lived the major portion of this time from 1883 till 1902 in the Lawen area adjacent to the Malheur Lake. I was borned in the Lawen area. And to this family,

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these brothers, the oldest brother, S. R. Bennett, who would be 86 if he was alive now, died in 1968. My next oldest brother, William M. Bennett, who is now 84 years old and lives with his wife Gertrude, in Woodburn, Oregon, in the senior citizens estate there. My next brother, Ellis Bennett, who lived in Burns the greater portion of his life, also died in 1968. His wife Mary Bennett still lives here in Burns. The next brother in line, Frank Bennett, who is 80 years old, is still active in business and still selling used cars on the Frank Bennett Used Car Lot. I might state at this time, that Frank worked for me all through the history of my automobile career. My other brother Chester Bennett, who is younger than I, lives in Enterprise, Oregon. Chester is seventy.

I was borned at Lawen, Oregon, in 1896, and am now 78 years old, and enjoy real good health. And I was married to Trilby Whiteaker in 1917 here in Burns, Oregon. We moved to Silvies Valley, and we had borned to our family three children. Our oldest son Bill Bennett, who has passed away, in 1965; our daughter, who resides in Portland, Oregon, LaVelle Pinkerton; our youngest son Harold K. Bennett, who resides in San Bernardino, California. And our son that we raised, Montie B. Miller, who married a local girl here, Beryl Stampke, lives in Newport, Oregon.

I have had a very rich life, in as much as I have been associated with some of the finest people in the world. And when we say that, we say it with all sincerity, because the people of Harney County are those kind of people. I was associated with men like Dr. John Weare, Henry Slater, Pluribus Tiller, Morgan Timms, on the school board for a period of about 8 years. Over a period of about 25 years, I was associated with a lot of fine people. I think I better skip the names, because if I tried to name them all, I would miss some. I will just mention one or two names. The first time I was elected on the Burns City Council, George Shaw, who has been gone for a good many years, was mayor. That was in 1933. The only other member of that mayor or city council that is alive at this time is Murl Coe, who still lives here in Burns, Oregon.

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After Trilby and me were married, we filed a homestead in Silvies Valley and bought a small cattle ranch which we stayed on and worked for about two and a half years. Then I accepted a job with the Forest Service as a district ranger and was moved to Canyon Creek. That fall, I was moved back to Crow Flat. I worked for the Forest Service about two and a half years.

After leaving the Forest Service, I was offered a job with the Eastern Oregon Livestock Company in Catlow Valley, where I went and acted as ranch foreman for about two and a half or three years. At that time the Eastern Oregon Livestock Company sold out and we moved back to Burns. Trilby says that we moved twenty-one times in the first five years, I think it was. She had it figured out. I never did check her on that for sure, but we was a doing a lot of moving.

In the fall of '25 we came back to Burns, and went into the automobile business, where the Chevrolet Garage is now. We built all the buildings that is there at the Chevrolet Garage now. We also built the Burns One Stop Service Station, built the Consolidated Truck Depot, which is now the Burns Fire Department; built the Bennett Apartments, which we called the Bennett Motel at that time. Brought into Burns, Oregon and set up the Union Oil Bulk Plant. And after all of these years, after we have finally started in and sold out, we started in 1955, when we made the first sale to Bud Grover and Garland Ganger. Since then, we have disposed of all the rest of our property except the house that we live in.

We haven't accumulated any great amount of riches that the average person calls riches. There is a lot of people, when you say you are rich, why they think you have a lot of money. Well, I haven't got much money, but we got a lot of friends, I hope.

We had the pleasure of working with some of the finest people in Harney County, and they don't grow any better people than they grow in Harney County.

I'm still, more or less a little active, not too active, just a little bit. I go to Kiwanis Club; I go

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to the Chamber of Commerce. I help out a little bit on Radio Day for the Kiwanis and raise the money to support the youth center up at Logan Valley. I raise money for the big county auction to help support the Chamber of Commerce, and a few little things like that I still keep a finger on.

They've got me on one or two honorary member --- members of one or two honorary committees that don't do too much. But they kind of treat me like a grandpa, but I kinda enjoy it.

This Pioneer's Day I'm going to be the president of the Harney County Pioneers, and you'll probably hear me on the air early that morning, as I am the chairman of the --- broadcasting for ads and where we raise our money for this youth operation. And to show you how that money comes in, money that was turned in today at the Kiwanis Club, I took over and put in the bank was a \$195. And there's probably not a third, there is probably not a third of it in yet. All these merchants up and down the street contribute these ads, whether they need an ad or not why they always contribute an ad for the Kiwanis Club for that program. Because they feel that it is a good program and feel that it does do some good in the community.

I believe that about winds up a quick resume of the Bennett family and of the history of my immediate family. And I'll see you all Pioneer's Day.

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