

HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #30 - Side A

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Hi, this is Pauline Braymen. The early history of Harney County wasn't all Fourth of July picnics and cattle drives. It was from time to time a little rough and tumble, and law and order was not always the by-word. The little settlements that sprung up around the country from Harney City to Andrews, from The Narrows to Drewsey, all had a couple of things in common. Saloons, and thirsty cowboys that showed up at the end of a long hard-working season for what the Armed Services would term nowadays an R & R, rest and relaxation.

These fellows worked hard, and they played hard, and sometimes their idea of fun was a good fistfight with whoever might be handy and willing. One of the stories gathered from the Harney County Library History Project from the Drewsey area is about just such a situation. The fellow who told the story wishes to remain anonymous, and since he is a little vague about the names of the individuals involved, we have changed the names to protect both the guilty and innocent.

Ross Johnson, local Burns poet has written a poem about the incident, and I'd like to share Ross' effort with you today. For a little background, Drewsey, along about 1884 to the early 1900's was a bustling center of activity. The PLS Company wintered their cows in this area, and it was a destination point for the freight wagons hauling wool to Ontario, and then hauling other freight and

supplies back to the Drewsey area, and on back into Burns.

So, on a Saturday night when the freight wagons were in, or when the sheep men brought in a load of wool, or when the cowboys had a night in town, things could be just a little interesting.

"The Ballad of Benjamin South and Patrick McGee"

By Ross W. Johnson

Benjamin South came out of the west
ridin' a paint --- his horse was the best.
Calm and quiet was cowpuncher Ben;
cheerful and gentle was he among men.
To quality ladies, he'd always defer;
yet of the hussy spoke never a slur.
From rangeland to Drewsey, he came in,
for one drink of whiskey at the Gouge-Eye Inn.
He sat at his table in perfect content;
personifying the well-wishing gent.

Now wild Irish Patrick Michael McGee,
arrived that day on his wildest spree.
Especially primed to raise all the hell;
that Drewsey had hoarded for quite a spell.
Shouting aloud, McGee lived it up,
bending his elbow, and raising his cup.
"I've five hundred dollars that talks for me,

I can whip any man in all o' Drewsey.
I'm tough as a tiger and I'd like to see
the shape o' the man who can stand up to me."

From bar to bar went the wild McGee,
raising the hell that he had set free.
And offered five hundred, as cool as ice,
for any tough man, who couldn't be nice.
"I've plenty o' punch, more than enough,
to fix your face fancy, without any bluff.
Is there any man here who'd like to see,
the stars that are made by the fist o' McGee?"
Amid his shouting and covered with sin,
he entered the door of the Gouge-Eye Inn.
And spotting Ben South at his table serene,
he cursed his soul and vented his spleen.
Then stepped to Ben's table and trod on Ben's toes,
and reaching across gave a tweak of his nose.
"I've five hundred dollars..." he started to say ---
'twas as far as he got, that fine summer day.
So fast was Ben's fist, that no one could see,
and it all but emptied the head of McGee.

A flash of lightning blasted Pat's brain,
he shivered with cold, like a steer in the rain.

He grabbed for a straw before he could sink,
then lay like a log sunk in the drink.
Then Ben picked him up from off the floor,
and flung his remains out the bat-wing door.
McGee then arose, and shook off the dust,
he straightened his tongue, forgetting to cuss;
Up Drewsey's main street, McGee then paced,
and wearin' a smile on his ugly face.
His call, still loud, was gentle and mild.
his speech was attuned to another style.

"I've five hundred dollars that talks for me.
Ben South can whip any man that you see.
If any man here thinks this isn't so,
he can come to me to wager his dough."
Then out of the town through sagebrush he went,
his wildest spree being practically spent.
And those who watched him ride into the night,
last heard his call as faint as the light.
"I've five hundred dollars that speaks for me,
Ben South can whip any man you can see."

Thanks Ross, I've enjoyed telling the story, and I appreciate your putting it into rhyme for me. This is the kind of material that we're collecting for the Harney County Library History Project. If you've got a story to tell, we'd like to talk to you.

Hi, this is Pauline Braymen. Some of the material we have collected for the Harney County

Library History Project has been in the form of documents and papers that people have had collected over a long period of years. Some of these are reminiscences, some of them are letters, and they make some very interesting reading indeed.

One of these documents is the reminiscences of Dennis O'Brien who came to Burns in 1896. When he was about 76 years old, his friend Anna D. S. Pratt, of Lebanon, Oregon, wrote down the things that he told her and typed them up. And because of her effort in doing this, we have the stories of this, really early pioneer had to tell.

George Francis Brimlow quoted extensively from the Dennis O'Brien manuscript in his book, "Harney County Oregon and Its Rangelands". But I thought you might like to hear some excerpts from the original manuscript.

The reminiscences of Dennis O'Brien. "In 1896 my cousin, John McCulloch, and I started to Montana to better our fortunes. But we never got any further than Burns. Burns then had three hundred inhabitants, and eight saloons. I worked for Mart Brenton for almost four years. He had a livery stable with thirty driving horses. The livery stable business then was in the big money. He often took in as much as twelve hundred dollars a week. Whenever Mart was away the barn was in my charge to pay out, and to take in the money, and to manage the teams and drivers as I saw fit. One time Mart left for Idaho and was gone six months. On his return I turned over several thousand dollars to him. He never asked for an accounting. It never seemed to occur to him.

Then for some time I drove the stage from Burns to Diamond, carrying mail and passengers. We made three trips a week, and changed horses about every fourteen miles. One of the stations was at Rock Creek. That was the longest stage drive we had to make. We stayed all night at Diamond and came back next day. Once, when I left The Narrows, which was quite a place then, I drove right into a howling blizzard, a perfect blinding smother of whirling snow, and night was coming on. Soon I knew that I was not on the road, and by and by the team brought up to a fence. I knew we should not be running up against any fence, but I could not tell to save me, where I was.

There was nothing to do but to keep on going until morning broke, and the storm let up. When I found I was up on Wright's Ridge (this is Wright's Point), and there were men coming to look for me. The horses were jaded when we left The Narrows, and on those last miles into Burns, after all their night's terrible trip, they could hardly put one foot in front of the other and were not in condition for weeks to be driven again. On the Fourth of July, a dust storm came up Rock Creek and The Narrows, so thick that I couldn't see a foot ahead of me. I couldn't go on, so I covered my head with a blanket and waited two hours while the dust simply drifted by. When I could go on, the road looked clean as a bone, as if it had been swept by a broom.

In August of 1898, I drove out on Wright's Ridge with Charlie Owens, my employer. A big black cloud was off towards the Blue Mountains. I remarked to Owens that I didn't like the looks of that cloud, and he had better take his coat along. 'Oh, I guess it's all right,' he said. But about noon the sky looked so threatening that he said, 'Guess we had better hurry and get back to Burns.'

We drove at a good pace, and soon Owens yelled, 'Put them to a gallop, I don't want to be caught by that thing, don't spare the team, they're my horses.' So, I drove at a high gallop into the livery stable and we unhitched the foaming team just as drops of rain hit, big as half dollars fell all around us.

The barn was a hundred feet long, and we ran with the horses to their stalls, not taking time even to tie them up. We ran back to care for the rig, but already the water was running past the front of the barn, eighteen inches deep. If Burns had been built in a canyon instead of a flat where the water could spread out, that cloud burst would have washed away every house in town."

I hope you have enjoyed these excerpts from the reminiscences of Dennis O'Brien who came to Harney County in 1896. This is the kind of material that we are collecting for the Harney County Library History Project. If you have a story to tell, let us know, we'd like to talk to you.

Hi, this is Pauline Braymen. I would like to share with you today some more excerpts from the reminiscences of Dennis O'Brien who came to Harney County in 1896.

Anna Pratt of Lebanon, Oregon, wrote down some of the stories that Dennis O'Brien had told to her when he was about 76 years old. And these excerpts are from this manuscript.

Dennis O'Brien says, "Yes, I knew Pete French. In fact, I worked for him for three months. He was one of the nicest men I ever knew.

After the haying was over, Pete wanted an irrigation ditch taken from Rock Creek out onto a field. Tom McKinney was the boss, and the job went to his head. He gave us outlaw horses to work on our scrapers. One of my teams went to kicking, and I didn't want to get hit by the scraper, or hurt by the horses, so I let them go loose. Away went the team, tearing up harness and lines generally, just as Pete French himself came along. 'Whose team is that, how did it happen?' I told him, so we started in again. But the team acted just the same, and I did not dare to get tangled in the long four-horse lines, so I turned them loose again.

'I have hundreds of good horses, and there is no use in trying to work outlaws,' said French. He asked if I could drive Moses and Chris, two old "P" Ranch mules, thirty years old. 'Yes,' I replied, 'if they don't run.' He had two thousand head of horses on the "P" Ranch, so old Chino rounded up two hundred horses. French said, 'Take all the day, and pick out the team you want, and match them up.'

I was a good judge of horses then, and I got some good teams. He sent a note to McKinney, and we went back to work the next morning. McKinney was pretty sore, and rather nasty to me. So after two days, I quit.

I met French on the streets of Burns. 'What are you doing here,' he asked. I told him about the swellhead boss, and that seven more of the boys had quit with me. 'You tell those boys to meet me at the hotel,' he directed. 'I like a man with a little spirit,' said he. Well five men went back to the "P" Ranch, and were working for him when he died.

I went back to working for Brenton, my good friend that I liked so well. I took the coroner out when French was killed. A settler named Ed Oliver shot him in the back of the head. A

number of settlers had fenced land on The Narrows that French had bought and paid for, and the case went to the courts. The settlers continuously cut the "P" Ranch fences. It was seventy-five miles long, and thirty miles across, and had a thirty mile lane across it, so people could cross Rock Creek and go to town. It was simply impossible to police that long a fence.

French met a number of the settlers. He was absolutely fearless; no one could run a whizzer on him. Although he weighed but a 140 pounds, he defied one of the settlers, a man named Marshall who weighed 250 pounds. 'I'll fight any man,' he challenged. 'Gentlemen, while this case is pending, come and work for me. You can work for as long as you want, and pay for your land.' But they would not. When Oliver was tried for the killing of French, it was before a fixed jury, and he was turned loose.

A strange thing was that Billy Anderson, who went out to the "P" Ranch as bookkeeper after French's death, was a perfect double for French. Same voice, same face and mustache, same weight, same walk. I saw him get off the stage, and if I had not known that Pete French was in his grave, I would have sworn it was he. People would turn on the street and stare after him. He asked, 'Why do people look at me so?' When he went out to the "P" Ranch and the Spaniards who had worked so long for French would come to the table to eat, they would gaze in a terrified manner at Anderson, and get up and bolt out the doors. They couldn't bear to look at someone who looked so much like their loved and lost master. Some people would even call him Pete. He stayed only three weeks, said he couldn't stand being mistaken for a dead man."

These have been excerpts from the manuscript of the reminisces of Dennis O'Brien who came to Harney County in 1896. This is the kind of material that we are collecting for the Harney County Library History Project. If you have documents or letters that you would care to share with us, they can be copied and you can keep your originals. So if you would care to share ...

Hi, this is Pauline Braymen. Darrell Howser, long time postmaster of Burns, has lived in Harney County all of his life. His father, Thomas, was six years old when the Howser family came

to Harney County in 1876, from California. His mother Rose Loggan came to Harney County with her parents in 1884.

Both the Howser and the Loggan families lived in the Harney City area in those early years. And this is where Darrell grew up and received his early schooling.

Darrell tells, "I was born in Harney, and went to school in Harney. I don't remember first grade, and all that, but I remember that after I got up in the grades there were two rooms in the school, and there were seventy kids going to school there. My sister and I had to walk a mile to school from the ranch, and then back again in the evening."

Of course Harney was a fairly good town then. This was in the early 1900's. There was probably two or three hundred people living there, and in the vicinity around there. The main store in Harney was run by Mr. and Mrs. Seth Bower, and Fred Haines. There were two stores, two or three saloons, two livery stables, and two hotels. One was the Russell Hotel, and the other was the Green Front Hotel.

Old Kellogg had the mail route between Burns and Ontario, and it was a daily mail stage. It finally went to three times a week, but when we first came here the mail came every day. He had about ninety head of stage horses. Then they had the old stagecoaches for travel. And of course in the winter that was kind of a rough deal. They had the big seat up in front of the others. They put foot warmers in the back. But up in front they had a canvas that came right across your lap, and then they put a lantern underneath to keep your feet warm. The foot warmers had bricks in them that would stay warm for four or five hours.

The first car I remember seeing was Lon Richardson's, it was a Ford. I think it was about 1906, and the next one was Charlie Loggan's 1910 Buick. Of course I lived in Harney, so I didn't get to see some of those around Burns. The first ride, I went with my Uncle Charlie. What did I think of it? I enjoyed it! Well, we'd never ridden in one before.

Although I never did ride in it, Dory Poujade out at Cow Creek had a car, and it was one of

the first cars I ever saw. That was one with the big buggy wheels. It didn't have rubber tires, it just looked like a buggy, and you sat up in there and drove with a stick. And they used to come by, Dory and his wife, and Mary and Lea, and all of them going to Burns. They would come by going ten or fifteen miles an hour. It was one of those big old chain drives.

My first experience of going to Ontario on a trip was with the freighters. I think we had about five wagons, two ten-horse teams, two six-horse teams, and a four and a two-horse team. Old Red Campbell was one of them, and my dad was one of them, and Joe Clark, and Roy and Pete Demaris. They had the ten-horse teams. That was Bert Bower's wagons.

Of course my dad went to get his supplies to bring in for the winter. They'd go out in the fall and bring in enough to last them all winter, until spring when they could go again. I was just a young kid when I made this first trip, and I was a pretty privileged character. It took five days to go to Ontario. We got into Ontario, and we always traded at Frazier's. They got their stuff from Jones & Company out of Portland. Well we got into Ontario, and the freight wasn't there. Hadn't come in yet. So with all those horses, we couldn't stay there.

My uncle lived at Skull Springs, so we hooked up the next morning and went out there. They were shearing sheep. It took about three days to get out there, and then all the wagons were loaded up with wool. They brought that back to Ontario, and that paid all their expenses, the hauling of that wool. When we got back, the groceries and things were there, and it took about a day to load up, and then we started home.

They have regular camping spots every night. We were gone six weeks. It took pretty near a week to go to Ontario. We were there one day, and then a week to Skull Springs, a day or so to load up, and a week back to Ontario. And by the time we got home, we'd been gone six weeks."

This is a little insight into the life of Harney County in the early 1900's. We're complaining now about slowing down to 55 miles an hour. Can you imagine driving from Harney to Burns at the high rate of speed of 10 to 15 miles an hour?

This is the kind of material we are collecting for the Harney County Library History Project. If you have a story to tell, let us know, we'd like to talk to you.

Hi, this is Pauline Braymen. Peck Amort came to Silver Creek, or Riley in 1903. He had some interesting stories to tell about those early days, and especially the time he was camp cook for Bill Brown's crew.

Bill Brown was a well-known sheep and cattleman in the Riley-Wagontire area. And Peck has this story to tell. He says, "Well Bill Brown had a crew gathering up horses, and I was a kid doing nothing here, and they wanted someone to go and cook for them. So the first thing he said was, 'you don't want just one pair of overalls, you'd better get three.' So we went to old N. Brown and Sons in Burns and got three pair of Levis for six-bits a pair, with a sheepskin tag. And now the tag isn't even sheepskin anymore, and they are seven dollars a pair.

Well then the buckaroos got forty dollars a month, and that was big money. The cook worked, and was up so many more hours than the buckaroos. Well Bill Brown said, 'I never paid a cook forty dollars in my life.' I said, 'Well, that's fine and dandy Bill, I can go home.'

Charlie Williams said, 'That's all right, you just go on with your work, Bill Brown won't be back again, and your forty dollars will go on just the same.' I wasn't going to work for no twenty dollars out there in that desert with a lot of old pots and pans and Dutch ovens.

There was a crew of ten or fifteen men, and then there were the neighbors that came in from towards Lakeview and towards Prineville. When you moved camp in the morning, why you didn't know how many men you'd have to cook for that evening and feed. Whether you would have your own crew, or a dozen, or two dozen more, you never knew. Some of these people would come to pick up their stock that was gathered with Brown's. We'd butcher a beef and put the wagon tongue way up high and hang it up there. We never lost any meat, and it was always fresh and dry. With a crew of ten or fifteen men, it didn't take us too long to use up a beef. And we had the biggest Old Dutch ovens. I had a five-gallon pickle keg. And then into the biscuit making, only for breakfast.

Had two pair of tongs to handle the big Dutch ovens with. We'd put them down in a hole and build a fire in there to keep that lid hot. Well the men didn't get in until two o'clock in the afternoon. Sourdough, you never cut that, you break it.

And I always saved seamless sacks. Charlie Williams said, 'What do you bring all them seamless sacks for?' And I said, 'Do you think I'm going to use a pair of overalls to wash the dishes with?' Seamless sacks are heavy cotton sacks used for seed. They are seamless clear around, with just a seam across the bottom. They are heavier than a flour sack. They used to make aprons out of them, and cover up bread with them. Bill Brown had them by the dozens over there. Oh they'll tear, but they are a pretty rugged sack.

All the buckaroos had a seamless sack to keep their clothes in. They are used to store fine seed in nowadays, alfalfa seed and like that.

Bill Brown was certainly a nice man to get along with. Well he was kind of a fidgety man you know, just as though he was on needles. He didn't drink coffee. In those days if a man didn't drink whiskey, something was wrong with you. But he didn't drink no whiskey. He was definitely against liquor.

He would carry raisins and strychnine in the same pocket. He had a brother that came out here with him to Wagontire, and the brother didn't exactly like it, so Bill Brown bought him out. He had a homestead over there. And that old fellow that had a row with him was going to get Bill out of there. That's the fellow Bill Brown killed. His name was Overstreet.

Bill Brown shipped all his sheep and cattle at Shaniko. Supplies were freighted from The Dalles to the Silver Creek area. But before they freighted from The Dalles, they freighted from Shaniko. It is just a ghost town now, but once it was the wool capital of the country. This was before there was any Bend. There was a great old hay shed there in 1903, and one clapboard house. Right there where one of those restaurants is now. When you look out that back window of that hotel, why it is in the Bend of the river."

These are some of the things that Peck Amort remembers about the days in 1903 when he came to Harney County from the Willamette Valley.

This is the kind of material that we are collecting for the Harney County Library History Project. If you have a story to tell, let us know, we'd like to talk to you.

Hi, this is Pauline Braymen. The people who settled Harney County will not be forgotten. This part of the history of Harney County will not be lost, because the Harney County Pioneer Association was organized nearly sixty years ago. From two hundred to three hundred pioneers register each year for the celebration. Their names and the date they came to Harney County are kept in the Pioneer Association file. Pioneers who came here prior to 1887, were born here, or who lived here thirty years ago are eligible to register. This year those eligible to register for the first time are those who arrived in 1944. Continuous residence is not a requirement for eligibility to register. It's based on the date that you first came to Harney County.

About 1915, Jim Mahon and Julian Byrd, and Mrs. Tom Allen decided a permanent organization that would provide a record of the Harney County pioneers, the people who made the history of the county, as well as provide an occasion for old timers to get together to have a good time once a year was a worthwhile project. It seems the people in the community thought it was a good idea, but not too important. However, in 1916, due to the promoting of the self-appointed committee of three, the Harney County Pioneer Association was organized and held it's first meeting. Jim Mahon was chosen the first president. And the group resolved to meet once a year for the annual pioneer celebration.

In spite of its small beginning, the Pioneer Association became quite important in the years that follows. A few years ago Julian Byrd recalled the days when all the stores closed for the afternoon, and everyone in town came to the pioneer celebration, picnic, entertainment, and games. And there was a free movie for the kids.

The Pioneer Association was the first organization to have plans for a museum. And in

1940, a special fund was set up by the county. But, due to the loose organization of the group, plans were never carried through, and the funds were not used.

The group chose a queen mother, the oldest pioneer woman in the community, Mrs. Julia Ann Hayes, to reign over the 1917 celebration and serve until her death. Through the years the method of choosing the queen mother changed, until 1944, when they decided to select a new queen mother and president each year from the pioneers who had lived in Harney County the longest.

Ruth Cowing and Cecil Bennett are eligible for queen mother and president this year. Saturday, June 8th, a record crowd is expected to turn out for the annual Pioneer Day celebration. A celebration to keep the history of Harney County alive. Pioneers may talk of old times, and their stories may vary, but their names will not be forgotten."

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