

HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #39 - Side A

Subject: Ethel Thompson Fine

Place: Burns, Oregon

Date: May 30, 1975

Interviewer: Pauline Braymen

Release Form: Yes

Ethel Fine was honored on June 14, 1975 as Queen Mother of the annual Harney County Pioneer Day celebration. This interview was done in connection with the publicity and planning for that event.

PAULINE BRAYMEN: Can you tell me when your father came to Harney County, or why, how he happened to come here? It was, we know it was about 1878.

ETHEL FINE: Well he came here because his brother Grant Thompson was here, and he came up here to work with him, and he was just a young fellow. Dad wasn't over 20 years old then. And then he returned to Eugene, and then he came back up here, and that's when he got, and he met my mother. Her folks lived up there, east of Crane, where that Mr. King lives now. That was my grandfather's old homestead there. And that's where he met my mother. And they were married, but they were married in Eugene. And I've got the date there in the Bible, when they're married, of course that, wouldn't need that, would you?

PAULINE: No. What was your mother's name?

ETHEL: Her maiden name, you mean?

PAULINE: Uh huh. Her given name and her maiden name.

ETHEL: Her maiden name was Carrie Gray, Carrie Hannah Gray.

PAULINE: Did her parents have a stage station or the post office, or something like that?

ETHEL: Well, they were at Lawen. They had the hotel and the livery barn, and a grocery store.

PAULINE: That's what I--- someone had told me that.

ETHEL: Yeah, and that old building that is there at Lawen, the store now, is the old original store. And they just built that little room on the back there, you know, when Starr Buckland had it. But it was moved from its present location to the highway there when Buckland bought it. It was just about a mile south from where it is now.

PAULINE: Well, what was your father's name?

ETHEL: Do you want his whole name? Oren Eugene. You can spell it O R E N, or O R O N, either one. O R E N, I think, is the way he spelled it.

PAULINE: Okay. And where did the Thompson's homestead? Did they homestead in the Lawen area too?

ETHEL: My father?

PAULINE: Un huh.

ETHEL: No, that's south of Crane about eight miles, where my nephew owns now.

PAULINE: That's Nevin (Thompson).

ETHEL: Nevin, yes, uh huh. That's where all us kids grew up, out there. We didn't have very many neighbors then. The nearest neighbor was Jim Mahon over in Anderson Valley, and then down to Lawen, that was 18 or 20 miles. That's where my grandma and grandpa lived. And then over at Crane Creek where Stauffer's lived, and that's the nearest neighbors we had at that time. I used to have to go get the mail when I grew up big enough to go horseback to get the mail.

PAULINE: Did you ride horseback to get the mail?

ETHEL: Oh yes. I never did work in the house until after I come up here to school in 1910. I was always, I was oldest in the family, and that's why I had to work outside. I rode a horse practically all the time, you know, ride. Go after the cattle and do out things like that. So, it was kind of tough times. We had an old, it was coal oil, we started out with coal lights, and then we wound up with electricity out there now, you know.

PAULINE: Yeah. Well, that electricity didn't come so awfully long ago, either.

ETHEL: Oh no. No, we didn't have that, you know, when we lived there. Of course, we had the coal oil lights there, and then we finally got the gaslights and thought that was wonderful, you know.

PAULINE: Do you remember your grandparent's name that had the store at Lawen?

ETHEL: Yeah, it was P. H, just give the initials, I guess, don't you?

PAULINE: That will be fine.

ETHEL: P. H. Gray, uh huh.

PAULINE: P. H.

ETHEL: P. H. uh huh.

PAULINE: Okay, and you were born in Eugene.

ETHEL: Uh huh.

PAULINE: What is your birthday?

ETHEL: October 3rd (1893). I was ten miles out of Eugene, west on my grandfather's farm, my grandfather Thompson's farm.

PAULINE: And you were three years old when they ---

ETHEL: When we came up here to live, yes, uh huh. When we moved up here to stay.

PAULINE: And this was to ---

ETHEL: And then we, when we first moved up here, when we first moved up here to live, we lived in a tent down there on Crane Creek. Elsie Bennett owns the ranch now, but that's where my Uncle Grant lived. We lived there in a tent. And then later in years, and I don't remember the year, but we moved up to this, my grandfather, which we call his homestead there, where this King lives there at Crane now. And that's --- and from there I guess we must have went --- Dad filed on that homestead. He had his chance for all kinds of water, a place with water. But he ... took that old dry range.

But anyway, from there I guess we must have went there. I just kind of forget. A person ought to write down history as he goes along, but you forget.

PAULINE: Well then where did you go to school during your younger years?

ETHEL: In the grade school?

PAULINE: Uh huh.

ETHEL: Well I went to school down at Lawen. I started, I went to my first grade, I went to the school at Lawen. And my Aunt Ella, my father's sister, taught school there. And then, I never got to go to a nine months school until I was in the eighth grade, because my father, after he went over, in the later years, he run sheep. And he didn't raise enough feed out there, so we'd have to go down to Lawen and put up hay, or buy some hay to feed the sheep. And then that's when we went to school; us kids would go to school. Then in 1906, I believe it was, that they moved that schoolhouse up to where it is now at Lawen. It used to be three miles below, down there on what they called the Campbell place. And I finished the eighth grade there. But I went to nine months school that year. But I remember all the other years when --- then of course they had a little old school district they, out there what they called Waverly, I went out there one or two terms. And I don't remember what years that was either.

PAULINE: Can you remember anything at all about Waverly? Who lived there, or how many --- were there, how many people were around, neighbors were there then?

ETHEL: Well Haarstrichs run a hotel, you know, just a place for people to stop, a hotel there at Windy Point. And then there was a fellow by the name of Brakeman that lived down there too. And they were the earliest people that came in there, Haarstrichs and Brakemans.

PAULINE: I've heard about Brakeman, but I hadn't heard the other name.

ETHEL: Haarstrich. Well Mrs. Paul was, it was her folks, the Haarstrichs were, you know, Jim Paul's wife. The mother and father of Dorothy and Henrietta. So that's --- Well, you know, we had to walk after we got up to Lawen, we had to move the schoolhouse up to Lawen, then we had to walk through the mud and the rain and every-thing, six miles a day. If children had to walk now that far, they'd have a fit, wouldn't they?

PAULINE: They could do it if they had to.

ETHEL: Why sure they could.

PAULINE: If the parents would let them, they'd love to.

ETHEL: Well, I believe they would.

PAULINE: Yeah.

ETHEL: I believe they would.

PAULINE: Yeah. I've found this out; children are indestructible. But we parents, we think about what we don't want to do, and we won't let the kids do it either.

ETHEL: Yeah, that's right. But that was --- well I don't know what else. In my early days there, I liked to ride horse. I was a horseback most of the time. And I had a little Indian pony that I used to ride all the time. I had lots of fun on that pony.

PAULINE: An Indian paint?

ETHEL: An Indian pony.

PAULINE: Indian pony.

ETHEL: An Indian pony, just a little pony.

PAULINE: Just a little pony.

ETHEL: Yeah. She wasn't a Shetland, an Indian pony. She looked more like these little Welsh ponies. My, she could run, so I thought --- I'd run all the kids around the country there, and I thought I was awful smart. Because that little thing could really run. And I outrun them all. Till one day Mack Thompson came along with another horse, and he outrun me, so that took the puff out of me.

But it was lots of fun, you know, because we didn't have, no place much to go. On the Fourth of July we'd get all fixed up, and shined up, and go over to Rectors, Joe Rector's place. That's where Howard Miller lives now.

PAULINE: They called that Crow Camp.

ETHEL: That was Crow Camp where we had their picnics. We had a wonderful time over there, you know. My goodness, it would take quite a little while to go in a buggy over there, and then

you'd just go over there and back.

PAULINE: Well, he had quite an orchard, didn't he?

ETHEL: Yeah, he did, yeah. That was one of the things that attracted us kids a lot was those yellow transparent apples were just getting ripe sometimes around the Fourth of July. Yes, that was a beautiful place there at that time. Of course, we was out at that old dry place, and didn't have no trees or nothing, so that was wonderful to us. But it was a pretty place. But it's kind of tattered down just now.

But you see what we used to; used to have to work so hard there, and help hay, and clear sagebrush in the first place, you know, pile sagebrush. Dad would have Indians come out there and grub sagebrush, and us girls and kids would have to pile it. But anyway, he'd reward us by taking us to Eugene pretty near every fall, you know. We'd go overland to Eugene, and it would take ten days from that ranch, ten days to Eugene, to visit with our Grandma and Grandpa Thompson.

PAULINE: Did you go in a buggy or by stage?

ETHEL: No in a hack, in a buggy.

PAULINE: In a buggy.

ETHEL: And sometimes in a wagon, uh huh. See my Uncle Grant used to raise draft horses. And they'd break them and match the teams up, and then my dad would take the teams down to Eugene, and my Grandfather Thompson would sell them. So, they'd take those teams down. The last trip we made I was 14. But we just went, didn't take anything that time. We just went down there. More to get my eyes tested, so I wore glasses ever since that time. We left the town of Eugene on October 3rd, on my birthday.

PAULINE: To come home?

ETHEL: Yeah. That was the last trip we made. But my, there was about three miles in that lava bed that was just nothing but --- you just had --- we'd always walk across there, us kids. You could just see the buggy, the wagon tracks where they would kind of scuff the rock. The only way you could see that there was any way to go, any road or anything. Oh, it was three miles, and rough.

But that was, it was beautiful though in there, beautiful.

PAULINE: That probably took a good part of the day just to go that three miles.

ETHEL: Oh, it took us quite a while to get across that three miles, because it was just awful. Yes, that was quite a --- I used to be so glad when we'd get down on the McKenzie River, and see those covered bridges. They just fascinated me. And the horses' hoofs on that bridge, you know, they'd just rattle across there. They just sounded so pretty to me. But that was --- and then other times he'd take us up the Blitzen fishing, you know, and things like that. But it was kinda rough out there, but we made it.

PAULINE: Did he try to put any crops in, like rye?

ETHEL: That's all he raised was rye hay, yes. That's all, it was a dry ranch, and that's all he raised was rye. Didn't raise enough to take care of the sheep. That wasn't very good sheep hay anyway.

PAULINE: Well then did he run the sheep in the Steens in the summertime?

ETHEL: Yeah, he'd run them back in the --- he'd lamb up in Beaver Creek hills, and over towards over, he'd lamb sometimes up above the Lamb Ranch. And then in the summertime he'd go to the mountains, Steens Mountain.

... (Pause in tape)

ETHEL: ... so I'm going to have to do a little shopping in town if it don't show up by the end of next week.

PAULINE: Well let's talk about your high school. You said you came into Burns then to go to high school?

ETHEL: In 1910, I came to Burns to high school, yeah. I came here in 1910, you see. I had to work my way through school, you know. You could work for your room and board around there then. And so I worked for my room and board. And then I took music lessons from Mrs. Gault. I took voice lessons from her, and piano from Mrs. McHose.

PAULINE: Now what was the piano teacher's name again?

ETHEL: Mrs. McHose, Grace McHose.

PAULINE: Do you know how to spell it?

ETHEL: M c H O S E, I think, McHose.

PAULINE: That's a new name; I hadn't heard that one before.

ETHEL: Yeah, well lots of people not familiar with it, unless they're older people around here then. Yes, she was a piano teacher here. Mrs. Gault was a voice teacher; she was really good. We had a lot of musical things a going.

She had what she called a Treble Clef Club, and there were several members on that. And then when she gave a recital, I gave the list of that recital to Shirley, she was going to write, she was going to write up a deal to read, you know. But I gave that to her. It was kind of interesting, because I know in this one, this one deal there was a quartet, there was just all Thompson's except one. There was Floy Jameson Thompson, and Florence Winans.

PAULINE: Florence, what was her name?

ETHEL: Florence Dalton Winans, you know, I mean Thompson, Ches Dalton's wife, first wife. Then she married Winans. She's Truxton's mother. And then there was us, just Ray and me, and then Nina Wiseman, she was the alto in the trio.

PAULINE: Did you ever take part in any of the musical plays that they put on? I know they put the Mikado on one time here in Burns.

ETHEL: Yeah, uh huh, I was in there. I don't remember that name, but Mrs. Gault put on quite a deal here one time. And I think that was it, probably what you referred to, isn't it?

PAULINE: I remember Julian Byrd told me about it. He played one of the leading parts in it.

ETHEL: Yeah, uh huh. Yeah, I don't remember that, but she had lots of musical things, and I was always in it. I remember Nina Wiseman, one night at this recital singing the ... from Tales of Hoffman. I'd have to work every day, you know, after school. And then we'd practice, and there was just one place in it that I would sing off key. And oh, that ... and Nina would razz me just awful. But my goodness, when it come to the final thing, I didn't make no mistakes. But it's kind of hard to sing. But it was real nice. I just love music anyway; I just love it. Never had much

money to go ahead and do anything with it, you know.

So, in 1914, it was, when I was going to school here why, you know there was evangelists came in, Matthew and Lewis, and I become, I was converted.

And then I went to Pasadena and finished up my high school. I just went on down there. I had the opportunity to go down there, because the opportunity for a working girl was good there. They'd pay you a \$1 a day and your room and board. So that was why I went down there to school, and it was a wonderful experience for me. I was there two years, and then came on back home here. Then I went to, in the late, what was it the '20's I run the telephone office in Crane for three years, I was a telephone operator there. And then from there on, you know, it was just a general run of life. And then we --- I married Joe, and then we went to the P Ranch to live.

PAULINE: What year were you and Joe married?

ETHEL: In '32.

PAULINE: In 1932. I knew this from talking to Joe before, but I had forgotten.

ETHEL: Yeah, uh huh. In '32, December.

PAULINE: And you lived at the P Ranch for a long time.

ETHEL: Until it was sold to the government for a Malheur, for a refuge.

PAULINE: That was about 1950 ---

ETHEL: In 1935, I think. Joe --- Joe, are you asleep?

JOE: No.

ETHEL: When the government bought the P Ranch was in '35, wasn't it?

JOE: Huh?

ETHEL: The government bought the P Ranch in '35, didn't they?

JOE: Yeah, they took possession of it.

ETHEL: They bought it in '34, what ---

JOE: In '34.

ETHEL: In '34, and they took it over.

JOE: Possession in April.

ETHEL: Yeah. Then we moved to Roaring Springs and set up headquarters up there. And that's where we were until, lived there until Joe's retirement in '58.

PAULINE: In 1958, yeah I thought it was about 1958.

ETHEL: Yeah, in '58. Well of course we raised thoroughbred horses, and that was kind of a sidelight. So, I took most of the care of them when Joe wasn't around to do it, you know, to take care of them.

PAULINE: I don't imagine you really minded that too much.

ETHEL: No, I liked that because I just love horses, you know, yeah. That picture over there is one of the mares we raised. She's a handicap mare. And then we took her to California, she raised colts, and we just sold them. But it was fun, yeah. Oh yeah, it was wonderful out there; it was a beautiful place out there. And Joe built it up until it was really ---

PAULINE: Well it is a beautiful place.

ETHEL: Huh?

PAULINE: It really was a beautiful place.

ETHEL: Yeah, it really was, yes. So that was about the --- well then I guess we just wound up here in Burns. And that's about --- I don't know of anything else you want. Anything you can ask, you know, that I might be ---

PAULINE: Well, I was trying to think what we didn't cover here.

ETHEL: I'll show you a picture of my aunt that was teaching down there, and the whole list of kids that was there, if you're interested in it.

PAULINE: Oh yes.

ETHEL: I think I've got it laying in here, if I can find out where it landed. At least I think it's in here now. I think I put it back in there.

PAULINE: Here it says something about the class of 1911, Harney County School.

ETHEL: Yeah. That was when we graduated. That was here when they had that reunion, you

know, you've seen that in the paper, didn't you?

PAULINE: Oh yeah, yeah.

ETHEL: I just stick things like that in here. I thought I put that right back in here.

PAULINE: There's a list --- Barnes people.

ETHEL: That's Joe's mother, I guess. Well, it's got a picture with it. ...

PAULINE: Is this it right here? School District, Lawen School District.

ETHEL: That's it. That's my Aunt Ella.

PAULINE: Is that your picture --- oh this is your Aunt Ella.

ETHEL: Ella, that taught the school.

PAULINE: The teacher.

ETHEL: I went to school with Dick and Ormand (Ausmus) down in there, you know, down at Lawen. And Ormand, you know, he was quite, he'd have been quite an artist if he had got to going with it. He used to draw little figures, you know. And he'd chew up pine string and paper together and make a softball, and then he'd flip it up and stick it on the ceiling, you see. And the wind, it would dangle around, and us old kids would laugh. The teacher never knew what we was laughing about for a long time. She didn't get on to that. She'd see all these things dangling form the ceiling.

PAULINE: She didn't know how they got there.

ETHEL: No.

PAULINE: No, do you know what happened to his career with art?

ETHEL: No.

PAULINE: He was working for the Oregonian as a cartoonist.

ETHEL: Yeah, yeah, I remember.

PAULINE: But he got snow blinded one time.

ETHEL: Oh yeah, and his eyes were terrible.

PAULINE: And his eyes were so bad, and the doctors told him that he just simply had to give up close work. That he just could not do it. And he had to give it up.

ETHEL: He was really good.

PAULINE: He was. We've got some of his pictures, and he was ---

ETHEL: ... of course you know ...

PAULINE: School District #15, Lawen, Oregon, September 9, 1901 to May 23, 1902. Presented by Ella Thompson, teacher. The School Board was R. R. Sitz, W. J. King.

ETHEL: That's Eldon's dad.

PAULINE: Mr. Drinkwater, and J. L. Sitz was the clerk.

ETHEL: It used to have a little ribbon and tassel on.

PAULINE: And the pupils were ---

ETHEL: There is a list on there.

PAULINE: Helen Swain, Harry Buck, Frank Thompson, Ralph Catterson, Ray Clark, Mary Otley, Charlie Otley, Annie Otley, Sammie King, Mildred Hawthorne, Delbert Hayes.

ETHEL: And I don't remember the Hawthorne gal, isn't that something. Of course, I was a little thing then.

PAULINE: Peter Oard, Alpha Oard, that's A L P H A.

ETHEL: Uh huh, Alpha.

PAULINE: Alice Parker.

ETHEL: That's Presley.

PAULINE: That's Alice Presley, yeah. Albert Swain, Floy Thompson, F L O Y, now is that one of your brothers?

ETHEL: That was, that's a girl.

PAULINE: That's a girl.

ETHEL: That was Grover Jameson's wife, you know.

PAULINE: Oh.

ETHEL: First wife.

PAULINE: Ella Johnson, and Bertha Spurlock, that's Bertha Carey.

ETHEL: Bertha Carey, yes.

PAULINE: Arthur Jordan, Alice Luce, Ethel Thompson, Ed Turner, Rose Lucas, Arthur Page, Bertha Claypool, Martin Buck, Oscar Swain, Ray Catterson, Elmer Riggs, Henry Otley, Dick Otley, Dewey Turner, Willy King, Rose Brookhouse. I've never heard of Brookhouses before.

ETHEL: Well, I don't know. I can remember they used to live down in that Lawen country, where Sitz' used to live, not far from Sitz', down in there someplace.

PAULINE: Annie Brookhouse, Charlie Oard, Lizzie Parker.

ETHEL: Charlie Oard, that's the one that was Bertha Parker's husband, you know, he married Bertha.

PAULINE: Jimmie Oard, Bessie Swain, Florence Thompson, Emma Johnson, Clarence Luce, Richard Brookhouse, Bertha Parker, Lizzie Turner.

ETHEL: That was Bertha Oard, uh huh.

PAULINE: Rachel Turner, Ina Harkness, and McKinley Thompson.

ETHEL: Yeah, you see Mack Thompson and Dick Otley and I all went, was in the first grade down there together. In later years, you know, when Ormand and Dick was there, you know, they're not on that list there.

PAULINE: No. 1902.

ETHEL: It was 1902. When they had that little get together down there to Lawen the other, awhile back, a farewell for Mrs. Wilkes, I took that down there. We took Bertha Carey, and then Alice was going to go with us, but she --- when we went to church, and we went to eat our lunch before, and we just got a little late. And so, Alice thought we weren't going to make it, so she had to call Teresa Guinee and she took her down. But anyway we were there, three of the oldest ones that had been, had gone to school in that school building. So, it was --- and I took that down there, and they got quite a bang out of it. And I said if they had that many kids now, why they'd have to have three teachers probably.

PAULINE: Yeah, yeah. That was quite a class.

ETHEL: Wasn't it, 42 of them all together. That was kind of interesting. That's a lot of kids, but my we used to have a wonderful time. There was kind of a slough went around, kind of in a horseshoe, you know, in the winter. In the wintertime that thing was full of water, we used to have more water down in there than they do now. And that was the most wonderful place to skate you ever seen, just wonderful. Kids had lots of fun. Some of them rode horseback, and most of them walked.

PAULINE: I've heard, a lot of people have told me about skating to school.

ETHEL: Uh huh, oh yes, it was wonderful. Recess and noon, why we'd eat, at noon we'd just eat and grab our skates and away we'd go. It was lots of fun. I remember when I was in the first grade my Aunt Ella stayed with her brother, Grant Thompson, down there on that place now where Dan Opie has, Don Opie has. And she rode horseback, and I rode behind her, I can remember that. But Alice Presley has a picture of that Lawen School, and I had it at one time, but I lost all my pictures at one time. And I wouldn't have taken anything for that picture. But Alice has it, and it shows all of them. I wasn't very big. So --- it's been a long time.

PAULINE: Well, what are some of the clubs or organizations, or your church affiliation, this kind of thing, that you would like to have told about?

ETHEL: Well just the Nazarene Church.

PAULINE: You are a member of the Nazarene Church. Did you ever belong to the Cow Belles or ---

ETHEL: Yeah, I belonged to the Cow Belles, uh huh. I let my dues pass, go by, until the last number of years. I'm not a member now, I guess, but I've kept up my dues. Yeah, I was a member of the Cow Belles. That's about all, you know, because we didn't live here where I could be in anything.

PAULINE: Yeah. No, you were kind of limited out there in social activities.

ETHEL: Socially, it was limited to anything out there. We was strictly out there on the ranch, and that was it. You just --- I went with Joe all the time, you know, practically. But there was nothing

much, not much social activity out there, you know. And only when you come to town here, so I was just kind of eliminated from anything like that, you know. The life we were living, you know, I mean just regular --- He was general manager there, and I was just a housewife, you know, and I just went along with him. So ---

PAULINE: Don't ever say "just" a housewife.

ETHEL: No, that's right. They never want to say that! But anyway, that's just the way it was. When I was in school there, we were working so hard, and all the activities I had was what was in the school. But any activities around here, and the social activities, why in Burns I haven't never --- been, taken any interest in those because of --- And since I came to town, well then I never did --- Well I did belong to the Library Club at one time. But I just ---

PAULINE: Well, the Library Club isn't anymore.

ETHEL: No, huh uh, I know it isn't. But I did at one time. So that's about all. It's not much activity, for a social activity, really.

PAULINE: Well, that give a ---

ETHEL: Of course, that's all the social activity we ever did out there was taking care of the --- Is that on now?

PAULINE: Yeah.

ETHEL: I was going to say that the people, the owners that came from back east, the Eastern Oregon Livestock Company was a part of --- it wasn't Swift and Company, but it was F. Swift. So we'd just have to entertain them when they'd come to the ranch, and take care of them that way. That's about as far as the social activity went, was seeing that everybody was taken care of that came there. So that was a part of my job, you see. Of course, I used to help Joe, of course, make out all the time and stuff like that. Of course, you don't need to have to put that in.

PAULINE: Well --- Well I think we've pretty well covered every-thing, unless you can think of something else special that you wanted to tell about.

ETHEL: Well, I can't think of --- I don't know of anything, Pauline. Unless you can think of

anything to ask me. I don't know.

PAULINE: Well, when I get to writing this up, if I think of anything more why I'll ---

ETHEL: Yeah, you can call me up.

PAULINE: I'll call you up.

ETHEL: I don't know if you can get very much interesting stuff out of that or not?

PAULINE: Yeah, I have a lot of interesting stuff out of that.

(END OF TAPE)

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