

HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #402 - Sides A/B

Subject: Raymond Olsen - Catlow Valley Homestead Stories

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Place: Portland, Oregon

Interviewer: Alice Olsen (Daughter)

RAYMOND OLSEN: I came out to Oregon in the early days, a long time ago when I was just a young boy at the time. Came out, I was 4 years old. And we had come from Chicago on the train, and we came to the end of the train line at that time, which was at Redmond, Oregon. Of course the train also went into Portland, but we didn't go there, because we were looking for homesteading. My parents were looking for homesteading. So we came to Redmond, which was the end of the line.

And the homestead properties that we were interested in, my parents were interested in, were over in the Steens Mountain country. And the Steens Mountain country, particularly in Catlow Valley, which was 85 miles south of Burns. But in those days it was so wild, and the roads were so poor, that about all you could do was go over to Burns, and then that wouldn't get you where you wanted to be.

So we hired a guide at Redmond, and Dad and Mother packed all their things in a big covered wagon. And we had four horses, including the covered wagon. We had a light buggy with a team of horses, and some riding horses. And we head out across the desert with this guide. We had the guide because he knew where the water holes were. And we weren't following any road; we just took out across the sagebrush and the boulders, and in a straight southeast direction.

We were on this trek for two weeks, and we'd drive, and we'd have the water

barrels full for the horses, and for our own use. And then we'd camp out, and then we'd get to the next water hole and we'd fill up again with water, and then we'd drive some more across the open country, down in the canyons, and up over the ridges. And finally after the end of two weeks we came over the top of a big plateau. And looking down over the plateau, here was this big valley laying out in front of us. And out to the left we saw the Steens Mountains, the slopes of the Steens Mountain, and way over to the right we saw the slopes of the Warner Mountains. And in between is this big valley about 30 miles across, and probably 50 miles long, and that was where we went to homestead.

Well the water hole we found, the first one there, was really in bad shape. Because it was a water hole, in the sense that it was just a plain hole, a hole in the ground, with steep sloping sides. And of course all the animals, and the wild animals, and everybody, livestock, what there was, wild horses and such would come down there to drink water. And along with it, when you got down a little closer to the bottom, why it dropped off a little steeper. And so there would be rabbits, and snakes, and bugs, and rats and whatnot that had fallen in and couldn't get back out. The water was pretty badly polluted. But the animals could drink it without any problem. Well we had to drink it too, because it was all the water we had.

And so what we did was take some great big 5-gallon oilcans --- Incidentally in those days if you wanted kerosene or something like that, they came in big 5-gallon cans. And we'd cut the tops out of those and take a wire bale for it, and that was our bucket. Take these 5 gallon cans filled with that dirty, terrible water, and put it over the fire and boil it until we killed all the germs, and then we'd take a piece of cloth and drain the water through that and get all the debris and stuff out, and then it was safe to drink. It was really stinky water.

Well then we went out, the man took us, the guide took his horses and his wagon

back and just kind of left us out there in the open with supplies, food, the barrels of food, and beans and stuff like that. We finally located a spot that we wanted to claim as a homestead, and that happened to be 3 miles from this water hole. So we took our supplies and dumped them off there.

And then every day the boys would, my brothers, I had two brothers, brother Earl and brother Austin, and they would take a 5 gallon bucket in each hand, and they would walk over to this water hole, which was 3 miles, they'd fill the buckets and then they'd walk back to where we were. And it was a daily chore. And, you know, we had to be very saving on water in those circumstances. Well anyway, this country was full of wildlife when we moved in there. I can remember there was just, well there were rabbits everywhere, jackrabbits and cottontails. And there were squirrels, and there were horn toads, and beetles, and just all kinds of --- lizards, all kinds of wildlife. And in the evening when we sat around the campfire and things got dark, and the day cooled off, why we would sit there, around the campfire, and the coyotes were quite curious about these people that are sitting around this camp-fire. They'd come around, and there were lots of coyotes, because there was lots of game to eat, lots of things for them to live off of. And they would start howling, and yelling, and yelping, and all going through their routine.

And as a young boy I was curious too about these wild dogs, you know, making all this noise, and so I would imitate them. And I got to where I could imitate those coyotes real good. And so when they'd start howling I'd howl back. And the first thing you would know we'd have a real chatter going on between the coyotes and myself.

Well later on, several years later actually, when we left the Steens Mountain country and were living in Portland, went up to the zoo one day. And they had some coyotes there in the zoo, and they were both --- they had a pair of coyotes, two of them, they were both there, laying there, snoozing on their paws and having a good quiet time.

There was lots of people gathering around to watch the animals, as there always is. And I saw the coyotes laying there, and I kind of thought it would be fun if I could wake them up. So I gave them the old chitchat that I had learned back in the days, and they got right up on their hind legs and they started looking around, and they starting howling and yakking back at me. I really had them going there. And all the people all around, they were going too, they wondered about me talking to the coyotes. So that was kind of fun. (Laughter)

But going back to the --- I can remember going back to the, living out there on the homestead. We had a, I had, when I started to school I had a 3 mile walk from where we lived to where the schoolhouse was. And in those days there was so many rabbits that they would just clean up your crop. You'd plant a crop of grain or something, you know, for hay, and the grain would come up and look real good, and then the first thing you know, it would get growing real good, and then you'd look around all the perimeter and it would be all chewed off because the rabbits would come in out of the brush at night and they would sit around there and they would just have a good feast, on this nice green. So people had to get rid of them, the homesteaders there, all petitioned.

The county decided that they would give you 5 cents for the bounty for catching a jackrabbit. So all you had to do was go out and catch a jackrabbit and cut his ears off, trim his ears off and down the piece, ... the whole ears together, see. Scalp them that way. And then you'd save those and you'd get 5 cents for them. And of course a nickel in those days was pretty good. Of course the people made a dollar a day they thought they were rich. So if you got a nickel for every jackrabbit, that was pretty good.

Well on the way to school I set a snare line, and a snare is just a piece of wire, thin wire, with a loop in it and you would fasten that to a brush along the trail where you could see the rabbits had been running. So I had a snare line that I attended on the way to school. I'd catch the rabbits and scalp them, and then on the way back home well I'd

check the line again. So I would check the line, you know, twice a day, once going to school, and once coming back from school. And we'd take the snares and re-set them in such a way that the rabbits coming through there would get caught. And then we'd take the rabbit ears and put them on a string, on a wire, string them on a string of wire; we'd have \$2.50 worth of rabbit ears on a loop of wire. We'd save those up, and then about once, about every three weeks or so, maybe once a month, we'd go down to the local store, which was 9 miles out into the desert, and we'd take these rabbit ears along with us. And when we went in we'd buy the bacon, and the prunes, and salt, and flour, and all those things, beans and stuff, and ammunition, because you had to have ammunition for your gun. And then when the bill was presented we'd just throw a whole bunch of those rabbit ears on the counter and the guy would count them up, and that's what we used for money, a good part of it.

In addition to paying a bounty for jackrabbit ears, the county also paid a bounty for catching predators, bobcats, badgers, coyotes. And so by the time I got to be about 8 years old, I might have been somewhere between 8 or 9, or in that area, I started setting out traps for the coyotes and bobcats. And I had a place about two miles from the homestead; it was up along the rim rocks. And the rim rocks, if you are acquainted with them they sort of, it's a plateau, a flat plateau and then it breaks off with the rocks, and the boulders kind of come down on the slope, see. So along this area, along the plateau up there among the boulders and all was a good place to catch coyotes and bobcats, and I had my traps up there.

So, you could hear the coyotes at night. And I was negligent, I guess, because I didn't always go up and check my traps. But after a period of about 3 weeks I decided I better go up and get the traps. I hadn't done anything, I went up there. I marked the traps; find the location of the traps. I had taken sagebrush and pulled it up, and then I

would stand it upside down on top of the sagebrush that, where the trap was anchored. So you would have the stub of the sagebrush sticking up in the air, and that would mark a location where your trap was supposed to be.

So I'd follow that up, and I found a dead coyote in there. Been there for too long, he'd died. I went over to the next trap and it hadn't been sprung. And then I went up to one higher up in the rocks, and I couldn't locate it right at first. There was something, the wind or something had kind of blown the sagebrush over so it wasn't quite visible. And as I walked up the slope, up this boulders, up along the boulders there, up along the slope trying to find the location of the trap I saw a sagebrush up there, and I saw the back of a jackrabbit, it was sitting under the brush. And he was sitting there humped up, and I all I could see was this, the round part of his back. And I thought wow, I bet I could take a rock and I could probably hit him, I bet I could hit him. So I reached down to get me a rock, and in the process I made a little noise, you know, scrambling around trying to get this rock. And then when I got ready to heave it at him why the jackrabbit didn't turn out to be a jackrabbit, it turned out, I saw a pair of green eyes and some teeth shining at me, and it was the head of a big bobcat!

Well I didn't throw the rock, and turned around and went back down the slopes quietly and quickly as I could and got on my horse. But I didn't have a gun with me, and I thought well I got to go home and get the gun. So I rode home to the ranch as quickly as I could and picked up my .22. And the one I had was a little single shot .22. It's one where you take a shot and then you open it up and pull the shell out and then you put another one in, see. And the shot that I had was a .22 short, which is one of the smallest ones that there is. But I used this gun to shoot rabbits, and to shoot squirrels. I got the, you go out and shoot these ground squirrels, and I was a good shot. I could stand off to the back and I could shoot them through the eye every time. I just really laid it in there just where I

wanted it.

So anyway, this is the gun I had, and I came back. And then instead of going up the way I had been, I turned around and went the other side of the plateau and got up on top so I'd have a better vision of what was going on. Parked my horse, and I looked around, and then I could see the sagebrush that had been bent over, the one that, the mark, the spot, see. So I got off the horse and then I very quietly edged my way over there. When I got within the distance there where I thought the critter might get frightened, then I got down on my belly and I crawled like an Indian. And I managed to stay behind the brush so that it would; I would be concealed from the animal, from the cat.

Finally I got within probably about 30 yards of the cat. And then I could see through the sagebrush, I could see the cat, and he was looking my way. And I know that he realized there was something out there, and he was getting a little bit restless. He hadn't done anything; he was just beginning to show signs of a little bit of nervousness. And I thought well this is close enough. So I took an aim with my little single shotgun, and I was aiming right for the middle of his forehead, right there, right between his eyes. And I pulled the trigger, and he just --- went down like that, killed him instantly. Because that's where the bullet hit him, right there, that's where I was shooting him.

And when I got the cat it was one of the biggest ones I'd seen. And I found out that he had been caught by his back foot, hind foot, and three of the main claws had been worn off, and all

--- the only thing that was holding him was the little tendon off of the last, last toe. And if he had given one hard push he'd have been free. So I took him out of the trap --- he was a beautiful cat.

And I got my horse over there and he didn't like it at all. He'd snort and he'd look at

it, and sniff, and snort, and back away. And he didn't want anything to do with that cat. I had a heck of a time, you know, trying to tell him the cat was dead. I'd rub my hand on the cat, and then hold it up to his nose so he could smell it. Finally I persuaded him to let me put the cat over his back, in the back of my saddle, and then we rode back to the homestead.

My brother had been out working, and he wasn't there. My mother was home. But he, brother was out working, out there some-place digging post holes or something. And so when I got home I thought I'd play a trick on him. And I went to his bedroom and I laid the cat there on the floor, right by his bed in such a way that the cat was looking up. (Laughter) And when he came in he was really quite shocked to see this cat.

Anyway we skinned him out, we skinned the cat out, and we found out that he was five feet from the tip of his nose to the tip of his hind feet when he was stretched out. And he was a beautiful thing. His fur was prime, because it was --- it was in mid November that I had caught him. And his winter fur was just real fine.

Well anyway I took these furs that I had, I had some coyote furs, and I had this bobcat fur, and we took it into Burns at one time and we got our bounty, and then I sold the furs. And I think I got a whole \$4.50 for my furs.

And in the meantime, from time to time, I'd look at the --- about the only thing we had to read down there was the Montgomery Ward catalog. And in the Montgomery Ward catalog I found a picture of a violin. And, well don't ask me why a violin appealed to me, but it was just something that I thought would be kind of fun to have. So I sent in an order, I took my \$4.50 and I sent it in and got this violin. And the violin was one made in Japan, and it had a case, and it had a bow, and a tuning fork, and instruction so that you could put the notes, glue them right on the violin where they were supposed to be. And then it gave you some instruction on how to do it.

So I started practicing on the violin, and I thought that was just a lot of fun. And we'd, once in awhile, about every six weeks or so the homesteaders would get together at the schoolhouse and have a potluck. And then after the potluck of course they would try to stir up some music of some kind so they could dance, see. And we had a man there by the name of Dewey Robinson and he was pretty good at free handing it on the piano. He didn't play by notes, he just played by ear, but he could play some of the old songs there. So I learned the melody, and then when I got home I'd practice it. Pretty soon I got so I could play that waltz that he used to play, see.

So the next time we went to the potluck I brought my violin along and Dewey and I, we played for the dance, and we had more fun. And people in those days they would --- after they would start dancing, you know, they would dance all night. See they had been working before they went to the potluck; they'd work all day. They'd come to the potluck and they'd eat their meal and have a good time, and then they'd dance until midnight or 1 o'clock. And then they'd sit down and have some more potluck, and then they'd go ahead and they'd dance the rest of the night until about 5 o'clock in the morning, and then they'd pack up and go home and go to work. So --- but anyway that's the story about the violin, and I still have it actually. The darn thing has been sitting around in my closet for 65 years or more. Actually, for more than that, about 70 years, because I'm 79 now. I couldn't have been over 8 or 9 years old when I bought that violin. See what it sounds like.

... (Plays the violin)

Doesn't sound too good! (Laughter) Now that is the song that I learned to play, one of the first ones I learned to play, and I used to play at the potlucks with Dewey Robinson. (Laughter) And we had more fun doing that on this old violin.

... (Plays violin)

Or something like that. Of course the first thing that we had to do, can't have the boys going for water in 5 gallon cans every day. First thing we had to do was to dig a well. And Dad was a real perfectionist-type fellow, and so he started digging a well by hand. And he started out with a hole, in a six feet, in diameter. And as he progressed down into the well, he --- we had a windlass up on top with a rope wrapped around it, and you would have to turn the handle to make the rope wrap up on there, and it would lift the bucket of dirt out, and somebody up above would have to do that. And then they'd empty the bucket, and then move it on back down. And also he, he had a safety rope. In those days, if the rope broke and you didn't have any other way to get out, you had to have a safety rope so you could climb out of the hole. And some people got caught in digging their wells, and the rope broke, and they didn't have any way to get out. So everybody that dug a well had a safety rope in addition to the one that was moving all the earth. So Dad had this safety rope hanging down there, and right in the center. And what he'd do, he'd miss, he had really a plumb line. And so as he progressed down the hole why he stayed a certain distance from this plumb line, and dug in a circle, he would dig in the circle, the hole in the circle. And as he went down, of course, the hole got a little bit smaller. It wasn't --- it started out six feet to start with, but as he progressed down, down, he got deeper in the hole, well then the hole got just a little tiny bit smaller, a little bit tiny, and smaller. And finally by the time he got down to the, about the 110 foot level it hit water. And he was working in water, standing in water, and working in water. By that time the hole had narrowed down to 3 feet in diameter.

So he continued to work, and finally we were bailing out water as well as dirt, you know, so that he could continue to dig. And he did dig some more. He finally got down to the 114-foot level, and that was enough. And then when he, when he got back up, and he built a deck on it so he could stand there to haul water and stuff. Why you could look

down that well, and it was just like looking down a gun barrel, it was so perfect, so perfectly round and tapered all the way down that it was just a thing, really a beautiful thing.

Well anyway, we got water, but we still didn't have a house to live in, because there was no lumber there, no building materials. You had to go 85 miles to Burns in a wagon to get your lumber and haul it back. Well somehow we didn't get around to that. So we had a tent, we had a tent that was about 10 x 14, a wall tent. Had about a four and a half foot wall on the side, and then it went up to a point. And in this tent we had a little cooking stove, just a little --- well it wasn't really like a kitchen stove, it was just a little stove about 24 inches long, and about 12 inches wide, and it stood up about 30 inches. And at the bottom, underneath the cooking, underneath the fire chamber there was a little box like thing in there that you could bake biscuits and bread in. And then two plates on top was for cooking, heating things, and frying things, and heating water for the Saturday night bath. (Laughter) So anyway that's all we had in the way of heat, and for cooking.

And my brother Austin, one of his jobs was to go out and get big sagebrush and trim the tops off and bring in the better part of the sagebrush and chop that up, use that for wood, to fire the stove with. And so that was quite a chore in itself. In the wintertime, however, it got pretty cold there. There were times when the thing would get down there probably around zero, or maybe ten below zero on a real severe night. And we were all living in this tent. We had in the one end of the tent we had some so called beds. They were just wooden affairs with planks underneath, and a bunch of straw on top of the planks, and then of course a piece of canvas on top of the straw, and then the bedding on top of that. And that was our bed. And of course in cold weather it was nice to huddle all together and share the heat. So we did, we all slept pretty much together in this bed on the end of the tent.

And at night when it would snow, if we were having a snowstorm, we had to watch out so the tent didn't get too heavy and burst. And Dad would get up in the night when it was snowing, and he would take a broom and push up on the tent and work it back and forth to get the snow to fall off, see. And sometimes, if it was real cold, he would wake up in the morning and he'd find that his mustache was all frozen, all full of frost and icy because it was so cold his breath would freeze on the mustache. So it was kind of rugged living, but we seemed to all survive.

We --- during the period there, we had, we spent two summers and a winter in that tent before we got, where we built a wooden house. During that time we were in the, we were out there in the snow, and we were out there in the open, and living pretty rugged lives, but nobody had a cold, nobody got sick. There were no germs to pass around, and we really were the healthiest, probably the healthiest at that time that we've ever been in our life because there was nobody there to contaminate the air and to give us bugs and stuff. So that was kind of interesting. Because it was rugged, we were cold, and sometimes wet, but none of us ever got sick.

Well in those days we didn't have automobiles and stuff like that to run around in, so we had people, if they wanted to go someplace they had a wagon with a team of horses, or they had a buggy with some horses, or they rode horseback, and they were long distances to travel. For instance we had, if we wanted to go to the store, it was 9 miles to the store, and 9 miles back, so that's an 18 mile trip by horse and wagon. That takes a little time to do that.

So it was just a code of the west in those days, and the west was that way, anybody came around at your place, anybody --- didn't matter whether you knew them or not, they could be perfect strangers, but they were welcome to sit down and have a meal. They just, it was just customary. And so also they, I don't know, people seemed to trust

each other more in those days, and they didn't bother to close up their tents or doors or anything. If you weren't home, if you had a cabin and you weren't home, and somebody came to your cabin and you weren't there, they were privileged to go in and help themselves and cook a meal and make themselves at home. Nobody thought any worse of it.

So anyway we had a, we didn't have too much to get by on, but we did have a few chickens, and one of them was a young rooster. And he liked to play around the horses, and scratch around the horses, where the horses were. And so one day he made a mistake and he got where the horse stepped on his leg, and you can imagine what happened to the little chicken's leg when the horse steps on it. It broke of course. Well the best we could do was to take and try to straighten it out and wrap it up with some cloth and try to keep it from, you know, falling all apart. And so he got along with that pretty good, and he learned to walk, pretty much, on one leg and he'd drag the other one. He'd kind of limp, and limp around, you know. And we kind of, it was kind of funny in a way to watch him go. And we thought, well we called him "Hinkey Dink". (Laughter) I don't know why we called him "Hinkey Dink", but it was kind of, we thought it was appropriate. And so old "Hinkey Dink" he grew up and got to be a pretty good-sized rooster. Oh, probably maybe by the time we got ready to butcher him why he was probably about a two and a half pound, or maybe three pound, but you know, not a huge bird.

So it was Sunday, and we decided to have chicken dinner. Well old "Hinkey Dink" he was butchered and we cooked him. And about 5 o'clock in the afternoon we was going to get ready and sit down and have our dinner. And low and behold here come some people to visit us, and there were four of them. And three of us, so that's seven people to share a little chicken. (Laughter) But western hospitality, sit down and we'll just share with you, and that's what we did. And the people that were kind of embarrassed,

they came there and they saw that we just had this one little chicken and so they were, you know, "Oh well we're not really very hungry." "Well, oh you sit down and have something to eat, you must eat with us." "Okay." So this one woman she says, "I'll have the neck." And my mother says, "Oh you must want more than that." "Oh no, I love neck, just love neck, and that's just what I want, the neck." So she ate neck. And somebody else decided they wanted a wing, so that person got a wing. And somehow, tiny portions for each person, we managed to spread "Hinkey Dink" around for seven people. (Laughter) So, but that was a story about "Hinkey Dink".

You know in those days when you wanted a horse, there were herds of wild horses running around in the mountains there, and in the rim rocks. And so if you wanted a horse you would go out and you'd drive this horse into a corral. A corral is just a big enclosure. And the horse would get in there, and you'd lock it up, and there he was. And then you would proceed to sort of tame him, and break him to ride, and make a good workhorse out of him, or a riding horse. Well we had one horse, one mustang; all of these horses were mustangs, wild mustangs roaming around. And so we had a mustang that was a nice riding horse, and he was just coal black, and we called him Blackie. He wasn't a very big horse, but he was real quick on his feet, and he was a good saddle horse. And whenever you wanted to go out and drive some horses, go get a herd of horses and drive them off someplace, you know, maybe try to drive them down a box canyon, or take them down to a corral or someplace like that, old Blackie he knew just exactly what to do. And he knew how to head them off, and he knew just what we wanted, and what the rider wanted. And it didn't matter where you were riding, whether it was full of boulders, or high sagebrush, or badger holes, or whatnot, all the hazards that a horse has when he is out in the open. But Blackie would go just like a streak of lightening over the boulders and around the brush, and over the gopher holes, and he was just as sure footed as an

antelope. He was a wonderful horse.

But you take a horse raised out in Tennessee or someplace like that, raised for racing purposes, they'd break their leg the first thing out in that kind of terrain. So we really, we really had good horses, and they were the wild mustangs.

In those days we hadn't gotten any beef stock, we hadn't gotten any cattle or cows or anything like that. All we had was some chickens, and we had a pig. And as a result why our diet was just pretty much limited. We'd go to the store and we'd buy beans and dried prunes, or dried apples. And for shortening why we'd get pails of Silver Leaf Lard, Swift put out a 5 pound bucket of what they called Silver Leaf Lard, it was a nice quality lard. We had that for shortening, and of course we had coffee, and we had beans and spices and things like that.

And then to supplement that why we ate rabbits. And most of the jackrabbits, the population had been decimated somewhat, but there were lots of these little ground rabbits and cottontails, and those were the best to eat anyway. So I would go out and hunt those and bring home some nice rabbits, and we would have rabbit stew. Mother really knew how to cook a good rabbit stew. So we supplemented our beans and our other stuff with rabbits.

And we had, Mother made homemade bread, of course, because there were no bakeries around, so if you wanted some bread you better make it yourself. And she made good bread, and sometimes she'd make some biscuits. I always used to enjoy a nice slice of fresh warm homemade bread, and I'd put Silver Leaf Lard on it, because we didn't have butter, and sprinkle it with pepper and salt and it was delicious. And I could eat some today and enjoy it just as much, I think. (Laughter)

And we had to go to the store, a long ways, to get our groceries. And we'd go down there maybe once every three weeks, or sometimes maybe a month between trips.

And the fellow that delivered the groceries to the, delivered the things to the store, he came from Burns and that was a trip of 85 miles by horse and wagon. And the only reason he did that, I guess, was not so much to get the freight of the groceries that he brought, but he had a contract with the government to deliver, to haul mail.

And so one time he got in a dispute or something with the government and they wouldn't pay him, or something, for some reason he quit hauling mail. In fact he didn't haul the groceries, he didn't haul anything. And so for a period of about, well almost two months he never delivered anything to the store, and the store ran out of everything, of course. And we were, probably we were, probably run out of stuff too, because we wouldn't go to ---

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RAYMOND OLSEN: --- because we wouldn't go to the store unless we were getting pretty short. But when we got to the store there wasn't anything there, the guy had stole all his stuff, we didn't have any groceries. And this was in the month of June. And we had planted some potatoes in our garden, that was the main stay of our vegetables. We planted potatoes, and had some, and planted some lettuce, and some other, radishes, and stuff like that. But the potatoes, of course, were in bloom, and when they're in bloom that means the little tubers are being formed. It doesn't mean that they are developed; it means that they are being formed. Well we were out of everything. We didn't have any ammunition, we couldn't shoot anything, and there was, the cupboard was just plain bare. There wasn't any cornstarch, there wasn't any flour, there wasn't any beans. There was a little salt, but not very much of that. We were just plain out of everything, no lard, no nothing. So as the last resort we just had to go out and start digging these potatoes. And they weren't very big, they may be the size of a, the biggest ones probably would be the

size of a chicken egg, and then they'd be small. And we'd go out and we'd dig these potatoes. So we had boiled potatoes for breakfast, and then we'd have boiled potatoes for lunch, and then we'd have boiled potatoes for dinner. And pretty soon the salt ran out, so all we had was potatoes and water.

Well this went on for three weeks, and we got so sick and tired of potatoes, but there was nothing else to eat. So believe me, when things did open up we were real happy to get something. We had a, we had a woman that used to --- she lived over in the Warner Mountains which was probably about, well 35, 40 miles from where we lived. And she had, what she did for a living, she was a single woman, she had a horse and she had some pack mules. And she would go out over the mountains where the sheep were, and she would pluck the wool from the dead sheep. Because the people that had the sheep, they didn't give a hoot about the wool off of the dead sheep. And she would go and dig all the wool off of the old dead sheep and pack it up, and then she'd take it around and sell it, ship it on down to where she could sell the wool. And that's the way she made her living.

When she heard about the plight in Catlow Valley, so what did she do, she got her pack horse and she got a beef, a whole beef, put it on pack mules and came into the valley, and she came to see the Olsen's, and she gave them a hind quarter of beef. And boy, did that taste good after all those weeks with potatoes and water. And then shortly after that why then the mailman got back on the job and the groceries were brought in and everything was hunky-dory. (Laughter)

Well, I don't know, there is not a great deal to tell about the school, except it was a one room school with all the grades in it, and one teacher. And I think the most students we had at any time was about 11, 10 or 11. And, well it was a good school, it had one big room, and they had a big stove in one end of the room, a big wood stove. And it was

surrounded by a sheet metal thing, and I mean it wasn't close to the stove; it was probably 2 feet of air space all around between the stove and the sheet metal, the circling sheet metal. And the reason for putting the sheet metal up that way was to cause the heat to go up, and the cold air to come under the sheet metal to give you circulation, and it seemed to work real good, it actually did. It just gathered, the sheet metal gathered the heat, and the heat went up of course, and then there was a space about 18 inches open below and the cold air would come in and hit the wood stove again, and so you had circulation, see. And that worked pretty good.

But gradually the people moved out of the country during the war, World War I, a lot of people left, left their homesteads and went out to work in defense, and some of them went to war.

So by the time I got in the 7th and 8th grade there was only three of us in school, myself and a boy and his sister, the three of us. So we really got some close attention, something you don't get today. We had individual instruction practically. And she was a good teacher.

Well after I graduated from grade school, and I was 13 years old then when I graduated, and so it was time for me to get out and go to work. And I finally got lined up with a haying job way out in the Blitzen Valley. And the Blitzen Valley is a big area, if any of you have ever been over there you know that it is miles long, and miles wide, and flat. And we used to cut the tule hay and the tule grass, it was all wild stuff, it wasn't planted. And that was cut and stacked and fed to the livestock during the winter.

So I got a job there, and I was doing a man's work, and getting a man's pay, my board and room and --- This job called for, my part of it called for getting up at 4 o'clock in the morning, getting on my horse, and riding out and bringing in a flock of horses from the outside. And some of them had been worked a year ago, but they had been wild for

several months. So essentially they were all pretty wild. And we would run them into a big corral, and you'd have maybe 20 or 30 horses in there in a big corral, and there would be a big post right in the center. And you'd go in there with your lasso and rope one of them, and wrap your line around the post and hold him, see, until you got him calmed down enough so you could get him out, and lead him out. So that's the way you did.

Well I had, after I had gotten my part of the job done, getting the horses in the corral, then I had to catch a couple of horses and bring them out where I could put the harness on them. And these fellows were real tricky. You stand off and you try to hold a whole set of harness and toss it over their back, and then they'd jump and the harness would fall down, and you'd pick it up and try it all over again.

And besides it was difficult to put the harness on, because we had to cover the horse and the harness with a big wool bag. And the wool bag is just a huge gunnysack, you might say, with one side cut out so it drapes over the horse like a blanket. And then you had another gunnysack that you had to put over their head. It had eyes cut in it so the horse could see. And the reason you had, put that blanket on, and put the hood over their head, is because when they got out into the tule lands there where they were cutting this wild hay, it was kind of wet and marshy, and there were horse flies out there, big horse flies that would sting them. And it would just drive them nuts unless you had them covered up, protected. So you had to have that on there, and that plus the harness on a horse that is tricky, really got to be a problem. Well everybody had the same problem because they had to do their horses the same way.

And they had, if I remember correctly, they had about ten mowing machines, old fashioned mowing machines with the sickle bars out to the side, and the tongue and two horses up in front. And they, when they got ready to hook the horses up, they'd have them there where they were tied down, and the blinds over them, and somebody would

come along and gently move the mowing machine up, and the tongue in between the horses, and hook them up. And then when they were all hooked up, the guy would get back in his driver's seat with the reins and the people up in front would take the hoods off and turn the horses loose. And they'd, "whoom" they'd go right down the field. Ten minutes later here comes back the mowing machine all busted up and broken. Out comes another mowing machine. (Laughter) And they had a man, some people working in the blacksmith shop, and that's all they did was just repair the tongues, and the mowing machines, and straighten out the blades. And so for the first two or three days this would take place. And then finally after that much work and all, the horses would behave themselves and they wouldn't break up the equipment. But they would.

And some of the horses when they'd get going, if they haven't broken the machines, they would pull so energetically and they would hold against the reins and the machine and everything else, and they would just come in with a white lather all over, they would just be absolutely lathered from sweat and perspiration. And the field that they were cutting was so long it would take them a half a day to get where they were going, and then they would turn around and take them the rest of the half a day to get back, it was that long.

They had a cook there that really knew how to turn it out. We had the best of everything you could think about. Steaks, and bacon, and eggs, and ham, and pancakes, and biscuits, and pie, and homemade bread, and everything you could think of. It was all, lots of milk, and cream, and butter, just everything you could think of. And nice desserts, and the dinner, you know, the cook would have pies and cakes and stuff baked. Just everything you wanted to eat, it was great, especially for a growing boy.

And then after dinner I would get out and I'd wrestle with the men. There was some men, there was some young fellows that I guess they kind of took a liking to me or

something, and we'd get out there and wrestle. And we squaw wrestled, and we did all kinds of wrestling, really had a great time. (Laughter) But that's the way I spent my summer.

One day I got sick, I guess I got the summer flu, and I felt terrible. And there was no place, nobody to take care of you, and so I just stretched a blanket out on the bunkhouse floor and I'd lay there and try to recover. And once in awhile I'd get somebody to bring me some water to drink, and I was just feeling really rocky and bad, I just had to lay down. And then the cowboys around there, those fellows that were working there in the bunkhouse they thought they'd get funny and they'd tell me something that they shouldn't, you see. They said, "Well now if you have a bad cold there is only one way to cure it." And they say, "You take a whole cup of kerosene, take a whole cup of kerosene and you drink it down and that will cure your cold." So being a kid, and being naive enough to think that, you know, they were telling me the truth, these older men, you know, I figured they knew what they were talking about. So I got a cup of kerosene and I drank it down. And I don't know how I survived, but I did. I don't think it cured my cold at all. (Laughter)

After I had finished working the first summer out, then it was time to move to Burns and I entered high school, so I was in high school. And then the following year then I wanted to go out and work again in the fields. And then I got into a deal, it wasn't that good at all. But it was out in this same general area, and we were doing the same thing, we were cutting wild hay and wild tule grass, and stuff like that, except it was close to a place they called Wright's Point. Now Wright's Point, you can see it from Burns, if you look south you can see Wright's Point, it just kind of extends in a long line. It's just a big long plateau, and it drops off quite sharply on both sides, and it comes out to a point. Maybe the thing is, the point probably is at least three miles long. So it is a long narrow

point of land, and you have to climb, come up over it, it's quite a climb to get up to the top, and then it's quite a climb going back down.

We were on the other side of Wright's Point, and Wright's Point is famous for rattlesnakes, all the rattlesnake dens back up in there in the boulders. And rattlesnakes would come down into the fields. Well we were harvesting down in this field. So, and we were living in real primitive conditions, we didn't have a bunkhouse to sleep in, we just slept in a tent. And we didn't have a very good cook outfit either because the cook was in a wagon, you had a cook wagon. You had to go into the wagon and sit down to eat your meal. And they did all the cooking in the wagon, see.

And of course the snakes would come down, and sometimes you would see them right out in the open there. And when we were sleeping on the ground at night, on just some straw or something, you'd be sleeping on that in an open tent, and you had to be real careful when you woke up to look about and make sure there wasn't a snake sleeping with you.

And when you were working in the field you had a similar problem, not as bad, because you were awake and you could see what you were doing. But they would take these big, what we called buck rakes, and a buck rake is a big wooden rake, has big prongs out in the front. Well the prongs are just, they're just like that and they kind of slide along the ground and pick up the hay, see. At the back of the prong is where the horses are, and they're pushing this. And the prongs are carried on two wheels. And so the horses are pushing this thing along and it gathers up the hay, in a big bunch of hay, and then they go over to the stack with it. And then the horses back up and they pull the buck rake away and they go out and get another load. And then the fellow down there by the hay he has a sling, and he tosses it over the hay and hooks it up. And then there is somebody on the other end of the stack that has a team and he pulls this hay right up

onto the stack.

Well of course you never know what's in that bunch of hay. Been going all around over the field there gathering up everything. So it wasn't unusual at all to have somebody find a snake up there on the stack with you. And of course they'd take the pitchfork and grab the snake, and say, "Snake come." Down, they'd throw the snake over off of the stack, and the guy down below would whop him and kill him, see. So this was nothing unusual. They'd, you know, up there maybe you was stacking hay and here is an old rattlesnake crawling around. So actually there was not much danger of them being bitten because the snake was all spread out, he wasn't in a striking position. Generally he has all been tumbled around in the hay and he is just laying there kind of all spread out, and so the fellow would see him. And he'd take his fork and pick him up and toss him over and say, "Snake come." The guy down below he'd catch him and kill him then, see. But this was quite a deal.

The living conditions there were really bad though because the well they had was just a drilled well, it was a drilled well. And it wasn't a very deep one either. And when we got to the camp there, to set up camp, and get ready to go to work, you know, and set up our tents and so forth. And then they had to clean this well out, and it was all full of dirt and some bloated rats that had fallen in, and crud like that, that had to be pumped out. So they pumped the well, and they pumped the well, and tried to clean it out as good as they could. And when they finally thought they had it cleaned out, well then that's when we, then we used the water.

But the part that was the worst was that it was alkali water, and it is awful stuff. To try to drink alkali water when you're working out in the heat, 110, 115 degrees, and you're thirsty and you want something to drink and you get this alkali water. It was really a terrible place to work. But I stuck it out for about three weeks, I think, and then I went off

and found another job under better working conditions. Went out and did some haying.

So those were great experiences.

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