

HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #436 – Side A

Subject: Vera Hotchkiss

Place: Burns, Oregon

Date: December 15, 2003

Interviewer: Dee Swisher

DEE SWISHER: This is Dee Swisher interviewing Vera Hotchkiss for the Harney County Oral History Project. This is December 15, 2003. May I introduce you to Vera Hotchkiss.

VERA HOTCHKISS: This is Vera Hotchkiss, and I was married to Dick Hotchkiss on April the 22nd, 1950. My mother's name was Dorothy Holmes; my father's name was Willie MacKenzie. I was born in Heppner, Oregon. I have two sister, Jean Wise, and Marge Barnes Fish. I was born and raised on the ranch in Ukiah, and I went to school there from first grade through high school. I went to Oregon State University, and finished my, almost finished my junior year but I quit and got married to Dick Hotchkiss in April of 1950.

I came to Harney County the first time when I was coming home from college one time, and my roommate was, her dad was bringing us home and my folks were meeting us in John Day. My roommate was from Baker. And we had a flood at Mt. Vernon and we had to come down to Burns to get to John Day. And I said I wouldn't

come, live here for love nor money. And the next time I came back was with Dick, so I learned to love it. I've always been just a housewife.

DEE: Let's see, you covered your education, your profession --- what outstanding events in your life?

VERA: Well I suppose I had three of them, three girls, Judy, Susan and Nancy. Judy was born April the 6th, 1952, and Susan was born on May 3rd, 1955, and Nancy was born on July 25th, 1957. They all went to school in Burns, and they all graduated from Oregon State, and they all have an extended degree. Judy is a CPA in Bend, and Susan has her Master's Degree, and she and her husband Mark (Doverspike) run the ranch, and Nancy is an attorney in Sacramento.

DEE: Okay, what do you consider your major accomplishments in life, Vera?

VERA: Well, raising three girls to be fine upstanding citizens. And I of course love my grandchildren. Susan has three big stapping boys, and Nancy has three lovely girls. And I spend as much time with them as I can.

The Hotchkiss family were pioneers here. My husband's grandfather Hull came to Harney County in 1888. He bought a ranch in 1890, and he married Edith Smith in 1892. They had four boys and three girls.

My husband's father married Ethel Whiting in 1919, and they bought a ranch in 1920, and they built the house there in 1922. When Dick and I got married we built our house right across the road from theirs in 1950. Dick was an only child. Dick served in World War II. His father served in World War I.

Dick and I were both in Oregon State College together, and we got married in 1950.

Dick's mother was a Whiting. Her father came to Harney County in 1874. He married Edith --- or Suzan Dixon in 1893. They had four girls.

DEE: When did you form your family corporation?

VERA: We formed a partnership, they did, before we, just before we got married and we formed the corporation in 1960.

DEE: Now is your son-in-law, Susan's husband, is he the corporate president at this time?

VERA: Yeah, Susan and Mark are both the major stockholders, and Mark is the president of the corporation.

DEE: And when did you purchase your property at Riley?

VERA: We purchased the Mayo Ranch at Riley in April of 1992, and Dick and I lived there for eight years. We thought that --- the girls, Susan and Mark had boys in school and it was easier --- Riley just has a little one room school so we thought it was better if they stayed in town to go to school.

But Dick wasn't too well, and in 1950 (2000) we celebrated our golden wedding anniversary. And he was in the hospital for three days before, and three days after, and when he got out I told him he had to shape up or I wasn't taking him back to Riley. So that summer we changed our address back to Burns. But we spent a lot of time at Riley, because he loved it out there.

DEE: Vera didn't tell us where she met Dick, other than at the University of Oregon, (Oregon State University) but I think there is a little story behind this --- Vera.

VERA: Yes, I met Dick on a blind date. And I was raised on a ranch without electricity, and I didn't have any electricity until we went, until I went to college. And I made up my mind that I was not going to live that way the rest of my life. So I decided when I went to school I wouldn't date anybody unless he had electricity, because I just knew I would fall in love with him probably, and that would be the same old story. So when this opportunity for a date with Dick come up, well I had the girl that was arranging it ask him if he was wired for 220. (Laughter) And she come back and said he was, so I had this date.

Well it was a blind date, and we went to the coast. And we were, stopped to have a hamburger on the way home. And I was in Home Ec, and I made the remark that any girl in this day and age that couldn't cook, there was something wrong with her. Because there were electric stoves, and there were recipes --- and I had been raised on an old wood stove, and I thought those electric stoves were pretty wonderful. And he looked at me and he said, "Will you marry me?" On our first blind date! (Laughter) Well I didn't hold him to that. We dated for about six-month, and then we were engaged for six months, and we were married for 51 years.

DEE: Thank you Vera, that's been a very interesting interview.

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