

## HARNEY COUNTY BASQUES

### Oral History Project

This interview of Josephine Ebar took place as a part of an historical inventory of Basques in Harney County for the Harney County Historical Society. The purpose of the interview was to acquire information about historic sites in order to establish a database for historic resources. As a result, the book *Harney County: An Historical Inventory* was published in January of 1978 by Royal G. Jackson and Jennifer A. Lee. Jackson and Lee taped this interview with Josephine Ebar on September 21, 1976 in Burns, Oregon. At the time, Jackson was an Associate Professor in the Department of Resource Recreation Management at Oregon State University and Lee was a student in that department fulfilling an internship requirement. Amanda B. Purkey created a transcription of this interview in March 2001 as a part of an independent study project at Oregon State University.

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JOSEPHINE EBAR  
September 21, 1976  
Burns, Oregon

Interviewers:  
Royal G. Jackson  
Jennifer A. Lee

### LOG

- [001-020] Information on years in Spain, arrival to US, parents' farm and province.
- [020-040] Brother in US as shepherd, Josephine's decision to come to US.
- [040-060] Information on husband, details of arrival in New York and train trip to Reno.
- [060-080] Using American money while not knowing English.
- [080-100] Trying to find brother in US, husband started working for the railroad.
- [100-120] Worked for ranches, and later moved to Burns, Oregon.
- [120-140] Husband built the Central Hotel in Burns and many Basques stayed there.
- [140-160] Discuss different Basque hotels in Burns, and discuss Josephine's children.
- [160-180] Children speaking Basque, Americanization of children, husband died.
- [180-200] Traditional dances, trips back to Spain, importance of language.
- [200-220] Children marrying Basques, Basque gatherings, Catholicism.
- [220-240] Comparing Crane and Burns over the years.
- [240-260] Information about Josephine and her husband's villages in Spain.
- [260-280] Size of their families back in Spain.
- [280-300] Typical Basque food, cooking.
- [300-320] Opinions on decline of shepherding in Burns.
- [320-340 end] Gaining citizenship in the US.

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[001] {R} Let's see maybe we could start by getting your name, your full name, first name and last name.

My first name is Josephine.

{R} Josephine, and your last name is Ebar, E B A R.

Ebar, mm-hmm

{R} Okay, why don't you tell us when you came did you, were you born in Spain?

Yes.

{R} How long did you live there?

Spain? Oh about twenty years.

{R} Twenty years? You were twenty years when you decided to come to the United States?

Yeah, yeah.

{R} Why did you decide to come here?

Well, I thinking about it because I like to see the, live in country or something new. And I not see very much over there even the living anyways so that's really I come in this country.

{R} What were you doing in Spain? Were you working?

Working in the raising the farm.

{R} On a farm. Your parents were farmers?

Mm-hmm.

{R} Well what kind of a, did they, what province did they live in?

Gipuscola.

{R} Gipuscola?

Gipuscola. The other ladies they (indiscernible) Viscaya, huh?

{R} Yeah, there are several provinces here in Harney County. Viscaya, Gipuscola, and, Nivara?

{R} Nivara, a lot of Basques are from there. Did you have friends already in the United States?

I had a brother here.

{R} Then when you came you had a brother?

Yeah.

{R} Where was he?

Idaho.

[020] {R} What was he doing in Idaho?

He's a sheep herder.

{R} Was he an older brother?

Yeah.

{R} And did he write you a letter and tell you to come, or?

Well, not telling me, but writing me letters you know, and he's here too and I think about coming here so.

{R} Weren't your parents afraid for you to come?

I made up my mind so.

{R} You made up your mind.

Yeah, yeah. And I never been sorry even so I like this country very very much. I been what oh four years ago or so been to make a little visit over there.

{R} Is that the first time you've gone back?

Yeah.

{R} Four years ago? Was it a lot different?

Well, yes and no I don't know. I never seen it very much myself (indiscernible) so, I enjoy you know seeing it and my old house and not that I know anybody or how they been,

{R} All you family are gone?

Family is gone (indiscernible) I don't know so, but I enjoy the visiting and I see a lot of places.

{R} Tell me about the trip coming over to the United States, what year was that?

1921.

{R} How did you come? By boat?

Boat.

{R} Tell me about the trip, what was it like?

Seventeen days and a half we make a boat on a French boat I don't know what. Boat is coming alright, I like it myself.

{J} Were you alone, did you have a friend with you?

No, yeah I got my husband and,

{J} Oh, you were married before you came?

Mm-hmm. And my sister in law and brother in law too so,

{R} So your husband, you were already married when you had decided to come here.

Mm-hmm.

[040] {R} And your husband was coming over to herd sheep here?

No, no, yeah well he do sometimes but not much. We work in the ranches.

{R} But did he have a plan when he came here to work with sheep like your brother?

Any kind of work.

{R} Any kind of work.

Any kind of work, ranches especially you know they're,

{J} Had your husband ever been here?

Hmm-mm.

{R} So none of you, none of the four knew about what the United States was like.

No, no I don't know neither.

{J} What did you expect?

I don't know. I knew would like it.

{R} You didn't know what to expect, huh?

No, I thinking about it, well I no see over there anything and lets go over there so I can see my brother. Might be something there (indiscernible).

{R} So you got to New York is that the way you came?

New York, yeah.

{R} Is that exciting when you came into New York?

Yeah, probably such a long years I'm forgetting you know, but it's coming New York and then one night stay there. Some Basco Hotel.

{R} What was the name of the Hotel, do you remember?

Valentine Agarde.

{R} Valentine Agarde helped a lot of people didn't it?

Yeah.

{R} Cause everyone I've talked to mentions Valentine Agarde.

Yeah, but sure we're not knowing much you know so they put on a train and coming to Reno.

{R} So you came by train. Do you remember what towns you went to, what cities?

I remember (indiscernible) and I'm looking at outside and then its snow you know.

{R} Snow.

I never forget. At the window we look out so we can talk even and we don't know anything anyhow you know so, then coming to Reno and that's one town I remember that very well.

[060] {R} Reno.

No. Elco.

{R} What about buying food on the train? How did since you didn't speak English?

Oh, we just uh got the money anyhow, a little money and then we give it the money you know,

{R} Gave your money to the vendor?

Yeah, and then they give you the change and then you know. I thinking about it you know, very wonderful persons. You no understand nothing but I think about it always that good persons stay here.

{R} How many days did you travel by train once you left New York? Do you remember?

I don't remember that either. But seventeen days and a half in the boat making.

{R} And then one night in New York.

One night in New York.

{R} At Valentino Agarde's hotel.

Yes.

{R} And then you came by train to Elco?

Reno, clear through Reno. Elco through Reno.

{R} And then is that where you got off the train then is in Elco?

Yeah, no we don't but I hear in train said calling it Elco, you know that remember that never forget. And I looking out the window and there is snow and cold you know so dark in nights and you know you just forget about stop signs.

{R} So you got off at Reno?

Reno, yeah.

{R} And was your brother there?

No my brother's Idaho, but we were going to some ranch over there by the spring.

[080] {R} In Nevada?

Yeah, yeah Nevada, California land and ranch and after that it's going to Boise you know so looking for the brother but no find the brother over there even so going to mountain so.

{R} So your brother didn't know you were coming?

Yes is knowing but can't wait for us we wouldn't be coming at a hard time so he's working and you know. And anyhow my husband got at a crossing in (indiscernible) and train coming over there too, you know train Boise and now there is a train here but at that time is Crane bringing out stuff. Well someway he found a crossing, and the crossing telling us come over here you know and we coming over there in the crossing, he worked in the railroad.

{R} Your brother worked on the railroad?

No, no, no.

{R} Your husband.

Mm-hmm.

{R} What year was that do you remember?

1921.

{R} Oh the same year.

Same year cause the same spring. We come in the February to here you know and the same spring and my brother coming same fall I thinking about it. Came over here and seed us.

{R} So did you then live in Crane?

Quite a while. I'm going California too and spend a while there and come back in Nevada again.



{R} When did you find your brother?

It was at the fall I think so,

{R} How did you find him?

Oh, I knew lots of place you know we can letters and come back you know and I go into Boise and I know lots of place that he is come in town to stay you know. And then tell them that they're knowing that they happen to hear stuff (indiscernible). Nothing like now the (indiscernible).

[100] {R} The what?

Nothing like (indiscernible) cars and used to be you know. No roads even (indiscernible) no highways no roads even good. Just old (indiscernible) no place to here no car either. Quite a few years from nineteen twenty one and now you know.

{R} What did your husband do then did he work the railroad for a while?

Yeah.

{R} How long, how many years?

Oh, I don't remember, I don't remember even that. And we go on from that and we come back to Nevada and we work in quite a few ranches both of us, cook and then

{J} Both of you cook?

No, he not but I cook and he work and,

{R} Buckaroo on the ranches?

Mm, there was in little, it was in the little. And finally we come back (indiscernible) and we stop here and I never go again no place but here.

{R} So you came to Crane and then here to Burns.

Yeah.

{R} Do you remember what year that was?

In here?

{R} Uh-huh, to Burns.

Burns, 1944.

{R} 1944.

Mm-hmm.

{R} Why did you decide to come to Burns then?

Well is my husband started this Hotel they're building here too.

[120] {R} The Central Hotel?

Yeah.

{R} The one you now own.

Yeah.

{R} And it was being built then?

Yeah. And I run in there ever since that.

{R} So did he buy it then after it was built or?

No he's building it.

{R} Oh, he himself built it.

Well, himself no, but he telling the builder how to building hotel.

{R} Oh he had the money and he hired some people to build it.

That's right.

{R} Was it a Basco Hotel then?

Yeah, Basques well same name as ever Central Hotel.

{R} And it was finished in 1944?

Oh no, before the finished. I live in the Crane quite a while, we live in the Crane quite a while after building this. This one we built in 1929 or so.

{R} 1929. And so it opened in 1929 for business.

Yeah and renting it and keeping it, leasing it you know.

{R} Was it mostly Basques that came here then or did Americans come here?

Oh lots Americans, not too many Basques here.

{R} Was there a main Basque Hotel then in 1929?

Oh there was like that that started two years the Plaza and another one too the Star Hotel.

{R} The Plaza, the Star Hotel.

Yeah, you been there?

{R} Mm-hmm.

And like that, more too but not too many Bascos needing that. Not staying in the Basco families.

[140] {R} Would you say that the Plaza Hotel, the Star Hotel and the Central Hotel would have been the main Basque hotels over the years in Burns?

And the Commercial Hotel too that, you said that the (indiscernible) she living over there too.

{R} The Commercial Hotel. So those four hotels were pretty much where the Basques when they came down, they stayed in one of those over the years?

Yeah, more in here that ones the Bascos so cooking and then you know but what else I cooked quite a few years you know.

{R} Do you have children?

Yeah.

{R} How many?

Six.

{R} Six children. Did you have any when you came to America?

One.

{R} So you brought one with you then and all the rest were born here.

Right.

{R} What do most of them do now, are they grown?

Grown and all married and even one lost in a car accident.

{R} Lost one in a car accident. When was that?

1963.

{R} How many boys and girls did you have?

Three girls and three boys.

{R} Three girls and three boys.

We never raise some living close to here some live in California.

{J} Did you teach your children Basque?

I do, but not too many Basques you know talking that time in the Crane then and only two families only and no talk, no learn it very much. Somehow the oldest one is talk Basque with me is pretty good.

[160] {R} The oldest one talks Basque but the other ones don't?

Yeah you know understand you know listen more you know,

{J} Doesn't that make you homesick when you realize that your children were becoming Americanized?

Never. I never homesick. Everything just happened to me and but I never thinking about it going back says something. Never think about it I coming here I think about it I living here.

{R} Most of your friends been Basque or?

No, any time they are close. They're good people, Americans good people a lot of good peoples to call on us so I like them.

{R} How about your husband? Did he operate this or does he ever now?

He's dead my husband.

{R} Uh-huh. What year did he die?

Five years from now, what?

{R} 1971?

1971.

{R} He operated the hotel up until 1971?

Oh yes.

{J} Did your children participate in dances and doing the Hota?

No mine.

[180] {R} They never did learn any of that?

No that time not here, now is everyplace to play. That time not too many Bascos around Crane then. Here is few and then over there another two that's all we never make it that kind of dances it's been years, but my kids no.

{J} Have they been back to Spain, your children? Back to your homeland?

I take one of them this last trip and then my grandson I taken but not the others.

{R} Would you like them to remember that they're Basques, to remember their language and their culture?

Oh yeah.

{R} But you don't really care if they learn Basque.

They just.

{R} Your children, if they want to fine if not that's fine.

Oh yes if you want to yes it's fine, or even China, Chinese you know, languages is all good if you learn them. I know that I know three languages.

{R} Did your father, I mean your husband and you speak in Basque at home?

Mm-hmm.

{R} So the children always heard it.

Oh yeah and the first ones and all you know, but after later on is going out and aren't you American and they grow you know and understand at the school and talk all day these kids and then you know some kids (indiscernible) but not mine.

{R} Did your children marry other Basques or did they marry Americans?

How can I tell you (indiscernible) Spanish, more like Spanish.

[200] {R} So one of your children married Avaneito who was a Basque.

Yeah, but the other ones are not Bascos, none of them.

{R} None of the others married Basques.

No.

{R} Does that bother you or do you care?

No, no.

{R} Not at all.

They are wonderful persons.

{R} That's all that matters.

Oh yeah.

{R} Do you ever go to Basque dinners or fiestas?

No not very many time, hardly never.

{J} Did you go to that picnic a couple of weeks ago?

No. I go (indiscernible) you been there? No?

{J} No we don't even know.

No I never belonged at that kind of a stuffs.

{R} You never liked it.

No. I'm independent I guess. No bother me and then (indiscernible) see a little bit and talk everybody and then go home.

{J} Are you Catholic?

Yes.

{J} And all your children, you brought your children up Catholic?

Yeah.

{R} Are there very many Basques now in Harney County compared to when you were here in 1921?

Here? No.

{R} More or less now?

More now, yes.

[220] {R} In Burns.

More in every I thinks are living here. 1921 is a kind of years (indiscernible).

{J} What was Crane like when you were there in 1921?

Pretty good.

{J} Pretty good? How was that?

Pretty good. Just about better than this our town.

{R} So a big town then huh?

Yeah, got everything. We living we got everything. We got nice schools and,

{R} You had everything huh?

Yeah, bars and hotels and bank and everything out there. We never think about coming to Burns very much. Except the (indiscernible) are here and something but,

{R} Were you there when the first train came to Burns in 1960? No you wouldn't have been.

Sure.

{R} You were there in 19,

1924, I go to California that time the train there the State of California. And that times is working here in the railroad. That time Crane is kind of small maybe the road to here, stock yards over there lots of cars to stock, sheep, a bank and everything had there you know, barbers and doctors and everything we got there you know, show house and everything.

[240] {R} You liked Crane then better than Burns.

That time yes, even my kids likes it there.

{J} Going back to when you first came when you were twenty when you came here. Your father farmed then, you lived in a small village?

A small village yeah.

{J} A small village, and your husband was just another village.

Yeah another village yeah.

{R} What village were you from?

The name you want of the village?

{R} The name of it.

Coostei.

{R} How would you spell it?

Let's see if I remember, C O O S T E I.

[260] {R} Okay C O O S T E I was the name of the village you came from and the province was Gispuscola, how do you spell that?

Pardon me, I forget it myself.

{R} G U

Just G, I think it's a little bigger.

{R} G U I P U Z C O A.

Guipuzcoa.

{J} How many children were in your family? How many other brothers and sister did you have?



Only three.

{J} Only three. How many did your husband have?

I don't know, quite a few.

{J} He wasn't the first born? Was he the first born, was he the oldest son?

No, not the youngest either. In fact there's two families too his mother die and combine two families, two mothers, you know two. You got Guipuzcoa written too, can I look at it, you got it down? I bet it's a little different than this.

[280] {R} Guipuzcoa?

{J} Yeah.

(people talking in background)

{J} Do you cook Basque food?

Oh yes.

{J} Here still?

You bet.

{R} Do you serve Basque food to people here?

No no I never do that. I cook at ranches it used to be the ranch hands and stuff like that but,

{R} What is a typical Basque meal? What would you cook?

Usually we asking that the ladies that perfect cooks you know.

{R} I bet you're a good cook too.

They cook you know every day and every weekend go to Patty's.

{R} What would be an example of what you regularly eat?

Oh, I eat all kinds you know garbanzos, Cod fish, and oh lots of things, rice, tripes,

[300] {R} Those would be typical Basque,

Yeah, Basco foods yeah everything.

{R} Do your children cook Basque food? Do they eat Basque food too?

Oh like me is cook lots same stew you know we messed up all everything now you know so not the purely Basque foods other things we cook here, this ones is fine, but this one cook in a bad way too I think so. But she's the cook the special cook.

{J} Did you know a lot of sheep herders, Basque sheep herders back in the early 1920s and there were a lot around this area I understand.

Yeah, yeah.

{J} What happened to them all?

What happened? They're grazing the sheep and then taking the sheep and is no later that they're running any more and then get out of the country.

{R} The Taylor Grazing Act you think is what made the sheep herders decline?

Yeah.

{R} Because they couldn't just graze their sheep anywhere.

No.

[320] {J} What about the immigration laws? Were they become more difficult to get in the country? For Basques?

Oh, I don't think so. Maybe not.

{R} Is it harder now to become a citizen then it was when you came?

Citizen, make a citizen?

{R} Yeah.

No I don't think so.

{J} But to come into the country isn't it more difficult? To become a citizen?

Well, I don't know it's a sheep herding community used to be the people you know that here but I don't know about that even. We're coming out there WWI

or what's that time coming in and we got a little bit you know we take time too you know fix the paper and then you know.

{R} So you're an actualized citizen then?

Mm-hmm. You putting that things in the paper someplace?

{R/J} No, no.

Thank God.

[340] {R} Well thank you I think that's probably as much information as we need to get on tape. (turns tape off)