

Historical Sketch of Harney County, Oregon

A presentation given to the Kiwanis Club March 19, 1936

[Transcription note: Spelling, punctuation and grammar are copied as typewritten in the original document. Corrections and clarification added during transcription appear in brackets. Phrases crossed out but readable in the original document are transcribed with the strikethrough noted.]

The settlement of Oregon was started by a wave of religious enthusiasm. Prior to the advent of Jason Lee in 1834, Oregon had no place on the map of the world except as a vast game preserve for the taking of furry skins of wild animals. Its native Indian population of eighty thousand had no standing or consideration in the minds of civilized men prior to the mission of Jason Lee.

To Spaniard, Englishman, and American all alike, the fur trade was the sole excuse for any action in relation to the Oregon territory.

I have read many histories and journals of the country. As far as I can determine, the first white man to see the Harney Valley was Peter Skeen [Skene] Ogden, who, in the summer of 1826, explored the Harney country and the Steens Mountains in search of furs. The next year, in 1827, Jed S. Smith, a member of the Missouri Fur Company, passed through the Harney Valley on his way from Salt Lake to the California Coast. Smith was the first man in history who ever made an all land trip along the Oregon-California coast. In 1828 he started north from San Diego, California, following the coastline. When he reached the mouth of the Umpqua River, his camp, consisting of 18 men, were surprised by the Indians. All but Smith and two of his men were killed. Smith made his way to Ft. Vancouver and told his story to the factor, Dr. John McLaughlin [McLoughlin]. Dr. McLaughlin sent a troop of his men to the Umpqua country, recovered the furs that the Indians had taken from Smith, and punished the Indians. History does not say as to how they punished the Indians, but it is safe to say that they killed the Indians, ravished their women, and stole their property.

The first immigrant train to reach the Harney Valley of which we have any history, was the train of 1845, organized and led by Captain T'Vault. When this train reached Fort Hall, the present site of Pocatello, Idaho, they were met by Stephen Meeks [Meek], a brother of the famous Joe Meeks [Meek], and the Rev. Elijah White, who induced 200 of the 1,000 members of the train to follow them on a short cut to the Willamette, through the Central Oregon Country. John Hampton, the father of the late Eliza Riggs of Burns, was the captain of the train. In that train

was the Riggs family, the Packwoods, Tetherow, Bagleys, Herrons, Wilcox, Parkers, Warneirs, Forrests, and Statts.

As far as I can determine by reading the early journals of the trip, the party followed up the Malheur Valley to Bully Creek, crossed over the Ben Deer [Bendire] Mountains, and reached the Agency Valley. At this point one of the women of the train, Mrs. Chambers, died and was buried there.

From the Agency Valley, they traveled west, crossed the Stinking Water Mountains and reached Little Rock Creek on the east border of the Harney Valley. From there they traveled south and skirted the east side of the Malheur Lake. Unable to cross the Blitzen River at its mouth, they ascended the Blitzen until they found a ford, descended [sic] on the west side of the river until they reached the south side of Malheur and Harney Lakes. From that point they traveled west until they reached the Wagon Tire Mountains.

After they left the Lakes, they began to suffer for water, sickness broke out, and their live stock began to die. When they made camp at Wagon Tire, the members of the train made up their minds that they had been betrayed by Meeks and White. They came to the conclusion that Meeks and White were leading them on a “wild goose chase” and that they never had been in the country before—so they gave Meeks and White a camp trial.

A large number of the party wanted to hang them, but wiser counsel prevailed, and they were allowed to leave camp with their horses, guns, and a small amount of provisions. Meeks and White started north and west and in due time reached the settlement at the Dalles. They reported the sad plight of this train and immediately led a rescue party in search of the lost train. In the meantime, the train, after leaving the Wagon Tire Mountains, traveled northwest to the head of the Crooked Creek, and finally reached the breaks of the Deschutes.

The rescue party found this train in the canyons of the Deschutes and what was left of them finally reached the Dalles and later settled in the Willamette Valley. I will not attempt to detail the hardships of that trip as told to me by Mr. and Mrs. Parker, Mrs. Riggs, and other members of the party. They mythical “Blue Bucket Mine” was supposed to have been discovered on that trip.

The next immigrant train that reached the Harney Valley was a train led by Tom Clark of Missouri in the year 1853. This train consisted of about ninety persons, including women and children. In this train came George C. Smith [Smyth], his sons D.H., John, Geo. A., and Prestley; Wm. Cummings [Cummins], the father of Chauncey Cummings [Cummins]; James Watson, the father of E.B., Lorin, and Finley Watson; Bob & Charles Clark; and a number of others who settled in the Willamette Valley.

This party followed the old immigrant trail west until they reached a point on the Snake River at what is now Ontario, Oregon, where they crossed the Snake River, followed the tracks of the train of 1845, reached Harney Valley at Little Rock Creek, at what is now the Buchanan Ranch.

From there, they travelled south to the south side of Malheur Lake, and crossed the Blitzen at Sod House. The party travelled west and after many hardships reached the Deschutes River.

When this party crossed the Snake River at Ontario, Oregon, Captain Clark sent his two brothers, Bob and Charles Clark ahead with two pack horses to notify the settlers in the Willamette Valley that the train was on its way, and asked for assistance in clearing the road over the Cascade Mountains, and relief for the party. Bob and Charles Clark became lost and did not reach the valley until late in the season, when relief was sent to the immigrants after they had reached a point about half-way down the middle fork of the Willamette River.

During the early sixties, the Harney Country was crossed by a large number of expeditions of miners enroute to Auburn, Canyon City, and Idaho mines. To protect these miners, and the west-bound immigrants, military posts were rendered necessary, and Camp Alvord was established in September, (5th) 1865. Camp Curry was established in August, 1865; Camp F.C. [C.F.] Smith at White Horse, May, 1866; Camp Wright, 1865; and Camp Harney, August 16th, 1867. Camp Harney became the permanent military post. It has a military post-office and received regular mails from Canyon City, There were many civilians around the camp from the time of its inception, but they were dependent upon the camp for their livelihood, and cannot be classed as settlers. A.T. Clark and Adam Adrien were suttlers at the post, and W.W. Johnson was the camp blacksmith. Just who was the first permanent settler is an unanswered question. Abner Robbins traveled and traded with the Indians long before any white man had established a residence. Before the erection of Fort Wright in 1865, A.H. Robie moved a sawmill from Idaho to the left fork of Coffee Pot, and furnished shingles and lumber for Camp Harney.

In 1869, John S. Devine came into the White Horse country with cattle. Later he drove cattle into the Harney Valley and in 1877 bought out Venator and Cooksey and established what is now the Island Ranch of the P.L.S. Co.

In a former paper I prepared on the early history of Harney County I made the statement that John S. Devine was the first *bona fide* permanent settler of Harney County. My friend, A. Venator, challenged that statement but up to the present time he has failed to furnish any proof to the contrary.

In 1871 Mr. Robie moved cattle from Idaho to the Harney Valley. In 1872 Robie, Snyder, J.M. Clark, and Frank McBean acquired rights under the swamp land act to large tracts of land in the Blitzen Valley, which were shortly after purchased by Dr. Glenn, and Peter French—thus laying the foundation of the famous “P” Ranch, noted in song and story. Peter French expended hundreds of thousands of dollars in draining and reclaiming the swamp lands of the Blitzen Valley, and now the Government of the U.S. is spending hundreds of thousands of dollars to re-convert this land to its original swamp conditions. After a period of 64 years, the circle is complete—from swamp to swamp.

The first plowing in the valley was done by J.J. Cozart and E.C. Buckley near Ft. Harney in the year 1867. They seeded 40 acres to grain but the experiment was a failure.

The actual settlement of the Harney Valley began in the year 1872, when George A. [C.] Smyth, with his sons, D.H., John (the father of my wife), George A., and Prestley Smyth; Stilly Riddle, John Boone, and the Chapmans came in with horses and cattle. The Smyth family first settled at the Warm Springs, 5 miles south of Burns which is the present site of the Hines Sawmill. The winter of 1873 was the winter of the deep snow. Snow covered all of the feed, and the Indians tell me that even all of the sagebrush was covered to great depths. The Smyths and their friends became alarmed and upon the advice of Robie, they started to investigate conditions south. When they reached the Lakes, they found no snow, and an abundance of feed. They returned to their camp at the Warm Springs and removed their families and livestock to Happy Valley.

In 1873 comes John S. Miller, J. Cooksey, the Venators, Tom Prather, James Sheppard, and the Curry family, with horses and cattle. In the fall of this year the Cummings [Cummins] family came in with sheep. Frank McLeod and Maurice Fitzgerald arrived this year. When the Smyths arrived in Happy Valley in November, 1873 they found located in the country Chapman, Weaver, Krumbo, on Krumbo Creek, Peter French at the "P" Ranch, Mace and George McCoy on McCoy Creek, Marion Scott in Catlow Valley, John Catlow on Trout Cr., and several others scattered around the country. The Whitings, R.E. Reed, and Thos. Howard settled in 1874. In 1876 the Howsers, Bakers, & W.W. Johnson settled. In 1877 Carroll Cecil; in 1878, the Sayers, Goodmans, Clemens, Creason, Chas. W. Jones, Jennie Baker Jones, Tom Allen, Tom Baker, George Marshall, H.C. Levens, Stancliffs, Joseph Robertson. In 1879, the Hanleys, Mahons, Terrills, Caldwelles, Beddells, I.H. Hughet, M.H. Brenton, George S. Miller. In 1874, P.F. Stenger and Thomas Whiting brought in stock from Douglas County. Stenger established his camp at what is now known as the Sod House, afterwards moving to the Peter Clemens place on Poison Creek, where Riddle and Boone camped two years before. Whiting made camp at Rock Point, present site of Burns.

That answers the question of your president Mr. Schwartz as to who was the first settler of the now present city of Burns: Thomas Whiting in the year 1874. The first saloon and store was put up by a man named Josephson, where the Burns Hotel stands. In 1879, Wm. Curry bought and moved the Josephson stock to the present location of the Town of Hines, and named the place "Egan." Wheeler was the first Justice of the Peace. In 1879-80 the Military post at Harney was abandoned and the cattle barons began to buy out smaller settlers and stockmen. In 1881, P.M. Curry came and established the post office of Egan. In 1882 George McGowan, the Martins, and A.O. Beddell located. McGowan & Martin opened a store at Egan and the next year Peter Stenger bought out the Martins and moved the store to the present site of Burns. In 1883 George McGowan named the post office located in the McGowan & Stenger store "Burns" in honor of the famous poet of his native land.

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[Transcription Note: the following 5 paragraphs were on a final page inserted at the end of original typewritten document; handwritten notation at bottom reads, "Turn back to page 3-Piute-Bannock War."]

The land question was at the bottom of all of the troubles with the Indian. The Hudson Bay Co. did not seek land for colonization or agricultural purposes. They sought to keep the wilderness as a vast fur preserve. That policy coincided with the idea of the Indian, and that sort of a white man was welcomed by the Indian.

The Indian exchanged his furs for the goods and trinkets of the Hudson Bay trappers and could understand that that transaction was a benefit to him. It was not so with the American. He came hunting new lands for farms and homes, clearing away the forest, and driving away the game, the natural food support of the Indian.

With the single exception of Wm. Penn in Pennsylvania who bought and paid for the Indian lands, the white man disregarded the Indians' rights and title to the land, with the result that it cost millions of dollars in money and thousands of lives before the Indian land question was finally settled. In my mind the position of the Indian was absolutely sound. As a socialist he believed in the common use of all of the land, and when the government sought to confine him on limited reservations of poor land, and without due compensation for the land that was taken he revolted and did what you and I would have done, fought in defense of his birthright.

The Indian has suffered terrible injustice at our hands, but we have become calloused at that injustice, as we become calloused at the injustice that is being perpetrated at the weak and defenseless people of India, China and Ethiopia.

I have mentioned this Indian land question for the purpose of pointing out to you the reasons for the Bannock-Piute war of 1878 which raged in the Harney Valley.

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-1878-

The most exciting event in the history of Eastern Oregon since its settlement by the whites was the Bannock-Piute War of 1878. Nearly every county in Eastern Oregon was embraced in its field of operation, and every section affected. Before this war ended with the betrayal and murder of Chief Egan by the Cayuse [*Note: in handwriting " → Umatilla" below paragraph indicates author's correction of the word Cayuse*] Indians at Pendleton, the United States Government was forced to call out practically all of the military forces stationed in the West.

In 1877, Chief Joseph, chief of the Nez Perce Indians in the Wallowa territory, fought a war in an attempt to drive the whites from the West. [*Note: "← not true" handwritten in page margin at this point*] History says that Joseph was the greatest Indian strategist since the days of King Phillip. He fought the whole U.S. Army of the West, conducted a retreat for over 1,000 miles,

and did not surrender until he reached the Bear Paw Mountains on the border of the Canadian Line. When he surrendered, he surrendered with the honors of war. Many honors were heaped upon Chief Joseph.

Buffalo Horn, Chief of the Bannocks, was jealous of Joseph. Buffalo Horn was a good politician, but events proved he was a poor General. Buffalo Horn sent his scouts and runners to all of the Oregon, Washington, and Idaho Indians, asking them to join him in a confederacy to run the whites across the Mississippi River. Buffalo Horn secured guns and ammunition at Ft. Hall, and started on the war-path, in the early spring of 1878. His warriors plundered, killed, and destroyed property in southwest Idaho, crossed the Owyhee River into Oregon, came through the Barron [Barren] Valley country to the east side of the Steens Mountains, killing and burning as they traveled. From the Barren Valley, they traveled north to Happy Valley where they killed John Smyth and his father. From Happy Valley, they went west to Diamond Valley. Peter French, with his buckaroos, numbering 16 people in all, were working cattle at the Diamond Ranch. Sylvester Smith, a resident of Happy Valley, was returning to his home from a visit to the Willamette Valley. When he reached the divide between Happy and Diamond Valley, he saw the ruins of the Smyth ranch, and also saw the Indians. The Indians also saw Smith and gave chase, but Sylvester out-ran the Indians, beat them to the Diamond Ranch and warned French and his men that the Indians were on the war-path, and a large number of them were only a short distance behind.

French had a repeating rifle and after ordering his men to retreat to the "P" Ranch, fought the Indians off until the men had a fair start. Those present at that skirmish were Peter French; Henry Robie; John Witzel; Sylvester Smith; Sid Thomas; the Dixon brothers, ~~men whom were later killed at the P Ranch by the Indians~~; Taylor; Juniper Jack, the buckaroo cook; the Chinese cook who fell off his horse and was killed on the retreat to the "P" Ranch; John Dale; Charles Luce, ~~the man who assisted John Witzel when his horse was killed and he was wounded~~; George Bollenbaugh; Joseph Hochneedle, and his brother George; Doc Kiger; Sam Miller, and Dixons' Indian Joe. Prim Ortego was also at the fight and on orders from French, took the news of the skirmish to Fort Harney. On his way to the fort, he found the buckaroos encamped at the Malheur slough. Upon learning the news of the Indian outbreak the buckaroos rode to the Fort and later some of them joined French and the other volunteers in the Silver Creek fight with the Indians. After French and his party reached the P Ranch, they gave the alarm and all of the women and children in the valley were taken to Fort Harney. Frank Kingsberry, Rye Smith [Smyth], and Barton encountered the Indians at Happy Valley after the death of the two Smyths, and the burning of their buildings. The[y] retreated to the camp at the Malheur Slough, and also warned the settlers of the outbreak.

A troop of volunteers was organized at the fort, who followed the Indians. From the fort they took up the trail at Barton Lake and followed the Indians to the Narrows, and from there to the "OO" Ranch and up Silver Creek.

John G. South was the buckaroo boss, and was with his men at the Malheur Slough when Ortego, Smyth and Barton gave the alarm. As stated before, the cowboys made a run for Fort Harney and joined the volunteers, but South returned to the Diamond, discovered the body of the dead Chinaman, and on his road to the P Ranch he found Dixon and Nixon camped on the river at the ranch and warned that the Indians were on the war-path. They disregarded South's warning and advice to flee to Fort Harney, and at a later date were killed by the Indians. When South started back from the P Ranch, he met Bill Shirk from Catlow Valley and told him of the Indian outbreak. Shirk returned to Catlow Valley to warn the settlers of their danger, and on his way to Catlow was shot at by an Indian who lay in wait for him. The Indian missed. The Indian was mounted on one of French's horses, and the only thing that saved Shirk was that the Indian's horse stumbled and fell, and that the horse Shirk was riding was fleet. Shirk warned all of the settlers of Catlow Valley and they gathered at the White Horse Ranch, where they constructed a juniper fort for their defense.

The Indians were encamped at Silver Creek and the volunteers were soon joined by the troops under command of Major Robbins. A fierce fight ensued, and a few of the troops and a large number of Indians were killed in that engagement. Colonel Bernard fought a duel with Chief Egan, and shot Egan in the hand. At this battle Buffalo Horn was killed and chief Egan succeeded in command. Many people take the credit of killing Buffalo Horn, but Stilly Riddle told me that no one knew who killed Egan [Buffalo Horn], as the Indians had retreated to a shallow cave, and the troops and volunteers poured shot after shot into the mouth of the cave; and that after the battle was over, they found the body of Buffalo Horn dressed in his chief's war bonnet among the dead Indians.

Major Robbins sent his scout, Maurice Fitzgerald, to deliver a message to General O.O. Howard, asking for re-enforcements after the battle of Silver Creek. The old timers say that General Howard was always two days behind the Indians. I don't know whether or not he ever caught up with the Indians.

From Silver Creek the Indians moved north to Grant County. The settlers of Grant, being warned, gathered at Canyon City and used the miners' tunnels as a defense. The Indians moved through the Bear Valley Country, down Murderer's Creek, along the John Day River, killing and burning as they went and finally reached Pendleton.

At Pendleton Chief Egan tried to induce the Umatilla, Walla Walla, and Cayuse Indians to join him in this war against the whites. The Cayuse Indians invited Egan to a rendezvous, killed him, cut his head off, and paraded before the Government troops. This broke up the war.

The Indians drifted back to the Harney Valley in small groups, and scattered over their former reservation. The next year, the Government sent in troops, gathered up the Indians and took them to the Yakima Reservation in Washington. In small groups the Indians departed from the Yakima Reservation and scattered over southeastern Oregon & Northern Nevada. The present

Piute Indian is a descendant of what at one time was a rich and powerful tribe of Indians. At this point I want to read you a brief sketch of the Indians.

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[The following segment was originally given as a talk to the Burns Mothers Club in April, 1932]

The first men to appear in ships off the Oregon Coast found that the Indian was here before him. Lewis & Clark found them everywhere when the great expedition came over the Rocky Mountains. The Indian constructed no roads, built no monuments, and left no trace on the face of nature to mark his existence or indicate the lapse of time. The origin of the American Indian is clouded in the deepest mystery. When Columbus reached America in 1492, he was under the impression that he had arrived in Asiatic India and when he returned to Spain named the natives of America, Indians, and Indians they have been to this day.

The Indian was the stone age man. Relics picked up all over Oregon contain the mute but indisputable story of centuries of occupation of Oregon by our native Indians. Stone axes, chisels, arrow points, mortars, spear heads exhibit the patience and skill with which the Indians had to contend for an existence against rival tribes, wild beasts, and the inhospitality of uncultivated earth.

He was the child of nature and harbored no selfishness, but the satisfaction of his immediate wants. He believes in a Great Spirit who made the stars and the earth and gave the land and water to all his children in common.

The Indian was the first socialist who fought for his lands, and divided the fruit of all of his labor as a socialist, and died in the conviction that the white man has robbed him of his birth right.

The idea of a Great Spirit that rules all the universe is universal with all of the Indians from the Atlantic to the Pacific. This idea assumes different names and meanings with different tribes, and as a consequence thereof there grew up a lot of petty or subsidiary Gods in the Indian theology. But over all these petty deities the Indians recognize one God subordinate to the Great Spirit, whose name is "Tullipis" with some tribes, and "Coyote" with others.

(from Gaston's History of Oregon.)

The Harney Valley Indians recognize "Coyote" as the God to whom they pay homage. They believe that when an Indian passes away his soul enters the body of Coyote and the mournful sound that is emitted from the Coyote is the wail of a separated Indian. Before a bounty was placed on the Coyote, under no circumstances would an old Indian kill one of them. Only the past summer Charley Parker, known to all of the old timers as "Scar Faced Charley," asked me if I knew the reasons why the country was in the throes of a drought. I confessed that I did not. He informed me that the reason of the long continued drought was due to the fact that the Great Spirit was angry with the white man because they were killing the coyotes. I asked him

why, if that were true, that the Indians themselves killed the coyote. He said that the old Indians would not kill them, and that the young Indians killed them because they were hungry and had to find a way to buy food and clothing.

I have talked a great deal with Capt. Louie and some of the older Indians, in an effort to learn something of the theological ideas of the Paiute Indians. When the soul of an Indian is released by death it enters the body of Coyote, but at a later date is released, and waft on the wings of the "South Wind," enters the happy hunting grounds, which is the Indian heaven. No place in their theology is there a hell. As he is a socialist on earth, he is a socialist in heaven. Believing that all of nature was created for the common good, he believes that all will share in eternal peace in the future.

Regardless of the age of the Indian when he dies and enters the happy hunting ground he is again made young, and so remains for all time. He believes in the immortality of the soul. He believes in a Great Spirit, and in spirit life. He believes that the spirits of animals go to the spirit land as well as man. He paints a beautiful picture of the spirit land, a land perpetually green, with blooming flowers, ripening fruit, its landscape filled with wild game, and its waters teeming with fish. The old are made young, and they live an everlasting life of peace and happiness.

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When the Malheur Reservation was created by executive order of the President on September 12th, 1872, the Piute Indians were led by chiefs Oites, Leggins, Ochoco, Egan, and Winnemucca. There Indians were scattered over a large area in Southeastern Oregon, and Northern Nevada.

On May 15th, 1875, additions were made to the original reservation. On January 28th, 1876, an order was made which superseded the order of May 15, 1875, and set up a new reservation, and returned to the public domain all that part set aside by the order of May 15th, 1875. On July 23rd, the President added the Fort Harney Military Reserve, containing 640 acres. On September 13th, 1882, the President restored to the public domain all of the Malheur Indian Reservation except 320 acres of the Fort Harney Reserve. On March 2nd, 1889, the President restored to the public domain the remaining 320 acres; thereby dispossessing the Indians of all their lands. I don't know, and never did know, the boundaries of the Malheur Indian Reservation. I know that in a general way it included all of the Harney Valley lying east of the East Fork of the Silvies River; that it extended in a south-easterly direction into Malheur County. It did not include the Lakes or the Steens Mountain country. Its eastern boundary was somewhere in the western part of Malheur County, and the main reservation headquarters was at Agency Valley.

From twelve to fifteen hundred Indians made this their headquarters. Sam Parrish, a brother to the late Chas. W. Parrish, was one of the first Indian Agents; and ~~W.W. Johnson, known to the multitude of his friends as "Brody" Johnson, was one of the first blacksmiths.~~

The area of the reservation was 1,778,560 acres. After dispossessing the Indians of all their lands some 20 or 25 years ago, the Government got "big-hearted" and sent a special agent, Mr. Wm. Casson to Burns, to allot to every Indian man, woman, and child 160 acres of the vacant Government land. Mr. Casson called to his aid Maurice Fitzgerald, who had been a scout in the Modoc War of 1872 and the Bannock-Piute War of 1878, and W.W. Johnson, who spoke the Piute language and who always had a friendly interest in the Indians.

In view of the fact that years ago the large cattle companies, and the smaller settlers had acquired title to all of the lands that were irrigated or lands that could be drained and irrigated, there was nothing left for the Indians except land in the hills or the dry land of the Harney Valley. This commission, consisting of Casson, Fitzgerald, and Johnson, examined all of the vacant, unoccupied Government land; and be it said to their everlasting credit, they allotted to the Indians the best lands that were available. In all, they made 104 allotments of 160 acres each, amounting to a total of 16,640 acres.

From 1910 to 1914 Harney Valley had a great influx of settlers who believed they could successfully dry-farm the valley. They filed on all the vacant land in Harney and Catlow Valleys. As a result of this land boom 27 of the Indian allotments were sold for prices ranging from \$10 to \$15 per acre. That is one time that the Indian "slipped something over" on his white brother. The remaining 80 allotments are still held by the Indians.

The Government, feeling that they had paid their full debt to the Indians by giving him 160 acres of land on which a jack rabbit could not make a living, rested on their oars and the Indian received no aid or assistance from the Government until about the year 1924. Captain Rastall, a new agent at the Warm Springs, made a visit to this ward living at Burns. He found them in a deplorable condition. They were ragged, partly naked, suffering from hunger and disease, and were living in the primitive wigwam, made from willows and cast-off parts of sacks, canvasses, and old carpets.

At that time I was Receiver of the U.S. Land Office at Burns, and because of the fact that both the Indian Office and the Land Office are Bureau of the Interior, the local Land Office cooperated with the Indian Agent in helping to solve the Indian problems. Captain Rastall called on me and informed me that Congressman Sinnott would be in Bend the following night and requested that I accompany him to Bend and place before Congressman Sinnott the condition of the Burns Indians. This we did, with the result that the Government sent to Burns, from Fort Knox, Kentucky, 19 large Army tents, which were given to the Indians. Captain Rastall was succeeded in office by J.B. Martsolf.

Mr. Martsolf made an investigation of the Burns Indians, and took steps to have the worn-out tents replaced by the 20 present two-room houses, which the Indians now occupy.

For twenty years, or more, the people of Burns and the Indian Agents at Warm Springs had talked about an Indian School for the Burns Indians, and Mr. Martsolf, in December of 1928, went before the County Court of Harney County and told them that he felt that the Indian

School was a necessity, but that the only way that a school would ever be built and operated would be by sending someone who was familiar with the Indian situation to Washington, D.C. for the purpose of presenting the facts to the Commission of Indian Affairs and to members of Congress. Mr. Martsof recommended me for that job. The County Court sent for me, and I agreed to make the trip. To make a long story short, with the assistance of Senator McNary and Congressman Sinnott, I succeeded in securing Government funds to construct and operate the Indian School.

This school started out as a successful Indian Educational Institution but soon met with violent, planned, unauthorized interference ~~of a man who I will not name~~. The Commission of Indian Affairs decided that the proper way to civilize and educate the Indians was to educate them in the white man's schools.

To this program the citizens of Burns objected on the grounds that the Indian children were not physically fit to enter the Burns schools, and that they would be a menace to the health and life of the white pupils. ~~The gentleman, to whom I referred above,~~ A denial that the Indians were unhealthy and a menace to the white children was made, ~~and he went so far as to have,~~ and some of the Indian children dressed up, photographed, and taken to LaGrand, [sic] Oregon ~~where he succeeded in securing~~ and a certificate of good health from some doctor there was secured. The question of the eligibility of the Indian children to enter the Burns schools was brought to a head by the Commissioner of Indian Affairs ordering and directing the Indian Agent at Warm Springs to proceed to Burns and start a suit to compel the Board of Directors to accept Indian children as pupils in the Burns school.

Naturally, the Board of Directors of the Burns Schools did not care to be put to the expense of defending themselves against a law-suit initiated by the Government of the United States, and so again, December, 1934, my traveling expenses were paid by the Board of Directors of the Burns Schools to make a trip to Washington and see if I could not explain the facts as we knew them to be—that the threatened suit would not be filed, and that the Indian School might be re-opened.

Again I will make a long story short. I had several conferences with Commissioner Collier, Dr. Ryan, who was in charge of Indian Schools, and Dr. J.G. Townsend, Director of Health. I finally told Commissioner Collier that all we wanted was a fair and honest medical examination of the physical condition of the Burns Indians, and if his Health Department would certify that the Indians were physically eligible for school attendance, the Board of Directors and the people of Burns would withdraw all objections to their admittance to the Burns schools. Commissioner Collier agreed to that arrangement and on Feb. 1st, 1934, signed a memorandum to that effect. In April, 1934, Dr. Townsend, accompanied by four other doctors, made a thorough examination of 35 Indian children under 21 years of age. On May 29th, 1934, Senator McNary sent me a copy of Dr. Townsend's report to Commissioner Collier to me.

Dr. Townsend reported that of the 35 children examined, 33 had trachoma, and the remaining 2 were suffering from tuberculosis. On May 25th Commissioner Collier wrote Senator McNary, saying that he had received Dr. Townsend's report, and said it would be evident that with the extremely high percentage of active trachoma it would not be reasonable to insist upon the admission of these children to the public school at the time. Also he stated that he would order the school re-opened for the Indians, and would follow the suggestions of Dr. Townsend's memorandum, which provided that the medical department would take steps to send a special physician to inaugurate treatments, which would be followed up by Dr. Smith and a field matron.

This gives, briefly, the highlights of the local Indian history.

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When Harney County was first settled the county seat was at the Dalles, Ore. Harney County was created by the legislature [sic] in 1889, and the Governor appointed T.J. Shields, County Judge; W.E. Grace, County Clerk; A.A. Cowing, Sheriff; T.J. Morrison and T.B. James, Commissioners; L.B. Baker, School Superintendent, and W.H. Graydon [Gradon], Surveyor. Harney City was named as the temporary county seat. At the next election, the question of a permanent county seat came up, and the question was submitted to voters. I wish I had time to tell you of that fight—it was some fight! The vote showed that Burns had won by a small majority. The citizens of Harney contested the election in the courts, but the Supreme Court held that Burns had won by a majority of votes, 4 votes.

A great many people have criticized men like French, Devine, Hock Mason, Tod Hunter [Todhunter] and the old time cattle kings for acquiring such large tracts of land, but these men were the products of the time in which they lived. They believed in—

“The good old rule, the simple plan
That they should take who have the power
And they should keep who can.”

Their whole lives devoted to building up and enlarging their original holdings. They wanted, like feudal Lords of old, to climb to the top of a mountain and say, “I am monarch of all I survey.” This kind of a policy did not encourage the settlement of the County; as a matter of fact settlement was discouraged. The only exception to this rule was William Hanley. The Hanleys—John, Bill and Ed settled in Harney County in 1879. John soon returned to Jackson County, and Bill on the death of his father returned to Jackson County and managed the Hanley ranches in the Rogue River country for a number of years. He did not return to Harney Valley until the year 1896, at which time he purchased the interests of Ed Hanley. Bill Hanley saw the necessity of development and people, and devoted his entire life to bring that about. It was men who, like

Nathan Brown, Cal Geer, George McGowan, J.C. Foley, Stephen Lampshire, Grant Thompson, Hayes Brothers, the Maces, the Levens, C.B. McConnell and other farmers and irrigators who saw the chance for agricultural development and had the vision to see that once the Harney Valley was irrigated under a system of controlled water it would be one of the richest valleys of the west. Nathan Brown built the first flour mill in the Harney Valley—and devoted his life toward development of the county, having for its purpose homes for more people.

[Transcription Note: handwritten in the page margin with an arrow here: "This brings the sketch down to the year 1890—46 years ago. Many significant and interesting events have happened in the past 46 years but time does not permit even mentioning the history of that."]

Some day I am going to write the real story of Burns—write about the “good old, bad old whiskey drinkings, poker playing, horse racing days of old.” Write of the famous race horses, their owners and riders; of the days that men had no uses for courts, where they settled their civil differences by arbitration and their personal grudges at the point of a gun. Write of Bill Brown and the horse thieves of the high desert; of the freight teams and the freighters; of the stage coaches and their drivers; of the legal fight over the Malheur Lake. The fight that indirectly resulted in the killing of Peter French at the Sod House on December 26th, 1896.

Let me close this somewhat lengthy paper and thank you for the opportunity you have given me to prepare and read it, and assure you that I consider it a privilege to be with you tonight.

Note: A later, expanded, version of this paper by James J. Donegan was presented at the Harney County Pioneer Reunion in Burns, Oregon on June 12, 1937. The expanded version includes early settlement history of the Drewsey area and adds more details of the events of the 1878 Bannock-Paiute war including Sarah Winnemucca’s involvement and firsthand narrative accounts by Maurice Fitzgerald and Col J.H. Raley. The expanded version omits details of the establishment of the Malheur Reservation and efforts to establish an Indian School in Burns.

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Transcribed

6 Feb 2020

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