

HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #102 - Sides A/B

Subject: Carlos Ereno

Place: Burns, Oregon

Date: September 25, 1976

Interviewers: Royal G. Jackson & Jennifer A. Lee

(Note: The preparation of this document was financed in part by the Oregon State University Research Council, and the Harney County Oral History Program. January 1978. By Royal G. Jackson and Jennifer A. Lee.)

ROYAL G. JACKSON: Okay Mr. Ereno, your first name is Chuck. What does that stand for?

CARLOS ERENO: Charles, or Carlos actually. I was baptized Carlos.

ROYAL: Carlos Ereno, E R E N O.

CARLOS: Yes. I was born in Nampa, Idaho, in 1922. And my parents lived there for probably 45 years. My dad came over as a young man, and he worked as a sheepherder for a few years, and then got into the sheep business himself. He ran a sheep business in Southern Idaho for 35 years, I would say.

ROYAL: What year did he come to Idaho? Do you remember?

CARLOS: 1916.

ROYAL: Why did he come to the United States? Did he have friends here, or family?

CARLOS: My mother had an uncle in Spain and he arranged for my father to come over. And had a job for him, and then my mother came over in four years.

JENNIFER LEE: You had an uncle in Spain, or the United States?

CARLOS: No, he was here. He come over probably in, maybe 1905.

ROYAL: Your uncle did?

CARLOS: Yes. And then over the years, he brought all of his relatives over. I would imagine that he probably paid their way over, and then they worked out their, you know, transportation. My dad was a fisherman in Spain.

ROYAL: Was this in the province of Vizcaya?

CARLOS: Yes.

ROYAL: What town, do you remember?

CARLOS: Locatillo.

ROYAL: Locatillo was his hometown, and yours?

CARLOS: Was his hometown, uh huh. And he served a hitch in the Spanish Navy and came over to the United States right after he got married. And then as I understand the thing, he came because he thought that he could do better here, and he had this job lined up if he wanted it.

ROYAL: Did his wife come with him, or was he married then?

CARLOS: No, he got married before he came over, and then she came over four years later with my brother. He was about 5 years old when he came over.

ROYAL: So your father came directly to Idaho did he, when he came over?

CARLOS: Yes.

ROYAL: And went right into the sheep business?

CARLOS: Yes, and he lived in Nampa all his life there. He died in 1968.

ROYAL: You were born in 1922 in Nampa?

CARLOS: Yes.

ROYAL: What was your early recollection of that? Was there a large Basque community there?

CARLOS: Yes, Nampa is about 20 miles from Boise, and I would say that Boise probably has the largest Basque settlement in the United States. Now most of the Basques in Boise are from the province of Vizcaya, which is one of the seven provinces of the Basque people. And I would imagine that most of them came the way that my dad did. In other words, they had a friend or a relative there, and then some way they got together and decided to come over. There is still a very large Basque colony in Boise.

ROYAL: Did you, in your home; did your mother and father speak Basque to you as a child?

CARLOS: Yes, my mother never did learn to speak English fluently, and we always talked Basque at home. And both my brother and I, we both speak Basque fairly well. I can go to Spain to the Basque country, which I have done a couple of times, and I will get along fine, I can talk. What's happened in Spain over the years is they haven't been able to speak Basque. In other words, Franco made it against the law. So all of the people like, that would be my age, they are more fluent in Spanish than they are in Basque, and some of them speak very little Basque because it has been against the law. This law has been changed. So the two times that I went to Spain, for instance, I thought it was real interesting. I'd go visit somebody and I'd tell them now I can understand Spanish but I don't speak it very well, so you have to talk Basque to me. And it was very difficult for them to talk in Basque because they were not used to talking Basque. And they would invariably slip over into the Spanish, and then I'd have to ask them again to please talk Basque.

ROYAL: What years were you there, the first visit?

CARLOS: The first visit was in about 1962, and the second time was in 1966.

JENNIFER: Did you go with your parents?

CARLOS: No, just with friends.

ROYAL: What was your idea about going in 1962? What were you thinking, just to see what it was like?

CARLOS: Well probably the main reason that I went is I thought that it would be real interesting, because I had heard so many of these Basque fellows talk about their home town, you know, ... And to me, it was very interesting to just visit these places that I'd heard these people talk about.

ROYAL: What was your impression? Was it about what you expected?

CARLOS: Yes. The only thing that really surprised me was that I thought that we would see a lot of sheep and shepherders, and I think I saw one little bunch of sheep in the whole country.

ROYAL: Is that right? Do you still have relatives there?

CARLOS: No, all of my relatives are in the states. My dad had, let's see, two brothers and a sister which he brought over. And then my mother had one sister and two brothers, and I think her uncle, you know, in time brought the whole family over. They are all in the states; some are in California, I have one uncle in Indianapolis, Indiana. I have another aunt in Nevada. So they didn't all stay in the Boise area. I think all of the relatives though, came to Boise originally, all my aunts and uncles.

ROYAL: Split out from there?

CARLOS: Uh huh. And went into different things, you know.

ROYAL: How about your second visit, when was that?

CARLOS: In 1966.

ROYAL: What was your intent there?

CARLOS: My intent there was that the first time, I didn't think that I'd spent enough time in Spain.

ROYAL: How long were you there the first time?

CARLOS: In Spain, the first time I was there about two weeks, all of which I had spent in the Basque country. Then the second time I went over in 1966, I bought a car and we covered all of Spain. I was there about five weeks.

ROYAL: How about that trip? Did you get any more insights into your heritage than the first time?

CARLOS: Not really, the one thing that I did learn was that the Basque country, I thought, was the best part of Spain in that the people live the best, and they live in the best part of the country, or the richest part.

ROYAL: You mean natural resource-wise?

CARLOS: Yes. The people are more prosperous. The land is broken up more than it is in Southern Spain. There they have the big estates with what I thought were very, very poor people just working. Where in the Basque Provinces, it looked to me like they all had small places, 5-10-15 acres maybe, but it was more split up and owned by many, many more people.

ROYAL: How are the American Basques, like yourself, you know, second generation have left and now come back, how are they regarded by the Basques that have never left the country, that are still there?

CARLOS: You mean in Spain?

ROYAL: Yeah.

CARLOS: Well I would say that most of the Basque people that I talked to in Spain, they have all had either friends or family or something in Spain, and have talked to Americans that have lived here. And many of them I think probably would have come over themselves if they had the opportunity, but they just didn't have the chance. So they look on Americans typically as they are looked on by the rest of the world, everybody is rich, you know, and all this?

ROYAL: Very fortunate and materialistic and better off materially?

CARLOS: Better off. And some of them are quite jealous, you know, the fact that Americans maybe live better than they do, or have more things than they do. They, to me, although they don't have everything that we do, they probably enjoy themselves much more than we do.

ROYAL: How's that? In what way?

CARLOS: Well as an example, I was getting a haircut in a barbershop and the fellow was a distant relative. So he was talking about taking his son fishing weekends or something. And so I was quizzing him on this fishing, and of course all the streams are pretty well fished out, and there aren't many fish and they just went fishing as an outing. But he had a fishing pole that his father had given him, and his son fished with a willow or something with a line on it. So I told him that I thought he was smarter than we were because an American that went fishing, he would have to have two or three fishing poles, and a hundred flies, and a 4-wheel drive pickup with a camper, and so he then had to work so hard to pay for all this stuff that he didn't enjoy fishing as much.

ROYAL: A different ethic of life, different philosophy of living? CARLOS: They take it easier and of course their pace isn't as fast as ours, and I think they just enjoy living. They have more dances and more get-togethers, and of course the way the Catholic Church is over there, they all have more holidays than we do, a lot of them are celebrations for towns. So they do, to me, I think they have really more fun than we do.

ROYAL: It's interesting; let's shift back to the stages for a minute. Does this ethic that you just described, this way of life, did that make the voyage across the sea to Boise and to the enclaves of Basques in this country? Did the Basques here live differently from the rest of the Americans in your opinion?

CARLOS: I think they do. They live more conservatively probably. They are closer, their

families are closer. I think most of them have probably had quite a struggle to get what they have, and so they are just more naturally conservative. The way they live, and the clothes they buy, and the food they eat, and so on.

ROYAL: And yet, they are frivolous in that they like to have parties; I mean they enjoy drinking the wine, and singing and dancing?

CARLOS: Singing and dancing and they, I don't know, they enjoy things, different things than the Americans do. The American will take more pride in maybe something that he owns, where maybe the Basque takes pride in something he owns, but that maybe is not as important to him as having a good time, or enjoying himself, or something like that.

ROYAL: What do you remember as a boy growing up in Boise? Or Nampa I should say. Were there a lot of Basque get-togethers, celebrations?

CARLOS: There were, in those days, two major celebrations by the Basques, and one was always in the month of December which they called the Sheepherder's Ball. And this was a big dance, I guess you would say, and being in the wintertime, this was when all the sheepherders were in the low country getting ready to start lambing, or something. So they were down where they could come to this dance. And they would have, oh gee, I don't know, but as I remember maybe a thousand people at this dance from all over the State of Idaho. Then their other big celebration was on what they call San Juan's Day or St. John's Day. And I don't know quite how this thing started, but it was more in the form of a big picnic type thing, and it was always on June 23 or something.

ROYAL: Why San Juan? Is he a patron saint of the Basques or something?

CARLOS: No, but he is an important saint evidently. And the uncle that brought my father over to the states, for instance, his name was Juan and he was born on this day in June, so this was his birthday, and I think he was one of the fellows that started this picnic thing on his birthday. And he would have a gathering of all his friends, and then all his

families. And they would have a kind of a separate picnic of their own, probably with a hundred people for the meal. And then, of course, they would after their meal they would get together with all the other Basque people and they would have their dances, and sometimes some contests.

ROYAL: The weight lifting, and the contest of strength?

CARLOS: Yeah, and maybe dancing contests. And then they are great, I don't know what you'd call them in English, we call them versolares in Basque.

ROYAL: How would you translate that?

CARLOS: Well "versifiers," they make verses. And two guys will, for instance, get together or three, and they will try to outdo each other making up verses about one of the other fellows. Not really derogatory, but ---

ROYAL: Just kind of bantering back and forth? Chiding each other?

CARLOS: Chiding each other, and this would maybe go on for three or four hours. And of course they were just maybe 20-line verses in Basque, and they would make those rhyme out and of course ---

ROYAL: Spontaneously, eh?

CARLOS: Yes, and these guys, of course, would drink a little wine and they get to feeling good, and of course at every opportunity they are probably doing this, and so some of them are very, very good at it. It's more of a funny thing, I guess, kind of chiding each other.

ROYAL: So you gather around and listen to this?

CARLOS: Yes, uh huh, it was always very interesting.

ROYAL: So you grew up with this kind of thing happening all around you. Did you take part in it? Did you learn how to dance the dances, the La Jota for example?

CARLOS: No, I didn't. But most of the kids did I would say in those days, but I was



always kind of timid, I think.

ROYAL: When you went to school, was it mostly with other Basques, or ---

CARLOS: Oh no, no when I went to school in Nampa, probably in grade school there was 200 students, and there might have been 15 Basque kids going to school.

ROYAL: Did you sort of "hang" with them or were you ---

CARLO: No, in fact I think the older people stick together more because of the language. Most of them, of course, don't speak English fluently, I don't think, or didn't in those days. And of course it was kind of a natural thing for them to associate more with each other, because of the language problem. And they were always very conscious of the fact that they didn't speak English very well, or they had an accent.

ROYAL: How did you feel about your parents as being foreign? Did you have any kind of feeling of inferiority?

CARLOS: No, no in fact we were always rather proud that we were Basque and we were taught this, I think, by our parents. We were Americans first, but we were Basque people.

ROYAL: So you graduated from high school in what year?

CARLOS: 1940.

ROYAL: And then what did you do? Did you go into the military?

CARLOS: I graduated from high school and I worked in a bank in Nampa for about a year, and then I was drafted into the service. I was in the service from 1942 to 1946.

ROYAL: What branch of the service were you in?

CARLOS: I was in the U. S. Army Signal Corps.

ROYAL: Did you have any opportunity there to associate with Basques, or use your language any way?

CARLOS: No, I was going to say in all the time that I was in there, I only saw one Basque fellow. And I happened to know him, he was from Boise. But that's the only one. Some

of the fellas, I think, were more fortunate. But we would, like when I was stationed in California, why I would always go, you know, to the Basque rooming house or something, did in Salt Lake too, with Basque people.

ROYAL: You could always find a center of Basques wherever you were, a Basque Hotel?

CARLOS: Well not everywhere, but in California and Nevada, and of course, I spent a lot of time in the Eastern United States, and there was no possibility there. I think there are a lot of Basque people in New York, but they are just scattered all over. But they do have, I guess you would say a Basque hotel, and normally those fellas like this one New Yorker and the one here, they help these fellas with tickets if they are going to Spain.

ROYAL: It's kind of a social service agency in a way. People that don't speak the language very well, or ---

CARLOS: That's right, or if they need a lawyer or something, or they want to bring somebody over, or something, they help each other that way.

ROYAL: What did you do after you got out of the service in 1946?

CARLOS: When I got out of the service in '46 I came to Burns, and my brother had a grocery store here.

ROYAL: Is that why you came here?

CARLOS: Uh huh. So I worked for him, and then he sold the grocery store. And we liked Burns, so we just kind of looked around and decided, well, they needed a clothing store.

ROYAL: Why did he come here? Did he come from Nampa, too?

CARLOS: Yeah, he owned, he and another fellow owned I think it was three grocery stores. They owned one in Burns, and one in Baker, and one in Emmett. And when they bought the one in Burns from Mr. Tiller, they evidently couldn't find a manager or something, so he came over and he ran that store while they had it here.

ROYAL: So you came here in 1946? Now you're not married, are you?

CARLOS: I'm single.

ROYAL: You've never been married?

CARLOS: No.

ROYAL: What about your brother, did he marry?

CARLOS: Yes, my brother married in, well he live din California there at one time and he married a German girl in the Los Angeles area. Then he moved back to Idaho and worked for Albertson's grocery, and then got into his own stores. He has one son, and one daughter. And to me it's kind of interesting, now those kids don't know any Basque words, they don't know anything about Basque history, or the Basque country. I mean they are completely Americans.

ROYAL: Is this Gary Ereno?

CARLOS: Yes.

ROYAL: That runs the other Burns Department Store?

CARLOS: Yes.

ROYAL: He doesn't have any contact at all with the Basque then?

CARLOS: None.

ROYAL: Was this because your brother wasn't very concerned about him learning Basque?

CARLOS: Probably. Course now he wishes that he had taught both his son and daughter Basque, and had worked at it, but I don't know. I wouldn't say why he didn't. I guess he just didn't think it was important, I guess, when they were kids.

ROYAL: Your parents didn't have any big influence on you as far as going out with Basque girls? Were they disappointed when your brother married a German girl instead of a Basque?

CARLOS: Oh, I would say that my mother was. I don't think my dad was particularly ---

cared about it. But I think my mother was disappointed naturally, she wanted him to marry a Basque girl.

ROYAL: So you came here in 1946, and have been here ever since?

CARLOS: Thirty years.

ROYAL: And at that time opened this store?

CARLOS: Yes.

ROYAL: Ereno's Men's Store. And have been here at this location since then?

CARLOS: Yes.

ROYAL: Do you affiliate with the Basque community? Are your friends Basque?

CARLOS: Yes, some of my best friends are Basques. Some of them aren't. And we, because of the fact that we speak the language and so on, we have quite a number of the Basque fellows come to us when they have some problem, for instance, I'd say that almost all of the Basques that come to town and go to work at the mill, they are handed an application blank, whatever you call it, and they will bring that in to me and I will help them fill it out.

ROYAL: These are younger Basques now that are coming over, or who would these be?

CARLOS: Yeah, these are the younger fellows. I'd say on the average they are in their late 20's.

ROYAL: But they are from Spain?

CARLOS: They're from Spain.

ROYAL: Do they have any trouble with visas or anything in getting in?

CARLOS: Well I don't believe so anymore. At one time it was difficult for them to get in. But it isn't any more, because there are several different ways that they can come into the country, under several different immigration laws, I guess.

ROYAL: The new Basques that are coming in, the young men, are they coming in for the

same reasons? Do they have relatives that have written them and said there are jobs over here, like they used to?

CARLOS: Not so much. I think that they probably, either someone in the family maybe has lived here and had gone back, or friends have been over and they realize that because of the wage structure and so on, that they can say come over here for maybe ten years and accumulate enough money that they can go back and maybe set up a little business or something, where they can't do that in Spain.

ROYAL: That's been the dream of a lot of immigrants that came to this country. "I want to go to America, try to make my fortune, but come home." A lot of them don't make it home. Is that the case with the Basques, or do a lot of them actually take it back?

CARLOS: No, they, almost all of them come over --- my folks, in fact I've heard my mother say many times that the reason that she didn't try to learn the English language like she should, or some-thing, was because when she came over she didn't really want to come, but thought that she should because her husband was here, and that she would be here 10 or 15 years, and then they would go back to Spain.

... (Confidential information deleted by interviewer.)

ROYAL: Well Franco persecuted all the Basques didn't he? Wasn't he the one that instituted the law saying that the Basques could not speak their language? And couldn't have their own school? It would seem that all Basques would be against Franco then.

CARLOS: Well of course the only thing that I know about it is what I got second or third hand. But we have one province of the Basques particularly who are monarchists, and they are interested in the king. We have one province of the Basques who we call ... and they were interested in a monarchy.

ROYAL: Which province was that?

CARLOS: This would be, I think it's Catalan, I'm not sure. But anyhow, this is the

province that Pomplona is in, that I remember. They were interested in a monarchy. So in order to get them on to his side, or get their support, Franco promised them a monarchy, and he promised the whole country of Spain a monarchy. But he won this one province over to his side and they didn't fight him. Where the other two or three provinces that are in Spain, I guess it would be three, they were on the government side. So I think that this is one reason that you had Basques on both sides, but you had the majority on the anti-Franco side. So of course he promised the people when he took over the country, not only the Basques, but all of the Spanish people, that he would be temporary as a dictator or ruler, and that he would turn Spain back to the monarchy. And of course, he dangled that at those people for 35 years I guess, or 40. And he told these people this for 35 years, and in the mean time, he picked up the young man who is the King of Spain now, as a young boy of 10 or 15 years old.

ROYAL: This is Juan Carlos?

CARLOS: Yes, and he groomed him to be the king. And I think he served a term in the armed forces, in the air force or something, and he was around Franco all the time, and being groomed for this job. And then he was picked as his successor. However, as I get the thing, why he was, this was supposed to be before Franco died. In other words, Franco was supposed to be a temporary government.

ROYAL: So when Franco died, Juan Carlos did take the throne, did he not?

CARLOS: Yes.

ROYAL: What's the Basque's feelings about Juan Carlos in general? Do they see him as favorable to them?

CARLOS: Yes, I think they like him. I think, I would say, that almost all of the Basques like him. However they are watching him very closely I think, because they want more freedom. And the ones that are here, of course, want more freedom for their families that

are over there, or their relatives. And so they are watching him to see if he is going to let up on the reins and give the people more freedoms, and more to say about the government than they have. Now my impression, when I was over there, was that the Basque country was not represented to a great degree in their government. They were taxed as heavily, or even maybe more heavily, because most of the industry and valuable businesses and things, I think, are in the Basque provinces of Spain. So as one fellow told me, they were being taxed heavily, but that the money was all going to Madrid and being spent in other parts of Spain. For instance, they didn't think that they had the road system that they should, because the government was spending all this money in other parts of Spain.

ROYAL: What about the rules or the laws against speaking Basque? Are those still in effect?

CARLOS: No, no they aren't. The only thing is that the people were faced with this for so long, that it's easier for them to speak in Spanish than it is in Basque, and it is a habit with them. So they unconsciously just slip into the Spanish from the Basque.

ROYAL: You mean that there was a law against speaking any Basque, anywhere, home or church?

CARLOS: You bet. If they caught you speaking Basque on the street, why if they wanted to, and they did, there were no Basque newspapers, for instance. There were no Basque newspapers printed in the Basque language. Basque was not taught in the schools in the Basque country. There were no Basque textbooks, or readers. So you do that to somebody for, I don't know how long this law was in effect, but maybe 20, or 25 years. The only way that they are going to learn to speak Basque, the children, is from their parents at home.

ROYAL: Is it coming back now that the laws have been lifted?

CARLOS: I would have no idea. But of course the Basque people that I have met are all very proud that they are Basque, and not Spanish. But these are the ones that are interested in all the history, and the heritage, and teach the Basque language to their children. And, you know, teach them history.

ROYAL: Getting back to Burns and Harney County for a second, are there any other disagreements among the Basque community here that causes it to fragment?

CARLOS: I don't think so.

... (Unrelated)

bl