

HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #106 - Side A

Subject: David Mallea

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)

ROYAL JACKSON: Okay Mr. Mallea, your name is David Mallea, M A L L E A?

DAVID MALLEA: Right, David Mallea.

ROYAL: And you are 100% Basque?

DAVID: True, 100% Basque.

ROYAL: Where did you come from? Where were you born?

DAVID: I was born in Jordan Valley, Oregon. That's in the far eastern part of the state. You been to Jordan Valley?

ROYAL: Not yet. Your parents were they first generation, were they born in Spain?

DAVID: Born in Spain, yeah. They came to this country --- my father came to this country in 1902, after he was discharged from the Spanish Army.

ROYAL: Why did he decide to come to the United States?

DAVID: I'm not sure. I believe that he made some acquaintances in Cuba, and possibly even some American troops, I think this was the way; right after the war was over.

ROYAL: We are talking about which war?

DAVID: The Spanish-American War.

ROYAL: 1898? He fought in that war?

DAVID: Yes, he fought for Spain.

ROYAL: Uh huh.

DAVID: Of course, I evened it up; I fought for the United States in the Second World War.

ROYAL: That's good. What are your recollections of his time during that war? Was he in Cuba?

DAVID: He was in the Spanish Calvary in Cuba. And I don't remember too much about it. I do remember him mentioning that he picked up a good rifle, the 30-40 Craig, U. S. Army rifle, much better than the Spanish rifle. Things weren't too good in Spain. If you were in the military you were okay, but other people were in sad straits.

ROYAL: Economic conditions were pretty poor?

DAVID: Yeah, pretty bad. And the Basques were kind of under thumb, you know, the Spanish rule was quite strict. So he wanted to leave. He applied for a, not a visa --- what's the word I'm looking for? Anyway, he applied for a chance to come over.

ROYAL: Immigrate?

DAVID: Immigration, and it came through real fast, like I say, 1902 he came over to this country and he went to Dalamar, Idaho.

ROYAL: How old was he then?

DAVID: Let's see, he was, I think, about 25.

ROYAL: Did he speak any English?

DAVID: No English at all. It was very strange. There was this mining town made up of a lot of rough speaking, you know what the mining towns were composed of.

ROYAL: Course?

DAVID: Yeah, really. So he worked in Dalamar, Idaho. This is not too far from Jordan

Valley.

JENNIFER LEE: How did he happen to come there?

DAVID: The only people he knew of were some Basques that had maybe four or five years before had come through Nevada north to Jordan Valley, and settled in the Jordan Valley country. At that time the only work available was in this mining section of Idaho, Dalamar, Dewey, and Silver City, so he applied and got work as a laborer.

ROYAL: In the mines?

DAVID: Yes, in the mines. He worked there long enough to get a little money, and went back to Spain and married my mother, who he had known for years, all his life.

ROYAL: What province was he from?

DAVID: That would be Vizcaya.

ROYAL: Vizcaya. And your mother was from Vizcaya as well?

DAVID: Yes, the towns were just little small villages, probably three or four miles apart.

ROYAL: So then he brought your mother over here?

DAVID: Right.

ROYAL: About when was that?

DAVID: This was in 1905.

ROYAL: How long did he stay then in Idaho?

DAVID: He didn't stay in the mines too long. Oh, perhaps about four years, then went in the sheep business on South Mountain. You may have heard of South Mountain, possibly not. They had a little ranch, this was before I was born, and he was in this business for some time. Then they moved to Jordan Valley, and then he went in the trucking business. Of course, you know, there's no railroad in Jordan Valley, so everything had to be shipped, the sheep and the cattle shipped out, and the groceries and the coal and whatnot shipped in. So he was in the trucking business until he died, in

1938.

ROYAL: Were you born in Jordan Valley?

DAVID: I was born in Jordan Valley.

ROYAL: What year was that?

DAVID: 1922.

ROYAL: What are your early recollections of life there among the Basques? Were you pretty much in a Basque community there?

DAVID: Yes, much more so than it is now.

ROYAL: You mean here or there?

DAVID: There, or here, anyplace, there's a lot of mixed marriages and everything now. You don't find too many that are all Basque families any more, I mean especially in the second generation. In the first generation most of them died, anyway.

ROYAL: So in your home everyone spoke Basque?

DAVID: Everyone, this was the first language I spoke, was Basque.

ROYAL: You didn't learn Spanish?

DAVID: No. My parents both spoke good Spanish, but they never spoke Spanish to us, so I didn't learn too much Spanish.

ROYAL: How many of the children were there?

DAVID: There were seven.

ROYAL: Large family. How many boys and girls?

DAVID: Five girls and two boys.

ROYAL: How have they pursued the Basque traditions, have they married within the Basque group?

DAVID: Three girls did, and one girl didn't, and two boys didn't.

ROYAL: You didn't?

DAVID: No, I didn't.

ROYAL: Was there any pressure from your parents, or any kind of influence to marry a Basque?

DAVID: No, not that I know of. I never even heard it brought up. Of course, as you are growing up you grow up with everyone, though, whether it is an Irishman or an Englishman, it got to be all one community pretty soon. We didn't follow the traditions.

ROYAL: But in Jordan Valley there was a large enough number of Basques that you could pretty much live within that group of people? You know, your socializing and all that?

DAVID: Yes, you could, and years ago there was a lot more activity, you know. The Basques, for instance, would have these three big celebrations or dances during the wintertime, and there were three Basque hotels in Jordan Valley, and each would have music, and they would have their traditional Basque dances and Basque meals Christmas and New Year's, and then Three Kings Day.

ROYAL: What were the big celebrations? Three Kings Day was one? What day was that?

DAVID: That was the 6th of January, I think.

ROYAL: Was that out of Catholicism? Is that a Catholic Saint's Day or something?

DAVID: Yes.

ROYAL: The other was New Year's?

DAVID: New Year's and Christmas.

ROYAL: You had them close together, didn't you?

DAVID: Yeah, all of them were close together. And in the summer they had nothing, they were too busy, most of them were in the sheep business and they didn't do anything. Now you've probably heard they have like in Boise, which is the biggest Basque center

around. Now, I think, they have a summer get-together and winter also.

ROYAL: When you were a kid did they have games of strength like I've read the Basques do in Boise? You know, contests, dancing traditional dances like La Jota?

DAVID: They'd have La Jota, ... they'd have the traditional Basque dances, but not the tests of strength. They did have one of the first handball courts.

ROYAL: The Pelota Court is still there, isn't it?

DAVID: It's still there. It isn't in very good condition. It doesn't look very good, the floor is gone but the walls, the two walls are there, it's just identical to the ones that we saw in the Basque country in Spain. That was built around 1916 by the Basques there in Jordan Valley, from hand hewn rock that was hauled in by wagon about six miles.

ROYAL: And the Basques continued to play that until when? Do you remember when they stopped?

DAVID: Yes, well the first generation were the people that really pursued it. The second generation, like myself, we attempted to play the game but we really had difficulty competing with them, even though they were twice our age.

ROYAL: They were pretty good, huh?

DAVID: Yes, they were good, and I'll say probably until 1935 or '40 they still played quite a bit.

ROYAL: But they don't now.

DAVID: Oh no. Like I say, there's not even a floor in the thing now. It was a kind of concrete floor, and it's all torn up. I wish that Jordan Valley did take it on themselves to repair it and put it back the way it should be.

ROYAL: I think it's on the state historic register now and there may be some money to repair that.

DAVID: Yeah, that would be terrific.

ROYAL: You know, when you were a kid growing up, were you conscious of being different from the other kids as far as being a Basque instead of American as they refer to it?

DAVID: Yeah, and I correct them continually. (Laughter) I don't think so. Well perhaps at times, I think, brought on by someone else perhaps by saying, "You're a Basque, therefore different."

ROYAL: How different? Was it ever negative?

DAVID: It was the language; really, I think it was probably a little bit negative. The language. The real difficulty was, I think, was our parents, you know, they couldn't communicate too well with someone else, with an English speaking person. And it reflected a little bit on us probably, too.

ROYAL: You had an urge to be an American, to be accepted.

DAVID: Yeah, and I still have a lot of pride, though, in the Basques.

ROYAL: Were your school chums Basque?

DAVID: Oh yes, both. I had no problems. Both Basque and English speaking.

ROYAL: On the school grounds did you speak Basque at all with your friends? Was that ever an issue, did the Principal ever tell you, you couldn't do that?

DAVID: No, I don't recollect that at all. I don't think we ever did it in school. We did, this is kind of funny. After I got out of --- my senior year in high school playing basketball we had five boys that spoke Basque, and we were playing in the little town of Homedale, and so we thought well we'll speak Basque to one another and give us a little advantage. And come to find out one of the boys we didn't know on the Homedale team, was Basque. (Laughter) He fully understood everything. We had a big time later, we got to meet the kid and we had fun.

ROYAL: You graduated then from Jordan valley high school?

DAVID: Jordan Valley High School.

ROYAL: What year was that?

DAVID: 1940.

ROYAL: Did you go in the military then?

DAVID: Yes, a year and a half later I was in the military. In the Navy.

ROYAL: Navy? Did you run across very many Basques while you were in the service?

DAVID: I ran across two people, and both were my cousins.

ROYAL: Is that right?

DAVID: One on the Spirit of Santos in the South Pacific, and the other one in the Philippines.

ROYAL: And did you know them before?

DAVID: Oh, yes, I knew them well. And they were also both in the Navy.

ROYAL: How long were you in the service?

DAVID: Three years.

ROYAL: You got out about '45?

DAVID: '45, yeah.

ROYAL: And then did you come back to Harney County?

DAVID: No, I went back to Malheur County, and I was kind of unsettled really. I didn't know quite what to do, and I worked for the state for six months.

ROYAL: Doing what?

DAVID: Highway Department, the station this side of McDermitt. Which I think now is called Basque, in fact.

ROYAL: Is that a right?

DAVID: Yeah, it's called Basque Station. Then I went to work for the railroad in Nampa, Idaho, and I was there. Not too happy with that, so I went to OTI, on the G.I. Bill.



ROYAL: What's OTI?

DAVID: Oregon Technical Institute, Klamath Falls. And I took medical technology, and X-ray. And soon after that I came to work here at Burns, and I've been here ever since.

ROYAL: You were married in there somewhere, weren't you?

DAVID: Yes, I was married in Nampa, Idaho in 1955.

ROYAL: And you've been in Burns ever since you came from OTI?

DAVID: No, I continued to work for the railroad for two and a half years, or thereabouts, then I came to Burns. I've been here about 19 or 20 years.

ROYAL: What sort of work do you do at Hines?

DAVID: I work at the hospital.

ROYAL: Oh, you're at the hospital.

DAVID: Yeah, medical technology, and X-ray both.

ROYAL: What about your wife? She wasn't Basque?

DAVID: No, she is German extraction. Hershberger and Gockner, about as German as you can get.

ROYAL: Do you have children?

DAVID: I don't have --- she had two girls from a previous marriage; I don't have any children.

ROYAL: So they aren't very tuned to the Basque culture?

DAVID: Not at all.

ROYAL: They don't consider themselves related?

DAVID: No. I'm the only Basque here.

ROYAL: Do you take part in the Basque community here? Do you consider yourself a part of that group?

DAVID: Oh, I like to think I am. Probably the biggest part I play, I'm sure is interpreting,

and helping them with their problems, attorneys and the doctors, especially the doctors. They can't communicate with their Basque patients, some of them.

ROYAL: Are there that many Basques in Harney County who don't speak English?

DAVID: They don't speak English well enough, yes, there's quite a number.

ROYAL: Are they younger ones or older ones?

DAVID: Yeah, both, from the middle 20's to the 40's that don't speak English well enough, some older than this. Some well enough to understand like, you know, if they have to speak to an attorney, or their income taxes, or lots of things that are difficult to understand for them. And especially medical problems, you know, no matter what age.

ROYAL: Are there still Basques then coming into Harney County, even though sheep is no longer a big industry?

DAVID: They are still coming in, however they are all going to the mill; the majority are going to the mill.

ROYAL: If you were describing the Basque community you'd say probably the most common employer would be Hines Lumber?

DAVID: Yes. It has taken over. Well, you know, there are no sheep in this country anymore.

ROYAL: Uh huh.

DAVID: I think probably there's one or two bands of sheep in the whole country. I mean Eastern Oregon.

ROYAL: You said you went to Spain. Once or more?

DAVID: Once. A little later if you have time I'd like to show you a prize picture I took of my mother's house.

ROYAL: I'd like to see it. What year did you go?

DAVID: '73.

ROYAL: Why did you go? What were you thinking about when you went?

DAVID: Oh, for many years, of course, I felt that I'd like to see the country that I'd heard of from my folks when they were young.

ROYAL: And this was in what village?

DAVID: Well my mother was born in Ea, it's called, it's "E A" in spelling, and she was raised in Ereno, on a little farm nearby. And of course for years you hear about the different places, and I used to even dream about, you know, I had a picture in my mind just what it was going to look like. And it didn't, it was different.

ROYAL: You'd heard all this time as a kid your parents talking about their village?

DAVID: Yeah, and how beautiful it was, you know, Jordan Valley is dry country like this, and that is green and rolling hills, and it's beautiful country. One of the first things I remember when I was young, of course, was my mother telling me how disappointed she was in Dalamar. I think she was a bride of 19 or 20 years of age, first of all leaving her family in Spain, knowing she would never see them again, you know. And quite trying times, upset, and then this cold, arriving in Dalamar in the wintertime, the snow this deep, and cold, and completely strange surroundings and language.

ROYAL: Was there ever the assumption that they'd stay here and make a certain amount of money and then go back, like a lot of immigrants looked at it that way, they'd make their stake and then go home?

DAVID: Not for them. At that time my dad felt that this was a much better place to live, the opportunities, even though to begin with he couldn't speak the language, he soon learned well enough.

ROYAL: And got by fine?

DAVID: Right.

ROYAL: What were your reactions when you saw your old home place after all the time

of hearing of what it was like?

DAVID: It was hard to believe, of course, to begin with, it was a great felling. One of the things I remember most was we rented a car in Madrid to begin with, and we had difficulty getting out of that city of 4 million people. But I had a little trouble so I let my wife drive, and I rolled the window down, and in my best Spanish I talked to the taxi driver, and so forth. "I want to go north, and I want to go to Guernica." Okay, we got out of Madrid. Anyway, when we arrived in Basque country ... Guernica is kind of the center, kind of the capital of Vizcaya, you know. That was a city that was bombed by the Germans in 1937, just about leveled during the Spanish Civil War.

ROYAL: But that's the capital of the Basque country, isn't it?

DAVID: Well, that's the capital of that province of Vizcaya. That's where the old government was before Franco put it down. Anyway, I arrived there and we were looking for this hotel, and I hadn't spoken any Basque yet to anyone, and I told my wife, "Well, I'm going to try right here. These people all speak Basque, that's a sure thing." And it was easy, I was surprised. It was real easy and very enjoyable, and I'll never forget it. And they spoke Basque just like I do, I thought I might stumble a little; of course, my folks were from that province, the dialect was just exactly as I had always heard at home.

ROYAL: The contact had been continuous enough with new Basques coming in to Jordan Valley that the language didn't become mutated there in Jordan Valley; it was contemporary Basque that you spoke?

DAVID: Oh yes, Vizcayan Basque, now the Guipuzcoa is a little bit different, that's another province, all are a little bit different.

ROYAL: How are you accepted by the Spanish Basques, being an American Basque? How did they look upon you?

DAVID: Oh great, real friendly, much more so than if I hadn't spoken Basque. We

stopped at several little taverns and they'd hand us these Spanish menus, you know, and I'd tell my wife I'm not doing too good. So I called one of the girls over and I'd speak to her in Basque, "I don't understand this, can you explain this to me in Basque?" "Sure." Their eyes would light up, and the owner would come and sit down with us, just like we were old friends, and they told me in fact, well, they are kind of bitter toward the Spanish rule, so they told me you're better off to never speak Spanish. That was their feeling.

ROYAL: The Basque language was suppressed for a long while under Franco, wasn't it?

DAVID: Yes. Just now they are getting their freedoms back. In fact, I read it in the *Statesman*, that's the Boise paper, just recently where now they're able to hang their Basque flags. This is the first time since I think just before the Civil War.

ROYAL: Do they have their own schools again?

DAVID: They are able to teach Basque in schools again, and bring out the books, and so forth. This was suppressed, you couldn't teach any Basque.

ROYAL: Do you take part in any of the activities they have here in Harney County, the Basques have?

DAVID: Anytime when I can, if I'm not off, and not tied up at the hospital. I like to take part. They have a picnic in the summer and they have a dance and a meal in the wintertime.

ROYAL: Do you usually go to those?

DAVID: Oh yes, and I like to dance the Basque dances.

ROYAL: Did you go this last picnic they had?

DAVID: This summer? No, I didn't get to that. I was working that weekend.

... (Confidential information deleted by interviewer.)

ROYAL: Finally, what do you see for the Basques in Harney County, are they going to continue as a viable group? Is the language being systematically taught to the young

people, is the cooking, which is distinctive as I understand it, is it being passed on from generation to generation? How do you see this?

DAVID: I don't know. I'd like to think it's being passed on, but I think a lot of it is going to be forgotten, you know, gone by the wayside, I really do, unless something is taken up like in bigger cities like Boise. I keep bringing up Boise because I know more about that country there because I lived there for a long time. They are teaching their children Basque, and they are having lessons on how to dance the La Jota, and all the traditional Basque customs and everything.

ROYAL: Think that's good?

DAVID: I think it's terrific, and I'd like to see more of it here. We are trying to do that, just recently this was brought forward that this winter we again, not again, but for the first time, lease a larger place and invite the public, and get a good Basque orchestra from Boise and have a big get-together where everyone can see the Basque dances. Perhaps even get this group of young Basque dancers that performs throughout the Northwest and everywhere, and have them put on a little show. Perhaps we can build up an interest.

ROYAL: Bring back some of the old ways?

DAVID: Yeah, even maybe some of the pride. I don't know.

... (Unrelated on politics.)

--

bl