

HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #108 - Sides A/B

Subject: Cecilia Urizar

Place: Burns, Oregon

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Interviewers: Royal G. Jackson & Jennifer A. Lee

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ROYAL JACKSON: When did you come to the United States?

CECILIA URIZAR: 1916. That was before your time.

ROYAL: How old were you in 1916?

CECILIA: Seventeen. I was born in 1898.

ROYAL: Why did you leave Spain?

CECILIA: I have no special reason. I had a brother and sister here.

ROYAL: Where were they?

CECILIA: In McDermitt, Nevada. That was on the Oregon side. They had a sheep business there.

ROYAL: So, your idea was to live with your brother?

CECILIA: With my sister.

ROYAL: Did you intend to stay here when you came?

CECILIA: Oh yes. I never thought I'd go back.

ROYAL: So, you came directly to, how did you come, by boat?

CECILIA: Boat. To New York and then train.

ROYAL: How was the trip going across the ocean?

CECILIA: Good. We had lots of fun. That was the first time I was by myself, before I had older sisters, mother, and father there. I was free then.

ROYAL: How long did the trip take?

CECILIA: Twenty-three days.

ROYAL: And then you came to Ellis Island in New York?

CECILIA: No, we don't go to island. We went straight to hotel. Valentin Aguirre.

ROYAL: That was a Basque travel agent, wasn't it? Mrs. Osa mentioned his name too.

CECILIA: Yes.

ROYAL: He had a hotel in New York?

CECILIA: Yes. The last time I was there, his son and daughter-in-law takes care of it.

ROYAL: Did you spend several nights there?

CECILIA: Yeah, couple nights, I think if I remember right.

ROYAL: And then what?

CECILIA: I came to McDermitt by train. No, I came to Winnemucca. I take a stage in Winnemucca and come to McDermitt in the stage, and my brother meet me in McDermitt.

ROYAL: What did you think when you left New York? Did you think McDermitt was close, or did you have any idea?

CECILIA: No, I wished I was back in New York. I was ready to go home.

ROYAL: You didn't want to come?

CECILIA: No.

ROYAL: Why not?

CECILIA: I don't know. I was lonesome.

ROYAL: You were by yourself? You didn't speak English?

CECILIA: No, not at all.

ROYAL: So, what, Valentin Aguirre got you a ticket and put you on the train?

CECILIA: Yeah, he help us get the tickets.

ROYAL: How many days did it take you to get to McDermitt from New York?

CECILIA: Four days from New York to Winnemucca, I think. And pretty near all day from Winnemucca to McDermitt on the stage. The roads were bad at that time.

ROYAL: You had to take a horse-drawn wagon from Winnemucca to McDermitt?

CECILIA: No, a car.

ROYAL: What was your reaction when you saw McDermitt? What did you think? Were you happy, sad?

CECILIA: No, I was half sick, and I wished I was home. And when sister came, I was glad to go with her.

ROYAL: You were happy to see her?

CECILIA: Yes. I don't even know her.

ROYAL: Was she a lot older than you?

CECILIA: Oh, yeah.

ROYAL: How many years?

CECILIA: She was, is 92 now. I am 77. So it is that much difference.

ROYAL: So, you hardly knew her then?

CECILIA: No, I don't even remember her at all.

ROYAL: What did you do then when you arrived? Did you live with your sister and brother-in-law?

CECILIA: Yeah.

ROYAL: Did you work in the hotel or something?

CECILIA: No, they had sheep, and they lived on a ranch.

ROYAL: And you lived on the ranch?

CECILIA: Yeah.

ROYAL: Outside of McDermitt?

CECILIA: Yeah.

ROYAL: Were there a lot of Basques there?

CECILIA: All the ranches were Basques. There were several of them. All in sheep.

ROYAL: Why was that? Why did so many Basques come over and herd sheep?

CECILIA: I don't know. Basque countries are small and there were so many people that they want to get away somewhere, and a lot of them came here.

ROYAL: Which province in Spain are you from?

CECILIA: Vizcaya.

ROYAL: So McDermitt was a lot different from Vizcaya?

CECILIA: Oh yes.

ROYAL: How is it different, can you tell me?

CECILIA: No, I can't really.

ROYAL: Was the land different?

CECILIA: Everything. Before I left home, we got all our garden put up, and after I come here, it took a month or better before I started working in the garden.

ROYAL: Because of the weather, you mean? Is it a lot dryer than here?

CECILIA: Yeah, I guess. Here is dryer. Different climate all together, especially this side of Oregon. Vizcaya is more like Portland. It rains a lot and it doesn't snow; once in a while a little bit.

ROYAL: How did you get along there on the ranch, were there a lot of Basques to talk to?

CECILIA: Oh yes. Lots of camp tenders come to the ranch and they come every week to get the food for the shepherders and themselves too.

ROYAL: Were most of those shepherders with families? Did they have wives or were they by themselves?

CECILIA: No. Once they had families, they lived in the ranches.

ROYAL: Those were all bachelors then?

CECILIA: Yes. Young fellows, all kinds.

ROYAL: Wasn't that very lonely for them?

CECILIA: Well yeah, probably. But they get together even in the hills. Maybe they had to walk miles to see other people, but they did, they claim.

ROYAL: How long did you stay with your sister and your brother-in-law?

CECILIA: Four years.

ROYAL: So that was 1916 to 1920?

CECILIA: Yes.

ROYAL: And then what did you do?

CECILIA: I married.

ROYAL: One of the shepherders?

CECILIA: One of the camp tenders, yeah.

ROYAL: How did you meet him?

CECILIA: He came to the ranch like a lot of camp tenders, to the ranch. I don't know, I guess we like each other.

ROYAL: And you got to know him there in McDermitt? Is this his picture here?

CECILIA: Yes.

ROYAL: How long did you know him before you married him?

CECILIA: Couple years or so. Maybe little bit better.

ROYAL: Were there dances or something where you would get together?

CECILIA: Oh yeah, we had the dances in McDermitt. McDermitt is 25 miles or so from where we lived. By then they had the car, little Fords, and I could drive Fords, and we got to town quite often. And three or four times a year, they had big dances. Fourth of July I was all week there in McDermitt.

ROYAL: Were these Basque dances or were they just community dances?

CECILIA: Community, no, they were all kinds. Sometimes American people asked to go to the dances, and I go with them. And maybe when I ought to say no, I said yes.

ROYAL: How were the Basques treated around McDermitt? Did they get along well with the Americans?

CECILIA: Oh yes.

ROYAL: No problems, no fights, or nothing like that?

CECILIA: No.

ROYAL: Was there much intermarriage between them?

CECILIA: Not then, but now there is. Well Basques that were American born, mixed more than we did.

ROYAL: At that time you would marry another Basque, boy friends and girl friends were within the Basque culture?

CECILIA: Yes.

ROYAL: You stayed there from 1916 to 1920, and then you got married. And then what did you do?

CECILIA: I came to Andrews.

ROYAL: I see a lot of pictures of the Smyth Hotel.

CECILIA: Yes, we bought it.

ROYAL: Can you tell us about your life in Andrews? What was it like?

CECILIA: It was good, just like the ranches. We had a hotel, and we hired a cook because I started with my family early after I married. I didn't know any better.

JENNIFER LEE: How many people were there when you arrived?

CECILIA: Smyth, and Turner ---

ROYAL: Shulls?

CECILIA: Not then, they come later. There was Carey ---

ROYAL: Why did you go to Andrews?

CECILIA: Well, my husband worked in Steens Mountain before he came to McDermitt.

ROYAL: So, after you got married why did you decide to go to Andrews?

CECILIA: He found out that the hotel was for sale.

JENNIFER: Who did you buy it from?

CECILIA: We bought it from Smyth; George and Fannie Smyth.

ROYAL: What year did you buy the hotel?

CECILIA: 1920. The month I don't remember.

ROYAL: I've seen postcards of the Smyth Hotel, and it said it had 20 rooms, I think. Is that right?

CECILIA: Yeah, I don't remember but maybe. It was a big house.

ROYAL: You and your husband ran it then?

CECILIA: Yes.

ROYAL: And he didn't herd sheep?

CECILIA: No, no. After we married, he don't herd sheep.

JENNIFER: Do you remember what buildings were in Andrews when you were there? How many?

CECILIA: There were four buildings, I think.

JENNIFER: Do you know what buildings?

CECILIA: Hotel, the store, the Careys, Mrs. Turner, and a schoolhouse.

JENNIFER: What about a saloon?

CECILIA: Well, it was all together, hotel and saloon.

JENNIFER: The hotel was connected to the store and saloon?

CECILIA: Yes, not the store, but the saloon.

JENNIFER: So, you ran the saloon too?

CECILIA: Yeah, my husband did. And there was a big dance hall. It was right behind the hotel.

ROYAL: There is a rock foundation there still today. Have you been there lately?

CECILIA: No, not lately.

ROYAL: Well, I'm sure it's still the same. It's just an old rock wall, and that's all that is left.

CECILIA: Is that right? The last time I was there, it was up. Twenty years ago, I was there.

... (Side conversation with Gilbert Urizar.)

JENNIFER: How many people lived there, do you remember? Wasn't Andrews the major stage route?

CECILIA: Yeah. The train goes from Crane to Denio.

ROYAL: What were the stage stops along the way then? From Crane to where?

CECILIA: I don't know how many stations. I think Alberson, and Andrews, and then Fields, and then into Denio. I think that's it.

ROYAL: Did the stage stop there when you owned it?

CECILIA: Yes.

ROYAL: Did they bring mail, and freight, and passengers?

CECILIA: Oh yeah.

ROYAL: Did some of the passengers stay all night at your hotel?

CECILIA: No, most of the time they go through. Probably some of them stayed there. But there was mostly people coming from the ranches.

ROYAL: To buy groceries?

CECILIA: Yeah, they come by to buy groceries and maybe stay overnight in the hotel.

ROYAL: So that was an area where a rancher would come to get his food for a month or so maybe?

CECILIA: Yes.

ROYAL: And stay all night at a hotel and maybe drink a cerveza?

CECILIA: Yes.

JENNIFER: Did your husband own the store?

CECILIA: No. The store was separate. It wasn't together.

JENNIFER: Do you know who owned the store?

CECILIA: Smyth, John Smyth. I think George and John were partners, but John was the one who ran the store.

ROYAL: What was life like in Andrews? Can you tell me about a typical day? What would you do?

CECILIA: Well, what would a housewife do?

ROYAL: Clean the hotel rooms?

CECILIA: Yeah, and clean the bed, and change the sheets.

ROYAL: Did you serve meals?

CECILIA: Oh yeah, you bet.

ROYAL: How much would a meal cost then?

CECILIA: I think it was 75 cents.

JENNIFER: Did you fix Basque food?

CECILIA: We had a cook most of the time, so I didn't cook then. See my oldest son, and the second son is a 13 months difference. Then 2 years younger is the third one. Then in 1926, we moved out of Andrews to here.

JENNIFER: You sold it?

CECILIA: Yeah.

JENNIFER: Do you remember who you sold it to?

CECILIA: Yes, my sister and brother-in-law, Arriola.

ROYAL: He was Basque too?

CECILIA: Yeah.

ROYAL: So, in 1926, you sold it to them, and then where did you go?

CECILIA: I came to Burns. I lived here in the Star Hotel. I run this hotel by myself.

ROYAL: In Andrews, was it mostly Basques that came to your hotel, or was it everybody?

CECILIA: Everybody.

ROYAL: But were there a lot of Basques in the area at that time?

CECILIA: Oh yeah. There used to be a lot of sheep in the Steens Mountain. There was Joe Laucirica, and then Ramundo Zabala had another company.

ROYAL: Usually there were partnerships, weren't there?

CECILIA: Yeah. Usually, young men come from old country and go help herd sheep and work maybe three or four years. And the older men give part of his sheep. Then the two young men go together again.

ROYAL: The early companies often had two names like Zabala and somebody else.

CECILIA: There was one man by himself, Benito Napal. And then Frank Kueny had a lot of sheep too. He had two Bascos as partners, Joe and Antonio. They come from Idaho those two.

JENNIFER: Does your brother-in-law still own the property at the Smyth Hotel?

CECILIA: No.

ROYAL: How long did he run the hotel then?

CECILIA: I don't remember just exactly. They moved from Andrews to Westfall.

ROYAL: Would it have been in the '40's, you think?

CECILIA: No, in the '30's.

ROYAL: In the '30's they sold the hotel, and you don't remember who they sold it to?

CECILIA: No, I don't remember the name. They traded; they had a ranch in Westfall and let the others take the hotel.

JENNIFER: What's the most exciting thing that happened in the six years you lived in Andrews?

CECILIA: Fourth of July celebration.

JENNIFER: Why was that?

CECILIA: We had lots of fun. Three or four days of celebration.

ROYAL: Gilbert says the hotel burned down. When was that?

CECILIA: 1924. Part of it burned, but we rebuilt.

ROYAL: New Year's night there was a big party and part of the hotel caught on fire?

CECILIA: Yeah.

... (Side conversation with Gilbert Urizar.)

ROYAL: I didn't know the hotel had partially burned down.

CECILIA: Oh yeah. If we were there, I show it to you how that was built. It was built straight this way, and then was built kitchen back, and then it was another room in the back, and front where you could go up, and back stairway too.

ROYAL: Was the house where Andrew Shull lives now there at that time?

CECILIA: No. It was built after we moved from there.

JENNIFER: So, there was just the store and the hotel, and then the Carey home?

CECILIA: Dance hall and the schoolhouse. And Mrs. Turner. You ought to talk to Mrs. Johnston, Alice was born there.

JENNIFER: Alice Johnston?

CECILIA: Yes.

JENNIFER: Is that her maiden name?

CECILIA: No, her name was Alice Turner before she married. She was born in Andrews.

ROYAL: You sold the hotel to your brother-in-law and sister in 1926. Why did you decide to sell it?

CECILIA: After that fire, I don't want to stay there. Because it showed there wasn't no friendly people there.

ROYAL: You thought somebody set that fire on purpose?

CECILIA: Yes.

ROYAL: Because you were a Basco you mean?

CECILIA: No, because they was mean. I don't think it would have mattered if we were Bascos or not.

ROYAL: Maybe an enemy you didn't know about?

CECILIA: Well, they had the idea we might run.

ROYAL: So, in 1926, you came to Burns and you bought the Star Hotel?

CECILIA: Yes.

ROYAL: Who owned it before that, was it a Basque Hotel?

CECILIA: It was just a little old house. And Chino Berdugo owned it. Mexican.

ROYAL: He was a Mexican vaquero. He owned the Star Hotel. The town of Berdugo in Catlow Valley is named for him?

CECILIA: Yes.

ROYAL: It was a small house?

CECILIA: Yeah, it was four or five rooms downstairs, and upstairs wasn't finished. It wasn't opened. So, we made the rooms upstairs.

ROYAL: What is there now where the Star Hotel was?

CECILIA: Now there is just a family living there.

ROYAL: What is the address there? Do you happen to remember?

CECILIA: It's back in the corner there near the U. S. National Bank.

ROYAL: So, you bought it from Chino Berdugo in 1926, and then ---

CECILIA: We lived there until 1946.

ROYAL: 1926 to '46?

CECILIA: Yes.

ROYAL: Was this mostly a Basque hotel, or did other people come too?

CECILIA: The rooms were for working people, and we had a restaurant and stuff too.

ROYAL: How many rooms were there?

CECILIA: Seven rooms, ten altogether, but we used three downstairs.

ROYAL: And these were mostly for Bascos?

CECILIA: No. Americans come too sometimes. Old friends from Andrews.

ROYAL: When you came to Burns, had you seen Burns before?

CECILIA: Once.

ROYAL: What was your reaction to Burns? Did it seem like a good place to live?

CECILIA: No, I liked Andrews better then. We were strangers. I still could not speak English then.

ROYAL: Could your husband speak English?

CECILIA: Yeah.

ROYAL: He was born in Spain as well?

CECILIA: Oh yes. He came to this country in 1907.

ROYAL: Had your husband had experience as a hotelkeeper in Spain?

CECILIA: Nah. We just learned together. We just wanted to make a living together. Was the only way we could, I guess.

ROYAL: How was life in Burns, from 1926 to 1946, was there anything exciting happening in Burns?

CECILIA: Not especially, no.

ROYAL: Your children were all born and young men by then?

CECILIA: Yeah. Frances, the youngest daughter was pretty young yet, but the boys --- my youngest boy just come from the service when we moved. He was in Tokyo.

ROYAL: Were there many Basque celebrations that you had? Dinners and so on?

CECILIA: Oh, yeah. We had a New Year's Eve party here. Big parties.

ROYAL: You stayed in the Star Hotel then from 1926 to 1946. What did you do then?

CECILIA: We come here.

ROYAL: Did you already own a ranch?

CECILIA: We bought this in 1937. But we lived until '46 there in Burns.

ROYAL: Did you start raising sheep here?

CECILIA: No, cattle.

ROYAL: All the sheep were gone from Harney County by then, weren't they?

CECILIA: Just about.

ROYAL: Why was that? Do you remember?

CECILIA: It was hard to get the herders. It was a hard life.

ROYAL: It was easier to raise cattle?

CECILIA: Yes.

ROYAL: You lived here on the Urizar Ranch since 1937?

CECILIA: No, since 1946.

ROYAL: Why did you leave Spain in the first place? Why would a 16-year-old girl who couldn't speak English ---

CECILIA: I just wanted to come to my sister, she was here, and I thought it was great.

JENNIFER: You must have been an independent person.

CECILIA: I don't know.

ROYAL: Didn't your parents worry about you leaving?

CECILIA: Probably.

ROYAL: But they didn't say no?

CECILIA: No, they paid my way to come. My sister offered to pay for me, but dad said no.

ROYAL: What did your father do for a living?

CECILIA: He was a rancher, farmer. Like everybody there, they got a few cattle. They raised different kinds --- it's different altogether. They don't take cattle outside; they keep them in all the time, inside the barn.

JENNIFER: Does the Basco community here get together at all?

CECILIA: Not as much as they used to. There are more Basques here now, and we don't get along as good, I don't think.

ROYAL: You mean there are more Basques now than there were in 1920?

CECILIA: Oh yeah, lot more. In Burns at least. In Burns I think there are about fifty.

ROYAL: Fifty families?

CECILIA: No, not families, maybe 15 or 20 families.

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JENNIFER: There were a lot of Basques in the Steens Mountain area though?

CECILIA: Yes. When we came, Ramirez, and us, and then Osas come. But they would never come to town.

ROYAL: Most of the Basques like the Osas, Urizars, Ramirez, were they all from Vizcaya?

CECILIA: No, Ramirez wasn't. She is a Basque but he was Spanish.

ROYAL: Where are most of the Basques that are now here from? Mostly from Spain, or from France?

CECILIA: From Spain.

ROYAL: Are there any families from France?

CECILIA: Not any families.

... (Side conversation with Gilbert Urizar.)

CECILIA: I don't think there are any French Basque families.

ROYAL: What about the provinces? There are seven provinces, and you are from Vizcaya. Are there other provinces as well?

CECILIA: Yeah. There are some from Navarra. Maybe Guipuzcoa. One Basco family used to live in Crane. They moved to California.

ROYAL: Are there other centers of Basques besides here in Burns now, in Harney County that you know about? Like there was once in Andrews, or anywhere else?

CECILIA: No.

ROYAL: Was that because the sheep herding business has passed, and they either came to Burns or they went elsewhere to herd sheep?

CECILIA: Well, lot of them went to some other places and retired, bought ranches. A lot of them are in California. Pretty near all these Bascos here work in the mill.

JENNIFER: Do your kids still know how to dance the Basque dances? What about the Basque culture, do you retain that at all in your family?

CECILIA: No, not anymore, I don't know. Mrs. Osa is in on that dancing deal, I am not.

JENNIFER: Have you been back to Spain?

CECILIA: Yes, twice.

ROYAL: What year did you go the first time?

CECILIA: '58.

ROYAL: What was your reaction, how did you feel when you got there?

CECILIA: I can't believe it. It hardly changed. It looked the same.

ROYAL: Is that good or bad? Did you like that?

CECILIA: No. I see so much improvement here since I come.

ROYAL: So, you didn't want to stay there when you went in '58?

CECILIA: No. Then we went 2 years ago. My oldest son and a daughter, and my sister and myself. And there is a lot of improvement there now.

JENNIFER: In what way?

CECILIA: Better. Dressed better and eat better.

ROYAL: Higher standard of living?

CECILIA: Yes.

ROYAL: You mentioned a while ago that the Basques don't get along very well now in Harney County. What did you mean by that?

CECILIA: Well, I don't know. I think we are jealous of each other or something. I can't figure it out.

ROYAL: You're not very well integrated then as you used to be long time ago?

CECILIA: No.

ROYAL: Is there more conflict among you?

CECILIA: Yeah.

ROYAL: Is it over the politics in Spain, or is that important to the Basques here?

CECILIA: I don't think so. Most of us are Americans now, so we don't care what they do there.

ROYAL: You see yourself as an American more than a Basque?

CECILIA: Yes, that's right.

ROYAL: So, you think the Basques should marry just each other, or should they marry with other Americans too?

CECILIA: That don't make any difference. My boys married to Americans, and my girls married American boys. We are all mixed up.

ROYAL: Do your grandchildren speak Basque?

CECILIA: No.

ROYAL: So, they will lose it with this generation, won't they?

CECILIA: They will. Because the family isn't speaking it, they all speak English.

ROYAL: Do you think that is good or bad? Or does that matter to you?

CECILIA: Well, it don't matter too much, but it would be better if they would.

ROYAL: Do you ever go to the festivals in Boise, or to Winnemucca to the Basque celebrations?

CECILIA: No.

ROYAL: Do your boys?

CECILIA: No.

ROYAL: Do you know if any of the other Basques of Harney County go?

CECILIA: They do, yeah.

ROYAL: There is some continuous connection?

CECILIA: Yeah, but I never do.

ROYAL: Finally, what do you see as a future for the Basques in Harney County? Are they going to gradually cease to exist as a group, and marry Americans and lose the language and lose the culture? Or will they continue to maintain it? How do you see that?

CECILIA: I don't know. I can't say. Because the American born kids, they are mixed with Americans, because they go to school together and they don't just mix with the Bascos.

ROYAL: You think that is good or bad?

CECILIA: I think it is good.

ROYAL: Are there things about Basque ways of living that are good that should be kept, you

think? Is there anything distinctive about the way a Basque child is raised?

CECILIA: Well, I don't think there is much difference, not in this country. My kids were raised as the same way as the Americans because they have always brought kids to my house, and I don't see any difference those kids from mine.

JENNIFER: Most Basques are Catholic, aren't they?

CECILIA: Yes.

ROYAL: All Spain is Catholic?

CECILIA: Yeah. But now American born, they don't attend church too often. Mine don't either. Gilbert is good, but my youngest son he don't go. Once a year or so. Gilbert goes every Sunday with me. My other kids they don't go. My grandkids, they pretty good to go to church.

ROYAL: Thank you very much Mrs. Urizar, I appreciate your information.

CECILIA: You're welcome.

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