

HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #109 - Side A

Subject: Vera Dot Timms (Mrs. Morgan O.)

Place: 1049 N. Court - Burns, Oregon

Date: July 31, 1984

Interviewer: Charlene Gates

Release Form: Yes

(Mrs. Timms gave me some information before the tape recorder was turned on. She was born in Grant County in 1902 and came to Burns in 1927. Her grandfather, named Shields, had fought in the Civil War for Arkansas and moved to Grant County afterward, probably in 1870's. Her father homesteaded in the county in the 1880's and raised a large family of thirteen children. They farmed and raised sheep, hogs, and cattle near Hamilton, in the general area of Monument, Oregon. She went to elementary school in Cottonwood Creek, about twelve miles away from her home. This was a one-room school with about ten or twelve students in all the grades, through eighth. They were taught primarily by teachers out of Portland, one of whom was named Hilda Muir. One male teacher was from Arizona and lived in Fox Valley. She remembers doing Christmas programs at school, which included singing carols and reciting poems about Santa Claus. They had about a week's vacation from school during Christmas.

Mrs. Timms went to school on horseback, sometimes riding behind her sister, until a school was built about one mile from their own home. The pupils studied reading, writing, arithmetic, geography, etc. After grade school, she went to high school in Long Creek and John Day, boarding with an aunt and uncle.

The seventh of the thirteen children, she had specific chores to do on the ranch. "The worst of it," she said, "was herding hogs, which had to be kept out of the grain fields." These hogs were kept for a year; long enough to make good meat, and then the hams were cured in the smokehouse.)

CHARLENE GATES: July 31, 1984. Now let's see. Do you remember what kinds of things they taught in the school? Did you have ---

DOT TIMMS: Well, it's mostly reading, writing, arithmetic, and geography, and I think pretty much the same as they teach now in the grade school.

CHARLENE: Oh, you probably had a better education, I think. It's kinda declined, you know, a little bit. It was something. Well, how long did you go to school every day? Do you remember how long it lasted?

DOT: Well, we had to leave home, of course, about eight o'clock. We had to get there at nine, I think, and then we'd go home about four.

CHARLENE: Then would you have to help with the chores?

DOT: Yes. Yeah, I didn't have too much. That is, I had to help in the house and wash dishes and do things like that, soon as I was old enough. 'Course there was things that I had to do when I was small too, but it didn't amount to much. Probably thought it amounted to too much. ... (Unrelated)

CHARLENE: Did you have hired hands on your ranch?

DOT: No.

CHARLENE: Just thirteen kids to ---

DOT: Yes. Well, sometimes we did, like in haying time.

CHARLENE: Your mother must have had to do an awful lot of cooking.

DOT: Well, she was kind of a sickly person. You would be, I guess, having that many children. So, it only, fell on the older girls. See, the first was three girls, and then three boys and then me.

CHARLENE: So, the older girls did most of the housework, I suppose?

DOT: Yes, and cooking.

CHARLENE: Oh, my goodness. Well, let's see. And after that school you went to school in Long Creek and John Day. They must have been awfully small towns then because they're not very big now.

DOT: Well, not too much bigger now, really.

CHARLENE: About the same size?

DOT: Oh, there's a few more people. But Long Creek has fallen down, I think, in their population. Because I don't believe they have a sawmill there now. They did have. I was over there, Decoration Day and I don't believe they have a sawmill now. There might be one down there on the creek someplace.

CHARLENE: I don't know. I don't remember.

DOT: They did have a pretty nice sawmill there. ... (Phone call.)

CHARLENE: So, you stayed over there after high school on the ranch?

DOT: John Day?

CHARLENE: Uh huh.

DOT: No, I went back to Fox Valley, and I taught school there one winter. Then I got married.

CHARLENE: Oh, I see.

DOT: And then we lived in Long Creek. Morgan worked for the Forest Service. So, we lived in Long Creek for three years, and then we were moved to Mount Vernon, and then over here. We stayed in Mount Vernon hardly one year. Then we came here.

CHARLENE: Oh, I see. Did you go into teaching; did you go to a teacher's college?

DOT: No, I didn't.

CHARLENE: You just started --- oh, my goodness. That's pretty impressive.

DOT: Well, that's the way they did it then, that you could teach out of high school.

CHARLENE: Oh, I see.

DOT: See, I went to John Day and went to high school and finished high school, and then I taught school for one year.

CHARLENE: Was that in another one-room school?

DOT: No, at John Day they had --- oh, taught, yes. It was a one-room school in Fox Valley. You've been through there?

CHARLENE: Not for a long time, but ---

DOT: Oh yeah, I think I only had just seven, eight students.

CHARLENE: Were they little kids mostly?

DOT: Well, there was two in the eighth grade, I think.

CHARLENE: Oh my, so they weren't that much younger than you were. Was that kind of difficult, or --- did you like it?

DOT: No, I liked it.

CHARLENE: Not much discipline problems, I suppose?

DOT: No, not really. They were pretty good.

CHARLENE: That's better than things are today. So you came to Burns then in 1927. What was the town like? It sure has changed, I'm sure, since then.

DOT: Well, I tell you, there was one thing; there wasn't any trees hardly then. These trees are fairly new trees (around Court Street house). But that was right in '27, you know, and this is what?

CHARLENE: '84, I think. Must have been awfully dusty.

DOT: Well, it was awful muddy. When we came, we met Harry Potter and his family. Then we had to come down the ridge up there and it was just an old rocky road, you know. It took us all day to come over here. We ate lunch up to the ranger station when we got there, and then we came on down here. And it began to rain awfully heavy, and when we came down that ridge why there was Harry Potter and his wife and two girls; I think it was two girls. And you know it was just raining, and those women were just wet as they could be.

... (Unrelated)

CHARLENE: Burns was not built up this far, was it? (To the hill on Court Street.)

DOT: Yes. Grover Jameson, didn't he have the house --- they moved from here when he built this one?

CHARLENE: Maybe. I don't know, but it could be. Maybe they did have it.

DOT: Maybe it wasn't him too. He lived around here someplace.

CHARLENE: Well, maybe they did.

DOT: You see they were just buying the mill. It wasn't the outfit that's had it all these years, was it? Well, they bought it at that time, all right, but someone else was bidding on it too. So, in '27, you see, was when the mill started. So we came here the year the mill --- well, it didn't get started, but they had talked to the Forest Service about it, you know, to acquire the timber and so forth at that time. Of course, I don't know just when the mill got started. Wouldn't, you know, for a few years. Wasn't too long, though. 'Course, they've got all that stuff here now.

CHARLENE: Yeah. What was the town like? There were wooden sidewalks then, weren't there?

DOT: Yes, there were wooden sidewalks. I don't think there was any paved sidewalks at all.

CHARLENE: Just dirt roads and ...

DOT: Yes, and of course you'd get stuck in the wintertime, you know.

CHARLENE: Oh gosh. That must have been something.

DOT: It wasn't so bad after I came here, but before that it had been pretty rough, really.

CHARLENE: How did they ever get a car out of the mud in the winter?

DOT: Oh, they'd have to pile up rock, and you know, jack the car up, if they really got stuck. Oh, they didn't use their cars much in the wintertime, just couldn't. Now I can remember that, when I stayed in Long Creek with my uncle and aunt, they had a car and it just sat in the garage. They didn't use it because you couldn't. The roads were just too bad.

CHARLENE: Well, how did they get around? Did they walk?

DOT: No, horseback, if they had to go any distance.

CHARLENE: Did a lot of people keep horses in town?

DOT: Well, I don't know as they did then, at that time, but they had been a few years before.

CHARLENE: Did they have a livery stable or something, where you could get a horse?

DOT: Oh, yes, uh huh. The doctor, of course he, I don't know whether the doctor --- we got a horse and went to see the sick. He might have had one, I don't know. I don't remember. Because that was just a little bit later, when they did have cars. Maybe some winters, you know how it is, it wouldn't be so bad to travel. But the next year probably would, just like this year ...

CHARLENE: Oh yeah, it's been so bad. Were the winters this bad when you first came here?

DOT: Oh, I think so.

CHARLENE: There was that much snow?

DOT: And we lived down on Whiskey Flat, isn't it called, down toward --- who does live there, in our house that's still there. Did you know where Hirsch's lived?

CHARLENE: I should, but I don't remember it.

DOT: Well, anyway, we lived there and every spring this water came from here, it came down --- didn't they call it Brown's Canyon? 'Cause Browns lived there. And it ran clear around, and they had a big ditch dug. No, I guess they've got that ditch filled in way down there by --- well, I want to say Gordon Ferris, but who does live around there now? It's on Riverside Drive. There was a big ditch that went clear down, and they had a walk on top of it, for the kids to walk to school, and people to walk uptown. So, they've done away with that, I think. I was just up the road there a couple of days ago.

CHARLENE: So that was called Brown's Canyon. I didn't realize that.

DOT: Yes, it was. I hope I'm not mistaken.

CHARLENE: Oh, you're probably right. There used to be a lot of nicknames around here that they don't use anymore. I remember my aunt said, you know, Cecil's Hill where the kids used to go sledding. I remember that kind of.

DOT: I imagine you do. That was right there below the courthouse.

CHARLENE: Do you remember any of the stores or things that used to be downtown?

DOT: Well, you know, they haven't changed so awful much. Changed before I came here. 'Cause there was Dalton's, you know, that had the store; it wasn't here when I came here. I can't remember who did have the stores when I came here, you know, offhand.

CHARLENE: You remember when they paved the streets and got rid of the wooden sidewalks at all?

DOT: Yeah, I can remember that.

CHARLENE: About when was that do you think?

DOT: Well, that would probably be in about '36, don't you suppose?

CHARLENE: Sounds about right, I suppose.

DOT: Maybe '40, but I imagine it would be a little earlier, 'cause after the sawmill came, you know, that would make things come along faster. But I don't remember just when they did put in the sidewalks; I mean the year.

CHARLENE: I suppose when the sawmill opened, there must have been, a lot of people must have moved in.

DOT: Worst of it was, you know, they bought the mill, bought the timber I mean, and then they kind of went under, you know. And the people came in to go to work, and there wasn't any work. Oh, it was bad here. Yes, you bet it was.

CHARLENE: Oh, for goodness sakes. Was that during the depression?

DOT: Well, that's what you call the depression.

CHARLENE: Oh yeah. That was during the Great Depression in the '30's?

DOT: Yes, I think so.

CHARLENE: Oh my gosh. Must have been like it is now.

DOT: And then it wasn't too long, of course, until it began to pick up.

CHARLENE: Oh, that's good. So, it was Edward Hines back then?

DOT: Seems to me like first though, when they first started buying it was another name, but Hines was the one that got the contract. I can remember being at the Chautauqua and they announced it then, that the Edward Hines Lumber Company of Chicago had bought the timber, I guess, you know, for the mill.

CHARLENE: Where did you go to the Chautauqua? Was it here?

DOT: Yes, it was one of those that would come in, you see, and it was up there on Main Street. Well, they just had a lot of benches, you know, to sit on. And those Chautauqua's would go through the country.

CHARLENE: Oh yeah. Did they have a building to hold them?

DOT: Well, I think they had a tent.

CHARLENE: Down on Main Street. I didn't know they came here.

DOT: That would be just during the weather that they could go there, you know, wouldn't be stormy weather.

CHARLENE: Summertime, I suppose.

DOT: Yeah. Probably not exactly summertime, 'cause that'd be kind of warm, wouldn't it?

CHARLENE: Oh yeah.

DOT: But it was next to summertime. Dry weather, anyway.

CHARLENE: Do you remember where that was on Main Street?

DOT: Well, it was right there pretty close to where the hotel was that burned down. It was on that side of the street.

CHARLENE: The Arrowhead Hotel, you mean?

DOT: Yeah. You can ask somebody else about that, and they'd sure dispute me probably, and they'd probably be right.

CHARLENE: Well, I don't know. Nobody mentioned it to me that they had a Chautauqua. I don't know.

DOT: I don't remember how many times, whether it just came the one time, or whether it had done that for several years. But I can remember that one time, on account of them announcing that about the deal.

CHARLENE: Oh, for goodness sakes. What kind of acts did you see, or what performers, do you remember anybody famous coming here?

DOT: No, I can't remember about the performers.

CHARLENE: Well, that's interesting. I didn't know that they came to such an out-of-the-way place as Burns, 'cause it's pretty far out here.

DOT: Well, it wasn't a very big Chautauqua.



CHARLENE: Oh, it was one of the smaller ones.

DOT: I think so. I can't remember how many people there was in it or anything. But I know that was what it was; it was there when they bought the timber.

CHARLENE: Oh, for goodness sakes. I was wondering, where did Morgan come from? Was he from ---

DOT: John Day.

CHARLENE: He was from John Day.

DOT: Yeah, he was born in California. He was born down this side of Sacramento up the road. I can't think of the name of the town. We stopped there and looked around once when we, oh, back about twelve years ago, I guess. But I don't remember the name of the town; I've got it written down, of course. I haven't thought about it for some time.

CHARLENE: His folks moved up to John Day?

DOT: No. His dad was a doctor, or his granddad was. So, he wanted to go to school some more. And he was also interested in mining, you see, that was the time when they had the gold strikes, and so he went to California. Well, Morgan and his mother usually went too, and his dad, Fred Timms, went too down there. But they didn't stay too long. I don't know how long they were there, but not so very long. I don't suppose things panned out very good. And then when Dad would get through taking his course --- ... (Unrelated)

CHARLENE: And they moved up to John Day to do mining or farming?

DOT: No, they went back to John Day. You see, they lived there. Well, he had a ranch there, Dr. ... did. ...

CHARLENE: Is it still in the family, do you know?

DOT: No, it isn't. Hasn't been for some time. But he had a ranch over in Izee, too.

CHARLENE: So, Morgan wanted to go into the Forest Service?

DOT: Well, after he'd been in the Army, and when he came home, why he got into the Forest Service. Had to take a, you know, an examination to get in. He did. Him and John Scharff joined

or got in about the same time.

CHARLENE: Oh, uh huh. Well, John Scharff worked out at the Refuge mostly, didn't he?

DOT: Yes, he started off with the Forest Service and went down on the coast, out of Ashland someplace and worked there, and then he came back here, you know. Has been here ever since.

CHARLENE: Oh, for goodness sakes. Back in the early days, in the '20's and '30's, what kind of things went on in Burns, what kind of activities? There was the Chautauqua, and what else did people do for --- just to relax?

DOT: Oh, dance, mostly. They had dances then. You know nowadays they don't have them, and the kids don't have dances to go to, do they?

CHARLENE: No, they don't, not very many.

DOT: Maybe there's a school dance or two, and that's about it. But oh, they played ball, football, baseball. Well sometimes, I think, they probably had more entertainment than we do now.

CHARLENE: Probably. Well, they didn't have television then to keep them home, and stuff like that. Well, who put on the dances? Was it Grange Hall?

DOT: No, they had it at the schoolhouse mostly.

CHARLENE: Oh, I see. Just people getting together.

DOT: Yes, just a get together, really. 'Course there wasn't a big lot of people, although there was usually, I expect, twenty or thirty.

CHARLENE: Do you remember if there were very many churches at that time?

DOT: Wasn't any in that vicinity, but there wasn't one in Monument. And the minister used to come out there, and he'd have church in the schoolhouse.

CHARLENE: Oh, I see, uh huh.

DOT: But that was twelve, fifteen miles, I think, from Monument up there. 'Course, down when they had the school down the creek, that was toward Monument.

CHARLENE: Did they have quite a few dances in Burns when you were first here?

DOT: Yes.

CHARLENE: Yeah, that was when they did, huh?

DOT: Uh huh, oh yes. Yeah, they had the dance hall down there where that secondhand place is.

CHARLENE: Oh, that was a dance hall?

DOT: Yeah, there was one there. I don't know whether that building was the one we danced in. I don't think so, 'cause Copeland's has got to get that place in there, haven't they? And I can remember when Lloyd Moore from over at Long Creek came over, him and --- and they had a show house down there for a while, but they weren't there very long. I don't think they were there a year.

CHARLENE: Did they have dances there every Saturday or something like that?

DOT: Oh, not every Saturday, but pretty often, really.

CHARLENE: Oh, that must have been fun.

DOT: Yes.

CHARLENE: Lot more fun than things are now. There's really not much to do anymore.

DOT: No, there isn't anything for --- used to, both the old and the young would go, you know. And now they can't. Anyway, they don't have anything to go to.

CHARLENE: No, it is too bad.

DOT: And of course, the Grange, we used to have dances out there. I don't know just what happened to the Grange. It's just started falling through, hasn't it? ... (Unrelated)

CHARLENE: Now back then they had the fraternal lodges, I know, like Masons and the Odd Fellows. They were pretty active, weren't they?

DOT: Yes, probably. I don't know whether they were any more active than they are now, because I don't go now. That is, the last year or so I haven't gone hardly any. I'm sorry that I don't, but I just can't get there.

CHARLENE: Oh, it is awfully hard in the winter, especially though this winter, terrible snow. In fact, it snowed more this winter than I remember having snowed in a long time. It was pretty high.

Well, let's see, can we think of anything else? Well, do you remember --- now I was a little girl, I think when this happened. But do you remember the old Tonawama Building?

DOT: Uh huh, yeah well it is still standing, isn't it?

CHARLENE: Well, I think --- I remember that it burned down or something; it was a pretty spectacular fire.

DOT: The Tonawama? Well, I thought that was the one right there by the service station.

CHARLENE: Yeah, it's down there above ---

DOT: That big building there, what's called the Tonawama.

CHARLENE: I think it was around near the --- oh let's see, near the Whittier Hotel or something like that. I don't remember for sure.

DOT: Well, it is further down town. It is still standing there. Right there by the service station, by Bob's service station.

CHARLENE: Oh.

DOT: That big building there by the telephone office was the Tonawama Building, wasn't it?

CHARLENE: Well, I thought it was further up the hill. I thought it was further up this way.

DOT: I think that's it right there.

CHARLENE: Huh.

DOT: Anyway, it's been there ever since I can remember. But of course, it's just been --- made it into an apartment building, I guess you'd call it.

CHARLENE: Oh, they've done that, yeah, quite a lot. Saw so many new apartment buildings in Burns. Never thought I'd see that. Oh, it's really been something.

Do you remember the little white church that used to be the Presbyterian Church before the stone one was built?

DOT: Oh, yes.

CHARLENE: ... I can just barely remember it.

DOT: I can remember Mrs. Browning and I was having a --- and had a heating stove, you know, or cook stove in this little back room. Can you remember that back room? You come into the back, and then you go in there, and we could cook coffee, you know, things like that on it. ... Earl went

up there and he tried to fix up the stovepipe, it was about to fall down. And you know that that doggoned thing --- I don't think the meeting had happened yet, but I remember that darn stove falling down. Say, we sure tore around there! We got water and got it out.

CHARLENE: My gosh. Yeah, it could have gone right up in smoke right then.

DOT: Well, the whole thing, of course, wasn't much gone up, 'cause it was about to fall down anyway. A lot of them, you know, could remember when that church was moved from out to --- when they first settled the country.

CHARLENE: Oh, where was that? Where did it first stand? I don't remember that.

DOT: Oh, it was out there where Olivia Withers used to live, on the ranch, Harney.

CHARLENE: Oh, it was way out there.

DOT: Yeah, it was way out there.

CHARLENE: Oh. No, I didn't realize it was built out near Harney. Probably more people out there.

DOT: Well, yes. When they first settled here, why they settled out there first, and then moved on in.

CHARLENE: When you first moved here, how many other churches were there, do you remember?

DOT: Well, there was the Catholic, and there wasn't any --- the one there close to the Presbyterian -- Episcopal. I don't think there was an Episcopal Church, although they had the old church before they built this new one. It burned down, but you can remember that.

CHARLENE: Uh huh, yeah. That was too bad.

DOT: Uh huh, it was. Although they got a nice new church out of it. Got it all paid for too, I understand.

CHARLENE: That's pretty good. So, there was Catholic and Presbyterian and ---

DOT: Yes, and there was Baptist, because the Baptists, you know, that old church over there close to the schoolhouse?

CHARLENE: Right, yeah, by the junior high school.

DOT: Uh huh, yeah. It was there at that time. It was there, I think, when we came here. And I think there was another church here, too. There was one, kind of down there on Main Street.

CHARLENE: Was that the Nazarene? That's about a block or two off Main Street.

DOT: Wasn't Nazarene, I don't think.

CHARLENE: Maybe it was the Assembly of God or something.

DOT: Oh, it didn't last any time. ... (Unrelated)

CHARLENE: Did they ever used to have revival meetings here? Those tent revivals?

DOT: Well, that was kinda what that was, you see, whoop and holler. So, they told, that was before I came here. Well, I think there has always been quite a few churches.

CHARLENE: Well, they sure have a lot now. Must be about a dozen churches in town. Do you happen to remember what the population was when you moved in?

DOT: No, I don't.

CHARLENE: Well, I know it is under 3,000 now, so many people have moved away.

DOT: Oh, is it?

CHARLENE: Yeah.

DOT: I think it did get up to about 5,000 though, didn't it?

CHARLENE: Oh, did it? Well, it may have when the radar base was here.

DOT: Yeah, all that.

CHARLENE: And the lumber mill was really doing a big business. Maybe it did. Well, I don't --- this is the first time that I can remember that the population has gone under 3,000. It is getting pretty small, shrinking all the time. That's quite something. Well, I don't want to take up too much of your time. We've been at this about an hour. Are you feeling all right?

DOT: Yeah, I'm feeling all right.

CHARLENE: Oh good.

DOT: I just got some stuff in my throat that just stays right with me.

CHARLENE: Maybe it is an allergy or something, you think?

DOT: Might be. I used to have it in my throat, you know.

(END OF TAPE)

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