

HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #120 - Sides A/B (No tape)

Subject: Glen & Beulah Clemens

Place: Burns, Oregon

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Interviewer: James Baker

Release Form: No

GLEN CLEMENS: My mother came here in '79 --- that's in Happy Valley ... My father and mother were married in '82 over in Canyon City. My mother came from Roseburg.

BEULAH CLEMENS: He wants to know about your dad.

GLEN: He built the barn at Whitehorse, (Local stone) made out of stone with wood top. He done all the stonework. He was married in '82 and he settled out here on Poison Creek, right out there where the home is now. My nephew owns it.

JAMES BAKER: Did he ever say why he went from being a stonemason to cattle ranching?

GLEN: No, that's what he took up. He made the first county jail up here.

JAMES: Asking about how Poison Creek was named.

GLEN: It was named by some soldier, as far as they knew --- some soldier must have had a drink from it and have died, that's as near as they know. ... the parsnips --- we've lost a lot of cattle up there from the parsnips. It's a weed that grows in the swamp.

JAMES: How big a ranch did he, your father, finally get?

GLEN: Well, he owned out there on Poison Creek about, a good 800 acres, and he owned 1,000 acres down here on the Island. That's what they called it, just an island down here on the highway south of Burns. He run about 1,000 head of cattle and he had about 200 head of horses, too.

JAMES: He was ranching about the later part of the 1880's and 1890's --- and probably up until about World War I?

GLEN: Well, he passed away in 1920.

JAMES: Well, by that time, of course, you and your brothers had the ranch?

GLEN: Well, no, I started in when I was about 17 years old taking care of the ranch. My other brothers were off doing for themselves. They weren't on the ranch at all. And then he sold that place down on the Island; they always called it the Clemens Place. And now my nephew, he was named after my father, Pete's son, he owns part of the ranch.

JAMES: Well, that gives me an idea of the land. Are there any human-interest stories that you remember about Poison Creek?

BEULAH: There's a lot of them he shouldn't probably tell.

JAMES: Do you mean because they were lies, or --- Okay, now you mentioned Harney --- what's there now, of course that used to be close to Poison Creek.

GLEN: Oh, no, that's about 15 miles from Poison Creek to Harney.

JAMES: What do you remember as the earliest buildings out at Harney?

GLEN: Oh, Fred Haines Store --- about the first time I remember being there, he bought me a new saddle. That would be somewhere along about 1905. I was a small lad, and he bought me a saddle there at this store ... They had about three saloons there and they had a post office.

JAMES: Did they have any churches?

GLEN: No, just saloons, no churches. That was a rough old place.

BEULAH: They had a killing right in the street there.

JAMES: Can you remember a killing?

GLEN: Well, I couldn't, but my father and my brother were there the day he got killed. Well, they heard the shot, but they never seen it.

JAMES: Who is this fellow that you are talking about?

GLEN: Stroud --- Stroud

JAMES: How was he killed?

BEULAH: They shot him.

GLEN: He was Marshal there, you see --- there was a Bunyard and a Buckland --- there were three fellows in this shooting.

BEULAH: There was a brawl in the saloon, fighting.

GLEN: This fellow came out of the post office, as near as I remember now, and they shot him just as he came out of the door, they were sniping.

JAMES: They kind of ambushed him?

GLEN: Yes, and they shot him, and he was a Marshal, and his name was Stroud. I'll tell you the year, that was the year we threshed the grain there on the old Company place. I found the grain there; I was about 17. My brother and I found the grain on this place. My father run a threshing machine, and they were threshing there at the time this occurred. That would be about 1911 [1912]fry.

JAMES: Well, I still don't know much about Harney, what would be a good thing to know?

BEULAH: Well, you see the Fort was there.

GLEN: Fort Harney was there, that's further back up than where the city was, back up in the canyon.

BEULAH: They didn't have a County Seat at that time, and as they tell it they wanted the County Seat here at Burns. Burns had the population.

GLEN: Harney was the County Seat.

BEULAH: But anyway, they went up there one night, a bunch of them, and stole all the books and brought them down here, and they've been there ever since.

JAMES: You mean there were some people from Burns, probably respectable citizens and ---

BEULAH: Yes, and Burns has been the County Seat ever since.

JAMES: Well, that's law and order for you.

BEULAH: They had quite a school there.

GLEN: Oh, yes, a nice schoolhouse.

JAMES: Did you go to school there?

GLEN: Oh no, went to Poison Creek, what little school I got.

JAMES: Well, tell me about that school you went to, what do you remember about that? Did you ever run a teacher out?

GLEN: Oh yes, by gosh, I tell you, they couldn't hold a teacher. There was one old lady there --- Lena ... they could never keep her there. She tried it about three different times. Kids then was 20 years old before they got out of the 8th grade. There was about 40 kids went there. It and Burns was the two main schools in Harney County. Some of the kids walked three miles, and some of them came ten miles on horseback. I rode four miles to school on horseback. In them days we had awful cold winters.

BEULAH: We went there for quite a number of years, and they couldn't keep a teacher. And finally, this lady, she weighted about 300 pounds, they got her in there and the first time any of these guys gave her any lip, she went right down there and grabbed him and ...

JAMES: Glen, could I get you to describe her, this teacher, I'm curious about the humorous part of it. You don't have to mention any names.

GLEN: I don't think she was over 18 years old, or 20, when she took this school and she straightened them out there. One kid there thought he was pretty tough, and she told him if you don't straighten out, I'll straighten you out. And he gave her some sass, and by golly she just went down there and shook him up. And the rest of us seen it, and we figured we'd better be good too. I could tell you a lot of them that went there. But most of them was just full of the devilment. Have you ever talked to Joe Fine?

JAMES: Oh, yes.

GLEN: Well, Joe Fine and Alvon Baker --- no, not Teresa Baker, Ida Cross, Ethel Hotchkiss.

JAMES: I talked to Judge Hotchkiss.

GLEN: No, they never went out there. Just the girls, the Whiting girls. There was Cowings, and Edna Black; Fred Black went to school there too.

BEULAH: One room school, one teacher taught all 8 grades.

GLEN: You only had school only just six months.

BEULAH: Most of these guys learned to figure, and they all turned out pretty good, pretty well to do now.

JAMES: Did you have recess time?

GLEN: Oh, yes, recess would be about 10 o'clock and the ... noon.

BEULAH: Tell him about bringing your lunch.

GLEN: Well, I went a horseback, and I had this horse, and he was pretty trained. And he'd buck me off sometimes, every morning, go about a mile, and after we went about that distance, he'd be all right. I couldn't ride him, he'd buck hard, and he'd throw me off. He'd never walk with me; I'd get off him and I'd go on to school --- until the next morning. Of course, I had to leave about 7 o'clock in the morning to get down to the school, and I would always --- I never could carry no bucket or anything, I'd tie my lunch on back of the saddle. And a lot of times when we got there, that lunch would be froze solid, and we'd always have to put it under the stove and thaw it out. And then Joe Fine, he came from way up on the ---

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GLEN: Well, you see, my brothers were about 10-12 years older, and my mother and father went to town ... so my dad he went off and left the saddle on the horse, he never took it off, and left him in the barn. And the barn door got open some way and the old horse came out, and of course they had the harness hanging on the pegs there, the work harness, and the old horse caught part of that harness on the saddle horn ... That was lots of fun, he was in the corral just running around, just bugging us, and so they thought they'd have some fun. And when he started to settle down, they got a coal oil can, 5-gallon coal oil can and they tied that to his tail. And my god, he went out of there and it seems like he jumped over the corral and got out. And finally, they got him back and they got that off. Cause they knew darned good and well if they didn't --- but they never told Dad, or they'd have got a good tanning. We used to do all them things.

JAMES: Sounds like kids putting tin cans on cars now, when people get married. Thought I'd ask

you about shivarees.

GLEN: Oh, yes, they had shivarees in them days, but no more.

BEULAH: Well, they just got together, tell about how they shivareed --- they got together and got tin cans and bells.

GLEN: Well now, when we was married ---

BEULAH: They used to have shivarees all the time.

GLEN: Yes, when you got married, they'd always have that, and they'd all come to the house and have their cans and rattle them, you know, around the house. And then they'd come in and you'd always treat them, and that's as near as I can tell you about that.

JAMES: Well, I heard somebody nearly got shot at, at one of them, I believe that was at the South End. Yes, he said, "Who's out there," and somebody said, "Duck, he's got a shotgun." And he opened the door and fired.

GLEN: Well, I tell you down in that country it was pretty tough in those days.

BEULAH: The state police went down there one time, and these old guys had been killing antelope or something, I guess, and he went down there and thought he would catch them. And he went up to the gate and, by golly, and this old guy had the gun right at the door and says, "Don't come through that gate, just go back the same way you came." And he did too. You know, those old guys lived down in there isolated, and they meant business, there wasn't any fooling.

GLEN: Your darn right, they lived out there in them wide-open spaces.

BEULAH: Tell him about the time the sheepherder wanted to put his sheep on your land, and how the neighbors got together, and they didn't wait for the law.

GLEN: Oh, I can tell a lot of stories.

JAMES: Well, I tell you, we can do it this way, that is, just to get the incidents down, because for my purposes, I don't know about the Library, but for my purpose's names are just immaterial, so you just say this guy or this fellow, leave their names out.

BEULAH: Well, some of these guys out at Poison Creek would hear that, they'd know just exactly

who it was. They would know, but there would be no names mentioned. I believe Alvon Baker's the one who ...

GLEN: See at first, they had a man teacher there too ... and so they got this man teacher in there, and that's the first man teacher we had. So, he looked a little different to us, so there was two brothers, they were called the Stubblefield brothers, and they were kids bigger than the rest of us. I'd say a couple of years bigger, and so we used to go out in the toilet, that's the four of us, there was Alvon Baker and ... William Fry and myself. The four of us fellows, and we'd run in there and we'd get in the toilet, and we wouldn't let the others in. And so, they tried to get in there and we broke the door down.

And, well, that was on a Friday, so when the next Monday come the teacher saw the door broke down and he wanted to know what happened out there. And he put us all out on the mat, and so we told him we was in the toilet and these brothers, I forgot their names, they said they wanted in and we wouldn't let them, and broke the door down. Well, he says, "Guess I'll have to give you fellows a tanning." Well, there was six of us in the layout, and well, he lined us all up there and I think he took Alvon Baker first, and he had a boil on his hind side ... and that old teacher he just warped him good. Well, he went back, and he was bawling, it hurt. He went through the rest of us four, and so he went to go on these other two, and by God they started to run, and run out the door. And they had those big brooms they swept with out there and the teacher took after them, and one of them, he hit him over the head as he went out the door. And they never did, the two Stubblefields, they got away. But he treated all us four, but the other two never did come back.

BEULAH: You know in those days most of them never did go more than the 8th grade.

GLEN: No, the 8th grade was as far as a kid ever got.

BEULAH: And then we had our County Clerk here, Erman Dillman for years and years, he taught school down at Suntex, or someplace around in there. But anyway, he only had an 8th grade education.

GLEN: The girls, they'd go to the 8th grade, and then they was teachers.

BEULAH: And I actually believe the kids in those days could read and write better than they do now. You can't hardly read the writing of these high school kids now.

JAMES: This shivaree thing has my interest; can we get around back to that?

GLEN: Well, only one time I went to a shivaree ... Williamson ... oh, he must have been about 35 years old and married a girl 15 years old. And they had a little sawmill up here about where Idlewild is.

BEULAH: You know, about all there was to that shivaree, somebody started it, and they said, come on, get your tin cans, and they'd always get tin cans and rocks and things, and they'd all just make it secret. And they would never know when they were coming, and they'd just come up to the door, and away they'd go.

JAMES: Did they ever sing songs?

BEULAH: No, I don't ever remember that. No, they just wined and dined, and no violence or anything. They just made a big ...

JAMES: Well, I've heard up in Kansas where they kidnapped the bride.

GLEN: Oh yes, you bet, they'd do that too.

BEULAH: And then later on when Bobby Smith, Speaker of the House, when he was married, they made him wheel her down the Main Street in a wheelbarrow.

JAMES: That was fun.

BEULAH: Oh, yes, they used to kind of take them away, I guess, once in a while. People used to play jokes.

GLEN: Oh yes, they'd play jokes on people then more than they do now. In them days always playing jokes, you know. I know my brother; he was going with this schoolteacher who taught school there. And they used to tease, and I'd go, and I had my horse --- I had a gentle old horse at that time, and I'd always ... and she's living yet this old lady, Hattie ... We was just talking about it today. She's about 90 some odd years old now. But she was a swell looking girl at that time, and all the boys, there was my two brothers and there was two or three other fellows all stuck on her.

And she was kind of a flirt, you know, and she had all them boys after her. And my two brothers, they got into a scrap over her and, well you know, she'd go with one of my brothers one Saturday night, and then maybe the other one next, and then maybe somebody else. And that's the way she was. And so, then she thought a little bit more of this one brother than she did of the other one, and she gave me a note, yeah, I was about 8 years younger than them, and she give me a note to give to my brother. And my next brother older than I, we always got along pretty good, and my older brother, he just whopped the hell out of me lots of times. But anyway, she give me this note to give to Cal, and I brought it home to give to him, and he knew I had it and he tried to get it away from me, and I wouldn't give it to him. And finally, I give it to Cal and then they nearly got into a scrap over it in the house. She was a nice woman. She lives over around ...

JAMES: You're talking about Saturday nights; you talk about going to dances.

GLEN: They'd go to these country-dances around. And one-time Cal, he took this girl up to this dance in the cutter. And he had two horses and this nice little cutter, by gosh, the boys all --- this cutter wouldn't weigh over 100-150 pounds. The boys took that cutter and took it way up the canyon and hid it. And when he got ready to go home, he didn't have no way to take his girl.

They'd hid it in the rim rock up there. They took the horses and tied them to the fence, but no cutter.

BEULAH: People would get their amusement that way. And, you know, we'd have these country-dances every Saturday, and they'd pile into these ---

JAMES: Up here, where would the dances be?

GLEN: Oh, right above where we lived there, it was a farmhouse. They've moved it off now, but they've had them dances there, people lived there.

BEULAH: Oh, down on Poison Creek Schoolhouse, maybe not too much, but around in the homes.

JAMES: They had them in the homes?

GLEN: Oh yes.

BEULAH: And we'd dance in the barn when they first built the barn.

GLEN: Yes, I had my barn; I had a nice clean floor in the hayloft.

BEULAH: I think there was 140 there that night.

GLEN: A barn about 40 feet long, and about 28 feet wide.

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