

HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #122 - Side B (No Tape)

Subject: Judge Newton Hotchkiss

Place: Burns, Oregon

Date: January 21, 1972

Interviewer: James Baker

NEWTON HOTCHKISS: ... others like Clarence Young, and Joe Fine, and those people. They've been --- Henry Slater and Marcus Haines and Jinks Harris, and a bunch of them, they've been kind of compiling stuff like this. I don't, I never look back, I'm not particularly interested in what I've been over. (Laughter)

JAMES BAKER: I wonder if I'll feel that way when I get to be 75 years old?

NEWTON: I don't know. And of course it's different, whether or not you have children growing up. We have no children, so we haven't that contact with the younger people that we would have if you had built up a contact through the years through their going to school and everything like that. You don't have it. But I notice a lot of difference now in forty years ago, fifty, somewheres along there. People didn't move around like they do now. That is, a family would stay in an area, and when the children grew up, why usually they went into business or worked in that area. Now they go to school and they're gone and they've scattered all over the world. Transportation is so much easier. Jobs are so much easier to obtain. And you take your federal jobs, a lot of your federal jobs, they discourage their personnel, in fact they move them about every five years. That's about as long as they want them to stay, like in the Forest Service or the BLM, and perhaps in other areas. And in the Bird Refuges, I think the same thing takes place. But it is their contention that they do not want their headmen to take root. They don't want them to get

too close to the people within that area, because they are afraid that they will have an undue influence over the general, broad thinking of what they are coming up with, and that kind of thing. And that's a fact. You take, oft times you will see a person come into the Forest Service or something, and if he doesn't particularly fit in there, most of them do, they are a good bunch of people. Occasionally you'll find one though that doesn't like the area, and after the first few months he begins to think, "Well now I've got four years and three months left." (Laughter)

JAMES: And I want out.

NEWTON: And I want out. So he loses interest, he doesn't take root. It used to be that people took root a lot more than they do now. That is where they want to stay. Like with me, I wouldn't live anyplace else. This is my home, the only place I want to live.

JAMES: Is it the people here, or is it the land?

NEWTON: Well, the whole thing, it just fits me, it fits me. Sure I like the people, I like the openness of it and the opportunities. Of course, for younger people, at the time that I was a young fellow, why this was almost strictly a livestock country, sheep and cattle and horses. Lots of horses. And it didn't take; it didn't take the amount of money to start in then. You go out here and buy a little piece of land, and the range was all free. You run your stuff wherever you wanted to, if somebody didn't steal them from you, why you was all right. (Laughter) You had to be kind of fast with the riata to keep, or hold your own.

JAMES: You said a riata?

NEWTON: Yeah.

JAMES: What's a riata?

NEWTON: A riata is a lasso. That's what they used to catch their calves and brand them with. In the early days in here, a riata was made out of rawhide or braided by the people that used it mostly. Sometimes they'd buy them, but usually they cut them out of cowhide,

and braided them up. The general length of them was around sixty to seventy feet, is what they did. That was what they used. They had some fine ropers here in the early days for that type of --- you're roping now --- as you consider ropers. Now in these rodeos, they're time men. They've got to get right up on top of an animal before they catch it. These old boys would throw a riata out there as far as that door and catch a calf.

JAMES: How far is that, a hundred feet?

NEWTON: Oh no, it isn't that far. Probably thirty feet, somewheres around there.

JAMES: Oh, that door there.

NEWTON: Yeah. And they were good at it; they were good at it. And your livestock were wild then. They run out all the time. A good deal of the time. Of course up in this particular part of Harney County you had to, the winters were such that you almost had to feed. In the early days, as I understand it, they would summer up here and then drift them down into the lake area in the hopes that they would winter there. And they didn't sometimes, they didn't. So as fast as they got to where they could cut a little hay, why they would cut enough hay so that it would tide them over for a long time. Of course, your hay cutting then was quite a job. I don't know whether they ever used anything other than a machine here, whether they ever used a scythe or not, I doubt it. If they did it was, ... as far back as I can remember they had mowing machines. They were only a five-foot machine. And they would cut probably eight acres a day, maybe ten if the going was good.

JAMES: How many people in a team that would cut that much?

NEWTON: Well, that was two horses on a machine, one machine. And that was your power.

JAMES: Two-horse power.

NEWTON: Two-horse power mowing machine, yeah. And usually in the big outfits a little

later on, like the Pacific Livestock Company down there, they would have about four or five haying camps. And those camps usually had about ten two-horse machines in each one of them. And then, of course, this hay was raked up by rakes, what they called regular hay rakes, and put in a bunch and then put in a stack. And this was done all by horses. It took a tremendous lot of horses. Because you take ten machines, that meant you had to have at least forty horses for those ten machines, because you changed horses at noon all the time. The flies and mosquitoes were terrible, and they just couldn't stand it.

JAMES: Yeah.

NEWTON: But you'd have, in each one of those hay camps you'd have close to a hundred head of horses.

JAMES: That's a lot of horses.

NEWTON: Yeah. Yeah, there's lots of difference now. Now you, even a small crew then you would have eight or ten men, somewheres around there, altogether, would make a crew that was considered economic to run. Now, before I left the ranch, there was myself and one man with our modern machinery, and we had put up, we put up as much as seven hundred tons of hay, just the two of us, you see.

JAMES: Is that right? My gosh, what a change.

NEWTON: You can see the changes that have taken place in just one lifetime, just one lifetime. It's remarkable; it's been a remarkable time to live. Now when I was a kid and went to school here, I don't know how many was in, I went to school right here in Burns. We moved from the ranch up here in the wintertime and us kids went to school here. But I think there was probably, I was trying to think awhile ago, I think about eight, I believe there was eight kids, maybe ten kids in the first grade. When I went to high school, the first year in high school we had, there was twenty boys in the entire high school.

JAMES: How many girls?

NEWTON: Well I don't know, probably three or four more. But the reason I remember there was twenty boys is that that was the first year that they had a high school football team.

JAMES: Oh, I see.

NEWTON: And of course we didn't have enough, we only had ten on a side. But we cleared off a patch of sagebrush down here, greasewood rather, and we fixed up some cleats on our shoes, and our mothers put some pads on our shoulders. And we started in; we started to have a game between us down there. It was either the first or second play, we started out and come together, come together, and broke one kid's leg. So that ended the football season. (Laughter)

JAMES: After one game?

NEWTON: One game. Only had nineteen kids. (Laughter)

JAMES: Was a short season.

NEWTON: So that finished the football season that year.

JAMES: That's a good story.

NEWTON: But it just shows the changes that have taken place here. I think that was about 19 --- probably about 1912 or '13, somewheres along there. Now I don't know how many kids they got out here, quite a lot of them, four or five hundred I suppose. But of course that was long before they had the sawmill here. That was long before they had roads in here. They had no highways in here at that time. And the railroad didn't come up here; I think, until about '27, 1927. And I believe the first road that was built between here and Crane, that was built in about 1916, somewheres along there. And it was just a graded road with a little gravel on it. And I don't recall when the first road was built to Bend, but not much before that. In the earlier days they used to go to Riley out here,

there was no road to Bend, there wasn't any Bend. And the road went up through, by Buck Creek and over by what they called Harding and come in at Prineville.

JAMES: That's a lot different, a lot different.

NEWTON: Then in place of going to Lakeview, the way they do now, they went out to the Gap Ranch and way around through by Wagontire there. The first time I went to Lakeview, I was a pretty small kid. My mother and two or three of the rest of us kids went down there to visit the relatives. It took us five days.

JAMES: To go to Lakeview? (Laughter)

NEWTON: You went with a team. You had these night stops every place you went.

JAMES: You stopped in on neighbors?

NEWTON: Huh?

JAMES: Stop in on neighbors?

NEWTON: No, well no they weren't neighbors, but they had stage stations. They had to have them there.

JAMES: Oh, that's what I mean.

NEWTON: Because your horses, your --- twenty-five mile a day trip was a pretty good trip for a team, the kind of roads you have. That's about what they made. It used to be, it took about, unless they drove steady, if you just drove at that rate between here and Canyon City, it would take you four days with a team, to go over there. People had lots of time, it seemed like they had lots of time. But it took lots of time to do anything.

JAMES: Yeah, you had to have lots of time.

NEWTON: You had to have lots of time.

JAMES: Yeah.

NEWTON: Today you seem to think nothing about it. Now if we take a couple of hours, to where it used to take two days, why we think we're going awful damn slow. Just think

we're going awful slow.

JAMES: That's sure true. Just a few hours seems like an awfully long time.

NEWTON: Right, you bet. You go to Bend here, a couple of hours, a little over. And if you don't make it in that time why you've probably been bogged down. (Laughter)

JAMES: Nobody wants to get bogged down.

NEWTON: No.

JAMES: Haven't got the time for it.

NEWTON: Nope, there's lots of changes. It's been very interesting to live in this length of time. But to see all the changes, the way they handle livestock. The cattlemen of course, the PLS Company, the Pacific Livestock Company, were the big outfit in here when I was a kid. And I don't know how many thousand head of cattle they run. But they owned lots of property in Oregon and Nevada, and a tremendous lot of it in California. Old Henry Miller was the start of it. And it's claimed that at one time they could start from Silvies Valley up here in the upper end of Harney County, and drive livestock from here to San Francisco, and only stay off of their own property two nights.

JAMES: That's an awful lot.

NEWTON: Of course they didn't own it solid between there, but they claimed that they could do that.

JAMES: From Silvies Valley to San Francisco?

NEWTON: Yeah. And camp on their own ground every night except two. And they used to drive cattle from here to San Francisco.

JAMES: And they didn't go to Ontario or Winnemucca, they went all the way to San Francisco?

NEWTON: That was before you had any railroad.

JAMES: Oh, oh, I see.

NEWTON: I don't know whether later on when the railroad come to Winnemucca, why that's where they went.

JAMES: Probably did.

NEWTON: And when I was a kid, there was no railroad in here, no trucks in here. Your livestock were all driven out of here. They either went to Winnemucca or to Huntington. Usually Huntington rather than Ontario. I think that was the end of the railroad at that time. Or, they'd drive them to California. They'd go through by Lakeview and drive down through there. But there was no direct market. Everything, everything, nothing was bought by the pound, everything was bought by the head. There was no scales or anything.

JAMES: I'll bet they looked pretty scrawny when they came in.

NEWTON: Well, no, you had quite a lot of feed. And they always claimed, they claimed if you had a good buckaroo boss and they got started out right, your cattle would gain on the road.

JAMES: They would?

NEWTON: Yeah. The average day drive was about ten miles.

JAMES: Uh huh.

NEWTON: It took; they figured from, they figured a man to every hundred or a hundred and fifty head. Usually they drove cattle in about a thousand head droves. And it would take them from six to ten men. They had their own buckaroo outfit, their own saddle horses, and their own cook wagon, took their own beds and took out and went. I never happened to be on any of them. But that fellow that you will see in a few days, and that's Buck Miller, he was on quite a few of them.

JAMES: That's going to be interesting to find out.

NEWTON: He's an old time vaquero and a good one. He was a good one. I knew him

very well, worked with him a lot.

JAMES: Yeah.

NEWTON: But --- Well even in the, when was it, I guess in the early '30's, I was buying cattle here for Holmes and Dixon at that time. And we drove those cattle from here to Fort Klamath. We made, droves through there, and about a thousand head in each group. And this Buck Miller that you will see, he was one of the foremen on those trips that they took.

JAMES: Well I'll ask him about those trips then. I'm glad that you mentioned that.

NEWTON: Yeah, he was --- Oh, there's lots of things a fellow could think of. (Laughter) He don't recall these little incidents, he don't put them down or anything. But no, we came here, my people came here, I think in '87. Came here in '87. My mother's folks, whose name was Smith, they came from Taylorsville, California. And I think my father's folks come there originally, but they came to Lake County in '80 --- or '77. Pretty early then. And then he come over here about ten years after that then, and bought a small place down below here. And that's where he started from. He run sheep the first two or three years that he was here, and then went out of sheep and run cattle from then on.

JAMES: What do you think brought them up to Oregon, and then from Lake to Harney?

NEWTON: I don't know, they never did say. Neither of my parents were much to talk about their history, I don't know why. They just never did much. Just got started a going. They were the type of people, by God, it seemed like they had to get out where there was lots of room. ... I suppose.

JAMES: Is that right?

NEWTON: Don't ask me. Yeah.

JAMES: Just get out where there is space.

NEWTON: Yeah. Get out in the country. They didn't like to be dictated to. All of those

older people were that way. They had minds of their own, and a new place where they thought they could start, start up good. And most of them were not spectacular people at all, they just come in and done what they had to do and raised a family, made no fuss about it. Nothing particularly outstanding about --- that they had done, except that they were good citizens, and law abiding. And that's what they ... They weren't the type of people that sought notoriety at all, anything like that at all. They didn't want any of it.

JAMES: To be left alone?

NEWTON: Huh?

JAMES: Want to be left alone?

NEWTON: Well, in that way. No, they liked to visit and everything like that. But they didn't give a damn whether they had their name in the paper every day, if you understand what I mean.

JAMES: Yes, I understand what you mean. Things are a little different.

NEWTON: Oh, yes, you bet.

JAMES: Things are a little different. Well, they must have had a good time when they got together?

NEWTON: Oh, yes.

JAMES: Dances and celebrations.

NEWTON: They had these dances. Maybe they'd go out here twenty-five or thirty miles to a dance, on horseback, or in the buggy. Maybe they'd stay all night, three or four times. Go to Thanks-giving, or dinners, or Christmas dinners. A small group of them would get together. They had good times. Oh yes, you bet they did. They had to blow off steam, because everybody does. They've got to have something for relaxation, no question about that.

But I don't know what to tell you about any more history. Hell, I knew a lot of these

old fellows. I knew Bill Hanley.

JAMES: Is that the Hanley that ran the store?

NEWTON: Huh?

JAMES: The Hanley that ran the store?

NEWTON: No, Bill Hanley was a big livestock man and a politician. And he was on the highway board, or the state highway department board for a number of years. He was an early timer in here. I think he died in about '34. I was acquainted with him. He and my dad were very good friends. And he was one of the bigger outfits in here for a long time. And, of course, there's a lot of old timers' names that I would know, but it's hard to recall anything about them.

JAMES: Yeah, I'll bet.

NEWTON: Clarence Young does more of it than anybody.

JAMES: He remembers, I think he makes a point to remember names.

NEWTON: Oh yes, you bet, and he keeps a diary all the time, you know. All through his life, and he's got all this stuff down.

JAMES: Oh, is that right.

NEWTON: He's taken an interest in it.

JAMES: Yeah.

NEWTON: He's built up quite an interest in it.

JAMES: Well what is --- what would --- what's interesting about, what is he interested in? Why --- what's the fascination with this country?

NEWTON: Well, it's just the best country there is in the world. (Laughter)

JAMES: Well, okay.

NEWTON: Yeah. I know this, when I go someplace and I'm gone three or four days, when I come over the hill out there where I can see Harney County, that's the best part of

my trip, just getting back. (Laughter)

JAMES: Sure.

NEWTON: Everybody --- or a lot of people will say, "Well, what in the hell do you see about that country out there, all sagebrush and jack rabbits?" And I say, "Well, by God, that's what I like."

JAMES: Yeah. Well I think I can understand part of that, by coming over from the city where you're hemmed in, where the air is bad.

NEWTON: Oh, yeah. Everybody's in a hurry.

JAMES: Yeah.

NEWTON: Everybody's in a hurry down there. You hardly ever see anybody smile.

JAMES: Yeah.

NEWTON: By gosh, they're just a going like this all the time.

JAMES: Yeah.

NEWTON: No, I don't care whether they ever settle this country up out here, or they sell it or not. It looks good the way it is. But we're not going to keep people out of here. We're not going to keep them out of here.

JAMES: Are they going to come in for tourists? Are they going to come in as tourists, or -

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NEWTON: Yeah, mostly.

JAMES: --- are they going to make money here?

NEWTON: No, there's not much for them to make money out of here. This is a livestock country, and a lumber country, timber country. A mill country you might say. Now your livestock business is getting such that you've got to be pretty big if you're going to make it. They're eliminating all these small places. You can't, I don't think you could start in the livestock business here, even in a small basis, very small, for less than a hundred

thousand dollars investment.

JAMES: That much? A hundred thousand dollars?

NEWTON: The very smallest.

JAMES: That's the smallest?

NEWTON: To make a living out of.

JAMES: Whew!!!

NEWTON: This whole country was all settled when I was a kid. You had school houses everyplace out through the country here. You had homesteaders that come in here, that settled up all ... And Uncle Sam bet them a hundred and sixty acres against five acres of their lives that they couldn't make it, and they didn't. He won, most of them. But it used to be a small rancher with fifty or a hundred head of cows; he could make a pretty good living out of it. You can't do it any more. You've got to buy all your feed, every bit of your feed. You've got to --- the cost of your equipment is tremendous. You take an old mowing machine, an old horse mowing machine, and it run you \$85 to \$100. And your horses, you used them in haying time, and you turned them out on the range, and then you gathered them up next haying. Now, one of these swathers cost you seven or eight thousand dollars, just for a swather. So, your cost of doing business is tremendous. And you've got to have a truck, you can't drive these cattle on the highways any more, the cars will kill them. And pickups, and all those kinds of things, your overhead is tremendous, it's tremendous. Most of these people that are still in the livestock business, unless they're a big corporation that are making money from some other source, are people that have grown up in it and they have got that clear, that's all clear. They are not borrowing money on most of that. If they had to pay interest on what that valuation is, they wouldn't make one percent.

JAMES: Huh. It's sad ---

NEWTON: But they think they are making a little money, they're out of debt, and they sell so many cattle. But they don't have to figure what they could get on interest. If they sold that thing and put the money on interest they'd be way ahead from what they're making. That's a condition.

JAMES: Isn't that something!

NEWTON: Yeah. But there's not much chance for, oh there's chance for development, yes, in the livestock industry by improving what you've got. By eliminating the sagebrush and by using the crested wheat's and more productive types of grasses ---

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