

HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #123 - Side B

Subject: Ilda May Hayes

Place: Burns, Oregon

Date: January 28, 1972

Interviewer: James Baker

JAMES BAKER: I thought that you had an incident in mind, and if I can help you talk about that then ---

ILDA MAY HAYES: Well when you came in today, you asked me what I thought about the winter, and I said it is a hard winter, but I was born here and I have experienced so much worse than this. It was about 1912, I'll say circa 1912, because I might miss it a year or two, and we lived up the river on our ranch, which is 5 miles north of here, and this was before the days of automobiles. My father always had beautiful horses, and he classed his horse. He had his driving horses, his riding horses, and then his draft horses. And he never worked driving horses or a saddle horse on a plow. Each horse did the kind of work he was supposed to do.

So this heavy winter, hard winter, the thermometer kept going down, down, down, until according to all the thermometers around, it was 42 degrees below. But we came along at a time, my brother and I, that everybody was determined to have an education. So it didn't make any difference how cold it was, nobody ever said, "Skip school today," regardless.

Well we had a little cutter, that's a form of a sleigh, and we had a beautiful driving team. And so my mother would take bricks and heat them, and put bricks at our feet, and bricks in the seat.

JAMES: Underneath this bed of the cutter?

ILDA MAY: No, no, on the floor of the cutter, and then in the seat she put the bricks between us. And we had a fur rug that came up, and then the top part came over us like a parka. And in the front was a slit where our hands went through. Well we'd start to town and my brother would drive until his hands would get cold, and then I would drive until my hands would get cold. They were gentle horses, they are what were called "true horses," but they were spirited horses. And many times for many a mile they ran a dead run, you know. But my father being such a horseman, he had taught us that a horse runs on the bit, and when I see people now, you know, slapping horses trying to run, slapping them like that, you know they don't know a thing in the world about a horse. They don't know how to make them run on the bit.

People in town prophesied that we would be killed every day, my brother and I. We never were, we ran our horses all the way through. I was in grammar school and my brother was in high school, we ran our horses until we got out of high school, but we were never killed.

But when you speak of cold weather now, you see it remained down like that for almost a whole entire month. And it never got up above zero. So when you think about this today, you see, that isn't anything compared to then.

JAMES: The clothes, it seems to me you would be wearing lots of different layers of wool clothes.

ILDA MAY: Well what I was wearing that kept me warm were hand knit things by my grandmothers. They knit our socks and our, my stockings; they weren't called hose, they were stockings that came up over my knees. I had leggings that buttoned up the side. And we had wristlets, knit wristlets, and then we each had knit mittens. Not gloves, but mittens. And then over those we wore leather gloves, leather mittens. So it was not

bungle some at all. But, of course, who would knit today? Who could take the wool and spin it? My grandmothers could do that.

JAMES: And all the oil would still be in the wool, and it would be warm and water repellent?

ILDA MAY: Yes, it was just great. As cold as that was, the only thing that really bothered us was the breathing. And I remember that by the time we'd get to town, our horses, one was a beautiful black, and one a beautiful bay, but they were frosted white by the time we got to town. But my brother would drive me up to the public school and then take the horses back down and put them in the livery stable. And they'd stand there all day and eat grain and hay. And then he'd walk up to the high school, and then he'd pick me up at night up there.

JAMES: And then you'd have the 5 mile ---

ILDA MAY: Run them 5 miles home.

JAMES: Imagine the wind for that 5 miles.

ILDA MAY: Yes.

JAMES: That would drop the temperature even lower.

ILDA MAY: Well, and then there wasn't such a thing as a wind-chill. But we had all this fur around us.

JAMES: I've never seen a cutter, could you describe that? It sounds like a sled.

ILDA MAY: Well a cutter is a pretty thing, and they use them now when they are making display windows for Santa Claus. It has the high front and comes up and around, a kind of a curlicue thing. And then the little seat on the back.

JAMES: Just like the Santa Claus sleds?

ILDA MAY: Yes, like the Santa Claus. They are very light, very light. And I assure you; you wouldn't want to hitch up a wild team to them.

JAMES: They go very fast?

ILDA MAY: Oh, they just sail.

JAMES: Was there a brake on it?

ILDA MAY: No, you used the horses.

JAMES: And there was another thing, I was curious about the wool, what kind of dyes would go into making ---

ILDA MAY: Just the natural, just an off white.

JAMES: Do you recall anybody using some of the local plants or anything around here for dyes?

ILDA MAY: Well I know the story of the Indian women. They took certain things, and if you look at anything that the Indians, they had lots of browns, and greens, and reds that they took from the native weeds, really, native plants. But my grandmothers never did do the dyeing. They just used the off white.

JAMES: From what area of the country did your parents come into what is now Harney County?

ILDA MAY: Into Harney County? Well, I hardly know where to start on that, because my mother has one family tree, and my father has another family tree. But I guess we just would say from the Willamette Valley. They started from the Willamette Valley. And since this is a man's world, I'll start with my father.

My father, as you know, was born near Springfield on this Tommy Edward's donation claim in 1864. And then in 1873 his older brother developed what they called everything, but probably a form of rheumatism. And the doctor said that they would have to get him out of that damp, wet climate. So the father, Cyrus Hayes, brought Scott Hayes and came up to Summer Lake and Paisley, over here, what was then Jackson County, before it was Lake County. And then the next year, the family followed and came

up there too.

Well Cyrus Hayes was a beautifully educated man. He was a carpenter. And he served his apprentice 7 years. He was a graduate of Wesleyan University in Ohio. So if you visit Paisley, and Summer Lake, and Silver Lake and you see those two and a half story houses over there, my grandfather built them. And he had sons, my grandfather had sons. The oldest son was very adept, showed great skill, and then my father had great skill. The thing, of course, that was interesting, that my grandfather cut every piece of timber before he ever drove a nail. And what do you call those houses now? Aladdin houses. But that's the reason that everything we ever had on our ranches, a wagon shed, granary, it didn't make any difference what it was, it was beautifully built. Because my father was trained by his father, and then he in turn trained his son.

JAMES: Did he ever give you an idea of why, what he was looking for when he came from the Willamette Valley to Eastern Oregon?

ILDA MAY: Well, as I told you, they came to save the life of this little boy; it was health for the child. Maybe, we don't know, but maybe this boy had a touch of polio. But, you see, they called it rheumatism. ... Then when my father and his brothers came through here, they were on their way to Jupiter Basin, Montana. Because they had heard that there was great grass up there, and a great cattle country. And they wanted cattle and ranches.

And even when they reached Jackson County over here, which now is Lake County, the best ranches had been taken. And my father said the longest time in his life was when he had to wait to be 21, and watch all this land being gobbled up. And then when he came here in '23, some of the best ranches were taken. But the ranches down on the Silvies River, which is near Lawen, Oregon, about 17 miles south of Burns, they had, the rights had been bought by a man that they knew. And he wanted to sell them.

But it was just a right for this land. It was still the Malheur Indian Reservation. So when they sold to my father's brother who was older, Scott Hayes, and then my father, Ted Hayes. And they each paid \$200 for their rights.

But then my father helped O'Neil and carried the chain when they surveyed it. So they could lay out the land and locate the corners. And then, at that time, my father's youngest brother, Bailey Hayes, there wasn't any right for him. But a buckaroo was sort of holding one on; maybe you might call squatter's rights. And my Uncle Bailey wanted to be with his brothers. So for his 160 acres he gave this buckaroo \$20 and his best saddle horse. That was about equal to \$200 then, you see.

JAMES: I'm not familiar enough with the system that you described as a right, now are we talking about government land?

ILDA MAY: It was government land, but it hadn't been surveyed, and so they were holding it on, really, squatter's right, that's what they were holding it on.

JAMES: Did the Government Issue these rights that you are talking about?

ILDA MAY: Yes. Well, they issued it after it was surveyed. But, of course, the squatter's right, that's where all the trouble and bloodshed came.

JAMES: Yeah. If I get the idea clearly, it was that originally your father's side came out for health reasons, and then found the ranches; I guess you'd say, an economic reason. Am I close at all, is that ---

ILDA MAY: Well for the life they wanted.

JAMES: Uh huh. Let's talk about that.

ILDA MAY: They always wanted, where this germ started with these young people, I don't know that I can answer that. But even today we have young people who wouldn't know what to do with a ranch if they had it, wouldn't know what to do with cattle. But they'll sit up and tell you, "I'd give anything in the world if I could have a ranch and cattle."

Don't they? So maybe this is an old, old thing. Because it was what my father always wanted, and it was what his brothers wanted. Excepting one, the oldest son, George Hayes, was very brilliant. He was an attorney and a judge, and he died in Vale, Oregon. He was in residence there many years.

JAMES: It sounds like something about the cattle ranching is an important thing to hold on to in this country's history, that there is something important about that experience.

ILDA MAY: I don't quite know what you mean.

JAMES: It affected people in a good way, it was a good life.

ILDA MAY: It was a good life.

JAMES: It is a good heritage that this part of the country is built on.

ILDA MAY: Well, maybe I can tell you a little story that will bring out your point. I had a friend visit me at the ranch, and she was a beautifully educated lady from Portland, and she was there two or three days. And finally at the breakfast table she said, "I have never been more confused." She said, "I can't tell who is human in this family, and I can't tell the animals, because every animal has a name." And she said I hear your Mother saying, "Did you put Delphie in?" Well, she said, I don't know who Delphie is. And then the next day, you are saying, "Well where is Kupie?" And then you talk about Towser and Tippie. And she said everything is talked about by name. And that's, see that is your true affection that surrounds a ranch. We never called a dog, a dog, or a cat, a cat. We had great fun in our family naming things. We thought we had some great ones.

JAMES: What were some of the names?

ILDA MAY: We had one uncle, who was the best at anything, and he called a beautiful sorrel horse, he called him "Nugget". And a dog, he called "Token." And we had a beautiful; we always had racehorses in our family. And we had one we called "Flute" because he really split the breezes.

JAMES: He stripped the breeze, huh?

ILDA MAY: Yeah.

JAMES: I'm glad you said that. I didn't know that.

ILDA MAY: And then my brother had a beautiful racehorse, he beat everything in Harney County. And he got cut in the wire when he was a colt, and he was a little bit lame in one hind leg, and so they called him "Tango".

JAMES: We had talked earlier something about the Chautauqua's, and I'd like to know something brief, a description of the Chatauqua circuit, and particularly in this county and around Burns.

ILDA MAY: Well I'll have to go back a little bit and I'll give you the history of Chautauqua, because Chautauqua started at Chautauqua Lake, New York. And people used to go there in the summertime and have study courses. It was before the days of good roads, and it was before the days of radio. And I'm not sure that I'm right in this, but I have a feeling that at one time people were more anxious for knowledge than they are now. I don't know that I'm right, but I have that feeling. They were most anxious to learn. Like my father won a scholarship at the University of Oregon. He was heartsick all his life, he lived to be 90 years old, but he couldn't take it because he had to support Ma and Pa. It was a daily heartache. So when they started Chautauqua at Chautauqua, New York, people came from miles and miles and miles to study. And then it just, a mushroom growth. They got so that they would take the programs and the talent and go out to little towns. And then it just grew, and grew, and grew until finally it was all over the entire United States.

I started with Ellison and White in Chicago. They were the president, the general manager, and the owners. And the first job that I had with Ellison and White Chautauqua's, they sent me to New Orleans. I was the advance man. And I would go

into these towns, and I had a list of all the people who were cultured and who wanted to improve themselves, and we would start and we would have meetings, and we would elect all the officers. We'd elect the president, and the secretary, and the chairmen, everybody who was going to do everything. And then I did that on my first circuit, and then after that, my next job was, I became a junior director. But this was set up; we'll take the premier circuit, seven-day circuit, so that seven towns shared the expense. And we had the best of everything. We had the best in music, we had the best lecturers, we had the best plays, we had the best talent of every kind. And we paid them; it was big money then, really big money. And we'll just say that they would come into one town and they open that night. The next day that first day's talent goes on. The second day's talent arrives, so you have seven towns operating at the same time-sharing the expense.

And we had big, big tents, big, big tents. When I was a junior leader, I appeared on a program with William Jennings Bryant.

JAMES: Is that right? What a thrill.

ILDA MAY: And of course we were back stage, I was spitting cotton and I thought I was going to pop everything. And I looked over at Mr. Bryant and he was perspiring and wiping his brow. And I said to him, "I know what's wrong with me." But I said, "I can't figure out what's wrong with you." And he said, "I'll tell you something. If an entertainer isn't nervous, they're not worth listening to." Isn't that cute?

But right here in this town we had ... Frank, and oh, all the best talents. Because they came to Prairie City, and then came from Prairie City here, and then went from here back to Ontario, you see. So we could share that. And they had the five-day Chautauqua here.

And I'll tell you a little incident that happened in Burns, Oregon. The play that year was, "Little Shepherd of the Hills," I can't think for the moment ... but anyhow, there was a

shooting scene in it. Well, we had a city marshal who believed in law and order, and he wasn't too popular with the boys around town. I guess maybe I could respectfully call them the "smart alecks." But in the scene of "Little Shepard of the Hills," there's some shooting, and just at exactly the same time there was shooting outside of the tent. And the city marshal got shot, right during, "The Little Shepherd of the Hills." And the poor talent, however imported they were, however great they were, they lost their audience. The crowd just got out of that tent in nothing flat. They never did see the last act of, "Little Shepherd of the Hills". Isn't that funny, and true. (Laughter)

JAMES: That's a very funny incident. What an incredible coincidence that is of a play and a shooting, to have the city marshal shot.

ILDA MAY: City marshal ...

JAMES: That's really something.

ILDA MAY: But this was --- see I was with Ellison and White, which was a Pacific Coast. The middle part of the United States was Red Path, and the Atlantic Seaboard was Swarthmore. Swarthmore Chautauqua, and it was named for the little town of Swarthmore just outside of Philadelphia.

JAMES: Yes, uh huh.

ILDA MAY: And the president of that was Dr. Paul M. Pearson, he was our president, and he was head of the Swarthmore Chautauqua. And of course he was truly great, and then by the time I reached there, I was what you called a Superintendent or Director. I was the big shot. And my tent man was Drew Pearson.

JAMES: Is that right?

ILDA MAY: Yes. With his beautiful blue eyes. But we had the best.

JAMES: What were the --- some of the stories that I've heard, these incidents that you are recalling, that --- I heard of a fellow by the name of Tebo who was a buckaroo boss for

Pete French, used to tell stories that would be, I don't know what you'd call them, local humor, I suppose.

ILDA MAY: Now when I get Ora Hayes with Joe Fine, Ora Hayes knows lots of those Tebo stories. And he head them, he learned them from Tebo, you know.

JAMES: I see.

ILDA MAY: And if I were to tell you, it's just that somebody else has told me, and you could lose the flavor.

JAMES: If I had a chance to talk to Ora, what stories would I ask him?

ILDA MAY: Just ask him to tell you about Tebo. And, are you going to be here now all this weekend?

JAMES: Uh huh.

ILDA MAY: When my grandparents, Cyrus and Julia Ann Hayes, when they crossed the plains, and that's a whole story in itself, and I'll just tell you that, they were looking for gold. They started across in '61, and they started from Des Moines, Iowa, and then they came right straight across, and they hit Oregon about Hunting-ton, and then went down towards Baker. But they went into Auburn, that gold town, you know. And if you go to Auburn now they've got a big sign up there and it says that at one time this was a great gold town, and inhabitants of 5,000 people. Well my grandparents made up part of that 5,000 people. And they stayed there all that year. My grandfather then, though, he didn't do gold mining very much, he did carpentering all the time. He built houses for these people. And my grandmother cooked. She was a great cook, so she cooked. Of course, they did pan some gold. I know because they had the poke and the gold dust in the poke, that Robert Service tells us about.

They spent that winter there in '61, and then they went back to Boise Basin because they heard that there was more gold there. And they were looking for more gold.

And when they went into Boise Basin, there were no roads at all, and my grandmother went in there on the back of a mule without any halter, or bridle, or anything, just turned loose and ran with the pack. And she held her baby, that was a boy at that time, in front of her. And her two other children were on another pack mule, and they were on an alforja, and the little girl was down on one side, and the little boy was down on the other side, and that mule was turned loose. And my grandmother told me many times that that was the hardest experience she ever had in her life. She fought Indians, she fought rattlesnakes, but she said nothing equaled the fear that her two babies would be killed on this mule that was just running loose.

But anyway, they got into Boise Basin and they spent another winter there. And they did pan for gold there, and they did have very good luck. And then in the fall of '63, my grandmother, and I don't know how she got there, but she got up to Umatilla, and she took her three children, and she had her gold dust in her poke, and she sailed down the Columbia River to Portland.

Now the thing that so many people don't realize, that many of these people were the same friends in Iowa or in Ohio.

JAMES: Oh, I didn't realize that.

ILDA MAY: Yeah, they were friends. So just when she let these people know, these Tommy Edwards, these people that she had known in Iowa before they started, that she would be in Portland. But anyhow, she got the message through. And so when she arrived there, Mr. Edwards was there in a buckboard to meet her, and to take her and the three children back down to Springfield. And she paid for everything in gold dust. So that was the reason that my Hayes grandparents came west, they came for gold. Because, you see, this was following the gold rush of California.

That's what brought them out of the most fertile land in the world. If you ever visit

Burlington, Iowa, and those places that they left, you've never seen such ranches, farms, you know, they are not ranches. Raise anything under the world, in the world, you know.

JAMES: They left that farm for the gold. Did they end up as ranchers then?

ILDA MAY: Well Cyrus Hayes was always a carpenter, but then his sons wanted to, the ranch and cattle.

JAMES: You mentioned the legend of the Blue Bucket Mine.

ILDA MAY: Oh yes. Well then in going on with all these gold mines, you know, there are just stories and stories of the Lost Mine, the lost this and that and something else. Well about this time there was the story of the Blue Bucket Mine. Now you can get a book on that right down here that tells you all about the Blue Bucket Mine as it now is told.

But my grandparents, now this is my mother's people, they were in the Willamette Valley and they came over to The Sisters. And they had, and the Metolius, the Metolius no less, my grandfather ran his cattle right there on the Metolius --- in the grass so tall he couldn't see his cattle. But he got the fever for the Blue Bucket Mine, and it was supposed to be not far from Fort Harney. So, he had always dabbled in mines, and they just decided they had some cattle, and so they came up here and brought their little herd of cattle, and he got a homestead, because he was sure that he could find the Blue Bucket Mine. That's Rube Claypool, the man who worked for John Devine.

JAMES: Do you remember what the story of the finding, and the losing of the Blue Bucket Mine is?

ILDA MAY: Whoever tells it to you has their own version.

JAMES: I was curious what version you had heard?

ILDA MAY: Well, let's see. Of course you know that they were camped. You can tell that, that the immigrants had camped. And they went out in the evening and they found these gold nuggets. And of course, they brought them in a blue bucket. And then they

had to move on because they didn't have enough provisions to stay on. And when they did move on, they took all the nuggets they could in their blue bucket. And then went on down into the Willamette Valley. Then they came back, they could never find it.

JAMES: It's always been curious to me why it was a blue bucket?

ILDA MAY: Well you can take this freight team up here, the one thing you always have on any wagon set-up, you've got your buckets, and you've got your snaps, and you've got them snapped underneath, because the minute you stop, you're going to be using your bucket for something. Either to fix your campfire and start your coffee, or to water your mules, water your horses. A bucket was very essential to ---

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