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HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #123 - Side A

Subject: Judd Wise

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Interviewer: James Baker

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JAMES BAKER: You came in, you said, when you were 10 years old?

JUDD WISE: Yeah. Pete French had been dead then. Well, he died in 1897, and I came in, in 1900.

JAMES: Where did you come from?

JUDD: Warner Valley.

JAMES: What did you come over for?

JUDD: Well, my brother was working over there, and I come over and went to work. Went to wrangling horses for old Chino. And I wrangled horses for years there, and then I turned out to be a buckaroo. And then I got married and moved over to the Home Creek over in Catlow Valley. I was there four years, and then they moved me down to the P Ranch and turned the whole layout over to me. I ran the whole outfit for 18 years there.

JAMES: Was Joe Fine working at that time with you?

JUDD: No, Joe Fine come afterwards. He rented the property after Swift's sold out. They went out of the cattle business and sold that to the Bird Preserve. Joe Fine rented it. When the Bird Preserve first got it, why he rented it and went into the sheep business by himself. And then afterwards, they went broke, and then he went back and went to work for Gill Brothers there for years, and years, after I left there. I moved from there over to the Riddle Ranch. In fact, I bought the Riddle Ranch from the Company. When they sold out, they gave me the pick of all the ranches, to buy any one I

wanted. So, I bought the Riddle Ranch over there.

Yeah, Marcus Haines was here the other day wanting me to go out and show him where Pete --- they'd looked and looked, and looked, and I guess I'm the only person in the whole country that knows right where his grave is --- right where he was killed. Not where his grave is, but where he was killed. They've looked; they've all looked in the wrong place. I think I can go right to it, though.

JAMES: It's out where there is a gate, isn't it?

JUDD: Yeah, there's a gate up there at the Sod House, at the west side there. There's an old mowing machine ... rolled right in the ground there. I guess it's there yet if the cattle hasn't rubbed it up. Stood up about that high. Right where he was killed. A Mexican that was with him showed me right where he was killed.

But Pete French evidently was a good man; all the people that worked for him worshiped him. You hear what a bad man he was and all that, but I don't think so, because all the people that worked for him just worshiped Pete French.

JAMES: What were the good things that they said about him? Why did they call him a good man?

JUDD: Well, he was good to the people. If they wanted a beef and was out of beef, or out of food or anything, he'd kill them a beef, or give them half of it, or send them food, or help them anyway he could.

JAMES: Yeah, I've heard that too. There's a lot of people who say that about him, if there is a family starving, he'd ---

JUDD: Oh yeah, he'd never let anybody get hungry. Of course, when I went there, they had around 65,000 cattle, that was when Pete French was killed. And 5,000 horses. Of course, then it went into estate, and it got down to 45,000 when Swift's bought it then. 45,000 and 10,000 sheep when I was there. But there was about ten to twelve different ranches all belonged to Pete French. He owned ten or twelve ranches there, besides the P Ranch.

JAMES: You were saying that you worked with Tebo 30 years?

JUDD: Yeah. Tebo was there when I first went there, and I was there 33 years.

JAMES: That's a hell of a long time.

JUDD: He was a good old man. He just tended strictly to his own business. He never bothered anybody. You could ask him something you knew he knew, and he wouldn't tell you because he was afraid he'd say something about somebody.

JAMES: Good kind of man to know.

JUDD: Yeah. He was a good old man, Tebo was. He always had some big stories. Like one, he said that he went up on Steens Mountain, a great big boulder up there just ready to roll off, and he said he got off and took a stick or a pole or something and pried it off the rim rock, and it rolled down the hill. He said he went back there the next spring, that rock was about that big, and it was still rolling up and down the hill. And he said that was what made that Kiger Gorge up there. Just such things as that, that he'd tell you, you know.

JAMES: What did he look like?

JUDD: Tall, slim, a Mexican. Pete French brought him from California up here when he first come to the country. There was him and old Chino, and Martinez, and old Loopey, and I don't know how many of them Mexicans. Well, there was 25 in the buckaroo outfit when I went there. One outfit, and then they had a white buckaroo outfit. There was about 50 buckaroos all together.

JAMES: They say the Mexicans were good ropers.

JUDD: Oh, they're good vaqueros, the best in the world. You bet they were good, good vaqueros. Everyone took a pride in his horse to see who could make the best one, and they had the best horses I ever seen. I never seen any like them since. Yeah, they were good.

JAMES: They make a rope pretty well too?

JUDD: Oh yeah, they used a 75-foot rope. I've seen them catch a calf 60 feet away lots of times.

JAMES: That's quite a fete. I understand that Tebo's horse, a palomino, called "Pally" --- was there anything special about that horse?

JUDD: Well, he was more on the racehorse type.

JAMES: Very fast?

JUDD: Yeah, he was a pretty fast horse. And then he had a horse he called Barbed Wire, a grey horse, he called him Barbed Wire. He had his shoulder cut across here in the barbed wire, he run him in all the races.

JAMES: Did he win much?

JUDD: Oh, he won quite a little with him, yes. He run in all the races, in all these fairs and everything. He always took the money with his horse.

JAMES: I heard a story once about that palomino when he was still a wild horse, that Tebo tried to rope him and he yanked the rope right out of his hand, and the whole 75-foot length was flying in the wind so fast it was straight out.

JUDD: Well, that could have happened all right, that could have happened.

JAMES: Well, the end of the story is that there were a bunch of tired flies that were resting on that rope as it was going by.

JUDD: I don't know about that part. That could have happened all right.

JAMES: There was another story that I heard about that palomino and that was that one-day Tebo tied the mane to a wagon that was stuck in some mud, and pulled the skin right off his neck. That Tebo grafted the hides of six sheep on to it, and the next season he sheared that wool and sold it for 54 cents a pound, which was 8 cents more than anybody else was getting.

JUDD: That sounds like one of Tebo's stories all right. I've seen him, ... seen him sit out on the porch and the mosquitoes would be just as thick, you couldn't cut them with a butcher knife, and he'd say, "Why do you ... they don't bother me. All that's the matter with you fellows is that you fight them." And he'd just set right there, they'd never bite him or nothing. He said, "You fellows fight them, I don't fight them, they don't bite me."

JAMES: When did Tebo tell these stories? What kind of a situation? Over the breakfast table? Around the campfire?

JUDD: We had a big, long cook house there and on the back end they had a big room where

everybody would come in there to eat, and then they had that to set there of an evening, and at noon, and them times when they'd all be setting in there, and that's when he, he never said a word at the table at no time. He'd just set there and eat, but when he got out in that room, he'd get to telling these big yarns.

JAMES: How did he get started? Did somebody say something?

JUDD: Somebody would say something, and he'd want to outdo them, so he'd just tell a bigger one.

JAMES: Do you remember any of those big ones that he used to tell?

JUDD: No, I thought I'd think of some tonight, but gosh, I don't remember now. It's been so long ago, and I don't know of any particular ones. I guess they'll come to me after while, but I tried to think after you called me up. Gosh, there's a lot of them stories people used to tell, but of course, they just went in one ear and out the other, you know. Just got a laugh out of them and that's about all.

JAMES: Do you remember anybody else that told stories the way Tebo did?

JUDD: Not particularly. No, I don't. There was always a lot of stories around a buckaroo camp.

JAMES: What about some of those?

JUDD: Well, I don't know any of them either any more. No, I'm getting to the age now where I don't remember very much. I'm 81 years old, be 82 the first of next month.

JAMES: It must be this life out here. Everybody looks young.

JUDD: I had quite a setback here not long ago. Me and my wife lived together 57 years, and she was in there cooking dinner and she just --- I heard something hit the floor, and I was just laying there on the lounge reading, and I went in there and there she was dead as a doornail, right there on the floor. 57 years we lived together. Just kind of left me alone. We never had any children.

JAMES: Did she live out on your --- where you were working?

JUDD: Yes.

JAMES: Did she have a job?

JUDD: Well, she was taking care of the White House and things like that around. Of course, we had a cook there the year around. We had 50 men there, averaged around 50 men all the time. We always had a big cookhouse there. She made --- we had the big White House over there. It was a big 14-room house, and of course, nobody stayed in it, only big shots when they came out, and she kept that clean and a few things like that. That's all she did.

JAMES: Who were some of these big shots? I don't know what you mean.

JUDD: Well old Swift and Cravens, and Bill Hanley and all those people.

JAMES: Did you ever meet Bill Hanley?

JUDD: Oh, I worked for --- Bill Hanley run that outfit for all the time it was in the administrator --- 10 years there I worked for him. All the time that was --- after Pete French got it, why then Bill Hanley took it over and he was general superintendent over the whole thing there for 10 years. Up to the time Swift bought it in 1897 till 1916.

JAMES: Did you stay on with Swift?

JUDD: Yes, I stayed on with Swift.

JAMES: Did they sell it?

JUDD: They sold out, the cattlemen sold to the Bird Preserve.

JAMES: Did you stay on through that whole ---

JUDD: Yeah, I stayed on till they was all finished up.

JAMES: That's the whole history of it right there, isn't it?

JUDD: Yeah, that's the whole history.

JAMES: You lived it.

JUDD: Yeah, I stayed clear through till they sold all the cattle, and then they started to colonize it. And then they got connected with the Bird outfit and they quit colonizing and sold it all to the Bird outfit.

JAMES: What's this colonizing? I don't know what that means.

JUDD: Well, they started to cut it up into small ranches. They had, I think, about twelve buildings,

twelve houses already built. But when they sold out to the Bird Preserve, they tore them all down again. It would have been a fine thing if they had colonized it, I think.

JAMES: How's that?

JUDD: Well, it would put a lot more people in the country and they could all make a good living out there, see. Put four or five thousand more people in Harney County.

JAMES: That would have been a good thing?

JUDD: Yes, and they would all have been paying taxes. The way it is, the Bird Preserve don't pay any taxes. It's a government set up; they don't pay any taxes. When I was there it was a time when a dollar was worth a dollar, we paid \$84,000 taxes every year, \$84,000. At this stage they'd be paying \$250,000-\$300,000.

JAMES: What about the changes in the cattle industry between the P Ranch time and the time when it was split up. The whole time in which you saw it --- there must have been a lot of changes in the way the cattle ranching, the operation of cattle ranching.

JUDD: Well, it started in with the Devon cattle, and then they got into the bald-faced cattle, ran all bald-faced cattle up until the time Swift sold.

JAMES: What about the things like haying and the diseases, and stuff around the ranch?

JUDD: Well, you done that yourself. I done that all myself. I've run as high as 34 horse mowers, that's before they had any tractors or anything. 34 horse mowers, and cut and stacked all that hay, 15,000 tons. Besides, we cut and bunched a lot of it.

JAMES: Put it in a shed that way?

JUDD: No, just stacked it. Where you cut and bunched it, it stayed in the field and then you just turned the cattle in on it.

JAMES: That hay stacking used to be quite a chore, to get all that up there so it wouldn't fall over. A few people have explained that to me, but --- there was a guy called a hay-stacker up there, what was his job?

JUDD: He used to stack the hay.

JAMES: He'd come in on a cable and ---

JUDD: He had a net, and you just drag it, one loading on this side, and another one in on this side, just keep a doing that, and keep it straight on each side, see. Of course, if your stack was 100 feet, you'd load 100 feet, and then when you got up to the top you'd run loads right down the middle and run the stack up to a peak like that.

JAMES: So, you'd have kind of a triangle?

JUDD: Well, you'd just have a top on it like that, just like you would the roof of a house. So, it wouldn't get wet, the water would run off it. And it was a good way to stack, you could stack hay and it would keep forever that way. In fact, there is one stack of hay there that Pete French had when he was killed, it was setting down ... never did get to it. And when I got to running the outfit, why it froze up one winter and we was a little short, and I told the boys, I says, "Go down there and tear that stack yard down and just scatter that stuff around and get rid of it," I says, "be better than burning it up." Got down that deep and that hay was just as green as could be. Been there, I don't know, I know of 25 years.

JAMES: Twenty-five years?

JUDD: Don't know how long before that. It wasn't any higher than that door is, a big 50-foot stack when they stacked it; it just sunk down and just packed as hard as a rock.

JAMES: From 50 feet down to ---

JUDD: As high as that door. You could walk right over the top of it. I just thought it would be a big manure pile, but we got in there, that hay was just as green as could be. So that hay kept awful good that way.

JAMES: What was the biggest problem ranching in the early days?

JUDD: Well, I don't know particularly. You could get lots of help them days.

JAMES: Labor was cheap then?

JUDD: Labor was cheap. Well, the biggest wage we ever paid was \$1.50 a day. And you worked your men 10-12 hours a day.

JAMES: They earned it.

JUDD: Yeah, \$1.50 a day. I worked there myself for a long time for \$30 a month. I was wrangling and I thought I was making big money, \$30 a month. Now if they don't get \$30 a day, they ... There's one change right there. You bet.

JAMES: You mentioned Chino.

JUDD: He was a buckaroo boss. He run the buckaroo outfit, Chino. He was a great big --- he looked like a big nigger, but he was a Mexican. Dark skin and right curly hair. Great big fellow.

JAMES: I thought Tebo was the buckaroo boss?

JUDD: No, Tebo never was a buckaroo boss. Chino was the buckaroo boss. Tebo always worked for Chino, buckarooed and all that, but he never was the boss.

JAMES: And Chino would be just the buckaroo boss of the Mexicans, he wouldn't --- there would be a different white, Anglo ---

JUDD: On the ranch, yeah. They had a ranch boss. And Chino had charge of all the cattle. He had charge of the white buckaroo outfit and the whole works. Yeah, he was in charge of all the cattle.

JAMES: That would be a big responsibility.

JUDD: Oh, you betcha.

JAMES: What was his job specifically, like during the summer and during the winter?

JUDD: Well in the winter he kept these cattle all --- had to keep them separated, had to keep the cows and the calves in one place, and the dry stuff in another, and the bulls in another. And he had to go around and see that they was fed. And in the spring of the year, he'd turn the cattle out. By the time he got them out, it was time to go back and brand calves, he'd start riding around all over the country branding calves. And then began about the 1st of July, and then just rest up about a week, and then he'd go back and go to get his beef. And then he'd drive beef from there to Winnemucca and Ontario, 3,000 or 4,000 at a time.

JAMES: Catch those trains that ---

JUDD: That's the only way you had of getting cattle out in them times. It took 21 days to go to the railroad.

JAMES: You probably went on some of those drives?

JUDD: Oh yeah. I drove a lot of them after Swift got it. I made several trips.

JAMES: What were they like, those drives?

JUDD: Well, you just took the --- started out and you, stopped wherever dark caught up with you. And you guarded the cattle and guarded the horses. And the next day at daylight, I think between the P Ranch and Winnemucca we had four places that we didn't have to guard, just four fields. The rest of the time we had to guard the cattle at nights.

JAMES: From what?

JUDD: To keep them from running off. Just keep them bunched up so you'd have them the next morning. If you didn't they'd be ---

JAMES: I guess I didn't understand why in four places you didn't have to guard them.

JUDD: Well, they happened to have fields in them four places.

JAMES: And they'd stay around the feed?

JUDD: Yeah.

JAMES: I see, that's obvious.

JUDD: I spent most of my life out there, all my young life.

JAMES: Never thought about going any place else?

JUDD: Oh, I thought about it, but I just kind of got attached to the place to where I felt like I owned it pretty near.

JAMES: You had a lot of responsibility out there.

JUDD: Oh, yes. I done lots of hard work there. Get up at 3 o'clock in the morning and wrangled the horses. You had to pack wood for the cook, and you had to wait on the cook, when I was wrangling.

JAMES: Well, how's wrangle different from buckarooing?

JUDD: Well, you wrangle; you've got the saddle horses, 300 or 400 saddle horses there. And you've got to have them in the corrals at daylight in the morning. And you've got to have them in the corral at noon, and then you've got all the chores to do. Just a chore boy is what you are.

JAMES: Oh, I get it. That's a big difference.

JUDD: The buckaroos, all they do is get the horse and go out and ride.

JAMES: I see. Well let's see, what the heck can I find out about Tebo? A couple of guys like that are really interesting to me. But they are so long ago; it's hard to ---

JUDD: Yeah, it's hard for me to remember those things, too.

JAMES: Oh, I remember one story I heard about Tebo. He was fishing in the Blitzen River and he hooked a big one, and I think it was the story that he told to show how big this fish was. He backed it 14 miles down to Malheur Lake before he turned it around, could turn it around and bring it in.

JUDD: Yeah, I've heard him tell that.

JAMES: You heard him tell that? Is that right?

JUDD: Yeah, he'd tell them things just one right after another.

JAMES: Well, I'd sure like to get a hold of some of those. A guy like that is really a funny character.

JUDD: Oh, yes. Yeah, I've asked him lots of times things that I knowed he knowed just as well as anything in the world. He'd say, "I don't know." I used to tell him, "God damn you, you do know." He'd say, "No, I don't know."

JAMES: Just lie right through his teeth, huh?

JUDD: I'd get tired of asking him and get up and walk off. He wouldn't tell you. He wouldn't tell you nothing.

JAMES: ... Seems like I should have a lot of questions about that cattle ranching in the South End. Let me ask you one question now, when there was free time, and you'd go into the city to get away from the ranch for, you know, vacation or something for a couple of days, where would you go?

JUDD: The only place we ever went at that time was --- you'd come to the Narrows to the dances,

but you never had no time off. I think I was out there seven years before I come to Burns.

JAMES: Is that right? You spent all the time out there?

JUDD: All the time there. Oh, you'd go to Diamond to dances, but we'd dance all night and then work all day the next day. Once in a while on Sunday, they'd say, "Well, we'll lay off today." And the boss would come down and say, "Well, we'll shoe horses." You'd shoe six or seven of them mustangs, that's what they call laying off. Roll 'em over on their back and put a log between their legs and tie them down and shoe them. That's what they called laying off.

JAMES: I'm glad you told me that. That was a day off, huh?

JUDD: That was a day off on Sunday.

JAMES: Shoeing a mustang's gotta be hard work.

JUDD: Oh, you bet your life. It's the hardest work in the world. Look out or they'd kick your head off, or bite your head off, or something. I never noticed it in them days, but I would now. No, you didn't lay off. There wasn't no such a thing as lay off. You worked every day. Seven years, I never went to town.

JAMES: They must have had people who, maybe a wrangler would take the wagon to town and get supplies?

JUDD: They had a store right there at the P Ranch and they'd get supplies there and everybody come there and got their supplies from all the other ranches.

JAMES: From all around there. Who ran that store?

JUDD: They had a bookkeeper. Had a bookkeeper there, he kept the books and run the store.

JAMES: Did they always use cash, or did they ever extend credit?

JUDD: It was all one outfit; there wasn't no charge for it. You wasn't charged for it. Only the buckaroos and that, they bought their tobacco. They'd just charge it, and then at the end of the month they'd take it out of their check.

JAMES: That bookkeeper would have everything they charged?

JUDD: Everything they charged, and at the end of the month, he'd just take it out of their check.

That's the way they did it. They never had no cash, never had no money. That's the way they worked it. Their overalls and their boots and stuff like that, they go into the store and get them, and then at the end of the month why just take it out of their check.

JAMES: Everybody had their own equipment, their own ropes, their own horse, their own saddle?

JUDD: No, they had their own saddle, and their own bridle, and riata, and spurs, and things like that, but the Company furnished all the horses. Every man had 10 horses, 10 saddle horses.

JAMES: Then he'd switch around.

JUDD: Sometimes you'd change horses three times in a day.

JAMES: In one day? You were riding hard then?

JUDD: It wasn't nothing to go 30 miles to work and then gather 500 cattle, and brand 300 or 400 calves, and ride back 70 or 80 miles in one day. Nothing to it. Many is the time I've rode from the P Ranch to Crane and didn't think it was any trip at all, a horse-back. That's quite a trip nowadays.

JAMES: Well, we think about it differently now.

JUDD: Oh, yes.

JAMES: We're bothered if we're an hour late or ---

JUDD: Nowadays we've got 10 miles to go to load a horse in a truck and take him in the truck and then unload him. (Laughter)

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