

HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #125 - Side B - (No Tape)

Subject: Henry Ausmus

Place: Burns, Oregon

Date: February 17, 1972

Interviewer: Jim Baker

Release Form: No

(Note: The following is a summary of the conversations.)

The boys used to put Alberta's saddle on backwards on this old white "stoved-up" horse, just to torment her.

There was a lot of these storms of sleet that would cut your face. One day Henry offered to get an old horse out of the barn, but he took off with his fast horse practically pulling this old white horse along. She got quite a ride. The ground was slick and muddy. The horse barely touched the ground.

Hair mecate rope: (You can get a machine to wrap the strands in the right way.) In winter, you pull the manes (the best) and tails and segregate the colors. Put it in sacks. Pull out the knots. Buckaroos would pass their time this way. Put it into a loose pile. Bore a hole in one end of wood, next to a knot. Put on a handle. Twist the paddle and the hair would spin on there. One fellow would feed and the other would twist. You twist it "anti-clock-wise", and it twists out 15-20 feet. Take some strands and twist them tight together. When you let go, they twist back and tightens. Very tough, light rope. "Never saw a hair mecate break."

For middle horse, can tie through hackamore to hold horse. But on bronco put it in chap's pocket. Then pull it out when you are thrown. (Hackamore is a knot arrangement to substitute for a bridle.)

To braid 3: over 1, under 1

To braid 4: over 1, under 2

To braid 6: over 1, under 3

Francis Griffin: Just on the verge of being brilliant. Very witty at times. His dad was a lawyer and his mother a County School Superintendent. His brothers would run him off and he would live off the land, e.g., eggs. He read everything. He had about 50 head of cattle. They were five to ten years old and had never been de-horned. He got \$100 a head, a good price, but he backed out of the deal when he found out they were going to tip their horns. Got taken later for taxes. Inez recalled that she always fed him (Francis). Didn't make any difference what he ate. And he could pack it away for two or three days.

He (Francis) wanted to restore the balance of nature. He put desert primrose seeds in a bank vault to later make a fortune growing them.

The "Daylighters" (including his brother) would steal horses from him (Francis) even during the daytime. He called them that.

Once Francis cooked up a hundred pounds of potatoes. He wanted to see how many kids could be fed with that much. You see, he wanted to start a youth college. He had a lot of ideas like that.

Francis wanted to build an icehouse: A deep hole sealed like a cistern with cement on top. Then to himself, he wondered, "How will I get it out?"

He (Francis) always carried a typewriter and a dozen gallons of water. He sat in the road, in the middle. He had his sack of magazines. He was just doing his research there.

About twenty years ago, the Ausmus furnace and oil had frozen. After a while, Francis came in. He had slept in a haystack. That was a very cold night, and he bragged about how warm it was.

He (Francis) was staying in a house where a wildcat company was selling oil. They found an artesian well. PLS had the land and put in troughs for stock, called Swan Lake. Though it had a

lot of chlorine in it. Francis had been reading the McFadden books on physical culture. He took a hot bath, then rolled in the snow.

Henry was about one-half done with chopping his hay when he got acute appendicitis. He was in the hospital for two weeks. When he got out, his hay was up.

He and some others and their equipment put in some seed so that a neighbor could qualify for payments. She would have lost the ranch. When ranchers want to move cattle down the road, they get on phone, and he has the help. You are obligated.

You get help with branding, too. That's sport: roping and branding.

A family could do some haying, then call someone to help stack. Later, you help them stack.

Meat ring: butcher a beef, then take a quarter or two around. Then it was their turn. You didn't have to keep meat so long that way (before refrigeration). You always had meat.

You wrap meat in tarp during summer day and stick it in haystack. Then at night, to avoid flies, you pull meat up the "meat pole" until daylight. It would get cold at night. And that's one reason we got up before dawn.

This dependence is a typical characteristic of the pioneer experience. They had to.

Rector had an orchard, and the cherries ripened on Fourth of July. He would not let anyone pick them. But he let kids pick them for the Fourth. He made a swing in one of his giant poplars. Six to eight kids could swing on it.

Poplars in the west were quick growing: shade, and you could see them in the distance as a landmark, e.g. on the lake so you would get your direction. Very common because all you need to do is plant a branch.

Because of winters, ranching involves protecting cattle from wind and snow (in Montana, Wyoming). But here cattle can survive storm. In Nevada and New Mexico, they don't put up so much winter-feed. But they get hurt by bad storms. Climate determines how you ranch.

Pete French was an early man who thought of putting up winter-feed. In the South End, it is

dry ground in winter and about 10-15 degrees warmer than in Burns area (have one foot of snow). The early barons in South End would be hurt by occasional storms. So French conceived of stacking hay, and ranchers have been doing it ever since.

Henry could drive a four-horse team as well as his dad when he was 10. (Put high-spirited team in front to keep line taught.)

There used to be thousands of wild horses in this country, but they picked up a lot in the 1940's.

The lumber industry doesn't interfere with the stockman, and so they didn't mind.

Those Bascos were talking in Spanish, and Henry asked one in Spanish to close the gate. After that, they only spoke in English.

They say Chino practically sold the P Ranch several times. But he never got away with it.

Fire in Burns around 1908. Tresa Baker recalls pushing baby carriage into the street; it contained her valuables as well as her baby.

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