

HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #131 - Sides A/B

Subject: Bill Bradeen

Place: Burns, Oregon

Date: February 3, 1972

Interviewer: James Baker

BILL BRADEEN: Well there was a place called Clover Swale, about 20 miles west as the crow flies from Frenchglen, and my mother and her mother and her brother came here and homesteaded. My mother taught school at Van, ... a place called Beckley in Catlow Valley ... in Catlow Valley, and Rag Town in Catlow Valley. They had a high school and grade school there. The buildings are long since gone. We bought one of them, it's part of the building next to the store in Frenchglen now, it's been moved twice.

But then in 1922 they went into the store business. Blitzen, bought a store. The man that owned it, the homesteaders were leaving by then, he thought it was a gone thing, so he sold it to them for a very low price. And my Dad had an idea of making a truck out of a Model-T, sort of a pickup thing, and delivering to those sheep men down south of Beatty's Butte. And so he concentrated on that, and built a very big merchandising business. Winter trade, thousands of sheep wintered down there.

And then in 1926, I think it was, they started the post office at the crossing on the Blitzen River, right near where the loop road crosses now. They called it Summer Range, Oregon; it was a summer store and post office. No, they started that before '26. Because in 1926 they moved the Summer Range Post Office to Frenchglen. Swift came out here and asked my folks to start a store at Frenchglen. He was colonizing the P Valley, going to sell it out in, I believe, 160's. And so he said he would build them a building and rent it

to them reasonably if they would put a store there. So they moved the Summer Range Post Office to Frenchglen. Then after they did this, they named it Frenchglen. It was originally Summer Range for a short time.

And then they continued the Blitzen store until 1936, and a few years later we sold to Frenchglen. The country changed entirely when the Grazing Act took over, just changed the entire complexion of the country. Because that south country, its principal and best use was for wintering sheep. We used to sell carload after carload of corn, we'd haul from the railhead at Crane to Blitzen, and then from Blitzen, there were no roads, they just made their roads. Trucks would go out and be gone for two or three days. We had a standing deal that if they got stuck and couldn't get out or something, they would go up on Beatty's Butte and build a big fire, and we'd see it from Blitzen and go after them. They did have a big merchandising business up till the time of the depression and the Grazing Act came in, and then we just walked off and left Blitzen.

Frenchglen became a beer and soda pop stand. My folks didn't like that kind of business and they were getting up in years any-way, so they gave that up and started the real estate and insurance business.

JAMES BAKER: Where did your dad come from prior to this, what part of the country?

BILL: Well he was from Maine, then he went to Alaska, traveled all over. Worked in Alaska, worked for Guggenheim (sp.?) Building Company, a big harbor and ... a mine up there, and I think they had what was this scandal that they had, like teapot dome, something like that and they made them get out of there? Quite a scandal. Anyway they stopped them, and it was all abandoned.

Then he went to Washington and leased a wheat ranch, and he came here originally with the idea of raising horses. Homesteading and raising horses. Of course horses went out of style after awhile and he lost the lease for the P Ranch, and my uncle

came down and he homesteaded up there where they had this Summer Range Store.

And my mother and father were practically next-door neighbors in their homesteads. Dave Crow was just above them. And then my uncle and mother and grandmother, and my father below. And when they were married, my mother was living in a tent there at Beckley, in Catlow Valley teaching school.

JAMES: What kind of advantages to living in Oregon and in this part of the country, what are the rewards that kept your dad here in this barren country?

BILL: Well I really can't say, I guess he just took roots here. This is a friendly country, open, and the population isn't stagnant, and people, I think are quicker to accept strangers here than most places. You take, I think even the Willamette Valley and perhaps some parts of Eastern Oregon, you have these communities that there is no change, and you get a sort of an established society or whatever you call it, a clique, and whatnot. I don't see any of that even in Burns. Of course, we are helped somewhat there by the mill, government agencies, and so forth, our population moves, and so strangers are not unusual. I think it has always been that way. I suppose that is a portion of it and people drift into situations.

He got in the store business and he was very successful at it for a good many years until the depression. Then the Grazing Act came along and run all our customers out. But he was satisfied. My mother's family, they were attracted here by all this advertising, free land. And my gosh, they worked their heads off. My grandmother must have been 60 when she came here. She went right out and grubbed sagebrush and tried to make something of this, you know. It's good soil.

My father came from Maine. You know how thin the soil is, they saved every bit of fertilizer, you know. People used to say, "My, out West you can just stick a seed in the ground and it will grow." They didn't realize that it is so arid. Of course, this country might

have been wetter then. My dad came in 1912, and he said this country was practically, Catlow Valley was practically a lake. And he never knew for years why, but apparently Mount McKinley erupted that year, and he'd heard this and never believed it years later. And then the National Geographic came out with an article about that all this smoke was in the air clear down over the northwest, and it caused a tremendous amount of rain, and it was an extremely unusually wet year, rained all summer. And he said it looked just like a garden when he came in here. But it was just due to this volcano. He said he always thought this was a foolish idea, until about four or five years ago National Geographic came up and authenticated it.

Well at that time Alaska was so remote, I guess people really didn't know about it. They just had a wet year, and of course they probably heard about the volcano, but didn't connect it.

JAMES: And then that wet year was followed by a few years of drought?

BILL: Well yes, I suspect from sometime in the late 20's on, our Weather Bureau, statistics would tell the tale. I think it was a much wetter country. I suppose this goes in cycles.

JAMES: I've heard people describe to me the way the land was recalled to them by their fathers in the 1880's and '90's, the grass was so high it came up to the horse's belly.

BILL: I used to have pictures of rye hay on my folk's homestead that's over a man's head. But it certainly didn't last long. You can't make a living farming here; it's got to be cattle.

JAMES: The overgrazing apparently had a lot to do with the deterioration.

BILL: I don't buy that too good.

JAMES: You don't?

BILL: No.

JAMES: Okay.

BILL: There is a study going on now, and I read about it recently, by a University of Texas, where now they are doing planned over-grazing. And they say that they over-graze it for so long, take the cattle off, and they find the grass comes back much better. Same way with fires. They used to burn off this country, they'd work and sweat and fan fires with their hats and everything else to burn it off, because the grass comes back better next year. Over-grazing can be, but it's not nearly as extensive as we are led to believe. I don't think most of your ranchers will verify that either when you get rid right down to specifics. But you have one problem with, well for example the Bureau of Land Management. The Government has to watch out for fraud and favoritism and all these things, so they have to have set rules. For example, the rule says you turn out April 15; you bring your cattle in October 15th. One year the grass might be real good April 15th. Another year it might be good in February or March, or it might not be good until May. But if you left one man, if you left that to his discretion

--- everything in the Government is more complex because you can't leave anything to discretion, there would be favoritism and nepotism, and politics creep in. So, this over-grazing doesn't wash too good.

JAMES: Before I turned on the recorder, you said that the Federal Government was quite a land promoter itself.

BILL: Yes, Al Brown probably has as much on that as anybody. I've got some stuff I couldn't find it, I'll try to dig it out for you if you're back over sometime ... But they did build this up, I guess, way out of proportion of what you could do, free land and own your own farm, and you could raise this, and raise that. They induced people to come here almost with false impressions.

JAMES: I suppose we are talking about the Department of the Interior?

BILL: ... I think that's probably the Agency, because it seems to me that the Secretary of

the Interior signed all these patents, didn't they? Well I've got some of them around here, I can look it up ... quite sure ... the Agency.

JAMES: Would it be fair to ask you what kinds of values they were promoting? What does it mean, free land?

BILL: I don't think they promoted values.

JAMES: I didn't mean values in a real estate sense, not money values, but I was thinking kind of symbolically. What was the dream that they were painting, with the words free land?

BILL: I hate to comment, because I couldn't be exact enough. As I say, Al Brown, I think, has got quite a file on this. But I think the implication was you would get this land that was fertile, and you could farm it, and make money off it. And of course, in those days there was one other thing. Anything that wasn't homesteaded was open range, and if you were competitive enough, or whatever it is, you could have a little homestead and you could have 1,000 head of cattle and run them on the open range. There was nothing to stop you, except just more or less, your neighbor says, "This is my part of the range." And I guess you could run him off if you could scare him off. Because there was no rules set. You didn't have to homestead, you didn't have to own any land. Just like the sheep men, they owned nothing. And they were disliked by the homesteaders, just the same as the big cattle companies. But I don't know, one thing supplemented the other.

A lot of the homesteaders, they derived some income from the sheep, they sold beef to them, they worked for them in lambing. And this was the first job when my dad drove in here in 1912 when he was just looking the country over; he took a job lambing. So they complemented each other in a way. But they would come in, perhaps, and feed around your place, and you'd have to drive your cattle farther. I remember my dad saying there was a foreman for the Company, that would have been, I suppose Hanley and

Corbett at that time ... And he said a guy rode through, and he said, "We don't mind if you kill beef for your own meat, but if anybody tries to drive some off to sell them, we're out to catch them." They had men hired, you know, on their payroll that just went around looking for cattle thieves.

I'll never forget my dad saying, there was a widow woman and a neighbor came over and they wanted to get a beef. Dad never told me this until he got quite old; he was a very straight, honest man. But I think they thought they had their rights this way, the Company ... Company beef, and they might even drive a few strays into the camp sometimes ... And so the neighbor said, "I'll pick one out and you shoot him, Jess." My dad said, "Fine." And so he pointed one out, a real nice looking animal, and young. And Dad said, "Now are you sure that that's the one you want?" "Yep, that's the one." And so Dad shot him, and they went over and the animal had this fellow's brand on it instead of the Company brand. But it was considered completely honest except long rope, trying to add to your own herd, you take them out of the country and sell them.

And the homesteaders didn't record their patents, you know, so they wouldn't get on the tax roll. Every once in a while we sell a ranch and find this piece of land that there was never a patent recorded, and we send back East and get it. But they built schools like crazy because their land wasn't on the tax roll, and the Company's was. So the Company paid for the schools. They had schools all over Catlow Valley. Even a high school at Rag Town. I guess the Clerk up there supposedly made away with, well he lost track of the money or something, and there was some complaints, and they came out to investigate. And he was in a tent; he was building his house. And he said, "Well, everything is straight in the records, I know, but I don't have them. There was a wind came through and just blew through the path of the tent and went right out on the other side, they are out there in the Valley some place." He was the Doctor there, too, I think,

knew a little bit about pills, so he administered to everybody. That's the closest we had to a pharmacy.

There was a fellow out there who was going with a girl, and he was an old bachelor, and he sent off to a novelty house and got a marriage certificate and filled it out and told them they were married. And so it was to be a secret, and so she took the thing home to her folks one time and they read it and told her, "This is a joke, you're not married." So she got her dad's pistol and went over and shot this old fellow five times. She held his ... in a wagon, he lived up until about two years ago, up to about 90 years old, I guess. Five times she shot with that pistol.

In Catlow Valley they had every kind of people; there was one woman was an opera singer, and another family of acrobats that were originally from Italy. Much the same as people moving here from Los Angeles now to get away from the smog, get away from the people, have their own piece of land, and be independent. This was the dream. It was then and it is now. I guess that's what brought people to the West, our own piece of land we could farm and be on our own.

You find that with these land promoters, they sell land to a lot of people in California, some of them well fixed, they've got this dream of getting away from crowds, and smog, and so forth. I guess it was true then, they wanted to get out of the cities and the sweatshops. It was pretty tough for a man to work for wages in those days. I know my uncle started in a boiler shop in Tacoma when he was 13. My aunt and mother went to work for the Telephone Company; one of them was 12, and the other 13. My aunt stayed with the Telephone Company for 60 years, they retired her and then called her back. Yeah, a whole 60 years, and I think the longest anybody worked for that company. Those were tough conditions to work under.

There was a lot of prejudice, like my folks were Scandinavian on my mother's side,

and they were kicked around pretty good. They were the newcomers even, you know, back in the '90's. The idea of getting off some place, having your own land, not having to put up with sweat shop conditions. The average guy didn't have all the privileges he has today. He was held down, I think. This was a big appeal, probably one of the biggest. It's hard to put myself in their shoes.

This picture up here is 50 years old; it was taken the year I was born. It's at Blitzen. You can see the lady in the dark dress, and then way over, a large lady with a black hat on --- Well they were two, one was a widow and the other was married to a buckaroo that never came home. They had a house there in Blitzen, a two-story house with a showroom in front, and they made hats, a millinery shop. And then one of them was a Notary Public, and the other was a Christian Science healer. And that's the way they carved out a living in Blitzen.

We used to set there in Blitzen in the summer, it was dead, the homesteaders had pretty much left, we had nothing but the winter sheep men. And we'd sit there and you could look off 20 miles in any direction pretty near and see dust coming, and everybody would sit out there on the benches and speculate on who that could be, and when they would get there, and what they were coming for. But people were happy.

We used to have dances. My mother would play the piano and an old fellow named Bazz ... played the violin. Nobody very much knew how to dance. Mother could never play the stuff that he played on the violin. He was just in ecstasy when he was playing that violin. A great long nose with a wart on the end of it. But he was almost handsome when he played that violin, his whole soul was in it, so she'd sit there and chord, you know.

They fought for years and years there over this school three miles from Blitzen. Some people wanted it left there because they would have to have a school bus, and they

didn't want to have a school bus. And others wanted to move it to Blitzen. And it got so bitter that when they had their meetings, half the families would sit on one side, and half on the other. ... They fought for years, finally they moved the schoolhouse, and the first year there were five students, and we moved the next year and they closed the school up, there was only two kids left and they hauled them to Princeton. After years and years of fighting.

This heavy lady, I remember one time there in Blitzen, she started from the store to go home, and there was ... mud. ... would ball up, and they couldn't walk ... feet would freeze at night. So she was going over there and she left ... got out in the middle of the street and started yelling for help. She was so heavy she couldn't lean over. And my uncle came up and scraped and poked the mud off, and she went on. ...

There used to be stories about the old timers, and I've read some and tried to separate fact from fiction. As I told you, I'm no admirer of Pete French or any of the cattle barons. The homesteaders are my heroes. I think they were shoved around. You've probably read up on the French, you've probably read the history of how the trouble came with Oliver, and how Oliver took it to court and got a road granted. Have you followed that through, have you?

JAMES: I know more about the trial than I do the background to the trial.

BILL: Well this is very interesting. Oliver homesteaded down south of Rockford Lane and it was in the middle of French's holdings. Then he applied to the County Court for a road across the, along the section line across French's land on Rockford Lane. And the County Court granted it to him. French contested it and took it to Circuit Court, and Oliver won again, because this was a right to have a road to your property. But French carried it to the Supreme Court and beat Oliver. Of course, Oliver was a poor homesteader and the Supreme Court, as I understand, in those days, were easily swayed by certain influences.

And so he lost. Well, it was government land, French (Oliver) legally homesteaded it, patented it, and after French died, the French heirs bought that land from Oliver's wife. And the place they call Oliver Springs was not his homestead as it was out in the middle of the valley. Oliver Springs, I think he did spend some time there, maybe camped there, but that was not his homestead. But he had a legal homestead and there is a patented record up here. French wouldn't give him a road, fought him all the way to the Supreme Court to keep him from having a road. Locally they thought he should have one, both the County Court and the Supreme (Circuit) Court.

He must have been a rather brave man. He rode up to French with all of French's men around him, and he was alone. You know the odd thing, if you'll read in the inventory of French's personal belongings, you'll find a ... and the saddle, and I think a shotgun and a few other miscellaneous items. But you'll find no pistol. And it is strange that an Indian fighter, a man who rode here, there, and yon in those days, didn't own a pistol. And of course, he was supposedly unarmed. But he must have had a pistol, and where did it go, and when did it disappear? You wonder. Because Oliver's testimony didn't give ... The fact is that the two coroner's reports don't even agree as to what direction the bullet came from. There was one report made on the scene, and another report after they brought the body to town. I heard Oliver turned into a bartender and left his family and all those things, but going through a thing like that can maybe sway a man's head or something. I can't see it all black and white as he being a scoundrel and killing a great man. He was a brave man to say the least, a brave man to homestead there, a brave man to ride into this fight. And he had every legal right to that homestead. And French tried to deny him access to it, and these are all things of public record. And French's heirs did buy it. Not his heirs, French died with nothing. But his wife's family bought that land from, I believe his wife, he deeded it to his wife and left here ... And you

go into all of these great cattle barons, and to me, they came in here with plenty, and with all the luxuries and what not. The homesteaders went out here and lived, my father lived in a dugout.

JAMES: Could you describe that dugout?

BILL: Oh, it was just in a hillside, he dug a hole in the hillside and shored it up with posts, and had a canvas flap for a front. He said it was comfortable, a few scorpions and snakes, but it was warm in the winter, and cool in the summer. In fact, he said it was a lot more comfortable than the house that my mother and grandmother lived in. It was rough boards that stood on end with ...

No, there are a lot of unsung heroes we'll never even know about because they didn't do anything so awfully unusual. Have you read the account of when Shirk shot one of French's men? It is very interesting. Two of French's men were up in Catlow, according to Shirk's version, this was from his memoirs. And I always say he was one of the most honest men I ever read. He said these two guys were skulking out on the other side of the ditch bank, he was out irrigating or something, and he assumed that they had been sent to kill him. They were armed. And as I recall one of them, he thought, took aim at him with a rifle, or did take aim at him with a rifle, bushwhacking, as you would say. And so he drew his pistol and aimed and fired, and he shot the man right in the forehead, and instead of saying, "I shot him right between the eyes," he said, "fortunately my bullet hit the sand dune or something, and ricocheted and very luckily for me hit him in the forehead." And I thought, how many men would say that I lucked out, and didn't just draw a bead and ... between the eyes. So French did make a great effort to get him convicted for murder, but he got off Scot free up in Canyon City. It is a very interesting book. I think Jinks Harris has a copy of it. It was published and I failed to get one. It was his memoirs of a man named Dave Shirk.

JAMES: I've heard of a few instances where the cattlemen ran their cattle through the gardens, and so forth, of the homesteaders.

BILL: I never heard my dad speak of this.

JAMES: A fellow up in Seneca told me that his folks stuck it out, despite the fact that a medium sized cattle baron in the area, who didn't want to refer to, because he still had powerful friends here and family, and he was just a small mill worker who was trying to get by, you know.

BILL: My dad never told me this. Of course he didn't come here until 1912. I shouldn't doubt; French must have been rough. You hear these stories that he gave Oliver's food and things like this. Perhaps so. But I think it was always on the basis of getting rid of them, starving them out. I can't believe otherwise. My dad had no rancor about this thing, but he was pretty objective, I think, in discussing it. But he saw it all as just a situation that arose, but he had no admiration for cattle barons. And his sympathy was with the homesteaders. But the homesteader wasn't a sophisticated person, rough and ready, many of them were uneducated, some were highly educated. But in dealing with a situation like this, they had no cash to go to courts, and lawyers to obtain information. They were very much in the dark about what they could do and couldn't do. And probably usually misled.

A good example is people who dislike the Taylor Grazing Act. They blame the law and the men who are working there now are just human beings with a job, and they'll go in and call them a bunch of blankety blank Communists. I've talked with friends and told them, now if you can't talk decent to those guys, hire a lawyer to do it for you, because they are just humans trying to do a job. They didn't pass the law, so there is no use insulting them and getting irate, because you'll never accomplish anything. They can't help you if you don't sit down and talk sensibly. Accept the situation as it is.

And I suppose homesteaders were faced with those situations and did foolish things and reacted, because the whole situation seemed unfair to them. In one incident they might have reacted foolishly. It was an every day, just rough old go scratch out a living, and they saw no glamour in it. And they were subject to all the little jealousies, they fought among themselves over range, the smallest up to the largest, you know. But they were a pretty hardy breed if they stuck it out. It would be tough right now to go out and try to do anything in the area, even with being able to come to town to buy automobile.

Another thing that I always thought applied to Blitzen as well as this land. I was telling you about the guy that said, "Dear Madam: Your land isn't worth the chattel mortgage on a school of codfish in the Atlantic Ocean." He also said, "It's 40 miles from hell, and 80 miles from the railroad, and the roads are so bad that very few people go to the railroad." They have my sympathy. And they're the unsung heroes.

There was a man came in here was the man who built Fort Harney, he cut the lumber for it. And he gosh he owned tremendous amounts of land even way down in the South End of the county. He was before, I think, any of these others, before Devine and French or any of them. His name appears in the deed records up here. And he sold to some of those fellows. I know there's a deed from him to French up there.

Those old ... papers, digs into even what happened down in California, the killing of Glen, and French's reason for coming here, and the fact that his wife never lived here. Things that are not too glamorous.

Now if there is anything I can dig out for you on land promotions, that sort of thing, I'll be glad to do it. ... Are you getting dates, towns, things like this? I have all that on such as Frenchglen, Summer Range, some of the other places in Catlow Valley.

I'm not good on anecdotes, I think of them as they come up, ... as they come to me, but to sit down and relate them, I'm not much good.

JAMES: It's practically impossible to ...

BILL: ... if you fall prey to the land promoters.

JAMES: What does the dream mean, having your own land? It sounds sort of like freedom from ---

BILL: Yes, I think so. And a conversation piece, too. You can buy these ranchettes, you know, and they talk about their ranch in Oregon, 40 acres, big deal. If you owned 40 acres in the middle of Los Angeles, you'd be right prosperous, or in Imperial Valley perhaps. But the power of it, you see this right among people who are working in town here, they want to get out and get a piece of land. Well the same thing that causes you or I perhaps to raise a garden in our back yard. Americans are kind of brought up with this doing for yourself, and being able to fall back on your own resources, to raise your own vegetables. We know that it costs far more to raise a garden. Gee, my wife and I, we raise a heck of a garden every year and love it. It costs us far more than if we'd buy at the grocery store. We imagine it's better, but it probably isn't. Maybe it's kind of a human instinct to want to raise things. But at least it's, what do you call it, the moray of our own civilization.

All of our heroes go back, not all of them, but so many go back to this, the power of the land. How the West was civilized it. But that same appeal probably was what caused the homesteaders. But more particularly in their times, when the factory worker was held down. If you lived back like where my dad did and everything had been owned for generations. His family had been there for 250 years when he came here, and things were pretty well set. He was the son of a widowed mother, who didn't have much, and the family helped a great deal, I guess, but just the same he must have had that instinct real strong to be on his own.

JAMES: You mean to take off?

BILL: Yeah, get out where he could compete equally with fellows of his own age, back there, whose fathers were bankers and big farmers and all these things, a pretty tough go.

I think one of the things that drove him away from home was he took an apprenticeship to be a core maker. They'd make cores for foundries, you know, to pour iron around to mold different things. He got through his apprenticeship with flying colors, and then they said, "Well, there's no chance of a job." Because all of the jobs that were open, it wasn't an expanding economy there, all of the jobs that were open were given to the sons of core makers. And so after all this struggle, and quitting high school after two years. And of course high school in those days was mostly Latin and Greek, which they really bored into them, he remembered this to his dying day, the things he learned in school.

My uncle, he finished high school, or academy they called it, prep school, and he read in Greek and Latin, and enjoyed it. But then, he went to practical education, he got all through it and he found there was no job, because he wasn't the son of a core maker. He wasn't the son of a farmer, he couldn't farm, he couldn't this, couldn't that, so he took off in search of more fertile fields, and finally he wound up on his own land, which he probably could never have done that probably. Maybe as time went on, but it wasn't that way when he was quite young when he left home.

JAMES: Sounds like the land gives an opportunity to compete where there is the resource ---

BILL: Start off even with the other guy, perhaps.

JAMES: Start off with the opportunity.

BILL: As I say, we have people who want to buy land now, and I know it is impractical, and you could tell them so, but they say, "Well, I don't care, I've got my job, and I want something to do on the side, I want to get my kids out of town." This is another thing that causes people to go to the farm. A fellow was telling me the other day, he was in the

insurance business, you can't be an insurance agent until you are 21, he says, "I'd like to be in something where I can raise my son and let him work in the business with me. And maybe he wouldn't want what I teach him to do, but at least he'd have that to fall back on."

My father he was strong on that. I used to, when I was just a little tyke, I used to stand on the Carnation milk box behind the counter, I wasn't tall enough to see over, I was put in the store the minute I could talk and add. That's a strong thing. Right now, it is.

There was a man came through here looking for a business, he didn't have the farming instinct. He was very successful in that line of business where he was, and I asked him, "Why?" And he said, "I want to get my kids out of the city. He said, "I don't know where they are at night, and to be frank with you, I don't know what kind of monsters I'm raising. I don't see enough of them. I have to go downtown to work, I work long hours, and I see very little of them. When I come home, they are out. I want to get in a small town where I know what's happening. I don't know; I might be raising some little monsters." Perhaps this was true in those days, to get your children out where they could grow up working beside you.

JAMES: No better then, than they are now.

BILL: They worked. My dad and mother told me so much about being Scandinavians in Tacoma, back in the '90's during the time when they were in their teens, and they said they had all sorts of names thrown at them. And Grandfather, I guess, used to tell them to walk straight and proud that they was just as good as anybody, but just the same it was rough on kids.

My uncle had a lot of things happen when he was working in this boiler shop, because the Scandinavians came in there, I think there were original settlers of mixed descendancy, and then the Scandinavians came in because of the lumber industry and there was always a little jealousy of a group of somewhat closing in by their nationality or

something. They say even that is part of the race problem in the South. To get away from things like that. My grandfather went to Alaska in the gold rush and died up there.

...

SIDE B

JAMES: Are you talking about the Blitzen, the store in Blitzen?

BILL: Yes, I started to say, we had a competitor next door to us, we had to walk from our store past his store to get to our house. And it was pretty keen, bitter competition, naturally, two stores in one town. But we tried to get along as best we could. But my father was always concerned I'd go over there and talk and say things, a kid can say things in the strangest way. I remember once I went over there and he said, "Now, just keep what you know under your hat and listen. Then, you'll know all you know, and you'll know what the other fellow knows. But if you talk all the time, you'll just know what you know, and he'll know what he knows, plus what you know." And so I went right over to the competitor's house, I played with his son, and they said, "You're awful quiet, Bill." And I said, "Yeah, my dad told me ---" And I related this thing, only I put it right in the first person. "If I listen and don't tell you anything, then I'll wind up knowing what you know and what I know too." And this got back to my folks.

But generally in an environment that way where you only have so many neighbors, so many customers in the store, you've got to get along with them. You've got to cooperate. You had your little likes and dislikes; maybe they are stronger because you can't talk about them. Things that boil up in you, that you can't talk to anybody about, and then they get stronger. But generally they got along good, and we were forced to by their environment. Where in the city why maybe you're not quite that restricted. But I always thought that it was a good environment, just to the good. People would help their worst

enemy in case of trouble, because it was expected of them. It would be different if you --- you wouldn't stand around and watch anybody get murdered in the street or anything because you were afraid to mix into it. You were afraid not to mix into it, perhaps. But I don't think those people were any different than we are now, or than city people were then, or city people are now. Just human beings in a different situation. And when you are in a small group, a restricted group, you can't reach out beyond it, then you have no restraint, I think. Fights, maybe, become more bitter than when they do boil up, because you still have the same audience watching you. What happens is going to be on your record forevermore in their memories. So therefore you either don't have a fight, or perhaps you shoot it out or some-thing. Maybe this is something to consider.

But I think it is a good environment and I won't say that things were better then, I think they were perhaps about the same as now. People were happy then and they are happy now, pretty well adjusted people. You make do with what you got. And the neighbors didn't have TV, so you didn't care. We just adapt to the situation we live in, and try to be happy if we've got any common sense. I don't see us as an unusual breed, except for one thing. I think the man who came to America from Europe, or the man who came to the undeveloped country from the East, must have been a more adventure-some type of person, and more of an individualist. Not so much influenced by what the crowd thought, or he wouldn't have struck out this way. He was an adventurous individualist. Had to be that type of person you would assume, except for those who were driven away. But then if they're driven out of one city, they'll go to another. So perhaps they were a different type of personality than the ones who stayed in the factory or stayed on the same old treadmill.

Of course, some of this was tragic, of husbands that wanted to own their own land, and had this dream and drug their wives and families out here to camp when they could

just as well have provided them with a nice home in the city. This is the only difference that I can see between those people. Now probably I'm not adventurous. My folks were here, I'm here. Maybe if I were as adventurous as my father was, why I would have struck out. But on the other hand, he came from a family that had little, and not much future for him, so he struck out. And I came from, not a wealthy family, but a family that was respected and established. This was my home, and I don't know any better. ...

As Giles French said, people get to trying to recollect and they are pretty hazy. He said, "I just try to dig out the facts, and they are hard to come by." When you get into it, the psychology or whatever you call it, you are talking about something that, you'd have to study those people to really know ... recollection. Maybe if you hear enough stories and you put them all together and shake them up you can come up with the truth.

JAMES: One way to nail this down would be to get a feeling for the country store, because the way you are describing it, it sounded like a center of ---

BILL: It was the post office, the place where people most commonly met, yes. It was the only place in the community that everyone had to go to sooner or later, to get their mail and groceries. It was interesting to grow up in a country store because you heard the neighbors discussed, and discuss each other, and discuss politics, and discuss the city people, and the guys in the courthouse. And there was just kind of this feeling, they was against us a little bit perhaps. Yeah, they were community centers, and usually there was a schoolhouse near the store, which was used for dances and community gatherings. The nearest thing to a social center you had, I guess.

JAMES: I have a theory that because people in small towns have many different roles, that they end up closer together, like a guy may be a storeowner, but he's also the mayor. He may be on the volunteer fire department; he may be on the school board. And when you are talking about a small town, everybody has lots of different roles. It brings

everybody into contact on a lot of different times during the day.

BILL: I think in a small community you might not find any people brilliant in one line, possibly, as much as you'd find people that have a broader general knowledge than they might in a large community. As you say, they deal with so many things that, how many people, what percentage of the people in Portland, for example, or New York, get to be Mayor, or get on the city council, or the county court, or president of a club, or such a thing as that? Where here, you know, they go around trying to draft you for those things. A guy takes one for so long, and he says, "To heck with it, let somebody else do it." So you do get perhaps a little broader viewpoint that way of more things.

But if you were highly specialized or highly skilled in one line, your services certainly wouldn't be as valuable here as they would in the city, so you would find the specialists and the experts. And of course, among the homesteaders, cracker box philosophers perhaps, but you wouldn't have found any textbook philosophers. Some of them were pretty keen men, with native intelligence, or whatever you call it.

JAMES: Can you remember any that flesh out some of what you are saying?

BILL: Oh, not too much, no. No, I really can't. The type of thing you probably didn't ... Oh, we had all sorts of men who took interest in politics and things like that, and were most interested and informed, but just how they would stand out, I don't know. Mostly you remember the characters, you know, and a lot of incidents that occurred. No, I really don't, as to any one person who would stand out as a brilliant or anything of that nature. Well they would hardly show up around here, they would have no way to show themselves, I don't suppose. But we did have people who were well educated who came here because maybe they had a little bit of the hermit in them, or something.

The pioneer, I don't think was a guy that was noted for his studiousness, or his mental accomplishments. You hear some pretty critical things about, of this nature,

almost insulting about the pioneers and what kind of people they were. They were largely uneducated and rough and tough, and some people imply that they were failures in the city. This I question, I think they had this need and desire to be on their own, these dreams about land, that sort of thing.

JAMES: Do you feel any strong spiritual attachment to the land, to the land, to picturesque beauty ---

BILL: I don't think so, no. I don't think this is part of my nature. I like to garden, and hunt rocks, and ... scenery, and this area is not really an awfully scenic place. No, I don't have this, this thing I've read about, I don't know how strong this is. I could make more money working for someone else, I've been in this business long enough I could qualify for government employment and five days a week, retirement, and all these things, and probably command a pretty good salary along the line of appraising and that sort of thing. I have friends who have gone into it. But this being on my own, the theory that tomorrow I could take off for a month's vacation and nobody could fire me, I can. My creditors would probably catch me at the city limits, but I'm somewhat my own boss. Really, I'm not, customers come in and give me the devil and I have to take it, but in theory I'm my own boss, and it's a good feeling to me.

But I don't know, spiritual or anything of that kind, no; I don't feel that for the land. Now perhaps if I had inherited a piece of land that had been in my family for a long time, I have a very strong feeling for family history. And my family has always been middle class, over 300 years in this country, just ordinary people. And to me, I think that ordinary people who keep out of jail, and keep out of trouble, and who raise their families, they are the strength of any society. I have pride in that, maybe I'd be more prouder if they were senators or presidents or something of that nature, but I don't know.

I've got a great affinity for the middle class. I think maybe they don't influence the

country as much as they used to. I've always said that the businessman, if he'd sell his politics and his ideas as well as he sells his products, why they would, you might say, control politics in their own, collectively, you might say. Not as a group, as an organize group. You have people who are capable of selling the right ideas if they can sell their product. I know my father had strong political views, but was very careful never to express them. But I think he had quite an influence on people by agreeing with them, and then bringing up something that maybe would cause them to think a little differently, without ever disagreeing with them. And I think; I'm sure he felt he had quite an influence and was proud of it. But it was never the tough something sort of thing. The average man in business, you know, he'll say, "Those blankety-blank, so and so's." He'll get almost violent talking about politics and taxes and things like that, and almost cramming it down the other fellow's throat. And yet when he goes to sell his product, he sells, but when he talks about his politics he does just the opposite, he un-sells it.

I'll never forget a man who was an old pioneer here, very prominent in business, and I was in his place of business one time and there were several men sitting around who were all working for wages. And he was pontificating about politics, and he said, "The trouble is, the working man is making too much money." And he was a keen businessman, he got rich. And I thought, "Why, you jack-ass." And here these men were his customers and they were all men making wages. And he said, "The working man is making too much money, that's what's wrong with this country." That's typical.

I was always proud my father saw through this. Of course, he came up from the bottom and he never got very high, a little ways above the bottom, and he was great for respecting the other fellow's opinion. And then, it was kind of a religion with him to sell his political ideas. The few people he had in his little area to talk to.

I think maybe businessmen were more of an influence in those days, politically, by

far than they are now. Maybe they felt a responsibility as half way leaders in the community without ever letting anybody know that they felt that way. It was an inner pride that they didn't go bragging about it.

--

bl