

HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #134 - Sides A/B - (No Tape)

Subject: Jim Harris

Place:

Date:

Interviewer:

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

Born in 1882 in Paisley, and came to Burns in 1885. Father, Mother, three sisters and two brothers. Town of Egan between Burns, and where Bertha Solomon lives now. Had two stores, Ben Brown and Sons, old gentleman would come up in summer from California. Pete Stenger also had store. He was a big horseman. Durkheimer came shortly after Stenger went out, and Welcomes came about the same time.

Welcome family quite prominent, was a saddle maker. In those days buckaroos had either a J. C. Welcome saddle or a Nelson saddle, which was made in Sacramento, for that country. They were brought here by Mexicans who worked for Pete French. Often stayed at Racine Hotel. Remembered when Maggie Welcome married Hank Levins.

When just a little kid, homesteaded down below Burns and lived in a sod house. Were there when Lux and Miller built a line fence across Harney Valley, first barbed wire ever in country. When settlers, who lived down below Burns came to town, had to go out by Wright's Point, about 25 miles out of way. Two gunmen from Texas rode the fence. Jim Harris and brother used to stand out and visit with them, one being quite funny with a gun ear. Wore boots and had ... in boot top. One night the settlers got together, cut every

wire between every post for 40 miles, as they were actually fenced out from Burns. Bill Brown, one of the fence riders, was a gaming man. He was in a saloon several days later and said that the fence cutters were cowards, and afraid to show up. He kept drinking and had a gun on the bar. A little fellow that lived down below said that if the shoe fits, and started to shoot. Hit him with four or five shots right in chest and killed him. Was first dead man that Jim saw laid out right there.

Twenty-five years later Jim was camped up in Long Valley, Idaho and a fellow camped near him. Jim had an I. S. Geer wagon from Burns Hardware Store. The man remembered Jim's father, and said that he was the man who had killed Bill Brown, was an old man then.

Lived down at the lower end of town. Bus Byrd, younger brother of Julian came along and said that a couple of men had been killed up the street, four or five blocks. Jim and his brother went up. The men had a fight over a girl who lived up the river, was really a duel. Agreed to go out to a slough along a trail. One of them flipped his handkerchief and the other caught it, then both began shooting. Killed one another. Let kids go out and look at them. Mace was name of one man. Tex Silvers ran a saloon.

Jim remembers when a very small child, or hearing folks tell about it, when they lived in south part of Burns on way to hot spring, the Indians had a war dance back up on the hill. Warm Springs Indians were visiting here. Paraded around and were protesting because were not allowed to hunt in Diamond and in Happy Valley. Pete French ran them out of there. Nobody thought much of an Indian in those days. It hadn't been too long since they killed Rye Smyth's father and brother in Diamond. Scarface Charlie was shot in the cheek by one of the Smyth's, but was quite influential with the local Indians. Old Louie was head of the tribe and Scarface Charlie was one of the chiefs. Boys, Fred Racine, Frank Goodwin and Jim Harris used to go out to the Indian Village. Boys had

horses and were friendly with Indians, even traded horses with them. Most people threw rocks at them.

When they would go someplace they would put a big pack on a horse and then put a papoose on top. The papoose would be given two sticks so he could hit the pack and be amused. One old Pinto horse had a broken bone in back leg. Every time he would slip, the bone would push out. They packed the old horses and let the young ones trail along.

Remembered when the white geese used to settle down on a flat near their house in the fall --- and would be just solid. Fellow by name of Gregg lived near, and would go down among the geese on a horse riding bareback with no bridle. Horse well trained and would feed among the geese. Had a 10-gauge muzzle-loading shotgun and showed boys how he poured powder into it, also shot, and hammered it down. He was only about one quarter mile from their house and they watched him go among the geese. He shot twice with the old shot gun and killed 22. He sold the feathers for goose down. He also shot tule hogs, which had gone wild after the settlers had turned them out, in the tules and camas. Usually were rounded, and owners known by special earmark, but some just went wild. This man fed the geese to his hogs.

Jim remembered that the Byrd family and his folks came from Virginia where they were distant relatives. Byrd's had newspaper and the families were friendly, called Mrs. Byrd Auntie. There were four saloons, and one small church with only about three or four women professing Christianity. Mrs. Reed, Mrs. Jameson and several others had a Sunday school where his mother took Jim. Very small church and no minister. Had few men going to church. Had Jews in Burns, and Catholics. First minister came over from Prineville, had long black beard and really preached hell fire and brimstone. Had 15 or 20 down at the hot springs and was first baptismal ceremony in Harney County, which was

witnessed by people from as far away as Diamond, taking a day or two to drive. Converted several gamblers and bar tenders, but didn't last long, as went back to old ways.

School was up on hill near museum. Had two teachers, Mr. Feckley and Lena Hardy. Hardy's lived across river about a mile from town. Started school at age of five, and was asked by Mr. Feckley to write ABC's, which he could do as sister had taught him. Next school was down south of the business part of town. Mr. Dillard was next schoolteacher. Mrs. Worthington came from the east and married a carpenter named Al Worthington. Used to whip boys with rawhide riding whips. Generally told them the night before that they were going to whip them the next day. One day two boys who were to be whipped, cut some willow whips from near river that were about three feet long, and two inches in diameter. Then Mr. Feckley started to whip one of the boys; the other got the willow stick and threw it at him, but hit his brother instead. Mr. Feckley knocked both of them down, but was only way could handle them.

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