

HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #136 - Side A

Subject: Ray Voegtly

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Interviewer: James Baker

(Note: This portion of transcript is not on the tape.)

RAY VOEGTLY: I knew Tom Stevens when I was a boy, and Tom Stevens was the original "Mutt" of the cartoon of "Mutt and Jeff". I understood that Jeff's real name was Shorty Bailey. And Tom Stevens, and Bailey, and the cartoonist himself, Bud Fisher, were interested in horses and horse racing.

And Mutt was rather a superstitious fellow, and I remember one time when we were sitting around my father's hardware store, and they got to talking about the age of different people. And Tom Stevens mentioned, "Well, I expect to live to be 100 years old, I feel good at my age." He was in his 70's, as I recall, at that time. And he said, "When I get to be 90 I'll probably have to use a cane, when I get to be 95 I might be on a crutch. But I don't see any reason why he shouldn't have either, except that he had an automobile accident which took him downhill.

And so I played him a game of pool one time when I was a boy, in our playroom in back of our home, and I beat him. He associated a good deal with a fellow by the name of Craven, who was nicknamed "Whiskers" around this country. And this Craven, incidentally, was the man who posed for the statue, "The Pioneer" down on the campus at the University of Oregon. And this statue was originally modeled out here at the Bell A Ranch. And Craven dressed just as you see him in this statue, buckskin coat, long hair,

whiskers, and of course the nickname "Whiskers" was very appropriate. And he'd go up and down the street here with his rifle strapped to his back, and he was a comparatively young man. And during a Fourth of July celebration one time, they had some foot races, and they had this track star, Foster, from the University of Oregon running. And as I recall, why "Whisker's was entered in the race and he beat Foster, the track star, in a foot race. Later on, Tom Stevens --- "Mutt" and "Whiskers" were driving a Model-T Ford over to Canyon City and something happened, and at any rate, they drove off the grade and injured Tom Stevens, who was down in the Elkhorn recuperating, the Elkhorn Hotel in Canyon City. And when I heard about it, I rode down on my bicycle and went in there, and I told him I was Charlie Voegtly's son, and he couldn't place me. And "Whiskers" and I were talking, and finally Tom Stevens recognized me, and he said, "Yes, you're that damn kid that beat me at a game of pool in Burns." And I said, "Yes, that was right."

So Tom Stevens, he wouldn't allow people in a card game to sit behind him or anything like that, that was bad luck. And he was quite a superstitious individual. That's about all I know about Tom Stevens, and that's all I know about Craven, who was known as "Whiskers".

JAMES BAKER: This guy, Stevens, evidently his superstitions paid off. I understand that once in a bar somebody took a shot at him and the bullet hit him in the belt buckle instead of in the stomach. He led a charmed life.

RAY: That could be. One time I belonged to a Toastmaster's Club here in Burns, and quite a group of us belonged to this little organization, and every meeting, every week or two, there would be two or three speakers give short talks, and we would also have a critic. This was probably 30 years ago. And we would have a critic for the evening to criticize these speeches, and we would take our turns.

I'll never forget, one evening the speakers didn't show up, or they weren't prepared

or something, and they called on me for a little story or a speech. I said, "I don't have any speech prepared either, but I'll tell you a little story about my boyhood days." So I related this story, and I remember the editor of the paper, Douglas Mullarky, was present and he said, "That's the best kid's story I ever heard in my life." And afterwards he told me he had told it on a number of occasions.

But at any rate, it was about a playmate of mine, and his name was Theo Sprague. And Theo Sprague had a horse by the name of Mocho. And Mocho was, in Theo's eyes, just a regular God. He just worshipped that horse. There was no horse like Mocho. And he would get out with his horse and run races on the Fourth of July and at fair time, and he'd win these races and made him a little spending money.

And then his mother had a little bakery down here located in the same block where the Safeway Store is at the present time, and she'd bake bread and he would take his toy wagon and his lasso rope, and he'd pull that wagon up town every day loaded with bread, and deliver it to the grocery store.

Then he also managed the town herd. In those days, a lot of people had a milk cow in town, and he'd gather up these cows in the morning and take them out to pasture west of town here, and in the evening about 5 o'clock, he'd round them up and bring them back and deliver each one to the residence, and so that was another chore that he performed with Mocho.

And one time Theo was over at my house and we were out there in the corral, and the idea struck us that we would like to smoke. So, we went ahead and found some scraps of newspaper and we found some good dry horse manure, and we rolled it up and we were smoking away, and the smoke was curing and furling around there as good as a good Havana cigar. And I thought we were getting along pretty good, and finally Theo leaned over and he says, "Say, let's go over there and get some of Mocho's, it's a lot

better." Mocho was such a good horse that even his manure was better than any other horse's. So that's the story of Mocho.

My father used to tell about when he came to this country, he and an attorney by the name of John Biggs roomed together down there in his store. They were both single men, and John Biggs was quite a character, a pretty nice fellow. Everybody liked and appreciated John Biggs. And I've heard him tell this story several times about my father. John Biggs had quite a laugh. He says, "Ha, ha, ha." One night a wood rat came and carried one of Charlie's socks off, ha, ha, and the next night he brought it back. So there were lots of incidents, of course, in the old times of this country. You can't think of them all on the spur of the moment. As a boy, why my father helped sponsor an oil well being drilled down here on Dog Mountain. During my high school days, I used to have to make a trip in our old Cole-8, and I would haul their supplies down there about once a week. They drilled that well, and they got down to a distance about 4200 feet. And some time before a bit had been lost in the well, and so they spent an awful lot of time, I've forgotten how long, a year or two, trying to get that bit up. And finally they got it out, and then a couple of fellows filed a labor lien on the place and closed it up, and there was no further development on it.

I'll never forget when I was a boy about 12 years old, the first trip that we ever made to Bend. It was rather foolhardy, we had a Michigan automobile. We had two of them; we bought one in 1911 and bought another in 1912. The first one we had was in 1911, and that was the one we made this trip to Bend in. We started off the middle of February, and it took us two days to get to Bend. The first day we got as far as the Halfway House, Hampton. I remember we got stuck this side of Hampton a little ways, and we had to go in and get a team to pull us out. And we stayed all night. And we had an awful lot of tire trouble. We had the side curtains up, and the hot bricks and hot water

bottles to keep warm. So, the next morning we fixed the tires, or my brother did, I was just getting over a case of scarlet fever. I was sick quite seriously for three months. We went on then towards Bend.

At that time there were two trucks that would make periodical trips from here to Bend, probably once every couple of weeks. And when we got within several miles of Bend, why the snow was so deep, I remember that my dad got out and would say, "Over this way, drive over this way," and he'd follow the tracks of these trucks. We had these acetylene lights on the front of the car, no electricity those days.

JAMES: Or no electric lights on automobiles?

RAY: And finally we got into Bend at 11 o'clock the second night on four flat tires. The next day we took the train to Portland. I remember my father bought four, bought a set of Pennsylvania Vacuum Cup Tires, which we put on the car when we got back, and made our return trip home. If anything had ever happened to us, a serious breakdown, I don't know what we would have done, because there was no traffic those days at all. Even many years later, there was a Sheriff by the name of Frazier, and his wife, made a trip to Bend, and they broke down and she froze her toes and had to have them amputated. Had quite a time. I've often thought that was a rather hazardous trip to make.

And this Cole-8 of mine, that my folks had, I remember when we'd make a trip to Canyon City even, why I'd have to spend a week or so tightening up the spokes and greasing the universals and everything else, because that was quite a trip, and I'd have to spend quite a little time getting that car in shape to make it. Our corrals, our home as a matter of fact was located, our corrals and barn and all that were located in the block that is now occupied by the bowling alley down here. Our home was just a block due east of that where Woyak's now live. And that's where I was raised as a boy. My father built that house in 1907. We had an old house sitting there before that, one of them was logs; it

was three units moved together. And the other was just a box house, at any rate, that's where I was born, was in that particular spot.

My father built this brick building that is now occupied by the Mode-O-Day, built that in 1899. And then the space where the Home Drug and Variety Store is located at the present time, that is where his old store was. Then there was --- that building burned down in 1912, and my father was in Portland at the time. He had leased a portion of it on the south side, the old building, to a man by the name of Athey. And Athey was going to start a new newspaper, the Harney County Tribune. We had two newspapers here at that time, The Harney County News and the Times Herald. But he was going to add a third one, the Harney County Tribune. He got a bunch of new equipment in and he was getting pretty well fixed up, and he was just about ready to come out with the first issue. There was just a little alley between the present brick building and the old building where he was located. And the building caught afire one night about 11 o'clock, and a clerk of ours who worked there ran through that alley and picked up a 5 gallon can of creosote and kerosene, or something that had apparently been used to spread over several bunches of shingles that were there, and the place was undoubtedly set afire. Mainly, I would say, whoever set it afire was gunning after this Harney County Tribune. So the man never did get to publish his paper, he left.

JAMES: Was your father's building destroyed in a fire that burned down the McKinnon's Livery Stable?

RAY: No, that was a different fire, that was down the street two blocks. As a matter of fact, that livery stable was located in the block where the Arrowhead Hotel is now. There was that livery stable and a saloon down there, Tom Jenkins' saloon, and the French Hotel. So that all burned, that was quite a fire. As I recall, there were a couple of horses burned up in that. And of course the hotel and everything burned up. Then later on they

built this more modern hotel, the Arrowhead. I can't think of anything else right at the moment.

JAMES: What kind of things did your father sell in the store?

RAY: Oh, a general line of hardware, paints, and oil. And then he was the first John Deere representative in this county. In this fire there was quite a little bit of farm machinery burned up, some mowing machines, and rakes, etc. that he had stored in the back part of the lot there. And builder's hardware, etc., that's what he sold.

(Note: This part of the transcript is where the tape picks up.) RAY: Household wares, crockery, buckets, and things of that sort. There were only two hardware stores in town at that time. The other was I. S. Geer Company, which was located in the same spot that Harris Hardware is located now, in the Masonic Building.

JAMES: Did you clerk in your father's store?

RAY: No, no I was just a boy going to school. And so my father, when I graduated from the University of Oregon, wanted me to come back to Burns. And he said, "I want to turn this store over to you boys." There were three of us. So I finally came back, because I knew he was letting the store kind of drift downward, you might say. I got back here, but he was just like a lot of other dads, he didn't want to let loose and give me any responsibility. And about the only thing he'd allow me to do was to sweep the sidewalk, and sweep the floor, and dust the shelves. And if it came to anything of a business nature, why I had to leave that alone. So I got rather discouraged and I was going to go to Portland and go to work for a finance outfit. And so then he finally induced, or asked me to stay again. So I stayed, and then pretty quick here came the depression. I graduated in 1928. And here came the depression and everybody was so poor you couldn't get out of town, and if you did get out you couldn't get a job. So I stayed right here and I went into business.

Well, I was in business in the Home Drug Company selling radios out of there about 1934. And I was teaching piano, and doing everything I could to make a living. Although I majored in music at the University of Oregon, why I fulfilled the requirements from the School of Business too. And I've really been a businessman rather than a musician, you might say, during the years. Although I still play some.

Well then after I got out of Home Drug, I went into business for myself, and I opened up in 1936, and I occupied a portion of the building that is now occupied by the Burns Office Supply. So then later on, about three years later, I moved down and I bought the building where Sprouse Reitz is at the present time. So I was in business there until about 1956, and I rented that building to a man named Cade, and then I moved my entire operation down to 39 S. Broadway, which is now occupied by the Surplus Store.

I had built that building in 1950, and had opened up another furniture store, that one was really a low end line of furniture down there. Then I sold out the furniture business in 1957, and took a trip to Europe, and then when I came back, why I began investing in some real estate, and I bought this, which is known as the Craddock-Shepard property, occupied now by the Al's Furniture and the Forest Service. And it was a wreck when I bought it, and I put in a lot of hard work and considerable money fixing it up. But I have it leased to two good tenants, Al's Furniture and to the United States Forest Service. Then the other one, I have leased to Homer Ritchey in the Surplus Store.

And then along in '64, '63 it was, I bought the J. C. Penney Building and I lease it. And then those three tenants across the street, Mode-O-Day, Home Drug, and Knox Variety. But I'm getting to the age, I just passed my 70th birthday in January, and I'm getting to the age where I think that I would like to begin to dispose of some of this business property, and spend the money. Poor probates and state taxes, and so forth,

eat it all up.

JAMES: What about the music in the early days, you must have had an ear open when you were growing up?

RAY: Well, Burns was rather fortunate musically. We had a lady here by the name of Eugenia Remboldt and she had studied at the New England Conservatory back in Boston, and she was certainly a very, very talented pianist, and you might just say a pretty good artist. She was an excellent sight-reader; she played a fine class of music, you know, by good composers. And she had, she taught and she had a good music class of interested pupils. And she was my first piano instructor. I started when I was 10 years of age, but I wasn't too good a pupil. I think my mother and dad had to get after me an awful lot to get me to practice. But she was a very accomplished pianist.

Then, we had a violin teacher by the name of Dodge, Mrs. Dodge. I think her first name was Mary Dodge if I'm not mistaken. She was a very accomplished violinist, and she is the one that originated the Sagebrush Orchestra, which you have probably heard about in Burns. They had a great big violin built, and they put it on a truck and all this orchestra could get on this violin. And it went to Portland --- and she later on moved to Portland, and she was the one who started the orchestra, which is now the Portland Junior Symphony Orchestra. She doesn't get the credit for it, but those are the facts. She's the one that really started it, and then someone else took over after her time. But Mrs. Agnes Kennedy of Portland can give you the details, because she was in it, and she knows what she is talking about in that respect.

Then we also had a man here by the name of Bergeron who was a very fine violinist, too. I don't know whether he did any teaching or not. I remember, though, he just very, very suddenly, because he eloped with one of our local girls by the name of Sizemore.

And then another pianist that was, a pretty good pianist, I personally don't think he was a good a pianist as Mrs. Remboldt, and that was Jim Fellows. Jim Fellows came here as a handsome young man from Northwestern, as I recall, and did some teaching and he had a little money that he had inherited, and he was going to start a power plant up here on Emigrant Creek, which was a failure. And Jim used to do considerable accompanying also, and particularly for a lady by the name of Mrs. Jim Gault, whose husband was the manager and cashier at the First National Bank. Which later, many years later after he got out of there, went to the wall during the depression. But Mrs. Gault, there again from the vocal standpoint, why she was a very accomplished person, and she sang very nice and she sang a good class of music. I've heard her sing, "Hark, Hark, The Lark," by Schubert's, "Hark, Hark, The Lark", and other numbers equally as good.

And Mrs. Vella Welcome also sang. We had quite a number --- we also had a dance ... by the name of Drewsey Dawson who used to teach some aesthetic dances. So we had quite a few talented people. And as far as I'm concerned, I've played for various public events, in other words, I'm a soloist, I don't do any accompanying. I've played at many, many entertainments since my boyhood days. As a matter of fact, I played day before yesterday at the Mother's Club up here. But I don't work at it, of course, like I used to because of old age, and arthritis is kind of crimping my style. But through the years I've played quite a few entertainments.

JAMES: What kind of public entertainments would these people, including yourself, be --- I'm not sure that you would be playing for dances. Would you be playing for some other form ---

RAY: Oh, there'd be a recital occasionally. I never did play for dances. Oh, I might relieve somebody a few numbers, you know. But to just hire out as a pianist for a dance, I

never did do that kind of work. Mrs. Gault came back when they moved away; she was over living in Corvallis. Well she came back a number of years ago and she was teaching vocal during the summer. I remember my brother was in her class; I had a younger brother. So at the end of the season why she decided she was going to give a recital, which was given up here, which is now the Lincoln School. It was the high school then. And so in order to diversify the program a little, why she asked me to do some piano numbers. And I think there were some other numbers there too, as I recall, but I did play the piano. I played some ambitious numbers; I can remember I played Les Pollannaise, and a couple of Chopin etudes, and some numbers of that quality.

JAMES: To shift the style and class of music a little bit to dance, what kind of music was played at the dances that you describe?

RAY: The main dance, of course, was the fox trot. And I would say about three fox trots and then a waltz, and that was it. Of course, occasionally you'd play the time dance too, which was Paul Jones and that type of stuff. I never did go in for that very much. Waltzes, you know, there were some good waltzers around town. I saw a cartoon here not long ago, I told the ladies I'd play them a group of waltzes the other day at this Mother's Club when I played. I saw this cartoon where a teenager was talking to a group of teenage girls and she said, "Well, he asked me for a waltz, whatever that is." (Laughter) I imagine he caused a little embarrassment to the people occasionally. But at any rate I invited him to play one evening at a Lions Club meeting. And so in the course of the evening I introduced him and I said, "Mr. Korten was going to play us some violin numbers." And so he got up there and he played "Turkey in the Straw" and "The Arkansas Traveler," and so forth, and I knew that he played Schumann's "Traumauri" real well, which is a simple melody that practically everybody is familiar with, it's only one page long. And so I says, "Play Traumauri." And so he turned around to the group and he

says, "Well Ray wants me to play Schumann's "Traumauri", I think it is away over your heads, but I'll play it anyhow." (Laughter) I know they all appreciated that. I got a little advice, too.

He made his money, originally, back in Chicago in the coffee business, coffee importing business. And I saw him down at the drug store one day and I says, "Sit down, Mr. Korten, and have a cup of coffee." "All right," he says, "I don't mind if I do." He says, "You know I used to be in the coffee importing business." And I said, "Yes, that's what I understood." "Yes, yes, I used to get in the back room and taste coffee with the best of them," he says. "You know, that's quite a thing. You have your cook there who brews this coffee all in separate pots." And he says, "They'll pour it out in little tiny cups," and he says, "you sit there and taste this coffee, and whenever you change, you rinse those cups out real good." But he says, "When you taste coffee," he said, "all these coffee tasters they make as much noise as they can." Because, he said, "When you make noise in tasting coffee, you can taste it better." He says, "That's the way all professional tasters will taste." He says, "You try that with orange juice or with soup," he says, "You can always taste it better." He says, "The Chinese don't think you like your soup if you don't make a lot of noise with it." So I says, "All right, I'll try that sometime." So he was right, I tried it with orange juice and soup. Of course a good wine taster will squish it around in their teeth, but I thought one day I'd try that with some wine. And so I drank it just like he was suggesting, making a lot of noise. And some way or another this alcohol in this wine vaporized, and darn near choked me to death, just choked you. So I thought it must have been a mistake or something, and I didn't try that anymore.

One night I was taking care of my father, he was an old man, while my mother went to lodge. And he got pretty restless and wanted to go home, and so I says, "Well I'll make you a toddy." So I made him a brandy toddy, and I made one for myself. So he

drank his. So I just tried that same deal on this brandy toddy. And again this alcohol vaporized and I got choked, and I didn't think I was ever going to come out of it. I thought I was going to be laying on the kitchen floor when my folks got home. So I advise, don't ever try to make a lot of noise when you're drinking an alcoholic drink. That might be the way to taste coffee, but it's not the way to taste a toddy.

JAMES: Is there any material here that you have on the table that I might be interested in going through?

RAY: Well, you saw this deal here, this chain of lineage.

JAMES: ... goes back to the 18th century. It's probably a German name.

RAY: It's Swiss.

JAMES: Swiss.

RAY: Of course, you know in Switzerland there are the German Swiss, and the Italian Swiss, and the French Swiss, depending upon which country you are nearer. And we are the German Swiss. Now this Voegtly, you are familiar with ... the name is spelled V O ... G T L I. Over here it was Americanized and it is V O E G T L Y. The name means "Lord of Lands". They owned lots of property, lots of land over there, and for that reason, I guess, they might not have been too popular.

But when I was over in Europe on that trip I mentioned, why I stopped in Berne one evening and stayed all night there. And the porter, when I registered, he said, "Oh, yes, I recognize that name." He says, "As a matter of fact they originate in a province out here called ... ." It is mentioned here in this paper. And he showed it to me on the map, which was about 30, 35 miles from Berne. Yes, the first one here that is on record was born in 1710, and left the following children: Nicholas Voegtly and Hans Jacob Voegtly. Well Nicholas Voegtly is a family name that's clear down through. As a matter of fact, we have a son by the name of Nicholas. And I had an uncle, and a brother by the name of

Nicholas. Nicholas is a family name.

JAMES: Where did your father come from prior to living in the Burns area?

RAY: From Pittsburgh.

JAMES: In Pittsburgh.

RAY: The Allegheny side over on the north side of Pittsburgh, they used to call it Dutchtown. In Pittsburgh, why there was a church which was just torn down, just a couple of years ago, and it was known as the Voegtly Evangelical Church, and it was located on Ohio Street right at the foot of Troy Hill. At the present time the Heinz Pickle Works occupies part of the old Voegtly Estate back there, and there is a Voegtly Street right near there. And it is name that, was an old name --- and I have a friend back there, from Burns, by the name of Herbert Irving, and he lives in Saxonburg. But about once a year he sends me a clipping out of a newspaper which refers to Dutchtown and the Voegtly family, and so forth and so on.

JAMES: Did your father ever mention why he came west?

RAY: He just simply wanted to pioneer out West. He had a friend by the name of Eichste (sp.?) who was also a German Swiss and he was quite a little older than my dad, and he was going to go to New Zealand, and he wanted my dad to go to New Zealand. As a matter of fact, we were just reading some of his old letters the other day that he used to write to my father. He got over there and he lost his fortune in the sheep business, came droughts, and so forth and so on, but he had written my father some very interesting letters regarding that country, and expressed that he always wanted to get back to Switzerland and visit again, and the United States, but I don't know that he ever did it. He's been dead a number of years.

JAMES: Do you feel any particularly strong attachment to Eastern Oregon and the desert out here?

RAY: Oh, I like it. Yes, I like this country, and I believe that we also like Eugene and the Willamette Valley. We used to have lots of friends down there, and sometimes you look at it and say well I wish we were located in Eugene. And we always like to go back, although our friends down there are gradually disappearing. We like Burns, and it's just like I was joking with a man and his wife from Oakland, California down here one night. They were kind of kidding me a little bit, and finally made some crack about Burns. And I said, "Yes, there are better places than Burns, and there are worse places than Burns, but they are mostly all in California." (Laughter) So, I think that Burns has a reasonably good climate. It used to be that we had severe temperatures, you could always depend on 35, 40 below. When I came home my freshman year from the University of Oregon, it got down to 48 below, and, of course I don't like that kind of stuff. But on the other hand, when it's moderate, I don't think we've had 100 temperature more than twice in the last ten years. Good hunting, good fishing, good healthy climate, not too much traffic.

JAMES: My last question is about the scenery; does it have any particular rewards for you?

RAY: Oh, I've never been one of these fellows that appreciates scenery too much. You can have scenery wherever you go. What interests me mostly about travel; for instance when I went to Europe, I wasn't particularly interested in going up in the Alps or clear up in Northern Scotland just for the scenery. I like to see the customs of the people and see the historical background, and eat their food, and sleep in their beds, and see how they differ from ours. That's the thing that is of interest to me when I go on a trip.

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