

HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #140AA - Side A

Subject: I. M. C. Anderson

Place: Corvallis, Oregon

Date: February 12, 1972

Interviewer: Jim Baker

JIM BAKER: How did Calamity Creek get its name?

I. M. C. ANDERSON: Henry Miller was in there in the early days, around 1888, '87, and saw all that fine grass in that particular country on Muddy Mountain, and he rode up on the end of the mountain there and looked over into this section of the country, where the grass was up to the horse's stirrups, and he said, "Next year we'll make these hills black with cattle," which he did. And that was a very dry summer and the cattle ate all of the grass. And come winter snow fell early and stayed late, and next spring why Miller came up there and it was not black with cattle, but white with bones. And he said, "What a calamity." So that give Calamity Creek its name.

Calamity Creek is small, a very small stream. Several of these streams come together and they run into Wolf Creek which is the largest stream down in the settlement, after you get outside the forest. But this whole country got the name of Calamity, even this Wolf Creek, which is now called Calamity, I believe most of the time.

The schools migrated up and down the creek there. First it was up at Poke Gearhart's place, that's on Wolf Creek, at the mouth of Calamity. Then it moved down into Anderson's place. And it was called Wolf Creek School there.

There was a little incident about that school there that might be of interest to some people. My father was secretary of the School Board, and one of the other men accused

him of trying to run things. He said well he said he had kind of a right to run things, he was furnishing half of the pupils and paying half of the taxes, and he thought he ought to have some right to it.

JIM: Was this the school that was on your land?

ANDERSON: Yes, it was at that time. Then it was moved over towards Howes place, a little farther toward the Malheur River. It's disappeared now, there's no school in there, hasn't been for years. And even the Van Post Office that served that community is a thing of the past.

JIM: Where was that post office?

ANDERSON: Well the first post office was located on the, across from the north fork of the Malheur River. I'm wrong on that, that's the middle fork of the Malheur. Then it was called the Van Post Office. A man by the name of Van Middlesworth was the first postmaster there, and it was called the Van Middlesworth Post Office. But the government, when they issued the post office, they left off the Middlesworth and just called it Van. It moved from there over onto Wolf Creek and moved up and down the ... there, and finally ended up at Cleveland's place on Wolf Creek, just above where Calamity Creek comes into Wolf Creek. That's where it ended its day. The house even burned down now.

JIM: I wanted to ask you how was mail delivered in those days?

ANDERSON: It was driven by a team, of course. You had weekly mail come out of Drewsey. Now everything moves into Drewsey. I think the rural route still runs up there, rural delivery.

JIM: You said that the first name of Drewsey was something with an odd background to it?

ANDERSON: Before there was a town there, there was just a community there that was

called Gouge Eye. Then it moved over to Drowsey, and from Drowsey to Drewsey. I remember those changes.

JIM: Yeah, from Gouge Eye, to Drowsey, to Drewsey.

ANDERSON: Yeah.

JIM: When you were going to school there, do you remember any teachers getting run out? Any teachers that couldn't last the six months?

ANDERSON: Well, that happened in Drewsey, I don't know whether it ever happened in the Van country. But it did happen in Drewsey. I remember an incident there where they finally got a teacher in that kind of took over. The big boys had been running the school for a while and they finally got a teacher that took over. He was a veteran of the Spanish American War. They tell the story that the first day he went in he took a card, the ace of spades, and put it up on the wall and took his 6-shooter and plugged the center of it and went back and sat down. Nothing was said about it. Later, Stanley Moffett was a student, he was one of the younger boys, and he got to cutting up and the teacher gave him a flogging and he run off and went down to the field and told his father that the teacher had beat him up, and some of the people went to kidding him about it and said, "Now you can tell that teacher where to head in, now's your opportunity." So he got Stanley by the hand and went back up to the schoolhouse. Stanley felt very degraded, you know, his dad coming along. When he got up there, the school was up over the second story building, his dad brought him up to the door and he just opened the door and shoved him in and told the teacher, "If you can't handle this fellow, I can." That ended the trouble with that school.

JIM: Well let's see, what else do I have on here.

ANDERSON: Well, sometime the sheep men of the north John Day country started moving their sheep over into Logan Valley, and cattlemen around in that section didn't

appreciate it. So when they got the sheep located near Logan Valley, why they started back to camp, why they heard some shots and they went back and the cattlemen were shooting the sheep. The sheep men they commenced to shooting at the cattlemen. There was a little exchange of fire there. One of the cattlemen got the cant shot off of his saddle. After they run away, he was feeling pretty bad and he told the rest of the boys that he'd been shot through the hip, and the blood was running down his leg. But it wasn't blood.

JIM: He'd gotten quite a jolt.

ANDERSON: Yeah. One of the cattlemen had blood poisoning, he was sent to Portland, but he didn't recover. That was the early days of gunfights in Logan Valley.

The first run of the train out through the Harney Valley there, was part of the train that was going over the Blue Mountains, went out through there and they got lost. It was foggy, they couldn't see the mountain and they wandered around out there. ...

JIM: Joe Meeks.

ANDERSON: Joe Meek, yeah, he or his brother, I don't remember which one now. But they was supposed to show them through the short cut across the mountain. And they wandered around out there at Wagontire Mountain, and were lost for a while. And then he finally went, Meek went north and somebody pulled them out, and they went back to the Columbia River.

And then later wagon trains went over the mountains at the head of Pine Creek and Immigrant Creek down through that way and out the Izee country, and come out down that way.

Now you talk about the Blue Bucket Diggings. If they hadn't been a lost train, they might have come out below Izee there where there was some of that gold. But that has been talked on as a possibility, but they were that far off from where they were supposed

to be. It was on Whiskey Gulch in the John Day country there, below Dayville where they eventually found gold. Whether that was the Blue Bucket Diggings or not, I don't know.

JIM: Well as I understand it the Blue Bucket Mine, these kids found some gold when they were looking for water. And then they kept the gold but lost it when they were crossing the Deschutes River. Is that the way you know it?

ANDERSON: Yeah. Well, there's been a lot of stories told about it, and written about that. The Blue Bucket, they claimed the girl had the blue bucket and she put these little rocks in, but she had to hide them because they didn't want to put any extra weight on the wagon. She was always picking up pretty rocks, and she hid them and it was several days after, before they found out about it. Her dad thought maybe it might have been around Wagontire Mountain, because they went through that way and left a wagon tire, at least it was left over there, and how Wagontire Mountain got its name. As far as I know there's never been any gold found in that particular country.

JIM: Did you know a fellow by the name of Herren? H E R R E N, William Herren?

ANDERSON: I remember the name, but I don't ---

JIM: Well the reason I say his name is that he claimed that it was his family that found and then lost the gold. Do you know anybody who's tried to find it?

ANDERSON: Oh, there's been a lot, I don't know anyone either. No, that's right, been a lot of people tried to find it.

After my father retired and was in Portland, some outfit tried to get him to go out there to Wagontire and see if he couldn't find it, because some of his folks were in that train.

JIM: Oh, I see.

ANDERSON: ... my father's people, that was in there. But I don't know their story; I don't know any of my father's people. He didn't have many relation on the Anderson side. On

the other side there's a lot of them.

JIM: Which side is that? What's the other side?

ANDERSON: On my mother's side. My mother and father were both born in Oregon. My father down here at Halsey, and my mother at The Dalles.

JIM: You were born in Drewsey?

ANDERSON: I was born up near Van there. My birth certificate says Drewsey, but I was born eighteen miles north of Drewsey.

JIM: I see.

ANDERSON: They didn't go to the hospital for minor things like birth.

JIM: Did the people have midwives or what?

ANDERSON: Usually. But occasionally they just had to deliver on their own. The husband was the midwife. ... I helped deliver all three of our kids, no hospital.

JIM: Is that right? No hospital. Wow! You were describing the differences between the drives in the early days and the drives just recently.

ANDERSON: I read a piece in the paper, I don't remember what paper it was, but they were moving a bunch of cattle out in Eastern Oregon ... south, and had less than 1,000 head of cattle and they had twenty cowboys. When I was running out there, we'd drive usually around 3,500 with about seven or eight men. That included the cooks and the wranglers. The PLS Company stopped on their own land every night; they didn't have to herd them.

JIM: Was that all the way to Winnemucca, or all the way to San Francisco?

ANDERSON: In the early days we went clear into San Francisco, trailed them in. In my time, why Winnemucca was the nearest station.

My sister in Portland has a diary of one of the old time buckaroo cooks on one of those drives ---

JIM: I'll bet that's fascinating.

ANDERSON: --- where he landed each night and the names of the people, who the cowboys were. I knew most of the boys in that drive. Most of them were older than I am, but they are older than I was at that time too.

JIM: They're still older, that hasn't changed.

ANDERSON: No.

JIM: Are there any stories that were told on these drives, you could sit around and swap lies, tell whoppers.

ANDERSON: Well, I don't know. Of course there were plenty of whoppers told, I don't remember any of them now.

JIM: I've had a lot of fun collecting some.

ANDERSON: Pardon.

JIM: I've had a lot of fun hearing some of them.

ANDERSON: Yeah. The cowboys in those days were real different from the pictures in the movies now days.

Very rarely did you ever see a man with a gun. It was too much trouble to pack it. If they had a gun at all it would be in the wagon.

JIM: I see. Six-guns, or a rifle?

ANDERSON: Six-guns mostly. A rifle was --- I don't ever remember seeing a cowboy have a rifle on his saddle.

JIM: What kind of handguns were popular?

ANDERSON: Oh colts, mostly.

JIM: Forty-five caliber?

ANDERSON: Yeah.

JIM: Any really fancy ones?

ANDERSON: No, not specially fancy. I bought one for \$2.50 once. JIM: Two and a half bucks?

ANDERSON: Yeah. I got that from a fellow who was going to be a cowboy and he didn't make it. He got on a drunk and he was wanting to have another drink, so I bought the gun for \$2.50. I never needed it, only for to kill a cow with once. I don't know whatever become of it.

JIM: What about those newcomers that would come out to Eastern Oregon? Do you remember any of ---

ANDERSON: Sandlappers.

JIM: Mossback?

ANDERSON: No, mossbacks were down in Western Oregon. Eastern Oregonians wouldn't like to be called mossbacks. A fellow there in college said he brought a McCarty along to run between their toes to keep the webs from growing ...

JIM: What did you --- if you were a sandlapper, sandlapper? Was that a tenderfoot?

ANDERSON: Yeah, that was a tenderfoot. They belonged to a blind-bridle outfit. Instead of being cowboys, they usually rode a workhorse with a blind bridle on.

JIM: Yeah.

ANDERSON: So they called them blind-bridle outfit or sandlappers.

JIM: I never heard that before. You were mentioning these Mexicans, one fellow named Placador. Did he tell stories like Tebo told stories?

ANDERSON: Well, I never head him tell any, but I suppose he did. A lot of them were stories you hear around the campfire at night, were considered as just stories, and you didn't usually bother yourself to remember.

JIM: ... the story about how fast that bull was?

ANDERSON: This happened up in Montana on the Milk River, a mile of track parallel to a

pasture. The owner of the place, he was telling the Chamber of Commerce in Helena, Montana, that he had a bull that could outrun that train. So the Chamber of Commerce they decided to go out and see the bull. The farmer heard that they were coming, so he told his colored boy that it didn't make any difference what he told them, that he wouldn't be there, he wouldn't be there. Well they asked him where this fellow went and he said, "Well he went to Los Angeles, San Francisco and around." And they said, "Well he was supposed to be here." "Oh yes, he'll be back all right." He said well, "How did he go?" This was before flying days. He said, "Well, he rode that bull." Well the sequel to the bull story was that when this train came along one morning the bull was down to meet it and run up to the end of the tracks and somebody left the gate open, and the bull came out of the pasture on across the track. They questioned the engineer about what he knew about this story about the bull, and he said well he didn't know anything about it only that the first thing he saw was this bull coming out of the alfalfa and then the alfalfa coming out of the bull.

JIM: You mentioned that story about Drewsey, how tough it was. But I didn't get what you mean; you had two guys before breakfast?

ANDERSON: Well the reason that they had two guys before breakfast, was for breakfast.

JIM: Oh, two guys for breakfast.

ANDERSON: Yeah. Means they were killed the night before in Drewsey.

JIM: And served up in the morning?

ANDERSON: Yeah, served up in the morning.

JIM: It was a tough town.

ANDERSON: There were several killings there, but it wasn't too tough. If you behaved yourself, you got along.

JIM: Yeah.

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JIM: I'm going to read a story from a typed script that's entitled, "Harney County, Its Early Settlement and Development". It is written by Maurice Fitzgerald and it has the date of 1940 on it. There are a few pages of early history here, and I'm going to get one story about, an incident in the life of John Devine. I'll read this, it starts on page four, and I'll just read it as it's typed up.

There was one incident of his life in the early years of his residence at the Whitehorse Ranch that but few have any knowledge of. In the late months of 1874, a tramp came along and asked for employment. As was his want, Devine put him to work doing some chores about --- this is on to page five now --- on his premises. He rarely, if ever, refused employment to anyone who came along looking for a job.

After working a month, he asked for his pay, and got it, saying he was going south. While he was on the job, a stray horse had wandered there from some distant point, having a brand that no one there knew. As was customary, he was put in an enclosure with the other horses, until such time as his owner might happen along and claim him. If no one claimed him, then he became the property of the ranch. That was the custom. This tramp knew of the stray horse, so when he was preparing to leave, he caught the horse and rode off in the direction of Trout Creek. When Devine learned what the fellow had done, he swore he couldn't get away with anything like that. So, mounting his horse, he started out on the trail of the horse thief. He caught up with him at the ranch of John Catlow on Trout Creek, thirty miles from Whitehorse. He commanded the tramp to mount the stolen animal and come back with him to the ranch from which he had taken him. The fellow obeyed reluctantly. But, when only half way back, he stopped and said he wouldn't go any further. He probably thought he might be lynched when he got there. So, getting off his horse and picking up some large stones, he told Devine to go right on home or he'd

knock him off the horse. He evidently didn't think Devine was armed. Devine told him to put down those rocks or he'd plug him. He called Devine a hard name and then he dropped in his tracks.

There was nothing done about that homicide for two years thereafter. Then the authorities at Canyon City began to realize that some judicial steps should be taken to comply with the law in such cases. It was then decided to notify Devine to come to the county --- I'm on page six here --- come to the county seat to give an account of his actions in taking the life of his fellow man. He did so two years after it happened. It took a good four days to get to Canyon City.

I remember meeting him in his buggy a few miles from that town as I was on my way back to Camp Harney. He asked me a few questions regarding the distance to Canyon, as this was his first visit to the county seat. That was the first time I ever saw John Devine, but we became very good friends in after years. His explanation satisfied the authorities and nothing further was done regarding the homicide of the unknown horse thief.

Here is a story that begins on page seven; I'll read it verbatim too. Now here is a good place to record an act that has something to do with the development of what is now Harney County. In 1868, William Clark of Canyon City, a member of the firm of Clark and Poindexter, retail merchants, was elected a member of the Oregon Legislature. While in that capacity he succeeded in having a bill passed appropriating a certain sum of money for the purpose of opening a passable highway from the John Day Valley to Winnemucca, Nevada, for the convenience of those wishing to reach the nearest point of Central Pacific Railroad, which had but recently been completed from Ogden, Utah, to Sacramento, California. The proposed highway began at the head of the John Day Valley passing by Warm Springs, thence over a spur of the Blue Mountains to Summit and Crane Prairie on

down to Otis Valley. Thence west down to Otis Creek to a fork on the middle fork of the Malheur River, close to where the town of Drewsey now stands. Then South to crossing of the Malheur River and over a spur of Steens Mountain to Barren Valley. Then Westward along the base of the mountain by Juniper and Mann Lake to Alvord. Thence South to Sand Gap and Whitehorse to Nevada State northern boundary line. This road was but rarely used for the intended purpose, being poorly constructed and devoid of necessary stopping places and a very great distance. However, it did attract attention to the features and natural advantages of regions traversed, and indirectly led to settlement.

Here's a story on page eleven about Peter French. The first time I ever saw or spoke to Mr. French was in 1874. I was then Sgt. Major at Camp Harney. One forenoon I saw a rather small, quick-moving stranger walking up between sleeping quarters and kitchen to the garrison. I had seen or spoken to the few settlers then in Harney Valley, but his man was a total stranger. So I inquired of some men sanding near if they knew who he was. Some of them spoke up and said, "That's Pete French." I had heard of him. Just then a dog belonging to the garrison, harmless but a bluffer, seeing the quick-stepping man, started after him, barking at his heels. Quick as lightning, French turned, pulling a revolver, and ready to pull the trigger. I yelled, "Don't shoot, Mr. French, he's harmless," and ran to drive the cur away. French said, "I don't like to have a cur snapping at my heels," put up his gun and went away.

Here is one on page twelve. During the Indian outbreak of 1878, Peter French suffered heavy damages and had many thrilling experiences. He was surprised at the Diamond Ranch about the middle of June by a party of about twenty Indians coming upon him and his men, when saddling up for the day's work. They were all unarmed, but one gun in the house which French got and held the Indians off until the men were all saddled and mounted. Then they were chased for many miles, only one man being shot in the

thigh, John Witzel. He's living yet, hale and hearty. The Indians burned some of his house and killed many of his cattle, and in many ways damaged and hampered his business. But he soon recuperated and kept on expanding until his untimely death in 1898, when he fell by the bullet of an assassin, a man with whom he had trouble regarding land.

Here is an account on page fifteen. The fall of 1873 was very fine up to the 27th of November, Thanksgiving. I remember it very distinctly. The snow began falling just at the noon hour and continued almost without intermission for three days. Harney Valley was covered to a depth of more than three feet.

This is on page sixteen now. The Smith and Riddle families became alarmed for the safety of their little bunch of livestock. Riddle mounted his horse and struck out to find a better location. He returned in a few days with the good news that over in the Steens Mountain country, the snow was only about eight inches and plenty of good range. So over to Happy Valley they moved and made permanent settlements. One on what became known as Riddle Creek, and the other on Smith Creek. They prospered and had no serious trouble until 1878.

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