

HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #140 - Side B (No Tape)

Subject: Lee Miller

Place: Burns, Oregon

Date: February 5, 1972

Interviewer: Jim Baker

(This is really a poor tape, hard to understand, hum.)

LEE MILLER: ... that's where this orchard was. He tried out every kind of a fruit tree that was known at that time. Three or four different kinds of cherries, peaches, apples.

(Orchard of Robert Rector.)

JIM BAKER: I heard one last night about Tebo having a pet fish and this fish used to follow him around the ranch, and one time he fell off a little bridge across a creek and he drowned.

LEE: I think I've heard that --- so darned many of them. There was a guy in the old Burns Hotel, name of Dale Dibble, he was originally from California. He could tell the wildest stories of anybody I ever heard. He had this hotel, and he just loved to tell you stories. I was a little kid. He would be in the lobby of the hotel, of course there was a bar, but he'd tell his stories to people who were sitting around in the lobby. One story, don't know whether he told it or not, about the dog got after the beaver and the beaver run up the tree. They said beavers don't run up trees, they can't run up a tree. He said, he did too, the dog was after him and he had to. Dale Dibble was always telling a story about a white horse he had. I can't remember ---

(From Jim's notes, this is about Bill Brown)

LEE: ... sort of a religious, to a certain degree. He apparently made quite a lot of money

even though they stole lots of his horses. He deposited money in the bank and if he didn't have a check, he'd just pick up a piece of wood and write a check on it. I worked in the bank and I've cashed them. I think he gave most of his money to the Presbyterian Church.

He was an odd man, in a way. He'd go out to herd sheep, all he'd take; he'd just fill his pockets with raisins. Apparently he was on some kind of a diet, or believed in eating just certain things. As near as I could make out he was one of those kind of guys. He was kind of a crank on what he ate.

I never knew him too well, just knew him when I saw him, that's all. But even though they stole his horses and everything else, he still seemed to accumulate a fair amount of money for those times.

JIM: How did they steal his horses?

LEE: Just go out on the desert there, partly in Harney County and partly in Lake County. Just drive them off and sell them.

JIM: Did he have a brand on them?

LEE: Yes, I think he had a brand. I don't think they kept them branded up too well, either. Horses were pretty wild; I don't think they had many brand inspectors in those days.

JIM: When I first came in we were talking about when your dad came in.

LEE: In 1884. He came from LaGrande, and before that he came from Kansas. He was born in Ohio, but the family left Ohio when he was two or three years old. I don't think they homesteaded, it was open country then. I don't know what his dad did.

JIM: Do you know why he came to LaGrande, what your dad was looking for?

LEE: He has a brother who had been there for ten years, they came out in 1866. I think he wanted to raise horses. When he first came here, that's what he did, had about six hundred head of horses. I guess the horse business was pretty good at times, but not so

good at others. If you had cattle with your horses, you could sell them, regular market. I think I was about three years old when he sold the last of his horses. He used to drive into Montana.

One fellow who used to be here said when he was a kid he came through here in '71, from California on a horse drive to Montana. Started someplace in Northern California and came up through here. When my dad left LaGrande, he and another fellow who came with him had been down in California, and they were headed for California when they left LaGrande. When he got here, he said, this is the kind of country I'm looking for, lots of grass; I'm going to stay right here. The other fellow stayed too, and he took up a place over there. His name was Irving. Clarence Young's wife was an Irving. Her dad and my dad came here together. She was raised over there too, north of ... My dad went from horse raising into cattle ranching. Not much of a change.

JIM: Is cattle raising better than horse raising?

LEE: I guess that would depend. At one time, particularly when he started, there must have been a pretty good market for a horse that would be a good cattle ... I guess that market played out and he decided on cattle.

JIM: Are there any wild horses now?

LEE: Not any more, used to be lots of them. Talk to Buck Miller, he's the one to tell you about that. He used to run wild horses. He was a good roper. He's one of the last ones here I knew of had anything to do with wild horses. Charlie Spencer can tell you.

JIM: Did you ever see one of Buck Miller's bridles that he braided? He's got eight braids that he runs together, a full bridle, beautiful piece of work. The only other fellow I've met so far who did that is George Hughet, put silver-plating on it too, concho, rosette. Do you know of any Mexicans other than the ones that Pete French brought up?

LEE: Oh, yes, there were other Mexicans here. When I first came here, there were three

brothers lived about three miles south of the ... Ranch. The Dolores boys. Dad used to tell about them. No kinfolk left around.

JIM: Did some of them have their own places?

LEE: Yes ... There were quite a few. Some of them were buckaroos and some had their own places.

JIM: What kind of influence did they have on life out here?

LEE: You mean the Spanish? Not too much, there wasn't enough of them. They were really horsemen. Just natural horsemen. Raised lots of horses, down in the Sacramento Valley. Lot of mixture, Spanish and Mexican.

JIM: They brought up some ropes, riatas, different from ropes people were using here. When I was a kid they just used rawhide ropes. Down in Mexico they make rope out of the different cactus plants down there. The McGay plant, the leaf is real broad and they beat that up and make all kinds of ... Makes pretty good rope. They were good riders and good ropers. Joe Fine's dad and my dad always claimed he was the best roper he ever saw. Joe's dad worked for Pete French. There used to be lots of good ropers and riders here years ago. The PLS Company worked a lot of cattle here.

JIM: Good marksmen? Do you remember anybody who could really shoot? Were there shooting contests?

LEE: Just shooting each other. They say there were seven or eight men killed here on Main Street in the early days. Too much to drink, maybe. Tom Stevens was quite a character.

(End of tape)

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