

HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #141 - Side A

Subject: Frank King

Place: Burns, Oregon

Date: February 1972

Interviewer: Frank King

JAMES BAKER: Let's start off with the college, would you mind repeating when it started, and so ---

FRANK KING: Well it was started by a man by the name of Rigby. Him and his wife came in here for that purpose, and they rented that room over this carpenter shop, and he had a class of about 15 the first year. The next year, I was going to public school in town and my dad thought that I could get an education quicker, and so he sent me to go down there. Well it was a good school all right, and I learned a lot of things. I took up bookkeeping; I was only 15 years old at the time.

And I went that year, and then I went the next year after they built the new place up on the hill where the Presbyterian Church is now. And I believe that it run one year after that, if my memory is correct. And then it folded up; he couldn't get enough pupils to make a living.

And the men who built the building, there were some of them from Silver Creek who had sons going to school there, and one or two men in Burns that were in business. Of course, in those days you could build a building pretty cheap, it was just a shell you might say, but it was a good building.

And after that why this man worked on ranches for a few years to make a living. He even taught school down here at the Five Mile Dam one term. And then him and his

wife separated. One of his pupils got away with his wife. (Laughter)

JAMES: I'll be darned.

FRANK: That's a fact.

JAMES: That's a fact?

FRANK: Yeah. They had two children, his first wife, that was by his wife. And after his wife married this other fellow, why they had one. I saw the man who got away with her, his name was Summerfield. I saw him down in Medford at Lester Hamilton's 60th wedding anniversary. Lester Hamilton was also a student of this fellow.

JAMES: I'm glad you mentioned that.

FRANK: Summerfield, he went to California after he left here and worked for the Forest Service. But his wife was dead when I saw him last time, but he had the oldest Rigby daughter with him. She was, at that time, getting along in years too, pretty well crippled up with arthritis. And that's the last that I've ever heard from them. I've seen Lester Hamilton and his wife once since that time; I've been down there.

But the college all disintegrated, and I think that the high school board bought this building from the people that built it, and they used it for an annex to hold classes over there.

JAMES: Yeah. Well you also said that the students would pay ---

FRANK: So much yearly tuition that they charged. I've forgotten just what it was, but it wasn't too much.

JAMES: Yeah. They would just contribute what they could, was that the idea?

FRANK: No, he had a certain tuition, but it wasn't very high. I've forgotten what it was now. My dad paid mine. I don't remember what it was now.

JAMES: Can you remember what classes that he taught?

FRANK: He taught anything from kindergarten up, you might say. He had one man in

there that was 27 years old that couldn't write his name when he went to school there. He would take anybody. He was just that good a teacher, he would teach them too. He took the time to do it. And the older ones, of course, he'd give them their work, and he'd carry through by ledger sheets that he gave them, you know, to carry through on their bookkeeping. So you might say there was no real classes taught.

JAMES: I see. So he would teach reading and writing, but he'd also teach bookkeeping and ---

FRANK: He'd teach anything.

JAMES: Was there shorthand then, do you remember?

FRANK: He could teach shorthand, and did start a shorthand class, but there wasn't enough in it. I was in that and I learned to write one sentence, and the class was discontinued, thrown out entirely. After he moved up on the hill, why he didn't try to teach it.

JAMES: Yeah. Well did any of the students in this class that took bookkeeping and those business classes; did they stay in here as businessmen?

FRANK: There was one of them by the name of Frank Jackson that owned an interest in a store downtown there, where Nyleen's have got their furniture on Main Street there. There was a 25-foot building in there, a wooden building, and there was a grocery store, and it was owned by Hagey, Fenwick and Jackson. Jackson was the one that went to school there. Hagey had been a rancher, and Fenwick was a rancher at that time, down here on the river.

JAMES: Do you think that education helped Jackson any in business?

FRANK: Well, he learned bookkeeping. Of course, they finally sold out. And he went to ranching, and he made a living all right at ranching. He was a nice young man. He finally got married, he was too old for the little girl he married, but I think they lived together until

he died. No, they didn't either, they separated. And Lester Hamilton, he taught school after that. And he had a sister went to school there, and I don't believe that she ever taught school. She got married.

There was a fellow run a store over on Silver Creek right there by the, are you acquainted with Silver Creek any? You know where the store is on Silver Creek, right across there, the place belongs to Don Hotchkiss now. ... He had quite a store and he went to school and his name was Hembree.

JAMES: Oh yeah, Hembree.

FRANK: And then there was Woody Best, his father owned a ranch up where Dick Cowan, owns a place up above Silver Creek there. And then Alfred Johnson, they lived down this way a ways. And Alfred Johnson, he stayed on the ranch, and stayed there until he passed away. After his folks died he ... Winnie Best, he left here and I don't know just where he did go to. He's passed away too, now. All of the Bests are gone.

JAMES: Yeah.

FRANK: And this undertaker, Clevenger, he was the only undertaker here at the time, and his business was up where the One Stop Service Station is, on that corner, and it finally burned. And then he had a furniture store, and they finally burned up. He never went into the furniture business, but he had his undertaking parlor down in what was at that time, it's where the Odd Fellow Building is now, but it was a big wooden building stood there at that time and he was in the corner of that until he sold out. And no, he didn't sell out there; he built another funeral home where it is now. He built that building.

JAMES: One of the things that's been curious to me, is how the ranchers who didn't know bookkeeping, or were in business of cattle ranching before bookkeeping came in, how did they, kept a hold of their money?

FRANK: Well they trusted the banker quite a lot for that.

JAMES: Yeah. Was that a safe bet, trusting the banker?

FRANK: Well, in a way. My dad came here to this country in 1884 with their father, who was the grand --- Leon Brown and he started working at that store where the Brown Building stands now, that big building, stone building on Main Street.

JAMES: Yeah.

FRANK: He ... he had a little wooden one. He went to San Francisco and bought a bill of goods and he didn't have the money to pay the freight on it. My dad loaned him \$800. Of course, he never had to borrow any more money after that.

JAMES: No. Browns didn't borrow money, did they?

FRANK: He came here in the same wagon team, my dad's wagon and team from Surprise Valley, Cedarville. Another Jew named Waldenberg was there with him. He was looking for a place to get in business, too.

JAMES: Waldenberg, he was a jeweler?

FRANK: A Jew.

JAMES: Oh, Jew, I misunderstood what you said.

FRANK: He finally build a brewery ---

JAMES: Oh, he built a brewery.

FRANK: --- where Ray Weeks' house is, up on back of the hill in that block there. But he didn't succeed very good in that, he went broke and he left here. He and his family and went to San Francisco. And they had one daughter that I believe is alive yet. She never got married. I think she's, oh 75 years or older by this time, I imagine, but she never got married.

JAMES: I was wondering if your dad got the \$800 back?

FRANK: Oh yes, he got his money back. A Jew is honest. If they owe you any money they'll pay it. They'll beat you in a deal all right, but if they owe you any money, they'll pay

it. You can trust a Jew.

JAMES: Were the bankers trustworthy?

FRANK: There wasn't no bankers.

JAMES: No bankers, so you had to do it privately?

FRANK: Yeah. ... his money was in a bank down in Surprise Valley, Cedarville, I think. He sent, there was a young fellow right down near, a nephew of this Jew that came out with my dad, went down there a horseback and got the money. There was no banks here until along in the '90's. Then John Biggs and, I forget names so quick, anyway they started a bank in where Carroll Jordan's Real Estate office is. There was a wooden building on that corner at that time and they run for a few years, and went broke, and the stockholders, depositors, I think got back about 25 cents on the dollar.

And then Brown started a bank in that building that stands there now, you now where Al's office is. It was partitioned clear back, and they had about a 4-foot vault in the back corner of that where they kept people's money if they wanted to leave it there. And they run that bank, they called it the Harney County Bank. And two years after they built where the bank is now, that stone building. I don't know whether you ever saw that or not.

JAMES: Well, I've seen pictures.

FRANK: It was a nice building, and they called that the Harney County National. No, it was still the Harney County Bank for two or three years after, until the National got it, then Harney County National.

JAMES: Well tell me, when a cattle rancher put out money to buy, well to pay wages, and he had his costs on one side, and then he'd sell his cattle, and he'd have income coming in on the other, how did he keep everything straight? Or did he even worry about it?

FRANK: Well most of them could do that pretty well.

JAMES: Yeah. So they just kept a list of what they spent?

FRANK: If they had any money on hand, cash, why they'd generally, lots of them kept their money in Brown's store in the vault. They could get in any time they wanted. I never heard of anybody being beat out of any by Browns there. Of course, you've heard about the scandal of Browns ...

JAMES: Yeah, that was something.

FRANK: Yeah. There was two of the Brown boys; there was Len and Ben. Ben was the oldest, when they came here. That was the only reason old man Brown came was to get a place for the boys to get in business.

JAMES: I see.

FRANK: And the oldest boy, they both worked in the store, and the oldest boy --- and at the end of the year why they divided up the surplus of the money they had. And Ben he liked to take a trip, see things. And he'd spend all his money and come back and have to go to work, he'd be broke.

JAMES: Where would he go?

FRANK: Oh, he'd go to a lot of different places. The last trip he ever made, he ended up in Denver, Colorado, and he went broke. And he wrote to his dad and wanted money to come home, and he wouldn't send it to him. So he wrote his mother in San Francisco, she never would come out here, she always stayed in San Francisco; she sent him the money to come home. And he told my dad after that, he said, "I made up my mind that if every I got back I was going to stay." He sowed his wild oats.

And then he hurt his dad, after that he married a Gentile girl. And that hurt the old man.

JAMES: Oh, I see.

FRANK: But he finally got over it, she was a good girl. They had three children, two boys and a girl. And after the store business went, he had the store the last of any of them.

Len run the bank, and Ben run the store, but it begin to losing business and they finally sold out and Ben left here. One of his boys was in some kind of a business up there in Washington some place, and he went up there and I think that they're all gone now.

Of course Len's boy, why Alfred, he's still alive, big fat devil, you know him, I guess.

JAMES: I haven't met him yet. This is only my second week, so there is a lot of things I don't know yet.

FRANK: He's got a real estate office ... don't know whether he sells anything or not ...

JAMES: Well he, maybe sells to the tourists. Do you know why your parents came up to this part of the country?

FRANK: Well my dad was a widower when he came up here. He had two sons himself, two boys. He was just like a wild goose, when he crossed the plains in 1852, he landed where Los Angeles is now. There was no town there at that time.

JAMES: Yeah, that's right.

FRANK: And he worked there a year for a big rancher, and then he came a little further north, and a little further north. He couldn't read nor write when he came, but he got up to some town, I forgot where it was, and there was a night school there where he learned to read and write. He just naturally wanted to be on the move. And he went up a little further north and he wound up in Surprise Valley, California, and he had a good ranch. I don't know why he didn't keep it. He sold that when he came up here.

JAMES: What do you think he was looking for in moving around?

FRANK: He was a man that could see lots of work to be done on a ranch, but he didn't like to do it himself. He liked to hire it done. Something greener over the hill, I think, more than anything else. He got up here. And of course, he was 54 years old when him and my mother was married. My mother was born in Germany. Her and her first husband

came out here in '84 too, but her husband passed away of what you would call acute appendicitis now, he only lived about 2 hours after he took sick. And she moved into Burns and took in washing, and that's where my dad met her, and they were married in '85, I think it was. And I was born in '87.

JAMES: How do you think the land affects people out here, the big open spaces, and the ranch way of life?

FRANK: Well this is a healthy country to live in. It affected almost everybody the same way, if you live here a few years and leave, in a few years you'll be back.

JAMES: Why do they come back?

FRANK: They like the country.

JAMES: It's pretty special.

FRANK: It's a healthy place to live. I only know one fellow who worked down there at the mill, I worked with him and I helped him build this house across the street over here, and he was an electrician. And he came out here in 1930, I think, and worked with Edward Hines Lumber Company one year. And he wanted to get away from here so bad, he said, he didn't know what to do. He goes down to Eugene and buys a store out on the River Road there, a little place out there. Anyway he run that and he went broke, and he was just as crazy to get back here, as he was to leave. He stayed right here till his health was broke so bad that he had to leave. He died down at the town of Rogue River above Grants Pass.

No, it seems like that after people live here a few years, they want to get away, they don't like it. They'll cuss it, and they get away for a year or two and they want to get back. Just lots of people. Not all of them, but just a lot of people. Of course, I've lived here all my life ...

JAMES: Yeah, it's in your blood. Is there anything in the past that you think is dying out, that you would like to see preserved, in the heritage?

FRANK: Well this has been a great cattle country in its early days, but it's no good now since the BLM has come in and they are just ruining everything. They tell you what to do, when to turn out, how many cattle you can run, and everything. And they claim they're building up the grass and all this, but they're not a doing anything. They are sowing the seed, all right, and getting grass started, but this here grass that they're sowing, after it's eat off one time in the spring of the year, why it's done for. It's not a real cattle kind. You've pretty near got to own enough land to run your stock on. Even the Forest Service is closing down on people, won't let them have enough range to run on, good herd to make a living on.

JAMES: So it sounds like the government is making it tougher?

FRANK: Yes, the BLM is a bureaucracy and the government, of course, always has been. It's worse than it ever has been before in years past.

JAMES: What were some of the good things that they did, that weren't too bad, in years past?

FRANK: Well if it hadn't been for the Forest Service, the lumber barons would have cleaned the country out. ... That's a good thing. The BLM was started for a good purpose, to get rid of the transient stockman. This country was infested by just lots of Bascos that run sheep, winter down in Ontario, didn't own an acre of land ... the Steens Mountain country in the summer and crowd out the local people. Not only here, but every place else. That was the reason why the Taylor Grazing Act was passed. But now they've made a bureaucracy out of it.

JAMES: That happens.

FRANK: Even the local man can't stop it, there's barely enough to live on. Over around in Ontario in that country, they've cut them fellow's worse than they have over here. They cut those fellows down to about 25% of what they had before in one year, compared to

what ... ten years ago.

JAMES: That's an awful big chunk.

FRANK: Well, it just ruined them, that's all.

JAMES: I wonder if you can remember any stories that are pretty funny?

FRANK: Well, none that I dare tell.

JAMES: Well, that's always a problem. Well I mean things like, let's see, somebody was telling me about getting stuck in the mud, and some of the incidents that they had. One dentist, George Hibbard's father was telling me, let's see George Hibbard was telling me that his father was out making rounds as a dentist and at one ranch he was coming into after he had been paid on, along the line. This one ranch he was coming into, he came by a draw and there were two fellows going to rob him, take the money that he had been paid, you know, on the way in. And they only had one gun, it accidentally went off, and they spoiled the robbery. He went in there, and it happened that they had some teeth they had to have fixed. And he later found out that the people he fixed up were trying to rob him once.

FRANK: I've never heard that.

JAMES: Well you know, now those stories are really the kind that

FRANK: ... Well, the store there where Welcome is, the drug store, a fellow by the name of Horton, he run a store up where Cyc's Service Station is now, there was four lots in there. There was a drug store and a hardware store in that same place. They both moved out of there. And a fellow run a blacksmith shop, name of Wilson. And they were great cigar smokers, and they got rheumatism they called it in them days, didn't call it arthritis. And there was hot springs down below The Narrows about 9 miles, used to be a bath house down there, and they decided to go down there and take some baths. Well,

they bought a box of fine cigars to take along with them, and they went down there, and they took about two baths and they couldn't smoke any more, just ... all out of them. They brought the cigars back. They never did smoke any more either.

JAMES: Is that right? That water just stopped it right there, right?

FRANK: Just ... that poison out of their system.

JAMES: Well I heard those hot baths are pretty ---

FRANK: My youngest half-brother, he was 17 years younger than I am, he was a great fellow to chew tobacco, he drank a lot of whiskey too. That took all of his money. He was up to the ranch one time and he got sick, and my dad was a great fellow to give sweat baths, steam baths, and he put him in that rig, in a sweat bath, and he said that the sweat from Dick was just the color of amber, the damn nicotine, the poison. But it didn't break him of smoking. ...

JAMES: Clarence Bennett told me that he used to sell Raleigh medicine and spices door-to-door, ranch-to-ranch.

FRANK: You mean Cecil.

JAMES: Cecil Bennett. What did I say? Yeah, Cecil Bennett.

FRANK: I don't remember that, but if he said he did, he did. If I'd knowed about it I forgot. He went into quite a lot of things. He was Supervisor of the Malheur Forest too, at one time. He's been into quite a lot of business. The Chevrolet Garage, he built all those building, the Chevrolet Garage over here. The building across the street where the Motel is ... the One Stop Service Station, the one where the firemen's building is now, he owned that. He had quite a lot of property.

JAMES: Do you remember any cowboys, that either stayed here a long time, or they moved right on, to which funny things happened, or exciting things, an adventure?

FRANK: Well I knew lots of cowboys that lived here and stayed here all their lives, but as

far as anything that happened to them, why I don't think I can recall anything.

JAMES: Did you ever go on drives?

FRANK: No, I never did. They didn't make us ride. I got to be pretty near grown, why the cattle drives were pretty near a thing of the past. They didn't have to drive so far; they only had to drive to Huntington or Ontario. In the early days, they had to drive clear to Omaha, Nebraska; their drives clear to there.

JAMES: They drove from Oregon to Omaha?

FRANK: Yeah. And they even drove sheep that far, they claim.

JAMES: Isn't that something. That's hard to imagine.

FRANK: Make the sheep swim all those rivers, and the cattle, too, that they had to cross.

JAMES: That must have been something, that must have been really something.

FRANK: It would take a long time to make one of them drives.

JAMES: Yeah. I wonder if it was worth it to them?

FRANK: Well it was the only way they could get rid of their sheep. Couldn't sell the sheep until they were two years old. And it was the same with the steers; you couldn't sell a yearling steer or calf at any price, unless somebody wanted some local. Had to be two and three years old, four years old, before you could sell a steer. And then get \$35 for it.

JAMES: Yeah, things have changed.

FRANK: The PLS Company, of course, they had their headquarters in San Francisco, and everything that they had went right straight south to ... clear to San Francisco. And Bill Hanley, he built a good part of the cattle in this country, and he made drives, mostly on to Huntington, before the railroad got into Ontario. The railroad come from Portland, went east instead of coming this other way.

And there were a few other buyers that would buy cattle and make that drive. But

it wasn't too good, because if they didn't have a place to sell these cattle when they got there, had to depend on the market, why then they didn't make anything.

JAMES: Do you remember any really hard times in the early days?

FRANK: No, we didn't have hard times in this country, we didn't have no bank here, and the hard times didn't affect the people in here.

JAMES: What about hard winters?

FRANK: Well, we had some awful hard winters. In 1888 and '89 was an awful hard winter, and people who didn't have hay enough, lost lots of cattle. But people who had hay why they come through all right. And then in 1917, 1918 and 1919, that winter, after the Swift Company bought the P Ranch, they didn't prepare for winter, they come from Texas ---

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FRANK: --- a lot of those people, and they lost 14,000 head of cattle. Pretty near cleaned the Swift Company out in this country. Of course they owned the packing plant in Chicago. But after that, they sold that ranch to one of the Swift boys and he run it until he sold out to the government. That is, he rented it out to different people.

JAMES: One last question, can you remember any superstitions?

FRANK: Oh, everybody has some superstitions. My mother was superstitious. Like lots of things, you didn't, you took a shovel through the house, there would be a death in the family. Lots of things, that's the main one I remember most. And I never told it to any of my kids, I didn't want them to believe in that.

JAMES: What about the cowboys?

FRANK: ... lived over in the Drewsey country, about a Mexican that used to work with some of those ... run cattle. He said he could stand aside of the chute, and as the cattle

would come through he'd throw a loop and get both front feet and a leg every time until ...

He said he never seen him miss a shot when he was branding. ...

JAMES: I heard that the Mexicans were really good ropers.

FRANK: Yes, they were good ropers and good cattlemen. I knew a fellow by the name of Virgil Maupin that was an awful good rider. I never saw him get thrown. I saw him ride quite a few horses. ... In them days when you got on a horse to ride, you didn't ride 8 seconds; you stayed on there as long as you could, either he throwed you or you rode him.

JAMES: There used to be rodeos on the ranches?

FRANK: No, not when I was a kid. Around Burns they'd have a race meet once a year, a few people around Burns raised race horses, and then there would be some come in. We had a mile track down in the lower part of Burns there, and then they moved it onto the east side of Burns. ...

Then a fellow by the name of Harry Smith started the County Fair about 1900, I think. ... there was a time there they couldn't make anything and disbanded it. And three fellows from Burns took a notion to start one again, and its been a picking up a little every year.

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