

HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #151 - Side A - (No Tape)

Subject: J. O. "Jinks" Harris

Place:

Date: January 14, 1972

Interviewer: James Baker

J. O. "JINKS" HARRIS: Well, what I wanted to tell you about this operation, business was, we sat down here at the Board a couple of years ago and compared prices, and you take back when I was just beginning to be grown up, along in there around 1920, around there some place, you could sell a yearling or a weaner calf for say \$35. Well \$30 of that was profit to us. We ran on what is now the Bird Refuge. We had a squatter's right in there, and we cut our hay in there, and there was no cost, and there was not taxes. There was no taxes whatever on the land, and the hay, and we paid taxes on 150 head of cattle. And we had about 500, and we turned them out on the range for about 6 to 8 months a year, and that was all free. So, the only expense we actually had was the salt and putting up our hay --- and that was done through a family operation, maybe hire two men. And our hay put in the stack cost us around --- oh, \$3.50 a ton, and we figured a ton to a calf a year. And now you sell a \$100 weaner, and \$95 is cost. That was the percentage I was saying, I was really surprised to hear the cost that you had. We didn't have any.

Not everybody was so ... A lot of people around The Narrows ... where all that lake was settled on, and squatted on there, was public domain actually ... That was declared a Refuge in 1908 under the Teddy Roosevelt administration, and we still had our squatter's right in there, and we still cut all the hay we needed in there, and we even cut ... Yeah! Had to ... a little bit ... but it didn't cost us a stinking thing to cut. ... just your time. ... cost

us around \$60; of course, that was a lot of money ... that happened quite often.

But there is such a ... difference in my lifetime. Sounds like everything's gone a complete change. Well it is a complete change --- there is no resemblance in running an outfit now and running an outfit then. For instance, now black leg is a big thing. You've got to vaccinate once or twice a year for that, and that costs you money --- and shipping and ... oh god, I can't think of all the things you've got wrong with cattle that we never heard of in those days. You turned the cattle on the desert --- where they were high and dry, we never had any black leg for years, and years, and years --- hardly lost a calf --- nobody knew what was wrong with them. And then finally ... named it black leg. ... so we started vaccinating for it --- and that cost us ten cents a head. Now it costs ... Now it costs more than that, of course.

JAMES BAKER: This is an interview on January 14th with Jinks Harris, and I think we'll start with Colorado. At what age did you come to this area?

JINKS HARRIS: Well I was born in January in Colorado, in Montrose, Colorado, and we arrived in August of the same year at The Narrows. I was 8 months old.

JAMES: Do you know why your parents came up here?

JINKS: I have no idea. I've never been able to figure that out.

JAMES: Were they doing the same thing in Colorado that they did here?

JINKS: Well, yes. Well primarily, probably one of the main reasons why, my mother's step-dad who had raised her was already here, and was settled here, and this was a booming country in those days, in 1908. And for that reason, I suppose that that's why they pulled stakes in Colorado on the Cimarron River. My dad had the highest ranch on the Cimarron River when we left there, and he was a stockman, of course. And that's all he done there, and that's primarily what he did after he come here.

Shortly after he came here he bought a saloon, and he ran it two or three years in

The Narrows, and sold it out, and then bought more cattle. When we came here we brought with us, of course, some good saddle horses and some ranching equipment that we had in that country. And they ... divided car and put horses in one end and harnesses in the other, and brought it through that way. And when we arrived in Ontario --- of course I'm telling you this from what I've been told, naturally by my family. What I've heard them discuss.

They bought a small wagon, a hack affair, and unloaded the horses, and there was one team in the bunch, and the rest were saddle horses, and they drove through, of course, with the team. There was no cars in those days. They drove through to The Narrows. And my older brothers rode horses, and drove the loose stock. And brought them to The Narrows, naturally, along with the outfit, and that's where my step-grandfather lived. And they put in with him until they could find a location to move into.

And then shortly after that Dad bought a saloon and dance hall, and kind of a living-dwelling attachment. The whole shebang in The Narrows. And then sold the dance hall part and kept the saloon; and then bought a house from some people by the name of Harper. And we lived in that for several years in The Narrows.

And I went to school there along with, of course, my brothers. I didn't have any sisters old enough to go to school at that time. Later on --- there was quite a family of us once. And later on, one of the girls did start to school, I think, at The Narrows. I'm not sure whether she did or not, but I think she did.

JAMES: Was the cattle business pretty much the same in Colorado as it was here?

JINKS: No, no it was much more advanced. Much more advanced. And when we came to this country, my dad, I can't help but feel was quite disappointed in what he found. Because he'd ran for a company, a big outfit, and he ran a small outfit of his own, and the grade of stock there was much more advanced than it was here. In fact, when I was about

6 years old, I went with him over to Hereford, Oregon, and he purchased 5 bulls there for \$500 and that's the first registered bulls ever brought into that lake country, to begin to build up a bunch of cattle. And as a result of his efforts --- why I can remember quite well when weaners were \$30 a head --- he'd get \$31, \$32, \$32.50 for his --- because of the better stock.

These were real common cattle when we came here, and, of course, they've been upgraded every year since. All of the cattle have. Of course, there's some of the finest cattle in the state out here in this county, and incidentally, right around on The Narrows. Marcus Haines down there has got some of the finest cattle that you can see, and he started in the business with a herd from our --- with a small bunch from our herd, Marcus did, actually.

JAMES: You were talking about the schools a while ago, and I'd like to know how many people were in that school.

JINKS: The highest that I know of --- 31.

JAMES: And there was probably a handful of teachers?

JINKS: Just one. Oh yeah, there was a handful, but there was just one. Hard to handle, that one. But that wasn't too many for a teacher in those days. They worked at it. That was the peak, it run around 22. But it did peak out one year that I know of --- of 31 pupils there for a short time.

JAMES: Do you remember the kinds of things that they taught?

JINKS: Oh, sure. They taught reading, and writing, and arithmetic, and geography, and history, some science.

JAMES: Did most of the people who were classmates of yours in that school stay in the area?

JINKS: They were all in the area, within probably as close in as we were. Let me change

that a bit --- for a few years we went to school --- I lived right in The Narrows. Of course, I was within walking distance of the schoolhouse. As a fact of the matter, I could probably throw a rock from our house to the schoolhouse. Maybe not, but almost.

And then we moved out onto a homestead and sometimes we stayed there and sometimes we didn't. I don't know what made the difference except the amount of feed that was available different years for our stock. But most of them lived in, and adjacent to, The Narrows. When I say adjacent to --- they drove for 10 miles with a buggy, or rode a horse.

JAMES: And after they got out of school, did most of the kids stay in the area?

JINKS: Oh, yes, they just stayed around and worked various places. Some of them drifted out and, of course, some of them went on to high school. Some of my older brothers went to high school here in Burns, and then drifted out. I have one brother now that's in Texas. He just moved there since Christmas from Arkansas, and he went through school in The Narrows, and he went to high school in Burns, and then he drifted out of the country and went on and got an engineer's degree, and he belongs to the American Association of Engineers now, and has made a fortune at it, really. He's done real well in his line of work. But he was no rancher.

My other brother that just died recently, in fact Christmas day, the older one, he stayed around and he just worked around the P Ranch and various places. Got down into Winnemucca, Nevada country, worked around those ranches for a while and drifted back. Got married and settled down, and built up quite a bunch of cattle, and sold out. And he was worth quite a bit of money. And he made some bad loans and he lost some of it. And he and his wife had some difficulty and that cost him some more money. And he got on down to Portland, and somehow he went to work for the State Liquor Control Commission, and worked for them until he retired. And when he retired he was pretty well

off. Again, he'd built up till he was well off.

Another brother older than I, of course, we seen him in death, and one sister older than I.

JAMES: Did she stay in the area?

JINKS: No, she died before we left Colorado.

JAMES: Do you remember anything memorable about that trip from Colorado?

JINKS: Eight months old, no, I don't.

JAMES: What about working at The Narrows, are there any memorable people --- worth remembering?

JINKS: Oh, many, many, many, maybe too numerous to mention, really. Where do we start?

JAMES: Who did you work for?

JINKS: Well at The Narrows I worked for my dad until I was grown, until I was 16 years old, 18 years old. Worked at home. Because we had 300-500 head of cattle we ran on the desert, and we cut hay for them in the summertime. It was always a family operation, never hired over one or two men. So I worked there as a regular ranch hand, you might say, from the time I was 6 years old until I was 18. You know, oh, I had odd jobs in between at various places, but ... basically I worked at home during that time. But I did; of course, this is kind of hard to describe in a few words.

JAMES: How would be the best way to get some of these recollections?

JINKS: Well I can recall just about everything, but to keep it in sequence is a little bit difficult. The first time I went away from home to work, I went with the ... outfit, and I think I was 17 years old. And I worked with them for --- just during the summers. In the wintertime I'd come back and feed cattle at home. I was out of school by that time, out of grade school. And I stayed out for a couple of years, and then I went back to high school

in Burns. I worked for them through the summertime.

One summer I worked with a buckaroo outfit, and then come back and worked at home during the winter-feeding cattle, helping my dad. Of course, somebody had to feed them. He either had to hire me or somebody else, and it was a little better for me, because I didn't cost too much wages. And then after that, the next job I had was herding sheep on Steens Mountain.

(Note: From here on the tape is so fast and so dim, I can't get it. Mae D. - typist.)

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