

HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #154 - Side B

Subject: Ray Voegtly

Place: Burns, Oregon

Date:

Interviewer: James Baker

JAMES BAKER: This is Mr. Ray Voegtly.

RAY VOEGTLY: Well I knew Tom Stevens when I was a boy, and Tom Stevens was the original Mutt of the cartoon Mutt and Jeff. Now I understood that Jeff's real name was "Shorty" Bailey. And Tom and Bailey, or Tom Stevens and this Bailey, Mutt and Jeff, and the cartoonist himself, Bud Fisher, were interested in horses and horse racing. And Mutt was a rather superstitious fellow, and I remember one time he and a group of men were sitting around the stove at my father's hardware store, and they got to talking about the age of different people. And Tom Stevens mentioned, he says, "I expect to live to be a hundred years old." And he says, "I feel good at my age," and he was in his 70's as I recall, at that time. And he says, "When I get to be 90, I'll probably have to use a cane, and maybe when I get to be 95 I might be on a crutch," but he says, "I don't see any reason why I shouldn't live to be a hundred." And as a matter of fact I don't see any reason why he shouldn't have either, except that he had an automobile accident which took him down hill.

And so I played him a game of pool one time when I was a boy in our playroom, in the back of our home, and I beat him. And he associated a good deal with a fellow by the name of Craven, who was nicknamed "Whiskers" around this country. And Mr. Craven, incidentally, was the man that posed for the statue, the pioneer, down on the campus of

the University of Oregon. And this statue originally was modeled out here at the Bell-A Ranch. And Craven dressed just as you see him in the statue, with buckskin coat and long hair and whiskers. And of course the nickname of "Whiskers" was very appropriate. And he'd walk down the street here with this rifle strapped to his back. And he was a comparatively young man, and during a Fourth of July celebration one time, why they had some foot races, and they had this track star, Foster, from the University of Oregon running. And as I recall why "Whiskers" was entered in the race, and he beat Foster, the track star, in the foot race.

And later on though, Tom Stevens who was Mutt, and "Whiskers" were driving a Model-T Ford over to Canyon City, and something happened, and anyway they drove off the grade and injured Tom Stevens. He 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 says, "Yes, you're that damn kid that beat me a game of pool over there in Burns." And I said, "Yeah, 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. So that's about all I know about Tom Stevens, and that's all I know about Craven, who was known as "Whiskers". I had a ---

JAMES: This guy Stevens is apparently, 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.

RAY: Oh, is that so?

JAMES: It might be that he really did live 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, which I believe was every week or two, why there would be two or three speakers that would give short talks. And we would also have critique. And oh this was probably thirty years ago. And we would have a critique every evening who would criticize these speeches, and we would take our turns. And I'll never forget one evening why the speakers didn't show up, or they weren't prepared or something, and they called on me for a little story, or for a speech. And I when I stood up, I said, "I don't have any speech prepared either," but I said, "I'll tell you a little story about my boyhood days." And so I related this story, and I remember the editor of the paper, Douglas Mularkey 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, his name was Theo Sprague. And Theo Sprague had a horse by the name of Mucho. And Mucho was, in Theo's eyes, was just a regular god, he just worshiped that horse. There was no horse like Mucho. And he would get out to this horse and run races at Fourth of July, and at Fair time, and he'd win these races and made him a little spending money.

Then his mother had a little bakery located down here 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. And then he also managed the town herd. In those days why a lot of people had a milk cow here in town, and he'd gather up these horses, or these cows in the morning and take them out to pasture west of town here, and then 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 Mucho.

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 he said, 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 a smoking away, and the smoke was a curling, and curling around there as good as a good Havana cigar. And I thought we were getting along pretty good. Well anyway why Theo leaned over, and he says, "Say, let's go over there and get some of Mucho's, it's a lot better." So even --- Mucho was such a good horse that even his manure was better than any other horse. So that's the story of Mucho.

My father used to tell about, when he came to this country, why he and an attorney by the name of John Biggs roomed together down there in his store. They were both single men. And so John Biggs was quite a character, and a pretty nice fellow, everybody liked and appreciated John Biggs. And I've heard him tell the story several times about my father. He, John Biggs had quite a laugh, and he'd go ha, ha, ha. He says, "One night a wood rat came," he says, "and carried one of Charlie's socks off, ha, ha, ha." He says, "The next night he brought it back, ha, ha, ha."

So there were lots of incidents of course in the old times of the country. And you can't think of them all on the spur of the moment. But there is a lot of interesting things.

When I was a boy, why my father helped sponsor an oil well being drilled down here at Dog Mountain. And during my high school days I used to have to make a trip in our old Kolait (sp.?).

JAMES: Kolait?

RAY: Yeah, Kolait, yes.

JAMES: That's a name of a car?

RAY: That's a name of a car. And I'd haul their supplies down there about once a week. And they drilled that well, and they got down to a distance of about 4200 feet. And

sometime before a bit had been lost in the well. And so they spent an awful lot of time, I've forgotten just how long, a year or two, trying to get that bit out. Finally they got it out, and when they got it out, then a couple fellows filed a labor lien on the place and it closed it up, and there was no further development on it.

But yes, 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 fool hardy, we had a Michigan automobile. I don't know that you have ever heard of a Michigan, but we had two of them. We bought one in 1911, and bought another in 1912. But this one, the first one we had was in 1911, and that's the one we made this trip to Bend in. And we started off the middle of February, and it took us two days to get to Bend. And so the first day we got as far as the Halfway House, Hampton, and I remember we got stuck there, just 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. We had an awful lot of tire trouble. We had the side curtains up too, and the hot bricks and hot water bottles to keep warm. And so the next morning we fixed the tires, or my brother did, I had just gotten over a case, or was getting over a case of scarlet fever. Well I was sick quite seriously for three months.

And so we went on then towards Bend, and at that time there were two trucks that would make periodical trips from here to Bend, probably once every couple of weeks, or something like that. 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." He'd follow the tracks of these trucks. And we had these acetylene lights on the front of the car, no electricity those days, and electric lights on automobiles. And finally we got into Bend at 11 o'clock the second night, on four flat tires.

So then the next day we took the train to Portland, and we went to Portland. And I remember my father bought four, or bought a set of Pennsylvania Vacuum Cup tires,

which we put on the car when we got back, and made our return trip home.

But if anything had ever happened to us, in the line of a serious breakdown, I don't know what, I don't know what we would have done, because there was no traffic those days at all. And even many years later, why 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, and had quite a time. So I've often thought it was a rather hazardous trip to make.

And this Kolait of mine, that we had, 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 at our home, matter of fact, was located, well our corrals and barns and all that were located in the block that is now occupied by the bowling alley down here. And our home was just a block that is due east of that where Woyak's now live. And that's where I was raised as a boy. And my father built that house in 1907. And we had an old house sitting there before that, one of them was logs, and well there was three units moved together, and the other was just a box house. At any rate, well 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 in the space where the Home Drug and the variety store is located at the present time, that was where his old store was.

And then there was, that building burnt down in 1912, and my father was in Portland at the time. But he had leased a portion of it, on the south side of that building, the old building, to a man by the name of Athey (sp?). And Athey was going to start a new newspaper, 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. Well 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 his first issue. And 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 man, a clerk of ours that worked there, ran through that alley and picked up a five gallon can of creosote and kerosene or something, and apparently it had been used to spread over some, several bunches of shingles that were there, and the place was undoubtedly set afire. And mainly I would say to, whoever set it afire was gunning after this Harney County Tribune. So the man never did get to publish his paper, he left here after that.

JAMES: Was your father's building destroyed in the fire that burned down the ... livery stable?

RAY: No, no.

JAMES: It was a different fire?

RAY: No, no, that was a different fire. That was down the street two blocks.

JAMES: Okay.

RAY: Matter of fact, that livery stable was located in the block where the Arrowhead Hotel is now. See there was that livery stable, and a saloon down there, Tom Jenkins' saloon, and the French Hotel, and --- well I guess that was about the size of it. So that all burned, that was quite a fire. And as I recall there were a couple of horses burned up in that. And of course the hotel and everything burned up. But 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, and paints, and oils. And then he was the first John Deere representative in this county. And in this fire there was quite a little bit of farm machinery burnt up there too, some mowing machines, and rakes and so forth, that he had stored in the back part of the lot there. And --- but ... hardware, and so forth, that's what he was selling. Household wares, crockery, you know.

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