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HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #16 Side A

Subject: Zola Shields, Jessie Williams & Peck Amort

Place: Riley, Oregon

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Interviewer: Pauline Braymen

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The Shields and the Williams were some of the very earliest settlers in Harney County, and the Riley area. There were several families that had a dairy on Dairy Creek, including the Williams and Shields. More information about both these families can be found in the old histories on file at the library.

(The following is a summary of the conversations on the tape.)

PECK AMORT: I came to Silver Creek in 1903. I came with old Henry Chapin. I had a horse and buggy, and old Henry Chapin was a horseback. He had a place on Mule Creek. There was a sawmill on top of Buck Mountain in them days. Chapin had a homestead up there. We came in November to Silver Creek, so it wasn't too warm. I worked for the Dibbles on the ranch there, old Dell Dibble. I took up a homestead in 1910.

PAULINE BRAYMEN: Why did you come to Harney County?

PECK: To get away from the Willamette Valley, I was wet. I was 17 years old when I came. In the winter in the Willamette Valley I had the rheumatism. My legs would swell up till I couldn't walk. Chapin said he had that, and over here in Eastern Oregon he hadn't had it. I came over and I haven't had it since either. Oh, that's too much wet for a duck down there.

PAULINE: Well, let's talk about Chickahominy.

JESSIE WILLIAMS: That was put in with horses and scrapers.

JESSIE AND PECK: That was an Indian name I was told.

ZOLA SHIELDS: Here's a picture of the crew and the woman there working.

CONSENSUS OF CONVERSATION: Chickahominy Dam was first put in by ranchers in the Silver Creek area, before 1903. They used horses and scrapers, and the dam was on a much smaller scale than it is now. Later bulldozers and carryalls were used to enlarge the dam and increase the size of the lake.

A slip scraper worked on the principal of a dustpan with two handles on it, and a bale across it for the horses. The dirt would fall on it and you'd pull it back, and when you got to where you wanted the dirt you just flipped it up and dumped it.

JESSIE: The horse got so that when they started pulling they'd just lead into it until you filled it, and then away they'd go. It was hard work. It was hard on your back --- really back breaking. A fresno scraper, they used four horses on those.

PAULINE: Where is Big Stick?

PECK: When you go through to Lakeview, on the Lakeview road, you see the house called the old Peterson place --- well, Big Stick Canyon is about three or four miles east of that.

JESSIE: The Williams built a dam there.

PECK: Yeah, southeast. We used to gather wild horses there years ago.

JESSIE: Yes, Bill Brown had lots of horses.

PECK: Well, Bill Brown had a crew gathering up horses for his own. And I was a kid doing nothing here, and they wanted somebody to go and cook for them. So, the first thing he said was, "You don't want just one pair of overalls, you'd better get three." So, we went to old N. Brown and Sons in Burns and I got three pair of Levis, for six bits a pair, with a sheepskin tag. And now the tag isn't even sheepskin anymore, and they are \$7 a pair. Well, then the buckaroos got \$40 a month, and that was big money.

JESSIE: Big money, I'd say.

PECK: Well, the cook worked, and was up so many more hours than the buckaroos. Well Bill Brown said, "I never paid a cook \$40 in my life." I said, "Well that's fine and dandy, Bill, I can go home." Charlie Williams said, "That's all right. Just go on with your work, Bill Brown won't be back again and your \$40 will go on just the same." I wasn't going to work for no \$20 out there in that desert, with a lot of old pots and pans and Dutch ovens.

PAULINE: Bill Brown didn't want to pay you \$40 to cook?

PECK: There was a crew of ten or fifteen men, and then there were the neighbors that came in from towards Lakeview, and towards Prineville. When you moved camp in the morning why you didn't know how many men you'd have to cook for that evening and feed. Whether you'd have your own crew, or a dozen or two dozen more, you never knew. Some of these people would come to pick up their stock that was gathered with Brown's.

We'd butcher a beef and put the wagon tongue way up high and hang it up there --- we never lost any meat, and it was always fresh and dry. With a crew of ten or fifteen men, it didn't take too long to use up a beef. And we had the biggest Old Dutch ovens. I had a five gallon pickle keg --- and then into the biscuit baking, only for breakfast.

Those big Dutch ovens had two pair of tongs to handle them with. We'd put them down in a hole and build a fire in there to keep that lid hot. Well the men didn't get in till 2 o'clock in the afternoon. Sourdough, you never cut that, you break it.

And I always saved seamless sacks. Charlie Williams said, "What did you bring all them seamless sacks for?" And I said, "Do you think I'm going to use a pair of overalls to wash the dishes with?" Seamless sacks are heavy cotton sacks used for seed. They are seamless clear around with just a seam across the bottom. They are much heavier than a flour sack. They used to make aprons out of them and cover up bread with them. Bill Brown had them by the dozens over there. Oh, they'll tear, but they are a pretty rugged sack.

JESSIE: When I was a youngster, our underwear was all made out of them.

PECK: All the buckaroos had a seamless sack to keep their clothes in.

JESSIE: You never lost anything out of a seamless sack.

PECK: They're used to store fine seed in nowadays. Alfalfa seed, and like that.

JESSIE: They used them kind of like a duffle bag for their clothes.

PECK: Remember when we had the rabid coyotes, when I was working for the Williams there? We used to sleep out in the open air, but when we got the rabid coyotes, we didn't sleep so good. By golly, we were scared to death. This was when I was working for the Williams outfit down there. I was getting ready to go to work along in the afternoon when somebody said, "There's a coyote here, it must be a rabid one. Look out."

PECK: There was an old wagon bed laying there along side of the fence, bottom side up. I pulled a narrow board out of that --- they are made out of hard fir --- the coyote ran behind the barn and I followed. He'd just got into another corral under the gates and he spied me. He came back. So, I maneuvered along side the fence, and when he came out, I gave him a swing or two right back of the neck and finished him right there. But he would have jumped right in your face.

JESSIE: You know, Harry had a little dog called Rover when we was married, and his dog got into a fight with a coyote and Harry shot his dog instead of the coyote. But he'd have had to kill him anyway. They had to kill their sheep dogs and everything else. We lost four.

PECK: Well, my sister and her man was out here, he was working with the sheep. The dogs and a coyote got to fighting and he ran out there, and the coyote jumped up and bit him right across the forehead. He said, "Oh that's not going to bother." But I forget how many days it was, but he did get sick. They had to tie him like a wild animal, but he came out of it.

JESSIE: This time the coyotes were so bad we had four cows. We always had about that many that we milked, you know. And one morning I heard those cows running in the corral like a dog was bothering them. I thought nothing of it because I knew there wasn't any dog out there. But later,

they found the coyote. Well, in a few days those cows commenced to go rabid.

PECK: Harry went to milk, and he put out some hay. He would go from one cow to the other and do his milking, and one cow jumped up and bellered and had the slobbers. And every one of the rest of the cows got sick. They got the slobbers off the hay, and they all died.

JESSIE: And they have such strength when they are rabid. You know we had that big old pole at the end of the barn that we used to put the hay in, and those cows tore the pole down. I remember Jim, when one of them was on the fight, was sitting on the fence with a gun, and one of those cows saw him and here she come. He said, "That was one time I made sure I hit my target."

PECK: Jim Sutherland from the Foster Ranch was picking up cattle. There was a cow down in the creek about four feet deep. A bunch of willows, where it was washed out, hung way out over the edge of the creek. The cow was backed up in there. I said to Jim, "The cow, the way she's bawling, that cows rabid." So we went down in there and she took after old Jim. So, then she comes back into that same position and starts to bawling. I don't see how an animal could get its breath to bawl as long as it did.

JESSIE: It must be terrible pain for them.

PECK: It must be.

ZOLA: I always thought, and maybe Peck can straighten me out, that Chickahominy, when it was built with horses and scrapers, was on the property of J. C. Garrett. That was Virgil's grandfather.

PECK: Yes, on this end.

CONSENSUS OF CONVERSATION: Chickahominy Dam was first built in 1888 or 1890, somewhere along in there.

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ZOLA: At one time there was a post office up here named Evergreen. And that precedes any Suntex or Riley.

JESSIE: I have a postcard, a leather postcard that was sent to my dad. And this fellow always

called him Bill Smithers, and it was mailed to Bill Smithers and it's postmarked Kennedy. That was down close to the Double O. My mother was postmistress there.

PECK: Where was Evergreen?

ZOLA: It was up pretty well near the old W. B. Johnson place.

JESSIE: Oh yes, that was on the stage road over Buck Mountain.

CONSENSUS OF CONVERSATION: Frank Dibble established a sawmill in the Silver Creek area. The granddaddy of all our sawmills, Zola says, on Nichol Creek.

PECK: Remember the old sheep man that used to come and go deer hunting with Bob Williams so much? And Mother Williams, she didn't like to see him come because he had an old hound he called Ruckus, and he tied him to his white horse's tail all the time. He brought him along to chase the deer with, so if he crippled one, the dog would get it.

JESSIE: What was, the Dell Dibble place was late our place.

PAULINE: You said you worked for Bill Brown. What kind of a man was he, Peck?

PECK: Well, he certainly was a nice man to get along with. Everything was ... with him. Well, he was kind of a fidgety man, you know, just as though he was on needles, you know. He didn't drink coffee. In those days if a man didn't drink whiskey, some-thing was wrong with him. He wouldn't drink no whiskey, he was deathly against liquor.

JESSIE: Isn't he the one they said would carry raisins and strychnine in the same pocket?

PECK: In the same pocket. He had a brother that came out here with him to Wagontire, and the brother didn't exactly like it so Bill Brown bought him out. He had a homestead over there. And that old fellow that had a row with him was going to get Bill out of there, see. That's the fellow Bill Brown killed, his name was Overstreet.

CONSENSUS OF CONVERSATION: Supplies were freighted from The Dalles to the Silver Creek area. But before they freighted from The Dalles, they freighted from Shaniko. It is just a ghost town now, but once it was the wool capitol of the country. Bill Brown shipped all his sheep

and cattle at Shaniko.

PECK: This was way before there was any city of Bend. There was a great big old hay shed there in 1903, and one clapboard house. Right there where one of those restaurants is now. When you look out the back window of that hotel, why it's in the bend of the river.

JESSIE: My dad told me he camped right in the bend of the river when he came. (The Deschutes where Bend is now.)

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