

HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #16 Side B

Subject: Darrell Howser

Place: Burns, Oregon

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Interviewer: Pauline Braymen

The A. W. (Andrew) Howsers came to Harney County in 1876 from Marysville and Yuba City, California. Darrell's father, Thomas, was 6 years old at the time. Darrell's mother, Rose Loggan, came to Harney County with her family in 1884. When asked how the Howser family happened to settle in Harney County Darrell replied:

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

DARRELL HOWSER: Just the pioneer lust, I guess. They had heard about Harney Valley, and they came by wagon train from Marysville. They settled up about where the old gristmill, the old flourmill, was on the Silvies River, right in that vicinity there someplace. Down here in the valley everything was flooded with water, and so they moved up to Harney and settled on Coffeepot Creek. It's where the old log house, the old log cabin, and the other house there on the other side of it is. This is where my granddad settled. And my dad took the other 160 acres on the other side of it.

They moved that old house in there from Fort Harney, and it is still standing there. When the Fort was closed down they had those vacant houses, and it was moved from there. That house is really older than the log house. My granddad and old man Potter, from Potter Swamp, are the ones that built the log house. My grandfather's name was Andrew, A. W. Howser.

My mother's folks came from Grande Ronde in 1884. They were up around Union or Baker, or up around there for awhile. Anyhow, they settled out by Buchanan when they first came here. Her dad was J. H. Loggan. And later they settled at Harney and he had a store and run the post office for years.

They came across the plains in a covered wagon. There were six or eight kids that came across with them, all just stair steps right on up. They had six girls and three boys, that's nine, and they came across in a covered wagon from Kansas. That's where they originally came from.

I was born in Harney and went to school in Harney. I was born in 1901. I don't remember first grade and all that, but I remember after I got up in the grades, there was two rooms in the schoolhouse there, and there were 70 kids going to school there. My sister and I had to walk a mile to school, from the ranch to school, and then back again in the evening.

Of course Harney was a fairly good town then. There were probably two or three hundred people living there, and in the vicinity around there. There was at least 70 kids, so you know there were a few people around.

The main store in Harney was run by Mr. and Mrs. Seth Bower, and Fred Haines. There were two stores there, and two or three saloons, two livery stables, two hotels. One was the Russell Hotel, and the other was the Green Front Hotel. There was the Stroud Saloon and Jim Buckland had a saloon there. That was when Stroud was killed there.

PAULINE BRAYMEN: How did that happen?

DARRELL: Well it just happened. There was Burbank Clay; he had a blacksmith shop and Frank Buckland and McFeeney. McFeeney turned state's evidence and went to Idaho. I don't know what the other's got, about a year I guess. There was just bad blood

between them, and between the saloons and that stuff. And so I imagine that's what ... he was shot right out in front of the post office. He had walked into the post office and just died right there. Ralph Bacon was running the post office at that time. I was a pretty young kid then, but I can remember when it happened and all. I remember I went up the next day and saw the autopsy, just a kid, you know.

Our mail in those days, old Kellogg had the mail route between Burns and Ontario, and it was a daily mail stage. It finally went to three times a week, but when we first came here the mail came every day. He had about ninety head of stage horses, and after he quit the stage contract he brought the ninety head of horses out to the ranch and my dad had to take the shoes off of all of them. If you don't think that was a job --- those old spoiled stage horses. They sold them. They just brought them to my dad to get the horse's shoes off of them. They were spoiled stage horses. You practically had to hog-tie every one of them to get the shoes off of them, especially the hind feet.

Then they had old stagecoaches. And of course in the winter that was kind of a rough deal. They had the big seat up in front of the others. Well, they put foot warmers in the back, but up in front they had a canvas that came right across your lap, and then they put a lantern underneath to keep your feet warm. That was the heat they had. They had those foot warmers in there and they had bricks that would stay warm for four or five hours. But in front they had the canvas that came right up over the lap and fastened on both sides, and then they put the lantern right down inside there to keep their feet warm.

Some years they used sleighs some of the time, but most of the time they used wheels. Of course, going across Mud Flat and all those places on the other side of Buchanan, the soil was a kind of adobe stuff that would just clog up on the wheels. So they'd use runners sometimes, but most of the time they used wheels. Most of the time it was these old stagecoaches.

The first car I remember seeing was Lon Richardson's, it was a Ford. I think it was about 1906, and the next one was Charlie Loggan's 1910 Buick. Of course I lived in Harney, so I didn't get to see some of these around Burns. The first ride I went with my Uncle Charlie. What did I think of it? I enjoyed it. Well, we'd never ridden in one before.

Although I never did ride in it, Dory Poujade out at Cow Creek had a car, and it was one of the first cars I ever saw. That was one with the big buggy wheels. It didn't have rubber tires, it just looked like a buggy and you set up in there and drove with a stick. And they used to come by, Dory and his wife, and Mary and Bea, and all of them going to Burns. They'd come by going 10 or 15 miles an hour. It was one of those big old chain drives.

When we lived at Ryegrass, every 160 acres had a homestead on it. I went to school with Bessie Duhaime and Picklezimmers, and Missy Sweek (Alice Bennett) was the schoolteacher. She rode a horse to school too. So I'd come by every morning and pick her up, and then we'd go by and pick up the rest of them. We were the furthest away. We all went to school together a horseback. We lived five miles from the Ryegrass school, south and east of where Wallace Shepard lives now. My dad just homesteaded the place.

We cleared 10 or 15 acres, but we just proved up on it and that was all. My mother and sister and I lived there all one winter, and my dad was up to Harney feeding cattle and taking care of the ranch. Then during the winter my sister went to Harney and went to school, and just me and my mother stayed there, and I rode to school at Ryegrass. Right in behind where Wayne Howes lives now, just off to the east in there was what we called Ryegrass. Before it was ever fenced or anything, people used to go out there and put up hay. This was before there was any ditches or anything, and the water would just come down and flood all that. Now they've got ditches used for irrigation and

everything, and it doesn't do that anymore. Even our homestead used to be flooded over in the spring. It was just rye grass and fine meadow grass. People would go down there and put up a haystack, and then in the wintertime they'd feed it. That was in the early days. This was before it was fenced or anything, and the water would flood out there, and there was no sagebrush or anything. If you figured you needed twenty or thirty ton of hay, you'd just go out and put that much up. And somebody else would come in and put up another stack.

I went my freshman and sophomore years of high school in Burns, and the last two years in Ontario. I graduated from Ontario in 1919.

My first experience of going to Ontario on a trip was with the freighters. I think we had about five wagons, two ten-horse teams, two six-horse teams, and a four and a two-horse team. Old Red Campbell was one of them, and my dad was one of them, and Joe Clark, and Roy and Pete Demaris, they had ten-horse teams. That was Bert Bower's wagons.

Of course my dad went to get his supplies to bring in for the winter. They'd go out in the fall and bring in enough to last them all winter, until spring, when they could go again.

I was just a young kid when I made this first trip. Lenny Vickers had a team too. I was just a young kid and I was a privileged character. It took five days to go to Ontario. We got into Ontario and we always traded at Fraziers. They got their stuff from Jones and Company out of Portland. Well we got into Ontario and the freight wasn't there, hadn't come in. So with all those horses we couldn't stay there. We hooked up the next morning and went out to Skull Springs. My uncle lived there, and he owned that place then. They were shearing sheep. It took about three days to get out there, and then all the wagons were loaded up with wool. They brought that back to Ontario and that paid all their

expenses, the hauling of that wool. When we got back the groceries and things were there, and it took about a day to load up and then we started home.

They had their regular camping spots every night. We were gone six weeks. It took pretty near a week to go to Ontario; we were there one day. And then a week to Skull Springs, a day or so to load up, and a week back to Ontario, and by the time we got home we'd been gone six weeks.

The only way I remember going to Ontario by car was going out by Crane and in by, what they call Hole In The Ground, and then come in at Juntura. We didn't go to Drewsey and across. The old wagon road went out there and over Bendire. You can go out there now, and in through the rocks, and you can see where the wagon wheels cut right through the rocks. And they went out through the Agency and right up through Bendire, and to Kate Fopian's up on Cottonwood Creek, and from there they went into Vale and on into Ontario.

How do you pronounce Egan? It is Egan as in man. It isn't "egun". They didn't start calling it that until after Father Egan came here. And it wasn't named after Father Egan (pronounced e-gun), there was a man named Egan. The first settlement or post office here was Egan, then Stenger and McGowan moved it into what they called Burns.

When I went to high school the building was located where Lincoln Junior High is now, there, and right across the street where the Episcopal Church is now. That was the science building over there. McDade was the principal, and he was from Maine. He was a big fellow and had played football. When he first came out here, he had a school out at Harney for a couple of years. I graduated from eighth grade from McDade. And then he taught at the high school here in Burns for a while. Then he went to Portland and worked with the Oregonian until he died. He worked with the kids. Anyhow, he was on the staff of the Oregonian for years and years. He was a real nice guy.

PAULINE: When did people start moving away from Harney? Was there still quite a community there in 1920?

DARRELL: Oh, there was still quite a few houses left there in 1920, but not an awful lot of people. When it did start to go, it went pretty fast. Fred Haines was about the last one that was there.

I started working for the post office in 1919. I went to take the civil service exam in April when I was still going to high school. They were advertising for a clerk in the Ontario Post Office. So I went down and there were seven of us that took the civil service exam. And I went to work the first day of June 1919. I worked there in the Ontario Post Office for about a year, and then I got the wandering lust so I went to California for a while. And then in about 1921 I came back to the ranch and went in with my father, and was there until 1923. Then Cecilia and I were married on December 2, 1923, and I've been in Burns ever since.

When we were first married we lived on the ranch at Harney for a while, and then on a ranch down on the river here. We were feeding cattle then. My dad had 150 or 160 head of steers down there. Well along about March, Leonard Locher was postmaster and he had leg trouble or something, and he had to be gone for several months. So they came down and wanted to know if I'd consider coming down and working two or three months in the post office. And Jay Gould was assistant postmaster, so of course he was the boss. Well my dad said, "You might just as well go on and do that, there is nothing to do on the ranch now." It was March, and the feeding was over. So we moved to town and rented a little house over here from Dutch Carpenter, and I went to work about the first of April. I was there ever since. I was appointed postmaster in 1944, and was postmaster until 1962.

When we first started there was two of us employed at the post office that was

Poleman Skeins and me. Then Poleman got the postmaster job. We went to work at 6 o'clock in the morning, and opened up at eight. Then mail was coming in from Crane. Jim Hackney had the mail contract and they wouldn't get in to Burns--- oh in the summertime, it was 9 o'clock at night. So we'd bring the mail in and store it, and go down at 6 o'clock the next morning to put it out. Of course Eugenia and Cecilia would come down and help us, especially at Christmas and times like that. It finally got to the place where we couldn't handle it, so then we had several work in there.

Don Filteau worked in there for a while, and Eldon Sitz worked in there for a while. Then Willis Skeins took the exam and he got on. Daryl Eggleston worked for a while. When we moved out of there (somewhere near the Bert Richardson Saloon) we moved into the Welcome Hotel. That was where Jim McCulloch's is (the Smyth Grocery building) and that burned down, and we moved across the street into where the Elks Club is now. Only it was a stone building then that belonged to Fred Haines. Then from there we moved into where the liquor store is now (across from City Hall) and we stayed there until the new building was finished. We moved into the Federal Building on the first of November in 1940.

PAULINE: I've heard the heating unit came from the old hotel out at Hines?

DARRELL: No, there isn't anything to that at all. The contractor put the heating unit in. We had coal there for years, and they finally did away with the coal and put in oil. And that's what they have now.

When I first went into the post office it was a third class post office. There's four classes, and fourth class is the lowest you can get. That's these little post offices like out at French-glen, and Crane, and Lawen and those. We were a third class when I first went in, that meant we weren't taking in more than \$8,000 a year. Soon it went over the \$8,000 mark, why then we went up to another class. And then after several years we were a first



class post office. You have to get up over \$40,000 to be a first class.

The thing is the change that has taken place in the past 70 years. Of course every place has done the same, but when you look back to 1900, and what you had then, you know --- I think we have lived in the era that has seen the greatest changes. Of course there will still be changes, but we've seen so much.

We've seen automobiles and everything like that that's come in since then. There's been a tremendous change in our way of life in the past 70 years. In those days you traveled in the horse and buggy, or you went on foot or horseback. Then pretty soon the automobile came along, and then your social life is so much different than it was in those days.

I've heard my folks tell that there were settlements in this part of Harney Valley, and there were settlements down around Steens Mountain, and down in that area. Well once a year in the spring families from down there would come up here and they'd spend a week. They'd come up in the horse and buggy, and they'd come and spend a week, and turn their horses out, and visit and celebrate and have a good time. And then in the fall, these would do the same thing; all the families from here would go down there. Of course this is before my time. In the fall, after they'd get their work done they'd all get together, and in the spring when the work was done they'd all get together and they'd spend the whole week. Dad said they'd play cards, they'd play horseshoes, they'd ride bucking horses, and just have a good time. And the women would quilt and knit, or just sit around and gossip.

Idle City? Idle City when I first knew it was a mining town up there. Old Sam Roach, he had a ... Marie Dodson's father used to be up at Idle City. Pardee, that was her dad. That was quite a little mining place then. They had those tunnels up in there and they had that ore out there. But how much ore, I don't know. I've been back in the

tunnel there and seen the streaks of gold, and of course they'd follow that out. You see that's an outcropping of that that leads down into Canyon City country. And of course that's where the gold was, there on Canyon Creek. I wouldn't be surprised if there wasn't gold up there yet that nobody has found. But they never made any big strike at Idle City.

Then of course on the old Bald Mountain, there was a mine there on this side. Oh, you could get gold there all right, but it never was a paying proposition. They used to mine gold up on Myrtle Park, but that might be in Grant County. Anyhow, they did some mining up there.

I suppose they started mining at Idle City around 1900, and from then on. Because I can remember I was a pretty big kid when they were still mining, seven to ten years old.

Indians? Old Scarface Charlie, he used to be at Harney, and old Tatsy. They were, at one time, on our place up there. I think it was before my folks came there. But it was one of their campsites on the hill there. And they had great big places, big as this room that they had dug out and filled with rocks. Then they would build a fire there. Then they'd go down in the field and dig this camas, and take the camas up there and grind it up and cook it in those rocks there. And they used it for flour. They used those rocks to make camas flour.

Sadie Capps was a little girl just about that high, and old Johnny Capps was her dad, and they'd come up there to camp every fall, and sometimes in the spring. Sadie and Beecher Capps were just little kids.

Zella Young could tell you more about Harney than about anybody. She was raised right there. Of course there were the Davises, Marshalls, the Bunyards, Goodlows, Hankins, quite a little settlement at one time.

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