

HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #160 - Side A

Subject: Lucille Meeks

Place: Eugene, Oregon

Date: May 9, 1991

Interviewer: Edward Gray

EDWARD GRAY: This is Ed Gray on 5-9-1991 with Lucille Meeks, a very nice lady, old-timer of Hampton, Oregon area. You can say anything you want, Lucille.

LUCILLE MEEKS: You ask me a question and I'll answer it.

EDWARD: Okay. I need to know, your father Burt Meeks.

LUCILLE: My father-in-law.

EDWARD: Father-in-law.

LUCILLE: Was Burt M. Meeks.

EDWARD: And do you know when he was born?

LUCILLE: In 1879.

EDWARD: In Oregon?

LUCILLE: No, in South Dakota.

EDWARD: Okay. And he married who?

LUCILLE: Emma Richard.

EDWARD: And, see 1879, did they marry before they went to Hampton, Oregon area?

LUCILLE: Oh yeah, they were married in 1900 in South Dakota.

EDWARD: What brought them, do you know, did Herb ever say what brought them from South Dakota to end up around Hampton, Oregon?

LUCILLE: Well when Burt was younger, he came out to the Oregon Territory with his

father. They came across what is now the Yellowstone Park area. There was one place they came across that they had to take the wagon apart, and hang it down over the edge to let somebody else go by before they could go on their way. And that was the first time he was to this area, I mean to the West.

EDWARD: West coast.

LUCILLE: Yeah. But when they moved out here, I'm not exactly sure what year it was. But they moved to Willamina, Oregon. And from there they went --- he had asthma so bad and they went to Eastern Oregon to ---

EDWARD: There must have been a lot of people with TB or asthma conditions, because that was, a lot went to New Mexico, Arizona, Eastern Oregon. So how many children did Burt and --- what was his wife's name?

LUCILLE: Emma.

EDWARD: Emma. How many children did they have, Burt and Emma?

LUCILLE: They had Gladys, and Herb.

EDWARD: Is that a Gladys Workman?

LUCILLE: Yes. Gladys Meeks Workman.

EDWARD: Oh, okay, now it's making sense.

LUCILLE: Herb Meeks, John M. Meeks, who was called Bill, and Willa Meeks Solvick (sp.?) is still living in Portland.

EDWARD: That's where Gladys ---

LUCILLE: Willa and Mary ---

EDWARD: Mary Meeks.

LUCILLE: Mary Meeks Lithcoe (sp.?) from Prineville.

EDWARD: Right, okay. I come up with some crazy idea that Mary was your sister. And now I can understand what's going on here. I wasn't sure who ---

LUCILLE: I'm one of the Brown girls.

EDWARD: Oh no, really?

LUCILLE: Uh huh.

EDWARD: Which Brown?

LUCILLE: Well we were from the Culver/Madras area.

EDWARD: Oh, okay. There was an S. S. Brown in Prineville.

LUCILLE: Yeah, that was my grandfather.

EDWARD: I'll try to keep this as straight as I can.

LUCILLE: Samuel S. Brown.

EDWARD: Yeah. Yeah, he was quite a hero.

LUCILLE: Yes.

EDWARD: So, the Meeks went to the Hampton area, you said in 1910.

LUCILLE: I think so, yeah.

EDWARD: Before I forget, when was Herb born?

LUCILLE: 1908.

EDWARD: Get some proportion here.

LUCILLE: 1908. He was born at Lebanon.

EDWARD: In Lebanon. And you're not sure why they took poor little Herb over there in the desert country.

LUCILLE: Well Herb and Gladys were the only two that were born yet.

EDWARD: Only two.

LUCILLE: And they went across the old Santiam Trail in a covered wagon.

EDWARD: And the other children, were they born on the homestead, or did they take them into town when Emma was getting due?

LUCILLE: Well actually, let's see, I think Bill was born in town.

EDWARD: Probably Bend.

LUCILLE: Gosh, there is the ice cream wagon, must be.

EDWARD: I don't think they have --- I didn't know they had one.

LUCILLE: I didn't either. I can hear something.

EDWARD: Oh yeah, it is. Oh for heavens sakes, I didn't know that.

LUCILLE: We used to have them in Portland.

EDWARD: Oh yeah, I remember that. And the milk bottles and all that stuff. That's all right. But Burt and Emma, they got there in 1910, how long did they stay in the Hampton area, do you know?

LUCILLE: Until 1955, before they sold out.

EDWARD: Really.

LUCILLE: Uh huh.

EDWARD: They started out with a, probably 160 acres, I suppose. Well that was desert land, they might have had 320.

LUCILLE: I really don't know.

EDWARD: And how much acreage did they end up with by the time they left, do you have any idea.

LUCILLE: Jeepers, no.

EDWARD: Thousands?

LUCILLE: Herb and I alone had 4040 deeded acres, not counting the BLM rangeland.

EDWARD: Did, what did, what, how did Burt survive, what did he live on, rabbits?

LUCILLE: Cattle.

EDWARD: Cattle. Was he a cattleman, a sheep man as well?

LUCILLE: No.

EDWARD: Just cattle.

LUCILLE: Just cattle.

EDWARD: Did he ever mention to you anything about Bill Brown?

LUCILLE: Oh yeah, he was through there all the time. In fact Bill Brown gave Glad bumper lambs.

EDWARD: Gave who?

LUCILLE: Gladys.

EDWARD: Gladys, Glad, okay, that's what I thought. And bumper lambs are those lambs that the mothers won't ---

LUCILLE: Or maybe they've got two. I don't know why they call them that. The mother didn't accept them, or one thing, I don't know.

EDWARD: Right, yeah.

LUCILLE: So they bum off of everything they can.

EDWARD: Yeah, right. And you generally end up feeding them your-self with cows milk, or whatever you can find.

LUCILLE: Yeah.

EDWARD: So Gladys, I mean Bill just did that, just gave Gladys---

LUCILLE: Yeah, yeah. Just the same as he gave Desil that horse that was a jug head, they had to sell.

EDWARD: What did Burt, in your memories; ever say about Bill Brown, what kind of a man he was? Was he a helpful man?

LUCILLE: I'm going to read this to you. This is what Willa wrote, the one that is still living. She said that: "The article you sent covered a lot of what I know about Bill Brown. As far as his general appearance he was rather tall and muscular build, probably from hard work. A few times I saw him he wore high top leather laced boots, Levis, old looking clothes, and a wide brim felt hat. He either had a beard or had forgotten to shave for

several months. I don't ever remember of hearing of him as a dangerous man. I would call him a loner. He didn't seem to want to mix too much with people, but would help in time of need, not expecting anything in return. Was never classed as a killer, but wouldn't be trod on either. In other words, you stay off my property and leave my sheep alone, and I will leave you alone."

EDWARD: That's very good.

LUCILLE: Yeah.

EDWARD: Exactly right. He was a big man; he was about six two.

LUCILLE: This is what I thought he was. Now I think Desil said in this one that she didn't remember him being very tall.

EDWARD: Yeah, he was a pretty good sized, about six two and a hundred eighty pounds.

LUCILLE: Yeah. But they stole him blind, I mean in the store, people would come in and get stuff and write it, maybe they'd write it down and maybe they wouldn't. But they'd just take it. And he didn't do anything about it.

EDWARD: Were most people, were most of those homesteaders, I know Burt and Emma lived amongst homesteaders. Did they steal from one another, or did they just steal from poor old Bill?

LUCILLE: No, they eked out a living with their chickens and their cow, and their whatever. They probably had a garden in the summer time.

EDWARD: But they'd go over to Bill's store and just rip him off.

LUCILLE: Well that was, not in those days. Because that, Bill Brown's store was a long ways away.

EDWARD: Yeah, yeah, from Hampton.

LUCILLE: Yeah.

EDWARD: Yeah, it was a heck of a long ways. Did, now who is Willa, Willa Meeks?

LUCILLE: Willa Meeks Solvick.

EDWARD: Solvick, and that letter is from Willa?

LUCILLE: Yes.

EDWARD: And she was, do you know when she was born, Lucille? After 1910, it must have been?

LUCILLE: Yeah.

EDWARD: Okay. She must have stayed there --- 1910, 1924 --- where in the world did they go to school?

LUCILLE: Well the girls, the girls don't stay around like the boys do. She was born in 1913.

EDWARD: Bill left that country about 1931, '32.

LUCILLE: That's why I don't remember him.

EDWARD: Yeah.

LUCILLE: Go out there, or didn't go out there to live until ---

EDWARD: Where in the world did you meet Herb?

LUCILLE: Oh, he had a cousin that lived at Culver.

EDWARD: You just happened to be walking down the road or ---

LUCILLE: I went out for, I went out on the desert with them, and we went to Burns to a dance. Just 75 miles!

EDWARD: Yeah. And here is Herb?

LUCILLE: Yeah, the whole family.

EDWARD: Oh yeah, you mean Burt and the whole family is ---

LUCILLE: Oh yeah.

EDWARD: --- over to Burns staying over night and dancing?

LUCILLE: Oh no, no. It was, the two boys and two girls that they brought out, and the cousin and his wife.

EDWARD: So that was like 1932 or something?

LUCILLE: Probably.

EDWARD: You married Herb Meeks in '33.

LUCILLE: '33.

EDWARD: Okay. Did Herb ever work for Bill Brown?

LUCILLE: No.

EDWARD: Did any of the Meeks, of Burt and Emma's family work for Bill Brown?

LUCILLE: I don't think so. But they run the service station and the stage stop, because they run the stage stop in Brookings' house until the highway went through there. And that took --- the highway went in the opposite direction then, and they built a service station on the north side of the highway.

EDWARD: Do you recall when they put Highway 20 in, as we know it now? Was it 1936?

LUCILLE: Oh gosh, if I was home, I've got a little address book there I've got all kinds of little things written down like the Hampton Post Office closed on a certain day, and things like that.

EDWARD: 1938. They must have moved.

LUCILLE: It probably ---

EDWARD: I think it was. It was in there, in that time span. I'm sure it was before 1940.

LUCILLE: Yeah.

EDWARD: Before World War II started, I know that. Because I think the CCC boys worked on it.

LUCILLE: Huh uh.

EDWARD: No?



LUCILLE: No, I was out there then. No, they worked on the other roads off of the highway.

EDWARD: Oh, okay.

LUCILLE: But they didn't work on the ---

EDWARD: Have you ever ---

LUCILLE: No, I think Herb worked on the highway, for the highway department. I think that's, jeepers.

EDWARD: When you and Herb got married, where did you go? Where did you live? Where was your shelter?

LUCILLE: We lived at Hampton.

EDWARD: In what?

LUCILLE: In what, the big house we called it. Because it had a big living --- well when they put the highway through there all the highway crew stayed there and they fed them.

EDWARD: This big house, what's this big house, the Meeks' house, or the Brookings' house?

LUCILLE: No, it isn't the Brookings' house.

EDWARD: Just somebody's ---

LUCILLE: It's, well the highway crossed, where is a piece of paper?

EDWARD: (Looking at map.) This has got to be, that's got to be the old highway, it has to be, they just straightened it out.

LUCILLE: Well when it got to Hampton --- where in the heck is Hampton?

EDWARD: Hampton is down over in here.

WOMAN: Was it a dirt road before that?

LUCILLE: Oh yeah.

EDWARD: Oh yeah, yeah.

LUCILLE: And it was, after they built the highway ---

WOMAN: Ed ... road prior to, oh '33, or '34, he went with his cousin and he said they bought water along the way. And it was a dirt road ---

EDWARD: The Meeks, Burt and Emma ---

WOMAN: There was three bedrooms on each side. This was a big living room where they fed the men.

EDWARD: How far --- where the Hampton Store is now, was that where Burt and Emma Meeks built their first store, their first gas station?

LUCILLE: Well, this is the Brookings' house.

EDWARD: Okay, I know where that is.

LUCILLE: Okay, well then right across from it over here was a little, it was a lunch counter and service station.

EDWARD: And did Burt and Emma build that?

LUCILLE: But they lived here, they lived up here in the big house.

EDWARD: How far away was that big house? Less than a block?

LUCILLE: Yeah, maybe.

EDWARD: It's not there anymore?

LUCILLE: No, it burned down, everything burned down when we left.

EDWARD: Like it burns down now.

LUCILLE: Yeah.

EDWARD: Shoot.

LUCILLE: Where is this supposed to be?

EDWARD: ... Ah, now we're getting some place. Who were these Brookings? What ---

LUCILLE: Well they homesteaded out there.

EDWARD: They homesteaded, and they built this?

LUCILLE: Yeah, they built it and used it for a stage stop. Herb says he's seen --- they used to sleep upstairs and the snow in the wintertime would blow right through the cracks in the wall.

EDWARD: Oh yeah, I've heard that. Particularly with the shakes. Were there, did Herb ever mention a lot of homesteaders in that country, Lucille?

LUCILLE: Oh there were, there were a lot.

EDWARD: Just one right after another, huh? And why do you think Burt and Emma went out there? I mean ---

LUCILLE: Well they went out there on account of his health.

EDWARD: Well wouldn't you --- they were full of a lot of energy or something. I've been out there in that sagebrush and stuff, and I go, you've got to be kidding me.

LUCILLE: Oh, it's beautiful out there.

EDWARD: Yeah, it is for me. But most people, a lot of people are from Iowa and Kansas ---

LUCILLE: You know not too many years ago a man came, he had been a schoolteacher, and he was one of Herb's schoolteachers out there at Hampton. He came back from California and took up his homestead, he'd been paying taxes on it all this time, right out there not too far from the highway. And he was going to raise sugar beets. He drilled a well, and heck that water just went down in the sand, you know, it wouldn't run anyplace.

EDWARD: Yeah, like a sponge.

LUCILLE: So he didn't last long out there.

EDWARD: Yeah, because when I wrote the book on the whole history of northern Klamath County, I experienced that homestead feeling. And if you were away from the water a mile you were dead.

LUCILLE: Well I suppose ---

EDWARD: I mean you --- you know.

LUCILLE: I don't know how long they were there before they drilled a well.

EDWARD: I was wondering how they got their water. Water is hard to find.

LUCILLE: I'm not sure, you know when Brookings went out there, maybe they were already there.

EDWARD: 1913.

LUCILLE: They were after.

EDWARD: Somewhere in there.

LUCILLE: They were after then, about the same era.

EDWARD: Yeah, yeah.

LUCILLE: But it was probably like places are now, it was probably misrepresented to people who were looking for land. And they could get, my gosh 160 acres, what they couldn't do with that, you know.

EDWARD: Another thing, the railroad company really pushed that back east, and they got these poor people out here. And they go, Fort Rock is a good example, and they couldn't make it.

LUCILLE: Because the train was supposed to go down there.

EDWARD: Oh, yeah, B.S.

LUCILLE: I wonder how their water table is doing down there at Fort Rock?

EDWARD: It's bad; it's bad, bad, horrible. Eastern Oregon is just; Lake and Harney County are hurting really bad.

LUCILLE: Well so is Eastern Oregon.

EDWARD: Buck Creek in August was maybe that wide.

LUCILLE: Buck Creek? I didn't know that it ever run.

EDWARD: About that deep. Barely. A few more questions. Have you ever heard of

Hollie Swiggle?

LUCILLE: No.

EDWARD: And we didn't get this Barbed Wire Ranch figured out. You mentioned Charles Keith, who was related to Lilah Houston. No, yeah, yeah, right.

LUCILLE: Yeah, yeah. Mrs. Sherman and Mrs. Keith were both Houston's.

EDWARD: Yeah. There are so many Houston's I can't keep track of them.

LUCILLE: Wayne Houston.

EDWARD: Anything about this Barbed Wire Ranch, Lucille, that you recall, except Charles Keith? Was that out by your guys' place?

LUCILLE: Yeah, it was around on the north side of the butte, kind of on the north, northwest corner of the buttes.

EDWARD: When we're talking butte, are we talking miles, or are we just talking a molehill?

LUCILLE: This was 6,000 feet before they put the TV stuff out there, they kind of leveled the top off of it and made a microwave center up there and the TV thing. But Ed Lamb, where did I see his name?

EDWARD: Oh yeah, I saw that on there. I know it's on there.

LUCILLE: Here he goes. The Keith Ranch, or the Barbwire would have been around --- why don't they have it on here?

EDWARD: I'm not sure what year this is. If it's '35, I don't think it is.

LUCILLE: Because the Lamb place and the Barbwire were ---

EDWARD: One in the same?

LUCILLE: No.

EDWARD: No.

LUCILLE: They joined.

EDWARD: They joined. (Looking at map.) Look at that, says U.S. now. And that did happen a lot, it reverted back to BLM land. But it was in this area?

LUCILLE: This is --- gosh; this is north of the buttes too.

EDWARD: Dry Lake is up over, right over here.

LUCILLE: No it isn't.

EDWARD: No it isn't? It's right here.

LUCILLE: It's right around ---

EDWARD: Now which Bradley, Homer?

LUCILLE: Well they called him Hom.

EDWARD: Hom.

LUCILLE: Probably Homer.

EDWARD: Yeah.

LUCILLE: But he was a brother of this one that was shot.

EDWARD: Harold, Harold Bradley was shot.

LUCILLE: Yeah.

EDWARD: What, did you ever hear anything from anybody about what the situation was?

The why, the one Bradley was shot? What the reason was?

LUCILLE: It seems like I have, but boy ---

EDWARD: Did Burt or Emma ever say anything about ---

LUCILLE: Oh yeah, Herb knew all about it too.

EDWARD: Herb?

LUCILLE: My husband. But I, you know, I can't remember enough about it to ---

EDWARD: Yeah. But Herb did a tape with somebody, you said, right?

LUCILLE: Yes.

EDWARD: Was it Dick Cowan?

LUCILLE: No, I know Dick Cowan too.

EDWARD: You know Dick was killed not too long ago.

LUCILLE: Oh, really?

EDWARD: Yeah, in a car wreck.

LUCILLE: Oh.

EDWARD: Helen, I've talked to Helen a lot. If you, Lucille, if you can, when you remember who Herb was interviewed by, would you write me and tell me?

LUCILLE: It's just so, it's such a simple name.

EDWARD: It's not Wanda Clark?

LUCILLE: Dale.

EDWARD: Gail?

LUCILLE: No, Dale was his wife's name. And he was a ---

EDWARD: Okay, Desil, the letter that Ed Gray has from, is going to use from Desil is, was married to?

LUCILLE: Bill Meeks.

EDWARD: To Bill Meeks, okay.

LUCILLE: Or John M.

EDWARD: Meeks.

LUCILLE: Yeah.

EDWARD: Okay. And this is ---

LUCILLE: And she was, his wife was Dessel Ammons Meeks.

EDWARD: Okay, let's see, that's a good way to put it, because that's the only way I can keep this stuff straight. Dessel Ammons, A M M O N S, Meeks.

LUCILLE: And now it's Strawn on the end of that.

EDWARD: Oh, don't do that. (Laughter) Because the Ammons worked for Bill Brown.

LUCILLE: Yeah, Carl, he was a brother, he buckarooed.

EDWARD: And Ellis, Elias.

LUCILLE: Oh, Ellis is the name of the guy that did this.

EDWARD: Ammons.

LUCILLE: Did this.

EDWARD: What? Lucille, what is your address in Washington, Washington, yeah. Go ahead.

LUCILLE: 405 Killion Road, #12, in Yelm, Y E L M, Washington, 98597.

EDWARD: Killion, K I L L I O N ?

LUCILLE: Uh huh.

EDWARD: Where is Yelm? I've been in Yelm.

(END OF TAPE)

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