

HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #173 - Side A

Subject: Ethel Hotchkiss

Place: Hotchkiss Home - Burns, Oregon

Date: March 21, 1986

Interviewer: Pauline Braymen

PAULINE BRAYMEN: This is Pauline Braymen, and I'm interviewing Ethel Whiting Hotchkiss at her home in Burns, on March 21, 1986. Ethel, you are about ready to celebrate your ninetieth birthday. What day were you born?

ETHEL HOTCHKISS: Yes. The day of the week, you mean?

PAULINE: No, the day.

ETHEL: The 20th.

PAULINE: The 20th of March.

ETHEL: 1896.

PAULINE: 1896. And who were your mother and father?

ETHEL: Frank and Susan Whiting.

PAULINE: Were you born in Harney County?

ETHEL: Yes, I was. I'll tell you, I was born right out in that little cabin by where the Ted Graves' live now.

PAULINE: Okay, the cabin where you were born is located over along the hill --- back of -
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ETHEL: No, more down in the draw, just a little north and almost east of where Ted's and Mildred live.

PAULINE: Uh huh.

ETHEL: Mildred Graves lives now.

PAULINE: That's just sort of north of Burns?

ETHEL: Yes, right north of Burns.

PAULINE: Well, your parents were one of the very first people to come to Harney County.

ETHEL: My dad was among the very first, yes.

PAULINE: Do you remember what year that was?

ETHEL: No, I don't.

PAULINE: It was in about the 1878's sometime. I can check on that date.

ETHEL: You should have it somewhere.

PAULINE: Uh huh, I'm sure I do. Were you the oldest? Or ---

ETHEL: No, no, Olivia is the --- older than I am.

PAULINE: Olivia is the oldest.

ETHEL: She's eighteen months older than I am.

PAULINE: And then Delphine was younger?

ETHEL: Ellen was next.

PAULINE: Ellen was next.

ETHEL: Ellen Shook. And Delphine was five years younger than I was.

PAULINE: Were there any boys in your family?

ETHEL: We lost a baby; he was just an infant boy, when I was 17 years old.

PAULINE: Where did you go to school?

ETHEL: Poison Creek.

PAULINE: At Poison Creek.

ETHEL: Uh huh.

PAULINE: That was located about where Shepards ---

ETHEL: Right there.

PAULINE: Wes Shepard's live, on Highway 20. Did you walk to school?

ETHEL: Oh yes, many times.

PAULINE: In the snow?

ETHEL: Well, Alvon Baker would pick us up as they went to school when the roads were real bad. But we most always walked.

PAULINE: Uh huh. Do you remember your first teacher?

ETHEL: I think her name was Lena Harkey.

PAULINE: What do you remember about the Poison Creek School? What is your best memory about going to school at Poison Creek?

ETHEL: We had lots of good times. And we had lots of school programs, and we didn't have the entertainment that they have nowadays. And school programs were always well attended.

PAULINE: Memory work, memorization of poems, and readings, and songs. This was really important in your school life.

ETHEL: Oh, reading, and writing, and arithmetic and --- my dad thought that if we knew those three things, we about had it. But of course you couldn't get by with that today. So, I think really a good education is very important. I was glad Dick and Vera were able to give the girls all good college educations.

PAULINE: Do you remember Christmas' at school programs? At Christmas time?

ETHEL: Oh yes, we always had a Christmas program. Well all the folks would come, you know, the neighbors all around. They was always --- and often we would have potluck lunches after the program.

PAULINE: Uh huh. I think it was Ida Cross, was telling me that you had a gift exchange. There was always gifts on the tree.

ETHEL: Uh huh.

PAULINE: Do you remember ---

ETHEL: I don't remember that part of it so very well.

PAULINE: You don't remember that.

ETHEL: I know we always got something. Lots of candy and nuts. The parents would furnish plenty of candy and nuts for the kids. Oh, just a general good time, or what seemed like a good time to us in those days.

PAULINE: Then did you go to high school in Burns?

ETHEL: No, I didn't. I never got to go to high school.

PAULINE: You didn't get to go to high school. You didn't ever teach school then?

ETHEL: Oh, no.

PAULINE: That either. Did ---

ETHEL: I was on the ranch right up until I was married, and then I went on the ranch again.

PAULINE: You've been on the ranch pretty much all of your life then?

ETHEL: All of my life, I've been a ranch woman.

PAULINE: Well, how old were you when you were married?

ETHEL: I was 23.

PAULINE: Uh huh.

ETHEL: Donald was too.

PAULINE: And Don was 23 too. How did you happen to meet Don Hotchkiss?

ETHEL: Oh, my goodness, we grew up together.

PAULINE: Could you say you were childhood sweethearts?

ETHEL: No, no. We just always knew each other. No, I wouldn't say that, no.

PAULINE: But as young adults, you found a special attraction for one another, as young adults?

ETHEL: As we grew older, I think maybe.

PAULINE: Where were you married?

ETHEL: At home, at my parent's place.

PAULINE: Did you have a special long dress?

ETHEL: No, no, no. It was very much a home wedding, and I wore a suit that my Aunt Ella Luckey made.

PAULINE: Your Aunt Ella was the first white child born in Harney County, wasn't she? At Fort Harney?

ETHEL: Uh huh, at Fort Harney.

PAULINE: Did she have a dress shop then, or ---

ETHEL: Yes, she did. But she made my suit. And it was a pretty material, all wool material.

PAULINE: Did you have a long skirt?

ETHEL: Well, all the skirts were rather long at that time.

PAULINE: What color was it?

ETHEL: Gray.

PAULINE: Gray.

ETHEL: Kinda, real dark gray.

PAULINE: What was the date of your wedding?

ETHEL: November the 2nd. I don't ---

PAULINE: Well, you were 23 and you were born in 1880 --- I forgot what you said.

ETHEL: 1896.

PAULINE: 1896.

ETHEL: I guess, I guess ---

PAULINE: Twenty-three, so that would have been 1919, does that sound right?

ETHEL: Yes, that's right, that's right.

PAULINE: Did you go on a honeymoon?

ETHEL: Yes, went to Portland. Big honeymoon.

PAULINE: To Portland. What are some of the things you did in Portland?

ETHEL: Donald's sister was taking nurse's training down there and we visited with her. And oh, just took in the sights in Portland.

PAULINE: How long were you gone?

ETHEL: Oh, not over a week. Ranchers don't stay away too long.

PAULINE: Sounds like things haven't changed a bit, have they?

ETHEL: Not a bit.

PAULINE: Well, when you came back then, did you make your home here on this place?

ETHEL: No, we lived on the old home place three years. And then Donald and I built this place. We moved into this house in '22, in December 1922. And I've lived here ever since. Plan to spend the rest of my days here.

PAULINE: Then you have one son, Richard?

ETHEL: Yes, just one son, my only child.

PAULINE: And he's married to Vera, and they have the four girls?

ETHEL: Three, three girls.

PAULINE: Three girls. I'm getting ahead of myself here.

ETHEL: And Susan gave us a great-grandson. Donald Brent Doverspike.

PAULINE: Does she just have the one now?

ETHEL: Uh huh, that's all so far.

PAULINE: I thought that was the case, but I wanted to --- seems like time flies so, a person loses track.

ETHEL: That's right.

PAULINE: So --- Well, you've had 90 years of living. What is the most exciting, or most important thing that you think has happened in your life?

ETHEL: The great-grandson!

PAULINE: The great-grandson.

ETHEL: Oh, I don't know what the most important --- Well, I think maybe it was kind of important, Donald and I lived together for 20 --- or 62, or a little better than 62 years.

PAULINE: That's quite a record.

ETHEL: Uh huh.

PAULINE: Do you remember the first ride you had in a car?

ETHEL: Oh, yes.

PAULINE: Can you tell me about it?

ETHEL: I'm trying to think of the man's name. He was an old friend of my family, and he took us for a ride in a large car. I think a Stude --- no it wasn't a Studebaker, I think it was a Buick. Pauline, I wish you could have given me a little time on this. He had a daughter that was a very good friend of mine. I guess that's how I got to ride in the new car.

PAULINE: Did you think it was a good --- Did you have fun? Did you like it?

ETHEL: Oh, I was crazy about it. I drove the first car my dad--- I learned to drive, you know, so I could drive the first car that Dad bought.

PAULINE: Well, I ask everyone that question, and I've only had one person tell me they didn't like it. Everyone has liked it.

ETHEL: Is that right? Oh, yes.

PAULINE: One person I interviewed, it was a frightening experience, and they didn't like it at all. So, I just find it an interesting thing to get that reaction. You know, you have seen --- you have gone from the time when it was horse and buggy, and through the automobile, and you have seen man on the moon, and all the space flights. You've lived

through a lot of change.

ETHEL: Oh, I should say. When I --- with all this space thing the first time, I was in the hospital. I think every doctor and nurse in that hospital come in my room, because I had the television room. And I thought it was wonderful what they could do. It is, you know. And I hope they continue with this space business. Even though they lost so many lives just recently, I think there's --- it's exciting to me.

PAULINE: Well, it is the new frontier. Where did your father come from?

ETHEL: The Whitings came from down in California. Dad, or my mother crossed the plains in a wagon. But, Dad was married, or born down at Nevada City, California. And he had told us so many stories about Nevada City, and the country down there, that my granddaughter --- Nancy and Jay took me for a ride through Nevada City a year ago when I was down there with them. And I really enjoyed it, because so much of the things, the real nice old homes, and things that were built years ago, were still standing. And I just enjoyed seeing the country where my dad came from.

PAULINE: Uh huh. Do you know how he happened to decide to come to Harney County?

ETHEL: No, Nancy asked me that too, but I don't remember. And Aunt Ella Luckey has told me. I have the poorest memory of anybody in our family, I think. But the Whitings were always great horse lovers, and they were looking for better grass country for their horses. I can remember Aunt Ella telling me that much.

PAULINE: Uh huh.

ETHEL: Oh, they was just adventurous I think, and looking for a new country. I don't know why they settled in Harney County, but they did.

PAULINE: Uh huh. What are some of the things that you have done? You have done so many things as a --- at community service. I know you have been a member of

Sagebrush Club for a long, long time, and Rebekahs. But what are some of the other things?

ETHEL: American Legion Auxiliary, I was very active in that for a number of years, and I'm still a member. Still a Rebekah paid up my membership.

PAULINE: Is Sagebrush Club even meeting anymore? I haven't heard ---

ETHEL: No, we disbanded.

PAULINE: You disbanded the Sagebrush Club.

ETHEL: A year ago, two years ago now.

PAULINE: I hadn't heard anything for a long time.

ETHEL: No, we don't meet anymore at all. There was no young people to carry on it seemed like in the Club, and the old ones were getting too --- getting just past the place of entertaining. We had always entertained in our own homes.

PAULINE: Well, I know it was the case for me. That if you are working at some other things, you just don't have time anymore to do some of those things.

ETHEL: It was strictly a club for handwork, and things, and people don't do that much any more either, you know. Some do.

PAULINE: Were there any other organizations that you worked in? Well, you are active.

ETHEL: I belong to Cow Belles.

PAULINE: The Cow Belles. And you have been a member of the Pioneer Presbyterian Church.

ETHEL: Oh yes, for a long time.

PAULINE: Do you remember when you joined the church?

ETHEL: Oh yes, I --- oh no, I don't --- well I'd ought to be able to figure it out pretty good -- - I can't give you the figures on that. I worked in --- I did lots of church work. It's always been my church. We was married by a Presbyterian minister. But

--- and, it was the church that if Donald ever went to church, where he wanted to go.

PAULINE: Can you tell about the little white church that we used to meet in before this big stone building was built?

ETHEL: Well, it was very much like the pioneers built. The one, when you went in, you went right into the sanctuary. Our ladies met --- our ladies church was in the back room of the church. We had a little kitchen back there. And I always felt bad when they tore the little old church down. I wish it could have been preserved some way.

PAULINE: I agree. It was a really a --- a nice building.

ETHEL: It would be something to have to remember now. Although lots of people admire our church. When Susan was married, one of the men who came was very interested in our stone church. He thought it had --- it was beautiful on the outside. One thing that makes our church so pretty is that window.

PAULINE: Yes, it is, that of Jesus in the Garden. It is beautiful.

ETHEL: I sometimes wish now we didn't have so many stairs to climb. But that was the only way we could have a church. We met for a number of years in the basement of that church.

PAULINE: I remember. Until they --- while they worked on the upstairs.

ETHEL: And lots of the help was volunteer. Fred Black did all the --- volunteered all of his time to do the upstairs painting in that church. He wasn't the only one that ---

PAULINE: No.

ETHEL: --- volunteered time, but just any number of our older church members. We used to never hire anything done. If we was going to have a big dinner, the members got in and cleaned the place up their selves.

PAULINE: Uh huh.

ETHEL: Cooked the meals, and everything. Your mother will remember some of that too.

PAULINE: Yeah. I think your voice is starting to sound a little scratchy. I think we'd better stop for today. I'd like to get together with you again another day, and we could talk some more. But this will give me enough to write a little bit about your birthday party.

ETHEL: Maybe after Sunday.

PAULINE: Okay.

ETHEL: Sometime next week.

PAULINE: Okay.

ETHEL: Did you shut it off?

PAULINE: Yeah, I'm going to shut it off.

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