

HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #177 - Side A

Subject: Thad Geer

Place: Geer Ranch - Burns, Oregon

Date: May 2, 1986

Interviewer: Dorothea Purdy

DOROTHEA PURDY: This is Dorothea Purdy and I'm talking with Thad Geer at his home on May 2nd, 1986. Thad, can you tell me something about yourself? First I'll ask you your name.

THAD GEER: Well, Thad Geer.

DOROTHEA: You'll have to talk a little louder.

THAD: Okay.

DOROTHEA: And, can you tell me something about your father and the railroad. This is what I'm interested in, is the Trout Creek Camp, and the railroad crew. How did your father get started in this?

THAD: Well he was a barber here in Burns --- well I'm getting a little ahead of myself. First he started out in the hardware business, and then I think during the depression why he'd either went broke, or they dissolved partnerships or something, and he went into the barber business. And then moved away and came back and went to work on the railroad for the Edward Hines Lumber Company. It was called the Oregon Northwestern Railroad. And I'm sure he went to work as a, I think, a brakeman, and then worked his way up to conductor, and eventually became a superintendent of the railroad which he was for a good long while. He must have been promoted to superintendent in --- oh, I was probably about 9, I'm 50 now, so it must have been about forty years ago. In the '40's, early '40's,

I'm guessing.

And it was while he was superintendent that they had a --- of course they had a lot of trouble with the track. The track had gotten in pretty bad condition, was one of the reasons that he was promoted to superintendent, was they felt like he knew the line pretty well, and some of his background and so forth, and so they promoted him to superintendent.

And he --- they had a section crew, as I remember, I was pretty young, but as I remember the section crew was made up of a couple of Polocks, Nick Tonkavitch, I can remember that name. And some Bascos and some --- I don't think there was any Mexicans. But there might have been some Oriental people on it at that time. There was quite a mixed bunch of people, but they weren't, they didn't get along to well.

And they weren't, they seemed to --- well, they didn't use any treated ties. So they were --- they had a hard thing to fight. The ties would last three or four years. They were using fir ties, and pitchy ones if they could find them, but --- But Edward Hines Lumber Company didn't have any market for their fir, so as I understood it, they sold the fir to the Oregon Northwestern Railroad, which was a common carrier, and got a, quite a price for their fir. I think they paid something like \$3 a piece for those ties, way back in the '40's and '50's. And that was where they --- one way that they operated, and they ---

The railroad could show quite a loss because it was a common carrier, so it had a quite a profit. Then there's not a whole lot of shipment, but there was some out of Seneca, and then there was some, they hauled some livestock and different things like that. So they were making quite a profit, so they could afford to pay the price for the ties, where Hines Lumber Company wasn't getting anything for their fir. And that's the way ---

That's why they had such a large section crew for so many years. It was the fact that they didn't use any treated ties, bridge timbers or anything, nothing was treated. And

gee, those ties would last, I'm going to say four or five years at the most, and they were shot. So they were changing 50, 60, 70 thousand ties a year, and all by hand! All tamping and by hand. And the Japanese --- he had experience, I heard him say many times, were the hardest workers he had ever seen. And they would really produce.

And they stayed at camp, and they didn't --- they didn't want to come to town all the time. And they were real dependable people, so this is the direction he went. He went --- And they didn't seem to mix all that well. Seems like they would rather work. The Oriental people would rather work together than they would with other people, you know, and they --- They were sociable enough, but they just worked well together, and of course they knew other people either in the camps or in Japan, and just went to where it was practically all --- well it was all Japanese at one time.

DOROTHEA: Well now how did he get onto this? Was there --- Most of these Japanese came from out of the relocation centers. Now did he get contact --- make contact through them, or how did he get a hold of these people in the first place?

THAD: You know, I just --- I really couldn't be specific, only that I can remember --- He was in, Dad was a, had something to do with the military. He was a, I think it was an Oregon Guard, which eventually became the National Guard. But he was a first Lieutenant in the Oregon Guard. And it was through that association with the military that he was able, or knew about the ones that were available in this Portland camp, which Betty and Frank Eki came from. Now that was some --- tied in there some way. And I knew he had to --- I'm not going to say account for them, but --- Yeah, he had to account for them I guess, and keep a --- I don't want to say a record, but to keep a, to keep tabs of all of them that came out of those camps. What they were doing, and send reports in on them and different things, during the war. I know all these people that came over here were all good Americans. They were no problem, that we were in the war with Japan,

only that they were mostly born and raised in America. They were as much Americans as we are. They just happened to be Oriental, and that's how it came about.

Anyway, he liked --- they had a lot of respect for him, and we always associated with them, and I liked them real well. And they were good hard workers; they did him a good job. And in just a few short years they built that track up. They had --- I can remember, I forget what he said, but fifteen or eighteen or maybe twenty runs, they had oh, I don't know, about the same amount of de-rails every trip. They had de-rails. And just, was a few short years after the Japanese were on the section crew that they had a camp at Poison Creek, and then they had one at what they call Old Trout Creek, which was about two or three miles below where Trout Creek Section Camp would be. It's not there now, but the remains of it are there. I can't remember the old camp, but that's where it originated. But then they split the camp and some of them went to Poison Creek which was about, oh I'm going to say four or five miles above the ten mile crossing. Just as you break into the canyon on Poison Creek. And then they had the camp at Trout Creek.

DOROTHEA: Now did --- when Frank and Betty Eki first came to Burns, did they go to the, what you called the "old" camp? Or did they go plumb to Silvies when they first arrived?

THAD: I think --- I can remember going up there. I can remember Dad taking them up there, and I went with him. I was pretty young then. I'm going to say they went to "new" Trout Creek, but I might be wrong.

DOROTHEA: Well then, he had other Japanese people working for him before Betty and Frank came?

THAD: You know, I'm not sure. They were one, among the first, and I think there was, but I don't know. I couldn't tell you who it would have been. I knew them all, but I don't know how many were here when they came. I'm supposing that there was. I think there

was a few.

DOROTHEA: Well I visited with Susie Okita, and she said that Jim had come in 1945 to stay. But he had been up here earlier, so maybe he was one of the first ones that had come up.

THAD: Could have been.

DOROTHEA: And then he was called back to the relocation camp in Tule Lake, California before he got to come back.

THAD: I'll be darned. Huh.

DOROTHEA: So, I didn't know about the first camp. I heard about it later, but I didn't know anything about it then.

THAD: Yeah, they --- I don't think it was, it amounted to too much. The main camp was there on Trout Creek, you know, in Silvies Valley. I think the camp that I call Old Trout Creek was just a, oh maybe just a building or two, it didn't amount to too much. And I think they put the siding in at where Trout Creek is now, and moved the camp there, just before they had very many people on the crew anyway. Most of them were located at Trout Creek.

DOROTHEA: The old one is the one that Clint (Purdy) refers to as up on Buck Clemens place.

THAD: Yeah, well, no.

DOROTHEA: Or up by there.

THAD: No, now that's Poison Creek Camp.

DOROTHEA: Oh? That's Poison Creek.

THAD: The Old Trout Creek is, in fact I think it's on probably Mervin's (Purdy) property. Where your, Clinton's dad's property there, just above the old trestle, about a half a mile.

DOROTHEA: Oh.

THAD: That's what they call Old Trout Creek. And it was just a little siding right there. In fact, that siding is where they used to double head the engines, used to double head up the mountain. They'd take a short train of logs to Seneca, then the long train would stop at the summit. Stop at the --- before they got to the tunnel, and the other train, I think, would come back. Now wait a minute, how did it? Okay, the other train would pull their logs off to the siding there at Old Trout Creek, then they would dead head, I think they called it, back to other side of the tunnel and hook on to the other engine and help him up the mountain. Then they'd come on home with their short logs, and the main train would come back, and then they'd do the same thing at the other end. They had some kind of a thing figured out where they double headed up the mountain. That's the way they operated there then.

DOROTHEA: Did your dad work right on the railroad, or with the railroad crew? Or how did --- did he appoint a foreman for this crew, or how did this work?

THAD: Yeah, there was a --- He, he took quite an interest in the track part of it, because he wanted a good track bed. And he tried to get them to buy treated ties. I can remember him arguing about that years and years and years before they ever did it. But any-way, he took quite an interest in the track, and he had a foreman on both, on all crews. I think there was three different crews. There was a crew at Poison Creek, and a crew at Trout Creek, and then one, maybe a part of a crew that did the bridge work, and different things like that. Anyway, they had --- they had two, at least two foreman all the time, and maybe a couple of sub-foreman on the crew. And Frank was one of the first --- he, Frank was a, Eki was pretty well educated, and pretty enthusiastic, and Dad was always --- thought a lot of Frank. And he made Frank what they call the "road master," which was over both section crews. And I think under Frank there was a couple of section foreman. They had, you know, like four or five men under them each, and maybe even

up to half a dozen. One time the was 20 or 30 --- I want to say, probably 22 or maybe 25 men on the section crew at one time, on that road. Part --- sometimes they'd split that crew up, and the railroad from Seneca up into Logan Valley was a different --- it was what they called the logging run and it wasn't a common carrier. It was strictly a Hines Lumber Company project, and it had a different --- Pat Maitland, and before Pat Maitland, I forget who. But anyway, he was a manager or superintendent, or whatever they called it, of that line. And Dad used to have to take his crew up there to fix that roadbed at times. It got pretty bad. They only just had a skeleton crew at Seneca. It was all Caucasian people. It was all people thee that lived at Seneca. I used to know some of them old --- mostly Swedes. But they --- they worked out of Seneca.

DOROTHEA: Oh, so they were a different crew than the others.

THAD: Yeah. Although the Japanese crew, they'd go up there in--- several summers, and they'd work practically all summer, fixing that, you know, the bad spots in that track.

JOYCE GEER: You worked up there, didn't you?

THAD: Yeah, I worked for them one year.

DOROTHEA: Did they have young college kids come in all the time, or did they have one steady crew, or ---

THAD: No, they had one steady crew. And occasionally during the summer they would get a few, and sometimes quite a few college kids. I remember one year they had probably --- I'm going to say maybe half, not ore than half a dozen, I don't think. But they were a, I think probably mostly American born Japanese that were just looking for some good wages to go to school on. And I don't know how, I don't --- not very many of them came from Japan. I know there was a few that --- might have been a few that came straight from Japan. But they all knew English. Most of them spoke English, they spoke Japanese too, but most of them spoke English. All the younger ones spoke English.

Some of the older ones would talk Japanese on the crew, but they all could understand English. Even if they didn't speak English any.

DOROTHEA: Well what did you do when you worked up there? Did you work on the line too, or ---

THAD: Yeah, I worked for the section crew. They had a, they bought a little D-4 Cat, and they were loading ballast. They used to load ballast in the --- they didn't spread much ballast with the railroad cars. They mostly spread it with push, what we called push cars. They pulled it with the speeder. And I'd load ballast on these cars, and then they'd go dump it, such as that, but --- It, the Cat, we didn't have it but for a short while, they wanted to use it at Hines. I don't know, to push sawdust or something. Their Cat broke down or something, so they took the Cat down to the mill and I had to go to work on the Section in order to keep my job. And there was me and about 20 Japs, Japanese. and I worked on there all one summer. Well, about, almost one year on the section crew. I sure got toughened in too, I'll tell you. It was hard work. I couldn't hardly, oh I could keep up with them, but I'll tell you it pushed me all the time. They were good workers, they love to work.

DOROTHEA: Did they have an 8-hour day, or did they work 24 hours on it?

THAD: No, we, mostly 10 hour days. They paid them by the hour, they weren't Union. And they made considerable less than the mill people. But it was always satisfactory with them. They were always well --- they never griped much about what they made. I don't remember what we did make on --- I remember when I quit the, or I remember I thought it was a quite a lot cheaper than I

--- than the mill work, what, you know, I could have been making. But they didn't complain much. And they didn't pay any overtime, as I remember. I think they worked straight 10-hour days. And I'm going to say \$2 or \$3 an hour at that time, when I worked there.

'Course your meals were furnished, and their little cabins and stuff.

JOYCE: They paid for their meals.

THAD: Huh? Well, as I remember they did pay for their meals, but I think the Company furnished the cook, and the Company furnished part of it. It didn't cost very much. Whatever it was it was just a few dollars a month to eat there. I can't remember whether that --- just what the arrangement was, but I know, I think the Company paid the cook and paid for, they must have paid for part of it, because it was fairly cheap anyway.

DOROTHEA: Did they pack lunches, or did they go back to the camp and eat their noon meals, or ---

THAD: Nope, always packed a big lunch box. At noon they'd build a fire there, and I think we probably just took a half hour to eat. They always had a good lunch, plenty of it, you know, plenty of good food. In fact, probably the highlight of the whole thing, as far as I was concerned when I worked there, was the meals, they were terrific.

It was, Betty Eki did most of the cooking for the Trout Creek Camp, and I'll tell you, it was out of this world. It was just a lot of rice, and a lot of things that maybe some people wouldn't like, I did. But it was good, good food, and plenty of it. They fed good.

And at Poison Creek a woman by the name of Azuma, Fred Azuma, he was --- I think he was probably one of the first Japanese that worked on the crew. He was a --- she was a cook there at Poison Creek. And Betty, I can remember two or three different cooks there, up at Trout Creek. But when I worked there Betty Eki was cooking.

Oh, I can remember one incident there. We used to carry the rails by hand, if you can imagine that. I guess they are 40-foot lengths. I don't know what a 40-foot rail would weigh but it'd take ten or twelve men to pack it. We set one down on one fellow's foot, a Japanese fellow. I can't --- do you remember who that was? Anyway, several days, maybe a week later, Dad was --- He used to go up the track in his little speeder, he had

an inspection speeder. He just loved to run that thing up and down the track. He noticed this fellow, and I don't know but what maybe it was Peanuts, a little fellow by the name of Peanuts that worked there. Most of them were small. There was a couple of them that were pretty good size, but most of them were small men. And he noticed him limping, and he asked him what was the matter. "Well," he said, "he'd hurt his foot." "Well," he said, "could I take a look at it?" My god, it was just a terrible looking thing, and he sent him to the hospital. His foot had been broken for a week in three or four places.

DOROTHEA: Huh.

THAD: But I don't know if he ever would have said anything. Just kept hobbling along without --- but they were tough that way.

DOROTHEA: Did they ever talk about the centers, and places that they were, or what they had been doing before they were sent to these relocation centers?

THAD: No, I couldn't tell you a thing bout them. They were real, they weren't, they didn't confide much. Or they didn't talk much about their personal things, they just weren't that way. I don't know whether they were abused at those camps, or they never did say. But if they were, I know they must have had some pretty hard times because they thought that was pretty okay. They appreciated their job, and their lifestyle at those camps was, you know, evidently better than anything that they had had, because they were happy, real happy with the work. And clean, my gosh every night after work they'd shower. Boy that shower room was immaculate, and everybody took a shower. You just didn't work there without taking a shower every night. That was just almost a ritual, even the kids, everybody. And almost a community shower. You just --- they had a big bathhouse there and you just went and bathed every night.

DOROTHEA: Did you stay at the camp, or did you ---

THAD: Yeah, I stayed there. When I worked there we were, worked mostly at the Logan

Valley, and we stayed in tents there, just a temporary camp. But I did stay at Trout Creek too, some.

DOROTHEA: Did they treat you different, or were you kind of left alone, or how were you treated?

THAD: No, it was different. Most all of them liked Dad real well. I don't know whether they just had been treated hard, or whether they just --- they liked their jobs and they just appreciated it. And Dad always had a lot of respect for them, and visa-versa, so they treated me probably better than they would anybody else just on account I was the bosses son, maybe. But I got along with them real well, and become friends with a lot of them.

And they, they expected me to work. I mean I had to hold up my end. But I didn't get any special privileges really as far as anything like that. I worked right along with the crew.

DOROTHEA: Was there mostly bachelors, or single men that lived up there, or were there several families?

THAD: Practically all were bachelors. They were all single men. The Eki's and the Azuma's and the Okita's --- I can only think of just those three that were married and had families. Well the Azuma's never had any children. The Eki's raised quite a family up there, and so did the Okita's.

DOROTHEA: Now did any of these kids work on the railroad track, or were they ---

THAD: No, they were all young. I think maybe in the later years some of the kids did. But that would have been after Dad had retired and gone, so ---

DOROTHEA: I'd ought to ask you what your dad's name is. We've been talking about your dad here all the conversation and haven't gotten your dad's name.

THAD: Yeah, it was Henry Geer, was his name.

DOROTHEA: And what kind of --- You mentioned that he had a hardware business before he went into the railroad. Can you tell me something about that?

THAD: It was the I. S. Geer and Son's Hardware. His dad, Granddad Geer, had a hardware store here in Burns in the real early 1900's, maybe late 1800's. But anyway, Granddad and Dad and Waldo were partners in the hardware business. I think before the boys, where Dad and Waldo were in it, it was Geer and Cummings. And then I. S. Geer bought him out and he ran the store there. And they had a building in town that they called the Geer Building, and it's where Cyc Presley's Service Station is on the corner there now. But they've torn it down.

In the depression years, why they had a lot of credit out, that they couldn't collect, and then it was bad times. And they went broke during the depression, and never started up. And my granddad, he moved away, he moved to California. And Dad --- Waldo stayed for quite a while, I think, and tried to keep it going, but I think it eventually fell in. And he moved to Salem, and Dad went to barbering. Well I, you know, that might not have been the way it happened. Dad went into the service, maybe before he went to barbering. He went into the service during the First World War. And then when he came back, I guess was when he --- I think then he barbered, and then he came back and he went to work for Edward Hines, or Oregon Northwestern Railroad, when he came back.

DOROTHEA: But he was a barber at one time? What was your grandfather's name?

THAD: Irving Geer.

DOROTHEA: And he had a brother who was Waldo? Or who was Waldo?

THAD: No, Waldo Geer was the oldest son of Irving Geer.

DOROTHEA: Your dad's brother.

THAD: Uh huh. There was a, four in that family. There was Waldo, and Ellen, Dad, and Nita. Neva or Nita? Nita.

DOROTHEA: And did any of them stay besides your dad? Did they all move away too?

THAD: Yeah, they all moved away. Dad was the only one that stayed.

JOYCE: Your aunt was here.

THAD: Well Ellen came back later, in later years. She was here probably, you know, in the '60's, maybe the early '70's. Then she died here, she passed away here.

DOROTHEA: Oh, she did?

JOYCE: Tell about your granddad's fruit tree farm.

THAD: Yeah, Irving Geer had a --- his homestead was out, right at the mill site there. There used to be a willow tree just above the, just north of where the Edward Hines Lumber Company mill property is. And that was his homestead. He had a three, no he had a section there, I believe. And they, he was quite a, kept records on everything. And certainly quite a gardner. And the state, it wasn't the State Land Bank, maybe it was just the State of Oregon, they gave him a plot and it was a 160 acres there, right where the cemetery is, and right where the City of Hines is on the, be west side of the road, the highway there. And he was to try to grow different types of fruit trees, to see what would grow in this high desert elevation. And they sent him down several varieties of trees. And my dad, and Waldo, and I, and the girls planted those trees, and watered them with a water wagon for years and years. And kept records of everything, and there's still some, I don't know if some of those trees are still alive, but a few years ago some of those old trees were still bearing fruit there, on the apple trees.

DOROTHEA: Huh.

THAD: And he got that land. He acquired that property for doing that, for making that study. Then he sold long before Hines ever came to the country. Either sold, or maybe traded the property for the hardware business or something. Or, maybe he --- I don't know how he actually got into the hardware business. But when they first came, they had

a ranch out there at the Hines mill site. In fact the old spring there, the warm springs at the south end of Hines, his property there was a stage stop. And it was on Granddad's property there, the stage used to stop there and water.

DOROTHEA: There where the swimming pool is?

THAD: Uh huh.

DOROTHEA: Can you think of anything that happened while your dad was superintendent on the railroad?

THAD: I can remember that wreck. I can't --- I shouldn't say too much about it, because I can't remember the particulars other than they, the air was froze, or they didn't check the air, or some faulty thing on the train or something. But they had a runaway down the mountain from the tunnel, coming this way. And all the crew jumped. And that was when Dad, I'm sure he was superintendent then. Yeah, he was superintendent at that time. But anyway, that train got up to pretty high speeds, and all those fellows that jumped off that train, they all got hurt some. But as I remember there wasn't any lawsuits about it, and I think, I remember the Company was pretty concerned that there might be. And there was quite a lot of talk about it. Dad worried some that there was going to be a lot of trouble on account of it, which there really wasn't. They lost the train, and they lost the engine, and some of those cars. And that, and parts of that old engine are still down there just above Peabody Spring there on, well it's just above the Whiting Ranch there, in a steep part of the canyon. It didn't make one of those curves. But it must have took a lot of guts to jump off that train. 'Cause it got up to, oh they figured 50, 60, 70 miles an hour before it wrecked. So it must have been going pretty fast when some of those fellows jumped off the train.

DOROTHEA: That must have been a hairy ride!

THAD: Yeah, yeah. That was quite a --- I remember another time there was a runaway

speeder. How did that --- I can't remember the particulars. It ended up at, well I think on two different occasions, one of them ended up at Hines on the, either on the pond track, or maybe it just slowed down and stopped before it got to the pond track down there in the plant.

DOROTHEA: Did, did they have motors on them?

THAD: Speeders? Oh yeah, they'd go like hell. They were --- and I'll tell you, they ran them pretty fast too. They'd scare you to death. I never will forget one time, well when I got married I was working on the section crew. And the last day that I worked was on a Saturday, and I was supposed to be in town that night for a wedding rehearsal. And Frank let me drive the speeder. And so we left, we'd worked late that afternoon, we were supposed to get into Trout Creek about six that night, but we'd had to work late. We'd had a derailment or something up there, and had to fix a bunch of stuff. And anyway, I was in an awful hurry, and I never thought about --- we had to; there was probably six or seven of us, maybe six of us in the speeder. And I was running the speeder and the rest of them were on the push car. There was a tool car and a push car behind. And I never, I used to run it just about as fast as it would run. We were just kind of hitting the high spots on the rail, and I never thought too much about the fellows on the car. I could see some of them on the speeder were a little worried. But I had her flat out, and I looked behind me and I couldn't see any of the section crew on the last push car. And I looked again, and they were all laying down on there. (Laughter) They were holding on for dear life. And they talked about that ride for several years. (Laughter) But nobody said a word to me, and I just kept her flat out. It was my last day anyway. I kept her just open wide up until we got to Trout Creek. They sure got a kick out of that ride, but nobody said a word about giving me any hell about it, or about being scared or anything else, but I'm sure we set a record from Lake Creek to Trout Creek. (Laughter)

DOROTHEA: When you first put in treated ties in there, how did you go about getting those? Or how did your dad acquire those?

THAD: They were going to set up a treating plant here at Hines. And they checked on the cost factor, and it was just, they just couldn't afford it, or didn't think they could. And they were tearing up some railroad, some spur line at Prineville and different places, and they had some. They used, creosote ties were pretty cheap then, and quite a lot of them available. So they, I think they trucked most of them in. Some of them came by rail, but most of them were trucked in. And they bought them for; oh I might say a \$1 or \$2 apiece. It was cheaper than what they were paying for their untreated fir ties, I remember that. But they were pretty ratty. They were checked and pretty punky. A lot of the first ones anyway, and heavy. They were hard to handle. But anyway that was, oh I don't think they even started putting any treated ties in until the --- I'm going to say the early '50's, '53 or '54 or somewhere in there. And then they could only get so many, so they would pick a stretch, put them all in one stretch, you know, or try to --- And eventually they were all, I think eventually they were all treated ties, but I don't think, as far as I know, I don't think they ever bought a new treated tie. I think they were all used ties from some other lines from different places.

DOROTHEA: I can't see that tape. I don't know how much.

THAD: It's probably gone, isn't it?

DOROTHEA: No, it's still going. I can hear it. But ---

THAD: Well, you got more information than I thought I could remember. I don't know of anything else to ---

JOYCE: Tell them about the train going through town.

THAD: Oh, I remember, that's kind of interesting. They had several wrecks at some of the crossings. The crossings were well marked. And of course the crew, or the engineer,

or the firemen I guess it would be, he whistled at every crossing. 'Cause hell they liked to blow that whistle anyway, you know. And so Dad would always get a lot of static of either they were blowing it too loud, or they weren't blowing it enough, or whatever. So he was always telling the engineer, or at least the engine crew to make sure they blowed the hell out of the whistle, because if they hit somebody why, you know, they were liable if they didn't blow the whistle. So I remember one night in particular, the phone rang at about 3 o'clock in the morning, and I happened to have been up, or it woke me up, and this woman says, "Is this Henry Geer?" And he says, "Yes." And she says, "Well how the hell do you like to be woke up every night at about 3 o'clock in the morning?" She said, "I'm going to call you from now on at 3 o'clock in the morning. That damn train wakes me up, and the kids cry every single night." And then she hung up. And she called several times and woke him up. And, of course he always laughed about it, but most of the people objected to it in town, of them blowing the whistle when they went through town, but there was no way out of it.

DOROTHEA: Well they'd complain if they, they didn't hear it. And they'd complain if they did hear it, so ---

THAD: Yeah, yeah, if somebody had gone through there and got killed at the crossing, why ---

DOROTHEA: Yeah.

THAD: --- they'd feel pretty foolish about complaining about it. But they had, there was so many of those crossings, that if you'd stop and think about it, why on every one of those streets was a crossing. And they blew from when they left Hines practically until they got to ten mile crossing, you might say. Hell, that whistle was just echoing, you know, and every night. They had to run at night.

DOROTHEA: Yeah.

THAD: They ran at night mostly, because you couldn't get any work done on the track if they were running through the day. They did run some in the day, but most of their --- It was an all night deal, you know. They ran ---

DOROTHEA: I always wondered why the train run at night, now I know.

THAD: Well that's the reason, because they had to work on that track, you know. They had a --- and that was a ---- the railroad, most of the people don't realize it, but the old Oregon North-western Railroad had a, probably as bad a track bed area to go through as any, outside of maybe the one going down through Juntura. But it was really a hard, it was a lot of elevation, they had quite a mountain to go over, and a tunnel to go through, and a big high trestle. You can remember the high trestle, can't you? Can you remember the high trestle there at Purdy's? Well that was quite an engineering feat in itself. But anyway it was a lot of maintenance to that track, a lot of bridges, a lot of sloughs, a lot of river.

And Poison Creek was a --- in the spring it's a running torrent. It washed the track out every year. There was just no way you could --- you'd have to rip rap that thing from, you might say Old Poison Creek clear down to Clemens, to save that track. And it practically was rip rapped all the way.

DOROTHEA: I've never been back in there.

THAD: Haven't you?

DOROTHEA: Never was. Nope, never been back there. What, do you remember what year that that train track was built?

THAD: That the track was built, laid? It had to have been in the early '30's. I'm --- no I couldn't give you a date at all.

DOROTHEA: You don't know who started it, or what was the purpose, or ---

THAD: Well it was laid out when the mill was built. The track was laid at the same; it

started at the same time. They were going to put their logging end of it at Seneca. It was going to be their base, and they were going to haul all the --- I think the theory of it at the time it was built was that they would have a perpetual timber to support that railroad and mill for as long as the mill was there, you know. And that's the way they did it until the trucks came into being. Why that was the --- that was the cheapest way to get the lumber to the mill.

They didn't --- I can remember when I was a boy, it was quite a trip to Seneca. Up that old canyon highway, it was all graveled, and the smoke, or the dust never settled. It was a tough old road to Seneca.

DOROTHEA: Yeah, I remember that.

THAD: Yeah, I'm sure you do. And in the springtime of the year, you couldn't hardly go up there without getting stuck. And later on in the summer, you couldn't, you could only go five or six miles an hour on account of the dust, it just never settled.

DOROTHEA: Do you remember when you were working on there, was there any of the mills, like --- I don't know whether the Temples had a mill, but the Dickenson's had a mill, and --- Did they send any of their lumber down on the train?

THAD: No, no, the only lumber that was ever shipped over the mill, was that Ellingston, and before Izee Lumber Company, and several of them shipped from Seneca. They loaded a lot of cars there at Seneca and shipped a lot of lumber, but outside of the ones that was loaded right there at Seneca, I don't think there was anything that was shipped. I can remember they used to have a cattle corrals, and a loader, loading facilities there at the north end of Silvies Valley, that they ---

DOROTHEA: There by the old schoolhouse.

THAD: Uh huh. And they, I can't remember who ran sheep there. I'm going to say it was --- what was his name? Not O'Toole, but

--- Oh, anyway, whoever it was. I'll think of his name in a minute, had a sheep permit in Silvies, up around Silvies Valley, and he used to load his sheep and send his lambs ---

DOROTHEA: The only sheep man I can think of is that Pete Obiague.

THAD: Obiague, okay, okay, that's who it was. And we used to go up there when we was kids and help them load sheep there at the stockyards there. They had stockyards, I guess you'd call it, and he'd give us a lamb every year for helping load those sheep.

DOROTHEA: So they'd ship some sheep down on it?

THAD: Yeah, sheep and cattle both. I can remember both of them being shipped from up there. I think, like some of the old Wintermeir, and some of the old people, or older people there at Silvies Valley shipped stock out of that, those same corrals there. But they, after the trucks got popular, why nobody used them for years and years. I think there was something, they had to maintain them for, up until the late '50's, on account of being a common carrier, they had to furnish --- If anybody would have wanted to ship, they would have had to furnish cars. And ---

DOROTHEA: Yeah, I think when Clinton and I first got married and we were working up there, the --- when (Fred) Fine was working up at, oh ---

THAD: Bridge Creek?

DOROTHEA: Bridge Creek, I know they were working on the corrals then, and taking care of them, so ---

THAD: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

DOROTHEA: They must have had to keep them going.

THAD: Yeah, and they had scales there, and they had a nice load shoot, and lots of pens. Some pretty good facilities there. I don't suppose there's anything left there now, is there?

DOROTHEA: I don't think much of anything's there. Okay, can you think of anything else

that would be of interest as far as with the crew camp, and --- Can you think of anything that might have happened with the Japanese people that was kind of a comical thing, or --

-

THAD: I remember one time a guy by the name of Tom --- I want to say Uasugai. Anyway, we became pretty good friends, but he was an epileptic, and I didn't know it. And we were going down the, we were going up to the north end there, north of Trout Creek there to work on some track. And he was sitting next to me on the speeder. And we were probably going 40 miles an hour, 35 or 40 miles an hour on that speeder. And he jumped up, and give this big lingo, and jumped off of the speeder. Just jumped right out in the barrow pit, and just started to kicking and --- And Frank stopped as soon as he could, and I run back there and one of them grabbed me and told me to just leave him alone. And he was having a, I didn't know he was having an epileptic fit. And by gosh, he had quite a fit there. And pretty soon he come around and he got back on the speeder, and he was pretty well knocked out, but he come to and he got back on the speeder, and we went up and went on to work. Nobody thought too much about it.

DOROTHEA: Huh.

THAD: But everything was done by hand, and we didn't have any, we didn't have any spike setter, or air tools for setting spikes. It was all done with a maul, a spike maul. So the first day I spent up there, I thought well hell I'll --- that's, I'll drive spikes, that looks like the best job. So I just went to the push car and picked out the best looking spike maul I could find and --- I didn't know that they'd spent a lot of time on those handles. Whittling them down, and they had just the right whip to them, and each one had their own spike maul. I didn't have any idea. So I went over, and they had to spike, some of them set, and about the third or fourth spike I tried to drive, why of course I hit the rail and broke the handle out of the spike maul. And I went to get another one, and about the third one I

went to get, some Japanese fellow, I think it was Ihera, a big old guy, he grabbed a hold of me pretty good. He grabbed me by the shoulder, and he had a crowbar, not a crowbar, but a spike puller, an iron spike puller in his hand. He says, "Here, you use this, don't use any more spike mauls." And I never, it was a long time before I got to use another spike maul. I had to pull the spikes; they wouldn't let me drive them. Every one of them had their own hammer, and I'll tell you, they could drive those spikes. Man, about three swings and some of those little guys, their feet would leave the ground when they drove those spikes.

And they'd all --- they never sang, but they had quite a lingo when they were working. When they'd swing a spike maul they'd go, "Ushh," usually go "Ushh" every time they'd hit. And man you could just, it'd almost sound like a steam engine coming around the bend when they were all driving spikes. Well, probably one on each side of the rail, and two guys driving spikes. One guy would go down each rail setting spikes, then there'd be two of these Japanese fellows would come down behind them driving spikes. And I'll tell you, they were keen, and it took a guy, he really had to get to going to set spikes for them, because they drove them pretty fast. Now wait a minute, I'm getting ahead of myself. There's two guys holding, two guys a shoveling, and holding the tie up to tamp it good, and hold the tie up to the rail, and then the two guys a driving. And I'll tell you it got pretty active. They really went to town.

DOROTHEA: Well I know they used to drive down that track pretty darn fast. I know they'd --- we'd hear them every once in a while go by the place there, and this was after we moved up there in the '60's. And they'd go by there, and I don't know how many people was left then, there wasn't very many people left there. But they'd start; you could hear them when they first started. This old speeder would go "whoo", you know, and then pretty soon it would stop. And then you'd hear this, this --- it sounded like grunting, really

is what it sounded like from the house.

THAD: Yeah.

DOROTHEA: But that thing would just go right down the road. They'd just travel right down that track.

THAD: Oh yeah. Yeah, they'd finally, a --- one of the master mechanic, I'm trying to think of his name too. Reis, Carl Reis, I think was his name, designed a rail layer. And it was the damndest looking thing you ever saw. It had two steam locomotive wheels on it, driver wheels, and a couple of idler wheels, and that was about it. Maybe a, maybe a couple of wheels in front of them, and then two poles for a boom, long boom, maybe 40 foot, 35 foot maybe. And that's what they called the rail layer, and then it had a hydraulic cylinder to work the boom. And the boom could only swing probably maybe 10 or 20 feet on the end of it. And they had a great big air compressor on that. And a big old White diesel motor to run it, and then a humongous big air compressor on it. And that was, oh probably in the early '60's that they built that thing. And then from then on they used air to drive their spikes. And they didn't do very little ---

DOROTHEA: Yeah.

THAD: --- with the hammer, with the mauls. They always used that ---

DOROTHEA: Built that big old ugly thing that they ---

THAD: Yeah, they called it the rail layer, and they'd take that pretty near everywhere they went. They load gravel with it and they lifted rail, and worked on bridges and every thing. And it went down the track, now I mean to tell you, it as heavy and it would go. It would just stay on the track better than a speeder. And I think it was a little faster. A little slower starting, but I think it was a little faster, and they used that a lot.

DOROTHEA: Yeah, I remember seeing it too. It looked like a big overgrown something, I don't know.

THAD: Uh huh. Yeah, but it was effective. It did a good job, and it had lots of air, and they could work their air tools. At least they could run, I think two hammers off of it, two air hammers to drive spikes.

DOROTHEA: Was that Carl Reis, was he that schoolteacher's brother? Or do you remember that John Reis that was in school?

THAD: I think it was different. Well, I don't know. Now he, Carl, he had a son that was an electrician at Hines. But the Reis that I'm talking about was in their late 40's, early 50's. He was a master mechanic at Hines.

JOYCE: Must have been Darlene Reis's dad.

THAD: Darlene Reis's dad was an electrician. It was his son, I think. I think that was his granddaughter.

DOROTHEA: Well see now, the schoolteacher was a brother to this guy.

THAD: Could have been, could have been.

DOROTHEA: So they all spelled their names the same, I think.

THAD: Yeah.

JOYCE: How about rattlesnakes on the track?

THAD: Oh yeah, there was lots of rattlesnakes. Killed lots of rattlesnakes.

DOROTHEA: Did you dig any dens up?

THAD: No, not that I know of. But we'd always, we'd kill. If we was down on Poison Creek, we'd kill, oh sometimes as high as four or five a day. Sometimes maybe we'd go a day or two without killing any, but you'd pretty near always hear one, or kill one. And then I think in the later, I think that they killed so many of them that they finally killed, you know, they just weren't as plentiful. They ---

DOROTHEA: Do you ever remember finding any rattlesnakes up in the Silvie's Valley area?

THAD: Nope. As far as I know mile post, Peabody Spring, 20, maybe just a little bit above Peabody Spring there at the mile post, I'm going to say 18 or 19, was the last snake we ever saw. And I can't tell you why, because there was damn sure rattlesnakes at higher altitudes than Silvies Valley. All over the world. The Castle Rock has got them, and a lot of places on the Steens. A lot of places that are a lot higher than Silvies. But as far as I know there's never been a rattlesnake killed in Silvies Valley.

DOROTHEA: The only rattlesnake we ever knew, come down off of a logging truck, and he got run over, so that was a good ending for him. But ---

THAD: I wonder where they picked him up off of the logging truck? You don't have any idea?

DOROTHEA: I don't know, but he was on the highway there at, just as you come down over the Cross Hill.

THAD: Oh yeah, I'll be darned. Yeah, I think they said mile, I think they said --- and I could be wrong, Frank could tell you. But I think milepost 18 or 19 they killed a snake, and he was a big devil. That was the farthest one north that they had ever killed. And they used to eat them. They eat --- they'd skin them, they'd save most of them. They liked them, they'd eat them. And they were, they were avid fisherman. Oh, they love to fish. And of course the littler the fish, the better they like them. 'Cause they like to pickle them. And boy, I'll tell you they were good. Their pickled fish are good.

DOROTHEA: How did they fix the rattlesnake? Did you ever eat any of it?

THAD: Yeah, I ate some of it. And I can't tell you, I think they just stripped out the meat and boiled it as I remember. Maybe they might have put it into a --- they used to do a lot of fry cooking, stir-fry cooking. They might have cooked some of it that way. I can't remember eating too much of it. I can remember eating quite a lot of Russian thistle roots. They used to put those, save those, they dig those up. And they were just them

old bull thistles, but the young ones. And they put them in sukiyaki for vegetables.

DOROTHEA: Are they like a parsnip, or ---

THAD: Yeah, in fact they look a little bit like a, bamboo shoots.

DOROTHEA: Huh.

THAD: Only not as big around, and they are kind of tough and kind of stringy. And I don't think too tasty, but they liked them. And they were --- man they raised some wonderful gardens, Trout Creek and Poison Creek both. They had those Japanese radishes, and boy they'd just take them, and pickled radishes, they'd pickle those radishes. That was the only thing that they fixed that, when they took the lid off of those Jap, and they called them Japanese radishes, pickled radishes, I had to leave the table. I had to get out of the cookhouse. They were, it was terrible. Of course a radish smells terrible anyway when it's pickled, but ---

DOROTHEA: Yeah.

THAD: My dad used to love them.

DOROTHEA: I never heard of a pickled radish.

THAD: Yeah, well they pickled them a lot. And they ate them a lot, and I'll tell you they were pretty rank.

DOROTHEA: Worse than a pickled egg, huh?

THAD: Oh hell yeah, they were rotten. Their radishes, they would smell terrible.

JOYCE: What about the recipe? How did they fix them?

THAD: Well, I don't know how they fixed it; I wasn't too crazy about that. And I remember they used to fix a, squid quite a lot. They'd get these little baby squid, and I don't know whether they were fresh, I think they were. I think they were packed on ice. And they'd boil them, and my gosh, then they'd pour the, they'd pour the water off of them, and it'd be just as black as ink. And then they'd boil them again and stuff, and when they'd put one

on your plate you didn't know whether you was going to eat it or it was going to eat you.

JOYCE: Thad liked it.

THAD: Yeah, I liked it. And their sukiyaki, I'll tell you, you never ate anything as good as that. They drank a lot of beer. They drink beer in the evening. They're a lot of beer drinkers.

DOROTHEA: Oh, are they?

THAD: Yeah, they drink a lot of beer, and usually in the evening, when we were up at camp, up to Logan Valley, I can't remember eating at the cookhouse. We'd usually just cook up a big batch of sukiyaki and we'd put, they'd put everything they could find in the damn stuff, you know, and stir-fry it. And just almost, drink a lot of beer, and eat that sukiyaki in the evening and then just go to bed.

DOROTHEA: Go to bed early?

THAD: You bet! Just as soon as you got full, and about half tight, and full about the same time, and you went to bed, morning came pretty fast. And they'd be hard at it.

DOROTHEA: What time did you usually start? Daylight or ---

THAD: You ---

DOROTHEA: 'Cause it didn't seem like they would work very ---

THAD: It was usually dark. It was usually dark pretty near, you know, it was pretty damned early when you ate breakfast. 'Cause we were out, I think we were probably out and working at six or so, fairly early.

DOROTHEA: It doesn't seem to me like they worked very late in the afternoons. Seems like they were always done by 4 o'clock.

THAD: Yeah, they were, they usually got out early, and then they'd knock off sometimes. I think so, about four or five, but

JOYCE: Probably had to on account of the train.

THAD: Yeah. Well they had to schedule their work around the train. Usually they'd have to, well of course usually they knew when the train was coming, so they'd have it patched back up, and if the train did come, why then they'd go, just stop until it went by, then went back to work.

JOYCE: How did you get the car off of the railroad track?

THAD: Well if the train was coming, if you were working on the track and the train was coming, why the speeder and the push car would go back to the nearest siding, and then just as soon as the train went by you'd come back, see. That was whoever was the speeder driver would take it down there, and of course the tools that you needed, would set them off. But usually he just went ahead of the train, so it was just, he wasn't gone all that long, you know. And there's sidings probably, there's probably five or six sidings between Burns and Seneca, so there was one fairly close wherever you was working, you know. If it was a little speeder, now Dad's little speeder, we used to go up all the time and he'd know when the train was coming and he'd just, we'd just set it off by hand somewhere, usually on a road crossing.

DOROTHEA: Huh. I think they did that a lot too, because I've seen them do that.

THAD: But they never, yeah, just the little speeders. They never set one of those; most of those big speeders were ---

DOROTHEA: Just the two men.

THAD: V-8's and --- no, they only had one of those.

DOROTHEA: Oh, did they?

THAD: Yeah. The rest of them were those big, they looked like a box going down the track.

DOROTHEA: Yeah.

THAD: And they were made out of plywood, and most of them were built right here at the, either Hines or up there. They had a two-way axle in them. They'd go backwards or front wards, the same gearshift. And they had a V-8, little V-8 --- old flathead Ford V-8 engines in them, and man they, just almost like they was falling apart. But they didn't seem to; they seemed to run pretty good. But they were rough, they didn't have any springs.

DOROTHEA: Can you tell me anything about the tunnel? Was it a--- how was it built?

THAD: Well there was always quite a lot of discussion about --- Dad always wanted to make a cut out of it, to eliminate it. It was a, if something was hanging out of a car or something, they'd scar the timbers in it, or maybe knock one loose or something. And I don't think the timbers that they used in the tunnel were too well treated. They were treated, but at the time whatever they put on them, they weren't too well preserved. And it was always a kind of a problem keeping that up. And it was a long curve to start with, which was hard to --- I'm pretty sure it was, yeah, it was just a long curve. The whole tunnel was made in a curve, and it was quite a maintenance problem. It was ---

DOROTHEA: Why ---

THAD: In the first place you couldn't haul any extra big equipment through there. If you needed to get to get to Seneca with anything it was pretty tight, you know.

DOROTHEA: Why did they go through it, I mean why didn't they just dig a hole out of it, instead of going through it?

THAD: Well that's what Dad always said they should have. 'Cause there isn't that much, there isn't that much material on top of the tunnel. It was just a matter that they couldn't get that extra altitude without another four or five miles of track to get the elevation to go over. They had all the --- I don't know what the steepness of the track bed was, but it was --- It's about all, I'm sure they could overcome it now. But at the time of the steam locomotives, it was about all they could do. The grade was pretty steep, considered for

what power they had to pull the train cars. Do you follow me? They had a lot of --- The timber; the logs that they were hauling were awfully heavy.

DOROTHEA: Yeah.

THAD: And of course the old steam locomotives weren't all that powerful, compared to diesel.

DOROTHEA: Well it was all those diesels could do to get up there sometimes.

THAD: Yeah, you bet! Yeah. It just took a lot of power. There was a lot of grade, and that's why they made the tunnel, was on account of they just couldn't --- That's all the elevation they could stand right there.

DOROTHEA: Well did it take quite a --- You say it took a lot of work to keep it up, but did it ever get to the point where it was dangerous?

THAD: Oh, you bet. Well not in Dad's lifetime, because he, that was one of his main goals was to keep that track bed up. And of course like I said, the Japanese crew, they kept it up well. Well after, now then after Dad retired, and Danny Crump was the superintendent, then he left, and Ronnie Barrett was. And during those years the roadbed they kept it up pretty good. And then after that, why evidently it was on a downhill course. They didn't put as much emphasis on the train as they did, because they were trucking too. So they didn't put any money into, into the track, and they cut the crews way down, and then they eliminated the two section camps, and just had a truck out of Burns. And they hauled just a skeleton crew and they just, you might say, just took it off the top, you know. Whatever was real serious, why they'd take care of it. And hell they, it went to hell, and they couldn't get a train. Then the last few runs they made they couldn't hardly get a train over the, over the track without having ---it was dangerous, you know. They'd have derailments and everything else. And I suppose after they'd once let it go bad, why it would cost so much to put it back into shape that they just abandoned it

rather than build it up.

DOROTHEA: Do you think that they will ever go back to the railroad itself, or do you think they'll use it?

THAD: No, I don't think that they ever will. It's a, it's just one of those things that it had its, its era. And it was a good one, and it served its purpose. But I would like to see it, gee, it was fascinating. Dad was one of the instigators of bringing the diesels in. And I was always thought it was a damn shame, because the old steamed locomotives were romantic, and interesting. And the diesels weren't, you know. They were just like a --- But anyway, they were so much more efficient than the steam. And hell, cheaper to run, a lot cheaper to run per horsepower.

But like now, the trucks have got to a point where they're a hell of a lot more efficient and they can get around better. And they're just, they can haul these logs. They can truck them so much cheaper than they keep the, than they can keep the train up, and the track and everything else.

DOROTHEA: Well, without the mill at Seneca too, well, it's a --- that's quite a ---

THAD: Yeah.

DOROTHEA: It's quite a deal.

THAD: Yeah, I'm sure that the shippers out of Seneca paid a good part of the expense on the railroad. Because they shipped a lot of lumber. Box --- you can remember the boxcars. Gee, they'd have boxcar, in fact, they'd have to put on extra, they had an "A" and a "B" crew. And, you know, and they'd just, they'd have to make several extra runs on account of having so many boxcars a lot of times.

DOROTHEA: Do you remember when the last --- How many families was left of the section crew? Was there just two or three families left up there in the very end of the train crew bunch? Or did they still have quite a crew up there, just before everybody moved to

Burns?

THAD: I think it kind of dwindled down. As I recall it most of those fellows, the Japanese fellows, the original ones, were getting pretty old. And as they retired and left, why they just never replaced them. And it just kind of, it was a gradual thing. I think Betty and Frank, and maybe the Okitas, but there was just a few, just a handful at the last there. It was, like you said, it ---

DOROTHEA: All of them, the original people.

THAD: Yeah, yeah, in fact I think a lot of the old original crew is probably, or quite a few of them are probably dead by now, you know. They were, some of those fellows were pretty old when I was just a kid working up there.

DOROTHEA: Are we still taping?

... (Unrelated conversation.)

THAD: But you probably, you could get more information. And as far as the train crews and stuff, those fellows, there's a lot of those fellows that are around, you know. Beans or Carlson, Davey Jones, and ---

JOYCE: Lloyd Fones.

THAD: Yeah, Fones and all those guys, you know, could probably give you a lot of information about the trains and stuff.

DOROTHEA: Well, I'm not really interested in the trains; it's just the crew itself. You know, how they got here, and why we started with a Japanese crew itself, and ---

THAD: Well, I'll tell you the primary reason that they ended up with ---

(End of tape. Interviewers report of continued conversation not recorded, Thad tells the reason for the Japanese section crew as the railroad track crew was because they worked so fast, and they were hard workers, and got along so well with each other and Mr. Geer. They liked the work and the opportunity to be there making the money, and

being some place where they could be useful.)

-dlp-

bl