

HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #18 Side A

Subject: Alvon Baker & Ida Cross

Place: Cross Home

Date: 1972

Interviewer: Jim Baker

*(No tape on the following.)

JIM BAKER: I'm talking with Alvon Baker and Mrs. Ida Cross, and we are in the Cross home. And before I came in and did that little bit to finish up the Whiting tape, you were saying that your father came with a ---

IDA CROSS: He came here in 1878, in the fall, and they were a family of five, and they lived in a dugout north of town here. And their father passed away the next spring from pneumonia, leaving the five little ones orphans. And they were just taken in by friends and taken care of. And our dad had to start out pretty early in life to make his own way. He didn't have much education, but he was prosperous and was a very wonderful dad.

JIM: Did he have a homestead?

IDA: No, he never did.

JIM: What kind of ---

ALVON BAKER: I never did either.

JIM: What kind of way did he make his living?

IDA: Stock, run stock. At one time didn't Dad have about 800 head of cattle?

ALVON: At one time he did. I used to ride for him, and it was the PLS Company down here. It was just like home to me. If I didn't have a horse, they would give me a horse to

ride. They furnished me horses lots of times. But no matter where it was at, plumb over at the town of Harper, plumb over to Izee, or wherever it was, if we had any cattle on the land where the Company was riding at, they'd pick them up and brought them. We did the same thing for them. And they leppied lots of calves here in the spring of the year. We was born and raised right out here on the Poison Creek, both of us. And they used to turn them cattle out there until you'd think it was squares on the checkerboard, you know. They leppied lots of calves. Both my dad and me too, have picked up those calves and leppied them along, and get them ... Yep, just like being home when I went out with them.

In those days people did this a lot, no matter where, if you run stock, no matter where, if you was riding stock and they knew if belonged to you, they'd bring it. Yeah, they'd bring them back and forth ... I was raised that way and I still like it. I don't like the way they do today too well, but I liked that. Because it was living and letting live, you know. Neighbors.

And you spoke of that man, Bill Hanley there. I don't know if that's what you want in it, but his ranch joined right below where I had out here. Well any time that he weaned cattle, my dad and I would go down, because we knew he had some of his stock in there. We've got as many as 12 calves at a time out of there that he'd weaned off, and his by-word was, "I say, I say, it was a mistake." Sure it was, but it was an intended mistake. And them cows bawl around there for about three days, they'd move away from there as quick as they could with a full bag. But when we'd go find them cows and put them back in the corral and calves suck, that's good enough. Yeah, we did that a lot of the time there. Yet he was pretty good to a lot of people.

Now my wife's father, Grant ... worked for him for years, and he was a blacksmith, and he'd do anything for that family. He was good. Grant had a horse, I don't remember

what happened, but Hanley told him to go pick out any horse he wanted in the bunch to replace it. He had an old sway-backed, hump-backed horse that looked like an old camel out there, and her father was that type of a man. He picked that old horse, he was a good horse, but he was a sore eye to look at, and he could just as well have had the best horse in there. It wouldn't have bothered Hanley any way, but he took that old sway-backed horse. You didn't need a saddle; you couldn't get it on him.

Speaking of my dad having all those cattle, I used to ride with them a lot, you know. They boarded me, and it never cost me anything. We thought the world of the PLS Company, and I do yet. They could start in back here in Silvies Valley where Harry Pons has those buffalo, and ride from there and go plumb into California and stay on their own land every night. All the way through there, a big operator. When they'd butcher a beef or anything, they'd hang that out on the wagon at night, cover it up with beds and stuff through the day, they had all that beef, you know ...

IDA: I've seen the time when there were cattle stringing from, all day long from here, going from down here at the PLS ---

ALVON: The biggest bunch of cattle I was ever behind was 10,000 head. They started out at Seneca up here with them to come down here. Well right out here this side of the Grange Hall was a school section, and they owned it. I seen them cattle going in there and we were still trying to get the calves out of the field up above up there. Cows going back and calves a coming, and calves going back, 400 and 500 in a bunch. And we'd have to take calves and tie ropes to them and each man on a horse, and a sixty foot rope, and get behind them calves and drag it and ... and out they'd go. But when you come back, they went back too.

Yeah, and that's the way they leppied lots of calves. Cows come down there that wouldn't go back. Yeah, they'd leppy a lot of them. You'd find them dead all over the

range and every place there. But the cattle, the big herd that I followed there, we got out here on this sand hill where Hotchkiss got that corral, but just back up a ways, and the old road used to come that way. Well I tied a shoestring into a can and had my rope tied into that, and I threw it out among these cows out there to scare them out. They just ---

*(The following is on tape #18-A.)

JIM BAKER: ... and his sister.

ALVON BAKER: ... went out among these cows out there, just scare them out. They'd just ... along, wasn't going. It wrapped around one cow's neck, and my wife's father come along there with a team and this old cow buck and bawling with that can, bucked right into the middle of that team. And the dust, we couldn't see them, see. So I wound on the turns till we got out of there. It didn't cause any trouble, but it could of tipped it over and killed somebody, caused a lot a trouble. You couldn't see from here to you for dust. You ever follow cattle like that? If you did, you know what I'm talking about. Just like ---

JIM: Only on the movie screen.

ALVON: Into that wall see, you couldn't see for dust. But that was quite a thing, by golly. Just threw that on there just in time. We didn't know he was in there, and he didn't know he was near the end of them, but he was meeting them, coming out.

By golly, that old cow, when that wrapped around her neck why she didn't like that. And we had to catch that cow and stretch her out and take that rope off of her. It wouldn't come off. Oh yeah, I don't know if that's the kind of data you're looking for or not.

JIM: Exactly.

ALVON: Yeah. And another time I was helping the PLS Company move cattle from here, and we was going to Silvies Valley with them. Well our buckaroo boss was away up in the lead, and of course he didn't have me hired, but it would have been all the same if he

had. I would have done the same thing. We took an old five-gallon can and knocked a hole in it with a rock, and put a shoestring in there. Wasn't too good a string either. And we thought that that would last a little ways, and she'd run in there and ... them. And do you know that cow went full length of that cattle right up behind the boss, and out in the sagebrush, and bucked and bawled with that thing and liked to never broke it off. But it finally did. Well he come back and wanted to know who tin-canned that cow, and nobody knew! Nobody knew! His own boys wouldn't admit it, and I didn't admit it, and they wouldn't tell, and so he never did know. But it scattered cows. She ran right on up the road, and just put cows out on both, and right on past him. Yeah, oh I could go on and on with a lot of that kind of stuff. Yeah.

But my dad he was more or less an orphan boy here, which he was, and he took that place out there, the old home place, Poison Creek. And to my knowledge, I never did know of him being on relief or anything, he always paddled his own canoe, and it was pretty hard to paddle lots of times. But as far as I know he always got help out of the bank here, if he needed any money or anything. And the stock business, and then he got to farming, you see, a little bit of ground. Finally planted in alfalfa, and stuff like that.

I froze to death on them old rakes out there, with a good fur coat on, a cowhide coat and everything in the spring of the year a farming, cleaning up sagebrush to do that. And I've walked a many a mile behind a harrow, out there on the old home place. I just walk a team to death. I've always been a good walker and pretty fair yet.

IDA: I remember Dad saying he paid \$9 for cows and calves, his first cattle he bought.

ALVON: Oh yeah.

IDA: That's the first stock he bought, he paid \$9 for a cow and calf, now what do they sell for? About \$300 or so?

ALVON: Well I got that sale ring slip from Ontario yesterday, or day before yesterday,

and they sold a bunch of stock cows there. Cows without calves, I believe, brought \$298. Cows with calves brought \$300 and something.

IDA: It's sure a difference between \$9.

ALVON: \$300 and something, there was fifty cents on ... I don't remember exactly what it was. But Wes Clemens here took some black calves out there, weighed 295 or something, got \$50.75, I think, for them. That's a lot of weight on them too, and then he had some 390-395 pound calves, I think it was, right at 400.

IDA: ... used to go up in the hills in the spring of the year and come back in the fall with the Indian squaws on top of the ponies, with kids all around them, and all their bedding and everything. Good lands out by Poison Creek Schoolhouse out there, you know.

ALVON: Well the Indians here used to make a practice of going up, they was not limited on killing deer. When I first started to hunt deer we was allowed five bucks. Well the Indians, I guess that's why the squaws always ahead of us, she's always got an extra buck; she's always got one. Anyway, they'd go up there, you know, and hunt these deer, and tan the hides, and smoke them, and I've seen them do all that. We used to kill our deer and take the hides and they'd smoke them and tan them. If you had one hide they'd split it right down the middle for half, and they'd make you gloves or moccasins, whatever you wanted.

But one time my dad and I was up here on what they call Big Sagehen, that's across the river from the Hickson Brandon place there. We seen an Indian coming down there on a bay horse, and he was sitting way up high. He had two or three deer, I don't remember which it was, and he was sitting right up on top of them, all on this one horse. Yeah, he was, them bucks they lazy. We seen them squaws out here carrying a load of sagebrush with a strap across their forehead, and it just looked like a load of brush a coming. And it was, you know, and the buck walking along beside, and they done the

work.

IDA: Well these willows out there, they went out here by the river and loaded willows on those old squaws, and they'd come up here, you know, loaded down with willows. And he was going along just as happy as could be, he didn't care who ---

ALVON: Now you see this town right here, when there wasn't any town right here, just a little ways off of main street, down here where I live on East Adams street, across here, they used to put up alfalfa hay there. Now they, what's their names, that do that ---

JIM: Ausmus?

ALVON: No, no. Before they was ever around here, long before. Dickensons, Dickensons, Abe Dickensons, yeah, they used to put that hay up here. This Fred Black on the hill, you was up to see him a while back, and his wife told you that he wouldn't be back for quite awhile. Well she ain't all right. She --- he was right there in the house, he was telling me about it the other day. Have you been back? You don't want to never miss him, go back, he's older than I am, he's eighty-four. He's been around here a long time, and he's got something for you. But she don't know, but he was right in the back room there. And she didn't know where he was at. He went to school right out here where the ball ground is now, the ballpark. That's where he lived right out there.

IDA: They lived in this dugout.

ALVON: Yeah.

JIM: What did that dugout look like?

IDA: Well I think it's all; there isn't any dugout there anymore. No, it's just right up where the, well the road goes over the highway out over north of town. This was just down over the cliff there. There isn't any dugout there anymore.

ALVON: There isn't nothing there anymore.

IDA: No, no.

JIM: What did he have in his house?

IDA: Well I suppose they just had their bedding, and maybe a little food.

ALVON: Of course we don't know.

IDA: We don't know.

ALVON: Just a place to eat and place to live. About like a groundhog would out there, I guess. But he went to school first right out there where the ballpark is now, north of town.

JIM: Do you feel any strong personal attachment to this land out here?

ALVON: Do what?

JIM: Do you feel any strong personal attachment to the land out here?

IDA: Oh yes, of course. We are right at home here with this land.

JIM: What do you like about this land?

IDA: Well we was just raised here. It's just home, and it just seems like that, we just think Harney County is about the best place, and Burns, you know. However, we was raised down on the ranch, but anyway we ---

ALVON: One thing we liked about it, there was nobody again' you. You didn't bump elbows or anything when you went out. And we used to never lock our doors. You was welcome, just go into this house, eat all you wanted, sleep in that bed. As long as that's all you done, and go out, you was welcome. But you can't do that today, can't do it today. Never locked a door. I can't hardly lock our door yet down here, but we lock it. Yeah, when we leave we have to lock it.

JIM: Is there anything like a spiritual feeling towards this land?

IDA: Well I think so, yes.

ALVON: You mean like we couldn't get away from it or anything?

We can. I lived six and a half years in Idaho in the early '30's. Went there in '30 and lived there six and a half years. I like it out there, but the way they done, they done the work,

and the big old fat horse down there watching you do it. And here we used our horses and equipment to do the same job they did. Them people worked awful hard out there in that country. Of course they got equipment and machinery nowadays. But I really enjoyed it out there, but I like it here too. We can get out and go a long ways before you bothered anybody. Yeah.

IDA: You didn't have to get down on your knees to do garden work either. Here of course it was all ranching, you know, cattle raising until the mill come in, and of course that's ---

ALVON: Well we raised gardens all right for our own use, and things.

IDA: Yeah, but it was a mighty long time --- they froze most of the time too, until the weather, the climate kind of changed.

ALVON: Yeah, it's a cold country. It's a stock country, providing you don't try to calve in the wintertime. Well we used to, way back. The first time I ever drove four horses on a wagon, on a road --- I worked lots of them on the farm there, but to get out on a road, we used to go to John Day over here and get our supplies, potatoes, and onions, and apples, and all kinds of fruit like that, and bring it back, you know. That's where we used to go and get that. They raised lots of fruit in that John Day Valley over there. Quite a bit warmer climate.

But the first time I ever drove it, was three horses and a mule to a wagon over there. I worked ... six, eight, and ten as far as that goes farming, but not on that. I'll never forget that trip. Yeah. My mother went and a neighbor woman. And they drove two horse on a light wagon, and I had four on a heavier wagon, and we brought their supplies. Now too when they did that they got enough to last a year, you know. Probably get five tons of spuds out at the ranch out here. There was six of us kids there, course we didn't eat only all we could get and beg for more, but we never went hungry.

IDA: Well there was always four or five hired men.

ALVON: I was just gong to say, dad always had a lot of hired help, then on top of that the buckaroos come by, they was home. They took care of them just the same, fed them. Didn't cost them nothing to stay, because they'd bring your cattle in. You never lose nothing by being honest and fair. Nope. Yeah. But as far as being attached to this ground, you couldn't get off; it didn't bother me a bit.

I milked 42 head of cows over there, and I went broke with them. I got the biggest whole milk check out of the whole Meridian Creamery of any producer there. And it wasn't my fault, but it just went down till it wasn't worth anything.

And I had the nicest white boar over there. I had, I believe I had, seems like I had three sows, these white sows, and they had the darndest litter of pigs you ever seen. But this boar was such a nice hog, you know, you just drop a tailgate down and take a little grain and just load him anyplace. Well he got related to my hogs, which you didn't want them inbreeding, so I thought I'd take him to the sale and sell him. I didn't expect much, but I did expect enough to buy a postage stamp. But it wouldn't buy it today. You know what that hog brought me through the sale ring? 50 cents, 50 cents, on a hog that would weigh probably 300 pounds, 50 cents. And I seen them put nice weaner pigs in that ring to sell, nice ones, big ones, heavy ones, couldn't get a bid on say two or three, just keep putting in, might be five or six. And you might get, oh maybe a couple of dollars for that bunch. That was in the early '30's. That's a little ahead of you. You wasn't operating then.

JIM: Not even, no.

ALVON: No.

JIM: Not even in any way.

ALVON: And that was pretty hard times at that time. Yeah. But I did, I got the biggest whole milk check out of that Meridian Creamery of all the producers, and there was lots of

them there. By god, and I just was going down. And I had a little money, I did for a while make about a \$1000 a month until that thing struck. And I thought I could stay till it broke back, but I stayed right there till I lost her.

IDA: Then you moved back here.

ALVON: Moved back here. Well Dad came over and got me.

I lost my hearing on the Arock Dam tending chuck for a big Swede on that Arock Dam. Bent over, you know. I loosened the clamp and tightened the switch, and the quicker you done it, the better they liked it. And we hung on a raft over the face of the Arock Dam, and we had several ton of steel on there. There was, if I remember right, there was five of us and they had a shaft about that big, and these jackhammers fastened to them. Every three feet up and down, and every four feet that way, they put a three-foot hole into that dam. The face of it was sloughing off; so they could reinforce it, see. Yeah.

JIM: Was it the jackhammers that did it, the noise?

ALVON: What?

JIM: Was it the jackhammers that did it, with the noise?

ALVON: Yeah, it was just like one of these here chain saws, putt putt putting. And you're bent over, that loosened the clamp, and tightening the switch with two big burrs. Oh they was about that big square, and probably that big. Maybe they was that big. You had a wrench that weighed fifty pounds to turn them with.

JIM: That's as big as your wrist?

ALVON: I guess. That was to loosen that clamp, you see, so he could tip it up and down and get the right angle, and the switch was this way, so to get straight in there. And that was your job. And you're bent over right there, and that thing popping in your ear. Well my head begin to ring, and I went to a specialist in Boise and told him about it. He said, "Does it quit at night?" I said, "It did for a while," but I says, ... He says, "I think you'll be

alright." He says, "I don't believe it will bother you." I went back, I don't hear out of this ear at all, I've got this aid on here. I just got it a while back. That's the third one I've had for it. But that's what it did to you, see.

I could have run that jackhammer as well as that Swede could, and he could have done it. Working on construction, and I never was no hand to get up high. I've seen the time I couldn't climb up on that porch. Well they lifted us over that Arock Dam --- you ever been to that Arock Dam? They lifted us over the top and let us down on this skid. We had a three by twelve, and we drilled holes in there and laid these ---I put plank on that. We carried that steel off and on, on that. And I've seen the time I couldn't do it. And I've, some of us come down that wanted to go to work, we didn't know who they were, they coming and going all the time. Get out from here to that door and grab that plank and you couldn't hardly pull them off of there. No business out there at all, and it didn't bother me a bit. I don't know why. At one time there, what we'd do they'd pull the skid up and down and all these rocks, that was made out of rocks stuck in that cement, would be loose, and our air cable come over the top there, big hose. Well it moved like that and worked some of those rocks out. Well we'd pull up and down and take all of them out that we could get, but when we'd start down here, by the time we'd get up, it would loosen some more, and I didn't see it. And the boys said you was bent over. Said you don't know how near you come to losing your head. They was afraid to speak to me or anything, if I'd raised up this rock a falling would have hit me in the head. It just went over my head and never touched me. I didn't know it. Yeah.

But you're bent over there loosening that clamp and tightening that switch, and it's all underneath. You got to be bent over to do it, and it's a heavy tool. And they wanted it done by the time they speak, they want it done. And I was lucky; I was one of the fastest ones on there doing it. If you pinched your finger you paid no attention to it, but that night

you had to bore a hole in here to let the pressure off or you couldn't sleep. And all that kind of stuff, you know. Yeah, construction work.

JIM: That's what made the country.

ALVON: Huh?

JIM: That made the country.

ALVON: I guess, I guess.

IDA: Yeah, construction work, what's made the country, that's for sure.

ALVON: Yeah, yeah, it's all right, but them fellows don't care anymore for you than they do for a yellow coyote out there. Nope.

JIM: Did the ranchers that hired people have a different attitude about their help? You know you were talking about construction and their attitude, towards help.

ALVON: Yeah, you mean in regards to what a man should do and shouldn't do, and things like that? Well some fellows we might call him a slave driver. Other fellows would hire a man and tell him what to do, and if he was any good, he might know more than the man that showed him the job what to do, and they respected him. Yeah, there's all that kind of stuff, and it still goes on. But today when you hire a man and show him to fix something over here, and the next thing you know he's standing right here watching you.

Well this Ormand Ausmus hired a fellow like that, and took him down there and he showed him what he wanted to do. And I don't think it was ten minutes he was back watching him. Ormand crawled off of what he was doing and said, "Now you won't have to watch me," he says, "I'll work. You can go back over there and do that." But they won't do, they won't work. ... they're not all that way.

No, we used to hay this whole valley with horses before there was any tractors, or cars, or anything here, you see. And start haying around July 1st and hay until the snow run them out, going south toward the lake here. Yeah. And some of those fellows would

run a mower all through the season like that. Work lots of bronco horses and stuff like that, doing that. But like I say, some fellows expect more than their horse could do, out of you, and like that.

But we boarded with anybody. We never carried a lunch or anything like that. I went to work for anybody here, they took, they fed you. You might go back and forth to home, but you come down for breakfast, all three meals. And they don't do that today like they used to, no.

IDA: We never knew who was going to be at home to eat dinner or supper.

ALVON: What?

IDA: We never knew who was going to be out home to eat dinner or supper. And when the buckaroos was driving those cattle, why I've heard Mama say they'd be so hungry when they came in, smelled the coffee, you know, and it just made them sick. They couldn't hardly eat, you know. Oh, late at night and cold, and the next morning get up and see the horses bucking out through the flat there, everywhere, you know, rounding up the cattle.

ALVON: Yeah, but it was a good old healthy life, yeah.

JIM: Where did your mother come from?

IDA: She come from Milton Freewater. Yeah, Milton Freewater. Well it was Milton then when she came from up there, but it's Milton Freewater now.

ALVON: Well they put the towns together now.

IDA: Yeah, you know about Milton Freewater now, yeah. I was raised right out, or born right out here where Stafford's place is. You know where this big house is? Well that's where I was born, but of course they didn't have that house there then, you know. My grandmother, Grandpa and Grandma Dixon. My mother was a Dixon.

ALVON: Well they were Demaris when they came here.

JIM: What was that name again?

IDA: Demaris, Demaris.

JIM: Demaris, I see.

ALVON: And they come from over here, there is relatives over there yet around Prineville.

IDA: Yeah, and all up around Milton Freewater and Walla Walla, and all around up there, yeah. In fact my mother has a cousin, he's, I guess he's about 92 years old, that still lives up at Milton Freewater, yeah.

JIM: Did she teach school?

IDA: No.

JIM: Have any activities that would be interesting to know about?

IDA: No.

ALVON: My mother on the ranch out there with us six kids. She was a housewife, and believe me they worked, they didn't have these washers and dryers in those days, they had a washboard. I can see her yet, bent over that. And lots of times she had to cut her own wood, they didn't have electricity.

IDA: And pump water, and carry it.

ALVON: Pump water and take care of anything they wanted to do on the ranch. Boy they really worked. And they do that yet in the Boise Valley, a lot of them. Yeah. It don't hurt anybody to work. But by golly she worked, and then cook that big meal for who and how many, nobody knew.

IDA: And on Sunday, good gosh, we always had a bunch of kids there on Sundays, riding calves and bucking colts or something.

JIM: Was that good fun?

IDA: Well we always had to watch it, you know. Sure, that was for the fun that the fellows

that was doing it, you know. But we always had to milk cows. Goodness sakes, you know.

ALVON: Never saw people that liked to hook a saddle and then ride him ...

IDA: I milked 20 cows myself. When my grandfather died I went and stayed with my grandmother. I had to help her milk cows, and then go to school, and come back. And then she made butter, and gosh I used to know who everybody was that lived here in town. She sold butter to most everybody around here. You had to get up early in the morning and get it out when it was hot. We didn't have ice until later.

ALVON: You made that butter in one of these big barrel churns, with stands like that. Kettle on each side, and you turned it. And when that butter made and hit the end there, it took a little power to turn it over again. Well us boys we wanted to figure out some way we could lay down there and pull the strap to do it, but you can't do it, you got to get up and do it. I milked them cows awhile too.

My dad used to have quite a lot of mares. Horsepower was only help you had in those days. And he used to breed lots of mares to Jacks, and raise mules and stuff. And I did all that when I was 14 years old back here.

And stayed with our grandparents, and they come down town with that butter with a team and hack, is what they hauled it in. And I milked them cows while they was there and ... with my hands it was really too much, but I milked them. And one of the worst things I had trouble with, Grandpa had so many cows. Say they was twenty, he milked ten, she milked the other ten. Well the ones that the man milked I would have no trouble, but when you go to milk them cows that a woman's milked, they object to it. Well I got what I could out of them while they was gone, and eventually they get kinda used to you. They'll kick you, bucket and all, and tell you to take that, yeah.

And she owned five Jacks, that I remember, during this time. And that was my job,

was to --- them horses run out on the range, and I'd go out every day and pick these mares up that were in heat, and breed them, what was there, and turn them back out. And the next day get maybe some more, see. I did that all my life up there. Know quite a bit about it yet today. Never had anybody ever show me how to castrate a horse. Some of our neighbors up here used to turn their mules, colts and stuff out, and they were studs, you see. Well of course they'd breed these mares that you'd want to breed to a high powered Jack, or a stallion that was a draft horse, or a saddle horse. So I started in castrating those horses, and I did a lot of that. I tried it every way in the world I could think of. Cording them, crazing them, or just castrating and turning him loose. And I've had some of them bleed to death before they got 200 yards out in the corrals.

... on what they called Donegan, the grade. And this Jack was a very cagey Jack, and there was one of the horses on the wheel there that, a Jack gets a hold of him, you catch him right here by the top of the neck, he'll just bite him and just paralyze him there, you know. I'd get him here and choke him, and there's been a Jack or two a holding this old horse, he was scared to death of them. Well we had him behind the wagon, tied like this with two ropes so he couldn't get out to the wagon wheel. Well some way he stretched this rope and got it over the wagon wheel. We didn't see it, and the wheel a turning cut that in two pretty soon, cut both ropes off. Well naturally that Jack was wanting to get up here with these horses. Up past the wagon he went, and he jumped onto the back end of this horse there. Well that caused a runaway and they was running, you couldn't hold them. And this Jack just --- they would make a braying noise when they're doing that, and he just hung on there and pretty soon he fell. And when he fell, we had a load on the wagon, and he went under there and it doubled him up and broke his back, just in front of the hips, and we had to kill him. Well I was about half happy because I wasn't wanting no mules anyway. I was courting the Mrs. along about that time, and I

couldn't be gone. But we had to kill him. That to my knowledge, that's the last Jack he ever had.

IDA: Yeah, and we wondered when we saw Dad coming back whatever happened, you know. They was a coming back and ---

ALVON: Yeah, we was going to move them up there, but they --- breeding purpose there. Oh he used to have lots of horse colts and lots of mules too.

And another experience about that, you've seen out across the country these knolls of dirt? Well a badger will generally dig there because deep soil is left there. If a mare foals up on top of that, and there's a badger hole there, well she'll push that colt, seems like indefinitely to that badger hole. Well then he can't get up. She'll attempt to get him up. What she does she just gets on top of him and tromps him in there so tight you can't hardly pull him out with a saddle horse. It kills him. I've seen a lot of that. Then some of them mares come fighting you too when they foal out like that. They're wicked. Yeah, yeah, you bet. Been a lot of water went under the bridge since some of this stuff I've told you. Yeah.

JIM: How were the schools around here? Did you enjoy that? Or were the schools ---

ALVON: Oh yeah.

JIM: Recess was fun.

ALVON: We had to go to school, no kid wants to go to school, but we had to. We used to have to walk to school. When we was small most of the time we walked. Then after we got bigger we had an old horse we could use on a buggy, or we could all ride him if we could get on to him. He was gentle, we could do that. But we had a lot of fun at this Poison Creek School up here where Shepards live now, Wes Shepard. They lived there at the old school grounds.

IDA: Glen Clemens, you interview him? He went to school out there when we did, you

know.

ALVON: Who?

IDA: Glen Clemens, yeah, and his brothers Clay and Cal.

ALVON: Clay and Cal. Yeah. Oh, I could name a lot of them. Rosalyn and Ora Hamilton, and Clyde Cowing, and all them. They're just a little older than we are. Clarence Mace.

IDA: Yeah. And I remember when Lena Harkey expelled Ora Hamilton and he went out the door and jerked the doorknob off. And he got a way out to the fence and he let that doorknob fall back, slide back, and it broke a panel through the door, and we were rolling it up through the schoolhouse there. But we was in there anyway. She'd expelled him because he --- oh, some of them big boys was pretty ornery, but some of those women teachers could make them stand around there.

ALVON: Yeah, but them, them kids in those days was 21 years old, going to school out there.

IDA: Yeah. Oh yeah, they went to --- they always set us back to the first of the book. We didn't seem to have grades, you know, they'd set us back. We'd have to take it over and over until finally we managed to get through someway. I don't know. Yeah, they had a high school here in town too.

ALVON: The only schooling I ever had was out here at Poison Creek. That was the only place I ever was. Some of our younger brothers and sisters went to school here in town. But they consolidated these schools, and I yet believe that they was just as quality of the kids, was just as good, and the teacher had more time with them. And she taught all the grades in one of them old country schools, as they're doing right up here now. Yeah, them teachers taught all the grades, and it seems like they done a good job of it, if the teacher was any good.

Now we had one teacher out there, she'd put some kid in school, in charge to run, and she'd go take a horseback ride with one of them big boys that was out there. She's still living. How old is she? Mrs. ---

IDA: Patty Miler.

ALVON: Ida Miler, yeah.

IDA: Patty Miler.

ALVON: Patty Miler.

IDA: Oh yeah, she's in her 80's.

ALVON: She's still a living; she's getting way up there. I'm 76, and she's older than that. And she was a teacher, so she's older than that. She's getting up there. I seen her awhile back.

IDA: Yeah.

ALVON: I didn't think she knew me, but she did. But you know what happened when she put a kid in charge of that school? We used to have them erasers about that long and about that wide, why that schoolhouse was full of them. The ceiling had dust all over when you'd bounce off there. Them kids couldn't handle them kids. So we did have fun at school.

There was a bunch of boys one time broke a toilet door, a toilet house door --- them old outside toilets. Some of the boys inside, and some of them was going to force their way in, and they tore it off the hinges. And we had one teacher out there by the name of C. C. Jackson, a man, and no matter what the other kids done; he'd tan me for it. And I swore that if ever I got big enough, if he was an old gray-headed man with whiskers, I'd ... them whiskers out or something. And I never did see him again. So when we lived in the '30's in Idaho out there, I heard he was in the valley somewhere, but we never met. But he did whip me a lot of times, and my folks finally told him to quit it. Yeah.

For things that just any kid did. Well I've had several tannings out there. I needed some, but didn't feel like I needed any. Gotta let some other kids have them too. Yeah. But you put a kid in charge of a school from first graders up to eighth grade out there, well what can they do? Teacher couldn't hardly handle them, some of them. They had to have one of these rawhide whips and not be afraid to use it. Or a big heavy rule with a rim around the edge of it. That feels good right there. I felt a little of it. Yeah. Them's good days anyway. I still liked them.

JIM: What kind of things would you like to have people think back on? The people who want to read about this part of the country, what would you tell them if you had something that you wanted to tell them? Anything important?

IDA: Oh, well unless --- I don't know. It's just something that we'd like for people to know.

JIM: About the early days.

IDA: Oh. Well I really think that people had, they had --- I think people, that they really knew what it was in the early days, you know. I think they'd be interested to hear about some of the things. Of course there is other people who can tell things better than we can, you know. Anyway, I think they kind of enjoy hearing some of the things. I know I've had, oh sometimes people come and ask me about things, you know, and they seem to enjoy hearing what I had to tell, you know. And I like to hear people talk about their experiences that way too, in the older times, you know.

ALVON: One thing that kind of heads up all ... You see he was left alone right here, that went from here. It wasn't like coming in a covered wagon. We've seen all that. I've seen a freight teams mired down in the main street of Burns right up here. And big old wagon wheels, you and I couldn't pick it up today, and put it on there, big old wide tires. I don't know what, and they stood way up. Yeah, we both seen that right here when they used to freight, see.

IDA: Oh yes, our dad went out to Vale and Ontario in the fall. It would take them about ten days to make the trip, you know, bringing in supplies.

ALVON: Yeah, they'd do that in the fall, you know.

IDA: Yeah, and in the spring sometimes too.

...

ALVON: Yeah. And it sunk.

JIM: The dredge in the P Ranch Valley?

ALVON: Huh?

JIM: This dredge at the P Ranch Valley.

ALVON: Yeah, and her father went in there and cleaned that all out. And what they did they'd dam it off here and float it, see. And got it, and they built a big canal back through there. Well this man cut wood for all of that before my time.

JIM: Fred Black.

ALVON: Fred Black.

JIM: Cut the wood.

ALVON: He lived there on the hill, him and his father and another brother. The other brother is dead, but then they cut lots of it. He'll give you all of that, and it will be just the way they did it. Yeah, ... and fixed it all up. Because to dig a canal, which they --- that swampy country down there. And they dug this big canal, and it's there yet, you see. Drains that water into the Malheur Lake down here. Yeah, there's quite a story that goes with that, and he's capable of giving it to you just like it was. He's got a good memory there.

Like I say, the main street up here, I've seen the water on main street, I wouldn't attempt to say how many times. Have you been down to Crane country yet, down this 78 Highway? I've seen all those low swales that you see across there, running water, not

just standing there soaking, running water. And people when they built that, said why they got so many culverts under that highway there? Well I said, "If you'd seen what I was, you'd wonder why they wasn't bigger." I've seen the whole valley, and I've seen the ryegrass so high from this valley --- there was no fences from Main Street here. I'll attempt to say outside of, out here three miles; there was a place there, 320 acres. There was a fence there, and my dad had a fence right, ... up north. And I've owned it all since and so has my son-in-law. But you could go plumb to Crane and there wasn't a fence. Well then the homesteaders come in and fenced that all up. Well they was going to make a big living off of it. And these old timers, like my dad and them, would tell them the truth. They said, "All you want to do is run us off." Ida Whiting probably told you some of that same stuff. They say you don't want us here, and they're gonna show you. Well they lived on jackrabbits and starved to death. You might once in five to seven years get a crop, but you couldn't live long enough to get the next one. And when they took the brush off of that ground, the wind blows in this country, we ain't had much yet, but this month of March, and maybe April, will take care of it, it always does.

But if they clear that off and their grain got up that high, if it didn't shear it off blowing that dirt, it would bury it. I can take you out here in the valley and show you a great ... where a fence was at, netting on there, to keep the rabbits from eating up what little they had. Thousands of rabbits. And that drifted up as high as that door right there, right out through the valley. I can show you them places. And some places that's as bare as this street, that nothing has ever grown, it just keeps it open, see. Well all of that stuff went on here in this country here. And then they'd ask these old timers that was here, the same as the new ones that comes in today, how come you haven't farmed and took care of that land out there? There's no water. If they was sitting over a lake here and could drill wells, and get it --- they've got some wells out here, but as they pump they lower it

see, and I imagine when they do that, which they have already in places, it will lower your well back here in some place, see. And if you had water, it is good land, it looks good to them, and it is good. It's really better than some of this right along the river here. And they could really raise something. But they don't do that, you know. It costs you, by the time you pump that and get it, and it's a crop that they can get, these people have all got it here, and you can't get rid of it. Course they're trucking it out, lots of it nowadays.

Yeah, and that and the homesteaders. We was here before they was here, and since they have been here. We were married, the wife and I, the 27th of last month, 55 years. And at that time, that's one thing I was going to tell you, there was two foot of snow on the level all over here. You think it's nice to get rid of a few inches, but there was two foot of snow, 18 inches, all over the valley. Forty below zero, and the valley was full of hydrophobia coyotes. Lots of cattle died. And if I remember right, maybe you do, I think three people got bit and died.

IDA: Yeah.

ALVON: It seems like I have a little recollection of it.

IDA: I can't remember just who they were.

ALVON: But if the dogs or something, if you had a dog and he barked, you didn't want to open that door and walk right out, because he may be right there. I killed several of them. And he won't die until you hit him in a vital spot. Well last year they had forty cases of rabies in Arizona, I don't know how many in California. And I've been telling them that right in this old carcass, I feel like it could break out here this season. I don't know if it will or not, but it could.

IDA: It could.

ALVON: Coyotes is awful thick here. There's lots of rabbits here.

Oh, there is a lot of things like that. I started to tell you about that ryegrass. That

water would come out there, but it wouldn't stay long enough to kill it out. And I've seen that grass so high you couldn't see this mountain here when you was out in the valley a horseback, and you wasn't riding a Shetland horse either. You was riding a pretty good horse. And I've seen some that was lost, couldn't find their way back here in that ryegrass out there. There's lots of ryegrass there yet, but it don't get that big. It used to be years ago that seed that grow on ryegrass, you ever seen it? It's black, curls out like a horn, you break it open it's white inside. You don't hardly see it. But last year or two once in awhile its been a little damper, and you see some of them heading down ... I guess it's kinda seed, I don't know what it is. Yeah, but I actually seen that.

And horses would come off of the range up here, that's before there was any forest, or BLM ever thought of. Hundreds of horses would come out and winter in that valley on this ryegrass. Because they'd eat snow for water, see, that's the only way they'd get it.

Well the old timers would go out there and they'd round up. I might say five, six hundred head of horses, maybe two hundred, and take out some to break for work next year, both ride and draft horses.

And I've seen some great old horse races out in there, you bet. Some of them old timers used to say, "That's a pretty good looking horse right there, I believe he'd make a saddle horse." And somebody would rope him; one of them old boys would get on him and run the horses, and ride him to town. I've seen them do it. Green horse, never had a rope on him, from the time he was born. I've seen all that. Then the horses in them days, she can tell you that too.

Did you ever hear a horse snort? You could hear from here to that signal light up there at the other end of Burns. And you don't hardly ever hear a horse snort anymore. Yeah, he'd just whistle, he was wild, you know.

IDA: You betcha.

ALVON: They've changed there. Something, they've got rid of that whistle out of them. He can do it, but you don't hardly ever hear it. Yep.

IDA: Well, they've been tamed down, I guess, you know.

ALVON: Different breed of horses. They've done away with them wild mustangs that run out there, you know. And that's what I was brought up with here. My dad had horses there, and we'd go out and pick out, oh maybe six, eight, or ten, whatever we thought we was going to work during this next haying season here. And I broke those horses. We'd go out and hitch one of them with a gentle horse, and the sickle bar is always on your right, on a horse mower. We'd put him over there so that if anything happened we wouldn't cripple our good horse.

And then another thing when you're mowing you turn to the right anyway, keep your sickle in the grass. Well my dad had just put a curb strap through the bit here, and get behind on a saddle horse. When you come to a corner, he'd put the turns on and this horse would hold him, and that colt looked around and see that he'd go just as high as he could, but he could hold him. As soon as he got so he'd turn that corner, he'd turn me loose. ... I had some great rides right out here, lots of them. Yeah. Kinda interesting, and it's dangerous too. Yeah, but I'm still here anyway. I've done a lot of it. Yeah, I ain't the only one that did it, there's a lot more of them that did it. But I think we had about as many bronco horses working.

And lots of times we'd take the front end of a wagon and make a two-wheel cart out of it, put a box on it. Well they could turn right around or do whatever they wanted to do with it. You wouldn't break your ... pole out. But they can do that with a mowing machine too, but it's dangerous if you got thrown in there and get cut up. Yep. Torn up a few of them. If you couldn't kick it out of gear in time, that big drive wheel, that top wheel,

will fly to pieces if it's in gear. But if you kick it out it's a free wheel and it's all right.

IDA: I bet you don't have any idea what kind of mowing machine he's talking about, do you hardly?

ALVON: Have you ever seen a horse drawn mowing machine?

JIM: I can see a large cart with a, that's being pulled, that has these blades on it.

ALVON: Steel wheels like that, with little bars about like that on it. That was to give it traction so the sickle would run see, it wouldn't slip. Yeah. You've seen a horse drawn ...

JIM: Only in pictures.

IDA: Yeah.

JIM: Just in pictures.

ALVON: That's what it looks like. Yeah.

IDA: That's what I say, we're talking before your time, you know.

ALVON: Yeah, but they see some of these things in some of these museums, and places around ... Yeah, I was just trying to think right here where there is one, but ... There used to be a bunch of them set right there, but they cleaned them out. ... He used to have them. ...

IDA: And went rabbit drives, we went to rabbit drives too. How many was they? Had 5000 out here at the old Fry place that time.

ALVON: Oh, more than that. I would say about 25,000, and half of them got away. Oh yeah, you couldn't see the ground. Yeah. Did Ida Whiting tell you about rabbit drives?

JIM: No, but somebody did.

ALVON: She never thought of it. Well you go out this 78 Highway and turn north till the first ... that goes that way. Its been abandoned and fenced up now, but there's some old buildings there. Just south of there they built this rabbit pen, say like this room here and made it high. Well they run a wing from here, way out there, maybe a quarter of a mile.

Run another one down along the ... of netting, see. Then go out in the brush out, from end to end there, and lay some netting down here.

So when, a lot of people would get way on the back side and start these rabbits. Well they'd get inside this; they keep working them toward this pen. And kill all you could while you was a going. No guns allowed, and no dogs, but there was always some nut out there a shooting. And somebody would turn a dog loose, he'd run up there and spook them, back they'd come.

Well, but the real thing was this fellow was a horseback there, the boss, a running it, a managing it. And you'd just keep driving them towards that corral. There would be a lot of rabbits get away, but you'd just keep a coming. Well when you get to this netting you'd just pick it up. Everybody would get there at once and you'd pick it up, see. Well them rabbits would stampede and back they'd come. They'd fill that up over there like that and run in here. And they'd run past you just like water over a dam. Well you think I'll hit this one, and here's one closer. And unless you looked at one and hit him, you wouldn't kill five rabbits out of that whole army. And you wanted to have a short stick. And look right at him and hit him and pay no attention to them or you wouldn't get him. And then after they'd killed all that they could get, these here would quit coming back, they'd crowd those last few into that small corral, and get in there and kill them, see. They'd just shut that up so they couldn't get out.

But you'd had to go to work here where this was closed off with nothing but rabbits. These rabbits was all healthy and fat. They were hid, these others killed on top of them. And you'd have to go to work and kill them before you ever laid this back down. I don't know, I don't know whether 25,000 would be what was killed at that particular spot or not. And they figured half of them got away. Well they drove it again see, and got a lot of them. Yeah.

IDA: Yeah. We used to go to the haystacks out home too, moonlight nights, you know, the rabbits would be coming in, you know. And the boys would get on the pony and run out to shut the gates before the rest of us come out on the sled, you know, to help kill rabbits. But you know those rabbits would get pretty smart, they'd hear them coming and they'd run out the gate, you know.

ALVON: We'd fix this hay corral so it was rabbit tight see, and up pretty high. But some of them would, learned to jump that. Like she said they'd hear you, and we'd leave a little gate open and they'd go around and go in, they'd go around until they found it and go into the stack. And I seen haystacks right out here north of town in this Indian property, alfalfa. And I seen it out where I was at, and all over the valley. Them rabbits so thick they start eating, and they just keep eating and clawing out under a stack. And I seen them tip them big stacks over.

IDA: Yeah.

ALVON: Yeah, I've seen it right out here too. And on a moonlight night, them rabbits sitting for two or three hundred yards, besides all that was in the hay corral. The ground was just black, just like looking at that rug, you know, hundred of them.

There is two places this winter that I seen lots of rabbits signs. They're getting thick again. That's one thing that makes me think that they'll get diseased, and the coyotes maybe too, and that hydrophobia could break out. Yeah, it could do it. I hope it don't. And the bats down around Klamath Falls they get quite a few bats with rabies, and they're carriers too. Yeah.

But 55 years ago, the 27th of this month, the weather was different around here. And during those times back that far, every January we had lots of snow all winter, nothing like it anymore here at all. Had lots of snow, but it just turned off hot, and rained, and all the big sloughs was drifting full. You couldn't tell where a ditch was at, and that

hot sun, and warm rain, you know, here would come that water. Well it couldn't run down the canal, it was full of snow, you know. And we used to take a team on each side and get a log and drag it up and down there and finally get a place cut out so it would come off. Heck, it'd run right up on your porch here, or anyplace. But all that snow and stuff --- and then that would freeze up again.

This ground hog that always figures six weeks of cold weather if he sees his shadow. I say he didn't see it this year, the sun so bright he couldn't see it, couldn't look at it. If he could, he seen it. Anyway, it would freeze up and just be winter again, like I just told you there in February. Forty below zero. And the next time it broke up --- why this country here when it's spring we have the worst cold wind and weather right here in the spring of the year.

It would be nice to live in a country when spring comes it just leveled off, but it don't do it here. It has later years, more so than back where I was telling you 55 years ago, and before that.

IDA: I've seen water right all over right here where my house stands.

ALVON: I was going to tell him a while ago, that was six miles out to the old home out here, and the road went around that way. You'd get in a boat and come to town and go back on it. You'd put on a pair of skates in February, January, when I told you it was colder, skate to Wright's Point and back too. It was all ice.

And don't forget there was a lot of cattle out there. Cows were heck to spread out and split their crotch, you know, lots of cattle lost that way on that ice. Yeah. Or they'd get marooned out here on an island or something, can't get any feed to them, or can't get them off of there. But someway or another you have to string some hay and get them out of there. Quite interesting times to go through all that. We've all done it. And before that freezes up too bad, the canal that was around here where they was isolated or anything

like that, you had to swim your horse in that ice water to get over there and get back. If you ever swim a horse don't go off in front of him, go off behind and get him by the tail. Because if you get in front he'll pull you under. Stay behind him. You betcha. And don't forget that. That's quite a sensation to feel a horse a swimming. Now some horses swim high, other horses swim low, so you're bound to get a little wet on that. And in that cold ice water, when you come out of there your clothes just freeze stiff. Yep. That's the life of Riley. Yeah. Rabbit drives. Occasionally they'd get a coyote or two in there. Now if ever you think you've seen anything with big eyes, it was him, when they begin to tighten up on him. And quite often he'd get out if he's got time he'll dig out. If you're crowding him too much he might accidentally run and hit the fence so hard it'd flip him over and he'd get away. But I did see him --- we used to have a couple of black hounds here in the valley. They belonged to Skip Whiting. They called them hounds Jack and Splinter. I don't know how many hungry coyotes them two dogs has killed. But I seen them turn them loose one time right up here on that sand hill and they killed a couple of coyotes that was inside there. Yeah, Jack and Splinter. Yeah.

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