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HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #18 Side B

Subject: Annie Coe

Place: Burns, Oregon

Date: 1972

Interviewer: Jim Baker

Release Form: No

JAMES BAKER: You were talking about your first relatives in the Harney County area.

ANNIE COE: Well, that would be my mother's people probably. Her father was a German immigrant. He came here after the Franco Prussian War. He came to the United States. And he had been a soldier in the Franco Prussian War. And I think that he originally started out to go to the gold field, but how he happened to get to Burns, I don't know. It wasn't Burns at the time. He stopped near Harney and homesteaded on Soldier Creek. And my mother had one brother, he was born there. And then she had a twin sister, they were born in 1887.

And then later when they were two years old my grandmother died in childbirth. And he took them to California. He was going to take them to Sacramento, and take them on the train, the twins, and send them to Chicago where his sister lived. He had made arrangements with the sister, written to her. And she wanted them. And when they got there, they went by wagon train of course, and when they got there they got a contagious disease. I don't know, probably measles or chicken pox, my mother didn't remember what it was.

JIM: Must of been a lot of this.

ANNIE: And she said that by the time they got over it, he got word from his sister that, or his sister's husband that she had died. So they stayed there until my mother was 15. And then they came back to Burns. At least --- only my mother and her twin sister, and their father came back to Burns.

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They came up through the Alvord, and up that way in a wagon. My mother said that she and her sister used to take turns riding a saddle horse that they had with them. And they'd ride on ahead.

JIM: And the other one would walk?

ANNIE: No, the other one would be in the wagon, or they'd ride double.

JIM: I see, in a wagon.

ANNIE: And then they'd find a place, a covered wagon, find a place that they would think would be a nice place to camp, or where they could eat their lunch.

JIM: Sort of sounds like fun.

ANNIE: It was fun, she said they enjoyed it.

JIM: I mean at the right time of the year, that would be fun.

ANNIE: I don't know what time of the year it was.

JIM: There could be other times of the year where that would really ...

ANNIE: But then they came up there, and my mother was 15 up there, by that time. And they went back to his homestead. And he had paid the taxes on his homestead. And I have a letter that was written by the tax collector at that time stating that his neighbor, Mr. Louie, who lived out near there, had paid his taxes. And I still have the letter. And I thought it was remarkable handwriting, it was beautiful handwriting.

JIM: Yeah. Well Louie came from Germany too, didn't he?

ANNIE: Yes, uh huh. I think he did, I didn't know him, I don't remember him. I can remember his name. And my grandfather, I can remember my grandfather had a lovely voice. And he would sing to me in German. And I can recognize some of the songs because I know Brahms Lullaby was one of them. And certain operatic songs that I hear, why it strikes a cord, you know, I recognize the song. But he sang in a choir in Germany, and also when he was in California, he sang some in the choir.

JIM: There was a lot of Germans in California too, weren't there?

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ANNIE: Well, they went to the gold fields, and he worked in the gold fields. In fact, I have a brass tray over there that is part of a scales, you know, one of those little scale deals that he had. But my other grandparents came here, and they must have come here in the early '90's. I don't know what year. I know that my grandfather died in 1899. And they settled on Prather Creek, which is one canyon over from Soldier Creek. And they came here from California, and from around Ione, California.

And they had a daughter who was married and living on Prather Creek. Her husband had evidently homesteaded there. Their name was Bugler, they had no children. But she had been ill, and they thought that she had what they called consumption. And they came up to see her with the idea that they would homestead or take up land here. Evidently, they had heard of Pete French coming up into the area and farming.

And they started out from Ione with another couple, my grandmother, and my grandfather, and my uncle and my father were with another couple and his family. And this other man and his family stopped in Winnemucca, Nevada because one of his horses went lame. And he became an undertaker in Winnemucca.

And later my uncle went back to Winnemucca and married one of the girls, and that became Edith Varien. This was the Varien family. And she was quite well known. And they moved to Prather Creek, of course.

But this Bugler and his wife, was my aunt, left and went to Arizona, they thought perhaps that would help her health. And she died there. And my grandmother and my father and all of them took up land. And my grandfather homesteaded part of what is now the airport. And then my, I don't know which piece of land that my uncle took up, but part of it was the Rye Grass area I know, was homesteaded by him.

JIM: I'm familiar with that part.

ANNIE: And well the original Rye Grass Ranch was ours, and they bought part of the land. And they had two ranches at Rye Grass. And they took over the Prather Creek Ranch. And they, in

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1905, they built the, our home on Prather Creek, our big home on Prather Creek. It was my grandmother's idea that she build this large house. There was ten rooms, and she built this so she could have her family around.

It was beautiful up there, just beautiful. And that's where I was born, that's where my mother was married. And my father died when I was a year and a half old, in that same house. And that's where I was born. And it, you know, had quite a bit of family life concerning, you know, the entire family. And my aunt had twins there, and they died.

Then they, while they were up there at this ranch they burned lime, they had a lime kiln. And my father was ... And of course, they were running cows, they ran cows. And they burned lime in many of these old buildings down here, had the lime that they burned.

JIM: What did they use that for?

ANNIE: Mortar.

JIM: I see. Is that the stuff between the ---

ANNIE: Yes.

JIM: I didn't know that was lime.

ANNIE: Uh huh. And they operated all three ranches. One ranch they finally rented to someone else. And they were both out at Rye Grass. And when I started to school, of course I started to school at Rye Grass, and my cousin started to school at Rye Grass. And we'd go back up to the Canyon Ranch though, that's what we called it, the Prather Creek Ranch.

And we'd go back up there in the summertime. And oh, we all loved that because it was beautiful. And we had a beautiful yard, and lawn, and trees, and an orchard, and a stream, a creek. Oh yes, we raised everything.

In fact, my uncle liked farming, and my father liked cattle. But he died, my father died when I was a year and a half old. And my uncle didn't like cattle, so they sold the cattle and they went into farming. And they farmed grain, and they had alfalfa. And they had, they raised different types of grasses and grain, particularly that type of thing in the Rye Grass area. They experimented

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with sugar beets, and they planted a garden and potatoes on that Prather Creek Ranch. And they, we raised scads and scads of potatoes, sold them commercially. And they raised a lot of grain.

And they were interested in this experimental farm, of using a method that they were using at the experimental farm. I guess you've heard of the old experimental farm, out past the airport.

JIM: Not so much.

ANNIE: Well, it was run by the Oregon State College, Oregon Agricultural College it was at the time. And Professor Hyslop, I believe, I think he must have been Dean of the School of Agriculture at the time. I knew him pretty well.

And when I was a little girl I used to go to these things, it was great fun to go, of course. And they, every year they would have a celebration, and they'd have demonstrations, and they would show the type of crops that they had raised and take the men on tours of the land that they had planted in various types of crops, to see what crops were best. My uncle was a very good farmer, and usually they would go out to our Rye Grass place and look at our crops. And I know Mr. Hyslop was at our place many times. And Governor Pierce, I can remember him, going out and looking at our crops, year after year while he was governor. I think it was only four years, I believe.

But it was one of the big events of the year as far as we were concerned, to go to this program that they had. They had speeches and all kinds of things. And a picnic lunch, and they-- The town had a picnic at our ranch one Fourth of July. And I can remember the elaborate preparations that were made. We had an aspen grove over across, it was by the canyon. And my uncle built swings, swings for two, and the tables. And they had to cross the creek, and fix the log for them to walk on, across the creek. And they used our lawn, of course, for tables.

And they had bunting on, around the tables, red, white, and blue bunting around the picnic tables. And I can remember all the people coming out there. We used to have lots of company out there anyway. They had their whole program there that Fourth of July.

And we'd go back to the, in the wintertime we'd go down to Rye Grass and go to school, to go to school. And they'd have to feed cattle down there. Here comes ... now.

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But there were many things that we did on this Canyon Ranch, I loved it. It was fun, and we used to ride horseback. I don't know ---

JIM: I'm curious about what kind of life that a kid had out on that ranch in the early days.

ANNIE: I had --- what kind of a life I had?

JIM: What kind of a life you had.

ANNIE: I had one of the loveliest childhoods you can ever imagine. All of the animals, the horses, I learned to ride, I had my own calves. I had a pond; we kids would go out on this pond in a tub with oars and float around in it. And there were fish; we could fish in the creek. We caught ...

Although my mother said that when she and my father were courting, when they were courting, that she could catch small fish, over eight inches, six or eight inches, as fast as she could throw her hook in. Why ---

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