

HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #192 - Side B

Subject: Judge Dick Hoppes

Place: Prineville, Oregon

Date: June 20, 1991

Interviewer: Edward Gray

EDWARD GRAY: I'm with Judge Dick Hoppes in Prineville, Oregon on 6-20-91, and we're going to discuss Jim "Buck" Burk, who Judge Hoppes knew in the '40's.

DICK HOPPES: Yes, I was pretty young.

EDWARD: How did you, how in the world did you get to know this Burk?

DICK: Well it was kind of interesting; my father always wanted a silver belt buckle. And he didn't like anything that he saw in the stores in those days, or anything, and I don't remember which member of the family had talked to --- well Dad was a good friend of a lot of state policeman.

EDWARD: Oh, I see.

DICK: Walter Lansing, Farley Logan.

EDWARD: In Salem, Lansing, Lansing.

DICK: Yeah, this was in Salem, yeah.

EDWARD: Lansing was a big wig, wasn't he?

DICK: Lansing was a captain of the state police.

EDWARD: Yeah, yeah.

DICK: There was Farley Logan, and Holly Holcomb, and that bunch, and I remember their names as a kid.

EDWARD: Holcomb, yeah.

DICK: And I knew Walter Lansing later on, because he and Dad were close friends and he stopped here in Prineville after my father died. We moved here in 1947.

EDWARD: Okay, you were in Salem before?

DICK: We were, I was born and raised in Salem.

EDWARD: Okay.

DICK: And so during the '40's, I was born in 1929, so in '44 I would have been about 15. And this was in the '42, '43, '44 era that either Walter Lansing or a guard at the penitentiary, who my father knew, told him about Buck Burk, who was out at the pen annex, because he was an old ranch hand. And they had livestock and everything out there, and he was not to them a danger of running away, or anything like that. And he was in the pen for murder, and thought that we ought to know that. But so we went out and met him, a big man, and ---

EDWARD: He was a big stature?

DICK: He was a big man.

EDWARD: Like six, two?

DICK: Big statured man. I, you know, I was 14, 15 at the time, I'm guessing he was six foot or better, and big, big frame. And he didn't talk very much, and he was especially kind of leery of strangers. But he, and he also, I remember as a kid, he didn't open his mouth very wide, he kind of didn't move his lips very much.

EDWARD: Did he have silver gray eyes?

DICK: Yeah.

EDWARD: That's a typical murderer's glare.

DICK: Yeah, it seems like he had a little scar or two on his face. But he, I remember when we first went out there to the pen annex to see him, I was impressed by the fact that we went to his room there, which was in one of the barns. And the, he pulled a nail out of

his pocket and stuck it through a little hole in the door, and activated an electronic opener and opened that door. And I had to ask him questions about that, because I was really surprised at such a thing. And he had designed that himself, little cellanoids and things, back in the '40's, you know.

But he did silver work; he got started making buckles and things like that. In those days there wasn't any German silver or anything that we knew of, sterling was the only thing. And he hand engraved these things, and Dad wanted one with a Brahma bull on it. And so he designed this little silver buckle. I still have it, the bulls off of it, and I don't know whether I still have the bull or not, but I still have the buckle. And he handmade that, and put the bull on it, made out of gold.

And so as a kid I used to go out there from time to time and visit with him. Never did talk about the murder, or anything like that, because I didn't, I was kind of afraid of him to tell you the truth. And he got out on parole, and he came over into this country, it was after we moved over here.

EDWARD: He got out on parole?

DICK: He got out on parole, because he was at the annex. He wasn't a life, my understanding was he was eligible for parole, and a term of seven years sticks in my mind. And I'm not sure that he got out the first time that he was asked, but yeah. And, was this on the second one?

EDWARD: Yeah, this is the Dobkins.

DICK: Well he got out, because he came over here and went to work at the Fisher Ranch, which is the Ochoco West now.

EDWARD: Where is that at?

DICK: The Fisher Ranch was owned by the Fisher that had the big, was the big car dealer in Portland years back.

EDWARD: Oh, okay.

DICK: And he bought this ranch.

EDWARD: Oh, and it's still there too.

DICK: And it's out here off of the Lamota Road, and it's called Ochoco West now, and it has been subdivided some. But it had, Fisher built a dam on it, to pick up Lytle Creek, I think it was Lytle Creek. And it's kind of a fascinating place; it ran up the draw there, near Grizzly Mountain.

EDWARD: Yeah.

DICK: You go on up to Grizzly from the back road through the Fisher Ranch. And we had put some horses out there on the Fisher Ranch, because when we first moved here we didn't have, Dad had bought the laundry over here, and we didn't have a place to run horses yet, and we had some in Salem. And so we ran them out to the Fisher Ranch.

EDWARD: You came here in '47?

DICK: Yeah.

EDWARD: Okay.

DICK: And about '48 or so, Buck Burk shows up in the laundry one day and talked to Dad and said he was going to work out at the Fisher Ranch. And then there is not, I don't know much about him after that, other than he and Dad, he bought a horse from Dad, a big yellow horse that we had, and he never paid him for it. And the next thing I know he's gone and my brother, who is, my middle brother is more cowboy than anything and didn't mind mixing it up with anybody any size, even though Buck was probably 220 pounds, and Earl was 165. Earl found him back in Salem, and he went to his house to talk to him -

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EDWARD: Get the money.

DICK: --- about paying for that horse, yeah. And Buck just told him, he said, "I don't have

it, and I probably won't, and you probably can expect not to get it." And so Earl was going to tear into him, at least get a pound of flesh out of him. But he had a girlfriend with him, and she said, "No, let's not do that, let's just get out of here." That's the last I knew of Buck Burk. The last I knew that he was gone. But he definitely got out on parole. I don't know whether you could trace that out through the pen, the penitentiary or not.

EDWARD: I was going to go up to Salem and see if I could get a picture and so forth.

DICK: And I know he wasn't an escapee, or I say I know, I don't think he was an escapee or anything because he was here, he'd come to town from time to time, not too often. And he also was back in Salem right in their back door and living out off of Lancaster Drive there. I can remember going with my brother once to see him.

EDWARD: He came, Burk, Buck Burk, which I found out last night from Jess Gibson that's what they called him, was Buck Burk.

DICK: Yeah, the minute you mentioned those killings down there, why his name came back to my mind that quick. But I never knew him as anything but Buck Burk, because that's what he ---

EDWARD: His real name was Jim, James D. Burk. But he came back to Prineville about 1948 then, right?

DICK: I think it was about a year after we were here, yeah.

EDWARD: And then when did you, Judge, when do you think he went to Salem, 1950? When did he steal the horse?

DICK: I doubt if he was over here, well he didn't steal him, he bought him. He just didn't pay for him.

EDWARD: Just didn't pay for it, yeah.

DICK: I don't think he was here over a year and a half or so. But that's purely speculation.

EDWARD: Did you ever hear a guy by the name of, down at Wagontire, Punk Robertson?

DICK: No, no, I don't recall that name.

EDWARD: You mention the Carlon's. Homer Carlon and his wife Austa, whom I'm going to see here in a couple weeks --- Homer was at this murder of Dobkins, he was there with Burk.

DICK: He ...

EDWARD: Yeah, and Harry Arnold. Yeah, there were four of them. Did the Carlon's ever mention anything to you about this Dobkins shooting?

DICK: No, no.

EDWARD: Okay.

DICK: I'm sure they're all related, but Homer doesn't ring a bell with me.

EDWARD: Okay.

DICK: Buck and Bo I knew, and Buck's son George. George, if you're going to Lake County, George has a place right there at Summer Lake. You can turn; it's right down on the lake. And he also has a house in Paisley.

EDWARD: Right.

DICK: So you could, George might have recollection.

EDWARD: I'm going to see the Fosters down there too.

DICK: Yeah.

EDWARD: Did you happen by any chance know of a Judge Charles W. Ellis?

DICK: No, but I remember the name, yeah.

EDWARD: Okay, he's the one that sentenced Burk evidently, October 1939, to the state penitentiary.

DICK: But yeah, because I remembered them telling this, that it was his second time he'd

been in for murder. But he sure did get out on parole.

EDWARD: So this Burk, Buck Burk, when you went to see him and he did this belt buckle for your father, right?

DICK: Yeah.

EDWARD: Was he just kind of like in the state penitentiary, within the walls?

DICK: No, no.

EDWARD: Oh, he wasn't.

DICK: He was out at the annex. See the penitentiary is right there on Commercial Street in Salem. And the, gad you're testing my memory now, out, on out toward Turner, out of Salem.

EDWARD: Out by Stayton.

DICK: Well, no, not near that far. Just out another 3, 4 miles. Where the tuberculosis hospital was out there.

EDWARD: Okay.

DICK: It's kind of on a hill overlooking Salem in a sense. And the pen owned a lot of farmland out there, and they called it the penitentiary annex. I think it still is; I think it still exists.

EDWARD: Probably, still there I would guess.

DICK: And I could drive you out there, but I can't tell you what roads it's on.

EDWARD: Oh, I'll find it. That's no problem.

DICK: The penitentiary annex, he was behind the walls, and this I don't know, I don't know how long before they made the --- what do they call the ---

EDWARD: Trustee?

DICK: Trustee, yeah, how long he was behind the walls before they made him a trustee. But when we met him, which like I say would have been in the '42 to the '44 period

probably, he was, he was at the annex, and he lived at the annex. This room, he had that room look like the, like a little one person bunkhouse with the old blankets that we had back in the '30's and '40's on his bed. He had an iron bed there, just a single bed like they'd have in the pen. And he lived right there at the annex. He could have walked away any time.

EDWARD: Walked away, yeah.

DICK: Yeah. So he was a trustee at that point, they just didn't figure that he was basically dangerous.

EDWARD: That's strange. I won't get into that, because who knows, you know.

DICK: Yeah. Well, you know, you might find an old prison guard or somebody down there by checking at the penitentiary, you might find an old prison guard or someone that was out at the annex there that knew him too, you can't tell. But he lived right there, he was a trustee; he wasn't behind bars at all.

EDWARD: Do you, you said, Dick, that you had that belt buckle made by him. Boy, but that the part might be gone?

DICK: The bull that he, was made of gold that was in the center, I think I still have. I think it's in an envelope with the buckle; it just came off. And we just, my dad died in '53, and we just, I just never did use it, so I never had it fixed or anything.

EDWARD: You know what would be fantastic, Dick, if you took a picture of that and sent it to me. Could you do that?

DICK: I suppose I could.

EDWARD: I mean here is a ---

DICK: I don't know whether I have a camera or not, I'll just locate it, and the next time you come through you can take a picture of it.

EDWARD: Oh, I have so much stuff to do. Where are you going for lunch?



DICK: Well I've got Kiwanis Club for lunch.

EDWARD: Oh shoot.

DICK: But I don't mind running out to the house.

EDWARD: I've got a camera.

DICK: Have you?

EDWARD: Yeah, a pretty good one.

DICK: I don't know whether I can --- I think I know where it is.

EDWARD: I don't have a flash, but we can put it outside or some-thing.

DICK: You can stop and get some flashes. Or your camera is not a flash?

EDWARD: Yeah, it's a 35mm, but I don't have ---

DICK: Well we could bring it back down here under the light or something.

EDWARD: Could I meet you back --- I have no idea, I've got to go back up to ---

(END OF TAPE)

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