

HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #209 - Side A

Subject: Minta Poteet

Place: Poteet Home - Burns, Oregon

Date: April 19, 1986

Interviewer: Pauline Braymen

PAULINE BRAYMEN: This is Pauline Braymen; I'm talking with Minta Poteet at her home near Burns, on April ---

MINTA POTEET: Now it's not Pateet, it's Poteet!

PAULINE: P O T E E T.

MINTA: P O T E E T. Say it like that.

PAULINE: Poteet. Am I saying it right now, Poteet?

MINTA: Uh huh, Poteet.

PAULINE: Poteet.

MINTA: You accent the last syllable, instead of the first part.

PAULINE: Okay. And this is April the 19th, I think, 1986. Yep, I've got the right date.

Minta, when did you come to Harney County for the very first time?

MINTA: It must have been about --- well 8 from '47 would be '39, wouldn't it?

PAULINE: 19---

MINTA: No? Yes.

PAULINE: Yeah, 1939. Okay. Did you come to visit friends?

MINTA: I came with my sister, Joette. We had been to the World's Fair down in San Francisco.

PAULINE: Uh huh.

MINTA: And we drove up. I had an uncle living in Portland, and we came up to visit him.

PAULINE: And you drove through Burns?

MINTA: And --- no, I didn't come to Burns, right at that moment. But we drove to see my uncle. And Jim had come to Burns. Or, first he came to Portland and worked at the stockyards. And, but he had later come to Burns to take up some work for Weed and Severe. And that's how he happened to come to Burns. And so we came to Burns. We did not come to Burns at that time. But that was later; I'm getting my dates all mixed up. Because I can't remember exactly just off hand.

PAULINE: But you --- did you know Jim in Oklahoma before you ---

MINTA: Oh yes, I've known Jim ever since I was a young girl.

PAULINE: Okay. Was he from Oklahoma too? I always had it in my head that he was from Texas.

MINTA: He was born in Texas. But he moved to Oklahoma with his family when he was young. I don't really know exactly the year, but he was quite young when they moved to Oklahoma, and --- His father passed away and he lived with his mother, and they had a pretty hard time. It was real early in the years. Right now I can't tell you what year it was.

But I knew Jim at --- I met --- Jim said the first time he ever saw me I was in a wagon going into Dustin, Oklahoma with some people to do a little shopping.

PAULINE: Uh huh.

MINTA: And my brother was a teacher at a school called Big Prairie. And anyway I went out to teach at the school where he was, because teachers were scarce in those days. And I never say that I taught school, I always say I kept school.

PAULINE: Did you, were you just out of school yourself when you taught, a real young woman?

MINTA: Yes, I was.

PAULINE: Uh huh.

MINTA: I had gone to Southwestern College in Weatherford, Oklahoma. And I had taught school in Commerce, Oklahoma, because they didn't have --- they was wanting teachers, wanting teachers. Well I didn't know beans about teaching school because I had never tried.

PAULINE: Uh huh.

MINTA: And it was really something to teach at that place.

PAULINE: Did you have all of the children of, in all different grades in one room?

MINTA: No, I had the fifth and sixth grade. And I guess I had about 60 kids.

PAULINE: Oh my goodness! That's a large class.

MINTA: You bet your life it is.

PAULINE: They say 25 is a large class today.

MINTA: And, and those boys and girls too, were --- it was a mining town and they were pretty rough class of people.

PAULINE: Uh huh. Did you teach for more than one year?

MINTA: (Laughter) I taught about half the year out at --- and I only got \$50 a month, and I had to pay \$25 for my room. And then I had to eat besides. And so I wrote to my father and told him to send me the money so I could go home to Wagoner, Oklahoma.

PAULINE: That's where you grew up?

MINTA: That's where --- oh no, I didn't grow up there. I've been in --- I grew up in several different places. We came from Missouri. I was --- from Missouri to Oklahoma in 1906, I believe it was.

PAULINE: What year were you born?

MINTA: Nineteen --- 1899.

PAULINE: 1899?

MINTA: Yes, I'll be 87 my birthday.

PAULINE: And your birthday is?

MINTA: November the 9th.

PAULINE: Okay. And you were born in Missouri?

MINTA: Yes, in Gentry County. Gentry County, Missouri.

PAULINE: So as a young woman then you went to the San Francisco World's Fair, and you traveled to Portland. And Jim had already come out here.

MINTA: Jim, yes.

PAULINE: So the first time you came to Harney County you came down to see Jim?

MINTA: Yes, I sure did.

PAULINE: Uh huh.

MINTA: With my sister Joette, and I. But he wasn't living here in Harney County at that time. He was living, he was living at, he was living in Washington, across the river from Portland. Let's see, what was the name of that town? Oh gee, I can't remember just the right ---

PAULINE: Would it be Longview or Vancouver?

MINTA: No, no. Well it was close to Vancouver.

PAULINE: Uh huh.

MINTA: But some other little town close to Vancouver. And he came, he sent a boat over. And we crossed, the boat, in a boat to go over to Portland later on. Let's see now, how we did. We came up to the World's Fair and to see my uncle, John Poff. And, you're not recording all this are you?

PAULINE: Uh huh. Yeah, we started.

MINTA: Oh, I didn't know that.

PAULINE: And you are doing just fine.

MINTA: And let's see. He was working for Severe and Weed, some cattle buyers, cattle buyers who always had a ranch over at this town near Vancouver, and right now I can't remember.

PAULINE: That's okay; we don't need to get that technical. And

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MINTA: Oh. And so then after we had been to the Fair, we went on up the coast to see Jim. And then that was after we had visited my uncle. And we went to Longview, I believe to cross the bridge, or maybe down the other way, I don't remember. That's been too long ago, and too much water under the bridge since then.

PAULINE: Yeah.

MINTA: Why I should --- could I remember those ---

PAULINE: Well after Jim came to Harney County then, you came here to visit him here? Can you remember what ---

MINTA: Well, let's ---

PAULINE: --- what you thought about Harney County the first time you were here?

MINTA: Well yes, you know they had that camp at --- oh that soldier's camp out here someplace, and we stayed down at the Queen's Court. The McQueen's run the court.

PAULINE: Uh huh.

MINTA: And my, he got my sister and I, my sister Ardith came with me at that time. That's the second trip up.

PAULINE: Uh huh.

MINTA: And he got us that place to live, but we had --- I'd never cooked with wood or anything. And we just couldn't stand to stay there so we got a different place to stay. And we stayed quite a while, and then my sister Ardith went home, and I stayed a few days

over, and then I went back home. And it was about; oh I don't know how many years before I even considered coming back.

PAULINE: Well that was one of the things my mother said coming here from Oklahoma that she had never cooked with wood before. Because all the stoves back there were gas.

MINTA: I know.

PAULINE: And she had quite a time learning to cook on the wood stove.

MINTA: Well so did I. But then I have a wood stove now in my kitchen. And then afterwards we moved to the Bell A Ranch, and Jim worked for Mrs. Haley. And I had, I had a pretty good time there. And Mrs. Hanley was really nice to me. She liked me real well. I know one time we went to Boise to shop, or do something. And oh, it was real, it was real icy and everything, and I, I said, "Oh, be careful Mrs. Hanley." Finally she told me, she says, "Be careful yourself." So I didn't ever tell her to be, able to tell her that again.

PAULINE: She wasn't very tall was she?

MINTA: No, she was about my height I guess.

PAULINE: Uh huh. And you are about 5 foot 2 or 3?

MINTA: Oh no, it was --- well I'm about 5 foot 2.

PAULINE: Uh huh.

MINTA: Stretches me to be that.

PAULINE: Uh huh.

MINTA: And one time she came home from Portland and she --- I was living at the Bell A Ranch at that time, and she came home and she called me up and told me to come over. That was after I was married to Jim, and we lived at the Bell A. And she told me to come over, and try on a fur coat. And I hardly got it on, till she says, "Oh, take it off!" So that

was the end of that. I mentioned the fact to her a few times; about why didn't she wear her new coat. But she had a beaver coat that she liked and she always wore it. So later on as years went by, her sister took the fur coat. And after she passed away the daughter of her sister, well she was an adopted daughter, she begged me to take the fur coat. Well I finally took it and I had it made over, and it did make a beautiful coat.

PAULINE: Was this the beaver one or the other ---

MINTA: Oh no ---

PAULINE: --- the other one that ---

MINTA: No, it ---

PAULINE: Okay. What kind of a fur coat was it now?

MINTA: It was a seal.

PAULINE: Seal coat?

MINTA: No, it's not a beaver, it's a ---

PAULINE: It was the one that she brought home that she didn't like, that she wouldn't wear?

MINTA: Yes, and then later on why her sister's adopted daughter insisted that I take the coat, which I did, and had it made over.

PAULINE: Uh huh.

MINTA: And it is a beautiful coat, and I have worn it a lot.

PAULINE: Did you cook for the hay crews, or that sort of thing? Or ---

MINTA: No, I never did. We always had a cook. We always kept a cook at the Bell A. And we always kept them on through the summer the same as the winter, and sometimes they'd --- I had one woman who was real particular about everything, and she didn't want to

--- She always wanted to have supper real early, but sometimes the men didn't get in

early enough, and she'd leave everything to get cold, because she was so afraid of fire. So one time Jim brought in a bucket of coal for her to put in the stove, and made her real mad about it, so she just opened it up and put a whole bucket full in it one time, and it danced around on the floor and about scared her to death. It scared her to death.

PAULINE: Oh, it would get pretty hot.

MINTA: So after that, why she kind of calmed down. And then one time when my cousin that lives in St. Helens was there, and she asked something from Jim about what happened to the woman that so and so --- And Jim says, "Well, she left and I just swept her tracks out."

PAULINE: (Laughter) Sounds like things haven't changed any. Ranch people still don't get in for supper very early.

MINTA: Well no! They --- you can't, because if something is happening that has to be tended to. However, though we always had our meals pretty regular. And Jim always told the men to try to stop when they were feeding. To try to get through with the feeding at a certain time and come on home. He didn't want them to be out real late.

PAULINE: Uh huh.

MINTA: And so we always had meals pretty regular. And he always wanted us to have something to eat on the table. He said you can't make money at the table. And he said people want, need something to eat. I know one man, Ardo Pruitt, who worked for us, why he was up town one time and somebody asked him if we always had a good Sunday dinner. And he told them, "Why we had a good dinner every day."

PAULINE: Uh huh. At what point in time did you leave the Bell A and, and Jim strike out on his own? Was that after Bill Hanley died, or after Mrs. Hanley died?

MINTA: Oh yes, Mr. Hanley was already dead before Jim ever ---

PAULINE: Before he started working?



MINTA: Yes.

PAULINE: He worked for Mrs. Hanley then? Uh huh.

MINTA: Yes, he did. He did not do anything about Bill Hanley. He didn't, he didn't know him, he had already passed on before he ever came up here. He worked down in Washington a good many years, until Weed and Severe decided to go out of the business, and so one of them took that ranch that they had, and so Jim didn't think he could work for just the one. So he started trading on his own. He had already done some trading, he had always traded. That's what he had done all his life, and, and when he was a young man in his early days, that after his father died when he was 7 years old, why he and his mother had a pretty hard time. And so, but he would always, would try to have a calf or a horse or something of his own.

PAULINE: Uh huh.

MINTA: And that was the way he started in life.

PAULINE: Well then you've lived here since --- Do you remember about when you bought this place, or when you moved into this house?

MINTA: Well let's see, I think it was, well I'd have to get out my book. I've got a book that tells all those things.

PAULINE: Well it's not important right now. I know that you were living here in 1957, you were living here. And a ---

MINTA: Well, well after Mrs. Hanley passed away why they wanted Jim to --- Well Mrs. Hanley wanted Jim to have the ranch. But he did not want to, because all he had ever done all of his life was run big outfits. And he just didn't want to do that anymore. And that's why he --- But in the meantime he had bought this land, and had added to it at different times.

PAULINE: Uh huh.

MINTA: And let's see, '37. Well when I first came out here I lived 8 years down at the Bell A.

PAULINE: Okay, 1947 and 8 would be 1955, then when you moved over here.

MINTA: Yes, I suppose so.

PAULINE: That's sounds about right. Because you were living here when Allen and I got married, and we got married in 1957, and you were living here then.

MINTA: Oh, uh huh.

PAULINE: So I know that it had to be about that time.

MINTA: Yes.

PAULINE: So 1955 sounds about right.

MINTA: Well yes, I guess it does.

PAULINE: And a --- well what are --- were you the --- you had two sisters at least and a brother. How many were there in your family?

MINTA: Well there was nine. We had a --- I came from a big family and long lived. My mother, my mother passed away and she was 96 when she passed away. Right now I have one sister in the nursing home in Oklahoma, at McAlester, Oklahoma, who will be --- let me see. She's ten; she's ten years older than I am. And she's in the nursing home, and my sister Ardith is just younger than me. She has a beauty shop, and she still does beauty work.

PAULINE: Uh huh.

MINTA: And I have one brother who was in World War I.

PAULINE: Uh huh.

MINTA: He is, he lives in Henryetta, Oklahoma. And my other brother lives at Garden Grove, California. He's my youngest brother and he looks exactly like my oldest brother at times. One time he was at some, I can't say what it was, but he looks so much like my

oldest brother that when he came he had to --- he was talking about something, I don't know what --- I don't know the occasion but anyway one woman almost fainted when she saw him come out. He looks so much like my first brother. My --- their birthday, one of them was born on the 9th of December, and the other one was born on the 8th.

PAULINE: Oh, for heavens sakes.

MINTA: That many years apart. And, and my oldest brother, well all of us have been very long lived.

PAULINE: Uh huh.

MINTA: And there's four, there's five of us left now, three girls and two boys.

PAULINE: Uh huh. Did you and Jim get married in Burns, or did you get married in Oklahoma?

MINTA: We got married in Boise, Idaho.

PAULINE: In Boise, Idaho?

MINTA: Yes.

PAULINE: Uh huh. Did any of your family come for the wedding?

MINTA: No, no we didn't have any kind of a wedding, you might say. We just went over and got married by a minister in Boise, Idaho.

PAULINE: Did you go on a honeymoon?

MINTA: Well, I guess. No, I don't know what you would call a honeymoon. We'd --- Jim was working for Mrs. Hanley and for Weed and Severe at the time, so he had to come back and work.

PAULINE: Uh huh.

MINTA: So I guess we had a honeymoon as the time went by.

PAULINE: I guess so. Well I think that's what a lot of us did.

MINTA: And the cook house down there that, what had always been the cook house, why

we really worked it over, and really made a nice little cottage out of it. I don't know whether you were ever there when I lived there.

PAULINE: No, I never was over there.

MINTA: And it was really pretty. And Mrs. Hanley was so proud of it. Before, while, when we were away anybody that came why she'd take them over there and show it to them.

PAULINE: (Laughter) Well she was quite a lady.

MINTA: Yes, she was. She sure was good to us.

PAULINE: I don't remember her very well; just have kind of a hazy memory of her. But she brought a phonograph over and gave to us kids, an old Victrola. She had bought it for the men in the bunkhouse I guess. And evidently she decided us Ausmus kids needed that phonograph, so she brought it over with a stack of records. I don't know, six or eight records that ---

MINTA: I have some that Ruth Cliff, after they moved there, that was still there, and I've got two of the old records right over there in that commode that went with some kind of a phonograph that she had. But I can't play them on mine, because my record player doesn't play those real fast ones.

PAULINE: Yeah, they were the 78's.

MINTA: 78's, yes.

PAULINE: Yeah. Well you have been a member of the Historical Society for a long time.

MINTA: Oh yes, I'm a life membership. I have a life membership.

PAULINE: A life membership of the Historical Society.

MINTA: Yes.

PAULINE: And are there some other organizations that you took part in?

MINTA: Well yes, I'm a charter member of the Cow Belles.

PAULINE: Uh huh.

MINTA: And, let's see, what else do I belong to? I belong to the, I belong to a lot of different things, but right now I can't think of all of them.

PAULINE: Well you said, you said when you first came to Harney County you really didn't like it all that well. But you've stayed a long, long time. How do you feel about it now?

MINTA: Well I like it all right, only it's too lonesome for me now, it's just too lonesome. I think I'd better go back where some of my people live. That's why I'm going.

PAULINE: Uh huh. Well it sounds like you'll live in really nice place, if your niece is right next door, and ---

MINTA: Well it's not right next-door, but it's just across the street ---

PAULINE: Across the street?

MINTA: --- and down a little bit. Yes, she's my oldest brother's daughter. And then she has two daughters and they both live there. Well not in the town, but one of them lives out in the country from there. And at one time she, with her family, came out here. She and her mother and dad came out here, and oh she was always crazy about horses. So now she has horses. And she goes to many shows and takes a lot of ribbons back home.

PAULINE: Uh huh.

MINTA: She gets lots of firsts. Let's see --- right now, you know, I'll tell you it takes me a while to get my mind settle down so that I can remember what I want to say.

PAULINE: Uh huh.

MINTA: I guess because I am alone so much, and you don't converse with other people, and I think that's the reason you get kind of

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PAULINE: Get kind of rusty?

MINTA: Well, yes.

PAULINE: Uh huh.

MINTA: Why a lot of days I just, maybe I talk on the phone maybe once or twice. And then some days I don't talk at all. And then maybe I'll read some books or magazines or something, and outside of that, well I don't have any reason to try to remember anything to talk about.

PAULINE: Did you belong to Mother's Club or the Library Club?

MINTA: I never did belong to the Mother's Club. I belonged to the Garden Club.

PAULINE: Uh huh. The Sunrise Garden Club?

MINTA: Yes.

PAULINE: Uh huh.

MINTA: And the Hospital Auxiliary.

PAULINE: I thought that you were, your name was on that list too.

MINTA: And I ought to get, to have all the cards that I've got, to see what I belong to. I was kind of like --- I'm like Frank McQueen one time, he and Vella came by our house, it has been a long time ago, and he was a talking and talking and he said, "Well now what clubs did I belong to?" So I'm like Frank, I can't remember all the ones I belonged to.

PAULINE: Well you have been very much a part of this community's life, that's for sure.

MINTA: Well I have always tried to. And did I tell you I was a charter member of the Cow Belles?

PAULINE: Uh huh. Is this a picture of you over here on the commode?

MINTA: No, that's my sister Ardith. Here I am over here in this other way.

PAULINE: Oh, okay. Well you look a little alike, but not ---

MINTA: No. We don't ---

PAULINE: Not, not that much either.

MINTA: No, you --- if you would see us together we don't look alike at all.

PAULINE: Uh huh.

MINTA: Well I don't know. This picture here that I have was made just a year ago. I thought I had the date on the back, but it was made last year, December the 5th, no November the 5th.

PAULINE: Uh huh. Well you were two beautiful ladies, and you still are. She's a very striking lady, isn't she?

MINTA: Yes, she's real pretty.

PAULINE: Very handsome.

MINTA: She's a --- she fell and she's kind of humped back, a little bit.

PAULINE: Uh huh.

MINTA: And this is my niece's piano, it's a Lowery, that's her name. And she can really play. And some people have it, and some people don't.

PAULINE: Yeah, that's true.

MINTA: And a --- and my sister Joette's son Wayne, he can play too. They both can play. And a, a lot of people have wanted Ellen to show them how to play that. Well, you -- if you don't have it, you can't do it. You just have to go with the music. Well she plays, she has the music too. And a, but she can really play, and so can Wayne. And they both have pianos and organs. Wayne has a baby grand. But he likes to play the organ better though, I think.

PAULINE: Uh huh. How long has Jim been gone now?

MINTA: Let's see, it'll be four years.

PAULINE: Four years?

MINTA: In June '82.

PAULINE: How much older than you was he?

MINTA: Well Jim was born in '95.

PAULINE: '95.

MINTA: And he was born in Texas. But at that time for some reason, and his father --- I have a history of all of their doings, and his father --- he was named for his father, James Samuel, J. S. Poteet. It tells about all of their holdings that they had, a cotton gin and lots of different farms around. Colored people lived on them and --- I know I'm not very interesting, because I can't remember to say everything that I want to. Oh, I belong to the Chamber of Commerce too.

PAULINE: Okay.

MINTA: If that's what you want to put down. I was trying to remember, that's like I said; I can't remember everything I belong to.

PAULINE: Well I've always thought you were a very interesting person, and I have always enjoyed listening to the visits with you. Do you know, do you remember what you gave me for a wedding present?

MINTA: No.

PAULINE: It was a beautiful turquoise tablecloth with gold pheasants on it, great big gold pheasants.

MINTA: Oh. (Laughter)

PAULINE: It's really the prettiest tablecloth I think I've ever seen. I still have it.

MINTA: Oh.

PAULINE: So, so you'll be leaving a lot of yourself behind when you go.

MINTA: Well --- No, I could no more tell you what I had given you or --- I know I have given away a lot of things, and then sometimes I think, I go and look for something, and then I have to kind of wake up and think, well I must have given that away.

PAULINE: Well I --- that was one of the things that --- You know we got a lot of presents from a lot of people when we got married. And you just don't remember what every, each



and every one gave. But that's one special thing that I will never forget, where that tablecloth came from. It's a ---

MINTA: Well right now you see my lamp over there? Well Mike --- I was going to rewire it a little bit. I made a --- it was a --- well they call it a student's lamp. There's the shade over there, and here's the ---

PAULINE: Uh huh.

MINTA: --- the thing for the oil. It went out across, and I don't know. He's had it for ages, and I don't know why he doesn't --- maybe he hasn't had time to fix it. But if he doesn't get it fixed pretty soon, I'll just go back and fix it like I had it before.

PAULINE: Uh huh.

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