

HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #22 - Side B

Subject: Irene Chambers Davis

Place: Burns, Oregon

Date: May 19, 1972

Interviewer: Pauline Braymen

Release Form: No

PAULINE BRAYMEN: ... Okay, well your folks came in 1916, and what did you say their names were?

IRENE CHAMBERS DAVIS: Ralph and Katie Chambers.

PAULINE: Ralph and Katie Chambers. And your dad did, they came to Juntura.

IRENE: In Juntura when they first came to Drewsey. And then we moved up to that place, you know, I think it was called Needmore at that time. And that's where I started to school at, was at Wolf Creek. And we, my first year we went in a buggy, but then I rode a horseback the rest of the time.

PAULINE: How far were you from school?

IRENE: Oh, it must have been 4 miles, or 5 anyway, 4 or 5 miles that we rode. And we did that summer, in the hot and cold both. Gee, it was cold when we'd go to school. We'd get chilblains, and we'd sit around that old wood stove, and your feet would burn, oh. I don't know what else, Pauline, that I can tell you.

PAULINE: Your dad worked for several people out around there, or had ranches ---

IRENE: No, we always ranched.

PAULINE: Ranched.

IRENE: We always ranched, and we farmed and ranched. We had cattle and sheep. But we always ranched. Dad never did ---

PAULINE: Well I know when we talked before you said that he was at several different places, and I didn't know ---

IRENE: Well we had leased them, Pauline. We had leased the, had bought the Sitz place, and then when the bottom fell out of every-thing, well they lost that. And then we rented the Needmore place. And then we lived where Harry Clark lives now at one time.

PAULINE: Across from the Drewsey Grange Hall?

IRENE: Yeah. And we lived there before there was a grange hall there. Matter of fact, they built the grange hall while we lived there. I remember going over there, just a little girl, when they were building that. And then we moved up to what they called the Larson place. There isn't any house there anymore, Bentz bought that.

PAULINE: Oh yeah, Kenneth Bentz.

IRENE: Yeah, and we lived up there for a while. And then I went to school at Pine Creek too, see, when we lived at the Laddie Clark's place, or Harry Clark's place. I went to school at Pine Creek, and we rode horseback there to school too.

PAULINE: How many kids were in school at the time you were going to school?

IRENE: Oh, it would vary. There was probably 8 most of the time, around 8 most of the time, it would vary some. Now one time when I was going to school at Wolf Creek, we went out freshman year there at Wolf Creek too. Agnes Stallard taught us over there.

PAULINE: Your freshman year of high school?

IRENE: Yeah, we went to Wolf Creek. And the folks, a group of parents paid her extra, so much a month, and we went to high school there our freshman year.

PAULINE: For heavens sakes.

IRENE: Went to Agnes Stallard.

PAULINE: I had heard that they tried to have a high school at Drewsey at one time.

IRENE: Yeah, I --- none of our family went there. That was quite a few years ago.

PAULINE: Well it evidently didn't last too long. I had heard it was just ---

IRENE: No, I don't think so. I think it was just started, and that was about it. But now there was no doctor or anything at Drewsey when we were there. But at one time there was, but there wasn't when we were there. But the folks would always, I remember my dad --- I don't remember mother going to town too much, but my dad would come either to --- years ago he'd go to Juntura and do our big bunch of shopping. And you know, isn't it funny, I don't remember my mother doing much of that. My dad would go, oh probably two or three times a year and that would be all.

PAULINE: And they'd buy enough to last you several months, or for a whole year?

IRENE: Oh, for the whole year. And I remember him coming to Burns, you know, twice a year. And I'd always want him to --- that's, I learned to write candy before I went to the store --- before I went to school. Because Dad would let me write candy on the list. And then he'd bring me candy back when he'd go after our big supply of groceries. And he'd come to Burns once or twice a year, and that was it.

PAULINE: Did you kids ever come with him? Did you ever remember?

---

IRENE: No, I never remember of --- The first time I remember coming to Burns, I was probably about, oh about 8 years old when I first remember coming to Burns. And we came; I remember coming across the old road down here in Harney Valley. And the dust would just go in front of the tires; just like water it was dusty. And the old road went along the hills over there. It never came through like it does now.

PAULINE: Yeah, it come over by Crane, and ---

IRENE: No, no, we came along the hills up there by Harney, and across that way.

PAULINE: Oh, oh clear on --- Yeah.

IRENE: Yeah, that's the way the old road used to come, was through there. And I remember how dusty it was. And we had a Model-T, and I remember we got this Model-T; it was new, brand new Model-T. Oh we really thought we had something.

PAULINE: Oh, I'll bet.

IRENE: And it had isinglass curtains, you know, that you put on for winter. We used to come to town, gosh, kids were so proud of that. We really thought we had something, we had that car. Oh, shoot. But there was, sometimes there would be more kids, it depended upon who moved in. But on the average about 8 or 10 is all that was in school. And one time there was only 3 of us in school over there.

PAULINE: And I suppose every one of you was in a different grade.

IRENE: Yeah. One time when we was going to school at Wolf Creek, they used to, the old school burnt down. And it burnt up all our books, burnt up everything. And we went to school in, what; there isn't any house there anymore. But the rest of the year we went to school in what was the Drewett, what used to be the Drewett house up there on top of the hill. And I remember there wasn't too much of school left, and we didn't have --- they didn't get us our regular books. And I remember reading; in my reader was Raggedy Ann and Andy.

PAULINE: I bet you didn't, that didn't hurt your feelings at all did it?

IRENE: Oh --- And there was only 3 of us then. I, my brother, and Howard Riley was all there was. We didn't have --- I guess we just picked up some books someplace to finish the year. But I remember reading Raggedy Ann and Andy when we was going to school there. And this --- I know the teacher threw some of the books out, but she threw them out on the downwind side, and the books all burnt up.

PAULINE: Burnt anyway.

IRENE: Yes. And I must have been about in the second grade I think. Must have been second.

PAULINE: When it happened.

IRENE: Oh, that was interesting to us kids.

PAULINE: Oh I bet, yeah. Well that's a child's dream is for the school ---

IRENE: For the school to burn up.

PAULINE: Did you come into high school at Burns then after ---

IRENE: Yeah. Then my folks moved to Burns before my first year was over. And I boarded in Drewsey with Perry's then, at the Sword place we lived. And then I went to school in Burns the rest of the time. Because the folks moved onto the Foley place, and we lived there the rest of the time.

PAULINE: Well I can't remember ever knowing your dad. Did he pass away early, a long time ago, or is it just that I ---

IRENE: No, my dad died in 19---, let's see '58 I think. Yeah, I think it was 1958 that my dad died.

PAULINE: And he didn't ---

IRENE: Well they retired, Pauline, after they sold what is now the Buchanan place. That's where they lived last. And they retired and moved to Rogue River. And then Dad had a real bad stroke so they moved --- we had to keep going down there, and Oscar and I went down and stayed two and three weeks at a time. It was just too much. So they bought that Lowell house where Dan and Jackie live now, and lived there up until my dad died, which was only a couple of years. And then he died, I think it was 1958. I'd have to check for sure, I can't remember.

PAULINE: Well a person --- those things ---

IRENE: But I'm sure it was '58.

PAULINE: They must have retired before I was old enough to realize about them. Because I didn't think I remembered ---

IRENE: They retired, oh when Carl was about in the 8th grade.

PAULINE: Yeah.

IRENE: So it had been quite a few years ago that they retired.

PAULINE: Did they run the Buchanan Store, or that, or did they just have a---

IRENE: No, just the ranch. Yeah, they bought that, and that's where they retired from was the Buchanan place, at the ranch. They had sheep part of the time, and then they had cattle the rest of the time. When they first went out they had sheep. Bought cattle and sheep, and it got to be too much work for them, and they got cattle.

But on that Castle Rock I just don't know. I know there is one, there is the Chambers lady, is buried there. And I'm ashamed to say that I've never been there to her grave.

PAULINE: When this wagon train came through though, they came by Castle Rock and then --- So

---

IRENE: And I have never went over there. I should be ashamed, I should go.

PAULINE: I found this account just very interesting, and Mrs. Slater did too.

IRENE: Did she?

PAULINE: She was real tickled to get a copy of it, and I didn't think you'd mind after I got to looking at it. But I wanted to ask you before I turned it in, you know, if it wasn't okay. Yeah.

IRENE: No, no, it's perfectly all right.

PAULINE: Anyway, did you, did you just get married --- and then after you got out of high school, or did you teach school, business school or anything?

IRENE: No, I got married. I graduated in May, and I was married in June.

PAULINE: Have you and Oscar always lived here?

IRENE: During the war years we didn't. Oscar went into the service and we moved to Bend, and instructed in Bend. And then he instructed in Idaho, and then we went to Montana where he instructed cadets until the end of the war. And then we moved back to Burns and just took the airport. And that's --- until we moved up here.

PAULINE: Well then he has been involved in the air ... the air search --- what do they call that?

IRENE: Well he is head of Air Search and Rescue for our area.

PAULINE: Yeah, that's it.

IRENE: And has been for, oh my gosh, 20 some years. And then we run the airport, you see, for 20 out there. We operated the airport for 20 years out there. And one of the girls, Lou she lives in, up by Olympia now, that's my oldest sister. And then Vi here in Burns.

PAULINE: And then you said you have a brother too.

IRENE: And then I have a brother that lives in Eden, Idaho.

PAULINE: What's his name?

IRENE: Ferrell, and he is still --- he's in the sheep business. He kind of followed in dad's footsteps, I guess. He's in the sheep business over there. He's lived over there for, oh gosh, 15 years probably.

PAULINE: How did Oscar happen to wind up in Harney County?

IRENE: Well I think he came up here when Roe moved out. And Roe moved up first, and then Oscar came.

PAULINE: They came from Idaho, didn't they?

IRENE: Idaho, uh huh. That's where I met him was up at Roe's wrecking yard. I used to drive an old Whippet to school, and that thing was broke down more than it would run. And that's how come I met Oscar. He was working --- and we'd get that old car fixed up there at the wrecking yard, up at Roe's, and that's where I met Oscar. But we drove this old Whippet that my folks bought from Ellis Bennett when they were selling Whippets here in Burns, years ago.

PAULINE: Oh, for heavens sakes.

IRENE: I drove that thing to school. And oh, I hated to drive that car. So I decided well, I'd just raise cain until I thought maybe they would buy me a little better car. And they bought me a Model-A Ford. And so then I just raised cain, and I had a heck of a time with it, and I was always having something go wrong with it, or trying to get it to --- because I still wanted a better car. And I was going with Oscar then, and he told me he said, "You'd better be satisfied with the one you got." And the next year when I went to school, I'll be damned they didn't trade it off and they got that old Whippet back again!

PAULINE: So you ended up right where you started.

IRENE: That darned old car. But my folks had bought that from Ellis Bennett years ago. Years ago I drove from out there at the Foley place, and Vulgamore's, do you remember them? Orabelle and I used to drive to school together in this old car.

PAULINE: Did they have a girl's basketball team or anything like that when you were in high school?

IRENE: Uh huh.

PAULINE: Did you play basketball?

IRENE: I played basketball. We didn't play much, other schools too much, but we played in classes, we played basketball. We used to --- oh, we'd have plays and things.

PAULINE: The high school then is what is now Lincoln.

IRENE: What is now the junior high.

PAULINE: Yeah.

IRENE: But at that time, see I graduated in 1938, so that was a fairly new building when I went to school.

PAULINE: Well that's what I was thinking; it would be, when you were going it would have been when it was first ---

IRENE: It was a fairly new building when I went to school, because I graduated in 1938.

PAULINE: Then Carl graduated in '58, didn't he?

IRENE: Yeah.

PAULINE: And he graduated from the same building.

IRENE: And he graduated from the same building.

PAULINE: I can't remember when they got the new one going, but that must have been one of the last classes.

IRENE: Let's see, it possibly was. Because Serena would have been the first class out of the new one if it wouldn't have burnt up.



PAULINE: Yeah.

IRENE: So probably Carl was one of the last classes. And I graduated out of there in '38, and he graduated in '58.

PAULINE: Well, let's see if we got anything.

(END OF TAPE)

-pb-

(Included along with this interview transcript is a copy of a history written by Elizabeth Harrison Chambers, and a portion of the family history, Part I, The Life of Thomas McCutcheon Chambers.)

bl