

HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #255 - Sides A/B

Subject: Railroad Tunnel - With Video

Place: Poison Creek Tunnel

Date: October 16, 1989

Interviewer: Dorothea Purdy

DOROTHEA PURDY: This is Dorothea Purdy, and I'm going to be going to the Railroad Tunnel up in the Malheur Forest, towards Silvies, with Hal Beamer, Avel Diaz, and Helen Davis. I'm going to try to do a little bit of videoing for the History Project. Hal will be telling us something about the history, maybe, of the railroad tunnel, and when it was built, and why it was built, and something about the railroad tunnel, hopefully. The date is October 16, 1989.

HAL BEAMER: ... good as far as those arches are concerned. It would be a typical job to get it as it exists today, but as they intended to do it, it would be very, it wouldn't be that difficult to get the, you know, to redraw the plans for that. My son is doing the plans on the Round Barn.

AVEL DIAZ: Oh, is that right?

HAL: As a part of his historical architecture class over at the, at Oregon State University. And that will go back to the Library of Congress, when he gets it done. But he decided to drop out of school for a while, and he hasn't completed the project. But no,

he's come down to do real finite measurements, and get the drawings on a Mylar, and then the finished product will go to the Library of Congress, so that if anything ever did happen to the Round Barn, you would have a --- you would have all the architectural drawings on it.

HELEN DAVIS: Now these have to be, these two here are treated, so they would be newer.

HAL: Uh huh.

AVEL: Oh yeah, this whole ---

HELEN: And see we've got three deals there and we've only got two over here. (Discussing wall timbers.)

HAL: Well they didn't believe in treated timbers back then. All the trestles, all the trestles, except those that were rebuilt are totally untreated timbers.

HELEN: Well I know, but --- treated yeah, they didn't ---

AVEL: I think it's a shame they tore down that trestle though, with the track here, the big one. Have you seen pictures of it?

HAL: Well all the trestles are still in place.

AVEL: No.

HAL: Oh, you're talking about out of Seneca?

AVEL: Yeah.

HAL: Or --- from Burns to Seneca, all the trestles are still in.

AVEL: No, one's gone. The big one is gone.

HAL: They must have replaced it.

AVEL: They replaced it with dirt, and ---

HAL: Oh, okay, that might have been.

AVEL: It was a beauty. It went for --- oh god, three or four football lengths.

HAL: Well there is one in Burns.

AVEL: Yeah.

HAL: There's one that cuts across the flood plane, where the river would flood, and spread. They've got quite a lengthy one down there. There's about thirty trestles between here and Seneca.

AVEL: But the big one they tore down, oh, about 19--- I don't know, maybe in the early '60's, late '50's.

HAL: Uh huh.

AVEL: It was a beaut. It was a picture all in itself.

HAL: Well Gordon Glass tells me, you know, I haven't validated a lot of the things that I've been told, but he's told me that this was the largest wooden structure in Eastern Oregon.

AVEL: I wouldn't doubt that.

HAL: And he also says it's the largest wooden structure in Oregon made out of native wood. He says that the Timberline Lodge, a lot of the timbers that went into that were imported from Washington.

AVEL: Uh huh.

HELEN: Huh.

HAL: So ---

HELEN: What is this timber?

HAL: I imagine it's pine.

HELEN: Pine?

HAL: Uh huh, I would imagine.

HELEN: Knotty pine?

HAL: Uh huh. I ... quite a bit of value today, those timbers. When you've got timber selling for over \$400 a thousand.

AVEL: Uh huh.

HAL: This timber sale, the Bear Valley Timber Sale, the advertised price was \$275, or \$2.75 a thousand, was the appraised rate, and it went for \$2.80.

HELEN: I think I was here at a different time of the year, because our sun has moved now. And at a different time you would get --- how is our sun going? It would have been over here early. (Talking from the North end of the tunnel, and the sun is low to the Northeast, yet.)

... (Idle conversation.)

HAL: Of course anything I say can always be refuted, because the people who worked on it are still around today. And a lot of the color, I'd imagine, is still right for the picking on this. A lot of the antidotes and so forth.

HELEN: And we're over here. But our sun now is moved over ---

HAL: 425 feet long.

AVEL: Is that what it is, 425?

HAL: Uh huh. It's a nice place to be when it's 85 degrees out.

AVEL: Oh, yeah.

HAL: Warm on the outside, and get nice and cool on the inside.

But you can see, I mean, just by the evidence, that very few people know it exists, because if they did, they would probably have it all painted up like radar hill road.

AVEL: Yeah, uh huh. Oh no, you'd be surprised, I mean, you're not surprised, but how many people when you say tunnel, they say tunnel?

HAL: Uh huh.

AVEL: You know. Yeah, there's a tunnel.

HAL: Well I've brought people up here, who were born and raised in Hines who have never been here before, or Burns, and Hines.

AVEL: Uh huh.

HELEN: Like Catherine Fine, who had never been to the top of the mountain in her life until just a few years ago.

HAL: The Steens? The Steens Mountain?

AVEL: And she was raised ---

HELEN: And she was raised right in Frenchglen.

AVEL: Her folks run the hotel there.

HELEN: And she says, "I've never been up on the mountain."

HAL: Uh huh. Well, I've heard this thing called two different--- I've heard it called the Fuqua Tunnel, and I've heard it called the Poison Creek Tunnel.

HELEN: The what?

HAL: The Fuqua.

HELEN: No, the other one.

HAL: Poison Creek.

HELEN: Oh, Poison Creek.

HAL: Poison Creek Tunnel, or Fuqua Tunnel. I don't know if it has a given name.

HELEN: Well you said on that deal that we've got, those pictures, that it's called that, the Fuqua.

HAL: The one that was in the Clemens, some of the Clemens pictures there, it's Fuqua Tunnel.

HELEN: Yeah.

HAL: Is what is written on that.

AVEL: Where did the name Fuqua come from?

HAL: Well Fuqua Creek is right up here. I don't know where they originated, but ---

HELEN: Is that almost Spanish? Fuqua?

AVEL: Yeah, Fuqua is.

HAL: You see, Fuqua Creek, if you go up here a little ways further, almost right up to the forest boundary, you dip down into the Silvies Valley, just before you get to the forest boundary, there is a road that takes off to the left, as you're heading towards John Day. And that's Fuqua Creek right there. And the one trestle that's on forest service land --- you see there's about 8 or 9 miles through here that are Forest Service and the one, but there's only one trestle and the tunnel. The rest of the structures are either on, well I don't think any of them are on the BLM portion. I think all the trestles, except that one are on private land. And when you go down the Poison Creek grade, well

you cross --- I mean it crosses Poison Creek so many times. You just keep, you cross one trestle, and then you go a few hundred feet and you cross another one again. It's just a series of trestles that go down through there.

AVEL: Huh, that's something. I didn't realize that.

HAL: It's an interesting trip. You could drive it, as long as you don't get shot. (Laughter) But you could drive, you could get on the --- you could get on this grade, right all the way back to, you know, right there where it crosses the highway. You could drive it all the way to Seneca.

HELEN: It doesn't cross the road then anymore, your train?

HAL: Huh uh, not after it crosses the highway there at, what would it be, about milepost 4?

AVEL: Uh huh.

HAL: You know, right there where it has been paved over. You get on it right there, and the --- a lot of the ties and rails, when they abandoned the railroad, they hauled them down, back down to Burns, right down over the trestles. So they still have the structural strength to hold a --- probably a highway legal load. But again, you're dealing with untreated timbers. So everything is always on its downhill leg. Are we having fun?

DOROTHEA: My fingers are froze.

AVEL: I'll bet they are.

HAL: I can imagine.

HELEN: Mine are too. I'm going to take those back to the museum.

(Talking about some of the rail holders.)

AVEL: It's colder than --- I think it's colder in the tunnel than it is out here.

HAL: Oh yeah, uh huh.

DOROTHEA: It is, I think so, yeah.

HAL: Well I think it's also cooler in the summertime. It must be cooler.

AVEL: Oh yeah, its got to be.

HAL: I imagine though, when the temperature is down to 20 below, it could be warmer in there, I suppose.

AVEL: Oh yeah.

HAL: This used to be, quote, "The Fall-Out Shelter for Harney County, for Civil Defense."

AVEL: It still could be.

HAL: Well I got a hold of Judge White and I said I don't think that really you want to have a fall-out shelter here anymore. (Laughter) How would you like to spend --- with a crowd of people inside of that thing after an atomic blast, or nuclear blast.

HELEN: Well you have to have some way or other to close it.

HAL: You'd have to block the ends, yeah.

HELEN: You bet. And you don't have time if they drop something on you.

HAL: I think that part of a fall-out shelter is kind of a thing of the past. I think, nobody worries about that anymore.

AVEL: Oh shoot --- no. Like you say, I don't think we need one

anyway, do we?

HELEN: When the war first broke out, I joined the Women's Ambulance Corps there in Salem. We had to go out there, we had an Army installation just outside of town, and we had to go out there on Sundays and drive the Army trucks, to get used to driving them. And just in case we had to come over, and then we had to man the, we took our turns at manning the stations. There were --- well ours was at the VFW Hall. And we'd have to go over and sit, take our time with that.

HAL: Well I like old things. Of course I'm a Virginian by birth.

AVEL: So do I, because I'm old.

HAL: Well, I'm a Virginian by birth, see, and it's all relative, you know. But I've lived out here for 30 years, and --- I mean, I have an old clock that has wooden works, Eli Ferry. And it was working there for a while. And it was keeping reasonable time. I've got to get it working again. I have these old music boxes, 1850's. And I'm the guy that drives the '57 Jaguar. I have a ball, I'll tell you, any time I got any worries, I just climb in that old Jaguar, and I let the worries go away. You've seen my Jaguar, that two-toned gray. Yeah.

AVEL: Uh huh.

HAL: Well, it's running.

HELEN: Well you're the guy then that I see driving that.

HAL: Oh, yes.

HELEN: I never --- See I didn't know you enough, and now that

you speak of it, well I know I've seen you.

AVEL: I knew he had it.

HAL: Oh yes, yeah, I picked that up. It was --- it came over from England in '64. They only made 6,232 of those cars, and I'm an impulse buyer. I see something I want, I get it. And I saw this over in Eugene, and the owner at the time was a university professor of English there at the University of Oregon. And he bought it from an English professor from the University of Cambridge when he came over to teach at the University of Oregon. So I'm a third owner, and I got it for fun. And I'd guess I'd have to say an investment. But I don't know if I'd ever part with it. The same with the music boxes. I own three of those, old time, has the cylinder type. In fact, I had them on loan during the fair week.

AVEL: Oh, did you?

HAL: Down there to the museum. They all work.

HELEN: When we were counting a while ago, did I miss Noel Cagle? I think he is November.

AVEL: Yeah. Noel was one, yeah.

HELEN: He was November. There is a whole bunch of us born between July and November.

HAL: Oh, is that right?

HELEN: And Allan Otley said, "Boy, that was sure a fertile year, wasn't it?" 'Cause he's one of them.

HAL: What year was that?

AVEL: '21.

HELEN: '21.

HAL: '21.

HELEN: There's a whole ---

AVEL: All but Ramirez.

HELEN: I thought he was born in '21.

AVEL: Yeah, but they didn't hardly get their seed back.

HELEN: Oh, that's right.

DOROTHEA: Well what did you decide on? I don't think I can get any more (talking about taking any more video pictures), I think we're going to have to come back in the afternoon.

HAL: Okay.

DOROTHEA: Because I don't think the sun is right. (Videoing was bad.) I'm just going blank, blank, blank. It's just too blurry.

HAL: Uh huh.

HELEN: Yeah, you need lights.

HAL: Well, I've taken pictures inside of it, but it was after you get enough sun up there on the portals, and you can get a pretty good picture of the structure.

DOROTHEA: Well, even getting back out, you know, with the light going into my lens, I can't get --- I get the blinks and it fuzzes out. So I don't have enough light.

HELEN: I wonder what our little bird with the white belly is that's flipping around up there. I've been watching them. See we should have had a bird guide with us too.

... (Idle conversation)

AVEL: Well, what do you think folks?

HAL: I think it's cool. Structurally it's not in the state of collapse. Again, with any, you know, being made of untreated wood

HELEN: We've still got --- Diaz, we've still got those supports. You can still barely see them.

HAL: And they also had telephone lines that ran through here, you see where they --- where the lines were strung through the ---

HELEN: Well see they did support that thing, cause that old metal stuff is pretty rusty looking. ... You can see it now.

AVEL: I realize that. I didn't at first. But those are new up there, that's what I was going by.

HAL: You see it is very difficult to tell what kind of condition the bulkheads are in at this level. You know a lot of it is how much soil contact exists against these bulkheads. Now the ends, they look like, you know, they are rotted out anywhere from a third to half way through. Those are 3" x 12" planking in through there. It would be nigh on impossible to try to repair this thing, short of actually excavating --- excavating the thing out.

AVEL: I wonder how deep these timbers are in the ground?

HAL: I don't know.

HELEN: There too, we've got some with ...

HAL: I think it probably got some rot into the base of those, and they just cut the rot out and shored them up again.

HELEN: Yeah, you can see that telephone thing down here now. ...

HAL: See it takes a long time for the dust to settle in here.

AVEL: Yeah, I can see that.

DOROTHEA: I didn't bring my boots; I don't have high enough boots.

AVEL: What would they do, if they saved this structure, put gravel in here?

HAL: Oh, I think it's possible. You know, you could put some ballasts back in here or something.

AVEL: Don't you think, Dorothea?

DOROTHEA: Oh, I think so, yeah.

AVEL: They'd have to do something to make that better.

... (Idle conversation while walking back to the automobile.)

AVEL: You could have the Forest Service blow it up. How much time have we got to preserve it?

HAL: Yeah, uh huh. Well from my perspective you've got sufficient time to muster support to do whatever. When I was working on this, we came up with nine different alternatives, and we finally narrowed it down to three that we thought were most feasible. The main issues are historic preservation, liability, and safety, and cost. And it ranged anywhere --- The final three that I come up with and submitted to my boss in John Day, because I felt we needed a little more public involvement in terms of what we did with it, and of course the railroad was progressing with their abandonment. And see this was an easement, or right away,

that was granted by the Secretary of Interior, back --- based on the laws of --- I think it was 1897, or 1893.

AVEL: Is that right?

HAL: So the land has always been Forest Service. This was to help develop the West and granted the rights of way. Well the stipulations are that upon abandonment it has got to be restored back to a condition satisfactory to the government. And anyway, of course the corporation doesn't have any assets anymore. And I know my boss was concerned that the Oregon Northwest Railroad could just walk away from all of this, and so he felt the press of time. I guess I don't necessarily look at it in the same way, but we came up with three alternatives, that range all the way from just total removal. Well, that doesn't do a lot for historic preservation, other than we have to attend to any recovery of data before it was destroyed, to collapsing the center span, the center portion, and retaining the portals, to bridging it up here on the "31" road. And then over time, if it required it, if it really got down to a state of deterioration, you know, and let it die its own natural death, is to some way preclude public entry into it, if it ever got to that state.

But it's a long ways from, you know, from its demise. As I say, the worst part of it is back here on the --- these arches here. You can see the deflection angle.

AVEL: Yeah, you can.

HAL: It should be about a 60-degree deflection angle off of those

things, and some of those have been compressed down to where they are almost flat. But it looks like the worst of it is at this end, there is a little bit of deterioration at the other end, but the center portion of it, the angles look pretty good.

AVEL: Then they'd have to shore this, have to build a retaining wall.

HAL: Oh yes, maybe even extend the retaining wall a little bit to catch the sluff that comes down. But ---

AVEL: That would be quite a job in itself, really. I mean expensive.

HAL: Uh huh. But the --- Gordon Glass, were you at the Chamber meeting?

AVEL: Yeah.

HAL: I understand we got kind of rocked over the coals on that one by Gordon. But that's what Don Cain was telling me, because of that news release. But my boss, out of the press of business, he selected that alternative which says, "Get rid of it." But he also included in the news release that went out, two things. One that we had, we still had to do our negotiations, consultations with the State Historical Preservation Office. The other part of it is if anybody had particular concern, to contact me or our public affairs officer in John Day. Well the local paper took those two paragraphs out. But heck, I've already got a letter from a reserve unit out of Portland, that are always looking for projects, and he said, we see that there was some local paper

releases that you are considering destroying the tunnel, and we'd like to take that project on. I guess what I'm saying is, if in terms of the element of time, if that were the last resort, there's always somebody willing to blow the doggone thing up.

AVEL: Oh yeah.

HAL: So I feel myself, we do have an element of time, as long as I feel that people are looking at trying to do something with it. My suggestion to Gordon Glass --- He seemed to be very much interested in trying to preserve it, is that maybe the Oregon Northwest Railroad would be willing to give it to a group of people, you know, deed it to them, and then we would under special use permit, make it available, you know, that's on your National Forest land. My primary concern of course is the "31" Road, right now. In terms of traffic on that, we certainly wouldn't want a log truck coming down there and have a big gaping hole in there to where it might collapse.

But here again, I don't think that it's in an imminent state of ready to fall down. We would take some of the over burden off, to put a --- But we would bridge it. We would put a bridge cross that. One other alternative that I considered, was right here where we parked the rig, is take the "31" Road off the tunnel, come down and back up, and that way we would get an opportunity to actually see it for some interpretative values.

... (Idle conversation.)

HAL: I know where you can get a caboose if you want one.

HELEN: Is it down the road here?

HAL: Well no, it's stashed away, I guess, in one of those big old long sheds down there at the mill.

AVEL: That's right.

HELEN: At the mill?

HAL: Yeah, Bruce Mallory was saying ---

HELEN: Well I heard there were four engines there.

HAL: Well ---

HELEN: I heard three, and this Hill, that comes to the bird club, he said there's four. He told me if I'd come out some time he'd take me through there.

HAL: Probably is. The old steam locomotives that they had on line, I think they are all gone. They were cut up and scrapped, I think, in '51. January '51 they put the diesels on line, but they cut the steam engines up for scrap. And then one of the locomotives crashed down here, oh pretty much down near the Whiting place down here. It went off, it lost its brakes and run off.

AVEL: 26.

HAL: Was it 26?

HELEN: The engine was 26.

HAL: Oh, Engine 26.

HELEN: 40 --- it's an uneven number, 47 or 49.

DOROTHEA: I can't remember either.

HELEN: It's an uneven number.

...

HELEN: But the engine was 26.

DOROTHEA: I've got the flag that goes to that.

HELEN: Oh.

HAL: To the engine?

DOROTHEA: No, Susie Okita gave me a flag that went with that wreck. I didn't know what to do with it, so I gave it to the Museum. So you can say that went with the wreck.

HAL: We can go back down here and get in the rig, and we can do some more talking. Or, if you would like, we can drive right on up through here and go out the Fuqua Creek, if you really want to see the rest of it.

HELEN: Let's do it.

HAL: I haven't driven through it before, but I'm sure it's no problem.

AVEL: Well it's a good time of day.

HAL: Roll the windows up.

DOROTHEA: Now there's a rail, you ought to take the rail back?

HAL: Could almost make an anvil out of one of those.

HELEN: He's bigger than ---

DOROTHEA: Yeah, you try to lift it.

HAL: Yeah, here's some plates. Want one of these?

DOROTHEA: These plates are too, that's small.

HELEN: Yeah.

HAL: What does that say? 1942 Colorado, TP 405 something or

other.

DOROTHEA: Now what about that place up there by the old ...

HAL: What's that?

DOROTHEA: The trestle. Is that on Forest Service?

HAL: Only one trestle, and that's the one up here at Fuqua Creek, is on Forest Service.

DOROTHEA: Is it?

HAL: Uh huh. What do you think, we ought to put these in the back, or do you think we can just put them on the floor? Maybe we can just put them (the rail plates) on the floor back here. Here, stick them in here. Well, we didn't do any recording ---

DOROTHEA: Yes we did, you just didn't know it.

HAL: Oh, we were?

(Inside the rig.) They developed the sale in this prospectus, which came out early in 1922. In fact it's quite a sales job. They talk about how frost free Burns was for growing crops. Talked about growing sugar beets. You know, that you could really do good on growing sugar beets, and how they had an agricultural experiment station there in Burns. And they had all this data on the fertility of the soil, and it was a --- The government did a super sales job in trying to interest somebody to actually buy the sale. Well it was advertised --- Oh, I just took some notes this morning before we came out.

HELEN: Well, you know, Blanche told me about picking grapes on the other side of Wright's Point.

AVEL: Oh, I don't doubt that.

HELEN: When she was first here. They had a regular vineyard out there.

AVEL: That was in Sunset Valley, and I wouldn't doubt that.

HELEN: Yeah.

HAL: The first bids were called for in February 15, 1923, but they didn't get any bidders on the first go through. And so they went back --- the government went back and re-let bids and Fred Herrick purchased the sale in '23, and there were a number of conditions in that contract. One was, of course, he had to extend the line from Crane into Burns, and then from Burns to Seneca, then build a mill. And he got himself into some financial problems and he did not complete --- he didn't get the line into Seneca by the time it was supposed to. And from what I understand he defaulted on the contract. And that's when Edward Hines then came back and bought it on the second offering, and then completed the job. But oh, there were all kinds of congressional investigations and everything else that took place, including investigation on at least a couple of Forest Service guys who were involved with the sale. And then after the sale sold, they quit the Forest Service and went to work for Herrick. Well that's kind of a no, no.

And Union Pacific actually provided a lot of the money to Herrick to get the line into Burns. He was working with Union Pacific money. But I guess, to me, my feelings about the tunnel,

it's kind of symbolic in a way, that probably the most --- I'm going to go on record as saying it was the most significant event in the life of Harney County. Maybe not the most colorful event, but certainly in terms of the economy of Harney County, and social well being, that this particular line is somewhat symbolic, you know, of --- where would Hines or Burns be today if we didn't --- if that sale had never sold?

AVEL: Yeah.

HELEN: Uh huh.

HAL: Oh, I think eventually something would have happened, but probably not the railroad. The government had an interest in the railroad at that time, I think the government still has an interest in it today, or at least that portion from Crane back into Burns. In fact we figure that the government is losing anywhere from a million nine to two million dollars a year in terms of timber value, in terms of how it deflates the value of that timber each year, you know. In other words, if that railroad was back into Burns, the government would realize an additional million nine to two million dollars a year in increased revenues on timber.

Well, what's it going to cost, three and a half to four million dollars? The government is going to get its return back in a few years.

AVEL: You know the government will.

HAL: So, anyway this is the prospectuses. Also I have a, I just

brought it with me, is a copy of the --- The Grant County Historical Society actually sponsored this archeologist to do the history on the railroad. It's not completed, it's still in draft form, but the guy has evidently moved back to Kansas. But there is one heck of a lot of information in here about the total railroad. Something about its history, and then there's site forms and so forth of what he found along the route. So there is a lot of information already.

And then you have the Otleys and so forth that were involved with its construction. The Clemens family and the like, and I'm sure that the colorful antidote of this ... that attach themselves. There is a lot of history yet to be garnered about this.

AVEL: Yeah, the Cowings and Otleys.

HAL: So anyway, just to give you some of that ---

HELEN: How do Otleys --- 'Course they were at Lawen, is that where they come in at, or what?

AVEL: Yeah, they --- Charlie, Uncle Charlie, and Henry and them people ---

HELEN: And Dick.

AVEL: --- rented teams, and --- I don't think Dick was involved, he was always different.

HELEN: He wasn't? Okay.

HAL: But I was talking to --- down at Princeton, was it Charlie, Charlie Otley?

AVEL: Yeah. There's old Charlie, Uncle Charlie they called him.

HAL: He says, I've got pictures. He says I could tell you all kinds of things, he says. His uncle, and I think his dad worked the railroad.

AVEL: Yeah, they did, they worked together. They were partners all through this thing.

HAL: He says, I could tell you all kinds of things. He says, is anybody putting together the history? Well yes, in a sense, but certainly not necessarily the colorful --- To me what I enjoy about history is not the, not necessarily just the hard cold facts, but some of the anecdotes that go with it.

HELEN: Uh huh.

HAL: So anyway.

AVEL: Well I guess the Otleys kept food on the table. They were renting their horses, and their fresnos and --- things were tough.

HAL: Well if you want to, if you are game, we'll go right on up.

HELEN: Sure.

AVEL: Let's go.

HAL: Somebody, by the way put bird houses out here. Must have been the Audubon Society or something.

HELEN: Wasn't our outfit, 'cause we just got started. Oh, it'd be the Scouts.

HAL: Could be.

HELEN: Knudsen's kids. Because Tom told me they were putting birdhouses out up here on the mountain. So it's the Boy Scouts,

Cub Scouts, that's who is doing it. Because the kids made a bunch of birdhouses.

HAL: Well by the time we drive through this, I'd imagine the dust will settle about July.

HELEN: Well, you know, it wouldn't be all that dusty if they hadn't taken these tracks out.

HAL: Yeah. If they hadn't removed the ballast.

AVEL: They removed the ballast is what really made it dusty.

DOROTHEA: Yeah.

AVEL: What did they remove the ballast for, I wonder.

HAL: I don't know, I don't know why.

AVEL: They came in here with them.

HAL: You know, I really don't remember how much ballast was actually inside of this thing.

AVEL: There must have been quite a bit though, I would think.

HELEN: Funny they didn't leave the tracks that would have kept it interesting too.

AVEL: You'd have think they would have left the ballasts in the area so ---

HAL: That's one thing that always could be put into the thing. In fact the Sumpter Valley Railroad up here, the Forest Service is putting the --- That's a narrow gauge, this was standard gauge.

AVEL: Yeah.

HAL: And the Forest Service is now reconstructing portions of the old Sumpter Valley for interpretive purposes.

AVEL: That's what I think should have been done with this railroad. Not tear it out, use it for an excursions, from spring until the snow flies.

HAL: You know, I've heard that myself, but you know, of course it would have to be an economic venture for somebody to --- You'd have to get enough business to do it.

AVEL: Oh yeah. I agree with that. That, you know, they struggled with that Sumpter Railroad getting it put back, and I don't know if that is economically feasible or not, but they are using it.

DOROTHEA: My grandkids and I come through here one time and the tracks were still in there, and it was in a little better shape. I mean, you know, you didn't sink down to your ankles.

AVEL: Well no, because they removed all that.

DOROTHEA: Yeah. I wish I'd have taken some pictures then, because it was nice summer. But, you know, you don't think about that.

HAL: Well we've got some videotape there at the office that we can certainly provide to you when the rails and everything were in place.

DOROTHEA: Okay. Oh, great.

HAL: Like the first day I came out here with the BLM, looking at it from a standpoint --- We were entertaining the idea of looking at it --- You have to petition the Interstate Commerce Commission if you feel that there might be a public use. And so we

petitioned, between the BLM and Forest Service, we petitioned them to give us the opportunity just to look and see if there was a, you know, if the public would benefit by keeping it public ownership. And since we've gone back totally, the Interstate Congress Commission knows --- You know I --- That's probably the area I've been most, very much criticized on, but I think that people had the wrong vision of what I was up to. As a government official, I'm responsible to attend to the government interest.

When we looked at the --- for instance, the Rails to Trails type of thing, it didn't predicate an income, outcome. The most disappointing thing to me is that we hadn't never bothered to look, you know. I feel that we were responsible to look. Not to necessarily say we are going to do something, but just to say, "Hey, is there a possibility?" And of course then we aborted those plans because from an economic standpoint, in terms of the condition of the structures, from a standpoint of community interest and support, it really didn't exist. And so we said, "Hey, no that's not true." We are really in a position when you are the deciding group to take an advocacy roll. We weren't in that field. You can't be the decider and the advocate at the same time. But it was certainly threatening to an awful lot of people. The concept of just looking at it and trying to keep it into a public ownership.

DOROTHEA: Well can anyone drive in through here yet, or is this still ---

HAL: Of the government portion, yes, I would not ---

DOROTHEA: There's no private ---

HAL: And I don't know what the status is --- I think the rights of way, as far as I know, are still with the Oregon Northwest Rail-road.

AVEL: Oh yeah, they haven't deeded nothing over to anybody yet.

HAL: And so I don't know what is the disposition of that. I have my own intuitive guesses of what's going to happen, but it's strictly an intuitive type thing. Just to try to get the title searches and everything for this, in terms its sale would be a monumental task, in terms of selling it off. And I don't know just exactly what the railroad plans are on that. But it would be cheaper for them just to walk away from it. Give it to the county, or counties, in lieu of a title search, and still pay taxes on it. Of course a lot of this doesn't carry very high taxes anyway.

HELEN: Are we in Grant now, or still Harney?

HAL: No, we'll stay in Harney all the way out.

HELEN: Oh, do we?

DOROTHEA: Yeah.

AVEL: Yeah. We've got to be in order ---

HELEN: Where's Seneca then? Seneca is in Harney?

DOROTHEA: No.

AVEL: No.

HAL: No, but you'd have to go quite a ways north.

AVEL: You've got to go north quite a ways on the road.

HELEN: There's no sign that says Grant County?

HAL: Right on the highway there is.

HELEN: Is there?

DOROTHEA: Yeah.

AVEL: Oh there is ---

DOROTHEA: Yeah, right just before the Silvies Store about, what a mile?

AVEL: Yeah.

HAL: Ah, the 17 Road that goes off --- that goes out to Van is in Grant County.

DOROTHEA: That's right.

HAL: Or in Grant, it what, crosses back and forth, but it would be south of there so it would --- and it's about two miles south of Silvies Store. It's probably south of Silvies, probably what three to four miles? Now the old Joaquin Miller Campground is right over in there.

AVEL: The old what?

HAL: The Joaquin Miller Campground.

AVEL: Oh, okay. Yeah.

HAL: And we are coming up on the only private piece that exists within the National Forest boundaries. Everything else is all government, but then comes up here --- Armond Nobel lives back in the timber back in here. In fact if you look right, you can see where he's --- see the glare up there. He's got his ---

AVEL: Right back up there, isn't it?

HAL: Yes, right over here. He has the --- he bought the old Crow Flat Ranger Station. What he lives in is the old ranger station that was at Crow Flat.

AVEL: Yeah, that's right.

HAL: You see, the Burns Ranger District, I think it was about '23, 1923, was actually the Crow Flat Ranger Station. ... See the rig; see a pickup back over there, that's Armond Nobel's. Now the piece, there's a piece here that butts Armond Nobel's place, that a couple from California were going to build a retirement home up here, and I see now, it's for sale.

DOROTHEA: Well it used to belong to Bill Hebner.

HAL: Is that right? Well they came in to get a permit. They applied to the State to get a permit for access off the highway, and then a road use permit to come across Forest Service so they could get to their property. And we got through all of that, and it was granted, and then they --- I see later on there are some "For Sale" signs out here.

AVEL: You family should have a lot of data on this too, don't they Dorothy?

DOROTHEA: Well, you see the part of my family that's got the data is gone.

AVEL: It's gone, huh?

DOROTHEA: Well Mervyn could probably tell us a lot about it, but other than that, well they are mostly gone.

HAL: Here's a birdhouse.

HELEN: Yeah, there was one right back there too. The Scouts came up here and put those out, supposedly for the blue birds. We had a lot up on the mountain.

DOROTHEA: I wonder if they're being used?

HELEN: Huh?

DOROTHEA: I wonder if they are being used?

HELEN: I don't know. I had one and ... Chris gave it to me at this bird meeting one night, that they had made and never did get it up there. 'Cause by the time we went in, of course it was too late to put it up, and I just never --- it's still out in the garage, or shed, whatever you want to call it.

HAL: Like I mentioned to Avel, the lands where it crosses the federal lands, both the BLM and Forest Service, always stayed in Forest Service ownership. But the Secretary of Interior, Railroad Grants Act back in --- I think it was 1893, provided that the Secretary of Interior could grant the rights of use, or right of way across federal land, for the purposes of railroad development, and all this pertinent structures, and would stay that way as long as that railroad existed. But upon abandonment then that right is terminated. But the land always stays in Federal ownership. And so of course, logically, if this is the preferred Ranger District, you ask yourself the question, "If this railroad is ever abandoned, what do you do with it? What do you do with an old abandoned railroad?" I certainly don't need any more roads, I

mean for traveling, like we're doing today. We've got too many roads now.

DOROTHEA: I bumped my head.

AVEL: I was going to grab you.

HAL: This is about as close as you can come to the highway. In fact the rights of way, of the railroad, and the right of way for the highway overlap each other right here.

AVEL: You say there's about how many miles of government land ---

HAL: Oh, the total, the total line was a little over 47 miles, between Burns and here. And between the BLM and the Forest Service, probably 12 to 13 miles. But the BLM portion is quite fragmented, you know, it's kind of inter ---

AVEL: In and out, yeah.

HAL: But the Forest Service portion is pretty continuous from, oh the old Whiting place all the way up here to Fuqua Creek, with the exception of the one piece there on --- near Armond Nobel's. It's the only private piece ...

AVEL: Yeah, I come up with seven miles of --- I was, when you were trying to build the Rails to Trails, or whatever, I was trying to figure out how much was private, and I come with --- Well, I wasn't too far off then, with a little over 7 miles of government land in the thing.

HAL: That's probably about right. I think within the national forest, which also of course would include the private portion, there's probably around 8 and a half, I think, total, 8.6. No,

the government figured about a million and a half dollars to construct a railroad from Crane into Burns, and from Burns to Seneca, and to build a mill for about a million and a half bucks. You couldn't do that today.

AVEL: Oh, god no. Look what it's costing to get the repairs for that, and --- between Crane and Burns, or Lawen and Burns. When are they going to start on that; have you got any ideas?

HAL: Oh, I thought it was going to be started here real quick. And actually be in use by next spring.

DOROTHEA: That's what they keep saying.

AVEL: Yeah, but I've heard that so much now that ---

DOROTHEA: I don't see any; I don't see any accomplishment yet.

HAL: Well, you know, the Department of Highways, the State Department of Highways, they --- When we testified before the Corps of Army Engineers, and I was talking about the government interest, of what effect it had on timber values, and the like, the state highways, or the State Department of Transportation claims that the truck hauls over to Boise Valley, for reloading of the lumber off of the rail sightings was costing the State an additional \$1,000,000 a year, jut to keep the highway up.

AVEL: Oh, I wouldn't doubt that a bit.

HAL: So, I think myself, that there's an awful lot of interest ...

DOROTHEA: It got cold up here last night, look at the ice.

HAL: Yeah, there's an old beaver dam.

AVEL: It certainly is costing the Department of Transportation extra money to --- just on roads.

HAL: Well, as I say, the government would stand to lose somewhere between a million and nine, and two million dollars, and it's costing the State a million dollars. There's three million dollars right there. All the public agencies could ... by getting the rail line back into Burns, could have recovered that in the first year, almost.

AVEL: You bet.

HAL: And of course in turn, if the federal government, and Forest Service in the national forest are losing a million and a half, or two million, that means Harney County is losing about \$500,000.

AVEL: That's what I was going to say. And then the County is losing revenue because of sales.

HAL: And with timber becoming more competitive, you know, in terms of market areas and the like, it just diminishes the market area when you lose, you know, the railhead, it shrinks the market area. It means the outfit say from Baker, and other locations, can make inroads into what has been the ---

AVEL: Private reserve.

HAL: Well yeah, John Day Lumber, and Malheur Lumber, and Snow Mountain Pine. You know, if the northern end of the forest, Prairie City, Bear Valley ---

SIDE B

HAL: It would be cheaper for an outfit in Baker to come down and buy the timber, haul it up in log form and process it and put it directly on the rail cars. So you lose your, the mills here locally have lost their competitive advantage by having the rail head out. All this --- technically speaking, all the lumber that is processed there in John Day is closer to the railhead here in Burns, than anywhere else. They still have that grade to pull, but in round trip minutes to get to the railheads, it's still closer to come to Burns.

AVEL: Oh yes, than to go across to Baker or even to Prineville, if they want to use that railhead. I feel that we need the rail all right, but it scares me when they don't get started on it, that something is going to come up, and that's what scares me.

DOROTHEA: That something else is going to come up, and flood us out. Right.

AVEL: I want it now; I'm getting impatient about that railroad. I'm being right honest with you, I really am.

HAL: This was a common carrier railroad.

AVEL: Uh huh, it was. I knew that.

HAL: That come down here. It also --- they transported some livestock on it.

AVEL: Oh yeah, and automobiles. Back in the old days they used to haul the automobiles. Most of the automobiles that went to John Day were railroaded to Seneca.

HAL: Is that right?

AVEL: Yeah. Unloaded in Seneca.

DOROTHEA: Well they have up here by the old Shetkey, Scheckel's place they have a --- well on further up to Silvies, I guess. They have that old place where they had the cattle and, you know, they loaded cattle.

AVEL: Yeah, the stockyards.

DOROTHEA: Yeah, the stockyards. In fact, that was used clear after Clinton and I was married. So, you know, I mean it hasn't been that many years ago it doesn't seem like, anyway, that it was still used as a stockyard.

AVEL: Well I can remember right after the war, and I was living in John Day for a few years, for Lloyd Ogalvie going to Seneca to pick up cars off of the boxcars, or automobiles off of the boxcar. The railroad would bring them to Seneca, and he'd unload them and drive them to John Day. No, it was a common carrier. Yeah, that's what scares me; I want to see them get started on that mother out there. With Snow Mountain Pine being like it is, and ---

HAL: It's going to be an interesting situation here, shortly. (We are meeting another vehicle on the trail.)

DOROTHEA: I think we could get off of the trail right back there, I don't know about up here, but ---

... (Stop and let the other truck go by.)

AVEL: That's just like the sale of that mill. I want it to happen now, not tomorrow.

HELEN: You know, it's really rough on the poor guys that's needing it to make his house payments, let's put it that way.

... (Discuss trucks passing.)

HAL: This here is what you call Fuqua Creek here.

AVEL: What creek?

HAL: Fuqua.

AVEL: I never heard of it.

DOROTHEA: Fuqua! Maybe that's because they called it Fuqua instead of Fuqua.

HAL: Fuqua. Now see there's the trestle right there. This is the only trestle that's on the national, on the federal portion, out of the thirty trestles it's the only one that we have.

DOROTHEA: The other one up there must be on Purdy's then.

HAL: There's a lot of them that goes, most of them, I would say probably half to two-thirds of the trestles are from Burns up to Poison Creek Grade. They're just one right after another.

HELEN: Well it either has to be somebody's name, or it means something. Look in your Spanish dictionary, Diaz.

DOROTHEA: I think it's the name of a man. He lived up here in the meadows, and he had a lot of kids, and I think it's his name.

HELEN: There's so many. Just like down there at McDade's, where they're at Williams Creek. Well the guy that established the ranch in the beginning, who McDade bought the ranch from, was Williams. And so the creek carries his name. Because I, when we got back, why I knew there was a creek there, so I called him up,

Jim, and I said, "What's the name of that creek?" And he said, "Williams." Said it was named for the guy that had established the place there.

DOROTHEA: Well, that's my understanding, it was ---

AVEL: You are probably right.

DOROTHEA: There was a man up here, and not that his name had anything to do with it, but he had quite a large family, and that's what they named the creek by. Its had several different pronunciations, but it was all spelled the same way, so --- The new pronunciation doesn't sound quite as ---

HAL: I wonder if it used to be --- it probably had a "Q" in there, rather than a "G".

DOROTHEA: It was, yeah.

HAL: Even the pronunciation of Fuqua, doesn't sound like a "G", it sounds like a "Q".

DOROTHEA: Originally the spelling was F U Q U A.

HAL: Maybe the Forest Service just didn't know how to spell.

DOROTHEA: Maybe.

HAL: I want to show you something here while we're up in this neck of the woods. ...

HELEN: Well look at your spelling of the Steens, you get it with an "I" too.

HAL: This is Crow Flat. We've got a work center up here, a guard station.

DOROTHEA: Do you still use this?

HAL: Oh, yes. In fact I think we are going to close down the one at Van, and over a time close the one down at Van. We have already closed down the one on West Myrtle Butte. And I think I'll center all of them out of this one workstation.

DOROTHEA: Well now there used to be a helicopter pad up here, a heliport or something.

HAL: There still is.

DOROTHEA: There still is?

HAL: Yes. And the old ranger station, I think they left here in about '20? I could tell you the actual dates, but they left here in about '23. The ranger station was actually located right down here in this bottom, and some of the old foundations of the original ranger station are located here. And there is a house we have over on, I think it would be E Street, there to the east of the highway, was moved from up here down to Burns.

DOROTHEA: Armond Nobel's house was moved.

HAL: And Armond Nobel's was the ranger station.

DOROTHEA: And we bought --- When we first moved to Silvies, we bought one of the houses and the animal shed, and made a house out of it. We moved it down to Silvies. We took the old road up over and back.

HAL: But if you'll search around in there, and you'll find all kinds of old foundations, and everything else. Probably find the old garbage dump in there, you never know.

DOROTHEA: Yeah. There's a spring in there too.

HAL: There's an old spring box in there.

DOROTHEA: Yeah.

HELEN: What was your maiden name?

DOROTHEA: Mine? I'm a Howes, but I married a Purdy.

HELEN: Yeah, that's what I say, your maiden name?

DOROTHEA: Yeah, I'm a Howes.

HELEN: Howes.

DOROTHEA: And I didn't know anything about this country except on picnics, until I married a Purdy.

HELEN: Oh.

DOROTHEA: I still don't know ...

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HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #255 Side B

Subject: Railroad Tunnel - With Hal Beamer

Place: Historical Society Luncheon - Burns, Oregon

Date: November 17, 1989

Interviewer: Dorothea Purdy & Barbara Lofgren

DOROTHEA PURDY: This is Dorothea Purdy, and I'm with Barbara Lofgren and we are attending the Harney County Historical Society meeting being held in Burns, Oregon, on November 17, 1989. Hal Beamer is the guest speaker, and he will be telling us something about the Railroad Tunnel in the Malheur Forest, and trying to ask people to help preserve this historical sight.

HAL BEAMER: Well again, thank you. I'm, really pleased to be here. I think I have talked to a diverse number of groups, but I think this is the first time I've ever talked to a Historical Society. I don't know why that is, because you are my favorite people.

I'm a Virginian by birth, and I have a certain fondness for old things. I think I've drug most of Virginia out here with me. I'm a collector of old music boxes. I've got a number of those that date back into the 1850's. I've got an old Eli Ferry clock that has wooden works that dates back in the 1820's. And of

course if you've seen me, I drive around in a 1957 Mark A Jaguar. I like things that are old, but I also like things that are still functional, or still work.

But anyway, I'm pleased to be here. You know this is our centennial year, and we talk about being "Proud of the Past, and Poised for the Future," and I know that there are a lot of treasures out there in Harney County, and some of them may be hidden. In fact, maybe that ought to be the title of my talk today is, "The Hidden Treasure of Harney County." Because when I check around I find that there are very few people that ever have been to the Poison Creek Tunnel.

Helen Davis, by the way, has supplied some of the materials for what I'm going to be talking to you about today, and I certainly appreciate that. Because when she asked me to speak to you I says, "You know as far as the railroad, I have a lot of the history of the old railroad, but when it comes to the tunnel itself, I don't have a lot of information." Well she managed to research a lot of it out, and has provided a lot of the information that I can share with you today.

This, as I mentioned to Helen here the other night, we are going to have a quiz, at the end, simply true and false. I do believe in open book tests, so I'll give you the question now, and then I'll look for the responses after I get done today. One of the questions, true and false, the Bear Valley Timber Sale. This was an 890,000,000-foot sale, and was sold by the United States

Forest Service, with the intent of extending the rail line from Crane into Burns, and then on to Seneca, and then construct the mill here.

The Bear Valley Timber Sale at 890,000,000 feet, true or false --- "Was this the largest sale ever sold by the United States Forest Service, as a single offering?" We'll come back to that.

Another question. I've got to take my glasses off, I can't see with them, and I can't see without them. The Poison Creek Tunnel, is it true or false the largest wooden structure in Eastern Oregon?

Third question. The Poison Creek Tunnel, is it the largest wooden structure in Oregon made out of native Oregon woods?

And then fourthly. Poison Creek Tunnel is identified in Harney County defense plan as a fall-out shelter? Now we'll come back to those.

How many people here have ever visited the tunnel? Let's have a show of hands. Well that's more than I expected. Because haven't that many people --- In fact if there were that many people that have visited the tunnel, I would imagine that the walls of it would be lined with graffiti. I don't know of any particular signs of graffiti anywhere in the tunnel. I think that's maybe a plus. But it's amazing how few people have visited it. And if you were around here in 1925, there were a number of people --- that was one of the major events of its time, in the

year 1925.

What I would like to show you is an eight-minute video. I have to apologize for some of the footage, because I tried to splice it together, to try to limit it to eight minutes, and so you'll excuse me for some of the breaks in it. For the good shots, those are the ones I took. You'll see some lousy shots that's what somebody else took, but I put them in there anyway. So if you'll excuse me for the moment I'll go over to the other end and show you. For those that have not seen the tunnel, or seen portions of the Malheur Railroad, or the Oregon Northwest Railroad as it is currently called, this will be your opportunity.

We'll take you back to July the 11th, 1916. The Union Pacific Railroad had constructed the line into Crane, and it was operated by their subsidiary, The Oregon Short Line. And Burns about that time was 40 years old, dirt streets, wooden sidewalks. And of course their economy was principally based on the ranching industry. But a number of folks eyed to the North the vast tracks of federally owned timber, said to themselves, you know, "What if we were to build a mill, and milled logs in Burns, you know, could we not improve our standard of living? Could we not improve our economy? Could we not improve the number of available jobs?"

At the time Burns was about, as I say, about a 1,000 people. And there was two people, one fellow by the name of E. W. Barnes, and another individual by the name of Henry Chaney, from Baker Fentries. Try to look at what Fentries --- does anybody know what

Fentries is? I thought I was the only one that didn't. I looked it up. Fent is a piece of cloth, so I assume it was a textile outfit. And they went east to Chicago to try to encourage Edward Hines to come out and take a look at the timber that existed out in this part of the country. And evidently he did come out here, but it didn't lead to anything.

And then the fine folks of Harney and Grant County started circulating a petition. And this petition went back to the Department of Agriculture with the intent of interesting the Forest Service to put up a sale to develop this particular part of the country.

Chief of the Forest Service at the time was a fellow by the name of W. B. Greeley, and he had the timber cruised and appraised, and in 1922, the Forest Service put together a prospectus that went out to various interested timber companies throughout the country. Somewhere I have a copy of that prospectus, or at least I thought I did. But anyway, it was a green prospectus, and it was very well polished, and it really sold Harney County and Burns. And the sale was subsequently advertised, it was advertised for six months.

Oh, by the way, the prospectus did require that the railroad be extended from Crane into Burns, that was about 30 miles. And then to extend a 50-mile length of line from Burns to Seneca, and then construct the mill. The prospectus also carried the fact that there was 890,000,000 feet of timber to be included in the

sale, mostly made up of ponderosa pine. I have trouble visualizing 890,000,000 feet. Burns District has been averaging the sale of 55,000,000 to 60,000,000 feet a year on our annual sale program. I guess if you try to relate to something like that, it would be like taking about 170,000 to 180,000 log trucks and stacking them up end to end. If you want to get some sort of picture of what 890,000,000 feet looks like.

No bids were to be considered for less than \$2.75 on the pine. And for those that have been following things in the paper, you'll notice the pine is going well over \$400 a thousand today. And 50 cents a thousand for all other species of logs.

As I say, it was advertised with bids to be received on February 15, 1923. Unfortunately came that particular date and there was no bids. So the Forest Service went back and re-examined it, reduced the price on the pine to \$2 a thousand, changed some of the terms of the contract, and re-advertised it. And there were two bids. One from a Fred Herrick, and the other one was from Brooks Scanlon. Herrick bid a price of \$2.80. Brooks Scanlon came in with the minimum bid, and so subsequently the contract was awarded to Fred Herrick.

Herrick, with financial assistance from the Union Pacific Railroad, commenced that same year to start to extend the line on into Burns. And the line was officially named at that time, "The Malheur Railroad." The line opened on September the 24th, 1924, and according to the "Burns Bulletin" of October 8th, 1924, a

four-day celebration was held here in the City of Burns, or in various other places. They talked about in quotes, "That Paiute Indians in war paint and feathers, early white settlers, and a variety of automobiles, and passengers on the first train, met on the plains." And Herrick was pretty much reimbursed for all of his expenses in terms of bringing the line on into Burns.

Then Herrick started to run into some financial problems. Not only financial problems, but problems getting permits from the Interstate Commerce Commission. And acquiring the rights of way from here to Seneca. And as a result of that, the Forest Service did extend his contract. It was the first of a number of extensions.

By December the 31st, 1925, certain additional sections of railroad grade were completed, including the grade from Burns over to the current mill site over in Hines. But at the time, it was called Herrick. Did anybody know that? I didn't know that.

By April 1926, the railroad grade between the sawmill and Seneca was completed, and ready for track laying. However, Herrick was behind schedule in completing the railroad, and the required cutting of timber by October the 1st, 1926 was in jeopardy. After other short extensions, Herrick's contract with the Forest Service was terminated. The sale was re-advertised, and Edward Hines Lumber Company, Edward Hines Western Lumber Company was awarded the contract in 1928.

Then Hines bought out Herrick's interest, and then as you

know completed the railroad, and completed the construction of the mill.

Let's go back to the tunnel. And this is why I'd like to thank again, Helen Davis. These are excerpts from what was then the "Harney County News".

May 7, 1925, I can remember this date well, because it was exactly 13 years and 1 day before I was born. Under the caption, "Tunnel Work to Start". Last week an aggregation of Swedish workmen arrived in Burns, headed by the contractor Elmer Johnson. They immediately set to work preparing the 400-foot tunnel for the Malheur Railroad Company on the mountain divide between Poison Creek and the Silvies Valley. They will operate an air compressor drill, and a two-way shovel. Now a two-way shovel to me, on a cable, is kind of like a dragline. Or at least I think that's probably what they were using as a dragline. The steam engine or hoisting apparatus that serve on the pile driver has been dismantled and taken to the scene of the operation for this undertaking.

Then on June 4, 1925, under the caption, "Steam Shovel to Work Double Shift." Malheur Railroad Company is having a Delco Electric Light plant placed on the steam shovel now operating in the cut, at the head of Poison Creek, so as to enable them to operate it continually day and night. This will practically double the capacity of the shovel. The work on the big cut and tunnel is progressing rapidly.

August the 6th, 1925, "Railroad Progress." The contractors on the Malheur Railroad Line who have taken a temporary layoff with part of their crew for the purpose of putting up their hay crop --- doesn't that sound familiar, have again returned to their contracts are now working with their former quota. Many of them will increase the force as fast as men are available, and the next three months will see the grade from Burns to Seneca along towards completion. The crew engaged in getting out the ties, are making good progress. Are getting out an excellent grade of ties. They are all hand-hewn, and most of them have a twelve-inch face.

September the 24th, 1925. "Work at the Tunnel Continues to Progress Ahead of Schedule." 270 feet of excavation is completed, with 216 feet completely timbered, and the other 56 feet timbered on the sides. This leaves less than 200 feet to excavate for the completion of the job. The north portal over the tunnel will be completed this week. And the south portal is much shorter than the north. The tunnel work will be completed in less than 30 days.

And finally on October the 29th, 1925, under the caption, "Coming Out of It." Harry Howell, a contractor of the Railroad Line between Burns and Silvies Valley, was in town yesterday for supplies, and reported the Big Tunnel would be completed that afternoon, as to the tunnel proper. All that remains to be finished is a south portal, or cut approaching the main tunnel. And this will be fast work, as all the timbering is done, and that

has been the slow part of the job. The contractors expect to have this portal far enough advanced to have a passage clear through by Sunday. People who are in authority on that class of work have pronounced this tunnel one of the best pieces of construction work in its line that they have come in contact with.

One by one, as they come to them, the impossible features of the Herrick Plan of Development are being successfully accomplished. And yet in spite of the enormous amount of work done, and money expended, and being expended every day, we still have a few individuals who contend that this work cannot, and will not be done. I think I'd ought to end on that note.

As you know for many years, that railroad was in existence. They averaged better than 40 some carloads of logs per day that came from the re-load sight up near Silvies, brought into this mill here. And then later on when the planing mill was put in at Seneca, it hauled lumber down through here. So it is a valuable part of our history. Maybe the Bear Valley Sale, and the construction of the mill, and the rail lines coming into Burns, and then onto Seneca --- maybe in terms of our economic well being, our social well being, our spiritual well being, is probably one of the most significant events in the life of Harney County.

And of course most of the railroad is gone with the exception of the tunnel, but I think beyond just the structure, is symbolic of an important event that happened in the life of Harney County,

and also the southern end of Grant County, I might add.

So with that, I come back to the quiz, the true and false quiz. Was the Bear Valley sale at 890,000,000 feet the largest single offering of timber ever sold by the United States Forest Service? How many believe that as a true statement? How many believe that is a false statement? I have been told this to be true. I have never validated the truth of that statement. I'd like to know. But I think it is worth finding out.

Is the tunnel at the head end of Poison Creek the largest wooden structure in Eastern Oregon? How many people do you believe that that might be true? I have been told that it is the largest wooden structure in Eastern Oregon. But again, I haven't validated it. Anybody know of a structure in Eastern Oregon that is bigger?

EMERY FERGUSON: The curve, the trestle curve right there at --- it ... has been filled in, but that was one of the largest trestles there, or structures, before it was filled in, I know that.

HAL: Yeah. That's an interesting one to check out. I don't know. Is it the largest wooden structure, of course depending on the answer to the first question? Is it the largest wooden structure in the State of Oregon made out of natural Oregon wood? How many believe that's true? Somebody told me that the only --- the largest wooden structure is the Timberline Lodge up on Mt. Hood. But I also was told that a lot of the wood that went into

Timberline Lodge came from Washington. And again, I haven't validated this, but I'd like to know.

And then finally, was the tunnel --- Finally, was the tunnel a fall-out shelter in Civil Defense Plans for Harney County?

EMERY FERGUSON: In Harney County it was.

HAL: That's a true statement. But knowing, when given the number of people that have ever been there, I think if you did have, if they ever had to use it, I don't think people would have been able to find it, because they have never been there before.

At this point I'll just kind of open it up for questions. I don't know if I've got the answers. Maybe we'll call this audience participation day, because if I don't, maybe somebody else does have the answer. Does anybody have any questions?

DOROTHY GEORGE: I wanted to know, or I would like to know what is the future of the tunnel? I remember reading in the paper something about it was going to take a couple of million to destroy this. And I thought that there was something going on to see that that doesn't happen. And of course I don't want it to happen personally. And what is there in the happenings?

HAL: Love you! If you hadn't have asked that, I would have been most disappointed if somebody hadn't asked that question.

DOROTHY: I don't want it to happen.

HAL: In fact I had a plant over here; I says if that question doesn't get asked, you ask it. Is that right?

WOMAN: Yes.

HAL: Let me first ---

MAN: Was that line ever completed ...

HAL: I can't --- I couldn't say. I couldn't say. Let me come back to the terms of your question. First of all, let me say I'm not --- Whatever happens to the tunnel, I'm not going to be the deciding officer to make that decision. On the other hand, I can guarantee you that I will probably be the one that inserts the most imports, at least internal to the Forest Service.

KATHERINE (CINDY) VOSS: Who would be the deciding person?

HAL: The Forest Supervisor in John Day. You're right, there was a news release that came out. Basically it said it would cost somewhere between a half a million and a million dollars. As the Forest Service saw it to bring it back to a structural condition that it previously --- existed at the time when it was constructed.

My boss, for a supervisor, asked me to develop a decision tree, or look at alternatives, what we might do with the tunnel. And we looked at --- What are the issues that pertain to it? Well certainly an issue has to do with cost. Another issue is liability, and safety, of people in that vicinity that might walk into the tunnel. Or the liability should the "31" Road, which crosses over it would collapse, would collapse on it and cause that road to fail. And then of course the historical interpretation and its preservation.

I narrowed it down to three alternatives that I submitted to

my boss. And I can let you know that I was as surprised by that news article as you were. I mean it says that the Forest Service had decided to destroy it.

DOROTHY: What was the three alternatives?

HAL: The three alternative, of course, one is to get rid of it, to blow it up. Or to demolish it in some way, and then back fill, and then close off the cut. Another alternative was to collapse the center of the span and retain the portals for interpretive purposes. And then a third alternative would be to bridge, and this is my favorite one by the way, I have to be up front --- is to bridge the sight, take off a portion of the over burden, go down to the local bridge seller and buy ourselves a bridge, and put a double lane bridge across there to safeguard the user on the "31" Road, and take some of the burden off of the tunnel. And then find somebody who is an interest group, who will enter into a partnership with the Forest Service to attend to the future of the tunnel. And I can go into what I can envision there a little bit more, if you would like me to.

WOMAN: Please.

KATHERINE (CINDY) VOSS: One question before that. Is this tunnel of any historical status anywhere?

HAL: It is a national registry eligible structure.

KATHERINE: So are there funds not available to do that?

HAL: Possibly, possibly. I don't expect --- let me go back. When the news article came out it says that the tunnel would be

done away with. But my feelings are, my boss in consultation with others in looking at that, we were dealing with the abandonment of the railroad. And certainly the Oregon And Northwest Railroad has an obligation on abandonment to return the grade, and return the right of way to the government. See they only had the rights of use as long as there was a railroad there. Upon abandonment those lands revert back to the Forest Service. And they had a responsibility to return them to them in an acceptable condition.

And of course the Oregon Northwest Railroad has little or no assets, once all the ties and rails and so forth were removed. And I asked my boss, when I sent him the three alternatives that I thought were the best three to deal with, is to have an opportunity to hold a public forum and public involvement meetings to see what could be done, or see if there were any interest. Recognizing the speed in which things were happening, I think he kind of short cut the process, and says, "Hey, we're going to get rid of the tunnel." And then we find out in short order if there was any interest in preserving it, in terms of that particular response.

And then after that happened, a reserve unit in Portland, an Army reserve unit, wrote me a letter and says, "Hey, we'd like to blow the tunnel up." Well, you know, when you find out that you've got a worse case scenario, and I'll offer that as a worse case scenario, when you've got that --- When you are walking around with that in your hip pocket, you say, well maybe we still

have some time to deal with the subject of seeing whether we can retain and preserve the structure.

I'd like to go back as far as the scenario of a partnership. There is a lot of money to be had in partnerships. Just, I mean, from the government perspective, anytime you are working in partnership with a citizen group, or something like that, in itself it magically seems to create money. Certainly the Oregon And Northwest Railroad is not particularly excited about the structure. I mean, potentially the cost to them is going to be \$30,000 to \$40,000 for its removal. I would suggest that if we had a local interest group that would be interested in retaining the structure, that structure could be deeded potentially by the Oregon Northwest Railroad to that interest group. The Forest Service, working in concert with this interest group, would issue a free special use permit ad-indefinitum. They would own the structure, it would be sitting on national forest service lands, but they would own the structure. We would build the bridge on the "31" Road to take the problem away there. And then the owner would attend to the questions of any liability. It would have to have the liability insurance, in this particular case. And then we would work together in terms of developing the interpretation of the tunnel. The government still would be probably supplying a good amount of the money for the signing and this type of thing.

The main cost to the interest group would be one primarily of the liability insurance associated with the special use

requirements. But without an interest group, again I'm not the decision official, but I would not hold much hope that we would retain the structure if the Forest Service had to go it alone.

KATHERINE VOSS: Because it has a national heritage status, does that not automatically give it some preservation power?

HAL: No, no. The responsible agency --- We have what we all the 106 process, and it is national registry eligible. But if, you know, we talk about historic districts, and towns and everything else. If this registered property constitutes a public nuisance, or there were other rationale, then the owner of the facility, in this case it would be the Forest Service, the way things are going right now, through a public involvement process would identify that it may be in the public's interest to dispose of the tunnel in terms of the liability in questions of safety. And then once we've satisfied the questions of public safety, the responsible agency, which would be the owner of the structure, would have the final say in what happened to it. There would be consultations with the State Historical Preservation Office and others. But finally the final say comes to the agency that has the responsibility for the structure. So no, just by being national registry eligible, does not protect the structure.

DOROTHY: Would it be advantageous for us to go after getting it on the register?

HAL: Yes, I think it would. I think, as I say, we've already to find it is eligible. I don't know whether, you know, only to the

extent that if it generated grant monies, or something else. I don't know if it could be repaired, in all honesty. On the other hand, I'd kind of like it to die its own natural death, than being helped along the way, if you know what I mean. I have a high degree of fondness for the tunnel.

I won't say I love the tunnel, because then I'm asked the question, do you love the tunnel more than you do your wife? No, I love my wife more than I do the tunnel. But I have a high, a lot of fondness for this tunnel.

DOROTHY: What is there out there for us to do to help to keep that?

HAL: Well I more than glad to talk to any group, and I think my boss is interested in having any group ---

DOROTHY: Yeah, where is he coming from? Is he interested in this?

HAL: Oh, I think as I say, I can't make no promises that I can't personally deliver, but I feel that he can be swayed if we could have a partnership arrangement with somebody.

DOROTHY: So you need an interested group that would be willing to do this is what I'm hearing?

HAL: That's right, that's right, to work with us. And as I say, partnerships --- We have what we call the recreation strategy in the government today. We're pulling money from sources that we never saw before, by entering into partnership. Not necessarily that the partners are providing the money, but by virtue of

government and private interest groups working together, we've been able to accomplish things we've never ever been able to do before.

DOROTHY: Is there ever any chance for Joaquin Miller to open up? I'm thinking of, you know, opening Joaquin Miller --- then that's a nice little hike from there to this tunnel. I mean ---

HAL: We --- we closed Joaquin Miller a number of years ago. We were getting about 5 percent use, and then replicated down the road at Idlewild was pretty much the same thing. On the basis, you know, we were being recommended by our regional office for anything getting less than 15 percent use, to do away with it. We found by closing Joaquin Miller, we certainly have increased the use at Idlewild. As far as the facility is concerned, yes, I think there's possibilities. Everything is still there basically. We do, and I think I mentioned that Harney County PRIDE, before it became Harney County PRIDE, but I mentioned about the snowmobile courses that we're putting --- Well the snow trails going in for snowmobile users and cross country skiers, we plan to have one there at Idlewild. And then just north of Idlewild, why there is a good straight tangent on the highway, having a place where snowmobilers could cross the highway, and then having a loop that will take you right down by the tunnel, and back around that way.

It may be possible that Idlewild, or Joaquin Miller might have some opportunities there. There is a concern I have on both Idlewild and Joaquin Miller, and that's the highway entries. The

entrances there, they are terrible entrances to the highway.

WOMAN: How much property does the Forest Service have in the vicinity of the tunnel?

HAL: We have all the property in the vicinity.

WOMAN: So I'm wondering is would there be room to put in say a man made lake for fishing?

HAL: Oh, sure.

WOMAN: And develop a park there for recreation?

HAL: That seems to be one of the primary concerns, is "What else is there to capture one's interest?" I do mention again, the snowmobile course. The subject of going --- putting in some sort of dam to create a fishing opportunity say along Poison Creek, has been suggested. We have not looked at where that might be feasible. Certainly at that elevation you'd want to have a reservoir deep enough that it doesn't freeze to the bottom. You'd have to have sufficient depth. It would be a major undertaking to put one of those in. But I think that anything we can think of in terms of augmenting the use in that particular area would be favorable in terms of giving the tunnel some identity that it otherwise would not get.

KATHERINE VOSS: Put picnic tables out.

HAL: Well that's a possibility, yes.

KATHERINE VOSS: Make paths, nature paths. Interpretation paths about plants and geology along the trails.

HAL: Well the railroad grade itself is, you know, provides a

path.

KATHERINE VOSS: Maybe that could be the interpretation, where you could have sight markers, where you could stop. And that would be much cheaper than a dam, and it still be increasing recreative value. Did I understand that the tunnel cannot be repaired?

HAL: Again, based on, and I would have to say this is an accuracy examination. It's not an in depth examination. This is by a facilities engineer out of John Day. He says it would cost between a half a million and a million dollars to repair it. I was rather intrigued, and by the way I haven't passed these pictures around. But just looking at the type of structure, when you talked about the post and beam type construction. As I say, there's 3" x 12" planking on the back side of those posts to hold the dirt back. And I look at these pictures, and the most intriguing thing that I see here, and this is while it was in construction, it looks like, when I look between the posts there is dirt there. I'm trying to figure out how they attached those 3 x 12's on the backside of those posts. I'd like to know the answer to that one. And I want to pass, is it okay to pass these out?

HELEN DAVIS: Maybe they haven't put that dirt back yet.

HAL: Well, look at the dirt right there, Helen.

HELEN: Yeah, but no --- ah ---

HAL: I'll let you start passing those around if you want. Those are some other pictures we have, by the way.

... (Crowd discussion.)

DICK DEMING: ...

HAL: Yes, I know you did. Uh huh.

MAN: ...

HAL: I've talked to Gordon Glass on numerous occasions. Of course Gordon Glass, he's with the Grant County Historical Society. He's the owner of S & M Motors in John Day, and he is, as I understand it, one of the primary movers on the Wau Chang Museum and various other things. He's even suggested maybe a consortium or a coalition of Harney and Grant County Historical Societies going together on such a project.

I've gotten a lot more, I guess, inquiries from Grant County than I have from Harney County, to date, on the status of the tunnel. Even though the tunnel is in Harney County, there's been more interest shown in Grant County. Helen.

HELEN HART: I'm a little confused about one thing. The road that is over the top of the tunnel, is that what will be removed? You mentioned something about a bridge. Where are you going to put the bridge?

HAL: We would bridge that particular sight, and keep the road in the same location. Now one other thing we did consider, it didn't make it among the final three alternatives, was to take the "31" Road off the tunnel altogether and build a new road at a grade crossing. That would be excellent from the standpoint of interpretation, but it would be a high cost to do so. Right now

you can drive right up to the tunnel. You can drive right through it if you want to. It's not difficult to get to.

HELEN HART: But isn't the road over it, isn't that vibrations and all that causing a lot of that erosion and sand to fall down?

HAL: In all honesty, Helen, I don't think that there is much eroding on the tunnel as a result of the fill. You know, certainly when they back filled over it; it did carry the weight of the fill. But over the time, you know, materials start to, you know, interlock with each other. And technically thinking, it's impossible to do so. But technically, I'm not so sure but, I'm not so sure but what you could slip that tunnel out of there and that earth and bridge would stay in place. It's carrying its own self-support right now.

HELEN: It looks so sandy in there though, you know.

HAL: It's very loose materials. But I know in a lot of our fill constructions, over time culverts do not carry the load of the fill, the fill carries its own load. But again, if the tunnel were ever to collapse, certainly the over-burden would go with it. I do know right towards the end, when they were bringing the lumber down from Seneca, as they would go through the tunnel, when they come out the other end they were pretty well coated with dirt from vibration and dirt pouring down through the bulk heads. So yes, from the inside, yes.

Again, is anybody interested in meeting with the Forest Service to discuss this further? I would leave it with the ---

this would be a very logical group. But I would leave it with the Society, if they are interested; to certainly contact me and we certainly could work out some details. I think it would be, most of the expense again would be carried by the government. But certainly I think there's a way of retaining the structure, as long as we do have a partnership.

And I would imagine --- I haven't talked to Snow Mountain Pine as to whether or not, or the Oregon Northwest Railroad, whether they would be willing to deed the structure to an interest group. We don't want it. The Forest Service doesn't want this structure. They would be more than glad to work with somebody that would own the structure, to retain it.

Any other questions? Well, I thank you.

End of meeting.

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