

HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #264 - Side A

Subject: Wanda Clark & Rodney Rosebrook Discuss Bill Brown

Place: Redmond, Oregon

Date: November 13, 1982

Interviewer: Richard Cowan

Release Form: No

RICHARD COWAN: ... Well, what I hear you saying is that most of these stories are untrue, that Bill was not a fool.

WANDA CLARK: He was no fool, definitely not.

RICHARD: And this is what I've been trying to figure out.

WANDA: Well, if you listen to the tape of Fred's [Houston], or read the transcript that he --- well this would give you, I think, the best picture. Because Fred had done such an excellent job, as I said, he started in at the very beginning when Bill came into the country, but he told him about when they came west, and so forth. And how they happened to be in here, and what he did, and about his education, and so forth. And he was eccentric; there is no question about it. But he wasn't a fool, no way.

RICHARD: Well, I've heard this story about the girls that he, I use chase, not in the sense that he was chasing women, but just---

WANDA: No, no.

RICHARD: But that he would have liked to have gotten married.

WANDA: That's right.

RICHARD: Now Lena Wilson, who was his niece, I've got a couple hours with her on tape, and he loved children.

WANDA: Well, he built a nursery at his home. And I have in my records, not on tapes, but notes

of one or two women that he proposed to. And what he was doing, he was by then getting too old, and he was trying to find somebody quite a lot younger, that could raise a family. And so, it just never worked out. In the years when he, well he was out with sheep when he was a younger man. But he, there is in Fred's tape, or someplace else, tells about some gal that he was engaged to I guess, about the time he was out of college. And then that didn't work out. And so, then he wasn't interested in anybody else for a long time. And then he begins to realize he didn't have a family, and didn't have anybody to leave all of his things to. And then ... and maybe you have done it, is check with the Methodist Home in Salem and see what records they may have left of his.

RICHARD: I intend to do this, if I could run it down. I was in Salem once, and made some inquiries, and couldn't get anything done. But the next time I'm down there ---

WANDA: Did you go out to the ---

RICHARD: No.

WANDA: Well, it's --- I suspect they may still have someplace ... some of their old records. Now my understanding is that he made the largest single donation for the building of that home. And then he did not make any provisions that they would take care of him, if he needed it. And when he was broke, why he went down there, and his brother, I believe it was George, paid for him to go in there. And I just wondered what their records may say. Because they wouldn't take him, you know.

RICHARD: Another thing, I've had, I forget who it was that was telling me about it, I posed the same question to them I posed to you about, he must have been real sharp, but people seemed to make a fool of him.

WANDA: Uh huh.

RICHARD: And this fellow said he thought that after Bill had killed that man, he was, he felt so strongly about what he had done, that he just kind of backed off from asserting himself. But he ---

WANDA: Well, I've never heard that.

RICHARD: This was a theory he had.

WANDA: Uh huh, uh huh.

CLEON CLARK: ... (Too far from microphone to pick up.)

WANDA: Somebody had told him, he'd gone off his --- nuts, he was in the state hospital out ... The man he took out of the pen was his ex-riding boss, and he came out --- yeah. Stole from him again. But that information, you have that.

CLEON: ...

WANDA: We have it though, someplace.

CLEON: ...

WANDA: I don't think that's his name. I think it's something else, and I can't think of it either. But we have that name either on tape or written down.

CLEON: Sumner would know.

WANDA: Yes, Sumner would know too. Yes, Fred was the one who was telling us about it. And it's on Fred's tape; I think is where it is. Well, what --- sometime when you get, have time, if you want to come over --- you have to go back I understand this afternoon.

RICHARD: I have a meeting with the Forest Service at noon.

WANDA: Oh, at noon.

RICHARD: Yeah.

WANDA: You don't have much time. Oh, in Prineville.

RICHARD: Yeah, over in Prineville.

WANDA: Yeah. Well, then that's --- Are you going to go back tonight to Burns?

RICHARD: Yeah, I've got to feed, go back to Burns. I thought maybe if our meeting is over early enough in Prineville, why I'd try to call Fred or Sumner.

WANDA: Yeah. Well, now if you could talk to Fred, and ask him if it would be alright if we give you a copy of this transcript of that tape, or let you copy the tape, whichever you want, why --- but I would want his permission.

RICHARD: Sure, sure.

WANDA: Because he does, he gave it to us, and so I would want his permission to do this. But I'm very willing, all I'm interested in is the history of Bill Brown be written. I don't care whether it's --- I'd rather not do it; the way things are piled up now. And if you want to do it, and since you're

interested in doing an accurate one, and not just all the tales --- why I'd be willing to share any information we have.

RICHARD: Well, I was about to say the same to you. (Laughter)

WANDA: Well mine is --- the thing that I'm involved in so many other things right now.

RICHARD: Uh huh.

WANDA: But, this is, what I'm --- I don't care who writes this, as long as ---

RICHARD: Well I started out really; I wanted to resolve in my own mind, it's a phenomenal situation of a guy building up an empire while people making fools of him all the time. And I knew the two of them didn't fit.

WANDA: No, they don't fit.

RICHARD: This is what I, another thing I've heard of a lot, and a lot of people who, along the same lines, they claim that so and so was working for Bill Brown, and he was stealing him blind. And if I weren't there to help him --- I've been told. You go over and see so and so, and he'd say that this other guy was working for Bill Brown, stealing him blind, but if I wasn't there ---

WANDA: That's right. Yeah, that's right. Well, we do know that people stole from Bill Brown all the time. And we have some pictures --- Bill refused to recognize for quite sometime, Deschutes County ... paying taxes in Deschutes County. Didn't own any land in it, as I understand, but a lot of his horses ran in Deschutes County. So, a fellow said to him, well, what was he, a deputy accessor or appraiser or something, if we could go out and ride in a certain area and gather so many horses, and let --- figure that he had seventy-five percent of them or whatever percent, that this would give so much, and then you have probably ten times that many horses running in this area. So, they did this. And we have some pictures taken at the time of that round up of those horses. That would be interesting. And I can't remember how many, but they corralled them at the Millican place.

CLEON: ...

RICHARD: Where is Six Corners?

CLEON: ...

RICHARD: I bet she would.

WANDA: Yeah, yeah.

CLEON: ...

WANDA: Yeah.

RICHARD: So am I.

CLEON: ...

WANDA: He was in here too.

CLEON: ...

RICHARD: Uh huh.

CLEON: ...

RICHARD: No, I can't place it.

CLEON: ...

WANDA: Now we have that written on the back of the picture. But we're going to have to go pretty quick. But why don't, if you come back ---

RICHARD: Yeah, this winter sometime.

WANDA: Yeah.

RICHARD: Okay, let me ask you one more question.

WANDA: Yeah, okay.

RICHARD: I've heard so many stories about Bill Brown's store.

WANDA: Yes.

RICHARD: Everybody walked in and took what they want, and wrote down what they want.

WANDA: Yes. Yeah, that's right. He started out, he had somebody running it, I think it was a niece, maybe it was the one ... And then she left, and then ... neighbors around there, and the people that worked for him, and so then they started in just keeping their own records. Well, of course, there were a lot of people who were taking things and were not keeping it.

RICHARD: Uh huh.

WANDA: I have a picture of the building. I have a picture of the store building.

RICHARD: Yeah.

WANDA: That I got from a gal out here in Powell Buttes.

RICHARD: You do?

WANDA: She let us copy some of the pictures she had. And so, I have that.

RICHARD: Well, we don't want to hold you up any longer. Lena Wilson is still alive.

WANDA: Where does she live?

RICHARD: Lives in Anderson, California.

WANDA: Uh huh.

RICHARD: And her daughter is Helen Moon. You might have known them Cleon, from the Double O country. Right down the other side of Riley. And she was married to Virgil Moon. Virgil died two or three years ago. But Helen is still there, and just as sharp, and Lena at ninety-five is just as sharp as they come.

WANDA: Oh. I wonder if Helen is the one who came and run the store for him for a long time. I think that we have that name of who ran it. I borrowed this book from the Brennan's, they loaned it to me once, and I went through and made a list of people who bought from him. Thinking that this would ... a lot of the early settlers in there. Because you could almost tell whether it was a family or whether it was a buckaroo working for Bill. Whether they bought overalls, and gloves and jeans, or shirts and shoes. Or whether they bought sugar and yardage and things like this. And so, I did make a list of people out of that book. And then of course returned it to her ... But I think this is great. You go ahead and work at it. We'll give you all the help we can.

RICHARD: Okay, we won't hold you up any ---

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HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

Subject: Rodney Rosebrook Discusses Bill Brown

Place: Redmond, Oregon

Interviewer: Richard Cowan

RICHARD COWAN: I'm now talking with Mr. Rodney Rosebrook in Redmond, who is an old timer in the desert here, and I know his son John very well in Portland. What we're interested in Rod, you said you worked for the Couch's before they bought the GI?

RODNEY ROSEBROOK: Yes. Well, they bought it really when I went to work for them, but they lived at ... Butte there. And I went up to Quinn River, I was then buckarooing for the PLS Company, and I came over and was living with my folks at Bend. And I got a job on the rock crusher, and that was too hard a work for a cowboy. (Laughter) So one time, one day I --- when the Couch's come in, they wanted somebody to pack them out from up at Quinn River to the desert with their sheep. So, I took the job and I went out there and worked for them the rest of the winter. And they was a taking over the GI at that time.

RICHARD: Now where was Quinn River, is it down in Nevada?

RODNEY: No, it's up above Crane Prairie.

RICHARD: Oh, okay.

RODNEY: It's just a short river, a man got killed up in there, and they buried him there at the head of it, and it's called Quinn River, his name was Quinn. And I packed them out, and we, it took us about ten to twelve days from Quinn River out to Hampton Butte. And there was a storm out there, and it was real bad for two or three days. But then we made it all right. We were out there, and I went to work on the ranch for them for the rest of the winter.

In going across the desert there, at that time, the homesteaders had moved out, and I didn't have much to do, and I went to --- used to, had to have a camp set up when John got in with the sheep. And I used to go to them homesteads out there, and there was almost anything that you wanted to think of at them their places. There were pictures hanging on the walls of their relatives

that they had moved out and come to, and moved into Bend to work in the sawmills at that time. And farm machinery, their harnesses, and their stoves, and all of that kind of equipment. And it used to fascinate me to go to them places and look them over. But, and they turned their horses loose ---

RICHARD: When was this, about 1920?

RODNEY: It was about 1922 to '24. And there was horses, just lots of them. And one night we camped at Pringle Flat, and the way the corrals was built, they had to go in and by the dance hall that's there, it's still standing. But the corral is torn down now, but they had to go down a lane. And that night, the horses started to coming in there, and they kept us awake most all night. And when I first pulled in there, I just set the tent up and started to cook supper, and the robins would come in to get water, and they were coming into the ... and I had to move the stove inside of the tent there was so many birds flying over. (Laughter)

And horses come in by the hundreds that night. They kept us awake most all night, they'd come in and then they'd snort, then run back, and then they'd come up again. And about the third time they'd just run by the tent. And ...

RICHARD: They were the horses that the homesteaders had just turned out, huh?

RODNEY: Yes, and Bill Brown's horses. They were just range stuff. But a lot of them were horses that ...

RICHARD: Then when did Couch's buy the GI?

RODNEY: Well, they was renting it at that time, when I came. The way I understood it, but it was about '22 or '23, along in there, along in the early '20's. And he was buying it at that time. I believe a man by the name of Stewart, I believe, had ...

RICHARD: And how long did you stay with the ---

RODNEY: I stayed until spring. And then I went up into Washington, and went to work on a ... ranch, and I stayed there a couple years.

RICHARD: Did you work any with Reuben Long on the desert, and run horses with him any?

RODNEY: No, no I never run horses with Reub Long. I knowed Reub real well, and him and me

was real good friends, but I got acquainted with him in later years. The Brown boys and me did run horses, wild horses at Deer Creek and Murderers Creek, and there was lots of horses there, and there was a lot of pretty good horses there. I got several out of there that made real good cattle horses.

RICHARD: When you say the Brown boys, do you mean Bill Brown?

RODNEY: No. No, Sonny Brown and ---

RICHARD: Oh, oh sure.

RODNEY: And Harry.

RICHARD: Yeah. I knew Sonny quite well, he lives in Burns now.

RODNEY: Yes, yes. We went over the Fourth of July and ... Silvies Valley ... we went up the Fourth of July there. ... lots of horses at Murderers Creek.

RICHARD: Well, did you know the Laughlin's over on, over near Buck Creek, at the ranch we used to have?

RODNEY: I knew of them, I didn't know them ... at that time.

RICHARD: Now Barney used to tell us a lot of stories about Laughlin's.

RODNEY: Yes, yes. Barney is quite a fellow.

RICHARD: Yeah. You never actually met Bill Brown then?

RODNEY: No, no I never actually met Bill Brown. There is no use of me lying; I could say that I did.

RICHARD: Yeah, uh huh.

RODNEY: But I wouldn't be telling the truth. But I did see him at Twelvemile one time. He was down there irrigating, and they said it was Bill Brown, and he was off, oh he was off a quarter of a mile.

RICHARD: Uh huh.

RODNEY: And that's the only time that I ever saw him that I know of. There was lots of them that wanted to say, there is lots of stories about him, and some of them there is a chance they ... true. But it's hard to say, I guess.

RICHARD: Yeah.

RODNEY: Like when we was talking to ... they said that the buckaroos would go in the store, open the window and throw out a hat, or throw out a pair of boots or something, and then come back at night and get it. But I don't know whether it is true or not.

RICHARD: Well, these are some of the stories I was trying to run down, find out if they were true or not. Well you didn't --- did you know Barney's well when they were on the desert?

RODNEY: No, I knew him better later years. Even, he sold out, why I have a little museum over here, and --- farm machinery, old farm machinery, and I saw Barney and his wife, and I got quite a lot of it from ---

RICHARD: Yeah, I see.

RODNEY: And that's really the first I knew Barney real well. I had met him, one thing and another, and his wife we had knew her for quite awhile. She worked up here around Bend.

RICHARD: The museum you have, is it open to the public?

RODNEY: Yes, yes, it's open. I don't advertise it. Anybody comes along, why I'll let them see it. I call it my junk pile. (Laughter) But it ... quite a little bit of interesting stuff.

RICHARD: Yeah, I'd kind of like to go over and see it.

RODNEY: All right, all right, we'll go over and take a look at it.

RICHARD: Okay.

RODNEY: All right.

RICHARD: I was trying to think of anything else. Did you know very many people in Harney Valley? Did you know anyone?

RODNEY: Well, at one time when I was a kid, my step dad and me didn't get along very good, I don't know which was the most bullheaded, him or me. But anyhow I left. I left home quite early, and I come over here and I was only sixteen, seventeen. I was just a kid. And I went to work --- Jim Brennan was boss, buckaroo boss at that time.

RICHARD: Uh huh. I've heard of him.

RODNEY: And he was a real nice fellow. And I buckarood there for several years. But I didn't

like Harney Valley. You went clear to your hips in the spring, and then in the fall you had to go a mile to get a drink. (Laughter) And I never liked it very well. And from there I went on down to Harper, and worked there for a number of years. And then I come back up to the Agency, and I liked that real well. I stayed there several years, and worked there.

RICHARD: That was pretty mean winter country, wasn't it?

RODNEY: What's that?

RICHARD: The Agency was pretty mean winter country.

RODNEY: Yes, yes it was. But still it was nice summer country, and there was lots of springs, and they had better horses. We had in, the ranch boys there that worked for the company, and they was all good hands with horses. And another thing, they run the horses for division up here on Stinkingwater Mountain. And the buckaroo bosses, when they was about two year olds, they took some of them better colts out in some of the pastures and kind of hold them. The Agency and Whitehorse, or not the Agency, but the Whitehorse and Harper and ... they didn't get to see them. And of course, ... It was different then than it is now, because we didn't start a horse at all before they were four, or most of them was five years old. And some of them was pretty large horses.

RICHARD: Pretty nice ones.

RODNEY: But they was good ones. You could go out and do a days work on them.

RICHARD: Who was running the Agency then?

RODNEY: The ranch?

RICHARD: Yeah.

RODNEY: Well, there was a fellow by the name of --- well George Smith was buckaroo boss.

RICHARD: Uh huh.

RODNEY: But I can't remember the fellow's name that was running it.

RICHARD: Did you ever see Mr. Miller up there, Henry Miller?

RODNEY: No, no. He was just a little before my time.

RICHARD: Oh, uh huh.

RODNEY: No, I never saw the man in my life. He was quite a man, as I understand.

RICHARD: Yeah, he built a real empire, didn't he?

RODNEY: Oh, yes.

RICHARD: Yeah. Well, you know one interesting thing I've found about Bill Brown is he built an empire, but I've never heard anybody say a bad word about Bill Brown.

RODNEY: No, no.

RICHARD: And all these other people, they seem to get where they got by stepping on someone.

RODNEY: Yeah, yeah. Oh, that's the way Henry Miller done.

RICHARD: Uh huh.

RODNEY: He took advantage of anybody that he could. And he used to get them buckaroos to take homesteads. And then all of them springs, and everything like that. He would, the man would look forward for things, but he didn't care who it hurt.

RICHARD: Yeah, yeah.

RODNEY: I have a book about ---

RICHARD: Yeah, "The Cattle King".

RODNEY: Yeah.

RICHARD: Yeah, uh huh. Well it was a great time, I guess.

RODNEY: Yes, they were, they were tough times.

RICHARD: Tough times though, weren't they?

RODNEY: What's that?

RICHARD: Tough times, weren't they?

RODNEY: Well, yes, yes. But I enjoyed them.

RICHARD: Uh huh.

RODNEY: You didn't, there wasn't a hubbub, and one thing and another that there is now. And Uncle Sam didn't take every dime you made. You didn't make many dollars, but he didn't take them.

RICHARD: Yeah. (Laughter)

RODNEY: Yes, when I first went to work there, you got sixty-five dollars a month, and then they

cut them down, and finally the last I worked at the Agency, I got forty dollars. I went there and went to work, and ... they come in there and go to bragging about what they, the horses they rode, and one thing and another, and how they buckarood, and one thing and another. They usually found out about the second or third day whether they was buckaroos.

RICHARD: Yeah, I guess.

RODNEY: But I always went in a new outfit, I asked for gentle horses, and I got along real good. And when I worked there last, why the other buckaroos was getting thirty-five dollars a month, and they wanted me to put some horses into bridle, and they had been started that winter, and just started. And then they went out there ... in July, and they wanted me to take those horses and put them to bridle. And there was two or three ... you know, five or six-year-old horses. And Chapo, they called him, ... to ride, the first time you ride him ... couldn't I guess. But I took him the first ... He did buck all right, and I think I got by ... I did get him off ... he bucked right up to the wagon and he turned back. I rode him, but it was just all I wanted to do.

RICHARD: Those outfits ... had some pretty snorty horses, didn't they?

RODNEY: What's that?

RICHARD: Those outfits all had pretty snorty horses?

RODNEY: Oh yes, yes, they used to have some there. In fact, they didn't ride ...

RICHARD: Uh huh. Well, after you left them, where did you go?

RODNEY: Well, I come back over into the John Day Valley, and I buckarood over there ... then my wife and me was married.

RICHARD: Did you stay up there mainly? Or did you stay up in that country most of your married life?

RODNEY: No, no, we stayed there a few years, and we wanted to get a ranch together, and it seemed like up there that if a ranch come up, why somebody bought it for their son-in-law, or something like that. And all you could get was just some little ranch that didn't amount to much. So, we finally decided to come down here, and I went to work in the mill. And started to putting cattle together and a little lambs. And finally, we got a little ...

RICHARD: Here in Bend?

RODNEY: Yeah. ... I shod horses about ten years, a blacksmith.

RICHARD: Well, you've seen lots of changes over the desert, haven't you?

RODNEY: Oh, yes, yes, I've seen lots of changes, and also of the world.

RICHARD: Yeah.

RODNEY: When I was first, just a small boy in Colorado, why I remember my uncle come over and he had an ox team and a ... And he stayed all night with us. The next morning, he got up and hooked that ox team up and took off. And from that there, why here they are sending jets to the moon.

RICHARD: Yeah, yeah. Think we're any happier?

RODNEY: What's that?

RICHARD: Do you think we're any happier?

RODNEY: Well, life is easier in a way. And in another way, it isn't. It's more of a hubbub.

Things went more smoothly, I think, in the early days. In my running around, why I'd get on a horse and it'd take me three or four days to go someplace, where now we can get in a car and go in a few hours.

RICHARD: Yeah, I'd like to go over and take a look at that museum.

RODNEY: All right. Now here's that list ---

(END OF TAPE)

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