

HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #270 - Sides A & B

Subject: Fred Baker Discusses Bill Brown

Place: Drewsey, Oregon

Date: October 1980

Interviewer: Richard Cowan

RICHARD COWAN: Okay Fred, I'm interested in anything that you have to tell me about Bill Brown, Fred, so just start in.

FRED BAKER: Well I'll start over here, will Bill bought; he bought several horse outfits up in, out in 1893. His headquarters was at Lost Creek at that time. And the spring of 1894, my dad was down to Lakeview working for Fitzgerald. And when he come back, he stopped there at Lost Creek, he was on his way back to Burns. And Bill had a field full of horses, and had to get them branded and worked, and he talked my dad into helping him for two weeks. Then he give him a vacation in town if he'd go ahead and work for him.

RICHARD: So Bill didn't have any help then, huh?

FRED: Didn't have any help. Had I think two men Papa said there, and no foreman or nothing. Of course he didn't hire Papa right off as foreman, but he did that summer. And let's see, Mike Morgan's dad, or Mike Morgan's granddad, and ... dad worked for my dad while he was there.

And Bill killed Overstreet over a sheep argument. I think it was in 1891, I'm not sure. And Mike Higdon, he come from Boston, a greenhorn, come there and went to work for my dad. And Bill sold a bunch of horses up in Canada. And Mike went up with them, and stayed there, and built up a big ranch.

RICHARD: I'll be darned, uh huh.

FRED: And let's see, my mother come there, where did I have it down. Well it would have been '97, I think.

RICHARD: Well now ---

FRED: Or '96.

RICHARD: Well was your mother married to your father when he was buckaroo boss for -
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FRED: Got married. They got married in 1900 I think, didn't they Harold?

HAROLD BAKER: Somewhere around there.

RICHARD: I see. Where did they live?

FRED: When he was over there?

RICHARD: Yeah.

FRED: After they got married, well Bill let him move to Silver Creek. He moved to the old Baker Field, and they lived there. And he was back and forth the rest of --- Well that's one reason I think Papa left Brown. He was between home and horse outfits.

RICHARD: Yeah, uh huh.

FRED: But anyway, let's see my dad left Brown's in 1902 or '03. And Bill Moss, Bill Brown he got them horses and brands, and the only brand he'd use was the horseshoe bar. Bill Moss, he registered the horseshoe ... And he just robbed Bill blind. I guess he took a lot of horses. They had him up on trial, and as I say, Bill was too honest, and wouldn't go out to get him in court.

RICHARD: Well what was the story on that, Fred?

FRED: Well, just like I was telling you, that black horse, had a black horse, that was solid black. Bill Moss took a hot potato and put a white star on that horse's forehead, and Bill wouldn't get up in court and swear that it was his horse. On account of he said his horse

didn't have any white. He was just that honest, his horse didn't have any white, and he wouldn't say that that horse with white was his.

RICHARD: Well was Bill like this all his life, wasn't he? I mean --- always believed ---

FRED: He had the name of being real honest with everybody. And let's see --- Well they took a bunch of horses, they took seventy-five head of horses to Portland one time to go to Vancouver Barracks. When they was loading them on the ferry in Portland, the ferry broke loose, and they all went into the Columbia River.

And oh, I could tell you something else too. Bill was such a bashful sort of a feller.

RICHARD: Oh, yeah.

FRED: And a little bit leery of women. They all come to town one time. And there was a Negro woman in town, well she was a prostitute is what she was. The rest of them went in together, and they hired her to go up to Papa's and Bill's room, and Papa was going to stay out and let Bill go to the room first. So Bill got wise to it, and he didn't go to bed that night. (Laughter) But, now let's see --- Oh I told --- Kenny Gibson worked there all the time Papa was there, about. And Peck Amort was cook one summer for the wagon. He got mad when they was camped at Sand Springs, quit and walked from there to Wagontire. Wouldn't ride, they come the next day with the wagon, but he wouldn't wait. Walked thirty-five, forty miles.

RICHARD: Peck always was a feisty little guy.

FRED: Yes. And let's see --- Well Harold Cecil come to Silver Creek in 1871, and camped up there at Camp Currey one summer. Then he went back to California. My folks come in April of '75 and settled. He come back in October of '75 and settled there. And let's see, Jerry Merrick, my granddad, my mother's father homesteaded the upper Gap, then sold it to Bill.

Oh, and I guess I said that Bill's headquarters was at Lost Creek to begin with. Then he bought the Buck Creek Ranch from Johnson's, and moved over there. Oh, and I've heard my dad tell there at Lost Creek, at the time it was there, it was twenty miles around the outside fence of that field Bill had fenced. Had an enormous field fenced.

RICHARD: Did they work those horses in corrals, or just ---

FRED: Yeah, they had good corrals. They had good corrals at Sand Springs, and they had a corral out --- well it was on the flat out there, what they call Ryegrass Flat. It was on the south side of the highway, out there. There used to be a big log corral there, and all you can find is just little pieces of logs there. Then they had a corral between Barney's and the Buck Creek Ranch, about halfway. Maybe you've seen those logs around there?

RICHARD: Yeah, I have, uh huh.

FRED: And let's see, that ... in your field, as I was telling you my mother's aunt homesteaded that place. And Bill had about seventy-five hundred head of horses at the time my dad was there. And they run them in five counties. That is they had to ride five counties to get them. And he went back east and bought good stallions, and brought out here, turned them on the range.

RICHARD: Uh huh. In other words, he was trying to build up the

FRED: He was building them horses up.

RICHARD: He knew horses pretty good then. Although he wasn't much of a buckaroo was he?

FRED: He wasn't much of a buckaroo, but he knowed horses, knowed good horses.

RICHARD: Uh huh.

FRED: That is, I've heard them tell, Bill knowed from hearing the buckaroos talk, which

was the best horse to run horses on. He'd come out there to ride, he was sort of in the way, I guess, when they was after a bunch of horses. He caused more trouble than he was good. And he'd say --- well I've heard my dad tell about one horse they called ... I guess he was a good horse. Bill would come out there, he'd say now Bob, you catch ... for me today. Bob would go in and catch some other horse, looked about like him, bring him out. Bill would say that ain't ... All the rest of them would swear to it, that it was. And they'd mount Bill on a horse that wasn't so fast. On account, I guess he'd cut right in, and as I say, do more damage that he did good at corralling a bunch of them horses. He wasn't a good hand to horse back. Although he, I guess he could take and herd ... two or three bands of sheep and herd them together at one time. Get short of herders, he'd put two or three bands together and herd them himself.

RICHARD: That's pretty good stories. His crew give him a poor horse so he wouldn't be in their way. (Laughter)

FRED: Yeah. One time him and Papa they was working a bunch of mares and colts out. And Bill says you're going to have them all leppy, you're going to have them all leppy. And Papa says, "Bill, if you'll just keep back out of the way, I'll bet you a new hat we don't have any leppys when we get done." They got done and they had one little old leppy colt that didn't have any mother. Papa says, "Well Bill, I guess I owe you a hat, there's your leppy." Bill says, "No you don't owe me a hat, that there colt was already a leppy." And so he bought Papa a hat. But Bill, that is Papa, said Bill was awful bad that way when they was working mares and colts and things. He'd get all excited and afraid they was going to leppy all them colts.

You know you get, well they get a hundred and fifty, two hundred head of horses in there at one time, and working them, it was quite a job.

RICHARD: Uh huh.

FRED: Working them, keeping them straight. Them horses, I've heard Papa say that he worked on, at least fifteen hundred head of studs a year there. Sometimes more. And then there would be that many fillies besides the ... colts to work on.

Oh, and I put down someplace here this morning, Charlie Couch, as near as I know, he come there in 1906. He come from Texas there. And he worked one summer and then Bill put him in foreman. And I guess that Charlie Couch could ride any horse that ever lived. They had an old black horse, or brown horse they called him Bill Hanley. They brought him in here to the rodeo, and he bucked every man off that come out the chutes on him. After the fair was over, the last day of fair, old Couch saddled that horse up and rode him up town. That's how good a rider that Couch was.

RICHARD: I guess, uh huh. Well Bill gathered some pretty good hands then, huh?

FRED: He had some good hands I guess.

RICHARD: Did he pay them pretty good? How did he keep them? What ---

FRED: Well at that time, wages was cheap.

RICHARD: Uh huh.

FRED: But he paid the regular men thirty a month. And he paid his bronc riders fifty-five, so I've heard Papa say. And Papa got seventy-five a month as buckaroo boss. But at that time, that's what wages was.

RICHARD: Pretty good.

FRED: And he --- oh, and there was something else, they made a deal, well with this Fitzpatrick. He run cattle out there ---

RICHARD: Who was that?

FRED: Fitzpatrick was his name.

RICHARD: Oh, Fitzpatrick, yeah.

FRED: He was from Lakeview, but he run cattle out there. And they made a deal with him, that they'd butcher his beef during the riding season, and keep track of them, and pay him once a year for them beef. They done that all the time Papa was there. Then there was a guy by the name of Bill Moss took over, after Papa left. And by gosh the next year, they only, they could only eat about half as much beef, or he didn't put it all down, and Fitzpatrick wouldn't go for the deal. But you know a funny thing, when they graveled this road up here, from ... up, they hired that contractor, you know.

RICHARD: Uh huh.

FRED: And there was contractors from Lakeview got it. And they lived in the teacherage. That's when I was janitor, and their name was Fitzpatrick. I got to talking to them, and their grandfather was the man that was over there at Lakeview.

RICHARD: I'll be darned.

FRED: He said that he'd even heard his grandfather talk about my daddy.

RICHARD: Huh.

FRED: Said there were two brothers and two sisters over here running them gravel trucks there.

RICHARD: I'll be darned.

FRED: I got to talking to them, and as I say, sort of a little world, because they knowed they'd heard their granddad talk about my dad when he was out there on the desert.

RICHARD: Did you see Bill Brown very often, Fred?

FRED: Just four or five times that summer of 1930. That's the summer he went broke, and went down below to --- Oh, that old folks' home.

RICHARD: In Salem.

FRED: Yeah, in Salem. He put up seventy-five thousand to build that at one time. When he went broke, they wasn't going to let him in there. And Bill says, "I put up money to buy this, I'm a coming in." He got down there, and he dug the front lawn up and put in potatoes.

RICHARD: (Laughter) Seems to me I heard that. He was going to make the place pay, huh?

FRED: Yeah, he dug the front lawn up, and put it into potatoes. RICHARD: Well now you, you were saying, you were working for Cecil's and they'd sent you over there once?

FRED: Yeah, they sent me over there to ride; I'd go over there and ride at Wes Rickman's, Rickman.

RICHARD: Uh huh.

FRED: And that's when I first met Bill there, me and Wes was going down Buck Creek, and met Bill there on the road.

RICHARD: Uh huh. Well now, tell that story again about the payroll.

FRED: Well when I was, went down there, I went over to Wes' alone. Went down, and my gosh, Bill was paying these shares. And so I knowed two or three of them fellers there, and I stopped and was talking to them. Old Bill says, "You better step on up here young feller if you want your pay." I said, "Well Mr. Brown, I wasn't working for you, I'm headed down to Wes Rickman's." But he thought I'd been working.

RICHARD: Yeah, some guy was telling me that he did that often. A guy would come up to him he'd never seen, say I'm going to quit, I'd like my wages.

FRED: Yeah, and you know I've had my dad tell me that Bill, if somebody quit or something, Bill didn't have a blank check, he'd make it on a cigarette paper, a piece of paper. Or for years they had a shingle in here in the bank, and I don't know what they

ever done with that. Well that check was made on a shingle.

RICHARD: Uh huh.

FRED: Bill made a check with anything that was handy, and they'd be good too.

RICHARD: Yeah. Was he a big man?

FRED: He was a little man.

RICHARD: Little man. Uh huh.

FRED: He was, oh five foot six or seven, and pretty slender when I knowed him, Dick. He wasn't too gray-haired; he had quite a bit of dark hair. But he was not too big a man.

And, well he dressed in pretty raggedy clothes. They claimed that's what he always wore.

In fact one time, why Bill was shoeing a horse there at Buck Creek and there was a feller sitting there a watching him, one of his men. Then there was a feller come along looking for Bill, and he walked up to that feller and he says, "Are you Mr. Brown?" The feller says, "No, Mr. Brown is a shoeing that horse." He was in a pair of old raggedy pair of overalls shoeing that horse. This feller figured he'd be dressed up, you know, or something.

RICHARD: Dressed up.

FRED: They claim he went real, well just in common everyday clothes. He was clean; he was a clean old feller, but he just had on a blue shirt and overalls every time I ever seen him over there.

RICHARD: Did he go to town very often?

FRED: They claim not.

RICHARD: How did he do his business, in the mail?

FRED: I suppose. They claim he --- well he'd come in, generally when his men --- he'd give his men a week or so off twice a year, them buckaroos. And according to my dad, he generally come into town with them.

RICHARD: Uh huh.

FRED: And he sort of liked to watch them play cards, and watch them get drunk. But he didn't drink himself. And as I say, he always wanted to get married, but he was pretty bashful around women. They was always a pulling some joke on him that way, if they could. Them buckaroos, you know a bunch of buckaroos.

RICHARD: Yeah, I've always heard that. He wanted to get married, and I guess ---

FRED: He wanted to get married awful bad. And I've heard the old feller say himself, he said if he had it to do it over he'd get married and raise seventeen boys, and have each one of them file on a water hole out on that desert.

RICHARD: Uh huh.

FRED: That water outfit.

RICHARD: Well how come he never did get married? I mean, you think a wealthy man like that would ---

FRED: Well, I don't know. He just didn't have any way with the women. He had a lot of money at one time, that is for that time. He was awful well off at one time. But he just didn't have a way with the women some reason. Yet he went with Maude Balford, he went with that McIntosh girl, he went with several girls over there. But it just didn't pan out.

RICHARD: I know Lena Street told me that he had one room in the house he called the nursery. Always planned on a nursery there.

FRED: Well he built that big house, the purpose he figured on getting married.

RICHARD: Uh huh. Were you involved with the sheep at all, Fred?

FRED: No, I wasn't. Didn't have anything to do with the sheep. RICHARD: I was wondering where he sold his wool?

FRED: Well, at that time, when my granddad was there and my dad, why he hauled his wool to the --- Hood River in a wagon.

RICHARD: Uh huh.

FRED: He had a big shearing corral, you've been to ... Well he had a big shearing shed there. The first time I was ever there, there was quite a bit --- well that's where he sheared then. Had a pretty good-sized shearing shed in there. And then in the horse and wagon days, why he hauled it from there to Hood River.

RICHARD: Where did he lamb? Up there or at Buck Creek?

FRED: Well, all over. Out on the range. Very seldom, you see, he didn't feed them sheep much. He run them out the year 'round, he didn't feed them very much. He brought his bucks in, and ... things he had to bring in. Two, four horses, the rest of them was all wintered out.

He raised some hay there at the Gap. Raised a little hay at Lost Creek. And what hay he raised at Buck Creek, well and the McIntosh place, that was darn good meadows there. Wasn't too big, but that was a good meadow. I always had a desire to own that McIntosh place.

RICHARD: It would be a nice place, yeah. Uh huh. Well he never bought Rickman's place. I guess Barney bought it, didn't he?

FRED: Yeah, Barney bought that.

RICHARD: Yeah, uh huh.

FRED: Yeah, Rickman come in, well during the homestead rush, along about 1910, or something when Rickman homesteaded that.

RICHARD: Uh huh. Well were there any homesteaders on the flat when you were over there?

FRED: There was a few left, most of them had done starved out.

RICHARD: Did Bill still have his store at that time?

FRED: No. No, they had a little store and a post office there at Fife, at the old town of Fife.

RICHARD: Uh huh.

FRED: That post office was still there when I was there.

RICHARD: Well actually the post office was there; it was the end of the mail run when I came here after the war.

FRED: Yeah, it was there a long time, that Fife was.

RICHARD: Well, what --- were you ever in his store when it was operating?

FRED: Yeah. I was in it a time or two there. That is he didn't operate it like he did, I guess, before. But they claim that was one thing that broke Bill. When the homestead rights there, them people would come there, them homesteaders, and they'd just buy things and Bill would write it on the wall or something. Maybe they'd come back and pay, and maybe they wouldn't. And if they wanted a sack of beans, or part of a sack of beans, he'd have a hundred pound sack of beans, they'd want fifty pounds, he'd dump the other fifty pounds out in the corner somewhere. In place of finding another sack and putting it in, he'd just --- I guess that he, well they claim when he really had that stocked, he didn't have it so much when I was first there Dick, they claimed he carried everything. Yeah, they claimed that there wasn't anything that ... that he didn't have there. And everything on time. And as I say, in place of having slips and things, he'd write it on the wall or something, when he charged it. Bill would ... it out.

RICHARD: Now this is what I think. The trouble, the guy was so wealthy, and had so much property and livestock and everything, yet his business methods were so loose.

FRED: Yes, his business, he'd ought to had a bookkeeper or some-thing, is what he ought to have done. And he never did, I guess, never did hire a bookkeeper.

RICHARD: Well how did he happen to open the store, did you ever hear that?

FRED: Well he opened it to begin with, for his own provisions; you know everything come in by wagon.

RICHARD: Uh huh.

FRED: And when them homesteaders come in there, and they'd be out of groceries and things, he'd sell them groceries, and write it down on the wall.

RICHARD: Well was this, Clemas (sp.?) Johnson was a storekeeper, wasn't he? Had had a store at one time?

FRED: Well I guess he did, sort of have a store there. When he sold that to Bill. Yeah him and Bill, Bill Johnson was Alfred's dad, Columbus was Alfred's uncle.

RICHARD: I see, uh huh. Well did, Bill didn't really have too much to do with people at Silver Creek, I mean from the standpoint of mixing livestock and stuff like that, did he?

FRED: Well, just the horses. There would be a lot of horses mix. That is Cecil's always had a man riding at the Brown wagon, on account of they had a lot of mules. And there would be Brown horses over at Silver Creek all right. And Bill, I guess, would come to them dances and things at Silver Creek when he was a going with them girls. I guess he made all them dances and things. And lots of times he'd walk over rather than coming horseback. They claim if Bill was in a hurry, he went afoot, rather than get a horse.

RICHARD: He could out walk a horse I guess.

FRED: Yeah, out walk a horse. Yeah, he herded sheep by foot all the time, and I guess if he was in a hurry, in place of getting a horse he'd take off twenty, thirty miles afoot.

RICHARD: Uh huh.

FRED: Yeah, one time he bought one of them pure blood horses, and he was taking it home himself. And he went past the Gap Ranch, and he tied it to a tree, and wanted to do some irrigating. He irrigated two or three hours, and went on to Buck Creek. Got to Buck Creek and happened to think he had that horse tied to that tree, and had to go back and get the horse. He forgot the horse. RICHARD: Well Fred, I've always thought he was a man with a lot of vision in the way he saw how that water went around this country.

FRED: Well he thought --- if he'd of been in the days when they had cats and things now, he'd of been a genius. He put that big reservoir in down there at Lillard's at Twelvemile. But he figured he'd do it high enough that it didn't need a spillway. He didn't put a spillway, and the second year it went over the top and went out. He had twenty-four horse fresnos a working there all summer long, putting that dam in. Well Grant Barney, Grant come to the country, and they was putting that in, and Grant got a job riding fresno there. Did you talk to Grant about Bill?

RICHARD: Some. But I've got to go back and really pin him down.

FRED: Yeah. Well he worked all that summer that they put that reservoir in there. He worked on that reservoir all summer long. Come in there, Grant come in there in an old Model-T. You know at that time they had magnetos and things, and they claimed, you know the mag was what give you the most trouble. They claimed that Barney had a half dozen extra mags in that old car. (Laughter) A bed, and a tent ---

RICHARD: Well Barney told me, didn't have a low gear, so he got to a steep hill, he had to turn around and back up, or something like that.

FRED: Yeah, he had the low gear burn out of it, so he told me.

RICHARD: Uh huh.

FRED: Well you know them old Model-T's, now Frank King had one for years, and he

lived up above where Harold lived over there now. Pretty steep going up. If he happened to have about a half a tank of gas, you know they was gravity feed, by god it wouldn't go ahead, and he'd turn around and back it up that damn grade.

RICHARD: Well I --- well did Brown, other than, you know, other than the time that he killed Overstreet, why I can't find any time that he got mad at anybody, or crowded anybody.

FRED: He didn't much. And well that was ... they had. Well you see that's before Harney County was formed. They started to have the trial over to Canyon City, and then it finally ended up in Lakeview. But ---

(Tape sound quality poor)

SIDE B

FRED: ... old Bill something awful. And by gosh, Bill went back to his own tent, he wasn't too mad. He told my folks; I heard my mother and dad both say, he says, "I wasn't too mad when I left there. But the further I went, the madder I got." He says, "When I got to camp, I just got my rifle out and went back and killed him. And that's all there was to it." Well that Overstreet just pushed him too far, and Bill didn't take it. Yeah, I guess that's the only trouble he ever had in his life with anybody. Of course he didn't settle that lawsuit with that Moss. But that Moss was just robbing him blind. And Bill --- that old Moss was a slick old devil. Just like that black horse, he put that white mark on him, and Bill wouldn't say it was his horse ...

And Charlie ... he stole Bill blind. And Bill kept Charlie there for years and years. Lots of people wanted to know why Bill didn't fire him. Bill said, "I'd sooner have him right here where I can kind of watch him, then have him come ..." But that's the only thing I

know that ... did. I really don't know about ... you wanted to know about.

RICHARD: Yeah, there is a lot of stuff that I hadn't heard of. These stories about Bill, about him being willing to pay you, pay you off. I've heard a lot of stories like that.

FRED: Well they claim that he was pretty bad that way, not to keep track of things that way. He'd just look up and see another man in line, and by gosh if you told him you put in so many days, I guess he'd just write you a check.

RICHARD: Okay, I'd like to talk to you a little bit ... about the history of Silver Creek. Before we go on that, let's get the genealogy down a little bit more. Now Lena Street, Lena Wilson, her first husband was married to Bill Brown's nephew. Her first husband was Bill Brown's nephew.

FRED: Yeah. I think so.

RICHARD: She married Wilson after. Now Lena said that apparently she was related to ... Ed Laughlin (sp).

FRED: Well she was, I couldn't tell you how. They was related someway. But how, I couldn't tell you. You know she was also related to Wood Best, was her uncle.

RICHARD: Oh, was Wood her uncle, or Best's first wife was her aunt?

FRED: I couldn't tell you for sure. Anyway, he was uncle, but I couldn't tell you, it might have been that his wife was her aunt.

RICHARD: I know she refers to him as Uncle Wood, Uncle Wood.

FRED: Well it could have been that Wood's first wife was her aunt, I couldn't say. Well, yes I can too. I know it was. Yeah, that's the way it was, come to think about it. Wood's first wife was a Street.

RICHARD: Oh, I see.

FRED: Yeah, it didn't come to me for a minute, but she was.

RICHARD: Well then Wood and Ed Laughlin were somehow ---

FRED: Yeah, they was cousins or something.

RICHARD: Uh huh. That would be Wood was a cousin of Laughlin, rather than ---

FRED: And old Ed Laughlin was a ... You ought to know some other history, I could tell you some things about old Laughlin.

RICHARD: I want to know ---

FRED: He was herding sheep, him and that woman that he married was ...

RICHARD: The one that lived up ...

FRED: Well he lived right back; well I don't think he owned that yet. He was herding sheep at John Day. But she was over here. He lived over in that country. Well old Ed come over, and they got married. He went back to herding sheep. In nine months, why that oldest child was born. He hadn't been back in the meantime. When that child was two or three weeks old, old Ed come back for a visit to see his child. He went back to herding sheep; in nine months she had another child. (Laughter) I think that's when he bought that ... Him and Wood ... were partners ... they went in partners.

RICHARD: Did they run any sheep, or was it all cattle?

FRED: They run sheep to begin with. Then they went to cattle. You know when they first started, well it was sheep.

RICHARD: Uh huh.

FRED: Then they went to cattle, and then Wood come over there and bought Uncle Bud's place. He ... place ...

RICHARD: Oh I see, that was your uncle's place. Wood bought ---

FRED: ... Yeah, that was Uncle Bud's place. And the place across the road from you was Uncle Nick's place, then the Baker Field was my granddad's place.

RICHARD: Across from Johnson?

FRED: Uh huh.

RICHARD: I see. Uh huh.

FRED: There was four of the boys, there was Uncle Jim, but he never did marry, and he never homesteaded.

RICHARD: Well now who came to the country first?

FRED: My granddad.

RICHARD: Your great granddad.

FRED: Yeah ... three or four years before the rest of them come

... I think the rest of them come right after the Indian War. Right after ... Well yeah, they was in ... Well they come a year or two after grandpa did anyway. ...

RICHARD: ...

FRED: ... and they just ... And they was going ...

And then John Witzel, the place where Witzel's had there, the rest of that section, John Witzel had ... He was my uncle, that is he married my dad's sister. And he was wanting to know, this summer when I was out with ... But those ... this was up there where Berdell's lived.

RICHARD: Now where was that now?

FRED: Well right down in Carl's field, I told ... last summer, and I told him. I said, "Carl, did you ever see that woven wire fence, chicken wire down there?" He said, "Yes." I said, "Well that was the old ... to that Berdell place." And you know when he built that ... under the hill there; well it was right there. And that was ... Then they moved it down there to where Uncle John lived, there at ... right at the hill in an old log house.

RICHARD: Oh up, up on ---

FRED: There up on ...

RICHARD: I see.

FRED: And Grandpa Baker, I don't know if you knew, but he named Chickahominy. Always a naming something some odd --- well he called that Yellow Dog. And when they ... to the government, to get that post office, they wouldn't go for Yellow Dog. So they changed it to Suntex.

RICHARD: The Evergreen Post Office was at the Witzel place?

FRED: No, it was up there ...

RICHARD: Yeah, yeah, okay.

FRED: Then they moved it down there to the Witzel place.

RICHARD: Okay.

FRED: Then Grandpa Baker named it Yellow Dog, went by the name of Yellow Dog for a year or two. Then they had to get ---

RICHARD: He changed it from Evergreen to Yellow Dog.

FRED: When they moved it down there. And then they went to making a government post office out of it, the government wouldn't go for Yellow Dog, so they changed the name to Suntex. Then it was moved here ...

RICHARD: Well I thought for a while it was out there west of us too, at one time.

FRED: Well it was, at one time. When the homesteaders come in there, it was out --- well you go out the lane and turn down, you know the road makes another turn?

RICHARD: Yeah.

FRED: There used to be a store and things, and the post office was right there. That was one place at one time.

RICHARD: Uh huh.

FRED: There was a store, a pretty good-sized store there at one time.

RICHARD: And then who run it then?

FRED: Gibson's. I couldn't tell you. Gibson's I think, was the name.

RICHARD: Now Mrs. Best, Mabel was a Gibson.

FRED: Well, she was, but I don't think it was that bunch of Gibson's. It might have been. But any --- I'll tell you who --- now let's see, who could tell you. I don't know who could tell you. But anyway, it was there at one time. Then Mrs. Best got to be postmistress ... Then the ... was down there right across the road there from, oh where the, well Hotchkiss' owns it now.

RICHARD: Oakerman?

FRED: Oakerman place. Right across the road there, Doc Hembree lived across the road. He was a doctor and things. And he had the Riley Store, and the Riley Post Office, and ...

RICHARD: How did the name of Riley get ---

FRED: From Huff and Riley, they was cattlemen there in the early days. And they named that after that Riley.

RICHARD: Okay.

FRED: And then it moved up to the, across the road right there where Jack Oakerman's place was.

RICHARD: Across the road from there.

FRED: Yeah. It was there for a long time. Then after it closed up there, why Virgil Shields come back and ... where the old place was ... where it is now.

RICHARD: I see. Well now, when was the post office moved from the Suntex?

FRED: In, my gosh it must have been right around 1940. Someplace right in there.

RICHARD: After Virgil came back?

FRED: Yeah, they done away with Suntex.

RICHARD: ... kind of old.

FRED: Yeah, and they done away ... But it was right around 1940, just about, it might have been a little after, about the time I went to the service. I went to the service in '42. I don't know why it was running ... but when I come back, it wasn't, it was down below.

RICHARD: Well did your family; did the Bakers live in Riley ever? Anybody from around there ---

FRED: Well my dad's sister married John Witzel, and another sister married another, Parker. And of course my dad married my mother ... Then he had a half --- my granddad, my grandmother died at Fort Harney, my granddad married again. Had a boy and a girl, the boy died. The girl, Aunt Mimey lives out in Idaho, just died ten or twelve years ago. She married out there. Yeah the Bakers, they married and remarried, so I'm related to everybody in the country.

RICHARD: Well you went to school there at Suntex, out at Silver Creek?

FRED: No, they had done moved over on the Riddle Ranch.

RICHARD: Oh, I see.

FRED: They moved ... moved to Burns. Now I was born in Burns, and then when I was four is when they moved up there where Harold lives now.

RICHARD: ... his brother was Alfred Johnson?

FRED: His brother was Alfred's brother ... Bill was Alfred's dad, and the one --- I don't think ... He was the main spoke in the wheel, that is he was the boss next to his dad. See out where the old Johnson place right down below Mayo's there.

RICHARD: Yeah.

FRED: Well that's where Columbus lived, and Bill lived down there where ... lived. And after Columbus died, he was the main spoke in the wheel.

RICHARD: I see. Well Lena I guess said that the reason she thought, the reason Bill started the store was Columbus kind of talked him into it. ... one.

FRED: Yeah. That's what they said, that he was ... come there to Buck Creek.

RICHARD: Well Fred, what about some of the other people? ... Silver Creek, were they when ---

FRED: Yeah. They homesteaded right out, you go right out the ... place where it turns there. Their house sits right out ... Williams, Bob Williams' folks and the ... come there the next year I think after my grandparents did. They was the next family that settled there. And they were ... I don't know just when ... come there.

RICHARD: Well now, did Bob settle where, what we call the Mike Morgan's place there?

FRED: No ...

RICHARD: Yeah ... Now was Bob, Harry's brother?

FRED: Harry's dad.

RICHARD: Oh, Harry's dad. Okay.

FRED: Yeah, he was Harry's dad. And him and ... related. Cousins I think. And Bob ... that was county judge for years, here in Harney County. ... all them younger boys ...

RICHARD: Well then, that's the ranch ... Then Harry had the one up there ---

FRED: The one where my --- It was the old Dibble place.

RICHARD: Yeah ...

FRED: Yeah. There was three of them Dibles. There was Bill Dibble, and Del Dibble, and ---

RICHARD: Rye?

FRED: Riley Dibble. Riley was the one that had the place ... And Bill Dibble --- no Del Dibble he come to Burns, had the old Dibble Hotel. He left out there. And then the younger boy, Frank, well Frank was one of the boys too, his boy is Bill. But then they had what, ... that's the old Dibble place.

RICHARD: Now who had the, ... what I call the old ...

FRED: It was ... And Henry come over there and ...

RICHARD: I see. Well when did --- you knew Clyde Gibbon, of course. And how about ... did you know him?

FRED: No, my folks did, I didn't know him.

RICHARD: How did they come to the country? I guess Mabel, before she married ---

FRED: Well she come here to teach.

RICHARD: Did she teach school at Silver Creek or Buck Creek?

FRED: Well both places, I think. And then she married ... and then Clyde come and started that ... over at the Gibbon's ... Buck Mountain, that's what he done, when he first come here is started that mill.

RICHARD: Uh huh.

FRED: And then he homesteaded out there, well what they called the George Johnson flat now. It used to be the --- well I can't think right now. They changed all the names out there. Like that Johnson Spring up there. When I was a kid, that was Ground Hog Spring. Then they changed it to Johnson Spring later. But my dad's cousin herded sheep, or my granddad's cousin herded sheep for grandpa there. And they always camped out there where them places are now. But ... And it went by his name for years and years. Do you remember what his name was there? ... that used to be ... flat. Then they changed the name to Johnson Flat afterwards.

Up there right by Chickahominy, come out the gorge, why Pat Cecil's brother, Homer Cecil homesteaded there. There used to be a big house, and a big barn there when I first went to work for Cecil's.

RICHARD: Huh.

FRED: Enormous barn, it was a big barn, and a two story house there.

RICHARD: It would be north of ---

FRED: Right where Chickahominy comes out the gorge there, there on the flat. Yeah it sat right where it comes out the gorge.

RICHARD: I'll be darned. Well now you said your dad named that Chickahominy down there.

FRED: My granddad.

RICHARD: Oh, your granddad. Well now where did that name come from?

FRED: Nobody knows. Grandpa was always naming something.

RICHARD: Pick it out of the air?

FRED: Yeah, just like he named that Chickahominy, named that post office Yellow Dog. Nobody knows why he called it Yellow Dog, but that's what he named it, and that's what it went by for a couple years. Then the U. S., they wanted to make a U. S. Post Office out of it, they wouldn't go for that.

RICHARD: But there wasn't any Suntex till then.

FRED: I couldn't tell you who come up with the name of Suntex.

RICHARD: Huh. Well I've looked and tried to find where the name Chickahominy came from, and I ---

FRED: Well my granddad named that creek there Chickahominy.

RICHARD: And what was his name?

FRED: What was grandpa's --- No, grandpa Baker, Robert.

RICHARD: Robert Baker.

FRED: Yeah, Bob, I couldn't think of it.

RICHARD: Did ...

FRED: No, he went by the name of Bob. And see my dad's name was Bob too, and they called him Big Bob and Little Bob. That's the reason Papa said he'd never name one of his boys Bob, because it'd be Big Bob and Little Bob. (Laughter)

RICHARD: Well it was Big Bob that named Chickahominy.

FRED: Yeah.

RICHARD: Huh.

FRED: They claimed he was always coming up with some odd ... name for something.

RICHARD: ...

FRED: ...

RICHARD: ... stage stop.

FRED: Stage stop. Yeah. Old Fred Oakerman I knowed him when he was just a little kid. ... about that time, that was old Albert

... his boy. And Albert was the one that ... Well Henry Richardson was the sheriff then. Well when he went over there he told Albert, he said, "I come over after your dad." But he says, "I'm taking the wrong man, your ought to be the one to go." But anyway, and just as soon as old Albert got Fred put away, why then that place went ... and in a year or two he lost it, or four or five years. There wasn't any money to do anything else, but --- Yeah, they run a stage stop there for years and years.

RICHARD: Well when did Hotchkiss' get it then?

FRED: No, they got it ... it went to the loan company, there is a lot of different people

rented it there over the years. And Hotchkiss got it ... about the time I went to the service, didn't they Harold, or after? Someplace in the '40's. Then they got, and they made a hell of a good ranch out of it ... it was a good ranch when Fred Oakerman had it. Then after it was rented, well you know what ...

RICHARD: Well --- I forgot what I was going to say. The Oakerman place is there, and then the Williams place is on up the creek, and then ... on one side, and Best ---

FRED: Well dad didn't get that where he was until --- it was a piece of road land that they had rented for years, and things, and when they went broke, dad had enough money laid aside someway that he bought that chunk of land there. And you see when he first bought that, oh I'll tell you in a minute ... Walt ... he had that old house there. Well he owned a little chunk of land, five acres there ... He lived in that old house several years, then he built that new house when he did.

RICHARD: ... He told me that ...

FRED: Yeah.

RICHARD: And he said Gus, if you won't promise me that you'll build a new house, I'm going to hold back the money and build it myself. (Laughter) ...

FRED: ...

RICHARD: And then Harry Williams, which was the original Dibble place.

FRED: ... Dibble place.

RICHARD: Did Dibble homestead it?

FRED: Yeah, I think so.

RICHARD: ...

FRED: It was the Buck Bars place.

RICHARD: Buck Bars. Did he homestead it?

FRED: I think he did. He either homesteaded or bought ... I couldn't tell you for sure.

Then the place right above it, that

... There used to be a great big white house there, it burnt down. That was my granddad, my granddad bought it. He homesteaded the Baker field, then he bought that place over there under the rim.

RICHARD: Who did he buy it from? Who homesteaded it before him?

FRED: I couldn't tell you who he bought that from. I really don't know. And then the place that, oh Carlon had, that was the old Foster place, Ike Foster. Then there was the Baker field, and the Nick Baker field, and the Doug Baker field where you live now, and the Witzel place there where Gibson's lived. Then Henry bought that road land, and Carl Barnes bought that ... road land. Well he didn't buy that, Williams bought, Blackie Williams he bought, then Clyde bought from him. Then the old man Cecil, there was four or five ... homestead, and then there was ... I can't tell you now off hand. The old man Cecil lived there all them years, and never used his homestead rights. All that land that he got he bought. He bought the Berdell place, that is he married the Berdell girl, one of the Berdell girls. Charlie ... married one. And he bought that from Berdell's. I did know who ...

(END OF TAPE)

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