

HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #282 - Side A

Subject: Henry Ausmus

Place: Burns, Oregon

Date: August 24, 1985

Interviewer: Pauline Braymen

Release Form: No

Pauline Braymen interviewing her father Henry Ausmus at Burns, Oregon.

PAULINE BRAYMEN: Why were they taking the soil samples then, to prove it was an alkali wasteland?

HENRY AUSMUS: They was trying to get a condemnation of the squatter's rights, you see, and Dad was one of them.

PAULINE: Well, I know he was one of them. So, Jewett and Finley went around the lake and just scooped up the alkali spots for their soil samples and didn't take a ---

HENRY: They didn't take a true sample.

PAULINE: --- a true sample.

HENRY: You know that if they had taken a true sample, why it would have been a different picture, you know. Some they wanted to appear ---

PAULINE: Did a gal call you the other day, Carol Savanon (sp.?)? Did anybody call you to talk to you about birds down on the, around the lake this last week?

HENRY: No.

PAULINE: Okay, I didn't think so. Did you read the story about the pelicans in the paper yesterday? Did you see that story about the white pelicans in the paper yesterday?

HENRY: Well it ---

PAULINE: In the Oregonian?

HENRY: I didn't read it, I guess. I saw a picture there one time.

PAULINE: Huh uh, it was just a story. There wasn't any picture with it.

HENRY: No.

PAULINE: I want you to read that, then I want you to talk to me about pelicans on the lake. I brought her to talk to Marcus; she didn't want to, she didn't really want to find out anything that would disprove her point of view.

HENRY: Well, I know they used to nest on Pelican Island.

PAULINE: Uh huh.

HENRY: That was their nesting grounds.

PAULINE: Well, where you grew up wasn't very far from there, was it?

HENRY: Oh, about three miles.

PAULINE: Yeah.

HENRY: I guess. Maybe four.

PAULINE: Did you ever go over there in the summertime when it was dry?

HENRY: Yeah. I've been over there when they were nesting.

PAULINE: Yeah.

HENRY: Standley and I went over there and we swam the channel, you know. There is a channel between the shore, only --- it's only, oh partially the street over there wide. And it's fairly deep, because the water, you see as that movement of water went back in through, it flowed through that channel, and it would swim a horse. And we went over there, and those pelicans nested on the ... just like mud hens or chickens. I don't know whether they laid their eggs in common, or like chickens, or whether they knew their nests. But they took one next right after the other, all over that darn piling, and dead pelicans, rotten eggs. Kind of a messy ---

PAULINE: A messy sight?

HENRY: A messy sight. But they did nest there.

PAULINE: How old were you when you did that, do you remember?

HENRY: Oh, maybe ten years old.

PAULINE: Well I was wondering, you know, the lake dried up in '34, '33 and '34, '35, along in there. I wonder what, you know, did --- the pelicans probably didn't come and stay in there. There wasn't really anything for them to eat or anything would there have?

HENRY: Oh, they ---

PAULINE: Or was there ponds of, little ponds of water left out in there? Or where do you think they went?

HENRY: Well, California I suppose. Summer Lake, and different ponds.

PAULINE: Probably Klamath ---

HENRY: Klamath country.

PAULINE: --- Klamath country probably.

HENRY: But you see, during the drought in the '30's, the lake was completely dry, except for a few acres right there at the Sod House Spring ---

PAULINE: Uh huh.

HENRY: --- you see. And it flowed out there. Oh, there might have been ten acres of water right around the spring there. And that's all there was. And I guess the Double O Spring over in Harney Lake, that Double O Spring flowed the same way, and has for years, you know. But it --- I read the, how much that spring flowed, but I just don't know what the figure is now. It's a pretty good spring.

PAULINE: Well, after the lake got water back in it, after the drought and then when the wet weather came back, and it started to fill into a marsh again, the pelicans come back then?

HENRY: Oh, yeah, yeah. But actually, there was more geese come in during those dry years, you know, on those grain fields, and things. They come in by the millions.

PAULINE: Even though there wasn't any pond water much.

HENRY: No, they come in there in the fall, you know, on those grain fields.

PAULINE: Well, the fall migration, where they draw quite a --- they don't really need the water. I guess they need water, but the fall migration the food is --- food and rest is probably as important as

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HENRY: Wherever you find the food, you'll find the geese.

PAULINE: Yeah.

HENRY: You see now since they developed up around Boardman, and up in there, raising those farm crops the goose migration has been settling there on the Columbia, because of the availability of feed.

PAULINE: Well, I'm a little disappointed that she didn't want to talk to anybody. We had --- we kind of got off on the wrong foot with Marcus, and I can't blame him for being a little upset. He'd run into her before. So, he had kind of a poor image of her from his previous experience with her. So, the interview with him didn't quite go like what I had thought maybe it would. He would have had some good stuff to tell her. But ---

Well, I never had heard that about the alkali, the soil testing before. Did they, they entered that into evidence then at the trial?

HENRY: Oh, no, that was never filed.

PAULINE: It was never followed through, huh?

HENRY: No.

PAULINE: I thought maybe that came ---

HENRY: But that was just an argument between Dad, and Jewett, and Finley. That's as far as it ever went, you know. But I remember hearing all, the whole conversation, and what was said.

PAULINE: Well, if Grandpa Ausmus' temper was as hot as mine and Jim's I can just hear him too.

HENRY: Oh, Jim couldn't hold a candle to him. But he wasn't an unreasonable man at all.

PAULINE: Well, you know, a sampling like that isn't very scientific, and you know it makes you wonder. I mean things haven't changed; the person that wants to prove their point is going to do the thing that they need to do to prove their point, regardless. And that's what; it's a real disappointment when you see that in a scientific study. Or a supposedly scientific study.

HENRY: Well, what they were trying to do, the way I understood it, was to get the value of that land down, you see, to rock bottom, where the government could buy it ...

PAULINE: Well, did the pelicans nest anyplace other than Pelican Island? Or do you know?

HENRY: Not that I know of. That was their nesting grounds, you know. And the sea gull used to

nest up along the river there, you know, between Ruh's and the lake. And they held that one area pretty well. And the egrets nested in those big willows, you know, that was in the ... And Ormand and Standley left that willow patch, you know, for that reason. They farmed all around it, but they never disturbed that willow patch.

PAULINE: Those willows still show in the photos. They are still there.

HENRY: Yeah. That's the reason they're still there, because that was the nesting ground of the egrets, the snowy egrets. And Leslie Culp and I used to go up there during nesting season, and climb up in those willows, and look at those young egrets, you know, that hadn't feathered out yet. And oh, they'd get, those egrets would circle and scream and ---

PAULINE: Well, according to this article yesterday, they found a pelican nest, they found one pelican nest, and they are really excited about that. They say that's the first pelican nest that anybody has found since the 1960's. So, I'm going to have to do a little digging on that and see what I can come up with. I know that there has been a period of time that the pelicans haven't been nesting, or been nesting successfully.

HENRY: Well, they nested there successfully I would say, on Pelican Island. Because my gosh, Pauline, there was five or ten acres of solid pelican's nests.

PAULINE: Well, there wouldn't have been any reason for them not to have a success. I think the DDT, I'll have to check that out, but I think the DDT concentrations were working on the pelicans the same way that they were on some of the other birds, so that the shells were too thin and they weren't --- the shells on the eggs were too thin, and they weren't successful for that reason. Not because there wasn't habitat for them, but because of the DDT concentrations.

HENRY: Well, whether there was ever enough DDT used around the lake down there to ---

PAULINE: Well, it wouldn't have been from there, it would have been ---

HENRY: It would have been from some other place.

PAULINE: --- just from, you know, general use everywhere. Because, you know, that was a concern with the eagles and some of the other --- There was several birds that were affected that way. And since they outlawed DDT, that has changed that. And at least that's my understanding

that the concentration level has come down now to the point where it's no longer affecting the eggs that way. I think that was pretty well proven that that was a factor. But that's not loss of habitat; the habitat has always been there. That was another reason.

Well, the pelicans have taken up a kind of an islands there, down there by the Narrows.

HENRY: Yeah.

PAULINE: You've seen that. And it's just covered with pelicans out there.

HENRY: Well that's the way Pelican Island used to be, you see. They concentrated there and they nest there.

PAULINE: Yeah. And I don't know whether ---

HENRY: And Pelican Island is under water now, you see.

PAULINE: This is the thing. I think Pelican Island is completely under water now. So, as it comes back out again it will be habitat also.

HENRY: Probably for pelicans because that's the kind of environment they like. They fish; they make use of the deeper water where --- Ducks don't feed in deep water, you know, neither do the geese. They work along the shorelines. A pelican, he dives, you know, he goes right down after him. And there's enough carp in the lake, you know, that they get their fish in that deep water.

PAULINE: Yeah. Well, I'm going to try to figure out that one story in that --- One of those books there is an interview with Chief Louie in there. Do you remember reading that one? I can't remember which one it's in, but one of the two, there is an interview with Chief Louie. And he tells the same story that Marion Louie told me about the buffalo, and them getting the disease and all that, and dying, and one thing and another. But he also says in there, he refers to the time when Harney Lake was all one big lake. And I've got to read it again real carefully to see what he said, whether he is saying that he remembers that, or that he has been told about the time.

HENRY: I think probably ---

PAULINE: But that would --- he was 84 at the time, and if he can remember when it was one big lake, you could go back, you know, like say 75 years and add that on to, go back 75 years from 1928. What would that be?

HENRY: Well about 19 ---

PAULINE: 1891, wouldn't it, '93?

HENRY: Well, I think that's legend.

PAULINE: Yeah, I think it must be.

HENRY: I think its legend. Now you are talking about young chief --- now old Chief Louie ---

PAULINE: Well, the one that was 84 in 1928. He'd be the ---

HENRY: That wouldn't be Jimmy Louie.

PAULINE: No. Which one was called Captain Louie, the old one or the younger one?

HENRY: The old one I think.

PAULINE: Anyway, in this interview he refers to the time when Harney Lake was all one big lake.

But I was in such a hurry, I was just skimming real fast, through, to pick out, you know, certain things I needed for that brochure, and I didn't read it that carefully.

HENRY: Well you see, they got pretty, pretty authentic history on, I think, well from '73 on, you know.

PAULINE: Yes, I'd say that they do from what I've been able to search out here. I was searching out this stuff for Carol, and I mean I thought that this was what she had come for. And evidently it wasn't what she was looking for, but she --- Actually going clear back to 1826, was when the first written records of travel through here comes. You know you can take those bits and pieces of description through and kind of come to some conclusions.

HENRY: Well, you can go back, you know ---

PAULINE: And if the Sodhouse was built, if the Chapman's and Weavers, or whatever those people were that built the sodhouse, there at Sodhouse, did it in 1865, and that's under water now. If it had been under water since 1865 it wouldn't have ---

HENRY: Wouldn't have been there.

PAULINE: --- wouldn't have been there. And the remnants of it were there right up until, well Marcus said that Joe Mazzoni thought that the CCC boys had hauled that rock in there. So he had the YCC kids haul it all off, or the Job Corp kids haul it all off. And Marcus told him, he said,

"You just hauled off what was left of the original sod house." It was a chimney made of rock.

Anyway, I guess that ---

... (Conversation resumes in pickup. A lot of static, and sometimes hard to hear.)

HENRY: ... my horses crossed that channel and went out on that island. And those pelicans, there ... pelicans, dead pelicans, and rotten eggs, and broken eggs ...

MARCUS HAINES: A hell of a mess.

HENRY: Well, yeah. And whether they nest in common, I don't know. But there was just nests everywhere, you know, and some of them hatching ... and some of them never did hatch, you know.

MARCUS: There used to be a, on the south side of Harney Lake here, there used to be quite a colony in there, and they just laid their eggs in the dirt ...

HENRY: That's the way they were.

MARCUS: Let's stop and measure the water here.

PAULINE: I want you to tell me about what this pile of rocks is here.

MARCUS: This pile of rocks? That was a warehouse. Charlie Haines' store that was built here in '92, and this warehouse was built in '98 I think. Had a saloon in the bottom of it. And the main store was out on the north end. It was a wooden structure, and then this stone was a warehouse that came from that point right over there. Took out from Larry Dunn's, you see.

PAULINE: What about the house, the old house there, is it later

--- days ---

MARCUS: That was Charlie Haines' residence. Him and his wife got in a fight, and Charlie set his tent up in the corner of the yard, and he slept in the tent, and she slept in the house for years.

PAULINE: The road used to come out by where that tree is now, you said, from around the end of Eagles Nest point.

MARCUS: Well, the road went right around through here, going on to Catlow Valley country, yes.

PAULINE: Okay, instead of going straight up and over the hill like it does now, you go around?

MARCUS: No, this road wasn't put in until about 15 years ago.

PAULINE: Yeah. So, before that you went out and around in here, and around.

MARCUS: Well, before that you went up here a mile and then went up over the hill ---

PAULINE: Oh, okay. Around towards Refuge Headquarters and there?

MARCUS: Uh huh, I'll show you where it's at. The road between here and the hill, and crossed about where that car is there now, and they went right out across that field there until it was homesteaded. A fellow by the name of Hans Bang's homesteaded the field. And then the road was changed and went up to his east boundary, and went over the hill. The road was changed then, and made a square turn right here in front of Taylor's place. You can see the road go right on up there. Right here is the old county road right along that fence.

PAULINE: This is right across from Taylor's haystack here, and his trailer and stuff ---

MARCUS: Where they are living now is right up here, you see, Henry, don't you?

HENRY: Oh, yeah.

MARCUS: He come to see me the other day. He lives down on Willow Creek now. He married again. He lost his wife ...

(Static on tape.) Years ago, there Wilber used to be there alone at the place, and he'd sleep all day, and then he was good for all night, you know. He'd come over to the house and he'd say, "Well have another Luckey and then I'll go." And if he had a full package of cigarettes, you had to smoke them all up before you got rid of him. John Scharff and I were laughing about him. He went out and visited with John, and John said I just had to see if he was still smoking. Used to go over to Lyle Hill's there, and Lyle was working, in the fall. And Wilber was sitting around, you know, "And there's a bed right upstairs there, to your right, when you get ready to go to bed Wilber." And he's going to bed and leave ... talking.

HENRY: That's kind of like old Red Gunkel, you know. He never knew when it was time to go to bed, or --- Anyhow he come to our place one night and he was talking, and I went to bed. Inez, she stayed up and listened to him. About two o'clock in the morning she'd about had it. I told her, I said, "Red just --- I kept --- go up and leave him, and he'll turn the lights out when he gets ready."

MARCUS: Who was that, Red Gunkel, you say?

HENRY: Yeah.

MARCUS: I never knew him.

HENRY: Oh, he used to work with Standley and --- and his dad was ---

...

PAULINE: Let's put this on the tape. This is a place on the east side of the hill that's south of the Warm Springs.

MARCUS: It would be north; it would be north of ---

PAULINE: North of the Warm Springs.

MARCUS: Yeah, north. Just over the hill, north of ---

PAULINE: And Mrs. Dunn, who was Sam's mother.

MARCUS: Yes.

PAULINE: What was her first name, do you remember?

MARCUS: She came --- Effie Dunn.

PAULINE: Effie Dunn.

MARCUS: And she came here in 1892. She said that when she came here that there was Chinese mining quick silver down here at the Hot Springs. Well, somebody has spent a little time around here; there is no question about that, when you look at that pile of dirt there.

PAULINE: There's quite a hole there.

MARCUS: Oh, yeah! You bet.

PAULINE: There's at least two more.

MARCUS: I think there's three or four really, because they say the fence line was cleared there, and those kids was up there with a cat, and they just, they went every place but where they should have gone.

PAULINE: Those were the Refuge crews?

MARCUS: No, Job Corp.

PAULINE: Job Corp.

MARCUS: Yeah. Out here, just on, north and east of us a ways is where John Toelle found that purple bottle.

PAULINE: Uh huh. So, Larry Dunn owns this right in here?

MARCUS: No!

PAULINE: No. he doesn't.

MARCUS: No, huh uh. No, I think the BLM, I think. The private land is on up just around this spring up here. ... when the mother died of childbirth, I think, with one of them, I don't remember which is the oldest now. The boy's name was Harry. And he --- back in the early '20's, was making moonshine, and put it in a tin or something. Did something wrong, and it paralyzed him. He laid for several years, just a vegetable. She took care of him.

PAULINE: That was Carrie Kidwell's father.

MARCUS: Carrie's brother.

PAULINE: Huh?

MARCUS: Brother.

PAULINE: Brother, oh.

MARCUS: Her father, his name was Coon Smith. Sylvester Smith was his name, but everybody called him Coon Smith.

PAULINE: Oh, I think ---

MARCUS: He's the one that started Coontown.

PAULINE: Yeah.

...

MARCUS: (Different conversation.) ... for a while. It sits right up there. And he told me that he took a sample of this mud back to his doctor, and there was eleven different minerals in it there. And he swears up and down, that everything that is Holy, he wouldn't be walking if it wasn't for this hot spring here. But, that is a matter of opinion.

(END OF TAPE)

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