

HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #283 - Side B

Subject: Culver Marshall

Place: Drewsey, Oregon

Date: June 12, 1970

Interviewer: Marcus Haines

MARCUS HAINES: This is Marcus Haines interviewing Culver Marshall about his parents who moved from the east back in the early '80's, to Harney County, to become some of the pioneer families of this area. Culver would you care to fill us in on this a little?

CULVER MARSHALL: My grandparents and their family moved from ... County, Arkansas, and crossed the plains, coming to Oredell, which is adjacent to LaGrande, the present site of LaGrande, where one of the children was born, an Uncle John at Island City. They stayed, they came across the plains in '82, and left then Oredell at LaGrande in '84, and came to Fort Harney, where my grandfather Edwin G. and his wife Susan homesteaded, and continued to raise their family. And Edwin G. then passed away there in 18 and '95, and he is buried at the Harney Cemetery. Later the children of course grew up and scattered. Among them an aunt --- among them was five, in the family rather was five boys and four girls. The boys after a time moved to Malheur Lake and homesteaded in that area.

George Marshall married a sister of Alvie Springer, which

perhaps is incidental in their coming to the area on the south side of Malheur Lake where they homesteaded.

My father Alfred homesteaded there about a mile east of the present headquarters. George Marshall homesteaded just adjacent to, east of the headquarters. William took a homestead right at the mouth of the river, where it empties into the lake.

John Marshall homesteaded a portion of land that now belongs to the Hill Brothers. And they all lived there for some time. Another Uncle Elvin spent some time there, but later left and was not heard from again, hardly.

They later, my father married Mary C. Stove of Pendleton, and she came with him back to the homestead here in 18 and '99. In this marriage there were three children, an older brother Ray Marshall, in fact six years older. A sister five years younger, Iris Marshall. They lived there and raised their family.

And later --- in later years my mother became postmaster, or mistress at Voltage. Voltage was started as I recall, in 19 and '11, by a bachelor whose name was Earl Batchford. He was an electrician, and I think he just picked the word because it was a part of his stock and trade, and named the post office Voltage.

We had, the family, our family, spent 19 and '14 and a portion of '15 in California, Ukiah in fact. Moved back here in 1915, when at that time Mr. Batchford was tired of the post office and wanted to get out of it.

Mother accepted finally the postmaster ship there, and

continued for nineteen years. They operated a store in conjunction with the post office. And this post office at one time was a central distributing office, or sort of central, you might say. It distributed mail to The Narrows and vicinity, to Catlow Valley and vicinity, which included Frenchglen, Beckley, Berdugo, and Blitzen. And later the Blitzen Crossing. It also distributed mail at one time, for a short time in fact, to Diamond.

At that time there was a terrific lot of parcel post. I recall the first mailman, I believe a George Winn, who operated the stage from Voltage to the Blitzen area, with six horses and two wagons. And didn't always have room or facility enough to move all of the parcel post. Then later Mr. Winn was replaced by Garrick and Bill Butler who drove the stage with Model-A trucks.

MARCUS: Well Culver, about that time that your folks took over the store there at Voltage, the land boom was really on in Harney County. You were speaking of the stores out in Catlow Valley, and that was true all around. At that time Charlie Haines was coining the money. He died in 1916, and left an estate of \$360,000. And he made it off of the land booms. I think he came to, I think he came to The Narrows in '93 and started the store, just shortly after the bridge was put in there. So that's the thing that really kept these little places humming, that has disappeared due to the modern transportation and all. And I suppose that actually was the thing that contributed to the closing of the Voltage store

and post office in your folks' case, wasn't it?

CULVER: Unquestionably. Because at one time there were many homesteads. As Marcus says, there was a land boom. There was quite an exodus to this area because of the availability of land, which seemed to be quite valuable to the people at that time. It was rock-free and level, more or less. And they thought it would be a very arid and productive land, which didn't turn out to be true. Although it would have been if water had been available, cheap water.

But so many homesteads, as I recall at one time the school at Voltage was attended by twenty-five pupils, and continued so for quite a number of years. There were many residents, or homesteaders in the area, which was common throughout the county.

MARCUS: Well in Voltage, Culver, I can remember when there was, there must have been at least a half a dozen permanent families who lived just right at Voltage. And your mother was quite instrumental in getting in the missionaries, and they would use the schoolhouse there. And just the immediate vicinity there would fill the schoolhouse, you know, with the youngsters there just attending Sunday School or what little religious services we were able to get back in those days. But the people were right there at hand.

You used to tell people, the people of nowadays of the circumstances of that time, and they can hardly believe you, and naturally so. But it's certainly the case.

CULVER: Very true. There was ever so many people that were in the immediate vicinity. To name a few would be the Frank Dunn family, the Durell family, two Durell families, three Jones families, Ted and Grandma Dunn, Grandpa Dunn. Alva Springer and his family, William Marshall, George Benson, Jim Gibson, Frank Adda, Earl Batchford, and "Coyote" Jack Marshall's. No relation incidentally. The Meyers, the Races, the Russell's, Ray Marshall and his family, and the Hackers, Claude Shug, and a man by the name of Cast, and Jim Ivey. Which is incidentally not all, but as nearly as I can recall that would be a portion of the people that would be readily available to any meetings such as Marcus mentioned. The missionaries, which were often there.

And we had public gatherings, dances of course, and socials, pie socials, basket socials, and so on, which were well attended. And at the same time the company ranch then, and I speak of the Blitzen Valley Company Ranch, which would be called the Sod House in our particular area. There were a good many buckaroos. As I recall it, perhaps as many as forty buckaroos on a year around basis.

MARCUS: Well there is one thing about it, Culver, we can be sure of living during the era when the biggest change that has ever been made in, seen in Harney County. I don't think there is any question about that. We see the homesteads that these folks strived to make a living off of, really producing now. We have power through the country, and the underground water supply is

ample. While we don't have the finest growing season, we do have good soil, and things are moving along pretty good for the people who are able to get established and get started here. So I think that, as I said before, we lived in the best time that we could of for Harney County.

CULVER: Marcus is so right in regards to this area. It is, it has a terrifically fine soil, not the best of growing seasons as he mentioned. And if free or cheap water was available, this country could support a good many more people than it did even during the times when the homesteaders were flocking in here, which would be nice for us all to see some time. Because this could be a terrifically fertile and productive area, and would certainly accommodate a good many people.

MARCUS: Well thank you Culver. I might add here that Culver now lives in the Drewsey area, just right near to the highway going to Ontario. And his son Conly and family lives nearby, and they're well established and certainly a fine family, and a fine addition to the Drewsey community. Well thank you Culver and ---

CULVER: And thank you.

MARCUS: We hope this will do somebody some good some time or another.

(END OF TAPE)

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