

HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #299 - Side B

Subject: Marcus Haines Discusses Busse Dam With Warren King &

John Scharff

Place: Busse Dam - Blitzen Valley, Oregon

Date: November 13, 1975

Interviewer: Marcus Haines

MARCUS HAINES: This is Marcus Haines on the 13th day of November 1975. And we're standing near where the present Rockford, on the Busse Dam above this Rockford Lane, and trying to find the location of Albert Busse, or Busse, homestead or shack here. He homesteaded the present area that --- where Busse Dam is located in now. And we're here with Fred Witzel and Pearl, and Mr. and Mrs. Warren King his --- Busse's grandson, and John Scharff. And we --- and Mr. Busse here is the fellow who put in the first dam in the Blitzen River nearby. And consequently the dam in this area has been named after him. So let's talk to Warren a little bit about this situation. Would you like to do a little farming here, Warren?

WARREN KING: Well, I've got rid of quite a lot of sagebrush, not in Oregon, but in Idaho.

MARCUS: Well you've got some big stuff to get rid of along this ditch. It's about as big as ... as you'll ever see, isn't it?

WARREN: Yeah. Grandfather was supposed to have raised gardens down here, and he sold to the freighters, and the ranchers too, I guess. It's easy to see how he could do it. There is good deep soil.

MARCUS: Yes, he had the water to work with too. Spoke about the Rockford Lane here, but the Rockford Crossing, where the traffic went through here in early days, ... the lane

was only maybe half a mile, between a half a mile of where we're standing here now, on down the river. So he was right here to catch the traffic going through the country here. I guess at that time there was quite a migration of California and around through there during the gold rushes and all. So he had a pretty good spot here.

WARREN: And that was the only crossing on the river that they could take wagons and stuff across there for quite a ways.

MARCUS: Yes, that's my understanding that it is. Well Warren, when did your granddad settle in here? Did you get that determined?

WARREN: That's what I'm trying to find out.

MARCUS: Uh huh. I see in Art's letter to John, he figured what John, a long about '85 that he thought maybe he came in here? But I think that's just a guess on Art's part too. But he sold out the property to Pete French and left in the late 19 --- 1800's there didn't he?

JOHN SCHARFF: Well it would have been, the first sale, it would have appeared in the records up in the courthouse in Burns, was in 1892. Then the other hundred, the timber culture 160, the deal was closed on that in ---

WARREN: December 30, 1899.

JOHN: '99.

MARCUS: Well we're on the original homestead, was this the timber culture here? Do you know which is ---

JOHN: I think this is the original ---

MARCUS: The original homestead, yes. And then the timber culture is on up the river south from where we are at here.

WARREN: We did find in the records at Burns where Grandpa leased a 320, from T. C.

Lusk for \$200. It was recorded. I think that was, if I remember right, that was in 1892.

MARCUS: Oh.

JOHN: Well it wouldn't have been Lusk in '92. Because you see Lusk came into the picture after French was killed in '97. You see he was the administrator of the estate in ---

WARREN: Well, I guess that's right. I'll re-check that. The notes that I took the first time I was here, why I left them home.

MARCUS: You'll have to take them all over again Warren. Well John, you tell us a little bit about this area here, about the Busse Dam and all. I know that you are well versed in it.

JOHN: Well of course it has been pretty well recorded about Busse's location here, and why he was here, what he did here. He wasn't a stockman; he was a farmer and grew produce, which was sold to the migrant people as they come through. The miners going one way or the other, and also the stock people moving into the country, and supplying the needs of the stockmen at that time. And then --- see I've lost my train of thought there Marcus.

MARCUS: Well when was the present dam, concrete dam put in John?

JOHN: Well the present dam was put in the winter of '38 and '39. Why I recall that was the, that was the first winter that Harry Willis was here. He came here in the fall of '38. And --- but the interesting thing about that was the old fitting that was in there for the original dam, or the dam that was built by the company administration here, I don't know who built it or when, that was just as solid as the day it was put in there. And I recall distinctly that Harry and I came along there and they had hooked onto it with a dragline and was trying to pull those fittings out. And they stopped it, and just built the dam right on the footings that were there. The treated wood fittings, they were real good --- they

was just as solid as the day they were put in there. The dam sits on the --- when that, I guess you know more about the dam being set afire, at least caught fire and burned, part of it, partially. And it has just been sort of patched up from year to year until such time it was rebuilt, the new one. The first time I ever saw the dam I rode up through here a horseback in '35, and all the old trestle --- Lowe wasn't that

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MARCUS: Lowe, Walt Lowe.

JOHN: Walt Lowe. He was collecting the big trout from down below the dam there, and was making bait. At that time there wasn't any water running through it, the water had been turned out above. And he was making bait out of these, had some twenty inch trout there. ... That would have been in August of '35.

MARCUS: Was there some concrete work in evidence that was done with cinders? Do you remember that?

JOHN: Yes, I think that's right, Marcus. It has kind of crumbled away, and quite a lot of dirt had gotten into it.

MARCUS: Yeah, Charlie Backus did that concrete work. He was one of the fellows that kept patching the dam. He told me about --- they told him they couldn't make concrete out of cinders. And he said, "I can," and he did, enough that it lasted for some time.

JOHN: Yeah.

MARCUS: In the dam there.

JOHN: We tried some of that and set the blocks down for testing, do you recall that?

MARCUS: Uh huh.

JOHN: And they said they would be good for just a single construction, but no more than one story.

MARCUS: Uh huh.

JOHN: It didn't have the tensile strength to stand a lot of weight.

MARCUS: Well this has been a very important dam ever since the beginning of the reclamation in this country here, John.

JOHN: Yes, it has. And then of course later the Stubblefield Canal was built under the administration of the Corbett's, and Bill Hanley the superintendent at that time, with the idea of colonizing this western side of the river, and probably the eastern side too. But of course then Corbett's were kind of running shy of money, I guess, and they sold the outfit then to Swift along about --- what was that again, around '17?

MARCUS: Yes, it was right in that neighborhood.

JOHN: Right around the neighborhood of '17 or '18, right in there. Just prior I think to World War I. And then Swift operated it for quite a number of years. In fact they leased it, leased, Duff and Company had it there a period of time, and ran a lot of sheep out of the "P" Ranch. And leased the Sod House to various people in the Diamond area.

MARCUS: But then also, there is an Eastside Canal that is a take-off from the Busse Dam here. And back at the advent of the refuge here, you used the water from here to irrigate the lawns, you know, rams.

JOHN: That's right.

MARCUS: And the takeoff was right here at the Busse Dam.

JOHN: One of the largest hydraulic ram was made, we used there. And we extended this ditch around through the Dunn property, and used that ram for a good many years. It was real successful as long as somebody took the time to take care of it. And then later of course why we got a pump. And I guess the old ram still sets there.

MARCUS: But without the Busse Dam that wouldn't have been possible.

JOHN: That's right.

MARCUS: Yeah. It was very important.

JOHN: Another thing about this Eastside Canal at that time was, there were a lot of sage chickens in this country, and about twice a summer somebody would have to walk this canal and kind of clean out the moss accumulation in places where they would impede the flow. And it wasn't unusual to see a couple hundred sage grouse between here and the refuge headquarters.

MARCUS: I suppose too, John, that this was, the Eastside Canal, it was on the outside of the fence here in many places, made water available for cattle, I mean out to the east here, out toward Barton Lake and that country too, and horses too for that matter.

JOHN: Yes, that's right. There were several places where the canal was outside, of course purposely for water. Just like here at Rockford Lane, the fences on the west side of the river and there were deep trails coming from the cattle that come from the Jack Mountain country through Rockford Lane. They would hang up here for a few days, and then go on into the east side of Malheur Lake. That was before it was fenced. And this country was completely killed as far as grass was concerned. And then the BLM comes in and seeds about thirteen thousand acres of it, and have a beautiful stand of grass down through that country, in an area that probably never would have come back in the time of one generation if it hadn't have been taken care of.

MARCUS: Yes, my mother came here in '96, and she told me that she used to ride out here on ... butte, right out to the northeast of us here. And she said the bunchgrass would drag your stirrups out through there. There was no sagebrush. Well the whole thing is gone, has been ever since you have been here.

JOHN: Yeah. Oh yes, there wasn't any bunchgrass in any of that country. Bill Davies

was telling me one time that out in the area where he lives that in the fall of the year, along in November, that if you could get up on one of those buttes you could see twenty camps, of sheep camps, waiting for the next one to go to the desert. And he said that was all straight bunchgrass country, just a beautiful waving country, and no brush on it. I rather suspect that that country we came through this morning, Marcus, through the big Sagebrush Field, looks pretty much like it did then if the brush was taken out of there.

MARCUS: Yeah. They're probably right.

JOHN: Yeah.

MARCUS: Because you know, you read these other diaries, and they had trouble finding firewood ---

JOHN: Oh, yeah.

MARCUS: --- as they came through this country. The grass had taken over all the brush, or else the country had all burned out sometime between the ... Anyway there wasn't any here.

JOHN: And they accumulated cow chips, you know, for fuel in a lot of places, just because of the lack of wood. And that's very true. And there wasn't nearly so many juniper in the country then either. Because ---

MARCUS: No.

JOHN: --- they had taken over that pretty good. They had taken care of that situation pretty good.

MARCUS: We were up on the east end of the lake with Sis and Ted, and Edna and I here around Sis's birthday about two years ago. And my mother and my father both had homesteads up there, they was nearby. And that's what we went up to look for. And Ted told me that his father had buckarood for Pete French and helped brand calves up on the

east end of the lake. And he said that they had to go way back out on top of those hills to find enough brush to build a branding fire.

JOHN: Yeah, uh huh.

MARCUS: And that would be back in the '90's sometime. And so there has been a vast change in this country here, and it hasn't been a hundred years either.

JOHN: No. Abe Cole was telling me about branding in this country here, and he said quite often they would have to move the cattle out a ways to get into an area where they had enough fuel, you know, to build the fires.

MARCUS: Uh huh.

JOHN: And he was telling me about the episodes, you know, of French and Oliver that happened right in this country here.

MARCUS: Yeah, I think there is some record of that in the testimony, you know, in the transcript of the trial about cattle branding and rodeos that they had up in this area here.

JOHN: They apparently would start a wagon down in this country and go up toward the higher country as they went. Because they had branded all this country here, and gone on in this camp that, about where Grain Camp is now, when they had this problem with Oliver working irons over on the cows. And so they had branded this country, and normally there wouldn't have been anybody back here for maybe four or five months, you know.

MARCUS: Uh huh.

JOHN: It would be pretty safe in getting away with some pretty big cows, but he got caught there.

MARCUS: But back in 19 --- well it would have to be '15 or '16 sometime, I was just a little kid. But Charlie Wade was my brother-in-law at the time, and he was buckaroo boss.



Well I used to travel with the buckaroo wagon, and Ermin Dillman was the cook. And we camped in the little Sagebrush Field over here one time, and we got ready to leave, I can't remember what they were doing down there, branding calves from around the outside here I suppose. And he hooked up four mules, and got Ermin and I on this old buckaroo wagon, and up the canal bank we went. There was a road up through, along here then, and we went up and camped at the Grain Camp. And about the first thing they did after they got there, it was the spring of the year, was to go over to the dam. And they had a trap set down on the water there, a rope on each end, pulled that out of there and they got any size fish they wanted out of that thing. We had a fish roast.

And then we went from there and worked our way on up to the "P" Ranch. I can't remember too much about it. I was a pretty small kid. But I do remember this ride up here; those mules always ran all the way to the Grain Camp. (Laughter)

JOHN: Yeah. They tell the story about Florence was helping old Tom Lucas, and he just had one leg, one leg was never developed. And he had a, walked with a crutch, but he usually made it out of a pitchfork handle, something pretty stout. Old Tom was a buckaroo cook for the PLS Company for years. And a fellow was telling me about him tipping the wagon over coming down Bendire Mountain. Said the five-gallon wood sourdough crock, which was rolling down the hillside, leaving a little roll of sourdough about an inch wide all the way down. (Laughter) I guess he was falling fast ... at the top of the mountain.

MARCUS: I thought you was going to tell he took after his sourdough on that peg leg. (Laughter) That's pretty steep country there. We made that trip over the Bendire Mountain here a couple years ago. And that would be a poor place to lose your sourdough jug, that's for sure.

JOHN: Julian Aerien found a Chinese shoe right there on that road coming down that mountain.

MARCUS: Oh.

JOHN: He was a real nice person.

MARCUS: What's a Chinese shoe like, John?

JOHN: Well it's an iron bottom; the miners in the early days wore these shoes. Leather tops and metal soles.

MARCUS: Oh, uh huh.

JOHN: And similar to the one you had, but a much older boot.

MARCUS: Well, the reason I asked you about this, Larry Dunn picked up a shoe that --- it wasn't a pot metal; it was steel on the bottom. And the Dunn's don't remember anything about this, but I remember Mrs. Dunn telling me, real well, about the Chinese mining down here at the hot springs. And we're going to go down there and look the situation over one of these days.

JOHN: ... metal put on ...

MARCUS: Yeah. Larry says he remembers seeing a shaft where they dug in there. I've never seen it.

JOHN: What were they mining for?

MARCUS: I don't know. That's the thing that Mrs. Dunn didn't know. She just remembers, you know, she was just a girl at the time.

JOHN: It's similar deposits at the borax works, you know, and of course there was Chinese labor there, at the borax works.

MARCUS: Uh huh.

JOHN: It would be similar deposit down there. Maybe they were exploring something for

borax.

MARCUS: They might have been.

JOHN: Well it could well have ---

MARCUS: But right back south, or northeast from the spring, Don Toelle and I came through there in '68, moved the cattle through there. And we found where an old building had been, with lumber around there. And he picked up the prettiest green bottle that I have ever seen. Of course a whiskey bottle. So it had to be there for a long time, to turn like that, you now.

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