

HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #302 - Sides A & B

Subject: John Wood

Place: John Wood Saw Shop, Burns, Oregon

Date: November 14, 1991

Interviewers: Dorothea Purdy & Barbara Lofgren

DOROTHEA PURDY: This is Dorothea Purdy along with Barbara Lofgren, and today we're talking with Johnny Wood at his workshop in Burns, Oregon. Today's date is November the 14th, 1991. And we will be doing a short video afterwards, it will be stored at the Harney County Library, along with the transcript and cassette tape, the number is 302. Now Johnny, can you tell us your full name?

JOHN WOOD: John Wood.

DOROTHEA: And where were you born?

JOHN: I was born in Baker City.

DOROTHEA: Is that in Oregon?

JOHN: Huh?

DOROTHEA: In Oregon?

JOHN: Baker City, Oregon.

DOROTHEA: And when?

JOHN: 1906.

DOROTHEA: What date?

JOHN: 17th day of June.

DOROTHEA: Okay, can you tell us something about the Ryegrass area? Can you ---

how did it get its name, do you know?

JOHN: Well, that country was all, mostly ryegrass that grew out there. That's a native bunch grass of the valley, and that's how it got its name.

DOROTHEA: How many people homesteaded out there, do you know?

JOHN: Well I don't know for sure just how many homesteaded, but when I was a young boy, why there was very few people lived out there. The McPheeters and the Dan Varien place was occupied, and the Rod Cazad place, he lived there. And before that, then there was a guy by the name of E. C. Taylor that lived, that Cazad bought the place from, that he had.

DOROTHEA: Now did your parents come here from ---

JOHN: Yeah, they come from Baker here in 1908, homesteaded, and was here a year, and then went back to Baker for a year, and then they come back again in 1909, late 1909.

DOROTHEA: What were your parent's names?

JOHN: Albert Wood, and my mother's name was Zella Wood.

DOROTHEA: Can you remember what her maiden name was?

JOHN: What?

DOROTHEA: Do you remember what her maiden name was?

JOHN: Well my mother's maiden name was Stultz.

DOROTHEA: Stultz.

JOHN: Yeah.

DOROTHEA: Now is your name spelled W O O D, or do you add an S to it?

JOHN: No, just W O O D.

DOROTHEA: W O O D, okay. What year did you settle in the Ryegrass area?

JOHN: Well we come here to stay in 1909.

DOROTHEA: And did you homestead a place?

JOHN: Yeah, well my dad homesteaded in 1908 when he was first here. And then we was here a year and then went back to Baker for almost a year, and then come back in late 1909. And then he lived on the homestead from there on.

BARBARA LOFGREN: What was the reason for going back to Baker City for that year?

JOHN: Oh, partly I think my mother didn't like it here, and thought that they could do better in Baker. They didn't so then they came back again.

BARBARA: Came back. And did you have brothers and sisters?

JOHN: I have an older sister than I am, and then a brother older than I am, but passed away when we was still in Baker.

BARBARA: And what is your sister's name?

JOHN: My older sister was Bessie Duhaime, or Bessie Wood, which she is dead now. But then I have a younger sister that is still alive, Eva. Her name is Rodriguez now.

BARBARA: And do they live here in town?

JOHN: No, she lives in Cave Junction.

BARBARA: I see.

JOHN: And so that's all the family was, just myself and the two girls.

BARBARA: And when they homesteaded in the Ryegrass area, did they have to live in tents or things like that while they were building their homes, or drilling wells, or whatever, or do you know?

JOHN: I suppose they did, but I don't really know.

BARBARA: So you don't remember.

JOHN: But then it didn't take long to build a house either, what we had to start with. They built the house in 1908 when they was here, half of it. The old house is still there yet, but it's got an addition, same size as what the first half was. And my younger sister, she was

born here in Burns.

DOROTHEA: Where did you go to school?

JOHN: Went to school first in Ryegrass district, until I was, I think, in the seventh grade. And then I went the rest, until the eighth grade in what they call the Lone Star district, and that was south and east of Ryegrass district.

BARBARA: Well did you ride a horse to school, or go by wagon, or walk?

JOHN: Rode a horse and walked most of the time.

BARBARA: Uh huh.

DOROTHEA: What was the weather like? Did you have hard winters?

JOHN: The winters were worse then than they are now. A lot colder, and a lot more snow in the valley.

DOROTHEA: Did you ever miss school because of the weather?

JOHN: Oh yes, quite a number of times.

DOROTHEA: I understand that they shut down the schools lots of times for the flu. Were you ever in one of the times that they shut that down?

JOHN: No, I don't know of them ever shutting the school down on account of weather.

DOROTHEA: How about sickness and flu and things like this?

JOHN: They did for the flu. They had, well I was going to Ryegrass School then, and it was, I think it was shut down for about three or four months in the winter, one winter, when it was the worst.

DOROTHEA: When it was the worst. How many students were in your class at that time?

JOHN: I think there were six in my class, in Ryegrass.

DOROTHEA: Can you remember any of the people's names?

JOHN: Oh yeah. Pauline Reed was one of them. Let's see, Myrthelene McPheeters

(Hughet) and Gladys Denstedt, I think that was all that was in my class.

DOROTHEA: Rod Cazad wasn't there?

JOHN: Well no.

DOROTHEA: He is older?

JOHN: He come from John Day over here, Canyon City.

DOROTHEA: Oh, did he?

JOHN: He wasn't, he lived there when I was going to school, but he was a grown man then.

DOROTHEA: Oh, he was, huh?

BARBARA: So you were the only boy in your class?

JOHN: No, there was others. And then there was another boy, Carol Jordan went to school the same class I was in.

DOROTHEA: You say Carol Jordan, is that the man that has the ---

JOHN: Did have the insurance.

DOROTHEA: Insurance, did have.

JOHN: But he is dead now.

DOROTHEA: He is gone now too, yeah. So what did your parents do for a living out there?

JOHN: Well we farmed, and then my dad worked out for wages. And then they run the threshing machine in fall on their own. So that was our source of income.

DOROTHEA: Did you help your dad with this?

JOHN: Well I did, started in when I was twelve years old. I started working for wages then.

DOROTHEA: Uh huh. What else can you tell us about that area? Was it mostly sagebrush, or ---

JOHN: Well yeah, it was all sagebrush about. Well there was three pieces of ground right close there that had small patches of farm ground on them. And then at Ryegrass why there was the old McPheeters place, and the Dan Varien place was the only ones that was farmed at that time. Later on, why there was quite a few of them farmed. About what there is out there now.

DOROTHEA: Now your niece is Alice Shepard, and she lives on what they used to call, above the Haines place. Now where she lives exactly, did someone live there at that time, or ---

JOHN: No, there was nobody lived there in the early days. It belonged to Fred Haines that owned the store in Harney. And the Duhaimes, after they came here in 1920, they bought a piece of ground west of it. And then later they bought the Haines place.

DOROTHEA: Do you know who that piece of ground belonged to?

JOHN: No, I couldn't tell you who that belonged to right now, that the Duhaimes bought. It is, well the county judge's brother lives there now, Don White.

DOROTHEA: Don White, yeah. You don't know who that piece of ground belonged to? That was farmed and originally belonged to Joe Duhaime, and probably Treft too.

JOHN: Well yes, the three or four brothers was into that at one time.

DOROTHEA: Uh huh.

JOHN: And then the home place actually belonged to Joe, the last, the younger boy. He finished up on that place there, and then he sold it to, and moved, well he died. And then his younger brother sold it and left here and went to California.

DOROTHEA: Okay, if I remember correctly the three or four brothers was Treft, Bill, Joe, Ed.

JOHN: Treft, and Bill, and Joe and Ed.

DOROTHEA: Okay. George was another brother, but he never ever lived there?

JOHN: Well the one younger one did live there, I can't think of his name now.

DOROTHEA: Was that George?

JOHN: George, yes. He is the one that was living there when Joe died. And so then he lived another year or two and then sold it. DOROTHEA: I think probably he sold that to the Jacobs', wasn't that right?

JOHN: Yes, he did.

DOROTHEA: And that was Laurence and Karola.

JOHN: Yeah. And the Paul Howes places was just east of it, just a road between them.

DOROTHEA: Now did he settle out there early too?

JOHN: Well no, we settled two miles farther south.

DOROTHEA: Uh huh.

JOHN: There never was any distinction of what they called that part of the valley there at all that I know of. But we were right on the main road from Burns to Lawen.

DOROTHEA: Now there was some Indian land out there too. Can you remember some of the Indians that used to --- I think they probably tented or lived out there.

JOHN: Well Scarface Charlie lived a mile east, a half a mile east of the Howes place. And they lived there quite a bit. And then there was quite a few pieces of Indian land there that nobody lived on. In fact most of it nobody lived on.

DOROTHEA: Now I know Johnny Pete lived on further down east and south.

JOHN: Yeah.

DOROTHEA: Southeast I guess you would call it.

JOHN: Yeah. There was several Indians come out there, and they may spend a night or two and then they was gone again. They didn't really live there. But Scarface Charlie did live on the place quite a lot.

DOROTHEA: Do you remember what his last name was?

JOHN: No, Scarface Charlie is all I ever knew him by.

DOROTHEA: All that you ever knew him as.

JOHN: Yeah.

BARBARA: You talked about your father doing contract threshing. Did he do it just in the valley here, or did he go in more areas?

JOHN: Just the valley. (Telephone rings)

DOROTHEA: Your father did some threshing. Did he do it in the area, or elsewhere?

JOHN: Well he threshed from Prather Creek to Buchanan, and this north half of the valley, clear around.

BARBARA: And who was working with him at that time?

JOHN: There was a guy by the name of Otto Gasch, who --- they owned the outfit together.

BARBARA: And was he a rancher in the same area too?

JOHN: Yeah, he lived just a quarter of a mile down from us.

BARBARA: And what was the reason for people settling in the Ryegrass area? Was it particularly good ground, or good water?

JOHN: Well it was good ground, and then they did have access to the water too, that we didn't have where we lived. Poison Creek Slough see run out through the Ryegrass district.

BARBARA: And you had to dig your own wells, each of you?

JOHN: Yes.

BARBARA: Did you have to go down very far to get water?

JOHN: Well ten feet to the surface water, but the water we used was forty-eight feet.

BARBARA: Uh huh.

JOHN: And they put the wells down by hand.



BARBARA: And what, boarded them up with lumber, and that sort of thing?

JOHN: Well the water would come up then about ten feet to the top of the ground.

BARBARA: And in the spring of the year, did you have a lot of water in that area? Was it flooded at all or did you have problems?

JOHN: Not after we lived there. Before we lived there why the water used to flood out in that area. But after we moved there, why it never did flood again until the last few years. Four or five years ago it flooded out there again.

BARBARA: And did you have root cellars and things like that on your property?

JOHN: Yes, we did.

BARBARA: And did your mother grow a big vegetable garden, and can food?

JOHN: Yes. Canned a lot of vegetables, we canned. But a lot of them we kept in the cellar for winter.

DOROTHEA: Did you ever marry?

JOHN: Well I did, yes. But I was twenty-four years old when I got married.

DOROTHEA: Do you have children?

JOHN: Yeah, I have two.

DOROTHEA: Two daughters.

JOHN: Two daughters.

DOROTHEA: And what are their names?

JOHN: Fay is the youngest one, the oldest one was Delcy.

DOROTHEA: Okay. How many grandchildren do you have?

JOHN: Well we have twelve grandkids.

BARBARA: Oh boy.

DOROTHEA: Grandchildren?

JOHN: Yeah. And about twelve or thirteen great grandkids.

DOROTHEA: What is your wife's name?

JOHN: My wife now is Nadine.

DOROTHEA: And what was her maiden name?

JOHN: Her maiden name was Gress.

DOROTHEA: Gress.

JOHN: Yes.

DOROTHEA: Did she have children? How do you have twelve grandchildren with two daughters?

JOHN: Well, I had two daughters, and she had a son and a daughter.

DOROTHEA: Oh, okay.

JOHN: So between us, we had four kids.

DOROTHEA: So you have four children. And what were her children's names?

JOHN: Well her oldest was Beryl, and the youngest is Joe.

DOROTHEA: Okay, so that explains the twelve grandchildren.

JOHN: Yeah.

DOROTHEA: Okay. Where did they go to school at?

JOHN: Well my kids went; I think the first year here in Burns, and the rest of the time at Hines until high school. And then they went to high school at Burns. And then Nadine's kids all went to Hines to school. The grade school, and the Burns for high school.

BARBARA: How long did you live in the Ryegrass area?

JOHN: Well, I lived there probably about twenty years.

BARBARA: And then did you come into Burns then?

JOHN: I come to Burns then.

BARBARA: At that time. I see. And what did you do for a living when you came to town?

JOHN: Well I worked in the sawmill a good many years, fifteen years I think it was. And

then I worked for myself since.

BARBARA: I see.

JOHN: Run a service station, and motel, and now I'm in the saw shop.

BARBARA: Okay, you were talking about coming into town and working at the Hines Lumber Mill. And what did you do there?

JOHN: Yes. Well I pulled lumber for four or five years, and then I drove a Grillinger for the rest of the time.

BARBARA: Drove what?

JOHN: About six years, a Grillinger, lumber carrier.

BARBARA: Oh, I see, okay. And then you did what?

JOHN: Well I quit the mill and went to work for myself. I run the service station, and then I built a motel.

BARBARA: Where was your service station?

JOHN: In Hines.

BARBARA: Okay. And is it still in business now?

JOHN: Yes, it is.

BARBARA: Which one is it then?

JOHN: It is the Standard Station out there.

BARBARA: Oh I see, okay. And then you ran the motel that is right there with it too?

JOHN: Yeah.

BARBARA: Okay. And how long did you do that?

JOHN: Oh, about twenty-five years.

BARBARA: That's a long time.

JOHN: Yeah.

BARBARA: And then what did you do?

JOHN: Well I quit that, but I kept the saw shop. I run the saw shop since then, and then I farmed, and done piecework for other people. Back hoed and hayed, and a little of everything.

BARBARA: And how did you get interested in having a saw shop? Did you learn to sharpen saws and work on saws when you were at the lumber mill? Or just picked that up on your own?

JOHN: No, I picked that up on my own after I went into the service station, why then I started that.

BARBARA: Kind of as a hobby, or side job?

JOHN: Well along with the station.

BARBARA: Well, just to keep you busy.

JOHN: I started selling Homelite in, see in 1954. I have been at it ever since.

BARBARA: That's a long time then too.

JOHN: Yeah. Yeah, it is way over thirty years.

BARBARA: Yeah, so you know pretty much about all these old saws then, don't you?

JOHN: Yeah. Most of the ones I work on, why I knew from one end to the other.

BARBARA: Uh huh.

DOROTHEA: Did you take your family on many vacations?

JOHN: No, we really haven't. I think we went on, what I call one vacation. We was gone about ten days that time.

DOROTHEA: Now where did you go?

JOHN: Went into Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, and then over into Montana, and back through Idaho.

BARBARA: So you're pretty much of a homeboy then?

JOHN: Well, it seemed like I never had the time or the money, one or the other.

(Laughter)

BARBARA: I think that is the problem with a lot of us. You say you did a little farming then too after you had your motel and service station.

JOHN: Oh yeah.

BARBARA: And where was the property that you farmed?

JOHN: Well it's my dad's old homestead. I have it, and then I've bought some other next to it.

BARBARA: So the family homestead is still in the family then?

JOHN: Yeah.

BARBARA: I see, okay.

DOROTHEA: Do you rent that out now, or are you still working on it?

JOHN: No, I still got it, and still use it. I haven't done anything for two years because it was so dry, but I probably will put alfalfa in some of it next year.

DOROTHEA: Then do you do your own crops, or do you hire somebody to do that?

JOHN: Well I'll probably hire it put up, but I'll do the rest of it. I'll do that.

DOROTHEA: You'll do that yourself?

JOHN: Between my ---

BARBARA: You like to get out there and work in the dirt, do you?

JOHN: Between my son-in-law and I'll do it. (Laughter) I'll probably tell him how, and he can do the work.

BARBARA: You're the supervisor, huh?

JOHN: Yeah.

DOROTHEA: You say your son-in-law. Does your family live very close?

JOHN: No, they live at Vallejo, California, but then he is figuring on --- he's retired so he's figuring on coming up here in the summer, him and my daughter. And they will probably

do most of the work on the place.

DOROTHEA: Which daughter is that?

JOHN: That is Delcy.

DOROTHEA: That's Delcy. And their children are all grown now?

JOHN: Yes, they are. All married but one.

DOROTHEA: What kind of problems did you and your dad have doing some of the threshing and farming? Was this done with tractors or with horses?

JOHN: Well most of our farming, well all of it practically was done by horses when he was with me. After he quit farming, why then I went with some tractors.

DOROTHEA: Did you have much trouble getting parts for your machinery?

JOHN: No, very little.

DOROTHEA: You did all the work by yourself?

JOHN: Well, most all of it.

DOROTHEA: Repairs, and what have you.

JOHN: My dad and I worked together on the place for several years. I had two sections that used to belong to the Weittenhiller farms. I had them two for ten years. And my dad helped me the first six years, and the last four years I run it by himself. Of course I hired some help, but not steady, just in busy times.

DOROTHEA: You said your dad worked with Otto Gasch for a while. Now I understood that Otto Gasch had a kind of an oil well, or tried drilling an oil well. Can you tell us anything about that?

JOHN: Well I think he did have an interest in the well all right, but mostly he worked in it. It was the Fay well, and he worked down there, and helped drill it, the last part of it.

DOROTHEA: And this was John Fay?

JOHN: Yeah.

DOROTHEA: And he just drilled on it?

JOHN: What?

DOROTHEA: How deep did they go?

JOHN: They went about 1800 feet.

DOROTHEA: Did they ever strike oil?

JOHN: No.

DOROTHEA: Just water?

JOHN: Struck artisan water, hot water.

DOROTHEA: Hot water.

JOHN: Yeah.

DOROTHEA: Okay. So, well there was some use to that then, wasn't there?

JOHN: Well they could have been, but they never did. They tried to plug the water off in the well, and they used a wooden plug, and then put about ten feet of cement in and put another wooden plug on top of it and pushed it down to where the artisan water was and tried to plug it off. And all they got done was they left the drill set on top of the wood to keep it from raising, and it cemented itself in. So it's still there, cemented in the hole.

BARBARA: Oh, dear.

DOROTHEA: Oh, it is?

JOHN: Yeah.

DOROTHEA: Oh well, for goodness sakes. That's ---

JOHN: They did shut off most of the water, but there is still about, oh I'd say forty, fifty gallons a minute run out of it the last time I was there.

DOROTHEA: It runs out by itself?

JOHN: Oh yeah, it's artisan.

DOROTHEA: Is it still hot?

JOHN: Oh yeah. Yeah, you can't hold your hand in it where it comes out of the well.

DOROTHEA: Is there a water hole around there, or ---

JOHN: well there used to be a ditch that run out. And it just run out in the ditch and sunk in the ground.

DOROTHEA: Does anybody use it?

JOHN: Not that I know of. I wanted to buy it, but my wife wouldn't let me do it. I had use for it.

BARBARA: Did anybody run cattle out in that area too?

JOHN: Well nobody is out there now. Well there is several live out there, but nobody does anything in the farming line anymore. BARBARA: Did your dad have cattle, or just the grain?

JOHN: Just a few head. Mostly just milk cows.

DOROTHEA: Did you ever own any cattle?

JOHN: Oh yeah.

DOROTHEA: Where did you run them, just on your ---

JOHN: Well I run them out there mostly.

DOROTHEA: Uh huh.

JOHN: Of course when I was on the Weittenhiller place, I run cattle there too. I had about a hundred head of cattle. And then sold them in the '30's when we had bad years like we've had in the last three or four.

DOROTHEA: Where is the Weittenhiller place, can you describe the area for us?

JOHN: Well, it's --- part of it joined the Ryegrass Lane on the north, and then there was a section, cornered it to the northwest. It was a mile and a half east of the old experiment station.

BARBARA: And when did the experiment station start out in that area? Did you have



anything to do with that?

JOHN: I think it started in 1914. It was a state owned experiment station, which I thought was a real good thing for the country, because they brought in and introduced a lot of new seed. And if you wanted a good seed, you could get it there. It was clean, and was true to what it was supposed to be. And they also produced potatoes out there that --- so people knew what did do good, and what didn't.

BARBARA: You never worked for them or anything like that?

JOHN: Yes, I even worked for them.

BARBARA: Oh did you? And what did you do?

JOHN: About six months, leveling ground.

BARBARA: Leveling ground. And how much of an area did they have out there to experiment with?

JOHN: They had two hundred acres, is what they had.

BARBARA: And it was just mostly crops then? They didn't have any cows at that time?

JOHN: Yeah, it was all in crops. But a lot of it was in little plots, you know, that wasn't very big. But that's where they done all their testing.

BARBARA: In test plots.

JOHN: They had a plot about twenty feet wide, and about forty feet long that they --- that's what they tested their stuff in.

DOROTHEA: So did you do any threshing for them, or did they have their own crews?

JOHN: Yes. They had their own, but we did do some threshing for them at times when they had some fields that were pretty good size, and they had more than they could handle with the little machine they had. So we did thresh for them.

DOROTHEA: So you were still using horses at that time?

JOHN: Well the farming was all done with horses. But a steam engine powered the

threshing machine.

DOROTHEA: What kind of a steam engine was it? Was it a tractor then?

JOHN: Yes, it was a tractor.

DOROTHEA: Can you describe some of the things about the tractor that you liked?

JOHN: Well, power wise it was real nice. It was only rated as an eight, no a twelve-horse steam engine, with a twin cylinder, and it was a Garth Scott make, and it had high wheels on the back. It had a lot of power, but it didn't have enough traction in Harney County to pull a big load.

DOROTHEA: So it didn't have cleated wheels, it had rubber wheels?

JOHN: Yeah, it had steel wheels on it.

DOROTHEA: Did it have steel wheels?

JOHN: About twenty-four inches wide, and about six feet high. But the ground was loose in Harney County, so it didn't have good traction. Been stuck with it a lot of times.

DOROTHEA: How did you get out when you got stuck?

JOHN: Oh, you could generally unhook from what you was a pulling, and it would pull itself out.

BARBARA: Did you ever run across any Indian artifacts when you were working out in that area?

JOHN: Oh yes.

BARBARA: Arrowheads and things like that?

JOHN: Quite a few. Thank you (to child). We got, I think the only perfect arrowhead I found was years after we had farmed it, and that's the only perfect one I found. I found a lot of the imperfect heads, and their bowls that they ground corn, or whatever, in. But then the only one arrowhead that I ever found that was perfect.

DOROTHEA: Did you keep any of these artifacts? Or this is probably something that ---

JOHN: I kept the arrowhead, but --- I still got it, but the rest of it I never kept.

DOROTHEA: At that time the artifacts didn't have the problems that we have today with them.

JOHN: No.

DOROTHEA: Yeah.

BARBARA: No restrictions at that time.

DOROTHEA: No restrictions.

JOHN: No. No, you could pick them up any place you found them. DOROTHEA: Can you tell us something about maybe how things have changed since you first came to the country, to now?

JOHN: Oh yeah. Most of the houses then was a clapboard house, just boards sitting straight up and down. And no dimension in them at all, only rafters. There was no insulation, or nothing else.

DOROTHEA: Did you burn a lot of wood, or how was the homes heated?

JOHN: With wood.

DOROTHEA: Did you get a lot of wood yourself?

JOHN: Oh yes.

DOROTHEA: Where did you get the wood at that time?

JOHN: North here in the hills.

DOROTHEA: In the hills?

JOHN: Yeah.

DOROTHEA: Just ---

JOHN: Hauled wood with a team.

DOROTHEA: Was it hard to get to the areas, or ---

JOHN: No, it wasn't hard to get to it. We had to haul wood out there about, oh about

sixteen miles is all.

DOROTHEA: Would that make quite a day's drive, or day's work?

JOHN: No. We never went up and back the same day. We'd go up one day, and come back the next. And then when I got older so I had a wagon too, why we'd go up one day and stay over a day, and come home the next day, and cut two loads of wood.

DOROTHEA: How many loads of wood did it usually take you to get through a winter?

JOHN: About ten.

DOROTHEA: So you made this trip several times?

JOHN: Oh yeah.

BARBARA: So that was a real chore then to get your wood in for the winter?

JOHN: Yeah it was, it was quite a little chore.

BARBARA: Uh huh.

DOROTHEA: How many cords would you haul at one time?

JOHN: About a cord, because we hauled ninety percent mahogany. There was about a cord or little over.

(Customer interruptions.)

DOROTHEA: We may get too many interruptions for you here pretty quick.

JOHN: Yeah, I think we should have went the other way with it.

DOROTHEA: We may have to do this a little later.

JOHN: Yeah.

DOROTHEA: Do you belong to any organizations?

JOHN: Well I used to belong to the Eagle Lodge, and I belong to the Poison Creek Grange for years. And that's the only organizations I ever belonged to.

DOROTHEA: Did you ever carry an office in these?

JOHN: No, I never did.

BARBARA: Can you remember some of the things that happened while you were going to school? Some of the incidents maybe coming or going to school, or some things with your classmates, something like this?

JOHN: Well, I can remember it snowing five or six inches one time. And then I rode horseback to school and I had a dog. So we would run rabbits going home. In that fresh snow you can catch the rabbits. So we'd run rabbits until I run the dog down, and then I had to quit. (Laughter)

BARBARA: Did you cut the rabbit ears off and get nickels for them?

JOHN: Oh yeah. Those rabbit ears then was worth a nickel.

BARBARA: Uh huh.

DOROTHEA: Did you do much rabbit hunting at that time?

JOHN: A lot of it. Every spare minute, I rabbit hunted.

DOROTHEA: Did you sell many ears?

JOHN: Oh yeah, a lot of ears.

DOROTHEA: Can you remember maybe the largest amount of ears that you sold?

JOHN: Oh, we probably had, probably three or four hundred at a time generally.

DOROTHEA: At a nickel an ear. During some of the heavy snows, did you have any haystacks that you had to go keep the rabbits from eating up?

JOHN: Well, we did have haystacks, but then they never had any that the rabbits bothered very bad. They did some, but not to amount to anything.

DOROTHEA: Because I remember my dad going out every night and shooting rabbits to keep them from eating up the hay.

JOHN: Well I used to do that too, but I didn't, wasn't doing it to keep them from eating the hay, I was doing it because I wanted to kill the rabbits.

DOROTHEA: But you wanted to get those ears, huh?

JOHN: Yeah.

DOROTHEA: The rabbits were quite a problem in that time too. Can you remember when they first started disappearing?

JOHN: Well that was about, oh about six years ago when they started to disappear.

DOROTHEA: Do you have any idea why?

JOHN: I don't know why, never did know. Some people said the BLM poisoned them, but then I don't think they did. But there was, well three years ago you couldn't hardly see a rabbit, where there used to be thousands of them.

BARBARA: Well sometimes disease comes in and takes over too and kills them off.

JOHN: Did I do what?

BARBARA: Disease sometimes, disease of the ---

JOHN: Oh yeah, yeah the rabbits had disease.

BARBARA: Uh huh.

JOHN: Of course it didn't seem to be when they died off though until there wasn't any. Well when I farmed the Weittenhiller place there, we had rabbit drives there and we killed three or four hundred rabbits at a time.

DOROTHEA: Did you ever trap them?

JOHN: Oh yeah, snared them mostly. Didn't trap too many, but snared a lot of them.

BARBARA: Did you ever hunt birds, like pheasant and ducks and geese, and things like that too?

JOHN: Oh yeah.

BARBARA: For food? And deer and antelope, did you hunt those too?

JOHN: Well we hunted deer some, we never did only one time that I can ever remember killing an antelope, and it wasn't fit to eat. So, but we did hunt deer. And we hunted ducks and geese.

BARBARA: I suppose you had enough beef to eat, so it wasn't worth the time to run around and hunt a deer, only more for sport was it?

JOHN: Oh, it was more of a sport. And then of course we eat the deer meat too. It was a lot better meat then than it is now I think.

BARBARA: And did you have programs and things like that when you were in school, like Christmas programs, or things like that that you put on for your family? Do you remember any of that?

JOHN: No, not really. Families used to visit one another all the time though when I was a young guy.

BARBARA: Uh huh.

JOHN: You know they went from house to house visiting.

BARBARA: Did your families take you along when they would go to dances and things like that?

JOHN: Oh yeah, yeah. Yeah. And always to the --- if they went to visit, most generally you went and stayed all night if you went to visit somebody, because you went with a team.

DOROTHEA: Did you play cards, or dance?

JOHN: Yes, played cards mostly.

DOROTHEA: Mostly.

JOHN: Yeah.

DOROTHEA: And the kids played games and ---

JOHN: Yeah.

DOROTHEA: What kinds of games did you play at that time?

JOHN: Oh, a lot of different ones, but I couldn't tell you what they called them anymore. Kind of forgot that.

DOROTHEA: Did you play ball?

JOHN: Yeah, we played ball some.

DOROTHEA: Baseball and ---

JOHN: Not to amount to anything, a little, but very little baseball.

DOROTHEA: Kind of --- did you play football?

JOHN: No, no football either. The biggest ball games we used to have when I was going to school was anti-over the schoolhouse.

DOROTHEA: Oh, okay. What were some of the classes that you had in that day? Today they have computers and things like that.

JOHN: We didn't have any of that. All we had was the straight reading and writing and arithmetic, that was --- English of course, and geography, but that was all there was to it.

DOROTHEA: Did you have a little bit of history?

JOHN: Oh yeah, we had history too.

DOROTHEA: Can you remember the president, the first president that you can remember of the United States? Do you remember who that was?

JOHN: No, I couldn't tell you who that was.

DOROTHEA: Can't remember?

JOHN: But I can remember back as far as Lincoln, but I can't go on back. (Laughter)

DOROTHEA: You weren't alive when Lincoln was in there. (Laughter)

BARBARA: Do you remember your first automobile?

JOHN: Yes, I can. I of course lived here when the first automobile come in. Come into the Ford Garage down there.

DOROTHEA: And did you drive?

JOHN: No, I didn't drive then, but I did later. I started driving probably in 1918, or somewheres along in there.



DOROTHEA: Did you own --- how old were you when you first owned your automobile?

JOHN: The car? I was about twenty years old. Yeah, I was about twenty when I first, the first car I ever bought.

DOROTHEA: What kind was it?

JOHN: It was a Star touring car.

DOROTHEA: And what is a Star? Is that a ---

JOHN: Well it was a make of a car. It come, finally wound up being a Durant. But it was called a Star, the first ones that they made.

DOROTHEA: Is that a General Motors car, or what kind of a car?

JOHN: No, no, it was made by Durant Motor Car Company made it.

DOROTHEA: Oh, so it was just a car on its own.

JOHN: It is one of the forgotten ones now.

DOROTHEA: It was one of the forgotten breeds.

JOHN: Yeah, which there is a lot of them.

BARBARA: Yeah.

DOROTHEA: Was it a two-door, or a four-door?

JOHN: Well it was four-doors, but it was a cloth top touring car. 1924 model.

DOROTHEA: Gears on the floor?

JOHN: Yeah.

DOROTHEA: Did you court any girls in that car?

JOHN: Nope.

DOROTHEA: You really didn't?

JOHN: No. (Laughter) I wasn't much interested in girls then.

DOROTHEA: That was before the day of girls, huh?

JOHN: Yeah. That was about the third one down the line before I courted any girls.

(Laughter)

BARBARA: When you first started dating, what did you do on dates? Did you go to movies, or what did you do?

JOHN: Mostly dances.

BARBARA: Mostly dances.

JOHN: Yeah. Oh, we didn't go to very many movies.

DOROTHEA: Did they have a movie house here at that time?

JOHN: Oh yeah.

DOROTHEA: Well you say you've noticed a lot of changes. What kind of changes can you actually say that have taken place since your childhood to today?

JOHN: Well I suppose the biggest change is probably in the roads. You know there was just dirt roads, and hardly any of them was even graded up when I was a kid. They was just dirt roads. And now the biggest majority, well all the main roads in Harney County is paved. Then of course the mode of transportation has changed an awful lot. Up until, well at least 1914; I never even rode in a car. The first year I learned to drive well enough was another guy's car, it wasn't mine.

DOROTHEA: Do you remember your first automobile ride? What did you think of that?

JOHN: Well I can't really say that I can remember that. But I can remember an old bachelor, well he had been married, but he was a bachelor then. He bought a car, and that's where I learned to ride, or learned to drive was in his car. And I drove his car clear to Pacific Grove, California and back before I ever had a driver's license.

BARBARA: They weren't too strict at that time about licenses.

JOHN: No, they didn't pay much attention to that.

DOROTHEA: Well can you think of anything real interesting that you would like to discuss with us. We're about to come to the end of this side of the tape. And unless

you've got something that you really want to tell us, well we may close off and just get a video of you and come back and do this a time when we're not so badly interrupted.

JOHN: Well I suppose the only other thing I could maybe tell you about the history of Burns, the things that happened. I was in Burns at a Chautauqua meeting, or a show, when the Burns police was shot and killed. And I knew all about --- is it off --- all about Goodman when he got shot and was killed. He was --- well Rod Cazad was one of the guys that went and helped catch the guy that killed him.

DOROTHEA: Okay. If you want to talk about that, we've got time, so we'll turn this tape over and you can tell us a little bit about it.

JOHN: Okay.

SIDE B

DOROTHEA: Okay, tell us something about the --- what did you call it?

BARBARA: Chautauqua.

DOROTHEA: Chautauqua.

JOHN: Yeah, I was in it; it was a musical show mostly in a big tent up here, well about where the old Bennett Motor Garage is there. And I can't remember what the deal was all over, but while we was in there, I heard the shots, that shot the city police and killed him there. And I can't right off remember the names, I knew them both. But then that --- I never did see nothing, but then I heard the shot that did kill him. And then that's about the only time that I ever had any experience of anything like that in town here.

But I knew about when Goodman got shot, well I knew about that from the start. And he was shot east of Steens Mountains. And then the guy come to Crane, and they corralled him after he come to Crane on what they called Saddle Butte. And there was about five or six people, Rod Cazad was the leader of it. And they caught up with him

and brought him to town.

DOROTHEA: Do you remember why he was shot? Was he chasing someone or ---

JOHN: Shot over a bad check, is what was shot over. The guy had wrote a guy a bad check, and Goodman cornered him about it, and that's the reason he shot him.

DOROTHEA: So what did they do to the man?

JOHN: Well that I can't remember for sure. But I know he went to the pen, but how long or how much, I don't know.

DOROTHEA: So he was put on trial?

JOHN: Oh yeah.

DOROTHEA: Can you remember some of the other things that happened, like maybe some of the fires that took place in Burns?

JOHN: Oh yeah, I can remember when the old Welcome Hotel burnt. I was down there to that fire. I was living here in town at the time when it burnt up. Took it all night to do it, but it done it. And then I can remember when the Arrowhead burnt, and Tiller's Store burnt.

DOROTHEA: How about Tiller's Store?

JOHN: That was there where, well just between Alice's Dress Shop and that little restaurant there now. That was Tiller's and it burnt out in there.

DOROTHEA: So you remember then more or less when Bill Tiller started the Tiller's Store?

JOHN: Well Bill Tiller didn't have it then. That was Pluribus that had the store.

DOROTHEA: That was Pluribus.

JOHN: He had the store. The first store he had was in the Corbett building here, where Safeway's. That's where I met Pluribus Tiller. And then after that he went into the store across the street there on his own. And he was there until he sold out to Eben Ray. And

then he never was back in the store of his own again. Bill Tiller started the store in where the NAPA Auto Parts are now. And then they moved from there to the, where the Big A Auto Parts are. And then he more or less quit, and the boys moved out to where Sentry is now.

DOROTHEA: How about Sandy's Shoe Shop? Can you tell us something about that?

JOHN: Oh yeah, I knew him when he first started, when he first come here. He used to be a logger in Washington, around Seattle. And he, I think he said he had about a hundred dollars in his pocket when he landed in Burns and started the shoe shop. And he worked that until he retired.

DOROTHEA: Did he say why he started a shoe shop? What got him interested in that?

JOHN: Well his health was bad in Washington a logging. And when he come here he'd, I don't know how he had come to, whether he had took training, he must have, before he come to Burns. But, because he started right in the shoe shop. And then he went to making saddles later. And he was, well I think probably the longest in the saddle business that Burns had.

But Welcome used to be in the saddle business too, they made the Welcome Saddle. That's the first one I can remember. And then (Bill) Dean made saddles for several years here too.

DOROTHEA: Can you remember that Dean's first name?

JOHN: No, I don't believe I can.

DOROTHEA: I can't either.

JOHN: He was related to Dan Dean, that's ---

DOROTHEA: That's Dan Dean's dad.

JOHN: I believe it was his dad.

DOROTHEA: Yeah, but I can't remember his first name.

JOHN: I can't either. I knew the man, but I can't remember his name. Of course a lot of names now I can't remember for some reason.

BARBARA: Who were some of the other people you were acquainted with in the early days, Julian Byrd, or people like that? Did you know him?

JOHN: Well I knew most everybody in the valley at that time. Like Paul Howes, and then the old man Weittenhiller, I knew him. I knew that his partner was B. L. Allen, which he didn't live here. He lived in Iowa, but he was a partner financially. And then I knew the McPheeters, and the Denstedts, and of course the old Brown people, I knew them. They had a place just off of Ryegrass too.

DOROTHEA: Was that Alfred, or ---

JOHN: No, that was Alfred's dad though, Ben Brown.

DOROTHEA: Dad --- Ben Brown. Can you tell us something about the banks?

JOHN: Well yeah. There used to be, the, I think the U. S. Bank was the first one. That was Brown, Leon Brown's Bank. It was called the Harney County National Bank.

And then they had the First National Bank in where Garland is now. And I don't think they went broke, but they left here. They didn't stay here long, ten years or so. Well they did go broke too, because they went out when the depression and the '30's was on.

DOROTHEA: So a lot of things have really changed on Main Street, hasn't it?

JOHN: Oh yeah. People borrowed money; well that McPheeters was one of them. Borrowed money there to hay on, and before they got a chance to get their haying done, well the bank closed its doors, and they lost the money. But they still had to pay the bank. I thought that was going a little far to do tricks like that to people.

DOROTHEA: Well is there anything else that you can remember, or in the earlier days that you want to tell us about?

JOHN: Well when I was a young kid, they could buy a cow and a calf for twenty-five

dollars. And people that had a 150 head, they had a hired man the year around, and still made a living and paid the man wages. So it was a good deal easier to live then than it is today.

DOROTHEA: That's for certain.

JOHN: The time when I was growing up, the Denstedts and the Frank Jackson's and the McPheeters and the Dan Variens, they was classed as well-to-do people, you know. They wasn't rich, but then they had plenty. And every one of them died, and the county buried them, so that's history. You know, it's happened a lot of times, a lot of places.

BARBARA: Yeah. People made their money, and they lost it.

JOHN: Yeah.

BARBARA: During the depression, how did it affect you here in Burns?

JOHN: Well it was hard during the '30's, you know. But then I never did, never was on welfare. And I never had any government job, and I made it on my own somehow or other.

BARBARA: Were there a lot of people hurting during that time here?

JOHN: Well yeah, there was quite a few people that was hungry. But I wasn't one of them, fortunately. But they've, I can remember when they started the WPA, and they had people with teams, and building streets out in Hines. They done more out there it seemed like than they did here in Burns. But they done a lot of work out there with teams on the streets. I went out there one day and tried to get on with a team, but I didn't get there for some reason.

BARBARA: Do you remember when the CC boys were out here?

JOHN: Oh yeah, yeah.

BARBARA: Did you get acquainted with any of those men?

JOHN: I did get acquainted with quite a few. And then there is quite a few CC boys that

has stayed here too.

BARBARA: Yeah. I know Hale Baird, I think, was one of those that stayed, ended up staying.

JOHN: The guy that used to be county clerk, he come here, and Butch Arntz come here to the CC Camp. There was a whole gang of them that stayed here after they was in here.

BARBARA: And what about the time that they started the refuge out here. Do you remember some of the things that went on during that time; they started, took the land from the ranchers and started the wildlife refuge?

JOHN: Well, of course most of that land to start with belonged, was lake land, so it didn't belong to anybody in particular. But then they bought land after that that did belong to people. I don't think they really forced anybody to sell. It was most generally, what they got was voluntarily sold.

BARBARA: So there wasn't a lot of hard feelings then when it first started out?

JOHN: No, I don't think so. But I do think the bird reserve is the biggest waste of land and water that you could find anywhere's in the world. (Laughter) And they don't have any birds. And the reason why they haven't got any, is no feed. But the people that is the most interested and backing that stuff can't see that. All they can think about is water for them to swim in.

BARBARA: I know Marcus Haines likes to talk about that too.

JOHN: I wouldn't doubt that.

DOROTHEA: Do you need to help these people here? Do you want to help these people?

JOHN: Yeah, I just as well.

DOROTHEA: Well, Johnny, would you like to tell us about someone else, or shall we



close off for now and get our video?

JOHN: Well I really can't think of much else I can tell you right now, I don't believe.

DOROTHEA: Okay. Well maybe one day we can meet up at your house or something, an afternoon when you're not quite so busy.

JOHN: Yeah, it might help.

DOROTHEA: Might help. Okay. And we would like to thank you for this afternoon, and our visit. And now we'll get busy and set up the video and do a video.

JOHN: Okay.

DOROTHEA: Thank you Johnny.

JOHN: You bet.

(END OF TAPE)

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