

HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #34 - Side A

Subject: Coral Harris

Place: Portland, Oregon

Date: January 29, 1973

Interviewer: Pauline Braymen

CORAL HARRIS: ... known this, I have some very good pictures down at Medford, stored down there, and one of them is of Governor Wist, and Mr. Mahon, Jim Mahon.

PAULINE: Yes, I've ---

CORAL: He was my boyfriend, really. He just loved me, and I loved him. They never, they had just one girl. And we didn't live very far from them. And he loved my husband too. And he used to say that we had our chickens trained so they would lie down on their backs when he sent for us to come over, because my husband helped him a lot, you know, when he was alone, after he got older. And said they would lie down on their backs to have their feet tied so we could bring the chickens over to him. Well, that was quite an adventure for a girl, for me.

I graduated from nurses training in 1912, and I was at the University of Iowa. And I went over there, and I had never been out in the country like that in my life before. But I, before I

--- I put my marriage certificate out too, and I wanted you to see that. There was some fun in the relatives about the --- because I came out and met my husband, and we were married in Burns.

And my brother-in-law was a lawyer. And I tell you, that was all my fault that we

was so long in getting our announcements, because I had to have engraved announcements of our marriage.

PAULINE: Well that's important.

CORAL: I thought it was too. And so anyway I sent back to Kansas City, Missouri for them. And I thought they never were going to come. That was when the, you see, our post office was up at Waverly and so ---

PAULINE: Oh good, because I want to know about Waverly.

CORAL: Oh that was wonderful, and I'll tell you that we stayed there the first night after we were married, on our way out to our own homestead. And I had never been out in the country like that before, you know, and I said to my husband, I said, "Are you sure Mrs. Brakeman is clean?" And he said, "Well she is just as clean as she can be, everything is clean." Well when I got out there I could smell a great odor. I have a very strong senses, you know, and I could smell it, and it smelled like socks to me, men socks. Because you see we'd had lots of tramps brought in, I knew what men's socks smelled like anyway. And so I --- but I didn't say anything to him about it until later. And I said, "You know I smell some terrible odor here." And he said, "Why I don't know what it is," says, "she is a very clean person." And I had looked around in the kitchen and everything, and the dining room, and I didn't see anything, soiled clothes. And it was the sagebrush that she was burning.

PAULINE: Oh, yes. Uh huh.

CORAL: And she was just fine. She was just a character, and they were, that Mr. and Mrs. Brakeman.

PAULINE: And they were at Waverly, they had the ---

CORAL: They were at Waverly, had the store there. That was --- David, and I can't think what her name was. Just a moment here. Because the men always called her Mrs.

Brakeman. But anyway, they were an older couple, and they had never had any children.

They came out there and they --- oh I will think of it. I'm not all---

PAULINE: Well it doesn't --- you know it really is not that important.

CORAL: Well I know. Lydia, Lydia was her name, Lydia. And I knew it would come to me, because there were so many bachelors over there. And they had all congregated at -- my husband was over there alone a long time, and then he came back east, and I met him. And then I was working in Iowa City, because I had graduated from nursing school there, at the University. And I was the youngest one in the state to pass the state board before 21. So I have to brag a little bit too.

PAULINE: Well that's wonderful.

CORAL: Well anyway, I nursed all my life until, just the last three years. And then my children thought I'd done enough. I've had some very interesting experiences with nursing. And of course we came to Ashland then, when our daughter was born in Whittier, California. And my sister was down there, we went down there when --- and we had the, the way we went out to the railroad was to Ontario. We had to go by wagon, you know. Because --- and a man came through and he wanted to buy some hay from my husband. Well we were going away, and so my husband said, "Well if you will spend the night here and camp here, we'll ride out to the railroad with you and I will give you the hay." So that's what happened. And the three of us slept in, a pallet on the ground, you know. He had a bedroll, and I was very pregnant, but I slept there anyway.

But I had very interesting experiences over there with the people. Because some of those women had never had anybody, a woman with them when they had their babies, you know.

PAULINE: Well now you came, did you say in 1912?

CORAL: Yes.

PAULINE: In 1912.

CORAL: I graduated in 1912. No, I didn't --- I, we came out later. And so, I'll look up my -- I was married in 1913. But anyway, my son, son's wife is a professionalist, professional bookkeeper and everything, and she --- So my son took my papers, my box up to have it, to go through it when --- and he's got it all arranged differently than I had it. I couldn't find anything, but I knew where it was, see. So I'll look up my wedding announcement and then you can see --- because Mr. Sizemore was the sheriff and so ---

PAULINE: Did you know your husband before you came out, or did you meet him after you ---

CORAL: No, I met him back east, back in Iowa at his home. His father, his brother was a patient in ... hospital. And the father, his father came up to visit us, visit him. And I met him that way. And he lived not far from Iowa City, and invited me to come down to the farm when the strawberries were ripe. And I said to my roommate, that's going to be a real blast. I've got this letter to go down, and I'm going down there, and I knew him, but I didn't know anybody else in the family. And I went down.

My husband was home then from Harney County. He'd been out there, and he was there. And my mother-in-law, who was a wonderful person, and she always said that the sparks just flew from my husband to me, so it was love at first sight. And I was saying when --- I saw the great waltz not long ago --- I may digress too much for you, I mean in my telling you what I, I'm telling. If you're not interested in ---

PAULINE: Just fine, you're just doing fine.

CORAL: Well anyway, his father loved, they lived on the farm there. They were older people, and fine people, both of them. And they just welcomed me; in fact Mother Harris met me at the depot, you know, when I went down on the train. I went down on the train, because I thought well it's a good time to have some strawberries. And it's just a blast,

you know, they call it now I guess, the young people do. And it'll be funny if I can't find my wedding --- it's here, I know it, because my son wouldn't take that out. But anyway, here's --- I got some of my wages here that he has kept for me, and my uniforms, the price of my uniforms. So he didn't destroy anything, I guess, that I needed. But it's here, I know, I'm sure of that. Because it is a little book that --- we were married in a Presbyterian Mass in Burns.

PAULINE: What was your husband's first name?

CORAL: Eugene.

PAULINE: Eugene.

CORAL: Eugene R. Harris. I don't know what he has done with that.

PAULINE: How long had he been in Harney County before you came?

CORAL: Well he'd been out there long enough to prove up on his land.

PAULINE: Well he probably came about 1910 or '11.

CORAL: Yes. And he proved up on his land, and I took, registered on my land just before we were married, before 12 o'clock noon. And we were married at 12 o'clock, high noon. And I had my formal, and I wore it, you know, I brought out one of my formals that I had. Because I had enjoyed the university dances a lot, and so I had that one formal left, and I was married in that. So --- I don't know what he's done. He must have --- he might have done something, put these in the bank because --- But I was sure they were in here. I said to him, "Did you save out my wedding certificate and everything?" He said, "Yes Mother, it's all there." So I guess he didn't destroy anything. There is the little book that the minister gave us. ...

This is my husband's account book that he always kept. And there I found something that I really was glad to find. These are some of my, this is some stationery that a friend of mine --- thank you, thank you, yes. I should have gotten out the little table.

This is from my friend that made those for me, I took care of her. I've had lots of nursing experience.

PAULINE: Did you just act as a nurse in the community, or did you work at the hospital, or with a doctor?

CORAL: Oh no, there was no hospital there. There was no hospital in Burns then. And I just worked in the neighborhood. I didn't get any pay for it, you know, I didn't charge anybody anything.

PAULINE: Yeah, just helping out your neighbors.

CORAL: Just helping out the neighbors. And I delivered some babies, several babies.

PAULINE: And you said some of the women had never had anyone with them.

CORAL: Why no, and they were delighted. Thank you. I can't see where that could be, that certificate. Because --- did I bring the whole thing out? Let's see, if I didn't why it is in there. Yes, I did. He must --- I'm sure he must of ---

PAULINE: He may have put it in the safe deposit.

CORAL: He's put it in the bank, because he did that. But --- you excuse me and I'm going to call down and make our reservations for lunch if it's not too late.

... (Pause in tape)

PAULINE: Well I would like for you to tell me how you happened, I mean how you traveled out to Harney County, how you came. On a train?

CORAL: On the train, yes.

PAULINE: To Ontario, I imagine.

CORAL: No, we went, well yes, and then we went into Burns.

PAULINE: And you had to come on the stage?

CORAL: Well no, we went in the other way from Baker.

PAULINE: From Baker.

CORAL: We went in on that narrow gauge from Baker into Burns. Most, many of those people that I knew over there are gone. Do you happen to know of anybody by the name of Quier over there?

PAULINE: Yes, she was my second grade school teacher, Alma Quier.

CORAL: Was she? Alma Quier, well I knew her husband, you see. And what was her husband's, name, do you remember?

PAULINE: Oh let's see, it was something ---

CORAL: Was it Dewey?

PAULINE: Dewey.

CORAL: Dewey, yes. Well Dewey was the youngest one of the Quiers, and they lived just about three miles from us. And so I haven't seen Dewey for years.

PAULINE: Well I ...

... (Pause in tape)

CORAL: There was quite a, they were part Indian people. And they lived right there, and I know --- they were very friendly people. And of course I never thought about going over there to stay all night, you know, but it was such a short place. But we went one afternoon there, and he was part, he was sort of a preacher, tried to be a preacher. But the boys said that, that the men said that they'd take him in to ... just to fill up on ...

And so he used to hold meetings then in the schoolhouse for us. And everybody would come that would hear about it on Sunday, you know. And his wife sang, she was a large woman, and she'd had 14 children. And so she would sing, and she sang --- have you ever known the family?

PAULINE: Uh huh.

CORAL: She'd sing, "'eer ye ready"? And she'd sing at the funerals. And it was just almost impossible to hold yourself straight.

PAULINE: Oh dear.

CORAL: Well anyway --- and then I had --- I think that Mr. Wright lives on our, he's had our land leased for a long time. And I haven't been over there for quite awhile. But when I was, there was a, I'd walk down through the cattle, and there was antelope in that cattle, in the herd. And so the, our buildings have been moved off there, and Mr. Wright moved those off, and we sold it to him.

PAULINE: ...

... (Pause in tape)

CORAL: And I've paid the taxes, and then see we have, we have 1,000 acres in there. Because my brother-in-law left his land in there too. My brother-in-law and sister-in-law were married in Drewsey. And then they came over in the summer after we were married in August. They came in August, I mean, and we'd been married the 16th of May.

PAULINE: In 1913?

CORAL: Yes.

PAULINE: At Burns, at high noon.

CORAL: High noon.

PAULINE: Who was the minister, do you remember?

CORAL: Well he was a Presbyterian minister, and I believe his name was Beebe. But I wish I had that certificate.

PAULINE: That would be interesting to see.

CORAL: I, if I had thought about it --- well of course I don't know when --- he's put all those things in my safety box over in

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PAULINE: Well undoubtedly that's where they ---

CORAL: Over at the bank here. And I let him; he does my banking and things for me.

PAULINE: What did Waverly look like?

CORAL: Well it was just a store and a post office, and very clean and nice. And there was always a great joke about Lydia and whatever his name --- David.

PAULINE: David.

CORAL: Because David finally, after he'd made some money he wanted to buy some special horses. And he went back east and bought horses, Percheron and another breed, and brought them out there. And the --- there was, as I said, there were a lot of unmarried men over there. They used to congregate and play cards at our house after we were married, you know. And I think they are all gone. Fred Peters was one, he lived in Burns. And my son met him and his wife, and he was --- but --- And then the Bennett's lived right next door to us. And Arthur Bennett --- and he was a bachelor when we went in there. And he was really our first guest for lunch, for dinner. He came on a Sunday with a clean --- he freighted from Ontario and Vale with the horses, you know. And he came over with a clean pair of overalls one Sunday to spend the day with us. And I had my table all set, and of course I was just a bride, and I had a white tablecloth and a doily on, you know. He upset his coffee on one end of my table, to the other, and he was so --- oh he was so embarrassed. And he said, "Well Mrs. Harris," he said, "you know a fellow like me shouldn't eat out, ever eat out of anything but a nose bag." (Laughter) So, and then he married. Then some other people moved in, their names were Cheek. And they moved in on the knoll, right across from where we lived. And he was quite an old sport, that old man was. He used his spyglasses on me when I put on jeans, and I never, when I never ... because we burned sagebrush and cleaned our place up.

And so Mr. Cheek moved in, and they brought a, they came from Oklahoma, and they brought a girl with them. And she was much younger than Art, but they were married anyway. And then she had a baby, of course, and I was the ---

The doctor, you see, was at Burns, and there was one. Dr. Denman was at, Dr. Denman was at, you might mention his name. I don't know what his given name was.

PAULINE: I have the list of doctors, so I can get that.

CORAL: Do you? Well he was at the --- what was that little place where he was, he wasn't in Burns. I can't think where it was now, what they called it. Lawen.

PAULINE: Oh, yes.

CORAL: Uh huh. And so I should have been dwelling on this, if I had known just when you were coming, I could have.

PAULINE: Well I couldn't be more specific in my letter, because I didn't know for sure. And then I had planned on coming last week.

CORAL: Yes, well it's too bad you had to have the flu.

PAULINE: Well, I'm glad I got it out of the way now.

CORAL: Well yes, I should say. One of my friends with whom I eat usually ...

... (Pause in tape)

PAULINE: What did you think of Harney County when you first came?

CORAL: I just love it. And I have a picture of myself and my husband, and we were on horseback. And I think Dale was thinking he was taking the cream of the crop away. Because we rode horseback, and he cut juniper and fenced our, my property because his was fenced at that time. And it's real, fenced real well, all of it.

PAULINE: Well if you fenced it with juniper, why it would ---

CORAL: It's forever then, that's what they say. Where was your home?

PAULINE: Well I was born in Oklahoma, but I came to Harney County when I was six months old.

CORAL: Did you?

PAULINE: And my dad was born at Lawen.

CORAL: Oh, is that so.

PAULINE: You may know the name, and you might not. He was Ausmus, A U S M U S.

CORAL: Ausmus, no.

PAULINE: And they, of course they lived at Lawen, and went to school at Crane.

CORAL: Yes.

PAULINE: So you would have been further on.

CORAL: We used --- well we used to, they didn't serve lunches did they, they didn't have any restaurant or anything?

PAULINE: No, no.

CORAL: There was always a place when we'd drive to Burns, which was 50 miles from our place, you know. And then we'd always make it to Lawen for our lunch. And on Monday they had beans.

PAULINE: Beans on Monday.

CORAL: Just like I said to him one time, I was called to take care of one of the girls, one of the little girl in the family, that there was 13, 14 children. And I delivered the 14th one, and then they never had anymore, they were old enough I guess to quit. But anyway, when I came home my husband said, "Well what did you have to eat?" And we were full of beans, and I never did care very much for starches, you know, beans especially. And I said, "Well, in honor of my being there, they cooked two kinds of beans." (Laughter)

PAULINE: Well, you know, seriously this was the main staple of the diet. My dad tells about a family he knew there in the Lawen area that they had every day, every meal was beans, and cream, and prunes. And they had beans with cream and prunes, and that's what they had every day. And the kids loved them; I mean the whole family just was ---

CORAL: We never used cream, but we used ---

PAULINE: I can't imagine cream on ---

CORAL: --- everybody in there bought cases of canned tomatoes, and --- because they're such a little fruit, you know. And so we always had canned tomatoes. And I can't, I eat canned tomatoes at noon, just heat them and eat them. They're very good, they're very good antacid, you know. And I had those sometimes. Yesterday I had some in my refrigerator, a can that I had opened and put in a little fruit jar, you know. And I had that, and that was all I really wanted, you know. And because we have our dinner early, and --- That isn't twelve, is it? (Clock chimes)

PAULINE: Uh huh, it's twelve.

CORAL: Well we'll have to go down and see whether they're ---

PAULINE: But before I turn the tape recorder off, when did you leave, what year did you leave Harney County?

CORAL: In 1939.

PAULINE: 1939.

CORAL: We came over to Ashland.

... (Pause in tape)

CORAL: ... husband would bake wonderful biscuits. But, and he'd bake biscuits. But I learned to bake bread. And Mrs. Mahon gave me a bread mixer, because you know I'm pretty short. And she thought I was pretty young too, to do it. But she'd bake wonderful bread. And so she gave me this bread mixer, and I learned to bake very good bread, and loved to do it.

PAULINE: What was a bread mixer like?

CORAL: Well it was just a great big bucket like thing, tin bucket like thing with an arm in it, a metal arm in it, you know. And it would mix the bread. And I've seen them advertised recently.

CAROL: Like an ice cream freezer type of thing?

CORAL: Yes, but it was open, you know, though. And ---

PAULINE: And of course you had a wood cook stove?

CORAL: Oh yes, with sagebrush. Oh, I must tell you that incident, I guess. But it has to do with having the hospital over. This one man was to come and help my husband, and he went over to get him. They were going to Mr. Mahons to do some work, leaving me alone for the first time with my daughter, you know, way out there with the coyotes howling, and so forth. And I was, it was in November, and so my husband had cut up a lot of stove wood, you know, sagebrush stove wood. We had very tall sagebrush on the -- - that's a sign of good land, you know. And he had cut up lots of wood for me. And so, but you know during the day it looked snowy, and I thought well, he'd thrown the tops to one side, you know, and they are very inflammable, but I didn't know it, I didn't think about it. But I filled my living room full of, just filled the room full. And I had a wood heater in there too. And I worked all day carrying those in, because I thought that would save me wood, you know, and I wouldn't need to burn my stove wood, stick wood in the heater.

Well along in the, late at night after --- I thought the man wasn't coming at all, but he did, he came and his name was Kenny, Wood Kenny. And he came and said, "My god girl, what are you trying to do, why you'll set this house on fire." And he began throwing that, the sagebrush out into the yard, you know. And he says, "Why that's not safe, safe at all." Well I just felt real dumb, because I had spent my whole day bringing that in there. Because he said I might have set the house on fire.

Well then he stayed and did my kitchen over, because I had taken care of him one time. ... went over and got him, when he was to come and help us. And he had gotten a ... between his fingers like this, and it was infected. And because the --- so that was in August, before this November. And so of course we didn't have any doctors any closer than Burns. And so, and we just had the one room.

But we put up a, my husband put up a tent and we slept out in the tent, and put Wood to bed in the house because his temperature was 104 when I took it. And so I finally, I said to my husband, I said, "I don't feel like taking the responsibility for this without contacting the doctor, anyway." So I rode horseback over to the Hatts, and that was over the hill there, you know. You see there's, there were hills between, there was just one road over there, and it was over the hills. And we lived on one side, and the Hatts lived on the other. Did you ever hear of the Hatts? They lived at ---

PAULINE: No, that name doesn't sound real --- I haven't heard that ---

CORAL: They were brothers. And so I went over there to phone. They had a phone, and I went over there to phone and tell the doctor. And he said, I said, "I want to tell you about Wood Kenny, he is sick." And he said, "Well where have you got him? Where is he?" I said, "I want to bring him, I thought we'd bring him in to you, to your house." He took care of patients sometimes at Harriman. And, because there was a hotel there. And he said, "God no girl, don't bring that fella in here," he said, "you can take better care of him than I can." And I said, "Well I think he's going to have to have an abscess lanced on his elbow." He said, "Go ahead, you got a scalpel, go ahead and do it." And so I said, "Will you give me privilege to do it, do you?" And he said, "Yes." And he was there several weeks, in our house, you know. And we slept outdoors, and of course I had to cook on the stove in the house, but we slept outdoors because it was warm weather, you see. And I didn't, I had to take care of him in there, as well as to cook outside, you know. And we did cook outside some, when we could, you know.

But he got well, and he rebuilt my house then. And he put a living room on for me, and fixed it so that I had a real house over there, about as nice a house as anybody in the valley.

PAULINE: How big did you say it was before he ---?

CORAL: Oh, 12 x 14.

PAULINE: 12 x 14.

... (Pause in tape)

SIDE B

PAULINE: Did you have cattle on your place then, or did you just

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CORAL: We had some cattle. But we put in a crop, but it burned out. The rabbits took it too.

PAULINE: Oh for heavens --- yes, I've heard about the rabbits, that they were really bad.

CORAL: Yes.

PAULINE: What kind of a crop did you put in, wheat or rye?

CORAL: Rye.

PAULINE: Rye.

CORAL: That was the one that they usually, most everybody put in around there.

... (Pause in tape)

CORAL: ... doctor. I had a patient of Dr. Denman's who had a baby during the flu epidemic. And his wife --- came over for me, his wife had pneumonia, as well as the baby ... We had to go though, seven miles, we had to go to ... to phone him. And he had, he was quite a horse doctor. And had horses. He thought he had misinterpreted the message, you know, because the connection was so poor. But he thought it was a ... because of the horse, you know, that he had taken care of. So he didn't come for several days. But by the time he came, why the patient was better.

PAULINE: Well, that's usually the case, isn't it? Better or worse.

CORAL: I finally wound up taking the baby home in a cardboard box over to our house,

and took care of her then for quite awhile. And we offered to, we wanted to adopt her, they had other children. And she was the cutest thing; her name was Custus (sp.?). I don't know how they --- I've thought about it since. I wondered how they ever happened to name her Custus.

PAULINE: Well so many people have told me about the flu epidemic, and how terrible it was, and so many people died. And so I imagine you got quite a bit of nursing duty then.

CORAL: Yes, I did. And --- but, and then of course there was, as I told you there was Art Bennett, you know. And I had to call the doctor to come and take care of her, because finally, because she couldn't have the baby. It was an instrument baby. We got her through. And then the doctor never saw the baby until she was, took her into Burns the next summer, and she was six months old.

PAULINE: Now we take, a baby is born and we go back every couple of weeks and have them checked. And every time they twitch a toenail why you're ---

CORAL: Sure, that's right. I had the visiting nurse work for the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company here too, which was very interesting. I liked that. It was more social services, you know. PAULINE: You visit people that are home bound.

CORAL: And call me, you know. I worked for one --- as it happened one of the doctors -- - well it wasn't here, it was in Medford. But I had been a visiting nurse for --- because some girls from ---

CAROL: Medford.

CORAL: No, from Burns.

CAROL: Oh, from Burns.

CORAL: Their friends from Medford. Carol ---

PAULINE: I'm Pauline.

CORAL: Pauline, and Carol.

WOMAN: How do you do, pleased to meet you.

CORAL: We're talking about old times over there in Burns.

WOMAN: Uh huh.

... (Unrelated conversations)

CORAL: Because my son, you know, had the three girls. And my daughter had the two boys. And I had the girl and the boy. I told him he'd better be a good boy, I waited seven years for him, and I did. I had Helen, and of course Helen remembers a little bit about Harney County, you know, because she has been back there too, you know.

PAULINE: Well she would have been up in her teens when you left.

CORAL: Oh no, no, no. We came to Medford earlier than that.

PAULINE: Oh, I see.

CORAL: No, no, she wasn't. She was just four years old when we came to Medford.

PAULINE: Oh, I see.

CORAL: Or to Ashland I mean. She came over --- there was a joke that I always have to tell, because it was real funny. We were in that covered wagon, you know, we rode over in that covered wagon. And so she was sitting there with us on the seat part of the time, and part of the time she had to sit back in the wagon, because it was a long trip, you know. We stopped at Crater Lake though, and that made a real slow journey. But, you know --- And camped along different, nice places, and one time we camped over close to Fort Klamath, and some Indians brought her some milk. And that was the only cow's milk she had on the way over, you know. But anyway, and I hesitated to give it to her. But I decided well, it wouldn't kill her anyway, so I got it.

Well anyway she was looking along like this, you know, and just ... we called him Wood, his name was Elwood. But he was doing, driving the team that time. And my husband and I walked a good part of the time, you know. I had high boots, and I walked

the soles off of them, the soles and heels off of them coming over to Ashland. And, because I liked to walk better than I did to ride in the wagon. And the load was heavy.

... (Unrelated conversations)

(As the interview continued, Mrs. Harris explained that they had some cattle at their homestead near Waverly, but that they placed their biggest hopes on the rye crop. The drought and rabbits took the crop. Mrs. Harris did quite a lot of nursing, home nursing care, while she lived in Harney County. She sometimes worked with, or had the advice of Dr. Denman who lived at Harriman, about seven or eight miles away.

Her daughter went to college at Monmouth.

Mrs. Harris was 81 years old at the time of the interview.

She really loved living on the ranch, loved it out there.)

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