

HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #392 - Side A

Subject: Lafe Comegys

Date: June 22, 1994

Place: Clackamas, Oregon

Interviewer: Edward Gray

EDWARD GRAY: This is Edward Gray with Lafe Comegys in Clackamas, Oregon, June 22nd, 1994. Also with his son Don Comegys --- I'm not saying that right, and Ann, Lafe's wife. All right, get this show on the road. You know that --- have you read any of this Bill Brown book, Lafe?

LAFE COMEGYS: Well not very much. I can't hardly read anymore. My eyesight don't stay lined up with my eyes all the time or something. Them letters move around.

EDWARD: Yeah.

LAFE: I've had, since I've had this last spell it hit me in that ---

EDWARD: I talked to Jim McDade down there in Fields, Oregon, Calderwood Ranch, Jim McDade.

LAFE: Jim McDade ---

EDWARD: Yeah. He said ---

LAFE: Who was his father?

EDWARD: Calderwood.

LAFE: Calderwood.

EDWARD: They were down south of you guys, way down by Fields.

LAFE: Yeah, yeah.

EDWARD: So I called him up, and I'm going to be over there in two weeks, and he goes, I have my good days, I have my half days, and I have my bad days. (Laughter) Just about croaked. Anyway, your father was who, Lafe?

LAFE: My father was Fay Comegys.

EDWARD: Fay Comegys. Comegys.

LAFE: Comegys, yeah.

EDWARD: Comegys. I had trouble with this last time. And he was born 1877?

LAFE: Yeah.

EDWARD: Where was he born?

LAFE: In Lake County, just south of Lakeview a little ways there. There is a place out, well --- out close to Paisley.

EDWARD: Paisley, oh that's right, okay. And his father was, your grandfather was?

LAFE: Nimrod.

EDWARD: Nimrod, Nimrod Comegys.

LAFE: Uh huh.

EDWARD: And then Fay had a brother named Sidney?

LAFE: Yeah.

EDWARD: And Sidney was born in 1879, so he was older than Fay, is that right?

LAFE: Yeah, right.

EDWARD: Okay. I don't know when Sidney passed away. I have 1955, do you have any idea? Does that sound right?

LAFE: '55?

EDWARD: Yeah.

ANN COMEGYS: That sounds like ---

LAFE: I couldn't tell you for sure, but you're probably right there.

EDWARD: You think that's in there?

LAFE: It might be.

EDWARD: I'll look. Okay. Why --- how did your father, Fay Comegys, end up in Harney County?

LAFE: How old was he?

EDWARD: Why did he go there?

LAFE: Oh. Well I guess they all moved out in that area to get out of the rain. None of them liked the rain down there on the Oregon side, Oregon coast side. So they went out into Lake County.

EDWARD: Okay.

LAFE: And then from there they moved on over to Burns, Oregon there.

EDWARD: Did they have any specific reason that you recall, Lafe, why they moved to around Burns?

LAFE: Why they moved there? Oh, I don't know, more open spaces, more sunshine. They just liked that kind of weather a whole lot better.

EDWARD: Okay. Do you know when --- first of all, do you know when Fay moved to Harney County? Have any idea what year, approximate?

LAFE: I --- oh that was in that book. I can't tell you offhand.

ANN: Who did you say?

EDWARD: Fay, why did ---

ANN: Oh, Fay.

EDWARD: When did he move to that country?

LAFE: He was just a small boy when they moved up in that part of the country.

EDWARD: Oh, did he move there with his father?

LAFE: Yeah.

EDWARD: Oh I --- Nimrod.

LAFE: Uh huh, the whole family moved over in that area.

EDWARD: I see, oh, okay.

ANN: Wasn't Nimrod, he was a carpenter and did a lot of carpentering.

LAFE: Yeah, Nimrod was a carpenter, yeah.

ANN: In fact he built the hotel in Burns.

LAFE: No, he didn't build that hotel, I don't think. He carpenterd for Pete French out there at the P Ranch, build barns and ---

EDWARD: Nimrod did?

LAFE: Yeah.

ANN: Well wasn't he supposed to have built the round barn?

LA FE: I don't know, I couldn't tell you. He probably did.

ANN: Well I ---

LA FE: He done that work for Pete French.

ANN: His daughter said he did, I mean his granddaughter.

EDWARD: So Nimrod Comegys, other than liking the weather better let's say in Harney County, he was also a carpenter and he could probably work for Pete French forever.

LA FE: Yeah.

EDWARD: Do you know for a fact he actually did carpentry for Pete French?

LA FE: Yeah. They took up a homestead there see, and they sold that to Pete French.

ANN: Well he was supposed to have built the round house. And Pete French's, the white house, didn't he build the white house, and the bunkhouse?

LA FE: I don't know, but I imagine he did, because he went out there to work.

ANN: Well that's what I've been told.

LA FE: And that's the only place to get work, was for people like Pete French.

EDWARD: Yeah. Now did Sidney --- first, did Nimrod have cattle?

LA FE: Any of them have cattle? Oh, just a few head, just a small herd.

EDWARD: Just a few.

LA FE: Not very many.

EDWARD: Okay.

LAFE: Sidney he was more popular, he run a saloon there in Diamond for years and years. That's where he got stabbed.

ANN: We did have a picture of him in the saloon, Sid.

EDWARD: Oh there is?

ANN: You just showed it to me a while ago.

LAFE: Yeah.

EDWARD: Oh a picture of Sidney in a saloon.

ANN: In the saloon in Narrows.

EDWARD: Oh.

LAFE: He lived at the Narrows, he lived at Diamond, and he lived all around there.

ANN: Or was this in Diamond?

LAFE: I can't tell you.

ANN: I don't know, it was either in Diamond or --- he had a saloon in both places.

EDWARD: Yeah, I think he did.

ANN: One in Narrows and one ---

LAFE: No, he never had a saloon at the Narrows. George Cawlfieid had a saloon at the Narrows.

ANN: Oh, it was George Cawlfieid.

LAFE: Charlie Haines had a saloon there when ---

ANN: Well you had that picture; you just showed it to me a while ago.

LAFE: Yeah, that was Sid's.

ANN: What did you do with it?

LAFE: I don't know.

EDWARD: Was it an old picture, Ann?

ANN: Oh it was an old picture.

EDWARD: Oh, boy! There we go, we'll find that.

ANN: It was in the bar.

EDWARD: We'll find that somewhere.

ANN: Well what did you do with those things you had in that --- Here? I just looked at it a little while ago, just before you folks came.

EDWARD: Okay, who did Fay marry, Lafe?

LAFE: He married Ollie McKenzie, was her name.

ANN: Ollie McKenzie.

EDWARD: Ollie McKenzie.

LAFE: Right.

EDWARD: Who did, who did Ollie McKenzie Comegys --- Who did Sidney marry?

LAFE: He married Annie Osborn.

EDWARD: Okay. Annie. Did they call her Annie or Anna?

ANN: Anna.

EDWARD: Anna.

ANN: They called her Anna.

LAFE: Yeah, she was a member of the Osborn family that lived around the Narrows. She was the only girl in the family. The rest of them were all boys. (Laughter)

EDWARD: That seemed to happen a lot. Okay, we'll get down to the old nitty gritty. Sidney Comegys lived on the south side of Malheur Lake for a while.

LAFE: Yeah.

EDWARD: I wished I had all that stuff, it's clear out there, three blocks away. What did Sidney Comegys; let's start out with the hardest ones. What did Sidney Comegys say about Pete French that you recall, Lafe?

LAFE: Recall about which?

EDWARD: What did Sidney say about Pete French?

LAFE: Well they was always friendly with Pete French, the Comegys family.

EDWARD: The Comegys.

LAFE: They were all friendly with Pete French. Yeah, they upheld him on his --- of course a lot of people didn't like Pete French because Pete French grabbed up that land there, see. That's what he was after, was land, so he could run more cattle. That's what he came up to that country for.

EDWARD: Did Sidney ever tell you about being shot at?

LAFE: Yeah.

EDWARD: What did he --- what do you remember about that?

LAFE: Well I was pretty small then, but I can remember that he was shot. And he went to put this guy out of the saloon, and this fellow was drunk, and he had his knife, a concealed one, and he stabbed my uncle in the ribs here, and it landed on top of a rib.



If it had went between the ribs it would have cut him, you know, bled to death. But he was lucky that way that it didn't go between the ribs.

EDWARD: By the way, where did Sidney die, in Burns?

LAFE: No, he died in California.

EDWARD: Oh, no wonder I can't find that. Oh.

LAFE: He died down there in 1955.

EDWARD: In California?

LAFE: Yeah.

EDWARD: Okay, that solves that problem.

LAFE: That's where we went.

ANN: Yeah, we went to the funeral.

LAFE: Sid's funeral. We was living in Burns at that time, and we got word that we had died, so we went down there.

EDWARD: Did he have any children?

LAFE: Have what?

EDWARD: Did he have any children?

LAFE: Yeah, he had one daughter; she's still alive as far as I know.

ANN: Georgia.

LAFE: But she is not in very good shape.

EDWARD: Oh.

LAFE: She lives in California.

ANN: She will be glad to tell you anything you want about him. All you have to do is write to her.

EDWARD: Would you give me her address, Ann?

ANN: Yeah.

EDWARD: Would you write it down someplace?

ANN: Well I'll find it for you.

EDWARD: Okay. Address of Georgia.

DON COMEGYS: Here it is, here is something you wanted to see.

LA FE: That's the saloon.

ANN: Yeah, but that's not ---

... (Pause in tape)

EDWARD: Sidney's wife was Annie, Anna.

LA FE: Yeah. Anna.

EDWARD: Did, was Sidney in, like Diamond, and maybe Anna staying on a ranch by Malheur Lake, do you think?

LA FE: No, that ranch by Malheur Lake they had before that time that he was in Diamond. That was an earlier part of his lifetime.

EDWARD: That was the time that he knew Pete French, 1890's?

LA FE: Yeah.

ANN: Well he had a store in Diamond.

EDWARD: That was later, that was like 1910's.

ANN: Oh, was that much later.

EDWARD: Yeah. So in the 1890's --- can't figure this out. Because Sidney was born in 1879, 1890 he would have been 11 years old.

ANN: What was he supposed to have done then at 11?

EDWARD: Because this map, this map shows an Anna Comegys living

here in 1896.

ANN: Well now he had a sister by the name of Anna too, the Comegys did.

EDWARD: Oh, maybe that's who that is.

ANN: That's what it would be.

EDWARD: So there was Fay, Sidney ---

ANN: Anna.

EDWARD: --- Anna. Was Anna older?

LAFE: Yeah.

ANN: Well she was old, yeah.

LAFE: Yeah, she was one of the older ones. Her oldest sister burned up in the Silver Lake fire.

EDWARD: Right.

LAFE: And Anna was the next one on her list.

EDWARD: That's probably who that is.

ANN: That's probably who that Anna is.

EDWARD: If it's not Sidney's wife.

ANN: Uh huh.

EDWARD: Oh.

ANN: Yes, they've gotten that mixed up in that other book too.

EDWARD: Okay.

ANN: And got her as the sister of Sid instead of the wife.

EDWARD: Okay.

ANN: And Georgia got pretty huffy about that, making that big mistake in the book.

EDWARD: So this Anna Comegys is a sister of Sidney and Fay in this map. That's who that's got to be.

LAFE: Yeah.

ANN: Yeah, that's who that would have to ---

EDWARD: The ages don't match up.

ANN: Because the ages would be ---

EDWARD: Okay, okay, we're done with that then. Whew. You talked to your Uncle Sidney quite often?

LAFE: Did I talk to him?

EDWARD: Yeah.

LAFE: Oh yeah.

EDWARD: Did you talk to him quite often about ---

LAFE: Yeah, he was one of my favorite uncles, you know. He had an automobile, and that was quite a deal in those days, you know, an old 19--- Cadillac, 1909, 1910 Cadillac.

EDWARD: But did he ever talk to you about Ed Oliver?

LAFE: Ed Oliver? I can't recall that he did. He probably did, but I ---

ANN: Who is Oliver?

LAFE: That's the guy that shot Pete French.

DON: Shot Pete.

ANN: Oh.

EDWARD: Did Sidney ever work for Pete French? No, he wouldn't have.

LAFE: No, I don't think he did.

EDWARD: No, no. He couldn't have, because French was killed on December 26th, 1897. And Sidney --- well he could have, Sidney would have been about 20.

LA FE: Yeah.

EDWARD: Could have.

LA FE: It's possible he did, I couldn't ---

EDWARD: Okay.

ANN: Everybody did.

EDWARD: The reason I'm asking about Sidney, so I can get him out of my mind, he's a nice guy, but get him out of my mind once.

LA FE: Yeah.

EDWARD: He was at the trial, see.

LA FE: Yeah.

EDWARD: He was at the ---

ANN: Sid was?

EDWARD: Yeah.

ANN: Oh.

EDWARD: And he testified on behalf of Ed Oliver.

LA FE: Oh, he did?

EDWARD: Yes. And I left the trial things out there in the pickup.

LA FE: I never heard that before.

EDWARD: Yeah.

LA FE: But that's possible I guess.

EDWARD: Now what he said I can't remember off the top of my head.

LAFE: My dad testified for Pete French, but he testified as a friend, a good man.

EDWARD: Okay.

LAFE: I didn't know that Sid testified against him.

EDWARD: I think your father did too.

LAFE: (Laughter)

ANN: Well they, the men that worked for him all thought he was okay, as far as I can --- hearing what they talked about. They always said that he was --- because I thought that he wouldn't be very well liked the way he was trying to get their property.

EDWARD: Right.

ANN: But he'd pay them for their land. He'd get them to come in and take up 160 acres.

EDWARD: Right, just like ...

ANN: Then he'd buy it, either buy it from them or --- he didn't take it away from them.

EDWARD: Well I'm not going to write about the character of Pete French, I just want to know facts about the death part of it.

LAFE: Yeah.

EDWARD: Okay, did Fay, your dad, did he ever sit down with you and talk to you about those days of Pete French, any of that kind ---

LAFE: I can't recall that he ever did. He might have, it is possible he did, but I can't --- It is not sharp in my mind that he did. But like I say it is possible that he did.

EDWARD: Do you have any theories on why Pete French was killed?

LAFE: Well people there didn't like him, those old homesteaders around there, because he was getting a hold of their land and using it for his purpose. Well that was the reason that Pete French went up there was to get land to run cattle, and that's the reason he got a hold of that P Ranch because it was a natural there, river run right through the middle of it. And a lot of people didn't like him, but there was a lot of people that did like him.

EDWARD: Do you know of anybody that you recall through talking to your dad, Fay, or your Uncle Sidney, or anybody else that ever said that they thought Pete French deserved to be killed, murdered?

LAFE: Oh there was a lot of them figured that, that he should have been killed, and he finally was, you know. That was the general opinion of the ones that didn't like Pete French, naturally, all talk against him. But he was good to the people out there that worked for him, and everything. And to the neighbors ---

ANN: The kids all liked him because he carried candy. And every place he went he gave them candy.

EDWARD: That Bill Brown did that too.

ANN: Uh huh. And this is one of the things that --- he'd go to dances and he'd see that they all had something, you know. So he was well liked with kids.

LA FE: And people that were hard up and didn't have anything to eat, food and stuff ---

ANN: And he gave people food that didn't have food. He gave them, told them to go ahead and kill a deer, or I mean a steer or something if they were without food. So to me, from what I could gather about him, he seemed to me like he was pretty well liked.

EDWARD: Pretty well liked.

ANN: And Lafe's mother said that she thought he was a great guy.

EDWARD: And she had probably seen him quite often.

ANN: And Lafe's father worked --- in fact they got married the next day afterwards, wasn't it?

LA FE: Yeah, they ...

ANN: The day before, or something. Anyhow, it was around Christmas time.

LA FE: The day afterwards.

EDWARD: Okay, Pete French was killed December 27th (26th), the day after Christmas, about 2 o'clock in the afternoon.

LA FE: Yeah.

ANN: Uh huh.

EDWARD: So your father, Fay Comegys, got married December 28th, 1897?

ANN: Was it after, the day after?

LA FE: The day afterwards. Well Christmas came on a Sunday that year, that's the reason Pete French was out there herding his cattle that day.



EDWARD: God, I think you're right.

LA FE: His shop foreman, or the buckaroo foreman wasn't able to go out ...

EDWARD: Chico.

LA FE: Chino Berdugo.

EDWARD: And he ended up going out?

LA FE: Yeah.

EDWARD: And then you're saying that your daddy, Fay Comegys, was married December 26th?

LA FE: No, well I guess that could be possible too.

EDWARD: Well that's right.

LA FE: Christmas came on the 25th, came on Sunday.

ANN: 25th.

EDWARD: On a Sunday.

LA FE: They didn't go out to the cattle until the day afterwards.

EDWARD: Right.

LA FE: And that's when Pete French took it over, that day.

EDWARD: And your father got married the same day?

LA FE: Huh?

EDWARD: Your father got married?

LA FE: Yeah, the day after Pete French was killed.

EDWARD: The day after.

ANN: The day after Christmas.

EDWARD: December 27th.

LA FE: The day after.

ANN: And Charlie got married at the same time, didn't they.

LAFE: I don't know whether it was the 16th, or I mean the 26th, or 27th, but it was one or the other.

EDWARD: One of those days?

LAFE: Yeah. (Laughter) Just have to throw them both in.

EDWARD: Hey honey, I got married the same day Pete French was killed.

LAFE: Yeah.

EDWARD: That just sounds ---

ANN: Well it wasn't the same day.

EDWARD: It was the day after.

LAFE: The day afterwards, yeah.

EDWARD: December 27th.

ANN: But Fay was one of the witnesses.

EDWARD: Right.

LAFE: At the trial, yeah.

EDWARD: Did your father ever talk about that, that trial of Pete French's death?

LAFE: Yeah, he talked about it.

EDWARD: What did he say?

LAFE: Well naturally he was working for French, because he always, their family always got help from Pete whenever they needed it. He always had a good word for Pete French. And he did at the trial, but they didn't all take it that way.

EDWARD: Did your father feel like the trial was a farce, or was

it; did he think it was fair or anything like that?

LAFE: No, they thought it was a fair trial. Of course Alvie Springer and some of those guys down there were homesteading didn't ever think it was a fair trial. And they didn't get their way of it. (Laughter)

EDWARD: What about Alvie Springer, tell me something about Alvie Springer, will you, Lafe?

LAFE: Something about him?

EDWARD: Tell me if he is a butt head, say he is a butt head. I mean tell me something about him. What about Alvie Springer?

LAFE: Well as far as I can remember why he was all for himself, that was for sure. And he owned this land; this homestead there by the warm springs there at the Narrows. And of course he didn't want to give it up because it was a good piece of ground, and there was a lot of range there. There was hay and, I mean grass a growing in those meadows there, and they cut for hay for their cattle. And they had a good deal a going there, that was all in their favor. That's the reason they didn't want to give it up.

EDWARD: You know in the long run they all lost?

LAFE: Huh?

EDWARD: You know in the long run they all lost.

LAFE: Yeah, that's the truth.

EDWARD: They were all banging heads, and then the government comes along and says you're finished! Were the Springer's noted as pretty tough people? Tough in terms of not taking any ---

LAFE: No, I don't think they were very tough. They were mostly blow a ways, or big talk. And Ed Springer, he was the boy, and he was totally worthless. He'd get on a drunk and stay drunk for a month. Write out a lot of checks and they'd go out and pay off all of these checks and get him back in position again. But he'd do the same thing over year after year.

EDWARD: What happened to Eddie Springer?

LAFE: Huh?

EDWARD: What happened to Eddie Springer?

LAFE: What happened to him? Well he finally died sometime along there.

EDWARD: You know he disappeared?

LAFE: Huh? You know how he disappeared?

EDWARD: He disappeared. (Laughter)

LAFE: I was working in Bend at the time that he got on a drunk and took off. And he come to Bend and bought a new car from a Buick dealer there, and he took it over into Idaho, and I think he abandoned it someplace. But I was working in the shop there and the foreman come over and wanted me to go out with this salesman to get that car. So we went down to Ontario, and Boise, and around, and we finally found Ed. He was in jail in Boise. (Laughter)

EDWARD: Yeah, that's the first place you should have went.

LAFE: So we started to go back to Bend, Oregon, well we went down to Ontario and back up the Snake River there to get him back to

Ontario to where we could stand trial for this, stealing this car, and writing out a bogus check.

EDWARD: Yeah.

LAFE: See he wrote out checks pretty regular when he was drunk. That happened to be one of the deals that they had to go pick him up.

EDWARD: I think there were a lot of them like that.

LAFE: But Mrs. Springer, she blamed my dad for getting him drunk. And he started out on his drunk all by himself. He went on a drunk there just regularly.

EDWARD: Sure, all the time.

LAFE: He didn't need anybody to help him.

EDWARD: That's what his own daughter-in-law said. He was a drunk. That's Clara Springer over in Ontario. She's had it with him.

LAFE: So Springer's, the Springer's and my dad they didn't agree on a lot of these things, you know. They were on different sides of the road.

EDWARD: And boy they lived close too. Did you ever talk to Alvie Springer yourself?

LAFE: What?

EDWARD: Did you ever talk to Alvie Springer yourself?

LAFE: Oh yes, when I was a kid I did. I can't remember but, distinctly, but I know that I did, because I can remember him. He was quite a good-sized man, pretty rough looking character.

EDWARD: Yeah. Did the Springer's ever say anything to you about the court battle they had with Pete French?

LAFE: No, no, I never heard any of that from the Springer family.

EDWARD: Did the Springer's ever say anything to you about the death of Pete French?

LAFE: No.

EDWARD: Supposedly Alvie Springer was on a hill with Reineman and Ed Oliver, just before Ed Oliver went down and shot Pete French.

LAFE: Yeah.

EDWARD: Alvie told, Ed Oliver says in these words, "Ed, don't go down there through the gate, go around."

LAFE: Uh huh.

EDWARD: Ed Oliver didn't go around, he went towards the gate.

LAFE: Yeah, that's where he went after Pete French, right at the gate there in the Sagebrush Field where the cattle were ... up, that they were taking up to the P Ranch.

EDWARD: Does that story, does that --- have you heard that before, Lafe?

LAFE: Oh yeah, yeah.

EDWARD: Where Alvie Springer, Reineman, and Ed Oliver were up on a hill looking at French?

LAFE: No, I never heard that directly from any of them. But they probably were, there is no doubt about it.

EDWARD: Was Ed Oliver and Alvie Springer friends, do you know?

LAFE: I couldn't tell you to that.

EDWARD: These are tough questions, I know.

LAFE: He might have been friendly with them, but that's hard to say.

EDWARD: You're doing fine, Lafe, we're just getting anything we can, because they're all dead.

LAFE: Yeah, right.

EDWARD: Unfortunately.

LAFE: It's hard to go back over this kind of ...

EDWARD: Oh sure it is.

LAFE: And piece together the things you get about it.

EDWARD: Wilbur Springer died just two years ago, and he knew everything. And his wife wrote all this down in a notebook about Pete French and all of that stuff. And she gave it to her kids, and her kids can't find it.

LAFE: Oh, is that right?

EDWARD: Oh!!

LAFE: Well Wilbur, he wasn't a very popular young boy, I remember. (Laughter)

EDWARD: Ain't this fun? Now you can say anything you want to, he is dead too.

LAFE: Yeah, I know. He was a big overgrown kid.

EDWARD: Were the Springer's big, physically?

LAFE: Yeah, yeah.

EDWARD: Yeah, that's what I thought. Because Ed Springer looked pretty good-sized, you know.

LA FE: Yeah.

EDWARD: Big.

LA FE: Yeah. Well Alvie, he was a big man.

EDWARD: Did Wilbur pick on you, Lafe? (Laughter) I bet you he did. Now is your chance to get even. Just before I forget, Burt French, ever hear anything about Burt French, Pete French's brother?

LA FE: I've heard about him, yeah. He worked for Pete French out there when he was a young fellow.

EDWARD: You know what happened to him?

LA FE: I don't know, I don't have the least idea. You never run him down either? You have?

EDWARD: In 1900, he was on the census working over by the White-horse Ranch.

LA FE: Oh.

EDWARD: And it has been told from Shull, Marjorie Shull told me on the phone --- "Didn't he die out there in the desert by Andrews?" (Laughter) Here we go. "Didn't he die out there in the ---" the old Turner place. And then Jim McDade told me, well I know Burtrum French was a drunk, you know, he was another Eddie Springer. (Laughter) And Jim McDade put it this way, "He died out in the desert because he didn't know his refreshments," you know.

LA FE: I never heard that, but it's probably true.

EDWARD: Me either. Could be. You know that Warren Curtis was



shot and killed too, don't you?

LAFE: He got shot and killed down there on the lake, by the Narrows. Yeah.

EDWARD: What do you know about that, just for fun?

LAFE: What do I know about it? Not very much. (Laughter)

EDWARD: It's true. His wife stole a horse, and George Miller came after him and shot him, and killed him. You think it's tough now, Don, you should have seen ---

LAFE: Yeah, that happened right down there on the lake, by the Narrows where he got killed.

DON: Well that was pretty serious. I mean that was ---

EDWARD: Yeah. And the Curtis' were told to move out. Guess what, my god they did, they moved to Vale. George Curtis, no he was gone then, he was gone, he already left. I'm just going to name some families and see if we can put some of this together. Billy Dunn, William J. Dunn.

LAFE: Yeah.

EDWARD: What about him?

LAFE: Well he was an old sheep --- not a sheep man, he was a stockman, cattle raiser. He had a big ranch down there right on the lake at the Narrows.

EDWARD: Tough guy?

LAFE: Tough? I never considered him tough. But he might have been in different ways. But as a kid just knowing him as a person why he seemed like a decent person.

EDWARD: Did you, did he ever mention anything to you about disliking, or liking Pete French?

LA FE: Liking or disliking?

EDWARD: Yeah.

LA FE: No, I didn't personally never know.

EDWARD: Did you ever meet Emanuel Clark?

LA FE: Emanuel Clark, yes, I remember him.

EDWARD: Good guy?

LA FE: Yeah, I considered him a good guy. He was the foreman of the Sod House Ranch for several years.

EDWARD: Right, exactly.

LA FE: Yeah, seemed like he was kind of a tall, overgrown height, guy. And I knew one of his family. He had two sons.

EDWARD: He did? Do you know where they are?

LA FE: They're dead, a long time ago.

EDWARD: God, dead.

DON: You're 20 years too late.

EDWARD: I know it, Don. I hate that word, dead.

DON: Yeah.

LA FE: Yeah, there was a young Springer there, I can remember him, and he was kind of a rounder seemed to me like. But old Alvie Springer, everybody liked him.

EDWARD: I guess he had quite a sense of humor.

LA FE: Yeah.

EDWARD: From what I hear. What about Marshall, does that ring a

bell?

LAFE: Which Marshall?

EDWARD: George.

LAFE: George Marshall? No, I don't recall him.

EDWARD: No. I'm going to finish these --- Tebo?

LAFE: Tebo, yeah I remember Tebo very plainly. He was an old Mexican, and chewed tobacco, and buckarood for Pete French.

EDWARD: Right.

LAFE: And he was on the ranch for years after Pete French was gone.

EDWARD: The P Ranch?

LAFE: Yeah. He rode range there, rode fences you know, and watched, that kind of work all the time.

ANN: Isn't he the one that used to crochet? Isn't he the one that used to crochet?

LAFE: No, no, that was a cook.

ANN: Oh, what was his name? I thought that was Tebo.

EDWARD: Mary. (Laughter)

ANN: No, he was a cook there, used to be.

EDWARD: Poor guy.

ANN: Crochet.

EDWARD: Nothing wrong with that.

LAFE: Yeah, he just cooked for the crew there at the ranch. And on his hours off, on his off time, him and Aunt Judy crocheted.

ANN: Yeah.

LA FE: They were quite crocheters.

EDWARD: Ida Oliver Petersen, no?

LA FE: No, can't catch that.

EDWARD: Simmons family.

LA FE: Who?

EDWARD: Simmons.

LA FE: Emma?

EDWARD: Simmons.

LA FE: Simmons.

EDWARD: Yeah. What do you know about them?

LA FE: Well George Simmons was a barber there in Burns. I can remember him.

EDWARD: I didn't know that.

LA FE: You didn't know he was a barber?

EDWARD: Huh uh.

LA FE: Yeah, there was a George Simmons was a barber.

EDWARD: What about the Simmons down there at Malheur Lake? Recall any of them?

LA FE: No, I can't.

EDWARD: Okay. Presley Smyth.

LA FE: Presley Smyth, yes I can remember him. He was George Smyth's brother that owned the Smyth Ranch there at Diamond.

EDWARD: Right. Did he ever talk to you about Pete French?

LA FE: No.

EDWARD: Okay. Did --- were you ever in this Anna Comegys' house?

LAFE: Anna Comegys' house?

EDWARD: Yeah.

LAFE: Yeah, lots of times.

EDWARD: It was right next to Alvie Springer's?

LAFE: No, I don't recall that.

EDWARD: Okay.

LAFE: That was the only place I can remember Alvie Springer was down at the ranch house, down there at the, by the lake.

EDWARD: Were you ever in that house, Alvie Springer's house?

LAFE: I can't recall of being in there. But I have probably been in it.

EDWARD: They're all gone, god dang it. Having troubles trying to match up photos with these old ranches because there ain't a blasted thing left. When they had that big flood, you know, '86?

DON: Yeah.

EDWARD: Right in there someplace I think. Oh, just wiped everything out, everything.

LAFE: Yeah, it is pretty hard for me to bring all that stuff back. It don't sharpen my memory too good. I ---

DON: You're doing pretty good.

EDWARD: You're doing all right. Don't worry about it. No, never, never, never worry. Ed Oliver, the guy that shot Pete French, what's your explanation, or what have you heard, put it all together, Lafe, and what the heck happened to him?

LAFE: Why he was brought up to be the one that killed Pete

French?

EDWARD: Yeah, we'll start out with that.

LAFE: Well I guess they figured he was a pretty good guy to put on the job.

ANN: Did they put him in jail?

LAFE: Did they put him in jail? Yeah, but they turned him loose.

ANN: Oh, they did?

LAFE: Oh yeah, they never convicted him.

EDWARD: Now you just said something that is real interesting, Lafe, and don't go hiding anything on me. I just put old-timer.

LAFE: Okay. (Laughter)

EDWARD: That's how I work that. If somebody says that I hated that son-of-a-bitch ---

LAFE: The way ---

EDWARD: --- I put old-timer. (Laughter) And believe me they did. Some of these guys would say Link Hutton; they should have shot his ass. I put old-timer.

LAFE: But everybody you talk to, you know, years back, they tell you how Pete French got shot. And Uncle Judd he said that this guy just walked up there, Pete French started to ride away from him, and this guy followed him up and shot him right in the back.

EDWARD: Now whose uncle?

LAFE: That was my uncle.

EDWARD: Judd.

LAFE: Judd Wise.

ANN: Judd Wise. You surely must have heard about him being around there.

EDWARD: I don't think so.

LAFE: He run the P Ranch after Pete French got shot there, at one time.

EDWARD: Really?

LAFE: Before the Swift ---

EDWARD: Wise, W I S E.

LAFE: Eastern Oregon Livestock Company took over the P Ranch.

EDWARD: Oh, that's right.

DON: That would be his mother's sister was married to him.

EDWARD: Yeah.

DON: Her twin sister, your mother's, Judy was married to Judd.

LAFE: Huh?

DON: Judy ----

LAFE: Yeah.

DON: --- was married to Judd.

ANN: Wise.

DON: Wise.

LAFE: Yeah.

DON: That's the one you're talking about.

LAFE: Mother's sister, yeah.

EDWARD: That's another ---

ANN: And Joey was her twin sister that lived in California.

EDWARD: Is any of these Wise still around? Wise?

ANN: No, he's, both of them are all gone.

EDWARD: Can't find any pictures of the Sod House Ranch either.

ANN: But he was quite a character around there. You speak to anybody that knew him, everybody knew him.

EDWARD: I think in that country everybody knows everybody.

ANN: Everybody knows everybody, yeah.

EDWARD: So you brought up an interesting topic just a while ago, Lafe, and that was --- from what you heard and remember back in the old days --- by the way, when in the heck were you born?

LAFF: Huh?

EDWARD: When were you born, 1904?

LAFF: 1904, right.

EDWARD: Yeah.

LAFF: Uh huh.

EDWARD: Where?

LAFF: Whereabouts? In Burns, Oregon.

ANN: Burns.

EDWARD: Oh, they took you to Burns? I mean --- your mother went to Burns and gave birth in Burns?

LAFF: Yeah.

EDWARD: That's, boy that's unusual in those days. They generally just ---

DON: Pop wherever they are.

EDWARD: Wherever, on a wagon, whatever.

LAFF: Yeah, that's quite awhile back, 1904, and this is '94. You



can see where I'm heading now, next birthday.

EDWARD: I don't want to live that long.

LAFE: In order to get that 90 post.

EDWARD: No way. I don't want to see what this world is going to look like in 2050; I want to be out of here.

LAFE: (Laughter)

EDWARD: Anyway.

ANN: I don't want to be here very much longer.

EDWARD: No. You mentioned, do you think that Ed Oliver was put up by somebody to kill Pete French?

LAFE: Yeah.

EDWARD: You think so?

LAFE: I think he was.

EDWARD: How do you know that, you heard this somewhere?

LAFE: Well it is just a general opinion of the people, of the way they thought about Pete wanting to get a hold of all this land from these --- see he had Springer, or not Ed Springer, Alvie Springer had a lawsuit with Pete French, you know.

EDWARD: Right.

LAFE: And he lost it, of course.

EDWARD: Right at that time.

LAFE: Yeah. And a lot of people were dissatisfied with that; with the way he got done with that. He got out of it with nothing, I guess, didn't he? Was he sentenced for anything? No.

EDWARD: Who, Ed Oliver?

LAFE: Yeah.

EDWARD: Yeah, he was charged with first-degree murder. I've got all that stuff out in the pickup. I would have brought my whole box in here, but I wasn't going to haul it three blocks, you know.

LAFE: He was charged with first-degree murder, but he wasn't convicted of it.

EDWARD: No. The jury, I have all the jury members and all that. Some of these people you probably know. The jury went out for deliberation, took them, I think it was four hours. Not guilty, self-defense.

LAFE: Uh huh, self-defense.

EDWARD: Now your father, remember now, your father and your Uncle Sidney spoke at that trial.

LAFE: Yeah, they was witness there, you know, for Pete French.

EDWARD: But I don't think they were witnesses for Pete French. I think they were witnesses for Ed Oliver.

LAFE: Ed Oliver.

EDWARD: I wished I had that with me. I'll send it back to you when I send these pictures back. You'll get a kick out of all that stuff.

LAFE: Uh huh.

EDWARD: There is not much, but ---

ANN: Wasn't your dad right there, he was there when this all took place wasn't he?

EDWARD: No.

LA FE: Huh?

ANN: Your dad was there and seen Oliver kill him, didn't he?

LA FE: No, I don't think so.

EDWARD: No.

ANN: Huh?

LA FE: They lived right close there, but I think he showed up afterwards.

EDWARD: Yeah, they lived close.

ANN: Well your dad was right there. He was in the corrals; your mother said he was.

LA FE: They said there was a man on a buckskin horse that shot Pete French. Well my dad rode a buckskin horse, you know, that was the color of their skin, or the color of the horse.

EDWARD: Yeah.

LA FE: And they thought it was my dad that shot him. But it was Pete French that was, rode up there by himself, that done the job.

EDWARD: Yeah, Ed Oliver. What happened to Ed Oliver, do you know?

LA FE: What happened to him?

EDWARD: Yeah, you ever hear?

LA FE: No, I can't tell you anything about Ed Oliver.

ANN: Well didn't they put him in jail at all? Wasn't he never put in jail?

EDWARD: Maybe --- he was bailed out.

LA FE: Yeah, they bailed him out of there. You talked to his son

over there.

EDWARD: No, they're all dead.

LAFE: They're all dead?

EDWARD: They're all dead.

LAFE: Well it is hard to find somebody left.

EDWARD: It's hard. God, yeah, it is almost a hundred years ago. Yeah, there is Burt French --- or Burt French. Burt Oliver is dead, Roy Oliver is dead, Roy Oliver's wife is still alive. That's the one I talked to, Viola Oliver, but she doesn't know anything.

LAFE: She was --- what was her name?

EDWARD: Viola Oliver. She married Roy Oliver.

LAFE: Oh.

EDWARD: Did you know the Oliver kids?

LAFE: No.

EDWARD: Oh, they moved to Burns, that's right. They moved to Burns. Where were you raised, Lafe, at Diamond?

LAFE: Where was I raised? In Harney County, out there around Burns, yeah.

EDWARD: Oh, around, at Diamond?

LAFE: Yeah, I lived at Diamond. One year I lived down at the south end of town, they called Andrews down there.

EDWARD: Yeah.

LAFE: My dad and mother worked at the hotel down there. My uncle had a saloon ---

EDWARD: Yeah.

LAFF: --- and I was pretty small those days, pretty young.

EDWARD: When did you leave?

LAFF: When did I leave Burns?

EDWARD: That country, yeah.

LAFF: Oh, in ---

DON: I was born in '28, and you left after that.

EDWARD: After that. Where were you born, Don?

DON: Burns.

EDWARD: Burns. What was your dad doing then?

DON: He was trying to be a mechanic, wasn't you?

LAFF: Yeah.

EDWARD: Oh, in Burns.

ANN: You went from Burns to Wenatchee. You was in Wenatchee in '29. You know Don was just a baby.

LAFF: Oh Washington, that was Washington. He was about a year old when we was up there then.

EDWARD: So you left that country in about ---

ANN: Then when you came back, you came back to Portland.

LAFF: I was working in a Ford Garage in Wenatchee, Washington, when I was up there.

EDWARD: You knew Link Hutton?

LAFF: Yeah. Hutton's and Egli's and all those people out there, yeah.

EDWARD: Oh yeah. Oh, Hutton was a mean dude. Okay, the Pete

French --- the P Ranch. You mentioned a long time ago that you were inside that house.

LAFE: Oh yeah.

EDWARD: I have never talked to anybody that has ever been inside it.

LAFE: Is that right?

EDWARD: That's right.

ANN: Why, I wonder?

EDWARD: Nobody ever went down that far.

ANN: Of course that Judy, she worked in there. I mean she ---

LAFE: My aunt and uncle run the P Ranch afterwards, after Pete French was ---

ANN: I've even been in the P Ranch when Aunt Judy and Uncle Judd were there.

EDWARD: Is Aunt Judy still around?

LAFE: No.

ANN: No.

LAFE: She's been dead for years.

EDWARD: She's dead. That word, I hate it.

ANN: They were all old people, just like we are.

EDWARD: What was inside the P Ranch? What was it like?

LAFE: The ranch itself?

EDWARD: Inside the house.

LAFE: Oh, the house? Well it was ---

ANN: Well he had lots of coyote picture.

LAFE: Yeah, he was great for hanging up pictures.

ANN: ... hanging his coyotes.

EDWARD: Coyote pictures?

ANN: Oh yes, cripe. And they got most of them down there at the museum. You go, first come in you look up on the wall right up there, and there is a picture framed just like that one, two or three coyotes, wild coyotes in it. Those, I gave that painting to Lafe's, when Aunt Judy was there. I guess Lafe's mother wanted that picture, and so Aunt Judy gave it to her, because that place was all left just like it was.

EDWARD: That's what I was wondering.

ANN: He had ---

EDWARD: Did they change anything? Because they had different managers and people living there all the time.

ANN: Well Aunt Judy and Uncle Judd was the first ones --- they were there for the longest time of anybody, weren't they? I don't know who was there after Aunt Judy and them were there.

EDWARD: Is this Wise? Judd ---

ANN: Who --- Lafe ---

LAFE: Huh?

ANN: Who took over after Aunt Judy and Uncle Judd?

LAFE: After they left there? Emanuel ---

ANN: Isn't that the bird refuge took over then?

LAFE: It's the bird refuge now, yeah. No they ---

ANN: Yes, but wasn't ---

LAFE: Emanuel Clark run the Sod House Ranch for a while.

ANN: Who?

EDWARD: Oh yeah, he run that for quite awhile.

LAFE: Emanuel Clark.

ANN: Oh.

EDWARD: See the government came in, in 1935 and said you're out of here, and you're out of here, and you're out of here.

LAFE: Yeah.

EDWARD: And we're taking this over, that's what they did.

LAFE: And Bill Hanley, or I think Bill Hanley run it for a little while.

EDWARD: Yeah he did, right at --- Bill Hanley run it for French-glen, right after French was killed.

LAFE: Right after French was killed.

EDWARD: Yeah. And then the Pacific Livestock ---

LAFE: I think Roy Clark was, run the ranch there for a little while.

EDWARD: Emanuel Clark.

LAFE: No, Roy Clark.

EDWARD: Roy Clark?

LAFE: Emanuel Clark's son.

EDWARD: Oh, son. He may have.

LAFE: He run it for a short time. Because they changed hands pretty fast there for a while.

ANN: Did Uncle Judd run it --- somebody was under him, Uncle



Judd?

LAFE: No.

ANN: Who run it --- who was running it at the time Uncle Judd had it?

LAFE: Who was running it?

ANN: Uh huh.

EDWARD: Probably Pacific Land and Livestock.

LAFE: Who, you mean who owned the ranch?

ANN: Yeah.

LAFE: Swift and Company.

EDWARD: Oh that's right, that's right. Yeah.

ANN: Oh.

EDWARD: Swift and Company, that's right.

LAFE: Yeah, they run it there for sometime.

EDWARD: Yeah. Oh they changed hands all the time.

ANN: Well didn't that same outfit have it for a long time? They took it over after French got killed.

LAFE: Well I guess French was appointed to run it or some darn thing. I don't mean French, I mean Clark.

ANN: Well this is what I understood ---

LAFE: That just kind of fell heir down the line from the Swift and Company.

EDWARD: It changed hands all the time.

LAFE: Yeah.

EDWARD: And different --- Pete French had many ranches, five or

six head ranches.

ANN: Well yes, he had some in California.

EDWARD: Right. And they were scattered all over the place.

LAFE: Yeah, they was big landowners down in California.

EDWARD: And they sold some of the land, and some they didn't. And other --- PL & L bought part of it, Swift bought another part, Hanley run part of it. It was a big mess. And then the government stepped in and took part of it. And then they stepped in and took the whole thing.

DON: Took all of it for ---

LAFE: They took all of it and turned it into a bird refuge.

EDWARD: Oh, you can't figure it out, Ann. I mean you can't figure out who owned what. You go through the records in the courthouse, it will drive you nuts. An attorney couldn't figure it out, there is no way. Recall anything, just talking about some of this stuff, Lafe, now, about any of, the death of Pete French? Anything that maybe we didn't discuss?

LAFE: No, I don't recall offhand. You've probably heard all of the stories that they told about it.

EDWARD: Haven't heard very many.

LAFE: You haven't?

EDWARD: No. Nobody talked about it, or they never wrote anything down. We don't have much to go on.

LAFE: Well when he was shot there they put a tent or something over there, and protected his body that night until the coroner

could get out.

EDWARD: Yeah, that's true. I can't find the autopsy report, it's gone. I can't find the trial transcripts, they're gone.

LAFE: Oh, you can't find any of that?

EDWARD: Not the whole thing, no, just parts. That's your, your father was in that.

LAFE: Yeah. You can still get records from the historical society there.

EDWARD: These records disappeared.

LAFE: Is that right?

EDWARD: Somebody stole it.

LAFE: Uh huh.

EDWARD: Yeah.

(END OF TAPE)

b1