

HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #393 - Side A

Subject: John Scharff

Date: July 7, 1994

Place: Scharff Home - Burns, Oregon

Interviewer: Edward Gray

JOHN SCHARFF: ... was like this. They started together ... river and they brought these cattle around. There is a gate here, right close to this corner. Well the, some of the folks think that he came in, they ... up the cattle in here. But all this country ... covered. The logical thing to do, and which I'm sure that they did do, was to bring all these cattle down here, and this was the logical fence to come in down here to the Sod House.

EDWARD GRAY: Okay. That's the Sod House?

JOHN: Yeah, the Sod House.

EDWARD: And this is north? Is this north, John?

JOHN: Well this would be east and west, and north and south here.

EDWARD: Okay, let me get that on there, John. This is north, south.

JOHN: That's east.

EDWARD: This is east?

JOHN: Yeah.

EDWARD: Okay. Where was the Wright house, do you know?

JOHN: The --- they apparently, what happened, French was next to the fence there, and he was riding down here to open this gate. And this fellow Kelly come from this direction -

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EDWARD: Who?

JOHN: --- up there, from the north.

EDWARD: Oliver?

JOHN: Yeah.

EDWARD: He came from, this is Oliver? Okay?

JOHN: And, but now his --- one of the fellows there in the buckaroo outfit had a couple of boys. Well let's see now --- well anyway, there is a later write- up about the killing of Peter French, and that is that he was, that he was killed on this side of the fence.

EDWARD: On the ---

JOHN: On the east side of the fence.

EDWARD: East side of the fence, okay.

JOHN: Which wasn't right.

EDWARD: That's not true.

JOHN: No.

EDWARD: He was killed on ---

JOHN: He came right in there on the west side of this gate, and was riding towards the gate to open it at the time that he was killed. And, but they hadn't opened the gate, or gone through there with any cattle yet. But things, Johnny Crow was one of them ---

EDWARD: David Crow.

FLORENCE SCHARFF: It was David Crow.

JOHN: Huh?

FLORENCE: It was his father, David Crow.

JOHN: Yeah. But Johnny and his brother, I think he is dead now.

FLORENCE: His brother, oh I can't think of ---

EDWARD: Rankin.

FLORENCE: Rankin, uh huh.

EDWARD: Yeah, he is ---

JOHN: The shooting and everything was east of the fence, which isn't right. And, because Oliver came riding in from this direction, French was coming down here to open this gate to let these cattle through.

EDWARD: How many cattle, John, 4,000?

FLORENCE: 4,000.

JOHN: Something like that. I've heard that figure. It could well be, but that's just somebody's, kind of somebody's guess. He had lots of cattle.

EDWARD: Oh yeah.

JOHN: And they always wintered about that much in that country there, according to the records of other people.

EDWARD: Now John, what field is this? If this is the Sod House Ranch, that's Pete French's Sod House Ranch. What field is this?

JOHN: That field there?

EDWARD: Yeah.

FLORENCE: What's the name of it?

JOHN: Oh golly, let's see.

EDWARD: I wonder if he has got a map of that stuff? See that's what I want to try to do, Florence, is map this crazy thing out.

FLORENCE: Yeah, I know, I appreciate that.

EDWARD: Boy he is right, look at this. Gate, barn, house. I think this is Wright's house. Burt French, west. So boy, which way is south from here? That a way?

FLORENCE: This is south, this way.

EDWARD: This is the west; see that, I don't know what that means. This is by Emanuel Clark, done in 1897.

FLORENCE: Yeah.

EDWARD: Where is the gate? Right there?

FLORENCE: Right there.

EDWARD: West side. This one, I can't make heads or tails out of this one. That is George Sizemore's. I don't know what that means. There is the gate, evidently. What you got there, John?

FLORENCE: Show him that map.

EDWARD: Yeah, let me take a look at that, Johnny.

JOHN: This ownership map ---

EDWARD: Oh boy, my knees get so --- geeze. Can't make my knees work. Now does it show --- okay I'll roll this up a little, John. Does it show ---

JOHN: ... (Too far from microphone.)

EDWARD: Oh, it isn't?

JOHN: ...

EDWARD: Oh, does it go far enough up?

JOHN: No. ...

EDWARD: ... come on, Krumbo. Oh, it might, we're getting close.

JOHN: ...

EDWARD: Oh, it ain't going to make it, I don't think. I think you're right, John. Nope, it is over here.

JOHN: ...

EDWARD: Do these two come together, John? Do these two come together, or do you role it all up into one?

FLORENCE: You role it all up into one.

EDWARD: Okay, I'll get it. Well let's take a look at my map, maybe we can figure it out. I

think we can figure it out, I hope. Okay. Boy, I'm hitting everything. Okay.

JOHN: I'm trying to think where I saw this letter that Johnny's brother, he's dead now, he -

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FLORENCE: Rankin?

JOHN: --- yeah. ... put on a demonstration there with ...

EDWARD: Coyote Buttes, Notch Butte, Saddle Butte, and this is from Rankin Crow showing where Pete French was killed. I can, I could find this. I have the original pictures from John Crow in color; they're about 5 x 7.

FLORENCE: Oh, uh huh.

EDWARD: Yeah. And we're going down there tomorrow, if, if, they'll let us walk out there. They're getting so strict you can't go off the Center Patrol Road.

FLORENCE: Really?

EDWARD: Yeah.

FLORENCE: Well I could understand that, you know, in the wintertime when the roads are bad.

JOHN: When ---

EDWARD: Yeah.

JOHN: When I came here there was a post, I don't suppose it would be where it was, and it was on the west side of that gate. And the two Crow boys, now they've got it over on the east side of that fence.

EDWARD: Oh.

JOHN: And of course Johnny is, that's the only one alive.

FLORENCE: Yeah, uh huh.

EDWARD: Yeah.

JOHN: But I don't think there is any question about the --- But anyway, what I started to

say, well I had a crew going along and tearing that old fence out. And I told the foreman, I said, "Now let's clean it up as we go." And it was probably 6 or 7, or 8 years that I found out that that post was taken out at the time they took that fence out.

EDWARD: Oh.

JOHN: Well the old road went through there, and it hit a high knoll, and that's where the gate was, was on this knoll. And I think I could find where that gate was, I believe I can. It might be some walking around, but it might not be too.

EDWARD: When did you have that fence --- now was that the Wright Field fence?

JOHN: Huh? Why did we turn it out?

EDWARD: No.

FLORENCE: No.

EDWARD: Was that, when did you have that fence taken down?

JOHN: Well let's see, when did we come over here?

FLORENCE: We came here in 1935.

JOHN: '35. Well it probably was, it could have been as late as '40.

EDWARD: Was that the Wright Field fence?

JOHN: Huh?

EDWARD: How do you --- Was that the Wright Field fence? Or Big Sagebrush Field fence?

JOHN: Well it was between the Big Sagebrush Field, and see this is the Big Sagebrush Field, and this was the Thoroughbred Field here, I think.

EDWARD: This is Thoroughbred Field?

JOHN: Huh?

EDWARD: Or was it Wright Field?

JOHN: Well it was, the lake was a long ways from here.

EDWARD: Yeah, the lake is like this. And Sod House road, it goes through like this. Do you know which field --- this is the Big Sagebrush Field.

JOHN: Yeah, uh huh.

EDWARD: And what field was that, John?

FLORENCE: Was that the Wright Field, by any chance?

JOHN: I think that's the Wright Field.

EDWARD: Okay. Did you remember ---

JOHN: Huh?

EDWARD: --- in 1935, do you remember the Wright house?

JOHN: The white house?

EDWARD: Wright.

FLORENCE: Wright house.

EDWARD: Wright.

FLORENCE: The Wright house, the Wright house. I don't think ...

EDWARD: It must have been gone.

FLORENCE: I think it was gone, because I don't ---

JOHN: This would have been the Wright Field here.

EDWARD: Now was the Wright Field part of the Sod House Ranch?

JOHN: Huh?

EDWARD: Was the Wright Field part of the Sod House Ranch?

JOHN: Yeah.

FLORENCE: Oh yeah.

JOHN: That was, the Sod House buildings would be off ---

EDWARD: Gosh this is hard to figure out. I wish I could find a map of all that stuff, but they're just --- I can't find any. Let's see --- John, let's try to --- what's going on here? Oh.

Try to figure this out the best we can, John, and I hope you can

--- All right, north, west, east --- the Sod House, see that little --- How is his eyes?

FLORENCE: Well they're pretty good.

EDWARD: Pretty good.

FLORENCE: Pretty good, uh huh.

EDWARD: Let me get this closer to old John here. I'd much have my hearing than my eyes, I'll tell you. Boy, my youngest son is an albino, he's legally blind, you know. But he's getting a doctor degree.

FLORENCE: Oh well that's wonderful.

EDWARD: All right, there is the Sod House, John, right there.

JOHN: Yeah, uh huh.

EDWARD: Okay. I'll let you, get you; there is the Job Corp thing, Coyote Butte.

JOHN: Some place, it should be right in this area here.

EDWARD: Do you recall this road? Can you see that, John?

JOHN: That road wasn't in there then.

EDWARD: Yeah, right. Now this is the Center Patrol Road.

JOHN: Yeah. And I'm pretty sure that road wasn't in there then.

EDWARD: Simmon's Slough, does that ring a bell?

JOHN: That was built later, by the administration of the ranch ... French, I don't think, paid any attention to roads, you know.

EDWARD: No. (Laughter)

JOHN: And ---

EDWARD: Do you have, boy, I wished this was bigger. I'm trying to figure out the fence lines, think that's possible?

JOHN: What's that?



FLORENCE: The fence lines.

JOHN: Huh?

FLORENCE: The fence lines. He's trying to figure out the fence lines.

JOHN: French?

FLORENCE: Fence, F E N C E lines, fence lines. Well you know like that old strip of fence that goes up towards the Field Station which is, you know, has been repaired for a 100 years, and they were going to tear it down after you left, and you found out about it and you went out and stopped them. That old fence that is going up to the Field Station, off of the main road that we travel in now, to go to the headquarters. It would turn to the right, and it has been mended, you know, for years, and years, and years. And that's a real historical old fence through there. And you stopped them from tearing it out. I'm assuming it is still there, I haven't been that way for several years.

EDWARD: Well, who knows. What ---

JOHN: Well I don't quite follow you there, Florence, I'm sorry.

FLORENCE: The old fence line that goes up towards the Field Station, which is now the Field Station.

JOHN: Oh yeah.

FLORENCE: And it has been mended, and re-mended, you know, over the years.

JOHN: Well that was next to Myrtle Caldwell.

FLORENCE: Yes, next to Myrtle's property there.

JOHN: Myrtle Barnes.

FLORENCE: Uh huh, yeah.

JOHN: Yeah. That's the only part of that fence in the Blitzen Valley that was there when we came there.

FLORENCE: That's left.

EDWARD: Really?

JOHN: Yeah.

EDWARD: What happened to them all?

JOHN: There is about ---

FLORENCE: Well I think everybody that owned a property ---

JOHN: --- I think there is only about a quarter of a mile that is left there.

FLORENCE: Uh huh.

EDWARD: Right along Sod House Lane?

JOHN: Well it is off the Sod House Lane.

FLORENCE: Well it's off of Sod House Lane.

JOHN: It's ---

FLORENCE: You know how you go up to the Field Station?

EDWARD: Right.

FLORENCE: Go down, and then you turn to the right.

EDWARD: Okay.

FLORENCE: Before you get to where Myrtle Caldwell's old house has collapsed and still laying there.

EDWARD: Right.

FLORENCE: And you go up that lane, and it is up that lane.

EDWARD: Oh, I was just there.

FLORENCE: That ...

EDWARD: I'll be down there tomorrow.

FLORENCE: Uh huh.

EDWARD: That would be part of the Sagebrush Field fence, probably.

JOHN: Well ---

FLORENCE: Well, let's see.

JOHN: --- no.

EDWARD: No.

FLORENCE: I don't think so, I don't think so.

JOHN: That would be --- Well it could have been all right.

FLORENCE: Well it could have been too, though.

JOHN: See they built the, Pete French built out from Rocky Ford Lane down there about, probably 12 to 15 miles of fence.

EDWARD: Whew.

JOHN: And the nesters behind him just went along and cut it. And this, practically between every post there was a splice or two in this wire. French sent his crew down there and spliced her up and rebuilt it. Well when we tore these old fences out, why we tore all of that out of there, but this was on a personal ranch there, a neighboring ranch. And it is just a quarter of a mile of it that's left. It shows the, how it is cut up, you know. And this fellow, this fellow has been building fence there, and I asked him to just leave that, which he has done.

EDWARD: Is it five wire?

JOHN: I think it is a four-wire fence, I'm not --- I don't think --- either four or ---

FLORENCE: I think it is a four.

JOHN: I think it is four.

FLORENCE: I'm not just sure either.

JOHN: But it could be five.

EDWARD: I'll take a look at that tomorrow, John.

FLORENCE: Yeah, because that's a historical thing.

EDWARD: Yeah, I hope it's --- don't count on it being there.

FLORENCE: Well, I know.

EDWARD: Not with these yokels down there now.

FLORENCE: Uh huh.

EDWARD: You know.

JOHN: Have you been out there?

EDWARD: Yes. Spent all day out there last Monday, getting my bearings on what was what.

JOHN: Yeah.

EDWARD: And whose homesteads, the Dunn's, the Simmons, Springer's.

FLORENCE: Springer's.

EDWARD: Yeah, I got it all figured out in my mind now. I can't write about something if I don't look at it, you know.

FLORENCE: Yeah.

EDWARD: What --- off the subject just a --- I'm going to ask you a bunch of questions, John, okay. What kind of gun was Pete French killed with?

JOHN: I couldn't answer that.

EDWARD: Nobody knows, nobody knows that question.

JOHN: Evidently it was a pistol.

EDWARD: It was a pistol.

JOHN: Yeah.

EDWARD: That's all, that's all they know. Do you have any photographs of any of those old homes, of Springer, Dunn, Caldwell?

JOHN: Not that I've ever heard of.

EDWARD: No photographs?

JOHN: No.

EDWARD: Oh boy. I can't find some of this stuff.

JOHN: Have you got all this ...

EDWARD: No. I got all of the Oliver kids, and things like that, but no house pictures. I think Marcus Haines has them.

FLORENCE: Well he could have.

JOHN: Have you met his wife?

EDWARD: What's her name?

FLORENCE: Edna.

EDWARD: That's right, Edna. I talked to her on the phone this morning and she wants Marcus Haines material left alone for now, maybe forever, I don't know. When did Marcus die, about two years ---

JOHN: Too bad, Marcus was a real historian, you know.

FLORENCE: Oh yeah.

JOHN: And he had things, and he was just right too --- A lot of that record is there, the case of --- I'd be a little hesitant about it. But Marcus and I were the closest of friends too.

EDWARD: Didn't he have one opinion of Pete French's murder, and you another?

JOHN: Yeah. He had, now his theory was that French was killed down there at that other gate. But I can't buy that, and that's what I told him. Because they still had a big area of the country that had to take the opposite way that, with those cattle. And so I don't think there is any question, there is no question in my mind about the gate that he was going through with these cattle. And ---

EDWARD: Now what was Marcus Haines' theory on why Pete French was killed by Ed Oliver?

JOHN: I'm sorry, I didn't ---

EDWARD: Okay, that's all right. What was Marcus Haines' theory, or idea why Ed Oliver killed Pete French? Okay, you want me to write that out, Florence?

FLORENCE: Yeah.

EDWARD: I'll write it, John, don't worry about it. Marcus --- I talked to Marcus, but I didn't talk about Pete French, because you never know what you're going to write about. So I talked, we were talking about Bill Brown.

FLORENCE: Yeah.

EDWARD: I don't know for sure why it was Ed Oliver that killed Pete French.

FLORENCE: Well I think there was, you know, in that day and age why everybody was suspicious of everyone else.

EDWARD: I hope you can read that, John.

JOHN: I don't know if Marcus had a theory why Oliver killed Pete. I really don't know what it is other than it is --- Well, you see what happened there, every spring they started down towards the north end of the valley, working these cattle and branding the calves as they went. And when they branded all this country we're talking about, and had moved up to the valley there, and so, and were just moving away from the cattle that they had already branded, and one thing and another. So when they were camped up in the Diamond country they had, one of the things in that day and age they broke the horses to run with the caviada. That was the first order of business, the horse disappeared, they put that, cut that horse back. So they, there was a, this horse ran down in that country there, that lower country, and so when the boys went down there to get this horse or two, why they found several calves that were branded, been worked over, by our friend there.

EDWARD: Who is the friend, Ed Oliver?

JOHN: Yeah, Ed Oliver.

EDWARD: Okay. He was my friend.

JOHN: So they, the buckaroo boss sent a man immediately to the Pete Ranch, the P Ranch, and Pete come down and they took a couple of the buckaroos and they went down there and they found several of these branded calves that had, the brand had been worked. And the theory was that it would probably be six months before they would be back in that country. If it hadn't of been for that horse that went down there, why they wouldn't have those calves, because they would have been, they'd have been taken off the cows as soon as they were able to. And that started the bad blood between he and Oliver. Why he didn't have Oliver sent to the penitentiary, or anyway why he --- nobody seemed to know. So he

--- then this trial was, it was, French was killed, you might say, over that bunch of cows. Because he told Oliver to never come back on the ranch, he never wanted to see him or hear --- And that was kind of an unusual thing because French was really tough on a thief. And why he didn't do something with Oliver at that time why nobody knows. So then Oliver he was coming up there, so he claims, to get his cattle out of French's cattle there at the Sod House. But that probably wasn't, didn't have much water either, you know.

EDWARD: Did you ever hear this story about drawing a short straw?

JOHN: I'm sorry, didn't hear it. Not so loud, I can do better, I think. What is a short straw? Well I suppose that would be something you would, pretty critical in getting toward the end.

EDWARD: Ask him Florence, did Ed Oliver draw a short straw.

FLORENCE: John, did Ed Oliver draw a short straw?

EDWARD: And was picked to kill Pete French.

FLORENCE: And was picked to kill Pete French.

JOHN: Well I've heard that too, that he had drawn straws with somebody else. Because

you see, there was one man, when Pete French come to the caviada, and he went with this Sod House, his man down at the Sod House and stayed all night. And on the way down there why he, this other man from the, from his buckaroos had a family, they were down there on the lake there someplace. So he decided, he told Pete he'd go down and spend the night with his family, and that he'd be back in the morning. Well he never showed up, but Oliver come up. So he got, apparently he got the word to Oliver that French did have a gun.

See when French came to the buckaroos and he found that the buckaroo boss, a horse had followed with him and ... him up, so that's why he was with the cattle. He sent his ... to the P Ranch, and they said that he was taking, shifting his clothing and one thing and another around, and he had his pistol and he buckled it on, and then he took it off and threw it in the suitcase and told the fellow. So they know then that there wasn't a gun in the outfit, you see, that was the thing that tipped them off. And then when this other fellow came up there, didn't show, why that was a dead cinch that he is the one that --- I've heard it said that there was several of them got together and drew straws to see who would go kill him. I don't know whether that is true or not. But this other, this one fellow, French had had this run-in over those other cattle, the branding of those calves, and he was the logical fellow to really do the job.

EDWARD: Huh.

FLORENCE: It gets more complicated, doesn't it?

EDWARD: Boy. Have you ever been to Oliver, Ed Oliver's homestead?

JOHN: Oliver's homestead? Yeah, you're in it, I think, every time you go up to the French, up the P Ranch road.

EDWARD: You know Oliver Spring?

JOHN: Well, Oliver Spring ---



FLORENCE: Yeah.

JOHN: --- was, no, I don't think it was. I think it; let me see here, I have all that stuff in my office.

EDWARD: Does he have a lot of written material on this, Florence?

FLORENCE: Yeah, he has written a lot for the Desert Trail Association, you know, in fact reams. In fact they were here, just copying everything for the Oregon Historical Society not long ago.

EDWARD: Oh, really?

FLORENCE: Yeah.

EDWARD: God, they're hard to work with. Boy, boy. Has John written down notes in relation to the death of Pete French and Ed Oliver and things like that?

FLORENCE: Well I suspect he does have some, some place.

EDWARD: Where.

FLORENCE: But where in the heck they'd be I don't know.

EDWARD: This desert magazine ---

FLORENCE: Desert Trail.

EDWARD: Desert Trails.

FLORENCE: Uh huh.

EDWARD: Do you have copies of all those?

FLORENCE: Yeah, he has kept copies of everything he has written for the Desert Trail.

EDWARD: Is there any way I could look at those tonight, and bring them back?

FLORENCE: Well, I don't know. They were here, let's see there was a chap here from, he was with a friend of ours who is a retired doctor, who now lives at Mitchell. And they copied, he brought his copying machine, and I don't know. Because like you go out to the mill here and then turn to the east and go down and hit the highway, #205, and I think he

has got a whole stack over there. But anyway they were here and copied these all for the

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EDWARD: You mean everything out of the Desert ---

FLORENCE: Yeah, Desert Trail. I don't know whether he has all of the copies or not, but he has a lot of them.

EDWARD: I don't think I've ever seen one.

FLORENCE: John, John.

EDWARD: I don't recall ever seeing that.

FLORENCE: John.

... (Pause in tape)

JOHN: I took some notes there when I was visiting with --- he was, he was a good fair fellow I found over the years. He had his family there at the Sod House Ranch, and Pete of course went down and stayed all night there, and then they come back to the cattle together the next morning. Joined, the buckaroo outfit was camped up in the Sagebrush Field there.

EDWARD: The buckaroo outfit was camped at Sagebrush Field?

JOHN: Well they were someplace up there, they weren't at Sod House.

EDWARD: Huh.

JOHN: And when he came to, there it tells about him coming to the camp there, or coming to the buckaroo outfit the day before he was killed. And from, he'd been out in the country someplace. Then he, the next morning they went back up to the cattle and that's when he was killed.

EDWARD: Huh. Do you know of any maps, maps of Sagebrush Field?

JOHN: No.

EDWARD: There is just nobody around anymore that knows.

FLORENCE: No, that's right, they're gone.

EDWARD: Now why this wasn't --- now Giles French ---

FLORENCE: Yeah, Giles French.

EDWARD: Yeah, did a pretty good job, and all of his papers are up in Portland. I'm going to go through his papers.

FLORENCE: Where are they, at the Historical Society?

EDWARD: Yeah, yeah. I called his wife, she is 90 ---

FLORENCE: Oh, she is way up in her 90's.

EDWARD: --- man, 96.

FLORENCE: I was going to say, I think she must be almost a 100.

EDWARD: Yeah. Lela?

FLORENCE: Lela.

EDWARD: Oh, she is still kicking.

FLORENCE: Good, good.

EDWARD: And she said yeah, all the papers were at the Oregon Historical Society. I ---

FLORENCE: Won't they let you ---

EDWARD: Yeah.

FLORENCE: --- look at them?

EDWARD: Yeah. But they're only open part-time now. They're ---

FLORENCE: Oh.

EDWARD: Oh, they're hurting for money.

FLORENCE: They are, huh? We knew the Tom ... family so well when Tom was in charge of the Oregon Historical Society.

EDWARD: Yeah, they kind of kicked him out of there, I guess.

FLORENCE: Yeah.

EDWARD: Yeah, he didn't --- He didn't do a great job of it, I guess. He got them kind of broke. (Laughter) Is there anything else, John, you can tell me that you haven't said?

JOHN: Well I really can't think of anything that would be --- Do you plan on contacting Johnny ---

FLORENCE: Well he has been up to see Johnny Crow.

EDWARD: Yeah.

FLORENCE: Yeah.

JOHN: I'd kind of like to find out ---

FLORENCE: What he had to say about it.

JOHN: --- why, how come they --- because that's what he was riding for, to the gate, to open it to let the cattle through. And they got him killed on the, outside of the fence there.

EDWARD: So you're saying that Pete French was on the west side of the fence.

JOHN: Yeah.

EDWARD: To Wright Field? Was he in Big Sagebrush Field?

JOHN: Well yeah, he was in the Big Sagebrush Field.

EDWARD: On the west side?

JOHN: And Wright's Field was, he had been going in to the Wright's Field.

EDWARD: Why were they taking the cattle, changing, why were they changing the cattle that day, do you know?

JOHN: Well it's, I was supposed to separate the steers from the beef cattle, and also they would winter about 4,000 head of cows there in that Big Sagebrush Field. It was usually by the first of the year by the time they got all these cattle worked, you know, and in there. And this bunch of cattle we're talking about here, a bunch of cows that they had wintered there, or were wintering in the field there. And what reason they had to gather them and take them down to the corrals there, why of course I've never heard anybody say.

EDWARD: It seemed like they would be feeding them, or just letting them alone. Well I don't know why they were moving those cattle. Maybe they had run out of feed or something.

FLORENCE: Well they probably had to move them from one field to the other because of the feed.

EDWARD: Yeah. Oh, the other --- did you know that Pete French on Christmas Day came from Chicago?

JOHN: Well he came from outside someplace, but where I don't know.

EDWARD: I can't figure out what he would be doing in Chicago Christmas Day.

JOHN: With the cattle, you say?

EDWARD: No. Why Pete French was out of town, and then came back to town on Christmas Day.

JOHN: Oh I'll tell you, he traveled around a lot.

EDWARD: He did?

JOHN: Yeah.

EDWARD: Huh.

FLORENCE: And we've heard these stories, that every time he was away, then when he came back he always brought all of the kids on the entire area a silver dollar. Have you heard that story?

EDWARD: Uh huh. David Crow in an interview taken in 1931, says that he remembers Pete French in 1876 at Diamond, because Pete French gave him a horse. And he thought that was really nice. And David Crow was only 5 or 6 years old.

JOHN: Well they say that French was ---

FLORENCE: Said he was wonderful to the children.

JOHN: --- ready to back his men anytime. He was --- And he, of course at that time this

country was in Grant County.

EDWARD: Right.

JOHN: And so that took him to the county court occasionally.

EDWARD: Boy did he go to courts.

FLORENCE: Yeah.

JOHN: Yeah.

EDWARD: Oh geeze.

FLORENCE: Yeah.

EDWARD: He, I was in the courthouse yesterday going through that, and he must have put lawsuits against 10 to 12 settlers to get them off the land. Of course he lost the cases, and he lost his life.

JOHN: Well of course then, see his theory was to, that he went to the center of the lake, that is to his land, you know, right to the center. All those old lake shore lines, why when you come to the, make a center down the center of the lake, and then all the owners would go out to that. But of course that was --- when they come up against this lake here why it was determined by the courts it wasn't a true meander line. And so that just threw French clear out of the country.

EDWARD: But he owned Sod House clear up to Sod House Lane.

FLORENCE: Oh yeah.

EDWARD: And there wasn't, because the lake went up and down.

JOHN: Yes.

EDWARD: I don't know why they wanted all that, rest of that land clear out to the end of the lake.

JOHN: Well then all the time we've been here, there has only been once, you know, that the lake has really gotten up into the Sod House there.

EDWARD: Yeah. Oh yeah, and that's when it --- That's what took down a lot of these old houses.

JOHN: Yeah.

FLORENCE: Yes, uh huh.

JOHN: See we've got two good watersheds here, and they're usually, this year we're short here, and not only that we're short on both.

FLORENCE: Well it was short to the north too.

JOHN: Ordinarily over the years on this one if it is really good, that one isn't so good. When they both are good, why then the lake gets going out here. And that's what happened, we had two years there that, over average water and they really built it up.

EDWARD: Boy, did it ever.

JOHN: It had been done before, you know, by ... that it had been out there. But ---

EDWARD: When was that, '81, '82 when the lake ---

FLORENCE: Wasn't it when the water rose on both sides, that was '82 or '83, which was it? Was it 1982 or '83 when we had the big flood?

JOHN: The big flood?

FLORENCE: Yeah. That's when they ---

JOHN: I don't remember, Florence.

FLORENCE: Rebuilt that road three different, raised it three different times.

EDWARD: I don't remember either; it was early '80's. I saw the pictures at the library. Oh!

JOHN: It was shortly after we retired that that ---

FLORENCE: Yeah.

EDWARD: Who built the Sod House Ranch, Pete French?

JOHN: Who built it? Yeah, he bought it. See they bought that, when he come here why

he --- well they homesteaded and preempted and done everything, you know, to get land.

And there were several ways in which they could buy this ---

EDWARD: Swampland.

JOHN: And especially if it was wetlands. And so he was able, he bought them, I think, one lump there about 40,000 acres, you know.

EDWARD: From Robie, yeah.

JOHN: And then he kept buying people out that ---

EDWARD: Hundreds of them.

JOHN: Yeah.

EDWARD: Hundreds, he bought out.

FLORENCE: Yeah.

EDWARD: You can see it; I've got it in the courthouse. So and so to Pete French, so and so to Pete French, hundreds of them right in a row.

JOHN: Yeah.

FLORENCE: Oh yeah.

JOHN: But Oliver Spring, I always thought that that was our friend's homestead.

EDWARD: No.

JOHN: But it wasn't, it was over in the valley, and went right to ...

EDWARD: That's right, it was about two miles away.

JOHN: Yeah, it was something like that.

EDWARD: Did you ever see a cabin on that place?

JOHN: There was no cabin there in my time.

EDWARD: There wasn't. I don't know whether Ed Oliver had a cabin.

EDWARD: There was a, I say no cabin in my time. There was later on, we had a cabin there, and some corrals and one thing and another.



EDWARD: Where at, Oliver Spring?

JOHN: Yeah, at Oliver Spring. But that was permittees headquarters there at, on ---

EDWARD: Oh. So that wasn't Ed Oliver's.

FLORENCE: No, huh uh.

JOHN: Wasn't anything there.

EDWARD: Oh. See I was told that was Ed Oliver's.

FLORENCE: Oh no, huh uh.

EDWARD: Okay. Thank you John, that straightens that mess up. Were you ever over to Ed Oliver's homestead, 160 acres?

JOHN: I'm not sure.

EDWARD: Yeah, it's hard ---

(END OF TAPE)

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