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HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #4 Side A

Subject: Ida Baker Cross (Mrs. W. A. (Albert) Cross)

Place:

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Interviewer: Pauline Braymen

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PAULINE BRAYMEN: In 1882, Walter and Adeline Cross, and their daughter Nellie who was three years old, crossed the plains by wagon train. The train arrived in North Powder in Union County in the fall of 1882. In the spring of 1883, they came to Fort Harney. Nellie, who was about three years old, got so tired on the trip across the plains that every time she saw a pile of tin cans or signs of civilization she would say, "We could camp here. There has been someone else camp here."

Archie and Nannie Cross, twins, were born at Fort Harney in 1883, and then the family moved to Trout Creek, 25 miles north of Burns where they took up a homestead on what is now known as the Purdy Ranch (Silvies Valley). Other children in the family were Jamie (Jessie Jane), and Mabel, and Albert (Walter Albert).

IDA CROSS: I remember (Albert's) mother telling me he was born up by the old Cove Springs. She was coming to Burns for the stork to arrive, and he flew over before they got there, and Albert was born up by what they call Tub Springs, close to the old Williams Saw-mill.

Albert's father raised cattle. His first school was in the little old log cabin schoolhouse

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between the Trout Creek Ranch and where Mervin Purdy lives now. He first went to a school in 1897. They took a picture of him holding a slate with 1897 written on it. Mrs. Jack Dorris was his first teacher. And I think he went to school some at Harney too. He didn't go to a high school, like a lot of us didn't, of the older ones.

He and I was married the 6th of June in 1923, and he was partners with his dad in the cattle business, and then he sold his cattle and moved to town. When they was building the railroad from here to Silvies, clear up into Bear Valley, he worked on the railroad and I cooked for the men. And then we came back down to Burns and he bought a shop from Henry Vulgamore and built auto tops and did upholstery work. It burned down in 1933. Then we went to Portland where he took schooling doing radiator work and things like that. We moved back here and he worked for Ellis Bennett. Then he bought his shop, which he operated until he retired. He built our house, and I still live here.

We worked for Dee Dickenson for his sawmill in 1925 and '26. When I was cooking for the men that were building the railroad, I had twenty men to cook for and I made forty-eight sourdough biscuits every day, and I baked light bread every day of the world. And I had to wash the towels for the men. There was one thing I was always thankful for. I didn't have a lot of little dishes to wash when it came to washing dishes. We had meat and steak for breakfast most of the time, and vegetables --- just good hard workingman food.

We went up there (to Bear Valley) in 1924. They used horses at that time to move the dirt, and so when it froze so bad they couldn't move the dirt we came down (to Burns) just before Christmas in 1924.

PAULINE: The Cross's worked for Dee Dickenson's sawmill for a while in 1925 and '26. It was

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located east of the Reineman place, up over Devine Ridge on Soldier Creek, about nine miles from Burns. They made finished lumber. They did their logging with teams. Ida cooked for six or seven men there.

IDA: I had plenty of time to do fancy work in the afternoon besides.

PAULINE: In 1926 Albert built their home. He started on it before Christmas, and they moved in, in April.

IDA: There wasn't any windows or doors. His dad gave us an old cook stove. We put that in the bathroom and stuck the stovepipe out the window, and we lived in the bedroom until he got the rest of the house finished. And he got the house finished in the fall. My mother gave us some canvas and rugs to put over the windows and doors to keep out the cold.

PAULINE: Ida's home today is both warm and comfortable. Albert built it to last. Then Ida told of her youth.

IDA: Well, sometimes I milked ten or twelve cows by myself. I remember one time when the folks were down on the place Sam Gunderson's own now --- this was my dad's lower place, we called it the hay camp, and I stayed with Whitings and walked up home twice a day to do the milking. Had an old leppy mule and I was a little late getting there that morning to feed him. He was in the yard and had come up on the porch of the house looking in the window. When I went out the door to go to milk, he was going to have his milk right now or know the reason why, and he was trying to paw me down. There was a shovel there beside the road and I picked that up and batted him over the head until I could get in the corral to get that mule some milk.

I'd separate the milk so we could make butter. At first, we used to skim the cream off the top of the pan by hand, but we finally had a separator and I churned it. The first churn I can remember

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was an old dasher churn. Then my mother had a kind of a little square churn with some paddles that you turned, and then later we had those big old barrel churns. It depended on the temperature of the cream how long it took to make butter. Sometimes it'd take an hour to churn 5 gallons of cream, and maybe we could do it in 30 minutes another time, it just depended. Then we sold the butter around town. And then I'd have to take the horse and take vegetables to the hay camp where my mother was cooking for the men.

Butter was 50 cents a roll --- 25 cents a pound, can you imagine? It was kinda hard to get it to look nice too; if the weather was hot you had to scald your molds. If you didn't, the butter would stick. You'd scald them with hot water and dip them in cold water. And if you didn't have them scaled just right when you'd take your butter out, it would tear the roll all to pieces. My mother used to take what surplus butter she had left over to Grandma Dixon. Grandma Dixon had the most customers here in town.

PAULINE: Food and vegetables.

IDA: We didn't have too many vegetables at that time. My dad used to go out to the railroad --- to Huntington or Vale --- and haul in the supplies. They always got about 500 pounds of sugar, and 100 pounds of beans and rice, and I suppose about 20 barrels of flour. (About four 50-pound sacks to the barrel.) And then in the fall he'd go over to the John Day country and get fruit and potatoes. But we just lived on beef and beans mostly, and dried fruit.

He got several cases of tomatoes and corn and fruit --- well, canned fruit was just a premium and you couldn't have too much of it. He'd get macaroni and things like that when he went to the railroad. It would take him about 10 days to make a trip there and back --- depended on the weather. Because if it rained the roads got so muddy you couldn't get too far in a day.

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We had an old dugout cellar to store the potatoes and apples and things like that, and then we had what we called the storehouse where it just kept things dry. One of the problems was to keep the mice out because they would get into the flour and sugar and things. So, we'd put the cat in there over night and he cleaned out the mice.

PAULINE: You kept the flour in wooden barrels?

IDA: Well, I said barrels of flour, but he would get it in the sacks. Then they piled it up. When I said he'd get so many barrels of flour, that was 100 pounds for a barrel. But I've seen flour stacked up there, and my goodness, we'd bake our own bread. And during the First World War we almost quit using wheat flour because it was so hard to get. And substitutes like rice flour, rye flour, and all that, we didn't like that too well.

You just couldn't get wheat --- well some people, if they had their flour made at the mill up here --- if they raised the wheat, and if it was the right kind of wheat for flour, now these people weren't rationed. But if you had to buy wheat and didn't raise it yourself --- and then sometimes they took it to feed the soldier or something. But maybe we could get a 50-pound sack of flour every two or three months and we had to use that in making our bread. Every woman was telling every other woman the recipe that she used that she thought was pretty good to make rice flour bread and rye flour --- and all the different flours we could get.

PAULINE: The thing I'd always heard about World War I was that everyone was knitting socks and things for the soldiers.

IDA: Oh yes, during World War I, we used to knit sleeveless sweaters, and socks, and gloves. And it was hard to get help on the ranch too, because so many of the men were gone. I can remember there was a fellow that had TB, and the doctor sent him out here for the summertime, so my dad

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hired him and another fellow. And this fellow's name was Ignatius Talli (sp.?). Well, anyway, I was running a rake and he was supposed to be running a rake. He just got on and was going right and left and just any which way. I had to stop and give him directions. I had him follow me and when I started a windrow, he had to dump his rake so we could keep our windrow straight. Oh, he grew a beard and he just thought he was roughing it awful. But he was willing to do, but he had never driven a horse. He didn't even know which end to put the collar on.

PAULINE: Can you tell about the organization of Sagebrush Embroidery Club?

IDA: When they started in to have rules and regulations, I think I was about the first secretary. We decided that Sagebrush Club was organized in about 1914, somewhere along there, maybe in the fall. And the first meeting was held at the Old Experiment Station (Dorland Ray owns that now.). Anyway, there was about eight of us that attended the first meeting. And then we got to taking in ten. And to begin with we weren't going to have any members except countrywomen, because it was kind of organized for the countrywomen. Well, then Mrs. Leon Brown and Mrs. Waldo Geer were invited so many times, that finally they decided to make them new members. So, after we took those in --- well the membership kept climbing.

PAULINE: Yes, I think they keep a membership of forty now.

IDA: I was a charter member of it. The first eight were my mother, Etta Baker; myself; Ruby Breithaupt; Ida Denstedt; Mrs. Frank Sawyer; Ethel Hotchkiss; Olivia Withers; Ethel Shingledecker.

PAULINE: Breithaupt's were the first superintendent at the experiment station, weren't they?

IDA: Yes.

PAULINE: Let's talk about Poison Creek Schoolhouse a little bit. It was located where Wesley Shepard lives --- on Highway 20?

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IDA: That's right. Oh, the teachers taught all the grades, one through eight, and sometimes they had as many as 50 or 60 pupils. And they walked to school, and did their own janitor work, and of course, the boys, if they could get them to do it, would carry in the wood, and we all tried to help her sweep. Oh, it was awful cold sometimes. Gosh, I don't think there was many kids that went to school at that time that didn't have chilblains on their feet. Children today just don't know what the hardships was to get to school. But I guess it was good for us. We all lived through it anyway.

PAULINE: Yes, I wonder how hardy some of us will be when we get to be your age that didn't have to walk to school and work so hard.

IDA: Yeah, we walked to school and in the wintertime, we went with the sleigh. And sometimes we'd have to ride, I'd just give out. I'd walk until I'd get kinda crippled up and would have to ride. And oh, how Alvon hated to get that horse ready for us to go to school, but he did.

NOTE: Ida suffers from a birth defect which has made it difficult for her to get around. In spite of this she has led a more active life than most.

IDA: I can remember one time when John Witzel was freighting from out of Ontario, or somewhere, and we saw him coming and we kids thought it would be fun to get under the bridge while he went over it with his horses. And I can remember that some of the kids, we had to hold them there because they were going to run out from under the bridge. They got scared, you know, because it made an awful racket with the horses and wagons going over the bridge.

I remember him telling my folks --- he used to haul us sometimes --- that every kid told him thank you when they got out. Instead of just one kid saying thank you for the all of them, everyone told him thank you as they got out.

PAULINE: What kind of stove did you have in the schoolhouse?

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IDA: We had a big old --- well, it was a tall, old round stove, the first one I remember, and then they got a smaller queen heater. It was a big stove too, you know. It kept somebody putting wood in there all the time during the winter; it was just so cold you know. Somebody would take a contract to haul wood to the schoolhouse --- 10 or 20 cords of wood --- probably 20 or 25 would be more like it.

PAULINE: At Christmas time would the community go together and have a big Christmas party?

IDA: Oh yes. I can remember my mother and my Aunt Susan Whiting, and Glen Clemens' mother, and a lot of the mothers would have a day when they would pop popcorn and string popcorn to put around on the tree. Then the teacher would have a program and all of us would get up and do our part. I can remember one time seeing a doll up in the --- they had curtains in front of the Christmas tree where they had the platform. And there was a doll way up in the top of the tree and all of us was wondering who would get the doll. I got the doll. All the other little girls were just a little bit disappointed because I got the doll. They would hang different gifts on the tree for the kids, and apples and sack candy. They would get together and sack candy. They made the sacks out of mosquito netting.

PAULINE: Did somebody play Santa Claus?

IDA: Yep. I can remember I was the Santa Claus one time. And I had to climb in the window on the west side of the schoolhouse. They had a box for me out there for me to climb up on and I had my dad's fur overcoat. So, I was climbing through the window. Roselle, and Arlene, and Twyla and all of them was just little kids, so I was going along shaking hands with them and Roselle spoke up and she said, "I think it's Aunt Ida." Well when she said, "I think it's Aunt Ida," everybody laughed. How I ever got through the window I don't know. I don't think I could do it today.

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PAULINE: What kind of a doll did you get for Christmas?

IDA: Well, it was probably 16 inches high and had hair and it went to sleep. And that's the first doll that I ever had that would go to sleep when you laid her down. Oh, I was proud of that doll. Then another doll I had, was a black-haired China-headed doll and my mother made a rag body for it. And I gave it to my niece, and it was wearing a dress I had when I was two years old. This little dress was black and white and calico, and it was a dress I wore --- she didn't have to cut it down too much.

PAULINE: What kind of subjects did you have when you were in school?

IDA: We had reading, and writing, and arithmetic, and history, physiology. Physiology was all about your body. I really did like physiology because I was interested in all the bones in your body. And we had grammar, I didn't like grammar. We had to do diagrams. And I don't know, I just never could diagram a sentence, I just couldn't. And I didn't like grammar, and I guess you can tell by the way I talk.

PAULINE: Did you have music? Did you sing?

IDA: Oh, sometimes, if some of the teachers could carry a tune to help us --- but we didn't --- well I guess after I was out of school, they did get an organ and some of the teachers could play. But we just had to learn the tunes, and somebody would start them.

PAULINE: How long a day did you go to school?

IDA: We had to be there by 9 o'clock, and we didn't get out until 4 o'clock in the afternoon. In the wintertime, I tell you, it was really pretty cold when there was a blizzard on and getting out at 4 o'clock in the afternoon and try to find the way home. I remember once going through the fields and there was such a snow blizzard that we missed the barn where we were supposed to go through the gate and we went about a quarter of a mile south of the barn before we came to the fence, and we

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followed it back to the barn so we could go through the gate.

PAULINE: Ida gave some more information about some other relatives. Frank Baker and his brother Tom Baker (Ida's father) came to Harney County in 1878. During his youth, Frank was employed at the Island Ranch by John Devine. Frank Baker engaged in the livestock and ranching business in Harney County on Sagehen Hill. He is Elmer, Walter, Frank, Chester Baker, Myrtle, Frances and Lulu's father.

IDA: I remember, it was Christmas day, and we were all there at my dad's ranch for Christmas dinner and dad says, "Let's go out and see how Uncle Frank is." He wasn't very well. So, we went out there and he seemed to recognize us all, but he passed away while we were there. And my dad was so glad that we had gone out there. We just hadn't realized that he was so near gone as he was. So, we were there all the rest of the day with his family until they came out to get the body, you know.

PAULINE: Ida and Albert Cross have been well loved and respected by the community. Albert died a few years ago, but Ida at this writing is still living in the same home her husband built for her so many years ago. She was Queen Mother of Pioneer Day in 1971, and an article was written about her and published in the Burns Times-Herald in June 1971, details more the many community services she has performed for the community.

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