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HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #42 - Side A

Subject: Thomas C. Howard

Place: Drewsey, Oregon

Date: December 12, 1977

Interviewer:

Thomas C. Howard, Drewsey rancher, tells his family history.

In 1832, Thomas Howard was born in New York City. He was born two years after his immigrant parents arrived from Ireland. He grew to early manhood there, and approximately around the time of the '49 gold rush, left his home and brothers and sisters, never to hear from them again.

At the age of 16, Thomas boarded a boat to join the hordes in route to California via the Isthmus of Panama. He crossed the Isthmus on a mule to catch another boat to San Francisco.

During his period in California he plied his trade as butcher throughout the gold camps, and on occasion, prospecting.

My grandfather had a great love for horses. He told the story of a Spanish Don. The Don offered in trade a Spanish grant of land in the San Joaquin Valley for the horse, but my grandfather refused, since it was his only mode of transportation.

He left California in 1862 with a herd of beef cattle in route to the gold camps in Northern Idaho, via Harney Valley and John Day Valley. While camping overnight at Canyon Creek, members of the group discovered gold. Some of the group remained

there while others rode on to Idaho. He was among the ones who chose to remain.

This led to the settlement of Canyon City and the John Day Valley. During the ensuing years, Grant County was formed comprising Grant County and all of Harney County. In 1866 he became the first sheriff of Grant County, serving for six years.

Having met and married my grandmother in California, a widow with two small children, who followed him to Canyon City by steam ship via the Columbia to The Dalles. During her stay in Astoria, she was to lose one of her children, who had received a fall down a stairway. She traveled from The Dalles to Canyon City on a mule with her little boy riding behind her. During her time in Canyon City she was a milliner, making hats for the ladies.

She revisited California again, traveling the old freight and military roads by wagon. While in California she lost her second child.

They moved to Colorado where my grandfather Edward J. was born, in Colorado Springs in 1873. They moved him back to California and then to Canyon City. In the summer of 1882 my grandfather Thomas, and his friend Sam Williams, came to the Malheur River Valley. Since this part of the valley was Indian Reservation, they squatted on the tracts of land now known as the Howard Ranch and the Jordan Ranch. Wintering in dugouts, Sam taking the Jordan property.

In 1883, the Indian Reservation was thrown open to settlement. My grandmother and father came to join him in the summer of 1883. They established residence on this property while he filed an additional claim north of this property on Mule Creek, where they spent their summers. She was later to become the first postmistress of Drewsey, keeper of the hotel, and taught school in her spare time. The schoolhouse was then located in one of the fields that comprised the Williams Ranch today.

Grandfather passed away in 1906, and grandmother in 1924. My father in 1941. He was married to Ida Ward, my mother in 1905. To this union was born three children; Tom, 1912; Evelyn, 1916; and Edward in 1918. I, Tom married Eleanor Joyce in 1943, and to this union came Pam Howard in 1948, Thomas Martin Howard in 1950. Tommy and his wife Barbara make the fourth generation with their six month old baby, Heather, who is the fifth generation on the ranch.

In the year 1982, we will become a century ranch. Incidentally while my grandfather was living in Canyon City, in the early '70's, he selected the 91 brand which is still a recorded brand for this ranch.

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