

HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #442 – Side A

Subject: Monte Garrison – Indian Boxers

Place: Harney County Library - Burns, Oregon

Date: April 25, 2006

Interviewer: Sandra Crittenden

SANDRA CRITTENDEN: This is Sandra Crittenden, April 25th, 2006. Interview with Monte Garrison from Lewiston, Idaho. This is Monte Garrison with a little ... he had written.

MONTE GARRISON: I guess it wasn't too much to get excited about in my hometown of Burns, Oregon back then. I know it was fun to go swimming and ride my bike and fish Silver Creek. And I know that, and I knew Lloyd Louie was the toughest guy in the world. No, really, maybe Larry Richards and Cliff Sands, Don Holly, Arthur Bob or the Capps brothers --- But back then boxing was number one in Burns, Oregon. Football, all those other things, they didn't matter. In the middle --- on Saturday night at the old Lincoln Gym was full to the rafters, including the --- and if there had been a Fire Marshall back then they would probably have shut them down.

SANDRA: And about what year was this?

MONTE: That was probably in the early '50's, mid '50's, and early '50's and '40's. And the coach of the boxing team was a guy named Morris Osa. But how tough were the Burns Indians? You might find the old boxing coach from the College of Idaho and ask him. He was fairly proud in 1956 when the Spinochos (sp.?) brothers, two Greek brothers at the college won the medals in the Olympics. The next year he was trying to get a match for his Olympians and ran into Keith and Bobby Capps, also two brothers from Burns Paiute Indians, out at the team, and coached by Morris Osa. I was at that match, and I can tell you that it was embarrassing to the Olympic medallists and their coach. Those boys put Burns on the map back then.

And I've seen a lot of events in the old Lincoln Gym, but nothing like the fight night when the black boxers from the Powell Club in Portland came to take on the Burns Indians. The local boys --- nobody was a showman, this guy Larry Richards was the early Mohammed Ali, put on the show. When he stepped into the ring, people just went crazy because he was such a showman and they liked him and he was a good-looking Indian boy, and he could pack a punch. He was left-handed. The fans loved how he jabbed with the right, and wound up and delivered the best left hand I ever witnessed. And I have seen a few since then, because I'm a boxing fan.

I believe we stopped here ---

SANDRA: Yeah.

MONTE: But that's the way it was back then. Those guys were our heroes. Now it is kind of like you come back, and they're trying to still keep the culture of their kids. And

I talked to Lloyd Louie yesterday out at the Camp for about an hour about the old times, and how when boxing was --- well it was obvious the pride that they had back then. And Lloyd told me that --- I asked him, and I said, “Well what about --- are any of the young Indians now here in Burns, do they really realize how it was?” He said, “No,” he said, “We were committed.” He said, “There was no drinking and that.” He said, “We, the coach made us work hard because we wanted to be the best, and we were.” And there was a pride there. Of course we were boxing at the time, my brothers and I too.

SANDRA: Was this through the school, the boxing and teams that ---

MONTE: No, no. No Morris Osa took a bunch of Indian boys and took them down to the gym and showed them how to fight.

SANDRA: Marsosa?

MONTE: Morris Osa.

SANDRA: Do you know how to spell that?

MONTE: It's Marcellus or something. They called him Morris. And he had one eye out, and he was really --- and ---

SANDRA: Was he just an individual, or was he just an individual here in Burns?

MONTE: Yeah, yeah, I think he had a family here. He has got relatives that are still living around. Matt Osa, I know him, because later on I coached him in baseball.

SANDRA: And he just took an interest in these kids.

MONTE: Oh, he wanted to help the kids, and that's all he wanted to do. And he was quite a guy. And then a guy came later who was, that stayed almost as long. His name was Bill --- oh goodness, I can't remember ---

SANDRA: So it was an independent collection of boys ---

MONTE: It was a club, an amateur boxing club.

SANDRA: And where did they use ---

MONTE: They fought in the Golden Gloves Tournaments at that time; they were all around, just ---

SANDRA: In the state?

MONTE: Yeah. And like Billings, Montana was in, in the Empire Golden Gloves. And that's where the kids went. And then if you won in that tournament, then you went to the nationals. And Lloyd Louie back then was national champion and got plenty --- They put Richard Sands --- I just found this out from Ron Tiller, used to be one of my classmates, we were talking about how it was. And he said that Denny Moyer had fought Clifford Sands several times. Moyer ended up as world champion, and Cliff had beat him several times. They fought back and forth; he was out of Portland back then. Anyway, that's how good these guys were. And they went all over, all over the West boxing as a team. There was a couple of White boys on there, a guy named Leonard Smith. But the main ones was like Lloyd Louie and ... Richards, and Clifford Sands, Don Holly.

But I'm going to get Lloyd in here. I talked to him yesterday --- and you know it's funny, you grew up with those guys and --- But we boxed, my brothers and I, and we went down to Idaho about the 7th grade and we went into boxing, two of my brothers down there. And we were still in contact with these guys over here, through tournaments and stuff. And then I'd come back later and --- And it was sad because one of the things,

like yesterday when I was talking to Lloyd, and I said, and I knew he was Chief Louie. Because I can remember when we were little kids, his dad on his horse riding down Main Street in a full regalia, Chief Louie. And he had, and I asked him yesterday, I said, “Lloyd, what do you remember about your Dad Chief Louie?” He said, “Well, he was a humble man. He was proud, he was humble, and he was proud to help people.” And I thought to myself, and then he said, and this is the sad part, he said, “Some people just thought he was another drunk.”

SANDRA: Unfortunately that happens.

MONTE: And that’s why at that time, why I want this history to be out there about us. Because they were, their self-esteem --- if the Indians back then, they took pride in being the best and the toughest. And they actually put Burns on the map back then. I mean ---

SANDRA: Absolutely.

MONTE: And that’s, that was their thing. He said they’re trying to start; they had started with the younger group. He said they are not as committed, and I don’t think they understand. I don’t think they see in the history --- That’s why I’m here this morning, because I want to help get that out.

SANDRA: I have not; I haven’t seen anything written in here in newspaper clippings or anything else. Since you mentioned the year around 1950, I’ll go back and go through some newspapers and see ---

MONTE: Yeah, it was in the ‘50’s, because I graduated from high school in ’58. And I was in grade school, so it had to have been, let’s see --- it had to have been in the late ‘30’s, or I mean it had to have been in the ‘40’s and ‘50’s.

SANDRA: It certainly is a history that is just nearly lost. It's just ---

MONTE: Yeah. Well and I don't want it to. And I talked to him about their language too. Because here is, there is a couple of things that came to my mind when I went in the museum over here. Because I mean I was a schoolteacher for a lot of years, and I know about history, how one-sided it is about the Indians. And yesterday I read this ---

SANDRA: Is it a paperback type?

MONTE: Yeah. ... (Conversation too far from microphone to be clear.) It was written by this guy Fitzgerald, called him Fitz here. I read this yesterday. It was typical of the type of view from the White man's view of this business with the Indians. There are different places in here where it just was, just struck me as being so white-washed as our history is from the --- we win the victories, they win the massacres, type of --- And one of these is this Silver Creek Battle. This is from the perspective of this guy. He talks about it --- and I'm not, I'll just read you a little bit about ...

SANDRA: ...

MONTE: Oh, here it is, Silver Creek fight. I'm just picking this particular part out because I remembered how it was described from their view of it. And reading through the lines from the Indians perspective it must have been somewhat like the Wounded Knee deal here, for what they did. But the way they described it ---

“Before daylight the next morning everything was in readiness for the surprise attack. And just as the first faint streak of dawn appeared in the eastern sky” --- Bernard the General, this Harney Valley Colonel, Bernard's forces joined the fifteen or twenty stockmen and settlers including Pete French, and this Steens Mountain cattle king D. H.

Smith ... and so on. That's these guys, along with some of the Cavalry --- And he had preceded this by talking about the Paiutes at the, some of the guys that they had thought had done something, disappoint people or something. So before daylight the next morning everything was ready he says.

“Bernard moved out with his little command to attack the force numerically superior six to one.” He was setting it up here. “The scouts and civilian contingent were placed some little distance on his right flank. All moved quietly and cautiously” --- And so on. “The channel of Silver Creek, at this point, was quite narrow.” And he goes on and tells about him sneaking up on these Indians. The Indian horses, in great --- “As Bernard's troops came thundering to the creek, the drowsy and bewildered Redskins” --- oh gosh --- “awakened by the clatter and shouts of the” --- like he had been reading the books --- “approaching column” --- well that's what they called them then, Redskins. “The approaching column which was advanced upon them like a whirlwind, tumbled out of their wickiups utterly demoralized by the suddenness and unlooked for attack, and seemed, for a few moments, incapable of resistance. To get out of the way of the trampling horses and their furious riders seemed uppermost in their minds. The cavalrymen dashed across the creek, jumping it in most places, and on through the scattered tepees pouring volley after volley into them as they went.”

SANDRA: The, how did you hear ---

MONTE: “It was an inspiring and spectacular sight. There is nothing in warfare that arouses enthusiasm like the Calvary charge.” I mean in one sentence the color of the history here says they were firing volley and volley into the camps of the sleeping

Indians. And then in the next one, “There is nothing in warfare that arouses enthusiasm like the Calvary charge. Is there anything so dreadful and demoralizing to disorganized foes.”

“Occasionally an Indian more brave and cool-headed than his fellows would take a shot at the charging cavalymen, but there was no semblance of concerted action as yet.” And then it goes on here to say, “Soon large numbers, coming down from the bluff, began to assume an aggressive attitude, placing troops in what might become a very dangerous predicament. However Colonel Bernard didn’t give them much time to plan. When he and his troopers had galloped through the entire hostile encampment, they immediately whirled around and charged back over practically the same ground, intending to do as much damage as possible while the enemy was disorganized.”

And basically what they did was turned around and beat their ass out of there. And the Indians started to get it together and get after them. So they did their duty and ran. But he makes it through here, the whole thing. But I just read that, because she pulled that out yesterday and I read it. But I’ve read similar type stuff.

SANDRA: And how did they explain it to you?

MONTE: Huh?

SANDRA: You must have gotten the story from the Indians. How did they explain it?

MONTE: No, no, I haven’t. That --- I just read this for the first time yesterday.

SANDRA: Oh.

MONTE: When I came into town. But I’m interested in finding what the other side of the story is. But there isn’t anything, I’m sure, from the Indian side that ... or if there is I

would like to help get it out there. Because they do have connections with the Indian ... because of this boxing. So I had to kind of --- But anyway when I was talking to Lloyd yesterday, now do you know Lloyd Louie?

SANDRA: I don't know him personally, no.

MONTE: He's the Chief.

SANDRA: Uh huh.

MONTE: I said, "You're still the Chief, aren't you?" He says, "Yeah, its traditionally." But he says ... accounts ... out here now though and all that. ... But I said would you get some stuff together, there is some people down there at the library that would like to get --- and there is some others of us who --- and other people that I know that would like to get any stories that you have. Stories your daddy told you about how it was. Because that's about the only way, they're dying off. His dad's going to die off and then who is --- you know, the story.

SANDRA: Uh huh, absolutely.

MONTE: So I said, you know, I kind of made up my mind that I want to get on it and help a little bit.

SANDRA: Well if you can do some interviews with them, and get some oral histories down on tape we would appreciate it.

MONTE: Well I'm headed back now, and I won't have, probably much time. But I did talk to Ron Tiller --- do you know Ron?

SANDRA: Just of him.

MONTE: Okay. He is my age too; he remembers all of ... in fact he was in my class. I saw him at breakfast this morning. I asked him if he would try and get some stuff together and get some interviews. And I actually talked to --- is that still on ---

SANDRA: Uh huh.

MONTE: Oh.

SANDRA: Do you want it of?

MONTE: No, I was just going to have you write down the names like Clifford Sands has got some pictures and so on I've heard. And Lloyd Louie I've talked to about getting some information about him. And if I'd have had --- and he seemed a little bit like he wasn't sure he had the confidence that he could write it down like, you know --- It is kind of an intimidation type of thing.

SANDRA: Well he shouldn't be because we're all just ---

MONTE: Well he shouldn't be. Oh I know. ...

SANDRA: And we do not have any criteria on punctuation or --- it's just the facts.

MONTE: And you could get him one of these I guess.

SANDRA: Uh huh.

MONTE: You don't have one of these around? ...

Yeah, we moved to Burns in about 1946. My dad Harlan Garrison was working out at the sawmill. And I had four brothers and a sister; so there was five of us boys and we were ornery little rascals. We used to get beer bottles up and down the --- the road between Hines and Burns and ---

The swimming pool back then was super. Everybody went to the swimming pool. It was beautiful clear water and we just swam all day long all summer. It was a great life back then.

We went fishing up on Poison Creek and Silver Creek, and Immigrant Creek. And we trapped ground squirrels out on the flats around our little house that Dad made out of planer ends.

And at school --- we had our friends. My best friend was Russell Barney. And Russell was an Indian boy from the reservation. And back then the reservation, I mean there was tepees. And there was a few shacks out there. And then later on for years they had these houses with no floor in them, no electricity, and no plumbing. For years the Indians --- but anyway my, probably my first experience with prejudice, because Russell Barney was my best friend and I had a birthday party and I invited him. And some of the other kids said they couldn't come because I invited an Indian. And I went home and asked my mom, I said, "What, what's the matter with Russell?" She said, "Well Russell, nothing was the matter with Russell, it was the other kids and their attitudes." But anyway I continued to have him as a best friend for years.

But anyway --- in fact years later, this is kind of getting ahead, when I was teaching school Russell had been to Vietnam, and as a soldier for --- I wanted him to speak to my students. And Russell, he didn't show up. And I went up --- he was up above the old Arrowhead Café, and I went up the stairs and down the hall and he was setting in there on his bed with all of his uniform. He was a Marine; he had all of his uniform and everything. And he said, "I can't do it." He had been drinking a little. And

I said, "You can do it Russell." And so he did, he came down and it was pretty funny because the kids said --- because he really got going, he got into it a little bit, how I killed all these Viet Conges and stuff. One of my students came up and said, "Mr. Garrison, do you think Mr. Barney might have had a couple to drink?" (Laughter)

Anyhow, anyway --- back in those early '40's and the '50's here in Burns it was --- in the spring it used to flood all over town. The old Silvie's River, we'd get on a raft, you could drive, or take a raft from Buchanan all the way to Burns in the barrow pits because it was that flooded. And then when the flood would go off, in our little places we would just load up all these pollywogs, and just --- I mean there would just be buckets and buckets full of pollywogs, and we'd pour them on top of each other and everything else.

Anyway, we used to trap these ground squirrels up there and try to sell them. We tried to sell worms to the fishermen, and we tried to be ... and then get money to go to the show house. They had a show house, and back then it was black and white. I don't know what time --- this person listening to this is but that was before television. So after I'd go to the black and white movie, then I'd dream when I got big my dreams was that I would have a movie theater in my basement. Then I hadn't even visioned that there would be TV. But that is what I wanted, because it was so neat to go to the shows.

SANDRA: Was the theater where it is at now?

MONTE: No. The theater was on the other side, up about halfway where the old bowling alley used to be was where the theater was then. I used to go in there, we were poor little rascals, so we would go on the floor, my brothers and I and we'd pick up candy

and popcorn off the floor that people had spilled it. I do remember one time that I was sitting in the back and I saw my brother's heads popping up here and there, they were going down the isles. (Laughter) I can't believe we'd actually do that to people.

But --- and I had a girlfriend, and her name was Marjorie Weare. She was the doctor's daughter. And so I think the only reason I liked her, it wasn't because she was so good looking, but it was just because she was a doctor's daughter, and she was clean. (Laughter) And I was a poor little boy down in the flats, and she lived up in --- So for my first --- I don't know whether anybody would ever want to hear this story but ---

SANDRA: Sure they do.

MONTE: So anyhow I, we had a Boy Scout crew and then the big deal was they had a party. And we could get dates, and I was about in the 6th grade then, about 11 years old, but it was my first date. And I can remember I went up and I got my scout uniform all pressed up. And I marched up to the door, and Dr. Weare come to the door, and I was so intimidated I --- that I wanted to pull it off so I said, "I'm here to pick up my date." And so I went in and he introduced --- I shook hands. And I said, "Well we got to go, I guess we better go now Marjorie." So I reached over, and there was a door right by the other door that went out, but it was a closet. So I opens up this closet and tries to bring her into the closet. And he said, "Well, I think maybe she wants to go out tonight rather than into the closet." (Laughter) Anyhow I remember that.

SANDRA: Was it a successful date?

MONTE: Yeah, it was my first date.

SANDRA: But you had fun.

MONTE: Well after that --- oh yeah, I always had fun. Back in those days it was super because ...

SANDRA: Kids could be kids.

MONTE: You could do a lot of things that kids don't do now, and have fun doing it. And there were little forts that we built and we ran all around. Used to sled off that hill over there, used to come down. There was an old guy, I don't know if anybody has ever told about Brownie. But there was an old boy, big, big, fat boy. And right at the bottom of the hill, coming from the school, we called it Brownie's hill. He sold hubcaps; he sold everything to the kids. He used to steal these hubcaps and then sell them right back to them. It was terrible. And he knew it, but he was such a nice old gentle old guy, but he didn't care, he just tried to help you out to buy candy, and come back the next day. Yeah, old Brownie he was quite a guy.

SANDRA: What hill was this, what school?

MONTE: From old Slater School up here. It's down, if you're going down where the old pizza parlor is now, or was, it's shut down. Maybe where the old bowling alley was. But there was another bowling alley downtown.

And I'll tell you what, after I went, moved away in about the 7th grade, went down to Nampa, and I came back and at that time Elvis was king, okay. And the bop was on. And it was so cool, there was an Indian boy named Arthur Bob --- that he would stand, and they had a juke box in the bowling alley downtown. And I came up from Nampa to visit my cousin one day and I went in that bowling alley and he had "Heartbreak Hotel" on, and he was doing the bop. And it was so cool of a dance because it was kind of the

Indian dance version where he went up on his toes. And he was just like this. And he was moving to the music, and he had a cigarette out of his mouth. And he was so cool that it just stuck in my mind as an image for years, and it was Arthur Bob. And I heard later that he was a hell of a boxer too, Arthur Bob was.

And the sad thing about some of these Indians was they all went like Ira Hayes, you know. They ended up either drunk and dying early, or whatever, you know. And as far as their life is --- in my mind, and they had so much talent and so on. I knew so many of them that were very, very good artists and so on. But it never, because of the circumstances and the situation out here, and the attitudes of the people about, you know, drunken Indians, about stereotypes and so on. It was awfully hard for these people to pull themselves out of --- over the years.

And that is what I discovered. I saw that, I saw the attitude, and I've seen it a lot of times in my life. And as I come back to Burns years later I see it is still there. It is an attitude that makes it awfully tough for them to have a good self-esteem about themselves.

I came back when --- I was in the Armory dance back in 1950 --- probably about '55. And I had a friend and we went out to the Armory dance, to the dance. I noticed the Indians were all in one corner. And I said, "Why, what's this?" He said they, there is an imaginary line, right there it is. If they cross that we will kick their butts. Which was a laugh, because those Indians were so tough they could have just --- I mean there wasn't any White boy in town that could whip a guy like Lloyd Louie or Larry Richards. Those guys were --- I mean they were far above anybody around. But that was the attitude of

the White boys. It was that they are not going to touch, or even dance with a White girl.

And that kind of attitude was there then, and it is probably still here now.

(End of tape)

bl