

HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #449 - Sides A/B

Subject: Merle Dodson

Place: Dodson Home – Burns, Oregon

Date: June 28, 1979

Interviewer: James Schultz

(Interview with Merle Dodson in Burns, Oregon, on June 28, 1979. Interviewed by James Schultz for the Horner Museum.)

JAMES SCHULTZ: First of all I'd like to know just where you were born and when.

MERLE DODSON: I was born in the state of West Virginia at Randolph County in the little town of Horton, on February the 25th, 1899.

JAMES: West Virginia?

MERLE: We left there when I was a small kid. I don't remember anything about it.

JAMES: So you didn't grow up there then? Where did you go then?

MERLE: I went from there to Arizona and then Dad moved to Nevada and at one time he cut wood for that Virginia City mine there. They cut it up in Washington and floated it down the river and took it out --- they cut it up in California, I mean, Horton.

JAMES: The Virginia City silver mine?

MERLE: Yes, that was the biggest mine --- I guess one of the biggest mines in the United States at one time. About 1899 and the turn of the century some place.

JAMES: He cut wood?

MERLE: He cut wood, you know, for that mining outfit --- cordwood --- floated down the river and took it out there. And then I guess they hauled it up in that narrow gauge railroad, part way.

JAMES: You were just a little kid then?

MERLE: Yes, I was only --- I don't remember it. I was only two or three years old. That story was handed down to me.

JAMES: And then what did you do?

MERLE: Oh, I came to Oregon in 1903. Dad had a ranch out there at Silverton and we were there ten years, I guess. And we went to Washington a while, I can't remember how long, up across from Hood River there. And then when I grew up a little more, I went to cutting logs up in the, Coeur d'Alene, up in the --- that Rose Lake Lumber Company in 1918.

JAMES: Up in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho?

MERLE: That was the Fourth of July Canyon. Do you know where that is? Well up in there on Hemlock Creek.

JAMES: I was just --- a couple of years ago they put in a four-lane highway through there, right through Wallace and Kellogg.

MERLE: Well, this wasn't as far up, you know. The Fourth of July Canyon was back this way. They flumed the --- fluming the logs into the north fork of the Coeur d'Alene river, then float them down to Rose Lake; about a twelve to fourteen mile trip. I was a

faller most of the time --- well cleaning up. They had to get a contract out. They had started during World War I and they, when the war was over, why they just left it and the government made them go back and take all that timber out, that they agreed to. And I worked next winter up in Metaline Falls, fell timber up there for Diamond Match Company.

JAMES: That was White Pine?

MERLE: White pine. And I worked around --- used to --- took in a harvest in the Palouse country a couple or three times. And then I went to Elk River, Idaho and worked in a lathe mill for a while. And next spring I came back to Spokane and got a job laying, relaying new steel from Edwall to Harrington on the Great Northern Railroad.

JAMES: From Edwall to Harrington?

MERLE: Yes, that was our section. When that was over I went to --- where did I go the ---

JAMES: That was hard work?

MERLE: Oh boy, taking up seventy pound steel and laying ninety at that time. But there was a lot of help on there --- get them old tongs and about eighteen guys on there and just pick up a rail and go anyplace with it. And I worked in Elk River while --- came back to Bend and I worked in the lathe mill there awhile. I got married during 1925. There was --- went to Grants Pass and back up into --- fell timber again there up at Maple Creek Lumber Company, out across from White Salmon. White Salmon, that's across from Hood River.

JAMES: White Salmon and Bingen, is that where it is?

MERLE: Yes, that's where they hauled the logs, the timber to --- down there and a little mill up in the woods --- logs for that Maple Creek Lumber Company.

JAMES: Was the flume up there then?

MERLE: No, not then. They trucked them down --- had old Mack trucks with the heavy solid tires and trucked the lumber down. Had the mill up there, see. It was a small mill and I had a job cutting logs for them --- and that took fire and burned up, timber got all burned up there. It was quite a time. I left there when that happened. I came back to Bend and went to cutting logs for Selvin Whitson Lumber Company, out south of Bend, and then I went ---

JAMES: What year was that, about?

MERLE: Oh, about 1926, I think. I went back to Elk River, Idaho in 1927. That's where Gene was born. He's 53 years old now or 54.

JAMES: Up in Coeur d'Alene, in that country?

MERLE: At Elk River, that's East of Harrison, down in that country there --- up by Colville. And I worked on the highway while out there, and from there I went to Alaska. I was up there one summer, and I came back down and I went to work for the mill at Hines. And I worked there for 32 years, and I've been retired now since 1964. I set planers there 18 to 22 years --- set planers there, for Hines.

JAMES: What year was that you started at Hines?

MERLE: 1932, last time. I scaled logs in 1930 up at Seneca.

JAMES: Was the railroad to Seneca then?

MERLE: Yeah, they hauled --- see we cut them logs --- they had a mill up there and they cut ties to finish that railroad. And all them spurs got up there, good pine logs --- timber

to cut to make ties out of, didn't have anything else. Had to get them logs out, didn't have any trucks at all. Everything was railroad, had a Caterpillar truck them down, load them on the cars, sent them to Hines.

JAMES: So they had spur lines going out from Seneca then, into the canyons?

MERLE: One went clear up into Logan Valley. One time --- they took it out now. There was one went out to the 96 Ranch, west. Then they had spurs go off like that (motioning) and they pick up steel, move them, then put them down someplace else, see.

JAMES: After that you went to Elk River and then you came back here again, and what did you do at the mill?

MERLE: I set planers, sit on the trimmer for a few years and then I set planning mill there.

JAMES: What is that exactly?

MERLE: Well, you take them rough lumber coming in there, you know, and you get them on the planer and you have to set the knives just the right width and thickness and keep them sharp so that they make a gloss finish on that lumber, it's quite a job!

JAMES: Yeah, I'll bet. You did that for ---

MERLE: Up till 1964. My wife died in 1966 and I've been just bumming around ever since. Well, Jack was born here in Burns in 1920, no 1934.

JAMES: Let's see, when you came over here the mill was already built then?

MERLE: No, when I went to Seneca first, they were just building the mill. See, Herrick had that mill started --- didn't you hear about that?

JAMES: I heard about that.

MERLE: He had the mill started and he went broke and the Forest Service took his contract away from him and sold it to Hines, see. Give Hines option to all that timber around here.

JAMES: So you actually were working for Herrick first?

MERLE: No, Herrick had started the frame --- was all up in that mill and a lot of them--- oh --- tramways down where they piled that lumber at that time. They stacked the lumber outside and when Hines took it over they made them sheds and --- all under the shed all the time. Hines --- I mean Herrick I think helped build that railroad from --- seems like from Crane, I'm not sure. I know he helped build the railroad up to Seneca --- part way and then Hines finished it. Herrick went broke, you know. You remember hearing of him, don't you? Used to be in Harrison, Idaho, got a big mill there, I think.

JAMES: I heard he got rich doing something else.

MERLE: Well, he had a --- flying airplanes. He had airplanes, you know.

JAMES: Right here at the airport?

MERLE: No, back in Idaho, someplace. He had two or three planes, it seems like, I don't know. I know one of them cracked up in winter there, we read about it, you know.

JAMES: When you came here, I understand that when the mill came, a lot of people from the Midwest came.

MERLE: Yeah, from Minnesota, see. They came --- Hines had a mill back there and I suppose when that shut down --- and brought all the help out here, a lot of it.

JAMES: Did they get along pretty well with the ranchers and other people that lived here?

MERLE: Seemed to. A lot of Scandinavians come up and they're pretty good people.

JAMES: No friction or anything like that?

MERLE: No, they didn't bring no niggers in here. Had of, that might have been some trouble at that time, now not allowed to say anything.

JAMES: No. Of course, I know you've been all over this county.

MERLE: Yeah, I've been over a lot of Harney County.

JAMES: Okay, say back in 1930, what were the roads like, like from Bend over here?

MERLE: It was just a gravel road. A lot of it wasn't even gravel when I come over in 1929; first, first trip over here. Then when they graveled it and I think it was in nineteen and, oh gee, I don't know, World War II is when I think they blacktopped it, a gravel road.

JAMES: How long would it take to get across there then?

MERLE: About five hours or six. I know it ---

JAMES: Okay, and how about the road from here to Jon Day?

MERLE: John Day? Well, that was the same way, dirt road, dirt and gravel to Seneca; and then it was dirt road from there into John Day.

JAMES: Did it follow the same twisting canyon?

MERLE: Practically, yeah. Oh, they made a few short cuts when they made the main road, changed the grade a little bit, of course.

JAMES: And from here to Ontario, would that be the same then?

MERLE: That was a dirt road all the way to Ontario.

JAMES: Okay, when you go up in the hills now, every canyon's got a road in it every place you go, I guess. Was it like that then?

MERLE: Naw, there was a few wagon trails back over through the country. There was one into Logan Valley from Seneca; that was just a regular wagon road. Of course not a car road, no gravel or anything, you just took your chances. If it got muddy you got stuck, that's the way it happened.

JAMES: Were there people --- you know, all those cabins like Oard's Cabin, were there people living up there?

MERLE: As far as I know, I didn't know it at the time. I never seen anyone living there, but I'd been told that was Mrs. Oard's homestead. Did you ever find that place?

JAMES: No, well we didn't try to go back. We know we can find it the way you showed us to get up there, but we want to try to go in from Buchanan.

MERLE: Well that's a pretty rough road through there, rough --- either way it's rough. But yes, you can get there that way. I've been through there a few times, a long time ago, but it's all dirt roads.

JAMES: You know where the Allison Guard Station is, up there past Delintment Lake?

MERLE: Yeah, oh yeah, I couldn't figure ---

JAMES: We were up there yesterday, and looking at the Allison Ranch. Were you ever up there when somebody lived there?

MERLE: I been there.

JAMES: Well the ranch is just past the Guard Station.

MERLE: I --- I can't say, I --- I don't know Norman Elswick, you know, he camped there quite awhile. He worked for the Forest Service, you know him, and he said they camped right there at the station all the time.

JAMES: I was going to ask you about gunsmithing. How did you come to doing that, just a hobby?

MERLE: A hobby that I had from a kid up.

JAMES: You been doing that all your life then?

MERLE: Practically, up to the last four or five years. I do a little of my own now, but I don't keep my license anymore. I turned that back --- let Guff take over where I left off. ("Guff" – Francis A. Thorpe, Metal Shop Teacher at Burns Union High School – later at Madras High School.)

JAMES: He's doing a pretty good job!

MERLE: Yeah, he's real good; he's a real good metal shop man. To start with, knows his metal and machines and measurements and all that stuff --- he's real good. First barrel I seen him turn, I helped him turn on my lathe out here, you know, then I taught him how to blue --- trouble between times but he does a real good job now.

JAMES: How would you say that the town of Hines has grown since you were here?

MERLE: Well, when I came here there was --- they was just working on the big old hotel out there. They had that started and that --- fall of 1929 and '30 they were building those houses. They was company houses, see. People were supposed to live in them when they worked at the mill and pay rent. And, then they decided to sell them, so they sold them out to the people out there.

JAMES: How about the guesthouse? Did they build that then too? The guesthouse, it's up on the hill.

MERLE: Oh yeah, that was built the same time. That was originally intended for a hospital when they first came out there, see, and then they made a big mansion out of it.

And then they got in contact with old Doc Brown; he was a company doctor from back east. He was a good old doctor, too. He was doctor here for four or five years and then he went to Bend and --- he died over there on the Metolius River, had a cabin over there.

JAMES: He had an office set up in the guesthouse then?

MERLE: I don't know, I don't know what that --- they didn't --- that was the intention when they built that for a company hospital. But then they didn't --- got in cahoots with the hospital here and they didn't use that for a hospital.

JAMES: Did they have barracks for the single guys, or ---

MERLE: No.

JAMES: Each single guy had his own house?

MERLE: Well you had to board with somebody. They didn't have a boarding house I know of there. Now there's a commissary there that you can board there and sleep for a little. Most people boarded in town or someplace --- single men would board with somebody else, some family you know.

JAMES: Did they ever log with horses?

MERLE: Not to my knowledge, oh, not when they get them Cats, the old gas burning Caterpillar tractors, when I first came to Seneca. And we had a few horses there all right, but they never logged with them. Used to log with them in Bend --- had the old high wheelers and they hauled them logs out of the weeds. You seen them high wheelers haven't you? They had them big high wheels and they crank it up and let the thing down --- axle came down like this --- tie the load up and start again and it pulls right up.

JAMES: You been to Idle City? Were they mining there? I mean, were you there since they've been mining it?

MERLE: Yeah, there was --- mined a little bit, they never did anything. My wife's uncle owned that mine a long time, old Nelson Pardee.

JAMES: Oh, Pardee, I've heard that name.

MERLE: Yeah, he was my wife's uncle; that was her mother's brother.

JAMES: I'll be darned.

MERLE: It changed hands --- he died and it changed hands two or three times; some outfit from California working up there. And besides a guy, you know him, I can't think of his name --- he's got a cabin up there. He mined a little bit. The Forest Service kind of beat him out of his mining claims, had an awful time of it, old Rhodes.

JAMES: How about --- we counted, I think, five buildings up there. We were up there the other day.

MERLE: You was up there? Did you --- did you go clear up the road that leads off at Idle City and goes back up a mile and a half or two miles up that old road on top? That's where the mine is up there.

JAMES: No, we probably walked less than one-half mile from the main road. We didn't get to the mine then.

MERLE: No. Well, they had a dredge up there; they mined --- over. Old Nelson, he had a mine tunnel four or five hundred feet back in there. I was back there just once. I didn't want to go back in there. They never took anything of value out. It wasn't --- the ore was too --- wasn't valuable enough to start mining, see. It didn't pay out good.

JAMES: And that's a couple of miles ---

MERLE: Yeah, a mile and one-half, but they did have a dredge up there. Up above that old --- it's where you go up there, had a dredge there for a while. Part of it sits there yet.

JAMES: Yeah, okay, that makes sense. We saw a lot of water pipes; I mean hoses, in there.

MERLE: Well, the guys that's working there now --- placer mining. They probably use a lot of that. A bunch of Chinamen got the placer mining, that's why they call it Idle City. One of the Chinamen was supposed to have an Idol --- he worshiped an Idol all the time.

JAMES: Oh.

MERLE: That's what I heard.

JAMES: Okay.

MERLE: Did you ever hear that?

JAMES: No, I haven't heard that. That makes sense, when I first heard the name I thought it was Idle, somebody that was lazy, wasn't doing anything --- Idol City --- I'll be darned. How about King Mountain Lookout?

MERLE: Well, I been up there a few times. I never --- we used to hunt down in, below there, see. I think old --- Cecil Bennett, he built that about 25 years ago.

JAMES: It's in pretty good shape.

MERLE: Yeah, they rebuilt it, you know. That one up at Sheep Mountain, they burned that down two years ago. That was a big high one.

JAMES: I didn't know that.

MERLE: I didn't either. I went up there to look, to show the kids the lookout and there was just a pile of ashes and twisted iron and concrete. Forest Service burns them down every so often when they don't need them, they burn them down.

JAMES: Up by Idol City, we went past --- by where the Dickenson Mill was. You turn off there at Crow Flats.

MERLE: Well yeah, there's one, two --- two or three Dickenson Mills in there.

JAMES: Oh, there are?

MERLE: Yeah, the old regular Dickenson's Mill --- quite a job getting in there, can't hardly tell you where to go. I don't think I could find it myself till I been in and looked around a while. The roads have been changed, the logging roads. They're putting, you know, bypassed old roads and you got to take the old roads to get to the Dickenson Mill.

JAMES: We went --- we found a --- there was a pond and a house and a couple of other buildings and an old house, oh, a couple hundred yards from there. This is a few miles off the highway.

MERLE: Yeah, was there a lot of old sawdust piles and old boards and stuff? That was the last mill they had, I think, in there.

JAMES: Across the road was a sawdust pile ---

MERLE: Yeah, that mill was in there about 1935, or something like that. Then Dickenson and another guy had a mill back farther up this way. That was sometime during World War II, wasn't it? Can't think of his name now, with Dickenson. Dickenson was working out at the mill, that janitor could tell you a whole lot about that Dickenson Mill stuff.

JAMES: Yeah, Walt, he moved to Canby.

MERLE: He did?

JAMES: Yeah. His son, Dee, still lives out there though. No, his son Dee moved to Ontario, that's the same Dickenson though.

MERLE: There's a whole lot of them brothers and I don't know just which is which --- they'd all know about it, see.

JAMES: How about the Horton Mill?

MERLE: Well that mill was out on the west side, or --- on Standcliff Creek. Let's see what canyons that --- not far from the mouth of Standcliff Creek --- Winslow Canyon --- in there. That was a long time ago and then another little mill in there since, don't know just where that was, someplace on Dairy Creek I think it was.

JAMES: You know we went up there. We didn't try to stop at it, but I was telling them about it. When you go up close to Willow Creek Flat and then the road forks off to the left and they paved that up to Delintment Lake. If you go up there, like maybe half a mile or a mile, then there's a mill there on the left. Turn left at the first fork then up a ways is the mill.

MERLE: Was there a rock pile there --- or gravel pile?

JAMES: No.

MERLE: That was the old Horton Mill site.

JAMES: Was it?

MERLE: There's a big gravel pile there now, at the old Horton Mill site, close to it.

JAMES: You know the fork I'm talking about? You go straight ahead to get to Emigrant Creek and, if you turn left, you go to --- you go up, kind of along the ridge to Delintment Lake, just across Willow Creek Flats.

MERLE: Well you go across the Willow Creek Flats ---

JAMES: Well yeah, you go through the canyon that way ---

MERLE: Take the lower --- the upper road goes to Delintment Lake and lower one goes down ---

JAMES: It goes to Cricket Creek.

MERLE: Goes to Emigrant Creek.

JAMES: Yeah, it goes along Cricket Creek to Emigrant Creek.

MERLE: You go the other way, you go to Yellowjacket --- take that east right there at the bridge, goes across, before you cross the bridge there. One goes to --- you go clear up through over the top and come back on the Myrtle Park road.

JAMES: Yeah, I'm talking about ten miles this side of that fork there. Just, you go across the flat over Radar Base Hill and cross the flat, you get in a little canyon there and all of a sudden the road peels off to the left.

MERLE: Oh, up that way. That goes to Delintment Lake, I think.

JAMES: Yeah. Just --- I know that as you go out that road about a half a mile, on the left, there's a mill.

MERLE: There's an old mill back this way. I don't know who owned that ---

JAMES: That wasn't Horton Mill?

MERLE: No.

JAMES: Okay.

MERLE: That mill hasn't been there too long. I think it's been, probably during the war, even before World War II.

JAMES: That wasn't it. If you take the other road then, the one that heads for Emigrant you go past the Horton Mill Burn, where they got that seeding. Is that where the Horton Mill was then?

MERLE: As near as I can figure out. The old cutting there you see --- they logged back south from there. Brought their logs in --- they logged clear out to the rim there, old stumps there that's been there for one hundred years probably, or eighty years.

JAMES: We tried to find the Association Corral, you heard of that?

MERLE: I've heard of it, but ---

JAMES: Way, way up there, almost to Twelvemile Creek.

MERLE: Twelvemile Creek? I don't know where that is, by that name. The Forest Service renamed a lot of them places, last twenty years, and I don't know --- I need a Forest Service map.

JAMES: I know they changed a lot of the road numbers --- I know they are going to change the numbers of the roads.

MERLE: Did you travel around that country looking them places up?

JAMES: Yes, we were up there yesterday and the day before. We camped at Delintment.

MERLE: Camped at Delintment?

JAMES: Yeah.

SIDE B

MERLE: That was last year, about the 3rd of July, I guess.

JAMES: Hunting, that's what I wanted to talk about. How would you describe the hunting, say when you first came here to what it is now?

MERLE: Oh, it was good. You go out here --- take the pick of your deer then.

JAMES: Pretty close to town or anywhere?

MERLE: Well you go up there around Horton Mill or back this way. I killed a lot of my deer back this way from Horton Mill and south. Oh, that was even after World War II. But after World War II the hunters come in here so thick they just seemed to chase everything out of the country --- what they didn't kill off.

JAMES: Were there more elk close to town?

MERLE: No, the elk wasn't in here when I first came here, there was no elk closer than up in the Baker country. But they started --- a few of them down along Pine Creek over there drifted in, see.

JAMES: Were they planted there, or they came by themselves? The antelope, they were always here?

MERLE: Antelope was always here, lots of them. At one time you didn't even need a permit, you know. Go get a license --- as long as you had a hunting license, you had an antelope --- 1930 to '31 or '32.

JAMES: Was the fishing pretty good?

MERLE: Well yes, I think it was better than it is now. It was better here a few years ago than it is now, you know. We used to go over into Logan Valley and camp there on vacation and fish for two or three days and have a good time. You'd always catch all the fish you wanted to eat. Now you have to work pretty hard to get enough --- for a couple of messes.

JAMES: How about, like Chickahominy Reservoir?

MERLE: Chickahominy --- that wasn't here till about, oh, fifteen years ago, maybe longer. I can't remember when they put that dam there.

JAMES: I think that was here when I came.

MERLE: What year did you come here?

JAMES: '66.

MERLE: '56?

JAMES: '66.

MERLE: '66. Well that would make it fifteen years ago, sixteen, eighteen. Might be twenty years ago, I wouldn't say for sure just what it is 'cause I don't know. But it hasn't been there a long time. It is not an old time reservoir; same with Delintment, you know. That was put in there about the '30's, I think. They dammed that --- made that dam there and backed that water up.

JAMES: Was there a lake there before?

MERLE: No.

JAMES: No lake at all?

MERLE: Flat, some kind of a drainage --- way the water drained in from all ways, made that pocket there.

JAMES: You were telling me about that guy down on Cottonwood Creek. You were telling me this morning about the guy on Cottonwood Creek, something about --- he was a trapper down there.

MERLE: Cottonwood Creek? You sure it was me told you?

JAMES: Yes, didn't you say some guy and --- he was a trapper down there and he hauled in a bunch of dead horses or something?

MERLE: Oh yes, that was John Penland. He trapped down there. He was a government trapper there.

JAMES: Oh, he was a government trapper?

MERLE: He was, you know, for --- yes, and I think he poisoned a lot and that's when they used poison. He poisoned a lot of them horses; you know, put poison in them and killed the coyotes.

JAMES: Coyotes a problem a long time ago?

MERLE: Ah, yes. A lot of sheep down there, thousands and thousands of sheep in the Steens Mountains, thus way and up until about World War II and then they quit. Old Urizar used to have fifteen thousand sheep up there, I guess. Old Joe Abasolo, he'd dead you know, so is Urizar. But old Urizar's boy out here, Julio, he died here a year or two ago. It was his dad had the sheep. And old Pete Obiague had sheep all over the --- out there by Sage Hen Hill, you know. That was his territory. They was hollerin' about the coyotes all the time then.

JAMES: Were there more coyotes around then than there are now?

MERLE: No more than there is now.

JAMES: How about bobcats?

MERLE: Well, there were a few bobcats, but there wasn't too many, I never seen too many anyway. Of course, I don't see too good these years. I don't think that bobcats are very much a problem like the coyotes.

JAMES: Oh, I know, beaver, that's what I was going to ask you about. Were there really a lot of beaver here, say thirty, forty, fifty years ago?

MERLE: Yes, eighty years ago, after that --- that Diamond Valley was just jumping with beaver; the old timers I've heard talk about it. Come in with pack train, you know --- packing their beaver skins out on pack horses, camp there and catch beaver all winter and then spring of the year they go pack them out.

JAMES: Yes, how about up in our hills?

MERLE: Up north? I don't think too many --- was a few beaver in Logan Valley country when I was there first.

JAMES: Did they get trapped out?

MERLE: They got trapped out. And I don't know about John Day. I don't know how the beaver was there but there was --- most all of them little creeks had beaver sign on them; you know the way they cut them trees.

JAMES: I was up at Yellowjacket the other day, I think there's beaver working in there now, they strip the bark --- like two or three feet of bark off the tree.

MERLE: And they cut the trees down? What kind of trees?

JAMES: They were pine trees.

MERLE: Pine, yes, yes they cut pine trees, I've seen them where they cut junipers and aspen or quaking asp --- that's what they eat the most. You have any of that around; they just kill that all off. Cut that timber all down.

JAMES: The only trees around there were pine.

MERLE: Yes, I think that's right. They're great along the willows too. That's when they're hard to catch in them willows. I've been with Miles Langdon a lot when he's trapping beaver. That's where I --- I used to catch beaver myself; I haven't trapped for forty years or fifty.

JAMES: They pretty hard to trap?

MERLE: Yes, if you don't understand them. And lots --- it makes a lot of difference where you trap 'em, you know. The only --- best way to do is to catch a beaver, you got to drown him right away. 'Cause if he lives just a little while, first thing you know he

just eat that foot off right under the trap and pull himself away. They do that now even under good conditions. But you had to have them by the water where they could jump off into the water and, well, you have a big weight on the trap; the minute he gets caught in the trap and heads for deep water and of course he couldn't get back up.

JAMES: Oh, he pulls the weight in after him?

MERLE: Yes. I seen a lot of trappers use a big long rod --- see, about, oh, twelve feet long, about a three-eighths inch rod and had a thing on it, kind of like a hinge with a hole in it. And it would slide up this way, and when they go to pull it back, slides down, when they go to pull it back up it would lock. It wouldn't come back --- they get down there, dive in, they couldn't get back up, it locks.

JAMES: Muskrat the same way?

MERLE: No, wasn't too many muskrats here --- quite a few down at the refuge. The Heinz boys used to trap there a lot. Muskrat, they are pretty easy to trap.

JAMES: What did you father do?

MERLE: Oh, he ranched a little bit over around Silverton there, after he come to Oregon, and then he went up into Washington, and he went up to British Columbia. In fact he died at British Columbia up --- at across from Colville or from Kettle Falls, in there. You ever been up in that country?

JAMES: Yes, I spent a summer at Kettle Falls. I spent a summer at Kettle Falls. And then your mother moved down to Prineville?

MERLE: She moved to Prineville then. She's there yet.

JAMES: Was she born in Oregon --- she came from Virginia too?

MERLE: She was born in West Virginia. Dad was born in Pennsylvania. I got an older brother, he was born in West Virginia and had one sister but she's dead now. She was born, she was oldest in the family and my younger, sister younger than me, she was born in Nevada.

JAMES: She still down there?

MERLE: No, she's dead. Dad lived to be 89.

... (This part of the tape consists of personal visiting between narrator and interviewer.)

MERLE: Did you ever fish up in Blitzen River, up in Tombstone, up in that country?

JAMES: No, just at Page Springs.

MERLE: I was going to ask Guff up there, one time, but he never got around to it. I fished up there, a place called Tombstone. That old sheepherder died, and so far --- couldn't bring him back on horseback and they just buried him in a rock pile.

JAMES: Oh yeah, is there any kind of marker or anything?

MERLE: They had a marker there at the --- somebody took a file or something and chipped on a flat rock. The name was Bolin; he died in 1911, I think it was, or 1906.

JAMES: I'll be darned, no, I hadn't heard about that.

MERLE: See --- was it Don Higgins talking about that? Somebody been up there and said they moved the gravestone away there someplace else, moved it over there, just a big pile of rock. So rocky you couldn't dig a hole. All you had to --- is probably lay him there and pile rocks on. We camped right there about, oh, one hundred feet of it all the time --- a spot there and walk down three-fourths of a mile to get to the Blitzen River, right down like that, you know, get in there and fish. Used to be pretty good fishing in

there too. Old Ruby and Norman, they used to go down there a lot --- Ruby Elswick. But since they curtailed that fishing, why there's not too many people go in there.

JAMES: Yes, I hadn't heard about that. I was just talking --- you know Jean Scrivner? Jean Scrivner, she runs the Hole In The Wall up there.

MERLE: Yes, she's crippled?

JAMES: I was talking to her; she said that somewhere up on one of Bob Smith's places, that used to be her dad's --- there was a grave up there.

MERLE: Oh, well that Bob Smith's place used to belong to Smith, the old, old time Smith that was in here first I knew of him. Like, remember old Dole Smith --- he's dead. It was --- his dad had that then. Seems like when he sold it to Doc Smith, Bob Smith's dad, he wasn't, I don't think any relation, and then Bob --- you been up at the Smith Ranch? They're old buildings, great big houses, one or two that they hauled the lumber in by horse and wagon, I guess.

JAMES: Where is --- that's up the river?

MERLE: Way up the river.

JAMES: I been up as far as, oh, who's that guy that's got that ranch up there now?

MERLE: The Baker ranch.

JAMES: Yes, Baker, I been about a mile beyond the Baker ranch on foot.

MERLE: Yes, he keeps it all locked up; Bob does now. I was with Langdon, with a guy there that had permission to trap and had a key. And the other road goes up through Mosquito Flat, down that way, and that's a better road --- and they got that locked up also.

JAMES: So the old place is up in there then?

MERLE: Yes, clear up in the end there.

JAMES: That was built by the old time Smith?

MERLE: Well, I think so. Dole Smith's dad and he --- about all died off now. I can't, don't know many of them. You know Nels Smith? That big kind of heavy-set guy? You see him around town. Well that was his dad's dad that owned that --- built that, I think, his granddad. Nice --- I never was in the house, nice ranch house. They re-roofed it here a while back, I know. They're keeping it up pretty good.

JAMES: Nobody lives in it though?

MERLE: I don't think anybody is living in it. They generally had --- Bob has --- staying up there in, take care of cattle in the summer time though. Two or three cabins there, I don't think they live in the big house.

... (This part is unproductive – attempt to locate Indian cemeteries for J. Lee.)

JAMES: You lived here in this house all the time you've been here?

MERLE: No, I've had a couple. Oh, twenty years ago we moved in here --- let's see what --- I was going to build out there and things changed for the worse and I didn't build. We lived in this, and I kept living here after the wife died --- didn't need a big house. Wish now I'd have built. I got them --- I got four lots here.

JAMES: Did you rent one of the Hines houses, the mill houses?

MERLE: No, I never did.

JAMES: Never did?

MERLE: Did rent that house out there on the highway where Sahlberg lives now. You know, you go down past the cemetery and made a turn there and go out on the main road.

I lived there for a while. And then I lived in a place down here on --- oh --- Fairview.

Lived there for quite a while.

... (The rest of the tape consists of more visiting.)

(End of Tape)

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