

HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #453

Subject: Harold Gibson

Date: October 31, 2007

Place: Burns, Oregon

Interviewer: Ralph Dickenson

RALPH DICKENSON: Here we go Harold, this is October 31st, 2007, and today we're talking to Harold Gibson about his experiences and lifetime in Harney County. Harold, glad you're here. So Harold tell, start off by telling us, would you please, where you grew up, where you were born.

HAROLD GIBSON: I was born February 25, 1947, at Prineville, Oregon. My dad had a little ranch at Post, Oregon. And we lived there until 1960, at which time he got rid of it and went to work and managed the old Carlon Ranch at Riley for Norm Weigand. My dad was born and raised at Riley. His birth certificate said Suntex, Oregon.

RALPH: What, when was your dad born, do you remember?

HAROLD: Yes, April 9, 1917.

RALPH: 1917.

HAROLD: Yes.

RALPH: What was your mother's maiden name?

HAROLD: Basey. She was born and raised at Suplee, Oregon, north of Paulina. And she, that was her community.

RALPH: Well about, back about the ranch in Post you were talking about. What did, how big a ranch was it, do you remember?

HAROLD: I think there was about 3,000 acres of deeded land to it. He run about, oh 150 head of cows. I went to grade school there, in a one-room grade school. One teacher, first through the eighth grade. And they shut it down when I was in the fifth grade, in the middle of the fifth grade, and we rode a high school bus, it run from Paulina to Prineville. To Prineville, and went to, finished out through my seventh grade at Prineville grade schools.

RALPH: Well I don't think we said, your father's name was?

HAROLD: Frank Gibson.

RALPH: Frank.

HAROLD: Yes. And Hazel was my mother.

RALPH: And Hazel, uh huh. You, you, so at the time that you're, you know, about 7 years old you say you moved?

HAROLD: No, I was 13 years old when we ---

RALPH: Oh, seventh grade you said.

HAROLD: Seventh grade, yes.

RALPH: And then you moved back to Silver Creek?

HAROLD: To Riley, yes.

RALPH: Uh huh.

HAROLD: And I went to eighth grade at Riley, to a one room school again. And then I went to, graduated from Burns High School.

RALPH: You had a lot of relatives out there, didn't you?

HAROLD: Yes my granddad was out there, and I had two uncles out there.

RALPH: Harold, what was your granddad's real name? I always --- Tin is all I ever heard.

HAROLD: Stanley.

RALPH: Stanley.

HAROLD: He had a niece, the way I understand the story, that she had a stoppage of speech and some reason when she tried to say Stan it came out Tin, and that's how he got that name.

RALPH: That's how he got his name. You know when I think about your grandpa, the one thing I can always see is his cigarette holder. He always had that plastic cigarette holder with a cigarette in it.

HAROLD: Right, a little orange one.

RALPH: Yeah. So, so your uncles out there ---

HAROLD: Jess and Stanley. Stanley --- Tin lived with Stanley. Jess had the original homestead that Tin had. Jess had it right across from the Riley school.

RALPH: So the place that I remember Stan living on, what place was that?

HAROLD: That was the Johnson place. It would have been my great grandparent's place on my grandmother Tin's wife, Luella, my grandmother. That was her folks' place. They bought it from them.

RALPH: Uh huh. So your grandmother's name was Luella. Lulu is what I always remember.

HAROLD: Yes, yes.

RALPH: Remember her as. So anything else about that period of time that you remember that you would ---

HAROLD: Well, that was an interesting time. Life, it seemed like life was really good then. I got drafted into the army in '66. I come back in '68 and some of those ranches had sold, and life was never the same at Riley again, like it was then.

RALPH: Uh huh. You know thinking about the earlier times, much earlier than that probably, probably when Stan was a boy. Stan, I remember telling me that as a kid that he played around the --- and I don't know whether it had been Currey or Union, Camp Currey or Camp Union, but remember seeing those hearths. Is that anything you ever remember seeing?

HAROLD: No, I don't. It should have been Camp Currey, you know.

RALPH: Probably was, probably was. So they're probably not there any longer.

HAROLD: I never did see them.

RALPH: Yeah, yeah. Well he didn't tell me too much about them, but he did tell me that he remembered seeing them when he was young. Well, so you came into Burns then to go to high school.

HAROLD: Yes sir.

RALPH: And I can remember when I was going to high school there was not a school bus that run through there. But they had a private car that came.

HAROLD: Yes. That was Jess Gibson's wife done that, Jean. And that was still the same way when I went to high school.

RALPH: Uh huh.

HAROLD: And she did it for several years after I got out of high school.

RALPH: Yeah. How many of those children were there when you were going to high school that rode that?

HAROLD: There was a Mayo girl, and my sister, and a cousin Henry. And then we picked a Hulburt boy up at the top of Sagehen. And that was our school bus.

RALPH: So four or five?

HAROLD: Yes.

RALPH: Four or five kids. I can remember that when I was going to school that Thorn and Mildred Basey ---

HAROLD: Basey.

RALPH: And that's the only two that I can remember rode in at that time. But they rode in too. So when you were growing up, you know I think that you grew up a lot different than, or I know you did than the kids that lived in town. And you start working earlier when you live on a place. So did you, did you spend much time on horseback as a youngster?

HAROLD: Yes, seemed like I lived on a horse, except for haying, then we lived on a tractor. But that, especially at Riley we run about 1500 head of mother cows and it was a constant buckaroo job. We trailed cattle to Emigrant Creek, and there was a private field there that belonged to the ranch, and we trailed them back, took two days to get them back. We had a trail to the refuge, at the Double O, took three days to get them cows

there and three days to get them back. And we'd take about 400 to the Double O and that was about what went to Emigrant Creek also.

RALPH: Well your family back past you spent a lot of time on horseback, didn't they?

HAROLD: Some good buckaroos out of that deal. My dad was an excellent buckaroo and so was Tin.

RALPH: Was, you know, I know that I had seen your dad, but were they all small people?

HAROLD: Yes, they was all small.

RALPH: Like, kind of like Tin was. Tin was a small guy, yeah.

HAROLD: Right.

RALPH: Yeah. Stanley maybe was a little heavier than ---

HAROLD: Than the others.

RALPH: Than the others.

HAROLD: Right.

RALPH: Yeah. So when did you, when you went to the service did you start working out away from the family before that?

HAROLD: Yes, I had a year --- I graduated in '65, and I worked away on road construction one year. And I rodeod too in between all of this, I rodeod, rode bucking horses.

RALPH: Did you rodeo quite a bit?

HAROLD: Yes, and especially after I got out of the army I did.

RALPH: So let's talk about that a little bit. At that time there was some pretty good buckaroos from around here that were rodeoing, weren't there?

HAROLD: I traveled a lot with Evan Osborn, I'm sure you knew Evan.

RALPH: Sure.

HAROLD: Evan and I traveled a lot together. Then there was a gentleman that traveled with us from Prineville, Ronnie Raymond. And there was also a guy from Redmond that had been a former world champion bronc rider by the name of Enoch Walker. The four of us traveled together a lot.

RALPH: So did you just hit a circuit, Harold?

HAROLD: Well, what --- if you could call it a circuit. We covered most of the Western United States.

RALPH: Just try to hit the rodeos as they come up.

HAROLD: Yes. We were all saddle bronc riders, is all we did.

RALPH: So that was before --- you mentioned Carlon's, that was before Larry was rodeoing?

HAROLD: No Larry was ahead of me, and ahead of these guys.

RALPH: So Menkenmaier (George) and Larry were ahead of you?

HAROLD: They were ahead of me, yes.

RALPH: That's kind of a tough life isn't it? A lot of traveling?

HAROLD: You know it's abusive enough riding a bucking horse, but the traveling, the traveling was the hardest part of it. You never slept good, you slept in a car. You never eat good, and --- but the traveling was more abusive on you than the rodeoing was.

RALPH: So how many rodeos would you hit, a couple a week, or ---

HAROLD: We tried to, and we would usually hit between 30 and 40 a year.

RALPH: Well, that's a lot of, a lot of miles.

HAROLD: And of course you figure, yes, you figure you know December, January and February there isn't much going on.

RALPH: So after you got done rodeoing, what did you do for work Harold?

HAROLD: Then I went back to road construction.

RALPH: Back to road construction.

HAROLD: I worked a lot of years for a big contractor out of Omaha, Nebraska that is world wide. Peter Kiewit, I worked for them for a long time.

RALPH: All over the country?

HAROLD: Yes, well I just worked for them in the West. Then I formed a guide business. I had a guide and packer business for a long time. I done that when I was working road construction too.

RALPH: Was that here locally?

HAROLD: Yes, I leased out of Paulina, Oregon. I leased a place, Earl McConnell called Grindstone Livestock Company. I leased, I don't know, 200 and some thousand acres of deeded land up there.

RALPH: Is that where they got the fishing hole now?

HAROLD: Yes, that's it. I lived at the fishing hole.

RALPH: Did you? I guess there is some big fish in there.

HAROLD: Big fish in there.

RALPH: Well, that's interesting. And so today you're still, you still do heavy type construction work.

HAROLD: Yes. Except I own my own now.

RALPH: Yeah. Well that's, you get to be the boss, you just get all the problems then.

HAROLD: Yes.

RALPH: Well Harold, anything else about that particular time that you want to talk about?

HAROLD: Well those guys, the Bill Brown story, those guys, pretty near all of them worked for Bill Brown, or been around Bill Brown.

RALPH: You're talking about your family?

HAROLD: Yes, and the old timers that was living at Riley. They knew a lot about that, and I heard a lot of those stories. I wish that I could remember more of them than I did. Some of those guys was pretty interesting characters. Virgil Shields that had the store at Riley one time, he drove the stage with the mail up the valley when I was there. And Virgil Shields was a good guy, and he was an interesting guy.

RALPH: How old a guy was he, when you're talking about, an older fellow?

HAROLD: He was an older fellow. He had to have been in his 60's anyway.

RALPH: Uh huh. Well how about some of the other old timers that you knew out there Harold?

HAROLD: Well there was a little guy called Peck Amort. Did you ever meet Peck?

RALPH: No.

HAROLD: Well right there when you come across that Shields Lane and turn, the road turns up the valley, there was a pretty new house set there that was Gus Zogalman's. Then there was a little house set down next to the road, that was Peck's. And they, two old bachelors, and they used to be mad at one another all the time, you know. But Peck was, wasn't very big and he had, took his, he didn't, never wore a belt. And down below his belt loops he cut holes in his overhauls and run his belt through that. The only person

I ever seen do that. But Gus had up here, what they called Gus' well, and there used to be wood gates up there, and he had big signs on them that said, "Big Gates on Little Hinges". Did you ever see those?

RALPH: Huh uh.

HAROLD: Never did? Peck had had a place that Phil Peterson's got now, there in the valley. And originally it had a homestead in what's in the upper end of the Chickahominy Reservoir, up in there. Clear at the upper end of it, Peck had a homestead there. They were interesting old guys.

RALPH: Yeah.

HAROLD: Yeah. People like that are fun to talk to when you're a young man.

RALPH: Gus Zogalman was a neighbor, these guys was. I assume in their 70's at that time. Gus had this garden out in front of his house. But he walked with a crutch, and he would get out there and he would get on his all fours to weed that garden, a big garden. Then he had this old Ford pickup and he'd load the back of that pickup up with all the produce out of this garden. Then he would go up and down that valley and give it away to everybody in the valley. Gus was really a nice guy.

RALPH: Yeah.

HAROLD: Peck was radical, he didn't like doctors, he didn't like politicians, but I really liked Peck.

RALPH: Just a couple old guys that were good to be around.

HAROLD: Just good old guys.

RALPH: Yeah. I imagine there were a lot of those out there.

HAROLD: Of course like my granddad, he was a character too. My granddad, I guess he had drove a little when he was a kid, this is Tin, or when he was a young man. He backed through a gate or something, and they made fun of him and he never drove again. And he had a theory that if you couldn't do it a horseback it wasn't worth doing. And his place looked it. You know he never worked on a fence, nor nothing. I mean everything was either horseback, or forget it. (Laughter)

RALPH: Yeah, he always had a twinkle in his eye.

HAROLD: Right.

RALPH: I, you know, I didn't know him real well but I think he was probably pretty mischievous old fellow.

HAROLD: Dad said he was. Of course Mabel Best and Clyde Gibbon was brother and sister there, over there now where Perlot (Gordon) lives. And they was, they was brother and sister, they was still there when I was a kid. Dick Cowan bought them out then, but they was there. And they, oh they was just kind of them old quiet old timers, you know, they never, you never heard or seen much of them.

RALPH: Uh huh.

HAROLD: That old house, you know, had never been painted, a big old two story house. Made you think of Halloween, just looking at the house, you know.

RALPH: Well times were a lot different then too. The country was a lot bigger.

HAROLD: Yes, yes.

RALPH: It was a lot bigger than it is now. Well Harold, you know, a guy could go on forever on that if he could just remember all the stories. Let's talk about how you got

interested in this history stuff, because you're quite a historian. How did you, and when did you first become interested?

HAROLD: Well I didn't get it in high school, I got it young, listening to those guys. My dad, granddad, all them old cowboys tell them cowboy stories. They used to set around and tell them cowboy stories, you know, how many of them was true and how many of them wasn't, I don't know. Some of the bucking horses got pretty rough, you know, but they --- I got interested in --- and I can still hear them guys telling them stories. And it's like you can imagine yourself being there when this was going on, you know. And the Bill Brown thing, I can remember those stories. They talked a lot about Bill Brown because they had all been around him. And so that's what kind of got me interested in this local history.

RALPH: Well so your connection with the Bill Brown stories, interesting to me, and your relationship with Ed Gray. That must have been a pretty good time in your life.

HAROLD: It was. Ed was a unique individual. He got a hold of me when he was doing the Bill Brown book, to show him, help him, show him the country where all this stuff took place. Him and I spent a lot of time camped on that desert, going to these places. And it was just --- I lost a great friend when I lost Ed Gray.

RALPH: You've told me that he was a good researcher.

HAROLD: Tremendous researcher. How he found what he found, I don't know. The Linc Hutton deal --- Leona Hutton left Wagontire, and my dad, granddad, all those people --- she mysteriously disappeared from Wagontire. Of course Harold Bradley got killed at the time she did. And he was innocent of what went on, but he got killed for it anyway. And everybody thought that she was dead, buried there somewhere, that --- in

one of them canyons at Wagontire. And Ed Gray found where she had --- she wasn't alive when he found her obviously, but she had left Wagontire with a cowboy out there named Woodard, and they had went to California. He found descendants of theirs down there, and made contact with them. And how he did that I have no idea.

RALPH: Well Harold there is a story there that I sure never heard. Is the story about the Bradley thing something you can tell, or ---

HAROLD: Well there again you got to be careful of what you're saying, but ---

RALPH: Sure.

HAROLD: But Harold Bradley stayed that night with Linc and Leona Hutton there at Wagontire, at Hutton Springs. And he got ready to leave, he was carrying the mail to Stauffer, and he was just --- I don't know, maybe 17 or 18 years old, he was just a kid. And he, Linc Hutton, thought he had an affair with Leona Hutton, and he didn't. He went out to get ready to leave, and she heard the shot, and Linc Hutton shot him twice with a rifle. And right out where there is an old, that house is still there, but the garage where that happened is not. Nothing was ever done, any prosecution over that. He claimed that Harold Bradley come after him with a tire iron, and they let it go. Harold Bradley was innocent, as far as I think, of anything.

RALPH: That's an interesting story. Well did you and Ed spend a lot of time when you were researching this, and going through the country, did you stay out at night much?

HAROLD: Yes, a lot. We stayed at, we stayed at Wagontire, we stayed at Buck Creek, we camped out, you know, right out every night. I remember one night we were staying at Wagontire, and Ed had a canopy on the back of his pickup, and he had a bed up in it, and it was raining. So there was an old barn thing there, but I had a canvas cowboy

bedroll. So I start underneath a tree. So it is beginning to leak through the tree a little, so I move my bedroll into the old barn, and it was worse in it than it was in the tree, so I moved back to the tree. (Laughter) But we had a good time.

RALPH: Yeah. Was he used to that sort of thing?

HAROLD: No, not like I was of course. I used to cook for him on a fire out there, and I'd make him take a Dutch oven and make him baking powder biscuits in a Dutch oven, and he had never seen that done.

RALPH: That was a treat to him. Well Harold, I can't think of too much other questions that I'd have. Is there anything that you'd kind of like to add to that?

HAROLD: Oh, no. The Bill Brown thing, I was interested in that forever. I wrote Louis Lamour a letter to try to get him to do the research on that. Dick Cowan had started it, but he never got much progress made on it. So I guess when Ed Gray showed up it was like an angel from heaven, you know. Because here is the guy that did it. Bill Brown is still one of the most interesting topics in this county, I think.

RALPH: When you first met Ed Gray, was he pretty deep into this Bill Brown thing, or was he just starting?

HAROLD: He was basically just started.

RALPH: Did he ever tell you how he got interested in this particular ---

HAROLD: He did, there was a friend of his, and I don't know who it was, they'd come to Eastern Oregon just spending time in the desert, and this guy showed him that Bill Brown house at Buck Creek. And Ed got to kind of feeling, and found out, and got a little of the story on how that house come to be. And that's what made him start the research on that Bill Brown thing.

RALPH: Huh.

HAROLD: And then he went from there.

RALPH: How long, how long did you spend on that?

HAROLD: A couple years.

RALPH: A couple years. A guy hates to see something like that end.

HAROLD: I can't, I have trouble, I can't let it go.

RALPH: Yeah.

HAROLD: It still has got a hold on me.

RALPH: Is there anything, is there anything further to do on that do you think?

HAROLD: I don't think there is, I think it was probably pretty well covered.

RALPH: Uh huh. You know, it appeared to me when I read that, did he have an eye to that being a research vehicle for somebody else? Because it isn't written like a story, it's written like research.

HAROLD: I know it is. I don't know. You know, if I learned one thing from Ed Gray about history, is the truth, is the truth, even if it is boring. And he stayed to the truth and the facts just as near as he could find them. He never glamorized anything, he just kept it as, you know, near the truth as he could get it.

RALPH: So there is no sugar on that.

HAROLD: There is no sugar on it. There was room for a lot of sugar in there, in places, no doubt about that.

RALPH: Well it's the kind of story Harold that you can make a heck of a story out of.

HAROLD: Yes.

RALPH: You know, and get away from the facts to do that.

HAROLD: One cute story on Ed Gray that I always like that --- I was to meet him at Wagontire, at the store at Wagontire. Of course I had come from Burns, and he come from Eugene through Silver Lake. And he'd stopped at Alkali Lake, used to a little kind of junk store there at Alkali Lake, kind of a little restaurant store there. So he had stopped there and got him a Coke or something. So he got up there at Wagontire and he jumped out of his pickup and he just started, and he kept saying, "You ain't going to believe it, you ain't going to believe it." And I said, "well I'm not going to if you don't tell me, you know." And Bill Brown branded a horseshoe bar on the left jaw of those horses. And they knew of where one branding iron was at in a collection that Rosebrook had at Redmond. Was the only one that anyone knew that existed. And he said while he was there that day, there was a kid brought out a bunch of branding irons. And he started showing him these branding irons. And he said there is a horseshoe bar branding iron. And he said --- I said, "Where did you get that?" And it was old, you know, of course obviously. He said, well this kid said, "There used to be an old corral up on Big Juniper." Well Bill Brown had a set of horse corrals up on Big Juniper. And he said, "We found it up there." And Ed says, "What would you take for it?" And the kid started to say, "I'll just give it" --- and the old man says, "He has got to have ten dollars for it" And Ed said I paid it of course. And he said, "I know that when I drove away they was laughing, because they had suckered the tourist into ten dollars, that brand." They didn't know that I would have give a hundred just to get my hands on it. (Laughter)

RALPH: That makes me think of another story you told me Harold at one time, and that was about the Bannock Indian war thing out there. And about a miss-location as far as you're concerned to where that battle really was, and where they'd place it now.

HAROLD: Right, I don't know who put that sign up at the old highway houses at Riley. They said it's what, northeast, or north something of that sign anyway. Well that's south of there, it's down there at the upper end of Moon Reservoir. You can go down there, you can find it, the old rifle pits that them soldiers had is still there. And that's where it was at, was right there at the upper end of Moon Reservoir.

RALPH: So somebody wasn't very careful about where they placed that sign.

HAROLD: No. And that needs changed.

RALPH: Well Harold ---

HAROLD: See at the time that went on, Camp Currey was not in existence at that time.

RALPH: It was gone by then.

HAROLD: Right. There is a couple of graves at Camp Currey that no doubt were soldiers, or something to do with soldiers. But they did not die in that battle, because Camp Currey was gone then. Everything was coming out of Camp Harney out here.

RALPH: So there is a couple of graves out there, you say ---

HAROLD: Yes.

RALPH: No markers?

HAROLD: No.

RALPH: Yeah. You know at Camp Harney there is a little cemetery there.

HAROLD: Uh huh.

RALPH: But when they closed down Camp Harney they moved all of those military, whoever was military in that to the Presidio in California.

HAROLD: Uh huh.

RALPH: This would have been earlier enough that they may not have bothered with that.

HAROLD: Well there was one that, and I don't know how close it was to that time, there was one that was buried at Camp Wright out here, at the end of Wrights Point. And Evan Osborn told me that they came and got, that Smokey Osborn told him that they came and got that in the '50's, 1950's.

RALPH: Huh.

HAROLD: They come and removed that one.

RALPH: It's pretty late.

HAROLD: Yeah. Those may not have been soldiers at Riley too, I don't know.

RALPH: Yeah, there is no way of knowing that, you know.

HAROLD: Right.

RALPH: There is a couple of markers left there at Harney, and I, you know, I would think that, who knows who they are. Well Harold, I think that is pretty good, and you know, and I think I was telling you earlier, I think that after we listen to this we may want to do another one.

HAROLD: Okay.

RALPH: But we have an idea ---

HAROLD: Of what we're working with.

RALPH: Of what we're working with now, and I appreciate it very much.

HAROLD: Thank you sir.

(End of DVD)

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