

HARNEY COUNTY BASQUES

Oral History Project

This interview of Nicholas Baraibar took place as a part of an historical inventory of Basques in Harney County for the Harney County Historical Society. The purpose of the interview was to acquire information about historic sites in order to establish a database for historic resources. As a result, the book *Harney County: An Historical Inventory* was published in January of 1978 by Royal G. Jackson and Jennifer A. Lee. Jackson and Lee taped this interview with Nicholas Baraibar on September 21, 1976 in Burns, Oregon. At the time, Jackson was an Associate Professor in the Department of Resource Recreation Management at Oregon State University and Lee was a student in that department fulfilling an internship requirement. Amanda B. Purkey created a transcription of this interview in March 2001 as a part of an independent study project at Oregon State University.

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NICHOLAS BARAIBAR
September 21, 1976
Burns, Oregon

Interviewers:
Royal G. Jackson
Jennifer A. Lee

LOG

- [001-020] Arrival in US from Spain; shepherding; province and family information.
- [020-040] Inheritance customs; deciding to leave Spain for the US.
- [040-060] Family's opinion; language barriers; flying to New York.
- [060-080] Flying to Fresno; first impressions.
- [080-100] Shepherding in Las Banos; isolation at a young age.
- [100-120] Evenings with other Basque shepherders; vacation time.
- [120-140] Spare time while shepherding; learning English; shepherding contracts.
- [140-160] Stopped shepherding; started milking cows.
- [160-180] Quit milking cows; moved to Burns; money amounts earned and saved while shepherding.
- [180-200] Working at mill in Burns; Basque Hotels in Burns.
- [200-220] Work at the mill; friendships with other Basques.
- [220-240] Visits to Spain; changes in his village throughout the years.
- [240-260] Parents; marriage in Spain.
- [260-280] Return to US; children; Basque, Spanish and English use.
- [280-300] Bought house in US.
- [300-320] Wife's opinion of US; Basque festivals.
- [320-340] Basque and American friends and differences in family styles.
- [340-360] Catholicism; Basque picnics.

Nicholas Baraibar

Log continued

[360-380] Basque festivals.

[380-400] Traditional dances.

[400-420] Wishes for children.

[420-460] Returning to Spain; discrimination; Basques as hardworkers.

[2:001-2:020] Politics; jealousy.

[2:020-2:040] Basques who fought in the Spanish Civil War.

[2:040-2:060 end] Political views different between generations; jobs in Burns.

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[001] {R} Baraibar, B A R A I B A R, Nicholas?

Right.

{R} Good. When did you come to the United States?

55.

{R} In 1955.

Right.

{R} Why did you decide to come here to begin with?

I was a sheep herder.

{R} Oh you were a sheep herder. Did you know other people here, other friends or family?

Yeah, brother and uncle.

{R} You came together.

No they came before. They brought me here.

{R} They wrote you a letter and said there was a job?

Yeah.

{R} What were you doing in Spain?

Farm.

{R} And your parents were farmers?

Yeah grew sheep and cows and like that, a small farm.

{R} What province did you say you came from?

Bastan.

{R} That's a new one I never heard of it. Bastan, B A S T A N?

B A S T A N.

{R} Is that near is that in France is that near the French border?

Yeah, that's right on the border. Just about real close.

{R} Bastan. Well, I think you're the only Basque in Burns that was from Bastan. Are there others?

Yeah, could be, I think so. No, I am only one I think.

{J} Your family lived on a farm, how many brothers and sisters did you have, do you have?

Let me think, twelve. We were twelve all together.

[020] {R} Were you the youngest or the middle or,

Middle. Nine brothers and three sisters.

{R} Wow that's a large family.

Yeah.

{R} In Spain it's the custom that the oldest son inherits everything isn't it?

Not really, no.

{R} No?

That's in France.

{R} In France.

Yeah, not really Spain.

{J} How old were you when you came here?

Sixteen.

{J} You were sixteen? Can you tell us more about the process of how you came over and why and what went through your mind before you came and what you expected?

Yeah, we were four. You know big family and everything so we decided you know look little better future. That's most important why we came most here.

{R} The future didn't look very good to you there huh?

No, that day now a days it is better but still you know. A little bit behind.

{R} Did your other brothers come over or how many of your family have come over now from the United States?

They went back. We were eight brothers here except one, except the youngest one.

[040] {J} What about your parents, what did they think of it?

Well, what we did is we came here two three or four, went back, and some others come back here

{R} Always in sheep herding?

Yeah, yeah, well most them brothers they came here on contract, two years contract, and they spend their two years contract here and they went back and they never came back again.

{R} What are they doing now? Are they in Spain farming?

No, driving truck and like that.

{R} What did you think about when you're sixteen years old and decided to leave home did that make you afraid or did you look forward to it or how did you feel?

No not really because I had family here and I knew pretty well where I was coming.

{J} Did you know English?

No I didn't know any English at all. I didn't know much of Spanish either, just Basque.

{R} Really? You didn't know Spanish either?

Not much just a little.

{R} So then what did you do, did you take a boat or did you fly?

No I flew here.

{R} From where did you leave from in Spain?

I went to France then I fly from Paris.

{R} From Paris to New York?

To New York.

{R} So what did you do when you got to New York? Couldn't speak English you got there and what did you do?

Well, they have always somebody to help us. We were six/seven guys coming you know and they had, the company, they had someone to help us.

[060] {R} What company was it?

Pan America.

{R} Oh you mean the airline.

Right.

{R} And did they have a Basque there that could help you or,

Spanish, somebody who knew Spanish you know, who helped.

{J} Just at the airport you mean.

Yeah just the airport to help where we was going to.

{R} So what did they do then did they take you to a hotel once you arrived in New York?

No we went all the way through, we didn't have any hotel.

{R} So what you got on an airplane again then or train?

No we flew all the way to California, to Fresno, California.

{R} And why did you go to Fresno, is that the closest to where you were going?

Right.

{R} Where was your brother then?

Las Banos. About sixty some miles from Fresno. So that was the closest airport you know from Fresno to Las Banos.

{R} What were your reactions when you landed in New York and saw the United States for the first time? What did you think?

Well, real funny especially speaking people you know, well I don't know.

{R} Was it what you expected?

No not really.

{R} What did you expect?

Well, I could speak or something a little easier get by a little bit. That was real hard for a while. But we don't stay in town very long you know, we went to work for Basque people right away and

[080] {R} From Los Banos they had a, your brother met you or somebody,

Right my uncle picked me up and he took me to Las Banos and I stayed there about four or five days with him and then I went to sheep herd.

{R} Where was that?

Las Banos.

{R} So the sheep were where though? Up in the mountains?

Yeah up the hill but thirty some miles from town.

{R} How many sheep did you work with?

About nine hundred.

{R} Just by yourself?

This sheep band was already made. Yeah all by myself.

{R} They just take you there and say here you are and there's your sheep and goodbye?

Yeah right, and a trailer house you know and that's all.

{R} Did you have a dog?

Yeah just a little dog and a few groceries. There wasn't anything I don't know anything about cooking that was real hard.

{R} You weren't married then.

No, no I married about five years ago, six years ago, just now.

{J} How long did you sheep herd?

Six years.

{R} What was the life like sheep herding? You know here's a sixteen-year-old boy and you just are living out in the country with a dog and a few groceries, what did you think?

It was real hard.

{R} Were you lonesome?

Oh yeah, lonesome every night. Actually is not old enough to stay by himself you know.

[100] {R} A sixteen-year-old isn't.

No. I don't think he should.

{R} So you got very lonesome then.

Oh yeah I did, but I had a few shepherders around. I used to go.

{R} Other Bascos?

Yeah other Bascos from Spain someplace, France, wherever.

{R} So did you come meet them periodically? How often?

Them, them guys? Yeah oh yeah, probably once in a week or twice you know.

{R} What did you do when you met them? Just talk or,

Just talk and eat big supper and stay together play cards for a while.

{R} Drink a little vino?

Little vino also, go home.

{R} And go back to your trailer house.

Right.

{J} Did you ever go to town?

No, no.

{J} Never during the whole six years?

We never, oh yeah just during the vacation.

{J} How much vacation did you get?

Once a year, sometimes maybe other three.

{R} How long was the vacation?

Week, two, something like that. Sometimes three weeks but usually we go two.

{R} How long did you stay up there when you first arrived before you got a vacation?

The first time?

{R} Yeah.

One full year.

{J} Boy I guess you'd be lonely.

Oh yeah, but you get used to it you know. After few months well,

[120] {J} What did you do? Did you whittle or read or what?

Not really, read a little bit sometimes.

{R} You had some books?

Yeah, but some people they like it to read some others they don't care you know. But some like singers sing in groups and whatever you like it how you know. I never did read very much I never had enough education either to you know to read and understand.

{R} So what did you do with you time when you had free time?

Well, free time? Not really a lot no, listen to the radio, we had a radio.

{R} Did you learn any English up there in the mountains?

No.

{R} Nobody to talk English to.

No way to learn anything.

{J} Did you get homesick?

Oh yeah for a while, but I forgot easy, my home place I forgot.

{R} So you stayed there for three years then, they have a contract for three years is that how that worked?

No we didn't have, we didn't have no contract. The contract was later. But when we came that time, we came free. So actually we didn't have to stay in the sheep like we did.

{R} Who paid for your air ticket to come over then? You paid yourself?

No my uncle did.

[140] {R} Oh so you didn't owe anybody, you didn't owe the owner of the sheep or anything you could've left.

Oh yeah I could quit and go right away. I didn't have no contract, like they had you know a few years later they had three years contract and they have to stay three years so it's all they could do.

{J} Well after six years wouldn't you get tired of it, didn't you want to leave, or?

Oh yeah, well I desire to get out and learn some English and find out what was going on, what was going on.

{R} By then you were twenty two years old when you quit and still not married.

Not married. Then I went milking cows.

{R} Where was that at?

Stockton, California. And I milked cows for like two years. Then I came here to Burns.

{R} Why did you come to Burns?

Well, somebody told me it was big somewhere here you know and well,

{R} A Basco told you or you don't remember, just somebody told you.

Just some Basco, yeah. And well I decided looking around in what vacation time, I and my brother we came here. My brother he went back and I stayed here.

[160] {R} That was in 1954?

63.

{R} Oh 63 you came that's right. And so right away you started working for Heinz Lumber company?

About a week, yeah.

{J} You must have saved up a lot of money sheep herding and not being able to go to town to spend it.

All we made, all we made we saved.

{R} You couldn't spend it huh?

Can't spend it, oh I figured I might have spend all years of vacation time I don't know, less than \$500 anyway no matter how high it was that's not bad.

{R} That was good huh?

That was.

{R} So at the end of six years you must have had a lot of money saved.

Well, that time we don't make you know we was making, first I make \$180 a month, by year or so then went up to \$200 and I worked three years maybe \$200 and then we made \$225 is the highest one I have, I make. \$225 a month.

{R} That's for pretty hard work huh?

Yeah well, that was pretty good money I think at that time and we was thinking, and what we was thinking was the money we, we made so much money in Spain we think in that and that's why we spend it all out here.

[180] {R} Oh you think this is so many pesetas we shouldn't spend this much money.

Right, and that's why we saving all the time all we could.

{R} So you came to Burns and started working for Edward Heinz mill.

Right.

{R} When you first came to Burns did you go to any particular hotel?

In Burns yeah, Plaza Hotel.

{R} Plaza Hotel.

That's where I came.

{R} Was Mr. Lete there then?

No, no way before.

{R} Margarite Olsa?

No after, Guillartilla.

{R} Were there mostly other Basques there at the hotel?

Yeah, a few more Basques and that.

{J} You knew English by this time.

I knew yeah I could get by. I don't knew too much but I knew enough to get by.

{R} How did you find life in Burns? Was it good did you like living here?

Yeah, that was my best one.

{R} You liked it best here of all the places you've been.

Yeah I like it best of anything else.

[200] {R} Why was that.

Well, that was my best job I had. So I work in sheep and milking cows and that was pretty hard too and I thought that was better than sheep anyhow I learned some English and,

{J} You still work in the mill is that correct?

Right.

{J} You like your job here.

Oh yeah, I love it, it's a nice job.

{R} What do you do, what is your position?

Grader, molding grader.

{R} Molding grader? Are there a lot of other Basques that work there?

Yeah, not in my place, but in the mill it's quite a few Basques working in there. And we had two Bascos and I working day shift and he working night but that's all. But there's quite a few Bascos like shipping, plywood, sawmill, all over the place.

{R} Are you friendly with all of them? Do you know them?

Oh yeah most them, almost every one.

{R} Do you eat lunch with them some days or something like that, or?

No but I used to work with you know and weekends we used to meet you know.

[220] {J} Have you been back to Spain since you came here in 55?

Yeah, three times.

{R} When was the first time you went back?

1964.

{R} What was your reaction when you went back and saw your home country again after being here.

Oh real different, I can't hardly, I couldn't hardly tell right away exactly so much different.

{R} You went to your hometown?

Yeah.

{R} What was the name of the place you grew up?

LeCaros

{R} LeCaros, that's the name of the village?

The town.

{R} The town.

Mm-hmm.

{J} How was it different?

I don't know, I just forgot how it was or something, just I leaves small roads and everything so little, little bitty places you know, and now I know how much difference is between then I couldn't tell. I was surprised when I get in there.

{R} Were some of your brothers still there then?

Yeah, yeah my oldest brother and the brother that was here before I came he is there and driving truck transportation, he went back and he bought a big truck and he's driving that all over town. So he's doing transportation.

[240] {R} What about your parents are they still alive?

My dad he died and my mother she is still alive. And sister she died.

{J} When was the second time you went?

Second time I went 69. And then I went married, and then I got married.

{R} Now did you know your wife before that?

Yeah I know her.

{R} From when you were a small boy?

No, no, now. No that time I don't know her, I don't think she was born either.

{R} What is your wife's name?

Maria.

{R} Maria and she's younger than you are?

She is about twelve years younger.

{R} So you went back in 1969 and met Maria there? Or did you already know her from before?

I knew her before.

[260] {R} From 1963?

Yeah the first time. I went back 54 I knew her then, but I met her now I really think now.

{R} 69. You got married in Spain?

Yeah. We were married 70? Or 69, no I guess 70.

{R} 1970. And then did you come immediately back here?

Yeah about two months later.

{R} I'm going to get her story separately. Maybe on a separate tape I'd like to talk to Maria if she would like if she would talk to me.

Yeah it's all right.

{R} Cause I want to get all her story separate. Don't want to get it mixed up. Where did you have your first child then?

First child, 1971.

{R} 1971 right, and you have two children now.

Right.

{J} Do you speak Basco in the

We talk Basco all the time.

{R} In the home.

{J} So your children are going to learn it too then, obviously.

Children? Oh they talk Basco, I talk Basco and she talks Spanish so they can speak English, Basque and Spanish.

{R} Oh that's great.

{J} Great.

I don't know how they going to do it but they do it now they can speak well.

[280] {R} They're very lucky. Most Americans only speak English and some of them not very well. So the third visit then, you said 69 was the second time you went, you came back here with Maria your wife and stayed till when?

And then two years later we went back all three. We had one boy and we took trip two years later after we came.

{J} Did you have this home then?

No, we had this but we rented, I rented this place for ten years.

{R} And then you bought it?

We bought it last February.

{R} It's a very nice home.

Nice old timers house.

{R} So you went back in 72 did you say? 73. What did you go back that time for, just so your wife could visit and,

Yeah, just,

{R} To visit.

Just to visit, see my folks.

[300] {R} Did you ever wish you could stay there?

No, no I never did, I never did. No I always think, take just a trip. Last time I spent twenty days. My wife she went a little bit before and she spent two months. We came back together.

{R} Was she sorry to come back that time, did she want to stay in Spain?

Oh I think so. That's all right she getting better though. She was homesick for a while but she getting a lot better now she can speak now.

{R} But she is a Basque too.

Oh yeah.

{J} Do you get together with other Basques and have dinners and dances and picnics and so forth?

Sometimes. Here?

{J} Uh-huh.

Oh yeah, once and a while. Yeah we didn't go, but sometimes we go out there. Yeah we meet once in a while with Bascos.

[320] {R} Are most of your friends Bascos or Americans?

Now most of them Basque. Well we got a few of American still you know, but we can't go that close friends because we don't know enough to meet with them guys.

{R} How do you mean don't know enough? You mean language, or?

Yeah like talking and way to live and everything kind of different so we can't meet, we can't go deep enough with them guys see what I mean?

{R} Do the Basques have a different way of living, in your opinion?

A little different.

{R} How is it different?

Well I don't know really how much difference, but a little different way to live between Basque and Americans.

{R} Can you think of some example of the difference between?

Well, I don't know exactly what difference, but you know far as I can see it's a little bit different.

{R} Maybe the idea about the family? Is the Basque have a different idea about his family from,

Yeah a little different idea about anything I guess.

[340] {J} You're Catholic, is that right?

Yeah.

{J} Do you all go to the, is there only one Catholic Church in Burns?

Yeah, there's only one.

{R} Do all the Bascos go there.

Supposed to most them, but,

{R} Some don't go?

It's few they don't go, never go, but most them Bascos supposed to go out there and then they're born that way, but a lot of Bascos quit once and they never go anymore. But so far we still going, you know not every Sunday but,

{R} Do you ever go to the, they tell me that in Boise in the Jordon Valley, in Elco and places like that there's a large Basque group, community and they have a big picnic and parties and celebrations every year. Do you ever go to those?

Yeah, yeah I went several times to Elco. That's the biggest one as far as I can,

[360] {R} Elco, Nevada? How many Basques would come to that usually?

I don't know really, but a lot of Bascos. They come all over the place, California and Idaho,

{R} California, Idaho, Oregon where else?

Yeah, well there could be some other Wyoming and others, well I mean Elco but there could be quite a few from Wyoming and like that too. Oh I don't have any idea how many but a lot of Bascos got there. They do you know wood chopping and like that.

{R} All kinds of contests.

Wood chopping and sheep dogs and dancing.

[380] {R} They dance the LaHota?

Yeah the Hota.

{R} Will your children learn how to dance that?

They don't know yet.

{R} Do you think they'll learn?

Oh yeah they will if somebody teach you know. She can dance pretty good, my wife.

{R} Your wife dances pretty good?

Oh yeah, yeah.

{R} The Hota? That's the main Basque dance isn't it?

That's the really Basque dance.

{R} The most traditional one that people think of being Basque?

Right, they used to dance just that, you know they never dance anything else, but now they don't dance just like they used to.

{R} It's different now?

Yeah well, like we do here. The Hota is still very, they doing it but no.

{R} What do you want for your children? Do you want them to grow up as Basques, or do you care if they continue to learn Basque, or have Basque friends, or what do you want for them?

Oh well, I don't know. Sure we like to keep Basque you know, teach Basque and everything else.

[405] {R} Do you want them to marry other Basques or does it matter?

Not really I don't think so.

{R} Doesn't matter to you.

I don't think we can take care about that.

{R} You can't control that anyway.

I don't think so.

{R} Well you went back to Spain to marry a Basque.

I did myself, yeah. They'd be different see, when they born here, well, they don't know anything about Basque like we do.

{R} But you'll probably take them to Spain when they get older?

Yeah, oh yeah, well we're going to take trips anyway and we probably go someplace to live. We don't know.

{J} You might live in Spain again?

Maybe, we never know.

[420] {R} Well have you thought about going back?

Well, we always thinking that you know, take trips anyway and, but when we go out there we don't see any way to live and we don't have no job no nothing. By that time we have to go back, so.

{R} Have you ever felt any discrimination against the Basques here in Burns or Harney County?

No I don't think so.

{R} Everyone's been very nice to you?

I don't know, yes.

{R} The Basques are regarded as hard workers aren't they, very industrious.

They're supposed to be, they're supposed to be a steady worker you know [435]. [2-001] Basques are not you know really smart but usually steady workers you know. They don't quit very easy usually they stay on the job. A few lazies every once in a while you know.

[2-005] {R} Are you involved at all in Spanish politics? Do you care whether France or dies or whether, you know the Basques have been persecuted a lot in Spain.

Yeah, but I never care about it because that was way before my time.

{R} Well don't they, are the Basques now free to speak Basque?

Oh yeah, oh yeah.

{R} For a while they couldn't as I recall, in the schools.

Well that was during the war at that time.

{R} So earlier times.

Yeah, but we never know that time you know we always can speak Basque and whatever you want.

{R} What about the Basques here in Burns, do they all get along pretty good are they all pretty friendly to each other?

Well not very good.

{R} No? Why is that?

I don't know, kind of jealous each other or something. Lot of them, we don't get along here.

{R} Why do you think that is, what causes that?

Well, that's little bit like you just said. During the civil war get the you know fighting each other. They used to fight each other and always keep going but you know.

{R} So that continues today?

Continues a little bit.

{R} Some of them supported Franco and some were against.

Yeah, right.

[2-020] {R} 1937, Spanish Civil War.

Mm-hmm and a lot of these guys they fought you know.

{R} They fought in the Civil War?

Yeah.

{R} On which side?

Well against Franco, most them people here against Franco. And people, whoever came from my place well you was Franco side as far as I can tell.

{R} The people from the province of Bastan, or just your village?

No, Navara.

{R} Oh from Navara. They were most, well you weren't from Navara were you?

Yeah, Navara, Bastan. It's Navara like what the state or something.

{R} Navara is the provincia isn't it, the province?

Yeah.

{R} And you're from the province of Navara?

Yeah.

{R} What is Bastan?

Bastan is like a county or whatever.

{R} Oh, like a county.

Yeah something like that I don't know.

{R} So most of the people here that were old enough fought against Franco.

Yeah.

{R} But are there some Basques here that were in favor of Franco?

Yeah, the Basques who were come from my place, from Navara, well he was Franco's side. You know what I mean?

{R} And you think that today is one of the reasons there is a little argument against, between them?

Yeah, oh yeah that keeps going really all the time.

{R} Are there any other reasons why they don't get along?

Well, no that's about main one I think, that's the main thing. They just remember that and I don't know, but I can speak for myself I don't know anything until I came here I was so young and everything I never knew this, but I learned here a lot of things like that.

[2-040] {R} You learned more about Spanish politics here than you knew in Spain.

Oh yeah, way more.

{R} Listening to the Bascos argue about this and that?

Right yeah. And I don't see why these people they can blame. Like young guys we came here, well I was born that time see I was like year old. I was born 1938. So I can't see why anybody can blame me about that but I still, that really hurts you know. And a lot of people it's why we don't really like each other and kind of jealous and I don't know what else. One from Navara, another one from Viscaya and just kind of we can't see too good each other.

{R} But you all speak the same language and you're all the same race.

Oh yeah we are close to the same thing. Totally different but same thing our race.

{R} What do you see in the future for the Basques here in Burns, is it a good place for Basques to come?

Yeah, oh yeah not too bad. The main thing that's here, good jobs you know. That's about all I can think.

[2-060] {R} That's probably good. (Turns tape off)