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HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #48 - Side B

Subject: Part I - Freda Oakerman Cline

Place: Burns, Oregon

Date: June 16, 1975

Interviewer: Pauline Braymen

Release Form: No

PAULINE BRAYMEN: Freda Selma Oakerman Cline in Burns, Oregon on June 16th, 1975. Can you tell me about what time the Oakermans came to Harney County, and where they settled?

FREDA OAKERMAN CLINE: They came in 1879, and they settled, well they bought a ranch and some property at what is now called Riley. In fact, my grandfather named Riley and Suntex.

Because, well he really named them after some great horse raisers, you know, because he came out on a purpose to buy this land, and have this ranch to raise horses, and that's what he eventually did.

PAULINE: What was your grandfather's name?

FREDA: Well, his name was John Frederick. He was born in Sweden.

PAULINE: And what was your father's name?

FREDA: Albert Frichoff.

PAULINE: Can you spell that for me?

FREDA: F R I C H O F F. [FRITHIOF]

PAULINE: Okay. And their last name was Oakerman.

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FREDA: Oakerman, of course.

PAULINE: Oakerman, that's O A K E R M A N.

FREDA: Yes, it was.

PAULINE: Well, this is interesting to me to find out how Riley and Suntex were named, because I hadn't ever really been able to pin that down before.

FREDA: Yes, he admired these --- I don't, I can't tell you, I used to have some books that told where, you know, where they raised, where these people were. But it was Suntex and Riley, and that's the reason, because he loved horses so, and came here for the purpose of raising them. It was something he always wanted to do. And when he left Sweden, you know, he and his brother got their inheritance. Their fathers gave them their inheritance. And his brother settled in Portland, and he came on out here. Of course, he had this great desire to raise horses. At first, they lived in the valley, and that's where he met my grandmother. And after they were married then they came on out here.

PAULINE: What was her name?

FREDA: Hannah, Hannah Margaret was her name.

PAULINE: Now, they run the Oakerman Hotel?

FREDA: Yes, they did. And I do have some pictures that I am going to give the Historical Society of it.

PAULINE: Oh, we'll be glad to get that.

FREDA: Oh yeah. I have quite a few pictures I'm going to give them. Yes, they had room and board. I have a sign with them standing in front of it, it says room and boarding.

And they also had the switchboard. My grandmother had it for the telephone, and I remember how aggravated they used to get because she also had a lot of canaries, and every time

the telephone rang the canaries started. It used to bother my father, you know, and of course I suppose my grandfather too, because they would start to singing and making all this loud noise.

And then she not only had the switchboard, but she also had the post office there at Riley. I don't know exactly how many years, but it was for a long time. Probably until we moved, or as long as there was a post office there at Riley.

PAULINE: I understand they also had some pretty good dances there too. And some people were telling me about going out and freshening up at the hotel, at the Oakerman Hotel, and then going across the street to dance above the store. Do you remember anything about that?

FREDA: Yes, that was a relative of Deirdre's here that had the store. Of course, she can tell you that part of it if she wants to. They lived across, and the store was across the street right directly. Of course, none of those --- we couldn't find any evidence of it when we visited there, you know, Friday afternoon. But it was, if I remember right, it was directly across the street. And I'm not too sure I don't have a picture of it too.

PAULINE: Can you fill us in then on who had the store?

DEIRDRE DIBBLE MEYER: Doc Hembree had it, but I don't know about the dates of it. He and my Aunt Ura, who was my grandfather's sister, on my mother's side, ran the store and the post office there at; I guess it was Suintex. I was thinking that one was called Suintex for several years.

PAULINE: Now that's Hembree with an H?

DEIRDRE: H E M B R E E.

PAULINE: Okay. And how do you spell Ura?

DEIRDRE: U R A.

PAULINE: U R A.

DEIRDRE: We did go in their home that is still standing, a little square one out there across from

the Oakerman Ranch. Parts of it are still standing.

PAULINE: Can you tell me more about the horse raising part of the Oakerman Ranch?

FREDA: The only thing that I remember, because I was quite small when I left the ranch, but I think it was quite successful as long as there was a demand for horses. But I do remember, you know, as soon after World War I when there was no demand because things become more mechanical, you know, they didn't use horses so much. And then of course, eventually, about that time, it seems like the pasturelands dried up and they didn't have water. We went through a period of time when they didn't have the water to use to keep the pastures green, which made some difference as far as the farming was concerned on the land. And that was one reason. But the main reason being that there wasn't the demand for horses.

DEIRDRE: They raised horses for the Calvary.

FREDA: Yes.

DEIRDRE: My grandparents, the Dibbles, did also. And that was where the big demand was.

FREDA: Well, they used horses too, you know, for ---

DEIRDRE: For the Calvary.

FREDA: Yeah, during the war.

PAULINE: Did they bring stock with them when they came from the Willamette Valley, or did they buy horses here and start raising them?

FREDA: Well, they did bring in, you know, their breeding stock, some of them. They did bring them here. They bought them and brought them and had them here. But when they came, I don't think, no, I'm sure that they didn't bring it with them. They bought those things after they got here. Another thing I do remember that they did every fall, they used to go down to the valley. I don't know that my grandmother went too many times, but they used to take a wagon and they would go

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to the valley, because of the family that lived there, and they would buy apples. They would cover it all over with straw, you know, so they wouldn't freeze. And they would buy their winter supply of things like --- And I remember one time they bought a hog, you know, that had been butchered, and they brought it back. And some way or another they had an accident and the wagon turned over out there on the desert. I don't know whether the wheel came off or what; I don't know the cause of the accident. And it ended up, and my dad said there this hog laid with an apple in its mouth. And of course, that was one of the stories they told about it, and how they had to gather all the things up and put them back in the truck. It took them several months; they were usually gone quite a long time when they went to bring the supplies back. I do remember that story.

PAULINE: Well, were you born at Riley?

FREDA: I was born here in the hospital at Burns, uh huh. Yeah. But of course, my mother just came into the hospital, yes.

PAULINE: What was your mother's name?

FREDA: Her name was Maud, just plain Maud.

PAULINE: Was she from a pioneer family here too?

FREDA: Yes, her family came here too. They were here, they lived at, let's see, did they call it --- it was between Burns and Riley. Sage Hill, Sagehen, Sagehen, was it Sagehen?

PAULINE: Sagehen.

FREDA: Yeah, Sagehen was the name. I couldn't think for ---

PAULINE: And what was her maiden name?

FREDA: Savage. Her folks didn't stay here too long. They had a little ranch out there on Sagehen.

I really, I think they just attempted to farm, and of course as I said there was no water, and those things didn't turn out to be too profitable. And then they went back down to the valley again after

they lived here awhile.

PAULINE: And then when did your father and mother leave here?

FREDA: Well, they never did.

PAULINE: Oh, they never did.

FREDA: No, they finally --- As I said, when there was no value for horses why then we finally gave up the ranch and my family moved into town. And when we first moved in we had a hotel, the old --- It wasn't called the Burns Hotel, I can't remember, but, you know, it was up on the hill next to the laundry. There was an old hotel up there, and they ran it for a while. Oh, I don't really know how long, maybe a couple of years or so, or three, they run this hotel. And then we finally gave that up. And of course, during this time my dad always just worked out during the summertime haying and farming, things like that for other people. And that was the only thing that I think would be of any interest that I can think of for you. Unless there is some particular question you wanted to ask me.

PAULINE: No, I was just, you know, wondering can you remember what date you did move into town?

FREDA: Oh yes, I think I was about, oh I think I was either 3 going on 4, I think, so that would be 1920 probably.

PAULINE: Well, this kind of puts an end to this era of the horse raising then.

FREDA: Yes, that was the end of it. After the war that was the end of the horse raising, yes.

PAULINE: So, you went to school here in Burns.

FREDA: Yes, I did, uh huh, my sister and I both. She started in, seems like we were here about one year before she started. Then I went to school here until I was a sophomore in high school.

PAULINE: Can you think of anything else then about Riley or Suntex or things that happened on

the ranch?

FREDA: Well, the only thing I remember that my brother had to ride all the way from Riley up to Suintex to go to school. The school was up there, you know. I don't know, eight or nine miles it seemed to me like. Which I thought was rather a long ways for a six-year-old child to ride to school, although he did sometimes go down into the valley and stay with his aunt and go to school. Then all the other children rode to school too. No, I just can't think of anything else. I really hadn't thought too much about it, you know.

PAULINE: Well, some of these things are very interesting. I've talked to Jessie Williams about the Oakerman Hotel. And she has given me some information, and your stories about the canaries and the telephone switchboard will add to this. And so, it will be ---

FREDA: I do know I have one other thing I might tell. I don't have it with you (me), but one time they had an epidemic. And I can't remember whether it was scarlet fever or, seems to me like it was scarlet fever or typhoid. And there was a shepherder got it out on the desert there. And my grandmother --- he came there, and he became ill after he was in, you know, at the boarding house there. My grandmother took care of him, and he was so thankful. He gave her a stone that he found out on the desert and he had it cut, it's a moonstone. And he found these rocks, and he sent them back to Chicago and he had three of them cut. And he gave one of them to my grandmother as a thank you gift and I had it set. I do have the stone, and --- which it makes a very nice keepsake for me and my family. It will be a --- it's really a heritage for the family now. I do remember that.

PAULINE: Well, thank you very much. And I'll turn this off.

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HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #48 Side B

Subject: Part II - Deirdre Dibble Meyer

Place: Burns, Oregon

Date: June 16, 1975

Interviewer: Pauline Braymen

PAULINE BRAYMEN: This is Pauline Braymen, and I'm interviewing, oh dear, Deirdre Dibble Meyers at Burns, on June 16th, 1975. Deirdre, can you tell me when your father's parents came to Harney County?

DEIRDRE DIBBLE MEYER: My grandfather's badge says 1894, or 1884. And my grandmother's, Martha Ann Dibble is 1892. She was a Johnson girl. And they raised, had a ranch in, I call it Silver Creek. I don't know whether you want to say Suintex or Riley. And they raised horses and ranched for several years. My father, who was Willy Ambrose Dibble, was born in 1901, and their only child. And shortly, now let's see --- they lived there until my father married my mother, who was Jessie Chance, when they were 17 and 18, and built a little house on the Dibble Ranch. And I was born out there in 1921. Then they moved into town and quit ranching in about 1925.

And then my dad wanted to become a pilot. He had always been very, I guess, speed minded or mechanical minded. My grandfather, Frank Dibble, ran a stagecoach line to, from Burns to Bend part of that time, one of the early ones.

My dad had a motorcycle and used to take my mother and my small brother Clarence and me on the cycle, which was the talk of the town, the country. But we were never injured.

Then my father wanted to go to flying school, so we moved to Portland in about 1925, '26,



and he took flying lessons from Tex Rankin, one of the first ones in the flying there. Bought his own plane, and we moved back to Burns. And he had, I think, the first airplane that was based, that was here at Burns for any length of time.

During the time that he had the plane he flew passengers, went to the near outlying towns and flew passengers. Part of the time he would fly to Nevada and round up wild horses with the airplane. Fly down low and chase them in where the cowboys then would gather them up and bring them in. Just the other day I was reading about them trying to get the wild horses in now, they are having too many of them again.

PAULINE: Can you remember what kind of a plane it was?

DEIRDRE: An OX Waco biplane.

PAULINE: OX Waco.

DEIRDRE: Waco.

PAULINE: W A C O ?

DEIRDRE: Biplane, a two winged plane. It was very different from the planes now. It was an open plane, had a stick to steer it with, instead of a wheel like they do now. And Daryl Eggleston, who was a boy of about 10, used to just be fascinated with the planes, and come out, and he spent all his spare time out with my dad at the airport, and the airplanes.

PAULINE: Where was the airport then? Where did he take off and land?

DEIRDRE: It was about three miles out towards Crane, I think.

PAULINE: Just south of where the Grange Hall is now.

DEIRDRE: I don't really know where the Grange Hall is now.

PAULINE: Well, that sounds about right, yeah.

DEIRDRE: I don't even know where the airport is now.

PAULINE: Well, it's about six miles, well yeah, about six miles out that way.

DEIRDRE: Well maybe it's the same one, I don't know.

PAULINE: I'll check with Daryl. They've moved it around two or three times.

DEIRDRE: Well Daryl, yes, Daryl will know that.

PAULINE: I think it was south of where the Poison Creek Grange Hall is now. Not south, north of where the Grange Hall is now. Can you tell me anything more about the motorcycle? What kind of a motorcycle it was?

DEIRDRE: Oh dear, I think it was an Indian, but I'm not --- I could tell you much more if I get to come back in two weeks to the reunion. If I come back over to that, I will in the meantime try to find out some more information from my mother, who is living.

PAULINE: I'd like to talk to you again if you do, because ---

DEIRDRE: I just really hadn't, you know, even thought anything about it. And then we went out --  
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PAULINE: This is an area that we haven't really touched on, the airplane and the ---

DEIRDRE: Well, I know my dad was the, had the first airplane here, and the people, the --- some of the older people were very upset with my family with their cars, and then with the motorcycles, and then eventually airplane. They were just sure that he would kill his family. In fact, they even tried to get something done so that he would not be able to take his family on the motorcycle or in the airplane. They thought this was very dangerous. We have sort of carried through with the machinery, I guess. I was one of the first; I guess the first driver education, woman driver education teachers in the state then. And my brother had his own plane and flew. So, we're kind of go-go family.

PAULINE: Real pioneers.

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DEIRDRE: Pioneers in the "going" field. My name is Deirdre, by the way.

PAULINE: Deirdre?

DEIRDRE: Deir - dre, Deirdre.

PAULINE: Deirdre. Well now do I have it spelled right, is the next question? D I E D R E ?

DEIRDRE: No, it is D E I R ---

PAULINE: D E I R ---

DEIRDRE: D R E.

PAULINE: D R E.

DEIRDRE: My grandfather's brother then, Del Dibble, ran the Burns Hotel.

PAULINE: Now I've heard his name quite frequently mentioned.

DEIRDRE: Yes, in fact the other night I met someone, and he said, "Oh, I knew your grandfather.

He could tell the biggest lies of anyone in the county." And I really hadn't particularly heard this about my grandfather. And he said, "Why, Del Dibble", and something about his tales. And I said, "Oh, Del was my grand-father's brother, he really wasn't my grandfather." So, it was my Uncle Del and Aunt Rose who ran the hotel.

I don't really know when the Dibbles came, the whole family of Dibbles. There was another brother, Zollie that lived out in Suntex, who never married. And then Frank and Del, but I don't know when they really came. They came from the Chico, California area, and I know there is a creek still down there named, a bridge named for, the Dibble Bridge from them. So, I guess the family probably came from, in that area.

PAULINE: Did you ever hear anyone say why they happened to come to Harney County?

DEIRDRE: Well, I supposed to ranch and raise horses, since that's what they did. I would assume that was why they came. Although I do know that my grandfather did run the stagecoach. They

were sort of pioneers in that they wanted to do things that were different.

PAULINE: Well modern, up with the times.

DEIRDRE: Yes. I don't --- my father was too young to go, to be in the war, to go to the World War. And I know he did, they did, he ran the stagecoach sometimes too, drove it. I know he used to say he started in driving, and taking people places when he was 8 years old.

So, I don't really --- it's too bad that I don't know more about it. If I had, as I said, if I'd have thought this would, anything about this ahead of time. Well Jessie, the Williams of course, have been friends of ours forever. And Jessie said, "Oh, Deirdre, bring some pictures over. Your mother must have some pictures." And I said, "Oh yes, she has a lot of old pictures." And she said, "Well bring us over some for the museum." So that was when it first came up, I guess. And then Barbara said, "Oh, you would be interested in some of the things about my dad and the airplane."

PAULINE: Definitely. Do you remember them ever saying how long it took to drive by stage from Bend to Burns?

DEIRDRE: No, I don't, but I'll tell you, I'm sure it took much longer than when I drove it Friday. (Laughter) I made a record time. I was thinking it used to be, I thought of coming to Burns from Bend, and I had ---- it must be just hundreds of miles between Bend and Burns, it was such a long trip. And now then it's just a matter of a very few hours. So, it just doesn't seem real.

PAULINE: Well two to be exact, and five minutes if you poke along. I, just in my --- since I was a kid, you know, it has changed so much. Horse Ridge you just --- well just within the last year, you know, they've taken from the bottom of Horse Ridge on the Bend side, on into Bend, that area of highway is new. And it just cut off miles, and miles, and miles. And of course, when I was a kid, and used to go to Bend, we went over Horse Ridge and you went round and round, and back and forth, and down and around.

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DEIRDRE: Back and forth. It seemed like such a long grade.

PAULINE: And now you just, up that hill, and over the other side.

DEIRDRE: Of course, the cars are so much better now, and you drive, you can drive so much faster.

... (Unrelated conversation.)

PAULINE: Well, where do you live now?

DEIRDRE: I live in Coos Bay, Oregon. I have taught high school there for the last 19 years. I teach math now. I did teach driver's ed. I started out in the ---

PAULINE: Well, if you do come back in a couple of weeks and have some more information for me, I really would appreciate you calling me, and we'll get together.

DEIRDRE: Well, that would be fine. Because my mother, of course, knows and remembers so much of this, where I was really very small when we left the ranch. I can remember various things when we were in Portland. And it was before I started to school, so I must have been five or six. And then we came back here, and I loved the plane, and loved flying. And I can remember going all over and selling tickets for my dad. And then I went to the first six grades; I finished the sixth grade in Burns and then left and have not lived here since that time. But I have always been a person, I'm a real people person, so I have kept in touch with many of the people here. George Hibbard has always been a close friend of ours, and I have always sent him Christmas and birthday cards. And have several friends here that I have kept in touch with throughout the years, but just haven't had the opportunity to come back and visit and spend any length of time.

PAULINE: Oh, I know, you mentioned selling tickets for your father. Someone called me on the phone several weeks ago, and this lady thought it was Tex Ritter who had come in and given an air show in Burns.

DEIRDRE: No, Tex Rankin.

PAULINE: And after talking to George Hibbard, why he straightened me out on that.

DEIRDRE: Uh huh. George's brother Hal was very fond of flying and used to fly all over with my dad. Ian Davis used to come out and spend a lot of time with him and fly. And Fulton Miller, who is, or who was Trilby Bennett's brother, and they used to just fly all over the country and do all sorts of, sort of wild things that upset people, like flying too low. And the air is --- it's more difficult to fly a plane here than it is where --- at a lower altitude, I guess is the thing. And with the old OX Waco they were not made like the planes now, I suppose they didn't have the horsepower or anything. And so, they would take off in this plane and fly various places.

And then of course flying down, and very low and chasing the horses, these were all quite new and quite adventuresome stunts to perform.

PAULINE: Well, thank you, and maybe we'll see you in a couple of weeks.

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