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HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #50 - Side A (Part I)

Subject: A. W. Walter

Place: Pioneer Days - Burns, Oregon

Date: June 1973

Interviewer: Pauline Braymen

Release Form: No

(Mr. Walter helped build the Harney County Experiment Station buildings located six miles east of Burns, just east of the Burns Airport. This State sponsored facility passed into private ownership in 1955 when the new headquarters were moved to the Squaw Butte Experiment Station winter headquarters at Section 5 on Hanley Lane.)

PAULINE BRAYMEN: This is Pauline Braymen; I'm interviewing A. W. Walter who came to Harney County in 1908. You came in 1908? Where did you come from?

A. W. WALTER: Yeah, oh, Yamhill County, Oregon. I come the year I was married. We lived together 56 years before my wife passed away.

PAULINE: Did you live here all that time?

A. W.: I was here for 10 years, 1908 to '18. So, I know quite a lot of ---

PAULINE: Quite a little bit.

A. W.: I know more than anybody, when I first come I was a youngster ... and when I first come I didn't know whether to stay here or to go back home. Well by golly when I filed on my homestead

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here Monday morning. I'd come here Friday, went out and looked at a place on Saturday, and then you couldn't file till Monday. And there was ... on there. Jess Bunyard, he was standing there, and he wanted to know if I wanted a job working on a rock building just across the street. And while I was waiting over the weekend, they needed help and they was paying \$2.50 for a helper. He wanted to know if I'd go out and help him hay. I asked him what he was paying, and he said he was paying \$1.50.

PAULINE: That's a day?

A. W.: Yeah. Well, I told him if I can get a job right here for \$2.50, course I'd had to bought my board here. And he says well, he'd give me \$2.50. And he had this saddle horse there, and he said come saddle the horse. And he rented a road car right across from the Burns Hotel, and he sure took me a merry ride.

And they hayed from up here above Burns clear down to the old Joe Hill place. And I got acquainted with all the old timers along there that they hayed with. After that no matter where, I come into here ... to see everybody. And then I would mention some of these others, and I was just all right because I knew all these others.

And the old timers didn't like these homesteaders because they was getting their range. And the homesteaders they didn't like the old timers, they thought they knew more than the old timers. So, I got in with both sides.

PAULINE: You were in a good position.

A. W.: I homesteaded there, and there was a retired Brigadier General, Asher C. Taylor.

PAULINE: Asher C. Taylor.

A. W.: Yeah, Asher C. Taylor. He took a homestead right not far from my place.

PAULINE: Where was your homestead?

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A. W.: My northwest corner, it was where the 12 mile post is out there on the road to Crane. Then I bought an 80, and I've still got it. ... stole all the pasture and all the fence, I couldn't do nothing about it, I wasn't here. I guess one of them is still in the pen for misrepresenting.

And I worked out on the building, I did the Experiment Farm for them start to finish. Here a few weeks ago they were telling about tearing that building down, and nothing but the plaster stayed. Something about the plaster.

PAULINE: Oh, the plaster stayed real well.

A. W.: Yeah, but I'm the guy that put the plaster on.

PAULINE: You're the one that put the plaster on? I lived there for 10 years, in that house for the last 10 years.

A. W.: You know, when we first built that, the well was right between that and the mess house. The first mess house burned down. And my daughter was married there or was born there. After I worked on these buildings I come to town and I worked in Bill White's carpenter shop for two years.

PAULINE: Bill White?

A. W.: Yeah, then I got a job working on the farm there for Breithaupt and I was chosen to ... And he was buckaroo from Southern Oregon and come up there. He was an assistant to Breithaupt and then he quit. Him and I didn't get along so good. But I had worked there two years, and my daughter was born in the mess house that was burned up. They got a new one there. I shingled every one of them buildings out there. You've seen pictures of that outfit before now, the buildings?

PAULINE: Yeah.

A. W.: I shingled every one of them. Done all the plastering.

PAULINE: Yeah, the barn burned down, oh three or four years ago. The barn burned down, and

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now they are tearing the house down. I think they will probably build a new house. You wouldn't recognize the old place.

A. W.: Yeah, I built that barn, worked on it and built it, and I shingled every bit there. There was a fellow; Raycraft and White had the contract.

PAULINE: What was his name again? Ray --- White?

A. W.: Raycraft.

PAULINE: Raycraft and White.

A. W.: Yeah, him and Bill White was the contractors. They took the job off us. And I was stopped. We stopped, and see two of Raycraft's girls, oh ... and Josephine. Josephine, you know, I hadn't seen her for a lot of years. ... When I knew her she weighed way over 200 pounds. Oh, she was big; have to go sideways to get through a door. Now she's down to about 120. I wouldn't have known her.

PAULINE: Well, that's quite a change. You said you worked on the Arrowhead Hotel when they built that too. Can you tell me about that?

A. W.: Yeah, I worked there a couple of weeks before I went out to work on the Experiment. Raycraft, or Bill White had this job here, and Raycraft was out there, just starting that. And I worked here a couple of weeks before I went out there and went to work. And I was going to do the plastering and they, well I told them what I'd charge them for plastering. So, this Raycraft ... community hall out there in Valley View there. ... about me being the plasterer and had me meet up with Bill White. And they talked to me, and I'd just do the plastering. And they said that well, that, I wanted to know --- if I'd be ready when it'd be ready to be plastered. And I said, "Well you could give me a job woodworking and I'll be right here." And they thought about it, a woodworker and a plasterer, and they didn't know about it. So, when it come to plaster the mess house I ... some.

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They was a fellow working on this hall here, oh, just across Main Street. They had a plasterer from Baker City, and they asked me if it would be all right to get him out there. Get the plaster on in a hurry. And he come out there, and he was a big, tall guy, and they put a scaffold up for him. And when I got up there, I couldn't reach up to the ceilings to plaster them. And Raycraft and White are standing right there in the doorway. So, when they got the ceiling on I picked up the Dauby, that's a long board with two handles on it. And I'd worked in Portland for over a year with a bunch of plasterers, and all I done was run the Dauby. So, they could reach up and run that. And I was just showing off and running it with one hand. This plasterer he stepped over to them, he said, "You don't need to worry about that guy, he can do your plastering." So, after that I done all the plastering there was in the country. Because I used patent plaster.

PAULINE: What kind of plaster?

A. W.: Oh, powdered plaster like you use nowadays. It sticks and it don't matter if it freezes or not. And when I plastered that house, that ... they just tore down; it was 20 below zero when I plastered that. Keep a good fire up until it set. And after that I got all the jobs, everybody waited for me. Kept me from starving to death on my homestead.

PAULINE: Well, how were things on the homestead? Did you find it very difficult to raise a crop on your homestead? Did you find it difficult to make a go of your homestead?

A. W.: Well, I had 110 acres in cultivation. And then I had every sagebrush off it, and I cut the ridge between the Nine Mile Slough and the railroad. I cut that for hay. That was the biggest rye grass there was in the country.

PAULINE: I've heard that it was taller than a man on horseback out there.

A. W.: The biggest sagebrush right in there than any place in the valley.

PAULINE: Well, why did you leave in 1918?

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A. W.: '18, I went over to Eastern Oregon. My wife's folks had, well there was nine in the family, and they all had places over there and they kept wanting me to go. And they got so they had to be close to a doctor, and they didn't have a road, so they wanted to sell the place. So, I, oh, they wrote and told them, they just got to where they tried to get us to take it. Said they just had to do something right away. So, I was going out to the field to work, and my wife asked me what to tell them. So, I told her, "Tell them we'll take it." So, the next thing we got was the deed. ...

PAULINE: Now this is over at Baker?

A. W.: Yeah, so I got the place. We lived there 50 years, before I sold it. One boy born after we got over there. He's up in the Columbia Basin ... Johnny Woods, their homestead is right out there too, not far from ours. We always stopped there at his place. Got in there a lot of times about 11 o'clock and stayed there.

I had this 110 acres into rye there one fall. I was the only homesteader that ever had a thresher. Well Woods and ... they both had homesteads, and they had a thresher. And they threshed there ... out. But I was the only homesteader --- and you know that rye came up and ... out and just looked like it was ready to die, and ready to dry up, you know. And we got over an inch and a half of rain. And I got over 20 bushels per acre.

PAULINE: Oh, that's a good yield.

A. W.: The only crop that was ever raised out in that flat.

PAULINE: How old are you now?

A. W.: Well, I was born in 1882. I won't have a birthday until after this month.

PAULINE: Did your parents come out to Oregon? Were you born in Oregon?

A. W.: No, in Iowa.

PAULINE: You were born in Iowa.

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A. W.: Northwestern Iowa. ... My mother's folks were the first homesteaders in Iowa. They celebrated their centennial in '65. So, I know quite a ways back. And I heard all the way back. And they come out here, and they got acquainted with my wife in ... and in 1900. And her folks had come from England, ... and they come here in 1848. I've got old books there at home, her folks date back to 1736, old mortgages, contracts and stuff. So, then we lived together 56 years before my wife passed away.

And then when I come here to Harney, you know, there was about a third of the first settlers was still in here. And I heard from them all the way back. And you know most all of them old settlers they had either done something, or thought they done something, is the reason they come here, to get so far away from any place. But they was nice people to live with. Different than what they are now.

I used to haul walnuts and prunes and fruit over here to sell. ... (Talks about walnut business.)

Note: Mr. Walter also played on Burns baseball team.

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