

HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #57 - Sides A/B

Subject: Haying In The Early Days - By Henry Ausmus

Place: Burns, Oregon

Date: 1972

Interviewer: Pauline Braymen

Release Form: No

(Note: The following is a summary of the conversations held.)

ABOUT THE PICTURES:

PICTURE 1: This haystack is probably at the Bell-A Ranch. The Ausmus family contracted haying for Bill Hanley. They are using the two horse bucks. They ran three of them. Standley Ausmus and Leslie Culp are on the net. Ormand Ausmus is on the stack. Harry Carey is on the Jim-wagon. Lloyd Culp and Dad (Ben) Ausmus ran the bucks, and someone else. They are using four horses on the Jim-wagon. Dick Ausmus was working on the crew somewhere too.

PICTURE 2: This is probably at the Bell-A too. But it is a different crew. The net setter is standing with the overthrow in his hand, and the pullback horse is standing there ready to pull it back.

PICTURE 3: Same crew, just a different stack yard.

PICTURE 4: Same crew and general location. This load of hay is just ready to go up. See the net pole and cable is tight on its way up.

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PICTURE 5: This picture is taken at the Alvord. This was the big crew. The Alvord always contracted their hay. I don't know whose crew. Evidently one of the pictures Ormand Ausmus took. Contractors for the Alvord, Island Ranch, all those big ranches always used the four-horse rudder buck. This is what is shown in this picture. The rudder buck, instead of having two wheels on behind, just had one big wheel. Just like the rudder on the boat. There was a platform, and the man stood on the platform with a tiller between his legs, and he steered with that tiller. It was taken after the old time headers they used in the wheat fields in the Midwest. The horses are between the platform and the buckteeth. They actually push the hay.

All the hay in the field was bunched with two horse bucks, and when the rudder buck went out to get a bunch, instead of just getting one, he'd get three to five bunches of hay. So with two or three rudder bucks and two men on the net, and this shows four men on the stack, this means they were really putting up hay.

The fellow on the rake was the scatter rake boy. All the crews had to scatter rake. These bucks would go out and they'd scatter hay all over the place, and the scatter rake boy would follow the bucks around and rake up the scattered hay, and windrow is so the bucks could pick it up. Every crew had a scatter rake boy, usually a kid about 10 or 12 years old. He's only got one horse on his rake. Well, it's just as hard work as anything else.

You can see that this team is just waiting to put a load on, and the other load is just backing out from putting a load onto the net. You can see how quick they were putting up the hay. The first driver will back out, and just as soon as that load goes up and the net hits that trench, the next load will go on. And it's up to the net setter to get that net set up quickly --- and he does.

They averaged putting up a load every three minutes. In a day's time, they'd put up a 100-ton to 150 ton of hay. And if they didn't, they'd fire somebody.

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PICTURE 6: They're using the two-horse buck here. If they had enough of them they could put up just as much hay. And evidently they've got visitors. A couple of ladies out watching them stack. You can see the ladies are not riding side saddle, but are wearing the old riding skirt that they used to wear in about 1915, some-where in there. They were just about like your granny dresses now, but they were split so they could ride astraddle. Note the crazy wheels on the buck.

PICTURE 7: This is a two-horse buck. You see he has a load of hay in front of him there. He's sitting on a seat like a mower seat, and those are crazy wheels there on the back, so they turn any way. When one horse walks around the other they'll turn. You hold one horse back and you turn. When we were kids we used to make a net out of heavy string and a pull back cable, Jim-wagon and all, and we put up stacks of hay. Then we'd scatter the grass out again, and put it up again.

PICTURE 8: This shows a four-horse rudder buck putting a load on the net. They're just finishing this stack. Now if you don't understand what the net is, the procedure here is: The net that they put the hay on has a pole about 16 to 18 feet long, according to the size of the bucks. A four-horse buck used a five or six chain net, mostly five. They have five long chains that laid out on the ground, and this pole lays in a trench in the ground so that the buckteeth wouldn't pick up the chains when they came on with a load of hay. There's a crotch chain on the pole. The chains are throwed into the trench so the buckteeth won't catch on them.

All right, when the bucks back out, the net setter pulls the crotch chains out of the trench, and there's an overthrow rope and he throws it over the load, and the ring is hooked onto a cable that goes over the stack. The chains on the net are hooked onto the crotch chain, and onto the overthrow rope, and the net setter hollers, "Go 'head," just as loud as he can holler, because the stackers wouldn't always be paying attention. So he'd holler loud enough so the man out there on the Jim-wagon could hear him. A good set of lungs were necessary. That was part of the job to be

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able to holler loud enough so the Jim-wagon man could hear you on the other side of the stack. But the stackers gave him the signal too.

The net setter worked at the end of the slide, and about thirty feet out. The Jim-wagon man has what they called a toggle on the back of his wagon. It's constructed so that it has a finger that latches down and holds the ring on the end of the cable, so they can trip it at anytime. It has a little lever on it, and he holds onto the rope, and when the stacker hollers or holds his fork up so he can see it, he trips it. If he doesn't trip at the right place, they get right on him. He trips it when they holler. And when the jim-wagon trips, he turns around and comes back to where the end of the cable will be when the net is in place to put another load on the stack. And that's all he does. He goes forward when they holler to pull the load of hay in the net, onto the stack, and trips the cable when it is in place.

Now the stacks are usually about 36 feet wide, and as long as they judge they need to be to hold the amount of hay in that particular stack yard. Usually they put about 100 ton in a stack. They judged the length of the stack; the number of tons to go into it, by the number of bunches in the field. They figured about five bunches to the ton. They counted the bunches in the field and prepared their stack bottom accordingly.

They put in the bottom first, one buck load high, and then they start putting it over the slide, pulling it to the back of the stack. And they run a tier on. The stacker can throw the cable to one side of the stack or the other, so that the hay is pulled where they want it. The stacker runs a tier by putting one load in one corner, and the next one in the other, then they run another one right up against that. Then to keep their stack solid in the center, they run a tier right down the center. And as they go up, they get well above the slide.

Then they start topping out. They bring the hay in a little closer and it forms a top. The last

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tier on the stack runs single right up to the top, and they have to pull that load right out to the end.

The net chains will be hanging right out over the end of the stack. And the stack will be pretty high, maybe 20 or 30 feet.

Whenever they get on the back of the stack, they signal the Jim-wagon driver that they are going to put a load on the back of the stack. He'll stop before they get right to the back of the stack, so the stackers can crawl over the hay and get out of the way. Sometimes if they have lots of confidence in the Jim-wagon driver, they'll stand just at the corner and let him pull a load in between. That's the way they get it right on the back end of the stack. They've got to be pretty careful when the next load comes in against it, because if they pull it in too tight, it will pull that bunch right off the back end, it will fall right off. But it was usually pretty solid, and they very seldom lost a load off the back of the stack. But there have been people hurt pretty bad because they were pulled off the stack when they were topping out.

The Jim-wagon driver has a big old heavy freight wagon. Some-times they used a big heavy cart, but usually a big heavy freight wagon. It had to be something that wouldn't tip over. I've seen sometimes when there was a heavy load of old wet soggy hay to go on the stack, it would be so heavy it would raise the hind wheels of the Jim-wagon right off the ground, and they would just swing in the air. That could be dangerous. They could tip a wagon over if they didn't pull straight. They had to pull straight at all times, so they needed something pretty heavy.

The Jim-wagon driver, in the big haying crews, usually used about six horses. They hitched four horses on the wheels, two on each side of the tongue, four horses abreast. Then on a lead chain, they'd hitch two out on the chain to lead. They would pull on the chain that went back to the hounds of the wagon. They used six horses that way, instead of stringing them out, because it was more convenient to make the turns.

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PICTURE 9: This could be at the Bell-A. The picture shows two men on the net. A crew of any size needed two men on the net. The man on the horse is the pull off boy. As soon as the Jim-wagon man trips his toggle, the cable will come loose on this load. You can tell when they trip it, because the chains all come loose. The net setter has a rope fastened to the crotch chains that is the same length of the cable. The pull off or pull back boy pulls that net back to the trench with his saddle horse to get ready for another load.

The net setter then unhooks the overthrow cable, lays the crotch chains in the trench, and the net is ready for another load of hay.

The Jim-wagon man walks to the back of the wagon, and he has a stick with a hook on it for convenience, and he picks up the chain and hooks it. If he is right agile he'll jump off the wagon and grab the chain and hook it. But he drives around with his team and stops at the same place where the chain with the net on it is, and he reaches down with his little hook and hooks it.

The slide, they didn't have one for each stack yard. When they finished the stack, the Jim-wagon hooked onto the slide and pulled it to the next stack yard.

I was setting net when I was about 15. I was setting net and pulling back alone. It was just a small crew. I had quite an experience. Dad was on the Jim-wagon, and he couldn't hear too well. He wasn't expecting anybody to holler before he got to the place where the load would get up over the end of the slide. Well, somehow or other, just as soon as we got that overthrow over, we'd holler go ahead, and in the meantime we'd have them all hooked up before he'd get the slack out of the cable. Well I caught my fingers in the rings of the net. And we were just starting out, and the hay wasn't up to the top of the stack yet. The cable was pulling right down over the top of the slide, hard! It carried me clear to the top of the slide, within about 12 inches of cutting my fingers off. Probably would have cut my whole hand off when the net and hook went over the end of the slide.

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The men on the stack finally got Dad stopped. Everyone was yelling, and I was sweating! There was some danger.

Some people down around Lawen are still using the slide, and some outfits down around Klamath Falls are still using it. But it's very rare anymore.

In later years they put tractors on the bucks and the Jim-wagon and eliminated the horse, all except the pull back horse. They still used the pull back horse to pull the cable back down. The horse was the best, you couldn't beat him because he was fast, and it was just more convenient.

They didn't always use a slide. Sometimes they'd just pull the hay right up the stack from the bucks.

A good stacking crew where they run three bucks, they'll put a load up every three minutes. When they use the four horse rudder bucks, they'll put them up just as fast, only they'll put up about three times as much hay per load than they do with the smaller bucks.

With three bucks you have three men, two on the net, and two on the stack, and the Jim-wagon man, and that's a crew, and a pull off horse. But usually the man on the pull off horse does this and helps set net too, so there is just the two.

One fellow works on the ground, and one man stays on the other end and picks up the chain and hooks it on the cable. Usually this man that works the ground will unhook the cable, throw the crotch chains in the trench, and get ready for the load to come on. Then he'll walk around, and the man that pulls off will be off his horse, and he'll pick up the crotch chains and throw them over the load, and the other man will hook them on and holler go ahead. That's the procedure.

But one man could do the job. It worked him harder and that's the hardest work on the stacking that there was. Now the stackers got paid more money, because he was supposed to work harder. But a good stacker did very little work. He knew where to throw that cable, and bring those

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loads in there so that all he had to do was keep the edges of his stack trimmed up. But he doesn't work near as hard as the net setter.

PICTURE 10: This is Grandpa Ausmus and his team (Henry's father). This was taken on the Hill Ranch. This pair of horses were stallions, and they were beautiful black Percherons. They were big, weighed close to a ton. This was Dick and this was Polly. They were always hitched up the same, Dick was on the left, and Polly was on the right. They'd work either way, but they didn't like it.

He used to hook them up to a little old spade cultivator and cultivate the potato patch. Those horses wouldn't step on a plant. If they did, they got a cussing. That was his pride and joy, that team of stallions. They were gentle.

We used to feed with them in the wintertime. We'd load a load of hay on the wagon and take them out a mile or two, hang the lines on the Jacobs staff on the wagon, and start them off towards the house. And we'd ride on in a horseback on a lope, because it was cold. They'd bring the load of hay on in to the house, along side the feed racks and stop. They knew their job.

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