

HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #59 - Side B

Subject: Leon & Lucille Thompson

Place: Harney County Library - Burns, Oregon

Date: May 25, 1978

Interviewer: Pauline Braymen

PAULINE BRAYMEN: This is Pauline Braymen, and I'm visiting with Leon and Lucille Thompson on May 25th, 1978 at the Harney County Library. Leon has been chosen Pioneer President for 1978. When did your folks come to Harney County? I think they were some of the very earliest pioneers, weren't they?

LEON THOMPSON: The fall of 1887 my father came out.

PAULINE: What was his name?

LEON: Oron.

PAULINE: Oron?

LEON: Oron, O R O N.

PAULINE: O R O N. Was he married then, or was he still a single fellow when he came to Harney County?

LEON: He was single when he first came.

PAULINE: Did he settle at Diamond?

LEON: No, he settled down here at Crane, well at Crane Creek, in below part of Elsie Bennett's ranch.

PAULINE: Of course Crane wasn't there at that time.

LEON: No, no.

PAULINE: Do you have any idea why they called it Crane Creek?

LEON: No, I don't.

PAULINE: I ask that question of everyone that I can, because I've never been able to find out.

LEON: It's been Crane Creek to me ever since I can remember.

PAULINE: No one really seems to know why. Some day, maybe, I'll find out --- Oh yes, my grandfather said, you know. But I've never been able to find that out. Did he marry then, someone from Harney County, or another pioneer family from Harney County?

LEON: My mother was a --- she was from Brownsville, Oregon. Do you remember the year they were married?

LUCILLE THOMPSON: No.

LEO: I sure don't.

PAULINE: What was her name?

LEON: Carrie.

PAULINE: Okay. You had several brothers and sisters, did you not?

LEON: Yes.

PAULINE: And you're not the oldest?

LEON: Yeah, I'm the oldest.

PAULINE: You are the oldest.

LEON: I'm the oldest son, yes.

PAULINE: Can you name the other children in the family?

LEON: Harold, or Ellis at Hayden Lake, Idaho.

PAULINE: Peyton Lake?

LEON: Hayden. H A Y D E N Lake.

PAULINE: Is he still living?

LEON: Yes. And Harold is at Carson, California. It's a suburb of Los Angeles.

PAULINE: Okay, and then the girls were named?

LEON: Ethel Fine, from Burns, and Pearl Frodsham at Boise.

PAULINE: How do you spell that?

LEON: F R O D S H A M.

PAULINE: F O R D ---

LEON: F R O D S H A M.

PAULINE: Okay. And where did you say she was from?

LEON: She's at Boise.

PAULINE: At Boise. Okay. Well I can remember now, talking to Ethel and --- You grew up then, there in the Crane Creek area?

LEON: That's right.

PAULINE: Where did you go to school?

LEON: We went to the Waverly school. That's, well they call it Windy Point. It'd be the Princeton area now.

PAULINE: Did you walk to school, or ride?

LEON: We did, we walked.

PAULINE: About how far about ---

LEON: Three quarters of a mile.

PAULINE: Three quarters of a mile?

LEON: Uh huh.

PAULINE: Can you remember anything about your childhood days?

LEON: Well at this Waverly School, it was a rough building, built out of this old lumber that was from the mill above Harney.

PAULINE: Uh huh.

LEON: They had no well there, we --- every day we'd, two of us kids would go down and walk a quarter of a mile to the neighbors and get water. The heating system was just a big old pot-bellied stove, and they burned wood, juniper wood and sagebrush. They didn't have --- At that time, the teachers taught from 12 to 15 kids, all grades. My eighth grade year, I went to Crane because there was a --- I was the only eighth grader. I rode horseback seven and three quarter miles. That's one way.

PAULINE: What year were you born?

LEON: 1900.

PAULINE: 1900. And you were born at Crane, or in the Crane ---

LEON: At Lawen.

PAULINE: At Lawen?

LEON: At Lawen. Uh huh.

PAULINE: Then they had a high school at Crane by 1918 then?

LEON: They had the first; the first high school was 1916.

PAULINE: Are you going to be taking part in the Crane High School reunion they're going to be having here one of these days?

LEON: I never did go to high school at Crane.

PAULINE: Oh, you didn't?

LEON: She did. I went to Boise. She went to Crane.

PAULINE: You went your eighth grade year there?

LEON: I went the eighth grade, yeah.

PAULINE: Lucille, you were the daughter of a pioneer family?

LUCILLE: Yes.

PAULINE: And what was your father's name?

LUCILLE: Charles Frazier.

PAULINE: And the place where you are now was his place, was it not?

LUCILLE: Yes, uh huh. We're still there.

PAULINE: What year did he come?

LUCILLE: He came from Kansas when I was a year old, in 1907.

PAULINE: Did he homestead that or was it --- did he buy that from someone else?

LUCILLE: He bought it from the William Hanley Company when they sold out.

PAULINE: So then you grew up in the Diamond area and went to school at Diamond?

LUCILLE: Yes, I sure did.

PAULINE: When, how did you happen to meet?

LUCILLE: I went to high school at Crane, and he was working there in the garage.

LEON: She baked a great big chocolate cake, a three layer one. That's what caught me.

PAULINE: Well that's what they've always said before, "The way to a man's heart is through his stomach." Okay, when were you married?

LUCILLE: You know when we were married? 1926.

LEON: I thought it was '25.

LUCILLE: No.

LEON: September 3rd, I remember that.

LUCILLE: 2nd.

PAULINE: You're as bad as Allan and I. Every year we get in a big argument because we were married on the day before Veterans Day, so that's what sticks in Allan's head. So he always says it's November 11th, but we were married on November 10th. We always have a big discussions about it. So, it was September 2nd.

LUCILLE: Yes.

PAULINE: In 1926. Were you married in Burns or ---

LUCILLE: Yes, down here on Riverside Drive. It was a home wedding.

PAULINE: And whose home was it?

LUCILLE: My dad was living there at the time, he was road master. It's where the Pennington Mill used to be, I think. Or the Pennington's used to live there.

PAULINE: Were you married by a minister, or a county judge?

LUCILLE: A minister.

PAULINE: Do you remember who it was?

LUCILLE: Harris, his name was.

PAULINE: I've heard that name.

LUCILLE: Uh huh, Reverend Harris.

PAULINE: ... in a garage at Crane?

LEON: Yes.

PAULINE: What garage was that?

LEON: My father, worked in my father's garage, and then I worked for Burns Garage after they bought it.

PAULINE: I didn't know that. Was your first car ride then in a Ford or ---

LEON: In a Model-T's, yes.

PAULINE: Do you remember your first ride in a car?

LEON: Yes, I do. It was a Buick. There was a young fellow who was coming to see my sister, and he took all of us kids for a ride, it was there at Windy Point. This fellow's name was Ray Dunsmore.

PAULINE: Yeah, I've heard that name.

LEON: You've heard of Ray Dunsmore? Yeah, that was quite a --- It was just a touring car with a top, you know, there was no --- those days there wasn't any glass, you know, in the cars.

PAULINE: Did you like it?

LEON: Oh yes, it was a thrill. Gee it was great. He didn't take us very far anyway, either. It was a short ride and it was quite something, you know. Yeah. I well remember the first car I ever saw on the road, it was down by The Narrows. It was Wilbur Haines? Did you remember Wilbur Haines that used to be here? Charlie Haines had that store at The Narrows, and quite a place then. And I thought that was the fastest thing I ever saw in my life. I imagine he was going twenty miles an hour. A lot of dust, you know. I was used to horseback riding, and it was really quite a thing to me.

PAULINE: How long did you work at the Burns Garage?

LEON: A little over two years, I guess.

PAULINE: Well then, when did you go into the ranching business? Because I know you've been out there a long time.

LEON: Yeah, well let's see, it was '26, I was still working ---

LUCILLE: We went out there in '28.

LEON: Yeah.

LUCILLE: Where we are, in 1928.

LEON: It was in 1928 we went to Diamond, but we were in the sheep business though, the year before that, about 1927 when we quit working for wages.

PAULINE: Did you run sheep on the Steens?

LEON: Yes, yes, until 1934, we switched to cattle.

PAULINE: Did you, how did you market your sheep and cattle in those earlier days? Did you drive them out? Did you ---

LEON: We trailed to Crane, and shipped out of Crane.

PAULINE: On the railroad?

LEON: By rail, yeah.

PAULINE: Where did they usually go? Did they go clear on back to Nebraska or did ---

LEON: Yes. Most of them went to Nebraska, and some to Portland.

PAULINE: Now you had several children, and Nevin's the only one I know very well.

LUCILLE: Shirley and Nevin. Just the two of them.

PAULINE: Just the two. And Shirley's living at Crane?

LUCILLE: Yes. She's living in her grandfather's house there. It belonged to the family a long time.

PAULINE: That's right in Crane proper? Right in the town of Crane, or ---

LEON: Uh huh.

PAULINE: Of course Nevin's at Princeton.

LUCILLE: Yes.

PAULINE: You said your dad had a garage in Crane. What did he call his garage?

LEON: Crane Garage.

PAULINE: The Crane Garage. Do you remember when he went into business there or --
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LEON: 1917.

PAULINE: And how long was he in business there?

LEON: About --- let's see, 1917. 1920, about three years I guess it was.

PAULINE: Well Crane burned down a couple of times. Were you there during that period of time when they had the fires?

LEON: No, I didn't happen to be there right when --- This garage finally burned down, my father's garage burned down. That was probably --- that was around the '20's. He had it rented out to some people before he sold it to the Burns Garage. They rebuilt it back, a smaller place.

PAULINE: Let's see, your dad came from Kansas. Was he married when he came, or did he marry someone out here? Charlie Frazier, did he, was he married when he came

to Harney County?

LUCILLE: Yes.

PAULINE: Well of course, you were a year old. I'm getting sleepy. I'm asleep! What was your Mom's name?

LUCILLE: Pearl Defenbaugh. She was a, her folks lived in Denio, and that's how they happened to come out.

PAULINE: I was just going to say that that name certainly sounded familiar.

LUCILLE: There's still some down there.

PAULINE: Can you think of anything that you think should be included in your history that I haven't asked you about?

LEON: I helped build part of this railroad from Crane to Seneca.

PAULINE: Okay. That's really worth telling about.

LEON: Yeah, uh huh. I worked on two construction jobs, building grade, and about ten miles of fence, right-of-way fence.

PAULINE: Ida Cross was telling me a little bit about the building of that railroad. I think she cooked for some crews from one time to another. I think maybe Albert worked on that, too. Can you

LEON: We used, we just used horses and fresnos. But a fellow by the name of Lynn Bower, you might of heard his --- some of your family speak of Lynn Bower? He used, through these tough meadows down here, he used an excavator. Oh gee, they had, I don't know how many horses on that thing. But they used that to, to rough the base in see. And then they finished up with scrapers and teams. But he did a lot of work. I know there was quite a lot of speculation about when, among the fellows that were doing that kind of work --- or rather that he could do that or not. By gosh, he did it.

PAULINE: In other words, you had to bring dirt, enough dirt in to build up a base for the railroad to get it up out of the water.

LEON: Yeah. They had to build this grade up. These excavators that, they plowed this sod up and it went onto a conveyor that delivered the dirt out to the side of the machine. It worked fast, I guess. That sod, when you try to handle that with fresnos, it's something, you know. I don't know how big of contract he had. It was, I suppose, it was down through Section Five, or close to Section Five there through those fields. It was heavy sodded and --- But I worked down near Lawen and up here at Crow Flat, and that part of the road.

PAULINE: In that area? Was it done mostly in the summertime or did you work through the winter too?

LEON: Most of, it was in the fall of the year.

PAULINE: In the fall.

LEON: Yeah, in the fall.

PAULINE: How long did it take to build that railroad in there?

LEON: It took several years, yes it did. They --- there was, it was pretty heavy work up this way. You know, they made one big cut up in there. Well I don't know just --- Well the train was running into Burns here quite a little while before it went on to Seneca. Yes.

PAULINE: On to Seneca. Do you remember what period of years that included when you were working on the building of the railroad?

LEON: '20, '21, and '22, I think it would be. Somewhere around in there, '21 or '22. Maybe, that's close enough, I think. It might have been a little later than that.

PAULINE: Okay. Have you ever served on the school board?

LEON: What's that?

PAULINE: Have you served on the school board at Diamond or any-where else, Crane

High School?

LEON: Oh yes, yes. Seven years at Crane, and I imagine 10 years at Diamond.

PAULINE: Okay. How about the Oregon Cattlemen's Association, and The Harney County Stockgrowers? Were you members of those groups?

LEON: Yeah.

PAULINE: Have you been president of those groups, or ---

LEON: Do I what?

PAULINE: Have you been president of the Harney County Stock-growers?

LEON: Yeah, uh huh. '30, '35, I think it was 1935.

LUCILLE: Oh my.

LEON: No, no.

LUCILLE: It wasn't that long ago.

LEON: '65, about '65.

LUCILLE: Yeah, that's more like it. Whenever you involve dates, well I'm lost.

LEON: Along about that, I was of course two years.

PAULINE: Are there other organizations in the county you've been active in?

LEON: Well I've been an Elk for 20 years.

PAULINE: Of course the Pioneer Association. That sort of goes without saying.

LEON: Yeah, that's right. I was a member of the Land Bank Board for 17 years, the Federal Land Bank.

PAULINE: Can you think of anything, Lucille, that he's done, that we ought to brag about a little bit?

LUCILLE: No, I've just been a housewife, mostly. I belong to the Cow Belles, of course, and Rebekah Lodge, but I haven't taken active part.

PAULINE: Well it's a little hard when you live almost 60 miles from lodge.

LUCILLE: Yes, yes it is.

LEON: Yeah, I served on this county zoning committee and planning commission. But I had to; I had to get off of that on account of the distance.

LUCILLE: Having the night meetings ---

LEON: Yes, having the night meetings. Too far. I guess they still got Henry hooked on that, haven't they?

PAULINE: I think he's about to get loose from them, I'm hoping.

LEON: That's what he told me, that he, last year when we was on that trip, that he was --- I was kidding him about that. I said, "You can't quit now." I said, "You've been there too long." He said, "I can quit." He said, "I'm gonna to just tell that judge I was gonna quit."

PAULINE: Well he keeps telling them that, but they keep ---

LEON: He's still there, huh?

PAULINE: Yeah, he's still there. Well you know they have Otley, yeah, Otley.

LEON: Homer?

PAULINE: Homer. Yeah, he took over. And then he got burned so bad, and so Daddy went back, you know, to rescue them from that after Homer got burned and couldn't do it anymore. And he hasn't got away yet, but I think he is going give it up here pretty soon. It's about time that he had a little rest.

LUCILLE: Time of his own.

LEON: Yeah.

PAULINE: Well can you think of anything else now, that we ought to mention about your history, or things that you've done for the community? I always think of something after I go home, or when I get started to write something up. I always think of something that I have forgotten.

LUCILLE: That's easy to do.

PAULINE: But oh, I --- Tell me a little bit about earlier Pioneer Days, the way they used to do it when you first got involved? Do you see some changes in the way we celebrate the day now, and the way we used to celebrate it?

LEON: Well I think I remember the first dance I ever went to. A friend of mine and --- It was a masquerade, and we were six, we were teenagers. We rode our horses over to Harriman. You've heard of Harriman? That was a little town sprung up just out west of Crane there, about three or four miles. We went masked as cowboys, you know, we had our chaps on and everything. We just --- we didn't dance, we just went, stood around there. Oh, we thought we had a wonderful time. Oh, that was about a sixteen-mile ride.

LUCILLE: I'll bet he wouldn't do it now.

LEON: No.

PAULINE: Well I think there would be a few other people, probably wouldn't do it now, either.

LEON: In those days, we used to have a Fourth of July picnic over at Crow Camp, where Millers lived. We always looked forward to that, too. They had, oh, they had ball games, and they had foot races, and stuff like that for the kids. We always enjoyed that. We'd load up --- We had a two-seated rig, a hack they called it. We'd load that up, and had a pretty good team trot along. That's the way we went to the celebration. The first trap shoot I ever saw was there. There was a gun club here in Burns came out there. They held a trap shoot. At Christmas time we always managed to join the Sitz's down at Lawen. That's Earl and Allen Sitz, you knew Earl? We always looked forward to that. We'd go down and, usually stay over till us kids got to fighting, and then we'd all go home.

PAULINE: Sounds like today.

LEON: Yeah.

PAULINE: Did you ever skate on the lake in the wintertime?

LEON: Yes, oh yes, yes. Yes, I remember one incident that was a funny one. My brother and I was --- Father had cattle out on what they call Pelican Island. And when it froze up, we'd have to go over there and chop ice for them. So we had a mule team that he had sharp shoes on, and I guess we --- I think we was taking some salt over to these cattle. And he had us hook up to this; it was an old sled with no tongue in it. It was a homemade sled, you know. And we got out there on that ice and got to trotting along pretty good, and we decided to slow the mules down, and we pulled on the lines, and we pulled the sled up and bumped their heels, and away we went. We took a pretty fast ride there. We finally circled them around and got them to run into a bunch of tules, and that --

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PAULINE: Slowed them down.

LEON: That slowed the, that slowed them down. That was a, that was a thriller all right.

PAULINE: Well from what my dad tells, although the lake could be frozen over, it didn't always mean it was frozen solid, and you could run into some running water.

LEON: That's right.

PAULINE: He tells about skating on a broomstick between his two older brothers, and if they came to a place where there --- they'd just skate around it. He'd just lift up his feet and go over the hole.

LEON: Yeah, there's air holes.

PAULINE: Air holes.

LEON: Yeah, there is air holes. Yeah, we used to go down there and we had our --- our big problem was with our skates. In those days, you know, they didn't have, they didn't have skates with shoes, and we had those clamp on kind. You've seen those dumb things. If you didn't have awful good heavy soles, you couldn't keep them on, you know.

Used to take a lot of good spills.

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