

HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #75 Side A

Subject: Jim St. Martin - Burns Paiute Tribal Manager

Place: Harney County Historical Society Meeting - Burns, Oregon

Date: March 18, 1977

Interviewer: Pauline Braymen

Topic: Development of Burns Paiute Indian Reservation and return of Paiute artifacts.

JIM ST. MARTIN: My initial impression was that I was supposed to do was about a two-minute thing, and then I was going to leave. But I found out this afternoon, or this morning about 11 o'clock that I was supposed to do a little longer thing.

I think to start with, I think most of you are familiar, who have been here for any length of time, what the reservation has been over the last ten or fifteen years. The kind of non-develop-ment that has occurred out there, that everything from old camp to the colony, and the kind of facilities that we've had, twenty-four buildings have been built forty years ago. The real problems that the tribe has experienced with the relationships with other Harney County citizens, as well as outside people, as well as with themselves. They've had a great deal of difficulty in trying to locate and identify what direction they're going, and how they're going to go, and who they are going to have help them; who they can identify to have help them. And it has been a real problem. And until October 13, 1972 when the Reservation received its federal recognition, this means an awful lot to the tribe, and it means an awful lot to Indian people. One of the things you do have to understand is that Indian people are not simply cultural animals that are brown skinned people who speak another language, or do things differently. Their whole lifestyles, their

relationship, is attached to the land. Without the land, they are not Indian. That's just about that simple, and it's just about that complex.

And so a lot of people don't understand that just having a good job, having a nice house, is not enough for an Indian person. They have to be attached to the land, and it can't be simply private ownership like most of you have experienced. You own your own piece of land, or you're renting somebody else's piece of land, and that's fine for a lot of people. But for Indians for thousands of years it's been a commonly held piece of land, and this is the way they operate. And no matter how many changes they've gone through over the past hundred years, two hundred years, three hundred years, that concept has not changed. If you understand that, it might help you understand why Indian people feel it is so important, that even though they only have 770 acres, and even though they are in extreme poverty conditions, and even though their housing conditions are bad, it means that they've still got what they are. It's a piece of what they were. It's a piece of what they are.

And for Indians in order to build, they have to be able to look at their past to see what their future is going to be. And it is kind of like you sitting here, you're looking at your past, and hopefully that relationship will tie to what you will be, what your children will be, or somebody else's children will be a hundred years from now.

Well Indian people, a lot of people accuse them, and saying well they're looking back at the past all the time, they're too interested in their past, why don't they get on and get out there in the world. Well they can't do that because what they have in themselves, and what they have in the land will determine what they are. And so 770 acres is vitally important to them.

With that, the kind of changes we've been bringing about, we've been trying to stop and figure out exactly what directions we're going to be taking in the next few years, the

next twenty years. And what we're trying to do out there is not myself or some other people on the committees and the boards, the general councils, we're not trying to decide now what direction we're going to take. What we're trying to do now, at least as far as the paid staff out there is trying to do, is to determine a way to buy enough time so those people out there, living there for generations, can figure out which direction they want to go.

Whether it be a tremendously culturally oriented from their past, or whether it is going to be an industrialized situation, but it's up to them to decide, it's not my decision. So what I'm doing now is trying to buy enough time, to get enough jobs for those people, get enough industry going, trying to re-develop cultural artifacts, strengthen the language, tie these things together so that they will have the time, hopefully in a couple of years, to sit down and say, "Well yeah, we see where we've come in the last few years, we see where we've been, and now this is the direction we want to go."

And they will establish the priorities, the needs, and the direction. And whether or not I am Tribal Manager, or somebody else is, that will be the direction that they will follow. And so right now what we have done is set out to get twelve brand new houses. And those houses, the tribal members are buying. They are not freebies. There is one free house out there, and that was by a family who couldn't qualify for loans.

The rest of the twelve houses, or eleven houses that will go in will all be given by loan through the Farmers Home Administration, State G.I., or the Federal G. I. loan package, or through the banks downtown. And this is a step that a lot of tribes, not only in the State of Oregon, and a lot of other non-Indian people, have felt that Indians have never taken. They have taken it. And this is by people who have had former alcohol problems, who have been in and out of jail, who have decided that this is the time to do it. And we are getting a few more who are interested in buying their own homes, and taking

that kind of responsibility. It may not appear that way to a lot of people downtown, but things are changing. And a lot of positive things.

We recently were awarded a grant of \$85,500 to put in a new 5,000 square foot light industrial facility that will go out there on the reservation. That facility will be the start for the reservation to start developing an economy. It will give them the kind of jobs, and the kind of choice in jobs that they have never had before. It will give them the kind of economic stability that they need in order to control their situation. Right now, most of the tribe is operating on grants, or working through the mill, or unemployment, welfare, or things of that sort. We've been able to, as of last year; we brought in about \$800,000 in construction projects. The new community center, which many of you have seen, it's a start. We're trying to get the facilities; we're trying to develop that little piece of land so that we'll be reaching an optimal production limit.

And the whole basis for that, I think is, there is a lot of reasons. But among many of those reasons is the fact that those people in their identification, and in their trying to maintain many of the elements of the past, they have to have that kind of structure, they can sit and wait, and take their time to look.

And they have to be able to understand what it is that they are trying to resist. They've held on here for many generations in some pretty adverse conditions.

What we want to do shortly is to be able to contribute, not only to our people, but to the people downtown. I think we have a drawing card, particularly with the federal government. I don't know how many of you really have given it a lot of thought, but something like \$800,000 has come into that tribe, and it hasn't been paid to tribal members. It has gone into construction, paying contractors. A good deal of that money ends up right here. Amos Gaines, the local contractor, built that facility out there, and he'll spend a good deal of his money downtown. We have that capability and potential of

bringing the kind of dollars into the county, which will benefit you, as well as every other person in the county.

And we hope that we can get more, get this across to more and more people so that they will be able to understand, that those federal dollars are going to be made available whether we like it or not, and whether you, as a taxpayer, like it or not. They are going to go to somebody, and it might as well come to Harney County. And it will allow us, when we get economic development, we can't possibly fill all the jobs for the kinds of plans we have on the board. So it will mean that Harney County people will be able to seek limited other types of employment elsewhere, in different kinds of jobs, in different kinds of areas.

This is part of the elements. Essentially there are three elements that we are trying to develop. One is the cultural; one is the social; and economic development. We are trying to tie all three of those elements together, so that when we get a lot of money out there, or a number of jobs, the impact on people who have never had jobs that last for a period of time, that never had a steady income before, they will have backup social services that will prevent the kind of activities that occur on many other reservations.

I might also go back and add that we built the first state G. I. house in the State of Oregon on a reservation. No other reservation has been able to do that. That is primarily because we decided that we were going to do it. That we weren't going to try, but we were going to do it, and so we set out to do it.

But the cultural element right now is about all the tribe has left. You don't see any tepees, or lodge poles, or people running around with a lot of feathers, buckskin moccasins, and all of that. It's out there, but you don't see it. The tribe has had to give up an awful lot to survive. They've given up almost all visual aspects of their culture in order to survive. The only thing that they really have left that is still living is the language. And

the language virtually embodies the past, the present, and the future. And out of that language we hope to develop elements of a culture that will provide the kind of answers that their former culture provided.

The Indian way, no matter whether it was on the plains, or here in Harney County, has always been able to provide the kind of family answers for the children, for the adults, and it has always included all elements from the very old to the very young. And when that culture broke down, they lost that ability to provide the answers for their kids, for their elders, and for the adults in the community. And so now they've got to rebuild that. We want to redevelop that language, not only for ourselves, we would like to see it incorporated in elements of the school. We would like to get people to understand exactly what that means to the Indian people. And it's not something that we just do once a year, once a month, it is something that many of those people live day in and day out. Most of those people out there think in Paiute. They don't think in English. When people start talking to them in English, they don't really understand it. And so it's going to take, well for example, what we're trying to do is trying to get some of them old people to teach me more about it, so I can start developing more and more of our presentations in Indian so that they can understand what the reservation is going, because we want to take them with us.

And what we're trying to do with that new community center, I hope that all of you will take the time, at one time or another to come out and take a look at it. It's a very small facility compared to many other reservation's facilities. Warm Springs has put up something like a 25,000 square foot building for their administrative office. Yakima just put up a 60,000 square foot building for their administrative office, and we put up a little 4,200 square foot building. But right now it meets our needs, and it is a place for those people to finally gather, to have a space where they can feel comfortable, feel among

themselves, and feel free enough to present their ideas.

In that community center, what we want to do is make it live, not only in modern day aspects, having nice facilities and showers and fireplaces, but to have elements of their culture there. We want to be able to establish the kind of visual impression that makes them feel at home; that gives them strength in the past; that they know that those old ways were not all wrong. Too often they've been told that their old ways were wrong. And too often they've agreed with that, saying that, well yeah those old answers don't stand up anymore. Well many of them do. Take a look at the family relationship. They had a very, very healthy family relationship between themselves. That's changed now, and we're trying to rebuild that. Throughout the past year we've got, we've been working to develop tribal members to come and take on jobs and we've had, we have a staff now.

Most of the staff people have less than one year's training experience, or one year of experience on the job. We've got a tribal cop who's been out there for six months; we have a Johnson-Mallory counsel that has been out there for a year and a half. All of these people we have working for us are people who had problems themselves, who thought themselves failures. And now they are in positions where a lot of times it takes other people to get degrees for. But these people know what kind of problems they have out there. They know the language and they are trying to help themselves, and they are willing to take that chance. Many of them are on very shaky ground right now, but they'll make it. And it's not because I'm a fortuneteller or anything, it's just that I refuse to believe that they can't make it.

And it's not bragging or anything, but I do a lot of that about the reservation. I guess I've kind of sold myself on it. I go all over the State of Washington and Idaho, not only talking about our reservation and our unique little situation out here, and the kind of relationship that we have now with the city, and the county, and the kind of relationship

that we could have. I think it would be a very healthy relationship. I think there are an awful lot of deficiencies in the City of Burns, and the County of Harney. And there are a lot of deficiencies out on that reservation. And there are a lot of problems that are essentially the same. But in order for us to be able to contribute to you, we have to be strong; we have to have our own backyard cleaned up. And that's something we're trying to do. A lot of people don't understand that. Say, well why can't you come down here and do everything with us. Well we can't do that until we're strong. When we're strong we can come down and contribute.

And I know that kind of an explanation would take a number of hours to fully delineate so that you that you could really kind of see where we are coming from. But we are many generations behind you as citizens. In terms of the types of development, and the types of programs, and the types of economic development. But I think we are trying to tie in all of our elders and we look, our primary resource, I think most of you know that that land out there, the only thing that it will yield is about 140 acres of fairly prime agricultural land. The balance of that land is essentially worthless. We've tried to take some steps to improve that land, but some of them have failed, and some of them are only minor improvements. The bureau and other federal agencies have this kind of thing about them where they see certain projects that have gone on in other reservations that have been successful; like cattle. They are trying to get us to raise a lot of cattle out here. And anybody that has fiddled with cattle knows that 660 acres of bench land is not going to support many cattle.

We've got to do something else with that land. We've got to develop in other ways. So our primary resource is the people. Some 160 people out here, wandering around, and many of them, you know, appear downtown and spend a lot of time, and end up harassing a lot of your citizens. Spend a lot of time in jail. Well I can't apologize for that.

I think everybody has to share the blame in the way those people act. And I refuse to be responsible for them. But I also feel that those people are resources. And maybe not this year, or next year, but every year we're going to be pulling, one, maybe two of those people off that street and turning them into productive citizens. That's going to take a lot of work, and probably a lot of magic by some of the people out there on the reservation to work. Spend hours and hours counseling with them. Spend hours and hours of time giving them second, third, fourth, or fiftieth chances. So that they'll finally take and feel that they are contributing to each other.

We're going to be running an awful lot of projects that will be drawing in an awful lot of money, one way or another. And unfortunately, most of that money just doesn't come into our banks or into our pockets, and sit out there. We don't have piles of hundred dollar bills; we're generally broke all the time. But we're slowly beginning to be able to attract the kind of money, we're getting the kind of management capabilities to be able to manage \$100,000 or \$400,000 or \$500,000, or a million dollars worth of projects.

This is something that the tribe has never been able to do before. To be able to manage that kind of money, to be able to handle it. And we're also, not only looking at that, we're looking at things like this as prime examples of what that tribe can do, what the past means to them. And we're still getting our children raised in these little things. (Shows a cradleboard). My son was raised in one of these. And it's not a matter of, I guess decoration, or it's not just a holiday, it's a way of life. And I think, you know for us, we believe in these ways, they're different, but we believe in them. And we think they work, and I know they work.

And so with the kind of arts and crafts ability, the kinds of things we have there already in our resources, people, we'll be able to change an awful lot, but we need an awful lot of help. And unfortunately, or fortunately, one way or the other, we don't have

the money to pay for a lot of that help. And basically what I'm asking you to consider is that most of those artifacts are not located on that little reservation.

Most of you, or some of you are aware of the old Malheur Reservation, and a lot of the artifacts exist out there where we haven't had the opportunity to go. Many of them are on private land, federal land, state land, and we don't have that kind of access to them. And those that have already been picked up, we're asking that some of those be returned so that we can start developing, so that we can put together a kind of a display that works for us, because possibly for you they are very important artifacts. They are something to look back on, they have historical significance. Well with us, that has future significance.

With us, it helps those people redefine their past so they can define their present, so they can define their future. And I think to them it is extremely important. They are just now beginning to discover that yeah, we can do it. They're beginning to find out, that because they've personally had a rough history doesn't mean they can't change. I have brought some photographs, and I notice we all have food in front of us, and maybe you want to kind of quickly thumb through them. But we hope that you will take some of these old photographs, that are twenty-five and thirty years old, and take them over to a photo shop and have negatives made of them so these people and their children can see the kind of history that they've been through, the kind of changes that they've been forced to make. You see here a little tepee with the Indian, with the Indian headdress on.

ILDA MAY HAYES: That's Captain Louie.

JIM: All the authentic photographs, all the authentic lifestyles are not this way. This was something that was brought over by somebody else in a wagon train, you saw them on the plains, this isn't Paiute. But this is a part of our past, a part of changes that we have gone through. And we would like for people who have artifacts who are interested in seeing a kind of, not only a kind of collection, but something that will be utilized in terms of

giving a people a perspective, to contribute something, or some of the things that you've gathered, or you know that is available. We're not interested in going out and digging up gravesites. We're not interested in going out and identifying other Indian archaeological sites. This piece of legislation that was mentioned (earlier on the program) --- I belong to the Oregon Commission on Indian Services, and the two pieces of legislation, or the three pieces of legislation were presented to us. I felt that the board is not representative of Indian people, because those artifacts are us, that's our life. And I know how you'd feel if somebody, a bunch of Indians went out here to a cemetery and started digging it up to haul off archaeological sites, or your grandparents, your grandmother, and taking it out to the reservation, studying those bones and then putting some of them in the museum. Sometimes some of our Indian people's skulls have been used as ashtrays. And then document all that information, putting it in vaults, and locking it up. Because that's what happens to most of the scientific studies that were done on Indian people. Indian people don't have access to that. Those archaeological studies end up in some anthropologist's library, who uses it to teach other anthropologists. He never returns any of that information.

And I think for us to deal with archaeological sites, I think that most of us would prefer to just leave them alone. We're not interested in going out there and having something that is ten thousand years old that would come from a gravesite. What we want to do is not only study it, but have materials there that we can turn around and make a reciprocal process, and return a lot of that stuff to the schools so your kids can see it. Possibly with a different slant on the presentation.

But I think our slant is essentially a positive one. It might be different than an anthropologist might take. Because what we intend to do is make kind of a living statement out of it. And there is not intent of building a big vault out there and locking that

stuff up. We want to have people see it. Not only see it and appreciate it, but see it and relate it to how these people are living. So that you can understand, hopefully, how and why these people are the way they are. I've spent a lot of time knocking around. A lot of people come up with a lot of simple answers. Well, you know what those Indians ought to do, they ought to go out and do this. And then that would take care of the problem. All of you know that life isn't that simple. There are always reasons why things happen. Maybe we can have that time to give you those reasons, or at least our reasons, for why they've lived this way.

I gave one of them to you today, and that's the land. No matter how much, or how small, they could have one acre out there, that would still be their tie to the land. So I don't really know where I'm going with this. I think I'm already done. So if you have any questions, I'd be glad to answer them.

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