

HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #77 - Side A

Subject: Victor Cleveland

Place: Burns, Oregon

Date: June 1979

Interviewer: Pauline Braymen

PAULINE BRAYMEN: This is Pauline Braymen, and I'm talking with Victor Cleveland today. He's been chosen the Harney County Pioneer Association President for 1979. Victor, were you born in Harney County?

VICTOR CLEVELAND: Yes, I was born up here in the old Hirsch Flower Shop, in 1901.

PAULINE: Really?

VICTOR: Yeah, yeah, yes.

PAULINE: I supposed you were going to tell me you were born at Drewsey.

VICTOR: No.

PAULINE: At the Hirsch Flower Shop. That's down there by the bus depot.

VICTOR: Uh huh, yeah, yeah.

PAULINE: When did your parents come to Harney County?

VICTOR: My mother came here in; I believe it was in '94. I believe she said from California. She was only 5 years old at that time. My dad, he came from Arkansas here in the year of '98.

PAULINE: What was your mother's name?

VICTOR: Elsie McKinnon.

PAULINE: And what was your dad's name?

VICTOR: Thomas Cleveland.

PAULINE: Were they living in Burns at the time, or ---

VICTOR: No, no Mother she was teaching school at Silver Creek, and Dad he was, worked at the Double O outfit, out there at the Double O. The Hardin and Riley ---

PAULINE: Did they live in Burns after they were married?

VICTOR: No, no they moved over there to Pine Creek. And Dad he bought a little place there, and they lived there about a year. Yes I was a year old, I guess, when we left there, about that. No, I wasn't either. But anyway, they lived there about a year, and then they, he come over here and went to work for the Hanley Company. He ran the old Sod House Ranch down here, run that for two years. And then we left there and he went to work for the PLS Company in Nevada. We was there two years, then we came back in 1910. And we stayed there at the ranch until; I left there in '69.

PAULINE: That was in Drewsey?

VICTOR: Well it's Van, is where it is, yeah.

PAULINE: At Van. Did he buy that property from someone else?

VICTOR: Yes, he bought it from a fellow named George Howell, yeah. Bought that in 1908. Then he went to Nevada, and stayed there until 1910, and we came back.

PAULINE: Okay. Well you went to school then at Drewsey?

VICTOR: All the education I got was right there in the schoolhouse at Van.

PAULINE: At Van, okay. I've got to get that straight in my head. You know I think of that whole area over there as Drewsey.

VICTOR: Well yes, that's the way the ... comes, you know, yeah. See Van, maybe you haven't been there, its 25 miles north of Drewsey anyway.

PAULINE: It was quite a little community out there at that time.

VICTOR: It was, yeah when I started going to school there in, well it was in 1910, yeah. Well there was about 19 scholars went to school out there. The teacher, of course, she

taught all the grades, up to the eighth grade.

PAULINE: Did you walk to school?

VICTOR: Yes.

PAULINE: How far from school were you?

VICTOR: I was about a mile and a half, yeah.

PAULINE: What about when the weather was bad?

VICTOR: Well when the snow got too deep, why then I went a horseback a few days until the roads got kinda broke up. Of course in those times, why they didn't do no grading road, you know. There just had to be horses to break them out to travel, that's all.

PAULINE: Let's check here and let's see if we're going okay. We're going just fine.

(Tape recorder)

VICTOR: Are we?

PAULINE: Yeah, do they have any other stores or --- There was a post office at Van.

VICTOR: Just a post office, yeah. My wife run that for 35 years, Agnes, you know. We had a, oh we sold gas there, we had a gas pump and that was all, there wasn't no store.

PAULINE: When were you and Agnes married?

VICTOR: Pardon?

PAULINE: When were you and Agnes married?

VICTOR: We was married in '32, I guess it was, yeah.

PAULINE: And did you have children?

VICTOR: No, no children.

PAULINE: I didn't, hadn't ever heard anyone mention any.

VICTOR: No, no I was the only child in our family too.

PAULINE: Did your dad raise cattle or horses?

VICTOR: Why we run sheep for about 25 years, and then we went to running cattle. We

run them then until '41, why we got rid of the sheep. And then I went ahead and run cattle as long as I was there.

PAULINE: Was there a reason for that other than ---

VICTOR: Yes, the reason we quit the sheep was because the coyotes got so bad, and it got awful hard to get shepherders. Yeah, they killed lots of lambs. The last year we run them, there was over 200 head of lambs short that fall. Coyotes ---

PAULINE: With the sheep, did you drive them out to market, or did the ---

VICTOR: Yes, we had to drive them. Well sometimes we'd take the lambs to Crane, sometimes to Juntura. And then we, when we got the railroad up in Silvies Valley, why we load them up there.

PAULINE: Did you shear, or have shearing crews come to your place?

VICTOR: Yes. No, I had a three-man layout, and myself and two other fellows would shear them. And I sheared some on the side too for other people.

PAULINE: Uh huh. Okay, when did you move in from Van?

VICTOR: Oh, the end of '69.

PAULINE: In 1969.

VICTOR: Yeah, just about Christmas time, yeah.

PAULINE: Okay. Did you belong to the Grange or ---

VICTOR: Yes, yes, I was one of the first charter members there; yeah I still belong to it.

PAULINE: Okay, now was that the Drewsey Grange, or the ---

VICTOR: Yes, I guess that's what they call it. The Grange Hall, you see, is up there at Pine Creek, but that's the Drewsey Grange, is what the name I guess it was, yeah.

PAULINE: Do you know about when that was stated out there?

VICTOR: No, I don't, I sure don't.

PAULINE: Do you remember when you took your first car ride?

VICTOR: Yes, yeah, it was in 1907. It was down there at Leonard Creek, Nevada. Was working for, the folks was down there running that ranch for the Company, yeah. A fellow named Nichols and Archie McGowan, they had a car. And Nichols he come down there, and I don't know whether he was just running around over the country or what, but he stopped there and he took us for a ride.

PAULINE: Yeah. So it would have been a Ford.

VICTOR: Yeah.

PAULINE: If Archie was driving it, yeah.

VICTOR: Yeah, a Model-T Ford and if was one of them with, and that one didn't have no doors in it at that time, you see. They didn't have no doors.

PAULINE: Did you like it?

VICTOR: Oh yes, you bet! I thought it was all right. I was scared pretty bad for a green kid, of course, when I first started. But it got to be funny though.

PAULINE: How long was it before you had a car of your own?

VICTOR: In 1916, Dad bought a Ford.

PAULINE: By the time that you left the ranch in '69, had there been a lot of changes in the way that you run your cattle operation?

VICTOR: Oh yes, yeah. When we first went there why the meadows was always fenced. And the Forest Service wasn't fenced, you know, and the BLM, nothing. You just turned them out at the gate of the meadow, and they could go as far as they wanted to, there wasn't no fences stopping them. Yeah, we used to have to gather cattle in the wintertime over in here, and up in Bear Valley. Sometimes in John Day there'd be cattle over that way too.

PAULINE: Did the community kind of get together to gather together?

VICTOR: Yeah, uh huh, that's the way we'd do it. You see we'd, well like these people

over here, they'd, what stuff they had of ours, and what we had of theirs over there, why we'd usually meet about halfway, have a date set and meet in the same way. We'd meet in Logan Valley with them, Prairie City cattle too. And they'd bring ours down that way, you see. Yeah, Juntura the same way.

Yes, they had to work together, and of course at that time, why the PLS Company they was running buckaroo wagons. Well, you'd take your horse and bed and go and ride, you know, and it didn't cost you anything, only your time. So you'd gather your cattle that way, and when you'd got a bunch of them together, why then you'd drive them home. We knew about --- well when we'd get so if we wasn't a getting very many cattle, why we knew we was just about around the outer edge of them, you see. So then we'd go home. And then what they picked up someplace else, why they'd put in the field. Wintertime there, we'd get them as I said before. Change cattle back and forth.

PAULINE: Then by the time when the Forest Service, the Taylor Grazing, and this kind of laws were passed, then they started giving you an allotment and you'd run in a certain area on the forest.

VICTOR: Yeah, yes. For awhile there they had the notion, you know, in the Forest Service, if you got to trespassing on them, that is before time to go in, they set a date for you. Well the cattle would go in and they got that notion of trespassing you. Well, they couldn't do very much of that, so then they put a fence up. Well that held them out, you see, until time to go in. Yes, we had a private allotment for our cattle, but the way we got that why we was running sheep at this time. Well at that time, in them days, and they do yet a lot, why they think a sheep won't, or a cow won't eat where a sheep runs. So then we had to fence our sheep allotment. So then we just --- when we changed over.

PAULINE: That's right, they did used to believe that, didn't they?

VICTOR: Oh yes, you bet. Yeah, yeah. But gosh, I'll tell you they, them old cows they'd

eat on a sheep range all right. You bet they would. And a sheep would eat on a cattle range too. And there was a lot of that done, you know, they --- the doggone fellows they would get to mooching. Why they'd get over on a cattle range too if ... sheep camp.

PAULINE: Well actually, from what I understand, the sheep eats a little bit different thing than the cow does. And so they run really well together.

VICTOR: Yeah, they do. A sheep, you know, they're more for weeds and browse. Now you take this big coarse grass, you know, you get up there sometimes high as your stirrups. By gosh your sheep, he wouldn't look at it, no. Oh, if they were right hungry, they might top it for a little bit, but they're a hunting --- Oh, they like to browse on bushes, you know, any little leaves that is tender yet. They like weeds awful well.

PAULINE: Did you train dogs to work your sheep with?

VICTOR: Oh yes, yeah, yeah. You was helpless without you had a good dog, yeah. They just --- you couldn't do nothing with them.

PAULINE: Did you have a favorite dog that you thought was really better than all the rest?

VICTOR: Yes, yes we did. Yeah, we had a yellow dog that was an awful good sheep dog. And it was kind of hard to get a good dog, you had to --- which I never was, I never could train a dog. But I used to have herders that, once in awhile made good dogs.

PAULINE: What kind of people did you have work as shepherders? Did you have Basque people?

VICTOR: No, no we never did. We had one or two Irish boys there that were awful hard to understand. They hadn't been from the old country too long, awful good herders, but we had the white men more, that is the American men, yeah. No, we never did have a Basco. The last herder we had, we had him for seven years. He stayed longer than any of them, a good herder too.

PAULINE: They used to have Fourth of July celebrations, and horse races, and this sort of thing at Drewsey. Can you tell me about some of those times?

VICTOR: Yes, one time there we had, oh there was four or five days down there at Drewsey, one in particular. Yeah, they run horses, and foot race, and play ball. You see, Harney out here, they had a pretty good ball team, and Juntura did too. Well a pretty good one there at Drewsey, the neighbor boys. So they'd have a ball game and then through the summer one or two years, why pretty near every Sunday they'd have a ball game. Either up in our part of the country, or in Drewsey. Usually went to Drewsey, because they'd hold them down there where there was more people to come.

PAULINE: And you played ball?

VICTOR: No, I never did learn to play. No, just at school a little bit. No, I never got to.

PAULINE: You were one of the spectators.

VICTOR: Yeah, I was a spectator. Well up there when I was going to school, and I finished up after I got big enough to have played ball, why there wasn't enough kids a going. They diminished awful fast there when they started. Why my goodness, like I said, there was 19 that first year, but they just got down to where there was only 5 or 6. And the last year that I went to school, I finished up there, why there was just one little girl going to school besides me.

PAULINE: What year was that?

VICTOR: That was in --- '17.

PAULINE: Well Van, after that really never was very populated after that.

VICTOR: No, no, it just kept a getting less all the time. And now, why, well till you get clear down to the Malheur River, which is 12 miles, there's only, well only one family lives up in there besides the bachelor that stays on the old home place where I was. Yeah, that's all.

PAULINE: Do you still own your own --- or did you sell it?

VICTOR: No, I sold it all in 1969 when I come here. No, all I brought is this old car out here. Sold everything. Yeah, I sold it all to Craddock Blackburn, and then he sold it. They made a Co-op out of it. There was six of them involved in it.

PAULINE: Oh yes, the Drewsey Grazing Association.

VICTOR: Yeah.

PAULINE: Well is there any other special thing that happened during your lifetime out there that you think we ought to tell about?

VICTOR: No, not that I know of. Of course, I've seen lots of changes out there, all right. You know it used to, when I was a kid, why you done all your work either with your hands, or with horses. Well I've seen automobiles and the tractors, and all that there mechanized machinery come into use, airplanes, motorcycles, everything. And of course during that time they brought the railroad into Crane. It stopped at Riverside a while. It stopped at Juntura a while, stopped at Harper a while. Of course it started in Vale, is where it started from to come on out, and then finally come to Burns.

PAULINE: When you were a kid would you have ever believed that they would have sent a man to the moon?

VICTOR: No, my gosh, I would have thought anyone was crazy to have mentioned such a thing. No, I sure wouldn't have.

PAULINE: That, I think, was the thing that boggled my mind the most. That, you know, Grandma was about 93, and let's see I've forgotten when she was born, she was born about '96 I think, some-thing like that. I've forgotten. But she's, you know, has seen all those changes, including putting a man on the moon. And I wouldn't have believed it when I was a kid, let alone, you know, it just is amazing what has taken place in the last hundred years.

VICTOR: By golly, she's a pretty lively old lady too. By golly, she used to be.

PAULINE: Yeah, she lived right as long as it was possible.

VICTOR: She sure did, yes sir.

PAULINE: Those last few years were kinda tough for her, but ---

VICTOR: Well yeah, well she got so old. I know Dave used to tell me some things about his Grandmother. By gosh, it was funny, you know.

PAULINE: Well she enjoyed living. She never looked back; she was always headed for what come next. She never dwelt in the past at all.

VICTOR: Well there's no sense in worrying about the past; my goodness, it's gone. You just as well be looking for something ahead all the time.

PAULINE: Well I've always thought that's why she stayed so young so long. Was that she, that whatever was new and exciting, that's where she was at all right.

VICTOR: But of course I noticed, and I'm quite a bit that way. I notice a bit more, it seemed like the older you get why you get to thinking and talking about that past all the time, more than you do the future. I don't know why, I guess you can remember it better, some of it. Some of it that I can remember doggone well, and other things I can't remember at all. I can remember things that happened when I was four years old. And some things that happened here just a month or two ago, I've forgot all about. Of course when I was a kid, why it made an impression on me, you know, and that's the reason I remember it, yeah.

PAULINE: Did you freight, go out like once a year to get your supplies and things and bring them in?

VICTOR: Well I went with Dad, you see, I was only 12 or 13. Well he usually, Mother left the ranch, and he'd usually have a hired man. Well he'd take in the fall of the year, he'd take a four-horse team, usually, and he'd either come to Burns or go to John Day and get

our supplies for a year's time, was what we got, you see. I went two different times with him. And then he might of went another year or two after that when I got bigger. Yes, he did, but I never went no more because I was big enough, I was supposed to be at work, or going to school, yeah. Yes, of course you know at that time why you raised pretty near everything you ate. Just your flour and sugar, such as that, was about all you bought, of course, you'd usually get through four what they called barrels of flour, there'd be four sacks to a barrel, and three or four sacks of sugar, because Mother always canned a lot. And of course we had our beef, and our pork, and chickens, and raised a big garden. We had a good orchard there at the ranch too. Some-times, of course, the food would get frosted or something, but they always canned enough so that, my goodness, there was a surplus, you know, and we wouldn't be short too much. And then as time went on why after we got a car why we'd usually go to Ontario and get some peaches in the fall, you know, and that made a variety of fruit a little bit more. We'd pick up melons down there in the fall too. You couldn't raise them up home because they'd always freeze. It was too cold.

PAULINE: Did you ever do any buckarooing?

VICTOR: Oh yes, all my life that's what I was doing, yeah. Yeah, that work on the ranch, yeah. Yes, I still ride if somebody furnishes a gentle horse. I go over in Drewsey once in a while, quite often, and I help Whiting out here a whole lot. Oh, I help several. Yes, if they just furnish gentle horses and plenty to eat, that's all I want.

PAULINE: Sounds like a good deal, especially the plenty to eat.

VICTOR: You're doggone right. And I've been awful lucky, wherever I'd helped why they always had lots to eat too, you bet.

PAULINE: Have you been active in any other organizations besides the Grange? Were you on the ASCS or anything like that?

VICTOR: No, never was, no. A few times they wanted to put me in, but I didn't have time, or didn't figure I did. Because, by gosh, I had ranching duties, you didn't have much business fooling around with something like that, or I never did figure I did. They did have me voted in one time to the Odd Fellows, but I never did have time to go down and get initiated. And they finally got tired of fooling with that. No, just the Grange is all. And I didn't fool around much down there neither. The main thing that I liked about that was the good insurance, you know, and I still carry it too. Yeah, I keep my dues paid up so I can keep my insurance.

PAULINE: Well Drewsey used to be quite a little city center there.

VICTOR: Pardon?

PAULINE: Drewsey used to be quite a city center.

VICTOR: Oh, you bet, yeah. When I was a kid, you know, there was a, well they had a high school at that time, and a grade school. And they had two hotels, two livery stables, a barbershop, drug store, and there was a doctor there. And of course there was a dance hall. And there was a, well there was around a hundred, I imagine, population there. Yeah, you see, at that time why that was a great place for, and had been for years, for freighters to come through, you know. My goodness, and then the Company, they was running full swing at that time. Well there was a lot of men working around there, and the buckaroos, and when they come just right, why the buckaroos they'd stop at them hotels, you know, and stay all night sometimes, and eat dinner there. Then when they had dances, why of course everybody come with teams ... they'd get rooms, you know, where they could, yeah. And there was a, now there was a restaurant there too, besides them two hotels.

PAULINE: Do you think that it was the fact that the highway went through, bypassed Drewsey that kind of kept it from developing, or do you think there was another reason?

VICTOR: Well no, I wouldn't say that. Of course in later years that did have quite a, well that's the main thing then. But the first thing that stopped that was when the state went dry. I was driving stage between the ranch; the home place that is Van, I pulled stuff through Drewsey at that time. Well at midnight when them saloons closed up, you could see the difference right then. The next morning, my goodness, you didn't see hardly anybody on the streets. They either left town, or they was in bed, I don't know what. And from then on --- Another thing that raised the dickens with the city, when the First World War come along, well they drafted a lot of the boys. A lot of them volunteered, a lot of the older men went to them shipyards, and Drewsey's never been very much since, yeah.

PAULINE: So the prohibition, and then World War I.

VICTOR: Yeah, that is what the, that was when you could see Drewsey die, right then, yeah.

PAULINE: Well that is an interesting observation. Because I knew that it had, you know, was really a vital town, and then just sort of dwindled down.

VICTOR: Then another thing, of course, that helped it to die was the railroad a coming through, you see, and then the cars. That done away with all that freighting, and that was quite a drawing card, you know. My goodness, all them freight teams a coming through there all the time, yeah. When all that quit, well --- That there then, as you said a while ago, why they bypassed it with that highway, you see, it's two miles out there. Well that helped to kill it too. But it wrecked all them little towns. Now Juntura, Riverside, and Crane, you see, all of them --- of course the train leaving them was what made an awful difference to them little towns. They was on the railroad, you see. But now they had another town over there at Beulah, a little town there. Now that was a place for them freighters to stop, too. And then Westfall, that was another one. A lot of traffic come through there, on that old road. Well they just didn't have nothing to support the town,

that's all, you see. No, I suppose if there's as much change in, well I'll say in the next 60 years, that I can remember the last 60, why there's going to be a whole lot of change.

PAULINE: You wonder with the oil crisis, the gas shortage and all this, if we aren't going to be going the other way for a while.

VICTOR: No sir, I tell you. Well I suppose you heard too, I heard the other day on the radio there, why they said, or the television, they thought it'd be 20 years, probably 20 before they'd catch up on this oil business. And I don't know ... the increase in the population, and if they go ahead and making all these cars, I don't know, it's going to take a lot of oil to back all that up. No, I don't know, they've got a mess out of this now. They've already spent millions of dollars up there putting that pipeline in, and now they can't, haven't got anyplace to refine that oil. Isn't that something?

PAULINE: Yeah, that makes you wonder. I was reading about that the other day.

VICTOR: If they put in that money in to get that oil down here, why don't they spend some more and get a refinery to take care of it? I guess they have to send that to Japan. I don't know where it's a going.

PAULINE: I don't know.

VICTOR: Isn't any good to us; that I can see. Then they got slipped up on down there in Mexico, when they started to get oil and gas down there, didn't they? That was good enough, and that fellow made that deal with them, and then by goodness, stopped the line right there at the line, so they couldn't get it to them. Didn't want it then, it was going to be too high priced, I suppose, I don't know. So they didn't get their oil from there so good this time.

PAULINE: Well it's going to be interesting to see how things turn out.

VICTOR: Yeah.

PAULINE: I was watching TV the other day and they were talking to a car manufacturer,

that they were showing this car design that gets, you know, much better, got, you know, triple, four times the best gas mileage. And they asked them how soon they would have them on the market, and they thought, well it'll be sometime in the 1990's.

VICTOR: Yeah, yeah.

PAULINE: And they said, "Well why so long?" And they said, "Well, the American consumer is slow to accept changes, and it's a too radical of a change." Why don't they try us and see?

VICTOR: Why yeah. Well if they can put, well like they've got them flying around up there on the moon now, in time I guess somebody --- well if they can do that, why can't they fix something else to run these cars? They just haven't got enough millionaires yet, I guess, they're wanting to make some more is all that I see. Now they've got these here little cars. Got the doggone things high priced as the big cars are. Everybody, or lots of them, you know, are selling them big cars, they want to get little cars. Get enough little cars to go around. So that's the reason they can charge so much for them.

PAULINE: Well are you going to have any out of town relatives coming in for Pioneer Day?

VICTOR: I don't know whether I will or not. Not that I know of. No, I don't know. I got a letter from my cousin's daughter; that was Otho McKinnon, he died over here in this yellow house two, three years ago. Anyway, why his daughter said they was going to try to come down, and they live up there to --- No, they live in Salem, I think. But I don't know whether they'll be here or not, that's the only ones that I've heard of, yeah.

PAULINE: And Cleo's going to be chairman for it?

VICTOR: Yeah, I guess she's ramroding the thing, yeah. Yeah, she's gone down to Portland, I think, now. So she'll be back again.

PAULINE: Yeah. Well let's see about getting your picture taken while you're sitting here.

VICTOR: Say that's going to be something.

PAULINE: Yeah, I took a picture of my dad the other day, if I haven't lost it here.

VICTOR: Did you? It's a wonder you ever get him to sit still long enough. My gosh, that's a good picture.

PAULINE: Isn't that good?

VICTOR: Yes sir, that's a good picture.

... (The remainder few minutes of tape talks something about cow's milk, amid the tape recorder noise and other noise. Then a train goes by and it is virtually impossible to understand what is going on.)

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