

HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #77 - Side B

Subject: Ruth Miller

Place: Burns, Oregon

Date: June 1979

Interviewer: Pauline Braymen

PAULINE BRAYMEN: This is Pauline Braymen; I am interviewing Ruth Miller at her home in Burns. She will be Pioneer Queen Mother for 1979. ... Were you born in Harney County?

RUTH MILLER: Yes.

PAULINE: What year were you born?

RUTH: 1898.

PAULINE: 1898. Were you born at Crane, or at Crow Camp?

RUTH: At Lawen.

PAULINE: At Lawen. Do you remember when your dad first came into this country?

RUTH: I can't be sure. I think it was 1884 when he first came here. That is, he may have gone back up to Union County, and then came back again. I don't know, but I think he first came here in 1884, he and Irving.

PAULINE: Irving? They had been living up in Union around LaGrande area?

RUTH: Yes. They lived up in there someplace, I don't know where. And then my grandmother, she lived up there.

PAULINE: Do you know where they came from before that? Your dad's family?

RUTH: Well, see my grandfather passed away when my father was very young. Well they were back in Ohio, or someplace like that. Then later on his mother moved around

from here to there, I guess. Then finally she and her mother made the trip across the plains. But, I don't know what year it was.

PAULINE: And they settled at Union?

RUTH: And settled up there in Union County, uh huh. But I don't know what year.

PAULINE: So they settled in the Lawen area first. How long did they live there? When did they move to Crane, or the Crow Camp?

RUTH: Well, now let me think about it. I don't know when he went, whether it was that he established --- Well he and his mother lived down in the Lawen country together. But, I think then his mother went back up to Union County, and he and --- I don't know when he went up to Crow Camp. It would have been, I guess, after he was married though.

PAULINE: You father's name was?

RUTH: Charles T.

PAULINE: Charles T.

RUTH: Uh huh.

PAULINE: And what was your mother's name?

RUTH: Ada L.

PAULINE: Did he meet her in Harney County?

RUTH: Yeah, he met her down there at Lawen.

PAULINE: And you went to school at Lawen?

RUTH: Yeah. Well see we had the two ranches at Lawen, and at Crow Camp. And sometimes I went at Lawen, and sometimes I went to Camp.

PAULINE: Did they have a school near Crow Camp?

RUTH: No, they just had school in the homes. You know how it was.

PAULINE: Were there other children that gathered with you?

RUTH: Yeah, the ranches. There was no schoolhouse there. Well, there was, no new

schoolhouse, we'll say up there. Although they did the year like when we came to Burns then after my mother died. Why they had a house that they had established as a schoolhouse up there, you see. But before that they taught in the various homes.

PAULINE: Did one of the mothers teach school?

RUTH: No.

PAULINE: Or did they board the teachers?

RUTH: They boarded the teacher.

PAULINE: Of course at Lawen then they had a schoolhouse at Lawen.

RUTH: Then at Lawen they had a schoolhouse, yes, and then they had a regular teacher there at Lawen. But we didn't --- well --- Our schooling at that time was, we went to school all the time someplace, but it was sometimes --- they had the schoolhouses --- They had a schoolhouse at Lawen, then they had a district right below Lawen. We wasn't in the Lawen District. So we --- it was a mile from our home, so we had to walk, I think, two and a half miles to go to the school that was in our district. We either had to do that or pay tuition or something, I know. We walked the two and a half miles one winter when we could have just been walking a mile to get to school.

PAULINE: Do you remember the ice skating parties they used to have at Lawen?

RUTH: Yes, uh huh.

PAULINE: Can you tell me about those?

RUTH: No, I was too small to really, you know, to remember much about them. I remember, I don't know, they had ice skating parties more, but I don't think I went after we moved to Burns, you see. I don't know that they had ice skating parties at Lawen --- they probably did, but I just don't remember anything about that part at all. Because, well I don't know just why, probably my folks didn't skate or something, I don't know.

PAULINE: Well they used to have picnics at Crow Camp every year.

RUTH: Yes, and then that was later of course. After that they had the picnics at Crow Camp. That was after --- of course we still had our place out at Crow Camp. And in the summertime we went there part of the time. We lived there part of the time, and at Lawen, and moved back to Burns for school.

PAULINE: Can you remember the first time you ever rode in a car?

RUTH: Ah, faintly. That was, let's see we moved to Burns in 1909. I guess it was sometime in 1909 that somebody who owned a car, a dealer, you know, I guess it was probably, came --- He was trying to sell my dad a car, which he; well Dad bought a car. Not that kind of car, but then he came and took us for a ride. It was really something.

PAULINE: Did you like it?

RUTH: Oh yes, sure.

PAULINE: I always ask that question. I've only come across one person that said she was scared to death.

RUTH: No, I don't remember being scared at all.

PAULINE: Well it was Bertha Carey, and she'd had her baby in Burns and they gave her a ride back out to Crane in the car.

RUTH: In the car.

PAULINE: And she said that she just didn't really think too much of that ride.

RUTH: We just went out for a little ride around, you know, we really didn't really go. Oh yes. Then my dad got a car and of course I immediately, wasn't old enough to drive it, but then I mean, he let me drive it anyway. He said you can drive it; I'm not going to ride with you. But if you want to take the car out and drive, you can do that.

PAULINE: And you did.

RUTH: And I did, naturally. Maybe I got hung up on a sagebrush every now and then, you know, but then you could always break the sagebrush away, and get the car off the

sagebrush.

PAULINE: Did you like to ride horses when you were little?

RUTH: Oh, I just loved to ride horseback. Yes.

PAULINE: Did you have a favorite horse?

RUTH: Yeah.

PAULINE: What was it like?

RUTH: Oh, it was a, he was a --- he wasn't white; I guess kind of a grub harbor gray. But later got kind of white, gray horse that was a, you know, the kid's horse. He was the safest horse that my dad had, you know. My dad when he came to this country, he had horses, not cattle.

PAULINE: Did he sell them to the army?

RUTH: Yes, that's what they raised them for, to sell them to the army.

PAULINE: What would he have thought about the protection of the wild horses that we have today?

RUTH: Well, I really don't know what --- I could say about what he'd think of --- course he kept his, well he turned them out on the range too, you know, but then ---

PAULINE: But he kept track of them.

RUTH: Yes, yes. Naturally, that was his livelihood at that time, was selling horses.

PAULINE: Did the army come in here to buy them, or did they take them out?

RUTH: I'm guessing, I think the army came in here and bought them. No, I'm pretty sure they didn't take them out.

PAULINE: What changes in the weather from then to now do you see? Do you think that the winters were harder then, or about the same?

RUTH: They were about the same. The, you know, the snow seemed deeper because we were just little kids that had to wade through the snow to school, you know.

Sometimes it seemed pretty deep. But I think it probably wasn't.

PAULINE: This last winter seemed to me more like the kind of winters I remembered as a kid, more than anything we've had for a long time.

RUTH: Yes, it probably, you know, was. Because, oh nearly always we had snow. I wouldn't say we always did, but then it seemed like we always, we had snow.

PAULINE: So you came into Burns in 1909, and you attended high school in Burns.

RUTH: No, oh well yes, of course we came in 1909, so we went to grade school, because we had just come from a country school to here. Like when I got here, and in the country schools you didn't know what grade you were in. And when we came in here then Lee and I were put in the 6th grade, you know. It seemed to be the nearest to where they thought we should be. But they just kind of ask you. I don't remember how they did tell me which grade we went to. They got some questioning that we probably, or what textbooks we had, had would be about 6th grade.

PAULINE: Then you attended then high school later?

RUTH: Then later on, uh huh.

PAULINE: Did you go away to school anywhere, after high school?

RUTH: I went to, well for a while to Normal School, and then to Business College.

PAULINE: Where did you go to Normal School?

RUTH: In Monmouth.

PAULINE: That's where Janet's going to school.

RUTH: Is that right?

PAULINE: Yeah.

RUTH: Yes, I went there for a while.

PAULINE: And where did you go to Business College?

RUTH: In, well both Links and Benke Walker in Portland. Links, in Boise. Links is where

I graduated from Business College.

PAULINE: Did you work anywhere before, or did you come back to Burns then to ---

RUTH: No, I came back to Burns to work.

PAULINE: Well, ever since I've known you, you've had the dress shop. But did you do something else before that, I know.

RUTH: Oh yes, oh yes. When I first came back here after I finished business college, I worked at the Harney County Abstract and Title Company for, I don't know, how many years. I just don't know how many years. But I would guess around 14 or 15 years.

PAULINE: Doing secretarial work?

RUTH: Uh huh. Well you wouldn't exactly call it secretarial work, but I don't know what --- running down titles to an end, I don't know.

PAULINE: Title searches.

RUTH: Yeah, I was a title searcher, uh huh.

PAULINE: That's an interesting job.

RUTH: It was a most interesting job that I had. You know, I mean it really was a most interesting job that I ever had. That was really interesting, going back into these old title and who had owned what, at some time, you know. It was interesting.

PAULINE: Then did you go into the dress shop after you left there?

RUTH: No, I worked at the courthouse for 7 years.

PAULINE: What office did you work in there?

RUTH: I worked in the sheriff's office for 3 years, and then I was the County Assessor for 4 years.

PAULINE: You see I didn't know any of that.

RUTH: You didn't know any of that? No, that's been a long time ago. I worked at the Harney County National Bank for a time, but I don't know just where it fit in between the

different jobs I had.

PAULINE: Well, you know, now that you mention it, now that I think about it, I do sort of remember when you took over the Mode O'Day from someone else.

RUTH: Yes, I bought the Mode O'Day.

PAULINE: Do you remember what year that was?

RUTH: Oh, let's see, when could that have been?

PAULINE: I'm thinking it must have been in the '50's some time.

RUTH: I think probably '49, or '50, I wouldn't say for sure which. That was after I left the courthouse. And so it would have been, I think my term at the courthouse ran out in '49. And I didn't want to go back there. So then I started at the Mode O'Day.

PAULINE: And then you changed it to The Heather.

RUTH: Yeah, I changed it to The Heather.

PAULINE: And you retired from that not so awfully long ago.

RUTH: No, that was in, oh I should know exactly. I sold it to

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PAULINE: Well let's try and think.

RUTH: Well it was about 8 years ago, I know.

PAULINE: Was it that long ago? Well it was about 1971 then, 197 or '71.

RUTH: Yeah, around in there somewhere. Well let's see.

PAULINE: Well, I could call up ---

RUTH: Ingrid (Johnson), see when she bought it --- my record will probably tell when I sold it, you know, it'll be easier. She'll remember.

PAULINE: She'll remember when she started it. Okay. Then you've always been active in Pioneer Presbyterian Church.

RUTH: Yes.

PAULINE: I was thinking last night, that that's been kind of an important part.

RUTH: Yes, that has been ---

PAULINE: Of course you were a member when it was the white wooden church.

RUTH: Uh huh. I joined the Presbyterian Church out in Boise. And then when I came back to Burns to work, why I naturally changed my membership to Burns. But I don't know what year it was.

PAULINE: And you were Sunday School Treasurer for umpteen years. Do you know how many?

RUTH: No, no I don't know how many.

PAULINE: You are a member of the session also, aren't you?

RUTH: I was. You see you only hold those jobs a certain length of time.

PAULINE: Well once you are an elder, you're always an elder. That's what I was told.

RUTH: Well, that's true too.

PAULINE: Yeah, I realize what --- you are an active member of the session for a term, but you are always an elder.

RUTH: Yeah, you are always an elder.

PAULINE: Were there any other church offices that you held?

RUTH: Well the first church office I held was back when they had the trustees. Before they put the trustees and the elders in one group they had the two groups. The trustees took care of the money part of it, and the elders who took care of the religious end of it. And then they put it all into one group. And a Deacon.

PAULINE: Well you're a Deacon now?

RUTH: Yeah, and I guess that's all.

PAULINE: Do you remember BPW (Business and Professional Women)?

RUTH: Yes.

PAULINE: Are you a charter member of that organization?

RUTH: Uh huh.

PAULINE: Are there any other organizations? Oh, Rebekahs. We want to be sure and remember that.

RUTH: Yeah.

PAULINE: Did you go through the chairs in Rebekahs?

RUTH: Uh huh.

PAULINE: You were Noble Grand?

RUTH: Yeah.

PAULINE: And of course, Harney County Pioneer Association.

RUTH: Yeah. Now I'm a Senior Citizen.

PAULINE: Really enjoying the new building too?

RUTH: Yes, it's nice, real nice.

PAULINE: Were you the youngest in the family, or was Lee younger?

RUTH: Lee is the older one; Dorothy was the youngest. I came second.

PAULINE: So it was Lee and then ---

RUTH: Lee and then me.

PAULINE: Then Howard?

RUTH: No, then Neil.

PAULINE: Okay, then Neil.

RUTH: Then Evelyn, then Howard, then Dorothy.

PAULINE: Okay, I didn't realize he was that much younger, I thought he was ---

RUTH: Yes, he is 6 years younger than I am.

PAULINE: Dorothy was the youngest?

RUTH: Yeah, Dorothy was the youngest.

PAULINE: Okay, is she still living?

RUTH: Yes.

PAULINE: And where does she live?

RUTH: In, well it's near San Diego, but you spell it one way, and you pronounce it another one. Yes, it's spelled with a J, Jamul, but down there J's are H's, you know, so you call it Hamul.

PAULINE: It's J A M E L. (Corrected to Jamul.)

RUTH: J A M U E L.

PAULINE: J A M U E L. Okay, and what is her last name now?

RUTH: Zigler, Z I G L E R.

PAULINE: Okay. Is she going to be able to come up for Pioneer Day?

RUTH: No. I don't think she even knows anything about it. I've never told her anything about it. She can't leave; her husband has a very bad heart. And she came up last at fair time and spent two weeks. But you see she couldn't come up for Lee's funeral or anything like that, because so much of the time she can't leave him at all. He's one of those people; he will live forever, because he has to take such good care of his heart. You know how it is?

PAULINE: Okay. And so Neil and Howard then still run the property, that Crow Camp and ---

RUTH: Lawen.

PAULINE: That your dad ---

RUTH: Yeah, uh huh.

PAULINE: Did he homestead them, or did he ---

RUTH: No, I --- The one at Lawen is the one he bought straight out. But what did they take it, like out at Crow Camp? I forgot what they called that.

PAULINE: Was that a pre-emption claim maybe?

RUTH: I don't know just what a pre-emption claim is. But a desert claim?

PAULINE: Maybe, yeah, that sounds like ---

RUTH: I think that is what that was, was a desert claim. It wasn't a homestead; I know that. It was before the days of homesteading. And the man beside us was a timber something, timber culture, because he planted a lot of trees on it, and of course there's lots of trees on it. A timber something or other, but they're not the kind of trees used for, you know, they're trees he planted --- poplar trees. But oh, I don't know --- so I expect it was a desert claim.

PAULINE: Okay, can you think of anything else that we need to get into this history?

RUTH: No, I can't think of --- probably you've got enough there. I really can't think of anything else.

PAULINE: Burns at the time that you were living here, and going to school, was a far cry from what it is today. Were there board sidewalks and ---

RUTH: Yeah.

PAULINE: Was this area here ---

RUTH: Oh, this right here it was out in the sagebrush. Where the kids played, you know, after school in this part of the country, there were very few houses over in here. Well this house right down here at the end of this building was here then, because it belonged to Ben Gowan who was the son of old Cap Gowan. And Opal up here in the next apartment, Mary Winn's, one of Winn's sons ---

PAULINE: Now that is an old house, isn't it?

RUTH: Yeah, that's --- I don't know whether it's one of the older ones or not. I really don't know. But it belonged to the ... Gowan's. The one he was married to, his first wife. I don't know, I suppose Opal would probably know, and maybe --- oh no, I don't suppose she

would know what year it was built, or anything like that. Our old house was one of the early houses here built around 1902.

PAULINE: That's right, where Evelyn lived.

RUTH: Uh huh.

PAULINE: I have some information on that house. I also have some information that Howard gave me a few years ago. So I'll be able to, I'll go to that and pull some of that in. That house is really a landmark up there.

RUTH: Yes, it is. It's the oldest house up in that part. But then down in here, there are some older houses, I think.

PAULINE: Well where was --- was the grade school located right where it is now, just about?

RUTH: What is where the grade --- yeah, yeah, Slater School, uh huh, yeah.

PAULINE: When you went to high school ---

RUTH: No, then not when I went to grade school. No, when I went to grade school, and started to school, both was Lincoln School. You see it was the grade school, and then just about the, well they made a change in there sometime, then the new school, you know. No, Lincoln School is the location of the old grade school. And then they built the, you see they built the new grade school then up where the Slater School is now.

PAULINE: Well I started school in that school. I think I was in the fifth grade when we moved into the Slater School, from the old school, which was the new school. (Laughter)

It's amazing the amount of changes that take place in a person's lifetime. Because where I went to high school is now the junior high, and it's where you went to grade school.

RUTH: It's where I went, yeah.

PAULINE: Not in the same building, but the same location.

RUTH: Yeah, in the same location.

PAULINE: Well let's see if we can get your picture taken here.

RUTH: Oh my goodness, that's going to be ---

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