

HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #82 - Side A

Subject: Reverend John L. Pickells

Place: Burns, Oregon

Date: August 25, 1979

Interviewer: Barbara Eggleston

BARBARA EGGLESTON: This is Barbara Eggleston and I am visiting with the Reverend Pickells on August 25, 1979, in Burns, Oregon about the history of St. Andrews Episcopal Church. Mr. Pickells, when did you first come to Burns?

REVEREND JOHN PICKELLS: That must have been ---

BARBARA: 1929?

REVEREND: 1929, yeah. I'm not sure about the exact date, but 1929.

BARBARA: It was sometime in August, I believe.

REVEREND: Yeah, yeah.

BARBARA: And then, where did you come from?

REVEREND: Well I had just graduated from the Episcopal Theological School in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Bishop Remington had come there and he talked to me about coming out. He didn't say where I was going to go in Eastern Oregon, but I agreed to come out to Eastern Oregon to meet with him.

So he purchased me a Ford, '29 Ford car and I drove to, well first of all, right after that, I was married in a little church in Sharon, Connecticut. Then we left and drove on to Chicago where we stayed with my parents for a while. Then we drove west and made some, few stops. We got out to Pendleton and stayed with Bishop Remington, and an Arch Deacon Creasy at that time. And came down here to Burns with the Arch Deacon.

The date I am not really sure of, but in 1929, in August. And he took me over to St. Andrews Church which had been purchased, I think from the town, one of the old high school buildings. And they had put a little apartment in the rear of that building. A new addition to the building that had these two big rooms which, we used as the church and the parish hall.

BARBARA: Then now you came as a Deacon, is that right?

REVEREND: Yes, I had been ordained Deacon in Cambridge, Massachusetts, for the Bishop of Chicago by the Bishop of Massachusetts. Is the way these things go. So I was a Deacon when I came here, yeah.

BARBARA: Okay. Now according to the history your opening service was August 25, 1929. Did you handle that service yourself?

REVEREND: Oh yes, yeah.

BARBARA: And what was the church life like when you first came to St. Andrews?

REVEREND: Well it was really rather well established because of the work of Miss Charlotte Brown, who was here the year before, and had organized the group of women, a sort of a Guild, I guess called St. Andrews Guild. She had also started church school. Now I don't remember how many were in that, but probably between a dozen and twenty. She had already gotten some of these things started like the church school, which was very important. She had been doing work with the women of Burns, and had started a guild. And they were very busy doing things, and sort of getting everything kind of set up for educational purposes, and for work in the church. She was actually at that point the, sort of predecessor of my arriving as the first Parish Priest of the church. There is history that I'm not too familiar with, going back when Bishop Paddock had called here and so on, and had sort of sorted out a few people who were Episcopalians way back, and were interested in starting a mission.

BARBARA: Do you remember your first marriage service? It was with Red --- I'll tell you who it was with, it was with Red and Naomi Walters September the 9th, 1929.

REVEREND: Yes, I do remember that. I think they are still here, aren't they?

BARBARA: Yes, yes they are.

REVEREND: I'm anticipating meeting them, and I think they perhaps are interested in going over their marriage vows. I'm not sure about that. But I've sort of had indirect illusions to that. Which of course I'd be very happy indeed to do. I do remember that, yeah. It was just after I had come.

BARBARA: I believe, according to the history, your first confirmation was December 16th, that must have been, would that have been the youngsters in the confirmation class? Would that be what that was?

REVEREND: Yeah. They were a group, which I gather had already been baptized. I'm not sure whether some of them had to be baptized in preparation for this. But I've really forgotten the names, and of course those records have been burned. We don't have that, and I don't remember how many there were. But I remember having the first confirmation class, and then the Bishop came down for confirmation, which of course is the steps that are taken. It seems to me that Doris Hotchkiss, which is not her name now.

BARBARA: Dora, Dora Burden.

REVEREND: Right. I'm quite sure she was one of them. And it really wouldn't be possible for me to call any other names out of the hat for that. And apparently those records have been burned. It's a darned shame, really.

BARBARA: Speaking of that, how did you feel when you found out that your first church had burned to the ground?

REVEREND: Well I didn't know about that until just a few months ago, when I received, getting letters from Perkins. Louie Perkins, yeah. Because I was back here, a trip that I

took out to the west coast in 1960, right around 1960 or '61, and I couldn't say exactly. And I had seen the old church and so on, and had called on some of the people who were still here like the Welcomes, who are still living here, and of course Gladys Holland. Some people are gone now. It was just sort of an overnight stay here, at the old hotel, which I understand has now burned to the ground.

BARBARA: Yes, it has.

REVEREND: And that was my last, and my first re-visit to Burns. And the last visit I had made until this one. But the old church was still standing at that time, the old building. ...

BARBARA: Do you, had it been completely remodeled by the time you came, or were you, did you come in the middle of the remodeling?

REVEREND: Oh no, they had --- I'm not sure who was behind it, but Archie Creasy had been put in charge of this venture by Bishop Remington. And the little apartment was complete, there was just a living room, and the Bishop got me a nice leather chair to sit in, and we had sent some things by freight, which hadn't gotten there. For instance some other furniture like a dining room table, which I didn't have. And I had ordered a stove, cooking stove, and that hadn't gotten there. But for a while we ate off boxes. It was just a matter of a few weeks, till our stuff got there. The bedroom furniture and that sort of thing. Some old chairs, which belonged to my grandparents, and I still have a couple of those. We had those up here. It was a little time before things got there, and we got settled, and of course we were busier than Sam Hill.

But there hadn't been much done in the church except some of the church furnishings were there, the alter and pews, which I believe were made here. Then the big guildhall, which is the other big room. There were some dining tables, I think given by the people in Hines. So there were just rudiments of things around. And in the church, which had been used as a gymnasium, it was alight blue color I remember, and there were

basketball marks all over the ceiling. And the two big chunk wood stoves, one in the church and one in the parish hall, and that was the heating arrangements. So everything was just sort of from scratch, except that the little apartment was very modern, and very nice, and so on.

And then we began to work. I mean we had men and women both painting in there, and getting the place cleaned up.

One very interesting chap who was an old prizefighter was looking for work. He just happened to be coming through and I have forgotten his name, he was a short fellow with a prizefighter's ears and everything else. And so I put him to work, and he did a perfectly wonderful job. We borrowed some scaffolding from one of the people in town, I've forgotten now just who that was. And so he spent about four days just washing that paint, just washing the church and the parish hall, right next to each other with a big sort of a sliding door between them, I remember. I've forgotten his name, but he should be remembered because he did a beautiful job. And I put him on a cot out there, fed him and he just worked like a beaver. I'll never forget him. Then after he finished everything was cleaned. And then I remember the women painting the ceiling and things like that. So did some of the men.

I've such a bad memory for names. There was one chap who was a carpenter, I'll try to remember his name as we go along, he did an awful lot of work.

BARBARA: ...

REVEREND: No. I'm sorry; maybe as we talk along I'll remember it. He'd been a lawman back in the Middle West with one of the very famous lawmen back in Kansas or around there. Reuben Drake was his name, Reuben Drake and his wife was still living, and Reuben was just one of the kindest old fellows I've ever met in my life. And he would come up and help with all of this work, carpentering and painting and so on. He

was just an invaluable guy, and always came to church and sat in the back. And when my daughter, who is with me now, was born out there and would begin to cry, Reuben would go get up and go out back and rock her.

So they were very busy days, those first days. Just a matter of house cleaning and so on, which was very important of course. And we got that done in a very short time, so that the place was presentable. And as I say, there were these two big chunk stoves there, they were tremendous big stoves. And of course we needed them because that winter was very cold. And as I remember it there was no basement under that place. I don't understand that but it was open underneath.

BARBARA: Well I don't know either. Sarah Elizabeth was born March 26th, wasn't she?

REVEREND: Well she told you, 1930, yes. Up at the old hospital, which was then under the direction of the Roman Catholic Church, and I thought a fine hospital. Dr. Homan was the doctor, our doctor, at least at that time. And he and his wife both came to church, and he delivered Sally, who is here with me now.

BARBARA: Could you tell me something about how you felt on the day you were ordained, which according to history was January 19th, and I believe your father did it?

REVEREND: Yes. Yes, my father was then director of --- I think in some of the records I have read I think he was in Freeport, Illinois, and then he went to Trinity Church in Chicago. And it was just, gee, I've forgotten now whether he had gone back to Chicago at that time, or whether he was still in Freeport, I've forgotten. But he came out and ... booklet, which we are getting out, was a picture of my father and myself. And he was ... of the church there. He had graduated from Cambridge, which I did, back in 1903 I think it was. So he of course was very much interested in coming out, and he came out and was there, and presented me for ordination to the priesthood to Bishop Remington. Of course that was --- he came out, and then went back. I remember taking him over to the train

that goes from Crane over, and he and Billy Remington had a great confab all of the way back. Of course he enjoyed that immensely, and that was a big day for me. I mean he had presented me for ordination for the priesthood. I had already been an ordained Deacon, as I just said, back in Massachusetts.

So from that time on then we didn't have to have the Arch Deacon, or the Bishop, or somebody else come down for communion services. Because as a Deacon, you can't do that. You can just have the morning and evening prayer.

But things were going, hopping, you know. There were a lot of kids and so on. I think it is rather important, I don't know who the man was, but he appeared at the door one night and said, "Would you be willing to take over the Boy Scouts?" And I think he had been doing it, and so this appealed to me. I mean I had been a Boy Scout, and worked in Scouting, and so immediately I was loaded with this gang of kids. There were too many for one troop, but they just made one troop out of them. There were fifty some, and I can remember the names of some of them. So that got started right away, and it really took a good bit of my time there. But time which was certainly worth it, and I enjoyed tremendously.

We had two summer camps, one out at a sheep place, and I've forgotten just exactly where that was. But if you don't mind little incidents, we had to bed these kids down and I got somebody in town, and I can't remember who the dickens that was, to sew up these mattresses. And out where this place was there had been a lumber mill, and I thought gosh this was going to be great, we'll just fill those things with sawdust. Well if you've ever tried to sleep on sawdust, you know what happened. We took that out and put branches and things in these things. Well that was kind of a tragic affair, but we had a wonderful time.

There was a man and his wife, and I don't remember their names, from Burns who

came out as cooks. There were about 50 boys, and we had this camp. And then the next year, and I think this is important to remember, a group of men from Portland had purchased some land out there in the Blue Mountains north of us, almost at timberline. And they had started building this; they were going to build some sort of a hunting place, a meeting place. They got it almost completed, and I don't know whether they ran out of money, or interest, or what, but there was no roof on it. So they turned that over to us, gave it to us. As I remember it there was no money involved. And so the next summer we went up early and took all of these boys, and I found out how to make shakes. We got a ... and mallet, and stuff you use. We got up there and I think we were up there for about three weeks. I would come home Sundays and it was probably about 70 miles or so up into the mountains. And leave them with some older boys who were there, in their late teens. But we cut this big tamarack tree down and we shaked over that whole roof, and it was a pretty good size building that summer, and did a good job. That was the center part where we ate and met and so on, and then the boys had tents.

It got pretty chilly nights. We dammed up one of those mountain streams up there, and made a swimming pool, and swimming was just lining up in the morning and diving in and getting out the other side, and as quick as you could, because it was cold. Oh my godfry it was cold. But it was a great experience.

And then the next summer we went up there, and then I've heard since that they had to give that up, of which I'm very sorry because it was a very beautiful place. And this big place, which these fellows from Portland had started, was a lovely building. I have some pictures of that at home.

But the very first year was the most interesting, because we did shake over the roof. And we also by mistake or misfortune, one of the boys started a forest fire and I forget, I think it was the first year, and we had to get in touch with the Forestry right away.

They came up and I got quite a scolding out of it, and so on, but it didn't amount to too much.

But that was, this Boy Scout Troop was a very much part of the work here, and I can't tell how much effect it had on this place as a whole, but I am going to try and see some of those boys while I'm here. It was a tremendous job, and of course they got interested in the church, sang in the choir, and that sort of thing.

Young Bill Byrd, who has some kind of work here in the state, and I'm not sure what it is, I want to find out, was one of the boys in that. And Neil Smith was one, I want to see him. I could remember some of the names, but anyway it was quite an important, I think very important thing for the town, because these kids were all interested, and practically every kid in town was in it.

And they also put on a very wonderful minstrel show.

BARBARA: Oh, they did?

REVEREND: Yeah. If I could only sing you some of those things. That was a good show. We made quite a bit of money in that show. I think all of the high school auditorium was pretty well filled. Miss Beznecheck (sp.?), does that ring a bell?

BARBARA: Yes.

REVEREND: Was a schoolteacher at that time, and she got the little orchestra together of these boys. They would practice, practice, and practice. We put on this, I think, really good minstrel show, and she led the orchestra, and took care of the music part of it for me. I am told she is still alive, and I certainly want to see her.

BARBARA: Yes.

REVEREND: She was a great, great girl, and the boys gave her a nice big bunch of roses or something, I don't know. But it was a wonderful affair. But those are sort of out of the church angle, but as a matter of fact they weren't really, because most of them were

into the church. The whole thing fitted in together.

BARBARA: I wondered if you could tell me about your preaching tour in the Diocese in Minnesota?

REVEREND: Oh yeah, I've forgotten the dates on that, but you must have that. That was a very interesting and I left on the Portland Rose and prepared a little sort of a talk, a sermon that I had given a few places. I've forgotten the first places. It was sort of down in the southern part of the state. I must of gone to about a dozen, maybe a couple more than that, places, speaking. It might be the regular service, or it might be an evening meeting. I traveled all around the state, and had a wonderful time doing it. In fact, telling everybody about Burns, and the people of Burns, and what we were doing, and this sort of thing, and it was a very enjoyable affair.

One of the funny things that happened, by about midway, I was up at a place called White Bear Lake in Minnesota, which was a very fashionable summer place, with a lot of wealthy people there. Instead of service, they had a big dinner. And as I remember it, there must have been a couple of hundred people there for this big --- it was a big and a very wealthy parish. So I was the main speaker, but we ate and had a wonderful meal. Then I got up and talked and sat down. And then this fellow whose home I was staying on the way out to his home in the car he said, "Do you know how long you talked today?" I said, "No, I don't." He said, "You were talking for an hour and twenty minutes." I said, "Oh no! I can't believe it." So we kind of kidded about it, but then I got back and I took out my notes, and by that time I wasn't using. And I looked them over and for the life of me I couldn't see where I had added anything, but every story got a little bigger. Well this is of course is what happened, and so I kind of revised the thing, and for the rest of the time tried to keep it down. But of course it wasn't a church service, it was a dinner, and we were having a great time. But it was just a, I think what I want to say this is because it

gave a picture and I've thought about it quite often since, of my natural enthusiasm for the work that was going on here in Burns, you see.

And I was myself so overtaken with all of this and so on. I told about the church school, and I told them about the services, and I told them about these summer camps, and all the different things that we were doing. And to me, in my mind, this had grown up so that I would just add to these stories as we went along, you see. So from twenty-minute talk it grew to over an hour. And I've always remembered that, and tried to profit by the experience. But I don't know that I've succeeded.

But it was a very, very enjoyable thing. And then I went from there, as a matter of fact I got pneumonia and I had to go back to Chicago and stay with my parents for a couple of weeks. Billy Remington came to see me in Chicago. I never found out how much money we raised. I don't know why, whether I wasn't interested, or whether I just never was told, but we were there quite a while, and it was a very enjoyable thing.

BARBARA: Well according to the little history that was written, it was \$5600, which was quite a bit of money.

REVEREND: In those days, yeah. But they wanted, I preached at the cathedral for instance, and all of these various places. I had a wonderful time. But gee whiz, I had my story, it kept growing and I could see why. I was so enthusiastic about what was going on here, that I just couldn't, that I just had to keep telling it, as it grew, you see. But I guess it didn't do any harm, even if I did talk that much. We raised what we were trying to raise, and it was a lot of fun.

BARBARA: I know that was very ---

REVEREND: And of course they were very interested because of Billy Remington having been in Minnesota, you see. And so it was an easy, easy to do, make people willing to listen to other words.

BARBARA: Well thank you very much, Mr. Pickells.

REVEREND: Oh, is that all? Okay.

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