

HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #85 - Sides A/B

Subject: Fred Baker

Place: Drewsey, Oregon

Date: June 28, 1991

Interviewer: Edward Gray

Release Form: No

EDWARD GRAY: This is Edward Gray on --- with Fred Baker in Drewsey, Oregon on --- what's the date Fred, I have no idea?

FRED BAKER: Well, it's June the 28th.

EDWARD: The 28th, of 1991. Fred's father, Bob Baker, worked for Bill Brown from 1894 to 1902. Fred was born in; let's see if I can do it Fred, 1909.

FRED: '13.

EDWARD: '13. Well, first of all, Fred, where were you born?

FRED: Well, have you been to the hospital in Burns?

EDWARD: No.

FRED: Well, I was born on the west side of Burns. I thought maybe you knowed where the hospital was. I was born just two blocks right on west from the hospital.

EDWARD: I saw the sign.

FRED: It was Grandmother's house that is my dad's stepmother's house.

EDWARD: Your father, Robert Baker, married in 1902, right?

FRED: Married my mother, yeah.

EDWARD: Yeah. And your mother was?

FRED: Teresa Merritt.

EDWARD: Merritt, okay. I got all that information. What I want to do, Fred, if it's all right, is to talk about specifically what your father said about Bill Brown, and the things that you recall that he said to you. For example, not Tin Gibson --- Charlie Parrish, did he ever mention ---

FRED: Yeah.

EDWARD: What do you recall about Charlie Parrish?

FRED: Well, I never knowed Charlie Parrish. He was working there for Bill when my dad come there and went to work for Bill. He was just a kid when he was working there. So, I couldn't tell you anything about the man.

EDWARD: He was a kid, is right.

FRED: Yeah, he was 18, 19 years old, I think. Well, my dad was only 19, I guess, when he took over the buckaroo outfit there at Bill's.

EDWARD: Did your father say why Bill Brown got into the horse business?

FRED: Well, he seen a, he figured he seen a place where you could make a little money, and he bought out nine outfits over there, brands and all.

EDWARD: The whole iron?

FRED: The whole "shaboodle". And that's how my dad --- my dad had been down to Summer Lake working for a guy, helping him put his cattle in, branding the calves. He come back through there and old Bill says, "If you'll work for me," he says --- well, Papa told him he was coming to Burns, was going to put in a few days, like a hog wild kid does. Old Bill says, "If you'll go to work for me," he says, "and we'll brand these colts up, these horses," then he says, "I'll take you to Burns on my time." So, my dad, that is when he come back, why Bill put him on as buckaroo boss.

EDWARD: Did, he was coming from ---

FRED: From Summer Lake.

EDWARD: --- Summer Lake, and just happened to meet up with Bill Brown?

FRED: Well, he come through Lost Creek there, that's the way you come horseback. And Bill was

--- and this Parrish was there, and another --- Morgan, not Morgan --- well some other kid. Anyway they was working for Bill there, trying to get them horses together.

EDWARD: Did your father, Fred Baker --- Fred, excuse me --- Bob

FRED: Bob.

EDWARD: --- ever mention if he got paid anything, or how he lived?

FRED: My dad?

EDWARD: Yeah.

FRED: He got \$70.00 a month there for being buckaroo boss.

EDWARD: \$70.00 a month in 1894?

FRED: The others, just the common riders got \$30.00. The bronco fighters got \$40.00, and my dad got \$70.00.

EDWARD: What's a bronco fighter?

FRED: Well, break the horses.

EDWARD: Oh, okay.

FRED: Ride the rough ---

EDWARD: Okay. Bill Brown must have been impressed with your father.

FRED: He was until about the time my dad left there. My dad and Bill had a falling out. You see this Bill Morris, my god he just robbed Bill blind.

EDWARD: Bill Morris?

FRED: And Bill had a black horse, didn't have a white hair on him, and by god Papa found this horse in this here Moss's outfit. But he had a white star on his forehead.

EDWARD: Now wait a minute, was it a Bill Moss, or a Bill Morris?

FRED: Moss.

EDWARD: Moss.

FRED: Did I ---

EDWARD: Yeah, you said Morris.

FRED: Well, Moss.

EDWARD: Okay, Moss.

FRED: Yeah. But anyway, that horse had a white star on his forehead; he was an entirely black horse. But Moss had hot potatoed him. Now, everybody wants to know what you mean by hot potato. You take a real hot potato and put it on there and it blisters, and then it will come in white.

EDWARD: You told me that in a letter.

FRED: Yeah. And by god old Bill wouldn't get on the stand and say that was his horse. All he'd say, he didn't know. Well, god dam all the buckaroos, eight or ten buckaroos that was working for Bill, knowed the horse. And my dad and Bill sort of --- that's when my dad left there.

EDWARD: Okay, you're exactly right, you know that?

FRED: Well, I'm supposed to be.

EDWARD: Because when I was in Lakeview I went through the court records and it took six years for Bill Brown to get that W. Z. Moss --- he stole a horse in 19--- October 1901. And your father didn't like what Bill --- he didn't back --- Bill didn't do what he was supposed to do.

FRED: Bill wouldn't back my dad on the deal. And by god, well Papa had rode the horse for six, seven years, absolutely knowed the horse regardless of whether he had a white dot on his forehead or not. And by god Bill wouldn't go on the witness stand and say that was his horse.

EDWARD: He didn't go on it because Moss stole more horses from him.

FRED: Bill had that Horseshoe Bar iron. Why he had all them brands, but by god he had the Horseshoe Bar. Well, my dad just begged him to change other irons, because Bill Moss took out the Horseshoe Triangle. They had a triangle underneath the Horseshoe.

EDWARD: You're exactly right. I've got those in the ---

FRED: Oh you have?

EDWARD: Yeah, the brand records.

FRED: Well, that's what my dad left ... over. By god, Bill wouldn't back him on that deal.

EDWARD: For this Moss, for stealing this one horse. He stole more.

FRED: Oh hell, I guess he stole hundreds of them.

EDWARD: Why --- Bill Brown, from what your father's told you, he wasn't much of a horseman, was he?

FRED: No, and he'd unlace his shoes when he rode, on account he was so damned afraid the horse was going to fall or something with him, and he'd hang. He'd unlace his shoes, so by god his shoes would pull off, if he got hung in the stirrup. Yeah, Bill wasn't no horseman at all. Well, at the time --- now I've got a few notes here. They took a bunch of horses, sold them to the army, and they had to deliver them at Vancouver Barracks. And they went to put them on the ferry there at Portland, and by god Bill wouldn't shove his side up, and the god dam ferry broke loose. They lost 40 head of them in the river. That is they got them out, but by god there was 40 head of them horses went in the river.

EDWARD: He --- what kind of a man was your father?

FRED: Well, my dad was a hell of a good boss. That is, I always said if my dad would have got in the army he would have been a general or something. He was --- you might say a leader of men. But god dam he was hard to work for.

EDWARD: People respected him?

FRED: Yeah.

EDWARD: Or maybe he did just as much as they could do? Or maybe because he had ---

FRED: Well, he was a hell of a good hand. And out there --- well Bill generally had, or that is my dad had around fifteen men riding for him during the year when they was branding them colts and all. And I've had a lot of people tell me; well, old Tin Gibson worked for my dad the whole time my dad was there. By god, Tin said my dad would mount all them fifteen men --- you'd have to rope the horses out of the cavvy. Never missed a shot. God dam --- well I always wished I could rope a horse a foot like my dad could. God dam he was a good roper.

EDWARD: You know I've talked to Jess Gibson, Tin Gibson's father, you know I've interviewed

him.

FRED: Tin's boy.

EDWARD: Right.

FRED: Did he fill you full of...

EDWARD: Jesse, yeah. A lot of ... there.

FRED: Yeah.

EDWARD: But, he was very accurate on a lot of things, too.

FRED: Yeah.

EDWARD: But he likes to draw out the stories, you know.

FRED: Yes, he did. Yeah, Jess is pretty ---

EDWARD: Yeah, he still does.

FRED: Jess is pretty much...

EDWARD: Your father --- I don't, a couple things I have a tough time understanding. Evidently there were a lot of wild horses out there in that, between Glass Butte and Frederick Buttes let's say.

FRED: Well, there was, but they was all branded horses. That is ---

EDWARD: They were Bill's brand?

FRED: Most all of them were Bill's. There was other people's horses run there too, but they --- But at the time my dad left there why old Bill had something over 7,000 head of horses on the range out there. And just before the World War, that First World War ---

EDWARD: World War I.

FRED: --- by god they built up to, what in the hell, corralled 13,000 head, I think. And he sold a hell of a lot of them to the army during the First World War. Well, that's what broke Bill, after the First War then the price just went to hell on horses. He had all them horses and nothing to do with them.

EDWARD: What would be --- since I just saw Peila branding, and taking the dry cows out, and taking this, you know, putting the steers on one place. Is a horse more wild, or tougher to handle

than a cow?

FRED: Well, it is according to how you handled them, and if you knowed what you was doing. And then a lot of them horses wasn't wild, they was --- well, they run on the range. They'd have to run them and get them in a bunch. But that goddamn driving to hell with the man in the lead of them. They're not like these fuzz tails that's left on the range now, the BLM has got.

EDWARD: I saw two of those.

FRED: Yes.

EDWARD: Two --- Wednesday, saw two of them on Wagontire.

FRED: Oh, you seen two.

EDWARD: Yeah.

FRED: But them horses --- and lots of people claim that them brown horses was just fuzz tails, that is people don't know. Well, Bill would go back East, and the Midwest, and buy the best studs he could find. That is thoroughbred and draft horses both. He had a hell of a lot of Percheron horses when my dad left there. And you know a stud horse he'll take a bunch of mares and herd them, keep them to himself. And by god they put them draft horse studs with the draft mares, and saddle horse studs with the saddle mares.

EDWARD: Okay, let's back up a little, Fred, you got to help me out because I ain't no cowboy.

FRED: You ain't?

EDWARD: I should be. Well, I would have been killed by now. But --- First of all, when did Bill Brown start gathering horses, do you know?

FRED: To get his horses?

EDWARD: To put his brand on them?

FRED: In ---

EDWARD: About 1892?

FRED: 1893, '92.

EDWARD: '92, '93.

FRED: Yeah.

EDWARD: Charlie Parrish was the first ---

FRED: Yeah, he was the first man there; he was just a kid. Well, what he was doing mainly, them horses all had long tails, they hadn't been anything done, had ... Them goddamn boys, old Bill had them running through the chute, well to put the brand on them. Then cutting that witch top off, and them boys was throwing that in the wagon. And old Bill says, "What you saving them for?" Them boys says, "Well that hair is worth money." Bill says, "I ain't got time to fool with it, you boys can have that hair if you want it." And they hauled a wagonload or two of hair and sold it, got pretty good money out of it.

EDWARD: Now was that your dad?

FRED: No, that was Parrish.

EDWARD: Parrish. So about 1892 or '93 ---

FRED: Yeah, that's when Bill bought all them horses.

EDWARD: And his holdings were at Lost Creek.

FRED: The main holdings was.

EDWARD: The main ones.

FRED: And he had the Gap Ranch at that time. And let's see, I guess, he got all that other, the Bixby pasture and all after that. But his main holdings was there at Lost Creek at that time.

EDWARD: So 1894 your father, Robert Baker, shows up, Parrish left. Parrish went to Hacklemans.

FRED: Yeah, he went to Hacklemans.

EDWARD: Yeah. So, your father shows up and they gather any wild horse on the range they could find, and corral them, right?

FRED: Well, the ones that had --- yeah they gathered all of them. But the ones --- all them horses Bill bought had irons on them, they was bred.

EDWARD: Okay, now just a second. So, he corrals these horses and brands them. But yet he

bought stallions, or studs. Now ---

FRED: Went back to the Midwest.

EDWARD: We got to get this straight, because this is what your dad told you. Now what kind of stud, male horses did he buy?

FRED: Well, thoroughbreds to put with the saddle horse type. Then he bought mainly Percherons to put with the draft mares.

EDWARD: What kind?

FRED: Percheron.

EDWARD: Percheron. What type of horse is that?

FRED: Well, they was a workhorse type.

EDWARD: Like a --- not like a Clydesdale?

FRED: No, they is nowheres near as big as a Clydesdale, and they ain't got the hairy legs like the --

EDWARD: And he'd buy these male horses, or studs ---

FRED: Yeah.

EDWARD: And they'd have to cut out the mares, the female horses, they'd have to cut them out, wouldn't they, and match them ---

FRED: Well, yeah, they cut them out, that is the draft horse type and the others. And they'd put studs with, oh from 15 to 25 mares. And after the heat that studs claims them, and didn't kick some of them out. Well, then hell there wouldn't be another horse come in. They herd them just like they was their bunch.

EDWARD: Because I was watching the cow's today, and yesterday, part of yesterday, and if you've got a good horse rider they can control those pretty well.

FRED: Yeah.

EDWARD: It looks pretty simple. But they have fence lines too where they can ---

FRED: Yeah.

EDWARD: They don't have that out there.

FRED: Well, when you've got a bunch of them horses under control, and then a man get in the lead of them, and they'd ... to hell, that is, they'd just fall right in behind the man a horseback and you could take them to hell.

EDWARD: Oh, they would?

FRED: Yeah.

EDWARD: So, you got to lead ---

FRED: Just as soon as you got a bunch under control, why then hell you had them, that is. They had them big corrals at Buck Creek --- I don't know if you would even see where them was at now. The last time I was there you couldn't hardly.

EDWARD: They're gone.

FRED: But they was big, well the last time I was there, there was just a few logs left. But the first time there in the '30's when I went to work for Cecil's, well them corrals, most all of them was standing up yet.

EDWARD: Where were those corrals?

FRED: They was about a mile below ---

EDWARD: Down?

FRED: --- yeah, down the creek from ---

EDWARD: The big white ---

FRED: --- the big white house.

EDWARD: I think they're gone.

FRED: Yeah, they're gone. The last time I was up there why hell it didn't even look familiar.

EDWARD: Did your father; you mentioned that he broke horses too.

FRED: Yeah.

EDWARD: He'd tie up the hind leg, and around the neck, and run around the corral until this guy said I give up, and whatever. Where did they do that at?

FRED: Well, they done it in the wintertime. A lot of times my dad had --- well, especially after my

mother --- my dad worked for Bill off and on for a year or two after my folks was married. And my dad had to --- well, his dad's old homestead there at Silver Creek, the Baker Field they call it now. And my dad would take a bunch of horses, 15, 20 head in there and break them for Bill during the wintertime.

EDWARD: I see, okay. Is your --- I was over at the Silver Creek Cemetery, and you're right Johnny Overstreet's grave is still, that little piece of tin is still there.

FRED: Yeah.

EDWARD: It says 1885, which is wrong.

FRED: Is that wrong? I've wondered about that.

EDWARD: Yeah, it's wrong.

FRED: Did you find out?

EDWARD: Yeah, I finally found out.

FRED: Well, when was he?

EDWARD: About April 27th, to April 30th, 1886.

FRED: '86.

EDWARD: '86, yeah.

FRED: Well, all that, as I told you over the phone, all I could go by is what it said on that ---

EDWARD: That's what everybody else said, Fred. Everybody thought it was '85, but it isn't.

When I was at the Silver Creek Cemetery, I wrote down all the names of people in there that worked for Bill Brown, and there is a lot of them --- or associated with Bill Brown.

FRED: Yeah.

EDWARD: There was a lot of Bakers in there.

FRED: Well, my granddad, and my dad's brother, or half-brother, and my half-brother and half-sister --- and who in the hell else of the Bakers?

EDWARD: There must have been eight of them in there.

FRED: Yeah, there is about eight Bakers ... are buried there.

EDWARD: And there were a lot of young ---

FRED: Yeah, yeah, my little brother and sister --- well, my sister was just 2, and my brother was 4 when they passed away.

EDWARD: Okay, that's, I saw that, okay.

FRED: They died, what they used to call summer complaint. I don't know what they call it now. Little kids used to get diarrhea, and they'd just get diarrhea till by God they'd get so weak they'd die.

EDWARD: It was probably from the water.

FRED: Yeah, or from the heat, and not enough green vegetables.

EDWARD: Yeah.

FRED: I don't know what, I guess they still have it. But whatever, I don't know what they call it nowadays.

EDWARD: I notice a lot of young kids there.

FRED: Yeah.

EDWARD: Yeah. And most of the graves are gone, you know, bad.

FRED: Yeah, a lot, they are.

EDWARD: Another thing, your father --- a couple things I have a tough time understanding. The winters are bad, aren't they?

FRED: Yeah.

EDWARD: Oh, it's cold, and sometimes it snows a lot, you know. What in the world, how did they live? Did they live at the Gap Ranch? Did Bill have a place at Lost Creek? Did your father ever --

FRED: Well yeah, there was a cabin at Lost Creek. And then after Bill got to Buck Creek why they stayed there in the winter lots of times. And they'd drive that timber country and get them horses out of there. Up there at that Jim ... place; it's at the head of Buck Creek.

EDWARD: Yeah, right.

FRED: They put a bunch of horses in there, they got them out of the timber up above, put them in there about dark one night, it was 40 below zero. The next morning, they went up and there was a

bunch of them was bunched right in the corner of the fence and froze to death. They was on their feet yet!

EDWARD: Oh, 40 below, oh yeah. The wind was probably blowing.

FRED: Yes. Yeah, there is 15, 20 head of them horses I've heard my dad tell, that was on their feet. They, well-bunched right together, they couldn't fall over; they just froze stiff right there at the fence corner.

EDWARD: Did your father; I'm not going to say nothing yet. But did your father say that you recall anything Fred, when he went to Buck Creek, let's say 1901, anything about where he stayed, how he --- a house, a cabin, do you recall?

FRED: There at Buck Creek? Well, there was a bunkhouse there at that time, at Buck Creek. And then my mother's father had a homestead right below Bill's there at Buck Creek. Well, there should be an old cabin setting there yet, on down the canyon. Is there an old house?

EDWARD: Yeah, the roof is about ready to cave in.

FRED: Well, that's my granddad's, my mother's father's old house.

EDWARD: What was his name?

FRED: Merritt, Jerry Merritt.

EDWARD: Jerry Merritt.

FRED: He was Bill's sheep foreman for several years there. And my mother, when she first come to the country there, why she was just a girl, she was 13 when she first come there. And she cooked there at Bill's for, oh two or three years before her and my dad got married.

EDWARD: Now we're not talking, we're not in reference to Bill's big house.

FRED: Yeah, the big house.

EDWARD: In 1901?

FRED: Well, he hadn't had, he didn't have it all built on. But there was part of that house there. That was built on to, that house was.

EDWARD: Does Columbus Johnson sound familiar?

FRED: Yeah. Yeah, Columbus Johnson moved from there to Silver Creek.

EDWARD: Yeah. He bought that that was the Johnson's ---

FRED: Yeah, that was the Johnson's.

EDWARD: And then he had that big mansion built.

FRED: Yeah, Bill was going to get married and raise 30 or 40 kids, and he never ---

EDWARD: It never worked out, did it?

FRED: Well, he, I don't know why Bill never got --- well I guess he couldn't get no girl to say yes.

But Bill was sort of --- And you know, well I've heard my dad tell, they come to town lots --- that is, well I say lots, but every now and then. Old Bill, by God they come to town one time, and my dad and Bill generally stayed in the same room at the Burns Hotel there in town. And one night they all got together, and they hired --- there was a nigger wench in town. They hired her to go up and go to bed in that room. They couldn't get Bill to go up there. By God, Bill got onto it someway. He said, "Bob, I don't think I'll go to bed tonight, and I think I'll just set up the night." And by God he never went up. I don't know what would have happened if he had gone.

EDWARD: Do you think old; this is off the record...

FRED: I don't know if he did or not.

EDWARD: I will never ---

FRED: Now that McIntosh girl, you happen to know where the McIntosh place is?

EDWARD: Yes.

FRED: Well, that is one reason that Bill bought that, he thought if he bought that --- he was mashed head over heels on one of them McIntosh girls. He thought if he bought that place maybe she would marry him, but she didn't do it.

EDWARD: What else did your --- some memories from Bob Baker, your father. Do you recall anything?

FRED: Well, I wrote a few things down here. He had a --- they used neck mules to fasten a horse that wouldn't ... they'd neck him to a mule. He had a little mule by the name of Abe, and by God he

could just catch a horse and he'd say, "Get over here Abe." And that god damn little mule, I guess, would saddle right up to be next to that horse. When they turned them out, maybe that their little mule and that horse would run out there a half a mile or so. Pretty soon that little mule would just kick the holy hell out of that horse and bring him right back to the bunch. He had four or five of them neck mules. But that Abe, I guess that Abe was good.

EDWARD: Neck mules.

FRED: Yeah.

EDWARD: That's when you got a horse that is kind of wild, won't stay?

FRED: Yeah, won't stay with the other bunch. Your, maybe some other rider would come in to ride a day or two with the outfit, his saddle horse won't stay, and they'd neck them to these mules. They'd be a heavy piece --- well hell it was that wide, a heavy strap of leather that would go around the mule's neck, and it had a chain about that long. By God they'd fasten the end of that chain in the halter of that horse, and hell that mule maybe would go out there a half a mile, decide he went far enough, and he'd just kick the shit out of that horse and bring him right back to the bunch. But that Abe, I've heard my dad tell about that a lot. And at the time my dad left there, there was 110 head of broke saddle horses. I've had people tell me that was the best bunch of saddle horse they ever seen in their lives.

EDWARD: Now your dad left in 1902?

FRED: Yeah, in 1902.

EDWARD: Because he was kind of mad at Bill for not standing up.

FRED: Well, him and Bill had a ... over that lawsuit.

EDWARD: That Moss thing.

FRED: Yeah.

EDWARD: And you're exactly right, that's why I kept my mouth shut, because it was October 1901, okay. ... mention Myra Shields?

FRED: Yeah, but I can't tell you just who she was.

EDWARD: Okay.

FRED: Whether she was Tom's wife, or daughter, or what.

EDWARD: Daughter.

FRED: Daughter.

EDWARD: And I guess Bill was just madly in love with her.

FRED: Yes, he was in love with one of them Shields girls.

EDWARD: Yeah, that was it.

FRED: And I'd forgot which one. My half-brother, the youngest Shields girl, my half-brother was madly in love with her, but she married somebody else. Oh, my daughter brought them out.

(Pictures)

EDWARD: Oh, that's Henry, isn't it?

FRED: No, that's my --- well God dammit, that's my dad's and mother's wedding picture.

EDWARD: Oh, oh yeah, okay.

FRED: Then that's my mother, the long picture there.

EDWARD: Okay, this one you sent to me, Fred.

FRED: Yeah.

EDWARD: Got that one. Boy, you're lucky you've got these.

FRED: Yes, I wish --- part of my mother's photographs got burnt when she moved from Hines back up to Burns. And I wished I had some of them.

EDWARD: How tall was your father?

FRED: Well, he was only five eight. He was a lot shorter than I am.

EDWARD: Yeah, you're a big man.

FRED: And my dad, I wished to hell I was the size my dad was. My dad --- I don't think he ever weighted over a 160 in his life.

EDWARD: (Laughter) That don't count no more.

FRED: Well, I've weighed pretty heavy for years.

EDWARD: Okay. Now ---

FRED: Why didn't I put a nail up there, it didn't have a head on it. I just hung them up --- well my daughter brought them over the other day. All them buckaroos there, that was Pete French's buckaroo outfit.

EDWARD: I wish you'd been ... Bill Brown never, I don't think, stole a piece of property in his life.

FRED: He was just as honest, I guess, as honest could be. Well, that was one reason that you couldn't hardly get him to go to court against somebody else. He didn't think --- well he, I don't think, they never did convince him that Moss was getting away with his horses.

EDWARD: He got a settlement though.

FRED: Yeah, he got a settlement.

EDWARD: You know it took six years to do it?

FRED: Yeah, I know it was after my dad left there before he ---

EDWARD: 1907.

FRED: I guess that Moss was a crooked son-of-a-bitch.

EDWARD: Moss must have just ripped him off. Because with that brand, and that was --- see that was brought up in the court.

FRED: My dad tried every way in the world to get Bill --- well he bought them eight brands, the horses, iron, and all. Why he wouldn't change to one of them, well chances are Moss would have done something to change too. But my gosh, he would not change from that Horseshoe Bar on account of Moss having the Horseshoe Triangle. On the same god damn place on the horse, on the jaw.

EDWARD: Yeah. What else did your father say there, Fred?

FRED: Well, let's see. Well, that's about all I got down here, just odds and ends. Big log corrals, as I told you a while ago, they was at Buck Creek. Well, when I first knowed that Buck Creek, goddamn they was branding yet, they was big corrals.

EDWARD: You know who owns all that now, don't you, GI? That's Bill's original house.

FRED: Yeah.

EDWARD: Did you ever see that?

FRED: Yeah.

EDWARD: Look how big that thing is.

FRED: That was a big house.

EDWARD: Only about that much of it is there now.

FRED: Yeah, I was over past there, oh four or five years ago.

EDWARD: Oh, that's good, that's good. Yeah, there is not that much --- That's where Bill died, that's the Methodist Home.

FRED: Uh huh.

EDWARD: And did you ever see the store?

FRED: Yeah, yeah it was there when I first went to Buck Creek. And by God in the corners --- he'd want some sacks. You know everything, beans, everything come in gunnysacks at that time. Well, Bill would want some sacks and he'd just go in and maybe empty four or five sacks of beans in the corner someplace and take the sacks to use for something else.

EDWARD: Why did he do things like that?

FRED: I don't know. Bill just threw his money away.

EDWARD: He killed horses, you know, I guess. Did your father ever mention how he mistreated horses? He didn't mistreat them, he just ---

FRED: Well, if a man --- when I first met Bill Brown when I was just a kid, I was working for Cecil's. Bill says, "You must not have been doing much, your horse is too fat." He had, he figured you had to have a horse just rode down till they was poorer than hell, or you hadn't been doing it.

EDWARD: Did you ever see Bill much?

FRED: Well, not too many times. That is, I went to work, when I got out of high school, I was 17, and I went to work ---

EDWARD: About 1930.

FRED: Yeah. I went to work for Pat Cecil at Silver Creek. And that's the first place he sent me to ride was over there at Buck Creek with Wes Street. And I stopped there to talk to Bill then.

EDWARD: Wesley Street.

FRED: And then I seen Bill a few times after that. It wasn't too long after that though till they closed him out.

EDWARD: What kind of a --- He must have been kind of a talkative guy.

FRED: He was, I guess, in a way. And he didn't cuss. Confound it, that was his cuss word.

Confound it! He wouldn't have said damn, or shit, or anything like that in a bet.

EDWARD: Or doggone it. (Laughter) Did your father ever --- well first of all when he left Bill Brown now where did he go?

FRED: To Silver Creek there at his dad's.

EDWARD: Dad's place.

FRED: Yeah, after his dad died why he got that place there. Then he sold it --- well, after my little brother and sister died, they wasn't satisfied there, and they sold that. I think he wished afterwards he hadn't. Then moved to Burns --- and well he bought a little place up the river, and then he traded it for a house in town. And he freighted for four or five years, then he bought the place up where my daughter lives now, up above Burns there.

EDWARD: Did your father --- there is one thing that still gets me, Fred, how did --- did they sleep, just sleep out in the open?

FRED: Yeah.

EDWARD: Do you know how many rattlesnakes are in that stupid country? I killed two of them yesterday.

FRED: They took their chances. Yeah, they slept --- oh they --- around after they sat up a cook wagon, all the men around, there wouldn't be many rattlers around. Yeah, they slept right out in the open.

EDWARD: They're all over, over there, particularly Wagontire.

FRED: Yeah.

EDWARD: Did your father, later on in his life, know Dobkins and those ---

FRED: Well, he knowed him, knowed who he was.

EDWARD: But your father, was he ever, was Bob ever, Robert ever involved with Wagontire area?

FRED: Well, not after he left Brown. He was before.

EDWARD: What did your father tell you about Johnny Overstreet?

FRED: Well, that was before my dad went to work for Bill, and he didn't know too much about it. But I guess from what I've been told, why Johnny Overstreet run Bill off once. Bill went down to tell him to get off his land, he was on Bill's deeded land, and Johnny refused to leave. Run him off with a gun. And old Bill went back to his camp, and he told my dad, he said, "The further towards camp I got, the madder I got." He said, "I just got my gun and went back and shot him."

EDWARD: That's pretty accurate too.

FRED: Then he come to Shields', Tom Shields was a Justice of the Peace, and he come there and turned himself into Shields.

EDWARD: Yeah, Myra is Shields' daughter we were talking about.

FRED: Yeah. Yeah, there was Ruby, and Myra, and I was trying to think ---

EDWARD: Zola --- oh, not Zola.

FRED: Zola was young Shields' wife.

EDWARD: Yeah, right. Virgil and --- I can't remember them.

FRED: Well, what in the hell was the youngest girl that my half-brother chased for years?

EDWARD: The youngest girl, Marie.

FRED: Marie, Marie.

EDWARD: Well, she is still alive.

FRED: Yeah, she's still alive.

EDWARD: I interviewed her.

FRED: Oh, you did?

EDWARD: Yeah.

FRED: Yeah, she is still alive.

EDWARD: 91, I got a picture of her in here.

FRED: Oh, you have? I've got one someplace here that was taken years, and years, and years ago.

EDWARD: What did, what would you want to tell --- well let me finish that Overstreet thing. He did shoot him, and it was '86 though.

FRED: Yeah.

EDWARD: Every book, every newspaper article says '85, but it wasn't '85. Did Bill ever tell your father where he went after he shot Overstreet, besides Shields' place?

FRED: Well, I guess he took right off to Shields and turned himself in.

EDWARD: And that he did. And now after that though, Fred.

FRED: Well, they took him to Canyon City first, and then I guess he stood trial at Lakeview, didn't he?

EDWARD: The paper that I was hoping would have proved that was not in the circuit court papers.

FRED: Oh, it wasn't?

EDWARD: No.

FRED: Well, he stood trial one place or the other on account --- that was before Harney County was Harney County.

EDWARD: Yeah, right. It's really tough, that kind of stuff is tough to prove, because it is getting a long time ago.

FRED: I imagine it is.

EDWARD: And it is hard to find newspapers, and it's hard to find a lot of things. Did your father when he first started working there --- now let's back up. How many horses --- well maybe you don't know this, but did your father ever say, did he have a large amount of horses, or ---

FRED: Well, I think when Bill bought them horses; all total he bought around 500 head. That is he bought eight different little horse outfits out.

EDWARD: Oh, okay.

FRED: Brand and all. And I think my dad said that there was 500 head of them. Well 500 head of mares when Bill first got them.

EDWARD: Now these he bought.

FRED: Yeah, he bought eight different bunches of horses out there, brands and all.

EDWARD: And then he bought stud horses from all over?

FRED: Yeah. He went clear back to Missouri and places and got horses.

EDWARD: Then he'd bring these stud horses out and mix them with the wild horses?

FRED: Yeah. Well, you couldn't hardly consider them wild horses. That is I guess they would have at one time. But they was all branded horses, gentle horses, been handled and things.

EDWARD: But he, it's been estimated, and this is another hard thing to prove, that so many people have said at one time he had 20,000 horses.

FRED: Well, I wouldn't doubt but what he did right there at the beginning of the Second World War. He sold a hell of a lot ---

EDWARD: First World War.

FRED: Or First World War. He sold a hell of a lot of horses to the army there. Then after the war was over, that's when horses went to hell. Shit, horses got down to a cent a pound for chicken feed.

EDWARD: 20,000 horses, Fred, is a lot of --- I think of cattle.

FRED: That's a lot of horses, but I'll tell you, at one time when I was in the --- see I was in the re-mount service during the Second World War. They had 16,000 mules, and 12,000 horses there at Fort ... besides Fort Robinson and all the other places they had horses.

EDWARD: But how could Bill Brown have 20,000 horses branded?

FRED: Well, they branded a hell of a lot of horses there every summer. Then, well he --- them horses of Bill's run in five counties.

EDWARD: Yeah.

FRED: Yeah, five different counties. Well, maybe some slopped over other places, but there was five counties that they rode.

EDWARD: They run all over the place.

FRED: I've heard my dad tell about that, when Bend was just a little berg, I've heard my dad tell about turning a bunch of horses right there in Bend, and take them back out.

EDWARD: Oh, that's another thing about these horses. Okay, they would gather them up, corral them, brand them, would they try to break them right then?

FRED: No, they would cut the horses out that they was going to break and sell. They generally took them to Lost Creek, but then Bill got a hold of what they called the Bixby pasture over at --- well it's in towards Suplee. I could take you there, but I can't tell you just where it was.

EDWARD: Bixby pasture?

FRED: He had twenty sections of ground there, and he'd take a lot of them horses and put them there until he got them. And then he'd sell them; them buyers would come in and buy them. And hell, them horses would go all over. A bunch of them --- well that, oh Mac ... I was telling you about the other day, he just went with a bunch that went to Canada. He liked it so well up there, he stayed up there, didn't come back.

EDWARD: Mark, Mark ---

FRED: Mac. I sent a picture of him to you.

EDWARD: Yeah, yeah, I've got it. I don't --- Bixby pasture, Bixby pasture ---

FRED: Well, you go ---

EDWARD: I know where Hardin is.

FRED: Well, you go right on towards Suplee from Hardin, and it's on --- what the hell is the name of that creek?

EDWARD: Grindstone?

FRED: Well, it ain't Grindstone, it's ---

EDWARD: Norcross?

FRED: No, Black --- Blackbreak or something. Anyway, it run down that son-of-a-bitching creek for eight or ten miles there, that field did. I don't know who owns that.

EDWARD: Probably the GI Ranch.

FRED: Well, it might. That is --- the last I knowed that is, a lot of that land of Bill's belonged to, oh them people that bought Mills and Sherman out.

EDWARD: Oh, well that's GI Ranch. They bought Mills and Sherman out. They bought Sherman out, 50,000 acres.

FRED: Yeah. But ---

EDWARD: And they just bought the Grindstone.

FRED: But that wasn't the GI, was it?

EDWARD: Yeah.

FRED: Well, I thought that that other outfit ---

EDWARD: No, it is GI. GI has got two hundred and some thousand acres.

FRED: I know, it was broke flatter than hell, I guess.

EDWARD: They don't even run their own cows on it. Jack Peila and I were just talking about that this morning.

FRED: Well, they haven't got any cows, I don't think.

EDWARD: They don't have any.

FRED: Mark's boss, I guess, is still there sort of looking after things.

EDWARD: There is, there is --- you want some more coffee?

FRED: Oh, I guess.

EDWARD: Oh, I know you do.

FRED: It ain't good for a person.

EDWARD: I don't know.

FRED: That's Zola Shields, huh?

EDWARD: No, that's Marie.

FRED: Oh, that's --- well by God she looks a lot like Zola. Yeah, I can see it ain't Zola now, yeah.

EDWARD: That is Marie Shields Barrett. So that's who your mother --- or mother, your brother was madly in ---

FRED: Yeah, half-brother. My dad was married before he married my mother.

EDWARD: This was taken last December.

FRED: Well, you don't know anything about Josephine McNamee, do you? Maude Street married Hart, Charlie Hart. And they had that, what was --- well anyway they had a boy, Cecil. Then they separated, and then Maude married a guy by the name of McNamee, he run restaurants. They had this one girl, and then Maude died. I don't know where --- the girl is just about my --- well a little bit younger than I am, Josephine. She may have not come into the picture. You might ---

EDWARD: Is it Josephine Street Wolden?

FRED: Yes, I think it ---

EDWARD: Okay, I've talked to her.

FRED: Oh, you did?

EDWARD: Yeah, yeah.

FRED: Well, where does she live at now?

EDWARD: Pendleton.

FRED: Pendleton?

EDWARD: Yeah.

FRED: By God, she was quite a girl; I'd like to see her again.

EDWARD: Do you want her address?

FRED: I could --- well I wouldn't care; I could get it.

EDWARD: I got it. Okay, back to Fred's father, Bob Baker. What, did he ever mention anything to you about not liking working for Bill Brown?

FRED: I think he liked to work for Bill, until him and Bill sort of got into it over that court deal.

EDWARD: That Moss deal. Did he ever mention any stories to you that were --- it was just hard work, or ---

FRED: Well, it was hard work. I've heard him say that a lot of times. He'd say it was hard work. He said it was exciting work, which it would have been. But he said it was hard work. And they lied to Bill; that is Bill would come out wanting to ride with them. And he, Bill, from hearsay, he'd been told what the best horses were. I've heard my dad tell this a lot of times. They had a horse they called Ballover (sp.?) I guess he was a hell of a good horse.

EDWARD: Ballover.

FRED: Yeah. Anyway, Bill would want to ride him. And they had another horse that looked just like him that wasn't much of a horse. By God my dad would catch that other horse and lead it out. Bill would say, "That ain't Ballover." Papa turned to some of the men and he'd say, "That is Ballover, ain't it?" "Yeah, that's Ballover." Now Bill --- if they'd have mounted him on a good horse and went out to get them horses, old Bill would get right in the way someplace, and cause them a lot of trouble. So, they'd mount him on a horse that wasn't much account. I've heard all them fellows, Tin Gibson, my dad, and all those tell that.

EDWARD: In other words, they wanted to put Bill on a ---

FRED: A horse that he couldn't get right out in the lead someplace and raise hell, turn the bunch the wrong way or some damn thing. I guess that Ballover horse, from what Tin and my dad both told me, I guess he was a running son-of-a-bitch. He could run all day, and just outrun most anything.

EDWARD: So, Bill, from your understanding, did Bill ride with the buckaroos when they ---

FRED: Very seldom

EDWARD: Very seldom.

FRED: Yeah, he run the sheep.

EDWARD: Oh, what did your father say about sheep? Did he ever mention anything about Bill and his sheep?

FRED: Well, yes and no. That is Bill had four or five bands of sheep. My granddad, my mother's

dad, was Bill's sheep foreman there for several years, yeah.

EDWARD: Merritt.

FRED: Yeah. But no, Papa never did say much about the sheep.

EDWARD: So, Bill stuck with the sheep most of the time?

FRED: Yeah, yeah, Bill stuck with the sheep. As you know that, now lots of people --- old Bill carried strychnine in his pockets to poison the coyotes. Lots of people claim, by God ---

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FRED: ... but he took a little bit of that at a time to make himself immune so somebody wouldn't poison him. Well hell, he'd taste it all right to see if it lost its strength. You could tell a tasting strychnine. They claimed he carried it loose in his pocket with raisins. Well shit, he didn't, he carried it in a bottle in his pocket.

EDWARD: Yeah.

FRED: Yeah, that's the reason I'd like to get a book written there --- I've read just short articles and things that are the god damdest lies.

EDWARD: The Oregonian put out a lot of b.s.

FRED: Yes.

EDWARD: And some --- I saw a Prineville paper, a big thing on Bill Brown; it was so full of manure.

FRED: I wish that my daughter, or my stepdaughter she is, and when her and my --- you see my stepdaughter married my brother. Now that is a mixed up deal.

EDWARD: Well, I won't get into it.

FRED: But anyway, I had a whole bunch of --- now Harold and Alice moved up to the upper place, they took that part of it when they got married. I had newspapers that dated back to 1900 in the corner of the house. And she didn't want them, and didn't see any use of keeping them, and she just took them out and burned them up. I give her hell about it. I said, "Alice, I'd have liked to kept

them papers."

EDWARD: I can't find two papers that --- The Dalles-Times Mountaineer, and the Grant County News, of April 1886 on Bill shooting Overstreet, that's the only two. And I'm a researcher, and that includes the U. of O., that's where I found The Dalles Times and the Mountaineer, when it was 1886.

FRED: Are you chewing shoelaces ...

EDWARD: No, she's just eating --- he or she ---

FRED: Oh, she's ignorant. She gets one piece at a time and takes it over here and eats it. Goes back and gets ---

EDWARD: Is there anything else, Fred, you recall?

FRED: Well, not that I know of.

EDWARD: When your father left Bill, he went over on Silver Creek?

FRED: Yeah, they lived there a year or two and then they moved to Burns.

EDWARD: Do you know where Tin Gibson's place was on Silver Creek? Where was he from that?

FRED: Well, you know, you go through that lane right below Tin Gibson's.

EDWARD: Best Lane.

FRED: The Best Lane, and there is no buildings or anything any more, and Mayo owns it now. But it's on the south side of the road, the Baker field.

EDWARD: Then Cowan's right up the ---

FRED: Yeah, then Helen Cowan lives --- well Helen lives on --- there was Uncle Dub Baker, and Uncle Nick Baker, and my grandfather Robert Baker, and then there was Uncle Jim, and they all come and settled there. But Uncle Jim never took a homestead. But where Helen lives, that was Uncle Dub's homestead.

EDWARD: There is a big white house right in there.

FRED: Well, the Alfred Johnson house.

EDWARD: Yeah right, okay, that's right.

FRED: Sit down Harve. This is ---

EDWARD: Ed Gray.

FRED: Ed Gray.

EDWARD: How you doing?

FRED: This is Harvey Hat.

EDWARD: Hi Harvey.

FRED: Set.

EDWARD: This weather --- We've got a problem here.

FRED: We're just peddling the shit.

EDWARD: Your father said in 1901 he had eight or nine thousand. Bill said he had around a thousand, and I think the reason he probably said that was for taxes.

FRED: It could be.

EDWARD: He ain't going to tell those guys how many horses he got. I agree with you, I don't think he really knew anyway.

FRED: Well, I doubt if Bill did. And I've been told, I couldn't say this for a fact, but I've been told right there at the first of the First World War that he had about 18,000. He sold a hell of a lot of horses to the army right there at the first.

EDWARD: Oh, oh, where did he sell those, do you know, what corral?

FRED: A lot of them went --- you mean where from over here?

EDWARD: What corral, yeah, did he sell them at?

FRED: Well, whichever they happened to have horses bunched at. Them buyers would come and look at them and buy them. Most of them would --- well they had to be driven out then, they didn't have trucks and railroads and things.

EDWARD: It could be Last Chance, it could have been Lost Creek, it could ---

FRED: Yeah, wherever they was a riding at that time, holding a bunch of horses.

EDWARD: We're talking about the weather; it's horrible.

FRED: How long a tape you got on that?

EDWARD: 90 minutes.

FRED: I was going to say ---

EDWARD: I was talking to Jess Gibson, two and a half hours.

FRED: Well, Jess peddled you a lot of shit, I'll bet.

EDWARD: He peddled me a lot of shit is right, quote, peddled me a lot of shit. But a lot of it was accurate too.

FRED: Yeah. Well, you haven't met Hazel Gibson, have you?

EDWARD: No.

FRED: She was Frank's wife. I can tell you where she lives. She was wanting --- well I don't know how much information she's got, but her folks was raised right over in that Suplee country. And she married Frank Gibson, that was Jess's brother.

EDWARD: Right, he's dead.

FRED: Yeah, he's dead.

EDWARD: His grave is at Silver Creek.

FRED: Yeah. And she lives, well just as you go through the Sand Hill, you know what they call the Sand Hill this side of Burns? Well, it would be the second house on your left there, that is the first one right on the edge of the hill, then just as you hit the flat.

EDWARD: Well, that's close to Hollie Schrodgers, isn't it?

FRED: Well Hollie lives up ---

EDWARD: Doesn't he live on the west side of Burns?

FRED: No, he lives on, yeah, on the west side of Burns. Well Hazel lives on the east side.

EDWARD: Oh, oh, I was thinking it was on the west side.

FRED: No, Hollie lives on out there, after you head up Sagehen.

EDWARD: Okay, I don't know then. I don't know where Hazel --- I've got so many people ---

FRED: I think it was a one room. I don't know if it was one or two, but he had a cabin there.

EDWARD: Was it the cabin on Lost Creek?

FRED: On Lost Creek.

EDWARD: Oh, okay, on Lost Creek. But never on Wagontire Mountain?

FRED: No, I don't think none up on the mountain.

EDWARD: Do you know where the Thompson place was?

FRED: Yeah.

EDWARD: It is on the ground now. Did you know that Grace Bradley was born in that place in 1917?

FRED: I didn't know that.

EDWARD: Her brother and father were killed, you know, murdered up there. Who was Thompson? Did you ever meet this guy, Big Foot?

FRED: Well, I've seen him. I didn't know him personally. But he had quite a reputation.

EDWARD: What kind of a reputation?

FRED: Well, he was supposed to have been sort of a mean bastard.

EDWARD: He may have killed Ira Bradley.

FRED: Well, could of.

EDWARD: Don't know? Okay, cabin, discussed that. When did Bill Brown begin gathering wild horses, we got that --- Geeze ---

(END OF TAPE)

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