

HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #97 - Side A

Subject: Celia Byrd Howser

Place: Burns, Oregon

Date: May 27, 1983

Interviewer: Pauline Braymen

PAULINE BRAYMEN: This is Pauline Braymen, I'm interviewing Celia Howser at her home in Burns, Oregon, on May 27th, 1983. Celia is to be honored as the 1983 Queen Mother of the Harney County Pioneer Association, on Pioneer Day in June. Celia, you were born in Burns, when were you born?

CELIA HOWSER: June 27th, 1901.

PAULINE: And you've lived here all your life?

CELIA: Yes, and the house I was born in is still standing, over there by the creamery, on the corner.

PAULINE: I didn't realize that. That's down on Washington, West Washington Street?

CELIA: It's right there on the corner.

PAULINE: Across from where the Alpine?

CELIA: No, it's right in the same block with the Alpine.

PAULINE: In the same block with the creamery? Is that where America Sutherland lived?

CELIA: No.

PAULINE: No, I'm mixed up then.

CELIA: No. Well, it's on, let me see, the first street is, it is Washington all right. It's right across from Johnny Woods.

PAULINE: Saw Shop?

CELIA: Uh huh.

PAULINE: Okay. And who are your parents?

CELIA: Charles and Louise Byrd.

PAULINE: And we know that they came to Harney County in about 1886.

CELIA: Yeah, I think Mother came about the time Dad did.

PAULINE: Were they married at that time, or he met her here?

CELIA: No, no.

PAULINE: He met her here?

CELIA: Yes.

PAULINE: Okay. Where did your dad come from?

CELIA: He's originally from Virginia. He was born in Monterey, Virginia.

PAULINE: And he came with his father and brothers?

CELIA: Mother, there were six of them, six children.

PAULINE: What was his father's name?

CELIA: W. C. Byrd.

PAULINE: W. C. Byrd.

CELIA: We always called him; everybody called him "Daddy" Byrd.

PAULINE: Do you know how old your dad was when they came? Was he a young boy, or was he a young man?

CELIA: Oh, I think so.

PAULINE: A young boy?

CELIA: A young man. You never think of those things, that you might need them someday.

PAULINE: And of course they were the founders of the Burns Times-Herald.

CELIA: Yeah, they all sort of went in there together. Dad didn't stay very long, because there wasn't enough to keep three families. He always, almost always, been in the newspaper business. He ran the Harney County News, and then he sold that to Doug Mullarky, and then he worked for Doug.

PAULINE: And your Uncle Julian was the editor of the Burns Times-Herald?

CELIA: Yeah, I have nothing to do with him; so don't mention him.

PAULINE: Well, okay.

CELIA: You'll not mention him in mine.

PAULINE: Oh, okay. And you say your dad was with the paper for a while, then what did he do after ---

CELIA: He went into a carpenter's store; he made nice furniture. In fact, Tommy's got the set down there now, he made. Cabinets, did a lot of cabinetwork, and so forth, in the furniture store. And Tommy's got the complete set down there in his apartment. He's got a chest of drawers, and then a commode, they called it those days. And I then I think he went into the newspaper business. It's kind of hard to remember.

PAULINE: He had the ---

CELIA: The Harney County News.

PAULINE: The Harney County News with your grandfather?

CELIA: No.

PAULINE: No. By himself?

CELIA: Uh huh.

PAULINE: Okay. What was your mother's maiden name?

CELIA: Tupker.

PAULINE: How do you spell that?

CELIA: T U P K E R.

PAULINE: And did she come to Harney County with her parents?

CELIA: Yes. They came from Cottonwood, California. And Grandpa Tupker had a blacksmith shop right where Sprouse Reitz is; he had a blacksmith shop.

PAULINE: Do you know what the name of it was?

CELIA: No, in those days they just called --- just a blacksmith shop.

PAULINE: Okay.

CELIA: I think it was about the only one then.

PAULINE: Do you remember when your mom and dad were married?

CELIA: Huh uh, no.

PAULINE: Were there other children in your family besides your-self?

CELIA: Mary, Mary Graven, and Dolph Byrd. Dolph lives over in Prineville, and of course Mary lives here.

PAULINE: Were you the oldest?

CELIA: Uh huh.

PAULINE: And then Mary? No, Mary's the youngest.

CELIA: Then Dolph and then Mary.

PAULINE: Is Dolph spelled D O L P H?

CELIA: Uh huh.

PAULINE: This sounds terrible, but is that a girl or a boy?

CELIA: Boy, Adolph.

PAULINE: Adolph, okay. And he lives in Prineville now?

CELIA: Uh huh. He was named after his Grandfather Tupker, he was Adolph Tupker. Thank God they didn't name me after anybody. (Laughter)

PAULINE: You have a pretty name, you really do.

CELIA: Oh.

PAULINE: It's unusual.

CELIA: There aren't too many.

PAULINE: There aren't too many, and it's a beautiful name. Okay. You went to school in Burns? Can you tell me something about your school days in Burns?

CELIA: Oh no, I can't think of anything in particular.

PAULINE: Was the school located up here where Slater is now?

CELIA: No, oh no. I went to school over here where Lincoln is. And then after they built that Slater School up there, I was in the sixth grade when I moved into this school up here.

PAULINE: That's the building where the gym is.

CELIA: Uh huh. I was in the sixth grade, and then I went to high school, back over where the Lincoln is now. Of course, it wasn't that, and I went to high school. By that time they had turned that into a high school.

PAULINE: What year did you graduate?

CELIA: '20.

PAULINE: 1920?

CELIA: Uh huh. I should have graduated in 1919, but that was the year they had that terrible flu epidemic, and they turned all of the schools out, and let all of the teachers go, so no one graduated that year.

PAULINE: Did you have the flu?

CELIA: No.

PAULINE: You came through it without any ---

CELIA: Yes. And they used the old Presbyterian Church for a hospital, and I helped. Why everybody had to help. But I didn't get it.

PAULINE: I've talked to other people that lived through that, some of them who had it,

and some of them who didn't.

CELIA: They just put row after row of cots in that old Presbyterian Church, and of course it had a kitchen to it. Broth was all I guess anybody ever ate. But that's when I should have graduated, but I didn't graduate till '20.

PAULINE: Did other members of your family have it? They didn't? Well your whole family came through it without having it. Then you met your husband ---

CELIA: Oh, he lived up Harney. We'd always sort of known each other. It wasn't a chance meeting.

PAULINE: Did you go to high school together?

CELIA: Two years. And then he went out to Ontario; he graduated out to Ontario. And he, of course, graduated in '19, because they didn't have flu out there like we did. But, you know, it's just like all kids; you've known them just about all your life.

PAULINE: What year were you married?

CELIA: 1923.

PAULINE: And you married in Burns?

CELIA: Uh huh.

PAULINE: Were you married at the Presbyterian Church?

CELIA: No, we were married at a friend's home. Earl Graham's home.

PAULINE: Is this the house where you first lived then?

CELIA: No, we rented a house for a while, and then we finally bought this property from the Foleys. And then we built our house in 19--- we moved in, in 1930.

PAULINE: And you had this house built?

CELIA: Uh huh, we built it ourselves.

PAULINE: Well I knew that you'd lived here ever since I could remember. Were you active in Burns Mother's Club and Burns Library Club?

CELIA: Yes. No, not Library.

PAULINE: Not Library Club. Burns Mother's Club.

CELIA: I worked so much, you see, I wasn't too active in clubs.

PAULINE: Where did you work, Celia?

CELIA: Oh, I worked for; I put in about 15 years of my life working for lawyers, different ones. And then after Charlie Foley died, I didn't suppose I'd ever work again. I was working for him when he died. And then Dr. Smith and Dr. John (Weare) came after me and I went to work for them in 1948, and worked for them until I retired.

PAULINE: And when was that?

CELIA: Let me see, I was --- I lacked six months of being 65, so I would have been 64 really.

PAULINE: You were born in 1901, so --- now that doesn't figure out right.

CELIA: Well I, I retired.

PAULINE: Oh, I know what, I subtracted instead of --- I was getting you back into 1837. Here, I'd better add this instead of subtracting it. So it would have been 1965, yeah.

CELIA: My full time would have been in the summer, in June, but I quit it. Oh, they started Medicare. I stopped and said I didn't want to start any more insurance. I was getting too old, so I retired.

PAULINE: So you were a long time.

CELIA: Well, over seventeen years.

PAULINE: For the Burns Clinic.

CELIA: Over seventeen years I worked there. So I wasn't too active in a lot of things, because I couldn't be.

PAULINE: Well you've been very active in the Presbyterian Church and sang ---

CELIA: I sang in the choir for over thirty years.

PAULINE: Music has always been a very important part of your family life, hasn't it?

CELIA: Yes, Grandpa and Grandma Byrd had six children, and they all sang, all of them, all six. And that I think is really remarkable because you don't hear of that very often.

PAULINE: Although you don't sing as much in the choir now as you used to, you still ---

CELIA: Oh no, I can't. I haven't got enough breath. That surgery fixed me. It was too much for me, and then I was getting too old, there was more young people up there.

PAULINE: It does reach a point in time where it is nice to sit in the audience and watch someone else.

CELIA: Oh yes. You just can't go on, and on, and on.

PAULINE: You had one son?

CELIA: Uh huh, and one daughter.

PAULINE: And one daughter, Donna, but what's her last name?

CELIA: Mundy.

PAULINE: Donna Mundy. They're not living here now?

CELIA: They live in Redding, but they'll all be here, even great-grandchildren.

PAULINE: How many great-grandchildren do you have?

CELIA: Four.

PAULINE: Tom has two, and ---

CELIA: Three.

PAULINE: Three, and Donna has one.

CELIA: No, Donna had three.

PAULINE: Well, I've lost track --- that would be six.

CELIA: Yeah, the grandchildren.

PAULINE: The grandchildren.

CELIA: Yeah, but great-grandchildren, I thought you meant great-grandchildren.

PAULINE: Oh, the great-grandchildren.

CELIA: I've got four great-grandchildren.

PAULINE: Six grandchildren, and four great-grandchildren, okay. And they'll all be here?

CELIA: Hope to. At least we're making plans.

PAULINE: Tom lives in ---

CELIA: Ashland.

PAULINE: What's Donna's husband's name?

CELIA: Don Mundy.

PAULINE: Don, D O N. I know so much of these things that I ask you, but sure as I use it out of my head, why I'd be wrong. I want to be sure.

CELIA: Yeah, I know.

PAULINE: Can you tell me what Burns was like in, at the time that you were growing up? Were there sidewalks?

CELIA: Oh no. There were sidewalks, all right! Just old wooden sidewalks, dirt streets, and mud. Just about like that end of town is down there, you know. No, it was --- when we moved from there, we moved off down there, off the flat down near the Village Trailer Court. Dad bought an acreage down there, and we moved down there. So I know what it is to walk to school.

PAULINE: I'll bet. It would have been what, a couple of miles?

CELIA: Well it was quite a ways from clear down there to clear up. PAULINE: Up here.

CELIA: Uh huh. But you thought nothing of it. You knew you had it to do, so you did it.

PAULINE: What about the weather, do you think it has changed a lot?

CELIA: Oh, I don't know, we had lots of cold weather. Gee, I can remember when it was 45 below once. And we had lots of snow, and it froze, and we went ice-skating. You know we'd coast down the hills, and so forth. That's about all you had to do in the

wintertime.

PAULINE: Which hill did you coast?

CELIA: The Cecil's Hill we went down mostly. That was from the courthouse, and of course there wasn't much traffic then, you know, just so you didn't hit Main Street you were all right. Just horses and buggies.

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

CELIA: Oh, I sort of do. This Smaltz, who I worked for, he was an attorney, he took us down to see the oil well once down by Wright's Point. The first oil well down there, we went down there in his car to see that oil well. I think that's the first time I ever rode in a car.

PAULINE: What did you think about it?

CELIA: Well I thought it was pretty nice.

PAULINE: You liked it.

CELIA: It sure beat sitting in the back end of an old buckboard.

PAULINE: Did you go to dances a lot?

CELIA: Oh yeah. We used to go --- Lois Sweek taught out Rye Grass, and we used to all go out there. My Uncle Bill had a car, and he would take us. I used to go with the Sweeks, and we danced out there a lot.

PAULINE: At the Rye Grass School?

CELIA: It was the Grange Hall there.

PAULINE: Oh, at the Grange Hall.

CELIA: I don't know what's happened, I think I saw that old building out there one day. Oh yes, I always loved to dance, and so did Darrell. So I think that's why --- we had that in common, was our dancing.

PAULINE: Darrell was the Postmaster at Burns for many, many years.

CELIA: Uh huh. Yes, he was. I got the certificate over there that Harry Truman; Harry Truman was President when Darrell went in.

PAULINE: Well he had worked there for some time before?

CELIA: Oh yes, right after we were married, the Postmaster, Leonard Locher, took sick and they took him to Portland. And he couldn't come back anymore, and Darrell had worked out to Ontario in a post office, just a little bit. So they called him up and asked him if he'd come down there, they were up against it. And we just stayed down then, till he really --- All of our married life he worked in the --- till he retired of course. He retired before I did. But I liked to work; I wish I could work now. But my poor old hands, I can't do anything with them. But I could be worse.

PAULINE: Well this is the thing. I guess it's best to look on the bright side, although when it hurts, it's hard to do that.

CELIA: I've taken pills today, because I was afraid --- I don't feel very well in the morning. After my pills begin to take effect, why I feel better.

PAULINE: Well are there some things that you would really like to have said in your family history?

CELIA: Oh no, I don't. I haven't done anything that's ---

PAULINE: Besides the Presbyterian Church and Burns Mother's Club, are there any other organizations ---

CELIA: Eastern Star, I've always been, I've been in Eastern Star all of these years.

PAULINE: Okay. Were you an officer in that?

CELIA: Yeah, I was Worthy Matron in 1937. I've always been active in Star. That was at night, and I could go to Eastern Star where other things I couldn't go to in the daytime.

PAULINE: Are there any other organizations that you can ---

CELIA: No, I really didn't.

PAULINE: What about the Red Cross Blood Bank, or ---

CELIA: Oh, I helped Dorothy a little bit down there for a while. And then we got so we went to Yuma every winter, and it didn't work out. She got someone else, and I just quit. But by the time you work and take care of your family, and house, you've about had it. You can't do very much extra work. Not in the daytime, in the evenings, of course, the things I did, why it was different.

PAULINE: Okay. Can you think of anything else now that we need to get in here?

CELIA: Gosh, I just can't Pauline. Just raising my children.

PAULINE: Well you did a fine job of that.

CELIA: Tommy's in Ohio today. He flew back there Monday. Oh, he's busy. He and two attorneys from Eugene flew back there to get depositions. He's awfully good to me, he calls me a lot. Donna and I talk every Sunday, but if Tommy just happens to think about it, he calls me. And of course he does my business, because when I had that surgery, I wasn't able to do anything. So he takes care of everything for me, I just mail it to him. I'm pretty thankful for that.

PAULINE: Well, I'm going to turn the recorder off now.

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