LOUISE DODSON

Union County resident for 100 years

AN ORAL HISTORY

Interviews in August, 2002 and June, 2003
at her home in North Powder OR

Interviewers: Betty Hyde & Eugene Smith

UNION COUNTY, OREGON HISTORY PROJECT
2004
(revised from 2003)

UNION COUNTY, OREGON HISTORY PROJECT
An Affiliate of the Oregon Historical Society

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In collaboration with Eastern Oregon University
Cove Improvement Club History Committee
Elgin Museum & Historical Society
Union Museum Society

Purposes

To record & publish oral histories of long-time Union County residents
&
To create a community encyclopedia

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Preface

Much of the history of a place is stored in the memories of people who have lived there. Their stories may be told to family members, but, unless someone makes a special effort to record these stories, they become lost to future generations.

Each of the historical societies in Union County, Oregon has begun to make that effort. Tape recordings exist in several locations, some of them transcribed in written form, others not. A more ambitious and thorough effort seemed necessary so that more of the oral history of Union County could be captured and preserved.

The Union County, Oregon History Project, begun in 2002, is making that more ambitious effort. One of its principal purposes is to collect as many oral histories of older Union County residents as possible and to make them available in both taped and written form. This edited transcript is part of the series of oral histories to be produced by that project.

About the Interview and This Edited Version

The interviews with Louise Dodson took place at her home in North Powder. At age 99, Louise appears to be healthy and vigorous, mentally and physically.

Betty Hyde, a volunteer with the Union County, Oregon History Project, completed a one-hour interview on August 28, 2002. Eugene Smith, Director of the Union County, Oregon History Project, completed a one-hour follow-up interview on June 26, 2003. Several times in the first interview, Louise responded to a question by saying she had answered it "in that book," referring to *A View of the Past,* a small book of essays and poems she wrote for the 2002 centennial celebration of North Powder. The editor has therefore drawn from that book to elaborate her answers to interview questions, combining her written and spoken words.

Heather Pilling's full transcription (available for research purposes) presents the literal contents of the interview. The edited version presented here differs from the literal transcription in the following characteristics;

- reorganization of content

- deletion of some extraneous comments

- omission of false sentence starts and other normal speech fillers that detract from readability

- normalization of pronunciation and grammar in conformity with standards of written English.

LD designates Louise Dodson's words, *I* the interviewer's.

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Born on a Powder Valley Homestead

I: Please tell me your full name.

LD: It's Violet Louise Parker Dodson.

I: Your date of birth?

LD: January 30, 1904.

I: Where were you born?

LD: I was born on a foothill ranch [in the Powder Valley of Union and Baker counties] of the Blue Mountains--one of the last homesteads available to early settlers. Ours was the last ranch at the end of the country road at that time. We were ten miles from town. It is now the Elkhorn Elk Refuge at Anthony Creek.

My birth occurred on a cold winter day, the snow eight feet deep and drifted. We had no telephone, electric lights, or indoor plumbing. There was a doctor in town, but my parents had no way to contact him, so helpful neighbors assisted. I was a tiny baby--two months premature and the last of a set of twin girls, one of whom had arrived a month and a half earlier and not survived--to forest ranger Thomas Henry Parker and Violet Kelsey Parker. They named me after a great aunt in Canada. I weighed two pounds. They were very skeptical that I would ever make it. But I guess the Lord's been with me.

I: Did you have younger brothers and sisters?

LD: I had one brother, born six years later.

Grandparents' Coming to the Powder Valley

I: Had your grandparents come to this valley?

LD: My father's grandparents came from Canada--an area near the Great Lakes. All they had was their saddle horses. So they hooked up with a wagon train that was coming west over the Oregon Trail. They herded cattle and took care of stock to pay for their way, and I suppose some of the people in the wagon train fed them.

They got here to this valley in 1862. Grandfather Parker said there wasn't a house in sight around here. No one had stopped in this valley because of the Indians; there wasn't a fort close. The valley must have looked like paradise to those early settlers that had come over the barren country of Idaho --those beautiful mountains with timber on them; they had been seeing nothing but sagebrush and dirt.

He said that, when they struck that valley up there, the native grasses were clear up to their stirrups, and the streams were running in all directions. But they couldn't stay here because they were afraid of the Indians. Then Doc Anthony and some people named Riggs, who had probably worn out their teams of oxen, just had to stop. So they went way up there to the foothills where they camped and took up property. They made friends with the Indians, but it was a pretty lonely life for them for awhile.

My other grandfather came, quite a bit later, over the Oregon Trail from Utah. They bought land here for $1.25 an acre. Later, when my grandmother died, my grandfather married a Wilson; my mother was only two years old then. It used to be that frontier women died young; they just couldn't hack it. It was no wonder; they didn't have water in the house and no refrigeration, and they had to do all their laundry with a washboard.

My folks took up the homestead right above Doc Anthony's. When I'd come by, Doc wanted to know if I had some candy left in my lunch pail for him. He claimed to be a doctor; but everybody thought he was kind of a fudge, but nobody ever proved it. They played a lot of tricks on him.

Father a Forest Ranger

I: What was your father's occupation?

Louise's painting of the Kelsey house, home of her mother's parents
Photo by Eugene Smith

LD: My father was the first forest ranger when this area became Whitman National Forest, and our place was his headquarters. He covered from Baker to Sumpter, including the La Grande and Starkey area. He surveyed the Lakes Trail, stocked Anthony Lakes with trout, and built log cabins and barns at strategic locations throughout the territory.

The way of transportation then was by horse only, and just one or two major roads led up into that area. So I know he built a lot of roads and trails, and he also fenced areas for their horses, so that, when their pack and saddle horses weren't in use, they'd have a place to graze and not get away.

I: Was he doing this work by himself or did he have a crew?

LD: He didn't work in the forest during the winter, so he just kept records and did other chores. But in the summer, when there was heavy work to do, he had a helper. And if there was a fire, they called in extra help. One fire that I can remember was in the Grande Ronde watershed area. The wind came up suddenly while they were eating their

Parker Forest Service Station, 1909
T.J. [ranger] & Violet Parker's homestead on Anthony Creek (Louise on horse, Nellie)
Photo courtesy of Louise Dodson

supper, I think it was--the firefighters kind of lying low right then. The wind came up, and the fire started booming toward where they were. He had to get that crew of men out of there, with what equipment they could and their horses, before it finally engulfed the area where they were. It was a pretty close call. When he got home, the hair was singed off of his horse's legs, since my father had to be the last one out; he had to through some of the fire in order to get out. I felt especially bad about the horse, though it didn't really hurt her any. I guess it was a blister probably.

I: Was there nothing they could do to stop a fire at that time?

LD: Not very much because they had to transport all their equipment on horses. They had only hand tools.

I: Do you remember what your father said about the experience of being close to that fire?

Louise at age two
Photo courtesy of Louise Dodson

LD: I can't remember what his reaction was, but I know it was scary for him because he was in charge and it was up to him to get his men out. They lost a lot of their equipment.

I: I think you said one of his jobs was to survey forest land.

LD: Yes.

I: Was he doing that regularly?

LD: Oh, yes. He was always doing that.

I: Was the purpose of the surveying to make maps?

LD: It was both to make maps and to show buyers of forest timber where they could cut. I can remember him making dozens and dozens of blueprints. I never understood quite what it was all about. He had built a little office building in our yard; when he was home, he was busy there most of the time, writing up reports and planning where trails should and shouldn't be. He was also game warden.

Louise & brother Gifford Parker, 1912
Photo courtesy of Louise Dodson

I: What did he have to do in that job?

LD: If someone was fishing without a license, he was just like any game warden.

I: Were there fishing licenses at that time?

LD: Oh, yes! You bet! There was a certain length for fish; you couldn't keep fish if they were too small.

I: This as early as 1910?

LD: Yes. It was kind of a joke for him. The Forest Service Headquarters was in Sumpter then; he had to go to Sumpter to all meetings. One weekend my mother, my little brother, and I went to Sumpter and stayed with him. He told us that the day before he'd been eating in a restaurant, and a couple of fellows sat down and were talking about different things. My father had Forest Ranger equipment on, but he didn't wear anything that said he was a game warden. One guy was telling him stories about catching fish where he wasn't supposed to. After he got through, my dad said he had no other recourse than to fine him for breaking the law. We all got kind of a kick out of that.

Memories of Childhood

I: Tell me more about the homestead your parents took up.

LD: This was one of the very last homesteads that was available. I don't know how he happened to find out about it, but anyway they took it up as a homestead. He had been a postmaster here in North Powder and decided that he wanted to build a ranch up there. I don't know whether he had any aims about the Forest Service at that time or not. He and my mother together built a two-room log cabin and fences. My father was a meticulous person; everything had to be just so. If he built something, it had to the very best he could possibly build.

I: Was the log cabin in use before you were born?

LD: I think they were up there about four years before I was born in 1904; I think they went up there in 1900 or 1901.

I: How did the larger house that you lived in get built?

LD: They just kept building onto the cabin.

Louise with her mother, transported by the Parker family's horse and buggy (Louise's dog, Queenie, at left), ca. 1905
Photo courtesy of Louise Dodson

There was one big front room, a bedroom, the kitchen, and a sort of dent on the side for a bathroom. The water he had piped from a spring ran through the house all the time; I could hear it running.

We had no communication at all. He sent signals by flying a flag on the pole at different heights. When he was there, he always had the flag up; if he was gone, he took it down. If it was half way, it was something else. From down the road at least two or three miles, anyone could see that flag pole.

I: Who was he expecting to see the flag?

LD: Somebody from the Forest Service might come up there looking for him, or someone might come wanting to get licenses. If they were going to take timber from the forest, he had to go and blaze all the trees they could take out. There's a lot of work to it.

I: What do you remember about the days when you were five, six, seven, or eight years old? What did you do around that house?

LD: I was the only child for six years. I had a little dog named Queenie--a fox terrier. She was like another child and a constant companion. I talked to her and played with her. I had toys and things like other children to play with, but it was a lonely childhood for me. I can remember always looking forward to coming into town once a week or maybe once in two weeks. My aunt lived just a mile out of town. She had a big family of girls--some my age. I looked forward to those trips to town because my mother let me off there, and I played with the girls while she went to town and did the shopping. She made butter and brought eggs to town to sell. We always milked several of the cows. Everybody was busy. My parents had a big garden and planted an orchard.

I: Were there duties that you were supposed to do everyday?

LD: I was kind of spoiled that way--such a little scrawny kid. I never had much to do. They did pretty well if they kept me amused. The hardest thing for me was when school started and I had to ride a horse to school. There was a country school up there, Mt. Carmel, that I went to. That was about three miles away. When it got really cold, I couldn't go. That's the reason they sold the ranch and left.

I: What kinds of books and magazines do you remember being in the house?

LD: About the only one I can remember is *Ladies' Home Journal*. We didn't take any papers or anything else. I think the mail came only about every other day, and we had to go at least three miles to where they left the mail. Sometimes it was a week before we got our mail.

I: I thought maybe you learned to read early and had a lot of books around the house.

LD: No, my mother told me lots of stories and read to me a lot. I was pretty active and wanted to be out doing something outside. I learned to ride a horse when I could just straddle one--a good,

gentle, saddle horse. I was knee-high to a grasshopper, they said.

In 1904, some Indians came by our ranch on Anthony Creek. I was lying in a buggy cart in the yard. The Indians wanted to trade for pelts my father had trapped. Joking, my mom asked a squaw, who had a papoose the same age, if she wanted to trade papooses. She grunted, took a look at me, compared her husky, big, girl baby, and said, "No. No trade. She heap too pale."

Growing up, I had some narrow misses. Jessie Goff, my cousin, and I were swinging at a July 4th picnic in the mountains. The swing was tied by a rope on a pole between two trees. The pole broke and came down on Jessie's head. A knot cut a big gash in her hairline. I had just gotten out of the swing a minute earlier.

Once I was riding bareback after cows. I slid off when the mare stumbled, swung around in front of her, and she stepped on my foot. She moved every one of her feet but that one, pinning me down for some time.

Another time I fell out of an apple tree backwards. Only a sturdy lower limb caught me long enough to check the fall to the ground on my head.

Once I was climbing on the roof of a shed and found some "sticks" that looked interesting, so I whacked one over the edge of the roof. It scattered its powdery inside over me. Later, I found out that they were sticks of dynamite my dad had put up there for safe keeping. Lucky they were damp!

My dog, Queenie, and I climbed into a grain box in the barn. I had a lid that tipped up, with hinges on the back. There was a latch that fit over a catch on the box. We bumped it down and the latch caught. We were trapped for about an hour. It was air proof and we could have smothered, but I bumped my head on the lid and it finally came loose.

One Christmas at Aunt Laura's, we girls were making an upstairs bed. We got to pulling the sheets across the bed. I was back of the bed, before an open window. One of the girls let go quickly, and I fell back into the window opening. There was only an old, rotten cloth screen on it with a footlong split. It caught me just long enough that I could scramble out. If I hadn't, I would have gone backward to the ground.

I was told that I could have a little pig if I could catch it. Its mother was plowing up the pasture down by the river. I was on one side of the rail fence, the two pigs on the other. I reached through and caught it. When it squealed, the mother came. As I tried to climb over the fence with the baby pig, she could almost reach me. I was determined to hang on to the piglet, but, if a man hadn't come by and rescued me, who knows whether I could have? She was one mad mamma!

While spending the summer camping with the Goff family on Wolf Creek,

we girls--ages ten to fourteen--had been reading *Tarzan of the Apes*. So, as we camped in a big grove of aspens, we decided to play we were apes and travel in the tree tops. This was done by swinging the tops from one to another, thus being able to travel for long distances. I happened to get a tough tree to swing, and it snapped back, leaving me caught between two trees, unable to go either way--like a spider in a web. Uncle Lane was called to rescue me; he wasn't too happy with us because he had warned us to stop doing it.

While in the mountains, we girls were gathering berries on a hillside. The yellow jackets were bad that year and had made their nests on the ground. Jessie, who was uphill from me, yelled that I had bees on my back. I called for her to knock them off. When she came, the bees met her half way, and she got stung several times, though I didn't get stung once. She was mad at me for a week.

Moving from the Ranch to North Powder and then Portland

LD: Soon after my brother, Gifford, was born, we sold the ranch and moved to town because of getting us to school. We spent one year in Portland, where my brother had what they called emphysema. It was a gathering between the lung and the ribs caused from a cold, I guess. He was pretty sick all that winter we were there.

My father had a business that had to do with travel scrip--stamps that were come-ons to buy different things. It was quite the fad then. My uncle and some of his friends in Portland got the idea that they would start a company that would sell travel scrip. When you bought something at the store, you'd get so many tickets that you could use for traveling on the railroad. The business just got going and was beginning to make money for them when another green stamp business or something like that came in--a big, well-established company. They put my father and uncle out of business. I don't know the ins or outs of it, but I know they had to dissolve their business entirely. My father was the one that had the money to invest to get it started, so he was the one that lost the money. He didn't want to come back to North Powder after that and went up into Montana to get into several different businesses there. Mother and I stayed in North Powder.

I: Were you about nine or ten years old?

LD: I was ten or eleven.

North Powder in the 1910s and 1920s

I: Could you tell me more about what it was like to live in North Powder at that time?

LD: North Powder was a booming, busy little city then. As I was growing up, we had three churches and the school. We had a laundry and at least two busy garages. There were general stores, a drugstore, and a meat market with a grocery attached to it. The town also had several different places to eat and always a pool hall or two.

My father passed away soon after we moved to town. That left mother with the two children--my brother and me. Her father had given her forty acres south of town when she married, just wild grass meadow. She bought land adjoining, developed a ranch, and raised two kids herself.

I: What was she intending to do with that land?

LD: Ranch. That's all she knew. That's all she wanted to do. Others tried to talk her into doing other things. She had been working at the post office, but no, she wanted a ranch. She knew she'd like it, so she went at it. She milked cows, sold the cream, and separated the milk. She bought a couple of little houses that were in town and had them moved out to our ranch. She had an artesian well drilled and built a barn, corrals, and outbuildings. There was nothing she couldn't do.

I: Did she have a fair amount of money, also?

LD: She didn't have much money to start with; she made it herself.

I: Did you have jobs at the ranch?

LD: Not much. I did quite a lot of cooking because she was outside, doing the hard labor herself.

I: How did she dress?

LD: She wore overalls and a sunhat, but, when she dressed up, she looked just like any city lady.

Of course, it was the time before cars, so Mother bought a real, blooded trotting horse from some of the other Parkers that lived on a ranch near Baker. (Carl Parker, one of the Parkers that came with my father's father when they came here from Canada.) That horse was gentle as could be but pulled the whole rig with his teeth. He was a goer--zipping down that road about as fast as a car. She drove him, but we kids couldn't drive him. When we needed a horse, we either rode a saddle horse or Old Mabel, bless her old heart. She was a faithful, old horse but deathly afraid of trains. She had been raised deep in the woods where there wasn't a train for a hundred miles.

Memories of Early School Experiences

I: What memories do you have of going to school in North Powder?

LD: It took about two hours at the very best--four miles to school in a buggy or on horseback. Coming home from school in the one-horse buggy, Gif and I met a train in the place where the track and road were side by side. Old Mabel reared up, spun around, tipped the buggy over halfway, and dumped us out. Down the road she went, back to town. Luckily, some boys caught her and we went home OK.

So it was a difficult job getting to school. We started from our house before daylight and returned after dark, when sometimes it would be thirty degrees below zero. Mother packed hot rocks and hot water bottles with several blankets, mittens, scarves, and

boots. Everyone wore "long johns," and the girls wore dresses--no jeans--and high-over shoes or boots. Many times our horse would have three-inch icicles hanging on her nose and eye lashes. Our hands would be so cold we couldn't unsnap the harness and bridle to put her in the barn.

There were no hot lunches. We took sandwiches and whatever else was handy to eat cold. The school was heated with a wood-burning stove, and those who sat close got too hot while those at a distance froze.

The rest rooms--outhouses--were outside in the school yard. Water was from a well. All ages played in the same space; it was survival of the fittest.

School programs were also social affairs--spelling bees, long poem recitals, minstrels, and plays acted out by students, singing, dancing, and music. We held debates. I recall being in one on the topic "Who was the greater, Washington or Lincoln?" Of course, we proved nothing but had some good arguments.

We had one principal who had the entire school line up in front of the schoolhouse every Monday morning, salute the flag, and name all of the presidents in order. That wouldn't be a bad idea today. I can still remember the first ten names, even after more than eighty years.

The teachers took care of their own discipline problems with a strap or paddle, and there was no sending students to someone else to take care of the problems. Consequently, there were fewer problems.

Reading was taught by learning the sounds of the letters, writing by the Palmer Method, and arithmetic by the times tables and practical applications. We had no adding machines to do our sums and certainly no computers, or even typewriters, to do the writing and spelling for us.

My most embarrassing school experience was one that I didn't live down for years. We had spelling matches where the class of fifth or sixth graders stood in a line and spelled one another down. I hated them because I was a terrible speller. As each child in the line got his or her words, I stood and shivered, worrying about what word I would get. When it was my turn, the word was *hatchet*. Bravely I started, *h-a-t*, paused, then in desperation I blurted out *s-h-i-t*. That brought the house down, and I took a lot of kidding. No wonder! And I later became a school teacher!

Activities and Changes in North Powder

I: Tell me more about the town of North Powder.

LD: North Powder started out to make major growth, but after the railroad came through in the 1880s, Baker and La Grande began to develop. That capped the migration to North Powder. At one time North Powder probably had six hundred residents.

I: You showed me a picture of a pretty good-sized hotel. What happened to it?

LD: It was a nice hotel, but when they had a fire, there was little means to combat it. That huge, old hotel opposite the lodge building went up in smoke in the early teen years.

The fire department consisted of a two-wheel cart with hoses wrapped around it like a spool of thread. A bell was rung in case of fire and volunteers pulled the cart to the fire. There was no city water system and no hydrants; some buildings had artesian wells and some had pump wells. Consequently, fires consumed whole blocks. I don't think there's a block in town that hasn't had houses that burned down; some of them were built back up and some weren't.

The main part of town burned on several occasions, once including everything on the west side of Main Street except the lodge building (now an antique store). Every block in town has had at least one fire loss.

The streets were just dirt--no gravel or surfacing. So, when it rained or snowed, they often became a lob lollie, as the old timers said. The sidewalks were made of boards; rotting underpinning and wide cracks made them hazardous.

Almost every home had a horse, cow, chickens or pigs--sometimes all of them--and outdoor johns. Picket fences were the style; if you painted them white, you were a member of the in crowd. Barns had hay mows.

When a farmer came to trade for supplies--maybe once a week--he would tie the horse to a long hitching rack that ran along the side of the dance hall on the corner of 3rd and Center Street, opposite City Hall. If the weather was cold, he'd throw a horse blanket over the horse. Many a poor saddle horse stood all day and half the night waiting for his master, who was in the saloon or playing poker in the pool hall. Many times the horse took his master home in a pretty dazed condition.

There was a nice flour mill here that was a booster, and an ice-making plant gave people employment.

The North Powder Ice Plant

I: What do you remember about the ice plant and the people who worked there?

LD: I remember that it was a very active business at one time because that was before they had refrigeration for cars.

I: Did you ever go inside it?

LD: Yes, though not in the big building where they stored the ice. There wasn't much inside the building. My husband, as he was growing up, worked there from the time he was probably ten or twelve until after we were married. He worked on the ice with a saw; they went out on the ice and cut it into eighteen-inch blocks.

I: Where did they go to get the ice?

LD: They had big ponds right there; they flooded them with water and it froze. They had cables with cross pieces on them. They ran the ice onto the cross pieces and took it up to the top. There, it scooted off; men grabbed it with tongs and shoved it on a tramway. They ran the blocks on chutes up into the buildings and stored it there in sawdust. There were two decks--one above the other, with the ice stored in layers. It stayed there frozen until they used it all summer to ice the cars.

I: Did you ever watch the process of getting the ice from the warehouse to the railroad cars?

LD: I never was right there when they were icing the cars. They were full of fruit or perishable things and had an opening in the top. Men slid those doors open and shoved big chunks of ice in. The ice never got down to where the fruit was; insulation around it kept it from melting quickly.

Other Aspects of Travel and Work

LD: So things were pretty busy for a while here. Anyone going to Baker, Portland, or other distant places took the train. At least one passenger train a day went each way through North Powder. A water tank stood near the tracks to supply the boilers on the trains.

Now it's mostly an agricultural community; people buy emergency things here now but don't depend on the stores here for most things.

I: But you used to be able to buy groceries and other merchandise?

LD: Sometimes we've had two grocery stores. Barter and trade provided much of the living in those days. If anyone needed money, they often just borrowed it from a friend and paid it back when they could.

One family would trade potatoes for hay or wood for meat. They took wheat to the mill to grind into flour. Every family had gardens and animals to provide most of their food. About all they bought was sugar, fruit, syrup, rice, beans, calico, and footwear.

Mothers seldom worked away from home. They were the bakers, seamstresses, gardeners, teachers, cooks, doctors, and family organizers--always there to care for the ill and discipline the tardy, boost the faltering, and provide solace to the troubled. The woman's work was never done--stoking the fires, cooking, cleaning, washing clothes by hand, feeding the stock, and chasing kids--though children took an active part in all the labors and rearing of the younger siblings. They learned responsibility early.

Fathers provided the income, did the managing, and often worked at added jobs as well. Wages were low, like fifty cents to a dollar a day. Ranch hands often worked forthirty dollars a month, plus board and room. Teachers earned fifty dollars a month and had to pay their own board and room and drove miles to work for eight months a term.

Social Life in North Powder

I: What sorts of social activities were there?

LD: The social life of the community centered on family gatherings, such as basket socials, dances, picnics, baseball and track, horse racing, church functions, sewing and quilting bees, celebrations, barn raising, and even thrashing bees. All the kids went along, since there were things for all ages to enjoy. They went ice skating and sledding in the winter. Town team baseball games and horse racing were weekend fun, though work always came first, and farm children had plenty of chores to do. Drugs, smoking, and carrying weapons were unheard-of vices. Young people had too much work to do to goof off and get into trouble.

The Fourth of July was a festival day for old and young alike--something for everyone. Often, a carnival company brought their games and color to town. There would be a big parade down main street, the local band leading the way, with horseback riders, decorated buggies, ex-soldiers in uniform and carrying flags, children with their favorite pets, clowns and popcorn vendors, and high-stepping teams and buggies darting around. It was a common occurrence for runaways to dash down the street as some horse became spooked by a fire cracker or popped balloon. Someone would yell, "Runaway!" The street would clear, and some sturdy hero would dash to the rescue; team, buggy, and hero would all disappear out of town in a cloud of dust.

Picnic lunches appeared at noon, and baseball games filled the p.m. hours, followed by a band concert and a dance in the evening.

The town had three or four saloons--boons to the men who could take refuge there where women never trespassed.

I: Did you hear about fights and other drunken activity?

LD: Yes. There was usually a local man, a peace officer, appointed for the day, who wore a big star and was supposed to stay sober for the duration. The one-room jail often was filled to capacity with those who couldn't handle their liquor gracefully. They didn't mind sleeping it off until someone paid their fines and they were released.

North Powder Churches

I: What can you tell me about church activity in North Powder?

LD: There were at least three churches--Baptist, Catholic, and Methodist--as far back as I can remember. They all had pretty good attendance.

I: Do you remember some of the activities they had besides their regular Sunday services?

LD: Only their Christmas programs.

Evolution of the North Powder School

LD: I was in the seventh grade when the new schoolhouse was built--the schoolhouse that's here now. There was an old one that began as a two-room, one-deck building. It served the purpse for probably five or six years. The school population outgrew that building, so they began to have classes in other buildings here in town. Then they put another deck on it and made an upstairs part. That's the way it was when I moved to town and was in second grade--a four-room schoolhouse. The outhouses were out in the yard and also an artesian well where the kids could go out and get a drink. We didn't have a gym or anything like that.

Town Services

I: Do you remember discussions among people who lived in North Powder about taxes?

LD: No, I don't. I wasn't very interested then. It didn't cost as much to run the city then as it does now. Everyone had their own well, so there was no water system. Also, no sewer system.

I: I suppose every house had its own garbage hole. You didn't have garbage pick-up, did you?

LD: No. You had to dispose of it yourself. I don't know what we did with it. I can remember everybody usually threw their dishwater right out the door. Life was pretty simple then.

Shopping in North Powder

I: Can you remember shopping in grocery stores and drugstores?

LD: You could buy almost anything you needed in North Powder then. We always had a drugstore. Most of the time in my growing up years we had a doctor and a dentist here in town. All those things are gone now.

I: What was it like to shop in the 1930s setting?

LD: When I graduated from high school, I went to work at the Huddleston's--the store that's vacant across from the post office. I worked there for a year before I went to college. Because the ceiling was high and the shelves went from floor to ceiling, they had ladders that ran on a track. You'd have to climb up that ladder, give it a push, and get whatever you wanted from high shelves. That was a lot of fun.

I: The customer stood at the counter and told you, item by item, what he or she wanted?

LD: Yes.

I: How long do you think it took most people to do their shopping?

LD: People never seemed to be in such a hurry to get things done as they are now. When they came to town, they came mostly to visit, probably, as well as shop. They did visiting along with the shopping. Where I worked, they had dry goods, farm supplies, shoes,

and bulk stuff--just about anything you could want.

I: Was it your job to wait on the customers?

LD: He hired me to do the bookkeeping for him, but it only took me about two hours every morning to post up what had been charged. I clerked the rest of the time.

I: Did you enjoy that job?

LD: Yes, I enjoyed it.

I: I suppose you knew everyone.

Louise's Apartment in North Powder

LD: Yes. I lived in town and I had an apartment, so I didn't have to drive back and forth in the winter. The apartment was in the home of a lady who gave music lessons.

I: What did you about cooking?

LD: I cooked for myself. I had two rooms --a bedroom and a front room; the front room and kitchen were all one.

I: Did she have many students?

LD: Yes. She was a wonderful musician.

I: All from North Powder?

LD: Yes. I guess most of them were. She gave piano lessons, and she was a beautiful singer. Her name was Mabel Laughlin. Since she and her husband separated, she was raising three children alone. She was a very talented person, but I never had any musical ability. I never really wanted to take music lessons, but I loved to dance--danced up a storm.

Community Dances

I: Can you tell me what went on at a community dance?

LD: Almost every Friday night we had a dance. It was at the Bungalow--a big dance hall that was rather primitive on the outside, but it had a wonderful hardwood floor. There were a lot of musicians in North Powder then; one family that lived up on the hill, the Olsons, had about eight children, two girls and the rest boys, and they were all musicians. At one time the family toured and played.

I: Did all of them play for the dances?

LD: No, not all of them. The man who had the dray business [i.e., hauling of goods with horses], Walter McGrath,

Louise, ca. 1920
Photo courtesy of Louise Dodson

and his wife were musicians, as well as their two children; they were the ones who played for most of the dances. The Olsons played with them a lot of the time.

I: Can you say what kind of music it was?

LD: It was old-time waltzes and two-steps. I think they did some three-stepping for a while. They had round dancing, too.

I: What time did the dance begin?

LD: It usually began about 8:00 and was supposed to quit about 1:00, but many a time I saw people take up a collection to give the musicians a little extra so they'd play for another hour or two. People enjoyed dancing so much, and families took their little kids.

The dance hall had several extra rooms. In one of them, a warm lunch was often served at night. There was a room where they put their coats and where little kids could wrap up in their parents' coats and sleep.

I: How much did it cost to go to one of these dances?

LD: I think a dollar or a dollar-and-a-half. Women didn't have to pay; men paid.

I: Did most of the men not bring a woman with them but simply dance with whoever was available?

LD: Pretty much. They always enjoyed the round dances, where the music stopped, the men went one way, and the women went the other way. You took whoever you stopped with. They were a lot of fun. The older men danced with the young girls so that they could learn to dance.

I: Had you always liked to dance?

LD: Oh, land, yes! I said I never saw a dance till I was about eleven years old, and I never missed one after that.

I: So you must have danced with many men.

LD: Yes. Lots of men, lots of boys--all the boys.

I: Were some of them people you hadn't known before the dance?

LD: No, it was mostly local boys from North Powder or Haines [town about ten miles away]. We also went to Haines when there wasn't a dance here and sometimes up to Muddy Creek. One wintertime when the snow was about four feet deep, a bunch of us took a four-horse team and sled to a dance there. That's when I was working here in the daytime. I got back at 6:00 in the morning and had to go to work at 7:00. I didn't get much sleep that night.

I: Then you had to work on Saturdays?

LD: Yes.

I: Was there any problem ever with liquor at these dances?

LD: Yes, a lot of times. There was one family here that was always kind of

itchy to have a fight with somebody. But if anybody started to get drunk, there was always a city marshall here.

I: And a jail.

LD: Yes, we had the jail if they started a ruckus. If they wanted to go outside and have it out, OK, but if they caused any disruption, he arrested them and let them cool off in jail.

A Town Newspaper

I: Did North Powder ever have a newspaper?

LD: Yes, we had a newspaper. The *Record Courier* people started their their first editing here in North Powder. It was the *North Powder News*.

I: Was this a weekly newspaper?

LD: I think so.

I: You read it regularly?

LD: Yes.

I: Was it mostly town news?

LD: It was about the same kind of paper it is now--just local news.

Leaving North Powder for College & School Teaching

I: After you finished school in North Powder, did you go to college?

LD: I went to college at Oregon State, or Oregon Agricultural College, as it was then, for two years. Then I decided that I was going to run out of money, so I finished the course that I was taking and transferred over to the normal school. I studied a year there and then taught school at Mount Carmel for a year at $130 a month; I also did the janitor work, carried in wood, and made fires because we had to burn wood for heat.

I had eighteen students in my room, some six feet tall, and I weighed less than a hundred pounds. I drove four miles to school.

I: Did you do that until you got married?

LD: Yes, then I got married. I didn't teach anymore, except for substitute work. In later years, I took a refresher course in La Grande so I could go back to teaching.

Harold Dodson, with his and Louise's sons, Dale and Don, ca.1935
Photo courtesy of Louise Dodson

Buying a House in North Powder

LD: My husband and I bought this place [where she still lives] in 1936, right after the Depression. We were ranching, but the Depression put us out of ranching, and we never did get back into it. My husband worked for the railroad, then at the ice plant and various places. But after my son took over my mother's property, that was down here on Sunny Slope [on the northwest side of North Powder], and he began to buy a lot more, too. All the rest of the family have been deep in the ranching business.

Living and Teaching in Vale OR

LD: We went to Vale and stayed there for twenty years. Then because of my age--I was sixty--the rule was not to hire teachers older than that. They tried to get me in but decided they couldn't, so I was doing substitute work. We had bought property there and were going to stay there. Then, at Juntura, which is about forty miles from Vale, toward Burns, they'd lost their teacher at midterm and called on me to see if I would come out and finish the term for her. That's what I did and stayed another year. After that, I thought I had better quit. We sold our property in Vale and came back to North Powder-- home again--and I've been here ever since. My husband passed away in 1975 when he was seventy-five.

North Powder in 2002

I: What keeps North Powder going?

LD: It seems to me that now the town is kind of becoming more of a retirement center. Most of the houses that are being sold or rented are occupied by people that are retiring. They want to get away from cities where the traffic is so dense and houses are bumped up against each other. They like to get to a rural community.

I: How does that affect your schools? Is the school population down?

Front of house in North Powder, puchased in 1936, where Louise currently lives
Photo courtesy of Louise Dodson

Louise during her teaching days, 1960s
Photo courtesy of Louise Dodson

LD: It fluctuates, but we have pretty good school turnout. My granddaughter has twenty-six people in her seventh grade room --about as many as they can handle in each room. We draw a lot of students from the Haines area [between North Powder and Baker City OR] and even from Baker. Haines doesn't have a high school and we do, and we have a good athletic program; kids want to get into athletics. They think they get a better chance to shine if they come to a smaller school. We've had really good luck with getting good coaches.

I: And your family has stayed around?

LD: They've all stayed here, yes. This is my clan here--from North Powder clear to where you go up the hill going to Union. They spoil me to death. I got a bee sting yesterday out here. It wasn't a bad sting at first, but it began to get worse toward the latter part of the day. So I called up the school's first aid place to see if they knew something for this bee sting. My granddaughter talked to the guy there; he came and so did she. She no more than got here when my son came. How they got word that fast that I had a bee sting I don't know. I just had to laugh at them.

I: They watch over you pretty well then.

LD: They surely do.

Louise as queen of North Powder centennial celebration, June, 2002

Photos courtesy of Louise Dodson

One of Louise's paintings, completed in recent years
Photo by Eugene Smith

One of Louise's unfinished paintings
Photo by Eugene Smith

Appendix: Poems by Louise Dodson

DREAMING
By Louise Parker Dodson
February, 1992

I wander down the country lane,
The air is cool and sweet.
The wild roses grow by the fences,
The dust clouds at my feet.

I dream of times of yester year -
When wandering, I would seek
The busy anthills teeming midst;
The birds nests by the creek.

Each tree was there for me to climb,
Its coolness I embraced.
The garter snake that slithers by
Would hardly leave a trace.

The winding old rail fences
Seemed to lead me on my way.
The pioneers surely put them there
For me to walk in play.

The strongly scented chokeberry blooms,
The swaying golden rod,
The pink wild roses and columbine
Brightened the path I trod.

The gray squirrels sat upon their mounds
and chittered as I passed,
The frogs would croak a merry chorus
saying, “Summer will not last.”

Those wander dreams of a country girl;
Riding her horse to school,
Mulling the secrets of the birds in the trees.
And the teeming life in the pool.

MY LEGACY

By Louise Parker Dodson
Mother's Day, 1990

The longer I live the more my mind dwells on the beauty and wonders of God's world.
I have loved the feel of wet grass under my feet and the sounds of running water by my side.

I have climbed the hills, sampled the exquisite beauty of the wild flowers and pine trees.
I have gathered the fruits of the native bushes and sampled the rocks of its hillsides,
Harkened to the subtle promises of early spring.

When I would sleep under the trees of the forest and savor the sounds of the night, the gentle wind in the tree branches - gaze up at the jewels of stars, twinkling in the darkening sky.
They seemed to speak of things to come. A greater splendor even than this.

I have quaffed the odors of the new mown hay and the breath of cows as they munch its savory bounty. No man-made perfumes could ever match these:
The newly turned soil, the odor of sage, chokecherry blossoms carried on the gentle breeze, huckleberrry fruit and ripe apples,lilac blossoms and sauerkraut working. The sweet dusky odor of a hay or straw stack as you burrow into its depths.

I have a great love and respect for this beautiful world - for I have tilled its soil, gathered ts harvest, and shared its great bounties. I have embraced its changing seasons, with their ever changing beauties and peace and promise.

There can be nothing greater than the communing with nature and the joy of feeling "in tune" with its music and artistry. Thank you Lord, for the health and sensitivity to climb its mountains, roam its forests, fish its streams, cross its deserts. To feel the sting of the frosts, the oppression of its heats, the coolness of the rains, and the strengths of the winds. All seem to add to the joys of going and coming along the paths of daily living.

What greater happiness than to have lived among such bounties of Eastern Oregon, in the time of its pristine freshness and unspoiled beauty.

I would leave no greater legacy to my loved ones than to pass on to them an appreciation and love of nature and a will to keep it pure and clean.

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