Jack Evans

1/98, T1, S1

JG: This is an interview of January 27th, 1998 with Jack Evans of La Grande, Oregon.

JE: …elsewhere…what was going elsewhere. We used to drive out here when I was a kid and shop. And we used to also stay at Hot Lake. We had friends there and my mother and I were both hospitalized there a couple times. But it really hasn't changed too much geographically since then. The…there was a mill out there where the wrecking yard is today. It was the Long Pine Lumber Company. And they… You know it was on both…both sides of the road, as I remember, and maybe shavings or something were transported across the road…something that was overhead. The Wigwam burner was right beside the road on the right as you go out there and the foundations for it were still there until not too long ago when they reworked the intersection there.

JG: About year was that, Jack?

JE: Oh, from 1933 to 1935 or '6. Um, there was that mill. One…one question I was going to ask you, but I'll ask you when we go through your…was exactly when the George Palmer Lumber Company started. It was probably about 1905 because they didn't start drawing on their holdings around Looking Glass area until 1908 when the railroad made it available them, but I don't really __ clear or not.

JG: What I… It seemed like that their…you know, the big push to start with was at Hopper Valley. I think it was…if I remember right…like 1907 to 1912… Or no, it's a seven-year period if I recall right that they cut that whole thing out.

JE: '07 to '14, something like that?

JG: About a quarter-million board feet would've been like 1907 to '14 or it would've been '05 to '12. Someplace right in there.

JE: I'm not entirely sure, but it seems to me when they ran the railroad on up the branch they didn't build it in 1908. And I think they…the year before probably they at least got it far enough to…for Palmer to use their holdings. And Looking Glass is named after the creek which is named after old Chief Looking Glass, Pashwyakite. But they…their…they had their little logging railroad that ran down to the __ at that point, Palmer Junction. And they…their Camp Number One was up to Looking Glass at the point where the fish hatchery is now. That was where their logging camp was. The area down in there beyond that I don't know too much about except that at the same time the Palmers were buying timber lands there C. W. Nibley and his associates were buying up timber lands on Smith Mountain and various other places in Wallowa County. And probably about the time Palmers established Camp Five on Smith Mountain side of the river and built their spur railroad line down the Vincent Grade to the siting that was then known as Vincent just north of Minam a little ways…at about that time probably Nibley and __ was pretty well established. They built a mill in Wallowa in 1907, I think it was. And they had quite extensive holdings north in Wallowa Country north of Wallowa. And they had a small logging railroad operation.

JG: It looked…sounded like the research I did that like Palmer after they cut out Palmer Valley then they moved to Smith Mountain and took about equal volume off there.

JE: I think that's probably correct. Camp Five was quite an establishment in it's day. And when Palmer…that may be coincidence, I don't know. Vincent was named after Vincent Palmer, one of the family. But George Palmer died in 1922 that may have been when they decided to sell the operation, I don't know. That was when Bowman Hicks, Kansas City based outfit, bought them out. And…and they operated the mill here for a time. There wasn't too much timber left, I don't think. And during the Depression they shut down and at the end of the Depression I don't think they ever really reopened it. It was…that was the end of the mill here. But in '23 Bowman Hicks bought the Nibley-__ Lumber Company in Wallowa mill. And they operated it until 1945 and then sold out to the J. Herbert Bate Company of New York City.

JG: The Bowman Hicks in La Grande here do you know if they pretty much just took over the Palmer mill?

JE: That's what they did.

JG: Same location there.

JE: Yeah, they took over the Palmer mill.

JG: Fairgrounds.

JE: Uh-huh. Palmer mill…I don't know exactly when they started, but I think it must've been the 1905 date that you have noted for that general operation. They had a fire in 1913 that burned the mill and they rebuilt it immediately. And I don't know that it cost 'em too much in the way of operating time. The Bate Company ran the mill in Wallowa until…I think it was 1961 that they had labor troubles and broke the union, ran the mill long enough to prove their point and then shut it down and demolished it. The other mills around this area I don't know too much about, except Charles Fox's, of course. And in 1881, I believe it was, Daniel Chaplin, who established the town of La Grande, had two mills, one at Meacham and one at Hilgard. And the one at Meacham interestingly enough was acquired by C. W. Nibley, Grande Ronde Lumber Company…Nibley and the Stoddards were Grande Ronde Company…in sometime early in the century. Nibley and the Grande Ronde Lumber Company acquired Chaplin's mill at Meacham and operated it. And then about…I think it was 1908 or '10…as soon as Sumpter Valley Railway reached Whitney Meadow Nibley shipped the machinery over there and set up the mill at Whitney which ran until about World War II.

JG: That was out at Meacham?

JE: Uh-huh. And that was the mill at Meacham and that's where it went. [laughs]

JG: It almost sounds like the, of course, that the railroad run through in 1884 that Chaplin that's why, you know, got to Hilgard with cutting…I imagine on the right-of-way…

JE: Yeah, well, Chaplin had a contract with the railroad to supply…I've forgotten how many board feet of timber and lumber for all their various kinds of construction. I think he was also maybe engaged in the tie cutting. He invested an awful lot of things.

JG: Yeah. ‘Cause you’d have tie cutting and trussels and…

JE: Yeah. People who settled up around Camilla were nearly all tie cutters.

JG: Oh yeah. Do you recall, Jack, anything of like how they’re cutting those ties? Whether they were sawin’ or __ ‘em or…?

JE: I don’t know. I really don’t. I’ve wondered sometimes and wondered whether the first ones were shaped at all or not. They must’ve been and I would’ve thought they probably hued ‘em square or rectangular, you know.

JG: It sounded like, you know, __ at least two sides ‘cause some __ round on two sides and then…

JE: Once they established a mill that handled them then of course they would saw them out and you’d have mountains and mountains of slab wood and trimmings [laughs] which would add a little bit to the fire hazard.

JG: Oh yeah. __ slab wood for fire. [laughs] On the Grande Ronde within the valley itself, Jack, do you recall like vegetative types __ been here?

JE: Not much. Crossing the valley by car when I was little in the ‘30s what I noticed mostly were that the farms were smaller by-and-large, had lots of windbreaks. It… It has only been in the last forty years or so that you see the miles and miles of nothing at all because the trees and the brush have all been eliminated and the fence rows in order to get the highest yield feasible, which is good and bad. I used to joke about some fellow over by Union who’d field blew away every winter and referred to it as our annual soil exchange program with Umatilla County. [laughs]

JG: Well, it’s still doin’ that. [laughs] Every time it dries out the wind blows.

JE: Yeah and then you got a real dust storm. But the river… It took them a long time to turn the whole thing into a canal between Orodell and Mt. Harris, but they did get the job done. I hadn’t known until I read your material that it was the railroad that was responsible for a good deal of it ‘cause they wanted to avoid getting their…having their yards flooded. And I imagine the city was happy about it ‘cause they were kind of tired of having part of the downtown under water every time there was a little bit of a __ in the spring.

JG: Yeah, ‘cause some of the old pictures there show like, you know, way up on Jefferson there were, you know, flood outs.

JE: Yeah. There’s that real nice picture of the Slater building that was down there…the one with the metal front that was built in ’91…that was the ’94 flood and it was sandbagged pretty heavily. But the river as I remember it…and I only remember most of it back for the last thirty, forty years…but they…those channels out in the valley where they had originally begun as ditches had reached the point where the banks are twenty feet high and the water is twenty, thirty feet across, you know, as they are in so much of the area. When I was in my teens we came out here one time with a friend to hunt ducks. And it was the lower end of the big field that’s just the other side of Rinehart right just as the river goes around…it turns and goes into that gorge, that pretty, little, rocky gorge that the highway used to go through.

JG: Oh yeah. Where the highway went through?

JE: Yeah. There’s that…the end of that field down there at that time was all slough. They drained that part of it and so that it’s not any longer, but at that time, why,

sloughs in there were perfect place to hunt…hunt ducks because somebody'd rigged a blind in there, quite a nice one with a wooden floor and a screen across the front and you could sit there and have a cup of coffee and take a whack at a duck when they flew in. And there's, of course, nothing of that remaining today. It's just a big field.

JG: What about the type of vegetation that was in that slough area?

JE: I don't remember anything different than what's there today. The same kind of brush, you know, more brush probably, but I would imagine mostly willow and alder. And there…as I recall there were probably more cottonwoods along the river at that time. Of course…

JG: Get down in the gorge there's quite a few cottonwoods. It seemed to me there used to be __ a rookery in there.

JE: There were. The heron rookery __ fall of that, but it seems to me there was quite a bit more. The gorge was always a pretty little spot and it hasn't changed much. You can't drive through it anymore.

JG: No, you can't.

JE: But it would be nice if they would re…repave it make a little scenic wayside through there. It'd be nice if they did that. But that part of the river I don't think has changed hardly any. If you were intimately connected with it locally I suppose any area there would be pretty significant changes that somebody not acquainted with it wouldn't notice.

JG: But there's… I want to get into like comin' out of Union there's…or through Union there's a lot of cottonwoods from there, you know, upstream.

JE: Right.

JG: And the same way La Grande coming down through the park area there. And then do you recall anything about how far out the valley the major…you know, where there were a lot of cottonwoods __?

JE: I really can't remember. If we… If we made side trips to Cove or anything like that I don't remember them at all. We were… We were probably in Union when I was little because we drove to Burns…to Hines I was probably four or five years old. And I really don't remember anything about that trip at all hardly. Trips to Hot Lake were to there and back, you know. We'd stay over maybe a weekend. But the thing I remember best about the trees around there, that avenue of cottonwoods that's along the foot of the hill where the spring ran is still there. And it was a beautiful avenue to walk down, which we did when I was a kid. But the…around the lake itself and from there out into the valley for quite a ways it was kind of marshy as it still is. But that's the kind of country that nothing much but brush would grow in. And I've forgotten when it was that they planted all those willows along the highway, but those were planted, the willows and the Russian olives, maybe during the twenties. But prior to that I doubt if anything but brush grew out there, mostly willow and thorn.

JG: __ or willow __ brush __.

JE: I…about the… There were some of the things that have puzzled me for a time. The…you read expert opinions these days and one of them tells us that red-topped grass, for example, is an introduced species not native to the area. But the first

pioneers through here were remarking that the red-topped grass in the valley was as high as a horse's belly.

JG: I remember that.

JE: Which makes me wonder a little bit just who introduced it. And then there was the other one that anytime you see sagebrush you're looking at overgrazed land that the sagebrush has moved into. But this leads me to wonder who…if it wasn't the cattlemen who it might've been because the earliest pioneers complained bitterly about the endless miles of sagebrush.

JG: Plus even in the valley on those higher areas there… Of 1863 when __ survey he making some locations there of what he crossed, you know, go into some sagebrush areas northeast of Union there and then out there towards the airport.

JE: East of Baker, you know, for quite a distance there's a lot of it.

JG: Oh sure!

JE: And Craig Mountain the lower __, that's all sagebrush, and I imagine it always was sagebrush.

JG: From the Powder River, you know, I mean from there out south to Idaho, you know, and Nevada…

JE: You're in semi-desert country and that's where the sagebrush flourishes anyway.

JG: But even, you know, in the valley here as lush as it was there's still, you know, evidently some sagebrush.

JE: Yeah, there were a few patches of it. The patch that's out there east of the airport I think's probably always been there. So I don't think you should…one should assume naturally when you see a sagebrush that it's been overgrazed by cattle. [laugh]

JG: In 1863 there wasn't that many cattle…

JE: There wasn't any cattle around. [laughs]

JG: ___

JE: And who brought the red-topped grass in?

JG: Do you recall, Jack, anything over…since you've been here as far as like fish, you know, in the valley itself, any of the salmon runs or steelhead runs?

JE: Not a thing. I really don't. That was something that I never had any contact with or heard anything about. The only stories about the fish that I remember were the…what they called the red fish that were the landlocked salmon in Wallowa Lake. They were taken out of there by the barrels and are, of course, are long gone. But those are the…that's the only thing I remember. I remember… We used to go up Bear Creek to the intake for the city water system and watch the salmon jumping in the spring. But don't know anything about it other than that, you see, so that's just a blank where I'm concerned.

JG: Do you recall like going up above La Grande going out towards Hilgard of the change since 1960 when they put the freeway in there of anything during construction or change in vegetation up through that area?

JE: Not too much. At Hilgard… I can barely remember where the golf course was, just above the road there, it's now the waystation. And the motel that was about where the waystation is. And there was a gas station at Five Points, that was the name of the spot. The professional mapmakers because they…I suppose it's because they don't know how to use apostrophes, but they have dropped all of

them and they're also trying to drop any 's' that looks like it might be a possessive from every title, so they now call it Five Point Creek, but it was also Five Points. And there was a gas station there at Five Points right where the little bridge is where the old road was next to the freeway. And originally the highway went on…the old Oregon Trail Highway…went on up through Hilgard and then up the side of the mountain and came out kind of up on top before you head across to Spring Creek. And the…by the time I remember it I think it had been changed so that it ran roughly where the freeway goes now. But when they put the freeway in, and when they put that highway in too, they made a lot of the changed right there at what is now Hilgard Junction where the Starkey road takes off, where the park is. And they completely removed a sizable point of land that came down. That's the one that the Oregon Trail would get up to get up on top. So if you cross the overpass there you're about forty feet under the trail, which is right above your head…was. [laughs]

JG: Was.

JE: If you're up above you can follow it easily and it, of course, __ it's in midair out there.

JG: You'd have to get a little switchback to get up to that elevation.

JE: But whether they did any much else to the river area there I don't think they did. The… There was always a nice little spot there with cottonwoods and that grove is still there. And the slope across the river it's been planted with pines more recently. That's where there center for the juveniles is. That area it was a flat when I was younger. And that is the point where Stuart remarked about the echo in the canyon. But it's not changed any so far as I can tell substantially.

JG: Yeah. It's kind __. I found an old negative that…it would've been looking probably from about where the freeway is looking down across where the Hilgard State Park is. The cottonwoods that are in there are really small. It was taken probably about 1910, I think, or something like that. It didn't have a date on it, but with the collection that…it was the old Wright Drugstore, the guy that probably he took it, or, you know, _ that collection.

JE: __ Wright might've taken it.

JG: So it's kind of an interesting one to… I __ goin' back, you know, rephotographin' that, you'd have to get up on the hill there __.

JE: You might have to get a skyhook and hang in midair if it was taken on that point. [laugh]

JG: ___ But it's from that angle.

JE: It'd be interesting to see it.

JG: It had the old trussel bridge goin' __ the Grande Ronde with the road goin' up that way. But the…

JE: Did it have…is it railroad or ___?

JG: That would a had to been the road because the railroad came up right along the river on…you know, as you're going up the river it'd be on the right-hand bank.

JE: Yeah, that's right.

JG: Because like where you said that correction facility is it'd be across the river, you know, in there.

JE: Yeah. It was over there.

JG: The old CC camp I guess was right in there, too.

JE: Yeah. It's on up the road a ways, but further up you get up toward the gun club you can see where some more tressels were crossing the river up there.

JG: But is just came out of Hilgard there and they just held to that side of the bank so they didn't have to cross it, you know, till they got farther up river.

JE: Okay. I wasn't quite sure where it went although I remember when they ended the logging railroad operation Dad pulled up the tracks. We were going through there one evening at dusk on our way somewhere and stopped because one of the engines was sitting there and I saw that they other one had been…had just been cut up into little pieces. But the engine that was sitting there still had steam up in it, it was cooling off, and they had been using it during the day obviously. That's the one that survives and is now down at Prineville.

JG: Do you remember about what year that was, Jack?

JE: I keep… Seems to me it was '49 or '50 or '51, but it may have been a little later. It was right around 1950 sometime.

JG: It was down Boise Cascade 'cause I always thought, you know, they quit by that time and they said the last rail…or short log that was hauled by the rail was in '56, but it…unless they had some deck someplace, you know, ___.

JE: They might have. I can't remember if we were on our way back to Hermiston when we lived there or whether it was earlier than that. It could've been '54 or '5 I suppose.

JG: 'Cause I came out '55 and they weren't hauling anything at that time. I still swear I saw the locomotive parked there at Hilgard…near Hilgard, but as far as railcars I never saw any sign of 'em.

JE: No. There weren't… There weren't any cars there at that time. They just finished pulling up the track and they were apparently using locomotives in connection with that. And then they had already cut one up. They save the other one and were…offered it to the city of La Grande and La Grande as might be expected said, "What would we want with something like that?" so they ended up giving it to the Historical Society and it set at Oaks Park in Portland for quite a while. And then the Oregon Historical Society lent it to the Cass Valley Scenic Railway in West Virginia and forgot where it was, forgot they even had it. And then not too long ago they suddenly realized to their consternation that they had a locomotive out there somewhere! And they got a hold of the people in Cass Valley who had already cannibalized it for parts. So the people in West Virginia evidently found parts to back on it and then they sent it out here and it was soon in good working order and I gather that the people in Prineville are doing scenic tours with it, which is nice. Beautiful engines. I didn't like the shape of their bodies. But that was the only contact I had in any sense with the railroad logging around here. And of course the operation at Perry was long gone. The old…if anybody want to take a good look at a lumber camp what's left up at Starkey Camp a lot of that's original. People use the little cabins for summer homes. They're beginning to show their age pretty seriously, but they're still there.

JG: Yeah __ yeah. Do you recall, Jack, of anything up the Grande Ronde as far as fish runs? Or what about fishing of the both Indians or white man?

JE: Never heard a thing. This just something… I have fished myself up the Grande Ronde a little bit and just like present day fly fishing anywhere, you know, it's not… Never remember any comments much about that sort of thing except what you usually here "fishing certainly isn't as good as it used to be", but that's about the size of it.

JG: ___ there look like, you know, the Grande Ronde had been worked over so much between the mining, the logging and all that, you know, ___ that you lost a lot of the pools…

JE: The only fishing I did in it, and at Tony just a couple times, was after you get way up when it's starting to get to be fast water with rapids going down through the draw next the road. That was when I got a few bites and caught a small fish or two, you know. But up there it's more like it is, oh, say on the Lostine or something like that. You're above where it's mostly just turbid water.

JG: What kind of fish were in there, Jack?

JE: I don't know. Those were trout.

JG: Trout?

JE: Yeah. I think rainbows. But the other fish…well, one of my friends, this is back in the '60s, around 1960, '59 maybe, he had a Model-A roadster and we went down over to Grant Chandler's place. Grant's place was just on the other side of the river and part of it was on the river. And we spent in there the nicest afternoon there with a six-pack of beer and plenty of worms catching suckers and square-mouths, as they were called. It was fun and we filled a gunny sack with 'em. And we brought it home and his dad planted it all around things in the garden and planted a bunch of 'em around the rose bushes and the rose bushes were enormous for a few years. [laughs] I think more could be done in the way of garden fertilizer if people would bother to catch lots of suckers.

JG: Yeah. It might help the fishing, too.

JE: Mm-hmm. It might help… The __ fish might be helped out a little bit if we used the suckers for fertilizer.

JG: Do you recall, Jack, anything of…ever hear anything about them logging lodge pole or cutting…not lodge pole, but cottonwood?

JE: No. I saw your question there and the Victors had the mill over in Wallowa and they cut cottonwood for a while. And knives had to be good and sharp if they planed it. It's fuzzy, you know, and if you can get cured without it warping or tying itself in knots and you finish it nicely it can be a rather pretty lumber. And they had some that was really nice, you know, fancy figure and everything. But with them I think it was more a novelty than anything else. And the… Nowadays we're getting some plantation because popular is…it's not acidic and it's…makes such…so much better paper than what we have now that turns brown and crumbles in no time at all. You get all this nice white paper to make your photocopies on and you file it for a couple years and you go back and it's already breaking in two. [laughs] A lot of it is the kind of thing you don't want to keep any longer than that if that long. Nonetheless, it would be nice to have a better…better access to non-acidic paper for things that you don't want to deteriorate.

JG: ___

JE: Yeah. But all the cottonwood I ever saw cut really, and I'm sure that was true around here, they cut it to get rid of it and they did their best to get it burned up and done with and you'd see these huge piles of old roots and ashes out in the fields. It's…was never considered, I think, a commercial proposition. Nowadays it might be. They're a very pretty tree along a stream, it's not nice to have one in your yard. They're awfully messy. From a little distance they're a really pretty… [laugh]

JG: It's real a lot of shade for the stream.

JE: Lots of shade.

JG: Out there in the valley, too, where the…that other rookery of blue heron…or great blues…

JE: Oh, that's…

JG: …Catherine Creek.

JE: Off of Catherine Creek northeast of Hot Lake.

JG: Yeah.

JE: Yeah. That was all…all marshland and it's been drained fairly recently with the canals put in by the Corp of Engineers and I think probably to the detriment of the area. It looks like it's mostly alkali, I don't know whether it really is or not. But I've often thought that if you won a billion dollars it'd be nice to acquire all that and get rid of all the ditching and breach all the dykes and raise the biggest mosquitoes in Oregon. [laughs]

JG: The…of course out there at Ladd Marsh they've increased their holdings and now hold over three thousand acres.

JE: I saw that figure. I didn't know how much that it had grown, but I'm glad they've done it. And over across the road just south of the wrecking yard I understand they own a large chunk in there that they're hoping to develop. I'm not sure just what they can do with that. It's just a big featureless flat. But they might be able to put in ponds or something over there.

JG: I'd rather the… I don't know what they're total, you know, long-term plans are or even use it for trading for ___.

JE: Yeah. It might be that they could do that.

JG: __ it's not where they're pursuing it, but the opportunity to pursue __.

JE: I think the… I think that refuge is a really…is a real asset to that…to the county.

JG: Tryin' to pull back some of these, you know, marshlands ___.

JE: It's… It's almost gone almost too far one way. Of course we…as a species we have a way of going to extremes over just about everything.

JG: Oh yeah, you know. That's… You wouldn't know how to act if you didn't. [laughs] You have to wait until it's almost disaster.

JE: Once you're on the outside looking in that's where I usually try to be.

JG: It's like the Willamette, right now they're concerned __ through that when the Willamette…

JE: They cleaned it up once and now they're…now they're hoping to clean it up again and they're decided they're gonna have to drink out of it so maybe they better.

JG: Yeah. Start to get a little __.

JE: You think of the Columbia and what it and the…well, the Snake and the others run into it…what they've been through and the water can't be very good by the

time it hits the Pacific Ocean. And over on the Snake, Shoshone Falls is one of the most magnificent cataracts in the world, really. And if you go to see it you want to see if before the first of May because during the summer they draw all the water out of the Snake River and you see all these cliffs with a few little trickles running down it and that's all there is.

JG: But when you're there… I happened to be there when it was, you know…

JE: Now you gotta be there before they start irrigating or you don't see it.

JG: I have a picture, you know, it's pretty spectacular.

JE: Oh yeah. The cataract itself is tremendous.

JG: You have to cover your lens with all the mist in the air. [laughs]

JE: But you still should…if they…if they irrigate it to the extent that it all soaked in or vanished out or evaporated out there, why, that'd be the end of the Snake River right there.

JG: Yeah__. Yeah, that kind of fills me in, you know, kind of go over the notes, Jack, of…

JE: You really need somebody that's, oh, spent their whole life here, you know, and closely acquainted with all of that certain thing.

JG: Unfortunately, there's not too many left.

JE: Yeah. There aren't too many.

JG: I think of people who were here when we first moved here, January '56, and any number of them told interesting stories about the early days. That was where I heard about the valley being so flooding the one year when you could row a boat all the way to Union. I wasn't sure which year it was, I thought it might be a '94 year, but I see from your work it's the '63 one.

JE: That was one year, you know, of course earlier…

JG: There were a bunch of 'em.

JE: Yeah. 'Cause there was quite a few, you know, that pre-dated that and had that, you know, real heavy floods across the valley and they're way back, oh, before the turn of the century about 1894, I think, or someplace in there ___.

JG: '94 was a big one. And then there's, oh, on…remember on Catherine Creek it seemed like, you know, in the teens there and the twenties, you know, that every…just every low __ would be another big one.

JE: The Corp of Engineers has always had it in mind to dam every running stream everywhere. Once you get started as specialists you want to continue your specialty. And the Corps were only interest relief for a long time was in building more dams.

JG: Oh yeah. If they could've they'd do it on every stream that existed.

JE: I think so.

JG: That was their agenda.

JE: They keep getting their appropriations that way and, yeah, the map I've seen…their projected work, a detailed map of the whole…this region, the Northwest, and every stream on it has a little…wrote a little blue lines across so that you…one pool finish you put in another dam. And they were… I remember a fellow that was here representing the Corp, nice guy too, he was checking out the proposed reservoir on Catherine Creek just above the park. And I went with him, he wanted to know about any pioneer or other structures that might be there

and I pointed out some cabins in the area and said it seemed a real shame to flood a beautiful meadow like that for no other reason than to provide trash fish for people who liked to float in boats. And he said, "well, it would help with floods." And I said, "I don't think the floods are probably serious enough to warrant the kind of expenditure in tax dollars that you'd be looking at." But my opinion it wouldn't mean anything to them, you know. It was just a chance to say something. I certainly wasn't aggressive towards him, he was a nice guy doin' a careful job. He took pictures and things like that. But the fortunate thing from my point of view, and that's a selfish one, is that the Indians complained. It was a place where they had camped and fished in the past evidently and they didn't want to see a dam put in there and their weight…their word would carry a lot more weight than mine would these days.

JG: I got into the…their side in the court there when they had that about the…to stop that one. __

JE: It seemed to me it'd be a dreadful thing to do is put a dam in there. And they wanted to put one in where the…that big wide spot is up the Grande Ronde, there's a farmhouse up there and I think the National Guard has a shooting range at the far end of it.

JG: It that by the shooting range, the gun club there, Jack?

JE: Not the one with the gun club. It's the one further up where the National Guard uses.

JG: I knew it was up in there someplace.

JE: They have that great, big, wide meadow up there. And they wanted to dam that and __ thought it would be a wonderful idea because here all the boating you'd have up there that was real close by and handy, but again I didn't really see that it would do any good. And if you've got a really bad year they're not much good for flood control because the pools are all full and they're all gonna have to run over anyway.

JG: Oh yeah.

JE: So it doesn't stop anything. Is that Tom? That must be Tom. It is Tom. [laughs]

JG: Yeah. 'Cause they had some of that like up there at the dam at Perry when they had the sawmill one __ got in there and broke loose, you know, came down and took out Orodell there right at the mouth of the canyon. It took out quite a few buildings.

JE: The dams for that kind of operation are usually not intended to be permanent so they aren't quite as strong as a permanent structure would be and their…the chance of them washing out is a little greater. I don't know of any other places where dams were contemplated.

JG: They were…like over at Elgin they were lookin' at a big one over in there.

JE: Yeah. You mentioned that.

JG: 'Cause they went through in the '40s they had a list of all these different places.

JE: They were gonna put in hundreds of dams. I remember about that.

JG: The one at Elgin I guess what it was they kind of lost interest, you know, they started lookin' at how much it was gonna cost and what the benefits were.

JE: [telephone ringing] Oops. [tape pause]…use for spares, but [tape interruption]…dam just a useless aside, but they were…there was a good deal of

talk about, oh, putting a dam up the Grande Ronde and one up Catherine Creek. And I think some of the farmers thought that would be helpful, I'm not sure just why, but it applied to what…something they were doing. Anyway, I wrote a letter to the paper suggesting that we should set our sights a little higher and not be such pikers and we should put in a dam three hundred feet high between Pumpkin Ridge and Mt. Harris and that way we could sale the beachfront property in Cove for high prices ___. [laughs]

JG: They'd have all the water in the world to irrigate __. [laughs]

JE: Make a dandy lake!

JG: Oh, you bet!

JE: I don't know what you'd use it for…

JG: Like Lake Powell, or, you know, one of those.

JE: I don't know what you'd use it for, but you can have it. [laughs]

JG: _ have excursions out there and this day and age you could water-ski and do all sorts of things.

JE: Or troll for alligators, as they refer to it in the South. [laughs] Oh my. [recording stopped]

2/29/03, T1, S1

TM: It's January 29th, 2003 and I'm at 806 Main in La Grande. We're speaking today with Jack Evans who is our narrator. We're gonna be talking about a number of things today, focusing somewhat on architectural issues in and around La Grande. And, in fact, Jack's house, maybe we'll have time to return to that, at 806 Main, is itself a La Grande landmark having been built in 1892 and Jack has done a lot of remodeling and restoring on this house. We maybe return to that later. But, Jack, I thought maybe today to begin maybe talk about downtown issues. The new town of La Grande, you had mentioned, was punctuated…the building of downtown buildings was punctuated by some fires. Would you wantta kind of start there as a starting point a little bit?

JE: As good as place as any. The Old Town of La Grande established the summer…spring and summer of 1962 and it was La Grande until the railroad came through in 1884. Daniel Chaplin who staked out the first land claim in what is now La Grande, in Old Town, also…he ended up, I think, with 320 acres, but at any rate he…when the railroad came through he offered them 105 acres for the purpose of establishing a division plant here and thereby nosed out Union and North Powder as being candidates for a division point. This was ideal place for them to set up marshaling yards and make up the trains that local…locally based engines would boost over the Blue Mountains. The business of developing the town was turned over to some people in Portland after it had been planted and…[tape interruption]…the various properties and, of course, __ later bought up lots of property and it changed hands numerous times in 1884 and into 1885. But by that time the town was pretty well established already, the new one. And a number of people, most of the businesses, immediately moved down to trackside and built frame buildings to house all of these operations. Unfortunately, being a

wooden town it had the same problem that others did and it burned out. The first time in 1886. The fire started in the back of J. Brooks' clothing store and jumped Adams Avenue, he was on the south side of Adams, it jumped the street and following that I think it burned seven blocks, six or seven, anyway, nearly all of the town that had been built at that time. And this included the railroad depot which had been finished in 1884. So the town was only two years old when the fire occurred. They rebuilt it immediately and began using brick. The principle building in the new town was a big brick one put up by Aaron Sommer. Sommer was a merchant who had had a store, a clothing store primarily, in Old Town and he moved down to the New Town, put up the brick building and also had his house moved down to the New Town. It is a large white one and it…it was on Fourth Street, I think. It is visible in the old 19…1875 photograph of La Grande. But anyway, Sommer had it moved down to the intersection of Fourth and Depot Streets and it sat there for quite a long time. But after the fire of the downtown section was immediately rebuilt and more brick buildings were put up. It still, I think, had a predominance of framed buildings. There's a very nice picture taken I think from the top of a grain elevator, it was taken in 1889. It shows the view of the downtown area looking west. And in it a few brick buildings are visible, but of all the buildings that are in it only one… Aaron Sommer's house was in…was there at the time, but I don't think it shows. This picture was taken in 1889. But of all the building that are there in that picture only one survives today and that's a brick house on Fourth Street where Nettie Bushner lived for many years. It's still there. And it was… I don't know who the original owner was. It was the house that Dr. Molliter lived in in the later part of the last century, that is the nineteenth century.

TM: Where is that house? It's at…

JE: It's just over here on Fourth. Yeah, it's a brick house. It's right next door to…on the north, to Lester Real Estate's house.

TM: Okay.

JE: That big Sears Roebuck house.

TM: That big house, yeah.

JE: It's right next door to that on the north. And it shows in a couple of the early photos of the town. But everything else in that picture, all those buildings, are gone. And in that picture the Presbyterian church is there so it had to be taken after 1888 and I'm sure it was summer of '89. But the Presbyterian church, of course, replaced by a brick one I think around 1928 or '9. I have that date somewhere. But anyway, the town then prospered for a while until the Fourth of July 1891 and at eight o'clock in the evening a fire started in the Blue Mountain Hotel's kitchen. And this building was on the south side of Washington where the Elks Lodge is today. And again there was a wind and it jumped…jumped the street and burned a little over four blocks, two blocks immediately north and then the two blocks north and east. So that Aaron Sommer came back up from Portland and put up a new building where the other brick one had been and that is that Sommer building that exists today. It was put up in the fall of '91 and then remodeled to a more modern appearance in 18…1916. And across the street to it on the east, the northeast corner of Adams and Depot, was the Rogers Building.

Rogers had put up a drugstore there in 1888 and his business burned and he built another one, a much bigger building and the building still exists although it's been pretty heavily remodeled since then.

TM: It's currently the building that's at Adams and Depot?

JE: Yeah. It was… After they remodeled it they called it the Phoenix Building.

TM: Oh, okay. It's the one across the street from Red Cross Drug. It being currently remodeled in 2003, yeah.

JE: Mm-hmm. The address of it… And that was the address of Rogers' Drugstore after the numbering process started, which was early '90s, it was 1201 Adams and still is. And that was the last major fire. When Sommer was here putting up his replacement building he also built another one in a burned out block and that's the Sommer Hotel, which is still standing just across from the post office. And then after that, why, there weren't any really…really serious fires like several blocks. There have been others that were one building or part of a block since then. And the other more-or-less spectacular one of the nineteenth century was the Pacific Company's grain elevator which burned in 1893. It was then the tallest building in La Grande at I think ninety-five feet. And it was… The lot where it was is still empty. It was right across the street to the west from what for many years was La Grande Lumber Company and is now occupied by Miller's Home Center. It was Ben Patten's for a long time and I think it was the Wanaha Lumber Company in 1917. The building goes back a long way and there's always been a lumberyard. They're prone to fire, you would think that would've been gone a long time ago, but it's…it's held up pretty well.

TM: You mentioned that part of the building…I guess I was going back to brick…after the fires they started more brick, you were saying, more brick structures came in.

JE: Mm-hmm.

TM: You mentioned that there were some early architects, now, a Mr. Thorton you had mentioned. Would he…you might want to talk about him a little… Would he have been involved in…would any… I guess what I'm asking, would any of these brick buildings been involved in any architectural planning or would they have been just more or less, you know, thrown together by people to get like a two-story storefront-type of thing built? Do you think there was some architectural design and planning involved once they started building in brick?

JE: Probably to some extent. I imagine in a sense there would have been when they were using wood. The person who desired the building would give the architect an idea of what arrangement was needed and what kinds of spaces were required and then the architect 'd do a sketch and they would talk about it. It's very much as it is today, probably a little less formal. When Calvin Thorton drew up the blueprints for the Mormon church here, which unfortunately is also gone, those were all done in pencil.

TM: That was the Mormon church which is now where *The Observer* building is now on Fourth Street?

JE: Yeah. It was where *The Observer* is now. Yeah. A very nice building. The problem that the LDS had with it was that it was designed for a pedestrian population and there was no parking and they have a large congregation so they didn't have much choice, really, but to relocate. And of course you can't very

well relocate a large brick building. So they did save I think the stained glass out of it and the organ and that was about it. It was a nice building. Thorton in that design he also designed the old Baptist church, which was also brick and stone, and it was built in 1907. And I think the Mormon church was also in 1907. So made in his life. Thorton…and I have…I've got quite a lot of material on his which give his birth dates, which I've forgotten at the moment, but he was self-taught I think. I don't believe he went to an architecture school. His designs have a kind of individual quality about him that…he wasn't making statements as a lot of modern people do. They will design something impractical just so it will be noticed. I think he was doing…trying to design elegant buildings that people could use. But I think he was largely self-taught because before he came here he had a drugstore over in Weizer and then…I have no idea how he got his training…but he had some engineering ability and quite a bit of architectural talent. I think he came here in 1889, which would've been the right time to start contributing what he could do to the area. And over the course of the next twenty years he designed a great many buildings downtown, some of which are still standing. The Rogers Building is one, the Rohlston Building on the opposite corner where Lawrence's Jewelry is located and it was remodeled to a more modern appearance around 1920, but it was one of his buildings. I think the bank where Mack & Sons is now, or has been, that was one of his because it was a very interesting design that I don't think it would've come from the hand of anybody else. He, I think, designed the Sommer Hotel probably. He might have designed the Foley Hotel. He liked that style of architecture. It was, oh, styles of the era are given various names…most of his architecture, I think, somebody might disagree with me, was what they would've called Romanesque Revival. It went out of style about 1891 in other parts of the country, but it seems to have held on here for a while and it… In some of the business buildings they refer to detail as being Queen Anne, but I think the only reason they do might be that some of the buildings had turrets on the corners, the Geiser Grande in Baker City has turret on the corner and the Foley Hotel had one, too. But mostly those were Italianate designs and it was a time when the rusticated stone and the brick and the round arches, or segmented arches, or combinations of them were quite popular. And these gave a hint of classical design, but they were I think more Romanesque than anything else. And the…at least as I have studied architectural styles they are. They would've included probably the Slater Building. The Slater Building's on the corner of Fir and Jefferson and it's the one with the elaborate metal front on the Jefferson Street side. I think…

TM: Fir…yes. I was gonna ask you, is that the one that's… Is that on the National Register of Historic Places?

JE: Yes it is.

TM: Yeah.

JE: Yes. I put it on for, I think for Bill Geddes when he had the building. It's been quite a few years ago now. I couldn't find the architect listed anywhere, but I'm pretty sure that it must've been Thorton.

TM: Yeah.

JE: The detailing looks like his…his work.

TM: So is that what would be called an iron-front building, or is it iron or is it…?
JE: It's sheet metal.
TM: Sheet metal. Okay.
JE: Those were done by a company in St. Louis and…old age is getting me…I'll think of the name pretty soon. It is well… It's a well recorded one. And Arthur Hart, for who a long time was the head of the Historical Society in Boise, has done quite a study of the surviving building with these Mesker Brothers metal fronts on them. There's a very fine one down in Silverton and there are other's with pieces of metal front, you know, like, oh, say a ___ or bay window or real fancy cornice or something like that or other design on the front.
TM: How is that Mesker spelled?
JE: M-e-s-k-e-r.
TM: M-e-s-k-e-r.
JE: Mesker Brothers, St. Louis.
TM: St. Louis. And there was also something called iron front. I remember growing up in Montana seeing a few of those. That was a…
JE: Those are more from the 1860s.
TM: Yeah. That's when this building I was thinking of at home it was built, or 1870s.
JE: Yeah. There are a lot of them on the…on I think First and Second Avenues in Portland. Quite a few of the iron fronts still surviving. They're all from the '60s. Some of them done by the Portland Ironworks, I think. One or two of the buildings downtown have old quints and polisters along one side that are cast-iron and some of those were done over in Baker, Baker City. So anyplace you could have a foundry established and if you're any good at sandcasting you could come up with building parts for people who needed them.
TM: So but in this case what we had here was something with sheet metal that was as a front?
JE: Yeah. And the thing is what they produces were all kinds of components, that is culinades, culinettes, freezes, prints, brackets, cornices, perifats, everything you might need on a building and framing for windows and then the designs…the stuff…how should I say it… The components were all interchangeable so that you could combine them in a multitude of different ways. The buildings didn't all have to look alike, you see, so they got a lot of fun with 'em.
TM: It was almost like a new style, in a way, right? I mean you could take elements of an older style and mix in…mix and match.
JE: Yeah. Take an Erector set or a Lego set or Lincoln Log set and using these standardized components come up with your own combinations.
TM: So it was kind of an offshoot of the Romanesque tradition, or kind of new…new…
JE: Yeah. The front on that one I would say is more in Italianate than anything else. And I think Mesker developed 'em during the 1870s and '80s and they were __ up into this century…well, not this one, but the immediate past one, the end of the nineteenth century. But I think that they were based more on Italianate renaissance designs. But he…Meskers were attempting to design relatively fireproof buildings. And if you had a metal front on your building you had a lower insurance rate. And the old Sandborn Fire Insurance atlas, which are the

best city plans we have of the period, they were color-coded…keyed so that a building was indicated as being a brick or with a metal roof or metal-sided or whatever to indicate how much of a risk it was to have it. Thanks, Dorothy. [pause] Okay.

TM: We were… We were chatting about, you know, buildings there so go back to that.

JE: Yeah. This… I think what we last mentioned was the Slater Building, which is La Grande's only metal front building, really.

TM: Yeah. That's what we've been talking about…okay, go ahead.

JE: I believe that Slater designed it and I think it's probably…or not Slater, that Thorton designed it. It was… It is the Slater Building and it was owned originally and the man that's responsible for it was James H. Slater who had been congressman and had been an attorney down in Silven for a long time. He and his family came West in wagon train 1853, I believe. But anyway, he moved up here in the '70s. And when he put up the building he built it as a commercial on the ground floor, offices upstairs arrangement. And the offices were occupied by himself and two of his sons who were in partnership with him, James D. Slater and the other one was Robert. And they…the partnership lasted I imagine till J. H. died, but Robert went over to Pendleton and practiced there and James D. took over the practice here. There was another son who was sort of a maverick in a sense because he didn't take up the law. He became a builder. He built Riveria School, among other structures around, and he built this house that we're sitting in. He listed himself as contractor for a long time and then later years listed himself as an architect so he apparently had some architectural training to go along with that. The Slater Building was still occupied by James D. Slater and…until the West Jacobson Building downtown was completed in 1913. It is still there and is still in use. And he moved to it as soon as it was available because by that time Jefferson was not a terribly good location and something on Adams was preferable. But it's a good building. I'm glad that we have it. There aren't too many of them left. There was one other building downtown that had a largely metal front. It was the one where the Imperial was and the second floor had a great big sheet metal bay window, __ window, and above that a very elaborate metal cornice with a gabled pediment. It was a fancy thing. There are a few pictures of it. It burned not too awfully many years ago, I think in the '70s.

TM: And where was it?

JE: It's where the Long Branch is now.

TM: Oh, okay.

JE: And now it's just a little block building in between the two brick ones. But in it's heyday there was a brothel upstairs and a restaurant downstairs, which was not an uncommon combination. And handsome building front, very handsome front.

TM: That would've been built probably in the '90s as well.

JE: Yeah. It was from the '90s, yeah.

TM: And again, close to the…close to the railroad. And your house, which we can come back to later, was 1892.

JE: Mm-hmm. Fall of 1892.

TM: So there must've been quite a lot of building, obviously, in the '90s, it seems like, all over town.

JE: Mostly I think…

TM: Downtown.

JE: It didn't… It was a long time before Old Town and New Town grew together, before it filled in in between. But the area that was the residential part of Chaplin's addition to La Grande and also Green Arnolds, that was Chaplin's brother-in-law who had a claim also, it was everything west of Fourth and up to, say, maybe Walnut filled in pretty quickly and a lot of that kept into the 1920s and quite a lot of that was more prestigious housing than you'd find in some of the less expensive residential areas. Main Avenue, where this house is located, was one of the better quality streets of the time, so was Spring and Washington. And La Grande at one time had a Park Avenue. The names of things change. Washington was always Washington, but where the diagonal part of it ends at Fourth Street you crossed the street and then you can go on up Washington which is east-west as traditional streets are. And at that point it…where you crossed Fourth it became Park Avenue and it was Park up as far as it went. And this got to be a nuisance, I think, to too many people and by the 1890s some blocks of it were referred to as Washington and then by early 1900s it was all Washington so Park disappeared. Some of the streets have been renamed or changed. I can't think of any that were markedly different. There was 'O' Street…or 'O' Avenue and then the next one is Penn. They probably didn't want to call it 'P' Street for obvious reasons.

TM: Right. [laughs]

JE: 'Q' was also avoided, but 'R' and 'S', of course, are commonly used.

TM: And it goes I think to 'Z', doesn't it? It goes all the way to 'Z'?

JE: All the way to 'Z' and then something else has to be substituted. You get in… Where you get into confusing situations is where you run out of numbers or you run out of alphabet and then you have to fudge a little as in some of the developments where all of the streets have names and this makes it a little difficult. I often refer to what I consider a joke about Salem. Church and street are not separated in Salem…church and state are not separated in Salem, they intersect a block west of the capital.

TM: Right. [laughs] Yeah, right. That's good. So there must've been a period then, at least in that time, when the main residential area was still up around 'C' and 'B', in that area.

JE: Mm-hmm.

TM: And then people would come down to…after the railroad came in they would come down __ to shop and whatever.

JE: Some of them even commuted.

TM: People would live up there and work down here.

JE: As long as the Oregon Trail functioned, and this would be even after it became the government road in 1861, which was actually just before the town itself started, the Oregon Trail was 'B' Avenue and it went up over the hill to the west. And it was not until I think the late 1860s that the Meacham Brothers' toll road was built all the way down the…down the Grande Ronde Canyon so that you

could go that way and not have to climb a mountain and then descend it again. But the…at that time 'B' Avenue was the street with the stables and the warehouses and so forth 'cause it was on the Oregon Trail, the main road. And then 'C' Avenue was the business district of Old La Grande extending from First, roughly, to Fourth or Fifth. Not a very large business district and not a very large population, but it was a pretty driving little community.

TM: And the coming of the railroad, as it did to so many places in the West, it changed all that for sure.

JE: Yes, it did. The… In the 1860s the old road coming down Ladd Hill, which was extremely difficult to come down and even worse to get back up, became a handicap because Union started in 1862 also a few months after La Grande did. And it was, in a sense, better located and in 1864, I believe, Jim Pyle laid out his road up Pyle's Canyon. And that was a much easier route even though it's knee-deep in mud, or hip-deep, or chin-deep in some places in the spring it was still a better road by far. And there is a notice in one of the 1868 newspapers calling for volunteer labor, people from La Grande, want volunteers to put a better road up Ladd Hill. La Grande was loosing out on all of the trade, or a lot of it, because of poor access to the community. So that was done and I think it helped matters to some extent. La Grande got it's big boost partly because Chaplin had the foresight to get the division point established here. But Union, at that time, I think maybe by 1870-something it was pretty much a rival for La Grande and had also become the county seat in the election at that time. The problem being that the people in Halfway-Richland area, which was in a strip of land that hadn't been taken from Baker County, it was…it's the pan handle later after Wallowa County was taken off…that area had quite a little population for the time and they already had fifty miles to go to get to Union and they didn't want to go another fifteen to get to La Grande. So when…and Cove sided with Union. So as it turned out Union got the county seat and retained it until 1904. And this bothered La Grande a little, at least the business center was in Union. However, the railroad came through the city fathers in Union were approached by the surveyor for a little consideration. He would locate the railroad right through Union. And the principle banker, I think Mr. Eaton, said, "You're just… This is the shakedown. We don't need to do this. You're gonna have to come through anyway." And the surveyor said "fine" and he ran it up the other side of the valley so that they, Union, didn't have access to the railroad after all and they had to put in Union Junction and then build a short line railroad into the town of Union. So that handicapped Union a little bit. Sometimes these errors that are not…seemed clearly at the time can cause changes in years ahead __ dissipated.

TM: Yeah. Foresight is not always automatic in these cases, is it? I'm gonna pause for just a moment.

JE: Hindsight is usually at least two-thirds regret.

TM: Right. Good point! [laughs] [end tape]

TM: I'd like to turn just for a moment, or for a few minutes, to some questions about residences…to homes that began to be built down in the area of New Town. And you'd mentioned one house in particular that you think is the oldest residence still standing in La Grande. Do you want to…

JE: Yeah. That's Aaron Sommer's house, I think I mentioned it. He moved it down to the intersection of Depot and Adams…or Depot and Fourth. And later years the house was moved again, this was in, oh, probably 1912. I think the Methodist church must've acquired the land that it sat on. And it was moved to a point on Spring Street facing south just across from the Methodist church. The new Methodist church was erected at that site in 1913. And it… I don't think they had intended to run Spring Street through because there wasn't really room for it, but later they did run it through and that's why part of it is one-way and it is quite…is only one lane wide, really. And I think that's just kind of an afterthought. But the Methodist church here, when that was put in, why, Aaron Sommer's house was moved across the street and it now belongs to Tim and Laura McManus. I think it's the oldest house in La Grande. It was built in 1872.

TM: Yeah. And it's sitting where right now?

JE: Um…___ get the address. It's nine…nine-oh-something.

TM: Four.

JE: Four.

TM: It's on Fourth.

JE: Nine-oh-something Spring.

TM: Oh, it's on Spring?

JE: Yeah. It's… It's two doors…two houses west of Lester Real Estate's building.

TM: Oh, okay. So it's west on Spring. It would be kind of across Spring from the Methodist church parking lot, in that area right in there.

JE: Yeah. Large white house.

TM: Okay.

JE: It was the biggest one in Old Town and still a big house. It's still a big house.

TM: Built in 1872.

JE: I think so.

TM: So that's a hundred-and-thirty years old or so.

JE: Yeah.

TM: years old or so.

JE: Yeah.

TM: Yeah. Wow.

JE: I'm sure that was what Clare McManus, who…Tim's father who had the house at that time…I'm sure that's what he told me, it was built in '72.

TM: And that's a frame…a frame house?

JE: A frame house, uh-huh. Balloon…old-style balloon framing which is a little different than the modern __ frame construction. Modern broom frame construction you build a wall one floor high, let's say an eight foot wall, and you stand those up, lay a platform on top of it and put up another eight foot wall a chunk at a time on top of that. The original __ frame construction starts with the foundations and the studs are as tall as the house. And they're put up and kind of scabbed together so that they'll stand and then the floor joice are nailed into the

studs so that the house…it's a different kind of a skeleton, but it's still a frame…a frame house. Then the __ stopped and __ braces are what you put into the walls, but it…your wall… Say it's thirty-foot high wall, why, the wall is probably hollow all the way to the bottom and if you don't put in fire stops, and most of the houses had them, they were well aware that fire going up inside of the wall could get away in a hurry.

TM: What kind of material was used for the fire stop?

JE: Just ordinary two-by-fours…they were all rough two-by-fours at that time.

TM: Oh, okay. It would stop the draft air.

JE: Yeah. Just something to stop the draft. And in those days didn't have wiring yet and any…so you didn't have to do any boring or drilling or threading or anything and until we got a water system the plumbing was pretty rudimentary, too. Once those things came along then they were retrofitted later with the wiring and the plumbing.

TM: Once electricity arrived and plumbing and so…

JE: Early '90s, I think. I think we had electricity here by '91 and I think they got a decent water system that they could use for fire fighting by, well, shortly after the second big fire. [laughs] Somewhere right along early '90s.

TM: There would've been an incentive there, an incentive for that.

JE: Sure.

TM: Are there other older…older homes that might now be standing still?

JE: The brick one I have mentioned, it's over here on Fourth.

T; On Fourth? Right.

JE: It was probably built in 1884.

TM: That's the one next to real…Lester Real Estate on Fourth?

JE: Mm-hmm. I'm sure it was built about 1884. The others there are some up in Old Town that were probably built in the '70s. It would be hard to tell and a lot of 'em have been re…rebuilt several times, you know, so…where there's nothing much to indicate what they were originally. There was one that somebody…I think she said the house she lived in was built in 1876 she thought. But most of them are later houses and some are the older ones that have been rebuilt, but I don't…you'd have to research the history of every single house in order to be sure about these things. And the assessors office guesses at them usually and says about 1890 or about 1900 or whatever. But if you… There was a time when any time you bought a piece of property you got a nice thick abstract that gave the complete history of it, all the hands it had passed through and everything else clear back to the beginning when it was first sold from sale of state lands or whatever, but that hasn't been done for a long time. They simply check the records and they…you get title insurance they guarantee it's clear…free and clear, which is the main consideration. So for the history you have to do some research on that both at the courthouse and in the abstract and title company or some other firm that handles titles.

TM: At least that information is available if people wanted to do the research.

JE: If you want to research your house it can be done. And this one I've been lucky in many respects. The… It's only had a few owners. The people who originally built it in 1892 there is a record of who they were and what business the man was

in and then after the…well, Mrs. Conkey…when the house was built she took out a loan from the bank. It was seven hundred dollars to be paid off a hundred dollars a year. In 1899 it was paid for and she…I don't know what part of the original cost it was or where some of that came from…the house cost $1800 to build. But once it was…once it was paid off then she sold it to the bank.

TM: She sold the house to the bank?

JE: The…well, not exactly to the bank, in a sense. The bank, La Grande National Bank, later First National, at that time they seemed to have owned quite a bit of property around. But anyway, she sold it to the cashier at the bank, F. L. Meyers. And he lived in it until 1908 and at that time he moved into a big house that still stands up on Spring, First and Spring. And this house then was owned by the bank until 1920. They seem to have rented it out during that period. Then in 1920 it was sold to the Moats family who had it until 1961, so forty years, you see. And then we bought it from the guy that it was sold to, fixed it up somewhat, and we've had it forty-two years ourselves…forty-one.

TM: How do you spell the name of the family who built the house?

JE: Conkey, c-o-n-k-e-y.

TM: Okay.

JE: Charles and Laura Conkey.

TM: And then Slater designed it…

JE: No.

TM: …or built it.

JE: He built it, yeah. The little spread in the paper said that Charles Conkey's going to put up a $1900 house and John Slater's going to build it for him. I have no idea who designed it. Eldon Burnton might have. It… The floor plan is a little odd in some respects which makes me think that it probably didn't come out of a planned book.

TM: Do you want to… Since this… Do you want to talk just a little bit about the so-called Victorian style, 'cause that's…would you call this house that style?

JE: Yeah, I guess technically. Anything built between 1837 and 1901 is Victorian. [laughs]

TM: Seeing how those are the years you can __.

JE: And if you've got a house built in 1901 or later, why, it's probably Edwardian, at least for a little while. But the principle Victorian styles in America are the Gothic, which is…there have been some more modern versions of that, but the regular Gothic, Victorian Gothic style, is from the 1840s and '50s. And before that it was Greek Revival, which is…they really do look like Greek temples, but all of 'em were back east or there are a few in the Willamette Valley.

TM: This is with lots of columns and…

JE: Yeah. The fancy portico with the gabled pediment and adental trees and the Corin…usually they're Doric columns, but some of them are Ionic and some are Corinthian. But those are all down in the Willamette Valley. There's nothing like that around here. The ones that do have columns are all much later. They're Classical Revival or Colonial Revival. The next one in most cases, after Gothic, is the Renaissance Revival, which they're usually big square houses, the round-top windows and bracketed gables…or bracketed eaves and generally the don't

have gables, they generally have a hipped roof or flat roof even in some places. And there are a lot of those down around Portland. And they date from the '60s and '70s and into the '80s. By the mid…well, the late-'80s they were starting to put up Queen Anne houses which generally had towers and…with conical roofs and fancy porch work and a veranda that goes partway around the house instead of the smaller porches that were earlier. And then this house is in the style…it's a version of Queen Anne, it's called East Lake. And East Lake has to do with some of the trim that's on it. And the trim on this one shows the influence of…well, the infatuation with the Japanese print that went on for a long time late in the last century. We have a Chinese porch…that is the railing is an Oriental appearing design.

TM: And as you said you were able to…when you bought the house you were able to preserve a number of these features because…in time because they might've been remolded…so-called remodeled away, they would've disappeared.

JE: And someone had bought the…who had bought the house was doing some modernization some of which was desirable in a way, but he had gotten a little too far with it, some of it, and he hadn't gone as far as he wanted to with others. But we saved the porch which he would've taken off and some other things. So it… I feel very lucky to have gotten a good Victorian house. I always liked 'em. But the… A lot 'em have been changed a great deal. And I was going to mention something about the bay window, most of 'em have bay windows, and back in the 1850s when Downing was designing houses…and these were the Gothic, some of the Gothic ones, they all they bay windows…and he referred to those as conservatories, they were a place to put your potted plants it what they were for. They're also an awfully good place to set a Christmas tree.

TM: Mm-hmm. So you have here in the front you have the one bay window in your front parlor.

JE: Right.

TM: You call it the front parlor.

JE: Uh-huh. This was probably… I suppose that was just the parlor. The sliding doors lead into the room we're sitting in and I think this was always a dining room. And across the hall was a bedroom and the room south of here was a bedroom. And there was an open porch there on the east side which was enclosed during the 1930s, I think, '30s or '40s. And that was used as a sleeping porch and now it is part of the sitting room which is what the back bedroom has been turned into. The __ about the design it had a bathroom built into it before the plumbing was available, I think. They knew the plumbing was gonna be here pretty quick. And there was a private passage that goes from the…that went from the bedroom back to the kitchen and the bathroom was off of it. It was also available through a separate door. There were an awful lot of doors in the house and I guess that's just common. But the private passage was a closet you could walk through all the way. And one reason for this was that they didn't have clothes hangers yet, at least as a common thing and so there was a strip of battin' down each side of the hall with hooks in it and you hung your coats and shirts and so forth on those __ on pegs. So the…that has since become a closet and a little place for the vanity in the bathroom, but that was the way it was originally. Kitchen was nearly all…all

doors and the man we got the house from remodeled it. It was pretty much a…still a nineteenth century kitchen, you know. And he put in an island and some other things, but it wasn't big enough, really, to take that kind of conversion. It's not… It wasn't a really large room like what the old kitchens were, it was just a place where you…where there's a pantry to keep the dishes and a sink in the corner and then probably a work table in the middle of the room and the big old range on the wall and the water tank. And it had a wood lift that went down to the basement. That's no longer there, but there was one. So that you ended up with all doors. All the meals, of course, were served in the dining room. If you want to eat in the kitchen and socialize it wasn't really ideal for that purpose. There was a narrow little porch that fronted on the alley so it was always dirty. And when we remodeled the kitchen we took in the back porch so that gave us an extra three feet and now it's a sizable room. It's nice to sit around the table out there. So I would say this is a modernization that increased the comfort. The back pantry was ideal for putting the washer and dryer and this kind of thing. And the outside entrance is now out there. So it has evolved while we've been in it, but I've tried to save as much as I could of what was attractive and bring back some of the things that weren't here any longer.

TM: You've done a great deal of the work yourself, I think, haven't you?

JE: Quite a bit.

TM: Yeah. Over the years, yeah.

JE: It… There were some things, of course, that had to be done… You have professionals do things like furnaces and, of course, we've had several of those over the…over the years. And __ and this kind of thing those are best done professionally, I think. Things you could do would take too long. [laughs]

TM: But you would call this house then a Queen Anne style, or a modified Queen Anne style?

JE: Yes, modified Queen Anne. It's Queen Anne and with the…and I guess the decorative style would be Eastlake probably. That's a reflection of Charles Eastlake who was a paste maker of the 1870s and '80s who preached a return to simple designs. And his…get rid of all these curves, you know, and let's get things to basic shapes. And he was…I think more thinking along the lines of Robert…of Morris and, oh, kind of the…what did they…

TM: You mean the English designer?

JE: Yeah.

TM: __ Morris.

JE: Yeah. And some of the others who were doing the…the term for what they…their school escapes me for the moment, but it was a return to simplify…they went to medieval styles.

TM: Oh, the Preriphial.

JE: That is…yeah, yeah. Preriphrialites.

TM: Preriphrialites, right.

JE: Rosetti, you know, and so forth. And Eastlake I think reflected their temperament pretty much. But over here his style was interpreted a little differently. We had had the curves of the Renaissance Revival furniture with the lots of carving and the…and crests up on top and all that. So what we ended up is we changed to a

new style, the Eastlake style, but it was the same furniture with the same kind of wood and everything except it was square across the top, we just got rid of some of the curves. So it's __ elaborate and Victorian.

TM: So but actually then you have tried to find furniture, in other words, that matches the style as much as you can?

JE: Up to a point and in a way. The… The styles that I…we like best are Renaissance Revival, there's a table in there, and Eastlake, here this is a fair example of it right here, a little late. But the…the styles that were probably used in 1892 in this house built were likely golden oak, which is a little bit past the Eastlake style. And I would imagine golden oak would've been primarily what the Conkeys had, I don't know. But I like walnut better and it's just a matter of personal preference. And the styles were some just about as intricate as the others. The sideboard here is probably more Queen Anne than Eastlake in that the decoration in simpler. It's not quite so…not quite so fussy.

TM: Not quite so ornate.

JE: Yeah. Not quite so fussy.

TM: I'm just gonna… I wanted to ask you about one other building in town just briefly today and that would be the La Grande's Carnegie Library. And if you wanted talk…I mean right now as we speak there's plans for a new library are apparently in the works, but just wanted to ask about the whole Carnegie idea, his mission to build libraries and how that impacted a town like La Grande.

JE: It… He influenced an awful lot of learning and refinement and education all over the country with what he did. Carnegie, like a lot of other people of his generation, came over here with nothing from the old country, that was in his case Scotland. And in those days you could really do what Horatio Alger books were all about, that is by _of hard work succeed. Horatio Alger always fudged a little bit, his hero always married the boss's daughter. But Carnegie did it in his own…on his own merits. But having made his fortune he did engage in some kinds of philanthropy and he may have been a tough old boy, but he did do a lot for the country. And the bigger the city the bigger the library. Union has a Carnegie library, La Grande has one, a lot of other towns have them. They are pretty good buildings and they served their purpose very well. The problem that they have today is that they are not designed for our time and you have to adapt them and some cases you have to adapt them so much that it's better not to do it. The…and they become other buildings. The one in Baker City has been an art center for a long time. It's a nice one. It's got Classical columns and it's mid arch is sandstone I think, or __ anyway, it may be __. But the one here is… They have done, I think, a very fine job of keeping it operable. And they…they have managed to adapt for a handicapped access and other things. But there is a kind of limit to how far you go and especially with all the electronic capabilities you have to have today you almost have to have a new building and I think that's the only way to go. And I like very much the idea of what they're apparently going to be doing. The old building it still has some problems and I don't know what it will be used for. The… One of the curses of our civilization is that a flat roof is the most practical in terms of building materials, they should all be gabled, I think, and then they wouldn't leak quite as badly. But there always roof leaks.

And this one suffered because somebody…it was a matter of poor judgment or I guess maybe ignorance…they tried to improve the appearance by sandblasting the walls and this takes all of the glaze off of the bricks and makes them soak up water like a sponge so that the water migrates through to the inside of the building. And that has damaged it pretty considerably. So I don't know…the city has, I think, done some really good things in the way of strengthening the structure and making it more lasting. What'll happen to it in the long run I don't know. It was made for a different kind of user, in a way, being built in 1913. It has a fireplace in the west end. I imagine a cheerful fire in there on a winter day would be very attractive. The fireplace is covered up and may not be useable anymore, probably isn't. But it… As to what might be done with it after is ceases to be a library I don't really know.

TM: It would be good… Hopefully, it would nice to see it used in a way the one in Baker City is, as a gallery. I know in Pendleton they have a much larger structure…I'm not sure if the old one was a Carnegie or not…but that one…

JE: I don't believe so.

TM: I don't know if it was. No, I don't think so either.

JE: There was a…I can't remember the name of the architect. It was a Portland architect, I think, that designed it.

TM: That's a very interesting building.

JE: Yes it is.

TM: And that's been preserved I think as a gallery or something, a gallery or museum.

JE: I believe so. It was roomy and had some very progressive things in the design for it's time. But again, industrial progress, I guess you would call it, has outdistanced it and it was beyond adaptation so they had to do something, but fortunately the saved it.

TM: They were able to covert it.

JE: Yeah. It's a good building and they…

TM: A good conversion and hopefully we can do that here and have a very interesting structure.

JE: I hope so too.

TM: I just… I was gonna ask you briefly before we stop for today I just wanted to ask you about one other building and that's the…I guess it's an apartment now, it's what we call The Tassel up on Second.

JE: Oh yeah.

TM: What would you call that with all it's __?

JE: It's an interesting, but it's a Queen Anne.

TM: Yeah, okay.

JE: It's Queen Anne, but it's a very late one. When W. H. Bohnenkamp had that house built…I have no idea who the architect was…but he had the house built I believe it was 1907 and this is at the very end of the Victorian styles. Nearly everything that was coming on at that time was either bungalow style, arts and crafts or the bungalow, or Classical Revival, Colonial Revival. And I could say something about…maybe I should say something about __, not that that has anything to do with that one.

TM: Okay, yes. That would be a good one to talk about, too.

JE: The thing that gives the Castle away as being really a late one is the railing around the porch, those are Corinthian columns, it's a Classical Revival porch, you see, and there are Palladian windows up above, that is a central window with a window on either side of them and there are some other touches that show that this is in the Colonial Revival era, which is from 19--…well, 1890s, late 1890s on to 1920. And it… It's Queen Anne house with all kinds of Colonial Revival touches. The big houses up on the hill that have the wide porches with the columns and…all…Helms place is one, the former Reynolds place across the street to the south is another; those are Colonial Revival houses. And the less ambitious ones are some like, well, over on Washington our son lives in one. It's got a columnated porch across the front, but it isn't a bungalow. It's more of a Colonial Revival house than a bungalow. So the Castle is maybe the last of its kind. And interestingly enough Mr. Bohnenkamp had a number of children but by the time he built it they were getting, I think, not too far from their own. And I believe that by 1912 it had been converted to apartments, which is very early. There's a lot of original stuff in it. It would be a fun one to restore. It'd be nice to restore that one. Ceilings have been lowered and above them, why, the plaster has been all torn up by heating pipes bein' run every which-way and so forth. You'd have to convert a lot of things. There's a big fireplace in the front parlor which is walled up. And they did finally locate the corner lights and the transom sash for the front entrance and get 'em fit in, which are…look really nice. But it would be a…it'd be fun house to do something with. It was… It was the only… I think there have only been two genuine mansions in La Grande and it's one of them.

TM: What's the other one?

JE: The other one is the Stang house.

TM: Stang Manor.

JE: Stang Manor, yeah.

TM: How would you describe that house?

JE: Charles Miller, the architect, and it was his first big commission here. He described it as being a combination of Colonial and Federal. And you can see the Federal designs in the…design elements in it. It's a house that could've been built around 1820.

TM: When was that house actually built? Do you know approximately?

JE: I think it was finished in 1923.

TM: Okay.

JE: It… Stang was a lumberman from Wisconsin, I believe, who came out here and he was __ quite a bit earlier than that buying timber and he established the Mt. Emily Lumber Company and…which is now Boise Cascade's La Grande plant. And he put up that house I think 1923. Interesting man. The… He did some nice for La Grande. In 1912 he…he wanted shady streets, he liked shade and he was from the Midwest, so he imported a large number of soft maples and planted them all up and down Second and Third and through this general area around here. And some of them are still standing, they're getting very large and old and rotten. They're not a long life tree, but they grew fast and produced abundant shade. And he…those were his gift to the city. He was an interesting man. And his

house about what you would expect in, say, a mansion. There's an indoor fountain in one of the rooms. And down in the basement there is a little theater with a stage and everything, the kids did theatricals down there.

TM: I've been in the house a few times, but I've never really toured it. That's a very interesting place.

JE: I toured it a long time ago, forty years ago. That was before they had done anything to it. They've preserved it very nicely. I don't think the fountain operates any longer, it wasn't operating then. But it was __ in their big sunroom, I think it's the north wing. Nice building.

TM: I think we're just about out for this…for today. Should we pause and stop?

JE: Sure. [end tape]

2/12/03, T1, S1

TM: February 12th, 2003. I'm at the home of Jack Evans, 806 Main in La Grande and this is our second session with Jack. We wanted today… Last time we talked a lot about the architecture of…of what's now downtown La Grande. We wanted to begin today by moving towards some discussion of Old Town La Grande, up around 'B' and 'C' Streets and that area. Jack, would you like to give us just a brief overview on Old Town and then maybe talk a little bit about if there are still any buildings up there that are original structures?

JE: Okay. The Old Town area was during the emigration period was campground for the people in the wagon trains. Mill Creek was handy and there's a level bench up there where they camped. But it wasn't until 1861 that anything was done about settling it. The fall of '61 Daniel Chaplin and a couple of other fellows, I believe, staked out a land claim for him and he told some others who spent the winter here, the first to do so, that in the spring he'd come back and lay out a town. And he did that. He came back and laid out a town on part of his claim, which was the first settlement of La Grande. And it's typical roman east-west, north-south grid. However, it's three degrees off and still is because they didn't compensate quite enough for the deviation of the compass. So it's at a little bit of an angle and I'm told that the people who have surveyed lots up there in order to get people the title to them have had quite a time trying to compensate for the crooked lines. Anyway, the original town was pretty well bounded by 'A' through 'D' or 'E' Streets and probably First through Fourth. At the upper end around First there are other streets now beyond it and Ben Brown's cabin, which was the first one to be completed, was at the corner of 'B' and Cedar Streets, so that's a little bit beyond where the regular grid is. But anyway, the original town occupied approximately that area and, of course, it grew some over the years. And 'B' Avenue was the Oregon Trail and the stables and warehouses and things of that sort were on the Trail. And the principle business street was 'C'. Everything else was residential. There's an 1875 photograph that…with buildings identified by somebody who knew what they had been, which is quite interesting. And one of the business buildings is still standing. It's a false-fronted building that's a dwelling now, but it was, I believe, the tinsmith shop. But the

town itself is pretty much…I would say there's almost nothing up there to suggest that it had ever been a business area. Everybody eventually moved down to the new town. The road going west I should say a little bit about that. When it was still the Oregon Trail up to 1860, or a little better, it went on up the draw behind 'B'…the end of 'B' Avenue and along the bench and then straight up over the ridge behind Table Mountain. And the wagons that went up there some of them had to have as many as eighteen oxen hitched to them to get them up that steep climb. They couldn't go Side Hill because they would tip the wagons over. But the government in 1861 finally honored one, I think maybe the only one, of the things they had agreed to do for the tribes in the area and this was to build a road around the south side of the reservation so that the emigrants wouldn't be tracking across it all the time bringing disease and other problems with them. And they did that. The old road leaving La Grande had a switchback, you might say, installed in it so that instead of going straight up they started a little further to the south on the bench and went up the mountainside at an angle. If you know where to look the traces are still there, but they're very faint now. Beyond that, why, it followed the Oregon Trail pretty much across the ridge and over onto the plateau which is north of Morgan Lake. And the old road is quite visible across there going west partly because it had been the Oregon Trail and it had become a freight road for everything went, supposedly they didn't go by the stage road. Meacham Brothers' toll road was a stage road across the mountains and that continued to operate. They were not handicapped in that way, but it was a toll road so most of the immigrant travel and a lot of the freight went the other way. But that road was only in use for a few years. At the point east of La Grande several miles where the Oregon Trail went down the slope to Hilgard Park, as it is now, at the point where you turn northwest the government road turned southeast and went down the draw and went across another flat that is now south of the Grande Ronde River and eventually intercepted the river a ways to the west of that. It was not a very good road. I understand that it crossed the river nineteen times and eventually wound up over at Pilot Rock. But it was only in use for a few years. After that Foster had taken over Meachams' station after Harvey Meacham was killed in 1872. He married Meacham's wife later on. He had worked for them. And he managed the toll road and built another road of his own, the Foster toll road. So by 1868 the road had been extended all the way down the Grande Ronde canyon to the Grande Ronde Valley. And after that, why, the old road across the flat up above was just discontinued. It was such a terrible thing to travel anyway. They didn't use it anymore. It was used, I think, by people to get up on top to herd stock and this kind of thing. And for a little while in the '70s there were some mining claims up there and people used that route to get up to them. It was… It was not a very good road. The road that came into La Grande after they reached the valley was…came through Orodell, which was right at the mouth of the canyon, it's underneath I-84 right at the mouth of the canyon. There's nothing left of it all. You can see a couple foundations on the hillside, I think, to the north. But the road then came along the western edge of town. The part of it that still survives is Sunset Drive. And at the upper end, then, of 'C' Street, why, you came to the business district and went

east along it. Fourth Street was extended to the north, I'm not sure how far. In 1884, of course, it would run all the way down to the new town.

TM: So the big change that occurred, obviously, was the arrival of the railroad in 1884 which was the impetus…and we talked about this a little bit last time…was the impetus for the building of the whole new town, right?

JE: Yes. There was nothing down there. There might've been a farmhouse or two, but there was nothing really down there where they put the railroad. And since it was all on Chaplin's land and he had donated the land to the railroad, some of it, and released some more for a platting as a town… All of the platting and sale of properties was taken care of by some firm in Portland that he engaged. And there was a lot of speculation as people would buy up lots and then resell them and so on. But the speculation period didn't last too long. The town got a pretty good start by 1884…I mean '86 there were quite a few buildings. And when the fire started in the back of J. Brooks' clothing store…general store on August the 4th it ate up the whole town and the whole seven blocks of it plus the new railroad depot.

TM: I know we mentioned some of the fires last time. It must've been really quite an occasion when that happened.

JE: Yes.

TM: Could I ask you about buildings that might be surviving in Old Town? You mentioned that there's one false-front building on 'C' Street…

JE: Mm-hmm, on the north side.

TM: What about…

JE: That was the tinsmith shop, I think.

TM: Yeah.

JE: Most of the buildings up there… There are some of the houses that do go back to that period, but they've of course been modernized and altered in various ways. The level place where Wilkenson's mill…flour mill stood is still level, their house is on it. The early part of the town at that end is up Oak Street…to the head of Oak Street. And that photograph was taken from up there in 1875. You can't get a shot from that particular spot now because there are pine trees…pine trees are sprung up and are in the way, but John Turner and I did look…look at that. And you can see where these buildings were that were there. There's nothing… The little corner place that was a corner grocery years ago and it still on the corner of Fourth and 'C' dates from a much later period. It was a neighborhood grocery from the '30s and '40s I would say and into the '50s.

TM: Yeah. So that was probably…that particular building would date maybe from the '20s or so.

JE: It looks like it.

TM: A lot of those buildings. Yeah.

JE: It's in that general style.

TM: Yeah. So when the town then was platted then in the 18… The new town was platted in the '80s and then the construction of the city, both the residential and the business area of the city as we know it today, began at that point, right?

JE: Right.

TM: So what would have been the population…approximate population of the Old Town before the railroad?

JE: You know, I don't know. It wasn't a very large town, of course. I'm not sure that… It seems to me I have seen some figures somewhere at some time, but I don't know. Right now I really don't know whether I have or not. The new one it's population increased pretty rapidly. And, of course, right after the fire it was rebuilt immediately partly in brick. And then after the fire of 1891, which wasn't very long after that, then they built almost exclusively in brick and other fireproof materials. The… One interesting thing about it is that Adams Avenue only went as far…in 1892, I think it was…'89, let's say '89, Adams Avenue only went as far as Fir Street and the old Ron Fowley house, which had been under several under names and was put up in 1888…it was a big hotel and rooming house…on the corner of Fir and Adams and it extended right across the street to the south and the gable front of it faces south so that it had to be turned around when they did run the street on through to where it would face west. And there are photographs of it showing it in both positions. I think they must've turned it around rather than torn it down or wrecked it and rebuilt it. They moved a lot of things. We think of this being the day and age when you pick up a house and move it. In the old days it was a lot slower, but they didn't have any phone lines or power lines to take down so they managed a little better. And some of the big ones were moved. The store that stood on the corner of Washington and Depot, that's the northwest corner of the intersection where the Reynolds Building is now, was a big two-story mercantile store, general store, with a gabled front that faced east. And that building was move down from Old Town. The… One of the illustrations in Stearns' *Tour of Union County* from 1882 shows a picture of it as it was up there. But it was moved down there. That was W. J. Stodress' store and he was the principle merchant at the time.

TM: This book by Stearns you mentioned before. What was the name of the gentleman again?

JE: His name was Doren, d-o-r-e-n, H. Stearns.

TM: And it's Sterns, s-t…

JE: e-a-r-n-s. Yeah. He was a journalist, printer, and evidently a photographer and a fairly good amateur artist. And he traveled over the state and wrote up with he saw and people that he met and talked to and vantages of the area, part of it was promotional, it carried some advertising. The one for Union County, which included what became Wallowa County later, was quite interesting and it really gives a good picture of the area as it was then. His… His lithographs are interesting. The towns do show the buildings about where they were and other things and they're the only thing we have that particular period. This was immediately before the railroad. One of the pictures, the one of the area where Perry is now, shows a railroad town on a bridge and he said that's just approximately where it would probably be located sometime in the next year or two.

TM: It didn't exist at that point, but it was coming.

JE: He said the right-of-way had already been cleared so it seemed likely it wouldn't do harm to illustrate it.

TM: You know, I wanted to ask another question speaking of building. The initial…going back to Old Town for a minute. The original buildings would… The original residences, in any case, would've been probably logs, right? They would have cut…

JE: The very first ones. They had a…

TM: I wanted to ask about a sawmill, in other words. I didn't know about a sawmill.

JE: There were several, I think. The one that's mostly known is Charles Fox's mill which was up on Fox Hill. And it was certainly one of the early ones. I think he started in '63. But there must've been some others because they brought an awful lot of timber out of Deal Canyon, Robert Deal's plane. And some of them…firewood, of course, they had to have firewood to burn. But there was a lot of good timber up there and it looks…looks pretty good today, too, but then this was a 150 years later. But the… There probably were other mills around, but I don't know about…but I haven't seen a list of anywhere. But the…the demand for timber, of course, had been pretty __. But the very first thing they would've done probably would be to get a sawmill established. And then…it's very labor intensive to hew logs, you know.

TM: By hand.

JE: By hand and hoist them into place and so forth. And with boards, why, you could build very rapidly. And the type of construction they used in those days was lots faster and simpler. It certainly wasn't better, but it was lots faster and simpler than the later types because these were simply boards stood on end with a batten up the joint and then a two-by-four across the bottom, across the middle, and across the top. And by 19…I imagine by…no, I'm not sure. There was an old house up in Old Town, it's torn down now and has been down for quite a few years, but maybe clear into the '70s I think that building was still in use. It was just a single-wall house. All the door casing…door frames…stuck into the room a good four inches and the space in between 'em was just the inside of that wall. It had been covered with wallpaper and other things years ago, but nobody had ever furred it out and put anything on the inside, which they sometimes did because… And so in winter it was a mighty cold house because all the wind blew right through it. It was a pretty house, but it was not a…not a sound one. And the…they used that for a long time and it wasn't till the '80s probably that balloon frame construction became generally accepted around here.

TM: So for those first twenty years or so you would've had single-wall construction?

JE: Quite a lot of it.

TM: What about a brickyard? Would there… Was that fairly… Would that come later?

JE: Not too much because Aaron Sommer, who was one of the early merchants, put up the first brick building in La Grande and this was prior to 1882. There was a brickyard here until quite recently. I think most of the deposits came from the same area. It was right around the mouth of the Grande Ronde Canyon. And Jensens' had it for a long time. But there were…there was a brickmaker in early La Grande and I think he is mentioned on one of the real early directories. There aren't any city directories, but there were regional business directories and any town that had anything in it usually advertised in the thing or got themselves

listed because otherwise there wasn't any way they could have any advertising. That was the only kind there was. So in 18…there's on for…1867 is the earliest that shows La Grande. And in it, why, it lists several people. But there was a bricklayer mentioned in one of the early ones. And that may have been the fellow that put it up. But Sommer did put up this brick building. That was in association, I believe, with Leopold Pear, another early merchant. These were fellows all out of Portland, I think. Sommer and Bloom was another arrangement, he was with other people, that was his store in La Grande. And then he had one over in Summerville which was Sommer Brothers, Daniel Sommer was his brother. And they were Jewish, I believe, and well-respected. There was no any…never any, that I can see, any animosity toward them at all. But many merchants at that time were Jewish. But Sommer he didn't…I don't think moved out immediately. He must have though, because while it isn't mentioned specifically that he lost his building in the 1886 fire he did put up another one immediately, a brick one, and that was the first brick in New Town…brick building in the new town. And he…

TM: And what was the year on that again?

JE: That would've been 1884 when…'86, excuse me. Yeah. It's '86 or '7 right after the '86 fire.

TM: Because when they had the '86 fire there was…

JE: It burned again in 1891.

TM: But they were all frame buildings when they had the first fire in '86.

JE: Yeah. And I think he had a brick…I think he had a frame one down there too because he built the first brick one right after the fire. And the second brick one he built in 1891 following that fire is still standing. It's been remodeled quite a bit, but it's…the Sommer building's still there.

TM: I wanted to ask you about the name Sommer. The town Summerville is a different name, different spelling.

JE: Entirely different.

TM: That has nothing to do with the name of those people?

JE: No. The… Sommer is s-o-m-m-e-r-.

TM: e-r.

JE: Uh-huh. That was Aaron and Daniel. And then Summerville was…it's described in Oregon Geographic Names and if I'm not mistaken the man who first put a building there named the place after a friend of his in Salem named Alexander, I think, Somerville. But he, of course, spelled it Summerville which people would remember. They wouldn't think of the other spelling.

TM: Right. That's very interesting. Do you know, I wanted to see if we could move to a couple of other areas and then you might possibly want to say some other things, too. Let's pause for just a moment, though. [tape pause] We'd like to turn for a few minutes to early day newspapers in La Grande and Union County and you wanted to discuss there were two early newspapers, you said, founded in the 1860s, one was a Democratic paper and one was a Republican paper. These would've been in the late 1860s?

JE: 1868. They were both first printed in 1868. The very first one was the *Blue Mountain Times* which was a Republican paper probably __ of Baker, an attorney,

and __ Coggin, businessman. I don't know very much about Baker. Coggin was killed in the Bannock uprising over near Pendleton in 1878, July 12th, I think. But the paper was printed on April 18th, the first one. In later years there was a story told to the effect that there was a race between that paper and a Democratic rival, each one trying to be the first to get their paper on the street and that the…it…the first one hit the street about three or four hours ahead of the other one and the Democrat paper was the first one. However, the Democrat paper, which was *The Sentinel*, was actually two weeks later than the…than the Republican paper had been. That story was told by the fellow who printed the print *Sentinel*, E. S. McComas, an interesting character who probably should have a book written about him because he did so many things and what he did was often kind of fascinating. He came out here in 1862 and wrote one of the better diaries of the westward journey. He and the fellows that he traveled with spent a winter up at Auburn working in the mines. And then…and he took a wagon all the way to The Dalles and back to get provisions for their winter stay. And then after the settlement era started in earnest, why, he became part of the La Grande business scene. He was always an entrepreneur or a busy man, you could put it that way. He was one of three fellows that got the first drugstore established in La Grande. He operated the hotel for a while. He hauled wood part of the time. He became, I think, the Register of Public Lands for a while. He did all kinds of things. But starting the newspaper gave him a good outlook for his personality which was a little flamboyant. And during the 1870s he agitated pretty strongly for a war of extermination with the tribes of the area, particularly the Nez Perce, because he felt that over in Wallowa County they stood in the way of progress. He didn't hate them at all, he just thought they were in the way. And he… I think he was influential to some extent because he blew some areas out of proportion and exaggerated other and said a few that weren't so. And there was a delegation, I think, to the legislature from that area insisting that something be done. Anyway, it all came to nothing fortunately and the Indians future that most people…crossed the Snake River into Idaho and that was the end of that particular scare. But he…he wasn't just a yellow journalist in the worst sense of the word, although the two fellows would've understood each other perfectly I think. But he didn't mind doing a little bit of sensational reporting or editorializing. And his stuff is often colorful and he had a lot of news and the paper was quite a lively one and I think, for it's time, a pretty good one.

TM: How do you spell his last name?

JE: McComas, m-c-c-o-m-a-s. He had two… He had three last names, Evans Smith McComas. No wonder he went by E. S., he was always known as E. S. But he, yeah, he was a character. And he published *The Sentinel* for quite a long time. When the county seat was moved in the election of 1876, I think it was, '74 he moved along with it. He went to Union and published the paper over there because that was where the…all the business of the county was transacted for a number of years…quite a few, until 1901. But…1904, actually. 1901 was when the county boundaries were redrawn and then La Grande knew the next election it would get the county seat. It tried before a time or two and didn't make it. Anyway, McComas finally retired and I think that was, oh, about 1882, something

like that. And after that he did all kinds of things. He was always involved with promotions of one kind or another and traveled widely usually with two big valises full of interesting things like…as one of the people who've written about him said shares in mines that should be there and aren't or shares in a lake that might have medicinal properties, lots in towns that hadn't been built yet and this sort of thing. [laugh] Usually came home… He must've been a pretty good talker because he usually came home reasonably wealthy. But the money disappeared quickly and so he had to go back on the road again. But when he came home the first thing he did usually was to go down to the jail and bail out any Indians that had been arrested for drunkenness or anything like that. And he often brought strays home with him, that is…I think one was Chinese who had been stranded somewhere and came along and was cook for them for a while. He did help people. He was an unusual and interesting man. Finally…this, I think, was pretty much toward the end of his career…he got into patent medicines and he…one of his friends was Chief Whirlwind of the Cayuse nation who went with him and they did the medicine show circuit for some time. His line was Whirlwind Remedies. So he'd always dressed himself up in a fancy western suit kind of like Buffalo Bill Cody wore when he did his show. And…let's see…he did a lot of other things, too, but that's about…just looking for the date when he died. Was after the turn of the century, I believe, and he died over in Wallowa. I'm not sure of the date of his death. Somebody should write a book about him. He had nieces and I think those were the ones that started writing. One of them in a writing class in the 1930s wrote several versions of her memories of him, lightly fictionalized, but obviously taken directly from life. And they are kind of fascinating. Most interesting personality…[end tape]

2/12/03, T1, S2

TM: We were going to…you wanted to…had a couple wrap up comments on Mr. McComas and…like the date of his death.

JE: Yeah. One thing I wanted to say was that the Republican paper that was printed before he was it didn't last very long.

TM: That was the *Blue Mountain Gazette*? No, the *Blue Mountain*…

JE: One moment. *Blue Mountain Times*.

TM: *Blue Mountain Times*.

JE: *Blue Mountain Times*. The fellows that ran it were no match for McComas' personality.

TM: What was the name of his paper?

JE: His was *The Mountain Sentinel*.

TM: Yeah, *The Sentinel*.

JE: Yeah. It became just *The Sentinel* later on. ___ he was quite a character and he died at 1911 at the age of seventy-two. He was living over near Wallowa at that time. He was one of those people that…well, he was just regarded as a character and I think very much…very much a character.

TM: Were these papers weeklies initially? Were they weeklies?

JE: Yeah. They were all weeklies, uh-huh. The first daily was one of the La Grande papers and *The Observer* tried a daily paper pretty early and I don't think it took, but later on they went to a daily and it's been with us ever since. They were…one or two others in La Grande tried it and failed. There just wasn't enough demand. But the…evidently once you get it…it's like one of those things where you create the demand by providing the item and sometimes it works that way.

TM: Yeah, by providing the service or the opportunity and of course with a larger business community there could be more advertising and so on and you could gradually make it pay, I would think, with a daily.

JE: Yeah. *The Observer* started in 1897, I believe.

TM: Was that the daily *Observer*?

JE: That was the weekly.

TM: That was… That was the weekly, 1897.

JE: Yeah. That was when it was first started. __ just where that is, but…it's all listed in the essay that I did which was printed in the…in *The Observer* a while back several years ago. 1896…October 20th, 1896 was the…

TM: That was for *The Observer*.

JE: That was the first *Observer*. And the daily was introduced November 1st, 1901.

TM: Oh. Okay. Just a little over a hundred years ago.

JE: Yeah. The daily was initially a morning paper and then switched to evenings in 1903. So it's been as it today, essentially, for a long time, over a hundred years.

TM: The technology has certainly changed. I would imagine the technology of those early papers was pretty much hand set type, particularly those early weeklies it would have been hand set type. The l__ machine came in later in the century in the '80s or '90s, I think.

JE: Yeah. The very early ones probably were just the printer had a type font, you know, and a simple press with an ink roller. I don't know when Merganthauler's machines…there was something…I ran across something about that. They came along fairly late and I believe *The Observer* had one about that time, around 1900 I think, they started using it.

TM: Yeah. They were… I think they were available by then. By the turn of the century they were pretty…pretty common. But before that I think it was pretty much hand set stuff.

JE: Mm-hmm. And those…those printers were…they were kind of a different breed of people, you know, and they… When you… If you read up on the old newspapers you keep finding the same names. Over in Wallowa county here's a guy that was working out in La Grande a while back and they just moved around and they… Once they tried to run a paper the size of Flora or Summerville. They had a very uphill battle and they had to be doing it for the love of the art. They really had to love newspaper printing and publishing, liked to see their work in print. And some of them certainly couldn't have made more than an absolute bare minimum of living. There was on paper… I have an issue, the only surviving one, of the *Summerville Annotator*. And the only reason it survived is because the paper hadn't been delivered, that is the stock hadn't come, it was late in being delivered and the deadline for the paper was due. And the editor printed the paper on butcher paper he got from one of the local butchers and it's much better paper

than the acid newsprint of the day so the paper's nice and crisp and rattley and it's still in pretty good shape.

TM: That paper didn't survive long, I think.

JE: No. The acid paper it starts to decay just about as soon as it's printed. And the old newspaper that have survived this long are crumbling, most of them. And they're…gradually you can't handle 'em. *The Observer* had a complete file, pretty much, in it's vault and in the last years when they were in the old building the staff kept using the old issues to put interesting items in the current papers that they took from the old ones. And by the time they were ready to move the bindings were coming off and the papers themselves were disintegrating into loose sheets and pieces. And they tried to move it to the new building and I guess up on the top floor there there's still a pile of 'em up there, but it's mostly just a pile of dust. The papers don't survive.

TM: Yeah, that's too bad.

JE: It is really.

TM: Did the Summerville paper itself last very long? Probably not.

JE: No, not very long and I think it was all in 1890.

TM: Just in one year.

JE: Uh-huh. I think it… I don't think it survived much longer than that. I've written down what there…information there is about it, but it didn't last long. Like so many little towns an effort was made to print a paper. Lostine had a paper. It had a rough time too and at some point was combined with one that covered some of the rest of the area and this sort of thing. But small towns… Wallowa had a paper and I think it was fairly well supported. I had a paper from 1911, I think, *The Wallowa News* and then at some point later it became *The Wallowa Sun*. And *The Sun* lasted until 1944, I believe it was. The editor got bent out of shape over something or an another with the people of the town, probably didn't feel they were supporting him well enough. He moved it to Enterprise. And then later Wallowa had another paper, it was *The Wallowa Record*, and it was published by a couple of fellows who also published a paper in Elgin.

TM: Did… You grew up in Wallowa county?

JE: Yes I did.

TM: Yeah.

JE: In the town of Wallowa.

TM: And so you are actually from Wallowa yourself.

JE: Yeah.

TM: Oh, okay.

JE: It…nice place to grow up in. I enjoyed my life over there.

TM: Let's for a few minutes just talk about drugstores, Jack. You're working on a project right now doing some research into early drugstores in La Grande. Do you want to talk for just a few minutes about…about that? About that first store and then anything else you want to say?

JE: Okay. I did…yeah, I did mention the first one. I'm sure it was the first one because three people combined their resources in order to get it started so there must've been a pretty fair demand for it. The three people involved were a man named Hulsey, he was a doctor, and Deal, that would've been Robert Deal

who…for whom Deal Canyon was named. He was a man of several occupations as most of those people were. He was a farmer, he had a livery stable and rented horses and that sort of thing and he was a butcher, so he was a businessman in town, too, in a couple of ways. And then the third person was Z. S. McComas who at that time was I think Register of State Lands and operated a hotel part-time and did several other things. Anyway, their combined efforts got the first drugstore going. It was a few years later I think it was Hulsey and Mahafee it seems to me that he had taken a partner and it was apparently a going…a going concern. But many of the early drugstores were established by doctors, which is a logical thing. They used a lot of medicines and this would be one good way to get them and keep them all in one place and maybe sell some of them on the side. So having the drugstore was a good idea. Another local doctor of the 1890s, really, '80s and '90s, was E. D. Steincamp. Dr. Steincamp at one time had the drugstore in Granite up in the mining country.

TM: When… About when was that drugstore in La Grande by Deal and so on…McComas and so on…when did they found it?

JE: 1867.

TM: 1867, so that was quite early. And it would've been, then, in Old Town.

JE: Oh yeah.

TM: It would've been Old Town somewhere.

JE: Yeah. 1862 was when the town was platted and settled, the first part of it, and five years later…they waited a little longer for a drugstore maybe than some towns did, but obviously there was a need for it with three people backing it.

TM: Was there another drugstore, a competing drugstore? Did that come in at any__?

JE: None of the old directories that I've consulted show one and there aren't very many. I think there's 1867 and then maybe '71 and then nothing until about 1881 or '2 and…so there's ten-year gap, at least. But by 1883 the drugstore in Old Town was operated by __ Palmer. And when the New Town was established he moved to New Town and the drugstore then became Newlan and Palmer, Ferdinand Newlan, I believe it was, that was the other person involved.

TM: In those days didn't doctors make up their own prescriptions? In other words, didn't…wasn't the doctor really the pharmacist in some of those early drugstores?

JE: Indeed he was. He… If there wasn't a drugstores he had to make his own pills, anything that he couldn't order from some firm. And, of course, if you needed the medication in a hurry and it took you a month-and-a-half to get it the patient probably didn't survive long enough to try it out.

TM: Right.

JE: So they almost had to have a supply on hand, I would think. And if they did then…if there was enough time on their hands, why, they might have had a store at the same time.

TM: Right. And they would sell other items in the store. Once they opened the drugstore they would be able to sell other items, patent medicines, I would assume, things like that, huh?

JE: Yeah. There were a lot of patent medicines in those days. And before the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906, why, some of those medicines were quite effective. There were a little problems involved. For example, the soothing syrup for babies

worked like a charm, but it was mostly laudanum, which is the same as opium [laugh] and not all that good for the child.

TM: Wasn't laudanum occasionally opium and alcohol as well? They'd mix some alcohol with it? I think I heard that.

JE: Yeah. Paregoric was one of those. There were various…these concoctions. The thing that made you feel better, usually, in the patents medicines, the __ and so forth, was the alcohol in them.

TM: It would kill the pain. Whatever pain you were feeling would probably go away with the alcohol.

JE: Yeah. You felt very pleasant.

TM: And the opium, too, I would imagine would be…

JE: It would indeed. So that was…too many people were becoming addicted to things like morphine and opium and so forth simply because medicine worked and they took it. And so the government had to apply some standards, which they did in 1906. And since then, why, medicine's been a lot safer. And the patent medicines that were mostly alcohol and flavoring with a little bit of grass or something to give 'em an herbal appearance those were…some of them were quite harmful, really, and so they were able to get some of those things off the…off the shelf.

TM: But in the early days that certainly would not have been true, so in the 1860s and '70s early drugstores could have sold the…any number of things without a prescription, really.

JE: Yeah. It would just be whatever was available. And they had a lot of things…and this was true clear up until World War II…they had a lot things that they don't any longer. You could buy almost any chemical you wanted through the drugstore.

TM: Like arsenic, for instance.

JE: Arsenic or I was thinking of things like things used in…in woodworking, actually, various dyes.

TM: Oh yeah.

JE: Log wood extract and alcinec and all those things were used to color various finishes. And all kinds of…well, there were a couple of things that are used for browning steel, mercurial chloride and other things you get those.

TM: You could just walk in and buy them over the counter, right?

JE: Yeah. If you need so much of this…I blew a gun I need this particular thing or rat poison.

TM: Yeah. I'd heard. I remember that things like arsenic could be sold without any questions being asked, you know. You could tell them you were gonna use it for rats or whatever and they'd sell it to you.

JE: Arsenic came in very handy sometimes. Lafayette C. Baker, who was something of a charlatan and not altogether honest, was head of the Secret Service during Lincoln's administration. And afterwards he swore that he knew an awful lot about various congressmen and other people that had been involved in the assassination plot and he died of arsenic poisoning. [laughs]

TM: Interesting.

JE: Like CIA.

TM: It'd be interesting to get the full story on that one.

JE: A different century, but the same idea.

TM: Same idea, yeah. I was gonna ask you another health related question that we could think about just for a moment as we wrap up. I wanted to ask if you wanted to say anything about an early hospital in La Grande or hospitals?

JE: The first hospital that I'm aware of…and I would imagine some doctors at certain points were like…well, the doctor over in Wallowa when I was growing up they had a building like a fairly large house. The upstairs was room…were rooms for patients up there and he conducted it kind of as a hospital. The…and it was called the hospital, too. He had his offices on the ground floor. But the… In La Grande the only one I know of that was actually called a hospital was Grande Ronde which was established by three local doctors in 1906, I think, the Grande Ronde Hospital. Doctor…oh, I would have to look up their names. Dr. Molliter was one of them. And one associated with them that wasn't involved in that, Dr. Lincoln was a dentist. I think one of the Richardsons was another of the doctors. But anyway, there were three of them that… There was a need for a hospital so they established Grande Ronde. And that was the first one here. I forget now when St. Joseph's hospital was established. It seems to me it was 1935. But the idea of a hospital was certainly prevalent during the '80s and '90s, particular the '90s, but getting one going was a different matter and we didn't get one till 1906.

TM: And of course in terms of babies being born most babies were born at home anyway, were they not? Or, in fact, they were all pretty much born at home.

JE: Yeah. Often midwives were the ones that took care of that. If the doctor had a nurse and he made her available for that sort of thing then it was a little more formal. If you operated a hospital facility of some kind then people were there. Hot Lake…the building at Hot Lake I believe was 1906…'4 or '6…and it was designed by the same architect that designed the administration building at Eastern, __ Bennes.

TM: This is existing building there?

JE: The existing big building at Hot Lake.

TM: And the name of the architect was?

JE: Bennes, b-e-n-n-e-s.

TM: I have heard of that.

JE: Yeah. He… He went on to Portland and designed buildings down there for various places around the state and one of them, I think, was one of the reinforced concrete structures in the state. But much of his work was done for the System of Higher Education at buildings on various campuses. But that was…when that was…building was put up the idea was that it was to be a sanitarium and it was just a hospital and curative facility. You could go and take the waters and recover from whatever. And it had also a hospital and they had a surgery…operating room and everything so it was fully-equipped hospital and quite busy, one of the best in the country, it was said at the time, up into the '20s until the time of the Depression. So it was an important early hospital for this area.

TM: Jack, I want to thank you for both of these interviews. These have been very helpful, very complete. We certainly have a lot more ground that we can cover

and hopefully we'll be able to get back on it soon to consider a couple of other areas. Did you want to add anything today, Jack?

JE: I don't think so. We can just try something else again.

TM: Sure. Thank you, Jack, and we'll get back to this. Thanks. [tape stopped]

Jack Evans

3/18/03, T1, S1

TM: I'm Tom Madden once again of the home of Jack Evans in La Grande. Today we'd like to talk a little bit about emigrant trails in Union County. Jack, did you want to start with the…talk…just summarize briefly the trip of the…the Whitmans and the route they would've taken when they came in? Wasn't that in 1836?

JE: Mm-hmm.

TM: Right around in there.

JE: '38.

TM: '38.

JE: The Whitmans and later…a little later Jason Lee went that way. Lee was with Wyatt's party, I believe, and the Whitmans were more or less just their own party. But there were others who went the same way. The early missionaries followed that route. And they came into the Grande Ronde in the same way that the Oregon Trail did down Ladd Hill and across the valley. And from the Grande Ronde River they turned northwest and went up Fox Hill. And I am not sure exactly where that first road went. It was the same as the 1843 route of the wagon trains. Later they went across they valley up 'B' Avenue, actually, and behind Table Mountain, over the ridge and across the plateau to drop down to the Grande River where Hilgard Park is now. But the first ones went up Fox Hill. And I don't believe they could've gone the present road does because there, say, Bald Knob up there it would've been too steep, I think, for the wagons to get up especially considering the kind of footing, it would tear the hooves of the oxen. That's, oh, what they called…oh…the name escapes me at the moment, but it's broken rock…cut rock, they called it…all sharp corners and it will eat tires on a car. So they probably went up the wooded canyon that is just east of Fox Hill a little bit. I think they could've gotten up that without too much difficulty. And I do know from one or two of the things they wrote…and they weren't too good diarists in 1843…but they did mention sending parties, young fellows, on ahead to cut brush and clear the trail. So there were areas where they did have to cut their way through the timber. But when the Whitmans went through, of course, this was horse trail and they had pack horses, but nobody used wagons at that time. And they…they went up Fox Hill and from the summit up there there is a very nice gentle swell that goes right down to Five Points Creek. And the Whitman trail went that way and so did the 1843 wagon train. From Five Points it's a spot of meadow there on the bottom called Camp One, which dates from one of the early mills, saw mills in the area. On the north side of that the…there's one place on the hillside of the bank, or the side of the canyon, that is negotiable. It

isn't steep as the rest of it. And they went up that way and when they reached the top there's a flat up there and they would've gone straight out to the end of the point where Sacagawea Spring is and then down into the bottom of Meacham Creek Canyon, up the side and on down Horseshoe Ridge. That was the where the horse trail…the old Indian trail went. And the 1843 train took it as far as the big flat and then they turned west and went over to where the present Mt. Emily Road interchange is and on north, that's the route that the well-known part of the Oregon Trail took. So they went that way.

TM: Was the 1843 train the first big year on the trail for wagons? For emigrant wagons?

JE: Yeah. It was the first one where some of them actually took their wagons all the way through. Many of 'em left 'em at the Whitman mission and took rafts down the river or whatever in 1843. And one of them who was very sure of himself he said he stoled up at Utility Falls and lost everything that he had. But rafting wasn't such a good idea, but many of them did that. The 1840, I believe it was, when the mountain men Joe Meek and some others, realizing the last rendezvous and been held and the fur trade was about done, decided thy would try their luck at something else in Oregon. And they, being mountain men, they knew the country and took their own time about it, but they picked up some abandoned wagons at Fort Hall and took them about three months to take their trip, but they took the wagons all the way to the Whitman Mission. So it was known by that time, then, that you could take a wagon across the Blue Mountains and the 1843 train did. It was guided partly, at least, by Marcus Whitman.

TM: And those…that train would've gone, again, up the Fox Hill route.

JE: Yes, it did.

TM: Did trains ever go, or travelers go, north to where Elgin is? In other words, come in Ladd Hill, go north across the valley over Pumpkin Ridge and then go west over the present Tollgate Road? Was that any kind of a wagon road up there?

JE: It was later. I don't know…it originally was another Indian trail and that was the route that Fremont took in 1843 when he came through here. He was guided by Kit Carson and…who knew all of the West reasonably well. And Carson took him across that way. They didn't have…they did have a kind of a wagon that had surveying instruments and scientific instruments in it. They had a cannon with them and a limber which had to be dragged behind. So they needed more than just a trail that was one horse wide. But the…that route part of it you can easily see…not exactly ruts, but you can see where it was from about where Rinehart is. Willow Creek goes under Highway 82 at that point and there's a meadow there, a good-sized meadow, with oxbows of this very slow-moving stream in it. And Fremont refers to the stream as being quite deep and his people, I think there were a couple hundred of 'em, they camped on that meadow and then they went right on about where the present Highway 82 does till you get to the top of the ridge. And where it bends to the right to go across the summit and down to the river that turned off. There's a dirt road there that turns off at the same point they did and it goes over a nice little spot in that ridge and right down to the Grande Ronde. Hits it about a mile west, I think, of where the present bridge is. And from there they went on across the flat to timber. There was a nice stand of pine timber where

Elgin is today. Fremont estimated some of the trees as bein' six-and-a-half feet through and two hundred feet tall and I'm sure he was correct, he had a pretty good eye for such things. But from there they went up Gordon Creek. And I don't know the exact route of it, although at least one person does know where the old ruts are. And it came out on the present Tollgate Highway at about Tollgate or just this side of it, I understand. And then from there they went across and down Lincton Mountain. And there's a pretty bad road that goes down that way yet. I don't know of other travelers over it, although it was well-known and the Indians had used it. And somewhere…I am sure it was 1856, and this was kind of a bad year for Indian problems, but I read this someplace and I wish I could remember where I saw it. Anyway, it mentioned a single woman who was…this was an unusual thing in those days for a woman to travel alone…and she had a spring wagon and she hired an Indian to take her across that route in her wagon. And I have…I have no idea where I saw that. It's been thirty years since I read it, but it's always stuck in my mind that…there was always a way known across that part.

TM: That, again, would've been up Gordon Creek or following the route as the Fremont.

JE: Fremont. Mm-hmm, same trail. But the Fremont's cannon wasn't an enormous thing. It was a mountain alitser which had a brass barrel about two feet long and fired a shot weighing twelve pounds. And since it was the model 1841 and this was only two years after it was adopted I think when Senator Benton sent his son-in-law out here to look things over this was taken along either to impress the Indians or maybe to see what practical use it might have in mountain country. It…It's a type that was used very little in the Civil War except in the western campaigns that they used it a little bit. But it was something of interest that they, of course, took it along. Until they ran into snow in the Sierras and at that point they had to abandon the cannon. So there have been stories ever since about where the cannon went and whether anybody ever found it or not.

TM: That's an interesting speculation, isn't it, that it's sitting up there in the Sierras someplace still, maybe?

JE: Yeah, it might be.

TM: Who knows.

JE: Who knows.

TM: It would've been towed by what? A couple of horses?

JE: Yeah, it would…a limber to go with it which is a cart…it's an ammunition cart, really. And then the…there would've been a team that would've pulled the…pulled the cannon. It was lightweight for it's day. I think the barrel weighed two hundred pounds. And it was designed to be taken apart and all the parts carried on horseback so it didn't have to be dragged, but it was just as easy to pull it on it's wheels, probably, as it would've been to carry it on pack horses or mules.

TM: Then you had to carry the ammunition someway anyway.

JE: Limber had the ammunition in it. Sometimes those limbers had, oh, twelve or fifteen rounds of either shells or solid cannon balls plus a number of musket cartridges. But I think what the…what Fremont would've taken along probably

would've been mostly cannon balls. And he did fire it, I think, a few times to impress the Indians. I believe they were suitably impressed. Just like kids with fireworks, you know.

TM: So that expedition was guided by Kit Carson?

JE: Mm-hmm. Yeah. He was well-known…a well-known frontiersman and would probably have been a natural for a military expedition, which essentially was what Fremont's was. He didn't perform as a soldier necessarily although it was a military reconnaissance really. And the idea was to get a better idea of the country and how the tribes were organized and other things that might be necessary in case they had to campaign in the West, I think. Benjamin Bonneville when he came out here in 1834 he was on an extended military reconnaissance, too, kind of the same idea. But he got so wrapped up in the romantic notions of life as a mountain man that he overstayed his leave and had a heck of a good time. And when he went back, why, he was temporarily suspended while he wrote the account of his travels and turned that over to Washington Irving who made a pretty good book out of it.

TM: Right. I'm not…that wasn't…let's see, Francis Parkman that was a different book.

JE: Parkman he wrote the book called *The Oregon Trail*.

TM: Right.

JE: But it only goes as far as western Nebraska, I think.

TM: Yeah, 'cause that's as far as he went, I guess.

JE: That's as far as he went, yeah. It gives you an idea of what…what it was like to start out, but nothing much beyond that point.

TM: Nothing over this way. Did Bonneville come through the Grande Ronde Valley?

JE: Yeah. He was here. He… When he came in he…as Hunt had done he tried to go down the Snake River through Hells Canyon and that didn't work out very well. Hunt had to turn back and had quite a tough time. But Bonneville they found a ridge that came down pretty much to the river and they went up that. And this was at a bad time of year…Hunt had come through in the middle of the winter, too. But Bonneville got up to the top of the ridge and crossed over and went down into the Imnaha Canyon and from there made his way…he was with the Nez Perce who were living there in the winter usually…and he didn't come through the Wallowa Valley, I don't think, though he may have. But he went generally in that direction. He explored around over Oregon, was up in the Blue Mountains part of the time. And he tried to get supplies from Hudson's Bay Company who wouldn't sell him anything. They didn't encourage competition. And he did have a vision of being champion fur trader himself. So they offered to…if he wanted to come back with 'em and they would take care of his people…travel with the fur brigade across the country. He could've done that, but he was a stubborn man and decided, no, he'd go back the way he came. So he crossed the Wallowas twice and it was a rather grim trip each way. So he must've known pretty much about the high country up there in the Wallowa Mountains. I'm not sure he would've gone back up the Imnaha and across the ridge and down into Halfway about, right in there.

TM: But he didn't…did he actually come through this valley?

JE: He was… He was in the Grande Ronde part of the time, I believe, if I remember his narrative correctly. And I'd liked to have seen his journal. I'd like to see Hunt's journal. I don't know what John Jacob Astor did with that one and I have no idea what the Army did with the other one. So all we have is his experience as Washington Irving interpreted it. And Irving hadn't been out here and didn't know the country so he was lost as much as Bonneville was part of the time. There's…nowadays it's easy to figure longitude because we have chronometers that keep perfect time. In Fremont's day he had probably the best watch that was available, ordinarily available, but it was off and so his observations, scientific observations…he always shot sun and wrote the longitude wherever they camped…but he was off. And if you…some fellow who wrote the Oregon Historical Quarterly back around 1911 traced Fremont's route by his astronomical observations rather than referring to Charles Groyce's map, he was the cartographer that went with Fremont and his maps are good. But anyway, this man was going by Fremont's journal and he had him crossing the Wallowa Valley, I think, in that area…fifty miles is what it was…is the amount of error.

TM: They were off.

JE: Yeah. Fremont's chronometer was off by fifty miles __ in time it would've equaled fifty miles in longitude. So it's a good thing that Groyce did his maps otherwise we might be a little confused as to where Fremont was.

TM: Where he actually went.

JE: Yeah. His maps are good and the one that shows where they crossed into the…they crossed the Powder River over in Baker Valley and then where they crossed the Grande Ronde Valley. And it shows…it doesn't show much of the valley where Elgin is, but it does show the direction they took and how they got across the mountains and down and then to Whitman's mission. Fremont had wanted to visit the mission and they did. But it…those maps are good.

TM: You know, another date is thinking of the Whitman Mission that…of when the Whitman Mission was destroyed and closed. I think that was in 1847, right?

JE: Yes.

TM: That caused a shift in the route, correct? I mean they didn't go…

JE: There were two things that caused it. That certainly was one, but Whitman was off the…to one side of the most direct route to the Willamette Valley.

TM: Yeah. He…it was really a detour to go see Whitman, right?

JE: Yes, it was.

TM: It was more of a detour.

JE: The first wagon train went that way because he guided them so they actually went to his mission. Most of them were annoyed that what they thought of as being terribly overcharged for any supplies that he let them have. Of course it cost him something to get the…whatever he needed there and to raise it and that was a factor, but they thought that they were being overcharged, some of them, and others realized that they had gone forty miles out of their way with things that were wearing out. So they…after that they generally went the more direct route and Whitman would meet them at some point, maybe Cayuse about, and sell them provisions. And in later years the Cayuse became such good farmers that they were the ones that sold all the produce to the emigrants and they had good stuff to

sell them. Whitman, like so many missionaries, he didn't come to learn, but to teach and so he steadfastly refused to learn anything from the people he was teaching. In other words, he kind of sealed his own fate in a way. And when it did finally happen it wasn't actually a massacre, it's always been called that, but I think sixteen people died out of a hundred-and-five, something of that sort. One of the casualties was Joe Meek's daughter by his Nez Perce wife who had died. And he called her Helen Marr, which is an interesting name. That's the heroine in Jane Porter's book *The Scottish Chiefs*, 1809…1830…1830. Anyway, it was a very popular novel and most of the mountain men were avid readers. You wouldn't know it by the language they used, but they read a lot. James Kliman was one, you could tell he…by reading his diary you could tell that he's familiar with Byron. They read the classics and they read a lot. So, anyway, that's just an aside about Joe Meek's little girl. But she died of neglect, apparently, not from being killed by anyone.

TM: That was in 1847…

JE: '47, yeah.

TM: And then when did trails start going up here out of La Grande, the 'B' Street route? I mean wagon trains.

JE: Pretty early. There's… It's either 1844 or 1845 and I'd have to look…

TM: So before…before Whitman…so before the Whitman's…?

JE: Yes.

TM: Okay.

JE: But they… It was either '44 or '45. One year they talk about two routes, a detour, and one of 'em took one route and the other one took the other and they wound up over somewhere coming back together again. But the route…that even as steep as it is going from La Grande right up over the ridge…and they had to tackle it head on, they couldn't side-hill without tipping over…tipping the wagon over. So even there they…they had some pretty steep going.

TM: What…

JE: …straighter, more direct route.

TM: Would they double-team?

JE: Oh yeah. [door bell ringing] Just a moment. [recording paused]

TM: So anyway, we were just asking about double-teaming. So basically they did, then, at the head of 'B' there they would…they would double-team and take one wagon up and then go back down and teams and take the next one up?

JE: Yes. The lower part of that is steep, but not too terribly bad. They probably double-teaming might've been enough to do it. And then when they got up to where it kind of levels off there's a bench there. They crossed the bench and then went on up over the ridge, but it really is steep. And I remember two of them mentioning specifically, one said that it took I think nine span of oxen to get their wagon up the slope, which is eighteen animals. I think the other one said eighteen animals. So they took as many oxen as…to get the wagon to the top then they'd go back down and bring up another one. And it took quite a little while to get up that hill, I think.

TM: Would they have camped at the bottom here somewhere? Was there a campsite along 'B' Street somewhere? Or was it on 'B' Street?

JE: That whole bench area up there near Mill Creek was the old pioneer campground.

TM: Okay, so I would see them in the morning try to start out and get up and over the hill and then they'd get as far as Hilgard, maybe about, over about one day?

JE: Usually they did a little better. They didn't like to stop where Hilgard Park is because it's near water, but there isn't much grass and so there was nothing for the animals to eat, really. And they tried to cross the plateau and down to the river and up the other side. And when they got on across a ways then they would camp. And one of those camps was the one where they had to go down to the bottom of California Gulch in the dark and get water and lug it back up to the top of the hill in buckets. ___

TM: That's kind of somewhere near that interpretive center is now, or the Blue Mountain Crossing Interpretive Center, in that general area?

JE: Somewhere…

TM: Somewhere along in there.

JE: …not too far from there. That's right up above California Gulch.

TM: Yeah, right. Right.

JE: But they managed to get about that far, some of them at least, and of course they camped in other places and along… There's an area where the trail runs, you can't see it anymore, but as you…from Hilgard Park go up the hill on the freeway and near the top, it's just on your right out on that kind of flat, and from there it went down and across Pelican Creek and up the north side. So they're off to the north of you while you're…when you go farther toward Spring Creek.

TM: Yes. I've walked on that coming from Five Points Creek, you know, walking up the road. Just a geographical thing, when they came over Fox Hill and down to Five Points then did they…did they actually follow…that's Pelican Creek there, did they follow Pelican Creek then?

JE: No.

TM: I mean this was before they took the other route.

JE: This was the 1843 train.

TM: Yeah.

JE: They just went right across the creek, it'd be Five Points Creek. They went right across Five Points Creek and up.

TM: Oh, you mean, oh, up past Hil…up past the…yeah, I see.

JE: Yeah. Where you would… Where they'd cross Pelican Creek is just…it's just above Hilgard there. There's a railroad overpass right there. There's a little…little hollow meadow. Later on that was where they pastured horses for the stagecoaches, in that little place right in there.

TM: Oh, you mean where the railroad goes across Pelican Creek now?

JE: Yeah.

TM: There's a railroad bridge there, right.

JE: Yeah.

TM: And then there's a Forest Service road that takes off up the hill along above the creek going kind of northwest there.

JE: Yeah.

TM: And you can actually get to where you can find the trail from there because the trail comes down the hill from the other way.

JE: Yeah. There's…the north side of Pelican Creek it's kind of rough in there and I don't think people have yet figured out exactly where the wagons went, but as soon as you get up there on that flat the ruts are clearly visible.

TM: Oh, you mean on the…

JE: Up to the north.

TM: …on the north side of Pelican Creek?

JE: Yeah.

TM: Oh, okay. Because…

JE: On the south side of Pelican Creek and up toward the freeway if you go up that kind of a little draw there are places of an old road in there and that's the old highway route. It went up there and made a kind of a double-s curve and then went on across the ridge where the present one goes. And in there there are a little fireplaces and things for a picnic area. And some people have thought this was Trail associated, but it's not. That's the old highway.

TM: Right, yeah.

JE: It's down in the timber right there.

TM: Yeah, I've never thought…people have told me that. I've never found that. I tried to find it one day, was just…was looking in the wrong place. But the trail actually does…

JE: It's easy to locate, actually.

TM: But the trail does actually coming up from the present Hilgard Park it does actually go up to the top of the hill and then northwest down through the creek.

JE: Right.

TM: And you can follow that, too.

JE: It can be followed. The…it's pretty faint across there, but the… One thing to remember at Hilgard Park, when they came down off of the mountain to the south and they crossed the river, as one said, you go four hundred yards downstream and then go up and over the hill. And where the present…well, Starkey overpass, it goes over the park and goes to the Juvenile Center up there…right at about the same place where that is there was a point that came down to the river. And that…and that point had been completely obliterated by highway and freeway construction and on the north side there's a cliff. And if you go up on the other side you'll find at the top of the cliff that the old trail ruts go on to the north from the top of the cliff because they went right up that point and the point's gone.

TM: So they came and crossed the…would they have crossed the stream already? They would've had to cross the river.

JE: Yeah, the crossed the river…usually the…I think they crossed it and came over to the north side as I think the bank was a little better and then they came along north side…

TM: And then went up the point.

JE: And then went up that point ___.

TM: But did they also come over, then, to the south of that cliff near where the…near where you go into the Job Corp center, you know, on the left as you're headed for the Job Corp center as you're headed south?

JE: There are some old tracks up there, that's the Foster Toll Road, which isn't much later.

TM: Okay.

JE: It follows… It follows the timberline on the opposite side of the meadow to the east and goes on south and then on up, I think, Whiskey Creek or Rock Creek, one of those little canyons. But the…the main trail went up that point and it's hard to believe that there was ever a point there now. And also it looks like the north side is pretty steep, but actually when you get up on top there's the old trail that's right up through the everberry brush and whatnot and are perfectly clear. They fade out again once you get further toward the top and there's been an awful lot of excavation and filling putting in the freeway. They have built up the bank on the east side quite a bit to keep it from sliding. And it's not until you get quite a bit further up that you can find any trail traces much.

TM: Right. But they did go up Pelican Creek and when they were coming the other way they would come down near where the…where Pelican Creek enters Five Points Creek? Or rather, I should say, which is the…which is the stream that the railroad crosses? Is that Pelican or Five Points?

JE: That's Pelican. Well, it crossed both, I think. But Pelican Creek is the one that comes down from the west.

TM: Yeah, okay.

JE: And Five Points Creek comes down from the east from the direction of Mt. Emily.

TM: Right, right.

JE: And they run together right near Hilgard.

TM: They run together right there, yeah.

JE: Right there at Hilgard they sort of join.

TM: They join just below that railroad bridge.

JE: Mm-hmm.

TM: Uh-huh.

JE: Yeah.

TM: But the trail came down there, then? It came…

JE: Yeah, it came down… It came down into Pelican Creek just about where the railroad…

TM: Bridge is.

JE: …bridge is. And you leave…leave Hilgard Park and go up the point and over the top and at the top you're kind of right along side the freeway.

TM: Right.

JE: And then you drop down again into the Pelican Creek bottom and cross over where…about where the railroad bridge is and then go up a big flat that's off to the north there. And it…I forget my…[end tape]

3/18/03, T1, S2

TM: …today we have been, you know, kind of going back and forth about your own researches here and you've written a book about the Oregon Trail in Union county actually, or in Northeast Oregon, right?

JE: Yes.

TM: Called…called *Powerful Rocky*. Do you want to tell us just a little bit about that book and what it covers?

JE: The title is from the diary of a man named Absalom Hardin who came through in 1847 and this is how he described the hill, Ladd Hill coming down into the valley from the south. And he said it was about six miles long from where you first started to descend it and it's "powerful rocky." The rocks are about as big as a person's head up there, so I imagine he saw quite a few of them. I…I'd always wanted to do a project like this and I had the opportunity at about the time I retired to do it. And it required three years of research and the writing and probably about actually a year-and-a-half to two years of research, third year in writing. And it was lucky that I had the resources of the Regional Services Institute up there because what I did in longhand and then redid on the typewriter they could put in the word processor and after that they'd hand me a stack of print and I would go through and revise and edit and correct and hand it back and they'd input the corrections and I'd get it back. By the time the book was actually published I…I'd saved all those copies and I think the stack of paper was five-and-a-half feet high ___ of going back and forth. And in the end we proofread it, a group of us together. So it's really a pretty clean copy. The maps in it are all from the USGS quadrangles on which the trail has been plotted by other people as well as myself. And it's checking out in the years since 1990 as pretty accurate. Nowadays they're going along with global positioning system indicators and checking against the map and it seems to be right on in most places. And that's not surprising because these are the same ruts that several other people before my time found, some of which are no longer visible. And I…quite a few that are no longer visible myself and I found one piece of it that we didn't know about. So this just a…quite a lifetime thing, really. And when I did it I tried to avoid reminiscences as much as possible and stick pretty much to things written at the time. What you write down at the end of the day is probably more accurate than what you can tell about it fifty years later. [laugh]

TM: So you worked a lot with the journals of people…

JE: Yes, I did. There was two or three hundred of…I think about three hundred, but I quoted from maybe half that many or maybe two hundred, I don't know. I haven't bothered to check that again. But I…I tried to get a pretty representative selection. Some of them were just people that would say "made thirty miles today and saw forty graves," you know, this kind of thing, how many dead cattle and so on. If it was a boring trip, why, that's what you keep track of. And for the fellows that were really excited, and some of the women who were along got excited, by the scenery. Though they had the drudgery, why, the cooking and trying to keep things clean and keep people fed and so on, but the people are the most interesting thing and nearly all of 'em were interesting in one way or another. Nice cross-section of the nineteenth century Americans. And there were some that, oh, they would betray a good sense of humor and others some were unhappy. The ones that were sick were the ones that were mostly unhappy, I think. And, of course, a lot of the women, I think, suffered a good deal because they remembered giving up something better than they were experiencing right now. But I think once they got where they were going, why, it wasn't too bad.

These were mostly farm people. There were a few from the city that were adventurers, but most of them were farm people looking for a better place to have a farm. And they were used to a hard life. So pioneering wasn't the…quite the absolute shock to them that it would be to us. All of a sudden you don't have anything that you had before. I have watched these, oh, exercises, I guess you'd call them, on TV, PBS, where they had to be pioneer family in Montana. But these were all imitation pioneers who were used to something else. They did at least get the flavor of what it was like, realizing that you had to chop no telling how many cords of wood to get you through a winter and they finally had to put in a barbwire fence to keep being run over by people moving cattle, and the primitive sanitary conditions and all that. Those were pretty faithfully duplicated, but they did…and they had something to compare what they were doing with whereas with the pioneers this is the way they'd always lived anyway. They were just doing it in a different setting.

TM: These were people who had been mostly subsistence farmers probably, right?

JE: I think so.

TM: They'd worked hard probably seven days a week kind of thing forever.

JE: Yeah.

TM: And were trying to get to a place where there would be better land and so on.

JE: Yeah, more opportunities. And I mentioned Absalom Hardin and he got in…down into the Willamette Valley country where it's all lush vegetation and pretty damp and he just rhapsodized over the beauties of nature. He just couldn't get over what a beautiful world it was down there. He thought he was in paradise, really.

TM: It must've seemed like a garden…

JE: Yeah, it did to a lot of them.

TM: …people like a garden. The…so…if we could backtrack just a little bit geographically of coming into the Grande Ronde Valley, we haven't gone in that direction yet today in this conversation. Coming into the Grande Ronde Valley then they would've come up out of the Baker Valley up over Ladd Hill, right?

JE: Yes. And there are quite a few traces of the trail that are visible up there, none that are all that easy to get to. Although, well, one or two them are not so hard to… It… It's a pretty straightforward route and followed the route of the freeway pretty closely. Up on top there's that nice little high meadow up there that the pioneers called Clover Valley. I don't think it has any clover in it now, but Clover Creek gets it's name from that and it's a little intermittent trickle that dries up in the summer. But the…from there they went straight on north across the top of the ridge instead of…they couldn't go down the canyon, of course. So they went across the top of the ridge and when they got to the north side of it then they went down. And there is…is an interesting hike, I have hiked over it, up near the top and you can't really see that from down below because it's in a fold in the hill, but there is a big aspen grove up there and rather a pleasant spot. I…they didn't stop there because they didn't…usually didn't stop until it came evening or time to camp, but I think they probably admired it. From there it drops down pretty steeply and then it makes a bend to the north. It has to because if you go any further you're too steep and you would be right down into Ladd Creek

over rough area. So they had to turn north and go around the side hill a ways. And at that point the ruts, I think, are about four feet deep. They…it's quite a trench. Quite a trench.

TM: I walked up there a few years ago. That's quite a thing to see __ speculate as to how they came down that hill is very intr__ because there's some very steep…steep places.

JE: There was a lot of… There were a lot of timber up there on top, still is to the south side of it. They…they would cut trees and use them to break their descent. Idea was to cut the limbs off on one side of the tree leaving the stub about a foot long of each limb and then when you towed the tree down the branches would keep it from rolling and the limbs would dig in. And this…___ coming out of the mountain ordinary wagon brakes probably wouldn't have worked there at all. So they had to…they didn't belay with ropes around trees. They did that above Hilgard Park when they came down that one. It was heavily timbered and they had plenty of trees to use to let themselves down a little ways. But Ladd Hill they…they couldn't have gotten a barer hill and they had to bring a tree with them and stories…you hear stories yet about years afterwards this great pile of old logs lyin' there.

TM: At the bottom.

JE: At the bottom, yeah. I imagine it's true.

TM: Yeah.

JE: One way to get down.

TM: When they got into the valley then they would've then come over, as we were saying earlier, they would've come along over toward what is now 'B' Street and then they would've camped at the bottom of the hill.

JE: Let me… First year or two, maybe just the first year, they went out into the middle of the valley, that's what Fremont said anyway, and he followed in their tracks. And then he said they crossed the river…I think he said they crossed the river and he said they left the valley by way of as steep as the one they'd used to come in.

TM: And that would've basically the Fox Hill route you were talking about earlier.

JE: That would've been the Fox Hill route, yes.

TM: But what…

JE: After that, I think it was within maybe three years, they started using the route that's now followed by the Foothill Road except that they…a surprisingly large part of it they were well above the current Foothill Road up the slope a ways. They did this partly because there is a level bench that runs along up there not completely level, but if…I've got some pictures of it…in the late afternoon the sun if the sun is shining at the right angle then it's kind of highlighted where it rises and falls. And from out in the valley a ways you can see…

TM: You can see that.

JE: …you can see that. And that's the way they went and they talked about how many springs there were along the west side of the valley and there are quite a few still. And they stayed up above all of that marshy area and much of it was marshland at that time. Ladd Marsh is pretty small patch of it compared to the way it used to be a hundred-and-fifty years ago. But they…they went that way

and it was a period in the 1870s…'60s and '70 when they were still going along that same route and then they went around the southern end of the valley, also in Foothill Road, to get to Union because they couldn't ride across the valley very well at that time, it was all marshy. Later on they did manage to get a road across it, but along the sand ridge. And they…that was another one of the early routes into the valley. It's the one nobody has identified as that, but I'm sure it is the one that Shaw's men used when they came over on their expedition which was the so-called Battle of the Grande Ronde in 1856 and it wasn't really a battle. But they used what Shaw referred to as "a secret route" known to the Indians that guided them. And what it really was was the route that the Umatilla River to a place that's called Ruckle where the road, or trail then, crossed the ridge and then it descended down to where Summerville is now. And then they came into the valley that way and surprised the Indians down at about where Riverside Park is. But the…the Indians were gathering their winter food supply and they weren't having a big wartime powwow as the propaganda had it. And it was ___ of fifty or seventy-five women, children and old men that were gathering food. And then the…Shaw's volunteers took the horses they wanted, killed the rest and destroyed, I think, a hundred-and-fifty __ of food that they Indians had gathered for their winter food supply. The general who was in charge of this country at that time, it was 1856 when they were having enough troubles already with the Indian wars that were all over the Northwest. Shaw and his men received strict orders that they were not to engage in any more expeditions. The idea was, "we'll hang you if you do." Shaw seems to have been a decent fellow, but they guys that were serving under him were just undisciplined rabble. They were a problem to everybody, let's put it that way.

TM: Yeah, that's not a very pleasant chapter in the history of…

JE: No, it isn't. We're fortunate that it's the only one of it's kind. It was usually a pretty peaceful place for everybody. The Indians traded here and the settlers that came through traded with 'em. It didn't have a very American bloody history although until about 1829, I think it was, it had been Snake country and it was kind of off limits to most of the people, the indigenous people, it not being a safe place to go.

TM: Then it was, uh, then who was it? Nez Perce or Cayuse?

JE: Cayuse principally. The Cayuse, Umatilla and Walla Wallas are all pretty closely related and they Cayuse and Nez Perce are very closely related. And the Nez Perce were over here some of the time, to visit their relatives probably. And they were up here but the valley here was largely Cayuse territory. In the summer they pastured their horses here and usually I think they had a pretty good summer. They liked to do that and…and they gathered their winter food supply and took it back home. So it was an area that nobody lived here the year round and for a long time people passing through would remark on what a beautiful place it is, nearly all of them did, and would love to settle here if only it wasn't quite so remote. And they couldn't be sure that natives would always be a peaceful people. And, of course, the time came when they weren't peaceful anymore because they'd had about all they could stand. So it…it must've been an interesting place to see it as it was before it was modernized, oh, draining the streams to get farmland and

cutting trees to make room for crops and this sort of thing. It…original Indian name for it "Takabi" means "place of cottonwoods." And there were cottonwoods along all the streams. We don't see quite so many cottonwoods now. And of course the river doesn't wander all over the valley like it used to, it having been ditched beginning in 1872, I think, they started the State ditch very early. Recl… The Bureau of Reclamation would call an improvement and for certain purposes it certainly was. It was all a swamp and bayous and meanders and oxbows and brush all the way from Island City to Union. Good for duck hunting, but I don't…I think about all the people who settled here at that time could think of was getting it drained so I can grow something. [laugh]

TM: So they could make pasture or farmland.

JE: Sure.

TM: Could we talk for just a few minutes before we stop today about other roads because there were stage roads that came in after a while that replaced the trail coming in and out of the valley, right?

JE: Yes.

TM: There was one went out through where the present Interstate 84 comes in from the west right as you go up the canyon toward Hilgard, right? In later years?

JE: Yes. There's a…I should go back to the route that Shaw followed when he came by his so-called "secret route." That later became the Thomas and Ruckle Road and it was a stage road. The Thomas and Ruckle Road went across the valley, sand ridge and then across to Union which meant that La Grande was being largely bypassed by traffic. Jim Pyle put his road up Pyle's Canyon in, I think, 1864, something like that, and it was pretty primitive road, but it was more direct and everything started coming that way. It was a much easier trip than coming over Ladd Hill. There was a little appeal in the 1868 paper, La Grande paper, for volunteers to improve the road. They were gonna get together and improve the road over Ladd Hill so that it would be fit for travel and they did. And that is a road that comes about the same route down Ladd Hill has the old Oregon Trail. It comes down the canyon that's just beyond there. There's a draw with switchbacks in it and I imagine that road…whether it's still passable or not I don't know, but that's what it is. And they used that so that improved La Grande's situation a little bit.

TM: Right. I think that's the road you can see from the left…on your left as you go up the hill toward the city…as you climb up past the rest area.

JE: Yeah. The bottom end of it is still used to service…service those utility poles that are up on the slope. But once you get to the bottom of that draw that it goes on up the draw and that is the…

TM: Stage road.

JE: …that's the improved road.

TM: That would be in the late 1860s that that would've been improved.

JE: Yeah, about 1868 or so. And…who's the famous artist that painted the views of the Oregon Trail? Old age is getting to me. But he…he painted the wagon trains at the Grande Ronde, that is, coming into the Grande Ronde, but he shows them descending the road that the settlers improved in 1868 not the old Ladd Hill

descent. But that was the way he saw it, but he came late, you see. But __ I'll probably think of it in a little bit.

TM: It's not Beirshtoff, no?

JE: No, that's…he was the landscape artist. This was…I'll think…

TM: Okay.

JE: I'll think…

TM: We'll put it in later when you think of it.

JE: The… The other roads… The old road west of La Grande that goes up over the top of the hill and across the flat in 1861, this just before settlement here, the government kept about the only promise it ever did keep with the Umatillas and it did build a road around the southern side of the reservation so, presumably, there wouldn't be this constant flow of people across their land. And what they did was to at the head of 'B' Street they went on up to where the bench is and then put in a switchback to go up over the top of the hill instead of that drop it went straight up. They fixed that. And then from there they stayed right on the Oregon Trail west until they got to the point where the old trail makes a half-bend to the north and descends to Hilgard. The old Oregon road then turned off to the southwest and went down into a canyon, up the other side and on straight to the west toward the Grande Ronde River. And that…there are traces of that road that you can still spot up there if you know what it is you're looking for. It wasn't used very long because it was so bad.

TM: Was this the toll road you were talking about early?

JE: No.

TM: No.

JE: This was the government road.

TM: This is the government road.

JE: Yeah. It was the way people were supposed to go and the later surveys that show the…that do not show the Oregon Trail any longer. It was either obliterated at that point or something, "No Trespassing Here," or whatever they did, but it was abandoned and they went on to the west. That was a terrible route. I think it came over around…came out over around Pilot Rock somewhere. But it was said to have crossed the river…forded the river, I think, nineteen times. And it was awful. ___ now you wonder how they got anywhere without wrecking their wagons. E. S. McComis who came out in 1862 and did some mining over around Auburn with some friends went down to The Dalles that winter for a load of supplies, team and wagon, though maybe __ just typical travel, you know, in those days. We would think it was pretty rough. But those…that road was one and it wasn't used very long. The Meacham brothers' toll road consolidated wagon __ was already in existence and it was a toll road across the mountains beginning 1861 or thereabouts. And so the…the Indians didn't really have too much of a decrease in travel, at least the big stuff, the freight wagons and stages. And by 1868 they had gotten their road extended all the way down the Grande Ronde Canyon to the valley so that you didn't have to go over the hill anymore. So the old road on top the hill is just forgotten. And the…after Harvey Meacham's death in 1872 his widow married a man named Foster who had worked for them at the Meacham Station. And he did some more improving of

roads of his own and he built the Foster Toll Road which kind of parallels the Oregon Trail route in a way and to an extent. The…some of the stage route I would like to know more about and I don't know…have a map of it anywhere. It may be the Forest Service has…has traced some of it. Bob Reynolds, who worked for the Highway Department, a man who chanced Oregon Trail remnants for years and probably a lot of what I know about it, always thought that probably the stage road, or one of them, might've come down California Gulch. It would be an actual route, certainly, and there is one man writing about a trip through this part of the country. The man's name is B. H. Sterns who did a little book called *A Tour of Union County*, which is interesting, said that they changed horses at midnight at Meachams' and went along well on pretty level country for quite a ways through the open timber then it just dropped down, down, and down. If they'd gone down California Gulch that's the way it would've been. And it's about the only way that it would've been that way, so I think there must've been a road down…down California Gulch. But Bob said he thought he had found traces of corduroy in the bottom at one time. But he had a bad heart and was heavy and he couldn't walk very far so he never really did get down in there and hike around. So there may have been one down that way, but we…___ the original route and then the wagon road company and then the stage route. And just down by Cayuse there was a place called Cayuse…well, that was Cayuse Station…that was…they called that Crawford Station and it was right at the bottom of the hill named Crawford Hill, the one that goes up the north side from Cayuse up to Dead Man's Pass. And the traders that were killed in 1874 were the ones who's names attributed to that. I believe it was about three people who died there.

TM: But the…the road that came into the valley on the what became Highway 30 coming in from, say, Hilgard into the valley down the river would've been in the late 1860s, it would've extended back in the canyon, the bottom of the canyon.

JE: They got it down in the bottom of the canyon by 1868 and it came out at Orodell, which, of course, no longer exists, but that was the little village that William Snodgrass established right at the mouth of the canyon. And it…he had put in, I think, a flour mill and a planning mill or saw mill, and he had a store and a saloon and other buildings and houses. And he…it was kind of his town, you know, he owned the whole thing pretty much. And then he had the big store up in Old Town in the '70s and '80s. He…he moved down to Depot Street just north of Washington. And he…that business, that area, survived the fire of 1886, but it didn't survive the fire of 1891. When he burned out in that one he lost $30,000. He wasn't insured and he never rebuilt. But it's a shame that Orodell's completely gone, but it's under Highway 84 if anybody ever wants to dig it up and look at it. [laugh]

TM: Jack, I want to thank you today and we'll stop for today and hope to continue this next time. Thanks.

JE: Thank you. [recording stopped]

Jack Evans

9/22/03, T1, S1

TM: Hello. Testing, testing, testing, testing, testing. Testing, testing. Light blinking now. Okay. Let's see what we got. [recording pause] Today is September 22nd, 2003 and this is Tom Madden. Once again we're at the home of Jack Evans on Main in La Grande. We're gonna talk about several other historical issues today. One of these is a ledger that Lee Johnson had in his collection. Jack, do you want to talk about that a little bit to begin with?

JE: Alright. It is a big heavy book, leather-bound in heavy boards that belonged to some store or operation of some sort in Hilgard. And it's… It begins with 1891 and goes through to 1894. This was not the only thing that they did there, but a large part of their operation was buying ties for the railroad. The railroad when it was being built through the mountains in early '80s, '83, had to have a lot of ties. Most of the people who settled up there around Camilla and Meacham, through that area, they had what are referred to frequently as homesteads, they were actually timber claims, I think. Many of them made a living – I imagine it was pretty precarious sometimes – of cutting ties for the railroad. They later on, by 1891 when this ledger dates from, the…evidently the place where you unloaded the ties or brought them was Hilgard rather than Camilla or Meacham. The… At that time they were paying twenty-five cents per tie, twenty-six actually, but one penny was for loading the ties. So this was hard strenuous work. There were a few fellas that would bring in two thousand or a thousand ties and get a sizeable chunk of money in exchange for them, but for the most part they would be dribbles of two hundred or something like that. Considering that you had to select a tree of the right approximate diameter – which I think would've been around ten inches or better. They also had to cut them to length and then they had to adz them on two sides, that is so that there'd be a flat underside to lie on the roadbed and a flat upper side to nail the plates to…spike the plates to for the track. The rails were… The ties were spaces about two feet apart, roughly. So that's a great many ties that they had to provide. By the time this ledger was started in 1891 the main line had been finished since 1894, but I would think that fresh cut ties that aren't creosoted or anything would rot fairly fast so I imagine there was a…it was a matter of constant replacement. Then they had to cut a whole lot more for the track…the branch line to Elgin which was completed in 1891. Some of the entries in here are for Elgin. After that, why, some other outfit, I suppose, collected them, but they were also cut for the branch line up to Joseph. And then, for an undetermined length of time after that they were supplies for replacements. Eventually, they became mill produced and I imagine there were mills here that specialized in that. Perhaps the large one that was at Hilgard at one time did that. But then they were milled on all four sides and then eventually they were creosoted and, later on, I think, pressure treated.

TM: What kind of wood was this? It was fir, I noticed, in some of the ledger entries, but would it also have been pine, perhaps, too?

JE: I would imagine that at some point probably they used anything they could get. Probably when they were completing the line there would've been pine I'm sure. Certainly fir, which is much more durable, I would imagine they used large whenever they could find it. I think the supply of tamarack, as we call it, was

pretty well depleted up there. But they… That's an awful lot of tracks when you stop and think how many it would take to do fifty miles of railroad, for example.

TM: Yes. Ties about every…what did you say? About every three or four feet?

JE: No. They were closer than that. It's if you're walking…walking on a railroad track you find that they are inconvenient intervals. That is, if you…you can't walk on each one without shuffling and if you skip one than it's a little bit longer than a standard step would be. So I think probably roughly two feet.

TM: So it would be about maybe as many…like twenty-five hundred a mile or something like that, if my math is correct in my head.

JE: I think so.

TM: That's a lot of ties.

JE: That's a lot of ties, yeah.

TM: Yeah, you need a lot of ties.

JE: People don't usually think about where the ties came.

TM: No.

JE: Generally it's something the company provides, but in this case where they were building through pretty much virgin country they would hire people to cut the ties for them or the people would cut them on their own and be paid for them.

TM: Yeah. They had…basically had to be cut locally. There was really not much of an option.

JE: Not too much of an option there. So it was twenty-five cents a tie plus a penny to load 'em.

TM: You mentioned that the main line was complete when? 1884?

JE: '84.

TM: '84.

JE: The first… The first passenger train came into La Grande on the 4th of July and that marked the completion of the track. But the actually passenger service didn't start, I don't believe, until about the 19th. It was later in the month, anyway, when they established regular runs. Freights, of course, were sooner than that because they…a lot of them traded rails, ties and whatnot to the end of the line.

TM: Right. Were they building from both directions? __ my memory on that?

JE: Yes, they were. The Union Pacific… Well, start over a little bit. The land through here from the west was the Oregon Railway and Navigation Company, OWR…OW&N. It became OWR&N around the turn of the century. But they… That belonged to Henry Valard. It was one of his operations. He went broke through overextending on the Great Northern so they…it came to a halt. He turned over his operation to the Union Pacific who just took the name and kept it and used it as a wholly owned subsidiary. For the purposes of building to need it Union Pacific had started the Oregon Short Line and run it west. The Oregon Short Line, again, was another wholly owned subsidiary of the Union Pacific. The rails made in Huntington in November of 1884.

TM: Okay. So the train that came in here came from the west?

JE: Yeah. It would've come from Portland.

TM: From Portland, yeah.

JE: But 4th of July it could come this far. It was just celebrating the arrival of the train into town. I think they probably had another celebration a little later when the end of track reached…

TM: Huntington.

JE: Well, Baker.

TM: Oh, Baker.

JE: Probably Baker City, yeah.

TM: __ Baker City then, too, sure. But technically…

JE: And then Huntington.

TM: …somebody could've gone from La Grande to Portland and back, at least…

JE: By late July.

TM: July. And then by fall, late fall, they would've been able to go all the way east.

JE: Mm-hmm. Starting at the…with the joining of the rails at Huntington the trip west on the covered wagons had been six months and by the 1860s or '70s when there was plenty of feed available along the way with horses and mules in about three months. Then, of course, stagecoaches went faster, but they had to change horses pretty often, but that still took a while. As soon as the tracks were joined they inaugurated a complete emigrant service from either Omaha or Kansas City that took from there to Portland took three-and-a-half days, which is…it was really a revolution, you know. It's hard to realize today how much of a step that was. A little bit like landing on the moon, you know. It's just one of those things that might get done someday.

TM: When you consider that a trip on the Oregon Trail, say, roughly from, say, Kansas City or that area would've taken six months, right, in the 1840s?

JE: It did.

TM: It would've been six months for them.

JE: They left usually in…well, as early as they could. High water usually held them up, but they got away in May. It was around the first of November when they hit the Willamette Valley. They… So it's kind of precarious. By the time got as far as the Blue Mountains here this was usually October and they had to worry about early snows. Then by the time that they got down to The Dalles, lets say, a lot of them built rafts…at first built rafts there and rafted down to Portland. But by 1845 __ got his road around Mt. Hood and they went in that way which was faster and better and you could take your wagons all the way. The only problem being early snow could catch you there pretty easily too because it was usually November by the time they got there.

TM: Right. So that was the real…much of an adventure when you consider, you know, three-and-a-half days versus six months. What a change!

JE: Yeah. The emigrant outfit… The typical emigrant outfit would be the family would, I'd guess you say hire, a railway car, a boxcar, and all their possessions would be in half of it and some of their animals in the other half and they would just ride. They'd live in there and look after their property. Three-and-a-half days later they would arrive in Portland and unload. Which wouldn't have been a very pleasant trip, all things considered, but only three-and-a-half days. [laugh]

TM: I had relative make that trip on the Northern Pacific, which was also the large enterprise, right?

JE: Yeah. I think I said Great Northern, but I meant the Northern Pacific.
TM: Yeah.
JE: It was the Valard interest. He went broke in ’81, I think.
TM: Yeah. And they actually didn’t… They completed it… It took them till about ’83 or ‘4 to actually complete the Northern Pacific, I think, about, across from Seattle to the Twin Cities, you know, to Minneapolis.
JE: Right.
TM: I had relative… I just want to say I have relatives who made that trip in the late, late ‘80s a few years after the train. They came from Wisconsin to Montana. It took a couple days, I think, in those days.
JE: Yeah.
TM: But it wasn’t all the way across.
JE: But it was still a sizeable savings in time.
TM: Yeah. And they were relocating, they were moving.
JE: Yeah. That’s what… Somewhere I used to have a…I think it was on the Santa Fe or the ___ it might’ve been. It was different railroads then what comes here, but it was one that went to I think Dodge City, Kansas. And right across the top of it was written Emigrant Outfit. So you could just hire…hire yourself a car…a railroad car and go that way and terrific savings in money. You might have to pay a little bit up front, but you didn’t have to starve to death part of the way and risk getting trapped in blizzards or hurt by hostile people.
TM: No. And you knew you were going to get there in probably about three days. You’d be getting where you were going, you know. It made quite a difference.
JE: Even if the train got stopped by heavy snow in the mountains the crews would get it out of there pretty quick and certainly much better that if you got trapped with the Sierras, the Donner party. They couldn’t get through.
TM: That was a late October storm, right, or something that got those people?
JE: I think so.
TM: Right around the end of October. But, you know, I was gonna turn to a related thing you mentioned earlier, branch lines now. ‘Cause you said that probably a good many of these ties that were being cut in the early 1890s were either for replacements of the original ties, some of which would’ve been getting on for seven or eight years old by that time, or they were for branch lines. So now what… You said there was a branch line to Elgin and that was completed when?
JE: 1891.
TM: 1891.
JE: They started it very shortly after they finished the line through here and established the division point. But I’m not sure just when they started across the valley. They didn’t really take too terribly long to get there. They went out to Island City and from there over to Alicel, which little station was established for the farmers to get their produce or their grain to market, and Imbler and finally on into Elgin. That was the end of the track for quite a while. It was important to get the line that far because the Palmer Lumber Company had a lot of holdings up around Looking Glass and they wanted to have access to a line. This was some kind of __, of course, to the Union Pacific to put the line in. The people in Elgin had expected that mill would be right there, you know, and they would become

quite a flourishing metropolis. They were dismayed to see all these train loads of logs coming right on through town and coming over to La Grande. Palmer didn't want to relocate their plant. You can't really blame them. It wasn't till 1908 that they finished running the line on up to Joseph.

TM: Okay, so it was 1908, a few more years, and then they put it all the way through Joseph?

JE: Mm-hmm.

TM: And then, of course, the mill was ultimately built in Elgin, but that must've been years…

JE: It was a little later. By the time they got to Wallowa, of course, there were local mills that supplied people locally. The town of Wallowa wasn't established 'till '87 so it was a pretty small town then. Enterprise about the same time, a little later. Or…I think it's a little younger. Anyway, it stopped at Joseph, being the oldest rail town in the valley. But the mills generally followed the arrival of the railroad 'cause there was no other way to ship anything.

TM: Yeah. No other practical way to things to market. What about other, let's see, branch lines around here? Wasn't there a railroad that went up…a branch up the Grande Ronde towards Ukiah? Wasn't there a line up there?

JE: Yes, there was. But that was the Mt. Emily Lumber Company's line, their own railroad. It went from Hilgard up to Starkey. The Starkey track is up there and then of course they had spurs all over the hills up there where they were doing the logging. Then the Grande Ronde Lumber Company, I think, might've used that one or at least parts of it before. They had one that ran up Five Points Creek at least to Camp One. That place is still… There's a meadow up there still called Camp One. There was another little branch railroad ___ a branch. It was located where the wrecking yard is east of La Grande, in fact, Pierce Lane and Highway…well, the Union highway, old US 30.

TM: Right.

JE: In the 19-…early 1900s it was the Hunter and Fox mill and by 1915 or '20 it was called the Lasters-Ewoldt Lumber Company. E-w-o-l-d-t. Then by the time I remember it, which would be about 1933 or '4, it was called the Lone Pine Lumber Company because it was very close to where that lone pine tree was. It was cut by the high school kids in 1935, I believe. But the mill it probably died during the Depression. I think the plant burned. It was on both sides of the highway, which is interesting. The burner and maybe the sawmill were on the south side of the road right in the angle of the intersection. Then the planer and yards were north of the tracks. But that wasn't too much of a line. It was a…may have even been ___. It had at least one logging locomotive __ engine that ran up there. Their track ran up Ladd Canyon a ways and then they had spurs up side canyons and they cut timber up there.

TM: And you think they might've narrow gauge?

JE: That one might've been. I don't know.

TM: But the Mt. Emily Lumber Company, whatever, the one up the Grande Ronde…

JE: It was standard gauge.

TM: …that was standard gauge, right?

JE: It was standard gauge, yeah.

TM: I've seen that roadbed. You can still see traces of the roadbed up there, up the canyon there.

JE: Yes, and not too awfully long ago the old trestles across the river still existed, no track on them, but they're all gone now. But there were trestles still surviving, many of them on the opposite side of the river from where the highway is now. And then Starkey camp they had their shops and quite a little company town up there. The company town still exists, that is, the little cabins a lot of them are still used for summer cabins.

TM: The railroad probably had a Y or something up there to turn things around and…

JE: Yeah, they would've had a Y.

TM: …facilities up there.

JE: There wasn't… I don't think they had a roundhouse or anything like that, but there was a Y.

TM: Yeah, 'cause they would've had to turn…turn things and get 'em down the tracks.

JE: Yeah. And spurs that ran every which-way. The logging companies had lines of their own simply in order to get their product…again, to get their product to market. The… When they moved the Grande Ronde Lumber Company from Perry to…and rebuilt it at Pondosa, which was their own company town, in 1925, '27…'27 I think, they had to build a line that went from Pondosa to meet the railroad track. That was the Big Creek and Telocaset Railway, but it was strictly a logging operation. The… First the Sumpter Valley Railway was built originally to access…for the Oregon Lumber Company in Baker City to access timber up around McEwen.

TM: But that's narrow gauge, right.

JE: Then they… That was narrow gauge. Yeah, that was narrow gauge.

TM: Right. Thought so.

JE: They extended it then onto Sumpter because then…it wasn't all lumber then, it was mining then. Then from Sumpter they ran it on over to Whitney and that was a mill. The old building is still there, but the town is nearly all gone. Then they eventually ran it on into Prairie City so the farmers could, again, get produce to market. That didn't work out too well. It wasn't used heavily enough to really justify that so they pulled back. I'm not sure when the mill at Whitney died and the machinery was taken elsewhere, but the things declined. By 1947, why, the Sumpter Valley Railway was an anachronism and although a lot of people loved it, why, it was time to discontinue it and they did.

TM: And now it's a tourist attraction.

JE: Yes. And the tracks that are there now are mostly not on the original roadbed. Same general direction, but not…not quite the same…not quite the original roadbed.

TM: Coming back to this ledger, in going through it maybe we could talk just a little bit about the history of it. It was in the collection of Lee Johnson.

JE: I have no idea where he got it, but there are several other early business ledgers in that group of materials. This one, as with so many things that were discarded, the flyleaf and whatever information it bore about the company or the firm that had it was torn out and materials at the end of it were also torn out so what we have is just the body of the thing. Although it starts at page one so they didn't get

anything torn out but the flyleaf and probably the attached title page. It would be nice if we still had it. This was normal. They would… Whoever was getting rid of this stuff, cleaning out the storerooms or the old offices or whatever, would remove the identifying information and then the rest of it normally went to the dump. This one didn't go to the dump and I'm glad it didn't because it tells a great deal about what was being bought and sold at Hilgard, which was quite a bustling little place until fairly…fairly recently.

TM: In looking at it it would seem to me that this was a very busy establishment, they were doing all kinds of things.

JE: Yes. They were selling hardware and they were buying ties. And of course that was some kind of a contract they probably had with the OR&N.

TM: With the railroad, yeah.

JE: But they…they were a pretty…pretty busy establishment. I know who some of the people were that had mills up that way, but I have no idea what that was…business was and who operated it. I believe that it would be possible if you wanted to go through the 1880 census of Union County a page at a time you might find who was in business at Hilgard and that would take care of it. But that'll be probably for someone else.

TM: Yeah. 'Cause just going through a book like this is…it's kind of…the raw material…raw material of history, it seems to me.

JE: Yes, it is. And these are the… If you don't have evidence… This is evidence. If you don't have evidence everything else is just a story. I know some very interesting stories that would fun to substantiate them, if it could be done.

TM: You just might find some of this. This ledger covers a three-year period, I think, right?

JE: It's '91 through '94, it seems to be. The later part of it is in a different hand and they were apparently at that time no long supplying ties and it mostly was sales of merchandise and this sort of thing. So it seems to have been some kind of a big general store operation or something. I haven't followed population counts…statistics for Hilgard. It was never a big town, but they did have a mill there for quite some time. If I'm not mistaken, Daniel Chaplain had a mill there. He was quite a wise man when it came to business. He didn't just invest in the real estate, which he did a lot of here, but he also… Of course he's the one who turned over 105 acres to the railroad so they'd locate the division point here instead of Union or someplace. But he also had that sawmill at… He either had one at Meacham or one at Hilgard. I'm not sure which now. And later on then the people who were connected to the Oregon Lumber Company – that's David Eckles' operation out of Salt Lake City. He was the first Mormon millionaire and a leading industrialist of the period. He and an associate named Charles Nibley… And Nibley had his sawmill at Meacham. He later transferred the machinery to Whitney at that's…the mill over at Whitney got it's start at that point. I'm not sure just when he did that. But he was… At that time Eckles', even that early, 1890s, he understood the handiness of having interlocking corporations, companies, operations of various kinds and had them so badly tangled that the tax people could never quite figure them out. This was the whole idea.

TM: Yeah, that was the plan.

JE: Sure. Anyway, Nibley was involved with him in many of these operations.
TM: Let's pause here for just a minute and change the…turn over the tape.
JE: Yes. I will… I think I'll slip in there and get that other… [recording stopped]

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JE: …a little cranky.
TM: We're going to shift gears here for just a moment and talk about another topic which we'll be moving back from the days of the railroad and the building of the road and the branch lines and so on, moving back to just an earlier time. I asked Jack if he would discuss briefly on the Indian populations…the Native American populations in the Grande Ronde Valley and the immediate Union County area.
JE: As far as we know the first tribe that complain…to express dominance over the…or to claim dominance over this area were the Snakes who were generally considered dangerous and people best avoided. This is back in the early part of the nineteenth century. The fur traders and trappers had fur brigades in the 1830s and '40s that went through here frequently. I don't think they had any trouble with anyone. Peter __ Ogden at some point in his journal mentions that the… There had been a treaty between the various tribes. By that time the Nez Perce had established a couple of trading areas down around Weizer. And the Umatillas…or the Cayuse, who were closely related to the Nez Perce, arranged with the Snakes to occupy this valley and the Snakes agreed. I don't know what the terms of the agreement were. Ogden didn't mention that. He said they'd reached agreement whereby the Cayuse would be controlling the valley in the future and that this should make it easier to travel through it. I think that's about 1828. And by the time the white emigrants came through, of course, it was well-established. The Cayuse were not the only people who used it, though they spent their summers here gathering food for winter, but the other confederated tribes, the Walla Wallas and Umatillas to some extent were here and so were the Nez Perce, maybe not as plentifully as in some areas, but they were here. And the Cayuse they raised a lot of horses and it's wonderful pasture for horses. Then 1860 some fellow needed to buy horses. I think he was working on the Mullin Trail that they built over into Montana about that time. He came here to get horses and he said their horses were wonderful and the Indians were all pretty sharp traders. Nonetheless, he got some good ones that he took with him. But in the time when it was Snake controlled this valley was not considered a safe place to go. When David Douglas was through west doing his nature study he stopped at the old Fort Walla Walla – that would've been around 1818 or '20. It's on the…right on the Columbia River near Wallula. At the mouth of the Walla Walla River is where it was. It's under water now whatever's left of it, which might be foundations or not even that. But the… At that time Douglas was quite an explorer of everything and he wandered around all over the countryside. The factor at the Hudson's Bay post gave him a companion or two to go along. One was an Indian who could not speak English and one was the factor's son, I believe, who was just a kid. He couldn't speak English either, but he could speak

French. Douglas could speak French. So they had a kind of three-way interpretation going and the boy, like any boy of his age, had a sense of humor…kind of a __ sense of humor so he always misinterpreted whatever Douglas told the Indian who accompanied them and kept him worried because he eventually, I think, told the Indian that Douglas was a wizard and would change him into a bear or something. But anyway, they made their trip up into the mountains. Douglas had wanted to look into the Grande Ronde Valley, but they persuaded him that it was too dangerous to go there and that so they didn't go. They got up as high as…a little snow so they must've hiked around Spout Springs or someplace like that. Douglas explained that he had walked clear across the range and back in a day and I don't think you can do that. Even though he was very energetic he was…all along the way he was forever spying some new plant and he would, oh, get the seeds or something, wrap 'em up in __ paper and poke it in his pocket. So by the end of the day he had these things protruding from him in all directions. The Indians referred to him as the Grass Man and thought he was crazy.

TM: What year was that that he was out here?

JE: Around… I have forgotten. I could look it up. I'm thinking 1818, but it's probably a little later than that, 1820, '20, '22, somewhere along in there, maybe. But anyway, Douglas never did get to see the Grande Ronde Valley. He explored over around the headwaters of the Walla Walla River and other places and then went on his way. But it would've been interesting to see what he would've thought of the valley. His journal has survived and he wrote his impressions in there. He was a…must've been a pretty nice person because the thing…the didn't just order the Indian, "Come on, we're gonna go take a look at that." He said in his journal that he could not think of exposing anyone else to danger so they turned back. So this was not quite the attitude of many explorers, if you want to call him that.

TM: So the earlier settlers then…I should say the Oregon Trail emigrants coming into the Grande Ronde Valley would've encountered…the Indians they would've encountered would've been…would've been more likely Cayuse then.

JE: Mm-hmm. Mostly Cayuse.

TM: In the 1840s probably.

JE: Mostly Cayuse. And the tribes that have since become allied with them or were at that time, they all knew each other. But they…they had very much exclusive use of it at that time. Even so the people coming through felt this would be a wonderful valley to establish a place to live, but it was too far from everything else and there was no assurance that the Indians would always be friendly so they didn't stay. Of course settlers weren't here until 1862 when they came back over the hill looking for gold.

TM: Right. It was the gold rush that actually kicked off some of that. And Baker City also about the same time, wasn't it?

JE: Right.

TM: Around the same…

JE: Well, Auburn. I don't think Baker City got started until about 1864, but Auburn was 1861 when it first began, about the same time as La Grande, '61, '62, that

winter. And Baker… Here is was always agriculture and in Baker it was mining __ around Auburn. And so the two county emphases have been a little different. But it…same general climate and settlement occurred at just about the same time. The tribes that were here always had…well, they enjoyed trading with the emigrants and the emigrants traded with them and they would trade a horse for something or usually the Indians were prude enough bargainers that they didn't get taken by the pioneers much. One Indian was disgruntled because he traded for a shirt and it turned out to be threadbare and the women laughed at him. So I'm sure he was not happy, but that's the only case I know of where anybody was discontented and I think this was after they'd already gone on.

TM: Somebody unloaded a wore-out shirt on him is what they did.

JE: Sure. And I imagine went away chuckling about that. But in most cases if you… It would depend on how badly – does in any trade – how badly one person wants what the other person has and how if it's badly enough then the other person can hold him up a little bit on it. The relationships with the Indians really pretty…pretty good here. That saying that the name of the valley Copi-Copi, which is Place of Cottonwoods. And they say that means Valley of Peace, it doesn't and I don't think it was ever called the Valley of Peace although it was a peaceful place for its time. But the only hostile act that's gotten down in the history books was the raid that Colonel Shaw and his party of volunteers made in 1856, which is right at the end of the Yakima War and the other Indian wars at that period. They came over in July of that year and they didn't exactly ambush, they just showed up and whatever conference took place didn't amount to anything and then the shooting started. The tribes where Riverside Park is today, about there. The troops came over the little saddle there from Summerville. They marched eight miles that morning and came down right there, appeared suddenly and the Indian camp, of course, saw them. But the…what followed was general shooting and some of the tribesmen tried to get away through the brush down the river and many were hunted down and some got on horses and were followed by the volunteers clear over around Union, fifteen miles, I think. Shaw's command got separated and so on. It was quite a mess. And as it turned out there probably weren't any able-bodied men, warriors that is, with the tribal members at all. They were old men and women and kids. The children of…they were Indians so they were shot, many of them. I think the… The Cayuse today say that there were fifty casualties, none of which were necessary, of course. But the troops on the other hand – and these were not regulars, these were volunteers – they figured that there was a great plot being held over here to attack the whites so they were going to foresaw that. Actually, the people here were just on a food gathering expedition. They were getting their food supply for winter. They… I think there were 150 pack horse loads of roots and other food that they had gathered and quite a large number of horses and I think the volunteers burned all of the produce that the Indians had gathered and took the horses they wanted and shot the rest. So this is not…not a bright chapter in our history.

TM: No.

JE: And for a long time it was handed down by people who had been around, if not at the time then at least during that general period, who firmly believed that

the…these brave men had come over here and forestalled a big attack on all the pioneers, which it was not.

TM: No. That's unfortunately an all too familiar story.

JE: Yes, it is.

TM: It happened quite a few times.

JE: Mm-hmm.

TM: In the history of the west.

JE: It's the only episode of that kind right around here. There are stories told of extirpations of various kinds around…over in the Ochoco country, but how much of that's fiction and how much of its fact I don't know. Some of it is probably true at least because efforts were made to get the native out so you could go in and do your own thing, whatever that might've been whether it was mining or agriculture, cattle or timber. So, yeah, there are some dark pages in history. The Cherokees being run out of their homeland and they were a highly educated people and might've contributed a great deal to Western civilization if they'd had the opportunity.

TM: I wanted to ask about Spring Creek. It seems to me that there are some Indian habitations or sites that are visible or that look like them along Spring Creek. Have you ever heard of that?

JE: No, I haven't. That's interesting. I never did.

TM: They look like… Someone was explaining to me once that there were… They look like little depressions in the ground where they might've had dugouts.

JE: Yeah. Fire pits or…

TM: Fire pits or even a __ or a little thing.

JE: This was a common practice, I think, of northern plains tribes. And of course the Mendens built quite elaborate buildings and it seems to me they were partly underground. I can't remember.

TM: Yeah. They were more permanent villages.

JE: Yeah, they were.

TM: I was wondering if these… I should try to research it a little myself. I was wondering whether these might've been winter camps or something up there.

JE: Could've been.

TM: They'd spend the winter up there.

JE: I don't think too many of them did, but they…you had to hunt all year, you know.

TM: Right.

JE: You couldn't live on jerked meat forever so they undoubtedly had hunting expeditions during the winter and you would need a decent shelter if you did.

TM: Yeah. That's interesting.

JE: Yeah. Very. I hadn't heard of those.

TM: I might research a little more. You know, before we run out of tape today I wanted to just ask you one or two other questions. We were talking earlier __ have a life-long interest in history and you're professional historian and writer I wanted to ask you if you wanted to share with us when did you first become interested in history? You said when you were a young person in Wallowa County?

JE: Yes. I think this as an interest is probably born with you. I…or maybe you discover it. But I think it's… A lot of people don't care about it. It isn't certainly…well, it had universal appeal, but as far back as I can remember I was wanting to know where a particular road went, an old road, where the road went. Or if there were older people I'd ask 'em about what it was like around there when they were young. They were always kind of amazed that a little kid would want to know these things. But I learned a lot about the area over around Wallowa, that is. Some of those people could remember when the town was started.

TM: 'Cause you were originally from Wallowa, correct?

JE: Yes.

R: Right.

JE: Yeah. I was born there. My… I'm not descended from pioneers to this region, though. My parents came out from Kansas City in the fall of 1922. The Bowman-Hicks Lumber Company of Kansas City had bought a mill out in Oregon and the person who was going to be the district manager of it, H. N. Ashby, was a depositor in the bank where my father worked in Douson, which is a suburb of Kansas City. And he told my dad one day that his firm had bought a mill out in Oregon and he'd like for my dad to come out and work for him. My dad needed to leave the Kansas City area because in World War I he…he didn't get into the Service because he nearly died from the Spanish Flu. It left him with pleurisy and other problems. His doctor had said, "You'd better get out of this climate." He had a cousin who had died of tuberculosis. So anyway, my parents drove out here and they didn't take the Oregon Trail route, they went…took the southern route through New Mexico and Arizona and up through California. My mother had a brother down in Los Angeles…two brothers down there. Anyway, they came up to La Grande and then the following year in 1923 Bowman-Hicks bought the mill over in Wallowa, which at that time belonged to the Nibley-Nimnah Lumber Company. Nibley being the same Charles Nibley who was associated with David Eckles in the, oh, Sumpter Valley…Oregon Lumber Company, some of these enterprise…sugar company here. The Mormons had a number of commercial and industrial operations in this part of the country. But anyway, Bowman-Hicks bought the Wallowa mill and…which I think…Nibley had…and Nimnah had put up in 1907, somewhere about there, and then they…so they of course moved over to Wallowa and I was born there. But I was always interested in history. People who found this unusual were glad to tell me whatever they remembered and I was able to remember quite a lot of it.

TM: So you're saying that some of the old-timers that you knew at that time had probably were living in Wallowa or were from the time when Wallowa was founded.

JE: Mm-hmm.

TM: Which would've been in the 1880s?

JE: Yeah, '87, I think, was when the town was established. The county was established in '87 and I'm not sure exactly when the town was now. I've got it here, but my things are slipping out of my head and I have keep looking them up. But Wallowa was actually started by the Island City Mercantile and Milling

Company who their practice was to buy up attractive land and build a general store, lay it out as a town and build a general store and then sell the lots to make money. After the store had been subsidized for a while and was on its own feet then whoever was operating would buy it from them. They never ended up really owning anything, they just sort of transferred it and created the town in the process. They built flour mills and general stores. The Wallowa flour mill, I think, was built in 1905 or thereabout. But maybe it was 1897. Anyway, it was, you know, a fairly recently established town. Enterprise was started the same way. They acquired the land and laid out a square for a courthouse and built the big store and the flour mill and Enterprise grew into a thriving little town and remains the county seat.

TM: I did have one other question about all the ledgers that you have here from Lee Johnson. There's…to just return to that briefly…there's one from a bank, correct?

JE: Yeah. La Grande National Bank and it's 1891. So it's very early in their operation. They are now Wells Fargo. It's the one that became First National and Wells Fargo.

TM: And you're going to… These are all ultimately going to go to Eastern Oregon University, correct?

JE: I hope so. We'll see whether they would be interesting in having them.

TM: Hopefully they would.

JE: I think they will. Yeah.

TM: Hopefully they would.

JE: I should do that __ if not today, tomorrow I'll call and see if…find out who I should talk to and then see what can be done with 'em. I've sorted all these papers and have…

TM: Lee Johnson's papers you've been sorting.

JE: Uh-huh.

TM: Right.

JE: Yeah. And quite a lot of it took up an awful lot of space in his den, but by the time you get rid of, oh, black papers that he had saved, you know, and books that didn't have any notes in them and this kind of thing and stuff that's obviously for the discard there's still quite a wealth of material on forgotten subjects. I don't think that it could be replaced, a lot of it, I really don't. He knew about too many things that nobody knows about now. He's got various kinds of documentary evidence as to their nature. He was always interested in things that hadn't really been explained historically. He was always fascinated by interesting characters. He wasn't the type of historian – he was a history professor, professor emeritus of history here. He wasn't a person who believed in this broad sweep of history concept in which no individual is important and everything is kind of a mass movement type of thing that nobody can be blamed for or praised for, which is…and that dates don't matter. You have to have the date because that's a pivotal point. You've got to be able to tie an event into its context. If you can't tie it to context it's worthless and the context suffers. So he concentrated pretty much on the…after doing the standard thing he then concentrated on people who were memorable for one reason or another. Sometimes it was memorable if they

were magnificent charlatans or there was other things that he thought they were unusual and remarkable. This man who advertised Eastern papers lots for sale in the city of Union, $100, and some people bought them. Some even came out here to look at their property. When they did they found they were lots in the cemetery. [laughs]

TM: He could claim that he wasn't guilty of false adverting.

JE: Absolutely not. They're lots.

TM: They are lots.

JE: Mm-hmm. __

TM: They were within the city. You couldn't build much on them, but that's the only problem.

JE: Yeah, your cellar could only be six feet deep.

TM: Right, right. And three feet wide or something.

JE: Something like that.

TM: Something like… Something like that. Well, you know, Jack, I think we're probably just about out of our tape for today, but this has been a very good conversation. I really appreciate you giving us all the time and all the information. I'm gonna with you well with those ledgers. I hope… I hope it works out.

JE: Yeah. They belong in a permanent place, certainly… I'm only their custodian until a proper place can be found for them.

TM: You're a very good custodian, Jack, so… Thanks for all the help today.

JE: Oh, you're surely welcome. [recording stopped]