MISKELL GALE

Union County resident for 105 years

AN ORAL HISTORY

Interview in 1988
at her home in Union, Oregon

Interviewer: Jerry Gildemeister

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

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

A non-profit, tax-exempt corporation formed in 2002

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

Purposes

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

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Preface

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

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

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

About the Interviews and This Edited Version

Two interviews with Miskell Gale took place at her home in Union. At age 105, Miskell appears remarkably healthy and vigorous, mentally and physically.

The first interviewer was Jerry Gildemeister, then a Union resident (now La Grande) and author of Watershed History; Middle & Upper Grande Ronde River Subbasins, Northeast Oregon (1998). He completed a one-and-a-half-hour interview in 1988.

Heather Filling's full transcription (available for research purposes) presents the literal contents of both interviews. The edited version presented here differs from the literal transcription in the following characteristics:

- reorganization of content

- deletion of some extraneous comments

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

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

MG designates Miskell Gale's words, *I* the interviewer's.

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Daughter of Union County Pioneers

I: Miskell, when were you born?

MG: In 1898. September 15.

I: Were you born in Cove?

MG: Yes. On the Ascension grounds [camp and conference center belonging to the Episcopal Church], where they now have the church school, there was a big, white house back in the grove. My parents lived there when I was born.

I: Tell me about how your relatives came to this part of the country.

MG: They arrived in Cove in 1862, travelling by oxen train—my great-grandfather, grandfather, and grandmother, with various children. Grandfather was a young man at that time, and Grandmother carried one baby on her lap across the plains. Aunt Mary was 13 and walked all the way. I remember seeing a buffalo overcoat and a buffalo robe that they brought.

In later years, when I was little. Aunt Mary used to drive with her horse, Rattler, and buggy up to our place. She'd say, "Willy, will you go out and take care of old Rattler? I'm gonna stay all day." She'd sit in the high chair with Mama's apron around her, while he cut her hair, and she told us funny things that happened on the way across the plains coming to Oregon. I paid very little attention because it didn't mean anything to me. I was just playing around there.

I can remember my father saying that he used to climb up on the roof of the cabin and watch the Indians go by. They never rode two by two, always one by one—the chief first, then the one who would inherit the chief's role, and so on by rank. Then would come the older squaws, the squaws with papooses on their backs, then the young ones, and so on down.

He traded something with Chief Indian Yellow Feather for an Indian pony he wanted. The Indians had tough horses. When my grandmother became very ill, he rode that Indian pony to La Grande from Cove at a dead run to get the doctor that was living there then. The doctor drove his buggy and brought his wife; they stayed all night and took care of Grandmother before they went back.

I: What were your grandparents' names?

MG: My father's mother was Martha Murphy before she married Grandpa Bloom.

I: What was Bloom's first name?

MG: Samuel. They always called him Sam.

I: Who were the other children besides Aunt Mary?

MG: There were a lot of children! Before Great-grandfather Lewis Bloom lost his first wife, they had seven children; he brought all of them. He married again, and he and his second wife had eight more. So there were fifteen chil dren in all. He brought his whole family on the oxen train.

I heard the story that, when they got up one morning, one of the boys was gone. They stopped the train. All men got on their horses and rode and rode and rode. They never found him. Grandmother was exasperated that she had lost a boy.

I: How old was he?

MG: Between eight and eleven.

I know they square danced sometimes when they stopped at night. They circled the wagons, and Grandpa called square dancing. They had to have a little bit of relaxation to go with the hardships of travel. They lost lots of things coming because they got too loaded sometimes.

I think Great-grandfather must have been the head of the wagon train. They were hitched up to the train that was going on out to the Willamette [western Oregon]. But when they saw this valley [i.e., Grande Ronde Valley], Grandpa said, "This is our valley. This is as far as we go."

I: Where did they come from?

MG: Ohio. My mother told me that one of the members of the family helped to build the Erie Canal.

They brought some Kentucky saddler horses, Morgans, and a heavy black team. I heard them talk about them. They never put the horses in the yoke with the oxen, though. One of the oxen died someplace along the way, and, since they had brought milk cows for the children, they put in one of the milk cows. She had to pull her share rather than a horse because they weren't going to let anything happen to the horses. They needed to use the horses when they got here.

I: How many children did your grandmother and grandfather have?

MG: Grandpa Sam had three boys and two girls.

I: What was your father's name?

MG: William. They called him Bill. After he grew to be a young man, he and my Uncle Pete, his younger brother, went to the Cornucopia mines and worked for money to attend school; one was going to be a doctor, the other a dentist.

Settling in Cove

I: Where was your father born?

MG: My father was born in 1864 in the first log house that was built in Cove, a short distance out of what you'd call town now. They hurried and built the house in time for him to be born in. Grandpa built a good, strong, log house —a big log cabin because they had a big family in the middle of a big field, where there was a spring. Everything was the way they wanted it. The way they got to the upstairs was a ladder.

I think somebody tore the house down for the logs; it took two men and a boy to get a nail out, though they hadn't used many nails. It was so well put together. The barn burned down. There are still some posts there where the spring was.

Miskell's Mother and Her Family

I: What was your mother's name?

MG: Cora VanSchoonhoven. Her grandfather was from Holland. Here's the story about them. In Ireland the family had a cattle and a daughter named Ida Mae. She had a maid to comb her hair; she had everything. A Dutchman named VanSchoonhoven worked for the family as a coachman. When she wanted to go someplace, he'd take her. And they fell

in love. When she ran off and married him, they disowned her.

I: So then where did they go?

MG: The United States. The family went from New York to Ohio. My mother was born m Wisconsin and came here from South Dakota. My mother was just a girl when she came by railroad. They chartered a railroad car so that the whole family--furniture and everything they wanted to bring with them—was in this car. She had four sisters and one brother.

I: What year did she come out?

MG: I can't tell you exactly, but it must have been the late 1800s. Grandfather was a merchant in South Dakota, when a doctor told him he thought his health would he better out in the west. I think he had heart trouble. So they sold the store and moved out here. They came to Union and then moved to Cove and bought a place there; that's where she met my father. When they came in to Union, people said the Dutch had landed because their name was VanSchoonhoven.

Cora VanSchoonhoven,
Miskell's mother, at age 20
Photo courtesy of Miskell Gale

Farming in Cove

I: Did your father spend the rest of his life farming in Cove?

MG: Yes.

I: What happened to his plan for being a doctor?

MG: He had his Latin; he was all set. In those days, you apprenticed under an old doctor. The old doctor he apprenticed with did some kind of funny things. So my father said, "I'm just not gonna do that. I'll just go back to farming." That's what lie did. Uncle Pete became a dentist, though.

We lived on a farm. We had everything on it that you could think of--an orchard, cows, pigs, and chickens, and everything on earth in the garden. We had an ice house, a meat house, and a root cellar.

If we kids were sick, my mother never had to think about that because my father always took care of us. He knew exactly what was wrong. If you had a sliver or whatever, he was right there. He knew exactly how to take care of any accidents.

I: Did you have both dairy cows and beef cattle?

MG: He always raised some beef. He and another man owned the meat market in town.

Characteristics of Cove in the Early 20th Century

I: What was Cove like as you were growing up?

MG: It was about like Union. There was a hotel; it had wooden sidewalks; and it had a post office with a drug store in the same building. A man by the name of Jasper Stevens was the postmaster. He made a lot of money somehow; he said he was going to be a millionaire, and I guess he did eventually become one. He never spent a penny.

We had large strawberry patches and a packing shed; women came to pack, filling and facing.

I: Was the fruit shipped out by railroad then?

MG: No. We didn't ship. We sold them locally in La Grande and all over.

Since my father had been in the meat market, we had that wonderful meat house, double walled and with deep planks on two sides, and all the hams and bacon hanging in there. They butchered the beef in the wintertime. The pork was cured in a smokehouse, and right next to it was a bin where all the grain was stored for use by the stock.

I: Where did he get the ice for the ice house?

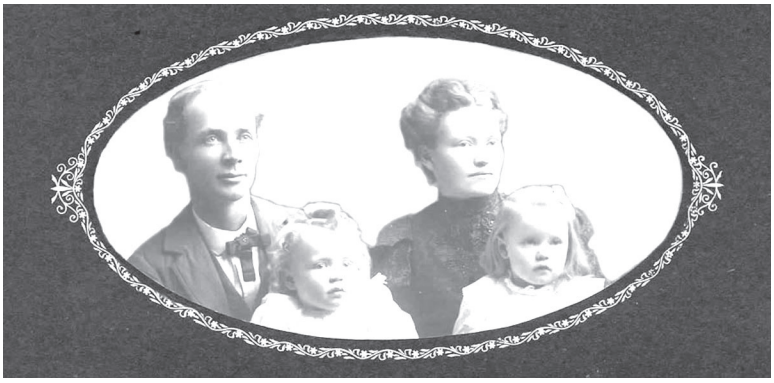
MG: From the frozen river. He took the team to the river with saws to make big chunks of ice.

I: Was that the Grande Ronde River?

MG: Yes. The water was pure in those days. The ice house was built with boards on the outside and the inside, and the space between was filled with sawdust--eight or ten inches of it. There were small mills all over the mountains where they were cutting timber and sawing hoards.

A ladder went up the outside of the ice house, and a little door allowed you to go inside and down the ladder to the ice as summer went on. It wasn't the only ice house in Cove.

We really were self-sufficient. There was a mill there at Cove. My father went there with a sack of corn to have it ground for corn meal. We had a barrel of whole wheat flour and all this corn meal and everything else ready for winter every year.



Bloom family: (l. to r.) William, Haskell, Cora, Miskell, 1903
Photo courtesy of Miskell Gale

Shopping in La Grande

I: Where did you shop for other things you needed?

MG: When it came time for our school clothes, if we didn't find what we wanted in La Grande or we didn't get to La Grande, we ordered from a catalog. When I was in high school, we'd go to La Grande and get school clothes for me and my brother.

I: How long did it take you to go to La Grande?

MG: I don't know. We usually had good teams that we just used for that--horses that could travel right along. My grand father had a pair of bays that he used with his covered buggy--Dot and Lady. I used to go with him quite a lot, and, when we got in the buggy to go to La Grande, he'd slap them on the hip and they'd take off for La Grande in about as good time as anybody could with a pair of horses. They'd be put in the livery stable while he did whatever he wanted, and then we'd go back home. We were never late going and never late coming back.

I: What did your father usually do in La Grande?

MG: He sold eggs, chickens, and honey.

When he was getting the eggs ready to sell, he would go down in the cellar, where he stored them in brick vaults. With a net, he took the eggs out carefully and candled them. He put a card board box over a lamp; it had holes in it the size of eggs. That way he sized them and could see through the egg to tell whether it was all right or not. Then he put the eggs in crates and took them into La Grande to sell them. He sold honey and chickens and whatever else he might have.

I: Was that all just dirt road at that time?

MG: Oh, yes. Or snow. It didn't make any difference. We went anyway. One time I remember my Uncle Pete saying he rowed in a row boat all the way to La Grande. You see, we had a flood some times.

Stores in Cove

MG: I was going to tell you about the stores in Cove. First was a post office on the west side and the drugstore. Old Doc Ranthel, we called him, was the druggist when I was going to school. Then there was Dave Lane's department store. Now that store had one section with stools in front for the dry goods department; it had the grocery store on the inside in the same room. Then you went to a door, and on the other side were shoes and dishes and all kinds of hardware. The wooden sidewalk was level all along and raised quite a bit in front of the Dave Lane store until it leveled down. There was always a hitching rack there for the saddle horses, and the horses they drove in were hitched to the railing. There were always horses along there.

Main Street of Cove, late 19th c.
Photo courtesy of John Turner & Richard Hermens

Then there was a state bank, a jail, a blacksmith shop, and a barber shop. Trippeer Hall was above the meat market, and there was another little store.

That was all on the south side. On the north side of the street was the ice cream parlor; by the way, that was home made ice cream. We put chocolate over our vanilla, and in the summertime, when there was fruit, we had those flavors. A little boy said, "Would you like to go and have a dish of ice cream?" That was really something because we didn't have much money to spend. I think I went to school all my school years without ever taking a penny or a purse with me. We took our lunches and ate together in a group, laughed and talked, and then played baseball or some other game.

The superintendent didn't think girls ought to play basketball. It was not a girls' game. We could go down a big hill off of Main Street a block or two to Macabee Hall. There is where is we danced and played basketball.

I: Do you remember about how big Cove was--how many people?

MG: I can't tell you a thing about that. Most people came in from out in the country, where they farmed. Everybody farmed in those days, except the druggist, the banker, and a few people that were running the businesses in town. As far as I know, there were never any real estate men. Everybody knew every body. You started school with the same group you graduated from high school with.

Going to School in Cove and Nearby

I: How many students were in the school. or in your class?

MG: There were seven or nine boys and I think four girls in 1914. We were like brothers and sisters. We all went to Sunday School together.

I: What was school like in those years? What were some of your activities?

MG: We didn't have much entertainment in school. At recess and at noon we'd swing in a giant swing--a hub of a wagon up on a very high post and ropes with a loop in them. When I was little, we sat in those and some of the big boys from high school each grabbed a kid, and away we'd go. They swung us clear to the top, out level with the post. If anything had happened to the post, we would all have been dead.

I: Did anybody fall off?

MG: Never that I know of. We had an awful lot of fun. That was one entertainment we had. We also played baseball a lot.

I: Was that at the school?

MG: Yes. At the school grounds.

I: Was the school the same place it is now?

MG: Yes. It's not the same building, but it's the same place.

Old Cove School, which Miskell attended
Photo courtesy of John Turner and Richard Hermens

I: What other games did you play?

MG: Run, Sheep, Run and whatever we made up. My father made a square hole in the fence and put boards around it. We crawled through that and went down the hill over the millrace, past the blacksmith shop, and up to school. We saw old John Parker out there at the mill, tall and thin with a white mustache, covered in flour. I thought he was wonderful. I don't know how our folks let us run over the place.

I: About how far was that?

MG: It was much farther than going the other way, but it was a lot more fun. So that was the way we went.

I: How long did it take you to get to school?

MG: We mostly ran, so I suppose 15 or 20 minutes.

I: How did everybody else get to school from their homes?

MG: Everybody walked. Winter, summer, snow didn't make any difference. They all walked, even over the hill from High Valley down to Cove School.

Photo by Mae Stearns, Cove & La Grande photographer--Miskell, witch in center
Photo courtesy of James Bennett

I: Even little kids from the outside farms?

MG: No. Little kids from out in the valley went to Shanghai School or one of the other small schools, like Red Pepper and Hardscrabble. Then they came in to Cove for high school. When they were that old and if they came from any distance, they came by horse and buggy; they put their horses in the livery stable.

I: Where was the livery stable in town?

MG: Right next to the bridge back in toward the old mill. There was a railroad track in there when 1 was going to school.

I'll never forget when the superintendent said, "When we have a baseball team and a football team, we should have some name. All the other schools are being called Tigers and Lions and everything, so Cove should have a name." So we decided it should be the Leopards right then and there. That was voted on and decided.

Our baseball team beat everybody. The Alexanders were a baseball-minded family, and they had eleven kids in the family, enough to form a team, with the exception of my brother, who caught for them. Once in a while, they used the oldest Brazile boy.

I can remember kids picking paintbrushes and yellow bells as Spring came along and these things bloomed. They brought them to school. One boy gave me some paintbrushes, put them on my desk, and a big, green worm crawled out. I couldn't stand worms ever.

We had inkwells in the desks. Our pens lay in a little slot across the top of the desk next to the inkwell. If a girl had long braids or long hair, it was so

tempting for a boy who sat behind her to dip her braid or some of her hair in his inkwell--dip it in there for devil.

I: What were the classrooms like?

MG: They usually had two grades in one room.

I: What kind of subjects did you study?

MG: Reading, arithmetic, geography, and Spencerian writing. That kind of writing didn't do me much good; I write terribly. We always had spelling bees and ciphering bees. I'll never forget how shocked some of those kids were in math. The teacher would go to the board and she would write four-digit numbers to make a long problem to be added. Dick Alexander was in my class in school, and he was always so quiet--wouldn't have anything to say. If she asked him a question, it was "Yes" or "No"--like that. That's all there was to it--sitting there in class like a stone image. She had him come up and do the adding. He took the chalk and put down the answer just as quick as that. She was surprised, of course. His math papers had been good, but she had no idea that he was quick like that. So she sent him two grades up and asked if they had a student that could cipher out her student. They sent some body in, and the kid couldn't begin to keep up with Dick. Finally she sent him to the high school.

The superintendent was Mr. Conklin when I was in the first grade. I used to read to him when he'd come to our school. He took me on his lap and had me read to him. He look an interest in every single child in school. I thought he was wonderful.

Maude Reese and Emma Wilson taught there. We always called her Miss Emma. The Wilsons were early settlers.

As we went on into high school, we studied all those other subjects, just like any school, like home economics and typing. We finally went into geometry and had Latin one year or two. We had some very fine teachers.

I think we had a really good growing up time. We didn't worry about war or anything like that. We didn't carry a load of books home. I don't ever remember

Cove High School freshmen, 1914;
girls--(l. to r.) Eunice Ramsdell, Miskell Bloom, Ella Sutherland
Photo courtesy of Miskell Gale

Cove High School basketball team, March, 1916;
Miskell's future husband, Don Gale, at left; others Mark Couter, Eddie Duncan, Lloyd Perkins, Earl Jones, Ted Kek [coach unnamed]
Photo courtesy of Miskell Gale

having any help. I just went home and did my work. But all kids were trained in those days to help Mother and Father. The boys helped Dad, and the girls did things in the house. When we left the house in the morning for school the beds were made, the dishes were done, the floors were clean. Everything was in order when we left the house for school in the morning.

Meals during Miskell's Childhood

I: What were typical breakfasts, lunches, and dinners?

MG: We always had a good breakfast. My father usually made the biscuits. We had bacon or some other meat, eggs, and fruit. My mother canned lots of fruit. We look our lunch with us to school. It was like any lunch would be nowadays. Maybe there'd be gingerbread, and there would be sandwiches and fruit--an apple or little jars with canned fruit.

For dinner in the evening, we usually had meat, potatoes, and gravy. My mother made cakes and pies. And on Sunday the house was full of kids. I'll never forget it! We'd all go to Sunday School--all to same place. Then here would be the whole gang up to our house. The table had all the leaves in, and my mother got dinner for the whole bunch. We'd play around--maybe baseball or some other game--and then all go in and eat. We had a general good time. Then, gradually, the crowd went home.

Childhood Activities

I: What were some of the things that kept you busy at home?

MG: We didn't have to be entertained. We never thought of such a thing! We could read or do our lessons. I wasn't allowed to ride down the hill a lot, and Haskell wasn't supposed to. But he'd get me to lead a two- or three-year-old horse up the hill. and then he'd say, "Now turn it loose, turn it loose." So I'd turn it loose. Down the hill they would come.

I remember one time everybody came to our place. We used to have lots of

Haskell ("Hack") Bloom, Miskell's brother, at age 5
Photo courtesy of Miskell Gale

Cove High School senior class, 1920;
Miskell's brother, Haskell, second from left
Photo courtesy of Miskell Gale

company--aunts, uncles, and cousins. My father had a pen of pigs up on the east side of the barn. Hack had been going out there and riding those pigs, and he wasn't supposed to, of course. We had parties at this or that house now and then, but it wasn't a regular thing. It was an occasion. We had hay rides and sleigh rides. We'd go to one house and have oyster soup some night, and we'd all go in a big sleigh together. And we had taffy pulls. We always had lots of things to amuse ourselves--things we thought up. We made up our own games.

In the wintertime we took the sled and went up the hill. Coming down, we landed in the snow bank, probably. I wasn't allowed to go up McNeil Hill to toboggan down because my parents were afraid I'd get hurt. I was very resentful that I wasn't a boy because I couldn't do that and a boy could.

Antles Lane [in Cove] was another place. We had to be prepared for the fence at the bottom or we might go into the fence or over it.

We put the sleigh bells on the horse, hitched him up to the cutter, and went for sleigh rides on moonlit winter nights. We put the buffalo robe over our laps and picked up everybody that we could get in. On the bottom of the cutter we had hot rocks that had been in the oven. In the cold and crisp air we could hear the horses' feet in the snow. We stopped along the way to visit with somebody and then got back home at a certain time, but never too late, before the rocks cooled off.

When we went to parties, we had to be home at 11:00, and that was late. Mostly 10:00 when you were younger. Everybody knew where we were; our parents knew and all their friends knew where their kids were.

We were busy also because we had to work. There was so much to be done; we all had our duties and we did them. We always had gardens, and we kids had to work in the garden in the summertime. That took quite a bit of our time--helping with the canning and making jam.

In the summertime we all hiked up to the light plant and up to the top of Mt. Fanny. We took one horse and our lunch, and usually one grown-up teacher or parent went with us. If anybody got tired, they'd take hold of the horse's tail, and the horse would help them up the hill a little bit. That's where one of the kids nicknamed me. My name was long and kind of involved, so they'd holler, "Comin', Mike?" So I was Mike after that. We went up there and had a snowball fight, had our lunch, and then we turned around and walked home.

We had parties someplace way up the hill. We all walked together up to the party. We didn't pair off; the whole bunch went. I remember one time one

Campfire Girls, 1915; Miskell at right
Photo courtesy of Miskell Gale

of the boys said he was going to take me to the party; I just walked with him. That was all right because we all went together. Then another kid came right away and asked me if I'd go to the party with him. I didn't think anything about it; I said yes. So here he came with a horse and buggy. I was so disgusted, but I couldn't say anything. I went and got in the buggy. We were driving along and everybody else was walking. I never had anything to do with him after that. I was all through with that guy. I wasn't going to be any different than the rest of them. I think he must have been raised in some other town and thought that was the way to take a girl. He moved away in a couple of years, and I never saw him again.

Sometimes we all got in a sled and went to skate on the river. We built a fire and skated away. The skates in those days clamped onto our shoes. I had one weak ankle, so they were not as stable as they might have been. We took weenies to roast and then all piled into the sled to go back home. We never stayed very late.

After my father pruned the fruit trees, the cuttings were put into a big pile and burned. When the coals got just right and the ashes were covering them, the potatoes got stuffed in there. Then out came the big iron frying pan, the ham was cut, and we'd have ham and eggs and baked potatoes outdoors when he was pruning. That was a big thing.

We broke the colts by going out in the corral when they were small and lying down. We'd tie ourselves on the colts, and, when they got up, they had us sitting on them. If they didn't, one of us would lead the colt over to the fence so the other one could get on by the fence. That worked till they got too wise; they switched around and we'd land on the ground.

Bedtimes and Waking Times

MG: We went to bed early because we got up early. My father always got up at 4:00 in the morning.

I: What time did everybody go to bed?

MG: I know my dad usually went to bed between 7:00 and 8:00. The boys had to help milk, and the girls had separator dishes and supper dishes to do. If there was a little time left, we could read or do our lessons or whatever we wanted to do and then it was time for bed. We went to bed at 8:00 or 9:00.

Heating but No Plumbing in the Family's House

I: How was your house heated?

MG: We all heated with wood. We fixed the fire in the stove and that did the whole house.

I: How many stoves were in the house?

MG: Usually, there was a stove in the living area and one in the kitchen--a good, little iron stove they brought with them from South Dakota. No central heating and no lying in bed, I assure you.

We didn't have bathrooms in those days. Inside plumbing was something you didn't have when I was a little kid. So I remember that in the mornings my father was up at 4:00 and built a fire in the cook stove. On the cook stove would be a big tub for heating the bath water. The drinking water was carried in a bucket with a dipper in it from the spring.

I: Was that an artesian spring, or did you have to pump it?

MG: It was artesian. I had a hand pump when I was first married. I carried water and carried water and carried water. That was the way we lived and we didn't think we were deprived of anything. We had all we wanted to eat, all we needed to wear, and weren't worried about anything. My dad used to sometimes go out and help the threshing crews so as to get money for taxes, or he would sell a beef. Otherwise, we didn't have a lot of money. What would we do with it?

Telephone Service

I: What kind of telephone did you have? The old crank?

MG: The kind that hung on the wall and you rang with a crank. You told Central what you wanted or who you wanted, and she talked to you a little while and then got whoever you wanted. She knew everything and everybody. All you had to do if you needed a doctor was ring Central and say, "Call the doctor quick. Somebody needs a doctor."

I: Was there a doctor in Cove besides your father?

MG: Yes. My dad was there to help us, but that was it. Everybody did things for the other fellow. If a woman was left a widow, the first thing my father did was find out if she had plenty of wood. If it was deep snow in the winter and she didn't have enough wood, he hitched up the horses to the sled, went to the mountains, and brought her wood. There were people with a wood saw that sawed her wood.

Christmas Activities

I: Do you remember any special holidays or celebrations?

MG: Most of our holidays were spent going to Grandmother's or having the grandparents at our house. We didn't think we had to celebrate it any special way.

One present was enough. The grandparents came and here'd be a big milk pan of peanuts and oranges or apples. Things like that seemed like a treat to us. One Christmas my mother was ill and Haskell and I had Christmas up at Grandma's in the parlor. My gifts were a little lamp and a white muff and fur; I can't remember what they gave Haskell. They were on little, black parlor chairs. We were expected not to go so they could be fixed up the day before. Then there was usually hard candy; that was treat enough. We didn't expect much.

We celebrated on Christmas Eve at the church, where everybody got an orange and some candy. The program pretty much took up our minds because we had to help with it. Then Christmas Day was at home with a Christmas dinner--pies and cakes and everything you have for Christmas.

I: What did you usually have for meat?

MG: Sometimes a goose, sometimes a duck, sometimes a turkey, sometimes a big chicken; whatever was available is what we had. It was always beautifully done, with dressing, mashed potatoes, gravy, lots of vegetables, always mincemeat pie and apple pie and sometimes homemade ice cream. We'd get the ice out of the ice house, mash it up, and mix cream and eggs. It was delicious.

Household Duties and an Accident

MG: We didn't have time to do a lot of other things because we didn't have the conveniences that we have now. We had two dish pans that we did dishes in. When I was small, my mother was ironing--she was not very well--and I was to the dishes. We had two stools that we put the dishpans on. After we washed the dishes, we stacked them in the other dish pan and poured boiling water over them.

We had a teakettle on the old stove, which had girth; it came out in front. I went and got the teakettle to scald the dishes. The handle was hot. Instead of putting it clear up on top of the stove, which was kind of high for me, I set it on the front part, which wasn't wide enough. The teakettle tipped over and scalded me from the knees down. That was terribly painful because that was boiling water!

My mother set down the iron on the stove and came over to see how badly I was burned. She went in the bedroom, tore a sheet in two, and sprinkled flour on both sides. First she took me out and set me in the big water tank that was out at the back where we got the water we used to wash. A ditch that came nearby filled the tank. She wrapped my legs and feet in that flour. Then she went to the door and called my father. He carried me in and put me on the bed.

I walked on crutches all summer. My grandmother came over. She set me in one chair, with my feet in the other. With sterilized needles, she picked the flour out of the pretty good-sized cracks on the top of one foot, and my father did the other foot. My mother couldn't do it. My father wrapped them again. Now I don't have one scar. They really pretty good sized cracks on the top of my feet, but he took care of me.

I: How old were you when that happened?

MG: I might have been eight years old. I just sat there and toughed it out, though I'll never forget the pain of it. The bottoms of my feet were tougher and they healed up, but I never could go barefooted; my feet were too tender.

Adventures of a Younger Brother

MG: My brother, Haskell--Hack, we called him--went barefooted all the time. I remember him coming in the house crying and saying, "Old Sue stepped on my best toe." The horse had stepped on one of his toes, and he'd already stubbed the other one. He was in bad shape. He could always think of something funny. I never knew him to complain about anything in all his life. He accepted life the way it was, and there was nothing to it. His philosophy was if you can help somebody, help them. If somebody said to him, "I'm cold and I need a shirt," he'd give his shirt. He wouldn't have cared.

I: Would you tell the story of Hack with the horses chasing coyotes?

MG: There was a porch off of our dining room. My father was there when he said, "Come out here and watch this." We all ran to watch what was going on. It was two old men--to me they were old men, though they probably weren't--John Smith and John Allen. They had a pen of hunting hounds. I don't know how they fed them in the wintertime, but meat was cheap and I

suppose they got bones and scraps at the meat market. Or if an animal died, I suppose the hounds got it.

In the fall of the year, the coyotes got thick out on the hills. And they were thick then. Carrying horns made out of cows' horns, the two Johns got on their horses, turned the dogs loose, and out they went after coyotes. Here they were blowing the horns, the dogs barking, and the coyote running as fast as it could run, the hounds right after it. Over the hills and over the rocks we watched the whole thing going all the way around the hill.

At the back of our place was a rail fence. Hack, entranced, raced to the back of the place and got down in the comer of that rail fence, watching this whole thing, because he figured the chase would come around that way, and it did--right over to our hill pasture. When he saw it coming right at him, he ducked down in the comer of the fence. Over went the coyote, the hounds, the horses, and the men on the horses right over his head. He came back happy because he'd seen the whole thing.

It was quite a sight to see those old guys. They rode like a regular old English hunt. They had guns, of course. I can't remember if they ever shot a coyote, but they had the chase and they had the good time.

They rode the horses home very slowly. The hounds, too, were all worn out. Horses don't generally like hounds. I remember my dad's leading a young horse, one that he was keeping in the corral, down to drink. He had to lead it to drink two or three times a day. Here came one of old John's hounds at the heels to that young horse. The horse kicked once, and the dog never moved again. That's all that it took to kill him. My dad said, "I'm sick that old Model killed one of old John's hounds. He was loose and he was going to bite that horse on the heel. The horse kicked him and he was dead." That was the end of that. That happened down there by that High Valley bridge [about one mile southwest of Cove].

Gypsy Visits

MG: The gypsies used to go in there and camp on our place by the creek. My mother was scared to death they'd get my little brother. He had curly red hair and she said, "You're just like the blond kids, you know." I remember when my father took him down there and put him on some of their horses and visited with them. He was always good to everybody.

I: How did the gypsies travel?

MG: They had covered wagons and lots of horses. They traded horses, but I don't know where they got the money for what they ate unless they traded for garden stuff in the summer. Sometimes they'd stay a week, sometimes for only two or three days. My mother was always relieved when they left. She didn't like that encampment. They'd play violins and never failed to have a good time. But we were not allowed to go out of the yard when they were there. We stayed right in close. My, that was excit ing.

Neighbors and Fishing Excursions

I: Who were some of your neighbors?

MG: A next door neighbor was Uncle Newton Merrit; he had been a Pony Express

rider. I thought Uncle Newton was great because he would take me fishing. We'd go down to river and catch catfish. He'd sit there and tell me about his rides on the Pony Express.

His wife was a short, fat woman, who wasn't going anyplace. Her name was Emmaline. She toddled around at home, did the cooking, and never thought of going fishing with him.

They had a cat that had one rocking chair, and it would even rock sometimes. Nobody sat in that rocking chair but that cat!

Grandpa would say, "I can't go fishing tomorrow, but Uncle Newton's gonna go. Why don't you go with him?" So I'd go fishing with Uncle Newton, and we'd sit there on the bank and catch catfish. He wasn't an awfully talkative man, but he wanted company.

I: How old were you then about?

MG: From the time I was six, I suppose, until I was ten or twelve, I went fishing with Uncle Newton and Grandpa.

I: What kind of pole and bait did you use?

MG: If we didn't have a bamboo pole, we used a willow and a plain hook with a worm on it. We threw the line in and the cork sat on top of the water. All of a sudden the cork would dive and we had a fish. Grandpa, and Uncle Newton knew just how to clean them. They had boards and really sharp, old-fashioned forks with both handles and tines fairly close together and long. They put that on the fish's head and split him down the back. Then they reached in with another fork and got the back of the fish after they cut his head loose and pulled it right out of the skin--just as slick as that and all clean. They cut lots of them, and they were awfully good eating.

We did things like that in the summer when I'd be there. We never thought that we had to be doing something for entertainment all the time. That was our entertainment.

Cats and Dogs on the Farm

I: Did you have pets?

MG: My grandfather never had a dog, but we always had a dog for the boys, and we did have barn cats. We didn't have them in the house. I'd want to make a pet of a cat, but I couldn't bring it in the house. I could bring it to the porch and feed it milk, but cats were fed mainly at the barn. City people had cats in the house, not farm people.

Train Rides

I: If you ever got to ride on a train, what was it like?

MG: Oh, it was fan! They had red plush seats, with plush on the arms. The conductor wore a nice uniform and was always polite and nice. Charlie Miller was conductor on the little railroad here. I thought Charlie was wonderful.

We had a little, yellow station there at Cove, right across from where the Episcopal Church is. Since we didn't have a dentist in Cove, they put me on the train and I'd come to La Grande and had my teeth worked on.

The Appeal of the Automobile

MG: Uncle Pete came to our house to visit every summer. That was his vacation.

He always drove a Buick when cars were very few and far between. He always brought his chamois to keep all the metal polished. It was dusty here, and he was very particular, very clean. My father was, too.

I'll never forget when Jack Stevens came driving into town with the first automobile. He had a cap and duster, the cap tied on, and he had on goggles and gloves. When he shifted, he'd take that lever and push it forward. All the horses panicked and there were runaways. He just putted down the street and turned the corner to go to his house. He looked like it was a real effort to turn that corner and made a show of the whole thing.

I: What kind of car was it?

MG: As far as I know, it was a Ford.

I: What year was that?

Chautauqua in La Grande

MG: I was a little kid. Tommy Thompson's father had a Model-T, and Tommy got permission from his dad to drive it. We kids, all dressed up, climbed into Tommy's car when Chautauqua came to La Grande. Oh, that was a big thing, I'll tell you. Here we were, scott-free, going to Chautauqua. I don't think we missed a thing. We had ice cream cones and cotton candy and a general good time. Then we got in the car and came home. The Chautauqua Company had printed programs for plays and many other educational presentations.

I: Once a year?

MG: Yes, in the summertime.

Getting Acquainted with Her Future Husband

MG: When I first started going with Don, he was at the ranch, getting the cows ready for the fall show that year. That was his job--to show cattle. No one else but Don touched those show cattle. He had charge of the feeding--a molasses diet. He was the same age as I was, and I had gone to visit my Aunt Polly.

He came into the house and the family introduced me. He just stood there and looked at me. Finally, I thought, "I'm no animal he's judging. I'm not gonna sit here." So I went around behind the stove and stood there. He stood awhile and then went back in the living room and picked up a magazine to read. I usually did the dishes, so he came out and helped me with the dishes. We started going together from then on. He took me to my home in September because he wanted to meet my folks. They called to make sure when I had started and when I'd get home. My Aunt Libby said, "This young fella out here is bringing her home" and told her who it was. They didn't know whether they liked that or not. She said, "They've already left." Aunt Polly was all for it. We'd been spending evenings together all that summer, while I was at the ranch. When he came to see me after that sometimes, he'd bring an extra horse and we'd go horseback riding. He got a motorcycle and he'd come on that in the summer. Then there was a cart and one rig or another, and there was a Model-T. His uncle had a Maxwell that he drove either Saturday night or Sunday to see me.

I was missing some of the Saturday night or Sunday things that the gang

was having. One time he came and we were having a party way up at Barker's. I went to the party with the kids, and, since I knew he was coming over, I told him where I'd be. He came out that way. In those days the bridges across the little ditches and streams were narrow. He met somebody, went to one side, and went head first into the ditch. That Model T stood with the back straight in the air, the windshield resting on the edge of the ditch, and the engine down in the ditch. The kids came along and lifted that car out of the ditch even when they didn't want him there. I got in the car with him, and away we went for home.

Then he went back to the ranch and took the show cattle all over the west, ending up at the Pacific International. He'd been doing that ever since he was 14. He didn't get back until the Pacific International was over in late September. He had to go to school in California for the winter and stayed with relatives, but I saw him each summer.

My father died when I was in high school, so my mother was left with the ranch and us kids. After high school graduation, I had a scholarship and took one year of teacher's training while I worked in the piano store in La Grande. Don and I were married in June, after three years of going together.

Marriage and Moving to Union

I: When did you get married?

MG: On June 24, 1919.

I: Is that when you moved to Union?

MG: I came here as a bride. We moved first into a little house down on the comer here because his mother wanted him near to work here. He quit the ranch because my mother didn't want me to be on a ranch. He said all right. He worked for Jim Hutchison, our banker at that time. George, Dick, and Sam Benson owned the bank, and Jim was involved in it, too, as the banker. Jim and his father-in-law had a herd of show cattle that Don took care of.

Miskell's Children

I: When were your children born?

MG: Donna was born on September 13, 1920, about a year and three months after we were married. Bill was born three years later on the 4th of October. They grew up about like we did. They walked to school and had 20 minutes to walk a mile home for lunch and 20 minutes to get back. That's the way they spent their noon hour. They'd rather come home and eat a hot lunch than they would to take their lunch. They nearly always walked home unless the weather was bad, and then they took their lunches.

If there was anything going on in the evening, it was walk or don't go.

Changes and an Eccentric in Town

I: What are the greatest changes you've seen, from your growing up to now?

MG: There is such a change--all the way from the horse and buggy to the moon. It's been gradual; you accept as it goes along. It was a tremendous thing to go to Pendleton from Cove--almost unheard of. It was done but not very often. Now you get in the car and away you go--to Portland, Hood River, wherever and think it's a short hop.

I think that was a good time to grow up. I think we were very happy. Kids came over to our house. We sat on the lawn in the summertime and talked. Maybe we'd go and pick apples or cherries and laugh and talk. Our homes and talk. Our families were more important to us than anything else.

We were well taken care of, I'd say. There wasn't too many crazies around, though we had one in our town that everybody watched. He had a rug on the floor at his mother's house--a cow hide that had been tanned and put on the floor. She said he bought it, but somebody went there and recognized their own cow.

Another time, she went to church and when she came out it was raining like everything. She had taken her rubbers and put them in the vestibule. When she got home with wet feet, she said, "Do you know, Dwight, my feet are soaking wet. Somebody stole my rubbers from the church vestibule while I was in there and I had to walk home."

House in Union where Miskell spent much of her adult life
(built in late 19th c.)
Photo in 2003 by Eugene Smith

Mantle over fireplace in Gale living room (original part of house)
Photo by Eugene Smith, 2003

Framed fan and cards on a living room wall in Miskell's home.

Note says:

"This fan was given to Mrs. Cora VanSchoonhoven Bloom by a man from China who worked in the Old Continental Hotel in Union, Oregon. Cora was nice to him because most people were cruel to the Chinese. They killed, burned & robbed them. He sent to China to get it for her. It is made of teak wood, is hand painted, and has real peacock feathers. Cora gave it to her oldest daughter Miskell (Bloom) Gale after she married in 1919."

Photo by Eugene Smith, 2003

Sign commemorating Miskell's serving as Cove Cherry Fair's Grand Marshall when she was 100 years old
(other birthday years written in later; sign affixed to back porch of her Union house)
Photo by Eugene Smith, 2003

Cove High School Canning Club, 1915--Miskell at left
Photo courtesy of Miskell Gale

Preparation for 4th of July celebration in Union, 1889
Photo courtesy of John Turner and Richard Hermens

Fourth annual Cherry Festival in Cove, 1914--
one that Miskell probably witnessed
Photo courtesy of John Turner and Richard Hermens

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