

FRANCES ELIZABETH MCCALL

Tape #1

August 18, 2006

Interviewed by Micheal L Minthorn

Transcribed by Micheal L Minthorn

Side A

I: This is history interview with Frances E. McCall of La Grande, Oregon. The date is August 18, 2006. Let's begin by uh, telling us your full name and date of birth and uh, the date that you married your husband and what his name is.

FM: Well, my name is Frances E. McCall. E is for Elizabeth. And um, my husband's name was Don Woodrow Mc Call. My ___ is. (chuckles)

I: Okay.

FM: Wasn't there something else.

I: When did you get married?

FM: Oh! We got married on December 24th 1940.

I: Where did you get married?

FM: Silverton, Oregon.

I: Okay.

FM: I was born December, uh, excuse me. January 3rd, 1915 out in the country between Yardley Springs [?], South Dakota and Garriton, South Dakota. I went to school at Garriton, South Dakota.

I: Okay. Now uh, we're gonna' concentrate the interview on Union County and so, uh, you told me that you came to La Grande in 1954. Now you also said that your husband came here before you. Did he come here before 1954 or was that the year he started working here?

FM: Oh he started working for the railroad about 1941 probably. And uh, we started- well we first uh, lived in um- well, we built a little shack, you might say out of Rieth, Oregon near Pendleton. And he started and then we moved into Pendleton.

Bought a home there. And then we got transferred, so we had moved there a couple years I guess it was. And then we moved to La Grande.

I: Now you had mentioned that he came to La Grande before his family did.

FM: Yeah. He was working on the railroad.

I: Okay. And um, how did that occur that he came first? Was it because you weren't sure if he was always gonna' be here, or?

FM: Well I'm not exactly sure about that. But most likely it would be a good surmise. But uh, well when he started on the railroad it was during the war and this fella' that- oh it was a cousin, was a had a- and uh, said, "Well they're hiring people on the railroad. You can prob'ly get a job but it won't last." 'Cause when the wars over with they figured everybody'd be let go, I guess. But uh, before that he was- when we were in Silverton he worked on uh, this kinda' mill. And that was hard work. He rode a carriage, I guess is what they called it and he calluses on his hands just so thick. So when we came to visit that cousin why and he got hired- or went to see about a job on the railroad and he got a job. And then they wouldn't- his board wouldn't release him to go in the service, 'cause it's a- had a job that was important. And so that's where he stayed until he had a bad heart attack and it ended his job with the railroad. So he was there about 25 years.

I: When you came to La Grande have you always lived at this residence 505 Adams?

FM: Right.

I: Then you must have seen quite a bit of- there must be quite a bit of difference between what's out here now and um, what was here when you first came to La Grande. Let's talk a little bit about that.

FM: Well when we first came there was a Safeway store where the library is built now. And it faced um, Adams. And then they built one behind that.

I: Another Safeway?

FM: Uh-huh. And then, they built one down where they are now. So that's I mean that's three different Safeway stores.

I: What else was in this particular neighborhood that maybe isn't here now?

FM: Well, when we moved here there was a service station where the La Grande Paint & Glass is. And that house came I think soon after or maybe they were here when we were, I just can't remember for sure about that.

I: Now the Hought's, uh, lived at this place where their, their store is.

FM: Yeah they had a house right behind the ice cream store.

I: Did you know them?

FM: Oh yes. Yeah. Yeah we've been neighbors for 50 years or so. And they're both gone now. But they have quite an attraction over there in the store of old time things that they have.

I: I've seen that.

FM: Yeah.

I: Uh, was there anything else? Were there any uh, little markets or grocers?

FM: Oh yes. There was uh, that little yellow building where the dog care is?

I: We're talking about 2nd and Adams now?

FM: Yeah. That Long's Grocery was there. Then a block up on, it's in here, was uh, Bigner's. Little neighborhood grocery. And Jerry would be a good one to talk to on that.

I: Do you know what was at the place where the Shell station is now currently?

FM: There was a service station there and I think, I think it was uh, Phillips 66. I believe. And, as far as I know why uh, it was uh, Laird always had that. But anyway, I don't know when the Shell moved in. Well, Shell hasn't been there too long. There was somebody there before him. ____, [083]

I: How about these uh, two motels that are right up the street? Were they there when you first came to La Grande?

FM: No and uh, I can't remember but I been tryin to think of what was there.

I: Well I know there was a, there was a, because um, their daughter was in college with me and there was a motel there right on the curve called the Red Shutter Motel.

FM: Oh yeah. Yeah.

I: Uh, their name was Ping.

FM: Ping? I didn't know them. But there used to be a hospital up where- when you make this curve just go straight up there, there's the Grande Ronde Hospitals was up there.

I: Is it where that care center is now?

FM: It's not a care center. It's a apartment.

I: Oh. Oh. On the other side of the road there?

FM: Yeah.

I: Mm-hm. Okay.

FM: And uh.

I: What was it like living here uh, when you came to town versus uh, are there any big changes in living uh, conditions in this neighborhood?

FM: I can't think that there are a lot of big changes. You just take 'em in stride I think and kind of forget. There was uh, a lady that lived across the street that had been here- she and her husband were living when we moved in. But other than that everyone has been movin'. She- well she sold that and went to Portland and she's passed. Away. She worked at the telephone office.

I: So basically all of your original neighbors are now gone from the neighborhood?

FM: Mm-hm.

I: Now, you uh, were raising your daughter who was in junior high when you came here?

FM: Started junior high here.

I: And where did she go to school when she came here?

FM: She went to college here and then when she graduated fro college up here she went to University of Denver for her Masters in Library Science.

I: I see. Um, but was she in junior high when you moved to La Grande?

FM: Uh she started junior high here.

I: Um-hm. And did she go- uh, what was uh, it wasn't- there wasn't a middle school then there was a junior high, wasn't there?

FM: Yeah it was junior high.

I: And then she finished out at La Grande?

FM: Yeah.

I: Did you, were you involved with any of her school activities or um, involved with school at all while you were?

FM: Well I suppose I don't remember a lot of other than goin' to PTA and things like that. But uh, I can't remember doing anything in particular.

I: Okay.

FM: I suppose I did but.

I: Uh-huh.

FM: Used to go to home extension, why.

I: What was home extension?

FM: Well, I don't know how to explain it. But um.

I: It's okay because other people have told us about home extension. How did you use it? How were they helpful to you?

FM: Well, I made friends that were in...that's a question that I just can't answer.

I: Was it, was it um, was it like a club or did you have learning activities there?

FM: Well, it was- no, it was more a – well more of a club, I guess. 'Course you know it's put on by that state, by the state. But uh, as I say I'm not too good.

I: It's okay. That's all right. Let's talk about your work uh, you said that you worked- uh, and I believe you said this was your only employment was with Keith O'Brien?

FM: Um-hm.

I: And you said that store had a different name?

FM: Well it was an Idaho Department Store. But it was all the same outfit.

I: And about- was that located in Adams down?

FM: Yeah where the new building is in there?

I: That new apartment building? Mm-hm. What did you do for them?

FM: Well I was in the office and I helped, well, filled out statements and.

I: For charge accounts?

FM: Mm-hm. Yeah. And when we- when I started there our office was in the basement. And then after I don't know how long we moved upstairs on the- well, balcony, I guess you'd call it. Had our office up there.

I: Well what um, excuse me; you said it was called the Idaho department Store, but I've heard it called Keith O'Brien, too? Was that the owner's name?

FM: That was the last name? I mean the last name that they had was Keith O'Brien.

I: Was he an actual person? Was that the owner of that place?

FM: That I don't know. I mean 'cause the Idaho Department.

I: Is that how you knew it?

FM: Yeah. And uh, it was all the same outfit.

I: What kind of a store? You said it was a department store. What kind of things could you get there?

FM: Oh. Shoes, clothes, gifts, yard goods. It's a store that's missed, I'll tell ya' that. It had good brands and.

I: Did a lot of people like to shop there?

FM: Yeah and they still mention they wish they had a store like that.

I: Uh-huh.

FM: Shoe department and.

I: Now working in the office or working with the books, uh, did you- is that all you did with them? Did you do other things in the store?

FM: I, I never waited on customers. I just.

I: Okay. Was it a big operation? Were there a lot of people employed there?

FM: Well, let's see- there were always at least two of us in the office.

I: Did they have a lot of employees out o the floor? Was it on different floors? Did it take more than one floor in the?

FM: No. Well.

I: It says the store was.

FM: It wasn't just the office upstairs it had the baby department up there. So that would take a- someone to manage that. Then down below there was usually one in the jewelry department and one n the yard goods. Somebody in the shoe department, somebody in the men's department and then in the women's department. So it took quite a few employees.

I: Were there any changes in the way you did the books uh, when you left as when you- compared to when you started? Were things more automated then? Did you do it all by hand? What.

FM: Well, I mean uh- they got a machine to post the accounts and everything. That's what I started out doing when we were in the basement. But uh, it's so gradual you kind of forget just what uh.

I: Mm-hm. Uh, what became of that store? Did it just closed or they went out of business? Or?

FM: Well, it closed and I was tryin' to think what it might have been just after we left. Or after- 'course I had quit before it closed up.

I: Mm-hm.

FM: When I started Ed Bennett was the manager. And then he passed away and Wes Foke came as the manager and he still lives in town. He and his wife. But uh, it was just a store and La Grande needs one like it. It's- Penney's is the only department store.

I: What other stores were down there on Adams that maybe aren't there today?

FM: Well there was a drugstore right where the McGlasson's Stationary is. That was uh, Graham Drugstore.

I: Did you know the Graham's?

FM: Powell passed away this last year. Or this year I guess it was. And then there was a drugstore down where, let's see, let me think- coffee shop, I guess in there now. Across from what used to be Bohnenkamp Hardware. And, oh.

I: How 'bout that- uh, do you recall the Flea market, uh, business that used to be there on Adams?

FM: I don't remember that.

I: Okay. How about Woolworth's? You were talking about Woolworth's.

FM: Yeah. Yeah. I can remember going into Woolworth's but I don't think it was there too long after we moved here. I just can't remember what- what happened to it. It's kind of hard. We had a good dress shop on uh, corner. Across from where, uh, _____. [209] Down there to the side.

I: Okay well, that's good information. What, what kinds of uh, social activities did you and your husband participate in? Did you do- did you do things socially or with friends in the neighborhood?

FM: Well we golfed.

I: You golfed.

FM: Yeah he was a good golfer. In fact he won the club championship a couple years.

I: Um-hm. So did you both belong to the country club?

FM: I still go out there.

I: You golfed also then?

FM: No, not anymore.

I: Mm-hm.

FM: Oh I fell and broke my knee. And so that laid me up for a while but then I golfed after that. But then, ten years after I broke it I had to have arthroscopic surgery. So there I was again. (chuckles) And then after that I had to have it replaced. So that kind of ended golfing for me. I was ready to try it again and my husband fell and he couldn't golf anymore, so I didn't so it again. But I go out there and play bridge.

I: Were there, um, were there advantages for the family being um, for the family of a railroad worker. Your husband came here, uh; the railroad was still a pretty big operation in La Grande?

FM: Oh yeah well they had passenger trains through here. And that's another thing that's missed around here.

I: Did you ever take those passenger trains?

FM: Oh yes.

I: Mm-hm.

FM: And when my daughter was going to school in Denver it was real handy for her to come home when she'd get homesick and. (chuckles)

I: Was it a convenient form of transportation? I'm guessing the freeway wasn't here when you moved, uh, to La Grande?

FM: No. But I thought it was a good- and I think it'd be a good way now if- especially in the wintertime getting all, my grandson _____. [239]

I: But uh, going back to that as a family benefit. Was that a benefit? Could you travel for free, or?

FM: Oh yeah. We had passes.

I: Mm-hm. Were there other benefits to being a family of a railroad worker?

FM: Well, pretty good income.

I: Mm-hm. Did you, um, uh, were you friends or do anything socially with other wives or families of railroad workers?

FM: Yes. I still have a very good friend whose husband worked on the railroad. He passed away but she and I are still friends.

I: Did they organize any, um, outings or social activities for families?

FM: Well I think they did but I don't think we took part in a lot of those.

I: I see. Now you had mentioned that you had belonged to the Ladies of The Grand Army. What is that organization about?

FM: Well it's a- it's a veteran's. You see my grandfather was a, in the Civil War.

I: So, um, is that how you get to become a member of that?

FM: Yes. Um-hm. And my mother's- other grandfather, too. So I have a grandfather and a great-grandfather that was in the Civil War.

I: Now is that organization you said no longer is here in town?

FM: Not here in town but there's one in Portland area and that's where I pay dues now.

I: Mm-hm. What kinds of things did they- first of all did they have an office or a building that they used here in La Grande when they were operating?

FM: Well we usually met at the Elks Lodge.

I: What kinds of things did the organization do? What were they involved in?

FM: Well, I cannot tell you too much about- 'cause I was working and I wasn't able to participate in too much. But I don't think we did anything out of the ordinary. It was just a lodge-type.

I: Okay. Then you said uh, you still belong to the Daughters of the American Revolution?

FM: Mm-hm.

I: Is that organization still active here in town?

FM: No, not here in town.

I: Were they at one time?

FM: Well, wait a minute. I take that back. We, uh Baker has a- one over there and so we kinda' trade off. We'll have a meeting in Baker and then they'll come over here some, too.

I: And you're still involved with that organization? What kinds of things do they do?

FM: Well, I myself crochet lap robes and stuff for the soldiers that are in homes. And, the others I don't know what- if they crochet or not. But um, they help a lot with soldiers. Veterans.

I: Now they're veterans, uh, are they, are they any veterans. Or are they particular veterans?

FM: Well, any veteran. Yeah and usually the ones I make they take over to Boise where there's an organization-

I: A veteran's home there?

FM: Mm-hm.

I: Yeah I see you've got a big pile of crochet going right here in the middle of us here.

FM: (chuckles) Yeah. Yeah. But I make- I do hangers. But uh, but they, they go to more than just the veterans, for them that. I'll be known as the hanger lady, I suppose. (chuckles)

I: Uh, you've belonged to those organizations for a long time?

FM: Yeah.

I: Uh, was there a.

FM: There used to be an organization in Pendleton. For the uh, Grand Army. And I guess it was the year we moved I was President of it, so I'd go back over there for the meetings, and. Well, it's just kinda' dyin' out.

I: That organization is?

FM: Yeah.

I: Mm-hm. Um, were there as lot of people involved at that- in those organizations in the early days?

FM: Yeah we met in the Vert Memorial?

I: But when you came to La Grande were there more people involved in it then than there are now?

FM: Oh yeah. Yeah. The younger generation- it doesn't appeal to them, I don't think.

I: What other things do you- how about, um, uh, movie theatres or places like that downtown that.

FM: Well the theatres pretty much in the same spot. And of course the outdoor one is still in the same spot. I haven't been to a movie in a long time, so I couldn't. And in fact when they divided this one up I haven't been since to the movies.

I: Were there other movie theatres in town?

FM: There was at one time. Um, down o this end of Adams. But it wasn't- I don't think it lasted long after we moved here anyway, but it was still in operation.

I: Uh, what, what church do you belong to here in town?

FM: The Christian Church.

I: Are you talking about the First Christian Church?

FM: On Penn Avenue.

I: Um, have you always been a member of that congregation?

FM: Since we've lived here. Back in South Dakota I belonged to a Methodist church. In this little town where I was born there wasn't a Christian church, I was a Methodist, Catholic, and Lutheran. And there was a little church I know but.

I: Now a lot of people that I've interviewed have uh, belonged to that First Christian church, uh, here in town. So, um, I've uh, it's, my understanding they've had some real good um, pastors over the years. But, any of those stand out in your mind that, that you enjoyed having.

FM: Well, every time one leaves and uh, I let my daughter know and she would almost be in tears, and she would say, "Mom, you like everybody that comes!"
(chuckles)

I: Uh-huh.

FM: And that's about the truth, so.

I: Do you uh, um, do you do activities with the church now or belong to any of the church organizations?

FM: Uh, just the church and the Sunday School class. I used to belong to a ladies group. But then when I got to working why that kinda' closed that down. And I don't know I got to doin' other things, I guess and. But I always- almost always am in church on Sunday. And Sunday School.

I: Were you involved with that church or going there when they um, built that, uh, built the new chapel or the new addition?

FM: Yeah. Yeah they were going to church in the other part when we came. Although when my husband was here, they still had the old church and he'd gone over there some but we hadn't moved over. So I never was in the old one, but this ___ [364] I mentioned helped on this new section and I imagine Buck did, too?

I: Buck Hermann?

FM: Mm-hm.

I: Now I saw a picture from one of these previous interviews that they used to take pictures of the congregation uh, from time to time.

FM: He was pastor when I came.

I: Well tell us about gene Robinson, what you remember of him? A lot of people have mentioned him.

FM: Oh yes, he was- I don't know how to explain him. I imagine whoever you've talked to has prob'ly told of better stories about him than- but he was a great man and then uh, I think the next one after that was Rollie Hastings. And Don and him used to golf some.

I: You're talking about your husband, your late husband now?

FM: Mm-hm. And uh, I don't know if I got the right order but there was a- tryin' to think who the next one would have been. Well, it doesn't make any difference; they've all been good.

I: Well.

FM: We've been real fortunate.

I: Mm-hm.

FM: And I like the one we have now. Mark Schleschman.

I: Has he been here for a while now?

FM: Oh, I suppose three or four years. Maybe longer, I don't know.

I: Mm-hm. Any um, any church activities, uh, other church activities you've been involved in? Did you hold office?

FM: Well, I don't think so. I can't remember.

I: Okay.

FM: I'm always there. (chuckles)

I: Mm-hm. Well it's a long time to belong to that particular church. Um, uh, and a lot of people have been involved in it.

FM: Well, I think that on that list that uh, are the Hermann's. And that might be the only.

I: Now we're talking about a list of names that she had known that we should interview.

FM: Yeah I think they're the only ones- well Howard Fisk. In fact he had something to do with the building and this new one. I wasn't that good a dancer but he was really- he won a prize on some dance contest. That was before we were married.

I: Did you do dancing then when you came to La Grande?

FM: Some. Not, not a great deal, but.

I: Was there public dance halls in La Grande at that time?

FM: I think there was but ours was mostly out at the country club there. And then his hours were such that couldn't always and then after he had that heart attack why, that kind of ended a lot of that in here.

I: Well let's talk about your husband and his work then. Uh, you know, you've mentioned that he had all kinds of hours. Uh, so he wasn't on a regular shift?

FM: No. Well, he did- he was when he was on passenger. Until he was on passenger up to Spokane, so that would have been a regular.

I: What did he do?

FM: Well he was conductor then. He was a brakeman-conductor. He was a conductor three years. Then I don't know, sometimes on call a lot of the time. He might be at a different hour, but.

I: Can you describe this uh, this train station that sits down there now uh, when it was a passenger? I- I myself have never been in it. But it looks like a, a passenger terminal still.

FM: Yeah it was, I haven't been in it for years so that I couldn't tell ya' now. But yeah it used to be the depot for people.

I: So several trains a day would come through each way?

FM: Well, I don't know about several but there would be at least two, I would imagine. It would be hard to uh, to remember.

I: Could you go to places like Enterprise, or uh, other directions other than just east and west?

FM: Well. No I don't- don't remember. It usually I think was just freight goin' up there. But I used to take it back to South Dakota. That was a long time ago.

- I: What were the um, I think there have been major weather changes over the last several decades and um, what were the winters like here in La Grande? Were they much harsher when you first came here than they are now?
- FM: Well, it had plenty of snow, that's for sure. But I uh, you never know in La Grande what the weather's gonna' be like. 'Cause sometimes you might have trouble getting' over the mountain. And that's why I think we need a passenger train through here. Especially in the wintertime. But I don't think the Union Pacific feels that way.
- I: Um, now you said that your daughter went to college here. Would have been, was it Eastern Oregon College then or was it still a teacher's- did they still have a teacher's college name on it?
- FM: Well I'm not sure but I think it was- but I thought it was called Eastern Oregon College.
- I: Um, was that- what was that like to send a child to a university or college that was right down the street. That sounds rather convenient.
- FM: Well it wasn't right down the street.
- I: Well, as opposed to being out of town or somewhere. You now? A local.
- FM: Oh I see what you mean. Well, I liked it 'cause she was home.
- I: She lived at home then?
- FM: Yes. For the first week I think they got to stay up in one of the dorms. But uh, yeah, and uh, I always enjoyed- ands till do when she comes home.
- I: Were there parent activities or things for you to get involved in while she was at college?
- FM: I don't remember anything in particular, and so. There was prob'ly plays or something we'd go to. Well I still go up there now and then for if there was something at McKenzie Theatre.
- I: What do you remember about um, what do you remember about all of the strip there at Island City going out there? That's gotta' be completely different than-
- FM: Well, I don't remember there ever begin too much out there. A few service stations and, but uh.
- I: You're talking about when you first came here?

FM: Yeah.

I: Uh-huh.

FM: And of course gradually uh, quick food service, you know? And then, that's it. And one time, Albertson's was just across the street from Safeway.

I: Down here on Adams where you lived you mean?

FM: Yeah.

I: Oh.

FM: And then Albertson's built out there and then all those other little shops started up and Payless Drug moved out there then, too. 'Course now it's a Rite Aid.

I: Was that farmland out there when you first came to town?

FM: That I don't remember.

I: You just remember there wasn't much there.

FM: Yeah. There probably was, there's a lot of it around here that used to be just farmland, I think.

I: Is this neighborhood different than we when you first came here?

FM: Not, not this particular- I mean it's still the same places and then even down on the next one except for where the paint store is. That was a service station. And I don't think it's changed too much really. But you know sometimes it the ones you don't notice. And then of course Ron's Grocery used to be down there where that pet place is.

I: Was that a neighborhood grocery or was that a big grocery store?

FM: Well, I don't- I wonder now when I look at it how they ever had groceries in there 'cause it look small.

I: Oh it was in the same building that-

FM: Yeah!

I: Okay so it was a little neighborhood grocery?

FM: Yeah.

I: Did you know the Longs?

FM: No I didn't know them. They usually would go up there to Bigner's. Theirs was a little bit bigger.

I: But that was a neighborhood grocery also?

FM: Um-hm. Yeah. And Jerry- well I guess his dad started it probably and then Jerry took over and he and his wife. And she passed away. Jerry would probably be able to tell you a lot of history because he has lived here all his life.

I: Now where was that store approximately you were saying?

FM: Well it would be one block up and just across the street?

I: Um, this is uh, I think that's uh, is that First Street?

FM: Be uh-

I: Uh that must be Cedar.

FM: Cedar.

I: Yeah. So it sat back there off of Adams?

FM: Mm-hm. And a block up. But things are pretty much the same as far as houses are concerned.

End of Side A

NO Side B

End of Tape #1

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