

Myron Ricker

12/97, T1, S1

- JG: Interview with Myron Ricker of Union, Oregon on December 4th, 1997. [tape pause] ...as far as, say, your birth date and how long you've been here in, you know, the Union area.
- MR: I've been here all my life.
- JG: Okay. Do you have when you were born? What year?
- MR: Have I?
- JG: When you were born?
- MR: 1915.
- JG: Okay. And that was here in Union?
- MR: Yeah.
- JG: Then if you could give me maybe just a brief, you know, description of your background, you know, what you were doing here during those years.
- MR: I was raised on a cattle ranch all my life...lived on all my life.
- JG: Is that the same location we're at right now?
- MR: The old home ranch is in south Union but it joined this place here on Catherine Creek so it hooked up together.
- JG: And on the...you know, on Catherine Creek here or Little Creek do you recall as far as any changes during your lifetime particularly with the beaver or, you know, any of the marsh areas. I know there's a lot of ditches in here that, you know, have drained...not necessarily drained water away, but, you know, irrigated...for irrigation like that that go through the area. But Dick Bonney was tellin' me like in Little Creek I guess used to be quite a few beaver ponds in there and then that, you know, was trapped out and then that channel was changed in there.
- MR: There isn't many beaver left. There's a... Up here at the old city intake the beaver move in there every year...
- JG: Oh, do they?
- MR: ...tryin' to dam that up. They have quite a time with that. That's about the only activity beavers I know of.
- JG: I know... I was talkin' with Will Brown, too, from the Game Commission, he said that like in the '30s they were just pretty well trapped out and then they started transplantin' a few, you know, back in on that. But didn't know you recall...like on Little Creek there where the Titus ground was of whether that was all marsh...
- MR: Yeah.
- JG: ...was it and before they drained. Do you know about when that might've been done?
- MR: No. It'd be before my time. That's been just like that ever since I know anything about it.
- JG: Oh, okay. Yeah, that's what I was tryin' to, you know, find out, about when that might've been. Like I said, Dick Bonney was tellin' me that that evidently way back like turn-of-the-century.
- MR: Yeah, that'd been a long time ago.

JG: Oh yeah. What about the vegetation in the bottom land here from here up to the State Park and, you know, down through these meadows? Do you recall any change or what that was like in the early days?

MR: About all that's been done is a lot of brush has been cleared out and man leveled, you know. This place here used to have just about...there's about twice as many acres as farm land here as there was originally. It was all brush...that lower field was all brush.

JG: What kind of brush was in there?

MR: Oh, just __ little willow like startin' goin' along the edge of the creek here now.

JG: What about the amount of cottonwoods? Was that about the same, or...?

MR: I think... As far as I know...remember it's about the same.

JG: 'Cause there's still quite a few cottonwoods scattered up and down the creek there. Do you know if they were cutting cottonwoods for anything? In the discussion somebody'd asked me and I said I'd never heard of cottonwood being cut. Suppose they were logging it or what it was used for?

MR: No, they would... __ talkin' about that, oh, about ten years ago talkin' about comin' in and cuttin' the cottonwoods, you know, but nothing ever developed. They never come back.

JG: I couldn't figure out probability to, you know, makin' it worthwhile in there. How about as far as...oh, remember like flood years or any times, you know, anything like that was...been some real problem areas down through here?

MR: The only flood we had was in '48...winter of '48 and '49.

JG: I remember S__ tellin' me, you know, a little bit about that. What was that? Where you had like heavy snows and then the...?

MR: Yeah. Real heavy snow and the...a real cold spring and then it started rainin' along about the 1st of May. That... That's when the flood got... It took all the high snow out and there was the rain too and it just rained more water than the __ could handle.

JG: Oh yeah. Yeah, I know I remember, you know, tell like to all the business district and clear down in towards, you know, the Ranger district there. Do you remember that was pretty well widespread or was it just in the Union area for the flooding?

MR: Flooding? No, it had just...just from Union out to...well, kind of north, northwest of here. The old channel...the regular creek channel picked up most of the water from there on.

JG: Do you remember there'd been any channel changes down from the State Park and going out, you know, towards Hot Lake there of, oh, either Catherine Creek or Little Creek?

MR: No. There've been some...oh, they've taken some bends out of the creek and stuff like that, just minor stuff, nothin' major.

JG: Again, that flood was it 1948 or '49?

MR: It was winter of '48 and '49.

JG: Oh, winter through that period of '48, '49.

MR: Yeah.

JG: Oh, okay. What about as far as fishing up through here? Do you recall either your experiences or from your folks of, you know, salmon runs of when they were up in here and about how many?

MR: They've just gradually got less salmon every year. They used to be...be able to catch quite a few...get quite a few salmon along in here.

JG: Do you remember what...kind of what methods they were usin'?

MR: Most of 'em just used them little grab hooks, you know, put a...it was a single hook on a pole and just...[laugh]

JG: ...just picked 'em out. Do you remember as far as like how far back you can remember about how many they were...how big those runs were and what time of year were they?

MR: Mostly right along after high water, but generally probably May or first part of June when the big runs was.

JG: Remember... Dick Bonney I got a picture from showed...of course that would've been back in probably the...oh, between '20s and '30s that they were right down near the low dam there, oh, by the fish hatchery. And then they were...it showed 'em in the creek, you know, workin' up along the creek there fishing. And do you remember how long that dam was in there? Would've had to been on the...oh, what what'd that'd be...as you're comin' this way...

MR: Yeah, I know...I know where it is, yeah. It's been there a long time. I wouldn't know just what year it was in there.

JG: I think they put it in probably 1920's when they built the hatchery. I didn't know if they'd done any...

MR: That S__ ditch is just below the...just below the bridge.

JG: Yeah.

MR: It was in along...it was probably way back in the 1860s or '70s along in there.

JG: The ditch part of it, yeah.

MR: It's an old, old ditch there.

JG: I've noticed that they've changed that up puttin' those like fish ladders in there.

MR: Yeah. That... __ I haven't got much use for that Game Commission. There's no sense of them buildin' what they did down there. Lost two lives right after they put it in there.

JG: I know, yeah. That was a real tragedy with that.

MR: And that bright idea they got from that __ New York didn't work.

JG: Is that how...

MR: __ make that water turbulent, see, too keep it clean.

JG: Oh, I didn't know how...what the background was.

MR: It's still right up the gravel. It's six foot deep that thing right below the dam.

JG: Oh, uh-huh.

MR: It's filled up in the middle now with gravel, but where they got that water piped in that turbine in each corner down there, why, that's clean. They did that... they said wouldn't fill up with gravel. It didn't work.

JG: Didn't work too good.

MR: No.

JG: Do you know if on the Davis dam about when that might've been put in?

MR: That...1800s.

JG: 'Cause I think that was the old Nodine property, wasn't it?
MR: Yeah.
JG: And then...then...I don't know...can't recall who owned it after that before Pete and R. B. were out there.
MR: Them's...they were related.
JG: Was that the... That's right. Yeah, the Benson. I remember reading that now.
MR: They originally got the land. Pete and Richard took it over.
JG: Okay. So it was probably went then from Nodine to Bensons and then to Pete and Richard.
MR: Yeah.
JG: 'Cause I know the...oh, research I was doing out there that Nodine, you know, they drained that Toolie Lake that was right there by Hot Lake. It was about 1,600 acres and they changed...you can find on the maps there where they changed the, you know, creek channel so it might've been at that time when they, you know, that got changed up.
MR: They cut a channel through there to drain that.
JG: Oh yeah. There's those big dykes, you know, when you got out in that Davis ground those things...there's a lot of earth movement in there. [laughs] Doin' a lot of changin' to drain that stuff and probably keep from flooding, you know, two or three years. Do you recall... I see, you know, you have this picture of your dad here in 1931 catching a salmon. Do you remember anything about like just the numbers of salmon that were coming up through here during different periods of time?
MR: I wouldn't... It'd just be a wild guess.
JG: That's fine.
MR: I know there's a lot of 'em.
JG: Do you remember about how long that lasted before, you know, 'cause I guess now do you see any...is there any sign of salmon here?
MR: Oh yeah. I'll show you... My wife...this is my second. I was married three times. That's my second wife. She used to get a kick out of that.
JG: Oh, that's a great one.
MR: That was in 1970.
JG: I'll be darned!
MR: They're still comin' up.
JG: __ yeah.
MR: There's less of 'em.
JG: Yeah. Boy, that's a dandy, though.
MR: Sure was. That... That salmon just got a few less every year.
JG: Oh yeah.
MR: I don't blame them dams down there for all that lost salmon, either.
JG: There's many factors, you know, that you get into so it's pretty complex.
MR: I used to have to go to Portland. I was loggin' on the __ and I'd have to go down and get parts a lot of time __ make just a trip down and back, you know. I know they was usin' them eel nets on that river.

JG: Oh yeah. They had a lot of things __ you know, the early days they had the fish wheels and then the, you know, went to gill netting and there's a lot of different methods they've used, you know, down through there.

MR: They used to stretch those gill nets clear across. Any fish that'd come up it'd get caught.

JG: Oh yeah. When was that about? What years, do you recall?

MR: Oh, that'd been late '40s or early '50s.

JG: Oh, okay. Do you recall, Myron, about what year it might've been as far as any major change in numbers here? I know you've said it's kind of gradual, but do you recall if there was just kind of, you know, gradual all the time or if it actually made quite a change?

MR: It seemed to me like, but I didn't...wasn't payin' too much attention to salmon, but it seemed to me like they just gradually got a few less every year.

JG: I remember in, oh, it was 1960 when I came back out of the Army I remember there was quite a good run up by the...there in the lower park area at that time. It still seemed like there was quite a number, you know, of them. I was about the same way, I never paid a whole lot of attention except I that we remembered seein' a bunch, you know. [laughs]

MR: I remember I was a kid back here and I was...oh, this'd been about over seventy years ago...went back and I met a kid...they was runnin' cattle there at the __ meadow and we's in there and took some salt up. What are you doin' takin' salt to cattle? There's so many salmon in there and they were stayin' where the __ back and forth. There were plenty where it didn't look like he'd walked across the creek all to the other side and back. [laughs]

JG: They were clear up that high? Was that right...

MR: That's where they used to spawn.

JG: Yeah, near the meadows there? It was right in the meadow, was it?

MR: Yeah. That's just sand. Water'd __ pretty level.

JG: Do you remember about what time of year that was?

MR: It was probably first part of June.

JG: Mm-hmm. It was about time the snow went out.

MR: Yeah, snow was all gone.

JG: Whereabouts was it that your wife caught this salmon here?

MR: What was what?

JG: Where was the picture taken? I mean where did she catch that one that was in the picture? That salmon on Catherine Creek.

MR: We caught him right out here.

JG: Oh, right out behind your place here. Do you remember how much that one weighed or how long it was?

MR: No, I don't think... We never weighed it.

JG: Never weighed it. It was a pretty good-sized fish, though.

MR: There was about eight or ten of 'em right there. My wife grabbed that one.

JG: Do you remember in the early days as far as the townspeople or anyone else coming in here to fish the salmon or not necessarily fish or how they used to take 'em?

MR: I remember when I was a kid there used to be a lot of Indians come over here. Just come over in their hacks and wagons, you know. They used to camp up here on this old Miles place.

JG: Which one was the Miles place?

MR: It's about the third place on up here now.

JG: Oh, okay.

MR: It's the last one before you get into the canyon. There's a field on each side of the creek there and quite a few trees. Them Indians used to set...set their teepees up. They'd be there for pretty near a month.

JG: I'll be darned!

MR: Old Ed Miles got a kick out of it. He owned the land there. They used to just string 'em up in the sun...just dry 'em in the sun.

JG: Do you remember how they used to catch 'em?

MR: No. I never did see 'em catch 'em. I could just go... I was just a kid goin' by ___.

JG: Used to dry 'em and then...

MR: Yeah.

JG: How about some of the local people? Do you remember if they used...or how much area here they used to fish in?

MR: People used to fish all the way up and down here, but...townspeople.

JG: Yeah. How far was it down there below Union, do you know?

MR: They never fished it below much.

JG: It was always up.

MR: Seemed like they always come up.

JG: Coming up this way.

MR: Country's flatter down there.

JG: Do you remember seeing anything else in here besides the Chinook salmon as far as eels or trout or any...any other fish?

MR: They used to be some of them we called suckers. They used to get in these irrigating ditches with the salmon. That's somethin' else there seemed to be that's fouled up. Salmon never went down these ditches. I never did see a salmon when I kid get in the ditch. Them suckers, though, they lived in the mud. They used to be down...I'd catch them down there once in a while.

JG: 'Cause I think the ditches were open, weren't they? They didn't have screens in?

MR: Yeah. These screens haven't been in too long.

JG: Were you familiar with any of the mining activity up the Grande Ronde River? Do you remember any of that?

MR: No, not that I know of.

JG: Oh, okay. 'Cause it wasn't real extensive, you know, it wasn't like the Sumpter country. They had that Camp Carson and then there's some dredging in there, you know, in the upper Grande Ronde. I didn't know if you'd gotten up in there or not. So, Myron, if you remember anything, you know, like goin' up the old highway, the Highway 30, before they put the interstate in? Remember any changes up from that, you know, you left La Grande up to Hilgard?

MR: No. I don't think... What kind of change do you mean?

JG: Just as far as the vegetation up that river bottom. 'Cause when they put Interstate 80 in, you know, they made quite a few changes of the river in there, you know,

straightened some of that out. And of course they had a different alignment with the Interstate compared to the old Highway 30 road that was in there.

MR: The old highway went right up the river, didn't it?

JG: Yeah, pretty much. There was a few bridges in there, you know, there's those old narrow steel bridges where they did make some, you know, crosses in there. Of course then they changed some of that up when they put the Interstate in. I was wonderin' if you recall any other obstructions in the river at all? Like we said, we had this one...I never...haven't been up to the intake here for the city. Is that a little bit of a dam in there?

MR: Oh yeah. Yeah, they had a... There's about a...about a...I think it was eight-foot dam they had in there. I know they had an awful time the city on the fish screen. They couldn't get one to work __ salmon up. They'd...all kinds of salmon came just right below the... They'd get back and jump. They had fish ladder, but they'd come out, oh, twenty feet below the dam. Darn fish'd jump down there, hit the end of the cement on that ladder and flop back in. They wasn't jumpin' where they was supposed to. [laughs]

JG: Wasn't designed for 'em. Did that get changed up then? Have they made that different now than what it used to be?

MR: Yeah.

JG: Do you remember about when that might've been done?

MR: The original?

JG: Both the original and then, you know, any change...you know, when it was changed up.

MR: That old one they must've put that in about, oh, sometime in the '30s. But this new one they just did it here a year or two ago, you know.

JG: Yeah, I saw...

MR: They made three dams is what they did.

JG: Oh, is that what it is? 'Cause like I said, I didn't see any pictures of it. I didn't know just what they'd done up there.

MR: Yeah, this one is ten feet deep. One it twelve feet deep water spill over into __ regular cement dam then that spilled over in the next on. So there's only a two foot fall between...

JG: Between each one.

MR: ...each one. I thought there'd be trouble there that twelve one...they had the twelve foot dam, but...the kids was goin' in there swimmin' __. [laughs]

JG: Could dive in that one.

MR: Yeah.

JG: Do you recall anything of the...out there in the valley at all as far as the change in vegetation along the rivers or the wetlands during your lifetime?

MR: There's a lot more land irrigated. About half of that valley used to...wasn't irrigated.

JG: It was all dry-land farmed, wasn't it, pretty much?

MR: Yeah.

JG: I know, you know, you really didn't put the circles in out there the last few years, you know, doin' deep wells and all that type of thing. I was wonderin' by chance you don't have a picture of your dad, do you? Of the original picture?

MR: Dave might have one. I don't know where he found that.

JG: Yeah, 'cause that's a dandy. That's... Yeah, 'cause it'd be nice if I could try and make a picture of it. This has got all the dots in it and, you know, if there's an original around where you can make a copy negative for ya and just count that as a kind of record.

MR: Let me look. I got a bunch of pictures here, but I don't...[recording paused]

JG: ...either showed the picture of the Union city intake, that was 1951. It says that foreground shows...

MR: That's just lookin' upstream.

JG: Yeah. It says blown up in 1949 because of the flooding. What'd they do? Take and, you know, then rebuild it? Do you remember?

MR: Yeah.

JG: Oh, I see.

MR: That old boy...that was just before Dad bought this place. He was livin' here at that time. He got a guy that knew dynamite and went up there and they blew it up. [laughs] But it... the old one was only about four feet high. But this...when they rebuilt it they been about eight feet.

JG: Yeah, that's a good picture, too. Do you know...think would Dave have that picture too, do you think?

MR: Yeah. He got this thing together. He was kind of head of this deal here.

JG: Just last week...or this comin'...I don't know what days...is it this week here, the 5th?

MR: Is what?

JG: It shows December the 5th...oh, 1995. I didn't read the...didn't read the year. [laughs] Yeah, 'cause I hadn't hear of it. Where's Dave living?

MR: He lives right here.

JG: Oh, is he...this is his place here?

MR: He just drove out. I should've stopped him.

JG: 'Cause, yeah, if there's a chance it would be real nice to have that as part of that history, you know, showin', you know, that change and like that. 'Cause I knew that, oh, that place that flooded a lot, you know, down there in '48, that was before I come here, but I remember ___ tellin' about it, you know, years ago, of all that heavy flooding and Dick Bonney, too. But didn't know just what all the background was, you know, how extensive it was. When you said you're logging was that...did you do anything up the Grande Ronde area? The Grande Ronde River country?

MR: I don't... I don't know much about that.

JG: Yeah, I didn't know where all you were hauling from. I remember you had the trucks there, but I didn't know, you know, how much area you covered.

MR: We wasn't up there very much.

JG: Uh-huh.

MR: We was back in here, Eagle Creek.

JG: Oh yeah.

MR: Dick Bonney had quite a lot of stuff on that, didn't he?

JG: Yeah. Dick...you know, of course his dad started that hatchery down there so he had some real good coverage on that.

MR: I went to school with Dick all my life. We were the same grade.

JG: I'll be darned! Yeah, 'cause he talked about bein' night watchman while he was at school there up by the dam there, you know. I just they tried to blow him out one night. He said they...somebody had a piece of dynamite out on a string and let it down the river...down the creek, you know. Had quite a scare.

MR: Blew a big slab out of that rock. [laughs] About all it did is tip it over.

JG: Yeah. But as far as the beaver activity, do you know anyone else around here that'd have any idea of...that's still alive, or, you know, any of the trapping or that remembers anything about the beaver?

MR: No, I wouldn't know who would know.

JG: I've said, there's not too many still around that, you know, that were actually doing something, you know, like that.

MR: That's right.

JG: As far as the meadow in here, that's been pretty much the same since your dad bought that?

MR: Yeah, it is. It was just a wild meadow.

JG: Yeah. Except for maybe you'd do some little brush clearin' in there?

MR: They used it...get a piece cleaned up, why, we'd cleaned up and level it and then plow it and sowed alfalfa. In about three years it'd be grass. [laughs]

JG: Did you actually do leveling yourself or...?

MR: Yeah.

JG: 'Cause I know some of that wasn't up __ didn't they get the big equipment in there from the Soil Conservation Service to level in there.

MR: Yeah. The Soil Conservation did a lot of it.

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

MR: Oh, right after the war. Probably the early '50s when most of that was goin' on.

JG: Do you remember about how extensive that was? Was it just the Huffman property or where there other areas?

MR: They did a lot of work around here.

JG: Oh, did they?

MR: Yeah, for everybody. They did to this place was that...most of that lower field.

JG: 'Cause I know Mack Devore, you know, up the creek that he was doin' a lot of the, you know, work for 'em.

MR: Yeah, Mack's worked for 'em quite a while.

JG: Yeah.

MR: They used to do a lot of work around here.

JG: Oh yeah. Yeah, I was wantin' to go over and talk to Bud Jones. I haven't done that yet 'cause he was kind of ram-roddin' that, you know, for 'em there for a few years. I remember tellin' about Max, you know, doin' the Cat work, equipment handling. But what was it with them? Did they do like clearin' the brush, too? Come in, you know, movin' the brush in that one?

MR: Oh yeah. They did do everything.

JG: Oh yeah. Do you remember as far as like up and down through here how many different areas they were workin' or had worked?

MR: They done work on pretty near every place along here.

JG: Oh, did they?

MR: Yeah.

JG: I didn't know, you know, like the Titus ground that that was...I know that'd been drained, you know, a long time ago where Little Creek has changed.

MR: Yeah. That's the old Fickle place. Ed Fickle used to own that.

JG: That was who, yeah. I couldn't remember the name. That's what Dick Bonney said. I think it was durin' his time is when that got changed up. Do you recall about when Titus got that?

MR: Oh, it was...it might've been in the late '50s or early '60s.

JG: Yeah, 'cause that would've been Burt Titus, wasn't it?

MR: Yeah. Burt's Ralph's dad.

JG: Right. [pause in conversation] One other thing with the, oh, the Indians when they were gettin' those salmon, dryin' 'em, was that all they did pretty much was dry 'em to pack 'em back over the hill there?

MR: Yeah.

JG: Do you remember what the...as far as the other people in here fishin' for those...did they know how they prepared 'em or what they did with 'em?

MR: No. I think the local people here they'd just catch one or two and, you know, use it up. They didn't try to keep 'em.

JG: I think in the early days didn't they do some canning of 'em? Do you remember?

MR: I don't remember what doin' with that.

JG: It might've been...oh, I was talkin' to Wayne West when he said...I guess his grandparents were up around this intake someplace where they used to bring a buckboard in and used to, I guess pitchfork 'em and, you know, and throw 'em in. And of course that was...I guess they'd can 'em for winter, you know, like that, but I don't know if that went on very long or not.

MR: Pitch fork, that's where my dad got that one.

JG: Oh, did he? [laughs]

MR: He used a pitch fork.

JG: Yeah, that's a dandy. Yeah, I have to get a hold of Dave, then see if he's, you know, he's got that 'cause that's, you know, be open to that. Good one for posterity, you know, as far as pictorial. Yeah, I think that...[recording stopped]