Warren Roe

4/8/04, T1, S1

ES: Please give me your full name.
WR: Warren Louis Roe.
ES: And where and when…
WR: Junior, originally.
ES: Junior?
WR: Uh-huh.
ES: When and where were you born?
WR: Boise, Idaho, May 1st, 1926.
ES: Okay. What brought you to Union?
WR: It was actually an exchange of prisoners. [laugh] What happened was was they…they made a big division between the Social Security division that was in California and the one that was up here. After that was done, why, there were people on both sides that didn't want to be there. They wanted to go back to the areas that they knew that they wanted. So we had what we called an exchange of prisoners. In effect, they spent a lot of money training me and they didn't want me to quit and…
ES: You had been working in Social Security in Idaho?
WR: Yes. I worked in Idaho and I worked in California and then I came here and I stayed here 'cause I liked it.
ES: What had attracted you to social security work in the first place?
WR: That was purely an accident.
ES: Like so many careers.
WR: Yeah. What happened, I first went to work for the Forest Service as soon as I come out of college and went down to New Mexico. I would've had a good deal there if I could've stayed, but… They were gonna make me manager eventually. They had me marked for manager of the entomological lab there – I graduated in entomology – but I had been…I married, you know, and I was goin' to school and – I guess I might as well tell the truth – I sent my wife home to have a baby, which was a mistake. Her mother… We had no problems between us. Her mother was one of these…you've heard of witches? She had all the attributes. [laugh] Anyway, that wasn't the first marriage she broke up. She had her so brainwashed after she had that baby that we just simply broke up. Now I came back from New Mexico because I was tryin' to save the marriage, which I didn't do. Anyway, then I went to work for the Forest Service out of Boise on the Spruce Budworm Spray Project up in the area of Warm Lake and that area where I had…we had a cabin there, a matter of fact. Anyway, when that was over with then I…I had put in my application for various agencies, you know, where I wanted to go to work, I'd take a test and all this. And the first one that came along was the Social Security Administration. They offered a good salary. In fact, they offered a better salary than I would've got as an entomologist, you know. So I thought, "Hey, that's alright." So I went to work for Social Security. And then they…they trained me. They sent me down to California to Berkeley

and anyway they…actually, they sent me for the real training they sent me back east to Philadelphia and we trained back there. Then we came back out and I went to work in the Lewiston office up in Idaho. From there I got promoted and they sent me down to Bakersfield, California. I didn't like Bakersfield. I always said we were in training for hell because that's the only place that I've ever been – and I've been in the tropics – the only place I've ever been where the tops of trees were burned brown in the summertime, live trees.

ES: This exchange of prisoners you spoke of, apparently, from what you've said, or I infer anyway, you really wanted to come to Eastern Oregon.

WR: Oh yeah. Yeah.

ES: And was this because…

WR: I gave 'em an ultimatum. [laugh]

ES: …there were longtime family connections here?

WR: No. That's another strange thing.

ES: You didn't know that there were…

WR: I did not know there was any family here.

ES: It sounds as though fate might have been guiding you.

WR: Yeah, maybe so. But there were some of us in Boise and some of these people had visited there, but I really didn't know anything about my family, about the Roes, you know. I came to this valley and I found out I'm related to all these Roes around here. There's one group that thinks we aren't related, but we are. We attend the same funerals sometimes.

ES: So without going into a great deal of detail about the Roe family, when had they come here? Do you know?

WR: Yeah. I've got the date that he came… I can't remember the date, but it's in the…

ES: Late 1800s or so?

WR: I think it was in the 1800s, yeah.

ES: And did they come here to farm?

WR: Yes. First… The first one was that great uncle that I told you about and he came here to farm and, you know, opportunities out here.

ES: I think I heard…heard the term somewhere, Sandridge.

WR: That's right.

ES: Is that where he lived?

WR: He actually eventually owned two thousand acres on the Sandridge.

ES: Would you give…give your explanation of where that is?

WR: As you're going out of La Grande you're going out of…out of…out of La Grande towards Cove, the sandridge starts there. You cross this little ridge.

ES: Oh, that one.

WR: Then it runs all the way out past…of course, like you said, past Summerville…

ES: But it was near Cove where your family was?

WR: No, no. It was in the middle of the valley, middle of the valley. He had a lot of grain elevators there. He was quite a character. I guess I might as well tell you about him. He was quite a character. He bought up a lot of ranches. And every one of those ranches he put a wider there at the house on the ranch. A widow. He was quite the…quite the goer of the blower. [laugh] He served in the state

legislature here in Oregon. He was a school teacher. He…just out of Summerville, I think that Dry Creek he taught there.

ES: What was his name again?

WR: I'm sorry, I'm havin'…

ES: That's alright.

WR: He's right there. Jonas Luther Roe. I think I can tell you when he came out here 'cause I think I got it in the…yeah, he was a farmer, a teacher and a state legislator in 1888. Let's see, I… Yeah, if you want to stop it a second I'll look…[tape pause]…it's not that near. …justly celebrated for the production of wheat. This is stuff that I took out of… And he…he farmed and he did real well, of course.

ES: And what relation did you say you think he was?

WR: A great uncle.

ES: A great uncle?

WR: Yeah. And then he said he later – Newton Jasper Roe – he said to the family, he says, come out and join him. So Newton Jasper came out – that was a brother to him. They both at one time lived in Imbler, but anyway… He's buried in the Summerville cemetery, by the way. I couldn't tell ya where he is exactly. His wife, of course, was Lucy Catherine Roe and she died. I think that was the only woman he ever really loved. I think the others were just all friends, you know.

ES: Does your discovery that you had long-dead relatives here affect the way you feel about this place?

WR: Oh yeah. This is home now. Actually, of course, Cornelia Diana Butler – that was the wife of Newton, his brother. And Newton is my great-great-grandfather and she is my great-great-grandmother and she's buried in the first row up here in the Union cemetery. And I did not know that when I came here. I did not know any of these Roes were related to me. I just got acquainted with 'em and…I don't know, by… I kind of become the family historian. I've gathered their stuff. [laughs]

ES: Every family needs one, don't you think?

WR: I guess.

ES: And these papers that you showed me have quite a bit of detail of each of them.

WR: A great deal of detail. Everything I could…I could find out about 'em.

ES: Alright. I'll comb through those and perhaps include portions of that with the transcript of this interview.

WR: Alright.

ES: Let's get back to the Social Security and some of the details about the kind of work you did around here for Social Security, some of your interactions with clients, for example.

WR: I had taken a minor in psychology when I went to college and, believe me, I used it.

ES: It was helpful?

WR: Yeah. It… It's a strange thing, but with psychology alone you can…you can almost guide a person to say what you want 'em to say. Anyway, I got along real well with the older people here. We got along just fine. I enjoyed interviewin' 'em. I enjoyed, you know, talking to them, that type of thing.

ES: Was your… Was one of the parts of your job to determine their eligibility and their benefits?

WR: That's right. That's right. That was… That was my job, their eligibility, their benefits and gather evidence to prove their age and their relationships.

ES: Was this maybe somewhat more complex if they hadn't worked for a company? If they worked for themselves, as farmers, for example?

WR: Not really. The main thing that we had… In a way, yeah. A lot of these farmers didn't…they tried to keep from reporting any more income than possible and then you end up with smaller benefits that way.

ES: You mean to IRS?

WR: Pardon me?

ES: Reporting to IRS, you mean?

WR: Yeah. That's the thing. But the ones that worked for wages, of course, they were reported. Although I found a lot of cases where these employers hadn't and I investigated that, too.

ES: Was it part of your job then to do research for prospective recipients as to what wages they had actually earned and what the sources might have been?

WR: If they questioned something on their wages, yeah, we went lookin' for 'em to try to find 'em. While I was there, with the Social Security Administration – and George, too, by the way…

ES: George Fleshman.

WR: Yes, George Fleshman. We had a different philosophy than they've got now. Our philosophy was we're there to help those people and we try to help 'em just as much as we can. I know in taking disability claims we really developed their claims for 'em, we really did, you know. We got a lot of those claims through, those disability claims, that wouldn't get through today because people are expected to do all this stuff themselves.

ES: Where did that philosophy come from in your case? Was it something that you and George sort of allowed to grow out of your temperaments, or was it a policy matter set by the government?

WR: It was a part of our temperaments and also that's the way you were trained, that you were to give service.

ES: Part of government policy then?

WR: That was part of government policy…well, it was part of our policy in Social Security. We had more human leaders at that time than they do know. Now it's all statistics.

ES: Human leaders? You mean people who had a sense of humanity?

WR: That's right.

ES: Okay.

WR: Now the ones that are on the top they're only interested in statistics and you gotta do good in statistics. They really don't give a darn about anything else.

ES: Or even a damn, huh?

WR: Yeah, right.

ES: Tell me a little more, if you can remember, a few incidents of interactions with people.

WR: I'll tell you one that I think was kind of fun. I was tryin' to prove this lady's age and she didn't have a bible and she didn't have a birth certificate. We were stymied. We just didn't know what to use. She says, "Well, can I bring in my obituary and show it to you?" So I said, "Yeah, bring it in." Come to find out, you know, they had the big flu epidemic in 1918 and it killed a lot of people worldwide. Anyway, she brought in this obituary and it gave her name and everything and it said that she had died on such-and-such a date and the whole bit. And then she had a second one which was a retraction. [laughs] So with those two things I proved her age. Pretty interesting. I know we can't use names, but I kept a list of names because there was some strange names, you know.

ES: Did you… I assume you went out from the office to these people's homes?

WR: Yeah, I went to… Not to their homes. We went to what we call contact stations.

ES: What were the contact stations?

WR: Baker, for instance, was a contact station. There where their senior center is, type of thing – before they built the new one – they came in on a certain day and then I interviewed 'em in the order in which they came in and did the same thing there that I did back at the office. I also traveled to John Day, there was another contact station. Sometimes I even…most of the time somebody else went there, but sometimes I was even over to Pendleton.

ES: Can you make any sort of generalization about the attitudes that many of these people had when they came to seek social security benefits?

WR: You didn't have the attitude you've got now that people think, you know, they're not going to get anything, a lot of 'em. But, no, the people were really very, very nice and grateful that you were doin' that for 'em.

ES: They were confident that they would get benefits?

WR: Absolutely.

ES: Did they seem to have any understanding of how this program had come to be or why it existed?

WR: No. Just that…not so much as they felt that they had earned it, it was a right, and it was.

ES: Did they site deductions made for social security while they were working? Did they know that the money was being deducted?

WR: Oh yes. They knew that.

ES: Did they have any…tend to have any…a clear idea of how much they might expect to receive for the rest of their lives?

WR: No. No. That's one of the things they were really curious about and one of the things, you know, that we…we developed because of the wages that we had there. When we got the claim developed we could tell 'em about what they'd be and then, of course, you'd get an official notice.

ES: Did that surprise many of them? Whatever the figure was?

WR: I don't remember seeing any surprise, particularly. They seemed to be very grateful that they were getting anything. People had a more laid back attitude then, much more laid back than they do now.

ES: Laid back, you mean…

WR: A lot of people have an aggressive attitude towards government. They didn't have it then.

ES: With more gratitude than it was a pushy expectation?

WR: That's right. Of course we did have some people that filed for disability and there were some of 'em and they'd come back and they'd file again and again and again and they get turned down again and again and again. Those people weren't disabled, they were just plain pure lazy. But thank goodness there weren't that many of 'em. Most of 'em that we…that we dealt with were really disabled, I mean, if they filed a claim. Once again, people back then didn't seem to expect as much out of the government as they do now.

ES: Were most of the people you dealt with in their mid-60s?

WR: Oh yeah. Yeah. Generally about anywhere from 62 to 65, you know, somewhere in there. Very seldom that we got any that were later than that. Oh, you're talkin' about interesting things that have happened. I remember this one fella that up there in Lewiston that he lived in a chicken pen. [laugh]

ES: By himself?

WR: By himself, yeah.

ES: With the chickens, or not?

WR: No, there weren't any chickens in there. It was an old chicken pen and they'd kind of…he'd kind of cardboarded up the inside of it and such. And that fella he really didn't want to get into paperwork too much and didn't want to do much of anything and we really actually pushed him and worked with him and fiddled with him until we finally got him benefits. The guy, I think, he was fighting us the other way, you know. Then we had another fella – and I don't know whether was full of bull or whether it's really true – but he claimed that he had been – and he was and old, old fella at the time – fact is, he should've filed for social security before – but anyway, he claimed that he had been with O. O. Howard's troops and that when…

ES: In the First World War?

WR: I'm sorry. You don't know who O. O. Howard is, do you?

ES: No. It's not a name that I remember.

WR: Okay. O. O. Howard was in the Civil War and later in the Indian Wars. He is the one that chased Chief Joseph across Idaho.

ES: Oh. I've seen a picture of him.

WR: Okay. Alright. Anyway, he claimed he was with that group. And when the thing was all over with and the Indians surrendered and everything that he took two of the Nez Perce squaws and went into the mountains and trapped for two years. [laugh] He was old enough he could've done it, but I don't know if he was just windyin' or whether he was really tellin' the truth.

ES: Imagination may have played a role there.

WR: Yeah. You might not wantta put this one in, but I had a fella that… You know up in…out of Lewiston there's Oropino and those areas up in there. Even back at that time there were still houses of ill repute up there. Anyway, we had this one fella that was real religious and I kind of pulled a trick on him. I sent him up to talk to this madam about coverage for her girls…

ES: This is one of your co-workers in the Social Security office?

WR: Yes, one of the co-workers. I didn't tell him what it was, you know.

ES: Were prostitutes eligible for social security?

WR: Sure they are. If they pay it. [laugh] Anyway, sent him up there to interview her and she… He interviewed her alright and he come back and – that guy never swore in his life – but he come back and he said, "God damn you!" [laugh] That I sent him up there for that. I did do it on purpose.

ES: Did he mean that he was shocked at her, or that she gave him a hard time in some way?

WR: He was mad…well, he was at least half mad at me because I had sent him in there without tellin' him anything about it and give him a hard time.

ES: I see. It was against his religious principles and therefore he really didn't feel welcomed or comfortable there.

WR: He didn't feel like he wanted to deal with 'em, you know, but he had to, of course, because, you know, they have just as much right as anybody else. We had some interesting times.

ES: So you continued working in the La Grande Social Security office…

WR: Right until I retired.

ES: First was it the office that's off Fourth?

WR: Yes. I was there in the office…

ES: The one that Elmer Perry built.

WR: As a matter of fact, there was one even earlier than that that was up there…you know where the clinic is, La Grande Clinic?

ES: Yes.

WR: Okay. It was the other end of that building.

ES: Oh really.

WR: That's the first office I worked in. And then down on Fourth. And then of course this other one that they have now, but that was later, after I left. See, I retired for disability in the '80s. I can't remember what date it was. Anyway…

ES: When, then, were some of your principle memories…not memories, but reactions to doing social security work in this area?

WR: I liked helpin' people. I enjoyed it.

ES: And you did that every day?

WR: Yeah. Like I said, people had…seemed to have a different attitude at that time.

ES: Do you think that being a somewhat remote area and a relatively small one, that working for the Social Security was considerably different from what it would've been in a large city?

WR: Oh yes. Their attitude is different, their…being pushed because there are so many of them and you're trying to get through all of 'em so you don't have the time to take with 'em that you would otherwise.

ES: In a city, you mean?

WR: In a city, yeah.

ES: And here you had a more leisurely approach?

WR: Here you took the time that was needed because…and you felt comfortable spendin' time with 'em because…actually…like I said, I believed in service. We had…I think George did, too, and all of us that worked in our particular group, we believed in service. We liked the people.

ES: Since that apparently was part of your temperament and in your blood almost, were there other sorts of service activities you did in La Grande? George, I know, was in the Rotary Club, still is.

WR: Yeah, yeah.

ES: That's very much service oriented.

WR: Let's see. Not in La Grande because I wasn't there long enough. I was there just a few months and then I moved over here to Union.

ES: Alright. Let's talk about that. What drew you to Union as a place to live?

WR: At first it wasn't anything about a place that drew me at all. I looked at Cove and I looked at Union and I looked around because we had limited amount of income, you know. We weren't paid all that much money then and we had a limited amount of income and I was trying to make sure that I could find a place, I wanted to buy a place that I could make the down payment on, you know. I tried Cove. There was a place there I'd of like to have, but I just couldn't swing the down payment. But I came over here and by golly this place was for sale and, hey, the down payment was one I could handle. So I came here and I bought this place.

ES: Is this quite old? A hundred years old?

WR: 1882 is when this place got built.

ES: How do you know that?

WR: Because I've been under this house all over the place and there is a trash pile right under the house and it was floored over and I dated by newspapers and everything else, 1882.

ES: It was probably then even before 1882.

WR: Could've been, a little bit.

ES: Have you looked up the deed?

WR: I haven't.

ES: Subsequent owners?

WR: No, I haven't gone back into that. I really haven't.

ES: That's something you might naturally do.

WR: Right. These little trees… These trees you see out here, I've got a picture of this house with those trees when they're not as tall as I am. These trees are over a hundred years old, you know. A matter of fact, they had one fall on the house last year.

ES: So that was in about what date? '60s?

WR: Yes. Yes. I think it was about 1961, somewhere in there.

ES: Can you describe from your memory what Union….what kind of a town Union seemed to be at that time?

WR: It was… It seemed to have a few more businesses than now and it…it's kind of a laid back town. People are more relaxed here, not like it's been recently. It was more relaxed and the people were much more friendly than the people in La Grande. Sorry, you're not going to like this, but the people in La Grande are clannish and the people here are not. It's much easier to make friends here than it was there. We were a young couple, you know, and we had…as a matter of fact, when we came here my wife was pregnant and she had her baby here in the old Grande Ronde Hospital there. We were a young couple. We went to the

Methodist church here and we belonged to the square dance club and things like that, you know. Socially we socialized with the younger people around town and all of a sudden I was older. [laugh]

ES: Was there considerable visiting of people's houses?

WR: Not really. It was that you generally you met someplace where you were doing something.

ES: You said it was easy…

WR: Visiting is kind of a lost art.

ES: You said it was easy to make friends, so you did that primarily through sort of scheduled activities?

WR: Yeah, organizations or whatever, but you made friends because those type of people were there too.

ES: Most of the activities that had made Union in the first place were either closed or on the downslope when you got here, weren't they?

WR: Yes.

ES: The mill…

WR: Yes, we still had a mill.

ES: There were two or three factories, I think, manufacturing.

WR: Yes. There was a place here that had…what was it they were making…electronic parts of some kind, which is no longer here. Yeah, there were a few things and there were a few more businesses. There are a number of buildings that have been torn down now that were here then. But it…still, it was a small, laid back town is what it was.

ES: What did you detect at that time – or if you didn't detect it at that time, when did you detect – that there might be some interest in history here?

WR: Originally, the interest was mine. I got real upset up something. In 1969 they made the movie Paint Your Wagon over here. Okay. The people that came from Hollywood and such they…the museum that was in Haines, which had a lot of things that were loaned to them that they actually didn't own…[end tape]

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WR: …the purpose of the meeting to see if we couldn't figure out to find a way to have a Union County museum.

ES: What was your proposal?

WR: What I…originally I was really carried away. I wanted to see a sub-museum in the various towns, you know. But I found out that was a bit impractical. You're hard enough runnin' one museum, you know.

ES: Did you have some ideas or suggestions about raising money for the purpose?

WR: I'll get you to that. [laugh]

ES: Okay. That comes to mind quickly, doesn't it?

WR: Yes, it does. Came to mind immediately.

ES: Yes.

WR: Anyway, basically there were a number of people who showed interest, but they didn't seem to show any interest in working, you know. So we kept working on

it. Now when I say we, I and O. C. Wilde, used to be…and he was in real estate here.

ES: In Union?

WR: In Union. We got very interested in this thing.

ES: Is that w-y-l-d-e?

WR: W-i-l-d-e.

ES: I-l-d-e.

WR: Anyway, I don't know why our wives didn't divorce us because every evening after work – and we did this for a months and months and months, well, gosh, a couple of years – we'd go out in the evening and we'd go see people with our hands out and ask for money.

ES: What were you saying at that time would be the use of the money?

WR: That we wanted to establish a museum and…

ES: Buy a building?

WR: Well, that was going a little too far. We wanted to establish… That was something that came, but it was something that…kind of in the future. Actually, what we wanted to do was establish a museum organization and then get a building, yes, that would be part of it.

ES: Start with rentals?

WR: Probably. Yeah.

ES: How would you propose to start collecting things?

WR: We didn't have any problem with that. But let's go on…

ES: You said people were sending them and shipping them away.

WR: We really didn't have any problem when people found out we had a place. One of the things we put in our original…original bylaws was that nothing could be sent outside the county, that if our organization went defunct we had to give it to a like type organization in Union County. We didn't want anything to ever go out. So, anyway, we kept working on this thing of getting money, trying to gather money. Artifacts, people came to us and gave 'em to us. We had all kinds of stuff. I had 'em stored in my barn. Other people had 'em stored in their sheds and stuff like that, you know.

ES: Did you evaluate them in any way when you got them?

WR: No, other than we accepted them because they were historical. But as far as valuation, no, we hadn't got that far.

ES: Were you accepting them at face value that they were old?

WR: Let's put it this way, I've seen these things enough in my lifetime that I know what's…[laugh]

ES: So you, in effect, were evaluating them.

WR: Actually, yeah. I and others, of course.

ES: Were there some things you rejected?

WR: Yeah. Junk.

ES: I'm not surprised at that.

WR: But anyway, the upshot of it was it was several years before we were able to do this. We kept searching for a place and we searched all over La Grande and couldn't find a spot. Although, Dave Baum offered us his house, the old house that he had there, if we could come up with the money to keep it up. We didn't

have any income to do something like that so we told him that frankly, so he wouldn't give it to us. So anyway, we kept looking and eventually we…this old bank building down here, that is the museum now, we gradually bought up the things that went both ways. That old bank building was for sale and the people that owned it were kind of friendly towards us and everything and made us a pretty good deal. So we went ahead and tried a contract and bought the building not knowing where in the world the money was coming from. [laugh]

ES: Do you remember the date for that? [pause] Approximately.

WR: I was tryin' to think. I think we still… I think it…it had to be in the '70s, but I don't remember the exact date. But the museum would have that.

ES: Sure. When you were talking to people about the museum and saying you'd like to gather materials to put in it, did you have any kind of a theme for what the museum would be…how this museum would be organized or what it's focus would be?

WR: Originally, my idea, and some of the others, was that any artifact that had historical value.

ES: But did it have to have something to do with Union county?

WR: Not necessarily. But it's the type of thing that was used in Union county. Say we got a piece of furniture here that come from Timbuktu that was the type of thing that they used in Union county, sure, we were interested in it. But the…

ES: Were you focusing more on home furnishings than outdoor equipment, for example?

WR: The first big gift that we got was home furnishings. They're still there. Horsehair furniture. You've seen some of our rooms down there?

ES: Oh yes.

WR: Okay, that's where that furniture and stuff come from. Then I have – and I had more – I have a lot of historic things and I gave an awful lot of 'em to the museum. I mean I probably, all the various things that I've given, maybe thousands of dollars, you know. But anyway…

ES: Were you at all interested in getting documents? Letters? Diaries?

WR: At first. We were overwhelmed with the other and…but yes, as time went on that's why we went into the same type of thing that you're doing. We interviewed on tapes and it was our idea, too, to transcribe 'em and have 'em available for historic reasons. And we do have a lot of 'em in the vault, but they need to be transcribed yet. I want to tell you about the early days of the museum. In fact, I've got some pictures here of the museum in the early days. [recording paused]

ES: Back to the Union Museum, once you had a building purchased and very little money, or no prospects for knowing where the money was going to come from, what did you do for the first year or so when you had that building?

WR: I went to the people that… I and O.C. Wilde again we went to the people who had money and we talked to 'em and, surprisingly, some of the ones you would be surprised about, gave us money. We kind of begged and borrowed, you know.

ES: Did you present them with anything other than your own oral explanation of what you wanted to do?

WR: Actually, no. We did give certificates of appreciation to people once in a while, but that's about it.

ES: You did draw up… You did become a formal organization.
WR: Oh yes. We're incorporated and…
ES: Bylaws and all of that.
WR: Bylaws and the whole bit. I might mention – you're talkin' about meeting bills and so on – it was pretty hard there in the…well, for quite a few years. There were times when we were comin' up short. I and O. C. Wilde actually put our money into the museum.
ES: I'm not surprised.
WR: I remember at one time that we, both of us, but $400 a piece in. That's just one time.
ES: Tell me about the…
WR: I wanted to tell you one other thing.
ES: Okay.
WR: I and my wife, Carol, the one that just passed away, for many, many, many years we paid all of the utilities at the museum right along with ours. So you see, we had to support the thing until… And then we started…they started…well, actually, these latter years…latter few years they've started to get more grants and money given to them and such that they've got a pretty fair budget now and they've been able to do… I might mention, I really had to fight with the board we had at the time – I can be stubborn when I wanna be – to buy that annex over there where the old grocery store used to be. They didn't want to buy it. They didn't want to commit themselves. I growled and screamed and moaned and groaned. Actually, I'm the reason they bought it because I just made a nuisance of myself. Later they came back to me and said, "boy, we're sure glad we bought that that'd give us a way to expand."
ES: Sure. Tell me about some of the volunteer in getting the museum started. The actual labor of taking paint of or doing some interior redesign or whatever you had to do.
WR: Basically, we used the building as it is. We did take the plaster off the walls to show the bricks and stuff like that, but it was strictly volunteers. I can't tell you who all, but we'd ask 'em if they'd come in and help.
ES: Saturday work party, for example?
WR: Yeah. And they'd come in and help and they would, they'd come in and help as volunteers. And we've had many volunteers over the years, including people who put roofing on and, you know, actually that was their business.
ES: What sort of an arrangement did you set up at the beginning for supervising the work?
WR: We did it ourselves. [laugh]
ES: You?
WR: I was just one, you know. Whoever we had that had a little bit of sense about something like that we let them be…say what needed to be done.
ES: Were you able to draw any of the town merchants into this process?
WR: Oh yeah. We got money from some of 'em.
ES: How about actual work?
WR: Not really work because the type of businesses we got here aren't into that type of thing.

ES: Who was responsible for designing the exhibits or placing objects to their greatest advantage?
WR: Volunteers again. People who had an interest in history.
ES: How did you do that? Did you say, "Find Mrs. So-and-so who's interested in dresses" and say to her, "okay, you figure out a way to display these sixteen dresses we have?"
WR: No. You were kind of omnivorous. What that means is you did everything.
ES: I guess what I'm trying to find out is, were you going into this idea of having a museum almost blind as to how to do it? Or were you getting guidance or consultation from other people who had experience with museums?
WR: We were almost blind to begin with. But we…
ES: It was the idea more than the actual look of the place that you were concerned about.
WR: Right. Right.
ES: Did it look like a junk heap?
WR: It really wasn't that bad. It was pretty bare, but it wsan't that bad. But we did…we painted, we took the plaster off the walls, we had volunteers that made those little rooms like we've got, you know, and things like that. Then various ones who had a talent for this type of thing… If somebody says, "I want to set up an exhibit." Go to it! You know, type of thing.
ES: You said you wanted to try to make sure that it was a countywide effort.
WR: That's right.
ES: Were you able to draw people from other parts of the valley?
WR: We have tried very hard to draw people from other parts of the valley. We get some people from La Grande, but we don't seem to be able to get anybody anywhere else, you know, and we've tried. They try all the time to get more people involved. It's a county thing and it shouldn't be anything else than a county thing like that. I might mention, you know the Historical Society?
ES: Yes.
WR: Are you a member of it?
ES: No.
WR: Oh. Okay. You know, when we wanted to establish this museum we went to the Historical Society and we said…we actually would have become a part of that organization if they had let us. But once again, you had this clique. They didn't want any part of it.
ES: Was Bernal Hug still active in the organization?
WR: Yes. Uh-huh. They didn't want any part of it. So we could see that we'd never have a museum that way so we went and formed our own organization.
ES: Did you ever figure out why they didn't want to be part of a museum?
WR: I think they were afraid that we might… They had kind of become a chowder and marching society at that time. I think they were afraid that we were too dynamic and we'd take it over. [laughs] 'Cause we were younger and we were dynamic.
ES: Are you willing to be publically quoted on that?
WR: On the…
ES: What you just said.

WR: Yeah. It's true. I hate to say that, but it is true. By the way, that's my statement, that's not the museum's statement.
ES: Right. You're not speaking for the board.
WR: No.
ES: You're not on the board anyway, are you?
WR: No, I'm not.
ES: You can't speak for them. Were there any signs of substantial assistance that came later from other parts of the county?
WR: We had some substantial assistance from La Grande from some individuals. We had some assistance from Cove, we've had some money, you know, at various times. I'm trying to think… And, of course, we've had some here from Union. Like I said, we went to people who had money and asked them…
ES: That's the obvious thing to do.
WR: Yeah. Ask 'em if they'd…
ES: I don't think I've seen anything in that museum that brings a strong emphasis to the fact that Union, for a while, was the county seat and that there was considerable anger and hostility that developed between…
WR: There still is.
ES: …some people in La Grande and some people in Union over the county issue question…county seat question.
WR: Still is. It was here the minute I got here and…
ES: Is there anything in the museum that really tells that story adequately, do you think?
WR: I don't think so. And the reason why is, well, mostly it's just because nobody's done it, but I think maybe we don't want a feud between everybody [laugh] in the county.
ES: It wouldn't be so much a feud, I should think, it would just be trying to be historically accurate about what happened.
WR: The story's there, yes. I interviewed a lady that was ninety-some years old at the time…talked to a lady, I didn't interview her, and talked to a lady and she remembered when La Grande, as they say here, stole the county papers and drug the building over there from Union. Early one morning, I guess, is when it happened and she saw it when they were leaving with it.
ES: There was a vote, after all. Did people in Union think the vote was rigged?
WR: Of course it was.
ES: Oh. Okay, I hadn't heard that accusation.
WR: Alright. I'll tell you how it was rigged. First of all, they agitated until they got the part of the county that's part of Baker county now lopped off and become a part of Baker, you see. That took enough votes out of wanting to have Union that La Grande – and La Grande had tried several times and had failed every time because the people up the branch here they didn't want 'em to do that. Then they also went to the legislature and La Grande kind of got things set up there. And between the two, why, they…two things, they had the preponderance…when you look at it now, see, the preponderance of people are there. They weren't before. That's how they did it. And, yes, it was rigged. [laugh] It was politically…it was political chicanery just like they do now.

ES: It also had something to do with the route of the railroad, didn't it?
WR: You know the story behind that, don't ya?
ES: I know one story behind that, yes.
WR: I wonder if it's the same story I know.
ES: A surveyor wanted a little payoff from the mayor of Union and the mayor of Union said no.
WR: He wanted some property right here in town. He wanted lots that he could sell. That's right. And then he went out and around. Of course, that's cost millions of dollars. That was the reason for it and La Grande went for it.
ES: In these experiences you've had with the museum, you've probably come in fairly close contact with most of the people around here who care about history. Has it seemed to you that there are enough people who do care about history to really say that this museum represents the best thinking about history here?
WR: Let's put it this way, since we have done this and made this tremendous effort and established this museum there has been more interest in this county than there ever was before. There are more people that appreciate things like that now. We marked the Victorian homes here in town, too, with signs, you know. We have caused people to have an appreciation of these Victorian homes. Before, they were just old houses, you know.
ES: Why isn't the Phy house marked that way?
WR: Why isn't it marked?
ES: Mm-hmm.
WR: There was a sign. I don't know what they did with it.
ES: Were these wooden signs?
WR: Yes. They were in the shape of the county and they had the type of construction that it was and when it was constructed, each one. There is one that's still up – people don't keep these things up – there's one, I think, that's still up and that's over here at the…if you go down to Fifth Street…go down Fifth on your left-hand side in there, the Townly house.
ES: That was a bed and breakfast for a while, wasn't it?
WR: Yeah. Right. And it still has it's sign. And there's one here at the end of town, too, we can stop by it, ask them to please pick up that sign and paint it again.
ES: Was that sign project officially part of the museum?
WR: It certainly was. We marked all these houses. Nobody keeps anything up.
ES: Maybe the choice of material was a mistake.
WR: That could be. But you can't afford anything else.
ES: Metal ones would have been much more expensive.
WR: Right.
ES: Do you think all of the information about each house is still readily available? Could the signs be duplicated?
WR: Certainly they could. We've got… We published, with a photographer, we published one description of all the houses and I've got all kinds of material on each one of these houses up here, a lot of historic material. I've got a lot of historic material if you want to go through it. You haven't looked at any part of it, really.

ES: Yes. I do. I think you said that you were trying to make signs for places in other parts of the valley, not just historic houses in Union.

WR: Yes. Imbler, we went…sign for Imbler and one for Summerville and so on. And we made some of these signs and we put 'em out. Every one of 'em were stolen, torn down.

ES: But they could be duplicated?

WR: So we gave 'em up. Sure they could be duplicated. You bet. We've got the history. I've got all kinds of history up here.

ES: Have you seen the signs that have been put on several of the downtown La Grande buildings?

WR: Yeah. Those are nice.

ES: I think they probably got a grant to cover the costs for that.

WR: But there's one thing you…

ES: I don't think they would be stolen.

WR: …you gotta be careful where you put your signs because you've got these vandals that'll tear these things down anyway. It really… Unfortunately, that's the way it is. I don't know what to tell you about it, except you do the best you can.

ES: Has the Union Museum board had any connection with the Elgin Museum?

WR: No. They went off on their own. As far as I'm concerned, that's what we originally wanted anyway is a museum in each town. Great. I hope they do well.

ES: I think I've heard a little talk about having something in Cove.

WR: I've heard a little talk about it. They talk about that railroad museum in La Grande. Which is… All of these things are good things.

ES: And you know about the fire museum?

WR: Yes.

ES: It's not quite open yet.

WR: All of those things are good things.

ES: It's very much a part of the concept you had, apparently.

WR: Right. Originally that's what I wanted. Fact is, I looked at the post office over there in North Powder. We were thinkin' about buying it. And also we looked at the building across the street from it. But monetary problems caught up with us. We just couldn't swing it, you know. There's a lot of things we'd 've liked to have done, so we did what we could do. I think, just between you and I and the gate post, I think that we're the reason that historical things are going so well in the county now is because we got people interested and we showed 'em there were value in these things.

ES: So that's about a thirty year effort now?

WR: At least that, yeah. Yeah, 1969.

ES: I thought you said the museum was started in the early '70s?

WR: No. 1969 is when we…when we had the first meeting.

ES: But you got the building…

WR: The building.

ES: Okay. Let's talk now about your…I guess your friend of the court kind of involvement with Union, the town of Union. Not an employee, but a helper.

WR: Over the years I have been involved in a lot of different things in Union. For one thing, I was involved in acquiring the VFW hall down here, part of it, you know.

ES: Acquiring it for what?
WR: For the VFW. Originally, that was the Women's Club. The Women's Club…
ES: That's on Main Street?
WR: Yeah. The Women's Club wanted us to have it and so they worked out a good deal with the VFW. And of course there were others…many involved, you know.
ES: What had the Union Women's Club done? Why did they have to have a building?
WR: It was built… Believe it or not, that building was built by the students up here at Union High School, way back, with their instructor, you know, guiding 'em. Then Women's Club used to be a very active civic organization. Then they got older and they called [laugh]…unofficially they called it the Old Women's Club. [laugh]
ES: Did they use the building for dinners and other civic events?
WR: They used the building for their meetings and things like…yeah, there's some civic events took place there.
ES: I think it's unusual for a women's club, or a men's club for that matter, in a small town to have a building, to own a building. Isn't it?
WR: Yeah, I guess it is. Anyway, the VFW owns it now and they let any civic organization use it. We've had the city itself meet down there.
ES: How were you involved in the city's negotiations?
WR: For one thing, the Forest Service complex out here, when we found out that the Forest Service was going to move out of it we contacted our congressman, we also contacted…actually, I did a lot of writing on this.
ES: Would you describe again where the Forest Service building was?
WR: Okay. It's on the…as you're coming into town from La Grande it's on the left-hand side directly across from The Boulder.
ES: Is that building still there?
WR: Yeah. There's several buildings there. There's three main buildings out towards the front and there's a building there they used to keep their oil supplies in. There's a warehouse, there's a garage.
ES: All built for the Forest Service?
WR: All built for the Forest Service. And then there's quite a bit of land there around it. The city acquired that from the…after the Forest Service let go of it…from the one that sells government property. Like I said, I wrote and contacted our congressmen. I…[end tape]

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WR: …spent a lot of time in writing and trying to negotiate with them on these things to see that they got it. And what we got…
ES: Were you doing this because there was nobody in this city who could or was willing?
WR: There were others that were working on it, but they didn't spend the time on it I did.
ES: After all, you knew the ropes of government, didn't you?
WR: Some.

ES: With social security work.
WR: Anyway, I…actually, I gave them a…I had a record I kept off all these correspondence and so on that I gave to the city for their records. I don't know whether they still have it or not. But anyway, I gave it to 'em because I didn't have any use for it.
ES: Where are city records kept, by the way?
WR: At the city hall.
ES: You think they're all there rather than somebody's basement?
WR: I hope they're all there. [laugh] I don't know.
ES: Sometimes secretaries get energetic and say, "we'll never use this old stuff again so throw it out."
WR: That's kind of like the museum in a way. I gave them records… I kept records from our daily deal when we were gathering money. I kept a record, we done this, we did this, we done this. I had an album or two, you know, just full of these pages. I gave it to the museum and I don't know what happened to it. I have no idea. Anyway, gettin' back to… I've worked in the Methodist church. I used to be an active member, you know.
ES: What kind of work?
WR: Basically helping out on anything that they needed, you know.
ES: Building repairs, dinners?
WR: Dinners.
ES: Yard maintenance?
WR: I've done some of that, too. In the past, I'm not doin' it now.
ES: What do you know about the origins of the Union…of the Methodist church?
WR: The origins? I do know that the original Methodist church… Do you remember that little white church that's up here at this end of town? Right next to the city hall?
ES: I don't think I've seen it.
WR: That was the original Methodist church. They had that for years. They… It was a small group of them they organized the Methodist and then they got that building, or had that building built, and then when they got too big for that they sold it to Catholics and then they moved down there and in 1918 they built that brick church down there.
ES: It's rather large for a small town.
WR: Yeah, it is. I think they had some rich…rich patrons at that time, which they don't have now. They struggle on finances, you know, like everybody else, you know. There's never enough, you know.
ES: Yes.
WR: I conducted… Another thing I've done in town is I've conducted tours in and around town for the various historical sites here and had the stories on 'em. I've got the tours upstairs, too, if you want it.
ES: Were these ad hock tours, or did you have a schedule?
WR: I had a schedule. I went from place to place. I got it all written out.
ES: No, I mean when you would give the tour.
WR: Oh yeah. They were given for groups, you know.
ES: By appointment?

WR: Yeah. On such-and-such a date we're going to take a tour of Union, type of thing. Actually, for a while there was a travel office over here that had tours and I conducted some tours for them throughout the county and in the town of Union and so on, you know.

ES: Was this in the '70s and '80s?

WR: This was…yeah, probably. Let me think about this. Yeah, more in the…more in the '80s I think, you know.

ES: Were you doing this completely as a volunteer?

WR: Yes. I don't get paid.

ES: Right. I gather these were not entirely walking tours?

WR: No, we drove and we'd stop at each place and explain these things, explain Hot Lake and what…but I've got all the facts up here. You want to look at my historic stuff at another time…

ES: Sure.

WR: …too much time.

ES: Yes. Indeed. How were these tours received? Did you have lots of people wanting to come and did they seem enthusiastic?

WR: Yeah. They were very well received. It seems to me that the groups were, you know, twenty, fifteen, twenty people, something like that, you know. I've even toured 'em through the Masonic Hall up here, you know, which is quite a story. You ought to see some of the stuff up there. There's a Tiffany lamp…or Tiffany chandelier that's up there, for one thing.

ES: Is it no longer used?

WR: Oh yes.

ES: It is?

WR: Yeah. The Masonic Lodge uses it. The Masonic Lodge in Union is one of the most active ones that you'll ever find in the state of Oregon. They do many things, you know. That's another place where I've been greatly involved, you know. And the Masons…I don't know…they don't blow their horn, but they do an awful lot of charity work. I've helped them in their fundraising, you know, and, I don't know, it seems like everything around town at one time or another I've been involved in it.

ES: Would you call yourself, then, a civic activist?

WR: I have been. I've really… The last, oh, probably seven years I haven't been all that active and the reason why is my wife was very ill and she passed away the first part of this year. My interest lies there, you know, that's where I spent my time. But prior to that, yes, I've been very active in everything. We used to… Another volunteer thing we used to do in Union… Do you… No, you weren't here then. You haven't been here for a while. We used to have a celebration and instead of this one we have in the spring now. We used to have a celebration where we robbed the bank up here and we had gunmen, you know, and then we had sheriffs and…

ES: I've seen that one in Joseph.

WR: Oh.

ES: It used to be a popular thing to do around here.

WR: We used to do that a lot here. I have an old '44, by golly, and I was a judge and had top hot and costume, you know, and all of the other fellas did too. Really, it was…it was pretty… We even at one time had a small cavalry unit dressed like blue-coated soldiers. We had a bunch of the sportin' girls, too, there all dressed up. Things like this. I was gonna tell you about somethin' else, but I don't know what it is now.

ES: Were you in any way…I won't say involved, but aware of drug activity during the 1960s and '70s in Union.

WR: I was aware there was stuff, yeah. And as a matter of fact, we had a police chief he wanted to watch my rental house over here. I found out I had druggies in there, you know. He wanted to watch it from my barn. I told him, "yeah, go ahead and do it." They did eventually run some of those people out. We used to have… That's another thing we did, we used to go out on the town patrol, you know. Just volunteer goin' out two of you in a car, you know, and goin' around the houses…

ES: Suspicious activity?

WR: Yeah. Until way early in the morning, until about five in the morning, you know, go through the night. This one druggy we must've really messed up his sale 'cause we go down the alley there twice and, boy, was he ticked off, you know. He came downtown and just chewed us out. We told him to go on about his business, we were doin' what we were supposed to. [laugh]

ES: Was it mainly dealing in Union, or was there some drug manufactured, too, like methamphetamine?

WR: It was dealing here. The only methamphetamine manufacturing that I know of was up Catherine Creek in a little trailer up there. The reason I know about that for sure is 'cause I and Carol were…we went out there on the ambulance. We were on the ambulance for twenty years. There's another thing we did as volunteers, EMTs. We never got paid for that.

ES: You were on call for that?

WR: Yep. You bet. Anytime of day and night, you know. You had these little deals that alarmed you, you know, and you got dressed and took off. We prided ourselves about five minutes and we were ready to go. Anyway, this one up the creek they were manufacturing there, I guess dealing too. Anyway, there were two of 'em. One of 'em was gone, the other one when the police went in…the sheriff went in he pulled a gun and tried to shoot 'em. They shot him dead. They wanted us to come up and check him out and see if he…let 'em know officially he was dead. He was dead.

ES: As far as you know, were the people who were actively involved in dealing or making drugs, or both, from elsewhere, or were they locals?

WR: One of 'em was from La Grande, he used to bring 'em over here, that I know of.

ES: Why do… Why do you think they came to Union? Did it seem somehow that they would be more…or less conspicuous here?

WR: Fewer policemen, you know. That's only one part of what police do. So that's the reason I think that they came. I had some of those druggies that we thought we got rid of 'em and then I had two females there they were druggies and I told

'em to move. I said I don't allow that. They didn't move and so one morning I went in there and shook their tails out. [laugh]

ES: By yourself?

WR: By myself.

ES: That's maybe a foolhardy kind of thing to do.

WR: I've done foolhardy things in my life. [laugh] By all rights I should've been dead a long time ago. [laugh]

ES: You are a chance taker.

WR: Yeah. And I was in the service and in combat. I've had a few adventures in my life.

ES: What do you know about Hot Lake?

WR: I know that I'm sure grateful that it's bein'…gonna be restored now.

ES: Anything about the past?

WR: Yes.

ES: That you feel as though you have direct knowledge of?

WR: Yeah. I do know that it was a state of the art place.

ES: Not when you were here.

WR: Not when I was here. Okay.

ES: It was in an advanced state of decline when you got here, wasn't it?

WR: Yes, it was. Actually, no. It was in decline, but not an advanced state.

ES: Okay.

WR: Dr…why can't I…

ES: Roth?

WR: Roth. Had it and he had a nursing home there. He did rent rooms and he had a barn. They had a swimming pool. They had all these things, you know. They were still operational. And then the promoters got a hold of it starting with the people in the selling real estate around here. And the promoters got a hold of it and gradually things were sold off and things were left to go to hell. There's one guy that he got a bunch of money to try to fix it up and I don't know what he did with the money. They had a big sign out there and that was about the size of it. He didn't… He didn't do anything, you know. And he left town under a cloud because he had a huge telephone bill.

ES: Were you directly involved with the hotel, visiting there at some point?

WR: Oh yeah. I went out there for New Years before, you know. They had New Years parties there. Yes. I used to go out there occasionally. They only had the things I mentioned to you, though. But I was gonna tell ya, my grandfather… I've got a little newspaper article that says that he had left Boise by pony and he was going to Hot Lake for the treatment. Now, I'll translate. Pony was the old interurban line in Boise and he joined the train and they had a signing there at Hot Lake where they used to let out passengers. When he went for the treatment it was a treatment like you're talkin' about now, it's the mud baths and drinkin' the water and all that kind of stuff 'cause he was ill. Anyway, I thought it was kind of interesting that my grandfather went out here to Hot Lake, you know. I didn't know anything about Hot Lake before I came here. I didn't know this whole valley.

ES: My understanding was that in addition to tuberculosis and other kinds of aches and pains it was a major treatment center for venereal disease.
WR: Among other things, yeah.
ES: Among other things.
WR: Yeah. Yeah. It was called the Mayo Clinic of the West.
ES: I'm sure they played that up a lot.
WR: Yes, they did. And he had a tremendous…his livestock was the top of the line on everything.
ES: And a handsome barn.
WR: Yes.
ES: No longer handsome, but you can see that it was.
WR: Like this old barn I've got out here. This is the old stagecoach stop in my pasture.
ES: It is?
WR: Yeah. It's about ready to fall down 'cause I can't afford to fix it up. It's a huge thing.
ES: I hope it has a sign on it.
WR: It don't. It's in the middle of a pasture. Why would anybody see it? [laughs]
ES: People wander around pastures. They should be reminded of historic…
WR: Anybody wants to see it I'd certainly let 'em, you know. There's no problem there. I used to tell everybody that used to come to the golf course that's where it was.
ES: You mention the golf course. Tell me why you started that.
WR: Mainly my son. He thought that'd be a good business to get in and it was a good business to get in. But every year it seems like somebody else sets up another golf course.
ES: The competition's getting keen?
WR: Pardon me?
ES: Is the competition getting keen?
WR: Very keen, yeah. There isn't enough business here for all these. However, we're not gonna go out of business because we…it's on our own place and we do make a little money on it and let the others go out of business.
ES: You said your son was the main…was mainly interested in it?
WR: Yeah. He's the one that said that, let's try this, because he though we could do real well on it. We did the first couple of years, you know.
ES: Has it been strictly a money-making project?
WR: That's what it was for, yeah.
ES: You didn't have any other purposes in mind?
WR: No. No. Other than that. Except…well, I might say this. Union didn't have anything. They were sayin' that the kids didn't have anything to do and there was nothing to go and no place to go and all this kind of stuff. So we thought, well, we'll do something for Union, too. We designed… My son designed this. He was __ the way he designed this. We put it together ourselves. I mean other than pouring the cement slabs we did the rest of it. We were finishing up the brickwork when I had a heart attack. [laugh] But anyway, yeah, you'd like to go over and see that?
ES: Sure.

WR: Okay. We can do that.
ES: Anything else to say about Hot Lake? Have you been a regular observer of what's happened to it?
WR: Oh yes. It has deteriorated, deteriorated and the people who have had it have…I don't care what they say…every one of 'em has left it in worse shape than it was before. They sold everything, they stripped everything.
ES: Do you have any specific observations on the vandalism which has been extensive?
WR: Yes. I think that's terrible. But I don't know what you do about it, you know. It's out away from things and unless you've got somebody livin' there it's gonna happen.
ES: There is someone there now, twenty-four hours a day.
WR: Good.
ES: But do you think that the vandalism occurred because no one took any responsibility for trying to keep the vandals out?
WR: That's basically it. Sure, the law tried to keep 'em out if they were trespassing and such. But this is out in the…we don't have that many lawmen around. If vandals want to do somethin', easy for 'em to do. Look at what they did up here in our cemetery. They went up there and pushed tombstones over. Why would anybody want to do that? I don't understand vandalism. When we were kids, yeah, we played tricks on people. We did things, but we didn't destroy things. I don't understand this destruction thing.
ES: Smashing and defacing seems to be the motive.
WR: And I think it's terrible. But what do you do about it? Of course we're not being raised correctly anymore. [laugh]
ES: A story with no end.
WR: Yeah. If my father had seen me do somethin' like that my bottom would've still been warm. Anyway…
ES: Are you inclined to think that because of values, social values as they're now being expressed, in effect of communication devices and change in entertainment tastes, that Union County is a less healthy place to live now than it was when you first came here?
WR: Definitely. I don't care what anybody says, the drugs weren't in here like they are now, the TV is a wilderness, you know. They're the kids to sit in front of and watch this. They use it for a babysitter. The type of things that they're gettin' over that TV is gonna make…they don't give a darn about anybody or anything. Of course that doctor that said you shouldn't punish your kids, you know, you shouldn't physically punish 'em, that's a crock. I was physically punished. You probably were, too.
ES: No, I wasn't.
WR: Almost everybody I know of was. It didn't hurt us a darn bit. And if anything I needed more whippin's than I got. [laughs] And I do not fault my father for this. He was trying to raise a law-abiding citizen. Honestly, that's a lot of what's wrong now a'days. There are no consequences for these kids.
ES: You think that sparing the rod does spoil the child?

WR: Absolutely. Absolutely. Now, spanking a child doesn't mean beating him, you know. There's a lot of difference in the two. I think that a child should be spanked if they've done something wrong. They need to know that it's wrong. Don't do this again. You know, most spankings that I know of they only happen a few times. The kids know what's gonna happen if you're consistent. You don't have to spank…

ES: Do you think Union's having a high school, and especially a high school that's in the same building that it was about a hundred years ago, has been beneficial to the town?

WR: Obviously we couldn't afford to build a new one, but they've kept it up pretty well. We've got good students here. These kids are pretty dog-gone good, you know. I don't see… We get just as good an education here as you are in La Grande. I don't see anything wrong with that. You know, the people in the town have gotten in and they've done a lot of things for these kids free, you know, used equipment, built the ball fields and put in lights and raised money for the kids. We did all that while we were, you know, we worked with the school while we were parents, you know, raising kids.

ES: Do you think that having the high school where it is for so long has had some effect on an attitude about tradition here?

WR: Oh yeah. Yeah. Most of the people here that have lived here that long graduated from that high school and they have a great affection for it. Right there… You know where the boiler room is? Just in front of where the boiler room is and out a little bit towards to road that's where they built the gallows for Kelsey Border, the only man that was ever hung in Union County legally. Inside the boiler room you still can see…that used to be the prison you know…and you can still see where prisoners had scratched on the walls and left messages.

ES: Union doesn't have a jail now, does it?

WR: No. They used to have… There used to be an old wooden one when I first came here that was two-by-fours that they'd nailed down together, you know, and made a building out of, but they destroyed that, of course. That was only a temporary type jail anyway.

ES: That was mainly for drunks and thieves?

WR: Yeah, that type of thing.

ES: No murderers.

WR: No. Since I've been here there've been some murders.

ES: Any observations on the effect of the library on the town?

WR: It's good. They are doing a wonderful job with what they've got to work with. If I ever win the lottery I'm gonna give 'em some money.

ES: What constitutes a wonderful job?

WR: They're reachin' out to the community, to the children. They have special things going, you know, for the children.

ES: Like story time?

WR: Yeah, type of thing. And classes and stuff down there… I don't know what they're teachin', of course, 'cause I don't have any little kids like that, but they're down there almost every morning. They're tryin' to gather historic things from the area to put into the library. They're doing this…[laugh] They have a pretty

wide variety of books there. For a little library like that it's really… You can find most anything you want, you know. Fact is, I'm going to contribute… I've always been into the Civil War a lot and I have a tremendous amount of books and history on the Civil War. When the time comes when I don't want 'em anymore I'm gonna give 'em to the library here to set up a section on it.

ES: A town by the name of Union the Civil War is certainly a good subject to have a…

WR: That's why it's named Union, you know. The Copperheads were all over in La Grande. [laughs] You heard about the battle that was almost fought up there, didn't ya?

ES: When and by whom?

WR: By Northern and Southern sympathizers during the Civil War.

ES: About 1864 or '5?

WR: Yeah.

ES: No, I guess I haven't heard about that.

WR: You haven't heard about it, huh? You know where Old Town is?

ES: Yes.

WR: Okay. Up there in Old Town there's a bunch of Southern sympathizers, Copperheads, that…

ES: Otherwise known as Confederates.

WR: Yeah. Copperheads. [laughs] Anyway, they wanted to burn Lincoln in effigy. The Northern sympathizers…

ES: Because he freed the slaves, you mean?

WR: No. They just… This was during the war. They hated Lincoln.

ES: Yes. But because of the slave issue?

WR: Not necessarily that. Despite all the propaganda you hear, the war did not start over slaves. In a way it did, but most of the people who were involved did not care about freeing the slaves. That was something that was done because it helped to win the war as a latter thought. They did not go into that war to free the slaves, they went into that war to save the Union 'cause it wanted to split, you know. Anyway, there was a bunch of Northern sympathizers here, including some here in Union, you know, and they all went over there and everybody was armed. They were on buildings and behind barns and behind buildings. The Northern sympathizers said that if they burned Lincoln in effigy they were going to open fire. The Southerns said, "we're gonna burn him" and they were gonna open fire. So anyway, the upshot of it was that cooler heads finally prevailed and you did not have a battle up there in Old Town in La Grande.

ES: But it was close.

WR: It came very, very close to being a shooting…shooting thing. There's a lot of that little history like that around.

ES: What kind… Did you have newspaper accounts of that story?

WR: I got it from the old-timers.

ES: Just orally.

WR: Orally, yeah.

ES: Did they witness it, or they probably heard that story from their elders?

WR: Probably from their parents. You know, there were newspapers at that time. You might be able to find it if you looked for it.
ES: There were several newspapers, yeah.
WR: So, I don't know.
ES: Okay. [recording stopped]