

Dr. David L. Crowder Oral History Project

Walter Homer Jones - Life Experiences

By Walter Homer Jones

No Date Recorded

Box 2 Folder 6

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Transcribed by Maren Miyasaki November 2005

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WJ: I did know awhile back—we had to make a personal report in our priesthood, and I wrote up one, giving my birth, and place of birth, and those things, and why...why I was born, but you've got where, and all that stuff, and how we got from Kansas to Oklahoma. And the depression after World War I, and then the Depression of the 29s and 30s.

Just prior to the to the declaration of World War I, we started moving from Corwin, Kansas to Guymond, Oklahoma. We went with teams and wagons. I drove four head of mules from the 308 or 10 miles from Corwin, Kansas to Guymond, Oklahoma. It took us nine days to travel that, and while we were on the road World War I was declared. The farm that father had traded for was 160 acres, 4 miles south of Guymond. It had no house on it or anything except a little dugout, which is a hole dug in the ground, three feet deep, and there's three foot of wall built above the dirt, and then just a roof over that. It was still so cold we couldn't stand to live in there so we lived in Guymond, and started building a house on the farm. I was ten years old—I was nine years old, is what I was. We got the home built—that is practically built, started building a barn, and a cyclone came through, and blew the barn away just as we were finishing up. So we waited a few weeks, and started building the second barn. We just about finished it, and another cyclone came through and blew it away. So then we moved about 50 feet off to the east to build the third barn, and it stayed, but another cyclone came through and it moved out house on the foundation.

With all that we had a hail storm that took all the shingles off the one side of the house that faced the south, and broke all the windows on the south and west side of the house. Killed birds, rabbits, some livestock, most small animals that were out that couldn't get sheltered was killed by hail. The following spring, in March, we had a real severe blizzard that most of the livestock that couldn't be got inside froze to death, or suffocated in the snow where the snow would drift over them. That broke a lot of stockman, and was the starting of the Depression.

After World War I, my father was able to hang on for about three years, then the bank finally sold everything he had. I had a sow and a litter of pigs. When the auctioneer started selling her I went over and told him, "Now that's my sow and pigs, and I want the money." The banker turned around and asked my father if that was right, and he said yes. The banker said, "All right he can have the money." The sow and pigs brought me \$37.50. Then after the sell was over with and the folks got all their bills paid, they had the whole sum of 90 some odd dollars, I don't remember exactly, it was less than \$100, five children [in] an Oakland car, and what they could tie on it, and no home. They moved back to Kansas. They found a place where they could stay. Dad went to work on a construction job, and I went to work for a farm. Dad got a chance to rent a piece of ground, but he didn't have any equipment, so I started buying teams. I bought a team of mules and one mare, and a set of harness, and some equipment. Dad was able to save enough to buy a team, and that got him started farming.

That following winter I went back and graduated from grade school. Then the next winter I started high school, but I only went a half a year. In fact, I quit along towards the end of the football season. That was the end of my schooling.

I continued to work for various farmers and stockmen until, up until 1925. I came to Idaho when I was 17 years old, and went to work for a fellow by the name of Carl Lang, working in the café washing dishes. He was quite a radical old German, big rough fellow. I decided I didn't like that and I went out and worked a few days on a thrash machine for a fellow by the name of George Harris. Then I went to work for Devirg Parkinson, known as D.D. Parkinson, I worked for him and his family for five years. In the first winter, I hauled grain from Canyon Creek to Newdale with seven head of horses pulling two wagons, then when snow came we went

to five head of horses on bobsleigh, three on lead, and two on wheel. I hauled 6,000 sacks of wheat from Canyon Creek to Newdale that winter. After that in the winter time I either hauled hay to the ranch or fed horses, sometimes northeast of St. Anthony, once in the Roberts area. Then later I started working in highway construction, well after Parkinson I worked for Browning, and I learned how to operate a crawler tractor, then I went to work for highway construction, driving tractors for them. I worked at that awhile, then I went up to the coal mine, and worked for a year.

I drew very little of my money, trying to save some money. In the meantime I met your grandmother here. She came up there looking for chokecherries—no huckleberries. She knew there wasn't any huckleberries, but she heard there was 80 men working up there in the coal mine, so her and her girlfriend, Vera Webster, came there to stay. I didn't know enough to stay in camp, I went down visiting her. Her father was sick, and I came down here to help them, but in the meantime the coalmine, up there, they went broke, and I didn't get what wages I had coming, I lost that. Then I came down here, and helped do chores and that for her folks. Then in the spring I helped put in the crop, and that June we got married.

We moved to Rexburg so we could keep her niece under medical care—that would be Betty's older sister. I tried to find work there and the only work I could find was helping, helping tear down a building, and I was to get a dollar per day. I worked for him for a while, but then I had trouble collecting my dollar per day. I went to work for the state of Idaho resurfacing roads in the Rexburg area. We ran out of money, and when you go to work for the state it's usually six weeks before you get a payday. I went to a fellow I knew that owned the store right next to where we were living, and he said we could have all the credit we wanted. Our first check I went right over and paid him, and I stayed and visited with him awhile, and your grandmother thought I had maybe took off, I was gone so long—took the pay check and left. I didn't leave.

Then I had a chance to go to work for Morris-Knutson, a construction company up in Island Park area. On the job for the state we had too many chiefs and not enough Indians, everybody was a boss, very few workers, so I quit and went to work for Morris-Knutson. Winter was coming on and I had a chance to go work at the Adimont Hotel for the winter, so I reported to my superintendent that I had this winter job, and he said, "Fine, you go take it, and we'll call you when we can come back in the spring." I worked there at the hotel, we got 40 dollars a month and a place to live. We saved enough money to pay our doctor bill and hospital bill when your father was born that spring. At 40 dollars a month we were able to save money. Then spring came, and Morris-Knutson started opening up their job, so I moved up there, and went to work. Grandma came up and stayed with her folks. When your dad was six months old we moved to Island Park, and lived in a tent.

I worked there all summer, then long toward fall, her uncle, T.H. Montiham, was getting quite old and was losing his farm also. But he decided he was going to have to quit. We brought his horses and equipment, what little he had, that's how we got started farming. We rented his 160 acres and 160 acres that joined it, which was the Montiham place and the Robin's place, which we later bought.

The first two years that we farmed I'd do the farming when I wasn't working on construction. I'd put eight hours on construction then put in the rest of the time doing my farming.

Then her father got to where he had to quit farming. First Neva and Chet were going to take the place, then they decided [they] weren't going to and we took it over. In the mean time we put together a nice herd of cattle, about 40 head along with a registered bull. It was in the

Depression, and when Chet decided he was going to buy the place it had got to where her mother had to sell the place or lose it. He father had pasted away, she either had to sell it or lose it. They were going to buy it, then they decide they shouldn't buy it; but when they were going to buy it, we moved off the place, and moved to Squirrel. We sold our 40 head of cattle—around 45 head—we got \$450 for 45 head of cattle. We kept just 3 or 4 cattle, milk-cows, and we moved over to Squirrel. Then Neva and Chet decided they weren't going to keep the place, so we moved back over here, and bought the place. I went to Federal Land Bank, we didn't have any security, but I knew Mr. Hollis. He came up, he and the Federal Land Bank board looked things over and advanced us money to buy the farm. We started accumulating cattle.

I was sitting on a jury, I got sick. I didn't know what it was. I came home at night, and packed groceries and stuff—we lived down on the creek at that time—and I walked through the snow and packed groceries down there. After I got in the house, quite a severe pain hit me and I sat down and pulled my leg up against my stomach, and the pain eased. The next morning I walked out, went down, sat on the jury all day. Well, at noon I went up and checked with the doctor. He says, "Well your blood counts way up, you come back as soon as court lets out." I came back as soon as court was out, and it had clumb still higher. He says, "We gotta do something quick." I say, "Well, I've got to go to Ashton and make arrangements for someone to go do chores, and take care of my family." So I went to Ashton and did that, then I went back to St. Anthony and stayed overnight in a hotel. Then I got up the next morning and drove to Rexburg for surgery. After the surgery, well, I walked into the hospital, didn't even go to the room, went right to surgery. They undressed me in surgery. In fact, the Doctor Rigby's wife was his main nurse in surgery, and she told, "You're going to have to lay down if we're going to have to operate on you," One of the nurses there, told me afterwards, when the doctors got through they told, "You can take him upstairs, but he won't be there long." But I came through that in good shape.

We got the rest of our stuff moved from Squirrel—we were just in the process of moving back to the ranch here. We got the rest of it moved back, and I came down with pneumonia. I recovered from that good.

Betty Jones: I caught him spitting blood, and I made him go to the doctor. The doctor couldn't even see his ribs they were so filled with fluid and stuff. The doctor told him that he had to go to bed, and I had to put muster plaster on him for a half an hour every hour. And he said, "If that don't clear up we'll have to take out a rib." That scared him so he decided he better behave himself.

WJ: Then later your grandmother here got sick. We got our crop harvested. I had an appointment in Salt Lake with the doctors for her. We got her down there—we borrowed some money on our crop, we had it in the elevator. It equaled about 30 cents a bushel that I'd borrowed on the crop. When we left I told the fellow at the elevator, I says, "If it gets to 90 cents you sell it." But while we were down there we got a letter from the man at the elevator stating that we had to send him money or he'd have to sell our crop, it had went down that much. Our crop was sold out at 32 cents a bushel for wheat. Your grandma got to where she was feeling better, so we got her home here. We had a car that we bought from her folks after her father had died. We got her in the back of that car, and the jar was such that she couldn't stand it, so I bought a kind of cot thing, and put [it] upside down, while I took the pad, and made a bed in the back of the car. Then I turned the other part bottom side up on top of the car, and put about six

bushels of apples in that to hold the car down. We were only able to make only just a few miles the first day because she just couldn't stand it. The next day we were able to get home.

We bought the custom thrashing machine and tractor, and started doing custom thrashing. Also acquired a truck, and got started doing some trucking. We'd haul—in the daytime I'd run the thrash machine, and at night I'd drive from here to Bozeman, Montana with a load of wheat, then back, and run the thrash machine all day. The next spring I found that I could buy tractor fuel up there cheaper than what I could buy it here. So I's haul grain up there then buy a load of tractor fuel and haul back. Then our depot agent down here turned me in, said I was violating Interstate Commerce Commission laws. They put up a road block and stopped me, I answered all their questions, and they told me I could go. I says, "Well, now I've answered all your questions, I wish you'd answer one for me." I asked them who turned me in, and they told me. We went on then and it really made a struggle for us to meet our obligations for a couple of three years, especially when we had to sell hogs at five to seven dollars a head. Pigs if you took 'em down to the sell ring you had to pay the commission in advance before they'd let you unload 'em, times were that bad. That was under Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration as president. We worked hard and was very careful, and we've been able to put the farm together as it is now.

I've always kept quite a few horses even when we first started farming. I started out by buying horses. Later, we sold all of our horses and we went on a little trip or vacation. We came back and were here for about a week, and mother and I went out looking for horses. She said she'd ride if she had a good horse. We went out and bought horses, and I had a saddle made, handmade for her. While we were looking for horses we saw a thoroughbred mare, which was Miss Belden. Later mom suggested we go buy her, which we did. We raised thoroughbreds, and bred her to thoroughbreds at first. Then Chet wanted us to breed her to appaloosa. We did and got real nice appaloosa colt, in fact we bred two mares and we had two real good colts. They wanted us to start showing them but they didn't do anything to help us, we had to learn all of it the hard way by just trial and error. That got us started showing horses. In the first show we went to, we didn't get any—we got one second. I knew by looking at the horses, I knew that there was something wrong, that our colts was just as good as what we were showing against. So I studied up on horse shows, and decided it was my lack of knowing how to groom the horse. So I started experimenting. First, I studied my horse for any faults that it might have. Then I started grooming to correct those faults, and to make the horse attractive and eye appealing as I could. Then I started training the horse. Our next show we had two firsts and one second. In one week we had improved that much just through grooming and working. We went on to campaign those horses to High point Horses for the Intermountain. During the five or six years that we showed, we never campaigned a horse without being High Point of the Intermountain. We went to two national shows with them, and was never out of the ribbons. In the two year old class, that is one of the largest classes that they ever have at the national show, we, we only had 86 in Kanticee's class for him to compete against. Two year old stud colts from all over the nation, and he stood fifth. We felt quite fortunate.

BJ: He got second in Boise.

WJ: In the national.

BJ: When he was a baby colt.

WJ: Yes, and he should have had first, but due to a party not taking care of his colt, not keeping his colt under control caused Kanticee to misbehave slightly. The judge told the audiences that the two colts were just both of them right on the money, but he was going to move the other colt up because Kanticee had misbehaved slightly.

Some of the horses that we've produced have went on to be a Champion of Champions. One mare was Champion of Champions in five different states, and was the State Champion performance horse two consecutive years for the state of South Dakota. One of our mares had Produce-a-Dan Merit Award for the state of South Dakota. A stallion get a Sire-Merit Award for the state of South Dakota. A horse that we raised, Beaver Dick, was the top appaloosa roping horse for the state of Montana.

Pertaining to our church activities, I think I was baptized when I was 36 years old when I was baptized into the church. I've had the privilege—well I was the first mutual president in the Farnum Ward. I spent one year in scouting that I worked with the stake supervisor of scouting, and helped organize scout troops all over Fremont County. The first scout troop ever organized in the Island Park area I helped organize. The first, I think it was the first one in the Lamont area I helped organize. It was in that troop at Lamont there was Mark Albretson, Spencer Albretson, Doug Morrison, and Wilber Cook, I can't remember, there were two or three other boys in the troop.

I worked in the Sunday school quite awhile, both as assistant superintendent and superintendent. When Farnum Ward was dissolved I was the Sunday school superintendent, your grandmother was secretary. Then we were transferred to the Marysville Ward, and we met there for awhile. They had a clique that we just didn't seem to fit in. So we went to the Ashton Ward, and she too over the secretary and I was made general secretary to the Aaronic Priesthood. Later we were called into the Stake Sunday School board, and was on that for about ten years. Also I was later ordained a Seventy, and we filled a stake mission for 31 or 2 months. During that time we baptized seven.

I've put in approximately 15 years on school boards. I was about 8 or 9 years chairman of the board of the Independent District we had here in this area. I also had 5 or 6 years on the Idaho State Wheat board, representing the wheat growers of the state of Idaho. I've put in about 30 years on the Board of Connie Creek Canal Company. I am presently in my third year of service on the committee nine of District one representing the Ashton area. Where do you want to go from there?

AJ: I've seen pictures of you in parades in that Indian suit. How did you start doing that?

WJ: In horse shows, just entering parades just to show our horses off. One winter, when we were going to Phoenix, and staying, we took horses that had never been broke—just took 'em down there, and broke 'em—then they entered in parades, and such as that. We participated in the Pareda-de-Sal which is a parade that everything is moved by horses or self, not any motorized vehicles whatever. It's all on the Spanish settlers and Spanish—I don't know what I'd want for it—but everything pertains the Spanish background of the area. The float I was on and helped—well, I handled the horses to pull this float, was first in the business float for the city of Scottsdale. It consisted of several ladies dressed in fine Spanish costumes, also the matador and the bull, the three serinadors, then nine out-rides on matched Arabian horses. It was really a fantastic fair, I don't know how much was put into it, getting it together. It started part of our showing.

Later we started riding in competition in pleasure classes, parades, and costume classes such as that. We also participated in horse racing. Some of our horses were taken to Portland, some to Turf Paradise at Phoenix. We raced through Montana, also in Idaho, Oregon.

AJ: You never did tell me how old you were when you left home.

BJ: Yes he did, he was 17.

WJ: When I came to Idaho. When I left home and started working out, I was 14.

AJ: You weren't living at home then?

WJ: I never stayed at home after that. I'd come home for short periods of time, but I never really stayed at home.

BJ: Tell her when you were staying with your grandmother and the lightning hit you.

WJ: This that your grandmother refers to—my grandmother lived just a quarter of a mile from us. It seemed like either my sister or I usually had to go up and stay with grandma. It was my turn that I had to go up there. While I was there a storm came up, and lightning struck the house—the north end of the house—right in the middle of the room, at the north end of the, on grandpa's picture. Well, when lightning struck the house it split the house in two and when it came to grandpa's picture it just disintegrated it. Splinters all over, the paper looked like mice had chewed it up. Grandma, evidently as I recall, she had went through into the kitchen, and she had made me a bed on the floor in that same room. She came in there, and I guess she couldn't get me awake or maybe I was knocked out, I don't know what it was, but I didn't know anything about it 'til she drug me out in the rain going to the storm cellar right close to their house. When she opened the kitchen door, and pulled me out in the rain I came to. I helped her get the cellar door open, we had to open it back toward the wind, and we had to lift it up and put a block under it then crawl through under the door, 'cause we couldn't hold the door up on account of the wind. We got down in the cellar and stayed there until the storm was over with.

I don't remember—oh, I remember a lot of things of my grandmother. I scarcely remember my grandfather or my grandparents on my mother's side. I can remember Grandpa Clements coming to visit us once, then us going to visit him once, and I went with him, and he—walking along and he stopped, and he said, "Now see that?" I looked up in the tree and I could see a bobcat laying on the limb, just laying flat on the limb. He pulled up and shot, and that cat came out, just straight out toward me and lit just about 15 feet from us, which really startled me. I thought that cat was coming right on top of me, but the cat was dead when it hit the ground. But just the muscle contraction when the bullet hit caused it to leap straight out.

My grandfather on my mother's side was an excellent marksman. He came from Scotland, to this country, then migrated to California in the Gold Rush, then back to Kansas and homesteaded there. My parents on my father's side moved from Missouri into Kansas, and homesteaded.

My father rushed into what they called the strip, which was a strip of country that laid between the state of Kansas and Oklahoma. I'm not sure whether it was suppose to be Indian reservation or what, but it didn't belong to anyone right at first. They opened it up for

settlement, and dad was in that rush for land down there, but he wasn't successful in getting ground. I can't remember the year that that took place, but it could be looked up in the history. I often heard him talk about the opening of the strip, and how they all lined up, and how they all dashed for the line. Nobody cared anything for the other guy, just to get down there, and get a piece of ground staked out.

AJ: Tell me how you got started in the snowmobiles.

WJ: Well, I don't know—the first man I talked to about a dealership was a man representing Western Power Sports, a Salt Lake fellow, but I met him in Ashton. I bought all the snow machines that he had at that time. One of the machines off the first load was that little 190 that you kids rode—I don't know if you got to ride it any, I think you did. That came off the first load in 1969. I've stayed with Snow-Jet then 'til they sold out to Kawasaki. In fact, before they sold out the dealer in Salt Lake decided to quit the business. I suggested that they contact Gray Olsen up here at Idaho Falls to see if he'd be interested in the distributorship, which he took. He kids me a lot about me coming with the distributorship, he says he just inherited me, I was part of it. So now we've been in the business going on our eleventh year. I think some of the machines that I sold this first year are still running. There's some in Teton Basin, and there was one—one come up here in Ashton now, I can't remember who has it, but it was up here this winter to be repaired. It has kept me in contacted with a lot of the young people, which I've really enjoyed very much. It looks like this is going to be the worst year that we've ever had with the snowmobile business. The snow hasn't been bad, it's just no money. The economic conditions have been such that you couldn't sell machines.

I don't know of anything else to tell you. I don't know what you'd be interested in.

AJ: Anything you have to tell me.

WJ: Anything I have to tell you. I'll let grandma take up the rest of the time.

BJ: I did mine the other day.

WJ: Another thing you might be interested in is that we've worked quite closely with the University of Idaho in the production of various small grains. In fact, the first pearling barley that was released was released from the Experiment Farm—when they decided to increase the seed [that] was brought here. We seeded it, and the University of Idaho allocated the seed to other farmers, and we were paid so much a 100 for the seed. We were active in getting pearling approved then for mauling. In fact I took the lead, and was very fortunate in being able to contact the proper people at the proper time to get it in a short period of time, to get that variety approved for mauling purposes. I worked through Hurferd and Hurferd, and also through our county agent, through the University of Idaho. Dr. Zunderman, and I don't recall the other fellow's name, but I got letter from them, then presented auids, and was able to get it done in a few weeks. When I first launched out on the project they predicted I wouldn't be successful. There were several varieties of wheat that was first released from the University, came here, and were seeded. Some of the seeds that were picked up from Aberdeen were produced here, and then the Experiment Farm in Tetonia picked up seed here to take to Tetonia. I worked real close with them for several years in the production of seed.

There were two to three varieties of barley, and about five different varieties of wheat, and one variety of oats. The oats were a little disappointing for us right at first then from Crop Improvement Association turned our oats down 'cause they had a real short black beard on the oat. So he thought they were wild oats, so he turned us down. Then I had another contact where they wanted real good oats to ship to Arizona for, to the race track. In the meantime I got a hold of him, and sold the oats. Shortly after that I got a call from the Drop Improvement Association that our oats had been approved, and a letter of explanation as to why they had held them up. But I loaded them on the car, and shipped them out of the state to feed race horses. So our oat growing product, as far as producing seed wasn't successful, but we did sell out oats for more than we had got for them for seed, just to feed the race horses.

AJ: When did your shop start on fire?

WJ: Let's see... '77 our shop caught on fire and burned eleven snow machines, all our tools, all our parts, and inventory.

(Walter Homer Jones born: 4 August 1907)