

VOICES FROM THE PAST

HAYDEN, TETON COUNTY

By Jim Breckenridge

July 31, 1983

Tape # 190

Oral Tape by Harold Forbush

Transcribed by Louis Clements

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Harold Forbush: Interview with James Breckenridge.

Breckenridge: Don't say James.

HF: It's just Jim. You must prefer Jim. And its B R E C K E R I D G E. You know that name is a noted name I think in Tennessee or Kentucky or some place.

JB: Yes, Virginia and in Scotland and Ireland.

HF: Is it a Scottish and Irish name?

JB: Yes, it originated in the religious wars over there in Scotland and Ireland. They got mixed in there and had to hide out and they took refuge in some brush that grew on the hills there called Bracken. And they took that for a name Braken and a ridge.

HF: That's interesting. I am interviewing Jim in his home here in Hayden or just west of Tetonia and on the 31st of July, 1983. This is a beautiful place in the Valley. As a matter of fact, this was one of the first areas in the Valley that was settled. Years back they had a livery stable down here, didn't they?

JB. Yes.

HF: Where the coach would come in and the persons riding the coach, passengers, would stay here. Did they house them overnight and then take their journey on over to Jackson, Wyoming?

JB: They generally went to Victor in one run. They had to carry the mail and passengers. They didn't stop much over here. It was mainly a relay for horses. After 1905 the town of Hayden grew up. They had a hotel and livery stable there. They fed people overnight that wanted to stay.

HF: Who operated that?

JB: I started last fall to write up the history of Hayden and I found so many things different from my opinion and knowledge that I finally just wadded the papers up and threw them in a book and just to hell with it. Let another generation do it. The history here is made up of different tales. My story of it, my dad came into this country and filed on some property in '82. The winter of '82 he was also in Jackson, over the mountain in Jackson Hole. But a year before, it was either '79 or '80, '80 I think, him and Frank Summers camped on Canyon Creek. Dick Egbert has been trying to locate the place they camped. He hadn't found anything yet. He was headed for Alaska.

HF: Your dad?

JB: He was trapping. My dad and summers. Winter caught them in this country they stayed over winter. Alaska passed a law against aliens trapping up there. So they stayed

here he trapped here that winter and over in Jackson Hole a winter. Either one of two winters over there. Then came back and settled here.

HF: Now he was quite a young man at the time then?

JB: He'd be in his thirties.

HF: What was your dad's name?

JB: Dave.

HF: Dave Breckenridge. Well, then he settled down here and started his ranching operations?

JB: Correct.

HF: Where do you fit in the family? Are you older than Bill?

JB: Yes, I'm older than Bill. I had a sister, Lucy, and a brother. She died as a small child. Then Preston, he lived to be about fifty years old. Then me, then Bill. Wait a minute. I missed my sister, Devita. She's older than I was.

HF: Who did she marry?

JB: Lynn.

HF: Is it Isabel who is Bill's wife?

JB: Yes, Bill's wife.

HF: Now, Bill's passed away?

JB: Yes.

HF: Is Isabelle?

JB: No, no. She is still down on the old home.

HF: Well, now. Were you born in the area?

JB: Yes.

HF: Would you care to mention the date?

JB: 1903, first day of the year.

HF: Probably arrived without the aid of a doctor?

JB: A midwife.

HF: Who was the midwife?

JB: Old grandmother Rammell. I can't tell you her name.

HF: That would be Russell's mother?

JB: Russell's grandmother.

HF: That's interesting. Have you taken over, is this place here where you lived with your dad's first ranch?

JB: Not exactly where I live. We built up about 1500 acres in addition to what he had. His boys and girls, Isabel and I, divided it up among us. We run it all. It is privately owned.

JF: What cattle have you traditionally always used and operated? What kind of cattle?

JB: Well, short horned for a number of years. Then Herefords looked to make more money. So we changed Herefords.

HF: Well, this is good country for cattle, isn't it?

JB: It's good cattle country.

HF: And yet the winters are so darn long you have to feed a long time.

JB: Well, our neighbors who didn't have snow have to feed just as long as we do, the hay and grass just don't come. There are spots that get by with less feeding but not many of them.

HF: Well, Jim, I know that when I was here as prosecutor they used, I know I got the impression that you have done a lot to restore and to improve the Hayden Cemetery. Bill was quite active at that regard too, was he not?

JB: Yes. We worked together. We had several laborers who donated a lot of work on it.

HF: At the time that you started restoring it, were there quite a few people buried in the Hayden Cemetery?

JB: That would be based on what very many people were. It's a small cemetery though.

HF: Were there more than a hundred?

HF: Were there more than a hundred?

JB: I wouldn't have any idea of how many. Ed shield around for a good many years in fear of that reservoir being put in here. It would have been submerged in the reservoir. But people have kind of forgotten about that now. They think there won't be any reservoir.

HF: Oh, the reservoir that they later built down on the Teton Dam?

JB: Well, that was a completely different project, you might say. The other project was built up here close to where the power plant is on the Teton River. That's where it would have been built.

HF: If there had been a reservoir, that would have inundated this area wouldn't it?

JB: Yes, it would have gone clear up into the Bates country.

HF: Well, was Sam Swanner a near neighbor to you while you were growing up?

JB: Yes, there was a fellow by the name of Kim Hibbard. Lived down here close to the river on South Leigh Creek. He, I can't just get it straight in my mind how those frontiersmen owned all the places they owned. He had this place according to some records. Old Jerry Seamore plowed twenty acres on this place and put oats. It was the first grain planted in Teton Basin.

HF: When was that?

JB: I don't know. I can't date it. I know what it was related to. A fellow could chase it down. Old Jerry was working for his wedding stake. The dug twenty acres of sod with a walking plow. He gave him fifteen dollars a month. One morning he went out hooked up the plow. The boss came out and gave him his months pay and three five dollar gold pieces. He put them in his pocket and plowed three rounds. Then discovered he'd loss hi money. So he put the team in the barn and took a pitch fork and went out and turned the furrows back for a round and a half and found the three gold pieces. He was working for his wedding stake to get married.

HF: Jerry Seamore?

JF: Yes. Married Maggie Hill.

HF: From that plowing and maybe some more with it, why, that's when the first oats were planted, the first grain?

JB: Yes, the first oats. He sold that place to Sam Swanner. That was when he left the county. How he acquired that place, I don't know. Like I said, I don't think he ever lived on it.

HF: Was that right here in the Hayden area?

JB: Yes.

HF: Not too far from here?

JB: Just about a half a mile to the corner of it from here. That's where Sam lived, where Sam's homestead was.

HF: Did Sam build a home on there?

JB: Yes. He built two or three homes there.

HF: What's your first recollection of seeing him or visiting with him? You were born in 1903. I know that Sam Swanner was the first named Probate Judge, I believe, of Teton County. The County, that appointed was made in July, 1915. Sam was living here at that time, of course. 1915, you'd have been a boy of twelve or so. Why don't you, what do you recall about the man? Was he a big fellow?

JB: He was fairly tall. He was public spirited. He liked to take part in everything that was happening. I don't know how much education he had. I don't think too big an education in school. The report is that he was a drummer for the army down there in Utah, the time of the Mormon trouble there. Everybody that knew him knows his reputation for being an outstanding drummer. Ralph Murdock couldn't say enough for him.

HF: That's interesting. Now, what induced him and motivated him to come and settle here in Teton Basin?

JB: What brought all the rest of them? I don't know. He came in here a while. I don't know a few months or a few weeks or something. Then he left and went back to Utah for a year or so. Then he moved back up here and brought his family with him. I'm not sure; he was a U.S deputy Marshal for a long time. I'm not sure some of that work didn't bring him in here.

HF: Was this common knowledge, that he was a U.S Deputy Marshal?

JB: Well, it must have been. He acted in that capacity in a number of cases. He was a posse on Spread Creek in Jackson Hole when they killed them two small town horse thieves over there. Sam was a living here and through him and oh, a guy that used to live up at Montana officers telling them about the horses being in Jackson Hole. Then they went with the posses. Several time he acted as an officer of the law.

HF: You know, I have always been told that Sam Swanner was one of Fred T. Dubois's deputy Marshal. Dubois, of course, came out when Idaho was still a territory to become the U.S. Marshal of Idaho, of the Territory of Idaho. Dubois, of course, did have a great

desire to crush the capacity of the Mormon Church so that they would stop polygamy for one thing, I suppose. But also closely kind to that was that he had the feeling that the Mormon hierarchy and the Church told it's members how to vote. He felt a need to crush that, break up that close relationship. Now, what way and what role he played in this whole program with the aims and purposes of Dubois, I don't know. Do you know anything about that?

JB: Not definitely. It was kind of a faith in which Swanner spent quite a bit of time hunting and chasing the Mormon polygamist. You know, the folks used to come in when it got too hot for them and go up Teton Canyon.

HF: Across the Wyoming line?

JB: Yes. A lot of them stopped with my dad. There was a regular stopping place where anybody going through would stop there. They were in and out. He tells some comical stories. One, I remember was in the wintertime. He had some horses running across the river from home down there. He rode over early in the morning to see what they were doing. He ran into an encampment out there. Two or three tents and people going every way to get into the brush. Some had their pants on and some didn't. He pulled up his horse and stopped to see what he had ridden into. A fellow by the name of Harris, one of them Harris's that used to be in Rexburg at the hardware store there, was, he recognized him. He was with the group to take them over to Teton Canyon. Several stories like that.

HF: Do you think Swanner was quite a Mormon hater?

JB: I don't know.

HF: You don't know what his real attitude was?

JB: I don't think Swanner took it too much to heart, what they were doing.

HF: I see.

JB: I think he did his pursuing of them through orders.

HF: Now, who was his wife? Did you know her, Mrs. Swanner?

JB: No, I didn't. He had two wives, I believe, and that I never could remember. But then I did know his next wife, Sterling's mother, yes, I knew her. Sealy Swanner was the first wife. I don't know what her last name was.

HF: Then Sterling was from a different wife?

JB: Yes, Sterling's mother's name was Rose but I don't know what his maiden name was. I think I can tell you where you can get that. You stop in Tetonia at Mrs. Warren Fullmer I think she could tell you. They were together quite a lot.

HF: I see. Well I imagine Sterling could tell me too. Let's see, where did Glen fit in?

JB: He was the second, older than Sterling. There was Harold, Willis, Clarence, and Glen.

HF: By the firsts wife?

JB: I believe they were all by the first wife. Shirley may have been by that wife too. There were two or three women in the bunch but I don't, couldn't tell you much on.

HF: Then, of course, you had Sterling. Did the old gentleman pass away herein the Valley?

JB: Yes.

HF: Is he buried here in Hayden?

JB: He is buried here in Hayden.

HF: I could probably find that date of his death. Somebody would be able to tell me that, I guess. Or I could get the record. Who takes care of the Hayden Cemetery now?

JB: Dale takes care of it with a set of trustees. Rose came across from the old country. I think she was Danish. I'm not sure.

HF: Well, I have a picture of Swanner; I think when he was probably the Marshal at some kind of a celebration up at Driggs riding his horse. I guess he was quite a horseman.

JB: He was a horseman as was the whole family. There's a picture, you know, in his history making flood papers. A group in Driggs riding his horse. I guess he was quite a horseman.

JB: He was a horseman as was the whole family. There's a picture, you know, in his history making flood papers. A group in Driggs set a little bench outside a store window. There's old Will Taylor, old John Buxton, Oscar Knight, Sam Swanner, Ray Kimball, I'm not sure whether there's anymore or not.

HF: Is that quite a common picture?

JB: Yes, a very common picture. I'm not sure that's in the Ben Driggs history.

HF: Could be. You probably have one of those old histories, don't you?

JB: No, I didn't get one of those. Dale's got one. That is he's got the revised edition.

HF: Well, I helped revise it. I sure like to...

JB: That book that the Church put out this summer, last summer, it's got that picture in it, and I'm pretty sure.

HF: Oh, has it. That would be helpful.

JB: There's a part of Sam Swanner, if you shut that off, I'll tell you.