Harold Hagen - oral history

(as told to Emily Miwa-Vogan, refuge operations specialist, Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge, June 4, 1996)

Born 1909 in Helena
Was 12 years old when the family moved to the Whaley Homestead in 1921

I have stories that I'm probably the only one that knew anything about....maybe I can tell you about it...maybe it'll be embarrassing to some people, but I can talk about it.

He belongs to the Sons and Daughters of Montana Pioneers on his mother's side of the family.

They came West over the Oregon Trail in 1864.
My great grandfather had been serving in the Union Forces and when his term was up he brought the family West. At that time Helena was a striving mining camp and gold was discovered there in '62 or '63, I don't remember what year, but there were a lot of people there. There was a big mining camp, then he came and took up land in Helena Valley. My grandmother was very young at the time she came across the plains. Her aunt was 16 years old and she came with her father, my great grandfather, and she told stories about coming across the plains...fascinating, very interesting...I've always been interested. One of the stories she told was...we always had it in mind that those pioneers had it real tough and they didn't have much to eat, but not exactly true with this wagon train. They had dairy cattle. My great grandfather bought a couple of milk cows, also some beef cattle, and so they had milk and butter and cream and cheese. Once in awhile they would kill a steer and have beef. They didn't have such a hardship even though it was a difficult journey. Anyway they settled in the valley and my grandmother was 4 years old at the time and she had six children one of whom was my mother. My grandfather had lived in the Gallatin Valley in the '80's and farmed there for awhile, then moved back to Illinois?. Grandma's oldest child was my mother. She married my Dad who had come from Wisconsin. They farmed in the Helena Valley, but there was a shortage of water there and he wanted to move to a better place, so he came to the Bitterroot. He got a farm that was relatively unproductive worked his heart out trying to make it work. The only thing he could do...we went through a depression in the 20's and times were tough and I always felt kind of sorry for my dad because the only way he knew to make it better was to work harder. The Depression years were very difficult. As I mentioned a little bit ago, there are some stories connected with the land that probably only I know and so I'll tell you some of those stories. They may prove a bit embarrassing to some people, but.... Mr. May, and I mentioned him earlier, what a fine old gentleman he was. He live on the farm at John and Brady's (?) our old place and right adjoining him were the Whaley brothers. Mr. May was telling me one time that he and the Whaley's got along all right, not too close. The Whaley brothers had a hotel and to get food for the restaurant they had in the hotel they had an old slaughterhouse on what we call the "Lower 80". It was only about a 1/4 mile from where Mr. May lived. Mr. May was feeding a bunch of hogs, fattening hogs, and one winter's night, why it was snowing pretty good and he went to bed and when he got up in the morning he didn't have any hogs. They all disappeared during the night. And what had happened was that the snowstorm had suddenly stopped and he was able to track all the hogs that had been taken from his ? and had been taken right over to the slaughterhouse and they were

slaughtering hogs. So he notified the sheriff. Sheriff got down there and arrested the Whaley brothers, and the older one, David, was tried and found guilty of "theiv'in", stealing hogs, and was sentenced to a year in the penitentiary in Deer Lodge. And they all laughed....he was given a job in the convescary there because he knew how to slaughter hogs. He went in there and here were some slaughtered hogs and he said, "another damn hog!". So he served his term...and another story about the place I don't suppose anybody's heard or knows very much about, but this was told to me many, many years ago. What we call the "lower 80"...there were 80 acres that were just south of the present, what was referred to on the refuge, as "the Barn" was called a ? and was on the cattle beef and this was in the early days and he heard that the sheriff was watching him pretty closely. He would steal cattle and slaughter them and sold the meat and to dispose of the hides he would throw them in the river. And ? thought that he skipped out of the country. The sheriff began looking down the river and he had put rocks in the hides and buried them in the river. Nobody ever hear of Mr. Benton again, but the Whaley brothers then acquired the 80 acres. Now of course there is no 80 acreas...it's part of the ranch my Dad bought. My Dad bought a total of 480 acres and that really was the nucleus of the refuge.

It seems strange to me that the first land that was taken up by the parade? of white settlers was by and large some of the poorest land in the Valley. I think that one of the earliest claims in this end of the Valley was taken up on the present land of the refuge is where the manager's house is. On that tract of land down there was originally taken up by a man named Woods...no relation to the Woods that lived near Stevensville. This man came in the early 80's in the trapper days I guess and located near the river. It was not very productive land, but it was close to water. That, I think was probably the earliest land that was settled by a permit. A permanent resident. Next to that land a family of the Norton had claims in there. Part of the refuge where the shop is now was owned by a family by the name of Sullivan. Mr. Sullivan was a miner in Butte and came in to the Valley in, I think, the early 1900's. He wanted to take up an additional....at that time the government would grant 160 acres for a homestead. There was 40 acres next to his claim that he wanted to acquire, so he built a little log building down there on the 40 acres and filed a claim on it...in whose name I don't know...perhaps one of his children. Part of the rules for acquisition of the land was that you had to develop it, improve it, and you were given a deed after a certain period of time. He would go down to the little log building every morning and start a fire and let the smoke come up through the chimney. Then he had Mr. Reynolds who had the adjoining claim testify before the hearing committee that every morning he saw smoke coming out of the chimney so he knew it was occupied. And the land was then deeded to Mr. Sullivan. A great deal of land was acquired in the early days by some similar procedures.

Peter Whaley was an imigrant from Ireland. He came to the California gold fields. He did rather well in the California gold fields, and stayed there for many years. When gold was discovered in Montana he came to Montana and came to ? was one of the early claims ? find the gold and as a result he went to Diamond City near Helena, not very far from Canyon Ferry, east of Helena. For several years he operated a store there and I suspect made quite a bit of money and he was active in politics in Montana. I'm not sure if he was part of the Legislature, the first territorial legislature, but he was there in some capacity. Because of his political connections, he was appointed as agent for the Flathead Indian Tribe and served in that capacity for a year. When he decided to leave, or was replaced, I'm not sure which, he came to the Bitterroot and bought some land and settled and settled some other land and that was the original Whaley Homestead. Because he was relatively prosperous he was able to build, for that time, a rather ostentatious ?

abode. He built a rather nice house. The original house was located a little bit south of the present one, but in 1880 or '81 I think he built the house in which I lived for so many years. He had four sons, they had a logging business, they had a hotel in Stevensville and were rather a prominent family. They told some interesting stories about their early connection to the farm. One of the carpenters who built the house, his name was Godfrey, Billy Godfrey. He still lived in the community when we moved there in 1921. He was an interesting old chap and I visited with him quite often. I lived in it for 68 years. I don't know what year it was (listed on the register of Historic Homes).

First we must remember that times change pretty rapidly. For a long, long time farmers worked pretty hard and produced what they needed from their labors and harvesting their crops. Then we went through the industrial revolution from agriculture. When the nation was first founded... at the time of revolutionary days, it took one farmer to produce the food for 2-3 people, almost everybody had the job or work of producing food. Now, at the present time, one farmer produces enough food to feed 100 people. And it all came about through the Industrial Revolution. When I was a boy (that's a favorite word for old geezers like me) we did things the hard way. We had a farm with horses of course...and hay, putting up hay, for example. We had a mower and we mowed the hay and we had a bunchraiser? York? and wind rows and we had to take forks and make the wind rows into shocks and haul the hay to York? Then we pitched the hay by hand onto what we called a boat. It was like a stone boat pulled by horses into a stack, then we had nets that we lifted up and....and we made a haystack. And this was all stacked by hand. So there was an awful lot of hand work. As a result we had the....power to make the crops. Power was produced through gasoline or diesel or something of that sort. It has changed an awful lot. Now what they have is what they call swathers? that cuts it and puts it in and crushes it so.....runs it through a press that knocks the juice out of the stems so the hay dries a lot more rapidly than it used to be with the old method. And they have balers that come along and tie it up in bundles. When it started out they'd make 40-50 pound bales, now they have balers that make as much as a ton of hay in one bale. It's picked up mechanically and hauled to a storage area where it's stacked mechanically. So hand labor has been reduced to a great extent. But you asked how we operated, and all that was done with hard physical labor. But it was a good life out in the open air, hard work and good food, and it was kind of a good life. In the winter time most farmers had livestock and you'd haul hay out of the stack and haul it up to the cattle or sheep or whatever it was you were feeding. In the spring lambs were born or calves were born and you had to take care of them. In our place we early got into the dairy business. The time was a deep depression. I mean the depression was very difficult. There was no money for anything. There was a lot of bartering and I hired a man for a dollar a day and they were some of the finest workmen you could ever get. And that's as high as the wages were. And we were able to pay it because we got into the dairy industry. People without a job, the last thing that went was milk for the children. And so there was a sale for the milk. We went into full milk business and operated a large dairy. We started out milking by hand, sit down under the cow, squeeze the teats by hand into a bucket, throw a strainer into a can and off to the cheese factory or the creamery or the frozen milk bottling company. That's how it was done. In later years I lost interest in the dairy. I often told my kids when they were growing up that we had to work long, hard hours and *all* the time. For nine years I never missed a milking. That mean *every day* for *nine* years. And that's a hard assignment for a teenage boy. I had wanted to go to college and had dreamed of going to college. There was no way I could do it because I had to help Dad on

the ranch, but I did go for one year. Then later I went back for one quarter, but then I had to go back home, so I never did get a college education. But in my case I had a substitute for it. I was appointed the original advisory council to the president when Dr. Y? became president, and I served on that for 49 consecutive years. Every president always kept me on there, so I'd go three or four times each year to meetings and in my mind I always kind of substituted those trips for trips to go to school. And in a way that was my college and I was finally victor of the board, and I was granted the golden globe award by the alumni association as the most outstanding alumnus of the year. I told upon receiving it that I regarded that as my diploma. Speaking about my father again. He was at heart a true conservationist. He had a saying. He said, "Son, when you get a piece of ground you've got to turn it over so that the next guy finds it is in better shape that when you found it." That was his words, and, actually, I don't think that I've ever heard it said better. I was interested for a long time in conservation groups. I was president for a while of the Montana Reclamation Association. It was a state-wide organization
that concerned itself with the wise use of our resources...the land and water. And although we were primarily interested in putting water on dry land and making it productive, we also considered the protection of our resources, and it grew to be quite a widely held view. I've been interested in environmental issues all my life. Anyone who lives close to the soil can't help but be that way. It's before you all the time, and I'm not a deeply religious person, but you can't help but feel that there is a plan somewhere, and it starts in the soil. My Dad felt that way and used to try to explain it to me. In the spring we'd go out to plow the ground and it has an odor, a smell and it subconsciously reminds you of the, maybe, debt we owe the soil because all we eat and wear come from it. And in that soil are millions of what I call little bugs. There are millions of organisms and each has some sort of relationship to each other. One little organism, one little bug dies, then some other little higher form of life comes avails himself of the food that he deposited back into the soil and the result is that a plant can grow and take that nourishment out of the soil and with the aid of the air and sunlight can convert it into food. Each part of life seems to have a relationship to another part of life. When you're a farmer that's just part of your nature. You just absorb it, not formally, but you just seem to know it. When I was first interested in it during the dust bowl years farming practices in the midwest had meant disturbing the vegetation, and the dust bowl had done away with the accumulation of centuries of soil building, and to have that all be destroyed was wrong. But we've made a lot of strides, a lot of information has been gathered about that, so it's no longer a problem.

continued on tape 2: June 17, 1996.....
(interview with Marcia Pablo Cross, Archeologist, USFS and Beth Underwood, LMR Outdoor Recreation Planner)
Gash gang....Pauper's cemetery

My neighbor was Johnny Higgins, and her grandfather was J.D. Higgins that was in the book. And, incidently, so I remember, I don't have very good memory retention on dates, when was the gash gang, do you know? (1878) Right before the '80's, uh huh, yeah, that would figure. The rumor is among the local history, and I guess it all came from Genesis, I don't know where that source came from. But when we first came to the Bitterroot and that was 1921, they told us, I'd heard about this, of the hanging up by the "Hollow". I didn't know where the tree was. I thought it was on the Pine Hollow Road. Other people seem to think it is more up in the timber, up Pine

Hollow a ways. I asked Johnny, my neighbor, whose grandfather was J. D. She thought the hanging tree was down at Jost's (Yost). Do you know where Yost Dairy is? It's south of town. And there's a big pine there, and she thought that was the tree that was the hanging tree. She asked her sister Ellen, who was kind of a local historian, and she didn't know either. I don't know if we can trace down where the hanging tree is, were you interested in that? I don't know where we could go to find out where that tree was. I don't know who would know. Her idea where that tree was is different from the story I heard many years ago, so I don't know what we can do about the tree. But I did go out to her grandfather's place. That's south of the creamery up here. Mr. Neuman is the man who owns it, and he drove in shortly after we got up there. I told him what I needed to know and he told me, "Well, that grave is up at the other end of my property." He said, "It's kind of up there in the corner. I maintain the grave. There are some rocks there...scattered around, I put the rocks around it." He said Walt Perry had told him, Walt Perry was an earlier owner of the land, I guess he owned it in the early 1900's, that Whiskey Bill and Pete Matt and some other renegade, I don't know what his name was were all buried there. And they'd been hanged. Well, I'm quite certain that Whiskey Bill was not buried there. Whiskey Bill was buried long before Pete Matt was. I think the stories on Whiskey Bill are a little more accurate than anything we have on Pete Matt. Because Mr. Reynold who owned the land where the shop is at out on the refuge, I don't know what year he came here, but I think it was 1912 or so, he told me at one time that this was the tree that they hung Whiskey Bill on. And it was exactly on the boundary between our place and what is now called the golf course. This was the North 80 I think they called that. There was a big limb that had been sawed off and Mr. Reynolds thought that was the tree they'd hung him on. Since he was here a long time before we, and seemed to know about that sort of thing, I took it to be accurate. Charles Amos Buck was a good, local historian and he was born here in the, I guess '80's or 90's or somewhere in there. He was old enough to have talked to Father Ravalli. He could remember Father Ravalli. He thought that the tree was down there also. So I know Whiskey Bill was buried there. I don't know whether Peter Matt was or not. But I can show you about where it is, I don't know if I can walk there, but I can show you how to get there. Quite frankly I wanted to go down and scratch around that tree for quite a long time, and I thought some day I'll go down there with a shovel see if I can find him because the historians say it was in January when the hanged Whiskey Bill and they said the ground would be frozen and they scratched out a very shallow grave and buried him. Well, they'd have to in January, it was right in the gravel bar there, so if I go down six inches or so I could find a bone or two. But I never got around to doing it. I couldn't even locate where the tree is now because it blew down. I don't know whether we worked it up or somebody else did, so I'm sure that...so maybe he isn't buried there at all. That is not in connection with the cemetery, the old ?ville cemetery. I don't think Mr. Neuman knows any more than Walt Perry told us. But that's about the extent of my knowledge really. I always thought that the grave they talked about where they put the outlaws in was the old catholic cemetery, but according to Neuman, it isn't. And Walt Perry should know because he was here a long time ago. So I'm pretty sure that that's the plot they had in mind, probably. But now if he was hanged on Pine Hollow Road, or Pine Hollow area, that would mean that after they hanged him they would have to bring him at least two miles from south of town to bury him, that doesn't seem likely either. And I don't know, you don't know what time of year this occurred? (It was in the spring of 1878) Well, then it could have been. Now this Mr. Higgins we were talking about owned a lot of land up in the hills to the east. He had come from Missouri and he had two

sons, as I recall, and a cousin or nephew, I don't know which is the father of Johnny Higgins, my neighbor, apparently he owned quite a bit of the land where the creamery is and that plot of land is just east of the Fort Owen Ranch. Apparently he owned that plot of land, I don't know how much is there, and he also owned quite a bit of land in the hills to the east. So it's possible they could have hanged him out there and brought him up here. Now I had quite a talk with Johnny Higgins, about where that tree was. There's a creek that comes down from Pine Hollow where the bridge was, he said that her dad the culvert.... this was way back when I don't know when. He and three or four others, neighbors, kind of got together to clean the culvert out so it would drain better and there was a man's shirt down in this, and something was in this shirt. The other guys didn't want to see what was in this shirt. They thought they had found part of a body there. Price Higgins took the shirt to see what was in it and here was a bunch of loot, some silverware and valuables that had been stolen from people around the community and he thought that Pete Matt and the gash gang had stolen it. Anyway, the Price Higgins family used the silverware for years, and still have part of it, it's quite an heirloom, I guess. (So we can point out where the Wayne Dayton ranch is) Yes, I can show you that and I can show you where, and you can talk to Mr. Neuman, I suppose. We can call him and see if he's home if you want to do that. The Neuman ranch and Dayton ranch are two separate places. If you want to see the places I can show those to you. (Why don't we do that. The Dayton ranch is up where the hanging is. We can go take a look there, then come back down where Neuman's are). If you could talk to Ellen Higgins, she would know more probably than anybody I could think of. (Discussion of visiting sites, people...decided to begin by visiting the Dayton ranch area where hanging probably took place, then call and visit Neuman ranch) Neuman was Dean of Men...when I went to school in Bozeman, that was many years ago, I had to work hard and I skipped classes a lot, and I always had to go before the Dean of Men, and in those days, if you didn't report to classes for three days in a row, your name went on a list. When I told him where I lived, he was a man tremendously interested in history, he had written this book, he had come to Montana in the 80's or 90's, I don't know...it would have been the 90's because the University was first founded in the 90's. We'd sit down and visit and I told him where I lived. One interesting factor about the land down there is Mr. May, and I told you quite a bit about Mr. May, told me, he said, there's a little patch of land just south of the residence there, towards the end of the Big Ditch as we call it. There's a place there where there's quite a hollow. He told me this is where John Owen got the clay to build the fort. It always kind of sticks out because there is kind of a swale in there, so I told him that and he was just thoroughly interested in that. He knew all about Major Owen and the Jesuit Fathers. That's past the refuge residence. The line between our place and the May ranch has been removed of course. But it was where that drainage ditch comes down. It will be north of there. I thought I'd dig around and see if could find some artifacts, but I never could. I was interested in some of the old Indians. I told Emily the other day about Indian Chip working for us. He was quite a noted leader of the tribe at one time. And the Clant family, do you remember the name of Clant. Tony Clant worked for me for many years. It was his father Isaac Clant, I think. He lived at Spokane Falls, owned the land where Spokane is now. He sold that and moved up the Bitterroot. He owned a place up west of St. Ignatius, or in that area. He owned a lot of land up there. He was an old, old man when I was quite young and I remember he was Hawaiian. And I'd go up and he didn't know much English, but a little bit, you could talk a little bit to him. He was interesting. Louie Ninepipe was one of the interesting Indians that worked for us. My reaction to them was quite interesting. I was interested in them. One of the Indian's name was

Finley and Jocko..he was a large man, 6' 3-4" broad shoulders. He was quite old when I knew him, yet he took an axe and went down there in the lower 80 and worked up a bunch of trees for us, just an axe, and he was an iron man, he really was. They said he could get on a deer and walk it to death. He'd get on a deer's trail and the deer would be worried and run away and he'd track it and he could kill it with his bare hands. And I believe this story. He was a hard working guy. It's ironic, they had a pageant in Stevensville in '42 to commemorate the 100th year of the founding of the Mission, and I guess maybe the state of Montana, I don't know. It was a beautiful, well-presented pageant. They had tepees, and they broadcast over the loudspeaker for the audience, and I would guess a lot of people got over here on a special train and the church people from Butte put up a pavilion, a temporary pavilion for this pageant, and the university professor, I've forgotten his name, directed it. He wrote the script, then he selected local people to read the parts. They depicted the arrival of Father DeSmet. My brother played the part of Father DeSmet and he dressed up in a robe and came in there and they had a bunch of Indians in costumes sitting there in the tepees and my Dad said it was the most beautiful scene he had ever seen. There were a whole lot of tepees in there and a lovely summer evening, August evening, smoke coming up out of the tepees, with the backdrop of the mountains, and he said it was just beautiful. It was well represented. It showed the arrival of the white men represented by Father DeSmet and when they removed the Indians from the reservation and moved them north to the reservation up there. The Bitterroot was their traditional home. I started to tell you about Jocko. They were so successful in Stevensville that Missoula put it on a year or two later. They had it out at the university football field. The scene where the Indians left the valley and went to the reservation was a sad one and... old Jocko was riding a horse and he fell off and broke his hip and he sued the university.

July 16th, 1996

Emily: There was one encampment west of the homestead, about a 1/4 mile and that was called Big Springs, and I also have that there was one east of the county road between the shop and the manager's house.
Harold: Well, at that time there was a slough and a series of channels and ponds and when the Indians were using that as a campsite, there was plenty of wood available and there was a level flat piece of ground and a marvelous stream with all the water was there and that was usually the place where they encamped, at least that's what the old Indians told me. On the land east of the residence, the railroad is there now, that's what they used for their races. At the time the Indians that were telling me about it, the old Indians, a lot of their wealth, what they considered wealth, was in the form of horses. And the brave that held a large string of horses, he was a rich man. And they spent a lot of time racing, apparently racing their ponies. And that was a favorite spot for them to hold their races.
Emily: Harold, why did you move from the house?
Harold: Well, at the time we farmed it as we always did, and we left a 1/3 of the crop for peat? Feed? for the migration of the birds. At first it was rather...? , but after a year or two I had a great deal of respect for the intelligence of those Canadian geese. They have a memory, they can remember where they have migratory plates and they stop there to feed. And as a result we started to accumulate quite a large native population. Previous to the establishment of the refuge we had very few geese that stayed over, occasionally yes, but after we started raising crops and leaving

the crops unharvested they learned very fast, and before very long we had great number of broods that just counted on that as their year round habitat. There were quite a few of these birds that stayed over. Most of them I guess they were called bachelors, they didn't mate the first year, and maybe they were all males, I don't know. Anyway, we had quite a population over here, and only in a very severe winter did they leave. So after it was established for quite a few years, we had quite a large population. I would hope that continues, but I'm a little bit concerned we don't have the feed base in there because there isn't nearly as much grain as there was on the refuge years ago. They won't stick around if there's not feed available.

Emily: When did you sell the house?

Harold: I think it was 1988 and we had a real bad blizzard. That was the year that they froze all the cherry trees up in the Flathead. All the years we had lived in the old house, we had never had the water main from the well to the kitchen had never frozen. Pipes in the house would occasionally freeze but that was no problem, we could thaw them out very easily, but this particular time there was a strong wind, and very, very cold, and the cold seeped in under the foundation of the house and froze the water pipes and we were completely out of water, and my wife (Willie May) was an invalid. My son lived in Great Falls and knew my predicament and he said, "Dad, you're going to have to move out of there and move into town." So he called around and found an apartment in town and the very next day my son who lives in Boston got on a plane and came out and my daughter who lived in California came, and the three of my kids ganged up on me and took all the stuff I'd accumulated in that old house for 68 years, almost too valuable to throw away and not good enough to use, so they went through there like a hoard of scavengers and books that I had and had treasured for years, they just sent to the dealer and sold them. The apartment we had in town was just a dinky little two-bedroom affair, not room for anything. Looking back on it, it was a very fortunate occurrence because there was no way I could bring myself to throw away the stuff I'd accumulated through the years, but they seemed to have very little compunction about it. The result of it is that mother and I have been very comfortable in our little apartment, didn't have responsibilities or cares. So it was much better for us after we moved to town. Of course there was an adjustment for me, I had lived all my life in a big, old house, and then moved to a 2-3 room apartment.

Emily: When did you sell the land?

Harold: I can't remember, '65 or so I think.

Emily: Why did you do that?

Harold: Well, at the time I was kind of heavily in debt. Our main crop was potatoes, and when you have a good crop and a good price you prosper, when the price is low and you don't have a good crop.... So I had to borrow money from the bank. One year I was hailed out completely, I had no crop. We had sugar beets that just barely paid the cost of harvesting and that was all, and we had potatoes and they were all completely hailed out. Then we were flooded out from the resulting flood from the hail, so I had to borrow money from the bank. I struggled for years to try and pay that back. Then we had a succession of years when we had crops, then one year on the 16th of June the potatoes froze down to the ground and that year we had no crop. Another year we froze out again and we had no crop. I was in debt at the time. It was a time when agriculture was in the doldrums, nobody was prospering at farming and it was difficult, so I thought, well, I could get a good price for the land, but I'd rather it be used for some useful purpose. My Dad wouldn't know what I meant if I called him a conservationist, but he really was. He had great respect and love for the land and I maybe inherited some of that. I didn't want to sell it to some

developer who would put a bunch of houses on it. I wanted it to be put to some useful purpose. And Lee Metcalf was a friend of mine. I had no trouble calling him on the phone and telling him it would be an ideal spot for a wildlife refuge. A waterfowl refuge was the term I used because of being Minnesotans?. He agreed with me, said, "I used to hunt there when I was a kid." I've always been impressed with how much authority a United States Senator can have because it wasn't a week later the head man in the Fish and Wildlife Service department came in person to see him.

I'm not sure I told you about how they obtained the site for building the Fort, Fort Owen. Mr. Mead (May?) told me, he was a neighbor that came here in the '80's. He owned the part of the refuge that is on the southern part of the present refuge. It was what we called the Mead ends?. He was a dignified old gentleman. I liked him very much. We used to visit quite a lot and he told me one time when Major Owen obtained the land he established a trading post and he called it Fort Owen. At the time he built holds? and bastions like the regular forts that they put up in the West and the clay they obtained for making the bricks came from the land that was on our place and he told me where it was. There's an underlying bed of clay about 4' or 5' under the surface that's out across under the slough what is now just a pond, I think they call it Pond #2, maybe Pond #3, I'm not sure, but the largest one of those little lakes formed by the dams that they put across there. And just exactly on the east side of that one there's sort of a little depression in the bank that goes across there and I always wondered what caused it. He said that is where they found the clay to mold the bricks that they used to make Fort Owen. I always wanted to go dig out around there a little bit to see if I could find an old shovel or something, but I never have. And there seems to be a conflict about whether that information is correct or not. Some people say that the clay was obtained from a little spot west of Stevensville. I would question that because I think Mr. May was a very thoughtful, and, I think, well-educated man and he seemed to be interested in the early days because he showed me where the old cabin that was old Francois', I call him Francois LaRoux?, and think his cabin was the first built on what is the refuge land now. He showed me that and he seemed to be interested in the early history. He told me stories about Dan Cowl? who had owned the land before he owned it. Mr. Cowl was a lumber man, organized logging operations throughout the area. I did tell you the fact that the Indians used that land.....it was kind of in the center of the Valley in a way and the whole Bitterroot Valley was their home. They liked this part of it, not only because of the big springs, the resource, of course, but I suppose it was probably the site of quite a lot of game, because the bottom land provided quite a bit of shelter for game like deer and elk. Waterfowl, of course, used it, so it had an interesting history from that aspect.
Emily: Did you ever hunt?
Harold: I liked to fish, but I never hunted. My brother loved to hunt and would go on hunting trips, but I never did, and mainly because we had to work hard, and never had time to go do much. In summertime when we'd get the first crop of hay up we'd usually take a little fishing trip, we'd go up either Bass Creek Canyon or Big Creek or other creeks up the mountains. I enjoyed that. Occasionally I'd fish in the river, and in the wintertime we'd fish for whitefish. But I never did hunt, oh, I'd hunt for ducks occasionally. It was a favorite hunting spot for a while for sportsmen in Stevensville. As a matter of fact that facilitated the establishment of the wildlife refuge. And Lee Metcalf hunted there as a boy and knew the area and it was his recommendation that they come to look at it. It was too small to use just my farm and the

adjacent farm and they were able to buy additional land, so now I think it's 2700 acres, isn't it?
Emily: When did Fort Owen stop operating as a trading post?
Harold: Fort Owen stopped being a trading post in 1855. Before that it was established originally as a church. DeSmet came west, and I think it was '41 or '42, and it is a fascinating story of how it got established. You should read the history of it. There were three Indians that had a glimmering of Christianity, they knew a little bit from the Iroquis and the French trappers and explorers who were Christians, had been Christianized. (I shouldn't tell you about it, there are other people who know more about it) But there were Salish Indians who had heard about it and wanted to know more about it, this Great White Father, the Great Father that we recognize. They sent a delegation of Indians back to St. Louis to find out about it. They told them they wanted a missionary to come tell them about this wonderful Father. One old Indian, Ignas is what they called him, Big Face, I think is what that meant, led two other men, went back East, and finally were able to interest the Jesuit Fathers in St. Louis of their plight here, they wanted a missionary. So the Jesuit Fathers appointed a man named Father DeSmet. He came out here, I think it was in '41 or '42 and thought, well, they'd establish a mission here. They had to have some Fathers here to run the mission and Father Ravalli was a Belgian, he was just a recent graduate of the seminary in Belgian, and was selected or volunteered to come out here. He came part way with a pack of trappers, mountain men, came out here with some other Fathers, and they established a mission and they called it St. Mary's. The mountain directly west of the mission they called St. Mary's Peak. This occurred in '42 or '43. They kept the mission alive and they did try to Christianize the Indians. There are all kinds of interesting stories that occurred during those early years. One of those that I remember, that I particularly liked was about Father Ravalli, who was a very highly educated man, he knew when the eclipses were going to occur. The Indians had not followed his suggestions or his advice or his instructions or whatever it happened to be. They'd been a little bit naughty I guess you'd call it, so he said the Lord must punish you for that, he said He was going to hide the sun. Most of the Indians scoffed at the idea, but sure enough the sun disappeared. That increased the Father's incredibility by a considerable amount. And from now on they believed what he told them. He told them other stories...he'd plant seeds in the ground and told them soon they would come up. The Indians in the Valley were not farmers, they resembled more the plains Indians who traveled around, following the buffalo around, and live off produce from the land, and lived off hunting and game that grew from the land. They didn't know about seeds being planted. The Mandans? and other eastern tribes raised corn and raised pumpkins and other things and understood that. But these Indians were dumbfounded when they saw sprouts come up from that little bitty seed. And that seemed to increase their impression on the workings of the Lord. The Mission did not prosper. They did not receive enough financial help from the East. So they decided to sell it out. As I recall they sold it for $250 to a settler in the army by the name of John Owen. They called him Major, but he had no military rank to the term, it was just a term they called the settlers who were essentially merchants who stayed with the troops and sold the troops produce or various articles. He plotted in 1855, I believe, and decided to establish a trading post in the area. Of course at that time the only thing that they traded for was furs, animal's furs. At that time there were quite a few people, a few hundred, perhaps thousands, that came from out of the Lolo ? That was the closest or down in Utah where the Mormons had become established in ? and also the Salt Lake Valley and there was a lot of commercial goods available in most places. So he would use pack animals to go on a spring trip and a fall trip and replenish his supplies and ? And one of guides that

would guide him out to Walla Walla was Francois LaRoux? to help translate. He was half Indian and half white. He could act as an interpreter and also a guide. Major Owen would occasionally get lost on his trips down to Utah near Salt Lake, I think the name of the place was Franklin, Utah, which was the furthest north where he obtained supplies. He'd run around the mountains for a month or two then finally found his way back. So he needed a guide and Francois LaRoux? provided that. I don't know how long John Owen kept the Fort. He finally mortgaged it to a man named McFarney? I first knew one of the original owners of the Fort, a man named Conner?, a Montana man, who bought it, I guess, with advanced money. Major Owen had a tendency toward strong drink, and he drank quite a lot of whiskey and didn't take care of business and finally lost it, moved back East and died there. History books will give you that information. It was an interesting time. I like to read about it, hear about it. The family that lived here at that time was the Brushville family, Elvin? Brushville. A man named Silverthorne that worked for Major Owen married a Brushville girl. Major Owen sent him back to Fort Benton one time to obtain some supplies at their store and he paid for it with gold. There was a rumor for a long time, people in this area wondered where Silverthorne got the gold. There are traces of gold found up Burnt Fork of course. The West Fork has been known to have traces if gold. There was a goldmine one time at Three-Mile. But apparently Major Owen had come into possession of this gold from travelers from California and had used it to pay for the goods that he'd bought from Fort Benton. There were some early, early people that came at the time that the Fort was active. I know of another time that was of historical interest. When Chief Joseph brought his band of Nez Perce through here. That was, I think, in '76. There were quite a few settlers in the area then. I had a fellow named Bill Kinney that worked for me. He was young at the time and his family lived here. He said he can remember going to the Fort and watching the Indians as they filed by. That was on the west side of the river. He said he was impressed by how long it took. They had 2000 or 3000 head of horses and other livestock and he said it took them several hours to drive by. Of course there were rumors about the Indians coming through and how dangerous they were, but actually they were not dangerous, many of the Indians were local residents, and traded with Amos Buck at his store in Stevensville. They had money in which to pay for the goods that they bought. When he (Major Owen) bought the property from the church for $250, he decided the present location wasn't the best place for a fort. The Fort should be located a half mile to the north. So they went down and built the Fort there. They had a Grist Mill, so they had to move it north to where they could get the water power to run the wheels to run the Grist Mill. That's why they changed the location of it (the Fort). They flumed the water from Burnt Fork Creek and ran it over a watermill and they also had, as the story goes, and I guess it's true, they took an iron tire that was on one of the wagon wheels and heated it and straightened it out and sharpened it and used it for a saw to saw the logs. It ran up and down, perpendicular. They'd push the log into it by hand. It sounds a little far-fetched because it's hard for me to understand how they can get an edge on an iron tire, but they were innovative, those early people, they could do a lot of things. I think when he built the Fort down there, he laid it out in the form of a store in a Fort and built those cabins and the church remained here, the present site of St. Mary's Mission. As I understand it, there was a grant of land, 640 acres, that was signed by, I believe, President Grant. As I say the Indians still lived in the Valley, then they moved the Indians out, in '93, I think. But I am old enough to have even talked to some of the older Indians that lived in the Valley at that time. Old Louie Ninepipe was a pretty good friend and he used to come work for us every year and he used to talk about old times.

Emily: All the Indians had left and some would come back down to work?
Harold: What happened was that this was acknowledged as Indian land, this was their home, then in the treaty of 1855, I think, the Hellgate Treaty, all the bands of the northwest gathered together for a treaty at Missoula. They hammered out an agreement. This was given to the Salish people, called the Flathead Indians, I don't know why they were called Flatheads, because that referred to a tribe that lived more northwest of here. By my recollections, an old chief of this band they called the Flatheads, Old Victor, was the first one the missionaries dealt with. Charlo was his son. Charlo was the chief of the Flathead Indians, and there were several subchiefs. Charlo said this was their home, this belonged to them. This was a very desirable location because of the versatility, the lay of the land, the level of the land. The white settlers wanted this land, so they were able to prevail upon Congress to create a reservation. The location of the reservation was to be north of Hellgate. It left this open for settlement. The story I've always told was that it was open for settlement, then the people that came up from the Mullan Trail established quite a little ? there, and there was a sign set up there that said, "This way to the Bitterroot", and the educated travelers, the ones that were a little bit more high class, were educated and could read, read that sign, and turned off and came to the Bitterroot, and the dumb ones went on west to Washington. At that time the Indians were notified that they had to move to the reservation. Charlo said, "No, I will not take my people, this is our homeland". So they stayed here and many of the Indians had cattle and had horses, and in the census of 1870 I was dumbfounded to learn how many horses and cattle were owned by Indians, a few by white settlers. Finally, I think it was about in '93, after about 20 some years, came the establishment of the Flathead Indian Reservation north of us. Charlo finally agreed to move his people. My good friend Charles Amos Buck witnessed the leaving of the Indians. He said it was a very sorrowful, moving, heartbreaking experience. These people had lived here all there lives, they didn't have but at the most a few scrawny horses, a few wagons that were about to fall down, they packed their few meager belongings on that, on a travois, and moved out. Said farewell. And I don't think Charlo ever did come back. Oh, I guess he came back to attend the trial on water rights. He vowed never to return and never did return except for that one time to testify at a trial. A few Indians remained in the area when I came, but they were mostly transients, and were not connected to the land in any way. But the Indians that did come on Sunday, came to go to St. Mary's Mission on Sunday, and the ones that worked for us would sometimes come up here to go to church. They still felt the obligation to return to what their fathers and mothers went to, I guess. In recent years we've spent more time thinking about the Indian culture. They had a very strong belief in what they believed. The stories were handed down from father to son and so on. They had no written language so everything was hearsay, but you look back at essentially all the Indian tribes and they all seemed to worship the sun. Every tribe seemed to have some story or tradition or connection to a great flood. Whether or not that was at the time the great glaciers melted I wouldn't know. Surprisingly, the tribes still seem to have that tradition, that old story handed down about a flood. The ancients, the Indians of centuries and centuries and centuries ago seem to have some sort of worship to the sun. The lodges, for example, always open to the East. Now maybe it's explained because the prevailing winds in this area come from the West. I really believe, I feel there was a worship of the sun. And, of course, all sources of life do come from the sun.
Emily: So you think there was already some parallels between the religious beliefs.
Harold: Yes, I suppose.
I wish I had been a little more of a scholar. I've always been interested in the stories and the

history of the people and whatnot, but I never was disciplined enough to sit down and write anything down, I just was interested. Looking back on it I wish I had talked more to the old time people who lived here and I knew several of them. It's interesting now to look back and think about how they did things. I was talking to Ed Brushville and he was talking about why and how our fences first came to the Valley. It must have been probably in the late '80's, maybe as late as the '90's. He and his uncle fenced in some land east of where we are now, up on the Bench. They obtained the first wire that came in. Originally they had fenced in 160 acres all in poles. There was an abundant supply of poles of course. There were two or three ways of fixing a pole fences, one of which they called a stick and a half, where the didn't stick the post in the ground, they'd bored a hole in it and leaned it on a little shorter stick, creating a leaning fence, then put rails along the leaning fence, and stick and a half was the term that they used. Then there were fence posts stuck in the ground and posts fastened to them. But when they got the wire they established a "corner post" as they called it, raised? it thoroughly, then they'd go down a way along the line of posts set in the ground and jack up the hind wheel of a wagon and use the wheel as a fulcrum and fastened the wire onto the fulcrum near the hub of the wheel and that of course raised the wagon axle. They could stretch the wire so tight that they could break the wire. That was the original way of getting the wire pulled. They used materials that they had at hand. There were any number of things they could adapt to do it. All things even in my time were done the same way my grandfather and their grandfather had done. McCormic came up with a binder that was able to tie the grain in bundles and feed it through a thresh machine. Before that they had what they called a "cradle". It was a scythe that they used in biblical times. Scythe was used to cut the grain, and they threshed it by pounding out the seeds or running livestock over it and let the wind blow the chaff out. That process was used for centuries. They found out that with steam power they could power a machine that could run a revolving cylinder that would knock the grain from the heads, collect it and elevate it through mechanical means to a sucking device, and siphon it and called it a threshing machine. Then they had a binder that would cut it by pulling it with horses, and with traction run the gears to cut and bind and tie up the bundles of grain and that facilitated everything. That didn't occur until the '40's, '50's, or '60's. The next step up to harvest grain was to invent a machine that went along and cut and harvested the grain, put it in grain storage bins with wagons or trucks. And the manner of harvesting hay was done for decades and decades. My grandfather came to Montana in the early '80's and worked for a man in Helena Valley. They built a road up the mountain over the Continental Divide. There were meadows at the top of the Divide with native grass. He said they would leave early in the morning, travel up this road that they'd hacked out of the hillside by cutting down timber. It would take them all day. They had a mowing machine and a rake at that time, a mechanical rake to break up the hay and put it in wind rows. They had a pitchfork and they would pitch it up onto the wagons. They would turn down at night, then they would leave at daylight and get back after dark. This was in the summertime and it was all done by hand labor. And that's the way we did it. We stacked it, we had mowing machines that would cut it down and rakes that would rake it up in wind rows. We'd take pitchforks and put them in what we called "shocks", let them cure in the shocks, then put them on what we called boats, it was just some boards nailed onto some runners and horses pulled. We pulled it on what we called these boats. And these boats had what we called "nets" and was ropes strung on with a ? and sticks to keep the ropes in place. Then the dairy..? fasten the pulley onto it, pull it up to a team of horses and swung it into a pile and we called that a "haystack". But it was all done by hand with pitchforks laid out there. It

was a nice symmetrical pile of hay with a round top on it, called a haystack. Well, that went out the window with the invent of the balers that drove down the wind row and picked up the hay and tied it in bundles on the ground, and then they'd come along and pick those up by hand. Now they have machines that come along and mechanically pick up the bales. So very little hand labor is used now. With the aid of machines one man can do now what used to be the work of 20 men. All this is the result of the Industrial Revolution. A lot of tasks that were done by hand in the factories are done now with machine tools. We call that progress. In the process we've lost a lot of very valuable attributes that the hard labor created in us or taught us to do.