

Historical Analysis  
LOH 78-1915

In this comprehensive oral history interview, Mr. Robert Benson, one of the finest amateur historians in Washington County and a most remarkable gentleman, reflects back upon the events of his life and the environmental and cultural phenomena<sup>9</sup> and their evolutionary changes in his particular region in northeast Washington County. His remarks are not only interlaced with both wit and humor but a number of thoughtful comments on past historical eras and historical preservation projects conducted to note these eras. As a result of his own map-making projects, written articles, and scholarly efforts, Mr. Benson has developed a keen world view and an awareness of the integral role that the knowledge of local history plays in it.

Mr. Benson's character is a composite of many of the traits which identify and set apart the long-time citizens of the county; a sense of civic duty and community participation, a care and concern for the land and its use, and that sense of fulfillment which comes <sup>to</sup> <sup>who</sup> when people are satisfied with one's station in life.

The oral historian ventured out into the watery elements one rainy spring morning to conduct a long-anticipated interview with this extraordinary man. Testing my car's <sup>shock absorbers</sup> ~~mufflers~~ to the limit, I jolted along the gravelly, muddy road leading to his cabin. Upon my arrival, Mr. Benson, clad in his denim overalls and tennis shoes, cordially greeted me at the door and bid me to come in and pull up a wood chair in front of his very warm wood stove. He proceeded to fascinate, entertain, inform, humor, listen to, ~~and~~ discuss, and share with me stories and anecdotes about the events and people ~~and~~ of the county. It is the oral historians' sincere wish that this invaluable resource material generates an interest and an appreciation <sup>for</sup> ~~of~~ the function ~~of~~ local history ~~for its users~~. plays in lives of the citizens of the county.

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## TRACK 6

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- You can  
LM: Continue with your story.
- RB: Well these young scalawags <sup>didn't</sup> hold much with temperance. They figured temperance was all right if you didn't carry it to far. ~~And~~ so they got on these long poles underneath the foundation of the little school house and just as the temperance man would be making a specially telling point they would give a heave and the whole building would lift up in the air you know ~~(laughing heard)~~. So that tradition has come down <sup>to</sup> from us about the <sup>SP?</sup> cowania school which was in Helvatia.
- LM: All right, Washington County is really a growing county. People are <sup>coming</sup> in from all over the ~~US~~ <sup>United States</sup>. How do you think these people can benefit from knowing a little bit of the history of this other county? Have you ever given this any thought?
- RB: I always wondered how outsiders feel when they come in as strangers, to an old settled community and there are so many of them that they practically drown us old timers out. The old timers are just a small fraction anymore. Whether there is an advantage in making somebody else's roots your own roots I sometimes doubt. ~~And~~ not everybody is interested at all. They couldn't be less interested in what went on in this little muddy out of the way valley, a hundred years ago or even fifty. But others, they realize that they have come to stay and their children <sup>are going to</sup> will have roots here even if they themselves hardly have. So they like to learn <sup>what's to be learned</sup> about the traditions here. I can't see that it hurts anything.
- LM: Do you think knowing other traditions can sort of play an important part or any part at all?

RB: Well to some extent, the old timers here were looking for a lot of things that the new comers were looking for. They were looking for less crowded conditions and fresh air to breathe and more room and cheaper land and they were also looking for a somewhat <sup>freer</sup> freer a social situations in many cases. Back home in Switzerland or New England or wherever they might come from there was likely to be a rather rigid stratification; a rich over medium over poor. And well educated over poorly educated and that sort of thing. Where as out here things had not jelled and nobody looked up your pedigree before inviting you into the house and so on. So there was more of a equalitarian attitude here and I understand that some of the newcomers value the West for that reason too. So there are some things in common between the newcomers and the first settlers here, the Swiss and so on.

LM: ARE you saying then that by understanding some of the reasons why the early settlers came out, they can understand their own motives for moving out then and knowing <sup>their area?</sup>

RB: Yes with some insight they can perhaps see into their own, they can see themselves as part of history too, and that is rather hard to do if you are a newcomer. But is true, sometimes you can see it.

(10) LM: All right, another historical activity I know that you are involved with is the Tualatin Valley Heritage. Can you explain a little bit about what that organization is all about ?

RB: Yes I can tell what I know about it. A group of people at West Slope were the begginers of the heritage group. They were faced with what seemed to be a inadvidable "uglification" of the Canyon Road in West Slope.

<sup>\*</sup>  
inevitable

Up until ~~about~~ ten or twelve years ago it was a rather pretty road there with quite a few houses and gardens along it, and some parts of it still are. But then it became common knowledge that the area from 85th <sup>avenue</sup> ~~ave.~~ down to Beaverton was bound to be industrialized and turned into commercial area. Why these people were very reluctant to see the scenic features ~~be~~ completely rubbed out. So they <sup>hoped</sup> among other things to get the State Highway ~~Department~~ <sup>dept.</sup> to make a little park along Canyon Road to save some of the nicest areas. They also hoped to entuse the developer and builder to the point where they would make some plantings and not be so <sup>completely</sup> money oriented as the traditional ~~strict~~ <sup>script</sup> development is. So a couple of these people came over to my map shop, They heard that I had maps and that I knew something about the county. I think I had a little article in the paper about the things like that maybe that is how they got my name. So we had a talk and I supplied them with maps and marked the maps to show the old houses that I knew about, the prettiest gardens and so on. And they invited me to their organization meeting. At first, they were, the whole group was very ambitious and wanted to make it a salvation movement for all West Slope and near by, <sup>of</sup> and they had a very ambitious program going, but when it <sup>bec</sup> came obvious that they couldn't do very much why most of them got cold feet and realized they just didn't have time to put into it. But there was one of the committees, that was the historical sights committee, that committee actually kept <sup>BR</sup> meeting for time after time under Louise Wilson. She lived in West Slope. She is a artist and has quite an interest in history. She has painted some historical pictures as well as modern ones. She has pictures of Lewis and Clark and Abraham Lincoln and people like that. So she is definately history oriented. ~~And under her leadership why we at her committee made several~~

20 And under her leadership, why we <sup>at</sup> her committee made several tours of the valley and got acquainted with owners of some of these old houses and were allowed to see old Indian carvings and things of that sort. <sup>we</sup> were invited into the historic churches and so on. So after some of that sort of work we got the idea, <sup>I</sup> I think it was Joe Wilson's idea <sup>at</sup> first. He had been down to Astoria and had seen that all the historic <sup>houses</sup> houses in Astoria had little plaques in front of <sup>them</sup> them. Little wooden shields with <sup>the</sup> this inscription on them <sup>to</sup> to who built the house and when and if there was especially anything historic about it, why and what it was. So he donated a unlimited <sup>supply</sup> amount of plaques. He says, 'I'll give you the plaque you just do the research and lettering and give them to these people and so it looks like it would help in the preservation idea.' So we now have placed 24 of these plaques. Sometimes as many as <sup>four a</sup> 4 per year, but usually only about <sup>two three</sup> 2 or 3 a year. We placed 24 of them, <sup>and</sup> we could have worked <sup>much</sup> faster if we had been, well for one thing if we had paid help but we <sup>only</sup> had volunteers, <sup>and</sup> for another thing if we had been satisfied with a little less thorough investigation. It sometimes takes quite a bit of looking up and quite a bit of <sup>persistence</sup> ~~perseverance~~ to find just when a old house was built and who built it and whether or not it's been drastically remodeled and so on. But anyway in at least 24 cases we have satisfied ourselves that these places are worthy of being honored and there are <sup>at</sup> least as many more on our list and we will get around to them. The fact that something has not been honored by us yet does not mean that we will never honor it because there are a number of equally worthy places that we will get around to. In some cases we had trouble getting the owners to agree to a plaque for the reason they fear thieves and vandals.

And you really can't blame them. In some cases, the historic spots are open to thieves and vandalism and in some cases thieves are so clever <sup>fast</sup> once they have been inside a house, perhaps as part of a celebration of marking the historical marker you know, perhaps they just mingle with the crowd they have been inside the house, they see what valuable antiques are there. They know where the stairs are and know how to open the windows if they are good thieves and pretty soon the thieves make off with the valuable things. So far we have not had <sup>Thievery</sup> thieves or vandalism. Except in one case, and that was the first house we marked. Vandals and thieves did strike that and that was because it was remote. It was not lived in and we had not our policy had <sup>not</sup> ~~not~~ jelled 100%. At the present time we would not mark any place that was not either lived in or directly under the nose of somebody there all the time. We have a firm policy not to mark isolated places. But at that time it was something of an urgency there, this old <sup>willow</sup> well-old farm the Walker Place on Walker road. It seemed to have a chance of being saved and being remodeled and made part of a historical center provided they had a few people to back up their plans and say that it was really historical so we were glad to lend our influence. But it turned out not to be practical to carry <sup>through</sup> ~~through~~ these plans. So vandals did their work and thieves did their work and at last there was just nothing to do but to tear the house down. So you might say that was a failure of our policy, all I could say was that we hadn't yet tried our wings very far. Perhaps we were a little gullable, but I think most historical organizations, in fact we were joined by the county society. I think most historical organizations would have given a good word to such a good scheme as that seemed to be.

(30)

They seemed to have worked it out nicely, but it turned out not to be practical.  
~~tical.~~

LM: What constitutes something worthy to preserve?

RB: Well, we have a policy that it must be at least 75 years old and beyond that why we require good records so there is confidence in what we say about it. There has to be a very good tradition or written evidence of it's having been built at a certain time. It helps a lot if the family was a pioneer family or otherwise distinguished. It also helps if it has been kept up well, very presentable and so on, all those things count. But we emphasize the historical angle.

LM: Are you looking for houses or maybe other types of buildings?

RB: No, we have had things besides houses. We had a blacksmith shop. We have had several churches. Eventually perhaps we will have things like Indian carvings and pioneer businesses, one or two of those left in the county.

LM: What kind of architecture is most predominant here in Wash. Co. Has it changed over the years, since white man has been here?

RB: Yes at first why there was a type they called the Missouri House, which was hardly more than two log cabins with a passage between. That was popular in the early days. But when they started making frame houses there was type similar to the New England Georgian house, or a Grecian revival they call it, that we have two or three examples of. There is a one and a half story house that is rather typical of the early days. There are several quite similar. There is a nice roomy ground floor and then the second story that is pinched in by the gable roof.

And from the middle of that half story there is often one triangular gable sticking out in the short direction, on the short side of the house. A gable like this one, I won't say the short it would be the long side of the house. See it sticks out in the long side of the house, and is often the main entrance you see is underneath that side gable. That seems to be rather standard for some of the <sup>oldest</sup> old houses such as the <sup>Fanno</sup> Fanno House and the <sup>Scotie</sup> Seofield House which was just destroyed up in Cornelius. Several of them have that orientation. And then after that comes the Victorian Ginger Bread House, There are several of those in the county. They were just carpentry run wild when jigsaw, automatic jigsaw ornaments became cheap and easy to get and became the thing to have your house exemplify every possible style and every possible jigsawing. I think they call it the "~~eclectate~~ style" <sup>Eclectic</sup> Eclectate meaning gathering in from 10 or 15 different traditions. A moorish <sup>cupola</sup> quipala here and a <sup>Gothic</sup> gothic window there and a <sup>SP? Pergola</sup> Greek perguila here and there and so on. Some italian features. That was considered high style ~~in~~ about 1890. There are some of those in the county. At the present time I can't recall the extreme examples of ~~them~~ seem to have been destroyed.

(40) LM: What were some of <sup>architectural</sup> the ~~architectural~~ styles after this Victorian . . .?

RB: Well, we had looked into a very modern house that had been said that it had designed by Frank Lloyd Wright himself. But our architect is rather suspicious of that. He says that is not Frank Lloyd Wright's style exactly. It might be one of his pupils. So using his expertise as ~~an~~ architect, why we are very hesitant to ~~except~~ this tradition that it is a Frank Lloyd Wright house. It does have some of <sup>The Frank Lloyd Wright</sup> his features, very nice and roomy and somewhat unexpected in it's passageways and connections you know.

LM: Where would this be then ?

RB: It is just north of Cornelius. A doctor owns it. I believe he has his offices in one wing, <sup>it</sup> is a very roomy thing. And it is just north of the railroad tracks in Cornelius. We might mark it eventually but first we want to satisfy ourselves, <sup>as to whether</sup> it was a Frank Lloyd Wright house. And it won't be old enough <sup>to meet our</sup> <sup>Criteria</sup> ~~criteria~~ for some time, because it was built in the 20's I believe. But it is an impressive house and it really could be an <sup>outlet</sup> ~~outlet~~ of some famous eastern architect. We also have in the valley <sup>notably</sup> ~~some notable~~ buildings built by famous Portland architects. There is one in West Slope for example. We should really investigate, <sup>at</sup> but we keep just as a volunteer group with half our membership in old age or sick or something and the other half very busy, why we can't give unlimited time to this. But we <sup>really</sup> should investigate that West Slope masterpiece as you might say, various others around the county.

LM: How about some of the more common settler homes, some of the earlier settlers. <sup>Would</sup> they build their own homes then ?

RB: Yes, it wasn't long after settlement here that a couple sawmills started here and there. And so as soon as they had sawed lumber, why they could forsake there uncomfortable little log cabins you know, and they could build a roomy, a New England type salt box house or a Grecian revival or whatever they wanted. And <sup>a</sup> lot of ~~them~~ did too. Their are quite <sup>a</sup> few of them that prospered enough to make a nice frame house. Not many of them are still standing, but some of them are. The missionary Smith's <sup>south</sup> ~~felt~~ that Forest Grove was the <sup>best</sup> preserved as of the very old houses. And there is also the Post House, which is called the century home, south of Reedville.

Which goes back as far as 1854. And then there is the Willow Brook. There is Willow Brook in Tualatin and the Gables in West Union are both very old, and very well kept up. Willow Brook is said to be a manor house style, a <sup>175</sup> rather simple style. It is two full stories with a very wide veranda in front of the lower story only. That is what they call a manor house.

(50) LM: These houses that are marked, are the public allowed to go through them, or on a request maybe?

RB: We make it as plain as we can in our publicity, that in general they are not open to the public. But there are some that are on request. Some cases the owners will throw them open on request, to special groups or sometimes all that is needed is a phone call. In the case of the Embrie House the Gables, south of West Union, there they <sup>have</sup> had turned their beautiful old house into a restaurant and perhaps that was the best thing to do because it allows them to make some money off of it which they couldn't do <sup>so</sup> all long as it was just a residence, and they could make some money off of it and pay the taxes and they were able to get it on the National Register of historic sites, that means that their taxes are <sup>mitigated</sup> mitigated. You see the fact that they have <sup>renovated</sup> mitigated it in a big way will not count against the taxes, with this new law. So this new law is quite a benefit to anybody who wants to restore or maintain <sup>an</sup> their old house. And it also works the other direction to beca<sup>u</sup>se in the fine print of the law, why there is a paragraph stating that, "If you destroy a building that is on the National Register you can not claim the expenses as a business deduction". In the old days, why you could take that big expense of bulldozing the old white

stone of land is completely locked up from any earthly use except restoring

elephant out, you could take that off your income tax. So perhaps that thing wouldn't cost <sup>very</sup> so much. But now it comes out of your own pocket exclusively and so there is not nearly <sup>the</sup> temptation now to remove a really distinguished old house from the land of the living unless it is so far gone that it can't be restored.

LM: How about some of the old barns around here in the county, there must be quite a variety?

RB: Yes, there has been a college thesis written on the barns of Wash. Co. <sup>ing to</sup> as a matter of fact. And this young lady photographed and described at least a dozen rather distinguished old barns. I could lead you to an old Swiss type barn, that has nothing but <sup>honey</sup> ~~honey~~ timber beams. Every beam is carefully humed with a broadax, and it is still standing just as it was built in 1880. That is down in Valley Vista. But I also know others that are just as distinguished and they are no longer around. They had become piles of rubbish.

LM: This might be a more of an opinion than based on actual experience but what did you think of the architecture of today, especially in the housing market. Do you think that will be worth preserving 75 years from now?

RB: Well that is a question to look into the future. It may be that the typical house now on it's lot will be considered a sinfully wasteful of land and maybe everybody will decide that you are either a farmer out in the country or you are an apartment dweller, so that your impact on the ground is not so severe. But a lot of these developments have the maximum impact on the ground, they destroy all the vegetation without any mercy and a good share of land is completely locked up from any earthly use except catering

to the residence vanity. The kidney shaped swimming pool and the ~~patio~~<sup>paddock</sup> for the horses and so on are all just vanity for the people that live there. And perhaps it will someday be considered not quite the thing to make such a heavy demand on the land, for so many to make. I'm not really one to talk because here am I just one person making a demand on all these acres. But I try to make it a light demand and not change the any<sup>m</sup> reversable way.

LM: Do you think there is something that modern developers can learn from earlier constructions and early architecture here in the county? In their future planning.

RB: Well there are lots of businesses including architects who buy an old house and repaint it and <sup>refurbish</sup> ~~refurnish~~ it into their own business offices and it seems to work very well. But as to go beyond that it is very hard to <sup>back</sup> ~~back~~ the current fashion and if the current fashion insists on chicken coup type and houses you know, why it's not easy to go back to earlier styles, although here and there they have done it and as far as I can see they haven't suffered from it. Of course there has to be some changes because the three car garage doesn't really <sup>comport</sup> ~~comport~~ with any of the old styles. You were doing well if you had one carriage house in those days, unless you were extremely wealthy. In that case there might be a <sup>porte cochere</sup> ~~portcoshare~~ where the carriages would pass through the house and go on to a roomy stable area in back, <sup>as</sup> ~~and~~ it is Mount Vernon or someplace like that. But that was only for the extremely high establishment types. And so as I say since everybody over the age of even now has a car why the three or four or five car garage is very much a <sup>SP?</sup> ~~reger~~. It is hard to make that with a Georgian revival or a manor type house.

However I think most architects are pretty well <sup>sensitive</sup> ~~sensitive~~ to the old styles and they would bring them back if they saw a market for them. <sup>There</sup> ~~And there~~ might be a market for them.

60 LM: What do you think one can learn or what benefits can one accrue by going out and looking at some of these houses on the Tualatin Valley Heritage list? ~~that~~. What should they look for?

RB: Well you become sympathetic with the problems with the owners of wood houses and they are, I <sup>assure</sup> assure you that they are major problems because wood rots. But however it so happens that some of the oldest wood in the foundations is very good yet, if they just had been able to protect it from direct contact <sup>with</sup> ~~from~~ the ground and too much weathering, why lots of the foundations are still viable as they say. So you get an appreciation of the <sup>sheer</sup> ~~sheer~~ expense of keeping a house going for a century, ~~and~~ Then you also get some idea of discipline because when you have a distinguished or historical house you are no longer the complete boss of the situation. You have to conform <sup>or</sup> ~~more~~ less in your efforts of painting and <sup>refurbishing</sup> ~~refurnishing~~ and so on, <sup>tackling</sup> ~~taking~~ wings on and so on. Your wings are clipped, you just have to conform you see or otherwise it just looks horrible and only a <sup>very</sup> ~~a very~~ little experience is needed to realize that you see so, nearly all of them have restrained themselves and had been very disciplined in what they had done.

LM: Well we have discussed quite a few things here and I think that is all the prepared questions that I have unless there is something that ~~there is~~ ~~something that~~ you might like to discuss.

RB: Well I imagine that these tapes are frightfully expensive and this one is about ready to come to an end so I can't think of anything at the moment.

LM: Any closing comments at all ?

RB: I have made the county seem much too tame perhaps. It had it's full share of murders, unpleasantness' of that sort. In fact, every once in a while you hear about one old covered wagon settler murdering his neighbor as this judge says in his memoirs . He says, he is one of the first judges here, he says " I was struck with the large number of homicides cases that I had to <sup>adjudicate</sup> ~~adjudicate~~ and he said, in many cases, it was one old covered wagon man who had shared the same cup, had <sup>drank</sup> ~~drank~~ out of the same cup with another for six months while they were crossing the plains and then when they settled side by side on the plains of the Willamette, why one would decide that the other had robbed too much of land and that it was well worth a homicide to settle it. And I could point out several cases in the valley here. One place is called the Devil's Lane where one pioneer was slain by his neighbor over a property dispute. That was over in Aloha, 198th <sup>avenue</sup> ~~ave.~~ is Devil's Lane, where the murder took place. Another such murder occurred <sup>IN</sup> ~~to~~ ~~me over~~ in West Slope and I get the hints of several others. Murder was a great problem for the <sup>authorities</sup> ~~authorities~~ in those days.

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(0) RB: You understand my people just came to Oregon in 19.. <sup>Now</sup> No my people didn't come to Oregon until the early 1900's ah, 1905 I believe my grandparents came to see the World's Fair in Portland. And they were so tired of the hard winters and hot summers of Dakota that is wasn't long before they had sold out their business in this little Dakota town and come to Oregon, and that is the story of many many Dakota people. In fact someone said Oregon is entirely populated by exDakota people, (laughing) I have been made welcome in all the historical groups inspite ~~that~~ of the fact that I am not an old covered wagon descendant and the same was true with Mr. <sup>Mooberry.</sup> Newberry. He was made welcome everywhere even though he wasn't one of the very oldest families either. He had come <sup>from</sup> Illinois with people in 1892 <sup>his</sup> So nobody should hold back from taking an interest in the historical <sup>or something like that.</sup> ~~routes~~ <sup>roots</sup> of the county just because they themselves are not very old family. Because it was at one time an affair of old families ~~but~~ it no longer is. The historical society and the heritage and so on have just as many new families as old. ~~and~~ There isn't all that degree of <sup>clanshness</sup> planishness that one might expect. <sup>may</sup> There once might have been ~~but~~ there is not anymore. So I would say <sup>that</sup> anybody that is interested in history can find things of interest here and would be made welcome. Gradually <sup>well</sup> they ~~will~~ have something to contribute of their own in most cases. <sup>they'll</sup>

LM: History is certainly not a <sup>science</sup> ~~sign~~ that in <sup>the sense</sup> ~~a sense~~ that things <sup>can</sup> could be accurately predicted, but some people can tell just by historical trends just pave the way or show where the future is going. Is that the case here in <sup>Washington County?</sup> ~~Wash. Co.?~~ Can ~~you~~ by looking into the <sup>historical</sup> ~~historical~~ patterns is one able to see the future of the county here ?

(10) RB: Well it is just possible because it took some rather, it took some foresight and some self <sup>denial</sup> ~~denial~~ just to put the Canyon Road in. That was done by subscription of the valley farmers and the Portland merchants. So there has been a tradition of self help here and doing it yourself, going ahead with what seems to be radical ideas at the time. It may well be that some of the recent planning decisions are pioneer ~~decisions~~ decisions in the old <sup>SAN SP.</sup> ~~since~~. And it may well be that we are leading the nation in this difficult thing of planning the growth of <sup>a</sup> suburban area. There has been some horrible results of suburban expansion as you have probably heard around many other cities and it may possibly be that <sup>Washington County,</sup> Wash. Co. is a firm, ~~is so firm~~ in their policies that maybe they can keep some control over the purely selfish money interests, the computer maximization of profits that we may call it, which would devote this entire fertile valley <sup>into</sup> ~~into~~ a leapfrog development <sup>Appalachia</sup> with an occasional bit of instant ~~Appalachia~~ <sup>Appalachia</sup> in between where the shanties could be put, and it would be quite a thing. So it may be that <sup>we are</sup> ~~we are~~ leading the nation that we are the pioneers in this planning matter. We have also pioneered in forbidding development on flood lands. <sup>Un</sup>luckily that <sup>doesn't</sup> ~~doesn't~~ apply to cities, so the city of Beaverton is allowing very dangerous, very risky placement of heavy buildings on <sup>their</sup> the bottomless swamps that cuts through the middle of Beaverton. That is bound to be regretted some day but the present policy can't prevent it, because it is within <sup>a</sup> the city. ~~But~~ outside of cities you just don't build on the flood lands, That is the best way of dealing with the flood ~~problems~~ <sup>because if you allow people to build on flood lands then you have 500 people</sup> <sup>some</sup>

...the land within a very short time and it will be, well they are probably almost irreversibly devoted to very wasteful uses.

That is the best way of dealing with the flood problems because if you allow people to build on flood lands that you have 500 people some are drowned and most of them are homeless every time the river rises. So there is a tremendous demand for every tributary to have a massive dam on and then there is a tradition of dams bursting in ~~Wash. Co.~~ <sup>Washington County</sup> and surrounding counties, so it may be that they <sup>be</sup> building up a terrific hazard by letting the developers have their way building on the flood lands. They followed by sacrificing all the tributary <sup>valleys</sup> ~~valleys~~ to dams. And then the dams burst. <sup>was to</sup>

LM: Along these lines, ~~Wash. Co.~~ <sup>Washington County</sup> is a traditionally rural agricultural area. Do you see the housing developments growing suburbia as a threat to the agricultural area? <sup>of course. So it isn't a very unusual situation.</sup>

RB: Yes, it is very much a threat. You see, the very land that is best for the farmer is also the best, on the whole, is best for the developer because his bulldozer operator doesn't like to work on the slope and his landscape designer doesn't like to work on rocky, poison oak situations. What they like is nice <sup>loamy,</sup> ~~loamy~~ first class farm land, and they ~~destroy~~ <sup>destroy</sup> that for the sake of housing. That's what they like because it is cheapest to do that. And when money is the only consideration that's what will be done every time. But if we look at it from the other point of view that agriculture should be preserved, why then we could see to it that it is preserved if we'll keep the necessary zoning requirements and then the housing will have to go the poor soil and the steep slopes and so on, such as would be used in Europe or any other part of the world except this. Just by natural common sense. But here we have to reinforce common sense with rather strict law otherwise we will lose all the choice land within a very short time and it will be, well they say irreversibly, almost irreversibly devoted to very wasteful uses.

Such as concrete driveways and swimming pools and things of that sort.

(20) LM: What do you think would become of Wash. Co. if the laws were not kept enforced? <sup>Washington County</sup>

(20) If the whole Tualatin Valley would be paved over and developed over?

RB: Well you just have to look at the Los Angeles surroundings, you can see the suburbia going up for miles after mile and in between there are lots of vacant lots with weeds and dead cats and here and there there might be a orange grove still wedged in between the developments. The city takes up far more land than it would need to. There is far more gas waste than driving to and fro. It is waste all around. It wears out the commuters over their lifetime of commuting. It wears them out and kills a certain fraction in wrecks of course. So it isn't a very pleasant situation. However for a few people, perhaps for the wives that sit at home and the children that are bused to and from school, perhaps they are the beneficiaries of the wholesale suburbanization. But even they are chained to the automobile and bus, they hardly ever walk anywhere they have to go. Their mothers have to chauffer them to all these various places of recreation. There is no longer any little wood lots or playing fields <sup>where by</sup> that they can go on their own two feet and maybe explore a little and so on. It is all a very artificial environment. <sup>where</sup> But the main thing is that it is so wasteful of land that it requires so much transportation to get back and forth. That is the main trouble with uncontrolled suburbanization. And it is quite true that the whole floor of the valley would not be enough for the developers. They would not use it all. They would leapfrog here and there as they could find a farmer that would sell at a price they could pay.

They would leapfrog here and there and there would be that much more transportation going past vacant lots as you ~~would~~ <sup>might call</sup> it. And there would be a few little farms making a living or half a living in between.

LM: Has the County Government been ~~historically~~ <sup>about</sup> concerned ~~about~~ <sup>fact of</sup> this back land development or is this a recent trend?

RB: Well, it's been a recent trend. When it became obvious to a few thinkers about 20 years ago that the Los ~~Angelo~~ <sup>Angelen</sup> trend just couldn't continue if the U.S. was to ~~face~~ <sup>safe for the</sup> with a future. Why ~~from~~ those few thinkers the idea spread further and further. ~~It became~~ obvious when you think of it that they just can't be unlimited development all over or we are going to lose a lot of values, including fertile land and natural scenery and so on. ~~So I think~~ in the last 15 or 20 years since then ~~Wash. Co.~~ <sup>Washington County</sup> has become a leader. ~~But~~ before then the philosophy of the more development ~~that~~ <sup>the</sup> better was in complete control, there was no obstacle placed before any developer. People just fell over each other making things easier for any possible ~~development~~ <sup>developer</sup> before ~~that~~ <sup>then</sup>. ~~Since then it has been much different, you kick that shovel when you use it.~~ <sup>Closes up the wood stove.</sup>

(30) LM: We are talking about ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> development of land. When the first settlers arrived here when the ~~Native American~~ <sup>or</sup> Indians lived here at the time, this must have been quite a beautiful area. There must be still quite a lot of natural beauty left in ~~Wash. Co.~~ <sup>Washington County</sup> that . . .

(30) RB: Yes there are places that where you can stand and imagine the old situation you know.

It was not a completely treeless plain at any time you understand. It was never completely treeless, but large areas, as much as a 1000 acres in a piece, large areas would be treeless and in grass or native plants. A 1000 acres here and 1000 acres there and there would be a little runs of woods in between them. So it must have been quite pretty and there are parts of the valley over this way that faintly ~~echo~~<sup>echo</sup> the old situation more less.

LM: Is it hard to imagine what it could be like in a lot of the places in the County? Because of the changes.

RB: Well yes, where ~~there~~<sup>there</sup> has been too much construction, of course it is almost impossible to imagine the old situation. But in large areas there hasn't been all that lot of construction and you could imagine how it was with the open places and the little pieces of woods and trees bordering the streams and so on.

LM: Through the years do you think Wash. Co. has been a pretty good place to live, generally speaking?

RB: Well, I would say on the whole lots of people have thought so. Some of them have even written ~~there~~<sup>their</sup> childhood experiences. I mentioned Mr. ~~Newberry~~<sup>mosberry</sup> and then there is this guy, Lawrence Pratt. He grew up in Forest Grove so he <sup>got</sup> spent his boyhood on record. And there has been several other things written about the early days here. Not as much as you would might think, not too many. A couple of the covered wagon families found a writer inside the family. The Wilkes' up <sup>at</sup> in Banks and the ~~Lanexes~~<sup>Lennoxes</sup> at West Union, they each had writers in the family. ~~Now~~<sup>Let's</sup> let's see if there were any others that wrote ~~their~~<sup>at</sup> life. <sup>at length,</sup>

There was a eccentric old farmer at School <sup>who</sup> ~~is that~~ wrote his life experiences. He came in after the covered wagon period, about 1890 perhaps. But he was a ~~go getter~~ <sup>go getter</sup>. He was one of these people that things work out for, he had the knack of having things succeed, where as the opposite type had the opposite knack of having everything fall to pieces when they touch anything. But he introduced grafted walnuts from California into this valley, ~~had~~ <sup>had</sup> a big success with them. He had a success with his tile factory, so on and so on. His book is one of the most hilarious ones to read because it is so naive. ~~He had~~ <sup>has</sup> no insight, I mean he had no perspective on himself as others might see him. So he indulges himself in all his little prejudices and he criticizes his neighbors ~~mercifully~~ <sup>mercilessly</sup> and so it is one the most hilarious things. I believe there is a copy over at the library. It is called, " Seeing the future from the Past." He thought that if you were an efficient go getter in the past why that would predict a good future for you. So that is the title of his autobiography.

LM: We are of course talking about ~~Fir~~ <sup>Ferd</sup> Groner ? He was quite a successful person all right. ~~alright~~ <sup>alright</sup>.

RB: Yes he was. He had a boundless ~~score~~ <sup>scorn</sup> for people that weren't successful. He didn't have to look any further than his own experience to see that it was all ~~there~~ <sup>their</sup> own fault, just inefficiency and there ~~stupidly~~ <sup>stupidity</sup>. If they had just a little bit of sense they wouldn't have been in ~~sort of strates~~ <sup>some straits</sup> as they were.

LM: Do you know Mr. Groner ?

RB: No, I just know him through his very revealing biography.

- (40) LM: What do you think some of the drawbacks of living in <sup>Washington Co</sup> ~~Wash. Co.~~ could have been? The weather for one, do you think that is quite a role?
- LM: Yes, this severe winter climate of rain must surely have dampened everybody's spirit. Some years are worst than others, when everybody gets very gloomy and depressed. <sup>Then</sup> until lately, until the enthusiasm for keeping the Oregon green and so on, why then <sup>uptill</sup> ~~until~~ about 1940 it was common than not to have a big forest fire raging <sup>somewhere around</sup> ~~somewhere~~ up in the hills. And of course that filled the summer air with smoke. Somebody that has a little poem about Oregon that was either veiled in smoke or hidden in fog or mist. You could never see it because it was all concealed and there is something to that. In the days of the forest fires, why it must have been rather a rare day. It was a rare day in summer when you could see any <sup>distance</sup> ~~different~~. So that must have been a trial too.
- LM: During the 30's when the Tillamook Burn, <sup>the</sup> ~~for~~ Tillamook forest fires were raging did the smoke from those fires reach this far?
- RB: Oh yes, The big one I remember especially. But that was moving behind a strong east wind so the smoke didn't come back this way. But all of Tillamook <sup>County</sup> Co. was black as midnight. Even at noon during the <sup>worst</sup> ~~worst~~ of the three days of the fire, but they had to turn the street lights on all day in <sup>Tillamook</sup> ~~full~~. ~~And~~ It must have been something to experience on that side because there was lots of cinders always floating about too. On this side it was just a spectacle, you could look all along the <sup>Coast Range</sup> ~~Coast Range~~ front there, you know could see these tremendous columns of smoke rising about six miles into the air.

And at the top they were mushroom shaped. They weren't just stationary either, they were in <sup>chaotic</sup> ~~kaotic~~ motion and tremendous turmoil. It was really something to see. That was one of the driest summers on record. There hadn't been a drop of rain since early May, <sup>no</sup> showers at all and there wasn't any in the fall either till November. So it was a six month period without <sup>a drop of</sup> rain. Southern California conditions you see. But those things can happen here, it is a very variable climate.

Well another depressing thing about <sup>Washington County</sup> ~~Wash. Co.~~ would be that there are never have been very many opportunities here for ambitious young people, so the ambitious and intelligent, the kids with real drive and genius had to reconcile himself, <sup>moving either</sup> ~~move~~ in all the very few cases, had to reconcile himself to either to Portland or more likely to San Fransisco or New York or Chicago. I know many cases that the bright kids in my class, <sup>I'd hear</sup> I would here and put them and " Oh he is over in <sup>Washington</sup> ~~Wash.~~ D.C. " or Chicago. Because there just wasn't enough <sup>opportunities</sup> ~~opportunitys~~. Too many of the bright, brilliant young types had to leave or thought they did.

(50) LM: When you mention opportunity are we talking about ~~businesses~~ in the business world or ~~-----~~ ?

RB: Yes, in business and also in educational world and various other things. <sup>Art</sup> ~~Part~~ to Portland had been a back-water in arts and music and architecture so the typical <sup>northwestern</sup> ~~northwestern~~ artists have moved to New York or somewhere else to California. And there has been some of course that have stayed here or have come back, <sup>Block SP?</sup> ~~and~~ There has also been a very few likely composer        at Lincoln City that have come here from elsewhere, that have lived out there lives here, but not many.

LM: ~~Do you think that some of these~~ <sup>Washington County</sup> What was lacking here in Wash. Co. just <sup>Washington County</sup> the training grounds for these artists or for the ambitious types ?

RB: Yes there is really no large metropolitan center, Portland was on it's way to being one but hardly had arrived yet. In those days it was very primitive what I would say. What a ~~New~~ Yorker would call <sup>provincial,</sup> ~~prevential~~ very <sup>provincial</sup> ~~prevential~~ until recently. It still is in the opinion of New Yorkers, but of course with every, you know with every museum and gallery that is opened and every symphony society <sup>is</sup> ~~that has~~ begun and every university that is started, why it becomes a little less <sup>provincial!</sup> ~~prevential~~. So ~~now~~ <sup>now</sup> I would say that there is quite a bit of <sup>scope</sup> ~~schools~~ for the ambitious in the PORTland area and you can live in <sup>Washington County</sup> ~~Wash. Co.~~ <sup>Washington County</sup> if you want to commute, ~~etc.~~ And even within ~~Wash. Co.~~ we have Pacific University which is more respectable all the time. And several community colleges with more and more opportunities, for what you might call the brilliant type parts of humanity. But we are still in a disadvantage compared to the New York area. But New York is losing ground in other ways, <sup>you see</sup> they are becoming too far polluted, Very much crime ridden. The Mafia and ~~The~~ <sup>vibe,</sup> what ~~do~~ they call these <sup>negro</sup> ~~negero~~ gangs, they have a pet name for them but they are getting much too powerful, pretty soon they might be the tail that wags the dog. A lot of people are leaving New York for that reason.

LM: Do you see the same problems <sup>cropping</sup> ~~crossing~~ up here in parts of Oregon here ?

RB: Oh they are bound to yes. There are crimes <sup>etc</sup> and violence in Portland and some of them are spreading into the suburbs too. Suburbs are not as safe as some think. The question whether we can civilize ourselves before we annihilate ourselves.

*Washington County,*

LM: Reflecting back on your years here in Wash. Co, ~~what~~, do you think it has been quite a remarkable experiences, ~~or~~ enjoyable experiences?

RB: Well most of the time I hadn't thought of myself as a localized <sup>individual</sup> individual. I have in connection with the heritage and the historical society and with some of my maps, but most of the time I have more <sup>or</sup> less thought of myself as ~~just~~ as a member of the western civilization. I have spent quite a bit of my time thinking ~~that~~ <sup>not</sup> as a Oregonian or <sup>Washington County</sup> Wash. Co. resident but just as a American or Occidental. But it became clear that not many of my friends and neighbors shared much enthisiiasm for the ~~you~~ <sup>what way</sup> you might call the ~~daughter~~ <sup>broader view</sup> of you ~~they~~ <sup>thought</sup> felt they were being pretty broad minded if they attended an American Legion meeting now and then. So I could see that the place where a person <sup>with</sup> was such broad views was a big city. A person should move to New York City where he can find you can rub elbows with ~~a~~ lots of people, Instead of saying "Boo Boo Boo" to what your saying, why they will say "Amen".

LM: Do you think there is an <sup>important</sup> important for , I think we have touched up on this or ~~alotted~~ <sup>alluded</sup> it ~~to~~ <sup>importance</sup>. Is there an importance to concern ~~with~~ local history or local ~~museums~~ <sup>view</sup> museums?

RB: Yes local history had a tendency to be <sup>trivial</sup> trivial and <sup>superficial</sup> superficial. It ~~had~~ <sup>has</sup> that tendency. If you <sup>have</sup> had the global cast of mind ~~or~~ <sup>and</sup> are used to thinking about national ~~or~~ <sup>and</sup> international <sup>politics</sup> qualities, why you will see there reflection locally too, <sup>It is</sup> It is right there, easy to be seen. But it isn't easy to be seen if you don't think along those lines. If you are just thinking in <sup>terms</sup> lines of personality <sup>is</sup> and little local affairs, why the flow of international events ~~are~~ <sup>are</sup> outside your camp.

But if you are used to thinking of the international picture, why then you can see it clearly enough in the local scene, because the local scene <sup>is just</sup> gets part of it.

(60) LM: That is something that you think people should try to understand <sup>or</sup> realize is the interrelationships between <sup>different facets</sup> all different facets of history such as the tie between local and the state, regional ?

RB: That is right. Of course everybody see's there is a tie and a occasional <sup>time</sup> tie when you wake up and there is a war on or something like that. And then you see <sup>the</sup> the local picture is not isolated from the world, <sup>picture</sup> But the rest of the time it is mighty easy to just think: "Well here we are, and <sup>add</sup> idealic little island and we don't have much to do with the outside world." If you are very alert and have a mind like a card index or a computer <sup>then</sup> you even can pick out in the local scene the places where the international or national effect has a direct connection for example. <sup>right over here</sup> I know here in Forest Grove is the home of the inventor of the gas tax. And the gas tax is swept all over the civilized world you know. But right there was the guy <sup>that</sup> decided that the local people would never stand for a local tax to fix up these muddy raads. But he wanted good roads because he <sup>had</sup> and just bought himself a hutmobile or a Stanley Steamer and didn't like to go chugging along from mudhole to mudhole. So he wanted good roads and he was part of the good roads movement. So probably some kind angel tapped him on the shoulder, some night down in Salem there and he got the brilliant idea of the tax on gasoline. So they <sup>hemmed and hawed</sup> <sup>well well</sup> ~~tried~~ and they said, <sup>almost</sup> ~~lets~~ try it and it wasn't three years before every state had gasoline tax.

LM: Who was this now ?

RB: His name was Graham. He was a state <sup>representative, a legislature</sup> ~~representative of legislature~~ from Forest Grove.

LM: Well Mr. Benson we are running ~~short~~ <sup>short</sup> of tape ~~wnce~~ again and maybe we have time for maybe one or two <sup>mor-</sup> comments. Do you have any closing remarks that you would like to finish up with then ?

RB: Well there will always be a place for local history and all I can say is that it is tied in with other kinds of history to <sup>o</sup>. You should approach it with as much as a broad outlook as you can because the real significance is sometimes hidden ~~from~~ <sup>from</sup> superficial observations. If you dig a little deeper you can find ties to grand human <sup>destiny</sup> ~~destiny~~ as we might call it.

LM: Well I thank you very much Mr. Benson. I think this has been a <sup>most</sup> ~~very~~ valuable conversation.

RB: Well it has been a pleasure Mr. <sup>Meyer</sup> ~~Myers~~.

End of interview, . . . . .