

Idaho Panhandle Oral History Project
Interview with Harold Theriault
October 24, 1979
Avery, Idaho
Interviewed by David Barton
Questionnaire Information

HT = Harold Theriault
DB = David Barton

Tape 14; Side 1

DB: ...area here?
HT: I'd say in the...my dad come before 1900.
DB: Did he come with your mother too?
HT: No, she...we come later, the family.
DB: Have you been living here ever since?
HT: Yea, I have been here since 1906.
DB: 1906.
HT: Come to Harrison in 1906.
DB: When did you move to Avery?
HT: July 26, 1908.
DB: And where had you lived at before...?
HT: St. Joe. And originally from Wisconsin.
DB: So, were you born in Wisconsin.
HT: Yea.
DB: And you say you lived in St. Joe too?
HT: Yea.
DB: When was that?
HT: '07 and '08. 1907 and 1908. I went to school there that year. And the year before I went to school in Harrison. 1907...1906 and '07 at Harrison.
DB: So why did you move here, to Avery in 1908?
HT: When the railroad was building...to be on the ground floor.
DB: Was that the Milwaukee line?
HT: Yea.
DB: What did your father do for a living at that time?
HT: He was a lumber cruiser--locator.
DB: What kind of work was that, what did he do?
HT: Locating homesteaders on homesteads, and such as that; and cruising for the lumber companies, and...
DB: What would the work involve, working for the lumber companies?
HT: Scaling and estimating the timber, per acre and per section and so on, and homesteads.
DB: Which of this country did he cruise?
HT: Marble Creek.
DB: Marble Creek?
HT: Yea.
DB: When did they start timbering that then?
HT: Get the timber out? Well, probably started in '12. '11 or '12.

DB: How long did that last?
HT: Still going.
DB: Still going?
HT: Oh yea. He-he-he.
DB: Did your father ever work as a lumberman?
HT: Oh yes, yea.
DB: What did he do?
HT: He was general superintendant for the Chevron Logging Company, in Stevens Point, Wisconsin. And then he come west for them, and then when they got here, why, he quit, and, and went homesteading and cruising on Marble Creek.
DB: Did he ever work for the Railroad?
HT: Ah?
DB: Did he ever work for the railroad?
HT: No, no. No. Him? No.
DB: How did you get started with the railroad?
HT: Oh, just here in the early days. Started right from the bottom and...
DB: OK. Ah...when you moved to Avery, were did you live at, when you first moved into Avery?
HT: About where the school house is. That was...we had built a hotel there, for the railroad to come in. And that burned down in 1912, and then they built on the location of the hotel.
DB: When was the school built?
HT: '23.
DB: '23. Where you living in the hotel?
HT: No. The hotel burned down in 1912.
DB: But where were you living in 1908?
HT: In 1908, we had tents and a little cabin when we built the hotel.
DB: Did you help build the hotel?
HT: Well, I was pretty small at that time, ha, might say I watched them.
DB: Who were your neighbors in those days?
HT: The only one that was here when we come here was the ranger. And, ah...then the ones building the railroad. But the ranger was the only family. Ralph M. Debitt. Have you got his...?
DB: No, I haven't.
HT: ...data down there anywhere? He was a...yea.
DB: Where was the station at, at that time?
HT: Where it is now, up by where the work center is, there back of the substation in the gulch there.
DB: When did people start moving into Avery then?
HT: '09, 1909.
DB: How many people showed up that year?
HT: Oh, probably, oh, I'd day at least a couple of hundred.
DB: Now, were they mostly working for the railroad?
HT: Oh, yes.

DB: What kind of people were they; who moved in, working here?
HT: They was skilled labor and so on. And then they had Japanese and, ahm...Italians for the laborers; for the section work, and roundhouse, and so on.
DB: Any other kind of ethnic groups move in around here?
HT: Well, 1910 and '11 there was a Geological Survey..ahm...a man by the name of Calins had the mineral portion of it and a man by the name of Blackburn was the surveyor and locator.
DB: I see. Back in those days how many of your relatives lived around here; which of your relatives lived here?
HT: Oh, probably, 10 of us anyway.
DB: Who did that include?
HT: My mother and my brothers, some uncles.
DB: Was the whole town just one neighborhood, or how was it set up back then; were there different neighborhoods in town, back then?
HT: Well, it's just like it is now, I'd say.
DB: Well, there's a person living up there and on this side, and then down below, it's a mile and a half long and pretty narrow. He-he-he.
DB: Were there quite a few houses; more houses back then?
HT: No. No.
DB: Where was the nearest town to here?
HT: Ah?
DB: Where was the nearest town, when you moved there first?
HT: Mean shopping center?
DB: No, just town, like small...you know, another community?
HT: St. Joe, 43 miles, and St. Maries, 45 miles. But there was no...Wallace and Mullan were closer but there were no roads, no connections, at that time.
DB: When did that come in?
HT: In the '20s.
DB: In the '20s?
HT: Early '20s.
DB: Did you ever do any homesteading?
HT: No.
DB: Did you know people who did?
HT: Oh yes.
DB: What did they used to do to set up a homestead; what was involved in homesteading then?
HT: Well, they would locate; pick out their portion of land, their 160 acres and then they'd estimate the timber, and they'd have a cabin or a house, a little clearing. And, that'd be pretty much for me to tell you about.
DB: Was there a government land office around here, to...?
HT: Coeur d'Alene.
DB: Is that the closest?
HT: Yea.
DB: When you first moved here, what was your first house like? The first house you had here?

HT: The hotel, the big one, the bottom corner of that picture, see--right there on the wall. Right there. That's the hotel where the school house is.
(BREAK IN TAPE)

DB: As we were saying before, you lived in the hotel for how long?

HT: That's run four years.

DB: And then, did you move into a house?

HT: Yea.

DB: Where was your house located?

HT: Right where this kitchen is. That little cabin there--the second one up. Yea.

DB: So, that was 1912?

HT: No, I moved in there about 1920; before that had another cabin here.

DB: So, how was this house set up, how many rooms were in this cabin here?

HT: Well, there was one big one to start with. And, then we partitioned it, and so on; and built on to it, and...

DB: How did you heat the house?

HT: Coal. With coal stoves.

DB: Coal stoves? I see. Was there a sleeping loft in it?

HT: Yea, a bedroom. And...had the bedroom right behind. Bathroom, and all that.

DB: How...

HT: Modern house.

DB: OK. What were the dimensions of it?

HT: The main cabin was 18 by 24, and the back part, that we built on, that was about, 14 by 36.

DB: And, when did you build that?

HT: 1920.

DB: 1920.

HT: '22.

DB: What kind of logs was the house built of?

HT: Cedar.

DB: Cedar? And where did you get 'em from? Which patch?

HT: No. No, we bought it from Northern Pacific.

DB: Did many people do that?

HT: No.

DB: OK. How did you aquire it from Northern Pacific, did you buy it through the office here--the train office?

HT: No. It all had to be taken care of in Coeur d'Alene. Coeur d'Alene or Missoula. Of course that's my folks...you asked my about...it wasn't me, it was my folks. It reverted to me later.

DB: When did your parents die?

HT: '44.

DB: OK. Were they living in the cabin also, with you?

HT: No, in the hotel. The hotel uptown.

DB: Who were you living with at the cabin from the '20s on?

HT: Well, I got married in '22. My wife.

DB: Did you have any children?
HT: One boy.
DB: And now he is living in...?
HT: In Alberton, you got the address down.
DB: In Alberton, aha. What was your wife's name?
HT: Frances.
XF: Tell them about...
HT: Ah?
XF: Tell them about the babies and things that she delivered in Avery.
HT: Oh, yes. At that time, well, we'd always had a doctor here but lots of times he was other places...ah...the town was quite large then, no transportation like now, so all emergencies, she'd have to take care of childbirth and anything else, that was...
DB: Where did she learn about midwifing?
HT: What?
DB: Where did she learn about midwifing?
HT: She was an RN.
DB: Where had she gone to school for that?
HT: St. Maries.
DB: Was there a college there, or...?
HT: Hospital.
DB: I see. So, she learned at the hospital? And, how long did she serve as nurse, here?
HT: Oh, she never...many years...Probably, I'd say 20; '22, to '63. I'd say 41 years.
DB: Is that when she passed away, in '63?
HT: Yea.
DB: What kind of a...did you have a garden here, at your house?
HT: Oh just...what would you call them...he-he-he. Little patch of this..
DB: What did you grow?
HT: Oh, you can grow carrots, onion, and potatoes, and lettuce and such as that, just so...And not a very long growing season. We had poor luck.
DB: How about corn, was there any corn?
HT: Corn ah...don't do good here, at all.
DB: How about tomatoes?
HT: We get pretty good tomatoes.
DB: When did you tear down that house, or add to it and make this house?
HT: Let's see. I'd say '30. The forestry destroyed it. They built that road back there, and put in a shot, the trained powderman from Butte, put in a shot, and wasn't gonna' touch the house at all. Just laid it all flat. He-he-he-he.
DB: So, when did you build this house, that we are in now?
HT: It was started, about '50, I guess. Maybe 1945. And, ah...no '48, I imagine. And it was partially worked on, then we completed it in '62.

DB: Did you live in any houses in between the cabin and this house?

HT: Yea. I been...For several years and I lived in the apartment in that building above the post office.

DB: Ok, so that's down across the bridge.

HT: Yea.

DB: What years were that, when you were living there?

HT: '23 till '44.

DB: So when did you live in the cabin here? The small one, this one?

HT: '16 till '48 I imagine.

DB: So you lived in the apartment part-time and the cabin part-time?

HT: Well, yea. We finished an apartment, we lived up there for many years.

DB: Where did your water come from here, drinking water?

HT: The creek back of the school house. The name is Theriault Creek.

DB: Theriault Creek. Can't imagine where that came from.

HT: No. He-he-he.

XF: Ha-ha-ha.

HT: It's a...now I wanna' tell you something else. This town is two miles long and it has eight water gravity systems without using the river.

DB: Is that coming in from the hills around?

HT: From the hills. They even had that in Ripley's Believe It or Not, at one time. You see there is five on this side of the river, and four over on that. Let's see. One, ..one. two..yea, four on the other side. Five on the other side. Had you ever thought of that?

XF: No I didn't know that, Harold. Ahha.

HT: Yes, and Kelly Creek, and Williams Creek, and Parkers, and Roundhouse Gulch. That one saddled the water there. Then ah...the creek back of the school house, the one at the oil tank; Hoghead Gulch, West Avery's got springs, and then the creek down at the landing.

XF: How about that.

HT: He-he.

DB: Did you have any kind of a root cellar here?

HT: Under the house.

DB: Under the house?

HT: Yea.

DB: Where would you take your trash, back in the '20s?

HT: Oh they had dump grounds, an'...we take it there and...

DB: Where was that at?

HT: Up at the east end of town, for many years. And then two miles out later. Then they closed it and put...garbage collection boxes and then they haul it away each week.

DB: How many houses were in this general vicinity, right here on this side of the bridge? I guess, that would be to the west of the bridge.

HT: This group here?
DB: Yea. In the '20s.
HT: One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14. Fourteen.
DB: Did most of those people work for the railroad, at that time?
HT: Yea.
DB: What kind of jobs would they have done?
HT: Oh, machinists, boilermakers, engineers, conductors, switchmen.
DB: Was everygody in the area pretty friendly with one another, did people get along?
HT: Oh yea, it was wonderful.
DB: Were there any ruckuses, fights, or anything?
HT: No. Just school board fights, lots of them. He-he-he.
DB: Was there any cooperation between families, like building houses? If a house burned down would people get together to build houses?
HT: Oh, yea. Yes, yea. Yea, pretty civic minded.
DB: Can you remember any specific incidences, like forest fires burning out somebody's house or anything, and then people getting together to help out?
HT: No.
DB: Were there any people in the area that had special skills and crafts, like..ah, were there any blacksmiths here?
HT: You mean was there?
DB: Yea. Like in the '20s, right. When you...
HT: Oh, yes. Many. Probably 50 skilled men. See, the roundhouse and the repair track used to be here instead of St. Maries--they moved it two years ago. They had a 14 stall roundhouse, and all the motors and the engines would terminate here, and change crews.
DB: Where was the roundhouse at?
HT: Down across from Parkers, down about 2,500 feet west of here. On the other side of the river, on the railroad side. They just tore it down.
DB: Why did they have so much activity here with the railroad?
HT: They needed maintenance and repair. Just like...
XF: Tell 'em about the division point and the changing of engines.
HT: Yea. They changed crews and repair all the bad order cars and then the locomotives from each end would have to be repaired. And...
XF: Also, tell them about the electrification. Switching from steam to...
HT: See, the electrification started here and went 440 miles from here to Harlowtown, Montana. And, and that come in 1917, and at the time it was the longest electrified railroad in the world. Later, Europe surpassed them. And,

they done away with it about, oh...40 years ago I guess. Something like that--45 years. I'm kind of poor on dates like that.

DB: Where were the generating stations for the electricity, where were they?

HT: Well, all of the Montana Power ones, in Thompson Falls. The ah...I think five different plants on the Missouri River out at Great Falls.

DB: Were they all water turbines?

HT: Oh, yes. And, then they also was linked with the Washington Water Power, at Burke. There's a substation on the hill above Burke, and when one was short of power, why, they'd transmit back and forth to the Washington Water Power, and they likewise would feed here, then the Utah Power Company...would feed from Salt Lake up to Butte, and that was another connection.

DB: Was it an efficient way to power the trains, electrification?

HT: Oh yes, very wonderful.

DB: How would you compare it with diesel-electric?

HT: Well, I think the diesel is superior, myself. But I wouldn't want to make a decision.

DB: Where were the blacksmith's shops located here?

HT: In the roundhouse.

DB: Were there any other private blacksmiths?

XF: What about the Forest Service?

HT: Forest Service had a big blacksmith shop of their own. they had...about that time they had a 100 and some packhorses, and a big barn up there.

DB: This is in the '20s?

HT: Oh, it started way before that and then...They probably had a blacksmith from 1915 to, probably '30 or '35. '30, I'd say. No, '35.

DB: How far is the work center from here?

HT: It's up at the big, big building you come by up there. It's on the hillside there. And the main ranger station is down six miles. Then they have another work center, 14 miles south, at Roundtop.

DB: Is that where we went by on the way over here?

HT: Then the Red Ives Ranger Station is up the river 40 miles from here.

DB: Where did people go to church around here, or did...?

HT: Schoolhouse has always been our church.

DB: Is it still the church?

HT: Oh yea.

DB: What denomination is it?

HT: All denominations, ahm...then the Catholics sometimes would hold their own services.

XF: Tell 'em about Dick...Dick Farrell.

HT: Yea, then the...They used to have a lumberjack preacher that toured the whole Northwest. And he would come here, at least once a month. Hold services and ah...

DB: Where would he hold them?

HT: In the school house. And, he was very noted. He was the Billy Sunday of the West. You never heard of Dick Farrell, ah?

DB: No.

HT: Yea. We, we gonna' have quite a write-up in the book, aren't we?

DB: He...is that the same Farrell as the Farrell down river?

HT: No, no. No, he was a pugelist from Chicago, and he took up religion. And ah...

DB: What would he preach about? Did he have favorite topics he'd talk about?

HT: Well, I wouldn't be able to answer that. Just ah...

DB: Did you see him many times.

HT: ...he was the Billy Sunday of the West.

DB: Did you see him many times?

HT: Oh, yes. Yea, very close friend of mine. He buried my mother and my wife and my brother, and married us, baptised my boy.

XF: I didn't know that.

HT: Yeah. He-he.

DB: Who were some of the other preachers who were here in the old days; how did they have preachers? Were there circuit riders, or?

HT: Well, I can't tell you that.

XF: They'd come in on. Didn't they come from a church in Spokane...different churches? They'd come in once, once a month.

DB: Would you have weekly services?

HT: Ha?

DB: Did you have church every Sunday?

HT: Pretty much.

DB: Where would you buy things at the store back in the... when you first moved here?

HT: We had a good grocery store, for many years.

DB: Where was it?

HT: The building that is east of the...the building that stand uptown that was torn down. Right near the...right near the substation, in that empty lot up there.

DB: What kinds of things did that store stock?

HT: General--everything. Hardware, clothing, groceries, meat. At one time we had as many as three stores here.

DB: When was that?

HT: Oh, in the '20s and '30s.

DB: So what kind of things would you buy at the store; what kinds of things did your family buy?

HT: Well, everything that a person...

DB: I mean, other than stuff from your garden I take it?

HT: Oh, yea.
DB: Did you ever send out mail order for anything?
HT: Yea. They done that quite a bit too.
DB: Who would you go through on the mail order?
HT: Bergen in Spokane and Greenough. Greenough was a very big outlet for the whole Northwest, and I think they still operate, a little bit.
DB: What kinds of things would you get from them?
HT: Fancy groceries.
XF: They'd come in...they'd come in on the train.
HT: Yea.
DB: So, you would mail out for them and then they'd come by train?
HT: Yea. They'd come express. Express was pretty good, at that time. Cheapest.
DB: How long would it take something to get from Spokane to here?
HT: Six hours. Four hours to be truthful, but, he-he.
DB: So, if you put in an order when could you expect it?
HT: The next morning.
DB: The next morning. What were some of the common foods that you ate down here, what were some of the common meals when you were working for the railroad?
HT: Oh, I'd say the general line of a restaurant, and...
DB: Did you eat out quite a bit, back in those days?
HT: Oh, yes.
DB: Was there a good restaurant, or cafe in town?
HT: Yea. Railroad run one right in the depot and the...passenger trains would stop 10 minutes for the passengers to have lunch. That's common in the whole country, all railroads done that. You have heard of the Harvey House and so on, well, we had a system here just like the Harvey system, on the southern railroads, and...ah...the first one here was the John H. Murphy system. That was located, its headquarters in Kansas City. Then the Van Nuys Interstate took it over, they operated for years. They had outlets in all the Sears-Roebuck stores, in the...
DB: Now these are restaurants, you are talking about?
HT: You bet.
DB: OK. Did they have good food?
HT: Oh, yes.
DB: What were some of the speciality foods that they--did they have any specialty meals they'd have?
HT: I wouldn't say. No.
DB: Working for the railroad, what kind of clothes did you wear, what was your typical clothing?
HT: Overalls.
DB: Overalls?
HT: Yea.
DB: Did you wear much wool clothes as an engineer?

HT: Oh, heavy clothes in the Winter.
DB: What was a typical day like working for the railroad? What was a typical day like when you worked for the railroad? When would you wake up? And go to work?
HT: Well, I was always in unassigned service. The day and night made no difference. In other shifts, they would have, eight hour shifts and...just like your mines do, or anything else, but an...on the road, I was unassigned services, never knew when you was going or coming or anything else.
XM: Where would you go from here?
HT: What?
XM: To which towns would you run the trains?
HT: Well, I was mostly on the outward services just out of here and over the mountain. But the next terminal was Alberton and then Deer Lodge.
DB: What's the farthest that you worked? What's the farthest that you worked away on a train?
HT: 212 miles.
DB: Where was that?
HT: Deer Lodge.
DB: Deer Lodge, Montana?
HT: Yea. And then 221 to Othello, Washington. Sometimes we'd go west. That's another..
DB: What was your...what were some of the jobs you did with the railroad through time?
HT: First job I had with the railroad was, when I was a little boy, was dishwasher; next one was call boy; then oil house man; then machinist helper; then a hostler; then fireman; then engineer. I was engineer 50 years.
DB: Could you tell me some of the duties that you did with each one of those jobs?

(END OF TAPE 14; Side 1)