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TLSUS 437 - Doing Community History

An Interview with Bill Otto,
A longtime resident of Longbranch, Washington

Synopsis

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Bill Otto was born in Menominie Wisconsin in 1900, the son of William and Wilhelmina (Rickert) Otto. Bill was one of the five Otto children; Ernest, Martha, Arthur, Edward and George. The family arrived in Longbranch in 1901 to join Mina's brothers, Adolph and August Rickert and the John Summerfelt families. Bill grew up in Longbranch in a close-knit community of other homesteaders like his parents.

Bill married Mae Curl in Longbranch in 1921, and they had three children; Marjorie (Hall), Jean (Guttormsen) and Myrna (Bradley). Bill logged, farmed and raised chickens. When Prohibition was repealed in 1932, he built the Maple Leaf Tavern, which is still in use as a business today, as Longbranch Mercantile, a general store. Bill has lived his whole life in Longbranch, and is now retired, but still gardens and is still active in the community. Bill was selected as one of the two Grand Marshalls of the 1991 Pioneer Day Parade held each year on the Key Peninsula, as an outstanding representative of the Pioneer Spirit of America, the theme of the 1991 parade.

Interview with Bill Otto, May 6, 1991

(002) Let's start out here with your full name and where you were born.

William George ...

Ok and you were born...

September 14, 1900.

and you were born out here or?

in Menomonie, Wisconsin.

... Your parents came out and they lived with somebody who was already here, is that what you were saying, and that was the Rickerts?

Yes.

How did they decide to come out here? Did they hear about it?

Yes, to Longbranch? I knew these Adolph Rickerts, they was the oldest Rickerts family. Their oldest son came out to Washington and he was here about three years. I guess he worked in the woods. I don't really know what he done, but that's what I imagine, that's about all they was going on. He came back to Wisconsin and he talked his folks into coming out here. I guess his folks passed word back and forth, you know wrote them{The Rickerts}. About a year after that, a year and a half my folks came out here.

Do you know what year that was, that their son came out to begin with?

No, about three years, that would be about '97 or something like that.

Your folks came out about what year?

In nineteen one.

So you were just a baby then?

Yes, I was, six months.

Were they still using the covered wagons then or how did they get out here?

I think by train... I never, that's what I have in my mind. I never heard any different.

Well, that would make sense, because that was about the time the train lines were run out. He came and talked to em, do you know what he told them? Good jobs, or...?

He evidently liked the country, that's about all I know about it, But what he said and talked back to them, I probably wasn't even listening. (laughter)

I just wondered if they ever talked about it later.

Yeah, uh, hum, well, probably. Then about another year and a half or two years, August Rickert came here and he settled up here on the Devil's Head road.

What relation was August to Adolph?

Brothers...They all came from Germany, to start with, and there was three brothers. Now, Charlie Rickert settled over in the Puyallup valley, I didn't know so much about him. I don't really know if he was one of the first ones, or just when he really did come.

I'm sorry, I hate to make you keep repeating stuff, but...
no!

The Rickerts were your relatives? Otto relatives?

Yes. My mother was a Rickert...There was about ten or so kids in that family, and my mother was the youngest and this was three of the oldest brothers. I had about 25 cousins in them three families The only one, the closest to my age was about a year and a half or two years older than I was ... and they're all gone.

That must be hard, to watch everybody go.
Yeah, uh, hum.

Your folks were, when they came out, did they homestead? Or what did they do?

No, they bought forty acres. They wound up buying the forty acres adjoining the Adolph Rickerts.

You said August was on Devil's Head Road, and where was Adolph Rickert's place? It was next to his?

No, up the Rouse Road here, about a half a mile and then in on the Nelson road.

(100) That's where the forty acres was?

Yeah, and then our forty was the one right in the corner. We butted the Rouse road and the Nelson road and the Rickerts were on the other side.

What did they do with that forty acres? Did they farm it, or fruit trees?

Well, I tell you this, you know, in the early days, when we came here, people didn't want timber land. ... It's different now.

Yeah, it's exactly the opposite, isn't it?

They didn't want timber land. They all looked for a place where they could make a home, and a little farm, where they could get enough land cleared to and they looked for something that had a few acres at least, or easy land to clear...My folks and Adolph Rickerts had a swamp, that was a peat swamp in there, they just about split that in half. Somebody had farmed a little bit on the forty acres and had planted [a] garden or something in there, in that swamp and that's I guess what got him to build. He knew he could clear that up pretty quick. It was pasture. One of the old time loggers that lived up the bay here, they say he pastured his oxen in that swamp in the early days.

Did you say it was Pete's swamp? Was that the name of it?

Well, no, peat ground.

Oh, I see, like peat moss or something...You had how many brothers and sisters?

I had four brothers and one sister.

Where were you in the family? Oldest, youngest, or in the middle or?

I had an older brother and then my sister was older, and then I had three younger brothers.

I wanted to ask you to go through a typical day in your childhood, starting out with maybe, how everybody got ready in the morning, or what the morning chores were, or what kind of things you ate for breakfast? All that kind of stuff.

Well, I started school when I was seven years old.

Where was the school?

It was right up the highway here to Cole's corner, and make that turn and then go down to that, almost where the road divides at Mahncke's point. Just this side of that, that place there where the people have the house right on the turn of the road there, they donated the land to the school. That's where I went to school.

About what time in the morning then did you get up in order to get ready to school, cause I imagine you had to walk?

Yes, a half hour or better walk and I had to be there by nine o'clock.

All your brothers and sisters, did you walk together, the ones that were going to school?

Of course, when I was going to school ... my sister. My folks lost two children between my sister and me, so there was a six year gap between us. They started me a little bit early so I'd have one year to go to school to get used to the school while she was still going.

So that you wouldn't be all by yourself?

Yeah, of course in them days it was different than now. I probably knew more of the kids in that school than if some kid came in here now... People don't mix like they did in the olden days.

That was another thing I wanted to ask you about. How did you get to know all these kids?

Well, I knew pret'near all of them before I went to school. You know we had baseball and a picnic ground and dances. Course that didn't cut in our ... that's where people ... that was our entertainment in them days.

In other words, pretty much all the local families would come to these things?

Well, another thing I'm gonna tell you, if it ain't out of line, when we came from here, I'm sure that over half, maybe two thirds of the people living here were Germans....(197)Here and Lakebay, and we knew pret'near everybody, even at Lakebay, because we had the old German church and the German cemetary. That was the first church and cemetary here and then, late, somewhat later, each community had a dance hall for entertainment.

Were there people that came and played instruments? I imagine there were some musicians.

Yeah, they were local.

So you say you think at least half the people were German, maybe more?

(210) Yeah.

A lot of those people still spoke German, I imagine?

Yeah, sure.

That was another thing you had in common.

Yeah, I tell you, while we're talking about Germans, my folks talked high, regular German and then they talked Low Dutch. They must in Germany have lived somewhere in a low Dutch family.

When you did the holidays, were those celebrated in a German style or did you have special things?

Yeah, in the German, and then they gradually changed over... Kind of a funny thing, the folks with us, when my brother and my sister they talked Low Dutch to them. Then they thought Low Dutch is not near such a popular speech, or whatever you want to call, but the High German ... then as us kids grew

up, when they talked to my sister and my older brother, it was Low Dutch and us kids, we could always tell whether it was them they wanted or us by what language. 'Til I went to school, my folks didn't know much English. They learned most of that after, well, my sister. I guess, I don't know so much about my brother but, my I guess he must of went to school here, I'm sure he went to school here. ... Well, maybe not. He might have been through school cause he was about eighteen years older than I was.

(240) *What grade did people go to, typically, eighth grade, maybe?*
...Through the eighth grade.

Did people usually go on to high school?

Well, that was one thing. I always felt sorry for the kids here. We had, very few had any opportunity to go to high school. They had no way to get to Tacoma. The only ones that had relatives in Tacoma or somewhere else over on the other side. They had somebody in the family that would keep them, you know, and they were the only ones that got to high school, so it was a very small percentage that ever got above the eighth grade.

... Did your parents ever tell you stories about Germany, or what their life was like?
Oh yes.

Do you remember any of them?

Yes, it was tough there. That's why they got out of there. I've talked to other people that came from different parts of Germany. I don't whether the folks lived in one place all the time, in one community, but where they moved away from was in Province-Posen, what's East Germany now. It and that was a poor peoples, they didn't pay nothing for wages. They just ... you just barely had enough to live on. I think that's what made all them people move out of there.

Yeah, especially when you had a country like America, where there was opportunity.

Yes. I've heard my dad mention this a lot of the times. Now, he worked for a farmer and I forget ... I didn't know how much a year, they got paid by the year, and it was only a few dollars. It just amounted to a few dollars for the year, but they got a acre of ground. He said it was good ground. You could grow anything on it, and ... a small house you got, that was threw in with your wages, and that was the only way they could live. They raised the biggest part of ... they lived like I do. I live mostly out of my garden too. And that's the only reason they could get along at all.

(284) *Do you know if there was a depression or something in Germany about the time a lot of people left that made it a lot worse and that's why they left, or people just got fed up over time?*

I don't remember that. About the first guy I remember is Hitler. (laughter) We all knew about him.

Yeah, that's kind of a bad place to start off, isn't it? Was that hard for them, to see that happen in Germany? How did your parents feel about that, when Hitler came to power and all that?

Oh, I really don't remember. I wasn't too much interested ... in politics... But, I could talk in German pretty good and that. I could read quite a lot of the print but my mother used to get German hand-written letters. I used to try to figure them out and I couldn't figure out nothing on the handwriting.

(300) *She still had relatives that she corresponded with?*

Yeah.

Let's go back to the typical day. What kind of chores did you have, if any around the place when you were a kid?

Well, I couldn't mention them all, but I had em when I was big enough to get around and do anything. The first was, between us, to getting the wood and maybe, when you got a little bigger, slopping the pigs, cleaning the barn ... and I learned to milk pretty young. My mother was a milker, and so I got to, soon as I got big enough, I learned to milk and I helped her milk the cows. My dad didn't milk. That wasn't a man's work in them days. Woman's job to take care of it, cows. Of course, my dad was working, out away from the place, all the majority of the time.

What did he do?

He worked in the logging camp to start with and he just worked in the summertime because it was horse logging in them days and unless you was on real high ground you know, it got so muddy to work with the horses that they couldn't work some of the time, so he didn't bother to work for the camp unless it was the summertime. Where he was working he had to work away from home. Then he stayed in this home in the wintertime and he cut cord wood. Most of our land was just, oh it had the nicest, the nicest old growth timber on there. You can't see anything like it anymore unless you go to some park or something... He cut cord wood. If he was already working the ... he got somebody to slash another acre or two of ground and then we, when I got big enough, I helped him clear ground. Art, my brother younger than me, he was my mother's helper in the house, and I helped my dad. Soon as I got big enough to pick up the lines, Dad, he done all the other work, and I drove the team and pulled the stumps and the huckleberry bushes. Them days you know, the old logs that had laid here for hundreds of years, there were so many of them that had to be cut up and I took them out to a pile and then my dad he come and helped me roll them up on piles and burn them... So always try to add another acre of land to the farm.

(343) When you say slash, that would mean you would go in and cut down all the trees and then ...

Yes, the small stuff.

... the small stuff and the underbrush?

Yeah.

And then when that was cleared, you'd come back and cut out the bigger trees?

Yes, we slashed that about in the middle of the spring of the year, as soon as the weather got good ... figured on having that done by about this time of the year, and so it had the summer to dry. You know now they have such a fuss about burning anything. In them days, in all this log, timber that they logged off, the timber was thick you know. They only was the tops of the trees, they was nothing growing under it but some huckleberry bushes and salal brush.

Cause there wasn't enough light?

Uh hmm... In the huckleberry pickers, huckleberry picking was getting good in them days. If the logger that logged it didn't set it afire, or whoever the land belonged to, somebody waited until the later part of August and when they thought it was the driest time of the year all these ... and slashes, oh ...

They were all on fire.

It got so smoky around here. They talk about smoke now. We really had ... if we had weather like we've been having a lot this spring, this heavy weather, it holds it down, but I remember when they had a big fire out from Olympia, down towards Grays Harbor. The first town down there ... they were logging alot in there then and that caught afire in the dry time of the year. You know that smoke was so thick from that fire, I know we were up on the hill clearing some more land. We quit working. We couldn't see to work, there such a smoke layer over the top of us.

(372) *Now, how long, if you remember, did it take to cut a cord of wood then, using hand saws.*
Well, I remember. I imagine a man wouldn't cut over two cords a day.

With two man saws?

Two men would split it in piles. Now we're talking about wood, my dad cut wood and Krausers, the old timers that lived over here ... in them days all the steamers, that was all their transportation, they all had steam engines, but wood burners. You never heard of an oil burner in them days. And he (Krauser) built the big float out here in the bay, and he'd bring that in to shore and he'd haul it down there. The boats, oh even the boats that didn't run in here, that went down the Sound, a lot of them came in here and bought wood from old man Krauser. He sawed and split that wood and piled it and left it dry during the summer and then Krauser, he got a dollar a cord.

A dollar a cord?

A dollar a cord.

The price has gone up a little bit in the last few years.

(391) Now, if you can get a cord of wood for about \$65, you're lucky.

Did your dad sell wood too, or was that just for burning in the house?

No, what he cut he sold. He used to try to cut 100 cords in the winter. Out of nice clear old-growth fir trees. They would try to examine your mind if anybody would do that now.

If they what?

If they caught them doing that now, cutting up old-growth trees like that for wood.

For wood, yeah.

And another thing while we're talking about wood, we never thought of burning second-growth wood. It had to be old-growth wood.

Because it burnt a lot better, is that why?

Yes. Well, it was a little better wood. Second growth wood was harder wood, and if it was good, it was harder to dry too, but if you got it good and dry it made probably a hotter fire than the old growth, but old growth burnt more even.... You just knew every so often when you had to fill up your cook stove or heater.

You probably had wood heat and wood cookstoves and all that in your place?

Yeah, wood heat and wood cookstove.

Did you have a well or how did you get water?

A lot of these people asked me 'What'd you do for refrigeration in them days?' I say, well that's easy, I can tell you what our refrigeration was. We had a shallow well about 18 feet deep or something, and I don't know how many little pulleys we had hanging up over that and everthing that needed refrigeration, we had a bucket it went down in the well right down to just above the water and that was our refrigerator.

What kinds of things would you keep down there, to keep cool?

Oh, butter and eggs, anything that would spoil quick just about you...

Just about what you keep in there now.

Maybe not quite as much... But we didn't have so much junk to pick from anyway in them days as we do now.... Now you'd have an awful time if you had to take home a family's stuff and put it in the well today.

Yeah, you would. You'd have to cut down on some of that I think. Was there a grocery store around at all or how did you get food that ...

I'm gonna show you a picture of the first grocery store.

I just wanted to ask one more question about the milk. Did you all sell the milk too? You said your mom was the milker...

No that milk ... That was the deal, maybe you'll believe me and maybe you won't, but when we came here, the store didn't handle any fresh milk at all. I imagine you had canned milk. I don't even know that for sure. But no. When you came here and didn't have room for a cow, why you had to go and bother your neighbor and get some milk from them.

So you pretty much had to have a cow, then?

Yes, that was, and then the next thing was to get a horse so you had something to get around with, and do your farmwork. When you got bigger, then you was the ... aim was to get two horses so they had a team to do their work.

That's a good point. When people started up a place, what was the most important thing to start with? You needed a cow.

Did people start with farming, did they bring farming tools, or where did they get the lumber to build their houses and all that?

Well, the first lumber I remember was the Lakebay Sawmill. Up in the head of Lakebay Cove, you know. Maybe you don't even know but the old timers... I thought old man Rush dug that ditch all the time, but he didn't.... I just found out in later years that Otto, Lawrence and Oscar, the old steamboat guys, they lived in Lakebay. Old man Rush, another old German, ran that, and they dug a big ditch by hand from the Lakebay Bay Lake down to that mill. It was a water-power mill. I always thought old man Rush done that, but I found out later that Lorenz ... brothers dug that ditch and had that first water-powered sawmill in there.

That was from Bay Lake down to Lakebay?

Yes, right down to the head of the... They even built some steamers right there, oh, I can't tell you. If you're going this back road and you go into Lakebay just before you get to the Lakebay store... On that beach here this side, that's where that mill was, on this side of that, and right there the orchard was they built some steamers there.

Do you know how big they were? Steamers are pretty...

Well, I only know of one for sure that they built. It was probably sixty, no it was more than that, probably a seventy-five foot boat. The average of these steamers that run the Sound, there was bigger ones, but a lot of them were around a 100 feet. They was all pretty good. They had to haul freight and everything.

They'd have to be of some size, just to get everything on there.

And another thing that's interesting to me -- when we first started to farm here, if you raised a sack of rutabagas or potatoes or anything edible, why all you had to do was have a grocery store in Tacoma that would buy it and you sacked that stuff or boxed it and put it on the dock and the steamer picked it

up and took it in to Tacoma. You could sell anything that was edible.... And then when we didn't have Eastern Washington apples and that -- we had everything, it was shipped in here... the business here like the apples, you know, they took good care of them ... but I think the people that come from Eastern Washington they thought it was a little better. I always thought they was bumper apples, because the people that had orchards in, they took care of them, not like now.

Did you have an orchard on your place?

(487)We only had a family orchard. We never settled on them, but this August Rickert that I had here, he bought a pretty big orchard up there. They made their living practically off their orchard. Another thing when we come here that was interesting to me almost all the big orchards, and there was a lot of land that was in orchards was prune orchards, Italian prune orchards. And, down here in Longbranch, there was three prune driers. They didn't sell any fresh fruit, maybe some of them did, but not most of them. They dried the whole thing and they had a market for all of them. But then that was like Eastern Washington with the apples. Oregon farmers, they raised Italian prunes, and they claimed their prunes were bigger and sweeter. And they put that over. I don't whether they was or not, but they put that over, and by gosh the people in the cities began to buy the Oregon dried prunes. Then these guys tore out the prune trees and planted apple trees.... (502)But, whatever you had, if you had a pretty big orchard you always had a variety, a little bit so you had a variety for your own use.

Did people bring those trees with them, or did they order them from somewhere?

Yes, there was a lot of nurseries already in them days.

What did people bring with them to set up a place? Did they bring farming tools and that kind of stuff? I would think if you're coming by train you would be limited in what you could bring.

No, I think they bought it all in Tacoma. They had several implement places.

So you'd have to bring some money, is what you'd have to bring.

Yeah.

How much do you think it would cost to get yourself started?

Oh, that's kinda hard to say, because they didn't ... this was a long drawn-out ... they didn't do ...

Right, but just to get yourself going, not with everything that you need, but just to get some kind of a basic ...

Gosh, I ... things didn't cost like they do now. You could buy the best kind of a milk cow for \$40, and a good horse for \$100.

How about lumber? Do you remember anything about what that cost?

Well, that was cheap in them days. This Rush, he didn't have a planer, everything was rough-sawn, but he was an old German planer, and you know, these foreign people, when they done a job, they done, they tried to do the best work. Old man Rush he was awful good that way. He sawed that lumber so even you know ... didn't hardly make it ... didn't need planing. Course it needed planing when you wanted to use it for finish, but didn't use no lumber for finish much.

The main thing was just to get something up.

Yeah.

You think that idea was really strong then, among all the early settlers, that idea that you do the best job you can?

Yes. I can remember as a kid the dock was about the same as it now down here in Longbranch. In the fall of the year when the fruit was ripe and all the winter vegetables were going to Tacoma, there was a pile of freight there like a small house. They ... started up at Allyn picking up this freight and passengers clear into Tacoma. Another thing I wanted to mention too, in them days the fastest you could go to Tacoma unless you had a boat of your own or something, was two days. Boat went in one day and you stayed overnight and come back the next day.

That freight run, it started in Allyn? And then where else did it stop, when it went around?

All down the shore on both sides. Pret'near everybody along the front had floats. There was lots of cedar logs here in that time. They all built, and when they stopped at all these floats in the fall of the year ... they had them big steamers and what most of them used ... if they could find a old big worn out cast-iron motor, that was for anchors you know. Them big steamers, especially when they got a load aboard, they had to slow down so far, otherwise they'd take that float right along with them. If they done that, in a few months there, their float would leave home. I know at night here when they were on the way down they unloaded here. They trucked feed and supplies for an hour or so - three men with trucks. They had a winch on the boats that pulled them and they had a slip going down where they come up with the truckload and they had about three guys trucking just as fast as they could go.

That must have been something a boy would be really interested in watching.

That's where we spent our evenings in the summertime, watching the boat run down here and go down and see who'd been to town.

Right, and what happened. And did they bring stuff in to as well.

Oh, yes.

Probably just about everything - how did people order things? To have delivered? Or did people just go to stores for the stuff the steamers brought in.

Oh, no anything you bought, it came, came addressed to you...and they put it in there. Same way going back. I know a few times when I was a kid and went in I used to stay down when they got to town, to see 'em start unloading. The captain had a list of his freight he had on and if you was shipping stuff in, he had the phone numbers in there and he stopped and called up all them, and if you stopped and stayed awhile, here come the horse and wagons down to pick up their freight.

So everybody pretty much had phones by then?

Not here, but on the other side.

On the other side. Yeah.

Oh, and another thing maybe is interesting to you, maybe you know about or read about Old Tacoma.

Uh, hmm, I have read about Old Tacoma.

(570)That was the main town. There was hardly nothing where Tacoma ... there wasn't much there until they built the municipal dock, the eleventh street dock. Then Tacoma began to grow.... I remember Tacoma when they had a few businesses right along the water and a few houses, just scattered, back to where the steeper side hills started, there was nothing but timber and woods up there.

And how often did you go into Tacoma when you were smaller?

Oh, not very often. (laughter)

And what would be the reasons for going?

Well, I'll tell ya, my dad used to have to go in. He sold pork and veal and shipped it into them, whoever shipped them, we shipped most of our groceries to Johnson Brothers store on the dock in old Tacoma. But they didn't mail you a check like they do now. Well, it wasn't much shipping anyway, it was cash in them days. You had to go in and collect it for yourself, so you had to make a trip once in awhile to get your money. My dad used to take me quite a lot. I used to get to go to town. And then to stay overnight, people didn't have any extra money to spend for a hotel room, so this uncle of mine, when they lived out on Wallis(sic) Road, about 68th and Waller Road. We went in and down Puyallup Avenue, to the Indian school and then through the school grounds and a trail over to where the road comes around from Puyallup and this Tacoma met there. We got on the county road, at the Indian school. It was just a trail through the woods to walk in and we walked clear out there and stayed at night, and then we had to get up early to catch the boat.

To get all the way back.

But, in the fall too, you didn't have to be in any hurry, when people sold their stuff in the fall. My folks, they put in a winter supply of most of their groceries, flour and sugar and if you didn't have your own lard and all of them kind of things.

Speaking of the Indians, were there still Indians in this area when you were growing up?

(597) Not much. The only thing I remember of Indians here was on Madrona Point. They used to come out in the fall of the year and they would pick huckleberries and they dried them in the sunshine. I think them Indians came from Nisqually. There was a tribe at that days at Nisqually. They never had a tribe here, and on this other cove here, on the Devil's Head road, there was a big pile of clam shells there. They said that was where the Indians came and dug clams and done the same thing there. They cleaned them and dried them in the sunshine.

(609) *So, they rowed across, is that what they did? They came across from the other shore?*

Well, I really don't know.

Okay. But as far as you know...

If they came from Nisqually, they must of had a boat of some kind.

Yeah, cause they were over in the Puyallup area, the Nisquallies.

...Yeah, No. It's over here between Tacoma and Olympia, right off the end of Anderson Island.

Right, right, right. That's right.

Just about straight over in this direction. So it wasn't so far in here by boat.

Yeah. Well, did you ever, did they ever talk with white people or did they just come and ...

Well, I don't know, I was pretty small then. And I didn't talk to strangers in my young life.

Is that what your parents told you not to do?

No, well, I never had a nerve enough to walk up to somebody I didn't know. Just wasn't out of the habit.

Maybe you were just a little shy.

Now in my older days if I don't have nobody to talk to, or if somebody's standing around and doing the same thing I am I go over and talk to them. And I met several different people that was really interesting. ... When the Lorenz brothers was here, there was Otto and Lawrence and Oscar. Oscar was an engineer and Lawrence and Otto were captains and one of them, either Otto or Lawrence, was married but they were both married, but only one raised a family, and I thought they had about five kids. We used to mix with them Lorenz kids and anyway one day I went down since the restaurant was open, I walked down and got lunch on Sunday then I pack my groceries up from the store, so I went to the store to get these few groceries and when I got in there, gosh, here was a bunch of people in the store and there was only one woman to wait on em, so I was standing there, and pretty soon a guy came in and he went over and got the Sunday paper, it was on Sunday morning and then he come back and stood so I walked over and started to talk to him. By gosh, we got talking about the old steamboats and then finally I mentioned some of his relations' names and he says, do you remember the Lorenz brothers? I said, sure, I remember them and I can remember one of them had kids. He told me what his name was, but I don't remember what it was and anyway I said, well do you live around here? And he said sure, I live down in Taylor Bay eleven years. I never happened to meet him before. If that'd been twenty to thirty years before that I'd a met him because you met everybody them days.

In your childhood, what stands out as your favorite thing to do or the best time of your childhood?

Oh, I don't know. In the summertime, baseball was one of our biggest ... every place along the line here had a baseball team.

Really, I didn't know that. And they played each other?

Well, now, we'll start from the start that I remember of. They had quite a lot of young guys here. You know people had families in them days. The first I remember of a ball game the Old Simonson place which is Mark Chopps now. We owned it at one time. We lived there three years. They had a big hayfield there and a hop field in the early days. These guys were looking for someplace, but they couldn't play baseball 'til after the farmers mowed their hay in the spring. They played in Simonsen's field. I was too small to get up there and see it.

What time of year did they mow the hay?

About the end of June...Then they didn't have no teams to play and the whole bunch of them got together and done like the school kids you know. You choose up sides and then somewheres they quit out there or had to quit or something. Then they moved up in the Adolph Rickerts field and that was the same deal. Us kids, we could go out in the yard by the house and watch them play ball. We always used to go out there in time so we could see them choose up sides.

You've mentioned several times about people and how people met each other more. What's the biggest difference that you see between how people get along then and now?

I can tell you pretty good on that. In the early days, if there was a few houses, some places had pret'near as many as they have now. A few houses around, and not very often a place sold either. But if it did and we got somebody new moved in, if I was a neighbor and maybe two or three neighbors in the neighborhood - If one of them couldn't go and meet them people, somebody else did. They went and met these people and then they went around house to house. That's the only way you had of distributing and telling - and before them people were there a few weeks, everybody knew their names and how big a family it was and all about them. So you got acquainted much quicker than you do now.

Yeah, people don't do that at all anymore.... Now what about when people had illness or hard times? Was there a lot of sharing between people?

Well, they helped people, uh-hmm. Not in a big way but you know even kids, it didn't take half as much to raise kids them days. Oh, half, what am I talking about.

Yeah, that's right. It was a lot simpler to take care of all that stuff. Would you say then that people were pretty well off or struggling or?...(737)

(741)No...they had plenty...[(741 - 772) descriptions of pictures owned by the interviewee & misc. conversation deleted] (773)Now that picture was taken in 1909 ... they had the baseball grounds about 200 feet from here, right over south of here. Old man Pete ... place. He let them have the land. My dad cleared the first ball grounds we had in Longbranch.

Did he like to play baseball too?

Uh, hmmm. I should have been in this picture. I was the waterboy in them days. I thought I was older than that, but maybe it was after this picture. Do you know the Watsons? Live over across the bay over here? This is Mrs. Watson... Where's Fred Rickert here. I thought he was sitting down. Oh, for gosh sakes. Al Rickert. At the time this picture was taken, when all the Rickerts were on the job to play ball on Sunday, there was eight Rickerts on the team, of these two Rickert families we were talking about, and the umpire, to top it all off, was a Rickert! ...(809)In this picture, two of these here Rickerts, swamp Rickerts they used to call them, when they got up, their oldest sister married a guy that had a print shop in Tacoma, done a lot of printing work. When Al and Heine, they were the ones that played ball, when they got old enough he took them in there and taught them the printing business. At this time, one of them worked for the P.I. in Seattle and the other for the Seattle Times, so you know that was quite a trip to get over here every Sunday to play ball. I know as a kid, I hated it when they said they couldn't make it this weekend, cause they were two real good players. [(826 - 846) picture descriptions & misc. conversation deleted.]

(847)George Meyers was logging down in Whitman's Cove and when I was a kid I rode my bike down there and watched them log. I stayed there til they quit. Old man Meyers ran the camp. I got my bike out ready to make it for home before it got dark and he says Oh, he says, you're hungry. Come in and get a bite to eat, so I went in. After we were all sitting around the table inside she came in and she says, Bill, eat every bean and pea on your plate. (laughter). I never forgot that.

You didn't know what to do.

I didn't say a word.

[(863-869) more picture i.d. deleted]...

(872)That was Harry Shelgren, oldest boy of the Shelgrens that were old-timers, some of the first that settled in Longbranch. They had the property right by the dock down here. Ellen Shelgren...the old man run the post office, in fact he's the one that got our first post office...[(874 - 888) misc. conversation and picture descriptions deleted]

(889) ... that would be Bill Rickert's brother, the umpire. He was a good umpire... When we played baseball out here, a lot of our baseball players came from Tacoma. And in Tacoma then, McCormick Brothers Department Store and Rhodes Brothers, they were the two main stores in Tacoma. McCormick Brothers came out on Sunday, had a big steamer and was that thing loaded to the brim with people. I was down there to see it come in. I was just a kid, but I made a guess at around 250 to 300 people on that boat. It was just jammed. About half of them men on that thing ... they must have had a lot of booze aboard ... they were drunk. From home to first, we already had a railing up to hold the spectators back but on the other side, on the third base side, they had a sack of lime there and before the game they

... out and you were supposed to stay back, but these guys were feeling so good you know. They were rooting to beat anything and when McCormick had done something to help them you know, oh they crowded in. Otto, he shooed them back over the line and pretty soon they wouldn't shoo so easy. It got harder and harder. Pretty soon he couldn't get them back off that ... Old Bill Creviston was playing center field and he was a guy ... he didn't pick fights, but if somebody got out of control, like when they were drinking or something, boy Old Bill, he'd sober em up. He came in, I seen him on center field. He took off his hat and his glove and threw down and he came in from center field. And this whole line there maybe 50 men standing along, and he went down the line, and he didn't hold his punches. He punched 'em right square in the nose and he went about maybe twenty people like that, and then they all started backing up... When he left, after they tried to pull together I heard oh a dozen or two of them say Gee, that god-damn rancher can hit hard. (laughter). Boy they stayed back of that ... that cleared the baseball grounds.

That shooed them, huh? Did they have a team name or something, is that what the letters on the shirts are?

Longbranch. Yeah, that was pretty classy. That was the first organized baseball team in Longbranch. Yes. Snazzy...[(948-001) misc. conversation and picture description deleted]
(002) (showing picture) There's our school house.

Oh, look at that. That was the school ...

A lot of people say to me, why you didn't have many kids in the school and I think that this year, when I started school, this was the first part of the school the old school, one room. I went three years in this one room school then they added another room and they put in another teacher, and then they, instead of just taking through the eighth grade, they took through the tenth.

So one teacher taught all these kids?

...This is a picnic at the end of the school year and there's quite a few folks there, but right around this time, we had 88 kids in our school.

And that would be ... there was no kindergarten. That would be first through eighth grade.

Yes, No, first through tenth grade. Oh, this was already the tenth. Here I am and my pal Bert Watkinson. Where he was I was.

Oh, yeah? What did you and Bert do together?

...I'm going to show you something. Now, this was a beautiful [trophy] cup when we won it. We won this at the Puyallup Fair, I think, I'm sure 1915, it might have been '16, but I think it was '15. It was the last year, I was out of school when we got this...[038- 058 deleted]

What positions did you guys play on the team?

I played first base and Bert Watkinson was our pitcher, that's how we... we won the championship on the Peninsula part of Pierce county and Eatonville won on the other side ...We had a cinch. Bert Watkinson had the most darn speed for a kid baseball player. When we played the championship game, that wasn't a school like we had all sizes, had big kids to pick from like Bert Watkinson and I and Tom Bannon we were pretnear full grown. Bert had the most damn speed and control. I used to catch him most of the time. I don't know why I was playing first base that day. Oh, John Schultz was there. He was the regular catcher. He ... caught a game we played in Tacoma, it was right across the street from the courthouse. We played a game and that was small kids. I sat down on my knees and caught the ball, them kids was scared to stand up to the plate...This day I played first base and ... I think the Puyallup Fair opened up in 1911 or 1912. All they had there was one small grandstand. It was hay land, I guess,

before that. It was mowed, but it had a good crop of grass on it ... and oh did it pour. I was on first base and about the first guy that got up, he knocked a fast grounder to me and it was a spinner. When it got about four feet from me, that water hit me in the face, and I don't know, the ball went to the outfield, I guess, but.. and did we get wet...We played about five or six innings. I know we had eight runs and I think they had one or two and Eatonville gave us the game, and so we quit playing. I can't think to this day, I've thought of it a lot of times, whether we stayed at the fair the rest of the day in those soaking wet clothes or whether... or not. I'm sure we didn't figure on a rain like that and we didn't take extra clothes.

What month of the year was this, do you remember?

September.

(100) It can do that sometimes. Were you friends with Bert then from the time, what are you here, about a third or fourth grader?

I think this was taken in 1909... Bert was the same age I was and we were in the same grade all the way through school...Bert just kept getting better and better, more speed and more speed and when they played up here he was pitching a game. Fred Rickert was the same kind of a pitcher. He was a speed pitcher too. Control. Both of them had almost perfect control. They could throw the ball right where they wanted it to keep the guy from hitting it. Bert pitched a ball and he hit the guy in the head with all that speed. That guy went down, I still see him go down. I was standing there close by... It took them quite a while to bring him to and Bert never pitched another game.

Hm. Cause he felt so bad. That's too bad...

[looking at school picture] Can you see a guy there standing in the swing, hanging over there?

Yeah.

That's Ray Meyer, our ... used to be our neighbors. They had the Longbranch store. They came here when they bought the Longbranch store. They had six kids soon after they were here. Whether they had six kids when they came here I don't remember, but they had just a little bit of store and the whole family, eight people lived in there and had the store.

That's the Longbranch store down here?

Yes ... The old house at that place used to be down at the head of the bay. My wife's folks rented that place and one of the old-time loggers, Shedrow, built that place. They had a big house on it. The bay is right out here... (to 157) and where this house was, the road went down there and ... branched like this ... there was a bridge going toward Lakebay you had to cross, and then a bridge to get across the cove and there was ... three wooden bridges you had to cross. And us kids were there one day, that was when I was pretty good-sized, I had a bicycle already. Sunday I guess it was. There was a bunch of us kids. Lena Hansen lived up above there. I think maybe she borrowed my bike. I know she didn't have a bike. Pretty near all the kids had bicycles. There was quite a steep hill and she went up and she couldn't ride very good and she came down the hill and she didn't use the brake. She tried to make that turn offa that bridge onto this one. I was standing right there and the bicycle went out from under her and she went under the railing and her legs were ... back and there she was right at my feet. I thought sure she was going over and I didn't use my head. I put my two feet and stood on her two legs and held her 'til I got help. I think if I hadn't done that, she wouldve ... the tide was in ... whether she'd have made it, whether we'd got her out.

Lucky you were there.

I never thought of that for years, but I think that's one time I saved somebody... This is the calendar we had when we had the store, an aerial picture ... The road used to come straight up from the dock, then when we got cars that was awful steep and they built it down the other way... (231) Now, this [picture] was taken in 1912, I believe. Fred Curl, Pat Curl's older brother took this from a rowboat ... now we was talking about the store. See the size of the warehouse they had in them days, and this was the grocery part up here... They needed a lot bigger building for the feed and that kind of stuff than they did for a store... This is the Stewart house right down here... It was a nice place. I was just a kid but I always thought it was the nicest place in Longbranch at that time. They had three kids. I used to put in a lot of time with them when I could get away from working... They had a boat house down on the bay down there. A nice big boathouse, with a dressing room for the women and the men and a lot of boat compartments and they had rowboats and canoes and we used to go down there swimming in the summertime...

(252)Is a lot of the timber already gone here? ... [(253-263) discussion of original location of Longbranch church deleted]

(264)Yes. I cleared part of this field up here in front of the house[in the picture]... I carried water from the ball grounds. I had a trail over here and I had to climb a rail fence to get over and then I went down. The well was right below that with an old-fashioned iron pump and Stewarts had a metal tank. They pumped the water into that tank and then they had gravity down to the house. That's where I got the water...

[(275 - end) - picture of Grapeview post office]