

RUBY CANFIELD WHEELER
First Interview

Interviewed by:
Laura Schragger

Oral History Project
Latah County Museum Society

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I. Index

RUBY CANFIELD WHEELER

Harvard; b. 1893

Homemaker

1.8 hours.

minute page

Side A

- 00 1 Father lost part of his land during depression. People visited for 2 or 3 days. Box socials and school programs. Chambers Flat and Harvard schools shared school term. She used to get excused from school and play hookey in the woods.
- 06 1 Chores around the home. Separating milk from cream. Cellar to let milk sit in. Mother got 10¢ a pound for butter in Palouse. Playing on hill. Skating all winter, every night and all weekend. Dam near Harvard to help them float logs down to Potlatch. Boys chasing them fall in the water. Tabogonning. Only one married man used to come to skate.
- 16 3 Princeton was the only nearby town - store, couple of salons, dance hall, hotel. Halfway-house between Palouse and Hoodoos. Chinese coming through. Some white men killed 5 or 6 Chinese miners one night.
- 19 4 Bachelor miners. Billie Duff and Charlie Wagner. Johnny English, a Frenchman. One old man chewed tobacco and laid it on the fireplace.
- 21 4 Camping on river. Huckleberrying and fishing. Stayed 3 days to a week. Scared at night. She slept by tent door with an axe. Put wash tub in creek and filled it with berries. Huckleberry wine.
- 27 5 Went horseback riding all Sunday in the woods. Sister knocked unconscious and didn't come to for 3 or 4 days. Parents would go away now and then; children knew how to take care of themselves. Mother made all her soap.

Ruby Canfield Wheeler

minute	page	
Side B		
00	6	Mother's cooking. Boarding men; mother cooked all the time. Camp near Harvard when building railroad. Men lived in tents. Father delivered milk.
03	6	Naming of Harvard by her father.
05	6	Early businesses in Harvard. French lady ran a boarding house. Boy hired to keep cattle from walking down railroad track into the field. Many of the loggers came from the East. Some came with their parents.
09	7	Built up Harvard quickly. Three story hotel. Loggers stayed overnight on way to camps. Whittaker - Steele store. No saloons. Father opposed drinking. Drunk men pulled off train to sleep it off on Harvard railroad platform.
14	8	4th of July celebrations. Wagon floats. Played for dances since age of twelve. Had only 6 piano lessons. Went up to Bovill every Friday night to play. Fights at the dances, usually caused by drinking.
22	9	Indians digging camas in her front yard. Sale days at the Merc in Potlatch were a celebration. Once they gave a prize for the heaviest family. Mother kept her shotgun nearby when her father gone. Shot at a neighbor's bull to get him to go away.
28		Father logged his own place. At first with oxen. Didn't need much money in the old days. Grew mainly oats - some wheat. Ice house - cut ice on the river and buried it in sawdust.
Side C		
00		Enamel ice box and pan to catch water. The REA. Father used to say "everything came to him." Used to be solid timber around Harvard. Parents when newlyweds went to cabin by Harvard. Mother took a clock with her.
04		Father went to California when 19, worked on railroad. Could have bought Spokane for \$5. A staunch Republican; in the state legislature in '18 and '19.

X

Tape 201

Ruby Canfield Wheeler

minute page
Side C (continued)

08 During WWI couldn't buy white flour, couldn't
bake anything decent, couldn't make bread. Prices
high. Mother made delicious sourdough biscuits.

10 Steffens said to have wanted to kill Sheriff Joe
Collins after killing Dr. Watkins.

14 Harvard and Princeton kids fought over ball games,
but were good friends otherwise. Father, as
manager, once had a team that whipped the county.

(17 minutes)

with Laura Schrager

II. Transcript

RUBY WHEELER:

RW: You'd make a real fancy box and decorate it all up with pretty flowers and everything, and then the men would bid on them and buy them. And whosever name was in it, that's the one they ate their supper with, the lunch, that was in the box. You never heard of those?

LAURA SCURABELL:

LS: No, I've heard of them, but I never heard of them being around here.

RW: Oh yes. We used to have them real often.

LS: Was that just for single people or was it...

RW: Oh, everybody went.

LW: So your could get stuck with a sixteen, I mean a six year old girl or (laughs)

RW: Yes. It didn't make any difference. Nobody cared in those days. You was just there for fun. And they had their programs, Christmas programs and things like that. That was a long time before the railroad came through there.

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RW: And at one time the Chambers Flat district and ours were so hard up that they had school three moths at one place, and three months at the other. Their youngsters would come to our school for three months, and then we would go down to their school for three months. That's the only way they could pay for their teachers. Went horseback.

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RW: We were kind of, just ornery kids, just like they are nowadays. I remember we used to get the teacher to excuse us. We'd tell them that the folks wanted us to come home, and then we'd take our horses and go up there into the woods and play hockey all afternoon. (laughs) We didn't tell our folks about it til, oh, a long time after we were married. We was telling dad about one thing and he said, "By gad, I've a notion to lick you yet." (laughs)

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LS: Were there any specific things that you'd do?

RW: How do you mean?

LS: As chores, you know, jobs, that you particularly had to do?

RW: Well, milk the cows. Bring in the milk and put it in the pan. We didn't have separators in those days. They had great, big pans, and we would put the milk in

that and let it set til the cream came to the top, and then skim off the cream.

LS: How long would it set?

RW: Usually all night, or it could set a day or two, it didn't make any difference.

Mother and dad had built a cellar and covered the inside of it with cheescloth to keep the dirt, see, it was an underground cellar, to keep the dirt from falling through. And she had a big table in the cellar, and that's where the milk set.

And she'd skim it off every day, and put it in a large jar to churn, and then when dad would go to Palouse, she'd send the butter in she'd made, and she got ten cents a pound for it. She sent eggs, butter to Palouse.

LS: Would the butter keep long?

RW: Oh yes. I think he probably went in about every week.

LS: They'd keep it in the cellar after it'd been churned?

RW: The cellar was just real cold, down in the dirt, it was always cool there.

LS: Was it under the house?

RW: No. It was out, just at the back door, and it sat in a bank. I remember we kids always liked to slide down the, you know, we'd get up there and slide off, and if mother or dad caught us we were in bad. 'Cause it knocked the dirt all down inside.

LS: Do you remember sating in Harvard? Did you skate on the creek much?

RW: Oh, yes. We skated all winter, we had good skating all the time. That's where we spent all of our time in the wintertime. Nights, we went out wvery night, and all weekends, we were never home weekends. Go down on the river and build a big fire and stay there. After they put the dam in, then they flooded the river above the dam, boy, we had real good skating them.

LS: The dam where?

RW: Potlatch put the dam in there at Harvard, to hold the water, to drive the logs down.

LS: I didn't even know there wassa dam.

RW: You didn't know there was a dam there. Oh, it was just a small dam you know, that Potlatch put in.

LS: And it was to help them float the logs down? Yeah, so that was really early on

when they put that in.

RW: Um-hm. They always, every spring they had a log drive. I can remember that real well, how they used to bring the logs down. And then when the Potlatch built this dam, well then they could hold the water back, you know, and float them right into Potlatch easy, then.

LS: How would the logs get over the dam?

RW: They went through. There was gates that they could lift up.

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LS: Did you ever fall in, did you fall in much?

RW: No, but a couple of the boys did. I never did fall in. One day a friend of mine and I were skating. We were acting smart, and these two boys came along behind us acting like we were of course, silly. All at once, we got over it 'cause we didn't weigh as much as they did, and when they came along they went in. (laughs) Boy, we had an awful time getting one of them out.

LS: Why'd you have trouble? He kept br^eaking through?

RW: It was just his head asticking out, but we finally got him. The other boy that was skating with him didn't go in, and the tree of us got him out. We didn't skate anymore that day, we went home. (Laughs)

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LS: Sounds like there was somewhat of a community there even before Harvard got going.

RW: Oh yes. I think there always is in a little settlement, you know, where there is families I think they more or less make their own fun. They did in those days, it'd be hard to do now 'cause the kids wouldn't be happy. Be pretty slow for them.

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RW: Princeton was about our only, it was the only town we had around there. Palouse was the next and it was twenty miles away. And there was nothing in Princeton but a store, a couple of saloons, oh, I think a dance hall, Princeton, they called it the "Halfway House" between Palouse and the Hoodoos. See, they were mining up in the Hoodoos, they mined up there for years and years and years, and this little town of Princeton was the halfway place. See it was all horses then, and they had

to have a place to stay, they couldn't make it in one day.

LS: Do you know anything about the mining in the Hoodoos, any stories about mining?

RW: Well, I know they had mines up there. And I remember when the Chinese used to come in there and stop at our place to inquire the way to the mines. They brought in lots of Chinese to mine.

LS: Do you remember any stories about anything happening, 'cause I remember there was a story about them.

RW: They killed, a bunch of white men went in and killed five or six Chinese one night, I don't know what it was over. That's when I was just little, and I just can remember them talk about it. I don't know why they killed them, but they did.

LS: Do you know why the Chinese disappeared from the area?

RW: I don't suppose they got enough to get 'em to stay. I don't think it was very rich mining in there. There were oh, several old miners that spent their entire life up there, and they made enough to keep them, I guess. It's the only way they had of making a living.

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RW: There was, oh, what was that ¹od fellow's name that...He used to chew his tobacco and then he had an old fireplace in his cabin, and then he would take the cud and lay it up on his mantle over his fireplace, and let it dry and then he'd smoke it. He was quite at saving.

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RW: We'd take our camping outfits and go in there and stay three or four days, maybe a week.

LS: The whole family?

RW: Yeah. Dad'd take us in sometimes and leave us in there three or four days to pick huckleberries.

LS: Just the kids?

RW: Yeah.

LS: Were you ever afraid of being left alone?

RW: Yes.(laughs) I was scared. I remember one time we went up there. There was a lady from Spokane came down, and so we all went up in there, and Dad took us up. He

helped us put up our tent and get all fixed up, and then he came home. And we stayed and went huckleberrying. And they was all afraid to sleep by the door so they made me sleep there, the door of the tent. They put the axe beside me and said "Now, if you hear a noise, hit it with the axe." We was in bed and asleep, and the little girl that was with us got up and she stepped on my sister's foot, and she let a yell out of her. She just knew that it was a cougar, 'cause we'd heard a cougar t he night before, up abouve our camp. But it wasn't anything so we,(laughs) everything was alright.

LS: That'd be pretty scarey when, you know...

RW: It's pretty lonesome when you're up there, a bunch of women all by yourself.

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RW: They used to make huckleberry wine, and it was good. Boy, it was sure strong though.(laughs) There used to be an old bachelor that lived up abcvr Harvard, and they called him Hobblegobbleson, I don't remember what his first name, or what his name was. One day a bunch of us went up there, we kids, he brought out his wine, course we girls didn't drink very much but the boys they drank quite a bit. We had quite a time going home.(laughs) Boys could hardly stay on their horses. Wine was sure strong.

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RW: Usually on Sundays we'd take our horses and go out into the timber, and be gone all day. Run races and jump logs, we really had fun.

LS: You each had your own horse?

RW: Everybody had a horse. I remember one time mother and dad had gone to Spokane. There were three of us, my sister and I and another girl, took out horses and we were out tearing around throught the woods. We were running a race, and this girl, she had a great big horse, and he kicked my sister's horse with his shoulder and knocked her down and threw my sister off. And she had a concussion! We didn't know what to do for her, we got her home, we got her on the horse and got her home, and she didn't come to for about three or four days.

LS: Really? She just lay there?

RW: Just laid there, and we kids were all alone. Mother and dad were gone, we didn't

know what to do, so we just left her in bed and took care of her.

LS: How'd you take care of her?

RW: Just left her there. We didn't have any medicine or anything. But she came out of it. She didn't know what she was talking about, she was out of her head.

LS: When she was lying there you mean.

RW: Yes.

LS: You mean she'd talk?

RW: It's a wonder to me she didn't die. But she didn't. Nowadays they'd have you in the hospital for a month.

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RW: Kids knew how to take care of themselves in those days. There wasn't anybody to baby you, you had to look after yourself.

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RW: Well, I know when they put the town in there, when they put the depot in there, they were talking to dad about it and they wanted to call it Canfield. And dad said no, that he didn't want it named Canfield. He said Princeton's down here about six miles, he said, let's call it Harvard. So they did. And then when they camp Laird was put in up there, they wanted to call that Canfield Park, and he wouldn't let them do that either. He said, no, Mr. Laird was, had helped so much on the park, he said, call it Laird Park. So that's what it's called.

LS: Now, did he donate the land for the townsite?

RW: Dad did, uh-huh. I don't know how much, but it's all on his land.

LS: And he just gave it to them.

RW: Uh-huh. There was a hotel, a livery stable, and a store, I guess that was all, a blacksmith shop, and a few houses, and a depot, and there was a boarding house, there.

LS: In addition to the hotel?

RW: Um-hm. There was a French lady came in there, and she had a boarding house. She boarded a lot of men. And then they built a new school, and brought it down closer to Harvard.

LS: Who would stay in the boarding house? Would it be the loggers?

RW: Yes. There was lots of logging around there then. That was ll new timber in there. They put a railroad track through my dad's field up into the, way back in the timber, and brought off the timber. They had to hire a little boy to keep the cattle out of the field. And my sister and I went up there, and we played up there all day, with this little boy. He didn't want to stay there alone, so we stayed there with him.(laughs)

LS: What was this that you were supposed to keep the cattle?

RW: From going in the field. You see, the railroad went right through the field and the cattle in those days were turned loose out on the range, and if there wasn't someone there to watch 'em, why they were all in the field. So he kept them out.

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RW: There was quite a few young men came in there from, oh, Minnesota and Wisconsin, and all those eastern places, you know, where they did so much logging. My brother in-law was from, oh, what was the name of that place, someplace in Wisconsin. H was just a young man, he come out here and married my sister. And then my oldest sister's husband came from, Minnesota, I believe. So there's lots of people came from the east, to work up here in the woods.

LS: Would they just, they' d come out here, and then would they try to make the area their home onche they got here?

RW: A lot of them, their parents came. I know my sister's husband, his parents came. The whole family moved out.

LS: Did all those businesses that you mentioned in Harvard, did those get going right away? Did they just start right up?

RW: I remember 'em building them. They got 'em up pretty fast. Of course, they weren't much to look at after they got them up. But they held the people, fed the men. H^U tel was pretty good size, I think there was three floors.

LS: Who stayed there?

RW: The men. And they had camps out around Harvard and if they went to, went out on the train or anything, why when they came back, why they'd usually stay overnight before they'd go out to camp.'Cause the camps were quite a ways away, a lot of them.

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RW: I know when the train stopped there at Harvard, that was the last town before the railroad had gone through. And these men'd come up from Palouse and Potlatch and Princeton, they'd all be drunk, and the conductor'd put 'em off and lay 'em on the platform at the depot, and let 'em sleep it off til they could ge up and take care of themselves.(laughs) I've been down there lots of times when the platform was just full of drunk men, lying there all dead drunk.

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RW: They'd get on the train, and be drunk by the time they got up there. They probably had to help them on too, in some places. (laughs)

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RW: I know I used to play for the dances. I played in an orchestra and...

LS: What did you play?

RW: Piano. And we'd play. We usually had about two or three days of it. We'd start in the afternoon and play til time to eat, and then start again and play til way up in the night, or way up in the morning. And then go home and sleep a little while ^{and} then go back and start in agcin.

LS: This would be for the Fourth of July?

RW: It's hard work.

LS: What kind of music would you play?

RW: Oh we had waltzes and fox trots 'n' square dances. Everything. It was quite a thing. I remember one time dad built a great big ope air pavillion and we played out there. That was nice, it was cool out there.

LS: How many of the people would there be in the...

RW: Orchestra? Oh, four or five. We had violins, and dad played trumpet, and we had a railroad man that played clarinet. There was quite a bunch of us.

LD: Did you learn how to play the piano yourself? You taught yourself pretty much?

RW: Well, yeah, you might say I did. I had a few lessons when I was about nine years old. I think I had six lessons; I learned the notes. But my dad was quite musical so he could help me.

LS: Did you play at a lot of the dances?

RW: I've played all my life. Ever since I was about twelve years old I played for

dances.

LS: Would you get any kind of pay for playing?

RW: Oh yeah. Always get paid.

LS: They'd pass around the hat or would they pay you ahead of time?

RW: Oh, usually for big dances like that, why, they had a rice, but I played for lots of dances where they passed the hat.

LS: How'd you keep yourself from dancing when everyone around you was?

RW: I couldn't ever get away. When the railroad went through to Bovill we went up there every Saturday nigh, Friday night, I guess it was, we played up there every Friday night for years. We'd get on the train at Harvard at six, and it'd take about an hour to get to Bovill, and we'd start playing about eight and play til about five in the morning. And then we would go down and the train would be ready to pull out, and it'd pull out at seven, and then we'd go home on the morning train.

LS: Were there ever any fight or any trouble in the dances?

RW: Oh heavens. I don't think I ever played for a dance in my life there wasn't a fight. (laughs)

LS: What would they fight about? Or do you remember any of the fights?

RW: Just drinking. They'd get to drinking. You know your fellings are awfullyeasily hurt when you're drinking. If someone'd touch you why you'd ^{hit} him. I don't think they knew what they were fighting about.

LS: Did they ever get pretty big?

RW: The fights?

LS: Yeah.

RW: Not like you see in the movies.(laughs) It was usually just two.

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LS: Whether you ever saw Indians very much when you were young?

RW: See what?

LS: Indians in that area.

RW: Oh,yes. We've gotten up lots of mornings when we were little kids. We had a little field right out from the house, and that'd just be full of Indians digging camus. They took that root and made flour out of it, I think they said. Dad never said a word, he just let 'em dig. The fields were just blue with that camus, in those days. You don't see much of it anymore. But they'd come in there and never ask or

anything. Just go in and get it.

LS: Would they just set up camp right out front there?

RW: No, they'd just dig it, and then go to their camps wherever they were. They didn't stay up in here too much in the wintertime, you know, so they didn't have any permanent camps up in here. They would come up in the summer, fish and hunt and pick huckleberries. But their winter camps were down around Lewiston, down in that country where it was warmer, no so much snow.

LS: You never had much dealings with them yourself or...

RW: No, I was scared to deat of them. Why, I don't know, but I just didn't want to be around them. dad, he always liked to talk to 'em, and they liked dad, very frindly, but I was scared of them. They smelled funny. They smelled smokey, and I was afraid of them. But they were very friendly. I guess my grandmother used to have quite a time with them down at Potlatch when they first come in there. They'd come to their place, and they'd want everything grandmother had. They'd want to take this and they'd want to take that, and she had quite a time with them. But we never did have any trouble with them.

LS: Oh yeah, there was something else. Do you remember, did you go int the sale days at the Merc? The Mercantile?

RW: Potlatch?

LS: Yeah.

RW: Always. Never missed one.