

TUALATIN HISTORICAL SOCIETY TAPE #3  
ALTON ROBBINS NARRATION  
Transcribed by Diane Barry

Ready? On September the 15th, 1851, Nathaniel and Nancy Robbins, their family and an undetermined – ooops.

This tape is being made for the Tualatin Historical Society. My name is Alton Robbins. First I'll give you a very brief history of my family coming to Oregon. On September 15, 1851 (ed. note – I think he meant 1851) Nathaniel and Nancy Robbins, their families and an undetermined amount of friends left Decatur County, Indiana for their first step on the Oregon Trail. Jo Anne Robbins Hamilton, age 24, Minerva Hamilton Robbins, 29, and Amelia Robbins Barnes, 29, were packing the last of their belongings. Young William Sharp, a driver hired by Nathaniel Robbins the day before helped carry their luggage to the wagons lined up in front of their house, 22 wagons in all pulled by strong oxen. That morning, five year old Sarah C. Robbins, daughter of James and Minerva Robbins, told her grandmother, Nancy, that her father had said that if they couldn't find buffalo or squirrel to eat, they'd have to eat Indians! She asked her grandmother if she could eat an Indian. "That is just some of your father's nonsense!" Nancy said.

The first day, the party traveled seven miles, camping one mile west of Greenburg. One of the drivers hired by Nathaniel Robbins, John B. Lewis, was responsible for the only surviving journal of the trip. He wrote a diary along the way. His English was terrible and he couldn't spell. Some of the words you couldn't even read but it is the only written diary of the Oregon Trail as far as the Robbins family was concerned.

By September 15 they passed through Indianapolis, by the 23rd they were into Illinois and October first they reached the Mississippi River. In the early part of the trip when some one got sick, they thought they could afford the time and they would stop while that person was ill. Dr. Nathaniel, the "Old Man" as they called him, became sick and was sick for a couple of days so they had to stop 'til he recovered.

On October the 12th, 1851, the Robbins family arrived at William Franklin Robbins' place in Randolph County, Missouri. They spent their first winter at this location. During the winter stay in Missouri, Melvina Robbins, William's wife, gave birth to a daughter, Melissa Ann. This is one reason the family stayed there during the wintertime. When they departed Decatur County, Jacob and Sarah were presented with a large quilt which was treasured for years. This quilt now is in the possession of the Oregon Historical Society in Portland, Oregon.

On April the 15th, 1852 (ed. note – I think he meant 1852) the Robbins family left Randolph County. On May the 14th and 15th they crossed the Missouri River. The wind came up and prevented the family from getting their cattle across the river at one time. The cattle and horses were a constant problem as each evening when the party camped, they let the animals loose to graze. The result was that the next morning they had to round up the cattle and horses that had wandered off, causing substantial delay in traveling.

By May 15th, the immigrants had left the lower bottom to the higher more level prairie. The same day, Absalom Robbins' wagon upset, causing no permanent damage except spilling molasses over the contents of the wagon. They also began encountering Indian bands, sometimes as many as 50 on the trail and the Indian Agency boasts they

passed. Perhaps it was during this part of the trip that the Robbins' had their closest encounter with the Indians.

Nancy Jane Robbins, James Anderson Robbins four year old daughter was admired by one of the Indians who wanted to buy her, offering James six ponies in exchange for his child. Since the Indians wouldn't give up trying to acquire Nancy, James took a long whip and whipped the Indians until they left. This prompted Nathaniel Robbins to say, "Why did you do that? They will come back tonight and massacre us all!" According to the story, the Indians were bought off with some gifts.

Now comes the worst of the trip west. On May the 18th, the party passed three graves, and on the 19th, four graves. On the 20th, they passed 10 graves. They encountered 2 wagons returning back to "the states", as it was called. They had lost some of their friends, and the women had gotten homesick, I guess or there would have been fresh oxen track in the sand, or something of the kind as they turned back.

On the 24th, the immigrants encountered millions of bugs, which alarmed the cattle to such an extent that they stampeded. Other problems included lack of timber, and most fatal of all, bad water. The Oregon Trail is known as the longest graveyard in the world, at least 4000 people have been buried on this trail and they don't know how many more, but it might be as high as 10,000.

It was, the whole Oregon Trail incident was one of the greatest migrations in history. Over 200,000 people over a period of ten years crossed the United States by the Oregon Trail. On the morning of the 3rd, Amelia Robbins Barnes became ill, but they had to keep moving and managed to travel 15 miles that day, with more graves along the trail haunting the company.

On May the 31st, things got worse. Amelia died of cholera at 9:30 in the morning and her sister, Amanda, became ill that morning and died in the afternoon. Mahala Robbins also became ill that day and died the next morning at 7 o'clock. According to late reports, the three sisters were buried by throwing a mattress in a wagon box and covering it with quilts and blankets. Nathaniel Robbins reportedly told his wife Nancy that nothing they could find in Oregon was worth the lives of their three daughters. John Lewis recorded this in his journal of events on June the 1st.

Absalom Barnes, husband of Amelia, became ill on June 2nd and died the following day. He wanted to go back and be buried with his wife and the other women but they didn't want to take the time. So he's buried on a high knoll overlooking a vast area of land. Sickness continued to plague the Robbins' wagon train. At no time, the rest of the journey, was everyone well. There was always somebody that was ill.

After they crossed the Platt River, they reached two landmarks that were famous on the Oregon Trail. One was Ash Hollow, notorious for its steep, rough roads. Four days later they caught sight of Chimney Rock, which is a landmark seen for miles and miles around. When the party finally reached the Continental Divide in what was then part of the Oregon territory, now present day Wyoming, they celebrated by having a great party with fiddle playing and dancing. The day was spent and so was the night for there were about 100 wagons here. We got the girls together and we had a fiddle and guitar and other instruments. No such party had ever been held in the Oregon territory before! This was the first party in Oregon and in this one, we had no house to dance in. We took it on the ground, as they say. The moon was shining very bright and the dust and the dancing could be seen from 200 yards away.

The Robbins family crossed present day Idaho, probably visiting Fort Hall on the way. Upon reaching Fort Boise, as it was called in those days, Nathaniel and Jacob Robbins

families split up going different directions. Nathaniel Robbins' party crossed the Snake River after waiting at Fort Boise for favorable weather. Shortly after crossing the river, William and Melvina's five year old daughter Sarah Jane, became ill and then died. She was buried in what is now Baker City near the Powder River slough.

After crossing the Blue Mountains, going northwest, they finally came to The Dalles. There, Nathaniel, his son William, and son-in-law John Hamilton, chartered flat boats to carry the family down the river, placing the wagons on the flat boats in such a way that they would not roll off – two lengthwise at the stern and one crosswise at the bow. The cattle were not taken along as they were to be kept over winter by a man named Harper. The boat was pulled up to the shore each night and on the cascade voyage, the immigrants had to get out and walk. It was also at this point that the Hamiltons were separated from the other families until Oregon City. They finally made their way to Portland and there they boarded a steamboat called "The Little Eagle" which took them up the Willamette River to Oregon City. After days of rain and cold in Oregon City, they were met by Colonel Whiten who found them a place to stay and gave them food. Soon after, he showed them to a large two-storied house in Linn City which is now West Linn. This house was owned by Mr. Pomery, which charged them no rent.

Even after they arrived, they had sorrow. Two days after arriving, Gilman Robbins became ill and died in Oregon City. That winter the Willamette River flooded tremendously washing away Linn City and the Robbins' borrowed home. In the spring of 1853, they moved their claim to, to their claims they had staked out west of Oregon City in the Stafford area. Nathaniel Robbins and his sons William, John Dow, James and Orville and son-in-law John Hamilton filed for claims in the northwest corner of Clackamas County and the southeast corner of Washington County. Nathaniel settled his claim in 1853, the others followed suit within the next year.

William Robbins settled further west than the others, near the present day Tualatin, in Washington County. Nathaniel also filed claims in the name of his grandsons, William and Nathaniel Barnes, as they were entitled to such as orphans of pioneers.

The next thing, Dr. Robbins and his sons returned to The Dalles to retrieve the cattle they had left behind in the fall. They found that most of the stock had been stolen by Indians. Driving what was left before them, they returned to the Willamette Valley by the Barlow Trail around Mt. Hood. Among the horses returned to the Robbins were two ponies given to Zebodah(?) and Nancy Robbins by their Uncle John in Indiana. Soon after arriving, a number of the Robbins family signed a petition to the Territory legislation calling for a road from Oregon City to Corvallis. This was the first record ever made in the Oregon Territory of anybody petitioning to have a road built.

In the spring of 1856, William Franklin Robbins, my great, great grandfather, died of an accidental gun shooting. On April the 11th, he was bear hunting on Saum Creek near one of his claims when he stooped, stopped at a stream for a drink of water. Picking up the rifle by the muzzle, it fired, hitting him in the head and killing him instantly. His death was recorded in the diary of Reverend G. H. Atkinson. William Franklin Robbins was the first Robbins known to be buried in the Robert Bird cemetery in Stafford. Now there are at least 25 or 30 graves up there with the Robbins name on them.

On June in 1857, Dr. Nathaniel Robbins was elected to represent Clackamas County at Oregon's Constitutional Convention. The convention had been called by the people as the first step to statehood. The convention convened on August 18, 1857 in Salem. Presiding was Judge Matthew P. Beede(?). On August the 20th, Dr. Robbins was appointed to the Education Committee with several others of the delegates. This committee drafted

the portion of the Oregon Constitution dealing with education and school lands, Article 111. This article was passed by the convention on September the 15th. Three days later the convention voted to adopt the new constitution and adjourned.

Dr. Nathaniel Robbins drowned in the Tualatin River on the 15th of December, 1863. According to family members, he was going to see someone who was ill that lived on Pete's Mountain and was on a flat boat or raft poling his way across the river. The pole broke, throwing him into the river. The river was at flood stage and he was drowned when he was swept over the falls at Moore's Mill. Dr. Robbins had a black servant with him who tried desperately to save his life but he couldn't do it. Dr. Robbins' son, John Dow Robbins, was murdered May the 2nd, 1873. It was a murder that caused quite a bit of controversy and never was settled, never did find out who did it for sure. Of the seven children of William Franklin Robbins, who was killed accidentally, four remained with their families in the Willamette Valley area. Nathaniel Robbins farmed in the Tualatin area, proudly taking over his father's claim. This was the farm on which I was born. My father was born on this place, September the 5th, 1875. Hamp Robbins was his name. He remained the only living relative of Nathaniel Robbins with the Robbins name.

My dad had a younger brother, William Robbins, who died in 1924. I had an uncle, George Henry Robbins, who died in the 30's at age 90. He never married and was really quite a character. He spent most of his life working on sheep ranches and cattle ranches in eastern Oregon but sometimes during the winter he'd come down and stay with us. He'd just love to tell stories and entertain the kids. One of his favorite stories, I don't know if it's true or not, but I've heard him tell it several times, and it may be. In the early days in the west, it was a capital offense to steal horses. Well, up close to Prineville, a man was caught stealing and he was sentenced to be hanged. 'Course in those days, all the hangings were public. So it came time for the deed to be done, there was about 75 to 100 people there, all drinking and cursing and shouting and all and this poor soul was up on the gallows and they asked him if he had any last words to say before he met his maker. He looked down on this yelling cursing throng and he said, "I am by far the most interested person here but I'm by far the least enthusiastic!" I was just a kid and a lot of the stories they told about Uncle George weren't very nice but I didn't realize what they were talking about. He worked so much on the sheep ranch, they said that he was the only man they knew that could make a "U-Turn" before they invented automobiles!

All of this information so far has come out of a book written by Kevin Mittge, "The Robbins and Herren Families of the Pacific North West". A very interesting book and I'm very grateful to Kevin for letting me use this book to make this tape.

My dad married Ethel Pearl Casteel June the 26th, 1904. He built a house on the homestead, a five room house or three bedroom house. The lumber all came from the Saum sawmill which is about three or four miles from where the house was built and it was all carried in by wagon and oxen or some horses, pull it. The whole house, counting material and labor cost Dad \$400. My dad was a true pioneer. He was born of a pioneer family, he lived a pioneer life and he never really accepted the 20th century, although he lived 'til 1949. He never really fit in with the people of that era. He still wanted to do things like they did in the early days. He just wouldn't accept the modern times. To give you an example of that - we had no electricity in our home and so when I was 21, my sister "Em" and I brought it in from Sagert Road, which is about a half a mile away. And when they brought the line in, they put the post up right on the property line between the property and the road and Dad wouldn't let them put their cross arms in the center when they put them on the post 'cause he didn't want the end of the cross arms extending over his property lines.

So he made them put all the cross arms up over the road. It looked kind of weird and it was weird but that was his reasoning. He didn't want those "damn cross arms" on his property! And he never really was happy with the fact that we got in electricity and had electric lights. We'd always used kerosene lamps. All the time I was in school, I used kerosene lamps. So did my brother and sister. He'd had 'em all his life and he thought that was good enough for anybody. We'd got by without electricity, he didn't see why we needed it now!

Well, a few years later, the only electric appliance we ever had was a refrigerator. I went to Montgomery Ward and bought a refrigerator for \$110. This was about 1937 or 8 and they were still in the house. My folks both died in 1949 and still going strong but that was the only appliance my mother ever had in that house. We never had running water. Of course all the water was from wells. We used to use the well, before we got the refrigerator, as our coolant. They were dug wells, generally about 35 to 40 feet deep. We had a lot of water, nice fresh water, but we had buckets. We set down, laid, uh, lower in the well with all our butter and eggs and cream and that kind of stuff in warm weather that we wanted to keep fresh, and it really did the job. We never had trouble losing food that way, 'cause it really kept it pretty nice.

All our lights, of course, were electricity and we had, uh, by the back door, we had two lanterns hanging. One was for when you went to the barn to do your chores at night or early morning – that was the barn lantern. Then we had another one for the privy lantern. If you wanted to go out to the "john" after dark, why, that was the lantern you took. We always kept them separate. And when I was a kid, little kid, my sister Emma was a teenager then. We used to go out together at night, 'cause I was scared of the dark. And we'd sit there and blow our breath out and see, uh, out in the cold night, evenings, when you could see your breath – we'd see who could blow our breath the furthest. That was the game we played most every night. In spite of our primitive life style, I look back on it and we lived very, very well. We grew everything practically. We always had plenty of meat. We'd butcher a hog or two every year, and a calf and we had lots of chickens and eggs. And, uh, all the fruit and vegetables we could use. In fact, a lot of it went to waste which was a shame. But our average grocery bill was only \$10 a month for the five of us and half of that was Dad's tobacco! He chewed and smoked both. And, even then, we got by very well, and I made a vow to myself that if it was that important, tobacco was that big a thing in a person's life, that it cost as much as your groceries did, that I'd never use it and I've never used tobacco in my life and that is the reason why!

Dad dug a root cellar which we preserved much of our food in. It was built under the ground. It was about 15 x 20 feet size and it was about three feet under the ground. The walls were heavy 2 x 12 planks and the roof was covered over with logs and then about three foot of dirt was over that. And we always kept our potatoes, carrots, onions and beets and that type of thing in there. And on one side of this cellar was lined with shelving and that's where we always kept our canned goods. Some winters Mother used to can as many as 8 – maybe 900 quarts of stuff. It was absolutely phenomenal, the amount of things she used to can. We used to can chicken, beef and all kinds of fruit and vegetables. I remember pickled pig feet, everything and, uh, it always kept. We never had any trouble with it. And, uh, in the summertime, the place never got warm. It was always cool in there and it was an ideal place for preserving food.

We used to, uh, can, or cure our own meat. Every year we'd kill a couple of pigs and cure 'em. I've made lots of brine. Put the meat on the brine. And we had a smoke house. We'd smoke 'em. Sometimes we'd use alder smoke and sometimes maple, or something else depending on the particular flavor we were looking for at that time. We made, uh, put up a

lot of beef too. We'd always have a calf or two. We'd eat lots of corned beef but we canned a lot of the beef meat, and, uh, cured the pork. We always had a lot of, uh, apples, many apples, and they kept pretty well all winter. We had fresh apples sometimes 'til the middle of the summer, the time the fruit came on. We always raised strawberries. We had about an acre, sometimes two acres of strawberries. We'd get the neighbors to help us pick 'em. They'd come in, pick all afternoon, pick all day, and then Dad, either I or my brother would go, get up early in the morning, about 4 o'clock and drive in to Portland, to South Portland. There was a lot of little family grocery stores – Mom and Pop Jewish grocery stores in what was south Portland in those days and we'd sell our strawberries in Portland, then we'd get back and sometimes it would be dark and the next day. And if we made as much as \$25, we'd had a terrific day, 'cuz I forget what they sold for – five cents a box or something. It was a very cheap price. It would take two days effort and we'd probably end up with \$25, maybe \$30. But that was a lot of money in those days. And, uh, we always kinda looked forward to these trips. I'd try to talk my brother into letting me go because all these Jewish merchants would give me candy. And that was a big deal. I'd come home with two to three pieces of hard candy, probably break my teeth if I ever bit down on them but, uh, I thought that was a great treat!

One time we were coming home, for some reason we came through Oswego instead of the other way, Capital Highway. We got down to close to where Wankers Corner is and there was about ten or fifteen wagons stopped. We couldn't figure it out. We'd never seen any traffic jam like that before. And come to find out, they were shooting a motion picture and they wanted to get all these wagons in the scene. I don't know what the picture was or who was doing it now, but I remember they give Dad \$5.00 for stopping and letting them take a picture of the wagon with us in it so I was in the movies at a very early age! I have no idea what the name of the picture was, or who was making it or anything else but that was a big thrill to me. And, of course, it was a big thrill to Dad to get the \$5.00. (chuckles)

The first time I ever saw an airplane, we were coming, Dad and brother and me were coming, we'd been over to Lincoln City for some reason and we were coming home, of course, in the horse and buggy. And we were about a mile or two west of the covered wagon, uh, the covered bridge that covered the Tualatin River and Dad stopped and he said, "Look up there!" And there was an old bi-plane, open cockpit with two people in it. You could see them sitting there. It was bright orange, I remember, the plane was, and my brother and I'd never seen a plane before. Dad stopped and let us watch that thing until it got clear out of sight over the west hills of Portland, and that was a big thrill to me! I didn't know that someday I'd probably be riding in them a lot, but it was quite a sight. And I'll always remember that first sight of my first airplane.

We always had 4, 5 or 6 cows. We sold milk to the neighbors. The area was settling up out there and, uh, we had a cedar tree out by Meridian Road we called the milk tree, with boxes. Each family had their own box and we'd take the milk out in the morning, set it down in their box and they'd pick it up and leave the empty milk bottles, and we'd fill 'em. We did that for several years, and uh, never lost any milk at all. Nobody ever stole it, it went fine. Eventually the state made us quit because we were selling raw milk. We had to pasteurize it. 'Course we weren't a big enough operation to put in a pasteurization plant so we had to sell, had to quit selling milk because of the state. One incident in relation to that, I'll never forget – 'course when a cow's giving milk, they have to keep them with calf or they'll dry up. And, uh, when it comes time to breed 'em, we had to take them, we used to say "to get serviced". And the only bull in the area was at Lou Sagert's ranch. So one night we had to take a cow over for so-called servicing and it was just getting dusk and it was kind

of wet and rainy. We hadn't had dinner yet but Dad and I – he put a halter on the cow and I got behind her with a switch and we went over. And, uh, 'course the bull performed his "service" without any problem. So Lou Sagert asked us, "Why don't you come in and have a cup of coffee before you go, and get warmed up a little". So we did. Dad tied the cow up and came in and, uh, while we were there, he performed his "service" two or three more times! He had a willing and able subject so –I can always imagine us as we went home in the rain and the wind and half hungry, and that stupid cow walking down the street with a big grin on her face! Incidentally, we got five cents a quart for the milk at that time. And we used to sell a few eggs, not many. Once in awhile we'd sell eggs five cents a dozen for fresh eggs.

The second floor of the house was not completely finished. One bedroom was finished completely. That's the room my sister, Emma, stayed in. The rooms my brother and I stayed in were not finished. You could see the wall, the 2 x 4's in the wall. The only lumber was the outside siding and in the wintertime, the wind would blow and the rain and the wind used to come in on the inside and it'd get very cold and damp, and we always – there was no heat up there at all, and we'd always have to sleep with long johns, pajamas and a bathrobe on to keep warm and two pairs of sox sometimes. And I used to have to drink water quite often during the night and, uh, on several occasions the water would freeze next to my bed! It was that cold! We managed to live through it but when I was 13, I had a very serious attack of rheumatic fever and had to spend three weeks in the hospital in Oregon City. And the doctors told my folks then that my life expectancy was to live to 45 years. Well, I kind of outfoxed 'em on that! I'm still going but I guess I'm very fortunate to be here at all because I just almost didn't make it.

Please turn the tape over and play the other side and I'll tell you some things of my childhood and uh, school experience. And some of the family experiences I had when we were all kids together.

End of Side 1

Side 2 – THS tape #3

We were quite a close knit family. We all worked hard. My brother Bill was five years older than I, my sister Emma was nine years older than I was. We all had chores at a very early age. One of the first things we did, our parents had us do, we always used kerosene lamps for lights and we always had five or six of them. The youngest kids would have to clean the wick, uh, shades, chimneys every night before dark, see that the lamps were full and that the wicks were trimmed evenly so we'd get an even flame out of them. And that was one of the first chores we had. Of course, we always had to have chores of getting wood for the evening, cutting wood, bringing it in and, uh, we all helped with the housework, what housework there was. We'd help set the table and cook sometimes and wash the dishes and things like that. And we'd also help her when she did the washing which was in a very primitive fashion. We had an old copper boiler. We heated the water on the wood stove and Mother would wash the clothes in a tub with a wash board by hand and rinse 'em out. And we'd go over there and we'd take them out on the line and hang 'em up, 'cause there's no such thing as a dryer. And then sometimes we'd gather them in in the evening and when they were dry. And even helped with the ironing on occasions when we had a chance. Mealtime was the, uh, really the social time for the family. We all gathered around. We had a big kitchen, no dining room. We ate in the kitchen and, uh, that was the one time of the day the whole , the family was together. My parents and my sister and we all

had our evening meal together. And we'd discuss the events of the day, especially those of us when we were in school, activities and what happened in school. Both my dad and mother were very interested. They took a great interest in our schooling. Now Mother did get some high school education. I think Dad went as far as sixth grade, but he was a very well-read man. He read extensively. And, uh, he'd read the Bible three times although he claimed he was an atheist. And we used to have the minister over for dinner once in awhile and Dad would sit down and quote scriptures to the minister, much to his surprise and mine too. But he had the ability to retain things. He'd read books and he'd retain what he'd read. And he'll remember books he'd read years before. He could quote from them. It was really a very gifted ability.

We ran a seventy acre farm and Dad, a lot of the time, worked for the state highway department in addition to farming. But my brother and I, when we got old enough, would do a lot of the farm work. I started working behind a team of horses when I was twelve years old, doing cultivating and harrowing, and disking and things like that. I didn't start using a plow until I was eighteen. I wasn't strong enough to handle the thing at the end of a row so my older brother or Dad did the plowing up until that time. After I was eighteen, I did quite a bit of it because Dad was working more for the highway department and it was up to us kids to run the farm, more or less. As I mentioned earlier, we had five or six cows at the time and my brother and I would go out in the evening and round the cows up but they wouldn't come up to feed. They were always out in the pasture. We'd milk them and distribute the milk, feed them and bed them down, clean the barn and things you do on a farm to make it operate. But it wasn't too bad. We always, um, also had a large garden. We raised a tremendous amount of vegetables and, uh, put them away as I alluded to earlier for the winter. And we canned and things like that. We were poor but we weren't hungry. We lived very well for poor people!

Mother had a hard time sometimes keeping us kids in clothes, especially during the cold winter weather. She made quite a few clothes for my sister. A lot of the things she sewed by hand. She had an old sewing machine, sometimes it worked and sometimes it didn't. But she used to make dresses, even made coats on occasion for my sister. But she never tried to make coats for us boys. But I generally got down - I got my brother's hand-me-downs, because he'd outgrow them just about the time I'd fit into them. But it was all right. We were normal. Generally we were adequately clothed though not very stylish sometimes. The kids at school used to make fun of us because our clothes looked so bad but they were practical and they were warm and most of the time we were quite comfortable in them.

Our folks took a great deal of interest in our school work and our education. They'd always help us with our homework if we needed it. And Dad insisted that we always read a lot. We always took the "Saturday Evening Post" and a publication called "The Pathfinder" which every week had articles of interest to children in it. And some were scientific and some were amusing, some were just general knowledge but there was always things that were good for us and we always discussed them as a family generally at dinner time. We'd all read these articles and we'd discuss 'em, what our point of view was on some of the points brought up. A focal point of our family was discussing the things we'd read in the "Saturday Evening Post" and "The Pathfinder". Lots of times we'd get other magazines. We had no newspaper, daily newspaper as you know it now. And, of course, in my early life there was no such thing as radio. That didn't come by until I was about ten years old. We did have an old wind-up phonograph we used to play records on. And I remember we had some Caruso records. They were quite highly prized in those days. They're worth a fortune now but we

always listened to Caruso records and had John Philip Sousa's band. Dad played the harmonica and every two or three nights a week in the evening we'd stand, uh, sit around and sing while Dad played the harmonica. That was always a highlight of the family. It was our family get togethers and sing-alongs and it was a lot of fun. Non of us could sing really, but we had a heck of noise – fun making noise, and it really made the family a close knit unit.

By today's standards, our house was very primitive. It was all wood floors, never had any coverings on the floors, no paint on the walls, bare wood walls. We never had any wall paper on any room. Every place you went was just bare wood. And we were real lucky that we never had a fire because every year we'd always have a Christmas tree. We'd decorate it with just some ornaments we'd made by hand. Sometimes we'd have some that were carried over. And we always had candles on this Christmas tree – live candles and Dad was the only one that was allowed to put them on or take them off. They were candles a little bigger than a lead pencil and about three inches long. They were in a little clamp holder that clamped down on the limbs and Dad was the only one that was allowed to light those candles. Us kids weren't allowed to touch 'em but we never had any trouble, luckily, because if a fire had ever started, the house would have gone up in smoke in a big hurry.

We had a cooking stove in the kitchen, of course, with a tank on it. We used to heat water. And in the living room, we just had a round wooden stove. Sometimes the sides would get red hot if the fire was too big. It was only about a foot and a half from the wall. I was always afraid the wall would catch on fire but it never did. But we had to warn people who come in with children, to stay away from the stove because it was always hot. But we never did have any trouble with fire or smoke in the house. We were very lucky that way!

Living on a farm, I learned the facts of life at a very early age. One of the stories my folks tell on me, I don't remember this, but it probably happened. I remember when I was a little kid, I always had bantam chickens. They are always so colorful and bright colors. I had a hen that I was particularly fond of and we called her "Bessie". I was always petting Bessie and feeding Bessie and Bessie was my pride and joy as a little kid. My mother had company one day, I don't know who it was now. I went screaming in the house and said, "That damn rooster is trying to kill Bessie!" My mother said, "What do you mean?" "Well", I said, "He's standing on top of her poking her in the head and I'm afraid he's going to kill her!" Mother said, "I don't think Bessie objects, so I don't see why you should."

My grandparents lived in Tualatin, which was two miles away. Next door to them was my aunt and uncle, Harvey and Rose Casteel. Every Sunday we used to go down to either Grandma and Granddad's or Harve and Rose's. We'd generally have a meal and then play cards. Sometimes there'd be one or two tables of us playing cards. That was an event we looked forward to every week. And we had Dolly, one of our team of horses that was the one we used on the buggy. We'd hook Dolly up to the buggy and all climb in and tell her, "Let's go to Grandma's". And Dad would just tie up the reins and when we'd get there, she'd turn in. She knew exactly where she was going! When we'd get ready to go home, we'd get in and say, "Let's go home, Dolly". You never had to touch the reins going or coming!

And then when I was about ten years old, my Brother Bill got a car. It was an old Model T Ford with square fenders. I think he got it for a couple a hundred dollars or less. And so, after he learned to drive, we used to go down in this car. But my dad never liked it. He thought we should take the horse and buggy because that's the way he had always done it. In fact, for the first three or four months that we used to go down in the car, he'd go

down in the horse and buggy and the rest of us would go down in the car! But finally, he agreed to go in the automobile, so we never had to drive the horse anymore.

I started to school in the Tualatin public schools in 1920. At that time there was eight, uh, there was a grade school and four years of high school. We, uh, first and second grades were in a room back of the gymnasium and, uh, my first teacher was a Miss Stone and she was probably a lady in her early twenties at that time. And, gosh, I thought she was smart! 'Cause she knew so much about so many different subjects! I just didn't think I'd ever be able to learn all those things that she was talking about! But she was very good with us kids. She helped us a lot and the next year, our second grade year our teacher was a Miss King. She was an older lady, probably in her mid-forties but had several years experience as a teacher. She was also very good and she especially helped us in our reading. She insisted that everybody learn the proper way to read and be able to read out loud fluently. She started us in oral reading and it was a great help. Our new school house was two story, though it was originally one story built in 1900. In 1914, a second story was added along with a basement. There was two rooms on the main floor and two rooms on the upper floor. On the main floor, one of the rooms had the third, fourth and fifth grades and the other downstairs room had the sixth, seventh and eighth grades and the high school was upstairs. One room had freshmen and sophomores and the other room had juniors and seniors. So it was quite a compact little operation. Now downstairs, the, uh, in the third, fourth and fifth grade room there was one teacher, and in the sixth, seventh, eighth grade room there was only one teacher. So these teachers had to take care of three different classes. And it was quite a hassle sometimes because she had so many students. She could just not give them individual attention like some of them needed, including myself on occasion. And it got to be pretty hectic. We did get through it and, uh, some of the teachers would lose their cool and get pretty aggravated with some of the students, which kind of made for a bad situation. Because then the students would get scared and be afraid that the teacher didn't like them because they didn't do things right, and, uh, it wasn't a very healthy situation. But that's the way the school operated in those days. And, uh, in the sixth and seventh and eighth grades, I probably had the best teacher I ever had in my life. She was an elderly old maid, in fact a teacher named Miss Powell. She stayed at Heimbach's which was right next to the school. They boarded some of the teachers, and, uh, she was an excellent teacher, a very good person. She was quite a seamstress and, uh, she used to help some of the girls with their clothes 'cause nobody had much in those days. And she's help remodel or repair dresses for the girls and she even made dresses for the girls on occasion. And sometimes she'd help their mothers with their clothes if they wanted to remodel something or repair something. She was a very gifted lady. One of the standard jokes about her was, that one time she wanted to, uh, do something good for charity. So she made six pairs of men's pajamas for the Salvation Army to give to needy people at Christmastime. And so, uh, she took them down to the Salvation Army and they thanked her profusely 'cause they were beautifully made, nice material. And they got to looking at them and they said, "But there's no fly in these things." And she said, "Of course not! I thought you was going to give them to the single men!"

There was no such thing as school lunches. At that time we always had to bring our own lunch, generally in a paper sack. And, uh, no lunch rooms. We ate at our desks then we'd go out in the play room. There was no exercise room. We'd go out in the gym sometimes. But there was no, uh, we'd stand at our desks once a day and take calisthenics and things like that but there was no organized Physical Education program for any of the students. Of course, we had our athletic events, such as baseball, football and basketball and

that type of thing. We did have a track team at times but not every year. But, uh, the girls participated mainly in softball and basketball. It was the only activity there was for the girls. There was no such thing as soccer in those days. There was an attempt at one time to put in some tennis courts but it never went through because of the money involved.

For several years my dad was on the school board and I remember him talking about worrying how they could pay their teachers, 'cause in those days most of the teachers were getting either \$80 or \$90 a month. That was a top salary for a teacher in those days. And then they'd get warrants from the county and these warrants were cashed at the bank on a 10% discount. So if you had a \$90 warrant, you'd get \$81 for it at the bank. That would be your entire monthly salary. So it was pretty hard to get adequate teachers but every school was in the same boat at that time. But some of these people were really dedicated teachers and they'd taught for years. I remember the principal we had in high school, uh, was named Otto Krause and he had been, uh, superintendent of schools in Washington County at one time. And, uh, he was a German fellow. And when World War One came by, because he was a German, one generation removed from Germany, the schools wouldn't let him teach anymore. There was some prejudice against his nationality. And he did other things for several years. Then in the late '20's he came back and was our principal at Tualatin when I was in high school and he was an excellent, excellent teacher. He really took an interest in the kids and he explained things and he was just marvelous at history. Of course, he lived part of it, I guess, but he was just an excellent history teacher. And he tried to instill in us the meaning of history and present day society – how they connected and how times change over periods of time, how things change and he was very interested in Civics, our federal government. He used to go into great length telling us how the government operated, departments in the government, how they function, their relation to each other and what each department should do and could do and what they shouldn't do and couldn't do. It was very enlightening.

As a kid, I always wanted to play the violin. So my folks got me a violin. Of course, I had no body to take lessons from, so they got me a keyboard that I pasted on the back of the violin so I could find where the keys were. And I taught myself over a period of about a year. I taught myself to play, not good, but I could play. This Mr. Krause I referred to, was an excellent music teacher also. And he always had a band and an orchestra. I played in both. Eventually the orchestra was oh, about 15 or 20 students and, uh, we played together all the time we were in high school – four years, and, uh, then after we got out of school we had a little band that used to play for dances. My dad was a caller for square dances and a couple of years after we got out of school, I got out of school, we would play for square dances. That was always a lot of fun.

In high school, I played baseball and football both. I never went out for basketball or track. They just didn't appeal to me for some reason. I guess I was too slow. But, uh, we always had a full slate of games with teams in the area. And, uh, Krause also coached the football team. One of the other teachers coached the baseball team. And, uh, when I graduated in 1932 it was right there in the height of the depression. I didn't have enough money to go to college the next year. I wanted to go to Willamette University and take music. The tuition was \$300 but I couldn't raise \$300 then. So they let us, some of us students come back to high school for the fifth year. Another one who did that was Gene Richards, who most of you people know. And so we went to high school. He graduated the year before I did. We went our fifth year together. So we played football again that year. We didn't play baseball. So we got to play football in high school for five years. If the other

schools had known that, they'd have probably thrown out all the games but they never did catch us at it and, of course, our school never said anything.

One of the things I remember from school, of course we always had to walk to and from school, two miles whether the weather was bad or good. Sometimes it got real wet and cold and miserable, but we had to do it. The only time I had a bus was the last year I was in high school, there was a bus. The rest of the time, I always walked. But the thing that helped, and most people in Tualatin never knew it even existed – Averys, up on Avery Road had a chicken ranch. And on the south end of this ranch there was a beacon light. This was, oh, probably a 50 to 60 foot tower with a beacon that went around to guide the airplanes. This was before the days of radar. There was no radar. And there was a string of these lights, between them from San Diego to Seattle, every 40 or 50 miles would be one of these beacon lights and they could be seen for several miles. In fact, I was talking to Gerald Avery a while back and he said he saw his, the one on his place from the top of Mount Hood, they could see it. But, anyway, this thing used to turn about twice a minute, this beacon did and walking home at night, it cast just enough light to walk by. And if you timed your steps right, when you was walking in the dark, you always had the light to step in, going home at night. It was a great help except in the fog. Of course if it got foggy, it didn't do any good. But it kept me from walking in a lot of mud puddles and water that I couldn't see if it hadn't been for this light.

My mother's father was Charles Casteel. He was born October the 4th, 1856 and his birth was the first birth ever recorded in Yamhill County. His father, Louis Casteel, was born in Spain in 1813 so my great-grandfather, on my mother's side was born in Spain. Now Louis Casteel had a brother and they both came over to this country at the same time, in the 1830's and their name back in Spain was C-A-S-T-I-L-E but, for some reason, Louis changed his to C-A-S-T-E-E-L. And so the two brothers had different names. Now Louis Casteel had ten children and my grandfather, Charles Casteel, was the fifth of the ten children. Now Charles Casteel married Emma Peters. She was also born in '56 and they both died in 1932. They had eleven children and my mother, Pearl Casteel, was the fourth child in that group. They had several children that died at an early age. One of them died in – Louis was born in 1900 and died two hours after birth. But I only knew of four of them. I had two uncles, Harve and Percy and then Bessie and Sadie were the two aunts that I remember. The rest of them had all died before I was born.

When air mail first started, it was carried in mail planes. That's all they, they weren't allowed to carry passengers. They weren't licensed to carry passengers, and, if my information is correct, the first air mail was started on the day I was born, May the 15th, 1914. And they were open cockpit planes, biplanes, single motor and they always came by the Tualatin area around 11:15 to 11:30 in the mornings. In the afternoons, there'd be some going back, one going back but they always flew real low and quite slow compared to the modern plane. And lots of times the pilot would dip his wings and wave at people if they waved back. We had a big red handkerchief we used to always wave at them with and sometimes they would recognize it and sometimes they wouldn't.

My grandmother had a rather perverse sense of humor, I guess. So one day we were down to her house and this plane come over. And, of course, all the kids yelled, "Mail plane, mail plane!" cause there weren't many planes in those days. We always knew when the mail plane was coming. So my grandmother stood out in the yard and watched this thing go by and she stood there and watched it and watched it. Then when it got out of sight, she said, "That's not a male plane, those are the wheels hanging down!"

When I just got out of high school in 1932, Tualatin was a much different town than it is now. The population was 271 people. The city limits was about a tenth of what it is now. A mile any way from downtown Tualatin and you were out of the city limits. I don't know what it is now but I guess the population is 13,000 and still growing. So it's a much different area than it was when I was there.

There was two railroad services into Tualatin – the Oregon Electric and the Southern Pacific and they both carried mail. And my grandfather had a contract with the post office to pick up the mail from the train stops. One was right downtown and the other was in the north end of town. And, uh, he'd go every morning and pick up the mail and every evening to deliver the mail and pick up any that came in. But one year he was quite ill and I lived with them one winter so I, every morning, I'd make the two train stops to pick up the mail and every evening I'd make a stop again to deliver the mail. And one stop on the Southern Pacific was such that I was, had to be 15 minutes late for school but they always allowed me to do that and, uh, that way, why, Granddad kept his contract with the government. My grandfather was a crippled man. He lost one arm in a mill accident and the three fingers on his other hand, on his left hand in a mill accident. And he belonged to a lodge, and I don't know what the name of it is now, but after the second accident, they bought him the house that he and Grandma lived there in Tualatin. Cost them \$5000 for this house about 1900 and something. And they lived there the rest of their lives and they both died in 1932.

Just one last word. I am the oldest living descendant of Dr. Nathaniel Robbins with the Robbins name. I had two children, a boy and a girl. My son has never gotten married so the name will die there. My brother had three children, a girl and two boys. One of the boys never got married, one of them is, and has a child three years old named Nathaniel, which is original. I guess he thought he was doing something original naming him Nathaniel Robbins! And that three year old boy is the only hope that we have of even continuing the Robbins name that is direct descendants of Dr. Nathaniel Robbins. This is about average for the course. Every year we hold our family reunion in Champoeg Park. Last year there was 190 people there and I was the only person there with the name of Robbins. All the rest of them were direct descendants of Dr. Nathaniel. But the name is dying out fast and before long there will be no Robbins that are direct descendants of Dr. Nathaniel.

I'd like to correct one thing, one statement I made earlier in this tape. That I remembered two uncles, Harve and Percy Casteel. I also had Art Casteel, which I forgot, so there was actually three uncles that I remember quite well.

End of Side 2  
End of THS tape #3

\*Upon reviewing this transcription, Alton Robbins corrected this statement. They were returning from Oregon City, not Lincoln City.