

Library of Congress

[Life in Oregon in the '80s]

W9657

[????]

Accession no.

W9657

Date received

10/10/40

Consignment no.

1

Shipped from

Wash. Office

Label

Amount

12p.

(incl. forms A-D)

WPA L. C. PROJECT Writers' UNIT

Form [md]3

Library of Congress

Folklore Collection (or Type)

Title Life in Oregon in the 80's

Place of origin Portland, Oregon Date 3/6/39

Project worker Sara B. Wrenn

Project editor

Remarks

Form A

Circumstances of Interview

Federal Writers' Project

Works Progress Administration

OREGON FOLKLORE STUDIES

Name of worker Sara B. Wrenn Date March 6, 1939

Address 505 Elks Building, Portland, Oregon

Subject Life in Oregon in the ['80's?]' Eighties.

Name and address of informant Mrs. Flora Ellen Jarisch South Oswego, Oregon

Date and time of interview March 3, 1939 — afternoon

Place of interview Home of informant, South Oswego

Library of Congress

Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant —

Mrs. Truchot, Oswego, Oregon

Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you —

Description of room, houses surroundings, etc.

Large kitchen of the old fashioned kind, with several windows; linoleum on the floor; range or cookstove, cupboards, a dining table, and kitchen chairs. The house must be 60 years old, one-story, once painted white. The roof is green with moss. A small, narrow porch, much warped [on?] the flooring, and at the entrance, a box of firewood. The interviewer was invited directly into the kitchen, where the informant, in a print dress, sat at the table, busily “tying a bright-colored cotton comfort” with bright-colored cotton yarn. The surrounding yard, perhaps 100 feet or more square is enclosed with an ill-attended hedge. There are many wide-spreading old cherry trees about, and a few feet from the kitchen door is the water supply, an old well with moss-green curb and windlass. Beyond the well is a woodshed. (A genuine folklore environment.) Shabby neighborhood. ?/

Form B

Personal History of Informant

Federal Writers' Project

Works Progress Administration

OREGON FOLKLORE STUDIES

Name of worker Sara B. Wrenn Date March 6, 1939

Address 505 Elks Building, Portland, Oregon

Library of Congress

Subject Life in Oregon in the '80s

Name and address of informant Mrs. Flora Ellen Jarisch South Oswego, Oregon.

Information obtained should supply the following facts:

1. Ancestry
 2. Place and date of birth
 3. Family
 4. Places lived in, with dates
 5. Education, with dates
 6. Occupations and accomplishments with dates
 7. Special skills and interests
 8. Community and religious activities
 9. Description of informant
 10. Other points gained in interview
1. William R. Bagby, father; Harriet McCauley Bagley, mother Irish Scotch-Irish
 2. Molalla, Oregon. July 1, 1869.
 3. Husband, P. H. Jarisch; Children, three daughters: Mrs. Leona Barclay; Mrs. Mary Bickner and Mrs Martha Harbin (twins). Husband and children living.
 4. Always lived in Oregon — in Clackamas County.

Library of Congress

5. District schools.
6. Housekeeping and some nursing.
7. General community interests; needlework.
8. Member of Grange for 50 years - 7th degree member; Ladies Aid Society. Attends Methodist Church.
9. Short, plump and jolly, with bright blue eyes and youthful pink and white complexion. Gray hair, neatly arranged.
10. The sort of person who has got a lot of fun out of life, though her life has never been one of ease.

Form C

Text of Interview (Unedited)

Federal Writers' Project

Works Progress Administration

OREGON FOLKLORE STUDIES

Name of worker Sara B. Wrenn Date March 6, 1939

Address 505 Elks Building, Portland, Oregon

Subject Oregon Life in the '80s

Name and address of informant Mrs. Flora Ellen Jarisch South Oswego, Oregon

Library of Congress

Text: My people crossed the plains in '52, in the same party with Harvey Scott, Abigail Scott Duniway and all of them, but I was born in Oregon, as I told you back there — born in Molalla. Like most people in them days we lived in a log cabin; that's the first home I can remember, just two rooms, and there was sixteen of us children. It sure was pretty crowded, but we managed to get along. We had trundle beds, and there was bunks along the wall, one on top the other. We had an awful nice fireplace. It was built of rock; there was four big rocks, each one of 'em cut square — one for each side, one for the back an' one for the hearth. The rocks came from some place up about Salem. I s'pose the chimney was mud an' straw like most of 'em them days. Anyway it was a nice fireplace, drawed good and we was proud of it.

With so many children of us, mother had to be kind-a strict — only she wasn't very. We all went to church every Sunday. It was five miles to church, so bright an' early mother would get my oldest brother up to go after the oxen, and while he was gone she would have the rest of us scrubbing ourselves and getting ready, all dressed in our best bib-an'tucker — which wasn't 2 so much, but we was clean and shinin'. When the oxen was brought in and hitched to the wagon — the wagon-bed had a lot of clean straw in it — we younguns all piled in and off we went, jostlin' over the rough road that was full of muddy chuck-holes in winter an' dust a foot deep in summer. We jolted an' bounced so it's a wonder, talkin' like we all did, some of us didn't bite our tongues off. One thing mother told us — if somethin' funny happened an' we must laugh in church, to be sure an' cover our face with a handkerchief. Seemed like we was always finding somethin' funny to laugh at. But there was one thing mother wouldn't stand for, an' that was makin' parodies on hymns. She'd larrup us every time she caught us doin' it, but we'd keep on. Seemed like we just couldn't help makin' parodies on them old hymns.

I recollect we had a minister. His name was Dart — the Reverend Dart. He was an old man an' he had a farm. Perty well off I guess. Anyway nobody ever paid him anythin' for preachin'. Them days I don't remember ever seein' a basket passed for collection

Library of Congress

in church. One thing this old man said every Sunday that always tickled me. He always ended up with it, "I'll be with you next Sunday, if I'm here and God's willing." I was always imitating him — when mother didn't hear — an' then one Sunday he wasn't there. He had died, an' I never did get over feeling sorry about how I imitated him.

My mother was 91 years old when she died. She was very proud, an' just the night before she passed away she asked me to be sure an' have her hair curled when she died, so she would look nice in her coffin. She wasn't sick then or anythin', but the next day, I fixed her some toast an' tea an' took it to her, an' she was gone — peaceful, just like that. Mother's father was a weaver. He was a weaver in Ireland, an' it's always been a proud story in our family that he wove the material for Queen Victoria's wedding dress. It had a crown in it. An old bachelor uncle of ours in Ireland — a great-uncle or more he was - was a sculptor. He left a big fortune of more'n a million pounds, an' the money 3 wasn't to be paid the heirs till the third or fourth generation. We're the third generation, but we can't prove identity, and so his money is all in chancery, an' we can't get any of it, an' it's getting more an' more all the time, compoundin' interest, they tell us. I sure could use my share of it.

I remember my first beau, 'cause he used camphor on his handkerchiefs, an' how he did slick his hair down. It was black an' shiny, an' he always wore high celluloid collars. He was tall anyway, an' them high celluloid collars, an' his slick hair seemed to make him look taller.

One of the times I got most tickled in church was when a red-headed boy — I guess you'd call him a young man — he was all dressed up an' everythin' — an' a mosquito got on his neck. He had an awful white neck, I remember, an' that mosquito, every time he slapped at it on one side, would buzz over to the other side of his neck, so he was slappin' right an' left, an' tryin' to act as if he didn't notice it; and perty soon his neck began to get red an' swell, an' I got so tickled I almost laughed out loud. Sister whispered, "Put your handkerchief over your face, quick." I put it over, but my shoulders was goin' up an' down,

Library of Congress

an' I got to stranglin' an' had to get up an' leave church. Mother got after me good for that, I can tell you.

They used to tell a story about an ol' man that got religion. He was tellin' about it. "Oh! Oh! I got religion!" he sez. "I got religion. I got it so hard I hed to stop in a fence corner." I s'pose he meant he stopped in a fence corner to pray, but it didn't sound like that.

When I was a girl our beaux always took us buggy-riding. They'd spend half a day mebbe polishin' up the buggy after cleanin' off the mud, an' curryin' an' brushin' the horse till he shined. Mebbe there'd be a span of horses. I was goin' riding once, and I was wearing hoops, an' for same reason those hoops of mine was bright red. Most generally they was pink or white. But I guess I 4 wanted something extra fine, and I had red ones. The hoops then had straps that came down from the waist to the wire hoops that was about a foot from the bottom of the skirt. I got in the buggy all right, what with being helped an' all, stepping off the horse-block on the step of the buggy an' then over the side very carefully into it. But when I went to get out! Goshen! I put my foot through the hoop and there I was! I couldn't move, lessen I picked up my skirts, an' that was an awful thing to do. Show your insteps? Why, the girls in town — the nice girls — wouldn't ever pass the hotel porch where the drummers set along with their chairs pushed back on two legs, 'cause they said they just set there to watch for a girl's ankles. Well, I was in for it if I wasn't going to fall an' disgrace myself; so I jus' put a bold face on it, an' laughed an' picked up my skirts. I guess my beau saw all my undershirts, but I got my foot out of them hoop wires. But wuz I embarrassed! I jest blushed all over. An' I laugh every time I think about it all these years.

That wasn't anything though, to the time I went with a young man to Hillsboro to somethin' or other. It was a good ways to go, an' I had a stomach ache. I jest had to get out, an' I didn't want to tell him what for o' course. I jest didn't know what to do. Finally we came to a steep pitch, an' I sed: "Fred, let me out. I'm goin' to walk up that hill. It's jest too much on them poor horses, pullin' you an' me up that steep hill." An' he sez, "No, you don't walk up that hill neither. You jest set still. Humph"! he sez, "I guess these'd be perty ornery horses

Library of Congress

if they couldn't pull the two o' us up a little hill like thet." I wuz feeling worse 'n worse all the time, an' finally mebbe he guesses, for after a lot more arguing, an' him insisting I set still, he let me out. An' when I got up over the pitch of the hill, there he was waitin' for me, lookin' kinda funny-like, an' I got in an' we both talked fast, not knowing what we was saying, I guess.

5

What with so many in our family, we had lots o' fun, though o' course my older brothers and sisters was mostly gone to work or married when I got bigger. I could dance from the time I was six years old. I could just hoe it down. We had an accordion an' a violin and an organ in the house. By this time we didn't live in that little old log cabin o'course. We hed a perty good house, an' one o' my brothers played the violin an most o' the rest o' us could pick out chords anyway on the accordion an' organ. What with all of us an' the young folks that come in, there was usually a perty big crowd around. Taffy pulls was what we usually ended up with. I'd like to get a nice long piece of taffy an' throw it 'round the boys' necks. I was al'ays up to somethin' like that — jest full of the Old Nick, I guess. But I sure loved to dance. It wasn't long after I hed joined the church, an' there was a Fourth o' July celebration at Wright's Springs, an' a dance pavilion, an' I jest danced all afternoon. 'Course the minister heard about it, an' he come to me, an' he sez, "What's this I hear about you're dancing, Flora?" an' I sez, "Yes sir, I did dance out there at Wright's Springs. I danced all afternoon, an' I jest had a wonderful time," an' he sez, "You danced, an' you had a wonderful time? Yes, Flora, I'm sure you did." An' he didn't say nothing more about it, not a single word. An' when I left out there to come here to live I asked for my church letter, an' he wrote me the nicest letter, an' he sez, "You could have the letter, Flora, but I don't like to have your name go out o' my church. I'd like to keep it here." An' so I left my name in his church as long as he lived."

Before we go any further I want to tell something that happened when I was a little bit of a shaver. There was a circus at Oregon City an' I was with my married sister at Canby, an' she gave me money to go to the circus, an' got me a ticket to ride down on the train. No,

Library of Congress

I think she let my buy the ticket, for when the conductor come to get it from me I wouldn't let him have 6 it. "It's mine," I told him. "I paid for it, an' I'm goin' to keep it." He laughed an' went away, but perty soon he came back, an' at last he got me to give it to him, an' he just laughed and laughed. My! but I hed a good time at that circus. What I enjoyed most was the bareback riders. They was just wonderful. I could hardly wait to get home to see if I couldn't ride bareback too. I had a little white Indian pony, an' I could ride good. Just as soon as I got home I went out an' got Prince an' put the bridle on him, an' I got a stick to balance myself, an' I stood up. An' when they found me I was lying on the ground in the barnyard, an' that was the last of my bareback ridin'.

To go back to dancing. They was most all square dances. I used to call a good deal, but I don't remember much of the calls, mostly: Honor right an' left Promenade single file First couple to the right Cheat or swing, etc.

The music we danced to most was "That girl, that pretty girl, that girl I left behind me." Then there was the "Flying Dutchman" that was a round dance. An' the mazurka; an' other music was "The Irish Washerwoman", an' "Turkey in the Straw."

Yes, I c'n remember when we used to have Chinamen to do most all the grubbing. They always worked hard an' was honest. They liked to gamble, but that's nothin', so did the Indians, an' so did a lot of white men. We had one Chinaman, Ol' Sam, we called him, an' he was with us for years an' years. He'd cut wood an' wash an' make garden — everthin' there was to do of that kind. My husband had a nursery then, an' when we would go away, like on the Fourth of July or somethin', we could leave Ol' Sam in charge, knowin' everythin' would be taken care of jest the same as we was there. Once the county — or mebbe it was State — fruit inspector came to look at the trees, an' he asked Ol' Sam

7

"Any San Jose scale? Any tree lice?" That was what Ol' Sam told us when we got home, and he laughed an' laughed, an' said, "Allee time I tell um, I no sabe — I no sabe." When

Library of Congress

the children would ask him for anything he would say, "I not your papa. Go ask your papa. I not your papa." Then one day a letter came from his wife in China, an' he told us he had to go home; he sed, his wife write, "Come home; sell girl, buy boy a wife." Ol' Sam just cried, He sed, "I likes Melican way more better. I no likee sell girl, buy boy wife. I likee Melican way, 'You lovee me, I lovee you.'" Well o' course when he went to China we never saw him again. He couldn't come back to America.

I was married by Rev. T. L. Eliot in the Unitarian parsonage at Portland. We went to California on the steamer. My husband's parents lived in San Jose. Crossing the bar down at Astoria the steamer broke its main shaft, an' we drifted for 90 miles out of the channel. We was out five days, an' nights, but I was too seasick to care what happened. Finally, somewheres near San Francisco, some of the sailors got in a boat an' went ashore. Land o' Goshen! how sick I was. There was a parrot on board, an' every time I was anywhere 'round it, it would begin to gag an' throw up, an' that would only make me worse. I never been able to stand parrots since. "U-K" he'd go, "U-k," an' then I'd start all over again. When at last a tugboat came in sight, mebbe I wasn't happy, but they wanted a lot of salvage money, knowin' the steamer was broke down. "Give it to 'em," I said to the Captain — he'd been perty nice to us on the trip, al'ays askin' me how I felt — "Give 'em ev'rything on the boat." When we finally got off at San Francisco I was steppin' high — not because I felt so good, but it seemed like that ol' boat was raisin' under me all the time. We went to a hotel there. It wasn't the Palace, but it was one o' the ol' time good hotels, an' when my husband wrote in the register he said "P. H. Jarisch" an' - what do you think - "an' Flora Bagley!" The hotel clerk, he looked at my husband an' then he looked at me, funnylike as you 8 please; an' then I begin to giggle, an' I sez, "I thought I changed my name, up there at Portland." An' then the hotel clerk laughed, an' my husband turned red as a beet. When we got up to our room, my husband said he guessed he'd go up town. I was wearin' bangs then, an' jest as quick as he was gone I got out my curling tongs. I wanted to look all pretty when he got back, an' I sure hadn't been pretty on the way down. I hadn't ever been used to anythin' but candles and kerosene lamps. I al'ays curled my hair with a lamp, putting the

Library of Congress

curling tongs down the chimney. But they didn't have any lamps at this hotel, just gas. I don't know jest what I did, but perty soon I got awful sleepy, an' when I came to a doctor was workin' over me.

My husband an' I came back home on the train. I guess I must hev had a jinx or something on thet trip, for at Red Bluffs the conductor took sick — awful sick, an' nothin' would do but I must nurse him. I'd had some experience in nursing, what with all those brothers an' sisters an' everything. So my husband and I stopped off, an' I pulled him through all right. Then later, at Cow Creek Canyon, we was snowbound for eight days. The food all give out an' we didn't have a thing to eat, till at last a man walked to Sims Station an' brought back something to eat. About all he could get was some flour an' baking powder, an out of that I made same biscuits; an' them was just about the best biscuits any of us there ever tasted. I remember the president of the road was aboard, Colonel Crocker, I think his name was. When at last we got to Portland we found the St. Charles hotel, down on Front and Morrision, three feet under water. When we wanted to go back to Oregon City the car track was covered. So finally we got up there in an express wagon, an' then the ferry wasn't runnin' across the Willamette, so back we had to go to Portland. An' then we got a horse an' buggy an' drove up to where we was to live; which is now Marylhurst / where the Catholics have their college.

9

But in tellin' you all this I forgot something. I wanted to tell about school. Father gave an acre for the Teasel Creek schoolhouse, where I went mostly to school. I guess 'cause he was director or something I felt perty smart. Anyway once when a boy sed I had looked at the book when I was takin' an examination, I got some of the big boys together, an' we took this boy out where there was an eight-foot rail snake fence, an' I laid all the rails down, an' then we made the boy lay down an' we laid thet eight-rail fence across him; his head an' body on one side an' his legs on the other, An' we told him if he told teacher we'd beat him up. Well, you bet he didn't tell teacher.

Library of Congress

The teachers in them days punished pretty hard. There was a red-headed teacher threw an inkwell at me once. A favorite way was to have you hold out your hands, an' they'd hit 'em with a ruler. There was some orphans went to our district school. I felt sorry for 'em, they never had anythin' good to eat in their lunch, so I'd bring 'em apple pie and good sandwiches; an' when they was due for punishment I'd sometimes take their lickin's for 'em. I asked teacher if I could an' she let me. But once I got mad an' grabbed the teacher's switch and broke it in two.

Now this isn't school. It's about a funeral. There was an' old man an' woman livin' near us. The old man had yellow jaundice. He was sick a long time, an' finally he died. Mother was allays a pretty good Samaritan, so she had the old lady come to our house an' have the funeral from there. When we started to go to the graveyard the old lady didn't want to go. Mother thought it was 'cause she felt too bad. So mother said, all right, she'd look after everything an' for her to make herself at home an' be comfortable. Mother had a nice dinner all fixed to put on the table quick when we got back from the buryin', chicken ready to put in the fryin' pan, an' everthin'. It was kinda late in the afternoon when we got home from the buryin'-ground, an' what do you think? That ol' lady had cooked an' eaten most every bit o' that chicken up!

10

Oh yes, we hed church basket socials, an' singin' societies. Or schools, I guess they was allays called. We had debatin' societies. I mind an old man in our neighborhood sez to me one day, "You goin' to the [de?]-batin' tonight? My son James is goin' to be ther." His son, James! Why, he didn't know "straight up"!

"Straight up", that was one o' mother's sayings, an' when she was put out about something she'd say, "Tut, tut! tut, tut!" She'd say it four times that way. An' we children used to say, when we was surprised or somethin', "For crying in the sink!"

Library of Congress

What, you goin' out the back door, when you come in the front? That means more visitors today.

Form D

Extra Comment

Federal Writers' Project

Works Progress Administration

OREGON FOLKLORE STUDIES

Name of worker Sara B. Wrenn Date March 6, 1939

Address 505 Elks Building, Portland, Oregon

Subject Oregon Life in the '80s

Name and address of informant Mrs. Flora Ellen Jarisch South Oswego, Oregon

Comment:

The narrative of this informant speaks for itself. She was simply “chockful” of folklore reminiscences, talking very rapidly, as she cut her cotton yarn and tied it in the brightly colored “comfort” she was finishing. Once in awhile — with the interviewer writing madly to keep apace — she would pause to recall a picture of the past. But she never stopped her work. An interesting feature of this interview was that whenever the informant started

Library of Congress

a new subject she would be more careful in her speech; but once she hit her pace, back would come the vernacular, from which there was only an occasional lapse.