

HOWARD MOSTERT

Interviewed by:

June 1, 1993

Transcribed by Rich Curran

This is Tape One, Side One of an Interview with Howard Mostert, of Carson, Washington. This is part of an oral history project conducted by the Skamania County Historical Society. My name is Pat Hanson, and the date is June 1, 1993.

Pat: Well, good morning Howard. We are sitting here at you kitchen table at your home in Carson, Washington on a rather rainy and gloomy day. You have some good stories for us. So I would like you to start out by introducing yourself, give us a little background, and then, ah, perhaps we can start talking about your grandchildren.

Howard: Well, my name is Howard Mostert, and, ah, I was born in Portland, Oregon, on Taylor Street, in 1908. I went to Beach Grade School and Jefferson High School. I become a pharmacist and owned and operated my own store for about 20 years, starting about 1931 to 1951, at which time I sold my store, and went down to the **Bodine Cattle clinic(??)** as a pharmacist in the clinic. It was a part-time job that lasted for 20 years. After that time, is when I, ah, got interested in, after I retired from my pharmacy job down at the clinic, then I got more interested in Carson. However, my interest in Carson, I should say, originally started long ago. I was born when my grandparents came over from Koblenz, Germany, in the sailing vessels. On one of the lower decks loaded like animals, because they didn't speak any English or understand any English. So they had their name tags on them, and, ah, as near as I know they landed in New York harbor. Like I say, it was in the latter part of the 1800s. Well, from there they migrated, I don't know just how or when, but they migrated to Kansas city, and they soon, they located in a little place at Idana, Kansas, where they lived for several years. They had some bad years, and bad thunderstorms, and so forth, which they didn't care much about. As it so happened they saw an ad in the Kansas paper, they needed help, laborers, to build the old Cascade Locks, so my granddad loaded the family aboard, they had, ah, eventually, they had a family of eight. But, when they came to this country they only had the older children, a boy and a girl. So, from there on they had the remainder of them. But, anyway they loaded them on the train and came out to Cascade Locks, but due to the influx of workers there, they could't find a place to live, so they brought them by boat over to Carson, where they find, you might say a shack to live in. That's about all there was outside the **(inaudible)**. So, ah,

I understand my granddad worked in Cascade Locks, and he had to row a boat over in the morning, work all day, and then row the boat back at night. And it was through the swift rapids, because there were no locks, ah, dams, I mean, in those days. So while they were living over here, why, they raised more of the family. And eventually my mother, of course, my mother went to grade school here and her older sister finished grade school, so she was eligible to go to work then, in those days. So she got a job down at St. Martin's Hot Springs, as a clean up girl, and, ah, general work for the Springs. After awhile, she got acquainted with one of the St. Martin boys, He was Presque St. Martin, not the Pres that we know today, he was his uncle. She lived with him for, oh, some twenty-odd years. During that time they ran a barge up and down the Columbia River. They would haul grain up the river, or beg you pardon, they would haul cord wood up the river and then bring grain back down the river. That was quite an experience, and my Aunt Gertie told me how they, when the wind was upstream, following the current downstream, that they would hang a canvas sail under a barge and pull them down with the current. I later saw an article in one of the magazines telling how they used to do it. And in later years, which would be, well, ah, I, let's see, I'm 84 and I was about 10 years old, so it would be about 70 years ago (c. 1923), that they had a restaurant in Stevenson in the Ash building, down where the depot stands now. I visited them there, and ate at the little restaurant.

Pat: This aunt of yours was named Aunt Gertie?

Howard: Yeah.

Pat: And she was a Doetsch. And she married Mr. St. Martin.

Howard: She married Presque St. Martin. So I had an Uncle Presque for many years. He was a very fine man, and, ah, quite a dresser, so they got along quite well. During the time when grandfather was employed at Cascade Locks, it was hard labor, but that was all he was used to. And he, ah, as I understand he had to chisel and break rock to form the sides of the locks, which are still standing. So, I guess they were pretty well built. And, as it so happens, ah, my mother's youngest brother, who was Herman Doestch, bought property down at Skamania and operated a little farm down there, and helped construct the trail up Beacon Rock. At that time, and before that time, that was called Castle Rock. And they were going to dynamite that rock, but a man by the name of, I can't recall right now but I will think of it (Henry Biddle). Anyway, this man, who was a wealthy man, Biddle, Mr. Biddle, he purchased the rock, which they had already dug tunnels at the bottom to dynamite it and use it for jetty rock down at the mouth of the Columbia River. He just couldn't see that, so he purchased the rock and the land it was on. And that's how come they put a trail up there. And my uncle used his

little horse and carried sand and cement and pipe, and, ah, in construction of that trail. And then, for a while the rock was called Biddle Rock, and shortly after he turned it over to the state and they called it Beacon Rock, which we know it as now. One of my mother's sisters, who married a man from Germany by the name of Ernie Haussman, and for many years they had a place down at Skamania where he cut cord wood for a living, and he had a contract with Shaver Transportation Co., to, ah, cut cord wood to fire the sternwheelers. And he and his wife would go out and cut the wood, cut the trees, buck them up in four foot lengths, all by hand, long before the time of chain saws. Then they would load the wood on a wagon and take it down to Butler's Landing, which is now Skamania Landing, and the steamship company would pick up the wood for \$1.50 a cord. And, ah, I often said to my uncle, "That isn't very much money, is it?" And he said, "No, but for \$1.50 I'd come home with enough food for the family for a week." Then it so happens that one of the sons, Carl Haussman, got a job on the seine, down on the Strong place at Skamania, and they were dragging teams to drag the seine nets in. They would stand on a little platform, put on a double-tree behind the team of horses and they would swim the horses out and they would hook on this seine and you would stand on the board and ride them on in, dragging the seine with as much as a half-a-ton of salmon, and kind, and dump them on the beach. He told me about how they had to rotate the horses, they could only use them about three days at a time, because their hooves would get so soft, just like your fingernails, from being in the water all the time, and walking on the sand and gravel. They had to rotate the horses, only use them about three days at a time. So, that was quite an experience.

Pat: Do you remember who they sold this fish to?

Howard: Yes. To the, well the canneries. I can't remember . . . well, the McGowans Cannery at that time, used to pick up the fish. They would pick up where the boats would come up there, and they loaded up and they were on their way. And, for awhile, my grandparents lived on the Strong place, and that's down near the river in Skamania.

Pat: Is this Emory and Ruth Strong home?

Howard: Some relation, I think, yes. Anyway, they lived there for a few years. But, the, in later years, my grandparents moved on into Portland, because of George and Mary's health didn't allow them to later work any more. Andy was getting along in years, he lived to about 75, I think.

Pat: You have a picture here, Howard, of your grandmother and grandfather, and it was taken about 1924 on Gay Street in Portland. Tell me about your grandfather's beard.

Howard: Well, my grandfather had a hearty beard and that is the only way that I ever saw him. He had it when he come from Germany and he still had it when he passed away. He was quite a robust man, when he was young. He had done hard labor all his life.

Pat: What kind of things did you grandmother do, and what was her name?

Howard: Her name was, ah, Mary, if I remember right. Information has happened all this years, but, ah, they stayed with us in Portland for a few years, and then they moved and lived in a little place that my uncle Herman (Doetsch) had at Skamania. They lived in a little shack there for a number of years. When my grandfather passed away, my grandmother went up and stayed with my folks, up on the ranch, up in Wind River, back of Carson (on Szydlo Road in Hemlock). By that time, I had acquired some property up there. And that why I said my journey started way back when. It is just a fact that my grandparents landed in Carson, is how I got interested in. When I had the drug store in Portland, why a man traded with me there. His family lived a few blocks from the store and he was working for the government riding horseback as a ranger up in Hemlock, and he would come in about every two weeks. One of his visits, why he stopped in the store to buy a milkshake, or something, and I said, his name was Gale Simpson, I said, "Gale, if you ever hear of any property up in the valley, let me know, will you?" And he said, "Oh," he said, "go up and see Chaune Price. He's got more property than he can pay taxes on."

Pat: And what year was this?

Howard: Well, this about 1930 when I talked to him. And about 1931 is when I purchased the property. I was busy in the drug business for a number of years, so I had little time to devote to the property. But I did. There is a small house up there, on the (Wind) river. I had it for a couple of years and a couple of fishermen came in to use it one day, broke the lock off, come in and started a fire in the stove, which had an extension chimney which I would take off when I left the place, and they didn't put the extension in place when they started the fire and they burned the place down. Naturally it had a shake roof and it went fast, and that was the end of that place. So then I decided to build another one, closer to the road, because it was pretty wild country there, yet. There was no cleared ground at all, so we just moved in and made a place that you could put the car off the road, and started to build another place. And that was, I would say, oh, 1934-1935, something like that, maybe 1936. It's hard to keep track of all these things. But, we built that place and it become a summer home for awhile, just a place to go to. Well, shortly after my father was left out of his job where he had worked for 25 years, a laborer, in fact he was the caretaker and janitor

at the **Woodland Memorial Hall(???)** at East 6th and Alder in Portland. And after 25 years they decided they didn't need him anymore, and there was no retirement of any kind, so I had him come and help me at the store for awhile. He was there during the World War II years, and then, as business dropped off, I asked him . . . he said he wanted to get away from the city and get out of town, and I said, "Well, where do you want to live?" And he said back of Carson there. And I said of course. My mother was kinda in favor of it because she knew that country. And so, I moved him up on the place. And they had a little bad luck the first year they were up there, well, maybe they were up there a year-and-a-half, and the place burned down. No electricity at that time, no phone, and they had gone down to the neighbors, down to Joe Szydlo's, he had the chicken ranch there, and they went down to get feed because they had a few chickens. When they got back the house was gone, everything they had. So, actually I made a quick trip up, and to see what we were going to do, and asked my dad, "Well, Pop, what do you want to do now? Want to go back to Portland?" And he said, "I've got nothing in Portland." "Well," I says, "we'll clear a spot and build another place. How is that?" During World War II we had quite a time getting material. It's about within 50 yards of the house that burned, why we built another one. We had quite a little tract of land up there, in fact 140 acres, so we had room aplenty.

Pat: Now that you mentioned the land, how far, distance wise, was you property to, like the Forest Service ranger station. Can you describe just where it was located?

Howard: Well, the road up the ranger station is Hemlock Road, and just a little ways up that road is the Little Church in the Valley, (*Szydlo Road*) and we turn right there and went on up the river, and right about there is where Joe Szydlo had his chicken ranch, just as we turned off; and then we drove about 3½ miles on up the river.

Pat: Up the Wind River?

Howard: Yes. And that property up there was about the last piece of private land. I think, ah, one of the Prices had 40 acres above mine, but it is just a swamp, so it was really the last private land, the end of the road up there. Of course, the (forest) road went on up to Bear Mountain, and Little Soda Springs, and so forth. Then, we, ah, well, just developed it slowly by hand, and actually got in the business at one time. My folks had about 1,200 laying hens, which is just about all two people could take of, in fact, more than they could take care of, they had to have a little extra help. So, that about the extent of the improvements as far as the folks were there, and they were there about 10 years, and they managed to get by pretty well. And then my dad's heart gave him a bad time and had to move him back into Portland. So, we built him a little house on the outskirts of Portland, in fact, out about 148th and

Klickitat. We built a little home out there and moved him there. But in several years he passed away, and at that time my mother moved on down to stay with my daughter, ah, her daughter, my sister, down at Sweet Home, Ore. She lived there for a number of years, and then, my daughter and family moved down to Tillamook, and so my mother went down there, and she wound up in a nursing home in Tillamook, but she lived to be 101.

Pat: And this is Mary Doetsch Mostert, your grandmother?

Howard: Yes. Well, her name wasn't Mostert, just Mary Doetsch.

Pat: Howard, when I was talking to you the other day, you mentioned you were building your second home on that property during, or right near World War II, and supplies were short. Would you tell me how you managed it?

Howard: In fact, it was the third home. The little house out by the river was burned, and then, the second one, my folks', it burned out. This is really the third place. We were gluttons for punishment, you see. So, well that was during World War II, you couldn't get lumber, you couldn't get plumbing supplies, you couldn't get anything, and here we were trying to build a house. So, the first thing I did was to go over and see Bill Birkenfeld, the elder Birkenfeld. His sons, Bill and Joe, are still in the area out there, and I guess still in the logging business. It was their father that had the mill at that time, so I went over and saw Bill, and said, "I need some lumber." He was kind of a rough talking man, a little bit anyway, and he said, "Well, I can't sell you any lumber because the government's got it all. They take everything. It all goes to Tacoma." Then he said, "Oh, you got burned out, didn't you?" And I said, "Yep?" Then he said, "Well, there are a couple of piles over there. I don't know who it belongs to. Maybe you can use it. It is cull lumber." And I said, "Yes, I can use it. I can use anything." So I made him a deal for that cull lumber, and he had his boys haul it up to the place, and the following day, why, there his trucks come, two big, ah, three big 30' timbers, 8x10 timbers. I happened to be there at that time, and he said, "Well, here are three timbers, they are too twisty, I can't sell them." I said, "Well, that's just fine. We'll take the twist out of them and we will shim them a little bit." So that's what we put underneath the third house. Thanks to Bill Birkenfeld, we were able to rebuild. And then with the help of a lot of good neighbors, one of whom was our closest neighbors up there, was Tom Cummins. He was one of the old-timers up there. He lost his right arm when a donkey engine exploded, when they were using old donkey engines for logging. And the engine exploded and somehow came down on his arm, so he lost his arm. But he carried on, and he could do as much work as any man with two arms, because he learned how to compensate for it. And, ah, Tom Cummins, Joe Szydlo, and a lot of the other good neighbors, we managed to get the place built and occupied. I remember distinctly that the folks lived in the place at

the time of the Vanport (Portland) Flood, which is about 1946, I think (*Editor: it was 1948*). Because I was up there on a Sunday, and went across the Denver fill, coming out of Portland, because I always come up the Washington side, and when you got up to the place you just stopped, we stopped to have lunch. The dike had broken at Vanport and it flooded everything, and they wanted any pharmacists or druggists that had their stores closed, to come down and help out because they needed supplies so bad. We were just up the road from Vanport a little bit, I was up on Killingsworth, so naturally I went on down. We had to go back the Oregon side to get down, and when we got down there they took all the first aid supplies, and medical supplies of any kind to use for the folks who were hurt or disabled in the flood.

END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE ONE

START OF TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO

Pat: Howard, when you were talking about the difficulty of getting material to build your third home on your property out on the Wind River, you also told me a story, last week, about a water pipe. Could you tell us?

Howard: Yes. We had a good spring up on the ranch, but we needed to pipe it down to the house to get gravity feed, so I went down to Alaska Junk and I bought a ton of pipe at, ah, a penny or two cents a pound, or something like that. Anyway, I had a big truck load, about a 2-ton truck, loaded with pipe, all shapes and sizes, fittings, and so forth, and I hired a man to haul it up. And that was in early spring, and I thought the road would be clear, got up as far as where the little bridge crosses Wind River, which was upstream from where the bridge is now on Hemlock Road. It was upstream away and it was quite a man-made dam there, and below the dam was a bridge, and that's where we crossed to get over to our road to go on up to our place. Well, I got up that far with the truck, and here the snow plows and plowed to the end of the bridge and that was it. From there on there was three or four feet of snow yet, so, not wanting to haul the pipe way back home, we unloaded it and stuck it under one end of the bridge, which was the only thing I could do. I was hoping it would be there when I come back again. Well, in two weeks time I was able to make a trip back up there, and, the pipe was all there, maybe a few pieces missing, and most of it was there. We loaded it up to our place and we put in our pipe line which ran from the spring to our house and give us gravity-feed water. So, that was just one of the instances that occurred. Then, ah, well, let's see, oh, I talked about Chauncey Price before. Chauncey was one of the commissioners of the P.U.D., in fact he was involved there some way for a number of years. And he also had a grocery store at the intersection of Wind River Road and Hot Springs road in Carson, which is now the Trading Post, or the second-hand store. He operated that

for a number of years, and then a man by the name of (Paul) Schindler had the butcher shop there. Folks got material and supplies. Later on he sold the store to (Walt) Hockinson, who had the store for a number of years. I think he had at one time taken the mail up the valley and also delivered a few groceries. But, he has passed away in the last few years, so that's the end of another episode.

Pat: Howard, your granddaughter, Lorena Hollis. she and her family live on the Szydlo place now, could you tell me anything about Mr. Szydlo and his wife?

Howard: Yes. Joe Szydlo was a very kind man, and helped me out a good deal and helped my folks out a good deal when they were up there. In fact, when they burned out my folks stayed down at Joe Szydlo's; lived there and went up each day and took care of their chickens, and then come back and stay down there over the night. I really appreciate what Joe did for me. During the time I knew Joe, why, his wife become ill, and they had to rush her to the hospital. When she was ready to be released from the hospital, we said she could come over and can have her stay at our place until we can take her home. The day she was released, why, we took her over to our home. And she said, "I'd like to get home." I said, "Well, maybe we can take you up tomorrow." She said, "Well, I sure wish I could go up this afternoon, or this evening." Well, I was still in the drug store and I worked until 10 o'clock at night, so I said, "Well, after 10 o'clock we will jump in the car and we'll take you home." And, so, we made a trip up there. Of course, it was 11:30 or so when we got there, and we sat and sipped coffee and visited with Joe. When we said goodbye, little did we know that would be the last time we'd see Mrs. Szydlo, because the following morning Joe called up and said that his wife had passed away during the night. So, I guess it was intuition, or something, that she wanted to be home. So, that's the end of that story.

Pat: Howard, when you first started talking on the other side of this tape, and you told where you were born and where you went to school, we haven't heard about your first marriage, and your children, and your second marriage. Could you give us a little background?

Howard: Well, like I say, I went to Beach grade school and Jefferson high school. Then I went on to take pharmacy at what was then the North Pacific College of Dentistry and Pharmacy. I received my diploma there in 1931, took the state pharmacy board (test) and passed it in year '31. And I also got married to, ah, my first wife, Mary Elizabeth **Kurkees(??)**. They were folks that had come from Hungary, in the early days, however most of their children were married in this country. Mary and I lived together for many years, but in later years Mary become crippled up so bad, well, it was a form of arthritis, but it affected the internal organs, and so forth, until she finally passed

away. That was about the time that I retired from the clinic (c. 1951). Shortly after she passed away I married my second wife, who was **Mary Elizabeth Babb(??)** at that time. They lived, they called her Babe instead of Elizabeth, and they lived right directly across the street from us, and they helped take care of my first wife for a long time, and she was there day and night when she was needed to help her over a bad time. One of the last words my first wife said when she passed away, was: "Whatever you do, be good to Betty." Because she had been so good to my wife. So, I thought the best thing I could do was to marry her, and that's what we did.

Pat: And you are still married, so it must have been the right decision. Howard, you had two daughters by your first marriage. Could we have a little information on them?

Howard: Well, yes, our first daughter was Marilyn, she was born in 1933, and then she went to Blessed Sacrament grade school, and graduated from Jefferson high school. Then she was married, and later her and her husband lived up on the place on the ranch. In the meantime, my dad's renters were up there, which wasn't so satisfactory. But Marilyn and her husband lived in the same house that my mother and dad lived in. Well, as time went on, there were changes in relationships, and so forth, and Marilyn and her first husband got a divorce, and then, shortly after she become married to Dick Misner, who she is now living with. She had a job with the Forest Service, in fact, that was one reason they started building that A-frame up there because they needed a place to live. So that's why the building was constructed and she went to work for the Forest Service, and, of course, Dick was working for the nursery up there. And then they lived in the A-frame for several years, and then Dick decided to build a home over on his property on Hemlock Road, and so they moved over there. About that time my wife and I moved up from Portland, and by that time I was retired, and moved up from Portland, and we lived in the home on the ranch, for, now about 17 years. We didn't do much farming up there, other than, ah, just gardening, and we fed the deer and made a very pleasant home. But, after that 17 years up there my health started to threaten a little bit and I was getting older and no longer able to get out and cut the wood, and shovel the snow, so we decided to move down into Carson, and we have been down in Carson now for about five years. And we are living in the old Estabrook home, the old homestead home. When my mother was going to grade school up here, she used to visit one of the Estabrook girls in the same home that we are now living, which made it quite interesting. So, that's about the end of that episode.