

# PAUL FRYE

**Interviewer: Ivan Donaldson**

May 10, 1974: Interview with Paul Frye of North Bonneville, Washington, in relation to one of his earlier friends, Henry Johnson, here in this region, a native American.

Ivan: Paul, will you relate the topics that you have on that list?

Paul: Well, Henry Johnson, he was known as “little Henrys by his friends. His mother was a full blood Yakima Indian; his father was white, nationality unknown with the exception that he was some part Negro, probably a quarter. Little Henry was born in 1850 and died March 24, 1956. He was born on the west side of Courtner’s Lake, where the present cottonwood trees are. At that time there was some 5,000 Indians living in that vicinity from the present town of North Bonneville, down through Skamania County. When he was 10 years old he was climbing on a pile of firewood and he fell, it rolled and fell with him and he broke his back and from that injury, he never recovered. He always walked with a very bent stature. Little Henry told me many things, he was quite an interesting character, one of the most interesting men that I think I ever talked to. He was very hard to get acquainted with and he spoke with a brogue that was very, very hard to understand. He was very brilliant, he was very bright and he lived up until his death; well, he remembered things that were almost unbelievable. He told me the story of the Bridge of the Gods that was told to him by his great-grandfather, whose father was at the present time, was with a tribe of Indians and they were going to fight with the Multnomah tribe. He said the Gods were very angry and they didn’t want the battle to take place but they were to meet on the Bridge of the Gods and fight. Before the Multnomah tribe reached there, they were probably as far as the present location of Bonneville Dam, when he said the Gods got so angry that the whole bridge shook and it fell down and the Indians were all afraid and they left, with the exception of his great-great-grandfather, and he stayed around and somehow, he didn’t know who he was, but there was a white man that was caught in the debris. Well, after 24 hours or so, they got up enough courage to get him out, they got the white man out but that’s Little Henry’s story of the bridge.

Ivan: And what was the other tribe besides the Multnomahs?

Paul: The Yakamas. Little Henry was a Yakama, his mother was full-blooded. The Bridge of the Gods story was quite interesting.

Ivan: Did he indicate about when this story, when the bridge fell, about how many years old . . .

Paul: No, but you could probably figure back on that because his great-grandfather told him the story and his great-grandfather's father was there at the time. Now about that time, along in there somewhere in later years, there was great blood through here. Little Henry said, the water run from mountain side to mountainside and his great-grandfather was there at the time. Now he said the medicine man wasn't a very good medicine man because he predicted what time it would be and he missed it by two days. He said the Gods had warned the Chief through the medicine man to get to higher ground and going to this higher ground, they went way back into the hills, now the rocks that they called the two chiefs, he called it the Chief and his wife and he said his version of it as told by the tribe was that they were told not to look back at all but when they got up to the top, the Chief and his wife could not resist looking back because they thought the other people might be in there, down below that hadn't come up. So the Gods were angry and they turned them into rock. So that's his story of . . .

Ivan: Are these figures over here, toward the west of North Bonneville?

Paul: Yes. Little Henry showed me the place of the block houses along the river, the locations where they were. He said the main one was here at Fort Rains and then they had another one down at Little Ashes Lake. Then they had one down by where the town of Cascades used to be and also they had another one up a little farther. He said there was four block houses.

Ivan: Oh, now that's interesting.

Paul: He said he knew because he played in all of them, went through all of them. There is a pile of rock back of Ashes Lake that has been called an Indian fortress. Now, little Henry said, that isn't an Indian fortress at all, he said the soldiers that were stationed in the block house at Little Ashes Lake, to give them exercise those commanders would make them carry rocks and put them up there, he said he knew because he went along with them.

Ivan: This was while the forts were still standing?

Paul: Yes, that's while the forts were still standing. He told me quite a bit about the soldiers and about the graveyard up on the hill, right across from Little Ashes Lake.

Ivan: Graveyard up on the hill?

Paul: Yes I have been there. There is a graveyard there.

Ivan: Across from Ashes Lake, Little Ashes Lake?

Paul: Little Ashes Lake, right up on the top of the hill.

Ivan: East or West?

Paul: It's on the East side of the road.

Ivan: Is it still marked? Can you still determine

Paul: It's marked.

Ivan: For Indians?

Paul: No, it's for soldiers. Most people don't know, but there is a graveyard there.

Ivan: Could you show it to me sometime?

Paul: I can't climb up there but I'll show you where it is. He also worked in the woods as a whistle punk. Now Mr. Walker, who is dead, lived at Skamania, he told me a story about little Henry. He said little Henry would get up at 3:00 and start the engine, the steam engine, so he said one day he met little Henry down the road hiding behind a stump and they stopped and asked him what was the matter. He said, it's going to blow, it's going to blow, he said the gage has gone around 2 times and it's starting around the 3rd time, he said this S.O.B. is gonna blow, it's gonna blow.

Ivan: A steam donkey, huh?

Paul: Steam donkey. So he worked in the woods as a whistle punk for years.

Ivan: Well, I'm interested to follow up. Did it blow?

Paul: Yeah, it blew. The safety valve stuck. But he watched the needle go around twice, when it started around the third time, he got scared. Now he had a house at Stevenson and when he was at the sanitarium, at the early part of his stay down there, he would run off and I picked him up many, many times as he was running off. I don't remember who it was, they picked him up and he wanted to go up to his house. He went up to his house and someone had robbed him; they had taken his prized possession which was a chest of Roger's silver,

among other things. He was quite broken up about it and Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_ can tell you how he cried and carried on about losing his possessions but he still continued to run off. One day I picked him up almost down here where I live, so Henry said, please take me house, please take me house. Take me house once, I no run off no more. So I said, fine. I took him up there and he wouldn't get out of the car, he just wanted to look at his house.

Ivan: This was at Stevenson?

Paul: At Stevenson. And he never run off again.

Ivan: He was quite old at that time?

Paul: Yes he was. That was a short time before his death. He died March 24, 1956. At that time, see he was born in 1850, and the welfare agency had him between 98 and 100 but I talked to Indian friends of his and according to his relations, they say he was born in 1850 which would make him 106, so I'll take their word over the welfare. He was one of the most interesting characters I think I ever knew.

Ivan: And where was his house in Stevenson?

Paul: It was back up in the neighborhood of where Jack Wright lives, up in there. He had a small house. Now, he made a deal wtht Pres Ash to keep him supplied with stuff he needed and when he died, Pres Ash was to get the house. Now, Pres Ash gave him, many times, more than that house was worth. We have to give Pres Ash credit for being a great man, which he was.

Ivan: And did the house go to the Ash estate then?

Paul: As far as I know.

Ivan: Did this gentlemen tell you anything about the roads through here?

Paul: Yeah, he told me about the road that went around that was built later, that went around the rapids. About how they would transport the stuff across and so forth. Whether he was alive at that time or not, I don't know, I mean if that was before his time or not, I don't know but he knew exact locations of where it started down here at \_\_\_\_\_ and where it come through here and where it went to up above where the Bridge of the Gods is.

Ivan: I wish I could have had an interview with him because these roads through this region are exceedingly interesting to me. The first road here, the portage road was built, the tramway, in 1851 and then the Bradford brothers were re-building it in 1856 when the massacre occurred.

Paul: Well he remembered about the massacre. He was about 6 or 7 years old then. He talked about it.

Ivan: He did. Did he say anything about the Bradford brothers? Did he talk about them at all.

Paul: No he never mentioned them at all. But he talked about the railroad and he showed me where the railroad had gone through; how it had gone through; he remembered it very distinctly.

Ivan: Did he remember before the steel rails were put in? Did he remember the old wooden rails on the first tramway? Did he mention that?

Paul: Oh yeah. You see he was born down here below North Bonneville. His father was a riverboat captain.

Ivan: Oh? Do you remember his father's name?

Paul: Johnson.

Ivan: Johnson, is that the man who's buried down here in the Pioneer Cemetery, this riverboat captain? There is one buried down here, I know.

Paul: That I don't know. He never mentioned his father at all. He wouldn't talk about his father, except that he did tell me his father was a riverboat captain and he repeated that many, many times. He also told me his father had a little (inaudible) in him, he didn't say how much but from what I get from it, his father must have been an eighth or a quarter. He wasn't very much. His mother was a full-blooded Yakama Indian.

Ivan: Did he have any comments that were handed down to him about his tribesmen in relation to the massacre? Did he tell you any stories about the massacre?

Paul: No, only he said that the Indians were in the right and the whites were oppressing them and forcing them to do it. That was his version of it.

Ivan: Well, I judge that I would have to agree with the Indians in that the whites were taking over their native home. I guess if I'd been in their shoes I would have protested too.

Paul: But his father, grandfather, great-grandfather were all warriors.

Ivan: Did he tell you anything about the first wagon road that went through?

Paul: He said they were rough, there wasn't much to them. That's about all he

said.

Ivan: Did he tell you where that first wagon road went? For instance, Charlie Ziegler and Raymond Sly told me it went between Rand and Wauna Lakes up there.

Paul: That's what he told me, too.

Ivan: Did he indicate when that road might have been built?

Paul: No.

Ivan: He would have remembered the Pioneer era, too, the first pioneers came through here in 1843 but the movement of the pioneers extended for many years thereafter. Did he say anything about the pioneers coming through here?

Paul: Nothing with the exception that sometimes there was a lot of them and sometimes there wasn't many, and many of them were lost in the river.

Ivan: Oh, floating downstream, lost in the river, from The Dalles.

Paul: Uh huh.

Ivan: Did he ever say that any of them went over the Cascade Rapids?

Paul: Oh yeah. High water in flood time.

Ivan: No, I mean the pioneer rafts being carried over the rapids.

Paul: Yes.

Ivan: Sams has said that was mighty, mighty wild water.

Paul: That's what little Henry said.

Ivan: Course, I remember the rapids before they were flooded out. I worked building guard rails on this road over here in the summer of 1935 before going to college. The fishwheels were still operating on, no, they were still existing on the Washington side of the river.

Paul: He told me the same thing that Mr. Phillips told me, that there was so many fish in the river, many times they'd push a barge under to catch the fish and he said, many times the barge would be sunk before they could pull the fish out, or pull the barge out. The barge would sink with the fish, there were that many.

Ivan: Does he mean the fishwheel barge, the floating type?

Paul: Yeah, floating type barge. Yeah, Mr. Phillips told that same thing.

Ivan: Is he still living?

Paul: Oh no, he's gone now.

Ivan: Let's see, the fishwheels came here in 1879 and this young man, Johnson, would be then in his 20's or nearing his 30's. Did he say anything about the beginning of the fishwheel era?

Paul: Oh, the Indians were very unhappy about it, he said. About the fishwheels coming in and taking so many fish.

Ivan: Did he tell you anything about the Hamilton brothers? S.M. Hamilton, Bill Hamilton?

Paul: No, he never told me anything about any individual and you'd ask him about it and he would shake his head.

Ivan: That's too bad. We needed that record. You know the first fishwheel on the Columbia was practically right out here in front of your door.

Paul: Yeah, that's what Mr. Phillips told me.

Ivan: Oh, he told you that too, huh?

Paul: Oh yeah, cause he worked on the wheel out there.

Ivan: Oh he did. Did he know the man who built it?

Paul: If he did, he never told me. He also worked on the big wheel down here at Beacon Rock.

Ivan: Oh, the Ice House Wheel at Beacon Rock?

Paul: Yes, he said one time they picked up a sturgeon that stopped the wheel. It took them 2 days to cut it apart. It was well over 1200 pounds. Now this wheel was still standing down here in fairly good shape when I was here.

Ivan: The one at Beacon Rock?

Paul: The one that the high schoolers burnt down.

Ivan: Oh? High school kids burnt it down? I didn't know that one.

Paul: Oh yeah.

Ivan: When was that?

Paul: 1943.

Ivan: Right there at Beacon Rock.

Paul: Yeah. Oh it was an antique that should have been preserved, just like the old jail house down here, even the door was hanging on it when I come here.

Ivan: I saw that, too, now it's smoldered into the earth. But the high school kids of Stevenson burned down the Ice House Wheel at Beacon Rock?

Paul: That's right.

Ivan: Do you know any of them that participated, where I could get some leads.

Paul: I haven't the slightest idea who any of them were.

Ivan: When did you come here Paul?

Paul: 1942

Ivan: And I come here September 26, 1941. Did Mr. Johnson say anything about the 1915 road around the point of this slide up there at Bridge of the Gods? (Interrupted by phone) We were discussing the 1915 road which would therefore be the more modern road than that old 1907 road up over the slide. Did he indicate anything about that?

Paul: No, he never mentioned it, so I didn't know anything about it either.

Ivan: Yes, one went around the point up there at the Bridge of the Gods and then it was, well, you can see part of it up here on the hillside just east of your home right now, and then in 1922 or 1923 the roads were placed at a lower level and there were some traces of some old roads there to the south of the present road right there a quarter of a mile west of the Bridge of the Gods. Old roads in there I would dearly love to identify.

Paul: I think these roads that were in connection with a railroad that went up there?

Ivan: Well, it's possible. I was just trying to tie it to the old portage roads that went through. In 1856, Lieutenant G. H. Derby spent \$25,000 in building a road from the lower Cascades up around the point here near the Bridge of the Gods up



around to the Upper Landing. I wonder if some of those roads which we can see up there, relate to the Hamilton brothers or to Chenoweth, who built the first tramway, or to this Lieutenant in the military.

Paul: He never talked to me about roads at all, except for the railroad.

Ivan: He did talk about the railroad?

Paul: Yeah.

Ivan: That history is pretty well established but when, what did he say about it?

Paul: Nothing with the exception that it was busy going back and forth.

Ivan: Did he say anything about the construction of the tunnel at Cape Horn?

Paul: No. What he told me was right around North Bonneville and right in here.

Ivan: Did he tell you anything about these burial platforms out here just a few hundred feet east of your home?

Paul: Yeah, he told me that there was a burial ground there but he didn't elaborate on it.

Ivan: Were there any remnants of that when you came here?

Paul: No.

Ivan: When did his people leave this region?

Paul: They started leaving after the big flood. He said there was over 5,000 came here and the big flood, he said water run from mountainside to mountainside through here; it was that big and he knew because he saw it.

Ivan: Oh, he saw it, and this would have to be a greater flood than the 1894 flood.

Paul: He said there hadn't been a flood since then.

Ivan: Could he have been referring to the 1894 flood?

Paul: No, this one I'm referring to probably happened in the 50's because he was a boy, probably 1850 or 1860, somewhere in there, because he told me he was a little boy when they had this big flood. He said there hadn't been any flood since, even the flood in '94, he said that was just high water.

Ivan: Did he tell you anything about the fish runs, the abundance of fish?

Paul: Oh, Yeah. He said he could walk across Wind River on the backs of the fish, there were that many.

Ivan: Would this be spring run fish or fall run fish?

Paul: Both, he said big in spring, big in fall.

Ivan: Did he comment about the fish runs into the White Salmon River?

Paul: No, nothing except what went right through here. I think he spent his entire life in Stevenson-North Bonneville from what I could get from him.

Ivan: What were these logging operations in which he participated? Were they after the turn of the century or before the turn of the century?

Paul: Well, I took it from him that it was before the turn of the century;, it might have been later. He might have been working because, well, Mr. Walker was up in years when he died.

Ivan: Which Mr. Walker was this?

Paul: He was married to Mrs. Sams, Grace Walker's husband.

Ivan: Oh, Bill Sam's sister's husband. He was a logger?

Paul: He worked in the logs because he was telling me about this incident with Little Henry, so he had to be there.

Ivan: Was this the era of the logging railroads, I wonder.

Paul: From what Little Henry said, it was. It was before trucks because he mentioned horses in the woods and he never mentioned a truck in the woods. He would have been pretty old to have worked in the woods with trucks anyway. He was born in 1850, you see.

Ivan: Trucks didn't come in until 1920, did they?

Paul: No.

Ivan: Did he tell you anything about the people that owned the Island? Bradford Island? Warren Packing Company?

Paul: No

Ivan: How long had he been in this nursing home down here with Mrs. Ragsdale?  
(North Bonneville.)

Paul: I don't know, he went in there when she first started the place and was in there a good many years. He was a little difficult to understand. You had to be with him for awhile to understand what he meant and what he said, but I got to the point where I understood him very well.

Ivan: I had some paper-and-pencil interviews with Frank Estabrook in Stevenson. This was before I thought I could afford one of these tape machines but I should have gotten an immense more wealth of information from him.

Paul: He's dead, he's a very close friend of mine.

Ivan: He had a very remarkable memory, remarkable experiences.

Paul: Well, Little Henry did, too. His, up until he died, his mind was perfectly clear. It was hard to get anything out of him because he was more or less reluctant to talk.

Ivan: But he would talk to you.

Paul: He would talk to me, yes. He'd talk to me, my wife and Mrs. Ragsdale, but he wouldn't talk to many. Sometimes there would be as many as 20 Yakima Indians come down to visit him at the Sanitorium. He had a cousin that run the hotel up the river on that barge, up at Underwood. She had an interest in it or something; she'd been there several years, too.

Ivan: Could she have been related to the Underwoods?, the Underwoods married into the Canadian-American group.

Paul: It's possible, but I've seen as many as 15 or 20 Indians down visiting several times.

Ivan: Did they speak the native English?

Paul: Yeah.

Ivan: And he spoke it back?

Paul: Oh yeah. I think that's one reason it was so hard to understand him because his dialect was hard to understand. It took me quite a while before I could understand him.

Ivan: Would it have helped if one were part Indian to talk with him, if he knew that?

Paul: Probably. I think he talked to me more freely than he did anyone else.

Ivan: I was just wondering if it were because he knew that you had some native blood.

Paul: I think that was it, yes.

Ivan: You are descended from what American group?

Paul: I'm part Delaware and Cherokee. My wife is half Mohawk.

Ivan: And you came originally from the East coast area?

Paul: No, my parents come from Tennessee and they moved to Texas while the buffalo was still on the plains. I think he saw three in the wilds and my mother come from Tennessee to Texas and they were married. I was born in Texas and I was there until I was 21 years old.

Ivan: Then where did you go?

Paul: Well, I was an electrical engineer and I went where the money was which was the Pennsylvania oil fields; so I worked in every state west to the Mississippi River.

Ivan: This is interesting that you had this electrical engineer background experience. Where did you gain that knowledge? In some formal school or the school of hard knocks?

Paul: Both.

Ivan: What formal school?

Paul: A Baptist College.

Ivan: In what city?

Paul: Plainview, Texas.

Ivan: What years were you there?

Paul: Well, I was born in Plainview, and I remember that little town, you could see the antelope run where the business part is now. It was probably a town of 150.

Ivan: What years were these, please?

Paul: Well, I graduated in 1923 from the Baptist College. Well, they called it Wayland College but it was a Baptist College

Ivan: You were then 23 years old?

Paul: About that. Yeah, I had a shop of my own for about three or four years and then I went to work in the oil fields. That's where the money was, big money. 50¢ an hour, 10 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Ivan: Rugged days. And this was in the days of the wild-cattin'?

Paul: Right. Seen wild cat wells come in, I've seen 264 nitroglycerin put down the hole and five minutes later, a guy standing over it to catch it as it come up, the gas pressure would blow it out, no place to go.

Ivan: He would actually catch it in his hand against his chest in his arms.

Paul: He had to, cause if he didn't it would blow up into the tower and that would be it.

Ivan: And why would they put this nitro down there with the gas blowing.

Paul: To expand the hole where you get more oil.

Ivan: And there was so much gas pressure, the 240 quarts of nitro would not go down?

Paul: That's right.

Ivan: Would it come up fairly slowly or would it come up fast?

Paul: Oh, not too fast because it was heavy. It would come up slow enough to where a person could grab it.

Ivan: How long a cylinder was this?

Paul: Oh, probably six or seven feet.

Ivan: A piece of pipe welded at each end?

Paul: Well, it was a round cylinder of gas. You'd stick one of those cans, that five-gallon cans they had nitro in, lay it out in the open for a year or two years and shoot it with a .22 and it would blow all to pieces.

Ivan: Is that right? Still enough nitro in it to blow? It must have been a dangerous job that fellow had catching this.

Paul: Well it was all dangerous. I had the \_\_\_\_\_ rings were made out of wood in those days and when they'd bring in a well. They'd shoot over the top and then we'd have to repair the lights on top. Climb that tower that was 136 feet, climb that wooden tower, no steps, covered with oil. I done it many times.

Ivan: When did you leave the oil boom country?

Paul: I quit the oil fields in 1928 and went to work for the Kansas Gas and Electric Company. I worked for them for four years.

Ivan: Then you came here?

Paul: No, I went to Colorado.

(Break in tape - someone came to the door)

Ivan: I think you said that Mr. Johnson would not talk about any of his associates, but did he ever mention Frank Estabrook?

Paul: Oh, yeah.

Ivan: They were friends no doubt.

Paul: Oh, yeah.

Ivan: And Mrs. Estabrook?

Paul: Yeah, he mentioned them; ever once in a while he would talk about them. They were friends of each other. He had known them ever since they were children.

Ivan: Did he mention anything about the town of Lower Cascades, down here?

Paul: No, he never mentioned anything about it. He showed me where the town of Cascades were but he showed me the boundaries, too.

Ivan: Now, that old Fort, Fort Cascade was right down there at the Garrison Eddy, right up at the Garrison Eddy.

Paul: No, it would be north and west of the old Fort.

Ivan: Oh, west of Garrison Eddy then.

Paul: Yeah, not too far but north and west of it.

Ivan: You've spoken about your Indian arrowhead collection, Paul, that you're going to show me in a few seconds, I hope. From whence came these points?

Paul: This collection is one I picked up over the various parts of the United States. There have been five different archaeologists at the Smithsonian Institute. The last one drove down all the way from Spokane and spent an hour here and drove back to Spokane just to see my collection because one of the archaeologists at the Smithsonian Institute had told him about it. I have been told by practically all of them, one was a woman, that as far as they know of I have the largest collection of ceremonial points than any individual in the United States. Most of my ceremonial points are from Lafloors County, Louisiana and various parts of Arkansas. And the ceremonial points were found in caves.

Ivan: What is that, a limestone country?

Paul: Yeah, it's a limestone country.

Ivan: Well, Paul you spoke about you might want to give your points to the County, to the Historical Society someday. Would this be a gift to the people of Skamania County?

Paul: Yes, that's right.

Ivan: Have you been in the museum recently? We're getting some new artifacts there, new accessions.

Paul: Not very recently. I have quite a few things in the West Texas museum in Kanyon, Texas. Stuff that was left me by my grandmother and my grandfather. I wish it was up here but it can't be, it's already down there.

Ivan: You gave it to those people long ago. What kind of items were those?

Paul: Well, one of them was one of the first nails and areas that my grandmother and grandfather had that they had brought from Tennessee with them.

Ivan: Any arrows, complete intact arrows?

Paul: Oh, yes.

Ivan: Any throwing sticks?

Paul: Oh, yes.

Ivan: Original wood, good shape?

Paul: Well, you couldn't say the wood was in good shape but it's distinguishable.

Ivan: I judge you read Emory Strong's Stone Age of the Columbia?

Paul: Oh, yes.

Ivan: Any other items about this Mr. Johnson that you can remember?

Paul: No, I think, I have talked it over with Mrs. Ragsdale, we got the fundamental points