

Extension Oral History Project -- Walt Schroeder -- Part 3

Date: October 28, 2007

Place: Walt's home outside Gold Beach, Oregon

Time: 23.26 minutes

Interviewer: Elizabeth Uhlig, Oral Historian

Transcriber: Sue Bowman

EU: This is Part 3 of the Extension Service Oral History interview with Walt Schroeder.

[00:05]

Walt, could you talk a little bit more about some of the programs you worked in; for example, the super tours?

WS: Okay, I mentioned earlier that when I was in Coos and also Curry County we used to have a tri-county livestock judging tour. It got to be that there were really very few kids involved in livestock and that seemed to be an anachronism; we didn't need to spend a lot of time on that, so the Coos County agent and I, whom I worked with in Coos County earlier when we were both agents there, started a super tour program which have kids an opportunity to see careers outside of their own community. And so we would get a bus or two and we travelled all over the state of Oregon to different places. One place this year and one place another year to look at different career opportunities, different enterprises and things like that. One year we went to Portland, I think it was, I get it confused with too many things, but we went to Swan Island to see truck manufacturing, for example. Did we go to the zoo that trip, Sally? We went to different businesses in the Portland metro area to see what was going on up there to give kids an idea that there is a wider world than you are used to down at home. A lot of the kids in Curry County never really got out of Curry County.

[1:25]

SS: Especially after the PI ended

WS: Yeah, after the PI, Pacific International Livestock Exhibition, ended. Used to have livestock kids go to that, but one year we had a maritime thing. We went onboard a ship, we looked at the port operations, we did a whole bunch of stuff like that that had to do with maritime. On another one, we went to Klamath area and we looked at the Klamath Reclamation project, the Irrigation Reclamation Project, a horse farm, the Modoc Indian Battle Beds there in the lava beds and a number of other things that pertained to that particular area. One year we went to Salem to the State Capitol, the mission bottom with a lot of agriculture out there, oh gosh, where else? I have it all written down someplace in my annual reports. In other words, we tried to expand the knowledge that arises in kids by going to different things rather than just having a livestock judging contest type thing and that was particularly a part of that.

[2:30]

Another one was our 4-H marketing program. It had been going here in the county when I came here but we greatly expanded it for I think sixth graders. And I developed a set of slides – 181 slides – showing the different phases of marketing from advertising packaging, retailing, wholesaling, just the whole line of things and we used that in the schools to show the kids the opportunities in marketing careers and then culminating with a tour to the marketing center which is in Coos Bay and we made arrangements for kids to go through different stores and businesses. J.C. Penney, for example, a manager just welcomed us in and they showed us behind the scenes how a big department store works. We went to distribution things for foods, freezer plants, automotive shops, all kinds of things like that to see the opportunities and careers in those areas. And all of those included advertising all the way through to the final sales, including the packaging and everything like that.

I got a national award for that. And fortunately, it was during the bi-centennial back in Richmond, Virginia and our whole family went back so we had a chance to put something on both ends of the trip and they never did pay my first class airfare, but we got us all on tourist class.

EU: Who gave you that award?

WS: Can't remember now who it was.

EU: But it was specifically for

WS: It was a company, yes, and there were several agents from I think eight counties and coincidentally enough, one of the guys from Kansas was a guy who was in the same company in the Army that I was. So we have kept in touch since then. But those are a couple of the things.

[4:25]

Our 4-H trail ride had been going here and very successfully here. We made a few changes in it that I hope made it for the better.

EU: These trail rides – you went out on horses?

WS: Yes, on horseback for eight days and half way through we would get a food drop – either a car would come in with food to refresh our supplies or we would take the horses out with pack saddles to the trail head to pick up food. Or we had aerial drops where they couldn't get in, you had have aerial drops, so one of the Dads would have a plan and fly over and drop a roll of toilet paper out to see which way the wind was blowing and then he dropped the parachutes with the food. And oh what an exciting day that was when the food came in! It was a real experience because it got kids, I don't know if I can say this or not, but away from home a little bit. They were on their own and they grew up a great deal in that eight days.

EU: These were high school aged?

WS: They were anywhere from age 11 to 19 and we had quite a variety. Anywhere from 10-25 kids would go on these trail rides, which seems like an awful lot of time to spend for a few kids but it was well worth it and it is one of the things that kids

remember these days when I see them on the street. "Remember that trail ride? Wasn't that a great time?"

SS: They had qualifying trail rides in order for them to qualify.

WS: Yeah, they had to qualify. They had to go on a pre trail ride for an overnight to qualify to go on this trail ride and we very rarely had any problems. The kids had to make their own beds up, they had to do their own cooking; well, they had a cook, but they all had to share. Everybody had a job.

EU: And they all did excellent cooking?

WS: Well, not really. The yuck meal was an example. Sally said they elected to cook but really somebody volunteered to be cook and okay, you can be, we'll elect you.

EU: Did they every complain?

WS: They didn't complain; they wanted to be cook because they had experience the previous year or two. A lot of these kids had been on the trail ride for four or five years or maybe more so they had experience the year before as assistant cook and they wanted to be head cook. So it was the assistant cooks that got in trouble with the yuck meal, they didn't know, they didn't pay attention to what was going on. But that was a tremendous experience for kids. Of course we had 4-H camp here and that was a five day camp.

SS: And county fair...

WS: And county fair and Achievement Days when I was 4-H county agent here we went out to every community and presented their achievement awards at the end of the 4-H year. That way, the parents were involved totally because all the parents would

come see their kids get their awards. They don't do that anymore now. I think it was a mistake not to do it.

[7:20]

EU: Could you talk a little bit about your involvement in the state and in national organizations? I believe you were in the Oregon County Agricultural Agents Association.

WS: Yes, I was very much involved in, I joined right away, the Oregon....well, I guess every agent was expected to join the Oregon County Agents Association and it was a very good group, a very serious group. We had a fun group associated with it called the Bull Association. We all carried canes with the number of years of service on it and we had a lot of fun with those canes.

EU: Was that the cane you showed me that had the black stripes around it?

WS: Yes, they had black rings around it....

EU: For each year...

WS: For each year you were in Extension, right.

EU: And then at the top and the bottom, if you had a gold ring...

WS: A quarter-inch gold ring was at the bottom, that meant you retired and the gold ring at the top – the half-inch gold ring (the other one was about a quarter-inch) the gold ring at the top was the past president. And I was president in 1980 of the Oregon County Agents Association.

And then I got involved in the national association by attending meetings. My first one was in Seattle and then I went to a number of them and got to be appointed as vice chairman, or regional chairman, of a committee or two and then later on I was named

national chairman for two or three years of the National Professional Training Committee and as such we had a lot of training activities for the agents-at-large or agents all over the country. We had a marketing program at Chicago Mercantile Exchange that had to put together to bring agents from all over the States to learn about hedging in marketing livestock. And I did that for two years. Again, that was a great experience, meeting agents from all over the country.

EU: When you say, “hedging,” what does that mean?

WS: Well, hedging is a method of marketing, another words you set a price for your product when the prices are where you think they ought to be and then if the value of that product goes down, you still get the amount you hedged for. But you also lose if the product goes up when you sell it. So hedging means to set in at a price where you know you can make a profit before the market takes over. They do that in a lot of commodities – hedging. We learned all about how to do that in this marketing program. And we had other programs that we carried out. The agents got recognition for work they were doing in professional training as well as in other phases of Extension work.

[9:55]

EU: And then, you did get a national award? Was this from 4-H?

WS: Well both 4-H and ag. I got a distinguished service award from the National Association of County Agricultural Agents and a Distinguished Service Award from the National Association of 4-H Extension Agents. I belonged to both of those organizations and got awards for those.

EU: And that’s when you had your trip paid to New York?

WS: That was for a different award, that was for the Marketing – they called it Career Education Program. I got that one, but the other one, I got my DSA in Connecticut, I think, New Haven, Connecticut.

[10:40]

EU: Could you talk a little bit – you were an agent during the '60s and '70s when there were so many changes going on in society. Could you talk a little bit about affirmative action and how that influenced your work?

WS: Well, the one thing about it is that at one time boys and girls as 4-H members we were all treated alike and pretty soon you have to say which ones are Indian, part Indian, which ones are Hispanic, which are Black, which ones are Caucasian, which ones are Oriental and it got so you had to figure out what ethnic group this group belonged to and before that they were just boys and girls and we treated them all alike. It got to be a problem because you had to do a lot of figuring. For example, one little girl was name Mandy Lopez – red hair and freckles. She looked no more like a Mexican than the man and the moon, but her Dad apparently was a man named Mendez so we had to put her in the Hispanic group. And the same was true of a lot of them. I think I mentioned to you also that at 4-H camp we had an Indian guy come in and speak one time to us and after the program we said how many of you boys and girls are part Indian. Almost every hand went up. We knew that couldn't be true. So that was the only problem I saw with it really was having to take the time to say okay, they are no longer just boys and girls, they are this kind of boy and girl.

[12:15]

EU: I wanted to ask you also about some of the changes you saw that happened in the Extension Service in the years you were there. For example, one time you talked about, you mentioned about the Conservation Service, the Soil Conservation Service?

WS: Yes, right. And I've seen this happening since I retired primarily; we no longer, for example have an ag agent in Curry County. There are ag agents that work out of Coos County – horticulture, forestry, and livestock work out of Coos County. They are good people and I'm not sure what they are doing, but as a result of not having an ag agent on the ground right here I feel, this may not be justified, but I feel that we have abdicated some of our responsibilities and right now the Soil Conservation Service is doing things that Extension Service used to do here in Curry County. I'm not sure this is

true of the rest of the state, but the Soil Conservation Service is having field trips, they having tours, they are having all kinds of things that Extension used to have the sole responsibility for. And one time there was a memorandum of understanding that the Soil Conservation Service would do technical services, mapping and charting, and doing that kind of stuff and Extension would do the educational programs. That line has blurred now and so we are finding that other organizations are taking over the responsibility and I felt that having an ag agent in the county was really important, even though we are not a very important agricultural county but when you get involved in Forestry and Community Resource Development that's very important to have a person who has those responsibilities in the county.

[14:05]

EU: Are there other changes that you noticed? The relation between counties, for example, and Oregon State University?

WS: Well, one thing is that a lot of the counties now have Extension Districts and it is very fortunate that they do have Extension Districts. In other words, that is a taxing district. Because if they did not have a taxing district, many of the counties, especially and O&C counties (Oregon and California Revested Land Counties) that don't have the BLM money coming in, would probably just wipe out Extension because it's not mandated and they would have to go with the mandated services which are delineated in state statute and they don't have enough money to do the rest of them so Extension would be possibly out of the way.

Fortunately, after I left, Dora Rumsey spearheaded getting an Extension District in Curry County and I am afraid if it were not for that, Curry would not even have an Extension Service. And we've seen that happen in Multnomah County. I don't believe they had an Extension District up there. I may be wrong, but I believe that's the case. So, they no longer have an Extension Service in Multnomah County. In some counties, where there is a strong agricultural area they may still have it even in spite of not having an Extension Service District, but the coastal counties are not really agricultural counties and people think of Extension as being agriculture and 4-H and home economics. And

unless there's enough people very much interested to fight for it, they could very well lose their support. So, that's a concern that I have.

[15:45]

EU: When we were doing these oral history interviews as part of the upcoming 100th anniversary of the Extension Service, can you give sort of a historical perspective, I mean some of the changes -- also a question is what are the best things about the Extension Service? The biggest contributions?

WS: I think the best service of the Extension Service was working with individuals and organizations to help them with agriculture, forestry, all of the things we have traditionally have done and making sure that is done properly with the support of the university and that's the backbone of the Extension Service is the university support. In other words, the technical support and educational support from the specialists, from the departments, the research departments, everybody else like that, making sure that the proper information gets out to the people and the only way they can do that is by Extension agents on the ground working with the individuals or groups with demonstrations showing how they can improve their yields for example, or improve the quality of their livestock...those are very important things.

And in Home Economics, too, is showing women how to properly take care of food, preserve it, any number of things. Probably now it's more on weight control too and some of those kinds of things than it was in the past. But a lot of things like that are really important to get out to the people and the Extension Service is the outfit that has that responsibility and has the know how to do it, to get it out.

And I'm sure you are aware that there are three divisions in the Land Grant Universities. You have the resident instruction, which is the students and that's what you think about when you think of the University of Oregon or Oregon State -- the students -- which is a very small amount of the total population served. There is a research component which does research on crops and all kinds of stuff and the Extension component which takes it out to the people. Somebody once said it's taking the knowledge from the college out

to the people. And that's what our responsibility was getting the knowledge from the college in a way that could be understood by the people and that's where the specialists come in. They can interpret the legal jargon, the scientific jargon, take the jargon that county agents, that the people can understand, because so much of that stuff is written in scientific terms and it's kind of hard to understand but the specialists can interpret that for us and that's where they have a very valuable role and they can keep track from other universities all over the country and world to know the best methods to use. And as county agents we can give them on to people in the area. So changes, I think at one time the county agent was the main source of a lot of those things. Now there are other organizations coming in and taking over some of those responsibilities.

[19:00]

I have a picture in the other room, on the wall in there, showing a county agent out measuring a calf's girth for a little boy who has a calf project, the little girl has her 4-H records, the Mom has some home economics questions to ask, and the farmer has an agricultural question to ask. And this county agent is out there in his grubby old clothes doing all these jobs for these individuals. It's a classic Norman Rockwell picture. I can show it to you here if you want to see it. It's one of my favorite pictures. That's what Extension was and I guess it cannot be that way today because of the many, many changes but that was the background of Extension - the individual's service to people. I always liked that and I always vowed that if Extension came to where we had to just sit back and be a middleman and not actually work with people, I'd just as soon find something else to do. Fortunately we had enough autonomy in our counties that we could continue doing that and I'm sure most of the old agents feel the same way.

[20:10]

EU: Maybe you've answered this question. What did you like best then, about working for the Extension Service?

WS: Well, the somewhat autonomy, you had some direction from the University and you had some things you had to do, but generally, you fit into the community and you did what the community felt was important and what you felt was important. Sometimes you had to lead people to help them see that this is important because there are some

that probably wouldn't see that unless they were given some guidance. But one of the key points, and I mentioned this, was the demonstrations and actually going out on the farmer's land and putting in a different kind of a crop or a different species or variety of something to show how that would improve his yield or using a different kind of fertilizer would improve his yield. And when his neighbors saw how well he was doing, boy they adopted that. And that was the key to Extension – demonstration work. And education from that demonstration work. So, I think that's very important.

[21:20]

EU: When we were talking once, you talked about; I think you said the “esprit de corps?” Could you talk a little bit about that? The close relationships amongst the folks in the Extension Service?

WS: Every county was different. Coastal counties are different from the interior counties, the valley counties and Eastern Oregon. It took different kinds of individuals to work in those counties. In other words, an Eastern Oregon cowboy might have a difficult time working in the western Oregon or coastal county. But most of the guys were adaptable but you generally wanted to be in the area where you were most familiar and the counties were different but we also had autonomy, we could develop our own programs with our local advisory committees and we all just loved each other. More like an agape kind of love where we respected each other and liked to work together.

We had many activities together. We used to have out outings and stuff. We had a retirees outing just here a few weeks ago. But we used to get together occasionally as families and it was a family affair. The kids and moms or the spouses were not left out. When we had some kind of activity, the whole family was invited. So we got to know each other's families and a tremendous esprit de corps I felt and it goes on to this day and that's why we have the retiree's outings. It's going down in numbers because a lot of the old guys are dying off and some of the other ones are too busy with families and don't have time but we have a great time getting together and sharing.

One thing we do each year is to share what other members of our family are doing – that they may be ill, or they may be doing something else – we want to know how they are doing. Just like your own family. “How’s Bill doing now?” And you want to know how they are. And so I think that esprit de corps is a good way to put it I think.

EU: Okay, this is the end of Part 3

[23:23]