

BEAVERTON ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with

CLARENCE BUFFAM

at his home in Beaverton, Oregon

INTERVIEWER: SHIRLEY TANZER

Date of Interview: October 28, 1982

SUMMARY OF TOPICS DISCUSSED

INTERVIEW WITH: CLARENCE BUFFAM

BEAVERTON ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

1. Worked in Beaverton Post Office;
First Assistant Postmaster
2. Scoutmaster
3. Volunteer Fire Department
4. How the Post Office has changed

(Where unknown, phonetic spellings are used)

INTERVIEW WITH CLARENCE BUFFAM

for

BEAVERTON ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Place: At Mr. Buffam's home in Beaverton, Oregon

Interviewer: Shirley Tanzer

SHIRLEY TANZER: Mr. Buffam, when did you come to Beaverton?

CLARENCE BUFFAM: In 1941. At the time I was working in the post office in Portland as a letter carrier and transferred out here February 15, 1943, as a clerk. I worked in the Beaverton Post Office and after a number of years was appointed first Assistant Postmaster. I retired in June, 1970.

TANZER: Where did you live in Beaverton?

BUFFAM: We lived down on 1st Street, across from the old fire hall for a number of years; then we moved over on 3rd and Washington and lived there for quite a few years. It was the first house we bought. From there we moved up here in 1961.

TANZER: Tell me about your activities and interests in Beaverton.

BUFFAM: I was interested in the Boy Scouts; was Assistant Scoutmaster for a couple of years, and then Scoutmaster for a couple of years.

TANZER: Were your boys members of the Scouts? Is that the way you became involved?

BUFFAM: Well, no, they weren't old enough when I first started. Then I joined the Fire Department in about '43 or '44 as a volunteer.

TANZER: Tell me about the Volunteer Fire Department.

BUFFAM: Well, at the time, we were living on 1st Street across from there. Part of the time we had the fire phone in the house -- one of the persons who lived nearest the fire hall had the phone.

TANZER: So you had the fire phone?

BUFFAM: Yes. It would ring and get you out of bed, or most anything, at night. During the day, Barbara would answer it -- course she was teaching school so she wasn't home all the time. The Post Office was in where the Russian Bakery is, at that time, so we'd go out the back door (the postmaster, Don Jenkins, and I were both members) and see who'd get to the fire hall first. I usually got there first. A fella with a radio shop around the corner, Cecil Sanford, would dash over there, too. Both Don and Cecil were a little heavier than I, so I guess that's why I got there first. And we'd get the engine started and take off.

TANZER: Where did the rest of the firemen come from?

BUFFAM: Different. Frank Moore came from the barber shop; others from different jobs around town.

TANZER: Was it an all-volunteer fire department?

BUFFAM: Yes.

TANZER: Until what year?

BUFFAM: That's where I think you should ask Ernie Metcalf. He has the written record, or he can get it, down at the fire hall.

TANZER: What kind of activities did you engage in to train for this job?

BUFFAM: We had regular drills and meetings, once a week, I think it was. We didn't have the training that they have nowadays.

TANZER: What was the pay?

BUFFAM: I think it was a dollar a fire.

TANZER: Were there a lot of fires in Beaverton?

BUFFAM: Well, they had their share. Of course, we covered the area from Reedville to Sylvan, and clear out Scholls Ferry Road. Well, we went clear out to the Tualatin River one night. The river was up and the most important thing in those days was to save the well house.

TANZER: Why was that?

BUFFAM: Well, if you're out in the country, a well is quite essential.

TANZER: So you could let the house burn down, but save the well?

BUFFAM: (Laughter) Save the well!!

TANZER: What about the people?

BUFFAM: Well, in that particular case the house didn't burn down. But we made sure that we didn't let the pump house burn.

TANZER: I understand that the volunteer firemen had their own social groups as well.

BUFFAM: Well, yes. They all got together. At Christmastime we usually had a party. And families came.

TANZER: Who was in charge of the training?

BUFFAM: The chief usually was in charge of the training. Archie Olson was chief at the time I was here.

TANZER: It's such a strenuous job. Was anybody accepted who wanted to volunteer?

BUFFAM: They didn't have restrictions in those days. As long as you could climb a ladder and drag a hose, well, that was all that was necessary.

TANZER: What instances do you remember that were humorous, if a fire can be called humorous?

BUFFAM: I don't think many fires were humorous, but if we didn't do a good job, we got blamed for it. People might put their hot ashes in a paper carton and put them next to a wall, which happened over in Raleigh Hills one time. Another time the dairy there, Walden's Dairy, burned down -- the barns burned down and they were putting in new mains, and we hooked on to them and drew the water all the way from West Slope. If they'd open a faucet in West Slope, it'd just go "whooooop" -- no water. (laughter)

TANZER: Was there a fireman's ball?

BUFFAM: No. We did have a dinner, though. Used to go up to China Lantern for dinner, take our wives.

TANZER: What do you remember about Beaverton in those days?

BUFFAM: Well, I thought it was a typical small town. When I first came out here, the population was 160 or something like that.

TANZER: So the Post Office's job was comparatively simple.

BUFFAM: Yes. When I came out here, there were two clerks and a postmaster and four or five rural carriers. We were in where the Russian Bakery is now and then we moved around the corner back of the building (it's office furniture and stuff now), right behind that. We had half of the building when we moved in. Within a very few years we had to have the back half. It had a coal, automatic stoker furnace and usually the stoker went bad when the weather was the coldest. Also, they changed the windows one year and my desk was right up next to the window and they had those windows out. That was a cold part of the year. Things like that you can't forget.

TANZER: Had they moved into the new building before you retired?

BUFFAM: Yes.

TANZER: What kind of area does the new Post Office serve now?

BUFFAM: It serves all of Beaverton, probably not as much up at West Slope as it used to. I don't know how far up they go now. And it covers an area around Oak Hills and Baseline Road and out to a little beyond 219th, all around Progress and out to Scholls Ferry.

TANZER: Well, that growth in forty years is really incredible.

BUFFAM: It is. Consider the fact that even when I retired in '70, we had almost 150 employees and now they've split the thing, and Aloha has an office,

a station for Beaverton. Now I see they want to put Aloha into a city of its own, which they probably will. They have their own zip code number now, which they could have had before, but now it's a different zip code number out there.

TANZER: So in less than 40 years, you've really seen quadruple the growth.

BUFFAM: Right. And more. The growth of the Post Office is an indication of the growth of the area. As more people move in, they need more postal services.

TANZER: What would you foresee as the potential growth of the area in the future?

BUFFAM: Well, I think it'll be just more houses and more apartments.

TANZER: Do you think it will double in the next ten years?

BUFFAM: It might. I know I said when we moved down on 1st Street, where the Post Office is now, I said that in 20 years they'll have to have a new building. And they are.