

The following interview is with Mr. Chester Robinson, the fourth generation of the Robinson family living on the original Donation Land Claim farm which is now officially designated as a Century Farm. The farm is located on the outskirts of Beaverton and Tigard.

Mr. Robinson talks of his ancestry coming to Oregon, the clearing of the heavily timbered land, and farming during the middle years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The first half of the interview is devoted to the stories <sup>sed</sup> passed down from his ancestors while the second half is more concerned with the events of Mr. Robinson's own lifetime.

The quality of the tape leaves much to be desired. Scholls Ferry Road does not transport horses and buggies. Therefore, it is not the "clip-clop" of horses hooves one hears in the background but the high-powered roar of the internal combustion engine. In addition, very animated and loud conversation is being conducted simultaneously with the interview and creates a very irritating disruption.

The last portion of the interview is more directed to the subject of farmland giving way to the expanding urban growth. The farmers themselves pin the root of the dilemma on the rising property taxes. While this is certainly a factor, it is this writer's opinion that many of the landholders are lured by the huge amount of dollars offered to them by speculators and real estate developers. Either way, the people of Washington County need to become aware of the importance of land ~~and~~ to make well informed decisions concerning its future use.

Finally, the Robinson wind-powered water tower is still preserved from the original farm and has been dedicated by the Tualatin Valley Heritage as an historic site in Washington County to serve as a reminder to the new suburban dwellers.

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The following oral history interview is with Chester Robinson. He and his family are living on a century farm on the outskirts of Tigard. The following story which takes place at his home, Mr. Robinson talks about the four generations of Robinsons living on the farm. Beginning with his great grandfather back in 1852. He reminisces about the history of the area, the uses of the farm through the years and the recent disappearance of the farm land here in Washington County.

Q: Good morning Mr. Robinson.

A: Good morning.

Q: To begin, I would like to ask a few personal questions, when you were born, and where you were born.

A: I was born her on the place in 1918.

Q: So that makes you how old now?

A: Well, just about 60.

Q: So, you were born here on the place. The place must have been in the Robinson's hands before then. Could you start out in telling . . .

A: Well, my fater and my grandfather were both born here on the place here. My great grandfather came across the plains in '52 and came to this area in '53.

Q: Your great grandfather did. Where was he coming from?

A: Well, it was crossed with covered wagons. I don't know exactly where. It was Indiana I believe it was were his place of residence was before he made the trek.

Q: You never knew him did you?

A: No.

Q: Did you ever meet him?

A: No. He was gone. Him and his wife were both gone before I was born.

Q: He came across in '52 then.

A: Yeah.

Q: Did you ever hear any stories from your father or grandfather why they decided to come out this way?

A: No. Really I imagine it's looking for a better life, most of them did because it was quite a trip. Course he was, after he got established here why he was, in his later years, he was known as extensive dealings in land and ... There was one story they told of him being down in Yamhill county and he came across a thrashing rig. It was owned by two men and they were arguing about where they were going to, who's place they were going to go to next with the machine and they couldn't decide. So it ended up that great grandfather bought the machine and was down there two months thrashing in the neighborhood.

Q: Is your grandfather, did he live in the United States all his life, or did he come from the old country somewhere else?

A: No. His father, I do know that he was, in other words, my great grandfather's father, was drowned in the construction of the Erie Canal.

Q: So your ancestry goes back quite a ways in the Unites States.

A: I think the original family came from Ireland.

Q: When your grandfather came out, or great grandfather came out here to Oregon, how did he come about settling on this piece of property out here?

A: I don't know exactly, how he picked it. Part of it he filed his, it was probably because the Fanno's were in the neighborhood and they had been friends before they came out. And they came over and liked the area, took up a claim on the area and he bought out a squatter that was on part of it, and filed on the claim, and proved up on it.

Q: So this was an original donation land claim then.

A: Yeah, it was.

Q: So how many acres was that?

A: 640

Q: And he bought more land as ...

A: Yeah, there was some more acquired and I don't know whether that portion that the squatter was on was part of the 640 or whether that was in addition to it.

Q: When you say squatter, what do you mean by that?

A: A fella that had built a cabin and was here before my great grandfather came. But he wanted a portion and apparently they came to a proper agreement and he bought out the fella's right. What his name was or anything I don't even know. Probably no records of it or anything.

Q: You say he went ahead and filed for the DLC (Donation of Land Claim) was that, did you ever hear how he went about doing that? What was the procedure on that?

A: I don't know exactly, but it took, they had to clear a certain amount of the property and it took several years because the actual claim, patent here is dated in '65, when it was actually signed. So it apparently took 8 or 10 years to get it up and then I imagine the process of communications between here and Washington, D.C. took considerable time, in them days.

Q: And you still have a copy of the original.

A: Actually I've got the original. We have had it photographed, so. . .

Q: It was signed by who?

A: Johnson, Andrew Johnson.

A: First one of the Johnson boys that was President.

Q: You mentioned that they might, your great grandfather might have settled here in this part of Oregon because he knew the Fanno's. Was there some type of communication between them before?

A: Yes, I think they knew them before they left the east and as I remember the story, they had some problems with stock and because of snow pack and some of the, I believe it was the Fanno's and there was another family and came up with fresh stock and helped them get down to Oregon City. And that's where he spent the first winter, before he came over here.

Q: When you say fresh stock, are you talking about . . .

A: Oxen, I think they run into some pretty severe storms in the Blue Mountains and they lost some of their stock and the rest was pretty well worn out. Apparently, they got the message through and these people went up and met them with fresh draft animals, I guess is what you'd technically call it.

Q: Your great grandfather, did he come along with others settlers?

A: Oh yes, there was a train. I don't know how big it was or anything, they usually always came in groups.

Q: When your, did you ever hear stories what this land was like when your great grandfather arrived?

A: Not too much, I do know they did say there was trails along Fanno Creek where the Indians traveled up and down the creek. And they apparently had a big storm in the latter part of the 1800's similar to our Columbus Day storm. And they said before that, there was no, hardly any downed timber in the woods, big old groves and very little down timber. But when that storm came why then there was quite a few trees blown down.

Q: The land was mostly timbered when you arrived?

A: Oh yeah, this was all timbered, heavily timbered. I can even remember when some of it was timbered here.

Q: How did they go about clearing the land then?

A: They just started digging you might say. A team and a cable or chain was, really probably a chain was about the only thing they had. They just cut down the trees, most of them, were just yarded together and burned. The stumps removed, a lot of them were just dug out, some of them burned out because I don't think in those first settlers, I don't think had access to powder or anything like that to help them that way.

Q: Was it your great grandfather's family that did the clearing or did they hire other groups of people.

A: Well, I don't know, I imagine most of it was done by the family itself. Probably they'd hire some help, I don't know.

Q: You never heard mention Chinese. . .

A: No, I don't think they had anything like that, or you might say group like that. It was something that was done slowly.

Q: Was that your great grandfather's original intention to use this land for farm land?

A: Yeah.

Q: What was the original farm used for then?

A: Well, I do know they had some cattle and did haul milk into Portland, early. Probably in the '70's or something like that. 70's or 80's and then probably they got into, all the farms in the area raised hay and in the winter they would haul that hay, course it was all loose at that time, they would haul it into Portland, to the livery stables. And from here, it was a good day's trip in and back. Sometimes they could make a trip every day, but quite often it would be every other day that they would make a trip in. Others out at Scholls and like that why they quite often, they would go in and lay over in Portland come back the next day. It was a two day trip because a team and a load of hay with the roads in the condition they were in those days, sometimes it was pretty slow going some places. Stop and rest the horses every once in awhile.

Q: What trail or road would they take into Portland?

A: Why I think a lot of it was up over Sylvan. I don't know if there whether there was any other route in or not, but I know some of them did go up and over Sylvan. Because lots of times they talked about, they'd get up to Raleigh Hills and then they, a couple of them would double up, they'd use two teams on a wagon to pull it up to Sylvan and then they'd come back with the team and get the other wagon.

Q: That must have been fairly tough, especially during the winter months, to go over that.

A: Oh yeah, it, course it was ~~Cor~~duroy Road and some of the mud got pretty deep,



- Q: Corduroy Road now, what is that now?
- A: That's rails or poles lay crosswise of the road. In other words, it's like railroad track with ties closer together. If the mud got deep there, why they'd just cut some more poles and lay them over the others. The poles just work down into the mud. They had to use small poles and put them fairly close together so the horses could walk on them. That's about what it was there was very little rock on the road, mostly corduroy.
- Q: Was that the major crop raised then among your family and surrounding families?
- A: I think at first it was mainly hay. There was some grain undoubtedly, but I think the grain came in a little later. I think the hay was more the main crop there for years. Of course by the time I got in it, there wasn't near the horses and they were baling hay by then and trucks were in use and so it ... The grain probably was more of a cash crop at that time when I first remember it. I think that probably turned, changed about 1910 to 1920 would be the time it probably changed from more hay to more grain.
- Q: That coincides with the coming of the automobile.
- A: From the automobile, the farm tractor, and then other things, so we used less horses, especially like in town.
- Q: There really was that demand for hay in Portland then?
- A: Oh yes. Because they had livery stables and of course all the livery's that they had in those days, of course everything was horse power in those days. They delivered it to the livery stables.
- Q: Was that the case still when you were younger?
- A: No, I can't ever remember where, I've been shown some of the buildings that were there and were livery stables in the early days that were, they revamped and remodeled them and were using them when I can remember as a parking garage. I can't even remember what street it's on, now, but at that time it was a garage.
- Q: Now, there's different kinds of hays isn't there? Hay is just an all inclusive term isn't it?



A: Well, more or less an all inclusive term, there's your native grasses, clovers or seeded, grains are used for hay too. For this it would be an all inclusive thing in that it would be how the crop was harvested in other words, for the forage rather than the grain.

Q: How would be the hay be harvested back in the 1850-1860's?

A: Well, probably then the biggest share was probably cut with a scythe. Then raked up probably by hand first and of course handled completely loose.

Q: It was thrown in the back of a horse cart then?

A: Cart or wagon.

Q: How much money would they get for a cart load?

A: I don't know what the price was at that time. I don't have any idea.

Q: Was it something that they survived on then?

A: Oh yeah, usually there was not much outgo most of their food was probably raised right on the place, a few staples, their grain they probably took to a mill someplace and had ground for flour. Coffee and sugar and a few things like that would be things that would be purchased and of course cloth. I don't think they ever done much weaving. If they needed a harness, there would be things that would be purchased. So there was very little cash as you would say outgo for the farming operation. Chances are, I imagine, if they had help the fella probably got board and room and probably very little other.

Q: That was the case with farming then?

A: Yeah, that's the general way it was done. If there was in later years when they had thrashing rigs why the neighbors got together and helped one another.

Q: So up until when your greatgrandfather arrived that was really what they raised was hays and ?

A: Well, I think your grains came in more in the early 1880's or something like that. As soon as they developed thrashing rigs why they couldn't thrash the grain so they - too much of a manual job to separate it why I think then is when they

started to raise more grain.

Q: Where were the markets for the grain then?

A: That was probably Portland or in town. First the people then the draft animals when they were working.

Q: So there was still that trip into Portland with the grains?

A: Yeah, the grain would be moved into Portland until the railroad come through and then when it came through why they of course shipped on it.

Q: When did this railroad come through? Are we talking about the Southern Pacific?

A: Well, it was - let me get something. This is the condemnation suit for the right of way it's got everything but the date on it, 1907.

Q: And what exactly does that document say when you say condemnation suit?

Well, it was, I don't know just what the argument was, but it was for the right of way, the railroad right of way. I think what it was was something about the amount or the fact that we wanted what was known then as cattle guard crossings. If they gave you a gate crossing it was the land owners responsibility to see if their gates were closed at all times and that the cattle were not allowed to be on the railroad right of way up and down. The cattle guard crossings why they had a cattle guard at each side of the crossing, in other words the cattle could cross the railroad track and their were gates there, but they could not go up and down the track. I don't know just what the technicality for it, but something on the cattle on the track. I imagine that's part of the argument on this, but that was in 1907.

Q: So this document allowed your family to cross the tracks?

A: This was just a complaint in the circuit courts for the Beaverton-Wollensberg Railroad was the actual railroad that built at that time. So that's why I can tie down the date, so it was sometime after 1907 that the railroad came through.

Q: So then everything was loaded on the railroad then and taken?

A: Yeah, anything that went into Portland was brought down to the crossing or anywhere there was a siding.

Q: That's just down the road here am I right?

A: Yeah. They put in a siding track, but there was a siding on this side on both north and south of Scholls Ferry siding there which was taken out quite a few years ago and now there's one side spur off to Argas that was put in later.

Q: So you must remember loading up the railroad?

A: Well, really no. When I got involved in it there was enough trucks at that time, well, I remember yeah unloading some things off the cars down there. And I remember hauling lumber and stuff down there and loading from mills off the road here and mainly ties. There was all kinds of goods shipped in there.

Q: How would that work? Would your father just take the grains or hay down there and get some kind of receipt or . . . ?

A: No, it was probably shipped to some specific person. They probably had enough. I don't know enough about that, I would think that what they would do possibly, a group of them would go together so they would have enough to load a car. Same way when they got, well there wasn't too much fertilizer used, but a little bit mainly was land plaster and I know that car would usually come in down there and be side tracked and then everybody in the area would have ordered some. In other words they would have ordered through some dealer and just have the car spotted down here. Each one would then go get their proportionate share of the . . .

Q: How about the Oregon Electric? Did that go through here then?

A: At that time it came through Tigard and Greenberg and up to Garden Home. And then it went on to Portland on what is now Multnomah Boulevard. And then there was a track that came out through Beaverton what is now more or less Allen Avenue now, in that general area and swung over. Then there was also the ? which was the Southern Pacific transportation that also had a track from Forest Grove and out in that area that came in and they crossed up at Raleigh and went through a portion of what is now the Portland Golf Course up there. Part of their tracks went up there. I can just remember them, but they discontinued service and then the passenger service was discontinued on the Oregon Electric and then freight only and then finally it was how long ago, but then they discontinued their track and used the same track as they do now between Greenberg and Beaverton for both railroads.

Q: Did you ever ride the Red Electric, yourself?

A: No I never did ride the Red Electric, I rode once on the passenger one that went through here which went over to Tillamook.

Q: Back in the 19th century when your great grandfather and grandfather were living here were there many other people, other farmers in this area?

A: Oh yeah, the Downings were here, Fannos - and oh there was others out towards Scholls, the Hesseys, Groeners, Rawles out there and then there were Caldwell place out here which is where PGE is now out there and . . .

Q: Were the Denneys associated with your family?

A: Yeah, yeah. It was the Denneys and the Fannos who came to help them out when they came across and they had that problem up in the Blue Mountains.

Q: Was there much contact between the various farming families back then?

A: Oh yes, I think there was. I think they probably got together occasionally and they were always even more so than now they, one fella would need a little help why somebody else went and helped him some way or another they helped on another.

Q: I'd like to switch a little bit more to your own personal experiences and reminisces. You were born in 1918. What were some of your activities on the farm. What was the farm doing at that time when you first remember, back in the twenties?

A: Well, it was, they were raising quite a bit of hay, but not, grain was the cash crop at that time and when I can first remember, Dad and his father had a dairy of registered holsteins and it was at that time, in the 20's and 30's practically every farmer in the area, not all, but practically all especially those that had smaller farms, they had some 12-15 cows that they milked and sold the milk. And that was more or less their cash crop then because practically all the hay they raised would be used at home. The grain, some of it would be used at home, but some would be sold. So the grain and the milk were the main cash crops at that time from the average farm here at that time. We/they sold their cattle and had sheep for a few years and then got back into the dairy business until about middle 1960's when we sold out the last of the dairy cattle and then we ran some beef cattle till we were just about, as long as we could.

Q: Was that the best suited for you, you think, growing grains and . . .

A: It's a general farming area as we did raise some seed crops for a few years, but not too often and so it was a diversified farming area. It varied as

Q: You were telling me there was a dairy here. Where was the milk taken?  
Was there a condensary?

A: The first milk I can remember was sold to what's know as Red Rock Dairy over in Tigard. Which is up across from Fred Meyer's. That's where I went for years and then quite a few of the fellas fixed up for what was known at that time for Grade B milk which went into the bottle/can trade in Portland. Then as things tightened up a little more, some of the fellas got a little older, they gradually got out of the dairy business because it

as health restrictions got a little more strict, why it got to the point where the fellas with 10-12 cows just couldn't comply with everything that you need to.

Q: This Red Rock Dairy, did alot of the farmers take their milk to that?

A: Yeah. When I can remember it there was a truck that came around and picked up the, everybody had a cart and they hauled the 10 gallon cans out to the road. People used to push the cart and there was a stand there and they put the truck and cans out there and a truck come along every day and picked up and left one set of cans. Left one set of cans and picked up the full ones.

Q: What would they do with them? Were they bottled milk or . . .?

A: No, it was cheese manufacture.

Q: Back in 1929, I understand there was a milk strike. Was that something that effected your dairy or the dairies out here?

A: We were not shipping to the city of Portland at that time. We were shipping to Red Rock and at that time I do remember they had the Red Rock truck stopped up here for awhile. We went up there and Dad said instead of having them dump it he'd take the milk back. We had a few pigs then and feed the pigs and got what cream we could off of it, but they finally ascertained it was not going to the Portland for the ? it was going over to the cheese factory so they, there was no problem. I can just remember that.

Q: Well, what was your responsibilities on the farm then, back when you were a teenager?

A: Well, as you grew up you had your chores to do around and when we started shipping to Portland why, when I was going to high school, it was my main job to wash up in the milk house, morning and evenings. They had to get done milking in time so I could get washed up and get back here and get ready and catch the school bus. I think I did some while I was still in grade school I don't remember just when we did start shipping to Portland.

I think I did wash some milk out then. That was the main thing I can remember, my main job. Of course what ever else there was, there was barn cleaning and stuff like that. You didn't worry about the organized recreation then you had things to do at home, always there waiting for you.

Q: Where did you go to school, in Beaverton there or Tigard?

A: No I went out here, the building is still standing. Ernest Height Junior is what the place, I think his father gave the plan for the school with the idea as long as it was a school it would be alright and then it would be reverted to them, or bought, I don't remember, but anyhow he's got the place and took the old school house and remodeled it into a home.

The first house on Frier Road on the right the big square house, that was the grade school. That was the first Hiden School and then in the late 30's or early 40's they consolidated with McKay School and then the bus run out this way. The other time there was a high school bus that ran from late 20's that's when a high school bus ran by here. Now of course they have the new high school when Beaverton School District put the one out there on Brockman why they finally decided they'd rename it Hiden. They still have the Hiden District out here was instituted in 1911 and they had the sign on the school house Hiden School District out here at 108th or something like that with a date on it and when the Heights got it they kept that plaque and the new Hiden School has that plaque now.

Q: How about high school, would you go to Tigard High School?

A: Beaverton High School.

Q: So once you finished school then you moved back to the farm and worked on the farm or ?

A: I graduated from Oregon State and went farming with my father and then for awhile it was a three way deal with my brother and him and then my father just phased out of it.

Q: I'd like to change the subject a little bit, here in Washington county, it's a traditional farm area and it's also a traditionally Republican area. I was just wondering if you could maybe explain why they have political leanings toward the Republican party or what was their interest? Does it stem from your great grandfather?

A: Probably that. Just why it was traditionally one way or the other I couldn't say. It might be, I know my great grandfather was active politically he never did run for political office. It might be that a few individuals like that had influence over a lot of people.

Q: Your great grandfather was active politically?

A: Yeah, he, as far as I know it was helping various people he believed were qualified for office, campaigning for them and like that. He never did run for office himself.

Q: What were the political issues that the farmers in this area were interested in? What did they want to see from the government?

A: Gosh, that I wouldn't say. I was never too much involved politically. Of course, things were beginning to change a lot when, by the time I got out of school in the 40's.

Q: Was it the common feeling among your grandfather and father to just be left alone by the government or ?

A: I think that was more the feeling of most of the people. There was a certain amount of things needed but if they could be left alone they would be happier.

Q: We talked a lot about the original families here in this area. I imagine each person would have 340 or 600 acres.

A: Yeah, most of them did to start out with. Of course, as some of them sold it off for various reasons, divided up into different members of the family, it was the practice in those days to more or less, it wasn't so much cash involved as when a person died their will probably left the



property to the wife during her life and then to the various children.