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**NEZPERCE HISTORY  
&  
MEMORIES**

**NEZPERCE CENTENNIAL COMMITTEE  
NEZPERCE, IDAHO  
MAY, 1995**

## BILL AND CLARA HUBER

*Excerpts from the Lewis County Herald, Aug. 30, 1979*

When J. W. (Bill) Huber and his family homesteaded on two miles west of Nezperce in 1896, the whole prairie was bunch grass several feet tall and there weren't any buildings on the prairie, he recalled when he was interviewed by Susan Tiede for an article in the Lewis County Herald.

He was born on American Ridge near Kendrick in Huber Draw. Huber and his wife, Clara, lived near the place his parents homesteaded.

Huber recalled everyone spent the first winter on the prairie in tents. They had to keep a good fire going all winter and wood had to be hauled by wagon from where ever you could see it.

By the second winter, some of the residents had started putting up shacks, 10 foot by 16 foot board houses, with board roofs that leaked like a sieve. In the early winters, there was a lot of snow, but no wind.

There were wild horses and cattle that belonged to the Indians all over the prairie. When the homesteaders put up fences, the horses didn't know what they were, and they just slaughtered them, he remembered.

"We caught the wild horses and broke them to ride. Some had never even had a rope on them before. There were all colors - bays, sorrels, and roans were the most common. There also were grays, but seldom an Appaloosa."

It took three or four work horses on each breaking plow to break the prairie sod. It was hard pulling on the 12-inch shear and you were lucky to get an acre a day, he said. The sunflower roots were the worst, he recalled.

"When we first broke the sod, we planted our garden potatoes. We just rolled over the sod and put the potatoes in there and they raised up the sod. They were really good that year."

The major crop for the first couple years was flax. The whole prairie was blue with flax flowers, but it was hard on the ground,

and in about two years, they started raising wheat and oats for feed.

Flax was mostly an oil crop. The flax stocks could be fed to horses as part of a mixed ration, but otherwise it bound them, and good-bye horse.

"We used a stationary threshing machine to harvest the flax. When I was 15 or 16, I started working on the bundle wagon. In those days, everyone worked hard. You were lucky to see town the Fourth of July."

A binder cut the grain and made it into 40 to 50 pound bundles. The grain was taller then, which made the bundle cumbersome when they had to be loaded onto the bundle wagon and taken to the threshing machine.

The bundles were as tall as a man, and it was hard work.

The earliest threshing machines machines on the prairie had 'horse power'. Twelve horses went around in a circle to power the machine. "We worked from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m., because that was as long as the horses could stand it."

Later steam engines brought longer hours to the harvest fields. Some outfits would work two hours before breakfast then work all day.

The size of a threshing crew depended on how many feeders and bundle wagons there were. They had a man who threw bundles into the cylinders. The horsepower threshers had 14 men-feeder, separator tender, horsepower man, and bundle wagons.

Steam engines brought in larger machines - they had four pitchers, a fireman, engineer, bundle wagons and machine crew, to total 30.

It took a lot of water for steam power. Four good horses and a driver spent the day pulling the water tank through the fields.

The workers didn't get a bath, except by sneaking cold water from the water tank.

If the engineer was gone, they might steal some hot water from the engine.

The fireman had to keep the fire going all night because it would take too long to heat up the machine if they shut down at night.

They burned straw in the machine except when everyone else was asleep, the fireman might sneak a couple of sacks of grain - it held fire well.

The fireman's day started again at 4 a.m. to get a full head of steam up for the day's work. Threshing crews got \$3 a day at the best.

The crew didn't get away from their job much either. There were cook wagons to feed them and meat was delivered to camp every day. If they really needed something from town, the roustabout might pick it up, as he was all around errand boy for the machine and cook house.

Clara Hartman Huber recalls as a young woman at Summit, near Gifford, she and her mother cooked for the threshers.

"There were so many, my dad had the bundlemen go home for supper, so we didn't have quite so many dishes to wash after we fed them."

But it was still late at night when they finished up anyway.

Her father had one field he could raise corn in. Clara and her mother helped shock the grain in the field.

After harvest, the farmers hauled their crop to the nearest shipping point, which was Culdesac. It was no small task, as they just went across the prairie because there were no roads. You could go a quarter mile and lose your wagon and everything in the mud.

The homesteaders followed the hill down from Reubens to Culdesac. They cut all the jack pines on top to hold back wagons on the grade.

"There were more than one horse killed on that hill by breaking wagon tongues", Huber said.

Returning to the prairie took extra horses to pull the wagons straight up the hill. They would double up the teams with an extra two or four horses helping out.

The teams would have to return to the bottom of the hill and pull up the other wagon.

Later, the farmers hauled sacked grain to the tramway east of Nezperce. "We just picked it up off the field after the combine and hauled it right to the tramway."

"People had strong backs in those days". 140 pound sacks were dropped off the combine and someone had to pick them up and put them in a wagon.

Bill, who was 5'11" and 220 pounds in his prime, hauled four loads of 100 sacks each to Nezperce in one day by himself. That adds up to 56,000 pounds of grain.

He also spent his share of time walking behind a plow over the years. He recalled one boy who didn't walk behind the plow, and his inventiveness didn't get him a job either. He was working in the field and his boss couldn't figure out why the youth's feet were not moving. He had wired a board under the plow and rode on it. He was fired for the invention.

There were also differences in seeding techniques in the early days when they hand broadcast the seed. Later, some got a "hot gun seeder" which was put on the wagon and fastened to the wheel to spread seed. Then came drills and seeders, but the drills couldn't be used for flax.

Bill was one of the first in the area to get a tractor, a Caterpillar, which he sold several years ago. "Everyone wanted to run it and they couldn't see how it pulled a plow. Many said it wouldn't work and we experimented a lot."

He recalls a neighbors first car. The neighbor brought the car home, pulled up to the barn, yelled "whoa", and ran right smack through the barn.

Huber sold his horses and horse machinery before he married Clara Hartman, over 50 years ago. She remembers Dick and Duke, a pair of white horses, which were his favorites, and he kept them.

Clara had moved from Gifford to Kansas with her parents, and was teaching school there. She came back to Idaho to visit friends, and met Bill Huber. They were married in Richland, Kansas, and have lived near Nezperce ever since.

Clara always liked Idaho. "It doesn't have the violent storms the midwest does", she said.

Bill farmed 600 acres in the Nezperce area and was forced to retire at age 85 after suffering a heart attack. He keeps a close eye on the activity on their place that is farmed by his nephew, Phil Miller, and family.

Bill credits his 91 years to eating lots of pickles and sauerkraut.

At times they canned 50 gallon barrels of sauerkraut. He even eats pickles with soup.

The Hubers and Millers have a large garden with a variety of vegetables. The garden is a good producer and earlier than those in town. "When we used to milk cows, we hauled wheelbarrows of manure out on it every day", she said.

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NOTE: The Hubers' only child, Mary Jane (Williams) died over 30 years ago, and Bill and Clara are also both deceased.

# NEZPERCE HIGH SCHOOL ALUMNI

## 1907 - 1995

1907

Webster, Helen

1908

Barbee, Mabel

1911

Booth, Herbert

High, Nellie

Newkirk, Floyd

Waters, Wilfrid W.

1912

Barbee, Alice

Booth, William

Harbke, Lillia

Jones, Cecil

Wright, Edith

1913

Baskett, Leslie A.

Booth, John M.

Brockman, Ralph E.

Carey, Beulah K.

Miller, Vonley J.

Mitchell, Myrtle I.

Nelson, Genevieve I.

Rowe, Floyd S.

Stellmon, Mamie E.

1914

Gehrke, Carrie

Harbke, William

Henderson, Grace

Jones, Ralph

Jorgens, Floyd

Nelson, Josephine

Ramey, Marvel

Robinson, Lester

Sorenson, Charlotte

Stevens, Lloyd

Wade, Lorentz

1915

Adams, Ruby

Browning, Maude

Cook, Norma

Eastman, Elwin

Fanning, Sherman

Miller, Claude

Miller, Leroy

Miller, Madge

Nelson, Evangeline

Ratliff, Penelope

Roberts, Vada

Wade, Jess

1916

Barbee, Lottie

Blakely, Florence

Brannon, Evangeline

Covey, Lela

Fertig, Leslie

Fogg, Frank

Fowler, Rosa

Fox, James

Grover, Tom

Harbke, Lenorah

Hartnett, James

Hines, Marie

Hollen, Nolan

Johnson, Galen

Kelley, Susie

Lehman, Ethel

Miller, J. Glen

Bubel, Genevieve  
 Diddock, Yvonne  
 Eggers, Beverly  
 Fuchs, Geraldine  
 Harding, Ann  
 Harding, Mary  
 Jacobs, Mary Kay  
 Kachelmier, Ken  
 Kennedy, Norman  
 Koepl, Don  
 Schlader, Orval  
 Settles, Ethel  
 Shawley, Jack  
 Thomas, Vernon  
 Turnbow, Charles  
 Vogel, Fred

1950

Bogner, Frank  
 Fuchs, Pauline  
 Hill, Marilyn  
 Hunter, Dwight  
 Jacobs, Frances  
 Lynch, Darrel  
 Phar, Gene  
 Powers, Joyce  
 Ralstin, Phyllis  
 Schaff, George  
 Shobbrook, Thomas  
 Snyder, Russel  
 Snyder, William  
 Stellmon, Goldie  
 Stevens, Ruth  
 Zenner, Harold

1951

Beckman, Max  
 Braun, Marjorie  
 Braun, Robert  
 Fox, Margaret  
 Fuchs, Dolores

Harding, Phyllis  
 Huber, Mary Jane  
 Schaff, Betty Ann  
 Schlader, Beverly  
 Stach, Richard  
 Thomas, Wayne  
 Thompson, Kay  
 Vogel, Robert  
 Vogel, Roberta

1952

Ewing, Monty  
 Fuchs, Richard  
 Hill, Dorothy  
 Hueth, Louise  
 Koepl, Clara  
 Marker, Dorothy  
 Melcum, Ruth  
 Roe, Tom  
 Settles, Carolyn  
 Turner, Tona Rae  
 Wright, Lorraine

1953

Berry, Marvin  
 Braun, Janet  
 Braun, Mary Lou  
 Harding, Janet  
 Harris, Donald  
 Knudsen, Lawrence  
 Marker, Joan  
 Puckett, Tom  
 Reid, Roger  
 Schuch, Arlene  
 Thomas, Richard  
 Wilson, Joe

1954

Bell, Lavonne Marie  
 Braun, Roy Emile  
 Braun, Stanley John  
 Conger, George William