

Jim Brooks oral history interview summary

MT State Historic Preservation Office Project—African American historic places in Helena, MT

With funding from the National Park Service

Total interview time 42 minutes

**Summary developed by Alan M. Thompson, Morrell Creek Associates, PO Box 9737, Helena, MT 59604
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Montana residence affiliation: Big Horn, Custer Counties and Lewis and Clark County (to visit Mother-in-law Lena Thorgramson – Lena was a ranch cook for 30 years to husband Ray B. Thorgramson's foreman jobs on the Figure 4 Ranch, ND, Van Cleve's Ranch, Big Timber, MT; Climbing Arrow (CA) Ranch, Three Forks; Kyd Cattle Company, Three Forks, MT feedlot, the Padlock/Scott Land & Livestock of Dayton, WY

1:00 minute-13:00 minutes

-born on a farm near Quitman, GA December 25, 1942 his father was Lorenzo Charles Brooks and his mother was Juanita Brooks

-his family had always worked on farms they later moved to a farm outside of Barrwick, GA (near the Florida border) The farms raised tobacco, corn, lots of cotton, tomatoes.

-Mules were used to work the fields and pull farm implements. Jim learned to drive stock from father and grandfather

- family moved to Trenton, NJ when Jim was 9 years old, Then to Morristown Pa

-Jim's mother Juanita was part Creek Indian (Georgia)

-"I was lucky because our family lived with the Quaker community. "The family had horses and He believes he became a peaceful person because of his family time with the Brad and Sam Snipes Farm

-He would drive the family to Sunday worship meetings in carriages

- "Horses kept me grounded"

-Jim considered the Snipes family as his "White Parents"

-Jim graduated from high school and college and his mother Juanita was very proud of him

-Ducky Harris, a friend a few years older than Jim had been writing him and just taken a job on the Circle M Horse Ranch on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota.

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1:00 minute to 13:00 minutes (continued)

- After High School graduation Jim travels to South Dakota to find Ducky Harris.
- Jim finds Ducky Harris at the Custer, South Dakota July 4th Rodeo
- Jim has first attempt at riding a Rodeo Saddle Bronc on a big Bay horse named “Scrape Iron” at the Custer, SD rodeo
- “I’d never been on a bucking horse. I was bucked off, quick, fast and in a big hurry”

13:00 minutes-24:00 minutes

- worked a couple of years for the Merrill Ranch on the Pine Ridge Reservation
- First job was that of a ranch hand
- fresh from the east and many Sioux had not seen folks like him other than Ducky Harris
- Quaker peaceful roots put to the test- “Even though I was raised as a Quaker I wasn’t going to let any of the “toughs whip me”
- Met Pedro Bissonette, a Lakota Boxer, eventually became his sparring partner
- Later while Jim lived in Montana Pedro Bissonette and his family came to visit
- Pedro Bissonette returns home to South Dakota and is shot while fixing a wind mill
- Sioux, Cheyenne and Crow people have become close friends of Jim
- Bought and trained first horse at the Merrill Ranch (Circle M-South Dakota)
- Tells experience of riding 20 bucking horses to make money to buy another horse from the Merrills
- “Rainy Day” was the only one of the 20 head that he rode that day at the Bucking Horse sale on the Circle M

24:00 minutes-42:00 minutes

- kept working to learn how to rope and ride better
- became one of the ranch “rough string” bronc riders at Merrill’s Circle M

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24:00 minutes-42:00 minutes (continued)

- got “itchy feet” left South Dakota for the Keeline Ranch in Campbell County Wyoming
- Became rough string rider for the Keeline-stayed for a year
- Journeyed to Padlock Ranch in Montana and Wyoming- worked 5-6 round ups for Padlock
- went to LO ranch near Powderville, MT-broke horses for them- LO was “wild” like Africa because of all the Antelope, deer and wild horses on the range
- Keeline reminded Jim of the Circle M in South Dakota
- “I was a Drifting Cowboy I wasn’t just in Montana- worked for outfits in Arizona, New Mexico, Nevada and even old Mexico
- given opportunity 5-6 years after high school graduation to finish college by the Snipes Family
- Jim credits his father in law Ray Thorgramson as a guiding source of his horse and cattle knowledge
- Others include Bob Hardy (owner of the LO ranch), Bob Pauley his sons Buddy and Bill from Miles City, MT Other contemporary stockman include Tommy Hope, Curtis Coombs
- 1965 won the rookie of the year in the Northwest Ranch Rodeo Association
- Married to Connie Thorgramson since 1969-married for 48 years
- Jim and Connie moved to Norco, CA around 1978
- Jim and Connie have conducted “Cowboy Schools” in Hardin, MT, Fallon, Nevada “if it was western we’d teach it”
- 2015 City Fathers of Norco, CA made Jim and Connie part of the Norco, CA lore by inviting them to be Parade Marshalls in the city “Day of the Cowboy: Observance
- some of Jim’s favorite working horses include “Jesse Hammer”- circle horse-Padlock Ranch, Keno-big Bay cutting horse, Bay Budd on the Keeline Ranch-WY, and Old Pete
- “Keeping the West Western” is his favorite slogan

End of interview session