

**ORAL HISTORY PROJECT OF THE
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Anne T. Kent California Room**

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INTERVIEW WITH BERTRAM DUNSHEE
by Carla Ehat & Anne Kent
November 15, 1979

INTERVIEWEE: Bertram Dunshee (BD)
INTERVIEWERS: Carla Ehat (C.E.) and Anne Kent (A.K.)
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TRANSCRIBER: Marjorie Hoffman

CE: Today is Thursday, November 15, 1979. Continuing the Oral History project of the California Room, once again we are at the residence of Mrs. Thomas Kent at 131 Goodhill Road in Kentfield. Joining Mrs. Kent and me today is Bertram Dunshee who lives on Fallen Leaf Avenue in Ross and has been a man active in conservation, preservation, the Marin County Historical Society and worked long and many years in helping his wife in the acquisition of land for parks and there is so much we want to talk with him. It is a pleasure to see you today, Bert. Tell me a little bit about your family and what brought you to Marin and then we want to talk a little bit about your wife, your late wife, Verna. You were born in Santa Barbara?

BD: Yes.

CE: November 19, 1891.

BD: That's right

CE: Tell us a little bit about that and bring us up to Marin County, how you got here.

BD: Well, my family lived in Santa Barbara since the early sixties. My grandfather came out to California in 1850 with another group walking across the north end of Mexico from Round Trail to Mazatlan and then taking a ship up the coast to San Francisco.

CE: That's an unusual route, isn't it? It's either across the isthmus or maybe through Nicaragua - -

BD: Yes. They had quite a time; they had to walk the last hundred miles because they couldn't find trails over the Sierra Madres that the horses could travel on. They weren't too popular in Mexico, it was only two years after the end of the Mexican War, and so they lost some of the animals and at least one of their men and some of the men gave up and went back.

CE: Where did your father come from, may I ask?

BD: Vermont. My grandfather

CE: Your grandfather came from - -

BD: Grandfather settled in Bristol, Vermont, in the early 18th century. So anyway, he landed in San Francisco. I have a copy of a letter he wrote to his brother after he arrived in Nevada City in which he describes this trip. It is quite interesting but we won't go into it now, in which he said he was doing very well. Well, after about three years in California he went back to Bristol and married a school girlfriend of his, built a house and started raising a family. One son was born while they were in Bristol. Two sons were born. Eventually, they started west and settled in Wisconsin near Madison doing ranching for a while and there my father was born. And then they came on to California. My grandfather was a cabinet maker by trade and he formed a partnership with two blacksmiths to make vehicles of all sorts, buggies and carts and - -

CE: Where did they form this business?

BD: In Santa Barbara.

CE: Did they come over the old California Trail? I guess so, huh?

BD: My grandfather walked across it - - Oh no - -

CE: No, but when they came from Madison -

BD: By that time it was 1860 and I don't know how they came.

CE: You didn't ever hear?

BD: No, I never heard about it, no. My father was born in Madison in 1864 and soon after that they arrived in Santa Barbara. I knew the daughter of one of his partners and the son of the other, who was very much younger than the rest of them, was a good friend of mine all his life. I mean I - played together as boys and went right through school and college together. Anyway, I graduated from high school in Santa Barbara in 1910, came up to California, up to Berkeley, University of California. Verna went to high school in Altos in Santa Barbara and we started going together then and she - -

CE: Oh, you met your wife in Santa Barbara?

BD: In Santa Barbara during high school, in high school days.

CE: What was her maiden name?

BD: Verna Wood

CE: Wood, Verna Wood.

BD: We were good hikers and we used to hike on the mountains outside of Santa Barbara a good deal, a whole bunch of us did. There were a bunch of youngsters there that liked the outdoors and we got well acquainted with the country around there. Anyway, Verna arrived in Berkeley, having stayed in Santa Barbara another year after an attack of pneumonia, in 1911 or 12. 1911 I think it was, she was a year behind me; she lost a year. In 1913, the four of us, this boy I speak of whose father was once my grandfather's partner, his girlfriend, Verna and I came up to Tamalpais for the first time on Washington's Birthday 1913. We had a lot of fun. We were kind of mean, the girls had gone to a formal party the night before with a couple of other fellows, and so we decided to give them a work out and we walked them from Mill Valley to the top of the mountain, from there down Railroad Grade to Muir Woods and then back to Mill Valley.

CE: It's a wonder they just didn't walk right out of your lives.

BD: Oh, they were good sports.

CE: But you loved the mountain from that time -

BD: Yes, we loved the mountain, we decided, and we went back many times after that on weekends and Verna and I decided that if we ever got married and if we had the opportunity we were going to live in Marin County.

CE: I see.

BD: Well, the opportunity came after the war. We were married in 1917 while I was in the service.

CE: What branch of the service were you?

BD: I was a Lieutenant in the Corps of Engineers.

CE: Army?

BD: Army Engineers, yes. I was in training camp, Officers Training camp, and we were notified that we were going to be moved to Vancouver, so Verna came up. She'd been teaching school in Santa Barbara. She came up to San Francisco and we were married then, just before we went to Vancouver. So, after school was over, she went to Vancouver and joined me there.

CE: Did you have to go overseas?

BD: Yes. I was assigned to the 316th Engineers, which was the engineer regiment of the 91st division. And we were given about two weeks between the end of our training camp and the day we had to report for duty. Well, we took the train down to Santa Barbara and got a car, got the car we owned, and drove up to Camp Lewis from Santa Barbara and it

was a tremendous trip. With no maps and with hardly any, almost no pavement at all, it took us just about a week to make the trip. Got there the night before I was supposed to return to duty and we were in Camp Lewis until June of 1918. They didn't make much provision for wives there and Verna just had to - other fellows had their wives there and they just rented a room in the little town of DuPont, which was nearby. DuPont was a powder town, which the name might imply. They spent their time in - well, what would correspond nowadays to a hostess house, it was an entertainment place there where the wives would come and play cards and get snacks and what not. In June I was sent overseas.

CE: Did you go to Europe? Did you go to France?

BD: Yeah, went to France. By that time, I was a First Lieutenant and I had a company command because the Captain of the company was sick. So I took the company overseas and we went into training there and finally into the Argonne battle in which I was wounded and spent the rest of the war in the hospital. Came back in - arrived in San Francisco in March of 1919 and Verna met me at the train. I was still - yes, I was free of crutches but I had to use a cane, but they had a - Letterman Hospital was so crowded that they - I didn't have any trouble getting a months leave of absence and a sack full of bandages so I could bandage my own wound which was still - -

CE: You were truly an outpatient.

BD: I was an outpatient. I was getting a month's leave and we went back to Santa Barbara and then up to Willows where my brother was working and finally landed in San Francisco at the end of the leave. I got my job back with the state highway. I'd worked with the state highway before the war for three years. And then I worked for a firm of consulting engineers and that gave me our opportunity. We were - the job took me part-time in an office in San Francisco and part-time up in Sonoma County, in Petaluma and Sonoma, so it was ideal to move to Marin County. So we moved to Marin County in 1920.

CE: What was this company?

BD: Well, it was a firm of consulting engineers that later went broke.

CE: Were you a civil engineer?

BD: Yeah, I was a civil engineer.

CE: Is that when you bought your home on Fallen Leaf Avenue?

BD: No, no we couldn't find a house. That was a bad time for housing, as you would know, Ann. I don't know if she was here or not but - -

CE: Sure she was, 1920 - -

BD: But there had been no houses built during the war and very little built since the time of the earthquake when so many people moved over, except, since the war there'd been

quite a few buildings but they were shoddy. The lumber was green and they were built just to sell.

CE: Did you find one, though?

BD: No, not for two years. Tom's partner, Tom Minto is the one that finally found us a house.

CE: So you lived in San Francisco then?

BD: No, we lived in Ross in a rented house down on Redwood Avenue, right back of the old Ross home, right across the creek from the old Ross home as it turns out, we didn't know that then. We lived there for two years while we were looking for a place.

CE: And Tom Minto found you - - -

BD: Finally Tom Minto - he called up one Saturday and he said, "We got you a house," he was going to send a car and he said, "just wait, you'll like it." Took us up and turned into Winship Park, Verna said, "I don't want to live over here, it's across the highway from the school, across the railroad tracks from the school and I'm not going to live over in this." Tom said, "Just a minute, don't make up your mind yet." So he drove us up to Fallen Leaf and Verna said, "I won't drive up this little narrow street." We walked up to the house and looked out the window right at Tamalpais.

CE: Right at Tam, that did it.

BD: Right at Tamalpais and the house was sold.

CE: Well, you were thinking ahead. Millie wasn't born by that time, was she?

BD: Oh yeah -

CE: So you were thinking of her getting to school when she became of school age.

BD: Well, it was true; it was a burden. Verna took her to school every day until she got to be a big girl. She went to Branson School. The Ross School in those days was - it was not Ross School as it is today; it was a two-teacher school.

CE: But you had to cross that highway, Sir Francis Drake highway.

BD: Had to cross the highway and the electric rails.

AE: That's right.

CE: So then was it 1920 you bought your home?

BD: 1922 we bought the house. That's the house I'm living in now. Now Verna's background, if you want to bring us together - -

CE: Yes, let's bring you together and then we'll get you both together on this conservation -

BD: Verna's great grandfather, David I Wood, was - you'd call him an entrepreneur, I guess. He was born in Virginia and they moved to various parts of Virginia. We could trace their movements by the old family Bible in which we found in one of the cousins when the kids were born. They had - oh, seven or eight children. They were born in various parts of Virginia and Tennessee and finally in Missouri.

CE: Here and there - -

BD: Yeah. In Missouri he was a - running a boat up and down the Mississippi River between St. Louis and New Orleans selling stuff from town to town. Buying stuff in one town and selling it in another, a trader.

CE: Moveable merchant.

BD: Yeah. And he came to California in 1849, overland, with a brother and immediately sent his brother back to bring his family over and his family came in 1850. They settled down there what is now North San Juan. North San Juan didn't exist then. At the mouth of the South Yuba, where the South Yuba joins the ? Fort Defiance, that was in 1850 and California had just become a state. The counties didn't have any money to build roads, so the legislature passed a law under which the county could authorize people to form a corporation, a Turnpike Corporation they called it, to build a road and charge toll. That's the only way they could get roads. Well, worked at a store in this place at Fort Defiance, outside near the mouth of the south fork of the Yuba River and - -

CE: What river?

BD: South fork of the Yuba River. We found a lot of papers by the city courthouse that gave us a story. We did a lot of this research after I retired. He formed a corporation called the Virginia Turnpike Company. See, he came from Virginia. The owners of the stock, most of them were relatives, or husbands or wives of relatives. Anyhow, they put up enough money to build a road about fourteen miles long from a point near Smartsville up to a place I would say two or three miles east of what is now North San Juan, up past French Corral. It involved crossing the south fork of the Yuba River, which they did on a low bridge which was washed out in 1862 when the big flood.

CE: Is this generally in the foothills of the Sierra?

BD: The foothills of the Sierra

CE: Like where the northern lines - - -

BD: This road was designed to bring traffic from Marysville, which was then the head of navigation to the northern mines, and eventually, when the mines were discovered in Virginia City, on over the Summit to Virginia City. It was known as over what is called the Henness Pass. Many of the old timers still say that is the best pass over the mountains; it should have been developed instead of Yuba Pass. But anyway, this used to be a section of that road. He could see the traffic had to come that way.

CE: Pretty enterprising -

BD: Yes. He bought land up near Alleghany including a Saw Mill and a flock of timberland and cut the timber and built a new bridge after this other one was washed out in [18]62, and the new one was a covered bridge.

CE: I was going to ask you that.

BE: Which is still sitting in place -

CE: It is -

BD: Until about two years ago it was part of the county road system but the county built a new road and partly through Verna's and my efforts up there they got enough interest in the old bridge to raise enough money to rehabilitate it so that it is now more or less a county park. Well, my reason for doing that research was to authenticate that bridge and it was in fact the old bridge that David Wood had built in '62 and so on and we did it by the records that we found.

CE: I wonder, Bert, why he made it a covered bridge? That's an eastern concept. Was there that much snow?

BE: Well, the same reason that the eastern one does, the same reason. It protects this wooden structure and it protects the structure from the elements, and it did.

CE: That's why it lasted.

BD: Yeah. It lasted. It's been in place now for 116-17 years.

CE: Well, let's get her father somewhere down here. How did they come from that part of the country then?

BD: They moved from town to town until - having a store in each town, until they were finally burned out for the last time in Virginia City. They had a store there. In the meantime, they had bought land on the Bear River, down there where it is now Woodland, they had quite a chunk of land down there. And they went down there in the late [18]60's and started ranching. David Wood died in the early [18]70's and his son, my wife's grandfather, took over the ranch property and he became quite a prominent citizen there. He was chairman of the Board of Supervisors of the county and president of the bank and the head man in the church and the water works and that type of thing. And Verna went to school there - and I'm told at the end of the third grade, at that time her grandfather, who apparently idolized her, and she idolized him and he spoiled her very much, suddenly lost all his money as a result of the hydraulics in the mines filled up the river and flooded the land and he had to spend money, borrow money and spend it on levees and so on and it finally caught up with him and he lost everything. It was at that time he got a job as charge of the creamery for the Mailliards out at San Geronimo.

CE: That's her father, now?

BD: Her father. Her grandfather was brokenhearted, he only lived a year or so later.

CE: So the son relocated and - -

BD: Yeah - About the only thing he knew- he was raised to be a rancher. He didn't have a trade. He'd gone to a military school for example, the old man handed out some money but he really didn't have a trade but he did know the creamery business because they'd run a creamery in Woodland. He ran this creamery for Mailliard. There were not enough pupils in San Geronimo to support a school, so she had to go over the hill to Nicasio to that old school over there, and she went to that school.

CE: Which is now painted red.

BD: Yeah. - that old building.

CE: Some retired general lives there, doesn't he?

BD: Yeah. Fred Dixon - -

CE: Yes, we know him

BD: Fred Dixon was manager of the ranch and ? used to ride around on his horse every morning and see how things were going and her father had to get up early and make butter so that it would be ready for the train that went to San Francisco.

CE: Did she ever speak of - did Verna ever relate any impressions that her father had of Mr., Old Man Mailliard?

BD: No, she never heard him mention him. Her dad and he apparently were friends. They lived there a year and then Verna's mother's brother, her uncle, became Warden at Folsom. He had been a sheriff down in Ventura County a number of years and then the Governor appointed him Warden at Folsom and Dave Wood and Verna's father was one of the officers there. So Verna had suffered from malaria up in the valley and she couldn't go back to Folsom so they moved to Santa Barbara, she and her mother moved to Santa Barbara, and started her in grammar school. By that time about sixth grade in grammar school.

CE: Is that when you met her?

BD: No, we were in different schools in grammar school. We came to the same high school; they only had one high school.

CE: That's where you met her, in high school.

BD: In high school - that's where I met her. We were friends from then on. Verna was a - They came here and Verna was a - She did anything, she went all the way in, she was - And she did that with her housework. I found her working herself to death in the little house we rented and then we bought the other one, keeping that going. She'd even do all of our laundry by hand. She'd say, "No, I'm not going to have my laundry mixed up with other people's dirty laundry." I said, "Let's get a washing machine..."

CE: Was she musical? I remember visiting your home once and there was a lively piano in your living room. Was she musical?

BD: No, it was my daughter's piano.

CE: Your daughter's piano.

BD: So, she tried to get a washing machine - No machine could get things clean, so I finally went and bought a washing machine and told the store man and it was Johnson's Hardware, I told them to deliver it Monday morning early with a demonstrator, who he said was his wife. And when I got home that night I didn't know what I was going to expect but I found that she was just delighted with it. So from then on, I had no trouble selling appliances, we had the house full of electric appliances. At that time I was working for the PG & E.

CE: I knew eventually you got with the PG & E.

BD: Yes. The firm of consulting engineers I worked at eventually went broke and -

CE: When did you go to work with PG&E?

BD: In 1922.

CE: And worked until when?

BD: 1934. And then after that - I retired in 1934 - Wait a minute, in 1956 is when I retired -

CE: Yes, I was going to say -

BD: Yeah, 34 years.

CE: Well, tell me, now I want to talk about the things you've been interested in, you and your wife, she's been such a doer.

BD: We're coming to that now.

CE: Okay.

BD: We carried on our Santa Barbara experiences of living outdoors a good deal by going out picnics up towards west coast and we picnicked many times in the Taylor property.

CE: Yes - Samuel P. Taylor, which was the old mill and it was just the old property then.

BD: Yes, we used to go down and picnic alongside the creek there.

CE: Was there any evidence of the old Azalea Hotel when you went there?

BD: No.

CE: Or the old mill?

BD: There was evidence of the old mill but not the hotel.

CE: That had burned down hadn't it, Mrs. Kent?

AK: I guess so.

BD: She knew of that property through an aunt, her mother's sister, who, when she was married lived in San Francisco and she used to tell of catching the ferry and the train and going out to this Taylor place on Sundays for big parties.

CE: We have some photographs of it and they dammed up that creek and they were out there in rowboats with Japanese lanterns.

BD: Well, anyway, she got interested in this women's club, which you know about, Mrs. Kent, regarding the - -

AK: Tamalpais Center Women's Club.

BD: Yeah, the women's club. They had a garden section and they got a project of raising money to buy what is now called Drake's Beach, there was a fresh water lagoon out there. And Judge Butler and George Brooks particularly - You know them both, I know, Mrs. Kent - -

AK: Yes.

BD: Were interested in getting that into public hands and they put up quite a lot of money themselves and Verna was very interested, going around raising money to help finish buying that property and that started that thing.

CE: That started her - -

BD: And they did it, they were successful. And one day we were out at Camp Taylor and I said, "Why don't you girls get together and buy this property, this would be a fine.."

CE: Acquisition -

BD: And I happen to know because the woman who owned it then, one of her former husbands was Montgomery, had loaned Taylor money to enlarge his mill. He was going to make it into a steam mill, he didn't have enough water to operate only as a water power thing, so he borrowed money from Montgomery to enlarge it and lost the property to Montgomery. Montgomery died. Montgomery is a Montgomery for whom Montgomery Hall is named.

CE: The Seminary -

BD: The Seminary. He is buried in the tombstone chapel down on the corner there.

CE: Certainly is, yes.

BD: And she did all those things, she was a very wealthy woman, and she gave the Seminary a lot of money and - -

CE: So your wife's group contacted him?

BD: No. He died; she married someone else. At the time I knew of her she was still another widow, again a widow, living on the top of the Fairmont Hotel. A very eccentric person.

CE: Do you remember her name?

BD: I've forgotten it now; it's in the records if you want to look it up because they finally bought the property from her estate.

CE: Do you have any idea of what they had to raise, how much money they had to raise to buy it?

BD: Not very much because - -

CE: What year are we talking about roughly?

BD: We're talking about - Oh, I would say in the [19]30's. That's more or less of a guess.

CE: In the '30's.

BD: We had to get rights of way across the property that she owned. And we found her a very eccentric person; she had refused to pay taxes on the property for something like fifteen years. She said the taxes were too high and she wasn't going to pay that kind of taxes. Still she could live at the Fairmont. And - So I said to Verna, "You can get this property without paying much money." I said, "The state has a bond issue in which they will buy property suitable for park purposes and put up half the money if the other half can be put up by local sources." I said, "If you can talk the supervisors into waiving the accumulated taxes, that would be your local source."

CE: So did they present that -

BD: They presented that. Verna then - that was Verna's job, she used to attend every meeting of the Board of Supervisors no matter whether they had anything on fire and that concerned her or not. And she finally talked them into making this proposal to the State Park Commission and the state went for it and then it was the state's problem to negotiate for the property.

CE: So she brought them together.

BD: Yes, she brought them together.

CE: She was a catalyst, really, in getting the Board of Supervisors and the present owner -

BD: Yes - I wouldn't say she - - She was the leader. There were other women, Mrs. Evers, Mrs. Livermore, of course, and so on, but Verna was the one that attended the Board of Supervisors. She got acquainted with the - with the - with the board individually, she knew them personally, and she would be there when she didn't have anything to ask them for - she wanted to -

CE: But they'd see her presence in the chambers -

BD: And they got so they would say, the chairman would say, "Verna, run down to the Recorder's Office and get us such and such a book."

CE: She did the legwork, too.

BE: So when she had something to present before the, to do for her, why, they were sympathetic to her.

CE: Well, she'd certainly done her homework in all of this, too.

BD: Well, she'd done her homework, she knew about it. And she and - Aubrey Drury and I were classmates and she knew him through my friends with him and Aubrey was a great - - he was Save the Redwoods League, she tried to work that angle on it, too.

CE: This little group of your wife's, did they call themselves anything at that point?

BD: By that time they had formed a Marin Conservation League.

CE: Oh they had, they had formed it.

BD: Yeah. It started out as something else, Marin Planning and Conservation - -

CE: But then it became the Marin Conservation League.

BD: Marin Conservation League. Verna was not one of the founding members of that, but Mrs. Livermore brought her in when she got into this park business. (End of side 1)
Side 2

BD: Well, they didn't have - -When the state finally made negotiations with the owner, who in the meantime had died, they had to deal with her estate, they didn't have quite enough money in the defaulted taxes, so the girls had to go out and raise money and they raised about - as I remember it only about ten or fifteen thousand dollars is all they had to raise.

CE: At that time-

BD: That made up the half of the county's share.

CE: How would they raise this money, might I ask? Did they put on events?

BD: They would write letters, had a mailing list, and they would send brochures out to all over the county and they would get five, ten, fifteen, twenty-five dollars now and then. They all went to work on that and they finally got it, it was quite a triumph.

CE: All right, now, did they get Drake's Beach? Backing up just a moment, was that acquired?

BD: That was acquired by George Brooks and Judge Butler and that group.

CE: Now, what else did they attempt?

BD: That was given to the county. Then the next thing was Shell Beach out on Tomales Bay. It was a favorite - it was the nearest beach to the town of Inverness and it was quite a favorite for people. You'd get there almost by car and we'd go out there for picnics some. And with the success of Taylor behind them Verna said, "Well we're going to see what we can do with this." So they got other people into it - -

CE: Were still in the 1930's, are we?

BD: I think so -

CE: Pre- World Was II, aren't we?

BD: Oh, yes it was pre- World War II. And Paul Wilson and his wife Pat Wilson and several other people like that got into the picture. Paul was a great help because he would point out the natural science advantages of these different places. And Mary Summers, who was - it was before she married Earl Summers - but she was in the planning. I think she was the head planner then, she was a big help. In any event, we got the county to agree that if they would raise half of the money to buy Shell Beach and the property back of it that the - -

CE: You mean up to the ridge sort of?

BD: Up to the ridge there. If these women would get half of the money, the county would put up the other half and they would make a county park out of Shell Beach. That was done. It went through the same routine again. Another gal who was very helpful was Charlotte Riznick; she used to do the publicity for them.

CE: Yes, I remember.

BD: She and Verna and Charlotte would every year get together and put out a green leaflet that they'd call it, annual report of this conservation league, and it was propaganda sheet for raising more money.

CE: Where would they meet, in the various members' homes?

BD: Half of the time they would meet, the directors would meet, in Mrs. Livermore's home or Mrs. Evers's home or in our home.

CE: Well, you were a member also, I gather,

BD: I was working, I was working -

CE: But you were more or less always supportive of her efforts and would do everything you could but it was kind of her baby.

BD: They used to ask me for engineering advice and things of that sort but I was not active at all in it. Then we started walking up beyond Shell Beach, into those woods out there. Those groves are Bishop Pines, that is now Tomales Bay State Park. By that time Newton Drury had become State Highway - head of the State Division of Beaches and Parks and Newton was a friend of mine and we got well acquainted with him, so we went

to Newton and asked him if he'd be interested in that area as a state park. He said he sure would. And so we became interested - - By that time a few years had gone by, Shell Beach property had increased in value and we asked the county if they would put up Shell Beach as the county's investment in a State Park that would include all of the timbered land out there - -

CE: Was this land contiguous to the Shell?

BD: Yes.

CE: I see.

BD: There was a piece of outland that's carved out of it up there, in the middle of it, but it does - - -

CE: Who did the land out there belong to mainly, ranchers?

BD: I've forgotten. Because originally Shafter - - -

CE: Yes, I remember that, sixty years the Shafter Brothers owned it, but it wasn't certainly being used for anything was it?

BD: It wasn't being used for anything, no, just to - - Bishop Pine, little grazing here and there but very little. So the Shell Beach property wasn't enough to supply their half to buy that so they had to go out and raise some more money. That time they had to raise something like thirty or forty thousand dollars, which they did eventually.

CE: Then did the state - did Tomales Bay State park then absorb Shell Beach?

BD: Yeah, yeah.

CE: And it became a State Park, that county section?

BD: It became a State Park.

CE: Well, gosh, they had nothing but success experience -

BD: By that time Fred Bagshaw was Chairman of the Board of Supervisors and he was a great outdoor person and he wanted something done towards Stinson Beach. He lived in Mill Valley and he used to like to go over there and camp in what they call Willow Camp. So they began working on that.

CE: Well, that was rather recent.

BD: No, that was still before the war.

CE: That still was! Well, okay. So, they started working on that acquisition.

BD: Yeah - I'm trying to think just when it was. They got Willow Camp as a County Park, the county bought that originally, and again they used that to trade to the state for a wider area. That came along sometime later. In the meantime the war came along about

then. Verna became on the Board of Directors of the Tamalpais Conservation Club and was finally elected President of the California Conservation Club.

CE: Well, now, what did this club do? It was larger in scope, of course -

BD: It was just to protect Tamalpais, at a time around 1920 when the - a piece of Tamalpais above Mill Valley was threatened with sub-division and this group had been hiking on Tamalpais most of their lives and they - -

CE: These were a lot of San Francisco and bay area people.

BD: Oh yes, San Francisco and Bay area people -

CE: Yes, that wasn't just Marin, no.

BD: In fact hardly any of them were Marin; most of them were San Francisco and Oakland people. Originally.

CE: It was their mountain, too.

BD: Their mountain, yes. They were able to raise enough money to buy that, that was a State Park, about – a small one – about 900 acres of that, I think it was. And then Verna thought, when she became president, the need to enlarge that a good deal and it included some of the Kent lands. So she and Will Kent made a deal. Will finally agreed that he'd sell. This was about the time that the railroad was abandoned and Will Kent was building a road up to Tamalpais. What she wanted was a piece west of the road and now some of those bare hills where there were trails and where there is a bench for one of the old timers of the Tamalpais Conservation Club, and Will agreed to sell the state that property for half its appraised value. In other words, he would supply the matching funds. So she was instrumental in enlarging - - And she did that alone - -enlarging Tamalpais Park really - - -

CE: Well, now isn't it - isn't it - seventeen - how large is it?

BD: It's not part of the federal park either -

CE: No, no, no. But it's many, many acres isn't it? Seventeen hundred or something like that.

BD: I don't know. Something like that.

CE: And it became a State Park.

BD: Much of the land that is used, of course, is Water District land.

CE: Which is another story.

BD: Which is still another story.

CE: Mrs. Kent has shared that with us and Dr. Stanley also.

BD: But the park really - - - whoever donated the land at that time roughly between the road that goes over to Stinson Beach and Muir Woods. Now since then they have bought additional land the other side of Muir Woods down towards Highway 1 and it's quite a bit of land in that. I've forgotten how much, a couple of thousand acres I think.

CE: Was she active with the California Conservation Club most of her life then? I guess so -

BD: Well - You mean Marin Conservation League?

CE: No, the California Conservation Club?

BD: No. That's the Tamalpais Conservation Club, it's not California it's Tamalpais Conservation Club.

AK: That's very much older, very, very much older, that goes far, far back.

CE: Oh, I'm confused. The California Conservation Club is - - Do I have the wrong name for it?

BD: You have the wrong name.

CE: It's the Tamalpais

AK: Well, now there are two of them. Tamalpais Conservation is one club and the new (what do they call it) Marin Conservation---

CE: Oh, I know that, but the one that was in San Francisco - -

BD: That was the Tamalpais Conservation.

CE: Started in the [19]20's - I got it straight now.

AK: Still in the Mills Building isn't it?

BD: Yes.

CE: All right, now that's quite an achievement.

BD: Not the Mills Building, it's the old building on Fourth and Market.

AK: I guess so. It used to be in the Mills.

CE: Well, these are wonderful achievements of your wife's, didn't she stop somewhere along here?

BD: Well, she was not the only one - -

CE: Well, I know but she was one of the fighting forces -

BD: She was a spark plug -

AK: That's what you call it.

CE: Then was she one of the early members of the Marin Conservation League?

BD: Yes. She was Vice President of Marin Conservation League for many years and then chairman of the conservation committee.

CE: Well, weren't there parallel functions going on here in some way? What is the mission of the Marin Conservation League? What's its mission?

BD: What its name implies, to conserve - - It was originally conceived as a planning organization to be sure that we had a plan. And they raised money to get that Mr. Pomeroy out from the east, a well-known, nationally well-known planner, to make a master plan for Marin County. From that they went into abolition of highway signs and that was their big - -

CE: Oh, that was the Roadside Council that Helen Baker Reynolds did.

BD: Well, the Marin Conservation League was the front in Marin County.

CE: I see.

BD: It was during that period that Verna joined the Marin Conservation League; it was before this park thing came along. Yes Helen Reynolds did a splendid job on that thing.

CE: Yes, she was a strong force going up there and fighting those political bosses up in Sacramento.

BD: Then, I think, going on, if you want to finish up the parks, the last one I guess would be Angel Island.

CE: Angel Island.

BD: Angel Island, Verna did very little of the pioneer work on that but she did do the footwork. She would go to Sacramento and talk to the Parks Commission to get them interested in it when it was supposed to be for sale. The first piece they thought they were interested in is what they now call Ayala Cove.

CE: Ayala Cove -

BD: The old Hospital Cove they formerly called it.

CE: Well, now the Park has the whole island.

BD: The Park has the whole island now. But Mrs. Livermore deserves much of the credit for that. Mr. Livermore and one of the members of their board on the Conservation League from Inverness who was named Johnson, Mr. Johnson, they each put up \$5,000 to hold that property, it was all of their own money. I don't know if they ever got it back.

CE: Do you want to add to that Mrs. Kent?

AK: I don't know exactly how much that but the Marin Garden Club got into that because we still ride it along, we still have a savings account. It belongs to the improvement of Angel Island, and saving Angel Island.

CE: Well, that was the last project she was involved in?

BD: That was the last project, the last park, she went state wide after that and was involved in parks elsewhere in the state but as far as Marin County was concerned that was - - And that was getting along after the war then and as I said then we got working on her family's history and - - -

CE: When did your wife die, Bert?

BD: In [19]73.

CE: Well, then she was certainly aware of all the litigation and efforts to acquire the Point Reyes National Seashore.

BD: I haven't mentioned that. She was, I would say, one of the first two or three people to recognize the value of the seashore as a park area. I took my vacation and stayed in Marin County for two years and we used to spend the time out there riding up and down those hills. We'd have to open the gates at every one of those ranches. And then we'd go out and hike up and down the wooded areas and we became acquainted with the operators, that is, the foreman of the ranches. They'd let us in the gates until we - on the Lake Ranch and the Bear Valley Ranch and all those like the Bush Ranch at the other end, we got well acquainted. She tried to get the state interested in it, but it was too big for the state. They would be enthusiastic and our vision didn't go as far as the National Park Service [?]. We conceived Bear Valley Ranch and the Lake Ranch and perhaps the Church's Ranch, which was south of the Lake Ranch, as a park. But the state, as I say, didn't have the money and they didn't have the ability, really, to handle such a large project even as that. So, we finally, we got acquainted with George Collins who was director of Recreational Planning for the Western Division of the National Park Service and - - - George - - We took George out one time and he just went bust about it. He was a - could fly a plane, he used to go out to Gness Field and rent a plane and fly over it and land on the spit and walk up and down. He drew up a plan then for the use of that as a National Park, national seashore, which it now is. And tried to get some action out of his boss and couldn't. One day he came up and he said, "Bert I've got an inkling that somebody, anonymously, has left the Park Service, has given the Park Service, enough money to make a survey of all potential recreational areas on the Pacific Coast from the Canadian border to the Mexican border. We've done the same thing on the east coast and the Gulf of Mexico coast, same man put up the money, so we'd know what was available. And if you know anybody in Washington that has an influence, they are going to start that survey - we'll get instructions to survey Point Reyes first, before they do anything else." Well, when I went to Fred Bagshaw and he said, "Yeah, I know somebody - the congressman," who was then a man - the name I've forgotten, he'd been a State Senator, he lived in Sebastopol. You'd probably know him, Ann - but anyway, he was then our congressman from this district.

CE: That wasn't Clem Miller was it?

BD: No, it was before Clem Miller, he was Clem Miller's predecessor.

CE: So you contacted him -

BD: So I sat down and wrote a letter to - - He said, "Fred," you know, he said, "I've campaigned for him every time he's campaigned for everything, he'll do anything I ask him for, I'm sure." So I asked him if he would sign a letter if we prepared one for him and he said yes. So I wrote out in longhand a letter stating the obvious advantages of this area, it's so close to so many people, you know, and much like Drake left it except for [?]. And George came up and edited it, he only changed a few words and Millie typed it and took it in to San Rafael and met Fred and he signed it and a few days later sure enough, why, we got orders to make a survey - -

CE: See what you did? Look what he did, Mrs. Kent - -

AK: Yes.

BD: I've still got that handwritten letter, draft, - -

CE: I'd like to see it; I'd like to have a Xerox copy of that for your file. Would you let us have a Xerox copy of that?

BD: If I can find it, I think I know where it is, but I'm not sure.. But that was the start of the Point Reyes Seashore - -

CE: That was - Sure, that started it. And you had no idea at that time, I imagine, at that time that it would snowball into becoming a national thing - -

BD: Well, it was going to be a national thing, but we had no idea it would be so big. So, sure enough, they sent a couple of fellows over, we offered to show them around, we knew who we could get the keys to the gates and things and so they came over. At that time I had just retired and - -

CE: Were some of the ranches a little leery of this, or were they aware of what was going on at that point?

BD: Well, some of them were in favor of it and some weren't. So we took them all through the Lake Ranch and Bear Valley Ranch and out to Pierce's Point and they had a big Fairchild camera and out onto all the beaches and they wrote a very - I've got a copy of their report on that, it was a very enthusiastic report: "It ought to be done and done right now." The result of that report, before the full survey of the coast was completed, we got the Director of the National Park Service out here -

CE: You're trying to recall his name?

BD: Trying to recall his name.

CE: Well, that's all right; we can find that out.

BD: Got him up on the point, we could see all of the - it was on the coastal side of the Bear Valley Ranch and it was a beautiful day and you could see the whole Bay and Point Reyes over in the distance and Verna said to him, calling him by his first name, "What will you trade me for this?" He said - "Verna, I haven't got anything I can trade you for it." He said, "You know, thirty five years ago I was a newcomer with this National Park Service and I was sent out here to look this area over and I recommended that this very area, this whole peninsula, become a national park."

CE: Really?

BD: Yes.

CE: He was a man of vision.

BD: And that was the recommendation that finally went in after he went back to Washington.

CE: And then there was the land use survey report. I've seen a copy of it - You know who gave us that? Margaret Campbell from the California Academy of Science. They did an outstanding job of research on that.

BD: Then George had to take over with his crew of course and - you know all the litigation - -

CE: Sure. And we've interviewed some of those ranchers out there, too.

BD: The ranchers, as far as I know, were all happy in the end; they were well paid for their property.

CE: Yes. Well, Boyd Stewart was - -

BD: Well, Boyd was always okay, Boyd was - -

CE: He was sort of a spokesman for a lot of those men - -

BD: He was on the Board of Directors of the Marin Conservation League for years. Boyd was always a staunch fellow.

CE: And as I remember some of their judgment, "What is our alternative? Wouldn't we rather see it a park than the spread of suburbia?"

BD: Yeah - Yeah, Boyd was all right, Jim Kehoe was all right. He was on the Board of Supervisors at one time.

CE: We interviewed his son the other - we went out to that ranch, he still has 1,200 acres.

BD: Well, that was the things I say - One of the things she personally started. She started it originally way back, she was on the board of the Youth Hostel, American Youth Hostel Association, at one time, and it was after this vacation trip I spoke of when we saw all those ranches around, they said, "Why wouldn't that make a good hostel?"

CE: And there is one now isn't there?

BD: There is one now.

CE: At Lake Ranch area? Mud Springs? Where is it?

BD: It's on the Murphy Ranch, down by Mud Hollow.

CE: Mud Hollow, that's where it is.

BD: But it didn't work out as a hostel because, you know, some of those ranchers weren't too clean, so the hostel group didn't approve it. But that got her interested in Point Reyes and from then on she wanted it as a park.

CE: Well, I really think your wife should have a tribute - there should be something definitive done.

BD: The ones you have to thank really, Verna for the idea, George Collins for putting it through. He was the staunch supporter - -

CE: Where is he now?

BD: George had a very serious operation about a year ago; he lost his bladder. He had a cancerous bladder and they took it out, so he's got an artificial one now. He's getting along well. Of course he doesn't say so, I think he's worried about his future. He has a daughter - - -

CE: How old a gentleman is he?

BD: George is about ten years younger than I am. They have a daughter who is quite a prominent attorney in Phoenix. She's making a barrel of money down there and her husband is an entomologist by profession and he's running an experimental farm down there someplace and so George and his wife, whose name is Mildred, decided to move down to Phoenix. So they sold out here and moved down. I think in the back of George's mind he thought if anything happened to him I want to be near the daughter.

CE: Was your wife or you, either of you, interested in Audubon Ranch?

CE: Yeah - We -

CE: Or in the acquisition of some of that property the Galloways had?

BD: Yes, indeed. I remember one time we came back from a vacation and Charlotte Riznick got on the phone and she said, "Verna, we've got another job to do." That - -Oh, what's his name that owned that old house?

CE: The old house on that property?

BD: Yeah.

CE: Mrs. Kent?

AK: Forgot the name - Bjorn - No - -

CE: The Bjorn house, the Bjorn ranch?

AK: No – that's not quite right.

BD: No. He built that tower down at Tiburon, you know - -

CE: Oh, Lyford -

BD: Lyford yes.

CE: Did he own that?

BD: His house was farther down on Strawberry and they were going to move - -

CE: Oh I see, you're talking about the Audubon land over in Tiburon now.

BD: What else were we talking about?

CE: I was talking about the Audubon Canyon Ranch, but that's okay let's get over to - You know the one in Bolinas, but let's get over to Tiburon.

BD: Well, we weren't on the Canyon Ranch, I can tell right off, that was entirely the problem of Doc - Marty Griffin.

CE: Yes - That was comparatively simple, wasn't that - as far as -

BD: They had a lot of money to raise but they raised it through the Audubon Society down there, but we were not a part of that. We were members of the Audubon Society but we were not active in it out at Canyon Ranch.

CE: But this Tiburon thing - -

BD: This Tiburon thing I thought that's what you were talking about.

CE: No - that's okay, go ahead.

BD: Their headquarters down there -

CE: Sure, that's the Lyford Building.

BD: So Verna and - - What's her name, the publicist? You mentioned her name - - Charlotte Riznick, they got together - they spent weeks on publicity, raising money to buy the old goat lady out so they could have a place to move that house and preserve the house. They finally made a deal with her that she could retain a life interest in the property but would sell it to us for a sum they could raise, and they had the house moved over to the property and that is now headquarters for Audubon. I was president one time of the Audubon Association of the Pacific, believe it or not.

CE: Were you?

CE: Yes.

CE: Well, I have to get to you because we're getting towards the end of this tape and I know that you've been involved in - -

BD: It was a funny thing, I was working in my garden, we had to build a garden up from scratch and I was interested in the birds that were following me around and picking up worms and somebody told me, "Why don't you take an extension course?" The University had a course they called Six Tricks of Field, and we took that course twice or three times and at the end of it, why, Mrs. Kelly who ran it just said, "I can't teach you anymore, why don't you join the Audubon Society?" It was then called the Audubon Association of the Pacific, a big name, it had about a hundred members all from Marin County and Oakland and San Francisco. And I was finally made president not because I knew anything about birds; it was because I was impatient. You know how those little groups are, they argue, argue, argue - -

CE: "Let's get on with it," huh -

BD: The poor speaker was sitting there and he probably had to drive back to Davis after the end of the thing, so when I got tired of hearing the arguments and I'd make a motion. So they thought I knew something and put me on the Board of Directors.

CE: When in doubt, make a motion. Well, I've seen you in action at the Marin County Historical Society board meetings - Mrs. Kent you know, he moves along. All right, let's make a motion on that, they get the stuff done.

BD: They stop the talking when you get all the facts out, why talk anymore? So I was president of that for a while and it was not a member of the National Audubon, it was an independent organization. Only Bay Area but it sounded like the whole Pacific Coast.

CE: Listen, Bert, we've got to either cut this off or put another tape in. We are at the end, shortly, of the tape. But could we continue your story sometime? We've talked about your wife but I'd like to talk to you again if we could, Mrs. Kent. Part two of this story and we'll talk about your contribution to the preservation of history of Marin County. Can we do that?

BD: I don't think I've done too much.

CE: Yes, you have. It's been a pleasure, though, to talk with you today.