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INTERVIEW WITH MELVILLE DICKSON AND FRED DICKSON  
by Carla Ehat & Anne Kent  
November 21, 1976

INTERVIEWEE: Melville Dickson (MD), Fred Dickson (FD), and Grace Katherine  
Dickson Tolson (GT)

INTERVIEWERS: Carla Ehat (C.E.), Anne Kent (A.K.) and Grace Katherine Dickson  
Tolson (GT)

DATE OF INTERVIEW: November 21, 1976

TRANSCRIBER: Marjorie Hoffman

CE: Today is Sunday, November 21, 1976. Continuing the Oral History Program of the California Room at the Marin County Library at Civic Center, this is Carla Ehat and joining me today is Mrs. Thomas Kent. We have the pleasure of being at the Dickson Ranch, at 182 San Geronimo Valley Road in Woodacre, California. And we are sitting in the living room of Alexander Melville Dickson's ranch house. Joining us also with Melville Dickson is his brother Fred. Talk with Mel and his brother Fred, I would like to read into the record from Monroe Fraser's 1880 *History of Marin County*, a brief profile on their grandfather, William J. Dickson, and I'll quote,

"William J. Dickson was born in Caledonia County, Vermont, January 25, 1829 and is the son of Robert and Janet Lena Dickson both natives of Scotland. Young Dickson remained on his father's farm until 1853 and in September of 1853 sailed via the isthmus for California and arrived in San Francisco around the 27th of that month. He went at once to Knights Ferry, engaged in the employ of Locke and Dent ], in the erection of the dam and the first mill that was built there. He remained in that place until 1856 when he came to Marin County and in company with his brother, David S., began the business of dairying and stock raising on the San Geronimo ranch. The county at the time was sparsely settled, traveling was

done mostly on horseback, fences were almost unknown and bear were plentiful, often killing the stock at night. In 1859, he returned to his old home in Vermont, bringing back with him his sister, now Mrs. W. R. Coburn of Middleton, Lake County. In 1869, when the San Geronimo Ranch was divided and sold, William J. Dickson bought about 500 acres and has since resided upon his homestead."

Well, Mel and Fred, does that seem quite accurate to your remembrance of your family?

MD: I would say that sounds accurate. Actually, the only thing we have to fall back on is that.

CE: Well, that was written in the rather flowery style, too, of the 1880's. But what is your earliest recollection of your grandfather? Did you meet him at all?

MD: No; Fred did.

CE: Fred, can you tell us anything about your grandfather?

FD: Yes. When I first knew him he lived on H Street in San Rafael. And as a youngster, I used to visit him and I don't remember much, I remember staying there overnight several times, but that's about all, I was about five.

CE: Would you describe him for us? Was he a big man?

FD: No, about medium size, probably 160 pounds at the time. No, not even that large, I don't think, and probably five foot six or seven.

CE: I understand he was one of the founders - founding officers of the Presbyterian Church of San Rafael, did you know that?

FD: Yes, I knew that.

MD: The house is also still standing, I think, Fred.

CE: Mel, it is?

MD: I think so. On H Street.

FD: He invested in several houses there. He owned three on one block there.

CE: Would you describe the confines of the ranch that he purchased? Fred, do you want to try it?

FD: The what?

CE: Describe the boundaries of the ranch. It was part of the original San Geronimo Rancho.

FD: Yes.

CE: Where are we sitting, at the epicenter of the rancho?

FD: No, we are sitting about on the south side, about roughly the southwest corner of it.

CE: All right, now the house - we're here doing the interview in a very contemporary house. This house can't be over thirty years old. The original house is the one that is across the road there?

FD: I don't think I was born there, I'm pretty sure I was born in San Rafael at my grandmother's.

CE: How about you Mel?

MD: I was born in Woodacre.

FD: I can remember living there before this house was built.

CE: I see.

MD: I understand there was one even older than that, but it was more or less of a temporary shack, I think. When they first moved in they had to have a shelter and they built a shack, then they built this rather delightful home, the old ranch home which is still here. And then in 1918 their third home was built, which is next door to us and a rest home now. Then this one was built in 1940. The other one, the rest home was built in 1918 - started in '17 and finished in '18. And Fred is right because - - I was the first guy born in that house - - and he was born in the old ranch house just behind us. Unless they carted you up to San Rafael?

FD: I think they went to San Rafael first, I don't know.

MD: Who would know - -

CE: That was the proper thing even in those days.

MD: Who would know in those days, you know, but Dad said I was the first one here.

FD: I remember several things about this house, little funny things that you'd know as a youngster. I remember that it had a bathtub downstairs and they used to get all of us in it at once on Saturday's.

CE: How many were there of you besides you and - -

FD: Well, at the time that we were still in the house there were five of us, but probably the youngest one was too little, she would have drown. And I've seen pictures of it and I can remember us all riding one horse. We had one horse, his name was Ned.

MD: Shucks, I thought it was Sam.

CE: See, this is what happens to history that makes it so fascinating, we all have different impressions.

FD: Sam came later.

MD: Fred is eight years older than I am.

CE: Oh, he's the oldest.

MD: I'm a 1918 model while he's a 1910 one. That's why Fred - -

FD: I had an older sister. Then I can remember going to school from this house. Went to grammar school at Lagunitas. My father had gone to grammar school in San Geronimo, but that school was discontinued, but the building was still there.

CE: Well, your father was born right here, though?

FD: Yes.

CE: He was born - according to the book - is that correct?

MD: That's correct. He was born here and there was a one-room grammar school right across from the now extinct, only service station in San Geronimo, there's only one piece of it left there that says Moses in the Bulrushes.

CE: Moses in the Bulrushes.

MD: Yeah, a guy by the name of Moses came in from San Francisco - incidentally his son is in Fairfax. But the school was just across from it. Then they moved to a two-room school, because that was only one room, in Lagunitas, which is standing today, just up from the Catholic Church. And I went there for four years and then they built the third one in San Geronimo which was the main school used today.

CE: Did your father or your grandfather - well, I presume you didn't discuss these things with your grandfather, Fred, but did your father ever tell you why they picked out this particular parcel of land here? The Maillard's owned it at that time.

FD: The Maillards owned it, I understand. We figured out that one of the reasons they picked up this place up there is not so much the value of the property, but the proximity to San Francisco, you know, where they could raise products for San Francisco. I always thought they picked the biggest rock pile around because it looked like Vermont where they came from.

CE: Very good, very good.

MD: I never thought of that!

FD: If you ever go to Vermont, if you go there, the territory looks something like - -

CE: That's the home of the granite, that's the tombstone - -

MD: That's a funny one because for fifty years they had their neighbor here, who was Ralph Wright or the Wright family, and they didn't converse very well between the two families, so after about fifty years or seventy-five years, they found out they were neighbors in Vermont! So, two of them liked the rock pile!

CE: You know it's interesting when you travel all around Marin County how many people came from Vermont here. Do you have an answer to that?

FD: No, I don't have an answer but I imagine one of them came over and was successful here and I don't imagine they came from poor people in Vermont because they seemed to have enough money to buy these ranches.

CE: That's true.

FD: And they bought them before they earned enough money - they had no way of earning money to buy the ranches. They were not gold miners or anything like that that settled here and they didn't have time enough to earn that kind of money because I understand they paid about \$14,000 for this place.

MD: [inaudible]

FD: Even in those days, \$14,000 was a lot of money - -

CE: Well, the more you read of the history of California, and coming across on the California Trail, those people that went by prairie schooner were people of substance. The more you read about it - and they had money stashed away, gold coins in the wagons and everything, intent upon relocating.

MD: Our grandmother came across the isthmus, which I guess was a faster way. You just took the boat down and stage coach across the - -

CE: It was the quickest way here because around the Horn was anywhere from four to six months.

MD: Except for the mosquitoes it was the safe way, too.

FD: But the rich lands of California were not developed to farm properly, in other words you could not farm in Sacramento area and stuff like that and this was available but I always wondered why - -

MD: Well, you really had to work it, too.

FD: But then when you trace the family, other families, back here, why, you notice lots of them from Vermont, probably one success. The same thing was happening over in the Tomales area, all the Swiss-Italians -

CE: With the Swiss, yes - Well, you mentioned the McIsaacs.

MD: Yes, Don McIsaac, I mentioned his name.

CE: We interviewed Nellie McIsaac, and she was a Cordoni.

MD: Which McIsaac?

CE: Nellie  
MD: Oh, yes.  
CE: And she said her father practically on the ranch ran a non-official Swiss Consulate. They would write back there and say, "We can get you a job," and they'd come here and they'd stay on the ranch until they got located. Then the Portuguese had done this, Italians, and everybody.  
MD: Well, in 1870, this wasn't too remote - what year did the railroad come through?  
CE: Well, about '75, so you were - -  
MD: Seventy-five years later the narrow gauge went through and probably in Tomales -  
CE: Was there a stop here?  
MD: What year was it?  
AK: In [18]72.  
CE: Was there a stop out here for your family?  
MD: No, the main headquarters - sure they'd stop if you asked them to, but the main stop was in San Geronimo. San Geronimo had sidings and so forth.  
FD: Oh no, there was a stop here, too.  
MD: No, not for the narrow gauge. The narrow gauge ran to the north side of the building you're sitting in and the wide gauge ran in way and up - - -  
FD: I do not think that's a hundred percent true because when I was little this was a narrow gauge road over on this side and moved from that side; I thought I could remember it over on this side, but I think it's only a memory that they told me it was there. I think I can remember a steam locomotive with a big stack but I'm not sure that I ever saw one; someone would have to trace back to find out - -  
CE: But the narrow gauge was over here and -  
FD: The narrow gauge was over here.  
MD: I disagree.  
CE: And it ran through that tunnel under White's Hill?  
FD: Yes, that was the narrow gauge when I was small.  
MD: I disagree with Fred, I think that the narrow gauge went through two tunnels as a matter of fact in this way.  
CE: Mrs. Kent do you have a story on that?  
AK: No, but I know the first one was on that hill across the other side - you can see the  
CE: Scar of it now.  
FD: We still pick up spikes over there.  
MD: On the other Dickson Ranch up here it went between the house and the barn over a trestle. It was crazy, you knew when every train went by. And for some reason they used to stop there, I don't know why, and change the brake shoes because Flander's up here has a bucket full of brake shoes he found, all kinds of them. They must have - I don't know why they would do it over there, but they did it.  
CE: Okay, now, your grandfather came out here first and then was it shortly after that his brother came and bought an adjacent rancho?  
FD: Yes. This one -  
CE: And his name was John Calvin?  
FD: Yes.  
CE: Are any of their descendants around here?

MD: I don't think he was ever married, was he Fred?

FD: Yes - what about that lady by the name of Dickson who just died the other day at the age of 100 - Fifth and H Street.

CE: Was she kin to you?

MD: She died a year or two ago.

FD: My sister went around to see her the other day. She didn't make her 100th birthday by a few days or something. She died within a few years ago.

MD: Well, what ranches did they own in Bolinas? Boyd Stewart's Ranch used to be one.

FD: When I knew about it, my Dad's cousin owned a ranch on the road between Olema and Bolinas.

MD: Oh, that was Ed Dickson.

FD: Ed Dickson, and he owned this one also.

MD: Yes.

CE: Well, getting back to your grandfather for just a moment, when he bought this ranch were the Roy's adjacent at that time, or was he the only one right there?

FD: I do not know for sure.

MD: Well, I think they all came at once -

CE: Okay. In other words, when the Maillards started to break up the rancho and the Lagunitas Development Company, etc. and all that was formed, then your grandfather purchased it.

FD: Yes.

MD: Yes.

CE: Now, what was his original interest in ranching, dairy exclusively with a herd of dairy cattle?

MD: They were all dairy, yes. They didn't sell milk, though -

FD: They were in the process of - they couldn't sell raw milk, it was too far from San Francisco, so when I was a youngster this place ran as a fundamentally a dairy, but also was a pig ranch, pork ranch, on the side. They fed their - they separated the milk off with a separator and fed the skim milk to the pigs.

CE: Well, wasn't that a common practice in Marin County?

MD: Oh, yes.

FD: And the rest of it, at one time, they made into butter - they made butter when I was a little kid.

AK: A very famous butter, that's right.

MD: As a matter of fact, that old building that is in San Geronimo on Creamery Road, that's where it got the name, Creamery Road. My dad had about 15 acres or 10 acres in there; it went that whole hillside there.

FD: And they made butter and I remember about it because I was fascinated with it because it was driven by a water wheel, to churn the butter.

CE: Well, it was right near the creek.

FD: Yeah, well they had to locate it for that reason - bought that land for that purpose, to get some high-pressure waterpower. They put a dam up in the stream and churned the butter.

CE: Any particular dairy cattle did they feature? Jersey's, Guernsey's or anything you know of?

FD: I don't know.

CE: You know, it's interesting the more people you talk with about Marin so many came with very little. That's not true of your family, and it's certainly not true of the Maillard's but the Maillard's had so much affluence because of their heritage from Joseph Bonaparte and they had thoroughbred everything, stock.

MD: Well, one time my dad operated the ranches for Maillard.

CE: Well, tell us about that, Mel.

MD: Well, I don't - that's about all I know because - he even operated ranches for the Big Five in Hawaii. He had them scattered all over from Nevada to Chico to Lathrop to I don't know where else.. He didn't talk very much and once in a while he would pop up with something and if you didn't put it in the back of your cranium, you wouldn't ever have known about it. He was not much of a talker.

CE: Well, as the years rolled by and your father, I would imagine, did he just assume the same function of the ranch or did he diversify, go into any other fields or utilization of the land?

MD: Well, his source of income was appraising ranches for the Bank of San Rafael and then he also managed ranches for other people and then he also had this one and the one with the lookout. And they used to have – mainly - He liked Portuguese and he'd have Portuguese farmers on some sort of a basis - a partnership and he liked that; that worked well. It all worked that way until World War II and then all the ranches fell apart.

CE: Did he ever talk about Lorenzo White?

MD: No, I never heard him mention that. As a matter of fact, every once in a while he'd call White's Hill, White Horse Hill.

CE: White Horse?

MD: Yeah, every once in a while. Nobody ever asked him where the name - why it was White's Hill.

CE: Digressing a moment, when the Maillard family had the rancho, Adolph had this idea about finding gold here. Were you ever shown the area, the site of the diggings or where they did some excavating mining?

MD: One guy made a living up here in the 30's – well, I don't know if he made a living or not but right behind the original house, the Maillard home, within a quarter of a mile of the Maillard home a man had diggings up there and he went down about 50 feet I guess, it was quite a hole. I'm not sure if the remains are still - I'm sure they are, and the one big one that was on the stock market is down by the Lagunitas School. And that one is also written up in your book and according to my dad it was nothing but a hoax.

FD: My dad thought it was more for selling stock than it was for gold.

CE: Well, tell us about your early years here. Mel, do you want to start in first? You went to school down the road -

MD: Well, I spent four years in Lagunitas in Grammar School and finally I went to the new one that just opened up and spent four years there and then we, for some reason, were in the San Rafael District here and we either drove or bused over to San Rafael High through the Tam District to get to San Rafael. And all the family finished up at San Rafael High and then dear old Dad was the one who started the Junior College down there.

CE: He did?

MD: He was one of the first Board of Education there. I think he was also involved in the Historical Society, but I'm not sure.

AK: Yes, he was.

MD: He was?

CE: This is Mrs. Kent speaking.

AK: Yes, he was interested in many things.

CE: Did you know him, Mrs. Kent?

AK: Oh, I did know him, yes, he was a very important banker along with all this, but to get back to the College of Marin, it was called the Junior College, you know, at that time, and he was on the first Board and he was one of the ones responsible for getting that, along with Tom Minto and my Tom, too. He was on the board a long time, I think.

MD: I think that same original Board stayed on for about twenty years before, I think, one of the members died, they never had competition or anything. So that got the College system started here, anyway. And he actually had four years of high school but he never got a diploma, there was a ruckus and he walked out the last week of school.

CE: Well, of those original 505 acres of the ranch, have you sold off any over the years?

MD: Oh, 400 acres of it.

CE: 400 acres.

MD: Yes. Again, the irony of it is back to the Lagunitas Development Company. They took 100 years and they wanted it back, kind of odd.

CE: It's interesting; your family has been here so long, 120 years is a long spell. There are other families, of course, that have been in Marin that amount of time but - third and fourth generations, some of those families out there in Marshall, Tomales area -

MD: Oh, lots of old ones out there.

CE: Have you followed in this, Fred - have you followed in ranching all of your life?

FD: Yes.

MD: He's still following it.

FD: Of a different type ranching. I've done almost nothing but that, most of my life. I have worked in San Francisco short times.

CE: And you're ranching right here, too, on the - -

FD: No, mine's out by Black Point.

CE: Black Point?

FD: Yes.

CE: Well, that's interesting, when did you acquire that, Fred?

FD: In 1937. We were farming out in that area before that and farming some out in the valley in Sacramento.

CE: You've seen great changes occur in ranching, we've talked to Boyd Stewart and some of the other men who've been here, the Martinelli family, the Freitas family. What changed it all in your judgment, Mel?

MD: Oh, I think largely mechanization and transportation, which also is the same thing. You had to turn your dairy products into cheese or butter.

CE: Then was it - - out Schooner Bay and went to market that way, or how did it get to the market from here?

MD: Well, that was interesting, before the railroads, of course, there was horse and buggy.

CE: Horse and buggy, yes.

MD: And the railroad came right through here.

CE: But where would it go, over to Schooner Bay or down towards -

MD: Ours went to Point Reyes.

CE: Point Reyes.

MD: Or to Nicasio. Which was it Fred? Where did the butter go?

FD: Well, we first had our operation down here, we made the butter and shipped it to San Francisco. In fact we shipped it to the Palace Hotel.

CE: Okay, how did you ship it there?

FD: On the railroad.

CE: On the railroad. How often would they stop for that? Once a week?

FD: No the train came every day.

CE: I realize that, but did you ship something every day?

FD: I guess so; they probably shipped every day.

CE: Do you have in your family - -

FD: They distributed some in San Rafael I think, but I didn't know anything about that operation.

CE: Well, you mentioned the Palace Hotel.

FD: Yes. My father did not like the butter business very well and they changed over to a cheese factory. Kraft came in here and bought up - since then bought up a lot of the cheese factories, but there was a cheese factory over by Nicasio. After the butter business stopped - he didn't like the butter business very much, and when he got a chance to sell to the cheese factory he did and folded up the butter outfit. Actually, I think what happened the guy that ran the butter outfit retired and died and he didn't want to keep up with it.

CE: Would you repeat again, Fred, it isn't clear to me, why they didn't ship the milk.

MD: No refrigeration.

FD: Everybody in San Francisco raised their milk right in town. In fact, there was some rumor my grandfather had some interest in a dairy that was in San Francisco. I didn't know anything about it. My dad told me once that his father once pointed to the hills back there by south San Francisco and said we ran a dairy over there one time. They were more ingenious in some ways than the people are nowadays. Well, he was running ranches in Gerlach, Nevada nobody ever heard of where Gerlach was, thought nothing of it. And he kept out of trouble and then he said he kept his .38 in his suitcase all the time. I went up to Gerlach one time to see it. You should see that country! How he even got there, I don't know. And he was running for other people. He ran a great big operation - a ranch up in a town called Biggs, which is near Chico. That was mostly for the Island people. And he shipped mules to the Islands. He had a lot of friends in the Hawaiian Islands. He went down there almost every year.

CE: Well, let's talk about your father a minute. He was an interesting, colorful man, I hear. Tell us about him.

FD: Yes, how he operated out of hand-cranked phone and we could always tell where he was talking because the further away it was the louder he talked on the phone. When it shook the whole house you knew he was talking to Gerlach, Nevada, or someplace.

MD: Well, they put the phone in the hall, which is in total darkness to begin with and he could close the doors and he could yell - like the farther away, the more volume he turned on.

FD: There were only two phones in the valley; we had one.

CE: And where was the other phone?

FD: We were 2F2-number-2 and they were 2F2-number-1.

MD: Ed Gardner.

CE: And Ed Gardner had the other phone?

MD: Yes, and they ran their own phone line.

FD: Yes.

MD: We had to run our own phone line into Fairfax to connect in because there was none, and so - then they had the F line and so we had 2F2 and 2F3. Gardner, even when he was head of the Marin County Fire Department, that was it. That was the telephone.

CE: Now you're a little younger, of course, than Boyd Stewart, but he talks about taking his horse from their original ranch over towards Nicasio and taking a horse and going to the train and going down to Tam High School. How would you do it?

FD: There was another fellow there doing it when I was going to school, you used to see him all day. We went to San Rafael High School by train.

CE: You went to San Rafael High School by train, okay.

FD: We went first to this grammar school.

CE: Yes.

FD: Then back to the earlier times, we started out in the local grammar school and for some reason, I don't know what, the transportation seemed to be very unstable. I remember going on the train down there and come back on the train for a while and then I don't know what happened, the train didn't run at that time or not I never did know why but then they took us on the milk wagon between here and San Geronimo. And then someone picked up in San Geronimo and took us that far. But if we got home early, we walked home. That's 3 1/2 miles and we used to count the ties - as far as you could count. Then if we had nothing else to do you'd walk on the rails as far as you could. That was a contest. But there seemed to be a bus came by afterwards, later bus. Then at that time - he was not quite right about the school, it was a one-room school. About the time I got to the third grade or fourth grade, I think it became two-rooms.

CE: Who were some of your classmates? Do you remember any of their names?

FD: I don't remember. A fellow by the name of Bill Bell was one of them that I've seen within the last fifteen years or ten years. Another one - there was just three or four of us - -

CE: Did you have just one teacher? Do you remember any of the teacher's names, Fred?

FD: No, I don't.

CE: Do you, Mel?

MD: Was Miss Cook there when you were there?

FD: No, that was afterward.

MD: Okay, I was after her. The Cook School in San Anselmo.

CE: I see.

MD: Isabel Cook. She was a teacher out here for around ? .

FD: They complained about the eight grades in one school and the lack of education. When we got to San Rafael High School, we never had such a breeze in our life. We just breezed in that place for the first year. They told us don't be nervous about the thing. Why other kids had terrible educations compared to what we had.

AK: That was often the way.

CE: Did you ever hear of the name Valerie Ansel, a teacher?

AK: How about Dolly Jenkins? Dolly Cushing?

FD: No.

MD: We were kind of isolated out here; what went on over the hill, we didn't know much about.

CE: Did you run any cattle at all or did you keep it - -

MD: Every dairy had to be set up not by acreage but by how much food or produce it could produce for the cattle and how much water you had. Now, if you didn't have enough water you were in trouble and if you had to go out and buy hay then you were breaking even or you were losing during those months. And so this ranch would produce about a hundred milking cows is what it could handle with the water supply we had and the fields that we'd plowed.

CE: I see.

MD: And that was generally. Now the next ranch down, the Roy Ranch, had more water but -

CE: Did you get the water from the same source, the Lagunitas Creek or -

MD: No, we just picked it up off these springs off the hills.

CE: Just through the streams.

FD: Picked it off your own. We didn't have public water until we built that house and we put in an extra system because, by that time, these people had developed a system about 1917 and we tapped into their system but only for extra use.

CE: For extra use.

FD: Just for our own household or garden - because they put in about two or three acres of garden in that place and to make sure - the ranch could not supply that much water, so we used to have to supply some from an extra source. But all the ranches were independent of that supply.

CE: How large a staff would you say was necessary to run the ranch when you were a boy?

FD: They usually had one family and one workman besides that. That just took care of the dairy part of it and then we had one woodchopper steady and of course the butter man was steady. But a woodcutter lived around here all the time. He chopped wood constantly.

CE: Was any timber felled by your family?  
FD: Well yes, to put up these buildings.  
CE: From lumber felled right here?  
FD: Yes.  
CE: And where was it milled?  
FD: Stumps are still out in one of the fields here.  
CE: Where was it milled, over - -  
FD: Well, they had portable mills that came through here and milled for a percentage. They wanted to build a barn here when he came through, you did it a year in advance or so, and the mill would come along and he took so much of the lumber and you took so much. There was a mill down in Lagunitas operating at that time. And he came through here and I understand they milled the lumber on the property and then he took a certain percentage and sold it and you kept what -  
MD: All these buildings were built at cost-free as far as lumber goes. You made a division and he got so much and you got so much. As a matter of fact, I don't know if you realize that almost every grove of redwoods, particularly throughout Nicasio and Mill Valley or anyplace, if you look you will see the one of the middle where they came from. And if you turn your head around you'll see it right here. The big redwood tree you see there - there was another big one there which was taken down, the stump is still there.  
CE: Oh, I see. (End of side 1)  
CE: You were saying something about the powder mill, I never heard that before, Fred do you want to tell us?  
FD: Yes. I understood there was one just below what do you call it - Lagunitas where paper mill - this Little Carson. We called these creeks a little bit differently than they do now.  
CE: Well, tell us what you knew them as.  
FD: Well, we know the one that comes out of what is now Kent Dam was the Big Carson to us,  
CE: The Big Carson.  
FD: And the Little Carson was about a mile and a half up that. That was our main fishing streams in those days. And right below that intersection about a quarter mile, the only thing I saw of it was some pilings set in cement. There were steel pilings that were filled with cement and my dad told us that was a powder mill at one time.  
CE: Well, can you add to that, Mel?  
FD: And I understand that's not because of some - it was to make paper mill.  
MD: No, no that was the powder mill and those old stanchions as you said are still there. The exact location is where that water is bubbling down the creek, used to be a horse trough and the county tore it down because they claimed it was contaminated, you know the big spring.  
CE: Yes.  
MD: If you park there and just walk down into the creek you'll still see it. But when Dad was a kid they had many buildings there and he had a - he didn't like to tell the story too much because he was with Ralph Roy, the neighbor, and they were hunting birds and my dad was apparently an excellent shot with a rifle, with a shot

gun, and Roy was an excellent shot with a rifle and they had competition between the two. But in that particular day, he was down there and the powder mill had been abandoned and he actually scraped up a bunch of black powder off the floor and he had muzzleloader. And even in those days you didn't use muzzleloaders unless you were quite poor for some reason and he charged the thing up and he said it fired but he said there was not much to it, it was pretty well used up.

CE: But you don't know whose enterprise that was?

MD: I don't know and I'm surprised it's not in more history books, I don't even know how they made the powder, what ingredients they used, anything about it, but it was on the railroad, it did burn down.

CE: Your father probably knew Samuel Taylor, or knew who he was - your grandfather, I mean.

MD: He probably did. Even today, a lot of people don't know it, but where the paper mill got the water for the water wheel, the moat or whatever you call it, the ditch is still there. Just about a mile, it's almost a mile long, and if you go down to Taylor Park, you can see it. And there is another side of the story; the buttons are still there.

CE: Really?

MD: Well, they are no good buttons; we went down and picked up about a jar, all little small, fingernail size buttons.

CE: These are the buttons the Chinese tore off the rags and clothes to make the - -

MD: To make paper.

CE: It was good quality paper, it was high rag content - -

MD: The reason there weren't any big buttons is they sold them again so they would be used. They're the little bone buttons, they're still there if you know where to dig for them, which is not legal because you're not supposed to be digging in there. But it was kind of a kick to see it. But if you are ever nosing around down there, the ditch is still there.

CE: Well, the rangers at Samuel Taylor State Park are very interested in the history of this area and they have kept a lot of the old photographs and they're trying to become informed about it.

MD: There was a hotel there.

CE: Oh, yes, and they have very graciously allowed us to copy some of the original photographs of the Hotel Azalea and they're great shots. Have you been down and talked to the rangers?

MD: No, I haven't.

CE: They have a girl ranger down there, named Kismet LaRue.

MD: You mean I should go down and see?

CE: Local girl who happened to get assigned here.

MD: The railroad actually used to run up - what Fred was talking about, that Carson - for lumbering, they put squares in for lumbering. The railroad actually, you know, it did turn into the narrow gauge and went clear to, up the Russian River.

CE: Sure, to Cazadero

MD: Yes, right to Cazadero.

FD: That was narrow gauge here and they turned this into broad gauge between here and Point Reyes.

MD: It never was broad gauge from Point Reyes beyond; it was always narrow gauge.

FD: When we went to school we had to transfer at Manor; we took a steam train from here to Manor and then - that's high school.

CE: Were you boys familiar and had your own horses during your formative years?

MD: Oh, we always had a half a dozen wagon horses around here. Some of the horses were combination; we would use them either way. We could use them to pull sleds around, get the wood down from the hills, various jobs, either way.

FD: I was not much of a cowboy as were the people on the range, the only thing we did, as far as riding was concerned, was mostly for transportation and we got jobs, my older sister and myself had a job once in a while for riding to count the cattle. You see, we ran beef stock as well as dairy stock.

CE: Well, that's what I'm interested in knowing, Fred.

FD: We leased Taylor place from a lady in - she lived in the Palace Hotel in San Francisco and her name was Rogers. And that's all I knew, I never saw the lady or never heard of her, I knew she was Mrs. Rogers and every six months went over to see her and that was what is now the Taylor Park place. That was that ranch.

CE: Is your brand registered in Marin County?

FD: Oh, yes.

MD: The Arrow D.

CE: Do you have a branding iron left?

MD: No, we couldn't find one.

FD: Couldn't find it. All we got from the State was the thing, I keep it registered, I keep it current.

CE: Well, Mrs. Kent and I went up to the Recorder's Office at Civic Center and looked through their book of brands, it's all public record, you know, and it shows everybody by the piece of the leather and the whole bit, all registered there.

FD: The dairy for my Dad - for my grandfather, the dairy and this ranch was his main business. For my dad it wasn't at all, it was just a place to live. He ran this and he ran at one time, I know he was running four of these places. He ran one here, one in San Geronimo, one in the upper part of Marin County, and one over in Nicasio.

CE: What social life did you have out here on the ranch? Or would you go to San Rafael? Or did you have meetings here or get-togethers with your neighbors?

MD: The automobile was in pretty good shape in - transportation wasn't - - it took ten minutes longer to get to San Rafael then than it does now.

CE: Because of White's Hill, you mean?

FD: What do you mean ten minutes longer - ten minutes shorter!

MD: Well, with the construction -

FD: My dad said it took him 12 minutes from middle of town, from San Rafael to here. I don't think he was very truthful - I think maybe he hadn't counted the part from the gate on in because the best we could do was about 14. And we could be at San Rafael High School at the other end of town, easy, in the building. From the time we walked out of our house until we were walking in to San Rafael, into the classroom, was 20 to 22 minutes and I don't think you can do that today.

MD: Another side was like Nicasio. Geographically, you have a railroad and the things that are near the railroad get it easier. And Nicasio was stuck - - and don't

pronounce it the other way that you did. There was never a Spanish Indian. There was never a Nicasio.

CE: How do you pronounce it?

MD: Ni-CASH-o. Ig-NAY-see-o [Ignacio] is correct, that is a Spanish name but not an Indian name. It is Ni-CASH-o.

CE: I see. Thank you.

MD: Okay, remember it. But anyway, the Farley brothers at Nicasio were large beef dealers and once or twice a year, they actually had a roundup. And they would bring in a hundred, two hundred head of cattle right down the highway over to San Geronimo where they had a holding - just like the old movie days. And they'd load them into these cars, the train would - -

CE: Holding pens?

MD: Holding pens and they had to bring certain cars for them at a certain time - it really, the old gay west was there again. All they needed was a bar.

CE: All they needed was a bar.

MD: Yes.

CE: Where was the closest bar?

MD: That's a good question, where?

FD: There wasn't any here when I was little, by the time I was eight, prohibition was here. I don't know if there was any before that time or not, I can't recall any.

MD: I bet you it was the Hotel.

FD: The Lagunitas Lodge, I think maybe had a bar in it. I don't know.

MD: Nicasio probably had a bar in the Hotel.

FD: They probably did.

MD: When I was a kid they had a pool hall and just like the old days.

CE: How did your father meet Grace Dollar.

FD: Probably in the church. They both went to the Presbyterian Church. My grandfather helped start that church and then Captain Robert Dollar took it over and really ran it.

MD: But he was later, he was a newcomer here.

CE: Well, now your grandfather and Robert Dollar were both from Scotland, weren't they?

MD: Yes.

FD: Originally but -

CE: Did they know each other back in Scotland?

FD: No, no my grandfather came from Vermont

CE: Yes but his parents came from - -

FD: His parents came from Scotland. He was a generation ahead of them.

CE: That's true.

MD: I don't think they knew -

CE: Wasn't Grace Dollar the only daughter?

MD: Yes. There were three sons and one daughter and I'm named after one of them, that's where I got that phony name.

CE: Alexander.

MD: Alexander Melville Dollar, then there was John Harold Dollar, Robert Stanley Dollar and most of these generations have gone. Even our first cousins, most of

them have dropped off, in the last year, as a matter of fact. John Harold, or Jack Dollar from Kent Woodlands just died and before him R. Stanley Dollar just died, cancer got him.

FD: Robert Dollar III just died of cancer, too.

MD: And we had a brother Robert who died of a brain hemorrhage, but the - -

CE: Do you have reminiscences of Falkirk, the Dollar home?

MD: I've never been there, after the City of San Rafael took it over.

CE: No, no but prior when it was in the Dollar family?

MD: Oh, I used to live there on weekends because -

FD: Oh, yes we lived there.

CE: Well, tell us about it.

MD: Well, when I was a little kid I was a little guy and they tell me I wasn't too healthy, I don't know.

CE: You?

MD: Yeah. I was skinny. The only daughter of the Dollar family was my mother and Fred's mother and I guess she felt kind of sorry for us so a lot of times we would spend weekends over there, cause we were motherless. And it took Dad three or four years before he solved that problem and got married again. As a matter of fact it was interesting on his marriage day, I don't know if Fred remembers this, he went off on his honeymoon, I was a little guy, I must have been four years old or five--

CE: You mother died when you were very young - -

MD: I didn't even know her.

CE: You didn't know her?

MD: No, Fred did.

CE: Did you Fred?

FD: He was three; I was eleven or twelve.

MD: Well, anyway, during his honeymoon he was up in, I think, Vancouver, my father and his new wife, and the fire of [19]23 came through here and it wiped out Woodacre. I think 36 good homes got wiped out here and that is a lot of homes for 1923. And when it came through it came through so fast this Ed Dickson, who has been mentioned previously, was over San Rafael with the cook buying food for the house. And I can remember him on Fourth Street looking out there and everyone standing on Fourth Street looking, "Pretty big fire, pretty big fire," "Well, I'd better get going," and he came over White's Hill and these redwoods were blazing. And since he had the cook in front, and I'm sitting in the back seat of this old Studebaker, 1921 touring car, and all the guys saying, "You can't go through, you can't go through; the gas tank's going to catch fire," and I'm sitting on it! It's right under me and I'm thinking, "Oh boy, this looks real good." He says, like General Grant or something, "We've got to go through," and we came through it. And it was late in the year and the grass had all been eaten off by the animals and it saved it because it saved our big house because there was very little wind at this time I remember and the fire was only a few inches high.

FD: We put it out.

MD: The kids were out there sacking it out.

CE: How did you put it out?  
FD: We took a bucket and a sack and went up the hill out here and beat on it.  
MD: Yes, it wasn't moving very fast. It did come right across Woodacre and it came right over the back hills. That was in '23; then the next big one, of course, was '45.  
CE: Do you have any remembrances of Christmas at the Dollar home? Did you ever go there?  
MD: Oh, sure.  
CE: What were they like?  
MD: Oh, every Christmas we'd have two of them. We'd go here and then we'd go over there.  
CE: Oh, you'd have one here, like Christmas Eve or something then you'd go - -  
MD: No. Christmas Eve, that was a tradition we didn't do. I don't know why. We had the opening of the goodies Christmas morning here, and then we'd all bundle up - the Dollar family would all come together, all our first cousins would be there and so then they had a big one there, at the Dollar home there. That was all I could say about that. The Dollar home wasn't much bigger than our home but they had more servants and everything and they put on a big - they could feed a hundred people, I guess - couldn't they, if they wanted?  
FD: Oh, no not that many.  
MD: Then we'd have to go out in the side room, the little guys.  
AK: Why don't you say something about Grandma Dollar?  
MD: Oh Grandma Dollar was just, as far as I'm concerned, was just a nice little old lady. She used to drive her electric out here once in a while to see us.  
CE: Would she really?  
MD: Oh, her electric could get out over the old White's Hill to here and sometimes she couldn't quite make it up her own driveway. She'd get up there to Fifth Street and have to walk up. The chauffeur would come down about an hour later and the batteries would rejuvenate themselves and up the hill they'd go, back to the battery charger. But it was so strange to think that that old electric would make it. It had the tiller arm.  
AK: [inaudible]  
FD: Grandfather Dollar and ourselves would walk up White's Hill to save juice.  
MD: I don't think he ever drove, did he?  
FD: No, I don't believe so.  
MD: My grandfather I don't think drove.  
CE: I remember only one electric in my life and it was sort of like a glass cage with a tiller, is that similar?  
MD: Oh yes, this had a tiller, and - -  
FD: It was the only car made where you drive it from the rear seat.  
CE: The rear seat!  
FD: Yes, you drive them from the rear seat. Oh, I remember them well.  
CE: Mrs. Kent, did you know Mrs. Dollar?  
AK: Yes, I knew her, too. I remember best the golden wedding. I remember that was a wonderful party.  
FD: Well, he was pretty domineering, when I was a little boy - -

AK: Cranky old guy.  
FD: When he said, "Jump!" everyone jumped.  
AK: But the grandma wasn't like that.  
MD: No. He would read his Bible every day.  
CE: Oh, he would?  
MD: Oh, yes.  
FD: He loved that Bible.  
MD: He even passed out these New Testaments that he had. He had his own brand made up, I think. But he could be a grouchy guy. He could turn a wrath - -  
CE: You behaved around him.  
MD: He used a funny word, he said, he always used to say a funny word when things were going wrong, "I'll have to put it right." A little Scotch to it.  
CE: "I'll have to put it right," yes.  
MD: He had a Scottish accent.  
CE: He did.  
MD: Oh, very definitely, and he liked that because that was one of his trademarks. He had a big white beard and he enjoyed his accent, I believe. Apparently he was quite a speaker; he spoke all over the world. Because one day my dad was talking to him and he was going to Stockton to make a speech and my dad said, "What are you going to talk about in Stockton?" He said very simply, "I'm going before the Chamber of Commerce and I'm going to tell them something about Stockton that they don't even know."  
CE: Was he interested in history?  
MD: He was, yes, but then he got he got the Stockton books opened and he could tell them how many tons had been shipped there, how deep the water was, how the levees were made, everything about Stockton. More than the natives knew. And he said everyone likes to hear about themselves.  
CE: He was a smart man.  
MD: Yeah, he knew how to do it.  
AK: Did he think Stockton would be a deep port as it is today?  
MD: I think it was fairly deep in those days, wasn't it?  
AK: I don't know.  
FD: I don't remember when they dredged out to thirty-something feet about that time but I don't think he had any intention of using it as a port.  
MD: No, he didn't intend to use it.  
CE: He didn't have any river steamers, or did he?  
MD: No, not here. In China, he did.  
CE: In China?  
MD: Oh, yes. He had a twice-weekly run up the Yangtze, way up the Yangtze, through the rapids. And he also had a steamship line that operated in the Philippines an inter-island steamship company. They went down to Mindanao and down south from Manila. And I think there were three or four ships there. Some day, if you ever want it, we have the history of that - three or four volumes of books. And one is quite fascinating, it's *A Hundred years of Steam Navigation*, which I think was very well written.  
CE: Was shipping always his interest from a boy?

MD: No, he was never a shipping man; he was a lumber man -

CE: A lumber man?

MD: Oh, yes, from the Great Lakes area. His health he claimed - he claimed it was too cold for him and so naturally he moved over here to the west coast and finally headquartered in San Francisco, but he had big mills up and own the coast, I don't know how many of them. One in Roseville, Oregon is still there and there are some up as far as Canada, weren't there, Fred? Where was Dollar Town?

FD: Dollar Town was in Canada.

MD: Yeah, there was a whole city; it was big. It burned down. But then he figured the guys with the boats were making more money than he was or taking more than their share, so then he bought a boat and he found out that he was right. They were getting more than their share but he did maintain the lumber business, but he went into the shipping business primarily for himself and he found it so lucrative, then he moved out into other areas. And he found the area of China to be fascinating and so that's why he went to China. Then he decided to go the whole hog and he had a round-the-world-steamship line on which both Fred and I worked on.

CE: You did?

MD: Yes. Fred took a trip around the world as a cadet and so did I eight years later. We made a dollar a day, I'll have you know. How much did you get, Fred?

CE: How did you learn that trade, just by - -

FD: You didn't learn a trade you were just what they call a cadet-

MD: A cadet. A cadet is a flunky-

FD: Lowest man on the totem pole.

CE: Well, a cadet has a different connotation today.

FD: The stewards were all Chinese.

MD: We looked like an officer, an officer without a rank.

FD: You were an officer when you came in and out of port, the rest of the time you put on your jeans and your shirt.

CE: How old were you?

MD: You had to be eighteen.

CE: Okay, you were about eighteen when you entered this enterprise.

MD: Yes.

FD: I had my 18th birthday in Manila.

MD: Well, you cheated because when I went I had to wait a couple of weeks until my 18th birthday.

FD: Not besides this but who cheated - the guy I was with, my pal I was with was 16 when he started.

AK: But you know, it was a wonderful thing, I knew people who used to go on the Dollar Line anywhere. They'd go on the Dollar Line and get off in any country and they just felt at home all the time because they knew two weeks later Dollar Line would come.

MD: That's right. It was the only west-bound steamship line in the world regularly scheduled and as she said, every two weeks you could stop in Shanghai and two weeks later pick up the next one.

FD: When you bought a ticket it was like the trains nowadays, you bought a ticket around the world and you just got off where you pleased.

MD: You could live and travel for \$10.00 a day perpetually in those days.

FD: And there were quite a few people doing it, retired people.

AK: I always thought of it as - when I used to be winding my wool, I used to think, that's just like the Dollar Line here it goes around the world, around the world and you're never away from home, you always know that you'll be safe and you could go home..

CE: But neither of you two brothers decided you wanted to follow the sea or follow the shipping business, I gather?

MD: Never thought of it.

CE: Never thought of it?

MD: I never gave it any thought.

FD: No, I was not too fascinated with it, I had so many interests at home and I came back and started just to work at odd jobs, I didn't have anything else to do. I thought of going to sea again, but my stepmother put the - I was very great pals with the quartermaster who was quite a bit older than I was and he decided to go around the world and it was going to be winter, it was going to be cold. Jobs were pretty easy to get if you had some experience, even four months' experience - gave us kind of an aid -

CE: Seniority.

FD: And right at that time it was 1928 and jobs were fairly easy to get and he was going to get out of the ship and he said, it's going to be warmer, the thing to do now is get a job in one of the fruit lines and run down to South America and back. I got off the ship and I said I would stay for a while ashore and see and he said, "Well, take 30 days off on shore, and I'll take, and I'll take 30 days, and I'll see if - I can get you a job." He had lots of experience in things and he said, "I'll get you a job anytime you want."

MD: It was pretty rough bunch of boys then, pretty rough bunch on those ships. And some of those foreign ports - -

FD: I think maybe my stepmother put her foot down and said, "Why don't you try college for a while?"

CE: Did you try it, Fred?

FD: Yeah.

CE: Didn't care for it too much?

FD: Well, no - yeah, kept on going.

CE: Well, good for you.

MD: He became a graduate engineer.

CE: Where did you go, the University of California?

FD: Yes. I went to Junior College for a while. My father gave me my diploma.

MD: He cheated. He didn't really go to college at all, the old man just handed him his diploma.

FD: Then I went over to Cal for three years, went down here for two years and then to Cal for three years.

CE: All right, now we're getting close to the depression years. How did that period affect the ranch?

FD: Actually, we had more of a depression - of course we never knew too much about the financing of the thing because we were partially Dollar-related and partially not. Theoretically we had a hard time - a little bit hard time around here but we were supposed to be very wealthy and we were very wealthy in name only.

AK: Everyone who owed money thought you didn't need it they should let you go and pay somebody else in the depression days.

CE: Oh, in other words they were low in priority for getting payments.

AK: They thought you wouldn't need it but somebody else would need it and so that's -

-

CE: Well, you had the regular families here helping you - you provided them a home, so they stayed didn't they, nobody deserted you, did they, in the ranch?

FD: No.

MD: No. But don't forget we didn't run the ranch. We had really nothing to do with it.

FD: I didn't like dairy cows at all.

CE: Didn't like dairy cows!

MD: None of us could milk a cow. In those days they milked by hand and none of us -

-

FD: Not the kind that grew up with the dairy and loved it and all. The money in it during the depression, too, was just starvation around there and it was not only the depression. They had a depression right after World War I, which hurt my father's thing and all that and he folded up a lot of his stuff except for this string of dairies. Most all of his beef business, he was running beef, he had a big range up in Chico and one in Los Banos and I think they're a spin-offs from his Nevada operation and the price of beef dropped exactly in half and the banks were unhappy with him and everyone was unhappy. A lot of those beef guys never did recover. That was 1921 or 2, no one knew about those depressions, but the farming often has a depression way ahead of the general population.

CE: Well, for example, the water shortage that has occurred in Marin County over the last two seasons has been a terrific hardship on some dairy farmers.

FD: Yes, it must cost them a fortune.

MD: How about you?

CE: Aren't you having water carried in or trucked in?

FD: No, we're dry land farmers.

CE: Dry land farmers, ok.

MD: Yeah, when it was so dry they didn't do any farming. They farmed but the grass forgot to grow.

FD: Well, everyone says, "You're making a fortune." We always tell them we - because they don't believe you are hurting. But when your crop drops off to less than twenty-five percent of your gross and unless you've got hundred thousand in your jeans you're out of business. Maybe a hundred or hundred and fifteen, 'cause if you tell other people that, they just laugh and tell you -

CE: Do you, Fred, have a personal opinion about how the water situation can be corrected in Marin?

FD: Personally, I was very much for that water deal where they got it out of the Russian River because I have lived on a farm in Sonoma County, so I'm torn

between the two. And I think stealing the water out of Sonoma County on a long contract was like a gift, which I don't think you're ever, ever going to get again. I know goddamn well you won't. And how they got the deal through in the first place - and then when the population turned it down, and I think it's probably settled now, they're going to build a dam instead, which is going to cost considerably more.

CE: I know this bond issue did pass. What's your impression of that, Mel?

MD: Oh, I think about the same. I think they should have had - I'm going back to 1908 - I think they should have the Reber Plan.

CE: The Reber Plan?

MD: Yes. Had a dam across the bay instead of the - -

CE: Would you explain to those who don't know what the Reber Plan is?

FD: Well, the Reber plan was originally - it was an old, old, old plan is to run before the bridges, that the other bridge was built here - -

MD: Richmond Bridge.

FD: Is to put a dam up across the top part of the bay between about where McNear's Point is right across there and then use flood gates that move back and forth and make the whole bay- keep it at the level of fresh water. They're still kicking it around in Sacramento. Someone in Sacramento said the other day, "I wish we'd done it because there is so much trouble with everything going on." Every time they try to move, they're in trouble. And it would make a fresh water lake out of the whole upper part of the bay and then you could feed Los Angeles. We got more and more trouble feeding them water and backing our own salt water up into those Delta regions. I don't know all about it, but that was the Reber Plan. And they wanted it built before the bridge went through, the Richmond Bridge, and once the bridge was already decided to be put though - they decided to put that through, anyway, then the Reber plan had no more use. In other words, it had a double use of being transportation and fresh water - I don't know whether the plan would have been good or not.

CE: You've seen any changes, both of you gentlemen, over the years -

FD: The only thing about the water proposition - I shouldn't say with that tape thing still running on there - I'm glad to see the water companies slowly getting out of politics and back in producing water.

CE: Thank you, I'm sure Mrs. Kent would agree with that.

MD: Going back to the original part of this valley, years ago when they had the paper mill, Dad was saying that they didn't truck the stuff through this San Geronimo Valley. It was on the Bolinas Ridge and there are signs of the old road up there still, and it went somewhere over towards the Meadow Club and then wandered around finally down to Sausalito. But it was back there and then I think they got involved in shipping and the paper went to Point Reyes to be loaded aboard the schooners. Because the whole coast had many hundreds of schooners.

CE: They were owned by the ranchers weren't they? Some of these schooners?

MD: Well, like the *Owl* that went to Bolinas - -

CE: Did you ever ride the *Owl*?

MD: No, I used to play aboard it.

CE: Did you Fred?

FD: Oh, yes.

MD: I used to run aboard it, I don't think I ever went to San Francisco on it. But there was one before the *Owl*, which I don't remember, it was before our time.

CE: The *Jenny Griffin*?

MD: That's it, right. And the fellow Smith that you were telling me about, you know who I'm talking about?

CE: Yes.

MD: He was part of the Bolinas group. But anyway when we were kids the *Owl* used to come in and unload the provisions for the farmers or for the town there, little town there.

CE: Sure.

FD: My education in farming was strictly not the way you dream your farms going. I got out of school and got thin shoes tramping the streets of San Francisco during the depression days and I registered every place, and being an engineer, of course, no one really wanted - all they wanted was a salesman, to sell some stuff or sales engineers, a few people got jobs at that. And I was partially blind and I wasn't a very good-looking salesman, or very good at that kind of work, and so I had nothing to do and so a friend of mine that my father knew of from Knight's Landing and I bought a tractor together. He was an operator up there and I started just going around the ranches with tractors.

CE: Well, there seems to have been a resourcefulness in - I guess I can say in "our" generation, I'm a contemporary of yours.

MD: Aw, you're much older!

CE: Those of us, I think, who went through the depression were scarred but not necessarily cruelly. I think it brought out a certain flexibility in what you would do, and could do, and did do.

MD: Well, we resented the people from the Oakies moving in, but after all they were good stock people, they were. (End of tape 1) (Tape 2)

AK: I wondered how old Grace was when I first saw her in what I now know as the new house. You say it was built in 1918 and so it must have been 1920, very early 1920, when I visited there. Was she about six years old? Well, what year did one of you get caught in the lawn mower?

FD: Oh, that was my brother, Bob, and that was - -

AK: Something in the '20's.

FD: Early twenties. See, my mother died in 1921, early 1921, so it must have been a year or so before that at best. He was born in 1916; he must have been about four or five.

AK: Because I was very new, you see. Tom and I were married in 1918, and so I was pretty new here in Marin. Elizabeth Arnold came out to your house. She brought me along and that's when I saw little boys that were on the floor playing around and Grace was there, a little girl.

FD: Grace would be about five then.

AK: Now I was wondering about - has she got some property out there around Marshall now?

FD: Yes.

AK: And she's doing some ranching too?

FD: Yes, they have a sheep ranch, she and her husband. Her husband's family had a ranch. They're very old; they're from Sonoma County. Grace's husband's mother's name is Marshall.

CE: Marshall?

FD: Yes.

AK: From the same Marshall family that ?

FD: The Marshall family that named the town.

CE: Well, we did interview Jim Marshall. Do you know Jim, James Marshall? He'd be a contemporary of yours.

FD: ?? I don't even know him, but I should. He must be a relative of Jim Kleiser's. He's definitely a relative of some kind.

MD: Oh, he'd have to be. But the old Kleiser's from Marshall or from Cloverdale, actually, but they seem to have this ranch in - and I think it will be partly under water from that new dam they're building. 'Cause they call it Salmon Creek but they also call it Walker Creek and the lower end of it seems to be called Walker Creek; the highway has a sign that calls it Walker Creek, and the other's called Salmon Creek and its Chileno Valley. My sister and Jim Kleiser bought this ranch adjoining it, another 1200 acres, so they have the old ranch and the new ranch and they have about 5,000 or 4,000 - 5,000 in there and they're probably the largest sheep ranchers in Sonoma county. Although they're both doctors, but they probably are.

CE: Do you know why they call it Chileno Valley?

MD: No. Mr. Chileno must have been there. Come on, tell us.

CE: Well, there were Chileans who lived there but I don't know any more than that.

MD: Oh, is that it?

FD: They were what?

CE: Chileans, natives of Chile that must have -

AK: You know, even Don Timoteo Murphy came from Chile.

CE: Well, indirectly, he came from Ireland but - they would all stop at Valparaiso and then wait for vessels and work -

MD: You know another odd thing about my father is that if you were walking down the highway here and saw two Indians coming the other way you got off the highway because Custer's last stand had just taken place in those days and there was a lot of hard feeling between the Indian and the white man right here in this country.

CE: In this county?

MD: In this county. He said if he'd seen them coming they get out, they'd disappear -

CE: Do you recall where any of the Indian lived?

MD: Where they lived? He said they lived at Nicasio. And he also told a story that the way they cured some of their diseases, which was kind of interesting, like chicken pox. They would get a bunch of hot rocks and get themselves as hot as they could and then jump in the cold water and that really fixed them up pretty good.

AK: I wouldn't be surprised.

\_\_\_: Did you say your grandmother - what was it she heard when she was right here in the house?

MD: I take that back. I made a mistake. My grandmother told me when she was on the porch and felt very sad when she heard of Lincoln's death, but she was in Vermont.

CE: I see.

AK: You know those Roy's must have come from Vermont, too.

MD: That's right and as I said, it was fifty years after they lived as neighbors they didn't know it. Dad didn't know that old Roy and he were neighbors back in Vermont, so close.

CE: He wasn't a very friendly guy anyway, was he?

MD: Oh, Roy he was a mean guy. He'd delight in giving little kids hell. The railroad went through his property and if we were walking up and down, we seemed to do a lot of walking in those days, and jump over the fence to get an apple, and if he could catch you with one apple, that made his day. Oh, he'd be the happiest guy in the world.

CE: Talking about these creeks that you named, the Big Carson and the Little Carson, fish, what fish would you get in there?

FD: Trout fishing, it was excellent trout fishing in those days. My dad would go there and catch fish. My dad did quite a bit of hunting around here, and I don't know whether he hunted quail for the market. I understand he hunted for the market, they go so much apiece for them and they shipped them to San Francisco in the early days. He tells about - Everyone visualized him sitting down - I don't know if he really milked a cow in his life, I don't think he ever did, maybe he could. But as far as running the dairy, they had them run - they were too busy to sit down and do that. They did a lot of hunting around the country, did a lot of quail hunting. He told me he wore out one shotgun completely. Then he hunted with the Kent's a lot. They had a place in - some kind of a hunting cabin or place in -

CE: Steep Ravine?

AK: Liberty's?

FD: Somewhere in the Point Reyes area.

AK: Oh, the one called Liberty's must be under the Alpine Dam now and we saw it - was very close to where the Alpine Dam is.

FD: That was when the game laws came in and you had to get legal on the thing. At first it was free -

MD: It's surprising that the deer population was much lower in those days than it is now -

FD: He did not like deer hunting.

MD: They killed does and everything in those days and they almost exterminated them and he was kind of happy in his later life to find out that the population was coming back. He had a different life than most farmers in that when he went to high school in Oakland, I don't know if there was a high school here, if there was one - anyway, so he went to Oakland High and had to board over there. And he befriended some people of wealth, because he was just a poor farm boy, and he became a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde in some ways. Why would any little farmer here have tuxedos in his closet? And he would come out with the darndest thing, he would say, "Well, in 1898..." and he told me all about the Fair in Chicago in 1898.

CE: What was he doing in Chicago?  
MD: Well, he had taken a train from here to Chicago to see the fair. He would travel.  
\_: Where was he during the earthquake?  
MD: During the earthquake in San Francisco he was in the same hotel with Caruso.  
CE: I think Mrs. Kent has a point; he probably visited the Kent's, who came from Chicago. They were pals here.  
AK: Yes, It's possible.  
FD: He might have. He worked for the Kent's, you see  
MD: As a matter of fact he saw Annie Oakley.  
FD: The Kent's, at that time, had a string of ranches around here, didn't they?  
AK: Oh, yes and in - -  
FD: In fact one in Louisiana I understand.  
AK: One in Nevada, Colorado too, Nebraska; of course still have some in Nebraska, at least the cousins do..  
FD: Did you own that one he was run - didn't you people own that one he was running over in Nevada?  
AK: That was Albert's ranch, yes.  
FD: Yes, you see my dad was running his ranch over there, helping him.  
AK: Yes it was Albert's, then it was Tom's. That was sheep, mostly sheep.  
FD: They always called them cattle ranches back there. I know a ranch back there they run 10,000 sheep and a 100 head of cows and, of course, you're a cattle ranch.  
CE: I've just been to Minden and the Danberg's have had thousands of acres there for years and the old grandpa came from Minden, Germany, (he named the town) but he had sheep and they called it a cattle ranch.  
FD: Oh, sure. The sheep made the money and the cattle bought them a Stetson hat. My dad used to laugh about that because they were all great cattlemen and when you saw the money come through like we was running that ranch over in Nevada - when the money came through it all came from the sheep anyway.  
CE: Did he do much entertaining here on the ranch?  
FD: I don't remember, very little in this house. When he had the new house I can remember quite a few parties. But, see we only lived there - my mother only lived there for three years, about three years.  
CE: When your father remarried they lived - -  
FD: No, he didn't do any entertaining at all, hardly.  
CE: Did they continue living here?  
FD: Yes, in this house.  
CE: That house over there.  
FD: Yes, they lived there until he died. Almost no entertaining from the outside, some people used to come by on Sunday afternoon or something like that..  
CE: What would you boys do for recreation if you ever went to town?  
FD: Well, what age would you say?  
CE: When you were young, say 16, 18.  
FD: Oh 15, 16, yes. I went to San Rafael High School and I went to their - usually went to almost all their dances or plays or things like that.  
CE: Eleanor Gilogly ring a name -

FD: I lived quite a bit of my time - after my mother died, I lived quite a bit of time in San Rafael.

CE: At your grandmother's home?

FD: No, I didn't really live there; I stayed there overnight if I was going out that evening. My sister and I would go out to high school parties and we'd always stay there.

\_\_\_: Eleanor Murray?

CE: Yes. Did you ever have Eleanor Gilogly Murray as a teacher?

\_\_\_: Yes, I saw her recently. She was at a class reunion of Bill's

AK: She's a wonderful person, just marvelous.

MD: She's sharp as a tack.

CE: She certainly is.

MD: This is Mrs. Murray, now. This is not the banking Murray.

CE: No, this is another Murray.

AK: My, she is very - how old -

CE: Well, she's about 89, I think now. In fact, she taught everybody. When we interviewed Judge Jordan Martinelli, she had taught him. And when we had interviewed 50 people Mrs. Kent thought it would be nice to have a reception. We had a party at Mrs. Kent's house and Eleanor Gilogly Murray came. She looked like eight million dollars and there was a woman - what was her name Mrs. Kent? Mary Armsby?

AK: Mary Armsby, yes.

CE: Mary Armsby Palmer - she looked up and she said, "Eleanor Gilogly, I haven't seen you in 40 years." It was an interesting party because people came from all - -

AK: She was a teacher. She was an English and Latin teacher at San Rafael High.

TD: And then the Dean of Girls.

FD: Edwina Cordoni

TD: Dean of Girls when I went there.

CE: Edwina Cordoni, did you say?

FD: Yes, she went to school with us, I think.

CE: She's a Director on the Historical Society of Marin County.

FD: I think I just saw her name in the paper that's why I just was wondering. I should have looked at my high school albums.

CE: Did you ever go to the Municipal Baths?

FD: All our entertainment was in San Rafael - Yes, I learned to swim there

CE: At the Municipal Baths, how about you?

TD: So did I, yes.

CE: Did you, Thelma?

TD: Yes.

MD: No, I learned in that picture that we just looked at ??

FD: I didn't actually learned to swim there; we learned to swim in these creeks. We swam all over these creeks in those days. You see, we were more transportation minded or less than that. By the time I was 12 or something like that, I was riding about in these homemade - not homemade but half-baked motorcycles. I had a motorwheel.

CE: A motorwheel?

FD: I wasn't so interested in farming, I was interested in – well, you sat here all by yourself and I had a neighbor, lived up the hill here, and a couple of girls lived up Lagunitas, that's all there were my age. The closest one of my friends lived up in Forest Knolls, so to be mobile we rode bikes around at that time, but then they weren't quite modern enough so when I was about 12 or 13 then I finally got myself a motorwheel. It's a wheel that goes on your bicycle. I think they have one up at Harrah's Club right now, I saw one.

CE: You mean it's powered?

FD: Yeah, oh, yeah. It had a 2 1/2 horsepower engine on it and you could ride around on that and two of my friends in San Rafael had them. We did most of our – any entertainment - we went to San Rafael at least on weekends, almost every weekend. My mother had a great friend and after she died they had a son my age by the name of Newhall and I practically lived at that house half the time.

CE: Alma Newhall?

FD: Yes. She would know of them. And I lived with them an awful lot of the time. He was my age and he had an awful lot of mastoid operations and he was confined to his home most of the time. And they wanted people to more or less entertain him at home, that was one of the reasons. He was interested in mechanical things and they gave him a lot of mechanical type toys and so I did that.

AK: Then he had a house in Bolinas; did you ever go out there?

FD: Yes. That was when we took the *Owl*. We used to go over to Bolinas; the only reason we went over there was so we could ride the *Owl* home. Then we'd go to Bolinas and stay overnight, then go down the next morning and catch the *Owl* back to San Francisco and then take the ferry back from San Francisco to San Rafael.

CE: That was a good ride.

FD: Then if I had to come home to go to school the next morning we took a chauffeur and drove me out here. It was kind of embarrassing - there wasn't many people out here but they wanted me to come there for almost every weekend at that time, when I was in seventh or eighth grade, and they sent their chauffeur out to that one-room school with their Cadillac and it arrived there and wait to pick you up. I finally told him I'd meet him down at Lagunitas ?

CE: Sounds like you had fun as young fellows.

AK: Then you know after Alma was married that's where the Marin Music Chest started - not the Music Chest but Thursday Musical. The Thursday Musical started in their home.

CE: Where was the home?

AK: Mountain View, I guess it was.

MD: No, just next door. It was next road over.

AK: Next road over, what was that called - in that neighborhood.

FD: The main gates are on Grand Avenue.

AK: The house in Bolinas was a great big house and filled with people all the time.

FD: They tried to keep the guests down somewhat around there but I looked around the table and it was 32.

AK: Yes, I don't know how that happened, but it was always so.

CE: Were there ever any Chinese on this ranch?  
FD: No.  
CE: No, no Chinese. I imagine they would be, though, at your grandmother's home at Falkirk for staff.  
FD: Oh, they had nothing but Chinese.  
MD: Yeah, the Dollar's only had Chinese servants or Filipino.  
FD: Not in the gardener part of the - -  
MD: In the house.  
CE: Well, this is the 19th century Ross Valley and San Rafael the prominent families had help was normally Chinese, at least in the kitchen and laundry and I don't know about the upstairs downstairs maid. The Kittles had Chinese, I know, and perhaps a Negro coachman.  
AK: Well, what became of the Fu dogs from the entrance of the Dollar place? You know, just lately and before it became Falkirk, somebody took them off. They were great big fellows and there were four of them, two at each gateway. Whoever did it did it very badly and they never fixed the gate posts up. It looks as if they were stolen almost. Do any of you know anything about that?  
MD: No. I didn't even know they were missing.  
TD: Well, do you remember them?  
MD: Oh, sure.  
CE: They're gone.  
AK: When all that talk began about what they were going to do with it, or maybe they might sell, all of a sudden one day they were gone. I often wondered who did it.  
CE: Well, how do you feel about Falkirk in its present status, doesn't it please you, in some way, that it has been saved and it's used for cultural activities?  
FD: No, I don't - I'm glad to see someone keep it - -  
CE: Keep it up.  
FD: Yes.  
MD: Well, you see the Dollar's didn't build that.  
CE: No, I understand that.  
MD: You should have seen their wells, their water supply.  
CE: Behind the house?  
MD: Yeah, they had horizontal wells.  
CE: What do you mean?  
MD: They went in a hole this way. They went straight in rather than going straight down so the water came in and out.  
AK: Well, why isn't it still there?  
FD: It is, I think.  
CE: Well, look at their lawns; they must have well water to water them with.  
MD: They dig sideways in the hill, slightly uphill  
TD: How deep were they?  
MD: No depth at all, they went up the hill  
\_\_\_: But how deep - -  
MD: Oh, I don't know, we were always afraid to climb in them too far. It was awfully dark, and it wasn't very big they were about two feet high. They never knew we were playing around up there. Because the top of the building had a water tank in

the attic. And the water used to flow to the attic and then gravity down to the house.

AK: Well, Louise Boyd had her own water system -

MD: They all did. There was no city water supply in those days. As a matter of fact the first supply - I believe it's in Jack Mason's book was wrong. I believe he's all wrong on that issue. The first water supply for San Rafael came from up Lagunitas Road in Ross and the pipeline went down to the Y in San Anselmo and from there into San Rafael to the reservoir in Culloden Park area - isn't it -

AK: The first one would have been Sequoia, up above Sequoia Park, I think.

MD: Up Sequoia Park?

AK: I would think there is a big one up there now.

MD: And from there it went into San Rafael.

AK: On the way to San Rafael, up above the United Market, up in there, there was a great big one.

MD: I think that was later because I think that's of a higher altitude than the one ?

CE: You mentioned the Foster place up in Fairhills area or what?

MD: Yes, in the Fairhills area. But I could be wrong, this friend of mine who I'm quoting on this just recently retired from the water company, George Wehrheim, and he was the bacteriologist for the water company for twenty or thirty years and he saw the mistaken article here. This article says that Lagunitas was dammed up.

CE: Well, you should tell Jack Mason about it -

MD: I don't know Jack Mason, but I would -

CE: You don't know him?

MD: No.

CE: Well, he's a very nice guy, he lives in Inverness in the oldest house there called the Gables and he would love to have any of these discrepancies cleared up.

A: Yes, he would.

CE: Tell me, are there any papers in your family, either journals about when your father started the place, any receipts or anything?

FD: No I've never seen anything.

CE: Nothing left of - -

MD: No, we're not much of a family for gathering or keeping things like that.

\_\_\_: In years to come, now she's got diaries since she was in elementary school.

FD: Grandpa on the Dickson side didn't keep anything that I ever saw. The only thing I remember about this house over here and they painted it out it was - one of the things is because they measured our height every three or four months and put it on the wall, that was the only record.

CE: Well see, that's one reason we're doing Oral History is that nobody keeps a journal anymore, nobody writes letters and how are you going to retrieve this data unless you all share it?

AK: Fred, he says one more thing -

FD: The only thing I can remember about it we used the top room in the front there as a kindergarten and I had the measles so I was confined to bed up there so they put up some very fancy children's wallpaper up there and I remember years later I spent all time and all my days taking it out with my fingernails.

MD: You were vitamin deficient and didn't know it.

FD: But we were interested in other things than farming. The farm didn't interest us too much.

CE: Well, I'm not trying to make you parochial, I'm just -

FD: You see, at the age of eight or nine I started to build radios, see. But I couldn't get much reception out in the valley here.

CE: What did you build, a crystal set first?

FD: Yes, and I couldn't make that work very well. We put a 200-foot antenna out over there on that great big pole. I was interested in that more than in the farm

AK: Are you a ham operator, by any chance?

FD: No, I never got into it. I never could learn the code very well. But the Newhall's lived in San Rafael and they could get much better reception than I could over there so I spent my weekends building radio sets.

CE: Well, we've all heard this story about the Maillard's and their visit by, when Alexander Graham Bell came to visit their ranch and ran the wire out to Castle Rock and you mentioned earlier - wasn't it you, Mel, Captain Dollar knew him also?

MD: No, I said it was - something that Mrs. Kent said.

AK: I think that they must have known each other because they were, I think - if they only kept some record, it probably would have - -

MD: The only thing, Fred, is they were both from Scotland and Graham Bell's father was Alexander Melville Bell.

AK: You don't think that's why they named you?

MD: And so they both moved to Canada the same, roughly the same time, same place. It could be that Dollar liked one of the Bell's. Alexander Melville.

FD: Oh, I see.

MD: Where the name came from - where else?

AK: Could be, you know.

FD: 'Cause our uncle was named the same.

MD: Yes.

CE: In Captain Dollar's memoirs - you say as written four volumes?

MD: Yes.

CE: Is there any mention of Alexander Graham Bell in there that you know of?

MD: No, I don't think so.

CE: I've never read them all.

AK: He was just experimenting, people didn't believe in him when he was doing all this wonderful stuff. It's a marvelous thing. I like to think it was one of the very first messages that ever went over the wire.

MD: But you know, Alexander Bell was quite interested in aviation.

AK: Oh, I didn't know.

MD: Oh yes, very much so, before the Wright Brothers.

AK: Just think of that. He was quite a guy.

MD: He was quite a guy. His four volumes are written nicely in as much as it's not all family, very little family. It's more - -

CE: It's more about his activities in the shipping.

MD: A lot of it is boring. Like in Australia, he goes down to Australia and he can tell you how many feet long the building was he was in and how deep the water was,

how the stevedores were and his conclusion was, "Don't go to Australia." Because the docks were owned by the government and to get a ship loaded or unloaded was going to take four or five days longer than any other port, so he never went to Australia.

CE: I know, but that's wonderful what he did, just think to annotate his observations is one of the greatest things, for a historian, that anyone could ever do.

MD: He could tell you how many miles it was from the port to the railroad track, but that's the way he was, everything was a measurement to him.

AK: That's fine for research, though, now, isn't it?

MD: Oh, yes.

AK: If they're interested in one particular thing, they can find out and find the detail of it. I suppose it's the Scotch of it, being so meticulous about every little detail.

MD: Oh, they hated him. When he went aboard one of those ships, it's a wonder he didn't get thrown overboard. Oh, they used to hate him. He'd run down the engine room - he'd give them a cup full of oil per engine per hour and that's all you're gonna get - you get that one cup full. Sometimes I don't think it helped the engine very much when it needed two cupfuls. He had everything measured out to the - one drum of oil's gonna - he didn't want those guys throwing any oil away. And he'd walk down the engine room with a white glove; he wanted things clean.

CE: Sounds like almost a sea captain inspection - white gloves.

MD: Yeah, he was never a sea captain.

CE: No, but they called him Captain Dollar.

MD: Well, he owned the captains

CE: Well, he rated it, I presume.

MD: He wrote the checks.

CE: Getting back to this San Geronimo Valley, do you ever feel kind of excited about its history, though - that the previous owners there were here beginning with Rafael Cacho and the Joseph Warren Revere and then the Maillard's and - does that kind of excite you, some of that history?

MD: Oh, the history does, that's why I have this book in my hand here.

FD: I didn't know anything about the Maillard's. I think I remember going to school with one of them for a very short time.

AK: It must have been Ernest.

FD: And then there was the one that lived here - I thought I went to school with a guy by the name of Jack Maillard at one time, but I found out - I'm not so sure he was the same age as I am and I talked to him one time about it and he can't remember going to school out here at all. I thought he was in the first grade or something, the first, second grade, but his uncle lived here and we used to go up and see him. He loved to talk to kids or something, we used to go up and see him once in a while.

MD: Which Maillard was the one that was the bird man?

AK: That was Joe.

MD: Joe.

CE: Joseph.

AK: I never knew him, you know, but Aunt Elizabeth ? Mary Elizabeth Parsons who wrote the wildflower book of California was a great friend of theirs, you

know, and she was always sighting that Joe said it was such-and-such a bird and they were both interested in the Academy over at Golden Gate Park. He was quite an authority.

MD: Well, he wrote a book, *Birds of the Golden Gate Park*, wasn't it?

AK: That's right and he also named a couple of them that had never been known before here.

CE: Do you remember weekend train excursions coming through here, Fred?

FD: Oh, yes.

CE: With Sunday folk aboard from San Francisco?

FD: Yes, lots and lots of people. Of course they'd all walk back at night and all singing.

CE: Walk back at night?

FD: Well, the trains would bring them out, but the trains usually didn't go home at the right time for them. The electrics only came as far - the steam train didn't go here very often.. And often come out here at night and walk home - Manor on out - and they stay overnight and walk on the way - the next night they'd be walking back again. All I can remember them singing as they come through. Take the last train from San Francisco or ? one of the last trains and get out at Manor and walk out here.

MD: Walk through the hills.

\_\_\_: They walk through the tunnel?

MD: Yes.

CE: Is the tunnel blocked off, to you knowledge, Fred?

FD: Yes.

MD: It's all closed down.

FD: The tunnel we explored was the original one that's under the White's Hill now. They blocked off the end of it but there was a hole down there you could climb down behind the block and look in there and then we'd run over and look in the other end. But it was awfully spooky in there so we never climbed in besides there was - we were scared it was going to cave in. We'd go up there and even think about it and take picnics around here all the time, run up there and sit on the hill.

MD: Well, there was a trestle out here when I was a kid on the other side of Smith ranch and it was only half there and we used to go out and see how far we could rock it. If that thing ever went down - it must have been a hundred feet - chase that thing down there, it finally fell down.

CE: When did you notice the first influx of population here, Fred?

FD: Well, there was quite a population when I was small, a population of summer people came in here and around Forest Knolls. Almost all the people in the Woodacre are here, very few of them lived here all year around. In fact, two or three families, that would be all.

CE: Was it after the Golden Gate Bridge was completed that year-round residence occurred?

FD: They didn't run year-round until way in the 30's here.

CE: After the bridge perhaps was built.

FD: About the time of the bridge

CE: And, of course, after World War II it really -

FD: Yes, then it did bet I didn't know -  
MD: They changed all the houses into ?  
FD: There were only summer homes when we were little, we had quite a few summer people and we'd run around and see here but they're all summer homes. Probably in this whole hill there were maybe one or two families living here in the wintertime.  
CE: Well, you moved out here in '46, did you say?  
\_\_\_: '36, 1936.  
CE: Was your daughter born – well, of course she's - How old is your daughter?  
MD: She's not that old. She may look it.  
CE: How old are you, dear?  
GT\_\_\_: I'm 33.  
CE: Thirty-three, she looks about 17.  
AK: She looks like a high school girl.  
\_GT\_\_\_: And her daughter is the fifth generation on this property.  
CE: Well isn't that great?  
AK: Very unusual.  
CE: Will you tell us your name please, dear.  
GT: My name is Grace Katherine Dickson Tolson.  
CE: And what is - you have a daughter  
GT: Yes, she's eight.  
CE: And what is her name?  
GT: Dawn Ellen Ramsire - from a different marriage.  
CE: Isn't that wonderful? So, five different generations.  
MD: She's the gal that runs the ranch. We have 70 horses here.  
CE: Well, tell us about that - come over here. Sit down and tell us about your interests. I think it's so interesting how these ranches evolve.  
MD: Let me interrupt for just a minute. Getting back to these old homes in Woodacre some of the people were rather famous. One summer home was Mr. Ruxstall's. You've never heard of him, but if you ever drove a Model T Ford you certainly know what a Ruxstall is.  
CE: What did he invent a gear or something?  
MD: Yeah, he doubled the gears in it and everyone had to have a Ruxstall to make the thing run. He was a very famous man that lived out here in this area.  
CE: All right, now we are going to talk to Mel and Selma's daughter. You are interested in horses.  
GT: Very much so, yes.  
CE: Any particular breed - Morgan horses or what are you into?  
GT: I have a little of everything. I have quarter horses, pinto horses and Morgan horses, I have a little bit of everything. I've loved horses ever since I was a little kid. I was raised here on the ranch and I was the only one that wanted a horse out of all my three brothers.  
CE: Your dad and your uncle weren't too wild about horses at all, it seems.  
GT: No. Nobody. I guess my aunt Grace is, my namesake, but otherwise. I always loved horses and so one day they bought me a horse.  
\_\_\_: Well you came in contact with horses at Greg's camp, didn't you?

GT: Yeah, in Forest Knolls, Forest Farm Camp. I developed an interest in horses, but finally they bought me a horse and so then someone came in one day and said, "Well, do you have room to take care of my horse here?" In fact Dr. Nutting was my very first boarder and he set the rate. I said I guess I would take care of his horse and he said, "Well, how much will you charge me?" and I said, "I don't know," and he said, "What about \$32.50 a month?" So that was my first boarder.

CE: Well, isn't that great? So you started getting more and more boarders?

GT: I started getting more and more, one by one. So I've been doing it since I was about - take a guess and say about 13, so it's been twenty years since I've been running the ranch.

CE: Do you have a name for your -

GT: The Dickson Ranch.

CE: Is that what you call your boarding?

GT: Yeah, Dickson Ranch Stables.

CE: Isn't that great? Do you have this corral out here - is that part of - -

GT: I have two arenas now.

CE: Two arenas.

GT: My husband built two arenas. We put on a lot of events for the children.

CE: Do you have ??

GT: Everything. We have cross-country here now and - through the fields - cross-country riding, dressage.

CE: Are you a member of the Tamalpais Trail Riders? Do you know that group at all?

GT: No. Yes I do, in fact I've helped them in years past, I helped judge a trail test for them once many years ago. I'm a member of the San Geronimo Horsemen but there's so much politics in the horse clubs that I'm glad we have our own arena. We run a very smooth function here.

CE: Wonderful. Do you teach riding yourself or do you have your own instructors?

GT: I used to. We have our own instructors. No, I don't have time. We have foster children now and I'm getting into that very strongly. It takes up too much time. So I'm running the business end of it, all the paper work and all the organization.

CE: Well, unlike Uncle Fred and to some degree your father, you really enjoy the ranch life, don't you?

GT: Yes.

CE: You couldn't envision yourself doing anything else, could you?

GT: Well, I was - I worked in a bank for almost six years as a bookkeeper and I worked for my father as a bookkeeper on the side.

CE: Well, that's good experience.

GT: But all my life all I wanted was to get back on the outside and get into the horse thing but it took a long time before I could build it up to the point where it would help support us. I had to work some place else. I buy my hay from my uncle Fred.

MD: How many dollars worth of hay this year?

GT: I don't even want to say. It doubled in price because of the rain. \$16,500 worth of hay.

CE: \$16,500 for hay this year?

MD: He sells it by the pound.

CE: Do you deliver, Fred?  
GT: That's delivered, that's the full price.  
CE: Where is your property again?  
FD: Black Point  
MD: You're closer to Sears Point than you are Black Point.  
FD: Well, I say Black Point because we farm both sides of the thing and that's my main base anyway is really at Sears Point but people didn't know where Sears Point was for years.  
CE: Where on the ranch are your stables for boarding?  
GT: Right here - you're looking at them.  
CE: Right here.  
GT: Well, on the other side of that truck it starts -  
\_\_\_: How many do you have?  
GT: Right now there's between seventy and eighty horses on the ranch. It varies. I can't keep track of it. I can only say it's sort of - -

CE: Most of the owners come out every week?  
GT: No. Some of the people live far away, but I make sure the horses are well taken care of. We have our kids, foster kids, that exercise them and - -  
CE: What a wonderful thing for the children.  
GT: It's family operated, completely. They think so until we assign them all the chores, sometimes kids can be awful lazy.  
\_\_\_: Grace you never mentioned the ranch house, which is how old -- a hundred?  
MD: Oh yes, over.  
\_\_\_: The age of the house is over 100.  
CE: Does it have a name?  
\_\_\_: The ranch house.  
CE: Well, sometimes they - -  
\_\_\_: It's the ranch house.  
CE: Because like at Boyd Stewart's house, it has a name, the old house they call it Woodside.  
GT: We just call it the old Dickson Ranch House.  
CE: Old Dickson Ranch House.  
\_\_\_: And it had this sort of cheap plaster, you know where all the plaster was falling down and the house was almost unlivable until somebody showed a technique for covering the walls. So little by little we did the whole house in deadening felt that you can't get more I think but we dipped it in wheat paste and flour and we put it up and overlapped it and the whole house is done in that technique and it really looks great. You paint over it and it's a beautiful wall.  
CE: Well, it looks great from the outside.  
\_\_\_: Well it's occupied - -  
GT: Yes, it's terrific.

CE: Hang on to it because it'll be something of historic value as every - -  
GT: Yes, in fact it was pretty dilapidated a few years ago, my husband and I redid the whole inside of the thing. We just did a tremendous amount of work in it and the house got happy again. It was kind of sad for a while, you know, then it got happy again.  
AK: That's wonderful.  
CE: Well, it's wonderful, it seems in the last decade, my observation, people are getting interested in preservation, it seems for years and years nobody cared about keeping things up and now -  
\_\_\_: There was this beautiful barn out there which no longer exists but was all hewed. In fact, if you look right out of the window you'll see some of the beams - -  
CE: I noticed that when I came up.  
\_\_\_: They were from the barn, you know, the square nails and all that. But finally it got so shaky that we thought it was dangerous - it was sort of tearing apart.  
FD: It was put together with wooden pegs. You see they didn't have too much metal, metal was a premium ? out here and they just put it together with pegs.  
MD: But the funny thing, Fred, the ? oak they rotted out some of them, where the redwood didn't. But the redwood pegs would be weak.  
\_\_\_: This is one of the pegs.

CE: Isn't that interesting? Could I see that, Thelma?  
FD: There was a lot of hay tools up on the top of this barn and an old cider thing and I never thought it would be an antique or anything like that - there are rakes to rake up the hay, they had a bar across with pegs in them.  
GT: Well, we took a lot of that stuff out of the barn when they cleaned out the barn.  
CE: Oh, did you?  
GT: I cleaned up the barn when it was not in use for many years. My friend and I got on our hands and knees with a putty knife to get rid of the manure that was in there and we worked all summer on it. That's what we did when we were kids from maybe six o'clock in the morning until six o'clock at night. And we saved all the stuff and it was stolen.  
CE: Stolen?  
GT: Yes, we hung it up and we made a real antique barn out of it, as kid not realizing that people would walk in and steal from you, you know, lost most of our stuff.  
CE: Now whose shoe is this?  
\_\_\_: My son found this shoe; it came from the ranch.  
AK: Look at the wooden sole.  
\_\_\_: It looks almost like a horseshoe on the bottom.  
CE: That is something.  
GT: I have a handmade spur that came from the ranch I found, too, with a 1912 penny on it as good luck.  
MD: That shoe isn't too old because in the old days they made one shoe, they did not - make a left and a right.  
CE: You mean they're interchangeable?

MD: Yes. What the kids would do is put them on and they'd run in the water so the leather would become changeable in shape and then they'd have a left and a right.

CE: Oh, I see.

MD: I'm quoting this story from the Mormons of Salt Lake, so I could be wrong. Maybe they didn't have a left and a right.

GT: Well I've never seen a shoe like that.

MD: But I was back in Salt Lake not long ago, and that's what they did then.

CE: Have you ever done any research of your family through the Mormons at Brigham Young?

MD: No, we weren't exactly Mormon's.

CE: No, no, I don't mean for that reason. You don't have to be Mormon but they keep on microfilm the history of so many families. They have completely filled up the country of England, they have total genealogical records and they are, regardless of their faith, they are very concerned with keeping - they feel everybody is related some way or another.

AK: Now is that - did you get Grace's name down?

CE: Well, say your name again for Mrs. Kent.

GT: Grace Katherine Dickson Tolson.

CE: Is that name a local name, Grace?

GT: No, my husband's family is from Kentucky and Indiana.

CE: Do you find more young people all the time getting interested in horses?

GT: It's a tremendous business.

FD: Mrs. Kent her husband was - I just finished reading one of those World War I fly boys - he flew during World War I or did you know that?

AK: That's right, that's how I came here.

CE: Mrs. Kent came from the tippee, tippee end of Long Island.

MD: You mean you came here in a World War I airplane?

CE: No, but she met Tom Kent who was the second son of William and he was in the Air Force and then they were married in New Haven and he got orders to San Diego and then she came into the Kent family. But she's the matriarch of the Kent's now because she's the oldest.

FD: That's where the Junior College was, was the airfield in - was on that property the only airfield was there where Murray flew out of.

MD: Oh, Murray Park.

FD: He taught Murray to fly.

CE: Oh, he - did, I didn't know that.

AK: He wasn't supposed to. Of course, after the war, the planes weren't really good. Everybody wanted to fly and he couldn't bear not to have a chance to fly if there was any chance. He'd always say, "Well, no, I won't do it, that's all right," and then he'd come home all sunburned and his shoes all muddy and everything, they went to Santa Venetia and made another little airfield out there.

FD: Yes, I flew on that.

AK: I wasn't very happy about that because, you know, nobody was keeping those little planes in very good order - you never know what --

CE: Mrs. Kent, tell the Dicksons about --

FD: Lived next door where Murray Park is and Phil Murray learned to fly from there and then he in turn taught most of the other guys around here.

CE: Well, Mrs. Kent came out brand new to California and she was going to grab her umbrella and Tom said what - -

AK: Oh, he said, "It never rains in California." We landed in San Diego and it was raining.

CE: And he said, "Wait till we get up to Kentfield."

AK: I didn't see Kentfield until Christmas of that year and there I found the bare trees and things I had known at home along with the nice things I had found in California and I really felt at home then. I loved San Diego, Coronado, we had a nice place there but there wasn't a single growing thing that I knew. Not one, not a plant or a tree that I had ever seen before. Now, up here there is a good mixture of what we new in the East.

FD: See, the trees here are what they have - -

CE: Yes. Well, in Ross Valley, all those Elms and all those trees that the Dibbles and the Roses - they planted trees that they had at home -

FD: You can see a whole bunch of houses like this - that's why I was interested in Boyd Stewart because these are all New England style architecture. That's the only architecture they knew and you could ride around here and Bolinas and stuff like that and Boyd Stewart's ranch over there is a house very similar to this one.

CE: Certainly.

FD: I can't remember when my uncle - I don't think my uncle built that, I don't know.

CE: It's interesting, too, when you study the lighthouse service, the predecessor, you know the Coast Guard took it over but all the lighthouses were New England architecture, no matter where they put them in the United States, you'd see this little New England clapboard house somewhere.

FD: Yes. I don't know how many houses like this there were. Some of them were better and some of them worse. Well, Alboloni's is very similar.

MD: Yes, they're all built within the next five-year period. All the west developed about the same time.

CE: That's true.

MD: See, the Midwest got skipped. They went from the east to the west and then the Midwest because there was nothing there.

AK: Let's get back to Grace and the horses. You've got some more to tell me about that. I think it's quite thrilling.

CE: Your granddaughter would just go ape.

AK: Oh, would she ever.

CE: Could she come and visit you sometime?

GT: Anytime, we are open to children out here. It seems - we put on schooling shows.

AK: I see that as I go by - going to the beach, I see it all the time.

GT: Yes, teach people things

\_\_\_: Did you mention the judo school?

GT: We also have a judo school. My husband is a black belt in judo and jujitsu and so I do judo and we all do judo and exercise ladies - -

CE: Well, that's why she looks seventeen.

AK: I think I saw you teaching them to jump also out there, are you doing that?

GT: Yes, we teach every day. We're starting to call us the ranch that has something for everybody because we have English, western, and jumping and the dressage, and the cross-country and the gymnastics, the barrel racing. Everything, you know, to teach horse care, anything you can name for a beginner and for people who don't have a lot of money.

CE: Do your students ever enter the Grand National?

GT: A couple of them are going to the Junior Grand National - our teacher students, you know, the gal who teaches here.

CE: Could you teach a gal close to sixty how to ride a horse?

GT: Oh, I'm sure.

MD: Why, do you know one?

CE: Right here.

GT: Yes. Absolutely.

CE: We'll have to spread the word. Give us some of your cards we go all over, maybe -

GT: We've never had a card; just call us. Very casual here, just call us, we're in the yellow pages.

TD: Gracie really loves this ranch.

CE: Well, isn't that fascinating, and it's so wonderful that she picks up this interest in the land.

FD: I never thought about that how many generations have passed.

CE: Five.

TD: Dawn is the fifth.

CE: There are not many families that can say that, do you know?

FD: If we can talk about the finances for a second, of the ranches, they must have been ? by other people fairly well off from just their ranching operation because, as my brother said, here's a guy, a little old farm boy and you notice there's a tuxedo and everything else in this ? . As a matter of fact, I borrowed his tuxedo when I was 18 or so like that. I had to have one at Cal or had to go to dances around here. And I noticed in 1906 he was in San Francisco just coming from the opera and he stayed over in San Francisco because the boats, they quit running at midnight and so he'd always stay over in San Francisco. He was in San Francisco during the earthquake.

MD: In the same hotel that Caruso visited.

CE: It must have been at the Palace Hotel, then.

MD: Yes.

FD: Oh, he wouldn't stay there, too expensive

MD: No, he was, he was there with Caruso.

FD: And he just got out of town or got the last ferry boat out the next morning and got out of there.

CE: Was there any evidence of the earthquake on his property?

FD: None at all.

CE: Just a little east of the fault.

FD: He told me a story about a cow that fell in, the tail just stuck out over at the ? .

CE: We heard that from Oscar Shafter's granddaughter who said that's true. She's 90 years old and lives at the Oakland Athletic Club and she said a couple of days

after the earthquake she went with her father to visit the ranches and, by gosh, she said, there was that crevice and there was that cow in there and she said it is true unless somebody put the cow in there after the crevice, I don't know.

FD: Well, you see, we're away from the fault here.

CE: Yes, you're east of the fault or northeast of it.

FD: Yes. There's not much damage you can do around here. But they were well off ? he went to school and lived over in Berkeley or Oakland at the time and the poor people couldn't afford to go to school at that time and I know he always went down to the Islands for his vacations - doesn't everyone?

CE: Do you, Grace?

GT: No.

FD: One of the reasons for that is - and he kept an office in San Francisco for part of the time, that was my dad, in other words his dad must've had enough money to send him to school and build a house like that and they did it off - from what they could earn from the ranch.

CE: Well, now, Fred, you traveled a good deal around, haven't you in your early days certainly on your grandfather's ? .

FD: No, no, I never did. The rest of the family - were, all the girls invited to go, I just went once around the world and that's it. Then I went to work for the company and for a short while, but -

CE: Well, according to Joseph Warren Revere and his - he's written two books, *Naval Duty in California* and *Keel and Saddle*, he describes the San Geronimo Valley as one of the most beautiful places in the world and he certainly had traveled all over. Would you agree with him?

FD: Well, I would. We used to call it the Valley of the Giants out here. About four of us went to high school and we were all strange - I don't know why they called it that, whether it was because of the trees or what. Of course, all the tall redwoods are cut down since he said that, this is all second growth you're looking at now. There are some originals on this property but very few.

GT: A lot of them were burned, too, weren't they?

MD: The fire really didn't destroy many redwoods. They have that thick bark on them and it's pretty good protection.

GT: You see an awful lot of stumps if you walk down there. They're big huge stumps.

FD: Well, the stumps are what they cut down.

GT: Oh, they were all burned later.

FD: They were all burned later.

MD: That was your barn.

FD: In high school days, by the time people started driving cars, we probably had more visitors than most people do because it was a place to go, to drive to. There was always someone coming in. Of course, there were six of us living over there and you always had people trooping in and out pretty much.

CE: Well, I imagine you were all a very hospitable family. Barbara seems to reflect that today.

\_\_ : The house where they were raised is now Marin Lodge, which is like a hospital for mentally ill.

AK: What's it called?

\_\_\_: Marin Lodge. I guess it's a non-profit organization, they get people out of the hospitals and put them in homes like this, so they have bought that. It used to be a rest home.

AK: It isn't a hospice kind of a thing they were talking about?

\_\_\_: No, I don't think so. It is sort of a hospital for - I don't know if they call it a hospital. What do you think, Grace?

GT: They call it a home, a home for schizophrenics.

AK: It's certainly a nice place to be.

CE: I know that Fred has to return to his home. Mrs. Kent and I want to thank you both for allowing us to come out to the ranch this afternoon and share the reminiscences of the Dickson family. Five generations have lived on this ranch over 120 years of productive ranching. And it's been a pleasure to meet you today and rest assured, these tapes will become part of the archives of the California Room at the Marin County Library at Civic Center and will be a resource for historians and scholars in the future. Thank you very much.