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INTERVIEW WITH DONALD C. PERRY
by Carla Ehat & Anne Kent
March 31, 1976

INTERVIEWEE: Donald C. Perry (DP)
INTERVIEWERS: Carla Ehat (CE) and Anne Kent (AK)
DATE OF INTERVIEW: March 31, 1976
TRANSCRIBER: Marjorie Hoffman

CE: Today is March 31, 1976. Continuing the Oral History Program of the California Room, Marin County Library at Civic Center, this is Carla Ehat and joining me today is Mrs. Thomas Kent. We are going to be talking shortly with Donald C. Perry, great-grandson of James Ross, who was the third owner of Rancho Punta de Quentin, the 8,800 acre rancho embracing most of Ross Valley. We are interviewing Mr. Perry today at his beautiful nursery. And it's Sunnyside Nursery, located at 130 Sir Francis Drake Boulevard in San Anselmo. And Mr. Perry is going to tell us about Sunnyside, his family's estate, and share with us some of his reminiscences of this area. Good morning, Mr. Perry.

DP: Good morning Miss Ehat. How are you today?

CE: Fine.

DP: Anne, it's always a pleasure to see you, too.

AK: Good, good. Old-timers.

CE: Well, now you have before you the family tree and I wonder if you'd just annotate for the record, your line of descent from James Ross, please.

DP: I'd be glad to. James Ross was one of the early settlers in California, having come here in 1849 from Australia and at the same time, or in the same year I should say, George Austin Worn also came here from Australia. Austin Worn was an Irishman, James Ross was a Scotsman. When they came over here, why, James Ross was married to Annie Sophia Grayling, and they were married in Australia and she came over later. Then they had, I'm speaking about the Ross' now, had three children. My grandmother, which was Annie Sophia Esther Worn, James Ross Junior, and Rebecca Ross. My grandmother, who is Annie Sophia Ross, married George Worn and they had four children or five, I guess it was. My Uncle George which was George Worn, my mother which was Annie Sophia Worn, Grace Worn, Isabella Worn, and Louise Worn. Now to continue on down we'll just -- I understand you've already contacted my cousin, George Worn.

CE: Surely. So we're interested in your life.

DP: Yes. So from my lineage, why, it dates from George Worn, Jr. and Annie Sophia Worn. My mother married Donald Edmund Perry. He was a Canadian; came from Winnipeg. And in my family there were four children.

CE: Where did they meet?

DP: Well, they met here in San Francisco as far as I know. I really don't know where they did meet. But we come on down to my family which as I say consisted of myself, my sister, Esther, and my sister, Ann, and my brother, Malcolm. I married Laura Louise Warren from Fort Collins, Colorado and we had one son, Warren Perry. Warren Perry married Jane Newton, also from Colorado, and they had three boys, Tom Perry, Ross Perry and Jim Perry. They incidentally are the sixth generation that have lived here in Marin County, which is really quite a long, long time.

CE: That is remarkable. Well, tell me, Mr. Perry, what are your earliest recollections of your grandmother? You were born in San Francisco but you went there just --

DP: Just went there because they had the hospital in San Francisco.

CE: But do you remember your grandmother?

DP: Oh, yes, I remember her very, very well. As a matter of fact, I remember her almost more than well because I was almost raised by my grandmother and my aunt.

CE: Where was the family home then?

DP: My family home?

CE: Your grandmother's family home.

DP: My grandmother's home was 38, what is now 38 Ross Avenue here in San Anselmo.

CE: Is the home still standing?

DP: No. I was torn down about 1955 and then they built those number of apartments up there. It was just about an acre of land right on Ross Avenue.

CE: I see.

DP: But speaking about that, getting into that deal, go back a little bit further to my grandmother and grandfather. Shortly after they were married, why, they were given, what is now, the Art and Garden Center in Ross and they built this home there which they lived in only a very short time. It was in the 1870s, mid-1870s, that my grandfather had taken the whole family to Europe and while in Europe, why, there was a break in the stock market and by the time he had got back, why, he had lost everything, everything he had. So from there they sold -- They had to sell the property and they moved up to what was known as a ranch up on the seminary property, almost to where the seminary gymnasium is now. And they lived there for a number of years and it was a farm. I can remember my aunt and my mother saying the water supply came from Bald Hill.

CE: Springs up there?

DP: Springs up there, yes, in a lead pipe. And the cattle every once in a while would step on the lead pipe and crush it and they'd have to go out and find out where the pipe was crushed and take a brick and round it out again until they had the flow of water.

CE: With the water shortage today, Don, wouldn't it be great if those springs were still there?

DP: Well, I imagine those springs are still up there. I think they are just home domestic use, you know, and not any supply. Then, as far as to get down where they lived at 38 Ross Avenue that you're talking about, and I haven't got the date on this, it was probably in the late, late '90s or mid-90s they had to sell off another piece of property. Now, we haven't mentioned the selling of property as yet but there was a continual period of having to sell off a piece of property to get a little money.

CE: Well, the original ranch, which is now part of San Anselmo, would be how many acres? Do you have any recollection of --

DP: Are we talking about the Rancho de San Quentin or not?

CE: No, no, not that one. Not the rancho but the little farm up here.

DP: Oh, that was probably five or six hundred acres.

CE: It was that large?

DP: Yes, it was quite a good-size piece. But I have, someplace, and I haven't been able to find it, a full page ad in the *San Francisco Examiner* stating that an auction was going to be held on a certain Sunday here to sell off what was known as the Sunnyside Tract. This was a tract of land that was bordered by Bolinas Avenue, ran to the top of Bald Hill, top of Bald Hill on down to Woodland Avenue which is parallel to Ross Avenue, the next street north, and then down to the railroad. And this ad, I can remember stating that it encompassed beautiful, beautiful lands and was only one hour by fast ferry and fast trains from San Francisco. Well, the day of the auction came and it poured. It just rained the whole, whole day long and the only piece of property they sold was 38 Ross Avenue. Well, the bank foreclosed, of course, and somehow they bought back from the bank or the sale of this 38 Ross Avenue didn't go through and they got it back probably for a very nominal figure and then built on that property. The next thing you asked me about, if I could remember my grandmother.

CE: Yes, could you describe her to us?

DP: My grandmother? Oh, she was really a character. She was the head man of the family, always was. My grandfather had died many years previously. He died I think in about 1875 and she raised the children. You see there was the one boy and four girls. She was rather short, stocky, built very much like Anne here, Anne Kent. White hair and was very much interested in gardening and flowers and just a wonderful, really a wonderful person. Then came -- The next thing I remember and I really don't remember too well, was the San Francisco earthquake. I don't remember the earthquake but my home sat right here where the Sunnyside Nursery is, right here.

CE: That was the family home?

DP: The family home. That was Donald Edmund Perry, my father.

CE: Well, let's see, you were about, what, five?

DP: I was six. Yes, five, five. I was born in 1901.

CE: You were in bed, actually. You were pre-school?

DP: Pardon?

CE: You were in bed that hour of the morning and it's pre-school?

DP: Oh, I had no idea of the earthquake.

CE: Oh, I thought you did.

DP: No, no idea of the earthquake itself here. But the house was partly a one-story house and partly a two-story house. And the one-story part, which was what we used to call the parlor and the living room and the kitchen; the whole family moved into it because all the

rest of the other houses, my Aunt Louise Beales and the Worn place were two-story things and they were afraid they were going to fall down so they were all bedded down in the living room and parlor. Well, just at that time -- Well, wait a second, no, I'm getting a little ahead of myself. You asked me if I remembered the earthquake. I don't remember the earthquake but I remember people in those two rooms and I can also remember being driven down to Sausalito in a horse and wagon and getting out there on Inspiration Point and watching San Francisco burn.

CE: You can remember that?

DP: I can remember that. I can remember the fire and I can remember the long drive down to Sausalito in the horse and wagon. Well, just at that time or shortly thereafter, my sister came down, Esther, with infantile paralysis and they of course didn't know too much about it and they thought it might be catching and they moved me out and sent me up to live with my grandmother and I never did come home. I lived there all the rest of my young life. Had my own room there and I used to eat my meals at the home here and then go up to Granny's to sleep.

CE: You must have had a good rapport with her.

DP: Oh, yes, no trouble at all, we just had a wonderful time. And my aunt, Miss Bella Worn, was really the one that took over and she was just a second mother to me, did everything. Used to read to me and that was one of the things I had against her and that was that she read to me so much I never learned to read myself.

CE: Well, was your sister Esther quarantined for some time or did that finally --

DP: Oh, no, I don't think she was ever quarantined but they were afraid of it, and consequently, as I say, why I never came back I really couldn't tell you.

CE: Where did you go to school, Don?

DP: Well, I went to -- First of all was privately tutored for several years by Mabel Bouick who was connected with the Seminary up there and I think in about the third or fourth grade I went up to Main School which is now Wade Thomas, you know.

CE: Now that time that we're talking about, was there much building? Wasn't it just mainly the Seminary on the hill and the church at the foot of the hill and your grandmother's houses there?

DP: There were more places than that. There were, of course -- In the Seminary they had built a lot of buildings around for the professors and so forth. Housing around the place.

CE: Housing for the staff.

DP: There were four or five houses up Ross Avenue in addition to my grandmother's.

CE: Was there much in Ross other than the Dibblee Estate?

DP: Oh, yes, sure, quite a few. It was -- I'm speaking now of 1910, 12, you know, something like that and there were a number of places. I don't know where I am.

CE: After Wade, you went to the school.

DP: Well you asked me about -- After I graduated from grammar school I went to Tamalpais High School.

CE: And how would you get down to Tam?

DP: Well, that was a good question. I went down on the electric trains. And as I say, I lived at 38 Ross Avenue which is, say, 200 yards up from San Anselmo Avenue and the trains stopped at both San Anselmo Station and also at Ross Station. And there were two trains; one came down from Fairfax and the other came down from San Rafael. So the one that came through from San Rafael left two minutes ahead of the one that came down from Fairfax. And I never left the house, my grandmother's house, until the first train would go on and then I'd run like the devil, you know, and get down and catch the train at Bolinas Avenue. But that's where I became such a wonderful runner. I was really, really fast. Then from Tamalpais High School, why, I went to the University of California.

CE: What was your major?

DP: Major? Geologist. I graduated in Mining Engineering from Cal.

CE: Did your profession take you a good deal around the world as a geologist?

DP: No. I graduated in Mining Geology, and before I got out of school I had a job with the Union Oil Company and I went back to Fort Collins, Colorado. Just at that time they had discovered this new oil field at Fort Collins. And I worked for the Union Oil Company for about three years, I think it was, and the oil field there at Fort Collins didn't pan out too well and they had decided to disband the office and gave us our choice of going to Venezuela or quitting, so I quit. And I think I was the smartest one of the bunch to quit because everybody else that went down there got every kind of diseases you can pick up in the tropics. However --

CE: Tell me, Sir, how did you ever get into the nursery business? It's a far cry from geology. Is it anything to do with the fact that the Worn sisters were so good and talented in the use of floral decorations?

DP: No, no. I wouldn't say so. After I left the Union Oil Company I went down to Peru to do some work down there for a fellow by the name of Malleget who had been Secretary of State under the Leguia government, which was a previous government.

CE: What year are we talking about, approximately?

DP: I'm talking about 1934.

CE: Okay.

DP: And he had high graded a lot of mines. They were really German mines that the German's had operated during the first World War and Markely Tungsten mines when Tungsten was so hard to get. And my job down there was to try to determine what mines might be worth keeping because the new government was starting to tax them. Well, they weren't too hot and I came on back to Marin County and had to be out-of-doors. I knew I wanted to be out-of-doors. So I thought maybe I'd try a little contracting and building a few houses. So we tore down the old home here. This is in 1936. Tore down the old home and after long negotiations I finally negotiated a lease with the Safeway Company and we built what is now the present, or rather, I built what is now the present bank, the Crocker Bank. And then a few houses, most of them up on San Francisco Boulevard, paid \$500 for the lot and the buildings, finally when they were completed, cost me about \$4250 and I couldn't sell them for \$4000 so we got out of the contracting business.

CE: That sounds like a familiar story, Anne Kent. Doesn't it?

AK: Doesn't it?

DP: So about that time -- Oh, then I got a job at the World's Fair over at Treasure Island and I was Chief Inspector of the roads that they put in over there. And when that was completed over there I became quite familiar with the gardening that was being done over there and I knew two or three of the gardeners, George Roding and so forth who did a lot of the proper planting and a few of the other men. At that time my aunt, Miss Bella Worn, did the gardening at the Pacific House.

CE: Oh, out on Treasure Island.

DP: Yes, on Treasure Island. And I don't know how it was but anyhow I decided that I would go into the nursery business and I didn't know anything from straight up. I did know the names of a few flowers and so forth and Aunty kept cautioning me. She said, "Donald, you'll never make a go of it here." She said, "I know people in the Ross Valley. They'll never spend any money; they're the tightest people of any place in the Bay Area." She said, "You'll never make a go of it." But anyhow I went ahead and did it and --

CE: Now this woman you're speaking of was one of the Worn sisters that did --

DP: Yes, Isabel.

CE: And had a business in San Francisco?

DP: Yes, that's right. She was the main person and connected with Beamus and Worn.

CE: Well, how did it come about then? How did you start?

DP: Well, I started right here where we're sitting now.

CE: What did you do, pitch a tent?

DP: No, didn't pitch a tent, but I built this Sunnyside Nursery just as it is today.

CE: Well, you had the building there?

DP: No, nothing here.

CE: Just the vacant land.

DP: This was a vacant land. And I built the building. The architect was Hertka Knolles and a rather interesting factor is that when the place was completed we got quite a little bit of notoriety on the thing. And two or three page article in the *Architectural Forum*. I remember it read in the headlines was "Florist, Nurseryman Goes to Town".

CE: When did you open?

DP: On November the 15th, 1939. And all that day that we hadn't opened -- I, of course, in the meantime had gone around and stocked the nursery up and I got a lot of my friends to act as stooges to make the place look like it was jumping, you know, and I figured if we could sell \$100 worth of stuff, why, we had made a go. Well, the day came and we didn't sell \$100 worth but we sold \$95 worth.

CE: So that was encouraging.

DP: Yeah. And we had a little cocktail party up at my -- I was living up there with my wife at 38 Ross Avenue at that time. We had a little party up there that night and I put the loot in a bag and had gone up there. I was the last one to go up to the house, and when I got up to the front porch I reached into my back pocket and I had lost the loot. So with that I tore out and headed on back but luckily in going through the gate there at 38 Ross it had fallen out of my pocket, so we found it and so we had another celebration. Well as I say, I didn't know too much about the nursery business or very little, nothing I'd say. But I always had good men. And we started off with one man and gradually grew and grew until today we have twelve or fourteen. I don't know, they keep coming and keep going, I can't keep track of them or know their names even.

CE: Well, the ones we know have been here many years.

DP: Yes, they have. Ernie Munson, who is --

CE: He's out at the ranch.

DP: No, he's not. He's almost retired. As a matter of fact, he only works one day a week now but Ernie was with me for 33 years; that's a long time. Walter Bacigalupi here has

been with me about 30 years, so those are the two basic men we had. Well, now I'm afraid you've gotten me down to a point here where I'm going to have to start digressing a little bit and tell you a little bit about the country here.

CE: Yes.

DP: I told you about the sale of 38 Ross Avenue. You asked me about, just a few minutes ago -- These are just thoughts that are coming back to me, when I went to Ross Grammar School. I remember one day that I had come home. We always came home for lunch, and I was on my way back up to school, going up Woodland Avenue. And here came a man riding a horse, galloping along, with a full tilt here, holding two bags out on the side like this and passed me and went on up to the road and on up into Bald Hill. Well, it wasn't long after that, I mean, it was a matter of minutes, why, the news got around school that the local bank up here had been held up. In wild west form, why, here this robber here had gotten the loot here and drove up the street here.

CE: Well, in typical western fashion, did they catch him?

DP: No, never did, even though we had the best town marshal here in San Anselmo; a fellow by the name of George Martin who ran the town pretty nearly and he knew by the type of crime that was committed who to contact immediately. We kids were always getting into mischief, figuring on hanging on somebody's gate, up on the fence post, or throwing rocks. I remember we played, when I was in grammar school, played Fairfax in a basketball game. And we had a horse and wagon and had all the kids with me. On the way back we got waylaid up at the Lansdale and some of these Fairfax kids started throwing rocks at us and we got out and started throwing them back. And I unfortunately was the one that threw a rock that happened to light on a railway rail there and bounced about a hundred and fifty feet through a plate glass window at the store there on the corner building, which resulted in a good licking for me and about a hundred dollars, I think, for my father to pay for the window. Other times he'd come outside I think it was only fifty dollars, so -- But anyhow, what I was going to say was, by the time we got down here to my place, why, George Martin was already sitting here waiting for us.

CE: In those early days, was the creek more noticeable?

DP: Oh, this creek here?

CE: Yes.

DP: Oh, yes, it ran water at all times and a lot of water. I've caught -- On opening day of trout season, why, --

CE: Opening day of trout season, what sir?

DP: Opening day of trout season I used to start fishing here at the Barber Tract Bridge and by the time I got up here to the San Anselmo crossing, which is right here at

Tunstead Avenue, I would have fifty fish and they were beautiful fish, too. They'd be eight, nine inches. And then in the fall of the year, why, the salmon all used to come up and we would go down and spear the salmon.

CE: Well now, Mr. Perry, for the edification of people listening to this in the future would you explain this creek? And where would this salmon spawn up from, the Corte Madera Creek?

DP: Oh, yes they --

CE: Is this the main creek that comes through?

DP: This is your main, main creek and it runs through San Anselmo, forks largely at -- Going up through Sleepy Hollow and then heads out towards White's Hill with another branch going off to the Cascades which is just here.

CE: Does this have a name?

DP: Yes, it's the --

AK: Corte Madera?

DP: Yeah, it's the Corte Madera Creek.

CE: Now where -- Does it cross under Sir Francis Drake Boulevard today?

DP: Yes, just a hundred yards south of Bolinas Avenue.

CE: I see.

DP: And then goes on down. You asked me where the salmon came from; they came right up the slough until they got into the creek which started really just about where the Junior College is, and then ran on up.

CE: Well, we understand that your great grandfather, James Ross, when Ross Landing was going strong there, that there were these wide haul boats. Can you describe any of that shipping that we know?

DP: I don't know anything about that. That was all, you see, way, way before my time.

CE: Well, Mrs. Kent has a photograph in our collection of tri-weekly packet schooner that was supposed to have been run by James Ross and they would bring in produce and they would offload cord wood, bricks, whatever.

DP: That's right, yeah.

CE: Can you enlarge on that at all?

DP: Well, no, I can't enlarge on it very much. I know this is the history of the thing and they were boats probably of fairly good draft. I would think maybe four or five foot drafts so that creek down there, the slough, if you want to call it that now, is really a pretty navigable stream.

CE: Well, in a hundred years you can see how it's silted in and even though the Army Engineers have dredged it periodically it is still --

DP: Well, it has, it's silted up like everything else, like Bolinas Bay and so many of the places.

CE: Did your grandmother ever have any recollections of stories about Ross Landing? Did she ever share any of these?

DP: Oh, I'm sure she did, but I mean --

CE: At one time there were thirty buildings there; school, blacksmith shop, and etc. And there's not too much annotated.

DP: Well, I don't know anybody who would know. I don't know it first hand so I can't help you out there at all.

CE: What other reminiscences would you like to share about your early boyhood? Who were some of your pals and playmates?

DP: Well, my very best friend was a boy by the name of Tallentyre Sturdivant and his whole name was Tallentyre Benjamin Basil Sturdivant.

CE: Where is that illustrious gentleman today?

AK: Well, that's -- One grandson is, has the name. That's Doctor Fletcher's child. Marion was --

DP: Yeah. Marion was -- Marion Fletcher was Tal's brother.

AK: They're both great guys.

DP: Then the Gagans. They were a big family. They all, both of them lived up here in --

AK: They were redheads, I think, weren't they?

DP: Yes, they were. There were a good many of them. Bob Taylor and Jerry Stratford and -- I don't know.

CE: Are some of these people still around this area?

DP: Jerry Stratford is still alive and one or two of the Gagans are. I think Helen Kagan, I think she still lives here.

AK: One of them has this business of making the uniforms for the schools.

DP: Uniforms for the Pope, yes.

(End of Side A)

CE: Mr. Perry, we haven't discussed your father or your mother. Would you like to share some of their story with us?

DP: Well, we'll start off with my father. As I say, my father was a Canadian, born in Winnipeg, and from a large family. I think there were about eight in the family, five or six boys and two daughters. He was the stray wolf of the family. He was the only one that migrated to the United States and the rest of them all remained in Canada and they were spread out from Vancouver right on through the east coast. But the main family home was in Winnipeg. And my father was in the real estate business and two brothers were doctors, very, very prominent doctors, too. Both of them graduates of Royal Academy of Surgeons in London and they practiced in Vancouver. Two of them were ministers. I remember when I was growing up and trying to figure what the dickens I wanted to do, I thought maybe I should be a minister or a doctor and I turned them both down because I didn't want to know what was the matter with me, and secondly, I thought I might run out of subjects to preach. But speaking about preaching, I was about twelve years old. I was sent up to Canada and shipped from one relative to another right square across Canada and visiting them all for a few days at a time. I remember getting into Winnipeg and my Uncle Guthrie's home on -- He was head of the Theological Seminary there in Winnipeg, Presbyterian Seminary, right on the Assiniboine River, and every morning before breakfast we had to gather to have Uncle Guthrie read the Bible. And I remember this one particular morning I was sitting there in the window looking out over the river and here were two men fishing in a boat down there and the boat capsized somehow, dumping these men into the river and I let out a war hoop and said, "Oh Uncle Guthrie, Uncle Guthrie, there's a couple of men drowning down there on the river." He turned to me and said, "Nephew," he said, "we are reading the Lord's word. the Lord will take care of them." And with that I looked out at the river again and they were both standing up, it was only about waist deep.

CE: Well, tell me what brought your father to California and eventually to Marin County?

DP: Well, I really don't know what brought him to California but I guess he met my mother, probably in San Francisco and started coming over here. Of course, this was a vacation, a weekend place to come and I guess he just came here. Now I don't know, I never did ask him how he got here.

CE: Well, that's one thing we'd like to know, what brought people to Marin.

DP: Well, I really don't know.

CE: Did he live a good many years?

DP: Yes, he was about 76 or 75 or something. Well we ought to have it right here.

CE: And after the earthquake, what happened to the house? Did they relocate?

DP: Pardon me?

CE: Did they relocate?

DP: Our house never burnt.

CE: It didn't? No, I realize that but you had all the people. Did he finally relocate from his home? What happened to that house?

DP: This house stayed there until I tore it down.

CE: You tore it down?

DP: I tore it down, yes, in 19 --

CE: And they lived there all that period?

DP: All that time, yes. And you asked about my mother. She was just the most universally beloved person I ever knew. And her friends were all young people. She just loved people and kids. Anyhow, when the troubles of the Worn family really got very acute in the mid-1890s, why, my -- All the girls, three of them anyhow, four of them, there's Bella, Grace, my mother and Louise, started this little firm of ? in San Francisco. Then my mother married and dropped out of the firm and then Aunt Louise married and dropped out of the firm and in 1915 my Aunt Grace passed away and my Aunt Bella was left the sole operator of the firm until we kids grew up. And after about 1930 or so we were all grown or graduated from school and so forth and my mother went back to help out my aunt. Then she helped out my aunt until she passed away and it was just a lack of interest that Aunty died of heart attack and it was just three months later, why, Mother just gave up and died for no reason at all. She just was through, and gave up.

CE: Well, their business was most successful, I understand, and they decorated for some of the great parties in San Francisco in private homes and receptions.

DP: Yes, they did, and I've got pictures by the thousands of their decorations. And it's rather interesting to note that they did the main decoration for every president and for

every crown head that ever visited San Francisco from 1895 until 1950 when they passed away here.

CE: This would be at the various hotels, I presume?

DP: Oh, yes, hotels, mostly. And up to the time of income tax, why, there were many, many lavish parties given. When I say lavish it is not at all unusual for decorations to run twenty-five thousand dollars. And I know of one, Toby Clark party, that ran over a hundred thousand dollars. That's for a daytime party.

CE: Did they ever do work down towards the peninsula people?

DP: Oh, yes, they did. That is where most of it was. And they had all sorts of opportunities to go to New York and the east to do decorations and the only time that they ever did do it was when they went to Chicago to do decorations and they had so much trouble they decided that they would never move out of San Francisco.

CE: As a young man, did you ever go over and volunteer your services to them?

DP: Did I ever! My gosh, you talk about getting over there. These trains, the electric trains, used to run here. They had platforms and you entered from the front and back and there was a little platform on the front and back of each car. Well, in the decorations they used flower blossoms, you know, very, very extensively and those would be wrapped in a piece of matting two feet in diameter but six or seven feet high. And very often before school, why, I'd have to catch the 5:30 train here with one of these bundles and deliver it to San Francisco and the bundles were so big you couldn't get them into the car so I'd have to stand out on the platform, you see, on the train all the way to the city. And then when you get over there, catch a streetcar to get up to Post Street. Their place of business was on the first block of Post Street. It was a job. And then for many, many years, I don't know why, they wouldn't have a car or a truck and especially at Christmas, I can remember them having to get these orders together and being delivered and they all had to be delivered by streetcar. So you'd start off with maybe one or two pots under your arm here and get on a streetcar and get all over San Francisco.

CE: I think through osmosis, if no other way, you developed an interest in plants. Maybe you were unaware of it at the time, but you knew.

DP: Well, I knew plants. I mean, the names of flowers and how they grew and where they grew. We did an awful lot of walking and hiking through the country here and gathering of wildflowers in the spring of the year and Auntie being extremely knowledgeable about plants. Why, it was a certain amount of osmosis, there's no question about that.

CE: Tell me, Mr. Perry, how did you develop this ranch that you call --

DP: Out here in Fairfax?

CE: Out here in Fairfax where you have all of your plants growing.

DP: Well, the nursery here as it is today was just about half the size when I first opened it. And we had to have a little backup stock, and I had that up there at 38 Ross Avenue for a while until that got a little bit too small and we had to look for another bigger place to grown in. So it was in, I think the late, late 40s, I can't remember exactly why, I bought this piece of property, eight acres, up there at the foot of White's Hill and we just developed it there and keep it going.

CE: With the advent of the Golden Gate Bridge and the population growth thereafter and coincidentally, I suppose the demise of the railroad, you've seen lots of changes, haven't you?

DP: Oh, yes.

CE: Had you any idea that it would mushroom the way it has?

DP: Oh, no, and I don't think I ever gave any thought to it, either. But you're speaking about changes and the railroad and so forth, I can remember we have a place over in Bolinas and after school was out, why, we'd shut up the house here and all go to Bolinas. Now that was for the summer. We went over there and we stayed there; we didn't, you know, come on back. And the old horse stage used to come by and McCurdy was the driver and I can remember going up at nine o'clock in the morning and sitting up at the drug store there at the head of the road waiting for the stage and looking on down to see when --

CE: Are you talking about the four horse stage?

DP: Yes, four horse.

CE: Are you old enough to have done that?

DP: Oh, certainly. Oh, my gosh, yes, sure.

CE: I thought that might have -- All right, can you describe that kind of a trip? Where would you go? What route?

DP: Well, I can tell you exactly, every turn on the road, where the waterfalls are.

CE: All right, would you do that for us because nobody's told us. Judge Martinelli briefly touched on it. Dolly Jenkins. Do you know Dolly?

DP: Yes, I know Dolly.

CE: Dolly Jenkins touched on it briefly but -- You would board it here; it would start at the --

DP: Yes, it would start at San Rafael.

CE: You'd board it where?

DP: Board it right up here at the head of the --

CE: At the crossroads, at the junction.

DP: Yes, the crossroads right up here. And Miss Shapira's Drug Store. Do you remember her, Anne?

AK: Oh, I do indeed. Yes.

DP: Remember her famous toothpaste?

AK: Oh, she'd demonstrate it.

DP: Yes.

CE: What is it, something she made herself?

DP: Yes, she made it herself. Guaranteed to wear your teeth down to the nubbins in three years, but it tasted good.

CE: All right. You board it early?

DP: Yes, about nine thirty in the morning I think it was and we went up to Fairfax and then up the road.

CE: Stop there?

DP: Not unless somebody wanted to get off. I think the stage was loaded by the time we got near San Anselmo.

CE: How many people, maybe dozen at the most?

DP: Yeah, about a dozen. And then we'd go up the grade, the Bolinas Grade, up to the -- where the road forks now. Do you know where Doctor Stanley lives up there?

CE: Crest Farm, yes.

DP: Crest Farm. Well, instead of going up toward the Meadow Club the road forked there and turned to your left and we went up through the Porteous Meadows and down through what is now the dam, Alpine Dam, and --

CE: You would actually be going where the water now covers all of that ravine?

DP: Oh, yes, right on the bottom, the whole thing. And then the road from the dam on up to the top of the mountain and on down to Bolinas is exactly as it was in those days.

CE: You remember the Summit House?

DP: Oh, yes, I remember the Summit House and I remember the --

CE: Could you describe -- What was it, a way station? Did you stop there and have a cool beer or something? Or what was it, a restaurant or --

DP: No, it really, really wasn't. This fellow lived up there. We used to call him -- think he was Santa Claus, he had a great big --

CE: Is that Constantine?

DP: No, not Constantine. I forget what his name was. But it was just a house up there at the top of the hill. We'd stop, but I think it was just to deliver the mail or the groceries, you know. They would deliver along the way, but nothing --

CE: Maybe it was a rest stop for the horses.

DP: There was a water trough there; I can remember that.

CE: Was that the first water trough?

DP: Oh, no, no, no, there were several. They had a hunt club down there. Well, it's just over the hill from the Meadow Club. I can't exactly tell you where it was but it was a hunting club and there were water troughs there and springs and the bottom of the lake there was full of redwoods and there was plenty of water all the way along. And there was water up on the road up the top of the mountain. There were two or three spots that had water troughs.

CE: Okay, then the road from the Summit down to Bolinas is pretty much as it is today?

DP: Exactly, exactly the same.

CE: That must have been a scary ride.

DP: Oh, I wouldn't say that. But you're talking about going over to Bolinas. We went over to stay.

CE: How long would it take you, that ride?

DP: About three and a half hours.

CE: Three hours? What would it cost? Do you have any idea?

DP: Oh, I haven't the slightest idea.

CE: I heard one time it was about two and a half dollars round trip.

DP: Well, I couldn't tell you that. But speaking about that lake and the road up over the mountain, my father came home from the city one Friday night, probably 1912 or '13, and the papers had that this *R.D. Inman* had gone ashore; a boat had gone ashore in Bolinas, inland, it was the inland area, inland. And we talked my father and mother into letting us go over to Bolinas that night. This was the day before we had any flashlights or anything like that. We had a couple dozen pocket matches and it was dark, I'll tell you that, just as dark as it could possibly be going down the bottom of that Alpine Lake there. It was just as we started up that trail, we always took the trail, my brother said to me, he said, "What's a drown man look like?" Well, I tell you I never made it to the top of that hill as fast as I did that night. We just took off and went up the top. And then we'd come down the other side on the trail and it didn't follow the road at all, it came down to a place called McKennan's.

CE: McKennan's Pier? Where McKennan's Pier was?

DP: Yes, that right.

CE: Dolly has a story that they used to have a stake in the water at McKennan's Pier and you'd watch that very carefully and when the stake was noticeable, I believe, you could continue on the road around Bolinas. There was a low spot. Have you ever heard that story?

DP: No, I haven't heard that but I do remember the low spots in the road and a lot of times the road would be covered with water with high tides, yeah, but it wasn't very deep, just six inches or a foot, something like that. But when we got to McKennan's --

CE: Is that about where the trail ends?

DP: Yes, that's where the trail ends. If Mr. McKennan wasn't around, why, we'd just take a rowboat and row over to Bolinas.

CE: Save a little time.

DP: Oh, yes, save time. And then he'd pick it up the next day. He had a launch that he would bring the boat on back again but we always had a boat to cross over there.

CE: Where was your property at Bolinas?

DP: It's on Terrace Avenue, here.

CE: Is it near downtown or is it up on the Mesa?

DP: No, no, it's not on the Mesa. It's in that sheltered, little sheltered cove up there. The Guthries had a place there and Miss Lock and the Martinellis are right across the way from it now. But our place was the first or second place; the Guthrie's was first, I think, ours was second and that was built 1915. Oh, I remember it and it's in some darn good shape right today, too.

CE: You remember those fabulous Fourth of July parades in Bolinas? Dolly has a photograph of --

DP: Oh, well, it wasn't the Fourth of July parades in those days. It was the parties at the beach. Mrs. Faville -- Do you remember Mrs. Faville, Anne?

AK: Yes, I do, indeed.

DP: She was the one who used to organize them and we'd have tug of wars and sack races and all those things. Then in little later years, why, Mr. Newhall, Alma Newhall, furnished the fireworks and they were really pretty extensive. But the parades and so forth I don't think came until the last fifteen years or something like that.

CE: Were there any evidences of the old hotel, either the Flagstaff or the Del Mar, along the lagoon side in evidence in your youth or not? Had they gone?

DP: I don't remember either one of those names. But we stayed at the Pamadas Hotel which was later Sayers and Bolinas Hotel. It's still there, it's still --

CE: Did you know some of the Peppers?

DP: Oh, I knew them all, yeah, everyone of them.

CE: Marin Pepper, who wrote the book about Bolinas.

DP: Oh, she was another --

CE: Great gal.

DP: Great, great gal, and here mother was quite a character, too. I remember her mother very well. She was always mixed up into something.

CE: Did you ever experience that period of the time when they were finding, drilling oil in Bolinas?

DP: No, that was before my time.

CE: Before your time.

DP: But they never found anything there, a little bit of gas maybe, but it didn't amount to anything and it didn't last very long. I can remember the wells, I mean, I remember where they were.

CE: The wells? Did you ever hear the story of finding that piece of armor that is now at Bancroft Library?

DP: Well, I'm the guy that found it.

CE: You are? Tell us this story. Dolly has a photograph of it and it is deposited at Bancroft along with Drake's plate.

DP: Yes, that's quite a story. Anyhow, we were on a picnic at what's known as Copper Mine Canyon which is about two miles north of the head of the bay.

CE: Near Woodville or Dogtown?

DP: Dogtown, yes, takes off to the right, goes up the hill. And four or five of us kids were playing up there, we were playing Run Sheep Run, and I was up on the hillside and caught myself on something and tripped and it was iron and I just wondered what it was and I went back to see what it was and here the shoulder strap was the only thing that was sticking out of the ground, the rest of it was all covered with dirt and leaves and one thing and another. And I got it out, cleaned it up, washed it off and that afternoon, why, we all had a lot of fun putting it on. It fitted me just perfectly as a maybe a twelve or fourteen year old kid perfectly. We'd take sticks and hit each other with the sticks, you know, and it didn't hurt at all. And so when we got back to Bolinas we thought we'd see what would happen if we shot it with a .22. So we set it up there in the backyard and took a couple shots at it with a .22 and heck it didn't even phase it. So I said to Brett, "Brett, you put the thing on and I'll shoot you."

CE: Typical kids.

AK: William Tell.

DP: So he put it on and I shot him but he never got a chance to shoot me because when I shot him the ? shattered and all came up, you know, and caught him all under the chin. Well, anyway, that armor sat in our home there for three or four years. And one time a Mr. Wisby, who is an artist over there, was etching the house and asked me about it or asked about it, I should say, and I told him the story and he said, "Do you want to sell it?" And I said, "No, no, I don't think I want to sell it." Well, he said, "I'll give you twenty-five dollars for it." "No, we didn't want twenty-five dollars." So a couple of years go by and he came on back and offered me fifty for it, so a hundred percent increase. I took it. And then it was sent over to the Bancroft Library where it was authenticated as 15th Century Spanish armor which is the armor that Drake wore, or Drake's soldiers wore, and from there it went back to the Metropolitan where again it was authenticated as 15th Century Spanish armor, and then it came back here and it was lost for a number of years.

I mean, nobody knew where the dickens it was and just in the last two or three years, why, it's been resurrected. I don't think it's on exhibit over there at the Bancroft Library but its on -- You can see it if you call.

CE: Well, there's so many stories, Mr. Perry, about the authenticity of the brass plate, you know, even, and some people have said this piece of armor was left over from a traveling --

DP: Salesman.

CE: Theatrical Company and etc., but is there any doubt in your mind that it was -- When you came upon it, it was --

DP: It was buried, it was.

CE: It was buried.

DP: It had been there for fifty or a hundred years or maybe even longer because it was completely buried with the exception of just the shoulder strap. And the shoulder strap was the only thing that had shown any signs of wear, or deterioration I should say.

CE: Things are always, it seems, since 1936 when they discovered the brass plate of Drake, since then -- I forget the year you found this armor.

DP: Well, I couldn't tell you either. Between I would say '13 or '14, some place in there.

CE: But since then Charlie Slaymaker, the anthropologist, has unearthed, near Olompali, the Elizabethan coin which has been sent to the British Museum and it has been authenticated as an Elizabethan coin. You see, these artifacts, I suppose, will be continually discovered, possibly, and that now resides in the brass plate. What an adventure story. Did you know that, Mrs. Kent?

AK: No, I didn't. Never dreamed of it.

CE: Dolly Jenkins has got a couple of good photographs of that, do you have a --

DP: No, I haven't got a photograph.

CE: We'll make one available for you.

DP: All right, wonderful. Thank you very much.

CE: And that will be something we can do. Well how about Mrs. Kent? Do you want to ask Mr. Perry some things in conclusion?

AK: I can't think now of anything more; we've learned so many new things. We thought we knew about the Worn girls. Do you know that the little garden next to the Octagon House is in their memory?

DP: In their memory, yes.

AK: Did you do that?

DP: No, I didn't do it. I mean I furnished a lot of the plants and so forth.

AK: And the nice maple tree of which we have so many now; that was one of the early ones.

DP: Yes, that was Bella Worn, you see. And Bella Worn was really the motivating person in the things.

AK: Was their house where gardener man or that garden architect lives now, Kapranos? Was that the house?

DP: Yes, that was Beales, that was the Beales place.

AK: That was the Beales place? And didn't a great many of those things that you had, the awful job of taking over and -- They were grown here in Marin, weren't they?

DP: Oh, yes, sure. I mean, you could go out and chop any orchard here.

AK: She knew where everything was.

DP: Our home here which was a big, big place; I think it was fifteen, sixteen rooms or something like that and it has a Japanese fence. Do you remember that Japanese fence around the place?

AK: Oh, I loved that.

CE: That would be a knockout.

DP: And a big pagoda, I mean a doorway, gateway, I should say. I can remember the two polished gates. They were shellacked and were my father's pride and joy; he used to keep those things up. I'd come in there with the old horse and wagon, you know, on a dead gallop and every once in a while why the thing would skid a little bit and nick the gates. Well, I'd just reach up and grab the top of the gate like that and pull me right out of the seat and take off and start running in that direction.

CE: Do you have in your collection photographs and memorabilia of some photos of this home?

DP: No. I've got one or two that are very, very small but the place was so crowded with trees that you just couldn't get a picture of it from any direction. There were any number of big bays in there, and when I say big bays, I mean it. One was right outside the living room there was, oh, I would say at least twelve or thirteen feet in diameter and when we cut those trees down and had to move them out, you know, there wasn't, oh, that much live wood in the tree. They were all hollow; just decayed out.

AK: Where is the gate?

DP: You were asking about the creek here, Anne, and where we swam in it and so forth. Sure we did; we used to dam it up there with sacks and make a swimming pool there and we had a rope on one tree that came right across the creek here half way up. We had a rope that we could hang there and swing across the creek so we used to go back and forth from one side to the other, jump on one side and get off on the other.

CE: How much land do you have in this immediate nursery area here? And do you own the property across the creek also?

DP: I own some of it across the creek but mostly -- Well, no, I own both sides, yeah, except for about 100 feet here which goes through the middle of the creek.

CE: Where the gas station was, is that your land, too, sir?

DP: No, no. What happened was that the family place was just about from where this fence goes on -- not fence but house, from there to the Barber tract. And this right here, this part that we're on now belonged to Jim Leach and had a service station on it, the Union Oil Service Station, and that was torn down.

CE: Are any of the Leach boys still around?

DP: Yes, Jim is still alive.

CE: Is he the builder?

DP: No, no, he was the real estate agent; the builder was Larry.

CE: Mr. Perry, this has been a most interesting narrative and when you think that your great grandfather in 1859 came to Marin and what his contribution has been, the entire valley is named for him, Ross Landing. Whenever we have visitors, Mrs. Kent, in the Marin Art and Garden Center, they always want to know the story of the area and the families that settled in Ross Valley. And the Worn's who built the Octagon House. It's a rich area and we want to thank you for sharing with us today your reminiscences. Mrs. Kent?

AK: I think it is extra wonderful that you have all those grandchildren and six generations here in Marin. I think that's wonderful.

DP: Yes, it really is.

CE: You should be very proud.

DP: Well, I am proud and they're three fine boys. One of them just graduated from Stanford, one is going to the College of Pacific, and the other one is going there next year and they're good athletes and good clean boys.

CE: That's a great deal to be thankful for.

DP: Yes, yes, very happy.

CE: Well, thank you, Don. Thank you.

DP: Well, thank you very much and I hope I haven't rambled on too --

CE: No.

AK: Just great.

CE: And this will go into the archives of the California Room and we will provide a copy for you. Thank you.