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Anne T. Kent California Room

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Marin County Free Library
3501 Civic Center Dr. #427
San Rafael, California, 94903

INTERVIEW WITH FRANCIS S. RODGERS

by Carla Ehat & Anne Kent
November 10, 1980

INTERVIEWEE: Francis S. Rodgers (FR)

INTERVIEWERS: Carla Ehat (CE) and Anne Kent (AK)

DATE OF INTERVIEW: November 10, 1980

TRANSCRIBER: Marjorie Hoffman

CE: Today is Monday, November the 10th, 1980. Once again, continuing the Oral History project for the Moya Library and its California Room at the Marin County Library at Civic Center, this is Carla Ehat. And joining me today is Mrs. Thomas Kent. And for once we are doing an interview at my residence at 84 Glenwood Avenue, Ross, because Mrs. Kent is busy with the roofers. Well this morning we are going to talk with Francis Rodgers.

FR: Francis S. Rodgers.

CE: Francis S. Rodgers, thank you Francis. And you reside at number 1 Antoinette Avenue in San Rafael. Well the reason Francis is going to talk with us this morning -- He was born in Nicasio and the family had been there, as I understand it, Francis, since 1866. And Mr. Rodgers' grandfather, Frank Rodgers, owned the general store in the town for over thirty years. And Francis has brought a lot of ephemera today: the original deed dating back to 1866 and some other papers that he is going to share with us and generally tell us the history of his family and some of the early history of Novato. Good to have you here, Francis.

FR: Well thank you very much, Carla. It's a pleasure. But to start out with, I am not a historian but I am very interested now that I've become involved in not only the early Marin County history but also of my own family.

CE: Your own family, yes. Well I think there's a general increase in interest in genealogy, don't you, Francis?

FR: I do.

CE: The young people today seem to be sort of interested in what is their heritage, what are their roots and it's up to us, every family, to preserve it. Now, I think it's extraordinary, don't you, Mrs. Kent that he still has in his possession from 1866 this transfer of title? Give us a little background on that land. Didn't Timoteo Murphy have some jurisdiction over the distribution of --

FR: Well, Don Timoteo Murphy was involved some place along the line, I just don't -- I probably read it but I forgot it, that he became involved in the John Lucas Family. Then later on the Lucas Family became involved, I don't recall whether it was marriage but history will tell it, with the Dixon family and that's how the Dixon family got into it. And when my grandfather bought this property he was living in San Francisco.

CE: Back up just a minute. Where did your grandfather come from?

FR: Originally? Okay, just a minute, Carla. I'll give you the data on my grandpa. I'm comparing this.

CE: Was he born back on the Atlantic seaboard as many of them were?

FR: My grandfather, Frank Rodgers, came to California fifty-five years ago, 1859, from his home in Vermont. He has been in this county forty-three years. Came around the Horn to San Francisco about 1857.

CE: Ok.

FR: Over fifty years ago he married Mary Byrne.

CE: Now wait a minute, you're not saying over fifty years ago. We've got this mixed up, that must be a quote from a published document. We're talking about a hundred years ago.

FR: This is when he died.

CE: I see. This was from his obituary?

FR: This was what I took from the --

CE: When did he die?

FR: He died in 1914.

CE: Okay, that will give us an idea of date. Go ahead. Ok.

FR: Ok. From 1879 to 80 he served as a supervisor in Nicasio District. During his term the Poor Farm was established. The funeral of Mr. Rodgers will be held at such and such a date which is immaterial. At the time -- When he moved from San Francisco he was selling water and he was selling water at the time of his marriage.

CE: Water from where? San Francisco?

FR: Spring water in San Francisco. Now where he got the water, I don't know, but a lot of the water in San Francisco in those days was barged over from Sausalito.

CE: Right. So that's what he did. He had a Marin contact then; he was bringing it over.

FR: Well, that I couldn't tell you. There again, history fails in many of these points. But, anyway, he was selling water, and what brought him to Nicasio Valley I'll never know.

CE: No record of that?

FR: There's no record of that. And the only records that I have are these old papers that were handed down which tells the amount of acreage involved.

CE: How big?

FR: It was fourteen hundred and seventy nine acres.

CE: He bought the old Dixon ranch, I understand.

FR: It was a portion of the Dixon ranch. Now I can show you this plot map which was dated in 1880 and it's the lands of Frank Rodgers. And this constituted, apparently, four

parcels divided into so many acres and it totaled out to fourteen hundred and seventy nine acres. It adjoined the J.C. Dixon ranch which is at the top of Whites Hill, going over White's Hill.

CE: Are there two Dixon families?

FR: At one time --

CE: Dixon and Dickson?

FR: That's right. The Dickson one was the San Geronimo Dicksons.

CE: Was a neighbor, too. But that isn't the same Dixon. Your grandfather bought from the Dixon.

FR: Dixon.

CE: See now, that's kind of confusing, too. Okay. And then James Miller --

FR: The only part that I've never been able to understand is where the old family home was. It was down in this point right here because the Lucas Valley Road and the creek come down this way and there's another creek that comes down and there's a division between the James Miller Ranch and so forth. And there was a little parcel in here which I think -- See it? It was Mrs. M.L. Lucas. Was the owner of that particular piece and I think that's where -- and I got a picture of the old home here -- and I think that's where they eventually lived all their life was on that home there. Because, the dairy ranch -- they had a dairy ranch up on top of the hill which has now all been sub-divided and the history of that is in there; not the history, but it was sold several years ago, 1940, 1941. It was sold to this Mexican by the name of Gonzales, and it's all been sub-divided into -- But the dairy ranch was up there and I still don't know whether or not they -- They probably had dairies when they first came over because in one of Mason's books it's recorded that in 1866 my grandfather took over the Dixon holdings. Now the only Dixon holdings that it could have been was this piece of property here, because afterwards, history will also tell you that Dixon had a mill in there.

CE: Well, it is my understanding, correct me if I'm wrong, that some of those early families that got into Nicasio were into dairying and cattle.

FR: That's right.

CE: And another group, a little later, went in there and did a lot of lumbering.

FR: That's right.

CE: I was surprised, Mrs. Kent, to read that in 1862 the same James Dixon went into partnerships with James Ross and they skidded lumber all the way to Ross Landing.

FR: I have all of that.

CE: Okay. Well now what -- Do you know what got your grandfather out of the dairy, into the store?

FR: No.

CE: Or having a general store?

FR: That's a mystery.

CE: Maybe that was in his heritage back in Vermont. Maybe his antecedents were merchandisers. Because you know to open a store it takes money.

FR: No, the store was there; he was not the first one. He was not the first one. The first store is another story.

CE: Oh, that's right, there was an Ed Jackson, wasn't there?

FR: There was an Ed Jackson; that's right. Ed Jackson had operated the first store. And --

CE: So your grandfather got it from him?

FR: My grandfather was born in Vermont.

CE: Yes, in 1830.

FR: In 1830. But how he got into the store business I'll never know.

CE: Did you know your grandfather?

FR: Oh, very well, very well. When he died in 1914 -- I was born in '02 so I would have been twelve years old, so I knew him well enough, but he'd be just grandpa. In fact, I have a picture of him; he was just Grandpa, and Grandma; Grandpa and Grandma. And the old place, it has to be that parcel because when Dixon supposedly opened his mill it was a mile and a half east of Nicasio which would have been right where the home was and I still want to find out someday who built the home, whether Dixon built it or what.

CE: Have you talked with Mrs. -- There's a woman we interviewed, Ellen Redding McNeil.

FR: Oh, sure.

CE: Doesn't she sort of live kind of east of the town? Her property?

FR: Well, no, they lived, I'd say, northeast.

CE: Northeast. Well I just wondered if it was anywhere in that direction.

FR: No. Now she is right at the edge of the redwoods; she's moved back up from LA; she lives there with -- You went out to see her, yes. She's quite a character. And the daughter, too; I've seen the daughter.

CE: And I'll tell you another family we interviewed is Nellie Mc Isaac, fortunately before she died.

FR: Well Nellie -- Nellie came in --

CE: Is that sort of near your property?

FR: No. The Mc Isaac ranch was out toward where the lake is now. In fact part of the lake took some of their property away. But Neil is with his sons in a dairy ranch in Novato.

CE: Okay, well let's get back to this family now. Tell us a little bit more about your grandfather. And I understand he married a girl from Ireland, Mary Byrne, and that there were six children, one of whom was your father.

FR: Yes. He leaves a wife, Mrs. Frank Rodgers, that was my grandmother, and four children, Mrs. Lillian Fitzgerald, Frank E. and William A. Rodgers and Clara Belle and he was the father of the late Nettie Wake. She died earlier in life. As I started to say, his home was in Vermont but I don't think there was much more that I could dig up on it about what he did before he came here, before he came to California. You were asking whether he was in the store business.

CE: Do you think he was attracted -- Well, he came in sixty-six, that was fifteen years after the gold rush.

FR: That's right. I like to think it was one of those things that -- The west was growing; a lot of those people were restless. Now the company brought him out to California-- It was either restlessness or the thought of pioneering; I just don't know, I couldn't tell you.

CE: You don't know if he came over land.

FR: He came around the Horn.

CE: He came around the Horn, I didn't know that.

FR: Oh, yes, it's a matter of record. In fact, I got that from my aunt who was instrumental in -- She loved history herself; she was a school teacher. She put that data all down, that they came around the Horn. And my grandmother came across the Isthmus of Panama.

CE: Were they married in California?

FR: They were married in San Francisco in 1858. Yeah.

CE: She came from Ireland and she landed in San Francisco and that's where they met and married.

FR: She was a seamstress in San Francisco when they got married. She was a seamstress.

CE: Her maiden name was Mary Byrne?

FR: Mary Byrne. I've got that here someplace.

CE: Do you have any idea how long they lived in the city before they came over or was that soon after they came to Nicasio?

FR: Don't know. My grandmother was born in Ireland in 1838 and when she died she was 82.

CE: Where did she die?

FR: She died -- Well, there was confusion about that as far as I'm concerned. The death notice said she died at the old home, but I think she was living with my aunt in San Rafael. She died in 1920. And I've still got to go back and dig up because after my grandfather die -- He died in 1940. I know she lived there by herself but she wouldn't have lived there for six years when she was up in her eighties, that's quite obvious. So, I think she died in San Rafael.

CE: I think the details of that you just have to work into your own genealogy.

FR: That's right, yes.

CE: Well, tell us now about your father. I mean, your grandfather started the store then; where was the home place?

FR: He didn't start the store, he bought it already a store, and the home place apparently must have been -- I'll never know whether they came from the ranch on the hill, which is just a terrible place for a dairy ranch and there's nothing but an old dirt road that led up to it. And the house up there, as I recall, I remember seeing it once or twice; it wasn't that big to accommodate that big family. Now whether some of them stayed in San Francisco until they got a bigger home -- Because the old home in the redwoods, which I think is that particular piece of property there that was taken over from Dixon, and the story is that my grandfather took over the Dixon holdings in 1866. Well, history says that Dixon had a mill a mile and a half east of Nicasio which would be this spot, so apparently that's where the Dixons lived.

CE: And the family was raised. Any pictures of that old house?

FR: I have --

CE: We can look at them later.

FR: That's another story.

CE: Ok. Is that where your father was born?

FR: No, my father was born in San Francisco.

CE: Oh he was born in San Francisco.

FR: He was born in San Francisco.

CE: What year was he born?

FR: My father was born in September the 27th, 1867; he died July 15, 1938. The record was taken from the San Rafael Independent Journal, July 15, 1938 and it's headed, "Frank Rodgers, longtime Nicasio merchant dies. Resident of Marin County for many years and a pioneer merchant of Nicasio where he conducted a general merchandise store for

several decades prior to his retirement and removal to San Rafael. A native of San Francisco, Rodgers came to Marin as a young man and engaged in business. “

CE: Did he go in business with his father?

FR: I have an old business card with my father's name, Frank E. Rodgers, in the middle of it and on one corner scratched out is Frank Rodgers who was his father and my grandfather and on the right hand corner was William E., which was my uncle. And so, apparently there was a family affair when they first started out and it ended up with my father. And my father married in 1900.

CE: Who did he marry?

FR: He married Carrie Scott of Scott Hardware in San Rafael. Scott Hardware was set up by an in-law by the name of Walsh. Walsh came into the family someplace. And so then my mother was involved with them, with Uncle Arthur, and then Walsh died so the business became the property of my uncle and my mother. Would you like to hear a sideline on that one?

CE: Sure.

FR: The sideline is also very, very interesting to the extent that Uncle Arthur never paid off my mother his share and this was always good for a laugh. And Jeff, the present proprietor -- I think Jeff is Chinese, at the present store now nowadays -- and he's dug up a couple of newspaper articles and I told Jeff one day, I said, “You know there's a very interesting part to that. My mother's name is mentioned but she never got her share of the estate, if you want to call it that.” And time and time again, after I started high school in 1917, when we first got a Model T Ford because we had no means of transportation, my mother would say, “Go in and see Uncle Arthur today after school and ask him if he's got any money.” And that always strikes me so funny that here I was, and I didn't know what the story was; it didn't come out. Uncle Arthur owes Ma some money so I'll go and see -- And finally, it finally got to the point Uncle Arthur would see me coming in, “Okay, Francis, tell your mother I'll take care of it later.” I never got inside the door! Well, that was a sideline. And to her dying day -- And then I have a baptismal record which showed that Uncle Arthur was, I think, my godfather, if I'm correct. So I was baptized in the little church up there in Nicasio. So apparently they came out for the day. But of course in 1902 I don't remember too much about that.

CE: No. Well, listen, when your father got married and entered the business, where did they live in Nicasio?

FR: The house is still there.

CE: Still there?

FR: Yes, the house is still there. Here's the store. Here's the house there as it looked. When this picture was taken, I don't know, but this was very, very old because the house has been razed. I remember I heard talk about that, they razed the house and then --

CE: Well, listen, while you're standing up here, Francis, I've got a little rough square here, would you mark on this map for me -- Here's the town square of Nicasio, there's the Catholic Church; now where was your grandfather's business?

FR: The store is right about in here, see, and the house, our house, was right on the corner here. This house was right on this corner, see? And then there was a road.

CE: Wait, this is the street, so this is the house?

FR: Yes. And there's the store. Then it goes up.

CE: And here's the General Store. Now, is the General Store very close to where the hotel was?

FR: Well, on the opposite corner. The church is here, now, see?

CE: Coming from San Geronimo and here's the way to Nicasio Lake.

FR: Yes, that's right. Now, as you come in from San Geronimo normally the road went like this. And the old Blacksmith Shop, which is still there, was right about there. It looks exactly like it is today. I don't know what they use it for. Then, there was a -- It shows a picture of the Redding home in here.

CE: Alright, where was the Redding home, over here?

FR: No, no, the Redding home was right here next to the Blacksmith Shop. See, this particular house sits right in next to the -- This was, I think, when the Reddings first came through there. And the little butcher shop, which is still there, right next door to it.

CE: This is good to know, isn't it, Mrs. Kent?

AK: Oh, it's great.

FR: Then you see this was closer to the corner because when I grew up there was another building in there but it wasn't used for anything, see. This was a bocce ball court, right in here; they had a bocce ball court. Then there was a parcel of ground in here that -- That present quonset hut belongs to the Druids; they took that, and then next to that between the butcher shop and that was -- I just don't know what it was; it was abandoned building when I grew up. There was nothing in it. That constituted that. Then there was a road that went right back over here, goes back to these dairy ranches, and went back on top. See the road went back over there. And our house was right on that corner, just like this picture.

CE: Well, where was the hotel?

FR: The hotel was on -- The hotel -- See the church should be over here, you see, and the hotel is here, because the church was right up here, the church should be here. Wait, wait, excuse me. The church is right there, see, well, the hotel has to be on the other corner.

CE: Has to be here.

FR: No, no, no, has to be on the other corner there.

CE: Well, this is the road. This is how you come in and --

FR: No, most of the time we went this way.

CE: Well, aren't there homes along here, this part of the square?

FR: No, there was only one home here. There was another home -- In my day, Taft, Hiram Taft lived there.

CE: Where was the school, down here?

FR: No, no, no, the school was way out over here.

CE: We're getting mixed up here. We'll draw the map later. Let's get back to the story. Now, some of those -- Your father lived anyway on the square, your family home was. And some of your neighbors at the time -- I mean, you were born there at home?

FR: Yes, I was born there.

CE: Sure. How many children? You have brothers and sisters?

FR: Well, I was the oldest, then I had a sister who was born in 1903.

CE: You were born in 1902. Okay, Francis, what's your sister's name?

FR: Alice; she was born September of 1903. Then I had a brother that was born in the earthquake. I'll never forget, he was born in October of 1906; he was an earthquake boy.

CE: What was his name?

FR: Arthur. Then my brother John came in very, very late in life. He was born in 1911. He was born in San Francisco. All the rest of us, to my knowledge, were born in Nicasio. Of course, there was no place else to go.

CE: Are all your brothers and sisters --

FR: No, my brother John and I are the only ones left. My sister died a short time ago and my brother Artie died many years ago. He died young; he died at 47.

CE: Okay, now, what was life -- Tell us a little bit about your life growing up in Nicasio. Did you have as a boy -- interrupting you -- certain chores or were you in town or were you on a ranch?

FR: No, we were right in the house. The house and the store were part of our life growing up.

CE: Did your dad get up and go off to the store immediately?

FR: He was in that store all day long.

CE: What did you sell in the general store? Give us an idea.

FR: Well, in those days it was all can goods, everything was canned. Flour came in fifty pound sacks, sugar came in sacks. Crackers -- I'll never forget the crackers because the cracker box was my playpen when I was growing up. Cracker boxes used to be, oh, I'd say about that long and about that square and about that deep and they used to buy the soda crackers.

CE: Two foot square, yes.

FR: Then the rest of it, of course he had overalls and shirts which were very appropriate for country people and he had a lot of shoes.

CE: Maybe work gloves and shoes?

FR: Yes, all of that merchandise.

CE: Any horses?

FR: No, we didn't have any horses. My grandfather had the horses but my uncle who lived next door, Harry Wigg, who married my father's sister and lived next door, he had gray horses, pair of gray horses, and he had a buggy horse. So whenever we went buggying -- I've got some pictures of that -- we used Uncle Harry's horse and buggy. But growing up Nicasio was -- There were really no kids there.

CE: During your early years?

FR: Yes, when I grew up. The Stewart family was down the road and there was only one in that and that's Boyd Stewart who is now out at Olema, on one of their ranches.

CE: Now where was their ranch?

FR: Well, it was as you go through Nicasio, it was the first dairy ranch before you hit the school on the right hand side. It was only down the road about a half a mile or so and his father dairied in there. Boyd and I graduated from grammar school in 1916. Well anyway, Boyd was one of those that -- When he went home, that was it. I never recall Boyd being up around the store or anywhere with us, where the kids would naturally play.

CE: Did your father run this store himself or did he have some help?

FR: At times he had help. At times he would have help. Because he had to have help because when you get married in 1900 -- Of course, he was a native son and the native sons used to -- The hall was upstairs, as that picture would show you there. You got the United Order of the Druids and the Druids some place along bought that. So, he was a native son and September 9th was Admission Day and we all -- Getting back to that a

minute ago, getting back, I wanted -- I never even asked them why they got married. I don't know why they got married. They're married, so what?

CE: Then all the records were lost in the Court House in the earthquake fire. Was he married in the city?

FR: Here's the story. I finally got it out of the Marin County Tocsin: "September 15, 1900. Mr. Frank E. Rodgers, the well-known business man of Nicasio was married last Sunday in San Francisco, September 9th, to Miss Carrie Scott of San Rafael. The wedding took place in St. Mary's Cathedral, Reverend Father Dempsey officiating. The bride is a sister of City Treasurer Scott and a universal favorite." They used great words in those days. "And a universal favorite." Imagine that; that's a beauty. "In common with the many friends, the Tocsin wished Mr. and Mrs. Rodgers long life and happiness."

CE: Well, it's good you've got that record because the records were burned.

FR: I knew when they were married, so --

CE: You knew when you came along.

FR: I knew when I came along. So, anyway, as kids we grew up -- As kids growing up, of course, don't forget this was in bootlegging days.

CE: That's right.

FR: Back in bootlegging days. And Pa had a bar; the old bar was in there, and, of course, he sold, he sold keg beer. There was no bottle -- There was bottle beer also, which the dairymen would take home where they'd buy a case of bottled beer and they'd take it to the ranch with them. But, as we grew up, we'd hang around the store; there was no place else to go.

CE: The Blacksmith's Shop?

FR: Well, yes, you'd go and watch them shoe horses on occasion. Not until later did I get going to the ranches where I would stay overnight with some of the other kids. But when we'd go into the store, as we grew up, got older -- And there was always somebody back in that bar, and the language was typical, so Pa would eventually chase us kids out. We'd find some place else.

CE: But you were attracted there.

FR: Then as I grew up I used to get up in the morning and I'd go over and maybe sweep out the store and then maybe after school -- My job, and then, of course, my sister as she got older, then my brother came along in the act, why, we'd go down to the creek and get sand and keep the bocce ball court in shape.

CE: Who ran that? Your dad?

FR: Well, it was part of -- The bocce ball court those days was an asset to the business because it drew people on a Sunday afternoon to play bocce ball and then, of course, there was beer involved and maybe a few drinks, cheese and crackers or whatever the case might be, see. So, anyway, the bocce ball court was there. And then of course us kids would kind of sprinkle the place down, sweep the porch off. But as I say every time there was anything in the bar we'd get chased out. So with the result I'd get chased out of that store so many times that by the time I graduated from high school there was nothing for me in Nicasio; I was not interested. So the result was I immediately moved into San Rafael to get in for myself. I went into business but it was in San Rafael. As I grew up had I been encouraged to follow it all the -- Well, apparently for some reason or other my father didn't want it. I don't know. Maybe it was because of the environment, which very likely it was. But he'd be in that store and then --

CE: Did he run any accounts?

FR: Oh, it was all accounts, it'd have to be. I only wish those books could have been saved but apparently they were passed on to August La Franchi who took over in 1927. He bought it out. And apparently all the books went with him. But I do remember that they had a terrible time collecting a lot of them. See what I mean? Without a doubt I think those days a lot of it was the barter system, you know. But the dairymen of those days they had -- Oh, they all had cattle, they milked, and many of them --

End, Tape 1, Side A

CE: Well, tell me, Francis, how would your father get the stuff in and out? You have a picture there of all that merchandise. Did they connect with the train?

FR: All the merchandise came up by train to San Geronimo. It was a freight, you know.

CE: And it was called then something else. It was called Nicasio Station, wasn't it?

FR: Nicasio Station.

CE: And how far was that?

FR: It was four and a half miles over the hill.

CE: Dirt road and all that?

FR: Dirt road in those days. To Nicasio and the stage line was conducted by Hiram Taft who at that time was Postmaster in 1870. He was the first postmaster and he was also the Wells Fargo agent. So in addition to carrying any passengers -- That was their only means of transportation was via this stage line. The passengers I don't recall were too many but then his business was packing the -- what cream there was and the butter and the beer and, of course, all the groceries that were involved in the store.

CE: Now as I understand it the post office was in your father's and grandfather's building?

FR: The post office was right there and the Wells Fargo office was right there, the Wells Fargo agent was right there and I grew up with Hiram Taft's son, Chester, who eventually took that end of it, see. And Hiram, of course by that time, was getting probably quite old. And this section of the store is where my father had sacks of feed.

CE: Oh, that's a big item.

FR: Sacks of feed which were vital because all the dairymen, they all raised their own hay, but they all used the mill feed in conjunction with the --

CE: As a supplement?

FR: As a supplement I suppose, which was par for the course in those days.

CE: We went out to visit Franklin Burns and his operation out in Chileno Valley and I went to the milking barn at milking time and he was giving them these goodies just as you described.

FR: Well in those days there were no such thing as machines; it was all by hand.

CE: Oh, I realize that.

FR: But getting back to being raised there, it was just like I said before, there was a blacksmith shop and then, of course, the old hotel was in operation and you'd go up to the old hotel and kind of visit but there --

CE: Tell us a little bit about that hotel. I understand William Miller build it in 1867 and --

FR: That's right. And it changed hands many times.

CE: Describe the old hotel, will you?

FR: Well, by the time I had got into it, it had reached the stage where, it had reached the point rather, where the visitors weren't there. But the automobiles were coming in and the visitors were not like they were in the early days where they would come out and they had the advertised fishing and they had a place to hunt, you know. And they would do that. But when I became old enough to remember it, a man by the name of McNeil owned the hotel.

CE: That's the same McNeil family that the Redding girl married into?

FR: No, I don't think so. I think it's another McNeil family. But he owned it. And I don't recall any travelers being involved at that particular time other than the occasion a salesman would come through. And I remember a fellow by the name of Daly who worked for. He was a salesman for William Cluff and Company in San Francisco, and he was the one who sold most of the merchandise to my dad, especially the canned merchandise. On occasion he would be up and stay overnight at the old hotel.

CE: I see. It had twenty-two rooms, I understand.

FR: It had dilapidated to a very, very great extent down through the years.

CE: It was supposed to have had a nice bar and parlor.

FR: Everything originally was set up, it was.. But as I grew up with it, it had reached the point where everything had been deteriorated.

CE: Well, it burnt down, I understand.

FR: It eventually burnt down.

CE: Was that in the fire of 1940 when a lot of things burnt down?

FR: I think it was 1940.

CE: Druids Hall burnt down.

FR: No, that was later.

CE: And your grandfather's general store?

FR: The store burnt down -- well -- My dad moved out in 1927 and August La Franchi took over and his son-in-law, Joe Dentoni, was involved. And in addition to the store they took what was originally our store room and put the bar in there and a dining room and they served meals in there. And they finally pulled out of it and a man by the name of -- slips my mind for a moment -- He took over. And then when he took over, when he had it, it burnt down. That's another story. It's an available story; if you haven't got it I've got the newspaper clipping of that. When it burnt down in the winter night, it was a heavy stormy night. And it was just remarkable that the house next, which is right across the road -- Our house wasn't any further than here to my car out in front, and they were very lucky to save the house. And I think that's what they did. They couldn't stop the fire because they had to pump out the creeks. That's the only place they had any water; no hydrants or anything like that.

CE: You weren't at home?

FR: No, I wasn't at home.

CE: You were in your twenties. You were out.

FR: Oh, yes, we were all out by that time.

CE: Let's get back to your schooling again. Now that restored school house that's red, is that the same location and everything?

FR: That little red school house has not been moved, it's in exactly the same location.

And of course, school -- school was another great thing. And I enjoyed going to school.

CE: You did? Good.

FR: Oh, I really enjoyed going to school. But, really, there was nothing else to do. So, that was the place to go, go to school.

CE: How many were there in your class or your school? Was it all class teaching --

FR: It was one room.

CE: A one-room school house.

FR: And I recall going through. I don't recall the first teacher because naturally when you start to school at age five, normally, you know, you just don't recall who your teacher might have been. But I do recall I had a teacher by the name of Harris. I don't know where she came from. And in those days the teachers used to live at various homes and I don't recall where she lived. But then there was another one came in, a lady by the name of Byson or Bryson and she came from Two Rock over in Sonoma County and whether she went back and forth or whether she lived with someone I don't recall neither. The last teacher when I graduated was Kathy Gallagher and the Gallagher family was down -- was west and she used to walk up the back road where the lake is now. That's all under water now, see, so she was the one I graduated from. As I say, I graduated in 1916 and Papa Gallagher, as we called him, had bought a great big Studebaker Special Six, I guess it was. It was a great big open car. So there was Helen Gallagher, his daughter, Boyd Stewart, and myself, and maybe a couple of others, and we went to Olema. That's where the central setup was and all the kids came from Bolinas, Tomales and the whole area, the whole area of northern Marin, gathered at the Olema School where we took our final examinations from out of grammar school. This picture was taken in 1916. At that time there was about sixteen of us. There's maybe a couple missing.

CE: Where are you?

FR: Oh, I would be up here.

CE: Where's Boyd?

FR: Boyd Stewart is right there. And this was Helen Gallagher and this is Ceil Taft and this is my sister. And here, I graduated with Jessie Ceil Taft, which was related to Hiram Taft, Helen Gallagher, Boyd Stewart and myself and we never had to go anywhere. So as I say -- Oh, there's a picture of the old home taken from a hayfield down here.

CE: Now what old home are we --

FR: This, what I think is the original -- It could have been the Dixon home but this is when my grandfather moved into when he came down off the hill, which is away back up on top over here, see. And so now I'm going to take this out and give it to Mrs. Roos; she just recently made some additions to it.

CE: Is this house still standing?

FR: The original is still there but she's made some big additions to it. Now what she did to it I don't know; I'm going to go out some day and see.

CE: Now where is that in relation to the town square? What direction?

FR: It's a mile and a half east going up through Lucas Valley Road. Where the Redding place is now, where Ellen Redding is living. You go through the redwoods and just as you come out of the redwoods maybe about a mile up, still going towards, coming down to San Rafael, it sets over to the right. You've passed it time and time again. It'll be very interesting to go out there some day. Mrs. Roos, I think -- He was an attorney in San Francisco, he died several years ago but she's still living there.

CE: They'd probably love for you to come out there.

FR: Oh, I've been there. She's taken me through the house but that was many years ago. But the road is very sharp; there's a wooden gate there that is always open and to the right, it'll be the first road to the right after you get through the valley. Of course, there's several off there. Homes are all built in there, but this is the first road that takes to the right and it only goes in there about -- oh, maybe a couple of blocks. That house sets on this parcel of ground here, you see?

CE: Where would the road be, relative to this plot here?

FR: Well, the road comes around right over like this, see. And then of course the creek comes through here, see. And it's right -- It's a pie-shaped piece of ground, so to speak. But it -- I think it covered about -- I forget how many acres that covered. I've never got into digging up information on that yet: how much ground that covered. But this house sat in that parcel of ground right there which was dugged up from Lucas at that time and then I think went on down to the Dixon holdings. That's what they're referring to.

CE: Look at this fine piece of linen. This is an assessment map.

FR: Yeah, isn't that something?

AK: That's good.

CE: Showing part of the Rancho San Pedro, Santa Margarita, Los Gallinas.

AK: It would not have been a part of the Redding Ranch.

FR: No, the Redding Ranch was at the corner of the Lucas Valley Road, where the San Geronimo Road comes in. Ellen now is on the old Redding Ranch. And the Reddings took it over from, I think, a family by the name of Conway.

CE: Yeah.

FR: The Conways I think married into the Redding. I think Mrs. Redding was a Conway, see. But that property is still there.

CE: Well listen, I want to throw some names at you, people that were around and in business when you were a little boy. See, do you remember any of these names?

Anderfuren?

FR: Anderfuren. He was a blacksmith at one time. He was a blacksmith. And then his son -- And they lived right across from the Montecito Shopping Center. The lived there afterwards, many, many years afterwards, in San Rafael.

CE: How about Cornwell? Horseshoe-er, I understand.

FR: Well, I don't remember him too well, but Jesse, the son, Jesse Cornwell, the son, dairied on this place afterwards. He wasn't there for a while but he wasn't there for very long. And then they moved. They moved into San Rafael. I kind of lost track of --

CE: How about W. T. Farley?

FR: Well the Farleys came in many, many years ago. I haven't got the --

CE: No, but --

FR: I haven't got detail. But the Farley Family I grew up with. Of course, they were older. There was --

CE: Was he the butcher? Do I have that straight?

FR: No, the original -- The father was the butcher.

CE: The father was the butcher.

FR: The father was the butcher. And then May Farley came in, and I came across that the other day; he came in from Chileno Valley, and Bill Farley was home. They lived at Nicasio, and then they formed the Farley Brothers and went into the cattle business. They were buying and selling and on occasion, as I grew up, they would kill a beef and

everybody, anybody that wanted meat, they used the little butcher shop there, see. Tulley was the butcher, see. Well they were all -- Kill a beef and then cut it in half and cut pieces off; there was no sizes involved in it. What do you want? You want some steak or what do you want or do you want some bones? Whatever it was you got, see. They had it.

CE: How about Marioni?

FR: Well Marioni, he was down, he was down the road about a half a mile and he had a bar there. The Marioni family. I don't think they had any saloon bar, saloon in those days. Yes, that's right. I don't remember too much about going to school with them.

CE: You mentioned a few of your classmates in the picture. Would you mind mentioning some of their names? These are people that were your contemporaries, right?

FR: Yes. Well, Jessie Filippini -- The Filippinis came in there many, many years ago. Her father and probably her grandfather dairied and then later in life, her father raised chickens and sold the eggs. He peddled eggs. He used to horse and buggy eggs to San Rafael. I guess he went to Grosjeans probably and then I guess he'd make one trip to San Rafael and the next trip to Petaluma. And then afterwards he got a Model T Ford and he used that for transportation.

CE: Well, when you were a youngster were there any cars around then or were you still sort of the end of the wagon?

FR: I remember the first Maxwell. A man by the name of Respini. His family are still there. They're about the only ones left -- the LaFranchis-- it came down through the ages. But Respini was the first one, I think, to come up with a Maxwell car and as a kid it had a little box seat on the back and I remember as a kid he'd give us a ride around the block and that was our first experience in an automobile and I don't recall what year that was.

CE: Well, as a boy growing up, did you have access to a horse? The neighbors, you said--

FR: My uncle's was the only one. I was no horseback rider because I'll tell you what happened one day! My uncle -- gee, you get me wound up.

CE: That's ok!

FR: I've got a dental appointment at 2:00; that's all I have to do. But, anyway, talking about that horse, I never could stay on a horse's back. So, anyway, there was a hay field here, and this is very interesting. I love this picture. I think it's the greatest. Look at that.

CE: Oh, that is great.

FR: This is myself and my sister. This was taken -- My cousin took this in 1908.

CE: Oh, isn't that great. Right in the back of the house, the property --

FR: This was the old hotel up here, see. And this was a barn, and our house. He had a hay field here, and our house, these are the oak trees and right across, right there was the house and then the store was right across that road, see. Talking about that horse. So, in that hayfield Uncle Harry would have us -- I thought you'd enjoy some of these pictures --

AK: These are wonderful.

FR: So, I'll never forget, I got on the back of the horse one day in the hayfield and we were going up to take him to the barn. I guess Uncle Harry had told us. My brother, Artie, was younger and he opened the gate for me and as he went through the gate he kind of raised his hand and that horse took off like that and the horse kept on a-going and I went over there. So I was never much on horseback riding, see. I just don't recall being on horses too much.

CE: Okay, now we have to get back to your family a minute. Would you describe your father as far as his temperament, his character, how he treated you and the children and

your mother. Was he a very dependable, conscientious -- My Lord, look at him. Is this your dad on the right here?

FR: This is my father on the right, yes.

CE: And who is that dandy he's talking to with the high beaver?

FR: That's a fellow by the name of Taylor. And Taylor was a resident of Nicasio years ago but I don't remember him.

CE: Look at that, Mrs. Kent. He's a handsome devil, wasn't he?

FR: Well, maybe that's what I got from my mother, I don't know. But Pa was in that store so much, you know, that we grew up practically without a father.

CE: Would you children have dinner before he got home or would you meet at the dinner table?

FR: There was times that he just didn't get home.

CE: I see.

FR: I remember as I grew older I would take his dinner over, you see, and he'd eat right there in the store because apparently at those times he was all alone and if there was people, well, you just didn't close those doors because you never knew who was coming in for something.

CE: So the hours were --

FR: The hours were very typical of that in many, many cases.

AK: Who's this? Who's the other man?

CE: Taylor.

FR: His name was Taylor. So Dad was in the store all the time, you know, except on occasion. On this particular occasion he had this man here who was working for him. But the only trouble is when he'd get them here, these men would -- They were young people; they'd come out from Petaluma. Well, there was nothing in the world for them to do in Nicasio.

CE: The clerk, you mean? So they'd get --

FR: He was the clerk and these people invariably lived up at the old hotel and I presume maybe somebody must have fed them up there. They must have had meals there because it was very, very seldom that they would eat at our house. So most the time they would --

CE: They'd come and go, these clerks?

FR: Well, he didn't have them all the time. I can only recall about -- I recall this man and I recall another one that he had. Oh, that's much later. That's when I get into business myself in San Rafael; that's another story. But, my mother -- As I recall I never had much conversation with my father.

CE: He wouldn't talk to you and say how were things going at school and --

FR: Well, I suppose he did but that was it. He was kind of removed.

CE: Removed. Well, your mother, I guess, was --

FR: My mother was very prominent.

CE: Describe your mother. Was she a very loving, resourceful woman?

FR: Well, yes, that's right. She was, considering that -- Here's one that was taken in 1900, when they were married. See, that was the old house. See, that's what it looked like in the old days. Well, I presume my mother was typical. You know what I mean. She was a --

CE: Do you have a photograph of her?

FR: She was a gracious lady. I've got her here in the --

CE: Did she run the entire home without any help?

FR: Oh, yes, we never had any help. Of course, those days when there was a birth, all of the ladies got in because I always -- I remember, I think, Neil Mc Isaac told me that my mother helped deliver him, so there was somewhat of a midwife connection and I know of another case where the Albertoni twins, which is right across from Jim Rodgers' family and Clarence Rodgers who now lives in Olema, he tells a story of his mother coming home one morning. Of course, the kids have all been in bed. His mother was coming home and his father said -- I think her name was Mary. "What happened, Mary?" and she said, "Jim, you wouldn't believe it. Twins!" And that was the Albertoni girls. So they probably took care of one another in those days like that.

CE: Well, they were, in a sense -- You were isolated out there.

FR: You were absolutely isolated.

CE: You had to be more resourceful.

FR: There was no such thing as you got to pay to go to the doctor; there was no such thing. They were all home cures. And I'll give you an old home cure that I still stick with.

CE: What's that?

FR: When you get a cold, and I do it invariably, if I feel a cold coming on I get the eucalyptus oil, take a spoon full of sugar (not a spoonful, a little sugar), few drops of eucalyptus oil, and you'd better be ready because it's horrible to take but it goes down. So, I go to Doctor Dooley and Doctor Dooley said, "You've got a little cold." "Yes, but I'll cure that, Doc." He says, "What do you take?" And I told him and he said, "Yes, that's an old cure and it still works, too." But, who had a doctor? On occasion I guess if there was anything serious a doctor would come out to Nicasio but he came out in a horse and buggy. That's all there was to it.

CE: From San Rafael?

FR: From San Rafael. I don't recall anybody coming from Petaluma.

CE: Would that be Doctor Howitt or somebody like that?

FR: No, I think it was Courzier those days; Courzier was one of the old doctors in San Rafael. Courzier. And then we had a Doctor Cavanaugh who was most of the time called. He was a railroad doctor and lived in Point Reyes Station. But then again, he had to come on horse and buggy.

CE: Well redefine the road from Nicasio to San Rafael. It was that four miles over to the train station, or where?

FR: The road is in exactly in the same location except where when you come to Nicasio Hill. If you come from Nicasio, as you hit the Nicasio Hill -- You know what Nicasio Hill I'm talking about in San Geronimo?

CE: I'm not too sure.

FR: Right down in San Geronimo.

CE: Oh, I see, by the golf course.

FR: That's right. As you come up, as you approach it and hit the bottom of the hill, the old road went to the right which is now blocked and was quite steep. But now of course they come around it and then when it went down the other side they replaced that road; otherwise it's in exactly the same direction.

CE: You went over White's Hill?

FR: Then it came -- You crossed the railroad tracks at San Geronimo. There was no such thing as the golf course. You went straight across and the old road which is still there went around where there are all homes in there. And it followed through and crossed the

railroad track at Woodacre. Then after you went through Woodacre it stayed to the right. The present road is on the old railroad right-of-way, and you can still drive it. It goes out through the redwoods and came over White's Hill, which has been changed, but the road is identically within moving it from here to there and maybe taking out some of the grade. Why it's the same spot; it hasn't been changed.

CE: And the only way you could get there is horse and buggy.

FR: Horse and buggy. And that used to be quite a trip when we came to town. Now, on those particular cases my dad must have had somebody because I can remember we'd drive to San Rafael. Of course, it was a long ride, you know, horse and buggy, but the trip going home was always interesting because of the fact in those days, whenever the local bartenders, or barkeeps or whatever you want to call them, they all had saloons, they would always stop. And our first stop coming through from San Rafael was Billy Shannon's. Of course, you've heard of Billy Shannon's? The second stop -- and, of course, Pa would have to go in and pay his respects and spend a couple of dollars in reciprocation because Billy probably had visited him the week before, I don't know. Then the second stop would be Bragg's.

CE: Where was that?

FR: Bragg's was Fairfax. He had a little -- I forget whether it was a little grocery store or a little bar. Before we got to Bragg's there was another one which would be as you turn into Pastori's. But I forget his name, but he had probably a bootlegging. But we had to stop there and pay our respects. Then we'd go up over this little hill and down into Fairfax, stop at Bragg's and that would be our last stop and then we'd go home and many, many a time we wouldn't get home until after dark. And the horse knew the way. There was no question about that. You want to do the horse and buggy; the horse always took you home. And that horse would never dump you. You had a little coal oil lamp just for -- I don't know what the coal oil lamp was there for but it was on the buggy.

CE: Ok, so somebody could see you.

FR: That's right, yes.

CE: We interviewed a man named Jim Leach. Did you ever know that name?

FR: Jim Leach. I could have.

CE: He was a builder and he said he bought a horse and rig from somebody and it was a long horse. Remember that story, Anne? They went to church the following Sunday and the horse can't get past this Billy Shannon's Saloon because the previous owner -- He had to reroute a new place to get to church, you know.

FR: You know, and don't think the animals don't realize that; they got to know that. Talking about that, I can remember when Jimmy Redmond was the mailman and he had the buggy, the old mail wagon, and that horse would follow Jim across the street and that's how he finally got decapitated when a car came along and hit the wagon. That was Jimmy's horse and wagon when he delivered the mail. That horse would just follow him back and forth across the street. So the horse would begin to know. Excuse me.

CE: Would your dad go into town for supplies often? Or would all of that --

FR: No, no, whenever he went to town it was all delivered. I don't ever recall, although later on --

CE: But he would go in to order stuff, wouldn't he? No?

FR: No, no, the salesmen came.

CE: Came to him?

FR: The salesmen would come to him, see. Various salesmen would come through. But the only one that I do recall, as I said I mentioned his name afterwards, Daly. He worked for William Cluff and Company in San Francisco. But other than that, I think when we came to town it was probably business; whatever it was. And of course --

CE: Was that an exciting experience for you? Did you like to go to --

FR: It was a big deal, oh gee, to get out of Nicasio and come to San Rafael. The first thing we did was have to see those -- My aunt lived on D Street and there was a Chinese laundry. Do you remember the Chinese Laundry? Lived right on D Street. Where the medical center is now, the Chinese Laundry was right there. We'd never seen a Chinaman before other than Jim Sam and he was no Chinaman, but this was -- We always used to watch those Chinamen with the iron, when they used to spit on the iron and iron the clothes.

CE: That was a novelty.

FR: That was a novelty and then of course you heard the electric train coming. Oh, God! My aunt lived within a half a block of the railroad track which at that time went right up Second Street. Then in particular when an engine would come through, that was a big event so we'd have to run up and see that. We'd stay overnight, you know, and, oh, that was a big deal to go to San Rafael.

AK: Why didn't you use the Lucas Valley Road? Was it so bad?

FR: Because it was a little bit longer. The only stop on Lucas Valley Road was, as you recall afterwards, was the Mile Inn, they called it, and Marty McDonalds. Do you recall Marty McDonalds? Well, Marty McDonalds was a roadside stop, a bar, saloon. It was right across, of course it has all been changed now, but it was right across from where the restaurant is now, out there at the intersection.

VR: Oh, yes, it used to be the Chateau.

FR: It was right across the street, long gone. So there was less stops there for Pa.

CE: Sure. Now, in that day of your dad's, women didn't go into those places, did they?

FR: No, no.

CE: And there were quite a few on Fourth Street I understand?

FR: Oh, in San Rafael, yes, there was. But, no, no, it was taboo. It was just taken for granted, I guess.

CE: In his store he sold it by the cask, whiskey, you said?

FR: No, no, no, he had a bar. Ten cents a drink, as I recall.

CE: You mean he had a bar in the store?

FR: In the back. In the back of the store was the bar.

CE: You got a picture of it?

FR: No. But see this window back here? There's a window back here and that was a window in the bar. This was a store room, a storage room in here, see. And he used to put -- He always had two great big kegs of beer. They bought the keg beer, and they were on a rack. They were hoisted on a rack, and the spigot went through to the bar. On the bar -- well, that's the way they drew the draft beer.

CE: It wasn't a plush bar like the hotel?

FR: Oh, no, no, no, it was rough and tumble. They were all rough and tumble.

CE: Just a board or two and a drink?

FR: No, it had a real bar. It had a nice back bar and everything there, as it came in those days you know. And then, of course, there was a couple of card tables. And that lots of

times would keep Pa over in the store until maybe eleven o'clock at night because someone would be playing cards.

CE: Well I get it now.

FR: And the loser would have to buy the drinks, I suppose. I just don't know, I don't remember. But, that was where the bar was and it wasn't very big. Oh goodness gracious me, I don't think the bar was much bigger than this room here, see.

CE: Well, then there were two bars then in that Square.

FR: Oh, they had more than that; the hotel had a bar, my dad had a bar, and Mariani had a bar.

CE: Oh, that's right; his was down the road.

FR: He was down the road a little bit. So there were three bars. And then afterward Gus La Franchi bought into the hotel and then later on he moved across the street and he -- Let's see, what did Gus do? I think he got into the stage line and he ran the stage line for a while as I recall. I'm not too sure. But then he opened up a little bar -- Was bootlegging days, so anytime that you sold a couple of drinks you made a couple of dollars.

CE: Sure, and tell me this, Saturday night or Friday night-- Did the ranchers come in and --

FR: On many occasions there would be a dance in this little hall. You see the little hall was in back of the -- There was a little hall upstairs in back of the old hotel.

CE: There's the old hotel.

FR: There's a good front picture; of course this was much later. I don't know what year this was taken; somebody gave that to me, but this is after the automobiles came in. See, this is what it looked like there. Then later on they took this off here and the --

CE: Is that the front of it, the front entrance?

FR: That was the front of it, yes. There was an addition back here which was -- The kitchen was downstairs and the dining room and the little dance hall was upstairs. Then on many occasions, and I've come across these things where -- I got one article there someplace, where they had this dance on a Saturday night, you know.

End, Tape 1, Side B

FR: Of course, on Saturday night on many, many, occasions there would be a dance up there and they always had the midnight supper.

CE: Well, didn't that interest you as a boy growing up? There was a lot of action going on.

FR: Oh, yes, oh, man, I'll tell you. And the ladies all made homemade cakes and the likes of that and there was a back stairway. And I can still recall it, every once in a while we'd have to sneak in and sample the cakes, as kids. But then, of course, the dance took place upstairs and naturally it was quite an event because of the fact that, well, it was just a Saturday night event and everybody showed up. They not only showed up from Nicasio but they would come from, maybe from Point Reyes Station, they would come from Olema, so it was always a big event. For example, here was one that I got from the Marin Journal dated February 12, 1885; "Grand opening ball at Nicasio Hotel on Thursday evening, February the 26th. Reception committee: Neil McIsaac, Jerry Adams, W. Frelander, F.H. Farley. The floor committee was: J. L. Smith, E. K. Cornwell and W. H. Abbott. Music from San Francisco. A most enjoyable evening may be expected. Tickets

including supper, \$2.00. Hugh Walker, Proprietor.” A later story tells that, “dancing was kept up in the ballroom until early 5 a.m. and a jolly, happier lot of ladies and gentlemen never met in Marin County. Your observer.”

CE: I love the language, don't you?

FR: That's something, I'll tell you.

CE: Well, listen, we've skipped one little important incident here about that church which is such an important part of your town.

FR: Well, Elsie has got a good story on the church.

CE: But that was your faith, wasn't it?

FR: Yes, that's right, we were Catholics. We were Catholics. Although I think my grandfather, I think he was a Scotsman and I don't recall ever seeing Grandpa in church.

Of course, maybe he was too busy with the cows; I don't know.

CE: But you grew up as a child right in that church.

FR: I grew up as a child in that church. I was baptized there; I have my baptismal records.

I received my first communion. And I -- All my life was there. So as I grew up, as I got older my job was to -- I think Mass was eleven o'clock in the morning, so my job was to ring the bell. I used to say -- pull the rope for Church. So I pulled the rope for the church, you know. When I look back, I just can't imagine because there was just a handful and the ranches were out so far they never could have heard the bell anyway, but it was just customary to ring the bell on a Sunday morning. In addition to that I would have to go over to the old hotel and get water for the priest, because he used the water in the Mass, so I had to get a pitcher of water. But most interesting was, I think, was when he would stay overnight; there was a little room in back, the coldest thing this side of the North Pole, I guess. Because he would stay there for two or three week, there was no heat --

CE: In other words, the pastor would come in --

FR: On occasion. In those days he came from Olema, you see what I mean, but it changed down through the years. It changed down through the years. The original was they came from Petaluma and -- But when I grew up the house was in Olema, which is still there. So, the night before he was coming I'd have to go up with a coal oil heater, see, and start the coal oil heater.

CE: They're coming back, do you know?

FR: I know, yes, that's right, they will.

CE: They are. I saw an ad in Time Magazine.

FR: I've still got one, there's one in the basement. It's a little rusty but I've still got it. But anyway I'd have to go -- And you had to watch it. You'd have to watch it because it would go up. That's another story, too. So, this poor man and the two-holer or the one-holer, whatever it was, was down the corner, outside. Well, come hell or high water, rain or sunshine, that priest stayed there that night. It was a cold one. Because you can just imagine crawling in between two sheets after the place --

CE: And coal oil heat didn't do much.

FR: Yes, and there was a certain amount of dampness that had to creep in. So, that was part of my job. And then of course the next day after church it was always an elaborate ceremony because Ma would have breakfast for the good Father and then afterwards, why, I think Tessie Farley, she lived next door, she was involved also. But my mother played the organ; I guess the old organ is still there. She was quite a piano player and she played the old organ.

CE: In the church.

FR: Yes, in the church, yes. But, the priest would come to the house and oh, that was an elaborate thing. The table had to be set up properly, you know. Much more properly and much more propriety than what you have today. The linen cloth and the candles and whatever is necessary, you know. I can remember distinctly the eggs had their egg holder; you know you had hard boiled eggs, you knocked the top off and you ate the egg. And this was a big event, and us kids would peek and see what the Father was doing you see, very quietly.

CE: You weren't included at this.

FR: Oh, no, no, no, we weren't included. This was after Mass. We ate in the kitchen and this was in the dining room. I often think about that, how lonesome those people must have been in those days. But, anyway, then I was the altar boy. I served as an altar boy for many years, until I got out of high school. And then, of course, after I got out of high school and turned twenty one I came to San Rafael and I lost track of it then for many, many years.

CE: Well, I guess you were delighted when this was restored?

FR: I've got a copy. I'm going to take back to my daughter.

CE: Doesn't that make you happy?

FR: But Elsie did a lot of work on that; that's a remarkable thing. In fact, I bought a copy out at the -- I went out to the affair they had for the church the other night here a couple three weeks ago. They had a barbecue dinner and they had them on sale for three dollars. I want to take one back to the daughter.

CE: Well, when we interviewed Mrs. Tomassini she gave us one of these.

FR: Yes, well, she's very active, too.

CE: Well, listen, we've got to get you into school. You graduated from grade school with Boyd Stewart, and he went on to Tam High.

FR: Yeah, I graduated from -- We graduated in 1916 but my sister was a year behind me, so there was no means of communication to go to high school, so I had to stay back and wait for my sister. We didn't have no means of communication, we didn't even have a car yet.

CE: You mean transportation?

FR: Transportation, yes. I meant to say transportation. So, when I went back from 16 to 17, of course Boyd went on to Tamalpais High School. He finished up ahead of me.

CE: He told me he used to ride a horse to the train and then take the train over.

FR: Take the train. And they used to go through. This was always very interesting. I recall that very distinctly it would be raining and storming and we'd hear the horse go by, Boyd would be going to school. And then my cousin who lived next door, Alice Wake, she's been dead for quite a few years; she was going to State Normal in San Francisco and she went horseback.

CE: To train and then ferry?

FR: To San Geronimo. And then there was another one, this Ray Rogers who afterwards -- Ray and I formed a partnership as you saw here was Rodgers and Rogers, no relation.

CE: Well, one has a D in it.

FR: Yeah. Well, there again it's confusing. I say that if you go back into history we're all related because we all came from European countries and we're all related. But Ray also traveled to high school and this was the big family; that was the Rogers and there was

twelve in that family and they lived up the road. They were on what is still the Redding Ranch, right at the corner of Lucas Valley Road and that old house is gone now, I understand. But, anyway, Ray also went horseback to San Geronimo. He didn't stay very long in high school.

CE: Well, then why did you go to San Rafael as opposed to Tam?

FR: No, no, San Rafael was closer.

CE: Why? We've often wondered why Boyd did what he did? I don't remember.

FR: I don't remember. I never asked Boyd why he went to Tamalpais. I have no idea. The only reason probably was this, you see, that the train went direct down.

CE: I get it.

FR: Otherwise, you would have to get off at San Anselmo and transfer to San Rafael. So, apparently, that was the easiest route. But then in 1917 -- Oh, I went back to school in 1916, so what could I do? Katherine Gallagher wasn't qualified to teach -- She didn't have any high school but she did have books on bookkeeping, you know, single entry and double ledger. So I took bookkeeping, for no particular reason but I had to do something. Then, of course, in 1917 when my sister graduated. And I don't recall how we got to San Rafael but I was about the proudest kid, I guess, in forty states when we drove home in a Model T Ford. That was in 1917, see.

CE: Is this the car?

FR: No, that was my uncle. I've got to find out what date that car was or what year it was. But I haven't got a picture but I haven't got it with me, But I have a picture of me standing -- I met the train at San Geronimo, somebody was coming in a Model T Ford.

CE: To pick you up?

FR: No I was picking people up; I forget who came. I haven't got that picture.

CE: Well, how did you get to San Rafael?

FR: Then we came in the Ford, Model T Ford. That was our transportation in 1917. My sister and I went to San Rafael High, drove back and forth every day.

CE: Drove in?

FR: Every day, back and forth for four years. Of course, the Model T didn't last that long. Then as I recall we dumped the Model T Ford and I think Pa bought a Reel and the Reel belonged to this fellow by the name of Daly who was William -- So we got the Reel. And then he picked up a Ford pickup truck and that's the time when Frank Bordenave was on the corner of Second and B Street and made French bread and I remember very distinctly that I had to pick up a great big -- that's when Pa got into the bread business because there was no such thing that everybody made your own bread in those days. There was no such thing as packaged bread but we did buy, and I used to pick it up when Frank --

CE: And take it out to the store?

FR: Take it out to Nicasio in a great big hamper. Oh, God, that was all bought and paid for -- I mean, he bought it, it wasn't paid for before they ate it but it was bought or rather ordered, let's put it that way.

CE: Well, you were helping him, too. You were doing stuff for him.

FR: That's true, yes. But, anyway, then we went back and forth everyday rain or shine.

CE: How many miles was that?

FR: Well, in those days it was about, oh, I don't know, maybe twelve, fourteen miles, something like that. But, boy, that was great stuff. Man, we roared out of there.

CE: Were you driving?

FR: Oh, yeah, sure, my sister couldn't drive. I was a master. And then we picked up this Francis Farley who later moved in but he didn't stay with us too long and he had to -- By that time we had gotten this, with a box in back. The pickup truck had a box in back, so Farley had to ride back there. But, anyway, that went on for four years, and we went back and forth every day. Then later on we got this Reel and we used the Reel and then I think in 1921 or 1920 he bought a Studebaker Special Six. Oh, God, that was first class.

CE: He was pretty generous about his cars. Well, who were some of your pals at San Rafael High? Did you make some friends that all through your life --

FR: That's another story.

CE: It is?

FR: I'm back in the Sirs with fellows that I went to high school with. Isn't that remarkable? It's a start for me; it just takes me back. I don't know how many at ? that went to high school with me. Not too many that were in my class. There's only one.

CE: You know from school?

FR: Yes. You won't believe this but I have the original copy of the San Rafael Searchlight in my possession, 1901 or even before that. People say, "How did you get them?" I say that it was simple. I borrowed them from the school library and never returned them. Because in my senior year I was manager of the Searchlight.

CE: Is that the school book?

FR: School book, yes. I was manager of the Searchlight and as I recall it was part of my job to pick up the advertising also, see, and in those days there was a lot of advertising. So I think I borrowed all the books to get an idea of the advertising.

CE: And never returned them.

FR: And I'm thankful that I have them today because they would have been lost.

CE: They're in good hands and I'll know you'll do something worthwhile.

FR: I'll turn them over to the Historical Society. I have no particular reason to have them now but it's so interesting. For example, one day I had a bunch of the Sirs and we had a barbecue in the backyard so I was digging out all of this old stuff and one of the guys said -- and my -- It was '21. I graduated in 1921. I was Student Body President. And there's a story there about, "Crash, Bang, you know that Rodgers is in the hall because he maintained order and he made a lot of noise." You won't believe this, either. I go up to the Historical Society the last luncheon and Pete Bertoni sits across the table, and my nickname was 'Noisy', I made so damn much noise, and Pete still calls me Noisy. But there's only, in my class there's not too many left in 1921. Ken Rogers is one and Pierce Thompson who has the Cheese Factory. I graduated with Pierce, but there's not too many of us left. But Ken and I are back in the Sirs now and we graduated in 1921.

CE: Do you remember a teacher, Eleanor Gilogly?

FR: Oh, sure. But she was before me, but I remember her afterwards.

CE: She's still alive and well.

FR: She is?

CE: She came to our reception last year.

FR: Eleanor Gilogly?

CE: Murray.

FR: Murray, right.

CE: Eleanor Gilogly Murray. Wasn't she at our reception this year?

FR: She must be up in years then. She has to be up in her eighties.

CE: She taught Gen Martinelli, Jordan Martinelli.

FR: Well, they were all ahead of me. But I love to go through those old books. In fact, I have a great big photograph that was taken in 1920, across from the old high school. There was a lot over there and there was the Methodist Church was there, see, there was a lot on the corner. In those days they used to take the camera, and it went on an angle. Remember that? They shot over here and the camera would go around.

CE: Oh, sure, they do these panoramic --

FR: Well, this worked on an angle; it got the whole group in. And I don't think there was more than 150 kids in the high school at that time, see, but there were two or three of them that were on the end and they would run around, see, as the camera -- They'd get the picture taken and then they'd duck and -- There's Bill McNear. Bill McNear showed up four times. Here's another. Then he'd duck down and he'd run over and he'd show up again. And I got that great big picture. Oh, it's interesting.

CE: Okay, now we've got to get you up to date a little bit. What did you do when you got out of high school?

FR: Well, there was nothing for me to do in Nicasio. That's why I say --

CE: What year are we talking about?

FR: 1921. I graduated in June of 1921.

CE: Was Prohibition still on?

FR: Beg your pardon?

CE: Was Prohibition still on?

FR: Oh, yeah, because Prohibition wasn't repealed until 1932.

CE: That's right. The World War was --

FR: Oh, that's another thing that was very interesting during high school. All day long -- Remember the Oakland Tribune? The Oakland Tribune would have these salesmen come over and they'd walk right up the middle of the street, you know, and all they had on was they had the headlines; this was in reference to World War I, the headline, the rest of the paper was the same, and, God, they sold papers. You could hear these guys for a mile coming, walking right up the middle of the street. But then in high school in 1917, we formed -- We became, San Rafael High School, Tamalpais also, The High School Cadets which was under the State. I remember the State Adjutant General was J. J. Baria. We had regular drill procedures.

CE: Sort of a ROTC?

FR: It was an ROTC in high school.

CE: In high school.

FR: So that was also very interesting. I became in that and I ended up as Captain my last year because it was -- You got seniority, so it was very interesting because of the fact that we used to go over to Leon Heights Rifle Range which was in the East Bay someplace. I've lost track of it. And we'd go over there on encampment as they called it with Tamalpais and we'd compete. We'd compete on the rifle range. We'd compete on drilling all that stuff and this Major Culp was our last instructor. But it was very interesting and it was educational at the same time. We just thought we were big stuff. And of course some of the kids went on and got into the service in the latter part of World War I. They got into the service, any number of them did that. And this little training that they had entitled them to a commission because they had some knowledge of what it was all about. But then after I got out of high school there was nothing for me to do in Nicasio so I came in

to San Rafael and this was in 19 -- The balance of the year 1921, there was a fellow by the name of Warren Strong who was ahead of me in high school and Warren somehow or other got a carload of sheep manure which came down from Montana or someplace like that. A lot of sheep in that country in those days, still is. So, he got me, and you won't believe this, he and I sold a whole carload in Ross of sheep manure. It was bagged, of course; it was already bagged.

CE: Why Ross? Gardens?

FR: Gardens. It was probably the big deal. There was all big estates; it was big, see. And I'll never forget, the car came in down here. It was delivered right down here, and they picked it up and we sold it.

CE: How in the heck do you deliver it?

FR: Well, it came in a carload. They had the horse and wagons here; they picked it up. I guess that was the deal, I don't remember that. But anyway, do you remember Louie Johanson family? Well, anyway, every once in a while Lil, I'll see her, Lil will say, "Yea, I remember when you sold sheep manure." She don't forget that, see. So maybe that was my first adventure after high school in the fall of 1921. Then we go through the winter and the United Purchases Supply Company -- And before that, on our old ranch in Nicasio -- The Barr brothers -- Remember Doctor Arthur Barr and Tom Barr? They were dentists. There's only one left now. They had all that country out there for the deer hunting and they had a big deer camp at the head of Lucas Valley which is now got a residence on it. And, of course, my dad -- And then we bought the Model T Ford in 1917 and Saturday night was always a big night at the deer camp. They had a big feed and carousing going on, ready for the big hunt on Sunday morning. So my dad and I, I had to take my Dad because he didn't drive, so we'd go up to the deer camp and this -- He was head of the PG&E at the time. I can't recall his name, but apparently Pa said to him, he said, "See what you can do for the son; he needs a job." So in the fall of '21 or the winter of '21 the United Purchase and Supply Company, which afterwards became Camgros Gravel and Fuel, and Alpers who was head of the Marin County Milk Company on Fourth Street -- And afterwards it became Borden's and they moved down the street, but they were in the thirteen hundred block right across from the Burchard Hotel. So he opened up Camgros and Mr. Alpers became involved and somehow or other I got the bookkeeping job right across the Burchard Hotel. So I was in charge of that office and of course it was feed again you know, they had sack feed, and they had some hay. And that was when the oil business, oil burners were becoming quite prominent, in the early twenties, you see. And then afterwards they picked up a salesman. Then it was in the spring of '22 Roy came down and bought out Tobias Hock and they started at Fourth and D Street where the copy center is now. That was Tobias Hock. And Tobias Hock had a barber shop in back and then his son Toby was growing up and Toby became involved in the early days in automotive supplies and he had Cates half sold tires and Cates tires and sold oil by the quart and by the gallon. So Toby must have put the business up for sale and Ray bought it and of course Ray and I were like brothers.

CE: Ray Rogers?

FR: Yeah. So that's when we developed this sign, "Rogers and Rodgers, No Relation," because we were no relation.

CE: Tires, tubes, oils and accessories.

FR: And that was at Fourth and D Street. So then I left across the street to get over here and I was in business for myself in 1922. Out of high school less than a year and I was in business for myself.

CE: How did that work out for you?

FR: Well, I'm still going. But it was interesting, you know what I mean, because of the fact that --

CE: Both of you men were unmarried, right out of school?

FR: Well, I was out of school, Ray went to business college. I think he went to business college in San Francisco. So, anyway, Ray and I stayed together but Ray was a country boy, you see, and it's the same old story that you can't -- What is it, you can't take the hick out of the country but you can put the hick into the same? Whatever it goes, but to me I was set to stay in Nicasio. So that was in 1922. In 1923, Ray --

CE: Did you feel similarly? did you want to go back to Nicasio?

FR: No, no, no.

CE: You were set.

FR I was set in San Rafael and that was it. So in 1923 I ran the business myself; I was all alone, because at that time Ray had gone back to Nicasio and bought -- Before I'd left, in the old hotel, May Cotta had bought a truck and Jim Sam -- That's another story. But anyway, Ray went out and took over this trucking business as such and -- We had formed a partnership in -- Articles of co-partnership, April 25, 1922.

CE: Gosh and you still have these. You know it's a wonderful thing you keep all this stuff. You're a pack rat, huh?

FR: I've misplaced a good batch of papers that I couldn't find for today. So, then on January 26, 1924 Ray had gone out to Nicasio and there was an assignment of partnership property and debts and at the same time a partnership of dissolution. So that leaves me in business for myself. Later on in that year I became involved with my brother-in-law at that time. He married my sister, a fellow by the name of Lartigue, and we had formed a partnership so we were a little late in getting together. This is September 1, 1926. So I still had the accessory business, which had built up pretty good by that time. Put a gasoline pump along side the store there --

CE: On D?

FR: On D Street, yes. I'd got one of these old -- I had one of those. So Ed had been working in the tire business; he wasn't a first class mechanic in so far as repairing tires, but we went into the retreading business. So we set ourselves up in the back of that particular store and -- Here's what the front looked like when I had it by myself.

CE: You know where Fourth and D Copy Center is? That's his business. 1924, right out of high school.

FR: That was in '24 and then Ed came in with me and --

CE: How much capital did you have to swing it?

FR: Nothing. Would you believe -- In fact I think I borrowed the money. My father signed the note. I didn't have anything.

CE: What did you do, go to the bank?

FR: Yea, I went to the bank. I first dealt with the Tamalpais Bank which was Bank of First. Remember Bank of First and the Tamalpais Bank which later went into the Italian Bank. So then I went down eventually to the Bank of San Rafael with Murray. But I don't think that we borrowed over a thousand dollars to get into this thing. And when we

separated there was no money changed hands. Ray went out and took over the trucking business in Nicasio. I think there was five hundred dollars apiece involved in that. So whatever it was, Ray said, "You keep the business there and I'll keep the business here. Boom. You assume the debts and obligations there; I'll assume them here." And that was the way it worked.

CE: Well, you had the counter -- Did you build this?

FR: No, they were all in there from Toby Hock.

CE: So that was a start. Then it was just something to acquire an inventory and get you started, huh? Did you have to have books again, accountants?

FR: I kept my own books.

CE: And most of it on credit?

FR: A lot of it was credit in those days. In fact we went on --

CE: What did you call your shop, again, when you were on your own?

FR: Well, I called it Rodgers Auto Supply then. I've got to make up some pictures. Now that's another one. Then afterwards, we had a five year lease from '22 to '27 and Lawrence Moore who had the stationary store across the street. Remember that Lawrence Moore Stationary Store? Well, he was the landlord and Lawrence and I got along fine; he was a wonderful man. He thought a lot of me, see. And I'll never forget this. The lease was up in '27 and he offered Ed and I the building, I think, for eleven thousand dollars at that time. And I'll never forget this. We didn't have eleven thousand dollars for sure because we just -- When you stop to figure in the early twenties, leading up to 1929, it wasn't the most generous time in the world.

CE: Right before the Depression?

FR: Just before the Depression. And so I went to banker Foote and explained to Foote -- Of course I was young. Sure, I was only, in '25 I was only 23 years old. And I'll never forget that old man. He says, "You're too young to have that much money." I can't understand a banker doing that because he had the -- We were paying seventy five or a hundred dollars a month rent which would have still been coming in, which was a lot of an eleven thousand dollar loan in those days, and he'd had still had the papers on the building. The property would have been his if we hadn't made our payments, but I got turned down. So anyway it eventually went on and later became a drugstore and so forth and so on. In the meantime, Lawrence Moore owned -- At the corner of Fourth and E Street there was a big vacant lot and Lawrence Moore put another building up for us. I have a front building -- But this was the building here right next door. See, that's where we ended up there. That was about '28 or '29.

CE: Is this a photo of it?

FR: That was still -- We still had the tire shop. But by '29 it was getting closer to that depression so eventually we got out of there; we finally gave that up and he let us break the lease. Lawrence Moore was very good. We broke our lease there and ended up at a service station at Fourth and Ida Street. It was a Standard Station and Frenchie and I set up a tire shop back in there. This is where the Yardbirds are now, in that corner. Grady had the ice house there. Remember when Grady had the coal yard and the ice house? So Ed and I went out there and we set business up there and then we developed a wash rack and McNally and McClure had the front part and then in 1929 or '30 I guess it was, not too long, they got out and we took over the whole service station. So we ran that service station for about -- We had the whole works, we had two gasoline pumps, grease racks

and so forth and so on, and we got by alright. And then in 1930 or '32 I think it was, Standard Oil wanted the station back. It was a Standard Station setup, so they bought us out. And by good fortune and good luck I had kept track of everything that we had bought, every piece of equipment. and they paid us off. And I've still got -- someplace along the line.

CE: So that bookkeeping again paid off.

FR: I saved everything. I recorded everything. And we got enough out of that to pay our debts and then that was in, ended up in 1930 and then -- I went to work -- We went to work for a Standard Station about 1930.

CE: You mean you worked right there in the same place?

FR: The same spot. The Standard Station came in and took us over. By that time we had to eliminate the tire shop.

CE: But they bought you out?

FR: They bought us out; they paid us. I've got a communication covering the check what paid all the bills --And at that time Frenchie and I, we had something like -- don't forget this is in the depression -- something like four thousand dollars on the cuff. I've got all those old -- I used to do all my own bookkeeping, see, most of it, and I kept all the records on three by five cards and I've got a couple of trays of those cards still tucked away in the basement. And every once in a while I go down and I look at them.

CE: Any of these people still around?

FR: This guy's dead; that guy's dead; they're all gone. In fact, one day I came across one -- this is a sideline -- I came across one fellow by the name of Bill Cheney who was in high school with me and I came across -- And he's now sitting along side of me at the SIRs; for lunch he came in. So one day I came across --

End, Tape 2, Side A

CE: Ok, now, 1934.

FR: About 1934, McElroy, who afterwards was McElroy and Jeness had the funeral parlors, well, Mac had taken over a service station at the corner of Third and A Street and Mac and I were very good friends. And so somehow or other Mac induced me to go down and take over that station. It was a Mobil Oil Station, but he had two men there working for him. I imagine he thought that I would probably be able to help him build up a business. Well, the odds were against me because these two fellows were jealous of me coming in and taking over, you see.

CE: A young squirt.

FR: So the result -- That didn't materialize too much, so that lasted until about -- I think that was in the winter of '34. So that didn't last too long. So then comes along -- I got through the winter. My wife -- We got married in '34.

CE: Wait a minute. Let's get -- Woah. We've got to get you married now. How did this come about? Was this a local girl you married?

FR: Well, my wife was born and raised in Trinity County, Hayfork.

CE: Oh, Hayfork. I've been there.

FR: And she often tells the story how they left Hayfork. Ma says to Pa, "Pa let's get out of here before the girls start marrying the Indians." So they came to San Rafael.

CE: Did she go to school with you?

FR: No, she was -- There's twelve years difference in ages. She graduated in '32; I'm twelve years older. But, anyway, at that time I think we were trying to form an alumni association at San Rafael High and I became involved in that; I'm the president of the Alumni Association. So we're getting ready for a dance and Ruth was --

CE: What was her maiden name?

FR: Blake. Ruth Blake. So she was on the committee and somehow or other we hit it up out in Lucas Valley to get huckleberries to decorate the hall and she was, still is, attractive, you know. And I was besmitten. Is that the proper word, besmitten? Well, anyway, that was the beginning of it. So we got married in 1934, July of 1934, and we just celebrated our 45th wedding anniversary not too long ago and we went to the Catholic Church and had a renewal of marriage vows and we got quite an applause from the audience in the church.

CE: Very good, very good.

FR: So that was in '34. Now, then in '34 -- I got by in '34, I forget how I got by, but Ruth was working at a local creamery there in San Rafael. It was Looney's Creamery on Fourth St. Do you remember Looney's Creamery? She was working there. So we got by all right. And then in 1935 somebody conned me into running for public office, so I ran against Gene Smith. And here's the story. March the 7th, 1935 from the Marin Journal: "Francis S. Rodgers is a candidate for office of City Clerk. There is going to be a three-cornered campaign for the office of City Clerk and Assessor, Eugene Smith, at the coming April the 8th election." This is in 1935. "This became officially known on Wednesday when Francis S. Rodgers filed the necessary papers and stepped into the political battle for a place at the City Hall. Rodgers is a young man, 32, well and popular known throughout the city. For many years he was in the tire repair business and later operated a filling station, Standard Stations Inc., 536 Fourth and Ida Street, then later to Mobil Oil at Third and A Street under the direction of Vi McElroy. His many friends expect to put up a stiff fight for Rodgers. Rodgers is active in a number of fraternal organizations of the city and has always taken an interest in civic affairs. The Marin Journal through December 26, 1920." Oh, that was it. People afterwards -- I was in Judge Broderick's court one day; this was a few years back. And the case involved a number of witnesses he was going to call upon. So there was a lady from Tiburon. I'll tell you this miraculous story. So, I kept raising my hand because I knew the witness, the lady. And Judge Broderick says -- Whatever her name was I forget. He says, "I've only got one or two more and if you don't answer this one Mr. Rodgers is going to be the winner of this contest." Ok, I'm the winner of the contest. I knew more than she did, of these witnesses that were going to be called. So, Judge Rodgers said, "By the way Mr. Rodgers, knowing all these people," he says, "how come you never ran for public office?" I said, "I did", "How did you make out?" I said, "I got beat." And everybody just roared. It came out so funny and I thought, "Oh gee, I'll get a crack at" what do you call it? Well anyway, so that was my political career.

CE: Didn't make it huh?

FR: Didn't make it. So this is strange. The very next day, and I lived right across from the firehouse at that time. The house has just been removed. It's all parking lot now. And the very next morning the doorbell rang and who's at the doorbell but William Pot Barr who was Supervisor at that time and he had, he was running a service station, or he was involved in a service station, right across from the present Post Office on Third and D

Street. And he was having problems getting somebody to take care of it. And of course I knew Pot from the deer camp many, many, years ago. So Pot says, "What are you going to do?" I said, "I don't know, Pot. I have nothing in mind," "How about coming down and taking over the service station?" "Okay, nothing else to do." "So, back in the service station business 1937, I mean 1935, down at Third and D Street. So I surprised Pot. I said, "OK. I'll see you in a couple of days, whatever." "Fine." He no sooner left the house and in walks George Hall who was County Assessor at that time and George and I were - - I knew George very well, too, because George used to run the card parties. Remember all the card parties? And I was involved in the Old Men's Institute and we also had card parties. I was the Master of Ceremonies for the card parties. See, George and I were old friends. George said, "What are you going to do?" And I said, "Well" I didn't tell him yet, see. I said, "George," I said, "What are you up to? What are you here for?" He said, "I need an assistant," He said, "I think you'd be a good man for the job." Gee I had to think fast. I had to think fast. And I was honest. I said, "George I just promised Pot Barr --" I couldn't renig on that. I said, "I just promised Pot Barr that I'd take over the service station." Ok. That's the way it went. So I'm back in the service station and I ran it myself for a while but it was another one of those deals. A lot of it went on the cuff. Credit cards were coming, but they were coming slow. And I had gone down and I had borrowed a thousand dollars to get into this business and again my father and mother signed a note. And in no time that thousand dollars was on the cuff. Here I am in a hell of a fix, no money. A lot of business but no money. So I finally had to go to Pot and said, "Pot, I can't handle it." Because in the meantime -- He said to me one day, he said, "Do we get Charlie Lund, Henry Hess Company? Do we get any of their business?" I said, "No." He said, "Well, I'll talk to Charlie Lund." So the next day here comes Charlie Lund's trucks on the cuff. Things were getting worse. I didn't need anymore of this on the cuff business. I'd been through that once before. So I finally had to throw in the sponge and I said, "Pot I can't make it." I said, "I'll go to work for you." So I went to work for Pot for I think \$110.00 a month which I'd be getting before but no commission. But my wife is still working at the creamery, so we'd get by. So that was '36 and then it went into 1937. And in 1937 -- I had joined the Volunteer Fire Department in 1926 so I was a volunteer fireman. And in 1937 Lou Helicke dropped dead at a grass fire. So Walter Castro was the volunteer fire chief and Walter was one of my good friends also. In fact, he was my bartender after we had the marriage we went across the street and he was my bartender. He was handing out the beer. So, when Lou died, Pot said, "Well I suppose you'll go to the Fire Department," I said, "No, I haven't been asked Pot." But eventually Walter came to me and they were putting on more help at that particular time in 1937. So I went to work, I went on. In July -- I got on in July 15th, 1937 and I stayed there and retired in 1967 after thirty years of service, plus eleven of active volunteer. Because in those days the volunteer, just like they were any place, the volunteers were the mainstay. That's all there was to it. So I finished up with thirty years.

CE: How many years? Thirty years?

FR: Thirty years. And fortunately in 19 -- When we went to work. of course we became involved in Social Security. I was already in the Social Security. When I went in, in '37, Social Security was in so the city took care of my Social Security and we paid our share, whatever it was. And then in 1957 we began to talk of retirements.

CE: Did you set up something?

FR: So we set up a committee and the first thing we did was -- A fellow, I forget what his name was, at the City Hall, went by the firehouse one day and he says, "We need an employees association."

CE: Sure, like a union of sorts.

FR: He was a very good -- Jack -- We need an employees association. "Jack," I said, "I'll work on it." And we formed up the association. Now that's an old piece of tattered, that's pretty well tattered, but I was the first president and I think that's 1957. So there again I became involved in something else I knew nothing about. Well, to make a long story short, we finally got it on the ballot and in 1957 the city adopted a retirement plan. And that was with the state retirement people, under the state retirement program.

CE: Now as well as the fire department, were all the departments on it?

FR: Well, we were the big -- I think we were the first ones to get into the retirement system; after that it spread fast.

CE: How many firemen were --

FR: At that time I think I was number seven man, when I went to work. There were three of us involved in this deal and we were all volunteer firemen, and so two of us agreed to let the third man take over because he needed it worse than we did. I was still working. I was still working. And a fellow by the name of Byron Cook, who I saw the other day, and Byron is 83 or 84. He was older than I was. But anyway, he was a mechanic for Bianco. So we were both working. So we agreed. The three of us were all involved and we all had a job coming. So Cook and I said, "Well, let Coutts stay." So Coutts was the first one of the three. I was the second one. I went to work on July 15th, 1934 and then Cook came in right after me. So I was number seven man at that particular time. So in getting back to the retirement, one of the stipulations was that the city had to include, or rather had to go back, include twenty years of previous service, or rather go back to your time of employment. That's what it was. Now I went to work in '37. '57 that was twenty years. So I got twenty years of previous service which the city had to pick up to get us into the retirement system. So I was very, very fortunate. Otherwise I would have only ended up -- From '57 to '67 I would only have ended up with ten years of service, which would have been nothing. And as it worked out, my retirement has been very, very satisfactory. But, of course, one thing we didn't tell people when we went door to door campaigning for this thing to get it on the ballot, we didn't tell them that we had social security. Because had we done that we may not have gotten it.

CE: Well, your career then in that service was a satisfying one for you?

FR: It was another one that, just like my high school days, I never missed a day of high school. I enjoyed every bit of it. And in the fire service I never missed a day; I never took a sick day. Now, God, every little thing, they either got a crippled back.

CE: I guess you saw a transition of equipment too. That'll blow your mind.

FR: It's fascinating; it'll blow your mind. Today it's an automated. Not an automated but a --

CE: Almost computer controlled.

FR: Computer controlled. It's getting them all, everyday. I look into the firehouse today and I look around at that little office that I use to work in.

CE: Would you care to comment on the fire in 1958 in San Rafael?

FR: In 1958 I was off duty. In those days it was quite complicated the way we worked. We would go to work at eight o'clock in the morning, for example, when I first went to

work. I'd go to work at eight; four or five of us would go to work at eight o'clock. Then at ten thirty, from ten thirty to twelve, we'd all go home for lunch. Then at four thirty in the afternoon to six we'd go home for dinner. Come back at six and we'd stay until eight o'clock the next morning and then the cycle started all over again. So while we were doing that, the men that at eight -- It was just the opposite for the other shift. Then as we went along and then we get into the retirement and times changed. Talking about the '58, that was the Fourth Street fire?

CE: Yes.

FR: Well I was off duty that day but where I lived I couldn't help -- I was looking right down the street.

CE: Where were you living?

FR: Same place I am now, number 1 Antoinette, which is just at the foot of Wolf Grade. Yes, Wolf Grade on the other side. And I look out my front porch and there was the smoke. And the sun was going up at that time and Ruth's mother was living in the Burchard Apartments, which -- The fire was in the next block. So, on those days, whenever -- And I had tapper in the house and I get the box alarm just as quickly as it came in the fire house and it was pulled in the street. And then in addition to that if they went out on a still alarm they would hit -- Each one of us had a -- I was on a certain circuit and we had a button there, so you'd get one, two, three. You'd get a three-bell which meant that the house was asking you to come in and we were obliged to come in.

CE: Well, did you hightail it right over there?

FR: No, I had a caller, so I had to go right in. So I spent that whole afternoon in the firehouse and of course everything was out and then I think San Anselmo covered in for us.

CE: Like you, sort of a backup, if somebody's out?

FR: Well, all of us, the off-shift came in; there were three or four of us that came in.

CE: The equipment was out.

FR: All the equipment was out so we just covered in, really. There wasn't anything to do about that and I think that lasted until about three o'clock in the morning. So what happened, I was watching it out the back window from upstairs. You could see the fire all the time. Of course, it seemed to be getting closer and closer, you know. But that's all there was to that fire.

CE: Okay, now, let's move ahead because we've got to conclude this sometime. You've got appointments and Mrs. Kent I think wants you for luncheon. I think you've got to tell us -- Well, first of all, you have children. What are their names?

FR: Our daughter, Francine, is married. They went to Marin Catholic High School and she married a fellow student named Caneen; the Caneens lived in San Anselmo. So then she went on after -- She was a very, very bright child; she was a very, very, good student. She was the first girl valedictorian Marin Catholic ever had and she was in the essay contest and she could enter the Pilots' Club. The Navigators' Club is the pilots. Well, she won a trip with the Matson Line, one of the Matson boats, too. She and her mother went by boat up to Vancouver. That was one of her prizes. She was in the Lions Club and she got trophy after trophy. And she was a very, very bright student. Then she went on to graduate from the College of Holy Names in Oakland. Then after they got married, her -- Dave's father, who was Barge Captain for Standard Oil Company -- So the father got him into the Credit Department of Standard Oil and they were living in Oakland. And just

shortly after that he picked up an ad in the paper; J C Penney was establishing a credit business so he got in with them and so that was the beginning of their career.

CE: Are you a grandpa?

FR: Wait a minute. He started out in Oakland. They moved to -- He worked in Los Angeles. By that time there were three children. From Los Angeles in one year they went to Mission, Kansas. Then they went from Mission, Kansas to New York; from New York to Pittsburgh; from Pittsburgh down to Atlanta, Georgia and now they're back in St. Vincent, South Jersey and he is still with J.C. Penney but he has gone up the line. Every move is an appointment. They now have six children. Six children and the oldest is just finishing up her first year in college in North Jersey, the second goes into college. She's going into to -- What is it? In Virginia, there's a girls school or some big school?

CE: William and Mary?

FR: William and Mary. She wants to go there.

CE: The oldest school in the United States.

FR: Very bright student. Very good. Then the son, he didn't do so well. He went into the -- Francine was born in 1939 and Blake was born in '42. So Blake went through St. Raphael's Parochial School and Marin Catholic High School and I guess in his mind he wanted to go on to the seminary so he did. He went to St. Patrick's Seminary. He graduated from college while down there and he put seven years in the seminary and when he came up to his dock and vows.

CE: Is that a Jesuit?

FR: It's a Catholic School.

CE: Is it Jesuit?

FR: No it's not the Jesuit. No, no, no. It was the Salesians, if I remember right. So then he went up to his dock and vows and once you take your dock and vows then you become a part of the Church, so he dropped out. Well then he went on -- He ended up -- Now, he was a counselor in the Reed School District. Just last year they had a change of some kind down there and he is now in the athletic end of it, still at the same school, and he lives in San Anselmo and he married and they just had a second child. The first one was-- Two little girls, so the second is a girl.

CE: Well they'll be interested in hearing their father's reminiscences. I want to ask you before we conclude this, Francis, you're so active in the Seniors in Retirement. Can you tell us briefly about that organization and what you do in it?

FR: The Sons in Retirement.

CE: Are you one of the founding members?

FR: No, no. I'll give you a little background here. "Realizing the social nature of man and his desire for the company of others, particularly those retired from gainful employment in commercial and professional life. The late Damian L. Reynolds conceived the idea of Sons of Retirement in the spring of 1958." I won't read it all.

CE: Gee it's that old, huh?

FR: 1958. "Three friends, all retired, would meet with Mr. Reynolds on occasion for a friendly luncheon. He suggested to these three, Messrs Kloss Hink, Lawrence H. Hanson and William Wallace B. Plumber, they joined with him in this idea. A kickoff luncheon was held in the Claremont Restaurant in San Mateo, California on July of 1958. Five of fourteen friends of the forefounders came to that luncheon." And that was the beginning of the Sons of Retirement.

CE: Well, is it all over everywhere?

FR: "In summing it up, the growth of Sons in Retirement has been phenomenal. From a single branch with nine members in 1958 it expanded in ten years to twenty-one branches and fifty-five hundred members. In June 1978, its twentieth anniversary, membership passed seventeen thousand five hundred with seventy-three branches operating. Growth continues and could be even more rapid as offers have been made to establish branches in other states. However, as it is a basic rule that each new branch be sponsored by an established branch, growth has been controlled so that personal contact between members are maintained." Maybe that's it.

CE: But you're not a service club?

FR: Not a service club, just a luncheon club. But we do -- Each luncheon club has their own activities. Now we have a group of retired musicians and we have our own orchestra and it's fantastic. We had a dinner dance the other night. We served a hundred and seventy seven dinners and these guys played for us. No electronic music of any kind, just the overtones and it was fantastic; everybody just enjoys it. Because, any senior citizen group today it's the thing. Go to the Goldenaires; it's the thing. Go down to the Whistlestop; it's the thing. But we are a little bit different in that we have luncheon clubs and no women except the speaker attend those luncheons. But we do have activities.

Now, for example --

CE: Are you an officer in this organization?

FR: No, I'm just kind of a custodian.

CE: Custodian, huh? Do you have a meeting place?

FR: We meet at Dominic's once a month.

CE: Once a month. In that big room?

FR: We take the whole thing. We have an average of two hundred people.

CE: No kidding?

FR: That's fantastic. They have golf, bowling, all individual. These that have these traveling trailers, that group, they go all over. Then we started out last year in January; we had a crab feed in the log cabin,

CE: You have dues, don't you?

FR: No dues, no fees, no dues. We just pass the hat, one dollar.

CE: Well, you have somebody as secretary? Somebody volunteers?

FR: We have a secretary. We have a complete set of officers. Instead of a president they're called, The Big Sir. The first vice president is a Little Sir. Then we have a secretary and we have a treasurer and then we have an executive board. It's all based on fraternal work.

CE: Have you been in --

FR: I want no part of it. Because I went through the chairs of so many fraternal organizations. One time I joined the Young Men's Institute in 1924, went through the chairs and I'm now over a fifty-year member. I belonged to the Redwood . I never took an active part. I was active in the Volunteer Fire Department, President, so forth and so on. I belong to the, at that time, the Exchange Club. I worked through the chairs in the Knights of Columbus. So I was involved in so many of these things I have no desire to become involved now, but I do anything and everything they want me to do.

CE: To help. Are you part of the orchestra?

FR: No.

CE: You're not musical yourself?

FR: I'm not musical, but I do everything else. It's just a lot of fun, old friends together and many, many new friends. We run bus trips. I'm in charge of the bus trips now. We've got a bus trip going up to Reno, to South Shore on the 18th and 19th. The next day, or two days after, on the 24th, the wife and I leave for, to spend the week, Thanksgiving, with the kids in the east. So there's no dull moment with me; I just got to be mixed up in things.

CE: Well you're a very vital man.

FR: I love to do it. Because my contention is that if you can keep your mind occupied and your hands busy, this keeps you alive.

CE: You've proven it. Well, look at Mrs. Kent. She's 88. She'll be 89 in two months.

FR: Yeah, I talked to her on the phone that day and I asked her how old she was.

CE: She still drives her Packard car her husband gave her in 1955.

FR: That's remarkable.

CE: Well, I can't thank you enough, Francis, for sharing not only the story and background of Nicasio but the story of your own life and how you started out in San Rafael and what you've made of your life. And I think we're very fortunate to have your reminiscences on tape. It's been a pleasure.