

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

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INTERVIEW WITH HELEN VAN CLEAVE PARK
by Carla Ehat and Genevieve Martinelli
September 2, 1983

INTERVIEWEE: Helen van Cleave Park (HP)
INTERVIEWERS: Carla Ehat (CE), Genevieve Martinelli (GM)
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TRANSCRIBER: Marjorie Hoffman

CE: Today is Friday, September 2, 1983. I'm continuing the Oral History Project for the Anne Kent California Room. This is Carla Ehat; joining me today is Mrs. Jordan Martinelli. And we're going to have the pleasure shortly of talking with Helen Van Cleave Park who resides in a beautiful acreage up here at number 15 Lee Street in Mill Valley. Helen has contributed much to the collection and preservation of Marin County history. She has co-authored two books, that I know of, with Jack Mason. One was published in 1971 entitled *Early Marin* and gives the background from the rancho's forward. And the other book published in 1975 is entitled *The Making of Marin*, which covers the period 1850 through 1975, the date of publication. I'm curious, Helen, what brought you to Mill Valley in the 1930s?

HP: I was married at that time and my former husband was very interested in Marin County as a home and so we came over and --

CE: From San Francisco?

HP: From San Francisco, where we were living on Telegraph Hill. And we went around to different places and we found this property and it was, of course, for sale, and we bought the two acres.

CE: Two acres. Might I ask what that might have cost you way back then?

HP: At that time it was five hundred dollars an acre; a thousand dollars for the two acres.

CE: Wonderful.

HP: And I was working at the -- Well, I worked at Gump's.

CE: You did?

HP: Oh yes, I worked at Gump's for about, oh, three or four years. And then at the San Francisco Art Museum.

CE: Has that been your interest most of your life, art?

HP: I was an interior decorator for many years.

CE: In San Francisco and here?

HP: Well in Portland, Oregon and San Francisco and Marin County. There are a number of houses that I've done here in the county.

CE: Great.

HP: And so we admired this piece of property and bought it and --

CE: Built the home?

HP: Well it's rather interesting how we built the home. It was the lower part of the home is the lumber and the fixings are from the job house that built the Golden Gate Bridge. My former husband worked on the bridge for Barrett and Hilp and there was a job house there and so he -- They were going to wreck it and he offered to wreck it and that would save them labor. So I was working at Gump's and he would come and pick me up and I'd change into overalls and leave work and wreck the place -- It was a five room house.

CE: When you say job house, do you mean sort of like the builders' headquarters?

HP: Yes, there is always a job house or for any engineering project. It's always amusing when you watch a TV or a movie they'll have somebody going around with the plans. Well of course that isn't the way it's done. The plans are nailed down in the job house and everybody that goes, the plumber, the electrician, and so forth; they go there. Because if it was carried around why they'd be lost. Well anyway, we worked and wrecked it. And then, I'll never forget, we paid fifty dollars to have the lumber hauled to here and we had wrecked a -- There was just a garage there and we had wrecked that so we stored the lumber in the garage. And then my husband built, coming up from down below here, he built an electric hoist and hoisted up. There was no road here you see at that time, and he hoisted up the lumber, and the concrete and so forth. And we were very poor at the time and so I had an offer to go back to Portland and do a series of lectures and so I did.

CE: On decorating?

HP: Yes, on decorating. So I went back and did that and we used that money toward the buying, financing, of the place. That is what is under the kitchen and the deck area. And we lived in that for, oh, a number of years, during the wartime. And when the war came, why, my former husband, Leo Gossliner worked at Vallejo for Barrett and Hilp, who were doing a big job there. And he would come home weekends and --

CE: Was this, interrupting you, was this originally to be a weekend house or was it to be your permanent home?

HP: No it was our home. So then when the war was over, why, he gave up this work at Barrett and Hilp and later then he, well, he did work for himself. And in forty eight we were divorced. And in the agreement I got the property and the house. My neighbor was Adrian and Dorothy Goldstone. Perhaps you're familiar with the fact that Mr. Goldstone was the great collector of rare books. And he and Leo had been friends when they were children. So then my mother, who was alone in Portland -- My father had passed away and my mother was alone so I brought her down to be here with me, and she came down and she lived here with me.

CE: Were you still working then at Gump's?

HP: No, I wasn't working any longer at Gump's.

CE: Is that when you sort of --

HP: I was doing interior decorating for myself.

CE: For yourself, here. In Marin County too?

HP: In Marin County, yes.

CE: Where did you acquire that? Through school, art school, or through your own ability?

HP: Yes, I had gone to the University of Oregon and I had taken work there. And I went to Rudolph Shafer's school.

CE: In San Francisco.

HP: And studied color and so forth. And I use to lecture on flower arrangement and color. I had an agent, and I use to lecture on that.

CE: Well when did this interest in history sort of become paramount in your life?

HP: Well as a child I was interested in history.

CE: You were a reader, I presume?

HP: I had always been interested in history and --

CE: You were born where again? In Idaho?

HP: I was born in what is now Lake Lowell near Lowell, Idaho.

CE: Anywhere near the Grand Tetons?

HP: No, no, southern Idaho. And my family at that time had a ranch, a farm there, and I was born there. And then the government condemned the land to build Lake Lowell. And my mother has told me that the next year, after the water was run into the dam, that they went out in a boat and they could look down and see the fruit trees that they had planted in blossom.

CE: How heart-sickening.

HP: Anyway --

CE: Well when you say the name Helen Van Cleave Park to most people in Marin today that are younger, not maybe your contemporaries, they associate you with history rather than design or color. So how did you manifest your history here?

HP: Well I'd always been interested in history of any kind and I'm a DAR and so that of course stimulated me and --

CE: Are you familiar with Hubert Howe Bancroft's collection of thirty nine volumes of western Americana?

HP: I own some of them.

CE: The original ones?

HP: Yes they're in on the shelf.

CE: Good, good.

HP: And I've worked at Bancroft many, many, times.

HP: I'm a Friend of the Bancroft Library; you too, I bet?

CE: Yes. So they -- It was --

CE: How did Jack Mason find out about you? How did you two get together? Had you known Jack before?

HP: No I hadn't. He had heard of me and knew that I was interested in Marin history. And I had worked with Eleanor Burt.

CE: Eleanor Burt. That name rings a bell. Tell us, who is Eleanor Burt?

HP: Eleanor Burt was -- She lived here in Mill Valley. She's gone now. But she -- We were both interested in history. We use to go up to the courthouse -- that was when the courthouse was in the old location -- and we would go into the files there and do the original research. And then we would take -- We stole out the different things and we had them copied and then we took the originals back and put them in the files. But that way I got a great collection of things.

CE: You started together.

HP: Well she gave -- When she passed, her collection went to the Marin County Historical Society; they have it there. But, Jack contacted me and he was -- Well they, the Board of Supervisors, wanted a book written on the history Marin County. You realized that there'd been nothing written since 1880.

CE: 1880, yes. And a great deal of that was so-so, too. I understand you paid ten dollars and they put your story in or something.

HP: Then we -- He would come over here and we would work together and --

CE: Did he do some of the legwork for you too? Go up to the courthouse or were you more mobile then?

HP: I was more mobile then. But he would come here and of course I had this library which is a tremendous library and --

CE: In your home?

HP: Yes, that's right here, the living room, on the shelves.

CE: You mean you started collecting Californiana and Marin memorabilia, you mean?

HP: Oh, years ago. And so we worked on that. And the Board of Supervisors wanted a history written and the Marin County Historical Society wanted to be a part of it, or to help it along. And in fact they financed, oh, I think it was twenty five dollars a month for a time but after a while, why, Jack turned that down and we didn't get any money at all. But, then we did the -- He wrote the book and I helped him with the research and so forth. And then we did the second volume. Now, there is one thing that I would like to put in here. I think it should be remembered. During the war, as you no doubt know, the Red Cross was very active in Marin County. So they contacted me and asked if I would work with the group that were doing leatherwork and so forth that would help to entertain the soldiers at Hamilton Field. And I said, "Well, my goodness, the war will be over

before I can learn how to do that!” So I said if there was anything I could do with flowers, why, I'd be glad. Well they said they would like that because there were so many soldiers, you know, in the hospital at Hamilton Field. It's hard for people to realize what it was like at that time. There was this big hospital and then there were the other areas and then between them there was a covered area. It had glass on the side, and floor and ceiling that ran between the different ones. And the different smaller ones would be sometimes -- They would be for men who had lung trouble or wounds in their limbs or something.

CE: Special areas.

HP: Yes. So I got the idea. And we got as small glass containers as we could get. The ones we very much preferred were the mustard, round mustard jars. And what we would do, we would get people. I joined the Outdoor Art Club in order to get them to help finance the paint. And we would mix the paint and get it a certain color and then we would all meet and we would pour the paint on the inside of the jar, turn the jar upside down and it would dry and it would hold the water without breaking for, oh, about two months of usage. Then it would begin to disintegrate and we would clean them up and do it over again, you see. And the thing that I think is forgotten today is that every garden club in Marin County contributed the flowers and it you could have seen the flowers we use to get. I'll never forget the Garden Clubs in Ross; they use to bring me suit boxes like this: violets, pansies, roses, everything that you can imagine. And the interesting thing was, we took in some calla lilies one time. The soldiers didn't want -- those were funeral flowers in the east; they didn't want calla lilies. But we would make these arrangements. We had to work outside because there was -- Well, they were so busy on the inside there wasn't room for us. We'd work out in the wind, you know, and make these arrangements. And then --

CE: Did the boys enjoy doing this?

HP: They didn't do it. We did it; the ladies did it.

CE: For them?

HP: For them, you see. They were put on their beside tables.

CE: On their bedside, I see. But they were interested in your efforts.

HP: Well some of them were and some weren't. You couldn't tell. But, the thing that I think is so interesting, I remember there was one lady that had a dahlia garden. They grew dahlias for sale in San Francisco and she was up in, beyond Mill Valley and she sent a bunch every week. She'd send a great bunch of them, you know. And sometimes they'd be that big and we'd just put one in the vase, you know. And we always did the chapels for the Catholics, and the Protestants and the Hebrew.

CE: Then I presume you decorated for holidays and Christmas?

HP: Oh, we always did, yes.

CE: And that gave you great pleasure, I gather.

HP: Well it was interesting, very interesting work. They --

CE: Do you think this is annotated in the history of the Marin Garden Club, for instance? I wonder. They just had their fiftieth anniversary.

HP: But we would do that work, and it was -- The thing that I think should be remembered is how people contributed the flowers. Oh, they were just -- You can't imagine. I remember somebody said one time that Podesta and Baldocchi didn't have anything as good as we had to work with, which I think was true. We had such beautiful things.

CE: Tell me, Helen, do you have any children?

HP: No.

CE: You didn't have anybody in the service?

HP: No.

CE: Well when the war was over, what did you do? Did you get working on this history stuff more?

HP: No. That wasn't yet. I was decorating. I was an AID at the time. It was very interesting to -- I did a number of houses here in the county. And I taught interior decorating at the evening high school. I did that once a week. And I did that, not for the salary which was minimum, but because I would contact people who were interested in decorating. And I would take samples, you know, and show the wallpaper, the wall covers. Then the upholstery and the draperies and --

CE: Well judging by your coverlet here you're very fond of color.

HP: Well I taught color for years, and --

CE: I seem to have difficulty, though, keeping you on the track of history.

HP: Well --

CE: Did you get involved at all with Mill Valley and their history room, or was that after?

HP: After.

CE: Did you know Lucretia Little?

HP: Oh yes. I hauled Lucretia Little all over the country.

CE: Tell me about her. She's gone now I know but -- Did she really accumulate quite a bit?

HP: She did, but Lucretia had a -- I don't like to criticize somebody that's gone but I will say this about Lucretia. If she got an idea about a thing, whether there was proof that her idea was wrong or anything, that was it.

CE: That was it. She was locked into that.

HP: Yes. And she did a lot of work. We did a great deal of work together and, well --

CE: They say she saved the old mill down here, is that true?

HP: Oh I don't think that she saved the old mill. What she --

CE: Did she get it landmark status?

HP: Yes she got it landmark status. But the thing that is wrong about the mill today is that the roof they put on it is wrong, you know.

CE: Not suitable, architecturally?

HP: No, it's not like it was originally. And --

CE: Do you think, in talking about history, when you're going back only a hundred years, it's possible you can get primary source material and you should, whenever you can; secondary source if not. If you go over a hundred years, it's sort of your perception as a historian somewhat based on the facts available that determined your attitude.

HP: Well the thing that determines everything is you have the -- For instance you have the land grants, and you have all the papers of the land grants.

CE: And a great many of those are at Bancroft Library, of course.

HP: They all are. And then you have in the county, you have the courthouse records.

CE: Much of this material in here I notice.

HP: That was all taken from --

CE: And the footnotes say page so-and-so, libra whatever.

HP: And that is what you have to work with and that's so important to do that because if you don't, it's fabrication.

CE: Well, people have a tendency, once something is in print, right or wrong, and they like it, that becomes mythology in a sense and they want to believe it, rather than -- Or if it's more dramatic and interesting and glamorous to believe one's story they're apt to do that aren't they?

HP: Oh yes.

CE: How would you advise a young person today to pursue a historical path? Up to the courthouse as you did when you were doing your work?

HP: Yes. Of course today you have to pay to do the work there; to do any work there.

CE: Why? Can't you go up and do it yourself?

HP: You can do it yourself but you have to pay for the time that you're there.

CE: To whom?

HP: To the county, the recorder.

CE: You do? I never knew that.

HP: Well that began when the blacks began being interested in history.

CE: And they were usurping the books and everything.

HP: And what they would do -- They would go walking in and they'd say, "Where's my great-grandfathers' -- "

CE: They were just interested in genealogy of their family.

HP: Yes. Where's this and that and the other thing? And they were very demanding, you see.

CE: And it took up a lot of their time.

HP: Yes. And that has happened now all over the United States.

CE: So now you pay for that service.

HP: Pay for the service of doing that. But of course the history is there. The recorder's office has the history of the land; the county clerk's office has the history of the people.

CE: History of the land at the Recorder's office.

HP: And the county clerk's office has the history of the people. That means their wills, their death notices, you know, and --

CE: And that's at the county clerk. In those offices, too, or did you leave that up to Jack?

HP: Oh no, I spent time long before I met Jack. I spent hours there. As I told you, you forgot that I told you I began when the old courthouse was in the city of San Rafael.

CE: Yes that's true.

HP: But the interesting thing about James Ross is, a lot of people say he lived over here. He never lived over here; his widow did, or his wife did. They were divorced. Not many people know that but that's true.

CE: That's not according to the living great-grandson. He died in 1862, five years after he bought the rancho. How do you know that? Through your research?

HP: Yes.

CE: In the county?

HP: Yes, he was a liquor dealer in the city.

CE: I knew that. Well that's interesting.

HP: And she got the property and then the different children got portions of it, you know.

CE: Well that certainly conflicts with the great-grandson's saga.

HP: Well, you'll find many times families --

CE: Cover up?

HP: They don't always --

CE: What about Mill Valley? I had the pleasure of knowing Dolly Cushing Jenkins for a good many years before her demise.

HP: We bought our property from Dolly.

CE: You did?

HP: Yes.

CE: She was great gal.

HP: Yes, she was.

CE: Do you know anything about her father?

HP: Yes, I did.

CE: And her -- Sydney Cushing, yes? And I know he took his life. And her grandfather, Eldridge built the Eldridge Grade.

HP: Yes.

CE: And her other grandfather had this Blithedale. What can you tell me about Blithedale? Was it really a spa?

HP: I wrote a paper on that.

CE: Where is this? On file at the Marin County Historical Society?

HP: I think they do have it, but --

CE: What do you do with all this stuff you have? You going to leave it in the county?

HP: Well, some of it will be left to the county, and some will be left in Bancroft. But --

CE: Sometime I wish you'd consider the Anne Kent California Room. Have you been there lately?

HP: Well I haven't been since I've been confined the last ten years.

CE: Well we raised some money and revitalized it and it's a very active room now. Mrs. Kent was in on the founding of the County Library; did you know that?

HP: Yes, I knew that.

(end of Side A)

CE: What gives you the greatest pleasure in doing history, the research itself? It's like a mystery story?

HP: Well, it's always interesting when you come across a fact that's not known, you know, and that you get information on. But --

CE: And you feel it's quite trustworthy to find out whatever you find in the records in the courthouse, in the recorder's office, or the county clerk should be as accurate as you can get. How do you feel about letters or journals of the time?

HP: Letters are very good and journals are many times quite accurate. They give you a picture of the times, and how the people lived, you know, and you can learn from them what people ate and what they wore and how their houses were furnished and how they traveled.

CE: That's good.

HP: And all of that of course is interesting.

CE: Don't you find when you're doing research sometimes, you're diverted by another path and you want to go down that path. You know, it bring up subject and it's sometimes hard to keep on track.

HP: Well this will give you an idea about --

CE: You spoke earlier about possibly leaving some of your things to Bancroft Library.

HP: Oh yes.

CE: I've heard objections from some people that they've got so much, that much of it is in boxes in the basement. This is true of the California Historical Society but I'd like to pose a question to you. Before Mrs. Martinelli helped in this oral history project, upon Mrs. Kent's demise in 1981, we used to travel around the county for the last eight years and people, in some ranch out there, old fourth, fifth generation family would say, "I am sick and tired of hearing about people leaving their things to the California Historical Society. They don't use it; they store it in the basement. Is there any place in Marin County where we can leave our family papers or any artifacts relative to our family history?" Well, the California Room was going but it was kind of limping along. So, to make a long story short, a resolution was written, unanimously passed by the Board of Supervisors in 1978 that, in essence, says, as long as there is a Marin County Free Library there shall be the California History Room in perpetuity. So, I want you to just know that that exists. I have served as a member of the Board in the Marin County Historical Society and the trouble there is it's a fire trap.

HP: Yes, that's the tragic --

CE: It's got to be a proper archival depository.

HP: Right now I know of a map of the county that was done in the very early days but the party that owns it won't give it to the Marin County Historical Society because of that fire trap, yes.

CE: That condition, yes. Well Elsie Mazzini has been trying for years to get a better place and it cost money and everybody -- The budget --

HP: Oh yes, they want to put their money -- Well they have to put it -- Money is tight today and history is not a thing which everybody --

CE: Interests everybody.

HP: A lot people, you know, have absolutely no interest in history. For instance, when I went into DAR, why, of course, you know, you had to do a lot of research and so forth. And I contacted different members of the family, of my mothers family, the Van Cleaves, and I'll never forget, one of them wrote and said, "What in the world is Helen bothering about digging up interest in all those dead people?" Well you know, they had absolutely no interest.

CE: Some people have no appreciation either for how we got from point A to point where we are today.

HP: No.

CE: All that evolutionary progress and to make it easy or to make life richer for them today, they don't give any credit to what went before.

HP: No. Well, now this paper that I wrote about Blithedale I think is interesting because it does give background of the family, you know, and the Blithedale romance, which was what gave it the name.

CE: Yes, that's true. Dolly told me that. She had quite a bit of ephemera too.

HP: Yes, she was a --

CE: Wonderful photographs.

HP: Yes, she had a marvelous collection of pictures.

CE: Early pictures.

HP: I have received this thing from -- I don't know where is it now --

CE: What is it?

HP: Oh, it's about Sausalito, this thing that's coming out about Sausalito.

CE: A book or what?

HP: A book. Jack Tracy is putting it out. And I -- I'm not --

CE: Back up a moment. Don't you think you have to weigh -- When you do research you have to weigh the various opinions and stories.

HP: Oh yes, you have to weigh the opinions and the resources of your information and sometimes you will find that they contradict each other.

CE: Then what do you do, Helen?

HP: Well you have to take a middle course and try to work out what it is.

CE: I had the pleasure a couple of week ago, Mrs. Kent's brother in law, Sherman Kent, was out. He comes out once a month from Washington, D. C.. And as you know he's a retired professor of history from Yale. He wrote a little book entitled *Writing History*. I don't know if you ever saw it. And he quotes Carl Becker; Carl Becker and his definition of history. Carl Becker wrote a book, *Every Men His Own Historian*. He has this succinct definition: "history is a record of what has been said and done." Do you take that as fairly accurate quote? History is a record of things said and done.

HP: Yes.

CE: So in that case oral history is really right on the nose.

HP: Yes.

CE: And do you know why we do oral history today? Because nobody writes letters anymore. Nobody keeps a journal; very few people keep a diary.

HP: You know, they used to. But the letters I have -- I have some old letters in the other room there and they're so interesting. And they were written when paper was very scarce and it was hard to have it carried, you know. And they would write this way on the paper and then they would turn it, and write it the other way, to get the information. And they would tell all of these different things. But, as you say they don't do it today. In fact, I don't that think children are taught to write a letter. Now, when I was in school I was taught to write a letter.

CE: Well this Arthur Quinn who wrote this recent book on history, *Broken Shore*; I don't know if you've read it.

HP: I have a copy.

HP: He teachers rhetoric at U.C. Berkeley. He came over to talk to me one day. I said, "You have to teach rhetoric? At college level?" He said, "Do I! They come here, they don't even know the parts of speech. We have to let them so they can at least read their text and carry on with the other subjects." Well, it is different. Do you find or do you care to comment on the attitude of local historians in this respect? I know it's important to find out and capture the biography and the history of a community, but we're just not isolated little pieces of land, are we Helen? We are tied up in -- We're just a small part of the larger mosaic.

HP: Charmaine Burdell's collection helped me a great deal.

CE: And what was her collection? Her private collection?

HP: Yes. Haven't you interviewed her?

CE: No. I know who you mean, Charmaine Burdell Veranda. We should do that.

HP: She's not Vernada --

CE: Anymore. I know she's divorced. And she's related to Elsie Mazzini someway. They share some antecedents. She has quite a library.

HP: Oh yes, and a lot of original material, marvelous pictures and wonderful letters and --

CE: I know she was instrumental in getting the 1880 history reprinted.

HP: Well she paid to have it done.

CE: Well that was a wonderful thing. And Bancroft's seven volumes on California have been reprinted; facsimile copy for eighty-five dollars. I bought one of those. And you've got some of the originals?

HP: I have the whole California section.

CE: It's it in fairly good condition?

HP: Yes.

CE: That's good. That's good.

HP: Yes. Of course, that helps you so much.

CE: What would you like to see done in the way of history in Marin County that hasn't been done?

HP: Well I would like to see the Marin County Historical Society established in a building of some kind that would provide adequate storage and visionary material.

CE: Perhaps a large library they could accumulate to, for research.

HP: That, I think, should be done.

CE: I wonder sometimes, in going before the Board of Supervisors, I question their interest in history some.

HP: It depends on who's on the Board of Supervisors.

CE: I know, it comes and goes. It changes, it changes. Alright, you'd like to see that done. Would you like to see any particular history of Marin researched more and enlarged upon? Do we know much about western Marin?

HP: Well I think Jack Mason's done a great deal on that.

CE: Northern Marin, do we know much about northern Marin?

HP: Yes I think that's a lot's been done about northern Marin. I think that in our books we covered it pretty well.

CE: I like the maps that you've used and the photographs in this book. Do you have photographs also?

HP: Oh yes, I have a lot.

CE: How do you catalog them? How do you keep them?

HP: Well I keep them in a file.

CE: In a file. I know in Anne Kent's California Room somebody was in there to look at it and they got all excited because it wasn't -- They weren't protected with archival paper, acid free paper. Do you go into that?

HP: Well no I don't think that I --

CE: That's very costly, all of that. What would you like to be remembered for, Helen? This effort?

HP: Well I suppose that's --

CE: This gives you as much pleasure as your decorating?

HP: I'm working now on a book on the ladies of Marin.

CE: The ladies of Marin?

HP: Yes. And I'm spending so much time on Marianna Richardson, who married Manuel Torres, and it's taking so much time.

CE: Well do you have some help, or somebody to go and do the legwork for you?

HP: I have done all the leg work. Behind you there is my resources. And, so --

CE: Well, is she the daughter of Captain Richardson?

HP: Yes.

CE: So we're talking about the next generation down?

HP: Well we're talking about her and her life and what she did.

CE: Was she born in Sausalito?

HP: Marianna? Yes. She's a very interesting person.

CE: Well the stories -- It's interesting how they all interweave, too, because there weren't so many people in California at that time you're doing.

HP: No there weren't. The thing that a lot of people forget about is that today, why -- Now this particular area right here is quite unusual. I mean, the houses are quite far apart, you know. There's houses up the hill there, and then here I have a neighbor above me, but there are not many people that are close together. But, in the towns and all of them there are just one after another.

CE: How do you correct somebody that talks about the old Spanish land grant when they really don't mean that?

HP: I don't correct them.

CE: You don't?

HP: There's no point to try and correct them. People get an idea, why they hang onto it, you know.

CE: I was interested in doing some research, living in Ross as I do, of the reasons why Juan Cooper picked that piece of land when he was -- The governor Alvarado was indebted to him. He saw those otters and that profitable trade, didn't he? And he saw all that good timber.

HP: Yes.

CE: People usually go into virgin land for some economic reason, don't they?

HP: Yes.

CE: Other than the initial entree perhaps by the Spaniards into California. But it was the, the Russians perhaps and the English and other people, the Americans, from getting in there first. Do you have any opinions about the Franciscan Fathers and their treatment of the Indians?

HP: Well I think that they -- Theirs was a very difficult life. Of course, in the first part it was -- They had money and it was sent to them you know, and they were able to establish the different missions and all. Then the time came when there was no more funds sent and no more soldiers sent and it was a very difficult life for them. But, they -- It's true that they did, in order to Christianize the natives, the Indians, that many of them were cruel to them; it's true. But, many of them were very kind and good to them.

CE: Well I've always had great respect for men of the cloth over our greater ancient history, too, for the preservation of books and the preservation and respect for learning and that of course applies here. Another thing that interests me and it's brought out in your books, about this migration across the continent, you know. It's fascinating to me that it took two hundred years to get from the Atlantic to the Mississippi and ten years to go two thousand further miles across this continent. And I suppose amongst other books you've read George Stewart's *The California Trail*.

HP: Yes.

CE: I think it's most interesting that he, in just researching the forts, Fort Scott, Hall, Bridger, etc., was made the determination of wagons, individual wagons with families in them, that a hundred sixty five thousand people crossed the plains. Now that excludes the individual men on horseback or men of the cloth or people going on a lark or for whatever reasons. Have you any idea how many came by sea compared to that figure?

HP: No.

CE: Would you say it would be a larger number?

HP: Well, those that came by sea as a rule were from earlier families.

CE: I see.

HP: And there weren't so many of them. Because almost anyone could get a wagon and a team.

CE: Right off their own farm even, yes.

HP: Yes, in order to come. And of course the east was filling up and they wanted to --

CE: Push west.

HP: To come west because they heard there was so much land here, you see. And of course when they got here they found that it was all covered with land grants.

CE: Well after the Lewis and Clark expedition, you know, that was initiated and all that land was sort of made aware. People at that stage were aware of that. And then the timing was such. The Texas problem had occurred and there was malaria they said in the

Mississippi Valley. There was a -- Do you think it's in the American psyche to keep pushing west or is that something created by manifest destiny?

HP: Well we keep pushing west but today we're pushing into space.

CE: Very good. Very good.

HP: It's the same spirit of adventure.

CE: Do you think it was particularly admirable of our country to come to this Californian place and establish the Land Act of 1850?

HP: Oh yes.

CE: Why? Why do you condone that? Because of the Treaty of Hidalgo and the war with Mexico. But we wanted that land, didn't we? We offered to buy it. They wouldn't sell it, so we took it. You don't read that too much in the history books do you?

HP: No. Well, it's interesting what the history books do to things.

CE: I don't know much about the Indians, do you, in California? They say they were here for forty thousand years before the white man came.

HP: They were here for a long time, longer than forty five years.

CE: Forty five thousand, anthropologists say.

HP: Oh.

CE: Are there any rancheros or villages in Mill Valley that have been --

HP: No.

CE: They found a couple in Corte Madera Creek.

HP: Yes.

CE: A lot of this timber -- Now, in Ross area, all that redwood second growth; is that true here too?

HP: Oh yes.

CE: This is all second growth in Mill Valley?

HP: It's all second growth. You can always tell because the trees grow up around the original stump.

CE: Didn't know that.

HP: You can see it right down here at the corner when you go.

CE: Okay, we'll do that.

HP: Downtown you can see it.

CE: You're old enough and have been here long enough; you probably were on the Crooked Railroad before they took it down, right?

HP: No, the railroad was gone when I came.

CE: Were you living in the city? Had you been aboard though?

HP: Well, no, I hadn't but my parents had, but I hadn't been aboard.

CE: Wouldn't that be a smash today?

HP: Oh my, yes.

CE: Wouldn't that be something? Because the road can hardly take the tourists up there over the weekend.

HP: Well, it's a tragedy that they ever eliminated it.

CE: Have you done any research on the Kent family at all or the Muir Woods or any of that?

HP: No, not particularly.

CE: Has most of your research --

HP: Been on the Reed family.

CE: On the Reed family.

HP: And the Richardson family.

CE: And the Richardson's. Do you hope to get your book published within the year? Is it pretty well organized?

HP: I don't know now; it's taking me a long time to do it, you know.

CE: What's the hardest thing about -- After you get the data, you do your research and you have to organize it into a narrative style, don't you? And chapter --

HP: Yes. And it's hard for me; I can't type anymore so it's hard to get it typed you know. But it's interesting.

CE: I understand they're going to have a series on television regarding California history. Did you read that in *Focus*?

HP: Yes.

CE: The big four. I think they're going to have the railroad.

HP: Yes.

CE: It's interesting to me too, how much of Marin County is tied up with San Francisco wealth. You've found that out.

HP: I don't know whether you know Millie Robbins. Did you know her?

CE: Certainly.

HP: Well she's a very good friend of mine. We talk about once or twice a week.

CE: Where does she live?

HP: She lives in San Francisco.

CE: Does she?

HP: Yes.

CE: Why do you mention her? Because she was --

HP: Well she's well informed on history.

CE: Is she?

HP: Oh my, yes.

CE: Has she ever been interviewed, do you know? For the California Historical Society or anyone?

HP: Not to my knowledge, no.

CE: That would be an interesting -- Her career would be interesting. Just think what she's seen and the social changes that she's had to write about over the years. She wrote for years didn't she for the *Chronicle*?

HP: Yes for the *Chronicle*. Now she writes for the *San Mateo Times*.

CE: Oh she does?

HP: Once a week she does a column. She going to Alaska on the tenth; she'll be gone for about two weeks.

CE: Is she a contemporary of yours, Helen?

HP: No. I think she's younger. I know she's younger than I am.

CE: Are you secretive about your age?

HP: No, I'm eighty three.

CE: What's your birth date?

HP: December 28, 1899 I was born.

GM: My son's birthday.

CE: That's Mrs. Martinelli's son's birthday. Have you done much research on the trains?

HP: Yes I've done a lot.

CE: There's a new book out about the electric trains I've bought --

HP: I have both.

CE: Did you buy them?

HP: Yes.

CE: It's interesting. I haven't bitten into it yet, but nice pictures. And it's always interesting when you talk to somebody who's been around for a while. They say they got to the city as quick with the old trains and ferries as they to today with the bridge and automobile.

HP: Much better. Yes.

CE: And it was a pleasurable experience.

HP: I remember when I first came here we went by the trains to the ferry and then crossed on the ferry.

CE: And here you live up in this kind of aviary. Do you have a view from your place?

HP: Oh yes.

CE: From the living room?

HP: From the living room to the mountain, yes.

CE: Did you have much damage last winter?

HP: No I just --

CE: Because you've on a rise?

HP: Yes.

CE: It all goes down.

HP: The front of my house was pretty well built.

CE: It was built. Well, I want to thank you so much for getting us come and meet you today.

HP: Well it's very nice --

CE: Helen, it's been a pleasure. Hasn't it Mrs. Martinelli?

GM: It has. Very, very, interesting.

CE: I don't want to tire you because I know you're really --

HP: There's book in there that I think you'd be interested in seeing. It's a bright red cover; it's on the second shelf.

CE: Alright. Before we leave, Mrs. Martinelli mentioned the name George Marsh and the lovely Japanese and oriental work that he collected in his stores in San Francisco, Monterey and Santa Barbara. They lived nearby here, didn't they?

HP: Lived right across from me.

CE: Right across. And what happened to the property? Is it still in the family?

HP: It's still. Some of it is still in the family; some of it's been sold. Look in the index.

CE: I see it, yes. Home, page 97. Have you been in their lovely home over the years?

HP: No, they were gone when we came here but I saw what was left.

CE: Well, I didn't realize they still had their San Francisco store.

HP: Oh yes.

GM: They don't have the store in Honolulu anymore though, do they?

CE: No.

HP: I don't know whether they still have the store in Honolulu or not. I really don't know.