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INTERVIEW WITH JAMES LEACH  
by Carla Ehat & Anne Kent  
July 27, 1978

INTERVIEWEE: James Leach (JL)  
INTERVIEWERS: Carla Ehat (C.E.) and Anne Kent (A.K.)  
DATE OF INTERVIEW: July 27, 1978  
TRANSCRIBER: Marjorie Hoffman

CE: Continuing our Oral History program we have the pleasure this afternoon of being at the residence of James C. Leach. Mr. Leach lives at 154 Hilldale Drive in San Anselmo, California. Mr. Leach has been a very productive gentleman all of his years in Marin County and he has built over approximately 50 years, 300 home that are lovely, still standing and he should take a great deal of pride in his achievement. It's awfully nice to talk to you today, Jim.

JL: Thank you.

CE: Now, is it true you were born May 16, 1887 in England?

JL: That's right.

CE: And whereabouts?

JL: Liverpool.

CE: Now, I've read a little biographical sketch of your life and I understand your father left Liverpool to seek his fortune for the family overseas. How did it come about that he wound up in San Francisco and in California?

JL: It was due to the climate. After he was in Los Angeles for about a year my mother couldn't take the hot weather - from Liverpool, England, why, of course ---

CE: That was too extreme.

JL: Yes. So they heard of the fog up in San Francisco so they came up here.

CE: And what was your father's trade?

JL: He was a carpenter in England and that's what he was attempting to do here, I guess.

CE: So they came to San Francisco. Were there other children besides yourself?

JL: Yes.

CE: Oh, there's a photograph. Six of you?!

JL: There was one born after this photograph was taken. Five of us. These have all passed on; I'm the only one left.

CE: Now, I know that later in your life some of your brothers helped you in your business. Which ones are they?

JL: The curly haired; David.

CE: David. Any other brothers help you?

JL: Yes. William was the builder and David was a partner of mine for over 50 years without the stroke of a pen.

CE: All right, you're in San Francisco. By then, how old are you? What's your first remembrance of San Francisco? Did you go to school there?

JL: Yes, I was a poor student.

CE: You were? Where were you living at the time, Jim?

JL: We were living on San Jose Avenue, quite close to where Mayor Rolfe lived and I went to school in the Horace Mann School and later was moved on down to the Catholic Sacred Heart School for Boys and from there I never went to school excepting at night.

CE: What turned you off about school? Did you think it was superficial? You didn't -

JL: No, I was just anxious to do something.

CE: You're a doer.

JL: Well, on weekends I used to go down to my father's mill - not a mill, a cabinet factory and work on Sunday - on Saturday. There I met a man who collected the rents for the estate, the Shields Estate, a family who came from Scotland and he asked me if I would like a job during the summer vacation and I jumped at it. My father agreed to it. So I

worked there for several months and instead of going back to school, I wanted to continue with the job of collecting rents and I collected about 500 rents.

CE: Where? All over the city of San Francisco?

JL: North and south of San Francisco. It was all gold and silver; there were no -- There was only one check, a \$1,500 check.

CE: That you received?

JL: That I received. As a kid I walked up and down the streets with pockets full of gold and silver and I brought it back to the office and wrapped it up as you do in rolls, you know, and signed it and took it to the Crocker Bank at the Gore[?] in San Francisco.

CE: Well, who was this Shields family that had acquired all of this property? You say they were from Scotland?

JL: Well, this was a Scotch family of steel[?] people who came to San Francisco and I think instead of loading gold or silver, I think they brought a lot of mattresses over and they made money off the local people. The family later were all sent back to Scotland for their education and they all became professional people, doctors, lawyers, and so forth. They owned a good deal of downtown property.

CE: Would you collect from residences and businesses?

JL: Oh, yes, residences were all south of Market. They would probably be around \$10 or \$11 a month.

CE: And you as a young boy would do this? You were what - about 18?

JL: I was 19. Well, I was 16 when I started.

CE: And you just gave them a receipt and they gave you ---

JL: They gave me the money.

CE: I suppose this was before the days they bonded anybody?

JL: Oh, yes.

CE: It was just your word and they trusted you.

JL: Yes. The rents north of Market, as you know, are all pretty high rents, but there was one doctors' building where every doctor paid \$85 a month.

CE: Even in those days. We're talking just prior to the earthquake and fire approximately, aren't we?

JL: Before the earthquake.

CE: Yes, but just prior to it. You continued in that operation until how long? Until the fire and earthquake?

JL: Until the fire and earthquake. I was burned out of a job.

CE: Where was the family living at the time of the fire and earthquake, Jim?

JL: On Dolores Street near the Mission Dolores Church.

CE: Big, wide, lovely -

JL: Wide street and that's the one street, of course, that saved the west side of San Francisco and I was one of the young squirts that saved the little Swedish Church on the corner of 16th and Dolores.

CE: What happened?

JL: We got up in the belfry, it was only a two-story building, and we pulled water up in these large cans that we found at the well in the back of the church.

CE: I was wondering where you got the water because the city couldn't get the water.

JL: Yes. I was up there in the belfry and they were at the bottom and I pulled this water up and the building was shingled, and dry shingles, and wherever the fire blaze would come, why, I'd put it out. But that street, I think, was 150 feet wide, some as Van Ness Avenue, both of those streets were the things that stopped the fire - where the it was stopped.

CE: The people who laid out the city did have some good ideas in that. I heard also that your family was not at home at the time of the earthquake, your father and you were there.

JL: That's right.

CE: Where were your mother and other family members? Over here in Marin?

JL: Yes. We had bought a lot on Florence Avenue with a redwood grove on it.

CE: Now, how had your family got interested in Marin County? I know you spoke of it earlier to Mrs. Kent. Your father's employee, was it?

JL: Yes - my father - he was a foreman for my father, in his business.

CE: What was his name?

JL: Silas Moore.

CE: Silas Moore. And what did he do? What did he suggest to your father?

JL: He didn't suggest anything that I know of.

CE: About getting some land over there?

JL: Oh, he just told us to come over and camp on his property.

CE: Oh, that was your initial introduction?

JL: That was our introduction.

CE: And you liked it.

JL: In San Anselmo - we had been to Larkspur before that.

CE: And you liked it?

JL: We liked it, yes.

CE: And so, your mother ---

JL: May I go back to a point in case - - I don't know whether you're going to ask me about the earthquake and fire ---

CE: Certainly -- Let's get back to that day.

JL: One point that I thought might be interesting is that after my father and I – rather, I had heard in the morning of the earthquake that the Valencia Hotel on Valencia Street had collapsed. That's all in the ---

CE: Yes.

JL: So I got up there as quick as I could; it was several blocks, and I helped pull the dead and the crippled people out and from there we got down, how I don't know, we got down to my father's place off 2nd Street in San Francisco. It was a brick building and, of course, brick buildings collapsed, but the large timbers holding them were hanging in the air and I, as a boy, made my way back to his office in among all these bricks, and got to the safe and unlocked it and cleaned it out. After that, it was quite a sight to see the people in the south of Market dragging trunks and all sorts of things; the poor things would never get anywhere with it.

CE: Continue. So what did you do to help them? They're dragging all this furniture around.

JL: Oh, from there we wondered where we would go and my father remembered he had a friend who was the superintendent of the Mills Building on Montgomery and Bush, and so we made our way there, walking, of course.

CE: Well, Jim, I'm confused a moment, was your home destroyed? Was your house -

JL: We lived in a rented flat, three stories, on Dolores Street.

CE: Was it destroyed?

JL: No, not until later.

CE: Later, okay. Excuse me.

JL: We made our way to the Mills Building and how we got there, I've often wondered.

CE: That's a long way.

JL: We got there -- we got there but it was an eight or nine story building, you know, and no elevator; so we must have gone up the steps. But he asked Mr. Moorin, he lived in the penthouse, on the roof, and his daughter, Kate, and I were out on the open roof looking over down to the Murphy Grant wooden frame building which was on fire and the flames were coming up through the roof. And while we were there at ten o'clock in the morning was the time of the second big shake and we were standing looking over down into the flames when this earthquake shook us loose, almost. But I thought that an interesting fact that not many people know.

CE: No, that is good. Well, is it true that you collected some of the family silver and did something with it? The family silver and some possessions?

JL: Oh, yes. Well, that gets around to the third day of the fire. The third day of the fire in the morning we were notified that all of the homes on the east side of Dolores Avenue would be dynamited and that they had all day to save what they could. Of course, the family being here and my father having been kicked by a horse and had to get over here as quick as possible because he was lame---

CE: You mean here in Marin?

JL: Yes, here in Marin. So I started to work carrying all the furniture across this 150-foot street into an empty lot. I carried everything but the big stove (you know, in those days) and the piano but I carried everything else and I got them over across the street. By that time, it was getting later, well, it was still daylight but --

CE: Were there lots of people milling around? Were there a lot of people around while you were doing all of this?

JL: No, everybody else was doing the same thing. Anyway, these men all appeared and they dynamited all of those houses, to lay them flat so that the heat would not sufficient to carry across that wide street to Dolores. However, from then on the point was -- did I mention to you about the saving of the church?

CE: Well, I thought there was some story about your taking some of the family possessions and storing them in an interesting place. Where was it?

JL: Oh, yes. Well, at night time, after dark, I didn't know where to go or what to do so I said, "I'm going home," and home was a camp in Marin county! And I had to get all through the devastated district of San Francisco still burning. So, I laid three sheets on the ground and I put everything I could, that I thought I could carry, and I really had a load --

CE: A bundle --

JL: A bundle. I was 19 years old; of course, I was strong, but --

CE: Did anybody stop you?

JL: Well, let me tell you. I zigzagged across over to Van Ness Avenue and then down Golden Gate Avenue, there was a way, and I got to where the Irish Bank and it was dark. As I came around the turn, you know the army was in there --

CE: Martial law.

JL: Yes. I had a gun right into my face, but I told them what it was they believed me.

CE: Told them you didn't loot anything.

JL: They didn't open the bundle.

CE: Well, they were looking out for looters.

JL: But the big points in my life, I guess, were from there to the ferry. To go through all of that burnt section; it was still burning lots of it, and these large beams, steel beams, that hung out into the air. It was light enough because there was plenty of fire going on, but I had to zigzag from there to the ferry and I went from Market to Mission to Howard to Folsom and then back again, you see, then down and back again and I zigzagged with this big load until I got to the ferry and I never saw one person in all that trip.

CE: You were in no man's land by then?

JL: Exactly.

CE: Was the smell something of that devastation, do you remember the smell of that fire?

JL: No, not the smell, no.

CE: Just the horror of the whole bit.

JL: Yes.

CE: Well, you started earlier to tell me about the church, Mission Dolores. Did you store some things there?

JL: Oh, yes, yes.

CE: Well, tell us about that, Jim.

JL: Father Cummings was the pastor there and I went over to him and I asked him, "Could he help me to find a place to put my things," and he said, "Why, young man, sure, you come with me and I'll show you." And I said, "This was just made to order." So I went out and I can't carry this stuff but about a block and a half, but I found an old man with a one-horse outfit, a little - I forget what they called them. There would be about eight or nine feet long and about three or four feet wide ---

CE: A wagon of some sort?

JL: Wagon - And I asked him if I could hire him to work with me to move this stuff and he said, "Well, how much money do you have?" I said, "I've got one \$20 gold piece and it's yours if you help me."

CE: Now is this after the three days?

JL: I moved this from the open lots, the next day after the ---

CE: I see - to the church, to Mission Dolores?

JL: To Mission Dolores.

CE: Did he do the job for you?

JL: Well, I did most of the carrying, he was an old man but he had the horse and wagon.

CE: He had the wagon. And then you kept it in the Mission?

JL: We kept it there. I forget how long but - I don't remember that part of it.

CE: Some weeks?

JL: Oh, yes, I suppose. It was in the basement.

CE: Isn't that interesting? Well, let's get you over to Marin County. So, you took the ferry. Where did you get the ferry then? Where were they running as far as that week in April?

JL: Well, I got on the boat ---

CE: Where? At Market?

JL: Ferry Building and I ---

CE: It took you where?

JL: I had no food for quite a while so I said to the man on board, asked him what he had and he said just cold coffee, that's all. I'll be home pretty soon and I got to ---

CE: Where did the ferry take you to?

JL: To Sausalito.

CE: Then what did you do?

JL: Then I think it was the electric train, yes, the electric train, and I got off at San Anselmo and had to walk a mile up to Lansdale.

CE: That was the campsite?

JL: That was that year's campsite.

CE: Now, of course, your mother didn't know where you were during all of this catastrophe ---

JL: No, no, no.

CE: She hadn't seen you for days.

JL: She cried when she saw me.

CE: Well, then, the fire and earthquake is over, the fire is out, and the city talks about rebuilding. Did your father get involved as a carpenter back in building?

JL: Oh, no, no. He was in business and building cabinets and alterations and so forth of stores in San Francisco and, of course, after the fire and earthquake there was an awful lot ---

CE: So there was lots of work for him.

JL: There was an awful lot, he was then out around Fillmore, that section of the city, and he was very busy.

CE: But he had probably made the decision to make his permanent residence in Marin County after that fire?

JL: Well, I think his family did. We all loved it so much that the poor man was confused and he was getting along in years. Isn't he a nice looking man?

CE: Fine looking man. He has the most distinguished looking face - and that beard. He looks so English; he's just a handsome, wonderful man. So then, what did he do, decide you ought to live in a permanent home then? Is that when you bought the house?

JL: Oh, yes, we started right away to build a house.

CE: Where?

JL: Under the redwoods, which we eventually had to give up because they're not very warm.

CE: Well, was there a street called Florence Avenue?

JL: Yes.

CE: Is that the place we're talking about?

JL: Yes, they're pretty old houses now.

CE: All right now, time is going on now and you're about 20 and you're deciding what to do with your life. How did it come about, Jim, that you go into this business, real estate? And home building?

JL: Having collected rents. You know, the old days you could stick a sign out, "Real Estate," without any permission at all, in a blacksmith shop. You know, you didn't have to have any permission at all.

CE: You didn't have to get a license to open this kind of business.

JL: No license at all.

CE: And you didn't have to be passed by a Board of Realtors?

JL: No. So I used to be a salesman. I used to rack my brain to see where I could make a sale.

CE: Well, first of all, we've got to get you in the business. How did you start? Did you open up a little shop?

JL: The first post office of San Anselmo was available due to the fact that they were building the first store in San Anselmo. I think it was the first one, and the post office went into that building and this little shack was available.

CE: We're looking at a photograph taken in 1908.

JL: Well, it was 1906.

CE: OK, well, this photograph is dated 1908 and it has a little building, ten by twelve feet, would say?

JL: I don't think it was quite that big.

CE: And it says James C. Leach on the top. Is that you standing in the doorway with the derby hat, all dressed up?

JL: Yes.

CE: It says that you're a local agent for Floribel Park.

JL: That was the name of Flora and Belle, two daughters of a man named Rosenthal who owned a good deal of the land of Bald Hill, which Albert Kent bought and which I later sold from Albert Kent, 56 acres to - I forget the name of the Jewish gentleman.

CE: Well, now this building stood originally, you said, on the corner of Tunstead in San Anselmo and then you moved it over to Sir Francis Drake Boulevard between Bank Street?

JL: Yes. George Martin, who was the big boy in the small town and ---

CE: What do you mean by that? He had a big truck?

JL: Big, husky guy, you always see them in the moving pictures.

CE: What did he have, a rig that could move that old building?

JL: I asked him, could move that building, he lifted it up and got it on, brute strength.

CE: What did he charge you to do that, do you remember?

JL: Oh, I don't know, 20 bucks or so.

CE: Twenty bucks and you're in business in a new place. Why did you want to move it?

JL: Well, because they were going to build a new building on that - the first drugstore, Hund's Drug Store was to be built on it, which was built.

CE: But this was also the main road?

JL: Yes, it was called Main Street.

CE: First I think it was called the Old County Road, then Main Street, and now Sir Francis Drake.

JL: Yes.

CE: Okay. So what was your first enterprise in selling real estate, was it Floribel Park?

JL: Well, no. I just wanted something to stick up there on the sign. I used to watch the - a great many picnics came to Fairfax on the weekends and these trains were open trains with seats running along side and they'd go up to Fairfax and they'd be sidetracked for the day until evening when they went back to San Francisco. So Fairfax had that park with the picnic tables and chairs and so forth and I used to drive up my horse and surrey and tie them and go to each table, you know, and talk with the people. Of course, everyone there, people, lots of them, they hadn't been to Marin and loved it, of course, and when I mentioned a chance to take a drive around, why they ---

CE: In a hose and buggy ---

JL: So I'd take them over to Deer Park and sell them lots for \$ 425.

CE: That's a good selling approach. Would you like to go for a ride and then when they're on the ride you're pointing out this beautiful area. "By the way, yes, I think you could buy it."

JL: They've used that method for many, many years in other places.

CE: All right, now. Excuse me. You were successful in this enterprise and I understand a few years later your brother, David, joined you.

JL: Yes.

CE: Didn't you develop some land together with him? I've heard of the Bush and Rosenthal tracts, is that your ---

JL: No, well, I sub-divided a number of small holdings. In those days we - people couldn't afford larger lots so we used to sub-divided into from 25 to 50 feet width, but later ---

CE: Do you think that was wise in hindsight to have those small lots, Jim?

JL: No. I've had two sub-divisions since then; one, Brookside Meadows which is a smaller sub-division of 80 lots and I changed over to 60 foot widths which aided a lot ---

CE: Well, you could do more with the home, the design.

JL: The home, design the home. This sub-division here ---

CE: The one we're in today at your home; this is Hilldale Park.

JL: Hilldale Park.

CE: Who did you buy this from? Who owned this land?

JL: I bought this from Willie Forbes, the old Forbes family that came from Scotland and lived in San Rafael. I bought this from Willie Forbes, about 50 acres from him and four acres from the Jordan family.

CE: Well, let's go back, let's don't jump ahead for a minute, because pretty soon we're coming to World War I and you had to fulfill your service time. What did you do, join the Army or Navy or what?

JL: The government took me by the neck and my brother and put us out of business. Sent us up to Camp Lewis.

CE: You were in the Army, you were drafted into the Army.

JL: We were in the Army.

CE: Did you have to go abroad? Overseas?

JL: Yes. My brother, Dave, and I -- He was called two months before I was and when I arrived he had a very fine Captain and he got the Captain to make it possible for me to come into the same company in the army. He always liked to have brothers - the Captain. So we were here quite a while and then we were sent on to England and on to France -- there's a big story there, of course ---

CE: Were either you or your brother wounded?

JL: No. He was shot at but just before the Argonne I call called - I was a sergeant then. I was called with a number of men back to officers' school and while I was at officers' school, he went through three major engagements and he buried about 80 men, but I'd been free of that which was lucky for me. When I got a commission I was assigned to the Seventh Infantry that had been through a great many battles and the Third Division of the Seventh Infantry and there wasn't an officer in the division that I was assigned to so I had to take over. Imagine a young squirt doing that?

CE: Well, I think it's part of your character. From little I know of you, you were entrusted with collecting all those monies when you were 16 to 19 and they could sense you had a great deal of integrity. Well, tell me, Jim, when you got through with the army or the army got through with you, how did you re-enter, when you came home, how did you re-enter the real estate business?

JL: Well, the house burned down the night before I got home.

CE: The family home?

JL: Well, it was the home my father had moved into, down in San Anselmo, close in. However, I sat in the office and thought of all the things that I could do that were better than what I was doing, so I sat there watching people coming in the office inquiring for low cost homes. They didn't have much money. It made me think, well, now, there's something. So I looked at the listings we had before and we had quite a few listings from about \$1,700 to \$3 – 4,000. So I went out and picked out those that needed things to be done.

CE: You called them 'fixer uppers'.

JL: 'Fixer uppers', yes.

CE: Today they call them 'handyman's delight'.

JL: Oh, they do?

CE: What did you do, get your brother involved?

JL: So I got by brother who had learned a bit about carpentry with my father and he was the younger one - he was this one - And I got him and I bought -- I was building houses before the war on Pine Street in San Anselmo and I had sold that section to a client of mine, an old man who had lots of money, and those were on 50-foot lots. I think I had three houses nearing completion when an old man who lived in Ross walked by one day and he said, "Well, young man, what are you going to do with those houses?" I said, "I'm going to sell them if I can, I owe the bank everything." He said, "No, don't sell them, keep them, because after the war those are going to be worth a lot of money."

CE: Do you remember his name? That's all right, that's unimportant, but did you take his advice?

JL: No. The point was that I -- The bank gave me a moratorium on the money after Uncle Sam took me and so when I got back, why, it was sold, people were coming around wanting my houses, and then I got a little fresh and I said, "How much you pay me?" I had heard somebody else was getting more for their houses. So I sold houses - I had a price before I went into the war of \$2,750 for five rooms and hardwood floors in the living room and dining room and one car garage and electric ---

CE: How much for the lot?

JL: Including the lot, the house and lot for \$2,750 and the banks wouldn't permit me to sell on terms as far as they were concerned but as soon as I sold some and made some money I started in that business myself. I made arrangements for time payments.

CE: Probably easier terms than the bank could do, in a way.

JL: Well, it was about seven or eight percent interest.

CE: Well, that really put you back in business then?

JL: Yes, yes. With that money I went out and bought a great many little, cheap homes and fixed them up and I think I made about \$17,000 at that, after a certain while. From then on I was not interested in brokerage business. I hated to sit waiting all day and all night for somebody to arrive that never did arrive.

CE: I'm sure they feel similarly about it today. But is that then when you started in buying acreage?

JL: Yes.

CE: When you bought Brookside Meadows or you named it - where was that located?

JL: Brookside Meadows, it's abutting - just north of Morningside.

CE: Morningside - I see. How many homes did you build in there - just roughly?

JL: Sixty out of 80 lots. And I sold those for \$500 down and \$37 a month and the \$37 a month included principal, interest, taxes and insurance. But the reason, of course, was --

CE: FHA.

JL: FHA, yes.

CE: And that made things a little better.

JL: Yes, well FHA made it possible to sell for \$500 down and \$37 a month and the interest was 4 ½% and that was made possible by FHA at that time.

CE: Well, did this Brookside Meadows take you up to World War II about, or past -- Were you doing this during the second World War or up until it?

JL: Right through.

CE: Well, then I heard you mention earlier, about 1947 you bought from Mr. William Forbes some more acreage and you developed Hilldale Park where we are today.

JL: That's right.

CE: How many acres was involved in this, do you recall?

JL: Fifty.

CE: Fifty acres.

JL: Plus four acres where the United Market is.

CE: I see. Well, you did something rather unique in this sub-division, wasn't it? You had bigger lots?

JL: Yes. I often wanted to widen the lot up to arrange a plan that would permit people to enter into their house without going through the other rooms. In other words, without going through the bedrooms or the kitchen; you entered into an entry hall that took you straight into the living room and to the right to your bedrooms and to the left your kitchen and garage. So right on this street that you came out I build 14 of these in one contract and I sold them for \$9,700.

CE: Well, everything was appreciating, too. The land and money was becoming more accessible, so in a 20-year period you couldn't offer a home around \$2,900 or \$3,500.

JL: Of course.

CE: Tell me, in those days, Jim, did you have much contact with the county planning commission or whomever that body is that passes on sub-divisions? Do you follow my thinking?

JL: Yes, but, my mind ---

CE: I mean, it wasn't a difficult thing for you to submit these propositions of these sub-divisions? No trouble in getting them passed was there?

JL: No, when you met all the requirements.

CE: Did you have certain lumber companies you favored to buy your materials from?

JL: Yes, yes. Henry Hess. In the beginning, we had E. K. Wood Lumber Company in San Anselmo.

CE: Now they were right downtown near the heart of town. What happened to that lumber company?

JL: E. K. Wood - I forget, I remember I used to play handball with one -- the man that managed E. K. Wood's, Ray Thayer. You know Mrs. Thayer in San Rafael? She's the widow of Ray Thayer. She's a lovely woman.

CE: Lovely woman, yes. All right, now, I know that Carolina Farms comes into your story.

JL: Well, that was the four acres down where the United Market is.

CE: So that joins this Hilldale Park?

JL: Yes.

CE: Now, who was Colonel Jordan that you purchased this from? Was he a local fellow?

JL: He was the owner of the four acres. He later died, alone ---

CE: He was a southerner, I presume, from the Colonel part, is that correct?

JL: Yes. This street of Carolina Avenue was named after his wife and the Jordan part of his name was the street that goes up through the tract to the heights.

CE: And he had a lovely home there, is that home still standing?

JL: No. To develop that, why, it had to be torn down.

CE: Well, that brings me to another story. I know you've done a lot in the development of San Anselmo and there's a story I wish you'd tell us about, the old schoolhouse on Ross Avenue, the Main School. Now you were involved in that directly. You put in a bid to tear it down. Tell us about that.

JL: I was always ---

CE: It was a hard, well-built place.

JL: Yes. It was really built and it was built of wonderful materials but they were putting out for bids and I thought, "Well, I'm not really qualified but I'll take a flyer." So I put in a bid of \$600.

CE: To tear it down?

JL: To tear it down.

CE: Was it a big frame?

JL: Two-story, frame, wooden siding, all redwood.

CE: Is this where the present Wade Thomas School is today?

JL: Yes.

CE: Well, how did you go about doing this?

JL: Well, I'd no experience at all, as I say I put in a flyer for a bid, and I inquired and I'd heard of the Cleveland Wrecking Company in San Francisco so I got in touch with them and asked if they could manage it and they said, "Yes, when would you want us over?" I said, "As soon as possible." So, the next morning, two men arrived, two big, rough, husky guys, and all they had in their hands were an axe, a pick, and a saw and some ropes. To listen to how this was handled, they came in, got up on the roof, took the roof off and all the shingles and then they went to the corners of the building, right down to the floor of the second story, all these corners, then they let this thing fall onto the lower ceiling, you see. Then they get on top of them with a pick and they picked and they pulled the most beautiful redwood you ever saw. The wide siding, they pulled that wide siding off without cracking it, without destroying it.

CE: Did you save the lumber?

JL: Oh, I made money!

CE: How?

JL: By this – I inveigled on the lumber company to take the wide lumber and cut it into narrower uses. Like, in those days, they permitted you to have two by three studding on the inside of the home and this was all wide stuff and the joists were - I forget - The joists of the ceilings and the floor, I think about 16 inches and we cut those all into - they were two inches by 16 or something like that and we had the lumber company, Henry Hess, had them split into sizes that I could use in building homes and saving a good deal of money.

CE: And you didn't waste anything. And this was all top grade wood?

JL: All top grade, just the best redwood you could find.

CE: Was there any plaster in the house?

JL: Yes - all the plaster was pushed off the floor onto the ground and he permitted the people around there to come in with sacks and for 25 cents he permitted them to fill the sacks with this plaster because it was used in the gardens for lime.

CE: They talk today about recycling! You were way ahead of them. Isn't that true, Ann?

AK: Yes, it's wonderful.

CE: Well, there's another story I wish you'd share with us. You did some work over on Woodland Avenue, I think you might like to tell us about. The Worn strip.

JL: The Worn strip. Well, the town fathers of San Anselmo were anxious to get a hold of that Worn strip which was 60 feet in width by 1,200 feet in length.

CE: Well, did it go back of the Worn sisters' property there on ---

JL: Yes, back of their home on Ross Avenue.

CE: Strange piece of land - 60 feet by ---

JL: Yes, strange. It was a division between two sub-divisions. One was the Sunnyside and the other was -- I can't think of it.

CE: Well, we'll think of it later. What was it good for, 60 feet, what was it good for?

JL: For a battle!

CE: All right, what kind of a battle? Did the town want it at all?

JL: The town wanted it.

CE: What did they want it for?

JL: For a street. They wanted a street to go through to the school and this 1,200 feet from San Anselmo Avenue all the way back to the school. So Mr. Hinkle was the old man that I had as a client and I made money for him and I said to him, "They've had a battle and they've been in courts--"

CE: Well, why would there be a battle? Didn't the sisters want to sell it?

JL: Well, they irritated them, I think. So I just figured there was a way to do this and I approached this old man and I told him, I said, "You can make some money. I've sold you the abutting land already, now you add that to your land and you will make it possible to have two frontages and you can make money that way. It's a long distance, 1,200 feet; so there's other property along there." So I got my father ---

CE: "Dear Dad --"

JL: He was such a nice man and people loved him so much, I thought he's just the man to go to these two sisters. So he went to them and he talked the two sisters into selling it for \$4,500.

CE: To your company?

JL: No, it was to old man Hinkle. I think it has been said that I bought the property but I didn't.

CE: All right. Did that help you in any other way?

JL: Well, it made it possible for lots to be created and we named it Woodland Avenue. I forget how that came about.

CE: They could run through then? So the advantage, then, was that you could borrow from this strip?

JL: We could use a portion of this 66-foot to the back end of the Pine Street lots.

CE: Now what do these lots go for? Much higher, didn't they?

JL: Well, I don't remember that, but I remember we built a lot of houses along that street, low cost housing.

CE: Well, you probably helped the Worn sisters, too.

JL: Oh, yes, they were thoroughly satisfied.

CE: You made it possible to give them more than the town would have.

JL: Yes. Well, the town couldn't find a legal way of raising the money to buy this street, 40 feet by 1,200, so I suggested that we arrange a sale without interest so that the town could have that street up to the school.

CE: Jim, we've got to talk a little bit about -- you have been in San Anselmo so long, you were in on when the town was incorporated in 1907.

JL: That's right.

CE: How did that come about? Why did San Anselmo want to incorporate? Ross, the neighboring town, wanted to incorporate. Why did all of these little communities want to be separate and apart from San Rafael?

JL: Well, of course, there were many things they couldn't do, not being incorporated.

CE: Well, there was a close vote, I understand; it wasn't a large mandate of the people. The vote was 83 for and 79 against incorporation.

JL: I never remembered that.

CE: Well, what changes have you seen in what you as a young man at 20 envisioned about San Anselmo in its growth and development? Are you pleased with the way it's heading?

JL: Well, it's all been such a difficult thing for this community to enhance and increase due to the bay barrier. That was the trouble, it's been very long growing. The peninsula of course went all the way down there in very short order in comparison to what we did on the north.

CE: Well, when the bridge was built there was tremendous change in Marin County.

JL: Yes, that, of course, was one of the things that brought about the ---

CE: How do you, as a developer and builder, cope with the attitude of the ecology and conservation -minded people today? You had no mention of those when you were a young man going into business and this is a very vital force today. What is your position with conservation and the preservation of the land and the good use of the land?

JL: Well, I've always built and sold to the low-income people and I've always worked for that end. I worked for the Home Owners' Loan Corporation as an appraiser. I have appraised four hundred homes in Marin County for them. And where people have lost their homes on the Courthouse desk due to the high rates of interest and high taxes, they weren't able to pay them.

CE: Do you believe home ownership makes for a well-knit family and the family unit is still a very important thing?

JL: Yes, yes. Well, of course today, in Marin County a man has children, they can't live here close to him. They can't live in the same county. They've got to go away.

CE: Well, I think Marin County has been indeed fortunate to have had Jim Leach come here in 1906 and build such lovely homes of high quality and to have given so much of his time and effort to this community. Would you not agree, Ann?

AK: Oh, I think he's wonderful. One of the best people that ever came, I believe.

CE: To close this interview, it's been very pleasurable for Mrs. Kent and myself and it certainly is a delight to have met you. Thank you, sir.

JL: Thank you very much.