

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

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INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT TRUMBULL

by Carla Ehat & Anne Kent
January 27, 1983

INTERVIEWEE: Robert Trumbull (RT)

INTERVIEWERS: Carla Ehat (CE) and Genevieve Martinelli (GM)

DATE OF INTERVIEW: January 27, 1983

CE: Today is Thursday, January 27th, 1983, and continuing the Oral History Project for the Anne Kent California Room this is Carla Ehat, and joining me today is Mrs. Jordan Martinelli. We are doing the interview in her residence, but we will be speaking shortly with Robert Hamilton Trumbull, Jr., who resides at number 75 Corte Oriental in Greenbrae. Mr. Trumbull has graciously consented to share his Novato roots with us this afternoon. He is the son of Robert H. Trumbull, who was a Marin County Supervisor from 1948 through 1952, and one of the vice presidents of the Golden Gate Bridge District when it was created. And Mr. Trumbull, Sr., was one time patriarch of Novato and manager of the Novato Land Company, which later, part of it, became the Trumbull Ranch. This was a huge undertaking which ran many fine dairies, milked 1,000 cows, tended 500 acres of vineyards and 1,700 acres of apples. His father also was known as an astute cattle auctioneer and farmer. Bob Trumbull, Jr., with us today, was born 1909 in Petaluma, though the family lived in Novato. His business career for many years covered the work of a property appraiser, and he became the chief appraiser for the Bank of Hawaii for 15 years. Though Bob is now retired for about 5 years, he considers himself a rancher, a hunter, a sportsman, and a fisherman, but does serve in a community capacity by being a director of the Marin County Historical Society. Well, you know, Bob, it's awfully nice to talk to you this afternoon. We haven't -- in all of these eight years we've been interviewing -- we haven't talked to many people from the Novato area, have we, Gen?

GM: No.

CE: Tell us a little bit about your family and what brought them to Marin. Do you want to start with your paternal line?

RT: Well, it's nice to be here, thank you. I think I should start with the grandfather who really was the beginning of all this. His name was Robert John Trumbull, and he was born, really, in Londonderry, Ireland. Left there at a very early age with his brothers and his mother and came to Connecticut and lived in Connecticut and were in the book-binding business. And all of a sudden decided he wanted to come west and took a boat from Connecticut down through the Atlantic Ocean to the Isthmus of Panama, which was not the Panama Canal any more, but it is only the Isthmus. And he traveled there by canoe, from there over to the Pacific Ocean and then, by sailing vessel, on up the coast to San Francisco.

CE: Do you know what year this might have been? Just after the gold strike?

RT: Well, I think he was here twice. We're not quite sure exactly what year, but it was early 60s. And he and a man by the name of Beebe started a seed business in San Francisco known as Trumbull and Beebe on Front Street in San Francisco. And finally he decided he didn't like San Francisco, and moved over to Marin, bought property on the west end of San Rafael, and started a nursery there. And then decided he was going to marry the girl that he had met in Connecticut, and her name was Elizabeth Hamilton. And she came out and met him here and they had two girls, Vine Trumbull and Dorothy Trumbull, and then my father, Robert Trumbull.

CE: This nursery, interrupting you, is that the site where the present West End Nursery is in San Rafael, roughly?

RT: That's right. And it also ran out pretty much to the Mount Olivet Cemetery and it included, at that time, if you remember back, some of you, there was a motion picture studio on that property, and probably the first one in Marin or anywhere.

CE: One of the first in California.

RT: In California.

CE: Did you know your grandfather?

RT: Slightly.

CE: I mean, he did live a little after you were born?

RT: Just within; I guess I might have been four or five years old, probably. But, his wife died and he lived on Center Street. I think it was just a block off of H. And after her death, he just left the house and moved to another little house which was beyond the nursery there. Stayed there with the two girls and Dad, and decided he was going to go into the subdivision business, probably the first one in California. And this was for retired ministers, and it was in Orland. He had quite a lot of property in Orland, California, and he would set up five acres for each minister and build a house, and it was all equipped with livestock and fruit trees and everything. This didn't work out too well.

CE: Why the ministry, I wonder? Was he a religious man?

RT: He was a very religious man and when he first came here he started, really, in selling religious books. And he and Robert Dollar and many of them were the instigators of the Seminary in San Anselmo, the starting of the seminary. And also the Military Academy, Mount Tamalpais Military Academy, which my father attended. Then getting back to my father, I guess my grandfather somewhere in there passed away, but I'm not sure what date or what year.

CE: Well, that's on record somewhere, of course.

RT: But my father's first job, as I can remember it, was in the lumber mill at Duncan's Mill. And he used to take the train, narrow gauge train, on up through Tomales on into Duncan's Mill. He was very friendly with Robert Menzies. Robert Menzies at that time was working for Parrott and Company in San Francisco, who were marine insurers at that time, and asked my father if he would like to go to work for Parrott and Company. And he did and worked for them for a number of years. He used to tell me that he would work down at the waterfront with a horse and buggy and have all the gold in sacks for each of the captains on the ships that they were taking care of. And just tie the horse up in front of the pier and go aboard with a sack of money and count it out with the captain, and come back and apparently no one would touch the gold. And finally he was asked by Novato Land Company to be manager of their branch in Novato. In the meantime he had married my mother.

CE: 1900.

RT: Just about.

CE: And what was her name?

RT: Her name was Edith Morrow Mac Brown.

CE: Mac Brown, one name?

RT: Mac, two names. M-a-c.

CE: Capital "B" -r-o-w-n?

RT: B-r-o-w-n; capital B. She was the daughter of Kate Farley, Catherine Farley, who came out across the plains as a young girl of ten years from Iowa. And married, ultimately, stayed at the old adobe in Petaluma for about, I guess, two or three years and finally married John McAllen Brown.

CE: When you say old adobe, you're talking about Vallejo's Adobe that's been restored as an historical landmark?

RT: That's the one. And they were married in Petaluma and he, in turn, bought the Bojorques grant as years went by. And we'll get into that a little later, or do you want me to keep on with the Trumbull end of it?

CE: No, keep on with the Trumbull. I think it's --

GM: What ranch did he buy?

RT: The Bojorques.

CE: That has an unusual spelling. I can't recall it right now but we'll -- And that's out west of Petaluma, is it not?

RT: It's west of Novato, starts west of Novato, starts with the Cheese Factory. Actually, the Petaluma-Point Reyes Road would be pretty much the boundary and it went down Salmon Creek and down Chileno Valley and took in the Soulajulle, took in Tomales, Two Rock and ended up at Washoe House.

CE: Tremendous piece of property.

RT: He bought that for a dollar an acre.

CE: Now what year would that have been, just after the turn of the century?

RT: This was -- Yes, he came out across the plains too, but worked for the Spring Valley Water Company.

CE: San Francisco?

RT: San Francisco.

CE: Mr. Bourn's outfit?

RT: That's right. Came across the Golden Gate on a barge with his horse. Came into San Rafael when they were having a fiesta. He was looking for the Bojorques grant and finally found it west of -- which is now known as the Petaluma-Point Reyes Road. Found a big spring there and decided this was the property and negotiated with Pedro Bojorques to buy his property. This went on for -- all of the children, seven of them, were born there in a ranch just as you go up Redhill, on the right hand side, which is now owned by the Spalettas, which is Edith Rossi's husband's name. They were all born there. And finally the squatters came in and worked on the property for, I guess, 10 or 15 years. And they tried to keep them out because at this time, you see, there were no boundaries, only hills or a rock here and a buckeye tree there; these were the boundaries of the old Spanish grants. And of course, the titles -- There were no titles to the property other than somebody saying, "From this tree to this rock was my property."

CE: Then they had all of those litigations for years.

RT: So he went into court, and he was in court for 20 years.

CE: Twenty years! The Land Commission, I remember that was started about 1850 and they were trying to do right by everybody, but who made the money? The lawyers.

RT: That's right.

GM: Who were the lawyers in those days?

RT: That's right. They really weren't lawyers. He was finally killed in Petaluma and my grandmother raised the seven children and finally moved off the ranch at Redhill into Petaluma and lived on D Street, which was a very nice street at one time in Petaluma. Big house --

CE: Did you know her?

RT: Yes, I did. Finally, this whole deal was settled or apparently settled in court, but a great deal of it was lost. And I have--

CE: Well, like so many people we have interviewed who go back four or five generations, the cost of the litigation necessitated paying off the lawyers by selling off the land.

RT: And of course, the fencing, the fencing was very --

CE: And the fencing --

RT: Was so much he just couldn't, the family couldn't stand it, and they lost a great deal through court action. I have many of the old deeds that go back to 1847, 1852 for these properties; and the court decisions that were laid down in San Francisco and Petaluma.

CE: When your grandfather had this acreage, what was it known as, familiarly? Did it have a name, this ranch?

RT: No, it was known under the Spanish names: The Chileno and Laguna San Antonio and Soulajulle.

CE: But he didn't, he didn't refer to it as his -- carry his name, Mac Brown?

RT: No.

CE: All right.

RT: So these children tried to keep it together and couldn't keep it together. It was just too much in those days. So that's pretty much the end of the Browns except that they were known as the Brown girls in Petaluma. There were five girls, I guess, and two boys: Bob Brown, Robert Brown; John Brown; there was Alice Brown; Genevieve Brown; Edyth, my mother; Ada. Let's see, guess that's all of them. Bob Brown had the ranch right across from the home ranch which is now owned, I guess, by Dolcini, the

Dolcini boys. The Barbonis have ranches which are right in close to the Thompson family. One of my grandmother's sisters married Thompson and that's how we're related to the Thompsons.

CE: Cheese people?

RT: Yes.

CE: We have a date to go out there and we just don't seem to get out.

RT: He's hard to find; he's always doing something. Very good interview he'll be.

CE: Well, let's go back, then, and kind of follow your father's career just a bit and somehow bring in the story of all that vast orchard land and the DeLong-Sweetser story as a prelude to it. I understand that your father had the first lumber yard in Novato. Is that true?

RT: That's right, he did.

CE: That was from his exposure up there at Duncan Mill and all of that?

RT: No, this was when he was still -- not with the Land Company, but after he had purchased the ranch he got into the lumber company in Novato.

CE: Well, tell us the story then about this Novato Land Company and how it came about. Give us a little background on the Novato setting there.

RT: Well, it was originally, you know, Sweetser-DeLong and the Sweetser's decided that they were not quite satisfied with being along with the DeLongs on a partnership basis so they decided to take a block of land which would be pretty much the town of Novato and out towards Black Point, and that would be the Sweetser division. And the other properties which included pretty much from the Stafford Lake today to the top of the ridge that goes down -- Lucas Valley Ridge, as we call it -- would go down to the Pacheco property, which would be almost at Ignacio. The other boundaries would be again from the lake going over Bowman Creek up to the top of -- We called it Nigger Hill.

CE: Burdell Mountain, called on the maps?

RT: It's now Burdell Mountain or Black Mountain.

CE: Black Mountain.

RT: Black Mountain was pretty much named after Captain Black who was the great grandfather, I guess, of the Burdell family. And that carried on down from there down through the marsh to hit what is known as Black John's Slough and then back up to the Sweetser property which went on to Black Point. But in that property we had probably the largest apple orchard in the world at that time. These apples were shipped, many of them, to the Orient. And we had apple packers, women, who came from San Francisco by train and boat to Novato in the morning and worked all day and then took the last train back to San Francisco at night. And these were apple pickers. They wrapped apples in tissue paper and each apple was separate and put in these boxes and shipped.

CE: You said earlier some of them were barged out of Novato Creek.

RT: No, that was the cobblestones that were made for the San Francisco streets. And as you look up on Black Mountain, or Burdell Mountain as you call it now, you'll see, it looks like a slide up on the top, but that's really a quarry. It was a rock quarry. And there were men that were doing these rocks on a chipping basis. There were, usually, maybe four or five men in a group and they would pick out a spot alongside of the hill and chip these rocks out and they were paid on a piecemeal basis. And these rocks were chipped out and there was a small railroad that went up there, horse drawn railroad, that took these rocks on down to what was known as the Cabbage Patch. And they were barged from the Cabbage Patch, which at that time had quite a lot of barge business, hay and things like that, for San Francisco.

CE: When you say the Cabbage Patch, can you locate the site today?

RT: Well, that's pretty much where Nave Shopping Center -- It's Novato Creek, really, right next to the Nave Shopping Center.

CE: And these cobblestones went to San Francisco?

RT: These paved the streets of San Francisco.

CE: Interesting. That was hard work, wasn't it, these cobblestones?

RT: Well, this rock is serpentine rock and it chips very easy, and it's very easy for them to work this rock. You can just hit it and chip it and it almost is like flint, it works very much like flint.

CE: I'm trying to think how big a cobblestone is.

RT: It's bigger than a brick.

CE: Is it heavier than a brick?

RT: Yes, much heavier.

CE: When they lay them on the streets then, on some of those hills that are so steep, would they be set in some kind of mortar or sand?

RT: No, they would be set loose and tight, of course, so they wouldn't shift too much. We also used to raise and break all the horses for the San Francisco Police Department, in San Francisco. They all wanted bays and blacks to match and they all had horses of --weighing anywhere from, oh, 1,000 to 1,200 pounds; and they all had to be broken -- where you could shoot around them and be perfectly gentle because, naturally, they were around people. And I can remember as a very young boy, the Spanish boys we had with us break these horses. And we raised a lot of them but we brought many of them down from Nevada which were not Mustangs, these were horses raised -- mostly Morgans -- raised in Nevada -- double square horses brought down. And in the spring these boys would break them out in the flat below the house, and they'd put a sack over their head and snub another horse up next to them and away went.

CE: Now when you say "the house" are we talking about this lovely old house here?

RT: Yes, we're talking about --

CE: That was the ---

RT: That was the main house of the ranch.

CE: DeLong house, built in --

RT: 1864.

CE: 1864. Well, this was a mansion in its day. My goodness, doesn't that have close to 20 rooms?

RT: Fourteen rooms and a full attic, I mean really full, and a full basement, rock basement. And then, of course, the kitchen, which was added to it, and I understand Novak now has spent, or did spend, about a \$100,000 in remodeling and adding another kitchen and rumpus room, plus servant's quarters and dog runs and so forth, garages.

CE: Is he still living there?

RT: No. It's been sold about two or three times, I think, since.

CE: Well, give us a little background on this DeLong gentleman. You've told us a little bit about Sweetser.

RT: Well, I really don't know too much about DeLong. All I know is what I --

CE: Are they easterners who came out west?

RT: Yes, they were.

CE: So many people came from Vermont. Don't tell me they were from that part of the world?

RT: I really don't know where they came from. But I do know that one of them was rather a high liver. He loved to spend money and loved to gamble and apparently that put the ranch in financial difficulty. And then there was a board set up to administer the ranch, outside of Mr. DeLong. And then they decided they wanted to sell the ranch, divide it, and my father had to have surveyors and put this ranch up for sale. Many of the tenants on these various ranches, you see -- The ranches were: A, the "A" Ranch would be just, I'd say, almost west southwest of the ranch; and the "B" Ranch would be down where Cabbage Patch is; the "C" Ranch would be where San Marin is and Nigger Hill; the "E" Ranch would be just over the hill from that along the Bowman Creek, which was the Magetti property. And then the "F" Ranch was the one that was right next to Stafford Lake, the end of Center Road.

CE: This seems to be a common practice because they did that in Point Reyes Station, I understand, when --

RT: Shafter --

CE: Shafter and Howard and all those, they --

RT: And Howard, yes. Of course, that was all the point, Point Reyes. And then the "F" Ranch we had, that was at the end of Vineyard Road. It took out to the lake where the Ryan property came in. "H" Ranch was the one that ran along the top of the hill, Lucas Valley Ridge here. Now all these ranches came into the main property and we had slaughter houses and we had cheese factories and we had dryers; we had vinegar houses all at the main ranch.

CE: At the main ranch?

RT: All at the main ranch.

CE: Would this be sort of like the home ranch?

RT: It was the home ranch.

CE: That was the home ranch.

RT: That was the home ranch for these ranches. We put up a lot of hay, a tremendous amount of hay. Of course, in those days it was for horses and that was a fuel for horses.

CE: Well, your father's introduction to this, really so intimately, was during his tenure as manager of this land company which embraced all of this acreage.

RT: That's right.

CE: And when he had the opportunity to buy some of this --
RT: He bought pretty much the home ranch.
CE: The home ranch --
RT: Yes. And kept pretty much the land around the home ranch for himself.
CE: Tell me, Bob, when you were a young boy were some of those orchards still extant?
RT: Oh, yes.
CE: And were they still packing fruit and shipping it out?
RT: Picking fruit and shipping it --
CE: When did that die off, that --
RT: After the ranch began to subdivide. People were -- apples -- There was no price for apples; the foreign market fell off. And these were Newtown Pippins and they -- Of course, you know, apples, why, they were apples that kept very well. But we had all kinds of fruit. I remember fig trees, peach trees, cherry trees, pears, chestnuts, anything you could think of was pretty much --
CE: Where did you get your help?
RT: Well, most of the help were seasonal help. There was Big Bob and there was Petaluma Charlie and there was Dooley Cork and all these guys used to come in from --
CE: All over.
RT: From all over, but they all came back and worked at the ranch during the height of the season. And, of course, the grape season was another big deal, too. But we had, as I say, about 100, 150 men during --
CE: Did you feed them?
RT: Yes. We had seven to eight cooks, Chinese cooks, and this is where you thought we were using Chinese labor. There was really only one Chinese who worked outside and one Japanese, and they got into a fight with hay hooks one day on top of the apple house -- which is the big apple house you can see here -- and we had quite a time with them. They cut themselves up pretty bad and finally we had to get rid of them. We also had parolees from San Quentin, a few of them.
CE: Trustees, sort of?
RT: Yes. And I can remember my dad having a little difficulty with these boys. One fellow hit the foreman over the head with a single tree, and on Saturday and Sundays were little drinking bouts that they had there and he'd have to untangle those. But I can remember, one day he had one man in the office that was from San Quentin and there was quite a ruckus and all of a sudden the door flew open and the door slammed and out went a man flying into the yard there. And he called for the man that was in the -- I guess where the horses were kept, the stable, to bring the wagon over and horses; he was going to take him back to San Quentin. And he put him in the wagon and took him back to San Quentin. We didn't have too much trouble, just on Saturdays and Sundays; that's the only time.
CE: In your judgment was this pretty well a self-sufficient operation?
RT: It was very self-sufficient. Butter was the big thing. You see, milk in those days -- You talk about dairies, but everybody milked cows on the basis of spring. Spring was the time. And they made butter. And they would bring this butter into the ranch and then it would be shipped out of there to San Francisco, or made into cheese, because we had a big cheese factory. And the slaughterhouse, which was over on this side, which Mr. Butler, I guess, was the head of that operation.

End, Side A

CE: -- must be 15 inches long and 6 inches high, and its wonderful overview, sort of looking southwest with the home ranch. If your father had to go to town, county seat, was it much of a ride to go by wagon?
RT: Well, it was about two miles from the ranch to the station in Novato.
CE: The railroad station?
RT: The railroad station in Novato. But he had many things to do. As I said, his father had this property in Orland, and he had to maintain that. And many cattle and car loads of hogs and cattle and horses went up to Orland. And he was going back to Orland quite often -- which is in Glenn County.
CE: That's a long way.
RT: And a lot of that was done by horse and buggy. That was really a long trip. And to Petaluma quite often, because Petaluma in those days was really the hub for the ranchers in northern Marin. San Rafael was not set up for ranchers at all.
CE: So many people have told that: "In West Marin we never went over those mountains to San Rafael; we went right to Petaluma. That was the heartland."
RT: That's true because they had everything the farmers wanted.

CE: Sure, sure.

RT: I can remember Ramon Correo, and he was the first one, I guess, that really put me on a horse and got me going. He was the last of the Spanish boys that was with us, and he would come into the ranch, just above the house, come up this road and maybe he'd have a steer or a bull or something that he wanted to brand. And he'd rope him and flop him right in front of this blacksmith shop, go inside and heat an iron, and this horse in the meantime was holding that bull or steer -- whatever it was -- until such time as he could come out and put an iron on it. I never got over that because this man -- It was --

CE: It's an art, isn't it? It's graceful.

RT: Yes.

CE: The Mexicans were just known, and the Spanish, for their vaquero's work.

RT: This was really the man, and he knew it all. He took care of all the cattle, all the ranches and all the cattle and so forth. You see, all these ranches had so many cows that were leased to them by the ranch, and then the rancher paid rent to the ranch on the basis of how many cows that he ran. And then the butter was brought to the ranch and sold for them, almost like a cooperative basis, to San Francisco.

CE: Tell me, Bob, looking at this photograph, could you sort of identify -- There's so many buildings. Is that the main residence there?

RT: Here's the main house, but if you go a little bit east of that was the blacksmith's shop and a bunkhouse on top of the blacksmith shop and carpenter shop. Everything had to be done on this ranch. You had to shoe horses. You had to make rakes, hay rakes. Everything had to be done there because --

CE: You had to be self-sufficient.

RT: Yeah. And because you had so many horses they had to be shod there. The hay bailers that went out from here, there were probably four went out a year, and were out for six or eight months, that had hay or bailed hay by horse power. And this means horses running around in a circle.

CE: And you'd do it right there in the field?

RT: They are done in the field, and you wouldn't see it. But in the meantime there would be four chuck wagons, or Chinese cooks going out with chuck wagons, that had --

CE: To support that.

RT: Yes. These boys, oh, they'd eat four or five times a day. It was sunup to sunset. The Chinese would be all supplied here at the main ranch and then they would go out. We'd have to bring water and fuel and bale ties, which were wire in those days, out to the bailers. And the cooks were working maybe two or three shifts, in the season, the height of the season. But the vinegar houses were where many men worked, and these were apples that were what we called culls. They weren't be able to shipped overseas. These went into vinegar. And vinegar in those days was a big thing. It was just like, I guess, your Clorox would be today.

CE: You use it for a lot of things other than --

RT: Yeah. But that was the first building from the house. Then came the big apple house and this was three-story brick building which took care of all the apples that were stored and packed and so forth and shipped from there. And then this was the cook house in here, which, after many years, I finally got up in the eaves here and found out that along the eaves little holes were cut in the wall and blocks of wood were in there, and I guess the Chinese boys sort of did a little opium smoking up there. And then there were many bunkhouses back in here for Chinese and for some of the foremen's families and so forth. Big hay barn back in here. Mule barns were over in here. Another big --

CE: Mule barns. What were mules used for?

RT: Well, mules were used the same as horses were used.

CE: Working capacity of some sort?

RT: Yes, they were.

CE: Where were the orchards in relation to here?

RT: Orchards, I would say, were south, south east.

CE: South and south east?

RT: Yes.

CE: We're looking --

RT: This would be west here, and this would be pretty much east, but this would be south, I guess. South and north.

CE: I see.

RT: They ran, really, down, started at Eucalyptus Avenue up here and went down Center Road and Vineyard Road then down Center Road all the way to almost the Cabbage Patch. And that was all apples.

CE: It really was the climate in that area was just right, wasn't it?

RT: Perfect for them. And very good for vineyards. There was a big vineyard up just west of the ranch, went up what is known as Vineyard Road and then up to Center Road and up to Sutro Avenue. This was all on Novato Boulevard; this was all vineyards.

GM: That was a large operation.

RT: Yes. And your father, Mrs. Martinelli's father, Pat, bought a piece of property from us.

GM: Oh, really? I didn't know.

RT: And he had a piece of property at Center Road and Sutro Avenue, and we maintained it for him for many, many years. And it was from Novato Creek to Center Road. And he had this, I guess, for years and years.

CE: Well, now, after you were born, did you come to this home?

RT: Yes.

CE: This is where you were raised right here on this home ranch?

RT: Yes.

GM: Was this operation all going like this when you were a boy?

RT: Yes.

CE: I didn't realize that it was still operating.

RT: Apple dryers, you see.

CE: Now what's an apple dryer? Tell us what an apple dryer is.

RT: Well, with all these apples that are culls, you see, they couldn't be shipped; they had to do something with them. So they had these vinegar houses which would press the juice out of the apples and made vinegar out of it. And you also had the dryer down here, where you could dry apples. You cut these apples. These apples had to be cut and put out in trays. In those days you didn't have a dehydrator, as you do today. You put them out in trays in the sun and they would dry. Also, you had a fire that you could build in this dryer that would keep the temperature down and help this drying process. And then after they were dried to a certain degree you could sack them and sell them as dried apples. Now you can go in the store today and buy dried apples, and it's the same thing. It was the way really of keeping a crop of apples from spoiling. As you notice here in this picture there is no Wilson Avenue which goes on today, goes up to the Hill Gun Club or to the "H" Ranch, as I should say. And this is a shopping center now which is on the corner where the old dryer was.

CE: Say again what this range of mountains is.

RT: That's the Lucas Valley Ridge.

CE: Lucas Valley Ridge, ok.

RT: And that's where the H Ranch went down. A.B. Hill from Petaluma was one of the directors of the Novato Land Company, and he was the one who bought the "H" Ranch. And I can remember as a kid hunting there, and every gulch and every arroyo and everything had a name, you know, like Crooked Horn and Rattlesnake Ridge, and all this sort of thing. Everything was named, to identify. There was also a lot of prunes down here. There was also apricots, orchards of these.

CE: Any of those shipped to local markets within --

RT: There was really very little local markets. Everything had to be shipped out. San Francisco was really the main thing. But it was a busy place.

CE: Well, tell me, as a boy growing up in such an atmosphere, that's a rare treat.

RT: Well, I can remember there was one Chinaman that we were very close to, and his name was Jenny and he -- As I said, my father was away quite a lot. My mother was there alone quite a bit. And he was just like a watchdog. Nobody went in or did anything without Jenny knowing about it. He really taught me Chinese. As a little boy I remember going to his house over there in the back where the other Chinese cooks were, and he had a big box and in that box was peanuts, and stale. There was candied pineapple and lychee nuts. And he would feed me this and then we'd go in and eat with the men in the cookhouse. In the meantime he would fight with the Chinese over there. I suppose in a game, they'd run me from the cookhouse, and then he would get out and save me from the four Chinese coming from the cookhouse, the big cookhouse. But he lived and did most of the work for us in the house, laundry and so forth, for years. And finally he came to Dad and said he wanted to go back to China; he was getting very old. And Dad said, "Well, ok," and he set him up to go back to China. He did go back, was there about a year, and wrote us a letter. What kind of a letter it was! He said bandits had stolen his passport and he wanted to come back, but he had no passport. So Dad worked -- I guess in those days Chinese, getting them back into the United States was very difficult. And he worked for two or three years and finally got

another passport for him. And we got another letter from him saying he was too old; he was going to stay and die in China. But we had many Chinese and they were very, very fine people, very trustworthy people.

CE: Was your mother the only -- and your sister -- the only women on the ranch? Or were there any help to support, female help to support your mother in any way?

RT: Just the Chinese. Just Jenny. He did the laundry, did the housework, and took care of the house and was probably up all night and day just watching. But the foremen had wives and so forth.

CE: So there were other women on the --

RT: There were other families there, yes, but they were way back in here somewhere. But there was a lot of action going on.

CE: Well, did your mother have to preside or be there when meals were served?

RT: We had many people. Senator Shortridge and many, many people would come and stay with us in those days.

CE: You were hosts to --

RT: Yes, because hotels and motels were far apart. And I can remember one morning my father was having breakfast with Senator Shortridge and all of a sudden we had a terrible stench of skunk coming from out on the patio, and we just couldn't stand it. And all of a sudden my dad went out and here was the Chinese cook standing out there on a box trap. He'd caught a skunk, and he was trying to kill it with scalding water from a kettle, and he was yelling, "Heap stinky! Heap stinky!" while he was trying to kill it with this boiling water. I think probably no one could have a better bringing up than I did, that's for sure.

CE: All right, tell us now, as a boy you had all these Chinese playing with you, and amusing you and keeping you sort of out of mischief, but encouraging you at the same time. When it came school time, what happened?

RT: Novato School. And that was two miles away. And about the 1915 Fair, my father went to the fair and bought a pony.

CE: And brought it home for you?

RT: Brought it home for my sister. But the pony was in foal and had a colt and the colt was mine.

CE: Oh, boy!

RT: And that was it.

CE: That was it. You got your feet off the ground on the back of an animal.

RT: The beginning of riding. And that was back and forth to school.

CE: On the colt?

RT: On the pony. And we had, I guess he was a Puerto Rican, who had been with the circus, who had trained this little fellow. You could whistle and he would come. And we took him out finally, hunting and so forth, with all the other fellows and big horses. He would stay up with them, and we could pack deer on him and so forth, you know. He was quite a little horse, rather than a pony. He was more a Hungarian type, and they were bigger ponies than you think of the Shetlands in those days.

CE: I remember talking with Martha Foster Abbott. Her father raised those --

RT: Well, this is where we got them, and we were very close to the Fosters who were over on Sonoma side and also up in Hopland. They had ranches up there. But it was a great.

CE: Were you and your sister close?

RT: Very close, yeah. We had to be because we were in very close quarters there. But she finally went to San Rafael High School here, by train back and forth, and then to Dominican for a while and finally finished at Mills.

CE: That's wonderful.

RT: And married Dr. Kendall who was a dentist, and then they moved to Walnut Creek and finally to Sacramento.

CE: Tell me a little bit about your mother. Describe your mother and her attributes, if you would.

RT: Well, she was a very patient woman. She would have to be. I can remember going with her and Dad to Grandmother's, which was, as I said, on D Street, and of course, this was by horse.

CE: You'd go by horse?

RT: Horse and buggy to Petaluma to visit, and, naturally, you would stay one or two days, and then back to the ranch again. And the thunder and lightning just like we had today. I can remember coming back and the horses clipping along, and you know the little light flipping out on the side, coming down 101 Highway, which is part of 101 today. Dad always had very fast horses, and we had Black Joe, who was the stableman who kept these horses, and they were really fast. I remember Dad came in one day and the bit, if you are familiar with bits, just as he got into the barn and let up on the reins, why, the reins just fell out of

the bit. Because the horse had been pulling so hard on these, and he had been holding back so hard, that it opened the rings on the bit and they just fell out. So even in horses you had problems, accidents, and so forth.

CE: After Novato School where did you go then?

RT: I went to Mount Tamalpais Military Academy.

CE: And your father was involved in the creation of that, did you say earlier?

RT: My grandfather.

CE: Your grandfather.

RT: And my father had gone there, and then I went there. And then just after I was there a year, I think, it changed to the San Rafael Military Academy. And I graduated from there and then went to Davis. Graduated from there and then came back and worked for North Bay Production Credit Association which was a lending institution to farmers in Marin, Sonoma, and Napa Counties for chattel mortgages. This would be cattle, crops, things like that.

CE: Getting back to your schooling, did you enjoy the military experience?

RT: Yes I did, I really did.

CE: Who was the head of it then, Vanderbilt?

RT: Vanderbilt was the head. I just the other day saw his son who was with the Marin Historical Society, Bill.

CE: William, yes, Bill. I remember he was telling the story about the Chinese who ran the kitchen, Jue.

RT: Jue. And part of the same Jue family worked for us.

CE: Tell us about that. There was Arthur Jue, and Sue. I know the two brothers that we met.

RT: I don't know the whole family, but --

CE: One of them went to the --

RT: One went to the academy and one was a photographer. He took pictures of all the young fellows in the academy and all the sporting events, and did outside work as well.

CE: The old man was the --

RT: The old man was the head, and they had a little house on the academy property which was down -- I can't remember the street that went behind the academy on the west side.

CE: Beginning of Forbes Avenue there?

RT: It could have been, yes. And he had a little shack down there and the whole family lived there.

And his contact, the father's contact, was our contact for most of the Chinese that we had at the ranch - for cooks in Chinatown.

CE: Your father would contact him and say, "We have a need." And he'd say, "Give me time and I'll find them."

RT: Yes, yes. We were very close and we -- even years gone by, this name, Jue, even some of the boys, I think, were dentists in Oakland.

CE: J - u - e

RT: J - u - e. And also in San Francisco; they did very well in Chinatown in San Francisco.

CE: Well, you know, mentioning how one person being a contact, I remember when we interviewed Nellie Codoni McIsaac out there in Tocoloma. She said her father was sort of like an unofficial Swiss consulate. He'd find out if this rancher needed milkers or what, and he'd write back to Switzerland and they'd come and stay with their family. I guess a lot of that went on.

RT: I'll give you a little idea, if Mrs. Martinelli doesn't mind.

GM: Oh, no. I know what's coming.

RT: My grandfather -- Of course, I'm talking about Mac Brown, on these various ranches that he had, he had the same thing leasing out cows and so forth to tenants. And there was one tenant who would come over to their house, and this is when they lived just as you went up Redhill. And they would sing a song and the song went something like this. And I brought this up to Rod Martinelli one day when I was in, just when I got back from Hawaii. And I asked him if the words in this song meant anything to him, and he said yes, it did. And I'll just mention a few words. The song goes: "Senti, senti buon giorno, spazzata camino." I'll go on, but I'm not a singer. He said, "Yes, it does mean something." He said, "spazzata camino means chimney sweep." And he said, "In my family," and they came from Switzerland, "they were chimney sweeps." And the Martinelli's were one of the tenants that my grandfather had, and that would be the great-great-grandfather, I guess, of Rod.

GM: Great grandfather, great-great, yes.

RT: Was a tenant on one of my grandfather's.

CE: Was that out near where you spoke of as Devil's Gulch?

GM: Hicks Valley.

RT: That's right.

CE: Interesting.

GM: I'd heard that story.

CE: Well, OK. You had that military academy experience under Vanderbilt. Did you feel like a country boy?

RT: Very much.

CE: Even when you went to San Rafael?

RT: Yes. You see Novato in those days was --You know we had a one-room school in Novato. I say one room. It was four rooms, but I think I stayed in one room for the term. I was there the eight years.

CE: Any of your classmates still around?

RT: Oh, yes. So many in Novato, quite a few of them. And even many of them are ranchers and so forth. The Nunes boys, the Rossis. Of course the Rossis didn't come down to Novato school. They had their own school out by the lake, which is out by -- Leveroni boys. We were very close, all of us, because there weren't many of us. And we had baseball teams in Novato and you'll find that.

CE: Well, you were kind of a big wheel, though, in that community.

RT: Maybe. Probably in their eyes I was.

CE: Yes, but you didn't look upon yourself --

RT: But we didn't look upon it that way. Dad, I think, probably, and this really should give him credit. I think that probably no man has given any more to Marin or Sonoma counties or northern California than he has.

CE: Well, let's talk about that.

RT: For the simple reason that he was involved with so many things. And I mean thousands of committees: Redwood Empire, Dairymen's Association, Poultry Producers of Central California. He was gone all the time.

CE: Why do you think he was so civic minded? Why do you think he --

RT: I know why. Because his father was, as I said, very close and a Presbyterian. And my father became very close to being a Presbyterian minister. Although he said that between prayer meeting and Sunday school and church twice on Sunday, the benches got awfully hard, and he decided not to.

CE: Did you have religious instruction in the home?

RT: No. That's one thing.

CE: Was church a mandatory thing when you were growing up?

RT: My mother was Episcopalian, my dad was Presbyterian. And we went to a Presbyterian church in Novato because that's all there was.

CE: Well, isn't service a big thing with Presbyterians, service and usefulness and give beyond your own needs?

RT: Yes. He really did it. Because when you talk about committees and things you think that these are well-paid things, but they're not. This man was going night and day. He was head of the Finance Committee on the Golden Gate Bridge, and you can imagine how tough that was because nobody said it was going to stand and nobody wanted to put any money in it. Finally they got the Bank of America to buy the bonds and this --

CE: He had that experience too, being a director of the Bank of San Rafael, was it?

RT: Bank of San Rafael, Marin Municipal Water District, Marin Savings: it just went on by the hundreds, and this was, I think -- Probably he was more interested in that than he was. He wasn't a rancher. He never was a rancher. You couldn't put him in that category. But he did serve all these people that were on ranches and bought from him or from the Novato Land Company in Novato. Always came, on Sundays, there would be wagons and maybe 10 or 15 people there and these people all had problems. One wanted to go back.

CE: Open house.

RT: Yes. One wanted to go back to Portugal. One wanted to go back to Switzerland. He'd have to arrange tickets for them, money, get their money set up in such a way that they couldn't be robbed and so forth. They would have problems maybe from land or for payments on their property, something like this. It would go on and on. So he was at their beck and call, I guess, for years and years and it didn't stop, I think, until the time he died.

CE: And he never thought to say no. He was just there.

RT: Yes.

CE: Was he a tall, genial man as you? Attractive?

RT: He was tall, yes.

GM: He was a very big man.

RT: Yes.

CE: You know, the more we talk to some of these people who were in the early start of Marin, and what they accomplished, it seems to me, Bob, they were a different breed of men. They were more giving. Not necessarily self-sacrificing all the time, but they weren't always just thinking about themselves. Would you comment on that?

RT: Yeah, I think these men were thinking of the common good of everyone. They were not thinking individually or the ecological group or anything else, but all this was encompassed in their thinking. And this is what kind of bothers me today, is that everybody is kind of going his own selfish sort of way than trying to get together for the common good of everybody. I know I had the same thing, and maybe this has been handed down from father to son, but when I got to Hawaii from here it was quite a change. Because here, your land is all owned individually. You own the land. And in Hawaii, a great deal of it is leased. And to get close to these people in Hawaii is a very difficult thing because you have all ethnic groups and these people are hard to get close to.

CE: I can't thank you enough for sharing with us today some wonderful reminiscences of ranch life as a boy in Marin County. It's been a pleasure to meet you and I hope we can get together again and talk more about what you've done in your life. Could we do that some day?

RT: We shall, thank you.

CE: Thank you so much.

RT: And the training that I had as a country boy, I don't see any other way of getting around it. Because these people have been, are very cautious of who they talk to and what they say.

CE: They're suspicious! They have reason to be.

RE: Yes, you can't blame them for it. And when they understand you're not coming to make fun of them, that you're not trying to take them or put them down, talk on the same level with them, these people will get close to you and talk to you.