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Anne T. Kent California Room**

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INTERVIEW WITH CHARLES TACCHI
by Carla Ehat & Anne Kent
May 9, 1980

INTERVIEWEE: Mr. Charles Tacchi (TC) and Marian Tacchi (MT)
INTERVIEWERS: Carla Ehat (CE) and Anne Kent (AK)
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TRANSCRIBER: Marjorie Hoffman

CE: Today is May 9th, 1980, and continuing the Oral History project for the California Room at Civic Center, Mrs. Thomas Kent and I are at the residence of Mr. Charles Tacchi, 8 Robert Dollar Scenic Drive, in San Rafael, California. Mr. Tacchi is a native son of Marin, and he is going to tell us and share with us hopefully this morning the story of his family and a little bit of what brought them to Marin County and his experiences of growing up at the Remillard Brick Company, where his father was a foreman, and eventually his schooling and his marriage and his business. We look forward to a very pleasant morning. Good morning, Charles.

CT: Good morning. Thank you.

CE: Now tell us a little bit about your parents. Your mother, Mary Soldavini, and Antone Tacchi, what brought them out of Italy here?

CT: I don't think my parents discussed much of their life with their children at that particular time. Today, I think, things are more open and the parents know so much more about a child and, vice versa, the child knows about the parents. So, what I have is from hearsay. My parents came from Lenat or Lainate Pesoli as it is called, which is north of Milan, twenty, twenty-five miles towards the Swiss border. From listening to their conversation, they lived in a two-story house; the upstairs was an attic. They collected mulberry leaves and thread silk worms in the attic and kept their cattle, couple of cows I guess, downstairs in the basement. Well that was very good because the cows kept the house warm and everything was fine. But where you get colder weather, they still do that, I've read, in

America, not now but they used to, would brush up a house and let the snow form on the side of a house and then that would keep the house warm. Italy being rather poor and lots of people coming in, I think a lot of them were forced. In fact, reading about the Italians in America you find that many Italian families used to travel out of Italy in the wintertime, or in summertime, and work in other countries and then come back to their homes so that they were, more or less, used to migration. Coming to America was very simple, another step, because they were attracted over here and probably landed in New York and then came across, to where they had relatives, in Marin County. And you will find that most Italian families who had their roots or were attracted here by other families, and they have formed their own group here. Can't think of a name at the present time, that's usually the way it worked. My dad came here originally and worked for Escalle, the vineyard, and he went to work for Mr. Escalle pruning the vineyards and taking care of the vines, vintner.

CE: As I remember too, correct me Charles, but wasn't that -- That was Callot's Brickyard and then the old man, husband, died and Escalle married the widow, didn't he?

CT: Yes, I believe so.

CE: And they switched from making bricks and went onto the vineyard?

CT: Escalle, yes he did. Then my mother came over here.

CE: What year are we talking about, roughly?

CT: Oh my goodness -- Roughly, I will tell you.

CE: You've got the papers.

CT: I've got here, believe it or not, a marriage certificate and they were married at the age of twenty six and nineteen in January 14, 1899, so that much is substantiated

CE: Isn't that wonderful. All right, so he started with Escalle.

CT: My mother came to work, or was brought here, I don't know which, by the Butler family in Ross.

CE: George Butler, where the College of Marin property is.

CT: That is correct. At the time it was Ross Landing and the schooners used to come up the Horseshoe Creek up to Ross where they would load up their hay and grain. etc. and take it out to the bay. Now, how my father ever got from here to there I don't know, but, somehow or other, either the Remillards picked him up or he picked the Remillards up and he went to work for them. Apparently, when they were married, they went directly to the Remillard Brick Yard.

CE: Okay.

CT: Now of course you read in the paper the first born in Greenbrae. Well not so. That's Schultz's property, and that wasn't Greenbrae until they named it such. Greenbrae was the original station, and there was a bridge tender, in a little bit of a yellow house, with nasturtiums down the bank, and then there was a bridge across there that they had to raise and lower to allow the --

CE: Now that's Greenbrae?

CT: That's Greenbrae.

CE: Now can you place the site of that railroad station for us today? Can you describe it verbally?

CT: Oh yes, definitely. Actually it's just about -- Well, the bridge is still there and the creek is still there, so as you come to the left side of the north side of the bridge, there was a trestle there, and I believe the trestle is still there. You still go under the trestle. Well it was on the left of the trestle, if you're looking east and on the side of the bank there.

CE: Because I have a photograph of that old station we got from the archives, Mrs. Kent and we were trying to place it. This side of, south of that tunnel, then?

CT: Oh, yes, south of the tunnel and before the bridge. Across the street there were two or three houses and I'm not sure, but it seems to me that some relation of Dad Thomas or somebody lived down there. And then, you crossed on a footbridge and Hammer Paint, the paint residence on the other side and about two more houses, arks, I would say were there.

CE: I wonder, historically, why they called it the Greenbrae Station, was that because of the Greenbrae Ranch there?

CT: I don't know, but the station was definitely Greenbrae. From the station, again going east, you went about half way between. Well I'll place it by saying the brick kiln which is down there now, and the station, about half way in an arc the road went down; this little white house was there with a brick path going down to the road. It was set very close to the road, in that sense. There was a garden on the other side and I can remember honeysuckle growing on the porch.

CE: Whose house was this?

CT: That is the present house that they are discussing as to where to move it and what to do with it.

CE: Oh yes, this little house.

CT: Yes, that's the house exactly. Of course it was all the front porch and stairs coming down and honeysuckle growing on the side. I can remember all the birds nesting in there. Half way between the Greenbrae Station and the house there was a well with a windmill and they used to raise grain in that area.

CE: The whole flat area?

CT: That whole flat area was grain at that time.

CE: Are we talking roughly about the foreground where the old Hutchison Quarry was?

CT: Yes, there. The whole contour has been changed completely; there's nothing you can identify that was in that sense. From the house, or the back of the house, I remember there was a water trough because my brother used to put these frogs in there and then he'd make me go and try to get them out. But anyway, the road from the brickyard went in back of the house and continued on up the hill and crossed at the present cut in the hill. You can see, if you look up on the side of the road up there and over the tunnel high, you can see portion of the road still there. Of course the cut has been enlarged immensely all the way down. But getting back more to the brickyard side, from our house you travel a bit further east and there was a big barn. We used to keep around forty or fifty horses and mules; they kept one or two saddle horses and one horse they used as saddle and also buggy combined, a combination.

CE: Well, I understand that the company was pretty self-sustaining when that brickyard was in force. You had bunkhouse, cook house, you had --

CE: Oh yes, yes, As you went further down the road there was a knoll and on the top of the knoll there was a cook house and they used to keep Chinese cooks, which I think were the bane of my father's existence, because they were all going over to San Francisco gambling and then they wouldn't come back. They'd wake up in the morning and no cook. Well they use to work from sunrise to sunset all summer long, as long as there was light to see. They worked; there was no stopping. Of course in the wintertime then they relax; they couldn't make brick when it rained.

CE: That sort of puzzles me. Maybe we can get into that later, but it's a seasonal operation, isn't it?

GT: Very much so.

CE: Is that because the clay? You can't fuss around with it?

CT: They used to take the clay. You have to view the whole picture. They had several boats; one, I believe, is still in the Maritime Museum.

CE: You mean the scow schooners?

CT: The schooner.

CE: And they would take the bricks to the -- everywhere?

CT: They would do two things: they would go up to what they called Black Diamond and get the sand. They use to dredge sand and fill them up with sand, come back, bring the sand back to the brickyard, and then take bricks and load bricks and deliver the bricks to wherever they were going. So they had a double function, the schooner had, and I believe there were two of them named after the Remillard daughters. But from the cook house you went a little further on down and there were the stables where they kept all their horses and then over the hill which is now gone, on top of this hill there were the crushers. Now they used to take and crush all of the rock that they took out of the hill in the back, toward the northern part, and bring that down and crush it and mix it with the sand so that they had the proper mixture of mud and that would go down a chute and land down below where they would take and put it in molds. The fellow down there would mold it, wipe up the top of the mold, and dump it in this cart and then they would take it out and put it out to dry. So you can't dry bricks when it's raining.

CE: I see. I get it, okay.

CT: So, they'd be out there drying. After the drying process was completed, they would take the bricks down to the kiln which is still there. Now the kiln is quite a deal. It was built in the shape of a donut, but rather elongated, and the donut was hollow inside, all the way around, of course. The upper part was boarded over on top and in the center of the donut up high way all the coal was piled that they burned. Then along the donut, on the top were the openings they had that they would pour their coal into to keep the fire going. The kiln was a continual operation; the fire never went out.

CE: Night and day it's going.

CT: They would board off a certain section of it and the bricks had to be piled in an exact manner, of which I do not know, but you had to allow for the smoke to go out and the heat to go up and the heat must be distributed evenly. If it were not even, you would get what they called "klinkers" and they would warp and twist and turn blue and green and all different colors, which again, used to annoy my

dad, because you couldn't sell a "klinker" in those days. You had to throw them away. Today, the "klinkers" are worth about five times the cost of the brick.

CE: Does steam enter into this operation in any way?

CT: No, it is all heat. They would pile these bricks in there then it would be boarded off and the sides would be clayed up, so that there were no drafts from the inside, then they would light the fires and this fireman was upstairs all day and all night. They had firemen there feeding these flames. And they would burn these bricks until they were just right, cooked. In the meantime, they would be loading on the opposite side of the kiln and when this firing was all done, they would fire on the other side. So this firing continued in a circle, and where they were firing one side, they would unload the other with their carts and take them down and load them on the boats to take away.

CE: Was there a little wharf there? Nothing left of the wharf --

CT: There was nothing left of the wharf and to me it was old. Well it was very young. They use to walk planks. They had about twelve, fourteen inch plank and these fellows would take these bricks and walk up the plank, with wheelbarrows and think nothing of it and I would walk up, without a wheelbarrow, and I practically have to crawl.

CE: Over the marsh, like sort of --

CT: Yes, between the boat and the shore. There was very little docking area; it wasn't the way it would be today where you have an enormous dock and all the equipment.

CE: Well, Charlie, you mentioned the Chinese. Are they the one major employees of the company?

CT: No, they were only the cooks.

CE: How many people would be involved in an organization like this?

CT: I don't know. There were bunkhouses all on the back of the kiln, the side of the hill. There were all kind of bunkhouses and I don't know, they had forty or fifty mules; they must have had at least a hundred, a hundred and fifty men. I just don't know.

CE: What did the mules do?

CT: Well they would hitch them to the carts and they would have to carry the dirt; they would have to go into the kiln and bring out the bricks and --

CE: Continual motion operation, either bringing the raw materials down and --

CT: One or the other, yes. They worked with them.

CE: Well, let's get back, just a bit, to the beginnings of the company before we get into your family's specific involvement. I understand Mr. Remillard had other brick companies around the Bay Area.

CT: Yes, he did; one at Port Costa and one at Pleasanton. I didn't have much to do with Remillards. I remember going with my mother once down to Pleasanton, and all I can remember is there were cherry trees in the place and there were gophers coming out eating the cherries, which was very unusual to me. I really don't remember. I can remember they had an accountant that used to come over, a very short man and he seemed to be rather stout and of course he had a little office that I -- My amusement was going down there and stamping with all the stamps they

had on any paper I got my hand on. So he came in very handy, he loaned me the stamps.

CE: But to your knowledge, you don't remember seeing old man Remillard?

CT: I don't remember him at all.

CE: How about the children or the daughter?

CT: No, I never saw any of them. All I can remember is that they were very interested in titles and married Italians. I think one was Countess Dandini.

CE: Countess Dandini, yes. Well the brickyard, as I understand, was built around 1889, would that be a fair year, about right?

CT: That could well be. As I say, I don't know how my father ever got involved with the brickyard or the Remillards, unless it was from Escalle. Could have been a connection there.

CE: Did you ever hear your dad talk about other brickyards in the Ross Valley area?

CT: No, but McNear had the other brickyard and that was quite involved. At a later date, when my dad had left the brickyard, and again I'm jumping ahead, I can remember E. B. McNear coming to the house and wanting my dad to go work for him. But my dad left, because of the fact it was getting his lungs, the dust and the dirt and the continual work, and the doctor said, "Well you'll have to get out," so he left.

CE: Did you have a house on the property? Your family?

CT: Yes. That is the house that we lived in, the small house they speak of.

CE: This is the house you lived in?

CT: That is the house.

CE: Is that the house you were born in?

CT: That is the house I was born in.

CE: Well, they better preserve it then, Charlie. Tell me, when were you born, give us your birth date?

CT: March 1, 1908.

CE: March 1, 1908.

CT: Getting back to the brickyard, when my mother wanted to go to town, why, you had two alternatives, you either walked up and took the train, or you had them hitch up a horse and buggy and went, over the hill, into town.

CE: Now when you say, "go over with a horse and buggy," you're talking about the original old road that used to go to San Quentin from San Rafael?

CT: The --

CE: Prior to when they built the railroad. That short span of railroad from that First Street Station down there.

CT: There was a very poor dirt road where the Highway 101 is now. It came on down, and met the road that goes to Kentfield now. At the junction of the bridge, the road stopped there. Oh, incidentally, there was a fellow by the name of McGill who had a stage, and people who used to go to San Quentin or come from San Quentin, and he ran his stage from San Quentin, I believe, to Kentfield. But, it was mainly the Greenbrae Station that I knew, because again I couldn't run out there. You'd see a two horse stage with a stair in the back that you would go up into the stage.

CE: What was the name?

CT: McGill had the stage line.

CE: Okay. so your mother had those two choices: she could either go and take the train, walk over and take the train, or go over in the rig?

CT: Right. Over the ridge brought you across the top of Highway 101 now, the top of the hill, and brought you to the left side of the road and then you went on down past the Redding Ranch, which was operated in those days, and across the marsh and came on up to the present site of Irwin and Second Street. And, if I recall right, there was a big Carson Glove two or three story yellow building there on the right hand side and on the left was the Railway Express, which is now extinct. That marked the end of San Rafael there, the border of it; there was nothing else. When you wanted to go over to San Quentin, you went down over the railroad tracks and continued east and that brought you into the San Quentin Prison, but then you had to go into the prison gates, if you wanted to come back, and go up to Greenbrae. There was no bypass road, as there is today, on the side. Incidentally, there is an interesting thing there. The west side of the San Quentin Prison they had what they called a patent gate. Did you ever hear of one?

CE: No.

CT: Well, it was made with an iron loop in the road, on the side of the road, It had a raised portion, a loop, and when you ran over the loop with the buggy, the gate was automatically pushed open and locked open, so as you continued on through -
- Did you ever see one of those?

AK: No, but there was one at the beginning of the Kent place.

CT: Yes, same thing, and when you passed it, on the other side your buggy wheel ran over the other side and it slammed the gate shut. You didn't have to get out; very economical. That was just a little bit east of the kiln that they had this patent gate there, then you entered San Quentin property, and if you wanted to go on further, then you had to pass through their guards; they had another large gate. Prison population was very low in those days. I would guess around four or five hundred. I can still vaguely remember, they used to let the trustee's out, and they had a whole flock of turkeys and a whole flock of cattle, and these trustee's used to walk the turkeys on up and then walk them back at night, because they'd want them to get away.

CE: Well, were the prisoners ever used as supplemental help for this brickyard?

CT: No, never, no.

CE: I read somewhere that they did make bricks. Where did they make them? Do you know?

CT: No, I don't know. They could have made them in their own property. I don't know.

AK: I think so.

CE: Was it a problem, as a young boy, knowing that that prison was so close to you? Did that disturb you?

CT: No, in no way at all. The fact is, I can remember going out one night down there to a play in the prison, but I don't remember too much about it. But I do remember coming back and stopping at the cook yard and getting some pie.

CE: Did you know Dr. Leo Stanley?

CT: Yes, I did, yes.

CE: He was at the prison some time in your life.

CT: Yes, we had a picture of Doc Stanley on the Matsonia, when we went to Honolulu, and of course he was up there, very regal and he was a very outstanding man and he kept himself trim, as anyone could ever keep himself; very nice. Yes, I knew Doc Stanley.

CE: Well listen, you're growing up now, how did you get to school? What is your first school experience?

CT: Well, as I said before, my dad had to leave the brickyard due to ill health.

CE: So, you weren't there? How old were you when you left?

CT: Oh, about, I would say five, six, in there. Came to San Rafael. My mother was very saving, and she watched out for things, and they had bought several pieces of property in San Rafael. One of them was a house on First Street, 306 First, and George Murray lived next door. He was the tax collector in San Rafael. He lived next door to us on First Street.

CE: So then you went to the school --

CT: So we went to the Short School up north of Marin Street. At the time it was quite a walk for a young person, but, when you look back at it, it wasn't so much.

CE: Well, before we leave the brickyard, can you tell me this: did the business continue for some years after that?

CT: The business continued just a very short time and then it quit, ceased. Why it ceased, I don't know. I would hope because of my dad's good management it lasted, and without him it didn't, but I can't say that.

CE: Well, what business did your dad go into after that?

CT: He went to work for the Marin Water District.

CE: Good.

CT: An early part of the history of the Water District.

CE: That makes Mrs. Kent very happy.

CT: Yes, because at that time that -- Well, Bob Lethbridge, the historian for the water district, he had copious quantities of files on my dad and the water company. He went to work there driving a two-horse dray, I guess you'd call it, and then he graduated up being the foreman of his gang. I think Joe Merla had the construction and my dad had the repair and up to the time they began to modernize; my dad knew where the pipe were and nobody else did. Then they modernized and they charted everything and today you can go to a chart and see this pipe runs here and this pipe there; they know where everything is. In those days it was all a system that was being built, and if you knew, you knew it, and if you didn't, you just didn't do it, that's all. The first truck they bought him -- The first car was an Overland. They bought that for Dick Longland. He was the manager at the time. He lived way out in the sticks, out in Sutter Street, far out. Then they bought a Republic truck, but the truck was complete for the day, no windshield, no lights, no bumpers, nothing. So when you drove in the rain you had to take and -- Oh, later they got real good and put acetylene lights on it. The second truck they got was equipped much better, had windshield and lights.

CE: Well, where would he have to go? All over the water district property and check -

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CT: Oh yes, for the leaks. He had his gang and they'd find leaks; they'd find them in San Rafael, San Anselmo, Ross, Kentfield. Wherever the system was, they went. They put a phone in the house on First Street, and there'd be many a night when he was called out. Clate Stocking was up at Ross, at the lake, and it started to pour like mad and he tried to open the gates by himself and he couldn't open them fast enough, so he'd get on the phone and my dad would have to run up there and help open the flood gates or otherwise they'd lose the lake. So he was continually on duty.

CE: Well then he was involved with the Water District when they built all the subsequent lakes?

CT: Oh yes, I can remember when they built Alpine, going up there, and all the machines on the side of the hill, when they built the tunnel through to bring the water through. Oh yes, he was involved in all of that.

CE: The school then -- When you finished the Short School, where did you go?

CT: Well, I went to the grade school which was on Fourth Street between E and Shaver.

CE: Oh, yes.

CT: The church was on the corner.

CE: Who were some of your contemporaries, your pals, during that period?

CT: Well there was Herb Armstrong. He was with Sandra Kell, later on.

CE: Did you make some life-long friends that period of your life?

CT: No, I don't think so. I had friends, Carl Ormsby who was tragically killed in a motorcycle accident in Ignacio. There were five or six motorcycles involved. He was killed then. He was probably one of my closest friends at the time.

CE: Well from there, did you go to San Rafael High?

CT: Yes, we went to San Rafael High, which was just across the way. It was on E Street and the other school was just across the way, so one playground ran into the other.

CE: This is prior to the present site of the San Rafael High School?

CT: Of course, when they brought the steam from the school on, from the grade school over to the high school. No, I guess it was the other way around. They ran a pipe through the lot there and they exposed all these iron coffins, as you went along, because that was a graveyard in there. I guess it's still up there, I don't know.

CE: We interviewed a woman, Eleanor Gilloghly Murray. Was she a teacher of yours, by any chance?

CT: No.

CE: Did you know her?

CT: Miss Gilloghly, yes. Miss Jepson and Davidson. Miss Davidson, I thought she was a fine teacher.

CE: Did you know Miss McKinney? Does that name ring a bell?

CT: Miss McKinney. Yes, I believe so.

CE: Miss McKinney. Later she married and became Mrs. Stanwood and took over the Hamlin School in San Francisco. But she was a teacher, right out of Marysville. I think her first job --

CT: Mrs. Cochran, of course, taught the eight grade. Disciplinarian if ever there was one, but really admired. I think today discipline has just gone awry, no discipline

at all, and I think people with children especially would be better off with more discipline, I really do.

CE: Well I think the pendulum is starting to swing back, don't you?

CT: I do believe so. I think it has.

CE: Yes, Mrs. Kent?

AK: You said the high school was on E Street. Was there still another high school, before this one came?

CT: No, that was the only high school there.

CE: Excuse me, Mrs. Tacchi is with us too.

MT: The old high school was on E Street, just --

CE: Yes, that's where he went.

MT: Yes, but before that, that was it.

CE: Then afterward the school moved to its present site. Well, what did you do, after you got out of high school, Charles?

CT: Well, I had a choice of either going further in studies or what, but my brother, more or less, had a opening in the garage.

CE: Your brother, tell us your brother's name.

CT: John.

CE: Two boys, that was your family?

CT: Two boys and a girl; I had a sister and a brother.

CE: What was her name?

CT: Helen. So I went to work for Howard Sparrow. That was about 1925, and I worked there in the garage on Lincoln Avenue until about '31, when I bought out Howard Sparrow's interest in the business and continued, from then on, working at that particular place. We were there until about six or seven years ago when we built the new garage at 555 Irwin that my son operates.

CE: Let's go back as a young person. Describe the town as you knew it in your high school days. It's different than today.

CT: Well the town has greatly enlarged. As I mentioned, we could sit up here in our living room and look out and see the Redding Ranch; that's all built up now. The town used to stop at the Union Depot, which was a big, a roofed-over affair. The trains used to come in there. On the other side of the track, there were a few buildings and then the Henry Hess Lumber Yard was further on down. They had almost a block of lumberyard in there. If you went through the lumberyard you came to the city dumps, beyond the Carson Glove on the left-hand side, that was the dumps, and that was the end of San Rafael. The marsh was -- Well, it went all the way up, at that time, to B Street. Where the Davidson School was built was all marsh; where we are now, at 555 Irwin Street, was all marsh. The railroad was built high over the marsh and, in fact, when the tides came up, many times, you couldn't get across the road; it would flood over. The marsh followed in a contour following Second Street and, getting down past Irwin Street. It went further on up to Fourth Street.

CE: When you cross over D, don't you go by a little tributary creek there right now? Isn't that the extension of the marsh that we are talking about?

CT: Yes, that was all marsh there. I can remember when they filled in the B Street marsh, as they called it, and I can remember when they filled in the marsh, which is east of Irwin Street and Fourth Street, Fourth and Irwin.

CE: Why did they want to fill it in? They wanted more level land?

CT: More level land.

CE: For San Rafael.

CT: The first thing they did they had a ballpark in there. I used to come up and watch them play ball. Then later on they built a lot of houses in there. Then eventually it was filled in further on down and then the high school was filled in. That area was filled in and the high school was built down there.

CE: All on marsh.

CT: That was all marsh. You went over the hill and down to the golf links, the golf tract in there, and on the side of the road that was all marsh. On the right side that's all been filled in. In fact, where the Yacht Harbor is today --

CE: The Yacht Harbor and Canal Street and all those multi-units are all on filled in land.

CT: In fact, I was down there one day, at Reed's Hunt House which -- On the right hand side and pass the Yacht Harbor of today and I was standing there and the thing began to rumble and shake and I thought an earthquake, and he said, "Oh no, it's one of McNear trucks passing on the road." You know, the thing bounces.

CE: Spongy.

CT: But San Rafael, as I said, was very small. From Petaluma Avenue, at that time, you went north and there were larger estates, but today --

CE: Now when you say Petaluma Avenue --

CT: Which is now Lincoln Avenue.

CE: Is now Lincoln Avenue and that was the county road out of town.

CT: That was the road going out of town to Petaluma. You went up and on the left hand side the Leon Douglass's had their estate, and it was. It took in a great area, where the church is now. Further up, where the Colonial Motel is, was another large estate. I'm trying to think of the man's name.

CE: Foge?

CT: Foge, right.

CE: How do you spell that?

CT: I do it with Foge. I always remember that because --

CE: Didn't the Martinellis have a place on that road, too?

CT: Yes, yes, there were the Martinellis.

CE: And the Boyds? The other Boyd family?

CT: The other Boyds, not Louise Boyd.

CE: No, the other one, Tom Boyd.

CT: Tom Boyd, that's right. So you didn't find many small houses on Lincoln Avenue and you didn't find many small houses around the convent. They were all rather large estates and belonging, I presume, to influential people, and the same way, if you went out towards the west end of San Rafael, you found the same thing. The Fosters had a truly large estate there, which is now Fairhills, and after that it stops; there was nothing there. But, yes, the motion picture industry was there.

CE: What do you know about that?

CT: Well --

CE: Some people tell us it's one of the first motion picture companies in California. Is that true?

CT: It was. The industry was starting in California and we were due to be the motion picture capital of the world. They built the studio out there, Beatriz Michelena Studios. I can still remember her. She had two white Russian wolfhounds and they lived up in West End, slightly west of the West End Station, up in the hill there.

CE: Oh, really?

CT: And I associate that with the Cliff Delap family, some way or another. I don't know why, but in any event, the studio was there when I was young, a big glassed-in studio.

CE: And I understand, the reason for that was they hadn't invented the klieg lights as yet, so this was a perfect place to get all that light and sun.

CT: That's true. But, then they found that they could have many more hours of sunshine down in Los Angeles and there was more money down in Los Angeles, so the attraction was to L.A., and this was abandoned. I can still remember looking over the yard and there was stage coaches and various sundry implements in there. From the Cemetery Road, which is an extension of Fifth Street, that was all lined with eucalyptus trees and there were no houses on that at all.

CE: And that was the entrance to that cemetery?

CT: Yes.

CE: Must have been beautiful.

CT: It was quite long; it must have been a couple of miles.

CE: Unpaved road?

CT: Unpaved. You went in, just about past, I think it would be J Street and then there was a dirt road went up and there were several buildings which, I understand, was the cook house and offices, right off Fifth Street. But, the studio was off in the wilds. We used to wander all over there, the home ranch over the hill. You could go anywhere you want, do anything you want, no instructions --

CE: When you say the "home ranch," whose home ranch?

CT: Freitas.

CE: Oh, the Freitas Ranch

CT: The Freitas Ranch was over the hill. So a young man could take a gun, or whatever, and go anywhere he wanted and nobody bothered him. Today there is so much private property you can't do anything.

CE: Wonderful place to grow up

CT: Yes, I think we had the best in that sense.

CE: Well, I notice you have a beautiful Brittany dog and you're still interested in hunting. Does that go back to those early days as a boy?

CT: Oh I like to hunt. I think, right in here where you can hunt a little bit and wander around a bit, you become more self-sufficient, you know. You're not depending on the crowd for your own amusement; I think it's much better. Today a child walks up in the hills and somebody chase him off.

CE: Or gets lost.

CT: Yes.

CE: Did you ever hike up Tam?

CT: Occasionally, yes. I used to go up there. Mr. Walsh was the keeper up there. Clayton Stocking lived in a little house, the first house by the dam, by the spillway, and around the corner, just a little bit.

CE: Now what dam?

CT: Phoenix. Bud Walsh lived up there. So I used to go up there and borrow a horse from him and ride over the mountain.

CE: Do you remember the old Porteous house up there, the cabin?

CT: Oh, yes.

CE: Did you know any of that family?

CT: No.

CE: That was before your time, because you're not that old.

CT: But to get back to San Rafael, why, there was not much from Lincoln Avenue, today called, going east; in fact there was very little. If you crossed the railroad tracks past Henry Hess, there were the big dumps in there and that was it.

CE: Were the baths still there or was that gone?

CT: No, the bathhouse I can vaguely remember when I was young was -- There was an open air bath house and there was the flood gate. I guess that's filled in now. Yes, I know, that's a parking lot. The whole area there was a big pond and the floodgate allowed the water in and then --

CE: They trapped it in.

CT: They trapped it in there, then there were baths there, so you swam in the open air outside, there were no buildings. Later on they built a bath and I guess -- I'm not sure of the date, I'm going to guess around 1918 or '20, I'm guessing. Anyway, they built a bathhouse and left the pond outside and they would trap the water in the pond and then use that to pump in and filter the water and use that to swim in, the filters -- Duffy, I can't remember his first name, managed the bathhouse.

CE: Were there any businesses on what is now East Francisco Boulevard, towards the San Rafael creek?

CT: No.

CE: That was all just open?

CT: That was all marsh. I would say that one of the interesting things is that, where the California Park Bridge is now, if you are familiar with that, there was a big hill there and that's what they used to call Scheutzen Park.

CE: Is that where the side of it was there, right at that --

CT: That was the site of it. And the hill --

CE: Well that was sort of near the Redding Ranch there, wasn't it?

CT: No, the Redding Ranch was so far up Irwin on the other side, you can look out from here and see the Redding Ranch and you can look over this way and you can see the Scheutzen Park area.

CE: Okay.

CT: The hill was there which is now gone. I guess the hill was about where the motor movies is now, and the hill is all gone, they carted that away. We used to walk over the hill from Greenbrae and go down and dig the lead out of the hill, because -- They used to use the Scheutzen rifles, which were a special rifle, and they

would go down there and shoot these guns for prizes or money, or what they would gamble, I don't know. So they shot on the side of the hill.

CE: And you'd retrieve the lead.

CT: We'd retrieve the lead.

CE: And sell it?

CT: That's right.

CE: Well it beats collecting milk bottles. We all did different things in our life.

CT: The rest of it was all marsh, and Smith Brothers used to raise some hay once in a while down there. Of course, I can remember the Camgros had a house which was on the left hand side and just about opposite the California Park.

CE: Well, coming up to this part of town, what do you recall about the Boyd house and where the Marin County Historical Gatehouse Museum is and the Dollar place and --

CT: Describing the town, in more or less coming up Fourth Street, as I said, where Castro built his garage, was all vacant lots there, where the Red Cross building was or is today; that was all vacant. I believe that building was floated up from the fair, the '14-'15 expedition, and put in there. So, San Rafael practically ended at the railroad tracks, and if you came up Fourth Street the Zirke building was there, on the right hand side, then there was Schneider's Beer Garden, next to Zirke's building, and then there was a big empty lot. This is on the right side, all the way up to the Masonic Building, which was a two story wooden structure.

CE: Before it was brick?

CT: Right.

CE: Do you remember the next block of houses, Victorian houses, that the Eldrdge owned? Dolly Cushing lived in and Dufficy Evans and --

CT: Yes. That extended from Fourth Street to Fifth Street with all the pear orchard in there. Then you came to the Masonic Building.

CE: That was left from the Mission days, I understand. Is that right, Charlie?

CT: Yes, that is very true. They were from the Mission. In fact I guess, this house here is built on Mission property. At one time the peak of the Mission was down below us. On the next block up, well, across the street, was the Hoover's Candy Store.

CE: Hoover's Candy Store. Martha Foster Abbott told us about Hoover's Candy Store. Now that goes way back, I guess.

CT: If you went down to the other side of Fourth Street, on the corner, there was the Stapp's. Had a candy store there

CE: At the corner of what?

CT: This is the corner of Fourth and Tamalpais, opposite to the railroad station.

CE: Okay, all right, we're working up the other side.

CT: The other side. There was a big empty lot. Later, one of Walter Castro's relatives put a wrecking yard in there and then, later on, Standard of Cal. came along and put their service station in there, but there was a wrecking yard in that corner once. Coming back up the street, you come to -- Opposite the court house, or rather, getting into the next block, which I didn't discuss, there were three houses there. I think Tom McConnell lived in one and I don't know who -- There were two or three white houses.

CE: Across the street from these other houses of Eldridge, Evans and Dufficy? Across the street, on this other side?

CT: Across the street, after you pass the Masonic Building, on the right hand side, there were, I think, two or three white houses and --

CE: Yes, I have a photograph of that.

CT: And then an abstract building and then the old building that was used as the County Hospital for a while and, I believe, the CHP was in there for a while.

CE: Are you talking about the corner house, opposite the courthouse?

CT: The corner house before you came to the courthouse.

CE: Oh, that was Dolly's property, the Eldridge home. It was used for various things.

CT: On the left side there was a big empty lot and down below it was the armory at that time.

CE: Well, I know there is a group of people in the Heritage Committee that are going, building by building, on the history of what was on Fourth Street, and I will digress a little bit on that because I think we'd be duplicating their efforts, but I'd like to bring you up by around the Court House Square for a minute. Do you remember those old homes, some old houses, across back of the courthouse, south of where the Mission is today? The Eden's house. Do you remember the Edens, the coroner?

CT: Yes, I remember Eden, but I just can't seem to place the house. I do remember when they enlarged the courthouse and added to it. They added -- The courthouse was more complete and a complex structure, or rather compact, then they added the wing on the right hand side. I do remember that.

CE: Did you ever hear of Miss Stewart's School? Up there, where the present city hall is?

CT: No, but the Stewarts had the academy.

CE: No, no, I'm not talking about the Stewarts. Some people, who are older than you by ten or fifteen years, used to, as children, to go to a little school called Miss Stewart's and it's supposed to be somewhere near where the San Rafael Public Library is, in that area. The Branson School started in that area also. The little White School, Little Gray School, and then they painted it red, and then there was something the little Red School before it -- Did you know the Menzies?

CT: Yes.

CE: Menzies family?

CT: Yes, I knew the Menzies family. Of course, they lived across from where the library is.

CE: Where the parking lot is today.

CT: That's true, the parking lot is today -- The house was taken down.

CE: We interviewed Mary Menzies. She came up from Carmel and told us the story of her family there, and the name of their house was Oldcot. Then the Dollar family who lived there for so many years next door --

CT: Well, getting back to my family. They, the George Soldavinis, lived on C Street between First and Second.

CE: That was your mother's parents?

CT: Brother.

CE: Brother, okay.

CT: I guess, if you go back, the original family lived there and I remember there was Pete Solvadini, Tom Solvadini, George Solvadini and Mary Solvadini my mother, and that was the Solvadini family. They lived there on the -- The railroad track ran down Second Street in those days and they lived between -- Across the street was a big junk yard, Bergtold I believe. We used to call him One-Arm George, George Bergtold; he had one arm.

CE: Every town's got some character like that.

CT: But there were so many empty lots in San Rafael, you could almost go anywhere you want and --

CE: What did they have to pay for property then? Have you any idea? What did you have to pay for a lot in those days? Like you said, your mother was very saving when your dad was at the brickyard and you bought some land.

CT: I do know, when my father passed away in '36, she sold two pieces of property on Tamalpais Avenue, Fifth and Tamalpais, for I think under ten thousand dollars. Today, why, they have run them up to a point where one of those houses down there would probably be one hundred thousand without any quibbling at all. No problem.

CE: Well, are there a lot of Solvadinis in San Rafael?

CT: Yes.

CE: You have cousins?

CT: Cousins, yes.

AK: What a question!

CE: Why?

CT: George had two daughters, and they are living. One lives in Santa Venetia and the other lives in San Rafael, here.

CE: Well, I want to know something about your business too. When did you marry, before you bought the business? After your business? Tell us what is your wife's name, her maiden name?

CT: Marian Lesbridge. I know that you see.

CE: What year were you married?

CT: I went to work in 1925, and I bought out Harris Brown in 1931, and I was married July 9, 1938.

CE: See, he does remember, Marian.

CT: We moved into El Ray apartments and, about three or four years later, built up here, about 1941.

CE: Very good. Beautiful home. And do you have children, Charlie?

CT: We have two children, Thomas Charles, who now runs the business at 555 Irwin and our daughter, Mary Jane.

CE: Is Mary Jane married?

CT: No. She is the Supervisor at the New York City Library.

CE: Really!

CT: In New York.

AK: That's good.

CE: Well, that's a success experience for her. Aren't you proud of her?

CT: Oh, very much.

CE: How did she get interested in library work? Through here?

CT: I don't know. I think she studied to be a teacher, got her credentials, and one day said she wanted to study to be a librarian, and I said, "That's fine." She said she'd like to live in Berkeley, "Would I keep the car?" Well certainly I would keep the car, so I kept the car for about a year, when she graduated from library school. She came home, all enthused, and said, "Dad I've got a job." I said, "Well fine," and I said, "Where is it?" She had been interviewed from Canada, Mill Valley, Oakland, Berkeley, and New York City. It was kind of a shock.

CE: When did this take place? How long ago?

CT: Oh, she's been there about fourteen, fifteen years now.

CE: Oh, my goodness. Isn't it interesting, Mrs. Kent? She's here, and she goes to New York, and you were born in New York, and came west.

AK: I was a New York librarian.

CT: Well, she went over there first and was in the main branch, and then the Harvard Branch, and then Fordham-Pelham, I believe, and then after that she went to --

CE: That's it. Well, listen Charles, that's very good, now I want to get back to you a minute. You've been in business -- You retired now?

CT: No.

CE: But you've been in business how long? And what is your business? I know it is -- Has to do with electrical repair --

CT: Yes, we do electrical repair, electronics repairs.

CE: Automobiles and trucks.

CT: Automobiles. And of course evolution, time change and business change. At one time we used to do a lot of radiator work, and then it gets to the point where you can buy a new part cheaper than you can repair it, so the whole business constantly changes and evolves. But we started in 1931, and I ran it up to about, oh, I would say, five or six years ago, and now Tom runs it.

CE: Does he enjoy the work? Is he doing a good job for you?

CT: Oh, he loves it. He has done a very fabulous job. He's done a real good job. He has one child at the present time, the picture you see over there. And they are hoping to have another child any day, so we might be grandparents again.

CE: Well, do you go down to the shop every day?

CT: Oh, yes, surely. I like to go down there.

CE: So today you're just goofing off a little, for us.

CT: I usually go down around nine o'clock or eat lunch with him and do little odds and ends. I'm not working too hard, but I do like to keep going and I don't tell him what to do, they tell me what to do.

CE: How large a staff do you have now?

CT: Right now, the staff is very small, we just lost a man, and business has suddenly dropped off this last week or month, and Tom will not put another one on, but usually we have three or four men.

CE: Well, you've seen it since 1931. You've seen a lot of change in the automotive industry, haven't you?

CT: Yes.

CE: You've seen those years, during the war, when no cars were manufactured and you had to keep together those cars that were still running around.

CT: During the war we worked many, many long hours and, yes, things were kept going. I think they had better automobiles in those days than they have today.

CE: Mrs. Kent would agree, who is with us. She is still driving her 1955 Concord, is it Anne?

AK: Yes.

CT: That's true, but what has caused the biggest commotion has been all this law and regulations, trying to push people to do things too fast. Appointing boards that like to rule and dictate and really are not familiar with the subject as they should be, in spite of all their talk. They have caused the automotive industry to do things that were, I would say, injurious to the automobile and certainly in an age of gas shortages, diminishing mileage dreadfully.

CE: Don't you think, realistically, this is going to change in the next year? Don't you think the EPA has to loosen up a bit about this stuff?

CT: I would go to the point to say that regulation is the ruination of America and that's a harsh statement to make but I think it's true.

CE: Too many regulations.

CT: Yes, too much of it. If they allow things to operate in the normal procedure, you have the automobile industry where they will take and change two and three models of pollution control in one year, so the next year what you bought this year is obsolete, and it's constant change.

CE: There is just too much regulation in everything and it certainly has been proven in the automotive industry.

CT: Yes, I feel -- I think you can go on almost any industry and over-regulate it. It becomes a fad. You get, I'll call it Naderism.

CE: Well we had a whole decade of extreme conservationism and this consumerism, that Nader has spearheaded and this is a kind of an overreaction to that wrong, wouldn't you say?

CT: Well, I can't say that I'm against conservation, because I think you have to be rational in your field that you have to provide for the next generation, both in conserving and also a place to live. You just can't cut them out and say you're not going to do anything. Too much open space or too much regulation -- When you get into government regulation it's over regulated to the point where companies cannot expand, they are taxed to the point where they cannot recreate capital to build their plants up again. Now you find in Japan, with plants that are probably ten years old, you find other countries with fifteen years old plants and we sit back in America with plants that are obsolete practically. And so, if we go to close them out, you find that your union and your Naders and the rest of them that you can't do that. Well it gets to the point where you can and must do it because you've got to conserve and you've got to compete. I think that there will have to be regulations to stop some of the imports coming in and to get back on a footing where we can produce our own goods rather than --

CE: So that kind of regulation is healthy.

CT: Right. Rather than go to Europe with all our factories and build everything over there. And this has been the point. As I said before Taiwan, Central America, various other places are doing more building and more supplies being built and constructed. That pencil you hold there was probably not made in America.

CE: Well you have a son and a daughter and you have a grandchild, and you want them to have a good life.

CT: I certainly would like to keep America clean and --

CE: How would you -- What guidance would you have for them right now? They've got to cope with this after we're gone, you know.

CT: Right.

CE: What do you think that you could give your children that will be supportive to them and help them to the future of their lives when you and your wife are no longer here?

CT: Well, first of all, I can leave them a good heritage, how to conduct their life, and I think I have; I think they're doing fine. Keep my fingers crossed always, but also I can leave them a certain amount of property that they can carry on with. But, essentially, I think that the country should have good leadership. That is the prime thing that they should be left with, not a hodge-podge, not a group of radicals that are going to tell them how to run their life or how to build or what to construct.

CE: For the young people of your children's generation are smart; they may not be involved, say, in the political spectrum, but they can't just go by and not, and let this happen without making some effort to have an input, don't you believe?

CT: Oh, I believe they will; I believe they will adapt.

CE: They'll work through it somehow.

CT: But, I also have the feeling that we, at our age, have had probably the better times. I've seen San Rafael grow from a place where you could go on any hill, walk anywhere you want, do anything you want, to a place where it's regimented by police and sheriffs and anything else, so a child can't do much anymore, so he has to change his type of life.

CE: You must realize that, to a degree, you grew up in San Rafael during its pastoral period.

CT: Right.

CE: And we must be grateful for that, and I want to thank you, Charles, very much, for speaking out so freely this morning and sharing your warm reminiscences of your life here. It's been a pleasure to talk with you.