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**INTERVIEW WITH WILLIAM JAMES MILLER**

by Carla Ehat & Anne Kent  
March 16, 1976

INTERVIEWEE: William James Miller (WM)

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

DATE OF INTERVIEW: March 16, 1976

TRANSCRIBER: Marjorie Hoffman

CE: Today is Tuesday March the 16th, 1976. Continuing the Oral History program of the California Room, Marin County Library at Civic Center, this is Carla Ehat of the Moya Library Guild. Joining me today is Mrs. Thomas Kent of Kentfield and we are at her residence at 131 Goodhill Road in Kentfield, for the purpose of interviewing William James Miller who resides at 14 Blue Rock Court in Corte Madera, California. Mr. Miller is a fourth generation Californian. His great grandfather, James Miller, settled in Marin County in 1845 on a 680 parcel of the Rancho Las Gallinas purchased from Don Timoteo Murphy, an earlier immigrant to Marin from the same County Wexford in Ireland. James Miller and his wife, the former Mary Murphy, their four children, William James, age 12 at the time, and Mary's father, Martin Murphy and family pioneered the first Westward Wagon Train over the plains and the mountains to California in 1844. But, to tell us more about this story, let us turn to Bill. Good afternoon, Bill.

WM: Good afternoon.

CE: Now, we have read and there is on file in the Historical Society a wonderful article written in July of 1971 by our own Florence Donnelly on the story of the Millers of Marin and I know it's very thorough and all-inclusive but would you tell us, Bill, in your own words, a little bit about what you were told about the great trek west? Did your grandfather tell you about it when you were a boy?

WM: Well my father told me about it and I did talk to my grandfather but I was just a boy then,. But I think that Florence Donnelly's article is the most complete and full and authentic of any I've ever seen or read, and contains many of the little articles and facts that I had remembered my dad talking about.

CE: Well it's an extraordinary thing, wouldn't you agree, that a year or so eighteen months earlier came another immigrant train that met with total disaster, the Donner party?

WM: Right.

CE: Now from legends you've heard or stories in your family what do you think was the attributing force? Was it anything: a personality, a leadership that your great grandfather contributed that made that train successfully --

WM: I don't mean to be egotistical or anything but from what I've seen and read of those people, they just had everything. They had good common sense and they didn't take a step before they knew where they were going to put their foot and they seemed to put all of their trust in a leader and they had the desire to leave where they were and come to California and they were going to get here.

CE: Do you remember their telling why they wanted to leave Missouri?

WM: Yes. Well they originally left --

CE: Canada?

WM: No, they left Ireland because of the oppression there from the British and so forth, and they came to Canada and bought land there and farmed it and then the winters were too hard so they decided to go further south and also further west. So they went to Missouri in what was then known as the Platte Purchase and which now is the part of Holt and some other county there, and the land was good and the climate right so they started farming there and were joined by others from Canada and from Ireland. Then they contracted malaria, some of them, and Mrs. Martin Murphy Sr. succumbed to it as well as three of their children and that broke them up quite a bit and they decided that they were going to do something else. And some missionary priest, in passing through the area, of course they were Catholics, very staunch Catholics, and --

CE: The Murphy's were your maternal great-grandparents?

WM: Maternal, yes. So this missionary told them of this, the glowing stories of the far west and the wonderful climate and fertile soil and so forth and they decided that in the spring they would head west. So that was what started them on their trek.

CE: Well it's all written of course, they were -- It was a large group wasn't it? Thirteen wagons or more?

WM: There were thirteen wagons and sixty-seven individuals in the particular party that left there.

CE: There were women, of course, and children.

WM: There were women and I don't remember the ages although I think I'm sure that Martin Murphy was the oldest of the group because he was around sixty something years old when they left Missouri.

CE: And again, as you were saying earlier, they made such plans and preparations. All of the wagons were in excellent condition; they had provisions; they seem to prepare themselves for any emergency and it proved out later when they got across the plains near the Sierra's. Wasn't a decision made then that necessitated stopping and sending a party ahead?

WM: Yes. But that's what I mentioned before. They were very level-headed people you know and they used good common sense and they fixed these wagons up just perfectly and some of them they even caulked, one or two of them, and then they had with grass and moss and so forth; they knew they would be crossing rivers and they would use these as barges, shall we say. And then they'd take the hides of a animals, of the oxen or the buffalo, and wrap it around there and then they would use these as boats to carry the women and children and provisions and so forth across the rivers, or wagons, and dismantle the wagons and take them to the other side of the river and put them together again and go on. As I say, they seemed to just know what to do.

CE: Well you've been up there at Bear Valley and Truckee area of course many times I presume and at Immigrant Gap there is a plaque there.

WM: I never fail to wonder how in the world they ever did it.

CE: Isn't that impressive. How did they get those wagons down that cliff?

WM: I don't know. Well I know how they did it but I would hate to try it today even.

CE: And even how did they get them up on the east side?

WM: Well they worked and they --

CE: Imagine the logistics of that.

WM: Oh I know. But they would dismantle the wagons and they'd find a way to get up around the top where they could secure a rope and --

CE: They'd use the strength of the oxen to --

WM: And they'd use the animals. They'd have to get the animals. They might have to take them ten miles around to the top of the mountain, but they would get them up there and then drop a line down and they could pull these things up with the oxen and the men pushing and so forth. And they had to cut many trees for the wagon roads to go through and move boulders or go around them. I tell you, men today couldn't do it without their bulldozers.

CE: Is it possible, Bill, there are any relics left in your family, any relic at all from that extraordinary journey?

WM: I have a few of the tools and things like that but I don't have any wagons or spokes of the wagon or anything.

CE: But you have some tools?

WM: I do have some tools and things. I don't know whether they were used on that -- Well I would presume they were used on the ranch here. They were all made right on the ranch here.

CE: Hand forged?

WM: Hand forged yes. Axes and shingle slivers and several things.

CE: Well tell me, just a minute, this man Elijah Stevens who was supposed to have been selected to kind of lead them, did he stay with the party the whole trip?

WM: No he originally came into Missouri looking for a group that was traveling westward. He had his own wagon and teams and all his provisions and he wanted to join a wagon train that was going west. But he wanted to go into the Oregon territory and it was a lucky circumstance that the Murphys and the Millers and the Townsends and a few others were trying to find someone that would lead them to, that had knowledge of the plains or knowledge of the country that they were going into, and they ran across Stevens. And while the Murphys perhaps wanted to elect a leader, could have elected a Murphy because I think there were over twenty in that group alone.

CE: Sometimes referred to as the Murphy-Miller party.

WM: Well yes.

CE: Because there were more Murphys --

WM: Yes there were more Murphys or I thought here in this county it's all been Millers but maybe I was raised a Miller, I refer to it as the Miller-Murphy party although I suppose in Santa Clara it would be the Murphy-Miller party but I give full credit to Murphy and Miller. The Miller was the -- was married of course to one of Murphy's daughters and I guess he was older than the Murphy boys and I suppose that's why it was, but he was a very competent person.

CE: Well now there was a doctor in the party, Townsend. That was an unusual thing wasn't it?

WM: Yes.

CE: To have a qualified doctor join your --

WM: It was fortunate but a strange thing that the party took off there with the sixty-seven people and actually arrived in California with one more. Mrs. James Miller at Independence Rock, Wyoming gave birth to a little girl whom she named Nellie Independence Miller. And so they actually came into California with one more than they left with. They had no trouble with Indians because they were not war-faring people or fighters or anything like that. They were coming to California to make a home for themselves. They were, of course, before the gold rush hordes came in; the Indians hadn't been aroused, and these people on the train only killed the animals and things that they needed for their own provisions. And they're not warlike in any way.

CE: Well, to your knowledge, Bill, did any of those people keep any kind of a journal or did they do it in those days?

WM: I don't know.

CE: If there was it's gone.

WM: If there was, it never came down to me. I was in my father's uncles' place, Bernard Miller, in San Rafael and he of course was the son of James Miller and this was in 1930, '28 and '30, and he had a lot of things there that came from the ranch and he had his sister's wonderful collection of Indian baskets, California Indian baskets, and a lot of Indian artifacts. And he had some of the furniture and pictures and so forth but I don't know of any diary or anything. If there was it could have been kept by the Murphys. I have an article here that was written by one of the Murphys. Lets see, it would have been Martin Murphy's granddaughter, I guess.

CE: Well now the Murphys -- Your family came to Marin County but the Murphys chose not to; they settled in Santa Clara.

WM: Yes, they went --

CE: On a rancho near Morgan Hill of today.

WM: That's right. Well when they came to California they came -- Part of the party stayed up at the head of the Yuba River and then Martin Murphy Senior and several of his family left and went on down to Sacramento, to Sutters Fort, to get some provisions and so forth to send out to help the settlers along. And while there, there was a war here between Micheltorena and Mexicans and the early Californians and so forth, and they were conscripted to fight the -- go on to some battleground, or whatever it was, to fight them. So they went on horseback and rode down through this Santa Clara country and on down to Cahuenga Pass, I believe it was. And nothing happened so they turned around and came back. But Murphy liked that country so much.

CE: Oh, he had gone through and he liked what he saw.

WM: Yes, but he had never been to Marin County. But he liked that country and it was beautiful country and it had everything that he wanted and so he stayed down there.

CE: Well, by any chance did your great grandfather James Miller know that Don Timeto Murphy was in Marin County? They were both from the same Wexford County in Ireland.

WM: No, they both discovered it themselves in San Rafael I guess.

CE: But he came down to Marin?

WM: Yes.

CE: They were very good friends, I understand.

WM: They were very good friends and --

CE: Well, looking back that was a nice thing in a way for Don Timoteo to do, to give him some of, sell him some of his land and get him started in a decent area.

WM: It was, yes. It was sold to him and I don't know whether the grandfather had the money to pay for it now or not or whenever or when he paid for it or if he paid for it when he finally made a deed, had the deeds made I don't know, but it was a fortunate thing that he had the deed made because other heirs would fight those things, especially today, you know they would.

CE: And I understand Bill it was the first deed recorded in Marin County.

WM: Right.

CE: Of the transfer of property. Now we have had the twenty-four original Mexican land grants but this now that we are talking about, an American transfer of deed that was your great grandfather. Well what did he do, settle down, built a home? What did he start off with? Certainly not Miller Hall?

WM: No. As near as I can figure, as I can remember rather, he worked for various people around here as a, well, he's cut wood and he managed ranches for some of these fellows, these early Don's or something, and developed, got a little money and started a herd and so forth.

CE: Well now this herd your speaking of, would this be for dairy cattle or would this be just for stock for beef?

WM: I think it was beef at first, yes. And there was a story that's been told to of taking 150 head of cattle he and his son and a few of the vaqueros driving them into the gold country and selling them each for so much a pound.

CW: A dollar a pound it's supposed to have been.

WM: A dollar a pound or something.

CE: Well that was a good enterprise.

WM: Yes and that fattened his purse I would say.

CE: Well you know this is not an unusual story; there are other families in Marin. We talked to the late Judge Jordan Martineli and his family got involved in a similar sortie, a little deflection there, and Joseph Warren Revere who owned the San Geronimo Rancho at one time, who was the grandson of Paul Revere, he did a similar thing. So, they were just smart. There was a need for it and they just drove those cattle up there and slaughtered them right at the site and came home with the gold.

WM: That's right.

CE: Well when did he erect Miller Hall? Do you have any idea, Bill?

WM: I haven't any idea.

CE: You have some photographs here on the table. Aren't they interesting, Mrs. Kent?

AK: Wonderful.

CE: There is a photograph here of Miller Hall and you have seen it of course and been there.

WM: Yes.

CE: Did your grandfather stay there after your great grandfather died or what?

WM: No. After my great grandfather died, why, there were three unmarried girls living there yet, three unmarried daughters, and one of them was Nellie Independence and she operated the ranch. And she kept it going until she passed away and then it was leased to some, to Portuguese people and when I was on there it was leased to Tony Silveria. Tony and his wife operated it all the time that I remember.

CE: Did you always sort of refer to this, as the Freitas did, to their Home Ranch? Is this called the Home Ranch?

WM: Yes. The Miller's had many other ranches.

CE: Well that's what I understand that there were other properties. Eight thousand acres all around.

WM: Yes.

CE: Other properties. Where, for instance?

WM: They bought and sold a lot, but they did have three ranches that they -- There was a Home Ranch and then there was one at Nicasio that one of the boys owned, or they gave it to the boy, and there was another one up at Tomales Bay which was called the Millerton Ranch and the station there.

CE: Oh, is that where the station is?

WM: Yes. Oh they had numerous ranches.

CE: Well when they brought the railroads in, did they provide a stop at the Miller Hall?

WM: Yes.

CE: What did they call that stop. do you recall?  
WM: It was "Miller."  
CE: "Miller."  
WM: "Miller." It was out near St. Vincent's.  
CE: I see. It's right opposite the -- That's what I wanted you to tell us. The location of the Home Ranch is --  
WM: Right opposite, just west of the St. Vincent's Orphanage, or it used to be the St. Vincent's Orphanage. Today it is the St. Vincent Boy's School I believe.  
CE: Yes. Now it's all Marinwood, isn't it?  
WM: It's all Marinwood except for a portion of the original ranch where Mrs. Silvera has -- They bought 400 acres adjoining the St. Vincent's School, on the east side of 101. And west of it was sold to a group that was going to build a boys school. However, something fell through and they decided not to, so it was sold to a Mr. Texeira.  
CE: Is that the Texeira that we met, Mrs. Kent, do you suppose, out in Olema area?  
WM: I don't think so, no.  
CE: An unusual name.  
WM: Yes.  
CE: They're ranchers also. I just thought maybe.  
WM: Yes, I know them also. No, this fellow had two daughters, I believe. And he operated it until he passed away. Then it was sold to these sub-dividing people, whoever they were, I don't know, from Marinwood.  
CE: Well I see, Bill, you have a photograph here. It appears to be a townhouse in San Rafael. Would you describe this to us and tell us whose home this is and where it was?  
WM: Well this picture here is a picture of the house that my grandfather built on the corner of Fourth and B Streets in San Rafael.  
CE: Fourth or Fifth?  
WM: Fifth and B Streets, rather. And my father was born there and shortly afterward my grandfather sold it to a Mr. Fred Gibson, I believe, and Gibson's had it for a while and then the Elk's Club bought it and they held it for a number of years until the Bank of Marin bought it and dismantled it and built --  
CE: Is that what the gorgeous building is now, the Bank of Marin, on that site?  
WM: Right.  
CE: Well now were talking about the 1880s or 18 -- Looks like 1887, do you think?  
WM: My father was born in '71, 1871, so it would have been about that time yes.  
CE: Were you born in that house?  
WM: No.  
CE: But you visited in that home as well?  
WM: No I didn't, I visited in the next house they had which they bought or built right along side of this one. And this house was later sold to the Knights of Pythias and the Three A, the California State Automobile Association was in

there, and now that has been dismantled also and is part of the Bank of Marin properties.

CE: Tell me, I understand, is it your grandfather William James who owned the ranch in Nicasio and built the hotel there?

WM: Yes.

CE: Is that your grandfather?

WM: Yes, he owned -- That was part of a ranch that he had. He was in the real estate business after he left the Home Ranch; he was also in the real estate business. He thought that that would be a good spot for the county seat. Actually it is the geographical center of the --

CE: Heart of the county, isn't it?

WM: And of course, I guess he was a little political minded too; he was the Mayor for a while and he was State Assemblyman or something for a while, so he thought that would be a good spot and he'd be all prepared. He had built a hotel so that they'd have a place to stay and there'd be a bar there, but it --

CE: I've seen photographs of it. You don't have one here today, do you?

WM: I don't have -- I didn't bring one, no.

CE: But it's a beautiful place.

WM: It was quite a place, yes.

CE: Now is that where that Nicasio Inn? Is that the site of the present --

WM: It's just about where the Rancho Nicasio is.

CE: Rancho Nicasio is today.

WM: Yes.

CE: Well tell us now William, Bill, about your own life. Start from --

WM: I can't offer anything like --

CE: Like this, I know, but I mean it's very interesting I do know that you spent a great deal of time in Bolinas. Were you born in San Rafael?

WM: No, as a matter of fact I was born in Alaska.

CE: How did that come about? Tell us about your father George. Was he the only son of --

WM: My dad always wanted to have a ranch but he also had a very good sweetheart and he loved her. And so anyway he went up to the mines in Alaska. He didn't go to the mines, actually, he went up there first to work for the Alaska Commercial Company. And his duties up there were to go around and buy furs and sell furs and buy provisions and sell provisions to the people up there and then when the gold was discovered up there and so he left them. In fact they went out of business and went with the Northern Commercial Company. And he would go out and start up wherever there was a strike; he would go out and start a new store for the Northern Commercial Company. And after two years up there he came back and got his sweetheart and they were married and they went up there. All in all Dad and Mother were there for seventeen years and there were three of us born up there.

CE: Whereabouts were you born?

WM: Well I was born at Tanana which is just at the confluence of the Yukon and Tanana Rivers. I had one brother born at Goodnews Bay, which is on the Bering Sea and another one born in Fairbanks. By the time Mother had had

three of them and gone through all those minus zero winters up there, although she'd been out to the lower 48 several times, she decided to raise her children in California.

CE: So that's when you first came back then and had an opportunity to meet your grandfather?

WM: Yes, and I was just two, I guess, a little over two, and I had another brother younger, one year old, and one seven years older than I, so we all came back to California.

CE: And then where did you live, in the second home here on --

WM: No, we actually came back and lived in Corte Madera for a short while and then Dad built a home in San Rafael on Center Street.

CE: Then as you were growing up did you start hearing the legend of the family?

WM: Oh yes, yes.

CE: From whom did you hear it, your father, your grandparents?

WM: My mother, my father and from my grandmother whom I regret to see -- When I was going to school, it was only a half a block, I went to the old B Street School. It was only a half a block there and I'd go over there after school and get a sandwich or something. But on Saturdays and Sundays, why, we'd go out in the country. But I think that Dad had the -- He used to pick up the rents from the tenants on the different ranches and I would ride around with him.

CE: So you got a feeling for it, didn't you, and a history?

WM: Yes.

CE: You didn't tell us, what year were you born; what is your birth date?

WM: I was born in 1909, May 16, 1909, and the ice was just breaking on the Yukon River.

End, Side A

CE: Bill, on these tours around the county with your father, how would you do that, horse?

WM: Well, we'd ride a horse and rig, as Dad called it, which was just a buggy, and we would start out early in the morning. We'd go down to Reddings Stable and rent a horse. The Reddings were early settlers in Marin also, having large ranches out in Nicasio.

CE: What did they have, a livery stable, the Reddings?

WM: One of them had a livery stable.

CE: Whereabouts would that be?

WM: Well it was just about opposite where the old courthouse used to be on Fourth Street. And we'd take along our fishing poles too because Dad was a great fisherman and we'd stop at all the little streams along the way and have some fun and I really learned to enjoy the good country life that way. Our home in San Rafael, of course, was out in what is today Sun Valley area, I guess. In those days it was part of the -- Well it was the pasture land; it was part of the old Forbes Ranch but part of the pasture lands of the old Tunnel Ranch which is over the hill from Sun Valley.

CE: Who were some of your school friends that you remember?

WM: Gee, you're going back a long time ago.

CE: That stayed in the community and contributed?  
WM: Oh I just can't think of any now but there were plenty of them; there was Herb Rowland.  
CE: Well the Freitas brothers, were they too old?  
WM: I went to school with one of them, one of the Freitases, but -- And I think my brother, my older brother went to school with one of them but I remember them. They went to different schools, though, than we did.  
CE: Oh that's right.  
WM: However I remember them, and Herb Rowland who has the old Pacheco Ranch now. He and I were in the same class.  
CE: We know him; we interviewed him one day. He told us the story of Ignacio Pacheco and that whole Rancho San Jose. So you went to school with him. Did you ever know Dolly Cushing Jenkins?  
WM: Oh yes, very well. In fact we used to go clam digging with Dolly out in Bolinas. In fact she called me up the other day.  
CE: Well we'll have to get to Bolinas shortly, but her family home the J. O. Eldridge house was near your home wasn't it? I mean your grandfather's home?  
WM: Yes it was.  
CE: His was on Fifth and C and hers was 508 Fourth Street; it's at Court, pretty close, isn't it?  
WM: Pretty close yes. Well they were gone I think before I grew up there.  
CE: I see.  
WM: When I was growing up there, after school and Saturdays I would work for either Grosjean's, Grosjeans and Company, or the Bordenave Bakery delivering French bread or when it was Grosjean's we were preparing orders and delivering. Grosjean's had five stores, I think, at that time.  
CE: Do you know those Mrs. Kent?  
AK: Yes.  
CE: Bordenave's the same place that is running today?  
WM: Yes, the same people.  
CE: Same family?  
WM: Still part of the same family. I think there's one girl there that's part of the original family. But the bakery is a different spot; it used to be down D Street I think.  
CE: How would you deliver that stuff?  
WM: Oh we had an old Chevrolet truck at that time.  
CE: And you had a regular route and you just take it.  
WM: Right, deliver it door to door you might say.  
CE: Were those baths in San Rafael going when you were a boy or was that a little before your time?  
WM: Yes, the San Rafael Baths were going; I can remember them. In fact that's where I learned to swim. I had enough money one time to borrow a pair, to rent a pair of water wings, and I floated around on those for that day and the next time I just had enough to get in so I went on my own and I could swim.

CE: Well now, tell us about your life when you met Violet and you use to spend a lot of time in Bolinas. How did that come about? What was the attraction at Bolinas?

WM: Well when my dad came back from Alaska he was looking for a piece of property to buy on the coast. He had been over there years ago; they use to ride over there to dances.

CE: Dances? All the way over there to a dance?

WM: Yes from San Rafael. And --

CE: People like to go away though to have fun?

WM: Yes they do.

CE: Get out of your own town.

WM: And Dad ran across this place, I think there were twenty-two acres in it and it contained the old Briones house, and the rest of it was all clear land and Dad bought that.

CE: The old Briones house was on it?

WM: Yes and it was dilapidated and -- In fact, when I first saw it there was a cow poking its head out of the bottom windows of it; the floors had all gone. And Dad fixed it up and we used that as a summer place. Prior to that we just go and camp over there on the mesa.

CE: Well where was this property?

WM: Well it's --

CE: Can you tell us, roughly, when you come in on the Olema Road, for example and you get past Dogtown or Woodville whatever you call it and your almost at the end of the lagoon --

WM: I would say it's right on the -- where the two roads meet, the upper road and the old county road when you're coming into Bolinas right on the Paradise Valley Creek, right where the Paradise Valley Creek comes across.

CE: There is supposed to be a descendent of the Briones family; Rose isn't it?

WM: Rose Briones is up there. She lives --

CE: Is she near this same property?

WM: She lives in Dogtown or Woodville.

CE: And yours is further south and west?

WM: Yes. But Dad fixed this place up and it was exactly the same as it was when Briones had it except that it did not have the full porch across the front. Dad only built a small porch on it.

CE: I think there are some drawings in the Marin County Historical Library of the original house.

WM: Yes. I have a couple of pictures of it, originally, and then of course I have lots of them that we took as we grew up. But I used to go over there as a boy for -- Well, all of us would go over in the summer but I had a horse and I would ride over on weekends and go swimming and play on the beach and so forth.

CE: And Dolly was over there, too, a lot.

WM: Dolly and her family yes; we all use to play on the beach. Not Dolly and I but her children and I. And oh I met my future wife there at a dance one night.

CE: Well tell us about the Petar family because it is such an interesting story in so many ways. Most people in Marin know about the wonderful schooner The Owl, but tell us a little more about her father Petar.

WM: Well her Father was Louis B. Petar, more commonly known as "Cap."

CE: Cap.

WM: He was a farm boy from Bolinas and he left there when he was twenty-one. In the meantime he had self-educated himself to be a carpenter and a contractor designer and architect and he came over to San Rafael and went to work for one Tom O'Connor who was a building contractor. They built many places here and then when there were slack times why he would go over to Bolinas and build homes over there. He built several of them there, you know. Then he decided he wanted to go into the boating business, the freighting business. They were just starting the Marconi Station about that time and they were going to need a lot of building materials and supplies and so forth, and so he bought two boats from Captain Gibson who had built them and used them there but Petar and his brother Joe Petar, who had the store there, bought the boats and they used to bring provisions and feed for the animals and all of the groceries and so forth for the village and parts or supplies for the Marconi Station. The boat, The Owl, was the one that was chiefly used. It was almost an exact miniature of the old C.A. Thayer which is over at the Maritime dock over at -- It didn't have steam engine; it had two gas engines.

CE: Coastal Lumber schooner.

WM: What they use to call the old lumber hookers.

CE: Lumber hookers.

WM: It was only sixty-five feet long, but I went with them on a couple of trips where we brought poles for the RCA that were eighty feet long and they extended over the bow and over the stern; it was really interesting going out through the Potato Patch when this thing would drive down and these would go under and then they'd spring out.

CE: Well I've seen photographs of the Owl loaded to the gun whales with passengers, ladies in big hats, and just -- You wonder how they got so many people on it.

WM: But you didn't see when it was loaded with hogs, did you?

CE: Well sometimes they had -- mixed up didn't they?

WM: They took the hogs in the middle of the week and they took the passengers on the weekends.

CE: Well where were the hog farms, up on the mesa there or up in Point Reyes?

WM: All of the dairies around there used to have cows and they'd milk them and get the milk and separate it and get the cream and sell it or make their own butter and sell it.

CE: Butter was a big industry.

WM: Yes. And then as a result of that they had the skim milk, which they fed to the hogs. That is the same milk your probably paying for. Well, you're buying two percent or whatever it is now; it cost quite a bit. But as I say they use to feed it to the hogs and threw in some barley and any scrapes that they had and

they fattened the hogs and then when they get around two hundred pounds they would notify the Owl that they had so many hogs and when he was going down again? So he would set a time and they would drive the hogs down in their wagons and drive them aboard and he would take them down to Butcher Town and sell them for them down there. And the farmers would always feed them heavily before they got aboard so they'd weigh heavily, but unfortunately the hogs would get seasick and lose a lot of weight.

CE: That is a rough ride. I've made it in small boats, sailboats. It's a rough ride through that Potato Patch.

WM: Yes.

CE: But that was one of the main ways people used to come to Bolinas, wasn't it? From San Francisco?

WM: It was, yes.

CE: What was the alternative?

WM: Well there was the stage. First there was a wagon stage that ran from San Rafael over the Alpine Dam Road and --

CE: Up to the Summit House?

WM: Then there was another one that branched off to the Summit. And then these were later opened to automobiles. In fact the first steam car I ever saw was on Bolinas Stage, a Stanley Steamer. Then they moved the stage starting point down to Sausalito to be right near the boats there when they come from the city.

CE: You wouldn't have to go all the way up to San Rafael. I understood that at one time your family had the old Bourne ranch on the east side of Bolinas. Is that true?

WM: I left the Shell Oil Company. I still have this Irish farming in me. And we bought, I bought a business out on the old Morse ranch from a Tony Silva and my father-in-law at that time was running a dairy. Captain Petar was running a dairy supplying milk and butter and so forth to people of Bolinas and so I felt that I had a market for my milk and so I bought the business there and it became too small so I moved over and I bought out the people who were on the Bourne Ranch and my father-in-law and I went in partners there. We sold, took care of his milk to Bolinas and also contracted with a milk company in San Francisco and we eventually put out around four hundred gallons of milk and -- Oh I think we had three hundred head of cattle or something like that on the place. Both my daughters were born there on the ranch, which is now the Audubon Society.

CE: That's the Canyon Ranch?

WM: The Canyon Ranch, yes.

CE: Well it's sort of boxed in there. Was it small, you say, because of the land, the confines of it, the configuration?

WM: On that ranch I think there were only -- I think I had eight hundred acres and I think about four of them were flat lands. I probably originated what they call corral feeding. In other words, my cattle were all kept in this little small area around in back of the dairy and I had a big barn full of hay there and my cattle would eat there. And we'd only get up on the eight hundred acres whenever

they had ceased giving milk during their dry or rest period, and the rest of that land -- I farmed some of it. I farmed about sixty acres I guess, on the hillside. It was work. I was doing it during World War II, I guess it was, and I'd find myself with all these cows to milk sometimes and my father-in-law and I would -- Such a lot of cows to milk. It's not only the milking; it's cleaning up after them and feeding them and taking care of their calves and fixing fences and the water lines would break and so you need water and you'd have to stop everything. I've worked many times around the clock just to repair the damages that storms have done. Then I was hauling my milk at night. I had a truck that I would take my milk into what is now the Buckeye and I would meet a truck from San Francisco there. And I would leave the ranch at eight o'clock at night and --

CE: Every night, too, wouldn't it?

WM: Every night. And the blackout was on then and you couldn't have, you couldn't use lights and if you want some fun you try and drive that coast road at night without lights. But anyway I would get in the truck some nights, after I had left my milk there at the truck, and I headed for home and I never knew how I got home. I'd wake up just before I got in.

CE: What a worry, too, for your wife.

WM: But anyway, it just got too much for me and so my wife decided that I'd better get out of it. I would probably have ended up in the Pacific Ocean or something.

CE: Well we interviewed Boyd Stewart one time; he probably is a good friend of yours.

WM: Yes, know him well.

CE: And he was telling how it became more difficult to get milkers, too and you could get wetbacks or something like that which he didn't want to do.

WM: Well his daughter and a friend of hers used to milk all of their cows.

CE: Well she finally sold them all and they're raising Morgan Horses and Black Angus cows. But another dairyman we interviewed in the Chileno Valley, up out of Petaluma, was Franklin Burns; do you know that young man?

WM: Oh very well. He's married to one of the McPhails.

CE: His sister. But he runs that three hundred herd with one man only assisting him, but he doesn't miss a day. He has to be there. And I think he puts out six hundred gallons a day. But he was talking, and I think also Marshall, Jim Marshall, was reminiscing with Boyd Stewart on the tape about the changes in the dairy business from those days of hand milking to the machine and et cetera. You didn't have to get involved in those milking machines then?

WM: Oh yeah, I had milking machines.

CE: Oh did you have them, too?

WM: Oh I had to have them. In fact the power one time and I was stuck with fifty cows to milk yet. My gosh, I thought I'd never get through. But anyway, we had milking machines.

CE: Well what happened? How long did Mr. Petar run the Owl? Do you have a rough idea? Ten, fifteen, twenty years?

WM: I don't know when he started but it was probably fifteen or twenty years, yes. He went out in 1932, I think. The trucking industry became so good and it was door-to-door with the trucks you know.

CE: That's what killed the railroad too.

WM: It killed the boating end of it, although he had contracts with the government to supply coal and supplies to the Coast Guard and the lighthouse people at Farallone Islands and Point Reyes and up the coast, or Trinidad or somewhere up there, that he would haul supplies up there for them. But then he finally gave it all up in 1932.

CE: Well I understand that the vessel wound up during World War II in Panama area. Did you ever hear that?

WM: That's the last time I heard of it. It was -- The party that Petar sold it to, I think, became involved in gun running and insurance frauds and so forth and the -- In fact there was an article in the San Francisco papers about this boat that was found floating outside of the Golden Gate and of course when they got out there they all recognized it as the Owl and it was towed in and they had a lot of cases that should have contained rifles, army rifles, and so forth, but they were all filled with rocks and the sea cocks on the ship had been opened to allow water to come in, so that it was --

CE: It looked like a planned scuttle, didn't it?

WM: A planned scuttle or someone had sold the cargo of guns to the Mexicans or something and then were going to ship it out and say the ship was sunk or something and it didn't get there.

CE: Coast Guard got it, huh?

WM: Well I don't know just what happened to it but the boat was refloated again and was sold to someone that was using it down around lower Mexico somewhere there.

CE: Have you any remembrance of what it would cost to -- the fare would be to go from Bolinas to San Francisco as a passenger or --

WM: A dollar.

CE: One dollar? I suppose round trip it was even better.

WM: I guess, yes.

CE: Where would the vessel land in the city, or did it have several places? I guess when they're taking the hogs they had to go to Butcher Town.

WM: Yes, they went to Butcher Town when they took the hogs, otherwise they had three piers. They were on Pier 7 for awhile, Pier 21 and Pier 23. They moved around.

CE: What was his nationality, Swiss? Was he a Swiss?

WM: Swiss and English I believe, Swiss and English. He was married to a Swedish girl, come over here when she was seventeen or something like that, spent her life here. They only had the one child, Violet, who is my wife.

CE: Was he able to run this schooner by himself, or did he have a crew of some -- He must have had a crew.-

WM: Ordinarily he had one crew; he had his engineer who is Arthur Bourne and they did all the work there. Although occasionally if they had a lot of cargo they would hire stevedores or something like that to --

CE: I wonder why they called it a schooner. Did you ever see it under sail?  
WM: No. It had a mast but that mast was used chiefly for cargo.  
CE: As a hoist or something.  
WM: They did have a sail too but -- I don't know it's something to do with the maritime rules or something.  
CE: Well did I understand that Louis Petar built a church? Did he build a church over there?  
WM: No, I think that he built the steeple on the Presbyterian Church there, the Calvary Church. He didn't build a church that I know of.  
CE: Well now tell us, you have two daughters?  
WM: Two daughters.  
CE: What are their names again? And they were born on the -- out there in Bolinas?  
WM: Yes.  
CE: On the Bourne property?  
WM: When I was on the ranch they were born. Marilyn who is now Mrs. Carl W. Pinnow of Yountville, and the youngest is Marjorie deGreeve and she lives in San Rafael.  
CE: What did you call that ranch? Did it have a name? Or just the Miller Ranch?  
WM: Well just the Miller-Petar Ranch.  
CE: Miller-Petar Ranch. I see. Did you ever go sailing out there, at Bolinas, or rowing?  
WM: Oh yes, we used to take canoes and come in on the beach, ride the breakers in and we built our own surfboards. And of course we rowed around the lagoon and we used to spear sharks there catching as many as fifty of them in a day.  
CE: Were the herons always so prevalent, Bill?  
WM: Yes there were always lots of birds out there. In fact, when we were on the ranch there, why, they were there at that time. And I can remember hearing them all night long there.  
CE: Did you ever make any trips out to the Lighthouse?  
WM: Yes.  
CE: Did you become friends with any of those Coast Guard people out there, those lighthouse people?  
WM: No but a lot of those Coast Guard people -- I had met some of them in Bolinas because Bolinas had a Coast Guard station also and they were transferred around. No, my visits out there were chiefly pleasure.  
CE: Well, Dolly Jenkins very graciously gave us a copy of a couple of shipwrecks out there. Had you been out there when any of this had occurred? She had one of the Polaris.  
WM: Yes I saw the -- saw one of them, the Hanalai, or the Polaris, I don't know. But I do have the Captain's desk, the Captain of the Polaris' desk and I also have the  
CE: The Captains desk?  
WM: Yes.  
CE: Gee, what, did it just float ashore with all the flotsam and jetsam?

WM: Floated ashore yes. And I have the shaving stand, which has a mirror in it and a little tray.

CE: Where did you get it? Go down the beach?

WM: They floated up and were picked up on the beach, yes.

CE: You know it's interesting, Bill, you keep referring to your Irish heritage and it's so interesting to me because we've interviewed the Marshalls, who of course were from Ireland, and then there's quite a few Irish that settled in West Marin up on the eastern side of Tomales Bay, those little communities.

WM: Yes.

CE: And most of them came from Ireland with nothing. Now they had nothing and they worked hard and three or four generations later they have ranches and kept them in the family with great pride. And it seems that your family, from your great grandfather James' arrival in 1845 there's always been Millers involved in the land.

WM: Well you see I'm the last one that has so far that has gone into the ranching business. The rest of them, no, they all went into -- Outside of the immediate family of James, they were all ranchers, but from there on none of them have gone into the farming or dairying.

CE: And your daughters don't --

WM: Oh they like it. They just think a lot of the time they spent on the ranch. The cows -- They'd sneak out and watch us milk the cows and so forth; they shouldn't have but they did.

CE: Do you go out there most every week now, Bill?

WM: I don't have any ranch anymore, I just have five acres out there and a horse and a three head of white face, lots of weeds to contend with and fences that fall down.

CE: Are you anywhere near Martinelli property?

WM: No. I know where it is but it does not adjoin me.

CE: Well don't you think that Marin has a fascinating topography, to be on some land with you and your horse and be near the sea? Don't you think it might be some similar to Ireland?

WM: Possibly, but it's just to be out amongst the grass and the trees and your feet on soil rather than concrete. And I don't know if you kick the dust a little bit it's good.

CE: Well, I think it's wonderful. Bill, we want to thank you so much today for coming and sharing your reminiscences with us. You certainly can be proud of the contribution of your family to Marin heritage. And in closing I would like to restate that the Murphy-Miller party was the first to open a wagon trail across the plains to California and they were also the first to cross the Sierra by way of Truckee and the Bear Rivers. And their train contained the first immigrant wagons that ever made tracks on California soil. What a legacy to receive. And thank you, Bill, for sharing it.