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THE PATTERSON FAMILY AND RANCH:
SOUTHERN ALAMEDA COUNTY IN TRANSITION

Volume I

AGRICULTURE AND FARM LIFE ON
FREMONT'S NORTHERN PLAIN, 1890s-1980s

Interviews with

Frank Berghi
Elvamae Rose Berghi
Ruel Brown
Donald Furtado
Tillie Logan Goold
William McKeown
Gene Williams
Mel Alameda

Interviews Conducted by
Ann Lage
Bill Helfman
Donald Patterson
in 1975 and 1986-1987

Since 1954 the Regional Oral History Office has been interviewing leading participants in or well-placed witnesses to major events in the development of northern California, the West, and the nation. Oral history is a modern research technique involving an interviewee and an informed interviewer in spontaneous conversation. The taped record is transcribed, lightly edited for continuity and clarity, and reviewed by the interviewee. The resulting manuscript is typed in final form, indexed, bound with photographs and illustrative materials, and placed in The Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley and other research collections for scholarly use. Because it is primary material, oral history is not intended to present the final, verified, or complete narrative of events. It is a spoken account, offered by the interviewee in response to questioning, and as such it is reflective, partisan, deeply involved, and irreplaceable.

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Alameda County Water District
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Regional Oral History Office
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Berkeley, California

THE PATTERSON FAMILY AND RANCH:
SOUTHERN ALAMEDA COUNTY IN TRANSITION

VOLUME I

AGRICULTURE AND FARM LIFE ON FREMONT'S NORTHERN PLAIN, 1890-1980s

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- ELVAMAE ROSE BORGHI Girlhood in a Patterson Ranch Farm Family, 1931-1948
- RUEL BROWN Observations of a Ranch Worker's Son, 1918-1950s
- DONALD FURTADO Working for Henry Patterson, 1930s-1950s
- TILLIE LOGAN GOULD The Logan Family in Alvarado
- WALLACE MCKEOWN A Neighboring Farmer Recalls the Early Days
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PREFACE

The Patterson Ranch

The historic George Washington Patterson home and ranch in Fremont, California, provides the focus for this oral history project which explores changing patterns of land-use in southern Alameda County over the past 130 years. George Washington Patterson was a forty-niner from Lafayette, Indiana, who left the gold fields to settle on the rich alluvial plain created by Alameda Creek, on the southeastern shore of San Francisco Bay. He accumulated properties to form a 4,000-acre ranch in this area known as Washington Township and an additional 10,000 acres inland in the Livermore Valley. In 1877, he married Clara Hawley and added on to his home to create the Queen Anne style mansion that now is the centerpiece of the Ardenwood Regional Preserve, a historic farm operated by the East Bay Regional Park District on former Patterson ranch lands.

Since George Patterson's death in 1895, three generations of his descendants have continued to oversee the ranch operations, sharecropped in the earlier years by tenants who grew vegetable crops on family farms and later leased to larger-scale and more modernized agricultural operations. Agriculture continued to flourish on Patterson ranch lands while surrounding lands succumbed to the pressures of urbanization from the burgeoning Bay Area metropolis in the post-World War II population explosion.

The rapid urbanizations of the area brought with it inevitable political changes. The several small unincorporated towns of Washington Township--Alvarado and Decoto; Irvington, Mission San Jose, Niles, Centerville, and Warm Springs; and Newark--incorporated into the three cities of Union City, Fremont, and Newark in the 1950s. The Alameda County Water District, formed to conserve the ground water for the area's farmers, expanded its operation and its water supplies to deliver water to suburban customers. The Alameda County Flood Control District channelized Alameda Creek, putting an end to rich alluvial deposits, but making year-round farming and, most significantly, housing development possible on the northern flood plain.

By the 1970s the Patterson family succumbed to development pressures and began selling off major portions of ranch lands for housing development. Their sale to Singer Housing of the lands surrounding the historic mansion and its landmark eucalyptus trees precipitated the controversy that, after several years of lawsuits and negotiations, resulted in the creation of Ardenwood Regional Preserve. In the 1980s, the family has organized into a corporation with professional management from family members and has managed the development process in accordance with a master plan that emphasizes planned development and preservation of open space. Three regional parks are on former Patterson lands: in addition to Ardenwood, the Coyote Hills and surrounding marshlands are preserved, and in Livermore, the Del Valle Regional Park stands in the middle of Patterson cattle lands. Adjacent to

the industrial park and the suburban housing tracts, lands still held by the Patterson family are leased to a modern truck farm growing cauliflower, lettuce, and specialty vegetables for Bay Area gourmets.

The Oral History Project

With a series of twenty-six interviews, the oral history project explores the transformation of the Patterson ranch as a case study of the complex evolution from agricultural to urban land use. The idea for the project came from the collaborative thinking of Knox Mellon and Leon Campbell. Dr. Mellon, former director of the California State Department of Historic Preservation and professor of history, was assisting the Patterson family to place Ardenwood on the National Registry of Historic Places. He saw the potential for an oral history project and found ready support among the Patterson family, particularly his friend and fellow historian, Leon Campbell, who was part of the management team for Patterson Properties. David Patterson, who has a keen interest in tracing family history, also took a supportive role.

Dr. Mellon came to the Regional Oral History Office with his idea, has worked steadily with us to formulate and direct the project, and has served as interviewer and consultant throughout the three years to the project's completion. Leon Campbell was instrumental throughout in arranging funding and serving as advisor. Because of his ability to look at the story of the Patterson Ranch with a historian's eye, as well as his first-hand knowledge as a family member, he was asked to write the introduction to the project, which places the twenty-six interviews in historical context.

As the planning for the project evolved, three main themes emerged, and these are reflected in the organization of the interviews into three volumes. Volume I focuses on agriculture and rural life on the northern plain of Washington Township in the prewar years and on the agricultural operations of the L.S. Williams and Alameda and Sons companies, the two outfits which farmed on the ranch during the transitional period from the mid-fifties to the present.

Volume II tells the tales of water, development, planning, and historic preservation in the area—topics seemingly diverse which are seen to be closely interrelated in these histories. Volume III focuses on the Patterson family, past and present. Two generations of family members combine nostalgic looks back to rural childhoods with insight into the processes of present-day property management by a family corporation.

Each volume has been enhanced with interviews completed on previous occasions for other purposes, but ones which added so centrally to our project that we requested permission to include them here. These include, in Volume II, the interviews with William D. Patterson, son of George

Washington Patterson, on his work with the Alameda County Water District; and Larry Milnes, assistant manager of the city of Fremont, on the city's role in the negotiations leading to the establishment of Ardenwood.

Volumes I and III have interviews which were recorded in 1975 and 1977 by family member Donald Patterson for the family archive at the Society of California Pioneers. These include the interview with neighboring farmer William McKeown in Volume I and cousin William Volmer in Volume III. Donald Patterson also recorded his own recollections on tape and later was interviewed for the Society of California Pioneers by Stanley Bry. Transcriptions of these tapes are included in Volume III. The project was further enriched by the volunteer assistance of Bill Helfman, a Fremont resident who recorded two interviews for the project. His interview with Donald Furtado is in Volume I.

To enhance the reader's understanding of the interviews, illustrative materials have been included. Maps of the southern Alameda County area in 1956 and 1987 are in the introductory pages for each volume. Family trees of the Patterson and Hawley families are included in Volume III (pages 2 and 31). The 1981 town development plan for the Patterson Ranch is in the appendix to Volume II. In addition, interview histories preceding each memoir give specifics on the conduct and content of the interviews.

All of the tapes for the project interviews are available in The Bancroft Library. Society of California Pioneer tapes are in their archive in San Francisco. In addition to the transcribed interviews included here, three interviews recorded for background information are available on tape only. These are interviews with Dorothy Wilcox Patterson, wife of Donald, and Eleanor Silva and Mary Dettling, former housekeepers for the Henry Patterson family.

Research Resources

Many resources exist for research on the subject matters of these interviews. The Society of California Pioneers has papers and business records and photographs of the Patterson family. A guide to these papers, a useful bibliography, and other information exists in Faces in Time: An Historic Report on the George Washington Patterson Family and the Ardenwood Estate prepared for the East Bay Regional Park District by Susan A. Simpson, 1982. The local history collection and the Grace Williamson collection in the Alameda County library in Fremont is another valuable source. Their collection includes many untranscribed oral history interviews with individuals prominent in Fremont's history. The library of California State University at Hayward also includes works on the history of the region. A CSUH master's thesis in geography gives specific information about the history of land use on the Patterson Ranch; it is based in part on a 1971 interview with Donald Patterson (Jerome Pressler. Landscape Modification through Time: the Coyote Hills, Alameda County, California. 1973).

Research Use

The diversity and the universality of themes explored in this series of oral history interviews insure that they will be consulted by a wide variety of researchers. They are intended to be of use to the East Bay Regional Park District in planning and interpretation. They provide information on the history of agriculture, particularly the loss of agricultural lands to urbanization and the problems of farming in an urban setting. They discuss the process of land planning from the perspectives of city officials, developers, and property owners. They give an indepth history of the Alameda County Water District and illuminate the role of water in development. Finally, they provide a candid look at a family business over four generations and give insight to the dynamics of personalities and intra-family, inter-generational conflicts in shaping decisions in family businesses.

Ann Lage
Project Director

September, 1988
Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library
University of California at Berkeley

INTRODUCTION by Leon G. Campbell

The three volumes of interviews prepared by the Regional Oral History Office of the University of California, Berkeley, dealing with the Patterson family and ranch between the years 1851-1988, constitute a case study of changing land use in southern Alameda County from the days of the first Californios to the present. George Washington Patterson (1822-1895) came to California with the Gold Rush but remained to found an extensive farming and ranching enterprise in Alameda County. Originally known as Rancho Potrero de los Cerritos (Cattle Ranch of the Hills), the 4,000-acre Patterson Ranch has remained in family hands as an agricultural and livestock enterprise to the present day. Under the ownership of George Washington's sons, Henry (1878-1955) and William (1880-1961), the Patterson Ranch became a dominant economic institution in southern Alameda County and the family an integral part of the emergence of Fremont as a major Bay Area community.

Situated between the eastern terminus of the Dumbarton Bridge, which connects Alameda County with the West Bay, and Highway 880, the Patterson Ranch is a prominent feature of the East Bay landscape. Today known as "Ardenwood-New Town" in honor of the Shakespearean title sometimes used to describe the ranch, Ardenwood serves as the western gateway to Fremont and the entire South Bay. Despite the fact that the planned district of Ardenwood is less than four years old, the size and scope of the changing land-use patterns on the Patterson Ranch resemble those taking place on the Irvine and Bixby Ranches in southern California, where uninterrupted family ownership has retained influence over time and throughout change.

Several important themes emerge from the various interviews contained within the three volumes. Volume I, Agriculture and Farm Life on Fremont's Northern Plain, chronicles the transition of the Patterson Ranch from a family farm in the nineteenth century to a large-scale agricultural enterprise operated by the L. S. Williams Company during the 1950s. The several interviews of tenant farmers and Patterson Ranch workers covering the period from approximately 1900-1950 constitute an excellent social history of farm life in Fremont's Northern Plain. Collectively, the memoirs of farmers and ranch workers not only inform about the Pattersons as owners but as well provide a third-party perspective upon changing public uses including the development of the Nimitz Freeway (1953), Alameda County Flood Control Project (1965-70), and the dedication of Coyote Hills Regional Park (1968).

The oral histories in Volume I hint at subjects which Volumes II and III treat more centrally, namely the immense changes taking place in the area during the lifetimes of the individual interviewees, particularly during the period following World War II. During the fifties and sixties, southern Alameda County shifted from a rural to an urban orientation, resulting in the incorporation of cities and the initiation of water and flood control projects, as these new municipalities began to debate the land and water use issues which had prompted their incorporation.

Volume I: Agriculture on the Ranch

The initial interviews contained in Volume I represent a broad sample of ranch workers and tenant farmers who were closely associated with the Patterson family during the postwar. As a group, they reflect the value of family and neighbors and of traditional virtues associated with farming and farm life. Quite apparent is the fact that these attitudes ran as deep in rural Alameda County as in more traditional agricultural areas outside California. Indeed, the Pattersons considered many of these individuals as their extended family, sharing with them an ethic of hard work and perseverance in the face of drought, flooding, poor crop years, and economic uncertainty. The interviews also cover the transition from cattle ranch to farming and provide important data on the presence of Chinese laborers, Mexican braceros, and migrants of all nationalities who came to comprise the ranch work force. Also recollected are recreational activities from horse racing to duck hunting, the introduction of the tractor to Ardenwood, and the life of the mind in a farming environment, particularly within the context of the development of Stanford University and the University of California at Berkeley where many of the early Patterson family members matriculated.

The second section of Volume I covers the more recent history of the larger-scale L. S. Williams and Alameda family farming operations on the ranch. In addition to providing an excellent overview of the agricultural basis of the Patterson Ranch, this section chronicles the decisions to grow various crops and the reasons for so doing, particularly the ability of various crops to withstand increasing salinity levels as a direct result of the ranch's location on San Francisco Bay and saltwater intrusion into the underground aquifers.

These interviews also reflect the rapidly changing agricultural orientation of northern California as East Bay farmland was converted to housing and industrial uses and agricultural operations relocated into the Salinas Valley, which in turn reoriented transportation and marketing networks. Increasingly isolated from the large growers and packers in the Salinas Valley, agricultural operations in southern Alameda have been forced to either transship their produce to the Midwest and other areas by means of refrigerated trucks or to diversify and reorient their production towards local markets. Since 1984, the Alameda Company has shifted from agribusiness to more of a diversified local farm operation. The Alameda family operates at Ardenwood for only half the year, relocating to Arizona and northern Mexico to grow cauliflower and lettuce during the winter months on a more convenient and large-scale basis. These growers' interviews provide an important case study of the decisions required when farming in a community which is making a rapid transition to urbanization in a precarious agricultural environment.

Volume II: The Context for Rapid Postwar Development

Volume II, Water, Development, and Preservation in Southern Alameda County, provides a more in-depth study of the dynamic tension between development, preservation efforts, and the water projects which have all impacted Alameda County during the period after 1945. The first-hand account of Mathew Whitfield, general manager of the Alameda County Water District during the years 1953-1977, provides a case study of this process of change in the East Bay. Whitfield's vivid recollections, the longest interview in the history, offer a fascinating study of family, water and South Bay politics during the postwar period. Whitfield's oral history may well be the most important single contribution to the project, for the actions of the Alameda County Water District in the 1950s provided the foundation for the subsequent growth of Fremont and the Northern Plain.

Whitfield was a close associate of W. D. Patterson, himself a director of the Alameda County Water District from its inception in 1914, whose recollections, based on a 1955 interview on the subject, are also included in this volume. Whitfield's perspective on the 1950s, the period in which the water district took a central role in planning for controlled growth, provides a context for assessing the subsequent changes which would alter Fremont and the Patterson Ranch thereafter. His reflections also touch upon an important aspect of Patterson family history not treated in this project, namely the events leading up to and including the creation of the Del Valle Regional Park in Livermore, which was created as the result of state condemnation of Livermore ranch land for the Del Valle reservoir. At one time the Patterson Livermore Ranch in Alameda County complemented the Fremont Ranch in an integrated farming-livestock operation. The Livermore operation is not treated herein in any detail, but is an important component of the history of the East Bay Regional Park system.

In addition, Whitfield provides an important perspective on the State Water Project South Bay Aqueduct, which linked both Patterson ranches to the future of water transportation projects. These decisions to import water for groundwater recharge and the subsequent Aquifer Reclamation Program of 1974 to counteract saltwater intrusion were determining factors in the continued agricultural development of southern Alameda County in general and the Patterson Ranch in particular. This interview thus provides an important complement to the Regional Oral History Office's series of oral history interviews on California water issues and relates changes on the Patterson lands to statewide water issues.

Another pivotal interview contained within Volume II is that of John (Jack) Brooks, an important developer in southern Alameda County from the postwar to the present and the primary planner of Ardenwood. Brooks's recollections, because of his long association with the Patterson family and his central position as a political force in Fremont, offer an invaluable look at the city as it has emerged to become the fourth largest municipality in the Bay Area. As Brooks makes clear, with the five communities making up Fremont, the Northern Plain was always anticipated to be a sixth or "New Town," its name today.

Whether this concept of an urban area on the North Plain was acknowledged by Henry and William Patterson before their deaths as Brooks contends, it was apparently supported by William's oldest son, Donald Patterson (1905-1980), who, as the oldest surviving Patterson son, assumed management responsibilities on the ranch after 1961 under an informal primogeniture (Henry Patterson's children were both daughters). Brooks holds that Henry and Will Patterson had virtually agreed to enter a development plan just before Henry's death in 1955. Subsequently, he recollects that the city of Fremont had begun to insist upon cancelling the Williamson Act, which had protected the Patterson family from future tax increases as an agricultural enterprise, so that the Pattersons would in the future pay their fair share of taxes.

Although Brooks understates his role in the process, under his guidance and with Fremont's cooperation, Ardenwood was brought out of Williamson in 1981 and substantial parts of the Patterson Ranch were sold, initially to the Singer Company and later to Kaiser Development Company and to Brooks himself. No less important are Brooks's recollections concerning the advent of a planned district concept and the complicated series of negotiations which led to the creation of Ardenwood Historic Park and the preservation of the George Washington Patterson House at its present location adjacent to Highways 84 and 880. Brooks's interview also describes in some detail why particular land-use decisions were made as they were and how a series of urban villages were created to establish a residential new town and a commercial and high technology center amidst a traditional farming enterprise.

The interview of Dr. Robert Fisher also provides valuable background on the politics of preservation involving Ardenwood. Fisher, the leading light in the Mission Peak Heritage Foundation, describes from his viewpoint how various interested local historical associations including the Washington Township Historical Society, Patterson House Advisory Board, and Ardenwood Regional Park Advisory Committee were all drawn into the question of who was to control and implement what had belatedly been recognized as an important historic and civic asset, namely, the Ardenwood Historic Farm and attendant Victorian mansion which formed its centerpiece.

The recollections of Fisher and of Larry Milnes, assistant city manager of the city of Fremont, provide a balanced view of how municipalities become involved in the process of acquiring valuable assets for future preservation, how these assets are administered, in this case through the aegis of the East Bay Regional Park District, which also operates Coyote Hills Regional Park adjacent to the site. Besides corroborating Brooks's reflections on the Ardenwood process, Milnes's interview describes how decisions were reached over the often controversial questions of deciding the focus and implementing the historical theme. Milnes also depicts, from the city's perspective, the evolution of the Patterson Ranch from agriculture to mixed use.

Following the gift of forty-six acres, including the family home, to the city of Fremont by the Patterson family in 1981, the city consulted the State Office of Historic Preservation in Sacramento to verify Ardenwood's historic value. This in turn led to the city and the Patterson family petitioning the National Trust for Historic Preservation in Washington, D.C., to have the ranch placed on the National Registry of Historic Places, which was accomplished in 1985. Since then, the historic farm has become an increasingly popular tourist attraction featuring demonstration farming and the recreation of nineteenth century farm life.

In sum, this volume treats the interrelated themes of water projects, municipal formation, planned district development and historic preservation within the context of Fremont politics, 1950-1988. It would be naive to contend that the issues delineated have all been resolved or to deny that choices forced upon the various groups involved have not produced bitter disputes. Nevertheless, these interviews, offered by the primary surviving decision-makers in each area, provide basic data about the campaign which transformed the Patterson Ranch from a sprawling agricultural enterprise beset by regular flooding and other natural hazards into a Planned Urban District (PUD).

From the Patterson's perspective, however, a view no doubt shared by Fremont and EBRPD, pride is taken in the fact that a large portion of the Patterson Ranch has been converted to public use, first for the Nimitz Freeway in 1952, then for the flood control uses proposed by Alameda County, and later by the dedication of large tracts of permanent open space, including both the Coyote Hills Regional Park and the Del Valle Reservoir and Park in Livermore as well as the most recent dedication of the Ardenwood Historic Farm now operated by the Park District. The Patterson family's strong advocacy of open space preservation is reflected in the creation of no fewer than three East Bay Regional Parks on Patterson family lands and a substantial portion of the acreage within the planned district being dedicated to public use. This distinguishing feature of Ardenwood, like the better known Irvine and Bixby Ranches in southern California, for example, is intended to provide for the needs of future generations and is a part of the continuing stewardship of the Patterson family management group.

Volume III: The Family Recalls the Past and Confronts the Future

Volume III, The Patterson Ranch, Past and Future: The Family's Perspective, is devoted to the reflections of the third and fourth generation of Patterson family members. The variety of these interviews reflect the quite different personalities and temperaments of George Washington's two sons, Will and Henry, who apparently contemplated a division of their undivided landholdings prior to their deaths, a decision which was never consummated. It was traditional in most large landowning families for the eldest son to assume management responsibilities following his father's death. This was true in the case of George Washington's eldest

son, Henry, who succeeded him in 1895 at seventeen years of age and subsequently with Will Patterson's oldest son, Donald, who assumed responsibility for ranch management in the period after 1961. Donald Patterson's interview, taped by the Society of California Pioneers prior to his death in 1980, provides interesting observations on both his father and grandfather and the nature of their lives at Ardenwood.

Perhaps the most insightful observation corroborated by many others in these volumes was the respectful and cooperative relationship between Will and Henry Patterson, who "never had a disagreement" and consulted one another on every major decision to be made concerning the ranch. Although the two sons differed in temperament and personality and were not what one might call close, they accommodated these differences pragmatically, with the quieter Henry running the ranch and his more outgoing brother Will dealing with the public. Their mutual respect and deliberate way of reaching consensus decisions in addition to their division of labors, both running the ranch and defending the ranch's interests in the South Bay, resulted in a profitable landhold. Ardenwood dominated the regional agricultural economy through the production of row crops (lettuce, cauliflower) and other high quality produce. Will and Henry were excellent farmers, good businessmen, and outstanding citizens, who extended and consolidated their father's agricultural presence in southern Alameda County.

The interview of David Patterson, Will's youngest son, who assumed management responsibilities for the ranch following the death of his older brothers, Donald and John (known as Jack), provides a frank assessment of the difficulties which a family agricultural enterprise faces when it suffers the loss of its patriarchs in a period of transition. During the period in which Donald Patterson ran the ranch, Henry's daughters, Sally Patterson Adams and Marjorie Patterson, were not actively involved in decision-making, this role having been assumed largely by John Brooks, a real estate developer who was close to Donald Patterson and both anticipated and orchestrated the development process.

The interviews with Donald's sons, George and Wilcox, provide considerable information concerning the ranch and their father. None of these memoirs, however, sheds additional light on the process of decision-making between the city, the Pattersons, and John Brooks, although it is likely that the public records of the period (1980-1984) would be helpful to historians interested in understanding the development process. The next stage of land use clearly mandated turning over of substantial portions of the ranch for residential development as rising land values and the shortage of available land for homes resulted in a new Fremont and a transformed Northern Flain.

Following Donald Patterson's death in 1980, David Patterson continued to manage the family farm as the city entered into a development agreement with Brooks. Despite serious rifts within the family, which included an abortive attempt by two of William Patterson's grandchildren to bring suit against their family to obtain the value of their undivided interest in the ranch property, the family held firm against this challenge. When the two

young people hired the nefarious Melvin Belli to sue the Patterson family and were defeated in court (1981), it prompted the Pattersons to move rapidly to incorporate as Patterson Fremont Management, Inc. (PFM) and to set up a series of limited partnerships to manage the land in order that one or more minority family members could not, through undivided ownership, lay waste to the family's plan for future ownership and management of the property. It was this incident which convinced the Pattersons that the days of consensus decision-making as it had existed with Henry and Will had ended. By 1982 the Patterson Ranch had converted to a true business organization.

Interviews of Sally Patterson Adams and her husband, Dr. John E. Adams, shed light not only on the personages of Henry and Sarah Patterson but also provide an alternative recollection on how decisions were reached during the 1960s and 1970s, as the transition was made from agriculture to development by individuals and forces outside the family. Sally Adams provides an intimate portrait of growing up at Ardenwood. John Adams, an ardent preservationist, casts a skeptical eye on the chain of events which led to the ultimate transformation of the ranch, contending that the demand for change was orchestrated by a prevailing coterie at City Hall rather than by population dynamics or other inexorable forces. Adams clearly believes that the ranch could have continued in farming had the family been given the opportunity to make this choice through timely dissemination of information and discussion of alternatives to development.

Interviews by the fourth generation of Pattersons are informative for their explanation of the transition from ranch management by individuals towards a corporate form of business organization. Bruce Patterson provides insights about his father, Jack, as well as the strongly independent natures of the W. D. and H. H. Patterson families. In this regard, interviews by the fourth generation of Pattersons make clear that the testamentary dispositions of their grandfathers, William and Henry, as well as their parents, has resulted in a current generation of Pattersons spread throughout the state and country, of different economic means and lacking common objectives for Ardenwood. This, in turn, has resulted in growing differences of opinion stronger than those developing during the tenure of the third generation. The implications of land being sold to outside developers and the first cash distributions to family members both raised expectations and produced further disputes, rather than silencing them. Certain limited partners began to question the decisions of those family members serving as general partners and to urge a liquidation of remaining ranch assets. In general, these disputes follow family lines.

Interviews with other members of the PFM Board include those by former president Robert Buck, a Patterson son-in-law and attorney who currently serves as PFM's legal counsel. Buck provides yet another perspective on the events leading to the Ardenwood development, particularly the Kaiser land sales and the creation of the Patterson Properties business enterprise during the 1980s.

Leon Campbell, another son-in-law serving as PFM's executive vice president, recounts how he and Buck were called upon to assume management and investment responsibilities for the Patterson family. As the vast, undeveloped acreage appreciated in value, situated within one of the most rapidly growing parts of the Bay Area, they completed tax deferred exchanges, putting the family into income-producing properties which PFM managed and operated. As they assumed their posts in 1985, Buck and Campbell were increasingly called upon to mediate between decisions which had been made prior to the Pattersons' complete awareness of a political process which had developed apart from them and future policy issues which loomed ahead, such as those of wetlands, the subsidization of agriculture, and the Town Center development.

These business recollections are paralleled by those of Donald Patterson's other son, George Patterson, who provides a sensitive internal history on the family at Ardenwood, and Abigail Adams Campbell, daughter of Sally Patterson Adams, on her grandparents, Sarah and Henry Patterson.

Taken together, the several interviews by the fourth generation of Patterson family management underscores the dichotomy of events which have transpired in Fremont's North Plain during the period since 1980 and particularly since 1984, when the initial land sale to Kaiser Development Corporation was instituted. Hardly conclusive in their entirety, these last interviews restate the younger generation's perspective on their fathers and grandfathers, as well as their own perceptions about the rapidly changing nature of the real estate which they have been requested to monitor in the future. These changes have rendered the personal managerial tradition of the Patterson family largely unworkable, although considerable nostalgia for the "old ways" still exists, which often precludes certain limited partners from adhering to a general partnership organization. In many ways the family runs each other rather than running a business, a not uncommon aspect of organizations with strongly paternal origins. The challenge ahead will be to forge a new consensus to accommodate an era promising even greater alterations in the Patterson Ranch and the East Bay.

Conclusion and Acknowledgements

In conclusion, this oral history of the Patterson family and ranch, 1851-1988, has much to contribute to the general history of southern Alameda County and is particularly informative on the transitional years between 1945 and the present, which are largely omitted in the historical literature, by drawing on the reflections of those who were the primary actors during those years.

The Regional Oral History Office of The Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley, has provided an ideal method for understanding the linkages between the Patterson family, its agricultural and ranching enterprise, and actions taken by city, county and state

organizations in response to the pressures of rapid urbanization occurring in the East Bay during the postwar period. These interviews with the surviving senior members of the Patterson family and key individuals associated with the family agricultural and business operations over the past fifty years not only underscore the enormous changes taking place in the area during the lifetimes of those interviewed, but they also indicate how and why these changes were implemented. Often it appears that matters of great significance were reached by informal agreement rather than formal debate both within the family and perhaps outside of it. These interviews reflect a simpler time, prior to the advent of citizen-sponsored initiatives and environmental impact reports, a period when many leaders shared common assumptions concerning the value of growth and development to municipalities. Few could have comprehended the scope of growth which was to transform the Bay Area so dramatically during the postwar period and the reactions which it would produce.

The Patterson family is proud to have its history included in The Bancroft Library's treasury of interviews with major figures in the history of California and the West. The three-volume oral history project represents a substantial historiographical advancement towards the development of a comprehensive history of the East Bay and its progenitory families.

I should like to thank the staff of the Regional Oral History Office at Berkeley, particularly Division Head Willa Baum and Project Director Ann Lage, for the dedicated effort which they have made in bringing this project to fruition through the recording, transcription and editing of these interviews. The trained oral historians on the ROHO staff, whose careful research and sensitive interview techniques are clearly manifest throughout the project, have clearly set the tone for the entire project. My long-time friend, Dr. Knox Mellon, former head of the State Office of Historic Preservation in Sacramento, who skillfully directed the nomination of the Ardenwood Regional Preserve to the National Register of Historic Places, has also been pivotal in finalizing this project. Dr. Mellon's liaison as a consultant to the Regional Oral History Office and ROHO's strong ties to state and local historical groups both assure that the project meets specific needs as well as serving the larger scholarly community through the questions it raises and the information it preserves.

This oral history project substantially advances earlier studies carried out by the East Bay Regional Park District, which were designed to analyze the property exclusively in terms of its archaeological significance. By recording the reflections of two generations of Patterson family members about life and work on the Patterson Ranch, the project also relates centrally to the history of Fremont and to the entire East Bay which otherwise might be lost forever.

Through the incorporation of interviews with members of the Patterson Ranch labor force, water district officials and a broad spectrum of Fremont city officials and politicians, as well as interviews with other key individuals now deceased, recorded earlier by the Society of California

Pioneers, and interviews with individuals charged with the stewardship of the remaining lands of Patterson, this oral history project anticipates a full history of the Patterson Ranch and the South Bay. The subject should be of future value to scholars interested in urban planning, land use decision-making, agricultural history, the process of municipal formation and water issues, matters related to conservation and historic preservation as they pertain to the East Bay and, of course, the political matrix in which these issues are situated. In this regard, this project, which deals with life, land and politics on the Patterson Fremont Ranch, exceeds the sum of its parts.

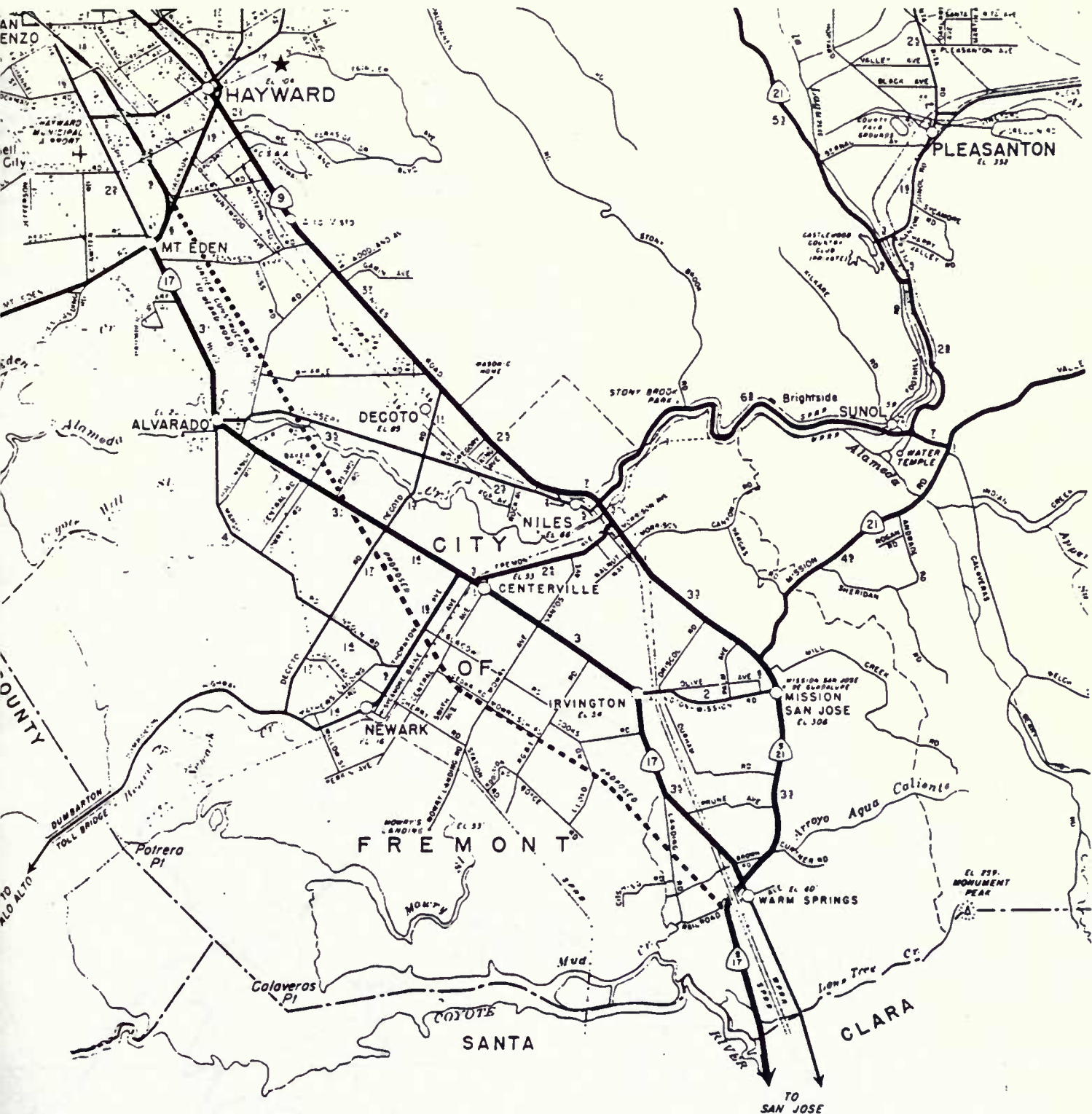
The personal and financial support of several individuals and groups also made the project possible. Financial sponsorship of the project has been provided by the East Bay Regional Park District, the Brooks Family Foundation, the City of Fremont, the Oliver De Silva Company, the Alameda County Water District, and various members of the Patterson family, especially David and Joan Patterson, Dorothy Patterson, and the J. B. Patterson Trust. David and Joan Patterson have been steadfast in their determination to preserve the history of the Patterson family over time and have supported this work at every juncture.

The present project goes well beyond the Pattersons to focus upon the Patterson Ranch during the years in which it was transformed from a rural agricultural enterprise to the Ardenwood planned community. A "New Town" both in concept and in fact, Shakespeare's idyllic Ardenwood may be an elusive metaphor masking the difficult choices that changes in land use inevitably bring.

Leon G. Campbell
Executive Vice President
Patterson Fremont Management, Inc.

May, 1988
Fremont, California

SOUTHERN ALAMEDA COUNTY, 1956



from the 1956 Alameda County map
California State Automobile Association

SOUTHERN ALAMEDA COUNTY, 1987



from the 1987 Alameda/Contra Costa map
California State Automobile Association

Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library

University of California
Berkeley, California

THE PATTERSON FAMILY AND RANCH:
SOUTHERN ALAMEDA COUNTY IN TRANSITION

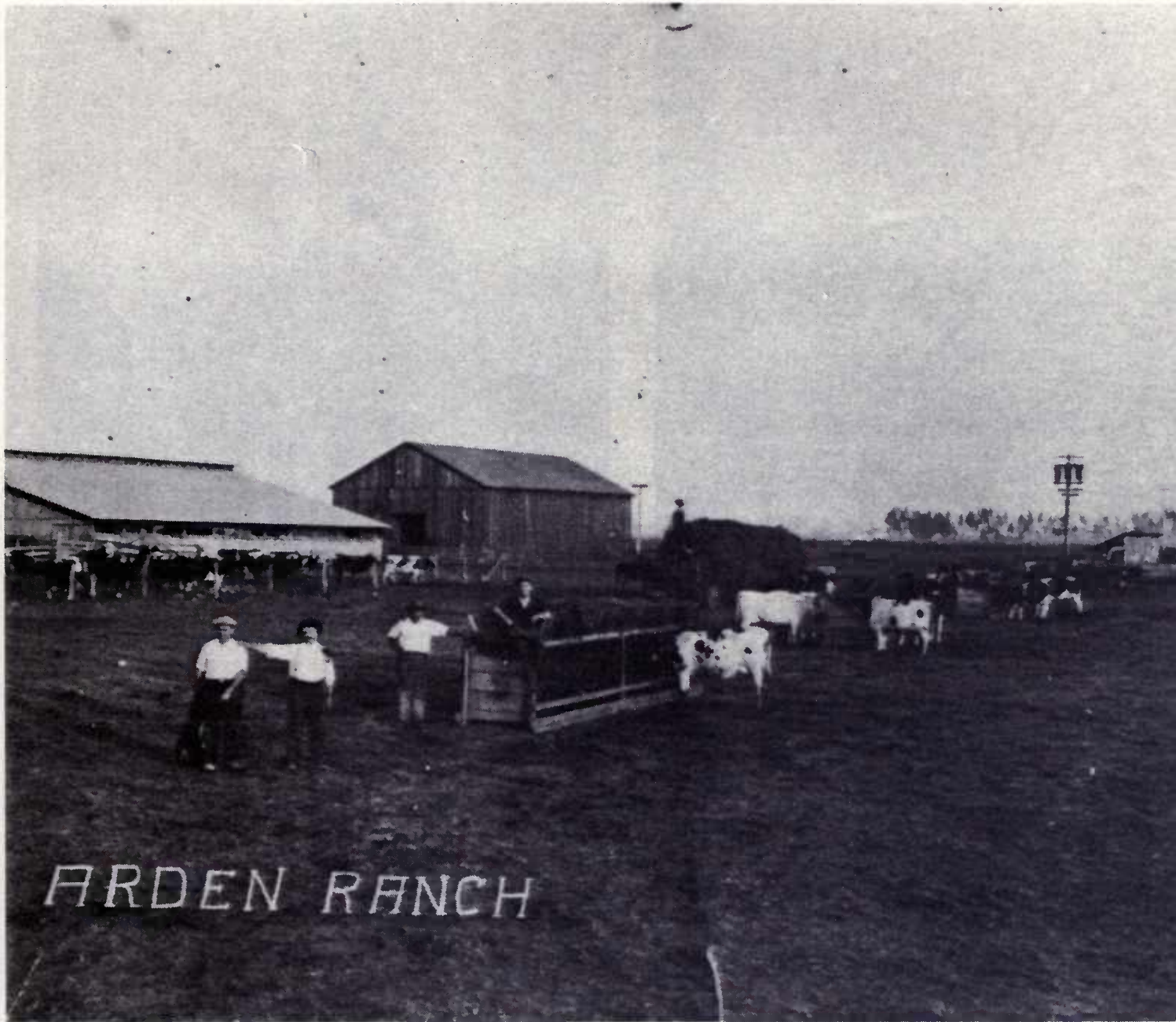
Frank Berghi

Dairying on the Patterson Ranch
1924-1950

An Interview Conducted by
Ann Lage
in 1987



Dairy on Patterson Ranch, managed by Fran



Borghi's father and uncle in the 1920s.

SCENES FROM THE BORGHI DAIRY ON THE PATTERSON RANCH, 1948



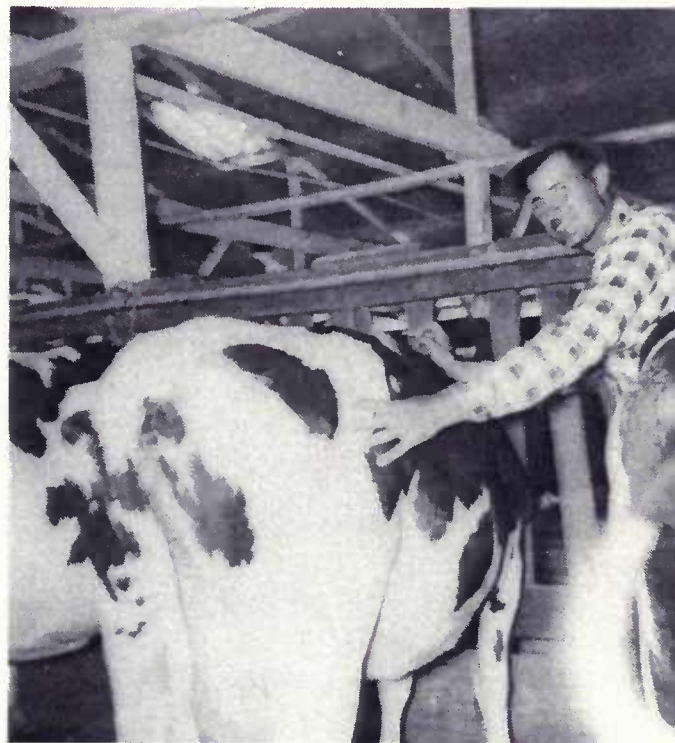
Frank getting ready to round up the cows for milking



Frank and employee feeding hay to cows



Frank and employee putting milk machine on cow for 4 P.M. milking



Frank and friend

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INTERVIEW HISTORY — Frank Borghi

This first volume of interviews in the Patterson Family and Ranch Oral History Project focuses on agriculture and rural life on the ranch and in surrounding areas for a period of more than ninety years. One of the uses of the westernmost portion of Patterson Ranch lands was dairy farming; over the years, several dairies leased land and buildings in this area. Frank Borghi, the subject of the following interview, lived on dairies on the Patterson Ranch for over twenty-five years, from his birth in 1924 to 1950, when he moved his dairy to nearby Newark. He worked on his father's dairy as a youngster and operated his own, in partnership with his uncle, from 1940 until 1964, when the increasing costs of operating in a suburban setting forced him to give up the dairy business.

Mr. Borghi gives a picture of growing up on the rural North Plain and describes the dairy farm operation in some detail—the workers from Switzerland and Portugal, the impact of the Depression, the changing technology of milk production. He recalls Henry Patterson as a considerate landlord concerned with the welfare of ranch tenants and Will Patterson as less involved with the ranch operation but active in the Alameda County Water District.

In addition to his dairy farming, Mr. Borghi has an impressive record of community service in southern Alameda County. Like William Patterson, he has served for many years as director and president of the water district. He has also been trustee for two local school districts and president of the Union City Chamber of Commerce. In 1958 he received the Junior Chamber of Commerce outstanding young farmer award.

Mr. Borghi was interviewed on April 6, 1987, at his home in Union City, California. His wife, Elva Mae, was present during the interview and was also a project interviewee because of her childhood connection with the Patterson Ranch. Mr. Borghi reviewed the transcript, making no substantive changes, and supplied a number of photographs which document the dairy operation.

Ann Lage
Interviewer/Editor
Project Director

September, 1988
Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library
University of California at Berkeley

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

(Please print or write clearly)

Your full name Frank Joseph Borghi Jr.

Date of birth 2-22-~~87~~¹⁹²⁴ Place of birth Hayward, CA.

Father's full name Frank Joseph Borghi SR.

Birthplace Canti Italy

Occupation DAIRYMAN

Mother's full name Bessie Anne Borghi

Birthplace SUNOL, CA.

Occupation Housewife

Where did you grow up? Centerville-Newark

Present community Union City

Education Graduate of Washington High School

Occupation(s) DAIRYMAN - Veterinary Supply Salesman
& presently School Bus ^{Driver} & School Bus DRIVER
TRAINER

Special interests or activities I have served as Union City
Chamber of Commerce President - Decoto Fire Commission
Washington High School - Trustee, New Haven Unified
School District Trustee - Director of Alameda
County Water District - Member of Washington
Township mens Club - Fremont Elks 2121 -
Director of Association California Water Agency
Member of County Committee to Redistrict Schools

Little League Baseball Manager and Umpire
 Member of Committee to form Fremont-
 Newark Junior College District

Member of Committee to form Zone 7 Flood
 Control District

Member of Alameda County Water District 29
 President of Board during these terms.

April-1966 - April-67

December-1971 - December-72

December-1974 - December-75

December-1978 - December-79

December-1982 - December-83

December-1986 - December-87

Member of Association California Water Agencies
 for 10 yrs.

President of Association County Water District

November 1985 - November 1987

Received Junior Chamber of Commerce ^{outstanding} Young
 Farmer of the year award in 1958.

I BORGHI FAMILY DAIRIES

Family Roots in Italy

[Date of Interview: April 6, 1987] ##

- Lage: Mr. Borghi, Tell me something about your family, where they're from, how long they've been here in Washington Township.
- F. Borghi: My grandmother came to California in 1890. In 1900, or shortly before there, she was married, and they dairied in the Calaveras area just above Sunol, California.
- Lage: Where did your grandmother come from?
- F. Borghi: She came from Asti, Italy. My grandfather came from Cantú, Italy; it's an area known for furniture making.
- Lage: Were they in a farming community in Italy, do you know?
- F. Borghi: My grandmother was, and I always remember her telling us about these castles and how the people in the country surrounding the castle would bring all their food to this castle. It was interesting reading of the history of Europe and Italy, that her stories coincided with the readings that I had at school.
- Then my mother was born in 1897, and she passed away in November of '86.
- Lage: She had a long life.
- F. Borghi: Very much so.

##This symbol indicates that a tape or segment of a tape has begun or ended. For a guide to the tapes see page 41.

Lage: Is this your mother's side of the family we're talking about when you tell me about your grandparents?

F. Borghi: My mother's side.

Lage: What was your mother's maiden name?

F. Borghi: My mother's maiden name was Borghi also.

My dad came to California approximately around 1911. He came from the same town that my mother's father came from, Cantú, Italy. He was a wood carver, his mother was a school teacher, and his dad had spent a great deal of time in South America. They bought quite a bit of property in Italy; they have apartments, and so forth, that are still owned by the family.

Lage: So you have some ties. Do you keep in touch?

F. Borghi: Yes, I've been to Italy approximately seven times.

Lage: Your father came here as a woodworker?

F. Borghi: Yes, but after he was here two months he worked for a livery stable, horse stable, where they rented horses out, and then he bought the stable out himself, and he operated the stable. He knew my grandfather so when the horses needed a vacation, when they were tired, he would bring the horses out here to my grandparents' dairy in the Decoto area. In 1902, I believe it was, or 1903, the city of San Francisco had bought up all this land in the Calaveras area above Sunol and built the dam up there. So my grandparents had to move their dairy, and they moved out to the Decoto area approximately in 1903.

Lage: Your grandparents on your mother's side?

F. Borghi: Yes. Then they dairied out here off of Whipple Road.

Lage: Do you think your mother and father were related somewhere back in Italy, since they both have the name Borghi? It might have gone way back.

F. Borghi: No, they're not related. As much as I can find out, there were two Borghi families, but they were not related. Could be maybe way back, but it's a common name like the Portuguese names like Rose, and Silva, Azevedo.

Dairies on the Patterson Ranch

- Lage: Did your father go into business, then, with his in-laws? Or did he stay in the stables?
- F. Berghi: He stayed in the stables, and then the automobiles and trucks came along. I believe he had rented his horses to the telephone company, and when they started buying trucks, eventually that forced him out. He went down to Fresno and worked in a dairy down in Fresno. There was a creamery in San Francisco called California Milk Company, and they bought this dairy on the Patterson Ranch, and I forget who they bought it from, and they asked my dad if he would manage this dairy. This was about 1922. So my dad managed it for approximately three years or so, and then he bought a dairy just on the south side of Jarvis Road, which is just south of Ardenwood, there, and still on the Patterson property. We leased approximately two hundred acres from the Pattersons. Then my uncle became manager of the California Milk Company. That's located where Mel Alameda and his sons have their operation yard--
- Lage: The cauliflower operation?
- F. Berghi: Yes, the yard is down there. In fact, I have a picture that we would like you to look at of the older dairy, showed all the milkers, and so forth, and I believe that was taken in about 1924, and I may want to donate that to the Ardenwood Historical Society.
- Lage: So there was the California Dairy, and that was managed by your uncle.
- F. Berghi: Yes, and that operated till approximately 1929, when the California Milk Company sold out to the Golden State Milk Company. My uncle got married that year, and went on a tour of Europe, and returned in 1930. Then he went into a partnership with Vierra brothers on a dairy on Marsh Road; that was still on the Patterson Ranch. In approximately 1940 my uncle bought out the Vierra brothers' part in the dairy, and we operated that dairy till 1950.
- Lage: Did you kind of operate it together, your father and uncle worked together?
- F. Berghi: No, it was always separate. So my uncle operated that dairy till 1950, and due to the fact that the cost of feed was getting higher here, we moved that dairy over in the Newark area where there were better facilities and so forth. It was a larger facility because we were milking more cows. The

F. Borghi: Pattersons had been very fair with us, they never raised the rent, or anything. In fact, when we moved off the property they gave us the last six months rent free on the properties.

My dad operated his dairy from 1924 to approximately the mid-fifties. My mother and my dad separated in 1940. But I recall the depression years when the milkers were paid a dollar a day, and the men that did the field work would be paid from the first of March through the first of November, the other four months they would just work for their board and room. I remember those days vividly.

Lage: Where did you live? Did you live in that area?

F. Borghi: Yes, I lived on the dairy that's south of Jarvis Road. In fact, the lane into our dairy is the same lane that now goes into Ardenwood. Now the subdivision there is known as the Lake.

Family and Schooling

F. Borghi: I remember my brother and I, we both liked school very much. We went to Washington High School. In fact, my mother had brought us on a tour of Europe in 1938, and then we both entered school in 1938. We were active in sports.

Lage: Let me just get a few dates and names. When were you born? What year?

F. Borghi: I was born on February 22, 1924.

Lage: Okay. And at that time your father had the dairy on the Patterson Ranch?

F. Borghi: Yes, we had the dairy at that time.

Lage: What was the name of the dairy?

F. Borghi: Borghi Dairy.

Lage: And how about your uncle's dairy?

F. Borghi: Well, he went under the name of Borghi and Vierra, and then later it became the Franzo Borghi Dairy. The first dairy that they were involved with was the California Milk Company.

Lage: Let's get your parents' names down.

- F. Berghi: My dad was Frank Berghi, and my mother was Bessie Berghi. I have a brother Henry Berghi, and I go by Frank Berghi, Junior.
- Lage: Any sisters?
- F. Berghi: No sisters, just the two of us.
- Lage: Then you say you started school here in Washington Township?
- F. Berghi: Yes, I went to the one-room school, Lincoln School, through the sixth grade. Then I went to Centerville Elementary for the seventh and eighth grade. Then I went to Washington High School. I graduated in '42; my brother graduated in '42 also. He went on to the University of California, where he became a chemical engineer, and he was also an excellent football player when he attended the University of California. He played in the Rose Bowl.
- Lage: It's been a long time since Cal's played in the Rose Bowl.
[Laughs]
- F. Berghi: You can say that again. [Laughter] As far as myself, my education terminated when I finished high school. Then I went to work with my uncle and became associated with his dairy. That was in approximately 1943. I worked with him, and I managed his dairies until 1964, when we finally sold out. There was one other dairy left in Washington Township.
- Lage: So you're going to have a lot to tell me about the dairy business.
- F. Berghi: Very much so.
- Lage: I hadn't realized you had been that involved with it yourself.
- F. Berghi: Yes. In fact, I received an award--what was the title, Elvamae?
- E. Berghi: You were outstanding farmer of the Junior Chamber of Commerce.
- Lage: When was that?
- E. Berghi: That was about twenty-six, twenty-seven years ago.
- F. Berghi: Approximately 1960.

Dairy Workers from Switzerland and Portugal, 1930s-1950s

- Lage: You started to tell me about some memories from the thirties, and I think that would be a good place to begin. What do you remember as a boy on the dairy?
- F. Berghi: Some of those things I remember quite vividly, as I pointed out--the employees working for a dollar a day, and some of the employees just working for their board and room. I always looked forward to the summer months because my mother would allow my brother and I to eat lunch with all our employees, and of course, during these years, we would board-and-room our employees. The majority of our employees then came from Switzerland; they were Swiss-German, and we could never learn their language. These men worked every day, they never had a day off or vacations. Finally in the mid-thirties they received a day off a month, and it gradually increased to two days, and so forth.
- Lage: Did most of them come directly over from Switzerland?
- F. Berghi: Yes.
- Lage: Specifically to work here?
- F. Berghi: To work here on the dairies.
- Lage: Did you have some tie to Switzerland?
- F. Berghi: Well, not so much, the ties were with the employees that we had employed, and they had their friends, and they would mention to them that it was a good dairy where the employers fed their employees real well, because sometimes you would work in those days and the meals were very skimpy. Of course, we always had plenty of food for all our men.
- Lage: Most of them were single men, then?
- F. Berghi: Yes, they were single.
- Lage: Did they intend to go back to Switzerland?
- F. Berghi: Yes, some did, some married, and some went into in the dairy business themselves. Some of the men we helped get started.

I also remember the sugar beet fields out there, and the tractor lifting the beets, and then mostly Filipinos that would top the beets, and they would load them on these trucks, and they would bring them to the sugar mill here in Alvarado. I remember in 1932, the year of the Depression, that I wore a

- F. Borghi: size seven hat, and some of the tomatoes were so large that they wouldn't even fit in the hat. Not a tomato was picked out of here.
- Lage: They just had no market for them?
- F. Borghi: There was just no market at all.
- Lage: Did the Depression hurt the dairy business quite a bit?
- F. Borghi: Yes, in fact, the creamery we were shipping our milk to, I believe, hadn't paid us for about three months, and I'll always remember they had a meeting. There were approximately thirty or forty dairymen there, and they wanted their money for three months. They held out there from ten o'clock in the morning till about ten o'clock in the evening. The rest of the dairymen were in a very difficult situation of losing their cattle, and everything. My dad and another gentleman by the name of Jack Stadler were very successful, and the rest of the dairymen always asked for their guidance. Finally Mr. Stadler and my dad relented, and they received a one-month milk check rather than the three months. We never were paid for those other two months.
- Lage: Was it a local creamery?
- F. Borghi: It was in Oakland, at that time it was Hagstrom's Creamery.
- Lage: Did you sell mainly to local creameries?
- F. Borghi: Basically we sold to Hagstrom's till approximately 1934, and then my uncle and my dad and some of the milk truck drivers that were involved with the California Milk Company in San Francisco started the Golden West Dairy, with distribution in San Francisco. Then we began sending our milk to this plant. That plant operated to approximately, oh, I would say about 1955, and then it merged with People's Dairy, and then after a number of years they sold out to Borden. Then Borden began to get their milk from the San Joaquin Valley, so then for the last, I would say, four years we shipped our milk to the Piers Creamery in Palo Alto.
- Lage: About how many laborers were employed by your dairy, or did this fluctuate a great deal?
- F. Borghi: When we had my dad's dairy, we had approximately eight men working full time. Then we went to milking machines, and when we were milking—well, actually, we were milking on two dairies, so we were milking approximately five hundred cows,

- F. Borghi: and we had approximately twelve employees between both dairies at that time. Towards the last eight years or so my uncle had two dairies, after my dad sold out, we had two dairies.
- Lage: Were they employed year-round, or was it seasonal?
- F. Borghi: Yes, they were year-round, and after 1940 we had all married employees; it was very difficult to keep single men at that time. So it was much more economical for us to keep married people.
- Lage: Did you have them living on the dairy?
- F. Borghi: Yes, the majority all lived on our dairy; we had housing for them.
- Lage: Why is it more economical to have married people? You don't feed them?
- F. Borghi: Yes, if you don't feed them, you don't have to have someone to cook for them, and so forth.
- Lage: They had their own homes?
- F. Borghi: Yes, but basically by having married people the men would stay with us for a considerable length of time. In fact, when we sold the dairy over in Newark, after we had moved from the Patterson Ranch, we had some employees there for ten and twelve years. It was interesting, after the forties we no longer had Swiss milkers. We had Portuguese milkers because it seemed like Portuguese brought their family with them. Then I learned how to speak Portuguese.
- Lage: So even as late as the forties you were having new immigrants from Portugal?
- F. Borghi: Oh, yes.
- Lage: I thought the Portuguese in the area went way back.
- F. Borghi: Definitely Portuguese came here at the turn of the century, and the majority of the dairies here were Portuguese. But we had employees, I remember, in the late fifties, that we were hiring directly from Portugal. There's still quite a few immigrants coming from Portugal. Now they go directly to these farms in the San Joaquin Valley. In fact, they have these fiestas, or holy ghost days, and when you go to one of those, you won't hear a word of English. [Laughs]
- Lage: How about the Italian community? Did it keep its language alive?

F. Berghi: Basically out here the majority of the Italians were involved in vegetable gardening. There wasn't that many Italian families; in fact, it was until the sixties, I think, before we had our own Italian club out here. That's when the residential areas grew up out here.

Lage: So it wasn't a big Italian farming community?

F. Berghi: No, it was basically a Portuguese farming community, and dairying, and so forth.

Milk Buckets, Pipelines, and Increasing Costs

Lage: What changes did you see over the years in dairy equipment? When did the mechanized milking come in?

F. Berghi: Oh, it was in 1940 because it was difficult to keep milkers, and so we started putting in milking machines then. We never did go into the pipelining, although, I believe there was only two dairies in this whole area that went into milking directly into pipelines.

Lage: You're going to have to explain that to me.

F. Berghi: For example, in a barn they had thirty cows to a string, so you had this milk line that goes where your stanchions are, and then you have your electrical hook-up there, and you hook up this milking machine, and then it attaches to the udder of the cow, and the milk would go directly into this pipeline, and then into the milk house where they had a cold-wall tank where you keep the milk at approximately thirty-eight to forty degrees.

Lage: I see. What's the alternative if you don't use the pipeline?

F. Berghi: If you don't, then in between every two cows you set an eight-gallon milk bucket, and so you could easily milk both at the same time, or you milk one, and then you switch over to the other, and it pumps the milk into this bucket. So basically it was more advantageous to us to do it that way. There was some disadvantages with the pipelines because of the fact that they were still experimenting with them. The milk was pumped up to about, oh, approximately four and a half feet, where now the pipelines have been put about a foot above the floor so that it's a lot better having the milk moved by just a good gravity flow, rather than being pumped up. If I had to continue in the dairy business, I would have gone to the pipeline system.

- F. Berghi: But it was a question of us moving down to the valley, the San Joaquin Valley. My family, Elvamae's mom and dad, they lived in this area. My mom was getting along in years, and so I stayed in the community. I had a lot of ties--I was on the school board, I was a member of the water board, I had been a fire commissioner, I was involved in flood control, in the formation of the junior college. There was a lot of good ties that I had.
- Lage: Tell me why you had to make that choice in the sixties. What was it that kind of forced you out in 1963?
- F. Berghi: Really what forced us out was the cost of producing milk here, bringing all our feed supplies in from the San Joaquin Valley.
- Lage: So you lost the support systems?
- F. Berghi: Yes.
- Lage: Before did you get your feed from local--?
- F. Berghi: Yes, from the local area. And also, the cost, for example, of leasing property became a problem. We were with the Heath Estate at that time, and there was some discussion then of developing their properties.
- Lage: That was in Newark?
- F. Berghi: Yes, so it was a good opportunity for us to sell out. Now, the property where we were located is where they have that big Mowry shopping center.
- Lage: It would be nice if you had owned all that land.
- F. Berghi: Yes. Well, the amazing thing of it is, that there was 365 acres, and in 1950 we had the opportunity to buy that property for approximately \$160,000.
- Lage: You didn't take it?
- F. Berghi: No, although my uncle and my dad owned properties in the Almaden Valley in San Jose. It's amazing, we leased property here, but we bought property in Santa Clara County.

II THE PATTERSON RANCH AND FAMILY

Growing Up on the Patterson Ranch

- Lage: Let's try to focus now on the Patterson Ranch area. When was the end of the dairy work there?
- F. Borghi: The end of the dairy there was 1950. Again, basically, as I pointed out, we were just milking too many cows for the facilities. We were in need of a storm shed, and Patterson had leased the property very reasonable to us. We knew that it was just a question of time because vegetable farming was far more lucrative to the Pattersons than the dairy would be. We just didn't want to confront them with the problem because they had been very fair to us over the years.
- ##
- Lage: How long did your uncle stay on at the Patterson Ranch?
- F. Borghi: The same time. We were in business together from 1920 to 1950.
- Lage: You grew up living on the Patterson Ranch then?
- F. Borghi: Yes.
- Lage: Although it's not part of the ranch that's preserved at Ardenwood, is it?
- F. Borghi: It was where the Lake is now located, that would be south of Jarvis Road. If you're going down Jarvis, the Lake is halfway between the freeway and Newark Boulevard. It's a large subdivision, just south of Ardenwood Park.
- Lage: So you were fairly close to where the park is now?
- F. Borghi: Yes, oh, right across the Dumbarton [84] freeway. I would say within three quarters of a mile. The lane that comes from

- F. Berghi: where we had our farm would go right into the Patterson property, where the Ardenwood home's located now.
- Lage: So that's the area where you grew up?
- F. Berghi: Yes.
- Lage: Now what was it like being a boy in what must have been wide open space. No Nimitz freeway?
- F. Berghi: No Nimitz, it was wide open. I remember my brother and I had chores. We had to feed the calves when we were young. As we grew up, we later started milking the cows, and in the summertime some of the men would want some vacation time or days off, so my brother and I would do some of the milking. We cut hay, we would load hay, load sack feed.
- In fact we always used to look forward, because down at Arden Station, off of Marsh Road, they would bring in carloads of grain, and we would hook our horses up to the wagons, and we would go out there. We had a truck, and the horse and wagons, and we would load twenty tons of sacks that weighed 100 pounds each. We looked forward to doing that. As I pointed out, we looked forward also to going to school. On Sundays we would always have some sort of baseball game going with our men. Or on a sunny afternoon we would go out and watch the Oakland Oaks or the San Francisco Seals. That was our only entertainment. But then we had to come back in the evening and milk those cows.
- Lage: You had a lot more responsibility than kids do today.
- F. Berghi: Yes, very much so.
- Lage: Was achievement in school stressed by your family?
- F. Berghi: Yes. They stressed it to a certain point, but we enjoyed going to school. There was competition between my brother and I.
- Lage: Which one was older?
- F. Berghi: I was. I was nineteen months older than my brother.
- Lage: But you had competition for grades?
- F. Berghi: Yes, always. He was a little smarter than I was.
- Lage: That's hard if you're older and he's smarter. [Laughs]
- E. Berghi: May I interject? Did you miss a few football practices because you had to come home and milk the cows?

F. Berghi: Yes, sometimes we had to.

Lage: So your family put the chores at home as the number one priority?

F. Berghi: Yes.

Lage: That's what I hear from others, too. I interviewed Ruel Brown. Were you a contemporary of his?

F. Berghi: Yes, I remember Ruel. Not so much him, but I remember his dad, and another gentleman named Henry Martin. They were the ones that would build the fences in the fall of the year.

Boyhood Memories of Cattle Herding

F. Berghi: That's another thing, when we were young, we would always look forward to the fall of the year. The Pattersons had a large herd of beef cattle, and in late September they would bring them down from the Livermore hills, down Niles Canyon, along Mission Boulevard, and Decote Road, into Jarvis Road, and then down where we were. These cattle would feed on the beet tops, and then later on the tomatoes, and then approximately at Christmas time they would herd them back into the mountains.

Lage: So they had a group of cowboys?

F. Berghi: Yes, they did, they had an excellent herd of beef cattle.

Lage: Isn't it amazing, it wasn't really all that long ago?

F. Berghi: No, it wasn't. It seems like it was yesterday; a lot of times I think about it.

Lage: And you never see something like that today, a herd of cattle coming down the road. [Laughs]

F. Berghi: That's right. In fact, when we were on the Patterson Ranch, it was amazing that we rented property from the Heath Estate, then we got involved in the Heath Estate again, but between Irvington and Warm Springs there was approximately a thousand acres of pasture land down there. We would truck the cattle down there, but then in the fall of the year, we would herd them up Fremont Boulevard, and along Cook Road, then down Blacow Road, and over to Marsh Road, and then on to our farm. So we used to look forward to doing that also.

Lage: Was that as a boy, or did you do that later?

- F. Borghi: No, as a boy. Later it became a little too populated. But we did that up to the forties, and then we had better equipment, so then we could do our transporting with our trucks.
- Lage: You must have enjoyed it, or you wouldn't have gone into the dairy business.
- F. Borghi: Oh, very much so.
- Lage: It was something that you liked?
- F. Borghi: Yes. I don't know if it was brought to your attention, but Zwissig Brothers, or the Zwissig family, in the early 1900s, and I would assume up till about 1918, would bring their cattle down to the Patterson Ranch and out towards Coyote Hills. They would milk the cattle in that area out there. Then in the fall of the year they would return here in the Decoto area. (The Zwissig Dairy was located west of the Masonic home along Mission Boulevard.)
- Lage: So they used the ranch as a pasture area?
- F. Borghi: Well, they had a lot of green feed, so cattle did very well. It was very economical pasture land, and so they operated the dairy there. I don't know if it had been brought to your attention.

Henry Patterson--A Considerate Landlord

- Lage: Did you know the Patterson family through these many years?
- F. Borghi: Well, yes, I remember Henry Patterson quite well. Every day he toured through the ranches, and sometimes he would stop and talk to me. In the summer, when they had fruit, he would tell me that I could go down and pick some fruit off of his trees. In those days we would pay our rent every six months, and so when we would go down and pay our rent I remember my dad would always tell me, "You sit in the car because these are very rich people, and they don't want a lot of noise around here, you know." So my brother and I would sit in the car, and he would go in and pay his rent.

We really looked up to the Pattersons, very nice people, considerate people. I know that some of the people that leased properties from them during the Depression, they didn't have any income off their crops, and the Pattersons would not collect any rent from them. They were very considerate people.

- Lage: You mentioned they kept the rents down.
- F. Berghi: Our rent never changed, I think from 1924 to the fifties; I don't recall our rent changing at all. That was one of the reasons that we were sort of embarrassed to ask them to make improvements and so forth, knowing fully well that dairying was going out in our area, and it was far more economical for them to lease their properties to the people that were growing vegetables.
- Lage: Was your arrangement that they put in the improvements; did they build the buildings you needed?
- F. Berghi: Oh, yes, they built all the buildings and everything.
- Lage: They built for your workers and everything?
- F. Berghi: Well, as far as I can remember, all the buildings were already there. In fact, when I was baptized in 1925, we had a large barn there for grain and hay, and it had a hardwood floor. In 1925 my parents had something like four hundred people as their guests. There was a big barbecue, and they had a dance band and everything. They did the same thing for my brother in 1926. Then again in 1933 we had just a big party for friends from San Francisco and Oakland, a big beautiful barn, beautiful hardwood floor.
- Lage: I never think of a barn with a hardwood floor.
- F. Berghi: Hardwood floor, yes.
- Lage: That was in the same area that we're talking about?
- F. Berghi: Yes, in the Lake area of the Patterson Ranch.
- Lage: Did you yourself, as you got into the managing the business, have connection or dealings with the Pattersons?
- F. Berghi: The only connections--sometimes he would tell me or my uncle that some of the farmers would be using the water, and he would appreciate it if we could work out some arrangement, maybe water at nighttime so we would not interfere with the farmers that were growing vegetables. But we never had too much occasion to really sit down and discuss things. My uncle was the one that would go over to his residence every six months. I had my activities managing the dairies.
- Lage: It sounds as if things just went along very smoothly. He didn't interfere in your operations--
- F. Berghi: No, Mr. Patterson never interfered at all.

- Lage: I've heard stories about his sort of making the rounds of the ranch. Would he come around to the dairy?
- F. Berghi: Yes, this is what I've mentioned earlier--I'll always recall that every day maybe around ten o'clock or so in the morning, you could expect him going through all the properties. He enjoyed looking at the properties, and sometimes he would stop and talk to my dad, ask how things were going, and so forth. The only thing that I can remember about his children--I was too small to remember, but my mom said that when they were going to college, and the kids, I guess they had brought their friends down, and they had a big party, and then they came down to the dairy, and they wanted to know how they could milk a cow, so they had them down there squirting milk around, and they said I was small, and they were squirting milk in my face.

Will Patterson, the Water District, and Water Problems at Ardenwood

- F. Berghi: Now Will Patterson--I remember Will as more of a shy person. Will was more active with the [Alameda County] Water District and community activities. He wasn't as active as Henry was. In the later years after Henry passed away, I think at that time we had moved over to the Newark--
- Lage: Henry died in '55.
- F. Berghi: That's right, in '55, so we had left in the early fifties, so I really don't recall that area.
- Lage: Then you didn't deal with the sons?
- F. Berghi: No, we didn't deal with them. Will, as I said, he was more of a shy person. From what I can gather in the water district he served forty-five years, twenty-two years as chairman of the board. He was actually a general manager because he was the first member of the board and knew a great deal about running the district and so forth. It wasn't until approximately 1950 when Mr. Whitfield came along, who had the technical experience [that Mr. Patterson could step back]. Before that Mr. Richmond was a general manager, but Mr. Patterson handled the operation as far as contracts and things of that nature. We were very fortunate to have a person of that type.

It was ironic last Thursday at the Ardenwood regional park, the Alameda County Water District commenced pumping the well located near the Patterson house. They have been having problems with the well there on the park property. I have been

F. Berghi: very much concerned with the quality of water, and the cost of putting in a well there would be approximately \$75,000, and the well they have now can not be used to water the crops.

Lage: It's too salty?

F. Berghi: Yes. So what we did, we're cooperating with the East Bay Regional Park, and we're pumping that well because our program to improve our underground aquifers has been very successful through this whole area. What's happening is we're forcing the high chlorides out towards the bay. We feel very strongly that after pumping this well, we can get these chlorides down. Chlorides have been dropping in all our wells; we've been able to clear up the underground strata. So I was very happy that I was able to press the button here because Mr. Patterson served so many years on the board, and now I'm able to carry out some of his ideas.

As I look back again, in 1924, when my dad first leased properties of Patterson, we could pump water at twenty-five feet. By 1939 we were down over three hundred feet, about three hundred and fifty. When the Pattersons dug these new wells, the first hundred feet were cemented so there wouldn't be saltwater intrusion. So now that has served two purposes. One of them is that it hasn't allowed industrial contaminants to enter the underground aquifer. For example, in Santa Clara County, they've had this problem. So that our underground aquifers are not contaminated, we have been sealing off the wells as development comes in. In fact, we've sealed a number of the wells on the Patterson property. Some of the wells that were drilled before 1939 just had a well casing. When that well casing rusts, and if it's in an upper strata and it has a lot of chlorides, the water goes into your lower strata and just contaminates everything.

Lage: Is that why the water is salty there?

F. Berghi: Yes. We overdrafted the basin from pumping, the water level kept going down, down. We have about four or five aquifers here, so the water from the upper aquifers, when the water table went down, and if these well casings were broken, it would just go right into your lower aquifers.

Lage: And contaminate the lower ones?

F. Berghi: Yes.

Lage: Mr. Whitfield told me about the various programs to get the salt water out and pump the fresh water in, and then I couldn't understand why, at the Patterson Ranch, they were still having trouble, why those programs didn't work at the Patterson Ranch.

F. Berghi: Well, it has worked. It's amazing; there are wells all around the Ardenwood where the Patterson home is, and in these wells, the chlorides are low. As I pointed out, the salt intrusion was up as far as the Alameda Creek; our percolation area is out here in the Niles area. These aquifers are in layers, so as the fresh water percolates down it gets into these aquifers, and it forces the salt water out. So basically what we've done, we've forced all the salt, or the high chlorides, below the Nimitz Freeway, so in everything below the freeway, there may be some pockets of water with high salt content. What happens is this pocket is there at Ardenwood. In fact, we put piezometers around Ardenwood Park to test the water. Within a half a mile north Newark has a park, and they have a well there with very excellent well water for their park. And the Ardenwood Park well is the only well that has high chloride.

Lage: I see, so it's a very localized situation.

F. Berghi: That's right. I went down to the park about three weeks ago with our staff. They thought there was only four wells in the area, and there was five wells. One of these wells that they had completely forgotten about was drilled in 1915. It's down about 125 feet, and we know the casing is bad in it and so we cemented that one, and there's another one that we cemented also. We put these piezometers in so that we can test the water.

Lage: What is a piezometer?

F. Berghi: It's a small hole, about two inches, that's drilled down 300 to 500 feet. Actually, it's a test well, so we can test the water. In the one that's down at five hundred feet, they found thirty-five parts of chlorides, so that's just about like pristine water. That's just excellent, you know. Then at 250 feet we're up at seven hundred parts, see. Now by pumping this well here--we have these three piezometers at different locations, and we can tell if the chloride starts dropping at some of these spots, then we know we're going to be successful. If it doesn't drop, then we know that there's a problem there. It could be the salt ponds--they were about a mile and a half from the park--and there could be some wells that were not sealed, and water can constantly drop in there.

But, see, what's happened here is that here about five years ago it was at about two hundred parts, and now we're at seven hundred parts; it gradually went up. So it's the feeling of our staff, and basically mine also, that what's happened is that the water with these high chlorides gradually pushed its way into this area here. We really don't know what's under



Carol Padovan — staff photo

Bruce McKinstry takes the carriage horses through a practice run in preparation for the season opening.

Water problem may be licked

By Carolyn Penn
Staff writer

FREMONT — A plan to reopen Ardenwood Regional Preserve's wells by pushing salty underground water back toward the bay was put into action Thursday.

Two of three wells were sealed this winter, when park officials conceded defeat in their ongoing battle against salt intrusion.

But the Alameda County Water District refused to give up and has begun pumping salt water from one well, allowing fresh water to return to the layers of sand, rock and clay beneath the park.

Water district board president Frank Borghi Jr. grinned broadly as he pushed the big green button to activate the pump Thursday. The water district's as-

sistant manager, James Beard, cautioned that it will take 90 days to determine whether the reclamation well can actually banish the salt water permanently.

But water and park officials were optimistic.

East Bay Regional Park District Director Lynn Bowers watched the salty water flow into the drainage ditch with visions of 125 cultivated acres dancing in his head.

"What this pump means for the park," Bowers said, "is that we can run a real farm here now; not just a Disneyland showpiece.

"With our own well, it will be economically possible to cultivate our own produce. We'll set up a roadside produce stand. And we'll cultivate all this acreage with the kind of row crops people

planted 100 years ago."

Well water had previously been too salty for the crops. The park has been paying residential rates for district water and limiting its annual cultivation to 35 acres.

The aquifer reclamation well is part of the water district's 25-year war against salt water intrusion of underground streams, a battle the district is very close to winning, Borghi said.

Project director Curt Ireland estimated the cost of the reclamation well at \$10,000. But if the project is successful, the park district will save the \$75,000 it costs to sink a new well.

"It's getting tougher and tougher to find sites to sink reclamation or monitoring wells," water district manager Roy Coverdale said. "So we're very happy about this cooperative effort."

- F. Borghi: there. But we're very hopeful that we're going to be successful, and we have a pocket also in the Heath Estate area off of Mowry Avenue in the Newark area.
- Lage: Does the salt water affect the Alameda farming operation? Or do they have a good well?
- F. Borghi: Their wells are good, they have about five or six, and they sprinkle, using a sprinkling system. At Ardenwood, they flood-irrigate. If you flood, you have more of a tendency of bringing up that salt, where if you're using the sprinkler system, or drip irrigation, you're not using as much water, and there isn't that tendency of bringing up your salt. Because what's happened, also, is that our program is so successful that we're bringing the chlorides up to the top, see, because the higher your water table comes, it forces your salt out. So the Alamedas are successful because they've been able to use a sprinkling system.
- Lage: Okay. I think we've pretty well covered things, unless you have more recollections about the land, or any other--
- F. Borghi: Well, like I mentioned, some of the highlights were doing the chores, going to school.
- Lage: Did you get to roam around any? Did you go down to Coyote Hills?
- F. Borghi: Yes, sometimes we would go out there because we had pasture land out there for our dairy cattle, so I would go out there. At that time there wasn't the willows; there was some willows, but it would flood in the winter months, but then in the summer it became grazing pasture, and so forth.
- Lage: Did your land flood when you ran the dairy?
- F. Borghi: It didn't flood until the year we moved out. In 1950 we moved out, and that winter we had our dry stock there, and we had six inches of water in the barns. But the other dairy out here never flooded. But that was the only time that I've seen water on that property. There was six inches of water in our cow barn.
- Lage: Pretty substantial. That was a big year, I gather.
- F. Borghi: Yes, there was a lot of rain that year. That was in April; we talk about April floods, and there was actually April floods.

III COMMUNITY SERVICE

School Board Member

- Lage: Tell me how you got so involved in community activities. Was the water board your first?
- F. Berghi: No, my first activity was a fire commissioner. I was in the Chamber of Commerce, and then the fire chief asked me if I would like to serve as fire commissioner, and so I did. Then the high school—I didn't think that they were doing a good enough job of public speaking, that's why I'm not an excellent speaker, and I thought that they could improve their college prep courses and so forth.
- Lage: Was this based on your own experience, then?
- F. Berghi: Yes, my own experience. My wife was my campaign manager before I got married, and I was elected to office, and it was a challenge. We built four or five high schools while I was on the board.
- Lage: How long were you on the board?
- F. Berghi: I was on the board thirteen years.
- Lage: During a period of real growth.
- F. Berghi: Yes. Four high schools were built, and a fifth went out to bid. We had a lot of interesting challenges, and we improved the educational program. We were one of the first districts to have nighttime counseling and night libraries, and actually full-time counselors. We were one of the first districts in the Bay Area that provided medical coverage for our teachers and our classified employees. When I proposed this the first year, the certificated employees wanted a three-hundred-dollar-a-year raise instead of the medical benefits, and the

F. Berghi: classified, they followed my suggestion and they accepted the medical benefits. The following year the teachers came and asked me if this was possible.

Our educational programs were highly visible; we had districts throughout the state that came and visited our school. Also I was in the forefront in dropping the class periods, teachers were teaching six periods a day, and we went down to five periods.

Lage: Sounds like you were an advocate for the teachers.

F. Berghi: Yes, I was. Of course, my cousin was a teacher, and she became a teacher in our district, my uncle's daughter, and then I learned later that my grandmother had been a school teacher. It was interesting also that some of the tests that I had taken in school when I was a junior and senior, the direction was that I should go into teaching. It's just fantastic.

Lage: Do you have any regrets that you didn't take that direction, or maybe you had enough being on the school board?

F. Berghi: Well, we can't look back, you know, we always look forward. I have one boy who now, I think, is going to go into teaching, and we have another nineteen-year-old boy that we've tried to direct in that direction.

Service on the Alameda County Water District Board

Lage: You became a member of the Alameda County Water District Board in--

F. Berghi: In February of 1962.

Lage: And how did you happen to run for the water board?

F. Berghi: I didn't run for the water board, I was appointed. They wanted representation from Union City, from the northern area of the district. Tony Enos, who did all the pump work in the Patterson properties, had a hardware store and did electrical work and pump repair. He suggested that I should serve on the board, and I assumed that he had talked with a number of board members, and they knew my interest in water, and basically also, I was involved in the Heath Estate Dairy there, and they knew I had an interest in water conservation.

By serving on the water board I nearly lost a lot of my farm friends because a pump tax was approved by the water

F. Borghi: district board, and I know that with Elvamae's father, they would ask him, "What's wrong with Frank, we've put these wells in, and now they want to charge me for the water." Basically what was happening was that the water was going bad in all these wells due to salt intrusion, and the only way we could improve the wells and continue the farming, and also the development of the area, was to bring water in. Because we brought this water in, and the development, these farmers sold their property for some large sums of money. I know that there's times now they sort of look at me sheepishly because if it wasn't for me, they wouldn't be millionaires today.
[Laughter]

Lage: That's an interesting perspective. So you came on sort of as a representative of farmers?

F. Borghi: Yes.

Lage: But found yourself looking forward to the changing community?

F. Borghi: Yes. Of course I would like to see things remain as it was in the forties and fifties, but time changes, and I would like to still see some open space out here, and I'm very impressed with what they're doing with Ardenwood. I sort of kidded one of the directors, Lynn Bowers, at the Regional Park, that they should have a small dairy on the farm there, because really, if these youngsters were to see a cow being milked, they have to travel for over an hour. They could grow up and never see a cow.

Lage: It seems to me they could do that there. It would fit in, wouldn't you think?

F. Borghi: Yes, Lynn thought it was a good idea.

Lage: Well, we'll see if they carry through on that. Maybe this interview will be a little help for recreating the dairy.

F. Borghi: Well, maybe when I retire maybe I could help them get a little dairy started there.

Family and Later Career

Lage: Tell me what you did when you left the dairy business.

F. Borghi: When I left the dairy business I went into veterinary sales, and that lasted about two years. I was still serving on the Washington High School Board that covered the Union City area when the unification committee, which I was part of, recommended

F. Borghi: that we form the Fremont-Newark unified area and Union City. So I came to work for the New Haven Unified School District, and I'm in their transportation department, and now I'm a driver trainer with their transportation department.

Lage: You train--?

F. Borghi: The school bus drivers.

Lage: I see. So that's a long way from running a dairy.

F. Borghi: Yes, and basically, also, my sons were growing up and I was involved in Little League, and so forth, and I enjoyed being around these young people. It was close to home, and my wife and I were fortunate during our early marriage on the dairies and so forth that we invested our money properly. If we had to live on our salary off the school district, there's no way we could send our youngsters to school.

Lage: You have two boys?

F. Borghi: Three boys. We have one that's thirty-three, and one that's thirty, and the youngest is nineteen.

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THE PATTERSON FAMILY AND RANCH:
SOUTHERN ALAMEDA COUNTY IN TRANSITION

Elvamae Rose Berghi

Girlhood in a Patterson Ranch Farm Family
1931-1948

An Interview Conducted by
Ann Lage
in 1987



FRANK AND ELVAMAE BORGHI

Photograph by On Site Photo/Graphics

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INTERVIEW HISTORY -- Elva Mae Rose Borghi

Elva Mae Borghi was born in 1932 and raised in a three-room house on the Patterson Ranch. Her father, Clarence Rose, farmed on land leased from the Pattersons, who had allowed him to move his house onto a ranch site near Alameda Creek in return for a payment of one dollar a year. Her father left farming in 1948 but continued to live on the ranch until the mid-fifties.

Mrs. Borghi vividly remembers visiting the Patterson home as a child and recalls Henry Patterson as a kind and generous man who always had candy for the children and who forgave his tenants' payments during the difficult Depression years. She tells of other Patterson Ranch tenants and describes the farm operations, the floods, and childhood experiences in the open spaces of the Patterson Ranch during the 1930s and 1940s.

Mrs. Borghi was interviewed on April 6, 1987, at her home in Union City. Her husband, Frank Borghi, had been interviewed previously that evening; his interview precedes hers in this volume.

Ann Lage
Interviewer/Editor
Project Director

September, 1988
Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library
University of California at Berkeley

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

(Please print or write clearly)

Your full name ELVAMAE ^{Rose} ~~HAAR~~ Borghi

Date of birth 8-31-32 Place of birth HAYWARD, CA.

Father's full name CLARENCE ROBERT ROSE

Birthplace ALVARADO CA (now Union City)

Occupation FARMER & HUNT FOODS Field Represent^{to}

Mother's full name MAE BERTHA ROSE

Birthplace HAYWARD, CA.

Occupation INDUSTRIAL WORKER - CANNERY + Leslie SAH

Where did you grow up? Alviso Dist. (now Fremont)

Present community Fremont

Education Alviso Elem. Sch, Washington Union Hi Sch,
SAN JOSE STATE

Occupation(s) Secty - F.M.C. - NEWARK CA.

Special interests or activities P.T.A. Past Pres, Vice-Pres.
Union City Womens Club, member of Our Lad,
of the ROSARY Guild. Enjoy^{PLAYING} golf & tennis
& attending SOFTBALL & BASEBALL games.

A Homesite on Patterson Property for a Dollar a Year

[Date of Interview: April 6, 1987]

- Lage: Mrs. Borghi, let's start out with some information about your family. I ran across a reference to a Rose on the Patterson Ranch in 1899. Was that part of your family?
- E. Borghi: No, it isn't. That was probably very close to my husband's dairy, the Rose that you're speaking of.
- Lage: Bill Rose.
- E. Borghi: Bill, and Frank. There was another brother that was an attorney, I don't know his name.
- Lage: So that's another common name.
- E. Borghi: Yes, they were very good friends. In fact, each summer we would go and pick their fruit, and they had a lot of peach trees, and plums, and figs, and they were very generous in that area. But my grandparents came over from Portugal in the 1880s. My dad's mother was Mary Rose, and his father was Frank P. Rose, and they were farmers, but they had their own property. My dad [Clarence Robert Rose] grew up on a farm.
- Lage: In this area?
- E. Borghi: In the Alviso district, which is now north Fremont. He came from a family of five. He had two brothers and two sisters, and they had cows right on their little farm, and horses. He met my mother—well, they were married in 1931. My mother [Mae Bertha Rose] was a city girl; she was from Hayward. She got on a horse one day when they went on a family picnic, and she kicked the horse wrong, and she took off and landed on a haystack. So that's the kind of city gal she was. [laughs] Her parents also came from Portugal, from San Miguel; my dad's parents were from Fial. My grandfather on my mother's side was a shoemaker in Hayward; that's how he took care of his family, he was the town shoemaker. My grandmother, naturally, didn't work. She came from

E. Berghi: a family of eight. Both my mother and dad came from large families, and I am an only child. My mom and dad got married in 1931. I was born on August 31, 1932. Then my dad began farming at the Patterson Ranch; when he got married, he left his family.

Lage: Oh, I see, he had been farming on his family's farm.

E. Berghi: Yes. Then he had a stepdad, and there were a few family problems, so when he got married his grandmother had left him a three-room home on the family property. But there was a little family friction, and again Mr. Henry Patterson was such a fine man, and he took a liking to my dad, so he told my dad he could move his three-room house onto a piece of property which is now the corner of Lowry and Fremont Boulevards, by the creek.

Lage: Was that east of the 880 freeway?

E. Berghi: West of 880. It was kind of a triangle there. I would say maybe it was an acre and a half or so, and it was by the creek. In fact, my dad and my friends watched the levee every winter because it would break, and we could get flooded out. So they really couldn't grow any vegetables there.

Lage: Because of the problem of flooding?

E. Berghi: Of flooding, yes. Like I say, he took a liking to my dad, and he said, "You move your little house on to that property, and you pay me a dollar a year." And that's what my dad did because he started with absolutely nothing. He had this three-room home, and he was getting married, and he was going to lease some property from the Patterson brothers. So he did. I believe at that time they worked on commission--so much that they got for the crops, then the Patterson brothers took the commission, accordingly. However, as I grew up I remember there was some very, very bad years, and they didn't charge any rent at all. They were very, very caring people.

Lage: Was the dollar-a-year for the property to live on? To put the house on?

E. Berghi: Yes, it was just because the house was on their property, and I think it might be some legality for paperwork, but he did pay a dollar a year.

Visiting the Patterson Home

E. Berghi: An interesting thing I remember is I loved to go with my dad to the Patterson home to pay the rent because it was like a mansion. It was, you know, such a big, beautiful home, and I

E. Berghi: lived in a little three-room home. So you can imagine my eyes, you know, it just really--

Lage: Did you have to wait in the car too?

E. Berghi: No, I didn't. Today's the first time I had heard that, because being a little girl, my dad would take me with him, and I would really look forward to that. But if he would talk too long, I would come out in the front yard and swing on the swing they had.

Lage: On the porch or out on the grass?

E. Berghi: On the big tree, it was a rope and wooden seat swing. It was on this huge tree, and I can remember that so vividly. When Ardenwood had their dedication, that's the first thing my husband and I noticed, they did not have the swing on the tree that the Pattersons had all these years. So my husband and I have been talking about the fact we would like to donate one, because this was really outstanding, in our minds, if it works in with the plans.

Helping Out on the Rose Family Farm

E. Berghi: My dad grew sugar beets, corn, peas, tomatoes, and I remember very vividly that the help was kind of scarce, and we really couldn't afford to hire too many people.

Lage: You didn't have a big family of boys.

E. Berghi: That's right. So I can remember when I was about ten, I just loved driving the truck while they would load the boxes of tomatoes on the truck, and I would go with him to the cannery and wait in line for hours and hours. I was the apple of my dad's eye, and I was like a little boy at the time. I would go out along with him, and do these things, and go to the sugar mill in Alvarado.

Lage: Was that unusual at that time for the girls to do the farm work?

E. Berghi: I don't recall seeing very many girls with their dads, no, but I would see a lot of the young boys with their fathers. I sacked potatoes with my family. We had the big barn in back of the house, and my mom used to sack potatoes, pick peas; my mom worked out in the farm too. My dad was not too successful as a farmer. I mean he did a good job; it was just in bad times. I believe about 1948 one of the field representatives from Hunt's Foods cannery, where he used to sell his tomatoes, came out and

E. Borshi: offered him a job as a field representative because he was so knowledgeable in the farming business. So he did take it then. He left the farming about 1948 and went to work for Hunt Brothers.

Lage: So you were there from '31 to '48.

E. Borghi: Yes.

Other Families Leasing Land on the Ranch

Lage: Then the other Rose family that I heard about, who stayed on later in the fifties, that was the family you're not related to?

E. Borghi: No, we're not related to them.

F. Borghi: Now I don't remember them staying to the fifties, that Rose family, but I remember that we bought the dairy, or the cattle from Rose in 1923 or so.

Lage: It could have all been different Roses. You say it's such a common name.

E. Borghi: Could be.

F. Borghi: So I don't recall any Rose family in the fifties. The Lewis family were farmers there. Tony Lewis farmed the Patterson Ranch for years.

Lage: Who else do you recall during that time? Do you recall a Chinese family that farmed--?

E. Borghi: Oh, yes. We used to visit--yes, they were right off of the Marsh Road. Weren't they in the little house?

F. Borghi: Yes, Cheng was, but Fong was right across by our dairy. I always remember Henry Fong.

E. Borghi: Yes, I wouldn't know their names, but I do remember going in there.

F. Borghi: Yes, I remember that clearly.

Lage: I was contacted by a Dr. Fong, who heard about the project and wanted me to interview his cousins, who he said lived on the ranch.

F. Borghi: I would like to have their addresses, because I haven't seen-- I went to school with Henry Fong.

- Lage: Now this would have been on the ranch, Henry Fong.
- F. Berghi: Yes, right across the dairy on Marsh Road.
- Lage: And then what was the other Chinese family?
- F. Berghi: Cheng.
- Lage: Were they also on the ranch?
- F. Berghi: Yes.
- Lage: Well, I haven't been able to arrange an interview with them.
- E. Berghi: Oh, that's too bad. You mean they're not cooperative?
- Lage: I contacted one member, and then we've been working on it, trying to get them all together, have a reunion. They seem reluctant. I don't know if they have unhappy memories, or what.
- F. Berghi: Possibly unhappy memories because the Fong's home was--
- E. Berghi: Yes, it was a little shack.
- F. Berghi: It was a shack, that's what it was.
- E. Berghi: One of the outstanding memories I have is--my mom being a city girl, all her friends would say, "Oh, being on a farm, this is wonderful!" You know, they would just come down, and when it was corn season, they would come down and pick corn in the field, and husk it, and cook it, and that's all they would want. They would just sit down and have a corn party, and when it was time for the peas to be picked, they didn't want my mom and dad to pick the peas, they wanted to come down and pick them, and they would shell them, and they would cook them. I mean, it was just a real party for them.

The Three-Room Family Home

- Lage: How did your mother feel about being on the farm?
- E. Berghi: As I recall the story, she wasn't too happy about it at first, and it wasn't very a prosperous farm, so she did go to work. She worked for F. E. Booth at a cannery, and then she worked for Leslie Salt, and then later, as I got older, she worked as a cafeteria worker at Washington High School where I also attended.

- Lage: So it was hard times in the farming business while you were growing up?
- E. Berghi: Yes, it was. Then when my dad did go to work for Hunt Brothers, just to show you what a very kind man Mr. Patterson was, he told my dad that he could still keep his house there, even though he wasn't working on the land. Then probably about 1956 or '57 my grandmother passed away, and my dad inherited some property. So he moved his home over to his property. By then he had expanded, and remodeled, and added on to it.
- Lage: So he picked it up and moved it again?
- E. Berghi: Just picked it, in two pieces, because he had added onto this home, and you know, the home is still at the same place right now, and it's the same home. It's at the corner of Darwin and Fremont Boulevard. My dad passed away in 1979, my mom sold our house in 1981 or '82, and it's been sold a second time now. In fact, I think the Fremont Ambulance is occupying it now. But it was just a cute little home with a cyclone fence around it, with roses in the front, tree roses, and it was a very well kept little home. So my dad did very well at Hunt's, and he was a buyer for tomatoes and cucumbers, and he knew the local farmers, so it was good for him and he enjoyed it because he still was working with the crops and all.

Memories of Henry and Will Patterson

- Lage: That sounds like a nice move. Do you have any other memories of Henry Patterson? Did you used to see him "surveying the estate" also?
- E. Berghi: Yes, I do remember him surveying the estate; of course, I was probably about ten years old at the time. But I do remember him. He liked children, he would always have candy for us when we would go there. I don't remember his wife that much, I don't know if she ever came to the scene when we would go and pay the rent, but he was a very, very generous man. I can always remember when things were very bad that my dad would comment about Mr. Patterson and his not taking rent, or the dollar-a-year arrangement, and when he left to go to Hunt Brothers, not charging him, you know, a bigger fee for the land.
- Lage: That's nice to have on the record. We have a few references to the fact that the family took a liking to some of the young people and sent one or two of the children to school. I heard that. But I hadn't heard about these business arrangements.

E. Berghi: Yes, well, he took a liking to my dad, and evidently he knew the situation with him and his stepdad, and he just kind of took my dad under his wing. So as a child, this was really outstanding in my mind.

Lage: How about Will Patterson? Did you see anything of him?

E. Berghi: No, I heard my dad talk of Will, but I don't recall seeing Will at all.

Lage: He wasn't involved in the day-to-day operation as much?

E. Berghi: Not that I recall, no.

Meeting Frank Berghi

E. Berghi: Then I met my husband in 1949, which was ironic, because he used to go right down past our house to his dairy for many years.

Lage: But you didn't know each other through that?

E. Berghi: No, I met him when I sold him a ticket to the Alameda County Fair. I was running for queen for the fair. I sold him and his mother some tickets, and he asked me to a football game. We went to one football game, and then I asked him to be my escort at the coronation because I did win as the Alameda County Fair queen. I was the first queen of the Alameda County Fair. It wasn't a beauty contest; I just sold the most tickets. [Laughter] But my husband stood me up; he didn't show up that night--can you imagine I still married him? This is on tape too, huh? [Laughter]

F. Berghi: Everyone knows about it, too. [Laughter]

Lage: What were you doing that night?

E. Berghi: He was probably milking the cows. [Laughs]

F. Berghi: Something came up at the ranch, and I just couldn't get away; it was embarrassing.

E. Berghi: So when we were dating (he failed to say also) we used to go to the dances at the Newark Pavilion--that was the place to meet all our friends--and we would leave early because Frank would have to come in and get the cows out of pasture so they would be ready to milk at three-thirty or four in the morning.

Lage: When would this have been when you went to the Newark Pavilion?
What dates?

E. Borghi: This was in 1951 and '52. We were married in '53, and then we moved. I moved to Union City, in fact to this home here, which his mother built for us. So I have lived, born and raised, in a radius here of about five or six miles. I haven't moved from this area.

Lage: You've seen a lot of changes?

E. Borghi: Yes, we certainly have, yes.

More Recollections of Tenant Farming

Lage: Anything else you recall about the farm operation, or other tenant families whose names we might get down?

E. Borghi: I was trying to think of some of the tenants down there, and I just couldn't--

F. Borghi: What's the name of Vargas, his wife's maiden name?

E. Borghi: Ernie Vargas and Isabelle?

F. Borghi: Yes, what was it, Isabelle, I'm trying to think of her maiden name. We'll find out what Isabelle's maiden name. Then there was Faria, there was a Faria that farmed out there for years.

E. Borghi: In fact, we had a little cultivator that was at my mom's place. That was used at the Patterson Ranch. I wonder if it's still there, I would like to have had that. My dad had his horses, you know, of course, the horses pulled the little plows, and the cultivators at the time.

Lage: So in the thirties you were still using horses?

E. Borghi: Yes.

Lage: Did they switch over to the tractors while you were there?

E. Borghi: Oh, yes, then my dad got a tractor, yes.

Lage: Do you remember when that would have been?

E. Borghi: Oh, well, I imagine he had his tractor in about the forties, the early forties.

- Lage: Were you aware enough to know who he sold his crops to?
- E. Berghi: Oh, he sold to F.E. Booth, and to Hunt Brothers. He sold his sugar beets to the sugar mill.
- Lage: Mainly local places?
- E. Berghi: Oh, yes, local. He didn't have the equipment--
- Lage: I interviewed Gene Williams of L. S. Williams Co.
- E. Berghi: Oh, yes, well he was a big farmer.
- Lage: And he was shipping east.
- E. Berghi: Yes. My dad was on a smaller basis. He had his own truck, and he hauled his own crops to the cannery.
- E. Berghi: When Gene came in and farmed, he was always very successful. Tony Lewis's farm through the Depression was successful also, and we were successful in the dairy operation; we were very successful also. But some of the smaller farmers, they're in the same situation as the family farm is today. The going is just difficult for them because their operation is so small; you really have to have a large operation.
- Lage: Tell me more about Tony Lewis. He had a big operation on the ranch?
- E. Berghi: Yes, then he had that beautiful home in Fremont.
- F. Berghi: Yes, on Peralta. Now his brother just passed away not too long ago.
- E. Berghi: And John passed away several years ago, too, yes.
- F. Berghi: But there has to be some relatives of Tony, I'll have to look into that.
- E. Berghi: Well, Bob Dutra's wife, Elaine Lewis, is a niece. Bob Dutra the realtor in Fremont, his wife is a Lewis, a niece.
- Lage: But would she have been aware of the operation?
- E. Berghi: Oh, I'm sure, yes.
- F. Berghi: I would suggest if you talk to her about this--
- E. Berghi: She may know where the children of Tony are.

- F. Berghi: Yes, about her uncle's farming. Then there was a King that farmed, did you ever hear of King?
- Lage: That name has come up, Gus King?
- F. Berghi: Gus King, yes. Gus farmed for a good many years.
- Lage: Was he another small operator?
- E. Berghi: I don't recall Gus King.
- F. Berghi: How about Louis Marchy?
- Lage: His name's come up. Now that's another dairy, isn't it?
- F. Berghi: Yes. His dad bought the California Milk Company from my uncle.
- Lage: Back to the Chinese family. How was the relationship between--
- E. Berghi: I don't know why my dad would go in, I think maybe he would help my dad out with some farm help. But I remember going-- they lived right there by the tracks. I think I was a little sympathetic to the family because the children were not dressed well, and the home was not well kept up. But as I recall, he was a good friend of my dad's, very helpful when he needed something.
- Lage: Was he there for a number of years?
- E. Berghi: I was just so young I really don't know.
- Lage: Did your father hire laborers at all?
- E. Berghi: Yes, he would hire some Hispanic labor.
- Lage: Seasonal?
- E. Berghi: Yes, just on seasonal. But he did most of it himself. When it was time to pick the crops, naturally he had to have some help. But my mom, like I say, she didn't get out there and do a lot of picking of the tomatoes, but she would sack potatoes and drive the trucks and things of that sort.
- Lage: Everybody pitched in.
- E. Berghi: Yes.

Schooling and Career—A Domestic Engineer

- Lage: How about school for you? Was that pushed by your family to succeed in school?
- E. Berghi: Oh, well they didn't have to push too hard. The Alviso School was about a mile and a half away, and I would ride my bicycle to school, and then I went to Washington High School, and then I got an A.A. in secretarial training at San Jose State, and then I worked at FMC in Newark until had our first child, and then I just stayed home as a housewife and mother since then. A domestic engineer is what I call myself. [Laughs]
- F. Berghi: Elvamae has spent a lot of time with the older members of our family.
- E. Berghi: Well, being an only child, and I have two aunts who didn't have any children, so as they became older, they depended on me a lot. Frank's mother just passed away at eighty-nine, and she didn't have any daughters, so I took care of her also. My mom lives around the corner from me now, and she has osteoporosis, but she still does very well but depends on me, so that's my life right now.
- F. Berghi: Elvamae's been involved with the foreign student exchange program at Logan High School. She's taught catechism at--
- E. Berghi: I taught religion for ten years when the children were smaller, and right now, for the last three or four years I've been involved in the Union City Women's Club, which is a nonprofit organization. We have fund raisers to give scholarships to the Logan High School students.
- Lage: Logan is an old-time family too. I interviewed Tillie Logan Goeld for this project.
- E. Berghi: Pop Goeld was my principal in high school, and also Frank's principal. So living in this area, we know a lot of the old-timers.

Recalling the Floods and Open Spaces

- Lage: Did your area flood?
- E. Berghi: Oh, yes, we flooded many-a-times. We would open up that back door in the morning, and the water was right up to the steps.

Lage: You said you had to watch the levee. Would you go out and sandbag the levee?

E. Borghi: Yes, all the neighbors would come over, and they would stay up all night. My mom would make coffee, and they would have doughnuts and cakes, and we were just very much on the alert about the levee.

Lage: The flood control district didn't come in till long after--

E. Borghi: No, there was no flood district control then.

##

Lage: I don't have any other specific questions, but do you have any other memories of the farming operation, or the ranch, or the family, the Patterson family you'd like to share?

E. Borghi: No, I think we've covered it all. Like I say, we lived there at the corner of Lowry, and to the right of Lowry, which is all homes now, was open spaces. We had the Italian vegetable gardeners, which Frank mentioned, the Accinalis, and the Taccahellas, and the Ceruttis.

Lage: Now that's all part of the ranch? Or it was just adjacent?

E. Borghi: No, that wasn't Patterson property, it was adjacent. In fact, Dr. Ramo Cerutti who is practicing out in Fremont lived down there, and the Emorys, Wes Emory had his ranch there. I would ride my bicycle down to the Patterson Ranch to see my dad, and all the ranches on the right are still so vivid in my mind. McKeown's potato farm.

It was a nice way to grow up, a lot of open spaces, and now you probably wouldn't let your children ride down there in this day and age, the way the situation was, because there was a creek there, and a couple of railroad tracks, and kind of desolate.

Lage: But you didn't worry about that?

E. Borghi: No, no one worried about it.

E. Borghi: Maybe before you close I should say this. Elvamae, due to the fact that she's a housewife, she's an excellent cook, and many of our friends are always asking me for special Italian dishes and so forth, so we entertain a great deal. Not only can Elvamae cook Italian dishes, she cooks other dishes also.

Lage: Portuguese?

- F. Berghi: Portuguese, Chinese, Mexican.
- E. Berghi: I kind of lean to Italian; you know how your husband kind of leads you this way?
- F. Berghi: But she's a very excellent cook.
- E. Berghi: This really doesn't have anything to do with the Patterson Ranch, except for the vegetables that grew there, and I cook vegetables. [Laughs]
- Lage: There's the connection. [Laughter] I can see he appreciates you, and I think that's the important thing.
- E. Berghi: He just knows where his next meal's coming from.
- Lage: And not only that, but you brought up the fact that he stood you up on that important date, and he's trying to make amends. [Laughter] Well, I really enjoyed talking with you.

TAPE GUIDE -- Frank and Elvamae Berghi

Date of Interviews: April 6, 1987

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THE PATTERSON FAMILY AND RANCH:
SOUTHERN ALAMEDA COUNTY IN TRANSITION

Ruel Brown

Observations of a Ranch Worker's Son
1918-1950s

An Interview Conducted by
Ann Lage
in 1986



LUCILLE AND RUEL BROWN

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INTERVIEW HISTORY -- Ruel Brown

Ruel Brown's memories of the Patterson Ranch go back to the early 1920s. The perspective he brings to this volume on agriculture and rural life is that of the son of a Patterson Ranch employee living with his family of eight on the ranch in a house provided by the Patterson family. Ruel was the son of Joseph Brown, who emigrated with his family from Portugal in 1914, joining the large colony of Portuguese people in Washington Township. He went to work for the Pattersons about 1918. The family lived on the ranch until 1934, when they moved to an orchard they had purchased several years earlier. Joseph Brown continued to work for the Pattersons until a few years before his death in 1954.

Ruel Brown, born in 1916, lived on the ranch throughout his boyhood years. His interview gives a view of farm and family life over fifty years ago: "In those days everybody had to get in and help. . . . You worked as a family." He sees this sort of upbringing as the best experience of his life. He provides specifics about the Patterson farm operation, remembering the sugar beet harvest and the cattle drives most vividly. He also is able to describe his father's view of Henry Patterson as an employer and something of the nature of his father's job and working conditions.

Mr. Brown was interviewed on April 28, 1986, the first interviewee for the project. His wife, Lucille M. Brown, was present for the interview in their home and a brief interchange with her is included in the transcript. Mr. Brown reviewed the transcript for accuracy and clarity and responded to additional questions in writing. His responses have been incorporated in the text. The tape of the interview is available in The Bancroft Library.

Ann Lage
Interviewer/Editor
Project Director

September, 1988
Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library
University of California at Berkeley

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

(Please print or write clearly)

Your full name Ruel L. Brown

Date of birth 2-14-16 Place of birth Fremont Ca.

Father's full name Joseph Brown

Birthplace Azores Is. Portugal

Occupation Farmer - Rancher

Mother's full name Mary Madruga Brown

Birthplace Azores Is. Portugal

Occupation Mother - Housewife

Where did you grow up ? Newark, Ca. (Patterson Rch.)

Present community Fremont Ca - Niles Dist.

Education 12th Grade Plus Ext. Courses - Engineering

Occupation(s) Traffic Engineering - 30 Yrs

Special interests or activities Reading, Travel, Playing Golf,
~~It~~, Family, Friends, Church, All Spectator Sports
American History and Government.

Wife's full name : Lucille M. Brown



The Joseph Brown Family, 1917

John (age 9)	Joseph (10)	
Joseph Sr. (37)	Mary (30)	Inez (7)
Ruel [twin](1)	Vernon (4)	Ralph [twin] (1)

Family Roots in Portugal

[Date of Interview: April 28, 1986] ##

Lage: Today is April 28, 1986, and I am talking with Ruel Brown, who lived on the Patterson ranch, and his father worked for the Pattersons. Let's start by talking about your father. You mentioned that he was an immigrant.

Brown: Yes, my dad came from the Azores Islands, the island of Pico. He came over here about 1890 and worked for a while and earned some money. He also became an American citizen about 1894, and then he went back to the old country, met my mother, and they got married and had four children. Then they decided to come to America in 1914.

Lage: That's interesting that he got his citizenship and then returned. Did he tell you how that happened?

Brown: At the time he was working in Hanford, in Kings County, and that's where he obtained his citizenship before he was married. Therefore, when he married Mom in the old country, Mom automatically became a citizen. So when they came over here with four children, they were all American citizens. A short time after they arrived here, in what is now an area of Fremont, my twin brother and I were born on February 14, 1916.

Lage: Did your father tell you how they happened to come to the Fremont area?

Brown: This area at one time was predominantly Portuguese. In fact, my high school class, the class of 1934, had one hundred graduates. Washington High School was composed of students from what is now Union City, Newark, and the city of Fremont. Over fifty percent of the kids that graduated in my class were of Portuguese ancestry. So, as I say, there were a lot of Portuguese in this area, and that is the reason apparently that Dad and Mom came to this area.

Lage: I never think of Brown as being a Portuguese name.

Brown: I believe the correct spelling is Brun, but of course, Mom and Dad could not speak a word of English when they came here. In those days when you went to the store, you just charged things and paid at the end of the month. They would say, "What is your name?" "Brun." So they said, "Okay, Brown."

This symbol indicates that a tape or segment of a tape has begun or ended. For a guide to the tapes, see page 61.

Lage: Did your family continue Portuguese traditions or teach you the language?

Brown: Oh, yes. I knew the language quite well. Of course, that is all my mom and dad and brothers and sisters could speak when they first came here. They started school immediately. My oldest brother was about eight; the other one was about six, and my sister was about four. They didn't go to school with any bilingual teacher, incidentally, but they learned the English language very well. In fact, all four that were born in the old country went to college.

Lage: Tell me the names of your brothers and sisters.

Brown: There was Joseph, John, Inez, and Vernon. My father was Joseph. My mother was Mary. My twin brother was Ralph. I was especially close to Ralph. At the time, monetarily we didn't have too much to buy baseballs, or footballs, or basketballs, or to go to the park and play. There was no such thing as that. We had each other. We lived out in the country. So we really were very close. We lost Ralph when he was fifty-one years old. I'm seventy so it's been nineteen years.

Anyway, that's the story of our family.

Father's Work on the Patterson Ranch

Lage: Did your father come to work for the Pattersons right away?

Brown: To the best of my knowledge, he went to work for the Pattersons a very short time after he came to this country with his family. As I say, he worked there--I'm guessing--about thirty-five years, until he had to retire.

Lage: When would that have been? You said that you left the Patterson ranch when you were eighteen.

Brown: I left home and married at age twenty-three, but we moved from the Patterson ranch to our own ranch when I was eighteen, in 1934. Mom and Dad bought an orchard on Mowry Avenue. Our ranch is now one square block on the corner of Paseo Padre Parkway, Mowry Avenue, Hastings Street, and Capitol Ave. Of course, the orchard is gone now. It's all built up. The property today is worth a fortune.

Lage: Let's try to get the dates of when your father worked for the Pattersons, if you can, approximately.

Brown: A short time after I was born, he went to work for the Pattersons, probably 1918.

- Lage: And you said he worked there thirty-five years.
- Brown: Yes, at least. He must have retired in the early fifties. He bought the orchard when I was about twelve years old, in about 1928. They kept that property until after he passed away, and Mom still kept it for a few years after that. When she sold it, she bought a nice home in the Glenmoor area of Fremont, and that's where she lived until she passed away.
- Lage: Let's talk a little bit about what your father did on the ranch.
- Brown: Dad was primarily a good laboring farmer. He knew farming.
- Lage: Had he farmed in Portugal?
- Brown: No, when he was in the Azores, he was a whaler. He got into farm work here in California. Anyway, he did all kinds of farming work for Henry and William Patterson. He took his orders from Henry Patterson most of the time. He would take care of the gardens around what is now called the mansion at Ardenwood. Also he harvested the walnuts, I know. I believe they used to plant some potatoes also near the Coyote Hills area. That used to be all Patterson property. That used to get flooded in the wintertime, and of course, the silt from the floods made it a very rich soil, a soft soil too, which made it very good, apparently, for growing potatoes.
- Lage: So he would plant and harvest the potatoes?
- Brown: Yes. That's one thing I can remember his doing. Of course, he worked there for so many years and did so many different things. Mr. Patterson also had horses and wagons that Dad used to drive to and from the ranch out to where they were farming.
- Lage: You mentioned that you can recall only one other direct employee.
- Brown: Direct employee, paid monthly by the Patterson brothers, yes. His last name was Martin, but I can't think of his first name now.
- Lage: And he also had a home on the ranch?
- Brown: Yes, the Martins had a home approximately three hundred yards from what is now called the mansion, and we lived in a big two-story home on the corner of Marsh Road and Jarvis Road. Today Marsh Road is called Newark Boulevard.
- Lage: So part of the employment agreement was a home and a monthly salary.

Brown: Yes. In fact, we used to get water from the ranch. At one time, we used to bring water in there in a tank. We used to have a well just a hundred feet from our house on the county road. Finally, that went dry. Then we started bringing water from the Patterson ranch over to our home so we could bathe and cook and drink until we finally laid down a pipeline, my dad and brothers and I.

We had to pay for that. We piped water from the Patterson home area--it was about a half a mile--through the eucalyptus groves to our home. Then we had running water.

Lage: The days of carrying it in must have been arduous.

Brown: It actually was a big wagon that we would pull with the horses.

Henry Patterson as a Boss

Lage: You talked earlier about Henry Patterson as a boss.

Brown: Dad respected Henry and William very much. Henry was a little more on the stern side, although he was never unfair to my dad or anyone that I ever saw. I talked to him a few times when I was just a boy. He was polite, but he wouldn't joke too much about things.

Lage: Reserved?

Brown: Reserved is a very good word. Very reserved and quiet. He never said anything unless he really had something that was important to say. He was a fine boss to my dad, and I know my dad always respected him very much.

Now his brother, Bill, or William, was a little more outgoing, and he would laugh or joke when he was talking with you. Maybe Henry had more responsibility. I don't know.

Lage: From what you told me earlier, Henry did most of the directing of your father's work.

Brown: Yes. He seemed to have more to say about how the ranch was run than William. And, again, I underline the word seemed.

Lage: Any recollections at all of things your father might have told you about his job?

Brown: No, because basically it was a very simple job, and I think I know about as much as any son would know about his father's job. He worked very hard from seven o'clock in the morning until six at night. I think they had one hour off for lunch, and Dad used to

Brown: take his lunch with him. Mom would fix it for him in the morning, and then he'd be back home at night and work some more around the house.

Sharecroppers on the Ranch

Lage: It seems like a large area of land and a variety of jobs, including the gardening and all, for just two employees.

Brown: Yes, but, as I said, I am sure that the Patterson brothers leased out a large area of their land to other people, more or less, I think, on a sharecropping basis. I think that is the way it was run.

Lage: Did you get to know any of the tenant farmers? Did they live there?

Brown: No. Well, there was one person, Anthony Lewis, commonly called Tony Lewis, who farmed an awful lot of Mr. Patterson's property. I believe it was sharecropping; I'm not sure of that. Maybe he leased the land directly, but I think it was sharecropping.

Lage: Did any of the tenant farmers live there that you know of?

Brown: No.

Lage: Do you recall any Chinese families?

Brown: No, I do not. I think the Chinese were more predominant before my time. I don't recall seeing Chinese people working on the Patterson ranch.

Lage: I heard from a Dr. Joshua Feng, who said that his cousins had lived and farmed on the Patterson ranch. And then there are other stories of stilt houses down by Coyote Hills, where Chinese farmhands lived.

Brown: I don't recall any stilt homes in the twenties. Of course, the Chinese had a lot to do with California history, a lot more than people think.

Between William's home and Henry's home on the ranch there was a home called the Chinese house. It was built entirely with Chinese woods, with no steel nails in it. I recall walking through that. Nobody ever lived there that I knew of. It was very attractive, but it wasn't taken care of. There was no furniture in it, just this house. I don't know the story of that house. [Mr. Brown is probably recalling the Japanese tea house. --Ed.]

The Patterson Children

Lage: Did you know the Patterson children as they grew up? They must have been about your age.

Brown: Yes. Sally is a little older than I, and Marjerie is also. But there was another girl that died in an accident. She was quite young, too, and that must have been between 1925 and '30.

They had a home in Piedmont, and that's where they lived, actually. They would commute; on weekends they would come back to the house on the ranch. (We shall refer to that as the mansion. That's the way you read about it in the papers now.) They would come back from Piedmont every weekend and return to Piedmont on Sunday afternoons, and spend the week in Piedmont.

Lage: And would Henry come down every day?

Brown: No. He may have come down during the week sometimes, but he didn't come down every day, to the best of my knowledge. But, as I started to say, they did lose their one daughter in an automobile accident.

Lage: What about the William Patterson children? Did they live on the ranch?

Brown: William had two sons, two or three sons, I think, Donald and Jack.

Lage: And then a younger son, Dave. Dave is still living. Were they around? Was there any play back and forth, or was this kind of two different worlds?

Brown: William Patterson, as far as I knew, lived only on the ranch, with his wife and sons. No, we weren't socially friendly. They lived on a different plateau. At that time, of course, the Pattersons had a lot of money, and in those days you didn't play with each others' kids if they were on different financial levels. I'll put it that way. But, of course, the Patterson family was not snobbish in any way, shape, or form. You just took it for granted that you didn't play with those kids. Of course, they didn't say, "Hey, come over and play" at any time, either. That was the thing to do at that time. I'm not saying that critically.

Lage: I think Pop Gould put it nicely. He said, "They just moved in different circles."

Brown: Yes, they did.

Brown's Work and Schooling, 1920s - 1970s

Lage: We talked a little bit about some of the things you did growing up. You mentioned picking walnuts at times.

Brown: Yes, that's about the only thing I did on the Patterson ranch, but after my folks bought their apricot orchard, I worked. In those days everybody had to get in and help, and I think that was the best experience of my life. I still look back on that as just great because you worked as a family. We were a large family; we had six children, and everybody worked together. Everybody had to step in and do their share.

Lage: How did you feel about that at the time? I hear that often, and it sounds like such a nice family feeling. Was there any resentment on your part at that time?

Brown: Not at all. And I mean that very sincerely, because that's the way we were brought up at that time. You were made to feel, "Hey, this is what you have to do. This is part of your life." And it was. That's the way everybody lived in those days, not just I. All the other families did the same thing. Everybody got in and helped each other. You had to. So I never resented that one bit, not one bit, for the simple reason that that was the only thing I knew, I guess.

But today's children I think might resent that a little bit. In fact, they resent it if they have to wipe the dishes, or something like that, but they live in a different time, and I respect their feelings also.

Lage: They probably don't feel as useful as you did.

Brown: I don't see how they could because most of the young people today don't do very much. They don't have to. But when I was a youngster everybody had to get in and work, and that was expected of you, and you didn't mind because you knew that was it.

Lage: How about school?

Brown: I went to a one-room schoolhouse the first six grades, Lincoln Grammar School. We had one teacher for six grades. These teachers today are so mistreated because they have to teach twenty-two kids all in the same grade, but that teacher had anywhere from twenty to thirty kids to teach in a one-room schoolhouse, six grades. At one time, that teacher taught eight grades, before I went there.

I think we all learned the English language fairly well. As I say, four members of my family went through college. My twin brother and I, after we went to Lincoln School, we went to Newark

Brown: grammar school, which was an eight-grade, eight-room school, for the seventh and eighth grades. Then we went to Washington Union High School, which was composed of students from what is now Union City, Newark, and Fremont, which was referred to at that time as Washington Township.

We graduated from there in the middle of the Depression, 1934, and Mom and Dad tried every which way to try to help us to go through college, but we just could not go through college at that time. It was just impossible. So we went out and got jobs. I was fortunate, because I was a fairly good baseball player. In those days, these big companies used to sponsor baseball teams. If you were a fairly good athlete, you had a chance of getting a job, which I think was unfair because there were so many people at that time, heads of households, that did not have jobs. And yet I, just an eighteen-year-old kid, was able to get a job because I had the ability to play ball.

Lage: What company did you work for?

Brown: I worked for a packing firm. We shipped fruits and vegetables throughout the East. I got a job as a shipping clerk, which in those days was tremendous, walking into a job like that. It was an office job.

From there, I studied on my own, and I quit that job and went to Alameda County. I studied traffic engineering, and I did get a fine job out of that. I worked there for thirty years.

##

I retired when I was sixty, and I've been enjoying my retirement. My wife and I like to travel.

[the following question and answer were added during the editing process.]

Lage: You mentioned to me that your mother was the mainstay of the family. Will you elaborate on that? What was her influence? What were her goals for you?

Brown: At that time in history the mother's "job" in the household of a large family was to assist the husband in providing food, clothing, care, and especially guidance to the whole family. Dad worked at least ten hours of each day for the Pattersons and anywhere from three to five hours at home, milking four to five cows, feeding and raising two hogs and approximately one hundred chickens. (We all helped a little with those chores,) so that left very little time for him to spend guiding his children. Therefore, Mother became the leader and guiding light to all of the children. She was a very well schooled and educated lady who believed very strongly

Brown: that education was a necessary and integral part of any person who wished to succeed as an individual, in whatever goal in life he or she chose.

Harvesting Sugar Beets, Feeding Cattle

Lage: Let me ask you a little bit more about the farm, since that is really what we want to focus on. You mentioned that there were tenant farmers. Can you recall different crops that were grown?

Brown: I can remember the sugar beets, of course, and tomatoes. I've read that George Patterson used to farm cabbage, but I don't remember ever seeing a cabbage there in my time.

Lage: Were you aware enough of the operation to see how the crops were shipped out? At one time they shipped them by barge to San Francisco.

Brown: That was before my time.

Lage: Was it by train, primarily?

Brown: As far as shipping to San Francisco, during my time they could have trucked it to Oakland and then by boat to San Francisco, but not by barge from Newark. That would have been Mowry Landing, and Jarvis Landing, and Mayhew's Landing in Newark.

Lage: Tell the story which you told before we went on the tape about how they cut the sugar beets.

Brown: I was telling you how the Pattersons had this cattle in the Livermore area, and every year after the sugar beets had been harvested, they would bring the cattle on to the sugar beet fields to feed the cattle with the beet toppings.

The way they would harvest the beet crop was to plow the beets, loosen them up.

Lage: Would this have been by tractor-driven plow?

Brown: No, no. There were only horses then, no tractors then. Then the farmhands would come along with a long knife with a blade about fourteen or sixteen-inches long; it looked almost like a machete. On the end of that blade there was a pick-like prong. The harvester would stick this pick into the beet, bring it up, hold the beet with his hand and chop off the green top with the knife. That would be the top of the beet, which was, of course, not good for anything to the sugar people.

- Brown: But the tops made good feed for the cattle that Mr. Patterson brought from his ranches in Livermore, and after they ate all the beet tops, they would take them all back. It helped the cost of feed, I'm sure. I'm sure Mr. Patterson saved an awful lot of money on feed by bringing the cattle here to feed off of that waste from the beet crop.
- Lage: Do you remember people driving the cattle in?
- Brown: Yes, I do remember some of the cowboys. That's what they were, but I can't think of their names now. I can picture about two of them. They were not hard looking, but had weather-beaten faces, like a typical cowboy. But I did not know any of them. My dad did, of course.
- Lage: Do you recall other similar types of stories that might help somebody who is trying to recreate the farm at that time? Other crops, or methods of harvesting?
- Brown: No, I can't, not right now.
- Lage: When you were living there, were only horses used, or was there a change over to tractors at that time?
- Brown: No. Mr. Patterson had quite a few horses. In fact, I think the horse barn is still there. I used to play in there when Dad would be feeding the horses. That's about all I can remember about that whole operation, I think.
- Lage: Do you remember the flooding?
- Brown: Oh, yes. Alvarado, particularly, used to get an awful lot of flooding, all the way from the Coyote Hills easterly and northerly to Alvarado. That used to be all flooded in there, almost every year in the winter months.
- Lage: Was it just a couple of inches, or was it flooded so that you could take a boat in?
- Brown: Oh, it would be more than a couple of inches. I've seen water four or five feet deep in that area. That was before the flood control district took over. Incidentally, my son is in charge of maintenance of flood control and the road division of Alameda County. Flood control has done a tremendous job as far as flooding in Alameda County is concerned. Since then we have not had any damage or even danger of a flood, and we've had some pretty heavy rains.

Washington Township as a Farming Community

- Lage: Let me ask you, in general, do you have some feeling about all the development in this part of the county?
- Brown: I could sit here and say, "Gee whiz, I wish it hadn't changed." And I think I could say that too, and even mean it. But you can't stop progress. For goodness sakes, where would America or any other country be if you try to stop progress? But I did love the country, yes. I miss it.
- Lage: A tremendous difference now.
- Brown: Oh, goodness. We were just a community of five little towns in what is now the city of Fremont. Actually, you knew people in every one of these towns, and you knew maybe half the people who lived in Washington Township. Niles probably had fifteen hundred people at that time. Centerville, which was another little community, had maybe two thousand. Newark had maybe fifteen hundred; Irvington another fifteen hundred. No community had more than two thousand people, and there were maybe eight or nine little communities.
- Lage: Was there a lot of community spirit, serving on different boards and belonging to clubs, that sort of thing?
- Brown: Well, you didn't have too much time for that. I'm talking about when I was a young man. You had to go out and get a job, and you didn't have too much time for socializing, compared to what we have today. I've done more socializing in the last two years than I did in my first twenty years. And I think everybody was the same way, not just I, but everybody.
- But I do miss the country. I can remember when we lived on the Patterson Ranch. The closest homes to us were a half a mile, I guess, and we'd never lock our house. We'd leave that house out there all by itself, never lock that house. Nobody ever bothered us. But today, I have to lock my house if I go out in the backyard.
- Lage: Mr. [J. Vernon] Goeld mentioned coming by and picking you up on the way to school.
- Brown: Mr. Goeld was also the bus driver.
- Lage: While he was a teacher?
- Brown: He was a teacher, of course. Just teachers drove buses in those days, after school. Instead of making five dollars for the day,

Brown: they probably made five and one-half by driving the bus and picking up the kids. And it was a real old schoolbus. I'll never forget that.

Mr. Gould did that, yes, and he finally became an administrator and then superintendent of Fremont Unified School District, which consisted of maybe three or four high schools when JV was in there.

Lage: I think we've covered pretty much everything, unless something else has occurred to you.

Brown: No, as I say, I knew the Pattersons, but of course in those days you did not become real friends as you would today. It's just the way times were.

Portuguese and Swiss in Washington Township

Lage: The one other thing I have read that I'd like to ask you about were the Portuguese festivals and fairs; was that part of your life as a young man?

Brown: As a young man I enjoyed going to the festivals, yes. They used to have what was called the Holy Ghost festivals. At that time too there were quite a few Portuguese lodges, of which I was not a member. My mom and dad were members, like most Portuguese people were. They had these Holy Ghost festivals in most every town. Newark and Mission San Jose were the two big ones. And then Alvarado had one, and Centerville, Milpitas, which is not in Fremont but is nearby. Nearly all communities did have the Portuguese festivals, because there were so many Portuguese in this area.

Lage: Portuguese really dominated, it seems.

Brown: Oh yes. No doubt about it.

Lage: Were there very many Italian families here?

Brown: A few, yes, but the Portuguese were the main strain in this whole area. Of course, in Union City there were a lot of Hispanic people also.

Lage: From Latin America or Spain?

Brown: I believe most of them were from Mexico. We had a few here in the Niles district. They were some of the most beautiful families, and they still are today. The old Hispanic families were beautiful.

- Lage: (To Mrs. Brown) Is your background Portuguese too?
- L. B.: My father was Portuguese and my mother was Swiss-Italian.
- Brown: There were a few Swiss families in the dairy business in the Newark area. There were a couple of Italian dairies too, but primarily Portuguese and a few Swiss.
- Lage: Were most of the Swiss in this area from the Italian side?
- L.B.: No, primarily German.
- Brown: The dairy people were German, I believe.

[Interruption in tape]

The Patterson Railroad Station

- Lage: While the tape was off, you mentioned the Ardenwood train station.
- Brown: When I was a young boy, it was about a half mile to the railroad tracks, which would be north from where I lived. There was this little station, which was a nicely covered bench, or benches. I would go down there and play and sit down there and just watch the trains go by as a youngster. That was put up there just for the Pattersons.
- The Pattersons did not want the railroad there at all. To pacify them a little bit, the railroad decided to build a station there for them. Not only that, the passenger trains would stop there if anyone wanted to get on or off at Arden station.
- Lage: You should go down there and look at Ardenwood. I'm sure you would get a kick out of it. In fact, they have an old train there that runs. I can't recall, I think it is horse-drawn.
- Brown: To my knowledge, since 1925, there never has been a railroad in the proximity of the Henry Patterson home.
- Lage: There was never a spur that came up to the Patterson properties?
- Brown: No, not to my knowledge.

William Patterson, the More Outgoing Brother

Brown: I didn't tell you that William Patterson, when I'd be playing there, would even invite me into the house and give me a cracker or cookie or something. That was the difference between William and Henry.

Lage: And would he chat with you for a while?

Brown: Yes, he was a friendlier person than Mr. Henry Patterson, although Mr. Henry Patterson was a real fine man also, but maybe he didn't have the time, or maybe the ability to take the time to talk to young kids. But William was a little bit different in that respect. It seemed to me like he never was as busy as Henry, probably. I think they were completely different personalities.

Lage: What were you saying about going down and picking fruit?

Brown: On the ranch they had different kinds of trees--apple, peaches, plums, of all different kinds. When they would come in, we would go in there and pick a few and just bring them home. That's where sometimes the Pattersons would see me. They would invite us to go there and pick up fruit when they had an abundance of it. They were always very kind to us and to our whole family.

Wages on the Ranch

Lage: You said you picked walnuts as a child.

Brown: Yes, gathered walnuts off the ground, and hulled them and got our hands so black. I used to hate that, especially when I started high school. We got a dollar a bag, a big potato sackful. I think it would hold fifty or sixty pounds of walnuts, at least. It would take a long time to fill a bag. In fact, my twin brother and I, if we had a good day on a Saturday, when we worked from seven to six, we might be able to fill up three bags, at a dollar a bag. Of course, in those days, three dollars was a lot of money.

Lage: Do you have any sense of what your father was paid?

Brown: If I remember correctly, at that time he made pretty good money. Of course, he had the home for his whole family, and water rights, and I believe he was making about one hundred dollars a month.

Another thing which I forgot, which I think is very important and is a credit to the Patterson family. After my father retired, Mr. Henry Patterson continued to send him his check in full until

Brown: Dad died in 1954. That's one of the nicest things that I can say about the Patterson family. They did always treat my dad real well. He respected them very much, but he also liked them very much.

Transcribed by Ann Lage
Final Typed by Shannon Page

TAPE GUIDE -- Ruel Brown

Date of Interview: April 28, 1986

tape 1, side A

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tape 1, side B

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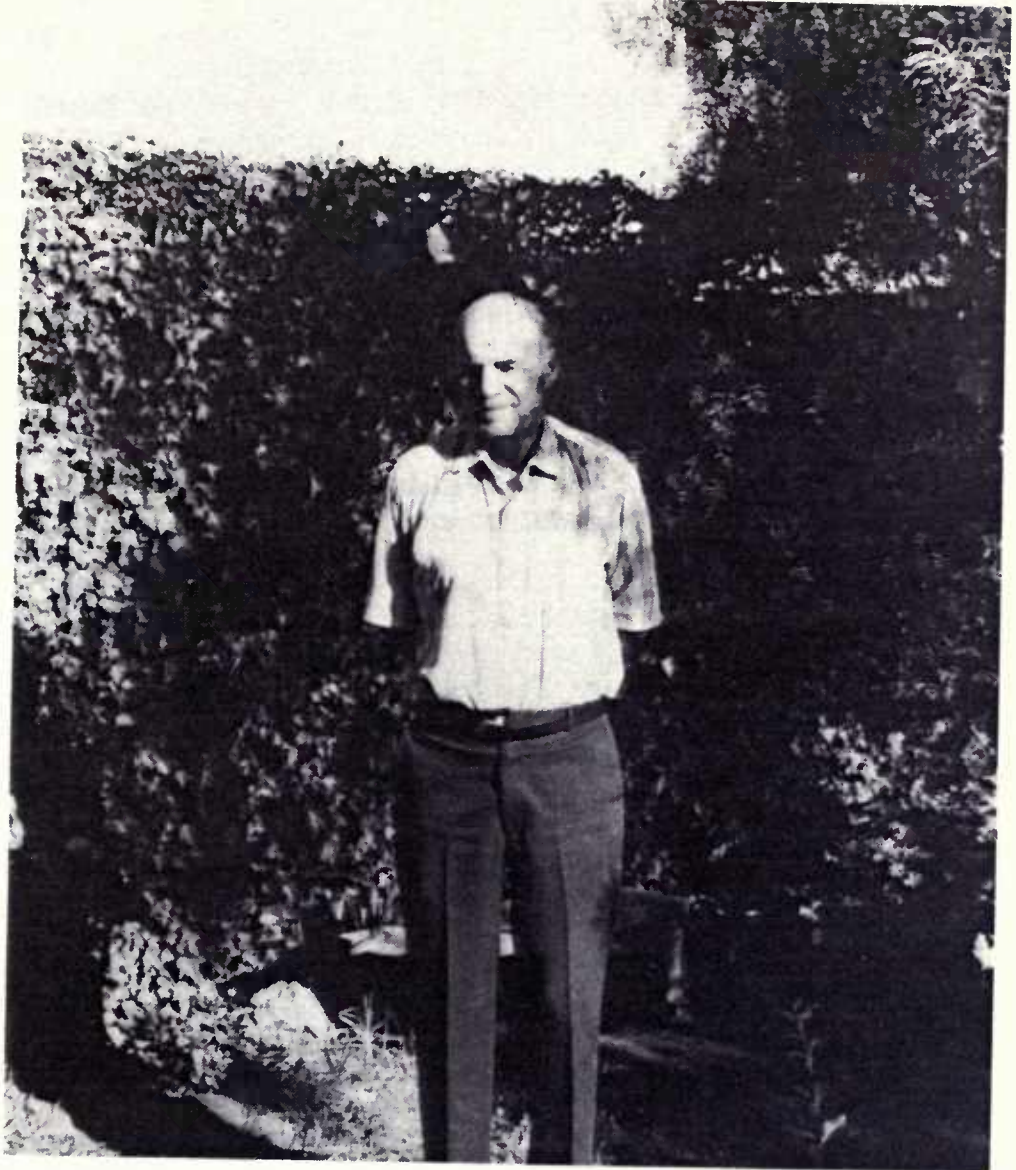
University of California
Berkeley, California

THE PATTERSON FAMILY AND RANCH:
SOUTHERN ALAMEDA COUNTY IN TRANSITION

Donald Furtado

Working for Henry Patterson
1930s-1950s

An Interview Conducted by
Bill Helfman
in 1987



DONALD FURTADO

1987

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INTERVIEW HISTORY -- Donald Furtado

Donald Furtado was interviewed for this volume on agriculture and rural life on the Patterson Ranch because of his thirty years as a ranch employee. The one-hour interview took place on February 7, 1987, outdoors on a quiet and sunny Saturday afternoon at the Ardenwood historic farm. Ardenwood is closed to the public in February, and aside from a few staff members scattered about, we had the farm to ourselves. We sat at a picnic bench near the Patterson house. It was a perfect place to interview, for it was here Mr. Furtado lived and worked from 1925 to 1955. Being at Ardenwood helped create a mood which stirred his memory. At one point, Mr. Furtado was almost moved to tears remembering the familiar sight of Henry Patterson standing on the porch outside his office.

Mr. Furtado is a short, thin man in his early seventies (born 1915). He dressed in Sears coveralls, a short-sleeved checkered shirt and cap-- probably very much like when he worked on the ranch. Although physically slowed by arthritis, with his joints visibly swelled at the elbows and hands, his mind was vigorous.

Mr. Furtado provided useful information about the ranch and a colorful portrait of Henry Patterson as an employer and ranch manager. He described Mr. Patterson as a fair and down-to-earth man and painted a picture of a well-managed and flourishing farm which yielded bumper crops of sugar beets and tomatoes. He also talked about the importance of water rights and, in a handwritten statement read at the start of the interview, described the Patterson's fight over water with the Spring Valley Water Company.

Bill Helfman
Interviewer

February, 1987
Fremont, California

[Bill Helfman, a Fremont resident with a degree in history, volunteered his services to the Regional Oral History Office as an interviewer for this project. He conducted this interview and an additional one with Mary Dettling, a former housekeeper for the Henry Pattersons. (The Dettling interview was not transcribed, but the tape is available in The Bancroft Library.) We wish to thank Mr. Helfman for his careful research and sensitive interviewing for the Patterson Project.

Following the formal interview with Donald Furtado, the two men walked around the grounds of Ardenwood. Their conversation, including some further reminiscences and Mr. Furtado's thoughts on the management of the park grounds, was recorded but not transcribed. The complete tapes are in The Bancroft Library.—Ed.]

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

(Please print or write clearly)

Your full name Donald Joseph Furtado

Date of birth 8-13-15 Place of birth Center ville (now Fremont)

Father's full name Manuel Furtado

Birthplace AZORES Islands (Island of Pico)

Occupation FARMER

Mother's full name Margaret Belisario

Birthplace Alvarado (now Union City)

Occupation Housewife

Where did you grow up ? Fremont Area

Present community Fremont

Education Graduated High School

Occupation(s) FARMER

Special interests or activities —

Introduction

[Date of Interview: February 7, 1987] ##

Helfman: This is side 1 of an interview of Donald Furtado, taking place on the grounds of Ardenwood Historic Farm, in Fremont, California, on February 7, 1987. The interview is conducted by Bill Helfman, for the Regional Oral History Office of the University of California's Bancroft Library. The interview is part of the Bancroft Library's Patterson Family and Ranch: Southern Alameda in Transition Project. Mr. Furtado begins the interview reading a written statement.

Furtado: Now I will do my best in creating a picture of the farming operation on the Patterson farm. But first I want to tell you about the Pattersons. Mr. Henry Patterson and Mr. William Patterson were the sole proprietors of this farm. Now I admired them immensely for the integrity. They were firm but you could trust their good judgment. I never once felt they acted out of self-interest or malice. The farm totaled 3,000 acres in Fremont; the Livermore ranch, 10,000 acres of grazing land. They raised several hundred head of cattle on this ranch. Mr. Tom Holly was the manager for years on this ranch. The Pattersons also operated a cement pipe plant in San Jose for making cement pipe for irrigation purposes.

They also were stockholders and directors of three Alameda County banks: the Alvarado Bank, the Niles Bank and the Irvington Bank. Mr. August May was the president of the bank, and he was a very conservative banker. Came the Great Depression and these three banks were completely sound.

This farm had some of the finest soil and produced bumper crops. Now the basic crops were sugar beets, tomatoes, potatoes, cucumbers, corn and also grain. And the farm also had a large walnut grove. All the land was worked with draft animals until about 1930; then some farm machinery started to come in on the farm. But it still took several years more to mechanize the farm. The reason that this farm was a success: it was under good management. Mr. Henry Patterson managed the farm, and he was always on the alert for any changes; such as land taxes, water, electric rates for pumping water. He was always on the lookout for things like that.

This symbol indicates that a tape or segment of a tape has begun or ended. For a guide to the tapes, see page 92.

Battle over Alameda Creek Water Rights

Furtado: Speaking of water rights, this is something that's history too. The water table at one time was about fifty feet from the surface. The wells were all shallow, most had pits and the pumps were down in the pits. There were centrifugal pumps down in the pits. Had to prime the pumps to start the water flow; it was a mess. We did it.. But after several years, the water table dropped down to about 200 feet, then changes were made to install turbine pumps. That's different from the centrifugals; the turbines go down.. Now the reason for the water table drop. The Mount Eden Water Works was pumping millions of gallons of water to the city of San Francisco. In order to reverse this, Mr. Patterson and other landowners all signed a petition and brought it to a vote to stop pumping water at the Mount Eden Water Works. The water table was dropping; they were pumping millions of gallons out in there. Then in turn the city of San Francisco bought Spring Valley Water Company, which became Hetch Hetchy. Then in turn tried to stop the flow of water which came down the Alameda Creek. That would bring the water table up, you know. Once they took away what they dammed, that watershed out there they blocked all the water and wouldn't let any water down that creek there and when they did that, boy, that still lowered the water down more. This water flow in the creek would enter the [underground aquifers], and here again the city of San Francisco tried to stop this natural flow. Mr. Patterson took them to court and he won the case. This natural flow could not be shut off. They had to release a certain amount of water down the Alameda Creek in order to bring the water table up.* And that's things I know because I was here, you know. And that's the reason why that--like I tell you--a success, they never let nothing get by you. Now if you got certain questions, you ask me and I can help you out. This is the basics of it.
[end of written statement]

Helfman: I do, but tell me more about the fight over the water.

Furtado: All right. The fight over the water was this: One time, see, the Spring Valley Water Company owned that dam up there [Calaveras Dam]. They built the dam, the Spring Valley Water Company, part of it. Then, the city of San Francisco took that dam over, and they were pumping water from the Mount Eden Waterworks. All their water supply was coming out of there into the city of San Francisco, and they had their pipelines going out on Mr. Patterson's ranch down in the back over here [near the Dumbarton

*See interview of Mathew P. Whitfield in this series for further discussion of water in southern Alameda County.

Furtado: Bridge]. When they did that, they lowered the water table. It was something terrible, the way the water went more than 200 feet down.

Well, in order to reverse that, then they got a petition signed, and they came to a vote, to stop the pumping out there. It took several months yet before they were able to put a stop to it. And they did. So, then in turn, the city of San Francisco bought out the Spring Valley Water Company, and built that dam and harnessed all that water from that watershed out there. But, when they did that, they stopped the natural flow of water coming off of that watershed down into Alameda Creek, and that natural flow of water coming down is what helped the water table in this valley. Well, then, they decided to shut the water off. Mr. Patterson, of course, told them that was a natural flow, and they couldn't do it. So they had to take it to court [1912-1916], and when they did, boy, he won the case. And I think at that time, if I'm not mistaken, it cost him \$50,000 in the court. But he beat them. So right today, you go back and take a look over there, and you'll see a certain amount of water flowing off of that dam into that channel. Of course, now I don't know what deal they had with the Alameda County Water District. They had some kind of a deal with them. What it is, I don't know.

But what I'm going to tell you is the Alameda County district was Mr. William Patterson. He was the founder and director of this water district. He always worked on the outside, Mr. William Patterson. Mr. Henry Patterson managed the farm in here. And that's the history of the water.

Problems with Salt Water Intrusion and Flooding

Helfman: So who did you work closer with?

Furtado: Mr. Henry Patterson. He made the decisions, and he was the manager, of course, on the ranch.

Helfman: So that's the Patterson that you knew best, you worked most closely with.

Furtado: Mr. Henry Patterson. Mr. William was around also, but he always worked more on the outside. He was always on the lookout for, especially he was very much in water. That was the biggest problem--with the water, because if the water table begins to drop here, then the salt water starts penetrating into the sweet water here. Then, in order to reverse that again they had to get a certain amount of water down into that channel there, mind you, to bring the water table up again. The certain amount of wells that

Furtado: were dug here had to have double casing. If you went down two hundred feet, at least the first hundred feet you had to have it capped with cement. It was a double casing, one case on the outside, another one on the inside, and then they had it capped with the concrete, to keep the salt water out. Because it would eat up the casing, and your salt water would come into the sweet water. You had nothing. And that was quite expensive.

Helfman: How about flooding? Was that a big problem here?

Furtado: Years ago, yes. It started flooding not on this area here but down through where the Coyote Hills are out there, you know, and all that lowland in there. The main stream of the Alameda Creek started at the Calaveras Reservoir, and it snaked all the way down into Fremont here and down into Union City. Then the water would drain out in Union City out to the marshlands out there. I'm not sure of the year. It must have been about--see, I was born 1915, but my grandfather, he farmed on this land also, on this ranch, and I picked up some of the information from him. I think--let's see, now to be honest with you, about 1918, probably--

The water broke over the levy out there, down in that area there where--now let's see if I can give you an explanation about the area. Well, anyway, do you know where this housing project goes out here? What is the name of it now? Ardenwood Village in there. Well, there was a creek that came out around through that Ardenwood Village. There was a levy that went all the way out and went through over the Fremont Boulevard. See where that bridge goes over there? It went right straight down. As Alameda Creek, the main creek, it broke in there one year. I think it was in 1918, it broke in there, and the water started flowing down into Mr. Patterson's property here. And she'd flow all the way down, and then it would flood all that area in there where the Coyote Hills are out there. Then there was an outlet where the water could drain into the bay out there. It was a regular flood plain, the whole thing in there. The whole works was all the flood plain. I don't know how much it covered, well the flood plain all together, I'd say, was about eight to nine hundred acres, all filled with water out there.

In one way it was an advantage, and I'll tell you why. It brought the water table up. That was the advantage of having that water come down there. And that was the biggest problem after about 1930. There was a water problem in here, due to the water table dropping and salt water coming into the sweet water. But they finally reversed it. It took a number of years. What they had to do, the wells already drilled had to be capped, so there'd be no salt water coming into the soil because it would ruin the soil, the salt water. And then, with the natural flow of water

Furtado: coming down, after Mr. Patterson took them to court, then it changed the picture. It brought the water table up again, not as much as it should, but it done the job.

Helfman: Do you remember the year that when he went to court?

Furtado: No, I don't remember that. But I know he did take them to court but the year I don't remember. I'm not sure of the year. [1912-1916]

Furtado Family on the Ranch Since 1914

Helfman: Let me back up a second, and just find out a little background on yourself as far as how you arrived in the area, and how you--

Furtado: Oh, I first arrived in the area. I was born on Thornton Avenue, and then I came to this farm in the year of 1925. And I lived just over across the railroad out there, and that's why I lived over there. I was here on this farm for thirty years, until around 1952 or 1955.

Helfman: You were from where?

Furtado: From Thornton Avenue, and that was in the town of Centerville, now it's Fremont.

Helfman: So you started working in 1925.

Furtado: No, it was later than that, because I was born in 1915. So 1925, I'd only be ten years old, right? So I started working maybe after about 1935.

Helfman: Did your father work for the Pattersons?

Furtado: Yes, we helped him here, and then we also farmed out here. Mr. Patterson made a change on this farm here about in the year about 1920 or 1925, then tenants started coming in. Then he dropped out of the farming himself. He had no leases. He had all oral agreements with all the tenants. Just all agreements. His word was as good as gold. Row crop farming was 25 percent, and the grain farming was one-third. There was several dairies on the farm here. Let's see, there was one, they called it the California Dairy. That was down near the Coyote Hills. And they had another one down here by the railroad, and another one that used to be across Jarvis Avenue. That was a large dairy in there, a 600-acre section of land there.

Helfman: So when you started there were no tenant farmers then.

Furtado: A few.

Helfman: Did you tenant farm yourself? Or you were--

Furtado: Well, my dad and I, we farmed part time, and then I used to help Mr. Patterson on the yards here, the orchards, and everything in here too. It was a two-way deal: farmed on a share basis on his land, plus what I used to do for him in here.

A Work Day: Rich Soil, Hard Labor, Draft Animals

Helfman: Can you just describe what a typical work day was like?

Furtado: A typical work day I'd say would be about starting in the morning about 7, and then finish about 5:30 or 6, all with draft animals.

But them days, different from now. The soil was easier to work. You didn't use no herbicides, no insecticides, no nothing, no fertilizer, nothing. Just work your land; not too deep, enough to mix the soil up and get rid of the grass; plant your seed and that was it. Today you can't do that anymore. It requires a, well, you have to be more scientific to farm now and I don't know why. The crops just won't produce without going through all that--you have to doctor them up in order to get a crop. There was a different environment. You had cleaner air, virgin soil, and bumper crops: potatoes, you'd get as high as 400 sacks per acre. No fertilizer, no nothing, no irrigation--you can't do that today. It's all different. The soil is already worn out now. So in order to get any production of any kind at all now on the soil requires a lot of extra work. You couldn't do it with draft animals no more. Them days labor was cheap. You work all day from 7 o'clock in the morning until about 5 or 5:30 at night--\$1 a day. That's all you would get. But a dollar was a good dollar and you weren't rushed to do the work. You just go along gradually; you weren't working to kill yourself, just to get the job done. And that's the way we did it.

Henry Patterson, a "Yes-and-No Man"

Helfman: Was Mr. Patterson a fair and good employer?

Furtado: Very good man. I gave it to you right here [taps his written statement], in the beginning, on page number one. Yes. I admired him very much because he was a very, very reasonable man, a very

Furtado: intelligent man. He was a man that you could sit with him and talk some problem over with him, no joking with him. He was a "yes and no" man. He was all business.

Helfman: Do you remember any incidents that happened?

Furtado: No. Any incidents would be some outsider or stranger coming loitering over the property, well then, he'd find out what they were looking for. That's how particular he was. A very good man. I have nothing to say about the man. I even miss him. Right now I feel kind of funny sitting here and looking at the house over there and don't see him. He was a very gentle man. Very gentle. He always gave you the benefit of the doubt, in other words. But if you was right, fine. If you was wrong, he was going to let you know about it. It wouldn't take him a day to tell you; he would let you know right here, right now. That's why there was a success on this farm. He never let nothing get by. He was always on the alert to make sure that if something would come along that was going to interfere with the farming operation he was there to find out. I told you about this water business here, and things like that. Now, this is all history. This is all fact that I'm giving you here. Some of the dates I don't remember; I don't want to commit myself to a date and then be wrong. Actually this did happen, what I'm telling you about the water and things like that. And what else was I going to tell you? [pause]

The Harvest and the Cattle Drive

Furtado: After the crops were harvested—sugar beets, tomatoes, corn, they were the basic crops. After the sugar beets were harvested, we left the beet tops in the fields. (This was all done by hand, remember now. All this farming was hand-labor. There were no machines to harvest none of this.) It was all harvested by hand: tomatoes, sugar beets, corn. Then about the month of October they started out with the cattle drive. From Livermore, they'd come over through the Overacker Ranch, and down to the Kirchner Ranch, and drove the cattle down in through Fremont Boulevard, into the town of Centerville, came down on Thornton Avenue, and drove the cattle down into the ranch here. Then in the month of December, just before the rains, the cattle would all be driven back again to the [Livermore] ranch.

Mr. Tom Halley was the manager of the cattle ranch in Livermore. I can picture him with a big cowboy hat on, and cowboy boots. He, too, was a very very reasonable man, and a top cattleman. He was the top man from Mr. Patterson, on the cattle end of it. They probably ran a herd of about, oh I'd say in the

Furtado: neighborhood of about seven to eight hundred head of cattle--all white face, beef cattle. Okay, now what else did you want to know now?

Tenant Farmers on the Ranch

Helfman: One thing is to know more about the tenant farmers that are working there. How many, what kind of families?

Furtado: Well, there were tenant farmers. They all worked with draft animals, and they didn't live on the farm. They came from different areas out here: some from Centerville, Newark, Alvarado. They didn't farm no big sections of land. I'd say each one maybe had about thirty acres, forty acres, something like that. I'd say all totaled he might have had maybe about forty, fifty tenant farmers.

Helfman: All different nationalities?

Furtado: Right. The majority of them were Portuguese farmers. Came from Europe, and came in here, and got started in here. All row crops were worked on a 25 percent basis. Mr. Patterson received 25 percent. The grains: one-third. The dairies: the land was rented to the dairymen at \$25 an acre. And the tenants were responsible for the pumping plants and the utilities. [But Mr. Patterson would split repair costs for the pumping plants with the farmers - D.F.] You took a motor at that time, about a twenty-five horsepower motor, you could run it ten hours for about \$3. That's quite a bit. Today you couldn't do that. A twenty-five horsepower motor would run you about \$60 to \$70 a day for about 10 hours. That's a difference.

Helfman: Mr. Furtado, how did you know what the dairies and other tenants paid?

Furtado: I knew these people from working on the ranch. It was common knowledge.

Crops were much cheaper. Labor was much cheaper, but then you didn't have too much overhead. In other words, your margin of profit was not too big, but you got by, due to no big investments in farm machinery--very little. And then some farm machines started to come in, but they took a number of years yet. A lot of that machinery was obsolete. It was of poor engineering--most of it.

Furtado: And from 1950 on, I noticed some improvements on the machinery, but not the best yet. Then when it got to about 1970, then I noticed a big change on the engineering part of the equipment. It was better equipment and better built.

Helfman: Sounds like the mechanization was slow.

Furtado: Very, very slow. And obsolete. Most of it didn't work the way it was supposed to. There were a lot bugs in them yet, that they had to work out. Sometimes the manufacturer would come out and check on the equipment and try to gather up all the information they could about the equipment--how it was operating and so on. They got all the information and sent it back into the main factories, so the engineers could make the changes. But it was a slow process. Very slow. But, we done the best we could with what we had. That's the knowledge that they had in them days. Of course, as the years went by, why then they kept getting to know better the different things that they had to do, in order to make the improvements on the machines. I lived through all that, and I seen what was going on.

Now all these tenant farmers did not live on the ranch. They had their own homes on the outside, and they come down through the Decoto road here, what they use to call Jarvis Avenue, with their draft animals, with their wagon--and bring a little hay on the wagon, and water to give to the animals at noon, to water them down and feed them. All done that way. Like I tell you, we had to walk behind the plow; we had to walk behind our harrow or roller; we smashed the clods on the ground a little bit, not too much plowing. We just got down, get rid of the grass, and then cultivate a little bit, and then get the ground ready, and plant the crop, and that was all. Didn't have to worry about anything else--bugs or anything else like that. No fertilizer. You know when you get virgin soil, you can't miss.

Helfman: Besides Portuguese, what other kinds of families were there?

Furtado: I'd say the majority were all Portuguese. Mr. Patterson liked the way that they were people that were willing and willing to work. He took notice of that, and he liked them very much for that.

Helfman: Do you remember Mr. Brown as a tenant?

Furtado: Mr. Brown was one of Mr. Patterson's employees here. His name was Joe Brown. And then he had another. Joe Brown was dead and gone already. And he lived down in--what's the name of that street that goes to Washington Hospital?

Helfman: Mowry.

Furtado: He lived on Mowry Avenue. He had a home out there. And he had another man out here by the name of Manuel Martin. He also worked in here for him. He lived on the farm right here. There was a home on the other side of these buildings. He had a home in here. Before 1915, you see I was born 1915, but before that, Mr. Patterson had living quarters for the farm workers out here, behind these buildings here. According to what they told me--Mr. Brown--they had thirty to thirty-five employees working here. And they had a Chinese cook in the kitchen. The sleeping quarters were separated from the main house. But of course, that's what I picked up from them--what they told me, which is true, because I still remember the home was over there. The back of that was torn down. The other part of it was out on Jarvis Avenue, but they tore that down also. But at one time it was all connected--

Helfman: How many employees were here when you were--

Furtado: There was quite a few. I'd say maybe half-a-dozen, because he kept cutting back, and then the land would be given out for farming on a share-basis.

Henry Patterson, the Decision-Maker

Helfman: What else could you tell me about how the day-to-day work on the farm went?

Furtado: The first thing that Mr. Patterson would do, he'd say there was a certain section of land that has to be worked out. It was getting quite weedy, we'd have to go ahead and disk it out. We disked that out, probably take maybe couple of days to get that completed, and after then he would say, now, we have to get this ready for corn, or sugar beets and things like that, and then prepare the land for the planting. But he always made the decisions.

Helfman: He was a real hands-on owner? He was out there working?

Furtado: Right. He never sat too much in the office. He was on the outside to make sure that everything was running right.

Helfman: Do you remember how he dressed?

Furtado: Ah, Mr. Patterson was a plain dresser. Very seldom ever seen that man in a suit. Just plain clothes, no necktie, always wore a hat. He was a yes-and-no man, and very conservative. Yes, very seldom ever seen him a suit.

Helfman: How about the brother?

Furtado: Same thing. No different. Then, when it come to some serious problem, then they both would come together and talk it over. One would consult with the other about certain matters, you know what I mean, that were quite serious--like when they had that water problem, why Mr. William Patterson, he was in it pretty thick.

Yes, they were very plain people. Very plain people. If you walk up to him, you'd say, "Who's Mr. Patterson anyway?" Because the way he was dressed, see? Naturally, a man in his capacity, you'd think he would dress like an executive. No.

August May, Successful Banker and Colleague of the Pattersons

Furtado: Mr. Patterson was one of the owners and directors of the bank also. Mr. May [president of the bank] used to come down here, and talk things over. There was another man with the same thing. He was quite a smoker. Mr. May never bought cigarettes. He always rolled his cigarettes. Very conservative banker also. Never did believe leaning any more out that anybody could handle on a loan.

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So in 1930, came the Great Depression. That's history; you don't remember that. The dairy farms on Mr. Patterson's ranch farm--I'm speaking of the dairy farms, not the ranch--were in trouble financially. Prices dropped. No market for the milk. They were in real trouble. So then Mr. May had loaned a lot of money out to these dairymen. He came to them and told them he wanted them to hold on to the business, because he said, "If I foreclose on you now and take these cattle, I can't put them in my bank." That's how smart he was. And he says, "And I'm going to continue on helping you." Mind you, it was something terrible. It was a crash. "And I want you to continue on," he says, "because there's going to be a change on the administration." I think it was--Roosevelt come in 1933 or 1934. And he says, "Things are going to take a turn for the better, and then when things start picking up, you get a market for your products, I'll be able to get my money back. If I do it different, I'm going to be the loser." And, you know, he followed that through. He was right on the money, what he said. They all came out of it.

But here's what I want to try to bring out to you. The time of that crash we had thousands and thousands of bank failures in the United States. You read it in the history. These three banks: the Alvarado Bank, Niles Bank, and Irvington Bank were completely sound. Completely sound, mind you. There were people that came from Washington, Oregon, and Idaho to try to borrow money off Mr. May in his bank over here, and you know what he told

Furtado: them? "This bank has no money for outside people," he says. "If your banks in those states can't help you, I can't do you any good," he says. That was him. He always said that any business that paid more than 7 percent interest for money would be a failure. And he was right. And he says, "Never overburden anybody with more than what they can handle, on loans with money, because then they are in trouble." He was a kind of a man that, one time there was a party that walked in there--now, I am going to tell you a story, and this is all history, this is true.

This man walked into his bank, and he's sitting in his office. I can picture him too, he was a big fat man, and a very plain man and was just in his office there in his bank in Alvarado there. That was the main branch. So one day this man come in and says, "Oh, Mr. May, we're kind of interested in buying an automobile." So Mr. May asked him, he says, "Well, you got a car now?" He says, "Yes, but it's not a very good car." "Well, I tell you the truth, I'm going to tell you right now: this bank's got no money for a new car for you," he says. "You just keep your old car," he says, "and that'll make do."

OK, and I had a friend of mine who came in one day and asked Mr. May if he could borrow some money from him. And so Mr. May asked him, "I want to know the purpose of the loan." "I want to make a new house," he says. "You got the plans?" "Yes." So he looked over the plans. "Well, I'll tell you the truth, your plans may sound good to you, but not good to me. This house is too high-toned for you. You got an old one; you stay with that one."

OK, a third party come in. One day a farmer come in there. I think he lived in Alvarado, but I can't remember his name now. And he says, "Mr. May, I'm going to need some money." "What is the purpose?" he says. "I need the money," he says, "for a team of horses." "You've got the money," he says. You see, anything that would produce something, you would have the money; but if it was for like luxuries, that was out with that banker. That's why the bank was a success. All his loans were all in the line of cattle and agriculture.

This farm, the reason why it was a success, Mr. Patterson was not only a good manager, but he didn't let nothing slip by to get himself in any kind of a problem. This farm was free and clear when his father died. Of course, I don't remember his father. But my aunt remembered his father. And he, too, was a very conservative man, Mr. George Patterson. He was a man with a big white beard, a big tall man. But see, I don't remember that because that's before my time.

The Great Depression

Helfman: What else do you remember about the Depression, and how it affected things here?

Furtado: Well, here's what happened. Came the Great Depression, we were in here. Mr. Patterson still kept thinking the dollar a day. But most of the farms in here who did hire anybody, they were paying ten cents an hour. That's all you could get. Maybe you worked six hours a day, that makes sixty cents a day. They held on. I'll tell you why the tenants held on on Mr. Patterson's ranch. This ranch was on a sound basis. In other words, they kept on farming, they didn't get much out of it, but they kept going, kept at it. Others had to drop out because there was mortgages on the farm, you understand? Then they foreclosed on them.

But this farm was in a different position. That's the difference. It took a number of years before the farmers got on their feet. At that time there was all draft animals, and you could buy a team of horses probably—I call a "team" two, or whatever it was—for about \$125, \$100, for using them for farming purposes. Machinery, that was out of the picture. I don't quite understand it, but quite a number of years before machines started coming in on the farm. Like I tell you, it was farmed out the slow way, but it produced crops.

Today you couldn't do that. There's a change in the environment. The reason why they talk about water pollution is due to all the different sprays they have to use in order to get the crop to grow, like insecticides. That's poison in that, you know. Then herbicides, to control the grass. Things like that. That is what's hurting the environment.

Sugar Beet Harvest by Hand

Helfman: What kind of crops did your family raise here?

Furtado: Sugar beets, tomatoes. That was the basic ones. And there was corn, and cucumbers, but remember, all this was all harvested by hand. Everything. If you had a part of large acreage of sugar beets, we had a beet lifter. It was not a plow; it was something like a sub-soiler [a tool with a "shoe" on it to lift the beet off the ground] to lift the sugar beets up—it's a root crop—to raise them up off of the ground. Then these people, they came from Mexico. They came in here by the hundreds. They didn't live on the ranch. They came from different areas. Then they'd go, and they had a large beet knife with a hook on it. They'd put this

Furtado: hook into the sugar beet, and pick it up out of the ground, and cut the top off, then put them in rows. Many rows would come into the center area, and they left an avenue for the trucks to come in, and then they'd pick them up by hand and throw them into the truck. And this farm here, with the three thousand acres it had, it produced sugar beets for the refinery at Holly Sugar in Alvarado. They could grind out about, I'd say, at the factory, maybe about twelve or fifteen hundred tons a day. So some years this ranch here produced about, I'd say, maybe around the order of about twenty thousand tons of sugar beets, twenty to twenty-five thousand tons of sugar beets. Tomatoes, I'd say in the neighborhood of about four or five thousand tons. That's the two basic crops on the farm.

The Henry Patterson Family

Helfman: Are there other things you can tell me about the Pattersons' personalities, the family, how things—

Furtado: All I can tell you, they were a close-knit family. Very close. Mrs. [Henry] Patterson was a school teacher. And I think, if I'm not mistaken, I think she came from Fresno. I can picture her out here in the yard also. He had three daughters. There was Sally, Marjorie, and Georgia. And Mr. William Patterson had three sons. They were Donald, Jack, and David. I think the only one left now is David, on Mr. William Patterson's side. And there's Sally, who's still living yet. I don't know where she's at. I think she's over in Atherton or in Piedmont. I'm not sure. She's in the neighborhood, I'd say, of about seventy-five years old already now. And Marjorie Patterson, that was the second daughter, I think she's down in Palm Springs, if she's still living. I'm not sure. I don't want to make any commitment because I'm not sure.

And there was Georgia. This I don't know if I should bring this out or not, but there'd be no harm in it.

I think she was around 16 years old. Sixteen or seventeen or something like that. It was quite a tragedy in the family. Mr. Patterson had gone to pick them up at the University of California. It was in the winter time. And coming back from his trip from Berkeley, when he got into town at Mount Eden, the road was quite wet. And he slammed his brakes in the car and the brakes locked on the car and the girls were sitting on the back seat and when he slammed the brakes on, she broke her neck. She died immediately. I guess it was no harm in it if I told you that. And then for one year straight that man never drove a car. He felt real bad about that. And she was a beautiful girl. Very

Furtado: pretty, they all were. And I tell you, I felt sorry for the man. He walked around here, and sometime I just wonder what was going through his mind. I just couldn't figure it...

So all he had left was the two daughters, Sally and Marjorie. There's no harm in what I told you.

Yes, they were a family that were close, but Mr. Patterson made the decisions. He's the man that made the decisions. But she was a real wonderful lady, Mrs. Patterson. You couldn't find a better person, a lady with a wonderful personality, a very friendly lady. Very friendly. And so the other family out there, the same way: very polite people, intelligent people, people with a lot of knowledge.

Helfman: I'd actually heard that there was other accidents or another accident--someone hit by a train out here. Do you remember anything like that?

Furtado: Of the Pattersons?

Helfman: I don't think it was family, but just that there was another accident.

Furtado: Well, years ago there was an accident, yes. It was a Chinese family that came later and farmed on Mr. Patterson's ranch here, and they lived down next to that railroad out here, along the railroad track. And that day, the lady, was his wife, the Chinese lady, she had walked over the railroad track to go and buy some meat. They used to have a delivery wagon, would sell meat on the roads. I think that time that she went over out there and bought the meat and came back, for some reason or other, I don't know what happened, she came across over the railroad and the train hit her and killed her. That was the accident that I know of. Now anything after that I don't remember, but that was the accident. But nothing connected with the Patterson family, no, nothing at all.

Game and Poachers

Furtado: Now this ranch became a game sanctuary in about the year 1935. It was stocked mostly with pheasants in here. It was a game reserve, in other words. But Mr. Patterson had one problem. It bugged him every year, the time of the pheasant season. He had people running all over this farm. They just kept him busy, him and his brother, and workers, we had to go out here and try to run them off the ranch. He just couldn't stand having people in here; of course, he was right! Always had that problem every year. Then

Furtado: later, he hired private detectives to help to keep them off of the ranch. He did. And he also had a large duck pond down there at the Coyote Hills, where they, every year about the month of October or November, they start hunting ducks out there. Then he and all his friends come over here. Early in the morning, they'd go down and start hunting for ducks. Real early in the morning, just about daybreak.

Helfman: Did they do a lot of entertaining, have a lot of people over?

Furtado: Yes, they did, but that was their own clan of people, you know what I mean, not just ordinary workers, no. Just the people, their friends, of course, from different areas here.

Henry Patterson and Tree Management: "Close to Nature"

Helfman: Are there any other things you can remember about the ranch that we haven't covered?

Furtado: Well, Mr. Patterson, like you know, had all this eucalyptus groves in here, all the way around the area. He had a family that lived out in the back and everything. But he was a man I believe that never had taken out any more brush or anything off of the trees as more than necessary. Like this grove in here, I did read in the paper that they said there was a certain amount of acres that had to be removed because the trees were all fallen down and decaying and all that. Well, that I don't believe, because—I'm looking out right here now—you see all those gum trees? There are quite a lot of them. Those will be here for the next fifty years or more yet. Only fallen trees he would allow to remove. Anything else, no.

Now, this is history that I have to go back that I picked up from my aunt. She was an old lady already. Her father farmed on this ranch also.

So when Mr. Patterson's father died he was laid out on this house here, you know. So when all the farmers came to view the body, they had to come through the porch out on the back there, but there was a fallen tree over the door—over the screen door—so everyone that come in would have to bend down to go underneath the tree. So one of them said, "Well, Mr. Patterson, you should remove the tree." He said, "Never remove it; nature put it that way, just leave it like that," he said. He was close to nature...

If a tree grew a certain way, like that tree right there, that was fine. It did no danger. Nature put it that way, just leave it like that. Very particular man. If you're going to do

Furtado: any pruning on the trees, only head high--no higher than that--as long as you can get through. But you start to trim them all the way down, no, he wouldn't allow that, no way.

Helfman: You said there were things that you noticed about what they're doing now that are--

Furtado: There was a large walnut grove in here. There was one out on the other side here, but now it's gone, because they removed it. They dug it out. What I'm observing here now, they've done a very, very poor job on the management of the walnut orchards. Some of the broken down limbs and trees that are decayed should be removed. Then the soil should have been all worked down, just down, to conserve the moisture in the land. Then we take, about in the spring of the year in the month of June, we take it, and we irrigate all the trees down. We have to work the soil down in the trees to keep the moisture up, to keep the growth up in order to get production off of the trees. Now, you go and walk out there, and what have they got there? They've got all decayed trees out there and a lot of limbs hanging down onto the ground there. They haven't removed anything. They haven't worked the soil down. So, you can't call that good management. That's what I'm observing right now. And if I had something to do with it, that would be all different there.

Now Mr. Patterson would never allow that. In a certain time of year we have to get in there and get all that down--the grass out, and all fallen limbs be removed, and that wood would be burnt. He'd have it all chopped up and make kindling wood for the wintertime for his fireplace. And now they're talking about removing I don't know how many acres of the Eucalyptus trees because due to a danger or hazard or something. Do you find a hazard on that tree there? As long as that tree has green leaves like that, that is no hazard there. When you see a tree that has no more foliage, then you know it's gone.

But here they're just doing it the opposite. Of course, this is my estimation of things, with the way they're doing it. I haven't got no say on this here, but this is what I'm seeing here. There was a wonderful family fruit orchard out in the back over here, family orchard. That's gone, I think, out here already. I think I came here last year, and I walked back there. It wasn't taken care of. That's gone there, and the one out here also. Now what they should do to bring it back to its original is take and set a plant in to replace each dead one. They should go out and plant a certain amount of dwarf trees in a different area out here. Soon they could bear fruit, and most of them they could sell to the public. There's enough space for it.

Furtado: Mr. Patterson was always a great believer in having a lot of fruit trees for the house. He had a lot of citrus trees--they're all gone already here now. Apple trees, he had a dozen of them. Peaches, all different varieties, that's all gone. I'd say if it's gone now, replace it now, bring it back to its original form that it was before. That's my belief. Like I tell you, I'm not the management. This farm here, or whatever it is anyway, I'm not running it. But I know what I would do if I had my say about it. Some of them trees are still in production yet--the walnut trees. But like I tell you, more work has to be done there in order to get that back in shape.

Helfman: What other kinds of things have you noticed?

Furtado: Let's see. [long pause] Well, I don't know, but I can tell you about it, what I notice is that it's just a different type of a management. I don't want to say it's the best in the world--it's not the worst either, but it's not the best. And I think Mr. Patterson wouldn't go for it. Everything with him had to be right. And if it wasn't right, he wanted to get an honest answer from you. You didn't go around the bush and tell him "Oh, it's this way, Mr. Patterson." He said, "No, I want to get the right answer." And believe me, you tell him the truth. And you lie to him, you were in trouble. He was a dependable man and an honest man, but he expected an honest answer from you.

The Pattersons and the Hobos

Furtado: Now, Mr. Patterson on his ranch here, had a large warehouse; where you see that house out there now. That warehouse was capable of holding about, I'd say the neighborhood of 2-300 tons of hay. So them days there was a lot of tramps on the road. I'd say we could call them hobos or tramps or whatever it was. And they done all their cooking in the gums out here, in the [eucalyptus] grove here. There was a large water trough out here where you see that truck parked out there now. And they'd come with their cans, the hobos, and get water out here. There's one thing about Mr. Patterson. Now, this is history again. His father told him, that's what my aunt told me. His father, "Remember," he says, "Never runs the hobos off the ranch; they have to live too." So the evening would come, and they would have their roll and they'd sleep inside the hay barn there. Not one time Mr. Patterson ever run one off. So one day Mrs. Patterson brought that up to Mr. Patterson--about the hobos being on the ranch. And she asked him that question. She says, "How come, Mr. Patterson, you leave these hobos on the ranch here?" You know what he told her? "They were here before you came here."

Furtado: Mr. Patterson's father, my aunt told me he was very, very liberal that way. Never did run them off the ranch. I can just picture them coming down--they used to sometimes cook down there by the railroad and then usually be coming down here to sleep. And this warehouse is still standing, and you'll find it in the Coyote Hills. Have you ever been out there?

Helfman: Yes.

Furtado: Did you see that big warehouse built out there--that big large storage building out there? As you go in, you don't go all the way out straight ahead, you make a left turn and then go down. It's on the back there. That used to be in here. This was dismantled here. The man that dismantled is dead and gone now. His name was Pete Freitas. He was the contractor. And he dismantled this barn. Then they removed all this material from here, hauled it down into the Coyote Hills, and they put it together out there, and just before they had it all together, Mr. Pete Freitas fell off of the scaffolding and he broke his neck. And when they picked him up, he was dead already. I remember that now. Now, is there anything else you can think up?

Furtado Family History

Helfman: Not about the ranch. I'm kind of curious more about you, brothers and sisters, and your family--

Furtado: In my family there was four boys and one girl. I'm the oldest, then came my other brother. My first name, of course, you know my name is Donald. And I have a brother by the name of Norbert, and I have a brother by the name of Cyrus, and a brother by the name of Leland. And my sister, her name was Zelda. About twenty years ago my second brother, he was going on a trip, I think, into Oregon, in a brand new car. But before he got to Eureka--that's in the state of California--this guy comes along, I guess he was travelling at about 100 miles an hour. He was intoxicated. He hit my brother head-on, and my brother went down that cliff about five hundred feet, and when he had got down to the bottom he had broke his neck. I'd say he was about thirty years old. I have another brother. He lives in San Leandro. He retired. My sister, she died. She's dead and gone. But my mother's still living yet. My father died. He was ninety-three years old.

My mother's still living. She's in a rest home in Mountain View, and she's ninety-two years old. She lived on this farm when she was a young girl, because my grandfather farmed on Mr. Patterson's ranch here. And all the water had to be drawn out for the house--there was no plumbing--with hand pumps. They'd bring a

Furtado: bucket out and pump the water by hand, then they had containers they would fill up with water and bring into the house. No plumbing. The dishwasher had to be taken out in buckets and thrown outside.

Helfman: Your mother worked for--

Furtado: The Pattersons, no. My mother, when she was a young lady, that was before she was married, she worked on the farm with my grandfather. That was toward the Coyote Hills area. My grandfather was quite a large farmer in this area. He grew a lot of potatoes. He had sugar beets and tomatoes. That was the basic crops. And she's still living yet. She's having a hard time. She's quite old now. When you get old like that, why, it's different when you're younger.

Helfman: And did your father also farm on the Patterson Ranch?

Furtado: Yes.

Helfman: Let's go back to working on the ranch. I'm not sure you told me. How many people did he have working full time on the ranch?

Furtado: Well, at my time, I'd say it was about not too many of them. Toward the end, he only had--in about 1950 or before that--he only had about two workers left here. They did most of the work on the garden for him in here. But before that, we had, when he was farming himself, I'd say about twenty-five to thirty people. As he kept letting the land out on share-basis, and he kept reducing it down, he had two--one by the name of Joe Brown and Manuel Martin. They were the last ones left here.

Helfman: Do you know if they're still around? Are either of them still around, do you know?

Furtado: If they're living? Oh, no. They're dead and gone a long time ago.

Characterizing Henry Patterson

Furtado: Mr. Patterson most of the time didn't have any domestic workers in here. He done the cooking himself and done a lot of the work himself in the house here. I can picture him with an apron on going and coming out of the kitchen door. When I lived on the farm here I used to raise a lot of fryers--chickens, you know. I feathered them down and cleaned them out, and I'd bring them down to him over here.

Helfman: He actually did the cooking?

Furtado: He did the cooking. He was the main cook. I can picture him out there in that kitchen on this side here. Yes.

The building itself, the house that you're looking at here now, you could hardly see it from here. A lot of foliage around--all over the house. I notice they made a lot of changes. They took a lot of underbush out. He never did believe in taking out too much. That's a difference I see here now. See the main door around the front there? That was office there, right in there. So sometimes I was quite dirty--I had regular coveralls. I'd say, "Mr. Patterson, I'm quite dirty." "Oh, no, you're a working man," he says. "Come right in," he says. That's the way he was.

Helfman: When you would go in to see him, what kind of problems would you be talking about?

Furtado: Sometimes about starting a certain block of ground, about working it, or about the irrigation. He says, "I think, well, yes it's about time we start getting prepared to put water into the walnut grove here." Things like that.

He was a very sincere man, you know what I mean. He was a man that you couldn't go up to him and try to give him a hard luck story or things would go out of line. He wanted the truth. He wanted everything right. That's just the kind of a man he was. I got along very well with him. No problems. As long as you told him the truth, he'd meet you halfway. But if somebody was coming here with some hard-luck story, or some kind of a shenanigan of some kind, you wouldn't get away with it. He was a college man you know. He was a surveyor. How much law he did know, I don't know, but he had quite a bit of knowledge.

Crop Management: Minimal Water, No "Poisons"

Helfman: How did you lay out the crops? Was there a system to that as far as--

Furtado: We always laid out the crop the way we'd run our water. In other words, you can't run water uphill, so you had to be careful how you get your row crops in. The land had kind of a slope. So you start from the highest point and plant down to the lowest point. So when you get all your rows in, you get your water to run out. You didn't use as much water then like they use now. Very little water. Your crop might be given one irrigation. That's always necessary. Then you'd come in and start working the soil right afterwards to hold the moisture in the crop. I don't know why,

Furtado: them days the moisture held very good on the soil. It didn't dry out. So the crop never withered, never did—always had bumper crops.

Today you can't do that anymore. You never had to worry about worms coming in and eating the crop out on you. Never. No fertilizer, the ground was real fine and fluffy, real strong. It was virgin ground. Like I tell you, after a number of years, the land is farmed, it loses its strength. The water had a lot to do with it. If you've got real sweet water, and very little alkali in it, it builds your soil up. But when your water becomes, well, if you use water that has a lot of salt in it, or alkali, and things like that, you're in trouble. But them days you didn't have to worry about that because the water was close to the surface. You had real pure water. Where today, all your water is—they use it like in these large farms in San Joaquin Valley, the reason why they having problems, they using too much insecticides, herbicides, and all that. All that gets into the soil, penetrates into the soil and poisons the soil up. Then when they drain the water out, look what happens. You got all that poisoned water—all over the place.

In my time we didn't have that problem. And that's the difference. You could go out in the field, say you was hungry and you wanted to pick up a tomato off of the vine, you didn't have to worry about the tomato being poisoned. There were no insecticides in it—there was nothing in it. Today you couldn't do that. You go out to a farm, they've got signs posted: Keep Out, Poison. That's the difference. So we're living in a different environment altogether in the year we're in now. And I'll be honest with you, I don't think it's going to get any better. I say, if you can live close to nature and just go along with nature, you're much better off. That's the way I'm looking at it. But it's impossible. You can't do that today. Sure, technology is a wonderful thing. It's helped the people out to work much easier. You're probably getting more production on your crops. But you're still in danger with all the poisons you use on the crops. You're in danger. So then they have to be more cautious in the way they work it out now. You can see it—you read in the newspapers. That's a difference between now and the time that I did it.

Farming with Draft Animals: Cheap Labor, Low Overhead

Helfman: I guess one last thing would be if there is anything else you could add about the changeover to machinery from draft animals.

Furtado: Well, here's the difference. At that time when we farmed, say you had fifty acres of land, it required probably about ten people to do it. One team of horses would be doing one job, which was draft animals, and another man would be doing another job with another team of horses with another piece of implement--all horse-drawn implements. Where today, you can take the same amount of land with one man, and do double the work with the modern machinery we have now. See the difference? It's faster, and more positive in what you're doing, and much easier. You got a better handle on preparing the soil. Ten to one--that was the difference.

And of course then, the bigger you get, you get bigger machinery. It depends on how much land you farm. If you get fifty acres, why, you buy a certain size machine. But then if you get bigger, then you get a bigger machine. But then you're doing double the work already. But then, let's put it this way. At them days you'd buy a team of horses for \$150 or \$100, and you took ten men away from there, and brought the machine to do the same job--\$40,000 to \$50,000. That's a difference.

So that means that you have to get more income on your product to take care of your overhead and your investment. If you don't get it, you're out. That's why them days the farm was successful because it was a low overhead. Now Mr. Patterson's father, when he came into this area here, all this land he probably bought for maybe, now I'm just guessing, \$50 to \$100 an acre, which was big money them days. But then, as he went along he earned enough out of it in order to accumulate all this acreage. Where today you take the same acre of land, would cost you at least about maybe \$10,000 an acre or more. So that means how much more you'd have to earn on that acre in order to pay off the loan and your machinery and so on. That's a difference. So that's why you see a lot of bankruptcies today, being overburdened with the large loans, high-priced machinery.

Labor, no. That's one thing that I can't get through my head is this: they blame the labor for everything. But I'm going to tell you something: labor is the cheapest thing that there is on the market. And I'll tell you the difference. The machine, you can repair it, but the man you cannot repair. I don't know if it makes sense to you, but that's what I'm telling you. Can be not only in farming, can be in a factory, can be anything. I think you see my point there. So the laborers at that time just earned just barely enough to get by. That's all. There was no extra. But we got by. We had to sacrifice--there was no anything handy or fancy. We couldn't live that way. We just had to go according to the times. That's the way it was.

"People Were Happy"

Furtado: But people in them days were happy, they were satisfied. Today nobody's happy anymore about anything. It's all different. And neighbors were always willing to help others. If you had a little problem or something, needed help, somebody got sick, they were right there to help you--no charge. One neighbor would help the other. Farmers that way. If the other farmers had a problem: OK, I got extra time, I'll come down and help you. No charge. That's the way it was. Today you can't do that anymore. If you need help, you have to pay for it.

Helfman: I think that's about it for now.

Furtado: I think I gave you quite a bit of information. I hope you'll be happy with it. Now this is not fiction. If anybody come up to me, I'll back you up on it. You don't worry about that. Has this all been picked up on tape?

Helfman: Yes.

Furtado: That's wonderful.

Helfman: It's all very, very good information.

Furtado: Do you think I give you information right? I hope I did. I'm was very happy to cooperate with you in it, and at any time in the future, anything else I can help you on, I'll be glad to help you. I'm sorry I had to delay all this time, you know I've been quite ill with my joints, and I have to lay down in bed sometimes, and my mind is not working right sometimes. I don't want to make a commitment to anybody on something and not get it right. I said today, for sure I've got to meet you and get this thing straightened out once and for all. Would they allow us to walk around here a little bit, I wonder?

Helfman: I think it's fine.

##

[Tape 2, Side B, records casual conversation as Donald Furtado and Bill Helfman walked around the grounds of Ardenwood Park. The tape is available in The Bancroft Library.]

A short portion of the tape was accidentally erased during transcription. It discussed Mr. Furtado's pay on the Patterson Ranch and why he left the ranch in the mid-fifties. Bill Helfman put these questions to Mr. Furtado again and reports:

On Pay and Working Conditions

Helfman: Furtado said he was paid forty cents an hour for eight hours work; with no retirement, health or other benefits. This was the prevailing wage. Patterson paid no better, no worse.

Furtado left the Patterson farm around 1955 (he can't remember the exact year) to go into partnership on a farm in the Fremont area. The farm was on leased land. Furtado did this for about ten to twelve years. Then, arthritis disabled him, and he retired.]

TAPE GUIDE -- Donald Furtado

Date of Interview: February 7, 1987

tape 1, side A

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tape 1, side B

77

tape 2, side A

84

tape 2, side B not transcribed

Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library

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Berkeley, California

THE PATTERSON FAMILY AND RANCH:
SOUTHERN ALAMEDA COUNTY IN TRANSITION

Tillie Logan Goold

The Logan Family Farm in Alvarado

An Interview Conducted by
Ann Lage
in 1986

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INTERVIEW HISTORY — Tillie Logan Goold

Tillie Goold was born in 1903 and raised on a 100-acre farm about two miles north of the Patterson Ranch. Her recollections of her family--immigrants from Ireland who raised twelve children on their farm--provide a picture of rural life in Washington Township in the first four decades of this century.

Mrs. Goold was interviewed on May 14, 1986, at her home in Fremont, California. Her husband, J. Vernon Goold (who is fondly remembered as "Pop" Goold by several generations of graduates from the Washington Township schools), was a teacher and administrator in the Washington Union High School District. Mr. Goold was present at the interview and helped fill in areas where Mrs. Goold's memory was hazy. A subsequent interview with Mr. Goold was not transcribed because of poor sound quality and less direct relevance to this project on the Patterson Ranch. He has been previously interviewed for a Fremont community history project, and tapes from that interview are available in the Fremont public library.

Ann Lage
Interviewer/Editor
Project Director

September, 1988
Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library
University of California at Berkeley

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

(Please print or write clearly)

Your full name Matilda Gilmore Logan (Goold)

Date of birth 3/10/03 Place of birth Alvarado district of Union City

Father's full name James Logan

Birthplace Ireland

Occupation Farmer

Mother's full name Rebecca Kerr

Birthplace Ireland

Occupation House wife and other

Where did you grow up? Quaico acre farm in Alvarado

Present community Fremont

Education Primary & Elementary Certificate - San Jose State normal (now U.C. San Jose)

Occupation(s) Teacher Elementary school district
House wife of mother

Special interests or activities Lodge and Civic activities

Parents' Immigration From Ireland, 1890

[Date of Interview: May 14, 1986] ##

Lage: We want to start with your parents. Tell me where they came from.

T. Goold: Both of them came from Ireland. They did not know each other, though, in Ireland. They met out here. My mother [Rebecca Kerr] worked for her aunt, housework, in Alvarado on the ranch. My father [James Logan] worked for the McKeowns when he came out.

Lage: Were the McKeowns relatives?

T. Goold: Yes, distant relatives.

Lage: When did your father come here?

T. Goold: It would have been about ninety years ago, about 1890.

Lage: And your mother about the same time?

T. Goold: Yes.

Lage: Did they ever tell stories about why they came here?

T. Goold: My mother came out to work for her uncle. That was on the ranch where I was born. And my father came out to work for the McKeowns, which was just a couple of miles away. And that's where they met. And all of us kids were raised there, on my aunt and uncle's ranch, A.J. Kerr.

Lage: What area was it?

T. Goold: Alvarado. It was really the Alviso school district, but we went to Alvarado Grammar School, because my father would go into town to shop, and we would get a ride.

Lage: Do you recall the kinds of farming that were done?

T. Goold: Well, they raised sugar beets; they raised potatoes, tomatoes, cauliflower. I don't think there was cauliflower at the very beginning. It was something that came later.

##This symbol indicates that a tape or segment of a tape has begun or ended. For a guide to the tapes, see page 107.

The Twelve Logan Children: Goals, Education, Chores

Lage: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

T. Goeld: There were twelve in the family. Six boys and six girls.

Lage: That kept your mother pretty busy.

T. Goeld: Yes. She had help in the house. Boy, oh boy, they were strict about the schooling for everyone. Among the girls, there were three teachers, two nurses, and a secretary.

Lage: And how about the boys, what did they become?

T. Goeld: They went on to Ag [agriculture]. My oldest brother ended up field superintendent for Holly Sugar in Alvarado.

V. Goeld: And Bill was at Thornton Canning. John was an auto mechanic. Jim was a car salesman. And Ted was in weights and measures for Alameda County. Ralph is a very successful rancher here and in Idaho.

Lage: Now, you say your mother had some help in the home? What kind of help did she have?

T. Goeld: A woman to help with the housework. Later on she had this Spanish boy. Well, the folks were really raising him, and he was a kid with the rest of us, raising heck in the kitchen while my mom was trying to cook. But he worked for the folks, too.

Lage: I wondered about your parents' goals for their children. Did they talk about what they would like you to do? You mentioned education was important. How did that come across to you?

T. Goeld: My oldest sister was a teacher, very successful. Then the next sister in line was a teacher, too. She was a supervisor in the San Leandro schools. Then there was me. I was a teacher.

Lage: Do you remember your parents emphasizing studying?

T. Goeld: No. When we were in high school, we thought things over and planned. We did what we thought we would like to do. I wanted to be a nurse, but Pa said, "No. You're not going to do that," because I was tiny. So, okay, then, a teacher. And then the next sister younger than me was a nurse.

Lage: What kind of training did you need to be a teacher?

T. Goeld: Oh, San Jose State. It was called San Jose Normal then.

- Lage: Was it a four-year program?
- V. Goeld: No, two, or three, or four years.
- Lage: Was it difficult for your parents to put the children through college, or did you work and pay for it yourself?
- T. Goeld: No. There was no place for us to go to work. They struggled. Everyone of us had to go on to school except the last brother. He was working on the ranch then, and he had started a ranch of his own.
- Lage: Did you have duties on the ranch as you were growing up, chores?
- T. Goeld: Well, the boys did. The girls helped Ma. My mother had help in the house until we got old enough that we could do it.
- Lage: So you didn't do any farm work, and your mother didn't do any farm work.
- T. Goeld: No, no.
- Lage: Did your father work on this ranch you were raised on, or continue working for the McKeowns?
- V. Goeld: You see, when Tillie's mother's uncle and aunt passed away, Tillie's mother inherited their ranch.
- Lage: Do you know how large the ranch was?
- T. Goeld: Oh, yes, a hundred acres. All farming.
- Lage: Did your father hire laborers to work on the farm?
- T. Goeld: Yes, he had to, in the season.
- Lage: Were they of a particular ethnic background, do you remember?
- T. Goeld: No, he took what he could get because it was seasonal. He had one man on the ranch who lived there. He came from Ireland. He was my father's nephew. He lived on the ranch and did the little handy jobs.
- Lage: Were there a lot of Irish people in the area?
- V. Goeld: A few, yes. McKeowns, and Barbara Smyrl's father, and your dad's brother, and then there were the Harveys and the Dinsmores.
- T. Goeld: I don't know about the Harveys, because those darn kids would make fun of us and call us the Irish.

- Lage: Was there a rivalry between different ethnic groups?
- T. Goeld: No. No, there weren't enough Irish around to be a group [laughter].
- Lage: Was religion an important part of your family growing up?
- T. Goeld: Very much so. My father was very strict. Every Sunday.
- Lage: Roman Catholic?
- T. Goeld: No. Presbyterian.
- Lage: From Northern Ireland?
- T. Goeld: Yes.
- V. Goeld: But her relatives in Ireland gave the Catholic Church over there an acre of land to build their church on. So there was never any competition between the Scotch-Irish and the Catholics.
- T. Goeld: There was never any in our family. We were all made to get along and be happy and thankful we were here.

Working the Land: Seasonal Crops and Laborers

- Lage: I wanted to ask you what you could recall about the farm operation because the East Bay Regional Park District wants to recreate a farm situation at Ardenwood Preserve. Let me ask you first about dates. Do you mind my asking you when you were born?
- T. Goeld: No, 1903.
- Lage: Where were you in the birth order?
- T. Goeld: I was sixth, I think. It was a boy, a girl, a boy, a girl, a boy, and then I was the sixth.
- Lage: Do you recall much about the work on the farm? Could you describe what harvest time was like, for instance?
- T. Goeld: Yes. We had one man steady and then had to hire men during each season, potato season, tomato season, and all that.
- V. Goeld: Those were the days when there were regular, professional crop followers. They centered in Decota. Many of them had homes there, but they followed the crops around California. So when beet season came, they would come to Mr. Logan with their knives

- V. Goeld: and everything to top beets and pick cauliflower and all that. The kids I had in high school sometimes could only stay part of the year because they were following crops. That was a regular profession in those days.
- Lage: Were they Mexican, basically?
- V. Goeld: Yes.
- Lage: Even in those early years?
- T. Goeld: Yes. That is when they started, when I was tiny. Pa had a couple working on the ranch. When we would be walking home from school, I would be scared to death, because we would meet these guys coming home. We were a couple of miles from town. I'll never forget--one of them started walking toward me, and I was ready to scream and run. He just knew he was going to scare me.
- Lage: Was that just your perception of them, or were there incidents?
- T. Goeld: No. It just scared me, I was walking alone, you know. But he was being smarty, too. So I guess Pa jumped him the next day because I cried then on the way home. So he got told off.
- Lage: How about planting time? Do you remember any of the specifics of that?
- T. Goeld: Well, there would be seasons, sugar beet season. We raised a lot of sugar beets and potatoes.
- Lage: Do you remember where you sold the crops?
- T. Goeld: Yes. There were commission houses from Oakland and some locally.
- Lage: You mentioned that you helped your mother. Was that a considerable portion of the day?
- T. Goeld: Oh no, because she had help in the house. Just little jobs.
- Lage: Did you help care for younger brothers and sisters?
- T. Goeld: Oh sure, sure, and it was always me! [laughter]
- Lage: How did the Depression affect farming families in this area? You were away from home by then, but do you know if it was hard on them?
- T. Goeld: Well, I don't think it was.

V. Goeld: Well, it was hard on the two of us, because we were teaching then. She was getting a good salary, and so was I, and they suddenly announced, "You're going to take so much, and you can get another job if you don't like it, or stay with us, and when times get better we'll try to do better by you."

But the Logan ranch seemed to get by. By that time there were only a few high school kids still there. Of course, everybody had difficulty. But Pa Logan was a sharp little Irishman, boy.

Lage: Let's get your parents' names on the record.

T. Goeld: James Logan, my father. Ma was Rebecca.

Lage: Do you recall, when you were on the farm, cycles of good and bad times?

T. Goeld: Oh, yes, because I had to work for a time before I went to San Jose State. I worked in Coney's store in Centerville. Then I had to decide what I was going to do, or else.

School and Community

Lage: Let's talk about your schooling as you grew up. You said you went to Alvarado grammar school. What was the school like?

T. Goeld: There were two grades in the primary class, three in the intermediate, and three in the upper class. First and second grade were in one room, then third, fourth and fifth were in the next room, and sixth, seventh and eighth in the other room.

Lage: Did you have friends over a widespread area?

T. Goeld: Yes, by high school. I had to come to Centerville for high school, in the bus. That took in all the schools around.

Lage: Were the families that you knew newcomers in this area?

T. Goeld: Oh, no.

Lage: Who were some of the people that you remember that your family associated with and knew well?

T. Goeld: It's hard to say.

Lage: We talked last time about how this area has changed so tremendously. Was the change gradual or can you pinpoint a particular time?

T. Goeld: I guess it was gradual.

V. Goeld: It was after the war, too. Some of the people shifted down from Richmond shipbuilding. And then some of the service people who came through here, on account of the climate and such they swore up and down they were coming back and, boy, they did.

Lage: So after World War II you had an influx into the community?

V. Goeld: Oh, yes. It wasn't a tidal wave, but they began to come in and still are coming.

Rich Soil from Alameda Creek Flooding ##

Lage: As I told you, this project is gathering information about the Patterson family, as well as the Washington Township area. Were you aware of the Patterson family as you were growing up?

T. Goeld: Yes, they were over at the gum trees. [laughter]

Lage: How close was your ranch to the Patterson ranch?

V. Goeld: I'd say two miles. There was Patterson, McKeown, and then the Logan ranch.

Lage: And so it was all the same kind of land.

V. Goeld: The thing I've always raved about the Logan ranch was that it was a perfect ranch, as was the McKeown ranch, too, and the Patterson ranch, because the Alameda Creek flooded every year and left at least a quarter of an inch of sediment every year--fresh land, fresh soil. It would produce anything. That land out there would produce anything in the world.

Lage: Did your land get that flooding too, then?

T. Goeld: Yes. My father would have to take us to school in Alvarado in a spring wagon. The whole ranch would be under water.

Lage: You realized that that was bringing you rich soil?

T. Goeld: Oh, yes. After the flood went down, there was sediment all over the yard. It was a job to get things cleaned up again, but it was wonderful new soil.

Lage: How about water? Did you pump water from wells?

T. Goold: Yes. We had two wells, wasn't it?

V. Goold: Yes, there were two artesian wells at the back of the property, and two pumps there at the house.

The Patterson Family Social Circle

Lage: Back to the Pattersons. You mentioned to me that they kind of moved in a different circle.

T. Goold: Yes. They lived there all year round, because Ellen Dinsmore used to work for them in the house.

V. Goold: They also had immense landholdings in Livermore and may have lived part time on the cattle ranch there.

Lage: And I understand that some of the family lived in Piedmont at times also.

V. Goold: Oh, yes, very chi-chi.

Lage: You mentioned a few people to me who were in that same social circle as the Pattersons. Do you remember that? I think you mentioned the Fords.

V. Goold: That was the bunch that went around with the Pattersons. They were the monied group.

Lage: Do you recall some of their names?

V. Goold: They were all socialites--the Fords and the Hansens and the Dusterberrys. Frank Dusterberry was the president of the bank here.

Lage: You had mentioned the Ellsworths and the Jones. Were these more business people in town?

V. Goold: Ellswerth was a big insurance man and a rancher.

Lage: So there were lines drawn by wealth?

V. Goold: Oh, yes, just the same as nowadays.

Working the Fields with Horses, Pre-1930

Lage: Have you been out to see Ardenwood farm?

V. Goeld: No. Neither Tillie nor I walk very well anymore. You see, for the two of us, who have been in close contact with ranching, it doesn't mean anything to us because we were there. Of course, the thing that I adore are the four big horses that they have out there, but on the other hand we raise show horses now in Oregon.

Lage: Were there horses on your father's farm?

T. Goeld: Oh, yes.

Lage: Do you recall when he switched over to mechanized farming? Was it while you were still living there?

V. Goeld: They had horses when I was courting her.

T. Goeld: Annie had to drive to Centerville to high school, and the horse she had was very frisky. It was a very clever horse, but not for a girl going to school.

V. Goeld: We married in '27. I think in '24 when I was chasing around after you they had horse there. In fact, I know they had them there in 1924.

T. Goeld: Oh, yes, they always had work horses there, a black team.

V. Goeld: You see they cultivated between the rows, and you can't put a tractor doing that. So they still had horses there, even in 1927, I'd say.

High Taxes and the Sale of the Ranch

Lage: When was the Logan farm sold?

V. Goeld: Well, I'll tell you. That was the tragedy of a lifetime, and of course, the incoming of Ganns proposition 13 is what saved us. The youngest brother, Ralph, who is now a retired stockman in Idaho, at the end there was working and making his living on the ranch there. Just before he gave it up, the taxes got so high that the girls, and everybody in the Logan family, had to contribute to paying his taxes the last year.

V. Goold: You take a hundred acres of valuable land, and the taxes were so high that no one could afford them. But you see, the politicians don't see that. So the subdividers came in, and they got what was then a fair price for the land, and they just sold the ranch.

[shows photographs of ranch house, Presbyterian church in Centerville] So there are many fond memories that have disappeared.

Remembering "Pa"

T. Goold: There were twelve raised in that house. I don't know how they did it. Of course, my mother had help all the time, but even so.

Lage: Did your father take a role in disciplining the children?

T. Goold: Oh, he did, and he was just a little tiny guy, but when Pa spoke everybody stepped.

V. Goold: He had two words. All he ever said was, "Boys."

T. Goold: Yes, and that meant the girls too.

Lage: So he had pretty good order. You have to, with twelve children.

V. Goold: When you take a family that size, you have to have organization that would knock some of these businessmen cock-eyed. I don't know how they did it.

T. Goold: But he was a good father.*

* James Logan was a long-time school board member of the Washington Union High School District. The James Logan High School in Union City is named after him.

TAPE GUIDE -- Tillie Logan Goeld

Date of Interview: May 14, 1986
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THE PATTERSON FAMILY AND RANCH:
SOUTHERN ALAMEDA COUNTY IN TRANSITION

Wallace McKeown

A Neighboring Farmer Recalls the Early Days

An Interview Conducted by
Donald Patterson
in 1975

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INTERVIEW HISTORY — Wallace McKeown

Wally McKeown arrived in Washington Township as a young boy in 1890 and lived for more than eighty-five years on his farm just north of the Patterson Ranch. He was interviewed by Donald Patterson on October 21, 1975, and tapes of their conversation were placed in the Society of California Pioneers. When this oral history project on the Patterson family and ranch was initiated, the Society granted permission for us to transcribe the McKeown interview, as well as Donald Patterson's interview of his cousin, William Volmer, and a tape-recorded narrative and interview of Donald Patterson. The latter two interviews are included in the third volume focusing on the Patterson family.

McKeown was in his nineties when Donald Patterson interviewed him in the McKeown home. He had some difficulty hearing, and some of his recollections needed confirmation or prompting by his sister, Nancy (identified as Ms. McK. in the transcript), who lived with him and was present during the interview. But he had no trouble recalling boyhood encounters with Donald's grandfather and the ranch's founder, George Washington Patterson. And he created for us a sense of the landscape, the wildlife, and the inhabitants of the North Plain at the turn of the century.

Ann Lage
Project Director

September, 1988
Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library
University of California at Berkeley

Early Families on the Northern Flood Plain

[Date of Interview: October 21, 1975] ##

Patterson: Mr. Wally McKeown is with us, who knows probably more about the northern part of the flood plain than anybody that's left now. I think it's important that we record this information because I think it was a part of Washington Township which was somewhat isolated from the rest of the community in the early days. Would you say that's true, Wally, that not too many people got into this area early?

McKeown: In the early days, it wasn't [very populated]. But that was Washington Township.

Patterson: Well, what was it then?

McKeown: Well, when we came here, this was Washington Township, wasn't it? [Directed to Ms. McKeown, sister of Wally McKeown]

Ms. McK.: Yes.

McKeown: We came here the spring of 1890.

Patterson: 1890, oh, yes. Well, you probably, then, remember the Ryan family. Was the Ryan family still here on the Ryan mound when you were here?

McKeown: What family? [Having a hard time hearing]

Ms. McK.: Ryan. Ryan ranch, down here. You know, you've talked about it. The Ryan ranch, down below here. He doesn't remember.

McKeown: I can't hear.

Patterson: How about the Hahns? Was the Hahn family here, or had they left?

McKeown: I don't remember them.

Ms. McK.: Well, you remember the Ryans. I don't think they were here, then. But, you knew where they lived down here. You knew where the Ryan ranch was.

##This symbol indicates that a tape or segment of a tape has begun or ended. For a guide to the tapes see page 139.

McKeown: Oh, yes, the Ryans. There were two of those Ryans, and Simpson; he lived in back. You know where the mounds is, Indian mounds, over there? Well, that's where the Ryans lived. There were two homes there. And Simpson, he lived further over. A man by the name of Parish lived out there, and if you drive down that lane, and Simpson was right around the corner. They had an orchard in there.

Patterson: Were they on one of the mounds--the Simpsons?

McKeown: No. That's a flat. The Ryans was on the mound--two Ryan families. They lived further down.

Patterson: What did they do, did they farm?

McKeown: Oh, yes. They owned land on this side, too. I guess Mr. Patterson bought it later.

Patterson: Yes.

McKeown: Do you remember where the two big warehouses used to be?

Patterson: Oh, yes.

McKeown: Well, the Anderson family lived there. On this side, they owned about twenty acres or more. They had a pear orchard. Pretty near all them farmers--the whole country had orchards. Most of them had pears and apples. Some had cherry trees, but, this was wet country, you know, and the pears could stand the water.

Fire at Patterson Landing

McKeown: Anderson landing, and then there's Patterson's landing further down. You got three big warehouses in there. They used to raise a lot of cattle in them days, and used to store them warehouses full of hay. I remember one time, one Sunday afternoon, we was coming from church and one of the buildings was on fire.

Patterson: Oh?

McKeown: They were plumb-full of hay, clear up into the tie beams, you know, they were big warehouses. And a Chinaman--I guess there was a space about ten feet in the end, and he had some onions stored in there--he either dropped a cigarette in it, or--when he was coming home. And it burned up. The thing was on fire

McKeown: about four o'clock in the afternoon. There was nothing to it, but--except that it burned. I remember your grandfather coming down with Pete McCaughlin, do you remember him?

Patterson: I don't believe so, no.

McKeown: Ahead of your time, I guess.

Patterson: Yes, I think so.

McKeown: He was a foreman. He came down with your grandfather--Mr. Patterson, anyhow--that was your father, wasn't he?

Patterson: Grandfather.

McKeown: Oh, he was your grandpa. Oh, that's right. Bill Patterson was your father. And he came down there, and looked at it--the fire--turned around and went home. He said it was no use. There was a big slough alongside--. The boats used to come up and load the--haul hay into South San Francisco. South San Francisco was the big cattle market, and they used to raise all the hay. Had his own hay press and threshing machine. And he had men living on the ranch over there. And he had that big Livermore ranch, too, you know. He had cattle. His line was cattle; he wasn't much of a farmer.

Farming in Wetlands--Chinese Farmers

McKeown: Down along the lower end, water springs flowing all year round, and a lot of Chinese lived in there. They brought Chinese here to work on the railroad in the early days. And then they settled down. But, all they raised was onions and garlic. Some raised a few vegetables for themselves, but their main crop was onions and garlic. A few raised maybe a few tomatoes, melons, or squash, or something like that. And they finally faded away when the water level in the ground began to drop down.

They hired somebody to come with a team of horses and plow up three or four or five acres and harrow it down and work it, and they would plant the onions. You didn't have to irrigate in them days. Plenty of moisture. If you didn't clean the ditch, the whole place would be a swamp. Even on our back place here, too, the same way. Used to go down there, and clean all the ditches. All summer long, running fresh water out. Never think of irrigating. Of course, they only raised a single crop a year or two, not like they do today.

Patterson: That's right. It was too wet in the wintertime.

McKeown: Oh, yes, it was too wet. [Everyone laughs] The water was all around this house, once or twice. Do you know where Alder Avenue is this side of Centerville?

Patterson: Yes.

McKeown: Well, I've seen that road covered with water, clean to the pump station this side of Mt. Eden. Not a foot of water. Not a foot of land under the water. Another fellow and I drove carts with high wheels—we drove all the way through it. There was hardly any bridges, there was sloughs—water running—. Had a big slough right back here. You remember seeing the slough?

Patterson: Yes.

McKeown: There was a bridge over here.

Patterson: Yes, that's right. I never saw this one that went through here. I've seen this one [indicates on a map or photo or similar type of drawing], but not this old one.

I guess I can remember it. Yes, on this road here, there was a bridge that went over.

McKeown: It was about a hundred feet long.

Patterson: Yes. Wally, was this road from Alvarado to Newark--was that an old road? Was that always there?

McKeown: That road was there when we came here.

Patterson: It was. Well, how did you get through in wintertime? Wasn't there so much water you couldn't go through it?

McKeown: Well, when the floods went down, you could drive through it. There was a few bridges on it. Three or four bridges between here and Alvarado. This one down here was about three times bigger than what it is now. And there's one further down--two further down around the corner. Then, of course, if you couldn't drive through, you stayed home. [Everyone laughs]

Recalling George Washington Patterson

Patterson: Wally, can you tell us a little about my grandfather? You see, I never knew him.

McKeown: Well, I used to come from Alviso school—I was about six or seven years old—and he used to drive around in his horse and cart. And he'd always pick me up and give me a ride home if he happened to be along that time of the afternoon. I can remember one time, be coming across the railroad track, you know, up here by the crossing. Well, a man lived on this side named John Freitas and he had a big bunch of hogs. And they were all over on Mr. Patterson's side of the road, below the track. A Scotsman had corn planted in there. You know, field corn. And the hog was in there, I guess, and he offered me five dollars if I could drive one of them pigs over to his house.

I told him if I could get a rope on his foot, I could drive him. "Oh, no," he says, "you've got to drive them." [laughter] They had about twenty-five, thirty hogs in there. And Mr. Patterson never had a hog on the place where he lived. After he passed away, then a fellow (I forget his name) brought two or three of these red pigs in there. I can remember that's the first pigs that he kept on the place. He didn't like hogs, for some reason.

Patterson: [laughs] What kind of a man was he?

McKeown: Well, he was a quiet guy. He didn't follow the saloons, I'll tell you that much. Well, he was nice to talk to. He always gave me a ride, if I happened to be coming home from school. He'd pass me, pick me up, and give me a ride, but not every day, of course. But he used to drive around. He used to have cattle all down through in this area. He had his own threshing machine, his own hay press, and he used to have this volunteer rye grass. Sometimes, grass be about that high, and he had his hay press. He'd cut it and bale it and store it down in these big warehouses they had down there. Then, he was half-owner of the boat—some other guy with him—was a captain on the boat. They owned that sailboat together. They used to come in, load that hay, and take it to South San Francisco.

Patterson: Do you remember the name of the boat?

McKeown: No, I don't remember the name. But, I don't know if it even had a name or not. In them days, them old boats—they never named them. I never seen the name on the side. Later on, when the salt companies come in, then they had names on the boats. But they were power-driven. But, later they put, on this boat, when Mr. Patterson was still living—the man, the partner, they put side wheels on it—they ran it with a gasoline engine for a few years then.

Patterson: Oh, yes. This I didn't know. So, they went from the sail, then, to power while they were still using the Patterson landing here.

McKeown: Yes, they used it. Well, the headquarters, I guess, were down in South San Francisco (where they kept the boat), but see, they could come in on one tide, on the one that was power-driven, and load it up and get it out in the same tide. But, if they sailed it in, he'd have to come in on the flood tide, and then load it up later.

Transition from Cattle Ranching to Farming

Patterson: Right, right. When did they stop shipping by water, do you know?

McKeown: Oh, yes. They quit grazing the cattle, you know. That's quite a few years ago when they quit the cattle business.

Patterson: I wonder why they quit the cattle business. Do you know?

McKeown: It was a losing business. I think Mr. Patterson that passed away--Henry Patterson was your uncle, wasn't he?

Patterson: Yes.

McKeown: Well, when they took over--then they went to farming vegetables. The cattle business, he couldn't make it pay in this area, for some reason. He used to ship the hay to South San Francisco. But a bunch of Chinamen used to farm down along where the willows used to grow down there. They used to farm--there were a whole lot of them--there must--at least twenty Chinese. They built their own houses. There was one Chinaman [who] had a team of horses. He lived down here in what they called Adderson ranch. He went down this other way to get in there [indicates on a map], and he was the only Chinaman had any horses. He had a team, and one day he hit one of the horses with a piece of his stick, and the horse gave him a kick and that was the end of the Chinaman.

Patterson: Oh, really? Killed him?

McKeown: Caught him right in the breast. The cattle business began to--well, I guess the taxes got a little too high, and they couldn't make it pay, so they must have farmed vegetables. Put in their wells, and later on--

Patterson: Yes. Was that when they started raising tomatoes?

McKeown: Yes, the tomato started in about that time. They used to raise a lot of sugar beets, too.

Patterson: Yes. Well, Wally, in the early days, as far back as you can remember, didn't they raise a lot of barley and a lot of wheat? Do you remember that?

McKeown: Oh, yes. This is the grain country, yes. You know what they used to call the Big Field? That used to be grain, year after year.

Patterson: Now, that's where the wild geese used to come in, too, didn't they?

McKeown: Yes, they'd land out in them Big Field. Well, pretty near every farmer had to raise hay if he owned horses. You see, you didn't have tractors in them days. I remember Mr. Patterson bringing some cattle from Mexico. You talk about wild cattle—with big horns about that wide. They'd never seen a white man on foot. You go in there, why, it would circle right around you. On horseback—they were used to that. But, a person walked across a field, there—. I seen them one time. I took a walk out a little ways. They all come running in a big half-circle. I had the fence behind me and I got out of there in a hurry.

Patterson: Wally, this was all fenced, then, for the cattle. They didn't run—they were within fences, yes.

McKeown: They were wooden fences, too.

Patterson: They were wooden fences, not barbed wire.

McKeown: Didn't have barbed wire. Might be a little bit later on because these fences were all wood.

Patterson: Oh, yes. My, that must have taken a lot of lumber.

McKeown: Oh, well, there were redwood posts—. Lumber didn't cost like it is today. Go over to San Mateo County or Redwood City over there, buy a redwood post—could get them for pretty near nothing. Used to cut them redwood trees down and they'd split them by hand—they weren't sawed. Split posts, and they'd last a long time in the ground. And they used to bring the pine boards in—. The railroad used to haul them into the stations, and then they'd go and get them out of the station.

There was a big difference in the farming in them days than it is today. Could get a man for a dollar a day, and beard him. Try and get one today for that. [laughter]

Patterson: That's right. And those fellows worked hard, too.

McKeown: Well, when they lived on the place, they worked--a lot of places they worked for a dollar a day and board. And there were other times when they got their bearding and done their chores--no pay.

Patterson: Oh, yes. When there was no work to do in the fields--

McKeown: No field work, and they used to do the chores, and take care of the horses. We used to have about ten or twelve horses here when we first came here. It's all field work with horses.

McKeown Family Roots

Patterson: Wally, where did you live before you came here?

McKeown: In San Mateo County. You know where Half Moon Bay is? Somebody told me the other day that the old house that we lived in is still standing.

Patterson: Really? When did your family go to San Mateo County?

McKeown: We came here in the spring of 1890.

Patterson: But, how about San Mateo County?

McKeown: Oh, I don't remember. Come before my time, I know that. Uncle Joe lived here, then, didn't he, when he came over there?

Ms. McK.: Yes, our uncle lived here. He had the carriage shop in Alvarado. We have a picture of that upstairs.

McKeown: He made wagons and carriages. Had a blacksmith shop. He owned his shop.

Ms. McK.: Oh, yes, he owned that corner, there. And then later, it was a blacksmith shop. And then, of course, he sold out. Well, he passed away--he died in 1890, or 1899. We lived over at Half Moon Bay, and then, of course, in those days, there wasn't any automobiles. They had to go in a horse and wagon. And my uncle died very suddenly. He had pneumonia--got cold and he died rather sudden. And then, of course, my father was the only relative out here that he had. And so, he had to come over here and tend to the place.

Patterson: That's interesting. I didn't know this. That's why you came over here, then.

McKeown: We came here in the spring of 1890.

- Ms. McK.: Of course, he'd have to come clear around by Alvis--
- McKeown: In the old spring wagon.
- Patterson: Yes. Well, now, who owned this place before you did? Do you remember who you got it from?
- Ms. McK.: Yes, there are old deeds upstairs that we have--I forget--
- McKeown: Who lived here before we came here? [Patterson and Ms. McKeown answer "Yes" in unison] Well, Uncle Joe owned it.
- Ms. McK.: Yes, but who owned it before that?
- McKeown: I don't know.
- Ms. McK.: The old deeds are upstairs.
- McKeown: I would just take the old deeds and trace it back. Might have known it one time, but I forget, anyhow.
- Patterson: Oh, yes. Well, now, did you build this house, or--?
- Ms. McK.: Oh, yes, we built this house. The other old house was right here, [indicates on a map or photo] just to this side of the driveway, there, of the old house. And then, in 1898, we built this house. And, of course, we lived in that one until this was built.
- McKeown: We built this in 1898, wasn't it?
- Ms. McK.: Yes. O.J. Emory built it.
- Patterson: Yes, he built a lot of houses.
- Ms. McK.: Yes. He was a carpenter then. He built this house. And, of course, we lived in the old house until this was finished. Then, when this was finished, we moved that old one out into the middle of the yard, there, and, oh, it was there for about twenty years, I guess. And then, when they started to raise potatoes and they needed the sheds to put potatoes in for the winter ('till they sorted them out)--then they took that one down.
- McKeown: That house was built, I guess, in around 1850 or 1849.
- Ms. McK.: Something like that. Well, that old pear tree that's standing there is over a hundred years old. It was here before we ever came here.

Ducks and Geese in the Marshes

Patterson: There must have been wonderful hunting in those days.

McKeown: You could knock down ducks with a stick—[and] wild geese.

Patterson: Really? All down through this marsh country, I suppose.

McKeown: I've seen the grain field down here. We used to plant a lot of grain in them days. Used to harvest in the spring. Ducks used to come in there by the thousands. Johnny Smerl, he worked here. When the ducks would get up, they'd hit the power line and Johnny would have three or four ducks to take home with him. [laughter]

Patterson: When did they start the duck clubs here?

McKeown: Well, I was pretty young. On the Briggs ranch—you know where the Briggs ranch was?—there was a livery across there, and them salt sloughs, and of course the spring was flowing all year round. And the duck season opened—I heard the shooting. I was about six or seven years old, I guess, along about that time. I heard the shooting. I went down there. A man by the name of Wills lived on the Briggs ranch, and I knew his boy (about the same age I was), and I went down there about three o'clock and Mr. Wills was out there with his boy and loading the ducks on a wagon. There were three guys shooting: one was attorney for the Southern Pacific in San Francisco, and I don't remember who the other two was. And they had about over three hundred ducks. Pretty near all mallard, and there's another breed in there—I can't think of the name right now.

Patterson: Widgeon? Teal?

McKeown: Widgeon, yes. There were widgeon by the thousands. There's not many now left. Lot of teal, and there was plenty of mallards. Mr. Wills took the ducks down to Newark—the train stopped at Newark—and he went to San Francisco.

Patterson: Would this have been the Wills family, Dr. Wills?

Ms. McK.: No. It was another Wills. William Wills was a--no, it wasn't any relation to Dr. Wills.

Patterson: Oh, yes. Did you ever know Briggs?

McKeown: Yes, I know that Briggs had—. I remember that there was one of them--his son's a minister, wasn't he? I met him one time (I was out hunting). I come up along the--Patterson owned this side—. And they had a levy across, between Mr. Patterson and

McKeown: Briggs' ranch. In other words, the spring was down by the hills and the water used to run out--he was a minister. I went over and was talking to him for a while. And he was sitting there--he wasn't hunting. The hunters had went home. This was in the afternoon. It wasn't on Sunday--it was a weekday. And he was talking to me for a while. He told me that nobody could shoot on his place, as long as them fellows had his right. And he says, "Watch it." When he wasn't around there--it was on a weekday, I think it was a Saturday--I took a walk down there, and I was tired of hunting about that time. And he was sitting in the levees, talking to me, and he didn't allow nobody to hunt in there.

Neighboring Families

Patterson: Wally, did you know the Parish family? Were they here?

McKeown: [In unison with Ms. McKeown] Oh, yes.

Patterson: How many were there, and how many children?

Ms. McK.: There was three. There was Carrie Parish--she was the oldest. She was a teacher. She taught up here in Alviso. And then there was Haddie, and then Ella. Those were the three girls, that's all that was--

Patterson: Now, when did they leave, do you know?

Ms. McK.: Oh, they left about [hesitates], it must be, about sixty years ago--fifty years ago, anyhow.

Patterson: That would be about 1910 or 1915, somewhere in there, yes.

Ms. McK.: Yes.

Patterson: Now, do you remember who lived across from the Parish house? The Parishes lived on the righthand side, and then there was a house on the left, right across from them.

McKeown: Charlie Bucardi.

Patterson: Right. Now, you don't know who lived there before. It's a very old house.

McKeown: That's an old, old house. Bucardi, he started a dairy. He had a dairy in there behind the back, and he lived there. And out in the big field, further out, there was another big home. I used to know the name of the person that lived in it.

Patterson: Was that Braum [er Brown]? That wasn't Ernest--

Ms. McK.: No. Are you talking about Zwissig?

McKeown: No. Long before the Zwissigs.

Ms. McK.: I don't know who lived there.

Patterson: I wonder who that would be.

McKeown: It was a two-story building. They tore it down later on. I don't know whether they owned the land or rented from Mr. Patterson, or not.

Patterson: Where would this be, Wally?

McKeown: Well, if you go down--you know the Patterson landing--it's just a little ways out in that field there. You come in from the county road into the house into a real big building, a two-story building.

Patterson: Isn't this interesting? This I didn't know. I have no idea who that--

McKeown: I know their name, but I can't--

Patterson: That wasn't the old Simpson--?

McKeown: No, Simpson lived around the back, further down. You went down the lane and turned off to the--

Patterson: Yes, that's right. Where the foreman's house is now. Yes, I know where that was. But this other one, I have no idea who that could be, no. Isn't that interesting, I'd like to know, too, because--

Ms. McK.: It wasn't Andy Ross's brother, was it?

McKeown: No. Andy Ross lived down, right across from the Parishes.

Patterson: Ah! Yes. It was the Ross family, then, who lived (I think) in the old house which is still there, and that I'm trying to identify. I think that's right, yes.

McKeown: Bucardi lived in there later on.

Patterson: Right, that's correct. I've been trying to establish that, and that's the old Ross house, there. Was there ever a small school in this area, in the early days? Do you remember anything about--?

Ms. McK.: Lincoln School.

Patterson: Yes, but that was further up, beyond our place. No other school in this area?

Ms. McK.: No, because when we came here, Alviso--

Patterson: Now, you went to the Alviso school, which was up here.

Ms. McK.: It's still there.

Patterson: You never went to the Lincoln School.

Ms. McK.: You went to which school? Lincoln?

Patterson: Yes, I went to the Lincoln School.

McKeown: Alviso School [was] up there. Lincoln School was over here, if you went to Newark. [indicates on a map]

Ms. McK.: Well, that's where Donald went, didn't you?

Patterson: Yes. You spoke of the springs down here, and running water, in the early days. There was, what, springs in the willows, or were they--?

Ms. McK.: Everywhere. They were all down in the lower part of--

McKeown: All of the low ground. You know where Mr. Patterson's home was?

Patterson: Yes.

McKeown: Well, there was springs pretty close to his home. And the ditch come all the way down--you know where the Browns lived?--across the road, there, and followed on out to the bay. The stream of water out there, you could--when they get down in this area--you could irrigate quite a few thousand acres.

Patterson: Really? What would you think, was it about what one of our wells pumps now, or was it more than that?

McKeown: Springs flowing--fresh water--. All these Chinese, when they farmed down there, they used to make ditches in the ground which formed into the main ditches; without, otherwise, the ground would be a swamp. They never had to irrigate. If a man wanted to dig a well, he didn't even, on our ranch way down here about a half a mile down--. Chinese would want to live here would dig a hole in the ground, and do it out about ten feet, and that's all the well they'd dig. That's all the well they needed.

Patterson: And it would just flow?

McKeown: Water used to fill right up. And it used to flow all--the back end of the ranch--if we didn't clean the watercress off the ditch in the summertime, the whole big place was a swamp.

Patterson: What did you raise down here, Wally? What crops did you raise?

McKeown: Well, they used to raise sugar beets, and grain, potatoes--

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Tales of Deer on the Patterson Ranch

Patterson: You say that my grandfather didn't believe in hunting. I wonder why that was.

McKeown: I don't know. He didn't allow no hunting.

Patterson: Did he ever hunt, himself?

McKeown: Not that I know of. He was pretty well along in years, when we came here, too. I know he told me--I was a kid coming home from school--he told me then that he didn't allow any hunting on the place. Of course, he had the deer park, and he had pretty close to a fifty-acre park in there.

Patterson: As much as that? Yes, I guess it was. I didn't realize it was that big.

McKeown: Oh, yes, and he had about twenty-five to thirty deer. And I don't know if he shot any, or not. I know your dad shot one, one time. Somebody gave him a little, young deer and tied him behind the ranch house there. Had a Chinese cook there, and the deer he kept pretty well along--couple, three years--he got big horns on, and they had a vegetable garden. The Chinese had his rice--you remember where the ranch house was?--well, there was a garden in there, and they put the deer in there. The Chinaman come out to get something under the tree--the deer got him down. Jumped on him and pulled him down. Do you remember Andy Carr that used to work there?

Patterson: I think so--Andy, yes, yes, I do.

McKeown: Well, he was kind of a choreman at that time, and he came out, and got ahold of the deer and pulled him off of--Chinaman run into the house and come out with his pistol--he was going to shoot him. And he wouldn't let him. [Patterson laughs] And then, later on, they turned him into the deer park. And some fellow come in there one day--old man getting some wood--and deer had him down. They come and get him in the front feet, and

McKeown: they got him by the horns, until they could hold him. The deer, they cut you with their feet. That's what he was trying to do, and he got him by the horns, and he was hollering for help. And there was somebody working on the Patterson place, and he was a big, husky guy, and he come out there. And he got the deer, the fellow holding the deer, but I had to let him go. He was an old man from Centerville. And the deer got the other fellow down. [both laugh] And he was a big, husky guy. He was no shrimp. And Andy Carr heard the--the old man, when he went out, he told Andy Carr about it. Andy come out and got ahold of a stick about four feet long, about two inches in diameter, and he come out there and the deer went for him. And, of course, he cracked him on the side of the ribs, and pretty near caved his ribs in. The deer kept away from him. He wanted to go for him, and the other fellow got up and, later on, when you boys were able to get around, your dad shot the deer--afraid someday he'd get out, and then--hit somebody.

Patterson: And there would be trouble.

McKeown: It's funny. With all the deer in there, they wouldn't bother anybody. But that one, somebody gave it to him, and I guess he was a vicious little fellow when he gave him to him because the Chinese cook--he tackled him right out in the yard (had him in the garden, there). Chinaman had the six-shooter and he wanted to finish him--one for Andy Carr. Then, they finally turned the deer loose. They were running through the country for a little while, but they all beat it up to the foothills.

Patterson: Wally, there are quite a few deer down in the willows now.

McKeown: Now?

Patterson: Yes. There are about five or six of them. Did there used to be deer down here?

McKeown: Well, yes, they used to come down there. First deer I ever saw go down there--there was three of them--they were out here on the road, coming down the side of the road, and somebody stepping automobiles looking at them. And then they run around and went down--that's the first ones I seen go down there, but there was one year that, before they had a harvest--they was harvesting grain down there--Tony Cabral, do you remember him?

Patterson: Oh, very well, yes.

McKeown: Well, he went to farm Tony's barley--harvest it, rather--and he said that he counted thirteen deer go ahead of him as he went through the trees as he was harvesting. Nobody ever seemed to shoot them. There was one dead, there--somebody shot it and left it there. And, I know Tony Cabral was down there one time,

McKeown: and your Uncle Henry came along and saw this deer around--he had horns on, he said big, wide horns--and told Tony to go and get a rifle and shoot him. And Tony, he didn't want to do it. He says, well, he's afraid he might miss him. And nobody shot him. That's about the last one I've heard that brought him down, but now they coming back again.

Patterson: Coming back again--that's because they don't allow any shooting down there in the park, you see, and we don't allow any shooting, so they're coming back now, yes.

[tape is turned off and then on again]

McKeown: You can't blame the deer.

Patterson: No. And now that the country is grown up, this is the only part down here that's open, yes.

McKeown: Well, I know the Chinese over here (I think it's Chinese) raised some kind of plants, and he complain to the game warden about the deer (or to whoever had charge of the place) coming in and chomping these plants down, and the game warden come in and he shot some of the deer. They'd come in and trample these plants that he was growing there, and he had to get out. I think he was growing flowers.

Neighbors, Parties, Horseracing

Patterson: Wally, when you first came here, were there any houses north of here, or did you have to go clear into Alvarado before there were any houses? Were there any people living in the--?

McKeown: Well, the next ranch over--Buchanan ranch--John Buchanan family lived there. And down here, this side of Alvarado, there was two homes on the side of the road, and none on that side. Above the road, there was a few. Pretty near all open ranches, there.

Patterson: Oh, yes. Well, now when you were a boy, did they have parties here? Did you visit back and forth, and have parties, and things, or did everybody work so hard, there wasn't time?

McKeown: They had parties. You visited one another. Families used to visit neighbors--come and visit back and forth. Of course, in them days, you couldn't--old horse and buggy days, it would take you quite a while to get around--but you used to visit one another. We used to go to Alvarado--we knew pretty near everybody in Alvarado town--and off and on, here and there, we

- McKeown: knew quite a few of them. Buchanans lived there, and then next to them was Andrew Carr. And then James Logan--did you ever know James Logan?*
- Patterson: Yes.
- McKeown: You knew young Jimmy--
- Patterson: Young--yes.
- McKeown: Well, his father lived over there. This James Logan was living on this ranch when we came here--spring of 1890--that's Jimmy's father. My uncle, I guess, sent back to Ireland for him--bring him out here. He worked on the ranch here. He left here and got married to one of the Carter girls and moved out and lived over there for--till the time he got killed in that automobile accident. I think he had heart trouble and he fainted and Jack Whipple was with him--do you remember the time he got killed?
- Patterson: I really don't, but I remember--we know Jack Whipple, yes.
- McKeown: Well, Jack got killed, and so did Mr. Logan.
- Patterson: Oh, that's right, yes. I had forgotten that, yes.
- McKeown: Met head-on in an automobile. Let's see--it was Logan [who] was driving, and I guess when he went forward on the wheel, Whipple couldn't get ahold of it to turn it around, and they met head-on. And, of course, they couldn't do nothing to him, but it's one of them unavoidable accidents.
- Patterson: Did you ever know Andrew Patterson?
- McKeown: He lived over by Decoto, didn't he?
- Patterson: Yes, that's right. Did you know him?
- McKeown: I didn't know him personally, but I know him by sight. I had seen him when I was pretty young. He lived over there near Decoto.
- Patterson: Yes. He was my grandfather's brother. Well, now, he was married, wasn't he? Do you know, do you remember? Did he have a family?

*See interview with James Logan's daughter, Tillie Logan Gould, in this volume.

McKeown: I don't remember that, no. I know I knew his name, and I seen him, and of course I never was acquainted with him. But, I used to meet him in town—in Alvarado—when he come to town. But, he owned, what they called, quite a few acres in there, back above the sugar mill on the road going from Alvarado to Decoto.

Patterson: That's right. And he used to raise racehorses. Yes, he had a track there, and raised racehorses.

McKeown: Yes, I remember something about that, too, but not too much. We used to have horseraces around here at one time, up around the other side of Centerville. Somebody, a couple of landowners, bought a few racehorses but they were sulky, not saddle horses. They used to—just competition among themselves. There were a few there in Irvington and some at Decoto—different ones. You could—. A lot of guys used to have a track. Made a little grandstand between Centerville and Irvington one side of the road, there. And they had racing track there—gets a good half a mile long. It was kind of a double track. One was longer. And they used to have them little two cart wheels, you know, and them raced in there, and they used to bet. Guys stand up there, and if you wanted to make a bet, go up there and make a bet with them. [Patterson laughs] There's no law against that.

Patterson: Did you know the Browns, then?

McKeown: Over here?

Patterson: Yes.

McKeown: Oh, yes, I knew Frank Brown and Bart. Some of the younger ones—I remember them. Gordis Brown, he stuck around--

Patterson: He's in Hayward, now. Yes. I don't see him anymore, I used to see him.

McKeown: I haven't seen him for a long time. Well, he was in some kind of a mix-up in the land deals, somebody told me.

Patterson: Yes, I think so.

McKeown: I don't know just how it happened, but he still owns the place over here, or not?

Patterson: Yes, he does. We bought part of it, just recently.

[tape turned off and then on again]

McKeown: --that was his father, wasn't it?

Patterson: I don't think so. Bart Brown was his father's brother.

McKeown: There was Frank Brown, and Bart.

Patterson: Yes. Frank was the father of the boys here, yes. That's an old ranch, there, that's been there--you remember the little station up there, Arden Station? It's gone now, but that was--

McKeown: Bart Brown used to go to Alvarado, take a few drinks. He could drive the automobile better when he was under the influence of liquor than when he was sober.

Patterson: [laughs]

McKeown: He was careful, very careful when he drove. I remember going down to Alvarado, he used to go to the old bar--the special bar--Merel Lagers [?] had the bar, there. And he used to go in and have a few drinks, and he went home, and never got in an accident.

Patterson: Well, that's a good way to be.

McKeown: Most of the time guys get a few drinks they can't even see where they're going. No, he was very careful--never got in an accident of any kind.

Patterson: [laughing]

McKeown: Yes, you could go in, get a drink for a dime, but try to do it today. Drinks were all of a dime at one time. In Alvarado, you could buy a beer for a nickel--and then, they'd give you, they had a counter there, you could take a sandwich. It's always a dime, no drinks less than a dime. Only soft drinks, you know, not beer, or whiskey or wine--they're all a dime.

Patterson: Did they charge you for the food, or did you just get the food?

McKeown: Oh, they had a little corner there with sandwiches on it. Some fellows would take two or three sandwiches, but of course, they'd spend quite a few dimes, though, to do it.

Looking at Records of Land Sales in the 1870s and 1880s

Patterson: What is this, Nancy?

Ms. McK.: I think, well, I'll show you that later. I think--[to herself] Is there one there--Washman?

Patterson: Oh, these are the deeds.

Ms. McK.: Yes. Now, Washman owned this place--

Patterson: [reading] John Welch to William Killday, in 1878. Now, who were those people?

Ms. McK.: [laughing] I wouldn't know. [with McKeown] Before our time.

Patterson: Well, now here's a James McKeown to Edward Sauls.

Ms. McK.: Well, that's a piece he bought from Ed Sauls.

Patterson: I see. The Sauls family were old friends of ours. They were in the grain business. This was in 1899. Now here's one, 1884, John Campbell to Joseph and James McKeown.

Ms. McK.: Yes. That's the old Campbell house. That's the one near Halls Station.

McKeown: Still stands there yet.

Patterson: That was 1884. Well, now, this is interesting. Joseph McKeown to George W. Patterson in 1877. Which piece was that? Would you suppose that--?

McKeown: That's a little before our time.

Patterson: I don't know what, the--

Ms. McK.: What's the name? Was it Patterson, Andy Patterson?

Patterson: No, this is George. That's my grandfather. So, he apparently bought a piece from your uncle.

Ms. McK.: Yes.

Patterson: Now, let's see what this one is. Now, this is an early one: Joseph McKeown to William S. Worsham?

Ms. McK.: Washam, yes. [mispronouncing the name]

Patterson: I wonder which piece that would be.

Person in background: Do you want me to give you a description on the deed?

Patterson: Yes, it would, but it's awfully hard to read it--you have to really have a map out in front of you to--

Ms. McK.: Well, Washman [probably means Worsham] owned this place, once.

Patterson: This was 1877.

Ms. McK.: Well, because I remember my mother talking about Washam-- Washman, Washam--how do you spell it?

Patterson: W-O-R-S-H-A-M. Now, here is an even earlier one: William Wershham to Michael Cashman, 1874. So that, apparently, was involved. Now let's see here--Stokes to John Welch--oh, well, this is something else. This is the release of a mortgage. And here is, again, Cashman to Wershham. So, apparently, this was 1874. And here is, well, this is between the family, apparently: John Welch to Katherine Welch, perhaps his wife, and that's 1879. And, here we are, back to the 1877, when it was Wershham to Joseph McKeown. So this is where they get it, yes. Very interesting.

Ms. McK.: And this is Assemblyman, and I think they sign their own name after their--and they say you're an Assemblyman of California, or something. That's old, I know that.

Patterson: Let me take a look now. I'm going to turn this off.

[tape turned off]

All right, I'm starting the recording again. I was going to ask you whether you have other documents or letters or maps or anything of the early days, here, or--? I wondered whether, particularly your uncle, did he leave papers?

Ms. McK.: Well, if he did, he left papers, but when they moved, I guess that, you know, they didn't think of keeping them in those days. I don't think there's very many. I mean, I don't have any more than--

Patterson: --than just these. Oh, yes. I'm always interested because these things are so valuable, historically. They should be taken care of--we're talking about the old records and letters and papers--people throw them away, you know, they don't keep them. But it would be so valuable and interesting if they had been kept.

Ms. McK.: I know--

McKeown: My uncle, he used to live in Alvarado most of the time. I don't know if he lived out here at the old house--Uncle Joe never lived out here, did he?

Ms. McK.: No.

McKeown: He boarded in Richmond, didn't he?

Ms. McK.: Yes, he boarded in Richmond, then he boarded in Alvarado, there.

McKeown: Street back of the hall, wasn't it?

Ms. McK.: Yes.

McKeown: He used to board there.

Ms. McK.: Liston House. Mrs. Randy Griffen's father was a Liston. She lives in Irvington, you know.

McKeown: He boarded in different places.

Ms. McK.: Yes, he boarded in Alvarado--lived in Alvarado. He wasn't married, see, he never was married. So he just lived in hotels there, and Liston House is where he lived most of the time. And, this place, when he bought this, it was for the help here. Jim Logan stayed here before he got married.

McKeown: Jimmy, there was Bob Conner, and somebody else--there was three old-timers living with him.

Ms. McK.: Yes. I don't remember hearing about who cooked for them. Probably, they had a Chinese cook, I don't know.

McKeown: Yes, he used to have a Chinese cook.

Ms. McK.: But this was a boarding house--but my uncle never lived here; he lived and stayed in Alvarado.

Patterson: Because he would have had some very interesting papers and documents, if he was up at Sacramento, you see--just lost, I suppose, yes. Do you see any of the early family people, now, here?

Ms. McK.: Well, the only one is Mrs. Griffen, in Irvington. And most of the older ones are gone.

Floods, Artesian Wells, and Reclaiming the Marshlands

Patterson: Yes, I guess that's right. You know, I'm beginning to get to the older generation, too. [laughter] I can remember back now to the big flood of 1911. Remember when this whole country went under water?

Ms. McK.: Oh, yes.

Patterson: That big flood. [laughs] My father put me in one of these big washtubs, and put his hip boots on, and pulled me from our old

Patterson: house to my grandfather's house, there--remember, it was all water. [more laughter]

Ms. McK.: Oh, yes. People that usually go along the road up there would look down here, and of course, it was all water--that's all it was. Just wondering how you ever lived down here.

Patterson: Well, it was great, because that's what made this land such rich farming. And we didn't have to irrigate in the summertime.

Ms. McK.: And then your uncle bought that land clear up to the creek, and made this ditch down here before this canal. And that brought all the sediment and made that land down there.

Patterson: That's right. It reclaimed a lot of this old marshland here, yes.

McKeown: When we came here, [the] artesian well in the yard--I think it was a hundred and eighty feet deep they dug that well, I'm not too sure about that--I think it was. The well fell off [?] at night. Come back in the morning--the whole country was a lake. Broke through during the night.

There was an old guy that come along on the marsh road one day, long years later, and he said he was coming down, going to Newark on this lower road. When they get down here about a little over a mile down, the whole country was a big lake--from out of that well.

Patterson: What did you do with those wells? Did you cap them to hold it, or did you just let it run?

McKeown: They put a cap on it. They put another casing down and put a swadge on it, and then they had this cap that stood about that [indicates] high. The faucet's on the side, and you opened that just like you would a valve, and a river of water used to come out. Didn't need no water in them days--plenty of water in the ground. And that well rusted away, and then they dug a new one. The one we dug on this side was a hundred and eighty feet deep--the one that was by the tank house. And it got salty--three hundred and eighty feet down, that was what the well is? [to Ms. McK.]

Ms. McK.: Three hundred, two hundred, I don't know, I forget.

Patterson: That's about it, yes. That would be about it in the three hundred--yes, our good wells are down around three hundred, three hundred and fifty, now, yes. How far away from here was the salt water--tide water--then? Did the tide water come up pretty far then?

- McKeown: Well, Don, if you were right at the corner, you know the little turn down there? It used to go out in the field about a thousand feet.
- Patterson: Oh, it did? The high tide.
- McKeown: Flood tide. Then they raised the road up, and there was this ditch that used to run--had to put a flood gate on that. And the tide come up, the flood gate would close, and the water on the ditch--had big, high banks on the side of the ditch, and, of course, between tides, then the water would go on out, and the tide would drop down. Then it filled up with the floods. Some of that ground down there by the lower corners filled up over six feet!
- Patterson: Really?
- McKeown: Yes, right around the corner. That's where the salt water used to back up. You could dig down there, now, but you would hit adobe when you go down about six feet. Filled in about six feet.
- Patterson: That's right. We forget that this area has been filled with sediment from these floods that were diverted. My father told me that there are places on our property where a fence was covered completely, and we put another fence on top of it. There was that much--
- McKeown: Well, it was the same way around this corner down there. Used to raise the posts up. Well, you take your uncle Henry. Time we had this bridge here, we wanted to level the slough off. And I asked him permission one day if he'd object to us putting a levee across this side to keep the water from running down--a little stream of water. He didn't object, but he wanted a main ditch to fill the lower end of his marsh, down there--fill that with sediment. That's why they turned the water down there, to wash the other side out, around the corner. You couldn't drive through that corner when the water was running down there. But we gave him permission to put the levee there. He was afraid there might be an objection, up above. Couldn't really object--they could complain about it down there at the corner, but you couldn't drive through. They used to close the road often, if a big flood was running.
- Patterson: I can remember that, yes.
- McKeown: And the flood was clean over to pretty near where you turn down to the Brown place, back up in there, all through them fields.

- Patterson: Yes, there aren't many people that realize that we're the ones that brought Alameda Creek down through here. It was done on purpose, yes, and that took it away from Alvarado, and of course, they were very happy that--
- McKeown: Used to flood the—I remember going up to the—near Alameda Creek—you owned some land up there.
- Patterson: Yes, clear up, we had a strip clear up to the--
- McKeown: We went up there and used horses and scraped the tanks to bring the water down.
- Patterson: Do you remember? They used to plow every fall to loosen the soil up, and then the flood would come through and it would wash about six inches out. And pretty soon, there was a channel there. That's very interesting. This was during my time. I can remember that.
- McKeown: Well, the water used to run across on the Harvey, F.C. Harvey [place]. And your uncle got permission to put a levee across. The Harveys gave him permission to put it across--water used to run on Harvey's place and the slough all the time, and he wanted to level it off, and he turned all the water down through here.
- Patterson: That's right.
- McKeown: And I remember going up there and digging the ground out with a team of horses—just loosening it up to wash out. Scrape it out, too, a little bit. Nobody objected to it. That made all that marsh country down there—filled that up. That used to be salt, all salt weeds in there where you're farming. There was a slough used to come in there. Of course, the Briggs ranch had a big levy alongside there, so the salt water wouldn't go back on his place. And after that, it filled up to Patterson's property, and he used to hold the water back on the Briggs' place. Of course, he had a ditch on the side that—I know that they were going to have trouble over that, one time, from one of Briggs' family. Not the old man Briggs, but one of his sons. He had two boys, two or three sons, I guess. Of course, when they filled up, the guy on this side of it used to—and the rain water would come down, but it couldn't drain out. But, then they dug a ditch right close to the foothills. They put a floodgate in so the salt water wouldn't back up into the Briggs ranch. And when the tide would go down, it drained the water out. And that was a good shooting ground in there, too.
- Patterson: Yes, I remember that. Not the first floodgate, but the second one they put in, I can remember. It was in the same place, yes.

More Stories About G.W. Patterson

- Patterson: Say, did you ever know James Hawley?
- Ms. McK.: Yes. They lived in—I was in Alvise school up there. The Hawleys, yes. John Beard married a Hawley.
- Patterson: Right.
- McKeown: Beard owned—was across the road, right?
- Ms. McK.: Right.
- Patterson: You see, and my grandmother was a Hawley.
- McKeown: Yes. You know when the railroad first come through and irrigate—it was the railroad [?]-your grandfather objected to them going through his property. When they hit the Jarvis Road, he put a man there in the daytime with a shotgun, and during the night, another one, to keep the railroad men from coming through. And your grandfather was off getting married. And they got the watchman drunk when they came through. [laughter] He married a Hawley, didn't he?
- Patterson: Yes.
- McKeown: While he was away on his honeymoon, and—
- Patterson: Oh, is that what happened? Well, I wondered how they, yes. Well, they tell me that my grandfather was a pretty hard man, that he was a pretty firm individual.
- McKeown: Well, he had a mind of his own, I'll tell you.
- Patterson: That's what I understand.
- Ms. McK.: He knew how to express it. [laughter]
- McKeown: I remember the time that Ed Clark—you remember Ed Clark? He used to be over here. Well, he was working for him. He went over to get a job there, and Mr. Patterson had a foreman there. And he went out, took Clark along, and told the foreman, the guy that was working for him, to take the fork (or whatever it was) and give it to this man. He was going to take over. You [referring to the foreman] come in and get your pay. And he was fired.
- Patterson: [laughs] Just like that?

McKeown: Yes, just like that. He had done something wrong that didn't suit your grandfather. That's what Clark told us. He had to work for him quite a few years as foreman. Of course, he did a lot of farming on his own, your grandfather did. Grand farm. He was a cattle man. He owned that Livermore ranch too. Had quite a few acres up there one time.

Patterson: We still have it.

McKeown: Still own it?

Patterson: Yes. Well, the cattle ranch up at Livermore, I've never been able to find out exactly what happened. But, I think that belonged to Andrew Patterson, and then he went broke. And I think my grandfather bailed him out, and I think that's the way he got [the property]--

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TAPE GUIDE -- William McKeown

Date of Interview: October 21, 1975

tape 1, side A

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tape 1, side B

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THE PATTERSON FAMILY AND RANCH:
SOUTHERN ALAMEDA COUNTY IN TRANSITION

Gene Williams

The L. S. Williams Company:
Farming in Southern Alameda County, 1930s-1983

An Interview Conducted by
Ann Lage
in 1986



GENE WILLIAMS

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INTERVIEW HISTORY — Gene Williams

Until the mid-fifties, most tenants of the Patterson Ranch farmed on small-scale units depending primarily on family members for labor. In 1956, shortly after Henry Patterson's death, Donald and William Patterson negotiated a lease of seventy-five acres of ranch land to L.S. Williams Company. The Williams Company not only farmed the land, but also packed the crops and shipped them by rail and, later, by truck primarily to the East. Over the next several years, most of the tenant-family farms on the Patterson Ranch were converted to the larger scale operations carried out by the L.S. Williams Company.

Gene Williams took over the L.S. Williams Company at the time of his father's death in 1956 and managed it until he sold the company to the Alameda family in 1983. His oral history is an account of the Williams operation from the 1930s, when Gene began working as a boy with his father, until the 1980s. Although a portion of the interview deals specifically with the operation on the Patterson Ranch and the relationship with the Patterson family, the scope is broader. Williams chronicles the changes in crops, equipment, marketing, farm labor, and pest control over a fifty-year period in southern Alameda County. His account is a significant contribution to the agricultural history of this area.

Williams was interviewed on September 30 and October 6, 1986, in his home in Pleasanton, California. Retired and living in a country club community, he was relaxed and reflective as he recalled the problems and challenges of his many years of farming. Following the interview, he reviewed the transcript of the interviews with only minor changes. The interview tapes are in The Bancroft Library.

Ann Lage
Interviewer/Editor
Project Director

September, 1988
The Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library
University of California at Berkeley

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

(Please print or write clearly)

Your full name STANFORD Eugene WILLIAMS

Date of birth Feb. 7, 1925 Place of birth ATLANTIC, IOWA

Father's full name LELAND STANFORD WILLIAMS

Birthplace PASADENA, CALIFORNIA

Occupation FARMER

Mother's full name ESTELLA (OSTRANDER) WILLIAMS

Birthplace GLENWOOD, IOWA

Occupation Registered Nurse, Housewife

Where did you grow up? IRVINGTON (FREMONT) CALIFORNIA

Present community PLEASANTON, CALIFORNIA

Education Local schools - Attended U.C. Berkeley - AA.

Degree

Occupation(s) FARMER

Special interests or activities Golf - Photography - Philately

I THE WILLIAMS FAMILY -- GROWERS AND SHIPPERS

Family Farming in Iowa and Washington Township

[Interview 1: September 30, 1986]##

Lage: Let's begin, Mr. Williams, with your family background. Tell me about where you were born and raised, and something about your parents, and so forth.

Williams: Okay. I was born in Atlantic, Iowa, in 1925 and moved out here with my family in 1928. My father was farming in Iowa, and he was induced to come to California by his three brothers who were farming in the Centerville area, now a part of Fremont.

Lage: I see. Had they been there for a while?

Williams: They had been there since the early twenties, I'd say--maybe the late teens. Right after the war. Only one of them was in World War I, but he survived it and came to Fremont. So there were three brothers in the Centerville area, and they talked my father into leaving Iowa, where it was very hard, and coming to California in February 1928. He got here on Groundhog Day, as I was told, February second.

So the four brothers operated a farming business in that area on leased land for a number of years until approximately 1938, let's say, when, as with many partnerships, there were problems, frictions between the brothers. Some felt that they were working harder than others, and so the four brothers split up, going various ways. My father stayed in the Centerville area, and one of his brothers stayed but had his own farming business there. The other two left--one went to Bakersfield, and one went to Edison, which is near Bakersfield.

##This symbol indicates that a tape or segment of a tape has begun or ended. For a guide to the tapes, see page 205.

Lage: Did they continue with farming?

Williams: Yes. The business was known up until 1938 as Williams Brothers, Ltd., and from 1938 on my father formed the L.S. Williams Company. His name was Leland Stanford Williams.

Lage: Leland Stanford? How did that happen?

Williams: That happened because he was born on or about the date of Leland Stanford's death on June 13, 1893, and his mother named him Leland Stanford. My first name is Stanford Eugene.

So my father farmed there until his death in February of 1956. As a boy I worked on the farm and in the packing house. We packed cauliflower. We loaded railroad cars in these days. It was all shipped to the East. And we packed green tomatoes in the summer, which ripened on the trip east. I worked in the packing house as a boy, started in 1936--that's when I started getting paid, when I was eleven. I'd worked prior to that, but it was just volunteer effort, you might say. I started getting paid fifteen cents an hour; for an eight-hour day I'd make \$1.20.

Lage: That was during the Depression.

Williams: In 1936, oh, yes. Times were very hard then, tough.

Lage: Do you remember that farming particularly suffered in this area during the Depression?

Williams: Was tougher?

Lage: Yes.

Williams: You mean tougher than other agricultural areas?

Lage: No, tougher than it had been, or than it was later.

Williams: No, I don't really have any recollection of anything but the Depression. The Depression really started about 1930, I guess, or right after the stock market crash, so all I really knew was Depression, and I didn't have anything to compare it with.

Lage: What about your mother's background?

Williams: Well, first of all I should say my father was born in California, in Pasadena, in 1893. What schooling he had was there, and he went to Iowa one summer with a boyhood friend whose aunt had a farm in Iowa, and they went back to work on the aunt's farm. My father liked it, apparently, and stayed. When this might have been, I'm not sure, but probably about 1915 or so.

Lage: That was a real reversal from the pattern of all the Iowa people that moved out this way.

Williams: Yes. So he went back there, he farmed, worked on this friend's aunt's farm, met my mother, who was a registered nurse. She had been educated in Council Bluffs, Iowa, and was working in Mercy Hospital there as a nurse. They met somehow, Council Bluffs being, I think, about fifty or seventy-five miles from this farm. They got married in 1917 and rented a farm--perhaps the same farm, I'm not sure, that he'd been working on--and were there until 1928.

But it was very difficult there, and lots of hard work, and no money, and my mother was just about burned out, I think, and my father too, after eleven years of that. So when the brothers were talking about California and coming back, they decided to do it. There were five of us--I have two sisters. One a year and a half younger and one a year and a half older; I was three, and one sister was four and a half, and the little sister was about a year and a half. We came out on the train to Oakland.

Lage: Your father's brothers all went into farming; was the grandfather in farming in Pasadena?

Williams: No, he worked for the Post Office department for a time, and he had just left--kind of a mystery--he just disappeared. Left the family, apparently. So my grandmother really raised their family. It was a good-sized family. There were four boys and three girls.

Lage: It's interesting that so many went into farming.

Williams: It is strange. Only one went to agricultural college, the one that went to Bakersfield in 1938. He'd gone through Davis. As for the others, my father had no college training, and I don't believe the other brother did either, the one that was a soldier in World War I. The other one, who's still alive, had perhaps some college education, but I don't think he had a degree. Why they all ended up in agriculture, I'm not sure.

Lage: Did your mother continue with nursing?

Williams: No, I don't think she did any nursing after she was married, actually. She got away from that.

Lage: She raised the family.

Williams: Yes, right, which was a full-time job. But she still had lots of jobs on the farm, with the chickens. There's just no end to the work.

Lage: So she did enter into the farm life.

Williams: Oh, yes.

Lage: Was it always leased land that your father worked, or did he own land also?

Williams: In Iowa it was all leased land. When he came out here, in 1928, it was all leased land, even up until 1943. In 1943 he bought his first land. Times had been so tough, up until World War II, that there wasn't much money in agriculture, just subsistence, really. So he had no opportunity to buy any land, but he did start buying a little land in 1943, and then he bought a few parcels.

Education, Military Service, and Entering the Family Business

Lage: How about your education?

Williams: Well, I went to local schools. We lived in Irvington, actually, which is also a part of Fremont. There were five towns, perhaps you know this.

Lage: Yes.

Williams: I went to grammar school there, and then I went to high school in Centerville, the old Washington High School. I graduated in 1942, and I had been working summers and weekends on the farm, or in the packing house, all this time, from 1936. When I got out of high school I didn't know what I was going to do. The war had just broken out in December, and I graduated in June of '42. Lots of young men were enlisting, and I was kind of young—I was only seventeen—and my mother convinced me I shouldn't be foolhardy. I worked on the farm for a while. I then, I think in early 1943, decided I'd go to Berkeley. My older sister was at Cal, and I decided I would go to Berkeley.

Lage: Even with this Leland Stanford background? [laughs]

Williams: Yes. I really wasn't that interested in Stanford University and didn't have the grades for it anyhow, I suppose. So I went to Berkeley and was going to class, but as I had had to register for the draft on my eighteenth birthday, I got a notice from my draft board saying I was to be drafted. My parents convinced me that I should come back and work on the farm, that I was needed there, and they could get a deferment for me—my father could—because agricultural workers were hard to come by. So I did that, with some misgivings, and this was in 1943.

Williams: I worked on the farm until early 1944, when I decided I just didn't want to do that anymore, and I was going to give up my deferment and go through the draft--"volunteer for the draft," as they said in those days. So I did, but it took a few months for all this to pass. Finally, in June of 1944, I went to Niles, got on a bus, and went to San Francisco, and I was shipped down to San Diego. By "volunteering" for the draft I was able to pick my branch of the service, instead of just going into the army. The army was the only outfit that was drafting, the navy was all volunteer. So I had some friends, and I decided to go into the navy, as an enlisted man. Which I did, and I was in the navy for two years. Then the war ended, and I was discharged.

Lage: Did you go overseas?

Williams: Never got out of California even. Ended up at Santa Cruz, of all places.

Lage: Could have been staying on the farm.

Williams: I could have, although I didn't feel good about that at all.

Lage: I can see that.

Williams: So I've never regretted it. If I'd been shot, or something, I probably would have regretted it, but it turned out okay for me. I was discharged, and practically everybody then was going back to school and had this GI bill. The government would give you an allowance, buy your books, and everything—it was quite an opportunity. So I went back to Berkeley, started again, but I really hadn't ever decided what I was going to do. I wasn't keen on farming. I'd seen quite a bit of it, done a lot of it, and I knew what it was.

Lage: You didn't have a romantic image of it.

Williams: No, not a bit. I hadn't seen that it was even very lucrative, although during the war my father did very well, as all farmers did. Prices suddenly were much better with war than in the depression that we'd known in the thirties.

I really didn't know what to do, what I wanted to major in. I was really confused about it. So I kind of messed around there for a couple years and didn't like college that much. I just didn't ever get really involved in it.

Lage: Did you commute?

Williams: No, I lived in Berkeley. I didn't join a fraternity. I was invited to a couple, and I just didn't feel I wanted to do that. I lived in a boarding house on Hearst Avenue for a while, a year

Williams: or so, and one on Haste Street, on the south side. In a couple of years, in about 1949, I finally decided I was just going to go back to the farm. I couldn't find anything I really wanted to do, and I was just sick of school, so I left. I didn't get my degree. I got a two-year degree finally, but I didn't graduate. My oldest sister had gotten out in 1944, she went just around the clock three years, and got out in three years, and my little sister got out of high school in '44, I guess, and she graduated in '48, but I was kind of a misfit. I didn't graduate.

So I came back to the farm in 1949 as a kind of foreman, I guess you might say, and worked there until my father died in '56.

Packing and Shipping Cauliflower in the Postwar Period

Lage: What was the operation like at that time, after the war? You say you were foreman--

Williams: Well, we were farming about a thousand or twelve hundred acres, I guess, of partially owned land. Most of it was still leased. I guess my father owned about a 150 acres of land then. The rest was leased land, and we'd have a couple hundred employees, I suppose, in peak season--two or three hundred, maybe.

Lage: Did you have the packing operation?

Williams: Yes, we were still packing tomatoes in the summer, and by this time business had changed somewhat, in that we started packing cauliflower in the packing house. We would haul it in from the field in trailers, and trim it, and wrap it. The cauliflower business was changing.

Lage: Previously it had been packed--

Williams: Packed in the field, and we brought the crates into the packing house and loaded the cars and top-iced them--put crushed ice in on top of the load. There was no other refrigeration. They didn't really have the mechanical units they later developed, where you load a commodity into a car, and it's in a cardboard carton--fiberboard, as they call it--all dry, everything has to be dry. And it's just like a refrigerator, the temperature's maintained at the proper temperature.

Lage: But at this time you had to put ice on it.

Williams: Right, and it was all in wooden crates—we made our own crates. Just bought the loose box shoo, as they called it, and hand-nailed our own crates. I did a lot of that in the thirties, just hand-nailing them. Then they came out with machines, and we made the crates with machines that drove the nails. So we were still using wood, and icing all of our cars, and loading them right there in Centerville on our siding at our packing house. We had a salesman, and he was on the phone all the time making sales and getting orders, and he would route the cars, and we'd send them out. They'd go to Baltimore, or anywhere.

Lage: Primarily East Coast?

Williams: All east, yes, everything went east.

Lage: Who would your salesman be dealing with?

Williams: He'd be dealing with customers we had built up over the years in New York and all the major markets, all the terminal markets. At this time, around 1950, everything was pretty much carloads, even then. We weren't getting into small shipments like we got into later. A carload was five hundred crates of cauliflower.

Lage: A railroad car.

Williams: A rail car, yes. So we had developed these relationships with various commission merchants in the terminal markets, and they'd take our produce on consignment. They'd sell it, and take out a commission of 10 percent, let's say, or something, and remit the balance to us after paying the freight. So they weren't really F.O.B. [Free on Board, meaning sold at shipping point] sales, they were just consignments. Occasionally we would have sales, but most of them were consignments in those days.

Lage: What would be the difference between the consignment and the sales?

Williams: Well, you never knew really what you were getting for the carload. We'd top-ice it, close the doors, and a railroad would come in at night, the SP [Southern Pacific], and pick up the string of the few cars that we loaded during the day. It would take about ten days for that car to get to New York, about a week to Chicago, I think, and ten days to New York or Boston. So ten days later it would get there, and maybe the market would be better or worse, you wouldn't know.

Lage: I see, so you would receive whatever it sold for there.

Williams: They sold it at the market (meaning, at the going price), and of course there's always a range depending on the quality, but there was no assurance. However, if we did sell a car, we'd sell it generally F.O.B. Centerville for X dollars, and that was the deal.

Now, if there were complications--for instance, if the car arrived in bad order, if they ran out of ice, or something. We would re-top-ice often, if it had to go through warm weather, just to keep the commodity cool. But if something happened and the quality was bad for some reason, why, we would have to make an adjustment, so nothing was for sure. You never knew for sure.

Lage: You were responsible for what might happen to the product on the way back East, then?

Williams: Oh, yes. We were in charge of the routing of the rail lines and the top-icing, if any, and the amount of ice we put in initially. Yes, we were responsible for the consigned rail cars until they arrived. In the case of a car sold on completion of loading at Centerville (as it was then called) the buyer routed the car and took all responsibility.

Lage: Was your father's operation a bigger operation than most of them in the Fremont area?

Williams: Yes. Most of the farmers there might grow cauliflower, but they'd sell it locally--to Safeway, in those days--or take it into the market in Oakland or San Francisco and sell it at the farmer's market. Some of them would come to us and say they had some cauliflower, and they wanted us to put it on the rail car with ours, and we'd have to keep track of it. We would do that and charge the grower a commission.

Lage: Was that a very big part of your packing business?

Williams: No, most of our business--I'd say about 99 percent of it--was our own produce. Just a very small percentage would be somebody else's. There was one other grower in the area who had a packing house next to us. His name was Lloyd Bailey, and he was doing the same thing we were doing. He was loading cars of cauliflower and shipping them to the eastern markets, but most of the growers had smaller acreages, and they didn't have a packing house, or salesmen, or connections in the East.

Lage: Were most of them people who owned their own land, or were they tenant farmers?

Williams: Most of them owned their own land, that's correct--small acreages that they farmed.

Lage: So your father really got into a different type of operation.

Williams: Yes, he did.

Lage: And he was doing that in the thirties, even when times were hard.

Williams: Yes.

Sugar Beet Cultivation and Harvesting, a Back-Breaking Operation

Lage: What other crops did he grow? You've mentioned cauliflower, and it sounds like--

Williams: That was kind of our staple.

Lage: Was it a year-round crop?

Williams: Year-round? No, not in those years. We were growing it for about November through April, and then we would go into tomatoes in the summer, and sugar beets, cucumbers.

Lage: Did they all get shipped east?

Williams: No. Cucumbers, for instance, were for processing locally, for pickling. They were pickling cucumbers, not the market cucumber.

Lage: Were there pickling houses?

Williams: Yes, in San Jose most of them were, and there was one in Hayward, I think. Most of our business was with Del Monte in San Jose. The sugar beets were local too. I guess we were trying to get away from the gamble of loading cars of cauliflower and never knowing really what you were going to get for them. With sugar beets, if you had a certain tonnage and a certain amount of sugar, you knew you were going to get some money for your crop. Same with the cucumbers.

Lage: Who would you sell the sugar beets to?

Williams: There was a firm in Alvarado, the Holly Sugar Company, which interestingly enough had the first sugar mill in the United States there in Alvarado, and I guess we (the growers in the Alvarado-Centerville area) grew the first sugar beets in the United States, perhaps on the Patterson ranch because that was very close to Alvarado.

Lage: I've heard stories about the sugar beets on the Patterson ranch. There must have been other growers in that area too.

Williams: Oh, they were all over, yes. Lots of people grew them. It was back-breaking, physically. All manual work, starting with the thinning. We'd plant them, and then the plants were too thick in the row, and you had to thin them out or you wouldn't get a good-sized beet. If they were all tangles, you'd just get a lot of little beets. So they had to be thinned with a short-handled hoe, which was hard work.

It took about six months for the crop to mature, as I remember; we'd plant them in the spring, and harvest them in the fall. Then, when the crop finally matured, when the beets were a certain size and before the rains, we had first of all to go through the field with a plow. This was pulled by a tractor, and it was a device that lifted the beet up. See, the beets are growing in the ground, so you can't just pull them out of the ground. They have a long tap root, and they're really hanging on, and some of them are eight inches, seven inches in diameter. So we had to get a blade under them to lift them up. It didn't actually pull them out of the ground, but this went under them and lifted them up, and then you could come along and pull them out of the ground easily. They had what they called a beet knife, which you held in your hand, with about an eight-inch blade, and it had a sharp point on the end.

You would stick this point into the beet and pull it up, and it would come right up very easily, because it had all been lifted. Then you'd hold the beet in one hand and chop the top off with the blade, and then we would throw it in a windrow. Then began another operation; and following along behind the beet toppers was a truck driven through the field, and men were throwing these beets into the trucks, and that was terrible work too. All this sugar beet work was hard.

Lage: Harder than the cauliflower.

Williams: Yes, right. Very physical work, and the beets would be awfully heavy and hard to handle. [laughs] Everything about them was hard—I can remember it well.

Lage: You did this yourself?

Williams: Oh, yes, I did it all.

Farm Labor: Locals and Braceros

- Lage: What about other laborers, at that time, during your father's--
- Williams: Before the war we had a group of local people, mostly from Decoto and Alvarado and Niles, I'd say. Mostly of Mexican descent.
- Lage: But they did live there full time?
- Williams: They lived there, and there wasn't much industry there. They did farm work, that was their thing.
- Lage: Were they able to keep busy year round?
- Williams: Yes, because we were busy year round. We tried to have something to harvest every day of the year. So they would work in the field—planting, thinning, topping beets, for instance, and loading the beet trucks. And some of them were driving tractors and trucks for us, the ones with better qualifications, let's say, more ability. The labor force was all local.

With the advent of World War II, and shipyards opening up, most of these people left because the shipyards were paying much better, or else they went in the service. These were all men; we weren't employing any women then, I guess. There weren't any women doing farm work, ranch work, that I can recall. Later on we got to using a lot of women in the packing house in the winter. But with the war many of these men left. This was a national problem, or at least a big problem in California, and Congress saw fit to pass Public Law 78, which allowed Mexican nationals to come up here under contract for specified periods of time--

- Lage: Is that the bracero program?
- Williams: Yes.
- Lage: So that passed during the war.
- Williams: Yes, I think the first ones came--and I may be wrong on my dates--about 1944. I don't remember that we had any before I went in the service. When I came back we had them. But we had to build a labor camp to house them and do certain things to care for them, feed them, and board them.
- Lage: Were the braceros there full time also?
- Williams: Seems to me that there was a period of time when they weren't there. It was a very touchy program, and we couldn't use them when there were domestic workers available because that was a

Williams: very sore subject with the unions; it upset the local workers who were being displaced by these imported workers. So as long as there were sufficient numbers of locals, we could not import workers from Mexico. I think there was a time, perhaps all winter for a good bit of those years, when we did not have the imported workers, and we relied on domestic people to do the work. They were available in numbers enough to get it done.

Lage: Was winter less labor-intensive?

Williams: Yes, it was, I guess. A lot of workers, besides leaving for the shipyards and the service, went to work in canneries. There were many canneries operating at San Jose and Hayward, and lots of these people would prefer to work in a cannery because they had better facilities, and they're out of the sun, and the pay was better, probably. I'm sure it was better than the average farmer was paying. But the canneries would close in the winter, so there was a group of people that were looking for work.

Lage: So you took up the slack then. Did the onset of the bracero program bring new kinds of problems?

Williams: It did, in that we were spoiled. We found that the braceros were wonderful workers. They would come up here, and they were hard workers, so they'd do perhaps twice as much as the domestic workers would do. Farmers always wanted them; they were very desirable.

Lage: How did the pay compare with what you'd been paying domestic workers?

Williams: It was regulated and very closely watched, and we were required to pay a prevailing wage, which was established by the Farm Labor Board. The Department of Employment had these Farm Labor Boards in various agricultural counties. They would take a poll of domestic workers, a survey, and see what people were getting for various jobs, and then—I've forgotten all the ins and outs, but we had to pay--

Lage: It was comparable?

Williams: Yes, right.

Lage: Did you have to have some kind of certification to show that you couldn't obtain local laborers?

Williams: Yes, you had to try. You had to advertise, and you had to put in an order with this Farm Labor Board for workers, and they would beat the bushes to find workers. They'd go to Oakland, and they'd go to skid row, and they'd bring these people out that really weren't qualified farm workers, but they were breathing,

Williams: so we would have to take them. If they didn't work out, we didn't have to keep them; we could discharge them, which we did. We very seldom get anybody that was reliable or would do the job properly. But it was a long process to get the braceros, and difficult.

Lage: It brought you into more government--

Williams: Yes, government regulation, and you really felt that you weren't running your own business.

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Dealing with Sugar Beet and Tomato Pests

Lage: Did the bracero program extend into the time when you were running the business?

Williams: Yes.

Lage: When was it you took over?

Williams: My father died in February of 1956.

Lage: By that time were you fully committed to the business?

Williams: Oh, yes, and I had been for seven years, I guess, since '49. We were using braceros, the Mexican nationals, in 1956, the year of his death, and growing these crops. There are a few I didn't mention. We were diversifying more, about that time, into cabbage, and corn, and broccoli, and lima beans, and things like that, just because--for instance, with the sugar beets, we had a problem with the sugar beet nematode. If you grew sugar beets and cauliflower, there was a build-up of this nematode.

Lage: And what is a nematode?

Williams: Well, it's a little microscopic critter that feeds on the roots of the plants, and the populations get so heavy that in the case of sugar beets, for instance, it would just destroy the crop. They would feed on the beets, and you wouldn't have anything to harvest. So you had to get out of sugar beets, and going into cauliflower wasn't a help because the nematode liked cauliflower too--not as much as sugar beets--but it would affect the cauliflower crop and keep the nematodes very healthy waiting for the next planting of sugar beets.

So we had to get into other things, and we got into lettuce, and cucumbers, and lima beans, and things that were of a different nature altogether.

Lage: How did you decide what crops to get into?

Williams: In the case of lima beans, I remember we grew lima beans for Del Monte—California Packing Corporation, it was called then—and they wanted to can lima beans. They had been doing it somewhere else, and they wanted to try it in our area, and they came around to the office to talk about maybe a hundred acres or so of lima beans, maybe two hundred, I've forgotten. And they were trying to get some other growers in the area, so they would have enough acreage to bring in their viners. They had the viners, and they would do all the harvesting; all we had to do was plant and grow the crop.

We didn't know anything about lima beans. We would plant and grow the crop, even though we didn't know. It's like most plants: if you give it water and fertilizer it will grow. We didn't have the equipment to harvest, so they would come in with their viners and their tractors to do the harvesting, with their people. Also it was a legume; it was good for the soil. They would cut and feed the plants through this machine-like thing, which kind of stripped the beans and left the vines. The vines were very good as a form of fertilizer.

Lage: You just plowed them back under?

Williams: Yes. Well, we'd end up with them in a big pile, and, as I remember, they would kind of ferment, and they got to smelling terrible. We would then spread them out in the field and plow them under to enrich the soil.

Lage: Like compost.

Williams: Yes, the same idea.

Lage: Did you draw on the university at all, the Agricultural Extension Service?

Williams: Yes, we had a farm adviser in Hayward with the extension service, and I knew the farm advisers very well. They were very interested in what we were doing, and they would do replications. When we were planting, they would want us to put in various seeds or treat certain areas of the field differently, and they kept track of the tonnage, and the cultural practices, the irrigation, and all. It was very helpful, very scientific.

Lage: Did they advise you on how to deal with things like the nematodes?

Williams: Oh, yes, right. Because we didn't have a trained agriculturist on the payroll or anything, we relied very heavily on the farm adviser.

- Lage: I read somewhere that the tomatoes developed a blight.
- Williams: We got a broomrape, as they called it. It's a parasite that attaches to the tomato, onto the root, and finally it was the end of the tomato industry in our area.
- Lage: There's no way of combatting that?
- Williams: Well, a farm adviser at the University of California, in conjunction with some of the Davis people, came down. We had a test plot, I remember. It was on the Patterson ranch, where there was a lot of broomrape (I'll tell you how that was spread, and how it ended up there). There was a ten-acre test plot, and first of all we put a levee, or berm, around it, at the request of the university. This was just to segregate it from the rest of the farm land, and no farm equipment was allowed to go in or out of there without fumigation.
- We knew this was an area that had a lot of broomrape in it, and then the university and the farm adviser fumigated the soil and tarped it—they had to put a plastic cover over it. They were using various things, methyl bromide was the one that was found most effective, I believe, and it would apparently control the broomrape, but it was a very expensive operation. In those years, it seems to me, it was about three hundred dollars an acre, and that was in the late fifties.
- Lage: Seems prohibitive.
- Williams: It was. It would even seem to be a huge expense now, I think. It just wasn't worth it to do that to grow tomatoes. Especially when you had no assurance that the land would not be reinfected, because broomrape is very hard to get rid of. You might fumigate an area, but another field might have the seeds in it, and it might blow in with the wind, or it might come in on the tires of your tractor. It's a very small seed, hard to detect, and very destructive to tomatoes.
- Lage: It's a seed?
- Williams: It's a seed at first, and then that seed germinates when it gets in the proximity of certain plants—tomato, tobacco, and a few others—we even had it growing on lettuce. Not very much, though.
- Lage: So it is a parasite?
- Williams: Yes, it's not an animal; it's a plant. Like the mistletoe in your oak trees. Mistletoe just attaches to the oak tree, and I don't think it's good for it, but it is relatively small in size, and it doesn't kill an oak very easily or very quickly. But the

broomrape seed would be in the soil, and when we planted the tomatoes, and the roots of the tomato spread out, the broomrape would attach to it as a parasite and grow off of it.

It comes up and it's yellow, like a straw. That's perhaps where it got its name, "broom," and it rapes the plant. I mean, it's just feeding on the plant. Finally, it'll get so many of these things growing on it that the tomato plant just doesn't ever grow. The tomatoes are as big around as marbles—they aren't marketable or anything—and I suppose ultimately the plant would die. So you just can't have the two.

I was very friendly with a fellow who worked for the Alameda County Agriculture Department--Fred Duffy his name was--and he told me that this broomrape came in to the California Nursery on some roses from France. I've forgotten just when, possibly in the twenties. Some roses came into the nursery, and they had the broomrape, and they got it in the nursery--the seeds. So broomrape was around in the thirties, and I can remember that we had some land out north of Centerville--not down near the Patterson ranch, but just north of Centerville, where the American High School is now. There was a little plot there that the county was looking at in the thirties--I can vaguely recall it--and there was broomrape there. That was rather close to the nursery, just across Alameda Creek from the old California Nursery, just north of Niles.

- Lage: So that broomrape spread from there; that was its point of origin.
- Williams: That's where it came into California, really. Then we had some big floods in 1952, and another one in December of 1955. These floods went through the nursery--Alameda Creek broke its bank, the one that goes down through the Niles Canyon and goes to the bay. It overflowed its banks, went through the nursery, and deposited the broomrape all down through that flood plain, and I think that's how the Patterson ranch got it.
- Lage: That sounds very likely. That's something I hadn't heard about the effects of the floods. I heard about the floods depositing silt which enriched the land, but not about contributing to spreading these seeds.
- Williams: Yes, that's the one bad thing, the noxious weed that we have over there. That's the theory; at least that was Fred Duffy's theory.
- Lage: It sounds quite logical. When these things occurred--you mentioned the sugar beet nematode and the tomatoes--would that be a whole season of no profit, or no income?

Williams: Well, fortunately, in the case of the sugar beet nematode, you'd see it in a portion of the field. You might have maybe only a tenth of the field, or a twentieth--a small portion--but you'd see it there, and if you kept planting sugar beets, that area would just keep growing. You could see it just driving by or walking through it, because the tops of the healthy beet would be, maybe, a couple of feet high anyway, and in these affected areas they'd just be very close to the ground, six inches or so, with spindly little leaves, a very unhealthy-looking plant.

Lage: So then you'd make your changes.

Williams: Well, we were committed. We had the crop, and we would keep it to harvest the 90 percent that was good. Then we would have to be careful not to plant another host crop. It would never go away. It would knock the nematode back a little bit if you planted barley, for instance, or lettuce, or some crops other than cauliflower, broccoli, cabbage, or sugar beets, which it just seemed to thrive on.

Specialized Equipment for Beets

Lage: You mentioned the tractor that lifted the sugar beets, what did you call it?

Williams: We called it a beet plow. It was not like a moldboard plow, which turns soil over. It's kind of hard to describe, but it was pulled by a tractor, and it was a big, heavy thing, because it had to go deep. It had to be strong because you didn't want to just go down six or eight inches and cut the beets in half, we had to go down under the beets--down, oh, thirty inches possibly, twenty-four at least. It had to go down, and there was a big kind of blade that lifted these beets up as it was pulled through the ground, just kind of lifted the soil up.

Lage: Was that something specialized for the area?

Williams: It was specialized for beets. It was the only thing that it was ever used for. We'd put it away and pull it out next season.

Lage: You owned that equipment yourself.

Williams: Yes, we owned all our own equipment.

Lage: What about other, smaller farmers? What did they do about equipment? Did they rent it?

Williams: I think the sugar mill had beet plows. For instance, when we would contract with the Holly Sugar Company, we didn't have planters for sugar beets. We did have this beet plow, but we didn't have a planter, so they would bring their own, and we would use it. But I think they probably had their own plows, if the farmer wanted. Why we wanted one of our own, I don't know. Maybe we had more acres.

II FARMING ON THE PATTERSON RANCH, 1956-1960s

A Transition from Family Tenant-Farming

- Lage: Let's talk a little bit about the Patterson family. You said it was about 1956 that you first arranged with them to farm their land.
- Williams: Yes. Just before his death, my father was talking to Donald Patterson, and he told me that he was hopeful that we could farm some of that land because in 1956 we were seeing subdivisions coming into our area, and we were going to be losing some leased land.
- Lage: Was a large portion of your leased land on the northern plain?
- Williams: No, I farmed only a hundred acres down there, which belonged to a fellow named Ernest Brown, just right next to Pattersons. We were leasing his farm. But everything else was north and south of Centerville.
- Lage: Do you know anything about your father's discussions with the Pattersons? Henry Patterson had died just shortly before, in '55.
- Williams: He never talked to Henry. He talked to Don, and talked to Don's father, Will, W.D. Patterson. But Donald was kind of taking charge then, I believe, because he was having most of his discussions with Don. And after my father's death, when I got acquainted with Don, I'd meet the two of them, Will and Don. Often they were together, and I'd meet them down at the ranch. But W. D. Patterson was not taking an active part then. Donald was doing most of the talking.
- Lage: What kind of things did you talk about?
- Williams: Well, the crops we might grow, and the area--see, the Patterson ranch had a history of having a number of tenant farmers. Most of them were paying on share rent rather than cash rent. They

Williams: would go out and plant various crops on the Patterson land, and sell the crops, and give the Patterson family a percentage of the proceeds of the crops. Often a fourth, or a fifth, sometimes a sixth, in the case of certain crops like cucumbers, which were very labor-intensive and had a lot of harvest costs.

Lage: Did they have several tenants?

Williams: They had a quite a number of them. They had the Rose family, two brothers, Ed and another one I don't remember. Two brothers and their father, actually. That was one family. And they had a fellow named Gus King, and they had another family called Lebon, and they had the Maciel family--Tony Maciel, I think.

Lage: Do you know if any of these people are around?

Williams: Let's see. The Maciels are over in the San Joaquin Valley. They left the Patterson ranch; they left the whole area. A number of them are dead: Gus King is, I think. There is one of the Lebon people that works for Gladaway growers, who grow the gladiolas in Fremont. His name is Mickey Lebon, and he is a very important part of that organization.

Lage: Would you know if he would have knowledge about the operation on the Patterson ranch?

Williams: I think he was part of the organization that was farming on the Patterson ranch, and when they left Pattersons the family kind of broke up. He went to work for another grower, and now finally he's with the gladiola people. He would have some knowledge of this, I believe, of the family operation on the Patterson ranch.

I think when we first started there the Lebons were going out, and we went in on their land. See, the Patterson family had a large acreage, and the Lebons had a certain piece--maybe it was seventy-five acres, or something. We took that seventy-five acres.

Lage: I see. So that wasn't the whole operation.

Williams: No, no. We started with about seventy-five acres, as I recall, in 1956. And I felt that we were kind of on trial there because they'd had these other families for years and years, so we were all trying to do the best job we could.

Lage: How was your arrangement different from those of the tenants?

Williams: Well, it didn't differ at first. We were paying share rent too, as I recall, for a few years. That's what the Patterson family was used to.

Lage: It wasn't what you did on your other land?

Williams: No, not generally. Well, we had paid shares on Ernest Brown's, for instance. I think he had a minimum--I guess that was it--he was guaranteed a minimum rent, but he was also entitled to a share of the crop, and if that exceeded the minimum, why he got his share--if that makes sense. So we did pay shares on the Patterson ranch, to start, and we had done that on other deals occasionally, but most of our rent was cash rent. We'd just pay so much per acre, per year.

Lage: So this would make the Pattersons more interested in how well the operation went, if they were getting their share.

Williams: Exactly. There's nothing for sure because if the crop didn't come in at a good price, of course, they don't get much rent. That's true, they would be more interested in the quality of the crop.

Lage: How active a role did Don take? Was it just friendly chitchat?

Williams: He said, you could take that Lebon land. As I remember, percentages were twenty-five percent to the family--in the case of canning tomatoes, which we were still growing then. We grew tomatoes for canning, for local canneries, and we also grew tomatoes for shipping. [In the interests of accuracy, the landlord's share of a canning tomato crop was twenty percent generally. Most crops were twenty-five percent except cucumbers, which were sixteen-and-two-thirds percent. --G.W.]

Lage: Were they two different kinds of tomatoes?

Williams: Yes, they were, in the early days. Eventually the canning tomato went out, and there was really only one kind of tomato. But in the early days you had to decide when you planted what you were going to do. The canning tomato is a big, misshapen thing, and the canners cooked it and kind of ground it up or something, so it didn't matter. But you couldn't ship a big, misshapen tomato like that for the fresh market. So you did have to decide when you planted which way you were going.

It was a percentage that Don said that the family wanted, and it was agreeable--it was the customary thing, and we'd had enough deals like that to know. So we started in--I can't remember our first crops. I know cauliflower was one and probably lettuce, and we were still growing sugar beets then, so we probably had some sugar beets, and maybe some tomatoes--I'm sure we had tomatoes. Canning tomatoes then because the shipping tomato business was pretty sick. We were just about out of that.

Williams: Within a year or so he came to me, and he said that the Rose brothers were going to quit. I think the Roses were the next to go out; they might have had sixty or seventy-five acres, so he said, "Could you take that?" So we took that.

Lage: Do you know why these families went out of business?

Williams: Well, I'm not sure. Don never told me. I don't know if they were pushed or not. The Rose people were not good growers, in my opinion, and they weren't producing much of a crop. I think the Patterson family could see that we were going to do a lot better, and their share was going to be a lot bigger, that 25 percent was going to be a lot better from us. I don't know if they pushed the Roses. They were very loyal to their growers, and they probably did not. But they must have had some misgivings about them, because they ran a pretty sloppy operation, the Rose people.

Lage: You could tell that, just by observing?

Williams: Oh, yes, just by the way they farmed. Weeds might take over the crop, or you knew the crop was being hurt, or they weren't using enough fertilizer, or something. They didn't do a good job of farming.

Don Patterson's Involvement

Lage: Did Don seem to have knowledge of farming?

Williams: He had some. I'm not sure. He was from industry—I've forgotten. He wasn't trained in agriculture; he was an engineer—possibly, I'm not exactly sure.

I've forgotten just what he did before he came to the farm, but he was a very knowledgeable person about it in that he read a lot, I'm sure of that, and he was very interested in everything, all facets. He was always looking for new crops for us, and talking to me about whether we couldn't find something new. Because he was concerned about our future too, he knew that tomatoes, for instance, were a problem--with the broomrape--and some of these crops were going out. We were always looking for more profitable crops. We were always talking about that.

I remember one time we were talking about safflower, which was grown for the oil, and which was a very popular crop in the Sacramento Valley about that time. This was probably twenty years ago, or twenty-five maybe. We did grow some safflower down on the Patterson Ranch, and it was fairly good, but it wasn't

- Williams: really that interesting. It seems to me it depleted the soil quite heavily and wasn't that profitable, so we just tried it a year or two. But he was very, very progressive, and interested in doing things the best and most efficient way.
- Lage: What would the Pattersons furnish? Did they furnish water?
- Williams: Yes, they had the wells, and we would pay the power, and we would maintain the wells. Well, I should reword that. They would take care of normal wear and tear. If the pump would break down through some neglect of ours—lack of oil, for instance, lack of lubrication—that was our responsibility, and we had to fix it. If it was just normal wear and tear they would put in a new pump, or repair the pump, and if a well went bad as they were doing then with the salt water intrusion, and they had to drill new wells, they would drill them.
- Lage: Was that standard practice with other people from whom you leased land?
- Williams: Yes, it was. They would generally maintain the pump and the well, if it took any maintenance, and we would have responsibility if it was proven that we had done something or not done something. If the pump doesn't get any oil it soon breaks down.
- Lage: So you were responsible for maintaining it.
- Williams: Right.
- Lage: What about labor camps? Did they supply that?
- Williams: We had a labor camp on property that my father had bought. When he got into the bracero business during the war he had to build a labor camp, which he did. This was on our land, up between Centerville and Irvington. And when we went to the Patterson ranch there was a labor camp there that Gus King had operated and built, I believe. Maybe the Pattersons had been involved in the construction of it, I've forgotten, if I ever knew. But we did take over that labor camp when Gus King left. After the Lebons left, then the Rose brothers left, I think, then Gus King was probably the next. And there were even a few more, a fellow named Zambetti. There were a number of growers down there.
- So we used the Patterson camp later on because our camp was getting into an area where there was a lot of development. It wasn't a good place for a labor camp, and finally we shut it down and just used that Patterson camp. That's still being used, I believe.
- Lage: It is?

Williams: I think so. Not for braceros or imported labor of that type, but for people that do work on the farm, single men, for instance. And there are a few units down there for families.

Lage: You said that you didn't get to know Will Patterson very well.

Williams: No, I didn't.

Lage: He was fairly elderly by then.

Williams: He was probably in his seventies, maybe upper seventies.

Lage: Were you living in the Fremont area then?

Williams: Yes, I lived there then. He had a home there, and I would go down and meet Don sometimes at his home, and sometimes I'd see Will and sometimes I wouldn't. I've forgotten what year he died, but I remember that he requested that his home be burned. The fire department went down and had a drill and burned the house down.

Lage: I've heard about that.

Williams: Now, the Henry Patterson house was saved, of course.

The Value of the Ranch as Agricultural Land

Lage: Yes. I asked you about the value of the Patterson ranch as agricultural land. How did the soil--?

Williams: It was good soil; it was very nice loam, and from what I've read a lot of it was alluvial, brought in from the floods over the period of a century or more, and the Pattersons really hadn't wanted the flood control. What finally solved our flooding problems there was the flood control, the army engineers going in and widening Alameda Creek, and deepening it, clearing it out.

Lage: And yet, William Patterson was president--

Williams: He was president of the Alameda County Water District for years.

Lage: And of the Alameda County Flood Control District.

Williams: Yes, you're right.

Lage: I wondered about that as I read that he was so active in it.

Williams: I think, at least in the early days, they didn't grow winter crops there, and they kind of wanted that land to go under water, with all the silt that would come in, kind of like the Nile delta, or something.

Lage: In winter you wouldn't have crops.

Williams: Not before us. In the thirties and forties I don't think there were many winter crops at the Patterson ranch. The Leben people, now, were cauliflower growers, so they were growing some cauliflower in winter. But their seventy-five acres were not in the lowest part of the ranch.

Lage: So do you think Will Patterson might have been interested in putting year-round agriculture in? Would that have been one of his reasons for working on flood control? Or do you not know?

Williams: I just don't know. I couldn't speculate on it.

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Lage: Flood control did allow for the development of that area, eventually, of the houses and industrial park.

Williams: That's correct.

Lage: Did the Pattersons ever speak with you about what they saw was coming on their lands in the future?

Williams: No--well, Don did. Yes, for years and years he said he knew the development was coming, but he wasn't anxious for it. He wanted it to stay in farming just as long as possible, and it did as long as he was here.

Lage: So he seemed to have a real commitment to keeping it in farming. You didn't get the sense that he was just biding time?

Williams: No, although he may have been. But his time frame was such that he may have been thinking twenty-five years or something. It wasn't anything immediate--I never got that feeling at all. I had the feeling that he wanted it to stay in agriculture just as long as possible, knowing, though, that the land was just going to continue to appreciate in value.

Lage: Did they use the Williamson Act?

Williams: Yes, they did.

Lage: How did your arrangement with them change over the years? You mention you kept taking over other parts--did you end up farming the whole thing?

Williams: Finally ended up with all of it, I think.

Lage: Did you continue with the sharecropping?

Williams: No, after just a few years—I've forgotten just what prompted us to do that—but we weren't too happy with it. We had to make these accountings, of course, and it would just be a lot simpler for us to pay cash rent. So we changed over with their concurrence.

Lage: How did you figure the rent?

Williams: Well, we had other leased land around, we knew what we were paying, and it was all kind of competitive. It was based on what we were paying other landowners.

Lage: How did it compare with the arrangement of being sharecroppers?

Williams: I think they were better off with cash rent.

Lage: There was a study done in 1974, when the city of Fremont was considering whether they should continue to zone the northern plain area for agriculture.* They brought in a consulting firm, which determined that the growers did quite well in the area, but that the landowners really weren't making any money.

Williams: On shares?

Lage: On shares or leasing land. They were just about breaking even.

Williams: Is that right? Well, I don't know when the Williamson Act came in, but--

Lage: I think that was in the sixties.

Williams: Was it? Okay. So they were paying taxes based on agricultural land.

Lage: Right.

Williams: I guess I knew that, I'd just kind of forgotten it.

Lage: I guess the going rate wasn't terribly high for the landowners in the whole area; they weren't just singling out the Pattersons.

* "Evaluation of Agricultural Viability of Northern Plain Area for the City of Fremont," April 15, 1974, by Maclay Burt Associates.

Williams: I'm sure that's true. I've kind of forgotten. I didn't have much knowledge then of what people were paying in other areas. Our big competition was Salinas—they were a similar type of agriculture—I didn't know what they were paying then. But I did know, later, that the rents they were paying in Salinas were much higher. And I'm sure what you're saying is probably true, that it was the competition for the land in Salinas that kept the price of the rent up.

Lage: During this period, when you were replacing the tenant farmers, was that a general pattern in the Fremont area? That the bigger operations, like yourself, were taking over from smaller tenant farmers?

Williams: Well, we were getting down, at that time, to not so many farmers. There was one other large farmer. The Baileys were pretty much out of it; they'd gone into cattle. They were out of vegetables.

Lage: Were they in cattle in that area?

Williams: Well, they had some cattle in part of Fremont, southern Fremont, down near the General Motors plant, or somewhere in that area. But they had some hill land in Hayward—they had cattle there, I think, up in the hills.

The Fudenna Brothers' Operation

Williams: The one large grower was the Japanese family, the Fudenna brothers, and it got to the point that there were only about two of us left—two or three: Fudenna, Williams, and another grower or two, smaller growers. But there weren't that many.

Lage: So there wasn't that much land left.

Williams: No, the land was shrinking, that's right, and about all the land that was left was in the north plain. Everything else was pretty well cut up.

Lage: Did the Fudenna brothers also operate out on the north plain?

Williams: Yes, they came into the Patterson ranch, too, and had quite a bit of land. I don't know how many acres, but they probably had several hundred acres at least, or three or four hundred, maybe, for a while.

I remember one particular part that they had, which had been in Marchy Dairy, and it's down near where the Alameda's farm headquarters now is; the Alamedas are the people that I sold to,

Williams: my old employees, that are now going on with the old business. The dairy was there. The Fudennas had that property, and they decided that the pH was too high, that there was too much alkali in the soil, and they were leaving. Don came to me and wanted to know if we would be interested in it. It was a hundred or a hundred and fifty acres, and I said, "Sure." So we went down there. It turned out to be fine land.

Lage: Did you have to grow a different kind of crop?

Williams: No, we just grew the crops we were accustomed to growing. Why they gave it up, I don't know. They said it was the pH, but it didn't seem that bad. We had a lot worse.

Lage: That's not the salt; that's something else.

Williams: It's the balance between the alkali and the acid; a high pH means it is too alkaline.

Lage: Had the Fudenna brothers been in Fremont for a long time?

Williams: Yes, it was an old farming family, very small before the war, just a very small operation, maybe strawberries. There were a lot of Japanese growing strawberries in that area before the war. Then they were relocated during the war. They came back after it, and then I guess they went back to their strawberry business, then got into vegetables, and then they bought a ranch next to my father's, between Centerville and Irvington. They leased land, as we did, in a number of places.

They had their home place there, and then they had a couple of growers, as I recall, that grew for them. They would advise them, and they would handle the crop, but the grower had his own equipment, and did the planting, and maybe the Fudennas would do the harvesting for them and the marketing. Then they got started with the Patterson ranch soon after we did. If we went in there in '56, why, by '57 or '58 I think the Fudennas were down there too.

Lage: Did they have a packing operation?

Williams: Yes, they did.

Lage: Were they well-respected farmers in the community?

Williams: Yes, they were excellent farmers. There were three brothers and a brother-in-law. Really the four of them ran the business. One brother was in charge of growing, and he was an excellent farmer. They always grew good crops. Then there was a tragic accident, and he was killed; he was hit by a truck a number of years ago. The farming, then, never was the same. They never could quite grow the crops they did before that.

Lage: He must have been the one with the know-how.

Williams: Yes, as far as farming is concerned. And then the eldest son--as with the Japanese families, the eldest son calls the shots--he was the president of the company, James. He got cancer of the bone marrow, I think, and fought that for a few years, but it finally got the best of him. And then a brother-in-law died, I think. That left one brother, and he finally just sold out.

Lage: Sad tale.

Williams: It was. But they had a great organization. They were very tough competitors, and we weren't fond of them, but we had a lot of respect for them.

Lage: So they were competitors for your--

Williams: Oh, yes. We were competing for sales; we were trying to sell to the same people. It was very competitive.

Lage: So you would compete on price. Would that make your prices go down?

Williams: Oh, yes, right.

III THE L. S. WILLIAMS COMPANY AGRICULTURAL OPERATION, 1956-1983

Crop Specialization: Cauliflower and Lettuce

Lage: We've talked about crops, but we didn't come up into more recent times. When did you finally sell out?

Williams: I retired on July 1, 1983, yes.

Lage: Were there changes from '56 to '83 that we should talk about, in terms of crops?

Williams: Well, yes, in that we gradually discarded crops. At one time we were growing about eight different crops in a calendar year. As our expenses went up and profits shrunk, we had to throw out these less lucrative ones, like sugar beets, for instance. That was one of the first to go. And lima beans, cabbage, carrots, and onions.

Lage: Less diversity.

Williams: Yes. We found it was to our advantage to put all of our efforts in cauliflower and lettuce. We'd grow cauliflower in the winter and lettuce in the summer. While I did want another crop or two--it would have been good in the rotation of things, good for the soil--we just could not seem to find it. We still grew a few cucumbers, but there weren't very many acres of these--for pickling.

Lage: Was the problem in the sales, or the cost of equipment, or what?

Williams: Well, in sugar beets, you just didn't get enough gross, even with a good crop. With the expenses we had here, we couldn't make enough money to justify it. In the San Joaquin Valley, or Salinas Valley, they could and still do grow sugar beets, and it's still profitable I guess. But it wasn't for us, just because of the cost of the thinning--although we had got a mechanical thinner--and I guess it was the cost of water, and our

Williams: pump tax. We haven't touched on that, but our expenses were coming up, and our labor. We were in more of an industrial area, and we weren't getting braceros. That had fallen into disrepute--the whole law--and had been rescinded.

Labor Arrangements After the Bracero Program

Lage: The bracero program ended in '65, I believe.

Williams: Well, after that, we had to rely on locals, of course, to do all this steep labor.

Lage: And whom did you rely on?

Williams: Well, we worked through a bunch of what we called labor contractors. That was one way to work. To get a huge crew of men we had to get a labor contractor, and there were people who did this. These were mostly Mexican workers, and the contractors were often Mexican. They could talk to them, and they had some rapport with them. They would come in on a bus every day from some urban area, possibly.

Lage: They were Mexican Americans?

Williams: Yes. Some of them were illegal, I'm sure, though. There were wetbacks in with them.

Lage: And you just dealt with the contractor.

Williams: I dealt with the contractor.

Lage: And paid him a fixed amount?

Williams: Well, the way we usually worked it was that we wanted to be sure the men were getting paid, so we would keep the payrolls. We would pay him--I've forgotten how we'd base it. We had the names of the workers, and we kept their hours, or he gave us their hours, kept the hours for us. We actually wrote checks to pay the workers, and he would get a percentage, I guess. Gee, that's kind of foggy. I don't quite remember how he got paid. The workers would pay him too. For instance, he would charge them transportation on the bus, to bring them, so he was getting something that way. And he would feed them all and charge them for that.

Lage: Did they use the labor camps that you had?

Williams: We had all kinds of deals. Some did; some came in by bus for the day; some would bring their men, put them in our labor camp; the contractor would perhaps furnish the cook. All kinds of arrangements.

Lage: Did the cost go up considerably from what you'd had to pay under the bracero program?

Williams: Yes, they did because these workers weren't as productive, they wouldn't harvest as much. Plus hourly wages were going up steadily; every year or so they were creeping up.

Lage: I've heard people mention labor "specialists," that certain groups of people would harvest certain crops.

Williams: Well, yes, in the case of lettuce, for instance. We grew lettuce and would get a harvesting crew, and these people just harvested lettuce. That is quite a specialized thing.

Lage: Were they of a particular ethnic background?

Williams: Most of them were Mexican.

Lage: In lettuce as well as other crops?

Williams: Yes.

Lage: What is the specialty of harvesting lettuce?

Williams: Well, you have to select the head that has the proper solidity; you can't have an immature head. Strangely enough, when you put them in the box, your row alignment has to be as perfect as possible just from a cosmetic point of view, so when the box is opened up, all the rows--there were twenty-four heads in a carton; that's the standard package, twelve to a layer, three by four, two layers of twelve--and the row alignment had to be just so.

Lage: So this was packed right in the field.

Williams: Yes, packed right in the field. That's a specialty in which people just followed the sun. We had the same season as Salinas, and then they'd go to the Imperial Valley, and they'd go to New Mexico and various places where there are growing areas.

Lage: Then you have another group come in for the cauliflower.

Williams: Well, for cauliflower we did our own thing. We had our own workers and we paid by the hour. The lettuce work is all piece rate; they were paid so much a box. The whole crew would pack a box of lettuce for a dollar, let us say, and the person that cuts

Williams: it got a little bit of that, and the person that puts it in the box got a little bit, and the person that closed the box and stapled it, he got something, and then the person that threw it up on the truck got something. It ends up that it costs us a dollar, but each little segment of this harvesting crew got their proper percentage.

Lage: So did each person within this little crew have a specialty?

Williams: Yes, they had what they called a trio, which was two cutters and one packer. This threesome would just go down the rows, two of them were cutting, and putting them together, and this packer would just come right along behind them, stuffing his lettuce in.

Lage: How did you keep track of how many boxes each group packed?

Williams: Well, let's see. [laughs] The specialist would do that. That would be a specialty, wouldn't it? He would keep track of his crew, and there might be forty or fifty in a crew. You might have ten trios, let's say; that would be thirty. I don't know, I've forgotten all the numbers, but there might be forty or fifty people doing this, putting the finished product on the truck. And it was our truck, and our driver.

Marketing in the East and Midwest

Williams: We'd haul it away to the cooler, where it was vacuum cooled, and then it was put in a rail car or a refrigerator truck.

Lage: Did that go to the East also?

Williams: East or Midwest. We got away from the rails in--oh, it was a gradual thing. We started using more trucks: pretty soon it was half and half, pretty soon it was three-fourths trucks, pretty soon it was about a hundred percent trucks, and we seldom loaded a car when I retired. With the trucks we could go into littler markets. We could go to Kansas City--which isn't a little market, especially--but we could go into the Midwest, into some of the smaller towns, with fifty cartons of lettuce, and the trucker would just stop there in some store and drop it off. You couldn't put a whole rail car of lettuce into some little town because they couldn't handle it.

Lage: How did you sell?

Williams: Well, this fellow that worked for me and was our salesman would deal direct. We liked to deal direct with these people. Some of them would call us, or he would call them, in various cities.

- Lage: Were you dealing with a particular retailer?
- Williams: No, he's dealing generally with a wholesaler.
- Lage: And the wholesaler would distribute it to markets.
- Williams: Yes. So we would deal with the wholesalers in various markets.
- Lage: On the phone?
- Williams: On the phone, and we dealt a lot with brokers from Salinas that had built up a clientele of these same wholesalers, only they would call the broker, instead of us. So we would deal with a broker because we couldn't sell everything out. We'd always have something for sale, and we knew we couldn't sell it ourselves, but the broker got usually—in those days it was ten cents a package brokerage.
- Lage: Did you continue to ship produce for some of the other small farms? I guess there weren't many small farm operations left.
- Williams: At this time there weren't any left, no. They were gone.
- Lage: So it was just your operation.
- Williams: Right.

Day Laborers and Labor Contractors

- Lage: What was your general opinion of the labor contractors? I've always heard very negative things about them. Is that fair?
- Williams: Yes, well, generally they've got an angle somehow. They're not the most reputable people, let's say.
- Lage: Did you feel that they dealt fairly with their laborers?
- Williams: Many did not. They would cheat them when they could, and often they could. They would overcharge them, and they would sell them stuff—food, and drink, and candy, and cigarettes and things—and I know they would make exorbitant profits on that stuff. They weren't the most honest people. There are exceptions certainly, but--.
- Lage: Was it standard for people like yourself to pay the workers directly, or was that something you devised because of your feeling about the contractors?

- Williams: I'm trying to think—we had so many deals. For instance, with picking tomatoes, we have used black, Negro, contractors at times, picking canning tomatoes. The pickers would be paid by the box, and they would have a card that would be punched. They'd be picking a row of tomatoes, and they'd stack all their boxes in a place, and a checker, so-called, would come along and punch these cards for this fellow who had picked twenty boxes, or forty boxes or so of tomatoes. At the end of the day they would come in—they'd load them in a bus and bring them into our office, and we would have to pay them cash. Lots of them.
- Lage: Based on their cards.
- Williams: Yes.
- Lage: Was the checker someone you--
- Williams: Worked for me, right. We also picked cucumbers that way, they were paid by the bucket of cucumbers. Now, if they were our workers, living in our camp, they'd still get paid by the bucket, but they'd get paid every week or two; but if they were just people who had come on a bus or something and were going back to town, they wanted to get paid every day.
- Lage: So some came each day on the bus.
- Williams: Each day.
- Lage: Were the black labor contractors hiring black people?
- Williams: They had both. No, they weren't discriminating, they'd take anybody they could get. Often they would be mostly black, but sometimes they'd be Asian.
- Lage: Were they people who had background in agriculture?
- Williams: No, they just had a background in steep labor, "background" meaning that that was the only kind of work they could do, probably-- the only job they could get. Yes, so I guess the answer is yes.
- Lage: Were the people who came in just for the day as effective workers, from your point of view?
- Williams: Well, when they were getting paid by the piece, by the box or by the bucket, we weren't so concerned. However, life got more complicated because eventually somebody said that they had to make a minimum wage. And some of them wouldn't do anything, they'd spend the whole day out there, and they wouldn't accomplish anything. So we had to be careful to discharge people like that, because they couldn't pick enough to make a minimum wage. They just weren't working at it.

Lage: Did you have problems with attempts at unionization?

Williams: Very few, I can just think of a couple that never amounted to anything. We never had any strikes.

Lage: There were a lot of lettuce worker organization attempts.

Williams: Yes. They never bothered us. We did try to pay the prevailing rate. For instance, if we were using a lettuce group, we'd pay what they'd make in Salinas, so we weren't standing out as somebody that was not paying enough. I think our deal wasn't big enough to really get the interest of the organizers. They wanted more--obviously, we were off the track up here--and there just wouldn't have been that much for them if they unionized us. It wouldn't have been worth the effort, in my opinion. They never bothered us that much. We did try to keep our wages always in line with other areas.

Advances in Farm Equipment

Lage: We talked some about equipment--anything else that you need to say about how equipment changed? One of the things that's mentioned, that might tie the labor topic to the equipment, was, did it become more difficult to get laborers? That's mentioned in a couple of newspaper articles I read, that the labor supply was unpredictable after the end of the bracero program. Was that something you recall?

Williams: At the end of the bracero program, yes. That's about the time the tomato harvester got started, I remember. We were harvesting tomatoes by machine then.

Lage: Was there a conscious thought on your part--we've got to get more equipment because labor's getting too expensive, or too hard to get?

Williams: Well, I guess there was at that time. If we wanted to stay in the tomato business, and we were losing our braceros, and we had tried to pick tomatoes with locals, with no success really. Everything was moving into the machine harvest of tomatoes.

Lage: The university had a role in that, didn't they?

Williams: Yes, they did, a very active role in the development of the machine.

Lage: Did you purchase a harvester?

Williams: Yes, I bought one. We grew tomatoes for a few years after that, but this was probably about 1965, and by 1970 or so, I think—or even before, possibly—the whole county had been quarantined because of the broomrape, and we couldn't grow tomatoes too easily. We could still grow tomatoes if they were processed in Alameda County and had been washed, and the bins, and everything—they were put in bins for machine harvest, not boxes—didn't leave the county. This, of course, made a problem for the canners, in that they had thousands of these bins going all over northern California, and they had to keep Alameda County's bins segregated and make sure that they stayed in the county. It just got to be too big a thing. Finally there were no processors left. San Jose was in another county, and we couldn't go there anymore, and, in fact, the canning companies were leaving San Jose, and they were going to the San Joaquin Valley anyway. So that was the end of the tomato business.

Lage: Any other special equipment?

Williams: Well, the times have changed considerably with the cauliflower.

As I've mentioned, when I was a young man of ten and eleven, working in the cauliflower and making the crates by hand, all the cauliflower were packed in wooden crates in the field and brought into the packing house and then loaded in a railcar. The crate was labeled in the packing house, and the crates were placed in the refrigerator cars, and we iced the cars with crushed ice that we blew in over the tops of the loads.

By 1950—maybe a little later than that, '55, possibly—cauliflower was starting to be packaged, trimmed and wrapped, and put in a cardboard or fiberboard carton in the packing house. One reason for this was that in a wooden crate, which was called a pony crate, which we packed in the fields, there was an established billing rate. The railroad said that crate weighed forty-two pounds—sometimes it would weigh forty, and sometimes it would weigh forty-eight, or something.

Lage: No matter what was in it?

Williams: They weighed a lot of them, and they said it's forty-two pounds per crate, and if you have five hundred crates it weighs so much, and you pay so much a hundred-weight for freight to various cities, depending on where it's going. So there was an established weight for cauliflower of forty-two pounds in a pony crate. We found, as others did, that we could trim the leaves off and put it in a lighter container, a fiberboard container, and it would weigh maybe thirty pounds. In the fiberboard crate the shipping charge was based on the actual weight. We could put a dozen heads in, have a much lighter load, and pay less freight.

- Williams: And also we had better quality because as long as we were bringing it into the packing house to trim it and wrap it, we washed the heads. This was helpful because sometimes in the winter there would be a little mud on the lettuce. Muddy water would splash across the head, or sometimes there would be mud on the leaves, and this could be trimmed off in the packing house, and we got a better product. So there was a saving there.
- Lage: Do you recall how you made that change? Did you see it happening elsewhere, or did you think of it?
- Williams: I'm sure we weren't the first, but I just can't remember. We certainly weren't the last because others were still packing in the field when we'd been wrapping for a long time in the packing house.
- Lage: So each head was wrapped?
- Williams: Right, individually wrapped.
- Lage: The way you see it sometimes now.
- Williams: Yes, exactly. In the old days, when it was packed in the field, we put twelve heads in one crate, sometimes ten if they were large, and we left lots of leaves on.
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- So we got better quality, we got more uniformity of size packing it in the packing house. Every head was examined.
- Lage: I would think that would be important to the purchaser.
- Williams: It was, sure.
- Lage: But you still were shipping east.
- Williams: Still going east, same places.
- Lage: Hasn't the packing of cauliflower changed again?
- Williams: Well, most recently, yes. The cauliflower's gone back to the field again; packing houses are closed. This is what happened in the lettuce business. Lettuce used to be packed in the packing house, then they shut all the packing houses in Salinas and moved to the field, dry packing it in the field with these tries. Now they're wrapping lettuce on machines in the field. The business keeps changing.

Williams: But in the case of cauliflower it has again gone back to the field. When I sold we were building a harvester, and when I sold my business and equipment in 1983 I sold the harvester. It hadn't ever really operated; it was still under construction. But they have finished it--the family I sold it to, the Alameda people--and they have three of them now, I believe. They don't use the packing shed. They go right into the field with the machine, and they scrutinize every head, and it's sized, and trimmed, and wrapped in the field on this machine.

Lage: Is a lot of it done by the machine?

Williams: No, the machine is mostly composed of conveyor belts moving the product past the workers and then transporting the wrapped heads to someone to place in the box. It's still hand work, the trimming and the wrapping. They haven't devised a machine that will do that satisfactorily yet.

Lage: You say that you built the machine.

Williams: We were in the process of building it. It was an old tomato harvester we started with that had four-wheel drive. It was a big thing, and you could carry a lot of people on it, and it was just kind of a naked chassis, if you want to call it that. We had hired an engineer, and he was working on devising this machine, and I sold all that to the Alameda family.

Cauliflower Leaves, A Disposal Problem

Williams: A tremendous problem when we packed cauliflower in the packing house was disposing of the leaves. We used to leave the leaves in the field when we packed in the field. But when we started packaging the cauliflower in the shed, we brought in leaves with it--I mean long leaves--we needed to leave them on it to protect the head. We couldn't just trim it all down to a naked head and throw it in a big bin and haul it in there because it got all broken up. So we had to bring all these leaves in, and then we had to dispose of them. So that was a problem. We were bringing the leaves in, and then we had to haul them out again. And in the winter you can't even haul them back in the field, you can't get in the fields.

Lage: Because of the flooding.

Williams: The wetness in the soil. The only way we got the crop out was with huge tractors with four-wheel drives going through like big tanks or something, pulling these trailers, and the men walking in their boots, looking at every head, and if it was of a certain

Williams: size they'd cut it, and throw it in. They'd cut off the bottom, they'd take some of the growth off--sometimes cauliflower grows three feet high. We'd take a big cut off the top, but we'd still leave a lot of leaves for protection.

Lage: You're showing about a foot of leaf section.

Williams: Yes, that we would cut off.

Lage: How much would you leave on the plant?

Williams: Oh, we'd leave probably a foot, and cut off a foot, or cut off eighteen inches maybe. But we had to leave quite a few leaves on, and that was a problem getting rid of them.

Lage: So what did you do?

Williams: Well, for years we hauled them down to a place down near the Dumbarton toll plaza. I had a fellow that had some cattle, and cattle like to eat that stuff. And he would haul, too, which was advantageous to us. He'd come up, and he had some trucks, and we had a conveyer system that took these leaves out of the packing house and up into a big bin where they could be held until he came with his truck, and then he'd open this bin up, and they'd all fall into his truck, and he'd close it up and go away with it, and the bin would start filling again. He'd have to get back before it was full.

That worked fine for a while, for a number of years, but eventually there was objection to these leaves--the cattle couldn't eat all the leaves, and they would decay, and there was a smell and there were flies, and even though this was way down in the salt flats in those days, uninhabited, it got to be a problem. Then we found a person from the San Joaquin Valley, and he was willing to take it. The price of hay had gone up, cattle do like the stuff, and it has some nutrition, apparently. In fact, they kind of blend it, I think, with other feeds, kind of like Hamburger Helper, to stretch out the alfalfa.

This firm in the San Joaquin Valley had a bunch of trucks--it was a long haul, maybe to Tracy. They'd come all the way over with the trucks, and maybe make ten loads a day, with a set of doubles. It would be twenty big units--a truck and a trailer--perhaps twenty of these units a day, hauling this stuff. So it took quite a bit of equipment, and I was thankful that we didn't have to have the trucks and the drivers doing all this.

Lage: Sort of a recycling operation.

Williams: That's right.

Lage: Did you get very much pay for that?

Williams: We would get a very little bit, and I always felt kind of thankful to get anything because it would have been terrible if we had to dispose of it ourselves. We did explore hauling it to the dump, and they'd charge us a tremendous sum per load to take it to a dump and landfill it, or something.

Lage: What did you do when it was left in the field? Did it enrich the soil?

Williams: It has a nominal value, I'm sure, as humus, but it had some.

Lage: Are they leaving it in the field now? Have they been plowing it under?

Williams: Yes, they are. It just sits there. Of course, it doesn't get plowed under until the spring because you're harvesting in the winter, and the soil's too wet to really do anything with. It's damaging to the soil to work it when it's too wet.

So the leaves are now back in the field where they belong, and maybe this is the way the business will be for a while.

Lage: There are constant changes; it's quite fascinating. Okay, I think we should stop today, and we have a number of things to take up next time.

IV URBAN DEVELOPMENT AND AGRICULTURE

Sale of Patterson Lands for Housing Development, 1971

[Interview 2: October 6, 1986] ##

Lage: Today we're continuing the interview with Gene Williams. I just wanted to pick up a point from last week, when we talked about the Pattersons and their views about development and your understanding that they were interested in continuing agriculture.

Williams: Yes.

Lage: It occurred to me to ask what effect the sale in 1971 to Singer Housing had on you, and your reaction to it.*

Williams: Well, it was pretty unsettling to us, to me, because Don hadn't said anything about it, it was just kind of a bombshell. We ended up then negotiating with Singer. The Patterson land became Singer's, and so I had to start talking to Singer about extending leases, and their plans.

Lage: So you continued some farming while they were--

Williams: We continued farming the land, but we were not dealing with Pattersons any more. We were dealing with Singer. They didn't call it Singer, they called it Citation, I think, or Citation Homes, which was the development.

*In 1971, some four hundred acres of the Patterson Ranch were sold to the Singer Housing Division. Development of the land was delayed by a Fremont zoning ordinance, subsequent lawsuits, and extended negotiations. The final settlement made possible the creation of Ardenwood Park on the Patterson Ranch and involved land exchanges between Singer and the Pattersons. See interviews with Jack Brooks, Robert Fisher, and Robert Buck in this series.

Lage: Did you deal with Jack Brooks? [President of Singer Housing and a prominent developer in Fremont]

Williams: No, not on this project. Jack Brooks was a deer. I had dealt with him a number of times before on other properties. His firm was then called Besco. Then I dealt directly with Jack. On the Patterson land (Citation Homes), I seldom talked to Jack. Jack was always in the background, but he was more of a planner on this project. I was talking with his associates.

It was much more difficult because development was their aim, and we were concerned about our pipelines. If they took a piece of property out of agriculture we hoped it would be at the end of our line, rather than between the pump and the end of the line, which would cause an interruption in our water service. They were, of course, starting to make roads. That was another thing. This was good land they took, at the beginning, some of the best land, we felt. And they started to put their roads in, and that means cutting the pipelines, and moving dirt, and it was difficult and upsetting.

Lage: How was Citation Homes to deal with?

Williams: Oh, they were fine. They were as understanding as they could be; they were fine. But their business was so completely different. I don't think they ever really did understand what our problems were. They just thought they could give us thirty days notice or so, or tell us so we didn't plant another crop. But we had planned ahead in our rotation of crops and things, so it was disruptive.

Lage: Did you ever have any discussion about it with Don Patterson?

Williams: Oh, yes, I told him. He realized it was difficult for us, but that was the way the family wanted to go.

Lage: It's surprising they didn't give you a little more advance notice.

Williams: Well, as I recall, he didn't. He may have given us a little inkling of what the family was thinking, but I'm just not sure. It just seemed to me that it was a shock. I remember it as being quite a shock.

Lage: Did the land trading that occurred during negotiations to settle the lawsuit affect you?

Williams: Well, not adversely, I don't think. I guess we were conditioned to the fact that changes were going to be made there, at least that that part of the ranch was going to be developed. I don't recall any special problems with the swap.

Pesticides, Homeowners, and the East Bay Regional Park District

- Lage: Then you were really farming right in the midst of the development.
- Williams: The regional park got into it too, a little later, and I found that it was a little bit difficult dealing with them. They are environmentally inclined, and they had reservations about pesticides, things we were using--although we used them with great discretion, we weren't reckless. We didn't apply our own. It was applied by professional pesticide people, and it was a very legitimate firm. I always felt it was being handled properly, but the parks looked askance at that.
- Lage: Were you farming park land?
- Williams: The land that the park ended up on, in this involved business of Singer, and the city, and then the East Bay Regional Park got into it somehow--I've just forgotten all the particulars. But it was generally property around the mansion.
- Lage: So you were involved with that.
- Williams: Yes, we were farming that land. Then we had to start working with the park people.
- Lage: Life did get complicated.
- Williams: Yes, it did.
- Lage: In general, have you had problems with adverse reactions to pesticides?
- Williams: Not anything serious. But every now and then somebody would complain. We were using pesticide dusts, rather than liquid sprays in the early days. In the forties, fifties, and sixties we were using dust that people could see, and naturally if a cloud of dust blows over your house you're concerned about it [laughs].
- So we'd get calls once in a while, people would want to know, "what is that stuff you're putting out there?" But the liquids were not so noticeable, and also it was done often at night. The professional people we were using did most of their work at night. There wasn't wind for drift, and it just seemed to work out a lot better. People weren't concerned about it if they didn't see it.
- Lage: Were these aerial applications?

Williams: No, generally ground application. We did use planes on occasion.

Lage: Did you get advice on this from the university?

Williams: No, I don't think so. On what to use, do you mean?

Lage: What to use, or how it worked within this urban setting.

Williams: No, we just kind of learned, I guess. Also, in the winter when we would have a pest problem in cauliflower, which we were growing in the winter, often the ground was too wet, and we couldn't go on the ground with anything, and we'd have to use aerial application. When we got a lot of homes around us, we couldn't do that anymore. We weren't allowed to. They couldn't fly anything on because it was just too hit and miss—too much of this stuff blowing around where it shouldn't be. So that made it complicated. Then we couldn't spray where we wanted to sometimes because it was too wet.

Lage: Did that affect your productivity?

Williams: Somewhat, I'm sure, but it was never that much of a problem. Usually it would dry out a little, or something would happen. We always got around it, but it was inconvenient.

Lage: Was the park district hoping you could go to more natural controls?

Williams: Yes, they would like that very much, if we could just use biological controls—I mean, if they had their druthers. But they were somewhat practical, too, in realizing that that wasn't possible for us.

Lage: Did you try that? Was it possible on these crops?

Williams: I don't believe we ever did try it, no.

Lage: I know the university was doing some work with that, but that was probably in the eighties. I don't know how effective it would have been on cauliflower.

Williams: Yes. Well, by the eighties—I'm not that up on what was happening in the eighties, I just wasn't paying that much attention, and I'd hired some good people to do that, to take care of that, and arrange it. I'm not that aware of what we were doing.

The Alameda Family and L. S. Williams Company

Lage: Were the Alamedas the good people you hired?*

Williams: Yes, I'd hired the three sons.

Lage: Let's talk about that a little bit. How long did your relationship with the Alamedas go on?

Williams: Oh, it goes way back because, you see, we have the third generation now. Originally Tony was the patriarch, if you'd call him that. He worked for my father and my father's brothers in the thirties. Tony started working there, I think, about 1927 or 1928. My father came out, as I told you, in 1928. So he was working there from that time. He had a large family: four boys and two girls. All the boys worked on the ranch as children, so I've known them since they were kids, in fact. I was only a year or two older than the oldest one, so we were all working together, you might say, in the early days, in the thirties and forties.

The kids grew up with this experience on the farm, and they all went their various ways except Mel, who stayed. When I came back in 1949, full time, Mel was working there and doing a very good job. I convinced my father that we should put him on a monthly salary about 1952. He went off to the Korean war about 1951, and he was gone for a couple of years. When he came back I was happy to see him come back because he was such a good man, and I told my father I thought we ought to make him a foreman, pay him by the month. Also he had gotten married during that period, maybe just before he went to Korea, and then they had a child, and they lost one. Anyway, Mel was not working, he was spending some time with his wife--if you work by the hour, of course, you don't get paid. So I told my father I thought we ought to put him on a monthly salary, which we did.

So he became a foreman when he returned from the service. Then with his marriage he had three boys and a girl. The three boys, as they got old enough, would come out with him, and pretty soon they were driving a tractor--when they were just youngsters. They would work weekends, and they would work every summer, just as I had, just as we all had. But this was a little different, this was in the fifties--well, let's say sixties, when they were about twelve years old. Kids weren't doing that much anymore. But it was just like we grew up. Here these kids were doing the

*See interview with Mel Alameda in this series.

Williams: same thing that their father did, that I did, and they were great kids, good workers. Saved their money--real sensible kids, never got into any trouble.

So they all got through high school, and the eldest one, Steve, went off to Cal Poly, in San Luis Obispo. And two or three years later Craig got out of high school, and he went down there to Cal Poly. Then a couple years after that Tony got out of high school, and he went down there. So when Tony's going in, Steve's coming out, and Mel said, "What do you think about Steve? Would you like to have him?" And I said, "Sure," so we hired him.

Lage: Then did you hire him on as a foreman too?

Williams: Yes, and he worked about three years, or so, then Craig was out, and I hired him, and then in a couple more years Tony was out, and I hired him. Anyway, at least they were all trained in various facets of agriculture. Steve was taking care of pesticides, and I kind of lost track of just what we were doing. I knew he was interested in "integrated pest management," as they call it.

Lage: He came with some new ideas.

Williams: Oh, yes, all kinds of them. There was a little conflict at times between Mel and Steve, because Steve had the theory--he also had the practice because he'd had plenty of practice in everything on the ranch. But Mel had done it the old way and wanted to continue doing it, so they'd have some lively discussions at times. [laughs]

Lage: Was the operation big enough to allow these four grown men to--

Williams: Yes, right. Well, it was then, but when we started to lose land, like the Pattersons announcing they were going to sell off a big chunk, it was obvious to me that the operation would have to shrink, or else move on somewhere, branch out somewhere, and I just didn't feel like doing that. So I felt it was time to get out.

Lage: And the Alamedas were the natural people to sell to?

Williams: Well, I talked to Mel about it about three or four years before. I said I might not want to go on with this indefinitely, and would he and his family be interested in buying the business? And he said, sure, he certainly would. So about the time Tony got out--he was the youngest son--and the time he came to work, it seemed to me it was about time for me to get out, so I told him I really was anxious to quit. Everything pointed that way, with the reduced acreage, and it was obvious that it was going to

Williams: be a smaller business, and I really couldn't have all these people. They were willing to do that, so we worked out an arrangement with them.

Lage: Did they go on to get other land? They must have.

Williams: They did. They came over here [to the Livermore Valley], strangely enough. I lived in Fremont all this time, and we had friends over here also. So my wife and I decided that the area that we were living in was changing, and we decided we'd move over here to Pleasanton. I'd had farmer friends from Pleasanton, and I'd always thought that cauliflower wouldn't do very well here. I'd seen a few of them try it, and I thought it was too cold in the winter and too hot in the summer. But Mel and his sons found some land here between Pleasanton and Livermore and have rented it now for several years, two or three years. And they've grown these crops with pretty good success, I think. Not in the dead of summer, or the dead of winter, but they've grown cauliflower and lettuce.

Lage: Of course, now the same thing's happening here, a lot of development.

Williams: Yes, that's right. But even with me out, the organization was still too big, apparently, and they felt they had to have more land to justify--

Lage: Support four families.

Williams: And, of course, we lost a lot of that Patterson land just at the time that I was leaving. Hundreds of acres were sold for development.

Effect of the Water District's Pump Tax

Lage: Let's talk for a moment about the effect of the pump tax on your operation.

Williams: For a couple of years there was a pump tax, as I recall, on industry only. Agriculture was exempted for a few years. I believe that's correct. Finally agriculture was included [1970], and the meters were installed on all of our wells, much to our dismay. But it was at \$8 an acre foot, which was considerably less than the industrial rate. So agriculture did get a good break in price, although at that time that didn't seem all that advantageous to us. We were just upset at having an additional charge.

- Lage: You didn't really have a charge before, did you, for the water you pumped from your own wells?
- Williams: No, we just payed for our electricity, and drilling the well, and putting in the pump.
- Lage: And then there was a property tax for the water district.
- Williams: Yes, for things like flood control and water conservation, yes-- which was a very nominal tax. But the pump tax was a flat user's tax, based on acre-feet, gallons.
- Lage: Did the pump tax add a lot to your costs?
- Williams: Quite a bit. It was costing us, as I recall, about \$30,000 or \$35,000 a year additional. It was quite a tax, yes.
- Lage: Did it affect how you used water?
- Williams: Yes, we were much more saving. We never purposely wasted water, but sometimes water would get away and run out the lower end. It was all furrow irrigation at that time; we weren't using sprinklers in those days. Yes, it did help push us into sprinkler irrigation, with which you get a much more even distribution and you don't waste water, don't have a lot of run-off.
- Lage: Was there a strong lobbying effort by farmers?
- Williams: As strong as we could mount. The farmers, even then--and I guess this probably came into being in the sixties--even then were kind of a vanishing breed. Every decade we had fewer. So there was quite a concerted effort, and we hired an attorney. A few of us got together and hired an attorney, and we were trying to protect ourselves and oppose it. In fact, it was our efforts, and our attorney's efforts, I'm sure, that made our \$8 rate possible, or we might have been paying the same as industry.
- Lage: Which would have been how much more?
- Williams: Seems to me they were paying around \$36, something like that. Yes. And now it's up to \$50, or something. I've kind of lost touch, but I think agriculture's still at \$8, and I think that we had that written into the law. So you really have to change the law to change that; it isn't something the water board could just say, well, next year we'll double it. I don't believe it's that easy.
- Lage: So the farmers did show a certain amount of strength, for such a vanishing breed.

Williams: Yes, we did. But we had a very sympathetic person in Matt Whitfield, who was then running the water district.* He'd grown up there [in the Washington Township area]. His father and my father were friends, and I'd known Matt for a long time. His roots were there, so he was as protective of agriculture as he could be, but of course he had to run his business, and I could always see his point. He argued, properly, that the district was importing water and paying a fancy price for it. If we were pumping it out, we should be paying a share of that, for the use of that water.

We argued that when you bought land you bought the water under it, and you have the right to pump that water out. So, anyway, they prevailed finally, but it took a little while.

Lage: Would it have caused enough of a cost increase to force more farmers out, do you think?

Williams: I really don't think so. I don't think it pushed anybody out, unless somebody was just on the edge.

Farmers' Support for the Incorporation of Fremont

Lage: Another thing relating to government would be the incorporation of Fremont. What was the farmers' view of that?

Williams: Well, I guess it was mixed. That was in 1956. The election was held in January, 1956, and incorporation passed. I don't remember by what majority, but I really didn't get involved in that. I did talk to my father about it. He actively supported it. He thought that Hayward was going to annex us if we didn't band together—the five towns—and form our own city. He thought, as an unincorporated area, we were going to get gobbled up by Hayward, and that it would be better to run our own show. So he supported it, and I think he talked to other farmers, and I suppose some of them voted for it. But we were already so outnumbered it probably didn't make much difference what the farmers did.

Lage: Did anybody approach you about the incorporation in an effort to get support?

* See interview with Matt Whitfield in this series.

- Williams: Well, they didn't approach me. They probably approached him, because he was kind of an agriculture leader there then, and I think they probably did. He was active in the chamber of commerce, and I'm sure they did talk to him.
- Lage: I'm just wondering if the sense was that by incorporating they would try to protect an agricultural area, or that incorporation would give the go-ahead to develop?
- Williams: I never heard that really discussed, and, unfortunately, my father died about a week or two after the election, after the incorporation. The incorporation was January 20, or something, and he died on February 9, so he didn't get to see any of this. I suppose there must have been some promises made to agriculture, but I think he felt we didn't have much choice. This was the lesser of evils.
- Lage: They felt that it would be incorporated one way or the other.
- Williams: One way or the other, and he really didn't think Hayward was going to do a good job for us. They were showing signs of expansion, annexation, taking on little pieces, and finally Decoto and Alvarado followed Fremont just by a year or two [incorporating to form Union City]. They were even more concerned about Hayward, I guess.

The Problem of Salt-Water Intrusion

- Williams: On the subject of the pump tax, we didn't discuss it, but of course all farmers were concerned with the salt water intrusion, and this was the premise of the water district, to import water to raise the table and stop the salt from coming in from the bay.* Not to push anything out, but to stop more from coming in, and they did that very successfully. So we were certainly in favor of importing water, but I guess we just wanted somebody else to pay for it. [laughs]
- Lage: [laughs] Now that you're out of the business, you can look at it in a different way.
- Williams: Right.
- Lage: I guess they still have some problem with the salt, up in the Patterson land.

* See Whitfield interview.

- Williams: I think it's a problem of salt water trapped there from when the table was so low.
- Lage: Oh, I see. Not necessarily that more is coming in.
- Williams: No, I don't think more is coming in. I think they've stopped it. They had the last I heard, a few years ago. They raised the water table way up, to sea level or above, and so more salt water was not coming in. But there's a tremendous amount there because all during the forties and fifties there was an overdraft, and we kept lowering the table, and more and more salt water was coming in.
- Lage: Were you aware of this at the time that it was happening?
- Williams: Oh, yes. During the war there was a real problem with wells going dry, actually. The water table dropped down below the well. So people were deepening wells when they could, and drilling new wells, or else, if you didn't run out of water, the water got so salty that the crop would die. So it was a real on-going problem.
- Lage: Something you were aware of--
- Williams: Yes.
- Lage: Would that affect your choice of crops?
- Williams: Yes, in certain areas we would try to grow crops that were more salt tolerant--sugar beets and barley. We never grew much grain, because even then it just wasn't enough of an income-producer. We just couldn't justify growing a grain crop on vegetable land. But we'd do it on occasion, just for humus, rotation, and a change of crop.
- Lage: It was more salt tolerant?
- Williams: Yes.
- Lage: There are a lot of considerations involved.
- Williams: Yes.

Pilfering From the Fields

- Lage: Let's talk about trying to farm in the midst of this growing suburban/urban community. You mentioned the smells of the cauliflower.

Williams: People, most of them, complained of that good-naturedly. But there was a problem with pilfering, stealing. When we had tomatoes, for instance, I remember one Sunday when Tony Alameda went out, and there was a whole crew out there. Just like one of our crews picking tomatoes, only they were just people that had driven by. Somebody went out there, and pretty soon somebody else saw them and stopped, and pretty soon there was a group out there picking tomatoes just to take home.

Lage: That's incredible.

Williams: Yes, it is. So there was always that problem.

Lage: Was that a serious, ongoing problem?

Williams: It was a problem always, not of that size, having groups out there. But people were always stopping. In fact, a funny thing happened to me one day. [laughs] We had an office in Centerville, and our packing shed's still there [burned down on January 1, 1987]. The Southern Pacific Railroad built the packing house for us in 1928, when the four brothers started, on the condition that we ship our produce on the Southern Pacific lines. It was located right along the Southern Pacific railway, and they put a spur in for us to load cars. I was there at the office one day, and Phyllis had asked me to bring home a head of lettuce.

I jumped in my car—it was noon, I was going home for lunch—and drove north. We had rented land out there, about a couple hundred acres, just north of Centerville where American High School is now. I drove out there, just a mile or less, stopped the car, went out and cut a head of lettuce, jumped back in my car, made a U turn, and went back into Centerville. At that time we had only one signal in Centerville, at Thornton Avenue and Fremont Boulevard. I was sure the light was green when I went through the signal, but I wasn't paying particular attention. But I looked in my mirror, and there was a flashing red light. "Oh, my gosh, I must have gone through a light or something," I thought.

I pulled over, and this officer came up, and he said it wasn't going through the light at all. He had seen me going to this field and cutting the head of lettuce. And he said, you know what you did back there? You went in and stole some farmer's lettuce. I thanked him profusely for being so alert, and I said, I hate to tell you this, but I happen to own that field of lettuce, and I just stopped there to cut one of those heads. He was so astonished, and he felt so chagrined about it—I really almost didn't want to tell him, because I was so pleased to have him doing this.

Lage: That's good support.

Williams: Oh, it was wonderful. I told him very kindly how much I appreciated it, but he went away shaking his head, and I doubt if he ever stopped another person.

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Lage: Did you ever get into the retail produce business?

Williams: For a few years, we had a vegetable stand. And it was pretty successful, although it was a lot of work keeping it supplied, and handling the money, and--

Lage: You had to bring other kinds of crops in.

Williams: Yes, to really get into it. We didn't make it that big a deal. If we had corn, and lettuce, and cauliflower, we might sell three things. And people would buy it, because they knew they were fresh, but we didn't have pineapples, and guavas, and eggplant, and all these things that markets do have.

Farm Laborers, Labor Camps, and the Community

Lage: There must have been other problems related to your suburban surroundings. We talked about the pesticides a little bit; what about people's reaction to the labor camps? Was that a problem?

Williams: Our labor camps were pretty isolated, so they really didn't present a problem of any size. I'm just trying to think if there was anything. There was always a resentment by some people about us having Mexican people imported here. I know people would stop and bawl me out once in a while for taking American workers' jobs away by bringing in these people from Mexico to do this cheap steep labor. There were always hard-core people who didn't approve of that at all. Lots of them, I think, were pro-union, and they thought it was just a threat to the unions to have these non-union people here. And they claimed they worked for substandard wages, which they didn't really, although all agricultural wages were pretty low.

Lage: Was this the bracero program?

Williams: Yes, that's what I was thinking of. There was really a lot of resentment to that by some people. They didn't exactly complain about our labor camps as being unattractive or anything, but they were not very attractive. They were just very functional.

- Lage: I've always heard that there were very poor living conditions in labor camps.
- Williams: They are poor. It's hard to keep them nice. If you give them something nice, these people that we were importing really didn't know how to take care of anything. They hadn't ever lived under very good standards. Many of them would come barefooted--they'd come up from Mexico without any shoes! They didn't wear shoes down there, apparently, and they looked pretty wild. They weren't very clean; lots of them didn't know about cleanliness.
- Lage: Were there showers in the camps?
- Williams: Oh, yes, sure, we had to have that. Oh, no, this was all first class--I mean, as far as labor camps were concerned. And it was regulated by the federal government.
- Lage: Would they make inspections?
- Williams: Yes, we had camp inspections, and they'd be made without notification, on the spur of the moment, and always there would be violations--the showers dirty, or something. In the early days the workers were charged \$1.75--that came out of their pay--per day, for food. Well, that was a long time ago, of course, but even then you couldn't feed them very vastly for \$1.75. But they were to have milk once a day, and a certain amount of meat, and it was supposedly a balanced diet for them.
- Lage: Did you provide the cook?
- Williams: Yes, we hired and provided cooks, and maintained the kitchens, and for a while we did all the shopping. I remember doing it, in the late forties I guess. There were stores in Union City and Alvarado that just had things that Mexican people liked.
- Lage: So you tried to get Mexican style food.
- Williams: Yes, right.
- Lage: Sounds like quite a job.
- Williams: It was, yes. Sometimes we'd have a hundred people there in the camp, and it was a big job. Also, when they were sick we had to take them to the doctor, and it was like sick-call in the service or something. You'd fall out if you were sick. That was a job I had. Somebody had to do it, and I didn't want to take somebody that was doing some productive job, so I would haul them around to the doctor. It was pretty frustrating because some of them were just malingering, or--
- Lage: Did you then pay their medical--

Williams: They had health insurance coverage through the association. There was an association formed of the growers in Santa Clara and Alameda counties, let's say, and maybe in Monterey County too, possibly. And we all brought these people in through the association. The association had some paid employees, who kept the records of when the braceros were due to go back. We kept their pay records, and stuff, but--

Lage: They just had a certain amount of time that they could stay here and work?

Williams: Yes, right. And you couldn't bring them up and not give them work; you had to guarantee them work, so it was kind of a touchy thing. You had to be careful to not get more than you needed, or they wouldn't be working enough hours.

You asked me something that I really didn't answer, about insurance. The association had this insurance policy which covered them all. They were covered for industrial accidents, but for illness they also had a form of insurance which the doctors didn't look on very kindly because it was low pay, and often the insurance company would not pay 100 percent of what the doctor was charging. It was always a hassle finding doctors who would look at these people because some of them didn't want them sitting around the waiting rooms. So I was always looking for new doctors, and as new doctors would come into town looking for business, they'd be happy to see anybody. But as they got established, pretty soon I found it more difficult to have my people treated.

Lage: These are the kind of things you don't think of when you think about labor problems.

Williams: No.

Lage: Then later, when the bracero program ended, were there new kinds of problems? You didn't have to look after their medical care.

Williams: Well, in a way, there were problems in that we sometimes didn't have the quality of worker that we had with the braceros, but it really was a blessing to get the federal and state people off of our backs, inspecting the camp, and all this. It was a real hassle. Sometimes there were complaints made by the Mexicans-- they would complain to the Mexican consul. I had to go to San Francisco at least once to talk to the consul about one of the foreman who allegedly had abused one of the workers. He'd complained to the consul, and I had to go up and talk about it.

Lage: So they didn't bring their own foremen. You used your foremen?

Williams: That's right, they were just the workers.

- Lage: When you went to the non-braceros, the American workers, did the labor contractor have anything to do with organizing the workers in the field, or did he just bring them to you?
- Williams: Well, let me think back. When the braceros first left, we got affiliated with an individual who had a group of men, and I think this person had his own camp somewhere, and he would just bring them every day. He'd bring thirty, or forty, or fifty maybe, whatever we were needing, and it varied because some days his workers wouldn't want to go to work for some reason, so we never knew for sure how many he was going to bring—and it wasn't all that important because if we were a little short we would just work a little longer, or something. So he was housing them.
- Eventually, I guess, he lost his labor camp, and we ended up housing the men. But he was involved; they were really his people, and he would go finding them, searching around wherever they find these people and get them for work. I think we'd pay him a percentage—we've had so many deals over the years I've just forgotten what we did with this one individual. I guess it was a percentage of whatever the men were making he would get as contractor, to give him an incentive to keep doing what he was doing.
- Lage: Would it be unrealistic to think that if they were paid a considerably higher wage you would have gotten better, more productive workers? Or would that have been economically unfeasible?
- Williams: Well, we never tried it. We did use piece work on some jobs, as I told you, like cucumbers and tomatoes. And I think Mel and his sons have tried to use it in cauliflower, which I always thought was pretty difficult, but they've used it to some degree, I think, just to give the worker an incentive to produce more, and earn more.
- Lage: Was there a minimum, and then--
- Williams: Yes, we have to guarantee them a minimum wage, but I can't recall ever even thinking—you mean, like doubling their pay, just to see if they would start producing more?
- Lage: Not with the same work force, but by offering higher wages you might attract better workers.
- Williams: Oh, better caliber.
- Lage: Better caliber people applying for the work.
- Williams: I don't know. I guess, if the pay's high enough you might hire them away from some other profession. I never explored that.

Coexisting with Suburban Neighbors: Dust, Noise, and Smog

- Lage: We were talking, before we got off on labor again, about coexisting with the neighbors. You had mentioned, in passing, tractor noise and dust and things like that.
- Williams: Oh, yes. We used to work at night, sometimes, in the spring. We'd work day and night and have people driving tractors at night with lights, and sometimes we've had people complain that the tractors were too noisy, even if they were a half a mile away. The sounds carry at night. So there was that. There were only certain areas you could work at night, and pretty soon there was really no place you could work at night; there were too many people around us.
- Lage: Would the city get in the act?
- Williams: No, I don't recall that the city ever got in the act. The city did get in the act when we would put mud on the roads. Harvesting cauliflower, in the winter, we would bring a lot of mud out of the field, and then it would fall off on the road as we were transporting the cauliflower into our packing house in Centerville. The police would get after us for that. So we would have to get the mud off the trailers before we could put them on the highway.
- I remember, too, an experience with dust. I think one of Mel's boys was driving a tractor, and this person came out to the field one day and just bawled him out, gave him heck because he was making all this dust and it was blowing over toward his house. It was our municipal judge, Judge Purley, and he didn't like it at all. I guess we stopped, or maybe the wind changed direction the next day, or something. We had to do our work, and the prevailing wind was from the west. He just happened to be on the east side of this field, and that's where the dust was going to go. There were always little problems like that.
- Lage: Did the urban scene affect you at all? I'm thinking of things like air pollution when the Nimitz freeway went through--did that affect your crop productivity?
- Williams: No. Years ago the farm adviser told me that we were having bronzing on the broccoli. It wasn't the head; it was the leaves, but the leaves affect the quality of the head too. He told me that it was from smog. This was in the fifties, and we didn't know what smog was. That was his assessment, that we were having some problems with smog then. But varieties change, and maybe they're more resistant to that now. I don't remember ever seeing anything from polluted air that I recognized as hurting the crop.

- Lage: Here's another thought that occurred to me--the banking relationships. As a farmer did you have to borrow money frequently for your cash flow?
- Williams: No, fortunately, we were established well enough we didn't have to borrow money. We financed our own farming operation.
- Lage: So you didn't have an on-going banking--
- Williams: No. And I think that's kind of unusual, but we didn't have to borrow any money.
- Lage: That was fortunate.
- Williams: Oh, yes, because that interest rate you pay could well be your profit.

Taxes on Agricultural Land

- Lage: Let's see what else we have to discuss here. Here's something going way back. Do you recall Proposition A2 in 1953? This was before the Williamson Act was even thought of, I guess; it was a county effort to keep the assessed values of agriculture land lower, and keep the taxes for agricultural lands under control. I found in a newspaper article from 1953 a quote from your father arguing for Proposition A2 before the county board of supervisors. He was quoted as saying, "Farming will be pushed out of Washington Township over my dead body." Do you recall this?
- Williams: I have no recollection of Proposition A2. The quote doesn't sound like my father. But if A2 passed, it must have been circumvented in some way because our taxes just went up horrendously.
- Lage: Did they go up more after incorporation?
- Williams: Oh, yes. I really wasn't even aware of taxes before incorporation. I never was involved in paying them or looking at the tax bills, but before Prop 13, which rolled taxes back to 1978 levels, I think, our taxes on the land were just going through the roof, and it was a tremendous savings to have Proposition 13.
- Lage: That was a benefit to you?
- Williams: Yes. We were just getting taxed out of existence.
- Lage: Did you pay the taxes on leased land, or are you talking about the land that you owned?

- Williams: I'm talking about land that we owned.
- Lage: Did the owners of the land that you farmed on pass the taxes on to you?
- Williams: Not directly. They were under the Williamson Act--Pattersens, let's say, specifically.
- Lage: Your land was not under the Williamson Act?
- Williams: No. I didn't think I should do it--I never did it. That's why our taxes were going up. I felt that we'd lose our flexibility because I knew that the land we owned was in a very key area. In fact, we'd given the city ten acres of land to build their city hall. So we were right in the middle. I knew we couldn't--
- Lage: You were right there where Fremont's central park is now?
- Williams: Yes, our labor camp was right there, where there's a big Mexican restaurant--I forget the name of it. So I knew that land would be sold, I was just trying to hold on as long as I could because it was going up in value. I just thought the Williamson Act wouldn't be the thing for us because we knew we weren't going to keep it in agriculture indefinitely. So we never got into it, but it was costly in taxes and really getting to be horrendous. I thought I was going to have to sell it about 1978 or so, just prior to Prop. 13, but that knocked it back.
- Lage: Have you sold it now?
- Williams: Yes, it's all sold.
- Lage: I think we've covered really everything that we outlined here, except I wanted to ask you a question about the involvement of your family with farming. Did your wife get involved in the business, or your children?
- Williams: No, no. I have a daughter, and she hasn't been involved in it--never was--and my wife wasn't either. Or my sisters. I have two sisters. So there was really no reason to continue the business when I got tired of it and ready to get out. No one in the family was going to take it over and try to go on with it.
- Lage: Kind of nice having the Alamedas there to pick it up.
- Williams: It is, almost like family. I've known them all so long. In fact, I went down and had lunch with Mel last Friday and had a very nice time with him.

Transcribed by Johanna Wolgast
Final Typed by Shannon Page

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Berkeley, California

THE PATTERSON FAMILY AND RANCH:
SOUTHERN ALAMEDA COUNTY IN TRANSITION

Mel Alameda

Farming on Fremont's Northern Plain in the 1980s:
Agriculture's Last Stand

An Interview Conducted by
Ann Lage
in 1986

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INTERVIEW HISTORY — Mel Alameda

Mel Alameda has been farming since 1947, first as an employee of the L.S. Williams Company and, since 1983, when Gene Williams sold the company to Mel and his three sons, as owner of Alameda and Sons. His father, Tony Alameda, worked for forty-eight years for the Williams Company and was a civic leader in the Washington Township area. Since 1956, when L.S. Williams first contracted with the Patterson family, the Alamedas have been farming on the Patterson Ranch.

The interview with Mel Alameda took place in his pick-up truck, as he drove me around the Patterson lands leased and farmed by the Alamedas. As we drove, he pointed out the farming areas, the areas of housing development, the newly developed farm machinery, and the water delivery systems. Mel Alameda's lyric appreciation of the rich soil and ideal climate on this "god-given site for farming", his quick reaction to incursions on his water pipes from construction workers, and his interchanges with the farm laborers all provided insight into the complexities of farming in the midst of constant urban development.

During our tour of the Alameda operation, Mel Alameda discussed the problems of adapting to a constantly shrinking piece of agricultural land, the impacts of the Coyote Hills and Ardenwood parks, and the constraints placed on farming by suburban neighbors concerned with pesticides, dirt, and noise. His account also reveals the pressure placed on his operation by the poor farm economy and his family's efforts to adapt their growing and marketing to survive in southern Alameda County in the 1980s.

The interview took place on November 17, 1986. Mr. Alameda made very few changes in his review of the transcript. The tapes of the interview session are in The Bancroft Library.

Ann Lage
Interviewer/Editor
Project Director

September, 1988
Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library
University of California at Berkeley

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

(Please print or write clearly)

Your full name MELFORD ALAMEDA

Date of birth 6/17/29 Place of birth CENTERVILLE, CA.

Father's full name ANTONE E. ALAMEDA

Birthplace CENTERVILLE, CA

Occupation FARM SUPERINTENDENT

Mother's full name PAULINE GRONLEY ALAMEDA

Birthplace ~~CA~~ SAN FRANCISCO, CA

Occupation HOME MAKER

Where did you grow up? WASHINGTON TOWNSHIP

Present community MISSION SAN JOSE-IRVINGTON

Education WASHINGTON UNION HIGH SCHOOL

Occupation(s) FARMER

Special interests or activities GOLF, HUNTING - TRAVEL
AND ALL SPORTS

I "PUSHED FROM ALL SIDES" IN AN AGRICULTURAL PARADISE

[Interview 1: 17 November 1986]##

Starting out on the Patterson Ranch in the Fifties

[This interview was recorded in Mel Alameda's truck as we drove around the ranch and he pointed out the areas recently developed, the farming operation, Coyote Hills park, the Alameda Creek Flood Control channel, etc.]

Alameda: That's my son [on the intercom]. I have three boys. All were raised on the ranch and all are expert tractor drivers and good kids, too. They still like me after [laughter] all the tough work they went through.

Lage: So they all were raised on the ranch and then went off to school and came back to it?

Alameda: They went to college.

I guess you talked to Gene Williams about when we moved on the ranch.

Lage: Yes, but you tell me from the beginning.

Alameda: Well, we used to farm--my dad worked for Mr. Williams for about forty-eight years before he retired, and I came to work when I got out of school.

Lage: When was that?

##This symbol indicates that a tape or a segment of a tape has begun or ended. For a guide to the tapes see page 258.

Alameda: Nineteen forty-seven. Graduated from Washington High and came to work for Williams. I used to do all the insecticide work, spraying the things at nighttime. These were the days when you could use dust and DDT and dust all night long. It seemed to me we didn't have as many mosquitoes and everything in those days because it used to just drift all over the place. Now they've got all these rules and you can't do any of these things any longer.

Lage: Do you have any feelings about that? Do you think that's a mistake? Has that interfered with your farming?

Alameda: Yes, it's made it harder to farm by regulating all the things that we can and we can't do. I'm not so sure. I hope some day that they don't prove that everything we've done is wrong. I'd feel bad about that.

It's impossible to farm without using some kind of fertilizer or some kind of chemical for control. If you did [use no chemical controls], you just couldn't harvest your crop. There's aphid on them, there's worms on them, and then they've got regulations that say you can't ship your product if it's not clean. Consequently, you have to keep it clean, and it costs a lot of money to keep it clean. But without it, you have to throw everything away. You can't exist that way; you have to do it the right way or don't do it at all. Unfortunately, the right way is probably cheaper than the wrong way because the wrong way you can't exist.

But we farmed this one ranch [the Patterson Ranch] and started in 1956. We came in and started farming the ranch, and there were a lot of little sharecroppers in here. The Patterson family evidently liked dealing with just one instead of with all these people; they chose that every time somebody gave up a piece of ground and we took it over.

Lage: Do you remember any of these people that were here?

Alameda: Yes. There were the Roses, the Rose brothers' farm; the Maciels-- they went to Tracy. Mr. Mello had a little piece of ground in the back. There's another Italian, a fellow by the name of Zambetti, he was in there. Mr. Christenson, he raised some corn there. Gus King, he goes quite a ways back, and Marchy's dairy.

Lage: Do you remember a Donald Furtado?* I've been given his name as someone who worked not as a sharecropper, but worked for the Pattersons on the ranch. Does that ring a bell at all?

*See interview in this series.

Alameda: He may--if he's the one I think--live right over on Jarvis Road.

Lage: He lives over across the freeway?

Alameda: Yes, I see him walking down the road every so often. I didn't know what his name was; I never worked with him.

Lage: Was he a sharecropper, do you know?

Alameda: No. He may have just been an employee for Margorie Patterson or something. When we got here, Henry Patterson was no longer alive, and the Patterson boys weren't on the ranch, and Will Patterson-- I think it was Will, the one that lived in the house on the other side of the ranch--he was still around the ranch driving around in his jeep and he had his dog that used to ride with him. Same kind of dog that General Patton had. I got a kick out of the two of them. Mr. Patterson was getting old at the time, but they were a good pair. They looked both rough and sort of ornery. I guess then I was just younger at the time, and they appeared that way.

But the dog and Mr. Patterson would sit in the jeep with no top on it and they'd ride around the ranch occasionally. He still lived in that house. When he passed away, why, I guess he stated that if none of his sons wanted to live in the house, it was to be burned. A lot of people thought that was a terrible thing. I didn't. I've seen houses out here when you move out of them for a couple of weeks. The next thing, they steal everything in it, the windows, the doors, faucets. At one place, they took the bathtub out of it and the water ran for three weeks before they even knew that somebody had stole the tub.

So, anyway, they burned that house and I had to take the tractor in there and push all the brickwork and everything--it had a big basement, and I had to push it into that hole and cover it all up. It's over there in the park right now. Someday somebody will think they have a big find when they dig it up.

Lage: Have a big archaeological research project. [laughs]

Alameda: That's right. But this was all part of the ranch [points out area where homes are built or being built], and this has just been developed. They took this away last year; this one this year; that one in '85, and this one back in here was--

Lage: Now, have we passed the freeway yet?

Alameda: No, this is all in the middle of the ranch.

Lage: Was this being farmed up until just a few years ago?

Alameda: Oh, yes. I farmed this one last year and this one over here in '85. This back over here was about '83 when we had some of it.

Lage: We're on Paseo Padre, heading east. I just want to make clear where we're going.

Alameda: That's right, Paseo Padre. When we first took over the ranch it was about twelve hundred acres.

Lage: Now, when you say when you first took over, are you talking about--?

Alameda: Nineteen fifty-six. That's thirty years ago.

A God-Given Site for Farming

Alameda: It was George Patterson, wasn't it, the first Mr. Patterson?

Lage: Yes, George Washington Patterson.

Alameda: He had to be fairly smart to settle in this area. There's probably a lot of people who won't agree with me and it's not just because I'm farming, but I think it's a disgrace what we're doing. The way we're taking this land and doing this [points to new residential construction] to it with these homes.

Lage: It's pretty good farming land?

Alameda: Well, yes. It's something that's happened over millions of years, where the water runs out of those hills and it washes all this top soil down, and there's not too many places like this. There's water underground. It's just like rivers down there. There's not that many places that I can say God made or whoever developed them, but when they dig sewer lines out here and find top soil twenty feet deep that's taken many, many years to wash from the higher country down here, and we're just putting asphalt over the top of it. I realize there's a lot of people that like this climate. That's the main thing that we've got going for us over here--climate. We can raise a product twelve months out of the year, and you just can't do that in so many places.

Lage: So you've got the climate plus the soil--

Alameda: Plus the water. There are hills up there that you can't farm; they have none of the top soil, nothing up there. But they proceed to come down here on this flat ground because it's cheaper. That's a mistake and someday it's going to be smart

enough, I think, that we'll probably destroy ourselves and it'll probably revert to the farm land again. We won't do it. We won't see it. Maybe it'll take another million years, I think.

But they dug a test hole over there one time for water and the driller said he hit some redwood at three hundred feet. I don't know how he hit redwood down there at three hundred feet unless it was somebody there a long, long time ago. But I think it can happen again. If some catastrophe happens, I would imagine this would all go down and fill up and somebody will come along and do it all over again.

Lage: Start over because it's a perfect place.

Alameda: Yes.

Lage: Do you get involved in any political efforts?

Alameda: No, my father did. My father [Antone Edward Alameda] was a good man. He was on the hospital board, the school board, handed all his kids their diplomas in high school. I saw the abuse that he took and I never wanted any part of it.

This is Alameda Creek right here. Now this creek ran right alongside the ranch for years and years. Every spring or every winter, the creek would overrun. It would just spill over its sides and go on into the ranch. That creek used to run a different direction years and years ago, and the Pattersons were smart enough to know that if they diverted that water and sent the creek out a different direction, eventually that ground would fill up a little bit with top soil and get better. So they changed the direction and the creek ran here.

Well, every spring I used to have to go out there with wagons and pick up all the trees that came down from the canyons and from the higher country, clean off the land, re-level it, and start hoping that the next year it didn't all run over and have to do it all over again. But almost every spring we had to do it. We had to pick up the dead wood. They always said that they wouldn't build up that area because it was in the flood plain, but when they fixed the channel there--the Army Corps of Engineers came in and they widened the canal from Niles Canyon all the way to the bay. They took it out of the flood plain. Once it was out of the flood plain, then they were able to build on it.

Lage: Did you have the feeling at the time that the reason they were doing this was to allow this land to be developed?

Alameda: No, I would say that they almost had to do it because every year they just knew it was going to go under water. You had no control of anything, and that's not good. But as long as it went

under water, there was nothing you could do about building on it. I think I would have my second thoughts on buying a house ever in that area because I think if everything happens right some day, if it's raining and the tides are right and everything, I can see that, maybe--even though these engineers have got it all figured out—I can see where some of these places would be in some water. The old cliff dwellers and all these old timers, the Indians and everybody else, went on high country. I think they knew what they were doing.

Lage: It definitely is a natural flood plain. It probably was under water completely at one time.

Alameda: Oh, definitely, I think it was. On the back of the ranch there are mounds out there where there's Indian burial grounds. They were pretty crafty. They could move about very fast if they had to. You'd hate to pick up a house nowadays to try to get it out of the way of anything.

Fifth Generation in Washington Township

Lage: [laughs] Tell me about your family now. When did your family first come to this area? Was it your father or grandfather?

Alameda: They tell me we're five generations here in Washington Township, so that would take us back about a hundred and twenty years, I think. My dad passed away two years ago and he was eighty-nine at the time. He was born in 1895 about four or five miles from here. They tell me his mother was born on Decoto Road. I don't really know about that, but I know my dad was born on Mowry Avenue and he went to school in Centerville. He didn't complete high school.

Lage: Did his father farm?

Alameda: I don't know what grandpa did. Grandpa had a little bit. I saw some old books of some records about chickens and selling chickens and a few other things, but it wasn't on any big scale. In those days nothing was on a big scale. We used to walk horses. My dad would send us out to move the horses, and we'd just walk them from one ranch to the other and that would be about, maybe, three or four miles just walking down the roads. That's the way everything was done. [laughs] You thought you were really doing good when you got a horse trailer back in the forties.

But we farm better now. My dad did it during the thirties. My mother drove a truck. By the way, my father's Portuguese but my mother's Norwegian. Her mother and father came from Norway and came to San Francisco. My dad was a pretty crafty guy. He

married my mother when he was, I think, twenty-nine and my mother was fifteen. [laughter] So he had the better of two things: He had a young wife, and then he had a younger woman to take care of him in his older days.

New Equipment for Cauliflower Harvesting and Packaging

- Alameda: We're cutting cauliflower right there. We used to haul it the old way and pack it in the shed. In the forties and the thirties, we'd cut and pack them in the field and then take them in. Then everybody wanted you to change to shed packing. That's what everybody wanted. So then all the equipment was designed to pick it up, throw it, take it to the shed, pack it, ice it. Now they say, "Stay off the roads. We don't want mud, we don't want any of this." So civilization has now caught up with us out here, and we can't exist. So we're back packing in the field. All the leaves, the mud, everything, we hope stays in the field, and the finished product comes out the back of that machine.
- Lage: Oh, I see. So the reason for going back to packing in the fields is to make your neighbors happy?
- Alameda: That's correct. It's been a necessity. We've had to spend a lot of money in order to try to get along with people. We have two machines.
- Lage: When did you develop this machine?
- Alameda: My boys designed this machine, and it's been in the field for about three years. We have a patent on both of them. There are just certain things about them that nobody else has.
- Lage: Describe for me what it does.
- Alameda: It's a miniature ski lift, is what it is. The cutters are cutting the flower, they trim it, and they put it on a little basket. It travels along that machine; it goes up to the top, where the women put each head individually in the plastic bag. Then another lady will put it in a box, and when it comes out it's a finished product ready to go to the market.
- Lage: All packed. How many to a box?
- Alameda: You want to get the boxes that have twelve. That's what you like to get, the ideal size. Sometimes cutters make a mistake, and they cut them too small, so then you put sixteen heads in there. There's all kinds of regulations. If you say you've got twelve heads in a box there has got to be twelve heads. If you've got

sixteen, you've got to state that, or nine, or whatever. We take it down to the vacuum cooler, and it's cooled. The temperature has to be kept right.

Lage: Where's the vacuum cooler? Is that something you own?

Alameda: No, it's a cooling operation about eight miles down the road, Central Cooling.

Problems with Water Quality

[brief interruption to talk to one of his workers]

Lage: Sounds like another headache?

Alameda: Oh, just pumps and things that all go haywire. Those wells there go down in the ground about three hundred feet and being so close to the bay, we have trouble with the water—salt. It's harder and harder to farm. We've been forced to use different techniques and sprinkle instead of furrow irrigate. When you furrow irrigate, it brings the salts up and when you sprinkle it drives it away from the seed. So we do a lot of sprinkling. It costs a lot more money but if you're going to farm this ground you can't do what's done someplace else, you have to do what's good for this area.

Lage: When I talked to Matt Whitfield, he told me about various measures they've taken to prevent salt water intrusion. Have they not worked totally, or are you just too close to the bay here?

Alameda: Well, you listen to them talk and they're saying that the bad water was being sucked in or running inland so they have to purchase more good water and force the bad water back out and you've got to sort of use it up as it goes. I can't see where it's getting any better; it just keeps getting worse. All these theories of theirs that are supposed to work, I don't see them working. But I know that if they didn't bring the water down Niles Canyon to pour underground that we'd have many more problems with our pumps. We used to run out of water in the summertime and the fall.

Lage: Run out of water altogether?

Alameda: Yes. The water would drop down below. Your pump is at a hundred and eighty feet or wherever it was; if the water goes below that, then you just get nothing. So once they started importing water, pouring it into that aquifer down there, we never had to lower our pumps again, so it's definitely helping. It hasn't helped the

quality of the water in this area, but it has helped that we haven't run out of water, and we've had two drought seasons. Yes, it has helped.

Lage: Does the quality of the water affect what you can plant?

Alameda: Oh, sure, definitely. The better the water, the better the crop. With poor water, you have to farm in different ways. If the water gets so bad that you can't use it, then you wouldn't be able to farm. There's been some wells out here that you couldn't use.

Duck Ponds, Indian Mounds, and Farming in the Coyote Hills Area

Alameda: This is all part of the Patterson ranch. He had a nice area when he came here. I don't know how many thousand acres he had when he started.

Lage: I heard about three thousand.

Alameda: That's very possible, because he went across Jarvis Road all the way up into the other side almost over to Thornton. That was all farm. And all these hills [the Coyote Hills].

Lage: Was this farmed down here, do you think, or was it too marshy?

Alameda: No, this used to be farmed. He used to raise hay and all that over there. In the wintertime this was where the water all collected--it went underwater--but in the spring and summertime it all drained off, and they put hay, and they farmed sugar beets and tomatoes. Probably used to raise some tomato plants on the backside of this hill right next to the water.

But they sold it. You probably have those times and figures when Don Patterson--that was Will Patterson's son-- was running the ranch. He was the one that we dealt with. He was a very fine fellow and a nice man. He was in charge of the farm operation, and they sold 435 acres, something like that, to flood control. That's some on the other side of the channel. They sold another four hundred and something acres to the East Bay Regional Park. So that was almost 900 acres.

Lage: For this Coyote Hills area.

Alameda: This Coyote Hills area and the flood control.

Lage: The way I understood it they didn't have a lot of choice about selling it. Coyote Hills was actually condemned by the park district.

Alameda: That could be. They never told me the particulars. All I know was the next day it was gone.

Lage: But you were farming this area for Williams?

Alameda: Yes. We came way down. Not down in this area [down near Coyote Hills at the site of the Patterson duck pond]. We hadn't done anything with it, but years before us the other fellows--Marchy's dairy and Gus King--had. We just farmed on the ground that we probably could get some lettuce and cauliflower and corn from. We raised a lot of things at the time. This was the best duck pond in the state right here because the Pattersons, all of them way back, used to like to hunt. They had in this low ground a wonderful duck pond right in this area, it was a natural.

All these hills and all--they used to get red rock off of this hill, much like that from the Niles quarry over there. This whole section down through here is all very good rock.

I always look. All over this ranch I've been looking for over thirty years. Every time a ditch goes in or a trench or something I always figure I'm going to find a treasure of some sort because I knew the old timers always used to bury their garbage or whatever they had. They didn't have dumps so they always found some place or other to dig a hole and bury things. Trenching all over, miles and miles of it, I've never found anything until I came down here. They had a cement line down here that was broken right in there. I took my back hoe and dug it up. Lo and behold, here I was pulling out nice old bottles, ale bottles. By that time the park had had the place, and they wouldn't let anything be taken away. [laughs] They never did dig it up. The only place I've found anything is right there [at the site of the duck pond].

Lage: Do you think that's from the duck hunters?

Alameda: Well, it's from the duck hunters. They probably had a dump in there years ago. I would imagine if you go down there and dig a little bit, you'll find some beauties but, I haven't been able to do it.

Lage: Someday they'll have a university team out here investigating. [laughter]

Alameda: Yes. I would imagine the Indians roamed here, but their burial grounds were down there further. The ground is real fine. I don't know why; it's like ash. The University of California, Stanford, San Jose State, they all used to come out in the fifties and their classes would research. They'd dig them up. They'd have them map everything. Then they stopped doing it. They fenced the areas off to preserve them. But I was told they had so many remains already in boxes and everything else, and nobody's

ever been able to do anything with them. They felt that the best place for them was right in their original state, so they haven't disturbed them anymore. But there are lots of shells: sometimes out here you can dig them up. The Indians were pretty smart. They knew which areas were the best, and that's where they set up camp. And now right on top of them they want to set a million people.

Conflicts with Park and Suburban Neighbors

Alameda: All this ground that you see that's nothing--I mean weeds. [looks at boundary between Coyote Hills Regional Park and his farm land] That's the park. Now this is what they say the people want: they want open space; they want places to roam. Well, it's pretty hard to farm right alongside of it. If I'd go slow enough in through here I'd probably find every breed of animal alive. Deer, lots of deer in there, about sixty of them. They've been running them all over and getting them down into here. Squirrels. It's awful hard to farm right alongside of a mess like that.

Lage: Now is that because the animals tend to be pests to the farmer?

Alameda: Oh, yes. They destroy a lot of the crop. They have to eat. But when you see that mess on that side of the fence, all these weeds and seeds that just keep blowing over the top, you have a hard time keeping—. See those deer out in the field?

Lage: Oh, yes. Out in your field.

Alameda: There's three of them right there. There's no cauliflower there now.

Lage: Would they eat the cauliflower if it were there?

Alameda: Oh, they're terrible. They don't eat the leaves. If they would only eat the plant, but they go and take one bite right out of the head.

Lage: How do you deal with it?

Alameda: It's awful hard, I'll tell you, if it's costing you thousands and thousands of dollars damage.

Lage: Now have you ever tried to negotiate with the park to farm that area? Or they don't want to?

Alameda: Oh, no, they don't want it farmed. They want it like that. They'd like to have the rest of this the same way. But we're

farming it, and we do the best we can with it. But anything that borders that area, you've got to figure that there's going to be so much for you and so much for them. You hope that so much for them isn't all that much that it's going to hurt you that bad, but it does. They'll take acres and acres. You get a depredation permit to shoot one or two or something, but there's sixty of them out there. They keep a count on them. There may be more now that they've had their young.

It's getting harder to farm because you're getting pushed in from all sides. Before, we used to be down on the other side of Centerville--not this ranch--but we used to farm that one ranch. We had the cauliflower, and you get a real wet year and you can't get out there to disk the cauliflower so the water sits in the furrows, and it starts to smell. Boy, cauliflower, when you don't work a field up, it's got a foul odor. So the people call the health department and say, "Hey, we can't have this. We just bought a house here. We don't want this smell." So then they call you and say, "Hey, you've got to get rid of that smell." Well, we were there first! "Okay, I'll get rid of the smell the first chance I get. As soon as I can get in there, I'll disk it and the smell will go away." It's the water. You've got to get rid of that water.

Lage: I see. So you plough it?

Alameda: So you disk it and get rid of the water. That one case I remember--God, it was thirty-five years ago--as soon as it was dry enough I took my tractors out there, and sometimes we have to work twenty-four hours a day. You can't help it. It just rains late, and you can't get into the fields. So then I put the tractors out there, and then the police call me at nighttime and tell me that I have to shut those tractors off because the people can't sleep.

##

Alameda: We find the same thing is happening over here. We put pumps on at nighttime, or big tractors. They're out in the fields as we've been for thirty years, but people are now complaining that they just moved there. They don't understand, but it doesn't matter: they call the police and they understand that I have to shut them off, so I have to do it.

Lage: How do they decide that the homeowner has priority?

Alameda: Just disturbing the peace, so do something about it. So it doesn't matter. Once they come in and once you get a complaint and a second complaint, you've got a problem.

Lage: What are the rules and regulations? I mean, you were here first when they bought. They saw all this around them.

Alameda: That's right. They're trying to change some rules that out in the country where you buy near a dairy or something, you just can't make that dairyman move. But, in this case, there're just too many people. You either conform or don't do it. So there's ways of doing it; they just cost you more money. Instead of getting a big diesel motor that pumps water, then you'll get yourself an electric one that costs you more and change everything over. But you just have to do it.

The Labor Force

Alameda: Now that's our harvest machine there. See that? [looking at and describing harvest machine] They cut the heads, place them in the baskets. They go up to the top and the women take them off and put a plastic bag around them, and they tape them. This crew's getting paid piece work. Since they work faster, they naturally do a little bit better.

Lage: Where does your labor force come from; where do you get them?

Alameda: Well, a lot of these people are Mexican people, families that live here. There's quite a few Orientals. Hopefully, when you hire them, they're supposed to be all legal: you're supposed to check and see that they have green cards or whatever. It's funny, as long as they're white you don't ask them anything; if they're Filipino, you don't ask them anything because you just figure that they have to be legal. I can see why the Mexican people sometimes don't like it when they come and look for a job and then they say, "Show me some papers that you're legal."

Lage: You're picking on them, it seems.

Alameda: You're picking on them, and that's what they say you're doing. By rights, I'm not supposed to say, "Well, show me something that says you're legal." But, then again, they're making up new rules now that I can get fined pretty heavy if I hire them and they're not legal.

Lage: So that new immigration law puts the burden on the employer.

Alameda: That's right. They're really going at you now.

Lage: But most of these people are local Fremont area people?

Alameda: Yes. Well, I have a labor camp over here, too. There's about twenty-five or thirty men that just stay in that camp. They will

go to Stockton or wherever there's work, that's where they'll move to. You have to have some place for these fellows to stay.

It's the middle of November, and we're still irrigating.

Lage: That's unusual, isn't it?

Alameda: Yes. You don't get this kind of weather, but that's the thing about farming. People will say, "Well, you've been doing it for so long, you ought to know what you're doing." Yes, you know what you're doing, but last year at this time the rain was killing everything. So you're just afraid to put the water on. If I were to irrigate that and it would rain heavy tonight, it would most likely kill the cauliflower.

Lage: It's that tenuous, that chancy?

Alameda: Yes. It just doesn't like a whole lot of water.

I've got to get out here a minute and look at this car.

[brief interruption]

"Farming is Changed": From Horses to Laser Scrapers

Alameda: My eldest son is in Yuma, Arizona. A company down there hired us as a consultant to help them grow cauliflower. We were recommended. There were enough of us, and my oldest boy went, and I'm leaving this afternoon. We're going to take our harvest machines when we're done here down there and harvest cauliflower. Unfortunately, the cauliflower and everything is being grown in Mexico. Then you bring the finished product over and sell it in the same markets that we're trying to get to. So I guess if you can't beat them, you join them! And we can't seem to beat them. They can do it. They've got so much labor; no labor problems, a lot of people to work for maybe ten times less than what we pay. So it's tough. I can see why companies are moving.

Now, with the trucks and the railroads and airplanes and everything, you can move your products so fast. Forty, fifty years ago you couldn't do this. You had to grow it right where you're at. That was one of the better parts, probably, of farming, but now everything is changed. Farming is changed. When my father started out here we had horses and I'd come out. I never cultivated with the horses, but I had to go water the horses on weekends. Then we got tractors, and we got some big ones and pretty soon my dad couldn't drive them. He knew the horses and he knew the first tractors, but he didn't know the bigger ones that came on. He couldn't start them. It wasn't his part of the

operation to take care of them, and I did it so I bought bigger tractors. When he said that we didn't need them we got them. Now I find that I'm going through the same thing. When my dad was having these problems he was fifty-something years old, I assume, and now I'm fifty-something years old and I'm having the same kind of problems with my kids.

Lage: The kids moving you on to new equipment?

Alameda: New equipment and big tractors, new levelers to level the ground. We leveled all this ground with a laser scraper. In the old days, you'd have to survey it with your eye, and then you go out there and hope that you've got everything pretty close. Now you go out and dial in this big transmitter, and you take off and that beam tells your tractor and it tells the scraper on the back of the tractor what to do. So it doesn't matter if it's dark, nighttime, you can level ground to within an eighth of an inch if you want. So those are the things that we never had twenty, thirty years ago. We just got them, but it's made things better.

Lage: It sounds like you're very receptive to these new things.

Alameda: Well, when they go to school and you pay somebody to go to school, and they come back and they start telling you how to do these certain things, either don't send them to school or you better listen to them, one way or the other. [laughter]

Lage: Maybe the experience you had with your dad gives you perspective.

Alameda: Well, yes, I think so. I try to beat them to the punch, maybe-- you can always tell somebody's age, I think, by telling them, "No, you can't do that. That's too much money." So if they come to me and say a tractor costs a hundred thousand dollars, I say, maybe biting my lip a little bit, "Gee, can you get it that cheap?" [laughter] I don't really mean it, but I surprise them because I think it's just a sign of the times when you can really agree with them without having to go back like my dad did. I think of all the places that I wanted to buy that he said, "No, don't." He remembered when you could buy them for eight thousand, now they're twelve. I try not to do that. If they say it's eighty thousand, "Well, that's a good buy. You'd better get it right away." So you throw it right back at them.

Lage: But with the squeeze on you for land in all directions, it must be hard to put this kind of money into equipment.

Alameda: Yes, it is. When you're paying a man to sit on a tractor, and it doesn't sound like very much, but you pay six, seven dollars an hour. He can get up there and disk ten acres a day if you give him a little tractor like we had. Or you can get him a rig that can do a hundred acres a day.

Lage: Yes, it makes a difference.

Alameda: The equipment costs, but you'd better do it faster. We might be able to work the ground even cheaper now than we used to do because we just do it faster.

Lage: This operation you mentioned in Yuma, is that growing cauliflower in Mexico?

Alameda: In Mexico.

Lage: But their headquarters are in Yuma?

Alameda: In Yuma, and their cooling plant is in Yuma. So they grow this cauliflower, and they bring it back and cool it. The funny part about the cauliflower is that there's no money growing it. People that seem to make the money are the ones that are packing it, and the ones that are selling it for you. They get their commission. The guy that's raising it, he doesn't make anything. That's the way it's been. Consequently, we tried to raise it and pack it and sell it ourselves so that if there is any phase of it, you can get in on it.

Marshlands, Weeds, and Wildlife at Coyote Hills: "No Good for Farming"

Alameda: This was all part of the Patterson Ranch. [showing ponds on Coyote Hills land] They put all these series of lakes in here just about two years ago.

Lage: Is this something the park is doing, the lakes?

Alameda: Well, it's something else that these people were trying to do that I think is bad for the ground. They're taking the water that's supposed to run down this creek and run on out to the bay. They're trying to take it through these series of ponds and tules and clean the water. They've run it through this and it sort of filters it--

Lage: I see, through the marshy area.

Alameda: Yes, before they shoot it on out to the channel. With the farming, you'd like to get that water in and out of there without keeping it. So they're storing it, and that's sort of bad, bad for us.

Lage: Is this park land that we're on?

Alameda: Yes, it's park land there, but it used to belong to the Pattersons.

Lage: But then it backs up into your land?

Alameda: Well, it comes underground and then that's the water table there. Now this is that big channel that I was telling you they put in so that we didn't have any more floods.

Lage: This is a flood control channel.

Alameda: Yes. This cut right through the Patterson ranch. Since they've put it in, it hasn't flooded. It'd take a tremendous amount of water to fill this thing in. But last year I was a little bit worried because we were going to have one of the highest tides we ever had. When the tide comes in, the watershed's going back this way. It'll go all the way up to that freeway. Well, if the tides come up high enough and if you get a heavy, heavy amount of rain at the same time and it can't get out, then I don't know what kind of problem you're going to have but—. Maybe it won't happen.

I'm planting differently now. We used to farm cauliflower year around here. I'm doing it now so I'm going to be done by the middle of December. We won't have anything in the ground because we've gotten whipped pretty bad the last three years with water just settling and coming back at us. Just a couple of days with water and the cauliflower's gone.

That's an Indian burial ground there, and the channel cut it in half so they sort of preserved it there. There was a pump right over there. The Patterson old timers had a unique system. They had trouble getting wells on this lower side so they put the pumps in up above and brought the water down through concrete pipes. At one time I used to think that we had about ten miles of concrete water lines underground. When they put them in years ago they didn't have the big trenchers and all these things that can take them down and put them down there forty inches deep like they should be. It didn't matter when you had the little tractors and the horses. You never got down more than a foot anyway.

Then later on as we started getting bigger tractors we start hitting all these lines, so a lot of them have been replaced with plastic. They're usually down there thirty-six inches deep. It's just the way they put them in and they tied them all together: if one pump went bad, why, you could just bring another one in. There're pipelines underneath these highways out there. Those highways weren't there when those pipelines were put in. There were just dirt and gravel roads. When you dig them up you see they're all sort of crooked. I don't know, the pipe used to come from San Jose.

Lage: I think Henry Patterson owned the company that made the pipe.

Alameda: That's very possible, yes.

Lage: You didn't know Henry, though?

Alameda: No, I didn't know Henry. What was Henry's wife's name?

Lage: Sarah. Did you know Sarah? What was she like?

Alameda: I met Sarah when I was asked to pick up a table which she had donated to the Country Club of Washington Township and she seemed very keen and civic minded.

See, now, this water's what hurts. Right there, that pond. Now, this water doesn't get out of here. Now if you dig a hole over here in that field—

Lage: Where you're trying to farm.

Alameda: If I dig a hole over there, tomorrow in the hole that I dug, the water would be as high as it is right there. It's under that ground. Now you don't want that. You want the water out of here. They call this project the Marshland Project. That was my fear, that they were going to make all this back into marshes. I don't think the Patterson family wants that. Might be good for the park, but it's certainly no good for farming or anything else.

Lage: No, not for any other use.

Alameda: No. I don't know really what use that park is when it gets so full of weeds like that, you can't do anything.

Lage: How about these seagulls, are they a pest on your crops?

Alameda: Seagulls are all right. They're protected; you can't shoot them. Can't do anything with them. They do raise heck with tomatoes. These black birds are bad; they're bad on corn. Nothing that we can't handle if we're allowed to handle it. But when you're next to a park they won't let you shoot the squirrels or the deer and poison the squirrels and do all these things. I don't think we need them. I don't think we need termites. I don't think we need any of these things that they're afraid are going to become extinct. I don't know, though. [laughs]

Lage: I'd just as soon termites became extinct.

Alameda: That's right. I'm surprised that somebody hasn't worried about these devils. [laughter] They worry about the little tiny mouse and all these other things. By golly, they may be right.

II ADAPTATIONS TO THE URBAN SETTING

Produce Stand and Pumpkin Patch: Plans for Direct Marketing

Alameda: [noise from distance] This big tractor is ripping the ground about fifteen to twenty inches deep.

Lage: It really gets down there.

Alameda: It gets so compacted with the big heavy equipment you have to rip it every so often and just let it sit during the winter and when you go back and plant later on, there's some place for the roots to go.

Lage: So a lot of this will not be planted at all in the winter, or do you put in another crop?

Alameda: No, I'm not going to plant this one.

Lage: You give it a rest, or is it because of the problem of the water?

Alameda: Because of the problem of water, yes. And you can't put a little plant out here right now. We just got in a harvest in cauliflower here, so we did all right.

Lage: Now, is it mainly cauliflower that you deal in?

Alameda: That's what we're in, yes. And lettuce in the summertime.

Lage: Any corn?

Alameda: I have corn. I had a produce stand out here.

Lage: Yes, I saw that produce stand.

Alameda: That was the first year I tried it because they cut the road in. Next year I hope I can make it bigger. I've got so many people who are just so tickled with the corn that we raised. We raised

- Alameda: corn that was not necessarily the big corn that looked good. Ours looked good and tasted good.
- Lage: Oh, I'll come down to get it myself. You raise any white corn?
- Alameda: Yes, white corn, a couple of different varieties of that.
- Lage: And where does that grow?
- Alameda: Right here, yes. We put in some broccoli and zucchini and pickling cucumbers, and bell peppers were wonderful. Our tomatoes, people just raved about them. We've raised all these things before, but we've just been eliminated from the markets. And the canneries, there are no canneries around here to take tomatoes.
- They've got a weed out here called broomrape. Broomrape is a bad, bad thing. It's a parasite that grows on the root of the tomato plant or tobacco plant or any of that family. You can plant tomatoes, and the seed is in the ground and it attaches itself to the roots of the tomatoes and takes all the strength of the tomato to keep itself going. So the tomatoes, consequently, will just dry right up. They don't want this, so they prohibited growing tomatoes in this whole area. They think that maybe at the turn of the century this seed got into the Niles nursery from Europe. Then when they had some flooding it washed it down to this area, and it settled. You can have it in the ground and maybe no host plant for it for a hundred years. Then you come back and put in the host plant, it'll still be there waiting.
- Lage: Did that affect your tomatoes this year?
- Alameda: No, you can do it, and it doesn't hit every plant. This year I didn't see it in any of the plants. But the canneries won't let you ship it, because they're afraid it'll go to another area. But when you're doing it fresh and you pack it yourself, then they don't say anything.
- Lage: Looks like you had a pumpkin patch here.
- Alameda: We had a pumpkin patch here that was a thing of beauty. It was the first time we had ever done it. I put it in the wrong place; I just hid it back here because I thought it would be nice for the kids and we had a little ghost lane and all this; it was cute. But I had too many pumpkins. We fertilized them and did it all very well and sold about a third of the pumpkins. So next year, I hope we can put them out by a road and maybe do it a little bit differently.
- Lage: Did people come in and pick them or did you pick them?

Alameda: We had some classes that came out. Had about two thousand kids. People always like to come out with their kids.

Lage: I think when people hear about that--my kids went clear from Oakland out almost to Half Moon Bay with their class. That's a long way.

Alameda: Yes. We had a couple buses from Oakland come. In fact, I've got some pictures in there of my daughters; they dressed up as witches. Then when the buses came out they explained to them when the pumpkins were planted and they gave them little brochures on pumpkins and recipes. They sort of liked it. We had a picnic area out here for them.

This is where I had my jalapenos and all these things for the stand in this little area here. This is only about six acres. Next year I'm going to put in maybe fifty acres of it because it's direct marketing. You don't have to go to the broker in San Francisco, and he takes his ten percent and somebody else when he gets back to you he says, "Hey, it's no good." Here, whatever you sell, you try to give the people a fair price, cheaper maybe than what they get in the store.

Lage: With better produce.

Alameda: It's fresh. The funny thing, some of the people that come out here, a couple of them, talk French to each other, not to me. They say that at home back in France when you go to those stands, why, you expect to pay more there than you do in a store because there they know it's fresh, and they know that in order to be fresh they have to throw a lot of it away. That's what I had to do. People don't understand that I pick the corn and the next day, if I didn't feel right about it, I'd throw it out and try not to pick as much that day so I would have to throw it out.

Lage: How about direct sales to restaurants?

Alameda: Well, we have a few little ones and all these other produce stands around here.

Cultivating Cauliflower

[brief interruption while talking to some laborers]

Lage: Was he the labor crew leader, in the back of the truck?

Alameda: No, he's just an irrigator. I was wondering how many hours they worked Saturday. He told me they worked until two-thirty. The fellow that was in charge of them is going back to Mexico.

I want to get you some cauliflower. I don't know if you want a box of cauliflower or a head of cauliflower. What do you want?

Lage: How about a couple of heads? I don't know about a whole box, but I'd sure love two or three heads.

Alameda: Okay.

Now this cauliflower was planted about ninety days ago, maybe eighty-five. We had a crop of lettuce in here before this that was probably planted in maybe May. It came off. We worked the ground and planted a crop of cauliflower. If we wanted, I could work this thing and put another crop of cauliflower. That would come off in probably April. It's possible over here to get maybe five crops in two years. A lot of people, if they want to do it, can get three in one year if they get on it early with a dry winter.

Lage: If you have good weather.

Alameda: Yes.

Lage: Is that hard on the soil, though, to work it that continuously?

Alameda: No, I don't think so. We have to fertilize. This head of cauliflower out here will probably take maybe a hundred and fifty units of nitrogen to grow it. So we put a hundred and fifty units of nitrogen in the ground. We don't take the chance of not having enough fertilizer. Once we plant it and we fertilize it--see those little rubber bands on those plants?

Lage: Oh, yes. What's that for?

Alameda: You have to tie the leaves up so the sun doesn't get on it or it'll get yellow. It doesn't matter, it tastes the same when it's yellow or white, but people want it white. If it's got yellow on it, they don't want it. There's nothing wrong with it. When you cook it, it'll probably turn a little yellow anyway. [gets out of truck]

Three Alameda Generations Farming on the Patterson Ranch

Lage: You've got a lot of little details to attend to here.

Alameda: Yes, and luckily I've got a lot of good people that know what they're doing, mainly my kids. They're good farmers. I wish they weren't my kids so I could brag more. They've never given me a lick of trouble. They put themselves through college by working out here on the ranch driving forklifts. It's unfortunate that they're in an occupation that's not very good right now. I hope it gets better.

Lage: How did they happen to choose to go into farming?

Alameda: I guess maybe it was my fault. I always thought that they could do good at it. Mr. Williams always had. But times have gotten pretty bad, especially with these other countries coming in. The Peace Corps, I think--the Kennedy administration, when we sent people all over the world showing these people how to take care of themselves and how to grow rice and how to grow wheat--is probably a great thing. Now they know how to do it, and they're sending it to all different parts of the world, and our markets aren't there like they used to be.

Lage: What is this deal you have in Yuma--is it just a one-time consulting thing or will you have some tie-in with them?

Alameda: No, we have no tie-in with them. It's a one-time thing, and we're going to send our machine and show them what it can do. Hopefully, they'll like what it'll do. It's something that--these are big agricultural people. Maybe not for me, but maybe for my kids, they may be able to make it work. Between this operation and something in the wintertime someplace else, it might fit, it might work. What we've been doing the last three years is not working. We've tried to make it work, but we've been pushed down to this lower ground where you just can't take a chance anymore. I've planted and had nice crops like this the last two years and just had to sit there and watch them as it rained and wouldn't stop. I'd see them just wilt right up.

Lage: So the land they're pushing you down to isn't as good for farming as the land that these houses are going in on?

Alameda: No, that was up higher, and that was sandier ground up there. You get the same amount of rain, but the water would run off. Here it runs down and collects down there in that park area and then it starts coming back this way. When you see where that water is sitting in that pond over there, and you know it's right underneath the roots of these plants, and once it starts coming from the top down and the bottom up, boy, you better look out. But they do very nicely as long as you can control it. They have nice growth to them, it looks good. It looks good in the box. But when you can't do anything about it, that's a pretty bad feeling.

Lage: Tell me some more about your father. He worked for the Williams Company. What did he do for them?

Alameda: Well, he was just a foreman like I was. I was in charge of growing, and he was in charge of harvesting. They were pretty smart. Years ago he used to pack in the fields. Before he worked for Williams, he worked at Booth Cannery in Centerville. I used to hear him talk about buying apricots when he was a younger guy in his twenties. He'd buy apricots and send them to the cannery. He did a little bit of everything. I guess during the thirties, during the Depression, he went to work for the Williams brothers. There were four brothers that farmed, and my dad went to work for them. Then those Williams brothers separated: one went to Nevada, one went to Bakersfield, the other two stayed here. The one that my dad stayed and worked for was for Leland Stanford Williams. That's Gene Williams's father. He was a nice man. So I worked for him, and he liked me.

Lage: Gene said you and he kind of grew up in the fields together working on the ranch.

Alameda: Yes. We grew up out here together. He went on to college, and then he stopped that. Well, I can't say—I think I worked harder than he did. [laughter] But he was good. His father had a heart attack and passed away in 1956, the same year we moved in on this ranch, I think. Then Gene just went right on into the office. It was pretty unique that they had people like my father that had been working for them for a long time. So when Mr. Williams passed away, as much of a loss as it was, it didn't seem to hurt the operation because they had other people capable of getting help and harvesting the crop and all that.

Lage: So did Gene, himself, mainly do office work and management, then?

Alameda: Management. I just drove a tractor and dusted and all those sort of things. The other foreman got sick so I ended up taking his job, and I was a foreman. So my wife gets mad at me because I don't like to go anywhere; I like it here. I've heard once that the Bay Area is one of the seven best climates in the world. So that means there's only six of them someplace else, and I don't know where they are.

Packing and Insecticide Regulations

[Mel Alameda gets out of the truck and is showing the interviewer the packed cauliflower--brings three boxes over with sixteen, twelve, and nine to the box.]

Lage: All the packing is done on that truck. That's an amazing piece of machinery. Those are beautiful heads.

Alameda: Nice heads, and there's twelve heads in that box. That's what we shoot for. Now if they cut them a little bit too small, you get sixteen to a box.

Lage: What happens if it's not twelve or sixteen?

Alameda: You mean if it's too small?

Lage: Thirteen, fourteen.

Alameda: No, you make it fit that box.

Lage: You can't do it. [laughter]

Alameda: This is what happens when they missed some the last cutting time, and then they get big, so you put nine heads in the box. The box has to state that it's a nine. The law says that.

The regulation on chemicals is something fierce. We have a chemical company that sprays for us. They put all these insecticides on for us. They're licensed for this. Well, they come and do it at nighttime. Before they can spray this field the county has to have been notified forty-eight hours ahead of time what they're going to do. Then their people can come out and check to see that you're doing it right if they want to. But you have to tell them. This happens to be Block 47. So every field has got a number; that's Block 61. Each field is numbered, and you report that Block 61 is going to be sprayed on the 22nd with a certain chemical. They can come out and check that tank and make sure you're doing what you say you're doing, and they do it. People think that we're just out throwing out a lot of stuff and not being careful about it, but it's as careful as we can be.

Lage: Do you have to wait for weather conditions to be right?

Alameda: Oh, yes. The wind can't be blowing more than five miles an hour. You certainly don't put it on when it's raining. It's very possible that--there was a man in there talking to me a minute ago in a white pickup. He's the fellow that comes and checks our fields. If he told me that field had to be sprayed, then I would

Alameda: tell him when we were going to harvest it. They've got chemicals that would last one day, three days, a week, two weeks. So if you've got time, you like to put on a material that would last a little bit longer, but you do everything that's within the law. If you're going to harvest it--certainly I don't want to eat it if it's got a chemical on it. Consequently, I don't want anybody else to have to do it either. It's not right for people to be trusting what you're doing and then try to pull some kind of shenanigans. Well, we don't do that.

Lage: Do you get complaints from residents or inquiries from residents about the pesticides?

Alameda: Oh, sure.

Lage: They have concerns?

Alameda: Sometimes you spray and some of them have different odors than others, and people call the fire department. They think there's a gas leak someplace or something. Some of them--Monitor's got a pretty strong odor. It's good material, safe for the person that's putting it on and lasts quite a while, but it does have a bad odor so consequently we don't use it so much.

See all this sprinkler pipe here? We've got lots of pipe. These pipes were out in this field, and then we'd run the water overhead. Now you can see those--see that little row coming up on top of the bed?

Lage: Yes.

Alameda: Those are peas. I planted some peas because last year I had a U-pick out here, and the people sort of liked it.

Lage: Where people pick their own?

Alameda: Yes.

Lage: Will you have that this spring?

Alameda: I hope so. We built this reservoir because we didn't have a well down there. When we fill this up, this can hold about ten million gallons of water. We pump the water from about a mile away. It runs in here, and those pumps will pump it out under pressure. It's something that we did to develop all this section because there was no water down there.

Pressures for Development

- Lage: What does the city have in mind for the area where you're farming? Is it supportive of continuing it in farming, do you think?
- Alameda: I don't know. I've been told that it's going to be open space, but I would imagine that when the time is right it'll be developed. If it was my property and the time was right to develop it, I'd like to develop it. Everybody wants a lot of open space, but I think we've got too many parks and I think we've got too many of everything that they don't even take care of. It's a shame. Parks are nice, but I think somebody ought to take care of them, not just acquire more and more. Every time they take one they take it off the tax role. Our problem--I've been arguing that for years--is that we have too many people. All these people are back East looking out here at football games at the Rose Bowl and everything else, and the sun is shining; they're going to keep coming.
- Lage: They've heard this is one of the seven best climates, too.
- Alameda: Sure, and they're here, they're coming. I don't know what the life span is for those people--probably longer than ours, maybe, [laughs]--but I don't think it's much fun shoveling snow and living in that cold weather. I don't blame them for moving out here, except there's not enough work.
- Lage: How about this industrial high-tech park? Is that a good neighbor for you? Any problems there?
- Alameda: Oh, there's no problems yet because there's nobody in them. It's funny, everybody--they all like farming. Everybody you talk to, you know, even--you can be a lawyer or a doctor or whatever but for some reason when you go someplace and you tell somebody you're a farmer it's something that they either do in their yard or they've got shrubs--
- Lage: Or they eat.
- Alameda: Yes. So there's something that they'll talk to you about. So we don't have that many problems with them except, I think, when they do get in here. I don't know how they're going to like it when the wind starts to blow and the dust starts blowing all across everything; it's not our fault, but they'll complain about it.
- I farmed all this. We had this all. [gestures]
- Lage: This whole area that's now high tech park, or a potential high tech park?

Alameda: Right. We had this whole piece and all the way back there near the Eucalyptus tree. Oh, we had cauliflower and tomatoes at one time or another. This area wasn't the best. That, way back there where those houses are, was the best. That's what used to go under water every year; this didn't.

Changes in Farm Labor

Lage: Now, how has the labor force changed over the years? You must have started out when the bracero program was in operation.

Alameda: Yes, I used to go to San Jose and pick them up. That was in the forties. You would order a hundred braceros, have a labor camp for them. We had to pick them up, take them to the doctor.

Lage: That was part of your job, too?

Alameda: Saturday night, go down with the bus and take them to Alvarado, the theater down there, so they could go to the show. When their time was up, you'd take them back to San Jose, and they'd ship them back home when the season was over, which was about October. They'd come for the summer.

We have summer vacations, you know, now for the kids. They all get out of school for three months, and they can play. But I guess when they ever started that years ago, I guess the vacations were at harvest time. You got out, and you went to work. You cut apricots, you did all these things that come in the summertime. Here, if everything goes right, you start planting in April, you start harvesting the first of July, whether it's corn, tomatoes, anything. That's about as soon as anybody could work the ground. So, consequently, the kids were out of school for three months, back to school in September, and if harvest weren't over you never even went back to school in September.

Lage: Did your kids work like that during the summer?

Alameda: Oh, yes.

Lage: And you yourself?

Alameda: Yes. They never played little league baseball. They worked. When they got back to school, then they'd start playing. Now, if you go to high school, you can't go out for football if you work because you've got to go practice during the summer, two-a-day practices and all this sort of stuff. I don't think that's right. It may be good for the football program, but it's certainly not good for the individual, I don't think. They ought to be working.

Lage: Were the braceros pretty good workers?

Alameda: Yes, and some of them came back. I had one fellow that came back and worked for us for twenty years after that.

Lage: As a regular resident?

Alameda: Yes, lived here. He went back to Mexico about two years ago. He had six fingers. He had a little finger coming out in his finger, so we used to call him Six Fingers. Nice man. These Orientals right now, they are nice people.

Lage: What group are they? What Asian group?

Alameda: Well, there's quite a few Filipinos, a lot of Filipinos that come from the Philippines. You have to sign papers saying yes, I'll give them work. They come over here, and they seem to bunch up and live in a house and maybe get ten or twelve in one house.

Lage: Do they live here in Fremont?

Alameda: Oh, yes.

Lage: Are they seasonal? Then do they move on somewhere else?

Alameda: No. For me, the ones that I've had, I've had work twelve months out of the year for them, because in the summertime there's lettuce and cauliflower, and then we start planting and we'd raise cauliflower all through the winter. This is the first year that I'm going to run out of cauliflower in December, and I won't have any work for these people in four months. They don't know it. They don't know it yet. I don't know what they're going to do, but I'll start planting as soon as it's right, the first of January or something like that. If it doesn't rain, I'll start seeding the ground.

The Farm Operation at Ardenwood Park

Alameda: We had all this land all around the house. [the George Washington Patterson house at Ardenwood]

Lage: And here we go into another park. We're going into Ardenwood.

Alameda: Yes, this is the park. They've done some nice things here. It's a good thing somebody's got millions of dollars. [laughter]

Lage: Aren't they going to plant in here? I thought that was part of the program, to have a farming--?

Alameda: Yes, it's a plan. I could have farmed it, but I didn't think I could get along with them so I didn't bid on it. I think Joe Perry, who had the pumpkins, he's going to do it. As long as he can do what they want--

Lage: What do you think the problems may be?

Alameda: Well, they're going to tell you that you can't spray, and you can't do all these different things. The people would be coming in, and you've got to do certain things on certain days. I find it hard to believe that that cauliflower plant's going to tell me that I can't put water on it Friday because it's not Thursday. [laughs] If it's hot, a hundred degrees, and I have to do something, I've got to do it. I can't wait. You have a whole bunch of rules that say you can or you can't do it; that's what you've got here [in the park]. I don't agree with it; I don't agree with any of it. It's a good thing they've got plenty of money.

Lage: Well, I guess they're going to try to earn some money on the farming to help pay for the rest of the park operation.

Alameda: That's what it's supposed to be, but you've got this farmer right now who is not making any money, and I don't know how they're going to do it.

Lage: Is Joe Perry also doing the horse-driven farming?

Alameda: No, I don't think they've done any with the horses yet. He had some pumpkins in here; that's the only thing he's done so far. That's another thing my kids wanted to do when the park wanted it: they wanted some farming with horses like it used to be done and then some farming with the tractors. So my kids got the bright idea that, well, we could do it, and I could take the horse part of it. Well, I mean, I'm old but I didn't cultivate with horses. I was just a little bit past that. [laughter] But they thought it would be good for me to get out there and cultivate. They seem to think I'm good for all the little things that they don't have time for. But I could take care of the horse end of it, and then the park, they said, "Well, we could go do it during the week with big tractors. When the people are there, we'll just do it with the horses, as if the horses did it all." That's what they're going to do.

Lage: Is that what they're going to do?

Alameda: I would assume. They're not going to go out there--they can't get anybody to go out there and plow a field with a horse. I don't think they're going to get anybody.

Lage: It takes a while, doesn't it?

- Alameda: Unless they can get some Amish down here or something. I don't know what they're going to get.
- Lage: I had some corn that they grew at Ardenwood--it wasn't, I'm sure, like your corn was at your stand--it wasn't that great.
- Alameda: No, it was terrible.
- Lage: Why was that? Did they use a different variety?
- Alameda: Sure. You plant the wrong variety, you're not going to get—I don't care what it is, if you get the wrong variety there's nothing to it. It could be fresh as could be but it's still not good.
- Lage: It was fresh because I picked it myself. I got home, I was really excited about having corn for dinner--[laughs]
- Alameda: --and it was full of worms, too, probably.
- Lage: It was full of worms, but also it was tough. It just wasn't tasty the way fresh corn should be.
- Alameda: Well, people think that just because you get a fresh ear of corn that's just picked that it's got to be good, but if it's already old on the plant then it's no good. It's just like a head of lettuce. You go out there and cut a head of lettuce, but if I had left that head of lettuce and it's old--it's already bitter and it's not going to be good. Even if you cut it fresh, it's old. they've only got so many days of life that are good, and that's it. That can happen with corn. Tomatoes are smart enough to shrivel up and look bad; bell peppers, the same way. Corn just gets dark yellow and just tough. But some varieties are just no good.

Tony Alameda: Farmer and Civic Leader

- Alameda: My dad worked for Williams for forty-eight years. He stopped working when he was seventy-eight years old, and he didn't want to stop then.
- Lage: I didn't realize he kept on that long.
- Alameda: Yes, until he was seventy-eight, he was still running the crew out here. He was pretty tough, a tough guy.
- Lage: You mentioned earlier that he took a lot of abuse in his public role. He was on the hospital board, the water board, and the school board?

Alameda: High school board, water board, yes.

Lage: What kind of abuse?

Alameda: Well, just politics, you know. Hopefully, more than half--I guess more than half have to like you or you wouldn't get elected. But the hospital, they were on a strike at the time when he was a director and they wanted more money. People that are friends of yours for years are carrying picket signs. All of a sudden, you have to make some kind of decision, either they get it or they don't get it. My dad was a pretty tough guy. He wouldn't give in too much to anything. I think he was concerned about taxpayers and spending money, and being an old timer, why, what they were making at the time seemed to be plenty--what's the use of going way overboard? Give them a little bit of something.

Lage: What about on the water board? Did you hear any tales of trying to defend the farmers' point of view there?

Alameda: Well, he was a farmer. They had tried for years to put meters on the wells to make you pay for every gallon of water that you pumped. As long as he was on the board, they didn't do that; they never got away with that. But once he was defeated, they did. They put the meters in and that cost the farmers a good amount of money. Maybe that was good. I don't think it was good; it cost maybe extra thousands of dollars just to buy the water. We never had those expenses before.

Lage: Yes, you just took it out of the ground.

Alameda: Yes.

III ALAMEDA AND SONS: COEXISTING WITH DEVELOPMENT AND A POOR
FARM ECONOMY

Cauliflower, Packing Sheds, and Labor Camps Amid Housing
Construction

Lage: Now, is this yours, too?

Alameda: That's my cauliflower, but this development isn't. I've got a concrete line that's coming down through here someplace. These people just amaze me how they start digging holes without asking.

Lage: So side-by-side here are the tractor digging water lines or something for the housing development, and your cauliflower operation.

Alameda: Yes. In fact, I just had my labor camp on this side of the tracks out here. They just bulldozed it all out of here, and they broke the water line that was there.

Lage: What are these covered areas?

Alameda: Those are my hothouses.

Lage: For what kind of plants?

Alameda: We put our lettuce and cauliflower seedlings in there in the wintertime when it's too cold. It's too frosty outside to sprout, and we put them in there. Then, once they're up about, oh, two or three inches, we transplant them. We take them out of there and put them in the field. Hopefully they're strong enough to survive, if you don't get too much frost.

Lage: This is a packing shed here?

Alameda: I have a packing shed there, yes. I used to have two of them: that one and one up in town that was there for fifty-something years. The one in town is no longer being used, but this one is

Alameda: still--you can just hit the buttons and start it up if we have to. I plan on starting it up, I think, because once we take one machine away, why, we'll maybe need the packing shed.

The railroad crossing is right here. There was a labor camp right over here that was there for fifty years. Then there was a road that went down through here and over to that house. That's the park [Ardenwood] over there.

I'm told about the horse and buggy days when one of the Pattersons or one of the fellows that worked for Patterson—I thought it was one of the Pattersons but I don't know which one--used to come out every morning at six-thirty or seven o'clock on his horse and wagon and go somewhere. One morning he didn't wake up, and he was a couple of hours late. He came out and without even looking he got hit by a train and killed—just because his pattern was at a certain time and that train always came by at a different time.

They must have told you about those Eucalyptus trees. Didn't somebody tell you about those trees?

Lage: Well, I've heard about the Eucalyptus trees, but I don't know if I've heard your story.

Alameda: How they grew these trees for harvesting them.

Lage: They first thought they'd be a commercial product.

Alameda: Yes.

Lage: It didn't work, though.

Alameda: No.

Lage: Now, apparently, they're suffering some from the salt water.

Alameda: That's debatable.

Lage: Are you going to check on your pipe here?

Alameda: I don't know how far this guy's cutting this line over there. [gets out of truck to check with construction workers]

Lage: Well, there's a good example of what you run up against.

Alameda: Jeez, it's like cutting your arm off!

Lage: For the tape here, now tell us what they were doing.

Alameda: Well, they're just putting in an underground electrical line or something, and they're just about ready to dig near my water line.

This is what I've been running into all the time. They just keep breaking lines. Then by the time they get them fixed the cauliflower's sitting there with no water. I hope it's not broke. If it is broke it takes a couple of days to put it in and get it fixed and that's why I don't want them to break it.

Working with the Patterson Family

Lage: Are they building over on this side? Is this going to stay agriculture?

Alameda: This is going to stay agriculture for a while. It's supposed to be a shopping center there after a while. But right now, what they're telling me is everything on this side of Paseo Padre will stay in open space.

Lage: Over to the north of Paseo Padre.

Alameda: Yes, and if that happens we'll just try to do a good job at it. If it doesn't work, it doesn't work, but I think we've been good for the ranch--farming it, keeping it looking good, and the Patterson family, in turn, they've been good to me.

Lage: Are they easy to work with?

Alameda: They're nice people, yes.

Lage: You're working with a new generation now.

Alameda: Yes, a new generation. I find that a little bit tougher.

Lage: How was Donald Patterson to work with?

Alameda: Donald Patterson was a nice man. That's Wil's father, right

Lage: No, Will's son.

Alameda: Yes, Will's son. [laughs] Don's got a son, Wil, also. [Wilcox Patterson]. Will's son was a nice man. There was Jack, Dave, Don. Dave's still alive. Jack died a young man. Don died.

Lage: In '80, I think.

Alameda: Yes. I think he was seventy-four.

Lage: Did he take much of an interest in all the farming operations?

Alameda: Don?

Lage: Yes.

Alameda: Oh, yes. That guy was good. He liked it; he took it seriously. One year this was all under water. It was up around the tracks even. We had a problem down there with the underpass, and I wanted to show it to him, and he didn't even have any boots. He just rolled up his pants and said, "Come on, let's go. I want you to show it to me." We walked down through the water. He was a tall fellow, and he was tough to keep up with when he walked. He was wiry. He was a heck of a guy.

His kids, I don't know all of them. I know George, Don's boy, and Wil. Both of them were out here connected to the ranch after Don wasn't around. Then when they had their, whatever they did, their meetings and this and that, the two of them were out here taking care of this. They were sympathetic. We had a tough two or three years when they were moving dirt, and dust was flying. It was hard.

Lage: When they were moving dirt?

Alameda: Well, all that development where those houses are and the big earthmovers are going through the fields and down through here, widening the channel, busting these concrete lines and all this sort of stuff. That's why I get a little bit mad now because I know what happens when they break them. They don't get them fixed so fast.

Lage: So Wil and George--?

Alameda: Wil and George used to be out here. They were good.

Lage: They'd help troubleshoot?

Alameda: Yes, they were here quite often. They're nice fellows. Then all of a sudden they changed things around, and Leon Campbell and Bob Buck, both of them fine gentleman, are in charge. The whole family--they've been very good. And we're good for the ranch. We've been farming it for thirty years, and it's sort of tough knowing where all these lines are and just because you open that thing right there to get water out of that, that's not where the water is. See that little thing there? You open that up to get water out of there but the water is over there. [points] See that red pump?

Lage: Yes, way in the back there.

Alameda: That's where the pump is. It comes underground all the way over. One of those things there is what those fellows just covered up over there. Hopefully they didn't break it.

Here we just ripped this ground like the other one and got it loosened up. You can see how the ground breaks up. It's better ground here than it is even over there on the other side [further west]--that's more adobe--and as you get further this way is where this ground used to flood.

Lage: So there's more top soil on it.

Alameda: Yes, more top soil on it.

Lage: It's beautiful soil.

Alameda: Yes.

Lage: Now, were the Pattersons, back at that time when Don was in charge of things, looking towards development, did you feel? Did Don talk to you about it?

Alameda: Yes, Don knew. He said that we had to start systematically taking acreage off. The way things were going, there was no way they could just keep not selling some of the pieces off; they had to start to develop it in an orderly manner. So that's what they started up there with a section--I think it was three hundred acres that he had earmarked for going first. In the meantime, after he passed away, they switched around and developed the back area and donated the front [to Ardenwood Park]. But, yes, it was his plan, I think, or some of the family's, to not just take off a section here and there. Try to do it so that you didn't disrupt all the water systems and all the pipes. You just don't go into the middle and cut off the heart of everything. So they've done it and--

Lage: Did they think at all about where the best lands were for farming, or was that not a consideration?

Alameda: I don't think that was a consideration because the best grounds went.

Lage: They went first?

Alameda: Yes. They have asked about lines and how you can go ahead and farm and how to put different lines in or put new wells in. They've done that. That labor camp, they've moved three buildings over there; we just got them moved. You have to have a place for these people to stay. You just can't work for four and a half or five dollars an hour and go out and buy a house.

Lage: So the people who live in labor camps live here year around?

Alameda: Some of them.

Lage: They're not just seasonal?

Alameda: No, they've been working for me, some of these people, for quite a while.

Lage: Oh, I see. I thought the labor camp was more for a seasonal--

Alameda: It is more seasonal. My tractor drivers and all my permanent help have homes and I have to pay them a little bit more, but the other ones, they can go seasonal. They may follow the lettuce and come back in the summertime. Other ones, after the lettuce is over someplace, they come and work in cauliflower.

Lage: Do they have families that live here?

Alameda: No, no. I don't have the families anymore.

I was just showing you the crossing there where somebody got killed? They knocked the labor camp at that site down. That year I had about six or seven permanent families, but we got rid of that. It's sort of hard to furnish a house for one person, and they've got four or five or six children. It's tough.

Lage: Probably not the best living condition for these kids.

Alameda: Well, the condition wasn't bad. I think they had a good time. Their friends were there, the school bus would pick them up right there. They had health insurance. I don't know. I'd see all these little guys—I'd take care of my family and my grandkids, I see them all going to the doctor's offices and running noses and everything else, and the kids who were out here in the labor camps running around barefooted are healthy. I don't know. We overdo everything, I think.

Scrambling to Stay in Farming

Lage: Did you have brothers and sisters?

Alameda: I've got three brothers and two sisters, and they all worked on the ranch.

Lage: Did any of them go into farming?

Alameda: No, they all got out, and I don't know why. I hear my mother say that there was only room for one out here. One worked for PG&E, and one worked for the phone company. One worked for the school district. Sisters, both of them; one of them was a legal secretary. They all went out. I'm the only one that stayed. I don't know why. They're all retired and retiring now, and I'm just getting started. I bought Mr. Williams's company three years ago, and I can't see any end in sight. My dad worked until he was seventy-eight years old, and I guess I'll work until I'm seventy-eight years old.

Lage: It doesn't sound like you want to retire.

Alameda: No, I don't want to retire. I play golf. I play that once a week; that's enough for me. I don't want to make a career of that stuff.

Lage: How do you like being an owner rather than a foreman for Williams?

Alameda: It seems no different to me. Everybody thought it would be a big difference, and it is. But I used to worry when I was responsible for somebody else's operation. Now I do what I have to do and if something happens I think that I've done the best I could, and I don't have to sit around and explain to anybody because I've already convinced myself. So it really hasn't been that much different. I guess I've always been pretty conscientious and a worrier. Rain, a lot of people like rain-- whenever it rains I can't sleep.

Lage: Now, you have some other lands that you're farming, don't you, over in the Livermore area?

Alameda: Well, we had a couple hundred acres over there, but they're starting to dig holes for gravel over there, too, so that one is gone. That worked out pretty good, too. That was real sandy, sandy ground, and if it rained, within a couple days you could start to plant. We leased that land right up until September, and we thought we were going to get it next year, but they said that they were going to start taking off the top soil and digging up the rock. There's so much building going on that they're five years ahead from what they thought they would be, digging that rock over there.

So we've got it all over here. That's why a couple of my sons are going to Yuma, just to see if they can help this other fellow and put our machines to work.

Lage: Yes. So you will take your machines down there part of the year?

Alameda: One of them will go, and then if they like it they'll probably take the second one in. That's one of my sons there, the youngest

Alameda: boy. He majored in engineering so he's the one that works on this machine. That little thing he's working on there is the carrier that will transport it to Arizona. That big machine is going on that thing.

Lage: That's going to be quite a trip.

Alameda: Yes.

Lage: Is your machine patented?

Alameda: Just certain parts of it. That doesn't really mean anything. I guess if somebody else built one like it you wouldn't do anything about it, but evidently if we didn't patent it and somebody else liked it they could patent it and prevent us from using it. So we sort of felt we should do it for our own protection. So we did. Without that machine I probably would not be farming right now. Well, we used to pack in the packing shed and it would cost us about \$1.70 a box to pack cauliflower. Out here we can do it for anywhere from \$.90 to a dollar depending how heavy we're cutting. So when you figure that you pack maybe three, four hundred thousand cartons a season, that's quite a bit of money. You're still not making money after saving that much. Then, I guess, you have to assume that maybe we still wouldn't be in business without the machine. I don't know.

Marketing—Nationwide and at a Roadside Stand

Lage: How much do you sell those boxes for? The carton of twelve, say.

Alameda: Well, today they're probably selling for six, seven dollars a box. Hopefully, if you're real lucky, I would say as high as thirteen dollars a box. I haven't seen that since I've owned the company, but--

Lage: Where do you sell it?

Alameda: If somebody happens to call from Boston or New York, a broker, and says, "I want a thousand cartons of cauliflower, twelve. What's the market today?" My son will say, "It's eight dollars." So they say, "Okay, I'll take it." Then it's arranged for a truck to pick it up and haul it, and whoever buys it has to pay for the hauling and that. So when we say eight dollars that's usually what we get. Sometimes if the markets are bad you could put them on a truck or a railroad car, and you could just roll them back there. A lot of people do that and hope that the market changes by the time it gets there.

- Lage: Then you'll get more.
- Alameda: Then you'll get more.
- Lage: So whatever the market is when it gets to the market is what you get?
- Alameda: No, not unless we sell them on consignment--that's consignment--but if we sell it here FOB [Freight on Board], that means that if they say they want it for eight dollars, they get it for eight dollars.
- Lage: Do you do mostly that?
- Alameda: That's the way we like to sell it, yes.
- Lage: But you sell mainly to the East?
- Alameda: Oh, we sell to Canada. Lettuce in the summertime, we had some lettuce that went to China. That takes three weeks to get there on barges, but it still holds up with refrigeration.
- Lage: That's amazing. Now, who did you deal with for that?
- Alameda: We were selling through Mendelson-Zeller in San Francisco. They were our broker. They were the ones that have the customers, and then they'd call in and say, "All right, we want lettuce, we want cauliflower, we want--" Whatever they wanted, we would get it for them.
- Lage: Do you sell at all in California, like to Safeway or Lucky?
- Alameda: We sell some to Safeway, sometimes, whoever wants it. They're looking for a price all the time. They're looking to get the best price they could get. Safeway, not necessarily, they'll buy the best to make sure they have the best.
- Lage: I've never seen any that look as beautiful as those in the back of the truck there.
- Alameda: No, and it's tough to get it to look like that. As soon as you cut it, it's on its way downhill.
- Lage: Well, I feel like I should go home and cook it right now.
- Alameda: Yes. But it's all right, it's fine and it'll be good today and tomorrow and a week from now but it's still--the sooner the better whether it's corn or whatever, if it's sweet potatoes and everything. Freshness is what counts, I think. Potatoes, I'm

Alameda: going to try to grow potatoes and everything. You've got to come out next summer because I'm going to have the best produce stand in the Bay Area.

Lage: Do you think that can be a money-making thing?

Alameda: Oh, certainly, sure.

Lage: I would think so. I think that's the way people are heading.

Alameda: All summer I sold cauliflower for eighty cents a head, and I don't know if you can get it anyplace for eighty cents a head, but I'd sell it for eighty cents a head all day long if I didn't have to wrap—I'd go cut it myself and take it over there. But eighty cents a head is like nine dollars a box. I haven't got nine dollars a box in three years.

Lage: I think people would pay, as you say, more for the good stuff. You don't have to compete pricewise.

Alameda: There's an awful lot of them that figure that as long as it's on a little roadside stand they ought to buy it for half as much. I went to a funeral service yesterday and a friend told me, "Hey, when you get done picking those peas let me know. I want to come out and get some," meaning they want them for nothing. I don't know why it is that everybody thinks a farmer has got plenty of everything out there, and he just wastes a lot of it and why not just go out and get some.

Lage: Yes. Didn't you have problems with people just coming out and helping themselves?

Alameda: Oh, sure.

Lage: Is that still a problem?

Alameda: Oh, sure. They take things off. I shouldn't say steal, but stealing is what it is. But they don't think it's stealing. It's just "sharing," I think. But I've got a lot of friends. I've given cauliflower and lettuce and cucumbers and corn, and they just take it for granted, but I've never had one of my friends say, "Hey, here's some steak." They don't say that, I don't know why.

Lage: What about, "Here's some free dental care or free lawyer's fees or whatever?"

Alameda: Yes. [laughter] No, it's, "Oh, I didn't know you really used this. I thought you were finished with it." And it's the same thing—you know, people say, "Why don't you give it to these old homes, or why don't you give it to this?" Maybe you should.

Alameda: Maybe you should be a good guy, but every time you give some away to someplace it's just someone else who is not going to buy some at the market. It doesn't do any good; you can't exist. This is what I tell the chemical man. I don't want him to gouge me. I want him to make what he thinks is a fair profit. I'm sure he doesn't want to see me go out of business, because I'm a good customer. So you just don't try to get the best you can today, you've got to look at the overall picture. Hopefully, I'm the same way; I don't want to go in and get a whole lot for everything everyday. I wish I could, but whatever is fair that you can keep going, you feel happy with that.

Cauliflower--you think that you've got to get six dollars a box to break even. If you can get over six dollars a box then you start to make a little. Lettuce is almost five dollars a box that you have to make to break even. Lettuce all summer; as long as I had lettuce all summer long it was three and three and a half dollars a box.

Lage: So you don't even break even.

Alameda: No, I wouldn't be surprised if this summer we probably lost \$150,000 on lettuce.

Lage: Now, is that competition from Mexico and places like that?

Alameda: No, in summertime it was just all over. It's Salinas, Castroville, Watsonville, all the way up along the coast. Farming is so bad in cotton and wheat and all these things, that people just are not growing them; so they're switching to other crops like broccoli, cauliflower, and things that they have a chance to make something on. If you plant grain and you know it's so much a bushel before you planted it, you're either going to make it or you're not.

Effect of Government Policies and the National Economy

Lage: So you're affected by all these nationwide trends in agriculture?

Alameda: Oh, sure. If farmers are suffering in some parts of the country, it's going to be bad all over. I think our whole economy is the same way. If the farmers do bad it's going to catch up--whether it's buying trucks and tractors or whatever. I don't know what's going to change. We do such a good job that I guess we're our own worst enemy. But we used to grow lettuce and think that four hundred cartons to the acre was a heck of a deal. Now you do it and you get eight, nine hundred cartons.

Lage: Now, what makes the difference?

- Alameda: Well, I don't know. Maybe these laser scrapers and all these other things, and fertilizing and the right drainage, sprinklers. In cauliflower, four or five hundred cartons to the acre used to be good. Now they get seven, eight, nine hundred cartons to the acre.
- Lage: That's amazing.
- Alameda: So we do a better job.
- Lage: That pushes the prices down?
- Alameda: Well, if you overproduce--if you check the market news, and there's fifty or sixty thousand cartons of cauliflower shipped a day, the price will probably be about six dollars.
- Lage: That's your breakeven point.
- Alameda: Then if you see that there's a hundred thousand or a hundred and twenty thousand shipped a day, the price is going to be three dollars. It's just that the buyer's got so many places to go get it, so everybody's trying to unload. If it ever gets below fifty thousand, then that's good--good for us, not good for the consumer. I think that the one thing that keeps the cost of living down is the price of food.
- Lage: Well, the price of oil does something there, too.
- Alameda: Well, the lower price of oil has just happened in the last year and a half. Last year I paid as high as 83 cents a gallon for diesel for my tractors, and they were riding high then. Now, I think this year it's been as low as 34 cents a gallon.
- Lage: Overall, though, are your costs going steadily up, is that part of the squeeze?
- Alameda: Sure, certainly. Labor goes up, all your parts go up, tractors go up. A tractor in 1950, the D4-Cat cost \$4,000. If you bought that same tractor today--if you could buy it--it would probably be \$70,000.
- Lage: That's a big investment.
- Alameda: Yes, big investment, especially when you think that it cost maybe fifteen times more than it did thirty years ago and yet the price of tomatoes is the same.
- Lage: So you have to increase your yield.
- Alameda: You've got to do something, but there's got to be an end to it someplace. That's why I say I think--I don't know the figures--

Alameda: but I think in this country something like 16 percent of our income on the average goes to food, something to that effect, I heard. You just go to some of these other countries, and it goes anywhere from--we're the lowest--16 on up to as much as 90 percent. So people in this country have gotten a good break as far as food goes. I don't know, maybe they won't do anything about it, but it's going to hit home one of these days when you have to start importing it all, I think.

I guess we've got a lot of land, we've got a lot of know-how, we've got these different varieties; I find that there's no end to what they're doing.

Lage: Do you think there's need for more government support?

Alameda: We've never had any of it. I wish they wouldn't have any, period.

Lage: You don't think that helps?

Alameda: No, I don't think it helps. Never, never have I ever seen anybody in what we're doing get a support of any kind. Right now they're helping these guys in the valley, I understand, for not raising cotton and not raising wheat--they're getting some kind of subsidy for that--but it seems to me they ought to be pulling that acreage out of production if they're paying for it. So what are they doing? They're not planting cotton, they're not planting wheat, but they're planting broccoli and cauliflower to compete with somebody else who's not getting anything! It seems to me they've already got a head start.

Lage: Sounds like they do.

Alameda: Yes. If that's what they're doing it doesn't seem right to me, but I guess I don't get involved enough. I stay out here, because I have a tendency to get mad too fast. Out here, if it's warm you decide you're going to put the water on and you put the water on, if you're going to cut you're going to cut, and you're not allowed the luxury of two or three weeks discussing it with somebody. If somebody's going to hit your pipe you tell them to stop. I find it hard to sit and discuss with anybody some little thing which seems to me that you're going to solve immediately if you want to. But if you listen to two people talk about the same thing it's going to take you twice as long to make up your mind and if you've got ten people it's going to take you ten times longer. I'm not very patient with that. Thank goodness there is somebody like my dad was and other people that do those things.

Raising a Family on the Ranch

Lage: How about your sons? Do they get involved in more political things?

Alameda: Well, yes, they're good. Steve is in the Farm Bureau and he was vice-president. He was going to be the president of the Farm Bureau over in Livermore and Pleasanton and Fremont area this year, and then he went to Yuma the other day so he had to back off, but he was going to be president this year. He would have been a good one.

Craig's on the board of a couple different things. He's the one in the office. He had the business management. He's a smart kid.

Lage: They didn't all take agriculture in college. They took--one, engineering; one, business?

Alameda: Yes, and Steve took crop science--that deals with the soils and all that, the insects and the soil diseases. Craig took ag business management, and Tony took ag engineering.

Lage: I see. That was a good planning.

Alameda: Yes. You know, if I would have sat down forty years ago and said this is what I want, I couldn't have planned it to have it work out any better, because nothing ever works out: somebody gets mad, somebody--but we still get along. I guess maybe I'm the worst one in the bunch. I fly off the handle. But if things aren't right, I get mad.

Lage: Sure, there's a lot at stake. I can see why you get mad.

Alameda: It's my philosophy that if you're just a nice guy, they just walk all over you. So you try to be a nice guy, and everybody thinks I'm a real sweet, nice guy, never get mad [laughter], but then other people see the other side of you, and they can't stand you.

Lage: Well, I haven't run across anyone who has said that about you.

Alameda: That's what I say, there's always two sides. I don't mind the bad side, really. Out here over the years both my kids--the one in Yuma right now, he talks Mexican and does a good job of it. I don't--I still find it hard to say that word, Mexican. It's always Spanish, and you speak Spanish. I happened to go one time with a fertilizer company--we went to Spain--and I found out there was a difference between Spain and Mexico. If you call somebody from Mexico Spanish, they're not. So, as I said, you've got to call them like it is. If they're from Mexico, they're Mexican.

A^mAlameda But it always seemed to me a slang word. I know it bothered my father. He was Portuguese and if somebody called him a "portagee," he didn't like it. I laugh at it because if somebody finds out it bothers you they do it more, and so it doesn't bother me. I don't care.

Lage: Besides you're Norwegian.

Alameda: Yes, yes, I'm Norwegian. [laughter] My mother worked out at the packing shed packing tomatoes and raising kids. I've raised my four kids, even my daughter, out on the ranch, working for somebody else. But it didn't matter: I had my pickup, and on Sundays the only outing was out riding around the ranch. When they got a little bit bigger, maybe I could think of some reason for them to get on the tractor and move it for me down to the other end of the field because I needed it over there--which I didn't really, but they all thought they were helping. I haven't had a lick of trouble with them. Nowadays, with all these drugs and everything, I wouldn't want to do it again.

Lage: Well, you did it the right way. How about their kids? Are they old enough to be out here yet?

Alameda: My oldest grandchild is six years old. Maybe a little more active than something that I'd care for. I'm not a very good grandfather. I'm supposed to spoil him, but I find that I want to also break their spirit like I did my kids, I guess. I probably did wrong. I think you've got to be more aggressive. My kids are good kids, but they'll back off in a corner and sit there and enjoy themselves; but they won't come forth, and I think you have to do that.

Lage: So they don't have the aggressive--?

Alameda: Yes, especially the one that's selling in there. You've got to blow your own whistle because nobody else will do it for you.

Lage: What about your wife [Lorraine Alameda]? Has she had a role in the farming operation?

Alameda: Yes, by maintaining our home, advising and teaching for thirty-six years. She has been a "professional" mother.

Lage: We'd better close off because I think I'm cutting into your day.

Alameda: You'll find that I just keep talking on and on--

Transcribed by Brenda Stine
Final Typed by Judy Smith

TAPE GUIDE -- Mel Alameda

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