

Interview with Lori Seward
at her home in Sonoma
August 6, 2008

L = Lori Seward

A = Arthur Dawson

L: [speaking of her grandmother] She was born in San Francisco during Victorian times. So I'd ask her things like what the clothes were like that she wore. The one thing that always tickled me—I even wrote that down for our family history—I knew my other grandmother lived there up until the 'forties and she wouldn't go out to the corner grocery store without putting on a hat and gloves. So I asked my other grandmother that came here, "Did you always wear a hat and gloves?" And she said, "Why yes. The street car wouldn't stop for you. You weren't a lady!" And I said, "What do you mean they don't stop for you?" [Grandmother speaking now] "They just tell the horses to giddyup!" [Laughs] The streetcars were horsedrawn in those days. We forget. It brought it all back to me how times do change.

A: Yeah. Was your mother there during the earthquake?

L: They had moved here to Sonoma. And they didn't know for three days, because they had no telephone, whether or not the relatives still living in San Francisco were OK. As a matter of fact I just recently was talking over with my cousin who's younger than me and doesn't remember the 'thirties . . . There was my great-grandfather that helped set up a bakery in Golden Gate Park for the people that were camped out there. He was a baker by trade. But the ones here [the relatives], the chimney did topple and my grandmother lost her teacups. Because the china cabinet tipped over. It was a very flimsy house to begin with. Just one of those with redwood walls. Here's a picture:

A: My wife's family was in San Francisco during the earthquake and they had to camp out on the street for months.

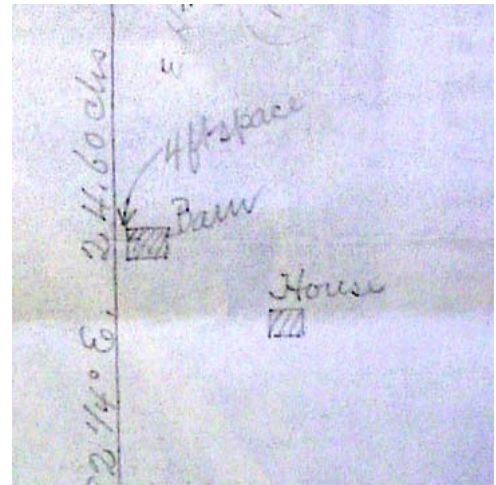
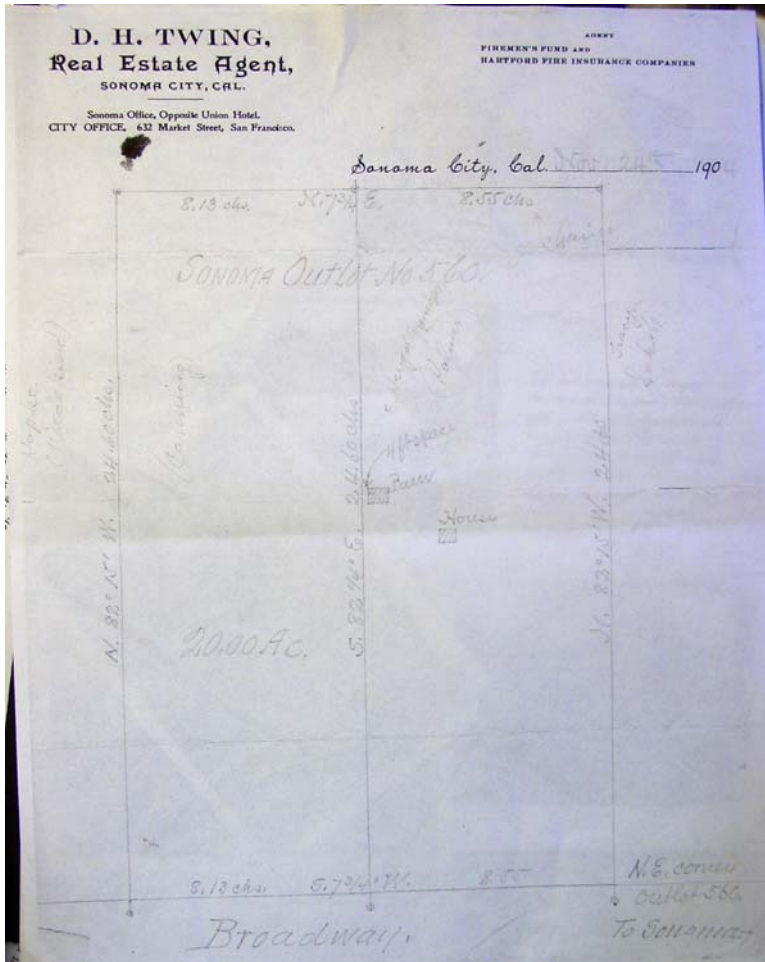
L: I didn't sort them [referring to photos]. Here's what the ranch looked like. Two redwood things up on stilts that they joined together. They were very poor and I'll explain why.



A: Was this basically right here where we're sitting?

L: No, it was on Broadway. This was property that they got later. This is the property on Broadway [showing old parcel map]. It's down this way [south], the old ranch and the old buildings. Now it all belongs to Sangiacomo and it's been changed a lot. They tore down the big barn many years ago. This is Broadway and it was this way towards the

creek. See, here's the barn and house [pointing at map]. The original well was right by the house. They boarded it over; it wasn't a very good well.



A: Do you know how deep that well was?

L: It was probably only twenty feet because when I was about five years old when my father's older brother, we called him "Cy." His name was Charles but he looked like Cy. So they called him Cy, everybody did. My father says they even had a diviner come to tell them where

to dig. The well is almost straight through here [pointing to map] and originally had a water tank on top. My father and his brother dug it with pickaxes and shovels. They did rim it with redwood going down and I wanted to see my father working. So I remember my mother holding onto my waist so I could lean over and look in 'cause they were down about ten feet in the ground. They had almost hit water. That used to irrigate all the ranch. It was a wonderful well. As Mr. Labre told my father, we hit the same stream that goes through the valley on our well. We could always tell when they were irrigating the fruit trees because we didn't have quite as much pressure. But we were lucky to get right on that main stream.

A: So that's a stream that goes up the valley?

L: Yeah. He said there were two different ones, one quite a bit deeper, when he had to dig. But we were right on the main one. Now our neighbors over here have had to dig twice. They thought they were on it too, but it wasn't near as good a well.

A: So that's toward Broadway?

L: Yes, over towards Leveroni and Broadway is not as good. It's right through here. And one of the original seeps is right over here, by the creek. Which I thought was real strange. But even in the summer there used to be a little damp spot right over here [pointing to a place behind her house on the east side of Fryer Creek, a little downstream]. The other one is in the far corner of our property. My father says when he was a kid that was very swampy land. And then slowly people filled it up with garbage. In talking with my cousin, I knew they got the other property later, but I didn't know how. My older uncle, Cy, was in World War One, and when he got back and had been here for awhile, the local banker, who knew that his check to pay for his military service was in the mail. I don't know how he knew, but he knew! And so he met him right there and said, 'You have enough money to pay for the land next to you.' And he did. Actually the first land, according to my cousin Dave. This 37 acres, was twenty dollars. And it was never actually paid off.

A: Twenty dollars for thirty-seven acres? Wow! That was in 1904?

L: Yes. I need to explain to you—what happened was, my relatives were bakers and they lived in a small town in England near Coventry. During the Civil War, because the cotton didn't get to England, to the mills, there were actually bread lines and soup kitchens for a lot of people. Even though our family had their own bakery in a small town, people were so poor that they had a hard time struggling just to keep things going. My great-grandfather, Ebenezer, and his brother Henry, decided that the only thing they could do was to come to America. They were old enough to be married and actually Ebenezer went to another town to work in a little shop. And he married the girl next door from there it turns out. I did all the research in England. He paid for their passage to the United States. They had relatives in Philadelphia. By being a baker on board the ship, they could . . .

A: That paid for their passage?

L: Paid for their passage, yes. So then they decided to come west, the two of them. After they got here, the main disaster after they were married and had children—I'm not too sure when all the different ones died, except for Henry lost his wife and his two or three girls, to the diphtheria epidemic in 1897 in San Francisco.

A: Hard to imagine.

L: These days we don't think about that. It must have been very tragic for the family. Henry worked all his life as the baker for the Protestant Orphan's Home in San Francisco. They were very strong Protestant religious people. What happened was, my father's father got into business with of his relatives. It was an oil business and it eventually became part of Standard Oil, frankly. They sold coal, oil, and grease for the ships. It was very prosperous and he had a wife and four children and he got TB. He died at thirty-two. That's why they came to Sonoma. My great-grandfather was ready to retire. He knew all about taking care of plants and animals from his life in England. They decided that for

the youngsters that they had to come to the country for the fresh air. So they just lived off the land. I give a great deal of credit, looking back, to my grandmother. She always was cheerful, never bitter about her life. She had to struggle and work very hard. But with her father you see, they helped take care of the kids. They had a good life. She lived until ninety-six I think it was. She was in her nineties.

A: How old was she when she moved up here to Sonoma?

L: She would have been . . . I can look that up later. She would have been only about, if her husband was about thirty-two when he died, she would have been just about thirty. My father was seven and his brother was nine. She loved her dear Tom. She always talked about her husband. They had a good, happy life until he got TB. So, my father you see, because he had to work hard and go to school. But all his spare time was basically helping grow or raise something. As soon as they could, they worked for other ranchers. One thing he remembered was, being good strict Protestants, that they didn't drink at all. But they would pick grapes on the Italian ranches. He said the Italians were always so kind. They dump extra grapes in their boxes. You know you were paid by the pound. As they would go down the row they would dump extra grapes in the boxes.

A: Help them out a little bit. They were pretty young at that point.

L: Right. My father knew August Sebastiani quite well. And of course, Wedekind too. My mother and father both helped found the Garden Club here in Sonoma. They were always active in taking care of plants. My father knew a lot about taking care of animals. He taught me that. Being an only child, I always had a pet. It was a small one. But I had a duck or a chicken or a rabbit [Laughs]. Or pigeons. My mother loved canaries, so we always had a canary bird in the house.

A: Was that knowledge passed down? Sounds like your great-grandfather . . .

L: Yes. Passed it to my father. And it sort of got all passed on to me. When I was little, he would, there on Mare Island, I was always helping dig there in the garden. He'd come and give me a signal—get my attention without saying anything. And knew I was to follow him quietly. It was usually to show me a bird's nest somewhere. The Marines, when they would find a wounded duck in the swamps over on San Pablo Bay, if a duck got shot in the wing and couldn't fly, the Marines that patrolled on the back of the base knew to bring them to my father. We put them in a box and would force feed them until they could fly again. When the feathers would come out. It was usually wing feathers just . . .

A: Clipped?

L: Clipped.

A: So your father was an amateur veterinarian then.

L: Yes, he was. He knew how to quiet animals. It never dawned on me until recently—they talk about horse whisperers?

A: Yeah.

L: Because the story always was, and my father made light of it—He was in town when Jack London came to town to buy something one day. Obviously Jack had observed my father being good with horses, because this was a spirited horse. He deliberately picked him out of a group of kids. I had to ask him, ‘How did you get picked?’ And he says, ‘I don’t know.’ He went up to my father and said, ‘Will you stay with my horse while I go in?’ Then gave him fifty cents! [Laughs] That was a fortune in those days. So obviously my father has a talent for knowing how to handle animals.

A: What kinds of animals did you have on your ranch?

L: It was always for food. They had chickens and rabbits and always had a pig to eat all the extra leftover fruit. As a matter of fact my cousin Dave told me the last pig they had, they did that clear up into the 1950s, it was drunk on rotten apples. They had to put her to sleep—she was so big they wouldn’t come and slaughter her if the sow had gotten any bigger. I loved to always go gather sweet grass. There was one pig that was very smart and knew when I came and would call to me. You know they say pigs are smart. So then I’d go get grass and we’d have a little conversation together. My father taught me how to sort of talk to animals to calm them down. So that pig did know me, I know that. I also knew they always got butchered.

A: That’s one of the realities on a ranch.

L: Yes.

A: My son just caught his first fish and he saw me whack it on a rock and he didn’t like that too much.

L: My father, because this was real farm days in the whole area, and my father fished and did go deer hunting. That was part of the food for winter, they’d get a deer.

A: This would have been in the ‘teens?

L: This is the 1930s. When I was little. He taught me to shoot a twenty-two, right over here at the ranch. I was a pretty darn good shot with a twenty-two. But he also taught me how to walk and observe. How to go over fences with a gun and everything for safety when I was quite young.

A: So this was part of his yearly routine was to go out and hunt deer?

L: I as a rule didn’t go deer hunting with him. We’d go up to Snow Mountain, and I would stay in camp and basically rest. That was the one time I would swim in the stream

and be with my mother. We'd just relax. There was a couple other men that would come and they'd get their deer as a rule. Also, my father made friends with Mr. Bowers who had a big ranch in Covelo.

A: That's a pretty area.

L: Yes. Twice we went there. They would take horses and go way up in the hills to get a deer. We loved going there. It was still very rugged up until the 'forties, the last time I was there. They let their pigs out to eat the acorns and then cured their own bacon. It was delicious. Everything was still kerosene lamps with a little hand pump in the kitchen for water. It was a beautiful area and we always had a lot of fun. The one thing I always remember—I would volunteer as a kid to go down and pump the water in the trough for the animals, 'cause they had so many. They had had a new batch of pigs and he let me hold the piglets while he put the little notch in their ear for their brand. In return, their daughter, Louise Marie, had never been to the city. So after World War Two they called and asked. It was just about 1945, at the end of the war. We took her. She had never seen an elevator. She'd never seen an escalator! It was really an education for me to see—she was only a little older than I, somebody who was really from the country. Shows how times have changed.

A: Did you have electricity here in the early days?

L: I can still remember everybody cooking on wood stoves. We had friends over in Napa Valley that still had kerosene. Actually, they got electricity quite early on the ranch. But they always had kerosene lamps around for emergency. I do remember my aunt still cooking on a woodstove. We cooked on a wood stove on Mare Island too, until the government, as soon as they could install a safe electric stove—being on the ammunition depot, it had to be a really safe electric stove. They put in these big Westinghouse electric stoves about 1939. But until then I knew right where the coal bin was and the kindling wood. They delivered the kindling and everything to us there. My father didn't have to chop the wood. Everybody had it and somebody was hired to do all that, obviously, there. Getting back to ecology, my father said that here in this valley, you never really had to worry about a fire because any branch that fell down it went for firewood in somebody's stove. You would deliberately stop and let your horse nibble any grass along the roadways. So that every bit got harvested.

A: So there wasn't much fuel on the ground.

L: There wasn't much fuel on the ground at all.

A: That makes sense. Do you remember big oak trees in this area when you were young?

L: Well, yes and no. There were fewer big trees. A lot of it was taken down. I wanted to show you that {shows photo}. This is on Broadway. The house is still there, but it's bigger. This is my uncle Henry. It's sitting out there in a bare field. And where did the other picture go? [Finds it]. Yes.

A: What year were these from? Maybe the 1920s?

L: This would have been earlier, when they first bought the place [1904]. Actually this is the road off Broadway down to the ranch. My father said before too long they'd chop those trees down because they were going east and west and putting all the shade on the fields where they wanted to grow stuff. [no copy of this photo in this document—shows trees along the driveway to the house]



Ranch house, from the west

So that's what the valley looked like. This was the ranch and that's all the trees there were.

A: [looking at another picture, reading label] 'Cy and Henry dug this ditch.' (page 11)

L: Yes.

A: Where is that ditch?

L: I don't know where that would have been exactly.

A: Maybe you could show me on this map.

L: Here's Four Corners and there's Leveroni [Road].

A: I think that's your house right there, that purple dot.

L: Yes, that would be it.

A: So the ranch was?

L: The ranch was, that would have been the well I think. I think it would be right about here [points out on modern map].

A: And this house was on the property?

L: No. My father had this house built when he retired. It was built in 1953. This was all prune orchards. There were 60 prune trees on this two-and-a-quarter acres alone. During World War Two it was all dried fruit. My uncle had his own dehydrator. Before that they dried them all in the sun on those redwood trays.

A: I think I've seen pictures of those.

L: I had some until not too many years ago. They still have them over in my shed in Stockton. It was mainly the prunes. But they did have peaches and eventually my uncle went more for pears, the dried pears.

A: Sangiacomo had a lot of pears too I've heard.

L: Yes. Finally what happened, it got too expensive. They couldn't do the pears here, it was a co-op and they had to take them further away for processing and you had to buy all these big bins to put on trucks. You know the old time ranchers couldn't really afford it. He did have another disaster—he wanted peaches, and had a lovely part of the property in J.H. Hales [peach variety]. They were so good and juicy and they were very good for about five years. Then one winter was extra wet, and they all got that root rot and died. I can still picture that. I was so sad. One of my favorite memories was one hot day sitting on the irrigation pipe. You know they were aluminum, long and about six inches around. It was a real hot day. I went out and picked one of those gorgeous peaches and sat on that cold pipe and just let the juice run down my face. Oh it tasted so good! Yes.

A: You mentioned some animals your family raised and some fruit trees. Was there any other source of income from the property?

L: When my grandfather was alive, my great-grandfather—I always called him 'grandfather' but he was really my great-grandfather. He was the typical English gentleman farmer. His actual occupation was baker, but he had beehives, we had a whole row of beehives. And he had a formal rose garden. His roses were really lovely roses. What they did was people would barter. If they were going to have a wedding or a special

occasion, they would bring him something in the way of food from their ranch in order to have the flowers for their special occasion. So that's how a lot of their special things happened. It was even true of honey. 'Give me a jar of honey and I'll give you a jar of my special quince or something.' That was something I wanted to raise up to you. My father worked on the Clements Ranch a lot and he told me that the largest quince orchard in the United States at one time was on that property.

A: Where is that property?

L: It's further down, somewhere. I'm not sure where the Clements Ranch was. You see in the days when everyone made their own jam and jelly, you always added the quince to make it congeal, for pectin. So he said rail cars full of quince were sent back east from this valley.

A: I had never heard that before.

L: I hadn't either, but I remember that. He told me that a long time ago. As a teenager he worked very hard on the Clements Ranch and there is a picture in here. This picture was one year after he started working on Mare Island. He commuted from the valley at first and then stayed in a boarding house there, in Vallejo. This was taken on the Clements Ranch. He helped toss the hay into the hay baler, or moved the bales or whatever [photo of hay baling machine, p. 67, *Images of America: Sonoma Valley* book].

A: I've heard about these old machines.

L: Yes, the 'widowmakers.' He said it was. The pulleys, the strap was you know in the open. You couldn't get near it too close or you were a goner. You'd be tossed who knows where? You'd become a bale of hay yourself. Have you seen this book?

A: Yes. Diane Smith, who helped put it together, is a good friend of mine.

L: I helped with some pictures. She and I went through pictures together. She asked me questions when she was working on that.

A: Does she have copies of these photos?

L: I'm not sure. At that time she wanted school pictures and uptown. Actually the pictures of the plaza and looking down Broadway, we had copies of those for her. This one right here. Also the one of the Mission. My father remembers when that was a hay barn.

A: When Schocken had it, yeah.

L: Yes. Getting back to my great-grandfather. After the bakery where he worked in San Francisco burned down, he was night watchman here [showing photo]. And I'm sure the reason why was because he knew so much about gardening and animals.

A: [Looking at photo] Oh yeah, Woodruff Gardens.

L: I understand there's now a plaque where it was. It was very famous. Ah yes, here's the picture we need to see. This is the tractor. From the well they put down some sort of mechanism to use the tractor.

A: To power the pump?

L: To power the pump, yes. It's somewhere in the middle of the property, but the property has changed so much since then. We're talking eight, ninety years ago now.



A: The Pentecostal Church, I'm not sure I have the name right. But just down Broadway a little bit. Seventh Day Adventist maybe?

L: Yes.

A: Was that part of your family's property?

L: Yes. I'm not sure. No. I'm not sure when that all got—I'll have to ask my cousin. They didn't own the whole thing up Broadway to Four Corners. After he bought it there were a couple lots that were separate. Mr. Ward I think, owned and bought all the property that's over by this here [looking at map]. I think he lived at the gas station on Broadway. I don't think he ever lived on the little ranch that was right over there. That was sold off, if it was sold off, before I paid any attention. That I don't remember frankly. Some got sold off in the 'fifties at the same time--that my uncle Cy, see had his own grader. He graded these streets and put in the proposal. It's the Palmer section or whatever it says on the deed (? Garbled). The next street over is Palmer and David is my

cousin's name, his son. I remember when was still all prune trees. It had all been prune orchard. I showed you this one right?

A: No. Where's that?

L: That's still part of that original irrigation that they were so proud of.

A: Oh, this is what emptied water into the ditch that they dug? [referring to well].

L: Yes.



A: You know I was doing some creek surveys and we went out in the back of the Adventist Church property to, I guess it's Fryer Creek over there. This was in the middle of summer and there was a tremendous amount of water in the channel. It was very strange because everywhere upstream was dry.

L: I don't know why. We always were happy if we had any water in the creek by the Fourth of July. The property on the other side of Leveroni was the Art Farm they called it. Before it was the Art Farm, originally it was chickens. You know with those long, low sheds. And there were a bunch of them.

A: We've still got some of those in Glen Ellen.

L: And then in the 'fifties, first they raised chinchillas, and then they raised mink. Actually I'm not sure which came first, the minks or the chinchillas. When furs were really in and chinchilla became the thing to wear. Then for a long time I think they just sort of sat idle. The family that lived there, I think had other jobs and didn't really use the

property for raising anything. And in the meadow there was a lower spot that would stay wet for a long time. There used to be even cattails in the middle.

A: Where was that? Let me see if we can find it on this map here.

L: That's what got us so angry down here. We wrote petitions and everything and they decided to put so many houses up over there by Fryer Creek.

A: So here's Four Corners [looking on map], is the old driveway into the Art Farm?

L: They were on the stream and it's quite a big piece of property that went all through here. Those three things [pointing to long black rectangles on topo map] are maybe the old chicken barns? I think those are the old chicken barns. [immediately west of 'Four Corners' label on topo]/The cattails would be right about here, where you see those little circles [immediately north of the barns]. The main drainage went to Broadway. It sloped down. When it started raining it would take three days before water would run this far down our creek. And, this was taken in 1975, so this was just before they put in all the houses and regarded all that property. This is how shallow Fryer Creek was on our property.



A: Do you know exactly where this was taken?

L: Yes.

A: I've got a camera so we could retake it.

L: That's why I wanted to show you.

A: So this looks like it's maybe four feet deep?

L: At the most. When I was a kid it was only like two feet deep. There was one deeper hole way down at the bottom of our property here. My father deliberately walked

me over—there had been spring rains, and he knew that there were tadpoles. So we walked through the orchards and came over and gathered tadpoles out of the creek and took them back to Mare Island and had them in a big wash tub so I could watch tadpoles turn into frogs.

A: That's great. Do you know what kind of frogs they turned into?

L: They were just the regular little frogs.

A: Little tree frogs?

L: Not the tree frogs.

A: Not the bullfrogs it sounds like.

L: It wasn't a big frog, just the regular little frog. One thing I should mention to you—when my father was a boy and it was all hayfields, he said there's be almost clouds of wild canaries come to eat the seeds. Because they knew the hayfields were full of all kinds of seeds. You could just see them come in. The other thing we used to have a lot more of were quail. Here, because of so many animals, especially cats [hunt them]. I even have a couple of cats. I have one that's been getting the moles. I have trouble with the moles because they love the damp earth on the creek. They come up in the winter and then they go back. I have regular trails where I know where the moles are. But I do keep a couple of cats.

A: We have a couple of cats.

L: One of mine is proud to deliver a mole to my front door. 'See what I did today.' My cats were strays. I usually have dogs, but it's worked out really well. [describes the stories of getting her cats]

A: Do you remember any fish over in Fryer Creek?

L: The last few years, after we had strong rains, I had one out here at the curve is where they tend to die. It was about this long [shows with hands].

A: So about a foot and a half? Trout or salmon do you think?

L: Yes [confirming length]. I think it was a salmon. One year I was out there watching and I saw a salmon coming up, trying to get through the reeds. They did get through upstream. That was the year it was in the paper that at Sassarini School they saw them.

A: Some of my colleagues took a classroom out and saw the fish. That was great.

L: I went back there several times and stood there under an umbrella to watch what was happening on the creek. We used to have more turtles. But it's been fished out for crawdads.

[SECOND SIDE OF TAPE]

L: I'm happy to do this because the valley has changed so much. There are a lot more trees, but of different kinds. In those days it mainly was oak and eucalyptus. They planted

eucalyptus here, according to my father, because they thought it was going to be, there was this one scheme, that they thought it was going to be good for furniture.

A: I think I've heard that. And it turned out . . .

L: It turned out it splits. It dries out too much. And it was the wrong kind that they brought. This is supposedly the end of the story, you know there are a lot of different kinds of eucalyptus. But also over on the ranch, there was a row of them and they were destroying the soil. The resin and the harsh chemicals. So my uncle took them out one by one and actually a lot of the wood, eucalyptus wood, was in this fireplace, back in the 'fifties. That was when they decided to get rid of them.

A: Do you remember changes in Fryer Creek upstream, through town, how it came through town?

L: Actually, what happened is, more and more vacant lots have had houses built on them through the years. There were little streamlets, 'cause everybody sort of wanted them to come out, keep things green as long as possible. And even here, on this street, when my uncle laid it out, it was shortly after World War Two and everybody only had one car. So the garages were just for mainly one car or even a two-car garage. But there was a ditch on both sides of the road with a culvert for the driveway. Now all except one, on this street, of those culverts have been filled in. Every single one of them I could point and say, 'That was the garage.' And it's been turned into part of the house. Then they built another garage further on. 'Cause everybody wants bigger garages and a bigger house. So the water, instead of all going down the street towards Leveroni Road, goes into their property or goes off the road to the Fryer Creek side further down, they filled it in so high. So it comes over into places where it never was intended to be at all.

A: Do you remember floods when you were a kid? Were there floods here?

L: Well, yes. But all the older houses that I went in were built up high. The old ranch house, you could crawl under, just bend down and see underneath. They were built up three or four feet off the ground on those wooden pillars. They were all redwood with a concrete, I guess, base type of thing. Actually, my grandmother had sort of like a little bunch of shelves for her extra canning supplies and canned goods. You didn't have cellars but you could just crawl under to get to it, easily. You have to stoop over as a kid, but not much, to get to it. Everybody you see canned all the fruit they could. My mother, even on Mare Island, we did have a huge apricot tree, she started out with a hundred jars of apricots every year. 'Cause in the winter she'd make apricot pie. But it was very hardy—full of the fruit. You could even have it for breakfast. Yummy treat! Usually you had something else. You counted on that for part of your food. This was before frozen foods. So everything you could dry or can you did.

A: To get you through the winter.

L: To get you through the winter. One thing I hated was, everybody had a big vegetable garden, and they were always trying to give you extra Hubbard squash. That stays all winter if you keep it in your garage or shed. Very hard and firm and stringy! I hated those strings! A lot of people waited until it got too big.

A: Right. When they're little they're OK.

L: Right. And you picked all the berries you could. Everybody had berries, a row of berries somewhere. My mother loved loganberries, so we had loganberries. They have a tart flavor. She would make a punch with different juices and then add it. She would actually make loganberry juice and bottle it, so we could have that to add to our special punch on special occasions.

A: I pick blackberries with my kids.

L: Yes, yes! The trees that I remember the most, because there were eucalyptus all down Broadway, and I can remember when a lot of the roads were not even fenced. I learned to drive on Watmaugh Road. My father told me, 'If you get off the road you know, you're just in the hayfield.' [Laughs]. Of course that would have been 1945, '46. They wanted me to get a driver's license when I was sixteen. My cousins all drove tractor from the time they were young kids and I would get on the back and hang on. It was very dangerous but nobody ever got hurt that way. Most of the trees that I remember were all well trimmed. But most of the orchards you see were hayfields and so there weren't that many trees. One picture I wanted to show you, this is where my uncle Henry was on the far side of Broadway. And this is looking up towards downtown Sonoma. Nothing but hayfields and not a tree in sight.



A: Where w

Ranch house, looking north towards City of Sonoma

L: I don't know. Things were so rural and so more primitive then. My father said he thought he was going to get in trouble when he was in grammar school. He hit a baseball, they were playing outside, and it went right through the outside wall into the schoolroom. The teacher, Mrs. Cook I think was her name, was inside and he had to go back in and get the ball. He peeked in around the corner and she said, 'Oh come on in and get it. Now maybe they'll do repairs.' And I said, 'What do you mean?' He said, 'It was just the outside batting and the frame. There was no inside paneling on it!' [Laughs]. They had a woodstove in the middle and everybody would hover around and that was it.

A: Which school was that?

L: It was the old grammar school. The "new" grammar school is now the Community Center [East Napa Street].

A: So this was before that one.

L: Before that one, yes. And it was just the outside tongue and groove redwood, that's all it was. Also, one day he told me that they were in class and the teacher asked why this one child hadn't come to school and everybody was real quiet. Finally one of them raised his hand and said, 'I think it's because he doesn't have shoes.' And she said, 'Oh, tell him that doesn't matter. Shoes aren't near as important as his schooling. Tell him it's OK.' My father said that at that time, his younger sister was so upset she came home and said, 'Oh dear! He didn't come to school because he didn't have shoes.' What she didn't realize is that both my father and her older brother were working at such a young age partly so they could have shoes. She didn't realize how close to not having shoes they were too. 'Cause they had some years when the crops weren't good or other years everybody decided to raise strawberries. The price was real high in San Francisco. And unfortunately everybody decided to raise strawberries and then of course the price was real low the next year. I've tried to look it up and I can't find out—my father said one year they didn't really have a summer. I was wondering if it was the year of the eruption of Mount Lassen. Because he said everything was green, the grass all grew, and they cut the hay and more rains came. A lot of the hay rotted before they could ever gather it up. Some people even had to kill some of their horse and other animals that year because there was just nothing for them to eat.

A: Do you remember any changes in Sonoma Creek?

L: Oh yes. Even little Fryer Creek—we used to count on a lot of gravel coming down. At the curve we could get ten wheelbarrow loads of nice gravel. It would fill in the curve so much it would almost dam the water back up. So it was nice to have that gravel to fill in where we really needed it and then make sure the flow would keep on going the next winter. We waited until it got real dry. But it was all this small gravel I guess came clear down from up in the hills. 'Cause it would run real fast and hard in the heavy rains. But now see it's down to hardpan in places. No more nice gravel. Sonoma Creek, we used to go down there and hunt for rocks. Eventually when I lived in Stockton I joined the lapidary club and learned how to do Cobachan [?] cutting and things like that. I was

fascinated by this dark sort of agate stuff I could find in Sonoma Creek. So I took a piece over and at first they couldn't figure out what it was either. We used to find a lot of it in Sonoma Creek. Turns out it's petrified redwood.

A: Really!

L: Yes. When you cut it and the heat from the cutting, you can smell.

A: You can still smell the redwood?

L: Yes. I haven't gone down there in years.

A: What color is it?

L: It's dark, dark. I have a couple pieces in my garden somewhere. It's very black. Apparently maybe the redwood had even burned when it ended up being on the ground and petrified eventually. But there were other agates too. We used to love to get agates down in Sonoma Creek.

A: Has the channel shifted at all?

L: Oh yes. The curve changes a lot. Actually what's changed also, is over on Leveroni Road, the further little creek that goes through the property [Carriger or Felder]. That has filled in a lot. That used to be more of a clear channel and there were more small oak trees on it. Because they irrigated so much I think that's what killed the oak trees, I'm just supposing that's what did it.

A: Has the channel of Sonoma Creek moved east or west? Right here at the bridge [Leveroni Road]?

L: At the bridge . . . Well it's a lot deeper than when I was a kid. They used to warn me that there were these hobos that were sleeping under the bridge. There probably were. I remember seeing men with knapsacks, especially during fruit season to pick. It was a smaller bridge then too. That was rebuilt.

A: This is the third one I think.

L: Yes. It's deeper and the curve is deeper north of the bridge than it used to be. When I look over the bridge and look down, there's two almost channels and an island in the middle. It used to be more evened out. It wasn't like that.

A: Wider?

L: I'm sure it's wider. I think it was cleaned out a lot. Maybe that was done in the 'seventies too. They came through here with the county—teaching young men to do survey. Do you remember when that was done?

A: That was a little before my time here.

L: OK. I have a paper. My father had to give permission. They dug out some of the trees in our creek even. It was a project, I think it was under President Johnson, for teaching and getting work for young men. Sort of like CCC.

A: What was the idea of taking the trees out?

L: They cleared it so that it would run better. My father was happy to do it because he had some trees—they came in with a little bulldozer—‘cause he was tired of trying to get to the roots of some of the trees. And they did some on Sonoma Creek. But that reminded me—my father told me that Spreckles, when he had his ranch up there [Sobre Vista, on Arnold, south of Madrone], he made sure that a boat came up Sonoma Creek as far as it could every year, so that it would qualify under the federal laws as a navigable stream. He paid for a little boat to putt-putt up the stream. So I assume in those days it would have been one of those little steam engine ones?

A: Why did he care that it was navigable?

L: Well he wanted it navigable. I can remember when there was still a drawbridge down at Sonoma Point. There was a man inside a little box thing who used to raise and lower the bridge over Sonoma Creek. There was one there and one at the original bridge way over by Vallejo.

A: That’s now the high one [Highway 37]?

L: Yes, the high one. We used to, as a rule, from Mare Island, we’d go up to Napa. You’d go right into town and take the old Sonoma Road over the hill and down to get here. In those days, in the ‘thirties, you only went thirty or forty miles an hour, and you were speeding along as a little kid.

A: The world was a little bigger.

L: And that was a steep hill up Sonoma Road. You had to shift down a gear. Even I remember that.

A: Do you remember boats coming up to Schellville?

L: I remember seeing boats coming up. I was never really over there to see. We always came right to the ranch and stayed all day. My father mainly was over here to help prune and whatever other chores to help keep the property going during the ‘thirties and ‘forties. We came almost every other weekend to help one day a week. He felt very responsible for helping maintain the ranch. His mother still lived here. My uncle had three sons to raise, so he was busy. He was always out there working. It was a large piece of property for one person. During the ‘thirties there was a handyman that lived in a little

shack on the property. That was before all these rules that you have to have. Did odd chores and stuff. He was just sort of a watchman person. Maybe he was even a little disabled.

A: Just to have someone on the property.

L: Yeah.

A: You mentioned that you know a lot about birds.

L: Yes.

A: Have you noticed changes in the bird life? You mentioned the canaries that used to come.

L: Of course there were a lot of pheasants in the valley. People used to go out pheasant hunting right here in the valley. You couldn't now—if you shot off a gun, whoa!

A: You'd be arrested pretty quick..

L: You knew who the ranchers were, whose fields you could cross. And you always knew to close your gates behind you. There were a couple places up on the hillside that we'd go sometimes for a picnic, that were on a couple of people's ranches. Whose names they were I don't even know. We'd just go in under lovely oak trees up there to a little meadow and have a picnic. That was a big thing to do. There were only a couple times, back before World War Two, you know the Fourth of July. Thanksgiving was always a big family affair. Christmas too. It was all just spent with family. My father was very active with Native Sons of the Golden West. They always have a summer picnic that he liked to attend. The other things were church affairs with the Methodist Church. And that was about it. No big get-togethers very much. So it was all the people you knew at the ranches around the valley. And of course there were a lot less people.

A: I brought a few things to show you. This is from an 1875 map. That's your street right there. Here's Leveroni Road. There's the original bridge, Coopers' Bridge. This one is a little big dark. Here's your road again. So we're right about there. This is an aerial photograph taken in 1942 for the beginning of the war. On the back it says, 'No unauthorized person may see this.'

L: Right!

A: Here's Fryer Creek coming through. Here's Sonoma Creek over here. That might be your ranch house. Those little dots.

L: Yes.

A: Do you know this spot? I think the road is now called Harrington [between Leveroni and Fifth Street West]? It goes up this way? These darker areas usually mean it was kind of a wetter area. It looks like it went right through where the curve of Harrington is.

L: As you can see from the lighter parts, there were patches of hayfields, or just not anything, whatever's growing, sort of scattered everywhere, until mainly about the 'sixties.

A: This one is a little bigger view. Isn't there a veterinary hospital here [Broadway across from Fisher Road].?

L: Yes.

A: So that's probably your ranch right there.

L: Yes, probably is.

A: You can have one of these if you want. Actually you can have them both. They're a little different views.

L: I have an old map. My son likes to go to flea markets and we went over when he was on vacation a couple years ago, to Sebastopol flea market. And a man was selling on one of those tables, just stacks full, for two dollars apiece, maps that were from Sacramento. Everything was being put on computers, so he bought this whole lot. The two of us, it took us about an hour, went through. I used to, as part of my husband's work, I never thought I'd love the desert, 'cause I grew up in northern California. My husband got transferred down to El Centro, lower Imperial Valley, and I learned to love the desert. It was a unique experience. But anyhow, so I got maps for that section. They're the government maps. I don't have any out because I had to put them all in the garage. I have one somewhere, that is an old one of Sonoma, that was one of those government maps. And it's very complete. Do you have any like that?

A: Is it a topo map?

L: I have two. I have a topo map and one that actually shows the orchards over in the Napa Valley, it shows every individual tree of the orchards! Which was fascinating. I'll have to hunt for those.

A: I'd be interested in seeing those. This is the whole map. This is the only map that I know of that shows the whole watershed within the city of Sonoma [vonGeldern 1875].

L: I'm glad to see this. I have tried, I've driven uptown and looked. I know that Sassarini School, I get balls come down the creek. Tennis balls, golf balls, and even the soccer balls come down the creek and end up by our curve. I tried to trace the two little gullies that go right through town and go up through the cemetery. It comes over and down Fryer Creek.

A: [points out cemetery on old map]

L: There's a little stream that comes right down by the cemetery and it comes down in the gully on East First Street and then part of it looks like it comes right over.

A: Diane Smith was telling me that she remembers in the 1950s there was a shoe repair store on Broadway that in the middle of winter you could go inside and see a creek rushing underneath the floorboards. That must have been Fryer Creek. I also heard that Maya Restaurant [across from south-east corner of plaza], if you go down to the basement, there's actually a streambed.

L: That's what I've heard too. I never really saw it. I knew that water rushed downhill from town, a lot of it in this direction. At one time I thought that once it got to sort of Leveroni Road, that a lot of it was diverted over towards Sonoma Creek. Don't know really what's happening up there now.

A: This is strange thing [still looking at 1875 map]. It comes out of Sonoma Creek and becomes part of Fryer Creek. Still don't know if this could possibly have been some sort of a natural channel. Or maybe somebody dug a little ditch and then . . . maybe there was a little branch of Fryer that came up to say here, and somebody connected it up to get water out of Sonoma Creek and bring it down. It's a pretty flat part of the valley, so it could be a natural feature, all these channels meander down. Do you have any memories of Nathanson Creek?

L: Oh yes. I have one memory that's kind of unusual. When my mother got older and the stream was running a lot in the winter time, she 'd get real worried. I think partly because she felt guilty. Where they lived used to be called Russian Street. Napa Road?

A: Oh yeah.

L: OK. There when you got over just a little ways, there's Nathanson Creek right there. That's where the ranch that she grew up on was. Her father had eggs for sale. He drove around in one of the first cars in town with his eggs that were for sale. And delivered some over to Petaluma.

A: What was his name?

L: Their name was Whitmore. My mother was the oldest. I finally got it out of her—the reason why she didn't like looking at this creek running so full, it brought back memories. Her younger brother almost drowned in Nathanson Creek. He slipped on the wet grass and went headfirst right into the creek. And she sort of felt responsible, being the older child who was supposed to be looking after him. One of those childhood accidents. She was afraid of that water running quickly in Nathanson Creek. Through the years it's gotten deeper. It was always more green than this far down on Fryer Creek. It comes more directly right down from the hills where the springs are.

A: Yeah—Fryer's a little smaller.

L: There were always big oak trees over that way.

A: Did your mom remember any fish in Nathanson Creek?

L: She never talked about things like that. Her brothers, when they were teenagers, that would have been before 1920, about 1920. They both had trap lines on Nathanson Creek. You got two dollars a pelt for muskrat and things like that. That's how they made their money. [Laughs] That's my memory of Nathanson Creek. Actually they were very good at being able to trap and knew how to fix the pelts. They probably learned from their father, who was raised by his father, who was a forty-niner. He grew up in Crow's Landing. He had had a general store at the crossroads in Livermore. To him that was getting too 'citified.' Crow's Landing, the barges used to be able to go down the valley that far, it was a boat landing. My great-grandfather had a general store there for many years. He came to California in 1849, didn't make very much in the way of gold, but he realized that they needed supplies. He was from Maine and he went all the way back to Maine and married and came back and settled here and then went back again a year later to get his wife.

A: Wow.

L: Married and came back and got things organized and then brought his wife out. Unfortunately, except for the names and dates of burials, nothing was written.

A: That's too bad.

L: It would be marvelous to know the adventures they must have had coming across country.

A: So they came by wagon train?

L: I tried to research it. The name Whitmore isn't that common. There were two people that came in 1849 by ship, so I'm not sure which one was him. Being from Maine, he came by ship.

A: Some of my ancestors were from Maine also. I've got some Maine-iac in my blood too.

L: They came from Gorham.

A: I've heard the name. My family is from Kennebunkport and Augusta.

L: That's not too far away. Actually you look like a relative! [Laughs]

[discussion of genealogy]

A: Well I think that's good for today. Thank you for all the good information.