The Oral History Project

A report on the findings of the Sonoma Ecology Center’s Oral History Project, focusing on Sonoma Creek and the historical ecology of Sonoma Valley. Includes interview transcripts, appendixes, and maps.

Sonoma Ecology Center
Sonoma, California
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Introduction

Over the past year, it has been my privilege to interview long-time residents of Sonoma Valley for the Sonoma Ecology Center’s Oral History Project. These elders graciously shared their recollections of Sonoma Creek and the local environment, giving a glimpse of living memory stretching back to the early 20th century. Many of these folks can recall a time when horses far outnumbered automobiles and farmers still used animal power to plow their fields. Together, these interviews represent over 500 years of human experience and observation in our watershed; it’s an astounding amount of information. Organizing it all into a coherent whole was at times a staggeringly complex task—the index alone runs to 27 pages! While everyone’s experiences are unique, the picture which emerges of Sonoma Valley’s past (and present) is surprisingly consistent, and is a rich and valuable piece of collective wisdom.

Like anyone who’s lived in one place for an extended period, each of the people interviewed has a “personal geography,” a small bit of the world they know exceptionally well. No larger than a stretch of creek or a few square miles, they’re familiar with it on foot and by names even residents living just up or down the valley might never hear: “Pendergast Hole,” “The Row Crop Place,” “Rattlesnake Spring,” “Hippie Hollow,” “Devil’s Rest” etc. Interviewing Bill Meglen and Milo Shepard in Glen Ellen, my own home town for twelve years, I was able to draw on my own personal geography. Talking with those two men, I needed little clarification or explanation—I already knew the lay of the land, the precise geographical context of our conversations. We shared a kind of shorthand speech, a local dialect if you will. Able to say much in a few words, our conversations moved quickly and effortlessly across the landscape and I was able to ask very specific questions, such as “When did that big slide happen across from Warm Springs Road?” or “Where did the old brickyard get its water?”

Lovall Valley was a different story. Having only been up there a half-dozen times, I didn’t know the terrain so well, couldn’t ask such locally intelligent questions. Of course, Charlie Cooke (who lives there) and I still had an extremely interesting conversation. I learned a lot, though undoubtedly it could have gone deeper had I known Charlie’s area more intimately. I mention this for two reasons. First, to point out my own limitations, as this may help the reader interpret what was said and understood in these conversations. Also, because it points out just how local a working knowledge of the landscape really is. Most of us would say we know Sonoma Valley, Sonoma County or even the Bay Area pretty well, but these interviews illustrate how small (though potentially deep) our “personal geographies” actually are. One of the pleasures of this project has been to discover so many wonderfully intricate and often unfamiliar landscapes so close to home.
Methods

The interviews were all conducted at the elders’ homes. I made an effort to find people who had lived in different parts of the valley and ended up with folks from Kenwood, Glen Ellen, El Verano, Sonoma and Lovall Valley. Contact with the participants came about in a number of ways. Sometimes they were referred by others, sometimes they called or wrote me after seeing an article on the project in the Sonoma Index-Tribune. One gentlemen, Bill Basileu, I located in the phone book after reading his father’s fishing column in old issues of the local newspaper. Once they agreed to an interview, I sent each person a list of questions (see Appendix). These questions provided a loose framework for the interviews, but I let each person’s unique knowledge and experiences guide the conversation in any direction that seemed interesting and fruitful. This led to many unexpected discoveries, such as the prevalence of gravel mining before World War Two, the impact of the Eldridge dam on fish migration, and the planting of fingerling trout from 1922-31.

Most of the interviews lasted about and hour and a half. Then the work of transcription began. As I discovered, translating spoken words onto the page was often tricky. I kept editing to a minimum, aiming to create a readable text that preserved the feel of the conversation. While the grammar (including my own) is often imperfect, I feel the unique texture of each person’s speech was an important part of what was communicated. People who grew up here many years ago have a way of speaking that gives us a glimpse of another era.

The biggest difficulty I encountered was in finding elder women willing to grant an interview. Several spoke with me on the phone or in person but deferred to their husbands, who they believed ‘knew a lot more.’ Gentle urging had little effect. While it may be generally true that men of that generation did spend more time outdoors and along the creek, it’s unfortunate that women’s perspectives are not better represented. In the end, I was able to convince only one woman, Shirley Churchill, to grant me an interview. She provided some unique memories, especially about wildflowers in the Glen Ellen area.

Once the transcriptions were complete they were given to the elders for comments and corrections. As the interviews are a joint creation of myself and the interviewees, we both signed release forms gifting the material to the public domain (see Appendix). Unfortunately, one elder had a change of heart after receiving the transcript and asked that all the material from our interview be withdrawn from the project. Luckily the other participants were all willing to bestow their memories and knowledge as a legacy to Sonoma Valley’s future.

While the “Findings” section which follows (pages 5 – 71) focuses on the memories shared by Sonoma Valley elders during the Oral History project, other sources have also been included. In order to highlight certain points, some of the elders’ quotes have been edited from the versions which appear in the transcripts.
The Elders

William (Bill) Basileu, eighty-two years old and a life-long local resident, was born and raised in El Verano. Bill shared a wealth of stories and information gleaned from a lifetime of fishing and hunting in Sonoma Valley. His father, Jordan Basileu, wrote a sporting column for the Sonoma Index-Tribune for many years. Like his father, Bill ran a barber shop in El Verano that served as a gathering place for local sportsmen. He is especially familiar with Sonoma Creek from the Verano Avenue bridge down to tidewater, a section he said he’d walked “hundreds of times.” He also spent a lot of time on many of the tributaries.

Robert (Bob) Cannard Sr. is originally from the east coast, but has lived here since the 1950s. He was a professor at Sonoma State University and has spent many years studying the local environment. He has extensive knowledge of botany and has spent a lot of time observing and researching ground water issues in Sonoma Valley. He has many well thought-out ideas about how conditions have changed over the last two hundred years.

Milton (Milt) Castagnasso was born in Sonoma in 1917. His ancestors arrived here around 1860 and Milt still owns the land that his grandfather first settled at that time. He and his family ran a dairy farm in the Temelec area for twenty-nine years and also dairied out in the western part of the county. He is especially familiar with Sonoma Creek from Sonoma Grove (end of Spain Street) down to the Watmaugh Road bridge and Rodgers’ Creek. He also has a good grasp on changes in the ground water situation over the years.

Shirley Churchill moved to Glen Ellen from Santa Rosa in 1938, when she was a child. In 1946 she moved to Santa Rosa to go to the Junior College. There she met her future husband Bud Churchill. After completing school and getting married, she returned to Sonoma Valley and has lived in the town of Sonoma ever since. She spent a lot of time fishing and swimming in the Glen Ellen area and also provided some very detailed information on wildflowers she collected there for a school project.

Charles (Charlie) Cooke first came to the valley in the late ‘thirties and attended kindergarten at the old grammar school on East Napa Street (now the Community Center). He lived here for much of the 1940s. He moved away in 1949, but returned often to visit and in 1975 came back for good. Charlie worked for the State Department of Education and was on a citizen’s committee that helped create the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District. He is especially familiar with the Lovall Valley area.

Albert (Al) Guffanti was born in San Francisco in 1917, moved to Glen Ellen in 1930 and then Kenwood two years later. He joined the military in 1940 and rarely visited the valley until 1970, when he returned to Kenwood to retire. His thirty-year absence gives him a
unique “Rip VanWinkle” perspective on the changes that occurred during those years. As a young man he often fished Sonoma Creek between Adobe Canyon and Warm Springs Canyon. In the 1970s he served on the Advisory Planning Commission for Sonoma County. He also has good geological knowledge of the area.

William (Bill) Lynch, editor of the Sonoma Index-Tribune, was born in Sonoma in 1942. His family has owned and operated the local newspaper since the late 19th century, giving him a broad grasp of local issues and changes in the landscape. His grandfather was a well-known local fisherman in the early 20th century. Bill Lynch has lived in the valley most of his life, leaving to attend college and serve in the Navy. Most of his youth was spent on the east side of Sonoma, where he played on Nathanson Creek. An avid sportsman, he used to fish many sections of Sonoma Creek and its tributaries, especially Adobe Canyon, Stuart Creek and upper Nathanson Creek.

William McCarthy contacted me after his sister sent him an article on the Oral History Project from the Sonoma Index-Tribune. Born in 1926, he wrote me a long and detailed letter about his experiences growing up on Sonoma Creek in El Verano from 1935 to 1944. During a phone conversation, he provided more information on a number of things. His father worked for the county and helped construct many of the bridges now spanning Sonoma Creek. William especially recalled the section of the creek from the Boyes Boulevard bridge down to tidewater and fished in Fowler Creek and the Glen Ellen area.

William (Bill) Meglen was born in Glen Ellen in 1915 and has lived here all his life. He spent a lot of time swimming, hunting and fishing through his youth and for much of his adulthood. Bill was a carpenter and a contractor and worked on many buildings and other projects in the area. Through years of observation, he has developed a solid practical understanding of the creek and how it responds to various changes. He was especially careful to be accurate with his comments and to distinguish between what he knew and what seemed to be true (e.g. saying it seemed like it rained more when he was a kid, but thought it better to check the records than trust his memory).

Milo Shepard’s family has been in the area since for over 100 years; his father Irving was Jack London’s nephew. Milo was born in 1926 on the Jack London Ranch above Glen Ellen and has spent much of his life on the property, working and managing the ranch and vineyard. He studied agriculture at CalPoly and is very knowledgeable about land use practices and soils. He also worked as a state park ranger for seven years, opening both Annadel and Sugar Loaf State Parks.
Overview of Findings

“There was plenty of fish,” said Bill Basileu, recalling Sonoma Valley of the 1920s and ’30s, when he was growing up in El Verano. “All the streams were open for fishing. The limit was twenty-five. If you didn’t take twenty-five, you took a dozen.” Upstream in Kenwood, Al Guffanti remembers steelhead in such numbers that you could “kick them out of the water.” Everyone who fished had similar stories, and agreed the fish population has declined precipitously over their lifetimes. At some point the limit was dropped to ten (exact date undetermined) and by the 1980s, Sonoma Creek was closed to fishing above tidewater.

Steelhead are an excellent indicator species. Like a “canary in the coal mine,” the steelhead population in Sonoma Creek reflects the overall health of the watershed and is an early indicator of problems. If the steelhead are doing well, then most wild plant and animal communities in the valley are also in good shape. Likewise, when their numbers decline, it’s a sign that substantial impacts are being felt by the local ecosystem. Steelhead are sensitive to the effects of many human activities, including: water pollution from livestock waste; erosion from logging, road building, grading and other causes; spraying agricultural chemicals; decreases in water quantity because of diversions for domestic, agricultural and commercial use; loss of riparian cover; narrowing, straightening and clearing of stream channels for flood control or other reasons; and filling wetlands for reclamation.

The decline of steelhead in Sonoma Creek is probably due to a variety of cumulative effects. While it’s a complicated story, the interviews show general agreement about the major changes that have occurred. Rather than having conflicting opinions, each person provided a unique “piece of the puzzle.” Fitted together, they create a surprisingly detailed picture of how the creek and its native fish have fared over most of the twentieth century. A full understanding of these elders’ experiences requires delving even further back, beyond living memory, to get a sense of the creek’s history when they inherited it, seventy or more years ago. What follows is the story of Sonoma Creek’s steelhead and the changes that have probably affected them, drawn from a synthesis of living memory and historical records. Full documentation can be found in the individual sections of this report.

Sonoma Valley’s earliest historical record comes from the 1823 journal of Jose Altimira, in which he describes his explorations and the founding of the Sonoma Mission. Though it was the summer dry season, he was so impressed with the number of springs here that he described the valley as “a fountain of fountains.” Water was noticeably more abundant here than in the Petaluma area or Napa Valley. A local native told him that the creek had “plenty” [bastante] of fish, especially salmon [salmon]. The meaning of salmon in 19th century Spanish is hard to determine. Altimira may have been lumping together fish that we now differentiate into steelhead and several species of salmon. It
seems safe to conclude that Sonoma Creek in 1823 supported an abundance of one or more kinds of salmonids (judging from other evidence, probably both steelhead and one or two species of salmon).

The founding of the mission and arrival of Mexican and American settlers during the next sixty years had a number of impacts. At the end of 1824, after just 18 months in operation, the mission counted over 4500 head of livestock, including 1100 cattle, 4000 sheep and 430 horses. Waste from these animals must have polluted local creeks and erosion (caused directly by hooves and indirectly through devegetation) led to silting of the gravel beds needed for spawning. The impact of introduced livestock must be balanced against the simultaneous reduction of deer, tule elk and antelope herds by early settlers. Nine years later, in 1833, the mission herds had almost tripled in size to over 12,000 animals, though some of these occupied outlying ranches in Napa Valley, Petaluma and elsewhere. After 1846, farming by American immigrants on smaller plots of land probably led to a reduction in the number of cattle. However, the total impact of livestock may have increased because other farm animals were probably being raised in larger numbers.

Like livestock, early logging for lumber (redwood and Douglas Fir) and woodcutting for firewood (oak and other hardwoods) increased erosion and silted spawning beds. Milo Shepard said that between the 1850s and 1870s, all the first growth redwoods were cut from Sonoma Mountain. Loss of riparian forest probably also happened at this time, taking away shade and summer habitat. Coho salmon (possible former and current residents) which prefer streams in redwood forests, would have been most affected by this early logging.

Undoubtedly, some early settlers fished the creek. Initially their impact may have been small and offset somewhat by a decrease in fishing by grizzly bears, which were locally exterminated by the 1850s. No historical record has been found giving details on the state of Sonoma Creek’s fishery between 1823 and 1880, though Milo Shepard surmised that “everything got fished out and they started stocking it themselves.” Supporting his assessment is an article in the June 5, 1880 Sonoma Index-Tribune announcing the construction of a dam on Graham Creek for the Lenni Fish Company’s hatchery. This dam may have been the first time a man-made obstacle prevented local steelhead (and perhaps salmon) from reaching their spawning beds. The newspaper’s single mention of trout fishing in the early 1880s gives the impression that they were not particularly abundant in those days.

In 1882, J.A. Poppe imported German carp to fill ponds on his property south of Schellville. Some escaped, and by 1889, Sonoma Creek was described as “swarming with carp.” The Index-Tribune mentions how they devoured trout eggs and feared they would “destroy the trout.” Despite predation by carp, trout fishing reports increased dramatically that year. They describe the fish as “plentiful” and mention a catch of 150 pounds by one fisherman in a single day. The newspaper gives a more mixed review the following year, talking of “very poor” fishing one week but saying “fishing is good in Glen Ellen” another. Poor numbers of trout are blamed on the use of nets by Chinese farm workers.
Catches of salmon are mentioned during these years in October, January and March; October is quite early for steelhead and suggests Chinook salmon. Steelhead could have been mistaken for salmon in January and March, or some of these could have been Coho salmon.

The hatchery on Graham Creek probably began operating at some point in the 1880s, and may have contributed to the apparent increase in the trout population toward the close of the decade. In 1890, the Index-Tribune announced the hatchery’s plan to stock Sonoma Creek with trout. In May of that year 100,000 trout eggs were received from the Klamath River and arrangements made with the North Pacific Game and Fish Club to be hatched and distributed “in Sonoma and Russian River.” It seems almost certain that native trout interbred with those imported from the Klamath.

The arrival of the railroad in the 1880s, which attracted more visitors and residents to the valley, must have ultimately affected Sonoma Creek. Sonoma township’s population grew 21% during the decade (Sonoma Index-Tribune, August 2, 1890) probably stimulating another cycle of logging on Sonoma Mountain to meet an increased demand for building materials. Smaller groves in scattered locations, like the one mentioned by Charlie Cooke on a tributary of Arroyo Seco, probably fell to the ax at this time, affecting spawning areas previously untouched. Cutting of oaks and other hardwoods also probably accelerated, to provide firewood both for the valley and San Francisco. Milo Shepard’s father remembered looking up at Sonoma Mountain when he was a boy [c. 1900] and seeing “cattle grazing all over the mountain,” it was so empty of timber. And of course, an increasing population meant more people were fishing along the creek. In 1889, the Index-Tribune mentions the opening of fishing season on April 1st, so some sort of fishing regulations were in place by that time.

The 1880s also saw the beginning of a large scale reclamation project in the sloughs and saltwater marshes below Schellville. At first, the Sonoma Land Company hired Chinese workers to build levees by manual labor. When the scale of the project became apparent, one or two dredgers were brought in to do the work mechanically. Comparing an 1877 map with a modern one reveals little change in the layout of the channels, suggesting that the dredgers deepened existing channels rather than create new ones. Over the next fifty years, 10,000 acres of marshland were reclaimed and turned into farmland. Much of the hay grown in this area was shipped to San Francisco to feed its horses which provided the main form of transportation.

Articles in the Index-Tribune from 1902 and 1903 indicate fishing was pretty good at that time, mentioning that catches of “25 to 100 trout have been the rule.” It also reports a catch of four salmon averaging ten pounds in late January, 1902. Jack London stopped the cutting of oaks when he purchased his ranch above Glen Ellen in 1905. After the hatchery on Graham Creek closed around 1909, the stocking of Sonoma Creek with fingerling trout may have stopped for a dozen or so years, likely decreasing the (artificially maintained) trout population. Another round of logging on Sonoma Mountain may have begun in the ‘teens using mechanical power for the first time along with animal and human power. Increasing mechanization probably resulted in greater erosion from
roads and vehicles, causing more siltation of streambeds than previous, animal-powered harvesting. By this time, lumber could be readily shipped by train, truck or barge to markets outside Sonoma Valley.

The creek inherited by our Sonoma Valley elders when they were children in the ‘teens and ‘twenties had seen a number of significant impacts, but still supported a healthy, though somewhat altered fish population. Two bits of evidence suggest that a decline in steelhead numbers was being noticed: Sometime between 1903 and the mid-twenties, fishing regulations began limiting local fishermen to 25 trout per day. Second, another stocking program was begun by the Fish and Game Department in 1922 or earlier. Bill Basileu remembers his father meeting the train in El Verano once a year to receive a shipment of 10,000 fingerling trout, which were divided up among several fishermen. “Each guy would take a bucket [of fingerlings] back to his pet stream,” said Basileu. He thought they might have come from the hatchery in Redding. Sonoma Creek’s native trout, which had already hybridized with Klamath trout hatched on Graham Creek, now were further diluted with stock from the Sacramento River watershed.

The 1923 fire, which devastated 10,000 acres from the Mayacamas to El Verano, probably caused increased erosion that winter. Significant silting of spawning beds may have occurred on Calabazas, Stuart, Agua Caliente and some smaller creeks on the east side of the valley. However, as fishing in the 1920s was considered excellent, this apparently did not have much long-term effect.

Perhaps in part because of the stocking program, which released 100,000 fingerlings over 10 years, fishing was exceptionally good in the 1920s and ‘30s. People reported that they often caught their limit of twenty-five. Al Guffanti remembered catching five or ten trout for breakfast within half an hour. Bill Basileu talks of catching salmon averaging ten to fifteen pounds in Sonoma Creek in October, with some as big as thirty pounds and over thirty inches. Enforcement of fishing laws was sporadic at best. The game warden in those days traveled from Santa Rosa by bus and called ahead to rent a horse in El Verano. By the time he got into the field, word was out and the illegal fishermen had cleared off the creeks. “Sooners” were resented by local fishermen for “fishing out” local creeks before trout season opened about April 1st.

Gravel mining in the creek bed, probably already well-established in some areas, was in full swing in the 1920s and ‘30s. Almost everyone interviewed could pinpoint several locations where this was going on. Pickups were driven down to the creek bed and loads of gravel shoveled out for concrete used in houses, commercial buildings, roads and bridges. Bill Meglen remembered Norman Cowan, the roadmaster. Cowan and his sons would take a load of gravel from Sonoma Creek near Glen Ellen, and spread it on the roads from Bennett Valley to Kenwood. The 1920s were the years when the automobile first established its dominance, leading to widespread paving of roads. When Highway 12 was put in, Sonoma Creek and some tributaries were probably the source of gravel for the pavement. Bill Meglen also mentions pumping of water from Sonoma Creek in the 1920s when the highway was constructed. Besides “informal” mining,
commercial gravel operations existed on the creek at Agua Caliente, El Verano, Sonoma and Schellville (near the end of Broadway). Undoubtedly this affected spawning habitat, which requires undisturbed gravel beds.

Summer swimming holes were plentiful in the 1920s and ‘30s. From the Watmaugh bridge upstream through Sonoma and El Verano there were many pools consistently described as eight to ten feet deep. The deepest was near the foot of Oak Street in El Verano, estimated at twelve to fourteen feet deep. Further upstream, pools were shallower, most estimates putting them around four to six feet in Glen Ellen and Kenwood. Several people talked of summer dams being built in this area to create enough depth for a good swimming hole. Bill Basileu said there was enough water in those days for a fish to travel between holes, though the riffles were only two or three inches deep. These descriptions indicate good summer habitat for steelhead: pools deep enough to keep the water cool near the bottom and enough water to travel between pools.

By the early 1930s, the last of Skagg’s Island was reclaimed. Shipping on Sonoma Creek had pretty much come to an end a few years before in the late ‘twenties. These two events probably signaled the end of large scale dredging on lower Sonoma Creek. Several factors may have depleted the steelhead population in that era. Basileu said the planting of fingerling trout stopped in 1931, after a disagreement arose between his father and a Fish and Game employee. Also, hard times led more people to fish for subsistence: “Those were Depression days and you went fishing for meat,” related Al Guffanti. He went on to describe how he speared fish at night, explaining “You only did it for food. You had to eat.” William McCarthy also talked of obtaining meals for his family with a similar weapon (he was also arrested once for illegally fishing this way).

The 1930s also saw the establishment of a local Soil Conservation District whose mission was to help farmers facilitate run-off by reshaping the contours of their land and creating ditches. Bob Cannard described how the district kept heavy equipment in the valley for many years to accomplish this goal. One long-term effect of these practices has probably been a decrease in ground water, since rains are being shunted to the bay more quickly, with less chance to soak in.

Fish populations probably benefited from a decline in local gravel mining in the late ‘thirties, due to the availability of better quality material trucked in from the Russian River. Bill Lynch, born in 1941, had no recollection of anyone going down to the creek to load gravel on small trucks. Better economic times and the fact that many young fishermen went off to fight World War II may have decreased fishing pressure during the mid-1940s, though this may have been offset by the establishment of Skagg’s Island Naval Base, bringing an influx of potential fishermen into the area.

A decline in the fish population began to be noticed following World War II. Milo Shepard recalled that runs of “blueback salmon,” which he said were “like the silver [coho salmon]. About that size.” were pretty much finished after the war. The 1950s saw the last reported logging of redwoods on Sonoma Mountain; Shepard said they took out about 2 million board feet at that time. Consequent erosion and siltation must have
occurred on some tributaries, probably including Graham, Asbury and perhaps Mill Creek. Fishing limits had been reduced from twenty-five to ten trout by this time. Bob Cannard, who arrived late in the ‘fifties, “never did much fishing on Sonoma Creek due to the fact that it seemed to be getting fished out.” By the early 1960s, Bill Lynch said, “I was a fly fisherman even then. I wouldn’t keep them, I’d just catch and release.” Also during the 1960s, the dam at Larson Park was put in and stocked with trout in the summer, perhaps further diluting remaining native stock.

The Eldridge dam, which was the most cited reason for the decline in steelhead runs, was also constructed at some point after the war (estimated dates varied widely). For several years the dam blocked migrating steelhead from reaching spawning beds in the entire upper watershed. Tributaries affected were Asbury, Graham, Yulupa, Bear, Calabazas and Stuart Creeks, as well as the headwaters of Sonoma Creek in Adobe Canyon. Eventually a fish ladder was installed, but not before much damage had already been done. “The biggest thing that ruined fishing was that dam,” said Bill Meglen, a sentiment that was shared by several others.

The late 1950s saw a decline in ground water, leaving many local wells dry. The arrival of the aqueduct from Coyote Dam (c. 1962) improved the situation, leading to a rise in the water table over subsequent years. (until the early 1980s, according to Cannard). The fire of 1964, the second biggest blaze in the valley’s recorded history, probably had effects similar to the 1923 fire—a short term increase in hillside erosion and stream bed siltation in some eastern tributaries of Sonoma Creek, especially Calabazas, Stuart and Agua Caliente Creeks.

By 1970, fishing in Sonoma Creek had gone seriously downhill. Al Guffanti, returning to Kenwood after 30 years, went down to the creek to fish and found “it just wasn’t the same.” In 1971, Bill Lynch wrote “Obituary of a Trout Stream” in the Index-Tribune lamenting the worst opening day for trout season in anyone’s memory. In our interview, Lynch stated that the amount of bank erosion from Glen Ellen down to El Verano seemed to accelerate in the 1970s, widening the channel and destroying summer trout habitat. The origins of the problem may have been a combination of factors including faster run-off caused by development upstream, a series of heavy winters, smaller streamside buffers for development and farming, or something else. Arundo donax arrived around this time, colonizing freshly eroded banks, especially in the middle and lower watershed, crowding out native riparian vegetation. The drought of 1976-7 was the most severe of the last 125 years, with total rainfall just 53% of normal (as recorded in Santa Rosa). Parts of Sonoma Creek’s middle reach dried up in the summer of 1977; some steelhead must have had difficulty finding adequate habitat at this time.

In the early 1980s, at the urging of a county supervisor (according to Shepard) Sonoma Creek was opened up to year-round fishing. This decision may have had a major impact on the numbers of steelhead reaching their spawning beds. A few years later, Sonoma Creek was closed to all fishing above tidewater. In the mid-1980s, Bob Cannard reported seeing three dead or dying salmon “24 to 30 inches, ten to twelve pounds” on Fryer Creek at MacArthur Street, in the city of Sonoma.
Comparing current fish populations with historic ones is difficult at best. When it was legal, fishing drew many people to the creek; with that attraction gone, there are far fewer observers to report its condition or notice changes. We probably have a better picture of Sonoma Creek from the first half of the twentieth century than we do at present. However, all the evidence points to a fairly drastic decline of Sonoma Creek’s steelhead between 1930 and 1970, especially during the latter half of this period. While some of their former abundance may have been due to the planting of fingerlings, their decline was probably the result of a variety of factors which cumulatively diminished the steelhead population. They may have hit a low point in the late 1970s and early 1980s (after the drought and the advent of year-round fishing) and even have rebounded modestly since then. Steelhead are still seen in Sonoma Creek and many of its tributaries. Chinook salmon were sighted by the author in October, 2001 in the tidal reaches, and a pair of Chinook were discovered spawning in fresh water in 1999.

Our land use practices continue to affect steelhead and salmon. Current issues negatively affecting salmonids include: continued development, leading to more, and more rapid run-off; new wells drilled to ever-increasing depths and old wells being put back into use, reducing the quantity of ground water; conversion of large amounts of land to vineyards, increasing erosion and amounts of agricultural chemicals; remnant summer dams; culverts that block fish passage; and increasing residential pesticide use.

Despite these problems, there are many reasons for optimism. Positive developments include: much less dumping of household garbage into the creek bed; greatly reduced grazing and commercial woodcutting; fewer fish barriers in the stream; increased public awareness; and greater legal protection of the creek and its associated plant and animal communities. Also, some land is being set aside through conservation easements with the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District. Restoration work being done by the Sonoma Ecology Center will improve both winter migration and summer habitat conditions, helping increase the fish population to a level closer to its historic abundance.
Comprehensive Findings
(by Subject)
“There was plenty of fish.”

Bill Basileu, Sonoma

Trout & Steelhead Fishing

“All the streams were open for trout fishing,” Bill Basileu said when I interviewed him at his home in Sonoma. “The limit was twenty-five. If you didn’t take twenty-five you took a dozen. All the streams had them and I know we had a lot more water.” Bill has spent a full lifetime fishing and hunting, much of it right here in Sonoma Valley. He grew up in the ‘20s and ‘30s in El Verano, where his father owned a barber shop and sporting goods store near the old train station. Later Bill took over the business and the place continued to serve as a gathering place for local sportsmen. Many other folks I interviewed remember “the Basileus” as top-notch fishermen, and asked how Bill was doing.

Bill’s experience was confirmed by everyone who remembered that era. Al Guffanti remembers steelhead running up a small stream in Kenwood in the 1930s in such numbers that you could “go out there and kick them out of the water.” He said he “could get up in the morning . . . and catch five to ten fish within a half hour. About eight to twelve inches long--breakfast.” Former Glen Ellen fire chief Bill Meglen says he caught “trout eight, ten, twelve inches long in those days. Even when the limit was ten in later years, I used to throw the small ones back and I’d end up with eight to ten-inch trout.” He could land his ten-trout limit in two hours, which included throwing the smaller ones back.

Fishing techniques varied with the times, regulations and personal circumstances. “When I started fishing the creek,” remembered Bill Meglen. “I used just a willow pole, a string and a bent pin to catch fish with.” During desperate times in the 1930s, fishing sometimes made a crucial contribution to the local diet. Al Guffanti said, “Those were Depression days and you went deer hunting for meat, you went fishing for meat. There was a lot of steelhead coming up and every once in awhile you’d say ‘Hell, let’s go get a meal. We’ll have fish for supper.’ It was very simple. We knew where the spawning holes were, where the spawning riffles were.

“With a flashlight you go out there, you watch them, they were spawning and you spear them. That was it [demonstrating with downward arm motion, like using a hoe to break dirt clods]. You took them home, cleaned them and cooked them. You only did it for the food. You had to eat.”

William McCarthy described how, as an adolescent, he also provided meals for his family of seven using “a brake rod from a scrapped Model-A Ford shaped into a large hook and filed to razor sharpness.” He also confessed that it was the only time in his life he was ever arrested!
Despite occasional lapses, the people I interviewed expressed an ethic of sportsmanship. “Sooners,” who fished before trout season officially opened (around the first of April), were resented for “fishing out” the creeks before the legal fishermen had a chance: “The sooners wiped it out . . . The sooners would explore the creeks back where nobody would see them and they wouldn’t buy a license, because they’re breaking the law anyhow.”\(^8\) Enforcement was sporadic at best. Bill Basileu told how the game warden would travel from Santa Rosa by bus and rent a horse in El Verano. By the time he got into the field, the word was out and the illegal fisherman had cleared off the creeks.\(^5\)

Though he wasn’t an official warden, Bill Meglen kept an eye on the stretch of Sonoma Creek below his house in downtown Glen Ellen: “I’d see guys fishing there and I’d say, “You know this fishing’s closed?” [answer] “Oh.”\(^10\)

As times changed, so did local fishing techniques. No one mentioned subsistence fishing or gaffing steelhead after the early 1940s. Limits for trout were reduced from twenty-five to ten. Al Guffanti, who returned to Kenwood after a thirty-year absence, recounted the dramatic decline in the trout population between 1940 and 1970: “When I came back . . . I thought, ‘Well gee . . . I’ll go out and fish.’ I got my license and went out and it wasn’t the same.”\(^11\) Sonoma Creek and its tributaries were closed to fishing. Bob Cannard arrived in Sonoma Valley in the late ‘fifties and “never did much fishing on Sonoma Creek due to the fact that it seemed to be getting fished out.”\(^12\) Bill Lynch, current editor of the \textit{Sonoma Index-Tribune}, recounted excursions to Adobe Canyon in the early 1960s: “I was a fly fisherman even then. I mostly would just go fishing, I wouldn’t keep them, I’d just catch and release. I would go up just because I wanted to fish.”\(^13\) In 1971, Bill wrote “The Obituary of a Trout Stream,” in the \textit{Sonoma Index-Tribune}, lamenting that “as little as ten years ago, we could catch limits of your rainbows as far down as Leveroni Road.” That year had seen “the worst trout season opening day”\(^14\) in anyone’s memory. Eventually Sonoma Creek and its tributaries were completely closed to fishing above tidewater.

\textbf{NOTES}

1. Basileu—3
2. Basileu—8
3. Meglen—20
4. Guffanti—12,25
6. Guffanti—16
7. Lynch—10
8. Meglen—156, 170
9. Bill Basileu, personal communication
10. Meglen—157
11. Guffanti—19
12. Cannard—92
13. Lynch—10
“Everything got fished out. It got fished out in the eighteen-hundreds and they started stocking it themselves.”

Milo Shepard

Trout Planting & the Fish Hatchery on Graham Creek

In the 1920s and early ‘30s, Jordan Basileu and other local fishermen seeded local waters with about 100,000 fingerling trout: “He planted all the tributaries,” recalled his son Bill. “He got about ten thousand fish—about an inch long from Fish and Game for ten years in a row. And they took them to Hooker Creek, Nunn’s Canyon, Adobe Canyon, Fowler Creek, Sonoma Creek. That was in ‘twenty-two to ‘thirty-one. They might have come out of Redding or somewhere. We got them on the Southern Pacific train that used to run through El Verano. The day they were coming my Dad knew and he’d have ten fishermen there waiting—each guy would take a bucket [of fish] back to his pet stream.”

A disagreement with a Fish and Game employee ended the shipments after 1931.

Milo Shepard said the planting of trout here “definitely” began toward the close of the 19th century: “What occurred in the late 1800s was similar to what occurred back East. This is why you have fishing back East—is the fact that in the early 1800s, as the population increased, they found out that their streams were being fished out. That’s why almost every area back there—Massachusetts to New Hampshire and everything, have fish hatcheries.” Milo’s account is confirmed by the Sonoma Index-Tribune from 1880, which reports the construction of “a dam at Sonoma Creek on the land of A.O. La Motte for the Lenni Fish Company.” Three months later, the Tribune reported the dam complete. While newspaper accounts are vague about the exact location, everyone familiar with the area placed the dam on Graham Creek, not far above its confluence with Sonoma Creek. Milo Shepard said the dam “served Wake Robin [Lodge] and what they called the ‘Fish Ranch,’ who had fish ponds that they raised fish in.”

It seems likely that the hatchery operated through the 1880s. The next mention in the newspaper occurs in January, 1890, when LaMotte was said to be “working with N.P. Land and Improvement Co. to stock Sonoma Creek with trout at Glen Ellen.” Just a few weeks later comes a report of the “Dam at Lenni Fish Co. partially destroyed” in a flood that also washed away the Glen Ellen bridge. By May, a new bridge was under construction and LaMotte’s hatchery was back in business: “One hundred thousand fish eggs from Klamath River rec’d by A.V. LaMotte will be hatched at his fishery near this place. Fish Commissioners have made arrangements with North Pacific Game and Fish Club to hatch out 100,000 trout eggs and distribute the trout in Sonoma and Russian River.”

Fish from the hatchery on Graham Creek were quite widely distributed. In fact, “LaMotte shipped rainbow trout to New Zealand,” said Milo Shepard. “Every rainbow trout in New Zealand came from Sonoma County.” This account was verified by Bill
Basileu. Milo believes the hatchery on Graham Creek operated until shortly before Jack London bought his ranch in 1909.

So Sonoma Creek saw at least two periods of large-scale stocking with trout: about 1880-1909 by LaMotte’s hatchery on Graham Creek; and from 1922-1931 by Jordan Basileu and other local fishermen. In both cases, hatchery-bred, fingerling trout from other parts of the state were used. Bill Lynch, who began fishing here in the late 1940s, didn’t recall Fish and Game ever planting Sonoma Creek. He did mention the dam at Larson Park, which he guessed was built in the 1960s, and said “for a couple years,” the Recreation District would put the “dam up for the summer and plant trout in there.” As far as he knew that was the only time the creek was ever planted.

For many years the fish population in Sonoma Creek may have been significantly increased by stocking. This may account for some of the abundance reported by elder fishermen. Another effect was that Sonoma Creek’s native strain of steelhead was undoubtedly diluted by breeding with planted fish from the Klamath and Sacramento Rivers and possibly elsewhere. If genetic studies are ever done on local trout, at least two streams probably contain isolated populations descended from planted fish that could be compared with the general trout population: Bill Basileu, referring to Hooker Creek above the falls, said: “They planted trout above there and I know about fourteen, fifteen years ago they were still there. George Nelson, who was the game warden at the time, told me.” Likewise, speaking of Sonoma Creek’s headwaters in Sugarloaf Ridge State Park, Milo Shepard said: “The steelhead couldn’t get over Reynold’s Falls. But up above there are trout and those are planted.” Milo worked at Sugarloaf as a park ranger for several years. (for the record, Bill Basileu said steelhead “would go over those falls.”)

NOTES

1. Shepard—31
2. Basileu—3,4
3. Basileu—3
4. Shepard—25,32
5. Sonoma Index-Tribune; June 5, 1880
6. Ibid; August 8, 1880
7. Shepard—24; Basileu—59-61; Lynch—32
8. Shepard—24,27
9. Sonoma Index-Tribune; January 4, 1890
10. Ibid; February 1, 1890
11. Ibid; May 10, 1890
12. Shepard—26
13. Basileu—62
14. Shepard—26
15. Lynch—13,14
16. Basileu—5
17. Shepard—31
18. Basileu—6
“You have to remember that this creek has non-native species in there preying on the trout eggs.”¹

Bill Lynch

Exotic Fish Species

In November, 1882, the Sonoma Index-Tribune reported that J.A. Poppe was importing German carp to fill six ponds he had created on his property south of Schellville.² By the end of the decade, the newspaper described Sonoma Creek as “swarming with carp.”³ Carp fishing became “all the rage.”⁴ Simultaneously, the Tribune recorded the damage being done to the trout fishery by the introduced carp: “They are voracious and trout eggs are often found in [their] maw. It is feared they will destroy the trout in our streams.”⁵

Carp still inhabit Sonoma Creek, some of them probably descendants of those imported from Germany 120 years ago. Four elder fishermen mentioned carp and other non-native fish living in the creek. Bill Lynch called carp, suckers, pike minnow and squaw fish, “trash fish that haven’t helped the trout situation.”⁶ William McCarthy mentioned large carp, suckers and pike living in the stretch of Sonoma Creek through El Verano.⁷ Carp were not mentioned further upstream. Bill Meglen said “there was pike maybe thirty inches long”⁸ just below the Glen Ellen bridge, and in Kenwood, Al Guffanti talked of chubs and pike.⁹ While the presence of “trash fish” did not figure highly in anyone’s assessment of the steelhead decline, Bill Lynch felt that it was one of a combination of factors that contributed to the deterioration of Sonoma Creek as a trout stream.¹⁰

NOTES

1. Lynch—26
2. Sonoma Index-Tribune; November 24, 1882
3. Ibid; April 13, 1889
4. Ibid; March 23, 1889
5. Ibid; April 13, 1889
6. Lynch—26,27
7. McCarthy—8
8. Meglen—20
9. Guffanti—65
10. Lynch--27
“Nos informamos por los Indios a si [llama] dho Estero tiene Pescados o no, y nos aseguraraon que bastante hay en especial Salmon.”

“We asked the Indians of the estero [Sonoma Creek], if it had fish or not, and they assured us there were plenty, especially salmon.”

Fr. Jose Altimira; June 28, 1823

Salmon in Sonoma Creek

Historic reports of salmon in Sonoma Creek come from a variety of sources. Besides the mention by Jose Altimira above, taken from his journal describing the founding of Sonoma Mission, salmon are reported in newspaper stories from the late 19th and early 20th centuries. There is also linguistic evidence from the Tcho-ko-yem, who occupied Sonoma Valley when the mission was founded in 1823. A large majority of the residents interviewed for the Oral History Project gave first (30%) or second-hand (40%) accounts of salmon in Sonoma Creek. Only two people (20%) said they’d never heard of, seen or caught salmon in Sonoma Valley.

Bill Basileu, who probably has the most extensive local fishing experience of anyone interviewed, said: “Salmon used to run--years back there was more salmon than now. Now the salmon still run, but they come up and they can’t go any further and they die in the salt water, most of them. We see them floating when I fish down there [referring to tidal sloughs]. But yeah, salmon would go all the way to the falls there at Golden Bear Lodge. Steelhead always do—that was a spot where they congregated.” He went on to describe them as “big babies. They were the dog salmon, the male just before they die they grow teeth and look mean. They were big, you know [showing length with hands]—thirty pounds. They go over thirty inches. They were a deep fish. Anyway, they’d go over thirty [pounds]. Most of them aren’t, most of them are ten, twelve, fifteen pounds.”

Bill’s description matches well with other reports. Bill Meglen also called them “dog salmon.” Bob Cannard recalled “seeing three dead or dying salmon on Fryer Creek, within the last 15 years,” describing them as “24 to 30 inches, ten to twelve pounds.” The Sonoma Index-Tribune mentions salmon eight times between 1883 and 1890, sometimes saying the runs were so “plentiful” that the fish could be “seen in large numbers every day.” (trout were reported separately during this period). A story from 1902 said that four salmon caught by one fisherman “averaged about 10 pounds.”

What species of salmon were being seen in Sonoma Creek? Both Bill Basileu and Bill Lynch believe they were chinook, or king salmon, Oncorhynchus tshawytscha. Others didn’t know, weren’t sure or used common names which apply to several species. Bill Basileu said: “You go back sixty, seventy years—October was a wet month—we had a lot of water in the creek. Having the water the salmon would run, because they run in
Two newspaper stories on salmon from the 1880s also appear in October. One reads: “Heavy rainfall, 9 and 9/100” in a month. Quite a number of salmon brought up in Glen Ellen.” The presence of an October or “fall” run of chinook in Sonoma Creek is consistent with the habits of chinook in other parts of northern California.

Milo Shepard describes what may have been a second species of salmon in Sonoma Creek: “We used to have what we called a blueback salmon run. I don’t technically know what they were. We just called them bluebacks. They weren’t big, about the size of the other salmon, the little ones—the silver. About that size. They were finished right after World War Two. That was the last we saw of them. They were spring run. We never had any fall runs. You didn’t have the water in the creek, you didn’t have the amount of water they needed to come up. They didn’t go much above Glen Ellen, they didn’t get to Kenwood.” (Al Guffanti said he “never saw any salmon” in Kenwood.) Milo also recalled they were most commonly caught among the steelhead in February and that their mouths were not black like King salmon (though he wasn’t able to give a more specific description). As Milo suggests, his “blueback” description matches well with that of the silver or coho salmon, Onchorhynchus kisutch. Smaller than the chinook, cohos usually run a little later—more “winter” than “fall.” “Blueback” is a common name for silver salmon, though it can connote other species as well.

One reason salmon were not often seen is probably due to the fact that, for much of the 20th century, fishing season didn’t start until April 1st. Fishing in fresh water in the fall and winter when salmon and steelhead were running was illegal and therefore less likely to be reported. Bill Lynch’s well thought-out comments on the presence of salmon in Sonoma Creek would account for some of the discrepancies among observers:

“Sonoma Creek was closed to trout fishing and steelhead fishing for as long as I can remember during spawning season. Even in the early ’50s it was never open. So you couldn’t go up there and go after steelhead or salmon in what amounts to fresh water. You could only fish it from tidewater down. A few guys would hook a salmon every now and then.

“The usual way that you would see salmon like that would be when there was an unusually early rain and there would be a sudden rush of fresh water coming down and salmon would come up early. Then there would be a stoppage, there wouldn’t be so much rain and people would see them spawning because they would have been early spawners. I had heard there were but I just never saw any. Steelhead, yes, not salmon.

“These little short coastal streams of this type here maybe not have been the right habitat. I’ve never heard in the history of the valley anyone ever talk about huge salmon runs. I just don’t think it was that kind of river. I don’t have any knowledge that this was ever a big salmon spawning area. You go back to the earliest history of Sonoma, there was a steelhead hatchery up in Graham Creek. But no salmon hatchery.”

In 1851, George Gibbs collected a vocabulary of 150 words from “the Tcho-ko-yem band of Sonoma Valley. It was obtained from an Indian who spoke Spanish.” Other than place names, this is the only surviving vocabulary for this group, who were living here when the Spanish arrived in the early 19th century. Gibbs’ Tcho-ko-yem vocabulary gives us:
Lo tah  Fish (generic term according to Gibbs)
Kah sih  Salmon

Unfortunately, the exact meaning of Kah sih cannot be established from Gibbs’ list. He and his informant were communicating in Spanish, a second language for both of them. We don’t know whether Gibbs himself made a distinction between steelhead and salmon. He might have used the word “salmon” for any anadromous salmonid. However, comparing Kah sih with better known and recorded vocabularies for neighboring Miwok groups, gives a clue to its original connotation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tcho-ko-yem (Gibbs)</th>
<th>Lake Miwok16 (Callaghan)</th>
<th>Lake Miwok17 (Barrett)</th>
<th>Bodega Miwok17 (Barrett)</th>
<th>Bodega Miwok18 (Kelly)</th>
<th>Bodega Miwok19 (Callaghan)</th>
<th>Marin Miwok17 (Barrett)</th>
<th>Nicasio Miwok18 (Kelly)</th>
<th>English (as recorded)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Lo tah</td>
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<td>Kah sih</td>
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<td>huul</td>
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<td>le win</td>
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<td>small trout [rainbow?]</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>olom-elewe</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“steelhead salmon”</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Anthropologist Isabel Kelly, who studied Coast Miwok language and culture extensively, states that Gibbs’ vocabulary “clearly is Miwok.”16

**Kelly specifically lists this word as “salmon, not steelhead.”

(Notes on pronunciation appear after this section’s bibliography)

This chart clearly suggests a meaning for Kah sih more or less in accord with our modern definition of “salmon.” Given the number of reports from diverse sources over so many years, it seems reasonable to conclude that at least some competent observers were making valid observations some of the time. Taken as a whole, converging lines of evidence all point to the conclusion that Sonoma Creek supported, and may still support, one or more native salmon runs. In fact, credible observers reported a pair of Chinook/King salmon spawning just above tidewater in Schellville as recently as November, 1999.20 Supporting Basileu’s description (page 21), one live and four dead chinook were spotted by Rebecca Lawton and Arthur Dawson of the Sonoma Ecology Center on October 21, 2001 in the tidewater reach of Sonoma Creek below Schellville. Estimated sizes (using a canoe paddle 8” across) ran from twenty-eight to thirty-six inches.
Some people have suggested that the Chinook currently found in Sonoma Creek are “wanderers,” that is “lost” salmon trying to reach the Sacramento River or one of its tributaries. This question could be resolved through DNA analysis, to establish whether salmon found in the lower reaches of Sonoma Creek are a distinct strain from those which spawn in the Central Valley.

NOTES

1. Altimira, Jose. Diario de la expedicion verificada con objecto de reconocer terrenos para la nueva planta de la Mision de Nuestro Padre San Francisco principiada le dia 25 de Junio de 1823.
2. Basileu—13
3. Basileu—23
4. Meglen—48
5. Cannard—92
6. Sonoma Index-Tribune, January; 1886
7. Ibid; January 25, 1902
8. Basileu—23; Lynch—30
9. Basileu—13
10. Sonoma Index-Tribune; October 26, 1889
11. Shepard—6-9,14,45
12. Guffanti—65
13. Shepard, Milo. personal communication, 2001
14. Lynch—12,29-32

Notes on pronunciation for table on page 3:

kasi Bodega Miwok(Barrett): “i” pronounced as in “machine”
kasi, kassi Marin, Lake Miwok(Barrett): “i” pronounced as in “pin”
“The valley in 1823 had an abundance of water. The water table was almost at ground level throughout the year in most areas of the valley.”¹

Bob Cannard, Sr.

“When you can see the vast change in the valley that a guy can see that’s been here a long time, you can’t help but wonder there’s problems about water. Our water table is dropping dramatically.”²

Milt Castagnasso

**WETLANDS, SPRINGS, WELLS & GROUND WATER**

Jose Altimira was so impressed by the amount of water in Sonoma Valley that he called it “a fountain of fountains,”³ [Sonoma es un manantial a manantiales] during his visit in the summer of 1823. He wrote, “The multitude of permanent small waters . . . are innumerable.”⁴ Local natives told him this was true even “during more extreme years.”⁵ In comparison, he found the area between Santa Rosa and Petaluma quite dry; having only “a few small ponds.” His party went “searching the hills for a little water” and ended up “having to hurry our campers to reach the small Arroyo of Lema . . . to find some small water”⁶ after nightfall. Earlier in the journey, he said Napa Valley resembled Sonoma in every respect except that “we did not find as much water as was in Sonoma.”⁷

On Altimira’s return from Napa, he writes of what was probably the biggest wetland his party encountered: “We descended to the plain, went exploring and in less than ¼ league [about 2/3 of a mile] we found 6 or 7 ponds of water, one between willows and others amidst tules and covered, but with waters clear, sweet, fresh and appetizing; the best which we know to be permanent springs.”⁸ Using Altimira’s figures, these springs must have averaged about 200 yards apart. Two people described what is probably the same area, on the east side of Sonoma:

“This whole valley was a marsh, you know,” said Bill Lynch. “I live on the 600 block of Oak Lane. When I was a little kid, my grandparents lived there and from their house all the way down to past Denmark Street was nothing but open orchard, and field and plain. In the wintertime, when we’d have a pretty good-sized amount of rain, a lot of that area was vernal pools. They were just all over the place. Ducks would come in, It was a real wildlife area. The area between what is now the extension of Fourth Street East, between Patton and France, was all blackberry bushes and there was a couple springs in there and vernal pools too. When I was a little kid, I used to play out in there. That whole area was really, really wild. There were pheasant, lots of pheasant out there. And quail. We used to go out there and pick blackberries and it was real marshy, slushy. It would stay that way into the early summer. That was really sad when that was all developed. It’s drained and everything else. Probably one of the greatest natural losses to the valley, that east side.”⁹
“In the city of Sonoma, there was a wet zone that started up at the Castagnasso farm,” said Bob Cannard speaking of the same area: “All of eastern Sonoma, from 3rd Street East, there was a strip of swamp that went all the way to 8th Street and hit 8th Street at about Denmark, right at the Batto farm. In fact, the farm on the other side of the street from Batto, at Denmark and 8th, was called the Spring Ranch, because it was filled with springs. They channeled all those springs into one pond and used it for irrigation. There was this swamp. Bill Lynch would know of the swamp—right where his father and mother lived was one of the worst parts of the swamp. That was one of the early parts to be drained. The last part to be drained was down here where York Court is, 4th Street East. Between Patton and France Street. France Street ran dead end into a swamp until 1974 or ‘75. Then you got to 5th Street, between where it dead ended at 3rd, and 5th Street, there was nothing but a big swamp. In fact, the city anticipated putting a water storage lake there at one time because of the natural depression that was there. This swampy area extended all the way to the Sonoma Slough. It stopped at 8th Street because it had been drained by the railroad down into the slough at that time. The drainage on each side of the railroad took it from where it hit 8th Street, directly down to Sonoma or Schell Slough. From there it went on down to the bay.”

Kenwood Marsh

Altimira’s route missed the Kenwood Marsh, once the largest freshwater wetland in the valley. Referring to Native American artifacts, Milo Shepard said that “in Kenwood you used to find some beautiful bird points, because that was a swamp and they used to shoot birds in there.” About the time the railroad arrived in the 1880s, much of it was drained and filled to create a site for the town of Kenwood. Over the years, the marsh has been reduced to a fraction of its former size:

“In the Kenwood area, there was a five-thousand acre swamp that is no longer there,” said Bob Cannard. “In the 1880s a man by the name of Griswold lowered the entrance to Warm Springs Canyon fourteen feet and that drained five thousand acres. You can see where they blew out a dam, a natural dam, and it lowered the level fourteen feet, and of course, drained the valley.” He also described the construction of five flumes to drain the Kenwood area and how “Sonoma Creek was pushed over against the hill on the left side[south-west] of the valley at that point. These five flumes—there’s one at Cypress Avenue and there are four more—the last one is up at Clifford Rich Ranch that goes through just above Lawndale Road. Sonoma Creek just ran into this swamp and then ran out. It was sort of like a big swampy lake. Nobody knows where the channel was but it was pushed over in the 1880s against that left side of the hill, where it runs today.” [maps from 1850 and 1877 do show a channel close to the current one—perhaps this was the summer creekbed.] Cannard added, “Losing that five thousand acres of swamp of course, was a major recharge facility for the entire Sonoma Creek watershed.”

Al Guffanti recalled a remnant of the marsh recently turned into vineyard (probably in 2000): “Right there by Mound [Street--at intersection with Warm Springs Rd.]. That was a vernal pool and bordered a marsh area. There was frogs in there—nice bullfrogs. We used to catch them now and then and peel them and eat them.” Coons and
skunks would hang out there—there was a lot of willows there.” Guffanti also described how “at one time Kenwood was a lakebed. X million years ago a great upheaval happened—a good earth-rendering crack and it drained the lake.” One of his daughters is a “GS-15 geologist with the USGS.” Both Guffanti and Milo Shepard believe Sonoma Creek drained out through the notch below Pagani Hill (route of Highway 12) at some time in the past.

**Other Wetland Areas**

“Where the General’s Daughter is,” said Bob Cannard, speaking of the restaurant on West Spain Street near 5th Street West: “The General built that for his daughter in 1863, and they called the area Willows Wild, which is of course the way the Spanish would translate “wild willows.” Willows Wild was the name of the home, because there were willows between Lachryma Montis and that home. It was a very shady, swampy area.” Cannard described how the Haraszthys put in a ditch to drain the area in the 1870s or ‘80s. He said, “the overflow from the spring at the house ran into that area down across the field. It now runs into culverts.” A photograph taken about 1880 shows that the willows “had been virtually cleared” by then.

**Springs**

“The oldest houses were built around big springs, whether they were starting in Temelec or Carriger Ranch or wherever you were,” said Cannard. Other places settled early were Lachryma Montis (“tear of the mountain”) by General Vallejo around 1850 and Pulpula, by J.A. Poppe in 1852 (the Miwok name probably means “ponds”). Cannard also spoke of “a major spring” in Sonoma on property the Duhring family settled in 1858 (south-east of the corner of East Napa and 2nd Street East), which “supplied all the water for all of the houses that developed in that two-block area. Today it doesn’t even show a wet spot on the ground.”

Milt Castagnasso talked of the natural ponds at “The Patch,” (260 2nd St. East—the “Castagnasso farm” referred to by Cannard above) property his family has owned since the mid-19th century: “There was two artesian ponds there. That’s the only irrigation that we had there. There was no pump. All gravitation flow, you’d use the water out of these two ponds in the daytime and by the next morning the ponds were full again.”

Milt said the theory that the mission’s water source was on the Vallejo property is mistaken: “Out here behind one of our barns is still the remnants of an old dam. Overflow from those ponds up there on our row crop place [The Patch] came down and they had a dam here where that big barn is setting way out there, that was a pond. My dad filled it in when he bought the place. That’s where they got the water for the mission was right here off of this pond they had.”He said the dam was made of bricks, “a baked kind of thing, similar to adobe.”
Prior to the mission, native people also used those artesian ponds, probably over a very long period, judging from Milt’s comments: “On the row crop place, where those ponds were? That was a large gathering of Indian mounds—we always found a lot of artifacts up there. A lot of arrowheads and stuff like that.”26

When asked if there were many natural artesian ponds around town in the old days, Milt said, “not too many. There was a few over here on the Vallejo property. That was a spot like that. But they’ve diminished now.”27 Similarly, he has had to drill wells at “The Patch” because the artesian ponds have failed: “We have a couple of wells on our row crop place up there. We have a well, we just installed a new pump in it.”28

A number of other diminished or depleted springs were mentioned:

Bill Basileu talked of the effects of development on Carriger Creek: “Take Diamond A—when they moved in there, they got a lot of homes in there. They sunk in a couple wells. That stopped the streams that were there, the springs that fed the creek—now they don’t feed the creek, so the creek gets dry.”29

Shepard also spoke of springs being depleted in the Annadel State Park area, due to a well sunk near the intersection of Channel Drive, Melita Road and Highway Twelve: “the guy who bought that property was selling the City of Santa Rosa five million gallons of water a day. He drained all of Annadel. Joe Coney, who owned Annadel at the time, sued him and lost the case. That’s why Coney built Ilsanjo for water, for his livestock. Because all the springs and everything on top, all the water was drained out of that hillside.”30

Bob Cannard Sr. talked of the original site of the Sonoma Mission, (called Pulpula by native people) now located on Cline Winery property [about 2 miles south of the Highway 121/116 junction]: “There were two major springs there, a warm water and a cold water within a hundred feet of each other. Those springs do not run today. There’s seepage, but there’s recirculation that allows four ponds [using] reclaimed water.”31

When the railroad came through Glen Ellen, it used a spring which is now depleted: “They got their water from a spring up at Garric’s tract, that filled their water tank. When you go up Gibson [Street], when you go down that first dip, that’s about where the spring was.”32

The only spring mentioned which has not seen noticeable change was Rattlesnake Spring on Charlie Cooke’s property on Lovall Valley Road. He said it “flows all year round,” and judging by the artifacts found there, was “a convenient place for Indians who were coming over from Napa.”33

Wells, Pumping & Water Supplies

“We had a city water supply from early on,” said Bill Lynch, speaking of Sonoma. “Everybody else out in the country got it from wells.”34 General Vallejo provided water from the springs at his Lachryma Montis estate and delivered it to Sonoma using pipes bored through redwood lumber.35 In Glen Ellen, “Chauvet had the water works,” recalled Bill Meglen. “They got water from Graham Creek. If you go up there you can find the old dam, a low rock thing. The second source was out of Asbury
Creek at the London Ranch.” Another early water system was built on the Carriger Ranch: “Around the turn of the 20th century, L.L. Lewis formed the Yulupa Land and Water Company and built a spring-fed reservoir with a capacity of twenty-million gallons. He hoped to compete with Vallejo’s municipal water system [and] … large redwood flumes were built to Sonoma and El Verano.” A number of mishaps (including trout clogging people’s faucets!) brought the project to an end by 1918.

Even in Sonoma, where water was available from Lachryma Montis, “there was a lot of wells around,” remembered Milt Castagnasso. “But a lot of them have gone down, dry. Schocken had a big well, he owned the Barracks and the houses around. He had a big well, a big high tank. At the Tuscano Hotel, my aunt had [her] water supply from a well, behind there.” As for depth, Milt said, “You didn’t have to go too deep in those times—anywhere from eighty feet to three hundred feet. Our well here is eighty feet and we seem to have plenty of water. The well up in the row crop place is a little short of three hundred feet. It seems to be a strong well yet.” Milt also listed several wells currently being used within the city limits: one “behind the Vet’s building” (city-owned, “a very strong well”), another “in the street” at 260 2nd Street East (at least 300 feet deep), and others at “the Pinelli place” (about 300 feet—“almost artesian”) and Sebastiani’s (“a good well”).

In the early days, “people would look for springs or they’d hand dig a well because they had no drilling equipment,” said Bill Meglen. By the 1920s and ’30s, wells were still being sunk with muscle power, though augmented with special equipment: “It [was] the same as a big auger,” said Bill Meglen, talking about a drilling rig he borrowed from O’Donnell, a well-known Glen Ellen citizen of that era. “You put the joints together—you have big handles coming out where two guys could work it, ‘cause it’s pretty heavy, and you had a tower to hoist it up.” Wells going down “sixty or seventy feet” were considered “pretty deep” at that time in Glen Ellen. “When they started drilling [using machine power] they would go down two or three hundred feet. Now, these deep wells, they’re putting them all over for these vineyards. They’ll go down five or six [hundred] or a thousand feet to tap the water.”

Milo Shepard described the sinking of an early well on the Bruning property on Sonoma Mountain; the water pressure was so great “it blew the bit out of the ground.” Subsequent drilling along that aquifer, which, according to Shepard, extends down to the golf course and the Felder ranch, has lowered the water table to the point where “the one up on Sonoma Mountain isn’t artesian anymore.” Shepard said “the water from the top of Sonoma Mountain does not come from Sonoma Mountain. Some geologists think it comes all the way from Shasta County, some say Lake County. You have to have a body of water higher to force it up to twenty-one hundred [feet] where these springs are on top.”

In Kenwood: “you dug down eighteen, twenty feet—you had plenty of water,” said Al Guffanti. The original well on his property was just “fourteen feet deep—that’s surface water.” He spoke of sinking a well to the “next aquifer” at eighty feet. When that one “pooped out” in the drought of the mid-1970s, he had another drilled to about 140
feet, to avoid contamination from septic tanks and leach lines. The deep well delivers a hundred gallons a minute. “So you have your surface water, eighty feet [and] a hundred twenty-five feet [upper limit],” said Al, summing up the water situation on his property. “Then you go down to four hundred feet—you get stinky water—sulphur and it’s warm. That’s the same kind of water at Morton’s Springs.”

Many people mentioned the creek itself as a source of water. From “Kenwood and Glen Ellen and south virtually everybody who lived alongside that creek had a hose running into it with a little pump, pumping out water to to water their gardens and vegetables and everything else. If you really looked at it, the people that draw water out of it all along its banks are probably more the cause of the low water than anything else.” Bill Meglen felt that “a little guy pumping out for a garden generally don’t hurt the creek. But the biggest diversions, like these guys on the vineyards—that’s another case where they would start sucking water out and it would suck the creek dry.” “Everybody sneaks water out of Sonoma Creek and they [the fish] can’t stand it,” said Milo Shepard. Lynch also attributed the deterioration of the creek as a trout stream to the amount of water being taken directly from the creek.

**History and Causes of Ground Water Depletion**

“The water table has diminished terribly,” said Milt Castagnasso. “There’s only so much water you can suck out of the ground. Nobody wants to think about that you know, that’s a bad thing to talk about.” Everyone with a knowledge of ground water agreed with Milt’s assessment.

“When the lands were first planted, whether to orchards, to vineyard, to row crops, no irrigation was necessary. None,” explained Bob Cannard. “In fact, the water table was so good that Haraszthy planted vineyards in the hills. He did the first so-called dry land farming. In other words, he knew that grapes can send down thirty feet to get water. Therefore he was able to plant even in the hills and no irrigation was required. And cherries were a big item in Sonoma Valley prior to the turn of the century. All of the cherries, all of the fruit, all of the apples and pears, and all of those kind of things were all planted where the water table was so high that percolation was sufficient to supply the needs of those trees. If you planted a tree out in any of those pastures today and thought it would get enough water, why it would be dead before the middle of July, the middle of June. It would be dead.”

Cannard gave a number of long-term causes for ground water depletion, including the draining of the Kenwood Marsh, increasing numbers of wells, reshaping of land contours to encourage run-off, and sewers altering underground flow patterns. “If you pump more than the recharge, the water table is going to gradually go down,” he said, describing the situation here. “Prior to the aqueduct, we got dangerously low. Hundreds and hundreds of shallow wells went dry in Sonoma Valley during the late ’50s.” He said many letters to the editor and newspaper articles were written at that time, and public meetings were being held on the situation. When “the aqueduct was put in, they all stop and the water table began to rise. The city actually contracted for more water than
they needed. They were trying to get people to use water—the more they used, the more went back into the water table, even if it was a small percentage. The water table came up until about 1980. With the heavy planting of grapes in the ‘80s and ‘90s, we started to pump more, the city started to use their wells, the water table has gone down again. It’s down to the point where it was in the late ‘50s.”

“The second major reason for losing the ability of the groundwater to recharge each year were the agricultural practices of the U.S. Department of Agriculture in the ‘30s to reshape the land. They were called Soil Conservation Districts. To facilitate the runoff and to create ditches, streams, whatever, to drain the fields more perfectly, so that they could be planted earlier and more uniformly cultivated with the soggy areas that were in every place. Instead of building swales to encourage the accumulation of water on the land so it could soak into the water table, it was run off, and ran quickly and we lose it in the bay.”

Another factor Cannard listed are the “transverse sewer lines. The ones that run across the natural drainage level, the ones that run east to west on Spain Street, on Napa Street. On every street that runs this way, those sewers catch the ground water as it comes down. Around the sewer pipe itself is gravel underneath and there’s a stream in every one. This [gravel bed] is picking up the ground water and directing it away. It’s a drainage system that’s been put underground all over the city and it drains a tremendous amount of water.”

Effects of Ground Water Depletion

“You know we always had plenty of water around here,” said Milt Castagnasso. “But there’s a lot of wells that are getting depleted and they’re dropping. And then one of two things—either the water vanishes or it gets so brackish that you can’t use it.”

“When you get out toward Buena Vista and that area, the water has got a lot of boron in it. It’s not very good. The farther you go that way the poorer the water gets.”

He also mentioned that “saline is creeping into the water. You know where Napa Road is—I think it’s crept up that far already and when they’re putting in newer vines in that area, they can’t use that water on them. Some of it is getting that bad. Especially toward Vineburg. Some of these fellows are hauling water.” He gave another example of “a number of those folks” living near the intersection of East Napa and Seventh Streets getting “hooked up to city water” because their wells were getting brackish.

Cannard echoed Castagnasso’s observations: “The boron levels, sixty years ago, were nothing in this area. Today they’re dangerous—there’s a lot of land you can’t use for agriculture anymore.” He explained how the increasing boron is a result of sea water intrusion: “When you pump water out here and you have a big body [the ocean] over here, some of it is going to soak through eventually. Virtually every well in Sonoma Valley as far north as Agua Caliente Road goes below sea level, every well!”

Looking to the future, Castagnasso said “You have to kind of wonder what is going to happen. They put in some big storage tanks. But on peak days, even now in town, in Sonoma, in summer on the hot days—they’re concerned about a shortage. It’s
just the way it is. They seem to be reluctant about new subdivisions and things like that. But with each building the city of Sonoma has to supply adequate water, sewage, schools, fire department . . . Truly you have to consider those things and nobody wants to think about that you know, Because water is going to be the big thing.”

NOTES

1. Cannard—8
2. Castagnasso—37
3. Altimira, Jose. *Diario de la expedicion verificada con objecto de reconocer terrenos para nueva planta de la Mision de Nuestro Padre San Francisco principiada le dia 25 de Junio de 1823.*
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid., p. 10
7. Ibid., p. 8
8. Ibid., p. 10.
9. Lynch—60
10. Cannard—15
11. Cannard—16,17
12. Shepard—85
13. Cannard—8-10
14. Guffanti—70,71
15. Guffanti—78
16. Guffanti—71
17. Guffanti—79, Shepard—51
18. Cannard—36
19. Cannard—36
20. Cannard—68
21. Cannard—43
23. Cannard—29
24. Castagnasso—39
25. Castagnasso—41-2
26. Castagnasso—85
27. Castagnasso—41
28. Castagnasso—37
29. Basileu—69
30. Shepard—15,16
31. Cannard—27
32. Meglen—86
33. Cooke—37
34. Lynch—71
36. Meglen—85-6
38. Castagnasso—47
39. Castagnasoo—42
40. Castagnasso—45-8
41. Meglen—88
42. Meglen—74-5
43. Meglen—93
44. Shepard—18
45. Shepard—14
46. Guffanti—80
47. Lynch—15-17
48. Meglen—95-7
49. Shepard—14
50. Lynch—15
51. Castagnasso—44
52. Cannard—46
53. Cannard—19,20
54. Cannard—22
55. Cannard—14, 18
56. Cannard—41-2
57. Castagnasso—50
58. Castagnasso—48
59. Castagnasso—50
60. Cannard—26
61. Castagnasso—53
“Devil’s Rest consisted of a series of three or four pools and riffles. It was an exciting adventure to swing our over the shiny surface and drop from a height of fifteen feet or so. It would be several seconds before we emerged from the depths for a breath of air. There were two deep spots—the north pool, which was 10 to 12 feet deep and the south pool at nine or ten.”

William McCarthy

The Creeks in Summer:

Pool Depth & Low Flow Conditions

Almost everyone had fond memories of summer days spent at swimming holes within walking distance of their homes. Milt Castagnasso mentioned Sonoma Grove at the west end of Spain Street and said a number of pools in that area were “eight to ten feet deep. Every now and then as the creek made a turn, you’d get those kind of things.” (others made similar estimates of pool depth in that stretch.) Several remembered Devil’s Rest, the swimming hole William McCarthy describes above, which was located near the corner of Oak Street and Riverside Drive. “There was lots of these holes that were deep enough for swimming,” said Bill Basileu. “But I don’t think there were too many as deep as Oak Street.” “That was always the favorite one,” agreed Milt Castagnasso. Further downstream, just above Leveroni Road, you could find “good trout fishing on running, cold water all the way into July,” and another swimming hole as far down as the Wedekind property on Watmaugh Road.

While typical pools in the lower watershed were eight to ten feet deep (though up to fourteen feet at Oak Street), they were somewhat shallower upstream. In Glen Ellen and Kenwood, the deepest natural swimming holes were said to be anywhere from five to eight feet deep. Several people talked of constructing summer dams in this area to create pools deep enough for swimming: “We’d look for a place that had a little depth to start with before we built a dam,” said Bill Meglen. He said they’d bring empty sacks down to the creek and fill them up with gravel to build the dam. Likewise, Al Guffanti remembered how the kids of Kenwood “got together and built a dam and we had a good swimming hole . . . about six feet [deep]. It was just a place to get wet.”

Pendergast Hole, about one-quarter mile below the Glen Ellen bridge was a favorite spot. Some years a two-by-twelve plank was set up as a diving board. The bank there was “pretty high, maybe twelve feet. We’d dive off the bank.” Pendergast was said to be both a natural hole “maybe eight feet deep” and a place where a summer dam deepened the creek to “five or six” feet. Ten years separate the two men who gave these accounts, so differences in rainfall may account for the disparity. (Bill Meglen mentions a summer in the mid-1920s when
lower Calabazas Creek had very little or no water in it.\textsuperscript{15} Recalling the same stretch in the 1930s, Henry Garric said people would swim there “in the summer. There was that much water.”\textsuperscript{16}

“During the summer the creek settled into many large pools with a steady run of water between them,”\textsuperscript{16} said William McCarthy of El Verano. Bill Basileu said between holes, the depth of Sonoma Creek was only “two or three inches. You couldn’t float a boat or anything. You could cross it just by getting your feet wet,” adding that the fish “could go between [holes], there was enough water.”\textsuperscript{18} Their descriptions square with the fact that no one had first-hand memories of boats being used in the summer on the main creek above tidewater, though some had heard stories: “My uncle once told me there was boats in Boyes Springs,” said Basileu. “But I think he was full of baloney. How can you have a boat? You can put a raft in one hole, but you got a riffle, not enough water to cross the riffle.”\textsuperscript{19} Bill Meglen had a slightly different impression: “During the summertime, there was never enough water. Except when you got down in the Boyes area where it’s flattened out. No doubt in that area the kids must have had canoes.”\textsuperscript{20} Milo Shepard heard that before his time there was a dam above Glen Ellen and “you could sail a boat all the way up to Warm Springs.” [resort at 1651 Warm Springs Rd., Kenwood] \textsuperscript{21}

Several people mentioned tributaries that had water in their upper reaches, but often or sometimes dried up lower down. These included Agua Caliente Creek, Calabazas Creek, Fowler/Carriger Creek and Nathanson Creek.\textsuperscript{22} Speaking of Agua Caliente, Bill Basileu said, “There’s always water up in the mountains, but down in the flats it dries, from half a mile above Highway 12 all the way to Sonoma Creek it’ll be dry in the summer.”\textsuperscript{23} Likewise, “Fowler Creek dries up quickly,” said Milt Castagnasso. “As you went way up, you’d find holes up there, there’d be fish in them. Where the cement plant is [Arnold Drive], why there was nothing there. In the summer that would dry.”\textsuperscript{24} Jose Altimira noticed the same phenomenon in the same part of the valley in the summer of 1823: “We discovered an arroyo which flows 500 plumas of water, both very clear and appetizing to drink, under a good luxuriant thicket,” but later notes that the same “arroyo does not flow beyond the border of the hills.”\textsuperscript{25} He may well have been describing what later became Fowler Creek.

More details of low flow conditions in various tributaries and reaches of Sonoma Creek can be found in the Appendix titled “Descriptions of Creeks at Low Flow.”
NOTES

1. McCarthy—14,30
2. Castagnasso—17,18
3. Basileu—105; McCarthy—30
4. Basileu—103
5. Castagnasso—13
6. Lynch—16
7. Castagnasso—13
8. Basileu—87-90
9. Meglen—15-19; Cooke—14; Guffanti—12; Shepard—45-7
10. Meglen—10-15
11. Guffanti—11-12
12. Meglen—10-15
13. Shepard—45-7
14. Meglen—10-15
15. Meglen—173
17. McCarthy—8
18. Basileu—58-9
20. Meglen—51
21. Shepard—66-9
22. Meglen—173; Castagnasso—80
23. Basileu—10
24. Castagnasso—91-3
“In the ‘70s, the amount of bank erosion seemed to accelerate. It seemed like the channels started to really widen out at that point. It destroyed the habitat within the creek for the summertime.\textsuperscript{1}

Bill Lynch

The Creeks in Winter

Flooding, Erosion & Channel Changes

Floods have been a fact of life in Sonoma Valley as far back as anyone can remember. “Schellville would always be under water—it was for years. Ford’s [Café] would be flooded out. We’d go around every bridge and see how high the water was. It was kind of a family outing,” remembered Shirley Churchill. Schellville\textsuperscript{3} was by far the most commonly mentioned place for flooding. Others were Felder Creek at Arnold, Glen Ellen near the Calabazas/Sonoma Creek confluence, Lawndale Road in Kenwood, and Sonoma on upper Broadway.\textsuperscript{4}

Shirley Churchill said the highest water she ever saw was to “the top of the bridge,”\textsuperscript{5} at the corner of Petaluma Avenue and Riverside Drive. Similar flood levels are described in family stories going back to the turn of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century: “My Mom used to tell me that she could touch the water with an umbrella from the Verano bridge,” said Bill Basileu. “That might go back to 1900.”\textsuperscript{52} Milo Shepard’s mother had the same story from the old wooden bridge in Glen Ellen.\textsuperscript{7} Calabazas Creek in flood has crested “a couple inches” above the roadway on the brick bridge\textsuperscript{8} [O’Donnell Lane]. Another indication of the size and power of floods is William McCarthy’s memory of “full-size trees, including big oak trees washing downstream during floodtime.”\textsuperscript{9}

Sometimes the erosive power of winter storms has had catastrophic consequences. One flood in Glen Ellen the mid twenties, “took the back end off the Riverside Hotel and [a] house out” just upstream.\textsuperscript{10} Several years previously, two other houses washed downstream and “parts of [one] came down and hit the bridge.”\textsuperscript{11} The destruction may have been partly caused by gravel mining and a wooden wier in the creekbed immediately upstream.[details on this in the “Gravel Mining” section]. More recently, at least one house on the outskirts of Glen Ellen was lost to a flood in 1983 and Henno Road was washed out.\textsuperscript{12} In the El Verano area, part of Riverside Drive was closed off in the 1990s\textsuperscript{13}, due to bank erosion.

No one has noticed a change in the color of the creek over the years, and people agreed with Shirley Churchill’s observation that it has always been muddy and brown at high water.\textsuperscript{14} While this appears to indicate the rate of erosion has not changed significantly over last half-century, Bill Lynch (as quoted in abbreviated form above) stated that “In the ‘70s, the amount of bank erosion that occurred from Glen Ellen down through El Verano seemed to accelerate. Whether it was an unusual series of heavy
winters, whether it was because people had finally gotten too close to the creek and there was too much run-off, the banks were really destabilized and it seemed like the channels started to widen out at that point. It destroyed the habitat within the creek for the summertime.”\textsuperscript{15} Bill Basileu, intimately familiar with the El Verano area, agrees: “It was a lot narrower. Three inches of rain would fill it up and make a dangerous situation. It’s washed away and made it wider. The bridge at Verano Avenue extends all the way across, but the original bridge was only halfway. That’s how much it’s eroded.”\textsuperscript{16} He goes on to say that during the summer, “When the creek was a lot smaller and narrower, there was more shade in the creek. Now it’s wide—parts of Sonoma Creek are a hundred feet wide [meaning the whole creekbed]. Eighty feet of it is watching the burning sun.”\textsuperscript{17}

Bob Cannard believes the channel is “being cut more deeply,” and recounts a story told by August Pinelli, who was a Boy Scout around 1912: “Robert Poppe was their leader and he led a hike with his scouts to the Russian River every summer. First night they would camp under the Franquelin Bridge. Pinelli remembered Poppe reaching up while standing on the creek bed and touching the beams of the bridge. He was a fairly tall man, so he might have been able to reach up to 8 feet. Now the creek bed is twenty or thirty feet below the modern bridge.”\textsuperscript{18}

In contrast, people most familiar with the stretch below El Verano, noted little change in the channel itself. Milt Castagnasso said, “I don’t think it’s gotten any wider.”\textsuperscript{19} Shirley Churchill observed, “It changes, creeks meander of course. It changes course, but it’s never changed that much really.”\textsuperscript{20} She did note the use of rip-rap to prevent bank erosion on the Leveroni property near Cooper’s Bridge [Leveroni Road]. Both Castagnasso and Churchill noted more brush and willows other vegetation in that section of the channel, specifically mentioning Cooper’s Bridge and the Franquelin Bridge: “It’s so full of trees now it’s amazing.”\textsuperscript{21}

The stretch above the main Glen Ellen bridge has seen a lot of channel movement, much of it caused by human activity. Bill Meglen detailed how the mouth of Calabazas Creek has shifted at various times from below the main bridge to 200 yards up Sonoma Creek.\textsuperscript{22} [current mouth is 3-5 yards upstream from the main bridge.] He remembers Sonoma Creek’s channel being “seventy-five feet further west” at one point,\textsuperscript{23} possibly pushed over by a weir built to protect three houses upstream (the same ones mentioned above in the third paragraph). The landowner on that side then filled in the creek to regain their lost property. He also believes the brick bridge on Calabazas Creek [O’Donnell Lane] helped create the peninsula between these two creeks.\textsuperscript{24} Using bridge length as a gauge, Sonoma Creek through Glen Ellen has seen far less erosive widening than the “doubling” described by Basileu at the Verano Avenue bridge. The bridge installed in Glen Ellen in 1939 was “just a few feet longer” than the old one.\textsuperscript{25} Several people noted active landslide areas along both Sonoma and Calabazas Creeks, within a half-mile upstream of their confluence.\textsuperscript{26}

Above Kenwood, in Adobe Canyon, Bill Lynch describes an apparent process of deposition: “The holes were actually a lot deeper than they are now. Those holes in that creek have really filled in. That creek itself has silted in a lot. I think it’s not only silted
in I think it’s also, there’ve been floods and stuff over the years and a lot of the rocks and stuff have filled in those holes.” He thought putting in the road up to Sugarloaf Ridge State Park contributed to the silting of the creek.

Opinions were mixed over whether flooding has recently gotten worse. Speaking of lower Broadway and Highway 121 near the Schell-Vista Fire Station, Milt Castagnasso recalled, “There was some flooding yeah, but it wasn’t like it is now. The water never used to race across by the firehouse, except one time.” He believed two things have increased flooding in that area: a lack of dredges to keep “the lower reaches of the creek clean and deep and the water flow[ing];” and, referring to development: “everything in the valley is getting covered and that makes the water come real quick. Early on it wasn’t like that and you didn’t have that flush real quick.” Bill Lynch, about 25 years younger than Milt, was of the opinion that “it hasn’t changed a lot. At least not in the last forty years. Schellville flooded in the ‘50s.” While not directly tying it to flooding, Lynch did say he thought storm run-off was “accelerated by all the upstream development.” Bob Cannard believes flooding in Schellville has gotten worse and lays the blame on land use practices which run the water “into the bay before it has a chance to soak into the ground.” Two upstream residents think the intensity of flooding has decreased over the years, so that now the channels aren’t cleaned out the way they used to be. Al Guffanti said that in the last twenty-five years, “we really haven’t had a good gully washer. I think we need that, to flush the creek.” Milo Shepard concurred: “We haven’t really had the rains. In 1960 [was] the last [time] we had the big rains. We had five inches in an hour.” In the Sonoma/El Verano area, Shirley Churchill and William McCarthy hold similar views.

Several things could account for the variety of opinions. Perhaps there have been long-range changes in total rainfall, amounts from individual storms, or in the intensity of storms over the years. Longer, less intense storms could produce the same total rainfall as shorter, more intense storms. Storm tracks may have shifted slightly, bringing more or less rain to certain parts of the valley than they used to. Careful analysis of rainfall records might shed some light on these possibilities. Bill Basileu believes the rainy season itself has shifted: “You go back sixty, seventy years—October was a wet month—we had a lot of water in the creek.” And as some people suggest, development has altered natural run-off patterns and this could be more or less visible in different parts of the valley.

NOTES

1. Lynch—22
2. Churchill—40
3. Basileu—52; Churchill—40; Castagnasso—60
4. McCarthy—22; Meglen—24; Lynch—58
5. Churchill—41
6. Basileu—52
7. Shepard—47

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<td>Churchill—199-209; Meglen—66-72; Shepard—70-3</td>
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<td>Basileu—13</td>
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“Every other year a gravel dredge would come up Sonoma Creek and dredge Sonoma Creek as far as the S.P. bridge.”

Milt Castagnasso

**Dredging & Reclamation of the Tidal Marshes & Sloughs**

For many years, dredging “kept the lower reaches of the creek clean and deep,” remembered Milt Castagnasso. “That gravel dredge, I think they came up from Richmond. I remember they’d suck this gravel and then send it out in a barge. In the years when the dredge used to come up, it was about ten or twelve feet deep all the time. The tide would be up or down.” The “S.P. bridge” mentioned was located about a half-mile upstream of the current Highway 121 crossing and was about the upper limit of tidewater.

While some dredging of Sonoma Creek may have been going on earlier to keep the channel open for freight and passenger vessels, Castagnasso described the large-scale operation that began around 1880:

“Jones owned the Sonoma Land Company and had two dredgers as I recall. They’re the ones that reclaimed that whole Sonoma Land Company that stretched all the way from Skaggs [Island] clear back to Arnold Drive. Those dredgers worked all the time; they reclaimed that whole area. That was a vast piece of ground.

“Sonoma Land Company had six camps, six separate camps. They kept pretty much a crew at each camp. The dredge was not a small part of the operation, but they [the camps] were all farming situations. They farmed hay and grain, things like that, that was the scheme. The last camp to be reclaimed was Skaggs. That was Number Six. I hauled fuel in there when I was just a kid. I guess I was about sixteen or eighteen years old when they reclaimed the last of Skaggs. [That was] a different time. That was quite a thing.”

One historian estimates the size of the reclaimed marshland at 10,000 acres and describes the camps as “self sufficient” with “kitchens and sleeping quarters” and “large warehouses” for storing the hay and other products until they could be shipped out.

Well before the Sonoma Land Company began its operations, fairly large vessels were navigating the tidewater sloughs of Sonoma Creek. As early as 1847, just one year after the Bear Flag Rebellion, the 37-foot paddle-wheel steamer *Sitka* began regular service between San Francisco and Sonoma. While the drafts of such early vessels are not currently known, running aground was a problem if the captain was inexperienced or the tides unfavorable. Frank Marryat mentions an incident on “a small yawl, with a crew of three men” in April, 1851: “Before we reached the mouth of the creek, they managed to run the boat on the bank, where the ebb tide soon left us high and dry.” A more successful strategy during the same period is described in “Schools and Scows in Early Sonoma: “Captain Green’s Mariese was small and in use during the 1850s and the early
1860s. He would wait for the outgoing tide to ebb before setting out on the return to Sonoma Creek. Then he would set sail on the incoming tide to boost him northward so that he could pass over the bar at Sonoma Creek at high water. The recorded drafts for later vessels were 4.5 feet for the 53-foot J.J. Stofen, 4.2 feet for the 36-foot Gazelle and 4.6 feet for the 54-foot Sonoma Valley, which began service in 1906. The J.J. Stofen had a beam of 21 feet, while the Sonoma Valley was slightly narrower, at 18.5 feet. (A boat’s draft measures how far below the waterline its hull extends. Beam measures a vessel’s greatest width. To accommodate these vessels, the channel size in the lower watershed at that time must have been at least 5 feet deep at high tide and 25 feet or more from bank to bank, even in the narrowest stretches.)

As a child in the 1920s, Milt Castagnasso visited the uppermost landing, on present-day Millerick Road: “Embarcadero they called it. There was a dock and a landing down there where they used to ship out wine and stuff from the valley. Haul it down there and load it on a barge. There was a kind of a barn there once too.” Milt recalled that shipping on Sonoma Creek was finished before end of the 1920s. “Then they had, over on the Petaluma River, the steamer Gold used to ply from Petaluma down. I remember that. I remember early on, one time my father acquired some wagons and livestock from a fellow in San Francisco. They shipped it up by the steamer Gold to Petaluma. Then we drove the wagons and horses over the hills to Sonoma here.”

NOTES

1. Castagnasso—22
2. Castagnasso—25-6
3. Castagnasso—66, 117-8
5. Ibid. p. 61.
8. Ibid. p. 69-71, 93.
9. Castagnasso—82-3
10. Castagnasso—84.
“You needed some gravel, you went down to the creek and got it out.”

Bill Meglen

Gravel Mining

“All the way along different people had roads down to get the gravel,” recalled Bill Meglen. “Because we didn’t have Basalt or somebody to deliver it to us . . . where else are you going to get it?” Almost everyone who remembered Sonoma Valley from the 1920s and ’30s could identify a number of places where gravel was being taken from Sonoma Creek in those days.

Milt Castagnasso said, “My father was in the gravel business for a long while in those days. One of his pits where he got gravel was out at Dutil’s [Riverside Drive, El Verano] . . . My father hauled a lot of gravel out of there.” He mentions “another pretty good size gravel pit” at the Hall Ranch, near the lower end of Broadway. When I asked if his Dad used machines, Milt replied, “Hell no. A number three scoop and a strong back, that was how you did it.” William McCarthy, who grew up in El Verano in the ’30s and early ’40s, remembered people driving small trucks down to the creek. He said sometimes they would set a screen over the truck bed to screen out the larger pieces. Then “one to three people” would shovel it onto the truck.

Sonoma Creek gravel went into making concrete for houses, commercial buildings, roads and bridges. Bill Meglen remembers Hazen and Norman Cowan taking care of the roads in the ‘twenties. They would go to a spot in Glen Ellen (near the corner of Henno Road and O’Donnell Lane) to fill up their wagon. The bed of their wagon had removable two-by-fours with handles, so the “gravel would slip down . . . and they’d pull another one and it’d slip down. So they’d go along the road and dump gravel.” Sonoma Creek was probably the source of gravel for Highway Twelve when it was first paved through Glen Ellen in the early ‘twenties.

On at least one occasion, gravel mining had catastrophic consequences. Bill Meglen describes what happened as a result of the mining the Cowans and others were doing on Sonoma Creek near O’Donnell Lane:

“O’Donnell built a weir upstream from . . . [three] houses to protect them from getting cut under by the creek . . . Then people started mining gravel, digging out gravel just below that weir.” Bill’s mother told him how two of the houses washed away in a flood and “parts of one house came down and hit the bridge.” Bill himself remembers the last house still being there in the early ‘twenties. Then, “One year when the water was high, it got around that weir, dug into that gravel pit, gouged out the bank there, and took out the house . . .” He said, “It got washed out about the same time the Riverside Hotel got washed out.”
While much of the gravel mining in Sonoma Creek was apparently small-scale and unmechanized, there were several commercial operations. “The first guy that started something with gravel was Serres,” said Bill Meglen. Milt Castagnasso listed Sonoma Grove, Dutil’s and the Hall Ranch as places that sold gravel to his father. Others spoke of Wrobels’ place at the end of Curtin Lane on the outskirts of Sonoma. Castagnasso described the Helberg place at the south end of Broadway: “They had a crusher in there and were more mechanized.” Commercial mining may have been going on as far upstream as Kenwood. Al Guffanti spoke of a place just downstream from the mouth of Adobe Canyon and said, “part of that ranch is nothing but a big gravel pit.”

By the 1930s, gravel mining in Sonoma Creek began to decline. Local material was used unwashed and this could cause problems: “If you didn’t know, weren’t conscious of . . . [using] too much sand, not enough rock and got some leaves in, you didn’t make good concrete.” One of the first people to bring in gravel was a fellow with “a flatbed truck—wasn’t even a dump truck,” who started hauling gravel in from Healdsburg, according to Bill Meglen. “He had better aggregates because the river [had] bigger, cleaner stuff and more rock to sand.” Bill Lynch, who grew up in the ‘forties and ‘fifties, had no recollection of anyone going down to the creek and loading gravel into small trucks, as had been common twenty years earlier. He did recall that the gravel operation at the end of Curtin Lane continued “even up until just a few years ago.” The last permit for commercial mining, held by the Shamrock Company plant on Arnold Drive along Carriger Creek, expired last year [2000].

NOTES

1. Meglen—178
2. Meglen—177
3. Castagnasso—20
4. Castagnasso—21
5. McCarthy—28
6. Personal communication to Arthur Dawson, anonymous elder
7. Meglen—174
8. Ibid.
9. Meglen—103
10. Meglen—24
11. Meglen—103
12. Meglen—24
13. Meglen—178
14. Castagnasso—26
15. Guffanti—17
16. Meglen—177
17. Meglen—178
18. Lynch—67
“When the hospital put in that dam, they blocked the steelhead run.”

Bill Meglen

Dams

“Behind one of our barns is still the remnant of an old dam,” said Milt Castagnasso, describing what was probably the first man-made dam in Sonoma Valley. The bricks it was made of were “a baked kind of thing. You can see they had straw in it and things like that—similar to adobe. That’s where they got the water for the mission.” The water source was a pair of artesian ponds nearby.

Over the years, dams have been built on Sonoma Creek and its tributaries for a variety of reasons: to provide water for humans and livestock; to create places for fishing, boating and swimming; and even to prevent sewage from escaping the treatment plant in Schellville.

Many people remembered the dam on Sonoma Creek at Eldridge, especially because it appears to have caused a decline in the steelhead population: “The biggest thing that ruined the fishing was that dam,” said Bill Meglen. “They put it in so they’d be able to pump more water out of the creek to fill Suttonfield Lake and sometimes they even pumped it to the top of the mountain [Fern Lake].” Estimates of its age varied widely, from “twenty to twenty-five years [ago],” to possibly as early as “World War Two.” Initially the Eldridge dam may not have been a significant obstacle to spawning steelhead, but “the water coming over deepened it on that side, then the fish couldn’t get up there any more.” When local people realized what was happening, “there was a big stink about it and the fishermen were going to blast it open,” said Bill Basileu, adding “you know how talk goes—nobody really would have done it.”

Steelhead were further impacted by “guys fishing right at the dam. You’re not supposed to fish near a dam,” said Bill Meglen. Likewise, Basileu remembered how “guys would stand there and try to gaff these fish as they would jump.” “Eventually they put a fish ladder in,” said Milo Shepard, “but they didn’t do that for three or four years.” The general consensus is that much damage had already been done to the steelhead run by then. (for the record, Bill Lynch said, “I think it was a summer dam. It was not up during the winter time at all and most of the spring. I think it was controlled by the Fish and Game Department. I don’t think they let them put it up during the migration cycle.”) At some point the dam was dismantled.

Another dam mentioned as a barrier to fish migration was on Graham Creek: “There was a dam right at Emery’s that Chauvet put in,” said Milo Shepard. “Below that was a dam that served Wake Robin and served what they called the ‘Fish Ranch,’ who had fish ponds.” Apparently the lower dam wasn’t much of an obstacle, as Shepard said
“steelhead could get to Chauvet dam, that’s as far as they could go.”

Meglen described the Chauvet dam as “a low rock thing.” There were “fall-spawning rainbows.” above the Chauvet dam, which Shepard said were planted.

Bill Basileu talked of problems caused by a dam built by the sewage treatment plant on Schell Creek: “Nathanson Creek now has got a bad problem because Schell Creek, sewer water used to go in there. They keep that [dam] so the sewer water wouldn’t back up. The steelhead can only run up there now at extremely high tide when they can get over the levee.” This dam probably also affects steelhead runs in Arroyo Seco, Haraszthy and Fryer Creeks, all of which empty into Schell Creek.

Arroyo Seco has a “sixty-foot concrete dam” in Bartholomew Park that is probably an obstacle to fish migration. According to Charlie Cooke it was put in before 1945. This dam apparently causes the lower part of the creek to dry up in the summer: “It flows all year long on my property [above the dam] and into that [dam], so actually it is seco [dry] from that dam on down through Old Winery Road.” He said there was a resident populations of rainbow above the dam.

Bill Lynch told of a summer dam on Stuart Creek which may have benefited the steelhead population: “David [Bouverie] put up a summer dam. He had a cement kind of gate and would drop in some boards and dam up a fairly large pool. I think he would feed water down to his lower ranch from there. Didn’t seem to have a lot of effect on the stream, ‘cause it wasn’t a very big dam, it was a pretty small one. It probably gave a good summer home for a lot of the larger steelhead. It created a fairly deep hole probably six, seven or eight feet [deep], a virtual mini-pond. It was well-shaded enough to so that it did keep a certain amount of coolness to it.” Lynch said “He put it up maybe in June; soon as the rains would start he would take it down.”

Bill Lynch also talked about the dam on Sonoma Creek at Larson Park, which he said was built to create a fishing hole: “Larson Park was part of a thing called the Valley of the Moon Recreation District—there was a couple of years, maybe in the ‘60s, that they decided to have more active recreation. They would dam it up for the summer and plant trout in there. I don’t think it was ever a real popular resource. It didn’t really work that good. It would dam up the creek so much that access was limited. It would push the water up into the trees.”

Several people mentioned constructing summer dams on upper Sonoma Creek to create swimming holes. Bill Meglen described building dams when he was a kid in Glen Ellen: “We’d look for a place that had a little depth to start with.” Bill and his friends would fill sacks with rocks, sand and gravel and stack them across the creekbed to make the dam. At one location they used “for quite a few years,” they built “a pretty good dam about four foot high. That would back up water maybe four hundred feet, way up underneath the bridge [downtown Glen Ellen].” Another spot was “right underneath the bridge, maybe a couple feet high. That wasn’t a very big swimming hole, but the water was four or five feet deep.” They also built a dam at Pendergast Hole, located just below the end of Yell Lane for “quite a few years,” that created a hole with a depth of “five or
six feet.”\textsuperscript{27} This is probably the same hole “that you could dam and swim”\textsuperscript{28} Shirley Churchill recalled. Al Guffanti also talked of a swimming hole under the Glen Ellen bridge\textsuperscript{29} and mentioned one in Kenwood, near the Kenilworth bridge: “All the kids got together and built a dam and we had a good swimming hole about six feet [deep].”\textsuperscript{30}

People mentioned several other (mostly) small dams: on \textbf{Fryer Creek},\textsuperscript{31} the large stone dam at \textbf{London Ranch} on a tributary of Kohler Creek;\textsuperscript{32} at \textbf{Sobre Vista}\textsuperscript{33} (which failed one winter and filled Sonoma Creek with its resident “French” frogs) and on \textbf{Rodgers’ Creek}\textsuperscript{34} (“a small dam that’s been done away with now.”)

\textbf{NOTES}

1. Meglen—37
2. Castagnasso—41-2
3. Meglen—46
4. Meglen—39
5. Basileu—18
6. Meglen—46
7. Ibid.
8. Basileu—20
9. Shepard—12
10. Meglen—154
11. Basileu—20
12. Shepard—13
13. Lynch—26
14. Shepard—24
15. Shepard—25
16. Meglen—85
17. Shepard—25
18. Basileu—63
19. Cooke—7
20. Cooke—10
21. Cooke—7
22. Cooke—8
23. Lynch—12
24. Lynch—13
25. Lynch—13-15
26. Meglen—15
27. Meglen—10-15
28. Churchill—7
29. Guffanti—2
30. Guffanti—11-12
31. Cannard—33
32. Shepard—3
33. Basileu—39
34. Castagnasso—88
Tree Cover, Logging & Woodcutting

Original Tree Cover

Altimira describes Sonoma Valley as a place of extensive forests interspersed with open areas on the hills and oak woodlands on the valley floor. He writes of “an extensive oak grove (trees very high and vigorous)” extending “for 3 leagues east to west and a league and a half north to south, though in some parts narrower.”\(^1\) This grove would have been about 7.5 miles by 4 miles in size. Orienting to magnetic north as he must have[note the magnetic orientation of the town of Sonoma, surveyed by Vallejo twelve years later], the only place this grove fits is between the slopes of Arrowhead Mountain and the vicinity of Champlin Creek, running up the valley about as far as Agua Caliente Creek. The grove may have extended below Schellville to Pulpula—describing that area a few days later, he talks of “firewood [probably oaks] at hand and in much abundance.”\(^2\)

As for “the hills encircling the plain,” they “have abundant timber for building, [and] numerous expanses bare of timber.”\(^3\) Near Glen Ellen he mentions “the mountain ridge running north and south which make the wall of the canada is well covered with trees fit for the lumber for workers of a pueblo.”\(^4\) [Probably meaning redwood and douglas fir. Ridge is probably Sonoma Mountain].

Of the Mayacamas, he says “The ridge of mountains which wall in the plain on the north are heavily wooded with firewood [probably oaks] and some timber; redwood [palo colorado] and douglas fir [? pinabete], in places they are very abundant, however some have small trunks because they are exposed to strong winds.”\(^5\) Altimira does not mention chapparal, the predominant plant cover over much of the west slope of the Mayacamas. He was probably much more interested in the presence of trees than in the lack of them. The ready abundance of timber for building materials as well as oaks for firewood, undoubtedly influenced his decision to found the mission here.

Nineteen years after Altimira’s arrival, Sir George Simpson visited Sonoma around New Year’s, 1842. Riding from their landing place on Sonoma Creek (probably just below current Highway 121 bridge) to the pueblo, he describes “a rich plain studded with scrub oaks and embosomed within well-wooded hills of considerable height.”\(^6\) They were probably riding through the area covered by the “extensive oak grove” mentioned in Altimira’s journal. Simpson’s talk of “scrub oaks” contrasts with the “trees high and vigorous” of 1823. Perhaps those trees had already fallen to the ax and the “scrub oaks” were second-growth oak woodland. Simpson’s “well-wooded hills” correspond well with Altimira’s “heavily wooded” ridges, suggesting little harvesting had taken place up to that point.

By 1880, due to increasing agricultural use and fire suppression, the character of the valley floor was markedly different than these early descriptions. Describing a photograph taken at that time from near Sonoma looking northwest towards Sonoma Mountain, Bob Cannard says, “there was brush all over the valley. There were big trees
and there was brush. The only areas that aren’t brushed over are the open agricultural areas.” The “big trees” were probably the remnants of Altimira’s oak grove.

Logging

“They started in the ‘fifties [1850s] and by the ‘seventies all the first growth were cut out,” said Milo Shepard, describing early redwood logging on Sonoma Mountain. “About every twenty-five or thirty years they [would] take trees out that were about twenty-two inches or bigger, chest high. The last time that was done was 1955—took out about 2 million board feet. You can’t even tell it was touched.” One person attributed much of the early logging in that area to “Redwood Thompson,” said to have settled on Sonoma Mountain before 1846. [Solid information on Thompson is hard to come by. Some of his descendants still live in the area.] “In this area they had little saw mills,” said Bill Meglen, speaking of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, before he was born. “They got everything local to start with because they had no transportation. They made the redwood for the buildings, they even used redwood studs, they made the doors out of redwood, because redwood was a good wood and that virgin timber [had] no knots. They used it up.”

Milo’s description suggests four or five cycles of logging since 1850. Ever increasing mechanization and demand (from a growing population), would have shortened the length of each cycle, from about twenty years initially to perhaps less than a year for the most recent. Local folklore credits General Vallejo with building the water-powered mill on Asbury Creek around 1840 to cut lumber from redwoods being harvested nearby. Sometime later, Treadmill Road, up on the mountain, got its name because there “a donkey walked a treadmill to provide power for a buzz saw.” By the 1950s, the same work would have been accomplished by gasoline or diesel-powered equipment. Here is a rough guess of dates with tentative descriptions, keeping in mind there was probably some overlapping, especially of the earlier eras:

- **1850s – 1870s** “pioneer logging” using animal and human power
  - milling done nearby
  - most of lumber used locally due to difficulty shipping it out

- **mid-1880s – 1890s** second cycle likely stimulated by the arrival of the railroad with consequent increased population and demand
  - used animal and human power
  - milling probably done nearby
  - easier shipping of lumber to other areas by rail

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• 1910s – 1920s  probably used combination of mechanical & animal power
  Milling probably done locally
  Shipping done by rail, with perhaps some trucking

• 1955  fourth cycle probably used only mechanical power
  Raw logs probably trucked away to be milled
  Much of lumber may not have been used locally

Interestingly, no one else reported any obvious changes in the tree cover on Sonoma Mountain since the 1920s: “I don’t think it’s changed, really hasn’t. There’s no big clearing or anything. It looks the same to me,” said Bill Basileu, born in the valley in the ‘teens. Several others concurred. Redwoods’ habit of stump sprouting and rapid growth may account for this perception, as well as the fact that the 1955 logging may have been the only harvesting done during their lifetimes.

Milo also described how logging practices created a common forest pattern seen on Sonoma Mountain today: “Sometimes you hike through and wonder why you see the burned out [redwood] stumps. When they first started cutting them, they didn’t burn the stumps. The top of the stump would sprout and they wouldn’t have good attachment. Wind would come along and blow them off and they’d fall down. So they started burning the stumps and that’s why they came up from the roots and formed what [we] call fairy rings. That was because they burned the stump.”

Charlie Cooke, at the other end of the valley, was the only other person to talk about logging. Speaking of a grove along upper Arroyo Seco, he said, “Those redwoods were harvested probably in the 1880s is my guess. There’s stumps down there that are anywhere from 14-20 feet. All the ones that grew up, grew up around those stumps. Now they’re now around three to four feet in diameter. Pretty big trees, but they’re all second growth. There’s no old growth redwoods here. They harvested them all.” The only known old-growth redwood in Sonoma Valley, at the Sonoma Developmental Center, has a diameter in the range Charlie describes. Charlie believed his property was only cut once, because “there weren’t that many [redwoods]. There may have been fifty or sixty, something like that, not a huge number.” Other small groves scattered in the canyons up and down the valley probably have a similar logging history, while the more extensive redwood forests on Sonoma Mountain made repeated harvesting more economically attractive.

Woodcutting

While redwoods were a fairly limited resource, being confined to moist canyons and slopes, oaks, madrone and other hardwoods suitable for firewood were all over
Sonoma Valley. Bill Lynch described how “when you look at old, old pictures of Sonoma Valley, the hills behind the city are pretty barren. I think that’s because in the first twenty years they cut down most of the trees and what you’re seeing now is a second or third or whatever generation of those. There’s probably more trees [today], except where they’ve planted grapes.”

Milo Shepard pointed out the window of his home to an oak tree with a double trunk, explaining that such multiple trunks indicate “the tree was cut. They cut this whole mountain off. London, when he bought the ranch from the bank, kicked Chauvet out, and said, “You can’t cut any more trees and sell any more wood. They put the wood down to the railroad and shipped it to San Francisco. That’s what heated San Francisco, the wood from this country. So the whole mountain was cleared, except for the canyons. When my father was a boy, you could look up and see cattle grazing all over the mountain.”

As with logging, the railroads’ arrival in the 1880s may have precipitated an increase in woodcutting, especially in areas like Glen Ellen, where the distance to tidewater had been an obstacle to shipping out local products by oxen or horse-drawn wagons.

Fires, Fire Suppression & Plant Succession

“If you read the history of California,” said Bill Lynch. “Our hills burned. And they burned, in some cases, for months, all summer long. California is a very dry state. Everything dries out and it burns real easy. Over the last fifty or so years we stopped the fires, we don’t let them burn. You don’t know what the effect of stopping those fires is. You have to wonder whether that’s changed the look [of the landscape].”

Speaking of 19th century drawings and photos [mentioned above] showing local hillsides nearly devoid of trees, he says, “What we saw in the those old pictures may have been the result of things always happening in California, which is that fires burn through. We were seeing just the result of fires.” Lynch speculates that “when the Spaniards came here there probably wasn’t a lot of trees, probably was valley oaks. The valley floor was more like a meadow.”

As Lynch suggests, suppressing fires has probably had a significant impact on local vegetation. The changes in Lovall Valley described by Charlie Cooke are probably at least partly due to active suppression of wildfires over the last 60 years: “All of the trees were considerably smaller. When we got here in ’38 there was almost no Douglas Firs. There was a big one right outside the house here. My mother liked the fir trees and there weren’t a lot of them in those days. That hill where you can see all kinds of fir trees on now, there was not a single fir tree on that hill. [It was] all chaparral. There might have been a few stunted live oaks in there, but not really. And there were no Doug Firs at all. Now those fir trees are taking over everything.”

Jose Altimira, traveling in or near Lovall Valley in 1823, noted that: “the place is bare of thick woods which would favor the straying of cattle.” He mentions natives in the area preparing to burn “the long grass,” a common practice among northern California peoples.

The biggest fires remembered in modern times were in 1923 and 1964. Speaking of the ’23 fire, Bill Basileu said it “burned everything. I lived in El Verano and we evacuated. The last house that burned was right on Arnold Drive and Grove [Street]. We
were related to the Stornetta’s out at the dairy. So we evacuated to their place. I remember the fire come over the hill. Next night it’s still burning, next night still burning, and the whole hill—I was four years old and I can remember that. Scary. It denuded that hill.” 26 When asked how long the vegetation took to recover, he said, “I don’t remember. But it only takes a couple of years. We had a fire thirty years ago[probably the ’64 fire], burned that whole ridge down to Sonoma and second year the grass is there, fourth year the brush is back. I think it’s pretty quick.”

Charlie Cooke described how one big blaze [also probably the one in 1964] turned one area of the Mayacamas from forest to brush: “The fire came down from St. Helena, took the whole top of Trinity. You see all those houses staring out at you up there? That used to all be forest.” 28 He’s also seen notable changes on his own property: “All those non-native pine trees and the young madrones, that was all after the fire. And on the hill right across from the water tank, which is pretty much chamise now, there were a fair number of good-size oak trees in there. They were all killed.”

Woodcutting has probably also created an identifiable successional pattern. In Glen Ellen, Sugarloaf Ridge and Annadel State Parks and elsewhere, Dawson has noticed “big old manzanitas being shaded by the oak trees.” 30 Most are dead or struggling to survive. As mentioned by Shepard, multiple-trunked oaks in these same areas are evidence of woodcutting (or perhaps grazing). As manzanitas prefer open areas, woodcutting probably encouraged their spread, but eventually the lack of fire allowed the oaks to multiply until their canopy is now shading out the manzanitas and ultimately killing them off. In some areas, dead manzanitas are under oaks which are themselves now shaded by douglas firs.

Riparian Canopy

During his explorations in 1823, Jose Altimira writes of Arroyo de Sonoma (Sonoma Creek) and how he “fell more in love with the . . . grove which bordered [it],” describing “the very tall trees, their delicate foliage according to their species: sycamore, cottonwood, ash, laurels and others” and “above all the abundance and vigor of the wild grapes.” 31 Bill Lynch gives a similar description of Sonoma Creek as he remembers it from the 1950s, a hundred and thirty years after Altimira’s visit: “The forest around the creek was pretty thick but it wasn’t impenetrable. It was just lots of big trees and lots of good shade. There were redwood groves on the upper stretches of Sonoma Creek in Adobe Canyon and on Bouverie’s Canyon at Stuart’s Creek and also in Nathanson Creek Canyon. Even the creek that runs through Temelec—there’s some beautiful canyons back there that had redwood groves in them too.” 32 Others spoke of willows, alders and sycamores along the creek.

Many people have noticed little change in the canopy along the creek in their lifetimes, though a number say the channel is not as shady as it used to be, particularly in the El Verano area. 34 As Bill Basileu describes it: “You always had the creek run with brush or trees alongside. As the erosion comes, other trees would still be on the bank as it gets wider. So I don’t think there’s any difference. But I’ll tell you this—when the creek
was a lot smaller and narrower, sure there was more shade in the creek. Now it’s wide—parts of Sonoma Creek are a hundred feet wide [meaning the whole creekbed]. Eighty feet of it is watching the burning sun.”³⁵ (for the record, William McCarthy noted “a decrease in trees and other vegetation along the creek’s banks”³⁶ in the same area. Milt Castagnasso says the creek “hasn’t gotten any wider.”³⁷ ) Bill Lynch attributed the problem to “upstream construction” which causes “more run-off and more run-off tears away streamside vegetation creating less shade, making this kind of Grand Canyon effect.” He also feels erosion has contributed to the establishment of exotic species like *Arundo donax.*³⁸

It may be that the canopy is changing, but so slowly that almost nobody notices: “One of the biggest things that has occurred so gradually that people don’t realize how many species of plants have virtually disappeared from Sonoma Valley. I walked the Sonoma Creek from Wingo to what is now Sugar Loaf Ridge State Park several times in the late ‘60s and early ‘70s,” recalled Bob Cannard, Sr. “And did a survey of all the plant material, whether it was native or whether it was introduced. Today if you walk that creek you would hardly find a big leaf maple in that whole stretch. They’re just sporadic. There were still lots of seedlings coming up at that time, but they require summer water. They require a lot of water.”³⁹ During his walks, Cannard also remembers that “the number of Oregon Ash increased as we went up the creek. Oregon ash is not an uncommon tree here.”⁴⁰

Several people noticed an apparent increase in the number of plants growing in the creekbed itself: “There’s quite a bit of brush, willows and things that are growing right down in the creek now,”⁴¹ says Milt Castagnasso, speaking of the view of the creek at Franquelin Bridge, by the corner of Petaluma Ave. and Riverside Drive. “It’s so full of trees now it’s amazing”⁴² agreed Shirley Churchill. She also noticed the same phenomenon from Cooper’s Bridge [Leveroni Rd.]: “it’s really filled up.”⁴³

The stretch between Glen Ellen and Bennett Valley Road has apparently not changed much from what people remember: “All of the trees are basically still there that were there when I was a kid,” said Charlie Cooke, speaking of the 1940s and early 1950s. “And the same way going down towards Glen Ellen. It is pretty well still covered.”⁴⁴ Shirley Churchill concurred.⁴⁵ Bill Meglen, long-time resident of Glen Ellen, said “the creek used to be shadier.”⁴⁶ Sections of Nathanson Creek and Arroyo Seco were also reported as being much like they used to be.⁴⁷

NOTES

1. Adapted by Arthur Dawson from p. 6 of Robert Smilie’s *The Sonoma Mission; The Founding, Ruin and Restoration of California’s 21st Mission.* Valley Publishers. Fresno, California. 1975. Referring to Altimira’s original journal at the Bancroft Library reveals that Smilie apparently mistranslated “*E. a O. 3 leguas y a N. a S. legua y media.*” Nowhere else in the document is a decimal point used by Altimira. Translating “*E. a O.*” as “*Este a Oeste*” is consistent with his use of “*N. a S.*” for the other cardinal points.

2. *The Sonoma Mission.* p. 10
3. Ibid. p. 6.
4. Ibid. p. 10.
5. Ibid. p. 6.
7. Cannard—61
8. Shepard—2
9. Cannard—79-80
10. Meglen—133-5
12. Basileu—44
13. Churchill—63; Lynch—46; Meglen—136
14. Shepard—1
15. Cooke—7
17. Cooke—8
18. Lynch—46
19. Shepard—56
20. Lynch—47-8
21. Lynch—47
22. Lynch—61
23. Cooke—4,5
25. Ibid.
26. Basileu—48
27. Basileu—48-51
28. Cooke—47
29. Cooke—46
30. Shepard—60
32. Lynch—51-3
33. Meglen—105; Lynch—5; McCarthy—4
34. Meglen—105; Cooke—44; Basileu—69; Lynch—22-3
35. Basileu—69
36. McCarthy—13
37. Castagnasso—57
38. Lynch—17, 18
39. Cannard—50-4
40. Cannard—89
41. Castagnasso—57
42. Churchill—42
43. Churchill—174
44. Cooke—44
45. Churchill—174
46. Meglen—105
47. Lynch—5; Cooke—44
WILDFLOWERS & UNDERSTORY VEGETATION

Shirley Churchill described collecting plants for a project at Dunbar School: “Any kind of a shady spot, the Trillium would be, and then a little bit further would be [Columbine]. Along little creeks you’d find it. It’s pretty. Diogene’s Lantern, that little yellow [flower], looks like a lantern. The most prized I think was the Dutchman’s pipe, which was a vine.”¹ She also talked of seeing, “All kinds of buttercups. Johnny Jump-Ups. Just about any kind you find. The first one that bloomed in the spring was a white something-or-other. They’re still there. And Hound’s Tongue, that purple stuff.”²

She reported a “red Trillium and a white Trillium” growing along creeks in Glen Ellen and also on Agua Caliente Creek, up in the Mission Highlands area.³ (It seems likely that the area near the confluence of Graham and Sonoma Creeks was especially rich in these flowers—Wake Robin Lodge was there, almost certainly named after the Trillium’s common name.) There are three species of Trillium in Sonoma County; all have been reported within a short distance of Glen Ellen.

“We used to pick a beautiful little pansy, a yellow pansy,” she also remembered. “[It] grew wild on the way from here to Napa. But there aren’t any more. Hopefully we didn’t pick them all. We always stopped there and picked a bouquet of those.” She said they were past Stornetta Curve, “when you start up the hill, along that rock wall. Every year they’d grow up there. They were so pretty. Haven’t seen them forever.”⁴

Speaking of Bouverie Ranch along Stuart Creek in Glen Ellen, she said, “It used to be just gorgeous. Poppies and lupine, all at the same time. It hasn’t bloomed that way for quite awhile. It was all natural. Everybody would stop and take pictures. It was so pretty.”⁵ “The Lupine and the California Poppy have about a five to seven-year cycle,” explained Bob Cannard. “And they build up, build up, and there’s this culmination of magnificent display. Then they don’t produce very many fertile seeds. Because of the crowding they don’t need it and only a few are seeded and you can start to go through the cycle again.”⁶

Along Nathanson Creek, where he used to play as a kid, Bill Lynch remembered “a lot of periwinkle and various kinds of vines and blackberries.”⁷ He also recalled “lots of ferns” under the trees in various parts of the valley.⁸

Bob Cannard has noticed a decline in one understory species, Calycanthus occidentalis, commonly known at Spice Bush or Western Sweet Shrub: “It was common. There are still many of them in the auxiliary streams coming in shaded areas on both water sheds. You’ll see quite a few if you go up towards Buena Vista Tasting Room, on the left side. You’ll see lots of them up at the State Hospital. However, at one time they were one of the primary undershrubs. They were so thick. Today, it’s not rare, but it’s not common.”⁹
NOTES

1. Churchill—139-40
2. Churchill—137
3. Churchill—142-3
5. Churchill—234-6
6. Cannard—55
7. Lynch—5
8. Lynch—51
9. Cannard—53-4
“Arundo. It’s a plague that didn’t exist when I was growing up.”

Bill Lynch

Impacts on Vegetation: Exotic Plants, Animal Pests & Disease

Bill Lynch believes *Arundo donax* arrived in Sonoma Valley “within the last 10 to 20 years.” Speculating on how it became established, he remembered “There was still enough bank and vegetation [and] a lot of shade on the creek even down as far as Leveroni’s,” when he was a kid in the 1950s. Accelerated erosion of the channel, beginning in the 1970s, may have created conditions which allowed it to take hold. He believes if locals had “stabilized the banks a little bit and made it less prone to erosion,” that might have prevented *Arundo* from coming in. And he said “this *Arundo donax* stuff and any other non-native vegetation including blackberries for that matter, probably have not been very helpful to the restoration.”

Bill Meglen described the damage done by wild pigs on Sonoma Mountain: “They’re after acorns and they’re also after Indian Soap—like a bulb. *Chlorogalum?* Even if it’s rocky, they’ll just push their nose down in that rock and uncover those. And mushrooms, they’re after mushrooms.” After they came through, “It looked like they disked the fields. They rip it all up.”

No one recalled any big diebacks of oak trees similar to the Sudden Oak Death fungus now affecting Sonoma County and elsewhere in California. “This disease that’s killing them now is something new,” said Bill Meglen. Bob Cannard has a long-range perspective: “The Oak problem, the Tan Oak problem, all of these so-called virus problems, that are effecting the oaks today, are part of an overall plan. I am not as concerned as many people because every plant has a cycle. Some years you’ll say, “All those Lupines or all those California Poppies, there are so many of them.” The next year you go back, there’s none, or very few. The Lupine and the California Poppy have about a five to seven-year cycle and they build up and there’s this culmination of magnificent display. Then they don’t produce very many fertile seeds. Because of the crowding they don’t need it and only a few are seeded and you start to go through the cycle again. [Every plant has a cycle,] it’s even evident in the biggest and the oldest trees.”

The biggest impact on oak trees Bill Meglen recalled was “a caterpillar invasion” in the early 1950s. “They would eat all the live oaks, they would eat anything that got in their path. There was millions of caterpillars. We took the old Dodge [fire truck] and put in something else to kill the caterpillars. We’d go out and spray trees for people. We had high enough pressure with the nozzle we could spray big trees with it—over the top. We did that to raise money because there were so many caterpillars that you could hear them chomp, chomp, chomp, chomp. You could hear them eating.”
NOTES

1. Lynch—18
2. Lynch—19
3. Lynch—20
4. Lynch—24
5. Meglen—119-22
6. Meglen—143
7. Cannard—55-6
8. Meglen—12-6
“You see actually more of the larger wildlife today than when I was a kid. Just about everybody had a gun and any kind of critter that was on their property they’d shoot at it. They see a deer, they’d pop it, skin it, and eat it. It was part of the larder. There wasn’t this friendly co-existence. It was not a petting zoo.”

Bill Lynch

Hunting, Trapping & Wildlife

A number of shifts in wildlife species and populations were reported over the years. Deer, mountain lion, bears, and probably beavers, are more common than they used to be. Possums, formerly unknown in the valley, are flourishing. So are wild turkeys, reportedly introduced by Fish and Game. Wild pigs, another exotic species, are much less abundant, due to active trapping and eradication.

Native Mammals Reported to Have Increased In Population

Deer

Everyone agreed with Bill Lynch’s assessment above. In particular, deer are said to be much more common today, especially on the valley floor. “To get a deer you had to go to the top of these mountains,” said Milo Shepard, speaking of the 1930s and 1940s. (one person thought deer might be less numerous today, due to habitat loss, but also mentioned how much more common they are in the town of Sonoma) “When we were kids, ten of us would hunt, I would be hunting with these adults--if we killed two in a season, that was a pretty good season. There is a lot more deer now, especially on this side, because you’ve got Diamond A up there. Everybody that has a home feeds them whether they want to or not. [The bucks] eat the gardens and they grow big horns, they look a lot better.”

Sometimes deer hunting was done for subsistence, especially in the 1930s: “Those were Depression days,” remembered Al Guffanti. “You went deer hunting for meat.”

Shepard described Scotch-Irish settlers, such as the Cowan family, who settled SonomaMountain in the latter part of the 19th century: “They lived off [the deer] and they wiped them out. It wasn’t until after World War Two that vineyards were ever fenced. We couldn’t grow a vineyard here now [without a fence].

Mountain Lions

Mountain lions are another animal which has apparently become more common. “I never, ever heard of a mountain lion in this valley, until just the last 5 or 10 years. We heard they were here but nobody ever saw one, because they weren’t protected,” said Bill Lynch. He described several sightings in the last two or three years.
Those who lived or hunted in the hills, had a slightly different experience: “Where the park is now [Sugarloaf Ridge State Park], we used to call it the Reynolds Ranch,” said Bill Meglen. “Up in that area is more rugged, there’s no houses. I used to deer hunt and we’d often see mountain lions.” Even so, he thinks, “they’re probably more numerous now,”9 due to the hunting ban. Milo Shepard reported a population of five mountain lions at Sugarloaf when he was a ranger there in the 1960s.9 He said they’ve been seen on his Sonoma Mountain ranch since he was a boy and that a recently sighted one is being attracted by the presence of wild turkeys.10 Similarly, in the Lovall Valley area, Charlie Cooke hasn’t seen much recent change in the lion population: “There’s always been one here at some time or other over the past thirty years.”11

**Black Bears**

As with deer and mountain lion, there have been more bear sightings in recent years, though on a modest scale. With the exception of Milo Shepard, no one remembered seeing any first-hand evidence of bears when they were young.12 Two of those heard a second-hand reports of bears, one in Lovall Valley and another up Cavedale Road.13 Shepard, however, spoke of bears on Sonoma Mountain up until about thirty years ago: “The last bear I saw was in the ‘sixties or ‘seventy, on this mountain. When I was at Sugar Loaf there were bear there. That was in the ‘sixties. In fact the deputy sheriff killed a bear on Spring Mountain Road—kept coming in and scaring his wife and he shot it. The deer club had Beltane and Kunde’s leased for deer hunting and we’d see tracks up there.”14 [Dawson saw what appeared to be bear scat on Beltane Ranch in the early 1990s].

Several people recalled recent bear sightings: “There was a bear not too many years ago, come down above Glen Ellen,”15 said Bill Basileu. In a separate incident, a black bear was captured behind a bed-and-breakfast in Glen Ellen in 1999. Another observer reported a mother and cub making their way along Sonoma Creek, south of the town of Sonoma in the early 1990s.16

**Beavers**

“Never ever had a beaver in Sonoma Creek as long as I knew,” said Bill Basileu. “All of a sudden they come up with beavers and I said, ‘bull’. I went down and looked at the trees—beavers [were there].”17 The sighting he was referring to happened about 1999. Upstream, Milo Shepard indicated beavers had been present for a long time: “We used to have the beaver on Sonoma Creek up here. They put up their last dam—they tried to start down by Spreckles, down by that vineyard. He shot one a year or two ago. They’ve always been in here.”18 George Simpson, who visited Sonoma in 1841, mentions beaver being caught “within a half-mile of the mission.”19 If his distance is accurate, this puts beavers on either Nathanson or Fryer Creek, as the distance from the Mission to Sonoma Creek is one mile.
Opossums

Opossums were apparently unknown in Sonoma Valley until about 50 years ago: “We never had any possums around here,” said Bill Meglen. “I guess they came up from the south to the valley [Central Valley] and from the valley they got over here. Some of the people must have brought them in.” He first saw them as roadkill in the Central Valley in the late ‘thirties and estimated they arrived in Sonoma Valley by the 1950s or ‘60s. Shirley Churchill also did not remember possums from her youth. Charlie Cooke reported that only within the last three years has he seen them on his Lovall Valley property.

Other Native Mammals (no population changes noted)

A number of native mammals were reported with no changes in population mentioned. Raccoons and skunks were the most commonly talked about, followed by coyotes, gray foxes, bobcats, squirrels, mink, badgers and finally ringtails (squirrels are so common that perhaps many didn’t consider them worth mentioning). Raccoons and skunks apparently inhabit every area of Sonoma Valley, including the city of Sonoma. Only Milo Shepard specifically mentioned seeing spotted skunks. Charlie Cooke said the skunks in his area “are all stripes. I’ve never seen a spotted skunk up here.”

Sonoma Valley’s coyotes seem to prefer areas like the Mayacamas, away from human population centers: “We’ve got a zillion coyotes,” says Charlie Cooke of his Lovall Valley property. “They sing a bunch at night and I like them because they eat the gophers in the vineyard.” About six years ago, a pair made a den among some rocks in his orchard and raised six pups there. Coyotes were also seen or heard along Stuart Creek, near Annadel State Park in Kenwood, at Sugarloaf and alluded to on Sonoma Mountain. No one in Sonoma, El Verano or Glen Ellen, spoke of them.

Gray foxes were reported in Lovall Valley. (Dawson saw a pair in 1995 on Sonoma Creek at Morton’s Warm Springs, 1651 Warm Springs Rd., Kenwood). Charlie Cooke indicated bobcats had been present in Lovall Valley for a long time, and had recent sightings in 1999 and again this year. Milo Shepard said they “always had bobcats” on Sonoma Mountain. Bill Basileu spoke of occasionally seeing and trying to catch mink along Sonoma Creek (see section below on introduced species. These mink might have been introduced.).

Shepard was the only person to mention badgers, “civet cats” or spotted skunks, and the ringtail (coincidentally, “civet cat” is also a common name for the ringtail. However, he was clearly talking about two different animals.). He mentioned badgers living on top of Sonoma Mountain: “We always had badgers up there. Big badger holes and you’d see them.” He also spoke of a family of ringtails inhabiting the attic of a house on Adobe Canyon Road and guessed they were probably still there.
While not mentioned by elder residents during the Oral History Project, otters are known to inhabit Sonoma Creek. A number have been spotted several times in the Glen Ellen area in the last ten years.\(^{34}\)

### Extinct and Declining Native Mammals

Sonoma Valley has lost three large mammals over the last 150 years. The grizzly bear, tule elk and the pronghorn antelope were all abundant in 1823 when the mission was founded. Jose Altimira talks of his party shooting as many as 10 grizzlies a day during their explorations of the valley in that year. Thirty years later, Joe Hooker (later famous as “Fighting Joe,” a Union general during the Civil War,) may have finished off the last Sonoma grizzlies when he killed a mother and cub in May, 1852, in the Mayacamas.\(^{35}\)

Altimira also describes herds of up to 300 elk during his explorations. “I know in 1850 the last tule elk was killed,” said Milo Shepard. “Down in the tules, down by Wingo.”\(^{36}\) Pronghorn antelope are mentioned by Sir George Simpson in 1841 in “very considerable” numbers.\(^{37}\) They too probably became locally extinct around 1850, victims, in part, to market hunting for hungry Gold Rush San Francisco.

Surprisingly, after the initial period of extinction, it appears no other large animals have since disappeared from the valley. Several species even seem to be at historic highs (as mentioned previously). Only one mammal was reported to be less abundant in recent memory: “You don’t see the weasels that you used to,”\(^{38}\) said Milo Shepard.

### Trapping and Bounty Hunting

“Some people used to trap in the creek, years ago,” recalled Bill Meglen. “For skunk, fox and raccoons.”\(^{39}\) David Bouverie, founder of the Bouverie Audubon Preserve, recalled a couple living along Stuart Creek in the late 1940s. They had “an outhouse on which 20 or 30 skunk skins were stretched on boards. They ate the skunks and sold the skins.”\(^{40}\)

An article from the January 31, 1920 issue of the Sonoma Index-Tribune reports “Trapping Good at Kenwood” and says one trapper has bagged 23 wildcats [probably bobcats] since December 1\(^{st}\), besides “other fur-bearing animals.” It said the county paid a bounty for the skins.

### Other Native Wildlife

“I don’t think there were many, but there was turtles,”\(^{41}\) said Bill Basileu, referring to boyhood memories of Sonoma Creek around 1930. William McCarthy talks of the “common mud turtle” and “colorful woods turtle” living in Sonoma Creek in the late 1930s and early 1940s. No one else mentioned turtles.
Three people talked of catching crawdads to eat. Shirley Churchill described the Glen Ellen waterways as having “lots of crawdads. In fact a friend and I used to sell them for five cents apiece. They taste a little like lobster. You just eat the tail. They’re kind of good. I think we used a marshmallow or a piece of hot dog and caught them that way.”\textsuperscript{43} Charlie Cooke went crawdad fishing in the same area, using a piece of bacon on the end of a string.\textsuperscript{44} William McCarthy had a more elaborate rig using “a piece of liver donated from Greppi’s Meat Market tied with ten to fifteen feet of string on a green willow pole” and an “onion sack cut in half and held open” by a piece of wire “shaped into a circle, nailed and tied to the end of a six-foot pole. We could easily catch a quarter of a gunny sack in a couple of hours. We could contribute to the family supper!”\textsuperscript{45}

Three people mentioned snakes, especially rattlers. Most rattlesnake sightings were in the Mayacamas. Charlie Cooke said he kills one to five a year on his Lovall Valley property.\textsuperscript{46} Bill Lynch described Bouverie’s Canyon as “just teeming with rattlesnakes”\textsuperscript{47} and Basileu indicated there was a sizeable population near the headwaters of Sonoma Creek.\textsuperscript{48} He also described a large rattler, about three-and-a-half feet long, up Carriger Creek: “He had twelve rattles. He was a big baby.”\textsuperscript{49} As for other species, “king snakes, racers, gopher snakes—they’re quite abundant,” said Cooke. Basileu spoke of water snakes preying on steelhead trout fingerlings.\textsuperscript{50}

Bill Basileu spoke of tree squirrels in the canopy above the creek. Bill Meglen noted that they seem to go through fairly drastic population cycles: “The tree squirrels--one time they were plentiful and another time they weren’t. They get some kind of disease and a bunch die off and eventually they come back.”\textsuperscript{51}

**NOTES**

1. Lynch—34; Basileu—31; Cooke—19; Guffanti—96; Meglen—53; Sealed Transcript—32
2. Shepard—37
3. Basileu—31

20. Meglen—31

21. Meglen—127

22. Churchill—183

23. Cooke—20-1

24. Shepard—43

25. Cooke—25

26. Cooke—17

27. Lynch—34; Sealed Transcript—23-7; Shepard—33

28. Cooke—16; Sealed Transcript—28-9

29. Cooke—17

30. Shepard—35

31. Basileu—25

32. Shepard—38

33. Shepard—43

34. Dale Richard. Personal communication.

Joyce, Suzie. Personal communication.


36. Shepard—36


38. Shepard—38

39. Meglen—31

40. *The Stories Behind Sonoma Valley Place Names*. p. 39

41. Basileu—42

42. McCarthy—8

43. Churchill—12-13

44. Cooke—12

45. McCarthy—9

46. Cooke—21

47. Lynch—35

48. Basileu—6

49. Basileu—72

50. Cooke—21

51. Basileu—3

52. Meglen—108
“There was easily fifty different kinds of birds around here. I can remember seeing big flocks of robins. [On] top of Sonoma Mountain I’ve seen big flocks of wild pigeons roosting in the trees. Now you hardly see any birds anymore.”

Bill Meglen

Native Birds

A number of people mentioned declining populations of native birds, particularly robins and meadowlarks. While many birds used to be hunted, including hawks, attitudes have changed dramatically. For this report, the local bird population has been divided into loose categories:

Raptors

Perhaps because they are so common, only a few people thought to mention turkey vultures. Charlie Cooke said their numbers around Lovall Valley are “the same as always,” “about 12 million of them.” Cooke also talks of seeing “quite a few” red-tail hawks. Only Charlie Cooke ever recalled seeing an eagle in the valley: “I had a golden eagle up here. I haven’t seen him in a couple years, but I saw him before that several times. He used to get on my telephone wire right over there and just sit there. It was really something to see him, gorgeous.”

Perching (Song)Birds

This was the only group of birds in which declining populations were specifically mentioned: “At one time we had a lot of meadowlarks and we had a lot of robins [and] a great amount of doves. In the winter time we had pigeons.” Meglen estimated the flocks of robins that used to come through as in “the hundreds,” enough to “do damage to crops.” Charlie Cooke thought robins had “maybe” diminished, and said he hadn’t “seen a lot in the last four or five years.” He described how they would come in large noisy flocks to eat the fermented toyon berries and get “boozed up” until they were unable to fly. Bill Lynch still reports big flocks of robins coming through Sonoma, gorging on berries in the spring.

Quail also appear to be undergoing some kind of population shift. “I didn’t see any quail up here,” said Charlie Cooke in Lovall Valley, “until [about] three years ago. Now I got quail in my garden. I mean they never came up here, it’s way too high for them. But they’re all up here now, so I see them fairly frequently.” In contrast, Bill Meglen “can’t remember seeing a quail for a long time” around Glen Ellen. He attributes the lack of quail to domestic cats. Others remembered quail in Kenwood and the eastside of Sonoma, though no comparison was made between current and former populations.
Pileated woodpeckers may be more common. Bill Meglen said he’d never seen one around [Glen Ellen], except recently, say less than thirty years ago. Since this is about their southern limit, he believes their range has shifted south. Shirley Churchill indicated that acorn woodpeckers are about as common as they’ve always been.

The dipper, or water ousel, was reported in Glen Ellen recently by Shirley Churchill, who said she was surprised to see it. Bill Lynch had seen one on Santa Rosa Creek, but didn’t think he’d ever seen one in Sonoma Valley.

Other birds mentioned were stellar jays and ravens in Lovall Valley, jays, kingfishers, swallows and wrens in the El Verano area in the 1930s and ’40; and bluejays, stellar jays and hummingbirds in Glen Ellen.

**Waterfowl and Wading Birds**

“We all hunted down there on the Sonoma Land Company,” said Milt Castagnasso. “Ducks, in the low country down in the marsh. Skaggs Island.” Shirley Churchill also talked of “good duck hunting” in the area south of Schellville. Bill Lynch described a large marshy area around Fourth Street East in Sonoma: “In the wintertime when we’d have a pretty good-sized amount of rain, a whole lot of that area was vernal pools. They were just all over the place. Ducks would come in, it was a real wildlife area.” Occasionally, mallards and herons are seen up in Lovall Valley, near water sources. “Sometimes, not lately, [on] some of the creeks you’d see wood ducks, a beautiful bird,” recalled Shirley Churchill. She did not recall Canada Geese from her childhood, but said “they’re becoming quite a problem” making messes and causing problems for people with ponds or swimming pools.

**Sport Hunting, Market Hunting and Changing Attitudes**

“They used to market hunt robins,” recalled Al Guffanti, speaking of the days when the flocks numbered in the hundreds. “When we were kids, we used to shoot robins and bring them to Sylvia Sebastiani and she’d cook them,” said Bill Lynch. “In those days everybody shot them.” But, reflecting on how times and his own attitude has changed, he said, “I hate to think about the things we did. Eat robins, eat birds. I mean, I don’t do things like that anymore. Kid would shoot a robin, you’d think, “God, you’re a savage!” if you did something like that now.”

**Introduced Game Birds:** See “Hunting, Trapping and Wildlife” Section
NOTES

1. Meglen—108
2. Cooke—18, 24
3. Cooke—19
4. Guffanti—65-6
5. Meglen—106
6. Cooke—23-4
7. Lynch—55-6
8. Cooke—18
9. Meglen—106
10. Guffanti—66; Lynch—60
11. Meglen—149
12. Churchill—158-61
13. Churchill—154-6
14. Lynch—53
15. Cooke—21
16. McCarthy—8
17. Meglen—114
18. Castagnasso—65
19. Churchill—176
20. Lynch—60
21. Cooke—19
22. Churchill—156
24. Guffanti—65
25. Lynch—55
Interview with William “Bill” Basileu  
November 7, 2000, at his home on West Napa Street, Sonoma  
B=Bill Basileu; A=Arthur Dawson

1  
A: Tell us a little bit about yourself—how long have you been in the valley?

B: I was born here eight-two years ago. I like to hunt and I like to fish—I enjoyed that all my life. As a kid I lived in El Verano and my brother and I could take our gun, walk out the back door and start hunting. Across Arnold Drive we had the whole area. Now you take your gun, your neighbor turns you in before you move.

2  
A: So that whole area was open then—across Arnold Drive?

B: There were a few houses, but you knew everybody and if the guy didn’t want you on the place he’d kick you off. So I’d give him a chance to kick me off every Saturday. That was it. Nowadays they don’t do that, you’re arrested for trespassing. But, all the streams were open for trout fishing. All had plenty of trout—the limit was twenty-five.

3  
A: Did you often catch that many?

B: Any time you went out you could pretty near do it. So there was plenty of fish. I mentioned when you called before, that my Dad had planted Sonoma Creek. Not only that—he planted all the tributaries. He got about ten thousand fish about that long—about an inch long from Fish and Game for ten years in a row. And they took them to Hooker Creek, Nunn’s Canyon, Adobe Canyon, Fowler Creek, Sonoma Creek. And then in thirty-one I was with him when the Fish and Game employee was with us and he dumped the whole can in a hole. You don’t do that—you spread the fish out. By putting them in a hole—those fish are in a can, thousand of them, so when they get in the hole they like company. So along comes one water snake that long [showing with hands] and eat a hundred of them. So my Dad turned the guy in, because he’s a Fish and Game employee and my Dad never got another can. That stopped it. Well the guy was one of the good old boys I guess. But that’s not the way to plant them. You generally put them in a riffle and leave them to spread.

4  
A: Do you know where those fish came from?

B: I don’t know where they came from at that time—that was in twenty-two to thirty-one. They might have come out of Redding or somewhere. We got them on the Southern Pacific train that used to run through El Verano. The day they were coming my Dad knew and he’d have ten fishermen there waiting—each guy would take a bucket [of fish] back to his pet stream, which was good. You ever seen the falls in Hooker Creek?

5  
A: Never been up there. It’s one of the few places I haven’t been in the valley.

B: It’s eighty feet—fish can’t get over it, no way. But they planted trout above there and I know about fourteen, fifteen years ago they were still there. George Nelson, who was the game warden at the time, he told me, “They’re in there Bill, they’re all that long [showing with hands, about 8-12 inches] and they’re all black.” Dark because there’s brush all over.
A: How about up in Sugarloaf [State Park] above the waterfall? Are you aware of anybody planting trout up there?

B: I don’t know whether they went that far. But there was always fish above there. That was private in those days—it was part of the State Home [State Hospital or Sonoma Developmental Center]—Reynolds? Reynolds Ranch. They had a gate there and the gate was locked. The fish would go over those falls, they’re not that high. I think they’re only about eight feet or something like that—ten feet maybe. Well the fish could go over them. So I know there was fish up in the flat. But this guy [meaning himself] is afraid of rattlesnakes and they’re in there.

A: There’s a Rattlesnake Creek up there.

B: Rattlesnake Creek is up there somewhere, yeah. Bear Creek—I fished Bear Creek right above the Golden Bear Lodge, it goes north.

A: That’s a pretty little spot.

B: That was full of trout. In those days you could go and get a meal. If you didn’t take twenty-five you took a dozen. They were trout six to ten inches; maybe every once in awhile you get a prize [fish]. All the streams had them and I know we had a lot more water. Nowadays you take a walk from Golden Bear Lodge to Glen Ellen, you’ll see thirty pumps in the creek.

A: Back in those days were people pumping any [water] out?

B: There wasn’t that many people. Undoubtedly those who had a yard or garden would pump water—it’d be very little. All the streams had a lot more water and the only way they would dry is in the flatlands. You know where [Agua] Caliente Creek comes down behind Fiesta Market? Just north of Verano Avenue.

A: Yeah—where the bridge is down in the dip [of Hwy. 12].

B: Yeah, then it goes up into the Norrbom Ranch. That was a beautiful stream. There’s always water up in the mountains, but down in the flats it dries, from half a mile above Highway 12 all the way to Sonoma Creek it’ll be dry in the summer. But there was always trout up there.

A: I walked it once with a friend of mine, just from the highway down to the main [Sonoma] creek. There’s one big hole back there—nothing was flowing into or out of it in the summertime—just a big round hole.

B: On a sharp corner?

A: Yeah.

B: I know that spot. I spent a lot of time in the creek. That’s all we done as kids—there
was nothing else we could do. We didn’t have a skateboard park, couldn’t skate anyhow. But we did a lot of fishing and a lot of hunting.

13 A: Did you ever see any salmon in the creek?

B: Oh yeah. Salmon used to run—years back there was more salmon than now. Now the salmon still run, but they come up and they can’t go any further and they die in the salt water, most of them. We see them floating when I fish down there [referred to tidal sloughs]. But yeah, salmon would go all the way to the falls there at Golden Bear Lodge. Steelhead always do—that was a spot where they congregated. I don’t know about the rainfall, but you go back sixty, seventy years—October was a wet month—we had a lot of water in the creek. Having the water the salmon would run, because they run in October. These days there’s nothing there, it’s pumped dry. Well—everybody with their vineyards got the water table lower and they are pumping out of the creek. I don’t know what the rights are. I’m sure if you own the property you ought to be able to pump a few drops of water out.

14 A: But when everybody does it—

B: When everybody does it, it’s a problem. Anyway Sonoma Creek, last week it was running due to the rain, but prior to that it was hole to hole—they weren’t connected. Now they’d be connected. As far as dams on Sonoma Creek, there’s one at Eldridge isn’t there?

15 A: Yeah. I’d like to go take a look at that. Do you know Bill Meglan?

B: Bill? I went to school with Bill. He’s a couple years older than I am.

16 A: I interviewed him last week and he was talking about that dam.

B: There’s another dam at Boyes Springs, at the park.

17 A: Larson Park.

B: Larson Park, yeah. But I don’t know how much water it stops.

18 A: Any idea when that dam was put in?

B: I couldn’t tell you the year, but it’s thirty years ago. And the one in Glen Ellen is—hey, time flies, that might be forty years ago[Larson Park dam], and the one in Eldridge might be twenty, twenty-five years old. Bill [Meglan] would know I guess.

19 A: Bill thinks that one was built during World War Two.

B: World War Two—that’s fifty years ago—no.

20 A: You don’t think it’s that old?

B: No, I don’t think so. I remember when it went in. They stopped all the steelhead from
going over and there was a big stink about it and the fishermen were going to blast it open. You know how talk goes—nobody really would have done it. Anyway, those guys would stand there and try to gaff these fish as they would jump. And the game wardens were looking over their shoulders.

21 A: Were you allowed to do that? [gaff steelhead]
B: Oh no, it was illegal. That’s why the wardens were there—they hawk it. No, no that’s all protected. But now, half the creek, none of the small creeks are open. I sort of disagreed with it because I had such a good childhood catching those little suckers.

22 A: Yeah, it’s too bad.
B: Hate to see it closed down, certainly. But they’re not being planted for the last seventy years, that hurts it too.

23 A: Do you know what kind of salmon they used to see?
B: I think they were king salmon. They were big babies. They were the dog salmon, the male just before they die they grow teeth and look mean. They were big, you know [showing length with hands]—thirty pounds.

24 A: So about thirty inches, thirty pounds?
B: Oh they go over thirty inches. They were a deep fish. Anyway, they’d go over thirty. Most of them aren’t, most of them are ten, twelve, fifteen pounds.

25 A: What other animals would you see along the creek?
B: Nothing special, tree squirrels mostly. Did see an otter once. No, not an otter—they’re about like this [showing length with hands]

26 A: A mink?
B: Mink [affirming]

27 A: I saw one of those in Glen Ellen, about ten years ago.
B: When we were kids we’d try to catch them. They’d have eaten our fingers off. Just recently, Hack Mathison saw two beavers down Sonoma Creek. Never ever had a beaver in Sonoma Creek as long as I knew. All of a sudden they come up with beavers and I said, ‘bull’. I went down and looked at the trees—beavers [were there].

28 A: Where is that?
B: Let’s see, Oak Street and then Walnut Street in El Verano—across the creek from there is the trailer park.
A: The trailer park that’s right next to the market [Maxwell Village]?

B: Yeah. The trailer park in the back. Well halfway down there, in there. That’s right where the beavers were operating. This was a couple years ago. I don’t know if they were there last year and I haven’t heard anything. They come around in the spring. But where do they come from? They can’t come out of the Sierras. One time I saw a porcupine on the plaza in Sonoma. Now where did he come from? Right there at the old El Dorado Hotel and the guys out there half-drunk going to catch him. So I had to park the car and watch and nobody touched him. If they did—I picked up a bunch of the quills. Now that’s something that’s never been in the valley—a porcupine. Saw that and I thought I was drunk.

A: I saw one once up in Yosemite one time.

B: They’re up in the Sierras. I deer hunt up in the Sierras and run into some porcupines, but not in the valley. Other than that I don’t think there’s any strange animals.

A: You ever see any bears?

B: I heard they had a bear once up on top of Cavedale [Road]. There was a bear not too many years ago, come down above Glen Ellen. I don’t know anything about it, it’s just what I heard. And you can believe it because up in Lake County there’s bears.

A: They might wander down the ridge.

B: Yeah that’s all, just stay in the brush awhile. I don’t think I’d like to run into a bear [chuckling]. Deer, lot more deer now than there was when I was a kid—a lot more.

A: Do you think there was more hunting?

B: Well there’s more homes and they’re protecting the deer. When we were kids, ten of us would hunt, I would be hunting with these adults, my Dad was in the group. If we killed two in a season, that was a pretty good season. Now, individuals go out and they can kill their two deer. Mostly now you got to poach them, unless you know a rancher who leaves you to hunt. But there is a lot more deer now, especially on this side, because you got Diamond A up there, all those homes. Everybody that has a home feed them whether they want to or not. They eat the garden they grow big horns, they look a lot better.

A: Ever see any mountain lions in the old days?

B: No, I hear there’s more of them now.

A: They’re more protected now.

B: They’re protected, yeah. If I ever saw a mountain lion when I was deer hunting I’d have shot him, nothing other than to get rid of him, because I figured he was the wrong kind of animal. Can’t eat him, but I did deer hunt for a long time, to eat.
A: Where were your favorite spots to go deer hunting?

B: Up in the El Verano foothills, above the golf course. I knew all those ranchers there. All the way from Grove Street to Spreckles Ranch. In fact the foreman on the Spreckles Ranch was a good friend of mine and I always had the key to go hunting when I wanted to, when Mrs. Spreckles wasn’t there. He says, ‘Make sure, now call me.’ That was good—she had a lot of deer there. Still does—lot of homes in there now.

A: That’s up Sobre Vista right?

B: Sobre Vista, yeah. That used to be Alma Spreckles place. There’s a lot of homes in there and every one is a mansion you might say. Beautiful gardens—that’s all animal feed. Turkeys all over the joint. One lady had about seventy-five turkeys, not hers—wild, maybe feeding ten bucks, plus how many does I don’t know. She didn’t want anything shot. So you hunt around her place, if you can get in on the neighbors. In fact her brother had acreage and he let us go in there.

A: Were there a lot of turkeys here when you were growing up?

B: No. absolutely not. I think the turkeys have been planted in the last twenty years. When I was growing up, turkeys were all raised like chickens. No white ones, it was before Nicholas, Nicholas come up with the white bird. But there was never a wild turkey that I know of. I was going to say wild goats, but the goats were tame that went wild. I think the old guy that owned them died and there was a whole hill full of wild goats for awhile.

A: Down in the creek, did you see many turtles down there?

B: Oh turtles, yeah. Oodles of French frogs. The frogs all come from Sobre Vista. There’s a lake up there and Spreckles had a lot of frogs. One winter I guess the dam went out and filled the creek with frogs, great big old things. We got two bits, twenty cents apiece. Go down and catch them. In Glen Ellen we found out on Warm Springs Road, Ernie Cambou’s Dad had a—

A: I live a hundred yards down from the old Cambou place.

B: He ran a French restaurant like, and he’d buy all our frogs. Twenty cents for a big one. I don’t know how much he made. I remember one day we had about twenty [frogs] and we [thought] “Jesus Christ, that’s only four dollars. If we get another nickel we can get five dollars.” In those days you had no money, no way. We held out for twenty-five cents and had to give them away. We wouldn’t sell them for twenty.

A: He wouldn’t buy them.

B: He wouldn’t buy them so we wouldn’t [sell them]. And Ernie Cambou and I were in the same class in High School. But this was pre-high school days, you know just young kids.

A: So we’re talking about late ‘twenties, early ‘thirties.
B: Yeah, I started high school in thirty-three. Three, four, five—I got out in six yeah. So this had to be about thirty, twelve years old or something. Turtles, I don’t think there were many, but there was turtles. In fact one made in my yard right here. I caught him over here and I don’t know how he got away from me. A couple months ago we mentioned it. I don’t know what happened to it, he just took off I guess.

43

A: Smelled water or something.

B: Well, I don’t have any idea. But he was right here in my driveway.

44

A: So what did Sonoma Mountain look like back in the twenties? Was there a lot of tree cover or was it pretty open?

B: No. I don’t think it’s changed, really hasn’t. The only change you can see is an occasional house. There’s no big clearing or anything. It looks the same to me.

45

A: Somebody told me a lot of it got cut down during Prohibition—people were operating stills up there and they cut trees.

B: [Shakes head in disagreement and points east]

46

A: Over here, Schocken Hill, that area?

B: Not Schocken, way back, top of Trinity, top of Cavedale. That’s where the goats came from too. That’s where every once in awhile you’d see a big blast of smoke going up—still blew up [laughs]. But those guys were hiding, they didn’t do any clearing. They’d get in a little godforsaken ditch. I know one guy ran me and Razor[nickname?] with a rifle. We were deer hunting—drive up the ridge and went over the ridge and back. You know where Moon Mountain Road goes up? If you go through that vineyard, there’s another vineyard in the back and the road continues up and over that ridge. We went down into there and the guy run us off at the point of a rifle. He had a still that’s all. We weren’t there to bother the still.

47

A: He was nervous I guess.

B: He was an eccentric old guy, hadn’t shaved in ten years—big beard [chuckles]. I’m sure they didn’t do any clearing. Oh—we had a fire in twenty-two [must be the fire of 1923]. It started in St. Helena. I don’t know if you’ve ever heard of that.

48

A: Yeah, I’ve heard of that one—it came all the way down.

B: Burned everything. That was in twenty-two. I lived in El Verano and we evacuated. In fact the last house that burned was my uncle’s, right on Arnold Drive and Grove [Street]. It came all the way through and stopped [there]. We were related to the Stornetta’s out at the dairy. So we evacuated to their place, maybe just overnight I guess. I remember the fire come over the hill. Next night it’s still burning, next night still burning, so we took off and the whole damn hill—I was four years old and I can remember that. Scary. It denuded that hill. I don’t think there was big trees. This side’s full of oaks and nice trees, up
there is full of chamise brush and rattlesnakes [chuckles]. You get over the ridge though, there’s redwoods and pines, everything up there.

49 A: Yeah the east-facing slopes are cooler than the west-facing ones.

B: Whatever it is, on the east side they had one canyon—lot of redwoods.

50 A: How long did it take for the vegetation to come back up there?

B: I don’t remember. But you know after a fire it only takes a couple of years. We had a fire thirty years ago, burned that whole ridge down to Sonoma and second year the grass is there, fourth year the brush is back.

51 A: So it’s pretty quick.

B: I think it’s pretty quick.

52 A: Any floods you remember?

B: Just the flood plain in Schellville. I built this [house] in ‘forty-two. I’m on a hill if you believe it or not. The highest place on West Napa Street is right out in front. So that’s good—there’s no flood. I’ll say one thing, you’ve got to realize it—a hundred years ago Sonoma Creek might have been, let’s say, [demonstrating with hands held close together] that wide and all the years of washing down, it’s that wide [moves hands apart]. The bridge at Verano Avenue, you know it extends all the way across, but the original bridge was only halfway. That’s how much it’s eroded.

53 A: Was the channel actually deeper in the old days?

B: I wouldn’t say it was any deeper, it’s washed away and made it wider. Why it would I don’t know—well there’s a corner, wherever there’s a corner, it would erode. But that bridge was built let’s say forty feet and then another forty feet was added on—eighty feet, maybe eighty feet or a hundred. Anyway it’s a lot wider now. Which actually prevents a flood—when it was narrow and you had a big rainfall it was high water. I don’t know how much truth was [in this anecdote], my Mom used to tell me that she could touch the water with an umbrella from the Verano bridge. So it had to be—she was born in San Luis Obispo—as a kid she was here in El Verano, so that might go back to 1900.

54 A: Do you have any idea if the old bridge that she did that on was lower than the current one?

B: I don’t think it was any lower. It was an old cement bridge like the one above Eldridge.

55 A: Steel?

B: Steel bridge. That’s what they had. Two piece—one piece and then the other piece
was added. But it was a lot narrower. Three inches of rain would fill it up and make a dangerous situation, but as far as flooding, I don’t think we’ve ever had that problem, except when you get down below Sonoma. Tidewater—whenever you get a high tide and a heavy rain you’ve got a flood. The fire house especially.

56 A: I used to deliver newspapers down there about five years ago and every winter there’d be a time I couldn’t get back in there because of the flood. Did you ever use any boats on this part [of the creek], in El Verano?

B: No. My uncle once told me there was boats in Boyes Springs, but I think he was full of baloney. How can you have a boat? You can put a raft in one hole, but you got a riffle, not enough water to cross the riffle. To have a boat you’ve got to have more like tidewater to come up or a big enough river that runs a lot of water. Kids have put canoes in, like in Glen Ellen before that dam. [garbled] I remember that, they’ve done that. But that was only in the winter when it was pretty dangerous to be out there anyway. I would think it should be too dangerous.

57 A: Yeah, all the stuff along the bank, if you get trapped in that you could drown easy.

B: Oh yeah.

58 A: In the summertime, between the pools—how deep was the water, you know the riffles?

B: In the summertime I would say it’s only a couple inches, two or three inches. It wasn’t very deep, you couldn’t float a boat or anything. You could cross it by just getting your feet wet. Now in the summertime I think it’s bone dry through El Verano, down through here.

59 A: In the old days would the fish get trapped in a hole—in the summertime they couldn’t go between holes or was there enough water they could go between holes?

B: Years back they could go between, there was enough water. Did Bill Meglan mention anything about Graham Canyon Creek? You know where that’s at?

60 A: Yeah, I’ve hiked up there myself.

B: You ever go up far enough to see where there was a dam?

61 A: Yeah.

B: That’s where they had a fish hatchery. The fish that they raised there are now in New Zealand. [spreads hands about eighteen inches] That big.

62 A: Those are steelhead?

B: Trout, rainbow trout, yeah. Well the difference between a steelhead and a rainbow is very little. If he goes back to the ocean and comes back, he’s a steelhead. If he stays in the
stream, he’s a rainbow. I think that’s about it. When he comes back in, he’s a slick, shiny fish. Where a rainbow has got all the markings. But I remember fishing up to that dam many a time. That Graham Canyon had good trout in it.

63 A: How about Nathanson Creek, did that have trout?

B: Nathanson Creek, the one that goes up Gericke [spelling?] Road. Yeah, sure. They all had them. Nathanson Creek now has got a bad problem because Schell Creek down in Schellville, they put a dam in to keep the—sewer water used to go in there. They keep that [dam] so the sewer water wouldn’t back up. Below the highway, the Schellville highway. So the trout, the steelhead can only run up there now at extremely high tide when they can get over the levee and come up. Because I know they still go up. They go up Nathanson, there’s another one way up by Bundschu’s [Denmark Street at base of Arrowhead Mountain]. There’s a little creek there you wouldn’t think there’d be any trout in it.

64 A: Is that Arroyo Seco, or another one?

B: I don’t know what the name of that one is.

65 A: Susan Bundschu is a friend of mine—I could probably ask her.

B: That’s the young Bundschu kid?

66 A: She’s a little older now.

B: Yeah—young Bundschu kid [laughs]. My kid and the Bundschu boy—Jim, they were in the same class and I was in the same class as Jim’s Dad, Towle Bundschu.

67 A: Susan’s father, right.

B: But I didn’t know Susan. In fact my wife was a housekeeper and cooked for the Bundschus back in the nineteen-thirties. You know when she was in high school. Like I say about the trout fishing, it was good years ago. I guess if they left the creek open now they’d be decimated—there’s more people. I could go fishing in any of these streams and very seldom ever run into anybody. If the creek was open today and you go up there you’d run into ten people—there wouldn’t be any fish. It’d wipe it out. So I guess the Fish and Game knows what they’re doing, preserving them anyway.

68 A: It’d be good if we could get back to a place where people could at least do some limited fishing. Maybe someday that’ll happen.

B: Right now Fish and Game, they raise millions of trout and they throw them all in lakes and the bigger streams. They’ll keep them fishable forever, but I don’t know about streams like this. I think it’ll only go downhill—more people and the more people will suck more water out of the ground or out of the creek. There’ll be less place for the fish.
A: In the old days do you think there was more tree cover over the creek than there is now? Or is it about the same?

B: No, I don’t think there’s any less, I don’t think there’s any more. You always had the creek run with brush or trees alongside. As the erosion comes, you’d [demonstrating with hand like a tree on the bank] fall down [referring to the tree], but those other trees would still be on the bank as it gets wider. So I don’t think there’s any difference. But I’ll tell you this—when the creek was a lot smaller and narrower, sure there was more shade in the creek. Now it’s wide—parts of Sonoma Creek are a hundred feet wide [meaning the whole creekbed]. Eighty feet of it is watching the burning sun. Get up on the hill and the brush is on all of the creeks. Take Diamond A—when they moved in there, they got a lot of homes in there. They sunk in a couple wells. Well that stopped the streams that were there, the springs that fed the creek—now they don’t feed the creek so the creek gets dry. Only up in the deep canyon would there be water year round.

A: That’s up Carriger Creek you’re talking?

B: Carriger Creek yeah.

A: That’s a pretty creek—I’ve been back there a couple times.

B: Caught my biggest rattlesnake up there. [Holds up hands to show length]

A: Wow--about three-and-a-half feet?

B: I don’t know how long he was—he had twelve rattles. He was a big baby. We were just walking down, we were deer hunting and we were walking down the creek because the brush was brushy and then he was right on our trail. He didn’t last long—I’m anti-snake.

A: When you look at the creekbed now, does it look any different—as far as the size of the rocks? How much silt or sand there is?

B: I don’t think so, I think it’s the same. [garbled] the difference, we used to have pits in the creek, where the landowner would take out [gravel]. You know all the gravel in the valley came out of the creek at that time. Serres had it, Wrobels had it.

A: Where was Wrobels’ place?

B: Wrobels long gone. Actually he had his plant—Curtin Lane. You go all the way down Curtin Lane, you hit the creek—he had a cement plant there. But his home was in Schellville, two hundred yards above the old railroad crossing. Before you get to Schellville you got that hump? That’s the railroad. Two hundred yards above there was his home. And they went down to the creek and got gravel for years.

A: That’s pretty close to Locust Grove, the old school?

B: Locust?
76  A:  Locust Grove—there’s an old school there.
    B:  There’s a school right on the corner there, by Sangiacomo’s vineyard. He [Warble] was below that old school. San Luis School.

77  A:  Actually there’s two old schools there—San Luis School, I think the house is still there, the house that was converted from the old school. San Luis Road is right across from there.
    B:  That’s correct. You know the area pretty good. But I don’t know the other school.

78  A:  It’s just a little downstream from there. It may have closed around 1900, but the building is still there. You can see it as you drive down Broadway, if you look off to the right, there’s a row of locust trees going into a real old looking building. I think it’s pretty much abandoned at this point.
    B:  I can’t place that. But I knew the old Watmaugh School and they had one at Huichica School. Those are all closed.

79  A:  You ever heard the story about the tornado that hit the Watmaugh School?
    B:  Yeah, oh yeah—turned it around or lifted it up or something. I don’t know when that was—I might have been in grammar school yet.

80  A:  I think that was 1928.
    B:  I would have been in grammar school. My wife might have been in school that day! [laughs]

81  A:  Is that where she went?
    B:  She lived out there on Sperring Road. Yeah I think that was pretty scary. I don’t know if any kids were in school that day or not.

82  A:  [shares account of the story from his book, The Stories Behind Sonoma Valley Place Names]
    B:  Yeah, I don’t remember anybody being injured. I wasn’t even sure that they were in class. But I figure in ‘twenty-eight I was in the fifth grade or something.

83  A:  What school did you go to?
    B:  El Verano. I was born here in Sonoma at the hospital. I can’t even think of the name of it now.

84  A:  Burnside?
B: Burndale. But we lived in El Verano. You know where Innskeep’s Bar is? Well the building next to it, I had a barber shop there—my Dad had a barber shop there since 1910. I was raised right there—we walked up to El Verano School. It was across Arnold Drive.

A: Behind that church I think—the building is still there?

B: The building is still there yeah. I went to a wedding there and I told the minister, I said, “Hey this is my basketball court!” First grade, second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth. The building is still intact. Now where’s the church?

A: I think it’s between the old school and Arnold Drive.

B: There’s no room—well there’s a lot of room, but I think that’s the old schoolhouse, I think the church took over that classroom because the wedding was in one of the rooms—the basketball court room. Then they added on a room here and in the back they added on.

A: Did you have any names for your favorite places along the creek? I was looking at some of the stuff your Dad wrote [Jordan Basileu had a fishing and hunting column in the Sonoma Index-Tribune in the ‘forties and ‘fifties] and he was talking about places like Helberg Hole.

B: Helberg Hole, that’s Wrobels’ home. He bought Helberg’s house. Down there you fish for steelhead legally. You can’t fish for them in the stream, but Helberg’s Hole was one of the pet spots, to Tire Hole. All that was in the salt water on a corner. The corners were better. You mentioned something about a swimming pool. The swimming hole in El Verano was right off of Oak Street, right on the corner there.

A: Did you have a name for that?

B: I don’t know if we had a name for it, it was just a swimming pool.

A: Could we sketch a little map, just to get an idea? [drawing] So here’s the creek, and you said—maybe you want to write this down. [pushing notebook to Bill] Let’s say this is the Verano bridge right about there [marking] and this would be Boyes Boulevard. We can go another page if that’s not enough room.

B: Well the creek isn’t straight, but that’s alright. [drawing] –Oak Street, and right here there’s a turn and this was the swimming pool.

A: Would that be dammed up in the summertime, is that how they would create the pool or was it just natural?

B: No, no it was just—fourteen feet deep, the kids would climb way up those trees and [making a motions and sounds like diving from a high place]. Never did learn to swim—the reason was all Eldridge sewer went in Sonoma Creek. My dad wouldn’t allow us to go in the creek because it was contaminated. So I never learned. But the valley kids all swam right here—I could go down there and watch them all, but I hardly got my feet wet. [drawing] If
here—I could go down there and watch them all, but I hardly got my feet wet. [drawing] If
that was the pool, this would be the bridge—

91 A: I’ve got some maps in the car, if that would be easier.
B: I don’t need a map because I walked every inch of this hundreds of times. There’s
West Napa Street right here—the bridge down here [junction of Petaluma Avenue and
Riverside Drive]

92 A: Was Helberg’s just a little below there?
B: Helberg’s was way down—

93 A: That’s right—you said way down in Schellville.
B: Helberg’s Hole—well let’s go way down here.

94 A: We’ve got another page if you need it.
B: That’s alright. Here would be the railroad crossing, that high spot there. Used to be the
bridge of course. Helberg’s Hole would be—[writing on map]. I don’t know whether I can
read that [laughing].

95 A: I can read that, yeah.
B: Helberg’s—OK.

96 A: And then Tire Hole, was that down there?
B: Tire Hole was way down. I’d have to turn the page—let’s do that. Now that’s
continuing from here. It would go down—I’m trying to figure here—and take a corner, a big
corner [drawing for many seconds]. That’s what we called the Tire Hole.

97 A: The 121 [highway] bridge, would that be [where]?
B: The 121 bridge would be right in here [still drawing]. I don’t know why I got this big
turn. Well this would be Millerick’s, the old Millerick home here. They got that in vineyard
now. Tire Hole, Pear Tree—whoops I don’t want that up there. [This spot] used to be the end
of the county road.

98 A: That’s that dirt road that goes south from Millerick’s? There’s a gate on it now.
B: There’s a gate, but that’s way up in here [showing on map]. They got that closed off—
actually shouldn’t be closed off. County road goes to here [pointed to a spot well downstream
from the gate].

99 A: Is that Wingo?
B: Wingo is way down further yet. But right here used to be a gate and that was the end of the county road. You go back thirty years ago, there was people fishing in the winter constantly down here. If they’d tried to close that stretch of the road then, they wouldn’t have been able to do it, because the people would have bitched about it. And being a county road it had to be maintained. But now I think Jim Millerick’s son-in-law, no, my brother-in-law I think, he closed it up, because he’s got vineyard in here and they own all this [referring to map, area east of Sonoma Creek in Schellville]. But if people fought for the road—nobody wants it now—nothing to go down there for.

A: I’ve launched a kayak down there with permission from, I forget who we asked, that vineyard down there, Sonoma Creek Vineyard [actually Sonoma Creek Winery]?

B: Oh yeah, it’s related to Millerick. I can’t even think of their name.

A: So is this Pear Tree Hole, right there [pointing to the map].

B: Yeah. I’ll write that down. It’s not a hole, just a corner. A lot of fish caught there and a lot of fish caught [garbled]—Tire Hole’s right here.

A: Was that one of the best spots?

B: Tire Hole was the best and then the Pear Tree was the best. Seems like wherever there was a corner—it might be a little bit deeper and cause the fish to lay up in there. As this goes through, it winds all the way down the [garbled] and the Wingo bridge. Then it’s all saltwater in here [downstream of Wingo].

A: Any other spots you remember? Good places to fish, good places to swim, or maybe just unusual.

B: Not down there [referring to Schellyville area]. That’s considered all saltwater down there, so you didn’t go down there swimming. [Looking at map] There’s the swimming pool, Oak Street swimming pool. There was lots of these holes that were deep enough for swimming. But I don’t think there was too many as deep as Oak Street where they’d climb forty feet up a tree, had ropes hanging down where you’d swing and ‘Wheee!’ [making hand motion like a kid swinging]

A: Sounds better than the skatepark [referring to skateboard park just opened at Maxwell Park].

B: Yeah [laughs]. Those kids in the neighborhood, they utilized it a lot, sure. Every other hole I would say was a swimming spot.

A: How deep were the other holes?

B: If you got eight, ten feet, that was a good swimming spot. There was one off—I remember I’ve been there a few times—off the end of Green Street in Kenwood. It runs right down to the creek? Right there was a swimming hole. I forget who the people were that
owned it, but I used to drive up there not to swim, to fish. Everybody let you get in you know. I’d just park there next to their house and go fish. That was one of the swimming pools—I remember the ropes hanging. But I couldn’t tell you how deep that was. Just about any hole, when you go all along the creek, kids would use it for swimming.

A: I don’t know if you can give me a number for this—-but you said there was a lot of holes—would you say there was an average distance? Like every two hundred feet you’d find another hole—

B: Some of the holes, like Oak Street, the creek took a turn here [referring to map], there was another spot just above Oak Street was pretty deep. But then you wouldn’t find another one until you got up by the El Verano Grammar School [now El Verano Elementary]. Those holes were shallow, except for that deep spot where the kids would swim of course. But they could be a hundred yards long. In fact the one up by the El Verano Grammar School was a lot longer than that I think.

A: Was that downstream from the El Verano bridge then? [A is confusing El Verano Grammar/Elementary School with the old one on Arnold that Bill went to.]

B: Upstream from the Verano Avenue bridge. I’m talking about the new El Verano Grammar[Elementary] School, it’s still thirty years old. Then you get to Boyes Blvd, a part of the creek I didn’t know too well, but they swam everywhere there was water. As for names for them [the swimming holes], I don’t think they had any names for them.

A: Did you ever find any Indian artifacts in any particular places?

B: Yeah, we used to have a burial ground above Mrs. Wyatt’s place. You know where Grove Street goes up? Before it crosses the creek, on the left there, I remember, three mounds where they had bricks stacked. In those days, you found them you never cared about them. Nowadays I got a couple friends of mine that find them all the time. Just go out of this world with a little piece of black flint [probably obsidian]. If you went up—I call it Fowler Creek, you call it Carriger Creek—if you went up Carriger Creek from Arnold Drive—

A: Starting from where the cement factory is?

B: Right where the cement plant is. You go up there, it makes a left turn, it goes around that brick fence and goes all the way back to the creek up over a little hill and into where the Indian grounds were. I don’t think there’s anything there any more. Mrs. Wyatt lived over here, across the creek. The people that own that could be the Van Hoosiers.

A: I was going to guess maybe it was up there—Westerbeke [Ranch].

B: Yeah, Westerbeke. It could be that they own that, because Felders [?] owned above that and down here. But I think that would have been Van Hoosier or Westerbeke. There wasn’t any other Indian ground that I knew of. As a kid, we never saved nothing. They had those bowls where they ground in them. You’d find stuff like that there.
A: Did you ever meet any Indians here in Sonoma? I’ve heard there were still a few Indians living here in the ‘twenties.

B: Yeah, but I don’t think they came from here—they were--you know Indian people. In fact my brother’s wife is half-Indian maybe. Yeah--her mother was full Indian, dad was English or Irish or something. They weren’t Sonoma Valley Indians. I don’t think there’s any Sonoma Valley Indians left.

A: You know Bill Churchill? His dad was Bud Churchill.

B: I knew Bud.

A: He showed me a spot up on Carriger Creek or Fowler Creek where there’s still a campfire ring. He said that was the last place they had a community.

B: That might the same one I’m talking about.

A: Yeah—I wouldn’t be surprised. It’s sort of an island in the middle of the creek.

B: This is off the creek a hundred and fifty yards or so. Bill, Bill died [meaning Bud].

A: Yeah, about six or seven years ago.

B: I gave Bill [Bud] a couple of canvas-back ducks once. And when I see him the next time he said he ‘never ever got anything so clean.’ Normally you know, you gut them, you clean them out—I took all the lungs out and everything. He really said they were first-class.

A: Do you remember any hot springs?

B: Boyes Hot Springs, that was all. I guess Agua Caliente had hot springs too. And maybe Fetters had them. They had the hotel and the pool and advertised ‘Hot Springs,’ so that whole section must have had hot springs.

A: You don’t remember any just coming out of the ground?

B: I don’t remember any, no. All up in the hills, everywhere you went, never got any warm water—[it was] all good cool drinking water coming out of the ground.

A: Would you drink out of the tributary streams?

B: I guess, I guess we did, but we had certain spots. Way up on top of Carriger Creek, back on the property, there was a pipe coming out of the ground. They must have put that pipe in there a hundred years ago. And that ran beautiful. ‘Iron Spring’ is what we called it. You take a glass, put it under there and get it full, it’d have rust floating in there. We thought that was good for you. I stopped drinking out of the creek when I was up in Lassen County once and I drank out of the creek—I didn’t drink, I didn’t want to drink, I wet my mouth, but you get enough in you, you get the craps.
119  A: That’s happened to me backpacking in the Sierras.

B: You find dead animals in the water.

120  A: Yeah, even if there’s no people around.

B: I found a dead cow in the water up there in Modoc County once after I fished all around below it. I’m glad I didn’t drink any of it.

121  A: Well—anything else you want to add at this point?

B: No. Like you say, if you think of anything else, just give me a call.
Interview with Robert “Bob” Cannard Sr.
At his home on 3rd Street East, Sonoma. July 30, 2001

B = Bob Cannard; A = Arthur Dawson

[Conversation begins with Bob talking about a poster of Milt Castagnasso that was made and marketed without Milt’s knowledge.]

1 B: He didn’t even know about it and this big poster’s for sale and lots of cards and what not you know. I think they wanted a thousand dollars for the original and a hundred dollars for the copies of the poster. The post cards were two and a half a piece. I saw them and I bought a couple and he had never even known about it.

2 A: Really? That’s terrible.

B: Didn’t even know about it. And this happens regularly to all of us. I mean, I know that a week never goes by that I don’t spend several hours with somebody on some local item. They’re trying to get information, they’re trying to get answers to problems or things that have occurred in the past that are occurring again and they haven’t been here long enough to know anything about it, or something of that nature. I spent more than a third of my life working for the public, and while Milt hasn’t spent that much, he’s eighty some years old. He’s very concerned about what little time he has and the things to be done that he wants to get done. You know he’s eighty-four. So I said, no, go ahead and send it in, it won’t do any harm. It can’t hurt you. But he was very reluctant.

4 A: Our plan is to put some copies of the transcripts in the library and make them available to people in the public that are interested.

B: Well, your project is worthy and I hope it gets some attention. It might get a little more attention through the local press because of Bill’s connection with the Ecology Center. I’ve done essentially the same study several times over the last forty years and it’s never had any attention. In fact he’s very reluctant to bring much information to the public because of his primary focus on furthering development in the valley. His ambition to see things grow. He doesn’t make much secrecy of the fact that he’s never seen a subdivision he didn’t like or he didn’t see a business he wouldn’t promote. I mean that’s been a four-generation thing. You can go back over the editorials and none of the editors during that period have ever denied that their primary focus was for rapid expansion as quickly as possible. This might get a little more attention, at least the fact that it’s available for people to look at.

5 A: Yeah. I guess on the other side of the coin, he is a fisherman.

B: Well he is a fisherman, but he fishes outside the valley. Bill knows the depletion of the water in the valley and he doesn’t quite understand some of the ramifications of things historically that have happened. But he does know that he fished in Nathanson Creek here for instance and caught fish. I can give you the names of people who caught big fish right here. Have you talked to Loren Sims yet?

6 A: No.
B: Well, Loren Sims, he’s caught plenty of ten-pound steelhead right here within a hundred feet of where you sit. [in a later conversation he said this was around 1955-60]

A: Really? Wow.

B: Yes, lots of them. You know where the General’s Daughter Restaurant is? There was a creek that ran between the General’s Daughter and where the school is next door and I could give you the names of people who caught lots of fish in that creek. And a bridge over the creek at that point that there’s no evidence of at all today.

A: Is that part of the creek all been channelized or put underground?

B: Put underground. The channelization doesn’t occur until after you get below Napa Street. However, the water in the creek has been bypassed and shunted to Sonoma Creek just north of the bike path. That water used to come through town, now it goes directly to Sonoma Creek there. Historically, that water never went to Sonoma Creek. That water came down and went into Schell Slough. I assume you’re aware that we just have two drainage systems in Sonoma Valley. The Schell or Sonoma Slough and Sonoma Creek, one in the east and one in the west.

What I think would be most productive--I read your questions and some of them do apply to me and some don’t. What I’d like to do is give you a historic overview of the situation as I see that it was. Let’s just use the term 1823 when Padre Altimira first came to the valley, and how it progressed through various periods and the effects that certain things that happened have had on the water table in the valley, the amount of water available, some of the historic uses of the valley water that aren’t in existence today. I think if we start right up at the upper end of the valley, at Kenwood it would be helpful to get this kind of overview. The valley in 1823 had an abundance of water. The water table was almost at ground level throughout the year in most areas of the valley. There were only a few areas where the water level in the ground wasn’t within just a few feet of the surface of the soil. Just a couple. Sonoma Creek would have gone down in the summer but it had an abundant amount of water running in it year round. And the reasons for that are this: In the Kenwood area, there was a five-thousand acre swamp that is no longer there. In the 1880s a man by the name of Griswald (check spelling) lowered the entrance to Warm Springs Canyon fourteen feet. You can go up and see that. You can photograph that if you like, and that drained five thousand acres.

A: Wow, where exactly would that spot…..

B: That was right there at the entrance to Warm Springs Canyon where you go down the canyon. You go down Warm Springs Road, make a left turn, dead end, and then make a left turn and then make a right and right there at the right where you made that second right turn is where the entrance to the canyon is. You can see where they blew out a dam, a natural dam, and it lowered the level fourteen feet, and of course, drained the valley. There were five major flumes that were built from the right side of the valley to the left side of the valley.

A: From the Mayacamas side to the other side?
CANNARD

B: Yes, from the right side to the left side. These five flumes are there today, [they] appear to be little creeks dumping into Sonoma Creek, which was pushed over against the hill on the left side of the valley at that point. Which would essentially be the west side although the road turns at that point and it’s not strictly north and south and east and west. However, from the right side, these five flumes--there’s one at Cypress Avenue and there are four more, and the last one is up at Clifford Rich Ranch that goes through just above Lawndale Road. There are five of these flumes. The Sonoma Creek just ran into this swamp and then ran out. It was sort of like a big swampy lake. Nobody knows where the channel was but it was pushed over in the 1880s against that left side of the hill. And that’s where it runs today.

A: Ended like at Green Street and then….

B: Yes, at the end of Green Street.

A: At the end, right.

B: Push right over against. These five flumes fed into it and they’re the drainage through the area today, instead of meandering through the swamp. Losing that five thousand acres of swamp of course, was a major recharge facility for the entire Sonoma Creek watershed, as it came on down the valley. Even in the late 1950’s the upper part of the valley was not deficient in ground water. It hadn’t gotten into the critical situation that, for instance, the area around Sonoma had.

Before the aqueduct was put in, in 1962, the ground water in Sonoma had reached a dangerous level. The city had problems with air pumps. The agricultural people couldn’t run the pumps at the same time, because the water level had lowered. We’ll get into that later. But Kenwood, even at that time, never had the problem because the dam across the entrance to Warm Springs [Canyon] was only lowered fourteen feet. So the water table didn’t go down more than fourteen feet. They still had that big area. And today, regardless of what the level of water is in the wells of Sonoma Valley, you ask the people in Kenwood, and it’s still as high as it ever was. Even with heavy, heavy agricultural pumping, they have difficulty getting down to a lower level. So we had that.

And then the natural thing for people as they came into the valley and built up to the level it is, is to drain their land. In other words, if you have a wet spot, whether it’s in a town lot, or whether it’s in a field and agricultural area you tend to grade it. Well the second major reason for losing the accumulating effect or the ability of the groundwater to recharge each year were the agricultural practices of the U.S. Department of Agriculture in the ‘30s to reshape the land. They were called Soil Conservation Districts. To reshape the land, to facilitate the runoff and to create ditches, steams, whatever, to drain the fields more perfectly, so that they could be planted earlier and more uniformly cultivated with the wet spots or the soggy areas that were in every place. In the city of Sonoma, historically, there was a wet zone that started up at the Castagnasso farm. Did he tell you of the two ponds or springs that were on his property?

A: Yeah.

B: Alright, they went from there, it came on down, right through this area. There was a high hump here along the creek, right on down. All of eastern Sonoma, from 3rd Street East,
there was a strip of swamp that went all the way to 8th Street and hit 8th Street at about Denmark, right at the Batto farm. In fact, the farm on the other side of the street from Batto, at Denmark and 8th, was called the Spring Ranch, because it was filled with springs. They channeled all those springs into one pond and used it for irrigation. There was this swamp. You can hear the stories, even from Bill Lynch. He would know of the swamp--right where his father and mother lived was one of the worst parts of the swamp. That was one of the early parts to be drained. The last part to be drained was down here where York Court is, 4th Street East. Between Patton and France Street. France Street ran dead end into a swamp until 1974 or ‘75. It’d dead end into a swamp. Then you got to 5th Street, between where it dead ended at 3rd, and 5th Street, there was nothing but a big swamp. In fact, the city anticipated putting a water storage lake in there at one time because of the natural depression that was there.

This swampy area extended all the way to the Sonoma Slough. It stopped at 8th Street because it had been drained by the railroad down into the slough at that time. The drainage on each side of the railroad took it from where it hit 8th Street, directly down to Sonoma or Schell Slough. From there it went on down to the bay. The three factors that I think are the greatest reasons for our depletion is: Number one--the draining of the swamp at Kenwood, which was a major recharge…..

A: Sounds like a big sponge up here.

B: Yeah, it was filled up there! It worked it’s way down of course, through the watershed from Kenwood all the way to the sea. The second, was the reshaping by the U.S. Corp of Engineers and the various soil conservation districts and our district extended exactly the flow of the Sonoma Creek watershed. It started there at the end of Pythian Road along Highway 12, and came all the way to the bay.

For years, and years, and years, they maintained heavy equipment here and it was out on every ranch in the valley to reshape the land, to facilitate the drainage. Instead of building swales to encourage the accumulation of water on the land so it could soak into the water table, it was run off, and ran off quickly and we lose it in the bay. It isn’t that we don’t have more than enough water in Sonoma Valley. It only takes ten inches of annual rainfall to adequately raise any crop in the world that is required to be raised. We have never had less than twenty, and it’s usually thirty. So we have more than enough water, both for people and agriculture if we just have enough sense to use it. But when you channel it off, when you run it into the bay before it has a chance to soak into the ground--Historically you might know, you might not have heard this from any other person except maybe Jim Metzger. Have you talked to Jim?

A: He’s on my list, yeah. I haven’t talked to him yet.

B: Well, you’ll hear from him that in no case can recharge happen in one year for the amount that you pump out of the water table. Whatever you pump out of the ground cannot be recharged in the following winter. So it’s been a worldwide known fact that when you pump a certain amount of water coming out, if you pump more than the recharge, the water table is going to gradually go down.

A: Sure, it makes perfect sense.
B: It happened in this valley. Prior to the aqueduct, we got dangerously low. We got [so] low that hundreds and hundreds of shallow wells went dry in Sonoma Valley during the late ‘50s. I would advise you to read the Index-Tribune, go to the library and look over the copies. It’s all on microfilm, it’s easy to read and read about the water. I’ve taken hundreds of copies of the letters that people have written, and articles that were written and public meetings that were held of the situation that was building up in the ‘50s. The late ‘50s and the early ‘60s until the aqueduct was put in. Then they all stop.

That’s the period of time that I came, the late ‘50s, and the water table began to rise. Because people weren’t pumping the water, we were using aqueduct water. The city actually contracted for more water than they needed. They were trying to get people to use water—the more they used, the more went back into the water table even if it was a small percentage. The water table came up, came up, came up, until about 1980. About 1980 we were finally pumping less out of the groundwater than we were letting come back in and so the water table came up, up, up, and it revived itself until about 1980.

Then with the heavy planting of grapes in the ‘80s and ‘90s, we started to pump more, the city started to use their wells, the water table has now gone down again. It’s down to the point where it was in the late ‘50s. We are now almost in the same situation we were before the aqueduct water came in. Increased population, increased agricultural needs, increased use of water for all purposes has now gone back down and the water table is finally going down. Recharge is the only long range answer and there’s only two things that will accomplish that: Where we use stored water for people and where we use the stored water that is brought in. Whether it’s stored in lakes here or brought in by aqueducts, it makes no difference where the water comes from, as long as we have stored water for people and we allow the water to get back into the ground.

We have to improve our practices of, for instance, of holding the water back in the wintertime. I have proposed all kinds of plans over the last forty years. Locks on Sonoma Creek. In 1970 I proposed four locks on Sonoma Creek that would hold the water back. Believe it or not, they could have been built for seventy-five thousand dollars each in 1968, ‘69 and ‘70. These locks would have held the water back. Then it would be opened up for the fish to migrate. The locks would never have been closed for more than two or three or four days. It would have eliminated the floods at Schellville and the rapid runoff which has been caused by this reshaping of the land at Schellville. They would be open for the fish migration in the summer. The locks would be closed and we would have had four major lakes between Leveroni Road and the State Hospital on Sonoma Creek. These four lakes would also have allowed additional water to soak into the ground. We would have had more ground water.

These lakes would have increased the value. Instead of having a blighted area in Boyes Springs, it would be the highest-priced real estate in the valley. Simply because there would be four major lakes in the streambed along it. This was pooh-poohed, not only by Bill Lynch’s father but by many of the other people in the valley. Can you imagine having four major locks for three hundred thousand dollars in Sonoma Valley that would save the water? Nobody had to save it in the ‘60s because the aqueduct was in. They laughed about it. “We have all the water we’ll ever need. We can’t sell half of what we’re allocated right now.” Some of the most shortsighted things that could ever happen. And today we’re suffering because of it. Smaller locks could have been put on the eastern watershed here in small areas that would have covered maybe no more than four to five acres. But they would have created pools of water that would have soaked into the ground, that would have increased the amount
of recharge we have each year. Until we do that, we’re just going to have a problem. It’s going to get increasingly worse, the groundwater table is going to go down. There’ll be greater intrusion from the sea. The eastern part of Sonoma Valley is now in a dangerous condition.

26 A: Yeah, Milt was telling me about that a little bit.

B: Who did?

27 A: Milt [Castagnasso].

B: It will get increasingly bad. I mean, the boron levels, sixty years ago, were nothing in this area. Today they’re dangerous--there’s a lot of land that you can’t use for agriculture anymore. You can’t use the wells for irrigation because of the boron in them, because of the intrusion. When you pump water out here and you have a big body over here, some of it is going to soak through eventually. Do you know that virtually every well, every well in Sonoma Valley as far north as Agua Caliente Road goes below sea level? Every well! We have a well right out here at three hundred feet.

28 A: And what is it here? A hundred and fifty feet elevation, or even less than that?

B: Less than that. Conceivably, in time, even a well such as this would be affected by the intrusion of sea water coming back in. Anyway, that’s a quick overview. As far as specifics in the valley, after Altimira came--you know that he selected the site down where the Cline Winery is, because there were two major springs there, a warm water and a cold water within a hundred feet of each other. That’s why we know the precise location from his diary, because it’s the only two major springs that were there a warm water and a cold water spring at that point. Those springs do not run today. There’s seepage but there’s recirculation that allows four ponds that use reclaimed water…..

29 A: Oh really? I didn’t realize that.

B: Well, most people don’t. And I’m not sure that they’ll advertise the fact to you. But I would tell you that it starts at that point and from there, further north at least until you get over the ridge into Kenwood, we have a critical water problem developing. The springs for instance, right here, one block just exactly, one block from here on 2nd Street, there was a major spring on that property that supplied all of the land. You know where the two Biggins houses are on 2nd Street?

30 A: I think so. One of them’s a bed and breakfast now and then across the street, that’s just been sold. [just south of the corner of Napa Street and 2nd Street East]

B: That’s true. Just behind the one that Cline’s just purchased. Not the bed and breakfast. Built by the Durhing family in 1858, this home was built there primarily because there was a major spring in the back yard of that property. It supplied all the water for all of the houses that developed in that two block area. Today, it doesn’t even show as a wet spot in the ground. There’s a well there which is a very good well but the spring is no longer there.
But that was part of that major movement of water, from against the hill here which of course the major Vallejo spring poured west and into Fryer Creek, rather than coming down and coming into Nathanson’s Creek.

31 A: So it sounds like there’s kind of a divide up there, somewhere up in Lachryma Montis and Schocken Hill. Some of it’s coming down here.....

B: Yes, no question about it. There’s a divide. The Schocken Hill water came down through here and went this way. From Lachryma Montis it went to Fryer Creek across the property. I can show you…. do I have that here? I probably do. I think I have a copy out here. I’ll show you where the spring once run by a photograph over, and how the city has killed Fryer Creek. You’ll be amazed. In fact, I’ll get it right away. It’s a series of photographs that I mounted up to show to the Planning Commission.

[after a long pause] See here’s a series of photographs on Fryer Creek that I’ve done. I’ll show you. This is where Fryer Creek enters Sonoma. This is up at the end of 5th Street West. You know where that chalet that now is a bed and breakfast is?

32 A: Yeah, near the Montini property? [northern part of 5th Street West]

B: Across the street. You go into the Montini property this way, you go up to the left. On Verano Avenue do you know where Pueblo Court is?

33 A: Let’s see....

B: That’s that first court to the left.

34 A: Yeah, ok. Near McDonald’s kind of?

B: Out towards that way. It goes out that way. Well, at that little chalet, they call it, there’s a dam and this was taken on 1/9/97. It runs a good part of the year. It probably wouldn’t be running now. I doubt it. But it runs at a heavy stream down through there. It then goes into a culvert which takes it out to Sonoma Creek instead of coming on through town as a creek.

35 A: And where is that culvert located?

B: Right at the end, it’s right at the city limits. If you turn in Pueblo. If you go up 5th to Verano, make a left turn and then make the first right turn you can. Which is only out there a couple hundred feet. You’ll go up into a little cul-de-sac which I think is called Pueblo. That culvert is at the back of one of those properties right at the city limits. Or you can see it from the other way if you go into the bed and breakfast and follow the stream down. It runs down directly into the culvert and that’s the end of the creek. This is another section of it. This is what happens to the water from Lachryma Montis. The Vallejo home—it [the water] comes down across the field.

36 Where the General’s Daughter is, the General built that for his daughter in 1863, and they called the area Willows Wild, which is of course the way the Spanish would translate “wild willows.” Willows Wild was the name of the home. It’s because there were willows
between Lachryma Montis and that home. It was a very shady, swampy area. The overflow from the spring at the house ran into that area down across the field. It now runs into culverts. This is right at the end of 4th Street West and Rosalie Drive. And this is the ditch—the General’s Daughter here, the barn is here and this is the ditch that was put in by the Haraszthys sometime in the 1870s or ‘80s.

37 A: So this ditch would be then to the east?

B: It would be to the east of the General’s Daughter. You stop at the General’s Daughter and go ten feet inside the fence and that’s what you see. It’s a dry ditch today. Now this is the view from the second story of my barn. This is where the creek used to run. It came from the Vallejo home here and this is Rosalie Drive here. It came across here and there’s a big eucalyptus tree here. It joined the branch coming down from 5th Street West, on down through, and this is directly west of where the cooking school is. This structure, you’ll see it came on down through here and went into a big five-foot culvert that the city put in to carry the old water of the creek. In addition to that, when they put the cooking school in, they had to dig through fourteen feet of creek bed gravel to get down to solid earth. There was fourteen feet of creek bed gravel at that point. I presented this to the Planning Commission with the idea of requiring the developer to at least leave an open area where the creek could eventually, --eventually these creeks are going to be restored. I mean, common sense demands that, in time, enough people will realize the loss. For instance, in Berkeley they’re restoring the creeks today that were put in pipes a hundred years ago. Santa Rosa is taking the [Santa Rosa] creek out of the trapezoidal ditch and the big underground channels and opening it up today.

38 A: Yeah, you can see that by the freeway there.

B: Of course you can. And these creeks will eventually be restored. I appealed to the Planning Commission. There’s plenty of room there. It wasn’t that there wasn’t plenty of room to have the cooking school and the creek. In my opinion, it was only good sense and good planning to plan for it now rather than have to tear it out fifty years from now. I’m not going to be here either way but at least we could have had the creek. You see the city had filled in, I don’t know whether you realize it, when you go out to 5th Street on Spain, did you ever wonder why the houses on each side of the intersection there as you go out 5th, sit much higher than the road?

39 A: I hadn’t thought about it, but when you mention it, I can picture that.

B: Of course. That was part of the mild break between the Sonoma Creek watershed and the Fryer Creek or the Sonoma Slough watershed on this side. Because Fryer Creek went all the way below town, crossed just below town and met up with Nathanson’s Creek and that formed the beginning of Schell’s Slough. Those two houses sit at least two to three feet higher than the roadway. The city, in about 1978 or ’79 leveled Spain Street at that point and dumped all that land in this area just north of, just to the right of here. Almost where the school sits.

40 A: The Culinary School.
B: Yes, from there on. From there north they dumped thousands of yards in that area and filled up the creek and put the creek in a five-foot pipe that ran on over and behind and through, between the Exchange Bank and Safeway. That’s where the creek [went].

41 A: I can picture there’s that old adobe on the corner of Spain—

B: Yeah, that’s not an old one. A fellow built that, but he did a good job. He was a vice principal with the high school. He made the adobes, and he built two of them. There’s another one on Spain and he made the adobes during his summer vacation and built those two houses. He lived in one and he built the other for his son but he never lived there. Anyway, the water came down through there. All of that watershed had been diverted. The water that used to come out of Lachryma Montis and flow that way, now comes down . . . it’s been stopped there so most of it seeps down and around the Vallejo home. The state dug a moat around the Vallejo home, put a sump pump in there and now the water goes down 3rd Street West. I wouldn’t even be surprised if they would be pumping water from time to time today. I haven’t looked at it in the last several months, but I keep an eye on those things. I know where the outlet is and I see the water running down and dissipates. Fortunately most of it goes back into the water table again. I mean it’s wasted, a lot of it evaporates of course, but at least it doesn’t run into the sewer.

42 Talking of the sewers, the sewers are another great drainage. Few people understand or even think about this, but in your investigation, I would strongly recommend that you get an opportunity to look in the transfer sewer lines. The ones that run across the natural drainage level, the ones that run east to west on Spain Street, on Napa Street. On every street that runs this way, those sewers catch the ground water as it comes down. Around the sewer pipe itself is gravel underneath and there’s a stream in every one. This does not come from water that has been flushed from peoples’ toilets, but is picking up the ground water and directing it away. These are an underground drainage system to our water table and it wastes literally millions and millions of gallons every year. These ones that run transverse to the natural slope of the water table.

43 A: Is the water sort of seeping in through, I don’t know, little cracks or . . .

B: No you see, you have to look at it a little bit under a picture. We have this reservoir of water which varies in height because of the permeability and impermeability of various levels and layers. But through it all we have a series of streams, we have a series of creeks which are really the arteries that supply the water. In the winter when they’re filled and bank full, the water runs back into the water table. It goes this way. People don’t understand how recharge takes place. The water table is low, the creeks are full, so the water goes that way. In the summertime when the creeks are low, the water in the hills comes this way. In other words, there’s a flow back and forth, back and forth and these transverse sewers cut across that. Essentially what they are doing is draining everything and most of that water, unfortunately goes down through the sewer system. That that’s underneath, I assume is shunted off, I can’t tell you. But it’s a drainage system that has been put underground all over the city and it drains a tremendous amount of water. You can understand what I’m saying?

44 A: Absolutely.
B: Alright. You’ve gotten to a couple good points. Now let me go back up the valley again. Once you get over that crease in the farthest part of the valley, at Kenwood, where they lowered the Warm Springs Canyon fourteen feet, you really get into a general area that has been affected by the supply and the demand. An area that the years have shown that if you take more out of the valley than you allow to get back in by percolation, then you’re going to lower the water table. That’s exactly what happened. There were springs up and down the valley. The oldest houses were built, if you look, around big springs, whether they were starting in Temelec or Carriger Ranch or wherever you were.

A: Lachryma Montis.

B: Any of them, the oldest. That was built in the early 1850s and he recognized it as a good source of water for himself. He decided he wanted to live in an American home rather than a Spanish home on the Plaza, Casa Grande, and picked the closest big spring there was, and acquired the land. And he actually had to buy that. That wasn’t included in any of the grants that he locally owned.

A: Oh really? Even his sixty-thousand acre Petaluma grant?

B: Yeah, well and also all the other grants. He owned about a hundred and seventy-five thousand acres in 1850, when we became a state. However, going back again up the valley and the supply and the demand. When the lands were first planted, whether to orchards, to vineyard, to row crops, no irrigation was necessary. None. In fact, the water table was so good that Haraszthy planted vineyards in the hills. He did the first so-called dry land farming. In other words, he knew that grapes can send down thirty feet to get water. Therefore he was able to plant even in the hills and no irrigation was required. And cherries were a big item in Sonoma Valley prior to the turn of the century. All of the cherries, all of the fruit, all of those kind of things were all planted where the water table was so high that percolation was sufficient to supply the needs of those trees. Why if you planted a tree out in any of those pastures today and thought it would get enough water, why it would be dead before the middle of July, the middle of June. It would be dead.

A: Do you think that’s one of the reasons—I’ve heard there were a lot of pear trees here back in the ‘fifties, do you think that’s one of the reasons?

B: Well there were, but that isn’t the reason. The pear trees survived the worst drought years of the late ‘fifties. They weren’t pulled out until after the end of the ‘sixties. The Sangiacomos owned the last big pear orchards in the valley and they pulled them out in the early ‘70s. So, no I don’t think the pear trees died from lack of water. They were irrigated at the end however. The prunes were a bigger crop in the valley than pears, and prunes suffered, but not critically. There are still prunes being grown, a few, in the Kenwood area up on Clifford Rich Ranch, and they’re not irrigated. There are walnuts grown there that are not irrigated. They just pulled out forty acres of walnuts between here in the valley and the city limits of Santa Rosa on the old--it starts with an F.

A: Frey?
B: No. It’s just above Lawndale Road. They pulled out forty acres. I’ve forgotten his name, but he’s an old friend of mine. Anyway, I don’t think the decline of the pears happened because of lack of water. I think it was an economic decision based on grapes being a more profitable crop than pears. Because the Sangiacomos had installed irrigation to those pears and that wasn’t a problem. However, understanding that the original crops did not need irrigation regardless of what they were. [They] did not need irrigation because of the abundance of groundwater.

The water table was so high—in most cases in Sonoma Valley, it would not have been more than, at the most, two feet in the wintertime underground, or less. And in the swamp areas it would be above ground, in large areas of the swamp area, to no more than ten or twelve feet, at the most, in the summertime. That was not enough to effect a crop that was well cultivated that encouraged the percolation to occur. The movement up through the soil and evaporation. Of course the more you cultivate, the more you stimulate the breakdown of the organic material in the soil, the richer the amounts of food available to the plants, and this drew up the water from the bottom and the land was able to be used.

One of the biggest things that has occurred so gradually that people don’t realize how many species of plants have virtually disappeared from Sonoma Valley. I walked the Sonoma Creek from Wingo to what is now Sugar Loaf Ridge State Park several times in the late ‘60s and early ‘70s and did a survey of all the plant material, whether it was native or whether it was introduced.

A: Do you have that written down?

B: I supplied that to numerous people. I don’t have a copy. The last copy I had, I gave to a man who was working on the creek. He lived up there in that area where Armand Franquelin’s property was. As you cross Sonoma Creek on Napa, there’s a big development back into the left. [may be with Jesse Longacre papers at Sonoma State].

A: Franquelin with a Q, spelled with a Q.

B: Yes. He was doing a good job. He was doing work on putting a bypass in Sonoma that would go up along Sonoma Creek. And I gave it to him, I never got it back, I don’t even have his name. That was the last copy. There were other copies, quite a few other copies made. But I did two detailed surveys with numerous students and we surveyed every species of plant that was here, both introduced and native. We noted all the dump sites and raw sewage inflows and things of that nature, between Wingo and Sugar Loaf Ridge State Park of Sonoma Creek. Today if you walk that creek you would hardly find a big leaf maple in that whole stretch of creek. They’re just sporadic. There were still lots of seedlings coming up at that time, but they require summer water. They require a lot of water. Another species besides the Acer macrophyllum would be a Western Sweet Shrub, Calycanthus occidentalis.

A: Oh, is that the Spice Bush?

B: Yes. It was common. There are still many of them in the auxiliary streams coming in shaded areas on both water sheds. You’ll see quite a few if you go up towards Buena Vista Tasting Room, on the left side. You’ll see lots of them up at the State Hospital.
A: In Glen Ellen too.

B: Yes, you’ll see them there. However, at one time they were one of the primary undershrubs. They were so thick. Today, it’s not rare, but it’s not common. In the Santa Rosa Creek watershed and the Rohnert Park area where they really destroyed the natural ecosystems by pumping the water down so low. Forty years ago, Big Leaf Maples were common. I mean if you drove down the Old Petaluma Hill Road, they were common. They were the main scrubby shrubs that were coming up all along the Petaluma Hill Road on both sides. Today you won’t find one! I mean, I’ve looked purposely as I’ve driven and can’t find one. Even the big ones have all died. It doesn’t take much. Some plants are fragile. Some plants have very little tolerance. Other plants have a great deal more.

The Oak problem, the Tan Oak problem, the Madrone problem, all of these so-called virus problems, that are effecting the oaks today, are part of an overall plan. I am not as concerned as many people who are very familiar with the problems because every plant has a cycle. I mean, if you’ve been observing you can see that some years you’ll see, “Gee, aren’t all those Lupines or all those California Poppies, there are so many of them.” The next year you go back, there’s none, or very few. The Lupine and the California Poppy have about a five to seven year cycle and they build up, build up, and there’s this culmination of magnificent display. Then they don’t produce very many fertile seeds. Because of the crowding they don’t need it and only a few are seeded and you can start to go through the cycle again.

It’s even evident in the biggest and the oldest trees. You take the Redwood trees and a Redwood tree in a Redwood forest will produce millions and millions of seeds but you won’t get one of them to germinate. You take an old Redwood tree out in the middle of a bare field on the edge of a fence row and every seed, practically, will germinate. This is just one of the responses that nature has to protect itself from overpopulation. If all those big Redwoods in the Redwood forest all produce viable seeds, they’d kill everything else.

A: I have this impression from the studies I’ve done, that the hills are actually more brushy than they used to be. Would you agree with that, or not?

B: I’ll show you some pictures. I just happen to have this book of mine back. I usually keep it up at the society. These pictures were taken in 1882.

A: Wow, I’ve never seen this book before.

B: No, nobody else has any of these. These pictures were taken by an excellent photographer in 1882. There’s that picture of Milt taken and he didn’t even know it.

A: Yeah, I can’t believe they didn’t…….and they used his name and everything. That’s pretty low. [conversation here is momentarily diverging from the book to the postcard mentioned at the very beginning of the interview.]

B: Yep. He never knew. I showed it to him yesterday. [returns to the book] The photograph was used, it was part of the promotion to promote the town of El Verano in the 1880s, a new town, for the Sonoma Valley Railroad Company.
A: Was this part of Maxwell’s venture?

B: Actually it was before Maxwell. These are some bonafide shots looking southwest from the Eastern foothills across the lower portion of the valley. You’ll see an abundance of plant material where no plant material could grow today.

A: There’s Sonoma Mountain. So some of this does seem more open than it is today.

B: Well, there’s some better photographs in here. These are fence rows and what not, so we can assume that these cultivated fields looked exactly like those. You see, there was brush all over the valley. There were big trees and there was brush. It’s evident to anybody that there was a lot more water in the valley when these pictures were taken. The only areas that aren’t brushed over are the open agricultural areas. You’ll see some of the big trees.

A: You were talking about cherries, there’s a cherry orchard right there.

B: Yeah, cherries were a big item in the early part. These are the flatlands but it doesn’t show much on that. A few of the trees, this obviously, has all been cleared. There are some good pictures here, later on, looking out over the valley. These are the first Eucalyptus trees I think planted in Sonoma Valley. It looks down from Carriger. I’ve looked several times trying to find those trees and I haven’t been able to. I’ve been thinking of trying to identify the exact location and putting a GPA [GPS?] on these and taking a current photograph, so that a hundred and twenty years from now, people would have successive views. Now this will give you an idea of what the valley looked like. These oak trees here, this would have been looking out over towards what is the Leveroni ranch today. These trees are nearly all removed. And in the in between area there’s been a lot removed, obviously.

A: This is probably a streambed here, where the trees are.

B: I think it is. And it’s a low area there that is now a stream. Those streams were all formed. They shaped the land into those streams. That’s what the soil conservation did.

A: I’ve looked at some of the old Spanish disenos and they seem to fairly consistently show trees mostly along the stream courses and not too much in between.

B: That’s true. This is up at the Vallejo home. I knew this fellow. Yeah, Dal Emparan.

A: So he remembered Vallejo then, I’m sure.

B: Yeah, he was the grandson of General Vallejo. This nice little treehouse. . . . that tree is still there. Most of these trees were still there in the 1950s and ‘60s. The state has effectively killed many.

A: That’s all lawn now isn’t it, more or less?
B: Much of it, not all of it. The big Camphor tree that he planted in 1858, they killed by overwatering. For three years they let an irrigation head run on it. I told them I’d repair it, I’d pay them to get it fixed, I’d give them the money to fix it themselves, they turned down all of it. Lost the biggest Camphor tree in Sonoma Valley. The stupidity of the State Park System can hardly be exceeded. These are all views of . . .

67 A: There’s Lachryma. There’s the reservoir, it’s still there.

B: There’s some pretty good shots here. This is a shot. I have enlargements of that. That’s the General’s Daughter house and that was a barn. I had this blown up and it shows it very, very clearly.

68 A: So are these the willows you were talking about?

B: The willows were between here and there. This had been virtually cleared by the Haraszthys by the time this was taken. It was cleared.

69 A: Oh right. You said this was built in 1860.

B: Yes, from the 1860s to the 1880s, 1882. These are fig trees and they were still there a few years ago, remnants of them. I don’t know if they are today. This is the building I offered to rebuild with the original bricks from the Mission and the city turned it down, up on 1st Street West.

70 A: Is that what was called the jail, the calabozo?[spelling?]

B: That’s right. Where they put that cinder block building in there just above the Police Station?

71 A: I’m not that familiar with that area, but I generally know where you’re talking about.

B: Just above the Police Station, they put in a cinder block building the last few years and that’s where the jail was. We found the foundation, we did the excavation and I wanted to use the bricks that came from the original Mission instead. They wouldn’t let me do it so I built the shrine down at Cline’s Winery. Are you familiar with that?

72 A: Yeah, I’ve been in there. Now where was this, C.F. Leiding?

B: I think that was east of town. [Thompson’s 1877 map confirms this location] I think that was on 8th Street East. Most of these are just residences that paid to have their picture taken.

73 A: That’s probably how they funded the book, I suppose.

B: Oh it is, sure. This one is the [garbled, sounds like Yule] residence up near El Verano, where Valley Mart is. You know where Sonoma Market is? Right where Sonoma Market is. [on another page] This is the big house just east.
A: Oh yeah, Buena Vista.

B: This of course, is Temelec. That building is still there.

A: What do you know about the history of Temelec?

B: Well, I know what the history is. Colonel Rodgers built the building with Chinese labor. He had made his money in the gold fields and lost most of it. Lost Temelec for that matter, was sold for mortgages. You know there are lots of stories.

A: This is Glen Ellen probably, huh? Hill.

B: McPherson yeah. The Hill property. The Hill ranch was part of the Jack London purchase. He bought that when he bought the rest of it. This would be looking across [the valley], looking south.

A: So, is that the railroad track?

B: I think so.

A: So Arnold Drive would be somewhere right in there.

B: Showing Sonoma Mountain, vineyard, and hayfield on the eastern slope.

A: So there was a lot of trees up there at that time. Milo Shepard was telling me that he’s pretty sure that the mountain was logged off, the Redwoods were logged off by the 1880s, at least the first growth.

B: I think so. I think Redwood Thompson took them off. There was a fellow that lived up there on Enterprise Road, it was the last piece of land to go through escrow in Sonoma County that was in the original ownership prior to 1846. It was on the corner of Enterprise and Sonoma Mountain Road.

A: Yeah, I know the house actually.

B: Yes, Redwood Thompson built that, and his granddaughter. I read that twenty some years ago. [new page] Sobre Vista. This of course, was developed into the Spreckles operation. They’re interesting photographs. They’re the only really good photographs we have. “The panorama from eastern slope of Sonoma Mountain, looking southwest across Sonoma Valley, showing Redwood, vineyards, olive, chestnut, and walnut orchard of Colonel Hooper.

A: There’s Redwoods I guess. Are these also Redwood?

B: They look like it the way they’re clumping there.

A: Yeah, they don’t look like Douglas Fir so much.
B: These are good photographs simply because they're a record.

83 A: Yeah. I have a scanner. I was wondering if sometime I could come and scan these photographs?

B: You certainly could scan a few of them if you like.

84 A: It’s a portable scanner so I could come here and the book wouldn’t have to leave your house.

B: [reading another caption]. Winery and vineyard. That’s the Glen Ellen Winery. It doesn’t show the railroad in there yet.

85 A: From what I’ve heard—is this the creek? Between the picture [meaning photographer] and the [winery]? As I understand it, and you probably know, the railroad ran along where the path is in the regional park. There was a bridge across to the winery, where they could take the wine across.

B: Yes, that’s right. This tree was here until a few years ago. I wish I had gotten a picture of it. It was out at the end of . . . if you’re going up to Diamond A, after that first big S turn, it was off to the left.

86 A: Pretty close to Carriger Creek then.

B: Very close.

87 A: I was up in Sugar Loaf a couple of weeks ago and there was a tree up there I didn’t recognize. A friend of mine said it was an Oregon Ash. I was curious if you remember seeing those.

B: Yeah it could be. We have several ashes here in the valley. Actually Oregon ash is not uncommon. Was it a big one up there?

88 A: Yeah, some very large ones up there, right along the campground.

B: I wouldn’t consider it unusual to find Oregon ash up there.

89 A: Do you remember when you walked the creek from Wingo up to Sugar Loaf, do you remember seeing quite a few of those?

B: Oh yeah, Oregon ash--I would say the most common Ash in Sonoma County is Oregon Ash. So yes, we mapped the thing in segments and the number increased as we went up the creek obviously, but Oregon ash is not an uncommon tree here. [looking at another picture] This is the creek at El Verano. That would be at Maxwell farm.

90 A: So you can see some willows there and oaks.
B: Probably oaks, maybe a Honey Locust. Doesn’t look like an Almond tree. Over here on this property on 2nd Street, is the biggest Almond tree I’ve ever seen. Also perhaps the biggest [latin name] in the United States. There’s [same latin name] over there. This is right in El Verano. I guess that’s the last one [closing the book]. That’s the most authoritative. There are only two copies of this known. The Bancroft Library has one with many of the same photographs and a few additional ones. Many in this that aren’t in that, and a few in that that aren’t in this one. If you have any specific questions, I felt that it would be better if I gave you an overview of the whole picture. Maybe you didn’t need that.

A: That was good. You provided a lot of good information. I just have a few specific questions I was thinking of.

Notes from A: Due to some mistake of mine or an electronic glitch, the second disc I put in the recorder did not pick up anything. Luckily, only about 10 minutes were lost and realizing the problem shortly after leaving Cannard’s house, I was able to recollect the gist of what he said:

I asked: What were his experiences with fish or fishing on the creek? Bob said he never did much fishing on Sonoma Creek due to the fact that it seemed to be getting fished out. He did mention seeing three dead or dying salmon on Fryer Creek where it crosses MacArthur Street, “within the last 15 years.” He described them as “24 to 30 inches, ten to twelve pounds.” He also mentioned his kids catching a steelhead in Kenwood by flipping it out of the water with a stick. At a later meeting with Bob, he added some details to the Loren Sims story [Cannard—6], saying that he was catching those 10-pound steelhead in Nathanson Creek in the 1950s up to around 1960. Expansion at Sebastiani Winery in the ’50s and ’60s polluted Nathanson Creek and led to the decline of the steelhead. Cannard reported seeing small trout in the deeper pools into the early 1970s—he was unsure if very many survived long enough to go to sea (and return as spawners). After the 1970s there was less damage to Nathanson Creek because of pollution controls. In the summer, Nathanson Creek channel doesn’t go dry until Patten Street.

I also asked if the flooding in Schellville has gotten worse. He felt that it has, due to land use practices which encourage run-off. (His locks-on-Sonoma-Creek idea came in here—he mentioned it in detail earlier.)

Cannard recalled a story told by August Pinelli, a Boy Scout. Robert Poppe was their leader and he led a hike with his scouts to the Russian River every summer. First night they would camp under the Franquelin Bridge. Pinelli remembered Poppe reaching up while standing on the creek bed and touching the beams of the bridge. He was a fairly tall man, so he might have been able to reach up to 8 feet. This incident was about 1912. Cannard felt that the channel was being cut more deeply—now the creek bed is twenty or thirty feet below the modern bridge. In our later conversation, he said that gravel mining in that area lowered the gradient from there to tidewater, thus making a flatter, shallower creek without so many deep holes. Formerly it was more of a riffle-pool configuration. After gravel mining it became mostly one long riffle. He also mentioned how gravel mining changed the bank structure of the creek just upstream from the Franquelin Bridge: behind Farrel’s Lumber the channel has widened considerably in that area. Cannard talked of watching the banks give way there at high water, sometimes “a couple of feet in half an hour.”
In the later conversation, Cannard also mentioned plank dams at Agua Caliente and Boyes Hot Springs to create areas two or three feet deep, enough to float small boats. There are some old postcards showing this.

Said he believes it was Griswold who blew the natural dam at the entrance to Warm Springs Canyon. It’s probably in Dee Sands’ book on Kenwood.

SSU should have Jesse Longacre’s stream survey from the 1960s or ‘70s. [mentioned at Cannard—50]
Interview with Milton “Milt” Castagnasso
At his home on East Spain Street, Sonoma. April 4, 2001

M=Milt Castagnasso; A=Arthur Dawson

1 A: Tell me a little bit about how long you’ve been in Sonoma.
M: Well, my family came to this valley around 1860 or before. I still have the land where my grandfather settled, the first parcel.

2 A: Is that this parcel here?
M: No. Up the street there’s what they call “The Patch.”

3 A: Oh yeah, there’s a little garden?
M: Yeah. Well that’s where he first settled. I still have that. So we’re not the oldest family, but we are one of the older families in the valley. That’s about the story on us, we have been here a long time. I’m fourth generation, my grandson and granddaughters are sixth generation. And then we have great-grandchildren who are beyond that, seventh [generation]. We’ve seen a lot of things in this valley, good and bad or whatever.

4 A: Where did your grandfather come from?
M: Genoa, Italy. He came to San Francisco as all those people did. They came to San Francisco and then they went down to Colma where the vegetable gardens were. All down there that was [an] agricultural sort of thing. That’s where they got a foothold, got started, and from there they branched out. There was relatives of my grandfather around here too. The Tuscano Hotel was Mrs. Chuchi [sp?], [she] was my aunt. On the corner of Napa and First Street East, the Boccoli [sp?] family, that was more of my relations. They were all people who came here early on. We had land all around. I guess I’m about the only one that kept any of the land. As times got better, you know—the smell of money turns people’s heads. Sonoma always was pretty much a poor community. There was a few moneyed people here, but it wasn’t a very prosperous community. It was a poor community and when things got better why a lot of people decided the money was the most important thing and then they disposed of their holdings, land, things like that. But my wife and I, we decided that the land was the most important to us. That’s how come you see this quarter block here, a half a block from the city square. That surprises many people when they come to town to see something like this, this close in. ‘What are you doing here?’ you know. Anyway, that’s kind of how things started.

5 A: When you were growing up did a lot of Sonoma look like your plot here? Small farm, pasture . . .
M: I’ve seen many things happen. Sonoma’s filled up now you know. There wasn’t anything like this even, when I was growing up. Good Lord, the street out here wasn’t paved or anything. Spain Street wasn’t paved. Just many things like that. Sonoma’s police
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a one man situation [laughs]. We called him the “constable.” That was all the law enforcement they had here.

6 A: What was his name?

M: Jim Albertson. He held court in one of those director chairs in front of Breitenbach’s Harness Shop on Napa Street down there. He always wore big ten-gallon hat and a swallowtail coat and cowboys boots and striped pants and had the pants tucked in a bit. Carried his six-gun on his side. I remember him. He lived down Broadway a short distance. That was one of the first. He took care of any law enforcement that was needed around town, which didn’t amount to much. That was in the early days. I remember as kids we played marbles in front of the courthouse down there. It was kind of sandy out there and it was a good place to play marbles. We played there, we brought our bicycles down and gathered there you know, half a dozen or more of us. Albertson was sitting over there in front of Breitenbach’s Harness Shop. Every once in awhile there’d be a scuffle arise over our game of marbles or something, we’d get a little out of hand I guess, get into some kind of a kid scrap you know. [chuckling] Old Jim would be sitting over there and he’d look across and see what was going on. He had a big booming voice—you could hear him for three blocks. He’d let out a holler and we’d leave on our bicycles and we were gone! [laughing]. I remember those times.

7 A: Would that have been back in the ‘twenties?

M: Oh hell, before that even. Early ‘twenties yeah, ‘twenty-one or ‘two, ‘three, like that. In that era. The park wasn’t much. There was sidewalks in there pretty much, a few sidewalks, but there wasn’t much of anything else. The courthouse was, as I recall, it substituted for the fire department and the jail. It had a cell or two in there and that was about the story on that. Once in awhile the locals would get around in the springtime like now and mow the grass or cultivate some of the ground around there, but there was no--the first thing, there was a little bit of lawn right here on this corner right down here [referring to corner of Spain and First Street East]. That was the first kind of decoration they had. That was about the story on the Plaza, it wasn’t very much in those days.

8 A: Were there chickens running around at that time?

M: Well, [amused] there was cows grazing around here and stuff like that, right there where that Mercato is now, that was all open over there. Mrs. Viviani, she used to pasture her cows across the way there. One of the kids would watch them and guide them you know. That was pretty close to the middle of town.

9 A: Were the cows fenced in?

M: No, no. There wasn’t any fence around there at that time. Down here on the corner, across from the mission, where that Vanesa [sp? maybe Viansa] has their place. That was a vacant lot for many, many years. I remember when they built that part of the building. Then the Pinelli buildings were there. Things like that. And on down there wasn’t too much. There wasn’t very much in Sonoma. The railroad at one time ran right up Spain Street here.
A: I’ve heard that yeah. Do you remember that?

M: No. They moved that before my time. The story that I got, one of the Fischettis [sp?] had an accident or something on that railroad along here. I think the Wiles [sp?] pushed a lawsuit against the railroad company and they forced them to move it up where the bike path is, where the depot is now. My grandfather gave them some land up here to go through his place and on and on all the way down. That’s how that got moved.

A: So you were born here in Sonoma?

M: Oh yeah. Just up the street.

A: Mind if I ask what year?

M: It was in ‘seventeen. Anyway that’s the official. My aunts disputed that for some reason or another, they thought the date wasn’t quite right. But I think it was. Maybe by the month it might not’ve been exactly so, but I think ‘seventeen is pretty much it. The house is still in part of the family, up here right across the street from Vella Cheese. There’s a little house right there, right next to the bike path. That was my aunt’s house and that’s where I was born. Any other questions that I can help you with?

A: I’m especially interested about the creek. Did you have some favorite places you liked to hang out?

M: Oh yeah. We hunted and fished in those days extensively, as kids you know. As we were growing up why we always swam out here at the end of Spain. Right there where Sonoma Grove is. The creek makes a kind of a turn in there and there was a good swimming hole there. We always swam there. The thought of going to the bath house or something, up there Boyes Springs or Fetters Springs or Agua Caliente, during the Depression why you didn’t have fifteen cents to go into those public places, so we always swam in the creek. We never did much swimming down below. But down as far as Wedekind’s, we swam down there some. But that was always the favorite one, out there in El Verano. Then there was another one just up the creek a little bit further, where the creek made another turn up in there. Kids from around El Verano swam it. Right across from where the Rovis [sp?] lived. There was a swimming hole in there.

A: Do you know Bill Basileu? I interviewed him a few months ago.

M: Oh yeah. How’s Bill?

A: He’s doing pretty good. Sounds like he’s got a girlfriend. Plays cribbage with her a few times a week. Sounds like he’s doing OK.

M: I know Bill. Bill’s Dad had the barber shop in El Verano for a hundred years. And hen Bill’s Dad was an avid fisherman. Bass fishing. He and my uncle George, they always fished all the time and hunted all the time. Oh yes, I know Bill.
16 A: He mentioned a swimming hole in El Verano, probably the same one you’re talking about, right at the foot of Oak Street?

M: Probably. Where Oak comes out and abuts into Riverside [Drive], is that correct?

17 A: Yeah.

M: Where the road makes a sharp turn there, right down in there was always a good hole. That contingent always swam there and we always swam down behind Sonoma Grove a little further down.

18 A: How deep was that pool at Sonoma Grove?

M: Oh well, we found pools that was eight, ten feet deep. Not all, but every now and then as the creek made a turn or something, then you’d get those kind of things. Al Dutill [sp?] owned property there that adjoined Sonoma Grove. Al Dutill’s place was out on Riverside there, just past Nicholas [current corner of Riverside and Petaluma Avenue]. He had walnuts in there and things like that. He was a baker. He rented my grandfather’s building down there on Broadway just below where that music store is. There’s a couple of brick buildings right there?


M: The next one down was my grandfather’s. He built that. Al Dutil ran the bakery shop underneath. Al had the place out there on Riverside Drive.

20 A: Was that close to Franquelin who lived out there?

M: Franquelin was kind of across the street. As you go that way. Directly across from Dutill’s was—he was on the city council for a number of years—Riboni. That was Riboni property across the street. Al’s was on the north side. My father was in the gravel business for a long while in those days. One of his pits where he got gravel was out at Dutill’s. Sonoma Grove sold gravel, but they was across the creek. In those days, I don’t know how they do it now, but property owners from one side owned to the middle of the creek and the other side owned to the middle of the creek. That was the scheme. My father hauled a lot of gravel out of there. Down the creek was the Hall Ranch [sp?], right at the end of Broadway. Where Broadway makes a very sharp [turn]. Well right straight in, Sangiacomo’s I guess. That was Hall Ranch. There was another pretty good size gravel pit down in there. We never swam down in there much. But my Dad hauled gravel out of there for many, many years.

21 A: Did your Dad use machines? Or did he just have guys with shovels?

M: Hell no. A number three scoop and a strong back, that was how you did it. I still have a couple of wagons out here that they used to use for those kind of things. I kept some things from each era, kind of a remembrance of how things were.

22 A: When would you say the gravel mining stopped on the creek? Or started to decline?
M: Oh quite some time [ago]. Serres had something going on up there too, early on. But I don’t know exactly. When the valley turned to mechanical, Sonoma Creek kind of died out. The Russian River Basalt sort of came into the picture, supplying aggregate to everybody. They came into the picture and it kind of ceased getting anything out of Sonoma Creek. Things went to mechanical age. Times change you know. How should I say it? The pick and shovel sort of begin to fade away. And you moved into the mechanical world. I don’t know if I’m getting ahead of you, but talking about this gravel mining situation, in the lower regions of Sonoma Creek, I think it was every other year a gravel dredge would come up Sonoma Creek and dredge Sonoma Creek as far as the S.P. Bridge [Southern Pacific Railway].

23 A: Would that be the railroad bridge at Wingo?

M: No, no. Sonoma Creek’s over here. You know where that truss manufacturing place is down on lower Broadway? On the left there?

24 A: Yeah.

M: Southern Pacific Railroad came through there.

25 A: Right—there’s still a hump in the road there.

M: Yeah. It came right through there and crossed Sonoma Creek right there and then they came up the valley to Santa Rosa. This gravel dredge would come as far as that bridge—that bridge is gone I guess now—but it came as far as there, and that kept the lower reaches of the creek clean and deep and the water flowed very well through there and they never had these floods that they have through there today. Of course there’s other things that enter into that, like everything in the valley is getting covered and that makes the water come real quick. Early on it wasn’t like that and you didn’t have that flush real quick. But that gravel dredge, I think they came up from Richmond or somewhere. I remember they’d suck this gravel and then send it out in a barge.

26 A: So they were actually mining the gravel then, it wasn’t just to make the channel deeper—

M: Yeah, it kept the channel deep. Now I wouldn’t be surprised if down there on the lower end of Millerick’s, Millerick Road, at low tide I think you can walk across Sonoma Creek in a lot of places. In the years when the dredge used to come up you didn’t do that. It was about ten or twelve feet deep all the time. The tide would be up or down. See the tidewater came up as far as that bridge—about—and just on this side of that bridge, they did some gravel mining in there too. It was the old Helberg Ranch. They did some mining in there. That was just above the bridge there, along in there about where that service that they have for limousines. That’s the old Crux [sp?] place right in there. That was part of the Helberg place there and they did some mining right in there. But that was about as far up as any great amount of mining was done. They had a crusher in there and more mechanized, but that was about as far up as any heavy mining was done.

27 A: Was there fishing down there?
M: Oh yeah, we fished all the time down there. We fished the whole creek as far as that goes, as kids. Fished Nathanson Creek.

28 A: Did you get steelhead out of Nathanson?

M: We trout fished there. We never did anything with the steelhead up that far. We used to fish for steelhead in tidewater as far as Schellville down there, Millerick’s. Millerick Road, right by the firehouse [Schell-Vista Firehouse], over that way. That was the old Brant place across the street. Jim Millerick and Rose Millerick acquired that in later years. They had that Green Acres Dairy. Sebastiani’s own that now. Just after you cross the highway bridge on both sides. There’s vineyard there and open—the upper part of that was Brant property. In later years Sebastiani and Millerick acquired that acreage. That’s kind of the story. The dredge came up as far as the Southern Pacific bridge. Didn’t come beyond that.

29 A: Probably couldn’t get beyond that, huh?

M: Getting under it or whatever, I don’t know. But that’s as far as they came. And that made quite a difference in the problem that they have today with the flooding and all that. I could tell you a lot of stories about that, but I don’t know what kind of questions you want to hear.

30 A: The flooding would be interesting and anything you remember about the fish.

M: Nathanson Creek was always very good trout fishing, very good. As far as fishing for the steelhead, we’d stay in tidewater. Never came to freshwater, like netting them or spearing them, we never did get into that. My uncles were avid fishermen, myself and Jim Wile [sp?] and numerous people—Basileus, one of the barbers around town. Moose Rabin [sp?]. We all had rowboats, we kept them down in Schellville, right down there by the land company. Nobody ever got much into fooling with the steelhead. And then for many years I dairied out here at Temelec. You know where Temelec is, where they’re putting that vineyard?

31 A: Yeah.

M: Me and my family were out there for twenty-nine years in the dairy business. That Rodger’s Creek, you’ve heard of Rodger’s Creek I’m sure. In our tenure there we never allowed anybody to fool with the steelhead. We allowed some to come and trout fish, but not to do anything with the steelhead.

32 A: The steelhead were spawning in Rodger’s Creek?

M: Oh yeah, they’d come up all the time. They came up that, they came up Sonoma Creek and Nathanson Creek.

33 A: How big were those steelhead would you say?

M: Big fish. Good-sized fish.
A: Over a foot? Fifteen, eighteen inches?

M: Some of them would be up near a foot and a half. We fished a lot, it was good. I don’t know exactly what has happened to this situation. We have to consider that there’s more people and there’s more people coming in here. People are kind of peculiar about some things. A throwaway world is what we live in today. A lot of people figure that if--

even living around town, they don’t think anything about throwing debris or garbage over the fence. It doesn’t ring a bell. Those are the things that I think affect our creeks today. People aren’t careful. And with all these new-fangled things—household toxics and all those kind of things, a lot of that stuff gets away and it ends up in Sonoma Creek.

A: Everything ends up downstream.

M: That’s right. So I think those are things that we have to fight against and try to educate. Of course you got the vineyard problem and dairy wastes, things of that sort. Those things have to be addressed, because those things do affect the water, there’s no question about that. They have to be addressed. You’ve read these things in the paper—some of these vineyard people are very conscious of what they do. They try to be careful, with all these new pesticides and sprays, they wipe out all the vegetation along by the vines and things like that. A certain amount of that residue ends up in Sonoma Creek. There’s only two outlets in the whole valley for water and that’s Sonoma Creek and Schell Slough. Now there’s no argument about that. There’s no other way for it to get out.

A: Right. It’s not going to go to Santa Rosa! [laughs].

M: Anyway, you agree with me on that I’m sure. You know, everything washes down. I think that spray situation has to be carefully monitored. We spray in our agricultural situation—we grow hay and we spray. But you have to work closely with the Ag Department, so that you know what you’re doing and we have to post our time when and where all the land is registered with the Ag Department that we fool with. We do stay within the law, that’s all you can do. Like they have the cut-off date for 2-4-D, that’s passed about a month ago. But when they lower the boom, why that’s it. You can’t sneak around, you have to have respect for the grape man too.

A: People have to make a living off their land.

M: That’s right, yeah. They have to make a living and you have to play the game fair. But when you can see the vast change in the valley that a guy can see that’s been here a long time, you can’t help but wonder there’s problems about water you know. Of course our water table is dropping dramatically. We have a couple of wells on our row crop place up there. We have a well we just installed a new pump in it. Early on, when I was a little kid, there was two artesian ponds up there.

A: And where was that?
M: On the row crop place. The Patch up here?

A: Oh, right.

M: There was two artesian ponds there. That’s the only irrigation that we had there. There was no pump. All gravitation flow, you’d use the water out of these two ponds in the daytime and by the next morning the ponds were full again.

A: Were they natural ponds, or did you—

M: Natural ponds. That place has been a row crop place since year one, nothing else ever.

A: Were there a number of spots like that around town in the old days?

M: No, not too many. There was a few over here on the Vallejo property. That was kind of a spot like that. But they’ve diminished now. All these would-be historians, they thought that the mission, the Indians at the mission got water from the General Vallejo property. But that is not so. It’s wrong. Out here behind one of our barns is still the remnants of an old dam. Overflow from those ponds up there on our row crop place came down and they had a dam here where that big barn is setting way out there, that was a pond. My dad filled it in when he bought the place and built the barn there, but early on, really early on, the remnants of this dam is still out here. In early times nobody never thought much about historical significance about anything you know. The wall pretty well diminished. We still have some bricks from it and there’s still part of it out there.

A: Was it adobe brick?

M: They’re a baked kind of a thing. You can see they had straw in it and things like that—similar to the adobe. That’s where they got the water for the mission was right here off of this pond they had.

A: Do you remember a lot of small streams in town? Maybe seasonal streams?

M: We just called them drainage ditches. There was one ran down First Street West, past the El Dorado Hotel, down that way. Then this one here ran down through our property up until last year, right down through town, underneath those buildings and Napa Street and across Broadway. Last year they diverted the water, all this water from up here was coming through our place, so they diverted it to the corner here and then down here and clear down to First Street West and then down.

A: That was when they were doing all the work on the Plaza and they were digging those big trenches?

M: Yeah. At one time it was all drainage you know. That’s how it was. So now of course you don’t see those things because it’s underground, but it’s still there. But the water table has diminished terribly. There’s only so much water that you can suck out of the ground. Really
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and truly you have to consider those things and nobody wants to think about that you know, that’s a bad thing to talk about.

45  A: It might limit growth.

M: Yeah. You know the day will come when there could be a civil war in California over water. It’s possible. A man gets thirsty enough, he might kill a man for a drink of water, just depends how severe it gets. Sonoma is in a more precarious situation than they like to admit. They’re already sucking on a couple wells. There’s a well up behind the Veteran’s Building up there—they’re sucking out of that one. And then up the street, right in front of my row crop place, there’s a well right out there in the street. If you ever drive by you’ll see the power thing and everything right there. They’re sucking out of that one too. That worries me somewhat because we have our irrigation well in the row crop place and we wouldn’t want anything to happen to that of course. They’re getting to the end—I suppose these things are hard to own up to, you know—

46  A: A long series of mistakes, or at least bad decisions—

M: You know the thing about it is, in their chase for the tax dollars they’ve allowed a lot of development in this town and of course they’re using Russian River water, but the day might come when Santa Rosa, for example, they’re growing tremendously, going wild, they might say to Sonoma and Rohnert Park and Marin County and whatever, “We don’t have enough to give any more.” Since they control the Russian River water, why they could create some kind of a problem. You’d have to look at that.

47  A: Do you remember wells around town, how deep they used to be?

M: There was a lot of wells around, but a lot of them have gone down, dry. The water table has fallen quite a bit. Schocken had a big well over here, he was a property owner—he owned the Barracks and houses around. Owned these houses down here by the mission. He had a big well up here, a big high tank. Then down at the Tuscano Hotel, my aunt had their water supply from a well, up behind there.

48  A: Do you have any idea how deep those wells were?

M: You didn’t have to go too deep in those times. You could go anywhere from eighty feet to three hundred feet. There’s a strata through here, the strongest strata through here I guess is about two to three hundred feet. Over here on the Pinelli place they were talking about putting in a hotel there. There’s a good well there. I think it’s at around three hundred feet. Still almost artesian. It’s not being used. Our well here is eighty feet only and we seem to have plenty of water, but we don’t know. Getting along about September or so, why you could—the well up in the row crop place is a little short of three hundred feet. We just measured it the other day when we put a new pump in. It’s what we call a ‘still well,’ doesn’t overflow. It seems to be a strong well yet. Over a little further, Sebastiani’s have a good well there that I know about. Then the city has this well up in the street here. I don’t know how deep that is. I’m sure it’s at least three hundred, maybe even more. They suck on that pretty
good. That one up behind the Vet’s Building, I don’t know how deep that is either. They just put a new pump and stuff in there within the last year. I don’t know what the depth of it is. It was considered always a very strong well. So there’s pretty good water down through here. And good water. When you get out that way toward Buena Vista and that area, the water has got a lot of boron in it. It’s not very good. The farther you go that way the poorer the water gets. Another thing that seems to be happening is—I hear the saline is creeping into the water.

49  A: I heard something about that.

M: I’m sure you have. You know where Napa Road is—I think it’s creeped up that far already and when they’re putting in some newer vines down in that area, they can’t use that water on them. Some of it is getting that bad. Especially toward Vineburg and that way. Some of these fellows are hauling water—you see those plastic tanks—

50  A: Those big black [ones]—

M: Yeah. Well that’s the scheme about that see. You can see the saline is creeping up. They keep sucking more and it just brings that in. Those are things that have to be addressed too and nobody likes to look at the down side of anything. Everything’s got a down side. I don’t care how good it is, it’s still got a down side. You know we always had plenty of water around here, but there’s a lot of wells that are getting depleted and they’re dropping. And then one of two things—either the water vanishes or it gets so brackish that you can’t use it. I’ll give you another small example: out Napa Street, just here the last three weeks or so, out there by Napa and Seventh? You’ll notice there’s some cuts across the road there and there’s a number of those folks out there hooked up to city water.

51  A: Because their wells are getting brackish?

M: Yeah.

52  A: I’ve got a friend who lives out in that area. I haven’t seen him for awhile. He lives in the old—I guess there was, on the train track was some kind of a gas company depot or something out there.

M: Yeah—Standard Oil. How is the water there?

53  A: I haven’t seen him recently. When I see him I’ll ask about his water and see how he’s doing. He may be getting brackish water.

M: See that’s close to Nathanson Creek there. This is how things are going that way you know, eventually the water is a big thing. It’s very important. I just don’t know. You have to kind of wonder what is going to happen. They put in some big storage tanks. But on peak days, even now in town, in Sonoma, the city water on peak days—in summer on the hot days—they’re concerned about a shortage. It’s just the way it is. They seem to be reluctant about this new subdivisions and things like that. But with each building you have to supply, the city of Sonoma has to supply adequate things. Water, sewage, schools, fire department,
and truly you have to consider those things and nobody wants to think about that you know, Because water is going to be the big thing.

54  A: Yeah, I agree.

M: Years ago a lot of people used to pump out of Sonoma Creek. That was no big deal. But that’s all stopped.

55  A: Up in Glen Ellen there’s a lot of people—

M: Sucking out of the creek?

56  A: Yeah, you walk along the creek, you’ll see a pipe coming down, people still sucking [water] out. Probably down here that’s true—there’s fewer people doing it.

M: I think if you’re doing it now you’re bootlegging it. I don’t think that you have a permit. You might have, but I don’t know.

57  A: Do you think that besides the fact that the creek has gotten lower and the holes aren’t as deep, have you noticed any other changes in the character of the creek? That it’s gotten wider or narrower?

M: I don’t think it’s gotten any wider. There’s quite a bit of brush, willows and things that are growing right down in the creek now. When you cross the bridge here going to Riverside [near T-junction with Petaluma Avenue], you can kind of see.

58  A: There is a lot down there.

M: That’s kind of got a two-fold situation. If you clean the brush out of the bottom of the creek for example. That would increase the speed of the flow. Well then you’re dumping all your water on the people of Schellville. It would create more of a problem down there because it would come faster. So what’s a good thing to do? Sonoma Creek in my mind really needs to be dredged from Highway 37 up. Not fool around up here, but start down there and you dredge, open the channel up, build the dikes up, you know things like that. You have to start down there and come at least as far as 116, where the bridge is,[probably means highway 121]. You have to come at least that far, maybe even a little further, but you’re getting so so there. Like building that new firehouse [Schell-Vista]—5 million dollars, because it was flooding there. If Sonoma Creek were properly taken care of, they wouldn’t of had to move the firehouse. It never used to do that.

59  A: Five million dollars could go a long ways towards dredging the creek.

M: A start you know—so much each year.

60  A: Do you remember any flooding in Schellville when you were young?
M: There was some flooding yeah, but it wasn’t like it is now. The water never used to race across by the firehouse, except one time. But the channel isn’t deep enough and the banks are down. You know all levees settle. It’s an ongoing thing—you got to dredge, you got to build the levees up every so often. A bad mistake is to put a road on top of a levee.

61 A: That just pushes it down more.

M: Pushes it down more and more. That’s one of the things down there at Skaggs Island? That’s kind of what’s happening.

62 A: That’s what they did, they put [roads]—I haven’t been down there myself.

M: Yeah. In my mind, the Army Corps of Engineer are the top dogs as far as all creeks, am I correct? You can’t do nothing unless you get a permit from them. They run the show. Their story always is that they don’t have finances to do certain things. And that might well be. What Sonoma Creek and Schell Slough need, I think, is a drainage district to be formed and by doing that you will have finances to adequately take care of those two streams properly. In the low country you have to dredge, build up levees. If there’s some cleaning to be done you’ve got an outfit to take care of that. I don’t know how else you could finance it. You talk to anybody around here in Sonoma, talk about drainage, and they don’t have time to talk to you. They say, ‘Well hell, my place don’t flood!’

63 A: ‘Not my problem.’

M: Yeah, but the water from your place is going on somebody else. You can’t deny that. You know if somebody tells me, ‘Well your place don’t flood.’ No but the water from here is going down to Schellville, that’s where it’s all going see. But an assessment, it wouldn’t be much I don’t think, per parcel or whatever. It’d generate a tremendous amount of money to form a district to take care of those channels. I don’t know if that can ever be done, but I think it’s the only way that those two channels are going to be taken care of. You can’t do nothing on your own. You talk to the Army Corps of Engineers—‘We don’t have finances for anything like that.’ Then you talk to the Fish and Game and they want all Schellville back to marsh. They’re gobbling up any place they can get and then they break the levee and let it flood. Well there’s a lot of good farmland down there. Farmland is becoming more and more valuable in our country today you know.

64 A: Did you used to go hunting down there?

M: Oh hell yes.

65 A: What would you hunt for down there? Ducks?

M: Ducks, in the low country down in the marsh. We all hunted down there on the Sonoma Land Company. All that area. Go to Skaggs Island and the Sonoma Land Company had six camps, six separate camps. The last camp to be reclaimed was Skaggs. That was Number Six. I hauled fuel in there when I was just a kid. I guess I was about sixteen or eighteen years old when they reclaimed the last of Skaggs. That was all Sonoma Land
Company. Fellow by the name of Jones reclaimed all that—[used] private money. Kept all those levees up and everything. Now today with all our high class equipment and everything, the Army Corps of Engineers can’t keep Sonoma Creek flowing. It makes you wonder about these things you know, the whys and the wherefore. Something isn’t being handled right. These drainage districts, I think, are the way to handle that. Everybody pays a little share according to the size of their parcel, clear from Kenwood, that’s where Sonoma Creek starts. It’s a big watershed and there’s a lot of parcels and you would get some resistance from some people saying, ‘Well my place don’t flood. Why am I interested in it?’ But then the guy in Schellville can’t get to his house even sometimes when it’s flooding, and it isn’t his water, somebody’s dumping it on him. You have to look at it in that kind of a thing.

66 A: I used to deliver newspapers down there for the I-T [Index-Tribune] and every once in awhile in the winter I couldn’t get to some of my customers because it was all flooded—Millerick Road, down by Schell-Vista.

M: Yeah, very true. It’s just, I guess, a way to look at things. But as far as the Army Corps of Engineers, they’re not going to do much, if anything. They just don’t. And a private person, by the time he goes through the permit situation, why it costs a fortune and it never gets done. The approach is wrong—you need a little more speed and all to get things done. To improve those two big channels—that’s where the water goes out of here, you know?

67 A: I was curious if your grandfather was a hunter.

M: Nope. Grandpa, he wasn’t much of a hunter. My Dad wasn’t either. My Dad’s brother and me and my brother and my two uncles, George Chicazola (sp?) and Enrico Castagnasso, all avid hunters and fishermen. We’ve hunted and fished all the time.

68 A: What do you remember about wild life in the valley, like deer?

M: We always hunted too. But you know, here we go again. Every now and then you’ll see in the paper where there was a mountain lion spotted close by.

69 A: Yeah, Nathanson Creek or—

M: Yeah or something like that. Or they call up animal control, ‘There’s a raccoon running around my backyard.’ Well people keep building out into the wilderness regions. Houses all around. Up in the hills, somebody wants a view, they get up high. Well they encroach on the habitat of the wild animals. Like Oakmont, there’s always something. Every now and then in the paper about, ‘The deer ate my roses.’

70 A: They come down out of Annadel [State Park].

M: Yeah, well you know when you stop to think about it, you put your house on the land that the wild animals inhabit. You’ve got to make a choice. What do you want? You keep pushing them back and then when they come down you either shoot them or something. Or they get the animal control guy out there and what’s he going to do? You want the privacy of
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A mountain retreat and then they’re putting vineyard in every hundred square feet of parcel somewhere up in the hills.

71 A: Do you remember mountain lions when you were a kid. Did you ever see a mountain lion around town?

M: I don’t know that I recall that we did down here, this close. Even yet today we have a deer problem up on the row crop place. We haven’t deer-fenced it, but it looks to me like we may have to. I’ve seen deer right here in our vineyard.

72 A: Do you think deer are more numerous now, or were they more numerous back when you were young?

M: I guess there might even be less now because there’s less habitat for them. I don’t know about that. You do see them down closer now than you did before. Because they had more area where they wouldn’t be molested or anything. They never came into town. It’s not uncommon to see a deer come across Spain Street, I’ve seen that recently. They get down here and I guess they get confused. Cars coming every which way, stuff like that you know. Out here in the barn, there’s skunks that come out here, raccoons come out there and things like that. But we’re not disturbed about them. Some people as soon as they spot a wild animal, they’re right on the phone with the animal control people. So that’s the story. The people are infringing on the wild animals’ habitat. You might say, ‘There’s just too many people.’ Well that’s possible too. One of these days we’ll have to do like China does—they limit the children in each family. It could get to that, you don’t know.

73 A: I was curious if—do you remember anybody ever catching salmon in Sonoma Creek?

M: Steelhead or salmon?

74 A: Salmon. I’ve heard scattered reports there may have been some King salmon.

M: You’re talking about different varieties of fish?

75 A: Most people agree there were steelhead in the creek [actually everyone agrees] and some people have mentioned—Milo Shepard told me about something called a blueblack salmon.

M: Well he could know about that, up there. Yes, you bet. I would put stock in what he says about that. I really would. These species I suppose are diminishing, it’s either that someone is doing something they shouldn’t to a certain species or they take them in abundance. Or their spawning grounds and things like that are being wiped out or disturbed. There has to be more and more supervision of the waterways and what’s dumped in them and what washes into them. Those are very important things.

76 A: The more people you get the more careful you’ve got to be about what you do.

M: You bet you. All these toxics and things they have today. People don’t realize if they
think they can get away with it, they’ll dump something over the bank in the creek, sure as hell. They just do. They figure it don’t amount to nothing. On the other hand if you sort through what they’re dumping there, it could have an effect on these kind of things. I’m certainly not against anybody who, or any agency, who tries to keep that thing under control. We have our dump and we have our garbage pick up. Now there’s a toxic thing coming up.

77 A: Up the hill, yeah. [referring to old dump which is scheduled to be cleaned up. However, next comment indicates M was instead referring to a toxic collection program].

M: Coming up. Every so often they collect them. All you have to do is bring them.

78 A: We’ve done that a couple times. Paint, household chemicals, that sort of stuff.

M: Some people try to sneak that, dump it over the bank of the creek someplace. Those are the things that hurt the fish and wild life. Some people have no respect for the wild life. [Brief interruption to introduce me to his wife] You just have to think about that sort of stuff. And then taking—let’s just say something is in season, let’s use abalone, season just opened. When something comes in season, some hunters don’t pay attention to limits, I think that that’s poor sportsmanship. But there are some people like that, that take things in abundance.

79 A: That’s kind of the frontier mentality I think.

M: Yeah, you know, if the limit is five you shouldn’t take six or seven. You take five. There’s a lot of really good sportsman around the country, around the valley here. They pay attention to the rules and regulations and I think that’s good. But there’s others, they’ve been catching all kinds of those abalone poachers. I think the judge has been real easy on them. If I was the judge, I might shoot them! [laughs at his exaggeration] More and more you’re going to have to respect those things as far as Sonoma Creek and any of the others. Nathanson Creek in the lower regions pretty well dries up in the late summer.

80 A: Was that true when you were a kid?

M: Yeah. It used to get down to where there would be holes. But the water would be underneath the ground a little bit. No over the top flow as it got down. Out here on Lovall Valley Road it used to dry there fairly quick. Then as you went back there was more water and the holes were more frequent. That’s how that creek was. But Sonoma Creek always had water flowing in it, as far as I knew.

81 A: Did people use boats at all above tidewater on Sonoma Creek?

M: I don’t know. We never did. I hear all kinds of stories, some people around Kenwood said that they used to have boats up there, but I never saw any boats going up there. There was a landing down there at the end of Millerick Road.

82 A: Was that the old Embarcadero?
M: Yeah, that was the Embarcadero they called it. There was a dock and a landing down there where they used to ship out wine and stuff from the valley. Haul it down there and load on a barge.

A: So you remember that going on?

M: Yeah. It was early on. I remember part of the dock there. There was a kind of a barn there once too. Early, early on.

A: Was that pretty much done by the ‘thirties would you say?

M: Oh before that, before that. Then they had, over on the Petaluma River the steamer Gold used to ply from Petaluma down all the time. I remember that. I remember early on, one time my father acquired some wagons and livestock and stuff like that from a fellow in San Francisco. They shipped it up by steamer Gold to Petaluma. Then we drove the wagons and horses over the hills to Sonoma here.

A: Do you remember any places where you’d find Indian artifacts? Places that might have been villages?

M: Sure. We called them Indian mounds. Up there on the row crop place, where those ponds were? That was a large gathering of Indian mounds—we always found a lot of artifacts up there. A lot of arrowheads and stuff like that. Of course, people keep picking them up and as time goes on, not many show up any more. The soil is very different than any of the other soil, where they had those—we called them Indian mounds, but they were gathering places. They always were where there was fresh water. You don’t usually find those out in the middle of nowhere, where there isn’t water. In my knowledge, you find those wherever there was springs or fresh water. Naturally it goes hand in hand.

A: Your row crop place, they were probably using those artesian ponds I imagine.

M: Oh yeah. There was fresh water there see. We found many things over the years. But everybody’s been picking up things and pretty soon they diminish, you know. I found Indian bowls and things like that. Mortars and pestles—you find those things occasionally. Sometimes they’re broken. Early on people didn’t place very much value on those historical things you know, like you do today. We were always people of agriculture and you’re always working ground everywhere you know, you find those things. But [they’re] getting more scarce all the time because people pick those things up and there’s a limit to how many of them are scattered around. But we found many arrowheads and things like that, up on the row crop place.

A: How about out at Temelec?

M: Yeah. We used to find a few things out there. There was a couple of spots out there. That was a creek and we found some things out there along the creek.

A: Along Rodgers Creek?
M: Yeah, sure. That was always a live creek. See that creek ran pretty much the year round. It diminishes in the late summer, but it runs all year round. That was another creek they used to pump some water out of too, I guess. There was a small dam out there. But that’s been done away with now. We were friendly with Mrs. Coblentz, being neighbors for twenty-nine years. We knew her long before we went there as well. Around here, we don’t seem to find—but we don’t do too much digging around here. Any land that’s this close to the mission, you’re going to find things. There was a lot of discussion about our land to the west here, was an Indian burial ground. I had to run guys out of there with picks and shovels wanting to dig. Any place this close to the mission, you could dig and you might find the remains of a human. There’s been a lot of talk that that was a burial ground out there. I don’t know. I’m not about to build on it. The horses run on it, that’s about all. I don’t know.

A: Somebody told me that right up into the ‘twenties there was a small group of Indians living out on the old Carriger place.

M: On the Carriger place?

A: Carriger Creek, sometimes it’s called Felder Creek through there. Not too far from the cement plant?

M: You mean not too far from Fowler Creek?

A: Fowler Creek, yeah.

M: I don’t doubt that in the least. Fowler Creek dries up quickly. If it don’t rain for awhile—I don’t know if it’s running right now with this dry spell we had. We dairied out there for years, out Fowler Creek. We rented Carriger property and there was another lady we rented from out there. I can’t think of her name now. She was out there, just back of where they got the vineyard there. They just put vineyard in that Vella place. We dairied there for a long time. Over at Biggins—Biggins was another place way up Fowler Creek Road. We used to milk cows up there in the spring. There was the Carriger place and then there was another spot out there in the flat that was a hundred acres. Wherever you have these creeks you know, you find these things. Water attracted people, the Indians—

A: Just like it does today.

M: Yeah. You have to have water.

A: Do you remember any steelhead in Fowler Creek?

M: Oh hell yes! Sure enough, sure. We used to fish Fowler Creek too. Like I say, as you went way up, you’d find holes up there the same way, there’d be fish in them. You had to go up aways. Where the cement place is, why there was nothing there. In the summer that would dry. Some fellows contended that there was water but it was underneath the rocks and gravel. Probably so, I don’t know. But it got pretty arid. But early on, before May, we’d fish there, Fowler Creek, Rodgers Creek.
A: What years were you dairying out there?

M: We were out there, let me think. Prior to ‘forty-three. When we quit dairying out in that area, we bought a large grade A dairy on Stony Point Road between Cotati and Sebastopol. We dairied out there from ‘forty-three to ‘fifty-six. We shipped milk to Lucas Valley Dairy, San Rafael. Then we stopped dairying out in that area. In that time we leased that Grace Ranch. We had the two places—the Grace Ranch and over on Stony Point Road, had both those place. The Grace Ranch was a little short of 1400 acres. And the other ranch where we milked was about three hundred and sixty acres.

A: Do you remember there was a tornado that picked up the Watmaugh School? Have you heard that story, back in 1928? Did you go to Watmaugh School?

M: No. I remember it yes—I remember the Watmaugh School. I remember when it was operating. I just can’t recall that tornado business. Sometimes you can’t remember everything. Some things stick in your mind, but other things you just don’t know.

A: I’m about half your age and I feel like my brain already getting full.

M: Sure. It’s quite a thing to remember everything. Then as you go along, something will come to mind out of the clear sky.

A: Do you remember the big fire of 1923?

M: Boyes Springs?

A: Yeah, the one that came through Boyes Springs.

M: Oh sure. I remember that. They finally got it stopped over here behind Vallejo somewhere, up in there. Wiped out Boyes Springs. Must have been a million of those little summer cabins all through there, mostly on the east side of [highway] twelve. Everybody in San Francisco had a little summer place you know.

A: Are there any animals that were introduced that you didn’t used to see? Any new animals that have appeared in the valley? Any new wild life?

M: I don’t know about any new animals that appeared, to tell you the truth.

A: I don’t know if you know Bill Meglen up in Glen Ellen?

M: Yeah.

A: He told me he doesn’t remember seeing any possums until maybe the early ‘fifties.

M: Could well be. They’re prevalent around here. They come out in the barn. Somewhere in Sonoma Creek there was some beavers. Did you hear about that?
A: I did hear about that, yeah. Not far from the old swimming hole you were talking about—Sonoma Grove. Out in that area.

M: Somebody had to mess with them as I recall.

A: They were afraid they were going to get in their vineyard.

M: Yeah. That’s kind of the story about the wild life. Pretty soon the wild animals, they got nowhere to go. Somehow or another I don’t think that they should destroy them. That’s the first thing that comes to mind—these vineyardists, some of them are kind of bad about that, I thought. I can understand removing them or relocating them, I’m an advocate of that. When you destroy them, I kind of take a dim view of that.

A: They were here first.

M: Yeah. My attempt wouldn’t be to destroy them. You might have to work around it somehow. We should do something to preserve them. I don’t know how you see that.

A: I agree with you. I think I’ve covered pretty much everything I wanted to ask you about. Is there anything else you’ve thought of?

M: No. Whatever I can do to be of assistance. I tell you, a couple of guys that you might talk to on Sonoma Creek, a couple of guys on Sonoma Creek. Benny Meyers. Going down Millerick Road, first place on the left?

A: OK.

M: Water used to swoop across his place there. Benny would be kind of a good guy to talk to, if he’d talk. That’s the old Meyer place, he’s just been there all his life. Further down there’s another fellow, another older family is the Yennis.

A: Yeah, I’ve heard of the Yennis. Norm Yenni and his Dad.

M: There’s Norm and Scott. Those are the two boys. And then there’s Glen, that’s the senior. Glen, he’s been down there a long time. He might be a good one to talk with. He knows quite a bit about Sonoma Creek and the water situation. He’d be good one to talk to I think, if he would do it, I don’t know. Glen would be the best of them I think. He’s the oldest, the father of the two boys.

A: Is Rose Millerick still around?

M: Yeah. She’s a friend of my wife’s, comes here all the time. Rose is a Scarfoni, she married Jim Millerick. They weren’t born here. I remember when the Scarfonis came here. She might have some information about Sonoma Creek, I don’t know. She’s not a real old family here. They came here from the valley over there somewhere. Her father owned Green Acres [Dairy]. You just dig around wherever you can I guess, see what you can find.
A: I appreciate you taking your time. Another thing I’d be interested in, probably not today—if you have any old photographs where you could see some of the landscape of the valley and what Sonoma Mountain looked like, so we can get an idea if the tree cover has changed. Or if you happen to have any pictures of fish people caught out of the creek.

M: No I don’t have anything like that. There’s some places that they’ve cut a lot of trees off these hillsides, you know the vineyard situation. Once again, those things have to be monitored. In some cases they want to plant vines where it’s too steep and that creates a bad situation for Sonoma Creek as well.

A: You get that silt coming down.

M: We should have things and laws and ways to enforce them to protect hillsides. I think they kind of got carried away on that.

A: Did your wife grow up here also?

M: Early on she was from Santa Rosa. Her father and mother owned the El Dorado Hotel. They came from Santa Rosa during the Depression. She was just a small child and she’s been here all her adult life, more than all her adult life. Pretty much raised here. Her side of the family is El Dorado Hotel and my side is the Tuscano Hotel.

A: [Laughs] This is sort of your block of town then?

M: Yeah. You know I didn’t mention this, but Spain Street at one time, from Sebastianis to [highway] twelve out there was ninety percent Italian people. They all just seemed to congregate on this street, all the way down clear out to the end. When these people came around, they kind of hung together. Down in Vineburg there was a lot of German people and on this street there was a lot of Italian people, just kind of like that. I guess when you go to a new country you hang out with your people or the kind you know.

A: Especially if they speak the same language, I’m sure.

M: Yeah.

A: Do you remember any Chinese?

M: Yeah, I remember the Chinese. There was a Chinese house down Spain Street for quite a long time. Then out here, you know where Ledson’s got these big buildings out here on Napa Street?

A: Right. [M is referring to mansions on SE corner of Napa & 5th Street East]. The old Armstrong place?

M: The old Armstrong place. That was the Van Damme [sp?] property. Van Damme was a ferry boat man, he was a money man and that was a diversified orchard. He always kept a group of Chinese there. They ran the orchard and the dry yard. Van Damme was friendly with
my father. Van Damme got my father to supply the horses for the Chinese to work the orchard. I’ll never forget, that was an endless task. They weren’t adapted to horses [laughs]. Anyway, Mr. Van Damme, he got my father to always help those Chinese there. That was quite a colony of them there, quite a few. Adam Adler right here had the planning mill. He had a Chinese man. And then the fellow that lived over here in this adobe right across the street.

116 A: The Ray Adobe?

M: The old adobe there [confirming]. That was the banker Jess Burris. He had a Chinese housekeeper. I remember him. Then there was the Chinese house that was down there, just by the State property [Vallejo home State Park]. Kind of right in there somewhere, there was a big frame green house and that housed a bunch of Chinese. There was quite a few Chinese around. A lot of them kind of stayed with the orchards and things. They seemed to be adapted to that. There was quite a few Chinese around. Lo Dong was another one—he was down there to south of town a little bit there, on MacArthur. He had a dry yard there. They kind of stuck to that. That was a Chinese outfit there. Up at Agua Caliente there was another one. I never knew that crew. But I knew they were there, down by Agua Caliente, down by where the bath house was [probably Boyes bath house] down there. There was a group of them down in there. They were around.

117 A: I heard they dug a lot of the levees originally, out around Wingo and even further south.

M: Well, some. But how most of those levees really got going—Jones, he owned the Sonoma Land Company and he had two dredgers as I recall. It seemed like there was a couple of them for awhile. They’re the ones that reclaimed that whole Sonoma Land Company that stretched all the way from Skaggs [Island] clear back to Arnold Drive there. That was all Sonoma Land Company. There was six camps. Each camp was kind of individual of the others. They kind of divided it up in camps. They kept pretty much a crew at each camp.

118 A: So these would be a crew of dredgers, these were the guys who would dredge the creek?

M: No. The dredge was not a small part of the operation, but they [the camps] were all farming situations. They farmed hay and grain, things like that, that was the scheme. Jones did this dredging and I don’t know if they owned one or two, but anyway one for sure. Those dredgers worked all the time, but they reclaimed that whole area. It was damn near down to [highway] thirty-seven. Especially over that way, Skaggs Island I guess, it did come down to thirty-seven. That was a vast piece of ground. They had these camps—there was six camps. [That was] a different time. That was quite a thing. For whatever that’s worth.

A: I appreciate you taking your time. You’ve given me a lot of interesting information.
Interview with Shirley Churchill
At her home on Curtin Lane, Sonoma, August 14, 2001

S = Shirley Churchill; A = Arthur Dawson

A: Tell us a little bit about where you grew up?

S: I grew up in Santa Rosa, I was born in Santa Rosa. My family moved to Glen Ellen in 1938 or ’39. My father bought the Glen Ellen Grocery. At that time the Post Office was next door in the same building. It had a gasoline pump and the cleaners and Greyhound Bus—it was everything.

A: Did you buy it from the Meglens? Do you know Bill Meglen?

S: I did. I don’t think so. I don’t remember, because I was a little kid. I don’t know who we bought it from. We were there through 1946, all doing the war years.

A: Then did you move down to Sonoma after that?

S: I moved to Santa Rosa and went to school. Well, they moved to Napa and I moved to Napa. I went to JC (Santa Rosa Junior College) and met my husband and got married after JC and moved to Sonoma, because he taught school. Been here ever since.

A: Was Bud (Shirley’s husband) principal over at Sassarini?

S: Yes. He passed away eight years ago. So, that’s about it.

A: Do you remember playing in the creek in Glen Ellen?

S: Oh yes. That was part of the life there of course. We swam in it for quite awhile. But then there was a scare—I’m trying to remember what year that was—they told us we couldn’t swim in the creek anymore because a lot of maybe infantile paralysis or I don’t know. It was polluted, so we couldn’t swim in it anymore. We did anyway [laughs].

A: Were they concerned because of the State Hospital?

S: Yes. We were above the hospital, but there were a lot of houses along the creek at that time and I’m sure all their cesspools and their sewage went into the creek, probably. That’s why we couldn’t swim in it anymore.

A: What were your favorite places to swim in Glen Ellen?

S: About a half a mile down from the bridge. There was kind of a good hole down there that you could dam up and swim. Right under the bridge wasn’t too hot, as I remember. We mostly played around in the water. We swam other places. Londonside was a swimming pool
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[was on Warm Springs Road, just east of Sonoma Mountain Road], Los Guilicos—it’s Morton’s now, that was another place.

8 A: Would you swim at the creek in those places?
S: No. We fished. My Dad and I fished—lots of trout. I think it was twenty-five at that time [referring to the limit], or twenty-something. It was a lot.

9 A: How big would the trout be?
S: Not really big. He didn’t steelhead fish, it was mostly trout. So that was fun.

10 A: What time of year would you catch those?
S: In the spring, after the water went down a bit. We used to fish up Bouverie’s, in that creek too [Stuart Creek], up by the falls. Hike up that way. That was always an adventure to go up that way. There was a cave under the falls that we could play around in.

11 A: I got to go in there once.
S: Oh did you? It had all kinds of tales about it. Treasures and things like that [laughs]. It was pretty.

12 A: Would you say there was more fish on that creek, Stuart Creek, than other places?
S: We always limited out at that one, up at Bouverie’s, I know. It was just one of those things to do—if you got home from school sometimes you go down and catch some fish or crawdads. Lots of crawdads. Those lobster-looking things. In fact, a friend and I used to sell them for five cents apiece [laughs].

13 A: I’ve eaten them a couple of times, not out of Sonoma Creek.
S: They taste a little like lobster. You just eat the tail. They’re kind of good. I think we used a marshmellow or a piece of hot dog and catch them that way.

14 A: They usually hang out under rocks don’t they?
S: Yes. And that was about all there was to do in Glen Ellen. Spent a lot of time on the London Ranch. One of their kids was a friend of mine, so we’d ride horses and play up there.

15 A: Was that Milo?
S: Joy, the youngest daughter.

16 A: Milo’s sister I guess?
S: Yes. There was Jack and Jill and Joy and, who’s the other one? He was killed, can’t remember his name.

17 A: Do you remember seeing any animals up there? Either down on the creek or up [at London Ranch].

S: Not in the creek, no. Not really. Or birds. You know, when you’re a little kid you don’t really care that much or look that hard. We did not go deer hunting ever. My Dad didn’t.

18 A: Would you see deer down in Glen Ellen?

S: No.

19 A: Were they fairly scarce?

S: Well, I was right in the middle of town. We lived upstairs of the store.

20 A: Is that now, or that was, the Village Mercantile? [corner of Arnold and Carquinez Ave.] Is that the same building? You know Finlandia Café’s in there?

S: It’s the stone one. At the turn.

21 A: That was Shone’s [Market] I guess. [corner of Arnold and London Ranch Road].

S: Yes, that was Shone’s. Right. It was great.

22 A: So that was your store before it was Shone’s I guess.

S: Long before, yes. It was a couple other people’s after my Dad sold it. Big thick walls—it was great.

23 A: It’s a neat old building.

S: Yes, nice building.

24 A: A friend of mine, he’s no longer in California—Bob Westbrook? His parents bought one of the groceries in town in about 1965. But I think it might have been the other one.

S: Yes, probably. It’s a little ways past the bridge on the other side. Not where the Post Office is now.

25 A: Kind of adjoining that, between there and the vet [Dr. Wagner’s in Bill Meglen’s old house]. Did you ever hear any stories about people catching salmon?

S: No. Not really. I don’t remember the word even coming up, to tell you the truth. The steelhead would be in town. They used to catch steelhead in Sonoma Creek, down in the
water by Schellville, would be steelhead. Usually little trout [meaning what she caught herself]. It was fun.

26 A: You mentioned a swimming hole below the bridge. Did you have a name for that?
S: No.

27 A: How deep was that?
S: I guess deep enough to swim in, not very deep.

28 A: Like over your head when you were a kid or--?
S: Just about anything would be over my head! [laughs] I think it was, yes. As I say, the creek was condemned, not condemned, polluted, so we weren’t supposed to go. Right under the bridge in town, we used to get green mossy stuff in the summer as the water would get low. Of course there wasn’t the grapes or anything else, the water being used for agricultural stuff. So it just kind of got slow.

29 A: Do you remember ever swimming in Calabazas Creek?
S: Where’s Calabazas Creek?

30 A: That’s the one that comes into the main creek right there at the bridge. It’s got the brick bridge across it.
S: The little tiny one, the cute bridge?

31 A: Yes.
S: No. There was never that much water in there. It wasn’t that big. It’s a little creek. That’s the cutest bridge in the world. [laughs]

32 A: Do you remember the bridge being built that’s there now?
S: No. It was built when we got there.

33 A: I’ve heard stories about the old steel bridge that was there.
S: It was like the one towards Eldridge. The old Jack London—we used to call it a museum or rec center, was still there, when I was little. Up the hill from the store. Then they finally knocked it down. It was never quite finished. The inside was still lathe and plaster. It was too bad. I don’t know what happened to that.

34 A: There’s a group in town, a few years ago they were looking for a place to have a community center. It’s too bad that was no longer there, that would probably have worked.
S: Mayflower Hall was the place to meet in Glen Ellen. It’s still there I guess. [corner of Henno Road & O’Donnell Lane].

35 A: I’ve voted there a number of times.
S: That’s a cute little old building. It has a stage and the whole business.

36 A: That church is real pretty too.
S: Yes. Cute.

37 A: Do you remember any big floods or anything?
S: No, don’t remember any. Not in Glen Ellen. That was back in the early ‘forties. Then the war started in ’41, so that kind of changed things.

38 A: What year did you move to Sonoma?
S: ‘Thirty-nine or ‘eight. I think I was in the fifth grade, sixth grade. I was probably ten. I was born in ’28.

39 A: Do you remember any floods in Sonoma? Either when you were a kid or maybe later?
S: Later yes. That was fun. We’d always get in the car and go see how high the water was[laughs].

40 A: Where do you remember particularly the water being high?
S: Of course the road would be detoured down by Four Corners [Broadway and Leveroni]. Schellville would always be under water—it was for years. Ford’s [Café] would be flooded out. We’d go around every bridge and see how high the water was. It was kind of a family outing [laughs]. It was fun.

41 A: What’s the highest you remember the flooding?
S: The top of the bridge [probably the Highway 121 bridge over Sonoma Creek]. Well you couldn’t go down past Ford’s. The one up here at Highway 12, where it’s the big turn. That one would be high.

42 A: The one that’s kind of on the way into El Verano? [corner of Riverside Dr. and Petaluma Avenue].
S: Yes. It’s too bad it doesn’t do that anymore because it cleaned out the creek. It’s so full of trees now it’s amazing. Over by Cooper’s Bridge [Leveroni Rd], that way. That would be washed out every couple of years and clean out all the underbrush and half the bank and some land too. I think they rip-rapped that for awhile.
A: So it sounds like what you remember from growing up and maybe as a young adult that there was a lot less brush and stuff in the creek.

S: Yes.

A: Was the creek bed itself any different? The size of the rocks, or where the sandbars were?

S: It changes, creeks meander of course. It changes course, but it’s never been that much changed really. People have tried the rip-rap and the Leveronis have tried to shore up that side of the bank. Every once in awhile though it just takes the whole thing, out it goes.

A: Yes water when it decides to go somewhere.

S: It goes [laughs]. No matter what you do!

A: Bill [her son] told me about a trip he took on a raft. Sounds like he was lucky to survive that one.

S: That’s true. They used to do that, go down that, raft. A bunch of us went down maybe twenty-five years ago in rubber rafts. That was fun. You’d end up going around a corner and standing on an old refrigerator or a sunken car or something like that! I think it’s been cleaned up since then. That was through Boyes Springs and that area.

A: So it sounds like it was a little more junky then, at least the big junk.

S: Oh sure. There was an old car under the bridge by the cleaners there for a long time. But I think that’s gone.

A: Which road would that have been?

S: The one by the cleaners, at the corner. “Off the Square Cleaners” or whatever it is. Under that bridge, on the road to Petaluma.

A: Petaluma Avenue, down that way?

S: Yes, by Nicholas Turkey.

A: Riverside [Drive] and Petaluma [Avenue]

S: Yes. Well it blocked out part of that Riverside Road too. Maybe ten or fifteen years ago. That road’s gone.

A: I vaguely remember that—you used to be able to drive all the way through.

S: Yes, you can’t do it anymore. That took a lot of property with it. But that’s the way creeks are.
A: Living along the creek, I guess you have to put up with that. Do you remember any other parts of the valley where the roads got wiped out?

S: Down in the sloughs you’d lose roads down there once in awhile. In fact you couldn’t get through lots of times down there. We were great ones to travel around looking at high water for some reason or other [laughs].

A: I’ve done that myself. It’s pretty entertaining.

S: Kind of fun.

A: That swimming hole you mentioned in Glen Ellen, was that natural or did people put sandbags?

S: No, it was natural. You found a big rock you probably took it out and put it on the bank.

A: Bill Meglen was telling me, one of those holes down there, they used to take sandbags and go down and they’d fill them up and make a little bit of a dam.

S: Is that the same area? I don’t think so.

A: It’s close to there. It may not be exactly the same. He was talking about probably the ’twenties and you’re talking about the ’thirties.

S: ‘Thirties or ‘forties really.

A: Maybe by then things had changed. Did Bud or Bill have any fishing stories that you remember? Where did they used to like to fish?

S: Where did we fish? Just about any place that we had access to. Down through I guess, Serres, you know where the Serres Ranch is?

A: Yes.

S: Fished down from there or anywhere along Glen Ellen. Up by Morton’s [Warm Springs], along there. Along by (Golden Bear—not Golden Bear, but) Londonside, in that area, that creek [could be Sonoma Creek or Graham Creek].

A: Would you go fishing up in Adobe Canyon?

S: Nunn’s Canyon?

A: Nunn’s too would be interesting to find out.

S: That was funny water up there. It was kind of chalky—Nunn’s Canyon. Where’s Adobe Canyon?
A: It’s on the way out of Kenwood, going up to Sugarloaf?

S: Oh! That’s the headwaters of Sonoma Creek, Santa Rosa Creek.

A: Sonoma Creek.

S: Sonoma Creek, OK. Bud’s folks had a house, at Melita Road. Had a little ranch. That was Santa Rosa Creek there. So they could fish there until, what is that project they have that changed all the creek, for the flood control? Along by Spring Lake, that way. That’s the intake anyway for something, I guess one of the lakes. That’s a pretty creek.

A: If you can picture looking at Sonoma Mountain back when you were a kid, would you say the trees are any different? Are there more trees, less trees, about the same?

S: Looks the same to me. It was never burned that I can remember. This side does.

A: Yes this side does all the time [Mayacamas side].

S: There’s some redwood parts up there. We used to horseback around that mountain. I guess London planted a lot of eucalyptus, which was kind of a mistake.

A: They’ve taken those out now. I don’t know if you’ve been up there in the last couple years.

S: Have they? Good. Yes, they’re worthless. You can’t burn it and you can’t make furniture out of that kind they planted, so it was kind of a mistake.

A: Somebody told me he was thinking about making ship masts.

S: Yes, well eucalyptus splits! [laughs] Some kind is OK, but the kind they planted was not. And it’s terrible to burn in your fireplace. Burns it out. It looks about the same to me [referring to Sonoma Mountain]. We used to play around a lot at the Wolf House and that area. It was open then—you could wander around all you wanted to. Times have changed.

A: Yes, it’s a state park now.

S: We used to swim in the lake up there. That was a nice lake. At that time there was a little dock and I think we had a little boat. It wasn’t so full of reeds and stuff. It’s a man-made lake anyway.

A: London built that I think, didn’t he?

S: Yes. It was their water, wasn’t it?

A: Maybe so.
S: It was pretty nice to swim in at that time. I was up there not too long ago and it’s too full of reeds now.

70 A: If it’s a hot day I’ve considered going in there, but it doesn’t look too—you go in and you come out just covered with algae and stuff.

S: I guess they kind of discourage people from going in there anyway.

71 A: I think they do, yes.

S: They’ve done a nice job with the ranch though.

72 A: They’ve got the cottage pretty well fixed up.

S: It was kind of a guest ranch when I was little. They had paid guests, a dude ranch kind of a deal. It was kind of interesting.

73 A: Do you remember Charmian? [Jack London’s wife]

S: Very much.

74 A: What kind of a person was she?

S: Kind of eccentric. Always wore red, dressed in red. Hat and coat and everything. My Dad taught her to drive somehow or other. She’d come down to town every once in awhile. She was around a long time. When did she die, in the ‘fifties or ‘sixties?

75 A: I think the early ‘sixties.

S: ‘Sixties, yes. Strange little old lady. Went to her house a couple of times for dinner. She was just different. The house was furnished just about like it is. That dining room had the fountain in it and had a pond in it of some kind, fish pond. You know, fountain with water. That was impressive! Pretty place. I always remember she had a bust of queen Nefertiti in her bedroom, which was impressive.

76 A: She probably got it in Egypt, huh?

S: I imagine. It was a beautiful copy. It was very pretty. Had a lot of dead flowers around. Vases full of dried up flowers. I said, “Why do you have those?” And she said, “Well I like them.” I just thought she was too lazy to get rid of them. [laughs] Anyway, it was kind of a charmed life in those days.

77 A: Your father grew up in this area right? Or both your parents?

S: No, he was from Shasta County.

78 A: Shasta County, OK. I guess it’s Bud’s family.
S: Bud’s family was from Sebastopol. Frank was from Stockton area, down south. Then they came up to—Bud’s mother lived in Sebastopol forever. They had a slaughterhouse in Sebastopol. His grandmother’s house is still over there. Pretty old house, almost like the one we had on Spain. It’s just a total disaster now[laughs].

79 A: New people not taking care of it?
S: Oh, somebody bought it and it’s just gone downhill ever since. It looks terrible.

80 A: Your family was there for a long time?
S: Bud and I bought that in ‘sixty-something or other, ‘sixty-one, ‘sixty-two. And we were there for about thirty-five years I guess, that’s a long time. Both the kids grew up there. I think Mary was just maybe five when we bought it and Bill was eight or nine. And Bill will be fifty next week! This week!

81 A: This week really? When’s his birthday, I knew it was coming up.
S: Friday.

82 A: I’ll have to make sure to give him a call.
S: I don’t know whether it bothers him more or me [laughs]. How are you doing with your poetry?

83 A: Doing well. In fact I taught your granddaughter. I forget her name.
S: Lizzy?

84 A: Lizzy yes. I taught Lizzy.
S: Oh really?

85 A: Yes, a few years ago. Did she go to Sassarini?
S: Yes.

86 A: Yes, I taught her over at Sassarini.
S: Oh good. She’s a delight.

87 A: She wrote some good stuff, yes.
S: She’s cute. She’s getting to be quite a little lady right now. She’s thirteen almost, going on fourteen.

88 A: I’ve got a daughter who’s three going on fourteen, seems like [laughs]
S: [laughs] I know what you mean! They sure get it early this day and age, don’t they? It’s scary.

89 A: She dresses up, got a little earrings and everything already. She can be an outdoor girl when she wants, in the right situation, but she likes her dress-up clothes.

S: Well that’s fun. You have one daughter?

90 A: I have one daughter and a son. My son’s just thirteen months old.

S: That’s nice.

91 A: He’s just on the cusp of walking. He’s taken a couple of steps, then he’ll kind of fall down, get up again, try it again and fall down. He’s a fun little guy. Call him “Jolly Joe.”

S: “Jolly Joe?” [laughs]

92 A: Do you remember anyone finding any Indian artifacts any particular places?

S: Not when I was kid, we never looked. We probably stood on them all day long. It just never occurred to us to really look for them until later. That was quite a family project when the kids were growing up. We’d go walk through fields and stuff like that.

93 A: Your kids would find some then?

S: Yes.

94 A: Where were some places?

S: Well you can’t do it anymore, because it’s private property.

95 A: Yes I wasn’t thinkin of that. More just be interested to know—

S: Oh, anyplace along the creek that looks like someplace you’d like to stop and camp, that’s where they did. You could always find an arrowhead or two or a bowl or something, in the creek. Lots of bowls in the creek. Broken for the most part, but once in awhile you find a perfect one.

96 A: Bill took me out one time over to Leveroni’s field [off 5th Street West] to look for stuff.

S: It you were walking along as an Indian you’d have stopped there too. It was such a nice place, that sunshine next to the water. You can always kind of tell by the dirt. If the dirt is kind of dark and greasy kind of, with bits of this and that in it. Shells and stuff. Once in awhile you’d find some wonderous thing. Usually after it’s been plowed and then rained on—would wash the flint off and it would shine.
A: I find little bits of obsidian at my house, I live in Glen Ellen myself.

S: Whereabouts do you live?

A: I live on Warm Springs Road, if you’re driving away from Glen Ellen, just past the Glenelly Inn. Kind of on the left-hand side—you probably know where O’Donnell’s lived, right?

S: Oh yes, OK.

A: Stella O’Donnell—you could just about throw a rock from my house to where her house used to be.

S: Well it had to be brought in, from what I hear—obsidian.

A: Yes, I don’t think it occurs naturally on the floor of the valley.

S: It had to be chipped off by somebody. It’s always fun to find a piece.

A: Yes. You think about the last person who touched it.

S: Who dropped it, right. You know for awhile we’d pick up all those little pieces of flint and take them home, that were worked at all. We kind of put them out in the path in the garden. Half the kids thought we lived on an Indian mound! [laughs] They were so disappointed when they found out we salted it. It was fun and games in those days.

A: When you were living in Glen Ellen, how did most people get their water? Did they have wells or . . .?

S: Chauvet, wasn’t it the Chauvet Water Company?

A: Yes, I think so. So you had water piped into your house from Chauvet’s.

S: We might have had some people that had wells, along the creek. There weren’t too many houses in Glen Ellen in those days, really. A few up the hill towards the London Ranch. Not very many.

A: What was Warm Springs Road like, going out from town? Was there much out there?

S: Some, but not much. Towards London side and up that way. There were summer places like Wake Robin [corner of Warm Springs and Sonoma Mountain Roads]. You know where that is?

A: More or less, yes. Right there where Graham Creek comes down along Sonoma Mountain Road?
S: Right. That was a great picnic place up that way. They had to close it up I think. There was a lot of beautiful redwood trees up that way.

106 A: Right there by Wake Robin?

S: About a half a mile up the road. Then there’s that great bunch up the mountain.

107 A: Cooper’s Grove?

S: Above Cooper’s Grove I think. It’s a big one.

108 A: Once you get over the top of the hill and start coming down?

S: No, it’s before you get to the top. Maybe that’s the one they call Cooper’s, I don’t know. There’s a house across the street.

109 A: Yes.

S: It’s gated now. Used to be wonderful Indian mounds in there. You just sort of brush the redwood needles off and you’d find an arrowhead! It was just really something else. It’s hard to find any place really any more, that you can just wander.

110 A: Yes. I’ve been in Glen Ellen twelve years. When I first got there I could still do that quite a bit. I’ve slowly seen it get more and more closed up.

S: More people. Glen Ellen does a good job though, trying to keep it like it is. They work hard at it I think.

111 A: Yes, I look at all the development happening in Santa Rosa.

S: Oh, that’s pathetic. It’s just amazing what happened to that town. I don’t know. Used to be such a great little town. But . . .

112 A: I guess the land was too good to build houses on.

S: Downtown is just gone. They put that crazy looking street down the middle on Fourth Street.

113 A: With those bumpy cobblestones.

S: And they took down the courthouse, which was in the middle of the town. Beautiful old building, domed thing.

114 A: I guess that’s a museum now, right?
No it’s gone. The whole square in the middle of town was the courthouse. They knocked that down. They don’t save buildings over there. They only saved one, that was the old post office or jail or something. That’s the museum.

That’s right. I knew they’d moved at least one building.

That’s the only building I think they saved. They knocked down the library, which was gorgeous, made out of volcanic stone. It was a beautiful old building. What else did they lose? They lost that adobe on Cherry Street. They never have done anything with the Carillo Adobe next to the Catholic Church. They might as well forget that one, it’s so melted down.

They’ve got a roof over it, but I don’t think it makes much difference at this point.

No. It’s too bad. Oh well.

Sonoma has held on to quite a bit.

Yes. Sonoma’s great.

Do you remember anybody ever using boats in the upper part of the watershed, like Glen Ellen or Kenwood?

No. Never.

What’s the deepest hole you can remember in the creek, in the summertime?

I guess that one that we swam in. It was probably four feet deep maybe. It wasn’t very deep. Five feet.

Were the pools pretty well connected by flowing water?

Yes. There was always water. But late in the summer it would get kind of green under the bridge [Glen Ellen main bridge]. It was always running. It still is, isn’t it?

Oh sure. Calabazas gets—like this year it stopped running. Some years it’ll keep going and some years it’ll stop. This has been a low rain year.

There’s a lot of vineyards too up Henno Road—doesn’t that come in [through there]?

Yes, it’s got quite a few vineyards now.

Out that way, isn’t that Calabazas Creek?

Yes, that’s some of the tributaries. The main stem ends up going under Highway Twelve.

By Warfield?
124 A: Yes.

S: Oh the train was in Glen Ellen when I was young. We had a hand car [laughs] and we could pump our way down to Warfield, but the train only went once a month. Just to keep it open. Then they took up the track.

125 A: Was that passenger service or they just did freight?

S: I don’t think it was passengers. They had a trestle. It was fun.

126 A: I’ve always wanted to ride one of those hand cars.

S: Yes, one of those pump things. It was too bad they took the train up.

127 A: Was that during the war, that they [took it up]?

S: Yes. They took all the tracks up.

128 A: I was walking in the [Glen Ellen] Regional Park, right along the old train bed and I found a spike, half a spike actually.

S: Bill used to bring those home by the bucketful. He had more parts to trains, it’s a wonder he didn’t have an entire train [laughs]. Piece of track and those little rivets and stuff. He probably still has it all.

129 A: Do you remember any of the smaller plants that grew alongside the creek?

S: Besides rotten watercress, which you can’t eat?

130 A: Do you know spicebush?

S: What’s that?

131 A: It’s got this reddish flower. It’s sort of smells like apple pie.

S: I don’t remember that one. Different wild flowers. There were a lot of good Trilliums and different things you’d look for. In those days of course, you had to pick them. That was a school project—you picked so many varieties of wild flowers, which is too bad [laughs]!

132 A: You don’t by any chance still have that, do you?

S: Yes I do, somewhere. It was like a project, every year, every student had to have a folder with every kind of a wild flower they found.

133 A: Was that at Dunbar?
S: Yes.

134 A: Did you have Miss Sullivan?

S: Yes that sounds familiar. What did she look like?

135 A: I’m not sure.

S: Max Cunningham was there. I think he got there a little after I was there.

136 A: I think my wife had him the last year he was there. She graduated Dunbar in 1970, ’71.

S: Max started there.

137 A: You mentioned picking Trillium, do you remember any other plants that you picked for that [project]?

S: Oh everything. Dutchman’s pipe. All kinds of buttercups. Just about any kind you find. Johnny-Jump-Ups we used to call them. The first one that bloomed in the spring was a white something-or-other. Columbine [referring to a different flower]. They’re still there. And Hound’s Tongue, that purple stuff.

138 A: Columbine I’ve only seen it one time.

S: Red Columbine.

139 A: Would you find that down along the creek or--?

S: Any kind of a shady spot, the Trillium would be, and then a little bit further would be [Columbine]. Along little creeks you’d find it. It’s pretty. Diogene’s Lantern, that little yellow [flower], looks like a lantern.

140 A: Yes, I know what you mean.

S: The most prized I think of all of them was the Dutchman’s pipe, which was a vine.

141 A: Yes, we have that still.

S: Do you? Oh good. We didn’t kill it all by picking it I guess!

142 A: The Trillium, I have rarely ever seen it around Glen Ellen. But where I have seen it in other places, it’s usually under redwoods. Was that true?

S: Used to be a red Trillium and a white Trillium, along creeks, yes on the banks. Some real shady [spot].
143 A: Real cool places.
S: Yes. The creek up Mission Highlands, a couple places up that way, it would grow. What creek is that? It comes down through Lazarotto’s Auto Court [on Highway Twelve], that creek? Starts way up in Mission Highlands.

144 A: That wouldn’t be Nathanson, would it?
S: Nathanson? No. Nathanson’s the one that goes through town.

145 A: Yes, it goes through town. Let’s see—I’m not familiar with Lazarotto’s.
S: It’s in Boyes Springs. That trailer park, Acacia [name of trailer park].

146 A: I think that’s Agua Caliente [Creek]
S: OK. It goes into Sonoma Creek. But I think it starts way up, somewhere up there.

147 A: I’ve never explored it, but on a map you can see it goes way, way up.
S: It goes way far up Diamond A [probably means Mission Highlands] Wherever you got off the beaten path you could find whatever kind of wildflowers you want, I guess.

148 A: Do you remember seeing Red Larkspur?
S: Yes. I think so. Rare.

149 A: I saw a few of those around, actually on Warm Springs Road going into Kenwood, there’s that real steep bank that was cut, with all the rocks? Near Lawndale Road? I see them there sometimes.
S: That’s a nice area, Lawndale. It’s pretty.

150 A: Yes, I like it. Did you happen to know Val Rossi? He lived up there.
S: No. I really haven’t had any contact with Glen Ellen since I moved away [laughs]. Very little anyway. The people we knew there of course are all gone.

151 A: Did you learn the trees also? You mentioned the wild flowers—did you do any school projects on the trees?
S: No. I don’t think so. Just the wild flowers

152 A: I saw a really old account from about 1870 that mentioned a two-and-a-half foot diameter willow right there where downtown Glen Ellen would eventually be, right there where the bridge is, [confluence of] Calabazas. I’ve never seen willows in that area, do you recall any? [this is true looking upstream, downstream there are small willows]
S: No, I don’t remember them. Huh.

A: There’s alders there now, but I’ve never seen any [willows].

S: Had dinner at the Glen Ellen Bistro, is that [the name]? With the little porch our there.

A: Yes that’s nice out there.

S: There was a water ouzel out there. It was a gorgeous bird.

A: A little Dipper?

S: Yes and dark. Looks like a bullet kind of.

A: I saw one of those recently.

S: I was surprised to see that. Sometimes, not lately, some of the creeks you’d see wood ducks sometimes, a beautiful bird.

A: I think there’s a few of those up in Annadel [State Park].

S: Good, good.

A: How about pileated woodpeckers? Do you remember those?

S: Yes. They’re still up around.

A: Yes they’re around here, they’ve come to my house before.

S: They’ll eat your house! [laughs] We had one out here in this pine tree, I don’t know if was that kind of a woodpecker, but it was a red-headed woodpecker with a black and white spotted breast. Is that a pileated?

A: Um, I think they’re more solid colored. I’m not much of a bird person actually. Mostly I can tell a pileated by the size. They’re so big.

S: No this was not that big.

A: Maybe that was an acorn woodpecker?

S: Maybe. He certainly was busy planting acorns this year. I bet I pulled up fifty-five trees out there. He really did a job this year. It was unusual. They’re planted in my garden everywhere. Can’t let them grow.

A: Do you remember egrets or herons around the creek up there?

S: No. They’ve always been, I probably just don’t remember them. They’re still there.
CHURCHILL

163  A:  Or Canada geese, do you remember Canada geese?
S:  No. I don’t remember seeing that. They’re becoming quite a problem! [laughs]

164  A:  Are they? I hadn’t heard about that.
S:  Oh yes. At Oakmont particularly.

165  A:  They probably eat peoples’ gardens . . .
S:  No, they just sit on the golf course and make a huge mess I guess. They are a problem for people with ponds or swimming pools sometimes. They decide they want to camp [laughs]. I can hear them, don’t you hear them?

166  A:  Oh yes. Especially right around dusk you’ll see them go overhead.
S:  Yes, it’s really a thrill to see them.

167  A:  They’re beautiful birds.
S:  Provided they don’t land in our pool over here [laughs].

166  A:  Do you remember people grazing a lot of animals around Glen Ellen?
S:  No. I guess the Bouverie Ranch had some stuff. When I was little, the Tevises [sp?] lived there, not Bouverie, he wasn’t there. He owned it, but he didn’t live there. I think he had some cattle. I don’t remember cows or stuff like that.

167  A:  Where would you get your milk from? Or did your family--

168  A:  Ever hear about any logging going on on Sonoma Mountain?
S:  No. There wasn’t any, well I guess there was.

169  A:  Milo [Shepard] mentioned, he didn’t give any exact dates, but he mentioned up until about the mid ‘fifties [1950s] they would come through and do some logging.
S:  I’ll be darned. Huh. Redwood?

170  A:  Yes, redwood.
S:  How is he?
A: He seems to be doing pretty well. I think he’s had a little bit of a rough life in certain ways with things he had to deal with in giving up part of the ranch to the state. But healthwise, he looked fine. He didn’t give any details, but he looked like he was still getting around pretty good.

S: Good.

A: He’s taking care of his ranch and things like that.

S: Well that’s good. Good for him.

A: Was the creek pretty shady when you were a kid?

S: Um-hum [affirmative].

A: So it had a lot of tree cover? There weren’t too many places where the sun would come . . .

S: No. Not really.

A: What was the attitude of people towards wildlife in those days?

S: You mean like hunting?

A: Or maybe a better way to put it—How has peoples’ attitude toward wildlife changed? Have you noticed a change?

S: Sure now. It’s a rich man’s sport. I only know one person who goes deer hunting anymore. And bird hunting, ducks and pheasant—you have to belong to a club. But in the old days you could drive down in the sloughs and see pheasant walking across the road. And they weren’t planted. And ducks; quite a few ducks were killed on the Sebastiani’s bird reserve down there, by Viansa. That was a good duck hunting area. But for big, for game, if you were serious, you’d go to the Valley. Sacramento Valley. For pheasant or ducks and stuff.

A: In those days did a lot of people subsistence hunt?

S: Oh I don’t think so.

A: Sport [hunting]?

S: Yes. They always complained—twenty-five trout wasn’t enough for anybody of course [laughs]. I don’t know what the limit is now, probably eight.

A: Zero actually.

S: Good. That’s good.
180 A: If you go down to saltwater you can catch them, but once you get above end of saltwater you’re not allowed to catch them.

S: Well I think the same thing about the coast; they ought to limit the abalone to nothing for awhile. As much as, how wonderful it is.

181 A: I’m sure Bill wouldn’t appreciate that, but . . .

S: Yes, it gets to the point though. We’ve had so much trouble with people poaching and stuff. They can raise it commercially now. Unless your family hunted, not for subsistence, but just for the fun of hunting. People don’t do that anymore, I don’t think.

182 A: Yes I’ve seen a change—I’m forty-two and as a kid I remember a lot more people going out and hunting. In fact I grew up in New Jersey and we had about a square mile of woods in back of our house. It wasn’t our land, but hunters would come through going after deer. There’s houses back there now so you couldn’t do that anyway.

S: The deer are a problem I know for a lot of people. Well people moved in there. Deer walk through and eat their garden. Why not?

183 A: Thank you very much. [laughs]

S: Yes, it’s a nice rose bush. The only thing we have around here are possum. I never remember possum.

[phone rings]

184 A: We were talking about possums.

S: They’re a problem. Well, they’re not really, they’re just ugly! [laughs]

185 A: They’re one of the ugliest creatures, I agree. [laughs]

S: I had one on my fence not long ago. It wouldn’t move. And raccoons, still. And we used to have skunks a lot at 180 [Spain Street], downtown. When we first moved to Spain, there weren’t any houses behind us. That whole field was empty. We saw deer a couple times and pheasant. A few things like that. But that’s a long time ago.

186 A: There’s a couple places on the bike trail as you go along there, that it’s still sort of marshy?

S: Oh yes.

187 A: Was it more marshy when you first moved in?

S: I don’t know. About the same. There’s still a lot of good polywog frog stuff down there in the spring. There ought to be a lake. Wouldn’t that be a pretty lake?
A: That would be a pretty spot, with the hills reflected.
S: It’d be nice.

A: Do you remember anybody going down to the creek and basically gravel mining? Going down and loading gravel into trucks?
S: Wasn’t there a gravel place down by the tidewater? By the cement plant?

A: Yes, I think you’re right, there was one down there.
S: That’s the only one I remember. As far as taking rocks out you mean?

A: Yes.
S: Rocks are a big business now.

A: They sell them by the pound sometimes.
S: Yes.

A: Probably before your time, people would just go down to the creek and load up. Then of course, Shamrock started and I think Serres had an operation.
S: Serres had a big operation yes. That’s right.

A: Right there on Sonoma Creek?
S: Yes. Forgot about that one. But I don’t remember any in Glen Ellen.

A: From other people I’ve talked to up in that area, I think it was pretty informal. You knew somewhere to get down to the creek and you’d go down and …
S: Pick up a rock.

A: Right, pick up a rock. Nobody cared.
S: There are enough of them up Felder Creek, up that way. Still.

A: Yes those are nice basalt up there. Do you think during floods, has the color of the creek changed at all?
S: It gets muddy.

A: Yes. Did it used to be muddy when you were a kid?
S: Yes. It’d wash down all those banks and land. It would just get brown.
200 A: So that’s about the same. Do you remember any landslides?
S: Oh yes. A big one in Glen Ellen. In fact we walked across it and darn near went down with it once.

201 A: Was that kind of up above O’Donnell’s property?
S: Yes, I think. You go up the hill towards the London Ranch and then on the right you turn off and there was a big, big landslide along there, towards the creek. Yes.

202 A: My house is directly across the creek from that.
S: That was a big one. You could watch it move in fact. It’s stopped isn’t it? Doesn’t move any more?

203 A: Yes, not that I know of. Although I wouldn’t be surprised at all if it continued to come down again.
S: That’s the only one I remember. That was dramatic.

204 A: So you remember when it first happened?
S: Yes, I think.

205 A: What did you see when that happened?
S: You could watch and it would slowly move. There’d be rocks and some trees. But it’d go really slow, ‘cause we walked across it, like a bunch of idiots [laughs].

206 A: So you were walking while it was moving?
S: Sort of, yes. Crazy. Anything for fun in Glen Ellen I guess, huh? [laughs]

207 A: A little excitement [laughs]. Somebody thought, it was probably before your time, that brickworks.
S: Oh yes, I remember that.

208 A: Was that still in operation?
S: No. It was vacant. Pretty little meadow in there. No houses. It was just an empty meadow and had a bunch of old broken bricks. That was fun.

209 A: Did the slide happen right about there?
S: It was up the hill from there.
A: Somebody I talked to thought maybe there was a connection between the brickyard taking out stuff at the bottom of the hill and hill coming down.

S: No. The slide was beyond there. I wonder when that brickyard went out of business—do you know?

A: I don’t. I was talking to Bill Meglen. He was born in 1915 and as I recall he used to play there, but it wasn’t in operation. So probably before 1920 [it went out of business].

S: It’s full of houses now, isn’t it?

A: Yes. Robertson Road I think. I keep my eye out around town for those yellow bricks, because I think they all came from the Glen Ellen [brickyard]--

S: Oh really?

A: I don’t know that for sure, but you don’t see too many yellow bricks around.

S: No. That’s a fire brick isn’t it? The yellow ones?

A: Probably, although I’ve seen, right next to me where O’Donnell had her entrance to her property there was two columns of yellow brick.

S: I just always assumed those were fire brick, for a fireplace. Maybe not though.

A: You look at the library, on the plaza, that’s got the yellow brick and Chauvet [Hotel] has the yellow brick. I haven’t researched it, just kind of speculation. Maybe that’s all from right there.

S: I wonder if they had their name in them? Some bricks do.

A: Right, they put it on the top. I should look for that.

S: We used to have a lot of those.

A: I’ve got a half one I found.

S: We used them in the patio at one-eight-oh for a long time. We’d never used to find one with a name in it, it was something else.

A: I guess one last question would be, do you remember any dredging or any other kind of work that was done in the creek?

S: In the creek? No. Other than the rip-rap once in awhile.

A: People trying to protect their [banks].
S: They’d load rocks and stuff to try and stop the erosion, but it wouldn’t do any good. As I say, when it flooded, it usually cleaned things out. You keep thinking there’s going to be a big flood and it’ll clean the creek out and it’ll be a mess because all the trees that grow in there. Not so much Glen Ellen area I guess. But down this way. Cooper’s Bridge, it’s really filled up.

A: I’ve noticed you can hardly see the creek this time of year because of all the willows and whatever else is down there.

S: Stuff. At least people aren’t dumping stuff in the creek anymore. Hopefully.

A: Most people aren’t. Occasionally somebody does. Compared to what it used to be, where people would just throw stuff out, if they lived on the creek they’d just throw it in the creek.

S: Sure.

A: [laughs] It’ll be gone.

S: Gone! [laughs] Well maybe they learned the lesson, hopefully.

A: What do you think has been the biggest change in the valley’s environment since you were a kid?

S: Just population. Don’t you?

A: I would guess that would probably be the biggest, yes.

S: That’s why it’s a constant fight to keep things the way they are. But you can’t. There’s just a lot of people. You can’t close the gate.

A: That’s true. Hopefully we can keep some of the best stuff, that’s my hope. Keep the good stuff.

S: Hopefully. Hope we can keep the hospital.

A: I hope so too.

S: That’s sure a mess.

A: I think the El Verano site seems like a good [one]—close to town. I don’t know all the details of it, but . . .

S: Just so we have something, my gosh. As busy as that emergency room is. My son-in-law just ended up there the other day with a cut on his leg that he got in the water in the creek. It was some kind of a weird bug. Has to be drained and “IVed” and all that kind of stuff. It
was something in the water. I spent a lot of time in that creek and never had any problem like that, but . . . I think Bill still wades around in it every once in awhile. [laughs]

228 A: Yes, I’ve waded with him a few times [laughs] In fact I even showed him a couple places he’d never been

S: My gosh! Well good.

229 A: Nunn’s Canyon. Well I appreciate all your time.

S: I’m sorry I didn’t have much.

230 A: No you gave me some good stuff. The wildflowers was especially interesting. Nobody else had really told me about that aspect.

S: I can’t remember why they made people, well I know why they did, ‘cause there weren’t any left, they put that in schools. Having kids pick all the flowers [laughs]. We used to pick a beautiful little pansy, a yellow pansy, grew wild on the way from here to Napa. But there aren’t any more. Hopefully we didn’t pick them all. We always stopped there and picked a bouquet of those.

231 A: That would be in the Carneros area?

S: Oh, just over the hill, when you start up the hill, along that rock wall.

232 A: Near Stornetta Curve?

S: Past there. Every year they’d grow up there. They were so pretty. Haven’t seen them forever. Now they’re planting flowers, which is nice. Along the roads. Some of them I don’t know what they are. Some of those red ones. It’s not fireweed.

233 A: No. Those are a little more purple usually.

S: That’s back East anyway.

234 A: And Alaska too.

S: Oh yes? Lots of fireweed up there?

234 A: Yes.

S: It looks pretty, it’s nice. Poppies are kind of coming back. I don’t think Bouverie’s have been so hot for the last how many years. It used to be just gorgeous. Poppies and lupine, all at the same time.

235 A: Yes, that’s a great combination.
S: That’s a sight to see, but it hasn’t bloomed that way for quite awhile. You can’t predict where it’s going to be I guess.

236 A: He [David Bouverie] wouldn’t sew seeds or anything, would he?

S: It was all natural. Everybody would stop and take pictures. It was so pretty.

237 A: It’s still a very pretty valley, that’s for sure.

S: Oh yes. We just watched a program on Italy last night. We’re going to go in October.

238 A: That’s exciting.

S: Yes! Beautiful country. Looks a lot like this.

239 A: I don’t know if you’ve seen these books, but I’d like to give these to you as a thank you. A couple books I’ve put together

S: I’ve seen this one. We used to sell this at the Visitor’s Center.

240 A: Oh yes. Maybe I even met you in there some time and didn’t even realize it.

S: I resigned.

241 A: That one’s all kid’s poetry.

S: I love kid’s poetry. Great. Very nice, well thank you very much.

242 A: Sure.
Interview with Charles “Charlie” Cooke  
February 7, 2001, at his home on Lovall Valley Road.  
C=Charlie Cooke; A=Arthur Dawson; R=Rob Hoenigman (videographer)

1 A: So you grew up here in the valley?  
C: Part of my life. I got here in 1941 came back, I mean we were here in 1938. I went to kindergarten in what’s now the community center. But then we came back in 1941, I was here until ’45, went to China and came back and was here in ’48, and I basically left in ’49 and finally came back in ’75. Of course every year I always came home for Christmas and vacation and stuff like that. I’ve seen the valley since 1938.

2 A: What do you remember? What are some of your first memories of Sonoma Valley?  
C: Sebastiani Theatre. Saw my first movie. Sonya Henie for god sakes. It was an ice skating movie. We rented a house as we built the first part of this house in ’38. And we were about a block and a half from what’s now the community center, so I just walked to school everyday. And, of course, we were up here every once in a while. In terms of what I can remember then and what I know now, the main difference is we used to have a prune orchard up here and a pear and a peach orchard. The guy that we bought it from ran this orchard and then there was another orchard across the canyon over here and he also managed that. Which was the old nudist colony. So he managed that orchard as well as this one over here. This one had apples, prunes, and some peaches. And you came up here just before you get to the area where the houses are, there’s a steep hillside there, well, that was all peach orchard. It was pretty well gone by the time we got it, although the prunes were still here and the apples, actually the apple trees are still here. They’re about 150 years old probably. I pay no attention to them. They’re all Gravenstein basically. I think there’s two prune trees left. And they’re over a hundred years old. But, my father didn’t want to do any farming, he came from Arkansas and he’d had enough of that when he was a kid. So, he didn’t want to do any farming or anything like that so this basically was just hills and rocks and trees and poison oak.

3 A: Are the trees much different now than they were back then?  
C: They’re a lot bigger. These trees around here that you see that are about a foot to a foot and a half. They were about that size, about six inches, in those days. So all of the trees were considerably smaller. I remember we used to go from here across the valley over to Shepard’s, London’s, and the trees over there were always a heck of a lot bigger than anything here. They had water. You know we don’t get the water over here that they get over there. So, I remember when I was a kid I used to think oh my god look at these big trees. Are ours ever going to get that big? And of course they are now, some of them.
A: I was surprised to see some Douglas Fir on the way in.

C: Well, that’s funny, because when we got here in ’38 there was almost no Douglas Firs. There was a big one right outside the house here. My dad paved over it for parking and killed it. This big one that’s out front here, it was here. And this one that you can see when you go out right over there, it was about five feet tall. But my mother liked the fir trees and there weren’t a lot of them in those days. That hill over there, where you can see all kinds of fir trees on now, there was not a single fir tree on that hill.

A: Would that have just been chaparral back then?

C: Yes. All chaparral. There might have been a few stunted live oaks in there, but not really. And there were no Doug Firs at all. The bucks when they’re trying to shed the velvet off of their horns, they use the young fir trees to rub up against. And they’ll just rub the whole bark off and kill them. So, mother wanted to save the fir trees and we used to go around and put chicken cages around the damn fir trees all around here. Of course now when you think about it it’s crazy because those fir trees are taking over everything. And I don’t protect them at all anymore. We started out doing that [laughs]. Of course now that whole hillside has got fir on it and this hill as you go back down the road, in front of Versaggi’s (sp.) place, you’ll see that’s got a lot of fir trees. There was not a lot in ’38. That was all chaparral.

A: Do you think that’s because of fire suppression?

C: Well a fir tree is very ecosystem specific. In other words, if I got a seed from a fir tree over on Sonoma Mountain and brought it over here, it wouldn’t grow. You have to have at least one take off and it has to be a mother tree and once that happens, it will spread everywhere. Which is what happened here over the years. And of course, they’re the dominant tree. They’ll wipe out everything under them if you let them take over. We also have some redwoods down on the creek on this side of the property.

A: Is that Huichica Creek?

C: Well, I don’t know. They call it Arroyo Seco, but it isn’t. It ain’t “seco” [laughs because in Spanish it means “dry”], it flows all year long. It goes into a big dam that’s on the Bartholomew Park. There’s about a sixty foot concrete dam there and it flows into that, so actually it is seco from that dam on down through Old Winery Road, that’s the creek there, where it comes out. But it will be dry in the summer because it’s dammed up up here, down at Bartholomew’s. But it flows all year round on my property, in fact, I can’t prove this, but my guess is that all of that water comes out of my hills in that creek. That’s pretty good water. So the redwoods—I don’t know the exact dates, but those redwoods were harvested probably in the 1880s is my guess. Because there’s stumps down there that are about anywhere from 14-20 feet. And they’ve all been cut, so I assume it was around the 1880’s, some where in there that they must have harvested them. All the ones that grew up, grew up around those stumps. Now they’re now around
three to four feet in diameter. Pretty big trees, but they’re all second growth. There’s no old growth redwoods here. They harvested them all.

8 A: Do you think those were cut more than once, or do you think they were just harvested once?

C: I doubt it because there weren’t that many of them. There might have been, there may have been fifty – sixty something like that, not a huge number. There’s an old mine up there too, which my mother thought was an iron mine, but I don’t think so, I think it is mercury. They used to mine mercury here. They did mine mercury around here, in the 1880s I guess. So that mine is still there, it is mostly collapsed. Supposedly there is the body of a Chinese miner and his donkey in there, but I haven’t bothered to go in and find them. [laughs] Supposedly, that’s the ghost, or something. There were fish in that creek.

9 A: Steelhead?

C: Trout. I think rainbow. And they were maybe six inches at most. The creek is not that thick. Most of the summer it gets down to about two feet in depth. Maybe three feet, there’s some deep pools that are maybe five. Of course, in the wintertime it fills up and overflows. The dam has some pretty big fish in it. I think, I never caught any out of there, but supposedly they were pulling some trout out of there that were 18 – 24 inches. Big trout, but I never caught any, I tried several times but I never got any. I assume there’s still fish in there now but I don’t know, I haven’t been down there in years. Bartholomew of course has made it into a park and people hike around there all the time, I don’t know if there’s any fish in there or not. I haven’t been down to look and see if there’s any fish coming up the stream from the dam but I assume there are.

10 A: Do you know if any of those were native or if they would have been planted at some point?

C: I have no idea. I know they’re rainbows, that’s all I know. It could have been either one of course. The state had the Bartholomew property and the dam for a long period of time. The woman that owned it, her name was Johnson, I think it was Kate Johnson. Kate Johnson had 300 cats and no heirs. When she died the state took over what’s now the winery. It was several things. It was a house for wayward girls. Whatever that is. And then it was the Sonoma Hospital for a couple years, the Sonoma Valley Hospital. And then it was a nursing home for a number of years. Bartholomew bought it, I think in around ‘45 – ’46, somewhere in that area. After World War Two. I can remember when I was a kid. My best friend was a kid named Merlin Ritz. As you come off of Napa Street and hit Old Winery Road, there’s an old farm house in there, about two blocks in as you’re going down Old Winery Road on the right hand side. That’s the Ritz Ranch. It used to be. And all of those houses going back to where that guy has planted a vineyard on Lovall Valley Road as you’re going before you get to where the turn is, the ninety degree turn, that new vineyard that’s in there. Well up to that vineyard and all the way back to where the Ritz house is was all orchard. It was pears, prunes. And the other side of the road, the left side of Old Winery Road, between
Lovall Valley Road and Von Sydow’s (sp?; corner of East Napa and Eighth Street East), what used to be the grocery. It used to be cherry orchard on that side. So, when I was a kid that’s how I would earn money. I went down there and picked pears and prunes and cherries, of course now it’s all houses.

A: Some of the streets are named things like Pear Tree Court.

C: It was all orchard in those days. Cecil Ritz, I think still lives there, I’m not positive about that, I think he does. He was the cousin of my friend Merlin. Of course in those days Sangiacomo was all pears. Now it’s all grapes.

A: So did you fish in Sonoma Creek?

C: No. I used to fish in that creek that comes down on Warm Springs Road [actually this is the main stem of Sonoma Creek]. There was fish in there, but what I was after most of the time was crawfish. We used to get bacon on the end of a string and drop it down there and when they’d grab that we’d haul them out. We’d get about 10 or 15 of them and there was enough to make salad. And I caught trout out of there.

A: How big were the trout?

C: Maybe ten inches at the most. Pretty small. And I used to fish up at Shepards’ out of their lake. But I never fished Sonoma Creek.

A: Right up off of Warm Springs Road, do you remember how deep some of the pools were?

C: You could swim in them. They might have been five feet, the deepest ones. They were fairly shallow but big enough for good size fish.

A: Were there any places up there you had names for? Any particular spots you remember?

C: I used to work that from where Wake Robin is up to the bridge, that’s about two miles up in there along Warm Springs before you turn off to go on Bennett Valley. That was basically it, and I guess we did do some downstream towards Glen Ellen, down to where that first ninety degree turn is when you’re coming out of Glen Ellen on Warm Springs. There was no houses there in those days.

A: Do you remember any wildlife along the creek besides fish and crawdads?

C: Not really. Around here there was of course deer, of which there are tons still. Foxes. We had a funny episode here. We moved up here briefly when the first few rooms were finished in ’38. We had a water tank up on the hill. One day the water started tasting pretty bad. So we went up there to try to figure out the reason for that was. Well, I guess the foxes were in heat. So a male and female had jumped into the top of the
water tank and rotted away. They were both gray foxes, beautiful animals. Not in that condition of course. Any way, we had foxes, we still have foxes. Mountain Lions.

17 A: You see mountain lions sometimes?

C: Well, the last time here was about three years ago. A mountain lion killed a deer up near my sister’s house. About a hundred feet from my sister’s house. I had seen the tracks on the vineyard about three years before that. So I assume they’re still around, but they’re pretty shy. They don’t come around people much. There’s bobcats. About two years ago, a bobcat came running across the orchard out here. I have this guy working for me, he saw a bobcat down here about two days ago. He didn’t know what it was. He said it was about this size, well, if its about that size, its about that size its got to be a bobcat. Of course coyotes, we’ve got a zillion coyotes. They sing a bunch at night, and I like them because they eat the gophers in the vineyard. So I don’t do anything about them. There’s a little area right in the middle of this orchard here which is full of trees and rocks, not planted, and about six years ago the coyotes had their pups down there. A nest, so these pups were coming out of there, about this big, they’re really cute when they’re that age. And they don’t bother the dogs, the dogs don’t bother them. They’ll bark and they’ll all go out and kind of look at each other but they don’t really close each other at all. Which is fine with me because I have no problems with coyotes, I don’t have sheep so I don’t care. And then we have a lot of turkeys.

18 A: Do you remember those when you were a kid?

C: No. I don’t remember seeing them until about fifteen years ago. I think they came up from the valley once the valley started filling up. It’s a little high for them up here. Same with quail. I didn’t see any quail up here, I’d say until three years ago. Now I got quail in my garden here. I mean they never came up here, its way too high for them. But they’re all up here now, so I see them fairly frequently. We have red tail hawks, got quite a few of them. Of course, we’ve got turkey vultures, about 12 million of them. One time I was going down the creek down here, the creeks on a trail about a half a mile down this hill. There’s this area back there which we use as a picnic ground which has rocks which are bigger than that fireplace. Huge, huge rocks which probably slid down in 1906, came tumbling down the hill to this flat area. And there was a couple of rocks kind of niched together and kind of a cave, about the size of the fireplace, maybe a little smaller. And by god, there was the baby vultures in there, and they were about this big. That was really crazy, they were down on the ground, I thought they’d be up in a tree. No, that’s where they hatch them. That’s really something to see them, they’re a lot better looking young than they are when they get old. Normally they camp out here in—I have one eucalyptus tree, that’s all I want, I don’t want any more eucalyptus trees, but I have one and its always been there and its never propagated, thank god—and that’s where they like to camp in at night. They’ll be about maybe ten of them in that one tree.

19 A: You ever see any bears around here?
C: No. I’ve heard people say they’ve seen them, but I’ve never seen a bear and I’ve never seen a track. I don’t think they’re here. If they’re here, they’re much further up the mountain, and more isolated. I had a golden eagle up here. I haven’t seen him in a couple years, but I saw him before that several times. He used to come up and get on my telephone wire right over there and just sit there. It was really something to see him, gorgeous, gorgeous. And, of course, once in a while a heron will come in, I have a little dam down here on my property, and a heron will come in there. And also I’ve had mallards in there, flying a little off from the central corridor, but they’d come in there.

20 A: Is there any wildlife that seems like it has disappeared?

C: Nah. There were wild pigs. Although I haven’t really seen them, or tracks, they may have gone further up the hill. One of them went through the vineyard fence, about a three hundred pounder, he just went right through it, but he didn’t do any damage. I thought he’d get in there and root up some of the vines, but he didn’t. He just went back out again. I haven’t seen any track, but I think they’re still around. Of course, we’ve got skunks. And I have actually seen in the last three years, a couple of times, those creatures that are down in the valley always getting in the garbage.

21 A: Possums?

C: Yeah, opossums. But again, up this high it’s really weird to see opossums up here. I’ve only seen them a couple of times. We’ve got a lot of raccoons. We’ve got raccoons out the kazoo. My brother used to feed them. Of course they eat the grapes. When the grapes are ripe they’re liable to get in there and just snarf down a whole load if you give them a chance. The dogs are pretty good about keeping them away, although I don’t like them to close an opossum. An opossum will really hurt them. They’ve got claws, tough, so opossums we’ve got plenty of. Rattlesnakes we’ve got plenty of. My year is not made until I’ve killed at least one rattlesnake. I get anywhere from one to five rattlesnakes a year, and quite often around the house. I don’t worry about them too much, but I worry about the dogs. And we rent this little house over here and they have a young kid, and I really worry about that. But, as far as I’m concerned, once you hear that rattle, freeze, don’t move, find out where they are!. The dogs haven’t closed them. I haven’t been around to see the dogs when I wasn’t around. Most dogs will not close a rattlesnake, they instinctively understand this is something they don’t want to do. We had one dog that did. Whenever I’d hear him bark, I’d just head lickety split for wherever he was with my hoe in hand, because I knew he’d found a rattlesnake and if I didn’t get there quick enough he’d go in after it. One time I watched him do the whole thing, it was the nuttiest thing I’ve ever seen. He was a terrier, weighed about 50-60 pounds, absolutely fearless. He’d go in and grab the rattlesnake and he’d throw them, flung them up in the air and then he’d catch it as it came down. And so every time he’d do that he’d get bit, and we’d have to rush him to the vet, and shoot him up with vitamin K. I think it finally killed him, you know after several episodes, his heart was weakened enough that he just died of a heart attack. He was crazy, I have not seen any other dog do that, they’ll circle around them barking, but they won’t close them. I haven’t seen these guys around one, I try to get them before they get there. And, of course, we’ve had king snakes. I always celebrate when I see a king snake, we used to have two living under the house. That made me feel better; they’ll kill rattlesnakes. We’ve got racers, gopher snakes, all that kind of stuff, they’re quite
abundant. A lot of stellar jays, noisy beasts. A lot of ravens, I see them all of the time, or maybe they’re just large crows, I don’t know the difference between a raven and a crow.

22 A: Have you noticed any difference in the numbers of types of birds?
C: Not really.

23 A: One person told me there used to be a lot more robins.
C: Well, I haven’t seen a lot of robins within the last four or five years. It used to be every spring when the toyon berries start to get very ripe the robins would come in and they’d get drunk on them. Fermenting is basically what they’re doing and the robins will come in and they’ll actually get drunk. They can’t fly. I’ve seen them staggering around, falling down, drunk as all get out because they ate all these toyons [laughing]. I haven’t seen that in the last couple years, I haven’t seen them around at that time, and normally you would see them.

24 A: Did they make a lot of noise?
C: Man, there’d be hundreds of them and you’d wonder what’s happening, what’s happening, of course, they were all getting boozed up. I haven’t seen them recently. I don’t get starlings up here, thank god. It’s too high for them. I do get the little bitty things, I’m not quite sure what they are, little bitty bird. They’re a problem up on the vineyard. What I do is cut the brush back about thirty feet. If you leave an opening that is less than thirty feet then they’ll cross over and start eating up all of the berries. If you keep the brush off then they don’t make that distance for some reason. That’s not very scientific, but it works. I can’t think of any other diminishing populations except maybe robins. The buzzards are the same as always, and the deer are more than there ever was. God, there’s a lot of deer. Some mountain lions, there’s always been one here at some time or other over the past thirty years.

25 A: You mentioned skunks. Do you know the difference between spotted skunks and striped skunks?
C: These are all stripes. I’ve never seen a spotted skunk up here. There’s another thing that bothers the dogs. If they’re barking at about ten o’clock at night I won’t let them out. I figure it’s either a skunk or a raccoon out there trying to see if there’s anything. Getting the skunk off a dog is not fun. Tomato juice works, but you have to keep doing it. It will cut it for about four hours, but then you’ve got to dose them again. Although, there’s another one, I don’t know if I should say this on the film, but douche. Female douche works and it’s a lot easier to handle than tomato juice.

26 R: I used to go to summer camp so I know. It doesn’t just work on dogs, but on humans too.
C: When we were up here during the war we had chickens. One day my sister went down there and there was a skunk in the chicken house. Of course, he was going to go after the eggs. So she came back up here and got the 22 and went back down there and by this time
the skunk had sort of gone under the chicken house. So she got down on the ground and aimed this 22 at him and shoots him right square in the ass. We couldn’t go in the chicken house for a month [everyone laughs]. I said, “way to go sis”. We used to have chickens and turkeys and ducks and pigeons you know, in small numbers. This has nothing to do with any ecology or anything, but my mother for years and years wanted a cow. My farther grew up in Arkansas on a dairy and he didn’t want a damned thing to do with cows. Of course when we bought this place, he finally had to give up and get a cow. So we got a cow, it gave wonderful milk. I remember that. And the only person this cow hated was my mother. Every time my mother went out of the house the cow would chase her up a tree. That was the last cow we ever had. So we didn’t have any other animals up here really, just dogs and cats, but no cattle, no sheep, no nothing. I’m very tempted to get goats. The only thing keeping me from it is fencing. Because they eat poison oak, which is actually my best crop.

27 A: In the 1930s how many other houses were up on Lovall Valley Road?

C: Maybe ten. Not that many. Somewhere between five and ten is my guess. It was pretty vacant.

28 A: Ten from the bottom?

C: Well, ten from here. I mean up in the valley itself there might have been ten. But I don’t think it was that many. It might have been five. And then coming up from the valley there were those two, you know right as you make that 260 degree turn there up the hill, there were two houses there.

29 A: Where those real new houses are?

C: No actually, there was three. There was another house in there, down at the bottom, but that was it. There were no other houses until you got up to our place. Most of Lovall Valley was basically pasture. There was a dairy up there at the very end and I think there was another dairy kind of the middle of Lovall Valley. There was more houses probably in Wood Valley than there was in Lovall Valley.

30 A: What were people doing up there?

C: Wood Valley?

31 A: Yeah.

C: I don’t know. I hardly ever went up there. That’s where I used to catch the school bus. I had to walk from here down to Wood Valley at six o’clock in the morning when it was as dark as hell. That’s right, that was my first mountain lion episode. I was walking down to school, to catch the bus at Wood Valley, and you know where those caves are? I looked up and there was a mountain lion up on top of the cave. He was looking at me and I was looking at him and we both took off. That was something. He didn’t get me! I guess I was around ten or eleven then. We used to get milk from the guy up at the end of the valley. He’d leave it
down at the bottom of the road and when I came home from school I’d pick it up and carry it up to the house.

32 A: Any sites around here where you found any Indian artifacts?

C: Yeah. See that silver box up there. They’re obsidian arrowheads. [A and R take down the box and open it] They’re all from here. The nicest one, the long one, that has all the stuff on it, it was found over toward the apple orchard. Another was down by where my dam is, but I’m not quite sure where the other ones are from.

33 A: Are you talking about the dam behind Arroyo Seco?

C: Well, the one on my property. You can see it when you go back out.

[Everyone looking through arrowheads]

C: They’re probably all from the obsidian deposit that’s over on the ridge on the other side of Napa.

34 A: Oh yeah, over in the Palisades area?

C: Over there there’s an obsidian deposit. I think most of these arrows here came from there. At least that’s what Jablonowski (sp?) tells me. You know him?

35 A: No, the name sounds familiar.

C: He’s an anthropologist, archaeologist, paleontologist.

36 A: Is he at the JC?

C: He’s at Sonoma State. He lives up on Trinity.

37 A: I should talk to him.

C: He knows a lot about all the Indian stuff around here. And this one here, it’s funny, because my wife was hiking around the apple orchard which is over there about a quarter mile. She came back and was unrolling her Levis, she had a cuff on them, and it fell out. Very weird. When you go out the road, you’ll see that meadow out there. Well beyond the meadow as you’re heading out on the right, there’s a small dam in there. And the reason its there is because, when we got this place, just about 200 feet up from the dam – up the road, and about 100 feet from the road to the right was an all-year-round spring. Which we called Rattlesnake Spring because we happened on a rattlesnake there when we first saw it. Rattlesnake Spring flows all year round. So my theory is that it was a convenient place for the Indians who were coming over from Napa. They’d come over here and it would be pretty dry because there isn’t any water, and there’s an all-year-round spring and its fairly flat in there and there’s that meadow plus a fairly flat grassy area which they could camp out and rest, whatever. One of these, I can’t remember which one now, I found down there, in
that area. And I found another chunk where the gully had washed out going down toward the
dam. Obviously that had been some kind of stopping place, campground or something. And
this would be a natural area too because you got this little orchard area in here is about three
acres and its kind of a little amphitheater. It’s protected from the wind coming from the west
and from all sides practically, its almost surrounded by hill so it’s a nice little protected area.
So I assume they lived in here too, way back.

38 A: It seems like human beings gravitate towards the same places.

C: I’m pretty sure that’s why she found that arrowhead there because they probably
camped in here.

39 A: You have no idea how it got into her cuff?

C: No, that’s a mystery, its crazy.

40 A: When do you think those were made?

C: I don’t know. I couldn’t tell you. Jablonowski could tell you, he knows. He knew
what they were. The kind of broader one is kind of just chipped off, that’s one era. And the
other one with the notches and all that is another era. Same tribe, I think, but I don’t have the
vaguest idea.

41 A: A friend of mine found a Clovis point pretty close to town, along Sonoma Creek and
somebody told him it was probably 9,000 years old.

C: It’s quite possible. Out in back of Jablonowski’s place—he actually off of Cavedale
Road. He’s almost up at the top and if you hike up a half mile back his place toward the top of
the mountain you’re looking down into Napa and you can see the weathered volcano. There
used to be a volcano there, in ten thousand years ago, whenever the hell it was. And, of
course, all of this rock, like in my vineyard and all down this way, that’s all volcanic rock.
All of it. You can see up at the top of my place, there’s some outcroppings which are these
rocks about this size and a lot of them are rectangular almost, black, its obviously lava piled
up as high that fireplace.

42 A: Is it some kind of basalt?

C: Yeah. I’m pretty sure. Of course my vineyard is all volcanic ash. It was a pretty
good size volcano, if you ever go up there and see the lip of that thing, it was something else.

43 A: Did you ever hear of anybody catching salmon?

C: Not here. Not on this place. Maybe Sonoma. Otto Teller (?) used to talk about
catching salmon in Sonoma Creek, but I never talked to anybody [else] that ever did.
A: I heard some conflicting reports as to whether or not there were any. Along the main creek up along Warm Springs Road, would you say the water is about as shaded as it used to be or was it more shaded in the past?

C: Well for the areas I was working it is still about the same as it always was. I told you I was working that part that goes from Wake Robin up to Bennett Valley Road and all of the trees are basically still there that were there when I was a kid. And the same way going down towards Glen Ellen. There might have been some trees taken out where those houses are right there on the creek, but it is pretty well still covered. I don’t know about below where that first ninety is when you’re coming up from Glen Ellen, I’ve never been on that part of the creek. Of course this creek here has been all forest and no trees have been taken down. [referring now to creek on his property, a tributary of Arroyo Seco]

A: It sounds like it’s pretty wild.

C: Yeah, it is. It’s a beautiful creek. Of course I’m talking to the Open Space District, I may try to get an easement over there to sell it to them but all of my neighbors will go absolutely bananas if I do that. It would hook up Bartholomew Park, all the way on top of the ridge. I actually have ten acres over in Napa, the county line is along the ridge here, and I’m over the ridge.

A: Were there any big wild fires you remember as a kid?

C: Oh boy, many many. Let’s see, I think the first one I really remember was ’48. ’48 it was coming down the ridge and we packed up all of the silverware and everything in the car to leave. Wind changed and it didn’t get us. I don’t remember the years on these exactly; I remember somebody started one down by the Bartholomew Dam, and it started coming up this hill here and my dad and I went down in the Jeep loaded with barrels of water and we managed to get it before it got going. The next one was down here just south of where Wood Valley comes in. You know the hill where the water tank is? Well, that hill and the hill across from it all went up. Of course we were trapped here then and we couldn’t get out, but they got it. It burned that whole hill that the water tank is on that’s why you see all those kind of non-native pine trees in there and the young madrones and all of that, that was all after the fire. And it used to be on the hill right across from the water tank, which is all pretty much chamise now, there were a fair number of good size oak trees in there. They were all killed.

And the one after that was the big fire in, I might have my sequences wrong, was in the ‘50s, I think. I think the fire came down from St. Helena, took the whole top of Trinity. You see all those houses staring out at you up there? That used to all be forest. That came down into Boyes Springs and then got stopped up in there before it got here. That thing was traveling like forty miles an hour. I was sitting over at a friend of mine’s house over in Glen Ellen who lived up the ridge on Hill Road. I was up on the ridge out of town and at nine o’clock at night I could read my newspaper by the light of the fire that was on Trinity Mountain. It was something, that was the worst of all of the fires that I’ve seen here.

And about eight years ago, I think, some where in there, somebody was camping up here on Fletcher’s property, used to be Edelson’s Ranch, and thought they had put out their campfire and didn’t. That bare hill back there, it was all burnt by that, right in back of the ranch, in back of Walter Benson’s home. I suppose it was about 200-300 acres. Borate
COOKE

bombers got that one just about where it hit my property line, they stopped it. Then, of course
that one about two years ago? By Fetters Springs. The one that took the whole Carmenet
Vineyard, and all of that stuff. That was coming here. I was in Washington D.C. and my
wife called me and I was supposed to be there about 2-3 more days and she said well, they’ve
evacuated the ranch, so I said I’m on the first plane out. By the time I got back here around 1
or 2 o’clock in the afternoon, the wind had shifted and it was headed towards Napa. But that
one would have got us if it had stayed with the wind. I can understand why some people have
a problem with trails. All it takes, in the summertime, is that one dingbat drop a lighted
cigarette and we’re gone. Like an explosion these things. I’m very fire conscious. I’ve seen
a lot of them.

And of course the latest one was Versaggi, my neighbor. Versaggi was clearing to put
a vineyard in, so he was burning his brush; this was around six months ago, I think, last
summer. So he had thought he put it out. I went to Santa Rosa to a planning commission
meeting so I’m coming back and I see this big cloud of smoke. Well actually going up to
Santa Rosa here comes one of those D-8s zooming down the road and I though oh boy there’s
a fire somewhere. I’m coming back from the meeting I see this huge cloud of smoke and I
thought where is it, where is it, where is it? And I got down to Boyes Spring and I thought
well it must be on Mission highlands ….keep going, it’s not Mission Highlands, maybe it’s
Schocken Hill . . . no it’s not Schocken Hill. By the time I could get around to where I could
see it, I realized it was my hill. And I thought oh my god my dogs have been fried and my
house is gone and everything else. Fortunately they were able to stop it. The wind was
blowing that way for a change. Normally the wind here is, you got a western, it’s coming
right through Stage Gulch. So any fire down by Bartholomew or Versaggi or anything that
way and I’m finished with a good wind. And a forty mile an hour wind is not unusual around
here at night. Usually I get a wind that comes in in the summertime . . . [phone rings, C has
short conversation]

R: Did you work for the State Department of . . .

C: Education. I worked for the Department of Education for about eight years. I was the
utility infielder to deal with the feds. I spent ten years in Washington. So anytime there was a
problem with the feds I got to fly back to Washington and argue about legislation, politics,
and appropriations because I was the educational legislation guy for the administration. I
spent a year and a half working the hill on administration bills on education. So I knew the
hill pretty well.

R: What do you think the health of the global ecology is here in terms of the stream, but
in general, just what is happening with Sonoma County open space?

C: Well, I think we’re doing fairly well. We’ve got a lot of protections in and we got the
hillside vineyard ordinance in now. And we’ve got a fair amount of controls set up. As far as
the district goes, we did a whole re-do of the acquisition plan in 2000. I was on the citizens
committee that put the thing together way back before the ballot or anything else and at that
time there was some question about prioritizing the money as to whether it would be for space
for the city or for trails or whatever. I said nah we’re not going to do that, we can’t do that
because we’re only interested in willing owners. You don’t know what is going to come to
you. If you put yourself in a box saying that you’re going to prioritize this kind of land versus
that kind, that isn’t very valuable because we’re really there to protect all of the resources of Sonoma County whether its some remote ranch that’s got a wildlife habitat or something between Rohnert Park and Santa Rosa. To me they have equal values, they’re different values but they’re not competing. So I set it up basically with four pots with ten million dollars in each pot. Recreation in one pot, natural resources in another pot, greenbelts, and so forth, four different pots of money. If we spent all ten million in whatever pot it was we could replenish that pot at any time. Because of the authority we can meet any Thursday of any week and we allocate money, if I’ve got three votes I can reallocate the money. With that I think it gives us the kind of flexibility we need and also some direction and also, the other emphasis is, much more active marketing – going out to land owners and persuading them they ought to be a part of this because there are many advantages for them to be a part of it. Be proactive rather than reactive.

[At this point Charlie’s dog began barking, a PG & E man arrived and since we were just about at the end of the disc, I decided to conclude the interview.]
Interview with Albert (Al) Guffanti
At his home on Laurel Street in Kenwood. November 28, 2000
Al started talking before I got the recorder going, so the first few sentences are missing.

AG=Al Guffanti; AD=Arthur Dawson

AG: You’re in Glen Ellen, you know where the Gaige House is—at that time it was ten dollars a month rent, my mother, and I, and my sister. Actually I grew up on the Pagani Ranch. My father died when I was seven and I went from here to there to there to there.

AD: So were you born here in Kenwood?

AG: No, I was born by accident in San Francisco. My mother went down to visit relatives and I came along. I lived in San Francisco for a while and then came back up here. I lived in Glen Ellen and I remember the swimming holes and the good fishing in Glen Ellen—used to be a hell of a good place to fish. There used to be a steel bridge over the creek and we used to jump off there into the swimming hole—the swimming hole was underneath the bridge.

AD: How deep was that hole would you say?

AG: Seven, eight feet. It was dammed up. There used to be a hotel down there called the Mervyn Hotel. We just filled a lot of sacks with sand and built a dam.

AD: So all the kids would get together [and build the dam]?

AG: Yeah. And the fishing was good all the way down to Eldridge. We never did go any further because we just didn’t want to go into the Eldridge area. We stopped right behind the Pagani Winery. That is now the Olive Press.

AD: Was that a good hole right down below there?

AG: Yeah. It was good fishing all up and down that. I used to fish in the little creek, you’ve probably heard of the old mill down there at the old winery.

AD: Yeah, the Grist Mill? It’s now called the Grist Mill.

AG: Yeah the Grist Mill. There’s a creek that goes on up, a real small creek, used to be an excellent place to catch trout.

AD: I think that’s Asbury Creek.

AG: I think that’s dry now probably.

AD: I think there’s still a little water in it. Do you know Win Smith?
AG: Yeah, I know Win Smith.

AD: He lives along that creek.

AG: I served with Win Smith on the Advisory Planning Commission for the county, back in the seventies. He’s an environmentalist. I am also. And then I moved up to Kenwood.

AD: What years did you live in Glen Ellen?

AG: ‘Thirty to ‘thirty-two. And then I moved up here, about two blocks down, down on Jessie Street. I remember the creek very well because we had a swimming hole up that way [pointing].

AD: Where would that be?

AG: Just before you get to Kenilworth Road. All the kids got together and built a dam and we had a good swimming hole.

AD: How deep was that hole?

AG: Oh, about six feet. It was just a place to get wet. When I was working on the haypress I used to go down there to wash off at nighttime or when I was picking apples or picking prunes or something, I’d go down there and get cleaned up. I could get up in the morning and go out there and catch five to ten fish within a half hour. About eight to twelve inches long--breakfast.

AD: Was that only at certain times of the year?

AG: Fishing season usually [started] the first of April. We didn’t break too many laws. You’re not recording this are you? [said in jest]

AD: Of course not. I’ll take it out of the record if you want.

AG: Those were Depression days and you went deer hunting for meat, you went fishing for meat. There was a lot of steelhead coming up and every once in awhile you’d say ‘Hell, let’s go get a meal. We’ll have fish for supper.’ It was very simple. We knew where the spawning holes were, where the spawning riffles were. I’ve still got my gig.

AD: What was the gig like?

AG: A three-prong fork.

AD: Is that something you would hold or set it down in the stream?

AG: With a flashlight you go out there, you watch them, they were spawning and you spear them. That was it [demonstrating with downward arm motion, like using a hoe to break dirt clods]. You took them home, cleaned them and cooked them. You only did it for the food.
GUFFANTI

You had to eat. Now people didn’t pump water out of the creek, like they do now. For instance, up here at St. Francis, you know where that is?

17 AD: Yeah, the winery just up the road? [almost directly across Highway 12 from Adobe Canyon Road].

AG: Down there where the old railroad track used to be, was a gravel pit. They hauled gravel out of there. Part of that ranch is nothing but a big gravel pit.

18 AD: So would that be pretty close to where Highway Twelve crosses the [Sonoma] Creek then? That’s where they were pulling out the gravel?

AG: Yeah. Consequently it made a big pool. I guess it’s still there. I haven’t been out there for twenty-five, thirty years. They pump water out of there to irrigate the vineyard. I suspect all the people up Adobe Canyon do the same thing. I don’t think it’s right. I know they have riparian rights—

19 AD: But it affects everybody downstream.

AG: And there’s pesticides applied and it washes into the stream. I left [Kenwood] in 1940. I used to show cattle for Annadel and for Los Robles and for various other cattle outfits up and down the coast. In 1940 I decided to beat the draft and I enlisted in the service and I came back in 1970. When I came back in 1970, I thought, ‘Well gee, I think I’ll go out and fish.’ I got my license and went out and it wasn’t the same. And then it just went downhill very very quickly.

20 AD: So you’ve seen a decline since 1970 also?

AG: We always used to hope we’d have a good rainfall to flush the creek. Well, we didn’t get very many good rainfalls—well we did one year. One year we had a hell of a good one.

21 AD: This was in the 1970s?

AG: Yeah. ‘Seventy-five or ‘seventy-six, something like that. And since then we really haven’t had a good gully washer. I think we need that, to flush the creek so to speak.

22 AD: So you think there’s too much debris, too much wood in the creek?

AG: They’ll take out the debris and then when it goes down, the steelhead used to come up. I don’t see very many, in fact I go out there and look--I haven’t seen any in the last ten years.

23 AD: I heard there’s still a few coming up, but it’s pretty sparse.

AG: I have a little creek back here that I used to be able to fish in [creekbed is almost obscured now, but crosses Mervin Street near junction with Kenilworth] back in the ‘thirties. No more runs in there now.
AD: Where is that creek? Does it come up to your property, just about?

AG: It’s just a little intermittent stream running back here. Just a big gully is all it is.

AD: But back in the ‘thirties there used to be steelhead coming up there.

AG: They used to come up here—[you could] go out there and kick them out of the water.

AD: Was that a spawning area, do you know?

AG: It was a spawning area, yes. I knew where all of them were. We could fish up Adobe Canyon. That was great fishing. Especially in April and May. Then it died down. By June or July we didn’t do much fishing anyway. Most of the time we were trying to find work. These were Depression days, things were rough.

AD: How old were you when you first moved to Kenwood?

AG: Let’s see—twelve, no—thirteen. I graduated from Dunbar. I first went to school at the one room schoolhouse. There was twelve of us from the first to the eighth grade—I was the only one in the first grade. I walked a mile and a half to school.

AD: Who was the teacher back then?

AG: Miss Dowdell, then she married a Bailey, [so she was] Mrs. Bailey. Good teacher—taught me phonics. I spoke Italian and English. She taught me how to read, that was wonderful. I could read! You know where the Pagani Ranch is? Well the lower ranch, Slattery Road?

AD: I have a friend who lives up Slattery.

AG: Up the top of the hill?

AD: He’s just about the end of the road. Not the one that veers off to the left as you go in, but you go up that little canyon. His name is Keith Hale, he’s been there about twenty-five, thirty years.

AG: It’s a funny thing—I don’t know too many people in Kenwood. I retired in ‘seventy and I came back here and there was just two or three people that I knew. The rest of them all died off or went elsewhere.

AD: So you were gone for about thirty years.

AG: I was gone for thirty years—thirty years with ‘Uncle.’ Thirty years in the United States Army. I was the first draft eligible to leave Kenwood. The war wasn’t on when I left. I enlisted to beat the draft. I enlisted because if I did so, I could pick my branch of service. I used to show horses and I used to show cattle, so I picked the old horse cavalry. I’m an ex-horse cavalry soldier.
AD: My grandfather was in the cavalry back in the ‘thirties.

AG: Which one?

AD: I don’t know the unit. He was back east, he ended up the navy but he started out in the cavalry back in the mid to late ‘thirties. He started in upstate New York and then went to Indiana. He was stationed in Indiana for a long time.

AG: Hundred and sixth Cavalry--Indiana. I was in the regular horse cavalry. I was in the Eleventh Horse. When the war broke out I got the hell out of the horse cavalry and went elsewhere.

AD: Did they disband the cavalry at the start of the war?

AG: More or less yes. I could see the horse wasn’t going any place. Before the war it was a good place to serve. At that time you were only supposed to serve a year. I enlisted—I was supposed to serve three years. So I served thirty.

AD: You must have enjoyed it, if you stayed in.

AG: Frankly it was a hell of a lot better than getting paid twenty-five cents an hour for pruning grapes, or ten cents a ton for bailing hay, or rousting a bunch of cattle around for forty-five dollars a month and board. I was just an itinerant cowhand that’s all.

AD: Was there a lot of hay being grown up here in Kenwood?

AG: Oh yeah. We had three cattle ranches here. Kenwood Farms, Annadel—which is now Oakmont, and Los Robles, which is now Oakmont. They had good show cattle. Up in Jenner, Charlie Rule, I showed cattle for him. We had a lot of horse ranches. In fact Annadel was also a horse ranch. I showed a big Percheron stallion out of Los Robles Ranch, at the Percheron show in Pomona. I showed cattle in Ogden, Salt Lake City, Denver, Portland.

AD: How many head of cattle would these ranches be running in those days—like Annadel or Los Robles?

AG: They only had about a hundred head of cattle. You see it was a show outfit. We went to all the fairs. I showed at the Sonoma County Fair in 1936. That was the year I graduated from Santa Rosa High School. I went to work for Annadel and we showed cattle at the fair grounds. From there we went to Ferndale, Sacramento and Stockton, Pomona and up and down the coast. It was a good life. It was a way of getting away from Kenwood. It was something new. Who the hell wanted to stay here in Kenwood?

AD: Especially when you’re eighteen and just out of school.

AG: It was a little excitement. It wasn’t easy work—you slept in the barn with the cows.

AD: How many vineyards were there around here in those days?
AG: Really not very many, because at that time the only real vineyards were the Kunde Vineyard and the Pagani Vineyard. For instance, all these vineyards you see up in the hills up here, they weren’t there. You had the Kenwood Winery, right up here.

AD: Kunde’s is Kenwood [Winery], is that right?

AG: Kenwood [unsure if this is affirming, or if Kenwood Winery was Pagani’s]. Pagani had that—it was just a small—about twenty acres. Then you had the Rossi Vineyard up on Lawndale. Then you had Kunde—not the whole business, just the flats and a little bit up on the hills. Then you had Pagani’s and you had Gallo’s. And that was it. Kunde had Hereford cattle and he had a dairy. Pagani had a dairy. Where the Kenwood Inn is? That was a dairy. I worked for them for awhile—I hauled hay—they had a hell of a good bunch of horses. Kenwood Farms which is now Kunde Estate Winery they had short-horn cattle. I worked for them.

AD: Sounds like there was more cattle around here than wineries at that time?

AG: There was, yeah. Up in Oakmont—Annadel Farms—short-horn cattle and horses and a hop field. What is now St. Francis was prunes. And what is now Landmark was walnuts.

AD: There’s a walnut orchard up there off of Frey Road, has that been there for a long time?

AG: Frey is one of the old settlers here. And right next to it was Rich and Rich had prunes. When the prune trees die, he plants a nut tree and now he’s got all nuts. That was all prunes. I picked prunes there when I was going to high school.

AD: Is that hard work, picking prunes?

AG: Yes it is. You got on hands and knees. You shake the tree and then you pick them up. You know what a big lugbox is?

AD: Yeah.

AG: You got ten cents for a big lug box. It took you damn near an hour to pick a lugbox.

AD: I’ve harvested almonds myself. You ever seen how they do that? They have machines that do it, but you can also take a big padded mallet and hit the trunk and the almonds fall down.

AG: Here we shake them. And then you pick and sometimes they don’t work the ground too well and the clods are big and you had sore knees—oh [expression of remembered pain]. I was a child of the depression. Believe me it was not easy. My bedroom was a barn, a loft in the barn. No lights, no heat.

AD: How many brothers and sisters did you have?
AG: I have two step-brothers and a step-sister and a sister.

AD: Where did the other kids sleep? Were they up there in the loft with you?

AG: Oh no. I was the only one in the loft. Hey—what the hell. I was one of the very few that went to high school. But every once in awhile I had to stay home a week or so and work so I could buy a pair of shoes to go to school. I went to a funeral yesterday—a ninety-eight year-old man.

AD: Pagani, right?

AG: Yeah. I used to work for him. I pruned grapes for him, drove a team for him, cut hay, drove a tractor. You see, work in those days—you had ten people trying to bid for three or four jobs. You were lucky if you had a chance to work. You only got paid twenty-five cents an hour. Worked all day for two bucks.

AD: You mentioned that during the depression people would go out and shoot deer or catch fish just to eat. Was there any other way that the depression affected the land?

AG: People didn’t really start clearing the land to plant grapes. If you cut a tree down, you cut it down for firewood. Usually you could get your firewood—walk into the hills and get a tree that was half dead or dead, cut it up, that was it. You didn’t clearcut. Back in 1923 we had a hell of a big fire here. It really wiped out all those hills. I was down at the Pagani Ranch. I remember my mother and I went up on the hill—my father was fighting fire. We went up on the hill and watched that fire coming sweeping down across Kunde’s. It went all the way out to Boyes Springs. It really wiped out everything. We had no helicopters to fly over and drop water, bombers. It was wet sacks and axes hoes and that was it.

AD: So the fire didn’t quite get to Kenwood, it sort of stayed up on the hill?

AG: It stayed up on the hill, yeah. Of course, between the hills and the road there was the vineyard and the fields, with not a lot of fuel, it stayed among the pine trees and the chamise brush. Chamise brush has got a lot of oil in it. Burns like hell. I mean—Whoof!

AD: Like gasoline, huh?

AG: And then of course in nineteen fifty-six. Was it fifty-six?

AD: ‘Sixty-four was another big one.

AG: Yeah—‘sixty-four. At that time I had been in Bangkok. We came home and I went to Fort Knox, Kentucky. I remember picking up the ‘Courier Journal’ in Fort Knox and they were telling about the big fire in Santa Rosa. That was ‘sixty-four. [next section gets into a long discussion of Al’s activities in Bangkok, including engineering of tall buildings on mud. Transcript about 5 minutes later in conversation.]
AD: So here in Kenwood, did you ever see any logging going on? You mentioned people would go up and cut down a single tree—was there any commercial logging?

AG: No. A lot of people cut wood for fireplaces, for stove, but no, no logging, not here. It’s just not the type of wood to log.

AD: I think a long time ago they went up above Glen Ellen and did a little logging up there.

AG: You know a lot of these old buildings were built with that good redwood. For instance, I built this house myself. In 1970 I came home. I retired up at Fort Lewis Washington. We toyed with the idea of staying up there. Back in 1944, ’43, the railroad decided to pull up—this is railroad property—in fact the railroad came in the front door’ and went out through the bathroom, which is behind you. The bridge is still out there, well part of it. They sold it to my stepfather—twelve lots for ten dollars—not ten dollars a lot, ten dollars for the [whole] parcel. He was an old Italian and he didn’t want to pay taxes. He used to holler and complain, ‘Goddamn taxes.’ Well I came home from Japan in 1949 and my mother says ‘Joe’s complaining about having to pay taxes.’ He tried to give the land to his two sons and they didn’t want it. She said, ‘Give him a hundred dollars and you can have the land.’ So I had some travel pay, I gave him a hundred dollars. But that damn tax bill followed me all over hell too. It followed me to Germany, it followed me all over the world. In 1970, we said, ‘Hell we got the land now, let’s go on down there and see what’s going on.’ We got down here and I applied for a Cal-Vet loan. I got a $25,000 loan—I built the house. That rock [on the fireplace] came from the Trinity Quarry.

AD: That’s pretty stuff.

AG: A guy I went to school with helped me build it. Mangiantini. He was a local character. My old school mate. Master carpenter—I hired him to help me. My wife designed the house and Harry Strong and I built it.

AD: Do you know Bob Glotzbach? He put together a book of oral histories from people in Glen Ellen. He’s got a whole thing by Harry in there. Harry Strong.

AG You know when I left here in 1940—I come home for two or three days maybe—but I didn’t know anybody when I got back here. It’s a bedroom community. People in Glen Ellen— I know Win Smith because I served with him on this advisory planning commission. And who else do I know down there? Well, I know Bob Marshall.

AD: Don’t know Bob. Oh—Marshall’s Garage?

AG: Yeah. That’s the only two people I know down there.

AD: You know Bill Meglen? I interviewed him a couple weeks ago.

AG: I know Bill Meglen, yeah. He’s about my age, a little older.
AD: About 1915 is when he was born, I think. He’s still pretty sharp and [active]. In fact we walked from his house down into Glen Ellen.

AG: He’ll tell you a lot about Glen Ellen. See I left Glen Ellen in 1928 or 1930 I guess it was. Bill Meglen—his mother ran that store?

AD: Exactly. Valley of the Moon Grocery I think it was.

AG: Glen Ellen used to be the terminal for the Northwestern Pacific. And then in 1927 or ’28, I can’t recall just what year, it came up here to Kenwood. At one time this railroad was the Southern Pacific and it went up to Melita and from Melita it went up what is now Montgomery Drive. Montgomery Drive is really the old railroad bed. Drive up Montgomery Drive, the way it follows the creek up there—that was actually the old railroad bed for the Southern Pacific. It ended up at what is now the Day’s Inn or Marriott Hotel. That’s where the ice house was, that’s where they used to load up the Pacific Fruit Express—PFE, those yellow cars, load them up with ice, and transport the produce back to the east coast. When you came out of Melita, the next stop would be—what did they call that? Pythian Road was a stop.

AD: Lawndale was a stop, right?

AG: And Lawndale, yeah, I beg your pardon, Lawndale. And then it was Kenwood, then it was Wildwood—

AD: Was that close to Pagani? Wildwood?

AG: Wildwood—well then there was Felice, which was Pagani. And then you came to Beltane, Beltane to Warfield, Warfield to Glen Ellen, Glen Ellen to Eldridge, Eldridge to Agua Caliente to Fetter’s Springs to Boyes Springs to Sonoma to Vineburg to Schellville to Wingo to Ignacio. I used to travel on the railroad, on boxcars with the show cattle. I was a bum, I was a hobo (laughs).

AD: I hopped a freight train once myself. So you got to see that area quite a few times then?

AG: Ignacio, then you went to Lombard, then you went past Napa and you went to Suisun, Suisun you went to Sacramento, to Roseville. Roseville was the division point. You either went over the hill to Reno or over the hill to Klamath Falls.

AD: That’s where I hopped a freight—got on in Oroville and went up to Klamath Falls.

AG: K-Falls. That was the old Southern Pacific. Yeah, I know how to ride the rails, believe me.

AD: Do you ever recall seeing any chinook salmon up here? They’re also called dog salmon, I think.
AG: No, all we had was steelhead. I never saw any salmon up here, all steelhead. Of course we had chubs and pikes, but mostly steelhead. They used to call them rainbows, but they were really steelhead. And we have a lot of birds around here. At one time we had a lot of meadowlarks and we had a lot of robins. In fact they used to market hunt robins.

66 AD: This was back in the ‘thirties?

AG: Yeah. We had pheasants, but the pheasants were planted. And we had quail and doves. Oh, a great amount of doves. In the winter time we had pigeons.

67 AD: Were those planted?

AG: No. The pheasants were. The sportsman’s association gave you the pheasant eggs and you hatched them under a hen. And then you turned them loose. In 1970 there were still a few pheasants around. We have a bunch of people that just like to shoot. It was alright to hunt to eat, but just to hunt for sport--I don’t buy that. I’m a Bolshevik, maverick environmentalist. I believe in recycling. I believe in taking care of mother earth. I believe in not cutting down a lot of trees. Don’t clearcut. Hell, I was up in Oregon and Washington and saw all that clearcutting up there--that’s pure hell. We waste all the beautiful things in the world, just cutting down trees and damming rivers, screwing up the landscape. And it come back to haunt us. Look at the selenium over in the [Central] Valley.

68 AD: Kesterson and some of those refuges.

AG: All the wetlands that we’ve filled up. We’ve done it here too. There was a vernal pool right out here that Gibb cleared it out to plant grapes.

69 AD: That’s too bad, yeah. I’ve seen some of those in the Central Valley. Those are really beautiful in the springtime. In fact there’s even a few in Schellville that I’ve seen in the last few years.

AG: This was right here in Kenwood. These two vineyards just planted on Warm Springs Road? Those were vernal pools. That used to be flood water.

70 AD: You’re talking about the vineyard they just put in in the last year or two, right there by Mound [street name]? Next to the sharp corner?

AG: Yeah. That was a vernal pool and bordered a marsh area. There was frogs in there—nice bullfrogs. We used to catch them now and then and peel them and eat them. ‘Coons and skunks would hang out there—there was a lot of willows there.

71 AD: Was that the old Kenwood Marsh then?

AG: Yeah, part of it. The other vineyard just planted—that was part of the Kenwood Marsh. The geology here is interesting. Daughter number three is a GS-15 geologist with the USGS. She’s in charge of monitoring volcanoes, geothermal—in fact her book is [pointing at book on table].
“Temperature Gradients in the United States” by Marianne Guffanti?

AG: She has about thirty-five or forty publications. [Al talks here for a few minutes about his views on feminism and women in the military, a cause which he championed as a full colonel. Transcript resumes at 49:39]

AD: I was wondering if you could draw me a little map of where things were in Kenwood? You said you knew where some of the spawning areas were, that would be real interesting to learn, where the steelhead were spawning.

AG: You know where Kenilworth Road is? The one that goes up the hill?

AD: Just before Mound [off of Warm Springs Rd.]?

AG: Yeah. [next section is drawing of map] Let’s put down Kenilworth Road and then this is Griswold and this is where I am. OK the creek comes more or less down this way. I’ll let you write it in here. [AD writes names on map]. The best spawning bed was [pointing at spot behind current Kenwood School] where the school is. This road stops here. This was the old railroad, it was private property. This is Randolph’s [pointing to the spot on the creek], this is a swimming hole here—Randolph. This is another swimming hole here. This is where the spawning bed [was], there’s a big riffle there and there’s one right here. You could get on this bridge and shine your flashlight down here [bridge on Kenilworth] and see them spawning. You could do the same here [other side of Kenilworth bridge]. There’s a spawning [area] here, here and here.

AD: Three spawning beds [two upstream, one downstream of Kenilworth bridge].

AG: This was a swimming hole also up here [upstream of bridge]. Randolph’s Swimming Hole we had to kind of sneak in here because the people up on the hill didn’t particularly like people in there. None of their business, but some people were like that. But this was an accepted swimming hole right here [upstream near the bridge]. This was a spawning bed and a spawning bed and a spawning bed [same three mentioned earlier]. Now when you go down here [further downstream from Kenilworth bridge], this guy would never let you go in there. The creek ran through his property and he was bit of a bachelor—if you wanted to go fish in there he wouldn’t let you in to go fish.

AD: What was his name?

AG: Midgley. This was back in the ‘thirties. I don’t know what the hell happened after I left, because I’ve forgotten, there used to be an apple orchard and they planted a vineyard.

AD: Where was that?

AG: Right down here.

AD: In Midgley’s area.
AG: Yeah. The creek runs right through the area. If you understand geology, you know that at one time Kenwood was a lakebed. [garbled]. X million years ago a great upheaval happened and what is now Warm Springs Road developed [believe he is talking about narrow canyon that the road goes through as it leaves Kenwood]. Probably a good earth-rendering crack and it drained the lake. Before that the drain was, when you go down, just before you get to Pagani’s, you notice that little rise?

AD: That was sort of a dam?

AG: That was where the railroad used to come up right along next to the road. You could see that there’s a little dip—that’s where it drained at one time. It drained also down Warm Springs Road when the big upheaval [came]. This was a lakebed. When I built this house and went to sink my septic tank, it was in September. I dug the hole and I had to fill the septic tank with water because it was floating. I have a well out front, you probably noticed there was a whole lot of rocks around there?

AD: I was looking more for the house at that point, but I’ll check it on the way out.

AG: That was the old railroad well. The bedrooms of this house are built on the foundations of the water tower. Hell of a good foundation—I just hooked onto it. That well was fourteen feet deep—that’s surface water. Everybody in Kenwood had a well and everybody in Kenwood had an outhouse. We didn’t have any septic systems, we had outhouses or cess pools. You dig down eighteen, twenty feet—you had plenty of water. The next aquifer is at eighty feet. When I first got here, I developed that well—I had a demand pump on it. You know you don’t make much money in the military, and I never saved much money anyway. Every time you moved someplace it’d cost you a lot of money. A full colonel makes pretty good money, but not that much. I had five kids too—it cost a lot to send them to school. The well kind of pooped out when we had that drought in ’73, ’75’, ’76. I dug another well out here, in the back. After eighty feet you go through a lot of clay and at a hundred twenty-five, a hundred thirty feet, you hit a gravel bed. You go through that to about a hundred thirty-five, a hundred forty feet and you hit more blue clay. Then you stop—that’s good water. I have terrific water. When we first started pumping it we figured it’d be about a hundred gallons a minute. I’ve got a well out there in my orchard that gives me now a hundred gallons a minute. So you have your surface water, eighty feet, a hundred twenty, a hundred twenty-five feet. I’m down at a hundred twenty-five feet, but my pump is down at 105 feet. Then you go down to four hundred feet—you get stinky water--sulphur and it’s warm. That’s the same kind of water at Morton’s Springs. It comes up through a crack. People don’t understand, you dig a well up top of a hill and you have water. It’s because of the strata of the ground--that’s basic geology.

AD: When you dug that second well and it was during the drought, did you get down to eighty feet and not find any water?

AG: I didn’t want to go to eighty feet because you’re apt to have some of that surface water. There’s a lot of septics here. I sealed off the first twenty feet—it’s sealed. The best water is at a hundred and twenty-five feet. So I’ve got good water—take a drink of it and you’ll find out. It’s soft, hasn’t got too many minerals The women love it because you can
GUFFANTI

wash your hair. When you wash your clothes you don’t have to use a lot of stuff to break the soap crud--it’s soft water. Ordinary soap makes a good washing. You don’t even need bleach. Back in the ‘thirties everybody had a well. We had no septic systems. Now there’s three water companies.

82 AD: Right here in Kenwood? What would those be—Valley of the Moon, Kenwood—

AG: Gibb has a water company for the top of the hill that goes up. [Kenilworth Road].

83 AD: This fourteen foot well out here, did that pretty much dry up during the drought?

AG: Pretty much. What I did is stick an eight-inch pipe down, cut holes in it and filled the thing [the well] with gravel. It has water in it, but right next door is a septic tank, I mean a leach line. I disinfect my well anyway [this is the other well]. Just for the hell of it, I disinfect it twice a year. I get two gallons of swimming pool bleach and pour it down the well. Then I recirculate it for about eight hours So you taste a little chlorine for about four or five days, but it’s just common sense. So you know about the aquifers.

84 AD: Bill Meglan was telling me about drilling wells in the old days and they had a big hand auger and you’d get two guys on it. He was basically saying what you’re saying--you go down about sixty, eighty feet there was good water back in those days. I guess there still is here in Kenwood. Sounds like in Glen Ellen people are going deeper now.

AG: That’s little different. Like I say, this is a mixed geology area. This is Franciscan on this side and that’s volcanic on that side. You can tell by just looking at the trees, looking at the ground. If you understand what’s happening over here on this side, you see the plate is going underneath and it’s tipping over. Up at Bodega Bay they built houses and then all of a sudden they found out—or in San Francisco where everything is dropping off the edge? That’s because the plate is going down underneath and it’s spilling over.

85 AD: What’s that called, a subduction zone?

AG: That’s right. And another thing, you probably understand where you fill in something, in an earthquake it’s just like jello. That’s what happened at the Marina [referring to 1989 earthquake]. When they had the earthquake down in the Santa Cruz hills, Prieta Loma [means Loma Prieta]. The Marina got a hell of a big shake-up. That’s where the fire was, and that’s where a lot of the buildings fell. But the minute that shock hit the Marin Headlands, that big rock—that’s what it is—absorbed the shock. That’s why it didn’t bother up this part of the country at all. You know that the Marin Headlands rock goes all the way down into the mantle.

86 AD: That’s Franciscan stuff up there right? Chert and—

AG: All the way down to the mantle and absorbs the shock. We have no faults through this valley. We have on the other side of the hill, Rodger’s Creek [fault]. Which goes right up Santa Rosa Avenue, goes up Mendocino Avenue, cuts over goes through the hospital—Sutter Hospital and then becomes the Healdsburg Fault. The thing starts there below Sonoma and
it’s really an offshoot, through San Pablo Bay, of the Hayward Fault. The Hayward Fault becomes the Rodger’s Creek Fault. This earthquake that was over in Napa [autumn, 2000]? They have some faults over there—but Maryanne [his geologist daughter] says she doesn’t know of any faults from Sonoma to Melita.

87 AD: Not here on the valley floor I think.

AG: Not here.

88 AD: I was amazed—I live in Glen Ellen and the epicenter of that quake in Napa was only five miles from my house. On my desk I had some blocks set up and it didn’t even topple them over. It was nothing here.

AG: See that little gimmick up there [pointing to object on a shelf], the two little balls hanging down. That’s what that is—it’s balanced—if that falls off—earthquake!

89 AD: And it didn’t fall off?

AG: Oh we had a few shakes, but nothing of any consequence really. Now you’re writing up all this stuff. For instance my conversation with you, I don’t know if you’re recording it or not.

90 AD: Yeah, I’m recording.

AG: You want to know about the valley. Are you going to write up something about it?

91 AD: The plan is to make transcripts of all the recordings and then at the end of the project I’ll make up a final report and try to summarize all the different things people have been telling me. I’ll be sending the report into CALFED, that’s state and federal agencies that oversee water quality on the North Coast. So they’ll get a copy of the report.

AG: I can’t prove it, but all these pesticides that people apply wash into the creek and it’s doing something to the fish—obviously. Something is going on. Riparian rights—I know these farmers say, “I’m going to pump water, the hell with you.” Some of the best wine in this country on the Pagani Ranch and they don’t irrigate. When you don’t irrigate that vine says—“I’ve got to go down deep to get moisture”. Those vines are a hundred years old. My father planted those vines.

92 AD: So your father lived here in Kenwood then.

AG: Yes. Down at Pagani Ranch. They [the roots] go down there and it does something to that vine that makes it produce better grapes. This is where the “Old Vine”—you’ve seen that ad for “Old Vine”? It sells for twenty-five, thirty, fifty dollars a bottle? That’s why. Those vines live a long time because they’ve got a good root system. They’ve got to have a good root system to go down and get water. If you just have a short root system, those vines won’t last long.
AD: If you keep watering them, they don’t have to go down deep.

AG: Sure you get a little more quantity, but not quality. You get a lot more wine, but you don’t get good wine. Hell, I’m a hard-assed old dago and I like wine. But I like good wine.

AD: Did your Dad have any stories about this area? When did he move here?

AG: My father died when I was seven years old--1923. That dates me doesn’t it? Old Joe Buck my step-dad, he was a grafter. He would dgraft grapes. My mother was a hard-working Italian woman who was ahead of her times. She was an environmentalist. She used to raise hell—‘What the hell are you cutting down all those trees for?’ or ‘Why are you wasting all that water?’ ‘Why are you wasting? Why are you wasting?’ She used to compost, which was unusual in those days. She’d say, “Just throw the food in a pile and put some dirt on it and we’ll put in on the garden.”

AD: Yeah you get some good fertilizer that way.

AG: Yeah. I’m looking over this thing [question sheet which AD sent him]. [Reading] What kind of animals did you see? You know we didn’t have deer on the valley floor—they deer were up in the hills. Now they come down here because we let them come down here. Nobody hunts them. I believe in game management to a degree. Because you know what happened to the deer on Angel Island—they just overpopulated.

AD: Did you ever seen any bear around here? Or hear of any bear around here?

AG: No. But I used to hear about mountain lions—pumas, up in the hills. At one time these houses up in the hills were not there. Those hills were unpopulated. You’ve heard of the Secret Pasture? Joaquin Murrietta?

AD: A little bit.

AG: That used to be wild country. He used to steal cattle and drive them up to what is known as Secret Pasture. That waterfall—what’s the name of that? That environmental place down there—Bouverie. Go up to the top of that creek—we used to hike up there. There’s a big cave under that waterfall. That’s a very interesting place. I think somebody went up there and jumped off or fell off that cliff up there recently. Trinity Road used to be a real nasty place—you’d have a hell of a time getting up there. But they paved it over. That’s the way I go over to Napa County now. It’s kind of nice swinging around there—interesting. That used to be where you went deer hunting. Now, hell they eat my rose bushes. I used to plant beans out in my orchard. The deer would methodically start at one end of my bean row and the next morning I go out there and a couple more feet of my beans would be gone. Finally had to put up a deer fence.

NOTE: This is where the mini disc ran out. Al had a few more comments which did not get recorded, but we wrapped up the interview almost immediately.
Interview with William (Bill) Lynch
February 28, 2001, at his Sonoma Index-Tribune office, West Napa Street, Sonoma.

B=Bill Lynch; A=Arthur Dawson

1 A: I’m here with Bill Lynch at the Index Tribune. Bill, were you born here in the valley?

B: Yes I was, born and raised. Born here in 1942 at the old Burndale Hospital which was a former rest home off of Burndale Rd. It’s kind of a single-story shack out there actually. It was Sonoma Valley’s first hospital.

2 A: Where did you live at that time?

B: That’s a good question, where’d I live when I was first born? I’m not sure. My first memories of a house was out off of Woodvalley Rd. in that area, kind of Lovall Valley, Wood Valley area. I was probably not more than a couple years old. I vaguely remember it. See, that was right before the war, World War II, when I was born. For the first couple years of my life, at least part of that time, we lived with my grandparents ‘cause my dad was in the Navy and my mom was living with the grandparents. So I remember mostly living with my grandparents in Sonoma over on Oak Lane. Actually, right next door to where I live now at my own home today. So, you know, in those early days I don’t have much recollection at all, I was just a toddler.

3 A: I interviewed Charlie Cooke a few weeks ago. Do you remember him as a neighbor?

B: Oh yeah! He actually wasn’t a neighbor, I think he lived up the hill. When you have those kind of foggy memories of your earliest childhood, you just have kind of glimpses of the past. You don’t really know exactly that much. Sort of little windows, and who knows, part of it could be fantasy in terms of what it really was like and so on. The various places we lived at the time when I was growing up included out in the country, and Lovall Valley/Woodvalley Rd. really was out in the country. At that point there were very few houses out there. We lived in this little kind of shack back on a ranch some place. Then I lived on Oak Lane with my grandparents and then we moved around to a few little houses. I remember living over off of First St. East by the Mission, in one of those little small houses there, at one point. By the time I was about the third grade, we were living on Spain St. in one of the houses owned by the Sebastiani family, along East Spain St. there. Just maybe half a block, maybe five doors down from the winery. I spent a lot of time during grade school living there. Finally, when I was in about fourth grade, we moved over to where my parents’ house still is and that’s right across the street from Prestwood School. Anyhow, I’ve always lived here except for being away when I was away in the Navy and in college.

4 A: When you were living over there by Sebastiani did you play in Nathanson Creek?

B: Oh yeah…. not so much by the winery because that was a channel. Samueli [Sebastiani family member—original patriarch I believe—A.D.] must have put that cement channel in there by the bridge long before I was born. Just south of the bridge, the creek that
LYNCH

rann from there down through to where it crosses Napa Street, that stretch of the creek we played in a lot. We had forts down there and you just hung out down there, you skipped rocks down there, you went into the water and looked for pollywogs and whatever. So yeah, we spent a lot of time in that creek. Matter of fact, one of the interesting memories I had was, I’m not too fond of a couple things, but we used to find wild mint growing along the banks there. I guess it was wild or someone let it go in their garden and it went wild. I don’t know if it’s a native plant or not. It was a mint leaf and as a little kid we used to like to chew on it and taste it and everything else. Well the mint leaf, if you don’t know, looks a lot like a nettle. One day I learned about nettles the hard way. We were grabbing leaves and I actually grabbed a nettle and put it in my mouth. What a bad experience that was. They really looked a lot alike and now, of course, I can clearly tell the difference. From that day on I never forgot that experience! The other experience I remember from that creek was every now and then you’d go through a bunch of bushes and every once in a while you’d turn up a hornet’s nest because they weren’t always in the ground, they were sometimes in the trees. I remember a couple times heading toward the water real fast because we’d be playing down there and stir up a hornet’s nest. Yeah, we’d play in the creek a lot.

5 A: How deep were the pools?

B: In that area they weren’t very deep. I think probably the deepest ones were maybe a couple of feet. Now again, we’re talking about mostly in the summertime. In the winter time it would get a lot of water running through there. We’d float boats and things like that down there, but my folks never let us get too close to the water when it was really flowing through there. But in the summertime typically there was still water in the creek. It wasn’t a lot of water, but it was clear water, it ran and it pooled, and to my recollection there was never a year when it dried up. There was always water in the pools, but not a lot. It was all very shady, just like it is today, there was almost a tunnel of trees. That whole area in there, right near the creek, is very much adobe soil. It was sort of molded and everything else and didn’t seem to wash away too much by erosion. Even then there was a lot of periwinkle and various other kinds of vines and blackberries and willows and oaks and everything else. It made quite a shaded kind of canopy over the creek so the water also stayed fairly cool because it was really shaded. That stretch of the creek probably stood a lot of that although there’s a lot more houses in that area now. You can’t even get in there. There didn’t used to be quite that many houses.

6 A: Do you remember steelhead?

B: In that particular stretch of stream I don’t remember seeing any steelhead. But when I was a little older, once I was about nine or ten and we started fishing, trout season would open around here. At that time I think it was around the first of April, I can’t remember the exact dates. Remember trout fishing around here you were really fishing for steelhead smolts. In those days I wasn’t aware of how the whole process worked. We would fish, me and a couple other kids in the neighborhood, guys like Ronny Lennon and a few others would grab our rods and we would go up to Nathanson Creek but we would go up above, kind of where Ravenswood Winery is now. That was all just farm land.

7 A: Where it’s starting to narrow into a canyon?
B: Yeah, there was a family up there that had a cattle ranch, I can’t remember the name of the family right now. Anyhow it was all private land but we could sneak onto the creeks over there. They didn’t bother us anyway. It was unfenced land. There may have been barbed wire but we’d just walk under the barbed wire. We would fish for trout from there all the way up to the falls onto a property that was called Edelson’s at that time. Edelson’s had a ranch and there was cattle ranchers and various people that had farms along Gehricke Road there. There weren’t very many—on that whole Gehricke Road there might have been two or three houses. There just wasn’t very many houses and again, the creek at that time was well shaded. There was nobody irrigating anything up there. I don’t think even the cattle ranchers were taking any water out of it. I think they had well water and windmills for generating water. There was water in that creek most of the summer. I don’t remember ever going up there in late August or September so I can’t really give you a picture. Certainly when fishing started in March, April, May and all the way through June and early July there was water in that creek. The deeper holes where we would every now and then go for a swim were fairly small, smaller than this office. [approximately 10’ X 12’, perhaps a little narrower—A.D.]

8 A: Little teacup kind of things?

B: Yeah, maybe a little narrower. There were some that were big. Maybe the deepest parts were maybe three or four feet deep. A lot of ledges and rocks for the trout to hide under and lots of shade so the water stayed cool. But it was clear water, it was running water. There was still water running from hole to hole, it wasn’t just an isolated stagnant pool. It seemed that the trout would summer over and if they didn’t make it out in the spring with the flood, they would go out with the fall flood and go out to be steelhead. With that particular creek, Nathanson, I didn’t really fish it all that much because, even in those days, it was a pretty small creek. It didn’t have a lot of water in it and it just wasn’t as good fishing as some others. In those days my dad and I would fish either what amounts to the headwaters of Sonoma Creek, which would be where Sugar Loaf Park is now. Again, that was all ranch land.

9 A: Reynold’s Ranch, is that what it was?

B: I don’t remember who it was, I was a pretty young kid at the time. We would go past Golden Bear Lodge up until (there were virtually no homes) find a wide spot in the road, park, and then we’d usually fish upstream as far as we wanted to. There’s some falls up there and so on. We would fish there and that was always, again a very dark shaded canyon, still is today. The holes were actually a lot deeper than they are now. Those holes in that creek have really filled in. That creek itself has silted in a lot. I think it’s not only silted in I think it’s also, there’ve been floods and stuff over the years and a lot of the rocks and stuff have filled in those holes.

10 A: You think that’s a natural process?

B: Well, it could be a combination of things. I don’t really know. It could be that maybe every now and then a big flood will come through and scour it out again. I really don’t know. I suspect some of it had to do with the silting. When they put that road up there to the park I think it probably contributed to the upstream silting that comes down and fills in those holes.
One thing I did remember, because I fished that stream up until—even into my college years [this is probably the early 1960s—A.D.]. I would come home, usually I would get out of college somewhere around the first of June, and one of the first things I would do is go fishing in the local streams. I was a fly fisherman even then. I mostly would just go fishing, I wouldn’t keep them, I’d just catch and release. I would go up just because I wanted to fish. I would either go to Golden Bear (I call it Golden Bear Creek but it’s really Sonoma Creek) or I would go up to Stuart’s Creek, which is the one that’s on Bouverie property. At that time David was still alive and we were family friends of David’s and so he would let us fish there. Matter fact I fished in David’s creek almost as early as I fished any creek because I was in Boy Scouts. At that time Troop 9 had privileges to go up there camping and we used to camp up there and we’d fish. I fished from there from opening day and that was always, of the two creeks, Golden Bear and that one, Bouverie’s was always the much more special creek. It was a beautiful canyon, I don’t know if you’ve ever been in there.

A: I’ve been on the Glen Oaks Ranch just a couple times. I had friends who were living there for a while. I’ve been up to the waterfall one time.

B: Ok, well you know what it’s like. It was incredibly beautiful and wild in those days because very few people went up in there. David sublet out some of his land for cattle ranching. I don’t think he actually ran the cattle, I think somebody [else] did it, but there was some cattle on his ranch but they were in that last open meadow before the canyon started to narrow. Once the canyon started to narrow there wasn’t anything up in there. There’s some, I think there probably still is today, some old redwood groves up in there. The canyon really narrowed down. One of the things people didn’t realize, if you take the old road up and you drop down on a trail and you go to the upper falls. One of the more interesting ways to go up there is if you stay on the creek and you rock-hop so to speak, up the creek, you’ll come to a lower set of falls that you couldn’t see from the road, couldn’t even get to from the road. The only way to get to it is walk up the creek. There’s a beautiful little kind of nook-and-crananny thing that you kind of crawl around these rocks and eventually you can work your way up and then you can walk up the rest of the stream to the pool below the big falls where the cave is and stuff. That’s just an incredibly beautiful canyon and wild as heck up there. Wild in the sense that there just wasn’t very many people. There was a few people that he let fish up there. Once in a while you’d see a steelhead, a big one that didn’t get down, that was trapped. They’d be in pools up there and I don’t know whether they survived or not. They were usually a couple of feet long and you’d see them cruising around.

A: Definitely a steelhead and not a salmon?

B: Oh yeah, they were steelhead. Salmon would start to turn kind of mottled. They’ll start to deteriorate. Salmon won’t make it through the summer. Steelhead could though. That creek always had enough water in it to survive—it was always well-shaded and very dark. There was water running through there, even over the falls. Now in the summertime the falls didn’t have a lot of water—it was barely a trickle, but there was a trickle coming down the falls, obviously from some spring upstream and it would continue on down. There was a few other springs that would feed in from the side. David, for a while, he put up a summer dam. He did do some irrigation out of that creek because he had a cement kind of gate and he would drop in some boards and dam up a fairly large pool for the summer, some
summers. I think he would feed water down to his lower ranch from there. Didn’t seem to have a lot of effect on the stream ‘cause it wasn’t a very big dam, it was a pretty small one. The plus side was, it probably gave a good summer home for a lot of the larger steelhead. It created a fairly deep hole probably six, seven or eight feet at some parts, pretty large. A virtual, mini-pond. I think probably in that case, and it was well-shaded enough too so that it did keep a certain amount of coolness to it.

13 A: He would take it down probably when it started raining?

B: Yeah, soon as the rains would start he would take it down. He’d put it up like maybe in June; a lot of the times at the start of fishing season it was not up yet. It wouldn’t be up until later. He would put it up sometime in late spring and then leave it up. But it was one of the few dams I had ever seen on the creek. The only other dam that I ever recall seeing on the creek, any of the creeks in the valley, was, at one point Larson Park was part of a thing called the Valley of the Moon Recreation District. There was a couple of years maybe in the 60s, I’d have to go back and look when it was, that they decided to have more active recreation and they actually put a dam in there by Larson Park.

14 A: Oh, that’s when the dam went in huh?

B: Yeah, they would dam up for the summer and plant trout in there. People would supposedly fish but I don’t think it ever was a real popular resource. I think it got a lot of play at first but most people felt that it didn’t really work that good. One of the things that happened was it would dam up the creek so much that the access was actually limited. It would push the water up into the trees.

15 A: So it was hard to find a good spot to stand--

B: Yeah, it wasn’t that great, I didn’t think. The creek at that point was starting already to deteriorate a little bit. One of the problems you had with the main branch of Sonoma Creek once it got into Kenwood and Glen Ellen and south was that virtually everybody who lived alongside that creek had a hose running into it with a little pump. They were pumping out water to water their gardens and vegetables and everything else to try to save money on water. I don’t know for sure, because I have no idea how you would measure that, but I think that if you multiplied the number of pumps over the years of people that gradually lived there and the amount of water they started taking out during the summertime, just exactly when the creek needed the water, it contributed a great deal to the deterioration of that as a trout stream.

16 I remember fishing Sonoma Creek, for trout in the summertime, all the way down to where Leveroni’s Dairy is, in front of Leveroni’s Dairy, even into the late 50’s, even into July, for trout. Cold enough running, clear water to fish for trout in that stream. By August and September the water was getting pretty warm and pretty low and the trout would find probably shady spots that were still there but we didn’t fish for them at that point. There was enough water in that creek that you could find good trout fishing on running, cold water all the way down there into July. So that was pretty good. I don’t know what exactly caused the deterioration of the creek. It could be any number of things from simply the change in the rain patterns, to what I think it is, which is a combination of people who all along there, to this
day, still exercise their riparian rights to draw water out of the creek. And the upstream people that are putting wells in and capping the springs and so on.

I think if you really looked at it, the people that draw water out of it all along its banks are probably more the cause of the low water than anything else. Everybody thinks it’s free water and they have a right to it, I guess that’s the way the law is. But boy it really, really does damage to that water. If I had my way, I would ban all water being pulled out of that creek, period. Nobody should pull any water out of that creek cause it kills the stream as a fishery. There’s still steelhead come up but not nearly as many. Mainly I think it’s because the smolt have no place to survive. The water gets too warm, it gets dirty. The combination of erosion because you have the other issue, which, as you know, it’s sort of one of those things that one contributes to the other. All the upstream construction you’ve got more run-off and more run-off tears away streamside vegetation creating less shade, making this kind of Grand Canyon effect. Then you have other issues that start to happen where you have both natural and what I would call, unnatural vegetation starting to take root . . .

A: Like star thistle?

B: Well, I’m thinking of the Arundo. It’s a plague that didn’t exist when I was growing up.

A: So you don’t remember any Arundo?

B: No.

A: Any idea when that began?

B: I have no idea. I think that’s within the last 10 to 20 years. I don’t remember any Arundo down there, anywhere there. There was still enough bank and vegetation around the side that there was a lot of shade on the creek even down as far as Leveroni’s. Even though the canyon was starting to be carved and it had been carved over many years. I think that probably is the natural course of what happens to a lot of rivers and stuff. I think it was accelerated by all the upstream development and all that rapid water that would run in there during the heavy rains and then the erosion would start and we’d have the problems.

A: Back when you were a kid and you’d have a big rainstorm and you were watching the creek at highwater, has the color changed? Would you say it’s muddier now than it used to be?

B: At high water?

A: Yeah. Or is it about the same?

B: I think it was always pretty muddy. When it’s at flood stage it would flood. Again, over the years we’ve had many floods in the valley and often Sonoma Creek would rise up. I think the thing that started happening, I don’t remember it happening that much in the ’60s but certainly in the ’70s, the amount of bank erosion that occurred from Glen Ellen down through El Verano seemed to accelerate. Now what exactly had happened where it reached
that critical mass and started cutting into that top soil along there, we lost a lot of banks and a lot of stuff really opened in the late ‘60s through the ‘70s period. Whether it was an unusual series of heavy winters, whether it was because people had just finally gotten too close to the creek and there’s just too much run-off, the banks were really destabilized at that point and it seemed like the channels started to really widen out at that point. It really destroyed the habitat within the creek for the summertime because once you’ve taken all that brush and trees and everything away from the water that means that once the channel goes back to it’s normal late spring and summer flows, now it’s right out in the middle of the sun in this open ditch essentially. There’s still maybe trees but the trees are 50 to maybe 100 feet away from the water.

23 A: Bill Basileu mentioned the same thing. He said that the channel is wider so there may be as many trees along the bank but they’re not shading the water like they used to.

B: Yeah, exactly. Particularly in some areas more than others. It was a shame that there wasn’t anything that could be done or that was done. There might have been things that could have been done but there wasn’t. There’s probably as many theories about why it happened as there are people who have some knowledge of it. I don’t know, I can’t put my finger on one cause because in those days, when the damage was done to the creek, the grape business certainly wasn’t getting going yet. The grape business didn’t really start booming until the late ‘70s early ‘80s. By then a lot of the damage had been done to Sonoma Creek. By the middle of the ‘70s, Sonoma Creek had deteriorated already. We always like to blame the grape farmers for doing it but it was happening before the grape farmers. I still maintain that the two biggest factors were the amount of water getting into the creek in a rapid fashion during flood stages caused the erosion and then in the summertime so many people pulling water out.

24 The other thing that has happened is a lot of people were using the creek as a dump in those days. They’d live on the creek, they’d dump all their old garden clippings and prunings and even garbage into the creek! They wouldn’t take it to the dump. It was a free dumping hole. They’d dump their old milk cartons and all kinds of crap over the bank in their own back yards! Of course every winter the water would take it downstream to Schellville. I think that all that stuff contributed in one way or the other to the damage in the creek. In the last 10 to 15 years I think that if anything, there’s been kind of a stabilization. But as I said this new phenomenon, this Arundo donax stuff and any other non-native vegetation including blackberries for that matter, probably have not been very helpful to the restoration. The only thing they might have done is they might have stabilized the banks a little bit and made it less prone to erosion. Again, I don’t have any particular knowledge about how that might have happenend.

25 A: You know the dam at Eldridge? Do you know when that was put in?

B: Oh yeah! I forgot about that one. That’s been there a long time but I have no idea. It’s been there for at least thirty years or so. Maybe more like fifty for all I know. Again, I don’t think it’s up all year long though.

26 A: I think they’ve pretty much taken it down at this point.
B: I think it was a summer dam. I’m not exactly sure why it was there or whether they used it for irrigation or whatever. But it was not up during the winter time at all and most of the spring. I think it probably was controlled pretty much by the Fish and Game Department. I don’t think they’d probably let them put it up during the migration cycle. I never really went to the creek at Eldridge that often. Once in a while, I’d walk through fishing. I mean I fished up and down all Sonoma Creek and I’ve seen that dam but I recall it being mostly a summer dam. I fished the creek in the summertime where really the trout pretty much were under cover and once in a while you’d catch one but there were plenty of suckers and carp and other fish in there too. Again that’s the other thing you have to remember is that this creek had non-native species of sorts in there preying on the trout eggs and stuff. Not just in the last ten years but in the last thirty or forty years. Carp and suckers and probably Pike minnow, squaw fish.

27 A: Yeah, I’ve heard reports of pike going back to the ‘20s at least. They’ve been there for quite a while.

B: Yeah, there was a lot of trash fish in there that haven’t helped the trout situation. They were probably introduced back in the ‘20s. Slowly but surely the combination of factors probably have contributed to the deterioration of that as a trout stream. I mean Sonoma Creek would recover quite quickly if for example, I mean it’s another heresy and probably not good for the upstream. For example, let’s say you built a dam in Adobe Canyon and you let out cold tail water all summer long from the bottom of the dam. You would then have a very healthy, nice creek running through Sonoma Valley. Of course you’d ruin, you’d flood Adobe Canyon. Obviously, nobody’s going to do that.

28 A: The homeowners might have a problem with that.

B: Yeah right. The point is that healthy water flow would fix Sonoma Creek really quickly. The other thing that I’ve always thought is that if somebody wanted to do a restoration project on the Adobe Canyon area and some other of the headwaters is you go in there and literally clean out some of the holes. You know, hand dredge, I don’t mean with a backhoe. Get in there with some people with strong backs willing to create some summer holes, some deeper holes for the fish. Literally, not making dams but just recreating the natural holes where water would pool up, especially where there’s already good shade. So you’d have shade and holes and maybe some of these trout fingerlings and smolt would survive the summer. They need to get deep enough to get away from the raccoons and the birds. And there’s enough oxygen in that water and the coolness would let them survive through the summer until the waters came through. So maybe you could essentially create more natural habitat for the trout. Because trout like shade, they like shelter and they like cold, dark water. They’re not too keen on hot, sunny, open places. They don’t like it at all.

29 A: Do you remember any salmon or ever hearing of anybody catching salmon?

B: Well, a few people, I never caught any and I’ve never seen any. Well, I’ve seen salmon spawning up here you know in wintertimes past, and I’ve heard of them going into small little ditches and stuff around town at various times. I personally never saw any.
Again, I didn’t fish too much in the wintertime. You would see salmon, you know, in the winter. I fished for steelhead down in Sonoma Creek but only just about the Schellville Bridge. That was about the tidewater—tidewater was actually a little bit above there. It was a pool by the Wroble Ranch which is maybe a half-mile above the Schellville Bridge. That was where Fish and Game said you couldn’t fish for steelhead above there. Sonoma Creek was closed to trout fishing and steelhead fishing for as long as I can remember during spawning season. Even in the early ’50s it was never open. So you couldn’t go up there and go after steelhead or salmon in what amounts to fresh water. You could only fish it from tidewater down. A few guys would hook a salmon every now and then. I never hooked one, I never even saw one.

30 A: Would those have been King Salmon or Coho do you think?

B: I would think they were probably Kings but I wouldn’t know. At that time there were references to them in Jordan Basileu’s column, actually Bill’s dad.

31 A: Yeah I read some excerpts from that.

B: They referred to some salmon every now and then. I’ve heard guys catch them. I’ve heard farmers say they found them in their ditches and stuff like that. But again, the usual way that you would see salmon like that would be maybe when there was an unusually early rain and there would be a sudden rush of water, fresh water coming down and salmon would come up early. Then there would be a stoppage, there wouldn’t be so much rain and people would see them spawning because they would have been early spawners. Again, I don’t ever recall, at least in my lifetime, discussion about a lot of salmon in the creek. I had heard there were but I just never saw any. Steelhead, yes, not salmon.

32 A: Did you sense that there was some sort of a sustaining native population or was it what some people call “wanderers”? You know, they were heading up to the Sacramento and got lost?

B: I don’t know. I think that probably all these coastal, bay area streams had salmon in them at one time. I don’t know that this was a huge population of salmon runs. The only reason I’m not sure is because of the particular type of streams that these are, these little short coastal streams of this type here maybe not have been the right habitat. I’ve never heard in the history of the valley anyone ever talk about huge salmon runs here. I just don’t think it was that kind of river. I don’t think even the Russian River was considered a huge salmon river. Although there was certainly more salmon up the river, they’ve lost a considerable amount. Compared to the Sacramento which has always been a huge salmon river. I’m not exactly sure why, I don’t have any knowledge that this was ever a big salmon spawning area. You go back to the earliest history of Sonoma, there was a steelhead hatchery up in Graham Creek. But no salmon hatchery.

33 A: That goes back to 1875 or something like that.

B: That leads me to believe that there just wasn’t very much going on.
A: Any other wildlife that you saw along the creek?

B: One of the funny things is that you see actually more of the larger wildlife today then you ever saw when I was a kid. One of the reasons is because just about everybody had a gun and any kind of critter that was on four legs that was on their property they’d shoot at it. There was a lot of people that were farmers, or quasi-farmers or whatever. You know, they see a deer, they wouldn’t care if it was season or not, they’d pop it, skin it, and eat it. It was part of the larder. Varmints were certainly viewed as things to be disposed of, so they saw a varmint like a coyote or something like that, they’d shoot it. They wouldn’t mess around. The fact is, there are more deer in the valley than there were when I was in grade school. When we were in Bouverie’s Canyon, we’d see an occasional deer but they were pretty wild. They wasn’t many people and there weren’t that many hunters. But the hunters were aggressive hunters and they would shoot them. So I didn’t see very many animals and we were up in this really wild area. We’d see an occasional skunk and like I said an occasional deer. You never saw any bear or lions or even coyotes. You’d hear them once in a while. I really think there is far more of that kind of animal life in this valley now than there ever was, because they’re very protected and there’s not as many hunters and people don’t shoot those creatures anymore. There’s all kinds of limits and stuff, particularly deer. The deer population is huge compared to what it used to be. As I said because everybody in those days, everybody in the valley hunted. When deer season opened up, everybody went hunting. There wasn’t that many people but the point is, the private lands around here now, now people [have deer] come down in their back yards and they’re pets. People feed them and stuff. Nobody fed a deer unless they were putting a salt lick out and were planning to shoot it for the season. I never, ever heard of a mountain lion in this valley, until really just in the last 5 or 10 years. We heard they were here but nobody ever saw one, because again, the same thing, they weren’t protected.

A: A couple of years ago there was one right down Nathanson Creek, just about downtown.

B: Oh yeah, they’ve been seen as recent as this year too. There was one killed on the highway out here by Bouverie’s about a month ago. A big one, full grown male lion. It just never happened, never see it. Rattlesnakes, yeah, Bouverie’s Canyon’s just teeming with rattlesnakes. That was the one thing I’d always have to watch out for because I’ve even stepped on them up there. It’s one of those kind of things, there were always plenty of snakes in the valley but we never saw many large critters of any kind. I think it’s because of the environment at that time. They were hunted. Not hunted to extinction but if you came to cross their path there wasn’t this friendly coexistence where we would feed the little creatures, you know. It was not a petting zoo. That’s really different.

A: Did you ever go swimming? Bill Basileu was talking about the foot of Oak St. in El Verano. A couple people told me about that hole down there.

B: Oh people used to swim there all the time. I didn’t swim in that part of Sonoma Creek. I swam down by Leveroni’s cause the Leveroni family’s always been life-long friends. At that time Bob Leveroni and even Vic was alive at that point. They were guys that knew my family, knew my grandfather. So I’d swim down there and we would swim
upstream, up in Glen Ellen along the creek. But I never actually swam right there in Boyes Springs where he's talking about. Boyes Bath House was there and we would swim there, but I never actually went down to the creek to go swimming there, but I know a lot of people that did.

37 A: At Leveroni’s how big were the holes down there?

B: Oh they were huge. Big, big areas. The creek down there even in those days you would have some riffles going into these holes and the holes would be maybe forty or fifty feet long and twenty feet wide. Maybe at the deepest point they were three, four or five feet deep, you know. They ran pretty good. Again, there still was enough shade, there was shade on those holes. Not all day long. At high noon you might have sun on them, but there was a lot of shade on those holes so the trout would still stay there.

38 I remember one of the more interesting sights I saw one time around there was, it must have been the early ‘60s. Went down there to go trout fishing and it was late so I knew it was probably going to be hard fishing. There was a lot of carp in there too. I remember I was parked at the Leveroni ranch and I was taking a path down to the creek. I don’t know if it was a hawk or an eagle, but if it was a big old eagle, I had never seen an eagle do this. It was hunched down on the rocks and had its wings spread out like this staying low and there was a big old carp that was feeding in the shadows. This eagle or whatever, this hawk, it wasn’t an osprey because it wasn’t white, it was more dark-colored. Anyhow, this bird was just waiting for the chance. I always thought birds stood up high and then glided in on top and grabbed something but this bird was just hunkered down. And eventually tried to hop over the water, he missed the fish but it was the most incredible thing I had ever seen. I have never seen a bird do that, ever! It was a fascinating thing to watch this damn bird, this stealthy thing--I don’t know if it had learned this new technique because it had been partially injured or whatever. I mean it flew, eventually, when I came down it flew away. To this day I have no idea what it was. I remember it was a dark-colored raptor of some sort, either a hawk, I don’t know that it was an eagle. It certainly wasn’t a bald eagle. At least it wasn’t a bald eagle with a white head anyway.

39 A: Golden eagle possibly?

B: Possibly, you know, it could have been. I’ve seen stuffed golden eagles, I don’t think I’ve ever seen a live golden eagle. It was amazing to me and he was after this big, old carp that was feeding in the shallow water. I’ve never seen a bird do that before. Particularly a raptor. You see water birds that’ll hunt and poke at…..

40 A: A raptor, usually you think they’re gliding or, what do you call it, a harrier?

B: Yeah, or even the ospreys. You know, the ospreys dive. They’ll fly high and then go down to the ground. I’ve never seen a bird do that before. It was like he was already on something eating it. You’ve seen when they go on it, they kind of hunch over….

41 A: It’s like a turkey vulture when they’re eating the carcass, that kind of stance . . .

B: Anyway, that was one of the more interesting things.
A: So those pools, I don’t know exactly the bounds of the Leveroni property, were they upstream of the Leveroni Road bridge, or downstream?

B: In between, I would say from about where the mobile home park, if that extension of MacArthur St. goes through to the creek right there. You entered the creek there and then you walked all the way down to the Leveroni Road bridge. That stretch there we used to fish that all the time. It was really good fishing up until the middle of June, I don’t know about July, probably was pushing it in July. It would start to get pretty hot. Even in those days the water would get warm. Then you’d fish up in the canyons where it was cooler.

A: You mentioned people planting fish up at Larson Park. Are you aware of any other places where fish were planted?

B: No. As far as I know, in modern times, that was the only place along the creeks that anyone ever planted fish. Now that doesn’t mean that they didn’t. I don’t think the Fish and Game ever planted trout in Sonoma Creek to my recollection, anywhere else. I say that and I might be wrong, you know.

A: Bill Basileu mentioned he and his Dad, the train would come through and they’d get a big bucket of fish and then pass them out to a bunch of fishermen and who’d go pour them in the creek. That was a little before your time though.

B: Could’ve been, you know, I mean they could’ve done that. It’s possible, I don’t really know. In those days they didn’t have a lot of knowledge about the impacts of hatchery-reared fish on wild fisheries you know. So they could’ve done a lot of stuff. I just don’t remember it.

A: How about Native American sites? Any particular places you’re aware of where you’d find a lot of artifacts?

B: No, I never really looked much to be truthful. I’d heard about some. I had heard there were some on the Leveroni property, some at the Maxwell farm property. Upstream, I never heard of very many discoveries. I always assumed there must have been some in Bouverie’s Canyon ‘cause of that creek with the cave and everything else. Even in the earliest days up there, I never saw any. Never saw any arrowheads or any other, you know, bowls. But again, I wouldn’t necessarily have known exactly what to look for. We were in Boy Scouts and I was up there a lot, but our scout master was not into looking for artifacts and so we just never did. I wasn’t that tuned in. The guys that have a handle on that are guys like the Eraldis and maybe even Sam Sebastiani might know some of that stuff. But I never did much of that. I don’t ever recall running across some big discovery, I don’t think I ever discovered a gourd or an arrowhead or a bowl or anything like that. I was actually interested in fishing but not very interested in anything else. When I was walking along the stream, I was pretty much paying attention to fishing.

A: How about the hillsides? Would you say Sonoma Mountain has more trees than it used to or less or about the same?
B: It looks to me like it’s about the same. Keep in mind that above Eldridge there they had orchards over a lot of those areas. They had farms going on so there was quite a bit of open space and orchards planted up there. On Jack London’s ranch there was quite a bit of farming going on as well. A lot of that’s overgrown since then. See nobody had done any kind of harvesting or clearing for anything major up there probably since the early ’30s. Of course with grape farming that’s changed a little bit. But up to about the ’80s, probably about from the ’30s to the ’80s or the ’20s to the ’80s, there wasn’t much anybody was doing up there. So whatever was there in terms of the oaks and all that stuff—Now of course there’s been some die off from either the fungus or whatever, choose your theory about what’s killing those oaks up there. As far as man made stuff, where people were going up and cutting trees and stuff like that, there hasn’t been much going on on the Sonoma Mountain side very much at all. On the east side of the valley, the mountain here, Schocken Hill, was mined for quarry stone for cobblestones for the streets of San Francisco. Until the ’20s, the ’teens, I don’t know when it was. I think that that mountain and a lot of the mountains around there were pretty well devastated by quarrying and also by cutting lumber for firewood and houses and stuff like that. A lot of what you’re seeing is second or third grow stuff up there. Because in the earliest days of Sonoma settlement I’m sure that those canyons, Nathanson Creek Canyon and all those others, had a lot more redwoods and other things up there. And they were all cut up. They burned firewood in those days you know, that’s how they kept warm. Matter of fact, when you look at old, old pictures of Sonoma Valley, the hills behind the city are pretty barren. I think that’s because in the first twenty years they cut down most of the trees and what you’re seeing now is a second or third or whatever generation of those. There’s probably more trees . . . except where they’ve planted grapes.

A: The closest resources are the ones that get harvested first and it kind of goes out from the center.

B: That’s right. But I think there’s still a lot of naturally wooded stuff back in the canyons and some of the darker canyons even up on the east side of the valley. Keep in mind the other kind of phenomenon that was stopped some time about the middle of the twentieth century and that was that California used to just simply burn every summer. It would burn, burn, burn and then it would burn out. We’ve had fires in the state since probably before people were here. You don’t know what the effect of stopping those fires is because we started fighting fires as though they shouldn’t burn, well maybe we should have let them burn because we don’t know the kind of stuff—look at what the last big fire did up the top here going across there. It looks pretty damn ugly. But theoretically at least, what that’s going to do is clear the way for new growth and new stuff to come through. You have to wonder whether that’s changed the look there too. What we saw in those old pictures may have been the result of things that are always happening in California, which is that the fires burn through. And we were seeing just the result of fires. Over the last fifty or so years we stopped the fires, we don’t let them burn. We have fire departments that respond to them and go to lightning strikes and everything else and keep those fires from spreading. I don’t know.

A: I think you’re right. That’s been a pretty major change.

B: Because I mean if you read the history of California, the history of California is that our hills burned. And they burned, and they burned, and they burned, in some cases, burned
for months, all summer long. California is a very dry state. We’ve now got a lot more water and a lot more people because we move it around, but the fact is that it still doesn’t rain very much. Everything dries out and it burns real easy.

A: It’s kind of amazing we don’t have more fires really, when you think about it.

B: Well yeah, I mean, we stop them. But we didn’t used to. You know, you’d get a fire and it was in the Coast Range between here and Santa Barbara or something like that, the Big Sur area, then Big Sur just would burn. Particularly Southern California, Southern California would just blow.

A: Yeah, it’s even drier than up here.

B: It’s a wonder there’s a tree standing in Southern California. They used to burn through there all the time.

A: Anything that you had marked that we haven’t talked about yet?

B: Let me see here [reading]. How big were the forests along the creeks? It’s hard to say. The forest around the creek was pretty thick but it wasn’t impenetrable. It was just lots of big trees and lots of good shade. What grew under the trees? Ferns, mostly ferns and other kinds shade plants. You know I wasn’t a botanist, I didn’t pay much attention to them. I remember there were lots of ferns though. There were redwood groves, yes. Both on the upper stretches of Sonoma Creek in Adobe Canyon and on Bouverie’s Canyon there at Stuart’s Creek and also in Nathanson Creek Canyon. Even over here in Temelec, the creek that runs through Temelec . . .

A: Rodger’s?

B: Yeah, I think, was it Rodger’s?

A: Or Champlin Creek?

B: Yeah, one of those. I don’t remember which but there’s some beautiful canyons back there that had redwood groves in them too. And I fished for trout and caught trout in there too by the way. We talked about animals, birds. You know it’s interesting, you asked about birds and I don’t recall a lot of birds in the canyons, in these dark canyons. I’m sure there were woodpeckers and flickers and things like that but I don’t remember a lot of song birds and stuff down in those dark canyons. I don’t know, maybe it just wasn’t their habitat. ‘Cause these canyons are real shaded in the areas that I remember. I don’t know if there was water ouzels around here or not. I believe I recall seeing some of them up on Santa Rosa Creek. I don’t think I ever saw any water ouzels in this area though. I don’t know if you know what a water ouzel is.

A: Yeah I’ve seen one in Yosemite, I’ve never seen one around here.
LYNCH

B: They used to be down this way and they’re kind of funny little birds. They dive in the water.

55 A: Yeah they actually kind of swim underwater.

B: They have this squatting movement, kind of funny. I told you about the public attitude that definitely has changed. As I said, now they don’t shoot them and in those days, everybody shot them. I hate to think about the things we did. When we were kids, we used to shoot robins and we’d bring them to Sylvia Sebastiani and she’d cook ‘em. Eat robins. Eat birds. I mean, I don’t do things like that anymore. Kid would shoot a robin you’d think, “God, you’re a savage!” if you did something like that now.

56 A: Would you see big flocks of robins?

B: Well, certain times of year. You know, they’d come through, they still do. They come through, they’re migrating, you know and they come through. They ended up showing up usually where there was berries. Robins were great for coming after camphor berries or pyracantha and those kind of things. They’d be gorging themselves on these damn berries. In that case they’d be a flock feeding on it and they would move from bush to bush. They still do that, they do it around my house. It’s a little late now, but about two or three weeks ago they came through pretty thick, a big bunch of robins. Cedar wax wings were another one that did that too. We talked about the water temperature. The streambed, sandy, rocky, covered with pebbles? Probably not so much sand. Rocky and covered with pebbles, yeah. I don’t recall a lot of sandy places. Did anybody ever try to straighten a stream bed or change its course? I don’t recall anybody doing that. There might have been a few people that did it in spots, but I don’t remember anybody getting in there with a bulldozer and moving the creek ever, I don’t ever remember that. Former ponds or reservoirs on your property--no we don’t have any property big enough for that. Were springs destroyed or developed? Hard to know. I never saw any hot springs on any of the creeks I went on there, never any natural hot springs anywhere. Do you remember any marsh reclamation projects, what was the extent of the tidal flow?

57 A: You mentioned that . . .

B: Yeah, I don’t remember any marsh reclamation projects. The tidal flow went up about maybe a half-mile above the Schellville Bridge, about the Roble Ranch. I could tell you what the house looks like but I couldn’t give the address. Earthquakes, landslides, fires or floods? Lots of floods, yes, land slides–no, earthquakes–a few, nothing big.

58 A: Would you say the flooding in Schellville has changed at all? Is it more frequent or less frequent or does it cover a larger area now or less area than it used to?

B: You know, in my recollection, it hasn’t changed a lot. At least not in the last forty years. Schellville flooded in the ‘50s. Probably flooded in the ‘40s, I don’t recall the ‘40s. But from the ‘50s on, Schellville flooded. I remember Broadway flooding. Broadway didn’t used to always be this big, high crown street you know. At one point Broadway was about two feet lower and flat.
A: All the way up here to the plaza?

B: Yeah, and it flooded. In the wintertime it flooded. There was a creek and I don’t know if you recall a couple of years ago when they were digging, doing all these culverts in there. This whole valley floor, there was little creeks, little tributaries, of either Nathanson Creek or Sonoma Creek, that riddled the valley. And obviously, as the town was built in General Vallejo’s time and others, and my grandfather’s time, they channelized some of these things. And they really were winter creeks, they weren’t summer creeks. They would cover them over with probably wooden culverts, in some cases concrete culverts, and literally build on top of em. There’s a couple of businesses on Broadway on the east side in the winter time, as recent as 5 or 6 years ago, maybe 7 years ago, that their back storage rooms would literally, all of a sudden, in a heavy rain, after a series of heavy rains the water would start to come up and these people would freak out. “What the hell is this water coming from?” They’d open up the floor boards and there was literally a creek running through the thing. Because, you know, these creeks were just there and it was part of the natural drainage system of the valley floor.

This whole valley was a marsh, you know. The east side of Sonoma, I live on the 600 block of Oak Lane. When I was a little kid, my grandparents lived there and from their house all the way down to past Denmark Street was nothing but open orchard, and field and plain. And in the wintertime, when we’d have a pretty good-sized amount of rain, a lot of that whole area was vernal springs--vernal pools I mean. They were just all over the place. Ducks would come in, I mean, it was a real wildlife area. The area between what is now the extension of Fourth Street East, between Patton and France, that area there. That was all blackberry bushes and there was a couple springs in there and vernal pools too. When I was a little kid, I used to play out in there. That whole area was really, really wild. There were pheasant, lots of pheasant out there. And quail. We used to go out there and pick blackberries and it was real marshy, slushy. It would stay that way into the early summer. So that was a real interesting area of the valley. That was really sad when that was all developed. It’s drained and everything else. It was really kind of a sad area. Probably one of the greatest natural losses to the valley, that east side.

A: This is speculation, but do you think that sort of environment was maybe what the town was originally on?

B: My guess is yeah. Trying to imagine what Sonoma was like when the Spaniards came up here, my guess is that that was the scene they saw. My impression was, there probably wasn’t a lot of trees, probably was valley oaks. But this was pretty marshy. I think there was a lot of creeks in there and probably a lot of summer grasses and bushes. Now, blackberries weren’t native so they didn’t see any blackberries, right? So whatever would be the native vegetation. I think that would have been that side of the valley. The drawings you get, the drawings I’ve seen, one of the things that I keep on commenting is the lack of trees, of large trees. I get the impression that the valley floor and the foothills, now maybe the foothills more, but there just wasn’t as many trees. We planted a lot more trees on the valley floor than were actually in the valley floor. The valley floor was more like a meadow that was probably at one point an extension of the bay. The valley did not have a redwood grove in the middle of it here. That wasn’t the kind of habitat this was. This was more of an open meadow, marshy area that at one time probably had been brackish water, gradually evolved to fresh
water and so was no longer the marsh, wetland kind of thing that you have in Schellville, but more like an upland meadow. My impression, if you looked at just my vague memories of that southeast section of the valley, that it was a lot of grass and some lower trees, willows, you know, whatever would be the natural trees around here. Maybe some kinds of oaks. I don’t think oaks do real well in really wet land either though so . . .

62  A: Yeah, they don’t like summer water.

B: I think that the amount of oak trees that are here now, there probably weren’t that many more oaks down in the valley floor. As I said, my impression just from the drawings, there wasn’t that many trees, large size trees.

63  A: The drawings you’re talking about are they . . .

B: I just remember seeing them at the mission and various places like that. The old pictures and the very crude drawings in history books and stuff like that. Now maybe they just didn’t take the time to put in all the trees. Maybe they were just concentrating on the immediate scene. I have never seen any depictions of the valley as being very wooded; it was not a forest. It was not one of these low-lying forests that you might see in England or some place. My impression, this was not like that at all. That it was more like an extension of the bay. These guys came up and they gradually came up from the brackish water marshes up to what amounts to kind of upland meadow and rolling hills. But interlaced by lots of winter and some summer creeks. My guess is that Nathanson had water in it all year long as did Sonoma Creek. And those were the two main branches. Fryer Creek would be the third and they kind of flow through. And everything else with little channels and stuff like that, they were probably winter creeks that connected everything and went down through it. I mean, again, that’s just speculation.

64  A: Altimira said “Sonoma is a fountain of fountains,” so obviously, there was a lot of water here. He came through in June I think.

B: Yeah see because Lachryma Montis, the springs that fed the Vallejo home, they essentially were the headwaters for Fryer Creek. And Fryer apparently was a pretty substantial little creek that flowed in. Fryer eventually joins Nathanson down South Broadway. You know that Ranch House Restaurant? I think somewhere down there it crosses Broadway kind of by the Seventh Day Adventist Church or whatever church that is….

65  A: I know where you mean, just south of Four Corners?

B: Yeah, it crosses Broadway and then eventually connects up and I think that’s Fryer Creek. But at one time it was a branch of Nathanson, but it hooks up with Nathanson and by the time Nathanson crosses Highway 121 it’s already been connected there. I think you probably could look at the branches and see that Sonoma had a lot of water and in the spring and winter you probably had a look similar to Schellville only you got to remember, fresh water not brackish water. That was probably the way it was. That’s my guess.

66  A: Makes a lot of sense.
LYNCH

B: Which means there wasn’t a lot of heavy trees. You wouldn’t have gotten hard woods and you wouldn’t have redwoods and you wouldn’t have many oaks. It would’ve had to been trees that could survive that kind of marshy, watery kind of stuff.

A: From the stuff that I’ve read, it sounds like a lot of the early logging took place up in Glen Ellen. Like that’s where the trees were.

B: In the canyons, they were in the shaded canyons. That’s where the redwoods were. And to this day you can see old stumps and stuff like that in some of those areas. Even the canyons off of Temelec, there was a few groves of redwoods in there, there’s certainly some off of Nathanson. Anywhere where there was a nice, steep, shaded canyon with the water ‘cause redwoods like that. Redwoods must have done well, they like a little cooler climate and they like that shade and apparently they could grow to a certain size in the canyon shade before they kind of started towering up. Again, I don’t know that much about how redwoods propagate, but if you look at the coast, certainly that seems to be the pattern.

A: Any other creeks that you’ve fished that you haven’t mentioned? Agua Caliente, did you fish Agua Caliente Creek?

B: No but I had friends that did. I didn’t fish it. It wasn’t one of my favorites. I fished in Nunns Canyon Creek which is another one that people fished.

A: Calabazas?

B: Yeah, Calabazas Creek area. We used to call it Nunn’s Canyon but that’s the right name. Fowler Creek. Fished that a little bit. Not much, but fished it, caught some trout there. That’s about it I think, that’s pretty much all the creeks there is.

A: That’s the big ones, yeah, definitely.

B: I never fished Fryer Creek. Fryer Creek was really, even during my earliest days here was nothing more than a ditch. By then it had been pretty much rerouted. I think Fryer Creek was one of those creeks that really got rerouted a lot. Probably by Vallejo himself and then by other people.

A: Just kind of “in the way” I suppose.

B: Yeah, it was always in the way. I think they put it in culverts pretty quickly ‘cause they had to put roads through. You know, they had an east-west road going through here. The only reason Nathanson Creek probably wasn’t more rerouted is, it kind of curved away from downtown. It came close, the closest it comes is right there on Patton near the firehouse. Then it parallels down by the high school but it never really crosses into the area there. It’s one of the reasons why it’s probably stayed more natural than Fryer, for some reason the town developed to the west. I think Fryer was probably smaller and easier to divert and it probably got channelized and culverted and put into various things. I don’t remember much other than that. How did people get their water, from wells? Well, we had a city water supply from pretty early on. Everybody else out in the country, obviously got it from wells. And I told you
about the creek water, I think for irrigation, a lot of people, from the main branch of Sonoma Creek anyhow, for many, many years have been pumping water out of there. How much water? A lot, too much. What were the depth of the wells? I don’t know. Dredging in the creek itself? I don’t think so, other than maybe down by Schellville. Obviously there was a lot of dredging going on, the whole Schellville farming area was built by dredging. But that’s a whole ‘nother story.

72  A: Do you remember, some of the people born in the ‘teens and ‘twenties talk about gravel mining in the creek? Just low level, you know, people drive down with a truck and shovel gravel in. Do you remember anything like that?

B: No, I know there was a gravel mining operation over here by the mobile home park at Rancho Vista, for many years. Even up until just a few years ago. But I don’t remember any specific operations, people talking much about it, no. It never became a local public issue. I don’t think anybody ever set up an industry here doing it. Other than, I said, right here. One guy did. But it never got to be a big deal. So, no.

73  A: The only other thing I can think of is, any stories that you’ve heard from parents or grandparents about anything related to what we’ve been talking about?

B: In terms of Sonoma Creek and fishing, the only one I remember is that my grandfather, my father’s father was quite a fisherman. When I used to fish at Leveroni’s, I would always call the ranch house and talk to Mrs. Leveroni, who would have been the current Leveroni’s grandmother. Her son Bob, who was my dad’s age, plus or minus, would often meet me when I would drive out there. Because I would always get permission to park on their property and come across their property to fish, ‘cause they were really nice people. And they were always very happy to see me and very nice people. But Bob Leveroni, inevitably I’d end up talking to Bob, and Bob would tell me what an incredible fisherman my grandfather was and how many fish he had caught out of Sonoma Creek. And how many fish there were there, but he was, by far, the master fisherman. And they always talked about trout though, not salmon.

74  The impression I got was that Sonoma Creek even before I was really fishing; (I was fishing mostly in the ‘50s, ‘60s, and early ‘70s) we’re talking the ‘20s, ‘30s, maybe early ‘40s even, Sonoma Creek was quite a trout fishery. Now there weren’t a lot of people fishing in it, but apparently it was really quite teeming with trout. And my grandfather was apparently one of the guys that caught a lot of fish. He was sort of a bandit. In those days keep in mind that they didn’t necessarily practice very good conservation and he was a guy that made his living as a high school kid, selling trout to tourists that he’d caught in the creek. He would set up a roadside stand with some ice and he’d catch trout and sell ‘em to the tourists! He ran his own fish market, you know! What can I tell you? I’m not sure that he single-handedly depleted the steelhead smolt population of Sonoma Creek, but I’m sure that he certainly caught his share. That’s how he earned some money as a kid.

75  Other than that, hearing stories about the environment and the creek, I think the main thing I heard was just how much water was on the valley floor and how there was all these little natural creeks and meadows and stuff. And that was just part of the accepted environment here. The one thing that’s really disappeared, with the advent of growth and housing, is that all of those natural little areas have been filled in and houses have been built
and drainage ditches been put in and underground culverts, and all that’s disappeared. That old part of Sonoma is really, really, gone and that disappeared from about, I’d say the ‘60s through the ‘80s. By then it was virtually all gone. That was the part probably that’s changed the most in my mind for Sonoma. The grape growing thing, in a sense, hasn’t changed much. I think it’s a revival. There used to be a lot of grapes grown here around the turn of the century. And they were pretty much grown where they’re growing now. The difference is, that during a certain period of time, after phylloxera hit, all those old grape orchards and everything else, became prune orchards, apple orchards, pear orchards and various other kinds of farm products. Then gradually, as those products didn’t do well and grapes started doing well again, a lot of them were replanted.

76 A: Prohibition probably contributed, phylloxera, and then--

B: Phylloxera and Prohibition, yeah. This place was a real booming, grape-farming area and then it died off. As I said, farmers found other things to grow and then they tore out-- Sangiacomo is a classic example, Sangiacomo’s had pears and prunes, acres and acres of them. And some peaches as well. But mostly pears and prunes. When I was growing up, that’s all they had out there, they didn’t have any grapes. Then they had diseases. Talking about “vine decline” for grapes now, they had a thing called “pear decline” that hit in the ‘60s, just about wiped out most of California’s pear crops. It was the same kind of disease, a fungus of some sort. I don’t remember the exact details, but it’s funny how agriculture swings. Now the valley’s predominant planted crop is grapes. As planted crops go it’s probably not that much more significant than it was right around the turn of the last century. So it’s about a hundred years later—

77 A: A full cycle.

B: Kind of a cycle gone around. Because that’s what’s going on right now. Who knows with “vine decline” and the glassy-winged sharpshooter whether they might go through another round of real devastation. Sometimes no matter what, you can’t stop them. Anyhow, I don’t know if I can give you much more about the “old days”.

78 A: You’ve given me a lot of good information. I appreciate that.

B: That’s good. My pleasure.

79 A: It might be a few weeks or a month before I get the transcripts. I’ve got an intern who’s doing the transcripts and she’s working on somebody else right now. But when I get that all set I’ll give you a copy and you can look it over.

B: Great. I hope it helps in some way. It’s a good project, kind of a fun project.

80 A: Yeah, it’s great to hear how things used to be. It gives me a whole different perspective of the valley.

B: I was going to say the things I miss are the waterways and the creeks and stuff that I fished as a kid. Not that I necessarily, knowing what I know now, would have fished in the
same way. Because I hate to kill those steelhead smolt. If I’d known then what I know now I probably wouldn’t have taken any of those fish back. I did keep some and kill them and bring them home because people in my family liked to eat them. But I don’t think we ever realized that what we were doing was taking away the spawning steelhead. It was never really explained to us. I mean we knew that steelhead were trout, but we never realized, nobody ever calculated what’s the impact of how many trout can you take before—how many people can take out so many trout out of the water. Now had it been only sports fisherman that were the problem I think we’d still have plenty of steelhead in the creek. But the conditions of the water etcetera combined—I think it’s been a combination of factors. I even heard people from the water agency speculate that the actual amount of rainfall and everything else might have also changed. We may be into a global warming period. All the global warming doesn’t necessarily mean less rainfall, in some areas it could mean more rainfall. But there’s some speculation as to whether there may have been more water at different times of the year or whatever. But I don’t think so because the average rainfall totals for the valley in the last hundred years have been pretty close to the same. So, I don’t know.

81 A: Bill Basileau was saying he thought there used to be more rain in October. It’d be interesting to go back and actually look at the records and see if that’s true.

B: Yeah. The water agency would have those kind of records. How accurate they are beyond the ‘thirties or ‘forties I don’t know. Before that, but I’m not sure. My feeling is that it’s primarily siltation that’s occurred because of upland development. Gradual stuff. Not necessarily massive development, but just accumulation of several things.

82 A: A little here, a little there.

B: Then the issue of riparian rights of water, taken both from the stream itself and from the springs etcetera that feed the streams. The combination of that I think—any one of which would not have done the harm, but by the cumulative effect. Then you combine that with the fact that you’ve lost a lot of shade on a lot of the creeks because of erosion issues. I think those factors more than anything else have contributed to the degradation of the waterways.
Written Memories and Phone Interview with William McCarthy
November, 2000

Sonoma Creek As It Ran Through One Boy’s Life
by
William G. McCarthy

My name is William McCarthy, I live in Terre Haute, Indiana, and I am 74 years of age. I am professor emeritus from Indiana State University having taught school at various levels for 40 years. I graduated from El Verano Elementary School, Sonoma Valley High School, and both the University of California, Berkeley (BA 1950) and Stanford University (1959 Ed.D.).

I used to live in El Verano from about age nine to age eighteen, between 1935 and 1944. The house in which I lived is still occupied and stands on a bluff above the creek across an abandoned section of Riverside Drive which has been eroded by the creek waters. My home was one block south of where the El Verano bridge crosses Sonoma Creek. As youths several of us boys played along the banks and in the creeks especially during the relaxing and sunny summertime.

Two of my friends were Albert Rossi and Louis Greppi. Albert Rossi’s father operated Rossi’s Resort which was a bar, dance hall, and picnic area. It is called Little Switzerland now. Albert became a heavy equipment operator in Dunsmuir, CA. Louis Greppi’s father and mother operated the El Verano Meat Market. Louis became a truck driver and lived in Napa, California for many years. My father, William, was a construction worker for Sonoma County and helped to build the many bridges which cross Sonoma Creek. He also helped to construct the roads which traverse the county.

For boys who were emerging from childhood and entering adolescence, Sonoma Creek was an ideal natural environment in which to observe and experiment with life. We would build rafts from flotsam drift wood. The dried tree limbs which floated down the creek in winter often became lodged in the high water willows, aspens, and alder trees. We would gather the dried brushy limbs, trim them with a hand ax and cut between two and five logs each about eight inches thick and twelve feet long for the floats of the raft. On top we would nail a platform of scrap lumber for a deck. One time we even put discarded desk chairs from the old El Verano School on the raft decks during our spring building projects. If we didn’t get our rafts out of the water and tied high enough to a stout elm or sycamore they would be swept away by the winter storm floods and find final rest in San Pablo Bay. With the completion of our rough timber craft they immediately became pirate ships, battleships, and means to transport us to many imaginary places.

We learned to swim in the creek. My oldest sisters, Lillian and Lucille, looked after me until I learned and then nothing could hold me back from hiking along the banks or floating and swimming from Boyes Hot Springs to Schellville. We would look up from the water’s surface on which we were floating and pass the homes and businesses of many persons. Harvey’s Store was located at the Boyes Bridge. Then floating on down came Mike Lyons Handball Court and Resort, Steinkamp’s Hotel, Decker’s Ice House, Joe Kuchera’s Resort, then the El Verano Bridge. Maxwell’s Farm with it’s prune orchards were on the left bank. Next came Sonoma Grove, Farell Lumber Yard and Armand Dutil,
the home of the town baker. Just before the Franquelin bridge was Nichol’s Turkey Hatchery. One could float clear to tidewater passing through people’s backyards and pastures.

6 The steelhead were a wily and beautiful fish to see in Sonoma Creek. They would migrate upstream in schools of flashing silver and black bodies and red gills. We could tell about the time of the year, the season, and the amount of water flow when they would be coming. One time I waded with my father’s black rubber hip boots on. The steelhead were flashing all around me in two feet deep swift current. I reached down and touched their black and silver shiny bodies. It was in the late winter of the year, probably late February in 1941. It was exciting to stand in their midst as their strength and energy were expressed through their sleek bodies and finny tails as they challenged the swift flowing rapids.

7 We seldom caught a steelhead in Sonoma Creek. They were too fast, clever, and intent on spawning. Many would enter Agua Caliente Creek where the bridge crosses Sonoma Creek now. One could stand on the old bridge and watch the steadily moving black shadows migrate upstream and enter the rushing tributary. They would splash upstream with a flash and shake of their powerful tails gaded under highway twelve and toward the eastern foothills of the Valley of the Moon.

8 Usually during the summer the creek settled into many large pools with a steady run of water between them. Large carp and suckers and some pike were fish that inhabited the waters. They would come to the surface for oxygen when the water warmed in Sonoma. The turtles were interesting and quick creatures. The common mud turtle and colorful woods turtle were enjoyable to see. The kingfisher with its chatter call, the silent wading cormorant, blue jay with acorns, robins, swallows, wrens all help to make the world of a boy a remarkable place.

9 Crawfish were the crawling, pinching back, exoskeletoned creatures that were our fishing specialty. They were much easier to catch that the regular finned water dwellers. Yet they could inflict pain with a sharp pointed claw squeezed too quickly on an unwary finger. With some spoiled meat or better yet, a piece of liver donated from Greppi’s Meat Market tied with ten to fifteen feet of string on a green willow pole, we were prepared to coaz our wary prey from their hiding places within the rocky crevices of the creek bottom or beneath the shaggy roots of beach or sycamore trees lining the shore. A string onion sack cut in half and held open by a short length of thick, number ten steel wire, shaped into a circle, nailed and tied securely to the end of a six foot pole or piece of scrap lumber, two inches by six feet, and we were prepared to catch dinner! We could easily catch a quarter of a gunny sack full in a couple of hours. We could contribute to the family supper!

10 Now I know that you are chiefly interested in the steelhead which were more easily caught in Fowler Creek or the tributary creeks in Glen Ellen. I must confess the only time I was ever arrested in my seventy-four richly lived years was for spearing steelhead in Fowler Creek. It was during the time that I was an altar boy at St. Francis Solano Church, too. (I have lived a rather exemplary life for seventy-four years as a schoolteacher and professor.) A brake rod from a scrapped Model-A-Ford shaped into a large hook and filed to razor sharpness brought several meals to the table for dinner for the seven members of my family. After all, the law which stated it was legal to catch these giant fish in tidewater, but not in freshwater, did not make sense to an adventuresome boy. This adolescent had four sisters who sometimes encouraged and assisted him in exciting creek side chases.

11 My father helped to build the fish ladder at the Fowler Creek Bridge, and so did I in a way. Dad was in charge of the concrete work and usually ran the mixer on the county jobs. He took me with him one fresh spring Saturday morning to inspect the curing concrete in the
four pool steps and the deck of the fish ladder. He sprayed water on the curing cement which he and the crew had poured the previous week. The concrete was composed of five shovels of gravel and one of cement, all mixed with a gas powered mixer and carried to the site in concrete buggies. The water sprayed surface kept the concrete from curing too rapidly and cracking. Ed Quay, fire chief at the Boyes Springs Fire House, came by and when my Dad and Ed went to check on some business I remained to water down the cement and look after the curing process. Both my dad and Ed are gone now, sleeping in the St. Francis Cemetery in Sonoma. The fish ladder, an example of society’s hopes for the steelhead and for the future generations, is gone too. Hopefully, we can find what is causing the demise of the steelhead and reverse the process so that they may swim again in the robustness and fullness of their migratory life cycle which I witnessed as I walked and waded among them on that dusky winter evening so many years ago in my father’s cracked and worn rubber hip boots.

Sonoma Creek had it’s problems. It served as an open sewer for some of the homes and businesses located on it’s banks and near to it. After a flood, several of which came each year, open drains and drain field tile would be exposed along the eroded banks. The Boyes Hot Spring Pools used to be cleaned and emptied into the creek regularly. The Sonoma State Home at Eldridge used to drain it’s overflow sewage into the creek waters. We were always haunted as boys by some who had contracted infantile paralysis (polio). I remember Warren, a classmate, who had one shrunken stiff leg supported by steel rods which would protrude from his denim trouser leg as he knelt to take a knuckles-down shot with his bull’s-eye marble shooter. No one at the time knew how one got the dreaded disease, but our older sisters and mother said we would all catch it from swimming in Sonoma Creek. We continued to swim believing the myth that water purified itself by flowing every thirty-three feet.

More water used to flow in Sonoma Creek, both continuously and especially during floods in winter and spring, than at present. The shallower creek may have several causes: a) more water is being pumped from the underground aquifer because of both people needs and crop needs such as grapes, (b) the dams are impounding more water for human use and more people need it now. (c) there is a decrease in trees and other vegetation along the creek’s banks to shade the water from heating and evaporation. The creek is wider in many bulldozed and scraped places which helps to prevent flooding during the winter high-water season. (d) the high water season doesn’t last as long and water moves quickly down the channel into San Pablo Bay.

On Riverside Drive below Little Switzerland and before the Franquelin Bridge was a wonderful creek location called “Devil’s Rest.” It consisted of a series of three or four pools and riffles. Some resourceful (not the author) boy secured a 100 foot length of rope from a Napa Milling Company feed delivery truck. He then shinnied and climbed up one of the overhanging trees and securely tied one rope end. The other knotted end dangled over the beckoning, clear, running, creek water. It was an exciting adventure to swing out over the shiny reflective surface and drop down into the sparkling, cool refreshment from a height of fifteen feet or so. It would be several seconds before we emerged from the depths for a breath of air, excited to try swinging and plunging again.

Grown ups would accompany their children to the sand gravel banks to feel the warmth of a few sun rays and to allow their children to enjoy a real live stream while beginning their attempts at the vital skill of swimming. Boys would go skinny dipping in the gravel bottomed pools but usually we wore cut offs. Curious girls would briefly watch from the bluffs along the bank near Riverside Drive. We would have to stay in the deep water and shout at them to leave before we could emerge.
Swimming was safe in the creek. The only drowning which I have heard of was that of a despondent alcoholic who jumped from Boyes Springs Bridge into a raging torrent. His body was found a week later in the El Verano section of the creek just south of Little Switzerland in a clump of flotsam near a turn.

What can be done to return this stream to some of its former pristine majesty? I would consult with some of the people who are trying to answer this same question about the Russian River and Dry Creek in Northern Sonoma County and Mendocino County. There is a full functioning fish hatchery near Cloverdale where they strip the roe from female steelhead, fertilize them with melt, hatch some and return some eggs to the streams for natural hatching. Similar effort could be made along Sonoma Creek with the same federally assisted funding. Education in the local schools could be supplemented. Teaching units of instruction could be planned and made available.

I remember during recess where the Old El Verano School used to be (now Church of the Nazarene?) seeing a steelhead vigorously splashing it’s way up the creek. The creek is still there on the south boundary of the church property but not nearly as much water flows there now. We have some intelligent people working at U.C. Davis, U.C. Berkeley, Scripps Institute, and Duke University. As well as changing the environment one might consider altering the genetic structure of the steelhead. Look what has been done for the Canada Goose, the catfish, soybeans, corn, wheat not to mention win and table grapes. Much of the world’s population would be starving if it weren’t for newly developed strains of bulgar wheat, soy beans, and corn primarily developed at Purdue University in Midwest Indiana. This might be a direction to investigate.

There is a Thomas Moore melody titled “Bendemeer’s Stream.” The lyrics remind one of Sonoma Creek.

There’s a bower of roses by Bendemeer’s Stream  
And the nightingale sings ‘round it all the day long.  
In the time of my childhood t’was like a sweet dream  
To sit in the roses and hear the bird’s song.  
That bower and it’s music I’ll never forget,  
But oft when alone in the bloom of the year, I think,  
Is the nightingale singing there yet?  
Are the roses still bright by the calm Bendemeer?¹

In another sixty years if someone were to ask, “Along the Sonoma Creek are the blue lupines, the golden poppy, and the fragrant white buckeye still brightly blooming? Are the steelhead still making their yearly spawning run up the fresh water riffles? It would be a beautiful gift to the citizens of our state if we could reply in the affirmative with a resounding yes! The real response depends upon the knowledge and actions of all of us who have lived along the banks of this stream and what we are motivated to do to build a better future for the people of California.

Notes from a phone conversation between William McCarthy and Arthur Dawson
January 5, 2001. These notes refer to the years 1935-44

21 William recommended that I also talk with Marlin Sassenrath, the Barsi Brothers, Emil Chelini, and his sister Lucille (996-8990)

22 Felder Road and Arnold Drive near there used to flood

23 Steelhead used to gather at the old El Verano bridge—people would watch them. They would then go from there up Agua Caliente Creek. New bridge was built after World War II. Original bridge constructed in the 1880s.

24 Would also see “grilse” trout—small steelhead about one or two pounds. Sometimes they would nest at the confluence of Agua Caliente and Sonoma Creek. From his description, these are probably rainbow trout. These fish would sometimes eat the steelhead eggs.

25 They would see runs of steelhead in a little creek that ran by the old El Verano School (just west of Verano Avenue/Arnold Drive intersection). There was a stone bridge there and another little wooden bridge connecting the school with the athletic grounds, crossed the same creek. This was a steelhead spawning stream

26 Common crops in that era were prunes, apples, hop fields. Between Kenwood and Santa Rosa were a lot of hop fields—especially remembers Annadel Farms having lots of hops. (attributes fall of hops to introduction of light beers)

27 Gravel mining locations:

200 feet south of spot where Riverside Drive is currently closed off (Riverside is closed off just north of Grove Street/Little Switzerland I believe). There was a little road down to the creek there (may still be evidence there) and people would drive small trucks down to get gravel. People also got topsoil there. Dan Kennel sold gravel in that area (possibly a little further south. Old Man Riboni owned this area and had walnut and prune orchards. Dan Kennel married into the Riboni family)

There was gravel mining in Boyes Springs not far from the bathhouse

Gravel mining in El Verano across from current El Verano Elementary School. Old Man Decker owned the area. He had two businesses—gravel mining and the Sonoma Ice Company. William recalls seeing him hauling 100 lb. blocks of ice resting on a gunny sack on his shoulder.

28 William recalls seeing how the mining was done—1-3 people with shovels, shoveling it into the back of small trucks. No backhoes were used in those days. Sometimes they would set a screen over the truck bed to screen out the larger pieces. It was used unwashed, unlike the gravel which came from Santa Rosa, which would be washed.
In wintertime you’d see full size trees, including big oak trees washing downstream during floodtime.

Confirmed that the Devil’s Rest area mentioned in his piece is same as swimming hole mentioned by Bill Basileu at the foot of Oak Street. There were two deep spots—the north pool, which was 10-12 feet deep and the south pool at 9-10 feet deep. He describes Devil’s Rest as being 100 feet downstream from foot of Oak Street.

Mrs. Denny, George Maxwell’s daughter, had a game preserve on her property near the Verano Bridge.

Tearing up the railroad tracks—men out there with sledge hammers getting out the railroad spikes. You could hear them at work—they would start early in the morning because the spikes would break easier when they were cold. Tracks were torn up because the tourist trade to the valley dropped off (probably due to the depression—A.D.) and because the iron was needed (I’ve heard this as a reason for the last tracks being torn up during World War II, am wondering if it was also a factor during the depression—A.D.)
First Interview with William (Bill) Meglen
At his home overlooking Calabazas Creek on Arnold Drive extension,
Glen Ellen. November 3, 2000

B=Bill Meglen; A=Arthur Dawson

1 B: Did you have a hard time finding the place?

2 A: No. I know Chris Zombres, your next door neighbor. He was out in front of his house.

B: So you know him?

3 A: Yeah I know him a little bit. You ever seen the sword that he found in his yard?

B: I think he showed it to me one time, yeah.

4 A: He’s actually lending it to me right now. I’m going around telling kids in classrooms stories about Sonoma.

B: Well the Gaige’s slaughterhouse used to be a little further on the creek. The bed and breakfast, that’s the old Gaige House [current name of bed and breakfast]. But that slaughterhouse was up in here. Just above us a little bit.

5 A: Was that on Stuart Creek then, or on Calabasas?

B: On Calabasas. Pretty near up to where the fork is with Stuart, just this side of it. That’s where the slaughterhouse was and then you had a butcher shop downtown.

6 A: Did they slaughter the animals here and then put the meat on the trains or was it mostly for local [consumption]?

B: Mostly for local I think, but I don’t know exactly what they did because that was a little bit before my time. I’ve seen the remains of the slaughterhouse and where the shop was and stuff, but Gaige himself, I didn’t know him. [Looking at question sheet] It says ‘what kind of activities’—a lot the activity was just hiking around the mountains, hunting—rabbits, deer, mushroom hunting and just exploring. You know in that day you didn’t have a car you did a lot of walking. We’d go from here and walk to the top of Sonoma Mountain or something like that. Sometimes we’d take our lunch and sometimes we wouldn’t. But now I wouldn’t think of walking that far [laughs].

7 A: I did that once myself, walked to the top of Sonoma Mountain. Do you think the deer are more numerous now? Or more numerous back then?

B: Well, that I’m not sure of. But I kind of think they’re more numerous now. They come around I see them in the yard here. They’re used to people now. They come down and eat the grass and you look out the window and see them sometimes. I saw one standing right out there one morning.
A: Right there in your dog pen?

B: I put that there temporary. That dog belongs to my son and he’s an old dog, he’s half-blind and hard of hearing. He’s [Bill’s son] on a trip to Tahiti with a sailboat. I’m just keeping him for a couple weeks. I just put that fence temporary so I wouldn’t have to keep him on a chain. But I looked out the window one morning and there was one [deer] standing right there. They don’t run from you very much, they kind of get used to you.

A: So in the old days they were more used to getting hunted, it made them a little more scarce around people you think? Or were there actually fewer of them back then?

B: Yeah, deer season come, of course you chase them with dogs, they take off. [Looking at question sheet]. Fishing holes—down by the Mervyn Hotel, where Shone’s has the store now. O’Rook—we used to help him build a dam, a pretty good dam there, about four foot high. That would back water up maybe four hundred feet, way up underneath the bridge. That was for quite a few years, and then when he wasn’t helping with the dam any more, we used to put a dam right underneath the bridge, maybe a couple feet high. That wasn’t a very big swimming hole, but the water was about four or five feet deep.

A: Would you make the dam out of creek rocks?

B: We used sacks. Then we [also] went to Pendergast Hole. When you go down Yell Road, just about at the end of Yell, it would be down in that area. If you go down past Shone’s store, where the bridge is, that first little place where the creek is, it’d be down in the creek from there. Oh—you know that old streetcar?

A: The one that burned just recently?

B: Yeah. Right below that.

A: That was Pendergast then.

B: We called that the Pendergast Hole, because he owned the house there. If we made a lot noise he’d come down and holler at us. We built a dam for a quite a few years there. We’d be swimming there.

A: Must have been a fair amount of work hauling those bags of sand down to the creek.

B: No, we’d fill them right there.

A: That makes sense, of course, yeah.

B: Whatever we had to fill the sacks with. And then we’d have just a board for a diving board. Just like a two by twelve. I’ve seen some pictures of people swimming down there. Somebody has some. And then the bank was pretty high, maybe about twelve feet. We’d dive off the bank. There was a ledge out there. You had to go out far enough to miss that ledge. A lot of times I just about skinned that ledge.

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MEGLEN

15  A: How deep was that pool?
B: I suppose about five or six feet right there. We’d look for a place that had a little depth to start with before we built a dam. We swam for quite a few years there, so that’s the third place and the fourth place was up at Jack London Estate. We didn’t put a dam there because the water was deep enough. Where it makes the corner.

16  A: I think I know the spot. Downstream from the bridge?
B: When you’re going up Warm Springs, you make that right hand turn—the road used to be sharper. Fact is, people that live there they blocked it off. When they cut the road off—the road used to go and make a sharper turn. Well right below that.

17  A: Is this where the Fosters live? You know Margie and Rich Foster? You’re talking about the curve—if you’re going from here it would be before the flashing yellow light?
B: Yeah. The first right curve. Of course it’s not very sharp now. They moved it, rounded the curve off, but it used to be practically a right angle. Down the creek from there. On the other side was the pond that London built on his estate—that was on the bank above there. Right there the water came in against a clay bank and it was deep enough where we could dive off the bank. We swam that for quite a few years.

18  A: How deep would you say that hole was in the summer?
B: I guess it was about six feet at the deepest. It was deep enough to dive in. But it was small. Probably a couple places not much bigger than this kitchen [12’X12’ or so]. It wasn’t very big, but it was big enough to dive in.

19  A: Sort of a little teacup.
B: The deep part, but the swimming part was bigger than the part where you could dive. The fish in the creek—I started fishing the creek many years ago. Fact I think I wrote in that Memories [Bob Glotzbach’s book, Childhood Memories of Glen Ellen], I used to just make a hook out of a pin and stuff like that and go down and fish.

20  A: I saw that in the book.
B: It was good trout fishing. I think the limit was about twenty or twenty-five. You could catch trout eight, ten, twelve inches long in those days. Fact is, even when the limit was ten in later years, I used to throw the small ones back and I’d end up with eight to ten inch trout. I usually managed to catch maybe one steelhead after the season opened. There was also pike in the creek. There was pike maybe thirty inches long. Behind O’Rook’s where the water’s deep against the rock wall.

21  A: Where’s O’Rook’s?
B: That’s where I told you we had that first dam. That’s old O’Rook’s.
A: That’s the one by the old Mervyn Hotel?

B: Yeah. Behind Shone’s. There used to be a lot of pike in there, pretty good size. Course now I think if you went down, way down to the tidewater you’d probably still see those fish. But there isn’t too many deep holes down there any more.

A: In the summertime, if it wasn’t dammed up, how wide would you say the creek was? The main part of Sonoma Creek up here?

B: Sometimes, where it was flat and wide, maybe ten feet wide, where it was narrow maybe fifteen. [I believe he meant to say this the other way—fifteen feet at the wide parts, ten at the narrow] Maybe some places it was narrow it’d be down to ten feet. And then there was pools where it would widen out to maybe twenty, twenty-five feet, shallow pools to the next riffle. People when they built on the creek, they maybe put up a wall to protect their property, take the trees out. Where you had trees in the water would gouge the gravel out from underneath the tree and make a deeper hole. So the creek has changed quite a bit. I could show you if we take a walk after, down where they used to take gravel out, there used to be about three houses that got washed out.

A: Was that during the ’82 flood?

B: No. One house I remember in the early twenties when the one house was still there and it got washed out about the same time the Riverside Hotel got washed out. But before that there was about two more houses above that, which I didn’t see washed out, but my mother told me parts of one house came down and hit the bridge.

A: That would have been the main bridge, not the Calabasas Bridge, the brick bridge.

B: The main bridge, yeah. That’s about the third bridge that’s been there. I only know of two of them that I’ve seen. The first bridge was a wooden bridge with two spans. Reason I know that—by checking the records up at the Recorder’s office. It told about the bridges. When that was broken, and they replaced that with a steel one span bridge.

A: I think I’ve seen a picture of that in Bob’s book.

B: There’s a couple pictures in there. After the steel bridge they built that concrete bridge, which was a two span. It’s in the same place, but I think it’s a little longer than the steel bridge. Just a few feet longer.

A: You mentioned the big flood that washed away the Riverside Hotel—do you remember about when that was?

B: Yeah. That was in, I don’t know, ’24? Let’s see, I started school when I was six, so I was in about the fourth grade. [Figuring on back of an envelope] ’Fifteen, ’Twenty-one, probably around, oh yeah—the school burned down around ’25. It must have been around ’twenty-five, ’twenty-six, ’twenty-seven. The school was burned in ’25. I went to that school in the third and fourth grade. And then we moved up to the Gaige House after that. I went to
Gaige House fourth and fifth, rest of the fourth and the fifth grade and the seventh and eighth I went to Flowery School.

28 A: How come you didn’t go to Dunbar? Was it because it didn’t go that high up?

B: No—I don’t know exactly when it was built, but I didn’t go to Dunbar. My brother went to Dunbar in eighth grade I think. Some of those books might tell you what date Dunbar was finished—I think the Behler story [in Childhood Memories] tells when Dunbar was built. I didn’t go to Dunbar, but one of my brothers went to Dunbar. We went down to Flowery. I went down there for the seventh and eighth grade. I graduated from Flowery and never did go to Dunbar.

29 A: Do you remember any other floods from those years?

B: I did have all the records of all the waterlines on the bridge but they painted it—I think there’s only one line left, one of the high water marks. I could show it to you sometime. They got a red mark across the creek, but it’s not as high as that mark. Those numbers you see there? They got that red line by sighting up-creek to Sylvia’s place [on O’Donnell by brick bridge over Calabasas Creek] and it was actually higher than that line, the highest watermark. But I think that’s the only line I got left, is the high water mark—all the different years I had high water marks because I lived right there at the bridge for a long time.

30 A: Whereabouts [on the bridge]?

B: Know where the post office is? I built that house on the corner where the veterinary’s is [Glen Ellen Veterinary Hospital] and I lived there with my mother for some time. But then I also lived in a small house back where the post office is. So I marked the high water mark for different years. But they painted it over because somebody wrote some stuff on there and they wanted to cover it. So I lost all that. They kept one mark that I think is still there. It’s way down on the left side, low down there, there’s still one water mark there.

31 A: On the left side on one of the pylons as you’re—over by the restaurant?

B: No, no the bridge—on the side where the post office is there’s a water culvert that comes down. Go down inside that water culvert and look for a little mark, I think there’s still one left there. [garbled from police scanner] I talked about animals. Some people used to trap in the creek, years ago, for skunk, fox and racoons. There’s quite a few coons in this area. But those possums. We didn’t have possums here—they came in later—they got imported from someplace. I guess they come up from the south to the valley [meaning Central Valley] and from the valley they got over here. Sacramento, San Joaquin Valley, whatever, some of the people must have brought them in. In the early days we never had any possums around here. But now they have possums.

32 A: I’ve seen them at my place up on Warm Springs a few times.

B: How far up Warm Springs do you live?
A: Just a little past the Glenelly Inn. You know where the O'Donnell place is, or was? Real close to there.

B: Yeah. This side of the pylons [old yellow brick gate posts for O'Donnell place]?

A: Just the other side of the pylons [A draws a map showing his house at 5026 Warm Springs Rd.] My house was built in 1986.

B: Oh. That’s on the old O’Donnell property.

A: Yeah. O’Donnell’s house was right there [points to map].

B: You have a well there too don’t you.

A: No, we’re on what is it? County water? Sonoma Valley Water District [Actually Valley of the Moon Water District].

B: Who did you buy it from?

A: We bought it from a woman named Diane Welch. She built the house. I was going to ask you—you’ve been part of the fire department for so long—I heard the property was originally owned by the fire department. I think she bought it from the fire department, is what she told us.

B: I don’t recall that. I don’t recall that at all. Unless O’Donnell donated it to the fire department or sold it, but I don’t recall that. I know she donated lots that we raffled off, but I thought they were on O’Donnell lane. The steelhead—there used to be a lot of steelhead come up here. I’d see sometimes as much as three, four or six steelhead in the pool [gesturing towards Calabasas Creek below his house]. But the thing that did the steelhead in is when the hospital put that dam in down there, they blocked the steelhead run. For several years. They’d put us in jail for doing that—but they--

A: In those days yeah--[indicating understanding that times have changed]

B: Well it wasn’t too long ago.

A: When was that, do you know? More or less?

B: When they put the dam in? It had to be—I worked on the Suttonfield dam in the late forties—I don’t know if they did it sometime during the war or what. They put it in so they’d be able to pump more water out of the creek. Because they pumped water out of the creek to fill Suttonfield Lake, and sometimes they even pumped it up to the top of the mountain.

A: Fern Lake

B: They put that dam in and then as the water went over it deepened on the side and the fish couldn’t get up. [garbled] Of all people they should have known better. People used to go
and fish right there at the dam where the steelhead was collected. Well that went on for some
time and then I think they put a wooden fish ladder in there so some of them could get up.
Eventually they took it out. Fact is I worked on that dam laying a pipeline across and I think
the reason they put the dam up was the creek was lowering and I think the pipeline got
exposed and eventually we took it out from across the creek and it went around the bridge
[Marian White Bridge].

41  A: I think I’ve seen it. Is there a pipe on the bridge today?

    B: Yeah. But that wasn’t there originally. Originally it crossed the creek. I was a foreman
down there on the dam and we put the line in across the creek. From the dam across and then
cemented it in.

42  A: I’ve noticed on the steel bridge at the state hospital—if you go underneath it there’s a
sign that says, “Warning, Turbulent Water ¼ mile ahead.” I assume that was because of the
dam?

    B: I don’t know, I never noticed that sign.

43  A: You have to actually go down under the bridge. There’s a little path down there and if
you look up and it says--

    B: Have you seen the remains of the bridge that was there before? If you look you can see
where the bridge before that was the actual—I went down there with Bob [Glotzbach]. Bob
has lots of information. I’ve gone around lots of different places and I’ve showed him
different things. He puts it all together. So his knowledge is greater than mine. He puts it all
together. Because then—if you put it all together you can kind of figure the dates. You know
where the pump house is there?

44  A: I don’t—no.

    B: If you’re going south on Arnold Drive, you turn left at the [first] stop sign and then
left again, just before the bridge. Then you walk up that way and there’s kind of a little road
that goes down to the creek. Well there’s where the pump house is. They still pump water out,
but they got a soft(?) section of hose that goes down there. I don’t know how much they pump
out, because if they handle it right they could bring water from up above. But they neglected
their water system for years, They took water out of Az Creek (Asbury Creek) and the pipe
out there was leaking and for a long time they never kept it up. They got a lot of money, they
run short of water they could buy it. [chuckles]

45  A: Taxpayer’s money

    B: It’s too bad they didn’t do something about that dam sooner.

46  A: When did that dam go in?
B: I don’t know. It might have been put in during World War Two, I’m not sure. You might talk to somebody at the hospital, some of the maintenance or engineers down there. That definitely hindered the fish. They may not want to ‘fess up to it, but definitely the fish couldn’t get over it. From then on I would say the steelhead [garbled], they do get up there but I haven’t seen any. Because they’re not numerous no more. So I think the biggest thing that ruined the fishing was that dam down there. Besides, a guy could fish right out there—it was against the law to fish near a dam. I don’t think they intended it to be at the dam, but I think the way it worked that the water coming over deepened it on that side, then the fish couldn’t get up there any more.

47 A: So they were sitting ducks so to speak for the fisherman.

B: They couldn’t jump—maybe at real high water they probably got up.

48 A: Did you ever see any salmon up here?

B: Well there used to be what we called dog salmon, but I never did catch any. They called them dog salmon, they would have their mouth and stuff, but there was never no king salmon or silver salmon.

49 A: How big would those salmon get?

B: I don’t really recall much because I just heard people talk about dog salmon and I’m not sure what a dog salmon is. I’d have to look it up. On my computer I got an encyclopedia, but I don’t know too much how to use it yet. I just got it shortly. It’s supposed to be an encyclopedia and I don’t know how to run that computer. I just do one finger [chuckles].

50 A: Did you ever use boats up here?

B: No it was never deep enough for boats. Sometimes some guys, when the water got up, maybe float a raft down, going downstream. Which is pretty dangerous to get sucked up against the bank. Course now with wetsuits—which we didn’t have in the early days when I went abalone fishing, we never had no wetsuits or nothing. We just went with our old clothes on. But you got a lot of protection with a wetsuit. I used to go abalone-ing quite a bit up there. Starting with clothes and then, after World War Two, I got an overboard suit, which kept you warm, but if you got turned upside down you might drown. Your feet would be up in the air and your head would be down, first you had to learn how to turn over by grabbing your knees and turn over. Then when I got my wetsuit, actually you’d be too warm at times. Course all the time you’re losing heat, but you could feel warm and still be losing heat.

51 A: Would you say people used boats further down, like maybe the Springs area? Did you ever see that?

B: No, the only place that boats came up is where the tidewater is. The tide water ended—you know where the firehouse is at Schellville and that bridge across Sonoma Creek—maybe two hundred yards above that, behind Warble’s house. He used to take gravel out there, that’s about as high as the tidewater came up. They used to take gravel out of the
creek, they was able to get up about that far was about it as far as my knowledge. The creek was never deep, except in the wintertime—at certain times of the year, if you had a powerful enough motor, no doubt you could come up. But when it went down during the summertime, there was never enough water. Except when you got down in the Boyes area where it’s flattened out. No doubt down in that area the kids must have had canoes and stuff they fooled around with. Because the water was deeper down there when you got closer to the tidewater, it deepened down.

52  A: You know anybody who’s lived in the Springs for a long time? I haven’t found anybody yet that I could talk to down there.

B: Not off-hand I don’t know of anybody, but if I think of somebody I’ll let you know.

53  A: Did you ever see any bears around here, when you were growing up?

B: No--but you know the bear story?

54  A: At the Gaige House, yeah. [referring to bear captured in summer of 1999]

B: They should have left that poor bear alone. That bear, you know they shot it when it was up the tree. He was up there I guess about twenty-five feet. And the bear got in the crotch of the tree—that bear was unconscious—bear could’ve fallen out of the tree and broken his neck, ‘cause he was unconscious. It’s only because he was in the crotch that he didn’t fall out. They should have just left that bear alone and he’d of went back in the hills and went some place.

55  A: That was my feeling about it—why’d they bother?

B: That’s the trouble nowadays, you can’t hardly do nothing. Things were different in the old days, like with guns. You read that story about that Thierkoff? [referring to Childhood Memories of Glen Ellen]. Every time somebody would rile him, he’d come out and shoot the shotgun at you. He shot at me when I was up to top of the bridge. He didn’t know I was up there. Because you read that story about how we used to rattle the bridge? [referring to main bridge in Glen Ellen]

56  A: Yeah.

B: The guys were down on the deck—I guess he didn’t see me up there. It was at night anyhow. Those BB’s were whizzing right past my ear. I was on top of the bridge, the old steel bridge. He was shooting up toward the top of the bridge. I guess he was going to shoot over the heads of the guys below. It’s a wonder he didn’t hit me with the shotgun. It was pretty near to the range of a shotgun from the bridge to where that house is on the corner, where that live oak is?

57  A: Yeah.
B: That’s where he had his bar, same place that house is. From there to the bridge it’s got to be over two hundred feet. Two hundred fifty feet or so. Unless you had a Goose gun, the BB’s didn’t have much power by the time they got there.

58  A: Do you happen to know Bob Westbrook? He moved here with his family in about 1965. His family operated a grocery, maybe even in the same building that your family was in—where Village Mercantile was [corner of Arnold Drive and Carquinez]

B: I don’t know any Bob Westbrook. The merchandise store, we built that ourselves. The one by the post office, we built that store too. Before that store, we had a larger store there. It burnt down.

59  A: That was the one in—was that during the ’23 fire?

B: Yeah, the fire started to the north of us, on the east side of the road, further up the street and wiped us out. You said he had a grocery store?

60  A: Yeah. I think back in the late sixties, early seventies. His parents had it, I can’t remember their names.

B: ‘Sixties or ‘seventies, OK. I think my mother sold that store in about the forties or something, so I didn’t know him. We had five different stores. We started out in the Chauvet building, where the bar is, the London bar where the cannon is.

61  A: So how long has your family been in Glen Ellen?

B: My mother came over around the late eighteen-hundreds, from Austria. At that time it was the Austria-Hungarian Empire. Franz Josef was the head of the country at that time. She took a train from Austria to I think LaHavre in France or Brest. I forget just which. And then went by boat to Ellis Island where the immigrants all went to and then took a train to San Francisco, I mean to the Bay Area.

62  A: So she came pretty much directly.

B: Yeah. And then from here they went to Honolulu for awhile and then came back from Honolulu, back to Glen Ellen.

63  A: So did your grandparents actually live here also?

B: No. [Looking at question sheet]. Streambeds, [garbled] down the streambeds, different people down the [garbled] they changed the creek. Because like I said, when you fix a wall in the creek or take out a tree, you straighten the creek and it gets rid of the deep holes. But the biggest change was right in Glen Ellen where it took out those three houses. [Drawing diagram] The bridge was there, and Calabasas Creek and Sonoma Creek. Right here by the brick bridge they had the Riverside Hotel and there was three houses along here [see map by A at end of interview]. I don’t remember these two houses [pointing to the two upstream houses]. But this house my sister used to live in, so I remember that house. But O’Donnell,
[referring to Stella O’Donnell and/or her husband] to protect those houses, they put in a wall made out of timber across here. Just below where those two houses is now [two houses currently there in 2000].

64 A: They’re pretty low down, those houses?

B: Yeah. They raised both of those houses. But the creek when I was a kid ran way over this side. [to west of current channel]. They bulldozed gravel up there, so they moved the creek over. [on my second visit, Bill said he thought the creek got moved over because they dumped excess dirt from putting in the sewer there] But then, when the creek was over this side [again to west of current channel, directly in front of the little church]. I lived right over here for a long time, this first house. They were taking gravel out of this creek for the road. They took gravel out and eventually the creek broke through into this gravel bed [below the timber wall mentioned above], and moved over this way [to the east]. But that gravel pit had something to do with moving the creek over. So it took the back end off the Riverside Hotel and took this house out [most downstream of the three houses mentioned above]. In my time that happened. But these two houses [the upstream ones], I don’t recall if there’s one house, two houses. I talked to Bob [Glotzbach] and I think he’s got that pretty well pinned down by talking to different people on it, if there was three houses all together at one time. But right now you wouldn’t know that right in where the bank is, the creek was way over [to the west] where the bank was. Now it’s right along this side [east].

65 A: So the bank has actually moved back this way again? [referring to eastward movement of west bank]

B: No, they bulldozed gravel up there, to make their property greater [referring to landowners on west side of Sonoma Creek], after the creek widened out. They pushed gravel up against there. So the creek couldn’t go back to where it was [to original channel west of current channel]. And when they built the new bridge, they forded where the church is [on O’Donnell Lane]. They went across the creek there, drove across the creek there when they were putting the cement bridge in. [current bridge, built in 1939]. They would drive through that way.

66 A: Do you remember, right across the creek from my house [5026 Warm Springs Road], right across from O’Donnell’s house—

B: That big slide?

67 A: Yeah. When did that happen?

B: That happened, I think during World War Two. But way before that, above that is a bigger slide. Where I told you about the swimming hole—just below that [most upstream hole]. You can see where that big slide is. That was sliding maybe a hundred years ago. The creek was eating at that slide, because the road used to go up through that way [above west bank of Sonoma Creek] before they had Warm Springs Road. That was called Bennett Avenue. It went in there. If you walk up there, you can see where the old road where they moved it back.
MEGLEN

68 A: So it’s actually on the opposite side of the creek then? People would get to Glen Ellen on the west side of the creek.

B: Yeah. They didn’t have the road [Warm Springs Rd.] past you at that time. [garbled] slide moved the creek back. During that other slide that’s right behind you, behind O’Donnell’s house, I think that happened in the forties. That moved the creek over. That took a lot of trees went down, that changed the course quite a bit. We had a slide right here [Calabasas Creek, across from Arnold Drive extension], behind here, you can see where that slide was. That didn’t change the creek any because the road was there [Henno Road] and they had the road rocked up. When the slide came down it just raised the road. Then the county came in and cut the road back to the same level that it was originally. And when that moved, the slide dropped about five feet and the road boiled up again, because they took the pressure off the road. It stayed that way quite awhile, and because I was connected with the fire department I got the directors to write a letter to the county to smooth it off so we could get a fire truck over there. They smoothed it off and then blacktopped it. They never did take it back down. So when you go back down Henno Road--

69 A: I think I know the spot—there’s a bunch of blackberry bushes on the right. [small rise about 0.1 mile from intersection with Warm Springs Rd.]

B: Yeah. Well that road was level at one time and when they cut it down after the slide, it was level again. Then the thing went again. So, because we got them to smooth it out so we could get across with a fire truck, they smoothed it off and they didn’t take any dirt out, just blacktopped it. So that’s why it comes up like that. But it was level originally.

70 A: That’s interesting. That’s a pretty good little hill there.

B: I think the slides have done more to change the creek. Behind O’Donnell’s where you are, there was a spring down there, a small spring. That hill went up pretty steep. It went up steep like that [demonstrating with his hand] and there was a spring down at the bottom.

71 A: This is on the west side of the creek? Or the Warm Springs side?

B: No, the west side. That’s where the slide was. Somebody said that someone was fooling with the spring and tried to dynamite it to improve the thing and they plugged the spring and they might have contributed to the slide. But I don’t put too much faith in that story because when you got a lot of rainfall and you got a clay layer, the water will soak down to that clay layer and then it becomes slippery and slides. That went out one year, but it did it more than once. Then up above there was maybe a hundred feet wide, there was another crack in the earth above the slide. The guy that was there, come and told me, “You can’t find that crack anymore. It must have sealed up.” Well, he wasn’t as familiar with it as I was—that crack wasn’t there because heck, the land just slid out. [laughs]. He thought the thing closed up! But what happened—the rain go down that crack, loosened the ground again and that slid out a different year. I went up and helped the guy across the street cut the trees. Of course we just let them go down the creek, getting them out of the way because they were blocking the creek. And then the creek ate into the slide and kept it from coming way over. They could have lost those houses on that side.
A: Those were the ones on O’Donnell and below? [referring to O’Donnell’s house—now 5022/24 Warm Springs Road address].

B: Yeah. The next house below, the creek was right up to it, but I think it cut back pretty near where it belonged, eventually. But that was a pretty good slide—I don’t know exactly what year. Bob might have some information on that [Bob Glotzbach]. I kind of guess it happened around World War Two. World War Two I was pretty busy, so I didn’t know everything that was going on.

A: Across Warm Springs Road from me and up in the hills, there’s a reservoir. Someone told me it was water for the brick kilns?

B: I’m not sure whether that’s true or not. But there was water for O’Donnell’s to do irrigation down there. They had a lot of trees and stuff like that. They used that water from that little reservoir. There wasn’t a lot of water there [on O’Donnell’s property] for extensive use. They did dig a well, she had a well there too. Fact is they had hand equipment for boring the well. I don’t recall ever knowing about a pipeline going across the creek to the brickyard. But it did go to O’Donnell’s—they had a lot of landscaping in there that they used the water to irrigate. Like I said, it’s not a very big reservoir. In the summertime there’s no water going into it. So it’s more or less like a big tank.

A: How deep was that well that O’Donnell dug, any idea?

B: No. But we used to borrow that stuff to drill the well at the store. We borrowed their equipment. It’s the same as a big auger. You put the joints together—it took two men to go around and you had a tower to hoist it up.

A: Sounds like a lot of work. I’ve done a lot of posthole digging myself.

B: This is much heavier than a posthole digger. You have big handles coming out where two guys could work it, ‘cause it’s pretty heavy. I don’t remember any hot springs. Any place that you drill around here, if you go down four or five hundred feet, you’re going to get warm water in this area. And the Warm Springs, we used to go swimming up there.

A: Morton’s Warm Springs?

B: We called it Warm Springs. That’s what they called it. They have warm springs there. But most all these wells, from here down to the golf links, below that to Boyes Springs, you drill down, all the way to Kenwood to, you drill down several hundred feet you’re going to get warm water in this area.

A: I think Sonoma Mission Inn did that recently, they’ve got a new well over there.

B: They got a big break because the state paid for that. I think they made a grant to the county and they didn’t have to pay it until they started using it. I think they use it in their laundry now. I don’t know how much they had to pay, but the county had money left over and
they were going to drill a well where that park is, Maxwell Park. I don’t know what they did with that money because I don’t think they drilled a well.

78 A: I haven’t heard anything about that.

B: They got a grant from the state and I think it was through the county. So they went there and thought they could use a well and the Mission Inn didn’t have to put up any money until they started using the water. I think they went down about 1500 feet or 1200 feet or what. But then, behind the hospital they were going to drill for hot water. Up there behind the powerhouse, where the road goes up to the hill [referring to the state hospital or Sonoma Developmental Center at Eldridge]. I think they spent about a million dollars there. They had a big rig come in and then they ran out of money. They had a big oil rig in there and they had the ponds and the fence around it and everything, and they ran out of money. The guy that put the money up, didn’t want to put any more money into it. The people who were doing the drilling had a chance to get money from somebody else, but the guy that put the money up first said, but he’d been out of the picture, he said, ‘You do that and I’m going to sue you and close you down.’ So it ends up it was a big waste of money—they never completed the well. It’s too bad that happened because there is warm water in that area, but I wouldn’t have drilled there, I would have drilled over toward the dairy. I think they picked that spot because it was close to the powerhouse. Because who knows what you’re going to find? But it wouldn’t be my choice to look for hot water. That money they spent was wasted. It’s a shame that they done that because with all the hot water potential in this valley, they could have a lot of greenhouses where they could raise vegetables year-round, they could make use of it. The only place that’s making use of it is the Mission Inn and it was done because the state put up the money. If they didn’t find hot water they wouldn’t have been out anything, see.

79 A: Pretty good deal for them, yeah.

B: Of course. I mean you could do it in your yard if you want to put a greenhouse in. Say, ‘Drill a well and if you find hot water I’ll pay for the well.’

80 A: [chuckles] Where do I apply?

B: You got it. They’re gambling with their money. If you got hundred degree water or hundred and forty degree water, you could heat your house, run it through a greenhouse and that’d be worth paying for.

81 A: Of course PG&E probably wouldn’t like it too much.

B: It’d be so little it wouldn’t bother PG&E. They want to get out of the generating business, they just want to transport the electricity. They’re selling all their powerhouses. They sold all their Geyser stuff and they sold a lot of their steam plants. They’re getting out of the generating business. I think they tend to keep—they didn’t at first—their hydro plants. A hydro plant is a money maker because there’s no money going out for fuel costs. So I don’t blame them for keeping that. Because that’s the cheapest way to produce power, is hydroelectric.
82  A: When did Glen Ellen get electricity? Do you remember?

B: No—but I remember when they got gas. My memory is about twenty-nine—twenty-nine, thirty when they got the gas. But electricity—I was just reading something about that, I don’t know if I was reading the Memories of Glen Ellen—I was reading something about when Glen Ellen got electricity. I think it was in the early 1900s for a guess. But in those days a lot of houses didn’t have electricity. I remember when we had a store, we had a telephone and Poppe’s had a telephone [Poppe’s was at south corner of Arnold Drive and London Ranch Rd.]. There was only four bare wires coming into town—two went to his store and two went to our store, and if we got a call for somebody you’d have to walk the street and get that person to come down and answer the telephone. Now they got hundreds of phones, everybody has a phone.

83  A: Sure—some people have two.

B: And then they went to ten people to a phone, you had a party line. We had one long and two short. To our number you crank one long and ding, ding. [demonstrating with hands]. When they got more lines, they got it so they had two people to a phone, but you only heard one ring, because they used one line to ring your phone and one line to ring the other phone. But if you picked up the telephone you could hear the other person talking. That was a two person line. Then they finally come to a private line. I was on the fire department—you couldn’t get a fire department [probably meant to say ‘you couldn’t get a private line], but I was able to get it because they used my number for fire calls at one time, so it helped to get a private line. Now they got the fiber optic, they can send 50,000 messages over a cable big as your thumb.

84  A: It’s incredible. Pretty amazing.

B: Yeah it is. They got a fiber optic that comes by here, they only just put it in about a year ago. Runs from Santa Rosa to Napa and it comes right down through Arnold Drive and cuts over Trinity [Road]. It’s only about as big as your thumb. I watched them weld it down there. They used to use connectors, but now they weld the glass together. It’s better than trying to get a connector, they actually weld it [garbled because of scanner].

85  A: How did most people get their water in Glen Ellen, back in the twenties and thirties?

B: Well, Chauvet had the water works, was my memory. They got water from Graham Creek, bulk of the water came out of Graham Creek. If you want to go up there you can find the old dam, a low rock thing.

86  A: I think I’ve seen that.

B: The water came down to a stone tank. When you go in that Jack London Estates [just east of corner of Sonoma Mountain Road and Warm Springs Rd.], make a left, just about fifty feet [to the left], back up the hill, that’s where the water tank was. There was a pipeline that came down through O’Donnell’s property, right behind your house, came down by the Mayflower Hall. There was only about fifty pounds of pressure on it. The second source was
out of Asbury Creek at the London Ranch. Chauvet used to own part of the London Ranch—he sold part to Jack London. London got the water, but Chauvet kept some of the water rights. They took it out of Asbury Creek, it went to a tank at Jack London. He had his outlet below, Chauvet had his outlet a little above and that pipeline comes down to where the park is, where that museum is [referring to Jack London Village, Grist Mill area, by mouth of Asbury Creek]. Came down the hill right where the Chauvet Hotel is, came right down through the Chauvet Hotel to Glen Ellen. That was another source. When the railroad started [1880s] they got their water from a spring up at Garric’s tract, that filled their water tank. Then after awhile they got it from the Chauvet. I showed Bob [Glotzbach] where that spring was and the water tank. I think it’s on that map that he made. There was a spring actually, when you go up Gibson [Street], when you go down that first dip, that’s about where the spring was. A lot of people drilled wells—we had a well where the store is at the Post Office. We had a well there and we had a well at Glen Ellen Square I guess they call it [just south of intersection of Warm Springs Road and Arnold Drive on east side of Arnold], that building where the Deli is. We drilled that, we used O’Donnell’s equipment.

87 A: You used that hand auger again?

B: Yeah. [garbled] it wasn’t like a post hole auger, but bigger, for drilling wells.

88 A: How deep were those wells?

B: That one was sixty feet. Between forty and sixty there was quicksand. That was the trouble was the quicksand strata down there. The well was OK, but the water—that sand is so fine that it comes up and sometimes if you tap a glass of water you might find a little of that fine. It’s like quicksand or clay or something. It’s a fine, fine sand. But a lot of people had wells. Much earlier the older people would look for springs or they’d hand dig a well because they had no drilling equipment. Basically the early settlements would be around a spring.

89 A: That makes sense. You aware of any spots around here where the Indians used to live? Any places where people found lots of artifacts?

B: Well, the closest I know—I used to work for Los Guilicos, the estate at Los Guilicos, where the county has that juvenile hall now—along that creek there, I never looked for them, but people would look for artifacts. The Indian workers for the old winery camped there, right behind the white house. [probably Hood Mansion] That was before my time—just something they left behind. I don’t recall any Indians in this area at all. They got chased out of this area a long time ago. They got chased back to the mountains. Yeah, the Indians got a bad deal in the early days.

90 A: I’ve heard there were a few still living on Carriger’s Ranch up until about 1920, or maybe somewhere in the twenties.

B: Carriger, out behind El Verano?

91 A: Right. I heard there was a small settlement back there. There probably weren’t very many.
It could well be—up to the twenties I wouldn’t really know about that. But it’s possible. We never did ever see a Negro in the early days. We never knew about Negroes until people started coming out from the south. Never ever in this area. Somebody said, ‘Negro, who do you mean Negro?’ They don’t use that term anymore, but in the encyclopedia that’s the race they are—Negroes.

People’s ideas about what they want to be called change over time, yeah.

Let’s get back to the creek. I told you about that one spring where the slide was.

And we talked about hot springs.

I don’t know if that was a warm spring or not. Some of those stories about the resort, they talk about warm springs and hot springs. But I don’t know about any springs except up there at Warm Springs [Morton’s]. And that was a drilled well. I don’t know if there was any natural [spring]. I can’t recall any natural warm springs, but I won’t say there wasn’t any. I just don’t recall any natural ones. Water depth? People used to dig wells—they’d dig them by hand—if they went sixty or seventy feet they were pretty deep. Of course when they started drilling they would go two or three hundred feet. Now, these deep wells, they’re putting them all over for these vineyards. They talk about the vineyards don’t use much water, but they’re really tapping the water. They’ll go down five or six [hundred] or a thousand feet to tap the water. Because they’ve got the money to punch those holes in.

Seems like the water table has gone down quite a bit over the years.

This vineyard up here drilled well, back on the hill [along Arnold Drive between Dunbar Road and Stuart Creek crossing]. Madrone just drilled a new well. Across Madrone just south of it, they drilled a new well. Down there on Arnold Drive across from where that church is down there [just south of Sobre Vista, on west side of road]. Used to be a barn, but it burnt down. They just drilled a new well there. They’re all deep wells. They bring in a rotary well driller and they could go a thousand feet in no time. I had a well driller once. I drilled a few wells once as a hobby. But they churn, they don’t go as fast as those rotary—it takes a lot longer.

Did many people pull water directly out of the creek?

Yeah. Like I’m on the creek, I could take water from the creek. I don’t take water from the creek now, but I could. When you’re on the creek you’ve got what you call rights to the water. Of course when you’ve got just a little three-quarter inch pipe you’re not hurting the creek. But the biggest diversions, like these guys on the vineyards—that’s another case where they would start sucking water out and it would suck the creek dry.

Which vineyard was that?

Up there where Montcruzer [spelling?] Ranch, where they had that pond. They’d pump out and fill that pond.
97  A: That’s up off of Henno [Road]?

B: Yeah. And then I think further up at Gordenker Ranch, I think they took water out for pasture, permanent pasture. When they put in those big pumps it’s commercial, but a little guy pumping out for a garden generally don’t hurt the creek because the water eventually is going to waste anyhow. Just goes down the creek and goes out to the ocean. If you got something that’s pumping ten gallons a minute—but you put a big pump or a dam—you’re taking it all out.

98  A: You want to take a little walk around?

B: Yeah.

[We started to leave, then got into further conversation, which didn’t all get recorded]

B: California Mountain Lions, some people call them cougars or catamounts or panthers, it’s all the same. But that’s on the upper Sonoma Creek, way up where it starts. That’s where the park is now [Sugarloaf Ridge State Park]. We used to call it the Reynolds Ranch. Up in that area is more rugged, there’s no houses. I used to deer hunt and we’d often see one of those mountain lions.

99  A: Were the mountain lions more numerous back in those days?

B: I don’t hunt deer anymore, so I don’t know. But I think they’re more numerous. They’re not hunting them anymore, so they’re probably more numerous now.

100 A: That’s probably true. They’ve been protected for a few years now.

B: They should control the population, but they passed that law, they snowed[?] the people in. They’re not allowed to hunt them anymore. They used to hunt them.

101 A: This is the second part of the Bill Meglen interview where we walked down into Glen Ellen. It was difficult conditions to record under, so I’m now looking at my notes and recalling what Bill said. Our first stop was at the Glen Ellen bridge and Bill showed me—if you’re standing there near the post office next to the bridge and you climb down a steep little bank into the culvert and go over the wall of the culvert, there’s a line still there on the wall [of the main bridge] which is the high water mark that he put there when he was living near the bridge. If you sight along that line it goes up to about the sixteen-foot level on the current gauge, which is painted on one of the middle pylons of the bridge. Bill put high water marks there for many years when he was living near the bridge. Unfortunately there was some graffitti painted in that area, so the whole thing got painted over with gray. So we’ve lost most of those, though there is still one of them there. He also showed me [looking from the east side of the bridge], if you look across to the far side of the bridge, you look under the far side and there’s a steel casing from the old bridge [steel bridge before current 1939 bridge]—kind of a big circular metal thing set in concrete, under the new bridge. That was the casing for the old bridge. He said the old bridge was a few feet shorter than the new concrete one. When
they were building that bridge [new one], they forded the creek up near the church on O’Donnell [Lane].

Then we walked up to the O’Donnell Bridge, the brick bridge, and we sat on the wall and looked over. On the downstream side of the bridge you can see a low wall, mostly covered with water at this point [of the year]. That was sort of a dam that was put there to prevent undermining of the brick bridge, Calabazas Creek bridge. He also said, he’s pretty sure there’s a picture that Bob Glotzbach has, he’s pretty sure that Calabazas Creek used to intersect Sonoma Creek about 200 yards higher upstream from the main Glen Ellen Bridge. [He said] The brick bridge helped create the peninsula that’s there now. You can see a place a little bit upstream from the brick bridge on the left hand side of the creek looking from the bridge—it’s kind of a low area. You can imagine the creek running in through there.

Then we walked over to Sylvia Crawford’s house, site of the old Riverside Hotel. We stood in her driveway looking down. The creek is almost directly below her driveway now. Looking across the creek, Bill said the creekbed used to be about seventy-five feet further to the west, pretty much where there’s [now] a railing alongside the patio behind the Jack London Bar—that’s where the creek used to be. *The people that lived over there wanted to increase their property, so they filled in that area over there [asterisk eight lines down refers to this site]. Bill was also telling me there was three houses just upstream of Sylvia’s house. The first two he doesn’t remember. The third one, the one [once sited] closest to Sylvia’s house, his sister lived in and the footprint of that [Bill’s sister’s house] would extend out over the creek at this point today. So that spot has changed quite a bit. O’Donnell built a weir upstream from those houses to protect them from getting cut under by the creek. He said the weir was made of 3X12s placed at a sloping angle into the water. Then people starting mining gravel, digging out gravel just below that weir. One year when the water was high, it got around that weir, dug into that gravel pit, gouged out the bank there, and took out the house that his sister lived in—I’m not sure if she was living there at the time—anyway the house that she had lived in.

[*A note here—that the owner across the creek had filled in about a seventy-five foot long section of the creek. I’m wondering if they may have filled it in there because the weir may have actually diverted the creek somewhat to the west and it may have eaten away at their property. Bill didn’t say that—this is my own thought.]*

Bill said the creek used to be shadier and that the vegetation hasn’t changed much—alders and willows is what he remembers. He said when the limit was ten fish he could catch his limit in about two hours and that would include throwing some of the smaller ones back. He used to go up and catch steelhead just below the Sugarloaf Falls also. [He said] people used to fish year round, even though it wasn’t strictly legal. He doesn’t remember the brick kilns operating when he was a kid. He said you could dive off the main bridge in Glen Ellen in the summertime [see earlier section in main interview about damming up creek to create swimming holes]. He remembers one time when the water actually came above the Calabasas Creek bridge, the brick bridge—just a couple inches on the roadway.
Second interview with Bill Meglen
November 29, 2000, at his home in Glen Ellen.

B=Bill Meglen; A=Arthur Dawson

106  B:  I can remember on the ranch, seeing big flocks of robins—by the hundreds. Of course they would do damage to crops and just the same with quail. We'd plant gardens, when you plow it up and seed the garden, here comes a flock of quail and take out a lot of everything and mess up your garden, especially if it was a little dry. I used to even have them out front here when I was trying to get a garden. Of course I never harmed them because I loved to see them. They would damage your garden. Now I can’t remember seeing a quail for a long time in this area.

107  A:  We’ve had them up Warm Springs [Road] in the last couple years.

108  B:  I think in this area it’s due to these cats running around. I think they get the quail—if there’s young quail around, these cats get them. We used to hike to the top of Sonoma Mountain and I’ve seen flocks of pigeons, big flocks of pigeons. They’d be roosting in the trees—you look up and you see flocks of pigeons, you know when they’re roosting.

109  A:  Were they native here do you think?

110  B:  Wild pigeons, yeah. They’re not as large as the domestic pigeon. But they were wild pigeons at one time—big flocks of them. I don’t know what the demise of those were, whether it was poison or just disease. Disease plays a big part—will kill a bunch off, just like the squirrels. The tree squirrels—one time they were plentiful and another time they weren’t. They get some kind of disease and a bunch die off and eventually they come back. I have a bird book--I estimate there was easy fifty different kinds of birds around here. I got Thompson seedless grapes out there—I could never let them get ripe, because as soon as they’d start to get a little sugar, the birds would peck the hell out of them. I would have to pick them all green.

A:  Would you want to get your book and we could go through and you could tell me what [birds] you remember being here? Or do you have it in your head already.

B:  No I don’t. I should have done that ahead of time. One time one of these birds guys set up a net across the creek, one of those thin nylon nets and they were catching birds. I went down and talked to them and said, “What are you doing to these birds?” They said, “Oh just catching birds.” Well, when I talked to them they bundled up their net and took off. I don’t know if they figured I thought they were doing something wrong. I don’t think that helps the bird [laughs].

A:  Right [laughs also]

B:  But I kind of counted and I recall the figure fifty. Right now you hardly see any birds any more. I have a suspicion that the vineyards are doing it. Then after reading this article—did you read this?
A: Is this today’s paper?
B: No.

A: [Looking]
B: A couple days ago. (Santa Rosa Press-Democrat, late November 2000) You can have that if you want.

A: Do you know the Meadowlarks?
B: Meadowlark bird?

A: Yeah.
B: Yeah and flickers—that’s another bird that you see with those yellow wing spots. Bluejays and you got the stellar jay and the other jay. Hummingbirds. I don’t feed them anymore. My wife used to feed them. Funny thing about a hummingbird—one will take over and be the boss hummingbird. Any other bird try to get to that thing and he’ll dive bomb them. [laughs] One will take over. Once you start feeding them, he didn’t want to share with the other, it’s funny. Just like up at the ranch when we had cattle, milk cows, there’d be a lead cow that’d be the boss.

A: He’d be the one to lead them back to the barn.
B: Yeah. Generally the one with horns, so he could buck better than one without any horns.

A: How about wild turkeys, were they here when you were a kid?
B: No, but there’s turkeys here now. They’ve been introduced. And pheasants were introduced in the ‘thirties. I forget what they call them, I think they were Chinese pheasants or something like that. But they were introduced in this area and they were having babies because you see a pheasant with all the little babies. Of course the cats would get those too, those babies, easy.

A: Tasty morsel for them.
B: Yeah. But I think the cats is what’s keeping the quails away here. I notice that this ground squirrel and the cat is walking around. The squirrel can be way up the tree and just freeze and be motionless until the cat leaves. He got his eye on that cat because he knows the cat can climb the tree. But pheasants were introduced—we had no wild pheasants or wild turkeys. And the wild pigs—we had no wild pigs, but they did come in from Oakmont and how they got to Oakmont I don’t know. Up Skagg’s Springs and that area, Annapolis, there’s always been wild pigs, many years back. They got so thick they were roaming behind the hospital [Sonoma Developmental Center or State Hospital], rooting everything up. Rooting up the mushrooms and rooting up the fields.
A friend of mine saw some up there at Jack London. You go above the lake and the road out on an open area—there’s a bench up there now. He saw them right up there.

B: They’re hard to spot, ’cause they mostly come out at night when it’s dark.

A: Yeah I think it was right at dusk he saw them.

B: Yeah. And they’re after acorns and they’re also after—we used to call them Indian Soap—like a bulb.

A: Yeah I know what you mean—soap plant.

B: Yeah—it’s got a bulb. Even if it’s rocky, they’ll just push their nose down in that rock and uncover those. And mushrooms, they’re after mushrooms. And also in the fields they’re after worms. They’re looking for anything to eat. But then I think they started trapping. At Oakmont they put in traps. I think they must have trapped them and killed them off. For now I think the population is down. They were pretty thick at one time.

A: Were they ever a danger when you were out there in the woods? I’ve heard they can be pretty ferocious.

B: I’ve never had any problem, because originally they weren’t around this area. It’s only been a few years they got bad. Then believe they were trapping them and it got down again. They put those traps, Fish and Game or somebody. Especially down in Oakmont, people didn’t want them coming in and root their garden up. They do a tremendous amount of damage.

A: I think I’ve seen a few spots up in the woods—it looked like somebody came through with a bulldozer.

B: It looked like they disked the fields. They rip it all up.

A: You remember any wild goats?

B: The only wild goats I knew—and of course the wild goats are tame goats gone loose.

A: Yeah—feral goats.

B: Behind Los Guilicos School—the county owns it now, used to be the girls’ school. There were some wild goats back there. But then some guys started hunting them and I don’t know whether they killed them all or not. That’s the problem, they won’t leave them alone. People are already hunting those turkeys. If you try to start something and they hunt them too much, it’s going to go out. But goats were back there. There were some goats running wild—that’s the only place I know. Of course, originally these wild hogs were domestic hogs going wild. I don’t think we really have a wild hog.
A: Yeah I don’t think we do either. Somebody told me at least some of those wild hogs started out with the Russians at Fort Ross and then they spread through the county.

B: Started in the north—Skagg’s Springs area and that area—many, many years. They weren’t down in this area at all. I don’t know if they walked over here or if somebody brought some over here or what happened. Just like the possums we talked about—the first time I seen them was east of Stockton. I had never seen them over here. But now they’re over here.

A: Any idea what year they arrived around here?

B: When I seen them over there it was in the late ‘thirties, when I was driving truck for Paris Brothers (sp?). In the late ‘thirties you’d see them on the road—roadkill. But never ever seen them here. But after that I seen them walking down the creek in this area.

A: So by the ‘thirties you think they were here?

B: Well, I’d say the ‘fifties, ‘sixties maybe—they were here. I seen them over there in the ‘thirties and I think maybe thirty years later I seen them over here. Would you like a cup of coffee?

A: Sure.

B: I don’t drink coffee, but I’ve got something else.

[Tape pauses for coffee to be made]

A: Do you remember any logging?

B: Not in my time. But they logged—if you go up Sonoma Mountain, not much on that side, but you can see the old redwood stumps where they cut the trees down.

A: Like as you go up Sonoma Mountain Road, and you’re by Graham Creek?

B: Yeah [garbled] is redwoods, even behind the hospital [SDC] property. Of course when you cut a stump down, the shoots will come up from the stump and there will be a ring of trees. Now the second growth trees could be three or four feet through, you know way up [meaning tall]. Did you ever see that old redwood that they didn’t cut [on SDC above Fern Lake] because it was a snarled tree?

A: Yeah, I’ve been up there. So that’s why they didn’t do it.

B: Yeah because it wasn’t a good lumber tree. And that’s a big old tree that was left.

A: That’s a huge tree.

B: And then a big branch broke off and somebody cut some burl off it or something. But you’ve walked back up to the tree?
MEGLEN

133 A: Yeah I’ve been up there several times.

B: If you look around, if you go into where there’s redwoods you can find old tree stumps. [garbled] In this area they had little saw mills in those days and they made the redwood for the buildings, they even used redwood studs, they made the doors out of redwood, because redwood was a good wood and that virgin timber—no knots. They used it up, they cut the local—in Guerneville, one of the biggest redwood trees they had, they cut right in Guerneville.

134 A: I heard that—maybe the biggest one in the world.

B: The stump was there when I used to work up on the Russian River. I caddied up there and I bellhopped up there and worked in the bowling alley. I worked there in the summer to make money to buy clothes for going to school. But the old stump was out there then, it’s probably gone now.

135 A: So you think that logging up on Sonoma Mountain was back in the nineteenth century?

B: Yeah, nineteenth century I would say. Because they got everything local to start with because they had no transportation. When they got the railroads they could bring in lumber from the Russian River area or some other area. But even moving stuff with a horse and buggy—Sutter bought Fort Ross and they had to move the stuff in horse and buggy all the way from there over to Sacramento. That would have been a job—no roads. Ford the creek, get stuck in the mud if it rained.

136 A: When you were a kid looking up at Sonoma Mountain, what was the tree cover like?

B: I’d say just about what it is now. We’ve never had a big fire up there, which has been lucky. The hospital put in that fire trail—I don’t know if you can notice it anymore.

137 A: I’m not sure if I know where that is.

B: If you went up to where the orchards are, between the hospital and London’s, they cut a swath over a hundred feet wide all the way from the orchard up the mountain to the top. One of the hospital patients, I think he actually ran the gang. I think I remember a guy by the name of Seacourt (sp?) or something to that effect. I think we used to call him Captain Seacourt. In those days they had higher grade patients that they could put out and work on the farm and work in the orchard and they did that wood chopping up there. They never hired (anybody), the patients did most all the work. They had a fire trail. If you look for it, there’s no doubt, you can make it out.

138 A: You can see it from down here in the valley?

B: You’d see it good from Sonoma Valley--it was plain as day. But if you went up there closer you could probably make it out (speaking in present tense) between the hospital property and the Jack London Ranch.
A: So if you went up to the orchard and you walked over toward London Ranch you’d probably notice where it was?

B: You’d have to get back away. I would say go up to the gate and don’t go too close to the hill or someplace at the lake where you can see the steep part of the hill, back a little bit. Then try and estimate where London’s property is and the Hospital property is where they had the fire trail. They had it bare and then it gradually grew. I used to deer hunt up there. Now they don’t allow hunting anymore. But I was above looking down, to see if there was any deer coming across the trail and somebody else came over and they sat down below me, where I was going to shoot. Well, I let them know I was there and he wouldn’t move. So I finally left—I went down and told him, I says, “What in the hell you doing? If a deer runs across between us, what are you going to shoot at it?” I says, “I’m not.” [laughing] The guy had no sense to sit there, because I let him know I was there and he should have moved on. No sense at all. I figured if the guy hasn’t got that much sense, I better move! [laughing]

A: You’re still here, so I guess that was a good choice.

B: A guy that dumb is just liable to start shooting.

A: Yeah, they see a cow or something, they’ll shoot at it.

B: If he see a deer come across, they’ll be right in line with me. Otherwise he wouldn’t be there. Why was he sitting there trying to shoot a deer?

A: Right now the oaks are dying back, do you remember any big diebacks of oak trees?

B: No, but I do remember we had a caterpillar invasion. They would eat all the live oaks, they would eat anything that got in their path. Uh-oh, some power trouble. [lights flicker] You have to be careful—they try to warn everybody, if the juice goes off, then they kick it back on, they’ll kick it back on three times if something gets on the line, try to burn it off. You can’t assume something is dead because they kick it automatically back on. This could be the juice switching over. Something that goes on the line like an eagle or something, hits two lines and burns, throws the breakers and it automatically goes back on again. Burn him off.

A: Get rid of that connection between the two wires.

B: PG&E they’re in business to sell electricity, so they don’t want to shut it off. What was the last thing? The trees?

A: Yeah the trees. You were talking about caterpillars?

B: There was millions of caterpillars. They would come down and eat all the leaves off the trees. We were trying to raise money for our new ’51 Ford [fire truck]. We took the old Dodge and put in something else to kill the caterpillars. We’d go out and spray trees for people. It didn’t do the radiator of the Dodge any good. We had to get a new radiator eventually because we had a valve that we could run the water in the radiator and that chemical didn’t help the radiator any.
A: So you were actually putting the chemicals in the radiator with the water?
B: No, put it in the tank. But we had a valve that we could fill the radiator with.

A: I see what you’re saying.
B: You would get it in the radiator. But that old Dodge worked good. We had high enough pressure with the nozzle we could spray big trees with it—over the top. We did that to raise money because there were so many caterpillars eating that you could get to the tree and hear them chomp, chomp, chomp, chomp. You could hear them eating. So many of them you could just hear them chomping away. This disease that killing them now is something new [referring to oak trees again]. There’s been articles in the paper. Smith [Win Smith, another former fire chief of Glen Ellen] is pretty well up on that. He wrote stuff in the paper.

A: I got a couple trees in my yard I’m a little worried about.
B: According to those guys there’s not much you can do. Are they bleeding?

A: Yeah there’s one that’s bleeding a little bit.
B: You might say it’s gone. They say you should be careful what you do with the wood and if you cut it with a chainsaw and go to another tree that you can spread it. They’re kind of guessing, trying to work out something to prevent it from spreading.

A: I heard the fungus isn’t what kills it, it’s the beetles that come in after. They finish it off.
B: The beetle comes in after the tree is harmed and starts bleeding and getting weak. Then the beetles come in when it starts to die. When you got dead wood—worms come in and termites come in. Those big birds, the pileated woodpecker—I seen one out there chomping away on a piece of pine stump. Next door that same one was in there looking for worms that were in there. He was coming down to find something to eat. I told you last time, I never seen one since about 1970 or so, maybe thirty years ago or less. Looking in my bird book, this is the extreme end of their range—it’s from here north. But I never ever seen one around here except recently, say less than thirty years ago. After I looked it up I could see why, because there probably wasn’t any here.

A: They’ve moved down a little bit.
B: Yeah.

A: When you were looking at the streambed in those days, was there much logs and woody debris in the streambed or was it fairly clear?
B: Yeah there was more—if a tree fell in, nobody would bother to move it because you didn’t have the houses on the creek. My house is way above the creek. Some people got to build their house right on the creek. Then they put up a wall and then they want to bulldoze,
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put fill in there. But that’s what makes a good creek—if a log or a tree stump falls over then the water goes over it and it’ll create a big hole. You got shade and you got cooler water. That helps the fish. When you start bulldozing the creek, you make a trough, cut the trees you end up with a trough. So they didn’t bother with the creek—they’re trying to protect the bridges, naturally by putting in walls. But the fishing was better because they didn’t bother with the creek. Somebody with their house against the creek, they didn’t want a patio, so they put the wall on the creek and then they want to fill it in and then the water hits that wall and chews up the other guy’s property.

152 A: So then the other guy does the same thing.

B: I started to tell you—I told you where they built that wooden breakwater—a guy by the name of Schutz had a vegetable garden there. He had a big waterwheel, he had an undershot waterwheel. He dug a two or three hundred foot ditch alongside the creek—that’s where Campbell’s live now, where the beauty shop is [O’Donnell Lane]. On the lower part of his property, where he had the waterwheel, and it was maybe twelve or fifteen feet high. It was an undershot wheel—picked the water up and dropped it into the flume that went to the highest part of the property and then he would irrigate his garden. I think the son is still living. He used to work at the hospital and I think he’s retired now. The father also owned a place across the road that the school was there awhile that they called Castle Cozy. They had the school awhile, that’s where he was living. In front he had the vegetable garden. You know where the driveway is that goes down to Campbell’s Beauty Shop? Right to the left of it they started drilling a well with an auger. If you look right above there’s a high tension wire. I think they’re higher now. He was raising the pipe, the pipe hit the high tension wire and electrocuted him. His wife run over to help him and she got electrocuted. This was in the middle, late ‘twenties. Before I was on the Fire Department, I was too young. We had the store over there and they [said] “Call the PG & E! Get them to shut the electricity off.” Then the Fire Department got there, by then with two people dead they knew what happened. They used a shovel to pull the bodies away from the pipe. Now they probably wouldn’t take a chance with a shovel. I don’t know if it blew the fuse. They don’t have fuses everyplace. I talked to a guy up here who was looking at the pole and I says, “What are you doing?” “Oh,” he says. “We may put a fuse in every one. We want to put in more fuses.” They want to put in more fuses so that if something happens to the line you only knock out a small portion.

153 A: That makes sense. Rather than knock out three hundred people, you just—

B: Yeah. I don’t know why the fuse didn’t knock out then, but it didn’t knock out right away. A second person lost their life and it could have been more. They intend to put in more fuses to limit the area. “We’re going to put one in the corner,” he said. So then if something falls across the line it would only knock out a small section. Because they can feed electricity from two ways with throwing a switch someplace and they got looped lines.

154 A: We talked a lot about swimming holes last time. I was curious if there were specific places you know steelhead were spawning.

B: I’ve seen them spawn right back here [points to Calabasas Creek below his house]. I’ve seen as much as half a dozen return fish coming down there. I lay the blame on that dam
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down there, more than anything. For several years it prevented the fish from coming up here. Also the guys were fishing right at the dam. I never fished at the dam, you’re not supposed to fish near a dam. Did you ever talk to Berkland?

A: No, not yet.

B: He’ll tell you about steelhead fishing. He’ll give you information on that.

A: I’ve heard people used to go out at night with flashlights and they’d gaff them.

B: The difference in those days is there was only a few people around. It didn’t hurt so much. You got a lot of population now. I seen one time. The first of the season I usually manage to get a fish that was still left in the creek when the season opened. Now you can’t even fish this creek, which is a shame. I think people ought to be able to harvest the fish to a certain extent. Closing it is not good either. I think the season ought to open quicker, they always open it too late. One time before the season opened I seen a guy stop the car—two fellows stopped the car. They come out with fishing poles and tried to fish the hole there. A game warden came along and took their poles away and evidently he wrote them a ticket too. When the game warden left, they went back to the car and got more poles and came back [laughing]. They figured he wouldn’t be back. When we lived on the creek, I told you last time, I would watch that creek and that area to see that those sooners wiped it out, right by the bridge.

A: Right by the main bridge?

B: Yeah. I could go out because I lived right there. I could go out within a couple of blocks and have some nice fish, right in that area. I knew nobody had been fishing there. I’d see guys fishing there and I’d say, “You know this fishing’s closed?” [answer] “Oh.”

A: So you think that was a spawning area, right there by the bridge?

B: They spawn right here [Calabasas Creek below his house].

A: Yeah right here, but also down in the main creek?

B: Any place there was a hole and a gravel and the water goes over. Back of Los Guilicos School, that little creek, I’ve watched them spawn. Likely could have gone down there and picked them out with my hand. Right where we talked about those Indian [first interview] artifacts were. Great big steelheads spawning in there. That was only a small creek, you could jump across at that point. Any place where you’ve got a pool and then it thins down and make a riffle down here [demonstrating]. When it goes down, the water goes faster. Where it’s deep it can move slow and has to speed up for the same amount of water. The fish—I’ve watched them many times--would sit there, they’d just keep wogging their tail until they get a hole in the gravel. They keep [garbled] back and forth and they lay the eggs, the male comes along and fertilizes it and the gravel is still in there and the little guys will come up inbetween the gravel when they hatch. I’ve watched them here and I’ve watched them different places. They have to get a certain area—water has to be moving—

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160 A: Maybe six inches deep, eight inches deep?

B: Yeah, not too deep. But the wiggle, the girt (?) will take the gravel, the fines out. So then they end up with pea gravel and air goes through. They get their eggs in there and then the fish, if there’s water in between, they’ll come right out of there, the little tiny frys. There not much bigger than that [demonstrating] when they come out.

161 A: They go between the rocks.

B: Yeah.

162 A: Any other specific spots you remember seeing that?

B: When I lived there at the bridge, I used to see them coming by there. I haven’t seen a steelhead in this [creek] in I don’t know how long. I think it’s a shame they don’t go up above Kenwood and put some fish in there, planted and open it up to fishing. Even if they open it for a month and close it. But not wait until the water gets down. You know until it gets hot and down. Open it up when you have light rains and then you got lots of water. You can’t wipe it out—you do it when you got a lot of water in the creek. If you got light rains and the water is not muddy but milky. That’s when I like to fish. When it’s got a little bit, not clear, it’s still kind of cloudy. [In a later conversation, Bill said this helped keep the fish from getting spooked because they couldn’t see a fisherman as well.]

163 A: A little sediment coming down out of the hills?

B: Yeah, got a little sand coming through. It’s not clear yet. You got better fishing.

164 A: I think I mentioned I talked to Bill Basileu a few weeks ago.

B: He was quite a fisherman—his father.

165 A: He was mentioning that back in the twenties the rains started earlier in October than they do now. October was a wetter month. Would you agree with that?

B: You know when I was a young kid it seemed like the rain would never stop. But that’s imagination. Look at these records[pointing to his own rainfall charts]—we can have a big rain in August. We’ve had green grass in August. The old saying of the farmers “If we get green grass up to our knees by Christmas, boy that’s a good year.” It be coming Christmas here now and the grass may be that high [demonstrating low grass with hand]. It depends on whether you have early rains while the ground is still warm and enough rains to keep it coming along. That makes a good mushroom year too. But there’s years you get one rain and you get a heavy frost and every time the grass comes up you look at the edge of the grass and it’s yellow. The frost burns it back, keeps burning it back. You won’t any green grass at all if you get enough cold weather. You have to look close to see that yellow end. I don’t know about that [more rain in October], the only thing I know. You go back [looking at rainfall records] you can get some idea of different times of rain. One time we had that party for Smith when he retired as Fire Chief and I told him up there that there was a good possibility
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that you could have rain that day, even though it was June. I says, “There’s a good possibility, thirty percent chance.” I could show him where it rained about that time of the year. I remember Fourth of July, I was working up on the Russian River and we had a big cloud burst when I was selling firecrackers. I was a young kid then, I was selling firecrackers to make a little money and a big rainstorm come. I’ve seen it in August where we had green grass, they were picking prunes and the grass was green. Come to pick grapes and had to use sleds, they couldn’t get the grapes out of the vineyard because it was so muddy. When it comes to nature, there’s no set thing. Anything is possible. You could pretty much say that there’s nothing that man’s ever done that hasn’t been done in nature, if you think about it. There’s nothing that’s been invented that hasn’t already been [done by] animals or [the] natural [world].

166 A: Even computers—our brains are still a lot more powerful than any computers invented so far.

B: Right. You got an atomic thing going on in the sun. Animals have sonar. Bats got things where they can see [in the dark]. You talk about flying—if you watch a bird, he can turn somersaults and do what he wants and fly what he wants and we haven’t duplicated that yet. [laughs]

167 A: That’s true. The hummingbird can fly backwards.

B: I’ve seen seagulls over at the coast, not even flapping their wings. They get in a position where they’re not going forwards or backwards in the wind, at a certain angle. I don’t know how they can do that without even moving. [laughs]

168 A: Yeah, right at a cliff where they’ve got the wind coming up.

B: Yeah. They get a good a glide and go up and down and around. I do remember when I was about four or five years old it seemed like it rained, rained, rained because I wanted to go out and play. But that’s not scientific.

169 A: When you’re younger time seems longer.

B: When you want to get out and you can’t go out because it’s raining.

170 A: You mentioned the dam down at Eldridge, so you probably noticed a decline in the fish after that—was there any other period where you noticed the fishing suddenly got worse or suddenly got better?

B: No. I’ve lived on the creek practically all my life and I’ve fished the creek all the time in open season. I know the sooners would explore the creeks back where nobody would see them and they wouldn’t buy a license, because they’re breaking the law anyhow, no use in buying a license. They’d go back up in those creeks. I used to fish way up Graham Creek and a guy came down the creek. I said, “How’s the fishing?” “Oh there’s no fish here,” he said. So I waited about ten minutes and I went up and I got some nice fish. I made a mistake and I told him about that. What happened the next fishing season, he was up there before me [laughs]. Made a mistake, telling him. When you fish in those little streams you got to be quiet. You
spook the fish easy, they go and hide and they lie for a certain amount of time. I fish way up Santa Rosa Creek. I used to go way back—now it’s closed off to fishing. It’s a shame. I’ve gone up on falls and I look over and the fish would be two feet from my face. I’ve seen them swimming and he didn’t see me because he’s facing upstream. Another time I sneaked along the bank and I threw the line over. Wham! Got a fish. Afterwards I looked—I’d swear where that fish bit there was no water there. He just came out of the water and got that! Because nothing was bothering him.

171 A: Wow! [laughs]

B: I don’t think there was any water there—might have been a half-inch. The fish, he had to be in the dry land to come out. He come up and got it. Because after I threw it over, I didn’t see where it was coming down. I looked after—no pool there at all, but the bench isn’t more than wet! [laughs]

172 A: Figured he’d get it, then thrash his way back.

B: Yeah. You know I got the fish, I hooked him. But I feel you have to wait at least ten minutes if you disturb them, before you have a chance that they settle down. You can’t go just chomping down the middle of the creek—you’re not going to get a fish. [brief pause while phone rings. No one is on the line—so we had a brief discussion about telephone sales people and answering machines]

173 A: So you mentioned gravel mining going on, people pulling gravel out by that wall down there off O’Donnell [see first interview]. Was that a commercial operation or was it just people going down and filling up their truck?

B: Hazen Cowan, back in the ‘twenties, they had horse and buggies, they went down with a horse. He used to take care of the roads. They were gravel roads. They go to the creek fill it up. They had a wagon and there was two-by-fours [on the bed] and there was handles down here [drawing a picture—next part of this sentence is garbled] they would--go down with--they’d load this gravel, then they would lift this thing and it’d drop down inbetween. See they’d pull this board up. They’d take it up and gravel would slip down there and then they’d pull another one and it’d slip down. So they’d go along the road and dump the gravel. They took the gravel out of there. Hazen Cowan, I don’t know if he paid O’Donnell. She might have got a little money for it, I don’t know, for taking gravel out of there. But they went down there with wagons and got the gravel out. They’d [garbled] gravel in holes, to fill a chuckhole. They paved this road in the early ‘twenties. That’s another thing I wanted to tell you—down there where that bridge was—when they built this bypass, the state highway. They did that from Warfield up to where the Dunbar Road is at Kunde’s because they wouldn’t go over the railroad track twice. They go through the railroad track right at Warfield at the intersection of Dunbar and the highway [believe he’s referring to a place near current Arnold Drive/Highway 12 intersection]. Just past the school it crossed the railroad track again. They used to have freight trains carrying over a hundred cars going through here. So they built that section of road. They used Fresnos to move dirt [Bill later defined this as a hand-held scoop about four feet across, pulled by horses and used to make the ground level.], trucks with hard tires, and they were still using horses and they put a pump down there and a
pipeline to get water up there to mix the concrete for the bridges they needed. They pumped the water out of Sonoma Creek. So evidently there was not enough water in Calabasas Creek, it might have been a dry year then. Some years it’d run all year, and some years it don’t. It might have been a dry year. I think after the big fire in the early ‘twenties, when all the vegetation was off. You hear one story—the vegetation holds the water back and lets it out all summer, or the vegetation uses up the water. You got a wet year it’s going to be bad for fire because the grass is high. You got a dry year it’s going to be bad for fire because it’s dry. [laughs].

A: Who knows, yeah [laughing].

B: You don’t have any scientific explanation to it, just somebody’s opinion more or less.

A: If it sounds good other people will believe it.

B: And if you say it enough and put it in writing and somebody else copies it, that makes it OK.

A: Do you know of any other gravel mining going on?

B: Right here [below his house]. Lesberales, when he owned this property, he used to come down here and get gravel out of the creek. Also I took gravel out to put in cement floors up at the ranch, behind where the turntable was, when we owned that railroad property. [believe he’s referring to Calabasas Creek near current Gaige House on Arnold Drive]—took gravel out of there. Also under the bridge, where I lived, we got a road down there. All the way along different people had roads down to get the gravel because we didn’t have Basalt [local company] or somebody to deliver it to us. Sometimes you get a place with a lot of leaves and you didn’t make very good concrete. If there’s a lot of leaves in it, tannic acid and stuff and sometimes there’s too much sand. So if you didn’t know, weren’t conscious of that—too much sand, not enough rock and get some leaves in, you didn’t make good concrete. You could use a little more cement to kind of make up for it. But right here they took gravel out, down underneath the bridge they took gravel out, behind where the [railroad] turntable was—they took gravel out of there. I took a lot out of there when I was putting in cement floors for a barn up at our ranch. Different people had ways to get down to the creek, to go down and take out gravel. Like I say, where else are you going to get it?

A: Nobody was in the business back then of mining gravel.

B: The first guy that started something with gravel was Serres and he wasn’t too dependable. I don’t know if he was too busy or just—you order gravel from him and you might get it when you wanted it and you might not. Then that fellow got a flatbed truck—wasn’t even a dump truck and went to Healdsburg and started hauling gravel down here. On a flatbed truck—we had to shovel it off and he was dependable—he had better aggregates because the river was bigger, cleaner stuff and more rock to the sand. You don’t want to get too much sand, you need some rock too, otherwise it takes more cement to make the concrete strong.
178 A: When did that stop do you think—people taking gravel out of the creek?

B: Well, I would say by the end of the ‘thirties I don’t think you had anybody going down to the creek taking out gravel because you had places to deliver gravel to you. There wasn’t too much stuff going on during the war except the war building stuff. So mostly after World War Two they had Ready-Mix and trucks to deliver your stuff, material you needed. But before that, you needed some gravel, you went down to the creek and got it out. Like I said, there was a guy with a flatbed and some people was trying to start a business. Just like garbage—at one time you had nobody to pick up the garbage. A fellow by himself started the garbage business—come and pick the garbage up. He started the business on his own and then he had the franchise in Sonoma and then Sonoma gave it to somebody else. That’s the trouble—one guy could build up, get something going and then the city says, “Well, we want a little part of it.” They want you to bid on it or something and somebody else could underbid and take their business away from them. But it started with one guy with a truck. Then a big corporation comes in and buys him out when it gets going good.

179 A: When they see there’s money in it.

B: The gravel business, the cement business, the garbage business—it’s all the same.

180 A: Before that guy started taking garbage out, would you just burn your garbage in the backyard?

B: We had the ranch up there and we had a wash where the water dug out a gully. I used to dump the cans and stuff in there and then we’d burn whatever would burn when you burn it, you burn the tin off the cans and then they rust easy. I used to be good with my pistol, I used to be a damn good shot because I’d go to that dump and set up the cans. At twenty-five yards off one hand I could hit a number ten can every time. I could hit that every time when I was shooting a lot. I had a dog that just loved to hunt. All he had to do was see my gun and he was ready to go.

181 A: What was his name?

B: Wimpy. That’s the one, did I tell you, climbed the ladder? He was a great dog and he loved to go hunting. Down there we lived at the store [building on Arnold Drive right across from Warm Springs Road] and that’s a two-story building, so it’s over twenty feet from the ground to the roof. I had a long ladder over twenty feet long. I laid if flat it on the ground and I got Wimpy to walk the rungs. Then I raised it a little and I got him to walk it. After that, I raised it a little more and I got him to walk it. I kept doing that over a period of time—eventually I had that ladder straight up and down. He’d get up on the ladder and use his teeth to grab the rungs. He’d get up it and he’d get his feet to walk up and then use his teeth. He’d climb from the ground straight up that ladder to the top of the roof. My brother-in-law took pictures of it, but I don’t know what happened to the film, I’d like to have it to show people. I wouldn’t let him come down. He’d wait for me to go up and get him, because he might break his neck if he tried to come down. I never told him to come down—dropping twenty feet, you could kill the dog. So he’d be up there wagging his tail and wait for me to go up and get him. But that dog would go straight up.
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A: That’s pretty amazing! [laughing]

B: Then I had a dog that would climb a six-foot wire fence. He would get his paws in and use his teeth too—chicken wire, it’s about two-inch mesh, six-foot high. He’d get his paws and use his teeth, he’d climb right up that six-foot fence.

A: Just like a ladder.

B: And then there’s this rabbit. My grandson, for Easter I got him a rabbit and he called him “Pizza.” He was staying with us awhile when I bought the rabbit. I had a garden behind the house, along on the side, and the rabbit would go back in there and start eating out of my garden. So I put up some strips of plywood, a bunch of strips from a job. I put a few inch thing and the rabbit would jump over that. I added another piece and he’d jump over that. I kept building the pieces a few at a time. I didn’t care if he went back in the garden anyhow. I had that rabbit—he’d get back about twenty feet and Charge! and jump that fence [laughing].

You wouldn’t believe what you can teach an animal—

A: Little bit by little bit. Have you got any old photos of the creek that would show—

B: I’ve probably got some someplace, but I’d have to dig them out. I did see pictures of people swimming in the creek, my niece or somebody had them. Bob [Glotzbach] might have some, because he had a bunch of old photos. Why don’t you see if Bob still has that picture taken at the bridge, shooting upstream. That was before the railroad even got in there, before the brick bridge was built. Because our deed [drawing a diagram]—there’s the bridge. That peninsula comes down—in fact it even came down beneath the bridge at one time. Here’s Sylvia’s [Crawfords’]—

A: Where the Riverside [Hotel] was—

B: Where Sylvia lives, yeah. Murray—Murray was in the Marines, General Murray built that house in there [believe still referring to Crawfords’ current house next to brick bridge on O’Donnell] after that hotel got washed out. Well that peninsula kept growing. But our deed said—it came up Sonoma Creek so far, then went up Calabasas Creek. So if you look at that brick bridge—I kind of showed you—the bank goes way over here [west bank of Calabasas, upstream of brick bridge]—I think at one time the Y [confluence] was up in here and this creek [garbled] houses was way over that side, actually against where that slope is. The creek was actually down where they filled in, it was way over there and then turned back to where they met. So that picture gives you some idea—if you visualize looking up there and you see the Y is further up. Like I said, the trees came way down underneath the bridge. There was trees on this side [downstream of main Glen Ellen bridge]. Here’s the main bridge [drawing], the trees were way down in here. The Y was way down in here, when we took gravel out. Our deed actually showed that that strip of land went down below the bridge like that [referring to drawing] and then went up Sonoma Creek and over. So we had a road down here and took gravel out down in here. So this was off the right-of-way. The main right of way, when they gave it to the railroad. The fifty foot right-of-way was donated by Gibson and he had a clause in the deed that you couldn’t sell liquor on that piece. But in the meantime, the railroad bought on each side of the main right-of-way, bought all the way down into the creek and up
to the road. That strip—the main road—went all the way up to here, the railroad [property] ended a few feet from where we are. My mother bought all that property, way up to here. One of the conditions, you weren’t supposed to sell liquor on it.

186  A: Is that where the store is now? [Glen Ellen Market, next to post office]
    B: Yeah, but nobody knows about that except me. [chuckling]

187  A: But it’s still in the deed though, huh?
    B: I don’t know, but I recall that was in the deed we got from the railroad. Of course they divided it up with lots, they write different deeds when they subdivide. If you went up to the recorder’s office and trace back, you find a lot of stuff. That’s where I found out there was wooden bridges and two spans. You could read about the property line.

188  A: I was talking to Bill Basileu asking him if he thought the creek was shadier in the old days. He said he thought it was, but it wasn’t because there was more trees, it was because the stream has actually gotten wider over the years. There’s still the same number of trees on the bank, but they’re not shading over the water as much. Do you agree with that?
    B: Yeah—because the creek will wash up against the bank and then make a deep hole and you might get shade from the bank where a tree falls in. They didn’t do too much bulldozing work in the creek, but any time there’s an action, there’s a reaction. Any time you put a bulldozer in the creek, you change things. Right over there [pointing out the window] the creek is working against the bank on the other side. Eventually those trees may go down. I told the county about it, but they don’t want to do anything until something happens. They’re willing to spend five times the amount of money to fix it. They don’t want to do any preventive stuff. They want things to collapse and then they go to the government for flood control, emergency money.

189  A: FEMA or somebody.
    B: Yeah. Up above, the road washed out and they barely put enough rock to have two cars go by [referring to a spot on Henno Rd. about 0.5 mile from Arnold, where Calabasas Creek washed out the road]. They had government money for that too.

190  A: You’re talking about that spot about a half a mile up there.
    B: Yeah up here where they have that cement thing.

191  A: I was walking up there during that flood—I was walking around looking at stuff. I got up there and I was going to the edge of the road and look down at the creek and I noticed there was a crack in the roadway. So I stepped back and you know what happened? A few seconds later that whole section, about three feet wide and twenty feet long just went [arm motions and splashing sounds] into the creek.
B: I criticized the guys, said, “You’ve got to put more stuff in there.” Then some people across the creek said, “Look what the county’s doing, they’re filling in the creek.” The creek used to be completely on the other side. There was a guy [garbled] and fill it in. They don’t like to hear it, but their lots don’t even go to the creek. It’s a no man’s land inbetween their lots. The creek moved over and when they subdivided [garbled] what is in their deed. Originally when it says, “to the middle of the creek” that’s a different story. Then their property moves. But when you got a definite lot, when it’s cut up in lots, then they buy the lot. So a lot of these lots up here don’t go to the creek. Then they hollered, “Look at the county.” I said, “What are you talking about, they’re not even filling enough to make a two lane road!” He says, “They should put the creek back where it was before.” See that—the county don’t want to get in trouble. It’s ridiculous, the county should of went down with a dozer and moved the creek into the center. They don’t have to push it back if they’d at least centered it, pushed the gravel up and then put the road back in. Stick the road out another twenty feet. They got it so narrow that two cars couldn’t pass. Where they have that ditch, they finally paved that so cars could squeeze by against the bank. Because there wasn’t enough room for two cars to pass when they finished it originally. And they were spending flood money. I told them about this out here. I wish they’d do something because if those trees go off, they’ll uproot the road. The worst part is it will turn the creek over to my side. I don’t want the creek going on that side—it’s just happening, the creek is going that way. I’d like to see them center the creek back again. I don’t know if you’d like to see, we could walk down there and I’ll show you.

192 A: Yeah, let’s take a little walk.
Interview with Milo Shepard

December 6, 2000, at his home, London Ranch Road, Glen Ellen

[As I was setting up, Milo told me about the interviews he had been doing with the Bancroft Library. The beginning refers to these Bancroft interviews.]

M=Milo Shepard; A=Arthur Dawson

1 A: So they’re doing a project specifically on Sonoma Valley?

M: A project on the ranch and London and our family—it’s more family history, but they get into ecological stuff. The changes and things that have occurred. I thought about those redwood trees—they started [logging] in the ‘fifties [1850s] and by the seventies all the first growth were cut out. When London came into the ranch, he bought it first in 1905. He had a small mill. What they found out—two things. Sometimes you hike through and you wonder why you see the burned out stumps. People say ‘Well gee they had a fire.’ When they first started cutting them, they didn’t burn the stumps and the top of the stump would sprout and they wouldn’t have good attachment. Wind would come along and blow them off and they’d fall down. So then they started burning the stump and that’s why they came up from the roots and formed what they call fairy rings. That was because they burned the stump. We’ve got these canyons up here that are very steep. There’s a fall up there about fifty feet high, forty or fifty feet.

2 A: Up Graham Canyon? I’ve hiked up there a couple times.

M: Graham Canyon [affirming]. Those canyons are narrow. So they start taking those trees down, about every twenty-five or thirty years they take trees out that were about twenty-two inches or bigger, chest high, to take the pressure off those canyon walls. The last time that was done was 1955—took out about 2 million board feet. You can’t even tell it was touched. You go up there now and you can’t even get up the creek, because all these trees and groups of trees have crossed and fallen and broken down into the creek. When that happens, all the earth comes down, the earth goes down and fills up the creek. And your spawning beds are ruined, all that occurs. Just a continual thing that occurs. My point is--they ought to go in and take the pressure off these canyon walls. In the thirties one year, there was a bridge between this ranch and Clark ranch to Sonoma Mountain Rd. And there was a footbridge down at Wake Robin that walked over to Sonoma Mountain Road from Wake Robin Lodge.

3 A: Is that about where—there’s a house down there now near the corner of Warm Springs [Road] and Sonoma Mountain [Road] that has a little footbridge? Is that where Wake Robin Lodge was?

M: Yeah. Anyway, trees fell across and caused a big dam evidently. But it broke loose and just wiped those bridges out. Sort of like the pond up here. When the state first took it over(referring to the lake at Jack London State Park)--in the summer time there was the overflow and you had boards and they didn’t lift them out before winter so the water wouldn’t go over the dam, it would go out the overflow. All of a sudden the water went over the dam and came barrelling through our vineyard and everything. So I go to the rangers. “Hey!” I said. “Your lake is overflowing.” I says, “It’s going over the dam.” I says, “Why don’t you
get up there and open the spillway?” Well fine. They go up there and the damn fools instead of taking a six-inch board off, they took four boards off—they took two feet. That thing came barrelling down and we’ve got a [gully] between our vineyard and along the edge of the road. Along the edge of the road, going down it’s about four feet deep and through the vineyard it’s six or seven feet deep.

4 A: Just from that one time?

M: Yeah. There used to be a fall where Heppy’s (sp?) road goes in, the first road to the left going up Sonoma Mountain.

5 A: Is that where Emery’s live?

M: No, no--way below Emery’s. It was part of Wake Robin. There used to be a big fall in there and a big pool we used to swim in there as kids. When that dam broke, it just wiped it out. It wasn’t rock it was sort of that volcanic tuff, but it was hard. It was only five or six feet high, but to kids it was pretty high. They had this nice pool—we’d dive in there. It just wiped it out.

6 A: How deep was that pool?

M: That pool was about six feet. Talking about your steelhead, it’s very simple what happened, why we don’t have any steelhead. We used to have what we called a blueback salmon run. And we had the steelhead run.

7 A: The blueback salmon, would they have been a type of chinook? What were they?

M: I guess they were—I don’t technically know what they were. I think they were a type of chinook.

8 A: Was there another name you called them by?

M: No. We just called them bluebacks. They weren’t big, they were about the size of—what’s the other salmon, the little ones?

9 A: Silver?

M: Yeah. Like the silver. About that size. But I always thought it was a series of things. One of them was caused by Brian Kahn (sp?) our supervisor who was quite a fisherman and he was also an ecologist. He lives up in Montana now. When he got on the Fish and Game Commission, he had Sonoma Creek opened for year-round fishing.

10 A: What year was this?

M: This would be—I forget when he became—he beat Ig Vella for supervisor. I’d say this was in the ‘sixties. He opened up [fishing in the creek] and that just finished [it]. Kids would go down the street in Sonoma with two steelhead on their handlebars in March and February.
It was illegal to fish for steelhead above the old Helwood place, down by where Jimmy Millerick lived, just above the Sonoma Creek bridge [referring to Hwy. 121 bridge].

11 A: Helberg’s? [rather than Helwood]

M: Yeah, Helberg’s—where saltwater came. You couldn’t fish above that, that was the law. That just about wiped them out. Just before that the hospital at Eldridge put a dam across Sonoma Creek. They made a pool to pump water up to the lake.

12 A: Was that up to Fern Lake or Suttonfield?

M: Suttonfield. The fish couldn’t get up. We went down there and caught what we could and threw them above the dam so they could get up there.

13 A: And there was no fish ladder there?

M: I think they eventually put a fish ladder in, but they didn’t do that for three or four years.

14 A: So the blue back salmon--

M: They were finished right after World War Two. That was the last we saw of them, right after. The influx of people moving in here, the number of people—you know those houses from the old Gaige House down along Calabasas Creek? Most of those houses had a little pump. You up to the old Gordenker place, he had a line in, you go up Sonoma Creek, they had lines in there. Jim Martin at St. Francis[name of current winery on north end of Kenwood, across from Adobe Canyon Rd.]—he filled his pond from Sonoma Creek. I think he’s since drilled a well, but he’s still probably sneaking water out—but everyone sneaks water out of Sonoma Creek and they [probably referring to the fish] can’t stand it. We always had spring water. So when we had to finally interplant a few years ago--the vineyard, I drilled two wells. Both of those have gone dry. The reason why they’ve gone dry we’ve had to go down deeper or drop our pumps down is that we’re in a foliated area, geologically speaking. The water from the top of Sonoma Mountain does not come from Sonoma Mountain. It has to come from some other area. Some geologists think it comes all the way from Shasta County, some say Lake County. Definitely doesn’t come from the Sierras because it can’t get through the Sacramento Valley. So, you have to have a body of water higher to force it up to twenty-one hundred [feet] where these springs are on the top. An example is, if you go on Melita Road, going to Santa Rosa? Where Channel Drive goes down and Melita Road comes from Highway Twelve—and you see those dead redwoods?

15 A: I’ll have to look for those. I haven’t been down there for awhile.

M: They’re dead. They’ve cut a lot of them down. The reason that occurred is the guy who bought that property happened to drill a well and he was selling the City of Santa Rosa five million gallons of water a day.

16 A: Wow.
M: He drained all of Annadel. Joe Coney, who owned Annadel at the time, sued him and lost the case. That’s why Coney built Lake Ilsanjo for water, for his livestock. It wasn’t built for irrigation or recreation. It was to have water for his livestock because all the springs and everything on the top were, all the water was drained out of that hillside.

17 A: Before that all the cattle would just drink from these various springs?

M: Springs, yeah. Well they had them boxed in a watering trough. This is what’s going to happen here in this valley if this water company starts going down with deep wells. They say, “We aren’t hitting the strata.” Well, you know, you got a body of water down here that they’re drawing from and here’s the small bodies up here [demonstrating different aquifer levels with his hands], these [small bodies] are going to drain down.

18 A: Are you talking about the project down in Four Corners, or just in general?

M: All of those. The first underground spring, underground artesian well that was hit was up on Sonoma Mountain on the Bruning property. It blew the bit out of the ground. You can follow that underground stream through here, down by the golf course, there was one hit there. Dario Marioni [first name garbled] hit it. Then, on the Felder Ranch, Durrell Ranch [correct?], they hit one. Each time someone would hit it [the water would go down] Now the one up on Sonoma Mountain isn’t artesian anymore.

19 A: You’ve got to pump it.

M: Yeah. In other words, it’s gone down and down and down [referring to water level]. Then it was hit down at that vineyard across from the batch plant[believe he’s referring to the cement plant on Arnold Drive, along Carriger/Felder Creek]. He’s pumping water back int the ground. So is the back of Yulupa Vineyard that Kenwood has—they’re pumping water back in the ground. So, this idea of drilling for water and continual drilling—like the new thing in Sonoma [referring to Four Corners project, currently drilling a deep well] There aren’t any laws—although the state came in finally and said “We own all the water rights, before individuals owned the water rights” Now the state controls it—they surveyed all these [referring to surface water] drainages and got them all marked down. Yet you can’t stop someone, you can’t say—this project they want to do at the golf course. I was just the other day, over in Petaluma. They’ve got such pressure, these politicians and everyone has such pressure on them. Mainly they voted not to restrict growth in Petaluma That occurred because they can’t expand their big shopping malls and this sort of thing unless they increase the population. I have a saying, “You get bankers, you get real estate people and you get attorneys and they’ll rape an area.” I don’t know what’s going to happen as far as our water is concerned, but it’s damn serious. To me it’s idiotic to blame the vineyards because ninety percent of these vineyards—we used to get it, the ones in the valley, used to get it from Coyote Water System until they got too many people. They said we have to do the people [first]. But, our drip system—I’ve got a little seven and a half horsepower pump. I just pump into a tank and just gravity down to the drip. When you’re dripping a vineyard, you aren’t using much water. I will say you do use more—we’re frost free—if you have your sprinklers going. But those only go for a few hours. Some years they don’t go, some years they do. But they aren’t using the sprinklers for irrigation like they do on these lines in the San Joaquin
Valley where forty percent of it is evaporated off. This is why drip was invented in Israel—to conserve water in the desert conditions. But I’d say the main problem is just people.

A: Back when you were growing up, were people irrigating their vineyards or was it more dry farming?

M: You didn’t have vineyards in the valley floor. This ranch has had a vineyard on it since 1862. You can go through this ranch and look. Every rainstorm I’ve got a man out cleaning out the ditches in case of leaves or if something happens. We preserve our land and we ditch our land. You’ve got all kinds of bars and ditches and stuff and straw we put down to stop long runs of water. We don’t have long runs of water. Another thing that bothers me is that the road up the mountain, you can’t get a vehicle up there now. You can’t get an emergency vehicle up there if someone gets hurt. The ecologist says, “Well we’re studying it, but we don’t want anyone to do anything with it, ditch it or anything until we come up with a solution.” Well the solution is—that road was put in in 1850 and been maintained all these years. It’s only until the state took over and did this. You walk in Annadel—there were fifty miles of road in Annadel. They want to make it into trails. Well gee, that’s nice to have trails, but here you’ve got these roads and they won’t ditch them. So now you can’t get up them. They’re rock, they’re washed out going up Ledson [Marsh] or Lake [Il-sanjo]. Hell, Gordenker used to go up that Rhyolite [Rhyolite Trail] and take heavy trucks up and down there. He maintained those roads. This is what I’m saying—man has to keep maintaining this and to let it go back to nature, nature is just going to wipe it out and you’ve lost it. You’ve got the problem of maintenance. I was a park ranger for seven years. I opened Annadel and I opened Sugar Loaf. I worked my tail off in the winter time. These guys don’t even know what a shovel looks like. They don’t even carry one in their pickup. You’ve got to get out there and do this. Otherwise, it just takes one good rainstorm to start a little rut and pretty soon it’s all gouged out. Thing is, if they [rangers] aren’t trained, then they don’t know. These new trails that they put in, they put one in Annadel—it cost about two hundred fifty thousand dollars. It’s so narrow that a horse and a man can’t pass. But it’s all eroded out and it’s only something like three years old.

A: Which trail is that?

M: I forget. I think they call it the Rhyolite Trail or something. I saw the way they’re putting this trail in up here. They call it—it’s going to go across to the ridge trail. That’s malarkey—it doesn’t go to the top of the ridge.

A: That’s all private land up there.

M: Yeah. They’re spending stuff to get things done. But there is a trail up there, there always has been. There’s a state road to the top and there’s a road from our place up through the park through there. But they don’t use it, they let it go to hell. There were twenty-five miles of trail on this ranch at one time and they’ve let most of it go to hell. So I don’t know what’s going to happen, those roads in Annadel—you go to the National Seashore. You’ve got all those old roads that those ranchers had, like the one going out Bear Valley. Nice and wide, you can walk through there. Some of these ecologists, they want these little narrow trails. Those are fine, but you’ve got to keep the bicyclists and the horses off them because they
can’t pass. I don’t care what you say—a bicyclist if he’s going five mile an hour and he comes around a corner and you’re walking, you can’t jump out of the way. I’m not against bicyclists and I’m not against horses. But gosh darn it, if you’ve got the roads in there, provide for them. After all these parks are all designated as to the use by law when they’re established. They’re a camping park, they’re a recreational park, they’re a historic park or they’re a preserve, like Armstrong Redwoods. There are certain rules. A horse can’t ride on those trails in Armstrong. They shouldn’t allow a horse on this mountain after it’s starts raining. I run into people that are helping to put in trails and people who are real ecologists. I say, “What in the world are you doing up here?” Here it is muddy right after a rain and they’re riding a horse. [they respond] “Well we help clear this out, or we ditched it.” I said, “Turn around and look at your tracks. See that? That’s all going to wash off.” This mountain is not like the Sierras, which is decomposed granite, you can ride on it. This is very fragile soil. Yeah, so they made a decision—you can ride on the road. But none of them will stay on the road. You go into Annadel and you see routes established. Illegal trails that are just eroding and cutting big gouges.

23 A: I’ve noticed that myself—I’ve only lived in the valley about twelve years. But up in Annadel I’ve seen trails get created just in the last couple years.

M: Yeah, it’s a shame. And most of this is being done by people who consider themselves conservationists. I know two or three hiking groups, they get great fun out of going on the illegal trails and stuff. I said, “You’re walking through there, you’re causing a trail, you’re causing erosion.” There’s one that comes out of Bear Creek, the old road the Heard brothers put in, but it’s washed out so they allow—

24 A: This is up by Adobe Canyon?

M: Yeah. You go up to Bald Mountain. You come out Fitzsimmons Creek, which is next to Golden Bear Lodge. Anyway, they shouldn’t be doing this. That’s what bothers me. I hike with a group and there’s not very many of us and we’re identifying flowers and everything and we go very slowly. But occasionally we’ll be at Sugar Loaf and someone will want to walk on Robin Willliams’ [the famous actor] property. [I say] “That’s private property. You shouldn’t go over there.” [They say] “Well we want to see what he’s doing.” [I say] “That’s none of your business.” But they do it. Getting back to your steelhead. You know there was a dam right at Emery’s that Chauvet put it. Below that there was a dam that served Wake Robin and served what they called the ‘Fish Ranch,’ who had fish ponds.

25 A: What was his name? I know who you mean—they had the fish hatchery down there.

M: Well there was two of them. LaMotte had a hatchery and Lenni Fish Company had a fish farm there. But LaMotte was first and he stocked all these—well above Chauvet--steelhead could get to Chauvet Dam, that’s as far as they could go. Above Chauvet Dam we had what were fall spawning rainbows. Those were planted. What occurred in the late 1800s was similar to what occurred back East. This is why you have fishing back East—is the fact that in the early 1800s, as the population increased, they found out that their streams were being fished out. That’s why almost every area back there—Massachusetts to New Hampshire and everything, have fish hatcheries.
A: They’re all stocked. So how long did those two hatcheries on Graham Creek operate?

M: I believe they operated until—London bought the properties in 1909—it was shortly before that it stopped. It was in the 1800s when LaMotte shipped rainbow trout to New Zealand. Every rainbow trout in New Zealand came from Sonoma County.

A: From Graham Creek itself?

M: The water came from Graham Creek. Graham Creek was always the creek, but they had ponds next to it that they raised fish in. In those days we’d get fish, we got what we needed. Same way with deer. To get a deer you had to go to the top of these mountains. You had to hunt a deer to find one, because there was Cowan’s Meadow, there was the Crilly place[correct name?], there was another—all these Scotch-Irish settled up in there. They lived off them and they wiped them out. It wasn’t until after World War Two that vineyards were ever fenced. We couldn’t grow a vineyard here now [without a fence]. But there used to be vineyard where the parking lot is and down the hill. None of that was ever fenced.

A: Not enough deer to worry about.

M: Not enough deer to worry about down low—they were up high. Now they’re all down low—there aren’t too many up high. The old bucks go up there. They’ve got easy eating in people’s backyards and along the creek, plenty of water and cover to hide in. So the majority of your deer are down low. But they used to plant all these streams around here with rainbow from the fish hatcheries.

A: I was talking to Bill Basileu, you know Bill?

M: Yeah I know Bill.

A: He was telling me his Dad used to get shipments from Fish and Game. They’d give them ten thousand little fingerlings and they’d pass them out to a bunch of fishermen and they’d go around to all the creeks and plant them.

M: Oh yeah. With the influx of people, Fish and Game would raid houses and they’d have three hundred trout in his freezer. There was a pond the state hospital had up there that they stocked with trout.

A: Is this Fern Lake?

M: No, no—this is up at Sugar Loaf. The Reynold’s Ranch. The steelhead couldn’t get over Reynold’s Falls. But up above there are trout and those are planted up there. When I was there I caught a few of them and threw them back in[because they were too small]—I caught one maybe ten inches long. There was a pond up higher that they had them in. One of the employees, Old Cowan lived up there and ran a crew of the kids. They had cattle up there and he stocked it and kept it stocked. Beautiful trout in that pond. This one guy went up there and he took out over a hundred in one day. Just bang, bang, bang, bang, bang. He was very proud.
of it. When you get people in you get all types. Everything got fished out. As I said, it got fished out in the eighteen-hundreds and they started stocking it themselves.

32 A: So you think the stocking began in the late nineteenth century?

M: Oh yeah, definitely. Now the Fish and Game has made another horrible mistake with these goddamn turkeys.

33 A: Did they introduce those?

M: Yeah they were introduced. Fish and Game introduced them. They came in and wiped out I don’t know how many rows of grapes from us. Now the men, one of them, I told them they could go and get some if they wanted. We must have about three hundred turkeys on this mountain. I mean just this thousand acres. They’re down here. Don Shone--he counted forty some across the road, coming around the houses and stuff. They ruined all the beds for mushrooms up on the mountain. Plus the fact that they bring in varmints and other things. There’s a mountain lion working on these up here. “No,” I told my foreman. I said, “It had to be a coyote.” “No, no, no,” he says. “He grande. He go [makes a hissing growling sound] at me. He goes [same sound]. I said, “No, must have had a tail like this[demonstrates with hands about six inches apart]—a bobcat.” [foreman responds] “No.no, no-- grande tail.” He says he’s seen him twice up there.

34 A: Do you remember mountain lions from when you were a kid?

M: Oh yeah. We had bear--

35 A: You had bear up here on the mountain?

M: Oh yeah. Bear and mountain lions, always had bobcats.

36 A: Do you have any idea—this would be well before your time—when the last grizzlies were killed here in the valley?

M: I don’t know--I know in 1850 the last tule elk was killed. Down in the tules, down by Wingo. Harry Weise has the horns, his great-grandfather killed it—Christian Weise. I have no idea when the last grizzly was killed. Always brown bears coming through here, they’ve always come through here.

37 A: Have you seen any recently, say in the last ten years?

M: No. The last bear I saw was in the ‘sixties or ‘seventy, on this mountain. When I was at Sugar Loaf there were bear there and there were five mountain lions. That was in the ‘sixties. In fact the deputy sheriff killed the bear on Spring Mountain Road—kept coming in and scaring his wife and he shot it. I used to belong, I still do, to the deer club. We had Beltane and Kunde’s leased for deer hunting and we’d see tracks up there. When I was in Sugar Loaf, people kept reporting this bear way in the back, up by the Williams property. I went up in there one day flagging for a trail and I heard this crashing and stuff and it was
black angus yearling [laughing]. Finally got it down with some other cattle that had trespassed in there and got it loaded and out. They swore they saw a bear back there.

38 A: Any other animals that you used to see, that you don’t see anymore?

M: You don’t see the weasels that you used to. We used to have the beaver on Sonoma Creek up here. They put up their dams—last dam—I forget what it was—I guess they tried to start down by Spreckles, down by that vineyard. He shot one a year or two ago. They’ve always been in here. I haven’t been up on top [recently]. But we always had badgers up there. Big badger holes and you’d see them.

39 A: I saw a mink on Graham Creek about ten years ago.

M: Yeah, well—was it an otter though?

40 A: No, it was definitely a mink—I checked it out in my I.D. book. I’ve seen otters and this was much smaller.

M: Occasionally I’ve seen--haven’t seen one for the last few years--a silver fox. But see those--there was a mink farm down in Schellville, you know where the Big Bend is? That road back in there, there was a mink farm in there. Mink farm up by Kenwood. There was a silver fox farm up on Schultz Road. Those animals, a few of them always escaped and then they breed. Sort of like golden pheasants, I used to see them once in awhile, but then wouldn’t last too long. I’m trying to think what other exotic animals—you call them today—that you don’t see all the time here.

41 A: How about fishers, you ever hear of any fishers around here?

M: No. I’ve never seen or heard of a fisher. I think they’re in colder country. Because these mink and these other ones are usually in colder country, but because they’re raised here--but I see the little natural foxes. When the park opened, the ranger came over and said, “I’ve got this fox out there barking at the people.” I said, “You better destroy it.” He said, “Well I don’t want to.” So I said, “I will.” So I went out after the park closed with my shotgun. Never take a rifle or a pistol to kill an animal like that—you always take a shotgun. I dispatched him because he was rabid. I’ve had raccoons at my door here. I just grab a shotgun and kill them. The state doesn’t even want to check them because it’s so prevalent, rabies is, with those animals. Any of those guys, if they aren’t afraid of you and they sit and bark unless they’ve got little ones, you better be careful around them.

42 A: You ever notice any differences in the types of skunks?

M: Yeah. We’ve got what we call the civet cat.

43 A: Is that the one with the stripes?

M: Well no—we’ve got the striped one, that’s what we call a skunk. Then we got the civet cat—he’s got the spots. We’ve got the ringtail with the big eyes. There’s a family of them
living up in a house, up in the attic, up on Adobe Canyon Road. They’d come out at night and the people fed them [This is the Meacham House]. He was a photographer, he moved up to this side of Eureka, up by Fortuna.

44 A: So this was a few years ago?

M: Yeah. Well the house is still there—the kids own the house. I imagine the ringtails are still there.

45 A: Those blue back salmon you were talking about—what time of year would they run?

M: They were spring run. We never had any fall runs. You didn’t have the water in the creek, you didn’t have the amount of water they needed to come up. They didn’t go much above Glen Ellen, they didn’t get to Kenwood. But there were big holes—you mentioned something about swimming holes. Pendergast was a big hole in Glen Ellen. Jim Berkland—he used to take a wheelbarrow and catch those steelhead and take them down to the old Poppe Store and sell them to people. [laughing]. He’s a character. He was a character when he was a kid.

46 A: How deep was Pendergast Hole would you say?

M: Maybe eight feet.

47 A: That one had a dam on it, is that right? Kids went down with sacks and dammed it up

M: No—not really, not when I was a kid. We had big holes, all the way from the bridge—this isn’t the bridge that was there when I was a kid. That bridge when I was a kid was not the bridge when my mother was a little girl. She said, “The water used to get so high we put our umbrellas over, lean over and put it in the water.”

48 A: That was during a flood?

M: Yeah. One year in the nineteen-twenties it took out the hotel there at the confluence of Calabasas and Sonoma Creek—there was the Riverside Hotel there, and washed that out. The bottom of it was being used as a schoolhouse at that time.

49 A: Did you go to school there?

M: Not there. I went to Sonoma the first two years, then I went to Dunbar.

50 A: Do you know Bill Meglen?

M: Oh yeah, I know Bill.

51 A: He was telling me that he thinks at one point Calabasas Creek actually intersected Sonoma Creek maybe two hundred yards upstream from where it does today.
M: Could have. I can’t visualize it, to tell you the truth. You know you can visualize how Sonoma Creek came down the other side. In other words it emptied out into the flood plain in Kenwood. They opened it up to take it out where it goes today [along Warm Springs Road]. Before it went the other way. It was able to get over Pagani Hill. The old road used to go from Glen Ellen, came up this road at the first big turn there and shot through the Country Club Estates [probably means current Jack London Estates], then it turned right and went up Wolf Run and then it turned right and went down through Pagani’s and then it turned left and went over to Warm Springs Rd. I testified in court on all this stuff. Then it went up, right in back of where Kunde’s winery is, just stayed along the edge up there.

52 A: So along the east side of the valley.

M: That’s where the old road went-- the east side you see the rock walls and stuff. When you went into Adobe Canyon, I was there--there used to be a stage coach stop, an adobe building there, when I went into Sugar Loaf. And old [searching for name], built that monstrosity of a winery—Ledson. He and Behler tore it down. They didn’t want to be bothered with historians. What do you call him did that too. The old white barn at the old Justi place on Dunbar Road? Well that covered up the adobe stage coach building. Old Roland Todd, didn’t want someone to do what they did to the Chauvet Hotel and made it into an historic landmark. He didn’t want it made into an historic landmark so he tore it down

53 A: That’s too bad.

M: This is what happens—my sister wanted to tear down my mother’s house up here and we had to spend a hundred and some odd thousand dollars fixing up our mothers old house because it became an historic landmark. They say they give you money for it, they don’t. A lot of historic structures have been destroyed because of that. So the Glen Ellen Hotel, the Chauvet Hotel just sits there. It’s not an economic unit.

54 A: Right—it’s too expensive to fix up.

M: Well, someday it’ll fall down.

55 A: Next good earthquake maybe. I hesitate to walk under that building—those bricks, you see them on the ground.

M: Supposedly they made it earthquake proof—but what’s earthquake proof?

56 A: Right. I was curious what the mountain looked like when you were growing up—how much tree cover there was, that kind of stuff?

M: I’ll go back farther--when my father was a boy, you could look up—the early picture shows and you could see cattle grazing all over the mountain. The reason why—there again this is man coming in. You look at all those oaks and there’s two coming out? I can show you right here [points out the window] there’s two [trunks] coming out. Means the tree was cut. They cut this whole mountain off. London, when he bought the ranch from the bank, he kicked Chauvet out, and said, “You can’t cut any more trees and sell any more wood.” They
put the wood down to the railroad and shipped to San Francisco. That’s what heated San Francisco, the wood from this country. So the whole mountain was cleared, except for the canyons.

57 A: So it would have been mostly oak—even going back before that—you think it was mostly oak woodlands and in the canyons would have been the redwood forests?

M: Yeah. It’s so stupid—the ecologists in Annadel. You seen those dead Doug Firs, those beautiful two hundred year old trees?

58 A: No. Whereabouts is that?

M: You go up the Ledson swamp area. She sent some people up there and they girdled all those /Doug Firs, because she said she wanted to preserve the oak woodland. Well, this is nature taking its course, for god’s sake. Now they’re standing up there and a couple of them are hazards—they’re going to fall on the trail. They could kill someone, if they aren’t careful. Same way with their burning. They spent over two hundred fifty thousand dollars on that little acreage right there in the parking lot, taking out those eucalyptus. And what does it look like? [the ecologist] “Well they’re native.” I said, “Native? After man touches something you don’t see any of that coyote brush underneath oaks over by the barn and that area.” I said, “It’s only when man comes in and clears something, then this lower-grade stuff comes up.” I said, “In front of your parking lot that was all vineyard, down that whole hillside was all vineyard.” I said, “You allowed that Coyote brush to come in and take over.” She said, “Well it’s native.” I said, “It’s a native weed.” Well, they sprayed to kill and they still haven’t got all the eucalyptus out. I told her, “Give me a D-8 for two days. I have that pushed out, ripped up. You can plant your oak trees and various trees and in five years it’ll look natural. Now it looks like hell. And then when they sprayed it, why they wiped out twenty rows of my vineyard. I’d still be in jail if I’d done that. They would have killed me. But they didn’t do anything to them. The Ag Commissioner is really upset because they lied, they didn’t say what it was. He sent the samples, spent all this money trying to figure out what spray they used. They did find that out and proved it. But nothing ever happened to them.

59 A: They never compensated you for the loss?

M: Well, compensation—what’s compensation? They said what was the crop worth? The vines damaged, some of them died. I finally gave up fighting about it. Because if you go in on something like that and you change it, and you start replanting it and that kind of stuff you don’t have anything to show, even if you take pictures. You document it, but it doesn’t hold up. They asked me to keep it out of the newspapers, which I did. What good does it do? They aren’t responsible for the things that occur in this park, because it was someone else did it—their contractors did it. So I don’t know what’s going to happen, just too many people.[laughs]

60 A: [We need to have] an epidemic or something. I live down on Warm Springs Road, right next to the old O’Donnell place. I’ve noticed back up in the hills on my side of the creek, there’s big old manzanitas, but they’re now being shaded by the oak trees. My guess is it used
to be pretty open and then maybe the woodcutters had been in and the manzanitas grew up. Would you agree with that?

M: Yeah. Everything’s changing, continually changing. When they went in they cut the oak and the madrone. But the madrone grows faster. See these[looking out window]? Those are oak—that was cut at one time. See that oak, see those two—there was another one coming out there? Those were all cut at one time. See this hill here, that knoll there, the knoll where the barns are. This is old—this is Franciscan soil. Very rocky and very stable. This was evidently a deep canyon. This mountain blew out—it was a mud volcano. It blew out on this side. We’re down three hundred some odd feet and still bringing up redwood in our well, and volcanic tuff—very deep. This is why the soils are so fragile. So the good deep soils, the soils that you farm—you can grow anything—I mean these trees will grow, but you can’t grow a crop on it. You can see where those rows end. You’re getting into that Franciscan type soil and those vines don’t do any good at all there. You know the oldtimers knew when they came in here from Germany and Europe. They settled up in these hills in good soils and stayed away from the valley floor because this is frost-free for growing vineyards. That’s why most of these vineyards were done up in these hills. But then you’ve got horrible things like up in there [pointing out the window towards a distant vineyard across the valley, high on the Mayacamas] Any farmer wouldn’t attempt to [plant there]. When you see chamise this high [demonstrating by hand a height of about three feet] you know the soil is no good. Something’s wrong with it, it’s unstable. They put those vineyards up in there—Hanna and I forget the other one—Schaeffer (spelling?). There’s other people putting vineyards in. They should never allow them to put them on those slopes in that type soil. It won’t hold and they won’t get any tonnage.

61  A: You probably have to use lots of fertilizer too.

M: Well that won’t do it if you don’t have the soil. It’s what’s under the ground that makes the vine or the tree grow. You can’t get enough fertilizer and stuff. Fertilizer will help the crop but won’t help the vine.

62  A: I suppose fertilizer is better for stuff like corn, where their roots don’t go that deep.

M: For years and years and years they thought there was no need to fertilize grape vines. Because grapes don’t take any of the elements from the soil. It was only when they started in on these new soils, that they started to [use fertilizer]. They used to put the type clone or type variety of grape, just fifty pounds or something. But now they’re putting on a hundred pounds and increasing the production. The quality goes down a little bit. The winemaker won’t admit it, but it does. I make my own wine—I just let the grapes make the wine, I don’t do anything. I used to show and then I didn’t show for a long time. I only make about five or six barrels. The last two years I’ve won the best of show down at the Vintage Festival and gotten medals from everything else I’ve made from the ranch here. That’s why Kenwood gets gold medals and stuff. These were farmers and a farmer knows his soils. I went to CalPoly and I was taught. My teachers at CalPoly—every one of them had bought ranches and tried to be farmers and went bankrupt. They knew the theory. They knew how to interpret research, they could teach you how to do it, but they couldn’t do it themselves. It’s that fine point in there and this is what occurred with the grape industry with the AXR1 that the university
recommended to everyone. Well, all of a sudden, phylloxera started in. Well, we had phylloxera. The French in 1904 said AXR1 is not resistant to phylloxera.

A: It’s been around that long?

M: The university recommended it. Now they recommend all these others, but they didn’t look at them enough. Now we’ve got black goo in. This was caused by scientists—they’re trying to get something out too fast because of the demand. You know the university herd in whitefaces—their bulls—they would never admit it and finally they did and the Hereford association wouldn’t allow them to register any more of their bulls, because they carried dwarfism. They had a herd that this man brought there of Jerseys in 1919. I don’t know—it was in the 1940s that the American Jersey Cattle Club finally said, “We will not register another one of them.” This guy says, “I’m going to do an experiment with inbreeding. Anyone knows what happens with inbreeding. He kept inbreeding the herd and getting theses Bulldog calves and horrible looking things, and still putting these bulls out, the ones that looked alright, to herds. Finally they stopped it. So I don’t know. I’m sitting here getting a lot off my mind as an old man. I don’t know what else you want to talk about.

A: Let me look at my questions here.

M: Excuse me a second. [Briefly leaves room. Interview continues on disc #2. First few seconds are missed, during which Milo begins to describe a mastodon tooth which was dug up on his ranch]—Paleontology Department at UC. It’s a pig tooth mastodon. They did a carbon dating or whatever they do and it was about a million and half years old. The tusk is in three pieces—one of them they left with us and it’s sitting over on the back of London’s desk up at the house [House of the Happy Walls]. It’s ten inches long—pig tooth mastodon

A: Someone told me that somewhere in the valley somebody found a child’s skull full of amethyst crystals. You ever heard of that one?

M: No.

A: You aware of anybody using boats on the creek up here?

M: Oh yeah. Right where the bridge goes over Sonoma Creek, up on Warm Springs Road, the first one that goes over into that property, just above that there was a dam and they dammed that water—you could sail a boat all the way up to Warm Springs [currently Morton’s].

A: That must be a couple miles.

M: Yeah, at least. They did that. Then when I was a kid there was a small dam there, but that was to get out irrigation water.

A: So that was near, what was that—Londonside swimming pool?
M: No, no. It goes into the old Pursell (spelling?) and Horne (spelling? same Ralph Horne that owned the garage in Glen Ellen?) property. It’s this side of where that big horse farm is on the left, the Zane property?

A: Yeah.

M: About there was the dam. See this was all summer resorts and stuff and that’s why they did it. People would bring their family up and stay in these cabins or tent cabins at these various resorts. There were hundreds of those resorts in this valley. O’Donnell’s had it—O’Donnell Lane [in Glen Ellen], those little houses there—of course they’ve built big ones [since then]—he had an abortion [clinic]. He was a doctor in San Francisco—he’d send the women up here to have their abortions and they’d stay in these little cabins. Across the creek, where the brickyard is, back in there, there used to be campgrounds. [I’ve] found old bottles and stuff.

A: Do you know anything about that slide that’s across from O’Donnell’s?

M: Well, there’s two slides. One is an old slide—which you go out Warm Springs Road and take the sharp turn to the right—back in there, there’s a big old slide. That thing’s been sliding since my dad was a kid.

A: You’re talking about the sharp turn before you get to the flashing yellow light?

M: Yeah. You look across and there’s an old slide over there. Then there’s one farther east or south.

A: A little closer to town.

M: Yeah. Well that happened in the 1950s. Mrs. O’Donnell phoned up and said, “Oh, your ranch is coming down in our backyard!” She was all upset and everything. That just let go and it’s been sliding ever since. That was part, I believe, of the Elsie Kohler property—it was not part of the LaMotte. There was a fifteen acre piece in there that was separate from the LaMotte place. But the other slide has been sliding since my dad was a kid. I testified in court about that two months ago. Not in court—I didn’t get to court, I gave a deposition, where the road went and everything. They claimed that the road went where it is today and I said, “No.”

A: Do you know Rich and Margie Foster? Their house washed away in the ’83 flood I think it was. Is that about where this other slide was?

M: Yeah. There used to be some big holes along in there. Some of the damage was done by people doing work up the creek—when you do work up the creek it affects what happens down below. You aren’t supposed to do it, so this was done without [permits] and some was done by the county, stabilizing roads and stuff. It changes the current and direction of the water. We haven’t really had the rains. In 1960 [was] the last [time]we had the big rains. I know the ranger over there, he was aghast--we had five inches in an hour. We had over a hundred and some odd inches of rain here [for that year]. As these storms hit and cross the valley, when they hit this mountain they drop and then they come up--like we have about a
sixty inch average. Glen Ellen[the town] has say thirty, has forty, the Forestry Station [on Highway 12 by the Glen Ellen Regional Park] has fifteen. As the storm goes across the valley it lightens up. Then you get on the other side, like Wall Road, that’s why you have redwoods [side road off Trinity Road] and it’s green over there—it gets the morning sun but not the afternoon sun. The storms hit that [ridge] and drop it in.

74 A: Are you aware of any fires happening over here on Sonoma Mountain?

M: We’ve only had a couple. The “con” [convict] crew started one about two or three years ago. Mack came up and I was talking to him and I looked up and I said, “Hey you got a fire going up there.” They were working putting a fence in or something up there and someone left a slow match. They sent in a helicopter and just doused it. There was one that started at Mrs. Dean’s, which is the upper Clark Ranch, and it burned up the side of the mountain. That’s where you see all that chamise. It burned up there and burned itself out. We went up there and circled it, but it didn’t go anywhere. We’re too wet—you don’t hear of too many fires on the other side of Trinity [either]. Wall Road, there’s never been a fire in that country. We’re too wet. Across the valley [eastern slope of the Mayacamas]—that’s burned three times in my lifetime—I mean the whole thing. I don’t know what’s going to happen when they get these new homes in. Because when that baby takes off, if those flames are a hundred feet high the borate planes can’t fly, the winds are so bad. Because of the way the canyons are they create their own winds and drafts and stuff. It’s really dangerous to be in.

75 A: The ‘twenty-three fire was just a little before your time, right?

M: Yeah. But there was one in ’28, I think it was ’28 and I was alive then; and then the a’36 and then the ’60. But there’s been a lot of inbetweens, smaller ones. The ‘twenty-three burned out Boyes Springs. Most of the buildings were damaged in the ’60 fire.

76 A: You’re talking about the ‘sixty-four [fire]?

M: Yeah. The fire chief of Boyes Springs panicked and he pulled all his radios out and was going to try to put them in over in El Verano or someplace. We lost communication then—that’s when they lost some buildings up--. Those oldtimers, like up on Moon Mountain, they told them to get out. Well Frank Canavari, he’d been through fires and stuff, he just stayed there and hosed down and let the fire go through. Hosed down his roof and you save most of it. You know he had things cleared away so he wouldn’t have to worry about a tree catching on fire. He was just off highway twelve. I fought it. I got all of Gordenkers back there where Weise’s pit is, all that flatland that Gordenker put into vineyard—he had turkey pens back there. We got all the turkeys in and boy that fire came over the top. I’d been up earlier with Kenny Weise and started his D-8, D-7 ‘round and got it out. Kenny he came barrelling back and said, “Let’s get the hell out of here. That things coming down.” I jumped on and we just tore out. I got the turkeys together with some of the men and we backfired when the fire came down. Forestry, old Ralph Matioli was in charge of it and he went up on the ridge and said, “Give me five engines.” He sent them down there and they backfired, and boy when that backfire hit that fire coming down the side of that mountain, that chamise—there were fireballs up two hundred feet high. It was just like an artillery barrage. But we saved all the turkeys [laughing]. And then it burned for two or three days. That was started by
a backfire up Adobe Canyon by the Forestry. It started up over at Torrei and burned around up toward Kenwood. And they backfired it and the damn thing got away about two o’clock in the morning. It went up over Bald Mountain and then she just shot right down the whole mountain to Boyes Springs. Those north winds started and goodbye. They had borate planes too, but they couldn’t fly them.

77 A: Too much wind and too hot, too big.
M: Yeah.

78 A: Biggest fire I’ve seen was about five years ago [1995 I believe]. But that was probably nothing compared to that one.
M: This was on for five days. I’d seen fires, I was a ranger, I was down at Millerton Lake [garbled, may be incorrect] I didn’t see a firestorm here. I didn’t consider this a firestorm. I saw a firestorm that wiped out Oakhurst, down below Yosemite. That was terrible—I forget how many people were killed, twelve or something. That thing was just an inferno. It sucks the oxygen out. Bill Derrickson was up on Trinity [Road] with a flatbed and Forestry said, “We want you to get this D-8 out of here.” So he loaded it, had the driver with him. They said, “Go out Cavedale.” He says, “I can’t make it out with this big rig, I have to go down Trinity. They said OK. He started out on Trinity and boy, both sides of the road exploded. And his old truck went [sound of an engine dying] The truck just stopped.

79 A: No oxygen?
M: No oxygen. The tractor driver, he started to open the door. Bill grabbed him and said, “Don’t open that door! This is the only oxygen we have.” Up above they saw what happened, they dropped down with their engines and knocked it down around them. Bill said that was a scary feeling. He knew what was happening when that old truck, when the engine just slowed down.

80 A: Any other stories you heard from your parents or grandparents?
M: Yeah there were a lot of people here. Glen Ellen had seven or nine hotels and eleven or thirteen bars. You just had a lot of people here. They were here during the summer. It was a recreational area and so things were used. They were replenished by fish hatcheries. My mother lived up on Chauvet Road in that big house up there, but they wouldn’t allow the girls downtown by themselves, they always had to have an adult with them. So much drinking—these fraternal clubs would come up for the day. Come up on the train and go back on the train. That’s what kept the trains here in business. We sort of stayed out of Glen Ellen. We always assisted, but we never considered ourselves as part of Glen Ellen, of the town itself. There was a lot of activity though. My grandmother Shepard, she was involved—she helped out a lot of people, [helped] get [them] started. Gave a lot of them work on the ranch here. Mrs. Meglen, I don’t know if you read that history?

81 A: Yeah, Bill [Meglen] mentioned it.
M: His father worked here as a stone mason, he worked on the pig pen. But there was a difference, and it was a sort of funny thing being Protestant. All the Catholic priests were always around asking for money because these were first generation Italians, they weren’t used to giving to the church because the church was supported by the state. Some of the poor priests [laughing] they had to come to the Protestants to get money to survive.

82 A: There was a little church on Warm Springs and Henno, right? A Catholic Church?

M: Yeah. That was burnt by someone who went through the United States and burned the old Weise barn at the same time. They were burning old churches and historic structures and stuff. Some group of oddballs.

83 A: Were there any particular places where you’d find Native American artifacts?

M: All over. I could probably take you out and show you all kinds of chips and stuff, but most of it’s been gone over. The main campsites—there was one at Kunde’s, just below Kunde’s house and one at Fern Lake. Aunt Kay Hill’s husband, Robert Potter Hill, he remembers Indians there when he was a kid. She had an excellent collection. She and Rose Gaffney were friends. Rose Gaffney was the one that owned the land out at the point of Bodega and stopped PG&E from—[putting in a nuclear power plant]

84 A: Yeah, I heard about that.

M: Anyway, those women, they’d go rob Indian graves and stuff. I don’t know where their collections are.

85 A: You said her father remembers Indians living up in the Fern Lake area? What years would that have been?

M: This was in the 1880s—those were the ones they inoculated the blankets with smallpox and shipped them up to Stewart’s Point. On this mountain, at the lake was one, right across from the cottage [Jack London’s cottage], on that hill there’s another one; at the prune orchard there’s one, Cowan’s meadow there’s one. These were hunting camps. You find bowls and stuff. The men give me stuff, I usually give it away. Find stuff all the time. There’s just a lot of artifacts. When we had the land ripped above Neil’s trailer, the flat up there, why they brought out three or four—we cracked a couple of them—they were big deep bowls. I found up in Graham Creek, before you get to Cowan’s Meadow, the Deer Camp, a little herb bowl about this big [demonstrates how it would fit in his palm]. But there’s so much of it, I think that’s all they did, was sit around and make points. In Kenwood you used to find some beautiful bird points, some really fine ones, because that was a swamp and they used to shoot birds in there. At SugarLoaf there are three or four different areas. I found all kinds of things when I went in there as a ranger. I had them on display and one night someone broke into the office and stole them. This is not one [from Sonoma Valley]—one that an Indian friend gave to me. [M shows A a stone knife]

86 A: This is what—quartz?
M: Yeah, that’s from down in Utah. He does nice work. I had some beautiful bowls here, one of them’s up at the JC. The other ones, the kids have them.

87 A: Brian’s your son right?
M: Yeah.

88 A: I’ve met Brian a few times. You mentioned to Jill [A’s wife] that you remembered her brother, Jim Herold.
M: Yeah. Where is Jim now?

89 A: He’s living, you know Skyhawk [new development along Highway 12] in Santa Rosa? He’s living there.
M: Yeah, Brian’s doing pretty good now. He bought out the company from the other guys—the Napa Valley Vineyard Management Company. This is beautiful work. London picked it up in Japan. These are old opium jars.

90 A: London picked these up too?
M: Yeah.

91 A: Is that the start of a wasp’s nest?
M: Yeah.

92 A: Is this a rock from Graham Creek?
M: No. You ever hear of stone-washed jeans? That’s the stones they put in. [both laugh]

93 A: I was guessing Graham Creek because there’s a layer of rock up that’s lighter than water. It looks kind of like that. You can chuck it in the creek and it’ll float.

M: There’s a seam—there was a diatomite quarry on the way to the ranch. That was worked on and off for years. That seam runs, you can see it right along the road and then it shoots across—

94 A: Kind of a white rock?
M: Yeah. That seam, you can see it way up at Burgers’. That material is formed by freshwater shrimps—so there was a freshwater lake that covered this area. This area is very interesting. The geological history is very complicated. That’s why because of the soils and what has happened to the soils, the way it was laid down, the way it was formed. See this mountain is so much younger, the Mayacamas is much older. So this mountain’s soils are not very stable. And yet they are stabler than some of the soils across the valley. Because that red
soil—the Goulding Clay Loam (correct?) where Kunde’s vineyard, you see that red soil. Those soils are very heavy—they’re stable. But where these guys down here cleared and it’s white soil—it’s different than our white soil here. Our white soil here is Spreckles Clay Loam. That soil is different, it’s very unstable. It’ll [garbled] and cause all kinds of problems. OK, maybe you can come up again. I don’t know if I gave you much information or not.

A: I'll look over what we did and see if there’s anything else to ask you. I appreciate your taking your time.
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Trout/Steelhead FISHING & SPAWNING SPOTS

Streams in **bold** were mentioned as spawning streams or steelhead habitat

**Agua Caliente Creek:** from ½ mile above the highway “That was a beautiful stream.”
“always trout up there.”
Basileu—10
had friends that fished it.
Lynch—68

“Steelhead used to gather at the old El Verano bridge—people would watch them. They would then go from there up Agua Caliente Creek. Would also see “grilse” trout—small steelhead about one or two pounds. Sometimes they would nest at the confluence of Agua Caliente and Sonoma Creek. From his description, these are probably rainbow trout.“
McCarthy—23-4

**Arroyo Seco:** says there were trout, “six inches at most.” above the dam
Cooke—9

**Asbury Creek:** “used to be an excellent place to catch trout”
Guffanti—6

**Bear Creek:** “full of trout” Basileu—8

“**Bundschu’s Creek**”: possibly Hyde Creek or Haraszthy Creek “a little creek you wouldn’t’ think there’d be any trout in it.”
Basileu—63

**Calabazas Creek;** “I fished in Nunn’s Canyon Creek, which is another one that people fished.”
Lynch—68-9

“There used to be a lot of steelhead come up here. I’d see as much as three, four or six steelhead in the pool [below his house] “I’ve seen them spawn right back here. [same pool]”
Meglen—37

**Dowdall Creek:** “I remember seeing a steelhead vigorously splashing it’s way up the creek.” [from description appears to be Dowdall]
McCarthy—18

“They would see runs of steelhead in a little creek that ran by the old El Verano School (just west of Verano Avenue/Arnold Drive intersection). This was a steelhead spawning stream.”
McCarthy—25
Fryer Creek:  “I could give you the names of people who caught lots of fish in that creek.”
Cannard—7

“I never fished Fryer Creek—even during my earliest days it was nothing more than a ditch.”
Lynch—70

Fowler Creek:  “We used to fish Fowler Creek too. Where the cement place is, in the summer that would dry, it got pretty arid. But early on, before May, we’d fish there.” When I asked about steelhead in Fowler, he said, “Oh hell yes!”
Castagnasso—93

“Fished that a little bit. Caught some trout there.”
Lynch—69

“Steelhead were easily caught in Fowler Creek”
McCarthy—10

Graham Creek*:  “I used to fish way up Graham Creek. I got some nice fish”
Meglen—170

“steelhead were easily caught in the tributary creeks in Glen Ellen”
McCarthy—10

“had good trout in it”
Basileu—62

“Kenwood Tributary”: crosses Mervyn near Kenilworth, “just a big gully”, “back in the ‘thirties there used to be steelhead coming up there
Guffanti—24

Nathanson Creek:  “yeah sure,” but mentions problem with sewer dam Basileu—63

“plenty of ten-pound steelhead”
Cannard—6

“Always very good trout fishing” also says steelhead came up to spawn
Castagnasso—30

“we would fish for trout from [near where Ravenswood is] all the way up to the falls.” “There was water in that creek most of the summer.”
Lynch—7

*Not definitively identified as a steelhead stream
Rodger’s Creek—spent twenty-nine years out there in dairy business. “allowed some to come and trout fish, but not to do anything with the steelhead.” steelhead were spawning there “they’d come up all the time.”

Castagnasso—31

“Fished that a little bit. Not much. Caught some trout there.”

Lynch—69

Sonoma Creek, in approximate downstream order:

Sugarloaf Ridge State Park: “there was always fish” “in the flat”

(campground area)

Basileu—6

“they were planted above the falls”

Shepard—31

Adobe Canyon: “That was great fishing, especially in April and May.”

Guffanti—26

“my Dad and I would fish what amounts to the headwaters of of Sonoma Creek.”

Lynch—8

“Falls at Golden Bear Lodge” (probably Reynold’s Falls): “that was a spot where steelhead congregated”

Basileu—13

Kenwood area: kids caught a steelhead there by flipping it out of the water with a stick

Cannard—92

“best spawning bed was where the school is.”

Guffanti—74

Kenilworth Rd area: either side of bridge was a spawning area

Guffanti—74

Glen Ellen, Warm Springs Road to Bennet Valley Road: good spot to fish

Cooke—15

“good trout fishing” right behind GEVM. “I could go out within a couple of blocks and have some nice fish, right in that area.”

Meglen—157
Sonoma Creek (continued):

Eldridge to Glen Ellen: “fishing was good”
Guffanti—4

“Once in awhile I’d walk through fishing.”
Lynch—26

“people used to fish there at the dam where the steelhead was collected.”
Meglen—40

Serres Ranch to Adobe Canyon:
“Where did we fish? Down through I guess, Serres, you know where the Serres Ranch is? Fished down from there or anywhere along Glen Ellen. Up by Morton’s [Warm Springs], along there. Along by (Golden Bear—not Golden Bear, but) Londonside, in that area, that creek [could be Sonoma Creek or Graham Creek].”
Churchill—57-8

El Verano Area:
“We seldom caught a steelhead in Sonoma Creek. They were too fast, clever, and intent on spawning. Many would enter Agua Caliente Creek where the bridge crosses Sonoma Creek now. One could stand on the old bridge and watch the steadily moving black shadows migrate upstream and enter the rushing tributary. They would splash upstream with a flash and shake of their powerful tails geaded under highway twelve and toward the eastern foothills of the Valley of the Moon.”
McCarthy—7

Sonoma (?) (Castagnasso mentioned walking down Spain St. to Sonoma Creek, so this may be one of the main areas referred to):
“fished the whole creek” also says steelhead came up to spawn
Castagnasso—27

Downstream from Sonoma to Leveroni Road:
Leveroni Dairy area (Leveroni Rd.) “Cold enough running clear water to fish for trout in that stream. Even into July.” Later specifies that it was good from where MacArthur would hit the creek down to the Leveroni Bridge. Also mentions his grandfather catching a lot of fish there. He would set up a roadside stand with some ice and he’d sell [trout] to tourists. “It was apparently quite teeming with trout.”
Lynch—16,74

Schellville Bridge (Highway 121):
“I fished for steelhead in Sonoma Creek, but only just about the Schellville Bridge.” Fish and Game wouldn’t allow you to fish for steelhead in freshwater, which began at a pool by Wrobel’s.
Lynch—29
Sonoma Creek (continued):

Helberg’s Hole: “Down there you fish for steelhead legally.” [lower Broadway]
Basileu—87

Millerick Road area (salt water) Basileu—97; Castagnasso—28

Stuart Creek “it was incredibly beautiful and wild,” “of the two creeks [Sonoma Creek at Adobe Cyn. or Stuart], Bouverie’s was always the much more special creek.” “once in awhile you’d see a steelhead that didn’t get down, a big one that didn’t get down, that was trapped.”
Lynch—11

Speaking of the abundance of trout: “We always limited out at that one, up at Bouverie’s”
Churchill—12
Descriptions of the Creeks at Low Flow

The following descriptions are arranged approximately in a “downstream” sequence—that is the ones closest to the headwaters come first, followed by those further down:

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<td>“[Agua] Caliente Creek comes down behind Fiesta Market? Just north of Verano Avenue. Then it goes up into the Norrbom Ranch. That was a beautiful stream. There’s always water up in the mountains, but down in the flats it dries, from half a mile above Highway 12 all the way to Sonoma Creek it’ll be dry in the summer.”</td>
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<td>[below Hwy 12]:</td>
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<td>“There’s one big hole back there—nothing was flowing into or out of it in the summertime—just a big round hole.”</td>
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<td>Dawson, in Basileu—11</td>
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<td>Arroyo Seco</td>
<td>“Most of the summer it gets down to about two feet in depth. Maybe three feet, there’s some deep pools that are maybe five. Of course, in the wintertime it fills up and overflows.”</td>
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<td>Cooke—7,9</td>
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<td>“They call it Arroyo Seco, but it isn’t. It ain’t “seco” [laughs because it means “dry” in Spanish], it flows all year long. It goes into a big dam that’s on the Bartholomew Park. There’s about a sixty foot concrete dam there and it flows into that, so actually it is secop from that dam on down through Old Winery Road, that’s the creek there, where it comes out. But it will be dry in the summer because it’s dammed up up here, down at Bartholomew’s. But it flows all year round on my property”</td>
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<td>Cooke—7</td>
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<td>Creek Name</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<td>Calabazas</td>
<td>“There was never that much water in there. It wasn’t that big. It’s a little creek.”</td>
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<td>“They pumped the water out of Sonoma Creek [when highway 12 was first paved]. So evidently there was not enough water in Calabazas Creek, it might have been a dry year then. Some years it’d run all year, and some years it don’t. I think after the big fire in the early ‘twenties [1923], when all the vegetation was off [it didn’t run].”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fowler/Carriger</td>
<td>“Fowler Creek dries up quickly. If it don’t rain for awhile—I don’t know if it’s running right now with this dry spell we had. As you went way up, you’d find holes up there, there’d be fish in them. Where the cement plant is, why there was nothing there. In the summer that would dry. Some fellows contended that there was water there underneath the rocks and gravel. But it got pretty arid. Early on, before May, we’d fish there.”</td>
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<td>Graham</td>
<td>“There used to be a fall where Heppy’s road goes in, the first road to the left going up Sonoma Mountain. It was part of Wake Robin. There used to be a big fall in there and a big pool we used to swim in there as kids. When that dam broke, it just wiped it out. It wasn’t rock it was sort of that volcanic tuff, but it was hard. It was only five or six feet high, but to kids it was pretty high. They had this nice pool—we’d dive in there. It just wiped it out. That pool was about six feet [deep].”</td>
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<td>Nathanson</td>
<td>[Upper Nathanson, Gehricke Rd. area] “There was water in that creek most of the summer. I don’t remember ever going up there in late August or September so I can’t really give you a picture. Certainly when fishing started in March, April, May and all the way through June and early July there was water in that creek. The deeper</td>
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<td>Creek Name</td>
<td>Description(s)</td>
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| Nathanson | holes where we would every now and then go for a swim were smaller than this office. [approximately 10’ X 12’]  
  “[The pools were little teacup kind of things,] maybe a little narrower. There were some that were big. Maybe the deepest parts were maybe three or four feet deep. The water stayed cool; it was clear water. There was still water running from hole to hole, it wasn’t just an isolated stagnant pool. With that particular creek, Nathanson, I didn’t really fish it all that much because, even in those days, it was a pretty small creek. It didn’t have a lot of water in it and it just wasn’t as good fishing as some others.”  
  Lynch—7,8 |
|          | “Out here on Lovall Valley Road it used to dry there fairly quick. Then as you went back there was more water and the holes were more frequent.” [refers to 1920s]  
  Castagnasso—80 |
|          | “Nathanson Creek in the lower regions pretty well dries up in the late summer. It used to get down to where there would be holes. But the water would be underneath the ground a little bit. No over the top flow as it got down. Out here on Lovall Valley Road it used to dry there fairly quick.” [referring to 1920s]  
  Castagnasso—79-80 |
| [between Spain & Napa Streets] | “[The pools] weren’t very deep. I think probably the deepest ones were maybe a couple of feet. Now again, we’re talking about mostly in the summertime. Typically there was still water in the creek. It wasn’t a lot of water, but it was clear water, it ran and it pooled, and to my recollection there was never a year when it dried up. There was always water in the pools, but not a lot.”  
  Lynch—5 |
| Rodgers’ | That was always a live creek. See that creek ran pretty much the year round. It diminishes in the late summer, but it runs all year round.”  
  Castagnasso—88 |
Sonoma Creek

“Off the end of Green Street in Kenwood. Right there was a swimming hole. I remember the ropes hanging. But I couldn’t tell you how deep that was.”

Basileu—105

“The best spawning bed was [behind] where the school is [current Kenwood School]. Randolph’s [pointing to a spot near the spawning bed], is a swimming hole. Three spawning beds [two upstream, one downstream of Kenilworth bridge]. A swimming hole also [upstream of bridge].”

Guffanti—74-5

“Just before you get to Kenilworth Road. All the kids got together and built a dam and we had a good swimming hole . . . about six feet [deep]”

Guffanti—11-12

[Wake Robin to Bennett Valley Road]
“You could swim in [the pools]. They might have been five feet, the deepest ones. They were fairly shallow but big enough for good size fish.”

Cooke—14

[Below Warm Springs Rd. about 0.6 miles from Arnold, where the creek and the road make the first sharp turn to the right (facing upstream)]:
“There used to be some big holes along in there.”

Shepard—73

“Up at Jack London Estate. We didn’t put a dam there because the water was deep enough. Where it makes the corner. On the other side was the pond that London built on his estate—that was on the bank above there. Right there the water came in against a clay bank and it was deep enough where we could dive off the bank. We swam that for quite a few years. I guess it was about six feet at the deepest. It was deep enough to dive in. But it was small. Probably a couple places not much bigger than this kitchen [12’X12’]. It wasn’t very big, but it was big enough to dive in. The swimming part was bigger than the part where you could dive.”

Meglen—15-19 (same area mentioned by Shepard above.)
Sonoma Creek (continued)

“I remember the swimming holes in Glen Ellen. There used to be a steel bridge over the creek and we used to jump off there into the swimming hole—the swimming hole was underneath the bridge. [The hole was] seven, eight feet [deep]. It was dammed up. We just filled a lot of sacks with sand and built a dam.”

Guffanti—2-3

“I think it was over my head. It was probably four feet deep maybe. It wasn’t very deep. Five feet. Right under the bridge in town, we used to get green mossy stuff in the summer as the water would get low. There was always water, but late in the summer it would get kind of green under the bridge.”

Churchill—28, 119-20

“Where Shone’s has the store now. O’Rook—we used to help him build a dam, a pretty good dam there, about four foot high. That would back water up maybe four hundred feet, way up underneath the bridge. That was for quite a few years, and then when he wasn’t helping with the dam anymore, we used to put a dam right underneath the bridge, maybe a couple feet high. That wasn’t a very big swimming hole, but the water was about four or five feet deep.”

Meglen—9 Downtown Glen Ellen

“Where it was flat and wide, maybe fifteen [feet in width] Maybe some places it was narrow it’d be down to ten feet. And then there was pools where it would widen out to maybe twenty, twenty-five feet, shallow pools to the next riffle.”

Meglen—23 Glen Ellen area

“We [also] went to Pender gast Hole. When you go down Yell Road, just about at the end of Yell, it would be down in that area. We built a dam for a quite a few years there. We’d be swimming there. And then we’d have just a board for a diving board. Just like a two by twelve. I’ve seen some pictures of people swimming down there. Somebody has some. And then the bank was pretty high, maybe about twelve feet. We’d dive off the bank. I suppose [the depth was] about five or six feet right there.”

Meglen—10-15; ¼ mile below the Glen Ellen Bridge
Sonoma Creek (continued)

“Pendergast was a big hole in Glen Ellen. Maybe eight feet [deep]. No [dam on it], not really, not when I was a kid. We had big holes, all the way from the bridge.”

Shepard—45-7

“In the summertime I would say it’s only a couple inches, two or three inches. It wasn’t very deep, you couldn’t float a boat or anything. You could cross it by just getting your feet wet. Now in the summertime I think it’s bone dry through El Verano, down through here. Years back [the fish] could go between [holes], there was enough water.

Basileu—58-9 El Verano area

“We always swam out here at the end of Spain. Right there where Sonoma Grove is. The creek makes a kind of a turn in there and there was a good swimming hole there. We never did much swimming down below. But down as far as Wedekind’s, we swam down there some. But that was always the favorite one, out there in El Verano. Then there was another one just up the creek a little bit further, where the creek made another turn up in there. Kids from around El Verano swam it. Right across from where the Rovis [sp?] lived. There was a swimming hole in there.”

Castagnasso—13

“Usually during the summer the creek settled into many large pools with a steady run of water between them.”

McCarthy—8 (speaking of El Verano area)

“Where the road makes a sharp turn there, right down in there was always a good hole.[corner of Oak St. and Riverside Dr.] That contingent always swam there and we always swam down behind Sonoma Grove a little further down. We found pools that was eight, ten feet deep. Not all, but every now and then as the creek made a turn or something, then you’d get those kind of things. Al Dutill [sp?] owned property there that adjoined Sonoma Grove. Al Dutill’s place was out on Riverside there, just past Nicholas [corner of Riverside and Petaluma Avenue].

Castagnasso—17, 18

“The swimming hole in El Verano was right off of Oak Street, right on the corner there. It was just [a natural pool,
Sonoma Creek (continued)

no dam]—fourteen feet deep. There was lots of these holes that were deep enough for swimming. But I don’t think there was too many as deep as Oak Street where they’d climb forty feet up a tree, had ropes hanging down where you’d swing and ‘Wheee!’

Basileu—87-90, 103

“On Riverside Drive below Little Switzerland and before the Franquelin Bridge was a wonderful creek location called “Devil’s Rest.” It consisted of a series of three or four pools and riffles. It was an exciting adventure to swing [on a rope] out over the shiny reflective surface and drop down into the sparkling, cool refreshment from a height of fifteen feet or so. It would be several seconds before we emerged from the depths for a breath of air . . .”

McCarthy—14

Later he “confirmed that the Devil’s Rest area mentioned in his piece is same as swimming hole mentioned by Bill Basileu at the foot of Oak Street. There were two deep spots—the north pool, which was 10-12 feet deep and the south pool at 9-10 feet deep. He describes Devil’s Rest as being 100 feet downstream from foot of Oak Street.”

McCarthy—30

“There was enough water in that creek that you could find good trout fishing on running, cold water all the way down there into July. By August and September the water was getting pretty warm and pretty low and the trout would find probably shady spots that were still there but we didn’t fish for them at that point.”

Lynch—16, Leveroni Road bridge to trailer park/MacArthur Street extension

“Down as far as Wedekind’s (Watmaugh Rd.), we swam down there some.”

Castagnasso—13

“If you got eight, ten feet, that was a good swimming spot.”

Basileu—105 (Sonoma Creek in general)
January 31, 2001

Dear [Name],

It was good to speak with you today on the phone. Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for the Sonoma Ecology Center’s Oral History Project. To familiarize you with the kinds of things we’re interested in, I’ve enclosed a list of questions to look over before my visit next Wednesday. These are just a loose framework; I expect your interests and experiences will lead to further questions and conversation.

If you have any photographs of local creeks, fish, wildlife, or the landscape of Sonoma Valley, please have them handy for the interview. Besides spurring memories, I’d like to scan them electronically (with your permission of course) for our archives. I have a portable scanner, so they’ll never leave your possession. I’ll also bring maps to help pinpoint places along the creek.

To let you know a little about myself: After spending several years traveling the world, my wife and I settled in Glen Ellen in 1989 (her family has been here for about 30 years.) I’m a writer and the author of the local bestseller *Stories Behind Sonoma Valley Place Names*, and have taught for nearly ten years with California Poets in the Schools. At various times I’ve also worked as a carpenter, gardener and in an Alaskan salmon cannery. One of my favorite pastimes is exploring our local creeks and wild areas.

I look forward to meeting you in person and hearing your memories and stories about Sonoma Valley. See you on February 7th at three-thirty in the afternoon.

Sincerely,

Arthur Dawson
What sorts of outdoor activities did you do when you were young?
Do you have any photographs of the Valley and/or the creek from those days?
Where were your favorite swimming and fishing holes? What did you call them?
Where was the deepest hole? How deep was it and the other pools?
How well did the pools connect up? Could fish swim easily between pools?
Did you ever use boats in the creek, particularly in the middle or upper watershed?
What were the kinds and sizes of fish that you saw?
In what sorts of numbers did you see the fish?

How big was the forest along the creek? Was it passable or impenetrable?
Did the forest extend much beyond the banks of the stream?
What grew under the trees? Any plants that are no longer common? Any new plants?
Where were the redwood groves? How abundant were they?
How was the tree cover over the creek? Was the water mostly shaded or sunny?

What kinds of animals did you see? What was the most common large mammal?
What parts of the valley were especially rich with wildlife?
What kinds of birds were common around the creek?
How have public attitudes towards wildlife changed over the years?
Are there any animals that have disappeared? Any new animals that have appeared?

Which creeks had water all year?
How wide and deep were the channels? Has the flow changed?
How would you describe the water temperature? Cold, cool, lukewarm, warm?
In general how did the creek look—clear or colored? What colors?
Have any streams gone dry? Which ones and when?
What did the streambeds look like? Were they sandy, rocky or covered with pebbles?
Did anyone straighten the streambed or try to change its course?
Are there any current or former ponds or reservoirs on your property?
Were any springs destroyed or developed? How much water did they produce?
Do you remember any hot springs, especially ones that are no longer there?
Do you remember any marsh reclamation projects? What was the extent of tidal flow?
Any memories of earthquakes, landslides, fires or floods?
Did these change the creek or springs?

How did people get their water? From ground wells, creek water etc.?
How much water was being pulled out for irrigation? (Both groundwater and creek water)
What were the depths of the wells? Where were the dams? Which ones are still there?
Was any dredging or other work done in the creekbed itself?
When were the roads (dirt or other) constructed?
Do you remember finding indian artifacts in particular places?
Do you recall any stories you heard from your parents, grandparents or oldtimers?
Arthur Dawson
SEC Oral History Project
5026 Warm Springs Rd.
Glen Ellen, CA 95442

September 4, 2001

Dear ______________,

It was a pleasure meeting and interviewing you in July. I’ve enclosed a copy of
the transcript for you to look over. (my penciled corrections have already been entered on
my computer). It is pretty much verbatim, with minor editing for readability.

We’ve already talked about the release form, or “Deed of Gift Agreement.” Once
all the interviews are completed, we plan to place copies of the transcripts in local
libraries and also make them available to the public. In addition, I’ll be writing up a
report (including interview excerpts) for scientists and others interested in our watershed.
I’ll send you a copy when that comes out. Eventually we may also publish the
information in other forms. There is a space on the “Deed of Gift Agreement” to add
restrictions on use of the material if you wish. Call me at 996-8727 if you have questions
about any of this.

I’ve included an envelope so you can return the transcript and “Gift Agreement”
with your comments and any corrections. Your lifelong involvement with the valley and
observations of our creeks and environment provided a lot of interesting and useful
material. Again, thanks for the interview. I look forward to crossing paths with you again
one of these days.

Sincerely,

Arthur Dawson
DEED OF GIFT AGREEMENT

I, ________________________________, do hereby give to the Sonoma Ecology Center Oral History Project the recordings and transcripts of my interview(s) conducted on ________________.

I authorize the Sonoma Ecology Center to use the tapes and transcripts in such a manner as may best serve the educational, scientific and historical objectives of the Oral History Project and other Sonoma Ecology Center programs.

In making this gift, I voluntarily convey ownership of the tapes and transcripts to the public domain*.

Donor: ________________________________ Date: __________________

*As donor, I wish to place the following restrictions on the use of this material:

1.

2.

3.

Received by ________________________________ Date: __________________
(representing the Sonoma Ecology Center)
[QUESTIONS USED AS REFERENCE BY THE INTERVIEWER, more in depth than the list sent (p. 320) with the initial letter. No single interview covered all these topics]

OPENING QUESTIONS

How long have you lived in Sonoma Valley?
What sorts of outdoor activities did you do when you were young?
Do you have any old photographs of the Valley and/or the creek?
What are your earliest memories of the creek?
Special places you remember along the creek?

RECREATION

Where were your favorite swimming and fishing holes? What did you call them?
Other special places—big boulders, ledges, waterfalls etc.?
Where was the deepest hole? How deep was it and the other pools?
Were boats floated on pools behind dams or in unimpeded stream?
Did you ever use boats in the middle or upper watershed?
What kinds of fishing was practiced? Nets, poles, pitchforks, dynamite?
What were fishing regulations in those days? How closely were they followed?

FISH

What were the kinds and sizes of fish that you saw? Chinook/King Salmon? Coho/Silver Salmon? Steelhead? Lampreys? Bass, carp, native warm water—suckers, squawfish,
What was the biggest fish you remember being taken from the creek?
In what sorts of numbers did you see the fish? (small runs to “walk bank to bank on their backs, etc.)
What was caught in the summer?
What size trout caught in the summer?
What was the best month for fishing for different fish?
Has the timing of runs changed?
What are downstreamers? (post-spawn?) Look emaciated.
Logs & woody debris in stream-nursery habitat? Create cover

RIPARIAN HABITAT

How big was the forest along the creek? Was it impenetrable or passable?
What grew under the trees? Any plants that are no longer common? Any new plants?
What names for plants did you use?
Notice Vinca major or star thistle?
Where were the redwood groves? How abundant were they?
Any clearings/cleaning/ logging? When & where?
Amount of tree cover over the water? Deep shade or exposed to sun?
Did it extend way beyond the banks of the stream and how far?
Have the banks gotten steeper and has the channel gotten deeper?
Were the banks more stable in the past or eroding more now?
Where were the old crossings? Changes caused by culverts or pipes? Greater drops downstream of culverts or pipes?
What sorts of wildlife lived there?
More turtles in the past?
HYDROLOGY

Which creeks had water all year? 
How big were the channels? Width and depth? Has the flow changed? 
How well did the pools connect up? Could fish swim easily between pools? 
What was the water temperature? 
In general how did the creek water look—clear, colored? What colors? 
How much did temperature and color change at different times of the year? 
Have any streams gone dry? Which ones and when? 
Have you noticed any lateral movement of the creek? Banks undercut? 
What did the streambeds look like? What were the particle sizes like? 
(10 – 45mm is median size for salmon spawning = 1 inch diameter average) 
Have you noticed the streambed change from cobbles to silt or vice versa? 
How have the pools changed over the years? How have they degraded? 
Did anyone straighten the stream or move it? 
Any current or former ponds or reservoirs on your property? When were they built? 
Do you remember any destruction or development of springs? 
Where were these springs and how much water did they produce? 
Do you remember any hot springs? 
Do you remember any marsh reclamation projects? What was the extent of tidal flow?

CATASTROPHIC EVENTS

Any memories of earthquakes? Did they change the creek or springs? 
Noticeable landslides beginning at any certain point in time or place? 
What happened during the ’63-’64 flood? 
When and where did catastrophic events occur? Fires, floods etc.

WILDLIFE

What kinds of animal life do you remember? 
What was the most common large mammal? 
Do you remember seeing any of these animals—Otters, beaver, bear, mink, muskrat, coyotes, badgers, bobcats, mountain lion, martens & fishers? 
What parts of the valley were especially rich with wildlife? 
What kinds of birds were common around the creek? Osprey, eagles, dippers, kingfishers, egrets, herons? Varieties of birds, abundance? 
What did you notice as you walked the creek? Anything, like piles of crawdad shells, which indicated what was happening at night? Any other creatures you noticed invertebrates like crawdads, shrimp etc? Any change in abundance of crawdads? 
Did you eat any wildlife? 
How have attitudes towards wildlife changed over the years? (personal & public) 
Are there any animals that have disappeared? 
Spotted skunk has disappeared—when did this happen? Reports on Adobe canyon (be specific to difference with striped skunk. Civet is another name for spotted skunk) 
Ring-tailed cat? Yellow-billed cuckoo—extinct now in the valley 
Any new animals that have appeared? These would include domestic cats & possums. 
Has there been a change in the numbers and kinds of rabbits or other animals? 
(Huge increase in jackrabbits, decrease in bush rabbits up in Alexander Valley. 
Is the situation similar here? Why do you think it changed?) 
Did sheep and cattle farmers have problems with coyotes and mountain lions? How did they deal with the problem?
LAND & WATER USE/HUMAN IMPACTS

How did people get their water? From ground wells, creek water etc.?
How much water was being pulled out for irrigation?(Both groundwater and creek water)
When did different parts of the valley go on local or regional water systems?
What were the depths of the wells?
Any noticeable stream level changes as wells were put in?
Where were the dams? Which ones are still there? What sort of changes/evolution did they go through? (earthen dam to concrete etc.)
When did stream obstructions go in? For example the Larson dam?
Any channel diversions or channels filled in?
Any attempts at flood control—culverts, erosion control? Did they work or fail?
Was any dredging or other work done in the creekbed itself?
When were the roads (dirt or other) constructed?

Do you remember finding indian artifacts in particular places?
(usually they camped along perennial creeks, which may no longer be there)

Where did logging occur and how was it practiced?
Were there waves of deforestation? When and where did they happen?
Did logging cause noticeable effects on the streams?
Tell me about other land uses you remember: grazing of cows, horses and sheep.
Noticeable overgrazing?

FOLK GEOGRAPHY:

What were the names and locations of your favorite fishing & swimming holes?

Locations of

Tire Hole
Helberg’s Pool
The Pepperwood Tree
the Piling
the Willows
Pear Tree Hole
(all mentioned in the fish and game file)

MISCELLANEOUS

How have attitudes changed towards agriculture and grapes?
Did you notice any massive oak diebacks?
Were the oaks regenerating better than they are now?
Stories you heard from oldtimers, grandparents etc.?
Additional people who might have information?
Historic Gravel Mining Sites
Sonoma Creek Watershed
Sonoma Valley, California

- Gravel mining sites
- Sonoma Creek
- Tributaries of Sonoma Cr.
- Roads
Historic Swimming Holes
Sonoma Creek Watershed
Sonoma Valley, California

Natural Pool
- ▲ 5 to 6 feet
- ○ 7 to 8 feet
- ● 8 to 10 feet
- ◊ Greater than 10
- ■ Unknown Depth
- ⚖ Summer Dam with Pool

Sonoma Creek
Streams
Major Roads

Sites on this map not necessarily open to public access.