

# UC Santa Cruz

## Agricultural History

### Title

Frank Barba, Filipino Labor Contractor, Watsonville, California, 1927-1977

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## **Introduction**

Frank Barba, a Filipino resident of Aromas, California, was interviewed in 1977 by Meri Knaster, an editor at the Regional History Project, as part of a series of oral histories documenting local agricultural and ethnic history.

Frank Barba was born in 1898 in San Nicolas, Ilocos Norte, northwest of Manila, on the largest of the Philippine islands. His family owned some land on which rice was cultivated by sharecroppers; another portion was reserved for home use. Barba received a high school education during the period when the Philippines were a U.S. possession. He learned English and some American history in a school with an American principal.

Barba came to California in 1924 via a short stay in Hawaii, where he joined his aunt and uncle working in the sugar cane fields. After working briefly as a busboy in San Francisco, and as a night clerk in a Stockton hotel, Barba arrived in Watsonville in 1927 to take over the management of a Filipino labor camp that had already been established by his aunt Apolonia Dangzalan. Dangzalan's oral history is also published by the Regional History Project as part of this Agricultural History Project series.

Barba worked as a labor contractor from 1927, at first independently, and then for the Birbeck Company of Aromas, which grew lettuce, string beans, broccoli, and sugar beets. When the company went out of business in 1967,

Barba purchased from them the property he lived on in 1977, the original site of the labor camp. At the time of this interview in 1977 Barba was 78 years old, and semi-retired, supervising school children in the fields for various growers in the area.

The system of labor contracting for agricultural field workers arose from the particular characteristics of California agriculture. California's extraordinarily diverse and specialized crop production requires peaks of intensive field labor for each specific crop. Also, since production is an almost year-round enterprise extending from the southern interior valleys up to the northern counties, a calendrical cycle has evolved, requiring field labor during specified times with different crops. Lettuce production, for example, continues about nine months per year, being produced in the Imperial Valley during the winter and coming into production in Monterey County in the spring. Workers migrate northwards as the crops reach maturity.

The labor contracting system also arose from the growers' need for an intermediary who would find and hire labor as it was required. Since the latter third of the 19th century various ethnic groups have filled this need. The earliest groups were the Chinese, Japanese, and Hindustani; later Mexicans, Filipinos, and dust-bowl refugees comprised the bulk of the migratory labor force. Because of the language and cultural barriers between the ethnic field workers and the growers, the labor contractor's function as

an intermediary became essential. The labor contractor usually was, and continues to be, of the same ethnic background as his workers. Serving as a recruiter, interpreter, transporter, supervisor, bookkeeper, cashier, and providing room and board, he or she acted as an organizing and mediating influence in bringing workers and jobs together in what was a mostly uncoordinated labor market. The system of labor contracting has developed and predominated in areas where there has been a heavy dependence upon a foreign, non-English speaking, unskilled labor force.

Filipinos began to be recruited by sugar growers in Hawaii in significant numbers when the Gentlemen's Agreement of 1907 and later, the Immigration Act of 1924, depleted the Japanese agricultural labor force. Many eventually trickled over to the West Coast. They were mostly young, single men with limited education and skills. Many intended to save a little money and return home to their families.

As a result of the Spanish-American War (1898), the Philippine Islands became U.S. territory and Filipinos were considered "wards" or "nationals," legally entitled to enter the continental U.S. Unlike the Chinese, the Japanese, and later, the Mexicans, the Filipinos' legal status precluded deportation. However, as Carey McWilliams pointed out: "Their status was ambiguous. They were not eligible for citizenship [but] when they traveled abroad, they used United States passports."

In 1920 5,603 Filipinos lived in the United States, 2,700 of whom were in California. When California growers began to fear that Mexican immigration would be restricted by a quota under the Immigration Act of 1924, the influx of Filipinos became important in terms of agricultural labor. In 1923 alone, 2,426 Filipinos entered the state of California. By 1930 their numbers had grown to 30,500, replacing the Chinese, Japanese, and Hindustani as the predominant Asian group comprising the state's agricultural labor force.

Welcomed at first as model workers, Filipinos, by the late 1920s and early 1930s, had become the object of racism, replicating the experience of the Chinese and Japanese before them. Watsonville itself was the locus of anti-Filipino race rioting in 1930s. Local newspapers recorded the racial violence that erupted during the month of January 1930.

With the passage of the Tydings-McDuffie Act in 1934, which granted independence to the Philippines after a ten-year period of commonwealth status, legal exclusion of the Filipinos commenced. A yearly quota of fifty was established and those citizens of the Philippine Islands who were not citizens of the United States were henceforth considered aliens.

Interviewer Meri Knaster first learned of Frank Barba when she contacted his aunt Apolonia Dangzalan in her liquor store on Main Street in Watsonville for an interview as part of the Agricultural History Project series she conducted in 1977. She wrote in her notes: "When I explained the nature of

the Regional History Project and our desire to interview a Filipino labor contractor, she immediately called him and handed me the phone. We spoke briefly; he was quite willing to participate.”

Knaster wrote in her field notes:

My first interview with Barba was also my first trip to Aromas. I found a quiet little community tucked away in the hills nine miles southeast of Watsonville. Barba’s modest home is on gently sloping land, just shy of 28 acres. From the front porch one can look down on the orchards fanning out below. There are several out-buildings on the property. Around the house grow beautiful and unusual plants and flowers, the proud results of Mrs. Barba’s efforts. Several yards away, on 6 1/2 acres leased by two Mexican families, grow strawberries.

During the interview we sat comfortably in the living room. The sound of vehicles passing on the road was audible but did not interfere with our conversation. Barba, a soft-spoken, modest man, recounted his personal history and life as a labor contractor, sometimes laughing good-humoredly. He displayed an easy willingness to answer the questions I posed.

Due to funding and staffing limitations, Frank Barba’s oral history was tucked away for 27 years in a safe at the Regional History Project. We are pleased to finally publish this first-hand account of small-scale labor

contracting in a highly productive agricultural county of California. Barba's narration is an informative, interesting, and significant contribution to the history of agriculture and to the history of Filipino immigration in Santa Cruz County.

Copies of the manuscript are on deposit in the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley; and in Special Collections at McHenry Library at the University of California, Santa Cruz. The Project is supported administratively by Christine Bunting, head of Special Collections and Archives, and Acting University Librarian, Robert White.

—*Irene Reti*  
Regional History Project  
McHenry Library  
University of California, Santa Cruz  
August 2004

## **Early Life in the Philippines**

**Knaster:** What were you born?

**Barba:** In San Nicolas, Ilocos Norte, in the northern part of the Philippines. I attended school there until seventh grade. Then I went to the capital of the province, to high school. We've got Filipino teachers and an American principal. During my third year [of high school] I was sick and we moved to Manaoag, Pangasinan. I went to Lincoln High School. Then I moved back to my hometown, and went to high school [until] my graduation in 1924.

My grandmother took me when I was a little baby. When she died, my aunt kept me. She was like my mother. She saw me through high school, and [brought] me [to] Hawaii and then [to] the United States.

I got two sisters back in the island. One brother left while was young and I don't know where he went, a lost brother. And one brother here in San Francisco, now.

**Knaster:** Did your family have a piece of land?

**Barba:** Yes, a little bit to support us. Everything that is grown down there they can sell, and we don't buy much. And costs cheap, too.



**Knaster:** Did you learn how to work in agriculture there?

**Barba:** No.

**Knaster:** Did you help cultivate the land at all?

**Barba:** Oh no, that's just home gardening stuff. Nothing to learn out in the field, because we have property and some tenants down there to work. So they raise rice and vegetables. In our place they have a little piece of land to plant some vegetables so we don't have to buy them.

**Knaster:** Could you describe to me the area where you lived, what it was like, what your life was like as a boy? What did it look like? What was the climate?

**Barba:** Back in the provinces we have two season—wet season and dry season. Six months of rainy season and six months for dry season. Once in a while there's a big storm, flood. The climate's hot most of the time, but when it rains it is nice and temperate.

**Knaster:** Was this a flat area, or did you live in the mountains?

**Barba:** It is a flat area. It's in the little town.

**Knaster:** Is it near the ocean?

**Barba:** Well, not very far. Let me see, about maybe from here to Santa Cruz.

**Knaster:** What were your houses built of?

**Barba:** Well, what do you call that—it is like tree doorstraw. They grow it out in the field outside town. We cut them and use them for roofing. The sides are bamboo. Some high-class houses, they use wood for walls and flooring, and sometimes galvanized roofing, but most of the houses are made of bamboo with straw roofing.

**Knaster:** How many rooms did you have?

**Barba:** One big room. And a kitchen.

**Knaster:** Was the kitchen separate?

**Barba:** Separate, yes. Walk down to the kitchen where you put water. For water for washing we have a well on the land.

**Knaster:** What did you use for fuel for cooking?

**Barba:** Wood.

**Knaster:** What kinds of foods did you eat?

**Barba:** The principal food we had is rice. And meat. Pork. Sometimes beef.

**Knaster:** Did you raise any livestock yourselves?

**Barba:** Oh yes. We raised pigs, had some chickens.

**Knaster:** So basically your family was self-sufficient. They provided everything they needed to eat.

**Barba:** Right.

**Knaster:** What about for clothing?

**Barba:** Well, we buy material and my aunt and my mother can fix it. And some ready-made clothing, which we get down near the capital of this province.

**Knaster:** Have you ever gone back to your home town?

**Barba:** Just once, in 1955.

**Knaster:** Had it changed very much?

**Barba:** When we went down, not very far after the war, everything was all demolished, but now they said everything was built. Now it looks pretty good, they said.

**Knaster:** Do your sisters still live in that town or someplace else in the Philippines?

**Barba:** My eldest sister live in that same town, and my younger sister live in another town.

**Knaster:** Was it not right for girls to leave the Philippines to go to Hawaii, to the United States? Is that why they stayed?

**Barba:** No, but they didn't like immigrating very much. They don't have the interest to go away. They'd rather stay there. Maybe they are afraid, because it was just a long ways from the islands to come over here.

**Knaster:** It could be a very frightening experience to leave the place where you grew up, where you're secure and you have a family.

When you were in school did they teach English?

**Barba:** Oh yes.

**Knaster:** At what age did you start learning English?

**Barba:** I don't know, about six or seven years old. They were teaching English then from first to seventh grade.

**Knaster:** What, in all of the years that you were going to school, did they teach you about the United States?

**Barba:** Yes, we had the history of the United States.

**Knaster:** Well, how did you picture the United States to be?

**Barba:** Oh, we picture it as very rich. We would like to go. It's very exciting. A rich country and a beautiful country. I would like to see and maybe make a better living.

## Hawaii

When I graduated in 1924 [in the Philippines] they were taking people to go to work in Hawaii. I tried to get in there [for] free transportation, but I was not qualified. So my aunt [who was by then in Hawaii] sent me some money for transportation. When I got the money I left and went to Hawaii.

**Knaster:** How old were you at the time?

**Barba:** I was twenty-six years old. During this time the transportation is very slow. I got this Presidential Line and it took me about three weeks to get to Honolulu. The name of the ship was the President Cleveland. We stopped in China and Japan for a little bit.

**Knaster:** What were the conditions like on the ship for sleeping and eating?

**Barba:** Oh, you have quarters and beds in there. It's not so modern like nowadays, but it was comparable.

**Knaster:** Were people very crowded together?

**Barba:** Oh no, in their room. You have a cabin, or you have a bigger room where a family can stay. We used to play there—lots of recreation, too.

**Knaster:** What kind of food did they provide? Was it Filipino food?

**Barba:** Yes, because the cooks were Filipinos. But most of the officers and owners of the ship are Americans.

**Knaster:** Was the ship mostly for Filipinos going between the Philippines and Hawaii, or was it a kind of luxury liner that also took people on vacation?

**Barba:** Oh, it was just a big ship. Because in those days we didn't even have airplane coming down there yet.

**Knaster:** Were you sick during the passage?

**Barba:** Yes, the first week I got sick in bed. Every passenger had to go up on top deck and they check them. I was so sick somebody would come and help me and bring me up.

**Knaster:** Do you remember whether there were women on the ship too, or only men?

**Barba:** Oh yeah, there were women passengers, too. Vacationers or adventurers.

**Knaster:** Were they Filipino women?

**Barba:** Different nationalities. Japanese, Chinese, and American too, because in those days there were lots of American families there. They live down there for a long, long time.

**Knaster:** Were there families that went to Hawaii specifically to work?

**Barba:** No, not in that ship. They have a different transportation if they are contracted as laborers.

Then when I reached Honolulu my aunt and uncle met me and took me down to the plantation where they were working.

**Knaster:** Was it pineapple or sugar?

**Barba:** Sugar cane. I stayed for about three months with them.

**Knaster:** Were you working on the plantation?

**Barba:** I scaled the sugar cane that comes in for about a month. Just getting about one dollar a night.

**Knaster:** One dollar a night, boy!

**Barba:** Yes, thirty dollars a month, used to be cheap then.

**Knaster:** How many hours did you work?

**Barba:** Well, from 6:00 a.m to 6:00 p.m. But the load doesn't come in too quick, so I have plenty of time to rest and maybe snooze a bit. I worked



down there for a little over a month, and then I came to the United States in April or May 1924.

**Knaster:** Did your aunt stay in Hawaii?

**Barba:** Yes, they stayed on there. They wanted me to come and see how life was here in America.

### **Coming to the United States**

I came over and stayed with my relatives in San Francisco for a little over six months, because I got a job as a busboy and a waiter.

**Knaster:** Who were these relatives?

**Barba:** Oh, my cousin and second cousin. They've been down here in the United States for a long, long time.

**Knaster:** Do you remember when they migrated here?

**Barba:** No, I don't.

**Knaster:** Were they from the same town?

**Barba:** Yes.

**Knaster:** What were they doing in San Francisco?

**Barba:** Well they were working . . . waitresses or busboy, dishwasher or cook.

**Knaster:** Had they come here as single people, or as a family?

**Barba:** Single people.

**Knaster:** Were they only men, or were there women too?

**Barba:** No, mostly men.

**Knaster:** Most of the time it seems that Filipino people came to the United States as single people, and mostly men, rather than families.

**Barba:** Right. Mostly men. Then after a while the man maybe go back and bring his wife.

When I liked the place, I wrote to my aunt in Hawaii. So they came over and joined me here. They stayed for a while in San Francisco, but they didn't work. I stayed in San Francisco for a while. I went and visited them once in a while in Stockton. They were working on Sherman Island in asparagus. I

worked as a busboy during the day, and as a waiter at the Saint Francis Hotel at night. I think I was getting about sixty dollars a month.

**Knaster:** Was that hard work?

**Barba:** Oh, not hard work, just collect the empty dishes, and put it in tray and take it down to the kitchen. But I like waiter better because it's a cleaner job, and you get some tip, too.

One day when I went to visit them, my friend who was insurance agent was talking to me. He was a neighbor of mine where I was born. He said, "Why don't you come here and look for a job? They are looking for a night clerk." So I got the job in Stockton in a hotel, renting rooms. I worked there for more than a year. Then my aunt and my uncle moved to Watsonville.

**Knaster:** Do you know why they came to Watsonville?

**Barba:** They figure that there's lot's of work in agriculture . . . lettuce and whatnot. When they came here they rented a couple of big houses in town. Keeping of boys. There's a lot of boys wanting to work.

**Knaster:** Filipino boys?

**Barba:** Yeah, all Filipinos then. They had a camp, and about fifty-five boys, sending boys to work for everybody who needs some help. There was this one big company from Salinas. He has a camp at the foot of Warner Hill in Watsonville. [The company] told them if they want to move in, you stay in the camp and keep boys and board boys. One day when I came down from Stockton to visit them, they said, "You better come back here and keep this camp and we move to another."

### Labor Contracting

I moved to Watsonville in 1927. I kept the crew down here in town for several years. All I did is look around and contact some farmers and big companies. Every afternoon we set course for some companies who need some boys. We did that all the time. I had the driver. I didn't have to drive the boys. They have a big truck to haul them. So we worked that way all the time, and then one year there is one American guy who comes down and contacts me and say, "How do you like having a license for a contractor and we will get an office here in Watsonville?" "Well, let me think it over," I said, because at that time we don't have to have a contractor's license.

**Knaster:** It wasn't a law then?

**Barba:** No, it wasn't, I don't think, because they didn't enforce it. But the advantage of having a license is that you can move all over, and then charge

the boys for transportation and things like that. "All right," I said. We tried it. We tried for not very long because this partner of mine died, so we sold the office that we rented. I just stayed home and keep up my license, so any question about it, well I have my papers to show them that I have a license.

I worked there until [1937], when the manager of this company that owns this property now, the Birbeck Company, (we used to work for them now and then because whenever they needed boys they contacted me) told me, if you want to move to Aromas and stay there and keep boys down there and keep the camps [it would] be all right. That way I don't have to move around too much to look for some work for the boys.

So in 1937 I gave up my camp in town and move in here. All my boys renting down in town move in with me. We have a big house here—how many rooms, about seven? Two-story building that can hold thirty-five boys. [After] two or three years I gave up my license, because the son of this company owner told me, "Why don't you give up your license, because you are not working. We can pay the boys in our checks. If you don't have license you can't write checks to pay the workers." I said all right. That give me about twenty-five dollars richer in my pocket. I was paying twenty-five dollars [for] the license.

I was keeping boys and then the war broke out. I lost all of Filipinos. So he said he give up.

**Knaster:** What was the Birbeck Company growing?

**Barba:** Lettuce. sugar beets, beans, and broccoli, sometimes. Everything. It was growers and shippers.

**Knaster:** You didn't start out like some people, working in the fields.

**Barba:** No, no.

**Knaster:** Did you ever work in the fields?

**Barba:** Once in a while I help but not [regularly].

**Knaster:** So you first became a labor contractor in Watsonville in 1927?

**Barba:** Yes.

**Knaster:** And that first year you got a license. Did you have to be bonded?

**Barba:** Only for the payrolls. Because the big companies we work for don't pay you. Maybe they thought you run away with the money.

**Knaster:** Was that a problem? Did a lot of people run away with the money?

**Barba:** There was a big problem about that. A man run away with thousands; he never paid his boys. He left.

**Knaster:** Did that happen very much?

**Barba:** Not much. It happened once or twice that I heard.

**Knaster:** Were all the labor contractors Filipino?

**Barba:** No, some of them are Mexican now.

**Knaster:** They were Mexican and Filipino. Were there ever Japanese or Chinese?

**Barba:** Not in my time. They are not contractors; maybe they're farmers. They are good farmers, those Japanese.

**Knaster:** How did you arrange for labor contracts when you first started out?

**Barba:** Well, I just keep a lot of boys, and those farmers know that there is a place where boys are gathered for work. They call me or they come down and talk to me.

**Knaster:** How did you get the Filipino boys together in the first place?

**Barba:** Boys know I have a camp or a house. I can help them to find work. They just come down.

**Knaster:** When you made arrangements with a grower for labor, was it usually an oral or a written agreement?

**Barba:** By word, not written.

**Knaster:** What kinds of things did you make the agreement for—for how many people; how much the fee was going to be; for what they would do?

**Barba:** I never made any agreement with them. They just paid the standard wages. Sometimes they said, "I'll give you this for yourself, for commission, or for your transportation." But I don't ask them. I never ask them. Like in thinning, if they boys want it for ten dollars, the farmers give me twelve dollars. That's two dollars for me and ten dollars for the boys.

**Knaster:** A little commission.

**Barba:** But it is not a written agreement.

**Knaster:** Did you ever have any problems with growers where they backed out of an agreement?



**Barba:** Only one time in the early years [it was] hard for me to collect money. I lost a little bit on that. One farmer close to Salinas I worked for didn't pay me the whole wages.

**Knaster:** Was this in lettuce?

**Barba:** Yes, working in vegetable.

**Knaster:** He promised to give you a certain amount of money and then didn't give it to you?

**Barba:** Yes, the wages of the boys.

**Knaster:** What happened afterwards? What did you do?

**Barba:** Nothing. I just disregarded it because I couldn't do nothing.

**Knaster:** Did the workers get paid?

**Barba:** No they didn't get paid, at least not very much anyway. But those boys didn't bother me too much. They didn't squawk. They knew that I wasn't able to collect so they didn't charge me anything.

**Knaster:** Did you ever have any other kinds of problems with growers? Did they try to interfere with your work, or mistreat the workers in some ways?

**Barba:** No.

**Knaster:** Did they mix in?

**Barba:** No, most of these farmers never came around because they were working. Once in a while the bosses come around and tell me and the boys how to do it . . . they don't bother us too much.

**Knaster:** They would leave everything up to you.

**Barba:** Yes.

**Knaster:** Did you ever get into a situation where you could not fulfill the contract, where you had to break the contract in some way? You know, where a grower asked you for a certain number of workers in your crew, and then you couldn't finish the harvest or something—did that ever happen?

**Barba:** We don't make any contract to start and finish. Whenever a farmer comes and asks for some help—like for thinning, I give them somebody. Then if they need hours again they come to me. If I can give them somebody,

all right. If I don't, then they go to another place to get some help. We don't contract for work from the beginning to the end.

**Knaster:** What kinds of crops did you work with?

**Barba:** Well, we thin lettuce, hoe lettuce. We pick beans, string beans, and pull carrots, and cut broccoli and pick apples, sometimes.

**Knaster:** Did they do this in the 1930s, the 1940s, and the 1950s, or have the kinds of things that they do changed?

**Barba:** No.

**Knaster:** I understand Filipino workers are specialists in asparagus.

**Barba:** Oh, yes. In Stockton, for a lot of them. But then some of them came over here. I had a lot of boys from Stockton that had been working in asparagus. But I think they like to change working environments. Yeah, they are good cutters of asparagus.

**Knaster:** Did they do sugar beets?

**Barba:** Oh sure they did sugar beets. Before they used to top it themselves. No machine yet. That was in the 1930s and 1940s, before they perfected the

machine to top. They used to plow the field, and the boys followed them and just top it, put it in file. Then they go back and pick it up and throw it in the truck.

**Knaster:** Did you ever have members of your family work in the fields?

**Barba:** Oh yes. I put my son to work, too. [laughter] When the high school closes they hire students. The foreman and manager had children, too, and they like them kids to work.

**Knaster:** Do they get paid the same as the rest of the workers?

**Barba:** Oh yes. But they don't work as long as the regular workers.

**Knaster:** Has your wife helped you in the business?

**Barba:** Oh yes, keep books.

**Knaster:** Does she ever do things like prepare the meals for the boys?

**Barba:** No, we have a cook.

**Knaster:** Does anybody else in the family help out in the business?

**Barba:** No.

**Knaster:** Did you keep the books yourself before you got married?

**Barba:** Yes, there wasn't very much to keep. There's even now expenses I don't leave in.

**Knaster:** You did not have to keep records for taxes or anything?

**Barba:** No, not for a long, long time.

**Knaster:** You just paid the workers?

**Barba:** The workers are paid by check of the company.

**Knaster:** The company would give you the check, and then you would distribute it to them. Was the check in the name of the workers, or in your name?

**Barba:** In their names. If it is all in my name then I have to have a license for a contractor.

**Knaster:** I see. So this is only since 1937 that you're doing it with the check from the company?

**Barba:** Before then we work for a private farmer. The farmers give one check to me and I cash it and pay the boys with the cash.

**Knaster:** You said that you had your workers in all the labor camps here. But I know some labor contractors would go around and just pick them up and get them for the day. Did you ever do that?

**Barba:** Yes, if we are short, then we have to pick up some boys in town. There are a lot of them down there standing up waiting for pick-ups.

**Knaster:** How early would you pick them up?

**Barba:** If you are supposed to work at five or six o'clock, had to pick them up about a half an hour before, so that they had time to go to the field and start in time.

**Knaster:** Were they paid at the same time as the regular workers?

**Barba:** Oh yes.

**Knaster:** Everybody would get the same wage.

**Barba:** The same wage.

**Knaster:** What hours of the day did you work? When did you start your day?

**Barba:** Oh, if it is too cold, or there is frost, we start a little late. Otherwise we start at six o'clock. That is for thinning and hoeing. If we cut lettuce we start about five o'clock.

**Knaster:** But did you have to start even earlier to get all the men together?

**Barba:** Oh yes, we used to feed them around 4:30. Sometimes earlier than that.

**Knaster:** And until what time did you work during the day.

**Barba:** If we have much work to do, we work until five or six o'clock in the afternoon, ten, twelve hours. But if it's slack, we work about eight hours.

**Knaster:** Did you work every day of the week?

**Barba:** Oh, sometimes even Sundays we work.

**Knaster:** So did you usually work five days, six days, seven days?

**Barba:** Mostly five days.

**Knaster:** Then you would be off on Saturday and Sunday. Did you usually have to work Saturday and Sunday if it was a big harvest?

**Barba:** Oh yes. But in those days they don't pay overtime or things like that. Not like now. That's why these companies didn't care if we worked on Sundays, because they don't pay more.

**Knaster:** Did you get paid for a job once it was finished, or did you get money from the grower every week or every day?

**Barba:** I used to go collect a check after we done with the business. Maybe a week after or earlier than that if I need the money very bad. Then I go right after it when we finish the job.

**Knaster:** So the grower would give you money. Would he give you cash?

**Barba:** Yes. That's why I go right to the bank and pay the boys.

**Knaster:** If a grower gives you three hundred dollars for a job, how much do you take for yourself and how much do you give to the boys?

**Barba:** Oh, I give it all to them. I don't take a commission from them. But sometimes if I work for a commission, like in piecework, then I have to dock that commission from their wages.



**Knaster:** How much percentage is the commission?

**Barba:** Well, if this job is twelve dollars an acre and the farmer says, "I'll give you two or three dollars an acre more," that's for me. The three dollars is for me and the twelve dollars an acre is for the boys. Sometimes these good farmers, to get me to work for them, they give me a little bit. But I didn't ask for a commission because I didn't have the right to.

**Knaster:** Did the workers give you something from their money?

**Barba:** No, they didn't.

**Knaster:** They would only pay you for the housing and the food?

**Barba:** Yes, I would charge them so much a day.

**Knaster:** How much did you charge a day?

**Barba:** During the early days we charged them fifty cents a day room and board. But in the 1940s we charged them . . . I think \$1.75 a day, room and board. In the 1930s everything was cheap and I charged them fifty cents a day.

**Knaster:** Who decided how much the workers were going to get? Was it always the workers' decision, or was there bargaining for the pay?

**Barba:** No, there was a standard wage. There was no competition on that. Only if somebody need awful bad. If the farmer need you to go fast, then they give the boys a little bit to do a faster and better job.

**Knaster:** Did the amount of pay change during the season? For example, at the beginning of a harvest, did they pay a certain price and then at the end of a harvest pay another price?

**Barba:** No, it always stayed the same. Until the company's association put up another price. Like now they pay more a box to cut lettuce than before. Before they used to pay about fifteen cents a box, but now they are paying more than twenty cents a crate of heads of lettuce.

**Knaster:** What were the wages like in the 1940s?

**Barba:** Maybe seventy-five cents an hour. I don't remember.

**Knaster:** How did you keep track of how much work somebody was doing?

**Barba:** Oh yeah, we had a pocket book for that.

**Knaster:** Did you just write it down?

**Barba:** Yes.

**Knaster:** Did they have tickets?

**Barba:** No. Write it down.

**Knaster:** Did you check each time they finished something, or only at the end of the day?

**Barba:** At the end of the day I ask them how many hours they work. That's how I keep track of it. Then I just add it and figure when I go to collect for their money.

**Knaster:** You would write it down how much each worker did, or did you just keep in your mind?

**Barba:** Keep it in mind.

**Knaster:** Were there ever bonuses for the workers, during the harvest?

**Barba:** No, no bonus.

**Knaster:** Were they ever paid during the job, or only at the very end of the job?

**Barba:** At the very end of the job. Only if the boys need money very bad I [lent them money] and then when I pay them I deduct it out.

**Knaster:** You would give them credit. Were you working at anything else all those years?

**Barba:** No.

**Knaster:** So your whole income was from being a contractor?

**Barba:** Yes.

**Knaster:** You said you had somebody with a truck to transport your workers? Whose truck was it?

**Barba:** It was mine at first.

**Knaster:** What kind of truck was it?

**Barba:** It was a Chevrolet truck.

**Knaster:** Did you buy it new?

**Barba:** Oh yes, I buy it new. It was 1920 when I move in here and I still got them.

**Knaster:** Was it an open truck, like a pickup.

**Barba:** Yeah, an open truck. A bigger one than the pickup. I have sides, until I put a top inside with an enclosure.

**Knaster:** How many workers could fit in?

**Barba:** About forty.

**Knaster:** Were there seats in the truck?

**Barba:** Yes, I put benches on the sides and one in the middle.

**Knaster:** Was it in good condition?

**Barba:** Yes, otherwise [laughter] it broke down on the way.

**Knaster:** Did you take care of it? Did you know how to be a mechanic?

**Barba:** Oh, no.

**Knaster:** You had someone do that for you?

**Barba:** Garage people. Take it down to the garage when it gets sick.

**Knaster:** In those days did you have to have insurance for the truck?

**Barba:** Oh yes.

**Knaster:** Did you ever charge the workers for transportation?

**Barba:** No.

## Labor Camps

**Knaster:** I'd like to talk a little bit about the labor camps you had.

**Barba:** When I move in here, to this camp, I gave up the place in town, the two or three houses we rented about two or three blocks from Main Street, on Bridge Street. [It's called] Riverside Drive now.

**Knaster:** How many men could live in a house?

**Barba:** The biggest place in there about fifteen. The other one was around that [size] too. The third one is a kitchen, but we have different rooms where I stay too. I had about thirty to thirty-five people altogether in the camp.

**Knaster:** Did the men sleep in the same room, or did they have separate rooms?

**Barba:** Oh, in the same room, if it's big enough.

**Knaster:** How many could sleep in a room?

**Barba:** We had three or five boys in one big room.

**Knaster:** Were there communal bathrooms?

**Barba:** Yes.

**Knaster:** Who would take care of things like the men's laundry?

**Barba:** They do it themselves. We have a big bathroom in the house and they can wash in there.

**Knaster:** Did they clean the place too, or did you have someone to come and clean?

**Barba:** The cook used to clean the house.

**Knaster:** And you lived with them too?

**Barba:** Yes, I live in one room in the big house down there.

**Knaster:** Did you give them mattresses and sheets and pillows and towels?

**Barba:** Oh yeah, the company furnished the bed and things. But they buy their own blankets.

**Knaster:** Did they buy their own clothes, too?

**Barba:** Oh, yeah, yeah. We don't furnish them.

**Knaster:** Were you ever called to help the boys with their personal problems?

Did they look to you for help?

**Barba:** Oh, yes sometimes they need help and they have to come to me and I help them.

**Knaster:** Did you provide any entertainment for them?



**Barba:** I let them play a little. I bought them volleyballs, net and ball and we used to play.

**Knaster:** What about liquor?

**Barba:** Oh no, no.

**Knaster:** What about cockfights?

**Barba:** No, I don't want any in my camp. I didn't like it. There is some place they go to. But not in my place.

**Knaster:** And music—they would have to go to other places for these things?

**Barba:** Yes.

**Knaster:** Did the workers ever try to go to school too, to study a little bit?

**Barba:** No, none of them did.

**Knaster:** During the work season did the workers ever get time off?

**Barba:** You mean did the company give them a vacation and pay them? No, they never did.

**Knaster:** Were there times when they didn't have to work, for example a special holiday, or did they always have to work?

**Barba:** Oh yes, on holidays, why if we have something to do they are asked to work. If they don't, well, that's all right with the company. Sometimes on holidays like Thanksgiving mostly, because that is during the season of the company, they buy us some goats or sheep to serve these boys. Or they give us turkey.

**Knaster:** What if the weather is bad, do you still have to go and work?

**Barba:** No, we don't have to, if it's raining like that, no. If you start in the morning and the wind blows hard you have to stop.

**Knaster:** Do they get paid anyway?

**Barba:** No. They are only paid when they work.

**Knaster:** So what if it rains for five days and they can't work? They can't make any money!

**Barba:** Well, sure [laughter] it's just tough luck because they don't pay them.

**Knaster:** Then how do they manage? Where do they get money from?

**Barba:** Well, what they keep during the times when they work. If those boys need some money and they don't have any, I trust them. I give them credit if they ask for it.

**Knaster:** What happens if they get sick? Who takes care of them?

**Barba:** Well, we call a doctor, put them in this hospital, on their expense. Unless they get hurt from working, then the company will have to pay the expenses.

**Knaster:** But otherwise it was not your responsibility.

**Barba:** No.

**Knaster:** Did they get lunch breaks during the days.

**Barba:** Oh yes.

**Knaster:** And were there any rest times, or did they just have to work straight through?

**Barba:** Before they used to give them a fifteen-minute break twice a day. In the morning fifteen, and in the afternoon fifteen. But lately, they ask the boys

if they want to work straight, even the lunchtime. They give them half an hour lunchtime but they pay straight.

**Knaster:** How much does a worker make in a day?

**Barba:** Well, if the standard wage is three dollars an hour, if they work ten hours, that is thirty dollars.

**Knaster:** But that's now. In those days they didn't make that much.

**Barba:** No, in those days if they work ten hours and fifty cents an hour, that's five dollars a day.

**Knaster:** Do you provide water for them?

**Barba:** Oh yes. We put those big cans in the truck for them to drink.

**Knaster:** Where did you get the water from?

**Barba:** From before we leave. But if they use it all during the day, why, we go and get some from the house of the farmer, or something like that.

**Knaster:** Was there anything that the workers used to complain about?

**Barba:** No, there is nothing. Only like we come across a farmer that are very strict. And he come down and mess around and look around, and fuss around and then they squawk about the kind of work. Like one time the boys didn't want to work for them no more. That's it, so we strike him.

**Knaster:** Did a worker ever quit before finishing a job?

**Barba:** Yes, sometimes.

**Knaster:** For what reasons?

**Barba:** For being too hard for him, or something like that.

**Knaster:** Did you ever have problems with your workers? For example, they would be late, or they would complain, or they would talk on the job, or they would fight . . .

**Barba:** Not out in the field. Sometimes in the camp they would fight . . . minor manner of problem, that can be fixed right away.

**Knaster:** Did you ever have problems with workers destroying property or stealing something?

**Barba:** No.

**Knaster:** Or they would get drunk?

**Barba:** Oh yes, they would get drunk all right. [laughter] And there was one guy who got crazy, talk bad and make trouble a bit, even tried to burn the place.

**Knaster:** You had workers who tried to burn the place?

**Barba:** Yeah, there is a couple of them that we send to the crazy house, Agnew.

**Knaster:** Really! What did they try to burn? The labor camp?

**Barba:** Well, when I asked them about it, they are just like dreaming, somebody was going to try to induce them to do something like that. They are crazy; they have to do it. So we have to take them down to the crazy house.

**Knaster:** Did you have to fire any of your workers?

**Barba:** No, I never kicked them out, because if there is something the farmers don't like, I tell them. I explain to them and they behave. I don't have to fire them.

## **Labor Organizing**

**Knaster:** Did the workers ever want to go on strike?

**Barba:** No, they never mention anything about a strike.

**Knaster:** Did they want to join a union?

**Barba:** No, but before there was a union you had to go compulsory, not like now you have to sign up all the time like in 1976, when this election for teamsters and farmers . . . Chavez. They had to go and sign but we foremen were not supposed to join the union. Only the workers.

**Knaster:** Do you remember that anybody in the 1930s came to organize your workers?

**Barba:** I don't remember.

**Knaster:** Anyone came from a union?

**Barba:** No, not in my place.

**Knaster:** In 1934 they went out on strike for lettuce in Salinas. People got very excited. Three thousand workers went on strike. Do you remember that?

**Barba:** Oh no. We were not affected here, I don't think.

**Knaster:** Well, I heard [the organizer] had a labor camp and people got very upset because of the strike and they went and burned to the ground his labor camp.

**Barba:** Yes, I think I heard that but it's a long time ago.

**Knaster:** How has the development of unions affected your work? Has it made it harder for you that the workers are unionized?

**Barba:** Yes, it is a little harder, because before the election the company I'm working for belong to the teamsters [union]. They don't hire you there unless that company belongs to Chavez. The company belongs to teamsters. We can hire everybody that wants to come to work if we need them.

**Knaster:** Do you think it's important to have unions, or do you think it works fine without unions?



**Barba:** Well, just for me, I think it's finer without restricted unions like this union they have now. The boys are more satisfied because they can come and work anytime. Not like now you have to go and report every day, and then pay fees every month, union fees.

**Knaster:** Do you think the system works better if you get the workers together, or there's a union to get the workers together? Do you think it's necessary to have unions if there are labor contractors?

**Barba:** I don't think so. It doesn't figure. Because then you can easily hire some boys without the interference of the union.

**Knaster:** Have you lost workers because of the union?

**Barba:** No, because I only work for the company now. But all these boys that I am watching, they say: I don't like this union; I don't like that one. They don't like it.

**Knaster:** Do you remember when you first came, was the general way to get workers through labor contractors, or was there another way to do it?

**Barba:** Oh, they can just go and contact boys in houses. These small farmers do that. But the company, they always depend on contractors, or bosses, foremen.

**Knaster:** Do you remember many contractors from the 1930s and the 1940s?

**Barba:** No, here in Watsonville there was one that I know, but he died recently, Ramirez. And some small contractors too. But not very popular, don't have any camp.

## Labor Laws

**Knaster:** When you worked as a contractor were you aware of any laws that were regulating your activities, any legal restrictions?

**Barba:** About the boys or what?

**Knaster:** About your work. Was there any law that said you have to do this and you have to do that? Or were you able to do whatever you needed to do, and not worry?

**Barba:** Well, there is books in there that tells you what to, but there's no restriction that I can't do it.

**Knaster:** What kind of a book?

**Barba:** Oh, like a guide or something, names of different contractors, something like that.

**Knaster:** Was that a government book?

**Barba:** Did I buy that book or what? Oh, somebody sent, like a pamphlet, you know, with the names in it.

**Knaster:** When you had the camp in town did any officials ever come to inspect it?

**Barba:** No. Like this sanitary inspection? No, no one.

**Knaster:** What about when you had the camp here?

**Barba:** Oh yeah, once in while, but they contacted the company first, and tell them about what they want us to do and then the company will send somebody to fix it.

**Knaster:** So you didn't have any problems. Do you know about the Farm Labor Contractor Registration Act? In 1963 they passed a law saying exactly what a labor contractor had to do. Do you know about that law?

**Barba:** No, I didn't.

**Knaster:** You don't have a license any more.

**Barba:** No. One year after I was here the company told me that I don't have to have a license as a contractor because they pay the boys themselves.

**Knaster:** So once you started working for them in 1937 your work was a little bit different.

**Barba:** Oh, a lot different, yes.

**Knaster:** And this land that you live on now belonged to the company in those days?

**Barba:** Yes.

**Knaster:** Did the company pay you a regular salary to run the labor camp?

**Barba:** Yes, wages as a foreman.

**Knaster:** Did they pay you by the hour?

**Barba:** Yes. I do not remember how much this company paid me. I think it's more than the rest of the laborers.

**Knaster:** So do you think you got a dollar an hour?

**Barba:** Oh yes.

**Knaster:** And did they increase that all the time?

**Barba:** Yes, when the year comes increases a bit.

**Knaster:** Are you still working with them now?

**Barba:** No, when the old man died in 1962, the son tried to run the business for about three years and then he couldn't take it. I suppose it was because he's not built up for agriculture. He gave it up. So then I was retired until this company who has a Filipino manager asked me to help them once a while. Once in a while he pay me so much an hour to go and watch the boys.

**Knaster:** What is the name of this company?

### **West Coast Farm**

**Barba:** West Coast Farm on Beach Road.

**Knaster:** So, do you still have to organize workers for them? Or do you just go to watch them?

**Barba:** Just to watch them.

**Knaster:** They pay you to supervise. Would it be too personal to tell me how much they pay you now? I'm trying to see how the wages have changed.

**Barba:** Last year they paid me by the week. Before they used to pay me by the hour, like \$3.50 an hour. And then a little bit at a time it raise up, until last year they pay me regularly by the week. They give me about two hundred dollars a week.

**Knaster:** How much time are you working for them now?

**Barba:** I'm watching the school children. When the school closes I start working for them, [until] about a week before it opens, because they give the boys and girls one week grace. But they let me work yet a little bit after that. So I work a little bit and I stamp celery. It's muddy sometimes, too wet to go through so I [but] I don't want to, I can rest, and then next year if they call me again, why, I'll go down and help. About June, when the school close.

### **Changes in Labor Contracting**

**Knaster:** Do you see that being a labor contractor has changed very much from the 1920s, to the 1930s, and 1940s?

**Barba:** It's pretty much the same.

**Knaster:** Do you remember any names of the growers you dealt with in those years?

**Barba:** Oh you know, Japanese farmers.

**Knaster:** Mostly small farmers?

**Barba:** Yes except this big company, Birbeck, that I work for.

**Knaster:** Were they usually Japanese growers?

**Barba:** Oh some Italians, and some white farmers.

**Knaster:** Were they German or Yugoslavian?

**Barba:** Yes.

**Knaster:** Did you ever form work crews for the orchards, or just for the fields?

**Barba:** Just for the fields.

**Knaster:** Did you find any difference among the growers if you were dealing with Japanese farmers, with white farmers, or with another kind of farmer?

**Barba:** Yes, well Japanese a little bit stricter in doing some work. Most of these other nationalities are satisfied with the way I tell my boys to work. Sometimes these Japanese don't even want the boys to wear a glove. Because the way they planted before are all very thick. It's not like now, [when] they plant mostly far apart. They don't like you to wear a glove because it is easier to pick one plant with a finger without any gloves.

**Knaster:** So it was harder working with the Japanese farmers than with the others.

**Barba:** Yes, the boys didn't like it very much at first. But after a while they didn't care. Because the boys find out, if they are beginners, it's cool in the morning, you know, they want to have a glove. But then when they get used to it then they didn't mind. They find out that it's easier and faster to work if they don't use gloves.

**Knaster:** Did you work for the same growers every year, year after year, or did every year you work for different people?

**Barba:** No, the same every year. Sometimes if a new grower comes, give them help, but mostly the same growers every year.

**Knaster:** In one season, how many different growers did you get boys for?



**Barba:** Four or five. They stayed the customers mine. Until I come to this company. Then I didn't bother supplying anybody, because I always supply this company. I only work for this company.

**Knaster:** Did the growers ever tell other people to go to for contracts?

**Barba:** Oh yes, sometimes they told me to go and see somebody that needs help. But I don't make contract with them. Just verbal word. I go ask them if they need somebody. If they do, how many? Then I give them.

**Knaster:** Does a grower usually deal with one contractor at a time, or will he go to several contractors for workers?

**Barba:** If one contractor cannot supply him, then he can go to the other camp.

**Knaster:** Did you ever work in another county, or only in Santa Cruz County?

**Barba:** Well when I work steady for this company, sometimes they buy lettuce in Gilroy or in Salinas. So San Benito County, Santa Cruz County, and Monterey County.

**Knaster:** You had to move around a little bit.

**Barba:** Yes, Springfield, and then Salinas.

**Knaster:** When you had to move around with the company did your workers go with you? Or did you find workers in that town?

**Barba:** Oh, I had my own workers. So I bring down to any place for the company.

**Knaster:** When you went to another place did you bring them back every night?

**Barba:** We bring them every night. We lug the boys in a truck and go to work there. Afterwards, in evening, we come home.

**Knaster:** So the fields were never very, very far away. It wasn't like down in the Imperial Valley, or some place like that?

**Barba:** Oh, no, no. This company of mine never worked in the Imperial Valley.

**Knaster:** Did you ever arrange any contracts with women growers?

**Barba:** Never. They were all men.

**Knaster:** What exactly would you do for the grower? You would get the boys, and would provide the transportation to the fields. Was there anything else that you did? Did you have housing for the boys, too?

**Barba:** Yes, I board them too.

**Knaster:** And meals?

**Barba:** Board and room, yes.

**Knaster:** Did you also do any kind of bookkeeping? Did you keep records for the workers?

**Barba:** Oh yes, I keep my bookkeeping.

**Knaster:** You did that yourself. And then you would pay the workers yourself?

**Barba:** Yes.

**Knaster:** Did you supervise them in the fields?

**Barba:** Yes, I go down there and look what they are doing, but I don't have to stay with them, because I had my driver to watch them, and show them what they wanted them to do.

**Knaster:** Oh, so your driver was also like a foreman?

**Barba:** Yes.

**Knaster:** What kind of arrangement would you make with him? Did you pay him a certain amount?

**Barba:** No, the farmers would pay him. That's usual. And being a driver of the truck, I don't charge him board. But I don't pay him for driving.

**Knaster:** You would give him a place to live and the farmer would pay the driver?

**Barba:** Yes, like the regular workers.

**Knaster:** That was included.

**Barba:** I never charged them any.

**Knaster:** Now they have a toilet in the field. Did they have those things then?

**Barba:** No, we never did.

**Knaster:** So you didn't have to provide any kind of facilities? Did you have to give your workers tools to work with?

**Barba:** Oh, they buy themselves.

**Knaster:** Was it up to you to distribute boxes in the fields for them to put the lettuce in?

**Barba:** No, no. These farmers never cut their lettuce. I don't give boys to cut the lettuce. Only the shippers cut lettuce.

**Knaster:** So you were never involved in the picking part.

**Barba:** In the early days the main job was to provide thinners, workers for thinning the crop, and then pulling it.

**Knaster:** Was there any quality in a worker that you looked for? Did you want only young, single men, or did you just accept any worker who came?

**Barba:** No, [they have] to be old enough.

**Knaster:** How old is old enough?

**Barba:** Seventeen maybe, or eighteen.

**Knaster:** And you only accepted them if they wanted to live in your camp.

**Barba:** No, if they live someplace and they want to work, they can come if I need them. I don't force them to stay in my camp.

**Knaster:** Did you have workers who didn't live in your camp?

**Barba:** Oh yes. Neighbors.

**Knaster:** Did you have more who lived in your camp, or more who lived outside?

**Barba:** More who lived in my camp. I had two, three houses. Sometimes farmers needed more, so next door there's people that are close to us and they come and help.

**Knaster:** If your workers didn't live in the camp, where did they live?

**Barba:** In apartments or houses nearby in Watsonville.

**Knaster:** Your work crews, were they mostly Filipinos?

**Barba:** Yes, just during those early days.

**Knaster:** And in the Thirties?

**Barba:** Mostly. Until after the war. Most of the Filipinos that I had went to the service. Only a few come back, so I had to get some other nationalities then. After the war there were not many Filipinos. Some of them immigrate to other places. Some of them stayed in the Islands, back home maybe.

Then in 1942 the United States and Mexico sign a contract giving them laborers to the United States.

**Knaster:** The Bracero program.

**Barba:** Yes, the Bracero program. So my company took some. But on top of that once in a while there are some wetbacks coming in. These immigration officers were very hot then. They come and raid the place once in a while. Every day they keep some boys and bring them down across the border, but next day they come over again. The same boys.

**Knaster:** Even now?

**Barba:** Even now there is some. Once in a while catch a lot of them. But I'm not keeping boys now, because I'm retired.

**Knaster:** Since you have worked with other nationalities, do you prefer one kind of worker over another? Who were your best workers?

**Barba:** I like to take Filipinos better than Mexican. Mexicans are sometimes stubborn. You can't tell them something. And they don't work too good and most of the farmers squawk. Then it is my fault.

**Knaster:** I see. Your Filipino workers, were they all immigrants?

**Barba:** Yes, they were aliens. At this time the Philippines belong to the United States.

**Knaster:** During those years were you aware of any laws that were affecting immigration of Filipinos, of the Mexicans? Do you know what kind of laws at the time said you could immigrate, or you couldn't be an immigrant?

**Barba:** No, not these early years. Because when I came over here the Philippines belonged to the United States. Most of the people who were here during the early days [had] immigrated to Honolulu, and then come over here. So, we were not so aware of these immigration officers.

**Knaster:** Was there a limit in those days?

**Barba:** No, nothing in those early days.



**Knaster:** There was no quota in the 1920s?

**Barba:** I don't think so. There was a lot of people.

**Knaster:** The reason why I asked was because I remember there was a law passed in 1934, and then only fifty Filipinos a year could migrate to the United States. I was wondering if that had any effect on your work. Did it mean that you had fewer workers when they weren't coming over?

**Barba:** No, because I had enough old-timers. It wasn't a problem. I used to hire these [people that we call] wetbacks now. Our locals. But the trouble with these locals is that they don't stick around much. They work one week and then lay off for another week. So we didn't really depend on them.

**Knaster:** Was there a problem having people from different nationalities working together?

**Barba:** They work together all right. Sometimes in your camp they argue or fight a little bit, but in the field they work all right together.

**Knaster:** When you had these other workers, were they also single men or did they come with a family?

**Barba:** Single men, because they couldn't live in the camp if they are with their wives, unless somebody lives not too far with their family. They come and work but they don't live in the camp.

**Knaster:** Did you ever organize women workers?

**Barba:** No.

**Knaster:** How large were the crews generally? What was an average size for a job?

**Barba:** About twenty-five [workers].

**Knaster:** Did the numbers of workers vary according to the crop that they were working on?

**Barba:** Yes.

**Knaster:** For example, if they were working with lettuce, how many did you need for a job?

**Barba:** In harvesting lettuce? When we start cutting lettuce with this company we use a wide truck that goes through the field. I have two boys on

each side and three boys at the back, that's seven. Sometimes we need four trucks. That's seven times four is twenty-eight.

**Knaster:** What about for sugar beets?

**Barba:** Before they used to plow it themselves, and then the boys go down and top them and put it in a pile. I don't need very many in there. If it's not a very big piece then you need about nine or ten.

**Knaster:** How big could it be, how many acres?

**Barba:** The biggest one I had is about twelve to fifteen acres.

**Knaster:** Were you able to provide steady work for these boys? For example, lettuce and sugar beets don't come out at the same time, do they?

**Barba:** No, no.

**Knaster:** Let's say one month they work on lettuce, one month they work on sugar beets. What else do they work on?

**Barba:** The company used to plant lettuce, and then sometimes when the lettuce is over the cauliflower comes, or broccoli, and that is done in the early

parts of the winter. Sometimes in summer, after finishing the lettuce, they have string beans to pick.

**Knaster:** So there would always be another crop.

**Barba:** Until about December. December, January, February. Sometimes if the weather is good they can plant the lettuce early. And about February to thin them. But sometimes, like this year, they were not able to plant early, so the boys start late. They had about three or four months vacation, these workers in vegetables.

**Knaster:** Do you remember what it was like here during the depression?

**Barba:** Well during the depression it's hard to go out and work. We were getting about fifty cents an hour before the depression. When the depression came, it went down to twenty-five cents, and as low as fifteen cents. But then if you buy bread, it's only seven cents a loaf. And you buy eggs, only about ten cents a dozen. Everything is cheap. Those boys that we kept in the camp, we board them and we house them, and they pay fifty cents a day for house and lodging. We didn't make very much, but that is helping everybody.

**Knaster:** Was there work during the depression?

**Barba:** Oh yes, there was work. There was work but they pay little.

**Knaster:** Do you think that people suffered during the depression?

**Barba:** Oh, we did suffer a little bit. Enough money to live on, but not enough money for leisure, for going to the show and things like that.

**Knaster:** Did you think that people didn't have food to eat during that time?

**Barba:** Well, the people outside maybe were crying a little bit, but those that are staying in the camp we managed, because we are responsible, because we feed them and look work for them. We still have few money and we buy groceries and stuff like that that we need.

**Knaster:** Did you ever feel competition with other contractors?

**Barba:** Oh yes. Like they go to the farmer trying to take you away from them sometimes.

**Knaster:** Were they Filipino contractors or other contractors?

**Barba:** Some Filipinos and some Mexicans.

**Knaster:** So there was quite a bit of competition?

**Barba:** Yes, there is competition. I heard that if the farmers or company promised them compensation the other boys say they can give him less. Some good companies don't like that, but small farmers do that sometimes, and that way you lose the one that you are working for.

**Knaster:** Did that happen to you a lot?

**Barba:** Just once in a while. But I don't mind because there's a lot of work.

**Knaster:** When you didn't have enough workers during the war, when a lot of Filipino boys went into the army, did you hire women instead?

**Barba:** No. I never hired women to work because most of the growers didn't like [to hire] women.

**Knaster:** Why?

**Barba:** I don't know. Maybe they didn't work as hard as men. But now they hire families and kids because they are short of workers. And we came to find out that women are even better than most of these nationalities. Especially these nationalities they just fool around too much when they work. But these women, they are not so very fast of course, but they do a good job, steady, not fooling around. Except those little kids, like the school kids. [laughter] Not them. Students in high schools. I had to do this now for

this company that is calling me to work. Some of them work if you tell them to work, but if you don't they keep on talking like kids. They play around too much.

**Knaster:** Did they use children in the 1930s?

**Barba:** No.

**Knaster:** In the 1940s did they use children?

**Barba:** No. I don't know when it was. I've never hired any.

## **Racial Discrimination**

**Knaster:** A lot of people come to the United States are discriminated against. Did you have any problems like that?

**Barba:** Where I had my camp down in town there were a few American people that didn't like Filipino very much. But I got along with them. Only they don't like to employ a lot of Filipinos if they could help it. They don't like it very much, [but] after a while they said they would try the Filipino. [Then] they would rather have Filipinos than any other, because Filipinos are not very fast worker but they're steady worker. They don't fool around too much like this Mexican people. So most of the private farmers said, even an

old Filipino I would like to keep him better than hiring a Mexican or a wetback. They're getting better to us. They don't despise us any more like they used to, long years before.

**Knaster:** Do you remember the anti-Filipino riots in the 1920s?

**Barba:** Yes, whenever I send boys to work they have to send somebody to guard them. They didn't want to give [work] to a Filipino. "You're hot-tempered," they said. "Filipinos are hot-tempered." Whenever I send some boys, it is accompanied by some security guard from the company.

**Knaster:** Do you remember that anybody got hurt? Anybody was shot or people burned a house down, things like that?

**Barba:** They used to throw rocks on the houses and break the windows. I heard a story that there was a dance hall where some boys got shot. [I] never attended those places because I didn't like it. There was one Filipino that got shot [in Watsonville]. He was laying there sleeping and somebody's shooting went through him, into the bed.

**Knaster:** Do you know why there were those riots?

**Barba:** I don't know. I was just wondering then why. All of a sudden there's trouble. Because American people and some other nationalities, they



discriminate Filipinos a little bit? Maybe some of these brave Filipinos tried to start trouble. I'm thinking that's one of the reasons.

They didn't bother me. Nobody bothered me when I just go back and forth in town because our camp is close to town, only about two and half blocks. During this time, there was some gambling, Chinese gambling houses, and bull holes, things like that. We used to go and play around. I wasn't bothered.

**Knaster:** Did you ever have trouble with the white men?

**Barba:** No, no.

**Knaster:** Nobody ever hit you.

**Barba:** No, nobody.

**Knaster:** Did people say things when you walked down the street?

**Barba:** No.

**Knaster:** I had heard that during that riot there was a dance hall out on Beach Road, that they had white girls there for the taxi-dance hall, and that the

white men in town got very upset and so they went out there and started beating up Filipino men.

**Barba:** I don't know anything about that because I wasn't fond of things like those dancing halls. I never went down there. I know there is a lot of troubles, so I didn't want to.

**Knaster:** Did the community get together and organize and help each other when there were those riots?

**Barba:** No, we never form a society then. Only friends help each other. But nowadays we got this Philippine Community Society.

**Knaster:** Did you know that during those years there was a law that said Filipino men cannot marry white girls?

**Barba:** No, I never heard of that.

**Knaster:** I only found about that recently myself. I was wondering maybe if there were problems because of that.

**Barba:** No, only that riot. I know about this dancing, that the Americans didn't like the Filipinos fooling with American girls, and then they don't let the Americans go inside, and that's why they started trouble.

## Changes in Agriculture

**Knaster:** Do you think that there is more farming here now than there used to be?

**Barba:** No, because some of them are planting trees, and they even put buildings in it now.

**Knaster:** So have they needed more workers or less workers?

**Barba:** Less workers.

**Knaster:** Is that also because of machines, do you think?

**Barba:** Yeah, that's it, machine too. They are cutting the workers because the machine can do a lot. And they only need few to take care of it, to follow it.

**Knaster:** What happens to the workers? Where do they go?

**Barba:** They immigrate to some place—move from place to place, or work in canneries.

**Knaster:** Can you think of any machines or ways of harvesting that have eliminated workers?

**Barba:** Like planting berries: they used to plant by hand, and hire more boys. Now they only need three or four men or women to sit down on the machine to plant, and three or four boys behind to drop the plants. Like planting celeries: they used to plant by hand and they used more boys. Now they have a planter that four or five women sit down with containers of seedlings. The machine goes right ahead, and then if they miss, there is about two or three boys following to plant where they miss.

**Knaster:** So in terms of numbers, has this cut the workers in half?

**Barba:** Almost in half, yes. They didn't perfect the thinning machine yet but they manage to plant the seeds far apart now so they need less workers to thin because it is easy to thin.

**Knaster:** So do they give other work to these workers, or do these workers just have to leave because there's no work for them?

**Barba:** Oh, these big companies give some other work for them to do, because they don't like to lose them. Some people don't care if they are laid off for one or two days. But people that have families, if they are laid for two or three days, they are worried, so they look for another place. They go outside and work, but then they come back.

**Knaster:** What other work do they get with the company?

**Barba:** Weeding and thinning.

**Knaster:** I forget to ask you if you became a citizen of the United States.

**Barba:** Yes I did. 1956, I think, that's before we took vacation. I went to night school for citizenship. I passed it in there and before we made the trip I got my papers.

**Knaster:** And you went back to the Philippines in 1956? For how long did you stay?

**Barba:** Oh, we were supposed to stay three months but I couldn't take the weather down there. I was so used to this kind of climate. So we stayed about a month down in the Philippines.

**Knaster:** Have you traveled anyplace else.

**Barba:** Chicago once in a while.

**Knaster:** When you left the Philippines, did you leave with the idea that you were going to make money and then come back home, or did you go with the idea to stay?

**Barba:** I was supposed to come here and go to school and continue in my studies. But when I got to the States, this relative of mine spoiled me and I forgot all about going to school then.

**Knaster:** Are there traditional holidays that are celebrated in the Philippines?

**Barba:** Oh yes, like Christmas and the town fiesta.

**Knaster:** Was religion very important?

**Barba:** People very religious.

**Knaster:** What about in the United States. Do people get together for these traditional holidays?

**Barba:** Yes, once in a while they have something. I'm a member of this Catholic Filipino Association. When they gather we all go.

**Knaster:** When did you get married?

**Barba:** 1943.

**Knaster:** Your wife was born in the Philippines? How did you meet her?

**Barba:** Well, when they immigrated here, the father took them down to Chicago. She went to school there, and then the father moved here because of asthma. He figured that the climate here in California is a lot better than in Chicago. Chicago is very cold. So he came over and got a job here in Catstroville. He was making pretty good [money] so he went back to the islands to bring his family.

**Knaster:** Do you and your wife have children?

**Barba:** We have a boy and a girl. Our children are nineteen and twenty, and they are both on their own.

**Knaster:** Was it a custom for people who came here to send money back to the Philippines to their families?

**Barba:** Oh yes, we send them a little bit. They ask you because they figure money is easy to get here. If I have it, I send them. That's before I got married. Even after, we used to help them a little bit.

**Knaster:** What advice would you give somebody who wanted to be a labor contractor?

**Barba:** Well, at first you have to have a license. Then contact some big farmers or a big company. And if you think you can supply them boys to

work, why you promise them and you can get jobs. Like this Mexican contractor from Hollister. I said, "Yes, if you want to keep this job, you do what they tell you. They ask you to do it, do it. If they want so many boys, try to get it. If you can't get it, tell them, and why. Tell your boys to work nice and do what the company wants so that they trust you. Once they trust you, why, you can get in."

**Knaster:** Did you like your work?

**Barba:** Oh, pretty good.

**Knaster:** Yes?

**Barba:** There is nothing that good. [laughter]

**Knaster:** Were there certain aspects of your work that you didn't like?

**Barba:** No, I like this job awful good. Even now I can't work so much, but if they want me, I'll go because I like it.

**Knaster:** What do you like about it.

**Barba:** Well it's not so hard, out in the sun and nice weather. I don't like to stay inside. I get sick if I don't move around. Maybe this way I keep a little



bit healthy. A lot of people say they don't believe my age because I am still moving around good, and still beating some of the young kids.