UC Santa Cruz
Santa Cruz History

Title
Frank Blaisdell: Santa Cruz in the Early 1900s

Permalink
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/60j352zx

Authors
Blaisdell, Frank
Calciano, Elizabeth Spedding

Publication Date
1967

Supplemental Material
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/60j352zx#supplemental

eScholarship.org
Powered by the California Digital Library
University of California

University of California, Santa Cruz

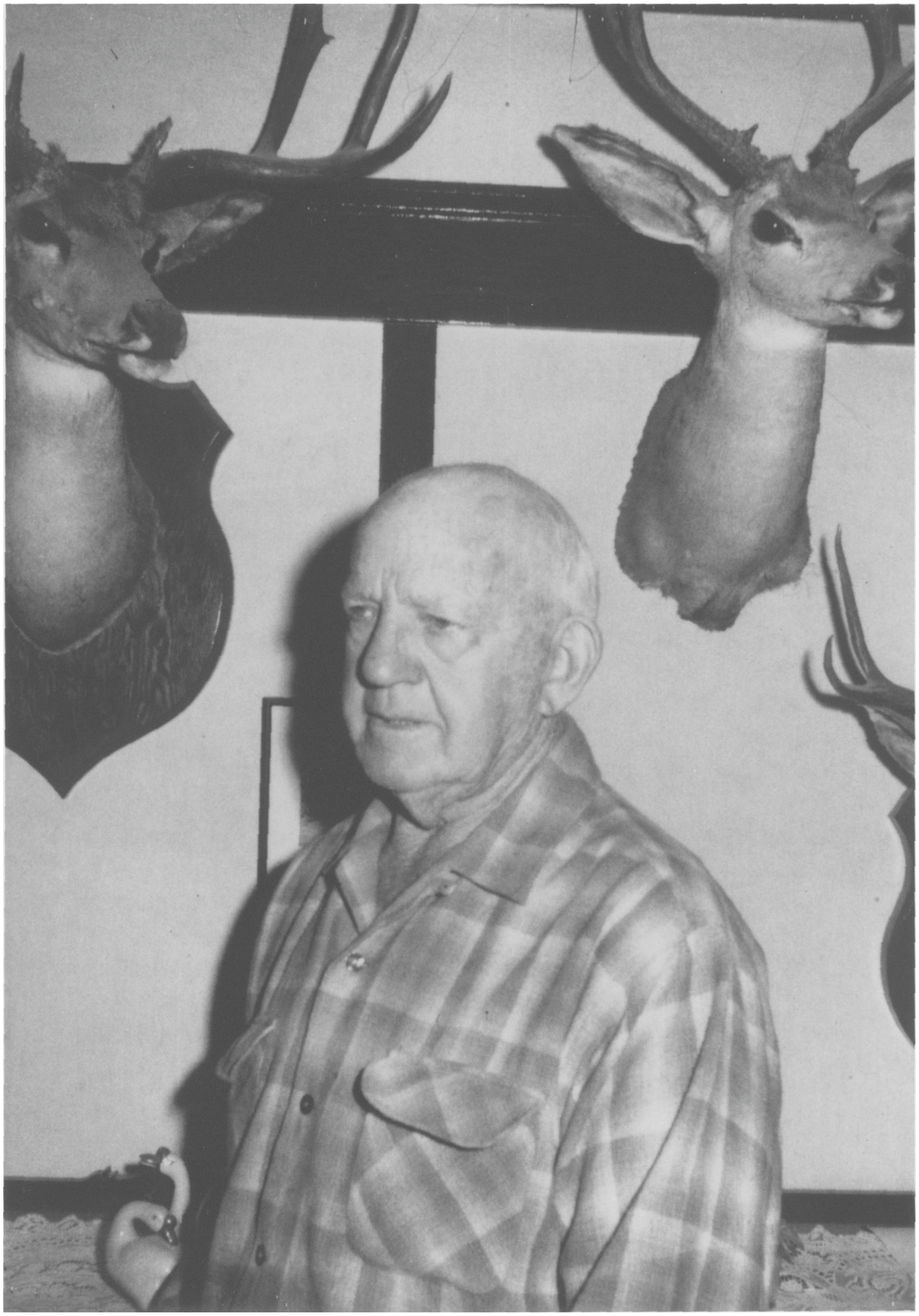
The University Library

FRANK L. BLAISDELL

SANTA CRUZ IN THE EARLY 1900s

An Interview Conducted By
Elizabeth Spedding Calciano

Santa Cruz
1967



Frank L. Blaisdell
In his dining room
January 30, 1968

All uses of this manuscript are covered by an agreement between the Regents of the University of California and Frank L. Blaisdell, dated July 10, 1967. The manuscript is thereby made available for research purposes. All literary rights in the manuscript, including the right to publish, are reserved to The University Library of the University of California, Santa Cruz. No part of the manuscript may be quoted for publication without the written permission of the University Librarian of the University of California, Santa Cruz.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

THE BLAISDELL FAMILY

ISAAC LAWTON BLAISDELL 2
ISAAC L. BLAISDELL'S CHILDREN 7
SETTLING IN SANTA CRUZ COUNTY 9

EARLY JOBS

STACKING HAY 14
HUMPHREY PILKINGTON, HORTICULTURAL COMMISSIONER 16

SANTA CRUZ POST OFFICE

FIRST MAIL CARRIERS 18
WALNUT AVENUE POST OFFICE 20
DELIVERY ROUTES 23
PAY SCALES AND WORKING HOURS 28
FIRST POSTAL "TRUCKS" 31
PAY SCALES AND WORKING HOURS, CONT. 34
POSTAL SERVICES 39
POSTMASTERS 48
CIVIL SERVICE SICK LEAVE, AND VACATIONS 49
1906 EARTHQUAKE 54

THE COWELL FAMILY AND RANCH

HENRY COWELL 60
THE ANNUAL BURN-OFFS 61
HUNTING ON THE COWELL RANCH 63
CHANGING ECOLOGY 67
HENRY COWELL, CONT. 75
THE COWELL WHARF 79
HENRY COWELL VS. THE CALIFORNIA POWDER WORKS 83

THE CALIFORNIA POWDER WORKS

SPORTS

BASEBALL 91
SWIMMING AND CARD PLAYING 101
CLAMMING 102

SCHOOLS

EAST SANTA CRUZ

SPANISH-AMERICANS 113
BULL AND BEAR FIGHTS 120
INDIANS 122

EVERYDAY LIFE IN THE EARLY 1900'S

Wood Spearing 129
Wood Stoves 141
The Family Laundry 147
Home Canning 150
Gardening 151
Butcher Wagons 155
Butchering the Family Pig 157
Outhouses and Bathrooms 161
Water Supply 165
Porch-sitting 168
Band Concerts 169
Vaudeville Shows 173
Dancing,Rollerskating, and Picnicking 177
Family Marriages 180
Retirement 183
Old Crab Joe 185

THE TWENTIES AND THIRTIES........

Prohibition 187
The Great Depression 191

ILLUSTRATIONS

Frank L. Blaisdell
In his dining room
January 30, 1968 Frontispiece

Barbecue for the Cowell Baseball Team
at the Cowell Ranch. Circa 1912.
(See page following picture for
identification of people.) 93

INTRODUCTION

Late in 1964 Chancellor Dean McHenry mentioned to the Regional History Project that a man named Frank Blaisdell ought to be interviewed as part of our Santa Cruz history series. He noted that not only was Mr. Blaisdell a lifetime resident of Santa Cruz, but that he had also acquired quite a reputation as a man who gave both accurate and interesting accounts of the city in earlier years. The Chancellor suggested that perhaps Frank Lazarotti, a longtime friend of Mr. Blaisdell's, would be willing to set up the first interview, and thus it was that three interviews were held between February 11, 1965, and July 8, 1965.

Frank Blaisdell was born in 1888 and worked for the Santa Cruz Post Office from 1904 until 1949. In this manuscript Mr. Blaisdell discusses his early years as a mail carrier, vividly describing some of the adverse conditions that both rural and city carriers encountered. He also talks about the pay scales and working hours in the pre-civil service post office, and comments on the postal service in more recent years.

In the course of the interviews we discovered that for most of his life Mr. Blaisdell has been an avid hunter. Inasmuch as the University is located on land that was once part of the Henry Cowell ranch, we were delighted to learn that he had frequently roamed its hills and woods. He was able to tell us a bit about the Cowell family as well as some of the practices of the ranch and has given us an excellent account of how the ecology of much of the ranch has changed over the years. The manuscript also contains references to the drawn-out land feud between Henry Cowell and the California Powder Works and then continues with a discussion of the activities of the powder works before it was moved to Pinole in 1914.

During his youth Mr. Blaisdell was also devoted to baseball and played on several of the local teams, including the Cowell Cement Team. In the manuscript he talks about some of the rival teams and notes that one team was so belligerent it even threw rocks at the Santa Cruz catcher! He also talks about other forms of recreation, mentioning specifically the joys of clamming during those years when the clams were so plentiful that one was allowed to take full gunnysacks of them.

One of the most fascinating sections of the book is where Mr. and Mrs. Blaisdell discuss everyday life at the turn of the century. Mr. Blaisdell describes winter wood-spearing sessions in the flooding San Lorenzo River (they could get a year's supply of stove wood this way) while Mrs. Blaisdell follows with an account of the numerous procedures that were involved in doing the family laundry. The dialogue covers such topics as gardening and home canning, the traveling (and fly encrusted) butcher wagons, home butchering of the family pig, sewage disposal and water supply, and the various forms of entertainment -- from porch sitting and band concerts to dancing and roller skating -that were so common in the early years of this century. The manuscript closes with a short section describing the fate of Santa Cruz during the years of Prohibition and the Great Depression.

The interviews were held in the Blaisdells' home, which is the house that they built in 1914 when they were married. The dining room was adorned with Mr. Blaisdell's hunting trophies, and there were always several vases filled with the lovely flowers that grow in the Blaisdells' huge garden. The recordings were made in the living room where Mr. Blaisdell sat in his comfortable rocking chair and Mrs. Blaisdell listened quietly from across the room. The microphone did not seem to bother him in the least. During the third interview, the one which dealt with household tasks and family life, Mrs. Blaisdell was persuaded to add her comments, although she still remained seated across the room from the microphone. The tapes have been preserved in the Regional History Project Office.

The manuscript was edited by the interviewer and returned to the Blaisdells who went over it most carefully, checking the spelling of names and responding to the editor's list of questions. Because of a poor recording obtained during the third interview session there were several spots where the Blaisdells were asked to fill in the passages that the Project had been unable to transcribe. This they did most willingly.

The picture used as the frontispiece was taken by Mrs. Doris Johnson, Regional History Project typist. The picture of the baseball team was given to the University by Roy Boekenoogen who had some years before received it as a gift from Mr. Blaisdell.

This manuscript is part of a collection of interviews on the history of Santa Cruz County which have been conducted by the Regional History Project. The Project is under the administrative supervision of Donald T. Clark, University Librarian.

Elizabeth Spedding Calciano

December 13, 1967
Regional History Project
University Library
University of California, Santa Cruz

THE BLAISDELL FAMILY

Calciano: You were born in this area, weren't you?

Blaisdell: Yes, 1888.

Calciano: 1888, so that makes you 76.

Blaisdell: I'll be 77 this year.

Calciano: Have you lived here all your life, or did you go away for a while?

Blaisdell: Oh no, lived right here in Santa Cruz all my life, yes. Born over on Ocean Street and then moved up here in 1914.

Calciano: Up to this house?

Blaisdell: Yes, we had it built. And back then you could build a whole house for what one room costs today.

Calciano: I can believe it.

Blaisdell: Yes, what would you think this house cost? Five rooms, cement foundation.

Calciano: I don't know; it looks well built.

Blaisdell: $1400, and painted.

Calciano: Oh no!

Blaisdell: Yes. If you get one room for that today, you'd be lucky, yes.

Calciano: Was your father born in Santa Cruz?

Blaisdell: No, my father was born in Taunton, Massachusetts, and my mother in Philadelphia. There used to be, and maybe there still is, a group called the Blaisdell Association.

Calciano: Oh really?

Blaisdell: Yes. We all date back to Ralph Blaisdell who came over from England. Well, he was on the English side of the Scottish border, but he's a Scotchman, and he came over just about the same time the Pilgrims come and landed near the same spot, just a short ways from Plymouth Rock. We all trace our ancestry back to him. There's lots of us around. Now I see where the Chief of Police of Honolulu is Blaisdell, and the mayor of Honolulu was a Blaisdell just a short while back.

Calciano: Are you related at all to Dr. Blaisdell in Watsonville?

Blaisdell: Yes, a distant Blaisdell. He's the same name as me, Frank Blaisdell, yes, very distant. We're all related.

Isaac Lawton Blaisdell

Calciano: What was your father's full name?

Blaisdell: Isaac Lawton Blaisdell.

Calciano: And what was your mother's name?

Blaisdell: Mary Spellbrink Blaisdell. Her father was a sugar refiner in Philadelphia. She was German.

Calciano: And what brought them out here?

Blaisdell: Well, my father came out here first on a ship. It was the "Lampico." He went to sea at the age of fifteen. He came around the Horn and got up as far as Valparaiso, Chile, and the captain was very mean to him, so he ran away. And he laid up in the hills there in the brush for four days watching the boat out in the Bay. When the ship left the harbor he come down into town and then he got a job on another ship and come up to San Francisco. And after he got there he went into the mining country up by Mokelumne Hill back of Stockton.

Calciano: What year was this?

Blaisdell: Well, I think it was in 1852. I don't know just how long he stayed up there mining, but I know he said that they'd work all summer and come down and spend their whole earnings in San Francisco in one week. He said everybody thought money was to spend, not to save, in those days. And he said he could have bought a whole block in San Francisco for a bag of beans, but he didn't have the beans. But anyway, after that he spent a good deal of time whaling on the old-time whaling ships and in those little open boats.

Calciano: Where did he do that?

Blaisdell: Well he went back East again, evidently. He didn't mine long. At least I don't think he mined long, because he did quite a bit of whaling. And in those years, between then and the Civil War, he did his whaling.

Calciano: Where did the whaling ships go?

Blaisdell: He talked about Cape Horn, Borneo, and the Hawaiian Islands, so he must have been out that way in the Pacific Ocean, and I know he talked quite a bit of Providence, Rhode Island, so I think he must have sailed out from there.

Calciano: But he didn't do any whaling around our coast here, like the Davenport area?

Blaisdell: Oh, no, no, not close here, no. I had a picture; I gave it to Roy Boekenoogen. It was of one of the old-time whalers, a man named Bettencourt that was an old-time whaler at the time my father was. He lived here in later years, but when he was whaling he once got dragged under the water for quite a spell. You know, it was dangerous in those days. They whaled in little boats. If the whale went down deep for any distance, they pulled the little boat right under, and this Bettencourt, he got dragged under the water for quite a spell, but he survived. (Laughter)

Calciano: It's hard to comprehend the things they had to put up with.

Blaisdell: Yes. My father said it was very dangerous. The whale, if he'd happen to come up anywhere near the boat, well, one smack of his tail would knock it to pieces. And another thing, he said you had to look out after that rope when it was reeling out, you know, and he said if you got an arm or a leg in there it'd be gone.

Calciano: I wonder if whaling paid well?

Blaisdell: Well I guess it did in those days. Yes, it did in those days. Not to the sailors, no. My father always said that the way they divided the money, he says the captain threw the money in the air and what stuck on the rigging belonged to the sailors, but what landed on the deck belonged to him. (Laughter) Of course he was only joking. But he said that's just about the way it was divided.

Calciano: Why did he keep on whaling? Why didn't he get a job on a different kind of ship?

Blaisdell: Well I don't know. He loved the sea. Those people in that neck of the woods, around Massachusetts and in there, you know, were all sea-going people.

Calciano: Had his father been a sea-going person?

Blaisdell: Yes. My father's father was killed in Narragansett Bay there off Rhode Island by a water spout. He was out there in a small boat and a water spout picked it right up and dumped him in the ocean.

Calciano: Have you ever felt any inclination to sail?

Blaisdell: Absolutely none. There was three of us boys and we had no desire to go to sea. (Laughter) That's right.

Calciano: You said your father was in the Civil War?

Blaisdell: Yes, he was in the Civil War under Farragut, and was in the battle of Mobile Bay. The first time he heard "Dixie" played was at Mobile Bay. He said the "Rebs" were entrenched on a low expanse of sand dunes near the beach, and when the ships approached they decided to get further back so as they ran on the double quick the fife and drums played "Dixie," and he said it really sounded nice. He was in the gunboat, "Mohican," and he had to leave that on account of he was in the fireroom and it was terrifically hot in those old gunboats. You know they weren't ventilated or anything. And so as they'd get off duty they'd come up, and they just had a pair of pants on, no shirt or nothing, no shoes, and they'd come up and lay on the deck to cool off because they got so overheated. Well, that quick cooling off gave him rheumatism, and it settled in his left side and kind of shriveled his left leg, and he had to walk with a crutch the rest of his life.

Calciano: Oh my. And how old was he at this time? Was he still a young man when this happened?

Blaisdell: Born in 1837, so this happened about in '63 or '4, see, so you can see...

Calciano: In his twenties.

Blaisdell: Yes, he was just hardly thirty years old, yes.

Calciano: Was he married yet?

Blaisdell: No. He got married, I think it was in Philadelphia.

Isaac L. Blaisdell's Children

Calciano: You don't know how your mother and father met, do you?

Blaisdell: Well, I think Ma was a nurse in a hospital in Philadelphia, and I think they met in the hospital right at the time of the Civil War.

Calciano: And then what year did he come back out to California after the Civil War?

Blaisdell: Well, he came out here first, I think it must have been about right after the Civil War, shortly... Let's see, no let's see now, Ben was born in 1870 in Philadelphia, and Ma come out here in '71, the year of the Chicago fire. Pa was out here first, though. He sent for her, and I know it was the year of the fire in Chicago. That was 1871. Yes, and Ben was born in 1870.

Calciano: Then you have a brother Edgar, too, don't you?

Blaisdell: Yes.

Calciano: He's older than you?

Blaisdell: Yes, he's about five and a half years older than I am. Let's see I'm 76 now, and he'll be 82 the 8th of May, next month.

Calciano: Does he still live around here?

Blaisdell: Oh yes, he's over on Pryce Street.

Calciano: And your brother Benjamin?

Blaisdell: He's dead.

Calciano: He'd be up in his nineties, wouldn't he? Yes, he'd be 94 or 95. So your family was really spread out.

Blaisdell: Yes, and my sister would have been 89.

Calciano: What was your sister's name?

Blaisdell: Addie Louise.

Calciano: Did she marry somebody out here?

Blaisdell: Yes, she married a Swiss, Dominic Gmür. It used to sound like "come here." Two dots over the u. When my mother came out in 1871, she said there was antelopes running across the plain when the engine of a train came along.

Calciano: That's quite an expedition by train.

Blaisdell: Yes.

Calciano: It took a number of days, didn't it?

Blaisdell: Yes.

Settling in Santa Cruz County

Calciano: What made your father settle in the Santa Cruz area?

Blaisdell: Well, he came first and worked down at the Clipper Gap Mill over in Hecker Pass, between Watsonville and Gilroy.

Calciano: This was a lumber mill?

Blaisdell: Yes. He tallied lumber there for Whitehurst and Hodges. I think that was about in '75, somewhere along there, about that time. And then he moved into Santa Cruz after being there. I don't know just what time it was, but earlier, sometime, he and Bean, you know Bean Creek that comes into the San Lorenzo by Mount Hermon? That's named after my father's partner, Bean. They had a timber claim up there, but they gave it up.

Calciano: Oh?

Blaisdell: My father said he never thought it'd be worth anything. He said timber wasn't worth anything, then. The taxes wasn't much, but it was just a white elephant. You couldn't sell any of it. They split a few shakes and then gave it up.

Calciano: My goodness.

Blaisdell: And Pa and he were up there one night, and they had a tent on their claim, and they heard something rooting around the tent; grunting. And old Bean was a very religious man and also liked liquor terribly well. Well, he begged my father to go out and shoot the bear, and at the same time he was praying to the good Lord to save him. And Pa went out there with the gun, and instead of a bear it was a wild hog.

Calciano: Oh no!

Blaisdell: Well in those days there was lots of hogs; they were tame hogs that had gone wild, got loose from settlers. He was trying to root under the tent and get their grub.

Calciano: What an anti-climax.

Blaisdell: Yes. Bean was praying for the Lord to save him, and begging my father to shoot the bear. My father also had a timber claim up on Newell Creek where the city's dam is now.

Calciano: What happened to that?

Blaisdell: He left it. He went up there to see his claim one day, drove up there, and the night before a grizzly had come and taken a two-hundred-pound hog out of the pen and jumped over the fence with it and never busted a slat. And they had a scaffold up in the tree and they had a pitfall baited where they were trying to trap the grizzly, and my father says it's no place for him. He give up the timber claim.

Calciano: Did he sell it out to somebody or...

Blaisdell: No! Just left it, yes.

Calciano: Who was it that finally did lumber out Newell Creek?

Blaisdell: I know of one, Al Pryor logged in there. He was a lumberman around here, and he logged in there. They had a railroad up in that canyon in later years.

Calciano: How did your father get claim to it?

Blaisdell: Well, I think being in the Navy, why he just took them up.

Calciano: Oh?

Blaisdell: That was along in the late '60's, I think. He said he could have bought any of that land in the Big Basin, where the big redwoods are, for a dollar an acre.

Calciano: Well, would he be buying it from the government, or from the Spanish land grant holders or what?

Blaisdell: I don't know. He didn't say who from, but I know he had tears in his eyes when he told of the opportunities he had around here. And Cowell and Hihn, he was a big landowner in Santa Cruz County, they were smart enough to grab up land wherever they could and hold on to it. They got a lot of these Spanish land grants. The Spanish took life easy, and, well, they would get a mortgage on it and then never pay it off. And fellows like Hihn and them, they got land easy.

Calciano: What did your father do after he gave up his timber claims?

Blaisdell: Well he came here to Santa Cruz and he spent a good deal of time around the courthouse. He served on juries; he was justice of the peace for a while. Oh he did anything to get a dollar or two.

Calciano: He never did any farming or anything with his land?

Blaisdell: No, no, we always had a garden, and he got a pension from the government, from being in the war.

Calciano: I see. You mentioned once that when he worked around the courthouse, he subpoenaed people and did this kind of thing.

Blaisdell: Yes he did. They called him Judge down there because he was justice of the peace for a spell. And then he, oh, he got jobs around the courthouse. He was constable for a while.

Calciano: Oh he was?

Blaisdell: Yes, he got deputized or something.

Calciano: When was this?

Blaisdell: In the eighties and nineties. You know my father took pride in the fact that he brought Henry Cowell in once. That's the father of Harry Cowell that had the ranch there.

Calciano: Oh, the old Henry.

Blaisdell: Yes. He took pride in the fact that he brought him into town once. My father was deputy constable, and they sent him up there to bring Cowell in; they subpoenaed him on a case. Cowell wasn't going to come. (Laughter) But my father whips out his six-shooters and says, "You get in that rig and come," and he came.

Calciano: Oh my goodness. (Laughter) Well, I guess Cowell sort of felt that he owned the area and...

Blaisdell: Yes, big shot you know. He was above the law. A lot of those kind of people think that. (Laughter)

EARLY JOBS

Stacking Hay

Calciano: You spent all your adult years working for the post office. Was that your first job, or did you start out doing something else?

Blaisdell: Well I did odd jobs. Over there on Water Street, between the Branciforte Creek and Ocean Street, you know where Smorgy's is there?

Calciano: Yes.

Blaisdell: Well, except for two or three houses on Water Street, that whole section in there was a hay field. It was known as the Leonard Tract. And the last. job that I worked at before I went to work for the post office was stacking hay in that field. And it was an immense crop. The hay was six-foot high, and it was a thick as lead pencils, you know. A favorable season. And just before it was ready to mow, a late June storm, June the tenth I think it was, come and put it down.

Calciano: Oh no.

Blaisdell: And the mower mowed it, and it just was a tangled mess. And there was four of us there. A Mr. Hamilton, Will Hamilton, rented the field and planted the hay and four of us, it took four of us four days to shock that hay. And I was amused when I come to work there. He asked me if I'd come to help him, I was a big and strong young fellow, and I said, "Yes, I'll help you. I'll be glad to." Anything for a dollar those days. And I showed up there at eight o'clock and he and these other two men had been working there since six. He was an Irishman, and he come over and boy did he look mad when he come. He says, "What time of day is this to be coming to put up hay?" He says, "Don't you know haymakers start at six and work 'til six?" I says, "I start at eight and work 'til five." And he looked at me and walked away and I didn't know whether to go on and work or go on home. I stood there thinking a while and I thought, "Oh well, he didn't tell me to go home." So I started working by myself. And he and the other two men were working on the other side and I kept by myself all day. Well we worked for four days and got the hay finished and when he paid us off that night of the fourth day, he come over and he had a smile on his face. I thought, "What's happened now?" He says, "Blaisdell, I was plenty mad at you that day you came to work at eight o'clock, but I want to give you credit," he says, "you put up more hay in eight hours than those other guys did in eleven." (Laughter) Well that was true, you know. That was hard work, and when you worked eleven hours, from six to six with just an hour off at noon, you had to do a lot of leaning on the fork. We were paid $2.00 a day for that job and that was good money then.

Calciano: Yes that was good money.

Blaisdell: Yes. I'd worked lots of days, odd jobs, for a dollar, or dollar and a quarter.

Humphrey Pilkington, Horticultural Commissioner

Calciano: The post office was your first real job then?

Blaisdell: Yes and no. I worked for Humphrey Pilkington, he was a horticultural commissioner here in Santa Cruz. Oh, this was way back along 1902, or '03 or '04. I worked for him a good deal. He had a big berry patch, and he also was making a study of the codling moth which hatches the apple worm. And he had a whole lot of little glass vials there that had eggs in them, and I had to check them every day, see when they hatched, put it down, and that sort of stuff.

Calciano: And did he make some important discoveries?

Blaisdell: I think they did. They've got sprays out that halts that now. They've got to spray two or three or four times to keep the apples clean, but they did find out about it.

Calciano: You worked for him for how long?

Blaisdell: Oh, I worked for him for two or three or four years. Two or three years anyway. About three I'd say anyway. Then in 1904 he was appointed the first warden of the Big Basin Park by Governor Pardee, and I was to be his assistant up there. And I went up there and we worked a week and we planted a vineyard, an orchard, out on the edge of the park where the warden's house was supposed to be put, and we worked a week and then come back into town, and I was to go back in about another week. I was to go back and be up there permanently with him. Well on a Saturday I was down to the next street above us there, Franklin Street, where some of the boys that I played with lived, and I was going to tell them good-bye because I was going to go up there and be up there. Well, when I went over there to tell them good-bye, the postmaster's son come looked me up and wanted me to come work at the post office, and I thought, "Well, gee whiz, I promised Mr. Pilkington to go up there and now they want me to work at the post office," and I thought, "Gee whiz, up there you'd be out there in the woods, and you don't see anybody for months and I wouldn't like that," so I went to work at the post office. Mr. Pilkington was very much disappointed. He figured on me helping him.

SANTA CRUZ POST OFFICE

First Mail Carriers

Calciano: A while back I was looking through some old voter registers and noticed that both your brothers were mail carriers.

Blaisdell: Yes, all three of us were. My oldest brother, Ben, was the first mail carrier in Santa Cruz, 1890, and he carried until 1904. Then my other brother, Ed, took his place when he resigned to go into the insurance business. And I started in, well I'd say it was 1904 that I was the special delivery boy and janitor in the old post office on Walnut Avenue. And it was 1907 when I was appointed regular, and I served over forty-one years as a carrier.

Calciano: You said your brother was the first mail carrier and you used the singular -- was there only one?

Blaisdell: No, there was about four or five appointed first, when they started mail delivery here in 1890.

Calciano: There was absolutely nothing and then all of a sudden the government decided...

Blaisdell: Yes, when the town got big enough for it.

Calciano: How had people gotten their mail before?

Blaisdell: Well they went to the post office.

Calciano: They had to drive into town?

Blaisdell: General delivery, yes, or a box at the post office. And then when they started mail delivery, it was four men they hired. Let's see -- there was Ben, and William Peaks, and Bert Balding, Frank Ennor, and Walter Richardson, but I think he came just a little bit later. They started with four; Walter Richardson was appointed later and was number five.

Walnut Avenue Post Office

Calciano: Where was the post office located?

Blaisdell: Well, the first post office I remember was about under the town clock, where the Odd Fellows Building is now. There was a little post office there, I can vaguely remember it, and then they moved onto Walnut Avenue, right back of the corner of, what's the big store? The ten-cent store, I think it is.

Calciano: Woolworth's?

Blaisdell: Yes, Woolworth. It was right against the alley there that goes through from Walnut to Lincoln.

Calciano: There was a livery stable located where the present post office is, wasn't there?

Blaisdell: Way in the early days the Swanton House was there, kind of a hotel. And I think it was either at the Swanton House, or maybe they had a hall there in connection with it, but one time my mother was there at a meeting of some kind, I think it was a political meeting or something, and there was a man, a prominent man here in Santa Cruz, making a speech, and the fire bell rang, and he told the people not to get alarmed, it was just a house afire over the river. My mother lived over the river and she thought well, he wasn't very much concerned as long as it was over the river. My mother always resented that -- "Just a house afire over the river. Don't get excited." (Laughter)

Calciano: This was the Branciforte area?

Blaisdell: Yes.

Calciano: Was it sort of the step-child of Santa Cruz, in a way?

Blaisdell: Yes, that's right. It was kind of a separate town over there in the early days, you know, Branciforte, and it was apart from Santa Cruz, this side of the river.

Calciano: Well now, the old post office, this was on Walnut?

Blaisdell: Yes, on Walnut.

Calciano: When did they move?

Blaisdell: They moved up to where they are now, I think it was in 1911.

Calciano: How did the government decide to put their post office where it is? Was there very much debate about where it should go?

Blaisdell: Well, I don't remember of there being any debate about where it should be placed.

Calciano: Because it seems that today any building has twenty proposed sites.

Blaisdell: Oh yes, somebody's against anything now.

Calciano: I imagine the new building must have seemed like a very impressive building when you moved in.

Blaisdell: Oh yes, it sure was. Well the old post office down on Walnut Avenue wasn't much of a post office. It was an old building; it belonged to the Hihn Company, F. A. Hihn; he was a millionaire here in Santa Cruz about then. He and Cowell owned most of the country around here, and he rented the building to the government. Well they had the downstairs basement filled with wood which Hihn used to cut down on the river bottom, maple and alder wood: The Hihn Company furnished the wood for the post office for its big heater, a great big stove there. They filled the basement full every fall, and whenever it rained hard like we had in December, the basement would get flooded and the wood would be floating up on top, coming up to the floor. (Laughter) We'd have to get that wood out of there and burn that old water-soaked wood.

Calciano: Oh, my goodness!

Blaisdell: But it was a big stove, and of course they had a lot of trash, paper and stuff; they'd come around with bundles of paper and fill the stove half full of papers and then put in some of this wood, so it managed to burn. (Laughter)

Calciano: Did all the basements fill up on Walnut Avenue?

Blaisdell: I don't know if they all did, but that one did.

Delivery Routes

Calciano: When I was looking at the old voting registers, I happened to find the one that had you listed the year you were twenty-one. I guess it was the first time you had voted and you had listed yourself as mail carrier and your brother Edgar had put himself down as letter carrier. Were these two different classifications -- mail and letter?

Blaisdell: When I was twenty-one, let's see that would be in 1909 in December that I'd become 21, well, that'd be in 1910, the register, yes. Well, I was the same as Edgar.

Calciano: I see.

Blaisdell: Yes, I was just the same as him. I was on the route that went out through all the River Street section -- Water, Knight, and Bulkhead Streets, and Cherry, Vine and Park Streets, and Mission Hill, including High Street and Davis Street and King Street to Hollywood, and then Mission Street up to and including upper

Locust. And it was two deliveries a day. I had that route from 1907 to 1921.

Calciano: Did you walk or...

Blaisdell: Oh walked. Sometimes I rode a bicycle if I was shy of time in the afternoon, but mostly I walked. And one time, 1909 1 think it was, I had to wear rubber boots for three or four days. That Pogonip Creek comes down from, well, from up at the University, on the side hill, on the east side there on the edge. It comes down right through by the tannery. And it got blocked where the culvert come under the railroad, and that whole flatland in there between Harvey West Stadium and the railroad was one big lake. And Encinal Street, west of the railroad, there was water there for oh, close to a hundred yards, and it was knee-deep. I had to wade through it in gum boots.

Calciano: Like that post office motto -- Neither snow, nor rain, nor heat, nor gloom of night stays these couriers...

Blaisdell: Well, it was pretty rough in those days. You know the streets weren't paved, and King Street down here at this time of year would be just impassable. It was mud, knee-deep. You know in those days there was lots of delivery wagons from the grocery stores, and soon as it begin raining that adobe mud would get turned up, and the more rain and the more horses went over it, it just got impassable.

Calciano: What about the people who lived there?

Blaisdell: Well, they got by some way. (Laughter) I carried mail out Davis Street, which they call Escalona now, from Highland west where it joins up with Escalona around here, and there was just one place there that I could cross it good. It was where there was a sewer manhole and the ground was higher there on the outer end there, and that was the place where I crossed it. And Mission Street, when it rained hard, like in December, it was just a creek going down Mission Street from Highland this way. And it went down I guess somewhere around oh, Crystal Terrace, somewhere in there. I guess it went down over the hill. But one day it was storming hard there, and I had a great big sixteen rib umbrella, and I had to jump over this water, it was close to a foot deep, flowing along, and just as I was in the air, the wind was blowing hard, you know, southwest wind, and it turned my umbrella inside out, ripped the bundle of letters right out of my hand and half of them dropped in the creek, and I had to quick run down and catch them when they come along. I got them all but they was plenty wet: (Laughter)

Calciano: Sometimes I hear people say that it seemed to rain more then. Did it, or was it that you didn't have as good drainage?

Blaisdell: Yes. We had storms that lasted longer, you know, oh, sometimes for two weeks. It wouldn't be raining hard all that time, but maybe hard all night and then it would just drizzle all day, then it'd get raining hard again. It really lasted. The mail would come over the mountains and through down by Felton, you know, through the tunnel up there where they have the safety deposit vaults. That's

Calciano: I don't know about this.

Blaisdell: Yes. They have that, a firm has that, and records are kept in there and of course it's up in the mountains, away from any bombing or anything that might happen.

Calciano: Which firm is this?

Blaisdell: I couldn't say what the name of the firm is.

Calciano: Is it company records or...

Blaisdell: Yes, any company records or records of people -any kind of records that want to be kept there. Oh that's been going for several years now. And the train used to come through the tunnel there and up along the canyon up here through these slides, you know, and redwood trees would fall over, and the train would be delayed for hours time and time again.

Calciano: Did you ever use a car or truck on your route?

Blaisdell: Yes. In 1921 and '22 I guess it was, for about a year and a half I carried the mail out through Glen Canyon, Scotts Valley, over Vine Hill, and down Blackburn Gulch. Rural one, rural route one.

Calciano: Were those roads all right?

Blaisdell: Oh, I should say not. I remember there in that winter of '22, I guess it was, it started raining on, I think it was November the seventh, and up until Christmas Day there was hardly a day that there wasn't a little rain, a shower, or something. And just before the rain started in those days they used to run a grader over and kind of smooth up the road, you know, those dirt roads. And that was a foolish thing to do because it put that loose dirt in the road, and soon as it rained it just got mucky and oh, for four months I had to walk over Vine Hill. My wife would take me up to the foot there, just by where Santa's Village is now, where it crosses the creek there, the highway, and I would walk over Vine Hill and down the Magnetic Springs grade on the other side at the head of

Blackburn Gulch, and she could only come about halfway up Blackburn Gulch because that was impassable. She'd meet me and I'd walk about, oh, four miles there, I think.

Pay Scales and Working Hours

Calciano: Well now, this must have taken you much longer. Would you get overtime pay or anything?

Blaisdell: No, no.

Calciano: You were just expected to do it?

Blaisdell: No, didn't get a penny overtime. One time down at the post office on Walnut Avenue, the overtime pay for Christmas was twenty-six cents, and then Congress got generous and they raised it to twenty-eight cents an hour. And the postmaster, he wanted to make a record of being, you know, saving, like President Johnson turning out light bulbs -- something of that sort. Well he made out our checks for twenty-six cents an hour and the law said twenty-eight, and we refused to take the checks and was he mad. He blew up. He said, "Next year I'll see that there'll be no overtime." Next year come around, he never said anything about it. (Laughter)

Calciano: What a man.

Blaisdell: Yes. Twenty-eight cents. And in those days we didn't have any relays.

Calciano: What are relays?

Blaisdell: You know, relays where they take the mail out in a truck and store it in these boxes and the carrier picks it up and delivers it when he comes along. We had no relays. One time at Christmas I started out, we had big mail sacks then, regular whoppers, one on each side of me, and all I could hold in one arm, and packages tied all over hanging on the sides of the mail sack because we delivered all the parcel post then.

Calciano: Oh, no!

Blaisdell: Yes. We had to deliver all the packages. I left the post office five times on Christmas. I would go as far as that load would take me, then come back and get another load, and go on from there. Five trips to finish the route. Began at five o'clock in the morning and got through at nine o'clock at night. Supposed to have been eight hours.

Calciano: How did your overtime pay compare with your regular pay?

Blaisdell: Well, it was just about the same. I think we figured it out just the same. It wasn't any time-and-a-half, or anything like that. I think it was just figured the same as your regular time. One time, I think it was Burleson; he was a prominent Texas Democrat, he became head of the Postal Department, you know, like Grunowski is now -- and his favorite word was "the exigencies of the service." (Laughter)

Calciano: Oh great.

Blaisdell: Yes. We had to work good, and we had to be saving -in other words we had to look out for the government, and we made quite a joke out of it -- the exigencies of the service. (Laughter) Right about that time they raised the postmaster's pay and they cut down on the janitor's. I was janitor at that time, and special delivery boy, and I got eight dollars and sixty-six and two-thirds cents a month for sweeping that post office on Walnut Avenue every day, and supposed to wash the windows, but I didn't do much window washing. I told the postmaster, he said they were awful dirty, they needed cleaning, well when they cut it down to six sixty-six instead of eight sixty-six, I wrote a piece of poetry and hung it on the clock about when they raised the postmaster and took it out of the janitor's slim pay. That was the title of it. (Laughter) The postmaster, he called me onto the carpet, started to lecture me, and I just laughed at him because I didn't care whether I had the job or not. (Laughter)

Calciano: No. Not at that rate.

Blaisdell: No. I didn't care whether I had it or not. He could have fired me. I wouldn't have felt bad at all. Finally he began laughing and he said, "Well, go on, that's all right." (Laughter) And he got after me. They had a marble washstand there in the corner and oh, I let it get black inside; I didn't clean it. And he left a note there on my desk -- "What's the reason you haven't cleaned this washstand?" "Well," I says, "I left that black to commemorate cutting down my wages." (Laughter) I didn't care because if he fired me I'd just walk out and be glad of it. "Oh well," he says, "clean it up, will you?" And I thought he was pretty nice about it and I got busy and polished it all up. (Laughter)

First Postal "Trucks"

Calciano: You said that when you first started out carrying mail you had to load up everything at the post office, no drop boxes or whatever you call them.

Blaisdell: No, no relay boxes.

Calciano: When did they get those in?

Blaisdell: Oh, that was after we come up, I couldn't say what year, it was sometime after we come up to the new post office in 1911. It was sometime after that, quite a little after that.

Calciano: When you used to use your bicycle, you had to pay for your own bicycle didn't you? It wasn't their bicycle.

Blaisdell: That's right. Oh no, we furnished the bicycles.

Calciano: When did the post office get its first postal truck?

Blaisdell: Oh that was in comparatively recent years, that was, let's see, oh let's see, I bought a Ford in 1917, and I rented that to them on one or two occasions -- only got enough to pay for the gasoline. That's all I got out of it. And that went along about 1918, '20. And it was after that they got the trucks, quite a while after that. Quite a while after that because Owens Brothers rented a car to the post office, you know, just an ordinary car for carrying mail, and one was an old Dodge. Abe Kirby run out on the Garfield Park section around here, and the old heap, you know, was just an old wreck. One day he wanted to bust it to get another car and he speeded up and got it going and then threw it into reverse, but he couldn't wreck it. (Laughter)

Calciano: Oh my goodness.

Blaisdell: He couldn't wreck it. He tried to tear the gears out, but he couldn't.

Calciano: He thought that if he could wreck it they'd have to give him a different car?

Blaisdell: Yes, they'd have to get one that would run better.

Calciano: Oh, that's rather drastic. When did they first install these letter boxes around town where people can drop their outgoing mail? Was that an old custom?

Blaisdell: Oh, they always had them, yes. They always had them, and way back when I carried over at Quintana Street and River, out back of the Catholic church there, there was one on the corner of Potrero and Quintana, right by the railroad there. And you know we had to go out and get that on a Sunday collection, and there never was a letter in it -about maybe one time out of six there'd be a letter in it. We were wishing something would happen to it, and one time a grocery wagon got a runaway and the horse, he smacked that box and knocked it all to pieces. (Laughter) And they never put it back.

Calciano: You were glad?

Blaisdell: Yes. They never put it back.

Pay Scales and Working Hours, cont.

Calciano: Did the mail come into town several times a day? Blaisdell: Well, if the trains weren't late or delayed, yes. The mail used to come in over the mountain then, you know, the narrow gauge we called it.

Calciano: Now this is through Felton?

Blaisdell: Yes, and Wright's and Laurel. Well it would rain; we used to have rain in those days, and they held on more than they do now. It rained, you know, maybe just drizzle, but for a week or ten days straight. The ground would get soaked up and big trees would come over the track and delay the train, oh, time and time again. And there'd be slides, too, to hold it back, and it was very uncertain. For two or three years I carried special delivery letters, and the train, it was die at six o'clock, but lots of times it didn't get in until twelve midnight.

Calciano: Oh my. You had to wait around?

Blaisdell: Yes.

Calciano: Would you get overtime pay?

Blaisdell: No, nothing. I got eight cents a letter.

Calciano: Eight cents a letter!

Blaisdell: Yes. Sometimes I'd wait half of the night and there'd be only one or two letters. Sometimes one of them would be out in Garfield Park and the other one way over by Seabright.

Calciano: Did you use a bicycle or horse?

Blaisdell: Had a bicycle, yes. In the wintertime you had to walk a big part of it because the streets weren't paved then; it was muddy, terrible.

Calciano: I guess you were at the bottom of the totem pole at that point, weren't you. What about the regular mail carriers? What were their hours?

Blaisdell: Well of course it changed sometimes. When the trains would change times, they would have to change times with them. But as a general rule we went to work about seven in the morning and then worked eight hours. But sometimes we didn't come to work till, one time it was late as eight, and then sometimes, for a long time in the later years we'd come to work at, oh, six or earlier.

Calciano: How long was the post office window kept open? Were there staggered shifts?

Blaisdell: It was kept open from eight in the morning till five or six p.m. at night, and it was kept open six days a week and even opened on Sunday.

Calciano: It was?

Blaisdell: Oh, that was a nightmare. We had to go down, there was nine of us carriers there along in 1907, '08, those years, and three of us would make the collection all around town and then come into the office, sort out all the mail to the different routes, and then it was open for an hour at noon. And all the people from church would come piling in, nine-tenths of them just looking for postal cards which was the craze then. Picture postal cards.

Calciano: For a penny?

Blaisdell: Yes, one cent. And two cents for a first class letter. And we gave two deliveries then, where you only get one now for five cents a letter.

Calciano: Even with the slow transportation you gave two deliveries?

Blaisdell: We give two deliveries, yes. I was talking to one of the fellows here a year or two ago and I says,"How are things going at the post office?" "Oh," he says, "great. We got real men down there now." I says, "How come you don't give two deliveries a day then? We used to!" Boy, did that work! (Laughter)

Calciano: Were your shifts sort of staggered, with somebody staying there later and others coming earlier?

Blaisdell: Well, no. We had one or two substitutes when one of us was sick, but otherwise we had to be on the job there all the time. As I say, we worked every third Sunday; three of us would work a Sunday, and there was nine of us carriers there for several years.

Calciano: Was there extra pay for Sunday duty?

Blaisdell: No.

Calciano: Were you paid by the month?

Blaisdell: Yes.

Calciano: I hope you don't mind me asking this, but it's interesting to get the economic relationships back then. What amount did the postal carriers get?

Blaisdell: Well, I'll tell you exactly. The first year I worked was fifty dollars a month. Yes, fifty dollars a month. And the next year I got sixty-six and two-thirds dollars a month. And we went along at that for several years, oh, I don't know just how many, but several years at that price, and then they raised it to seventy-five dollars a month.

Calciano: This would be in the teens?

Blaisdell: Yes, that would be along between, oh say, 1912 and the '20's, somewhere around in there. Those teen years. And then they raised us from seventy-five to a hundred and then gradually up to, now they get about four hundred a month, yes.

Calciano: Well now in the years when you first started, a lot of places had their people work ten-hour days, didn't they?

Blaisdell: Yes, oh yes.

Calciano: Wasn't this kind of an advantage to you, for the post office to have eight-hour shifts?

Blaisdell: Oh yes, oh yes. The grocery stores, my, some of them would come at six in the morning and work until six at night, and even after that some of them, yes. Well you think that's terrible, it was, but my how cheap things were then. Now a pair of overalls which I use out in the garden, I pay $3.25, $3.50, even more than that in some of the stores now, and I used to get them for fifty and sixty cents.

Calciano: Yes, it was proportionate then.

Blaisdell: Round steak, ten cents a pound, and now you pay forty or fifty cents for a good lamb chop. When we first married in 1914 we would get four of those large loin lamb chops for thirty-five or forty cents. Now you pay more than that for one.

Calciano: Yes you do; it's very expensive.

Blaisdell: So it wasn't so bad.

Postal Services

Calciano: What was the price of a special delivery letter? You said you got eight cents for it, but what did the person sending it pay?

Blaisdell: Ten cents. Ten cents for a special stamp, yes.

Calciano: Well now today when a man is on special delivery duty, he doesn't get paid by the letter, does he?

Blaisdell: No. Now when the city's got big enough and there's enough specials and they charge, I forget...

Calciano: Thirty-five or something.

Blaisdell: Yes, thirty-five or forty somewhere, I haven't got one in so long I don't know what it is, but they charge a way up now. Now they have one of the clerks in the office that ain't too busy take one of the trucks and go out and deliver. Yes, but in the days when they only got eight cents I'd get maybe fourteen dollars for a month. I'd have to be there a half a dozen times a day, come at seven in the morning and take out what might have drifted in during the night, and then again at ten o'clock, and then again about one, right after twelve when that noon train come in, and then again at six, and then there was a later train come in from Watsonville and have to wait for that. Eight cents. Some days only have five or six all day.

Calciano: Did they have registered mail?

Blaisdell: Oh yes, yes.

Calciano: And did they do money orders back then?

Blaisdell: Oh yes.

Calciano: So really very few services have been added recently; it's mostly been that things have been cut out.

Blaisdell: The post office has poorer service today than it was fifty years ago.

Calciano: In spite of all the modern equipment?

Blaisdell: In spite of it; it's not going forward, it's going backward. They try to tell you different. For instance, they have that schedule. Now that's just like playing football and making a touchdown, but not having the ball with you, just exactly what it is. I was carrying that there in town by the courthouse on Pacific Avenue, and one day one of the county departments, I forget, Welfare or something, had an office over there above the County Bank. And I come in that morning, right on the dot. I was scheduled at 8:20 and I come to work at seven o'clock. I got out of the office about eight and went right down the avenue to the Welfare office and turned in and, "Oh," she says, "what good service we're getting today. Right on the dot, look." I says, "Yes, you think this is good service." "Yes, look," she says, "right on the dot." I says, "Let me tell you something; a big part of the first class mail is right up there in the post office that if they'd of let me take fifteen minutes more to sort the mail I could have brought it out to you on this trip. No, I have to get out on schedule and that lays there until afternoon. Now do you think that's good service?" "Oh," she says, "I didn't know that." Well I says, "I know you didn't know that." But that schedule is just to fool the public, make them think they're getting something that they ain't, see what I mean?

Calciano: Yes. I used to be intrigued. I went to school in the Boston area, and sometimes in the winter it would take five days or six days for an air mail letter to go from Iowa, where I lived, to Boston. I could always get one back to Mother in two days, but the Boston post office, I guess, just didn't care to get the mail delivered.

Blaisdell: Yes, yes. We have gotten letters from Weaverville or Redding up there faster than we get one from Salinas.

Calciano: Yes, it's strange.

Blaisdell: Yes.

Calciano: Fred Wagner told me something that interested me. Do you know him?

Blaisdell: Yes, I know him well.

Calciano: He lives up on Highland.

Blaisdell: Yes.

Calciano: He said it was just recently, although I don't know how many years he means by "recently," that mail delivery was started up there. He said that they used to have to walk down to the post office to get their mail even though people living way out in the country got theirs delivered.

Blaisdell: Yes, that's right.

Calciano: About what year did it get up there?

Blaisdell: Oh gosh I couldn't say.

Calciano: Twenty years ago? Ten years ago?

Blaisdell: Well I think it must have been within the last ten years. It was after they built up there on Meadow Road, all these homes, and got the road paved. We didn't get delivery on our street here until the road was improved in 1918 or '20.

Calciano: You couldn't get mail delivered here because your street wasn't paved, but yet you were telling about all those horrible places you were going out to! Vine Hill, Blackburn Gulch.

Blaisdell: Oh yes, that was rural route. That was different, yes.

Calciano: So Mr. Wagner was really right when he said that the rural routes got better service than a lot of the town did.

Blaisdell: Yes, that's right. They did because the people out there could go out and ask the carriers for stamps and everything right in the street, while people in the city had to go to town to get stamps.

Calciano: Was this a government regulation or a Santa Cruz postmaster's decision?

Blaisdell: Oh that was a government regulation. One time down on Walti Street, it's right under the hill down here below the Babbling Brook on Laurel Street; it runs on the flat towards the lagoon down there...

Calciano: Yes.

Blaisdell: Well Vic Buckman was carrying that route, and there were three or four houses down there; the street wasn't paved, and they didn't have no continuous sidewalk. If you had continuous sidewalk like this cement here, you were entitled to delivery even if the street wasn't paved. But anyway, Vic Buckman was down at that end, and so many people wanted delivery there that Vic goes down there and delivers the mail, see. One day one of the superintendents went around with him, "How come you're delivering down here?" "Well," he says, "the people want a delivery." "You quit that right now." He had no business doing it. Then there was people, Rodgers, they lived right down where the school is now on King Street, and on the other side of the street, the west side, the people had put in a boardwalk so as to get mail delivery. There was a Sollars family living there, and one or two others, and I delivered the mail there then, and right across the street there was absolutely no sidewalk, and King Street in the wintertime was knee deep in mud. It was terrific, just almost impassable, and Rodgers wanted delivery. "Why," I says, "I can't deliver mail over there." "You deliver it on the other side." "Yes," I said, "because they built a sidewalk specially so that they could get delivery. You have no sidewalk." But they blamed me for that.

Calciano: Oh.

Blaisdell: Just plum stupid; I couldn't have delivered it if I'd of wanted to. I'd have been in the same pickle that Buckman was in.

Calciano: Yes, getting reprimanded.

Blaisdell: Yes, sure.

Calciano: You know nowadays we often get Christmas packages that are just about splintered to pieces; do you think the mail is handled more roughly now?

Blaisdell: Yes, lot of these fellows now, they don't care about anything. They don't care how they handle things. I've seen one of the fellows, I won't mention the name, in the post office there and he's just delighted in throwing the package ten or twelve feet.

Calciano: (Gasp)

Blaisdell: Yes, and it's a shame you know. And a lot of these fellows right now, they don't seem to care, don't have any respect. The turnover during the last war there when I was there, it was terrific. A big husky fellow come in there one day and come up to the register room; he wanted to turn in his register receipts the same time I was there. He says, "I had enough of this," and threw down his sack, and he had just worked that morning. That was his first day. I thought he was kidding. He quit right then, threw the sack down and handed me the registered receipts and he walked out, never come back. He was a big, husky fellow. Frank Lazarotti had a fellow go around with him, he was over on the east side and he was delivering them in the car, and this fellow went around the first day and Frank says, "Now all I want you to do is just sit there and note the streets that I go on, where I turn, and just the way the route runs; that's all I want you to do today." Okay, he's sitting in the back seat, and Frank would drive up to the boxes and put the mail in, and some places he had to get out. Then he come back to the office and the fellow said, "Uh-um, I ain't going to work like that," he says.

Calciano: Oh, for heaven's sake.

Blaisdell: That was enough for him.

Calciano: Well I wonder what kind of jobs these people find?.

Blaisdell: They want a job with no work and big pay. Yes, it's amusing. Gosh, when I think of the work we did for fifty dollars a month. Walter Richardson, he was one of the carriers for years, and he lived up by Glenwood. He was only a sub at first, and he'd come down from Glenwood to work part of the day or one day and then go back to Glenwood. You had to go back in a horse and rig in those days.

Calciano: Oh my goodness.

Blaisdell: Yes.

Calciano: Are you on sub for a while until a position opens up and then you...

Blaisdell: Get on regularly, yes.

Calciano: And is it a regular waiting list, or can you be passed over?

Blaisdell: Well, yes. You could be passed over.

Postmasters

Calciano: You mentioned the postmaster who cut your Christmas pay back to twenty-six cents an hour. Was he a political appointment or...

Blaisdell: Oh yes, he was a political appointment. That was 0. J. Lincoln; he was the father of Rob Lincoln that's still living here and is in the real estate business. He has an office over there about where Plymouth and Ocean Street join below the Colonial Inn there. And his father was O. J. Lincoln, Orlando J. Lincoln; he looked just like Abraham Lincoln. He had those side burns, just like the picture of Abraham Lincoln.

Calciano: What were the postmaster's responsibilities? Pretty much what the postmaster does now?

Blaisdell: Oh yes, yes, just about what it is now. He's supposed to run the place. And I think some of the men that'd been there longer could run it better than it's run now.

Calciano: Is it Civil Service now, or is the postmaster still political?

Blaisdell: He's still appointed, yes. That's one of the forty-four reasons why the post office don't pay. Putting in a man that's never been in a post office before to run it.

Calciano: I see.

Blaisdell: This man who's there now, he was a union man. I think he was a pile driver before he took this job, you know.

Calciano: Really?

Blaisdell: Yes. I think that's his field of work, and then they bring him into the post office there. And his assistant postmaster, Danny Wright, he's a nice fellow, I like him, but he wasn't even a regular sub, and he puts him in as assistant postmaster. And then they wonder why the help don't give their best. What's the use when they put somebody in over you that has had no experience after you've worked there for years. Well it's discouraging.

Civil Service Sick Leave, and Vacations

Calciano: When did Civil Service come in?

Blaisdell: Oh, I think that was around about 1920. I think about 1920 we started paying in three percent towards retirement, and then they raised it to three and a half and to four and to five, and I think now they're paying six percent of their wages.

Calciano: And did Civil Service also mean that you had to take a qualification test to become...

Blaisdell: Oh yes, you had to take the examination there.

Calciano: Were the employees in favor of it, or not?

Blaisdell: Oh they're in favor of it.

Calciano: They were in favor of it then?

Blaisdell: Oh yes, oh yes, they liked that.

Calciano: Well now there was some Civil Service election in the twenties or thirties -- I guess for city jobs. Was it separate from the post office?

Blaisdell: Yes. That was for the city employees.

Calciano: So the post office had had it long before then?

Blaisdell: Oh yes. We had it about 1920, I think it was. Forty-five years ago it was started.

Calciano: Now when you first started, did you ever get vacations? Was this part of your job?

Blaisdell: Yes, we got fifteen days a year then.

Calciano: Well that's not bad for back then.

Blaisdell: No, no. Now they get twenty-six, I think it is. Right now I think they get twenty-six days vacation.

Calciano: That's very good. It sounds like a mail carrier's job was a pretty attractive job back then, except in nasty weather. (Laughter)

Blaisdell: Well, yes. It was amusing, you know. I had a fellow say to me, he was a plasterer and a brick mason, one of the Van Wagner boys on Ocean Street, and when I went into the post office he says to me, "Oh, you're foolish for going in here, putting your time in here." He says, "You're foolish for doing it." Well, I thought it was a steady job, and I didn't give it too much thought. But anyway that same man during the Depression in the thirties says to me, "Gee you're lucky you got this steady job." Yes, but I was foolish several years before for tying myself up to that job. Then I was lucky I had a job like that during the Depression.

Calciano: Were salaries cut back at the post office during the Depression?

Blaisdell: Yes, we had payless furloughs. They'd lay us off for, oh I forget, something like a day a week I think it was, something like that. We'd lay off and they'd put someone extra on.

Calciano: So as to give more work to other people?

Blaisdell: To give more work, yes.

Calciano: But your family apparently came through the Depression pretty well then, since you had steady work. Were a lot of people pretty badly off in Santa Cruz?

Blaisdell: Oh yes, oh yes. I carried mail down the avenue there, and right at the corner of Maple and Pacific there was a vacant store there. It was vacant right then and they had a place there to hand out can goods and stuff like that. There'd be quite a line there.

Calciano: And what about the businesses in town. Did they lay off a lot of people or not?

Blaisdell: Well yes, yes, some of them did.

Calciano: Well like Leask's or the tannery, were these places badly hit by the Depression?

Blaisdell: Well, I would imagine so, although I don't remember just how the tannery fared. But there wasn't much building going on, you know, and things were so uncertain right during those years, I could have bought any number of lots around here for a hundred dollars and paying the street assessment. Now they're five or six thousand dollars.

Calciano: Getting back to the conditions that went with the post office jobs around 1907 and '08, was there such a thing as sick leave, or if you were sick did you just not get paid?

Blaisdell: I think that come in about the time of the Civil Service. We got ten days a year and it was accumulative. When I retired, the first day of 1949, I had, oh, I don't know, about six or eight months time coming. But a lot of the boys that retired, when they seen how many months they had of sick leave coming, why they would lay off on account of they'd say their heart was wrong or something. But I didn't have anything to lay it to. so I worked my time right out and let the government have six or eight months anyway. I'd worked for a long time and had drawn very little sick leave.

Calciano: Well that's the way it's supposed to be done, but I'm afraid all too many people do take...

Blaisdell: Oh yes, a lot of them took advantage you know, lay off, get a doctor's certificate, which isn't too hard to get, and they'd be laid off for the amount of time that they had coming.

1906 Earthquake

Blaisdell: I was lucky to be down in the old post office at the time of the earthquake, you know. That first post office in 1906, I was janitor there when the earthquake came. And I was special delivery boy also, and the night before the quake the train was late, and I had to wait and wait for the train to come in so I could carry out any special delivery letters. So while I was waiting I thought it was a good time to sweep out that alley. I had to sweep it out once a week and that next morning was the day to sweep it. So I swept it out that night, and it was a good thing I did because the earthquake come about eighteen minutes after five in the morning, just the time I would have been in that alley sweeping it. The earthquake threw the brick firewall right down into the alley and the bricks were two feet deep in places. I'd a been under it too, because it was right at the time I would have been sweeping. So that was lucky for me.

Calciano: My goodness, yes. What other damage did it do?

Blaisdell: Well, the plaster come down inside the old building, and it was a mess. We left it there for three or four days because it kept shaking every hour or two; it just kept shaking so we didn't want to keep cleaning up.

Calciano: What happened to the mail?

Blaisdell: Well the mail didn't come in for four days. And I was special delivery then as well as janitor, and the fourth day word got around that the mail was going to come. It come around by the way of Watsonville because the tunnel had caved in and they couldn't come over the mountains. But the mail got through by way around Watsonville, and the lobby was full of people, and I had forty some, I think it was about forty-eight, special delivery letters on that train. Well, I just entered them up in the book and went out in the lobby and called out names, and I delivered, oh I don't know, a dozen or fifteen of them right there.

Calciano: Just by yelling?

Blaisdell: Yes. People that were there anxious to get word from relatives in San Francisco and other places you know. So I just called out names, "Is so and so here?" and delivered a bunch of them right there. And after the fourth day was up we thought that we'd have a feed; we'd clean up the place and then have a feed afterwards and celebrate. So we got hoses and brooms and shovels and oh, I don't know how much stuff, plaster and stuff, we took out in the alley and piled up, and then we took hoses and washed off the floor with them, and then it was about half past ten or eleven at night when we got through, and the whole force had come down, and then we went up to the California Restaurant and had an oyster feed to celebrate. Oh the oysters were old or something and I got sick; I was sick for three or four days.

Calciano: Oh no.

Blaisdell: I couldn't get the oyster taste out of my mouth.

Calciano: Oh dear. Not too many buildings fell over in Santa Cruz, did they?

Blaisdell: Well, it wrecked a lot. It broke chimneys all over town; it wrecked the courthouse bad. I had a photo where Earl De Berry and I are standing in front of the house on Water Street. It was a brick house, two story and that kind of an A-shaped shingle roof up top. There were seven people in there their name was Crowson, and it just threw those bricks down in a heap and set the top right down on the pile of bricks. And nobody hurt. (Laughter)

Calciano: Were water mains broken?

Blaisdell: I don't think it broke any water mains, I don't remember, but it sure did throw down lots of chimneys. Our chimney, it cracked it right off at the roof and threw it down in the garden alongside the house. A lot of the chimneys, it cracked them off and then spun them around and left them setting at odd angles. (Laughter) And oh how the roosters crowed and the dogs barked.

Calciano: It must have been a frightful feeling.

Blaisdell: Oh, yes, and it kept shaking all day, you know. Every now and then another one would come. You didn't know whether there was going to be a bigger one or not. I laughed; my brother and I were sleeping upstairs and he had a big dry goods box, it was up about four feet high, and on top of it was a bookcase full of books. Just as the earthquake come he noticed that thing swaying, and he jumped up there and was holding it and was going right back and forth with the thing and finally it settled down, he got back into bed, and he no more than got the covers over him, and bang! the second shock come, and he just got up in time to grab that bookcase again and go all through it again -- back and forth. (Laughter)

Calciano: I hope he moved it down for the rest of the day!

Blaisdell: I went over to town to see the damage it had done to the courthouse and other places, and I was coming back across the Water Street bridge, that was an old wooden bridge then, and I was right in the middle of it when a good shock come -- that thing just swayed like you was in a hammock. (Laughter)

Calciano: What did you do that day? Did people try to go about their work or did they just...

Blaisdell: No, everybody was, I'd say not everybody, but a big part of the people, were afraid to go back in the house. And there was people all over sitting around on lawns. It was April 18th, and I remember it was pretty warm that day. People were sitting out on lawns, even into the evening people were out; they were afraid to go back into the house. My brother's house was on Water Street, right opposite this place that was thrown down, right this side of Ocean on Water, on the south side. He had a big house there and the chimney come right down through the ceiling in the front room, what we called the parlor in those days, come right down through and landed on the floor.

Calciano: Oh. It's really quite miraculous there weren't more injuries in the town.

Blaisdell: Yes. Yes it was.

Calciano: I've heard the stories of the men who were killed in the slides out in the country, but I have wondered if any people in town were seriously injured?

Blaisdell: Not in town, but out in Olive Springs where the Hinckley Creek come in, there was a sawmill there, and it buried that sawmill, and I don't think they ever did find the men. I was there when they were digging for them.

Calciano: One of the men who helped dig out said they found seven of the men and part of an eighth, they think, but the ninth they never found.

Blaisdell: I know when I was there they hadn't found him. I went fishing up Soquel Creek; we caught our limit of fish and then ate our lunch and walked up there and, they were digging for the men. And I know for quite a while they didn't find any of them. Maybe they did afterwards. But it buried that mill -- the side of the mountain just slid right down and quite a ways up the other side. And there was only one man, I think, who escaped. He was in a cabin, and as the slide come up the hill he bounced out of bed and he went right out the door. He was knocked out or jumped out or something, and a redwood limb hit him and threw him to one side and he didn't get buried. And there was another big slide up in Deer Creek.

Calciano: A couple of men were killed there, weren't they?

Blaisdell: Yes. Two men were killed there. It was the Hoffman mill, I think. A small mill there. And for years from any high point in the hills back of Santa Cruz you could see that great big bare spot where the slide was.

Calciano: You could?

Blaisdell: Yes. For years. Now it's grown over. That was up at Deer Creek, a tributary of Bear Creek.

THE COWELL FAMILY AND RANCH

Henry Cowell

Calciano: You know you said that your father brought in Cowell once, and I've been wondering, what did your father ever say about Cowell? What did he think about him?

Blaisdell: Well, I never heard anybody say anything good about Cowell no time. No. No time.

Calciano: He just wasn't liked in town?

Blaisdell: He wasn't liked, no. He did mean things. Frank

Lazarotti will tell you about the time when he had a couple of wood cutters cutting wood, and all they got was seventy-five cents a cord, and that was a day's work to cut a cord of wood. They cut I think something like three hundred cords, and they had them tiered up and Cowell hadn't paid them for it yet, and along come a forest fire and cleaned up the whole thing and he wouldn't pay the men.

Calciano: Oh no.

Blaisdell: That's right. Frank will tell you about that, Frank Lazarotti.

Calciano: Was this old Henry, or was this...

Blaisdell: That's old Henry, yes. I'm quite sure it was him, yes. He wouldn't pay them after all their work, and because the forest fire burned it up that wasn't the woodcutters' fault.

The Annual Burn-offs

Calciano: I've heard that Harry was a lot better type of man. Was he?

Blaisdell: Well he was somewhat better, but not an awful lot better.

Calciano: Oh, not that much?

Blaisdell: Not that much better, no.

Calciano: Did you know any of the Cowell family yourself?

Blaisdell: I didn't know them personally, no. I'd seen Harry several times, but didn't know him personally. David Schafer, who lived across the street here, he was quite friendly with Harry Cowell and I always remember one thing that amused me. You know way back in the late '90's and early 1900's the Cowell people would set fire to the woods up there in the fall and burn off the brush and anything else that got in the way of the fire. They'd set fire to it every year about the time the first rains come, about the first of November. And yet at the same time his men, well like Frank George and Joe Netto that had worked for him for years, they would go up there before Christmas and parade around the ranch on horseback to keep any kid or anybody else from getting a Christmas tree. Well, one time they were coming in and Dave met them there. He knew them well, and he says, "You fellows amuse me. You spend you time riding around up here to keep a poor kid from getting a Christmas tree, yet every fall you set fire and burn up thousands of them. How come?"

Calciano: There was no sense to it.

Blaisdell: No, that's right. (Laughter)

Calciano: He'd do that to the grazing land?

Blaisdell: Yes, to keep the brush down and make grazing land.

Calciano: Did these fires ever get out of control?

Blaisdell: Well, they didn't seem to, no. Not at that time of year; they didn't burn off his ranch. I remember when we were going to the Mission School and, oh, there was a big smoke up there. Us kids from school got out at a quarter after three, there was a half a dozen of us, and we went on the run clear up to Pogonip there, and up on that hillside about where you've got the peripheral road that goes around where it gets the furthest north there. The fire was burning up there and we got up close to it and here come a poor rabbit a running out of the fire and he was about two-thirds singed. I felt sorry for the poor little rabbit with its fur burned off of him.

Hunting on the Cowell Ranch

Blaisdell: There was a fellow I knew named Velasco; he went to the Grant School, and he lived right on Grant Street there. There was' a bunch of them Velascos, Spanish people, and I went fishing with a couple of the boys, Charlie and Alfred, and this younger one, let's see, I think his name was Joe. He was younger. I didn't go fishing with him, but later he worked for Cowell for years, riding, you know, to keep hunters off and the likes of that. Well, I hunted up there for years, unknown to them. But after Joe quit there he went over in The Rocks over there near Hollister. They call it The Rocks where the highway goes through there, and he had a kind of a little resort there, a drinking place, a tavern. We stopped there one time and I says, "Joe, it's been a long time since I've seen you -- those Grant School days." He says, "Yes, sure has, but I've seen you." I said, "It must have been up on the Cowell ranch?" "Yeah," he says, "I've seen you several times up there, but when I seen it was you, I went the other way." (Laughter)

Calciano: Well, what would he have done if it were someone he didn't know?

Blaisdell: Oh, send them out.

Calciano: Then he didn't shoot at them?

Blaisdell: No.

Calciano: Cowell really patrolled it, though?

Blaisdell: Yes. But they tell the story, and I'm quite sure it's true, because Nick Alvarado, a Chilean, he lived over on Fern Street and worked at the tannery. Old Nick, a black, mean-looking guy, he was hunting up there once and he told me of this. He shot at some quail, and he went over to pick them up and here comes Henry Cowell, the father of Harry, galloping up on horseback and he says, "How many quail did you get?" Well Nick told him and he says, "Gee, that's a good gun you got there, let's see it." And Alvarado hands him the gun and Cowell points it at him and says, "Now you march to town. I'm taking you in and having you arrested for shooting here." And this Alvarado had a six-shooter; he whips that out and he says, "That gun is empty but this ain't." (Laughter) And. Cowell handed it back. Yes sir, he said, "This ain't," and Cowell handed the shotgun back in a hurry.

Calciano: You used to do a lot of your hunting up on the Cowell ranch, didn't you?

Blaisdell: Oh yes. One time Cardiff had a camp over on the other side of the ranch, you know, down near the road to the petroleum mine on the west side of the ranch. And Merle Briggs, he was quite a friend of Cardiff's and them. He still goes up there hunting; he went last year the opening day of the season with Hal Ritchey up to what they call Cardiff's Camp. Well anyway, Briggs has hunted up there for a good many years, and they hunted a lot without very much success; they weren't getting very many deer. Did a lot of hunting, but no deer. And someone said there one Sunday when they hadn't had very much luck he says, "Why don't you get somebody up here that knows how to hunt and has got a good dog or two, and we'll get some deer." And Merle Briggs says, "I know a fellow that's got a good dog and could help -- get Frank Blaisdell to come up here. Cardiff jumped up: "No, we don't want to have him here."

Calciano: Oh. You knew too much?

Blaisdell: Yes. It made me laugh. And we'd go way down in Monterey County and kill a deer, and soon as we come back here we put in the paper the next day that we killed a deer in Cave Gulch just to annoy them. We knew they'd see it you know.

Calciano: Oh, that's funny.

Blaisdell: Yes, quite a good many times, no matter where we killed the deer we put in we killed it in Cave Gulch. (Laughter) Just to send their blood pressure up.

Calciano: Goodness.

Changing Ecology

Blaisdell: I see you're building a big science building right where I hunted many a time.

Calciano: What did you hunt mainly? On the Cowell property, I mean.

Blaisdell: Quails and rabbit. And later, deer. But it's a funny thing, way back, oh, say 1904, '5, '6, '7, those years, there was just oodles of quails and rabbits. Oh, there was lots of quail, but I never saw a deer in all those years I hunted quail.

Calciano: Oh really?

Blaisdell: There was no deer in there then -- that is I never seen any. There was probably a few, but very few. But now the quail and rabbits are gone and there's lots of deer. It's just changed.

Calciano: I wonder why?

Blaisdell: Well, the conditions changed. You see up to the turn of the century and shortly after, Cowell used to set fire every fall and burn off the brush.

Calciano: Oh, that's right.

Blaisdell: That was for his cattle and goats; he had an immense herd of goats at one time.

Calciano: He did?

Blaisdell: Yes. And he burned the area to make feed for them, and that made ideal conditions for quail and rabbits. Not only that, he cut off the timber to burn lime, and then around those redwood stumps those shoots would come up and made a nice place for quail and rabbits to hide, and there was green patches of grass, and it was just ideal cover for quail and rabbits. But now it's all, I can show you acres that have gone into madrone and oak trees that used to be open, grassy places.

Calciano: Oh really?

Blaisdell: Oh yes. And that changed conditions; that's good for deer now, and there's lots of coons, wildcats, coyotes, and things, in that timber, and very little feed for quail or rabbits, so that just changes it.

Calciano: Were there any raccoons back when you hunted?

Blaisdell: Oh yes, there were still, but there was so much nice country for quails and rabbits. There was lots of coons, though.

Calciano: Well now, where the Natural Sciences building is, that was always a redwood area, wasn't it? Or was that meadow?

Blaisdell: No, that was always pretty much redwoods, but there was more openings in there than there is now. Oh, right near there was a kind of a gully that started there, and that used to be a wonderful spot for quail and rabbits, but I noticed it's practically all grown up now in that gully.

Calciano: With redwoods, or is it mainly madrone?

Blaisdell: Madrone and oak, yes.

Calciano: Now that you mention oak, Cowell used to cut tan oak, too, didn't he?

Blaisdell: Well, there was lots of tan oak. Tan oak usually grows on the north side of a ridge. There was lots of tan oak back towards Felton, on that side of the hill. A beautiful stretch of tan oak in there. That long ridge that runs out to where the tunnel is, where the railroad used to be. Do you know where that is?

Calciano: I think I know where you mean on the map.

Blaisdell: Well, there's a long ridge that runs out from the flat up there, and on the north side of that was a beautiful tan oak forest.

Calciano: Why does it grow on the north side?

Blaisdell: It's shadier, wetter, damper, and that likes the damp hillside. It's like down in Monterey County, the south side of a hill is nearly always chamise, that thick greasebrush, and on the north side is oaks.

Calciano: That's interesting.

Blaisdell: Yes. The chamise brush likes the hot side, and the oaks like the shady side.

Calciano: Well up on Cowell land, what would be on the southern slope?

Blaisdell: Well there was live oak and fir, and laurel and redwood.

Calciano: The laurel would grow on the hot side?

Blaisdell: Yes, the laurel is tough. Laurel is tough wood; it's one of the toughest woods we have.

Calciano: Oh it is? Sometimes it seems to grow bushy and sometimes it grows into extremely large trees.

Blaisdell: Yes, oh yes, it grows into an immense tree in time. Up here in Scotts Creek, up there by Swanton, there used to be some immense laurel trees. They grow awful big if they've got good rich soil down near the creek bed. We were amused one time, we were up in Oregon, you know, and they sell that for myrtle wood. They make bowls and other curios.

Calciano: Is that what their myrtle wood is?

Blaisdell: Yes, it's laurel.

Calciano: Oh!

Blaisdell: And we stopped there at a stand, you know, and this lady that had things to sell there, she says that myrtle wood is getting awfully scarce. Well I says, "If you run out of it up here, come down to California 'cause we got plenty of it." It's nothing else but bay or laurel or whatever you want to call it. Avocados belong to the same family as the laurel tree; the avocado is a nut, and you see it's got that pulp on the outside just like the laurel tree has a little bit of a nut about as big as a hazelnut, and they have a pulp on the outside. The gray squirrels go up there in these laurel trees because they like the nuts.

Calciano: Did you shoot many squirrels when you went hunting?

Blaisdell: Well, there used to be quite a few up in there. Yes, I think there was more gray squirrels when we hunted them than there is now when you're not allowed to shoot them. You know they build up for seven years, and then they get a disease which almost blinds them, or practically does blind them, whatever it is, and they'll run right out into the road and get run over by machines and they die out. They almost get annihilated. Then it takes another seven years to get back. But there's none to what there used to be. Oh, when we hunted at Monterey County in 1915, '16, those years, oh, there were just hundreds of them. And up in Trinity County too, oh they were everywhere, but there're very few up there now. But they weren't shot off, because very few people hunted them, and there was so much forest there that you'd have to do a lot of hunting to get rid of them. They just died off by themselves.

Calciano: Were there very many red squirrels?

Blaisdell: No, those red squirrels that are around here now, they've been brought in, you might say, quite recently.

Calciano: Oh? From the Middle West or...

Blaisdell: Yes, they're back East and in the Middle West, but it's only in recent years that they've been out here.

I hunted for years and years and the first one I seen was about, oh, about twelve years ago. I went up to Brookdale to help them when they had the fish hatchery there, getting trout to plant. I showed the fish and game man where to get into the river down there by the Big Trees, and we seen a red squirrel; that's the first one I seen. That was oh, twelve, maybe fifteen years ago. But there's quite a few around. There was some down here on Towne Street; there's a little gully there, Towne Street runs off of Mission towards the bluff overlooking town. There's a little group of redwoods there and there was a little bunch of them hung out there.

Calciano: Did you ever see any bobcats?

Blaisdell: Oh yes.

Calciano: Where were they mainly?

Blaisdell: Oh, there was lots of them up on the Cowell property. One time there we were hunting deer, Frank Lazarotti was with us that day, and I think it was five wildcats that we seen all together, within one afternoon.

Calciano: Good heavens!

Blaisdell: Oh, there're a lot of them up there, and there still is. Let's see, not last year, but the year before last, I was up at Frank's place watching for deer, and a big wildcat come walking around right in front of me, stood there looking around and everything, and leisurely walked away.

Calciano: They don't attack men very much, do they?

Blaisdell: Well I don't think they'd attack you, no. They're kind of snarly and mean. I was sitting with a fellow up in Big Creek once, Roy Smith used to run the powerhouse, and one jumped up on the log and turned around and snarled at us. (Laughter) We didn't want to shoot it because we were looking for deer you know, and you fire a shot and there's no use looking for deer around after you fire a shot. (Laughter) Yes, and one time up on Cowell's there, the funniest thing. I was sitting there taking a rest and there was a little old road in there, and here something come up the road that looked like something with horns. And as it got into view it was a wildcat, and he had a rabbit in his mouth and the hind legs were sticking up just like horns. (Laughter) He come walking up the road right towards me, right close to me. Oh, I could easily have shot him, but I was looking for a deer then and I didn't want to shoot and scare the deer.

Henry Cowell, cont.

Calciano: You said that Cowell used to have a lot of goats.

Blaisdell: Yes.

Calciano: Why did he have goats? What did he do with them?

Blaisdell: I don't know whether he sold the wool or what in the dickens he did do with them, but he had a big flock of goats at one time.

Calciano: Were they the kind that had a lot of fur on them, or were they the old nanny goat kind?

Blaisdell: Well, I don't think they were a very choice breed of goats. They were just plain goats, and I don't know what he did do with them goats. Maybe to keep the brush down. They are good for that. They wasn't those foreign ones, what I could call angora. They were just common goats as I remember. I remember seeing them once up there on the hillside back of Pogonip there.

Calciano: You mentioned that Cowell never wanted hunting on his property. Now what about the other big landholders. Did they let people on or...

Blaisdell: Yes, you could hunt most any place, fifty, sixty years ago.

Calciano: You could?

Blaisdell: *Yes.* And you could go up the coast camping, go into Laguna Creek, San Vicente, or Scotts Creek, Big Creek, and just pitch your tent and camp there *a* week or two weeks or a month. Nobody said anything to you. It was the way of life then. They didn't think anything of it. Practically everywhere you could go hunting. You didn't have to ask -- just go hunting. They just expected it, and you took it for granted that it was all right.

Calciano: Then this was really quite eccentric behavior on the part of Cowell?

Blaisdell: Oh, yes. There was fewer hunters then and they didn't destroy property then like the young kids do nowadays. Now if they don't see any game to shoot, they'll shoot an insulator off a telegraph pole or shoot a hole through a water tank. There was none of that then. There was one time, though, when Cowell let hunters up on his land. Along about '95 or '96 I can remember going across the Water Street bridge and looking up towards the tannery, up the canyon there, and there was a black stream of wild pigeons, one bunch of them going to the Cowell property and another returning. They were roosting over back of Laveaga Park, somewhere in that neighborhood, and they were feeding on Cowell's grain fields. Cowell wanted the hunters to come up there, mind you as opposed as he was to shooting, he wanted them to come up there and shoot the pigeons that were just eating the grain field. Oh, there were just thousands and thousands and thousands of them.

Calciano: Did you go up?

Blaisdell: No, I was too small. That was along about '95 or '96.

Calciano: Oh, I see, yes.

Blaisdell: I was seven or eight years old. But I can remember those pigeons, my there was lots of them.

Calciano: These weren't the carrier pigeons?

Blaisdell: No, no, they were the band-tail pigeons. Carriers are extinct. They were back in Ohio, Michigan, in through that neck of the woods. They claimed there were billions of them in a flock.

Calciano: That's what I've read, and when you said there were so many here I wondered if they were connected. Was Cowell so opposed to hunters because he was afraid you'd all shoot his cows, or because he just didn't want people on his property?

Blaisdell: I think he just didn't want people around.

Calciano: Do you know why the Cowells were so opposed to having their pictures taken or having anything recorded about them?

Blaisdell: Well no, only that they were kind of odd people and they weren't friendly, you know; they weren't what you'd call mixers.

Calciano: I gather that the Cowells weren't all that popular in town, were they?

Blaisdell: No, they wasn't. And it amused me here a few years back, Harold Richey, he's a good friend of mine, but he had a piece in the paper about the good things that Henry Cowell did. (Laughter) He could have mentioned a whole lot of bad things. Henry Cowell got shot up there in, I think it was Solano County, putting his fence over on another man's land -- trying to claim some of his land.

Calciano: Oh is that why he was shot?

Blaisdell: Yes. He was shot.

Calciano: How did Cowell get so much land here? Did he buy it all at once,, or did he buy it piece by piece?

Blaisdell: Well he got most of it at once. This ranch here, yes, it was in the early days when land was cheap. Let's see, I think it was first Davis and Jordan who had the lime kilns. And he bought out Jordan first and later bought out Davis.

Calciano: Yes. Why did he never get the Cave Gulch property? I've always been intrigued by that.

Blaisdell: Well, I've wondered that too, how he missed that, but probably some of the early settlers filed on it before he could get a hold of the property.

The Cowell Wharf

Calciano: The Cowell wharf was, of course, for exporting his lime; now I've heard that other people could use it by paying -- you could ship cheese or lumber and such from it. But then I've also heard that nobody was allowed on it.

Blaisdell: Well, I think people were allowed on it. There was one old-timer, popular old character around here, Crab Joe, that went down there almost every day of his life and fished for the crabs off Cowell's wharf. It was right there, well, just a little beyond that Dream Inn Restaurant. It was a short wharf. Cowell shipped his lime out from there and also hauled in tanbark that was shipped from up in Humboldt County mostly, and some come from down in. Monterey County I believe.

Calciano: And it was for the tanneries here?

Blaisdell: Yes. There was a man, his name was Lee, George Lee, I think; he worked for the tannery, and they had a team and a long wagon with big stakes to haul this tanbark. He went out there one day and backed off of the wharf with the team. He wasn't hurt and they got down in time to cut the horses loose and they were able to swim ashore so it was a lucky ending to what might have been a disaster. Anyway they used to haul the tanbark in these great big wagons. It was a long wagon and had big posts on behind, and they just corded it up on there, oh, way up high. They'd haul it up to the tannery and they had big bark sheds there where they had cords and cords and cords of it stacked.

Calciano: Why would it come in at Cowell's wharf rather than the city wharf or the railroad wharf?

Blaisdell: Well that I don't know. They had the old railroad wharf, but for some reason or other it would always come in at Cowell's wharf. Maybe they just made a deal with Cowell; it was cheaper or something.

Calciano: Were any other things shipped in at Cowell's wharf?

Blaisdell: Well no, his lime went out there and tanbark come in. I think that's practically all that come in there. On the railroad wharf they started shipping in a lot of lumber from the north. They used to have schooner loads come in from Brookings, Oregon. It come into the railroad wharf here though until the union stopped it. The unions tried to boycott this wharf in Santa Cruz because Santa Cruz wouldn't hire union pile driving crews to come down from San Francisco to put in one or two piles. The regular workmen on the wharf could do it you know. Why pay them a great big price to come down here and put in a pile or two to help them out in jobs, and so the unions boycotted the wharf and that ended lumber shipping over it.

Calciano: About what year was this?

Blaisdell: Well that was, oh I don't know, I think that must have been along in the 1920's, or possibly the early thirties -- I'm not sure.

Calciano: The Cowells never did very much for the city at all, did they?

Blaisdell: No. Now you take up there just beyond where you enter the University property there, where the buildings are, right near the road on High Street -- that turn, that bad turn in the road there, if some poor individual had owned that the city would have condemned it long ago and straightened that road out. But no, they didn't want to tangle with Cowell.

Calciano: Of course I imagine they got a lot of tax money from Cowell.

Blaisdell: Well, they never paid too much taxes on that, as Frank Lazarotti can tell you. He found out a few years back that for the same type of ground Frank was paying about double what Cowell was paying. Not his home place, but that ground he sold up there along the north side of the University ground, bordering on Gold Gulch there. Frank had a hundred and thirty-three acres there at one time. You know I played baseball for the Cowell's team for a couple of years when A.S.T. Johnson was manager for them. That was along in 1912, '13. Yes, we had a good baseball team.

Calciano: This was more a company team, wasn't it? The Cowell family didn't do much about it, did they?

Blaisdell: No. A.S.T. Johnson was the manager for Cowell then and he was quite a baseball fan. He organized the team and we played for Cowell's.

Calciano: About Johnson, I've heard glimmerings that some big scandal happened.

Blaisdell: Yes. He was pocketing some of Cowell's money.

Calciano: Oh! (Laughter)

Blaisdell: Yes. A.S.T. Johnson. He left and went back East, I think to Virginia, or someplace back there.

Calciano: He wasn't prosecuted or anything?

Blaisdell: No, no, they just let him go.

Calciano: He was before Frank George?

Blaisdell: Yes. Well Frank George was there at the same time, I think, but Johnson was manager.

Henry Cowell vs. The California Powder Works

Blaisdell: You know you asked how Cowell got his land? Now over on the east side of the river, which Cowell donated to the park, the part that is on the Graham Hill side of the river...

Calciano: Oh, yes.

Blaisdell: For years the Cowell people and the powder mills were in a lawsuit over a big chunk of that land -- each claimed it. And they lawed for years over that as to the ownership of it; and my opinion, I don't think either one of them had any claim to it. My father told me several times that a lot of that land in there was government land, and he knew quite well because he was around the courthouse a good deal. And I know for years everybody over our way that wanted to and had a team would go up there and grub out manzanita roots. They made fine fireplace chunks for heater chunks and burned a long time. And they'd cut pine limbs or gather leaf mold or anything like that and nobody ever stopped them. Now if it belonged to Cowell, he sure would have stopped them. (Laughter) They lawed for years and Cowell finally won out, but I always thought from what my father said neither one of them had any title to it.

Calciano: This was near the Paradise Park area?

Blaisdell: Yes, but it would be beyond that on the east side of the river and take in that sandhill country up there by what we call the Portugee Joe Ranch.

Calciano: I see.

Blaisdell: It was along in the late '90's and early 1900's that we lived over there on Ocean Street and people that had teams would go up there and dig a load of manzanita roots.

THE CALIFORNIA POWDER WORKS

Calciano: Do you know anything much about the powder works?

Blaisdell: No. But I could show you the old roads up there that led down into the powder mill when they hauled down that pine timber that they made prism powder out of, brown prism powder. It was six and eight-sided stuff and had a hole in the middle. I don't know, I think they used some of that in blasting and also in cannons. Then they come in with smokeless powder, and they also made black powder up there.

Calciano: When it moved out of the community, that was about when, 19...

Blaisdell: '14.

Calciano: Was it an economic blow to the community or did nobody...

Blaisdell: Well it was somewhat; they employed a lot of people, quite a few, but it had dwindled down. Oh it made a good deal of the powder used in the Spanish-American War -- particularly the smokeless used in the navy. They paid what was then good wages, around $4.00 a day. They had a big explosion up there in '98. Along about five o'clock in the afternoon I and another boy, Fred Ross, were playing marbles over there on Franklin Street, and I was just going to shoot and "Boom."

Calciano: You could hear it all over town?

Blaisdell: Oh yes, the ground just bounced over there on Franklin Street. We looked up and there was that big mushroom cloud going up in the air, fast. Gee, in just a few minutes there was teams going up Ocean Street (it was all horse and buggy days, you know) and men standing right up in the buggy and whipping the horse to get up there fast, you know, so they could help fight the fire or get their folks that were hurt. The fire was spreading; it was feared other mills would go up.

Calciano: Oh my.

Blaisdell: There were thirteen men killed in that explosion; it happened in April of 1898. Yes, there was a man right in back of us in one of those explosions -- Mercier. He lived right across there on Hunolt Street, and he was burned terrible. It was fatal. Too bad when he died; he begged to be put to sleep, but of course that couldn't be done. And oh, that big explosion blew parts of machinery up on the Graham Hill area. There were pieces of corrugated iron it blew up there half, three-quarters of a mile away. They used to make smokeless powder, and there were waste cakes, round cylinders, just like great big brown cheeses, and they were about that big around, and they'd be about that thick.

Calciano: About two feet in diameter?

Blaisdell: Yes, and about eight or nine or ten inches thick, but solid you know, and brown. And smokeless powder, when they shot it in the cannon it had holes bored through the center of it and was primed with black powder put in near the cap, and that went through those holes and exploded the smokeless.

Calciano: I see.

Blaisdell: The smokeless was, well, you could take one of these great big waste cakes of smokeless, bigger than a great big cheese, and just touch a match to it; it wouldn't explode; it would burn.

Calciano: Really?

Blaisdell: Yes. And us, kids used to make what we called volcanoes with them. They would float down the river when it was high because the powder mill people just rolled them over the bank to get rid of them. They would roll down the river, they wouldn't float, they would roll down in the high flood and come up on what we called the island, up between Franklin and Blaine Street. It'd roll up there when the river was high and us kids would find them and we would set fire to one and we would keep putting sand over it and over it, and it would keep shooting up out of the center just like a volcano.

Calciano: Wasn't this dangerous?

Blaisdell: No, it would be controlled; it would just burn. To explode it you had to confine it and get air holes through; it was the black powder they put inside that exploded it. I remember one year in the nineties they peeled all the willows and the alder trees between Blaine and Franklin Streets, down in the river bottom.

Calciano: Why?

Blaisdell: They made charcoal with it for making black powder.

Calciano: Oh, they used wood to make the gun powder?

Blaisdell: Oh yes. Black powder is made from charcoal, salt peter, and sulfur.

Calciano: Well, I didn't know that.

Blaisdell: Oh yes. Neither one will explode alone, but put the three together...

Calciano: Where did they get the sulfur?

Blaisdell: Oh, it was shipped in.

Calciano: Why didn't the powder mill locate near a sulfur supply?

Blaisdell: Well, I don't know, that's a difficult question. That's why I guess they moved it when a bigger company got a hold of it; they moved it up to Pinole, you know, where it's easier to ship stuff in. But they were here quite a few years. I think the powder mill started back in the late '60's, and lasted until about 1914 or so. Yes, they made lots of black powder.

Calciano: What did they make the prismatic powder out of?

Blaisdell: That's what they cut those pine or fir trees up on... There was a stand of pine up on Graham Hill; that's what they made that out of.

Calciano: And with salt peter and sulfur too?

Blaisdell: I imagine so, yes. Blasting powder, I guess they made it too, and that was, that was coarser and wasn't milled as long as the fine grain black powder which they use for shotgun shells. That was before the advent of smokeless powder; finally smokeless powder come in and they loaded shotgun shells with it. CPW brand - California Powder Works smokeless shells.

Calciano: Was it made like shotgun powder?

Blaisdell: No, no, that was made of, well, some of it is made like glycerin and like the smokeless powder of the big cannon only it was ground up fine. Nitroglycerine and ether and guncotton. They made the ether out of alcohol and some of the guys that worked there must have got drinking the alcohol. There was one poor old lady down on Blaine Street, her son worked up there, and she says, "Oh, that powder works is terrible; the smell of that ether is just driving my son crazy," but if she only knew it, her son was drinking the alcohol, and that's what was driving him crazy.

Calciano: Oh my goodness.

Blaisdell: And there were a lot of the others that were drinking the alcohol -- they didn't just breathe it making the ether. They have a cylinder there and it's filled with sulfuric acid, and there's some coils running through it, and when they put the alcohol through those coils, it goes down through the cylinder which has sulfuric acid heated, and it comes out ether. I don't understand that. You can make ether out of alcohol, but you can't make alcohol out of ether. You wonder why, because it don't touch the sulfuric acid when it goes through those coils and yet it changes. And they used to dump it over the bank there, that guncotton which is cotton and glycerin soaked with ether, and they dumped the imperfect refuse on the bank there, and years afterwards people would stop there and would go up there and have a picnic. One time one of them lit a match, and it started a fire, and the whole bank flared up with that old guncotton and stuff. Several of the group got quite badly burned.

Calciano: Oh my!

SPORTS

Baseball

Calciano: You don't happen to have any old pictures of any of the Cowell family, do you? Perhaps one of them is in a group picture or something?

Blaisdell: I give that picture away where Harry Cowell was at a barbecue they had up there.

Calciano: Oh dear.

Blaisdell: I played baseball with the Cowell cement team in 1912-13; we had a good baseball team. That was when A.S.T. Johnson was manager up there. And I did have a picture of the feed they had one day, but I wasn't there that day. I loved to hunt deer, and I'd play baseball one Sunday and hunt deer the next Sunday, and that happened to be the Sunday that I was deer hunting. They had a barbecue up there, and Harry Cowell was there at the head of the table; it was a good picture of him.

Calciano: I wish you had it.

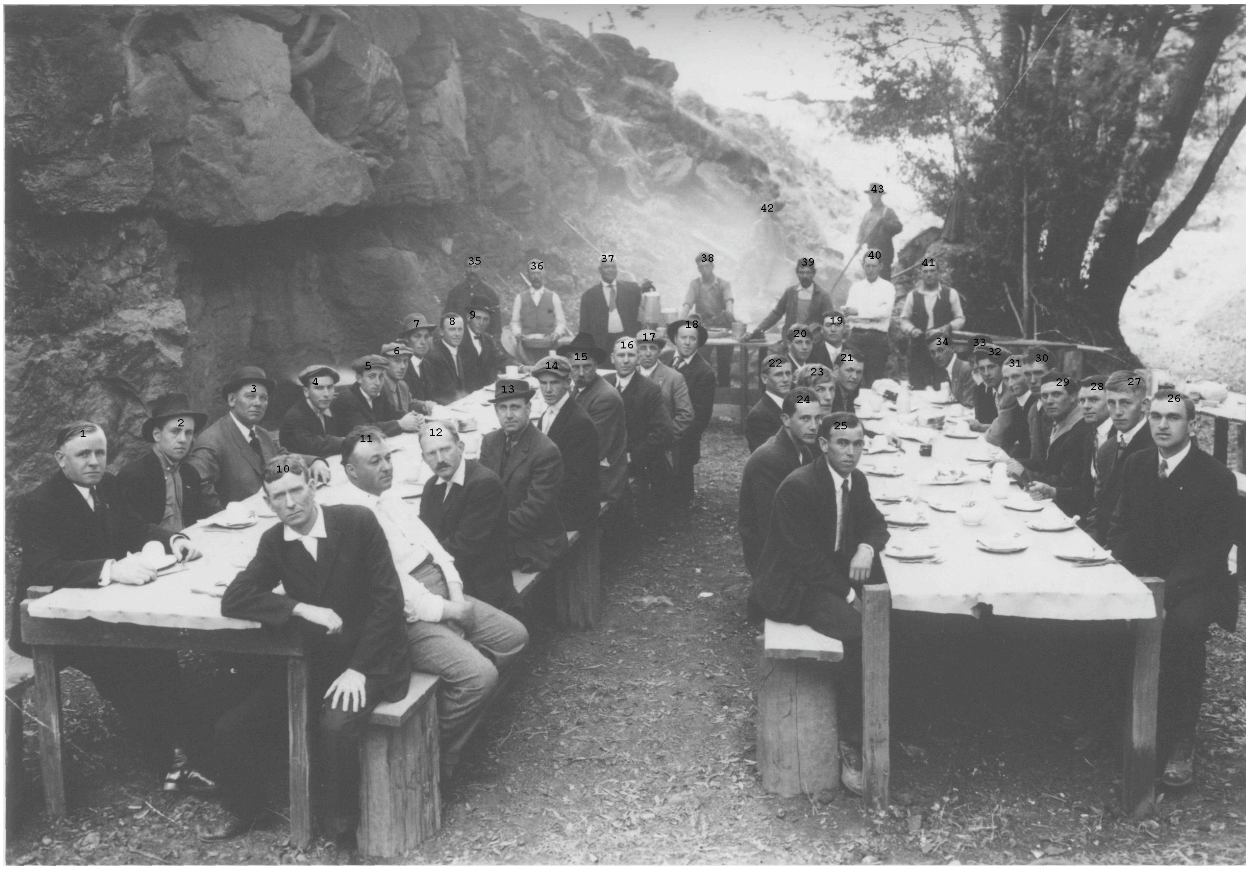
Blaisdell: A lot of the fellows that played ball on the ball team were in it, but I wasn't there that Sunday, so I gave the picture to Roy Boekenoogen that has the old-time pictures of Santa Cruz.

Calciano: Perhaps he still has it.

Blaisdell: Yes, he's got them, you can say that of him. I remember Al Quick, he was there in that picture. He had a cyclery right there at the foot of Mission Hill in a building owned by Cowell, and he used to be kind of-a chauffeur for Cowell. Whenever Cowell wanted to go someplace why he drove him in his car.

Calciano: That's interesting. Oh, I wanted to ask you, were there a number of other baseball teams in the area?

Blaisdell: Yes, we had a league here. There was the cement team, you know, the cement works at Davenport, and the Southern Pacific Railroad team, and


1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43

Barbecue for the Cowell Baseball Team at the Cowell Ranch

Circa 1912

(See page following picture for identification of people.)

MEN IDENTIFIED BY FRANK BLAISDELL

1. Possibly a man from the San Francisco office.
2.
3. Possibly a man from the San Francisco office.
4.
5.
6.
7.
8.
9.
10.
11.
12.
13.
14.
15. Samuel H. (Harry) Cowell
16.
17.
18.
19. Albert Quick
20.
21. Amos Feeley
22. Possibly Joe Alvarez
23. Fred Quistorf
24. Frank Tabacchi
25. Manuel Silvey
26. Harry Trotts or Herb Manners
27. Victor Trotts
28. Charlie Hammerson (catcher)
29. Harvey Bradley (outfielder)
30.
31. Dick Jones
32. Earl Long
33.
34. Earl Gouin
35.
36.
37.
38.
39.
40. A.S.T. Johnson (Albanus Sidney Theodore)
41.
42.
43. Possibly Tom Weeks

Holy Cross, and the Cowell team. We had a league and played down there over the hill at the high school. We had good games.

Calciano: Holy Cross, was that sponsored by the church or...

Blaisdell: It was the fellows that had gone to the Holy Cross School.

Calciano: Well now, about how old were you when you were playing for Cowell?

Blaisdell: Oh let's see, 1912, I would have been about 24 years old. We had a pretty good team, and over at San Jose there was a team, the J.U. Winnegars, and they were supposed to be about the best semiprofessional team in northern California. Well, they came here and played the Santa Cruz Independents(that was the bigger team that played more professionally), and they beat the Independents. Well A.S.T. Johnson, he was a Southerner and kind of hot-headed and quick to get riled up; and he was the manager, you know, for Cowell's. And one time down to the poolroom (we used to gather there on a Saturday night to talk baseball for the next day), well we got to talking with Jose Arellanes. He was the manager of the Independent team, which the Winnegars had just beaten, and Johnson says, "I think we can beat them." "No," Arellanes says, "boy you wouldn't have a chance. How could you beat them when we couldn't?" "Well," Johnson says, "we got a better team, that's why." (Laughter) Arellanes says, "No, you wouldn't have a chance." Johnson went to the phone right there, I was there when it happened, and called up San Jose and got in touch with this manager of the Winnegars and scheduled a game for about a week or two afterwards, and we went over there and we did beat them.

Calciano: You did!

Blaisdell: Yes, 2 to 1.

Calciano: Oh my goodness.

Blaisdell: The score was 2 to 1, and there was a big piece in the San Jose paper about it. Well anyway, Mr. Johnson took us to the St. James Hotel, and oh, what a spread he give us. There was twenty-two in the party (some had their wives, and there was extra players), and he had this big spread for us. It was a grand meal with sparkling burgandy and everything with it.

Calciano: Oh my. (Laughter)

Blaisdell: Some of Cowell's money, I guess. (Laughter)

Calciano: I've heard of the Santa Cruz Sandcrabs. Were they another team?

Blaisdell: Yes, that was in the nineties, yes.

Calciano: Oh, that was earlier. I see.

Blaisdell: Yes. I went out to see some of their games. They played out there at Vue de l'Eau, way out to the outskirts there. In those days there was an old racetrack there and they played out there. And they had a fine team at that time. There was old Brick Devareux and those fellows.

Calciano: Well now, were they semi-professional or straight professional or...

Blaisdell: Oh, I guess you'd call them semi-professional, yes. The Examiner, I believe, the San Francisco Examiner had a tournament of leading teams around this section of California, and it seems to me the Sandcrabs won it one year.

Calciano: Were the players men who worked in the daytime at other jobs?

Blaisdell: Yes, yes. Yes, there was Abel Arellanes, he was a fine player; he was a brother to this Jose Arellanes they were all baseball players. Frank, the older brother, he pitched for Boston for several years. He went from here to Boston. Then there was Jule Stribe, he left here and went up in Canada to play ball afterwards up there, Calgary, Canada.

Calciano: I imagine that a lot of people watched these games?

Blaisdell: Oh yes, everybody went to a ball game or something like that. It was a ball game or a dance. There wasn't the amusements there is now, and people took far more interest in things then, you know, because there wasn't so many things to distract them. Everybody liked to see a ball game in those days. And when we played we brought our own gloves and balls and bats, and arranged our own transportation sometimes clear down as far as Soledad in Monterey County. We went to San Jose and Watsonville, and went up to Boulder Creek, Ben Lomond, Felton. We'd go to Boulder Creek and play the Saw Filers of Boulder Creek. They were a tough, mean bunch. A Boulder Creek man once spiked me in the heel. Oh, what a rough bunch up there. We'd beat them at baseball and then they'd want to fight. They even threw rocks at our catcher. It got so bad that we wouldn't go to Boulder Creek anymore; we'd make them meet us on neutral ground in Felton.

Calciano: Were they all lumbermen?

Blaisdell: Yes, most of them; that's why they got the name of Saw Filers. And Felton was known as the Woodpeckers. They were a good team; they were really good; they were tough.

Calciano: Was this around 1912?

Blaisdell: No, along about 1907, ‘08, or ‘09. In 1912 I was playing for the Cowell Cement team.

Calciano: Well what team have you just been talking about?

Blaisdell: Pryor's Colts team -- that was the team I played with about 1908 or nine. We played twenty-one games and we only lost one, and that was to the Felton Woodpeckers, a thirteen inning game, they beat us 4 to 3.

Calciano: Were there regular bleachers and all for the people to sit on or...

Blaisdell: They just had wooden bleachers. Not very elaborate.

Calciano: And about how many people would come out for a game?

Blaisdell: Oh, there'd be maybe a couple of hundred or something like that, maybe three hundred.

Calciano: Was there any admission charged?

Blaisdell: No, I don't think so. When we used to go to Felton or Boulder Creek there was lots of saloons in those days, and whoever managed the team up there, he'd just go around to the saloons and say, "Give me a couple of dollars to pay the expenses of these fellows up here," and that's the way they did it.

Calciano: Were these usually Sunday afternoon games?

Blaisdell: Yes, Sunday afternoon, yes. I've got a picture here of Pryor's Colts. Now this fellow is that big Jack Pedemonte who's been seeing the kids through the mud puddles at school. He and I were pitchers; when he pitched I played right field, and vice versa. And this is Pryor back here. He was a kind of promoter. Money went through his pockets as fast as it went in, and after leaving Santa Cruz he went down to Mexico at the time of the Villa revolution, and he took moving pictures. He posed as a doctor, which he was no more than I was. But he took moving pictures. I saw his pictures when they come to the theater here, and they were really good. In fact they were so good, they made people faint.

Calciano: Oh no.

Blaisdell: Some of them, you know, those wounded Mexicans. I remember one picture, a fellow had a hole, you could look right through his leg, and they were drawing gauze through that and no anesthetic. Oh, the look on that poor guy's face. People fainted, but he made a pile of money out of it. But what he ever did with it... I don't think he kept it long. I never heard of him after seeing his pictures. He was a piano player. I always remember he came on the Avenue one time in one of these old one-lung automobiles of the day. It went chugging along, you know, and you never knew when it was going to stop. And there was a big German fellow, he had a produce company on Front Street there about where the Palomar Garage was, and he stood there a laughing. I came along and he says, "The automobiles, they sure don't care who runs them nowadays, do they?"(Laughter)

Swimming and Card Playing

Calciano: What other sports were popular back then?

Blaisdell: Well, hunting and fishing and swimming. I did lots of swimming.

Calciano: You mean competition swimming?

Blaisdell: No, not competition, I just swimmed for the fun of it.

Calciano: In the ocean?

Blaisdell: Yes, I'd go swimming in the river in the morning, and maybe in the afternoon I'd go down to the beach or the mouth of the river, or maybe at night I'd go to the plunge. In fact I went swimming so much I got sick of it; I've turned against it. I should have known different.

Calciano: Did people do a lot of card playing? Today people often play bridge or poker.

Blaisdell: Yes, yes. We had the Five Hundred Club -- played five hundred, you know.

Calciano: What is that?

Blaisdell: It's a card game. Yes, we had the club for two or three years and played every Saturday night through the winter. We'd give prizes, you know, like cups and saucers and things like that.

Calciano: Now was this just the men?

Blaisdell: Men and women.

Clamming

Blaisdell: I used to do a lot of clamming out in Aptos. When I first went down there about 1904 or '05, there was no limit as to number or size; you'd just take all you wanted. We'd go down there then, we used to go down with a fellow, Abe Kirby, that worked at the powder mills and afterwards carried mail in the office where I did. And we'd go in horse and rig and gosh, we'd get about two-thirds of a barley sack you know, all we could lug up to the horse and rig, and that was close because we could drive right down on the beach. We turned in this side of Aptos, about where that Poor Clares place is. There was a little road used to go down there and there was a little old church that used to be there, and we'd go down to New Brighton. We'd go down there and drive on the beach and go down towards the mouth of Aptos Creek, right along in there, and oh, the clams were thick then. They used to plow them out at that time. I never did it, but others did it.

Calciano: What type of recipe would you use for the clam meat? Did you make a chowder or...

Blaisdell: Well we'd make lots of chowder. My father was born back in Tauton, Massachusetts, and lived around Rhode Island where they was strong for clam chowder.

Calciano: Good Boston clam chowder?

Blaisdell: Yes. When we made clam chowder then it was really clam chowder because as I say, we'd come back with a hundred or more clams, lots more sometimes. And when we'd give people a mess of clams, which we would because we had no way of freezing them in those days, we wouldn't think of giving them less than twenty clams or twenty-five.

Calciano: Oh my!

Blaisdell: They had real chowder in those days. We used to like to go clamming at night, which was legal then, because the water seemed so much warmer then and it was calmer. The afternoon north-west wind would go down and the ocean was much calmer at night. And the night, the first time I ever talked to Arlie was the night the high school burnt down, 1913, October 1st. We were down there clamming, my brother and I and John Geyer, who was city electrician, and we were just about finished, and we were down there on the beach about where La Selva beach is, and we looked up and that fire had started in the top of the high school building. That flame was shooting up, and John, being city electrician, he says, "Gee, that looks like a big fire up there in Santa Cruz. I'll have to get back." Being the electrician of the city he had to cut off the current and wires. It was dangerous; the firemen were fighting the fire, you know, and if you hit a wire with a hose, you were liable to get killed. It'd come right down with the water, you know. And so we had gotten a sack of clams apiece, a barley sack that you could just tie over the top, and had our old Ford.

There wasn't much room in it, you know, and there was two sitting in the front seat, and we had our rakes and old wet clothes and things in the back and two sacks in the back, which is all there was room for, so we tied one on the running board. They had a good wide running board, so we tied it on there. And just beyond Aptos, along there from where that Deer Park Tavern is over to Aptos, there used to always be a rough, bumpy strip of road, potholes in it you know, always. It was that way for years. And my brother was giving the gas to the old Ford, making it go as fast as it could go, and he forgot about those potholes and he hit one, and that sack on the running board split, and it was a hundred yards before we could stop. He spilled that sack of clams all along the road for, a hundred yards. Well, we didn't want to lose the clams. We jumped out and run back and got an armload and come running and fired them in the back, and we run back and got another bunch and fired them in the back until we got all the clams picked up, and then we headed towards Santa Cruz, and we got there just as the whole building was aflame. It was a big fire; it was an old wooden building there that old high school, and it really burned.

Calciano: It's a good thing it was at night with nobody in it.

Blaisdell: Yes.

Mrs. B.: It wasn't too late -- a bit after six. We were preparing dinner, and I was looking out, looking down there, and we could see right where it was. It was no question, you could see the high school from our place, the top of it, so all of us went down there.

Blaisdell: Yes, we come in Towne Terrace there and come in that Grover Lane and Arlie and her folks and some of them were there watching the fire. That was the first time we ever talked.

Mrs. B.: I'd been to my friend's wedding that day, the first of October, 1913, and I had never met Frank. My brothers had; they knew him. Then on the first of October, 1914, just a year later, we were married.

Calciano: Oh, how nice.

SCHOOLS

Calciano: Speaking of clamming and fishing, the fishing season opens the first of May, doesn't it?

Blaisdell: Yes, next Saturday.

Calciano: Somebody once told me that school used to be let out on that day.

Mrs. B.: I think they had a holiday on that day because the kids would anyway; the kids would take the day off and go. Years ago they used to do a lot different than nowadays. Great big men would go to school just a little while in the wintertime and in the summer they worked.

Blaisdell: Yes, I went to the Grant School, and well let's see, I began the first of January in '96, and there was men there that never got beyond the sixth grade, and in summertime they would work, baling hay, driving teams, or cutting wood, any kind of a job. Big, husky fellows, and then they'd come back in the wintertime and go to school. They never got beyond the sixth grade; they never got any further.

Mrs. B.: Well it took them so many years to get that far, but then a lot of those turned out better than these that are getting education nowadays.

Calciano: Did most of the boys in town go through ninth grade, or did a lot of them drop out?

Blaisdell: Oh no, like I said there was men going to school there that was only in the sixth grade at the Grant school. After sixth grade you'd go to the Mission school down there right at the top of Mission hill where the administration buildings are now. And that was a big wooden building, about three stories, and they're so afraid now of having firetraps, they ought to have seen that. Big wooden building -- if they'd had a fire in underneath, the kids wouldn't have had a chance.

Calciano: That was the high school?

Blaisdell: No, that went up to the eighth grade. There was a kindergarten downstairs. Then the ninth grade, which was the end of elementary then, was at the high school.

Calciano: I see.

Blaisdell: I spent a year there.

Calciano: Ninth grade was sort of the terminus for a lot of people then, wasn't it?

Blaisdell: Yes, oh it was.

Calciano: Rather like high school is now?

Blaisdell: Yes, yes, that's right. Well, we had a year of Latin then in ninth grade, and algebra.

Calciano: This was in the general curriculum?

Blaisdell: Yes. I think the funniest thing over there at the Grant School was when it rained hard, like we have here in December, three quarters of the schoolyard was under water, anywhere from a few inches to a foot and a half deep at the back part. And whenever there was good big ponds the kids used to play snap the whip and get a green guy on the end who hadn't played before. (Laughter) I remember one time, it was the last day of school when we had the big recitations before Christmas and the kids would come dressed up, you know, for that day. (Laughter) Herbert Beck, his father run a brewery over on Market Street then, he came, he was a good recitationist. He was really good; he come all dressed up, you know, for his recitation. And big Jack Pedemonte, he was a big burly fellow, you know. I guess he weighed 225 pounds, a great big husky guy like a football player. He always got next to the end. Well he sent poor Herb right through one of those puddles just like one of these surf boards. (Laughter) And poor Herb, he had to go right out the gate and go home and change his clothes, and come back.

Calciano: Oh dear.

Blaisdell: Oh, those were great days. One time the teacher put Charlie Miller in the little room, and they used to send over to the high school for D.C. Clark. He was the principal there (they called him Billy Goat -- he had a little goatee). (Laughter) He'd come over to thrash him, you know, give him a whipping. And this Charlie Miller, he was a Spanish boy, a tough one, so she put him in the little room...

Calciano: Was this the cloakroom?

Blaisdell: Yes, that's right. And the three teachers' lunches were in there and he ate all three lunches, then climbed out the window and went home. (Laughter) And he stayed home for two or three days, and finally word come down to the school that he was coming back. Well, his mother was a big black woman -I think she was part Indian. There was lots of Spanish here that married Indians, you know, in those days, and they were kind of mixed races. And I can see her now just as though it happened yesterday -- she come to the front gate with Charlie, and the whole group of school kids were out in front to see what was going to happen. Miss Grant, the principal of the school, came out on the front porch platform. This Mrs. Miller shook her fist at her, she says, "You touch that boy, I'll break your back." (Laughter) And Miss Grant didn't touch him. She meant that.

Calciano: Was there any concept of truancy? You said he stayed home three or four days -- there were no laws that required you to go to school?

Blaisdell: Oh, yes. There were laws against it, but lots did anyway.

Calciano: Lots of them did?

Blaisdell: Yes. I don't think they enforced it too well.

Calciano: You said there were grown men coming back to the fifth and sixth grades, and I suppose some of the woman teachers might be just eighteen or nineteen themselves?

Blaisdell: Yes, oh yes. I remember Miss White -- she taught the third and fourth grade, and she was a small woman, kind of frail. And John Barbageleta, she was going to give him a licking, and she got a strap she had and she'd hit at him with a strap and he'd grab it and she would pull and he'd let go and she'd fall over. (Laughter) And she'd hit at him again, he'd grab it again and do the same thing.

Calciano: Oh no.

Blaisdell: Yes. And he'd laugh! Great big guy -- big as I am now.

Calciano: It must have been hard for her to keep discipline in the class.

Blaisdell: Oh, it was bad at times, and yet at times it was all right.

Calciano: For the most part, do you think the kids were less sassy than they are now or...

Blaisdell: I think so, yes. Yes, I think for the most part -- there were just a few of those ruffians that didn't are.

Calciano: About how many kids were in a class?

Blaisdell: Oh, I would say about twenty-five or thirty.

Calciano: And was your school big enough so there was a first grade and a second grade with a teacher for...

Blaisdell: Yes. There were three teachers. There was one teacher for the first and second and another for the third and fourth grade and another for the fifth and sixth. There were three teachers.

EAST SANTA CRUZ

Calciano: Now when you were a boy you lived...

Blaisdell: We lived over the river.

Calciano: What street did you live on?

Blaisdell: We lived on Ocean Street at the corner of Hunolt.

Calciano: Did most of the townspeople feel that there was a difference between over the river and this side of the river? It was all one town, wasn't it?

Blaisdell: Yes. Well, there's always has been a little antagonism or controversy between the downtown, or the west side here, and the east side. And that was shown up a couple of years ago in the restrictions they put on planning for Soquel Avenue.

Calciano: Oh?

Blaisdell: You know about the restrictions they put on that. They didn't like to see business go over there. Yes, they wanted to keep it over here, downtown, over on this side of the river. And there was quite a much-a-do about that here two or three years ago, but I think they got it straightened out a little bit now. Better than it was, anyway.

Calciano: And this is a hangover from years gone by, you think? There was some friction even years ago?

Blaisdell: Yes, yes.

Spanish-Americans

Blaisdell: Way in the early days that over the river there, the Branciforte as they called it, got dangerous to go over there after dark.

Calciano: Oh really?

Blaisdell: Yes. There was a lot of, oh, what you'd call half-breeds, Spanish and Indian, and Mexican-Indian, lived over on that side. In fact it was pretty much them that started that Branciforte village over there, and it was a tough neighborhood.

Calciano: This would be around where the Branciforte school is now, or down near the river, or where?

Blaisdell: Over where the Branciforte School is now, on that side. It was bad country over there in the early days.

Calciano: When you got over to where Ocean View Avenue is, then there were nice homes, weren't there?

Blaisdell: Yes, there were nice homes over there, yes.

Calciano: Was the other sort of a slum area, or what?

Blaisdell: No, not slums. There was some Spanish, half Spanish half Indian, or half Mexican half Indian, and some were tough ones. I can remember many of them when I was young and we played ball. They were always quarrelsome, ready to fight, especially when there was a gang of them together. You get one of them alone, he was a coward, but you get three or four or five of them together, they were awful brave. Always quarrelsome. But don't get the idea that all these people were unruly or mean because many of the Spanish were good, very good, peaceful citizens.

Calciano: Had their families been here long enough that they spoke English fluently, or was there a lot of broken English?

Blaisdell: Oh they spoke pretty good English, yes.

Calciano: So it was just a natural grouping together? It wasn't because they wanted to speak Spanish to each other or anything?

Blaisdell: No, no. I know there was one of them threatened to get my father, and my father carried a six-shooter at one time in the '80's and up to the early '90's. That was when he ran a wagon up to Boulder Creek with vegetables and fruits, and there was one of those Spaniards, those half-breeds, that was going to get him, and my father carried a six-shooter. And one day up there on Graham Hill Road, who should he meet but this guy. My, father says he held the reins in one hand and he held the butt of the pistol with the other and he never took his eyes off that guy until he went past him. He said that's one time he met him out there and he never give him a chance. Pa was a pretty good shot with a pistol, too.

Calciano: Why did the guy want to get your father?

Blaisdell: I don't know. He never said, but he said he threatened to kill him, so Pa carried a six-shooter.

Calciano: Did a lot of men carry six-shooters?

Blaisdell: Yes, a lot did.

Calciano: About what year did they begin stopping?

Blaisdell: Well, probably in the nineties; that's about the date. When my father and mother first come in this area, they were over to the French redwoods. That was between Hecker Pass and Gilroy. They were at Whitehurst and Hodges mill; my father tallied lumber. And then they came in by Aptos. My sister was born in Aptos there, at the mill out there. And then they came into town and they lived on Water Street. Right there, just beyond Ocean, as you go towards Branciforte, there's a double brick house, an old double brick there, and they either lived in that or next to it, I forget which. It's before you get to Branciforte Creek. It's on the left going east. And one night there was a knocking at the door in the middle of the night, and my father gets up and he goes out with a six-shooter; he thought there was something wrong. There was this knocking on the door and he asks, "Who's there? Who's there?" and he got no answer, and he was going to shoot through the door.

Calciano: Oh my!

Blaisdell: And my mother begged him not to shoot, not to shoot, and she won out and finally they opened the door and there was a poor old deaf and dumb man who couldn't talk or couldn't hear. He knew my father and he wanted to come there and get a place to sleep for the night. (Laughter)

Calciano: Oh heavens.

Blaisdell: Pa was going to shoot him.

Calciano: That was a close call.

Blaisdell: Yes.

Calciano: Well now when you said that half-breeds lived over there, was this in the '80's and '90's when you were a young boy growing?

Blaisdell: Well, they lived over there before that. When it was really tough was in the early days, in the '60's and '70's.

Calciano: I see.

Blaisdell: But then there was still some of them around, the younger generation, when I was in my teens you know. We went over there to play baseball sometimes against them, and there were a lot of them around then -- Aranas, Rodriguezes, and names like that.

Calciano: Well then by 1900 where was the tougher section of town located?

Blaisdell: Well, it's hard to tell. I wouldn't say exactly tough, of course there was tough boys around...

Calciano: There wasn't one area that was regarded as such?

Blaisdell: No, no. But those Spanish boys that used to be around here then, a lot of them were always wanting to fight you, big, quarrelsome.

Calciano: Oh.

Blaisdell: Yes, always wanting to fight, to pick up a quarrel of some kind.

Calciano: Were they sort of looked down upon and made the object of scorn? Is that why they wanted to fight? Or did they...

Blaisdell: Oh yes, I suppose. It's their nature more than anything else. But I'll always remember it when these Spanish boys would get into a fight. The one that would call the other a black Indian first, he had all the advantage. There was nothing worse that he could call him. After he calls this other guy a black Indian, why the other guy couldn't call him anything that would offset it. That really made him mad. (Laughter)

Calciano: You said a fair amount of the Spanish population did have Indian blood in them?

Blaisdell: A good amount of them were part Indian. They mixed, you know, in the early days.

Calciano: Were the Spanish pretty much second-class citizens?

Blaisdell: I would say so, yes. Yes, they were kind of looked down upon.

Calciano: I don't think many of them succeeded in holding onto their land.

Blaisdell: No, they weren't too ambitious you know, and they liked to take it easy and not work too hard.

Calciano: Of course they were at a disadvantage in not knowing the language and the American law and all.

Blaisdell: That's right, too. So they lost their land left and right.

Bull and Bear Fights

Blaisdell: You know they used to have bull and bear fights here.

Calciano: Can you tell me something about this?

Blaisdell: It was before my time, but old Pat Neary, this old Irishman who had this store there in Mission Hill, he used to tell me about it. He often told me about the last bull and bear fight they had. They used to have them right there on Soquel Avenue, right there, well, almost on the corner of Ocean. There was a brewery there, Bausch's brewery, in the early days. I used to go there and buy yeast when my mother baked bread. And they had a corral, an enclosure, down there right by that brewery, right between Branciforte Creek and Soquel Avenue, and they had this stockade made of poles, saplings you know. They'd go out in the hills, Glen Canyon was a favorite place, and drag in a bear.

Calciano: Would it be a grizzly?

Blaisdell: Grizzly, real grizzly, yes. A bunch of these vaqueros, these Spanish horsemen you know, cowboys half a dozen or so would go up with their lariats. They were strong ropes made of braided leather, you know, very strong.

Calciano: Yes.

Blaisdell: They would rout out a bear up there in that manzanita brush. They would get four or five ropes on him; they'd get a rope on each leg and a rope around his neck, and he'd go to go one way and they'd pull you know and they'd control him. And they'd pull him and drag him, practically, right into town. Well they'd bring him in there and Pat Neary says the last fight they had was a Saturday afternoon. Everybody was there. There was two or three tanneries running, there was Kirby's tannery, it was down here on the Laurel hill, and the tanneries closed, and everybody went to the bull and bear fight. Well, he said, they let in four bulls, one after another, and these bulls, when they seen that bear they would make a mad charge at him to hook him. He said that bear would just sidestep like a boxer and tear the whole side of that bull at one swipe with those big claws. Their claws were as long as my fingers you know. Well, he said, after the bear killed the four bulls he lowered his head and he charged right through the saplings and went down

Branciforte Creek towards the river there under the Soquel Avenue bridge. Well, he said, in those days everybody carried a gun almost, every man, anywhere from a little one-shot derringer pistol to a double-barrel, muzzle-loading shotgun. And he said if you could have heard the yelling and shooting; he said there must have been a hundred men and big boys chased that bear down there and shooting and yelling, and he said they finally killed him under the Soquel Avenue bridge there in the San Lorenzo River willow glen. Well, he said, then just about that time was the temperance union; the women had gotten together to straighten things out and they put up such a holler that they had no more bull and bear fights. Too bad old Pat isn't living today; he died quite a few years ago, but he was a very interesting old fellow and he'd been here in the early days.

Calciano: Yes, I wish somebody could have tape-recorded him! When was this last bull and bear fight? Did he ever tell you the year?

Blaisdell: Well no, but I imagine it was in the '70's. Roughly speaking around '75 I guess, around there.

Indians

Blaisdell: He used to tell me about when the Indians used to come; they'd trek here every summer along about the last of May. They would come from way over as far as Tulare and Bakersfield and come with their travois. He said they'd have these poles and the leather skins in between or blankets or something and big old lazy men would ride and the women would be walking, leading the horses. And they'd go from way over by Tulare and Bakersfield and that neck of the woods and come clear up by New Year's Island. They lived there on the abalones and the mussels and the clams. They'd stay there all summer, and then in the fall when the rains were starting to come, why they'd go trekking back.

Calciano: I don't imagine there were any native Indians left when you were a boy, were there?

Blaisdell: Yes. I remember two that lived out there as you go past Arana Gulch. Right at the top of the hill on the left there was a little bit of a shack there, and there was two lived there for a long time. They were little short squat people and black as Negroes.

Calciano: Really?

Blaisdell: Black, yes.

Calciano: Goodness. Then they were much darker than the Middle western Indians?

Blaisdell: Yes, yes, they were ugly looking. Gee, they were short, awful black. Black as Negroes. They lived right there and were the last ones I knew. There was two Indians, or half-blood Indians, that shot a man right there where the gas works is now on River Street. They shot a man there to get a dollar to go to the circus. Old Pat Neary had a store at the foot of Mission Hill there for years, right opposite Pine Street, and he said Montgomery Queens Circus was here that night, and they wanted to go to the circus, so they held up a fellow and shot him and just got a dollar. That's all they got. They shot him right behind the ears with a little revolver. I guess it probably wouldn't be a revolver, probably it was what they call a derringer, one shot. He said that Dr. Fagan, I think it was, examined this man that was shot and they couldn't find no bullet hole and finally discovered a little hole right behind his ear where he was shot. Anyway, the sheriff and the officials, they got a posse up and went after them, and they found them down by Aptos asleep in a cabin. They caught the two of them, and they brought them up here to the Water Street bridge. They had a flatbed wagon they put them in, and they took them on the Water Street bridge. There was big arches, you know, on the bridge, and they put a rope over a crossbeam there. They asked one of them if he had anything to say, and no, he didn't have anything to say. So they put a rope around his neck and hung him up there. And the other one, they asked him if he had anything to say. Well, he said he'd like a drink of whiskey, and somebody pulled out a flask and give him a drink of whiskey, and then they put a rope around his neck and drove the wagon away and left them hanging there. They hanged there two or three days. I remember my father telling me about seeing them hanging there.

Calciano: And there was no judge at all? It was just a vigilante type thing?

Blaisdell: No, no, that's right. They just took them out there and hung them.

Calciano: And all the children could see them and everything?

Blaisdell: Oh yes. Pat Neary showed me a picture, I don't know whatever become of it, but he showed me a picture of it and he could point to people and say, "This was so and so; he was just a boy then, and this was so and so." They were standing there watching it and got into the picture.

Calciano: Well, do you think there was very much of this type of thing, or was that very unusual?

Blaisdell: Well there was a lot of it up in San Francisco in the early days. Oh, there was a lot of it.

Calciano: Yes, you hear about it in San Francisco, but I didn't know whether it was down here too.

Blaisdell: There was a lot of it there, and they stopped crime. Boy, that's something, they ought to do a little of that today. That would stop it, yes.

Calciano: Returning to the Indians for a moment, you said that in general they were much shorter than the white people.

Blaisdell: Yes, these that were around here were. These around here were called Digger Indians, and I read that they were about the lowest type in the United States for the simple reason that the climate was so agreeable and there was so much game and fish and everything here and they got things so easy, you know, that they just didn't have to get very clever to get by. Like up in the cold country, up in Wyoming or Montana up there, those Indians became much more talented in making tents and making their weapons and everything, because they had to be.

Calciano: Did any of the old-timers tell you what these Indians lived in? The type of houses?

Blaisdell: Yes. Some of them, the old-timers, I'd never seen any of them of course, but they said that they were just a hole in the bank. They'd put some uprights against it and put maybe bark or trees or branches or skins in front of it and that was that. You know this was an Indian burying ground around here. From my back corner of this side lot up to the intersection of Laurel with Escalona there was an Indian burying ground. 'When they put the sewer down there the workmen dug up some beautiful big pestles and just picked them to pieces and threw them out, yes. I found quite a few arrowheads here in my place. I found a big white spearhead, a white obsidian, pure white. I gave that to Mr. Pilkington, and he eventually gave his collection to the University of California.

Calciano: Oh?

Blaisdell: Yes. He and Governor Pardee and Kron, who run Kron's Tannery originally, they were scholars together at the University of California. That's how Mr. Pardee happened to appoint Mr. Pilkington warden of Big Basin

Park.

Calciano: There's a Pilkington Street in Santa Cruz. Is that named after him?

Blaisdell: I think that's named after his brother, another Pilkington. This was J.H.B. Pilkington, Jacques Humphrey Blakey. And I think this other one was around Seabright way. His name was James, I think.

Calciano: I see. Getting back to the Indians, I'm just curious, you said they were much darker in color than most of the Indians in the rest of our country. Were the facial features different too?

Blaisdell: Yes. These here, at least those two I remember of, were very square faced, and as I say they were squat and short, very short people, very square faced, wide, square. They weren't like the ones you see in the pictures with prominent nose and high cheekbones. Not that type at all.

Calciano: This is changing the subject a bit, but when you were mentioning the lynching, I was reminded that you said that your father served on juries quite often. Nowadays your name is picked at random from the registered voters list; back then was it whoever was around the corner?

Blaisdell: Back then the constable would go out and nail the first guy he wanted. I remember one day when I was on the route Constable Carney says, "Oh Frank, lees see, we want you for the jury." I says, "You can't have me; I work." "Oh yes," he says, "that's right." I worked for the government, so I couldn't, but he nailed me just as I come out of the courthouse there, but I says, "You can't get me."

Calciano: Are government employees never allowed on juries?

Blaisdell: Well, if you're off duty you could serve on a jury, but not while you were working as a mail carrier.

Calciano: I see. And where was the city jail?

Blaisdell: Well, at one time in the early days it was up next to the Catholic church, a little stone jail there. And then it was down on, let's see now, it was down on Front Street, right there about where the courthouse annex is, right in there. And city hall was there too.

EVERYDAY LIFE IN THE EARLY 1900'S

Wood Spearing

Blaisdell: You know there's something you might be interested in. Years ago we used to have a wood stove and wood heater and, of course, our family needed a big supply of wood. And for years my brother and I got all our wood down at the river, mostly by spearing. We had a spearing platform at the foot of Pryce Street, and we captured big logs, all kinds of wood. In 1907, on March the 23rd, the river was awful high. It was just black with logs and wood. I've never seen anything like it. It was a log jam; it was up in Boulder Creek proper, and they said it was close to half a mile long. And the river got so high that that broke loose, and it came down sometimes a dozen logs crisscrossed, you know, big logs, forty, fifty feet long, crisscrossed in piles, and it was just black with wood for three or four hours. And we speared thirteen cords of wood that day.

Calciano: Heavens!

Blaisdell: And a whole lot of it was bridge timbers; the county had put in new bridges up there that summer, and they were big long pine timbers painted green, and we caught three or four cords of them alone.

Calciano: Oh my goodness. All the bridges were just knocked down all the way down?

Blaisdell: Yes, most all, that's right. That day they rode a boat from Laurel Street down to the hill on Pacific Avenue, and that meant that the river must have been just as high as it was during the flood in '55, because the river was wider then, and the channel deeper.

Calciano: It was deeper?

Blaisdell: Oh yes, I've talked with Mervin Kerrick, he had the laundry on Front Street for years, yes, now it's Bariteau's over across from Branciforte Creek, and he said the same as I thought; the channel has filled up a yard deep from sand that has come down and deposited, you know, along the tidewater area.

Calciano: Between 1907 and 1955?

Blaisdell: Yes, that's right. And another thing, there was lots more area under the bridge. There was a wooden bridge on Water Street, and there was much more area for it to go under than there is now. It's narrower now; the channel is narrower in there.

Calciano: Man made it narrower?

Blaisdell: Yes, that's right. Before they built the cement bridge there was quite an approach to the bridge which was all open underneath. Now it's filled up clear out to the first pier there on the edge of the bank, see?

Calciano: Yes. Well now, did you do most of your wood spearing in winter, or could you go down anytime?

Blaisdell: No, it was most always in winter, whenever there was a flood, when the river come up high, then the wood would come down. We had a good arrangement for catching logs. We had a platform built out in the trees from the bank, and we would spear a log in the front end, always, and when it got to the end of the rope, it'd swing towards the bank. Then we had a line with a hook on it that was fastened to a tree that the platform was built on, and we put that hook over the rope that was holding the log and sort of slid it down toward the log. We always had a good audience on the beach and a couple of fellows would help us pull on the rope, and as we pulled, the hook would slide down toward the spear and it would pull the log into the bank. Then we had a steel cable, a one-inch cable, tied to another tree on the bank, and we'd tie the logs onto that cable after we'd haul them in. We'd have whole bunch of logs side by side, tied together, and after the water receded, it would leave them right up there on the bank of the river.

Calciano: You mean you left them there for several days?

Blaisdell: Yes, we waited till the water went down and then we'd cut them up and haul them away.

Calciano: And you weren't worried about people taking your wood?

Blaisdell: Nobody ever seemed to bother it; we never lost much wood. There weren't so many crooks around in those days. (Laughter)

Calciano: Now this was just wood for your family?

Blaisdell: Yes.

Calciano: Did a lot of other people do this?

Blaisdell: Oh yes, there was other people did it. They speared wood from the Water Street bridge, and they speared from the Riverside Avenue bridge, and other people got their wood on the beaches too, the people that lived in that direction. Now the houses over across the river, like on Ocean Street where we lived, for many years we didn't have any gas you know. It was all wood burning.

Calciano: You mean there were no gas lines over there?

Blaisdell: No. For years there nobody had any gas; none of the neighbors.

Calciano: What year were gas lines put in?

Blaisdell: Well I don't remember just when; I really can't say.

Calciano: Well now, you said you speared wood from a platform. Did you construct a platform every time?

Blaisdell: Oh no, we used our platform for seven, eight, nine years. We had a good platform; we had it in a good place, and it was built well, too. We got 32 foot timbers that were two by sixes, set on edge, and we run them back to some alder trees in sort of a V shape. The part of the platform near the water was wider than the part fastened onto the trees, and we braced it, and it worked just fine.

Calciano: Did anybody else use your platform?

Blaisdell: Not when we were using it. No, nobody did much; maybe a few kids in the neighborhood played on it, but nobody bothered it.

Calciano: How high was the platform?

Blaisdell: The platform was about, well of course the water raised and it'd come up higher and you was closer to it, but as a general rule you were about eight feet above the river surface.

Calciano: Would one week of spearing give you a whole year's supply of wood, or...

Blaisdell: Well, that week in 1907 did. The river was up twice. It was up very high on Monday and Tuesday, and then came up a booming on Saturday, so we got thirteen cords that week.

Calciano: And that's enough to carry a family through a whole year?

Blaisdell: Oh that lasted us for two years. But there was people down on the beaches, down Seabright direction, and they got wood by the cords and cords and cords and cords. Just hundreds of cords.

Calciano: Why didn't you get your wood at the beach?

Blaisdell: Because we didn't have a horse and wagon.

Calciano: Well how did you get it up from the river bank?

Blaisdell: We hired it hauled.

Calciano: But you didn't want to hire someone to haul it from the ocean?

Blaisdell: Well, it was a long ways, and we got enough at the river.

Calciano: Did you say that you cut it up yourself before you had it hauled?

Blaisdell: Yes, we used to cut them up on the river bank, you know, so it would be easier to handle. We used a crosscut saw and wedges and ax and maul, and then we'd have it hauled up home.

Calciano: How big were the pieces you cut?

Blaisdell: We just cut them up into whatever would handle easily and threw them in a pile. It was mostly four, five, and six foot lengths, and if they were too big we'd split them in half. We had our backyard so full of wood that year that we hired the steam saw, or a gasoline saw. There were several men in town who made a business of sawing wood and we'd get them to come. They'd saw off two or three cords, which was all we'd have room for that week, and when we'd get that piled away in the barn or woodshed, why then they'd come and saw some more up for us. We'd have so much in the backyard we didn't have room for any more.

Calciano: Well now, who's the we, you and your brother?

Blaisdell: My brother and I, yes.

Calciano: Just the two of you.

Blaisdell: Yes, that's right.

Calciano: How many years did you do this?

Blaisdell: Well, I quit it about 1915. I got married in 1914 and we moved up here and it was too unhandy. And also our platform got knocked out just about then; the trees it was fastened to got knocked down. We built another one up the river a bit, but it wasn't as good a location; the water seemed to move too fast or something, so we just gave it up.

Calciano: A few minutes ago you started to say steam saw and changed it to gasoline saw. Were there two different kinds?

Blaisdell: Yes, the steam saws were the first ones. The gasoline saws came in about the turn of the century, but I can remember as a boy in the nineties watching those old steam saws. You know they burned a good portion of your wood just getting the steam up. (Laughter) And they had to keep feeding it wood all the time they were sawing, and then when they drove away they took enough wood with them to get it started at the next place.

Calciano: It sounds as if the gasoline saws were quite an improvement!

Blaisdell: Oh, yes.

Calciano: Now this week you mentioned in 1907 when you were busy gathering wood, did you take vacations from your job, or was it in the evening or...

Blaisdell: No, we'd do it before work, after work, whenever we were off, if it was a holiday or a Saturday. This happened to be a Saturday, March 23, 1907. That'd be a Saturday, and I was off.

Calciano: I see.

Blaisdell: You know, when we were spearing, we always speared a log in the front end, and that would give it a swing to the back. And we never speared a big round chunky chunk, because that had so much water pressure behind it you couldn't hold it.

Calciano: Oh?

Blaisdell: We've had spears into a log, and when it got out to the end of a rope, we'd have a rope as big as our small finger, and the thing would stretch and the spear would pull out and come right back through the air and hit the platform.

Calciano: Oh my goodness.

Blaisdell: From sixty feet out. Yes, there was such a stretch in that cotton rope that it would come right back like a bullet. Sometimes a spear went down in a log and out in the sea. But we were generally pretty careful not to spear that kind of a log, a big heavy chunk, you know, that was broad. That kind got too much water pressure behind it.

Calciano: About how big a diameter could you handle?

Blaisdell: Well, the biggest one we got that day was a log that was about thirty feet long and thirty-two or three inches in diameter at the big end, and about twenty inches in diameter at the small end, and about thirty feet long. That was a big one. But we got that log spearing down just pat. Sometimes a limb of a tree would come floating along; it would maybe just be two or three inches in diameter, but we would slap that spear out onto the water just in front of the limb, and it would sort of skid along the surface of the water and slide right into the piece.

Calciano: You were really sharpshooters! Did you use more than one spear at a time?

Blaisdell: Oh yes, we always had two big spears in action, and sometimes we had a medium spear along too. And then sometimes, when the water wasn't too high and there wasn't much wood coming down the river, we'd used a real light spear with a very small rope, and we could throw that very far and very straight. If you'd like to stop that I'll show you a log spear.(Pause)

Calciano: That would hold a log? That and a rope?

Blaisdell: Oh yes.

Calciano: Did a blacksmith make that for you?

Blaisdell: We'd take them down as a rule and have the black smith sharpen them, but we made the spears. See that's leading [led-ing] in there, and that's heavy.

Calciano: Let me describe it to the tape: it's about four and a half feet long, isn't it?

Blaisdell: Yes.

Calciano: And it's a wooden pole about two inches in diameter.

Blaisdell: A regular shovel handle like.

Calciano: Yes, and a metal end.

Blaisdell: A little ferrule, and leaded at the end to give it weight.

Calciano: And then a spear point about three and a half or four inches long, tapered to a point.

Blaisdell: And you always attached the rope about a foot and a half from the end when you fired the spear. And we speared so much wood that we got so that we could hit a foot square board three times out of four at a distance of thirty or forty feet.

Calciano: Oh my.

Blaisdell: There was a fellow that day that was with us, the best man with a lasso that I ever saw. He was a Spanish fellow named Filbert Chaboya; he was a teamster, and he came down there with his lariat. And you could take a little piece of wood that long and he'd say, "Which end do you want me to catch it on?" We'd say, "Front end." He'd throw that rope out there and give a jerk and drop that noose right over the front end as slick as a whistle. You'd say that you could see going downstream how it would run into a noose, but we would say, "Back end," and he would throw that out, give that a flip, and put it onto the back end as it was going away.

Calciano: Oh my goodness.

Blaisdell: Oh, he was clever. He was sure clever with the rope. And he'd get one of the kids to run by him, and he would throw the noose over their head, drop it down to their feet, pull it, throw a half hitch around their arms, and in seconds have them so they couldn't do nothing.

Calciano: Hog-tied?

Blaisdell: Yes, that's right, hog-tied. Oh, he was clever. A big heavy-set Spanish fellow, Filbert Chaboya.

Wood Stoves

Calciano: I know you needed the wood for your wood stove. Now did that stove supply the heat for the house too, or do I recall your mentioning a heating stove?

Blaisdell: We had a heater stove, a wood heater, and also the stove for cooking.

Calciano: The two were separate?

Blaisdell: Yes.

Calciano: How big was your stove? Was it one of these things with four or five or six hot plates?

Blaisdell: Yes, about four hot plates. It was a St. Louis stove.

Calciano: What is the correct name of that black round thing that lifts out where you cook?

Blaisdell: A lid.

Calciano: A lid, that's right.

Blaisdell: Four lids, yes.

Calciano: And then an oven to one side I guess?

Blaisdell: Yes, an oven to one side. Yes, and lots of them had pipes in for heating hot water. That's the way you got your hot water.

Calciano: Oh?

Blaisdell: They had coil pipes in the fire box. You built your fire right in between those coil pipes and then you had hot water.

Calciano: Was there a tap at the bottom?

Mrs. B.: Well it was attached there and it would go to the sink.

Calciano: Oh, right to the sink!

Mrs. B.: Right to it; we had hot and cold water.

Blaisdell: Yes, when the fire was going.

Mrs. B.: And we had a warming oven up above. Things would get hot in the oven and you'd want to keep them warm, well you put them up there and a pipe went right straight through the chimney.

Calciano: I see.

Blaisdell: It was set up about a foot and a half above the stove.

Calciano: Would you keep the fire going all day long, or would you set it just for cooking the meals?

Mrs. B: All depended on what you were cooking. If we were just going to have breakfast and it was a hot day, we wouldn't make it up again until night or until noon, but everything was cooked on it, coffee or anything.

Blaisdell: It was sure hot work on our mothers. You take a day when it was hot and they were canning fruit, or when they had the wash on and heating the water. Everybody had a copper boiler in those times, a big boiler about two feet long and about fifteen or eighteen inches high; and fifteen inches wide. It'd be copper.

Calciano: Because it conducted the heat well or...

Blaisdell: Oh yes, they didn't rust you know.

Calciano: Oh is that why.

Blaisdell: And there used to be men go around "Tins to mend," they'd yell, and they would have a little coke box, a heater, you know, with coke in, and heat their soldering iron, and they would mend those if they got a hole in, and they'd charge you two bits or something like that you know, not much, but they made a living. "Tins to mend." Years ago there was a plumbing firm, Senegrini Bros., they got to be a big firm in the end, and when they first come here from Italy the old man would go along with his pack on his back, "Tins to mend," and the boy would come behind, "Me too." (Laughter) Yes, they both had a pack on them with their little coke box, you know. And the little fellow would blow in it and heat up a soldering iron, yes. "Tins to mend." "Me too."

Mrs. B.: He had the name Me Too all his life.

Calciano: How funny!

Blaisdell: And they eventually got to be a big plumbing firm here. They're all dead now.

Calciano: What was the name again?

Blaisdell: Senegrini. Italian.

Calciano: How would you regulate an oven? Sometimes you want an oven 300° and sometimes you want an oven 400°. How did you get that?

Mrs. B.: We didn't get that.

Calciano: Then how...

Mrs. B.: Some of them had a thermometer on them, you know, I mean a little gauge, but ours didn't. We didn't have one on ours.

Blaisdell: We used to bake bread, and then you'd take a straw from the broom and poke in the bread and see whether it was done or not.

Mrs. B.: That was mostly in cake. You take a loaf of bread out and press the bread, and if the bread flipped back it was done, and if it didn't come back, why cook it a little more, but cake you always had the straw. You put the straw in because the cake is thinner and it would stick; bread dough don't stick anyway.

Calciano: Yes, right. Now about the oven temperature, I know that you can tell by putting your hand in whether you have a hot oven or a medium oven, but how do you adjust the wood and everything so...

Mrs. B.: Well you just have to keep a medium fire.

Calciano: Were there no vents to open?

Mrs. B.: No, there was nothing to open. We very often had to put a piece of paper over the top of the bread to keep it from burning.

Calciano: Oh, I still do that every once in a while.

Mrs. B.: Well we used to, and as I say, we had to tell with our hand, and then Mama'd know or we'd know if it was about right, by putting our hand in it. And then after that we'd put the bread in, and we knew it'd be done in about an hour, and we'd watch it pretty close. Now when the fire’s go down, we'd just stir it up a bit and put in a little more wood.

Calciano: Would you make all the bread for a whole week all at once, or...

Mrs. B.: I made thirty loaves a week when I was home; there were nine of us, seven of us kids. I was in school, and I made thirty loaves a week, but I'd make it at night and in the morning make it into loaves. Mama'd bake it the next day. And then very often we used to make biscuits. We were bread-eaters you know.

Calciano: You must have been.

The Family Laundry

Calciano: Oh, I was interested In what you saying about the washing. You'd do your washing right on the stove?

Mrs. B.: You put the washing, the boiler, right over the front where the heat was, and we had to shave our soap.

Calciano: Shave your soap?

Mrs. B: Grate it.

Blaisdell: A lot of people made their own.

Calciano: Even when you were children they still made their own?

Mrs. B.: Oh we had to, even when we were married I made some, too.

Blaisdell: We saved the grease.

Mrs. B.: Save the grease, and use some lye in with it, and it made good soap for washing. Then we'd take the bucket and we couldn't put in too many, but we'd boil the sheets and take the sheets and put them out into the first rinse water, put them into a second clear water, then we put them into the third so we could do the bluing. We wanted to get them rinsed well because you know we didn't have a wringer.

Calciano: What did you use for bluing?

Mrs. B.: We used to buy ball-bluing, little round balls like this. We had a little clump, about six or eight of them. We'd take a little piece of cloth and put the bluing in there and tie a little string around them, put it down in the bluing water and swish it around and then save it and use it next time. They were just like little marbles. We'd buy little boxes of those. It was years before we had the liquid.

Calciano: Now was the bluing done on the stove too, or was that...

Mrs. B.: No, no. That was just put in the cold water to do the bluing.

Calciano: So the only thing that was on the stove was that first wash water?

Mrs. B.: That's right. Anyway we put on the big boiler, and then we'd scrape a bar and a half of soap, and then we put that in and let that all dissolve and all melt; we had wonderful suds. And then when we got down to the tail end and had things that didn't boil, we had to rub with a little washboard. First was a tin one and then a little glass one.

Calciano: Glass?

Mrs. B.: Glass ones never wore out. The tin ones we used to pick them up and cut ourselves. We'd be washing and they would wear through and then all of a sudden they'd break.

Calciano: Oh!

Mrs. B.: But the glass ones, our old glass one, I guess we still have it somewhere.

Calciano: You know I often wonder how people managed to clean house before vacuum cleaners were invented?

Blaisdell: They used a broom.

Mrs. B.: When it come time to clean the rugs we'd take all the rugs out and put them on the clotheslines, half as long as clear across the street, yes. And then we'd have a pole with a couple of nails in it to hold it up.

Calciano: Oh, yes, yes.

Mrs. B.: Pa'd take the rug out there, and we'd work like the dickens to get that big heavy rug over that line. We'd all have to take our turns; Mama would say, "Your turn." "Now it's your turn." We'd all go out and take our turn. We'd beat it on the rope. A lot of people if they had lawns would put it on the lawn, but we didn't have a lawn.

Calciano: Oh, you didn't?

Mrs. B.: No, we had a vacant space between the house and the barn. And then out on the whole back place we had a corral. We had horses. My brother carried papers on horseback. His route was all on the top of Mission Hill here, from over River Street, on this side of the river, clear out to Garfield Park. He had his own route.

Home Canning

Calciano: I guess you did a lot of canning back in those days. Would you grow a lot of your own fruits and vegetables, or would you buy them?

Blaisdell: Well, we grew quite a bit, but if we didn't have it we bought it, yes.

Calciano: And how many jars would you put up for a winter?

Blaisdell: A big family would really put up hundreds.

Mrs. B.: My mother put up about 300 jars of fruit, and that wouldn't be counting any jelly or jam or apple butter or pickles, or anything in that line. It'd just be pears and applesauce and apricots and peaches. We'd buy all of our fruit.

Calciano: Oh, your family bought?

Mrs. B.: We had to buy it all. There used to be a lady, Mrs. Rodgers was her name, and she used to come around once a week and take an order for next week, or come twice a week and bring my mother's fruit.

Calciano: And did you put up pickles?

Mrs. B.: Oh my golly yes, scores and scores. Now we did that when we were married, too. My mother put up lots and lots of pickles, chili sauce, chowchow and piccalilli.

Calciano: Chowchow, what's that?

Mrs. B.: Now the chili sauce is made of red tomatoes, and chowchow is made from the green ones.

Calciano: Oh.

Mrs. B.: It had a different taste. And the piccalilli is a spiced tomato, and she made it. We had a great big pantry, a big dark pantry with deep shelves, and she was never satisfied until all the shelves were filled.

Blaisdell: And I remember we made Our own catsup.

Gardening

Calciano: Well now, did your family have a garden where you grew your fruit, or did you also buy it?

Blaisdell: Well, we were always gardeners, and we had fruit trees of our own. We raised quite a bit of garden vegetables and fruit and berries.

Calciano: Did you can the berries?

Blaisdell: Well, some yes. We sold berries too.

Calciano: To friends or stores or...

Blaisdell: Yes, different people, different stores, yes. We had Mammoth blackberries, immense berries. We had berries that were two and a half inches long, Mammoth blackberries. Haven't seen one for years.

Mrs. B.: My mother used to make jelly out of peaches, and then she used to take the peelings and the pits and she'd boil that and make a peach syrup like for hot cakes.

Calciano: The pits and peelings?

Mrs. B.: Well, I guess they must have strained them to get the juice and then you can make syrup like that to use instead of maple syrup.

Calciano: Heavens. Did people garden much for pleasure, or was it pretty much for your vegetables and...

Blaisdell: Well, it was pretty much to get something to eat. When I was five or six years old, I can remember watering the beans and the cucumbers for my father. One time I was cutting the top off of corn, you know, to let the corn fill out better, and I hit my wrist with the sharp knife, and I got the scar here yet. I remember how the blood spurted out.

Calciano: Did you go to a doctor or just use home remedies?

Blaisdell: No, home remedies mostly then. We just bound it up. Yes, we used to have lots of home remedies then.

Calciano: Didn't you worry about blood poisoning? Wasn't that what they called an infection then?

Blaisdell: Well, they had them then, but we didn't worry about it. I always remembered people would take off warts. They would burn willow bark and make it into charcoal and then mix it with vinegar and put that on. And it works.

Calciano: It sounds as if it'd take the skin off! (Laughter)

Blaisdell: It took the warts off. When a dog used to get mange, they would take gunpowder. Let's see, I think it was gunpowder and willow bark and vinegar, and rubbed that on the dog's back and it would cure mange. Just black gunpowder.

Calciano: Were the kids of Spanish heritage still wearing garlic around their necks during wintertime when you were a boy, or was that...

Blaisdell: They wore asafetida. Oh, it was the stinkingest substance. And they wore that around their neck, a little bag of it. Yes, that was a great thing to ward off, I don't know what it'd ward off, if anything, but we wore it.

Calciano: Oh you wore it.

Mrs. B.: Oh yes, nine out of ten kids used to wear it.

Calciano: I would think it would work because no one would get near enough to you to contaminate you!

Blaisdell: That's right, that's right, it worked that way. (Laughter)

Calciano: Now, about your garden...

Blaisdell: I always had a big garden, ever since I was a kid, and I remember one time when tomatoes, I had lots of tomatoes, I would sell them to people for canning, and there was an old Iowan lived over near us, and we sold what we called a peach box, it held about thirty pounds of tomatoes, for twenty cents.

Calciano: What a price!

Blaisdell: And he'd see me on the street every few days, "How much are tomatoes now?" "Twenty cents." "Ain't they ever going to get any cheaper?" I says, "When they do, I'm not going to pick them!" And he never bought any;

he'd wait for them to get cheaper. Twenty cents for thirty pounds.

Calciano: Oh my goodness.

Blaisdell: (Laughter) Yes, gosh.

Butcher Wagons

Mrs. B.: We had the butcher come to our house in a little wagon. He had the meat all hanging inside and some laying down and just thousands of flies. He had a little curtain at the back of the wagon, and he'd come out there with a piece of paper and swish the flies.

Calciano: Oh! (Laughter)

Mrs. B.: Everybody bought; we had to buy.

Calciano: Flies or not.

Mrs. B.: All of us kids would stand around and he'd give every one a wienie.

Blaisdell: He'd give you liver for the cat, bones for the dog. There used to be an old German fellow, he lived over by, oh, Twin Lakes, and about once a month he came with his wagon with pork. He had wonderful pork; he raised a good deal himself and sometimes he bought it from the farmers who raised it. And my mother would go out with a great big dishpan and get it heaped up with pork, different cuts; some was to make pickled pork -- that was a side like for bacon. And she'd get a roast and a ham and she'd get leaf lard, and it was all from five to eight cents a pound.

Calciano: What is leaf lard?

Blaisdell: It's the heavy fat that's along the inside of the back. And then there was the back fat too, in that day: But the leaf lard made the best lard.

Calciano: What did you use the lard for?

Blaisdell: For cooking purposes.

Calciano: Frying or for pies or?

Blaisdell: For frying or for pies, for anything. That was five cents a pound, and we tried it out. We cut it up in little chunks, put it in a pot, and heated it. That was known as trying it out.

Mrs. B.: You just keep stirring it and stirring it until it all gets melted. And it's got to be plenty cooked or it will spoil; it'll mold.

Calciano: Does it get all brown?

Mrs. B.: Well, it starts to melt, but don't let it get too hot, and just keep stirring it, and pretty soon all the fat will float.

Calciano: Is it sort of like bacon grease?

Blaisdell: It'd be nice and white, you know.

Calciano: Oh, it was white?

Blaisdell: Oh yes, yes.

Mrs. B.: Oh yes, it was pure white lard you know.

Blaisdell: That leaf lard was white as that cloth there.

Calciano: Well when I cook bacon, why do I get brown grease?

Mrs. B.: Because bacon has been smoked.

Calciano: I see.

Butchering the Family Pig

Blaisdell: We raised pigs here when we first lived here, and we made our own bacon. We used liquid smoke. It made wonderful bacon.

Calciano: What is liquid smoke?

Blaisdell: Well, it's a chemical, and it smells and tastes just like smoked pork. It smells just like you had smoked it over a fire.

Calciano: And does it preserve it well?

Blaisdell: Oh yes, it made wonderful meat. I brought this in from the shed to show you. That's the gambrel stick we used to hang the pig on after we butchered it.

Calciano: My.

Blaisdell: See, you put a little hole in the pig's hind leg here underneath the cord; you slit it back of the knee joint, between the cords and the bone, and do it on each hind leg and spread him out on the gambrel stick.

Calciano: Oh, I see.

Blaisdell: That's old as the hills; that gambrel stick's made out of oak.

Mrs. B.: Our family raised pigs too.

Calciano: Oh?

Mrs. B.: Yes, oh yes. We lived down on Mission Street between Van Ness and Laurent, and we had pigs and cows and a horse and chickens right there, down there. Then my folks moved up next door here in 1905. There was two houses down between us and King and one up above. There wasn't anything else between here and Walnut and only one house on King. And we could stand right here and our cows were in the pasture at the time, and all my father had to do was step right outside the door and he'd be in the pasture to milk the cows.

Calciano: I didn't realize that so many people raised animals right here within the city.

Blaisdell: Oh yes. Nearly everybody had a cow. Cows, chickens.

Calciano: And you had farm animals out back here after you were married, didn't you?

Blaisdell: Oh yes. I owned three or four cows, but usually two were out in pasture and two were here. When these were too dry, why we'd put them in the pasture.

Mrs. B.: We had cows and chickens, pigs, geese.

Calciano: Well did you have more land here than you've got now, or was this just...

Blaisdell: Oh yes. I owned four lots out back then and had the use of three or four more. It was all vacant -just a few houses. These over across the street now, there was none there. All that was field.

Calciano: When you went to butcher your pig, did you do it yourself, or was it kind of hard to do after you had brought the pig up from babyhood?

Mrs. B.: Oh no, we never made pets out of them, no pets.

Blaisdell: She got mad at them instead.

Mrs. B.: No, no, we only had one that was a pet. A fellow gave it to me. It was a stray. He picked it up on the road. It was a runt, and he brought it down to us, and we made a pet out of him, but he got mean later. We put him out in the pigpen and every time my father would go to feed him he'd go over there and bite him. My father'd take a club and club him first and then feed him. Always when they killed a pig it was a big day. My father was always telling the kids about how he did it. He had a big old sled and they'd get the pig all washed and get the big barrel ready. They killed the pig by cutting his throat right in the middle. They'd scald him, you know, and scrape all the hair off, every bit of it.

Calciano: Did you see the actual killing? All the kids stood around while your father...

Mrs. B.: We didn't watch him kill the pig, no. We were always in the background when he cut his throat and bled him, yes. Then they'd bring him to the stripping room and they'd get a hay hook on a rope and pulley and drop him up and down in boiling water, and then all the little kids would have a hand in scraping the hair off. It'd make him nice and white, pure white. My father'd hang him up overnight and let him get good and cold.

Calciano: I guess you used almost every part of the pig?

Mrs. B.: Oh yes, we used everything that we could. A friend of ours used to like to make headcheese, but we never cared for it.

Calciano: That wasn't Fred Wagner was it?

Mrs. B.: No.

Calciano: He once told me about headcheese.

Mrs. B.: Well these were friends and neighbors of ours. Whenever we killed a pig, you know, we'd give some to the neighbors, and when they killed a pig they'd give us a piece.

Calciano: I see. Well now, would you kill just once a year or twice a year or...

Mrs. B.: We'd kill them in the fall. For many years for our Thanksgiving, which I would rather have now than I would turkey, we'd have roast pork. We'd take the whole side. I don't know when I ever started having turkey. I always did like roast pork better than I did turkey.

Calciano: Did you very often sell animals?

Mrs. B.: We sold all the calves.

Blaisdell: Yes, sold all the calves, and sold some of the pigs too.

Outhouses and Bathrooms

Calciano: What kind of plumbing would you have? You mentioned you had the water pipe going through the stove if you needed hot water.

Mrs. B.: Well, we had hot water in the bath, to fill the bathtub. Yet in those days why we had the old-fashioned outhouse out in back, way out in back.

Calciano: About what year did you get an inside toilet?

Mrs. B.: We had them in here when we were married in 1914. They put them in the house then, but...Well my folks were next door here from '05 on and I think it was about 1911 or so before they got an indoor toilet.

Calciano: Was there already a room that had a sink and bathtub in it, or did you have to make a special bathroom once you put the indoor plumbing in?

Mrs. B.: Yes, you had to have a place. They didn't hardly anyone even have bathrooms, I mean just the bathtub and the washstand.

Calciano: If they did have a tub and washstand, would there be space to put a toilet in that room or...

Mrs. B.: No there wasn't hardly any room for it the way that things were crowded. We didn't used to have halls. Two doors opened to the bathroom. And besides the two doors opening in, they'd open against the tub, and you didn't have room. So then some people would have these folding doors put on, and they'd have the toilet inside.

Calciano: I see.

Mrs. B.: Of course the outhouse was in the backyard. We had a greenhouse, and ours was behind the greenhouse.

Calciano: Yes. Well I have always wondered in these old houses if they just blocked a corner off a room to make the indoor bathroom, or what they did.

Mrs. B.: Well, my grandmother, for about as long as I can remember, she had what we always called a water closet. I don't know where the water came from; I don't know where it was connected. You pulled up on a little lever and a thing to flush, and where that water came from I don't know. It wasn't a regular toilet like we had later, but they had that there for many, many, many years, and I don't know what in the world, or whether they had a cesspool there where they used to put water, or what. We used to think that was wonderful because we didn't have anything like that. Every once in a while we'd have to clean the cesspool when it flowed over.

Calciano: Oh great. (Laughter)

Mrs. B.: Yes, flowed over. One outhouse over here got blown over; ours got blown over once by a strong wind.

Blaisdell: On Halloween, when they played Halloween pranks (they used to do a lot of that years ago) they'd take a backhouse and put it on somebody's lawn. And then they used to get a beer sign and put it on some minister's lawn.

Calciano: Oh!

Mrs. B.: They'd always look forward to that. Then they'd take the gates, everybody had gates you know, and that was the night they'd take peoples' gates. We would come over and our gate would be way up on a telegraph pole.

Calciano: Oh no.

Mrs. B.: Yes, as high up as they could climb.

Calciano: Did you usually get everything back?

Mrs. B.: Oh yes, always got them back. But in those days people expected them to steal their gates. But nowadays, the kids set fires and throw things through windows and things like that.

Blaisdell: One time down there at Bright's blacksmith shop on Front Street and Soquel, they put a buggy up on top of that roof. It was up there thirty, forty feet up in the air, oh, at least thirty feet up in the air, on top of that roof. How in the dickens they got that up there I don't know, and I can't remember how they got it down.

Calciano: How awful!

Water Supply

Calciano: Getting back to the plumbing, did you ever have a pump in your kitchen?

Mrs. B.: Well not us.

Calciano: You mostly had running water from a tap?

Mrs. B.: Yes.

Blaisdell: In the early days there was city water and there was Hihn's water, and the city water was sixty cents a month, no meters, and the Hihn was fifty cents.

Calciano: You could have either system? You could have your choice?

Blaisdell: Oh yes.

Mrs. B.: They changed, one or the other.

Calciano: Then why would anybody have the city instead of the Hihn, if Hihn was cheaper?

Blaisdell: In the '90's the city voted, oh I forget, I don't know how many hundred thousand dollars, I forget the amount, I think it's around five hundred thousand more or less. And they voted bonds to make a nice modern city water system. Well, the bonds were stolen somehow or other you know. Somebody stole the bonds and went over the hill with them, and the city had to vote the bonds again and pay for them twice. And they told the people when they voted those bonds the second time, I remember my father and mother talking about it. They said we was to have free water if the bonds passed. Free water, yes. That was what they told the voters.

Calciano: Oh my.

Blaisdell: Oh they told the voters some big lies. And so they had to vote the bonds over again, and pay again.

Calciano: And no free water ever?

Blaisdell: We were a long ways from free water.

Calciano: Why did Hihn have his own company?

Blaisdell: Well, he was a big man around here; he had timber holdings in the mountains and he owned Capitola practically. He had lots of property, a rich man.

Calciano: Well now, the city charged sixty cents and he charged fifty cents, why didn't everybody buy from him? Why would anybody buy from the city?

Mrs. B.: If you lived in the city you had to buy it from the city.

Blaisdell: They didn't want to change over, for one thing. And, well, when the city come in with that new bond business, they bought the Hihn Company out and it was all city.

Mrs. B.: My grandmother used to live on California Street, and she had a pump out in her backyard.

Blaisdell: Yes, some people had pumps.

Mrs. B.: She had this pump and it pumped a lot of water. She'd have water in her house anytime she wanted it.

Calciano: What did you do for watering your animals? Did you have a pump out in back or use...

Mrs. B.: No, we had plenty of city water at home, and there was water in most cow pastures.

Blaisdell: Yes, there's a whole lot of water right under the ground here because you go down just three or four feet at the most and you'll hit a white marl which won't let nothing penetrate. And the water seepage from up in the hill here comes down just on top of that white marl. It used to come out diagonally from

Laurel Street over to where Kinzies live on Van Ness Avenue. It was all green all summer because the water comes close to the surface where the closeness of the marl to the surface forces it up. And when they dug the sewer line down on Laurel Street, they dug it down pretty deep. There were lots of Indian relics like mortars and pestles and things like that, big long pestles, beauties, that were chopped up by the workmen. Anyway, when they dug that trench for the sewer, water run right down in a stream on the bottom of the trench.

Mrs. B.: We used to have to park our cars on a raised place on the street. We'd have to go up high because it was always wet. And in wintertime that adobe, we couldn't get over it. Everybody that tried to get through got stuck. There was a great big adobe hole in the middle of the street.

Calciano: My.

Porch-sitting

Calciano: One thing that I've often heard about is that people used to spend some of their leisure time sitting on their porches. Is this true?

Blaisdell: Yes, yes, in the evening, especially warm evenings, people would sit out there until after dark.

Mrs. B.: We'd walk over to somebody's house, and they'd be sitting out there; we'd sit on the steps and visit there for an hour or so. The man who used to live up above us here used to sit out every night. And when he found out that my folks were on the porch next door, he would come down with a handful of raisins and he would sit there and talk.

Band Concerts

Blaisdell: Fifty, sixty years ago most of the stores downtown had a big porch which went out over the sidewalk and was supported by posts that would come down right at the curb. And in summer they had band concerts two or three nights a week. And every night people would go downtown, you know, and some of the stores would be open, ice-cream places, candy stores, and people would go down and listen to the band concert. You got a good ice-cream soda for five cents in those days at Horsnyder's drugstore which was down on Pacific right about opposite the Palomar Hotel. Today you can't get one to match it no matter what you pay. Yes, five cents.

Calciano: I have often heard that the ice cream was better then.

Blaisdell: Oh I never tasted any like Gillen and Trezona had. They were right in there where Leask's store is. In fact the north side of Leask's store is where they bought out Gillen. A boy used to work there, he was kind of a chum of mine, and I used to go down and help him make the ice cream. Oh, it was delicious. There's never been any ice cream here since then that could compare with that, Gillen and Trezona. They had real vanilla then, and that was everything.

Calciano: Yes, and I suppose they used a lot of cream?

Blaisdell: Oh pure cream, you know, and real vanilla. And we'd make that great big freezer and churn it with electricity and then when it come to take the dasher out, he'd hand me the dasher and a plate and a spoon. Oh boy. (Laughter) That was sure good.

Calciano: You're making me hungry! I'm interested in these band concerts you mentioned. Where did the band play?

Blaisdell: On these porches.

Calciano: Was it a stationary band, or did it walk up and down?

Blaisdell: Oh no, no. They sit up on these porches just like an orchestra.

Calciano: Oh, I see, and then the people were in the streets?

Blaisdell: People were in the streets, yes. It was really nice. They'd have those two or three times a week. And they'd have some nice bands, too. And when the Casino started they used to have those band concerts down there. They had some nice bands there. Like I remember the Third Artillery Band; it was a very good band.

Calciano: That was a military band?

Blaisdell: Oh yes, Army band, yes, from San Francisco.

Calciano: Oh, and they would come down here?

Blaisdell: When they started the first casino here about 1907, Fred Swanton was the man that got the idea and got it built, and to advertise it, well, he had the Third Artillery Band come and we had a little drum corp which I was in, and we went all over the state advertising Santa Cruz.

Calciano: Oh my.

Blaisdell: Yes. Oh, we had a dandy time.

Calciano: Now about these bands that would play on the front porches of the stores, were they local people who played in the band?

Blaisdell: Generally it was a Santa Cruz band or Hastings' Band.

A musician by the name of George Hastings lived down there on Lincoln Street, and he had a band for years, quite a nice little band. And sometimes it would be a different band.

Calciano: Would they get any money from people?

Blaisdell: Well...

Calciano: Contributions or anything?

Blaisdell: I don't know where they got the money because I know I never paid any when I went down to hear them. Nobody else did, but I don't know whether the city paid them or what. They must have got some money somewhere. (Laughter) But they played and played a good many years. But you didn't have to pay musicians then like they do now. You pay them more an hour now than they got all night in those days. Way back along around 1903 or '04 the Kilties Band came here. They were an organization who was got together up in Canada. Good musicians, there was 75 of them, and they were all dressed in kilts like Scotsmen. And they had a wonderful band. They come here and give a concert in the Naval Reserve Armory which was on Front Street just below Soquel Avenue, and they packed the place. I'll always remember there was sixteen of them in the chorus sang "Annie Laurie."- Never forgotten it, beautiful. And they had a drum major; he was seven foot six.

Calciano: Oh my.

Blaisdell: Allen McDonald. And he had one of those bearskin shakers on, two feet four.

Calciano: Oh my goodness.

Blaisdell: Boy, he looked like a giant coming down the street. They paraded down Pacific Avenue. They let all the school children out so they could go and see the Kilties parading. It was really fine.

Vaudeville Shows

Calciano: Did you ever go to Knight's Opera House?

Blaisdell: Many, many times. They used to have these stock companies come and play for a week. They'd play a different show every night, and they'd have vaudeville in between. They were usually always three act shows, and in between the first and second and second and third acts they'd have vaudeville shows. Ten, twenty, thirty cents. Good show, too; they were good.

Calciano: Was ten cents the balcony or...

Blaisdell: Ten cents was the balcony, twenty cents for the medium, and thirty cents for the reserved best seats.

Colored minstrel shows used to come, and they were funny. I think the finest act I ever seen in vaudeville was a quartet imitating the steam calliope. Just wouldn't let them walk off the stage. They imitated that just to perfection, and they just wouldn't let them get off the stage. They'd clap and clap and clap until those guys would just be tired out.

Calciano: Oh my. You wouldn't think they could do it with voices.

Blaisdell: Oh, just perfect, just perfect. They were colored. Those minstrel shows were good. I always remember, there's one joke that always tickled me. This interlocuter asked one of the colored men, he asked, "Where you living now, Sambo?" "Well," he said, "I was living over on the east side, right here in Santa Cruz." "Yeah? How do you like it?" "Oh," he says, "I like it fine. It's the best place I ever lived, Just tickled to death," he said, "but I've got to move." "Well," he said, "that's funny you've got to move, what's wrong?" "Oh," he said, "the neighbors, they're talking about me. Some of them say I stay out late nights and gamble, some of them say I quarrels with my wife, others are saying I stole a few chickens in the neighborhood." And the interlocuter says, "That's simple, why don't you make them prove it." He says, "What'd you say?" "Why don't you make them prove it." He says, "They did." (Laughter) There used to be a fellow here, Billy Johnson, and he was a colored man and janitor. And he was popular; everybody around town knew him. Good-natured guy, always laughing.

Mrs. B.: Hadn't he been a slave?

Blaisdell: He could have been, I don't know. Anyway he was a good-natured guy, everybody knew him. And one day I was coming in from my route out River Street, coming back to the post office, and he was across the street, right across from where those gas tanks are now, washing some windows on the outside. He was over there by himself, and all of a sudden as I was opposite him he bust out laughing -- I thought he was going to fall off the ladder. I said, "Billy, what on earth's the matter with you?" He said, "Come over here and I'll tell you." So I walked across the street. He says, "You remember two weeks ago that terrific wind storm we had?" and I said, "Yes, I remember it well. It threw down the chicken yard fence at my place. It was right before Thanksgiving. A terrific gale." And he says, "You remember that?" I says, "Yes." "Well," he says, "It blew down my chicken yard gate. I went out to feed them next morning and the chickens was all gone. I couldn't find them no place." And he says, "My next door neighbor seen me looking around and says, 'What's the matter, Billy?' And I says, 'My chickens is gone; can't find them no place.' And the other fellow says, 'Maybe they went home." Billy says, "You know, I never knew until right now what that man meant." (Laughter)

Mrs. B.: They really went home.

Blaisdell: Yes, to where he'd stole the chickens from!

Calciano: (Laughter)

Blaisdell: He says, "I never knew until just now what that man meant." It was two weeks soaking in!

Mrs. B.: A show used to come every so often down on Locust Street. They just put the old tent there on the vacant lot and just put the chairs all around. It was dirty and dusty on the bare ground. Well everybody used to want to see every one of their plays. Sometimes they'd have a different one every night for maybe a week and everyone would want to see it because we didn't have any shows. One night we went down there and they had an aisle down the center. Somebody'd just come there and sat down, and the chair was in a gopher hole, and it knocked down the whole row. Everybody in the whole row went down. And as I say, such a dirty, messy row in the dirt ... (Laughter)

Calciano: Oh, that's funny. Like dominoes.

Mrs. B.: Yes.

Calciano: Were there ever any chautauquas in town?

Blaisdell: Once or twice I guess, yes.

Calciano: They weren't as popular as the traveling shows though?

Blaisdell: No, those stock companies would do a terrific world of good; those colored minstrels too, they were fine. They had one fellow, all he ever did for twenty-five years was sing "Silver Threads Among the Gold."

Dancing,Rollerskating, and Picnicking

Calciano: Were there many dances?

Blaisdell: Oh yes, yes, they were popular, usually on Saturday night.

Calciano: Did you go very often?

Blaisdell: I didn't go to them very much though. I always liked to hunt. Dances were usually on Saturday night and they interfered. I couldn't go dancing all night and get up at three or four o'clock in the morning and go hunting or fishing, so I didn't go to many dances. Went to a few.

Calciano: Did you go when you were courting your wife?

Blaisdell: No, we didn't go to dances. We went to some afterwards. There was a Forester's lodge, and one of them had a place way up Blackburn Gulch. They were right up among the redwoods, and we used to go have dances up there. We also had them in the lodge hall, too.

Mrs. B.: Our parties were at home. We'd have a masquerade, and everybody would try to guess who everybody was. And at our home we had one big room that was unfurnished and we could turn that into a dance hall. We'd dance until about seven o'clock and we'd eat, then we'd dance until about two. Poor old father would play the violin for us, and then he'd want to get up at five and milk the cows and go to work over at the tannery.

Calciano: What a schedule!

Mrs. B.: And, never complained. He liked the company; about twenty-five to thirty.

Calciano: Mostly neighbors?

Mrs. B.: Neighbors, yes. Friends and neighbors, they were invited. And then some of the other of our neighbors had a great big kitchen, and they would sometimes set their stove over to one side, get somebody from the country to sit on top of the stove and play for us, and we'd dance over there all night. And then we'd have a skating party in our front room on skates.

Calciano: Skates!

Mrs. B.: Yes, roller skates. And I don't know where we ever got them, but it's a wonder we didn't get killed. It didn't suit any of us; we all took a turn and went around the room and fell. Then Sundays we'd go on our picnics up the coast. We'd all walk, forty of us, walk up to Wilder's ranch and sit in there and have a picnic. My mother and father and other couples and old friends. We'd take their wagon and carry our lunch in it, sandwiches and a picnic lunch. We'd spread out our lunch. You don't see anybody doing it now; nobody would walk that far for a picnic now and walk back, clear back home.

Blaisdell: A bunch of us used to walk on Sunday afternoon clear up to Rincon lime kiln; that's three miles up the canyon. There was a swimming hole there and fifteen or twenty of us would go and swim the whole afternoon and walk home that evening.

Family Marriages

Calciano: I remember you said you had two brothers and one sister.

Blaisdell: Yes I did.

Calciano: (To Mrs. Blaisdell) And how many brothers and sisters did you have?

Mrs. B.: Four brothers and two sisters.

Calciano: Did most of your brothers and sisters marry local people and stay in the area?

Mrs. B.: Many of them married around in our own group. One sister married a fellow from Santa Cruz. The other sister married a man in San Francisco. My brother married a girl from Salinas; the other one married one from San Francisco.

Calciano: Now how did they meet these people from San Francisco and Salinas?

Mrs. B.: My brother was up there in San Francisco working for the telephone company. And then my other brother moved from here to Salinas; he had a butcher shop in Salinas. That's where he met her. And my sister, this man that she knew was introduced by her aunt. They met there at my aunt's in San Francisco.

Calciano: (To Mr. Blaisdell) And did your brothers and sister marry local people?

Blaisdell: Mine, yes. Well no. Ed married a girl from Montana, and Ben married a girl from Pescadero.

Calciano: How did Ed meet the girl from Montana?

Blaisdell: Well, she come down here; he carried mail down by the beach, you know, where a lot of the summer people stayed on Riverside Avenue down there, and she and her mother had come down here on vacation, and that's where he met her.

Calciano: And the Pescadero girl, how did she...

Blaisdell: Well, my brother went up there hunting with a fellow. This fellow was kind of sweet on this gal and took my brother up there with him, and that's where Ben met her, and he wound up marrying her.

Calciano: And did your sister marry a local boy?

Blaisdell: Yes, she married a man that, he was Swiss, and he lived over there near the cemetery when my sister lived near there.

Calciano: There were a great number of people who moved in from other parts of the United States, weren't there?

Blaisdell: Oh yes, yes. Once there was quite a bunch come here from up in Point Arena; quite a bunch come down from there.

Calciano: Why?

Blaisdell: Well I don't know, I guess they just didn't like it up there and they wanted the sunshine. And there was quite a bunch that come here from South Dakota at one time.

Calciano: Oh really?

Blaisdell: Yes. And right after the big earthquake in 1906, about a month afterwards, there was quite a jolt one afternoon about two o'clock, and I was carrying mail on King Street there. I was subbing for Springer, I guess. And this lady, Mrs. Shortridge, she came a bolting out of the front door, never touched the stairs, three or four steps, and landed on the lawn. And she says, "What do you do, stay in the house or run out?" (Laughter) And it amused me because she lost no time getting out.

Calciano: Was it an earthquake?

Blaisdell: It was, oh yes. Oh yes, it was a good jolt. She'd just come out from South Dakota.

Calciano: Oh, and she didn't know.

Blaisdell: Yes, and the Wood brothers, Wood died here just about last year, wasn't it? Arthur Wood that had the manufacturing place on Cherry Street. He made incubators and things like that. Well they all come out from South Dakota too.

Retirement

Calciano: When did Santa Cruz come to be desired as a retirement place?

Blaisdell: Well, I'd say more in the last twenty, twenty-five years.

Calciano: This is the impression I've been given too. Certainly at the present time a good percentage of the population is older.

Blaisdell: Yes, yes. It's a nice climate and it appeals to people. I know I had a man on my route down on the Avenue, his name was Bahm, Gus Bahm, a German man, and he run the delicatessen there. And before he was in that business he was on the big ships you know, like the President line that went around the world, these tours, and he said he'd been nine different times around the world, and he had visited in twenty-nine different countries. And he says this is the nearest to paradise right here that he'd ever seen.

Calciano: Oh my.

Blaisdell: This is the best place that he'd ever seen.

Calciano: Did people tend to retire as much around the turn of the century as we do now?

Mrs. B.: Well it wasn't established. My father made $28 a month, and he didn't own a home here until 1905. Of course at that time we didn't have to pay very much rent.

Calciano: Well did your father work until he died, or did he retire?

Mrs. B.: He retired. My brother thought he'd worked long enough.

Calciano: So some people did retire then.

Mrs. B.: Well he wouldn't have retired if my brother didn't help him. He didn't have very much money saved. He couldn't since he worked for $28 a month at the tannery, and before he went to the tannery he did ranch work and worked in sawmills.

Calciano: (To Mr. Blaisdell) Did your father ever retire?

Blaisdell: No, not exactly. He spent a good deal of time around the courthouse.

Calciano: Oh that's right.

Blaisdell: He'd be on juries and, oh, he served as constable some, you know, special jobs I guess. I think he was Justice of the Peace once, and he did things like that. He got a pension, too, since he was in the Civil War.

Calciano: Well, for example, if a man worked as a clerk, would he work until he was eighty or ninety, or would he have to retire? What was the common thing? Today you are expected to retire.

Blaisdell: Well, years ago they wasn't on the retirement so much. They worked if they was in good health.

Mrs. B.: If you couldn't do the work, why then they'd replace you with somebody else.

Blaisdell: Yes, there was no Social Security.

Mrs. B.: There was nothing like that; no unemployment or anything in that line.

Blaisdell: You didn't get much money in those days, but things were a lot cheaper. Like I said before, you got a better ice-cream soda then for five cents than you get now for thirty-five cents.

Old Crab Joe

Calciano: Before we finish talking about the old days, one thing I wanted to ask, were there any people in town who were sort of legends? People that everybody heard about or knew about?

Blaisdell: Yes, there was old Crab Joe; he was kind of lame, and he made his way to the Cowell wharf every morning, and he'd get a couple of crabs and eke out an existence. Finally he got religion, and there was a friend of ours used to laugh at him, he knew him well. And one night he happened to be down-town and the Salvation Army used to preach on corners at night back then. Anyway, Crab Joe got religion, and he was out with them, and he was making a speech you would have died of laughing. He says, "The trouble with most people is that you're too ignorant. You stay right here at home. You never get out in the world and see something. You don't know nothing." He says, "Me, I been to Monterey, Salinas, Hollister, all these places. You ought to get out in the world and see something."

Calciano: Oh no!

Blaisdell: And then my friend said that when the Klondike Gold Rush was on, that old Crab Joe actually thought that you'd have to go over Pacheco Pass, get a boat over there, go up a few miles and you'd be at the Klondike.

That was Crab Joe.

Calciano: When was the Klondike Gold Rush?

Blaisdell: It was about 1898.

Calciano: Did people go from Santa Cruz?

Blaisdell: Oh yes, they went from everywhere. Yes, yes, oh yes.

THE TWENTIES AND THIRTIES

Prohibition

Calciano: Two important periods in more recent history were Prohibition and the Great Depression. What happened to Santa Cruz during Prohibition?

Blaisdell: Oh, God, there was bootleggers and people would go out in the hills and get liquor. There was plenty of liquor then. The people drank then that never drank before or since because it was just the fad to get a drink. Yes, you could buy, I don't know, a gallon of whiskey for next to nothing. A fellow got a gallon for me, it was made somewhere up here in the hills, a dollar per gallon. There was no tax, and it was pretty good whiskey too.

Calciano: I've heard that there wore a lot of speakeasies and bootleg joints?

Blaisdell: Oh yes, yes. And there was a fellow out on Vine Hill, the rural route see; I was out there in about '22, and Prohibition come in along about 1919 or '20 at the most. I was out there then and this fellow, he was bootlegging and selling wine. One of the fellows in the post office named Springer drank a good deal, and he knew the rounds, where to get liquor. He says to speak to so and so out there, he's got good wine. So I spoke to him, oh no, no, he didn't have any, he was all out. He didn't know me, see?

Calciano: Yes.

Blaisdell: And I told Springer what had happened. "Oh," he says, "he just don't know you. I'll see him." So Springer saw him a few days after to tell him that I was okay. So when the fellow saw me on the way, he waved at me, "Say, I got wine now."

Calciano: You had to be careful. I guess.

Blaisdell: Yes, yes.

Calciano: There was a lot of liquor run in at New Brighton beach, wasn't there?

Blaisdell: Oh yes.

Calciano: Was that the biggest place or...

Blaisdell: Well, that was about as big a place as there was, I guess, yes.

Calciano: Who did it out there? Who ran that operation?

Blaisdell: Well, there was different ones into it, and they would have whiskey put in bottles and in a case made right around here somewhere not too far away, and they'd take it out there and dip it in the salt water, and then they'd claim it was shipped in from Canada, and run through the surf into shore.

Calciano: Oh, isn't that funny. Were there a lot of speakeasies on Pacific Avenue and the downtown area?

Blaisdell: Yes there was, but you had to kind of be known to get into them. But they were all over. Yes, I went over hunting with a couple of Santa Cruz men here, prominent men, and before we got out of Santa Cruz they had to stop over on Soquel Avenue and get a drink upstairs there in a place they all liked. It was just beyond Branciforte, about where the Shopper's Corner is now, someplace in there. They had to stop there and get a drink. And then we got up to the top of Pacheco Pass and they got out their own flask there. I didn't drink with them; I don't like the stuff. I drink it once in a while. I might take a drink of wine at dinner, but I don't like it. Anyway, when we got to Los Banos they had to hunt up another place there that they knew of.

Calciano: Oh my, they really were into it. (Laughter)

Blaisdell: And then they finally got to the hunting ground.

Calciano: Were there many raids by law enforcement officers?

Blaisdell: Oh yes, yes, lots of them.

Calciano: Was this in the papers?

Blaisdell: Oh yes. They'd arrest them and most of them would be out and at it again.

Calciano: Well now, in a lot of the cities the police force knew very well where all the bootleg joints were, but didn't enforce the law. Were there a lot of people in our city government who knew all about it and didn't care?

Blaisdell: I think it was pretty much that way; unless they were forced to action they didn't do too much of it. There was one old fellow, he was a watchman for the Southern Pacific there at Laurel Street. He had a little house there, and when the trains would back up there, you know, switching, he would come out and stop traffic, and he made liquor out of figs.

Calciano: Oh!

Blaisdell: I bought some of it. Well that fig makes kind of a brandy, strong stuff. Up in Trinity County, we'd go up there year after year, and these people up there where we stayed, their uncle made brandy out of figs. He distilled it, and he got the still too hot and burnt it. And this stuff was, oh, just liquid fire. It had a burnt taste; it was terrible. I took one sip of it, and they had a water pipe right to the outside of the house. It was running day and night; of course it didn't cost them a cent, you know; it come out of the spring there, so they had plenty of water and it didn't cost them a cent. I said, "I have to put a little water in this," and I went out and threw the stuff out and run some water in it and come back and drank the water. Um, terrible.

Calciano: They didn't know the meaning of mellow, did they?

Blaisdell: Oh my it was awful, like pouring hot lead down your throat.

The Great Depression

Calciano: I've been wondering about Santa Cruz at the time of the Depression. There were a lot of crack-pot economic schemes that went floating around California at the time -- Ham and Eggs, the Townsend Plan, etc. Did any of these have a large following in Santa Cruz?

Blaisdell: Ham and Eggs, Townsend Plan, and these chain letters, everybody was talking about how somebody made so much money in these chain letters, you know.

Calciano: Oh?

Blaisdell: Put a dime or two bits in and tell four of your friends and get them to send it. Well some guy, if it was kept up any length of time, would get some, but those at the end never get nothing, you know. It was against the postal laws those chain letters, but nevertheless there was hundreds of them going left and right during the Depression.

Calciano: I didn't know that.

Blaisdell: Oh yes, that was a fad for a year or so, yes, chain letters. Everybody was going to get rich by the chain letter.

Calciano: Did the people in Santa Cruz listen very much to this Ham and Eggs business?

Blaisdell: Well yes, it had quite a few followers, oh yes.

Calciano: There was an election, wasn't there? Wasn't it statewide?

Blaisdell: Yes, yes, they voted on that welfare business, that old-age pensions. They said that we wouldn't need hospitals anymore if that went through. They've been building wings on our hospitals out here ever since, yes. Oh, there's lots of good promises in elections. Yes, we wouldn't need County Hospital anymore; that was one of the main things that they said.

Calciano: What was the reasoning behind this?

Blaisdell: Well that people would be taken care of by this old-age pension. They wouldn't have to go to the County Hospital. Oh yes, they used that. And I tell you, there was another thing, it originated in St. Louis. There was a guy there, oh, I can't think of his name, and he printed a little paper, The Women's National Daily, and they went out by the thousands. I had the least on my mail route because I had a lot of Italian people out in the River Street section, and I had Chinatown with Chinamen, and a lot of Italians around Front Street and Water and Bulkhead, and I didn't have many, but I had eighty-five to deliver. That was the least of any of the routes; but one or two of the routes like Frank Ennor over on the east side, he had over four hundred, and it'd come every day, a little thin sheet, oh it was only half as big as an ordinary newspaper. And this guy back there in St. Louis was going to give everybody a pension when they were about fifty-five or sixty years old, or maybe not that much. Oh he was going to give them so much a month, and just for the mere one payment of $55. Well poor old people, I remember people named Guinee, he worked at the powder mill and then he got too old to work anymore, and they had a few dollars saved and they went into that scheme and hundreds of others paid in, thinking they were going to get a life-time pension. Well finally the government got after him and closed him down and all those people, just hundreds of them here in Santa Cruz that had paid into that thinking they were going to get this for nothing, practically.

Calciano: Oh dear.

Blaisdell: They just lost every dollar they put into it. I can't think of that guy's name that was the head of that, but he got rich, of course.

Calciano: Yes, it was quite a scheme.

Blaisdell: And those papers, you know, they came from St. Louis, and they would get blocked by snows in Colorado in those days, and sometimes they'd be four days late and we'd get four issues at once, and we had to fold those and case those, you know, and what a job that was.

Calciano: You had to case them?

Blaisdell: Yes, we had to case them and route them for delivery.

Calciano: Oh my goodness.

Blaisdell: Oh, my goodness is right. The work that that meant! And yet we made two deliveries a day. Boy. I remember once the boss went with me (you know they check the routes once a year). He went with me, and I started hitting it up out River Street, and I could really walk fast because I was hunting and fishing all the time and my legs were tough. And he says, "Wait a minute, you don't have to walk that fast." "Well," I says, "You do if you're going to get through in eight hours. Come on." (Laughter)

Calciano: Oh, that's funny.

Blaisdell: Yes sir, you had to really step it off.

Trans: Carolyn Sakamoto
Phyllis Morris
Hilda Gallaghan

Typed: Nancy Roark

Digitized: TriAxial Data Systems