San Luis Obispo County
Ranching and Land Stewardship
Oral History Project

James Sinton

Ranching in San Luis Obispo County

Conducted by Dean Miller
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Special Collections Department
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Sinton Ranch
Shell Creek, Shandon, California
March 26, 2003

The interview begins by viewing photos.

DEAN MILLER: There are a bunch of pictures. Does that building look familiar?

JAMES SINTON: No, no.

DM: It looks pretty impressive. I don't know whether that's in Atascadero?

JS: I say No – I don't know. I've seen this building. This creek would indicate it wasn't in this area.

DM: Maybe in Atascadero?

JS: Possible, possible.

DM: Maybe that is a good thing. This has got "Medley Still, horses in corral" written on back of the photo.

JS: Medley Still lived out at the La Panza. They called it something like the La Panza station.

DM: It's the old stone building that's still there.

JS: Right, and they operated kind of a hotel/boarding house, or some place, the post office. Yes, I remember Still. When they hauled grain in from Carrizo Plain the only place they could take it was San Luis to get it on the boat. So they went right past there, dropped down into the Navajo Canyon and then back over the hill again to Pozo. And they stayed one night there at what we refer to as La Panza, which was where the McClains/Stills were, and then the next night, if all went well, they were in Pozo, where there was a hotel and store – in ideal weather – you forget about that.

DM: Was the trip to SLO from Pozo possible in one day?

JS: I'd guess they had to go to Santa Margarita. Pretty slow, two miles an hour, mile and three–quarters of an hour is a pretty good clip for a team. They had two wagons, one driving behind the other.

DM: What were they, four–horse teams or –

JS: Oh, no, no, there would be six, eight, ten mules. The mules would be in pairs, and they used what was referred to as "jerk lines". Usually the teamster rode a lead mule, a mule in front of the wagon. You controlled the lead mules – were the bosses – you controlled them by jerking the line once, twice, three times...go right, go left, stop. Have you been over what I'll refer to as the old grade from Pozo?

DM: I don't know.

JS: It's a road I'll take you over some day if you'd like. The original road from the Carrizo Plain – left the plains, went up by where the Stills lived, dropped down in Navajo Canyon, came down this way where eventually it circled back and went up over a lower divide with lots of tight switchbacks, dropped down into Pozo. These guys had to have this long line, I'd say eight mules and two wagons, and they'd go around very tight turns and they really had to know what they were doing. That was the only way they could get in, and they had to go clear to San Luis. They'd eventually unload onto the narrow gauge, then to the port.

DM: Then that was abandoned for the present, more or less, road.

JS: This road that you took in, [Highway] 58, was built at the time of the Second World War. There would have been no way to go – well, if we had wanted to go from here to the Carrizo Plain, we would have gone up this valley, past where you saw I pointed out where the Camatta Ranch house was, up to the canyon from there, and then we would have hit a road which went from Pozo to La Panza – two grades – and we would have gone over that second grade and dropped down the road to the La Panza Ranch and then out, which was quite a trek.

DM: That explains Medley –

JS: Medley Still. When I first knew of the people who lived out there, were the McClains. Verna Still would be Laverna Still who married a guy named McClain, who was an accountant. After awhile they came out here to live and then he must have died. She lived there; I remember her well. She was always riding in the Pioneer Day Parade and she always rode sidesaddle, and then some of her brothers lived out there. They were goofy.

DM: Whatever –

JS: Yeah, one guy was goofy enough to castrate himself, which I consider to be ultimate goofy. But again, there are people on that ranch now – fellow named Tom Foss, whose wife was a descendant of the Stills, she's still out there. She may provide a lot of the history.

DM: So there're a lot of the Stills out there.

JS: There's Stills out there at Annette. Their name is Rowden.

DM. They mention that in here.

JS: Doreen Rowden, who would be a little younger than I, probably. She probably knows quite a bit. It may be that Judy Foss may know. She was a granddaughter, but her mother was a McClain and a Still. An original Still, I think, was a doctor or what passed for a doctor in those days.

DM: So they'd been out there a hundred years, anyway.

JS: Oh, sure. The old stone building, which must have been their hotel, whatever they had there, rooming house, roadhouse, is still there. It's gutted, but it's still there. I went by there the other day.

DM: I've talked to a lady that wants to preserve that. I guess it's just right next to Highway 58, the structure.

JS: No, no, that one isn't. That one would be as you go by the La Panza Ranch. Do you know where the La Panza Ranch is?

DM: On a map I know where it is.

JS: It's back about 6–7 miles from there. You go off on Pozo Road. Pozo comes in to 58 at La Panza Ranch. Fosses live there, maybe five, six or seven miles, and that's where the road goes. That's where the old stone building is.

DM: That [picture] doesn't have any citation on it.

JS: Just from the hills it looks like it could have been a bridge across the San Juan Creek up there. That's what it looks like. It's not much of a stream. It's a real good picture of that man. I don't know who it is. But that looks like the country up there.

DM: This on the front says, "No irrigation August 16th, 1915." It has some more stuff on the back: "Picture of the Arroyo Grande Rancho." Is that "Corn crops on my Arroyo Grande Ranch"?

JS: I suspect that's "Bean."

DM: That looks like "Beans on the irrigation."

JS: Yes, but we know that's Arroyo Grande. Unlikely that anybody would know who that person was.

DM: This is just a bunch of goats or –

JS: Sheep, sheep.

DM: I think this says "Steve Daniels."

JS: I don't know Steve Daniels. In the Farm Bureau paper, they often publish a picture, and invite people to write in. These pictures would probably be the kind of thing they would like to have.

DM: They would, yes. That looks like where they're making an oil reservoir or something like that.

JS: What do you think that is? Oh, that's the bottom of the tank.

DM: For an oil tank.

JS: I don't know where these are.

DM: I think that's an oil port down there on the Sunset Terrace between Avila and Pismo.

JS: That could be, there are a bunch of those – you could almost tell that's the inlet there. The bunch of tanks across up on the hill back of Morro too. They're empty.

DM: This says "Refinery at Oil Port." An oil port was there on Sunset Terrace.

JS: There were two. There was one near Estero Bay and there was one, would be above Morro. That oil was stored in those tanks up on the hills.

DM: Those are still there, I think.

JS: They are still there sitting there, empty. My daughter was interested in buying a piece of land down there. We went up to a piece of land right behind that which was for sale, and looked at it, but from the best building site you're looking right down into the tanks, and it was very, very ugly.

DM: They won't last forever. They'll take them down just like they did –

JS: That's right. There's a piece of property up there belongs to the same guys that owns the farming land next to the Madonna Plaza Shopping Center – Dalidio. Has this piece right behind the oil tanks, and has 500 acres, about a mile, mile and a half of ocean front further north. That's where it is.

DM: Let's see, we've been through all of these. Okay. Now, these are some of the Still pictures.

JS: Bert and Clara: This Bert Alley lived – you know we looked up and we saw where Highway 58 goes?

DM: Yes.

JS: Right at the top of the hill you would head back toward the mountain. Some called it Red Hill Road. [It] dropped down into the canyon and that's where Bert Alley lived. An Alley lives in Shandon – if you started down there there's a Bill Alley, who's the age of my children, lives in Shandon, right nice fellow. I don't know how much Bill knows about those ancestors, but Bert Alley was his grandfather. His father – Billy Alley's father, Bill, was born up there. I do not ever remember the boys, but they used to do mining up there. They had a hydraulic mining thing. I don't think they made much, but they could raise a family on it.

DM: Was it gold or cinnabar or –

JS: Gold. They panned gold; they washed gold out of the creek bottom up there.

DM: And then they started –

JS: There's still some big piles of gravel up there in Navajo – yes, Bert Alley's place, that's where it was. I remember Navajo Canyon. Yes, I knew all those people.

DM: That's good. What about this? Says, "Homestead."

JS: A Still in Annette. You would turn at Cholame; go back in the hills up there, probably ten miles. That's where it is and it's Doreen Still Rowden's probably grandfather or great grandfather. Doreen's son is Billy Rowden, lives out there, and I would think Doreen would know quite a bit about this. Maybe her son does too, I don't know.

DM: Or she might like copies of the pictures, too.

JS: She well might. I don't know. I used to know her when she was a girl and went to school in Shandon. She was somewhat younger than I, but she has had Parkinson's for years and years and years. So I don't know what condition she's in, but her son is very nice, though. I'm sure they might be very interested in this.

DM: This doesn't have any notes on it.

JS: No. What in the world is that?

DM: It looks like something of a digging –

JS: Somebody would be able to tell you what that is. That's a tool for moving earth, large quantities of earth. I would think it had something to do with mining. What do you think this is – something hanging from up there?

DM: Well, that looks like it; it's a great big block....

JS: Yeah, I don't know. It's not something that I've ever seen but –

DM: That's what I was thinking, placer mining.

JS: This is just basically a Long Tom over here. Since you have Still pictures, it might be that, or might be from Alley. I don't remember the Alleys ever having anything that big.

DM: This doesn't have anything, it's just a –

JS: I've pitched hay up onto a wagon like that. That's what we used to haul with and that's –

DM: Let's see, that's for four animals – or four horses?

JS: Yes, four. We usually would haul hay with two horses. But, you know, that could be around Santa Margarita or Pozo or La Panza. It's obviously this area, Sunset at La Panza. I don't think it would be very hard to find where that is.

DM: The silhouette of the hills would probably tell you. Probably look around –

JS: I think that's probably the top of the La Panza grade. Yes, I think you could find that quite easy.

DM: That's interesting. I don't know who that guy is.

JS: I don't know. You know, we always had a lot of guys like that and the headgear, bit, western saddle.

DM: These stirrups: is that pretty routine?

JS: That's pretty standard. Sometimes you had what we call *chaparajos*, which were leather–covered and it could keep the brush –

DM: From coming in there, yeah.

JS: Yes, from scratching your feet. Sometimes the *chaparajos* came down and had long flaps on the bottom when they were working cattle, parting the cows and calves. They would like to shake the flaps out and scare the calves back. Saddle – I used to have one myself. The saddles were very heavy. They didn't care; they rode big horses. I do not know that fellow. But this shows what they looked like.

DM: That's one of the questions I have. Is there much difference in the livestock between [now] and sixty, seventy, eighty years ago? Were they – nowadays more of a recreational horse, more of a quarter horse type of thing?

JS: More differences than just horses.

DM: Well, the working horse, let's –

JS: They work totally differently now. Everything [is different], when they have these highly trained horses, and they're quite wonderful. The horses are trained to be very fast and they want them to part out. They've got twenty animals here. You go in and you move one animal out. Just likely, he wants to get back and the horse is supposed to keep the animal out. When I was young, these fellows didn't want their horse to do it, they wanted their horse to rein. They wanted the horse to do what they wanted them to do. But the horse knew, totally different kind of a horse, and he was very light as you reined him. These horses today, they don't expect to guide them, they expect the horse, by instinct, to do it, a wonderful skill. It was equally wonderful when the horse was responsive to the reins and the pressure of the legs and all those sorts of things. Originally we wanted to be able to direct our horses. Not want the horse to do it himself.

JS: Then, people used to rope: a braided rawhide rope, maybe 60 to 90 feet long. The better the cowboy was, the further out he could catch them. He might catch them 40 feet out in front of his horse, going hell–bent. That was a good cowboy. Now, they want the horse to be much faster, they want the horse to take them right up alongside the animal as they rope down instead of roping out, with a rope about 30 feet long, with a much smaller loop. A rope with a huge loop like people used to use, now, the animals would run right through it. They roped with a great big loop and would take up 25 feet of the rope in the loop and then they'd rope out at the end of the rope. The horse was totally different. They liked horses that were more thoroughbred and [had] lots of endurance. These are big horses, more for short spurts of speed, because if you're a modern kind of roper, you've got to be on top of that calf within a couple of leaps.

DM: And they're going to drop their –

JS: If you go to the Salinas Rodeo fifty, sixty years ago, they roped the animal way out in front of them. The further they roped the better they were.

DM: Let me see if I understand. You were still trying to do the same thing, cut that animal out from the herd. What you're saying is that seventy years ago it was you that was cutting that out and you were working the animal. Once you got the animal set, then your lasso would be out quite a bit.

JS: Suppose you would be working for Miller and Lux[1]. Big cattle [ranchers]. Big cattle around and they would move forward. They were in this area today, going to sort out with fat cows. So they'd have twenty cowboys in the gathering area, and they would hold the cattle in a group. They would circle the cowboys around them and somebody would have led the foreman's cutting horse out. He wouldn't have ridden the horse out there, nor would he have ridden it himself. Some flunky would have put his saddle on the other horse, he would have cut the cattle out he wanted, maybe they were pregnant heifers, maybe they were fat steers or whatever it was. When he got them out of the herd, then a group of cowboys would take them and hold them in a separate group and in the evening they would move them. The foreman prided himself in being able to do this by himself. He didn't want to drive herd in the read of these guys. I've heard, "If I can't cut this animal out, I'll let you know and you can do it. If it's my job to cut him out, it's your job to hold the herd."

DM: So that they don't stampede or anything like that.

JS: Pride. "I don't need you to sit here and help me. If I can't...." We had a big ranch in Oregon. The horse wrangler brought the horses in the morning. They were trained and he had made a big corral and he had stakes about two feet long with a ring around it. And he's thrown stakes in the ground, it was only about that high and the horses go through with their heads out. We had about 15 cowboys and each cowboy told the foreman what horse he wanted – nobody else rode the horse. He didn't throw the rope overhead, because his horse came out. When they branded, they held the cattle usually in the corner of the field and the foreman and one other guy roped the calves by the hind feet, dragging them on the ground. The crew grabbed them and took the rope off. If the guy that was in there doing the roping with the foreman missed a few, the horses were trained for this very specific thing. Totally different now than it used to be, but these horses are just as wonderful.

DM: [*Returns to photos*] Let's see – again, that's the same old thing.

JS: It's in these foothills someplace. I don't know where.

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[1] In 1857, two German immigrants named Henry Miller and Charles Lux formed an influential partnership to buy ranchland to raise cattle in the San Joaquin and Santa Clara valleys.

DM: This is a pretty scene on the river in Pozo.

JS: The Salinas runs north about a mile to the west of Pozo. That's a great picture. The fellow that works for me, John Arnold, would probably know where that was, but you see the cattle were quite different.

DM: These people – that's Mrs. Still, I guess R.N. Still.

JS: "They were born in Missouri." "Born in Newcomb County, Virginia." "Fifteenth of May." I don't know what this is. I don't know whether the people in the family – have plenty of Stills around – I would think they've never seen these pictures. I would think they would be fascinated by them. I don't know who Mrs. R.N. Still was, but certainly Doreen Rowden would know. And let's see, if Doreen isn't up to it, her son or daughter might know. Who else? The other person most likely would be Judy Foss who lives out these, who was a Still. There're a lot of others, I'm sure. I just don't happen to know them.

DM: This would seem, from the dress, late–1800s.

JS: Oh, sure. She was a Gorman.

DM: 1831?

JS: She was still in Missouri at the time this picture was taken.

DM: Or she was home visiting. Anyway, at this point she's 70 years old.

JS: That's a great picture. This is E.M. Still. Gosh, you know, those pictures were $3.50 in those days.

DM: Probably the [antique] dealer [price] who had them before.

JS: I am sure that either of those ladies that I mentioned would be able to tell you who these people were and what relation they were and where they came [from]. They could clearly know. If you want to know for sure, you might go and talk to Bill Rowden. Bill Rowden Sr. is married to Doreen Still. Their son lives out on the ranch, too. I think you should call them and tell them you have a bunch of old pictures and would they be interested in going over them with you, and they might. They're very nice people. I think you could otherwise call Tom Foss. I don't know Judy, really. I haven't seen her for many years.

DM: Probably the thing is to call, say, Tom, and find out who in the family would be interested in the genealogy and then let them decide.

JS: I guess I would be inclined to start with Bill Rowden. Between Mrs. Rowden and Mrs. Foss, I think they would know a great deal about these. I'll tell you who else – I think he's still alive – is McClain in Paso Robles, who's written a number of books. You can get them in bookstores. I've forgotten which one it is. Duncan or Arthur. Anyway, it's a McClain, and he's written a lot of history. He would be somebody to talk to. I don't have his book.

DM: Steve Daniels, that's the one we didn't know.

JS: Don't know Steve Daniels.

DM: This is Owther or something like that.

JS: I believe that would be Owther McClain. I think there may have been an Owther Still. There was an Owther McClain and he would have been a great uncle of Judy Foss. He would be related to the La Panza Stills and he would be [related] to the Annette Stills.

DM: That's a baby picture. Now this is J.H. Crafts at the old mine.

JS: That's in Navajo.

DM: 1910.

JS: Again, they did a lot of mining out there about that time. They had a minor gold boom, Louis Sinsheimer told me. He never remembers them able to bring in much gold. Mostly booze, not much gold. There were a lot of people out there in those canyons: La Panza Canyon, next to three canyons down, and the Navajo Canyon. They think there's some gold out there, but there's nobody alive who's ever seen any of this. I've ridden horseback through most of that country, and have never seen anything like it.

DM: It looks just like a little shack or something.

JS: "J.H. Crafts, the old mining camp." I don't know who would know about that. McClain would know more than anybody, because he's researched it – he's written some books about the Indians out there and Painted Rock, and he's the local historian. I'll look and see if I have his number.

DM: I'll go up to Paso Robles. Maude Fotheringham...

JS: The Fotheringhams, I think, were out on the Carrizo. I'm not sure. I never knew them. I know that was a name that I remember. I just remember hearing the name. I don't know anything about them. I know that's Judy Foss's great

uncle or something of that nature. I suspect her grandmother's brother. She would be a good source for you.

DM: This is Edith Still.

JS: Yes, that's a great picture. I don't know who Edith Still was. I suspect that she belongs to the Annette Stills. I'm trying to think of any old married people around, but I can't think of any Edith out there.

DM: I think I'm going to check this back against that other picture where we've got a house. See, I'm wondering if this is the house.

JS: It surely looks like it, doesn't it? You can't see this house, but it's got the same kind of picket fence. Yeah, I guess that could be Stills, sure.

DM: There's "Medley Still and a colt Chief?" What would a colt Chief be?

JS: It's a colt they called Chief. He's got that colt there and his front legs are down.

DM: Mag Rellers. Looks like R–E–L–L–E–R–S.

JS: Seller, I believe it's Sellers. There was a Sellers lived up on the Avenales. Whether this is it, I don't remember. I don't know about the name. But Sellers' daughter and the family lived up there on the lower end of the Avenales, just after you go to the ranch. I think you will probably find it's Sellers.

DM: Then this one right here is Clarence Percy Still, 6 months old, and the picture's for Uncle Will, evidently. That's kind of interesting – Arnold – that was a [photographic] studio in San Luis.

JS: Somebody in the historical society would probably know about that. Those people can be identified. It shouldn't be a real problem. We will look and see if I have Still's books on the Indians.

DM: McClain's books.

Js: If not in the historical society, they sell them in the bookstores.

DM: Mark Hall–Patton just got a whole bunch of these things and a passel of pictures and they didn't want to lose them and so he bought the whole kit and caboodle and he's over in Las Vegas so he didn't have any chance to look at what these things are. But I could follow them up. Well, let me just stop this and then we'll see if I have McClain's book.

JS: This is Mrs. R.C. Heaton. Came there one time when my mother–in–law was there and she said she had taught briefly at that school when she was a girl and she showed my mother–in–law where she thought it was. It was several miles from the house. Avenales. It was up in there. Then the American school... it was more toward Pozo.

DM: More towards Pozo. OK.

JS: It was a couple of miles further. I think it was probably where the ranch house is and the American school was somewhere in the general vicinity of where our locked gate is.

DM: OK.

JS: I'm not sure about that. Gosh, there were a lot of schools. There was a school in Park Hill, El Dorado schools, one about three miles, three or four miles down the river from Pozo, New School.

DM: There is a school there in Pozo.

JS: They moved old Pozo School less than three miles away then, before they abandoned it.

DM: You mentioned that there was something like 60 homesteaders, over a period of time from probably 1890 until –

JS: There must have been a time when there was quite a lot of them there, because they had a school and a post office at the ranch house, Avenales. There were some people who were school trustees who were not landowners.

DM: The 60 families, were they scattered from one of the Avenales ranches to up closer by Douglas Creek or –

JS: They had to live on their homesteads. In order to prove up that homestead, you had to live on it.

DM: So their kids weren't going to go a long distance to school.

JS: I imagine they'd go –

DM: Three to four miles.

JS: Probably six miles. They used to have a school, Alliance, that was halfway between here and Shandon. There were kids going to Alliance whose parents were on this ranch; the boy rode a whole seven miles on a horse rain or shine.

When the San Juan Creek was up, why, somebody would be down watching him cross the creek to make sure it was OK. He'd have a little pacing horse and he'd get down there in about forty minutes. When he was about ten years old, his sisters went to school, but he drove the Model T there. Somebody would start the car up for him in the morning and he'd drive down. The teacher would have maybe eight to ten kids there, and so between horseback and some in wagons and cars, and she'd have to see that the cars got started in the afternoon, the horses got bridled...

DM: This is the Alliance school, huh?

JS: This is the Alliance school.

DM: She probably had maybe 15 kids total?

JS: Probably eight or nine, I think. Ten. I can remember that school.

DM: This was operating as late as what, the 20s? Did you go to school there?

JS: Closed it about 1930. No, we lived up in Hillsborough.

DM: In other words when you were –

JS: I never lived here when I was going to school.

DM: When you were a child, it was pretty much a ranch existence for you.

JS: Yes, we have always come down on vacations.

DM: For vacations, that type of thing.

JS: My father usually came down every month for a week. Went to all the ranches.

DM: I see.

JS: We had three ranches then, rented some others, so he came down every month for a week. And then my mother and father would come down in the spring and spend a couple of months and –

DM: You'd come down too?

JS: Well, no, we'd stay with a grandmother or somebody. We were still going to school.

DM: When you got out of school, then you would come down and join mom and dad?

JS: By the time we were in high school then my brothers and I would come down for the summer.

DM: Was it expected of you that you would be ranch hands then?

JS: Sure.

DM: I mean, it was not just fun.

JS: If there was any work, we were supposed to do it. That was during the depths of the Depression, there wasn't any free money running around here.

DM: It was more or less treated as your summer employment; you weren't coming down here and skylarking.

JS: Yes, it was possible to do, you see, because each ranch had a cook so there was always a place that you got fed. Otherwise it wouldn't have been so easy.

DM: You went to grammar school and high school in Hillsborough?

JS: No, we didn't have high school in Hillsborough. I went to grammar school there and high school in Burlingame.

DM: Then – did you go to Berkeley?

JS: I went to Berkeley.

DM: Then you switched allegiance later on.

JS: Well, my kids all went to Stanford.

DM: You didn't trudge three hours or four hours through the snow to go to school or something like that.

JS: No, no. Oh, say, this little boy living down here, say he rode seven miles to school, that was a pretty good stint. It was cold –

DM: Seven miles, OK.

JS: He did that for probably four years and when his sister went to school, they didn't want her to ride that far, so he was 10, I think, and they let him take the Model T.

DM: Was that your dad's head hand at the ranch?

JS: Ranch foreman.

DM: The other people that would have been working wouldn't have had [families]? Other than that, they were all single men.

JS: They lived in the bunkhouses. Sometimes in a particular bunkhouse there was three or four individual rooms for the permanent guys. The other guys, in the summer, if it was raining or something, they might all have slept in the living room, otherwise they slept out under the trees. But the food was very, very good, and people wouldn't stay if the food wasn't good.

DM: Was that a characteristic thing, a ranch was known not by its crops, but by its food?

JS: That's right. Had to have a good cook.

DM: That's interesting.

JS: The La Panza Ranch had a cook; and the Avenales had a cook; and the Camatta had one. All the ranches always had cooks. In the very early days, long before I remember it, the cooks were often Chinese men, but then when I remember, they were mostly all women. Cholame Ranch had a man, as I remember it.

DM: Was this probably a couple or was it just a single woman?

JS: Well, I remember both: it was better if it was a couple. People were happier.

DM: He might have been some sort of a ranch --

JS: He was usually referred to as a "choreman." Because it was a long way to town, they had chickens and milk cows and pigs, sometimes turkeys, and he took care of them and took care of his garden.

DM: So he was doing domestic –

JS: He was doing the chores. One of his jobs was always to bring in the firewood. The cooks were always beefing and bitching about the firewood: it was too big or too small, too green. It was always much better if it was her husband who brought in the firewood. You kept from hearing about it, she gave HIM hell.

DM: And this was the pattern throughout all this –

JS: All the ranches.

DM: Was your dad responsible for cooking up the deal with Sinton & Brown? Was that as a consequence of him seeing the feedlot business was new? Did he see that started in Spreckles and then said, "Hey, we can do the feedlot down here?"

JS: The Union Sugar Company factory was closed down. They closed down in like late 1927. It opened around 1899, and closed about 1927. The price of everything was terrible.

JS: To change the subject: when you wanted to sell cattle on a ranch here as they have now, you had two choices. You tried to get a buyer from the meat packing plant to come up and look at them. To get here he had to get on the train and come to Santa Margarita or Paso Robles. Somebody met him and took him out, and by the time he got here, you'd had your cattle up for him to look at for a week or two and they was trying to eat all the grass up in the field. He had you at his mercy. The other thing you could do was drive them to the railroad and put them on the train and ship them to the stockyards. You tried to get them to the stockyard on Saturday night or Sunday morning, so they'd have feed and water, but then the buyers descended on the stockyard, and there were 36 meatpacking plants in Los Angeles. There was competition there. There were probably five in San Francisco. So there was competition there. On the other hand, all the buyers knew it was costing the owners of cows money to keep them at the stockyards. You shipped them to a commission agent, who had a group of corrals – each commissioner had corrals. You shipped them to whoever you favored and then he charged you for the feed and water and care and whatever else.

DM: So you and a number of other ranchers would get your cattle to, say, Paso, where the commissioner was?

JS: We did it individually. We didn't merge our cattle with anybody else's. Somebody might have.

DM: I mean, there were other ranchers doing the same thing you were.

JS: Sure. We all couldn't handle Los Angeles. These guys knew if they didn't bid on the cattle too strong on Monday or Tuesday, by Wednesday you'd be calling the commission man and urging him to get those cattle sold. "Eating me out of house and home here." Now, interestingly, in Europe well through the Middle Ages, the big market, the big city in Europe was Paris. There would be people like a commissioner there. You or I would start out from Paris, on foot, of course, and we would go into Poland, Ukraine, and other places like that and we'd buy cattle. We'd get a little bunch together, maybe ten or 12 cows, and we'd drive

them to Paris. On the outskirts of Paris was a stockyard and corrals and commission men. The guys who had assembled the cows would put them in somebody or other's pens and the retail butchers in Paris came out every morning. No refrigeration, they would come out every morning and they'd buy an animal, or two animals and they'd butcher them right there and load the meat on their wagons, carts, and take them down to the butcher shop.

JS: In Paso Robles, there was a meat packing plant and the people who owned the meat packing plant, the Brians, also had a retail butcher shop. They supplied other retail butcher shops. They killed each day. They killed sheep, two sheep, and pig and a couple of cows: whatever they thought they could sell. They had no refrigeration. They had a couple of fans later on. Originally they had nothing, and then they had some fans powered in some manner by a gasoline engine in the back, and some belts that came in, that tried to create a little cooler.

JS: But every morning George Brian, the retail butcher, and his crew went over there. They butchered what they needed for the day, put it on the wagon, this side of the river, and hauled it across the river to their retail butcher shop and delivered pieces or sides or whatever they had ordered. That was the way it was. Very similar to what had been done for 500 years. My father thought that if you only had a feedlot, put the cattle in there, then it wouldn't be so crucial. Then you didn't have to ship them to the stockyards, anyway. The packing buyers came out and pretty soon there were some in Bakersfield, scattered about. The packing buyers would usually go to Los Angeles stockyards and buy cattle on Monday and Tuesday, and then by Wednesday they would be fanning out and you would know that the buyers would be by your place either Thursday or whatever. Then they would buy some of the cattle. It wasn't so crucial that you sold them this week or not. You couldn't keep them too long.

DM: How many times a month did a typical ranch like yours to go market?

JS: Once or twice a year, when the grass dried. So that in itself was a bum deal. Everybody wanted to sell their cattle at once.

DM: That's what I was wondering about. In other words, you've got a cattle glut and so if you can get to market faster –

JS: Or you can put them in a feedlot and string it out so that the thinner cow which you put in would need a little longer. You'd be selling your cattle out of the feedlot maybe over a period of time of six weeks instead of a whole stockyard selling on one day.

DM: So the feedlot business, that came about as a means to kind of moderate the market.

Js: For my father, when the sugar factory started up again in 1933, he knew some people who were big stockholders in the company. They got him the contract. Then he had to find a partner. He found Howard Brown who was somebody whose family and my father's family had known since the 1860s.

DM: Was he from the Peninsula, then?

JS: I think he had been up in the San Joaquin Valley, but he came from San Francisco.

DM: Was that their only feedlot?

JS: Yes. Howard liked to own cattle – to come into the feedlot – so he liked contract cattle to be delivered in two months or three months or six months, have cattle scattered about to come in. Then as soon as they got in the feedlot, you'd try to sell them, you didn't want to own them all. You would try to sell them to the big meat packers in San Francisco [such as] James Allen & Sons. We normally had maybe six to ten thousand cattle would go on to James Allen. They happened to like to own a lot of cattle. So when you couldn't sell them, then you had to own them, because you had to keep the feedlot going.

DM: But you didn't want to own any more than you had to. If you had to own them, then you had a place to feed. That's so. You were quite at their mercy. Was this innovative as far as feeding the beet pulp to the cattle?

JS: People had been feeding beet pulp, since, I presume, they had been making beet sugar. Beet sugar was a big crop in Europe. So the technology came from Germany and Sweden, if I remember, also from France. You raised more calories per food value per acre with sugar beets than any other crop. So this has been a major crop for, I don't know how long, maybe hundreds of years. But you had to do something with the pulp before it was dehydrated. You'd pump it into big silos, great big tremendous things, and it fermented there and it smelled. You had to be quite a distance from town because people didn't like that. As Santa Maria grew in that direction, it would have become impossible, and then they'd put it into the silos, they pumped it in with water, and that it was very wet –

DM: Slurries, yes –

JS: Went into the silos where it had drains in the bottom, slats on them, and the water drained out and there was a ditch which went into the ocean, about six miles away, and that smelled pretty bad.

DM: And then was this shoveled out to the animals?

JS: We took over this particular feedlot which was falling to ruins down there, because there had been a feedlot ever since the 1900s. It had been closed down for five years and everything was in disrepair, but they had a little narrow gauge railroad with cars and a little engine like a mine engine would be, and the tracks went into the silos and they'd back the switching deals and back these cars in. Originally they had Filipino laborers shovel the beet pulp into the cars and then they also filled cars with grain and had cars with hay and whatever else they mixed. Then, when they got the train loaded, the laborers got on and the train went chugging down the tracks. There were pens on both sides of the tracks and they shoveled the stuff off again. Later on, they got a mechanical shovel, to load at least, the grain and stuff by gravity. You still had to have people to shovel it on.

DM: Union Sugar, closed, what, around 1960 or something?

JS: Yes, for a long time it was national policy and the government reserved a certain part of the sugar market for domestic production, the beets, the sugar beets. They had a quota: the Philippines had a quota, the Hawaiian Islands had a quota. They were allowed to ship in a certain amount of cane sugar. The Caribbean islands could ship in a certain amount and if they got over that, a high tariff was applied. So it was possible to raise or produce beet sugar in competition because that is a protected market. When they stopped protecting the market, why then that was the end of it, at least in California. I think it was in Colorado and [inaudible] but that was the end of it in California.

DM: So if there was enough sugar per hours of labor, it was cheaper to make cane sugar. That was why they would come in from Cuba and other places – sugar beets wasn't as cost effective maybe to produce, but it was protected.

JS: That's right, after it wasn't protected, they couldn't raise it. It had to do with the national defense strategy – they decided the country ought to be able to feed itself and one of the essential foods was considered to be sugar. I'm sure there was a lot of political chicanery going on, each guy wanted his crop protected, but...

DM: When did the Betteravia thing close?

JS: We were gone from there when it closed. We owned the dehydrator – we were the only facility in which the dehydrator belonged to somebody other than the sugar factory. We owned the dehydrator and when management changed there, they didn't want us to own the dehydrator, so they bought us out.

DM: So then you were basically out of the feedlot.

JS: Before that happened, we had stopped feeding cattle and were selling the dehydrated pulp. We decided that we would do better that way.

DM: By that time were you involved in what was basically your dad's business?

JS: Oh yes, my father died in 1947 and we were continuing that business until 1972 or '3.

DM: I thought that you had been raised around here –

JS: No, we spent a lot of time here, but we basically went to school up north.

DM: The cattle were driven to market until –

JS: They were driven from this ranch to San Miguel and from the Avenales they drove to Santa Margarita. Carrizo Plains drove to Santa Margarita. I don't know why we drove them to San Miguel instead of Paso Robles, some reason or other, but I don't remember.

DM: That went on until – when did it stop?

JS: I would guess probably around 1940 or thereabouts. The trucks were able to do short hauls. They couldn't get out to the ranch, they COULD get here, couldn't get to the Avenales, it was too steep a hill for them. So we had a place down by Pozo where we'd take them to truck them to Santa Margarita and put them on the railroad there. Then the long haul trucks came in after the war. The long haul trucks really came into being, I would say, because the Eisenhower administration made a policy decision to build a national highway system. They could have made the decision not to do that, but build more railroads. That's why the railroads went into a decline, and the trucks came into ascendancy. So we trucked to Betteravia.

DM: So it was a combination of improvement of the mechanical trucks and also the roadbed. The road became a big deal.

JS: The first trucks probably were maybe 30 feet of truck bed. They could haul maybe 50; some of them were double deck.

DM: So, 30 would be what, a dozen head, 15 head in that?

JS: Depends on the size of them.

DM: And the weight.

JS: A big truck and trailer that you see on the highway will haul about 25 head. It's a little different than that; it's so many pounds per axle. You often see them

set up and stop the traffic going over the Cuesta, they have a portable scale and they run that axle over the scale to be sure the guy isn't overloaded.

DM: Yes, just like grapes or whatever.

JS: It would be pretty hard to overload a cattle truck; you can't get enough cattle in them. When we shipped we always asked the driver how many head he could handle, how many pounds. He'd tell us around 46,000 or 49,000, whatever. It depended a lot on the weight of his tractor. So you get your cattle weighed and you figure it out and figure the numbers and so on. You don't want any trouble.

DM: There were a lot of changes at the end of the '30s and the war years I am sure, that were brought about by different social factors. When you came back from the war, did you come more or less here?

JS: We had already built our house here. We had been here a couple of years and then we left. Then we came back in three years.

DM: And you were in the Navy?

JS: Yes, two years I was on ship.

DM: Norma lived down south?

JS: Norma and her parents rented a house, a huge house, in Portuguese Bend. Do you know where Portuguese Bend is?

DM: Very well.

JS: It was a huge house there. I can't think of the guy's name. Very well known, very rich guy, with a big house and built with stables and places for chauffeurs. They lived in that house and rented out the apartments to mostly Naval officers. People were always around, [but] they were very isolated.

DM: Did you ship out of Long Beach?

JS: No, the first ship I was assigned to was a ship under construction in Portland, Oregon. Was up there for a while and when it departed I went to the Aleutians. When I came back I was assigned to a tanker in the South Pacific.

DM: It was a support fleet, not a tactical or combat fleet?

JS: Right. The minesweeper was a combination minesweeper and anti–submarine vessel and had there been any submarines where we were, then it might have been a combat ship.

DM: In other words, all you could do was ram them.

JS: No, we had all the depth charges and all that stuff, sound gear, depth charges, guns, but when we were in the Aleutian Islands, there was nothing there but stormy weather. We were supposed to be an oil tanker, it was outfitted for that, but it went out just about the time they invaded the Marianas going into Saipan, and they had to have troops on amphibious vessels much longer than they had ever contemplated. They didn't have enough water, so we hauled fresh water for the amphibious vessels.

DM: I wonder how that worked in an oil tanker?

JS: We never had any oil. The tanker was brand new. The next three tankers were built in Portland and they would be filled with water. The amphibious vessels would come alongside and pump their tanks full of water. Sometimes later on we would get ships that had been in combat and had damage, and their evaporators weren't working or something and we'd go to them, give them water, take about two to three weeks to pump out a cargo of water.

DM: Then you'd go back up to –

JS: Go back to wherever: Guam had water, Saipan had water, we watered a couple of places in the Philippines and the islands.

DM: I wouldn't think many people would even be aware of it, but you can imagine –

JS: I often think about it listening to the news now. Eight people got killed. People don't really remember, it doesn't mean anything to them. There were 12 million people in the Armed Forces and they didn't have time to interview the families of the poor devil that got mashed, because it was happening every day all over the place. What the Navy did is something quite different than had ever been done before or since. Their supply depot would be an atoll, a big lagoon, and the supply ships came in there, anchored, and the combatant ships, carriers, battleships, came in there and got supplies, and then dropped anchor. When we first went to Eniwetok there was a thousand ships at anchor.

DM: It must have been impressive, seeing that.

JS: Something to see, yes. But the big ships, the battleships, would all come in there and water barges would go around and they would send their orders to supply officers who put in orders. Then there were ships like the transports that have doctors and maybe dentists.

DM: The hospital ships.

JS: I never really saw a hospital ship out there, but the transports, of which there were a lot, usually had a dentist if there were enough to go around. Probably weren't, but some of them, if a man needed an operation like an appendectomy, they would try to get him to a ship that two doctors, one guy to give the anesthesia and one guy that operated on him. I never saw a hospital ship that I can remember.

DM: They may have just been transporting, probably.

JS: They kept the hospital ships some distance from the operation and isolated, a long ways, so there was no excuse for anybody to not realize that it was a hospital ship. "I was shooting at somebody else." That's why the big anchorages – Eniwetok was the first one and Ebeye was another one and Gulf of Leyte island another, and there were just hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of ships at these places.

DM: Yes, the logistics of that whole thing must have been amazing.

JS: Unbelievable.

DM: A story that you don't hear about – you hear about the Nimitzes and all of it, all that type of thing, but the logistics of how that was put together is something else.

End of First Interview

Atascadero, California
June 9, 2003
Second Interview

DEAN MILLER: I notice that Steve was just recently hiring a major domo for the Avenales – it seems like you would have to hire a person who's got to go into the culture of the ranch. Or is that projecting? But it seems like who you hire is really important.

JAMES SINTON: It used to be true, but now it's so hard to get someone who would want to go and live that far out. It's not a place where you can have school age children, for instance. Now you pretty much hire who you can get, and hope for the best. We're very very fortunate. We have this one fellow who has a ranch in Pozo and comes out by the day, and has been doing that for 32 years now. He fits in perfectly. But there's nobody else like him. We just hired a fellow – don't know how he's going to do. I hope he's going to be all right but it's a –

DM: It's a different climate from what it was fifty years ago.

JS: Yes – we used to have people who grew up on ranches in the area where we would know about them, and that was fine, but that's gone now. There aren't such people.

DM: In other words, everybody wants the bright lights – you just don't seem to find the person.

JS: It used to be you had a cook and a cookhouse and a bunkhouse and you hired single men and you fed them. They usually were guys who had some kind of a problem, probably alcohol. You kept the alcohol away from them when they were on the ranch the best you could. They usually got drunk every six months. Some of them got drunk every month, but they'd have to go to town to get drunk. You got so you could tell. You knew if old so–and–so was going to go get drunk next week and it didn't make any difference what responsibility he might have had, he had to go. They were oftentimes wonderful men. That was the sort of men you had. Then there were what we now call Hispanic people, at that time they were Mexican–Indian–Spanish combinations who lived in the area, and this is what they did. The only thing they knew. They were fine. people and their descendants have gone into the mainstream now.

DM: Would they have had families over the hill so to speak, that they would visit their wife and children?

JS: They might well have had a family. We had one fellow who worked for us ten years. He had a family in Santa Margarita. He went home every Saturday night and came back every Monday morning. Seemed to have plenty of children,

anyway! There were people like that, sure. Or there were young men who worked on ranches for a few years and as they got married they had to move into town. We didn't in any case that I can remember have houses for families until after the Second World War. After the war this method of operating a ranch disappeared. It was the way everybody operated a ranch before then.

DM: So this old myth of the crew going to town and getting drunk has some fact in it.

JS: Absolutely. I may have told you before: oftentimes you may have had some fellows who worked for you for years. They would go to town and they would take their paychecks. They'd go into a bar, maybe they'd just give the check to the bartender. He'd give them whatever they asked for until the money was gone and then he'd call the cops. He'd say, "Old so–and–so is down here and he's making a nuisance of himself." The cops would come down – they never booked him – and they'd put him in the drunk tank in the jail. They would call us, or some other ranch owner, and say, "We've got old so–and–so. I think about noon tomorrow he'll be dried out. Why don't you come and get him then." They never booked these guys – they had no record or anything like that. That was simply the way it was. Sometimes if they had relatives in Paso Robles some relative would bring them out. Sometimes they'd stay drunk for a week or two. We had one, I remember, who was the foreman on the Canyon Ranch, and he only did this about once a year. He had a wife and family on the ranch and the wife, she couldn't go near him – he was very antagonistic. She would call my father and he'd come down from San Francisco and this man was very docile then. My dad would go in and say, "Come on, Bill, it's time to go home now," and he'd go right home. He'd be sick for three or four days, but then he was good for a year! So once a year, it was worth it. We had a lot of those fellows.

DM: That's an insight on the personnel problems on the ranch. It has noticeably changed.

JS: Oh, totally different now.

DM: Now – when you built the adobe out there at the ranch, was that basically the local men? They turned from herding cows to –

JS: Yes. My father had a fellow working for him who had been a rancher in Pozo. He came to us when they sold the ranch in Pozo and Jack I think was 36 years old, and he worked for us the rest of his life. He could do anything. He'd build a house, build a barn. He was a good cowboy. I can remember when we were kids, in the summertime we'd come down from college and bring a lot of books home, and this guy read all our books. He'd had a grammar school education but then he went to work. His father died and he and his mother ran the farm. He could have gone to college just the same as we did. There was no tradition about going

on to school so he didn't do it.

DM: You respected him for what he was. Even when you were a kid you could recognize it.

JS: Well, we grew up that way. My father, oftentimes when we were little, would say, "You go and spend the day with Jack", or Fred or whoever it was. If Jack was using his tools he'd say, "Get me the hammer." We'd go get his hammer for him, and that would increase his efficiency greatly. Besides which, we learned how to do carpentry, or whatever it was. We worked with those people and my father had respect for them, so we did. We just learned it that way. There was never a time when even my brother or I was the best at anything on the ranch. There were always men who knew more than we did. I guess we were sensible enough to realize it. It's still that way as far as that's concerned.

DM: You can get there by managing.

JS: I still tend to ask people rather than tell them.

DM: Was that a relatively quick thing, to build that adobe? It just went from one stage to –

JS: Oh, it took them a long time.

DM: They had other chores...

JS: Well, Jack had an Indian fellow who helped him, but the Indian had never made an adobe brick and Jack had never made an adobe brick. They had to figure out that it was adobe, so you use adobe soil. Where there's a hill that's adobe, you go out there and get some adobe. Experiment with some adobe bricks. Well, adobe cracks, so that didn't work. Then Jack figured out you had to have clay, and he knew when the Indians made the mission they had put mud, dirt, water, straw, whatever, into a vat and they got in there and stomped it around with their feet, mixed it up. That's what he was going to do. Well, that lasted a very short time. He built a box about three feet square, put an axle down the middle of it, put some paddles on it and a long sweep, and they harnessed a work horse to the end of the sweep and he went round and around and mixed the mud. Then they shoveled it out. Every bit of that was shoveled by hand. Later on, when we had a contractor build our house, which is adobe, he built a monstrous machine which automatically shoveled dirt in one end and it turned out bricks at the other. Then they had to put it into forms. It was a mechanized system. But what Jack had, was a horse– and man– powered thing. It was very slow, but he did it.

DM: So it was just one of the processes that was going on on the ranch.

JS: Yes, he did everything. At that time, they hadn't had a fire in many years and there were many large pine trees up on the mountain and they went up there and cut down pine trees and dragged them down with teams of horses and adzed them out. He did everything with the help of this one Indian who was just help, not a very capable man –

DM: We've talked about a bunch of different things. I remember one time when we were out at the Avenales you talked about you were kind of mystified about there wasn't a regeneration of oaks if I recall. That there were big oaks, and weren't cattle feeding on them or something like that?

JS: We don't know – nobody knows.

DM: We talked about how you were out at Shell Creek, how maybe eight inches to a foot of soil on your property now was up on the Canales Ranch. Then you also mentioned at one time that you could go up there and see the influence of farming practices that were done fifty years ago. All these things were separate instances to me of you being pretty perceptive about what's going on in the land. It's not just good business practices, but it's kind of stewardship of the land. I'm wondering – am I projecting or do you think that's true?

JS: Yes, I think that's true. It's something we learned – we didn't start out by being so perceptive but we had some neighbors, particularly Ian McMillan, who was almost a pioneer in that sort of thing. He was an expert on the California quail, that was his thing. Before anybody else that I knew of, he became aware of the degradation that was going on, on the ranges, and he had to talk about it. We all thought he was crazy, of course, but over the years he prevailed.

DM: So he really was a mentor in that sort of thing.

JS: I think that Ian's ideas influenced many, many people. He was a thorn in the side of the Board of Supervisors – he was always down there objecting to something which he thought would degrade the environment. He was the first person I knew who was seriously thinking about that, although he himself was influenced by other people – who was the fellow – Aldo Leopold. Aldo's son, Dr. Leopold, was a professor at Berkeley. He came down. We were privileged to go quail hunting with him a number of times. A lot of people like Leopold – Dr. Leopold – became great friends of Ike McMillan, came down and stayed with him. They learned from one another.

DM: Was this in the late 40s or early 50s, about that time?

JS: Oh, I think clear on into probably the 70s or 80s. Of course by that time the world had caught up with Ike. What he had preached when he was a younger

person had become standard knowledge then. But he thought of it before most people. Naturally he probably read Aldo Leopold and others like that. But we used to kid him because when he was a kid he and his brother used to go out with a guy named Kelly Truesdale who dealt in bird eggs. There were people who collected bird eggs. They collected many, many condor eggs. The condors nested on these two cliffs over there between the LaPanza and the Avenales ranch. He would take these McMillan kids with him and lower them down on a rope – they were fearless – they'd pull these condor eggs out and Kelly would then sell them.

DM: They were doing it because they were buddies – they didn't realize the consequences.

JS: Sure. Later on they were probably influential than anybody else in the attempts to preserve the condors when there were still condors in the wild. Ike always thought that the condor preservation program that was instituted was wrong, that if they couldn't make it in nature they should let them go. That's still, I think, very debatable. But he was not in favor of the program. He knew more about quail and the condors – and his brother Eben made films for the Audubon Society. Started out there was a big dead oak tree close by where he lived. There was an eagle's nest in it, [and] he set out for his own enjoyment, I think, to make a film of the life history of the family of eagles. Eventually he became good at it, and he took that film and then many others and went all over the world. So the whole family was really well–known for their efforts in preservation of wild life.

DM: You wouldn't say that your dad was persuaded to be part of that?

JS: No, he was not. I think he was desperately trying to keep up with the money part of it. I think the truth is that a place like the Avenales, when my grandfather and my father acquired that land, had all been homesteaded. The homesteaders themselves were desperate because they had 160 acres which would run four or five animals, and so they couldn't make a living because they overgrazed it. The land had been terribly deteriorated. They cut down oak trees to make fence posts and for firewood – they really did quite a lot of harm to the place. After it had been put all together into a larger ranch it was much better taken care of. It was much less overgrazed and there was no more cutting of live oak trees – things like that.

DM: You were saying that they might not have any water at all on 160 acres.

JS: Well, in a dry year they surely hadn't. That's why – one of the reasons – they had to leave.

DM: So as far as homesteads go maybe 160 acres wasn't appropriate. They should have been able to take 500 acres or something like that.

JS: The 160 came from Kansas or other places where it was possible to make a living. You can see all sorts of places, even in California, where ranches that once provided a decent living for a family now will not do that. It isn't that the land has deteriorated, it's just that the economic condition of agriculture has deteriorated to such an extent that it won't do anymore.

DM: If you've got the right land you can make it on ten acres.

JS: Sure, strawberries, that's different. You have to have the right land and you have to do your own work, work like the dickens, to do it.

DM: I got the feeling that maybe from your granddad there was some sort of an attachment to the land. He put the thing together and basically lost it in the 1900s. Then he went right back and put it all back together. I was thinking that maybe there was some sort of bond between your granddad and –

JS: I suppose we absorbed the idea that this was something that was desirable to have and to keep and to pass down. But I don't think that at the time anybody had the range improvement sort of idea that people now have. That was not part of it at all.

DM: The schools:

JS: Every school I could think of is here – but I will try to see if somebody else can think of some I wouldn't even know the name of. Here's a school called "Home." 1859. Who knows where that was. The schools office may have the record of where that was. It is very interesting – it would be something some historian ought to carry forward. I know of schools that have totally disappeared, there is no evidence of any kind. I don't even know what their names were, but I know there were schools there.

DM: I think that would fit with the idea that maybe schools existed for several years before they became formalized.

JS: Yes, we have some interesting stuff about schools but it's really very sketchy. One of the ways we learn about schools is the records from the Teachers' Institute, where teachers got together once a year. I don't know what they did, but they had a meeting once a year. You can get lists of what teachers were present from what schools, but it's not very complete.

DM: I've learned recently about the idea of "High School". I didn't even realize that it was a privilege to go to a high school in the –

JS: Shandon had the high school there and there was one fellow I know who went to high school there in the 1920s. He might have had a Model T Ford to go

in – he must have lived 20 miles from the school. I don't know how they got there. But a lot of people didn't get to go to school.

DM: There was a Union High School in Shandon of some sort or other?

JS: The first I know of it, is it was a branch of the Paso Robles High School. The people in Shandon became very bitter because they felt that when an item of lab equipment, let's say, was worn out in Paso Robles they'd send it out to Shandon. They made a tremendous effort and got separated. That was very difficult, to separate, because even then there was a tendency to have the school districts bigger and bigger. At one time there was a big push to unify all the school districts. The state policy at that time was to try and get districts with a minimum of 10,000 students. That was more efficient in terms of administration. During that period we were afraid Shandon would get gobbled up again by Paso Robles so we set out to get the school unified, which meant that the elementary and high schools were all in one unit. It took us a couple of years. Several of us devoted lots to it.

DM: When would you say this was?

JS: It was around 1960. We were filled with luck. There was a lady in Creston Dr. Algee – she was an M.D., she was from Stanford, was retired, and she was a very eccentric lady. She thought that if we got our school district unified we would pay less taxes than she did. It was not necessarily true – but that's what she thought anyway. She went to every meeting, and we [had] dozens and dozens of meetings. It would get by one committee and then another. The final decision was at the State Board of Education. One of our members went up, and when our thing came up he was sitting back watching, and he said district after district, larger than we were, were being turned down for unification because they were too small. He made a calculation we were going to lose 4 to 1. They had set aside ten minutes for Shandon on their agenda. The time came and Dr. Algee got up and started to talk and she talked and talked and they couldn't shut her up. So then it was not four to one, it's three to two. Then it was three to two the other way. When Dr. Algee got finished they allowed us to unify. She just antagonized them so much.

DM: Where did Gail go to school? Did she go to Paso Robles?

JS: No, our kids all went to Shandon. Two grandchildren went to Shandon, and all five of them went to Stanford.

DM: When did the Shandon unified school demise happen?

JS: They pulled away from Paso Robles probably around the early 1930s. They had an independent high school with, I think, five independent elementary

districts. Each one had Boards of Trustees and so on. We decided that since we had more money per student than Paso Robles did, we were a ripe target to get taken over. All Paso Robles had to do was to unify their district and include us. But they were asleep at the switch – we got in ahead of them. Once we were unified it was very unlikely that the State Board would force us to merge. That's how we happen to have Parkfield – it's in Monterey County – but it's the closest high school for those kids. It's called a Joint Unified School District because "Joint" means it's across two county lines.

DM: Were you on what amounted to the School Board?

JS: Oh, yes. For 17 years. Don McMillan was a prime mover in getting it pulled away from Paso Robles. I guess he went to Poly, so I don't suppose he went to Shandon. But he lived there all his life.

DM: More about the stewardsh– [Tape break]

[Tape Resumes]

JS: –northern part of the county. It had to be because of the homesteaders – there was a lot of families out there.

DM: A lot of these weren't too far away from the immigrants' experience and there's this mystical love of the land and hope against hope that "If I get my 160 acres I'll be able to survive."

JS: What my grandfather bought oftentimes was where somebody had put together three or four homesteads and eventually couldn't make it, had to sell out. Someone who had bought a neighbor's homestead hoping to turn a profit on it.

DM: They didn't have much to lose if they didn't have much in Texas, then what the hell?

JS: It surely was the end of the western experience. After that there was no place to go.

DM: I think that probably explains why they would take this uneconomic unit, 160 acres, and try and make it economic. It just didn't –

JS: On some of these you can see from the foundations they built a pretty decent house and barn and all. There must have been, apparently, people in the area who were specialists. I know there had to have been one or more people who dug water wells, because they dug a well and they cased it with rock that came out of the creek. If you did that you had to know what you were doing because they had

a little barrel shape to them. Something like an arch, I guess, kept it from flowing in. So there had to have been somebody there who was skilled, but we don't know anymore who those people might have been.

DM: Did Hathaway take money to accumulate his property out there on the Huasna or did he acquire homesteads along the way?

JS: I don't know. Verne had 3 or 4 thousand acres out there. His sister Ella had another ranch further down the Huasna, not joined to his. I've forgotten how big that was, about 2500 or 3000 acres. Their father was a doctor, of course, and he had a substantial home and grounds in San Luis – maybe the father bought it for them, I don't know. Have no idea. But he had at least five children –

[Tape inaudible]

JS: I know that Murray Hathaway Jr. would be the only descendant. Three girls apparently didn't marry – Anita and Ella, I think they were both school teachers and Bud didn't – had a lot of girl friends but didn't get married – Cam died young. Cam and Hal and Bud were the boys. I think Murray, the one who was the sheriff, must have been Hal's son.

DM: I was thinking about Verne – he had two or three thousand acres out there then.

JS: I never knew how he acquired it, but it was homestead area. Of course he could have bought from the government, too, at that time. I never looked at the records. It used to be very easy to trace the records – one of the title companies that had the old books – big – each section was on a separate page. You could turn to the section and you could see every document that had been recorded against that piece of land going back to the original patent. It was easy to check. I don't know what has happened to those books, whether anybody knows.

DM: Some of them, American Title –

JS: It's all computerized now, but for years, until maybe five or six years ago you could go into the title insurance and trust and those old racks of books and you could find out. It was a lot of fun.

DM: I do worry about the history, because there was a lot of history on those old maps.

JS: You could see where your ancestors borrowed money and paid it back; and borrowed and paid back...

DM: Also, the location of stone corrals and adobes and ephemeral things that

would be important. I don't know what happened to those maps. I heard that American Title's went to Bakersfield or someplace.

JS: The old surveyor's maps the county has copies of. I have copies of the ones that pertain to us. The original maps may be lost, just as a lot of the original documents for the land grants are. I don't think they're lost, but I can't find them. I have traced them to where the only place they can be is in the National Archives, and that means a trip to Washington. We tracked them from San Francisco to Los Angeles and then they disappeared. I wanted to find out if part of the Avenales had been included in the Pozo grant, so I went to the Bancroft Library and spent a half a day and couldn't find anything. It was a very busy place. I went back when I was on the Alumni Council there – went out to the Bancroft one morning when it opened. Nobody there but me. I talked to the Librarian and he said, "This is what you wanted," and he pulled out a folder – had all this stuff on microfilm. They had copies of the documents on the Canales ranch. I asked if these were original documents and he said, "All I know is that when the Land Commission went out of business they turned over the documents to the Clerk of the Federal Court in San Francisco." So I called the Clerk of the Federal Court in San Francisco, but nobody knew. Finally somebody said, "A very old gentleman who worked here all his life comes in every Tuesday. If you call on Tuesday you can talk to him." So I talked to this guy and he seemed to know. He said, "After the fire and earthquake whatever was left was shipped to the Clerk of the Federal Court in Los Angeles. I called them, and there was no old person there, and it was a total dead end. The documents may have been there. Where else could they be? Well, they could be in the National Archives in San Bruno, they could be in the State Archives in Sacramento. We went to both of those places. These documents are not there. The people in San Bruno said the only place they could be, if they exist, would be the National Archives in Washington.

DM: It's a different thing – a half day at the Bancroft and a trip to Washington.

JS: Yes. Most of the people in San Bruno and most of the resources there are devoted to people who are doing genealogy, so they really aren't expert on these things. It's strange that with so many of these documents there are copies in the Bancroft, microfilmed, but nobody knows where the originals are. Without a copy of the map you can't tell what area you're at – the descriptions –

DM: Yes, the context is lost. That isn't to say that the maps aren't in San Francisco or Los Angeles or Washington, but they may be misfiled or –

JS: I did find on the Internet a list of all of the grant documents that are in the State Archives, which was far more than we saw. We saw all that we could find, and they tried to help, to show us what they had, but there are a hundred times as many documents there. Didn't happen to have the ranches that we were

concerned with. Even if it's there unless you happen to get a very helpful librarian you just can't do anything.

The End