CALIFORNIA STATE COLLEGE, BAKERSFIELD

CALIFORNIA ODYSSEY
The 1930s Migration to the Southern San Joaquin Valley

Oral History Program

Interview Between

INTERVIEWEE:	Clarence William Graham
PLACE OF BIRTH:	McClain County, Indian Territory, Oklahoma
INTERVIEWER:	Michael Neely
DATES OF INTERVIEWS:	March 18 and 23, 1981
PLACE OF INTERVIEWS:	Lindsay, Tulare County
NUMBER OF TAPES:	3
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Preface

Mr. Graham has an attractive home located on the edge of an orange grove. He is a bright and happy person. He and Mrs. Graham are very close and spend much of their time traveling. Mr. Graham is proud of his Indian heritage. The first interview session went quickly and smoothly. Mr. Graham seemed upset at the beginning and revealed that a close relative had become ill. Although Mr. Graham insisted we go ahead, I found him too distracted. I ended the interview as soon as possible without offending Mr. Graham. The Grahams left a strong memory for they are such kind and warm people.

Michael Neely
Interviewer

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INTERVIEWEE: Clarence Graham (Age: 81)

INTERVIEWER: Michael Neely

DATED: March 18, 1981

M.N.: This is an interview with Mr. Clarence Graham for the California State College, Bakersfield CALIFORNIA ODYSSEY Project by Michael Neely on March 18, 1981 at 755 Valencia Street, Lindsay, California at 9:00 a.m.

M.N.: What's the first thing that you can remember?

Graham: I can remember pretty well when I was about one year old. We moved up to the prairie, as we call it, and stayed all night in a deserted house on the way. We were moving with wagon and team and we got a little old butter mold. I had that in the family for many years.

M.N.: Where were you born?

Graham: I was born in the little town of McLain, Oklahoma. That was Indian Territory in those days. It's about 20 miles south of Muskogee, Oklahoma.

M.N.: Was Indian Territory different than other places?

Graham: Well, there were no state laws. It was all governed by the Indians. They had some kind of tribal government and the hanging judge from Fort Smith. He was the main law and order. He took all the criminals to Fort Smith, Arkansas and hung them.

M.N.: Everybody?

Graham: I guess he hung more men than any man that ever lived. I have his history in there. They called him the hanging judge.

M.N.: What's the next thing you remember?

Graham: I remember moving up to this bare country. There wasn't even a barbed wire fence there. It was the land that my father had filed on through the Dawes Commission. He went to Muskogee, Oklahoma before the Dawes

Commission and took his father and witnesses to prove that he was an Indian. He became an enrollee on the record of the Dawes Commission. They gave him a number and they gave me a number. He filed on land there. There were two 80 acre pieces. I got 80 and he got 80. When we moved there there wasn't even a barbed wire fence. For many years after that why we could still see the tracks where the wagons cut through the mud to bring the lumber to build the house and the bar when we moved there.

M.N.: Do you remember what that place looked like?

Graham: Oh yes. We built it up from scratch and lived there then till I was married. I was still living at that place when I went to the Navy. I went off to college to Bacone College. That's an Indian college at Muskogee, Oklahoma.

M.N.: At what age?

Graham: At 17. Then I got interested in serving my country and I left my college and went and joined the Navy.

M.N.: What year was that?

Graham: 1918. I was sent to the Naval Training Station at Great Lakes, Illinois. I went through boot camp there and became interested in radio. I transferred from seaman to the radio school and became a radio operator. Later on I was transferred from there to Philadelphia. I was an instructor in the radio school in the Parkway Building in Philadelphia when the Armistice was signed.

M.N.: How long was it before you got married?

Graham: We were married while I was in the Navy.

M.N.: What year was that?

Graham: 1918. I came home on furlough and we got married.

M.N.: You came to California in 1924.

Graham: That's right.

M.N.: What happened in those years between 1918 and 1924?

Graham: We married. My father and mother left the farm and moved to Nowata, Oklahoma which was about 20 miles from there. We decided to farm. I had my 80 acres and rented my father's. In the meantime he had acquired another 80 acres there. He bought it. We had three 80s there together so I tried farming for a year or two. I did all right at it. I had good equipment, good horses, and good tools.

M.N.: Your father left you that?

Graham: I bought some of it. My wife got an allotment out of my pay. She didn't get the check until we got home and we used that money to buy a new wagon.

M.N.: How much did that wagon cost?

Graham: Oh, about $100. My mother always said my wife was about as big as a bar of soap after a hard day's washing. She says, "Well now you'll never be able to do the things out here on this farm that I do and I think you ought to consider getting off this farm and doing something else." My father had been a Rawleigh Retailer. He had done that in the adjoining county.

M.N.: A Rawleigh Retailer is like a salesman?

Graham: Yes. They go from house to house and sell extracts, spices, medicines like liniments and ointments, and stuff like that. They sold stock food and poultry food.

They insisted that I get into that. I got over in the adjoining Craig County and I tried that for about two or three years. I could sell it all right. It was no trouble to sell it. The company kept saying, "Oh, these farmers are all honest. They will take care of you so you don't have to worry about it. You just sell it." Well, I sold it. But when the panic hit, why I had out several thousand dollars in Oklahoma. Every farmer in the country owed me because I went far and near.

M.N.: What panic is that?

Graham: The Depression started.

M.N.: When was that?

Graham: That was in 1923. The farmers back there couldn't pay their taxes. They had some bad years and they just couldn't. I had men come to me and say, "Well, Graham, I sure would like to have another bottle of that lin ment. I just simply can't pay my bill now but I'll get it someway." I'd give them another bottle and that would just put me in that much worse. Finally, in 1924, we realized that we couldn't make it. Her folks were out here and they were all doing good in California.

M.N.: Good in what way?

Graham: Financially. They were all getting along good.

M.N.: Were they farmers?

Graham: Some of them had farms. Some of them worked on farms. Her brother worked in the post office here. They wanted her to come to California.

They said they would pay our way to California to come out here and visit. So she came to California. During that time why I made up my mind that I was going to collect all I could. We owned our home back there. I called her and I said, "How would you like to move to California?" She said, "Well, I would like to." She thought that that was the thing for us to do. So I said, "We're going to have a sale and sell all we've got and we're coming to California." She told her family, "I'm going back there and help Clarence sell out and then we'll come back. You can keep the children if you will and they won't have to make the trip."

That's what we did. We went back there and had our sale and sold out. We paid all of our debts and left Oklahoma practically broke.

M.N.: You sold the farm.

Graham: We had sold the farm and bought a house in town. We had built a good big barn with a storage room to hold all these products that I ordered.

M.N.: You had that many products?

Graham: Oh yes. We had a big store full of them there. I carried them and used a wagon and team. I finally got a car, a Model T, with a back end to haul them in. That way I'd come in more often. When I had my wagon and team I'd go out for a week at a time and just stay all night with the farmers. They'd put my team up and feed it. The next morning why I'd give them $1.50 worth of liniment or something like that or take that much off of their bill. That's the way we lived. Later on we discarded the horses and wagon. We got the car and that way I had to come in twice a week.

M.N.: How old were you at that time?

Graham: I was 23 years old. You see I stay up with the years. In 1924 I was 24 years old when I came to California.

M.N.: Do you remember how much money you were making in a good year when you were 22?

Graham: We lived all right and got along good. I just made a living.

M.N.: What would that be?

Graham: I don't know. It wasn't much in those days. We didn't keep books. We had a little bank account. Sometimes it was pretty low. We just kind of lived from day to day.

M.N.: Would you say you made $200 to $300 a year?

Graham: Oh more than that. I took more than that to run our car. Gasoline was about 15¢ a gallon. I remember when we got to Bakersfield we ran out of oil. We brought a five gallon can from Oklahoma in the Model T.

We got to Bakersfield and we were out of oil. We had to buy a quart of oil. He said, "Do you want western or do you want eastern?" He told me the western was 15¢ a quart. I think the other was about 20¢. I bought the western quart of oil and that got me to Lindsay.

M.N.: How much money did you have when you got here?

Graham: We had about less than $5 when we got here.

M.N.: Not a lot of money.

Graham: No. I got here about ten o'clock at night and I stayed all night with a sister. The next day I looked around the country and made some acquaintances. I went down to a man by the name of Morris Gifford. He ran the Lindsay Feed and Fuel. He had a trucking business and her brother worked for him. He said, "Well, I understand you're going to be looking for a job." I said, "Yes, I'm looking for one right now." He said, "Well, I'm going to hire you to drive a truck but it's going to be a couple weeks before I can start you." I said, "Well, that's fine." That night I went out to her father and mother's and we stayed all night. They lived three or four miles in the country. He said, "Well, how would you like to go help me pick grapes? I'm picking grapes out here for a man and he says he needs some more pickers." I said, "Yes, I'll go with you." That morning we got up about six o'clock. I guess we were getting some lunches ready. This brother-in-law's wife came out to the house. She says, "Clarence, the boy that's driving the other truck had an accident. He dropped a big lump of coal on his foot. They want you to go to work."

M.N.: Mashed his foot?

Graham: Mashed his foot badly. He couldn't work. Seven o'clock that morning I went on the job.

M.N.: Did you have any prior experience driving a truck?

Graham: Oh yes. I had driven. Like I told you before, I'm a jack of all trades. I'm a pretty good carpenter. I'm a pretty good painter. I'm a pretty good electrician. I've done everything in my life practically.

M.N.: All the good things?

Graham: And some of the bad things too. Anyway, I went down there and went to work on the truck. From that day till the day I retired in the post office over 35 years later I had never been off the payroll a single day except Sunday. I drove that truck until I got a job out here on a ranch. It just worked that way from one job to another. I went to work in the post office and I worked 35 years. The first day driving a truck I hauled about 25 tons of sack milo. I hauled a load from out in the country to the Porterville Poultry Association and unloaded it, went back and got another load and brought it to this Feed and Fuel in

Strathmore. I unloaded there and went back and got a third load.

M.N.: You didn't unload it by hand did you?

Graham: Yes. We unloaded by hand. A man out on the ranch helped me load it and a man at each place helped me unload it. I took it off the truck and put it out there and they stacked it on dollies and drove it.

M.N.: So you weren't just driving a truck. You were loading too.

Graham: I was. I was doing everything. When night came I was dragging. I stayed with it and made him a good man. Even after I went to work part time in the post office he would still say he had some odd jobs if I got a little time off.

M.N.: How long would one of your days go?

Graham: Ten hours at least. Lots of days as much as twelve hours. I worked by the hour. This man was very strict. He had me to keep a record of what I did all the time. If I drove 20 miles to Hanford to pick up a load of feed, he wanted me to show the time on the clock from the time I left Lindsay till I got to the place. He paid me for the time I put in.

M.N.: How did you come to find out about the post office?

Graham: Her brother worked in the post office. By that time I had made a real good friend out here on the El Torres Olive Ranch. They had 110 acres of olives and had about 80 or 90 acres of oranges. I hauled the fruit out there and this man took a liking to me. He needed a ranch man and one day he asked how I'd like to have a job by the month. He said, "I'll furnish you a house, your water, your lights, and I've got a cow here. You can milk that cow and get your milk." We had children. They could go to school then.

M.N.: How many children did you have?

Graham: We had two then. We have three children now.

M.N.: What year was this?

Graham: 1925. I said we have an agreement that I give 30 days notice and he'll give me 30 days notice. I said I couldn't leave my job without a notice. He said he had already talked to my boss and my boss wouldn't stand in the way. I said I might consider it. We made the deal and on the first day of January I moved out to the ranch.

While I was there this brother-in-law said, "They're holding an examination for a job in the post office and I think you ought to take it." I said that I'd consider it. I thought about it for a few days. One morning I said to the manager of the ranch that I wanted to go into the town and

take the civil service examination. I said I'd get up early and put in a day's work and take a couple or three hours to go down to take the examination. I had taken the civil service examination in Oklahoma for the Railway Mail Service. I passed that and was on the eligible list for the Railway Mail Service in Oklahoma when we came out here. They never did call me to go to work back there. He told me not to worry about the ranch. I got up early that morning. At daylight I was out driving the tractor. I worked till about 8:30 and went in and took a bath and went down to the bank. They had the examination in the back of the bank. There were about 12 to 15 people who took the examination that morning. Eight of us passed. One girl who worked in the bank had the highest grade. I had the second highest grade. It wasn't long after that till they said they'd like for me to take a job in the post office. They couldn't take the girl because they wanted a clerk carrier. In those times just men carried the mail. So I got the job in the post office. It was a part time job. Some days it would be four hours and some days it would be eight hours carrying and two hours clerking.

M.N.: How much money did you make?

Graham: 75¢ an hour. The top salary for a clerk was $1800 a year. That's $150 a month. Her brother was getting top salary and everybody thought he was rich. When I started I had to supplement my income. I got a job in a store.

This store was a Seventh Day Adventist store. They always kept it open on Sunday. This was a big store. It had furniture. It had a big grocery and had an adjoining meat market. They finally put in a line of shoes too.

M.N.: That was here in town?

Graham: That was right here in town. This lady was the manager of the whole outfit. She just put me a time book up there and I kept my own time. She told me anytime that I wasn't working in the post office to come down. There's always work to do. In those days we kept a big store room out there and there was always sweeping to do. There were potatoes to sack, sugar to sack and sweeping. I could always find something to do and she just turned the store room over to me. She said, "I've never had a good store room out there. We get ten cases of corn covered up with tomatoes and pretty soon I ordered 20 cases of corn and I've still got ten."

I redid that whole store room and worked in there lots of times. It took me a month or two to get that thing really organized. Every time I had a little time I put it in the store room. That's the way I worked and I worked eight years in the post office before I got a regular appointment. A postal inspector came down one time and said, "Graham, I've looked over your record here and we're going to try to give you a regular job out of this." He went into all of the figures. He made a

recommendation to the department. They turned it down and said there wasn't enough work to make me full time. Lots of days I'd put in twelve hours, some days I'd only get in three or four. They were using me everywhere. Lots of days I'd go out and carry, work two or three hours on the window at noon during the relief lunch hour. Then I'd grab a sack and go out and carry some more. That's the way it worked until I got a regular appointment.

When I got a regular appointment it was as a clerk not a carrier. I worked at that for several years and at that time we had a good, large money order section here and we had postal savings. We had over $100,000 in postal savings in the office. That was carried through the postal savings or through the money order section. We had one section for money orders, postal savings and registered mail.

M.N.: You mean it was like a savings account at a bank.

Graham: Yes. It paid interest. They wanted somebody to take over that section. I was one of the younger employees. Several of them had more seniority than I did and could have gotten the job if they'd wanted it. It seemed that no one wanted it because of extra responsibility and you had to take out a bigger bond.

M.N.: On yourself?

Graham: You had to buy your own bond. I said, "Yes, I'd like to have it." I never was a guy to back down on anything. I went in there and I guess I made them a good employee because the inspectors complimented me on it and I got along at it good. A few years later our assistant postmaster retired. Mr. Bandy was the postmaster. He said, "Well, I've kind of got a problem. I've got several senior employees here but the man I want to have for assistant postmaster is Graham."

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 1

Graham: Mr. Bandy's boss called me and Mr. Bandy in and had a talk with us. He said, "Well now, you're going to appoint a man that's a junior employee. You might get into some problems unless you work this just right. I'm all for it. I think that's the man to have it all right. Whenever he goes to telling those other boys that's been here longer what to do, you might get into some problems unless you back him up 100%. You'll have to stand behind him in his decision even if he makes a wrong decision. Privately take him into your confidence and tell him he made a mistake there and he should have done so and so."

I told him, "That's the only way I'd take the job anyway. I realize what I'm getting into." We did have some boys there that had been in lots longer than I. None of them made any holler about my getting the job. I took it over and got along real good. I had no problems whatsoever and it worked out good. I was assistant postmaster for twelve years until I retired on my birthday in 1959.

M.N.: What have you done since then?

Graham: Traveled. I've traveled to every state in the union. I've made fourteen trips into Mexico. I've been on the three long trips into Canada. That trailer setting there has been to every state in the union. It might not have been in some but we left it in one state and drove over into adjoining states with the car. We have been in every state in the continental United States during that time. We've fished and we enjoyed Mexico. Went all over the Republic. One time we were gone from home for ten months.

M.N.: How old are you now?

Graham: I'm 81 years old.

M.N.: What I'd like to do now is to go back to the time after you got out of the service when you first started farming. Describe the farm and what kind of farming you did.

Graham: It was a general farm. We raised wheat and oats and corn, kafir corn, milo, and maize.

M.N.: What's kafir corn?

Graham: It's like milo maize only it's white instead of being red. They grow it back in that country. You cut it off and it's wonderful feed for chickens. You just throw it out in the chicken yard and they'll peck it all off and leave the tassle that it came out of. In those days we thrashed with steam thrashers. I can even remember one time when we used horse power. We had a team that went around and around and ran this thrashing machine. I can only remember that one time doing that.

M.N.: Was that on your farm?

Graham: Yes. We cut the bands. They cut this grain with a binder and bound it into bundles. They tied a string on it so in order to thrash it. You had to cut that band off. We had a man there and every time you'd throw a bundle off he'd hit it with a knife and cut that band. They fed it by hand before we had all these automatic things. We also drilled a well. They drilled there for about two or three weeks and used a team. The team would go around and around to drill the well.

M.N.: How big would the pipe be?

Graham: A regular size well of six inches or something like that. That old thing would chunk and chunk and chunk when drilling in hard rock. Then they'd take it out. They'd build a fire and heat that bit. They'd take sledge hammers and sharpen it up. They put some new points on it so it would hold out to the required distance so they could get a casing down in there.

In later years we got steam engines and they put on the automatic feeders. That was a canvas that rolled around and all you did was pitch the bundle on there. We always tried to pitch with the heads forward so that the heads of the grain would hit the spinning cylinder down in there. That would knock the grain out first. If you did it the other way the butt end went in and it didn't do as good a job. We had two men. One man would drive up on one side and another man would drive up on the other. We'd pitch into that. They had a divider in the center of it and it all went through. They also had a big circle blower that would make the big straw stacks. Some farmers would stay on the straw stack and walk around and stack this straw. My father always did because we had lots of oat straw and oat straw is very good feed for cattle. Wheat straw is not near as good as oat straw. He always built a good stack and kept it for his cattle.

M.N.: Did they do it collectively?

Graham: This thrashing machine would go from one farm to another. They all joined in and helped. Every farmer helped the other one thrash. We'd have eight bundle wagons and four wagons hauling to the granary. We'd have men out in the field that would pitch this grain up off of the ground and to the man on the wagon so he could haul it into the thrasher.

M.N.: Where did these steam thrashers come from?

Graham: They were owned in the neighborhood. Four or five men would own thrashers and they'd thrash all summer.

A man named Gus Arning, I remember him well, thrashed all of his life. He visited me here after I was working in the post office. That man that had thrashed for my dad many, many years.

M.N.: What were the people like in 1923? Were the farmers honest people?

Graham: Oh yes. In those days a man's word was about as good as his note. I can remember when my father needed some money he'd just call up the bank and say, "Well, I'm going to overcheck. I'm buying some cattle over here." They'd say, "Oh, that's all right, Ed. We'll take care of you. Come in when you get around to it." That's the way they were.

M.N.: People didn't cheat each other?

Graham: No. There's always a few bad apples in any basket but most of those farmers trusted one another. They loaned each other equipment and in this thrashing they always helped the other. The women went to the house where they were thrashing and helped them get this big dinner. Twenty-five or 30 men would be there for dinner. It was a cooperative effort. The farmers were all hard working people.

In those days they all did it with horses and plows. I walked many a day behind a team and plowed corn all day long walking and plowing,

holding the handles on that plow. We broke all the sod up with a team. We used three horses on those and a three horse evener. That's a thing that all three horses pull on. They all pull even on it.

M.N.: What was your house like?

Graham: We had a nice house. My mother was one of the most extreme housekeepers I believe I've ever known in my life. I think my wife would bear me out in this. She was so clean that she was the talk of the neighborhood. We did have a nice house. I'm sorry to say we didn't use it much. We took off our shoes at the door if the shoes were a little bit muddy and came in in our stocking feet. That's the way she kept her house. We had no modern facilities. We had no water. We had outside toilets. We called them privies.

M.N.: You didn't use the Sears Roebuck catalog did you?

Graham: Oh, I guess everybody did that. I guess toilet paper was practically unknown in those days. That's right we used the newspapers. We had lots of good times. The farmers would get a day off now and then. They'd all get out and have a rabbit hunt. We'd kill lots of ducks and we caught fish. Game laws in Oklahoma were unknown in those days. I'm sorry to say this. There were some men back there that even poisoned the duck just for their feathers to make feather beds out of. I had an uncle in Oklahoma. His name was Gideon Graham. He sponsored the game laws. When he died he had the quails and the bob white quails mounted all over his house. He had lots of wild game mounted and put in his house. He got the game laws to where they had to have limits and seasons. He sponsored all that and did a good job of it for the hunters and the fisherman in Oklahoma.

M.N.: What about coal?

Graham: Craig County was adjoined to Kansas. There was a coal company that came out from Pennsylvania. They used core drills. They drilled a little core about two inches in circumference. They started in 1922. They drilled for coal. They brought these little samples out to the top. In the long run they finally found coal all over that country back there. They bought the coal right on it for $60 an acre. When they closed that deal at the county seat it was one of the largest money transactions that had ever been made in the state of Oklahoma.

Most of these farmers had their land mortgaged at that time. They were in bad shape financially. Many farms were foreclosed on and the banks were land poor. They had more land than they knew what to do with. This was a great thing for that country because they used this money to pay off these mortgages and back taxes. It set these farmers up again with a clean bill of sale so to speak. They could go out and farm the top land without being heavily mortgaged and having to pay a lot of interest and back taxes.

That was in 1922. Up to this present time they've never taken out any of that deep coal. Oklahoma does have a top strata of coal in it that has been there ever since I've known anything about it. We always burned coal. Lots of times we'd just go over to a place where we knew where this coal was and in a day why we could dig us enough coal to last a month or two. We'd go over there with a team and wagon, pick and shovel, and maybe a stick or two of dynamite to break a big rock if there was one in the way. It wasn't over six or eight feet of dirt down to this coal. Lots of men dug for the whole country. They had it to sell. One of the things that that country was noted for was cheap fuel.

M.N.: Do you know how they dug these mines?

Graham: I've dug coal myself. Me and a friend of mine dug our own coal. We'd go over there and in one or two days we'd get out enough coal. We did it ourselves with a pick and shovel.

You just find a place where it's been dug along a creek or a wash. Just dig the dirt and throw it back. The next time then you just dig over a few feet further and throw that dirt back over where you've already taken the coal out. It wasn't too hard. You could do it real easy. When you get down to the coal you clean it off nice. Then you drive pins through it with a sledge hammer and it breaks out in big lumps. You just throw them on your wagon and then if any of it breaks off in small stuff why you just take your shovel and shovel that in too. It's all good coal.

It was what we call soft coal. It wasn't the hard coal. There was two kinds of coal. There was black coal and there was red coal. Most people like to get the red coal because there was less soot in it. It didn't make as hot a fire as the black coal but most people like it for the cook stoves.

There was some slate on the coal. You'd take that slate off. We didn't use it. Just pitched it off. It was usually on top of the coal. In some places it was only two inches deep. We didn't like to have any more than we had to have because that was kind of hard to work off. We would drive our pins in and then throw the slate off and then take the coal out in big chunks. Sometimes it was about all one person could lift. We liked to get it out in big chunks as much as we could. We never blew it out. We used the pins and pinned it out.

M.N.: What did these pins look like?

Graham: Oh, just an iron wedge of a thing with a sharp point.

M.N.: You didn't have to go down underground to get this out?

Graham: Oh no. There wasn't over six or eight feet of dirt on top of it. We just took it off and got the coal.

M.N.: Did people sell it?

Graham: Yes. I know of one man. In a day he'd get out 25 bushels of coal and load it in his wagon. He'd take it to town that night and unload it where he'd sold it. The next morning he'd go out and dig him 25 bushels and come in. He got $5 for that load of coal he delivered.

M.N.: How big is a bushel?

Graham: Every farmer back there used to have what we call a half a bushel. They used it for everything. They used a half a bushel of coal and a half bushel of wheat. Lots of times one farmer would run out of oats. We fed most of our horses oats because oats is a better feed for horses than hard corn or wheat. Wheat's good grain for hogs but not for horses. If one farmer would run out of oats he'd borrow 25 bushels from his neighbor till he thrashed. He would measure it in these half bushels.

M.N.: Is a half bushel like a bucket?

Graham: Yes. It's about a five gallon bucket. They used it for everything. They put this wheat in and then they'd take a straight edge and just level it off. They'd stand there and count it and pour it in and make a mark on the wall.

M.N.: What kind of food did people eat in those days?

Graham: People raised what they ate and they ate what they raised. We raised our own potatoes. We raised our own roasting ears. We raised cabbage. We had a family orchard. We had apples, peaches, gooseberries, Concord grapes. We sprayed our own trees with a hand sprayer.

M.N.: You had grapes in Oklahoma?

Graham: Yes. There's lots of grapes in the adjoining state in Arkansas. They have lots of Concord grapes in Arkansas. They sell them in five pound baskets.

M.N.: Were they cultivated as they are cultivated here?

Graham: No. Nothing like it. It's a different process all together. We'd grow them on a trellis wire. We had them along the back fence of our garden. We didn't have any to sell. We just used them for grape juice and jelly and a little jam. They were real good. They're slip skin grapes. They got a seed in them and every time you put a grape in your mouth you spit out the seed and the skin. They were wonderful for jelly and grape juice.

M.N.: Do they make wine or alcoholic beverages with them?

Graham: No. I don't know that I ever heard of any of that. There was lots of moonshining in Oklahoma. They set out in the boondocks somewhere and set this mash. They'd use wheat and barley and a little bit of everything. They put apricots in it. It fermented for a few days. It's like making vinegar. There's something about it that it ferments. They put it in wooden barrels. You had to have wooden barrels to put your mash in. They'd put so much water in there and then after it got to the right place where it had the alcohol in it, they'd take it out and distill it and get the alcohol out.

They put a fire under this wash boiler and start it to steaming. As this steam came out they ran it through a cold water tank. That'd bring it back to a liquid and that's the way they would get their alcohol. They took this copper wash boiler because that is one thing they had. Every woman back there in those days had a wash boiler to boil her clothes in. They didn't wash in those days like they do now. There were no hand washers so they used wash boards. They rubbed it on a wash board. In those days they always put those clothes in and boiled them after that. That's what they used. Every hardware store in the country had copper boilers. That was an easy thing for them to buy. They could put this top on and screw it down with some clamps to keep that steam from blowing the top off. They did sometimes if they weren't careful. There were some men who got scalded pretty bad. They knew how to do it. They had copper coils down in that wash boiler. That thing boiled and made it into vapor that came out and turned into alcohol.

M.N.: How strong was that?

Graham: Plenty strong. You'd better have something that you can take after it or it will burn your throat. It's just too strong really. If they'd let it age awhile it wouldn't have been so bad but most of them didn't let it age. They used it in two or three weeks.

M.N.: What would the aging do to it?

Graham: It moistens it and makes it better. You let it age awhile and it gets to where you can drink it.

M.N.: Was that fairly typical?

Graham: There was a lot of moonshine made in Oklahoma. Those farmers got in straits financially. That was one way that they could reclaim their farms. I know of one man there named Bible. He was a very fine, good man. He was an honest, upright man. I don't think he drank. I don't think he smoked. He was a religious man. He was in financial straits so he started moonshining. They finally caught him and took him to jail. He said, "Well, I've got my farm paid off now and I can go back and live without this now. I'll farm my farm. I was in debt so bad that if I hadn't done this, I was going to lose my farm." They found out that he put this mash in down in a tunnel in under his hog pen. That way

you couldn't smell the mash. As it ferments it gives off quite an odor. The prohibition agents could smell it a mile. He took care of that by putting it under his pig pen. He got away with it.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 2

M.N.: I'd like now to go on and talk about your business.

Graham: I drove a team for a long time. The farmers were just dirt farmers. They worked in the fields and did most of their own work. Very few of them had hired men. They did most of their own work.

M.N.: Were they glad to see you?

Graham: Most of them were glad to see me. I sold stock food for their horses. The ones that had the better farms had good stock. They fed them worm medicine and stock food just like people taking vitamins. They give them to their horses. The same way with their chickens and poultry. They had to keep disinfectants to keep the mites off of them. They had the chicken food for the roup which was a disease that a lot of chickens had in those days. It's nothing more than a cold in chickens and I had a remedy for it. It was a good one and was one of the things that they used.

M.N.: Did they ask your advice about problems they were having?

Graham: Oh yes. I had books from the W.T. Raleigh Company that explained all that. I became kind of a veterinarian to a certain degree. I couldn't practice it but I knew what was good. The company told me these things.

M.N.: So they looked forward to you for more than just products.

Graham: That's right. I supplied them. If I was a little late getting around, they'd sometimes call me up or write me a card and ask me when I was coming because they needed such and such a thing. Sometimes I would make special trips.

Staying with the farmers, I found out how they lived. They were all hard workers. They would get up long before daylight every morning and they would work till sundown. They'd be eating their supper about seven or eight o'clock. They wouldn't any more get the last bite down than they'd go to bed. They'd be up the next morning at five.

I stayed all night with a man one time. I pulled in there and his wife told me to take out my team. I asked if I could stay all night. She said, "Yes." Her husband was out in the field shucking corn. I took out my team and put them in the barn. I took care of a few chores for the day around my products and got them in order for the next day. About that time he came in with a double side board of corn. [He] came over and greeted me and said, "I'll pull this corn in here to the crib and

take the team out and I've got to unload this corn." I said, "Well, I'll help you unload your corn." I started shovelling his corn. They had a scoop board in their wagon. That was a slanting board that was set up on the back end of the wagon and went down in it so you could start your shovel easy otherwise you couldn't. With corn you couldn't get that shovel started so you'd shovel off of that scoop board. By the time he got his horses taken care of, I had his wagon about one-third unloaded. He got up in there then and we both shovelled till we unloaded the wagon.

Then he had four or five cows to milk. I said, "Well, give me a bucket. I can milk cows." He gave me a bucket and said, "Well, now that cow there is a good easy cow to milk." I just sat down and milked that cow. I milked about two of his cows while he milked four. He took the milk to the house. They ran it through a DeLaval separator. They turned it by hand and he separated all that milk. He took it outside. I followed along with him. I was interested in seeing what was going on. He took his milk out to the pig pen and gave it to the pigs and kept the cream.

It was after dark and we were still out with the lantern. Finally he said, "Well, supper is ready." So we went in and ate our supper. Those folks were good feeders. It was just corn bread and beans and home grown pork. A lot of them lived on pork. They grew their own hogs. That was what we had. They might have had some pie. They were good people. They lived good. About nine o'clock he said, "Well, I guess we'd better go to bed." We went to bed and the next morning I heard him get up about four o'clock. It was black dark. In a few minutes I got up too. We were out and had those cows all milked and were back in there for breakfast and it still wasn't daylight. By sunup he was out. We were ready to go to work.

I carried two big satchels with a lot of these products in them. I would take them in and they would fold out and there it lay. I sold bottled extracts and all kinds of spices. In one case I had medicines. I had liniments and ointments and all kinds of stuff like aspirins and a general line of traveling drugs that you could buy without a prescription. I took those in and they bought a liberal supply of stuff from me. I said, "Well, how much do I owe you for my night's lodging?" He said, "Well, brother, you don't owe me anything. You did enough work here."

M.N.: You made yourself welcome then?

Graham: Yes. I enjoyed it. They bought a nice bill of goods and I went on my way rejoicing. Later on, I did away with the horses and used the car. He was away up by the Kansas line and it was a long ways from home. I usually didn't get up there with the car. I'd drive back home at night.

M.N.: Do you remember how much your car cost you when you bought it?

Graham: I would say that it cost around $600.

M.N.: Was that a lot of money?

Graham: It was in those days. When I decided to leave and give up the Raleigh business, I sold out to another man. I had this car. I didn't have it paid for. He had an old Model T and he gave me that for my equity in the new car. That's the car that we drove to California. It took us eight days and eight nights to come from there to Lindsay, California. We drove lots of nights till ten o'clock at night. We averaged about 35 miles per hour on the trip.

M.N.: When you were traveling as a salesman how many stops would you make in an average day?

Graham: I used to try to make at least ten stops a day. I'd name over a few things and sometimes they would say, "Oh yes. I should have so and so." Lots of times I would say, "Well, okay. If you don't need anything, why I'll just go." Lots of stops. I'd be there an hour and a half. Sometimes we'd go out to their chicken pen or to their hog pen and look at their hogs and talk about things of that nature.

M.N.: What kind of livestock problems did they have in those days?

Graham: One of the main things in those days was worms in hogs. Now those worms get into a hog and it will live all right but he just doesn't get along very good.

M.N.: It won't get into people?

Graham: No. It doesn't get into people. That is one of the things we could cure.

M.N.: How did they get these worms?

Graham: By eating decayed food and things of that nature. It gets into their intestines. They multiple in there. That was one of the things that we worked on.

M.N.: And you could get rid of them?

Graham: Yes. Horses have them too. It's a different kind. We used a different kind of preparation for horses. If you keep your horse good and healthy and give him body builder, why, he'll take care of it himself.

M.N.: What's a body builder?

Graham: The same as a vitamin would be for a human.

M.N.: What about the chickens?

Graham: Well, they have the roup. They have mites and they have lice. You have to spray the nests and the roosts to keep those mites and lice off of them. If they get on them, they just sap their vitality. They don't

lay good and they just don't fatten.

M.N.: What about plant problems?

Graham: In those days we heard very little about that. We never heard of spraying anything except a few apples and peaches.

M.N.: Did you ever hear of boll weevils?

Graham: Never heard of them in those days.

M.N.: What about the people? What kinds of illnesses did they have?

Graham: We had about the same things that you have now except heart disease. I don't remember hearing much about heart disease. We had a disease back there they called consumption.

M.N.: Would that be like slow fever?

Graham: That's what we call tuberculosis now. We had lots of people who would have that. They would linger on for months and months and finally die with what they called consumption. I think that was a name that they had for it in those days. We call it tuberculosis now. They didn't know what to do for it. Didn't seem to have any cure for it. Rest was about all they could do for it.

M.N.: Would it take a whole family?

Graham: Sometimes it would be communicative. One would get it from the other.

M.N.: Did the other farmers help that family or did they quarantine them?

Graham: No. No quarantine. They didn't quarantine for it at all. If anybody had sickness in the family, why one family would go over and set up with them and take care of them. When people died, why they just laid them out in the home. They'd set up with the corpse. I've done it many times.

M.N.: Was that for religious reasons?

Graham: No. It was just a custom that we had at that time. When anybody would die in the community, four or five men would go dig the grave for them in the cemetary. Very simple. They did have undertakers and they would supply the coffin. They would come out and help. The men did all the work. The neighbors did all the work.

M.N.: Did they have divorces in those days?

Graham: Oh yes. They had divorces in those days. Not like they do now. It was kind of considered a terrible thing to get a divorce.

M.N.: How did they do it?

Graham: Well, they went through a process of law like they do now. I heard very little about it. Illegitimate children in those days was just a terrible thing. Only seldom would you hear of anything like that.

M.N.: How did people handle that? I know it must have happened.

Graham: Well, it did happen. If the people didn't get married, why they just took care of their daughter in the house the best they could. It was considered a terrible calamity for something like that to happen in the neighborhood. Usually the people would eventually move out of the neighborhood to clear away from where they were known.

M.N.: Did people go to church back in those days?

Graham: Yes. Most of those people were religious and churches were everywhere. I was raised in a church right close to where we lived. It was two and three-quarters from our house to the church. We were regular attenders. My father and mother belonged to it. We grew up in church and Sunday school.

M.N.: Have you ever heard of an arbor church?

Graham: I've been to them. They go out in the woods. They cut down some trees and cut some limbs and throw the limbs up with the leaves on. They'd have church right under that arbor out in the forest in the summer. They have what they called association meetings. That's where several churches go together and hold a kind of a union meeting. They had picnics.

Our little town, six miles from us, had a little fair every year. That was a farm affair. The farmers all saved a sample of their grain, their corn, melons, watermelons, and cantalopes. They had a canned fruit section. They had a section where the ladies brought their needle work. It was judged and they offered prizes for it. There were always a few race horses in the country. They'd team them up and they'd have a few horse races. They would have a balloon ascension. That was where they filled the old balloon with hot air. They had a parachute hooked to it. This balloon would go way up. They always made quite a big show of it. Some man with the outfit would say, "Oh, he can't get loose. Give me a gun. I've got to shoot him loose." They'd have a stir around there. Of course, we knew it as a put on. About that time the old boy would cut loose and come down in his parachute. The old balloon had a weight on the upside. It turned over and all that black smoke would go out and the balloon would drop back to the earth. The man would come down. Some of them had accidents and got killed.

M.N.: How did he dress?

Graham: He usually had a white suit on so you could see him. I've seen them bring them back in. That old black smoke would have his clothes

pretty well smoked up.

M.N.: Was it a modern type parachute?

Graham: It wasn't like that. He just hung down by it. When he cut loose, his weight just opened it. He had it tied with little cords or something that would just break open. They folded it in that position. They always said that the man jumping did his own folding. He got that parachute ready himself.

These farmers would bring all this fruit in and get it judged. They'd have the horse races. They would have different kinds of contests: boys' races, barrel races, sack races where two of them would get their foot in a sack and run together. It was quite a little affair. It lasted three days.

The first ice cream cone I ever saw was at that place. They made it like you'd make a pancake. They made it on a little griddle. They took a little thing and picked it up and rolled it into a little cone. One end of it was open so as soon as they put the ice cream in it it began to drip at the bottom. That's the first ice cream cone that I ever remember seeing. It was a brown cone.

I remember seeing my first airplane. It was made of bamboo and the guy got it up for about a minute or two. That must have been about 1914. I was about 14 years old then.

M.N.: When you stayed with these farm families, did they play instruments at all in the evening?

Graham: Sometimes they did. Sometimes we'd play games in the evening. We'd play dominoes or something. Maybe you'd stay all night with a man and next morning it was raining. If he was a good customer, you would just stay there for half a day maybe. We did whatever we could to pass away the times like playing checkers or dominoes.

M.N.: Did people have problems with having children in those days?

Graham: Most of them had what they called midwives. Our first child was born with a midwife. She was just a neighbor of ours. My father went and got her from about two miles away. She came there and stayed till the child was born. She took care of the whole thing.

In later years they had some doctors too. They were general practitioners. They'd go in a horse and buggy to see you and if they had an epidemic. The flu was one. Typhoid fever was another. They'd just drive from one house to another with their pill bag. They'd give you some pills and look you over. They'd go far and near with that horse and buggy to see you eight or ten miles out in the country. Some of them employed a livery stable man to drive them out, especially if it was at night.

I remember one time we had to get a veterinarian from 21 miles away. He came out in the night. We put a lantern up in a tree because we didn't know whether he could see our place or not when he came to it. Some of it was pretty crude all right. In those days they got along with it.

I remember one time I rode a horse six miles to town to get my tooth pulled. They pulled it out and I got on the horse and rode back home six miles. The doctor just got in the back of his office, set me down, and pulled it out. I don't think he gave me anything for the pain. He just pulled it out of there. It was a jaw tooth. A friend saw me there and he came in and kind of helped me down. Old Doc Snargrass, I remember him well, just pulled that tooth out.

I had my own pony. I had a famous pony that I rode all my life until I was grown. It was old Dexter. I rode him six miles to a high school. I courted my wife on him. I'd ride him to the livery stable and rent the buggy for a quarter. I'd put the harness on old Dexter and go out to see my girlfriend. Then I'd take the buggy back and leave it in the livery stable and saddle my horse. After we were married, we went to parties and my wife would ride in the saddle with me. I'd carry our baby daughter in my arms and we'd go to parties on old Dexter. He was a wonderful horse.

M.N.: Did you ask your wife's parents if you could marry her?

Graham: No. I didn't. We eloped. I was in the Navy and I came home on the train. She met me at the train station. We got on another train and went to the adjoining county seat and got married. I was married in a Navy uniform. We just went to a justice of the peace and his wife was one of the witnesses. I think there were two or three witnesses. We just had a little simple wedding there in the justice's house. It must have been a very small fee. The justice asked my wife how old she was and she said, "Eighteen, I guess." He says, "You guess!" She says, "Yeah, I'm eighteen."

M.N.: How old was she?

Graham: She just lacked a few days being eighteen.

END OF TAPE 2, SIDE 1

Session Two March 23, 1981

M.N.: You came to California in 1924?

Graham: That's right.

M.N.: Were there a lot of other people who'd come from Oklahoma?

Graham: There were a lot of people from all the midwest states. It seemed

like in the next five or six years there were many more that came than were here at that time. That was the time that Steinbeck wrote The Grapes of Wrath. I've read the book and also read Of Mice and Men. The people camped or set up housekeeping any way they could along the Kern River and some of the ditches near Bakersfield. Now I never did go right down to see those camps. I've talked to a lot of people that did. Some of our church organizations around this country and relief people gathered up food, blankets, and quilts and took them down there to help those people.

M.N.: When did they really start coming out here?

Graham: It would seem to me it was around 1930 to 1935. It seemed awful hard to get a job then. There were a lot of people who would just practically work for anything. I know. We had a man come to our house on Denver Street in Lindsay. He wasn't begging. He was looking for work. I said, "Well Mister, I just don't have anything." I'd come home for lunch that day and he'd come by. He said, "Oh couldn't you just let me cut some weeds or something? I'll do anything to get a dollar so I can get me something to eat." We had a fence, I could have done it in probably an hour or two myself. I said, "Well, I don't have any money to pay you for such work but you go ahead and I'll give you $1.50." I gave it to him. He did all right and went on his way. That was typical. There were just a lot of people who couldn't find work. It was a critical stage in the history of this country.

M.N.: Would you say those people were deadbeats?

Graham: No sir. There's always a bad apple in every barrel of apples. There might have been some deadbeats. Those people were sincere. They wanted to work and they would work. People that hired them said they worked good and they made good, conscientious hands. It seemed that they were upright people trying to get along. They were in desperation and were doing the best they could.

M.N.: Did they come to the post office where you were working?

Graham: Oh yes. We had a tremendous general delivery in those days. They all got their mail general delivery. Some of them looked pretty ratty. Some organizations asked the stores to give them a sack of potatoes to take down there to those people. I never did go down there. I was working every day and just never did have a chance to get down there.

M.N.: Did their presence in the camp create problems in the community?

Graham: From some reports that I heard, the sanitary conditions got out of control. They just had little old privies along the river banks. It created quite a commotion for the people who were trying to help them and trying to look after the sanitary facilities. Over a period of time, they just kind of worked it out. They almost ordered them off

of the place. They had nowhere to go. As fast as they could, they moved on and found jobs or found shacks to live in. They finally cleared them out of those ditch banks down there. Lots of them settled in this country. A lot of them became fruit tramps. They followed the fruit. They'd come through this country and they'd pick the oranges. They'd go right on north and pick cherries around Stockton and Sacramento. Then they'd go to Watsonville and pick apples and work their way on into Oregon and Washington. A lot of them went to Yuba City because they raise a tremendous amount of peaches. They worked in the fields and in the canneries.

Some of them would get permanent jobs on ranches here. They paid them about $75 or $80 a month and furnished them a house. They got along good on that. Many of them made good substantial citizens. I know some of them that's dead now. One of them in particular came out here and they were real poor folks. They got in and worked for a man and later bought a little grove. When he finally passed away they were real well up in the money. They came out and made good money and worked for a man that really helped them. In later years they got up in the money.

M.N.: What other groups did they have in this area at that time?

Graham: Not too many when we first started. They didn't have too many Mexicans. Half of our population is Mexicans now.

M.N.: What about other groups?

Graham: The Japanese people came in here and settled. They became growers and vegetables raisers. When we had the war, why we had to put them all in internment camps. I was assistant postmaster when that happened. I fingerprinted every Japanese in this area. My postmaster and I worked for about three days and nights. We'd hold a session after supper for the ones that couldn't get in in the daytime. That's what we did. We filled out a form and then I fingerprinted them. Those were nice people. They realized that they were in a tough spot. I don't think we had a man that ever had any idea of doing anything against the United States government. But the law said to do it and we put them in the internment camps. They were stationed over here at the Tulare County Fair Grounds. Built old tar paper buildings and gave a little hut to each family and put guards around them. They were just like prisoners. It was a sad thing.

A lot of these people had substantial amounts of money in the postal savings here. Years after that it fell my lot to try to find them. They had this money here and we owed them interest. It was quite a little deal to find them. Finally they did away with the postal savings all together and they got all that money back to them.

M.N.: Times were hard for everyone in the community?

Graham: Yes they were. People that sold out back in the dust bowl country

hadn't had a crop for a good many years. They came out here practically broke. I was the same. I came out here practically broke. People got out here and got a little job. Then they'd have hard luck and maybe sickness in the family. A man that had come out here got sick and wasn't able to make a living. The churches met and made quilts. We brought cans of food to take out for these poor families. That was not only people from Oklahoma. They came from Missouri, Kansas and all over the midwest.

A lot of them were good and honest people and wanted to do the right thing. They just seemed like their health or luck was against them. They were taken care of as best we could in those days. We didn't have all the relief programs that we have now.

My wife's father and mother got pretty well down and out after coming out here and staying for a good many years. Of course they got old and there wasn't old age pension at that time. We had to take them to different hospitals. It was quite a problem. My father-in-law bought a lot down here and always wanted to put a house on it. He never did get it on there. Finally, when he got to where he wasn't able to work and he wasn't able to make a living, they did start this old age pension. I said, "Well, Dad, if you'll deed me that lot, I found a house that I can buy. I'll put it on that lot and you can live in it as long as you live. Then, when you pass away, I'll do whatever I want to do with the house." I did. I bought a little house down here for $600 and had it moved on the lot. They lived there as long as they lived. I never charged them any rent.

M.N.: Are you satisfied with the way your life has turned out?

Graham: I'm more than satisfied. I thank the Lord every day for my blessings. I don't understand it hardly. When we retired my pension was $330 a month. We traveled for a good many years on that. We did it on $10 a day and we did it religiously. We went all over the country. We didn't drink or smoke. We didn't buy expensive clothes and a lot of things like that. We did a lot of things that we wanted to do. By saving my money and investing I'm doing real well now. I can't hardly believe myself, really.

M.N.: So you feel that coming to California was good?

Graham: Oh definitely. It was definitely a turning point in my life in every way. I changed my living habits. I wasn't doing very good in Oklahoma. I never was a boy to drink or gamble or smoke. I wasn't living the right kind of life really. Got my leg broke playing Sunday baseball. My wife had to nurse me back to health. It didn't take the leg long to heal back up. We turned over a new leaf when we came to California. We didn't join the church for several years. We naturally fell in with a different crowd when we came to California. It paid off for us real good. We have been active in the church for over 50 years and I am a deacon in the Primitive Baptist Church here. I feel like we're trying

to serve the Lord now in an acceptable manner.

We're still real active. My wife and I are both past 81 and we've been married over 62 years. We're still strong and we're looking forward to some more trips with that trailer out there. I've got a good pickup to pull it with. The cost of gas going up and all that but we'll still make some trips and enjoy a few more years anyway, sure.

M.N.: You're quite a person, Mr. Graham, I've really enjoyed talking to you.

Graham: Well I've enjoyed doing it. It's been a pleasure for me to relate some of these experiences of my life.

END OF INTERVIEW

Joseph Edward Graham
b. 1877, Coryell County, Texas
[His parents from Texas]

May Bradshaw
b. 1877, Fort Smith, Crawford Co., Arkansas
[Her parents from Oklahoma Territory]

Clarence William Graham

b. 1899, McClain County, Indian Territory

Education: 10th grade

Church: Primitive Baptist

m 1918

Anna Caldwell Minor

b. 1900, Centralia, Oklahoma

Esther Gay Wolf
b. 1919
Housewife

Clarence W. Graham, Jr.
b. 1922
Real estate agent

Calvin Blaine
b. 1929
State of California (retired)

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