

ORAL HISTORY OF THE SOUTHERN SAN JOAQUIN VALLEY PROJECT
CALIFORNIA STATE COLLEGE, BAKERSFIELD

INTERVIEW FORM

1. Name of Interviewee: MARY ASH
2. Date of Interview: 5-10-76
3. Place of Interview: HER APT.
4. Address of Interviewee: 2019 O. ST. BAKERSFIELD
5. Date and Place of Birth: NOV. 1893
6. Place of Longest Residence: PANAMA ~~CA~~ CALIF.
7. Length of Tape: 1 HR.
8. Transcription: Yes _____ No
9. Has the Interviewee signed a release? _____ Yes _____ No
10. Name of Interviewer: JOSE A. BENAVIDES

Ashe, M
History in Panama

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PIONEER PROJECT

HISTORY IN PANAMA (KERN COUNTY)

Mary Ash
Interviewed
by
Jose A. Benavides
on
May 9, 1976
Transcriber: Jose Benavides

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CALIFORNIA STATE COLLEGE, BAKERSFIELD
PIONEER PROJECT

INTERVIEWEE: Mary Ash

INTERVIEWER: Jose A. Benavides and Rita Verde

SUBJECT: History of Panama, Kern County

DATE: May 9, 1976

TRANSCRIBER: Jose A. Benavides

This is an interview with Mary Ash.

M: Yes...interview with Mary Ash.

The Ash family came from Chaple Hill, North Carolina
in 1868.

My grandfather however, had come before that. He
and his two older daughters had come before that. And
the grandmother with, her mother-in-law, and her sister
and the younger children came in 1868 across the isthmus
(mumble).

After remaining in the northern part of the state
doing dry farming at livingston along the merced. They
heard that irrigation had been developed in Kern County
and alfalfa was being grown; they pulled up stakes, then
came south. My father at that time was seventeen and they
settled in the . . . what was then New River, which is
now recognized as Rio Bravo. Anyway It was out in the
isthmus lane country way west of here.

After two years of dry farming there, my father was then nineteen. In the spring of 1877 he bought the north west quarter of section 34, 30-27. The family moved to that area in the panama district

Panama which had been settled by the Mexicans and named Panama...and...because it wore close resemblance in appearance to the real Panama, to the isthmus, extended at that time from caliente over to the river; it took in... about half of Bakersfield which it existed at that time. And clear to the Wheeler Ridge area in the mountains.

A colony of four hundred Mexicans was established in the South (correction) in the Northwest corner of section 27, 34-30, which is now the Rudnick feed yard or owned by the Rudnicks. And after...when that land...was . wanted to be used for something else the Mexicans were moved up on the Stine Canal, to about where the high schools, the old high school farm was located. And then when that area of Bakersfield where they are now more or less established.

That part of the a country my father told me pre-ceed (correction) prevailed when he came here the Mexicans were there.

The roads at that time; everybody drove on: the roads were very, very poor; we should erase some of this. The roads were very, very poor because people drove two horses and there was a track and in between the two tracks there were tusuls everywhere. Water was so close to the surface

that the whole area was green, the grass was green, the country was really beautiful because it was covered with trees; true, there were only cottonwoods and willows, nevertheless it was verdier and it was pretty and we always had green grass. Now I can remember as a little child across from where swer farm is now it was always green and cattle were grazed in there..

My ah...father bought that quarter section as I mentioned. When they moved to that particular section, they took with them from the Rio Bravo or the New River area four rooms. It was a two story portion Now whether they built it there or whether it had been there when they bought it and they moved it over: anyway from that... that was the nucleus of a nine room house that my nineteen year old father and his thirteen year old brother built for the family.

The family consisted at that time of my grandfather's mother, little grandma she was called, and her sister, Aunt Polly.

My grandparents James and Miss Ash, their daughters Margret and Sobilla Evelen, my father, and his youngest brother Richard Samual.

Besides farming they entered the dairy business. They built a dairy an adobe with walls about three feet thick and had the straw and the grass to mix with the mud. But to give them the height and something else to adhere to they cut willow poles and that was the; they built in

these wall with those willow poles all around and then filled it with mud and covered it with gorden and in back had a window there were two rooms a window in each side the east and west side, and the both of each room and a door at the north and south and over that they built a bunk house, that of course was to keep the thing cool. Course we never heard of refrigeration then but it was amazing how delightfully cool that old dairy was. And they made butter and sold it to Dave Hersfield who's store was in Bakersfield, and at that time was the predecessor to Hawk Himers and Brocks with another one or two owners in between. Dicker and bolt I think were the names, is the names.

Previous to the Hersfield store in town, however, he had an adobe building out in between the, (trying to remember) on pan, on ah, Panama Lane, between the ranch house of the Panama Ranch and the stables on the south-side. And that was the original store, of Dave Hersfield and also the first one that I ever heard of. Of that area out there. That prevailed for quite some time; my father a very great lover of stock cattle and horses always had very fine stock and that ah from the dairy business of making the butter he went into the meat market business and I don't know...ah...what year that was, but anyway, he went out of business in the panic of 1873 which a good man; good deal of indebtedness hanging over him and his customers...ah... (in a lower voice)

I don't know, what next do you want? Is that a good introduction to you?

R: Yes!

J: Yes! Ah. If I, if I may or we may, might ask you ah! A few questions here.

M: Now can! Most of these things about the ah . . . Dave Hersfield store. I don't remember, it seems to me however, that I have ah . . . ah hazy recollection of seeing that old adobe but it was never a store in my time. (Noise of passing car outside) Then in . . . ah . . . 1893 I remember very distinctly the. . . ah. . . flood we had because I got up in the upstairs window and looked out at all of this water. That had just covered the whole area, and at that time, my father, I heard him tell, floated or swam 120 head of cattle from the east side of the ranch through an arm of the slough which ran through the ranch over to the high land on the west side.

R: (mumble)

M: An ah, now to get down to the Panama area as I remember it and grew up in it and so on. There were farmers come in, there were some people that I don't know when they came in they were just there since I can remember And we can mention the Websters they were about 2 miles south of us they had a family of five children...and ah...all the farmers at that time, that was ah, all the farmers at that time they all had their own orchards, they all raised their own chickens had their own eggs and they raised a hog

or two. And ah...that was just...they were that much sustaining and then some would trade their eggs. It was a barter and trade deal they would trade eggs, take them to town and buy groceries and many, some people raised their own gardens. My father never did because when he was young he never did but as he grew older he did have a wonderful vegetable garden. But we always had fruit a variety of fruits and grapes and we always had a few sheep and hogs and cattle. In other words, we raised our own meat; after he went out of the dairy business.

Then there was Mr. Stillson who had come from Michigan, he was on Taft highway and his place was bought by the Saleses a Swiss family who moved in from Buttonwillow. And they had had two children they had I...

J: (I interrupt) do you remember what year this was?

M: What?

J: Do you remember what year this was?

M: Oh! It was some time after I was born, I don't know. It was my childhood as I was growing up. Now this is what I remember, you see! Well I'm just telling you the families who lived there at that time. And he sold out to the Saleses who moved in from Buttonwillow and ah...Sales daughters still own a half of that original Stillson farm. And her brothers widow, and, in her family own the rest of it. They bought well they think shes the widow of course she inherited Nale's share of it.

Then there were the Baldwins a most outstanding family

who lived quite far down on Stine road and back on the field. And they rode to school, and walked, there were seven children in that family and Miss Baldwin was the main stay. And they had chickens and dairying.

The Swiss came in here and one man one Swiss by name of Chris Rudy established a creamery and all the neighbors there or all the farmers enlarged there-there, not all of them but some of them, my father was one. Had a fair dairy and they took their milk over there and he separated it and made butter of it and then we took the skimmed milk home and fed it to the hogs. That was one industry that was one of the industries out there..My father had the first one in making butter and taking it to town...and then...ah... there was another man just south of Panama ah! Taft highway on Stine road who's name was Webster, he was known as Honey Bee Webster because he had bees. He had bought the place from old Grandma Pile, a dear old lady who lived there on twenty acres and sold out to George Parish when George got married.

Below the Pari (stops) Grandma Pile was Walter Abye a carpenter. He was the tallest man in town to had ever hit the county. He was well over six feet, six feet three or four or five inches. Very tall man and slender like a bean pole so he looked taller and then on beyond that was really raw county it was uncultivated land. It belonged to the land company...and in years to come Mr. Pile had

been a foreman, as I remember the story, for the land company which later became or is now...ah! Ord what is the Ordina district this seventh home extention colony I think. Long about 1803 or four, that area was sold to people who came from Arizona and Kansas and that area of the country Ah! And they...some of those went into ah...farming and they all as I say, they all had their orchards; everyone of them. One couple Mr. and Mrs. Cob went into the chicken business and they found that lucrative and also they farmed and worked quite successful at ah there was. There was no family.

Then Mr. and Miss Rawlins. Miss Rawlins is still living out here on Trudston Manor. Well they had chickens exclusively. And ah...Mr. Kinkaid who had been a guard at San Quentin and was let out through a political change came down and bought twenty acres from the land company and on it, he got a house with it you see the land company. You could always tell their houses because they were painted red and they had that. They had three girls and a son. The son is living, he's blind now living in Kern City. And it was such poor land that the land company told him to take one of the houses and move it to a better twenty. He was moved up to McKee road which is east of Stine road. He lived there, I guess till the old man died and the children grew and went away and the mother was moved to town and then one of the parishes bought that twenty.

And then there was W. W. Gan had bought some land from

the land company and ah...that was at the...Northeast corner of section thirty-five where McKee road and Wible road come. And it was right north of the McKee property which cornered on Taft highway and Wible road. The Saleses bought the McKee property and we joined them on the north. And we owned the property old Mr. Gan was a bachelor and my father, he and my father worked on what was known as the big ditch. Some people had told me that that was the Caloway canel. But my cousin assures me that it was not. That the big ditch was a separate deal entirely. But they worked together. He was about nine or ten years older than my father, but a very warm friendship had developed between them and existed until he died. And he always spent Christmas with us. And his birthday was the day just after Christmas so he usually stayed that day too and had the left over turkey and so on from the Christmas dinner. But there was a very warm friendship between the two men. Now when he died he left the sixty acres to my mother and let her (not understood) her heir inherited that.

Then across the road from the Kinkaid's on their new location was the Dave Hersfield ranch which is now the Lustalo place. And he went into the specialty of growing prunes and I think peaches. But I know we had prunes, the trayety prunes. And the french prunes all the youngsters in the neighborhood used to go and cut prunes, and in the or pick prunes! Not cut but pick prunes. And one time my brother and I went over, and ah...in two days we made 88

cents.

R: Rita laughs in background.

M: It was grueling job and filthy. But there was a negro family there who had been in school ever since I can remember, and he and Harry, him, Dick and Harry were good friends and that. There was ah. He had a black man for an overseer and he had three children and Harry and Dick put in their time pestering those children when their father was not around. Thats why we didn't pick any prunes. I was nagging at my brother to behave himself and pick prunes but anyway in the two days we made 88 cents. (Mumble) That ended our career as prune pickers.

R: (Laughs in back ground.)

M: But the Kinkaid family always went over and picked prunes and they were very diligent in it. Both Mr. and Miss Kinkaid and the three children. The boy was...well I think they had the boy at that time but if they were he was a very small child. Mr. and Miss Kinkaid all picked prunes. They made Miss Kinkaid quit when she made a dollar and a quarter a day. Now imagine that. But she made money enough, I don't know what the rest of the family made but she herself would make a dollar and a quarter a day. And then ah...she made enough, however, to build an addition onto their house. What she was working for and she bought it. Well they had a few cows and I can't remember too much about whether they carried milk over to the Chris Rudy creamery or not. That was getting to the point when I was

in high school, and I don't just quite remember whether they did or not but I know they had cows and they raised chickens. And then south there is one family I failed to mention, a German family by the name of Halter came in south of, well they bought the Walter Abey place, they lived there. And they had cows and they had several children but I never went to school with any of them. They came in after I was out of school. Out of Panama school if I remember right. And ah...they...they sold to a French man I think by the name of Arow lives at the place now.

And Anna Arow, Ana, but not the, she didn't marry one of those Arows that bought the place. Ana Hawlter Arow lives on Wible road on the south (correction) East corner of the McKee road and Wible road. But she married another Arow entirely. And let me see then they...I'm trying to keep to the Panama district.

North of that where my sister Miss Louden now lives there was a place owned by the Prises, John Prise, and there was a big apple apricot (correction) orchard there and I never cut apricots for him. But later when a man by the name of Windslow Iren Windslow I went and cut apricots for him. And the Kinkais also cut apricots. They were right right available to these two big orchards that really produced you see. And then ah...now across. .McKee road I mean across Wible road..(in a low voice)...but I...they went to the Panama school (in a low thoughtful voice) maybe that was...(mumble) Wible (more mumble) the McKee ranch and they

had prunes and peaches and I used to go over and cut peaches at that place. My mother and I went at one time and cut peaches for a while. Well they were; they had come from New York and they made a very lucrative business. But for most of the farmers it was a way of life rather than a business, but they made a business of it.

My father made money but he gave it away. He was from the South a most respectable and cordial man and a gentleman. But after, when he was, (Miss Ash gets a little emotional) in the meat market business he would go out into the mountains and buy his meat from the (stops) men up around Kernville and Palateral and Tejon and all around and always they ah, they would entertain him as one man. But he would ah...always invite them to come down and some of them took him at his word and they brought their families.

When my oldest brother was married, one of the McKees said that Mike Ash had given away enough meats to buy the best fourty acres in Kern County. But that would give you an idea of his hospitality. (Miss Ash again got a little emotion in her voice) So far as such a thing as ever, ever charging was never heard of until one time a woman we met over in Pismo when we were over there and her baby. She was ill, she had gone over with a couple and they separated and they left her over there and little Miss Tebits who was the mother of Laurence Tibits came over and she asked my mother if she would take this woman said she is sick and she has a baby and Mr. and Miss Thruston had separated.

And will you, can you take care of her? Well! We had a man along with us, a hired man to look after us when my father wasn't there and he and my brother slept in a small tent. And this man spoke up and said, yes! Dick and I will sleep on the wagon and she can have our tent. And it was worked out. So that when we came back we brought her with us of course she boarded with us that winter for the huge sum of \$20 a month. And later her husband; we had met him one time before and ah...he got a boarding house out here in the oil fields in the Kern River auto fields and they went out there and ah...operated the boarding house for a while.

Well let me see what's next.

R: Miss Ash I was wondering if I could interrupt you here for a second, you you've touched on the various businesses.

M: Touched on what?

R: On the businesses and ah several people had, not businesses but their ways of life and the.

M: Yeah!

R: Different ways they supported themselves I would like to now ask you ah...you mentioned the school...the Panama school. I would like to ask you a little bit of back ground.

M: Well I'll get to that in a minute

R: OK!

M: Get to that in a minute. Ah...of course I went through all of us well my oldest brother and sister started it over but...but I went all the way through Panama school. Where

was I...well most of them though you see it was a way of life they had their chickens and they had a pig or two, fruit and their gardens. Then they raised hay. E. R. Long and E. H. Loveland I think it was Loveland the initials were. Loveland and Long, anyway, were the hay buyers and ah...they bought the hay from the people and at that time the farmers always stocked their hay. It was not bailed in the field. And stocked their hay and when Loveland and Long came along and bought it why then it was bailed out of the stack. It made for better hay but of course efficiency came along with the hay press. Well then my father had a hay press and he did ah...commercial bailing. Now let me see what else.

Well that was more or less the way of life there in Panama as I remember it when I was a child. And then the school was established the school district was established in 1875 and that was two years before my father came to Panama. He came in '77 well his, his sister Margret was the teacher. I think the first; the first teacher was a Miss Wagner. No she wasn't, she was there after my grandfather, cause he used to make out her records for her. And my Aunt taught there but the original school house was on what is now Tift (correction) Taft way ah! Taft highway next to that canal the farmers canal that runs across there. Well the little school house was there and she took children from...well the Mayes who lived in Old River that was across what is now Ash road. Maybe at that time it was all Panama split

school so far as I know. When she taught there might have been. But, anyway, she served; I remember hearing her tell this story. It used to be a dust storm. We used to have some terrific dust storms. I remember them, she took children on each side of her, held on to a child then that child held on to the next one and they formed a coninuous line and brave this wind. So that nobody would get lost and blown away.

R: That was very smart.

M; And then the next one was the two story building right there on the intersection of Stine and Panama of Taft highway I mean. I always think of that as Panama and that. That's where I started school and where I finished school there, we had a pump on the outside we all pumped the water and drank out of the same cup and the chip said the boys was on the west corner and the girls was over on the east corner and we had a board fence all around it and the horses were always tethered across the road under the cottonwood trees and then we had a style a flight of steps up on one side there must have been about six or eight, I should think, about six steps...up...and then a platform on top and then six steps down the other side and then that lead a walk up to this school house. Was two stories and the four; the five upper grades were upstairs and the primary grades were downstairs. And they used to have ah! I started with two teachers. And I had a Miss Gallaway for the first 2 years and my cousin Laura Miss Laura Louis was the next 2 years.

And ah I said that everything I learned at that time I learned from these two women because I was brought up on phonics and it was carried on we learned, we learned to read and write and spell and speak correctly and I remember the old language book we learned about the daiaty. The daiaty began with the capital and we showed all the records to the daiaty and so on that is a far cry now. We were taught the history of our country and we got a good foundation.

(End of side A of tape.)