

CALIFORNIA STATE COLLEGE, BAKERSFIELD

CALIFORNIA ODYSSEY
The 1930s Migration to the Southern San Joaquin ValleyOral History Program

Interview Between

INTERVIEWEE: James E. Lambert, Jr.

PLACE OF BIRTH: Pleasant Valley, Garvin County,
Oklahoma

INTERVIEWER: Michael Neely

DATES OF INTERVIEWS: February 10 and 17, 1981

PLACE OF INTERVIEWS: Oildale, Kern County

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Preface

Mr. Lambert is a lively, intensely proud man. He lives in Oildale, California in a small house on a large lot. He has his own citizens' band radio workshop next to the house. This is where we conducted our interview. The shop and house are busy with relatives and friends dropping in to visit. While Mr. Lambert is simple and unpretentious in life style, he is enormously proud of his family and his personal accomplishments. He is an interesting storyteller and I enjoyed listening to and recording him. We had to stop a number of times to let airplanes pass over or to wait for his neighbor's dogs to quiet down. The interview was technically difficult but personally rewarding.

Michael Neely
Interviewer

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INTERVIEWEE: James E. Lambert, Jr. (Age: 57)

INTERVIEWER: Michael Neely

DATED: February 10, 1981

M.N.: This is an interview with Mr. J.E. Lambert, Jr. for the California State College, Bakersfield CALIFORNIA ODYSSEY Project by Michael Neely at 320 Sycamore Drive, Oildale, California on February 10, 1981 at 1:00 p.m.

M.N.: You came out here in what year?

Lambert: 1928.

M.N.: Do you remember anything about that time?

Lambert: Well, I was pretty small at that time. I just remember part of the country and where we was at.

M.N.: Where was that?

Lambert: We first landed on September 11, 1928 at the old lake bottom now known as Buena Vista Lake and we lived there I guess in what you'd call tents 'cause that's what we lived in and worked on a farm. Seemed to me it was like a Banducci farm or something or other like that, a lake bottom farm and we picked cotton, hoed cotton, everything that could be imaginable around a ranch.

M.N.: Did you do that as a child?

Lambert: Yeah, I've worked all my life. We was a family. My dad and mother and nine children and we all worked as a family. Back then there was no law in California [to make it] necessary for kids to go to school unless they wanted to. 'Course most of us did. I didn't at that time 'cause I was too young but we lived and played all through the lake bottom.

M.N.: What was your tent like?

Lambert: It was just an old square tent and had a ridge pole and two poles on each end. We had one that my parents slept in along with the small kids and then had another one--we called it cook tent--and us kids that was big enough slept in there.

M.N.: How did you sleep? What was the arrangement?

Lambert: On old hay mattress, straw mattresses they called them. They'd be two or three kids in the bed. The beds would be taken up every day or rolled up, you know, to get them out of the way where we would have room to sit around tables and stuff.

M.N.: What did you do when it rained?

Lambert: Very little 'cause that lake bottom was muddy as all get out.

M.N.: You mean the tent was in the lake bottom?

Lambert: It was I think close to where Pumpkin Center is now. It was rough. People had barns or stuff like that that kids played in but if it was too cold to go out we just stayed around the wood fire and had games inside.

M.N.: What kind of games did you play?

Lambert: We played Drop the Handkerchief which was one of the favorite games and Ring Around the Rosie. Oh heck, I can't remember them all but just back then there wasn't a whole lot of games and the boys always hunted for food--for rabbits, squirrels, any kind of game bird that we could get. This was part of our diet--wild game.

M.N.: You got them in that area.

Lambert: Oh yeah, there was plenty of cotton tails, young jack rabbits, quails, got a few pheasants.

M.N.: What kind of gun did you use?

Lambert: A twelve gauge shot gun.

M.N.: Where did you get the ammunition for it?

Lambert: We bought it in Shafter most of it. There's an old place there that we done most of our trading and Bakersfield to us was a big town because we was raised on a farm in Oklahoma.

M.N.: Did you have any trouble getting jack rabbits?

Lambert: Oh no, there was plenty of jack rabbits, plenty of cotton tails.

M.N.: But that was important as food.

Lambert: That was fifty per cent of our meat we'd eat.

M.N.: What were your meals like?

Lambert: Well, in general, just say for breakfast, Mother would get up on an old wood stove. First of all she'd make a gallon of coffee. She would cook hot biscuits for breakfast, fry some eggs, make some gravy and that was our breakfast most mornings.

M.N.: Did you all eat together?

Lambert: We'd all eat together on one table at all times. We never grabbed a plate and run someplace and set down elsewhere. We set at a table and ate.

M.N.: What time did you get up?

Lambert: My mother got up at four o'clock every morning, seven days a week and we'd eat breakfast at six o'clock and Daddy went to work at seven o'clock.

M.N.: How did he get to work?

Lambert: Walked.

M.N.: How far did he walk?

Lambert: Well, we lived right there on the lake bottom farm and he walked to work cause gasoline then was nine cents a gallon and who had the nine cents to buy it with?

M.N.: What did you do at lunch?

Lambert: At lunch time Mother, like I say, cooked all the meals. She would put on a pot of beans right after breakfast. She would cook the beans and have those ready for what we called dinner time which is known as lunch now but we called it dinner. She would have corn bread, beans, potatoes if we had them. Our garden had greens--turnips, mustard, radishes--all kind of garden stuff that we grew and Mother fixed that. If we was lucky enough to have rabbit or something like that why we would have those for lunch.

M.N.: What about the evening meal?

Lambert: The evening meal was pretty much the same which we call supper, pretty much the same as lunch.

M.N.: How did your mother handle washing clothes?

Lambert: Mother washed clothes in a big old cast iron pot where she put the clothes in with soap water and lye. Then she would boil them twenty, thirty minutes. She would take them out of there and put

them in another tub with an old rub board and lye soap which is made out of animal fat.

M.N.: Did you buy the soap or make it?

Lambert: No, made it. Mother made it.

M.N.: How did she make that?

Lambert: I don't remember. I know she used all the fat off the pigs and beef we killed and she'd put that in a big old cast iron skillet or pot and she would cook the fat, take the cracklings out, leave the grease in, then she added lye and stuff they had. I really don't know how to make it.

M.N.: Where did she learn how to make it?

Lambert: From her parents. They lived in Arkansas all their lives.

M.N.: Was it good soap?

Lambert: Better soap than you could buy now. It doesn't cause no rash. It gets you clean and you got a good smell instead of all this perfume smell. Getting back to the clothes, she would take the clothes out of the pot, put it in another tub with a rub board and wash them by hand, then put them in another different tub where she would rinse them and hang them out on the line to dry. Then that evening if they was dry she'd take them in and fold them up.

M.N.: How about the toilet?

Lambert: That was what we call out door shack and that was everywhere. In the cities they had modern bathrooms but on the outside it was just an outside john we called it.

M.N.: Right. And what about when you went to take a bath or when the family washed up?

Lambert: When we were getting ready to wash up, we used just old wash pans with soap and towel hanging out there and used this old cotton sack that had been wore out and wasn't fit for anything else so we used it for a towel. But when we got ready to take a bath one tent was vacated and a warm tub of water was taken in. Then you went by age. The older you was, the fresher bath you got. When us three or four take a bath in the same water then it was dumped and then the rest of us take a bath. And usually Mother and Dad went first, then the oldest boys or girl which ever one's the oldest--in our case it's the boy that's the oldest and that's the way we were taking our baths all the time.

M.N.: When you look back on your childhood was it pleasant?

Do you feel good about it?

Lambert: I feel very good about mine. I wished it was that way right now.

M.N.: What was your family like?

Lambert: We was a close knit family. They was eleven of us and we looked out for each other at all times. You would never see one or two or never see one by himself. There would always be two or more and we went to town on Saturday evening and we would get candy. There wasn't no shows but we'd go to those church arbors.

M.N.: Church arbor?

Lambert: What they called old arbor church that was made out of sticks, shed put up by just sticks and anything we could find you know to knock the sun off or the rain.

M.N.: And where was that, in Shafter?

Lambert: No, this is still in Pumpkin Center. We went to church Saturday night and Sundays.

M.N.: Did you walk both times?

Lambert: Walked both ways--the church was right there within a quarter of a mile from where we lived.

M.N.: What kind of church was it?

Lambert: At that time there was no such name as what church it was. It was just a preacher coming through.

M.N.: He came through every week?

Lambert: Every week he would come and hold church. Sunday school in the morning and back that night for church and everybody would sing until ten, eleven o'clock and go home.

M.N.: Ten, eleven o'clock at night?

Lambert: Yeah, old kerosene lanterns and fire built on the outside.

M.N.: How many people?

Lambert: Oh, we've had fifty, seventy-five people there--most of them farm hands living around close to the area there.

M.N.: What was your dad like?

Lambert: My dad was a big strong bull of a man is what he was. He was

six feet, two inches tall, approximately 240 pounds. He drove team and cultivated.

M.N.: What was his name?

Lambert: James E. Lambert, senior. He would take the cotton to the gin with the team which is about a bale and a half, two bale on a wagon at that time. It was all hand picked--no leaves or bolls in it. Farmers wouldn't go for that. He built roads with the "Fresno" and I'm going to let you guys look the "Fresno" up and you'll know what it is then.

M.N.: What's a "Fresno"?

Lambert: Like a B.G. Scraper that they pull behind tractors and catch now but it was pulled by horses at that time and it was hand dumped. There was no hydraulics or anything. You dumped it by hand and you load it by hand and he built roads around the farm.

M.N.: Was he tired when he came home?

Lambert: Very tired. You didn't work by the hour back in the 1920s. You worked what we call "can to can't" and that's from the time that you can see until you can't see at night and the hours was long--always twelve hours to fourteen, sixteen hours a day.

M.N.: What was the pay?

Lambert: That was a dollar a day.

M.N.: Did the children get paid as well?

Lambert: The children didn't work on the farm until they was about twelve, fourteen years old and they got paid fifty cents a day chopping cotton, weeding cotton whatever there was to do you know on a farm like feeding the stock. This is what the young people done in them days and if they went to school which most of us did we went to school at eight o'clock. We went from eight till twelve then we had dinner then back at one and we got out of school at four and we was lucky if we got home by five. By the time we got our chores done and everything it was dark and time to go to bed and you didn't feel like going out and running around all night.

M.N.: What do you remember about your father's personality?

Lambert: My dad was a hard, hard man. He'd tell you one time to do something or other and this is what he meant to do. He was a gentle man but he was also hard. He believed in wearing the pants in the family and he didn't go around getting drunk, coming in, beating up on the kids or anything like that but if he told you to do something or other. We had what we called a quirt, most people

know it was cat-o'-nine-tails and this is what he used either that or his belt or a willow switch and it smarted a little bit.

M.N.: Were you kids a discipline problem?

Lambert: No, you didn't want more than one whipping a week from the old man.

M.N.: Did he treat the girls different than the boys?

Lambert: None. There was no difference between a boy or girl as far as he was concerned.

M.N.: How many girls and how many boys? I know you said nine children.

Lambert: There was four boys and five girls.

M.N.: How old were the girls?

Lambert: There was one girl that was smaller. We'll get to that later-- she was born in Shafter. The other girls was, let's see, now, my brother is the oldest and then a sister, then I think a brother, then another sister, then a set of twins, then myself, then a baby sister and then a baby brother.

M.N.: Did the older girls help your mother?

Lambert: At the age of ten years old Mother took the girls to the kitchen with her to learn how to cook and by the time they was fourteen years old they could cook just as good as my mother could--and this was the training. Back in the old days the woman taught the girls and the men taught the boys.

M.N.: What was your mother like?

Lambert: Oh, my mother she's probably about five feet, seven inches and weighed 200 pounds and was full blooded German and as far as I'm concerned, the best cook in the world 'cause she could cook anything. She could take cold bread and turn it into the best dessert you'd ever eat in your life.

M.N.: Did she work hard?

Lambert: She worked hard. She didn't work in the field. She worked around the camp, did all the cooking, all the washing. Her and the girls that was big enough to do anything but when the girls was big enough, they went in the field to work.

M.N.: What kind of work did they do in the field?

Lambert: Picked cotton, chopped cotton, cut grapes, trayed grapes, just whatever was in season. They worked right out with the men and

we got fifty cents a day at that time and the work was hard. You had to hold your end up or they would can you right on the spot so the young people back then wasn't these little people that run out here and work two or three hours. They had to work twelve, fourteen hours a day.

M.N.: What would happen if you got fired?

Lambert: Well, the old man would probably tan your hide.

M.N.: Could you go someplace else and work?

Lambert: Oh yeah, go someplace else. The people around there didn't hold it against you 'cause you got fired 'cause everybody got fired occasionally especially a kid 'cause a kid's a kid regardless and they do play pranks and jokes on each other.

M.N.: Were you and your brothers and sisters close?

Lambert: For years and years we was close. Back then we took care of each other.

M.N.: Did the girls take care of the younger ones?

Lambert: Oh, the girls took care of all the babies and when we had a young kid or a young brother or sister, well the oldest girl would take to her mother, do the cooking, do the bossing of the family, et cetera.

M.N.: What kind of chores did the children do around the camp?

Lambert: The small children like myself carried water for my mother for the family to wash in.

M.N.: Where did you get it?

Lambert: Out of an old cistern they called it at that time either that or out of a pond which was rain water that saved up. Sometimes we was around where there was wells but there was no such thing as water in the house. We carried every bit of it in the house and carried it out. My job was to help carry water, get the wood, build fires for my mother to keep the cook shack going or the tent warm. We had to have wood at all times and that was the young boy or girl's job. It didn't make any difference what sex you was, if you was in line for it you done it. You had to handle a chopping ax which most people don't even know what they are.

M.N.: What it is?

Lambert: It's a piece of metal about seven inches long and about three and a half inches in diameter. It kind of reminds you of a diamond shape what they call a double bladed ax. The handle's about three

and a half feet long and you went out to cut limbs, cut trees down and split them into twelve, fourteen, eighteen inch links for the stove and the heater.

M.N.: What kind of stove did you have?

Lambert: This is going to be funny. The stove in the tent we slept in was an old gas tank off of a car with a door cut in front of it with stove pipe holes made pipe run out through the top of the tent and this is what we used for a heater in the bedroom tent. In the cook tent, if we was fortunate enough which we was, we had a cook stove, a wood [burning] cook stove.

M.N.: Store bought?

Lambert: Store bought. Was bought in the nineteen hundreds by my mother and dad and it was moved out here to everywhere we went.

M.N.: Was it cast iron?

Lambert: It was solid cast iron. It weighed about 750-800 pounds. This was one of the first things that was loaded in a wagon or truck which ever way we was moving and one of the first things out.

M.N.: Do you remember how they came out here?

Lambert: I don't remember personally. We sold out in Oklahoma in 1927.

M.N.: Do you know why they sold out?

Lambert: Yeah, all the money grows on trees in California.

M.N.: Were times hard in Oklahoma?

Lambert: They was very hard.

M.N.: What part of Oklahoma was that?

Lambert: McAlester. My dad sold all of his property except 160 acres and all the cattle. There was more or less a depression. At the time they paid him a dollar a head for killing cattle. They wasn't worth nothing. And he decided to come to California.

M.N.: How did he find out about California?

Lambert: He'd made one trip out here by horse back back in 1920 or 1921 along in there somewhere.

M.N.: That must have been rough.

Lambert: Oh, it was rough. He was gone nine months making the round trip. And we stayed at the home place while he was gone and when he got

back, he decided to move to California.

M.N.: Have they told you what the home place was like?

Lambert: Yeah, I can remember the home place. I went back to see it.

M.N.: Oh, you did. What was it like?

Lambert: The home place was a big two story house.

M.N.: Now he kept that 160 acres?

Lambert: We still own it today.

M.N.: And it's in McAlester?

Lambert: It's in McAlester or nearby. If I'd say the town that we was living in nobody would know where it's at anyhow, no.

M.N.: Say it.

Lambert: Pauls Valley, Oklahoma. The little place where we lived is named Pleasant Valley just across the street from the Pleasant Valley School. Nobody even knows where it's at now. The school is gone and everything.

M.N.: Did you ever see the school?

Lambert: Oh yes, I went back and seen it but we lived in a big two story house that my dad built in about 1900.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 1

Lambert: A big, two story house as I remember it. It had about six bedrooms upstairs, two downstairs plus a kitchen and most of the family was raised on the homestead and there was a big old tree that we played under. Most of it was bottom ground.

M.N.: What do you mean by bottom ground?

Lambert: Bottom ground is where the river is. What everybody back then called the bottom ground is low part of the land closest to the river and this is usually the farm ground.

M.N.: Why is that?

Lambert: 'Cause the land is so rich that you can grow almost anything that you wanted to on it.

M.N.: What kind of crops did they grow?

Lambert: We grew cotton, corn, watermelon, cantaloups and our biggest

crop was sugar cane.

M.N.: Sugar cane!

Lambert: Oh yes.

M.N.: Why sugar cane?

Lambert: They didn't have Karo syrup or pancake syrup and stuff like that. My dad had the only sugar cane juicer there was in the entire county. And we done this commercially and made syrup. We sold the syrup if we could sell it but most of the time it was traded for groceries--staple stuff that we needed that you couldn't raise on a farm.

M.N.: Did that work out pretty well?

Lambert: Well, it fed us for many years back there. The old juicer machine-- you take a mule hooked to it and he would walk in circles and you take one cane stalk at a time, stick it in this squeezer and squeeze the juice out of it. It goes into a vat and it was transferred from the vat to the boiler and it was boiled down till you made syrup--and it was pure. There was nothing added.

M.N.: Where did he get the juicer at?

Lambert: He bought that juicer in Little Rock, Arkansas when he was a fairly young man and he started that right after him and my mother was first married.

M.N.: I was asking you about why things got bad.

Lambert: Well, things got bad out there in Oklahoma 'cause it's known as the Dust Bowl and everybody was selling out or starving out.

M.N.: How come they starved out?

Lambert: Well, there was no work and you couldn't raise anything. You might get one or two, three good years then you'd lose two or three years and you can't exist this way.

M.N.: Why were the years bad, just weather?

Lambert: Well, it's the weather. It rained all the time or there was so much dust you couldn't raise anything. You'd get nubbins of corn instead of corn ears.

M.N.: Why the dust--was there a reason for it?

Lambert: No rain.

M.N.: Did they have tractors then?

Lambert: No. Everything was cultivated by horse, mules. Few people had tractors, very few. It was more a family farm. The only time you hired anybody was during harvest and you helped each other--from farmer to farmer and the whole crew would go around. The people that was big enough would go around helping each farmer, individual ones.

M.N.: How did you handle the slaughtering of cattle?

Lambert: The slaughtering of cattle--this is going to be a little bit long.

M.N.: That's all right.

Lambert: Just like for instance my dad was going to kill the winter meat which is usually November or December, the farmers around would be invited to come over and participate in this. There may be four, five, six families that would come over. The first thing they done, they got out and they killed a hog, dressed it as quick as possible, killed a beef, dressed it as quick as possible, carried it down to the river, throw the carcass in the river to cool it off and it was cut up and it was fried, cooked, served that day and the next two or three days whatever it took to kill our animals we had.

My mother and the farmers' wives would come around and they would cook for the whole crew which is forty, fifty, sixty people. They would start killing hogs for our winter meat and we'd kill anywhere from six to ten hogs for the pork. Then the beef, we'd kill three or four, five of those and they was put in a smoke-house and cured by smoke and this is the way we kept our meat year-round.

M.N.: It kept fresh that way?

Lambert: It kept fresh year-round. You wanted meat, you just take a knife and go out there and cut it off the bone. Anyhow we would get all of our meat put up and take two or three days. Then the farmer says, "Well, I'm going to kill a certain day. You're invited over." My dad would hook the wagon and the teams together and we'd all go over there and we'd spend two or three days over there killing their meat. And this went around the entire neighborhood where we lived.

Getting back to lye soap, I said awhile back, Mother would take the entrails as we called them, the guts, at that time she would take all the fat off of those and this is what she made her soap out of which is called old lye soap. All the farmers' wives done this and they would cook that and then the dogs would get the left overs, what they call the chitlins or cracklins whichever one people knows them by and the dogs would get those. But life in Oklahoma was rough.

M.N.: Did you ever make ice cream?

Lambert: Only ice cream I ever had in my life before I came or was brought to California is what we call snow ice cream. If it snowed we take sugar and flavoring and snow and milk and mixed it together and that was our ice cream.

M.N.: Was it good?

Lambert: Yes, it was good. I still eat it today. I go up on top of Green Horn and if it's fresh snow up there I'll bring some back down here at the house and have snow cream.

M.N.: I've never heard of that before.

Lambert: Oh, it's delicious! You can put vanilla flavoring, little bit of sugar, little bit of milk and just stir it up and it tastes just like ice cream.

M.N.: Your dad decided to come out to California, right? What year did he decide that?

Lambert: I think he decided to come out here in 1926 but we didn't leave until 1928 and he sold everything he had: cattle, chickens, hogs. We sold off our lease ground around us.

M.N.: Your lease?

Lambert: Sold our lease ground. He sold it off and like I said before we kept our homestead back there--that's in Pleasant Valley, Pauls Valley and he decided to bring his family to California so he bought a 1927 Model T Ford truck and a 1926 Chevrolet truck and a 1926 Star and loaded up and headed for California. I don't remember too much about the entire trip except it was long and dirty and tiresome.

M.N.: Do you know how long it took you to get out here?

Lambert: I don't remember the time we left there I only remember the time that we got here but we must have hit California some time in early 1928 'cause it was in the wintertime and I can remember the part coming across the Mojave Desert when the old Chevrolet would jump out of gear and I had to hold it in fourth gear. As I was told, I almost froze to death. They had to take me out of the car. They had taken a tub and poured water in it and put me in it and a blanket over it to thaw me out.

M.N.: How long did they leave you in that tub?

Lambert: I don't know, must have been around three or four hours at least to get thawed out. At least I didn't get pneumonia out of it. We camped over night there and the next day we loaded up and started

on to Bakersfield. Where Four Corners is now where the [highways] 66 and 50 cross it used to be 466. It was known as the watering hole there and as I know it now it was Four Corners but my dad got lost and we got down into Los Angeles area.

M.N.: When you stopped at Four Corners did you stay there?

Lambert: No, the trucks was getting hot and he tried to get water and if you didn't buy gas, you had to buy the water which was ten cents a gallon, gasoline was nine cents a gallon and that's old Polygreen gas--some of the other things coming back to me, too.

M.N.: Polygreen?

Lambert: Polygreen was the name of it. We got lost or my dad got lost and we wound up in Los Angeles.

M.N.: Now were these paved roads down to L. A.?

Lambert: Partly, most of it was gravel road or rub board road, whatever you want to call it.

M.N.: Rub board?

Lambert: They used to call it rub board road where they got little holes worn in and it just vibrates.

M.N.: Okay, then you got to L.A.

Lambert: He got to L.A. and found out which way to come out of there.

M.N.: How did he find out?

Lambert: He talked to people there in the station and he said, "Which way to get to Bakersfield?" and they said, "It's the ridge route." At the end of the ridge where you start up, San Fernando I believe it is, from out of there a little ways it was paved road, then you turn off into gravel across the ridge route. We was three days and nights from what I call the L.A. area to Bakersfield. Where we landed at was in Pumpkin Center which we've already went through and we moved from there to Shafter September 11, 1928 and the reason I can remember the date so well, that's my dad's birthday.

M.N.: How old was he then?

Lambert: Oh, jiminy, my dad was born in 1879 so he was up in his forties or fifties, long in there someplace.

M.N.: You moved from Pumpkin Center?

Lambert: From Pumpkin Center to Shafter--we moved on a guy's place named

Harry West. In Shafter today he still owns the property, what we call the diamond, from just out of Shafter there where the gins are two miles south by the railroad track where the red top barn is today, that was Harry West's property.

M.N.: How did your dad come to get a job there?

Lambert: He stopped in and talked to a guy by the name of Henry Ratliff and told him he had a big family. The farmers in those days hired big families 'cause they didn't have to go out and look for other people. They furnished us a big twelve room house and the first electric that we ever had that I ever seen where I could turn off and on. We had electric lights and when my dad got the first bill, it was a whole dollar a month and he like to have a fit about that--said that was too high but anyway we worked on the ranch there for Harry West for several different years--apricots, peaches, grapes, cotton. My dad ran the dryer.

M.N.: Dryer?

Lambert: Yeah, kiln dryer where you dry the peaches and apricots and make them what they call dried fruit and they was sent from there in great big 60 pound boxes and they went to some kind of a plant. I don't know what they would call them. I guess you'd call them packing houses nowadays. What they called them then I don't remember and this is where Ratliff was the foreman at that time. Dad worked for him for several years and then Henry Ratliff taken the property over on a lease from Harry West.

M.N.: He leased it from Mr. West?

Lambert: Yeah. My dad switched from Harry West then in order to stay in the house and work for Henry Ratliff. The rest of the time he worked for him. I believe 1941 was the last time that my dad worked for the Ratliffs or the Wests but anyway Harry West started a company of his own which now is known by Camp, West and Lowe Company.

M.N.: What about having children? Did your mom go to a doctor?

Lambert: No. Like I said before, there was nine of us and on June 9, 1932 in Shafter my little baby sister was born and there was no doctor. My dad delivered every one of us kids. We was all healthy.

M.N.: Did your mom see a doctor when she was pregnant?

Lambert: No, not with none of us children.

M.N.: She just took care of herself.

Lambert: She'd take care of herself all the way through. She knowed what

foods to eat and what foods not to eat and when the time come for the baby to be born, they would go to the field get my dad-- send one of the older kids out there. He would come home and by the time he got home Mother would be in her bedroom, the other kids would have hot water going and the necessary stuff that it takes for a baby to be born. My dad would get there, wash and clean up, deliver the baby.

M.N.: He didn't have any problem with that?

Lambert: No problems whatsoever. We had no problems with any of our kids at all.

M.N.: Was that normal for a man to deliver his children?

Lambert: Oh yes, back in the old days, my oldest sister after she got married, my father delivered three of her children.

M.N.: Where did he learn how to do that?

Lambert: He learned from his dad and mother. This goes back many, many years from life to death. I'm going way on back many years now. Usually when a person's passed away somebody else comes in and done the shaving and the dressing and putting them in the coffin and stuff like that. Well, my dad was unfortunate. My grandfather passed away first. He shaved him, dressed him, built an old pine coffin, dug the hole and buried him--the same with my grandfather. So it's an old tradition which was passed down for many, many years--death and birth was the same thing.

M.N.: Did your father deliver other people's children?

Lambert: Many a thousands of them.

M.N.: Even out here in California?

Lambert: Even here in California--my next to oldest sister had twins and there was no doctor available at the time right there in Wasco.

M.N.: What year was that?

Lambert: This was in 1932 or 1933 and my sister was having twins. There was no doctor available and my daddy delivered those so I don't know what you would call him--a midwife or a granduncle or whatever you called him--but he knew what he was doing. He got no pay for it.

M.N.: People trusted him?

Lambert: People trusted him all the way and he would drop whatever he was doing if he was needed to deliver a baby.

M.N.: I've heard people talk about the term "Okie". What does that mean to you?

Lambert: Well, to a lot of people "Okie" means a dirty word. Back years and years ago, back in the 1920s and 1930s "Okie" was trash. But "Okie" meaning to me is that you are one hell of a man or a woman or a child whichever one you might have been at that time. You worked hard, you lived hard and you played hard. There was nobody else to do the work same as your "Arkies", your "Texan" people, they were the same.

M.N.: Were they honest?

Lambert: Honest as the day is long. We didn't beg anybody for anything. We didn't steal anything. Anything that my family or our family which ever way got anything we worked for it. If you had something that we wanted, we would ask if you wanted a price for it and if we could afford it we bought it. A lot of stuff was given to us.

M.N.: Did you have a lot of things?

Lambert: No, we didn't have nothing luxurious at all. I had no luxury until after I was married and then I made that on my own, but my dad couldn't afford it.

M.N.: Was he a bitter man?

Lambert: No, my dad wasn't bitter. My dad was a great man.

M.N.: What was he like when you were older?

Lambert: Oh, my dad was a big man, kind.

M.N.: Did he change from when he was in Oklahoma?

Lambert: No, my dad never changed at all. He has done so many things. He knew all kinds of work but most of it was farming and a farmer today is still hard worker. He was kind, he would help anybody I don't care who you was or where you come from if you asked old Uncle Jim for anything, you got it and he never asked for too much back.

M.N.: What year did you start working?

Lambert: I started working when I was eleven years old. I worked my own self through school. My dad and mother separated when I was a small child but I worked myself through school all of it in Shafter.

M.N.: Your mom and dad separated?

Lambert: My mother and dad separated in 1936. I don't know what happened or anything but my dad raised the balance of the kids which was five of us left.

M.N.: And your mom just left?

Lambert: Yeah, my mother left and she went back to Arkansas and like I say, the reason I don't have no idea but my dad raised the rest of us kids right here in Shafter, California.

M.N.: Did your sister take care of the young ones?

Lambert: I had twin sisters just older than me and they done the housework. Myself, I done getting the wood in, carrying the water in the house for my sisters. My little brother and sister that's younger than I, they done the housework, swept the floors, made the beds, washed dishes, whatever come along and got ready for school.

M.N.: The kids just took over then.

Lambert: We had to take over. We had nobody else.

M.N.: Still lived in that big house?

Lambert: No, we had moved from that big house to over on a different part of the ranch because we didn't need that big house anymore and most of the brothers and sisters got married off and moved over on close to Riverside in Shafter and we're up there until 1941.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 2

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M.N.: Did you father deliver other children in that area?

Lambert: Oh yes, at this time we lived in Shafter and my sister lived in Wasco and back in the early 1930s there wasn't that many doctors around and most women used midwives or the men whatever they called them. I don't have any idea what the name for them would be but my dad used to deliver babies quite often for the neighbors--six of them all-around.

M.N.: Did he ever have any trouble?

Lambert: No trouble at all--never lost one and everything went real smooth and he'd be called on.

M.N.: Did he charge people for that?

Lambert: No, there was no charge at all. Back in the early 1930s you

helped your neighbor and your neighbor helped you even in California. The people from back east in Oklahoma, Texas, and Arkansas wherever they came from believe in helping each other.

M.N.: Were most of your friends from that area? Were they migrants too?

Lambert: Back in the 1930s ninety percent of the people in California was migratory people that had come from one state or the other and I'd say fifty per cent from Oklahoma, Texas and there's where the Okies come in. I guess people like to call them that but the name still goes and it still sticks. We get over being called Okies because we found out we are better people than most of them.

M.N.: What were the people that you met in California like?

Lambert: The native Californians out here, to put it blunt, you go up and knock on a front door and they would ask you to come around to the back. If you knocked on a door of a person from back east they would ask you in the front door so it's all together different between the two people. They was good people but they just didn't act it is what it amounted to. I guess if they seen an Okie come in their front door that made them a little bit lower than the average California person.

M.N.: Did you ever encounter any violence?

Lambert: Yeah, there was a lot of violence up in the 1930s when people really started pouring out here like the gold rush.

M.N.: Could you describe that?

Lambert: Well, if you was from Oklahoma or Arkansas, Texas, anywhere back east, the California people come first. If there was a job opening and you're from California, you got the job and the Oklahoma [people] take what was left. This was the way it amounted, you worked on a farm. If you worked in a store or a gas station or anything like this, nine chances out of ten you was from California somewhere or a native and if you worked in the field you was from Oklahoma or Arkansas or Texas or back east anywhere. They seemed to cater to the California people first.

M.N.: What about discouraging migrants from coming out or discouraging migrants from coming into an area, did you ever see that?

Lambert: Lots of it. The people wanted to save the work for themselves out here--even Okies [helped] each other as far as that goes. The people would come in and they would want the farmer to hire a bunch of people and get the crop over with. They wanted to save

themselves then they could make more money and have a better life but the farmers wanted to get their crop out on account of the weather. They would hire the people and they'd be fights [that would] break out and strikes and everything else.

M.N.: What about the strikes?

Lambert: You'd be picking cotton for fifty cents a hundred and strikes would break out and they'd want seventy-five cents or take guns in the field and keep other people right at them was what it amounted to. This went on clear up until the early 1940s.

M.N.: Who would bring the guns?

Lambert: The people that was doing the striking.

M.N.: A strike takes organization. You don't just all of a sudden strike. How did they do that?

Lambert: Well, you got twenty, thirty people out in the cotton field they couldn't make a living at fifty cents a hundred. They couldn't buy the food. Face it, for the average cotton picker a hundred, hundred and fifty pounds a day was just about tops. A good cotton picker could pick 300 to 350 pounds but the average cotton picker was just about 150 pounds. Well, that's seventy-five cents a day and if you had a family even back when bread was a nickel a loaf well you couldn't make it. There was too many people for the jobs so they just throw a strike in the field. Everybody would get together, talk it over, there would be no leaders or gang leaders or anything like that. It would just be a strike on that one farm and the people wouldn't let other people in to pick cotton. They were striking for more money.

M.N.: They wouldn't let anybody else come in to work.

Lambert: Right, wouldn't let nobody else come in to work. If they had tractor work to be done we didn't have nothing to do with that or most people didn't, but they wouldn't let the harvest go on and we won a few times [and sometimes] we didn't, but most of the time the ones on strike would always win.

M.N.: How did the farmers react to that?

Lambert: Oh, let's face it, most of the farmers in California back in the 1930s were somewhere from the east. They wasn't natives out here. They come out here and bought ground from somebody, rich people and started [farming]. They realized this so they would go along with the migratory workers most of the time.

M.N.: Did you ever have trouble with law enforcement?

Lambert: No, not really as long as there was no real bad violence, a

lot of fist fights and stuff like that going on. The law enforcement didn't cause too much trouble. They'd drive around where the strike was going on but as far as staking it out or anything like that they didn't. They'd just drive by and make sure everything was still peaceable.

M.N.: Did you ever see anyone get hurt?

Lambert: No, I've seen them go to the hospital and having the hell whup out of them trying to walk through the picket line or something but there was nobody killed or anything like that.

M.N.: That's good that nobody got killed. So how old were you at that time?

Lambert: Oh, ten, eleven years old.

M.N.: What time did you start actually going to the fields working?

Lambert: I started going to the field when I was about ten years old.

M.N.: Do you remember your first job?

Lambert: Yeah, picking cotton, that's the first thing that I ever done.

M.N.: Would you describe it?

Lambert: What people calls them gunny sacks nowadays, we called them tow sacks and my dad made me a little tow sack and I pick it full of cotton and when he went up to weigh his cotton why I'd carry mine up and he'd weigh it for me. They had it all in one book, it didn't go in different ones. It went under a family and my dad would draw the money for all our work and we'd come in from school September, October and November and we'd pick cotton. Then we'd pick on Saturdays and we'd go to the show Saturday night and that was our recreation. We worked for what we wanted to do.

M.N.: How did you feel about working in the fields?

Lambert: I loved it. I loved it then and I still love to work in the fields and I worked in them most of my life.

M.N.: What were some of the problems people had working in the fields-- physical problems, safety problems?

Lambert: There was no such thing as safety problems. There wasn't that much equipment mostly you'd be out in the field early in the morning it would be damp and cold.

M.N.: What time would you start?

Lambert: We started what we call thirty--that's just the minute we start seeing the cotton was drying up we started to work. Usually 6:30 was about the time we started and we worked through until dark.

M.N.: Did you get a break for lunch?

Lambert: Oh yeah, we'd knock off and take about an hour for lunch.

M.N.: What kind of food did you bring?

Lambert: We'd bring biscuits, corn bread that Mother would cook, eggs, bacon, sugar cured ham, fried potatoes, whatever we had. We carried a ten gallon can of water with us and we had our own water and this is the way that everybody done--not just one but everybody carried a lunch with them and you worked from the time that you could till the time that you couldn't see.

M.N.: Were there any people that didn't make it, that couldn't work in the fields or found it too hard?

Lambert: Well, a lot of people couldn't make it especially women. You take 80 to 90 pounds of cotton in a sack and you have to carry it for quarter of a mile and take it and hang it up on a pair of scales, then crawl up a ladder and dump it in a cotton trailer. Well, that's man's work and there's not too many women could do that although they would work most of the time and the husband would carry the cotton up. This is the way we got around that and this went on fine till 1936 when the state of California come out and said you had to have a working permit to do any kind of work. Until you was fourteen years old you had to have a working permit to work or the farmers weren't allowed to hire you.

M.N.: Why did they do that?

Lambert: I don't really know. I always thought it was so California could grow. They didn't want the kids doing a man's job. Course back in my days a fourteen year old kid could do as much work as any man.

M.N.: Do you think it was to protect the children or to reduce the number of people in the fields?

Lambert: I think it was to reduce the amount in the fields where California could grow from the seventh or eighth state up to one or two which it is number one now but this is my opinion of it. The law took over the families or started to in 1936 and they've done a damn good job of it ever since.

M.N.: How did you get a permit?

Lambert: You had to go to the principal's office or school office which ever one you want to call it and put in for a permit. You would have to take papers home and your father would sign it and you'd have to

take the permit then to the person that you was going to go work for and they had to sign it and you worked for that man until you was through. Then you had to get another permit for somebody else.

M.N.: Oh, for each employer.

Lambert: Each employer you had to have a separate permit.

M.N.: It was a lot of trouble.

Lambert: More trouble really than it was worth. It's a lot worse now than it was then because it is just hard to get a permit and if the parents don't learn their children how to work, how are they going to learn how?

M.N.: So you feel that caused a hardship for the families.

Lambert: It caused all kinds of hardship for families when you had to be fourteen years old to work and had to have a permit. If you didn't have one the farmer had to go by the law and he wouldn't let the kid work so if that kid went there and he picked a hundred pounds of cotton that was fifty cents more that they had, but they stayed at home that's fifty cents less they had and back then fifty cents was a lot of money.

M.N.: Did you ever see anyone get injured in the field or get hurt in the field?

Lambert: No, I've seen them fall off the trucks--not off the trucks--off the trailers and break an arm or a leg something like that.

M.N.: How did they handle that?

Lambert: They just had a broken arm or leg which ever happened.

M.N.: They take them to a hospital?

Lambert: Well, parents would take them to a doctor.

M.N.: Where was the doctor located?

Lambert: Well, our doctor was in Shafter--old Doc Kay and none of us ever got hurt but there was several you know who would get up there playing and fall off.

M.N.: What was medical care like back then?

Lambert: Medical care was--I don't know how to describe it. Well, if you got sick, you went to bed. If you were lucky enough to get a doctor they would come out to the house and they carried medicine right along with them and the doctors would leave the medicine there with orders how to give it.

M.N.: How did they charge?

Lambert: Most of it was charge because people didn't have money to pay for it. Sometime might give the doctor some fruit--canned fruit that had been home canned or if you had chickens you'd give him a chicken or two that was already dressed, just whatever you had. If you didn't, why you just paid him when you could get it and as far as my knowledge of old Doc Kay, I don't believe he ever sent anybody a bill.

M.N.: Did people get sick very often?

Lambert: No, back then it wasn't that bad. People took care of themselves. They ate the right food. They went to bed early and they got up early and they worked all day so they didn't have time to really go around catching all disease and stuff. Well, there wasn't any then but they had smallpox and whooping cough and mumps and measles, stuff like that but that there are just childhood diseases and we thought nothing about it.

M.N.: I talked to one gentleman who said that they had home remedies for some things.

Lambert: Oh yeah.

M.N.: Do you remember any?

Lambert: I remember one that Mother made. In fact, I need some of it right now. She made it out of mulligan leaves.

M.N.: Mulligan--what is mulligan?

Lambert: It's a plant that resembles tobacco when it's growing--broad leaf that she would take and boil it. She used sugar and white lightening--whiskey--and mixed it together with lemon juice and made a cough syrup out of it and believe it or not it worked.

M.N.: Where did you get mulligan?

Lambert: Just out on the desert--it grew wild.

M.N.: Did you have it in Oklahoma?

Lambert: Had it in Oklahoma. It was growed out here a little. I haven't seen any of it in years now but it used to grow down on the river here--Kern River. She used to pick it and make syrup ahead of time 'cause it's hard to come by. For anything beyond that we used what they called a mustard plaster, that was for a real bad cold.

M.N.: How did they make those? Do you remember?

Lambert: I don't really remember. I know it burnt like hell when it was put

on your chest 'cause you wore it all night. The stink was horrible but it would knock a cold out and of course for most of the sickness there was castor oil and most people believed in that or senna tea --which I doubt that you ever heard of.

M.N.: S-E-N-N-A?

Lambert: Something like that. I don't know how to spell it and you boil it and they used that and it would act as a laxative. They believed in that quite a bit.

M.N.: Did people smoke a lot in those days or did they chew?

Lambert: Well, not as much as people do now. My dad smoked a pipe and chewed tobacco both. [Neither] my sisters nor my mother [smoked] and when we was young, we didn't smoke. I started smoking when I was about eleven years old I guess sneaking around from my dad but the average kid didn't smoke. It was well we just didn't like it.

M.N.: When did people start smoking so much?

Lambert: Oh, I started smoking when I was about eighteen, nineteen years old all the time.

M.N.: I mean society in general or the people that you knew. It seems to me that many people smoke today. Do you remember when that became so popular?

Lambert: Way back in the 1940s, late 1930s and early 1940s, when things began to pick up a little bit I guess people could afford more of it and they started buying this old Bull Durham.

M.N.: Those are roll your own.

Lambert: Everybody rolled your own or a pipe. Cigarettes really didn't get started that you buy in the store until about 1941. That's when they really got popular and they were a whole five cents a pack. People couldn't even afford to buy them at five cents a pack then. They still wasn't making the money.

M.N.: What did people die from in the 1930s, the older people?

Lambert: Most of them just of old age. I know my grandparents did although I never knew them. This is my grandparents, one set of them from my mother's side lived in Arkansas and they was 117 years old when they passed away. On my dad's side they was all fairly young, 50 to 55, when they passed away but it was the hard work back then that killed the people it wasn't sickness. It was more or less hard work. And usually when the man passed away, in just a short time after that why the woman passed away on account of grief and this happened.

M.N.: Is that fairly common?

Lambert: That's common then. They would grieve over their mate.

M.N.: Was life that much harder for them after the husband was gone?

Lambert: Well, naturally life had to be hard for them. Even the man, if the laddy passed away first the man would grieve over his wife and shortly after that he'd go. It's just, back then I guess you'd call it love, what they call it now I don't know but it doesn't work that way now because I have friends that their mate passed away and thirty days later they get married again.

M.N.: Let's talk about your childhood from the time you went into the fields. Can you just generally kind of go through what happened from 1930 to 1932 when you were ten years old until let's say 1940?

Lambert: Well, when I was a youngster, five days a week we went to school and we'd come home, do our chores, got all of our work done. The rest of it was our time to play. We didn't have cars or little toys or anything like that, we made them. Our favorite game was playing with a hook or wagon rim rolling it with a stick which a lot of people don't even know what it is.

M.N.: Here in California?

Lambert: Here in California, yes. We would find a little old hook maybe eight, ten inches in diameter and take a stick and put a piece of tin on it and roll that thing for miles and miles and play with it.

M.N.: Do you do it alone or with your friends?

Lambert: No, with friends mostly, with the family. Boys and girls both played with them. We would play that till we give out. We'd play hide and seek, we'd play Drop the Handkerchief all [are] games that we played and we I guess we had fun at it because we played at it hours then. We'd be called in for dinner at dusk then we wasn't allowed outside anymore.

M.N.: Why not?

Lambert: Well, people back in the old days believed in going to bed with the chickens. When you eat your dinner and got your dishes washed, you went to bed and you got up the same way but in general a life of a kid in the 1930s was more work than play.

M.N.: How did you sleep?

Lambert: Me and two of my brothers slept together usually, three to sometimes four in a bed and the baby always slept with Mamma and Daddy.

They never had a bed to theirselves until they was at least a year and a half, two years old or another one come along and pushed them out of bed.

END OF TAPE 2, SIDE 1

M.N.: You say that the people from Oklahoma came out at a particular time of the year.

Lambert: Yeah, just as quick as school was out in Oklahoma.

M.N.: That was what time?

Lambert: In May, about the 20th of May, they would leave Oklahoma coming to California for the harvest and be May, June, July and August and then they would have to go back to get the kids in school. This is what a migratory worker is.

M.N.: Were they picking cotton at that time?

Lambert: They picked cotton, fruit, vegetables that was growed right here in Kern County. During the summer months they would bring their family out, make enough money to go back to Oklahoma, Texas or Arkansas wherever they came from and bring the entire family-- that was Mother, Dad and all the kids would work in the fields and we lived in camps.

M.N.: What about your family now? You stayed in one place and worked all year round or did you move?

Lambert: No, our family in the 1930s lived in Shafter on Harry West's place for the biggest portion of my early life. I guess we was fortunate. We was still called that "Okie" but we was a permanent Okie or transplanted which ever way you want to put it and you stayed in Shafter. I stayed in Shafter until I got married in 1934, I mean 1944, 1934 I would have been a little young. Until I got married in 1944, I lived in Shafter and after I spent time in the service and was discharged I moved back to Shafter and we lived there two or three years after that and finally moved to Bakersfield.

M.N.: Here in Oildale?

Lambert: No, we lived over in I guess you'd call it the southeast part of Bakersfield which is known as East Bakersfield now and that's where I started the family at.

M.N.: Did you still work in the fields at that time?

Lambert: Yeah, we worked in the fields. Well, I worked in the fields all my life like I say after I was married in 1944 and started a family we lived in East Bakersfield for several years. Then I bought a little old place out on Brimhall Road--it's known as Rosedale now.

We lived there for several years and I'd work on a farm or work on the railroad up until June and the kids was out of school. Then it was time to go and we would load the car and trailer with all of the stuff that we had to take with us and we'd head to Oregon and we would spend three months up in Oregon working in potatoes, peaches, pears, apples strawberries, planting broccoli, cabbage, well kind of late vegetables, and come early September it's time to come back home.

M.N.: Did you have any problems with that--did that create family problems?

Lambert: No, a lot of people thought, you know, that a migratory worker didn't have a family life or they was far apart but my children got an education out of it. They learned how to work. They learned how to buy their own clothes. They worked and paid for them. They learned how to shop for groceries, how to cook, how to work in the fields. They could raise a garden, They knew how to do it. They didn't have to get a book to read it. They was taught this from the time they was small.

M.N.: Did you settle in Oregon?

Lambert: No, we were just migratory workers in Oregon.

M.N.: Did you have a tent or trailer?

Lambert: If we was lucky, we'd find a house to rent. If we didn't, we lived in a tent or in camps. Most of the people that had beans and strawberries and stuff that would go to waste had what they called a camp or cabins for the workers to live in. My wife and I and five children lived in a little two room shack that you could see through. We would take cardboard and go over the walls to stop the holes up and keep the weather out.

M.N.: This is in Oregon?

Lambert: This was in Oregon.

M.N.: Pretty moist, pretty damp up there?

Lambert: It's wet there but we made good money. We went to work when the fields was dry enough.

M.N.: What were the wages?

Lambert: We picked beans by the pound. My family and I could go out and pick a ton of beans at that time for \$44.

M.N.: In a day?

Lambert: In a day--that's for a family of seven.

M.N.: That's pretty good money.

Lambert: That was good money at that time. This is in the late, well in middle, 1940s. In the middle 1950s or early 1950s we done the same thing and the same ton of green beans we picked would pay us \$88. Then we was what we call making money and we'd make enough money in the three months that we was in Oregon to last us all year back in California. 'Cause we come back in September and my kids went to school here all their lives on Rosedale Highway in a little school by the name of Greeley. My oldest daughter went from the kindergarten through the eighth grade and my second daughter went through the same school and after that why we moved from Rosedale to Oildale and the rest of them went to Beardsley School and North High.

M.N.: What year did you move to Oildale?

Lambert: We moved to Oildale in 1961 and we've been here ever since.

M.N.: At this same location?

Lambert: Well, you might say the same location. This is the trailer court we lived in just right back of my property here now. In the same area, on the same block and I've lived here ever since.

M.N.: What time in your life did you stop working in the fields?

Lambert: I stopped working the fields in 1959 I believe was my last year in the fields. I went to work in cement and for a company that no longer exists--California Septic Supply--I worked for them for years. Then in 1972 I believe I went into business for myself and I've been in business ever since.

M.N.: Do you have any other means of income other than your self employment?

Lambert: None at all.

M.N.: Seem to have done all right.

Lambert: Well, I've made a living.

M.N.: And how many children did you have all together?

Lambert: My first wife and I raised five till they was grown. They're all married and have children. I have twenty-two grandchildren from them and my second wife and I raised three and I got two grandchildren from them.

M.N.: That's quite a number.

Lambert: A few. I got my own ball team--most of them girls.

M.N.: Let's go back to the 1930s. You said you stayed in the same place

from 1931 to approximately when?

Lambert: From 1928 till 1938 we stayed in one place.

M.N.: How have times changed--how has the world changed or how has work changed or how has your family changed?

Lambert: Awful lot of changes.

M.N.: Well, let's take work. How did the field work change?

Lambert: Okay, the field work. The field work in the ten year period went from, oh, horses and mules to doing the plowing, the cultivating, making what we call reservoirs now by mules. It went from mule power to tractor power.

M.N.: Was that a big change?

Lambert: That was a big, big change. Nobody knew anything about how to drive a tractor. You can look a pair of mules between the ears and pull a straight row but you get up on that tractor and that tractor didn't have sense to go straight. You had to make it go straight and this is a big change from walking all day to riding on a noisy tractor. I have noticed the difference in peoples' hearing from loud tractors back down into the days when I was young when there was no noise. Myself, I can hear a pin drop when it's quiet and most young people today don't have that kind of hearing. Even back in the early days the tractor didn't have mufflers on it --nothing but a straight pipe. It was just a solid roar all the time. That began to cut the migratory workers out of the jobs that would come out. The tractors got more plentiful, taking less hands to take care of the same amount of acreage.

M.N.: Did they do a better job?

Lambert: No. The tractors couldn't get in close as you could with a team to plow or cultivate. They was harder to handle there was no power steering. They had old steel wheels on them. They would jar and jam around and you'd get stuck every time you'd turn around 'cause the wheels would slip and they'd just break right down.

M.N.: Was there more waste in the fields because of the tractors?

Lambert: Oh yeah. The team you could walk them all the way out and turn them right at the end. The tractor you had to have a lot more room to get it turned around and to get it heading back through the fields. Lot more waste, of course you didn't have to feed the tractor at night and turn it down but it had to be greased and taken care of and as time progressed along we used to have a one row cultivator and went from the one row to a two row and used two row planters up till, oh, in the middle 1930s. Then the four row

started coming out and the four row cultivators, well, it's just progress, just kept going. As for the waste, say from 1930 to 1940, for the vegetables and cotton waste was probably two and a half per cent maybe if it was that high up against about fifteen or twenty per cent waste now that they can't get these big eight row cultivators and planters and everything turning in the fields. So really, to me, a lot of it's waste.

M.N.: What about mechanical pick ups? Did they have them?

Lambert: There was no mechanical pickers. I've got a good story on that. I ran the first mechanical cotton picker that ever hit the state of California. We worked on the Secco Ranch. It's just out here between here and Shafter and the tractor number was number one. That was the serial number on it. It was an Allis-Chalmers and that was in 1946. It was the first mechanical cotton picker ever to get to the state of California. I do have the pictures of it. If necessary I can dig them up for you. That was the first cotton picker. Then the first mechanical potato picker come along.

M.N.: What year was that?

Lambert: That was 1946. The potato picker come out and, oh, the first one that I knew about was in Delano where the guy invented it up there. The first one that went on the market was 1963 or 1964 along there someplace.

M.N.: Pretty late then.

Lambert: That's way late but since then we got grape pickers. We used to pick grapes by hand and put them on trays by hand and turn them by hand and take them out of the field by hand. Now that's all done by mechanical [means].

M.N.: That's quite a change.

Lambert: There's all kinds of changes from the time I was kid to now in the field work it is like daylight and dark. It's changed that much.

M.N.: What other changes did you encounter in the fields during that ten year period 1930 to 1940?

Lambert: 1930s and 1940s the living conditions got a little bit better. The money wasn't any good up until World War II. And as you progress along, the migratory worker or the field workers whatever you want to call them their living condition is getting better and the money is good now.

M.N.: How did those living conditions improve?

Lambert: Well, we'll go back into the 1930s. You lived in a little tent in

government camps.

M.N.: You lived in a government camp?

Lambert: I never lived in a government camp. I lived in a county camp in Shafter for a while.

M.N.: It was called a county camp?

Lambert: It was called a county camp. It used to be located on the street which is now named San Diego. What it was at that time I don't know.

M.N.: What was that camp like?

Lambert: It was a county camp and everybody lived in tents. The county built a big well, bathrooms and showers and you burnt either wood or kerosene. There was no natural gas.

M.N.: So they just used wood or kerosene.

Lambert: Just wood or kerosene in the county camp out on San Diego in Shafter. They lived in tents and some of them had wood floors in them. Some of them had wood up the side of them but most of them were just right on the ground. It didn't cost anything to live there. If you had one electric bulb, it cost you I think it's twenty-five cents a month to burn that bulb and you take your towel and soap regardless where you lived.

At that camp there was 150 to 200 families. A little later on they put a big recreational hall in where we had dances on Saturday night. My dad and my uncle played the fiddle and guitar and mandolin for the young people to dance. That would start on Saturday night at six, seven o'clock and go through till midnight. Then on Wednesday night we had what we call a young people's meeting and we played games, danced. All the boys and girls back then could play some kind of music instruments and we'd play games, dance there in the rec [recreational] hall.

M.N.: Where did you get your instruments?

Lambert: We brought all of ours from Oklahoma when we come out.

M.N.: Where did you get them back there?

Lambert: My daddy had an old fiddle that he got when he was a youngster from his dad. It was a Stradivarius. 'Course today money can't touch it. They're worth literally thousands of dollars. How much I really don't know. His daddy give it to him.

M.N.: So it was just passed down.

Lambert: It just passed down.

M.N.: Do you know where it originally came from?

Lambert: It originally came from overseas somewhere where they make them. I don't remember where it's at now. It was the most beautiful violin in the world as I found out but at that time it was nothing but an old fiddle but it happened to turn out to be a violin, a Stradivarius. It got busted up.

M.N.: How did that happen?

Lambert: Oh, this guy there in the county camp came up and was about half looped and wasn't suppose to be there in the first place. He made a pass at one of my sisters and my dad busted the fiddle over his head. It just went [crash]. He later bought another one in Shafter which is somewhere in the family still. I don't know who's got it but we have several heirlooms that we keep that's passed down from generation to generation.

M.N.: What are they?

Lambert: I've got an old conch shell of my great-great granddaddy's.

M.N.: Conch shell.

Lambert: Conch shell--it's a big white shell it's been rimmed out to where you can blow it like you can a horn and this thing is, oh I don't know, if my dad was living today he would be 102 years old this coming September and it'd be at least 200 years old.

M.N.: Where did you originally get it?

Lambert: I don't know where my great-grandfather got it from. I know by the stories that my daddy's told me. I was called out of the field with it. It was used to call the people for dinner time-- that's lunch time as we call it nowadays. In case of an emergency that horn was blowed and one of the better kids or my dad would make a run for the house 'cause there's something wrong and this is an heirloom that we passed down from generation to generation.

M.N.: Things like that have their own story.

Lambert: That thing has got a long, long story. The value of it is nothing to most people but it's priceless to me on account it's a keepsake.

M.N.: What are some of the other heirlooms?

Lambert: We have two old shot guns that my grandparents gave to my dad and their old twelve gauge single shots and my brother has them that lives in Paso Robles and they are still in working order. And we've got part of an old weaving mill of my mother's and it's an old relic

but it's still a keepsake and [we] got a Colt 41.

M.N.: Do you know what year it was made?

Lambert: Made in 1898.

M.N.: Does it still work?

Lambert: It's still in good working order--good shape.

M.N.: That's quite a prize.

Lambert: That's a big prize and I've also myself personally bought one gun when I was a young man. It's made by Savage Arm and it's a 1879 22--pump 22 with an an old hex barrel and this is my family heirloom that I will be passing down to my sons.

M.N.: And it still works?

Lambert: It still works and it will be in perfect shape. I have been debating about it with two of my sons and I'm thinking about turning all this over to this Bakersfield Museum. I been thinking about turning all this over to them. It ain't no promise but I'm thinking about it very strongly 'cause there's history right there in about four items.

M.N.: Is this important to you the idea of things going through a family or a family carrying on?

Lambert: Yes, it's very, very important to me.

M.N.: Why is it?

END OF TAPE 2, SIDE 2

Lambert: I don't know. It seems to me like we've had things that belong to our parents and it's something that I can look back on anytime that I want to and say, "Well, this is what my dad gave me here" or "This is what my mother gave me." Not only my knowledge, I have part of them that they have used--just like our old guns. We kill food not only for ourselves but for our entire family with these guns and that old loom that we have, Mother made lots and lots of cloth on it. To me, this is something that nobody else has that you can look back on it, say 30, 40 or 50 years back, "Well, my dad used to carry this." My dad done this with an old plowshare that I have here. The value of it is nothing except sentimental value but the sentimental value is what people nowadays is getting away from.

M.N.: Why do you think that is?

Lambert: I think it's getting where they just don't care. Back when I

was a youngster, boy or girl, mother and dad--that was love. That wasn't something that happened. It wasn't planned but this was nature, you loved the kids and you saved stuff from their parents to try to get it on down to their sons and their sons on down just right on down along the line. To me it's something that I can pick up and show somebody and say, "Well, my daddy carried this." Although I call him on this interview "Daddy" and I call her "Mother"--well, we didn't do that.

M.N.: What did you call them?

Lambert: Mamma, that's what we always called her. It wasn't Mother, it was always Mamma and instead of calling him "Father" or "Daddy" it was always Papa. I never called him "Daddy" in my life.

M.N.: What did you call your grandparents?

Lambert: Grandma and Grandpa and we didn't put no name to it if we had two grandparents. Two grandmothers, they was Grandma and the one you was talking to, you looked at. You didn't go way off across the yard someplace and holler, "Grandma." You had to be looking at them and they talked to you.

M.N.: What would happen if say someone died and there was a child left? Would another family take him in or relatives? How was that handled?

Lambert: If, just say for instance, there's an accident to one of my brothers and sisters where both parents got killed. Regardless of the amount of kids that they had, they was taken in one home and raised as that family's own children. It made a hardship on a lot of people but still the aunt and the uncle or the grandparents would take it in and raise it as their own.

M.N.: The grandparents would raise them?

Lambert: Oh yes, my dad raised one kid one of his own grandkids. Through no fault of its mother or dad, they was raised up right along with us. They knew that they wasn't brothers or sister but they was treated this way. They got the same things that we got. They got the same loving, the same care.

M.N.: Grandparents didn't object to raising another family.

Lambert: You can't object to raising another family. To me it's part of life. You have a grandkid that doesn't have no place to go, somebody has got to raise it. To me the state or the county has got no business interffering in it--this is family. Some of the family ought to take them and raise them. I know I will if one of my grandkids or all of them has to be raised, I'll raise them.

M.N.: I wonder if you have a belief or an idea as to why people changed so much value wise?

Lambert: Yeah, it's my own idea. Let's take back say in the 1930s if I had done something or other that I wasn't suppose to, I got whipped. I don't mean spanked--I mean I got whipped. There wasn't no blood or anything like that, a few bruises which didn't hurt me and I think I'm a pretty good man. I believe in this. I raised my family, five of my own and three of my wife's that I'm married to now and I whipped them.

Nowadays the people can't whip their kids. They can't get what you would call respect. Kids has no respect whatsoever for the parents nowadays. Oh, there's a few of them do I'll grant you but the average one, they have lost respect for Mother and Dad to me nowadays. My kids was raised to help each other. Nowadays the kids is raised to do whatever they're big enough to do and to hell with everybody else. Time has changed. My kicks when I was young was going out hunting, fishing, occasionally stealing a bottle or something or other from my dad and drinking it, fixing up old cars and running them across the desert, playing with them, but nowadays the kids don't have anything to do. They don't have anyplace to go so they turn to alcohol, dope, whatever they can think of for the simple reason that they have no respect for the parents or the law officers and most of all, they have none for themselves.

M.N.: What are changes you've seen in society that have made a difference?

Lambert: I can't say a whole lot about it except the way that I've seen it's changed. Myself, when my family was growing up, my first family, you didn't drink in front of kids, you didn't curse in front of the kids, you didn't say filthy language in front of the kids. I don't care who they was, from the time that my first one was born to the last one, they never heard me curse or say anything into slang or about anybody but society has changed from where a very few know what the four letter word was until it's popular. Now they think nothing about it but back then if you would come out and call somebody you was mad at a SOB in front of a lady or a girl, probably you would get knocked to the ground or something or other for the simple reason you didn't respect that lady there or the child. So to me it all boils right back down to respect. I know I have lost it. I'm not proud of it but still I have lost respect for people up to a point and this is in my opinion the way society has changed. It used to be good and now they brought it on theirselves--it's bad.

M.N.: What kind of changes did the war make? What did you think just prior to the war and what changed did it make in your life?

Lambert: Well, prior to the war everybody still had respect for each other. After December 1941, let's say 1942, before everything got rolling real good. The Depression was in from the 1929 and the Depression lasted all the way through until 1941. It started getting better. They started taking the young men from 18 to 29.

M.N.: What year was that?

Lambert: In 1942, started taking them in the service.

M.N.: Is that the way you went in?

Lambert: That's the way I went in. I didn't go in until 1944. Before I went in the service and the war came along, all of the married men [went] up to the age of 29. They changed that shortly after that and took them up to 39. They would take them and put them in the service. This is when the women had to start looking out for themselves, I mean living wise, they had to get jobs. They worked on farms, they worked in factories, they worked everywhere taking the place of their men that had to go to war. And this is where the respect for each other started going out. You take a bunch of men and put them together, they start losing respect for them and everybody else.

M.N.: So you think the war was a major change.

Lambert: The war was a major change. To me, what we call war babies from 1941 through 1947 this is your generation of what we call war babies. To make a long story short, you didn't know if it was yours or somebody else's. This is where your respect for the other person got started. I raised a war baby and I know it doesn't belong to me. This is a fact I can prove it.

M.N.: How did you feel about it?

Lambert: I love her just as much as I do the other four. She's 35 years old. I have two beautiful granddaughters from her. She works for the federal government right now. I love her just as much as I do the rest of them.

M.N.: So it really didn't make a difference.

Lambert: Didn't make a hell of a lot of difference to me. She was mine. I raised her. But a lot of people I could name, a whole lot of them which I won't, they would come back and the wife would have a new baby and immediately it was gone. "I didn't want that little bastard baby. It's not mine." They didn't realize that it's still a human being. Maybe they already had one or two kids.

M.N.: What did they do, give them up for adoption?

Lambert: No, the mother and dad would separate and this is where all of it [began]. I'm talking about the soldiers that come back from the war like myself. I left a woman here and I come back and I had a baby.

M.N.: You left in 1944?

Lambert: I left in 1945 is when I left. I went overseas in 1945 and when

I got back I had a baby that was four and a half months old.

M.N.: When did you come back?

Lambert: I left for overseas, let's see, I went on January 19, 1944 when I entered the service and when I came back on May 5, 1946 I had this little baby girl and to this day she's my baby. She has my name, married under my name and she calls me "Daddy" and that's all that's necessary.

M.N.: I remember you saying something about your brother becoming ill and dying. Would you want to talk about that?

Lambert: Yeah.

M.N.: How did he get sick?

Lambert: Well, back in 1938 in January 1938, we lived out on the West place, in Shafter and he was working out in the fields [when it was] raining and caught pneumonia.

M.N.: He got pneumonia?

Lambert: Yeah.

M.N.: Was it sudden?

Lambert: Well, he just got sick and had high fever. Back then an automobile was hard to come by and my brother come down with a fever and my dad walked from Shafter to Wasco and got my sister to come over to take him to the doctor or take him to the hospital. He went in the hospital at Bakersfield, Kern General.

M.N.: Did you have any trouble getting him in?

Lambert: No, there was no trouble getting him in. They took him in all right.

M.N.: Was it a big hospital?

Lambert: No, it was a three-story hospital at that time, very, very small, but it was the county hospital. There was no charge for going in the hospital at all and anybody could go there regardless.

M.N.: Was that the first time someone in your family had been there?

Lambert: That's the first time that any of my family had ever been there. He went in there in January sick. They'd taken him in and this was either a Thursday or Friday when they'd taken him in there and my sister went back up to see him on a Sunday. They had said he had double pneumonia, that he was in bad shape but they thought that he would be all right. My sister went back up there Sunday to visit him and the pneumonia was breaking and he had big drops of sweat all

over him.

M.N.: The fever was breaking?

Lambert: The fever was breaking and one of the damn nurses came in and he was on the north side of the building and opened the window, just tripped it all the way open, to cool him down. That was her excuse for it, to cool him down where he could get where he wouldn't sweat so much and I think this is what threw him into double pneumonia because on Monday about six o'clock my brother passes away, January 28, 1938.

M.N.: How old was he?

Lambert: He was 20 years, seven months and fourteen days old.

M.N.: That came as quite a shock.

Lambert: That was the first brother or sister we ever lost. That was hard to take. Something you see around the house every day was never there. He's buried right there in Shafter in the old cemetery. When he was first put there in 1938 it was nothing but a cotton field and his was the thirteenth grave put in that cemetery and since then we have quite a few of them right there in Shafter cemetery. My daddy's buried there, my mother, my brother that died in 1938, then I have two sisters, one buried along side of him and one right in front of him and numerous nieces and nephews there.

M.N.: Is that important to you--that they're buried there together?

Lambert: Very important. I think a family ought to be together. They was raised together why shouldn't they stay together? Although my dad is buried by himself, he's still in the same cemetery.

M.N.: I was interested in what kind of people doctors were--the medical people--were they good people?

Lambert: The medical doctors was good people. If you could get word to them they wouldn't say, "No, I don't have time to go out there"--they would make time. The way they looked at it that I seen was if a person was able to come to their office, they was sick but that person that wasn't able to come in needed medical care more than the ones did that could come in. The doctors always had transportation of some sort--horse and buggy or a good car that they would go to their patients.

M.N.: If the patient needed to go to the hospital did the doctor take them in?

Lambert: If the patient needed to go to the hospital and had no other way the doctor would load them right in the car and take them up there. He didn't leave them until they was in bed and make sure that that

patient was taken care of.

M.N.: Did you ever see a woman doctor in those days?

Lambert: Only one. Old Doctor Mary we called her in Wasco. Doctor Mary Hendricks and her husband both was doctors.

M.N.: Was she a good doctor?

Lambert: She's the best. Her hands to my notion was small so that she could do things that a man doctor couldn't do. She was more gentle with patients. She was my sister's doctor in Wasco that delivered most of my nieces and nephews or my dad whichever one of them was handy. When Doctor Mary wasn't there, well my dad done it. She was my doctor until I left Wasco and Shafter and moved to Bakersfield.

M.N.: Was she old?

Lambert: At that time she was old to me 'cause I was just a youngster. She was probably 30 or 35 years old then. Well, she should be around, oh, in her seventies by now and old Doc Mary is still going.

M.N.: Is she still practicing?

Lambert: She's still practicing medicine today in Wasco.

M.N.: How do you feel about what happened to you? Do you feel good about it? Do you have any particular regrets?

Lambert: I have no regrets. If I had my life to live over all except one incident we won't mention I'd like to try it all over again. I have no regrets.

M.N.: Feel you've had a good life?

Lambert: I've had a good long life. I've had hardships. I've had good [times].

M.N.: In spite of all the hardship.

Lambert: I still feel good about my life. Like I say, I have gone from fifty cents an hour or fifty cents a day to my own business which I own six. I went from a pauper to a millionaire and today I know how they both feel. When I first got married I worked for fifty cents an hour and my wages today are \$35 an hour and, like I say, I went from a broke man to a millionaire. It took me eight and a half years of hard work and then I got playing with the big boys. I'm almost broke again but I'm still happy.

END OF INTERVIEW

[NO QUESTIONNAIRE SUBMITTED]

James E. Lambert, Sr.
b. 1879, Arkansas

b. , Arkansas

James E. Lambert, Jr.
b. 1924, Pleasant Valley,
Garvin Co.,
Oklahoma

Education: high school

m. 1944 →

m. 1979 →

First Marriage

5 children

22 grandchildren

Second Wife's Children

3 children

2 grandchildren

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