CALIFORNIA STATE COLLEGE, BAKERSFIELD

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

Oral History Program

Interview Between

INTERVIEWEE:	Clara Beddo Davis
PLACE OF BIRTH:	Pauls Valley, Garvin County, Oklahoma
INTERVIEWER:	Stacey Jagels
DATES OF INTERVIEWS:	January 29 and February 12, 1981
PLACE OF INTERVIEWS:	Bakersfield, Kern County
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PREFACE

Clara Davis came from a family of sixteen children in Pauls Valley, Oklahoma. She is extremely proud of her heritage and takes offense if people from Oklahoma are not treated or spoken of well. She was very interested in the Project because she is so aware of her background. Mrs. Davis has read everything about the migration that she could find. She appeared in an episode of the BBC series When Havoc Struck in the early seventies. The episode dealt with the catastrophe of the dust bowl and the resulting migration to California. Mrs. Davis was not in the best of health at the time of the interview which took place in between two major operations she had. Mrs. Davis provided the Project with a number of newspaper clippings.

Stacey Jagels
Interviewer

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INTERVIEWEE: Clara Beddo Davis (Age: 62)

INTERVIEWER: Stacey Jagels

DATED: January 29, 1981

S.J.: This is an interview with Clara Davis for the California State College, Bakersfield CALIFORNIA ODYSSEY Project by Stacey Jagels at 700 33rd Street, Apartment D, Bakersfield, California on Thursday, January 29, 1981 at 9:30 a.m.

S.J.: Why don't we start with your childhood? Would you tell me where and when you were born and what it was like growing up in a family with sixteen children?

Davis: I was born in Pauls Valley, Oklahoma on May 13, 1918. I lived on a farm till I was six years old. My earliest memories of the farm are when I was about two years old. A year before that my father had got crippled and he was in Oklahoma City in the hospital for a year. I remember when they brought him home from the hospital. They brought him from Pauls Valley out to our farm in the back of a wagon. He had blood poisoning in his leg and he never walked again without two crutches. He stayed on the farm until I was six years old and he gave that up for a county office. He was elected to the county office in 1924. We had a good life on the farm.

My next memory that sticks in my mind was the day we moved into town. It was sixteen miles into town. It was Thanksgiving Day, 1924 and my mother cooked Thanksgiving dinner the day before. They had two wagons to haul our furniture into town and they had a car to take my mother, my father and the smaller children in. She had the Thanksgiving dinner in the car and we stopped on the side of the road and waited on the wagons to catch up and we had our Thanksgiving dinner on the side of the road on our way into town.

My father went into office on the first of January in 1925. We

lived in several different houses and we were a very happy bunch of kids. Even though there was a big bunch of us, we each had our own work to do. We did our work. We weren't yelled at. We weren't told we had to do this or that. We knew exactly what we had to do. We got our spending money on Sunday morning. Sometimes it was a nickel and sometimes it was a dime, but it lasted us with candy all week long. We were raised in church. We started to church when we moved to town and we stayed in church all of our lives. We had one sister and two brothers born after we moved into town. Of course, my mother only worked at home.

S.J.: Was it kind of a tight squeeze trying to feed and clothe sixteen children?

Davis: It was. I can imagine now that it was very hard for my father. He was in county office, but we had an aunt and uncle that lived on the farm and nearly every morning my uncle came to town in his truck and he brought milk, butter, eggs and farm products to us. So that helped a lot--an awful lot. Then in the wintertime we killed hogs. I can still imagine it was very hard on my father to raise sixteen kids because his salary was very small in the office he held. As each one of us got big enough we worked. My brothers worked on the farms and my sisters and I did house work for the people in town. That money went to help support the family, but we had spending money out of it too.

We usually bought some of our clothes with that and we had money for the show and things on weekends which was very hard to do with a large family like that. But we lived real good. We were very happy. Some of my brothers and sisters were married way before the younger ones were born so when we moved into town in 1924, there was twelve of us at home. There were four born after we moved to town and that took a very large house. At the time my father didn't buy a home. He wanted to look around and find one that was big enough. By the time he got around to looking the Depression hit and he didn't buy a house. He never bought a house. We rented.

But we always had a large house to live in. We had about four or five bedrooms. It took that many. My grandmother lived with us too. I guess she moved into town with us. I don't recall that because I was young. I can't ever recall not having my grandmother in the house with us until she passed away. When somebody in the family got sick, my mother would go to take care of them and my grandmother took care of us. So we really had two mothers. She wasn't like a grandmother. She was just like a mother to us.

S.J.: Could you tell me a little bit about school?

Davis: We all went to school. My two oldest brothers quit school in the tenth or the eleventh grade and my oldest sister got married when she was fifteen. All the older ones quit school to work and help make a living. All of us went through the eighth grade and some of us went a year or two in high school. I finished eighth grade and I quit to go to work full time. There are several younger than me that quit after eighth or ninth grade. Of the four that was born after we moved to town, the first one passed away at eighteen months, but the three younger ones all finished high school. They were the only three in the family that did finish high school so we were all really proud of them. It was just a thing that we couldn't do. The sister that finished high school married and moved to Texas and had four boys. When her youngest one was small, she and her husband separated and divorced and she worked and went to college at night. She graduated from college the eighteenth of May, 1980 and was fifty years old the eighth of June, 1980. She's a school teacher now so we're really proud of her.

S.J.: After the eighth grade you quit school to go to work. Would you tell me about your job and your brothers' and sisters' jobs?

Davis: My sisters and I just done housework for people. At that time there was a lot of hay baling going on in our community. The older ones worked in the hay and then some of the younger ones worked in a service station. My oldest brother went on and he was deputy sheriff of Garvin County--where we lived. From there he went to Norman, Oklahoma and he was chief of police in Norman. He went in the service in World War II. When he came out of the service, he went into work for the Interstate Commerce in the cigarette and tobacco tax division and worked in the State Capital in Oklahoma City until five years ago when he retired.

S.J.: It sounds as though it was kind of tough trying to take care of sixteen plus the two parents and your grandmother. Do you remember if you were any better off than some people or worse off?

Davis: We were middle class I guess. We always lived in a good neighborhood. Our neighbors next door had one child and naturally they could do more for that one child than my father could do for sixteen. We fit in with those people and we had a good life there. We were better off than some people but naturally there was people that had more than we did. But we had a good life.

We had neighbors down the street from us that had a store there. They had two girls and I can remember when I was a child those girls would pass by from work in the evening--especially in the summertime--and they'd stop and they'd watch us on the lawn. We weren't allowed out of the yard without asking. We had a huge lawn and we played there all the time. We had trees to climb. We had everything that a child needed. We didn't have everything

we wanted but what we needed. I guess those two girls really envied us because they said we had a lot of brothers and sisters and they didn't have a brother. I couldn't see it at the time because I thought they must be crazy, but now I can see it because we are a very close knit family. I think bigger families are closer than smaller families.

In the early part of the summer my father would take us to a resort--Turner Falls, Oklahoma--and we camped out there for a week. The first week in August we always had a family reunion at Turner Falls. We had around five hundred relatives from Texas and Oklahoma come for that family reunion. In fact, I've just found out now that this family reunion still goes on down in east Texas and if I get to go to Oklahoma this summer when they have this reunion, my sister and I are going down there to the reunion. It's down in Sabine, Texas. We hope to get down there for that this summer.

S.J.: Could you tell me what it was like when the Depression came?

Davis: When the Depression first hit I didn't pay much attention to it. But within six months after it hit, I can see now that my father lost everything we had. He was still in office though. He held that office until 1941.

S.J.: What was his title? What was his job?

Davis: He was the County Weigher. They weighed the trucks and anything that came over the scales to weigh. I remember one incident. When the Depression first hit my sister was born. My mother made us two dresses apiece when school started and we had those two dresses to wear to school. I had worked for a neighbor and I'd worked quite a bit. Her daughter had a yellow silk dress and she gave to me. It was the most beautiful thing there ever was and she gave it to me. I only wore that dress to Sunday school and church. It stayed in the closet at home. I didn't know my mother was expecting a baby. I went to get my dress one Sunday and it was gone. I accused my sister of taking it and letting somebody else wear it. Nobody knew anything about it. I couldn't find that dress and after my sister was born I found out my mother took that dress and made my baby sister a dress out of it without saying anything to me. Even though my sister was about the fourteenth child, we were just as proud of her as anybody ever was so that was all right for her to have that dress. We still laugh about that incident. She had two boys after that and I was so proud when that last kid was born. We really loved them all. We all was just really a close family.

S.J.: You said your father lost everything in the Depression. Can you remember what things?

Davis: No, I can't because a twelve year old child don't pay much attention

to things like that. I just can remember hearing them talk. I can't really remember what they lost, but they said he lost everything. And then I remember another incident that happened the year Franklin Roosevelt was elected. I was sitting on the front porch and an elderly man came down the street. He was a friend of my father's and he stopped and talked for a minute. He started to cross the street and a car drove up and a man jumped out and picked up a rock and hit him in the head. I hollered at my mother and she run out the door and hollered at him and then she called my father and my brothers came home. They called his sons. The people in the car had hit this elderly man because he had voted for Franklin Roosevelt. I couldn't imagine anyone doing something like that.

S.J.: Could you tell me about the dust storms?

Davis: That dust came in from Kansas through northern Oklahoma and the sky was just as red as it could be. My mother was in the hospital. I don't remember what for--I don't know if she had had a baby or what. The dust got so bad that you couldn't even see the houses across the street and it would just come in through the windows and everywhere. Somewhere we got the idea to wet sheets and hang them over the window. With a dozen kids to make beds for we didn't have too many sheets. My mother come in and we had those sheets hanging over the window. But it kept out the dust.

That dust was terrible and I know we didn't go out. I don't think my father even went to work for several days because he couldn't get out. At that time we didn't have a car. I don't know if he ever owned a car when we were younger or not. I don't know whose car it was that moved us into town from the farm, but we didn't have a car because he was crippled and couldn't drive a car. Apparently he must have got rid of the car when he moved into town. By the time my brothers got old enough they would manage to get some old kind of a car. So when we were teenagers we always had a car. Our brothers let us go with them--they took us. Most kids nowadays won't let their sisters go.

One time my oldest brother had a car and we was going to go to Turner Falls for the day. He was going to take us but something came up. He had to go to work and he couldn't go. My younger brother didn't know how to drive a car and my older brother took him out to the car and showed him how to shift that thing and he said, "Now you take them to Turner Falls." It was 28 miles to Turner Falls. We got in that car with him and went to Turner Falls and he never had been behind a steering wheel before in his life. He took us down there and back. We spent the day.

S.J.: Do you remember how long the dust storms went on? Did it come in gusts for a few days and then go away?

Davis: No, I think this just stayed, but I really couldn't tell you

how long it stayed. It just blowed everything away. That's when the people started coming to California to get out of there because the people on the farms had nothing left whatsoever. It would just dip the dirt up out here and pile it up over there somewhere. There was nothing then and that's what brought on the writing of The Grapes of Wrath when those people started leaving those farms because there was nothing there to farm--no land to farm with. So they started leaving and coming to California.

By then I was big enough and old enough that I would set and just wish that my dad would go to California although he had nothing to do with a farm except his job. The farms kept his job going, but I would just set and wish that he would go to California. That was out of the question. One time it got so bad there that my dad just wasn't making any money at all hardly and so they decided they would move us out on my cousin's farm and us kids could get some work to do out there. I was old enough by then. I must have been about sixteen. I just told my oldest brother--he was deputy sheriff then--that he could move them out there but I wasn't going because I hated the country. I said, "I'll get a job somewhere here in town and I'll stay in town." He said, "Okay. There's no need in moving out there then." They wanted my father to run for the State Legislature and he was assured that he had no problems -- no worries that he would be elected although we would have to move to Oklahoma City. I said I would not go to Oklahoma City. I was a small-town girl. I wasn't going to Oklahoma City. I wanted to stay here and my sister is younger than me and she said she would stay here too. And my older brother that was still at home said he would stay here too.

My father said he wasn't going to tear them up and he'd stay here. We were old enough to realize that my father could have went on and done a lot better for us--especially for the younger ones--but we didn't take that into consideration. We were thinking that we'd be better off to stay and let them move on up there. But he didn't go. Anyway, I always had this idea about going to California and before I married my husband I said, "Will you go to California?" He said, "Sure."

S.J.: Did your aunt and uncle lose their farm too?

Davis: I don't guess they did because they stayed on the farm. He eventually gave it up and moved into town when he retired. I was already in California before he retired so I don't know what he done -- sold it I guess.

S.J.: Do you remember the farmers talking about the drought and what that had done to their crops?

Davis: Oh yes, it just wiped them all out. We picked cotton. We didn't

start to school when school started in August--school starts in August back there. We didn't start to school then because we had to go out and pick cotton. Somebody would come and get us and take us out everyday. At times there was places where my mother and the ones that was big enough to pick cotton would move out on a farm and pick till I guess right around the first of October. We didn't get to start school till the first of October. But we had a very intelligent father and in a week after we started school we was caught up with the rest of the class. I have set many a night till after midnight right at the table with my father going over our back lessons. We all made almost straight A's in school and it was our father that done it. We talked about it since then--my sister and I. We think it was foolish for our father to keep us out of school like that but apparently he needed money very bad or he wouldn't have kept us out. So we didn't really lose too much school after that.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 1

S.J.: I wondered if you had heard anything about tractors coming to the farms and doing most of the work. Some people think that a lot of tractors were on the farms and so people lost their jobs. Do you remember hearing anything about that?

Davis: If that happened it probably happened after I left Oklahoma. I don't know if it was in this documentary this crew from London made or if it was in The Grapes Of Wrath that they showed the tractors going in there and just leveling everything. I remember seeing something where they would take those bulldozers and go in there and just level those houses off and I guess tried to level the land. Of course, they have lots of tractors back there. That's all they have.

When my brothers worked on the farm baling hay, they had a team of horses to pull that baler and they walked along the side of it with pitch forks throwing the hay in the baler to bale it. That's the way it was baled when I was a kid back there. I can't recall ever seeing a tractor back there when I was a kid. After I was married and come out here and went back to visit, of course, there were tractors all over the place.

S.J.: Do you ever remember people saying that the railroad was one of the reasons why they were losing money? Some people say that the railroad rates were so high that they couldn't afford to have their goods shipped and that was one of the reasons they lost money.

Davis: Yeah, I've heard that. Now a lot of the stuff then was hauled in trucks like cattle and hay. My father's job was to weigh all of that. It had to be weighed over the county scales before it could be sent anywhere. Of course they hauled all the cattle to Oklahoma City to the market. He taught us kids how to weigh on those huge scales. He would stay at work until way in the night. Then one of my brothers would go stay up the rest of the night and then someone would go in the morning. He kept them open 24 hours a day in the summertime back in the early 1930s when hay wasn't so plentiful.

S.J.: You said that when the Depression came he didn't make nearly as much money. Was he paid a salary by the county?

Davis: No. He was paid by the weight.

S.J.: And so when the farmers stopped or couldn't farm their land that directly affected him?

Davis: Yes. They don't even have the scales there anymore. They done away with them because they didn't need them. When things picked up he made more money. When they went down he made less money. I think he was there about ten years that he made good money. He would have stayed on the farm but he was crippled and couldn't walk without two crutches. He realized the boys were getting old enough that they would be married and away from home pretty soon so he couldn't depend on them. I had three brothers older than me. The others were younger. He knew the older boys would be up and gone before the others even got half big enough to do any farming so that's why he give up the farm and went into the office where he could have a better job. He didn't have to get up and walk around.

He fell several times just walking on his crutches and broke his leg. One crutch would go in a hole. One time I remember was a Sunday and he was in the office and my mother was real bad sick. Instead of somebody going after him, somebody called him at the office and told him. He couldn't find anybody to bring him home so he started walking and there was no sidewalk or paved street where he was walking. He said he thought he heard a car coming and he looked around behind him to see and his crutch went in a hole and he fell and broke his leg. They could never set it. I don't know how long he laid there before finally my brother went to find him and found him laying there where he fell and broke his leg.

S.J.: Could you tell me a little bit about your husband and how you met him?

Davis: Yes. I met him at church. Two of my sisters and I went to church one Sunday night. My mother didn't go that night or this would

never have happened. A friend of ours that we grew up with come into church and this guy was with him. They sat down across from us. I asked my sister, "Who's that guy with Whitey?" She said, "I think it's Vernon Davis's brother." I said that if he'd stay till church was over I'd find out. They didn't stay. They got up and left. I told her to come on--let's go. If my mother had been there we wouldn't have left. We had to go a couple blocks and cross a bridge and when we got to the bridge, they were setting there waiting on us. This friend Whitey knew when he left I would foller him. He was just a close friend--just like a brother to us.

So we went to the show. I was about sixteen then and when we got home my sister said, "Now don't tell Mama who you was with." I was one that talked all the time. She said, "Because he's Vernon Davis's brother and you know Mama don't like Vernon Davis." That was a guy that lived out in the country. One of my other sisters went with him.

We got up the next morning and Mama asked us where we went. She knew we had come in late. Opal said,"We went to the show." Mama asked, "Who with?" and we said, "Whitey Coffee and Arthur Davis." She said, "You go with him again and I'll beat you to death." So I sneaked around and went with him. I was sixteen years old then and we got married when I was nineteen. I went with him off and on for four years but eventually my mother met him. I finally told her that he was not Vernon Davis's brother. He was his nephew. She met him and she liked him. He lived in the country and it got to where that if I went out anywhere when he didn't come to town, she'd tell him. We got married on July 17, 1937 and was living at Lindsay, Oklahoma. He was working in broom corn--cutting broom corn. That was another thing that they raised there. He was getting twenty cents an hour for cutting broom corn.

Well, he worked at that for about a month and when it was over with we came back to Pauls Valley and we lived with his parents. On a Sunday afternoon, August 20, 1937 two of his cousins came by. They lived down in eastern Oklahoma and they said that they were going to California. They asked my husband if he wanted to go and he asked me. I said, "Sure I want to go." When I was a kid I'd never go away from home and stay over one night 'cause I'd scream and bawl till they'd take me back home.

But I said we didn't have the money to go to California and one of the cousins said that it was all right. They had enough money just for our eats. We had a little bit of money and we packed our clothes and got in the car. The next morning we went up and told my parents we were going to California. They were stunned because I had one sister that came to California before that but she was already back home. We left there on Monday morning on

August 21 and we got to the Arvin Labor Camp on Saturday at noon. That's how long it took us to come out here. Out on the Mojave Desert near Needles we come upon a family setting by the side of the road and they flagged us down and said that their car was broke down. They were from Duncan, Oklahoma and they needed some help so my husband and his cousins stopped and they got the car to running. There was an elderly man and his wife and three kids--two girls and a boy. They boy was grown and he said he had drove all the way from Duncan, Oklahoma by himself 'cause his father couldn't drive. He said that if one of the men with us would finish helping him drive, we could go with them and stay at the Arvin Labor Camp where their daughter was until we could get a place to live.

So we came with them on into Arvin and those people we'd never seen before in our life took us in. We stayed with them for about a week till we found a place to live in. And those people are still good friends of ours.

S.J.: It took almost a week--from Monday to Saturday--to get here. What did you do along the way for food and when you wanted to sleep--did you just pull alongside the road or did you find someplace to stay?

Davis: We would stop and buy food in a grocery store. Several mornings we would eat breakfast in a cafe but that was the only time we'd eat in a cafe. At night we'd drive until they got tired and we'd just stop and sleep. We broke down ourselves over in New Mexico and it was around one or two o'clock in the morning. We saw a depot down the road. The railroad track was off the highway. We pulled down to this depot. We broke a spring on the car--that's what it was. We slept till daylight. There was a blacksmith's shop there and when this guy opened the blacksmith's shop, they asked him if he could make a spring for the car and he said yes, he could find something to make a spring out of. He got an old wagon wheel--the outer rim of a wagon wheel--and said he would make one out of that to get us on out of there.

There was a hotel in this depot and we went up there and had breakfast and when we went back, we waited around and he got that wagon wheel spring made for us and put it on the car. That's the only car trouble we had and I think it cost us 75 cents to get that made. We didn't have any more trouble then but we run on those people that had the trouble and they brought us on into California.

We had rain. It rained on us in Arizona then. Typical Okie style in the thirties--we had our suitcases tied on the fenders, on the top and in the back. When it started raining so hard we just got out and put the suitcases on the fenders in the car with us and parked on the side of the road or wherever we could find a place to park.

S.J.: Do you remember coming over the Tehachapi Mountains into the valley?

Davis: Yes I do. It was the scariest thing I ever went over in my life. When we come down that mountain into Arvin, we come down what they called the White Wolfe Grade then. I'll tell you, when we come out that first time and saw that valley down below, that was the most beautiful sight I ever seen because the farmland was just laid out perfect. When I saw that I told my husband that it was the prettiest thing I ever seen. And it was. It was just beautiful. We came on into Arvin then and when we got into the Arvin Labor Camp of course everybody was from Oklahoma, Texas, or Arkansas. In fact there was several families from my home town there.

Today I can start out somewhere--walk into a store somewhere--and somebody knows me from there. But I don't know them. Last Saturday night in Wasco I went up to see Ernest Tubb at the high school auditorium and I started out and this guy was standing there and he said, "Hello, Clara." I said, "Well hello. You know me but I don't know you." Of course people don't forget me. The people from Pauls Valley say they never forget my family because there was so many of us.

S.J.: You said that when you were a teenager, you would sit and just wish that your father would come out to California. Do you know why you wanted to come to California? What things had you heard about California that made you want to come here so much?

Davis: I'd heard about how you could make more money out here and I knew we needed a place where we could make more money. It was so hard to make a living at that time in the thirties. I just thought that if we could get to California that I wouldn't mind going out in the fields and working because they said the work was so much better. I could even do cotton picking as bad as I hated it. They printed fliers and sent them out from California to Oklahoma and distributed them around for people to come out here--which was a big nothing! I don't know why the people in California done that. The fliers said what big money you could make and what wonderful living places you had--how you could make money working in the grapes and picking cotton and all this and that.

The only thing that I was disappointed in when I came out here was in that Arvin Labor Camp--all those tents stretched up over wooden platforms. That's something you never seen in Oklahoma--people living in tents. They couldn't do it because the winters are so bad back there. But then I decided maybe that would be a pretty good way to live.

S.J.: Do you remember actually seeing one of these fliers?

Davis: No, I don't actually remember seeing it but in my mind I can remember reading it.

S.J.: Do you know who had sent these -- do you remember what ranchers?

Davis: No, I don't know what ranchers sent them. I don't really know if it was ranchers or if it was just people doing it on their own. Somebody back there for a long time had kept one and when I think about it, I think when I go back there I'm going to get that and make a copy of it and bring it back. I'm a nut when it comes to collecting things like that. But I've forgot who it was and so I've never been able to get one. I'd sure like to get one though because I would like to keep it.

S.J.: You said you were a little bit disappointed when you saw that everybody lived in tents. Were there any other things that you heard about California that weren't true or perhaps some things that you found were true?

Davis: The main thing I found out that wasn't true was that there was work. There really wasn't too much work to do around. The first winter we was here we was just picking cotton. When that was over with there was nothing else. We couldn't find a job. That winter we got help from the welfare. Then in the spring we had moved to another ranch--Lester Frick's ranch south of Arvin. That's where we got our first job and we moved down there.

They had some little two-room cabins down there that was better than the tents. I still had my mind on that tent--I guess--just for the fun of it. I wanted to live in one of them. So we stayed there that fall and winter on Lester Frick's place and then we moved to another place--I forgot the name of it--and we got help from the welfare. Then my husband got a job driving a tractor for a Mr. Cobb who was a rancher down there.

S.J.: Could you describe to me the cabin that you lived in on the Frick ranch?

Davis: It was two rooms. The kitchen was--I imagine--about six by twelve. The bedroom had one bed and then a half-size bed in it and that's practically about all we had to start out with.

S.J.: What about water and sanitation?

Davis: They had put hydrants around by the side of every house and we got our water from that and carried it in. I'm sure he had a place for showers because I think the Health Department required it. I think he had outside showers in with the bathrooms. And everybody had to use the same ones. But first my husband got a job with Jack Stokes. He was irrigating south on the desert at night and I would go with him. We had managed to get us a car and he got this job irrigating with Jack Stokes.

We went out and bought a 1928 Graham Page. That was the biggest old

car I ever seen. And we bought it from C.C. Douglas Car Lot here in Bakersfield. We give $80 for it. We paid $5 down and paid about $5 a month. My husband would irrigate at night down there and I'd go with him and sleep in the car. It was far out on that desert south of Arvin there. He'd have to build up a fire to keep the coyotes away. Then he went to work for Mr. Cobb who was Jack Stokes' father-in-law driving a tractor. And that's when I moved into a tent. He didn't have any houses and we lived that way for I think about a month in that tent. That satisfied me with living in a tent so then we moved into a house.

In the spring of 1938 he went to DiGiorgio Farms. The workers had to go every morning and get a number to go to work. There were so many people. My husband would come home without a number and so one morning he got up and said, "I'm going to get one of those numbers today." He's tall like I am. And this morning he got up early and went right up to where the guy was on the platform and he just reached up and took a number out of his hand and walked in and got a job. He went to work picking fruit on the DiGiorgio Ranch.

He got a job there. His friend wasn't as tall as my husband but he hung onto him and got him a number too and he went in with him. We had this old Graham Page--the biggest old thing. When that seasonal work was over then we decided we'd go to Marysville and Modesto and work in the fruit. So the four of us took off and went up there. We got there too late to get anything at all up there so we come back. I don't really remember what he done then after we got back.

We had some more friends--people we had met that had moved in on Lester Frick's place with us. They'd come from Oklahoma and one had a brother living in Shafter. He went up to Shafter and he come back and he said there was a strike on the Hoover Ranch up there between Wasco and Shafter and he said we can all get a job up there. He said we've got a job if we want it. He said the only thing is that we're going to have to move in after dark on account of the strikers. This was the fall of 1938. We needed a job so we moved in about midnight and went to work on the Hoover Ranch up there. I don't know how long we stayed there but while this was going on I was getting more homesick by the day. I cried my eyes out because I couldn't see any family.

In 1941--the summer of 1941--I said we are going to work and we are going to Oklahoma. That was four years after we came out here and we both went to work in the drying shed cutting fruit to dry. I cut the fruit and tabled it and he carried it away and put it in the sulfur house to dry it.

S.J.: Where was that?

Davis: This was on the Hoover Ranch out between Wasco and Shafter.

I cut fruit for three cents a box lug. We would stand and they'd set it up to us. We'd just cut them and line them up in there and then they'd take them away. I cut that fruit for three cents a box. I don't know what he got--I think it was twenty-five cents an hour. But I never worked so hard in all my life because I wanted to go home. We left here going back home on August 21 -- four years from the day we left there.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 2

S.J.: Could you tell me a little more about the Sunset Labor Camp in Arvin? You said you were there just a week.

Davis: About a week--yes--but we were visiting there. The Sunset Labor Camp was really a good place. I meant that it was good for the people because they had a place to go and it was a clean place. They had entertainment there on Saturday night. They had a big dance platform and they had a dance every Saturday night and if they didn't have a band they had a jukebox that they danced by. It was an open-air dance platform. The only way an outsider could get in was to be invited in by somebody that lived there. It was just for the people in the camp so naturally we were invited every Saturday night. At that time I didn't dance because I was raised very strict in one way. We didn't go to dances although my father was a musician. He could play any kind of musical instrument and he went out and played for country dances, but we didn't get to dance. We weren't allowed to go.

We went to the dances and my husband danced but I didn't. I couldn't dance. And we had a lot of fun. It was really a nice place to go because I don't recall anybody ever being drunk or raising Cain or anything like that. It was just like a family because we were all from Oklahoma, Texas or Arkansas and we were all there for the same purpose--to try and get out of the Depression and make a living and try to make something. Some of them went on quicker than others and got better jobs quicker than some of them did. And then I'll admit some of them is probably still living the same way they did then because there is people that just don't care and that's the people that give Oklahoma, Texas and Arkansas the bad name--the Okie name. Somebody should write another book. I hope some day that somebody does it.

S.J.: Do you ever remember visiting or seeing some of the ditch camps or the tent cities? For instance, there was a ditch camp up here in Oildale underneath the bridge. Do you remember any of those?

Davis: Yes, I remember seeing them but I was never around any of them. Then there was a tent city up around Tulare I think. In fact, that's where some of The Grapes of Wrath was wrote. 'Course most of it was filmed in the Arvin Labor Camp but the Joad family lived up there in that tent city. I never lived in them but I do remember seeing this one down here on the river. As far as ever having anything to do with it--I didn't.

S.J.: You were talking about the Frick Ranch. You seem to be pleased with it though.

Davis: There was not a thing in the world wrong with Lester Frick's Ranch. We were all families that lived there and I never seen anything in the world wrong with the way Lester Frick run his. Now after I left there I don't know.

S.J.: Was there another Frick?

Davis: Yes there was. I can't remember but seems like I recall in later years after we left Arvin something about a controversy over there. It was somebody else--the other Frick--I don't know which one it was.

We picked cotton for Lester Frick and that's when we moved in there. We moved in there to pick cotton. Then they tried to get a union started that fall of 1937. After we picked for Lester Frick we went over to another ranch. I don't remember which ranch it was. We were picking cotton there and the strikers would come by and try to get us to go with them. I don't really know who's right and who's wrong there because at that time all we were trying to do was make a living. They kept the trailer parked in the middle of the field and we would just go to the trailer and wait till they'd leave and we'd go back to pick cotton then. I don't know if we were right or if they were right trying to get the union. My husband never worked in a union then. He went on to working in welding shops and then in a manufacturing shop in Shafter and none of them were ever union.

S.J.: Do you remember any name associated with this attempt to organize a union?

Davis: The only name I can remember is his cousin that we came out with because he got in with them and tried to get us to go with him, but we wouldn't do it. That's the only name I remember. His name was Elton Cole. When the war started he went in the war and lost a leg and he lived in Oklahoma. But that's the only one I can remember.

S.J.: Why didn't you and your husband want to join the union?

Davis: Because we would have been out of work at that time and we'd have

had to quit work. We just wanted to work and make a living. I don't know how we would have lived without it. Those people that were striking--I don't know how they lived. So we just stayed out there and picked the cotton and then when the winter come on, we got help from the welfare until work started up again and then we went on and done good. After we came to the Hoover Ranch, during the slack season W. B. Camp was leveling some land out on the other side north of Wasco. My husband had never run one of those land levelers but he was never a person to stand back and say he couldn't do it. "I can learn," he'd say. So he went out and got a job leveling land.

He worked for Gideon's Construction Company leveling that land and when they got that leveled and Mr. Camp started farming it, then he hired my husband to work for him and we moved out on that ranch and stayed out there. He worked on the farm until our son was born. He was born in 1946. In 1947 we worked on other ranches and in 1950 he went to work on the Maricopa Seed Farms south of Bakersfield in the shop as a welder and he stayed there till 1953. Then he came back to Shafter and went to work for Mettlers in the welding shop and then he worked for Frank Russell up until 1970. We never bought a home and then in 1970 he got sick and he retired in 1971 and passed away in 1972. He had cancer. He was operated on the first time in September in 1970 and then he passed away in September in 1972. Our doctor and hospital bills was over $40,000 so when he passed away that left me with nothing--like when I first come to Arvin. But I've managed to take care of myself since then with the Social Security that he left.

S.J.: Your husband went from job to job depending where the work was. Did you work just some of the time or all the time?

Davis: No, I just worked in the summertime. I worked in the potato sheds then. I worked in the potato sheds after the oldest one got old enough to take care of the two younger ones.

S.J.: When was your first child born?

Davis: She was born July 17, 1943. We was married six years the day she was born.

S.J.: How did your husband know where to find work in the late thirties?

Davis: We knew what time the fruit would get ripe and ready to pick and pack because we had worked on the Hoover Ranch in the fruit. Other people was going back and forth too so work got around from the experience that the others had had. When we left to go to Marysville they were still working in the fruit, but they already had all the people they needed. We were young and if we'd just stayed around there we'd have probably got work but we decided we'd go over on the coast around Salinas and Gilroy. We went over

there and we decided there wasn't nothing there. I guess really we wasn't looking too hard for work at that time. There was two couples--my husband and I and another couple. We were all young. We came back to Wasco and we got there later one afternoon. We went out in the potato fields--they were digging potatoes--and they said we could pick up potatoes the next day. So we stayed that night and we slept on the side of the potato field.

S.J.: Is that the way you usually did when you had to move from one town to another--camping beside the road?

Davis: No. Sometimes we did because we wanted to. I mean it was an adventure for us. I know we went to the Tagus Ranch one time. They had places for us to go. They had cabins there but we decided we'd just camp out. But we picked up potatoes in Wasco and then we eventually went back to Arvin and then back to Shafter and we lived there then.

S.J.: How about the money for the gas and the food when you were going from place to place? Had you saved up money from the previous job?

Davis: Yes, because at that time gas was only about ten cents a gallon and a gallon of gas even in the big old car we had would get twice as far as it does for a new car now. With two of us--two couples together--it didn't cost us so much for gas. But eventually we settled down and started raising a family and stayed in one place then.

S.J.: Did you find that when you were going from job to job that you had enough money for everything you needed?

Davis: We did. Now the first year we were living down there at Arvin--that winter got kind of rough. The welfare helped us and we never went hungry. Now I believe there was people that did. But we didn't. At one time our money was getting low and we didn't have any welfare assistance. My father-in-law went to see this rancher and he let him clean the reservoir out. My father-in-law, my husband and my brother-in-law did it and that was enough money. We didn't have to pay any rent or utilities on those ranches. It was all furnished for us at that time--so really all we had to do was just buy groceries and the very few clothes we bought. They made money cleaning that reservoir and I know we spent every penny of it buying groceries and putting them away so we would have them to last us through the winter. Then we got assistance. I think it was only one time that we got assistance from the welfare. And that was just before the spring work opened up and then they all got to work in the spring.

S.J.: What did you usually do during the off season when there was no work?

Davis: If we wasn't very far from the foot of the mountains and the weather was pretty, we'd spend the day up there and climb the mountains. Then we'd play cards and just set around. But I couldn't do that now. And really, we didn't have any worries then. Like a friend of mine said the other night--we didn't have anything but we didn't owe anything so we really didn't have any worries. We had a place to live and enough food to get by on and we weren't the only ones. It was everybody. I guess millions of them came from Oklahoma, Texas and Arkansas at that time.

S.J.: How would you compare your situation to other Okies--especially those with children? Do you think you were better off than many other

Davis: Yes, we were. I think so. And I think one reason that I got by so well was because I didn't realize the situation of things. With my parents I growed up where we had nothing to worry about. We had a big family. We didn't have a lot but we didn't have anything to worry about then. So I went into my marriage with the same idea that somewhere or other I would be provided for. And we came right on to California so I didn't really worry. My parents worried more than I did -- I found out later -- because they was afraid I was going hungry. I was the only one of the family that was out here at that time and I told them they didn't have to worry about me. I was taking care of myself. But there was people with large families that I guess really had it rough.

I know in later years I met a family that had about eight kids and that poor woman! I just felt so sorry for her. We were living down south of Bakersfield on the Maricopa Seed Farms then. Her husband was nothing but a drunkard, and that's something my husband didn't do. They just had a terrible time. They had a rough time then. But we never did really have it rough because my husband always provided for us then and after we had our family. We had three kids. But after we got over the Depression and got settled down into a job--about in 1938--my husband was never without a job over three days at a time. I've seen people--back in the forties before the war--say they just couldn't find work nowhere. Well, we never had a hard time finding work because it's there if you want it and it's there <u>now</u> if you want it.

S.J.: Could you tell me a little bit more about the farm work you did? How did the system work? For instance, if you were picking fruit or potatoes, how would they pay you?

Davis: For cotton they paid us by the hundred pounds. I don't remember what it was at first. I know it wasn't very much--probably a dollar a hundred if it was that much. It might have been just ninety cents. And if you picked a hundred pounds, you made ninety cents. But each time you went to weigh up they didn't give you money--they give you a paper scrip. It was about two inches square and they marked on it with a typewriter how much

that sack weighed and how much you was getting. Then at the end of the day you could cash them in and get your money or you could save them as long as you wanted to. We picked that way. Sometimes we could save some till the weekend where we'd have more money. Then we went to picking up potatoes. We were paid at the end of the week for that. And then of course we cut grapes and we were paid by the tray for that so how much money you made depended on how fast you were.

S.J.: Do you remember the growers ever taking advantage of you or trying to cheat you?

Davis: Never. I don't ever remember being taken advantage of or cheated or anything. Maybe they done some people that way but I was never mistreated--taken advantage of. The farmers that we worked for down there at Arvin were just wonderful people.

S.J.: Do you remember hearing about other people that were taken advantage of?

Davis: Well, I remember hearing about it but I can't remember who it was or anything. They said they took advantage of them down there in the labor when they first come out here but I never seen anything in the world like that. They were all so nice to me. If they couldn't help you, they didn't do anything to go against you. They were just really good to us and let us work and everything so I can't see anywhere where anybody was taken advantage of.

S.J.: You talked about when you lived on the Hoover Ranch and you went there to work because there was a strike. Could you tell me a little bit more about that? Did you have any trouble with the strikers?

Davis: No. No, we didn't. Like I say--we moved in after ten o'clock at night. We all loaded our cars up in Arvin and we came and we stayed outside at Shafter until after ten o'clock and then we went down one at a time--one car load at a time. The foreman on the ranch was at the railroad track where we had to cross to go into the ranch. He was standing there letting us cross the railroad track into the ranch. They had houses for us to live in and my husband went to work immediately. I think they were pruning trees then and we never had a bit of trouble. Apparently that strike must have just died out because I guess the people that were striking seen they couldn't do anything by moving people in like that. So they started pruning the trees. They had to be taught to prune trees. We picked the fruit, dried it and packed it. I dried the fruit, cut it to dry, and I packed fruit too. I didn't pack much fruit because it was on a belt and at that time I'd get dizzy when that belt come around and rolled over. So I just went back to the drying shed and worked there. But I never had a bit of trouble. We didn't--not a bit.

END OF TAPE 2, SIDE 1

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S.J.: Did you know any of the people that were strikers on the Hoover Ranch?

Davis: No, I didn't. I met people that was living there when we moved in and they were there when the strike started but they didn't participate in the strike. The strikers were all gone then.

S.J.: During that whole time in the late thirties there were quite a few newspaper articles written about the strikes, the attempts at unionization and generally about farm work and the Okies. Do you remember reading newspapers then and reading things like that?

Davis: No, I didn't read very many newspapers then although I've been a reader all my life. My whole family has. We're great readers. But I didn't read newspapers then. I guess the main reason was that we just didn't have money to buy a newspaper and we were too busy working trying to make a living. But my husband's cousin was participating in trying to get this union down at Arvin and we heard about it from him. We wasn't interested in it because we wanted to make a living and we knew that if we took part in the strike there would be no work for us for who knows how long and we were just barely surviving like everybody else. So we didn't take any interest in it at all then.

S.J.: Do you remember any specific things that your cousin told you about unions?

Davis: He just told us that there would be better wages and that we would have help from the unions--which I didn't believe at the time. I didn't believe at that time that the unions would help if they were on strike because I didn't see how they could help. So we were just not interested in them at all. But he finally gave it up himself and just went on and worked with us--which is what everybody done. They never did get a union back in the thirties. They don't even have a union now for farm workers. They've never had a union for farm workers far as I know--except Caesar Chavez. He's got his union now. Although they tried awful hard and they worked awful hard for it and I admired the people for what they done. But like I said--we weren't interested.

S.J.: Could you explain why your cousin and the other people were interested in it? It seems to me that they had to feed themselves and their families just as much as you did and they weren't very well off either. What made them take a chance in doing that?

Davis: I don't know what the other people done but my cousin was--shall we say--sort of a radical. He could be talked into anything

where he didn't have to work--if he thought he could get out of work. In my opinion that was the only reason that he went along with them because he just wanted to be a Mr. Know-it-all and try to get something for nothing. He's still that way. But then in 1942 he went in the service and he went to Germany and he lost a leg in the war so he's a war veteran living in Oklahoma City right now. He still works. He has an antique clock business in Oklahoma City so I don't suppose he ever got in a union of any kind.

S.J.: When you first came to California there were not nearly as many jobs as you had been told there were and you even described one job where you had to go and pick a number in order to work. Can you give me a little bit more of an idea how you found the jobs and how you and your husband and the people you were with always seemed to find work when there were very few jobs?

Davis: With the seasonal work, you learned when it was from other people going up and down the valley. When the season was over here, then it was starting in Stanislaus County up around Modesto. It was fruit work up there in the sheds--the packing sheds and the canneries People would just automatically load up their cars and go up there when the work was over here.

Now there was fliers sent out they tell me but I don't remember ever seeing them telling where the work was, when it would open up and where the places were to live. The Tagus Ranch in Tulare County would send out fliers but I can't recall ever seeing any of them and when the work would start, they would have places for people to live. People would leave Kern County and go to Tulare County for the Tagus Ranch, then on to Modesto, then on to Marysville and then some would go over on the coast around Salinas and San Jose in August. I know one year in August we went to San Jose to pick prunes and we stayed up there for about six weeks. I can't recall what year it was--sometime in the early forties. We didn't have any children then so we was free to go if we wanted to.

S.J.: I've heard that some people were lucky enough to retain a permanent home here in Kern County and then follow the crops when they could and eventually come back to Kern County. Did you do that or did you have a temporary home each place you went?

Davis: At first we had a temporary home but then we had our home here and we'd come back to it.

S.J.: About how many months of the year would you be traveling around to other crops in the valley?

Davis: We didn't travel as much as most people did. I'd say we were gone about five months and then of course we worked in the potatoes here in Kern County. After we went to the Hoover Ranch, we just

quit traveling completely. Then we moved from there to W. B. Camp's ranch out north of Wasco and we worked out there and that's where our oldest daughter was born and our son too. And then we went down to Maricopa Flats on the Maricopa Seed Farms and our other daughter was born down there. We lived there three years. Then we came back to Shafter.

S.J.: Before you had your children and you were moving around because you didn't have the responsibilites of keeping children in school and taking care of them, did you find moving around, new experiences and new places kind of exciting?

Davis: Oh, yes it was. I was born and raised in one place and we seldom ever went anywhere except to Turner Falls. After I came to California I guess I was thrilled to go from one place to the other for several years. When we started having a family we settled down. But it was a wonderful experience for anybody--living out here in the thirties until the war started. I think most people started settling down then. But of course there's still some that goes now.

S.J.: There weren't very many people that were as lucky as you were. Most of the people I've talked to or have read about had children and many times while they were trying to follow the crops they would arrive too late or too early for a crop or perhaps there were enough workers and they didn't need any more and they really had a rough time of it. Do you remember seeing people in ditch camps by the road or on the ranches that were a lot worse off than you?

Davis: Yes, we had friends like that that had children school age and they just would go and camp by the road. Most of them would get there too late or too early and then it was a problem trying to get the kids in school and work three or four weeks and have to take them out and go somewhere else and put them in another school. I just don't see how they done it but they did and they took it in their stride. It wasn't too much of a problem to them because they had to make a living the best way they could. There was kids that was drug from one camp to the other and yet they went on and went through school and got an education and are doing real good. But then there's others that I know of that failed somewhere along the line. We didn't have any children and it was easier on us.

I think back sometimes and I think that was foolish for us to do like we did. It was quite an experience and I wouldn't take anything for it. I can look back and see that we really enjoyed it. We were young and it was quite an experience. Then we settled down and started raising our family.

S.J.: You said that you and your husband were always able to find work. You also mentioned that you thought people who wanted to work

could find work.

Davis: That's right. And back then I felt the same way. If they wanted work they could find it if they would look hard enough and long enough and far enough. It was hard sometimes to get from Bakersfield to Tulare for instance, but everybody tried to help everybody else that wanted help and needed help. There was a lot of people that just came into Bakersfield--mostly Arvin and Lamont--and would work a little while and then depend on welfare to see them through the winter. Well, we didn't do that. Now we had welfare help one time--the first winter we were in California. We found work. If we couldn't go somewhere else to the work--to another town or another county--then they would get out and they'd find maybe a day's work here and a day there.

Sometimes we'd go for a week without any work but we had enough to live on so it wasn't because we didn't want the work. It was just that at times there was no work to do because in the wintertime the weather was bad--it was raining and there wasn't anything to do and we'd go out and pick cotton even in the winter when it was raining and cold. As soon as it would get a little dry we'd jump out and we'd pick enough cotton to keep us for a day or two. I wouldn't take anything for those experiences I had. I wouldn't take anything for them. Because they taught me a lot.

I was raised in a large family but we were raised close at home and our dad took care of us. Us girls babysat and things like that, but Dad would not let us get out and do work like cotton chopping on the farm. He would never let us do that and he would never let us work in a cafe. Back in the early thirties I assumed from the way he talked that if a girl worked in a cafe she didn't have a very good reputation. So we never done that. After getting married and coming to California all this was a whole new world opened up to me. I have never told any of my family about my experiences in California. They know nothing about it because they weren't out here. They were living back in Oklahoma in their secure lives and I was running from place to place trying to make a living. And they never knew anything about it. Someday I will tell them about it but I haven't told them about it yet.

S.J.: You said that you had to take welfare one winter until the spring came and you could go back to work. You mentioned that other Okies took welfare every year--all year. Do you think there were very many that relied on it?

Davis: I think so. Some of them that had families had to. But there was people just like now that do it because they don't want to work. We had welfare in the spring of 1938 for one month and then we had welfare in 1949 because my husband was bad sick. He had spinal meningitis and we had welfare for one month then. And that's all we ever had welfare.

S.J.: I've found that most of the people are really proud and they didn't want to have to take welfare.

Davis: Nope, they didn't want to have to do it. But back then people with children had to take it because they could get maybe one day today of work and no more work for a week or so. Well, one day's work wouldn't feed a family very long. What I would do when we were both working was to buy food and store it away and can food. But some people didn't even try to do that. Of course I know a lot of people that still does that nowadays. I mean it's the only way to live now. My daughter does. I always stored food away so we would have it when there wasn't any work and that way we didn't have to go on welfare.

S.J.: We were just talking about some of the Okies that just didn't try hard enough to find work. Do you think there were very many like that?

Davis: Not too many. The biggest majority wanted to work, wanted to make a living, wanted to have a home for their family. The wine was cheap here and they had never seen anything like that before. They could go to the wineries down there at Kovacevich Winery and take a bottle and buy their wine for very little. We didn't buy it, but we did know what was going on with those people. They just got to where they became winos.

S.J.: Do you think that had a lot to do with why some of them weren't finding work?

Davis: I do. I think it was because they just couldn't give up that wine.

S.J.: Did you know very many people like that?

Davis: Well, not too many. I knew one family there. There was this elderly lady and her two sons. One of them tried to take care of his mother and work and the other one became a wino. Then after I moved to Shafter I met their relatives and they're all wonderful people, but this one just became a typical wino. Now we had a friend of ours living with us. He wasn't married and he worked all the time right along with us. Usually it was the same old boys that would get on that wine. Some married men did too. But this guy that lived with us didn't. He is living in Sacramento now and he's worked at one of the schools in Sacramento ever since he got out of the service years ago. He is still a good friend. He was our friend in Oklahoma and he came out after we did.

S.J.: Do you think that there were any more Okies that became winos or alcoholics than blacks or Mexicans or other Caucasians?

Davis: Well, I don't know because at that time there wasn't so many Mexicans or blacks either. Out where we lived right on the farms I saw a few Mexicans around Arvin mostly. There was Filipinos around Arvin and they all worked. They had what they call bunkhouses where the Filipinos lived because most of them were single. I guess all of them were. They lived in these bunkhouses and worked on these places in the grapes--which we did too. So it was more Filipinos that we seen than Mexicans and blacks.

S.J.: How about other Caucasians that had already lived here in California? Do you think more Okies were alcoholics than other whites that were already here?

Davis: I don't know. Well, you know there's people that drinks all the time. They keep it hid. So you just couldn't say. And a wino didn't care--all he wanted was another bottle of wine. They were down on the river bank. So I just really don't know.

S.J.: Many of the women in the families are very religious. This could have presented a problem when the man was spending the money to go out and drink.

Davis: Yes, I knew several families like that but their women just went right on to church and took their children too. Now I was raised in church back home before I came to California, but after we came to California I quit going to church for a long time because we were moving around. It's kind of easy to think this is Saturday night and I have to get up early in the morning so I'm not going to bother going to church. Maybe the next week you'd be at another town and you didn't know where a church was to go to. But then after we had our family and the kids got big enough to go, sometimes I'd take them and sometimes I'd send them. I started my kids going to church when they were very small.

S.J.: Do you think most other people in your position--most people from Oklahoma that came out during the thirties--were very religious and did go to church when they could?

Davis: I think that the people that came from Oklahoma--the biggest majority of them-were religious people. But then they come to California and a lot of them just seemed to put church out of their mind and they didn't go. But then some of them did stay in church. I'm saying this with my experience with the people that I knew. I think there was more that quit going to church than there was that stayed in church. Then when they come out here they just forgot it I guess. The Arvin Labor Camp--the Sunset Labor Camp--I believe had church services on Sunday for the people that wanted to go. Of course we didn't live there long. We only lived there about a week that time. We moved out south of Arvin where it was so hard to get into town because

at that time we didn't have a car. We just had to depend on his cousin. Eventually we got a car. Boy then we was making pretty good money so we just decided to drive around and see what we hadn't seen in the mountains and other places instead of going to church. It was more or less sightseeing trips on Sunday. I think the biggest majority of the people were that way too because all this was new to them. They come out here with high hopes because the fliers had been sent back to Oklahoma. I didn't see any but the fliers had been sent back there saying there was all kinds of work and good money to be made out here. When we got out here it wasn't here, or there was too many people for each job or something like that because the work wasn't like they had it in the fliers they sent back to Oklahoma.

END OF TAPE 3, SIDE 1

S.J.: Do you think very many were disappointed with California in general?

Davis: I think they were but they took it in their stride. The ones that really wanted to make a living did. It was a poor living until things got better but they managed to make a living for their families and feed and clothe them. Some of them didn't even have cars but other people did so everybody shared. I remember one time we had the car and somebody told the men they could go to work at Kernville. There was jobs open at Kernville. It must have been in the loggin up there. We had this big old car--the 1928 Graham Page. There was about seven or eight men that all worked together and bought the gas to go to Kernville. It didn't take much gas or very much money because gas was only about fifteen cents a gallon. They went up there and there was no work up there. But they had to go see because the only way they was going to find work was to go and see about it. They didn't get a job when they went up there. That's the way they would go. They would all get in one car and go together to look for work.

S.J.: Even if people were somewhat disappointed in the employment prospects out here, do you think in general they were glad that they came to California?

Davis: I think not, because I talked to so many that said if they had the money they would go back to Oklahoma, Arkansas, Texas or wherever they came from. At that time they would have went back because they was so disappointed in the work conditions, the living conditions and everything. We weren't used to seeing things like the labor camp down there. That amazed me when I saw it for the first time because I had never seen anything like that in my life.

They don't have them in Oklahoma or Texas or anywhere back there. And I really believe that there was people that would have went back if they could have got the money to go back home. I know I would have went back and all I would have to had done is write to my father and tell him I wanted to come home. But I wouldn't do it. I was nineteen years old and you have no idea how homesick I was and how many tears I shed. It was four years before I got to go back but I didn't ask him for a penny. Finally we made it on our own and went back four years later.

S.J.: Do you think very many people did go back permanently?

Davis: Not too many. Now those that did go back I don't think you could ever get them back to California. I was on vacation in Texas--in east Texas--this summer, and our car was having car trouble way out in the country. There was a little garage beside the road so we pulled in there. I was out there trying to help the man see what's the matter with the car and he asked me where we were going and I told him we were going to Hemphill, Texas which was only about thirty miles down the road. I told him I was from California and one sister was from Oklahoma and one's from Dallas. And he said that he came to California at one time and he said he got out there and never hated a place so bad in his life. He went to church and got down and prayed and said, "Lord, if you'll just get me back to Texas, I promise I'll never go back to California again." He said he had to go back one time to Modesto when his sister was sick. I told him that California is not like it was back then and he said, "I don't care. I'd never go back there again." So the people that went back then still got the idea it's the same as it was.

S.J.: Can you think of what other things bothered them so much besides not being able to find work? Were there other things about California that upset people--that disappointed people?

Davis: I think it was the way they had to live. I'm speaking from my own experience. I didn't like the way we had to live. I made the best of it. I didn't let it worry me or upset me. And at times it was--I wouldn't say nice--but it was fun. We would just stop by the side of the road and sleep and nothing would bother you. We had no fears or anything. The people with families had their cooking facilities with them and they'd cook by the side of the road. We would make coffee and that's about all we ever done by the side of the road. The people with families of course had to cook everywhere they went. They couldn't afford to eat any other way.

S.J.: What were some of the things that you missed so much about Oklahoma? Was it your mom and dad--your family?

Daivs: My family. And my friends because all of my friends were back there. My best girl friend came to California and she was down

in the Los Angeles area. She wrote and give me her address. We had never been in Los Angeles and my husband said, "We're going to see her." It took us nearly all day to find her but I found her. But she lives back in Texas now. She went back there and she won't come back out here. Her sister lives in Santa Paula and she won't go back there to live. So I think all the people that went back during those times would never come back. I don't think any of them would. In fact, some of my sisters were out here and they live back there now. They just stayed a little while and went back.

S.J.: From the way you described the town you grew up in, it sounded like a smallish town--probably a very tight-knit community--where you knew most of the other people there--like the merchants, the teachers, the minister. Then when you came out to California, it was a larger spread-out community. Did you miss that feeling of belonging to a town that you had in Oklahoma?

Davis: Yes, but I run onto several families from Pauls Valley. They used to say if you're from Pauls Valley, Oklahoma you didn't have any problems out here because half the people out here were from Pauls Valley. I still know them. In fact, I've got friends out in Shafter that's lived here since I have back in the thirties. They are from my home town. At one time we counted eleven families. We lived in the north Shafter camp then and we counted eleven families from Pauls Valley that lived there. They were relatives but there were eleven different families living there from Pauls Valley.

I could probably name you half a dozen families right here in Bakersfield from Pauls Valley right now. I never see them. Some of them I know their names and that's all, and the some of them are friends. I've got a friend over just off of South Union out there by the fairgrounds that I growed up with in Pauls Valley. He married a distant cousin of mine and I haven't seen those people in nearly ten years. I talk to them occasionally on the phone but that's all. So there's a lot of people from Pauls Valley.

S.J.: When you said you were a young girl growing up, dreaming of California and wishing that you could come out here you also said that you had heard of California from people who had already come out before that. Do you remember what sorts of things you heard that made you want to come here so much?

Davis: My husband was the one that had me interested in California. We weren't married then. I don't know where he was getting his source of information about California but that was all our talk. This friend I was telling you about that lives off of South Union and the other friend that lived with us was coming to California. We were the first ones to come. But my sister came to California before I was married. Her husband came out with his family, and then she came out later on the bus. I think it took her nearly

a week on the bus to come to California. This was in 1936 and my dad told her to call back every time the bus stops because she was the first one that ever got that far away from home. She came to Wasco and stayed for a while and then she got pregnant. So she wrote and told my parents she was pregnant and they insisted that she come home. She and her husband came back and she said that she didn't ever want to come back out here again. She had her baby--she had twin girls in May of 1937 and I married in July 1937 and came to California in August 1937. In 1938 she came back to California and lived in Madera and she never went back either. She and I are the only ones that are still out here. She lives in Riverside now. I had three sisters besides her to come out here. Two of them are in Oklahoma.

S.J.: When she came back to Oklahoma did she tell you favorable things about California? Things that made you want to come here?

Davis: No. She said she would never come back. She hated the place. It was just my husband and friends talking that made me want to come. We went together four years before we married and it was always our talk that when we could get married we were going to go to California.

S.J.: Did you have a general impression of what California was like or perhaps what it looked like?

Davis: I just can't recall what kind of an impression I did have before I got here. When I come off of Bear Mountain down into Arvin that was the most beautiful place I'd ever seen--the way those farms are laid out down there. 'Course back in Oklahoma you run upside of a hill and down a hill farming. They don't level land too much back there and they don't irrigate so they didn't have to have their land level like they do out here. So all the ideas that I had in my head about it I guess were when I saw that Arvin for the first time.

S.J.: How about when you first came across the border into California into the desert? That must have been very disappointing. That probably didn't seem at all what you thought California was.

Davis: No it didn't. We stopped out there on the desert out around Needles to help those people fix their car that was broke down. It was in August but I can't recall it being too hot out there. It was early in the morning when we stopped--about daylight--when we seen these people and we stopped. 'Course we had the car fixed in just a little while so we didn't set out there on the desert like some people did. I know I had one sister that came to California and they were back over in Arizona and their car broke down on the desert somewhere coming from Blythe into Desert Center and she just about died. She had two small sons. It just about killed them out there but we never had problems like that.

S.J.: How about when you came across the border? Do you remember having to stop?

Davis: Yes I do. They went through our car with a fine-tooth comb. We had picked some cotton in Oklahoma just before we left. We had cotton sacks and we knew we could pick cotton in California so we brought those cotton sacks with us. They took them away from us at the border. They wouldn't let us have them on account of the boll weevil. They was afraid we would bring it from Oklahoma to California. They took that away from us. We was parked at the inspection place. Right behind us was a carload of black people coming across and they had some food. They was going to take that away from them and the people said no they were going to sit down here and eat every bite of this. They had potato salad. I remember that girl sitting there eating that potato salad and they ate every bit of their food. They wouldn't let them take it away. Which I don't blame them. But they took our cotton sacks and I suppose that's all they took from us.

When we got over here and got a job picking cotton, Lester Frick bought cotton sacks for us.

S.J.: When they took the sacks away from you at the border and asked to take the other people's food, did you feel that that was unnecessary--that they were rude or not treating you very well?

Davis: No, because I was raised that people in authority know more about what they're doing than I do. To me they just knew what they were doing so they had to take those sacks. It didn't bother me a bit. They weren't rude or anything. One of my sisters tells me I'm just too easy on the world anyway but I've got along pretty good being that way. Even if a person is rude to you I can't see being rude back to them. I wasn't raised that way.

Another time we had been back to Oklahoma and my mother and father-in-law was with us. He had got some plants of some kind in Oklahoma and before we got to the border he took them out of the car and put them in his pocket so he could get across with them. I don't remember what it was. I don't know if they would have taken it from him or not, but he wanted whatever it was he had. They didn't take too many things away from people because people didn't have very many things to bring with them.

S.J.: Did you ever hear about the Los Angeles sheriff going to the border in California and stopping some of the Okies?

Davis: Yes, I heard about that. I heard that he went to Yuma at the border and Needles too. I don't know if he done it or not but I'm pretty sure that he tried to do it. I read about it years later. I read a book about the sheriff going down there and trying to stop the people from coming in and I just can't

remember what that book was but I would give anything in the world if I could remember and get it again and read it. But we never had problems like that.

S.J.: Did you ever think of going someplace other than California?

Davis: No. When I was a child growing up there was only one other place that I wanted to go to. I wanted to go to Galveston, Texas because I had a girl friend whose father worked for the railroad and they got a free train ride to Galveston, Texas every summer. About five years ago I went to Galveston, Texas and it was a dirty old place!

In the thirties there were flowers on the side of the mountain in Arvin. People could go not only up the Bear Mountain Boulevard up out of the mountain but they could go on what was the Tejon Ranch. They would open the gates to let people go in there on the weekends to see those flowers. They were just beautiful. The whole mountainside was covered. We could stand in our yard and see the flowers blooming but we always went up there too. In the spring it was just car after car after car of people going up there. They let them in through there to drive up there and see the flowers. They don't do that now. But it was a beautiful place and we spent a lot of time there. I never took any pictures. I don't know why I didn't. I guess I just didn't think of it.

You could take a picnic lunch and go up there on the side of that mountain and set there all day long and have a picnic. That's what we would do a lot of times and it was the most beautiful place you'd ever see. I think the people think Arvin, Lamont and Weed Patch are Okie towns, but they was beautiful places then. I haven't been to Arvin in years but I'm sure Arvin is a good town just like all the rest of the small towns around here. The people from Oklahoma, Texas and Arkansas made the towns. They built them up and they own their homes there and they've lived there over forty years. I have nothing to say against any of the towns and I don't like to hear anybody else call them Okie towns. Because you don't have to be from Oklahoma, Texas or Arkansas to be an Okie. My definition of Okie is trash. Well, we're not trash. I'll grant you there's some down there in those towns that is trash but they've made themselves what they are and they didn't have to do it because they could have come out of it like the rest of us did. There was no need for people to go on down in the trash--in the gutter--like some of them did. And giving Oklahoma, Texas and Arkansas the bad name that they gave them too. I don't feel sorry for those people.

S.J.: Do you think that there are just as many people that are white trash that didn't come from Oklahoma? They came from some other place?

Davis: I do, yes.

S.J.: Because of the circumstances at the time the word Okie seemed to be synonymous with white trash.

Davis: Okie is just a short word for Oklahoma like Arkie and Tex, but there was people from other places that never seen either one of the three states that is just trashy as people that left there in the Depression and came out here. When they lived down here on the river there was one woman I knew from my home town that lives right in Bakersfield here somewhere and she wouldn't tell people that she was from Oklahoma because she didn't want them calling her an Okie. She'd tell them she was from Arizona and I said, "What's the difference between people from Oklahoma and from Arizona?" But she would not tell people she was from Oklahoma. Well I'm proud of Oklahoma. I've lived here most of my life but I'm proud of that state. It's a beautiful state and I'm proud to be from the state.

S.J.: When they started using the term Okie in the thirties did it immediately have a negative connotation? Did that mean trash at the time?

Davis: A lot of people resented being called an Okie or an Arkie. They did. They resented it. I didn't give it much thought at all one way or the other because I didn't live in the labor camp too long and that's where most of the Okies and Arkies lived. People will still call somebody a stupid Okie. Well we're not stupid. Some of them are but not all.

S.J.: Do you think the use of the word has changed through the years? Perhaps it was used in one way in the thirties and now it's used differently. Does it have a more negative connotation now?

Davis: I don't know now. I seldom ever hear the word now. Now my girls were born and raised here but they'll say something about a stupid Okie every once in a while. That's just talk with them and outside of that I never hear anybody called an Okie anymore. My son got married to a girl from Arkansas. She and I were in the kitchen talking one time and I said, "That's just some stupid Arkie a-talking like that," and I thought, "Oh Lord, I said it now, haven't I?" Got off to a good start with her. As far as ever hearing the words Okie or Arkie, I seldom ever hear them anymore.

S.J.: Do you think people just don't understand that there are two meanings to the word Okie?

Davis: People don't want to understand that there's two different meanings to it. Some people just want to call the Okies trashy Okies. That's all they want. That's the way some people look

at them. Even if I wasn't from Oklahoma I wouldn't say things like that about people. Now there's one family I met from Oklahoma and they were Okies. They had eight kids and honest to goodness that woman and those kids never took a bath. We lived on a ranch and they moved on it. They never took a bath and they never combed their hair. They used to call them typical Okies because they were the typical people that came from Oklahoma that had the trashy name. Their kids are all grown and married now. They still live the way their mother raised them. And their mother's dead but they still live that same way. And you know there's no reason for anybody to live that way nowadays because a bar of soap don't cost much and they could go to the river and take a bath if there was no other way.

END OF TAPE 3, SIDE 2

S.J.: Did it bother you very much that trashy people like that were giving Okies a bad name?

Davis: At that time it did. My kids were the same age as the kids in that dirty family and they went to school together and played together--so I would keep my kids clean. In fact, one of the girls my oldest daughter was with all the time would come to my house and I'd make her take a bath.

S.J.: Do you remember if your children ever had any problems at school or with other kids?

Davis: No. I know a lot of people say they [the Okies] were mistreated when they came out here in the thirties. I can't really say that. I don't recall anybody trying to mistreat us for any reason whatsoever because all we were doing was just trying to make a living. When they had that strike in the fall of 1937 we would just go and set down in the middle of the field till they'd leave and then we'd go back to work.

S.J.: Have you read The Grapes of Wrath or seen the movie? The story that Steinbeck told was read by a lot of people who accepted that stereotype of the Okie.

Davis: I think Steinbeck exaggerated in that book and that's why I said that somebody should write another one--a sequel to that. Because I really think he exaggerated a lot. I remember one scene with Henry Fonda when he was trying to find a can to get something to eat out of in the pile of trash. I don't think

anybody done that--especially people like the Joad family. They was trying--that's for sure. And I think he just downgraded them.

S.J.: He painted them as a very crude people whose only real concern was existing--continuing to eat and sleep and live--and they really didn't ever look beyond that. And he painted them as crude and ignorant.

Davis: And I think he exaggerated on that. I think Henry Fonda done a good job in that movie and I don't know anything about making movies but I don't think they could have got me--if I'd been Henry Fonda--to have made that movie. I mean if he had any respect at all--if he had known anything about the people in the San Joaquin Valley from Oklahoma, he wouldn't have done it.

S.J.: Can you remember some other ways in which Steinbeck stretched the truth? We said that he painted them as very ignorant and crude people and that he had them digging through garbage cans and things like that. Can you remember any other ways that he misrepresented them?

Davis: Back in the thirties people didn't use language then like they do now. They just didn't say anything at all. My husband seldom ever said a word and if I ever said a word more than darn when I was a child growing up, my parents got me. Steinbeck was writing this and I think he exaggerated there about the language. Some one of them died on the road out here and they stopped and buried them side of the road. I don't think there was any state in the United States that would let anybody do that and get by with it. Not even back then in the thirties. I don't know--I could be wrong, but I don't believe they would. So I think there was a lot of things in there that he exaggerated about.

S.J.: Have you found when most people think of Okies they immediately think of Steinbeck and that's the impression they have of Okies?

Davis: I think they do. The people from Oklahoma do not have any use for Steinbeck. The biggest majority of people in Oklahoma didn't want it [the movie] showed in Oklahoma. And I don't blame them. I wouldn't either after I went and seen it. But I didn't see it for years after it come out. I didn't want to see it. I guess it was ten years before I seen it. Then I saw it on television. I read the book a couple of times but it's been years since I've even read the book or seen it on T.V. There was a lot of things I think he exaggerated about. That's the reason why I keep saying somebody should write another one and if I knew how to write one I'd write it.

S.J.: Do you think that the book and the movie <u>The Grapes of Wrath</u> had very much to do with the views people have had of Okies? Do you think it really had a great deal to do with the bad views of Okies?

Davis: I think so. But Eugene Burmeister told me that when he retired he would write another one. 'Course it's going to take him years to write a book. He's going to have to talk to a lot of people to learn what went on. Now this deal with these people from England--I'm sure he's got every bit of that.

S.J.: Could you tell me a little bit more about that? It was called When Havoc Struck and it was part of a series that the BBC [British Broadcasting Company] was doing?

Davis: Yes, the BBC was doing it. It was When Havoc Struck. They filmed some of it in Oklahoma and some here. It was a thirty-minute episode. In fact, I'm not sure, but I think I was the only one that was in California around Kern County that was in it. I'm not sure. I could have been mistaken.

S.J.: Were you interviewed?

Davis: Yes. I'm sure that Mr. Burmeister has all the information on this. He could probably give you the information that the BBC researched. I would think he'd have it.

S.J.: Do you think they gave an accurate representation of what happened?

Davis: Yes, I think they did because they talked to the people in Oklahoma and people that had never left Oklahoma that stayed through the dust storms. I think it was older people that lived through it so it was accurate to the best that people could remember.

S.J.: Do you think that possibly this series--When Havoc Struck--was better than The Grapes of Wrath or other articles?

Davis: Yes, because it told the truth. The people in Oklahoma that had stayed lived through the dust storm. They knew what went on and they told it the way it was because they were country people and they had lived their life on those farms back there in Oklahoma and they were just telling it like it was. And so I think that that told it more than anything else -- more than what Steinbeck done in that long book of his.

S.J.: Do you think there was something about the Okies--perhaps their language, the way they dressed or the food they ate--that made people recognize them as Okies?

Davis: Maybe the food they ate because that's one thing that was different out here. Still the people from Oklahoma eats different from the way they do in California. People in Oklahoma raises their own food--most of it--in their gardens. They eat beans, fried potatoes and corn bread. It's just different from what

they do out here. My nephews that was born and raised out here will come over once and a while and want me to cook some beans and corn bread. So I set them all down and cook a lot of it. Now I don't like it. I don't like beans and I don't like corn bread. But that's the way most people were raised.

S.J.: When they came out here to California, did most of the Okies continue to eat the way they did in Oklahoma?

Davis: Yes. For one thing, the potatoes were raised down there at Arvin and they didn't have to buy them. They could just take them home out of the fields. They continued to eat the way they did in Oklahoma. That's one thing that wasn't exaggerated in Steinbeck but they didn't do like he showed. Even the people on the way out here--the people that loaded up their trucks and brought their families and come to California had their things with them to cook and eat by the side of the road. They didn't have to get out and dig in the trash for those things because they had their plates and everything right along with them. So there's where Steinbeck exaggerated I think.

I don't think that there was anybody that had to do that on their way out here and after they got here. We got a place to live, and we went to second-hand stores and bought enough for us to get by with. I think he exaggerated terrible there.

S.J.: When you first came out here and money was a little tight as you were traveling from job to job, were there some kinds of food that you found you couldn't have because you couldn't afford them?

Davis: There was foods that we couldn't have because we just didn't have the money. We eat basic foods. We didn't eat meat every day but we bought the other things. We eat a lot of fruit and none of us have any problems that even look like we ever suffered from malnutrition. That would be the biggest majority of the people. We didn't take vitamins but we had the fresh fruits. I think we ate more fresh fruit than people do now because it was there for us to pick it off the tree and eat. We had any amount of it we wanted. The potatoes are a starchy food. People shouldn't eat too many of them. But we had a lot of vegetables that were grown around too. So we didn't have any problems. If we didn't have money we always had food put away that would keep. And we had the fresh fruit any time--practically any time--we wanted it.

S.J.: How about the Okie accent?

Davis: Well, do you think I still have it? On those tapes, yes.

S.J.: A lot of people recognize that someone is from Oklahoma from the accent.

Davis: I can go back to Oklahoma now to my sister's house and I get on the phone and call somebody and they will think it's her. And she's lived there all her life. When my youngest daughter was small I'd take her back to Oklahoma and stay two weeks and Lord, it took me six months to straighten that girl out with her talking.

S.J.: I talked to some people that had a few problems with it. People would hear their accent and look down on them or criticize them for it. Did you ever have any problems with that?

Davis: No. I can't believe that I ever talked that southern accent like my relatives in Oklahoma do. I just set and laugh at them when I go back there. But my sister and I talk just alike.

S.J.: When you went to public places, to stores to buy things or to church or to a movie house or restaurant, did you encounter any difficulties?

Davis: No, because all the people were from Oklahoma too.

S.J.: Most of the people that you came in contact with were also from Oklahoma?

Davis: Oklahoma, Texas or Arkansas, yes, and I suppose they all talked the same way. I never was one to put the emphasis on the way a person talked or anything.

S.J.: I've talked to a couple ladies that went into a store and maybe because of their accent or possibly the way they were dressed the clerk knew they were Okies and didn't treat them well.

Davis: That was back in the thirties?

S.J.: Yes, back in the thirties.

Davis: Well, I was never treated that way. I can't recall ever a time anybody doing me that way.

S.J.: Did you feel like you fit in the community then--you felt comfortable wherever you went?

Davis: Yes, I did. I guess because wherever I go I can talk to people. I'm one of them that puts my foot in my mouth every time I open it, but nobody pays any attention to me when I do it. You talked to those two women--I think they were going around looking for it. That's what I think. They were going around with a chip on their shoulder because they were from Oklahoma. At that time we were all from Oklahoma, and we were all Okies. This friend of mine wouldn't tell people she was from Oklahoma. One time I went to see her. She was living in a tent and it was pouring down rain. She didn't even have a platform on that tent and water was rolling through that tent and I said if some of your friends could see you now, they'd know you was an Okie.

END OF TAPE 4, SIDE 1

S.J.: You said you had three children. I wonder if you'd tell me a little more about them and what they're doing now.

Davis: My oldest daughter is living in Shafter and she's a housewife. She works part time. She has three children--a 21-year old son, and 18-year old daughter and a 5-year old baby. We worked with her husband's family on the Hoover Ranch in 1938 before he was born. He works for Bakersfield Ag-Chem. He has a good job. My son was born in 1946 and he has three children. He was born with an ulcer so we had problems with him until he was about twelve years old. He's a deputy sheriff in Tulare County and doing real good. We're proud of him. My youngest daughter was born in 1951 in Bakersfield. They were all born in Kern County. She's got one little boy and she's working at Memorial Hospital. She's divorced.

My husband passed away in 1972. He worked on the farms all the time up until about 1952 and he then went in a shop as a welder. He got sick in 1970. He had cancer and he passed away in 1972 and of course everybody knows when you have cancer--especially for two years--how much it can cost. When he passed away I was completely bankrupt. His doctor and hospital bills was over $50,000 and all I had was $4,000 insurance when he passed away so I've made it real good. I draw his social security now. I'm not rich by any means, but I get by.

S.J.: Looking back on things over the years, are you glad that you did come out here and stay?

Davis: Oh yes. I just thank the Lord every day for leaving Oklahoma and coming out here. Even back in the thirties I did. We came to California for new horizons and it wasn't here, but we struggled and we made it.

S.J.: Do you think people have been better off here than they might have been back in Oklahoma?

Davis: I'm sure they have. My husband was like me. He didn't get much of an education. He finished eighth grade--same as I did--so he knew nothing but farm work and the farm was nothing in Oklahoma. The farms were small and everybody done their own work. The farmer owned the land and he tilled the land himself. A few of them hired help but not much and they didn't pay anything. No, I would not go back to Oklahoma. I am proud that I came to California and I am proud to call California my home because to me it is home.

I came out here when I was nineteen years old and I'm 62 years old now so my life has been in California. But I wouldn't give up my growing up in Oklahoma. I get homesick to go home to see my family occasionally. I try to go back every year but it's getting harder every year to go back.

S.J.: So you still have ties there with your other brothers and sisters?

Davis: Yes. My sister's coming out March 15. I'm having surgery March 1 and then she's coming to stay awhile with me. I'm really going to enjoy that. I've never regretted coming to California even when I was here for four long years and didn't see anybody but one brother, I still wouldn't have went back to live if my family had known what I was going through out here. I'm sure my father did know because he talked to other people that come out here and went back.

There was one man that I met when I first come into the Arvin Labor Camp. He was standing there and he knew me because he knew my father and anybody from Garvin County that sees any of my family knows us. He said he never thought he would see one of the Beddos in California. He went back and I'm sure he told my father how the living conditions and everything were out here, but my father never said a word to me about it. And as long as I would write to him at least once a month he never said a word about how we was getting along. He knew that I knew if I needed help all I had to do was write and tell him. But we made it on our own.

END OF INTERVIEW

From The Shafter Press

Clara Davis gives TV crew lowdown on Labor Camps

MRS. CLARA DAVIS joins the crew for the British television documentary "When Havoc Struck" filmed at the Shafter Labor Camp. Her son Wayne Davis, a member of the Shafter Police Force, is at her right.

Giving authenticity to a documentary about farm labor camps recently was Mrs. Clara Davis, a Shafter resident, who was interviewed on camera for the film and supplied the producer with first hand information about what it was like back in the Dust Bowl days.

The documentary "When Havoc Struck" is being produced by Associated Television of London and will be shown in both England and the United States. It was filmed here on July 14.

Mrs. Davis was selected when the local police department was contacted and her son Wayne Davis recommended her as one who had actually come from Oklahoma in the 1930's and had lived at both Sunset Labor Camp in Arvin and at the Shafter Labor Camp.

The Davises lived on th Frick Ranch in 1937 an worked on the Cobb Ranc for the Cobb's son-in-lav Jack Stoltz. In 1938 the came to Shafter and lived i the homes at the local cam at various times until 195 Those homes have recentl been torn down.

"It was lots of fu working with the Englis crew", Mrs. David report "but I didn't get to se Glenn Ford. They wante to know if I recognized th descriptions in *Grapes Wrath*, and I said I did, bu I didn't think it was fair t the Okies. They ought t have a follow-up to sho what has happened to the forty years later."

Mrs. Davis expects t hear more from her ne friends and to get som information from Englan for a family history she compiling.

Labor Camp TV film--

"When Havoc Struck," a television series which will feature Kern County labor camps, began showing recently with episodes on a Florida hurricane and the Hindenburg disaster. The segement on labor camps will be part of the series, although the exact date of its showing has not been announced.

The Kern County segment was filmed here last summer with Mrs. Clara Davis as consultant.

The series is being aired on Cable Channel 2 or 7 and Fresno Channel 47 at 7:30 p.m. on Wednesdays.

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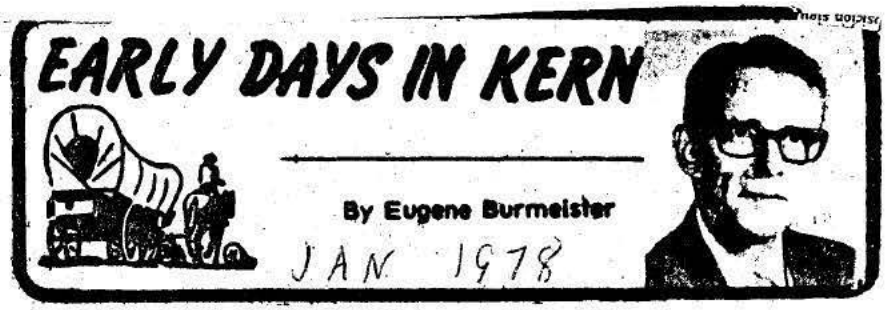
"Dust Bowl," an episode in the TV series "When Havoc Struck," will be braodcast tonight (Wednesday) at 7:30 p.m. on Channels 2 and 7. This episode was filmed in Kern County by a British crew last summer. Eugene Burmeister, who writes the *Press* column, "Early Days in Kern," and Mrs. Clara Davis of Shafter were asked to advise them on life in the labor camps during the 1930's. The episode features Glenn Ford as narrator.



Sequel to 'Grapes of Wrath'

There often are "spin offs" from these weekly columns. The latest was in response to "The Great Okie Migration," my column of Dec. 7.

Not only did I get a lot of phone calls and letters in response to that column, but Jeanette Wheeler recently wrote an excellent article for the Shafter Press, including an interview with Mrs. Clara Davis, which was published last week in the Tiller-Booster and Reporter, on John Steinbeck's Grapes of Wrath and the "Okie" migration of the 1930's.

Mrs. Davis wasn't the only one who suggested a sequel should be written to Steinbeck's Novel Prize for Literature novel. A number of readers called or wrote, suggesting that I write a sequel to Grapes of Wrath, showing the "Okies" 40 years later.

Flattering as that may be, I'm not at all sure I'm in the same league as John Steinbeck as a writer, and with a fulltime job to tend to, undertaking such a project is simply out of the question, anyway. My thanks, however, to those who put their trust in me to tackle such a writing project.

The Dec. 7 column was started last August, after I served as a consultant for a film crew from Associated Television in London who were filming a sequence at the Sunset Labor Camp, with Glenn Ford as narrator. From my suggestions, a number of changes were made in their script and Ford's narration. Mrs. Davis was on of those interviewed by ATV for showing in the British Isles in the fall.

The 12-weeks' series of "When Havoc Struck" will be shown here on television, starting this evening, Jan. 11. I don't know when the half-hour sequence on the Dust Bowl era and the great "Okie" migration will be shown, but it will be announced in the television guides.

Several other related things have happened. Reporters from a number of newspapers, including the Los Angeles Times, Kansas City Star, New York Times and Newsweek magazine contacted me last fall regarding information on the drought and the great migration. In November, I lectured to junior English and history classes from St. Francis High School at La Canada, which were bused to Sunset School, on Steinbeck, his novel and the labor camp history, and out of that came an invitation to lecture to several English classes at California State College, Bakersfield.

Also, a sociology major at the University of California, Berkeley, was referred to me for assistance, and I have been helping her with her theses on the great migration for her master's degree.

And, I have a standing invitation from the ATV film crew to join them for a spot of tea, I assume they meant tea, when I get back to London.

What happened to the Okies?

by Jeanette Wheeler

The drought in California the past two years and the recent dust storm recalled for many people the situation in the Middle West in the 1930's, when drought was followed by high winds, which blew away any hopes of making a living on a family farm. Farmers in Oklahoma, Arkansas, and Texas sold out and moved West.

Eugene Burmeister in his column in the Shafter Press, "Early Days in Kern County", maintains that the dust storms were not the only factor in the move. There were many other factors also at work, including the age-old "westering" impulse that had populated most of the country in earlier days. The dream of "going to California" was there long before the bad weather and the economic crisis which followed the stock market crash of 1928, gave the final impetus.

The legend is that the "Okies" came to Kern County to find work after the dust storms ruined their farms, and big companies began buying up the mortgages. They weren't all farmers, and they weren't all from Oklahoma, but the epithet "Okie" was given to all who came to California in that movement in the 1930's, whether it was from Oklahoma, Texas, Arkansas, or any of those dust bowl states.

The Joad family in John Steinbeck's Grapes of Wrath were taken to be the archetype of the Okie. Pa Joad sells his farm when the drought takes his crop. The whole family, including Ma, Grandpa, Sister Roseann and her husband, and brother Tom, just out of prison, pile what they can of their belongings into an old truck and head west to pick grapes in Kern County. The story recounts the breakdowns along the way, the shortage of cash to buy gas, and the eventual arrival at a government labor camp in the San Joaquin Valley. At the end they are not much better off than when they started, with Ma Joad proclaiming the dignity and unity of the family.

But it didn't end there in real life. There are people in the Shafter area who made the trip from Oklahoma, or one of the other states, who know what happened after that. Some of them feel there needs to be a sequel to The Grapes of Wrath to show the Okies forty years later.

One who knows first hand what the Okie experience was like is Mrs. Clara Davis, who lives at 326 West Ash Street in Shafter. Recently, when she acted as a consultant for a British television crew, making a film about Kern County labor camps, she told them there ought to be another story about what happened to the Okies since the dust bowl days. Her story is typical

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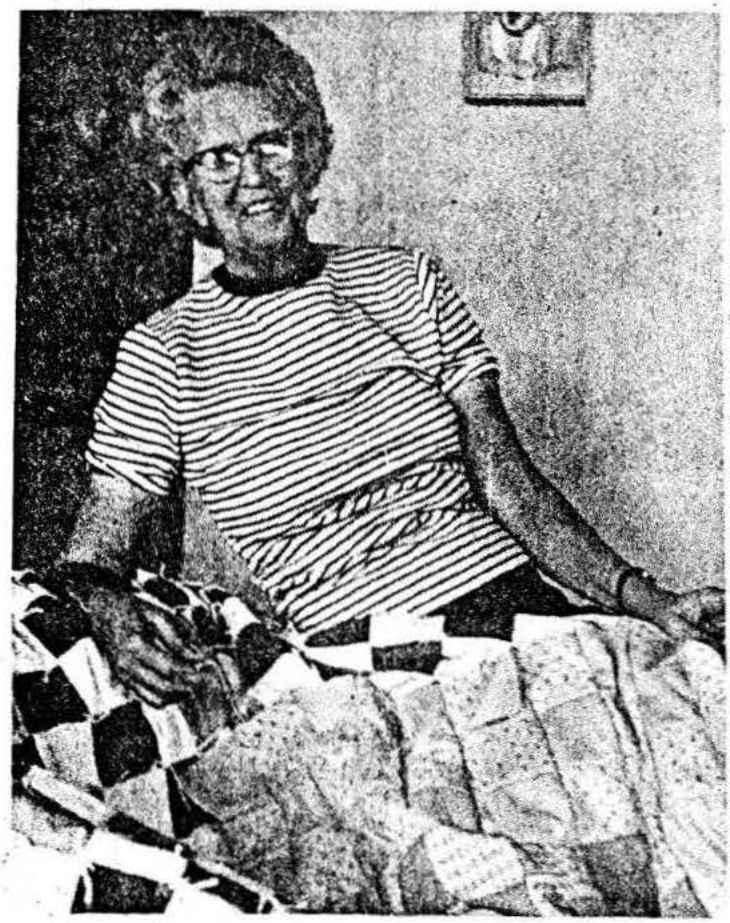

CLARA DAVIS, who came to California in 1937, tells the story of the Okies, forty years later.

She had just married Arthur Davis in Paul's Valley, Oklahoma in July, 1937. She was nineteen and he was 23. He had job cutting broom corn, which barely kept them alive. One day a cousin of Arthur's came with his wife on their way out west. He persuaded Arthur and Clara to join them. It had always been a dream of Clara's to go to California, and even though they had no money, they now had transportation in their cousin's Model A.

They left on a Monday morning and took turns driving. In the Mojave Desert between Needles and Barstow they came upon another family, a couple and three children from Duncan, Oklahoma, who had broken down. The boys helped them fix the car, and then offered to help the man, the only driver in their group, to do the driving. The family was on their way to join their folks in Arvin. By Saturday night they all arrived at the Sunset Labor Camp and had a place to stay.

By September, they had a job picking cotton for Lester Frick, at his ranch south of Arvin, and were provided a two-room cabin there. They went to second-hand stores and furnished the cabin with a stove, a bed, and table, some chairs and a few odds and ends of dishes and pans. Mr. Frick replaced the cotton sacks which the agricultural inspectors at the California border had confiscated, and they went to work.

"We liked the work", Clara recalls. "You were your own boss. You could pick or not as you pleased. When you got enough money, you could quit."

But then the strikes began. When the strikers came, Mr. Frick advised them just to go to a trailer he parked in the middle of the field and wait until they went away. The strikers would yell and throw stones, but they wouldn't come into the fields, Clara remembers.

After the cotton season, Davis went to work on the Cobb Ranch for Mr. Cobb's son-in-law, Jack Stoltz, driving a tractor. By the spring of 1938 he was looking for work again and the DiGiorgio farms were just beginning to hire help. There was a line-up every morning at 5:00 a.m. The foreman handed out numbers until he had enough workers each day, and those who were left would have to come back the next day and try again. Davis resolved to push in and get a number and finally got a job picking fruit.

Although they were constantly having to look for more work, in such places as Modesto and Marysville, the Davises were saving money, and managed to save $5.00 a month to buy a 1928 Graham-Paige automobile for $80.00.

In the fall of 1938, through neighbors who had relatives in Shafter, they heard that workers were needed at the Herbert Hoover Ranch located between Shafter and Wasco. There was a strike there, so they went after dark, one car at a time, and were met at the gate and escorted to a cabin. Mr. Davis' parents and his brother soon joined them, and they worked that winter pruning trees. In the summer they picked and dried the fruit, getting about four cents a box. By this time they had a three-room cabin on the ranch.

By 1941 they were able to make a trip home to Oklahoma to visit, with another couple going along to help with the expenses. In 1942 with the beginning of the war, they lived in the North Shafter Labor Camp when Art went to work for H.S. Giddings, a land developer. When W.B. Camp developed his new ranch near Pond, Art went to work for him and they lived in the new houses Camp built. The Davis' three children, Donna, Wayne and Clara Lee, were born there.

After the war, Davis worked for land developers, mostly at Maricopa Flats, south of Old River, for Oscar Banks of Wasco. It was a barren, isolated place, with a motel and one grocery store, 30 miles from Bakersfield.

Following a bout with spinal meningitis in 1950, Davis found the land-leveling too difficult for him and found a job with Maricopa Seed Farms in the welding and machine shop. Then he joined a brother-in-law in Marena, Arizona, in his machine shop, but the shop failed and had to be sold. He tried land-leveling again at 75 cents an hour, but in 1954 they moved back to Shafter, where he worked in the machine shop for E.M.H. Mettler for the next 14 years. When he retired in 1970, he had been working for Frank Russell since 1967.

Mr. Davis passed away in 1972 after a long illness which took all their savings. Mrs. Davis was still too young for widow's pension, and since they had a lived in housing pro by their employer, sh no home of her own had worked picking packing fruit and also i potato sheds, but i longer able to do work. Recently, her f helped her to get Su mental Security inc and she has a two bed home in the federal ho in Shafter.

"You don't have rich to enjoy life", explains. Nowadays makes quilts, sews herself and her family enjoys reading. Her and her daughters nearby and see her c and she enjoys her s grandchildren.

She treasures a f history written in 192 A.F. Beddoe, M.D Dallas, Texas, the he the American branch c family. The Beddoes their ancestry back to drydd, Prince of the Royal Tribe of Wale 1100 A.D. Each family a recordkeeper, the sponsibility being ha down from father to through the centuries. family crest is a stag's pierced with an arrow, they are entitled to a co arms bearing the m "Let justice be though the heavens fa

It was this sens justice, perhaps, w promoted Mrs. Davi respond as she did to story of the Okies as to others. It is her sens history, inspired by family record-keep which suggest the nee continue the story.

The Shafter Press believes that the stor the Okies, forty years l

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should be told. In the weeks to come, the histories of families living here who came to Kern County from the Middle West in the 1930's will be recounted. To do this requires the cooperation of those fa ies in notifying us of t presence and telling their stories.

Call Jeanette Wheele 746-4942 if you know story of such a family or help us find one wit story to tell.

Burleson Walker Beddo
b. 1881, Texas
[His parents from Texas]

Dolly May Malicoat
b. 1892, Oklahoma
[Her parents from Oklahoma]

Clara Barton Beddo

b. 1918, Pauls Valley, Garvin Co., Oklahoma

Education: 8th grade

Church: Church of God

m. 1937 →

Arthur Lee Davis
b. 1915, Oklahoma

Clara Lee Davis Smithson
b. 1943
Housewife

Wayne Earl Davis
b. 1946
Deputy Sheriff

Donna Marie Davis Beatty
b. 1951
Housewife

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