

CALIFORNIA STATE COLLEGE, BAKERSFIELD

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

Interview Between

INTERVIEWEE:	Thomas J. Smith
PLACE OF BIRTH:	Le Flore County, Indian Territory, Oklahoma
INTERVIEWER:	Michael Neely
DATES OF INTERVIEWS:	March 4 and 16, 1981
PLACE OF INTERVIEWS:	Visalia, Tulare County
NUMBER OF TAPES:	5
TRANSCRIBER:	Barbara Mitchell

PREFACE

Mr. Smith was an enjoyable and interesting subject. He has an exceptional ability to recall the details of his past experiences. He is bright and has a slightly mischievous twinkle in his eye. In our off-tape conversations his affection and devotion to his wife and family was always evident. He remains active and forward-looking in his viewpoint.

Michael Neely
Interviewer

PREFACE

Mr. Smith was an enjoyable and interesting subject. He has an exceptional ability to recall the details of his past experiences. He is bright and has a slightly mischievous twinkle in his eye. In our off-tape conversations his affection and devotion to his wife and family was always evident. He remains active and forward-looking in his viewpoint.

Michael Neely
Interviewer

CALIFORNIA STATE COLLEGE, BAKERSFIELD

CALIFORNIA ODYSSEY

The 1930s Migration to the Southern San Joaquin Valley

Oral History Program

Interview Between

INTERVIEWEE: Thomas Smith (Age: 77)

INTERVIEWER: Michael Neely

DATED: March 4, 1981

M.N.: This is an interview with Mr. Thomas Smith for the California State College, Bakersfield, CALIFORNIA ODYSSEY Project by Michael Neely at 2216 Sallee Lane, Visalia, California on March 4, 1981 at 2:00 p.m.

M.N.: I'd like to start with the first thing that you can remember as a child.

Smith: I must have been seven years old. We lived about three miles from school and walked a trail down through the timber. There were some older children going along. They got to telling me that the teacher was really rough, that he was going to get me when I got there. The teacher didn't even know I existed. I said, "If he's that tough, I'll not go. I'll show him how tough I am." I didn't go. They went on to school. I climbed up this big tree and waited till they came back that evening. That went on for three days. My older sister told me the third evening that this had gone far enough. The next day I went to school and the teacher was glad to find out who I was.

That was the start of my education in School District Number 35 at Oaklodge, Oklahoma in Le Flore, County. It was a red brick building. It had two rooms and a sliding partition in between. I went one year to the high school in Spiro, Oklahoma. Then I left Oklahoma and rode a freight train to California.

M.N.: By yourself?

Smith: Yes. Rode a freight train back. I was 17. After I got back to Oklahoma I went to work. I worked in the oil fields around Seminole, Oklahoma in El Dorado, Arkansas and in Smackover, Arkansas. Then I went to work for my half-brother on a farm over in Sequoyah County, Oklahoma along about 1923. In the summer of 1923 I met my wife. We were both hoeing cotton and she got behind with her row. I got out first and I turned around and helped her out. She thought that was pretty good. We got acquainted and in about a year and a half we got married.

M.N.: What was your father like?

Smith: I don't remember too much about my parents. My father passed away in 1916. I was 13. I was born in 1903. My mother passed away in 1928.

My father and I used to hunt together. It is the one specific thing that I remember. He worked on the Santa Fe Railroad in the mountains down in Talihina, Oklahoma and Mena, Arkansas. He would come home once every six weeks. We were farmers in the meantime.

I had two older sisters who married. My older brother married and moved away. I worked on the farms and around town at roustabout jobs after my father died. I don't have one of his pictures. He was a small man. He was part French and part German. He weighed 150 pounds and was probably five feet seven inches. My mother was a large woman. She was Dutch and Cherokee Indian. She weighed probably 165 pounds. She passed away after I got married.

M.N.: Was your father strict?

Smith: He was a strict person in certain ways. I remember that we never did work on Sunday. We could go to the horse races, the ball game or the poker game all day on Sunday but no work. The other six days we worked. We usually worked five and a half days. The latter half of Saturday we did what we wanted. Sunday we could do anything but work. We couldn't harness up, couldn't do plowing, hauling wood, hauling hay, or any kind of work.

I remember we went to a Ringling Brothers Circus which came to Fort Smith, Arkansas. We lived about sixteen miles over in Oklahoma. We caught the train at a little flag stop way out in the country. We flagged the train down. Dad took us over there in a wagon. We went to the circus and we came back late in the evening. It snowed. Dad came back and met us at the train. There was snow on the ground.

I remember very distinctly that the conductor got down, put the foot stool down and helped my mother down to the ground. The train started moving and I got afraid that they were going to take me on down the road. I got excited and I ran and jumped off the observation platform on the back. I dived off right onto my hands and face. I got scratched up a little. Daddy was standing over there holding the mules. They were trying to break loose and run. He didn't say a word until he got Mother in the wagon. He got my brother in the wagon. He went around and took one of the hitch reins down off the mule's harness. He said, "Come here, son." He said, "I'm going to learn you not to jump off another train." He doubled that hitch rein and gave me about five or six good licks. With that he said, "The next time you ride a train, you stay on it till they tell you to get off." I didn't forget that. That stuck with me. I had on a pair of little knee pants that buckled below the knees. Had on a little bow neck tie, a little coat, some kind of a hat with a short narrow brim on it. I had my hair cut short. They didn't wear long hair.

My mother wore a large coat. It was a dark brown color. She had her hair done up in a wig on top of her head. She wore a bonnet over to the train and then she took the bonnet off and left it in the wagon. She put it back on her head when we went back home in the wagon.

My younger brother wore a little suit. The coat was kind of a grey color and the pants were a little bit darker color. He wore a blue shirt that Mother had made. This was a homemade shirt out of some material she called percale. My father wore a pair of big blue bibbed overalls and a blue checkered shirt with a big checkered coat. I don't remember the material. He wore a large hat. It wasn't a cowboy hat. It was a western high crowned hat.

M.N.: How come he didn't go with you?

Smith: I don't remember. He'd promised us all summer that we'd go to the circus that fall.

M.N.: Was it expensive to go to the circus?

Smith: No. It cost about 50¢ apiece to ride the train from this little place called Scullyville. It's an old Choctaw Indian name. It means Money Town. There wasn't any village there much. There were mostly Choctaw Indians around there. We rode from Scullyville over to Fort Smith on a branch of the Kansas City Southern Railroad. Now the road is deleted and the highway goes down the old right of way.

It was 50¢ apiece for me and my brother to enter the circus and a dollar for my mother. The peanuts, popcorn, Cracker Jacks and the red soda pop came in extra. I was excited. We got there early that morning. I remember the parade was moving back through town back toward the circus grounds. The horses came and pulled the wagons. They had the lions and the animals in the cages so you could see them. That's the first lion I'd ever seen. I'd never seen a camel. It had two humps. I said, "I wonder how that one got that way."

We had a good time and a great experience. When we got back home we told the older children about the circus. They couldn't believe us so Mother had to recite all the things and verify them. They couldn't understand. They hadn't been to the circus. Some of them were almost grown. It was a great life.

M.N.: How often did you get out of town?

Smith: We lived about three miles from town. We'd go to town probably twice a year. We'd go once in the spring and once in the fall. When we went in the spring we would buy spring clothes. In the fall of the year we'd buy our winter clothes. I remember very distinctly that Red Wine Brothers mercantile store in Spiro that we traded with. Their store was established in about 1898. I remember very distinctly getting a pencil in the spring of the year. We'd get a penny pencil. You don't hardly know what a penny

pencil is now. It had rubber on one end of it for an eraser. We cut that pencil in two. I'd get half of it. My younger brother would get the other half. That fall we'd get another pencil and I'd get the end that had the rubber eraser. We'd alternate back and forth.

M.N.: Did they last that long?

Smith: We'd make them last that long.

M.N.: Where did you get paper?

Smith: They had great big thick, five cent tablets with probably 200 pages of rough paper. It had a great big Indian on the front of this tablet. We would halve that tablet.

We would get a dime to buy a candy with. We wouldn't spend that dime all in one place. We'd buy a penny's worth of candy. We'd get five or six pieces for a penny. We'd go around somewhere else and spend another penny. We'd have part of that dime when we'd leave to go back home.

M.N.: Do you remember what Christmases were like?

Smith: We'd usually get a little toy wagon. Nearly all the toys then were tin. They didn't have plastic stuff like they do now. We'd get a little figurine of some kind. We'd get a little wagon. It was usually a buggy or wagon, a figurine, or some kind of a glass animal filled with candy. They're collector's items now. I remember one Christmas before my father passed away. He bought an old pump organ. The name of the organ was J.B. Thiery. It had a place up on each side where you set an old kerosene light and had a mirror on top. On Christmas why we were about the only people in the community that had a music box outside of a guitar, banjo or fiddle. They would gang up at our house at Christmas.

We sometimes had 25-30 neighbors around. We'd play games and different songs. Some of them were Christian songs. It was just fun. We would have wrestling matches, foot races and horse races. We'd have chicken fights. Somebody would bring an old Dominique rooster and an old Rhode Island Red rooster. They'd have these chicken fights. They didn't bet on them. It was just all fun. There wasn't any gambling.

M.N.: Did the men chew tobacco?

Smith: Most of the men chewed. They raised their own tobacco. They pulled the leaves when they were green, laid them down and sprinkled sugar on them, twisted them up kind of like cotton boll twist. It was a form of tobacco. It was just for their own use and for home consumption.

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

Smith: We farmed in the Arkansas River bottom. We grew cotton. Corn was our

main crop. Alfalfa was just beginning to come in as a hay crop. We harvested the cotton and the corn by hand.

M.N.: How did you pick the cotton?

Smith: You took a sack and put it over your shoulder. It had a strap on it. The bottom part of the sack came up probably six to eight inches closer to the body than the top part and made kind of a mouth. We just started down the row. We picked the bolls as we got it off the stalk out of the burr. You'd put it in your sack and when you got twenty-five to fifty pounds in the sack you would go to the scales and weigh it. They picked by the pound. I remember a lot of colored people worked for us. They picked cotton in the fall of the year.

My younger brother had the habit of nursing a baby's bottle with a nipple on it. Mother would do the weighing. We'd go to the field and my brother nursed this bottle until he was about seven years old. He'd stand up in the cotton wagon nursing this bottle. The colored people would bring the sack of cotton up to the scales to weigh it. They would laugh and tease him. They'd get a bang out of him nursing that bottle. They'd tell him, "When you get married, I guess your wife will have to fix you a nipple on a bottle. That's the way you'll drink milk. You'd better throw that bottle away boy."

M.N.: Did you have any other relations with black people?

Smith: After we sold out and quit farming, we moved to the edge of Oaklodge where the school was. We moved in close there and we farmed occasionally. We'd sold most of the livestock. The older children married and moved away. The family wasn't able to farm great acreage like we had.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 1

M.N.: You moved to the edge of town.

Smith: My father passed away right after that. He had a stroke. He was 78. He and I'd been duck hunting. We walked over the ridge and came back home that evening. We'd hunted most of the day. He had a stroke on the way home. We didn't think the stroke was real serious. It struck him in the right leg and in his foot and knee. We went on home. We didn't have hospitals and doctors available at that time. The inflammation kept going up into his hip. He couldn't walk too well. He limped. It got up to his shoulder and to his right arm. We finally went to a doctor. The doctor told my mother it was creeping paralysis. He said there's no cure for it at that particular time. He told us when it goes to the heart on the left side it will paralyze him. He'll pass away. He lived probably a year bedridden and passed away. It wasn't long after that I began to leave home to go off and work.

I remember his funeral. My father was buried in New Hope Cemetary about

three miles east of Spiro, Oklahoma. I remember the neighbors coming in. They didn't take the body to a mortuary. Neighbors went in and washed it, dressed it, and laid it out. Some of them made a coffin, dug the hole and made the opening in the cemetery and carried the body out. We had a graveside service.

People were closer in that day and time. They realized that they depended on one another. If a person got sick, why doctors weren't available and they would go sit up, give medicine, and take care of the family.

M.N.: Where did they get the medicine?

Smith: Usually from the doctor. He'd come by. They were circuit riding doctors. They rode horses and had a pill bag on each side of the saddle. Later they would come in old Model T cars.

M.N.: What were those old doctors like?

Smith: Most had a little mustache. Some of them had a little goatee on the front part of their chin. Most of them wore spectacles. They would prescribe medicine to the patient. They'd leave it right there. You didn't go to a drug store. If it was contagious they quarantined you. You'd put a yellow flag up in the front on the front yard gate or on a tree. That meant no one could leave or no one could go in.

M.N.: Did they charge a lot of money?

Smith: Not too much. Sometimes they'd pay them in money. Sometimes they'd take a side of bacon or frying chickens as payment. People trusted them. They trusted the people. The neighbors would come after the doctor left. He'd leave the medicine and formula for administering it. They would give the medicine. Maybe one or two would sit up this night and the other two the next.

If they got behind with their crop why the neighbors would come in with their teams, cultivators, hoes and a bunch of the children. They'd work and see that he didn't lose his crop. In the fall of the year, they'd come in three or four wagons and teams. They'd gather the corn and put it in the crib. They'd go over and pick Mr. So and So's cotton because he was sick.

Times have changed quite a bit but people are still basically good at heart. If people know that you're in need, they're just as considerate as they were then. There are a lot of good people around. You can depend on them.

M.N.: Let's talk about the time after your father's death.

Smith: I quit school. I was about 14. I went to working on the Kansas City

Southern Railroad. I was the water boy on a construction crew.

M.N.: What was that like?

Smith: I had a long rod of metal that had a hook on each end. I put it across the back of my neck and on my shoulders. I put my arms out to balance it. I had a bucket on each end and two tin cups. I tied them with a string. They hung down probably two feet. I would walk down the middle of the railroad track and the men on each side would get a drink of water. The crew would be a couple of hundred yards long. I'd turn around and come back.

I usually wore a pair of bib overalls. I got 50¢ a day. That was considered a good wage then for a teenager.

M.N.: This would be about 1917?

Smith: About 1918. I remember World War I. I remember my great-grandfather. He was very outspoken. He carried the mail from this little town Scullyville out to the railroad at Spiro, Oklahoma. He made a remark at the Post Office one day about the war. Three or four days later the sheriff came out. He didn't like what Granddad said about the war somehow. I don't remember what he said but he was always speaking his piece. Someone reported him to the sheriff. The sheriff came out and told him, "If you keep talking like that, I'm going to have to arrest you and put you in jail." I remember the sheriff rode a real dark grey horse. His name was Sheriff Monroe Self. He was a nice fellow. Everybody seemed to like him. He was a stern man, wasn't much foolishness.

He wasn't too big but he packed a big pistol. They used to say it was a Colt 45. He was a sheriff for several years in Le Flore County, Oklahoma.

I worked on the railroad and kept venturing a little farther from home and getting a little braver, a little bolder.

M.N.: Traveling with the crews?

Smith: I went to work for a different construction crew and I got acquainted with some older men. I was the youngest in this construction crew and it was a pretty rough crew. Gambling was the pastime every night. I soon found out that I could get just about anything I wanted by getting one of those older guys against the other. I guess that spoiled me. It wasn't long after that that I got the idea to come to California.

M.N.: How did you get that idea?

Smith: Well, I would see pictures in the geography book in school and read the history. I'd see pictures of California and far away places and they stayed in the back of my mind. I thought, "Someday I'm going to see those places." I never did forget that. After I got bigger, these men that I worked with talked me into going with them. We'd usually

ride a freight train. Hardly ever bought a ticket. Sometimes we'd see an ad in a paper that a certain type of labor was wanted in a certain area. We'd take this advertisement in and it was good for one pass to a certain town. The company would pick up the ticket for the pass. They'd reimburse the railroad company. Sometimes we'd just crawl into an empty box car and go down there.

It was rough times then. I worked down in Port Arthur, Texas. That was the end of the Kansas City Southern Railroad which ran from Kansas City, Missouri to Port Arthur, Texas.

M.N.: What did you do in Port Arthur?

Smith: I did practically the same work. A little later on I got a job as timekeeper. I had had part of one year of high school. I was pretty high up on the totum pole. I'd write letters for these construction workers. A lot of these old construction workers couldn't even sign their own name. I'd sign their name and they'd make an X by the side of it. I'd pick up all kinds of favors that way. I'd say I'd write a letter to somebody, girl friends, parents or some of their relatives. I soon found out that I could manipulate people like that. I got to be a timekeeper.

M.N.: When you worked as the water carrier, where did you sleep?

Smith: They had tents that they traveled in. Some of these crews had what they called boarding cars with a kitchen in one car and three or four cars with bunks. We slept in those cars. They had what they called a crumb boss. He came through everyday and cleaned and swept out this car where we slept. He watched to see that no one came in and carried off anything. People would sometimes catch snakes out in the job and bring them in and put them in one another's bed. He'd go through it and turn the cover back. Sometimes they'd catch a skunk and bring it in and turn it loose.

The crumb boss was at this particular time from Louisiana. He'd tell me stories about Lake Charles, Louisiana, New Orleans, Alexandria and the Mardi Gras. He was a colored person and his wife did the cooking. She cooked in the boarding car. He was the boss over those cars.

M.N.: Did he take care of you?

Smith: Yes. He took a liking to me. I kind of manipulated him too. His wife would slip me an extra piece of cake now and then. After we were supposed to go to bed, I'd go down to the kitchen and set and talk to them. I'd write letters for them. They couldn't write, couldn't read, couldn't sign their name. I'd write letters for them and we'd sit around and drink coffee.

She dressed in the typical style at that time. She had on a long skirt that dragged on the floor. You couldn't hardly see her feet. I don't

know what kind of shoes she wore. She had on an apron tied tight around her waist and she had on a blouse. She had a red or blue bandana tied over her head. Her hair was pulled back and tied in a knot behind her head. He was a typical man. He wore bibbed overalls and a pair of heavy brogan shoes. They were rough shoes like laborers shoes. They're a cheap grade of shoes. He wore a blue or red checkered shirt. In the dining car he always wore a checkered apron same as his wife did.

They were nice people. They claimed to be mulatto. They weren't real dark. They were kind of tan colored people. They were big hearted. They would play jokes on one another and they would take it in stride. They were always laughing, cutting up, and enjoying life.

M.N.: After you got to be a timekeeper.

Smith: After I got to be a timekeeper, I quit working for the Kansas City Southern Railroad. It was about 1919. I was around 16. I branched out a little bit. One of these older men that I was working with was five or six years older than me. We decided that we would work for another railroad company. We'd heard of a job over at Memphis, Tennessee. We were close to Port Arthur, Texas. We decided we'd go. We went up there and went to work for the Santa Fe Railroad. It was a little different, more adventuresome, more exciting. It was working on a bridge gang.

We built, repaired and painted bridges on the railroad over rivers, creeks and streams. You climbed up on the banisters on what we called the camel's back. A lot of people fell and got hurt. That's why they were always wanting laborers. An experienced bridge builder, painter, or repair man could go to work just about anywhere for nearly any railroad company. We worked our way up north from Memphis. We went from Memphis to Cape Girardeau, Missouri. When we got to Cape Girardeau the crew transferred over to what they called a maintenance crew.

At that time they didn't have containers. It was all redwood water tanks put up high. They'd fill these tanks with water and let a big spout down and fill the tank on behind the engine. They switched us over to that maintenance crew. We would go and repair those redwood tanks. They probably held five thousand gallons. We went back down the Santa Fe Railroad to Memphis. That took about a year's time. Then we got the idea that we were coming to California.

We started out for California. We caught a freight train and came up through the San Joaquin Valley, through Bakersfield, Fresno and on up to San Francisco. That was about 1919 or 1920.

M.N.: What was that Valley like?

Smith: It was pretty unsettled. We always stayed along the railroad track from one town to the other. We didn't get out in the country. There was a lot of sheep and cattle in the country. The farming was just beginning to get developed.

The farming industry was just on the ground floor. I remember 1921 Christmas Day down in the Imperial Valley. We were waiting to catch a freight train to go back across Arizona. We went out in a watermelon patch. Me and another boy picked watermelons on Christmas Day. That was in 1921 and was a big joke years later after we got back into Oklahoma. Folks thought I was telling a big story. They couldn't believe it.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 2

Smith: They couldn't believe that watermelons were growing on Christmas Day. Back there it was too cold. Nothing grows in the wintertime. I remember another story they didn't believe. I told about these giant redwood trees and I told about the General Sherman Tree up in Sequoia Park with enough lumber in it to build 55 three bedroom homes. It was one hundred and some odd feet to the first limb. It was six feet through. Some of them thought, "Now that boy, he's got to be the biggest liar I ever heard. A real big windjammer."

I had a dime when I left Oklahoma coming to California. The other guy with me had one big red onion.

M.N.: How did you eat?

Smith: We would stop at cafes. Let me go back just a little bit. Fred Harvey used to have a bunch of eating houses. He had the franchise for the railroad company, the Santa Fe from San Francisco to St. Louis I believe. He had eating houses in every depot on the railroad. In every town he had a Fred Harvey House. You could always go to Fred Harvey House and work out a meal. He never turned away nobody hungry but you had to work. He didn't believe in bums and hobos but if you'd work why you could go there and get something to eat. They were open day or night. That's the way we would eat. We'd get to town hungry. We'd go down and look up this eating joint down in the depot. It was nearly always in one end of the depot. We'd go in and wash dishes, mop the floors, or sweep out for something to eat.

M.N.: What would they feed you?

Smith: Stew, beans, bacon and just the average grub. They put out fancy food too. We'd usually wind up with a piece of apple pie and a cup of coffee for dessert.

We went down through Fresno, Bakersfield, Los Angeles, and on down. We got off somewhere in the Imperial Valley. We hitchhiked from there on over to Yuma, Arizona. It took us about three days. There wasn't much traffic.

M.N.: What was the road like?

Smith: It was a black top road. They called it macadamized road. It was something like the oil surface we have now. It was a hard surface,

narrow two-way road. I remember one place just over the line in California. The sand blew and it would cover up the road. It was a section possibly two or three miles long that was built out of lumber. They'd go along when the sand covered it. They'd lift this up, shake it, and let the sand fall down through the cracks in the slats. I remember going across that was a narrow one-way road. They had sections there where you could pull out and pass if you saw a car or wagon coming.

M.N.: They still had wagons?

Smith: A lot of people would just be going five or six miles from one farm to the other hauling a little produce or something.

After we got over in Yuma, Arizona we had had all the hitchhiking we wanted. We decided we'd go back to the freight train. We caught a freight train and went back across Arizona and New Mexico. I remember distinctly that I went to work at Williams, Arizona at a saw mill. It was a combination saw mill and lumber mill. We worked there for three or four weeks. It was in the wintertime. We got tired of that. I was working off-bearing from the cut off saw. They'd run this log through there and square it up. They fired the boilers with sawdust. That's where they made the steam. Electric motors were practically unheard of.

M.N.: Do you remember how much you were paid?

Smith: I got \$1.25 a day. I'd go to work at eight in the morning and work till six in the evening with an hour for lunch. I paid 25¢ a day for board. If you didn't have any money, which we didn't, we'd go over to the hotel. The lumber company owned the hotel. The men would go over to the employment office and they'd write us out a slip. We'd go over to the hotel and the manager would write us out what they called a bean book. It was a book with several meal tickets. Every time you ate, you took this book up to the manager and he tore out one of these tickets. They would issue \$2 books and \$3 books. When you used this book up you had to go back and get a new book. If you didn't have any money, they'd issue a book and then after you got a little money they expected you to buy the books.

M.N.: What was your room like?

Smith: I had a nice average room. Nothing fancy. They had a wash stand that was a dresser with a mirror in it and two or three drawers for your clothes. The wash basin was made out of blue granite and had a pitcher. We'd have to go outside and get water. We had to go outside to a faucet and they had a bath house outside. Just one big long bath house. Everybody took a bath out in the same building. We had an outside toilet.

M.N.: I've heard people say that they used Sears Roebuck catalogs for toilet paper. Is that true?

Smith: That's absolutely true. You'd whip a kid for throwing away a Sears Roebuck catalog as quick as you would for breaking a window. That was important stuff. You'd tear these pages out and there would be a little bit of that page left. You can't tear it completely apart. They may throw that in the fireplace or stove and burn that part of the catalog.

M.N.: You worked there three months?

Smith: I worked there for approximately three months. Then I went over to Gallup, New Mexico. It was a wild and wooly cow town. It was an Indian town. They wore the long hair and sat around on the street. Wasn't any money there much. I worked there for the railroad probably three weeks or a month. There were a lot of fights and killings. A lot of murders went unsolved.

M.N.: Did you carry a weapon?

Smith: No, I never did. I carried a hunting knife. I went and signed up for this extra gang. They had an extra gang that reinforced the section gang. They had a section gang that worked so many specific miles each way. They had an extra gang that reinforced them. If they got behind then they'd send this extra gang in to help catch up.

M.N.: What did a section gang do?

Smith: They drove spikes on each side of the rail. If a rail was broken or worn, they would replace that rail.

M.N.: Did they chant?

Smith: A lot of times they did. That was traditional. They'd sing while working on the railroad, a lot of lyrics, lot of jokes. I never was much of a singer. I remember one, "Working on the railroad/a dollar dime a day/give the dollar to my sweetheart/and throw the dime away."

M.N.: Did it help them keep in rhythm?

Smith: It did, yes. It was amusing to see how some of those fellows could use what they called a spike mall. There would be two men with one on each side of the rail. If this man got through, why he'd reach over that rail to help the other man drive his spike. They'd go back and forth just like a machine. They got so good at that they'd never hit one another's mall, never break the handle or nothing. Sometimes they'd get kind of comical about it and say, "You take mine and I'll take yours." That meant he would hit your spike and you'd hit his back and forth. They had to get good at it, but they got good at it.

They set the spike. They would tap it once with the spike mall to set the spike and hit it about three or four more good licks.

M.N.: Were they black or white?

Smith: Sometimes they were black, sometimes they were white. Didn't have much racial problem then because they were too tired. When night came they fell over and went to sleep. They were all just about the same class of people. I mean rough, tough, jolly, easy come--easy go people who followed that kind of work at that particular time. People built the west. It was hard work. People had pride in their work. They'd have contests and I got to be water boy. I was in on that extra gang at Gallup. I signed up down there as a water boy but the second week they promoted me to timekeeper.

M.N.: What did the timekeeper do?

Smith: He'd just make sure they were on the job. Called your name and you answered. After the time checker went back to the car to make out the time sheet some of these people would leave. Some of them would stay till noon and they wouldn't come back after lunch. I got to where I'd go out and check the crew twice a day. Well, they thought that was something fine. That was a great invention. If these guys didn't show up I'd give them a big zero for absent. I had a few arguments to start with but then the boss found out that some of them had been doing that. He backed me up. He let a few of the guys go. I got a pretty good reputation.

They jokingly would say I had gypsy blood because I was always on the move. I never stayed put in one place very long. I went on down to Oklahoma. About 1922 I went to work in the oil fields as a roughneck and roustabout. I went to visit my brother about 1923 and I met my wife. We were chopping cotton.

M.N.: What exactly did you do?

Smith: You took a hoe with a handle about six feet long with about an eight inch piece of metal on one end with a goose neck on it. They planted cotton in a drill. After it got up four to six inches high you went along and blocked it out. If there were any weeds up in the drill you'd cut the weeds.

The drill was where the planter went along and planted the seed. The cotton came up probably every six to eight inches. After it got about four inches high you took this hoe by hand and you went down and thinned this cotton out to about eight or twelve inches apart.

The plows couldn't get up in the drill. That's what we were doing. When I got out to the end of the row I turned back on my wife's row. I didn't know her at that time. I knew she was a pretty good looking woman. I got on her row and I hoed back till I met her. She thanked me and said, "That was nice of you to help me out."

M.N.: How old was she?

Smith: She was 17 and I was about 22.

M.N.: You'd seen quite a bit of the world.

Smith: Oh yes. I thought I knew it all. She looked up at me and I looked at her. She had coal black hair and big brown eyes. I thought, "That's kind of like the woman I've been looking for. I like that look." I looked back at her again and she was looking at me. She told me later, "I don't know. There's something about you. Whenever I looked at you something or other went out to you. [I] had a different feeling."

I said, "Well, I did you too." I was staying about a half a mile from where we were hoeing this cotton. She lived about three miles from there. They came down in a wagon with a group of people in two wagons, twelve or thirteen people in two wagons. They went back home where she lived. I stayed there that summer and the next summer.

I went to see her occasionally but not regularly. Then I moved closer to her. I moved out a couple miles from where she was. Then I saw her regularly for a while. I was getting too serious. I knew nothing about marrying. I'm not a family man.

The gypsy blood started stirring again. The next spring the grass began to get green. They said, "Well, that tickles his feet. He'll be gone somewhere." Sure enough a friend of mine said, "I was in Kansas last summer working a wheat harvest. You know they pay \$4 a day and board up there?" I said, "I'm going with you." So we went. We caught us a freight train and went up to Wichita, Kansas. He said, "I worked out here last summer. Let's go out and see if we can get a job." So we walked out through the country. We probably walked about ten miles. We just stopped around inquiring for work. The next day we got over pretty close to where he'd worked the summer before. We found out we were about three weeks early. The grain wasn't ripe and wasn't ready to harvest. The third day we came to this ranch house and went up and asked for a job. As usual this man said, "Well, I'll tell you what. I've got about two weeks before I'm ready to start harvesting but if you boys want to work I've got some odd work around here I'll let you do until harvest time if you'll promise to stay with me. I'll pay you \$4 a day and board." He milked fifteen cows.

M.N.: Was he a wealthy man?

Smith: He was pretty well to do. He farmed probably three hundred acres of grain and probably forty acres of corn. He was an average size farmer. He had what they called three team farm. He was of German origin. I think he was second generation. Very nice people.

We went to work and slept in the barn loft. We had a cotton mattress laid down on the floor of the barn loft. They stored the hay up over where he milked the cow. Had a big door on each end where they put this hay in there. We'd open those doors and it was nice sleeping up there at night. It was hot in the daytime. We stayed there and worked.

He said to take the manure spreader and the team and clean out the barn. Haul the manure out and dump it in a canyon. I said, "Dump it in the canyon? Why don't you put it on your land?" He said, "No, [it] makes the grain grow too big. Can't harvest it." They hauled it a half mile over in the field and dumped it all down in the canyon.

END OF TAPE 2, SIDE 1

Smith: I thought it was a waste but he said, "No, the land is rich enough. The grain would grow. The wheat and barley would grow with oats as high as a fence post with great stems as big as your little finger. The harvester won't handle it. If you make this ground any richer it will grow so big that they would cut it off twelve to eighteen inches above ground." I thought that was odd. He was throwing all this manure away.

I went to work. I would clean up around the house and help him do the milking. I'd turn the separator by hand with a big crank. We poured the whole milk in the big container at the top. It held about five gallons. We'd push this big handle. It had a spout on one side with a pail hanging under it. On each side there was a pail. The cream came out of one spout and the skim milk came out of the other. It had a set of disks in there that separated the cream from the skim milk. We'd carry the cream out and set it by the side of the road at the mail box. A truck came through once a day and picked it up in a five gallon can. That was my job.

Then we went to harvesting. They didn't have moveable harvesters. They set the separator in a certain place and you'd haul the grain. Binders cut it and put it in bundles. Then they would haul it in. A sheaf is the official name for it. They called it bundles, bundles of wheat, bundles of oats and bundles of rye. They tied it with a machine, a machine binder which went through and cut and bound each bundle and tied it with a string, then it would kick it off.

M.N.: How much would a bundle weigh?

Smith: A bundle would weigh from five to ten pounds. They would haul these bundles and stack them in two big stacks. They would take this machine and pull it in between there and park it. They took the wheels off it. They'd set an old steam engine out there with a big pulley on it. They'd run a belt out there probably twenty feet from these stacks so there'd be no danger of fire. You'd get one man on each side of the separator on this big stack and throw these bundles off down in there. That machine would thrash it out and it'd go out and into a big bin. They'd back the truck under it and dump it and haul it to the elevator.

After we harvested these big stacks, we'd go out in two big bundle wagons. We had two men on each wagon. One would drive the tractor around in this huge field. One would go around with a pitch fork and pick these bundles up and throw them up in the wagon. We'd haul them in to the

separator. That way, while one team was in unloading the other bundle wagon would be out loading up. By the time he got that one loaded, we'd have the other unloaded.

I worked that summer up there. After the harvest was over I went back down where my wife lived and worked around there and we decided we'd get married. [We] went to town in a wagon. It was ten miles from where we lived out in this community. That was August 3, 1924. We'd taken my wife's older brother with us as a witness. Her oldest sister's husband went along as a witness.

I was dressed in an ordinary pair of pants which probably cost about \$3. It had a little stripe. I had on a white checkered shirt and a pair of black shoes which probably cost \$3 or \$4. It cost \$5 for the marriage license. That was a lot of money then. Then we went over and looked up the minister. He charged us \$1. That included the marriage ceremony. He took the marriage license back to the courthouse and had it recorded.

M.N.: Do you remember what your wife was wearing?

Smith: I think my wife was wearing a plaid checkered skirt. She had on a blouse. She didn't wear a bonnet at that time. She might have worn a bonnet into town but she had a big comb sticking up in her hair. I thought she looked beautiful.

M.N.: Where did you live?

Smith: We lived out in the country in Sequoyah County ten miles from Sallisaw in what's called Watts School District Number Eighteen. We rented. Later on we went to farming and got a team of our own, some plow tools, a wagon and some livestock.

END OF TAPE 2, SIDE 2

Second Session March 16, 1981

M.N.: You got married in what year?

Smith: 1924.

M.N.: What year did you come to California?

Smith: We left Oklahoma in 1936. We got here in January 1937.

M.N.: Let's talk about what happened in the period of time between your marriage and your coming to California.

Smith: We moved to Tulsa from Sequoyah County. I worked at construction and carpenter work for six months. I was paid 50¢ an hour, \$4 a day.

We got married August 3, 1924 and then most of the time in 1925 I was up

in Tulsa. In 1926 and 1927 we farmed down in Sequoyah County. In the fall of 1927, after the boll weevil went into the cotton there, I worked in western Oklahoma.

The boll weevil works in a cool, damp climate and we had an excessively wet year in 1927. The vegetation and the cotton and corn all grew real high. We call it rank. The cotton stalks were as high as a man's head. The boll weevil is a little weevil that penetrates in under the leaves and under the branches of the stalk. It lays its eggs in the squares that make the bloom. The bloom falls off and makes the boll that the cotton is inside of. After the egg hatches, the larva grows and it eats the inside of the boll. It destroys the seed and the lint inside the boll too.

There was a little bit there in 1926 but we didn't realize the danger of it until 1927 which was a wet year. With plenty of shade and a cool, damp, moist climate they do excessive damage. In my crop they took probably 75% of it. Didn't make any money. Some farmers didn't make enough to gather. The bolls didn't open. That fall it kept raining and what few bolls stayed on the stalk started decaying and molding. The bolls rotted eventually. They didn't have any lint and the seed wasn't any good in the boll so they didn't even pick the cotton.

M.N.: That was a hard time.

Smith: That was a pretty hard time. That fall in 1927, after I gathered my corn and saw the cotton wasn't worth picking, we needed a little surplus money to pay taxes. We heard they had a good crop out there in western Oklahoma. The boll weevil hadn't gotten out there yet. So we went out there and picked cotton and worked around to get money. While I was out there up toward Christmas time in 1927 I made a deal with a man to farm in shares. I sent back for my wife and daughter down in Sequoyah County in eastern Oklahoma. They came out and we farmed out there in 1928. In 1929 we sold out and went back to Sequoyah County.

M.N.: Did the Depression come in 1929?

Smith: It began to tighten up a little bit. In 1928 we made a good year. We got fairly good prices for cotton. We sold anywhere from 14¢ to 16¢ a pound. We'd take it into the gin. They'd gin it out and they bought it right there at the gin. The buyers were right there. We put it usually in about a 500 pound bale.

M.N.: What was the arrangement when you worked on the shares?

Smith: The finance company or the bank that was financing you furnished the feed, seed and the equipment. You furnished the labor. You got one third of the cotton and one fourth of the corn. That was crop rent. We gave the landlord a crop rent first and then we divided the rest fifty-fifty between the finance company and the man that was doing the

labor.

In 1930 we moved down to Fort Smith. We farmed down there in the Arkansas River bottom. That was good land. We made a fairly good crop down there. I believe I made seven bales of cotton. I didn't make too good a corn crop. The land wasn't suited for grain. It's more cotton soil.

Cotton soil is a kind of red, tight soil. The roots of corn need a soft open porous soil so it will grow, expand and the stalk will grow faster and mature quicker. Cotton is more of a hearty plant and can stand drier weather. It takes less rainfall for cotton than it does for corn.

In the fall of 1930 we moved back and rented a farm back up by the other end of Sequoyah County. We moved back up in our old home community. We moved about half a mile from the schoolhouse. Our daughter was getting to school age.

M.N.: What year was your daughter born?

Smith: Our daughter was born in 1926. In 1929, after we moved back down to Sequoyah County from western Oklahoma, we had a son. In 1930 we moved down by Fort Smith and farmed. We began to think about the children's education so we moved to this farm back up in our old home community. There was probably fifty acres of pasture land. Twenty acres was pretty good land and then 30 to 35 acres was just marginal. It was shallow soil where light crops such as maize grew. We planted a lot of sorghum cane for rough feed through the winter. We cut it and stacked it and fed it out of the stack in the wintertime to the livestock.

Cotton, corn and alfalfa were the three main crops. On the light type soil why they'd grow maize or sorghum cane for kind of a roughage through the winter. 1930 was a good year. 1931 was pretty good but out in western Oklahoma and up in Kansas and Colorado we began to hear rumors of the dust bowl.

M.N.: What kind of rumors?

Smith: That it was dry with excessive droughts setting in. That the crops burnt up and the soil blew away. They began to sell off the livestock and move it down to Texas and down into eastern Oklahoma where there was rainfall.

M.N.: What caused the drought?

Smith: The thing that caused the drought was the type of farming that they did. The main thing was the weather condition. Didn't get enough moisture in the soil to hold the soil together. They broke up all the sod on the prairie and the natural type of vegetation was destroyed. [It] kept getting drier and drier. No moisture, no rainfall. Then they began to farm and turn that crop of vegetation under to try and hold the soil.

But the soil was so dry that the more they stirred it, the more it blew and the lighter it got. The wind blew the top soil away. We weren't really in the dust bowl where we were. We were probably 150 miles east of the dust bowl but they'd have winds up to 40 and 45 miles an hour.

M.N.: So the dust bowl itself was actually a fairly small area?

Smith: It was probably 50 miles wide and 150 to 200 miles long. It ran north and south and the prevailing westerly winds blew at an angle. It was just right for it to come down off the Rocky Mountains and down onto the plains with such gravity that it picked this light soil up and carried it down in our part of the country and deposited a lot of it down there.

It just fell. In the summer of 1934 for three months it was just a haze. This dust was in the air. That type of soil out there was reddish. The sun didn't look clear and it was in the air. It settled in the pastures. It began to irritate people's eyes and lungs. The livestock's eyes would water and they drank more and more water. People began to notice an itching and burning, kind of like hay fever. It began to get dry down in our part of the country in 1934. In 1935 it got drier.

The dust kind of let up in the winter of 1934 and the spring of 1935. It began to get some rain out there. In 1936 it began to rain out in the dust bowl and it began to settle back down. We began to plant grain and wheat and barley. We had enough moisture to get that out of the ground. That would hold the soil down. It didn't blow so bad.

M.N.: Things were actually starting to improve in 1936?

Smith: Yes. They were getting better but then we began to think about leaving. A lot of people in the dust bowl left during that period of time. Some of the people went north to Detroit and the auto plants. Some went down south to Texas and some came to California. People began to migrate out from the dust bowl. We began to hear rumors of people working in California. The drought gradually moved down into eastern Oklahoma into our community. It began to get drier and drier. Our family's health began to fail.

At first you noticed it in your lungs. It affected practically everybody's lungs. It was kind of like emphysema, kind of hard breathing. It got to where it irritated the nostrils and throat. Your head stuffed up like you had a head cold all the time. Your eyes got irritated. It affected the children more than it did the parents. In the fall of 1935 some of the younger folks came to California and they got work out here.

They were getting 20¢ to 25¢ an hour. That was good wages. Back there, if you could get a job, it was for \$1 a day and glad to get the work for that. They came back and they farmed. They saved a couple hundred dollars. That was a lot of money then.

The wife and I got to thinking about it. I was working in the mine by

that time digging coal. I had about 90 tons of lump coal out on top of the ground. We couldn't sell it. No one had any money and we couldn't get enough money out of it. My wife said, "Why don't we go to California?" We got to talking to several of the people who had been out and came back with \$200 to \$300. The children's health was getting bad. You could go out there and stay a couple of years. We could save \$300 to \$400 and come back. Maybe by that time the droughts will be over. We really intended to stay two years when we left there.

M.N.: When you left things had just been getting worse and worse?

Smith: Worse and worse over a period of about four years. Actually we had three real dry years from 1934 to 1936. Everything practically burned up. We'd been hoping each year. We thought next year we would have a good year with plenty of rainfall or some snow this winter putting moisture into the ground. It didn't come. We would plant in the spring hoping and thinking maybe this is the year we're going to come out all right. It would look pretty good up until the first of June or July and then the hot winds would begin to blow. It would cook the crop. The corn would be up waist high and it would just start burning and the top would wilt down. Then it would just go right on down and as the moisture came out of the ground the heat kept wilting the plant until it was clear down to the ground. It would just lay over on the ground. The process would take a week or ten days. All during that time we were thinking we'd get rain maybe tomorrow. It didn't rain.

The suspense of the whole thing [was hard]. In the wintertime I worked in the mine with the rocks falling and me having to clean up the rocks.

M.N.: Where was the mine?

Smith: The mine was on a place that I had rented on the north side. It was already there. Someone else had opened the mine. I bought a couple of people out. I didn't give very much for it because they were talking about abandoning the mine anyway.

M.N.: How long did you work it?

Smith: I worked in the mine for three winters and I farmed through the summertime but the crop burned up every summer. In the winter I would work enough and sell enough of the coal to kind of tide us over until the next spring. We'd sell the coal for \$3 a ton. That was the lump coal. If they had the money all right, if they didn't have the money we'd sell it to them anyway. We figured we'd rather sell on credit than have it laying on the ground. Some people wouldn't pay us and some people did. We'd sell it to the school district. The school district would buy so many tons for the winter and they would give us a county warrant. We'd take this warrant down and register it at the county office. When enough people got enough money to pay their taxes and there was a little money in the county treasury, why then they would notify the people that had this number. Sometimes you'd hold that warrant for two or three years

before you could ever get your money. Most of the people that needed the money would discount that warrant for some merchant or some big businessman that had a little excess money. We'd discount some of the warrants fifty percent.

M.N.: He'd pay you half price for it?

Smith: He'd buy it up at half price and we'd sign the warrant over to him. Then he'd collect full price on it when they got money down in the county treasury. That was a pretty good business for a person that had a little money and it was a pretty good deal for people that made the money too.

M.N.: How deep and how far back did this mine go?

Smith: When I quit working there we were probably 400 feet back under the ground on an angle. We went in at about a 15% grade and then straight down from the back end of the main shaft. We drove back in the mountain straight down or straight up to the top. It was probably 70 to 75 feet. It was what they call a slope mine. The vein of coal was anywhere from 24 to 30 inches with about four to six inches of what they called slack on top of the coal. It would come down when we took the coal out. We had to dispose of that so we could go further back on and get the rest of the vein of coal out. It was a form of sulfur and coal combination between the rock and the main vein of the coal. The chemicals in the coal, the ground, the sulfur, and the water that came down formed this real hard layer in there between the rock and the main vein of coal.

We couldn't sell that. It was lost. It would burn to a certain extent but it would make big clinkers in the stove. It wouldn't burn up. The sulfur and the iron in it would weld together and make great big lumps. You couldn't hardly get it out of the stove and a lot of people didn't like to burn it. It made fumes in the house. It also made an odor.

In the winter of 1936 I worked in the mine up until Christmas time. Some folks came back from California. My nephew, he and I were good friends and he was a single fellow, and he said, "You can get a job out there. It's going to be dull through the wintertime out there but not as bad as it is back here."

M.N.: You weren't making much money on your mine?

Smith: [We] weren't making much money out of the mine. In fact, we weren't making any right then. We might make \$3 a week. There were two of us and we split that half way. Maybe we'd sell two tons and that would be \$3 apiece for a week. Maybe we'd go for two weeks and wouldn't sell a ton.

END OF TAPE 3, SIDE 1

Smith: We weren't making any money and it looked like things weren't going to

get any better for a while. The family's health was going down. He said they were getting ready to come back to California. We celebrated Christmas there together at a family reunion and so they were getting ready to come back out here. I asked him what he would charge me to take me to California. He had a 1936 Ford pickup with a camper type deal on the back that he had made with some seats in it. He said, "Well, you pay me \$10 down to help pay the gas and expenses and I'll take you out there for \$35. You pay the other \$25 when you get out there and go to work." I said, "Well, what if I don't go to work?" He said, "You can't pay it." I thought that was a pretty good deal. I went home and told my wife. I said, "Let's get ready to go to California."

M.N.: Just like that?

Smith: Just like that.

M.N.: But it wasn't just like that was it?

Smith: Well, we had actually talked about it but we made the decision just like that. She said, "Let's go and try it." We sold off our household goods and our chickens. We got two bits apiece for the chickens. That was a pretty good price for them. They were pure bred brown Leghorns or we wouldn't have gotten that much for them. We sold them to the neighbor-- three white thoroughbred OIC [Ohio Improved Chester] Berkshire hogs. This neighbor of mine asked what I wanted for those three pigs. I said, "\$5 for all three of them." He said, "Well, they're worth more money. If you can't get any more money for them I'll buy them. I don't have much money myself." He was a World War I veteran and he drew a pension. He got wounded in the Argonne Forest in World War I. He received \$16 a month. He had a family of three boys and a wife. That was pretty good income then. He had a little extra change. He was farming too. I said, "I can't get more than that. Just pay me for them." He said, "All right." He paid me for them. We sold him a divan. I think we got \$1.50 for the divan. We rounded up \$75. That was all the money we had.

I paid my nephew the \$10 and we left there on December 30, 1936. My wife's older sister and her family lived up in Tulsa. We went up there to visit them. We had lunch and we left Tulsa about 1:30 p.m. We drove to Weatherford, Oklahoma and stayed that night. The next day we drove over to Las Cruces, New Mexico. We stopped in Las Cruces and we talked about getting a motel. The boy that was driving was young and I was young too. I was 33 years old. We had three drivers in the vehicles so he said, "Let's drive on until nine or ten o'clock to Deming, New Mexico. We'll stop and get a motel over there." We got out about half way between Deming and Las Cruces and we had a car accident. A man and his wife and a twelve year old boy in an old 1931 Plymouth Coup ran into us. It turned the pickup over. I think it was \$750 for the insurance company to fix it.

My wife's older sister got her collarbone broke. It broke two of my daughter's front teeth. It banged the rest of us up, skinned and bruised us but no bones were broken. We got out of it very well with no more serious injury than what we got. We flagged down a car. This was about 9:30 or 10:00 p.m. We were out on the desert practically half way between Deming and Las Cruces, New Mexico. I think the tow truck registered 26 miles and he told us that was exactly half way between Las Cruces and Deming. So, we flagged some traffic. It took us about 30 minutes because there wasn't very much traffic that day and time. It was just a two way highway. People didn't want to stop. At night there just weren't that many cars going by. Finally, somebody stopped and picked up my wife's sister. She seemed to be the one that was injured the worst. My wife went with her in this car to kind of take care of her.

This car took them down to a hotel, not a motel, and put them up. I don't remember the name of the hotel. I wish I'd written it down. We were all bruised up and kind of excited too. Later another car came by and picked up part of the crew. There were eight of us in this pickup and none of us were seriously injured. The nephew that owned the pickup stayed till the wrecker came out to tow it in. We got back to the hotel I think at three o'clock the next morning. That was on New Year's Day. We stayed at the hotel the rest of that night. After daylight we went three or four blocks from there and rented some cabins at a motel.

M.N.: Did the lady with the broken collarbone see a doctor?

Smith: Yes. There was a doctor who came to the hotel that night. He set her collarbone and put a brace on it and put her arm in a sling.

M.N.: How much did he charge you?

Smith: I don't think he charged anything. The people at the hotel that night didn't charge us anything to stay the rest of the night. They were the nicest bunch of people I ever saw. In fact, two of the people that were guests there got up and had them take the oldest sister in there and they gave her their bed. They slept out in the lobby and laid around there the rest of the night and visited with the rest of us. The hotel clerk brought out coffee and sandwiches. The nicest group of people I ever saw.

They really helped out. We appreciated it. The next day we moved down to a motel. We didn't have very much left. We gathered up part of the clothes and stuff and put them back in the suitcases that night. We put them in the old pickup and they brought them back in. The next day we went up to the garage where the pickup was towed in. We salvaged what we could out of the back of the pickup. We carried it down to the motel. Then we called some of the family here in Delano. Two of the boys came over from Delano to Las Cruces and brought a pickup and a car. My wife's sister that was injured most seriously got in the car and she rode in the car. The rest of us got in the pickup and we came from

Las Cruces to Hemet, California. We drove in one day from Las Cruces to Hemet. We stayed that night at Hemet and then the next day we came on into Delano.

They had rented us a cabin, a little three room cabin. We had written them a post card and told them to look out for a house or cabin. They had rented us a little cabin and I remember when we got in they showed it to us.

M.N.: Was it furnished?

Smith: No. There wasn't any furniture in it. We paid \$10 a month. That doesn't sound too bad but \$10 was a lot of money then. They paid the water bill. We had to pay the gas and electricity.

We had a 40 watt bulb in each room. That was a bright light because of the light we'd been used to in Oklahoma. We didn't have rural electricity out in the country then. The Rural Electric Association came in after we left Oklahoma. We were using kerosene lights or gasoline Coleman lanterns. A 40 watt bulb was a treat to us. That was really a bright light and, of course, it was a small room and it was sufficient light. The party that had moved out of this cabin left a cardboard table about three feet square. The legs folded up under it so we folded those legs out and I said, "Well look here. We've got a dining table." A friend of ours came to visit us and said, "I've got an extra bed out there in my garage. If you want it you can have it for just a little nothing." I said, "What do you want?" He said, "Oh, \$1.50." We went over and got that bed and carried it over. It was about two blocks. I think we had two quilts and a blanket that we'd salvaged out of the wreck. We spread those on the bed. It was pretty cold. We had a little gas heater that was furnished with the cabin. We turned that gas on and we were pretty comfortable in there.

The next day we went out to the DiGiorgio Fruit Corporation packing shed. They'd give you nail kegs. We got some of those nail kegs and carried them in. The wife cut up some old papers. I don't know where she scraped it up from. She made a cushion on top of that nail keg. Those was the chairs that we had. I carried in some of the grape boxes and put some nails in them and mended them up and that was our furniture. The two children slept on a quilt on the floor rolled up in a blanket. No rug on the floor, just linoleum.

We stayed and it rained and rained. I was short on money and I wished that it would quit raining. You couldn't work. We were living cheap. You could buy 100 pounds of Irish potatoes delivered to the door for \$1. Pinto beans were four cents a pound and pure lard was nine cents, bacon was twelve to fourteen cents a pound and you could get sliced bacon for 20¢ a pound. That was too expensive. We'd buy the whole slab of bacon and the wife would slice it up herself. We stayed there for three weeks. I was looking for work. It rained and rained. The children started right

to school. We lived close to the schoolhouse.

M.N.: What school was that?

Smith: The school was the Westside School in Delano. It was a public school. A big red brick schoolhouse.

M.N.: Did people treat you in a kind way when you came?

Smith: Yes. People did. They were friendly enough. Most of the people that we were friendly with were people who had migrated out here like we did. The business people were pretty friendly. I went to one place. It was a big corporation. They were building a big building. I was looking for a job. I went down and the man that owned the property was the main boss on this building. I went around inquiring for work and somebody said, "That's the boss over there. Go talk to him." So I went over and asked him about a job. He looked at me and said, "I don't hire anything but native labor. Are you a native?" He could tell by looking at me that I wasn't a native. I said, "No. I haven't been here a month yet." He said, "I'm sorry. I don't need anyone right now. If you don't find anything, come back next week and maybe I could use you."

That was a polite way of giving me a runaround. He didn't want to hire me. He was working Mexican laborers, native labor he called it. I found out later that he had some 1500 to 2000 acres of grapes down in old Mexico. He was afraid it would cause labor problems with his laborers down there. They would come up here and work and go back.

I kept looking. I was walking down a railroad track one day and looking around to see if anybody was building or working. I went by Gibson's Concrete Yard down in the southwest part of Delano. As I was going by the plant a man hollered at me, "Hey, you looking for a job?" I said, "Yes, sure am." He said, "When could you go to work?" I said, "Right now." He said, "You come down here in the morning. I've got a carload of gravel setting there on that side track."

M.N.: You mean a railroad car?

Smith: Yes, a gondola type. It's an open type that they dump gravel and haul coal in. Had 30 tons of gravel in it.

The next morning by daylight I was down there. I waited around till he came. He showed up directly. He came around where I was and pitched me a shovel. I'd been shovelling coal in the mine back home. He said, "Well, come around here." We went around to this railroad car. He said, "I'll give you \$5 to unload this carload of gravel." I said, "You just hired you a man."

I flew in shovelling that gravel out. I shovelled and shovelled. Come

lunch time I didn't have any lunch. The wife didn't know where I was. She didn't know for sure whether I was going to go to work that morning. I told her I might go to work. Lunch time came and I thought I better go up to the house. It was four or five blocks from the house up there. I stood the shovel up in the corner of the car and I went up to the house. I told her, "I'm working making money. I'll make \$5 today." She said, "Today?" I said, "Yes, if I get that carload of gravel unloaded today." She fixed me some lunch and I went back down to work.

At five o'clock that evening I had that carload of gravel unloaded by hand. I went around to the office. He said, "You got that car unloaded already?" I said, "What do you mean? It's been all day." He couldn't hardly believe me. He went and climbed up on the side of the car and looked over there. I had it unloaded. I had pitched it over the side and it went down a chute into a big pile in a bin. He said, "Well, come to the office and get your money." I went to the office and he paid me. I said, "What about tomorrow?" He said, "Well, I won't need you anymore. Maybe next week if I get in a carload of gravel. Keep coming by and I'll let you unload it." I thanked him and went home.

I went on for three or four days after that. It quit raining during that time but the fog would settle in at night. It would be way up in the daytime before the fog would burn off and the sun would shine.

I got down to my last \$20. I believe it was just about the time that I got the job unloading that carload of gravel and made that \$5. My sister's husband back at Fort Smith, Arkansas was a foreman at the Border Queen Furniture Company. They never did have any children. He was about twelve years older than me. My sister was about six years older than me. They thought our two children were just about their own. They just took care of them when we were around them. They would take them and keep them if we would let them. We'd have to go get them and bring them home. So he told me when we were getting ready to leave, "Now don't get down to your last dollar. You keep enough money to phone me or send me a telegram. I'll send you a bus ticket or a railroad ticket. You and your wife bring those kids and come on back here. We'll see that you get enough work around this factory to where you won't starve and go hungry." They made us promise. I got down to that last \$20 and the wife said, "Well, it looks like we're going to have to call back there for a bus ticket." I said, "Well, we don't have anything to go back to."

END OF TAPE 3, SIDE 2

Smith: I said, "Let's stay on a little while longer. We'll save out enough money to give him a phone call or a telegram. He can get a ticket out here pretty quick. If it comes to that we'll go back."

So we're sitting there, I think it was the next day, in the visiting room with some of the neighbors there in the camp. There were four little cabins on this one lot there on the west side of Delano. This was a privately owned camp. A car drove down through the driveway

and I heard him say, "Does anybody in here want to work?" I jumped up and went out. I said, "I want to work." He said, "I'm looking for cotton pickers. Be out at a certain road in the morning and I've quite a bit of cotton to pick." I said, "Well, I'll be there." So I inquired of some of the folks. They knew where this rancher lived and where he was farming. I found a way out there the next morning. I walked out there. It was probably a mile and a half or two miles out in the country. I got out there and I didn't have a cotton sack. I said, "Do you have a sack here I could buy?" He said, "All right. I'll sell you one." He went and got it. It was practically a new sack. So I went to picking cotton. It was way up toward noon before we picked. That evening the fog came. I didn't get to pick over three or four hours. He was paying 55¢ per hundred pounds for picking and 45¢ per hundred pounds for pulling bolls. I'd rather pick the cotton than pull it because it was easier on the wife and I figured my wife would go to work too.

M.N.: Why was pulling bolls harder?

Smith: You pull more bolls. You pick cotton in a sack. There's 50 to 60 pounds in a sack and you carry it down to the trailer. You weigh it. Then you climb up a ladder and dump it in the trailer. You come back and start picking again. It's pretty strenuous work for women to climb this ladder and dump that. If you climb it and dump her sack and your sack too, well, it's double work on you. By picking you don't have as many sacks to empty. You get a little bit more per hundred weight. It averages out. You'd make about the same amount each day.

M.N.: There was more to picking cotton than just picking cotton.

Smith: Yes. Quite a bit of work to it. I went down that night and I got a new sack. I gave the sack that I bought off of that rancher to my wife. We went out the next day. Some people in the camp drove out in a car and we rode out with them. We sat around out there until the fog lifted and the cotton dried out. They didn't have the modern gins to dry out the cotton. Now you can pick it pretty wet and run it through this drier and it dries it out. We had to set around there and I think we made \$2. That was a lot of money.

M.N.: Apiece?

Smith: No. \$1 apiece. The next day I think we made \$2.50. The third day I woke up and it was daylight. It looked like the sun was shining. We would sleep in because we knew the fog was expected. So we had slept in late that morning. I raised up and looked out that window and I could see that there wasn't any fog. I grabbed the wife and went to shaking her. We jumped up and threw a little lunch together. She fixed breakfast and the children got up and went to school. They came in and fixed their own lunch at noon. They didn't have these school lunches then. We walked out to this cotton patch. That day we made \$4 and my wife were really living high on the hog!

M.N.: That was good.

Smith: That was a good day's work. We thought a week or two at \$4 a day and we'll be pretty well fixed. I think about \$4 or \$5 a day for both of us was about as much as we made. In two or three weeks the cotton picking ran out. We started looking for a job again. Jobs were hard to find. In the first part of February most of the cotton was picked out.

I was walking around on a ranch out in the country asking for work. I could see somebody working. I saw this Japanese fellow and I walked up to him and asked him [for work]. He spoke broken [English]. I could hardly understand him. I said, "You want somebody to work?" "Yeah, yeah", [he said]. I said, "What kind of work?" He said, "Irrigating the grapes." I said, "I want to work." He stuck the shovel up in front of me and said, "You take him. You work tonight. In the morning I come back and I take him." Before I could say, "How do you do this?" or anything, he was gone. He went and got in the pickup and left. I didn't know anything about irrigating. He was one of the bosses but they didn't have any crew working. He was doing the irrigating until the crew started.

M.N.: You didn't ask him how much he paid?

Smith: I just asked for the job. You didn't ask how much, how long, or what kind of work it was in those days. You just asked for a job. If they said a job, why that meant a pay check. So I went to work. I worked that night and my wife didn't know where I was. I didn't have any way of getting to the telephone so I walked back into town and told her. She said, "Where in the world have you been?" I said, "I've been working. I'm still working and I've got to go back and work tonight." "Work all night?" she said. I said, "Work all night." She fixed me up kind of a midnight snack and I took it back with me. I ate and went back on the job.

M.N.: How did you see to irrigate at night?

Smith: I had an old kerosene lantern. When the water got down to the lower end you had to walk up through the vineyard up to the other end and go over and open some more valves and start the water going down some more grape rows. You'd come back and close these off. I went up and closed these off and put on some more rows. They got out to the end. That was all the rows on that block. I began to look around to see where to put that water next. I didn't know where it went so I went back over to where this pipeline came down through the vineyard. I climbed up on this ladder and looked down in there. It was about six or eight feet off the ground. I was shining my lantern down in there. This big concrete pipe was about 36 inches in diameter. It had three valves down in there with a handle sticking up above the water. This handle raised the valve and lowered it. So I was shining my lamp down in there to see and I dropped the lantern in this water. I went down in there. I thought I could climb down in there and stick my foot down and hook it in the bale. It was dark in there and I didn't have any light except the moon shining a little bit.

I had to take the ladder from the outside. I climbed up on top and stood up on top of this big pipe. I picked the ladder up from the outside and stuck it down on the inside. When I started to climb down, I caught hold of one of these big rods that were sticking up that closed and opened the valve. The rod came out. It had a cross bar across the top for a handle. That gave me an idea. I thought, "Why can't I turn that up and reach down in there with the cross piece. Maybe I can get that lantern without climbing down in there." It was pretty cold that February. I took this handle of this valve and reached down in there and fished out the lantern.

I didn't have any matches. I didn't smoke. I wondered how I was going to get that lantern lit. I started back up to where the pump was. I didn't know where the water was coming from. In the meantime, this water had got full down there and it was just running all over everywhere. I figured there must be a place up there where I first saw the boss. I saw a little old house out there and I heard noise. It sounded like a motor running. I thought there must be a gas motor in there. There must be fire down there and I can get this lantern lit someway. I found out when I got in there that it was an electric motor. I could see a shaft turning. I figured that must be pumping the water. I went over to the switchboard and I saw a couple of buttons there. One said, OFF and I pushed that button. The noise stopped. The shaft quit turning and the water quit coming. I fished around there and I couldn't find any way to light my lantern.

M.N.: This was all in the dark?

Smith: It was all in the dark. There was a car light coming down the road. I ran out there and stopped this car. The fellow smoked and he gave me some matches. I didn't know if my lantern would light or not. The globe wasn't broken. It was cracked a little bit but it wasn't broken.

I finally got it lighted. I thought I had it made. I went back down and got up this air vent on the ladder and looked down in there. The next avenue of the grape vineyard is called a check. They had them for check one, check two and check three. I was up on check one and I had to move the water down on check two. It was just gravity flow. I went down below and I closed that valve down there and opened this valve. I went up and started the pump. It had taken about 15 to 20 minutes for the water to get down there and start running again.

That was my first experience irrigating. I did a lot of irrigating after that. I worked there for about a week. The boss came out one day and said, "Here's your check. Don't need you no more. Maybe later." I thanked him.

M.N.: How much was your check?

Smith: Seems to me like I was getting \$4 a night. That check was about \$20.

That was a bit of money.

Well, I was out of a job. I worked around just a few days at a time until the Fourth of July. I bought me an old 1931 Chevrolet touring car in the meantime. I paid \$100 for it. I paid \$10 down and \$10 a month. I was driving this old car out in the country one day. Gas was nine cents a gallon. I saw a man working way out in the middle of a young vineyard. The vines had been put out that spring. This was on the Fourth of July. He hadn't put up the stakes yet. Had the pipeline in and the grapevines were up about knee high.

M.N.: Did you know anything about farming grapes?

Smith: No, I didn't know a thing about farming grapes. I parked the old car and walked out and asked this man if he knew where I could get a job. He said, "You work?" I said, "I can work." He said, "Take the shovel and irrigate." I said, "Why, I never did irrigate." He said, "You just make the water start here and go to the other end." He just went and got into his pickup and took off and left it with me. This man owned the vineyard I learned later. He just took off and left it with me.

I worked for that man the rest of the summer and that winter. The next spring my brother-in-law and a neighbor of mine were irrigating just across the road. I talked back and forth to them. This friend of mine had a son that was suppose to go to work for the DiGiorgio Fruit Corporation where they were working. Instead, he got a job in a defense plant and he didn't come to work. About the first of April they came over and told me I could go to work over there with them. They said it was a big company with work the year round. That sounded pretty good. I was looking for a steady job. I told my boss, "One more week and I'm going to have to quit and go to work over there." He said, "All right."

I went to work for the DiGiorgio Fruit Corporation and I worked for them for six years irrigating. In the fall of the year, in grape harvest season, I'd work driving the truck hauling fruit to the packing house and to the winery.

My daughter got married during that period. My son-in-law was working around in town and there was a contractor who came up from Long Beach by the name of Moore. In 1943 I got to talking to a neighbor that lived down the street and he said, "Why don't you come down and work for this contractor?" At that time they were paying 30¢ an hour for ranch work. He said, "He's paying \$1 an hour." I said, "I'll be down there in the morning." I went back and told my boss. He said, "All right. I don't blame you for quitting."

I went down there and went to work. I worked two or three weeks and he raised my wages to \$1.25. I was really making the money then. We would work anywhere from eight to eleven hours. We were building buildings around the town out of concrete blocks. Lumber and stuff was on priority then. You had to go down to the office and get a permit before you could

buy very much building material. The government had the priority on everything during the war.

So I worked around there for the last part of 1943 and the fall of 1944. The contractor quit and moved back to Long Beach. I went to working on my own doing little jobs. My son-in-law and I went to building houses. We built several houses. We'd buy a lot and build a house on it.

M.N.: Were they good houses?

Smith: I would do the brick and cement work. He would do the carpenter work and the wiring. We'd both do the plumbing. Then we would sell the house and buy another vacant lot and build another house.

In the summer of 1947 the Teamsters struck. We couldn't get the cement and the gravel from the factory. The construction industry kind of shut down. A friend of mine that lived down the street was working for the county. He got to talking to me about going to work for the county. I didn't want to work for the county. I'd worked on several jobs and then went to work for the Caterpillar and John Deere people in Delano. I worked there for practically two years. What I was doing was interesting. I was in charge of the yard, all the equipment, the new and old equipment that came in on trade. I had to look that over and examine all the parts. We oiled and serviced it. We put together and assembled new stuff. We assembled the disk and the plows and all that came in from the factory. It got kind of dull then and in the spring of 1950. That summer the work at the tractor outfit got kind of slack. The boss said, "I'm going to have to lay you off a few days."

This friend of mine down the street got to talking one day. He said I could work for the county almost right then. I hesitated going to work for the county because you only started out at \$249 a month. When I worked on my own little jobs I'd make more money working half the time than I could working full time for the county. So I hesitated. He came by one evening and said, "They need four men. Why don't you go down there and go to work for the county? Me and you can ride together with two more guys here in town. We just have to take our car one day a week. You could afford to work cheaper."

At that particular time I was out of a job. I went down to talk to the superintendent. He put four of us to work but it was just going to be temporary. I said, "Now listen. I want a firm job before I go to work." He kind of laughed and said, "That's the way we start out nearly all of our extra help."

END OF TAPE 4, SIDE 1

Smith: The superintendent said, "I've got men that went to work here on a temporary basis 20 to 25 years ago. It might be a good idea for you

to start. If you want to work you come down in the morning." We worked two weeks. The first check I got amounted to \$116. That was quite a bit of money but I'd been making more. I had to have a steady job. I got laid off. I was laid off for two weeks helping my son-in-law build a house.

M.N.: How old were you?

Smith: When I went to work for the county I was 47. We were finishing out this house and the foreman came by from the county and said, "The superintendent told me to come up and tell you to come down and go to work. I think this will be permanent." I said, "Well that's what I'm looking." I showed up the next morning and went back to work. I worked for practically eighteen years and I went to work temporary.

I was on probation first six months. They paid once a month. That was a long time between paydays. I told my wife, "I won't get a pay check until the first of the month." She said, "I don't know how we're going to make it." I said, "We'll get used to it." We were in pretty good shape by then. In the meantime, I'd bought a lot and we built us a home up in the northeast part of Delano. Our daughter had gotten married and our son was going to Bakersfield Junior College. He was staying at home. At that time they ran a bus to Bakersfield Junior College from Delano. He was riding the bus back and forth and staying at home. He was working in a filling station there in town until ten o'clock at night paying his way through college.

So I went to work for the county and I rode with these four fellows. We rode together for about twelve years.

M.N.: What year did you retire?

Smith: I retired in 1968. I was 65. At the time I retired I believe we were up to about \$700 a month. I was a heavy equipment operator.

M.N.: Did you like it?

Smith: I liked it pretty well. I was getting up to where I began to think about retiring. In 1958 I had surgery on my right eye and I wore a contact lense. I retired the day I was 65 on May 21, 1968. I started my retirement the first of June in 1968. I lacked going from June until September putting in 18 years. They deducted the first six months I was on probation and I only got credit for about 17 years. That cut my retirement check down a little bit and I didn't like that much. I found out later that it worked out to my benefit. When you retired you had four options. The children wanted me to take number three. Well, that's the way I did it [more money, fewer fringe benefits].

On May 5, 1978 we moved up here. The children helped us buy this home and we put a little money in it. After we moved up here I got a card from the retirement board. It said if you retired before July 1, 1968

you have a choice of changing your option if it's to your benefit. I retired on June 1 so I jumped in the car and took off down to the retirement board. The girl pulled my records and said, "Mr. Smith, you ought to change. If you pass away your wife won't get anything. If you change your option then she can draw your check after you pass on."

So I said, "Well, let's change it." We changed everything so it worked out to my benefit.

M.N.: What kinds of things have you done since you retired?

Smith: I haven't done much work at all. We've just traveled around. We bought a brand new pickup and we travel. We go to scenic places. The last one we traded in in 1965 had 125,000 miles on it in three years' time. We've had a good time and have had good health. We've traveled quite extensively. We've gone to Yellowstone, Kentucky, Oregon, Washington, and all around Colorado, Arizona, the Grand Canyon and the Petrified Forest. We've just enjoyed life.

The county, Kern County, was real good to me. I was six years on the Board of Directors for the Kern County Employee's Association. I met a lot of people there. Judge J. Kelly Steele, Herb Roberts, Mr. Reynolds with the Veteran's Department, Phil Frickert, Johnny Loustalot, the Sheriff, Jessie Stockton, and Judge Head. They'd sit in on business meetings when we were negotiating. We had what we called an association which was something similar to a union. We didn't have the option to strike but we would negotiate just like the union does now. We'd negotiate a pay raise or pay hike or something with a supervisor and we'd take them out for dinner and talk things over. I got to learn a lot about negotiations.

M.N.: Did you ever see anything that had to do with organizing the farm workers back in 1937?

Smith: No I never did. There wasn't any organized farm labor in the Valley at that time. The only organized farm labor that came down here would have been the people who would come down to the packing sheds from up around Salinas.

M.N.: How were they treated?

Smith: You couldn't tell any difference. We worked the same hours and we worked right along side of them. They got union wages and we didn't.

M.N.: Did that create any problems?

Smith: No, not necessarily.

M.N.: Did they try to start unions down here?

Smith: They talked union. Most of them were union because they had to be union

when they went back up there. They'd come down here and work right along with the non-union employees.

M.N.: Did the union people come down and try to organize and run into trouble?

Smith: No. They never did.

M.N.: Did you ever see any labor trouble back in the 1930s in California?

Smith: No. I never did.

M.N.: Did it bother you if someone called you an Okie?

Smith: No. It didn't. It was all just a big joke you know anyway.

M.N.: You mentioned one story I was interested in about cutting work in the fields.

Smith: That was right after I came out in early 1937. I didn't have any car at that time. I was walking around out east of Delano in the country looking for jobs. This nephew of mine and I worked together quite a bit. We were good friends and he was a good worker. He wasn't married. We would walk around out in the country and look for work.

We went to work out in a vineyard cutting grapes. They pruned the canes off the vines and then tied the vines up that had fruit on it for the next year. They'd go in with clippers and cut four buds, what they call four joints, on each one of these canes. They were 18 inches long. We would cut those cuttings \$1.10 per thousand. We would have to cut them, count them, and put them in bundles of a thousand. We'd carry them out to the end of the grape vineyard, lay them down, and put our number on them. We had to furnish our own clippers. The first day I think I made 75¢. I made ninety some odd cents the third day. The fourth day we made \$3. We cut 3,000. We were working long hours.

They plant what they call a cover crop in the fall of the year in the vineyards. They let it come up in the winter. Then, when they start cultivating the vineyards in the spring, they turn this under to build up the soil.

This is what happened. We were wanting to work and weren't getting to work very early in the morning because there was frost. It was cold out there. We'd go out there and stand around with the other fellows. They would build up a fire and stand around there and talk. I told my nephew the fifth morning, I said, "I'm going to go to work early in the morning. I've got me some old cloth gloves and some old potato sacks which I'll wrap around my feet." I went out there at the vineyard and waded out in that frost and ice. I went to work. That's when we made the \$3.30 a day. The sixth day we made about \$4 apiece.

These fellows were standing around the fire and got jealous. They told the foreman we were not cutting those cuttings right. They said we were not putting a thousand in a bundle and that we couldn't cut that many cuttings. So the boss came around and looked at our bundles. I asked him, "What's the matter? We doing it right?" He said, "Yes. I can't see nothing wrong with it but those boys down there are getting jealous. They tell me that, if I don't make you fellows slow down, they're going to quit. They're my regular hands. They stay with me the year round. I don't want to lose them because they're good men and they're good friends of mine. I'm going to have to lay you boys off for a few days." I said, "Well, that's all right. We don't want to cause any trouble, but we've got to work. I've got a family to feed and I've got to work. I can't stand around that fire down there until ten or eleven o'clock before I go to work." So he laid us off.

M.N.: Your whole life has been one of working.

Smith: Well, it was. I never was without a job very long. I never went on welfare.

M.N.: Why was that?

Smith: I didn't believe in it. We weren't raised that way. We were on a "pay as you go" basis. We didn't go into debt.

M.N.: You didn't come to California looking for welfare?

Smith: No. We never asked for welfare back there. That's a way of life with a lot of people. It's good in a disaster but I think that it tends to demoralize the public. You give people something for nothing and they don't know the value of it.

M.N.: Sounds to me like you never asked for anything you didn't earn.

Smith: No, we didn't. We paid as we went. The only thing we bought on credit when we came to California was that old car. It was almost a must to have a car to get out because about two miles around Delano is about as far as you can walk in eight hours and inquire for a job. So we bought that old car. He said, "Ordinarily we don't do this but you've got an honest looking face. I'm going to take a chance on you." I said, "Well, I don't think you're taking a chance. You don't own the company. You're just the manager here. Don't jeopardize your job because you need your job too." He said, "I'm going to sell you that car. You pay me \$10 down and \$10 a month." I got the car and I paid him off. My wife usually made the payments. I'd usually give her the money and she'd go down.

M.N.: You came to California for two years and ended up staying a long time. Are you sorry?

Smith: Oh no. We planned on staying two years but it was five years before

we went back. Things had changed. The war began to come on. We went back with the idea that we were going to stay. We had a little money. I think we had about \$1,000. We decided we might buy something back there. We went back in the wintertime to spend Christmas and also to look around for a little place to buy.

My daughter started going with this boyfriend. We didn't know it at the time. When we got back there why she was unhappy. That made us unhappy too. In the wintertime there came a big snow. We'd been out in sunny California for five years and we didn't know how cold it could get back there. I went out one morning and I couldn't get my car started. We were close to Fort Smith. We were going to go back over to Sequoyah County.

END OF TAPE 4, SIDE 2

M.N.: You were trying to start your car?

Smith: A man from Taft, California had an old 1933 Model Chevrolet. He had a big rope. He backed down in the driveway where my car was parked and said, "We'll pull you out on top of this street here. Then, I'll pull you down this hill. We'll get it started that way because the oil is too cold." The battery wouldn't turn the motor over. I didn't know much about automobiles then. He started pulling me down the street. The oil was so stiff in that motor that the rear wheels would just slide. It wouldn't break loose. I said, "Pull it on down to the highway." The snow plows had come through and the snow was off the highway. He pulled me on down there. He got up a pretty good speed. We hit this blacktop where there wasn't any snow. My wheels were still sliding and they went to smoking. I smelled rubber burning. I went for about 100 feet before the wheels broke loose and went to turning. The motor started. He was going to visit somebody else around there. I thanked him and tried to pay him. He wouldn't take any pay. I said, "Well, I'll see you out at Taft sometime." He went on his way. I went around four or five blocks and came back up to where my wife was visiting. I went in and said, "Honey, let's get ready to go to California." She said, "I'm ready right now." I just forgot how cold it can get back there. So we threw the things in the car. I didn't even kill the motor. I was afraid it wouldn't start.

We went back over to Sallisaw and stayed all night with my brother-in-law. My other brother-in-law, that lived in Delano, was going to come back through as we did. Well, he came over [the next morning] and said, "We can't get our things together to leave today. Why don't you and your wife wait until tomorrow and go with us? We hate to drive through by ourselves. Wait one more day. We'll be ready tomorrow and go with you." I checked with the wife and I said, "Well, we'll wait on them one more day, but we're leaving in the morning." The next morning we loaded things up and went over and told them we were ready to go to California. He said, "Wait till we get ready." I said, "You ought to be ready."

His wife said, "It will take us about fifteen minutes." I said, "We'll wait that long." I pulled my watch out. He was one of these guys that likes to talk and visit. I held my watch out like I was timing him. Well, they were ready to go.

M.N.: Are you sorry you came?

Smith: Well, in a way, that will be a question that will never be answered. We always had the idea that we would go back. Then our daughter married out here. Our son went to college out here. We kind of got oriented to the country. The times change, people change, ideas change and you change your plans. You have to change because nothing stands still. I guess, all of it together, Kern County was good to us. Visalia has been good to us. We like it up here and we've made a lot of friends here. We've got a lot of good friends. The family is moving up here now. Our grandchildren are moving up here and our daughter will probably be up here when she retires. She's with the Department of Motor Vehicles in Delano. Our son has property in Tulare and we kind of look after that. California has been good to us. I guess we'll just stay.

END OF INTERVIEW

James L. Smith
b. 1838, Virginia

Belle Rogers
b. 1870, Kentucky

Thomas J. Smith

b. 1903, Le Flore County,
Indian Territory
[Choctaw Nation]

Education: 8th grade

Church: Pentecostal

m. 1924

Jewell E. Smith
b. 1907, Sequoyah Co,
Oklahoma

Lenora Smith Dunn
b. 1926
Employee, Department of Motor Vehicles

Verlin J. Smith
b. 1929
Principal, Saratoga District,
Congress Springs School

INDEX

- Arkansas
 - El Dorado, 1
 - Smackover, 1
 - Fort Smith, 2, 3, 18
- Arizona
 - Yuma, 10, 11
 - Williams, 11
- Art/Music, 4, 12
- California
 - First impression, 9
 - Treatment in, 25
 - San Joaquin Valley, 9
 - Imperial Valley, 10
 - Delano, 23-25, 31, 32, 34
 - Long Beach, 30
 - Kern County, 33, 37
 - Visalia, 37
- Crime/Law Enforcement, 7, 12
- The Depression, 17
- Discrimination
 - On job, 25
- Education
 - In Oklahoma, 1, 6, 7, 18
 - In California, 25
 - College, 32
- Family Life
 - Entertainment, 2-4, 33
 - Sports, 4
 - Cars, 22, 30, 36
 - Cooking/Food, 10, 24
 - Dating, 1, 14
 - Marriage, 1, 16, 30
 - Hunting, 2, 5
 - Bartering, 6
 - Gambling, 7
 - Credit, 20, 21
- Farming
 - Methods, 5, 15, 18
 - Land rental, 16-18
 - Sharecropping, 17
 - Crops, 4, 5, 17, 18
 - Drought, 18-20
 - Dust storms, 18, 19
 - Boll weevil, 17
- Health
 - Diseases, 19
 - Health care, 5, 6, 23
 - Causes of death, 5
- Housing
 - Homes in California, 24, 26, 32
 - Tents, 8
- Impact of Experience, 37
- Kansas
 - Wichita, 14
- Migration to California
 - Attraction of California, 7, 9
 - Reasons for move, 19-22
 - Transportation, 1, 9, 10, 22
 - Shelter, 22, 23
 - Belongings, 22
 - Funds available, 10, 22
 - Cooking/Food, 10
 - Route, 22-24
 - Migration to Detroit and Texas, 19
 - Accident, 22, 23
- Missouri
 - Kansas City, 8
 - Cape Girardeau, 9
- New Mexico
 - Gallup, 12
 - Deming, 22, 23
 - Las Cruces, 22, 23
- "Okie"
 - Reactions to term, 34

[continued]

Oklahoma

- Oaklodge, 1, 5
- Spiro, 1, 3, 6, 7
- Seminole, 1
- Sequoyah Co., 1, 16-18, 36
- Scullyville, 3, 7
- Sallisaw, 16, 36
- Tulsa, 16, 17
- Return to, 36, 37

Relief

- Welfare, 35
- Attitudes toward, 35

Texas

- Port Arthur, 8, 9

Work

- Migrant labor, 27-30
- Odd jobs, 25, 26
- Permanent jobs, 2, 7-16, 30-32
- Oil fields, 1, 13
- Coal mines, 20, 21
- Employers, 6, 7, 25, 26, 28, 30-32
- Unions, 33, 34
- Wages, 7, 11, 16, 19, 26-32, 34
- During WW II 31
- After WW II, 31