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Early education in
Kern County

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

EARLY EDUCATION IN KERN COUNTY

Juanita Burton Hinmen

Ruth Burton Berry

Interviewed

Orville Armstrong

on

August 20, 1970

Transcriber: Juanita Millican

ORAL HISTORY OF THE SOUTHERN SAN JOAQUIN VALLEY PROJECT
CALIFORNIA STATE COLLEGE, BAKERSFIELD
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INTERVIEWEES: Juanita Burton Hinmen and Ruth Burton Berry

INTERVIEWER: Orville Armstrong

SUBJECT: Migration to Kern County

DATE: August 20, 1970

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This is Orville Armstrong and I'm speaking with Ruth Burton Berry and Juanita Burton Hinmen. We're discussing their family, the Ebanesir Scott Burton family who came to Kern County in the early days. As a characteristic family who came down the north to make Kern County it's home.

Mrs. Berry could you comment on the early history of your family, your mothers and fathers family?

B: Well, ah, my mothers family, ah, came to Oregon on the covered wagons and Mama was not yet born but she was born in Oregon in 1854 and ah, the family had bought stock you know and all of their belongings and then ah, they came on down to this county and the mother, my mother's father, died before they ever left Oregon. So the mother married a man by the name of Bacon who had come across with them and they came on down and settled in the San Benito County and the original property is in where the Pinicals are now. It's

a national monument now and Mama

A: What about your fathers?

B: Mama grew up there, and then my father, he was born in 1844, he was ten years older than Mama and he had been at sea, he went to sea when he was a young man and he was a sea captain at the time he lead that life. He came down into the valley to visit a brother who was a missionary at that time and was in that area and he met Mama and married her.

A: And then they moved down into the valley futher down?

B: Yes, I don't remember how long they lived there but Papa was no rancher and he was no cattleman, he know nothing about it. He had

A: Maybe he had part of his family there.

B: Oh yes, there were fourteen children, in the family. I was the last one. All of the boys were born in that area.

A: In the San Benito County?

B: In the San Benito County. And ah, then they

A: The girls were born where?

B: The girls were born on the Plains. They finally, ah,
. . . .

A: Now the Plains, they would be what area?

B: Well, Delano, that was known ~~as~~ then as the Plains. It was an open country and they came there and settled

and went into a sort of a farming, cattle raising.

A: Now the girls

B: The girls were all born there. I was born in Pixley.

Now I don't know how they got that far.

A: Mrs. Hinmen could you tell us something about the life on the Plains? This area around Delano and ah, something, about the farm what they did there.

H: Yes, according to the family story and as I remember.

Of course we lived there when Ruth and I were only four years old but they did raise cattle and turkeys and they ah, it was all open range and they had to be herded in on horseback.

A: Even the turkeys?

H: Yes, even the turkeys. And ah, at the time, my grandfather was away most of the time because he was building schools and hotels and what not in new territories. And at the same time my grandmother, which I called Mama, she was making butter and that sort of thing and shipping it by railroad cars down to Bakersfield where it was sold, so this, oh I forgot to mention, we also raised bumer lambs. There was a lot of sheepmen in this part of the country and often there was a little trouble with these sheepmen but then again they got along peaceably but to bumer lambs, that that is the multiple, births, and the sheepmen felt it wasn't advisable to try to have so many little lambs on one une so

they would give the bumer lambs away and so they raised these bumer lambs on bottles and of course they had the milk to do it with because they had milk cows as well as range cows.

A: Well, when it was decided that you would move down into Bakersfield, it must of been quit a parade of people coming down, ten, or eleven, twelve or more children and all of the family and what was that like the trip down?

H: Well, they had to, of course there was some big decisions which we could talk about later about going down there and why they went there but at the time they did move, they did move one room of the home, which was a high ceiling big dining room which we later used as still as a dining room. But this dining room was moved all the way from the Plains to Bakersfield, with teams of horses and one of the older sisters remembered it well. She said they moved it by using big rollers which they moved one after the other to get this big dining room clear to the ranch and those big rollers were heavy too. Then how we got there well all of us, is another story too. We went some of us on horseback, some in the wagons and some in buggies and we were a large family going off to Bakersfield. And that is what we did.

A: Yes, now you did locate about two and a half miles from down town Bakersfield, to the south. Did they look around in any other area before they decided on this property?

H: Well, yes they did. At this time where the Kern River oil fields are at this time. There were no oil fields there at the time. This looked like very profitable land so they looked this over but it wasn't for sale, and it was a dollar and a half an acre but the grass didn't look so good, it isn't good feeding there but there was the river close by to ah, water the stock if they did do it, but they decided against it and my grandmother especially who had been raised on a cattle ranch, didn't think this would be profitable at all, so they didn't buy that. They bought this ranch, south of Bakersfield. Also at this time they bought some ranch land there which later on they did live there, just how long I don't know, I was to little. I don't remember this part, now I do remember part of it real well because the older boys went to Emet Berry's father school at this locality.

A: Yes.

H: But they did not keep this place to long, they sold it.

A: Now, Mrs. Hinmen could you tell us some of the characteristics of this twenty acre farm which was south of Bakersfield?

H: Oh, yes. Well, first of all I guess I should locate the place. We lived on what is now 'H' street and not too far off from Brundage Lane.

A: Who lives there now?

H: Well who lives there now, at this time is Huchen, Elsey Brassney Huchen, she lives there now but at the time we lived there no one was living there. But the thing about this was that there was a hill there and it was called Kern Island, now 'H' street at that time was not called 'H' street it was called Kern Island Road, so we lived on Kern Island Road, just south of Brundage Lane. Now our property set back a distance of ten acres and there was the hill, and we built our home at the top of the hill. Now it was not a sharp up rising hill, it was quite a big hill and my grandfather leveled it off where we could put all the buildings which consisted later on of a home, and a barn.

A: What else?

H: Oh let me see. Oh other things. Well, let's start. We had to have water, so then he drilled a deep well, ninety feet deep it was. And then he put up the wind mill and of course we couldn't depend on that all the time so we had a horse bar which Ruth and I had to drive the horse and make it go round and round to get the water up because when you live on a ranch you have to have a whole lot of water. And of course we never had a lawn because water had to go up first to the house, then the cattle, but we did have roses and shrubs around the house.

A: What were some of the other buildings up there?

Did you have the barns up there?

H: Well, yes we had a big barn, horse barn, it had one side for carriages and the other sides for all the horses and then we had a bunk house. A good size bunk house for the hired help. Then we had a big wood shed. My grandfather believed in the wood being out of the weather and the rain in the winter time so then we had that. Of course there was the house also the mild house and the milk barn oh, we had a long equipment shed because my folks thought that all farm equipment should be out of the weather and there hung harness by the pegs full all along the shed.

A: Now this property boarded I believed the or to the west of the Chinese cemetary ah, Ruth could you comment on that?

B: Yes, I sure can. In those days you know, kids never had much entertainment, so we had to invent our own. We remember so well that whenever we could hear the bands of the Chinese coming out of Bakersfield, of course, we didn't have cars then to drown out the noises like we have now. We knew when there was going to be a funeral because we were over there helping dig the grave and so forth and ah, it always gave us time to get over there and wait by the gates and if the person who had passed away was fairly well to do, why they would pass out little pieces of coins, usually nickels or dimes or something wrapped up in these little papers which they had scattered all the way out

there with little holes in them. I think the devil was suppose to pass through those little holes before he got to the body so he would be worn out by the time he got there. Well anyway our dogs always heard the tunes too and they came because there was always food to and they would stand around and could hardly wait for the ceremony to be over so that everybody could leave and they could begin to eat.

A: Actually what was some of the ceremonies? They would put the food out?

B: Yes, they would always put the ah, ah, it was very formal and they would lay these mats out in front of the casket, the casket was sitting on some trassels and then as I said if it was a wealth man there would be one roast pig or more and their rice cakes and their funny white colored buns and ah, the family was never to show any grief at all. They always hired morners and of course these morners would go through a trance and we were always right there along side of all of them.

A: There were two burning places ther also. What did they burn?

B: There were two burning places. It seems that the Chinese never kept any personal property at all of the deceased and the bedding and all the clothes or anything this person ever used went into one. Then there was a smaller one, that looked like a little pagoda and there was a little

door on that and they would put any silver that the man had and ah, any jewels or anything like that in there and burn and of course that was always roaring hot. It really burned up, you couldn't find anything after it was over.

A: With the dogs being there ready to consume all the food there must of been a time when the dogs would fight among themselfs for this food. Do you remember any?

B: Oh yes. One time all the family in our home, went to this one funeral. We knew it was going to be a larger one because there was an awful lot of music and an awful large procession coming from Bakersfield and it was all in buggy so and persons, so you had plenty of time to get there. So all of us were there and of course our dogs went too. And here was the casket all set out on the trassels and the mat with a couple of roast pigs and ah, tea was poured and the rice cakes were there and the chickens which they boiled and jung out there you know. All of this was going on up there. They had the casket open and right in the middle of it I remember distinctly, my own father was there and eldest sister Ella was there too. Well right in the middle of this one of our dogs, a bull dog, got into a fight with another strange dog and it was the darnest fihts you ever saw. And my sister Ella fainted right away and the mean time the China men were jumping around like crazy and my father took thses two bull gogs and sort of bend down and

put them across his knee and banged their heads and that separated them and in the mean time the dogs had upset the casket and of course you know what happened. The poor corpse was half ~~was~~ out of the casket and I guess the Chinese are pretty superstitious, they were terribly frightened, but anyway we had to get the man into the casket well we didn't but my folks did and calmed the Chima men down that was the end of that.

A: That was quit an event?

B: That was terrible.

A: Is there any thing else we should record reguarding the Chinese cemetary?

B: Yes, I think it would be interesting to know because since it's all gone now and there's no remains of the cemetary any longer there are homes build over the top of it, but I believe that all that could have been removed had been removed of these remains that were there. But an interestion thing was that in the middle of this Chinese cemetary was quit a large white piked fence and inside this fence were members of Lawrance Tibit's family, you know Lawrance Tibit was the metropolitan opera singer. I think he was the first American opera singer that did not have to study in Europe. But any way, all of his family had very nice head stones there and we would often wonder just why they were there, but of course the Tibit family were

an old pioneer family and they lived not to far from us across Brundage Lane lived Burt Tibit who was a Deputy Sheriff and then not to far from him lived the grandmother Tibit who was Lawrence Tibits grandmother and an old salvation Army lady.

A: Ebanesir Burton had many fine work qualities and many skills ah, Ruth could you tell some of the really big jobs he contracted?

B: Well, yes. Before we left the Planins as I say Papa was no cattleman or no farmer he didn't know a thing about it but he was a builder and he knew that trade very well and he build many railroad bridges and when the Tehachpi railroad was put through on the big loop up there, he did the work. A lot of the work pu there on that railroad and ah, he went out there with his teams and a cook car and my sister-in-law and the older ones all went out to help cook and take care of all of that. He also build the Watson Reservoir at the, in oil in the Kern River oilfields and he did all that with teams. Also he used scoop shovels, scrapers they called them and lined it with lumber and put tops on them. At one time when he had build one of them of these reservoirs out in the Kern Oil field, it was known as the largest one in the world, and it held a million barrels. Then when they had the gusser over in the Lakeview area in 1912, why he went over there with all of his

outfit and all of the things it took to tun a team of horses and these scrapers and he scraped out reservors over there just make shift was in a hurry to hold that oil so it wouldn't get away.

A: Did he have any other large contracts?

B: Well, yes, when they build the railroad around the Sultan sea, he had the contract for that and he took all of his equipment over there and put all the necessary trassels and so forth and build that. I have heard , I don't know because although I was very young and wasn't interested but he did build the Pioneer Hotel in Porterville that has recently been torn down and also the Burton School. Burton school is still there and being used. How it got the name of Burton and the district, I don't know.

A: The people in the Bakersfield area know the Burton name because of the Burton Dairy in the early days, could you comment on that dairy Mrs. Hinmen?

H: Well, yes, I guess you might say Ruth and I got this Dairy business started. Well, there were two quarts of milk that were delivered to a couple of families that lived just a short way from what was then the Leal School. Now we could take these quarts on our bicycles or we could go on horseback or with the buggy. Now the milk was delivered in fruit jars. There were no milk bottles just ordinary quart uars, well we did this for quit a while

and then after a while it was not two quarts but somebody else wanted milk and it got to where it go to much to take on a horse back or our bicycles, so then it had to go on the buggy so after a while it got to much for the buggy, so then it began to grow into a dairy. Well, then this is when Papa came in. He no longer was working in the oil fields, it had been two years and he was no longer a young man. He took an interest in this, so he fixed up a real good delivery wagon and our dairy just grew like mad and the first thing you knew we had quit a lot of cows. We had the very finest cows, Jersey cows, and the as time went on we bought, it was no longer fruit jars, it was standardized milk bottles where you didn't have the caps like today, you had a little paste board cap you stuck in the tin that we bought by the barrel. We then had a cerified dairy and as time went on we build a very fine milk cows and a very fine dairy barn and since it was a certified dairy, all the equipment used had to be sterilized and so on.

A: Do you remember ah, the names of any of these early customers?

H: Well, as I remember ahm there was the Annette family which were good friends of ours, then there was a family by the name of Brent. Then there was there was the Jaybrews Paine family. Now there were many others but this was quit a few years ago where I think I could ride to their places

but I can't remember their names.

A: Did your father keep the dairy for a very long time or did he shift responsibility?

H: Well after a time it got to where it was a little to much for Papa so then the boys took it over. By that I mean two of the brothers, that was Johnny and Frank. Well, as time went on, our dairy needed to increase. We did not have the amount of land to support a big dairy and did not want to buy more and go into the big wholesale dairy business. In the mean time the Underwoods were sort of casting about they wanted to increase their dairy so Mrs. Underwood approached our family and we made a deal and we sold our dairy to the Underwoods.

A: Are there any other comments regarding the old place up there on the hill at, you know?

H: Well, yess to me it was very interesting when we were small children. There was an Indian, well I think he was part Mexican, mostly Indian, that worked for us and he told us that when he was a small boy that the river divided right in front of our hill there and part of it went to the south and part of the river went to the north and then divided way out further on and also this hill of course was the head of Kern Island and that was where we lived and at this time when by the time we lived there the river was no longer there but what was there were some sloughs and swamps.

Right across some distance of five acres there was quit a swamp in there and I remember quit a time I will make this comment. The Japanese had some hogs there raising them and they didn't know much about hogs I think but anyway you know that they turned them, the hogs, loose and they were just like crazy and they ran out to the house and over the hills and Frank Burton, the one with the brothers at Comen, herded them back and what did they do? They all headed for that swamp and drowned in the swamp and that was a good thing so they didn't have collars spread any where but then on one end of the ranch there was one place to the south around the side of the hill where if you would dig down with your hands, there was sand there the water would come down that high, you could dig the water there, just got water right there, but any way today the water table is low there's no swamps anywhere.

A: Yes, Ruth what is the property like now in general?

B: Well, of course a lot of the property has been sold off there's homes around there but ah, the trees are there. Ned and I helped to plant those Eucalyptus trees when they were just about three inches tall and Papa called them gum trees and we thought we were going to get gum off of them, so we just worked like mad getting those trees. Later when the Houchins acquired the property why we were so pleased to know that the left all those

lovely trees there and build their home around those trees. Of course they removed our old home and the old dairy barn and the shylows and all that but the home, our original home is still down off of the hill down on Terrace Way and I think one of Katey's sisters lives in it now. To us we have never lost contact with that ranch because Katey Blassnick Houchin was our dear friend and we went to school with her at the Lowell school.

This interview took place at the Emmitt Berry home in Jack Ranch on August the 20th 1970.