

CALIFORNIA STATE COLLEGE, BAKERSFIELD

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

Oral History Program

Interview Between

INTERVIEWEE: Myron C. Frane

PLACE OF BIRTH: Tingley, Iowa

INTERVIEWER: Michael Neely

DATES OF INTERVIEWS: March 25, 1981

PLACE OF INTERVIEWS: Hanford, Kings County

NUMBER OF TAPES: 2

TRANSCRIBER: Barbara Mitchell

## Preface

Mr. Frane has had some illness in the last few years. He has some speech impairment and had difficulty maintaining his train of thought at times. Mr. Frane did provide insightful information into the function of governmental representatives and their motives during the 1930s. Mr. Frane spoke at length of his involvement in the internment of Japanese-Americans at the beginning of World War II. I found it necessary to eliminate most of this material. A considerable amount of manipulation was required to maintain continuity of the text due to Mr. Frane's tendency to lose track of his place in the recollection of events. Mr. Frane and his very nice wife were pleasant and gracious hosts.

Michael Neely  
Interviewer

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INTERVIEWEE: Myron C. Frane (Age: 68)

INTERVIEWER: Michael Neely

DATED: March 25, 1981

M.N.: This is an interview with Myron Frane for the California State College, Bakersfield CALIFORNIA ODYSSEY Project by Michael Neely at 1400 North Irwin, Hanford, California 93230 on March 25, 1981 at 2:00 p.m.

M.N.: You're not originally from California?

Frane: No. I was born in Iowa in 1912. The family moved to California in December of 1917 for my father's health. He had a brother at Reedley who had a lumberyard. He worked for him. By April he'd found a place to buy. It had thirty acres a mile and a half south of Reedley. We had our proud home and all until my mother died in 1956. The ranch was sold.

M.N.: What was the health problem that caused your father to come out here?

Frane: It was really cold in Iowa in December. He had stopped the team from plowing and was chopping some hedge. A thorn hit him in the eye and he had to have one eye removed. It affected his health all around. We had been thinking about moving to Tennessee. The doctors decided his health would be better in California.

M.N.: Do you remember the trip at all?

Frane: Yes. I was quite small. We stopped at Denver Colorado. We bought a bunch of grapes which was pretty expensive in those days. The part I remember is about getting off the train. I remember getting to California. There were four children and my parents.

My dad had farmed his father's farm in Iowa. They had a sale and sold little things like fruit jars. We used to have records of those things. They brought whatever items we needed. They had a pretty good sale. It was a matter of bringing stuff in trunks.

My father had about \$4,000. I believe on my mother's side they had a little more money. He had \$4,000 and borrowed \$4,000. That was really our start. We bought a place there at \$600 an acre. In three months' time we were offered \$2500 an acre for it. Dad had found what he wanted. He didn't see any use in selling. They weren't dealing in cash in those days. Things went up pretty fast. From April till three months later that whole country just inflated.

M.N.: What kind of farming had your father done in Iowa?

Frane: I remember him telling about the old days. They had some cows. They would make cheese. A big contrast was that in Iowa we just went by horse and buggy or sleigh. I think there were two cars in town. We didn't even have a car when we left. We moved into Reedley and almost everybody had at least a Model T Ford. We bought a 1918 Model Ford. Another thing was that we started school earlier in Iowa. I had gone about six weeks or a little more. All you really learned in the first grade in those days was how to count to 100 and your ABCs. I was too young when I moved to California so I had to stay out for the rest of the year. I didn't like it at first. The following September I started grammar school. I went through all the schools in Reedley. [I] graduated from Reedley Junior College in 1932.

M.N.: What kind of farm did your father establish in California?

Frane: Peaches and grapes were the main crops at that time. Fruit prices were good until 1923. Then we got the Depression. The rest of the country got hit in 1929.

M.N.: You mean the Depression hit out here earlier?

Frane: Fruit prices went down. There wasn't as much money. The banks closed up or went broke in the early 1920s here. My dad grew some alfalfa. He took out some of the peaches and went to hogs. That's what his experience was in Iowa. He did fairly well with that for a while till he got to where there was no profit. He ended up getting into chickens for eggs. Between that and the fruit, he saved the ranch. The place was very easily sold in 1956 for \$50,000. It was the highest sale price in the Reedley area at that time.

M.N.: Times were pretty hard?

Frane: It really was about 1942 or 1943 before things kind of pepped up. 1946 was a good year.

M.N.: So that was about 25 hard years getting to a good year.

Frane: Yes. I can remember I was around five or six years old. Dad would put me on a team harrow. We'd have three sections and we had three

mules. We'd smooth things out in the orchard. I'd sit on the box and drive the mules. I really came along with the team. Then we had somebody else prune the fruit. Our family was growing and we learned.

One year when I was in college I had to make some money. I came home and I operated the place for ten months from crop to crop. It's 30 acres and I did all the work except picking.

It was a good Thompson Seedless area. We would pretty well make two tons of raisins per acre. A lot of areas couldn't produce more than a ton. Peaches weren't too productive. They had varieties then called Tuscan cling and orange clings that wouldn't be acceptable on the market today. They would have split pits and different things but they did bring a good price. When we first bought the place World War I was on. Probably the best production came along about 1943. We had six acres of Emperor Grapes that did sixteen tons an acre of green pack. On those six acres we picked them and hauled them to town and had \$11,000 left. The Emperor's a table grape. They would be thinned and pruned for the eating market. They would keep well. In the east they ship them all over the world. The winery grapes the winery was paying more that year. These were just huge bunches of grapes. They didn't color as nicely as they would other years but they had the weight. That vineyard never did more than nine to ten tons an acre after that. It was the third year. I took some credit. I trained them up. We hadn't had any experience with them and it just hit right. The weight was there. They would be sold more for color and marketability.

I remember we had a couple Chinese men that pruned. That was interesting and odd to us because I'd never been around any other kind of people. Reedley is quite a League of Nations. After the second year the family did the labor excepting at harvesting time. Then you'd have to have your peaches off in a hurry.

M.N.: Describe these two Chinese fellows to me.

Frane: They lived in this boarded up place. [They] did their own cooking and everything. When they would go to work pruning the trees, they would work away. It would be pretty frosty and cold. They'd have a bucket with them and make a little fire from twigs in the field. Every so often they'd go over and warm their hands. They knew how to adjust like that.

One time we took one of them to Kingsburg. We went over in a Model T Ford and parked by some sort of a Chinatown. This fellow had a habit. They would let one of their fingernails grow real long and curl. I've always puzzled ever since how he ever pruned in the orchard. He told my dad to wait a minute and he brought back a box of Cracker Jacks for me. I thought he was all right.

Probably would be considered pretty slow today. They were the ones that were customary to do that kind of work. Harder times came and people

did their own pruning. They went through a sequence of Chinese probably being the first laborers in California. Then it followed up with Japanese.

They were fast and good and they learned quick. They were held back in one respect. They couldn't become citizens. They progressed. The Chinese were crowded out of the farm by the Japanese. They gradually went to town. They were the ones that used their head.

We all had our so-called Chinatown. That's where people would come in and play cards. The Chinese made their living off of their gambling with them. The Japanese began getting assimilated and saved their money. They generally rented farms and got to farming. They were followed by quite a lot of men from the Philippines. The Filipinos came in 1925 to 1929. There were a lot of them. They generally came without any family. They pretty well stayed. They kind of mingled around the Delano area. I think there's a lot of them yet. Probably the thing that held them back was that they didn't bring any women from their country. They were quite a while getting assimilated by marriages. I don't know how many married. They sort of kept their place.

M.N.: When did the migrants from Oklahoma start coming?

Frane: The dust bowl and drought combination affected many states. For some reason there was a preponderance of people from Oklahoma. The word Okie became prevalent. They were the people who lost out first in the drought. They headed west to try to find a place to make a living.

It started around 1932. I know by 1933 or 1934 the whole country was in flux. They had these organizations in the south first and then in the various states. They were rehabilitation agencies. When I started on my job we had the Rural Rehabilitation Agency. The state started it. It was really more federal money. About 1936 it became Farm Security Administration. It was a federal organization then. We weren't under civil service. By 1936 it was established. In California we had what we called grant camps. In those days California had a reputation of good welfare. You had to be a citizen and be in the state five years before you could draw on it. These folks that came in as migrants, if they were hungry, had no place to go.

I graduated in 1939 and had to wait until April before I got a job in Merced. They had had a grant camp at Chowchilla which had just been closed. People came in from Dos Palos, over thirty miles away, simply to say they were farming and hungry. They could get a place to farm if they could get a loan. If we could help them we would. They were hungry and their cupboards were bare. I realized later they might have starved to death. If they're out of work and didn't have any place to go, they were sort of day to day. They were without funds.

The Oklahoma people got spread around all over. It did seem that

Bakersfield was the center. It was easy to get at and I think more of them settled down there. They're just like other people. I think Steinbeck did a little exaggerating. They had a lot of people whose habits of living were such that if they were in a camp or a house they'd rather go outside to a restroom or didn't have other facilities. They would just bore a hole in the house and that was their toilet. Some of those things existed. The Okies got the credit for it.

I've seen some conditions where their living conditions were very bad in labor camps. One that comes to my mind is over in Nipomo. It existed perhaps as late as 1950. The pea pickers were up in the hills between Santa Maria and San Luis Obispo. They were considered the poor people. They came from all over. They weren't just Oklahoma people. They were people who had never been able to acquire anything. You go in there from October to December and those people would be living with dirt floors. They might have a tent with a wooden floor. I would consider that camping out in pretty tough conditions. They were just renting. That was their way. They would go out and work picking peas. They would work. They just never acquired enough education to do other things. I've seen seen some places down by Stratford in Kings County where a family of six was just in a little two room. Couldn't have been more than eight by fifteen feet. That's pretty tight quarters. They got a couple beds in there. Some of them have to sleep on the floor.

M.N.: You started with the Farm Security Administration in 1940?

Frane: Yes. It was a little bit tough picking. I first made an application for teaching agriculture. I had two brothers that were teaching agriculture in California. Nothing seemed to be offered at that time. They asked me whether we should make it a family affair. It was all right with me. They finally ruled that out.

I just had to go home and work awhile and look again. I went back up to Davis. I was 25. They had what they call the NYA [National Youth Authority]. I was getting 40¢ an hour. I had a job grinding soil samples. We ground them up for making mud pies to plant things in. That was quite boring in one respect and interesting in another. I was a horticulture major. When I became 25 I wasn't eligible for those funds. I was just out of a job. I went to the comptroller at the school and he said, "Well, I know they got some money over there and you just tell them I sent you over." I went right back on my same job. I was 25 and the pay was 35 cents per hour.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 1

M.N.: You were 25.

Frane: I had heavy science laboratory courses and it just proved too much for me. I went to professor and told him I'd better stay out a year. I remember his words. He said, "Well, don't stay away too long." I

hitchhiked home. I operated my father's ranch for a year. I had to have money. I saved between \$1100 and \$1200 out of my share. Things weren't too good all over. It was like borrowing money from my dad. It did give me a chance to finish up at Davis with my B.S. degree in horticulture agriculture. Even with an education things were just tough. I'd had two brothers to get their degrees. My sister got into a business course and she was able to carry jobs. I had no other idea but that I should go on to get my degree.

After I was out and I'd been waiting nothing seemed to come up. I had taken tests to inspect fruit. It was a little bit political. They didn't like to have guys with degrees in the Federal-State Fruit Inspection. It was federal and state funded and it kind of had the corner in the Reedley/Dinuba area where I was raised. I'd handled apples and been around fruit and grapes and all that all my life. I thought I was qualified and had a B.S. degree. After I took my test, they that only qualify me for table grapes and raisin grapes. The chaps in charge didn't want anybody to get their job. They never let anyone get on permanent that had an education.

You'd work six months. Then you were laid off. One of these head guys said, "Well, you just as well give up because they're not going to let you advance." I took the test along about June or July of 1939. I got a call to report at Shafter to inspect potatoes. Now I'd been told I could only inspect grapes.

They had some sort of rot in the potatoes. They were irrigated so they broke down pretty fast in the shipping. We had an inspection there and at least ten per cent of them were being culled. They wouldn't keep as well as russets raised in dry areas. We'd cut about six sacks out of a carload of 300. You had to cut them to see this rot. The price was cheap too. This was the first time they had ever had such a situation where they were being inspected so carefully. They started marketing only what could be sold and then destroyed the other potatoes.

I went down there and got a room. We were paid \$150 a month. I stayed there 30 days. I had experience working in potato sheds. They get awful hot in the summer. I went out one time in the field where they inspect before they shipped. I worked in Edison in the sheds. Arvin was a new area by Bakersfield. We set up a new packing shed. It started after dark and those potatoes were raised on virgin ground. They were the biggest things I ever saw but they had a lot of sunburn. They popped out of the ground. I wasn't out on the farms enough to know who was employed there. In the sheds there were a lot of people. They'd joke among themselves and call them Okies. They were pretty much southern people. They had gotten out of the fields to work in the packing sheds. It was seasonal work. One time I noticed there was a couple there. The others were calling them Arkies. That's the first time I'd ever heard of an Arkie. I was quite puzzled and wanted to understand. They were friendly and were just joking but they did segregate these two people that were from Arkansas. The others were

apparently from Oklahoma. They had to work together. It was just kidding they were getting from the crew. I just thought that everybody that got dust bowled was an Okie.

That's when the Arkie came in. The little town of Armona had a cannery. Armona is about four miles from Hanford. Most of those people came from Arkansas. They were migrant people and they would come out here and work either picking fruit, packing fruit or in the cannery. They'd then go back east for the winter. They would be traveling back and forth migrating every year. That was their way of life. I learned a lot of people from Oklahoma did the same thing. They made enough here to tide them over there. As I say, I thought everyone was from Oklahoma.

M.N.: What did these people down in Arvin look like?

Frane: They were out there to work handling potatoes. It was pretty nice work for the ladies. They merely stood by a grader and would pick out culs. I remember one lady. I was sort of in charge of the shed. The men would just dump potatoes and try to rush them through so their wives could go home with them. This one young gal was pretty nice and dependable. She would let me know when it was happening because I had to be taking potatoes out to grade them. They didn't have any responsibility about the potatoes. The men had merely come in from the fields and they wanted to get home. We worked long hours. I was only there thirty days. When I got off work I pretty well went to bed.

M.N.: Do you remember any characteristic that stood out?

Frane: Yes. You would know from their talk that they had a different dialogue. They came in groups that pretty well got classified.

M.N.: They did tend to work in families?

Frane: Yes.

M.N.: Did that create a problem?

Frane: No. I don't think so. They brought a labor source. Amongst them there is always the ones that will progress somehow or other. Some of them have become our biggest farmers.

M.N.: How's that?

Frane: Well, I guess they're just thrifty with their farm work. I know there's a family here by the name of Yocum\*. I got to talking to one of them one time. I was talking about a program we had. We could help people in improving their houses by getting them bathrooms and facilities. As of 1943 there was a lot of houses in this country that had a room for a bath but didn't have the money to put facilities in. By World War II we had a program so we got more bathrooms. My dad was very progressive

\*See 141, interview with Hadley Yocum.

because in 1918 we put a bathroom in the place we bought in Reedley. In Iowa we didn't know of such a thing. I was talking about these people that had been very successful in farming. He says, "You know my mother didn't have a sink inside until 1945."

M.N.: The Yocums?

Frane: Yes. I think the father's still alive and moved over to the coast.

In 1961 and 1962 we had a drought. That way I got to meet some of those who got a little more progressive. We had a drought in the area here and all of a sudden the insurance companies all pulled out. We had an emergency program which also would help these larger operators if they couldn't get help elsewhere. They had to drill deeper wells. They had adapted and generally got their family in the business. Nowadays you go and meet them and nobody would even talk about Okies or Arkies around them. This is home now. They always say they came in a Model T Ford and what they could bring.

M.N.: Let's get into how you got into the Farmers Home Administration. You were grading potatoes?

Frane: Yes. I was hoping for a job out of it. It did last thirty days. I didn't get a call from them until late in the fall.

M.N.: You talked with someone at Davis who told you to go talk to a Mr. Folger at Berkeley.

Frane: Yes. They had been hiring people.

M.N.: Who did this Mr. Folger work for?

Frane: At that time he was in one of our head offices of the Farm Security Administration. He had a pretty good title. He referred me over to the head office in San Francisco and I was interviewed. They thought I was just the right type to work with family farmers. I went back to Reedley to wait. It went on about six weeks. I was getting kind of hungry again and wanting to know why I wasn't getting somewhere. I went back up to San Francisco. They were two days trying to find my record. They were honest about it. They were hunting high and low. They said they would place me nearer my home. Some other fellow from Davis got the job in Fresno as a supervisor. By the time they found my record they hired me to go to Merced. I was having to start out at \$135 a month.

M.N.: Was that fair pay at that time?

Frane: Well, no. In 1940 you could probably have made that much at some other things. They took it as training.

M.N.: Were you pleased to have a job?

Frane: Oh yes. I went to the bank with my father in Reedley. I'd known the banker since I was a child. He'd had a farm ranch with my uncle. I went in and presented the situation and was able to borrow \$500 with my father's co-signature. I went into Merced with that \$500 and shopped and found a car for around \$360. It was a nice 1936 Plymouth. I went over to buy some clothes and the guy offered to give me credit for a year. I paid it off at \$5 every two weeks. So I ended up with a two-pants suit of clothes and the vehicle. I really got wrapped up in my job. I was able to work with families and farms.

M.N.: What was it like?

Frane: I was quite discouraged. My boss lived in Madera. He would work up from Madera and come in later in the day. I wasn't getting any attention. There were about six in the office. There were three girls for clerks and they kind of took turns. I filled up any forms they had for the day and then I wasn't doing anything. They had me sitting around waiting most of the day. I thought I wasn't earning my pay. I was kind of provoked that you could go to work and not have to work.

I was an assistant county supervisor at \$135 a month. You moved up to be an associate within about a year. That meant you got \$150 a month. The county supervisor was \$2,000. I turned down a couple promotions. I couldn't see that. I got most of the raises anyway. I thought it was not worth it to take all that responsibility to only get a couple hundred dollars more a year. I got to be an associate at \$150 a month.

In the middle of 1942 we had this situation at Pearl Harbor. Some of our boys from along the coast had gone to famous battles around in the Philippines. Some of them lost their lives. To protect the local Japanese and to protect us too they decided to evacuate all the people of Japanese descent away from the coast.

I went into that overnight. Saturday we were in a meeting in San Jose. A man was in charge. We called him Wild Bill Helvey, the Army wanted him to do this job. We had to do it under Army controls. Nothing had been done except in a few cases the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] had gone in and found they had shortwave radios in the Santa Cruz area.

I knew if we got into trouble we could call the FBI. They wanted Bill Helvey to set up an organization covering Alaska, the whole coast of Washington, Arizona, and the San Joaquin Valley. They wanted them to have offices going by Monday. They said to do it. All the procedures and everything were developed over that weekend. We were called the War Food Administration. We were loaned over to them. They did their job for the Army.

Frane: We went in at our same titles. We went from Farm Security Administration right into the War Food Administration. We never missed a pay check. They went to the Farm Security Administration for help and said they wanted the offices to be set up by Monday. Old Wild Bill said, "Give me till Tuesday."

I had mine going by nine or ten o'clock Tuesday. I got a telephone call at two o'clock Monday. They said, "You're to report at Watsonville tomorrow morning and have an office going to evacuate the Japanese." I went to the employment office on Tuesday morning and they had a desk ready for me. We had a box of supplies. I hired two men and a clerk and set up our office right there for Santa Cruz County. They opened up sixty-four offices. Old Wild Bill did quite a job. He got the supplies there.

That was the first time I heard of the nisei. They were just Japanese to me before I knew them. I had gone to school with them.

M.N.: These are Americans of Japanese descent?

Frane: Yes. People that weren't U.S. citizens had been moved five miles from the coast by the time I arrived. They never proved any of them had tried sabotage. About a week or two later I saw a lady that did the social part about the families moving. There was sort of a hard-hearted man that did liquidating. He was a Federal Reserve representative. There was a young man there of Japanese descent in our uniform with a sister and a mother. All our workers were crying. Turned out that this family had been housekeepers for a lady and her father. The young soldier came in to see if he couldn't get permission for his mother and sister to stay there. He was in the service. These others were saying I'm sorry but you got to go. It was a tear-jerker. It was quite puzzling. He was in our uniform. The point was their dad wasn't a citizen.

It was a job that had to be done. I never ate so many strawberries and bushberries in my life. They were good. It was over on the coast. It was very nice. We worked hard.

M.N.: So they just took the Farm Security Administration and changed it?

Frane: Yes, to the War Food Administration.

M.N.: What happened to the Farm Security Administration?

Frane: We did a lot in a short time from March to July. By July we were all back in our county Farm Security Administration offices.

M.N.: We were talking about your first day with the Farm Security Administration.

Frane: They assigned me to an assistant named Charlie Justus. He drove a Packard automobile. Quite a big car in those days. He'd learned to

enjoy the job. I remember the day I was assigned to go with him. We started out about 10:30 or 11:00 and we met some of his friends. Finally got onto a ranch toward Livingston way about time for a meal. We ate with the family. That was kind of controversial later. They were ordinary American people of Finnish descent, name was Escola.

M.N.: Why weren't you suppose to eat with them?

Frane: Well, they would accuse you of taking a bribe. See we were deciding whether they could have loans. They had to make some determination as to what was proper. They were ten or twelve miles away from a restaurant. If we had gotten there and then left to go eat and come back, we'd have wasted an hour. The thing I noticed, which helped me in my training, was that he wouldn't have a form he needed so we came back and he didn't have anything done. We'd spent a day and didn't accomplish anything. From then on I learned to get my forms ready. When I went to work, I was prepared before I went there. It was just a job to him. He got promoted to supervisor and then he left the organization. At the end of six weeks he'd moved on and we had another assistant. I didn't have anything to do. Didn't have any money. I'd go up to the office and work at nights. The boss drove by one time in the evening. He called me on Monday and gave me quite a lecture. [He] said I wasn't suppose to work like that. He and the assistant had only written 22 loans together. I'd written 18 loans against the two of them in the six weeks period. I enjoyed my job enough to work at it.

M.N.: What kind of loans are we talking about?

Frane: The majority of them would be to families that had graduated from farm labor to renting a farm. They needed a vehicle. They needed tractors. They needed equipment, cows, seed and maybe living money. We saw to it they got fair leases and a fair share. They weren't as well schooled. It wasn't a sign of dumbness. They lacked fine schooling. They generally knew that they had owed money. They were very talkative because they couldn't write too well. They had to learn to defend themselves.

We had a few that would sell cows and not report them. We had to keep track of everything. They couldn't go to the bank for money. Their living expenses were just as important as everything else. We'd make a comprehensive plan, very well itemized, covering their living as well as their farming expenses. Some people feel that's restricted and that's why they were in that condition. They spent what they made before so planning and supervised credit was the part that appealed to me. We would try to do a very thorough job. After they set up we would try to visit them every three or four months.

M.N.: Sounds like you were kind of a farm social worker.

Frane: Yes. It did help them graduate to regular credit. That was quite a goal. Those that did that would never go back on welfare.

M.N.: Were the loans that you were giving considered welfare?

Frane: No. They were legally obligated to pay them back.

M.N.: Why did you say welfare a minute ago?

Frane: Well, a lot of these people had been on it in the camps or on welfare. They got a chance to farm but if we weren't there they couldn't have it because they didn't have any money.

M.N.: Do you feel that you were effective in getting these people into active participation and farming?

Frane: I think so.

M.N.: Are you proud of that?

Frane: Yes. Through it, most of their children went to school.

M.N.: Did you realize what your effect was going to be?

Frane: Probably not. It was appealing. I could see the point of getting them off welfare. It was awfully hard to see where somebody would fail with us.

M.N.: Did you have failures?

Frane: They went to what we called collection only cases. Most of these would have to give up. They couldn't make it. Rents had gone up or something like that. They went into what we called collection only. I went down around Stratford on some of these so called collection only cases. I made about twelve contacts. Had to find the people and all. Ten of them were all from the same town in Oklahoma. We had a lady supervisor that went around to all the offices. She was from Oklahoma. I made a mistake of talking about the Okies one time and she let me know. There were ten families that had landed in the same place in the state. They were farm laborers mostly. They had tried farming there and failed. A small guy didn't have much of a chance to get started around there.

M.N.: If people wanted to make a loan, you had to go out and you had to study their finances in such a way to insure that they would be able to pay it back?

Frane: Yes. My idea of a successful supervisor was to be able to put yourself in their place. Then, by asking questions, project the paper work and guess markets a year ahead.

M.N.: Could you do that fairly well?

Frane: We thought we were doing pretty well. You could help a man buy a farm and a nice house and forty years to pay it back at three percent interest. If they couldn't do it on that, why I thought nobody can. Some of the farming didn't do so good in some areas. If they failed and got ready

to sell, the price of land had been going up so that we had very few losses in that program.

When I started our operating program was limited to \$2500. The average units around Merced would be say 40 acres with 30 in cotton and 10 for alfalfa. Then a ten cow dairy that made a little balance. The point was that they had a dairy and the cotton. Most of them knew about cotton from where they came from. You could buy dairy cows for \$60. Within six weeks they went to \$100. You could set them up with dairy cows for \$1000. You could get them a new Ford tractor. You could get them a tractor, hay mower, rake and a combination plow for about \$1500. That was about it. The dairy brought income and they'd meet their grocery bill.

M.N.: That would kind of hold them over until the crop came in?

Frane: Yes. That was the pattern. Cream was gradually going up. Grade A dairy butter fat in those days was 35¢ a pound. Grade B was about 30¢. We had women home supervisors. Their main job was to make the home living budget. To meet with them and help them improve it. By the time I moved to Hanford I didn't have a home supervisor. I had learned the whole racket enough to do both jobs.

M.N.: So you were really not just a loaning agency you were an educating agency.

Frane: Humanitarian and rehabilitation. That's what they called it. The average family would earn about \$100 a month. If they had a baby less than a year old, they went \$5 more.

END OF TAPE 2, SIDE 1

Frane: They lived on \$1200 a year to get the essentials for living. Made \$60 more for a baby.

M.N.: They had a formula?

Frane: Yes. A lot of people didn't want to abide by it. I remember one place. I said something about I was sure glad these folks were going to get an electric refrigerator. The home supervisor just about had a fit. She said she had made the plan out for an ice box refrigerator. That's the way it had to be. I had been down shopping myself and you could buy an electric one for nothing down and \$1.50 a month. It was really low. They could show you they could save you 15¢ a day by saving food. You could make your payments for that. Before we got through with that area she thought I was the best farm supervisor they had. I thought I did something there.

M.N.: Why did she think that?

Frane: Well because I convinced her that I could get along with people and they could progress.

M.N.: Was your philosophy to help people?

Frane: Yes.

M.N.: Did you really try to do that?

Frane: Yes.

M.N.: And you felt you were successful?

Frane: Yes.

M.N.: Well, that must be a really good feeling. Did the people appreciate what you were doing?

Frane: Yes. I meet their children and their grandchildren. I've had people come up on the street. Kids tell me who they are. They're married now and they were just little babies when I saw them. I felt that I did a good job and I got along with people.

M.N.: Did you ever go out on a limb for people?

Frane: Yes. One family had a loan. I'd bought them some milk house equipment. It was in the deal. They sold \$40 worth and did something else with it. At the time I didn't think anything of it. I think I told them they could replace it. I made the mistake of saying not to tell an investigator. Well, it so happened this man couldn't sign his name. He talked all right. I thought but they were honest. An investigator came through soon after that the first thing they did was tell them about selling that \$40 worth of stuff. It taught me a lesson.

M.N.: Did you get in trouble for that?

Frane: Not really. It was so small. I learned not to tell people to keep a secret.

M.N.: You scheduled the loan. Did you help them actually get the equipment?

Frane: Yes. You knew where the dealer was.

M.N.: Could you get them a better price that way?

Frane: No. That wasn't the object. They got their value. My main interest was to protect them. In Merced dairy cows at the auctions were about \$60 a head. In about three months they went up to \$100 a head. If the dealer got hold of a greenhorn, why you'd get the culs. We adopted a policy that we'd better go with them and at least see that they got their money's worth.

I got a fellow who was legally blind. He convinced me. He took me around the place. He knew where every fence was. He'd go ahead and hold the

fence up for me. He was legally blind but he could see some. I made that loan. I went for the Japanese evacuation. When I came back I found the office had been short of help. This fellow had just gone out on his own. Oh, he got suckered. When they sold the cows, they only brought \$50 a head. He just didn't make it. I transferred to Hanford to start an office in 1943. Never had one down here before. The first dairy loan I made I thought I had to go with the party. Well, I did for the first few. I finally got one that the fellow knew more about dairy than I did. I didn't know it. I took him to a dealer. He didn't have any cows. We went up to another dealer and he told us right off he didn't have any cows. I looked across the field and saw an animal. It was foggy. He thought I was a greenhorn and interested. He said he didn't have any cows but he's ready to sell me that one. It was a heifer. It wasn't a milk cow. He just thought he had a greenhorn. He figured he could sell him. We went over then to a guy by the name of Floyd Fike. I saw that they knew each other. They were going along picking the cows. Got all done, Mr. Fike said, "You're different. Those guys from Fresno come down and pick the cows out for the guys. I told them some were culs and they wouldn't believe me." I learned there. I was trying to see that they got a fair deal.

M.N.: But you didn't step in and actually do it for them.

Frane: That's right. I urged them to get into cow testing and better breeding though artificial insemination to build the herds up. We really did some good. We urged them to do things that was good for them.

M.N.: So you not only were able to help people get started in farming but you were actually able to improve the kind of farming that was occurring.

Frane: That's right.

M.N.: You were in a unique position with all that influence.

Frane: Yes. A lot of the operators became quite large. In a county like Kings we had some of the biggest irrigated farms in the world. Maybe a man would have only two acres of chickens or five acres of something else. This area has the big and the little. That Tulare Lake area is really big.

M.N.: What are some of the bad things that have been said about the Farmers Home Administration or the Farm Security Administration?

Frane: They started having the emergency programs to help people. The idea was all right but it would be at say 3% money. Our regular programs were five. You'd have every millionaire in the county come in wanting some of that cheap money. We had to weed them out. I took that very seriously. They had to justify it.

M.N.: Did everyone have the kind of conscience that you did?

Frane: No. I don't think so. We had one situation. I had a boss who had been a banker at one time. In those days a bank might make a bad loan. They didn't have to repay that loan. They might fire someone, but they didn't have to repay that loan.

M.N.: If a bank officer made a bad loan and didn't come through on it, he had no liability?

Frane: Yes. As long as he was honest. He made a loan. He didn't steal any money. He just made a bad judgement. In our case, if we made a bad loan, they could attempt to make you repay the losses.

M.N.: So you had to make good and sure that a loan was solid.

Frane: If I'd known that I'd have never gone to work for them. I know plenty of people who sweated it out. It wasn't a case that you stole any money. It was a case that they objected to your judgement where there was a loss.

M.N.: You had to be particular about assuring that loans were going to get paid back.

Frane: Yes. We weren't making enough money to pay those things back.

M.N.: That certainly would justify your intrusion into a person's affairs.

Frane: Well, it was a matter of approach. You learned to work with people. Of course, there's always the unexpected.

My first ownership loan in this area was for people who didn't have funds and had three active boys. I made them our first ownership loan. In those days we had to work within \$12,000. From that they paid the place off. The three boys all got college educations. Two of them went to Boise State, the American Legion program. They were successfully educated and active in the community. The third boy came back and decided to run his mother's farm. He had a brother in the area so I set him up on a loan. I loaned him maybe \$6,000 for operating. They managed to get themselves into about \$20,000 debt around the community in one year because of the family's good name. I was trying to watch one point. I was afraid the brother who had the place before might double-cross in some way by using the same equipment.

He got off on a tangent that he didn't like me. He thought I should have done better with him. He left. He couldn't go bankrupt because of the family's good name. He went over to San Luis Obispo and got a job. He talked to an attorney there. About that time there was an article in the Reader's Digest against the Federal Housing Administration. The attorney thought that was all FHAs. This fellow was telling him he had an FHA loan. I got a letter almost demanding that I come to this attorney's office in San Luis Obispo. My office is in Hanford but I serviced San Luis Obispo County. I didn't know what the score was. I went over there. I straightened out his first mistake that it wasn't

Federal Housing. Then we talked better and he instructed the young lad to come by and apologize to me. We were supposedly good friends thereafter. He went to my boss anyway and tried to get my job because of his own failings. You never know where trouble is going to come from.

M.N.: Were there a lot of politics?

Frane: Probably. I'm the kind of guy that stayed in the county office. I couldn't stand what I had to see at higher levels. At the state offices and the national level they have a different job to do. They can make things happen. They interpret the procedures.

M.N.: They can make the supervisors do things.

Frane: They just live a different life. Maybe I wasn't progressive enough. I stayed in the county and was able to mix with the local people.

M.N.: Did you like the local people?

Frane: Oh yeah. That's why I kept the job. I couldn't say that about all state and national people. Some are fine. Some you get along with. Others would just crack the whip. They were the officers.

M.N.: Weren't there problems with you having an education and some of the people you made loans to?

Frane: No. I was raised without too much money. I was raised on a family farm myself. I could understand their problems and get into their position. We had some that were just fellows from the cities and they wouldn't make a home plan.

As of 1946 we became Farmers Home Administration. They did away with the home supervisors. We still had to go for home plans but the people who were trained after 1946 thought that was a lot of hooey. They just put in so many dollars. Well, I'd been raised the other way. I kept on with the plans.

M.N.: The Farm Security Administration became the Farmers Home Administration in 1946?

Frane: Yes. We joined together and became Farmers Home Administration.

M.N.: What was the other loan organization?

Frane: The ECFL [Emergency Crop and Feed Loan]. You would call them Republican. They'd come up under the Farm Credit Administration which goes back to 1918.

Roosevelt started our program. That was the New Deal. I didn't know any other President for four terms.

M.N.: He was your influence?

Frane: Yes.

M.N.: So one loan program was Republican and one was Democrat.

Frane: Yes. It happened that our organizations were started when the Democrats were in. But we had more people. They couldn't put themselves into our position.

M.N.: They didn't actually go out and get involved with the people.

Frane: That's right.

M.N.: There were nine of you to one of them?

Frane: Yes. Nationally.

M.N.: So you had a much larger program.

Frane: You might say we won out personnel wise. Our program became the program. We came in with supervision.

M.N.: You felt that the Democratic approach was more responsible.

Frane: Yes. It was better.

M.N.: How do you feel about what you did?

Frane: I think it was the right thing. I am disappointed that the family farmer is going. I still think it's a good way of life and a good place to raise your children. You'll find a lot of them nowadays who live in the city. I just think the family farm is a better way to live. On the other hand, money seems to make the world go around. The more acres you've got, you just keep making more money.

M.N.: What is your view on your participation in events at that time?

Frane: I think that we did good. It gave the families a chance to see what they could do. Otherwise they couldn't have. Their children went to school more.

M.N.: You feel that the Farmers Home Administration/Farm Security Administration was a positive influence?

Frane: Yes. I had an example of that. A man from Montana had failed in his farming. He'd apparently wanted an education. I went to look him up. His son was the head personnel officer at Cal Poly [California Polytechnic State University]. From there he went to Madera with a big cotton company. I think later he ran the whole show for this cotton oil company for the whole state of Arizona.

That fellow had a chance to go to school because we helped his dad. He went to school and somehow got an education. His dad was educated all right too. I ended up cancelling part of his debt. We came out with a son who was able to do things accepted by the world. Things bigger than I could ever do.

M.N.: So you really had a strong effect on the way that society developed.

Frane: Right. That farmer I was telling you about never went past grammar school. The father and mother wanted to see their kids get educated. They all got through college.

M.N.: With your help and with the help of the Farm Security Administration.

Frane: I would say that. They had the incentive. They just needed the means to get going. They paid us back.

M.N.: In general, you made good investments in good people.

Frane: Yes. Real estate was good. You're up against a crop. One boss I had said the farmer's the biggest gambler in the world.

M.N.: You gave people a chance to be successful.

Frane: Right. To improve their conditions.

M.N.: And that was what happened?

Frane: Yes.

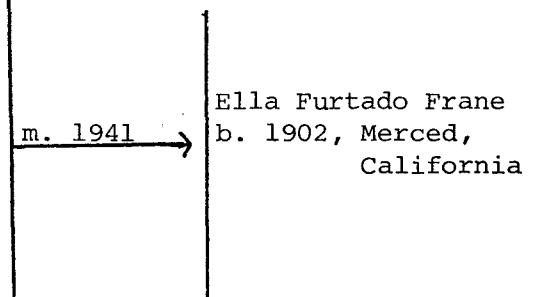
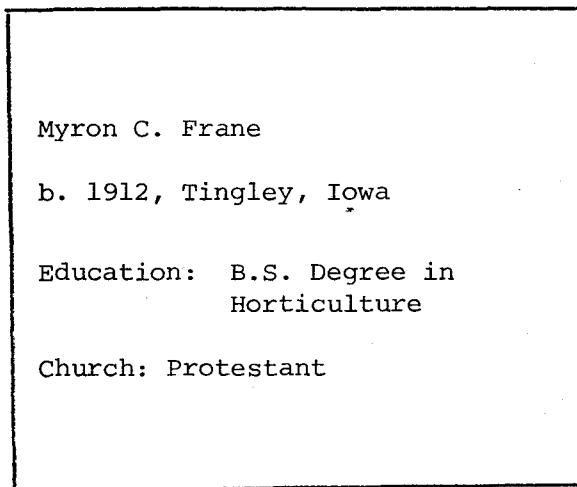
END OF INTERVIEW

Edgar M. Frane  
b. 1879, Tingley, Iowa

[His parents from Pennsylvania]

Alvira Mariner Frane  
b. 1879, Canton, Fulton County,  
Illinois

[Her parents from Illinois]



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