

TAPE #24MARY LAWRENCE-----POSTMASTER, FIDDLETOWN

Recorded: March 1979

Reference: Early days in Fiddletown

I remember my mother telling about her people coming here. They came up over the Carson Pass, and they had to draw the wagons up with ropes. They unhitched their horses or whatever they had; maybe they had oxen. And she said quite a few wagons left the train on the journey.

(How did they get to Fiddletown?)

I don't really know. Maybe through Placerville. This was about 1853. This was my Great Grandmother. They were my mother's people. My great grandfather came here in 1859. That was on my father's side.

(What did he do?)

He did some mining and worked in a saw mill. Farnham's saw mill, to be exact. The Farnham's were one of the first people to come here.

(What brought the Chinese to Fiddletown?)

They must have come here for mining. I heard my grandfather tell about some of the Chinese. They were treated pretty badly. If a man wanted to take a claim, it didn't matter much; he'd just as soon kill for it. They found them dead on their claims, and then this man would take possession...I don't suppose it did him any good; that sort of thing never does.

(What can you tell me about the Chinese store?)

I can remember going into the Chinese herb store with my father, and I can remember this old gentleman saying something to me, and it scared me to death. I was just a little timid kid, you know. I was

from the country, and you rarely saw anyone but your own flesh and blood. Yee, that man was there then, and I might have been four years old or something.

(Did the townspeople buy his herbs?)

Oh yes. A lot of people went to him. In fact, I can vaguely remember this old gentlemen.

(What can you tell me about the other Chinese fellow? The one who died in 1940.)

I knew him ever since I was old enough to remember. He lived here all his life. He was born here---some will argue on that---this Chinese woman left this little fella, and Old Dr. Yee and his wife brought him up. Yee was a doctor, and he lived in this area. There are still some Yee's in Sacramento that come from this family.

(Was this man lonely?)

They wrote up a big thing in the paper about him being lonely. Why, he was the most taken care of person you ever met! If some person was going to Stockton, say, why they'd stop and pick him up and take him along. They probably had lunch together and stayed away all day. This was right up to the end. My husband was his very best friend, and he took him to the hospital in his last illness. He brought him home and knew he didn't have any business bringing him home, but the old man wanted to come home. The doctor said nothing could be done for him. Well, they brought him home, and he just got so ill that we took him back to the hospital. We were there the day he died. He died of leukemia.

He had arthritis just about all his life. It would flare up even when he was a young man.

He went to school here, and he wore a que. And they used to put his que in the inkwell. Finally he cut his hair. He got all his education here, and he was not dumb. He could figure in his head better than some people could figure on paper. He worked with a Mister Pigeon in the blacksmith shop; where the big house stands down there, that used to be the blacksmith. Just down the street from the Chinese store. He would shoe horses and set tires on wagon wheels, and he even made wheels. In fact, Jimmy did a lot of this kind of work. Well, Mr. Pigeon left here, and Jimmy went down to Stockton. And there he learned carpentry. And he did a lot of work in the Stockton area. In fact, he built the house we're sitting in. It was built in pieces, but he did it. He's built several houses in town here. Finally, he came back up here to stay. I don't know why. Maybe he just got lonely for the community. He had quite a few Chinese friends in Stockton too, but he was embarrassed when he talked to them in Chinese...when we were there, that is. I don't know why he should have been, but he was.

(Somehow, there seems to be more to do in a small town than in a big one.)

My mother told me that from the old livery stable down to the old Pigeon barn, the town was one constant layer of houses. One house right after another, and most of them were two stories high. And when they caught fire there was no stopping it. There were lots of Chinese and there were some on the other side of the street too. I remember there was another house across the street where two Chinese lived--- a man and his wife. We called the man, Lie. I think they're buried in Ione.

(What is the brick building across from the Chinese store?)

They had Chinese girls in this place. You could hear them singing and carrying on till all hours of the night. Now, Mr. Yee, he called them entertainers. But other people didn't call them that! There was a balcony upstairs, and that's where you'd hear and see them.

But that was actually before my time.

(Further down the street on the same side is another brick building. What was that?)

It was a gambling hall, I think. Jimmy Chow sold most of the gambling equipment. It was his property. Grass Valley has a lot of the things that came out of Fiddletown. My husband would tell Jimmy that the place could be a museum someday, but Jimmy sold most of the stuff anyway. He gave me this little square-round bottle with a tiny hole in the top. And it was medication for headaches. You know, you'd just rub a little on your temple, and the headache would go away. I don't know what it contained.

(~~What~~ <sup>What</sup> did the people do for doctors?)

Years ago there were doctors here. There was Dr. Tiffany and he later went to Oakland. And Dr. Sanders; they all lived in the country and the people would give what they had to maintain things. These doctors I didn't know. The first doctor I ever knew was Dr. Norman. He was born in Fiddletown; he always said he was born in a chicken coop in Fiddletown.

(You grew up on a ranch. Can you tell me something about that?)

I'll tell you, it was pretty primitive. My father was a teamster; he hauled mining timbers to the mines. From the Fremont clear over to the Argonaut in Jackson. I hated it, I'm sorry to say. When my dad wasn't home, that is. We would go down the road to meet him at night

in the summertime. The dust would be a foot thick, and we were usually barefoot. And we'd go way down the road, maybe three or four miles, my mother, my sister and I, and we'd wait for him.

(Where was the ranch?)

It was out on the old Quartz Mountain Road. At one time that was the only road to Jackson.

(Did your dad work for himself?)

He worked for a man who had a team. He was the teamster.

(How many horses were on a team?)

Twelve or fourteen. That would include two horses, they always had two horses on the wheel. The rest were mules.

(What does "on the wheel" mean?)

They were closest to the driver. I had some pictures, but I can't find them. Anyway, my dad worked from three in the morning until eleven at night. That's the kind of team jobs you had. Most of the time you tried to travel as much as you could in the daylight hours. He would go up this way (above Fiddletown) to get logs to bring down to Fiddletown, and the next day he'd go to Jackson or wherever they needed them. It was pretty slow going in the wagon. Sometimes we would get on the wagon down at the old Payton place. Then we'd ride with him back up to the ranch.

(Who stayed at the way-stations?)

The stations were mainly for the people who were moving into the country. The people from other states, you see. They had to have places for these people to stay.

Well, finally mining slowed down, and dad got more established on the ranch, and he did that.

(Where did you go to school?)

I went to this schoolhouse up on the hill out here. My grandmother went there, my father went there, I went there and my son graduated from that school. That's all the education I have.

(What did you do for entertainment when you were a kid?)

Well, I'll tell you. The people of today don't know how to entertain themselves. We were kids; we had a lot of land. And my folks always said, stay inside your own fence. This should be a lesson to the kids today. Anyway, we were told to stay inside our own fence, tend to your own business, don't bother other people's things and that's what we did. We had a lot of territory to roam on, and when we were little kids I can remember that we weren't afraid of anything and we had been all over that ranch.

But in those days we did our own entertaining. We'd go along through the brush and maybe we'd see a little pink something on a leaf. Well, we'd pick that leaf and how we would treasure it. And we didn't have anything to play with. We didn't have toys; we didn't have a wagon to pull around like the kids do now. We didn't have anything like that. My brother had a bicycle though. I got so I could ride that.

(Was the family closer than they are today?)

Well, I thought we were. I don't know; maybe it's my feelings. But we always ate together, if everyone was home. I think our home was an ideal home. My mother did the best she could with what she had. And in those days you didn't have too much. I can remember this that impressed me: my dad brought home some pickled salmon, it came in a little barrel, and that was the most delicious treat.

We'd never had anything like that to eat before. And we had a garden in the summer, and we had a little bit of pork. Later on we had more of it. And we had goats on the ranch, and you could kill a goat and use that. Of course, we had no refrigeration.

(When did you get electricity?)

Never did have electricity while I lived on the ranch. I was married in 1924. We got electricity here in Fiddletown in 32 or 33. We had a big celebration in town when electricity came in.

Now-a-days the kids are transported to school; we walked every step of the way. And we walked to dances too. We danced all night, and kept it up until daylight the next morning.

(Where did you have the dances?)

Right down where the hall is now. There was a smaller dance hall there then. Then about midnight we would have lunch. Sometimes they would have a big dinner, but most of the time we would have a sandwich and a cup of coffee. We just danced and thought it was great.

And our folks went to the dances with us; we couldn't go out of the hall by ourselves. Now-a-days nobody goes with the kids. The kids don't want them, but I didn't feel that way. I loved my folks being along.

(What kind of music did they play?)

They had a piano and a violin and a guitar usually. Some of the people around here could play an instrument, mostly by ear. But they played in time, and we had a lot of fun.

(Did you travel much?)

We didn't have much transportation. We went by horse and buggy... no, we didn't have a buggy, we had an old spring wagon.

(Did you go to Sacramento?)

No, I never went to Sacramento. First time I saw it they had a celebration

and I forget when that was, 29 probably. No, it was before that. My father took us to Sacramento, he hired a car and took us to see this celebration. I guess it was held at the fairgrounds. I must have been about 12 years old. Infact, I never went to Jackson until I was about 14 years old. My folks might have gone a time or two, but we kids didn't. The only trip we looked forward to, was going to my grandmother's house for either Thanksgiving or Christmas. And you didn't go Thanksgiving and Christmas. It was one or the other. (Where did she live?)

In Shenandoah Valley. We went in the spring wagon, and we kids would stand up in the wagon all the way.

(What was Christmas like?)

We didn't, really. We'd put or stocking up, and we might get an orange in it or an apple. A little candy maybe, and sometimes a simple toy. I can remember one time we each got a doll. That must have been a hey-day, but I didn't care much for dolls.

(Was there a hotel in town?)

Years ago there were several hotels in town. The St. Charles was the last to go down; it was torn down. There was the old US Hotel, and there was one where the post office is now. I can remember when we had boardwalks here. I was pretty small, and I can vaguely remember walking over them. I was scared to death that I would fall through the cracks.

(What year did they change the name back to Fiddletown?)

They made a big deal about it, I guess. I think it was 1932. I didn't really care; I wasn't that interested.

(Were there many Indians around?)



Years ago, I guess. But I didn't know very many. The only family I knew much about was the Howdy(?) family. They lived above town here. The grandmother lived on a back street here in a little cabin. She lived there until she died. But she was considered one of the whites. Ramona Dutschke (Miwok) is also related to the Howdy family. The Wajupe(?) family was a well known family in the valley. My mother, who would be over a hundred if she were living, was telling about Ada Howdy whose maiden name was Wajupe. She married Walter Howdy. Getting back to this now---the ranch that I grew up on...my grandmother and grandfather lived there and they moved off of that ranch and my dad took over. The old folks lived right over by the main highway where Plymouth is now. Anyway, we lived in a little three room house until about 1918 when my dad built onto the house. There were four of us, you see; I had two brothers older than me. But the brothers were not as close as my sister.

(Is the house still there?)

The house is still there, but in very bad shape. I was going to show you some pictures of the old livery stable, that was about the time of the old hotels. I'll try to find them. The livery stable was right across from the antique shop down there.

(What about the big blacksmith shop down and across the street?)

I don't remember that man; he died about 1912. I was only two years old. But my husband talked about him. He was a German; I think he was murdered, but I don't know.

I remember my dad talking about when the town burned. This was in 1902.

I guess that wasn't the first time it burned. I can just remember folks talking about it.

(What did the people do about it?)

I guess they helped each other out as much as they could. Nobody had a whole lot in those days, you know. We didn't have very much, but I never was hungry. In the early days, when my dad was ranching, he had some horses and cattle and he nearly always had a milk cow.

(Where did you get your water?)

You carried it from a spring. In the summer the mosquitos would lay their eggs in it, and you'd get these wigglers in the water. Then we'd have to clean out the spring; we'd do this two or three times in the summer so we'd have clean water. I don't really know if it was good; we just sort of survived on it. I remember my mother carrying it, and she carried it in a big coal oil can. Some people had wells, and you never had any butter that wasn't melted.

(What did you do for refrigeration?)

I'll tell you what we did. Dad built kind of a square shaped thing, and he covered it with gunny sacks. On the top of it you'd put a dish pan full of water. And we had stockings hanging out of that thing to soak up the water and drop it on the gunny sacks. We kept milk and stuff in there.

(What did you do for meat?)

We always had a smoke-house.

(Did you ever eat a steak?)

Boy, one day my dad brought home steaks. He brought them home on the wagon from Plymouth. To have it fit to eat when you got home was something. It took so long, and it was hot, and the dust was on the roads a foot deep. I used to ride a bicycle and you couldn't

drive it except in someone else's tracks because the dust was so deep. There was a time when you couldn't get through Fiddletown in the winter. In a car, that is. The road would be axle deep in mud. I'll tell you how my mother worked around here. And it was not that long ago. Folks would donate chickens, and my mother cooked those chickens and carried those chickens to town in a bucket for the dance suppers. These people donated the chickens, and they went and bought their tickets too.

And we had the Oleta Good Road Association. They would do a lot of gravelling of the streets and things. People would donate the gravel and they'd get wagons and horses and fix the roads.