

#1026

LANDMARKS SOCIETY ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM
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Transcription of Taped Oral History

SIDE A

Narrator: Sam Chapman

Interviewer: Bryan Chapman

Date: March 6, 1997

I(Interviewer)-Sam, if I may call you Sam, where were you born?

N(Narrator)-I was born in Tiburon

I-What year was that?

N-1916

I-How long did you stay in Tiburon?

N-I stayed in Tiburon until I graduated from high school
and then I went over to Berkeley to college

I-What date was that?

N-Oh, that was 1934

I-What are your earliest memories of Tiburon?

N-Well Tiburon had a railroad then; it came down from the North
and then went on boats to San Francisco

I-Did it take passengers to San Francisco?

N-Yeah, there was a small boat that did that

I-Did you get off the train or could you go with the train

N-No, the train would go separately on barges that would take it
across the Bay

I-How old would you be when you first remember the train?

N-Oh, I probably went to the station at 3 or 4 years old

I-Where did you go to school at first?

N-Here in Tiburon

I-That would be the old school

N-Yeah, the one up the hill a ways

I-The place that is now senior housing

N-Yeah

I-Where did you go to school after that?

N-I went to Tamalpais High School

I-Oh, so you went through all the primary grades at the old Tiburon School.

Tell me some of the other things you recall about Tiburon in those days.

N-I remember we had only 200 people at that time

I-Where did they live?

N-Up on the side of the hill across from the railroad tracks, looking down on the tracks is where most of them lived. And where the road goes now was then part of the Bay.

I-I guess Mar West was the only road in those days. Whereabouts did you live?

N-On Mar West at the first street before you get to the railroad, right above the roundhouse. Do you remember the bridge that crossed the tracks?

I-Yes there is a Landmarks Society photograph on a postcard which shows the whole area including all the spur tracks and the

ferry, of course. Did you take the ferry much?

N-That was all we had to go to the City. Dad had a friend who was a doctor in the City, so When we went to see him, we would take the ferry and when we went to shop in the City.

I-Did your dad work in Tiburon?

N-He owned the grocery store.

I-Where was that?

N-It was on Main Street down in Tiburon. It was in two places, because it burned down one time.

I-Where was it first of all?

N-Well, facing the Bay - on that side of Main Street.

I-Can you think of what is there now where it was?

N-Well, you know where Sam's is - it was about two doors down towards the end.

I-Just before the turning into the Corinthian Yacht Club?

N-Yes, but after it burned down, it was down where the Dock Restaurant used to be.

I-What year was it burned down?

N-I don't remember what year it was, I was very young.

I-Were you more than five years old?

N-Yes, maybe a little older; I was able to go down and work at the store.

I-You helped sell things in the store before it burned down?

N-Yes, and we also had a mail office in the store and I worked on the mail. I was the youngest mailman in the country.

I-And the name of the store was Chapman's. How long did he own

the store?

N-Oh, a long time, I guess he owned it before I was born. And he kept it until after I left highschool.

I-So, that was 1930 or so?

N-Yeah, my memory is not very good.

I-No matter, we can pin these dates down more precisely later, but just to get a rough idea. Do you know how long your father had lived in Tiburon before you were born?

N-He came from back east and worked on the railroad and then opened a grocery store - don't know exactly when.

I-So, he probably came to work on the railroad prior to 1900, did he not?

N-Yes, and my mother came from San Francisco after the earthquake had hit in 1906. She came over here and married my dad - maybe it was only a few days after the earthquake.

I-Your dad came from back east, what part?

N-My dad came from the Great Lakes - east of Bute, Iowa.

I-When you were growing up in Tiburon, who were your friends?

N-I remember the Mantaganis.

I-Did they have a store?

N-Yeah, they bought my dad's store. That was around 1936 or so.

I-Do you remember other people besides them?

N-I was gone so long back east I lost track of a lot of people

I-But you must have known quite a few.

N-Well yes, but there weren't that many to know then.

I-You knew Milt McDonogh?

N-Oh yes, and as I said the Mantaganis - Fred is still around -
and the Berises.

I-Did you know Dave Teather?

N-No, but I worked for the guy who had the bar downtown, Sam
Veller when I was in highschool or before even.

I-Did you know any of the folks in Bevedere?

N-Very few I can remember.

I-Dave and Howie Allen?

N-I remember the names But I cannot picture them.

I-Dave told me how he used to go out in little boats in a string
towed by Milt McDonogh's father.

N-Yeah, I used to work for him. People used to swim across the
Golden Gate where the bridge is now and each swimmer had a boat
with them. We had a heck of a time getting the boats back
afterwards - they would be floating around the bay. they used
to put them on the beach but then the waves would wash them
away. We would tow them back to Tiburon all in a string.

I-Did you fish or do other things?

N-Oh yeah, we fished and hunted. You know the land was all empty
except for two dairies. We hunted rabbits.

I-Did you take a dog or just go on your own?

N-Oh, we'd run them down. You could catch a rabbit; they would
get ahead of you, but you just keep going and they would run
out of gas.

I-Guess they were smaller than the jack rabbits you occasionally
see today. What was your major at Berkeley when you over there?

N-I majored in Chemistry and I was there four years. Then, in 1938, I got a call from Mr Mack, Conny Mack that is.

I-Now you are going to have to tell me about him.

N-I was graduating that year and he said if you can get back for the last few days of the season, I would like you to come.

I-Now where was that?

N-He was in Philadelphia with the Philadelphia A's. So I got back for the last couple of days of the season.

I-Let's backtrack a minute. Did you play baseball in highschool?

N-Yes, I played baseball and football.

I-When did you first start to play?

N-I first played football at Judge Field which is now part of the Tiburon Peninsula Club. It was all mud dredged from the bay and we used to see who could get deepest into the mud. This was before it really became a ball field. I was probably around ten years old in about 1926. We had no school teams then; we just had local teams and I played any position, third base or outfield. I was young and they were mostly older men in those days and when anybody did not show up I would play their position. It was a lot of fun for me.

I-You were a natural athlete.

N-And I was very healthy since I used to run all over the hills running down the rabbits.

I-what positions did you play in football?

N-I played first in highschool; I was small and only played on the lightweight team. Then I played on the Varsity when I was

a senior - that was at Tam High. There was a fellow from Berkeley, I forget his name, who could run backwards, he scored a touchdown for the other team (both chuckle); he was the coach at Tam High. The day after graduation, he took me to Berkeley. He wanted me to go to Berkeley; I had no idea of going to college in those days.

I-Did you get a scholarship?

N-No, but I got a lot of jobs - I did not have much money.

I-Fees were not too much in those days which must have helped.

So you started right at the beginning to play baseball at Berkeley?

N-Yes, baseball and football; played varsity for both.

I-Where did you play?

N-I had played tackle in highschool and in my senior season I played in the backfield. Then at Berkeley I played halfback and in baseball I played short stop and third base. Then Mr Mack called and I went back to see him and he asked me where I played in college and highschool and I told him I played in the infield. We talked for a little more and then he said well you're starting in centerfield today. I did not have any clothes

I-So did the Second World War interrupt this?

N-Yes, I was in it for almost four years. I had graduated from Berkeley in 1936. So I joined the Navy in about 1941.

I-So you played for the Philadelphia A's up until 1941?

N-Yes, but I came home for the winter each September.

I-What did you do here at home?

N-Not too much except play around. I was a rich man I thought; money went a lot further then.

I-I presume you were popular, socially.

N-Well one knew everyone. I lived on Mar West with my parents. I had two sisters and they are still around and an elder brother who died when I was still fairly young.

I-What do you recall about Tiburon in 1936?

N-It was great as far as I was concerned; there was quite a bit going on. There were a bunch of boys around my age and girls - we all knew each other. That was a good life. Going back to when I was in highschool, the thing I most remember is that I had to walk home every night because I would play ball after school.

I-That must have been about seven miles - a goodly distance. Did you have to carry your bat or other equipment, how many times a week?

N-Oh, we played every day; I had to carry some books once in a while. No weekend games; we just played baseball and football after school. I played football just two years in college - in highschool I was too small.

I-What else do you remember about the late 1930's?

N-The railroad was still there and once in a while a couple of us would climb up on top of a box car, go trough the tunnel and jump off in San Rafael.

I-There was enough room on top going through the tunnel?

N-Yes, there was about that much - you had to lay down. We did

not get swept off anyway. And then the train would come back in the late afternoon and we'd get on it again and come home - just during the summer.

I-Did the train go through Corte Madera and Larkspur?

N-It went through Larkspur; I am hazy about Corte Madera but it did go north along the edge of the bay in parts. The tracks are still there and they are trying to revive the train I believe.

I-Yes, it would be good for traffic congestion. Did you go to Mill Valley much?

N-Only to school. But when I was young I worked in the grocery store here and my dad would send me up to San Rafael occasionally to get supplies in his truck. I did not have a license or anything.

I-But you never got stopped?

N-Yes there was an insurance salesman who was a very good family friend and also a cop. So one time he stopped me and that ended that.

I-As you said before, the store was the only one in the area.

N-Yes, and we had a post office too. When we started at the store there might have been 200 people here and when we sold it in 1934, perhaps there were 1,000 people in the area.

I-How do you explain the population growth? It was not just the use and employment on the railroad expanding. Do you think people had begun to live in Tiburon and work in San Francisco by then?

N-Yes, a lot of them did; there was still a ferry, but you had to take two boats; a small one to Sausalito and then there was a big boat to the City from there. Then they switched to one big boat direct from Tiburon, the Eureka, I think.

I-Let's get back to your baseball career and the Philadelphia A's
How long did Conny Mack own the A's?

N-Till after the war, I think.

I-How did the A's rank before the war?

N-Not very well before the war. Mr Mack did not have any money in those days, so he did not get good players.

I-Though you were a very good player.

N-But he got me cheap. Even so, he was a nice man. In 1940, I volunteered for the Navy. They were going to draft me anyway, but I volunteered so I could get into flying. I started out as an ensign after I got my wings and they sent me down to Texas and I instructed there for three years.

I-What did you fly?

N-Fighter training planes. Then the last year of the war I spent here on the West Coast in a fighter squadron. And we just flew up and down the coast training and everything, waiting for the invasion of Japan. And of course it never happened, thank God. One thing I remember, we had this fellow talk to us who knew the people of Japan and he said, if you ever got forced down, save a bullet for yourself.

I-I remember the book by Bader, the guy who crashed and lost both his legs. Did you know him?

N-No, but I was very lucky not having to get into the war with Japan. We were supposed to support the invasion, so we had to train on carriers.

I-So after the war did you get hold of Mr Mack?

N-He got hold of me. I was down in San Diego when the war ended and the next day, I got a telephone call. I don't know how he knew that I was down there. And he said, if you can get here for the last few days of the season, come on back. So I went to the officer in charge of our unit and said I had a job if I could get out of the Navy now - and I got out the next day.

I-Fantastic, the fastest demobilization anyone ever had. So you rejoined the A's?

N-Yes, they were playing in Cleveland; it was the end of the season. And I continued the next season with the A's. One year we got close to the top of the league and we were in second place most of the year. Then, in 1950, they traded me to Cleveland and I quit after one year. I came back here and got a job with the State; I had a car and drove around checking on air pollution.

I-That was quite early on to be doing that - 1951?

N-The office was in San Francisco and I covered from here to Santa Rosa. They had passed a law which was bad for farmers who burned anything. I retired in 1956.

I-That was pretty good. You were born in 1916, so you were 40 and you had really had a very concentrated career.

N-Yes, and I enjoyed every bit of it I was living in Greenbrae

then with my wife; we had met and married in Texas when I was there in the Service. I still knew a lot of people in Tiburon even though it was changing. They filled in Belvedere Lagoon with a road down the middle.

I-I gather the original reason, according to Dave Allen, for filling the Lagoon, was to get rid of the mosquitos.

N-Yes, the mosquitos got bad after they^{put} in the bridge on Beach Road and made a causeway because then the Lagoon got stagnant.

I-Dave never told me that part. Did you like Greenbrae?

N-Yes, we got the second house built there and stayed quite a while (N estimates till about 1983). And then we came here temporarily; we were going to build or buy a house somewhere. Then the people who had bought this whole section, wanted to raise the rents and change things. And we said OK but you cannot raise the rents of people already living here. WE were paying \$250 a month, now it is up to \$900 for us - they raised the others' rents to \$1200 a month. We always had in mind we were going to move but we never did and we could never do better than this.

I-Can you see the Bay?

N-No, but we can see the mountain very well. I used to get together with other retired ball players, but there are not too many around any more. I still know a few of the old timers like the Mantaganis - do you know them?

I-Well it is near the end of the tape. Thank you very much for speaking with me.