

OH2401

Beemer, Millard J.

“Villa Park Orchard Association”

Interviewed by Laura Gray Turner

Date: October 2, 1995

Language: English

Ephemera: none

Project: VPOA

Status: Incomplete, Digitized on three CD's, migrated to server.

Abstract: An oral history with Millard J. Beemer in conjunction with Villa Park Orchard Association (VPOA) Oral History Project as a part of California State University, Fullerton's Center for Oral and Public History. Mr. Beemer migrated to Santa Ana from Illinois in 1918 and his family began growing citrus and walnuts. Soon after they moved south and drove the first well in the Pauma Valley and his wife chronicled living alongside the natives in her book, “My Luiseno Neighbors,” and he recalls living with them and even taking a few of the children in with them to live. He began working for the oil refineries at Signal Hill and Wilmington during the depression and soon after recalls starting a nursery with citrus seed bed stock. Became Chairman of the Board for the Escondido Cooperative and became a member of the board at VPOA in 1960 when they closed the co-op. He also worked on the Sunkist Board. He discusses Lord and Thomas, which became Foote, Cone, and Belding, an advertising company that promoted the first orange growers. He discusses in detail the Agricultural Producers' Labor Committee to combat labor issues, the Fallbrook strike led by Cesar Chavez, how the Percentage Payout Pooling Plan and Prorate system worked, as well as fighting anti-trust allegations and the trial process. He also briefly recalls Villa Park's labor camp and dealing with the water companies Santa Ana Valley Irrigation Company, and the Serrano Irrigation District.

OH2402

Worsham, Nita

“Villa Park Orchard Association”

Interviewed by Laura Gray Turner

Date: October 9, 1995

Language: English

Ephemera: none

Project: VPOA

Status: Incomplete, Digitized on one CD, migrated to server.

Abstract: An oral history with Nita Worsham in conjunction with Villa Park Orchard Association (VPOA) Oral History Project as a part of California State University, Fullerton’s Center for Oral and Public History. Mrs. Worsham’s great-grandfather and grandfather bought a Lemon Grove in Yorba Linda in 1913 and she began working as a packer with Yorba Linda Citrus during junior college and upon graduation got a job with VPOA as a seasonal helper in 1943 as a payroll clerk which lasted forty-five years and led to shipping and accounts payable and finally to an office manager position. She recalls the first year of the Bracero program and living quarters on the ranch. She discusses the orange crate label’s origins and meanings, working with Mr. Herbie Nichols, Mr. Leroy Hull, and how they kept track of all the oranges going through the packinghouse. Interviewer goes through accounting sheets and Mrs. Worsham recalls the trucking and hauling companies, Ice companies, pension program, etc. She briefly mentions the transition from hand accounting to computers after her retirement. Two portions of the transcript are “left un-transcribed per instructions” and Side B of the tape is not transcribed as well.

OH2403

Bradford, Albert Sumner (Bud)

“Villa Park Orchard Association”

Interviewed by Laura Gray Turner

Date: November 8, 1995

Language: English

Ephemera: none

Project: VPOA

Status: Incomplete, Digitized on two CD's, migrated to server.

Abstract: An oral history with Albert Sumner “Bud” Bradford in conjunction with Villa Park Orchard Association (VPOA) Oral History Project as a part of California State University, Fullerton’s Center for Oral and Public History. Mr. Bradford was born in 1933 and began working with his family at Bradford Brothers Incorporated, a packinghouse located in Placentia. His grandfather came to Orange County in the 1890’s and is called the “Father of Placentia” for his role in starting the city and his influence in getting the Santa Fe railroad to go through Fullerton and Placentia. Bradford moved his family south across the Santa Ana River to Pala and joined the VPOA because of their Sunkist standards and family ownership. He discusses his Agua Tibia ranch, the Tesoro ranch, the Fifty-Acre ranch, and their connection with University of California, Riverside’s Citrus Experiment Station. Bradford recalls government regulation and oversight being “oppressive” turning agriculture into “more of a business than a lifestyle.” He spends time covering the Leichtfuss family and their dedication to the industry, the unionization attempts of the thirties, the Bracero program, the elimination of the Prorate and its effects on small growers, the anti-monopoly cases of the 1970s, modern packing techniques and the professionalization of packing employees, the increase of international exportation under “Butch” Leichtfuss and the younger generation of growers, the diversification of groves to include red, pink, and white grapefruits, Valencia, and navel oranges. He also ends the interview with a brief discussion of his family’s connection with Sy Fluor and the Fluor family.

OH2404

Leichtfuss, Lawrence K.

“Villa Park Orchard Association”

Interviewed by Laura Gray Turner

Date: November 9, 1995

Language: English

Ephemera: none

Project: VPOA

Status: Incomplete, Digitized on two CD's, migrated to server.

Abstract: An oral history with Lawrence K. Leichtfuss in conjunction with Villa Park Orchard Association (VPOA) Oral History Project as a part of California State University, Fullerton's Center for Oral and Public History. Leichtfuss was born in Orange in 1914 to one of the founding families of Orange County and began working for VPOA as hired help doing odd jobs around the packinghouse. He began working in the packing house in 1932, became foreman in 1935, and packinghouse manager in 1955. He discusses his duties and responsibilities as foreman as well as manager and the original boundaries and grower quality restrictions of the VPOA. Calls the Bracero program a “savior” and recalls not having any real problems with the workers unlike attempts to bus in slum workers from Los Angeles which did not work out. He mentions his workers reluctance to join with Cesar Chavez and the VPOA's attempts to combat labor organization. He recalls the frosts, fruit packing process, grading, transition from railcars to trucks, building an expensive cooling house during the depression, the constant struggle to meet Sunkist quality standards, and the constant cutting of fruit for inspections. He became involved with the overseas expansion of the citrus industry in Asia and he discusses the challenges such as transportation, language barriers, obtaining contacts and distributors, and constant travel. He also recalls a yearly shareholder and employee meeting where they would meet in the basement of the packing house and cook for close to five-hundred people.

OH2416

Mead, Frank

“Villa Park Orchard Association”

Interviewed by Laura Gray Turner

Date: December 28, 1995

Language: English

Ephemera: none

Project: VPOA

Status: Incomplete, Digitized on one CD, migrated to server.

Abstract: An oral history with Frank Mead in conjunction with Villa Park Orchard Association (VPOA) Oral History Project as a part of California State University, Fullerton’s Center for Oral and Public History. Mead began as a citrus grower who after a few short years in the nineteen thirties distributing with Mutual Orange Distributors switched to the VPOA. Discusses his decision to move from Seattle through Los Angeles into Orange County where he began raising oranges, avocados, and lemons. He worked as Manager of Central Lemon for one decade and later became a board member of VPOA and “helped Lawrence Leichtfuss build the company to what they are today.” He recalls working for Clyde Watson and Herbie Nichols as well as a banker named Harry Simmonsmaugh who helped local farmers through Banks Fruit Company. Mead elaborates on the great freeze of nineteen thirty-seven and how he managed to make money by selling his undamaged seed bed stock orange trees to people whose orchards were wiped out. He discusses labor in detail including the early abundance of it, the scarcity during and after World War II, the use of the Bracero program, the failed attempt to use Jamaican field-hands, and the eventual development of the area and decline of the citrus industry. He recalls the purchase of the old Santiago Packing house and the transition that occurred as well as the anti-monopoly lawsuits of the nineteen seventies. He discusses the development of Orange County and the rising taxes and costs of farming as well as declining fruit prices which led to his leaving the citrus industry.

OH2417

Felix, Salvador

“Villa Park Orchard Association”

Interviewed by Laura Gray Turner

Date: January 2, 1996

Language: English

Ephemera: none

Project: VPOA

Status: Incomplete, Digitized on one CD, migrated to server.

Abstract: An oral history with Salvador Felix in conjunction with Villa Park Orchard Association (VPOA) Oral History Project as a part of California State University, Fullerton’s Center for Oral and Public History. Felix began his career at VPOA as a truck driver in 1950 and was later promoted to work in the Santiago packing house as the grading foreman alongside Bob Skiles, the packing supervisor. Born in Mexico, raised in Orange, he recalls segregation in movie theaters but not falling victim to it because he spoke English very well and hung out with American kids. He discusses his duties as a driver on the groves as well as the duties of the Swamper, his assistant. He recalls his volunteering to military service after being drafted and waiting for the Mexican government to allow Mexican citizens to serve in the U.S. military. He served in the Army from 1943-45 in Alaska and later England during the Normandy invasion as support personnel. He briefly mentions the Braceros and their difficulty with assimilating into society as well as the orchard packing and grading process and changes in the processes over time.

OH2418

Leichtfuss, Larry K. (Butch)

“Villa Park Orchard Association”

Interviewed by Laura Gray Turner

Date: December 25, 1995

Language: English

Ephemera: none

Project: VPOA

Status: Incomplete, Digitized on one CD, migrated to server.

Abstract: An oral history with Larry K. “Butch” Leichtfuss in conjunction with Villa Park Orchard Association (VPOA) Oral History Project as a part of California State University, Fullerton’s Center for Oral and Public History. Leichtfuss was president and general manager of the VPOA. Interview covers his and his family’s years of involvement with the association. Prior to being president he began at the age of fourteen doing clean-up, general labor, and selling fruit at door sales and later became packing house supervisor. Began through the Sunkist Training program and worked at several packing houses before returning to Villa Park. Interview covers a detailed description of Keith French’s duty as field manager, his son Brad’s duties as packing house supervisor and his other son Craig’s job as the “numbers guy.” He discusses VPOA’s high standards, quality, and his dedication to customer satisfaction. Leichtfuss also goes into detail about the resistance to change amongst the fruit growing industry specifically, the switch to refrigerated rail cars, to plastic cartons and large bins, and to automated graders and packing machines. He then details the transition from the original Villa Park facility to the new Santiago and the future of VPOA and orange growing in California in general. His concerns include international competition and exportation and fumigation issues—namely the Medfly, which caused his packing house to be under quarantine for two years, and the Fuller Rose Beetle.

OH2419

Fluor, John S. (Sy)

“Villa Park Orchard Association”

Interviewed by Laura Gray Turner

Date: January 8, 1996

Language: English

Ephemera: none

Project: VPOA

Status: Incomplete, Digitized on one CD, migrated to server.

Abstract: An oral history with John S. Fluor in conjunction with Villa Park Orchard Association (VPOA) Oral History Project as a part of California State University, Fullerton’s Center for Oral and Public History. Fluor, a VPOA grower who grew up Anaheim, graduated from Anaheim High School, class of 1945, attended Fullerton Junior College and purchased his parents farm after they got divorced in 1953. Briefly discussed his grandfathers migration from Switzerland to Wisconsin and finally to Santa Ana where he set up a construction business. Owned land in Orange County until condemnation of his land for construction of the Santa Ana Freeway began and he was forced to trade and sell his land and purchase new acreage in Pauma, Pala, and Ivanhoe. Briefly examines the “quick decline” and how he was lucky it only affected one quarter of his trees. Fluor details the frost process and the use of heaters, wind machines, and other improvised ways to reduce impact on fruit. He explains the packing process and how devastating droughts and the Santa Ana winds can be on fruit. Fluor lists droughts as his biggest fears and discusses how water shortages will continue to drive growers away from farming as well as how his farms make use of personal wells and district water but that the overwhelming cost can be a deterrent. Served as president of the Yorba Orange Growers Association and vice-president of VPOA and discusses the differences between the two groups. Briefly talks about Millard Beemer and his respect for him, Proposition 13 in California, and the requirements for a person to make a living off of fruit growing today.

OH2492

Beltran, Basilio (Chilo)

“Villa Park Orchard Association”

Interviewed by Laura Gray Turner

Date: May 1, 1996

Language: English

Ephemera: none

Project: VPOA

Status: Incomplete, Digitized on one CD, migrated to server.

Abstract: An oral history with Basilio “Chilo” Beltran in conjunction with Villa Park Orchard Association (VPOA) Oral History Project as a part of California State University, Fullerton’s Center for Oral and Public History. Beltran was a VPOA employee for over fifty years. Born in 1920 in Mentone, California and moved to Orange in 1936 to work for VPOA as an orange picker. Joined the service in 1941 and served as a Dental Technician during the war in Africa, France and Germany before returning home and being hired as a truck driver for VPOA in 1946. Worked as a driver for ten years and became a foreman for another ten, and finally a field superintendent until he retired. Briefly discusses segregation and racial prejudice in Orange County, specifically community pool, “The Plunge” in Redlands, movie theaters, and schools. Explains the damaging effects of frost on orange orchards and his role as field superintendant including: solving packinghouse strikes, cutting and inspecting frosted fruit, overseeing the picking process in Orange County, Riverside, Imperial, and Ventura. Briefly mentions his parents origins in Michoacán and Guanajuato, and the immigrant experience on the orchard including daily life and duties as migrant workers.