

TAPE #46

MR. AND MRS. CLIFFORD BUZZA

Taped: May 1979

Reference: Early days in Sutter Creek.

(What year did your Mother come to Amador County?)

Let's see. Her first husband was out here for years before she ever came out. He always wanted my mother to come out---he wasn't my father. My mother, who was in England, said, I'll never cross that ocean. She had two little girls before she came, and they fell over a step and both of them died. Anyway, my mother said, I won't cross that ocean until you come after me. So, after six years here, he went back after her.

(Why did he come here in the first place?)

To work in the mines. He had an uncle here, and his uncle sent for him. He was a Cornishman. Well, they came back here, but he died just a couple of years later of pneumonia. They certainly had their troubles.

(What did she do then?)

She was left with two children, and expecting another one. He passed away in December and the baby was due in March. Two or three years later, she married my father. And he and her dead husband were first cousins.

(Enter Mr. Buzza.)

(Do you and your husband travel much?)

We used to go to Daffodil Hill with a lady friend. We'd sit under the trees and have lunch. It was beautiful...but I wouldn't go out now. I'd be scared to death!

(Why?)

We're afraid somebody might knock us on the head!

(Don't go to San Francisco.)

Don't worry about that! I'll never go there. I've only been there about three times in my whole life, but I don't like it.

(What was your father doing when he met your mother?)

He was working in the mines. Both he and his cousin worked in the mines. They worked in the old ~~Empire~~ Empire Mine in Plymouth.

(Where were you born?)

Here in Sutter Creek. Just down Main Street. My folks moved here on this street (~~Knickerston~~) when I was 5 months old. So I've been here all that time. I'm the oldest one on the street now. Lorinda Barney passed away in January, so that leaves me the oldest one!

(Where did you go to school?)

All my family went to school right up here in the ~~same~~ same place.

Clifford and I had the same teacher. Our daughter had the same teacher we had. And our granddaughter had the same teacher we had. That was Rose Lawlor. Sutter Creek Grammar School. The one they plan to fix up, because they have plenty of money now. They better fix it before I go. I want to see it done!

(How big was it?)

Oh, it had five rooms. Five teachers. It was a beautiful school.

They had eight grades. They used to have nine, but they cut one of them out. That was before the high school was built.

But things haven't really changed too much.

(What did you do for pastimes?)

Oh, we played duck on a rock, and things like that.

(What about dances?)

I never went to a dance till I was eighteen! But Clifford did.

They had town dances all the time. Patton & Springer had a band, and they played here a lot. The Bowers Orchestra was also very good.

(Did the bands play a lot of jazz?)

We didn't like jazz in those days. We danced the waltz and the shottish and things like that. The polka too. But I never danced one in my life.

(Mr. Buzza comes on.)

In those days they used to have ragtime. And the dances always had what was called a floor manager. If they saw you raggin in a corner, they would pull you off the floor and kick you out of the dance.

(Mrs. Buzza again.)

Well, I used to like to rag, but it was never something that would get me kicked off the floor.

(Ragtime dancing wasn't considered proper?)

No, it wasn't. And they didn't allow dringing. You had to go outside if you wanted a drink.

(What about the movies?)

Clifford ran the theater for John Ratto for five years. John and his wife stood up for us when we got married. The first theater was where Belloti's dining room is. Then after we got married another man took over.

(What stars do you remember?)

Well, there was Pearl White. "The Perils of Pauline." But everything was silent then, remember.

(Mr. Buzza)

We ran a lot of westerns. Sometimes they would have special showings like "Birth of a Nation" and "Tess of the Storm Country".

"The Squaw Man". All those nice old movies.

(Who was the piano player?)

Mildred Ratto. The one who was buried today. She was a beautiful piano player. When the sad parts came along, the piano player would play kind of a soft, slow piece; it was very nice.

(Mrs. Ratto)

Tom Mix too; he was very popular. The lady who was buried today always said that her youngest daughter looked just like Lillian Gish!

(What did the movies cost?)

Ten cents. If it was a special it was a quarter.

(Then Ratto built the theater across the street?)

Yes. That was in 1919. But when they changed over to talkies he got out. He was sick of the business. He owned the whole circuit of movie houses in the county. Jackson, Sutter Creek, Plymouth, Ione. Then when the change came, Perovich and Tam bought him out. They then closed the whole circuit and put a theater in over in Jackson. It was in the Bennett Auto Parts building. They ran that theater until it got too small. Then they put up a big theater where the parking lot is now. It was called The Amador. Then TV came in, and that finished the movies off.

(I get the impression that family ties were stronger in the early days.)

Oh, it was different altogether from what it is now. Nobody has time for anything now.

I would always run home every noon time. One time I was going up that steep hill by the school house, cause I fell down and nearly broke my neck.

(Mr. Buzza)

That's right; I was right behind her. AND I used to like the rainy days, because I'd take my lunch. And all the kids would sit around and tell stories.

(When did you get married?)

1916. 63 years this coming July. And we went together for five years before that. But we still get along. We have a lot to be thankful for.

All my family, and great-grandchildren, live right around here.

My oldest daughter lives in the house she was born in.

(Mr. Buzza)

I don't like the idea of a compulsory draft. The men came out here in the old days to get away from the draft. I talked to a lot of the Slavs and they came out here to get away from it.

(When did Sutter Creek get electricity?)

Years ago, but I don't know when. There used to be a power house down where the garage is now on Main Street. My mother had one of the first electric irons in Sutter Creek, and we still have it.

I didn't get drafted in the first war because I was a family man. The principle of the High School was on the draft board, and he told me to wait. Well, the war ended just as they got to my classification. But it made you feel like the dickens to see all your friends go, and you had to stay home. But in those days the mines were considered essential. You'd see big signs saying to keep open the mines. But during WW II, they shut all the mines down. But I worked up top on the hoist.

(What mine did you work in?)

All of em on this side; not the Wildman or those others. It was from Martell over to the old Eureka. The Onida Mine too.

(Do you recall when you made your first long trip?)

We haven't been on any. We worked all the time and stayed home with our children. We've been to Oregon though. And we went to the 1939 Fair in San Francisco. But I like to be home in Sutter Creek.

(How did you get to San Francisco?)

We took the train.

(Where did you catch it?)

In Martell. You changed in Sacramento for San Francisco.

(What do you think about the trend towards tourism in the County?)

The foundation of the County is beginning to dissappear. It's all getting different. But they're restoring some of the old buildings instead of tearing them down; this is good. But the old American Express, which is now Belottis; they're sorry they ever remodeled it. A lot of places on Main Street have gone. There was the hospital...

(Was that Dr. Goodman's place?)

Yes.

(What was he like?)

He was the grandest doctor we ever had! He was an old Missouri doctor. A corn cob smoker and a chewing tobacco guy. He'd talk to you and make you feel better. He was better than all the doctors put together.

(Must have been rough on him?)

I'd ride in his horse and buggy to Ione sometimes. Once we went up in the mountains at night; it was past Volcano. We were in an old Model T Ford. We had carbide headlights, and before we got up there the darn lights went out. Well, we got a lantern from some farmhouse, and I stood

out on the running board of that car, waving that lantern until we got to Volcano! Then old man Grillo, who had the store up there, got us some carbide so we could get back.

(I hear the doctor drank a lot.)

I think he knew more drunk than most doctors did sober. He'd get drunk, and then he'd shoot off his gun in the air! I had him when my first baby was born.

(Did he finally retire?)

I don't know, but he's buried up here on the hill.