

Interview of Stephen Davies, February 2005

Interview with Stephen Davies, Jr., February 2005 by John Daley. Also present is Stephen Davies' daughter, Joyce. Transcribed by Kristi Hawthorne.

John: I want to be sure to get your name right. Is it Stephen with a "v"?

Stephen: No.

John: S-t-e-p-h-e-n. And Davies, is that D-a-v-i-e-s?

Stephen: Yes. My aunt did a dirty trick on my dad.

John: Your dad's sister?

Stephen: It was when I was in the hospital. He was sitting with my mom and he says to my aunt, "Go and put my name down for Steve Davies, Jr." So she run off and put down "Audley S. Davies". Audley was her husband. Well, we didn't know this until the war years, in the late 1930s. I had to register and it came back that name and I showed it to Dad and he pretty near went through the ceiling!

John: What is your father's name?

Stephen: Stephen Davies.

John: Where did he come from? Was he born here?

Stephen: I think he was born in Los Angeles.

John: Do you know what year he was born?

Stephen: I have no idea. He was 79 when he passed away right up here in this house. We sold that property.

John: What year did he pass away?

Joyce: That's what I'm trying to think. I have the article at home.

John: What was your mother's name?

Stephen: Cecelia Burgess.

John: Where was she from?

Stephen: She was from Los Angeles.

John: Was she born there?

Stephen: Yes.

Interview of Stephen Davies, February 2005

John: Do you have any idea where your grandparents on either side were from?

Stephen: Well, my grandpa, her dad, was from France originally. The grandmother, I never did get any information.

John: What about your dad's side?

Stephen: I think they came from Utah.

John: How did your dad end up in San Luis Rey Valley?

Stephen: We came here when I was one year old and we came to Marron canyon. Do you know where the golf course is now?

John: El Camino?

Stephen: Yes. My dad leased that ground and farmed it. We had a house right on that little knoll. They took that knoll off.

John: So the house is gone now?

Stephen: The house is gone.

John: Let's back up then. When were you born?

Stephen: December 14, 1912.

John: So when you were a year old, you came to this area. You were born in Los Angeles?

Stephen: Yes, it was in the Los Angeles area. My mother's mother had a family in Los Angeles. They had the only winery there was in Los Angeles.

John: Do you remember the name of it?

Stephen: No, I don't.

John: So you came here about 1913 and your family lived on El Camino and farmed the golf course area.

Stephen: Oh yes, all the lower area.

John: What did your dad farm?

Stephen: Lima Beans, that was in the lower area and grain was in the hills.

John: How long did you stay there?

Stephen: I was seven years old when we moved to the San Luis Rey Valley.

Interview of Stephen Davies, February 2005

John: Well, that's a pretty big valley, what area?

Stephen: We moved within three miles of Oceanside. Do you know where the drive-in theater is? Just on that side of it, where all that flat ground in there was my dad's. It was a hundred acres.

John: Was it across from the Hubbert ranch?

Stephen: Yes. [further west and north]

John: Hubert was on the north side of the river and you were on the south side of the river?

Stephen: Yes.

John: What did your dad raise in the valley?

Stephen: He tried to raise lima beans and the worms eat them up so that ended that crop. He didn't get anything out of that at all. So he raised a lot of alfalfa because he had a lot of water.

John: Did he pump water?

Stephen: Oh yes, you have to have water for alfalfa.

John: Did he use pumps or water off the river?

Stephen: A big pump.

John: Was it a windmill pump or a gas engine?

Stephen: It was electric.

John: Where did the electricity come from?

Stephen: From the main road and the line went through.

John: So you guys were there after the flood in 1916. So was that soil pretty fertile?

Stephen: Oh yes, that was real fertile soil. They told us that the house was sitting on stilts. That's the way they built them in the old days. It was about this high on stilts, I would say that high. They said it was an inch from coming in on the floors, but it was back water, but it wasn't a river there, it was back water.

John: Was the house closer to where Mission Avenue now is than the river?

Stephen: Yes. Right close to the road. There are two big palm trees on that main drag that goes through in front of this house. Great big things now. We planted those when they were that high.

John: That would be by Fireside?

Interview of Stephen Davies, February 2005

Joyce: Yes, that's where those homes are now. That's who they sold the property to.

John: So at Fireside, that's where the homes are, so you could locate those by looking at Fireside and Mission Avenue. So what year do you think your dad planted those?

Stephen: Well, it wasn't very long after we were there.

John: So somewhere around 1920?

Stephen: Yes.

Joyce: Mom and dad went out and took a picture of them before mom passed away because they are still there. That's where the original ranch house was.

John: Right next to those trees?

Stephen: Yes. The trees were here and the house was set back.

John: So you were seven years old and living in the valley. Did you go to San Luis Rey to the stores or did you go to Oceanside?

Stephen: No, we went to Oceanside.

John: How old were you that you can remember going to Oceanside?

Stephen: First time that I can remember? Oh my gosh. I was probably about 5 years old.

John: Do you remember the name of the grocery store?

Stephen: Cary.

John: That was on 2nd street. I've got pictures of that, it was an open market.

Stephen: They carried everything.

John: What was the name of the bakery? Do you recall?

Stephen: I remember my mother going in there all the time. Every time we'd take off in the buggy, which wasn't that often. I just don't remember the name.

Joyce: What you didn't tell John, Dad, was that you rented the land on El Camino from Sonja Henie.

Stephen: No, he rented the land from the man who ran the post office. McInerny was one of the names and the postmaster. I remember the partner was McInerny.

John: So you came to town and went to the bakery, what else can you remember?

Interview of Stephen Davies, February 2005

Stephen: There was a big butcher shop.

John: That was Martin's.

Stephen: Yes. We used to get a lot meat there. I remember that, too.

John: Did you ever go to the parades?

Stephen: Oh yes, we used to go and watch all the parades. Do you remember the old plunge? I used to go swimming in the old plunge, too.

John: How old were you then?

Stephen: Oh gosh, I don't know. Pretty young.

John: Are you a member of a church?

Stephen: No.

Joyce: Grandma was Catholic, wasn't she?

Stephen: Yes, Catholic.

John: Where are your parents buried?

Stephen: Here. In Eternal Hills.

John: Did your grandparents come with your father and mother to this area?

Stephen: My grandparents were separated.

John: They didn't move here then?

Stephen: No. He'd come down and live down here. My dad's father.

John: When he died, where was he buried?

Stephen: He died down there. They were filling the silos. They had a big dairy and they were filling the silo with corn and he was helping – they had to stomp it down, you know, he was right up close to the top and Dad tried to get him stay down that morning, I remember this real well. The old man was hard-headed as I am and as Dad was.

John: Like any farmer!

Stephen: He was going up there to help Dad out and he said, "It's got to be stomped down." Okay, so he went up there. In his tramping down, he evidently fell and he went right down on those big engines. That silo was quite aways up there, about 30 feet. It killed him instantly.

Interview of Stephen Davies, February 2005

John: So you don't know where he was buried?

Stephen: I don't know if he was buried here or not. That bothers me. I think he was buried in Los Angeles. ... my grandmother was a fairly big woman, a German woman.

John: The grandmother on your dad's side?

Stephen: Yes.

John: So your dad raised alfalfa and you lived on that piece of property for quite awhile?

Stephen: Forty-five years.

John: What other crops did he have?

Stephen: He raised alfalfa most of the time and corn for cattle and he sold a lot of stuff to Miss Whelan. She came from Los Angeles down and she was a teacher.

John: Did you know her dad, John Whelan?

Stephen: I knew John.

John: That was her dad, he was a teamster who worked for Andre Pico. The house that she lived in was Andre Pico's.

Stephen: Well, I knew him, too. He was a nice old guy. I remember one day he came riding on his horse across the river over to our place. It was pretty near direct across. He told him to get his gun and come down to our pump house. Our pump house, the reason why he wanted him to come down there, he had great big eucalyptus trees down there and they had a great big cat up the tree. It was a bobcat. They had been having trouble up there with the bobcats taking their turkeys. He said, "Steve, will you get that cat?" So dad took his shotgun and he went up there and he shot the cat. Then later on, John liked to drink quite a bit. He was a drinkin' man. I think it was his liver or something, but they wanted him to go the hospital. he was beginning to get blood poisoning. In those days, they called it blood poisoning and they wanted to cut his arm off, it was too late. But he said, "no." He said he came in this world with both arms and he said, "I'll go out with both arms." He passed away.

John: Do you know when that might have been?

Stephen: Well, I was probably 12 or 14 years old.

John: Did your dad have a dairy also?

Stephen: He had three dairies. When I was going to high school, I milked cows. Before that, the second dairy I milked a little. I was learning to milk. The third dairy, why, I was really a milking man!

John: Where were the dairies at?

Interview of Stephen Davies, February 2005

Stephen: Right there on the property.

John: What was the size of the property?

Stephen: It was 100 acres. He bought it from—

John: There was a Grosse ranch out there, was it Mr. Grosse?

Stephen: No. I lost the name out of my head.

John: Why would have three dairies?

Stephen: The first dairy he sold the cow and he didn't have a dairy then. The second dairy, I don't know where he picked the cows up. He had a big, big barn and it was all piped for milking machines and stuff. The last dairy he bought the cows from a man here in Vista, on Vista Way.

John: Would that have been the old dairy that was on Vista Way that he bought them from?

Stephen: I don't know the name of the man, no.

John: So he was raising his own crops to feed the cows with.

Stephen: He was growing corn, that's why he had those silos.

John: How long did you live on the ranch?

Stephen: We lived there for 45 years.

John: You lived there after your parents?

Stephen: I think I lived there 45 years. My folks moved up here a couple of years before. So I was leasing the ground.

John: You leased it to someone else to farm it?

Stephen: No, I was leasing the ground. They were Jewish people. All I know is that they stopped paying.

John: You were there during the time the railroad ran out there.

Stephen: Well, there wasn't any railroad there, no.

John: So it was before you lived there.

Stephen: Yes. We had the beet dump.

John: Where was that?

Interview of Stephen Davies, February 2005

Stephen: That was on the north end of the property. East.

John: Was it on your property?

Stephen: It was on the property, just this side of El Camino. El Camino comes down the hill and around and the beet dump was over here.

John: I have a picture taken from the Rosicrucian and I can see the beet dump and a little further back you can see the Mission.

Stephen: I walked to school every morning, it was a couple of miles, right below the Mission there.

John: What was the name of the school?

Stephen: It was just the San Luis Rey School. It wasn't the Catholic School.

John: That little building is still there.

Joyce: I went there.

Stephen: George went to school there, too, didn't he?

Joyce: Yes.

Stephen: I don't know if you know Dave Jones. Dave and I were, he was six months older than I was. We were pals. We walked those hills and when got the bicycles we rode the roads, you know. We'd go out swimming.

John: Where did you go swimming at?

Stephen: Let's see, it was on the north side of the river.

John: Was it Hubbert Lake?

Stephen: No. You remember the man that owned the grocery store? What was his name? I can't remember. Well, anyway, we used to ride ... [side one of tape ends and side two begins] ... Peggy and a friend of hers. We thought we heard women talking, girls and all of sudden Dave said, "Oh my gosh, there's some women coming up here." I jumped out of that thing and ran and he stayed in there and he pulled his clothes down in there and put his clothes on underneath the water. That was the end of that. We got on our bicycles and went away!

John: How old were you then?

Joyce: Were you in high school yet, dad?

Stephen: No, no. I was in grammar school. I wasn't that old.

John: You went to San Luis Rey all the way to 8th grade?

Interview of Stephen Davies, February 2005

Stephen: To the 8th grade, yes.

John: So where did you go to High School?

Stephen: Oceanside.

John: What year did you graduate?

Stephen: I didn't graduate. I walked out of there when I was junior.

John: We have some early pictures of the kids at the school. And time and time again we see pictures of kid without shoes on. Were you one of those kids?

Stephen: I don't know.

Joyce: Did you wear shoes to school? Didn't grandma make you wear a suit to school?

Stephen: Yes. Dave Jones and I were going to school one morning on Dave's motorcycle. The old grade was there and you turned at the bottom and boy, we hit that corner there going about 40 and some guy had come down that hill and had spilled gravel. You know, just as soon as we hit that, we had just started going up the hill and woosh! Pow! I went up in the air and lit on my back! And of course, going 40 miles an hour I wore my suit down to the skin. Didn't make me bleed or anything, but I went back and lifted the motorcycle off of Dave's leg and he got up and he said, "I'm okay." And I said, "I can't go to school like this." He said, "You sure can't. We'll go back to your house." We went back and I changed to overalls and then he took me back to school.

John: Now when you went to high school, do you remember the building you were in? Was it the two-story building?

Stephen: No, I don't think it was. It was a modern building.

John: You didn't finish high school because you were busy working?

Stephen: My dad was having a rough time on the farm. They were just about ready to foreclose. So I just went to work on the farm.

John: Did you work for your dad until he was old?

Stephen: I worked for my dad for years. I forget how long. During the war, the guayule came. They came and took the farm. They didn't take it, they leased it from my dad. He leased it to them.

John: Explain that to us? Who took it?

Stephen: The government, to raise rubber.

John: Was that successful?

Stephen: I don't know. My dad never did think it was but they said it did make good rubber.

Interview of Stephen Davies, February 2005

John: Did you dad raise it for them?

Stephen: No, no. They did all their own.

John: Was your dad drafted in World War II or was he too old?

Stephen: Oh, I think he was too old.

John: What about you?

Stephen: No, I had two children. I was too young the first war. Then when we went to the war with the Japs and the Germans, I was too old and I had two children then.

John: What kind of work did you do during the war?

Stephen: I went to work for the county.

John: What did you do for the county?

Stephen: I was a mechanic. I took that up in high school.

John: Where did you work for the county?

Stephen: Right in San Luis Rey.

John: Right there behind the Mission?

Stephen: Yes.

Joyce: He and Dave Jones were both there.

John: Dave worked there, too?

Stephen: Yes.

John: Let's back up a little bit. How did you first meet your wife?

Stephen: Dave and I were just driving around. He was going with Helen Starr and Helen happened to know Leona, the girl that I married. She said, "let's go over and get Steve acquainted with Leona." So that's the way it happened.

John: Where did Leona live?

Stephen: In Escondido. I remember, Dave was kind of a rough driver, you know.

John: He was kind of a rough guy.

Stephen: Yes, he was a rough guy. He said, "Steve, I'm going to give these guys a dusting off here." So right at Vista here, there was a vacant lot in the middle of town there where all the

Interview of Stephen Davies, February 2005

buildings are, and he went up on the top of that thing and he started spinning and the dirt just flew! All of sudden, I said, "Dave, there's a red light coming!" And he said, "Oh the cops!" and he took off and went over the railroad tracks and he hit that first road, Olive I guess it is, and he started doing this with his car (swerving) and there was so much dirt that they couldn't see us and they had to quit. So we went on home and went on to work. Then later he got a letter of summons!

John: So they got him!

Stephen: Yes.

John: So Leona lived in Escondido, what year did you get introduced to her?

Joyce: She was 18 when they got married. How long did you go together, Dad?

Stephen: Not very long.

John: Did you marry here during or after the war?

Stephen: I think it was after the war.

John: Was she the same age as you?

Stephen: No, she was 84 when she passed away.

Joyce: There were seven years between you and mom. She was born in 1919.

John: So you got married about 1937, before the war.

Stephen: Yes. I was 24 years old.

John: You courted her in Escondido. How did you get a ride?

Stephen: I used my folk's car.

John: Did you take the train?

Stephen: They had the train but I never did ride the train.

Joyce: Dave married Helen Starr from Escondido.

Stephen: I remember I used to drive over there. The fog would come in and it would be so heavy that you couldn't see from here to

John: We haven't had bad fog for years and years. It used to be so bad.

Stephen: It was terrible. I went over there to see her and then I came home and honest, all the way home, I couldn't see, I was just driving along real slow.

Interview of Stephen Davies, February 2005

John: Where did you get married at?

Stephen: We got married in Escondido at her parents' house.

John: Where did you live?

Stephen: H.E. Ellery, that was my sister's husband.

John: What was your sister's name?

Stephen: Phyllis.

John: Now that we brought that up, how many brothers and sisters did you have?

Stephen: I only had the one.

John: Is she younger or older than you?

Stephen: Younger.

John: By how many years?

Stephen: 3 or 4 years.

Joyce: She married Hank Ellery. He owned a lot of property.

John: What did he do for a living?

Stephen: That's what he did, he bought and sold property.

John: So where did you live after you got married?

Stephen: Mr. Ellery had a home he built, a brand new home down on the Ellery tract, which was up by the Rosicrucian. South of the Rosicrucians and he built a little home there. He said he had a house, and I'm not kidding for, for \$12.00 a month. There was a stove, refrigerator, the whole thing was all brand new in the whole house. H.E. says—he called me Bob—I don't know why he called me Bob, but he said, "Now, treat it nice, Bob, I want to sell it. I don't know when I'll sell it. I might sell it three months from now." We were in it a year. He came in and said, "Okay, I've got it sold." So we said, okay.

John: Do you remember what street the house was on?

Stephen: I don't. We lived on Mesa Drive, I think.

Joyce: It's Ellery street now, isn't it. There's a street up there named Ellery Street and didn't mom say that's where the house was actually at?

Stephen: Yes.

Interview of Stephen Davies, February 2005

John: Do you think the house is still there?

Stephen: I don't know.

John: Where did you move from there?

Stephen: We moved into the valley. We moved the old garage, made a big floor and we moved the old garage and put all the different stuff inside, lined it and we made a kitchen and two bedrooms. We lived right next to the road.

John: What was the name of your farm?

Stephen: Just the Davies Farm.

John: Who did your dad sell his milk to?

Stephen: To someone in San Diego. Maxey. Do you remember the name Maxey?

John: Sure, Maxey Witman. One of the kids, his mother was a Maxey and his first name was Maxey.

Stephen: His last name was Maxey.

John: But his mother was a Maxey.

Joyce: Ruth.

John: Her son was named Maxey Witman.

Joyce: Ruth Witman and my grandmother were very, very good friends. Dad used to go horseback riding with her husband on the base.

Stephen: I don't know about that. I used to ride horses all the time with Mr. Maxey. He had horses down below at the river bottom there. Maxey used to haul the milk to San Diego. One of the girls used to drive, I forget whether it was Ruth or Joy. Joy was a little younger. And old man Maxey used to take me in his car. He was a character, that old guy was. He was an old Texan. I used to ride horses. I would walk down there, it was quite a walk from that farm and get a horse from old man Maxey. He was a character. He would cuss me out. One time I got on a horse, never had a saddle, bareback, and I was going through the trees and all of sudden a bunch of hogs went in front of us. They came through the brush there and that horse stopped and away she went back. Where she was there was a fence this high and old man Maxey was there that day. She was going like the devil and she never slowed down and she got right close to that fence and she stopped and I went right on through the air on over to the other side. Oh, man, did I get a bawling out. "Goddamn, what the hell is the matter with you. Goddamn, you didn't hold that horse back!" I said, "I couldn't hold her back." That's all I said, you know. I used to ride all kinds of horses. He had one named "Cactus." She was a pretty horse.

John: Was Ben Hubbert around when you were growing up?

Interview of Stephen Davies, February 2005

Stephen: No.

John: So you lived down in the valley with your family. How many kids do you have?

Stephen: Three. Joyce, Bill and Bob.

John: What does Bob do now?

Stephen: He works in Carlsbad for that big outfit, they lease apartments.

Joyce: He's the contractor for the Carlsbad Inn.

John: When was your oldest born?

Joyce: Bobby is two years older than me. He just turned 65. I was born in 1941, so he was born in 1939.

John: So you have Robert, Joyce and younger son is—

Stephen: And the boy that you met in here is Bill. William. He's in his middle 50s.

Joyce: He's past the middle 50s.

John: Did you do business in the valley or did you have to come to Oceanside?

Stephen: What do you mean?

John: When you shopped.

Stephen: We shopped in Oceanside.

John: What grocery store would you go to?

Stephen: I don't remember.

John: What do you remember about those days?

Stephen: It was too early for a Safeway, wasn't it?

John: The markets were down on Hill Street. Did you interact with the other farmers, like the Wackermans?

Stephen: Oh we knew the Wackermans. Dad, when he was a dairyman, he knew the Wackermans and the Stokes.

John: How about the Johnsons?

Interview of Stephen Davies, February 2005

Stephen: The Johnsons didn't have a dairy. The Johnsons were nice people. Mrs. Johnson and Mrs. Stokes were sisters.

Joyce: Was that Bea Johnson?

Stephen: Bea Johnson was over here. Melvin married her. Melvin was right here in the valley. His boys are right here now. Melvin and Donny.

Joyce: They were best friends with Mom and Dad, Melvin and Bea. Dad used to go flying with Melvin.

John: I never knew Melvin, but I knew Bea because I owned 27 acres behind her.

Stephen: Bea was wonderful.

John: When I first met her, she had an old Caterpillar tractor next to her house. I used to ask her to sell it to me. She said, "No, we used to use it to disc the land with." They hadn't used it for years. I tried to talk her out of that tractor but she wouldn't let me have it. But I still wanted to get it running so I had a friend and we pulled it with his truck and we started that old thing up. I think it was called a Caterpillar 1010. It was built in the teens. It was 1915 or 1916. It was a pretty old tractor and I got it running for her so they could do the discing again but you know what she did? She gave me Melvin's truck. He had a 1941 Chevy truck. It had been sitting in the yard for years and also hadn't run, but she gave me the truck. I didn't want the truck, I wanted the tractor.

Stephen: I helped Melvin wipe his plane off. I remember when he instructed. It was during the war. He went to Ventura or Oxnard.

John: I remember her telling me stories of him flying into the lagoon in Carlsbad where the mall is now. He used to land there where the mall is. [tape ends]