

LELAND DAVIS

Resident Naturalist, Columbia Junior College

(A tape recorded interview)

by

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Columbia Junior College





LELAND DAVIS
Resident Naturalist,
Columbia Junior College

A tape recorded interview

TAPE 2 (Cont'd)

SIDE A

TOPICS INTRODUCED

Purchase of 70 acre tract

PG & E position, 1942

PG & E projects

SIDE B

TOPICS INTRODUCED

Davis' family -

Marriage

Children

Divorce

Move to claim at San Diego Reservoir, 1942

Neighbors

Davis' claim

Gold taken from claim

Description of local marble

Other claims around the Reservoir

Picking up "color" after storms

Quality of Tuolumne County gold

TAPE 3 February 27, 1971

SIDE A

TOPICS INTRODUCED

(Some repetition)

San Diego Reservoir

Characteristics of local soil

Davis' cabin

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TAPE 1 December 9, 1970

SIDE A

TOPICS INTRODUCED

Parents settled in Humboldt County

School days

Drifted from job to job in California

SIDE B

TOPICS INTRODUCED

Move to Sonora, 1916

Work in the woods

Bee keeping business

Work at the Lime Kiln -

Rescued a fellow worker

Problems with workers and manager

PG & E position

Property in the county

TAPE 2 January 12, 1971

SIDE A

TOPICS INTRODUCED

(Considerable repetition)

Davis' moves: Humboldt County, Oakland,
Los Angeles, San Joaquin delta, Sonora,

Work at Standard Lumber Company

U.S. Army service, 1918-19 -

Handled messenger pigeons

Work at May quarry (Lime) kiln -

Terrazzo Plant

Mosaic tiles

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TAPE 3 (Cont'd)

SIDE A

TOPICS INTRODUCED

Neighbors

Fish in the Reservoir

Mistletoe

Miwok camps and burial sites on the
campus

SIDE B

TOPICS INTRODUCED

Miwok camps (Cont'd)

Picking up gold

Mining techniques

Tunnels used in mining

Rare plants found on the campus

Persons to interview

Additional information by Terrill Deatsch

A Biographical Sketch of the Life of Leland Davis

Procedure and Problems

An Outline of Moves and Dates

A Biographical Sketch of the Life of Leland Davis

Leland Davis is the son of parents who came to Northern California probably in the 1880's for the purpose of gold mining. When this did not pay as well as it was expected to, his father turned to the dairy business. At the time of Davis' birth his father was operating the Eel River Creamery in Humboldt County.

Davis attended school in Humboldt county until he reached the sixth grade. As was typical of this time in history he then stopped his formal education and went to work. The jobs and their number that Davis held from that time until the present are far too great to go into in depth in this paper. He worked in the fields in Humboldt county before coming down the coast by boat to Oakland to join his father in 1909. In Oakland he held various jobs such as construction, driving team, ushering in a theatre, driving a bakery wagon, picking squabs, and chimney sweep.

During 1914 Davis went to Los Angeles to work as a chimney sweep but the job was short-lived and by 1915 he was back in central California at Frank's Tract in the San Joaquin Delta. Evidently his father was working there as a foreman on a ranch. Davis worked in this area at various jobs for about one year during which time he caught malaria. Upon hearing that by moving to the mountains he could escape the recurrence of this disease he came to Sonora. His brother was already here working in the woods but at this time was quitting to go back to high school and Davis took his job. Along with working in the woods he was also keeping bees for honey. He soon quit the logging job and turned to bee keeping full time. In 1917 the County Bee Inspector died so Davis put in for the job and got it.

In 1918 the United States was involved in the first world war and Davis went into the Army Signal Corps. His duty was interesting from the aspect of today's advanced communications systems, during his stay in the Signal Corps he was a handler of the messenger pigeons. He spent 13 months at this position

at which time he was released from active duty. His time in the Army was spent in southern California.

After keeping bees for six or seven years Davis gave this up as a full time job and went to work at the May quarry for the lime company that recently closed its operations on Lime Kiln Road here in Sonora. He worked there for three or four years before quitting to go to work for what is now known as the Sonora Aggregates Corporation on Shaw's Flat Road north of Sonora. Davis refers to this as the "Terrazzo Plant" on the tapes. One of his sons works at the plant now. Davis worked at this job until laid off during slack time in 1942 during which time he applied for and received a job with the Pacific Gas and Electric Company. He retired from this job in 1958 at the mandatory age of 65 years.

Mr. Davis moved onto his mining claim at the San Diego Reservoir in 1942 (the year he started with the PG & E). His house was here already due to the fact he got the claim from his father-in-law who had built it previously. The house sat where the Learning Resource Center sits today. Davis claims to have done fairly well at mining at this claim. He indicated that the best hole was located in the vicinity of the small parking lot at the south end of the dam.

Davis was married "sometime in the 1930's" to a woman from this area. They had children and lived at the lake before she "flipped her lid" and left him. They were later divorced and he received custody of the children.

Procedure and Problems

To begin this project I went to visit Mr. Davis one day in order to establish a basis of communication. All of my well laid plans for getting to interview him were not needed because Davis was eager to talk and welcomed the chance to be interviewed. I established several common grounds for communication in dogs, flowers, and interest in gold mining.

The first session went fairly well considering I had no previous experience in interviewing. The questions I had set out to ask proved to be ambiguous even though they were thought to be well designed. This ambiguity led to rambling on Davis's part and left me with a poorly structured hour of tape.

The second interview went much better because the questions were designed to eliminate the ambiguity of the first tape. Therefore the second tape is probably the best of the three as far as proper interviewing procedure is concerned.

During the third session, devoted to local and campus history, the questions were again not to the point enough and Davis repeated several of the interesting, but insignificant, stories from the first and second sessions. I feel that the tape would have been better had we been able to walk around campus as planned.

In taping our conversations I tried to use the methods outlined at the Oral History conference in Monterey. The tape recorder was out of Davis's sight during the actual taping of the interview but located so I could check it with a minimum of disturbance. The microphone was placed on the table in front of Davis. This seemed to bother him only a short time during the first interview. During the following sessions this presented no problems.

All sessions were completed in Davis's home, so he could not have felt awkward about the surroundings. In fact, by listening to the tape one can hear comments occasionally that do not fit in, this is Davis commenting on the passerby that he watches daily from his window.

The problems arising during this project were probably typical. First, as mentioned before, being inexperienced it was difficult to phrase questions in such a manner that they would not lead to wandering and when Davis began to wander how to politely cut him off. Secondly, being unfamiliar with the recorder I did not use the full amount of tape on each side

because I was fearful of running out in midsentence. As a result there is a large amount of unused tape. Thirdly, and probably the most time consuming, was the fact that I failed to check out the equipment at the time it was turned over to me at the audio-visual section. This led to two cancelled weekend interviews because by the time I found fault with the machine the school was closed.

In conclusion, I think it is obvious to anyone listening to the tapes that Mr. Davis is not a historian. However, the man has lived in this area for many years and can reflect some of the local color of past times. Many of the tales related in the three tapes must be considered as exactly what they are. The stories are the stories Davis remembers and are told in the way he heard them or the way he saw them happen. What is now necessary is to verify what he has said, but that is another project.

This project has shown me the importance of oral history in the field of local history today. The "old timers" are getting to be fewer and fewer every day and if their part of the history of this locality is to be told it must be done in their words and language as they saw it happen.

An Outline of Moves and Dates

Born in the Eel River Valley, Humboldt county, California
1893

Moved to Oakland - 1909

Moved to Los Angeles - 1914

Moved to Frank's Tract in San Joaquin Delta - 1915

Moved to Sonora - 1916 (23 years old)

Became Toulumne County Bee Inspector - 1917

Army Service - 1918 (13 months)

Began working at May quarry for Lime company - 1924 or 1925

Began working at Sonora Aggregates Corporation (Terrazzo
Plant) - 1928 (35 years old)

Began working for Pacific Gas and Electric and moved to San
Diego Reservoir mining claim - 1942

Retired from Pacific Gas and Electric Company - 1958 (65
years old)