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Interviewer: Robyn Krock
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This is Robyn Krock on June 8, 2005 interviewing Louis Tarke at his home in Sutter, California.

First of all, thank you for agreeing to be interviewed. Let me start with just looking at the information you filled out here. So, you were born in Oroville?

Lt: Yes.

Rk: Not here on this land.

Lt: Not right on the land, no. My folks lived right here, but my mother had a doctor in Oroville she wanted to go to, so she went up there to that doctor. And that's where I was born.

Rk: So you were born in Oroville, but you lived here?

Lt: Never lived anywhere else but right around here.

Rk: Really? You've lived here your whole life?

Lt: <affirmative response> Except I went to school and when I was in the service. I was in school, college, and then I was in the service for about a year and a half.

Rk: Where did you go to college?

Lt: San Luis Obispo, CalPoly. I got a bachelor of science degree from there. In field crops production and a minor in livestock.

Rk: That's appropriate.

Lt: That's only what I thought I needed.

Rk: And then you were in the service for just a year after that?

Lt: I was in the service before I went to college.

Rk: What branch?

Lt: And I was in about a year and a half and the war ended – the war ended when I was just getting started to... in fact I was being shipped over to Hawaii and the war ended.

Rk: Which war?

Lt: And they dropped me off and then I worked there in what they called the receiving barracks—I was in the navy—and I helped, I took care of their returning troops pay records. They taught me how to do that. And whenever they came in they all had beards and didn't look like navy guys, but they all wanted money to go to town. They hadn't been to town for a long time.

Rk: And what year was that?

Lt: That was in '45 and '46. I started Yuba College for one year, I think it was in '46—7, maybe I guess, and went there for one year, then went out to Cal Poly and graduated in 1950.

Rk: 1950. And then you came back here?

Lt: Yeah.

Rk: You were born in 1927? That makes you...

Lt: 78 right now.

Rk: Much older than you look. Good Lord.

Lt: Well, my goodness sakes, thank you.

Rk: You're about 10 years older than my father, and I thought you were younger than my father. So you were here up to that time, till you went into the air force.

Lt: Navy.

Rk: Navy, I'm sorry. So you grew up right here?

Lt: Well, I grew up where my folks lived over on the other side of the bridge.

Rk: On the other side of what bridge?

Lt: Sutter Bypass bridge here. That was my home. My dad grew up in the Sutter Buttes up here off of West Butte Road. My mother grew up in Yuba City.

Rk: Now, the land that we're on right now, is this the land that's been in your family since...

Lt: If you want to call the family, extended family, this was in part of our family, but this—I bought this piece from a cousin of ours because I wanted to live here and my wife didn't want to live on up further. She wanted to live where she could at least see the road.

Rk: So, are there other Tarkes that still live here?

Lt: Yes.

Rk: That live in the buttes?

Lt: They live on up further. I have two cousins up there, and my brother lives just across the bridge in, off of Highway 20 there. My dad built over there after he got married because he said he didn't want to live in the buttes because it was too tough trying to make a yard or anything like that.

Rk: And there's that electricity problem.

Lt: Oh, they had electricity there at the home place, but right here, he discouraged me from building here because he thought I'd never get a decent yard. And I said, well, you know, I think I can. And I think I've done pretty well.

Rk: You've done beautifully.

Lt: But it had a good... this was a cousin of ours, it belonged to a Stohlman, by the name.

Rk: Stohlman?

Lt: Stohlman was the name and they were cousins. And she told me, she said, I'll sell you a piece—I wanted this piece here, I think it was an 80. And she said, no, I won't sell you the 80, but I'll sell you about 12, 14 acres. That's all you need for a house. I said, well, that's better than nothing. But I wanted more, but I couldn't get it. Anyway, I paid \$200 an acre for the land and I told her I'd buy the place if we could get water. And she says, well, that's fine, we'll drill a well, and so I did. I drilled a well, and I got, when they tested the well, 200 gallons a minute, which was pretty good for the buttes. It's very difficult to find water here in the buttes. And 200 gallons a minute would take care of whatever I wanted to do here. That was enough. So, I told her I'd buy the place, and she says, good, now I have a neighbor.

Rk: So, you have 12-13 acres right here?

Lt: I got a little over 12 acres right here.

Rk: And is this, like is that livestock down there yours?

Lt: Yes.

Rk: So, you still ranch?

Lt: Yeah. My place come from the South Butte Road back of the house here about 100 yards or so. It's not a real big piece, you know, 12 acres isn't very much.

Rk: So this piece, you bought this from your cousin. Did you have, your father's land that you said your brother lives on now...

Lt: I coulda built over there. He woulda give me a piece.

Rk: Okay. And how big is that piece?

Lt: Well, he wanted to give me 50 acres.

Rk: And that's the piece that's not actually in the buttes?

Lt: No, it's all down here. See, we, see, you have to understand that when my great-grandfather came here in 18—around 1850, he came out here as a gold miner, and he mined gold until about 1853 or 4. And he did well, saved his money, German thriftiness, and he came back, and he was a farmer back home, in Germany. He and his friend, which was also a farmer by the name of Hoke, Frederick Hoke and Frederick Tarke. They both had the same first name. Anyway, this was all swamp land out here. See, there was no control on the rivers. Feather River and the Sacramento River and the Yuba River, in the wintertime they just flowed everywhere. Well, of course, that's why Yuba City is built on a knoll over there, and Marysville is too, right up there close, and it's high ground there. You don't understand that, I know.

Rk: No, I do understand, I never realized.

Lt: Yeah, and this used to be all swamp land out here. Well, they wanted to raise livestock and also some grain, and they got started with—they got a couple hundred acres from the government, each one of them did, up here on high ground, up in the edge of the buttes there. And they did well, they were very thrifty. And then they wanted more land, and I don't know how they got this lot of land down in the flat down here. But when my grandfather died he had—he died in 1889, I think it was—they had over 5 or 6,000 acres. My great-grandfather I'm talkin' about now. And a lot of it was in the buttes. And then a lot of it was flat ground down here in the swamp land that they ran their livestock on in the summertime. That way they didn't have to worry about summer pasture. In the wintertime they had them up in the buttes and high ground and they didn't have any problems with grass. So that's how come they got both hills and flat land.

Rk: That's a lot of land.

Lt: Well, 5,000 acres, but when my great-grandfather died—maybe he had more than that even. I don't know. But when my grandfather died, he had over 5,000 acres too. There was three in my great-grandfather's family, three children. My grandfather and two daughters.

Rk: What was your grandfather's name?

Lt: Louis Tarke. Same as mine. And he had two sisters.

Rk: What were their names?

Lt: Emma was the youngest and Annie. And Emma was a painter, she loved to paint. She had good artistic feel, but what happened to her, she married a gambler. And the gambler... that's what they all said, I couldn't tell you, but anyway, he got away with all her money, anyway, and

my grandfather had to buy her out 'cause she didn't want any land. And my other aunt, great-aunt, she married a farmer up there in the buttes, and his name was Hawn. And my great-grandfather had given her 2500 acres before he died. I think he had a lot more land than 5,000 acres when he died. I couldn't tell you off hand.

Rk: So, then, your grandfather ended up with his land plus your great-aunt's land.

Lt: My Aunt Emma's land.

Rk: And you're saying he had like about 5 or 6,000 acres too.

Lt: Well, he had quite a lot of land too. And how they increased their ranch... people would come here in the buttes, settle, and take up the land, get some kind of patent rights on it. And then it was tough farmin', tough livin', and they would sell and move away. Well, my great-grandfather and my grandfather both bought them out. That's how they kept gettin' bigger and bigger pieces and all the land has names, former names of people owned it. And we know where they are. We have the names, where the fields are.

Rk: So then your grandfather had that land and your great-aunt Annie had land. Your grandfather, how many children did he have?(13:00)

Lt: He had five children.

Rk: And did they all get some of they land?

Lt: Yeah, they all got land too, when he died.

Rk: And who were they?

Lt: It was Anne Shields. Anne was his oldest daughter. She married a fella by the name of Shields. And Frida Sanstrum, and my dad Fred Tarke, my uncle Eldon Tarke, and my other uncle George Tarke.

Rk: And they all got a piece of the land?

Lt: Yeah. Uncle George went to college at the University of California and became an electrician, and he was livin' in San Francisco. He got maybe 300 acres or so and my two aunts, they got 3 or 400 acres. My grandmother was still alive, see, and she got all the buttes. And my dad got, he got, maybe 8 or 900 acres too, and his was mostly down in the flat down here, south of the buttes in that open country here. Or a lot of it was maybe never even divided at that time. He and my uncle farmed together. My grandmother, when she died, then she left all the land in the buttes to my uncle because he was still living with her.

Rk: Your Uncle George?

Lt: My Uncle Eldon. Eldon Tarke. He got most of the buttes and he got the home place.

Rk: Okay. So, he got the home place where your brother lives now. No, the one up in the West Buttes, here. Sorry. I'm getting confused here.

Lt: I don't mean to make it confusing, but if you had... I think you studied some of the history there. You saw some of the history on the family, I guess.

Rk: Yeah, I did. It's easier to have a visual though, to actually draw a picture.

Lt: But, anyway, my grandmother died in, I think in 1933. '32, '33. And my uncle wasn't married at that time. He lived there at the home place. I think he married... I don't want to say... it was a gal that was helpin' him. Housekeeper, you might say or something. And she was from Norway. Born in Norway, came to the United States from... North Dakota, and then came out here and her family. And then she worked as a helper, you know, housekeeper. And she was helpin' my grandmother and she was there, and that's how come I guess he married her. I don't know. Pretty handy.

Rk: Yeah, she's already there. And, then, did they have children?

Lt: Uncle Eldon?

Rk: Yeah.

Lt: He had two boys and they're up here now.

Rk: And what are their names?

Lt: And their names is Kermit, is the youngest, and James is the oldest.

Rk: Okay.

Lt: Kermit Tarke.

Rk: And they both still live—

Lt: They still live up on the, right around the big old house.

Rk: And then, your father, it's just you and your brother?

Lt: My brother and I had a sister. Janice Anderson was her name and my brother's Richard Tarke.

Rk: So your brother Richard Tarke doesn't live in the buttes.

Lt: No, he lives over here next to the home place.

Rk: And your sister, where was she?

Lt: She lived in the, in my home place. When she got married my mother was still alive, and my dad had died in the meantime. When my dad died my mother decided she didn't want to live there by herself, so she traded houses with my sister who had a house in Yuba City. And so my mother moved to Yuba City. But my sister got the... lived in the home place.

Rk: And where is the home place?

Lt: Just across the bridge on the right hand side.

Rk: So it's still Sutter?

Lt: No, Meridian over there. This side is Sutter and the other side is Meridian.

Rk: And that's flat over there. That's flat, that's not the buttes.

Lt: No, that's not. And my dad built there even though that country flooded, was flooded. He thought it was a high knoll, and the house has been flooded twice since <inaudible>. The first time in 1940, the house got flooded, five feet in the house. And the second time is 1997 and they got about three feet in the house.

Rk: In '97?

Lt: Mm-hmm.

Rk: So they didn't flood in the '86 flood?

Lt: No. Flood in '97.

Rk: How did they... there was a flood in '85 I think it was.

Lt: Not out here.

Rk: Hmm. I was thinking that was the last flood—because I remember '97. I was already in California then, but I thought it was, it seemed like—

Lt: They had some floods over towards Yuba City maybe at that time. But '97 was the last flood in here.

Rk: So they didn't flood between 1940 and '97? So the levies and stuff must have worked for them.

Lt: Oh yeah.

Rk: Okay. So you grew up in that place, but did you grow up like coming to the buttes—well, actually, let me take a step back. Your father got 8 or 900 acres from your grandfather.

Lt: I think so. Something like that.

Rk: And that was mostly the flat land.

Lt: Yeah.

Rk: And did that include the home place or did your father buy that?

Lt: He bought that separate. He bought that before anything.

Rk: And so the land that he got from his father, is that still in your or your brother's hands?

Lt: Yes.

Rk: And that's not this piece.

Lt: No.

Rk: But that's that piece that's up...

Lt: No, it's like... a lot of his land is over in the flat land, reclamation district, we call it. Reclamation District 70 and in the bottom of the Sutter Bypass.

Rk: Okay. It's easier if I have a clear picture of how this land <inaudible>. So, the 1940 flood, so you were living in the house.

Lt: I was about, I think I was freshman or a sophomore in high school.

Rk: So you remember it?

Lt: Oh sure. I remember it well.

Rk: Can you tell me about it?

Lt: 1940 flood? Yes, it was March the 1st, Sutter Bypass broke. And it was late spring rains, I guess like we had this year. There was no Shasta Dam at that time, and no Oroville Dam, or any of the dams around. We had a nice, had a good levy, but it certainly wasn't high enough, or _____ enough to hold back the water, the amount of water that broke out of it. And it broke and (nobody?) at district 70 and district 1660 are together there, and there's a levy on the bottom too, which is another levy, which is it borders the Tisdale Weir, and then that takes care of the district 1500 which runs clear down toward Knights Landing. Knights Landing's a much bigger district than 1660 or 70. They got their numbers, you know, as they were reclaimed. It was reclaimed land. 1500 took in Robbins and right up to the Knights Landing levy there. 1660 was the south portion of this area up here and it had its own levies too, small levies. But then it was more or less incorporated into 70, which was the first one that was reclaimed in 1878 or 9, something like that. And it had its own levies too. Then they combined it. They reclaimed 1660. But each one

has the individual self. Each one has their own pumping plant and drainage system and they cooperate together.

Rk: So, in 1940 the Bypass was already built and district 70 already existed.

Lt: Uh-huh. And 1660 existed too. And then you were talking about the flood. Well, the flood broke March the 1st and it flooded the whole thing. Meridian got water up to, I think it was 4th street, something like that. Then they had to pump the water, start gettin' the water out of the district and they got their water out of the district and the levy break almost fixed, and then April 1st come another big high water and they got flooded again. And so April 1st the house got water in it again, right up to the bottom of the floor, I think, my dad's house, but a lot of the people got wet again. They had just got started movin' back in. Made the crops that year really late, but they all survived, you know, hard work and perseverance, and then they all came out of it okay. That's about the way it was in those days.

Rk: And did they lose any livestock?

Lt: Well, I remember at that time, my dad... it was tough times, just comin' out of the depression, and we had cows at the house, and we had milk cows. I think we had 10 or 12 milk cows, we had to milk night and morning. And so, when the levy broke, the water was coming, so we drove the cattle up on the levy because it was high, see? And after the water, afterwards, the water hadn't gone down yet or anything, we rounded up the cattle and there was one of them missing, said it got drown. So, one didn't make it. And we all felt bad about 'em because, you know, nobody could milk 'em. We felt bad because their bags were plenty full, I'll tell you. And we took 'em up to the buttes, took 'em up to my Uncle Eldon's place.

Rk: And did you, during the flood, did your family go up to the buttes? Because that would have been the closest high ground.

Lt: No, they went to Sutter.

Rk: Okay. No, wait, we're in Sutter right?

Lt: They lived over in Sutter for awhile, and then... I went to Sutter grammar school for about... till the first of June, June the 15th or something, whenever it was. We couldn't get back to Meridian because the water was on the road all the time. Because that's where I went to school, was in Meridian.

Rk: What school?

Lt: Meridian School. Meridian Grammar School. And I used to ride my bicycle back and forth to school. I was in the 8th grade, I guess it was, at that time. Must've been because I rode my bicycle back and forth to school, and then on rainy days the folks would take us to school. Highway 20 wasn't that busy in those early days, so you didn't have to worry about gettin' too much with the cars. (27:23)

Rk: So, Meridian School, that was kindergarten through...

Lt: 8th grade.

Rk: And then where did you go to high school?

Lt: I went to Sutter.

Rk: Sutter High School.

Lt: And my brother, he went to Slough School, which was another little school not very far from the house, and he either rode his bike or walked. It wasn't that far. My mother said that she had to separate us boys because we'd fight. But I never thought we fought that bad.

Rk: How close in age are you?

Lt: There's about 2-1/2 years difference.

Rk: Oh, you fought. My sister's two years older than me and we fought.

Lt: But there was a good school there at school. And he had... there was five students in his class and they went all the way through and graduated. And I had eight students in my class at Meridian. And over at Sutter we had maybe 10, 12, 14 students, I don't know. But I only went there for about 2-1/2, 3 months.

Rk: And what about the high school?

Lt: High school? Had 150.

Rk: In the whole school? Or in your class?

Lt: No, in the whole school.

Rk: Okay, just making sure. So what year did you graduate high school.

Lt: I graduated in '45. And I got... see, '45 the war was on, and I didn't want to get drafted in the army, so I joined the navy.

Rk: Why didn't you want to go into the army? I don't know anything about the service.

Lt: Well, I didn't want to go in the army because I just thought the army was a lot rougher than the navy and I thought I'd at least have a place to sleep at night, you know.

Rk: I appreciate that. You don't see me going into the service, that's for sure.

Lt: So I joined the navy. And, in fact, I graduated on one and the next I was—my folks took me to San Francisco and they shipped me off to boot camp, San Diego.

Rk: So they wanted you to go into the navy?

Lt: Yeah.

Rk: And is your brother older and younger than you?

Lt: He's younger than I am.

Rk: So, did he also go into the service?

Lt: He went into the service not at that time, but he was drafted in the Korean War. And he had to spend, well, he had to spend nine months, he spent nine months on the front line in the Korean War, and if you spent nine months on the front line in the Korean war, they can bring you back. So he was in the service until the Korean War was over.

Rk: They can bring you back?

Lt: Bring you back to Calif—you know, to the United States. You didn't have to stay over there then.

Rk: Like you do in Iraq.

Lt: But he was on the front line for right close to five or six months.

Rk: That's scary.

Lt: It was scary. He hated it, but then he hated the Chinamen that just marched right on 'em. They had to keep shootin' 'em, never could stop 'em hardly. They'd walk right over their brothers.

Rk: So, when you were growing up in Meridian, you had this land up here in the buttes. How much time did you spend on the land in the buttes that your father had?

Lt: He never had any land in the buttes.

Rk: He just had the land... right, right.

Lt: My uncle had all the land in the buttes. But they were—my uncle and my father were partners, and they farmed together. And they used to raise sheep and cattle. My uncle and my dad, they had around 23, 2400 head of sheep, and maybe 150 head of cattle. And I remember then really well. My dad was always helpin' out with the livestock in the wintertime, lambin' the sheep and takin' care of the cows.

Rk: And bringin' em back up into the higher land.

Lt: They put 'em down in the tule land—we called it tule land—in the summertime.

Rk: In the flat.

Lt: Uh-huh.

Rk: and then in the winter brought them back up into the hill—

Lt: In the winter they took them back up there, and the sheep would be—the ewes would start lambing about latter part of October, first of November.

Rk: And did you help out with that?

Lt: My dad did all the time, but I didn't really do much of it. I was in school, see. October, see. But I helped him on Saturdays. I helped with movin' 'em and marking, things like that. I liked that. I loved that.

Rk: Moving them and marking?

Lt: Marking. That's where they cut the tails off and castrate the _____ and the bucks and make them _____, see.

Rk: You like that?

Lt: Yeah, I like that, thought that was great.

<interrupted by phone call>

Lt: Anyway, I enjoyed helpin' out on the weekends, you know, and in the summertime we used to help move them all the time, move the sheep. But they had herders, just like the do now. Basquo people and they all came from Spain and they lived in cook houses—those houses in little cook houses and moved 'em around.

Rk: And they still have the Basque sheep herders up there helpin' em.

Lt: A lot of the Basque people now own their own sheep. And they have—some Basque people come from Spain, but the Spanish Basque now people over there in Spain, the Spanish people, are all very wealthy too. They don't—well, I mean, not wealthy, but they don't have to come to the United State to make a stake. A lot of the people they have now for herders are Peruvian, from Peru.

Rk: You said the Basque, they own their own sheep and they just lease the land?

Lt: Yes.

Rk: And what about the Peruvians?

Lt: Oh, they're just herders, they're just herders. Just like the Basque were for awhile. But the Peruvians, you know, they're always lookin' south. All they want to do is get their money and get the hell out of here. Want to go home.

Rk: How many people do you have working here?

Lt: Well, we have on the ranch... my ranch is now... when my brother and I retired, we'd built the ranch up to about, our portion of it and such was 4500 acres, which was my brother and I. And, of course, I have a son and I have two son-in-laws and they're takin' care of the ranch. My brother's son, he's not interested in farming, but he is interested in the financial end of it.

Rk: And what's your son's name?

Lt: Fred.

Rk: Okay. So everybody's either Fred or Louis goin' all the way back.

Lt: They used to skip generations. I named my son Fred after his father, and his father named him Fred after his father, you understand. And I got named after my grandfather.

Rk: Okay, so your son is Fred, and your daughters...

Lt: My daughter? I have one daughter. She was just named Janice.

Rk: After your sister.

Lt: There's no family name there.

Rk: I thought you said you have two son-in-laws.

Lt: Two son-in-laws. Oh, my daughters? My own personal daughters?

Rk: Yeah.

Lt: Okay. No, we didn't use any family names.

Rk: So, who are they?

Lt: Oh, I have Kristine, she was born at Christmastime. And my other daughter is Cheryl.

Rk: And do they live—

Lt: They live in Yuba City.

Rk: And what about your son?

Lt: My son? He lives out here. And when he got married we made a straight... found a nice piece of property for him and he was able to buy, I think 200 acres and there was a nice house on it. A real nice house.

Rk: And is that—that's in the flat?

Lt: That's down in district 70 there. And it just joins our property too, which is real handy.

Rk: And then your son-in-laws, do they farm?

Lt: One of the son-in-laws farms for us. And the other son-in-law, he's a tractor salesman over at Colusa John Deere tractor company. And he now is farming a little bit with my other son-in-law. But Fred, he didn't want to get along or somethin'. I don't know how to say it, but I was hopin' they'd all farm together, see, because that's so much nicer to have more help and more people thinkin' about doin' things. So they each took some land and that's the way it was. My brother has all his land, and I have all mine, but I had to... I gave some to my son-in-law, who's farmed it.

Rk: And which son-in-law?

Lt: The one that married Cheryl.

Rk: What's the last name?

Lt: Peacock.

Rk: Peacock. I've heard that name. Is his family from around here?

Lt: Yeah, he lives around here somewhere, but I don't know where it is. He has a brother that... he and his brother farm together quite a lot and this is a pretty good size farm. But he and his brother divided, and Todd Peacock married my daughter, and so we got him set up over here.

Rk: Were they at the landowners' reception?

Lt: One of them might have been.

Rk: Okay, maybe that's where I heard the name from. And then, Richard, what is his son's name?

Lt: His son is named David.

Rk: And he's farming up there?

Lt: No, he's not farming. He's a stock broker, investor kind of guy. He runs a—he has a branch of Edwards and Co. here in Yuba City.

Rk: So then what happens to Richard's land...

Lt: Well, it's still here all together, but Fred and Todd Peacock farm it.

Rk: They farm Richard's land?

Lt: Yeah. We've given 'em separate pieces, separate parcels.

Rk: And then, who will that land go to?

Lt: Well, the way we have it set up now, we got a generation-skipping trust, so the inheritance tax isn't going to be so great. So the land will go to the grandchildren, actually, and there won't be any tax on that.

Rk: That's very smart.

Lt: Well, it's smart, but I feel bad about it because, you know, the further you get away, the grandchildren may be not interested in the farm. I can certainly see that happening.

Rk: And which grandchildren are you talking about?

Lt: Well, my brother's.

Rk: So David's children?

Lt: Yeah. And his daughter—he had a daughter, too, one daughter, and she's got two sons. They have two sons, his daughter had. And I guess maybe her—the boys never had, never farmed, never been around a farm, but, you know I don't think they're interested in their farm.

Rk: Are you worried about them selling to developers?

Lt: Am I worried about them what?

Rk: Them selling to developers?

Lt: Well, I oughta mention here too that developers aren't interested in buyin' much in the flat country over here because of the floods. But maybe they might be someday, but right now I'm not going to worry about it.

Rk: Okay. So Richard's land is flat.

Lt: Well, it's all together. Richard's and my land are together. My dad left it to both Richard and I, and then we bought quite a lot of land. We bought a lot of land. Most of it's down here in

district 70 or 1660. We have a... we bought one piece up there in the buttes, 700 acres, real good land. It's high ground, it's in the buttes, and we started plantin' it with almonds, and it's good. Almonds, there's a lot of land there to plant them. Some have... I have some hills up there too, not much, but mostly it's flat ground and all we need to do is develop water.

Rk: So there's no water up there?

Lt: We have water for about 150 acres of almonds, and there's about 350 acres more that could be planted almonds if we wanted to do it.

Rk: And what's the source of the water?

Lt: Dig a hole in the ground.

Rk: So you're not like running water up there or anything like that?

Lt: No.

Rk: So where we are right here, we're just at the base of the buttes. Do you consider this to be in the buttes, or... where... when you think about the buttes, where does it end?

Lt: Well, I think anywhere along the... you know, I'm up here about 50 feet off the road, I figure this is part of the buttes. Anything... West Butte Road, South Butte Road, kind of borders the buttes, and East Butte Road on the east side, North Butte on the north side.

(inaudible)

rk: When Frederick Tarke first came out here, he was with Frederick Hoke?

Lt: Yes, Frederick Hoke. And they landed in New Orleans or someplace over there. And they were just immigrants, you know. They had nothing in mind, nothing... they got jobs on the river boats, on the river boat, I don't know... Dad talked about throwin' wood in the fire, you know, to keep the boilers hot. And my grandfather was workin' in there, and I guess one of the boilers got too hot and burned, blew up a little bit, and he got hurt a little bit. And so, at that time a nigro mammy, he said... that's why my grandfa-- great-grandfather like the nigros so well – she kind of took him in, nursed him back to health and then right about that same time they struck gold here in California and they decided that they might as well go to California. So they got... I guess they got jobs on a... they weren't walkers. They weren't gonna walk across the plains to get here, so they got a job workin' on a boat comin' to San Francisco. And they went around the horn to San Francisco, and the arrived here. And I'm not sure what year it was, see. Early 1951 or '52, something like that. And when they got here it was wintertime, and so they got out—they had enough money to get outfitted and so they went on up to the mountains and when they got there with their supplies for themselves, the miners were really hungry. They were starving, really. So they had food. So the miners traded them for flour, pound for pound for gold, you know, a pound of flour, a pound of gold. That sounded pretty good to them, so they turned right around and went back down to San Francisco and got more and brought it up. And they spent

quite a little while bringin' food back and forth to the miners and they did very well at that. They got a pretty good stake. I don't know whether they ever found much gold as far as mining. I never heard. But they found enough, they saved enough money to decide they didn't want to mine, and they wanted to settle up here, and they settled in the edge of the buttes because it was high ground at that time. And they were able to buy a piece, and they bought joining pieces of property. And they expanded their operations from there, and as they... in 1856 then, they were of corresponding back home with their families, and they said they were lookin' for women! And they wrote back and there and said that there was some nice young girls came to the United States and they were in... I forgot whether it was in Missouri or Iowa, from their home towns. And they decided they would go back there and look them over. (laughs)

Now, I'm being very nonchalant about this, but that's the way I have to characterize it. But anyway, they went back down to San Francisco, caught a ride on the boat or ship and went back to Mississippi, to New Orleans or wherever it was, and then they got a ride, or walked up there I guess to wherever these girls were. And they looked them over and each one picked out a wife. (laughs) And my great-grandfather married a gal by the name of Maria Stohlman, and then he went back around the horn again, and came back out here to their property here in the buttes. And my great-grandfather was born about 1857, '58, and they had two daughters and one boy.

Rk: You mean your grandfather.

Lt: My grandfather, yeah. Louis Tarke. Anyway, her name was Stohlman, and, you know, my grandfather was doing very well, and they were writing back and forth to Germany all the time, and I didn't know that letters went that good, but they did, I guess in those days. But she had... she came from a family of 11 children. And some of her brothers wanted to come out to California. Easy pickin's out here. And my grandfather says, well, we'll send them enough money to get them out here, whatever it was, they sent them the money to stakes, I guess it was so they could come into the United States. Anyway, he did. And they came out and they worked on the Tarke ranch there enough to pay their stake off. And then they all took up land. And this piece of property here was owned by one of the Stohlmans, who was her brother by the name of Henry Stohlman.

Rk: This was your great-grandfather's wife?

Lt: Yeah. One of her brothers. And her brother came here to California and he worked up there at the home place. Of course, my grandfather was happy to have him. And they had Chinese cooks in those days too, you know. (laughs) and they had a bunk house and quite a few people would stay there and work. And in the wintertime they... to keep things busy, they built these rock fences.

<phone interruption>

Well, you know this is where we disagree, that the rock fences were built by the Chinese. The rock fences on the Tarke ranch, which they call the rock wall ranch, they gave it that name, were built by German immigrants and workers that worked for the Tarke family. And they built their own fences.

Rk: So your great-grandmother's brothers who came out?

Lt: Well, her brothers and people that they hired, you know, they had help. They were raising livestock and such. Not all of them. Probably the brothers only worked for awhile until they got enough money and they got their stake, see. And this piece of property here was half my grandmother's brother. He liked it and they were able to help to get it, to buy it, see. And then he built that house right down here on the corner there. It's a big, two-story white house after he got goin' there. And he had... I think he had about 8 or 9 children too, and his wife was from Germany too.

Rk: So, that's interesting though. The rock walls on the Tarke ranch were not built by the Chinese.

Lt: No, that's what I understand.

Rk: That's very interesting. I mean, 'cause, you're right. Everybody else says that—

Lt: And that's not true. But, I know, you probably talked to Randy Schnabel; he'll have to agree that not all the rock walls were built by Chinamen. But anyway, in the wintertime they would take a team of horses or mules, whichever they had, and go out and pry rocks lose and bring 'em in and build fences, in the wintertime. And that's how come the... you know, and keep the guys busy.

Rk: And did the fences mark off the property line?

Lt: Well, they were all shot by engineers, and if you ever noticed, the rock fences are pretty straight. Some of them go crooked with the... but the main boundary line fences are pretty straight, really. But I'm not gonna say that they were all built by immigrant people or workers, but the ones on the Tarke ranch were pretty well built by workers for the family. Anyway, the raised a lot of... my grandfather, great-grandfather then started raising horses and cattle and sheep, and during the Civil War, according to my father now, my grandfather made a lot of money sellin' horses to the Union army. And the Union army didn't care as long as they were good-lookin' horses. And my grandfather had a lot of horses that were not too nice, a little rough. (laughs) And they bought them all. They bought everything, all the horses that they wanted to sell. And he made plenty of money on that. That's what got him really on easy street. I shouldn't say easy street, but it gave him a good supply of money.

Rk: Really? Just selling horses to the union?

Lt: Selling horses to the Union. (laughs) And of course I imagine he sold beef and lamb to them too, you know. But, anyway, the horses were the ones that really set him up. That's what my dad said. (laughs) But he had a lot of horses couldn't break, and they were tough. (inaudible)

Rk: So he sold them to the Union. But he was out here...

Lt: Well, California was a Union state.

Rk: Oh. Yeah, I guess it was.

Lt: If you went across the Sacramento River over in Colusa County, that was a southern, Confederate state (laughs)

Rk: But there wasn't any fighting here?

Lt: Oh no. But there was always that feeling, see, they were Confederates over there, and that's what my dad always said, and that's true, that they were more or less leaning it to the Confederate states there. I don't know why. It was settled by people from the south, I guess.

Rk: Did your father or your grandfather have any stories about Indians in the area? About interaction with them?

Lt: Well, you know, that's a funny thing because I never really heard them talk too much about the Indians, except the Indians were lazy. Well, I'm tellin' you the truth, that's what he said. They didn't want to do much. And they would only work when they wanted to. Sometimes they would go out and glean in the fields after the harvest was over. As far as my dad talked about the Indians, they weren't real ambitious kind of people, didn't want to do much.

Rk: But they didn't have any real problems with them?

Lt: No, they never had any problems with them. These are pretty mild Indians around here, I guess, according to what he said. They never had any problems at all. They were—the only problems they had was they were always takin' stuff, stealin'. (laughs) But, you know, they were decent people, I guess, but they really didn't have much contact with them. Not that I know of.

(pause)

Anyway, that's about all I can tell ya'. And then my great-grandfather did pretty well and the Civil War ended. I think it was in 1870-something, somethin' like that, and they did very well and crops were good and such. And then in 1885 or somethin', '87, somethin' like that, they wanted to go back to Germany, he and his wife. And so they left \$5,000 with my Aunt Emma to build a new house. And so the house that you see up there was built around 1885, '86, 1887 with \$5,000.

Rk: And which house is that?

Lt: Oh, the big house that's up there.

Rk: Up on West Butte.

Lt: You know, the Tarke house on the West Butte Road there. And the old house, they just kind of built around the old house. They incorporated the old house in the new house. Part of the...

like the kitchen and some of the stuff down below, the smokehouse, that's all incorporated into the old house. I mean the old house is incorporated into the new house.

Rk: And so they went back to Germany and your Aunt Emma did that and did they ever come back from Germany?

Lt: Oh, yeah. They stayed over there... they gave \$5,000 to their daughter and she was a designer and she helped design the house and got it built. My grandfather and my other aunt, they were right there too. And they took the other \$5,000 and went back to Germany. And visited with the families back there for awhile or how long I couldn't tell you. I don't know that there's any records on there. And then they came back again. And then, I don't remember exactly what year my grandfather died, my great-grandfather died. But, anyway, he died, he was only about 64 or 65 or 70. 64 somewhere, 65. And he got... he died from a kick of a horse. He was trying to make a mare let a foal suck and he got him in a... the barns up there were all built with stalls in 'em, and he had the mare in a stall and he was tryin' to get that little foal to suck. And somehow or another he got behind her and he got hit with her hoof and it killed him. You know, hit him in the chest and he died. And that was it.

Rk: And do you know, was your grandfather married and having kids by then, or was he younger than that?

Lt: My grandfather never got married until after my great-grandfather died. I could get you the records on it, probably ought to let you borrow one of those books, maybe before you leave. You might be interested in looking at that because it's got the genealogy of the Tarke family after they married the Stohlman, married into the Stohlmans. I'll let you, before you leave, get to look at... you can take it with you, but I want it back.

Rk: You'll get it back. I'm gonna need to come back anyway. I actually, I forgot my camera. I was halfway up here and I...

Lt: Well, I'm sorry about that. (laughter)

Rk: I'd like to get pictures of you and Betty and of the land.

Lt: Well, like I said, I only have 12 acres here. But this was part of the Stohlman ranch. And the Stohlmans bought this probably from somebody else. And I know they call this, I think they call this the Marconi place. And there's some disagreements I see, and my father used to tell me different things about the buttes and such, but what Sutter County has and the museum has in there, the topo-

Rk: Topographic.

Lt: And this creek out here is the Marconi Creek. But he always called this canyon here Pinchgut.

Rk: Peachgut?

Lt: Now, if you look on that topography map, and you'll see that Pinchgut no wheres near here. They got it down there further somewhere else. But this is really Pinchgut, according to what he said.

Rk: Is it Peach?

Lt: Pinch. You know, you pinch. You see, it starts at the base of South Butte, the creek does, and comes right on down and it dumps down in here in this—down below us here. That goes on it. And now they pump it back out into the bypass again.

Rk: And where did it go down here?

Lt: The creek runs right by my house here and right underneath the road. And it runs on down and then there's a pumping plant down here. When they built the Sutter Bypass, they built a levy here, right over here, and that cut this portion of this area off. They had no drainage. So they had to have a pumping plant to pump the water back into the bypass.

Rk: Okay. Do you know what year they built the bypass?

Lt: Well, I could sure tell you, I could find out for you.

Rk: Were you around then?

Lt: No, I wasn't here because of... I think it was about 1889, '78 or something like that.

Rk: I didn't realize it was that long ago.

Lt: Yeah, that's when they started building—reclaiming that land, see. I could sure tell you, find out for you.

Rk: No, I can look it up.

Lt: You can get that from the reclamation district over here at Meridian.

Rk: There's actually a really good book called *Battling the Inland Sea* by Robert Kelley, Stephen Kelley, I can't remember. And it has so much good information in it, I couldn't possibly remember all of it. But he had all that kind of stuff in there.

Lt: Well, anyway, that's sort of a basic deal there. And he got killed and my grandmother, she didn't live too much longer. She was pretty young when she died. But she had breast cancer and so she died fairly young.

Rk: Your great-grandma.

Lt: My great-grandmother, yeah.

Rk: And where are they buried?

Lt: Up at Noyesburg Cemetery. That's where my grandfather and my grandmother are buried up there too.

Rk: What about your father?

Lt: My father's buried over in Sutter. I remember when he died, my mother said, well what're we gonna do? And the fella' that takes care, that does most of the funerals here in Sutter County, Ullrey, he says, well, the old cemetery, that's old up there. He says, you should go to the new. (laughs)

Rk: You know, in 200 years it's all gonna be old.

Lt: So, my mother says, okay, we'll buy a lot or so over there in Sutter, and that's where my mother and father are buried, in Sutter. Anyway, that's about... Now, my grandfather, he took over the ranch. And I don't remember... he didn't have any help. Maybe a brother-in-law or somethin' might have helped him, but he had to run the ranch by himself in that time. And I don't remember exactly when he got married either. I'd have to look that up in the history of the family.

Rk: Okay. You mean your grandfather?

Lt: Uh-huh. But that book that I can let you use and look at, you can look at it. It's all there.

Rk: Thank you. That would be very helpful.

Lt: Yeah, it's all there. It'd get you straight on that thing. (pointing to my hand-drawn family tree)

Rk: You don't like my picture? (laughter)

Lt: Because it's all laid out in a diagram like that.

Rk: Okay. It's just easier, even when you're talking about, you know, the ranch or something like that, it's easier to have some kind of a picture.

Lt: I probably out to go get it for you in just a few minutes. Would you like to see it?

Rk: Yeah.

Lt: I'll bring it out. I got three of 'em. When they made 'em, they were made over in Germany, and half of it's written in German and half of it's in English. I got, I wanted three—one for each of my kids. (inaudible – binding problems)

(long pause while LT leaves room and looks for books)

I've got three of them but this is two of them here. But I'll let you take the better one of the two and you can look at it. Turn on page, I got written here, page 272.

Rk: Do you speak German?

Lt: No, I don't. My father could speak German. But he never spoke it. My grandmother, grandfather could speak German well. My father could speak some German. And I remember the old lady that lived over here at Stohlman's, she never spoke English. (laughs) She never learned. Anyway, I got written here on page 272. That's the beginning, I guess. That tells you the whole story. In fact, I'm wasting my time here. You could certainly look, here's the whole thing write here.

We still correspond with the family back there. They've been here. Most all of 'em's been here.

Rk: So, on page 282, that Louis Tarke is your grandfather.

Lt: Let me look and see. Yeah.

Rk: And then, how far...

Lt: Well, it goes quite a ways, even... I don't have a picture in here of myself, but... you

...

Rk: Who put this together?

Lt: Oh, one of the old Germans over in Germany. (1:16:22)

Rk: Look at this old picture of the two of you! Page 294.

(discussion about the book)

Rk: So, Betty's maiden name is Tucker.

Lt: Yes. She was born and raised in Colusa.

Rk: And you were married in 1956.

Lt: Yeah. This goes back to 1820. No, 'scuse me, 1200-something. That's when they traced the Stohlmans back. You see, the Tarkes never came into the Stohlmans until he married that...

Rk: Oh, so this was the Stohlmans story.

...

Lt: We've been over there. We've been to the graves over there and the church and the house that they grew up in. It's a barn house.

...

Lt: They still live in the barn house. The Tarke name kind of died out over there. One of the daughters got married to a fella' by the name of Whitcamp and he's been over here. He don't speak any English. We had a lot of fun. (laughs) And he brought another friend of his over too. And he was a lot of fun. We enjoyed him. He was here for a week. And he just loved this country. He was a farmer over there and we've been to his farm, and he just thought this was great.

...

Lt: But, anyway, I wanted to tell you, my uncle Eldon Tarke, see, married the gal that worked there at the house and she was a Norweigan and she had strong ties in Norway. And they had two sons, Kermit and James, but James is the oldest. Eldon and my dad farmed together for a long time, but then they decided to divide and Eldon took all the livestock and of course he got the hills from his mother and such. My dad took all this down in here and he didn't get any sheep, and that was always a sad thing too, because he loved the sheep too and livestock. And we always had a few sheep, no matter what. (laughs)

Rk: Why did he not get any of the livestock?

Lt: Well, he didn't get any of the high ground, see.

Rk: Was your grandmother playing favorites?

Lt: Sure. My dad was probably the least favorite of the boys.

Rk: It seems like he did okay for himself though.

Lt: Oh, he did. He did well.

Rk: And they farmed together. They got along?

Lt: They farmed together until 1942, something like that, and then they divided up. And Eldon took all the—he had all the land up in the buttes anyway, and then he took most of the sheep. My dad had to sell his portion of the sheep and the cattle. And that's a, that was a sad day. A lot of tears over that. But they went ahead, and each one done very well for themselves.

Rk: He had to sell them when they were dividing up?

Lt: Yeah. My uncle didn't want 'em. He didn't want to have to pay any money, see. And it was right at lambing time, and they were all just about, well they were lambing some of 'em. So he

lost quite a little bit on that. But he got rid of 'em. The guy that bought 'em was happy. So everything went fine. Anyway, that was a sad thing for my dad. My dad, it one of the most sorrowful things in his lifetime that he couldn't keep the live-- involved in the livestock business. But anyway, that was during depression times, you know.

(Interruption from ranch walkie-talkie. Talking to Betty Tarke about old Farm Journals.)
(A lot of discussion about procedure.)

LT: ... talked about it this morning. You know, I told you this out here was what I call Peach Gut Canyon, we call it Peach Gut Ranch. But now that big, that bluff, you know, in the pass, they call it Old Craggy?

RK: Okay.

LT: Now the common name for that when I was a kid, and my father and all them knew it, the common name for that old bluff, they called it Dead Man's Cliff. And, see, that was a portion of the land that Hoke had, and he ran sheep and livestock too, and Tarke had sheep and livestock too. They were practically across from each other there. Anyway, Hoke, he was out lookin' for his herder one day, couldn't find 'im, couldn't find 'im. Sheep scattered all over everything. And he was out, he had to walk, had to walk all over a good portion. And he found the old guy, the shepherder layin' dead underneath the cliff. Evidently he fell off or he slid. So, anyway, so, after that, everybody called that Dead Man's Cliff. That's what they called it, you know.

Anyway, that's how I grew up. (laughs) That was what I called it. Now I understand it's called Old Craggy.

RK: I've heard Old Craggy.

LT: You know, in those early days they had no, nothing much for Christmastime and such, so they would go up in that canyon, they called it Brockman's Canyon, and they would cut down a piece of that California Holly – I don't know if they call it California Toyon or California Holly – anyway, it had those little red berries on it, and they'd bring down a limb of that and that was their Christmas tree. That's what they had for Christmas tree. I remember Dad talkin' about that. They never had Christmas trees, you know, fir trees, in those early days. So that's what the Tarkes had. They'd go up and get one of them, one of those little limbs down. There's a lot of bushes up there. I mean, I've been up in there lots of time, and pretty bushy lookin' stuff. So I can see where they'd go up and get a couple of limbs and bring 'em down and put 'em together and that was there Christmas tree.

I always thought that was kind of interesting.

RK: It is. It's a good story.

LT: That's just things that my dad would tell me. Those are things that I remember that impressed me when I was a little kid. Dead Man's Cliff.

RK: I'll bet that impressed you.

LT: I never dreamed that it wasn't called Dead Man's Cliff until I saw the thing on the map and it said Old Craggy, and I said, what? That's not Old Craggy that's Dead Man's Cliff.

RK: Well, if you think of more stories like that, make a note to yourself and the next time I come up you can tell 'em to me.

LT: I'll start rememberin' some of those.