

# **Stanley Lathen Oral History Transcript**

**Interview conducted by Harvey Schwartz**

**May 16, 1997**

**Labor Archives and Research Center, San Francisco State University**

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## Interviewer's Note to Researchers

LARC oral historian Harvey Schwartz conducted a three-hour interview with Stanley Lathen on May 16, 1997. The interview was transcribed by Jennie Kogak (paid for by the Central Labor Council of Napa and Solano Counties, AFL-CIO).

Unsatisfied with the look of his speech in the original transcript, the interviewee asked to edit it before signing a release form. Mr. Lathen and his wife retyped by typewriter a new version with many sentences rewritten, portions added and deleted, and sections extensively restructured. Because the new transcript was not on disk, it was word processed and lightly copyedited by LARC archival assistant Joshua Paddison in spring 2000.

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**Labor Archives and Research Center, SFSU  
Stanley Lathen Oral History Transcript**

**Interviewer: Harvey Schwartz [HS]**

**Interviewee: Stanley Lathen [SL]**

**Date: May 16, 1997**

**[Begin Tape 1 - Side A]**

**HS: This is Harvey Schwartz. I am in Vallejo, California. This is May 16, 1997, and I am with Stanley Lathen. This interview will be part of the collection of San Francisco State University Labor Archives and Research Center, and it is being sponsored by the Napa-Solano Counties Labor Council. Stan, let me begin by asking you a little bit about your background; when and where you were born, etc.?**

**SL:** Yes. I was born in the Arizona Territory and have just celebrated by 89th birthday [born in 1908]. My father had an eighty-acre ranch and a small dairy in that territory. These were located in what is now the heart of Phoenix, Arizona.

**HS: And how long did you live on that ranch?**

**SL:** I was born on that ranch, which Dad sold about two-and-a-half years later. We moved from there to Ukiah, California. This was in Mendocino County, where we stayed for several years before moving to Lake County. That move to Lake County was really something. We had two large wagons, fully loaded, and each was pulled by six mules. The lead mule teams wore belled harnesses across the shoulders to alert on-coming traffic due to the very narrow one-lane road. We left Ukiah at 4 a.m. and arrived at our destination at midnight.

**HS: May I ask where you dad and mother's relatives originally came from?**

**SL:** If you mean as "immigrants," well, as nearly as I can figure out my ancestors — my Dad's people — came from the area of the Black Forest of Germany. Believe it or not they were Catholics and supposedly came to America on the same ship as Lord Baltimore. The Baltimore, Maryland, city was named for him. At that time there did not appear to be a German settlement in the area called Maryland, so my ancestors migrated on to Pennsylvania. It seems they found no German Catholics among the Pennsylvania Dutch so they became Lutherans.

**HS: Approximately what year would this be?**

SL: I'm not sure; possibly in the early seventeenth century. I had three great-grandfathers who lived very long lives, which is really remarkable for those days when so many people passed away at an early age. I do know that when Andrew Jackson was president in 1830, members of the family were given land grants near Fort Wayne, Indiana. I have heard tales that they went to those grants via carts pulled by oxen. My mother was born in Fort Wayne in 1865.

In 1944 I was a delegate to the Democratic National Convention in Chicago. While there I took a side trip to Fort Wayne to visit a cousin on Mother's side whom I had never met. He took me on a tour of the area, pointing out old homesteaders where my folks and grandparents had lived. My mother's parents had a beautiful two-story home sitting on a bluff overlooking the Saint Joe River — [the house] was still standing in 1944 and looked well-kept. In the olden days homesteaders had their own graveyards. My grandfather's grave was there on the knoll with the graves, lined up beside him, of three wives he had outlived.

**HS: What about your mother's parents or ancestors — where did they come from?**

SL: I don't know specifically, except that it was Germany. Mom and Dad both spoke German but never did so unless we kids needed them to. For some reason they didn't like to speak German. Well, you know, Germany was not well-thought of in the United States. Personally, I have felt a dislike of Germany — after all, those fatheads started two wars.

**HS: Yes, they do come in a group on occasion —**

SL: [Laughs] I don't know whether they come in a group or what —

**HS: I mean an army, you know, armies. Anyway, what was your dad doing in Ukiah?**

SL: I was pretty young when we lived there and didn't pay much attention. When we moved to Lake County we lived on several different farms/ranches. The main thing in Dad's life seemed to be hunting or fishing. I think that was why we moved from Arizona to northern California.

**HS: What kind of work was done on these ranches? Crops grown, etc.?**

SL: Produce. Vegetables, food for the family and farm animals. We always had a number of farm animals — horses, cattle, chickens, turkeys, pigs. As I mentioned, Dad was great for hunting. There were no laws regarding licenses. You could shoot deer year 'round if you shot it to eat. We had a lot of deer meat and so did everyone else.

**HS: What kind of work did you do around the ranch yourself?**

SL: Harvey, to me that is a rather embarrassing question. I hate to say so, but my father was a hard taskmaster. He believed all his children should work as soon as they were out of the cradle. Everyone was up at 5 a.m. to get out and get busy with chores. I was too small for many of them. I fed the chickens and pigs, and got chips and kindling for the stove. Considering the lifestyle of children today, compared to my growing up years, it was a completely different world and not always a pleasant one. That changed a little when we moved to Marin County.

**HS: Sounds like farm life. Why would this be embarrassing to you?**

SL: Maybe because of what I have to say about my father. Father was the “king of the slave drivers,” much too severe with his children. We lost all love for him and that’s a bad thing to say. But work we did, even planting corn by hand and there were many acres to be planted. This was especially hard on the younger children, particularly the girls, but Dad raised crops where no one else could. The vegetable crops were raised mainly to sell to the resorts, as well as other people in the Lake County area.

**HS: I see. What was your dad’s name?**

SL: His name was Daniel M. Sapp. For the record, you notice I go by the last name Lathen. When I was born a doctor by the name of Lathen delivered me. I was the only child [in my family] to be delivered by a doctor. I was named Stanley Lathen Sapp.

**HS: When and why did you drop the last name Sapp?**

SL: During my school years I had so many fights, and embarrassments, over the name “Sapp.” I was a small boy, very sensitive, and was teased unmercifully by the kids at school. I hated to be called “sap” or “sappy” because my name was Sapp.

**HS: Did you feel the kids made fun of you because the name Sapp was German?**

SL: No. Actually, Sapp wasn’t even a true German name. It was a derivative of the original name, which was changed when the ancestors came to America. Back then there was no problem with the name Sapp. If you look in the San Francisco phone book today there are many people with that name.

**HS: I understand. So when did you drop the name?**

SL: In the early 1940s my wife and I talked about dropping the name Sapp and using Lathen

as the last name. By that time we had two sons and I didn't want them going through what I felt I had. My wife was agreeable but in order not to upset my mother we decided to wait until after her death to make the change. Mom passed away in 1946 at the age of eighty-one. The attorney for my union, Roland Davis, made arrangements for the change in 1950 just before our third son started school. By this time, I was working for Local 373. My name was constantly exposed to the public, as well as in my civic activities. More than ever I disliked the name of Sapp.

**HS: Let me ask — how many brothers and sisters did you have when your dad was ranching in Lake County?**

SL: My parents raised to man/womanhood twelve children. I was the youngest and am the only surviving child. Three additional children passed away as babies. I think my oldest brother was about nineteen when I was born.

**HS: My goodness! Tell me more about your mother. What was her name?**

SL: Her name was Nettie. I believe I told you she was born in Fort Wayne, Indiana, in 1865. She was a certified grade school teacher at age seventeen. She and my dad married in 1883.

**HS: Were your parents at all interested in politics?**

SL: No, not particularly. They were Democrats but took no active part in politics. My mother could have been called a liberal progressive. She voted and made sure all the children did too.

**HS: Was your father in the Civil War?**

SL: No, I think he was born just prior, possibly 1855. He passed away in 1934.

**HS: Tell me, why did he move from Lake County to Marin County?**

SL: Well, he didn't. Prior to that move there was a family problem. Fortunately — or unfortunately — there were only two of us left at home. This was my sister Jeanette (eighteen months my senior), myself, and Mother. Mother had divorced my father at the insistence of the other children who were living in Marin County. It was only the three of us who moved there.

**HS: Had the other children left home early, or what?**

SL: Yes, sort of. Most left home as soon as they could, some got married or other things - just

wanted to get out from under Dad's thumb, I think.

**HS: You mentioned there had been, or was, a family problem? You don't have to go into that if you don't want to.**

SL: I don't want to.

**HS: Okay. The older ones were gone and you moved to —**

SL: Yes. Mother, Jeanette, and I moved to Marin County where my sister Georgie and her husband lived. At that time they lived in Sausalito where [her husband] was an engineer on the ferry boats. He was previously in the army. During the 1906 earthquake he was on day and night duty due to thieves and looters.

**HS: Right. About what year would this be?**

SL: That was in 1921. Mom, Jeanette, and I all worked at whatever jobs we could find. We pooled our money to live. With the help of my brother Doc, Mom was finally able to buy a small house in San Anselmo.

**HS: Okay. In 1921 you were still a youngster — what about school? Were you in school?**

SL: Oh yes, I had to enroll as soon as we got down there. It was around Christmas time.

**HS: What schools did you attend in Marin County?**

SL: The San Anselmo Elementary School. I graduated from there. By this time I, more or less, had to start looking out for myself. In fact, by the time I was fifteen I was completely on my own. I went to high school at night for a couple of years in nearby San Rafael. What I really wanted to do was to learn a trade. Education-wise, I knew I was handicapped. I also thought about my brother Doc. His name was Daniel, but he was always called Doc. I greatly admired him. He was a self-made man. He took all the tests the highway department had and passed them all with flying colors. He finally became a state highway resident engineer. When the Golden Gate Bridge was built, his work was on the south end of the bridge and he was in charge of building the area of 19th Avenue, that and the tunnel. He was very talented with figures.

**HS: I've seen all that area. Most impressive.**

SL: Well, his work was beautiful and it gave me encouragement and I said to myself, "Well, if I can't get an education, I can do the next best thing and get into a trade." And I worked at trying to get into one. Wasn't easy.

**HS: Okay, how did you go about doing this?**

SL: I said it wasn't easy. While I was still in elementary school I worked for Landsdale Butcher Shop. Landsdale was the name of one of the stations on the Northwest Pacific line. Everyday after school and on Saturdays I headed for that shop. I'd deliver meat on my bicycle, which had a basket up on front. I made \$3 a week — the good old days.

And then I did just about every kind of job you could imagine. Wherever there was a chance to make a buck, I was there. I got a chance to earn two dozen eggs a week by cleaning up a goat barn. I was a kid, times were tough. I worked at a lumber yard on call, bucking lumber out of railroad cars. Now these weren't flat cars, these were big boxcars. The owner, a Mr. Wright, had a son a bit older than I who had already graduated from high school. He and I worked together. It was a really rough job for kids. One day I said to Mr. Wright, "You know, sir, I want to learn a trade. I'm not getting an education and I want to get ahead." He said to me, "Stanley, you're a good worker, I'll see what I can do."

Some weeks later he said to me, "I can get you a job driving truck for six months for a plastering contractor who tells me that is what he needs at the moment. Provided he can get a lad who will be a good worker, he will give him every opportunity." I went to see this contractor and he put me to work five-and-one-half days a week for \$18 a week. I worked for him about six months. Then came one Friday night he paid me off. By Saturday morning he had disappeared, just left town in the middle of the night and didn't pay the other fellows. I don't know why. Very strange.

About a week later, a plastering contractor, name of Andrew Tennant, sent his stepson to see me. He said Andy wanted to see me about a job. I didn't waste any time going to see him. Tennant put me to work to learn the trade, starting pay \$24 a week. I was in seventh heaven and boy did I hustle. Tennant was a mechanic. He trained and taught me and was very good to me. Those were the days of the Maxwell car, a delightful car. I don't know whether you've ever heard of one?

**HS: Oh yes, I've heard of it, go on.**

SL: Well, Tennant bought a brand new, bright red Maxwell. He sent it to San Francisco to a shop that could build and close the car in, make a sedan out of it, with sliding glass window. Worked like a charm. At that point, and because of his drinking problem, I became a chauffeur for him and his wife in addition to learning the plastering trade. Now, those were the days when there were practically no unions. Well, there was a union in San Francisco, but here you get back to the American plan.



In Marin County we had no union. I worked with a fellow named Hydinger who had been a union plasterer someplace. We talked about this and he said, "There's no reason why we can't have a union here. Let's organize one." That sounded good to me. I didn't know much about unions, but I did know it was better than being nonunion.

**HS: How did you know that? Some people never figure that out. How did you figure it out?**

SL: Studying, thinking, reading —

**HS: What were you reading?**

SL: Anything I could get my hands on with respect to working people and how to get ahead. Anyway, Hydinger and I invited the plasterers we knew in the Marin County area to a meeting upstairs at the Old Star Theatre in San Rafael.

**HS: About what year would this be? It has to be between 1924 and 1927 because you said something about going into the Teamsters in 1929, right?**

SL: It was possibly sometime in 1926, because it was in late 1927 that I got married.

**[End Tape 1 - Side A]  
[Begin Tape 1 - Side B]**

**HS: Okay. It's about 1926 and you called a meeting —**

SL: Yes. We expected about fifteen men, because there were just about that many working at the trade in Marin County. Only five showed up. That was all. We saw the others later and they indicated they didn't want to get into trouble — afraid of their jobs, I guess! I was only an apprentice, I wasn't afraid of losing my job. To hell with them. I've been pretty independent all my life.

**HS: Your friend was there, one of the five — do you remember his full name? And what did you do now that nobody showed up for your meeting?**

SL: Hydinger was his last name; I don't recall his first name. Anyway, we gave up on our organizing these guys — what else could we do?

**HS: Tell me — how did you pass the word beforehand about having a meeting?**

SL: By talking to them, or calling them, or just wherever we ran across them. The meeting date was set long enough in advance so we could make contacts.

**HS: Backing up a little, do you remember what you were reading, what books and articles? Were they newspapers, novels, you know, like Jack London or Frank Norris, or what?**

SL: I don't recall. I do well remember the first book I ever owned. It was Jack London's *Jerry of the Islands* [New York: The Macmillan Company, 1917]. Jerry was an Airedale dog. A sort of kids' book. I received this one Christmas from a cousin I didn't know and I never met. Couldn't forget it, because it was rare to receive a Christmas gift when I was a kid.

**HS: In the 1920s, did you ever read anything like Eugene Debs's stuff, [Socialist Party newspaper] *The Appeal to Reason*, or maybe anything of the Wobblie stuff?**

SL: No, I hadn't gotten that far, but I must say that my mother was a real liberal. We would discuss economics because, you see, we were scratching to get by and wondering what was the matter with everything and how come we couldn't have things too. I guess I just grew up being a radical.

**HS: So it's your mother who was a big influence?**

SL: She was a very strong influence on me, yes. She always had to work, and to work hard — cooking, baking, canning, washing, ironing, sewing, cleaning — all done the hard old-fashioned way, this besides taking care of her large family. She had a hard, rough life, poor soul.

**HS: I believe you mentioned something about her doing other work?**

SL: Yes, I mentioned she was a teacher at the time of her marriage to Dad. Up in Lake County she acted as a practical nurse and midwife. You see, the closest doctor was miles away in Lakeport — a person could die before he could get there. So mother would go out on childbirth cases and maybe be gone a week or ten days. And, if not childbirth, just go out to nurse sick people. She was well thought of and did a good job — well, she had plenty of at-home experience.

**HS: You said something earlier that around, maybe before, 1929 you felt a sense of the coming depression — what about that?**

SL: Before the depression actually came it could be sensed. The economy began to slow down, the thieves got into the stock market. There were no regulations. The banks were in on it too. When the crash came, or maybe two years before, you could feel everything

slowing down. At that point you just did what you had to in order to survive, just made out the best you could. During 1927, '28, and '29, my wife and I had some tough times. At one point I walked the streets for eight solid months. There were no jobs to be had. In 1930 a contractor, Doug Worth, got a contract for a group of tract homes in San Anselmo. He came to me and offered me a job paying \$11 a day. When that job finished Worth bid on the balance of that tract. Now, the depression was still on and worse than ever. Worth asked me to stay on the job at \$10 a day. I was glad to do this.

**HS: Now you had been laid off when business slowed down?**

SL: You better believe it — and so was just about everyone else. I was in the Volunteer Fire Department in San Anselmo along with eighteen other young fellows who had gone to elementary school together. Some had gone on to high school, most had not. When the depression hit only three of these men had jobs. Those were horrible times, fifteen million people walking the streets and there were only 125 million people in the whole country. Now, maybe this shouldn't be in the record: the only time I was ever critical of FDR was for saving the goddamn capitalistic system.

**HS: Hey, that's okay, that's good stuff. There are some fancy-pants historians who have made that statement.**

SL: Well, those SOBs called FDR everything under the sun. These same people he had saved, they fought him tooth and toenail, the bums. So much for that.

**HS: Backing up again — you mentioned that in 1929 you were a Teamster. You drove a truck, or what?**

SL: Yes. During that time I drove a truck. My brother Doc got me the job and unfortunately I couldn't keep it. The company's old Sterling trucks were chain-driven with solid wheel tires and they were junks. The fumes from their motors made me almost deathly sick. Some others on the job had this same problem. I talked it over with my wife and we decided, tough as times were, I just had to give up that job. I recovered after I quit the job.

**HS: Were you in the Teamsters union at that time? Was that Local 85 or some other?**

SL: I belonged to the Dump Truck Drivers of San Francisco, I think it was maybe Local 210. That's an old one, probably no longer exists. Local 85 was the highways and related people. I took a withdrawal from 210.

**HS: Looking back again, there is something we should explore a bit more. You said that for an eight-month period you were unemployed, walking the streets, looking for**

**work. How did you manage to survive? Can you recreate for me what it felt like at that time, in that setting?**

SL: Well, if you miss a few meals and don't know where to turn to get food for your wife and child, you are in big trouble. That's about what it got down to. My wife came from a fine well-to-do family. Her father was a Harvard graduate, an electrical engineer. He worked for the Boston Fathometer Company, which had developed the first depth sounding device. The company had asked him to consider going either to London or to the west coast. He chose the west coast. In any case, he and his wife helped us as much as could be expected; plus, anytime I could pick up a few days work any place, or at anything, I did. I once worked, for about six months, for the Fuller Brush Company. Covered the "rich bitch" area in Marin County. Rarely met the mistress of the house but met a number of butlers and maids. This job was not my cup of tea, I assure you.

**HS: Did you ever go down to the waterfront?**

SL: No, I never did. I had a longshoreman friend who had that "blue card." He told me about conditions there. I just couldn't cotton up to that; anyway, I wanted to stay in Marin County. In the meantime, Andrew Tennant, whose apprentice I had been, had given up contracting and gone to work as plastering superintendent for a large general contractor named Libert & Trobock. This contractor had an arrangement with the Catholic Dioceses for all their building projects in and around the Bay Area. I worked with Andy on some of these jobs.

You may or may not know — in the building trades work, most jobs are not of long duration. A week, a few weeks, maybe a month, and then you just sit around and wait for the next job. You can never count on consistently steady work. During the 1926, '27, '28 years, I worked for a number of plastering contractors on various jobs. I earned anything from \$10 to \$13 a day. One job I remember in particular, because it was not the type of job experience you get to have very often: an Italian contractor, name of Nickolini, had a contract for the plastering work on the mausoleum at Tamalpais Cemetery. I really enjoyed that job. I think this was in late 1928 because shortly after that the plastering work just petered out. Zilch, nothing.

**HS: There was still no union, and no plastering work at all?**

SL: No union at all while I was there in Marin County. And the depression just went on and on. Again my brother Doc got me a job with Grandfield, Farrar & Carland (the same contractor I had quit before) where he was the assistant resident engineer. The company now had a job building highway from Cloverdale to Hopland parallel to the Russian River. I went up to that job in early 1931. When we were through moving dirt I was put to work with a crew building fences parallel to the highway. That job gave out in late

1933.

**HS: Exactly what kind of work were you doing up there?**

SL: Driving dump truck. We were building a road, tearing down mountains and hills with big steam shovels. There were two other types: a gasoline, a diesel, and I can't remember how many "cats," trucks, and other equipment. The resident engineer was named Fosgate. He and my brother were living in a big tent on the bank of the Russian River, not uncommon in those days. As soon as a contract was let you could hardly find a place to live. It was sort of first come, first served, and a Johnnie-come-lately didn't have a chance for a house.

**HS: Where had you been living when you took this job?**

SL: My wife and I and baby son were living in Ross.

**HS: That's a long way from Cloverdale. Did you commute, or what?**

SL: Oh, no. I was invited to stay with my brother and Fosgate in their tent. My family was in Ross and we were paying \$25 a month rent, which was more than I could afford, and he let me live in Cloverdale. Then my brother decided to build a tent camp. He suggested we join him and put up a place close by. So that's what happened.

**HS: So, was this a good camp tent, not like a little A-frame?**

SL: It was a large tent, a big room. I put in a tongue-and-groove floor and put sidewalls up four feet. The tent went over that, with a canvas top over the tent to take the brunt of the rain. Built a bunk in there for the baby. We had electricity for cooking and water right at the porch. It wasn't the best, considering the home my wife was raised in. Truly remarkable she stayed with me — damn few women would have.

**HS: So, what came next?**

SL: That particular job was completed in late October 1933 and I ended up in Vallejo. This same contractor bid and received the job from Carquinez Bridge, north up over Hunter's Hill. I had the dubious honor of taking out the last load of dirt from that Hill.

Getting back to the question of the union — I had this withdrawal card from the San Francisco Teamsters. This contractor, Grandfield, Farrar & Carland, were union in San Francisco. When they took the job in Cloverdale, they said to the sheriff, "When the union business agent comes up here, we are going to call you to run him out." The sheriff cooperated with the contractor and ran the union business agent out of Sonoma County.

Ah, the good old days.

**HS: Well, now you were in Vallejo, in Solano County. What happened?**

SL: This is a different story. The fellows all knew Vallejo to be a union town. In a contract those days, the wages, hours, etc., were set by the state and federal laws. All we could work was six hours a day, twenty-four hours a week, if we got full-time. We worked by the hour at 65 cents per hour. The worst of it was we worked in shifts. I was on the morning shift. Up at 4 a.m. and get to the job. Then maybe the shovel, or the “cat,” or the truck was broken down — didn’t matter, you didn’t get to work. But there you are, and you can’t go home because everything might get repaired in a short time so you had to stay there.

So, we wanted a contract to correct the injustice, wanted “show-up” time — three hours pay (one-half day). We all deposited our withdrawal cards in Teamsters Union 490, Vallejo. I’ll tell you, that union almost tripled in membership overnight. You see, another big contractor, J. P. Holland, out of San Francisco, got the contract to build the new causeway onto Mare Island Navy Yard, and their men came in. You never saw such a bunch of *big* men in all your life.

**HS: A bunch of what?**

SL: Big men. I’ll tell you those Teamsters were enormous men, and me, I’m just a little runt. So here we are, all in the union, and would you believe, they made me the Sergeant-at-Arms. Can you imagine that? I said to these couple of hundred guys, “Why the hell do you want me in this position? Just look at all you big men. I could get killed.” One of these big guys said, “Never you mind, Stanley, we’ll take care of you, and look out for you.” There you have it — more good old days.

**HS: That’s wonderful. Do you have any idea why they selected you? Were you, or had you been, active in —**

SL: Oh yes, I was active in most everything. I could speak up, at least speak English so the rest could understand me. Plus, you could say I was full of beans and tired of being kicked around. There comes a time and this seemed to be it. The company, old Carland that is, refused to sign our one-page contract. So we decided to straighten the company out. Everyone — shovel runners, cat skimmers, Teamsters — all just stopped work. Well, old Carland finally said, “Looks like we aren’t going to get anything done around here, maybe we better sign,” and he did.

**HS: How about that? What did you say that man’s name was?**

SL: His last name was Carland, I never heard his first name. He was a very typical, red-faced Irishman, and he could swear like one too. The madder he got, the redder his face. He had nine kids, regular chips off the old block. A great group of youngsters.

**HS: This was 1933? Weren't you aware of the new labor law at that time, section 7(a) of the National Industrial Recovery Act?**

SL: Yes, 1933, but the contract couldn't be changed in any way. It was written, signed, sealed, and delivered. There was no way of changing the contract, but the working conditions could be changed. Anyway, so much for that. I finished up there in 1935.

**HS: Stanley, let me ask you: the year 1934, that was the big waterfront strike in San Francisco —**

SL: Yes, it was, and our job was down, completely down, but only for one day. They said, "You better go on back to work and we will take care of things down here."

**HS: Who do you mean by "they"?**

SL: I don't really know. I guess some of the union people from the city. They came in, said, "Knock it off," and we did. This was the general strike in July of 1934.

**HS: What did you do during this time? Were you active at all, were you still Sergeant-at-Arms in the Teamsters Union? Let me put that a different way — what did you think of the 1934 strike when it hit?**

SL: The Longshoremen? I personally thought it was long overdue. Recall I was a rebel, and maybe that's why I made a pretty good leader for the union when I was finally conned into it — but I won't go into that now.

**HS: What union is that? Are you talking about the Retail Clerks?**

SL: Yes, the Retail Clerks. But prior to that I returned to the plastering trade.

**HS: Oh, you did?**

SL: Yes, I did. I had a call from a good friend of mine, a latherer in San Rafael. He said they were finally organizing over there and he needed me to sign up so they could get a charter for Plasterers Union 355. I asked what it was going to cost me. He said, "Five bucks," and I had that in the mail the next day. So I became a charter member of that local and I left my card there for a while.

This all happened while I was still driving truck. When the trucking job finished, I moved my Plasterers card over here to the Vallejo local. Do you know there were only four members of the Vallejo local who were holding down a charter for the plasterers/cement masons here? The men were active, but there were only two union contractors. The International Union was glad to have those men holding the charter.

**[End Tape 1 - Side B]**  
**[Begin Tape 2 - Side A]**

**HS: The time was approximately 1933 to 1934 and you were working at heavy construction in Vallejo and now belonged to Teamsters Local 490. You were also now a charter member of Marin County Plasterers Union. Right?**

SL: That's true. I served my plasterers apprenticeship in Marin County, 1925 to 1930. When I moved to Vallejo in 1933, and when plastering work became available, I moved my card to Vallejo Local 631.

**HS: So you were now a member of both the Teamsters and the Plasterers and you previously said there were only a few guys in the Plasterers Union?**

SL: Yes. There were only four Plasterers. A little later one cement mason joined us. Let me tell you how we organized — I'm talking of all the building trades people who were in about the same shape we were in. The men from all the trades got together. We always did work well together here in Vallejo, had a marvelous relationship in those days.

There was a great deal of building going on in the years 1935, 1936. This house where you are sitting was built in 1936. We all agreed to set up picket lines where houses were being built with scab — non-union — workers. These houses would be picketed on weekends to keep the public from buying them. At that time just about everyone was talking unions. You know, Roosevelt and the New Deal, freedom to join unions, etc. We had enough men — plasterers, cement masons, hod-carriers, laborers — to picket several jobs. We would do this one weekend and other building trades people would do the same the next weekend. We stayed with it, stopped sale after sale of homes. The general contractor finally said, "Give me your damn contract, I'll sign it!," and he did.

Then we started in on the sub-contractors. Believe it or not, we had this whole town organized in about a year and a half. We were being paid \$1.25 when we began, the following year we received \$1.50, and the third year \$1.75. We took a one-page contract around and the contractors signed it. We were militant and willing to work to build good union conditions to help our families. We cleaned this town up! It was wonderful!



**HS: Did you ever run into any problems with efforts to break up you guys, on the part of the contractors, or police, or vigilantes, or something?**

SL: Yes, once. There was a general contractor working on homes in an area we called "mortgage hill," a rich district. The PG&E [Pacific Gas and Electric Company] was digging a trench right up the hill to these homes. We put a bunch of pickets up there. This contractor had built a small shack up top for his office. One day our picketers were there doing their thing and this man came out of his shack with a loaded shotgun. All the picketers dove into the PG&E trench. Now, I wasn't there that day but heard it was the funniest thing you ever saw. But, no, we had no real problems with the police or anyone.

**HS: Well, what happened with the guy with the shotgun? I mean, how was the problem solved?**

SL: The police came up there and told him he couldn't do that and to knock it off. Later he signed a contract and he and his brother became union contractors. Their name was Teicheira and even today one of them is still serving on some commission here in town.

**HS: Okay. So now what was your official position in the union? You were still the Sergeant-at-Arms in the Teamsters, and what in the Plasterers?**

SL: Yes to the first. As to the Plasterers, I was their delegate to the Central Labor Council. I took an active part in all union activities along with other very good men. My best friend, Lowell Nelson, who was also a member of the Plasterers, later became Executive Officer of the Council. He was also business manager to the building trades. That was before we had a building trade charter. We worked hard, from the later 1930s to the close of the 1940s, to get that charter.

**HS: You previously mentioned having had a hand in the revision of the City Building Code, and that you had also been the first chairperson of an apprenticeship training program prior to the state program?**

SL: That's right. I also represented the Labor Council on a number of boards, bureaus, and commissions of the city of Vallejo. This took place between 1935 and 1941. In retrospect, I think I must have been wearing roller skates. I was involved in every segment taking place in the union movement in those years. There were a few of us who seemed to have the ability to get the job done, to lead. I seemed to have the ability to lead, to express myself, and to think, "What comes next?"

For example: Vallejo had no Health Department. There were some good union workers in the Culinary Workers local. They had the town organized almost completely and totally.

A fellow named Joe Killeen, a really great guy, was head of that union. He was a real liberal and one hell of a worker. The more conservative labor leaders thought he was a Communist. They didn't like him much, but he got the job done.

Example: In the 200 block of Georgia Street there were at least twenty-two bars, with possibly that many places of horizontal pleasure upstairs. That block was known far and wide, I kid you not, as the finest place in the world for sailors. Property on that block was owned by Vallejo's most prominent citizens — I can name them all. Anyway, most of these bars also served some type of food and when the business agent was organizing he would see cockroaches running across the top of bars and tables. He started checking on this.

**HS: If there was no city Health Department, where could he go for help?**

SL: I'm getting to that! First, this was reported to the Central Labor Council. They were horrified. A delegation then went to the City Hall and didn't get any help. So! We decided to do our own thing. There was a fellow by the name of Fred Shortridge, who was a pharmacist making \$125 a month. He was a good head, smart fellow. Fred was questioned as to how he would like to be named Health Inspector for the city of Vallejo. Fred agreed, but only if he was paid more than he was making. Organized labor, with its organizational strength, brought this about.

**HS: How did you go about it? What did you actually do to get the city to go along with the idea?**

SL: We used the local press and our labor journal. We had a marvelous labor journal with a mailing list, eventually of 18,000 union members. Also had a friendly local press, all union. When the issue of a Health Department came out, the "old stuff" hit the fan, all thanks to the press and to organized labor. The city now had a Health Department. Might add: at the present time our local press is a scab outfit and not one-third the paper previously owned and operated by Luther Gibson.

**HS: What other things were you involved in during that period of time? How about politics? Were you involved in that between 1933 and 1941?**

SL: You bet I was. You might recall — in the old days, a majority of the international unions had prohibitions in their by-laws and constitutions that prohibited talk of politics on the floor of labor union meetings. At that time the unions, on the local level, didn't have the strength to buck their international unions on this. What we could do, and did, was to form an organization which we called the AF of L Promotional League. We could promote anything! Witness our promotion of a Health Department. Well, we really went to town — we were into politics up to our ears. Labor gave a lot of leadership. It was a

wonderful period of cooperation.

**HS: Do you remember what kind of issues you pushed? Like, say, re-elect FDR? Just what political issues you were involved in at that time?**

SL: All the unions belonged to our Promotional League. They sent their delegates to our policy-setting meetings. Solano County had a conservative Democratic Central Committee. We couldn't seem to break into the Democratic Party here. So, in 1942, we formed the Greater Vallejo Democratic Club. We built that into a really progressive Club. Records show I was that Club's first president. Also during those years we were considered the "ring-tails" who helped set up the California Democratic Council [CDC] in Fresno. I attended and participated in the initial meetings, along with Alan Cranston, Phil Burton, and other young liberal Democrats.

**HS: Alan Cranston? You mean —**

SL: Yes. Alan later became the State Controller, and I believe he was named the first president of the CDC. Phil was in the State Assembly. We all became good friends. You recall: Alan went on to become U.S. Senator and Phil went to Congress. It was Phil who was instrumental in setting up the Golden Gate Seashore Park. His brother John is now a state Senator. We young political activists referred to ourselves as the "young Turks."

**HS: Meaning exactly what?**

SL: Mainly "full of beans," ready to take an active part, etc. The Greater Vallejo Democratic Club was one of the founding Clubs of the CDC. Other Clubs affiliated and new Clubs were formed. Then we went about changing the cross-filing system. Do you know what cross-filing means?

**HS: I can't recall.**

SL: Cross-filing was when a candidate, in the primary, could file his or her name on any or all tickets and a person could vote for whoever —

**HS: So what did you guys do?**

SL: Well, the Republicans were in power, we couldn't get them out, so we set about to change the law and get rid of cross-filing. We had the help of our new Democratic governor, [Edmund G.] Pat Brown [Sr.]. Pat was also a good friend of mine. By now the labor unions and Democratic politicians were all "sleeping in the same bed," so to speak. I might add: The CDC is still in existence today, but it is not the driving force it was in those days. Nowadays, we seem to have cross-filing back in a different manner, but it

isn't as effective as that old cross-filing — that was murder on us.

**HS: Tell me, did you work on the Colbert Olson campaign?**

SL: Yes I did, and I went with him to the Democratic Convention in 1956. I was also a delegate to the Democratic Conventions in 1944 and 1960.

**HS: Were you ever interested, or involved, in any of the left politics at the time, or were you always in the Democratic Party? And what about the Communist, or Socialist?**

SL: No. I never belonged to any party other than Democratic. I became of voting age in 1932. I voted, and worked like hell, for FDR. I had no interest in the Communist or Socialist parties. I know there are Communists in other countries with their form of economic socialistic systems and it scares the hell out of our capitalists at times — as well it should.

Anyway, I was present when there was the fight over Truman coming in. I was for Wallace, and believe it or not all eleven western states were for Wallace. We were having a meeting about 1 a.m. laying the groundwork for Wallace. But we lost — the powers that be had that thing all cooked.

**HS: That would have been 1944, right?**

SL: Right. Then in 1960 I was at the Convention with Pat Brown. We were committed to Stevenson when Kennedy got the nod.

**HS: Tell me about your friendship with Pat Brown.**

SL: We became friends when he was District Attorney for San Francisco. We met at all the Democratic affairs around the Bay Area, always doing our good deeds for the Democratic Party and its candidates. When Pat ran for the job of Attorney General, the [California] Labor Federation [AFL-CIO] didn't support him. Some of we more liberal guys said, "Nuts to that, we'll back him." So, when the California Labor Federation sent out their voting pamphlets to be distributed to union members, we marked out the name of their candidate and put in Pat Brown's name. Well, I told you we had one hell of a good mailing list, and we won — it was great!

**HS: So, next came Pat Brown's run for governor?**

SL: Yes, but let me back up a little. Earl Warren had been governor for several terms and planned to step down. At that time [Goodwin J.] "Goodie" Knight was lieutenant governor and he was elected governor. Now, labor had not taken kindly to him in the beginning but he turned out to be somewhat of a liberal. Knight was planning to run for a

second term, but — what happened? Bill Knowland, who was head of the U.S. Senate, and his pal Richard Nixon, came out here and literally dried up Knight's finances. Knowland informed Knight he was running and would be the next governor of the state.

Well, that same election year, 1958, Proposition 18 — to outlaw union security from all union contracts, called the "Right-to-Work" Proposition — was on the ballot. Knowland was all out in support of this measure. Organized labor was all out in opposition and we took up the fight to defeat it. We did defeat it, and at the same time elected Pat Brown governor.

Do you know, a few years later, Knowland committed suicide? I must tell you too, for the record — the county campaign to defeat the proposition was run from the office of Retail Clerks Union Local 373. I had been named as county chairman to defeat Proposition 18. A bit of history — my wife, Bernice, and I attended the inauguration of Pat Brown, and our youngest son, Robert, who was a high school student at that time, played the organ for the processional.

**[End Tape 2 - Side A]**  
**[Begin Tape 2 - Side B]**

**HS: Let's go back for a minute to the period 1938 to 1941. What were your jobs? What were your union titles?**

SL: In 1938 I was working at the plastering trade. I also served as the president of the Central Labor Council. Following that I served as a member of the Executive Board of the Council and also served on a number of other committees.

**HS: You stopped working at the plastering trade in October 1941 — why was that?**

SL: Well, I'll tell you. I was being urged by officers of the Central Labor council to go help out Retail Clerks Local 373. Now, at that time I was top man in my shop working for a plastering contractor, name of Mahoney. We got along well, and I sometimes worked when others didn't. I didn't know the first thing about clerking or retailing. But my good brothers in the Labor Council assured me I did not have to know that because I certainly did know about labor and how to negotiate and to get around in organizing.

This went on for about six months. I met with the so-called Executive Board of the Retail Clerks. Their situation was absolutely pathetic, to say the least. They were using space upstairs in the old Labor Temple. They had a desk (of sorts), a small file cabinet, and a portable typewriter which had seen better days — and that's all. Had about 105 members.

**HS: So this Retail Clerks Union Local 373 had a little over one hundred members?**

SL: That's right. I researched the background of Local 373 and found it had secured a charter from its International Union around the turn of the century. This came about because clerks working in what was called the "rag" industry and related lines — anything to do with cloth was called the rag business — were sick and tired of working days and nights without overtime pay. These clerks had approached the Labor Council, which had been formed in 1899, to beg their problem. There were only five local unions belonging to the Council. The Council put up \$10 for a Clerks charter. Unfortunately that charter was suspended around 1916. It was reinstated after about two years and then lost again for about thirty days in the early 1920s for nonpayment of per-capita to the International Union. Unfortunately, again, all communications pertaining to this were lost.

Well, continuing about how I came to take on the job: After having been browbeaten again by the Council officers, I finally made a deal with the Executive Board of the Council, with the Clerks, and with my plastering employer. I would go to the Clerks for a six-month period just to get the Clerks straightened out. I had to take a wage cut to do this and I wasn't particularly happy about that.

**HS: Tell me how you went about straightening things out? Didn't the employers know you were on the job to organize? Were they upset about it?**

SL: In those days employers were more cooperative. They didn't want pickets around their stores. Pickets were very effective in keeping customers away. In any case, employers had no say in who the union hired to organize.

**HS: So you got this job through the union?**

SL: No, I did not. I negotiated with the Executive Board of the Clerks Union to take on this job for a six-month period. I was hired by that Board.

**HS: You were not a clerk?**

SL: No. I never worked as a clerk and didn't give it a thought. Well, when I was a kid I did deliver groceries over in Corte Madera. Worked for a Tompkins Grocery. I think I was paid \$18 a week. Tompkins had an old Model T Ford. All the stores delivered in those days.

**HS: So, now you were the Clerks organizing agent, hired, not elected. Where was your office located?**

SL: I believe I said the Clerks didn't have an office as such. The Labor Temple Association had this large old building at 316 Virginia Street in downtown Vallejo. The Labor Council used the upstairs of the building. It had a large assembly hall where union meetings were held. There were several small rooms around the perimeter and the Clerks had a small space there. The lower floor of the building was occupied and used by a large grocery chain.

Later on, the building trades made a deal with the Labor Temple Association to rent the entire first floor and remodel it for individual offices of the building trades who wanted office space. When this occurred the Clerks asked for a front office next to the Culinary Workers. You see, both the Clerks and Culinary Workers had a number of women members. The back offices and the hiring hall of that downstairs had no windows — very dark down there and some of the trades people were rough, tough, and on occasion nasty. There was also a small bar and cafe in the back and that's where the restrooms were located. No place for women members to be. Well, this wasn't the best. As soon as the Clerks were able, they moved elsewhere.

**HS: Okay, getting back to your work of organizing business agent, etc. —**

SL: I was still holding my Plasterers Union card. Didn't have a Clerks card and didn't want one because I only planned to work at the job for six months. It didn't work out that way. One of the first things I found out was skullduggery on the part of the woman who had been acting as business representative. Members asking for withdrawal cards couldn't get them because their dues and initiation fees had been pocketed by this woman and membership never recorded with the International Union. I talked to the woman and she indicated she would take care of the matter. Six weeks went by and nothing had been done.

The international president — in title — was "Pop" Desept. He lived in San Francisco and was a good and likeable man. I called and advised him of the dishonesty in Local 373, told him that if this matter wasn't taken care of, and cleaned up, within thirty days I was leaving the job. Time went by and then the Clerks held a meeting in a room above Crowley's Department Store. I walked in for the meeting. Now, recall: at that point I held no office whatsoever, I wasn't a member, just an employee of the union. Anyway, there on the platform was "Pop" Desept, and beside him was this woman [the Clerks' business representative]. The meeting got underway and, under the heading of new business, this woman got up and read her letter of resignation.

**HS: Do you care to give the woman's name? Was she prosecuted?**

SL: No, I won't give her name, never have, and, no, she wasn't prosecuted. Really, this was just two-bit stuff, I guess you could say.

**HS: Do you assume Desept suggested to her that prosecution was possible if she didn't resign?**

SL: Maybe so. She knew she was going to be removed from office, he had told her that.

**HS: So, you cleaned up that situation but you still had only about 105 members on record, and the organizational pattern, or effort, was really flat, for that era especially.**

SL: Yes, I found the only policing of what contracts they had was being done by the janitor of the Labor Temple Building. He was doing this for free. He was a nice little old Welshman, name of Chauncy DePeau. He had been my hod-carrier at one time. He would walk around town checking on and trying to help out the Clerks.

I straightened out the contracts as fast as I could, starting with the smaller stores. This took some time and I worked like a dog. Had a bit of a problem — the Clerks charter said “city of Vallejo.” Vallejo was a two-bit town prior to World War II and a lot of the area around, and even in, town had not been incorporated into the city. It was referred to as “greater Vallejo.” This was because no one wanted to pay taxes to the city. This was another thing I got into with both feet, getting those areas into the city.

**HS: Let me ask — you eventually managed to expand the membership — tell me how you did this?**

SL: Working, and working damn hard. During this time I was working under a handicap — no proper office. The union had elected a secretary and a treasurer — these offices were combined later. The secretary was a fellow who worked in a plumbing shop and he wasn't much of a secretary. I had to take care of all the business, all the correspondence, until I got a girl who took shorthand. Then I would have to take the letters to this donkey for signature. I got damn tired of that and again thought of giving up the job. Ultimately all the problems were ironed out. Then it wasn't long 'til I got an assistant business agent. Couldn't hire one out of the stores — fellows working in stores were scared to death of the job.

**HS: Why would they be scared of the job?**

SL: Well, I'm not really sure. People in those days were scared of unions for some reason. I went outside the Clerks and hired a fellow named McCabe. He was an ambitious old carpenter who wanted to make a change. He went to work for me, and he worked hard policing contracts, or just whatever I asked him to do. This worked fine, until he decided he liked my job better than his. Then I had to call him to term.



Through our efforts the union began to grow. We certainly outgrew that space in the old Labor Temple. Finally rented three rooms on York Street up over a bowling alley. Again, this wasn't the best, but it was downtown where most of the activity was. We outgrew *that* office space in a very short time and moved downstairs in what had formerly been a paint store. Had to remodel, and the only problem here was we had only one restroom. This had to be kept for the women, and the men had to use a facility upstairs, an inconvenience to say the least. We stayed on there for a number of years. Eventually I had three business agents and two women secretaries.

Again the time came when we really needed more office space. I spoke to the Executive Board about this on a number of occasions. Finally, I had a local architect, another good friend of mine by the name of Charles Daugherty, draw up plans for our own office building — but that's another story.

**HS: Okay, so now what?**

SL: I need to backtrack again. I told you of the nonprofit organization labor sponsored called Promotional League and about how we were able to promote politics. Back in the mid-1930s Vallejo had little or no recreational facilities. So labor stepped in and began another nonprofit group we called the Athletic Friends of Labor. There were a number of young men, working in the trades, who wanted to — and did — start a baseball team which they called the Vallejo Builders. They needed a place to hold ball games.

Our Athletic Friends of Labor had five officers: Jim Richardson, Lowell Nelson, myself, Lloyd Johnson, and Frank Cheeseboro. These five men found a three-acre plot of land out on Nebraska Street. After *much* negotiation it could be purchased for \$12,000. This acreage had a big drawback: it was 8 foot 10 inches below street level. For years it had been used, illegally, as a dumping ground for everything under the sun. During the winter months it completely flooded. The ducks loved it. The fact that there was beginning to be a great deal of building in Vallejo, and that we knew all the contractors, enabled us to talk the contractors into putting all their excess dirt, from their building sites, into our acreage as landfill. With volunteers we began clearing off the site and leveling the fill as it came in. Finally cleared enough space for a baseball field. We had to continue the landfill for several years before we were actually level with the street.

Again using volunteer help, we began building: a Boy Scout house, with office and meeting space; a children's playground with all modern equipment; an eight-tiered, covered grandstand [with] bleacher seats; announcer and ticket booths; and, of course, restrooms. We finally enclosed the whole area with an eight-foot wooden fence. Now we were ready for business. Maybe I should say here — seed money to begin this operation came from small donations from various unions and interested persons. As you can

imagine, we incurred quite a debt for materials and supplies. We added to that debt a year or so later when nighttime activities became popular. With the help of Bill Green, business agent for Electricians Local 180, we purchased \$18,000 worth of flood lights.

The first events held were the ball games and there was good attendance. Our Vallejo Builders had joined the Northern Semi-Pro Baseball League and there were any number of opposing teams to play. As an officer of the organization I had been assigned the jobs of public relations, publicity, and bringing in activities and events, etc. In addition to ball games, we branched out to holding carnivals, with a percentage of their profits going to local charities. Later, children's events, including mini-car racing.

One of the biggest events ever held was a rodeo. Lowell Nelson and I were members of the Junior Chamber of Commerce. We heard, via their grapevine, that cowboy movie actor Gene Autry was to make an appearance in Vallejo. So! We decided to capitalize on Autry's publicity by holding a rodeo at the same time he would be in Vallejo. We knew absolutely nothing about how to set up such an affair, so we called on the local Horseman's Association for advice. Would you believe we sold five thousand tickets to our rodeo? One of the men riding that day was a fellow by the name of "Slim" Pickens, who later became a movie star. He had a broken arm, in a cast no less, and rode a bucking horse that day. All the activities mentioned took place during the late 1930s and on through World War II. You will find pictures of these in the Labor Archives.

**HS: That's an interesting story. Now what happened when your activities as the Athletic Friends of Labor ceased?**

**SL:** Following the war, the citizens of Vallejo founded what was called the Greater Vallejo Recreation District. I was appointed on that organization's first board of directors. In fact, my name is on a plaque in Dan Foley Park as such. The officers and the Labor Council agreed the Nebraska Street property should be sold, and the accumulated equipment either sold or whatever. I know the Scout house and the playground equipment were moved elsewhere in Vallejo. Some other things we were able to sell — we were in need of the money to pay off the outstanding bills.

In the late 1950s — well, maybe before — the property was put on the market to go to the highest bidder with cash. There were several bites but no sale. Then negotiations began with Carpenters Local 180 to sell the three acres to them for \$75,000 with the stipulation the Carpenters would hold approximately one acre, on the east end, to be sold to the Clerks union. Both unions have buildings on that site today. The \$75,000 cash went to pay the balance of the debts of the Athletic Friends of Labor, and to reimburse some of those who had donated the original seed money. The few bucks left over went to charity.

**HS: Most interesting, entertaining. Now, you had mentioned something about the**

**original background of the labor movement around here?**

SL: I did, and we haven't touched on that. Back at the turn of the century, maybe 1898 or 1899, five trades got together to try for a charter. The California Labor Federation had received a charter and held their first meeting in San Francisco. [The California Labor Federation, AFL-CIO, called the California State Federation of Labor until 1958, actually was founded in January 1901.] Their second meeting was held here in Vallejo. An election of officers was held annually. At that second meeting, a well-educated and dedicated man, name of John Davidson from Vallejo, was elected president. He was reelected for a second term the following year. In later years that man had a Vallejo school named after him. That was the real beginning of the labor movement here.

**HS: At that time did you have any experience, or think anything about, or maybe reflect on, the AFL/CIO split, which was especially bitter between 1935 and 1941, as a serious problem?**

SL: Yes, of course. The more liberal people thought it was a terrible thing to have that split. The matter of the word "jurisdiction" was widely discussed and had created many problems for labor and the workers. It was ridiculous. You notice that as of today no one pays any attention to jurisdiction — just go out and organize whoever you can. When I first ran across the CIO I was working at the plastering trade. There were several fish canneries over in Benicia. The CIO was moving in to try and take them over. We had to stop that, and we did.

**HS: Why did you have to stop this?**

SL: Because at the time we felt, as all labor did: "We're in the AFL and you better protect your jurisdiction." Some of us didn't feel good about this but had to stick together.

**HS: How did you go about stopping the CIO in the Benicia canneries? Did it come to blows? And what year was this?**

SL: With a show of pickets and brickbats. No, it didn't actually come to blows. Those CIO people didn't want to get off their boats when they pulled into Benicia. Made it easy for us. We had a huge bonfire going, I think we looked like a bunch of Ku Klux Klanners. Don't recall the year.

**HS: Now, in Vallejo you were just across the bridge from Crockett. Did you ever encounter ILWU Local 6? They were CIO from 1937 on.**

SL: No, we never had problems there. The sugar workers AFL union was in there and both unions worked together pretty well.

**HS: Were there any strikes in the 1930s that you remember were particularly significant to either the Plasterers or the Retail Clerks? Big strikes?**

SL: There were some strikes, yes. There was the big general strike in 1934 in San Francisco and, well, we've already touched on that. Prior to my association with the Retail Clerks 373, pickets were placed in front of some independent food markets for their refusal to recognize the union and sign union contracts. In the late 1930s, these disputes ended up in Superior Court. A well-known labor attorney from San Francisco by the name of Clarence Todd won that case for labor. Union labor officials of that time maintained it to be an "historic" decision.

I must tell you about this Clarence Todd. No one ever really considered him an attorney — he was a "barrister." He was a large man with a marvelous speaking voice. Almost spellbinding. Always dressed immaculately, and always wore a big gold chain across his vest. When he stood before the judges he would fiddle with his chain. It was kind of like a movie scene. Todd was still the attorney for Retail Clerks 373 when I came on board in October 1941.

**[End Tape 2 - Side B]  
[Begin Tape 3 - Side A]**

**HS: So now you were with Retail Clerks 373, and you were speaking of attorney Clarence Todd?**

SL: Shortly after my employment with Local 373 in 1941, the Local joined the newly established Bay Area Retail Clerks District Council. During the war years 1942 to 1945, the secretary of that Council, Ben Crossler, assisted the area's local unions in disputes before the Regional War Labor Board. Also, during this period of time collective action could be taken on a number of issues. Among these was the need for uniform legal council. There was a young man, Roland Davis, a recent graduate of Stanford University. He was employed by a firm of labor attorneys in San Francisco and was interested in establishing his own firm. The officers and board members of Local 373 concurred with the Bay Area District Council's vote to secure the services of Roland Davis as legal council. Roland, a dedicated man interested in the welfare of unions and their memberships, became a good friend. We developed a close relationship. He remained the advisor and legal counsel of Local 373 during all my years there. In fact, I still hear from him from time to time.

**HS: You had previously mentioned the excellent cooperation of members of the labor**

**movement in your area. Let's explore that.**

SL: Yes, here in the area we put together one of the finest, solid groups of labor organizations in the state of California. This was due to outstanding leadership and cooperation. The top representatives of all the unions worked together. If one union had a problem, well, it was everyone's problem. That's the way things were run here and it stayed that way for many years. Then, when Lowell Nelson left us to accept a state position under Governor Pat Brown, the man who followed him in his position didn't seem to have the leadership abilities to get the job done. He began "hitting the hooch" rather than attending to business. This became a problem and began to affect the entire labor movement. So, it hurt us, and things didn't go well from then on. That man passed away at an early age and those who followed him in the job had little or no drive. But, again, the cooperation we had for ten or fifteen years or so was fantastic.

**HS: Where did the California State Federation of Labor come into things at the time?**

SL: Our area was the 12th District of the State Federation, covering Napa, Solano, Marin, and Sonoma counties. Unfortunately, at that time we were represented by a man with little ability and narrow vision. The sort of person who saw a "Commie" under every streetlight.

**HS: Do you care to name that person?**

SL: No, I won't do that. Anyway, the State Federation was holding a convention in San Francisco, sometime in the 1950s. There were around 2,250 delegates from unions attending. For years Lowell Nelson and I had been attending as delegates but had never taken an active part in their elections of officers, etc. We were actually "green peas," so to speak. Well, at this convention we were talking with other delegates and it was suggested that Nelson try to unseat the 12th District incumbent. Nelson agreed, but we had to figure out a way to do this. On our way home that evening, Nelson and I decided to draft — and have copied — handbills to be distributed to all the delegates the next day. We worked all night on this and were at the convention hall early and passed out these handbills. We won! Nelson was elected vice-president of the 12th District. This was a big surprise to most because the incumbent represented the Teamsters and they had a large block of votes. The other big block of votes was the Culinary Workers. At that time the Retail Clerks didn't have a handful.

**HS: I understand that later you held that same 12th District vice-presidency?**

SL: That I did. In 1960 I followed Nelson in that position and I held it for thirteen years. Actually, the position was sort of handed to me. You see, I was the first Retail Clerk to ever serve on that board. At that time, [C. J.] "Neil" Haggerty was the executive officer

of the State Federation. Neil was a great and capable fellow. I believe he was followed in that job by Tom Pitts, also a good man for the job. In the meantime, Jack Henning, who during the Haggerty years had been chief statistician for the State Federation, was picked by President Kennedy as U.S. Assistant Secretary of Labor and later returned to work for the State Federation. He then followed Pitts as State Federation executive officer.

When I retired from Local 373 in 1968, I planned to step down as State Federation vice-president, 12th District. I had worked hard for that District, attending all the events of their Labor Councils and I had a good relationship with them. Jack Henning and I had become the best of friends and worked well together. In my opinion, no one could beat that man for intelligence. He had a powerful speaking gift, just unbelievable. Well, Jack wanted me on the board. So I held that position until 1973.

Now, prior to that time I had approached Henning about continuing to have a Bay Area Retail Clerk on the board. An opening for such in the Santa Clara/San Mateo counties area came up when their representative, a fellow from the Culinary Workers name of "Tiny" Small, passed away. I then recommended to Jack that James P. McLaughlin, executive officer of Retail Clerks Local 428, be appointed to that spot. When I stepped down a short time later a representative from the Culinary Workers, Loretta Cross — formerly of Vallejo, now in Santa Rosa — was named vice-president for the 12th District. I believe she still holds that job.

**HS: Let's get into the strike situation. You were involved in a five-and-a-half month Retail Clerks strike in 1948 or 1949, no? How did this come about and would you call it a major issue?**

**SL:** A major issue most certainly! However, prior to that, and just at the end of World War II, Local 373 was restricted in negotiations under the Federal Labor Relations Law as set forth by the 10 percent wage ruling's "Little Steel formula." During the war, labor unions could negotiate a number of contract changes — provided the cost did not exceed the wage ruling. The contract changes, by our union, were opposed by Mr. William Caldwell, who was president and CEO of the California Retail Trades Association. He also represented the Vallejo Retail Trade Bureau.

After we had been denied justice for more than three years, our soft-line division, five hundred strong, met for a special called meeting on a Thursday night at the Casa de Vallejo Hotel. This was 1945, just three weeks after the end of World War II. These members refused to have a secret ballot vote to strike. Instead, they passed a motion via standing vote — 499 yes and 1 no — instructing me to secure their employers' signature by Saturday morning when they would meet with me in front of the Labor Temple. Came Saturday I had no signed contract. We had no strike, but had a complete work stoppage. Twenty-one stores closed, and remained closed for about three weeks.

**HS: Why did the stores close?**

SL: No one went to work. Replacements could not be hired. The Navy Yard was still operating full blast and there were just no workers to be hired. The union had pickets out. Some of our pretty young ladies were escorted on the picket lines by off-duty Navy and Marine personnel. They had a ball!

**HS: So what finally happened?**

SL: At the “subtle” suggestion of our state senator, Luther Gibson, who was the owner of the *Vallejo Times Herald*, I met in Gibson’s office with William Pendleton, the president of the Vallejo Retail Trades Bureau. One hour later an agreement was reached whereby, upon approval of the Bureau directors, the man Caldwell was fired, and, upon approval of the union members involved, a contract would be signed.

**HS: Now this work stoppage was settled — what about the big 1948 strike?**

SL: I will tell you, and this is really a major issue: Prior to that time, negotiations were held annually for members working in the soft-lines — shoes, dress shops, etc. Year after year we made the same request: change the work week from six-and-a-half-hour days to five eight-hour days for a forty-hour week. The employers gave us promises, like, “Next time,” etc., but never action. In late September 1948 the soft wear members voted to strike. They were on the picket line for five-and-a-half months, all through a bitter, cold winter. During those months the business in downtown Vallejo was literally reduced to the point of no return. My committee and I advised the merchants of our concern about this. We were right — that business area never recovered.

I previously mentioned that the fellow Caldwell had been fired. Following his discharge, the employers hired a well-known Bay Area attorney, Paul St. Sure, who also represented other employer groups. Do you, by chance, know that name?

**HS: Oh yes, I do. I know that name well.**

SL: Well, that man talked in circles. We couldn’t get anywhere with him. Our Local 373 membership had the full support of labor all over the Bay Area. Members of unions from far and wide joined our picket lines from time to time. It was finally agreed by our Local 373 negotiating committee, our attorney Roland Davis, Retail Clerks State Council Secretary-Treasurer Larry Vail, and the Employer Committee that within ninety days each side would make an economic study of the cost of our demand for a five-day, forty-hour week, and, if the cost did not exceed a 10 percent increase, the demand would be met and take effect in the next contract. Strange as it seems, both sides came up with the

same figure.

**HS: Excuse my lack of feeling for this, but — the Fair Labor Standards Act had established the principle of the forty-hour week, as I recall, but you guys didn't have it?**

SL: No. My people worked six-and-a-half hours a day, six days a week, at straight time pay. We were going for five days a week, eight hours a day, or a forty-hour week at straight time. In Local 373 we had other division contracts who did have the forty hour per week contracts.

**HS: And even after the two sides came up with the same economic study figures, you still couldn't get Paul St. Sure to move on it?**

SL: No. St. Sure put every obstacle in the way of a settlement. Our committees were doing everything we could think of, then along came another problem: I caught some of my own officers meeting with the employers to try and make a deal behind our backs. Oh yes, we got that mess straightened out, and those people appeared before the membership to admit guilt and apologize.

**HS: So, you finally got the eight-hour day and forty-hour week?**

SL: Yes. The strike was settled and our demand met in the next contract. At this point the employers fired Paul St. Sure. Then they came to the union and asked that we join them in an all-out advertising campaign to try to regain business. David Selvin, a well-known labor writer, designed and developed the "Sign of the Good Neighbor" logo. This union house sign was placed in all the stores and carried in all advertising. A few weeks later I was approached by a representative of the Trade Bureau asking my approval of their hiring a local attorney, name of Jack Bradley. Bradley was representing store owners in the area. I was quite frank with this person in indicating it was not the business of the union who they hired. We had no other trouble and were able to negotiate additional benefits in the following years.

**HS: Tell me — during the strike, what kind of setup did you have for the strike itself? What kind of picket lines? Did you have a war chest, a strike benefit? Were there scabs you had to deal with? Exactly what happened during the life of the strike?**

SL: In the makeup of the strike, it's pretty hard — a sort of day to day thing. You have a formula you need to follow. You set up various committees, the number one being the picket committee. A number of picket captains are needed for various times of the day and night. Other committees are needed for whatever has to be done. Some committee has to be in charge of coffee and food to be available at all times.



Another important committee is that of finance. It has to decide who gets paid and how much — can't pay all the pickets. The International benefit for pickets, at that time, was \$15 a week. We received other monies from members who were working. They assessed themselves \$5 a week to go in the general pot. Other unions made donations, as did the Bay Area Council. We scrambled and got along best we could. And, let's say someone can't pay a utility bill or something important was due — the committee took care of that when possible. As the responsible officer, I had to make sure everything worked, make contacts, talk to the various committees, and in general see to it everything was running as smoothly as possible. Any big strike works the same way.

**HS: Were you being paid your salary at the time? Were things pretty rough for you?**

SL: My staff and I, but not the office employees, voluntarily went off the payroll for about three months. Then the International found this out and they said to me, "You get back on the pay roll — don't you realize the employers want you to receive no pay because sooner or later you are going to break? You have to eat, you know. Those employers are just waiting for the day." Well, I said, "They will wait a long time before we break." However, the International insisted and we went back on the payroll. This only added to the strike expenses. There were damn few officers of unions who would have gone off the payroll.

**HS: Would you say, or was it your feeling, that you actually won the strike? How did you feel at the time?**

SL: We won, yes, but it was a letdown. I felt neither good nor bad about it, because I had had five hundred members out and now they were back to work. They had good wage increases and other changes in their contracts. I think you can't feel good unless you win everything, particularly an important thing like this.

**HS: Did the employers try to keep their stores open during the strike?**

SL: You bet they did, by hiring fink labor, but they didn't do any business to speak of. That's one of the reasons the downtown area was shot. That's why we, and the employers, had to come up with a plan to rebuild business. I already mentioned the advertising and the "Sign of the Good Neighbor" union logo developed by Dave Selvin.

**HS: I believe you said that 1949 was the only time in your twenty-seven years at Local 373 that you received a challenge when you stood for reelection?**

SL: Yes, and this was because of the strike. There were some disgruntled people who were not in the strike but, more or less under protest, paid the \$5 a week strike benefit. They

assumed if they got rid of me there wouldn't be any more strikes, so they tried to unseat me.

**HS: Would care to name the fellow who ran against you?**

SL: His name was Alvin M. Melser. He was employed at a sewing machine store. He later bought the business. I heard he passed away recently.

**HS: What was Melser's argument at the time? I guess you sort of outlined that, but what did he say? What did his people say?**

SL: Mainly he campaigned to get rid of me. I was a bad boy, and I had caused all the trouble. He said he had been a Retail Clerk for nine years in a governing capacity and that he was qualified to handle union business and to work for the best interest of the membership. I don't know what he was talking about — he wasn't even a member of our executive board.

**HS: But you never had anyone else run against you? Someone must have liked you!**

SL: No one ever did. I had to assume the membership liked what I was doing for them. When I had the time, I went into the stores, sort of glad-handing. I tried to keep close to the members and they appreciated that.

I had a tremendous workload both in and out of the office. In addition to the work for my own union, I had a call from the International union telling me the CIO was planning to organize the food clerks in Santa Rosa, in Sonoma County. They requested I go up there pronto, check this out, and report my findings. The International then assigned me to organize enough stores in that area to secure a charter. This I did and I received no reimbursement nor car expense for this. After about two years, running back and forth, I asked to be released from this responsibility. I was then appointed trustee of that local and requested to secure a competent person to carry on.

**HS: What kind of things did you have to do in the office? Were there grievances, arbitrations, negotiations, or what?**

SL: There were all those things and more. I handled all of them while my staff men were policing contracts in the field. Between those things, plus the correspondence and affiliations — I had at least two hours every morning of dictation with the office secretaries.

**HS: Is there any grievance outstanding in our mind that was funny or more or less illustrated a point?**

SL: One time there were five attractive young ladies who came to see me. They all worked in a small local drug store. In this store there were steep, sloping stairs leading down to the basement where stock was kept. The manager of that store was a horny SOB. It seems that when the girls went up or down those stairs to replace stock, this man would manage to be either in the basement or on the stairs and would run his hands up under their dress. One of the girls was so frightened she fell off the stairs and hurt herself.

These girls were telling me their stories when I stopped them and asked my secretary to come in, be a witness, and take a deposition from each girl. The five girls signed these depositions and I immediately took them to my good friend District Attorney Tom Lynch. Tom was flabbergasted. He wanted to have the man arrested immediately. I assured him I just wanted to make him aware of the situation and that I planned to see the store's owner, who had offices in Oakland.

So I made an appointment to see the store owner. He was a very nice, elderly gentleman and he was horrified at my story. I told him of my taking the depositions to the district attorney, etc. He assured me he would take care of the matter. Then he asked me if I knew who that manager was. I said I did not. Then he laughed and said, "Unfortunately, that man is my son-in-law." That really took the cake. Within twenty-four hours that manager was gone.

**HS: Did the women retain their jobs under a new manager?**

SL: You better believe they did. An employer can't remove those people, the union would have their hides. It would cost the employer a bundle.

**HS: Do you recall any situation when you got people their jobs back?**

SL: Offhand I can't remember a specific case, but there were dozens of them.

**HS: Were there any other situations, or grievances, like the five women, that you recall?**

SL: You know, this is very distasteful, but there were two other situations I do recall. The first — down the street from the drug store in the previous story, there was a nice ladies dress shop. Top quality merchandise. A man and his wife owned the shop, as well as a similar one in Napa. The man was a good-looking young fellow, always well-dressed. He operated the Vallejo stores and his wife the Napa shop. The two shops were under fairly open union contract. We had no control over their hiring. So, this man hired attractive, young, and well-endowed girls, and he insisted they model the merchandise. Come summertime, they are to model the swimsuits. This man hired a new young woman who hadn't been in the union long enough to know her rights. At his insistence she was to

model a swimsuit — and what does he do but follow her into the changing room and assist her in getting her breasts into the suit.

The girl was terrified. She came to my office to report this matter to me. I confronted that SOB about this, and what do you know, six months later he committed suicide. He must have had a serious problem of some kind.

**[End Tape 3 - Side A]  
[Begin Tape 3 - Side B]**

**HS: So, you were the father confessor for members with problems, right?**

SL: I guess you could say that. The other incident that comes vividly to mind: The wife of the assistant manager of one of my Safeway stores came to see me. She wanted my help in saving her marriage. It seems her husband and one of the store clerks — a gorgeous, married, well-stacked blonde — were having a torrid affair. With another couple from that store — also married, but not to each other — they had been going someplace in the Rio Vista area and having a lot of fun and games. This assistant manager's wife showed me a picture of a very beautiful, stark naked woman. I immediately recognized her face. I asked the woman to leave this picture with me to be locked up and kept in confidence and told her I would make contact with the woman pictured and see what I could do.

I called this woman to come in and see me, which she did. Now this was embarrassing as hell. I told her this assistant manager's wife had come to see me about a problem that had developed in the Safeway store, and that she had told me her husband was involved with a woman there, and that the wife had left a picture of that woman with me. I pulled out the picture and showed it to her. She exclaimed, "That isn't me! Someone has superimposed my face on that picture!" With that, I said, "Well, it might not be you, I can't argue that point, but I will say that whoever has that body, it is beautiful." Her face turned red as a beet and I knew I had her dead to rights. That settled the matter and to my knowledge there was no more hanky-panky in that store.

**HS: So, it appears you handled everything from "A" to "Z"?**

SL: Yes I did, it was part of my work. I don't remember anyone ever taking such problems to my staff officers. The members knew I was fair and honest and they trusted me.

**HS: Tell me — in the 1950s when the McCarthy period came along, and all of a sudden the CIO was purging its Left unions, did anybody say, "Well, look at that guy Stan Lathen, he's always for everything progressive"? Did you get red-baited in that**

**period?**

SL: No, I never did. I thought McCarthy was a first class bastard, a real bum. He hurt the reputations of so many good people.

**HS: Did you have any repercussions in Vallejo during that whole McCarthy period?**

SL: Just like in any community, it was discussed. We didn't have anyone in the local labor union like that. In fact, I can't recall anyone here being called on the carpet or accused of being a "Commie sympathizer."

**HS: The reason I ask is because it's part of that period, a part of history, and was a big aspect —**

SL: I never ran into that issue. People we dealt with in the labor movement were anti-McCarthy. Most thought that SOB should be tarred and feathered, along with the past governor as well as past president Reagan. Reagan was at one time head of the Motion Picture Actors Guild and that dirty so-and-so was tipping off the FBI about all his friends. No, I never knew anyone around here who had that problem. The FBI did contact me during the war years and asked me about certain people they were looking for. I assured them I knew nothing about the people mentioned, and I didn't.

**HS: When did you become president of the Solano County Central Labor Council?**

SL: I think it was in the 1950s. But, prior to that, there was a fellow who had held that position for a long time. Actually, no one wanted the job. Anyway, he was a lousy president with a low I.Q. A bunch of us got together to unseat this man. We talked to Percy Lund, who was executive officer of the Carpenters Union. Percy was a prince of a fellow, a real gentleman. He didn't want that job but we pressured him to run and we elected him. Percy served one year and refused to run again. Then I was elected. At that time I assured my supporters a change would be made to hold an annual election for that office so the job could be passed around. I'm sure that change is recorded in the minutes and it was carried out for a number of years. I heard later, after I had retired, that everything with the Council got screwed up and a lot of things that were going on were pretty bad.

**HS: Tell me more about any major issues that occurred in the 1950s and on into the 1960s. Any big situations you had to deal with?**

SL: Well, first of all, there was a major issue in my personal life. In 1953 I was in and out of the hospital for forty or more days. Had to have a kidney removed and my life was, more or less, on the line. Thanks to my great staff, and my secretaries, the union got along

beautifully while I was off work. Then, in early 1955, we learned my wife had incurable cancer. She was in and out of the hospital until her death in October in that year. We had been married twenty-eight years and had three sons. Needless to say, the boys and I were devastated.

**HS: That's sad; you have my sympathies. Tell me about the period of time after your own hospital stay. Were you okay?**

SL: Yes and no. I was down to skin and bones, had lost much of my energy, and just couldn't seem to get going.

Getting back to union business and going back a few years: You may recall Earl Warren, who served three terms as governor and was later named chief justice of the Supreme Court. Well, sometime during his terms as governor he proposed the people of California have a State Health Plan. He requested each county to select a committee in equal numbers — for and against — to explore the possibility. I was selected as Solano County Chairman of the committee *for* the proposal.

**HS: How did this come out?**

SL: It was a lost cause, a no-win situation. The Medical Association was strictly opposed, and organized labor and friends lost. This was my one big defeat.

**HS: So what happened next?**

SL: In 1950 the Retail Clerks unions in northern California pressed their demands for a full-coverage health plan for members and their dependents working under grocery contracts — hospital, medical, surgical, optical, prescription drug. Our consultants had advised us on benefits and on costs. We settled on 5 cents per hour — \$8.66 per month — and this included \$10,000 life insurance.

Kaiser and Occidental Insurance were the low bidders. Occidental Insurance agreed to administer the plan. Members had annual free choice to change plans. After eighteen months, Occidental requested Local 373 take over the plan administration. The Employers agreed, and I had that responsibility, in addition to my regular duties, for eight years. The 1.5 percent commission on the premium was insufficient to underwrite the cost of administering this plan, therefore Local 373 had to underwrite the additional cost from its own treasury.

Then, in 1960, the Bay Area Retail Clerks unions established one master health/welfare trust agreement with headquarters in San Francisco. Here I should add: In 1957 we had collectively negotiated, and secured, a pension plan paid for by the employers. During

that same period of time I was able to establish a credit union for my Local 373 members and I was administrator of that for many years.

**HS: You spoke of your involvement with other organizations, committees, etc. — tell me about that.**

SL: I've told you of being active in the political arena. I believe I failed to mention: in 1945 I had an invitation from the White House to attend, along with two hundred others from all over the state and from all walks of life. It was a luncheon with President Truman at the Fairmont Hotel in San Francisco. He was in California for purposes of the signing of the United Nations charter.

Another interesting incident: In 1956, when Adlai Stevenson was a candidate for president, he was campaigning in California. In September of that year, my Local 373 was holding a Fall Festival, held every four years. This was a big occasion with a dinner and dance held at the Veteran's Hall. I was able to arrange for the appearance of Stevenson at that affair. We had an attendance of some 1,500 members and guests. Some of my lady members will be able to tell their grandchildren they once had a dance with Adlai.

**HS: That's an interesting story, worthy of note. Is there anything else you remember from way back, not necessarily political?**

SL: There is, yes, and I think you could call this a feather in my cap. You no doubt recall FDR's physical problem, which resulted in the March of Dimes. In the early 1940s, Vallejo had the first actual March of Dimes in the state of California. Phoenix, Arizona, had the first march held in the U.S. Well, an area March of Dimes meeting with delegates from Arizona, Nevada, and California was held in Reno. I was a delegate to that meeting and was later named chairperson to set up a march in Vallejo. I met with a number of friends from the days when I had worked in Civilian Defense Committees — handling public relations, block wardens, etc. — so I had quite a list of potentials I could encourage to get on the bandwagon.

Here is what we did. I talked to the mayor, the city council, county commissioners, the fire and police departments, etc., and told them of our plans. We wanted their cooperation to do the following: we intended to hold our March of Dimes at night. This march would be highly advertised. We requested the city streetlights not be turned on that night until 8 p.m. We advised all citizens, who were interested in donating, to turn on their porch lights at 8 p.m. We planned to bring into the downtown area the big Hollywood-type floodlights. We asked that the fire department blast off with their sirens at 8 p.m. I'll tell you, at 8 p.m. Vallejo looked like the Fourth of July and Fairyland. Everything went off like clockwork — our people hit the streets, door to door, picking up donations. It was

absolutely great! I had stationed myself in the penthouse at the Casa de Vallejo Hotel where I could observe the whole thing. Per-capita wise, we raised more money than any county in the United States.

**HS: That's terrific. Really great history, sort of symbolic?**

SL: Something like that takes a lot of organization, leadership, and hours and hours of work.

**HS: Stanley, I understand the original of this interview is to be lodged with the Labor Archives at San Francisco State University. Will you tell me where, and how, you became involved with the Archives?**

SL: In 1983 I was advised by either Walter Johnson, or Roland Davis (can't remember which), about a move underway to set up a Labor Archives for the nine Bay Area counties. A meeting was held, which I attended, but I didn't follow through. Well, recall, I had been retired for fifteen years. I had taken up the game of golf and my wife and I had purchased, by that time, two motor homes. We were busy traveling and enjoying retirement. It was fairly inexpensive to travel in a motor home in those days. We sometimes spent the winter months in Palm Springs or Phoenix. In 1991, at about the time we were leaving on another trip, I had a long letter about the matter of a Labor Archives. I laid that letter aside and forgot all about it.

**HS: At some point you must have talked to Dave Selvin about this?**

SL: I had talked to Dave at the 1983 meeting, as well as to other old-timers I had known from earlier days.

**HS: So when did you actually get involved?**

SL: In August 1996 I was contacted by Lynn Bonfield, the Archives Director. Lynn sent me information along with a beautiful brochure outlining what had been done. She explained that Solano and Napa counties had been inadvertently omitted from that brochure. She asked my help in correcting this oversight. I immediately contacted officers and members of the Central and Building Trades councils and AFL-CIO unions in the area, as well as their retiree clubs. A meeting was arranged, which Lynn Bonfield attended. She explained to those present what documents from their organizations might be suitable for inclusion in the Archives. Some of those people followed through; some didn't.

**HS: Have we missed any other major issues or items of importance?**

SL: I assume we have. I can't remember everything.



**HS: You retired in 1968, you said, at age 60. Tell me why you opted for such early retirement.**

SL: For good reason. I had been in the workforce for forty-five years, sometimes working day and night to scratch out a living. This would be a good place to tell you of my second wife, Bernice, a wonderful, beautiful person. We were married in 1957 and have now been married forty years. When we met she was president of the Vallejo Office Workers Union Local 86, which later merged with Local 29, Oakland. She was employed for many years as the dispatcher, bookkeeper, and general “Girl Friday” for the Plumbers/Steamfitters Union. Between the two of us we managed to save a little money.

You might be interested to know: unlike some labor representatives, I never gouged my union for money. My salary was never above \$300 a week and that included my car expense. So I didn’t get rich off my union. When I retired, my pension was minute to say the least. Bernice retired at the same time and was not old enough to receive a pension, and neither of us were old enough for Social Security. So, you want to know how we survived?

By this time, the children were grown and all but one out of the nest. We had a friend in the real estate business. He suggested we put our savings into second mortgages. Where other investments were paying only 5 or 6 percent interest, second mortgages were paying 10 percent interest; plus there were late-pay and early-payout charges. These were ten-year mortgages and were guaranteed, as we held the first deed of trust. So, we built from there and eventually went into other investments, and we slowly got ahead.

There is a political thing I forgot to tell you. All during our working years, Bernice and I were both involved with politics. Once a year we could hold a big “political” cocktail party at our home, paid for out of our own pocket. In addition to friends and political supporters, all the city and county elected officials were invited, as well as judges, or anyone running for democratic office. Those parties were a blast, especially in election years. Ours is not a large home, but one time we entertained eighty-five people. We didn’t intend to have that many at one time, it just turned out that way. Anyone who “had one too many” couldn’t have fallen down with all those wall to wall people. We were also generous as possible with campaign contributions and still are.

**HS: Stanley, we are coming to the end of tape three, and I want to say it was really good of you to sit for this interview. You did a knock-out job. Now, before we bring this to a close, can you reflect on all this and sort of summarize what your work meant to you — kind of like a final statement?**

SL: A closing statement? Yes, and here I would be remiss if I did not give plaudit for many of my successes to a few exceptional members of my staff, four business agents in

particular — Wayne Wilt, Jack Sparlin, Harry Clark, and Robert Jones — as well as two top office secretaries — Eleanor Garrity and Barbara Roy. These people were most loyal to me and to their work. A special thanks would also be due to members of my executive board from the many contract divisions, and to the good rank-and-file members who supported me and were dedicated and loyal to the union.

With the help of all these people I was able to establish pension, health, dental, and prescription drug plans and then to administer the contracts by giving day and night service to the membership. In addition, we were able to totally organize the food industry in our jurisdiction. Retail Clerks Local 373 was established as a militant, progressive union dedicated to its members. The membership increased from 105 people in 1941 to 1,600 at the time of my retirement in 1968. Local 373 had the respect of all the area local unions and councils, as well as the California Labor Federation.

**HS: That sounds like a lot of impressive accomplishments, and a great deal of hard work. Following retirement, did you “rest on your laurels”?**

SL: I can't say that I did. Together with other Retail Clerk retirees, I assisted in establishing our Local 373 Retiree Club. I became a member of the National Council of Senior Citizens. Following that, I assisted in the formation of the Congress of California Seniors and served for many years as a delegate to its Region III branch. I was also instrumental in establishing the Northern California Retail Clerks Multi-Retirees Club and its Spring Festival. This affair is held annually during the month of May and usually generates an attendance of some four hundred or more Retail Clerks retirees. Each Club takes a turn as host.

Bernice and I helped to form the Westerner Recreational Vehicle Club, Inc. and both served as officers and directors of that club for twelve years. And yes, I have kept an eye on Retail Clerks Local 373, which is now called UFCW instead of Retail Clerks. I have followed its progress, its leadership, and its problems. We have also continued in support of local, state, and federal politics, and I remain a member of several Democratic organizations.

You might say I am enjoying my “golden years.”

**[End of interview]**

**[End Tape 3 - Side B]**