

THS Tape # 18

LM

Date of taping
unknown - "a few years
ago" by Alton - all his
Tapes done in a 2 mo.
period.

Gerald Avery Interviewed by Alton Robbins

Date:

At the Avery home in Tualatin, Oregon

Transcribed by Toni Martinazzi, Glenview IL July 31, 1996

Length of Taped Interview: 27 minutes.

AR: Gerald, when did you come to this area?

GA: Uh, June 1922.

AR: Whereabouts did you come from? What part of the country?

GA: Uh, we were in Portland four years and before that we lived in a logging camp - Chapman - out of Scappoose. Nine miles west of Scappoose.

AR: Were your, was your dad a logger? or..?

GA: He was a master mechanic. He run the uh machine shop that repaired the locomotives and stuff. They had four, had five locomotives. That's when they logged with the old donkey engines, the deckers, you know to load. And they used these, uh, chain locomotives and the pistons go up and down, you know, to climb the hills. And we were there seven years. Then we moved to Portland because when two of us got old enough to go to high school we moved to Portland to go to high school because there was no high school there, you know.

AR: Which high school did you go to?

GA: James John in St. Johns.

AR: Oh, that's down in St. Johns?

GA: That's gone now. It burnt down. Our class only had 40 members there.

AR: What year did you graduate from high school?

GA: 1921 and there was 40 in the class and on our 50th reunion we had over half the class there were 20 people!

18-1

AR: Umhum. When you came out here do you remember how much land there was, your folks had?

GA: They bought 15 acres there on that side of the road. That's what it was. And that long chicken house was there. Dad always thought he wanted to raise chickens, and when he saw that chicken house he bought the ranch! [chuckle]

AR: That's all they did with the property then, was raise chickens?

GA: Well, he put the first filbert orchard in here, in this area in the early - well, mid-twenties. He was going to have that for his old age pension, insurance, you know.

AR: That was his annuity, hum?

GA: Yeah. I run the chicken ranch and he run the filbert orchard. He, he wasn't interested in breeding chickens, and I kinda grew into that.

AR: Did you have, uh, any brothers or sisters that lived here then?

GA: Yeah, one sister and two brothers when we moved out here. There were six of them in that old house. But, uh, my sister died pretty young. I think she was in her 40's.

AR: Umhum. Did you always run the chicken ranch or did you work in Portland or someplace?

GA: I've never worked for anybody. When I went to high school I worked in a grocery store in the summers and after school but after that I was self-employed. When we came out here I started the chickens.

AR: Was it your brother that worked for the paper company? Wasn't it ^{him} Abe that used to work for one of the paper companies in Portland?

GA: No, my oldest brother, uh, worked for [AM?] Sellers in Portland. A wholesale, uh, house, sold all household stuff, you know, uh, crockery and uh, appliances and things.

AR: Yeah, I that's where I saw him.

GA: He was there til he retired, or until they sold out actually, and then he went to work for Newberrys a few years.

AR: Let's go back to this chicken business. When you started out, about how many chicken's did you have?

GA: Well, we started out with, I think Dad bought 500 chickens. That time I think somebody in Portland had a little hatchery. My younger brother wasn't interested. Dad bought this place because he wanted to get my younger brother out of town. He wasn't getting along in Portland. [chuckle]

AR: What kind of chickens were they?

GA: Well there was some, when Dad bought this place, there was some, um, brown leghorns on it. They were the wildest things I've ever seen [chuckle]. But, I never kept those at all. We bought leghorns after a couple of years and Dad 'worked out' to pay for the ranch so somebody had to take care of things so I stayed home and did it. And then I wasn't interested in just raisin' chickens so I bought a couple of incubators and I got up to about, I think I had 6 of those old...where you had to turn eggs by hand, you know?

AR: Oh, yeah!]

GA: I had that, from up there in the barn there was a big celler in there, a fruit celler, I mean potato celler, is what it had actually been, and on top was the floor of the hay and stuff in the barn and that's where I had the incubators. And in 19...I got interested in breeding them and, uh, built trap nests and kept family records, you know, and all that stuff. In 1932 the old barn burned and there went my incubators! [laughs]

We stored hay up there and it was spontaneous combustion, you see, it was too green. It was on a September when we had one of these dry East Winds, you know, and that was a real HOT fire, Man!

I never even thought to get the horse out of the barn, so [sad tone] the horse went, too. Then, ~~[Gerald seems to be having trouble keeping his composure here]~~

But, uh, Saarinen, well it was a big barn right on line there, right on the corner of Saarinen. And then I had to rebuild something so my uncle built the garage and the building for incubators and I, we, I didn't have anything, really. Well, I did, I saved two of those incubators. My younger brother, Lawrence, and I carried those out somehow. Then I wanted to buy an incubator and 'a course that was Depression Days, you know what things were like in '33.

So there was a second hand incubator up at Hood River for five hundred dollars and I didn't have five hundred dollars. So I went to the US Bank and asked them to loan five hundred dollars and [chuckle] heck, they'd **closed** the banks and he said, "Sure, we got lots 'a money!" So I just signed the note and went up and bought the incubator and I got back in business. And from there it just grew.

AR: Where did you market most of your chickens?

GA: I sold 'em. Most of 'em went locally. When I say locally I mean in the area, between, within thirty miles of here, probably.

AR: Did some go to other hatcheries, or--?

GA: Well, they went to poultrymen who were just raising 'em for eggs, see. Then I left, cause we didn't get to selling breeding stock until, gosh, I don't know when! At that time, I just bought chickens and then bought some roosters and mated 'em for a couple of years, you know? Until I got trap nests and records and then we used our own eventually.

AR: Most of your stock, then, went to egg production, not to meat?

GA: Nothing went to meat.

AR: Umhum. Do you remember any of your neighbors, beside Saarinen, when you moved out here?

GA: Well, I didn't know anybody until we moved here, you know. 'A course I got acquainted with Nybergs while I was, I did, you know this was all farm, and Nybergs had a big farm, and Old Doc Smith and somebody else farmed. In summer, you know, I'd work on the hay baler and then stacking

grain and stuff like that, that's when I got acquainted with 'em.

AR: Did you ever know Reverend Blake?

GA: No, I didn't. I didn't know Blake.

AR: He lived around the corner down here about a mile, you know.

GA: Oh, Blake Road?

AR: Yeah, that's who it's named after.

GA: I remember him, but not personally. I got acquainted with Joe Byroms [sic] right away, 'a course. I know when our well went dry one time, we got, had to haul water from up there, he had a good drilled well there.

AR: Yeah. How were the roads out here then?

GA: There weren't any! [chuckle]

AR: Just gravel? or dirt?

GA: Dirt road.

AR: Dirt road.

GA: Yeah. In the summer they used a Ford delivery mail and in the winter, they used horse and buggy.

AR: Were you on a Sherwood route?

GA: Umhum.

AR: Route 1, we were on.

GA: Yeah, it was Route 1. That was all horse and buggy in the winter. I remember down in, I pulled a lot 'a cars out 'a the mud in the winter.

AR: You remember the first car here, ever had?

GA: First car Dad had was he had to take it in on a trade when he bought this farm out here. It was an old Overland. An old Overland, you know, they were one of the worst cars ever made! But, I know if whenever we'd go to Sherwood or anything, my mother would always put her walking shoes in the car because she knew we'd have to walk home probly. [both chuckle]

AR: Lots of confidence, huh?

GA: Then we got that little Ford panel. An old Model T, you know, that you had to pump uphill and usually reverse coming down hill for the brake! [laughing] Yeah, that was somethin'! I had to use the old Boones Ferry Road at that time, you know, Slavin Road you'd come up that because they wouldn't let trucks go out Terwilliger.

AR: Remember the first radio in the family?

GA: Yeah, we made it! [chuckle]

AR: Was it a crystal set?

GA: Two or three tubes, anyway, and that was the worst thing. Each of those tubes cost about six dollars and money was worth money in those days, you know, and we was always burning the damned things out by hooking up a 22 volt battery or something, experimenting. [chuckle] But it was fun, you know? You'd get your ear phones and , Heck, I remember getting a Philadelphia station, Pittsburg, I mean. PDQ and some darned thing and KGO and Oakland, I think that was Oakland. KSL and uh, Salt Lake City and we would just play with that to see how far we could get and how many stations we could get. [chuckle]

AR: I suppose you'd get better reception at night. huh?

GA: Oh, yeah! But it was interesting.

AR: Did you have a telephone *in your house when you first got* out here?

GA: Yeah, I don't know where it ever went, I wished I did.

AR: Was it a grind, wind, with a crank on it?

GA: Yeah. Everybody was on one line or a lot of people were on a line. I think ours was two shorts and one long, or somethin' like that. If you wanted to hear what the other guy was sayin' [chuckle] you'd just pick it up. You knew who it was! [giggle]

AR: Year, ours was a long and two shorts.

GA: I sure don't know what happened to it. I think it was stored up in the attic up there and then when we rented the place out, I think it disappeared.

[Silent pause like he was thinking] I don't know, 'a course, Ted ^{GARVER} Garber lived over here at that time, you know. Guyberger built that house, too and... he finally married a Guyberger girl and, Yeah, I rented that for one of our hired men for years. ^{weiburger}

AR: Did you know Kenneth Close?

GA: Oh yeah! Yeah, I remember taking him to the hospital. He had a ruptured appendix or somethin'. Seems like I was runnin' ambulance here for all one summer!

AR: Oh, you did? I didn't remember that!

GA: Yup, yeah, I had them in my car.

AR: Oh!

GA: Mrs. Saarinen, I took her to the hospital for...

AR: Which hospital did you go to from here?

GA: That was St. Vincent. That was the only one I knew. [Pause] No. I think one summer, my mother had her appendix out and Mrs. Saarinen had this ovarian cyst removed. [Pause] She was a good hearted old lady, but rough talkin', Oh Boy! [hearty chucle]

AR: I know that, the whole family was! Remember when they had their steam bath?

GA: Ah, yes! [chuckle's again] I remember when the kids, when the youngest boy was born. What the heck were their names? I forget.

AR: I went to school with Ted!

GA: Ted, he was the oldest one.

AR: Umhum.

GA: I remember, he was only about so high when we moved out here.

AR: That's right!

GA: Yeah, and uh, I remember, he'd, whenever I'd go to town, whenever I'd come back he'd be over there at the fender and he'd say, "You got any peanuches?" [laughs] I'd buy him some peanuts [laughs] and bring 'em out. He was, Ted and um, Bob, Bob, that was the youngest one, I remember that when he was born.

AR: [changing subject] Are your brothers still living?

GA: No, I'm the only member of the family left. It's kinda...well, I guess somebody has to be the last.

Anyway, when we came out here everybody, I remember Sagarts and people, well I'd worked for 'em. They didn't expect we'd be out here very long in the chicken business. Nobody ever stayed in the chicken business .
[Chuckle]

AR: Boy, you were in it for a good many years, weren't ya?

GA: Well, until I retired, sold out.

AR: When was that?

GA: In uh '66. I decided I could make more money retiring than I was making in the chicken business. It was either get enormous, you know..

AR: You'd have to expand.

GA: I never was interested in being a big outfit. But really, well, being a

with a family.

AR: You were in it about 40 years, then, or more?

GA: Yeah, from about '23 and quit in '66, yeah, over 40 years! And I was tired of the chicken business. I never wanted to go into it anyway. I mean it didn't mean anything to me because, well, somebody had to stay here and do something, so I just built it up.

AR: Did you have a family?

GA: Yeah. Three. Three children. Two sons, I mean one son and two daughters. My son is a senior planner at Washington County, Hillsboro. He has about twenty people working under him.

And my youngest daughter, uh, works out at the Primate Center. She is a technician, she used to work out at the medical school, but she liked this other job so she took it.

And my eldest daughter, Elizabeth, lives in Phoenix, and she married real young. Nineteen or somethin', and he spent all that time in the Army till he retired about four years ago. And he really done well in the Army. He got a education. He had charge of all the equipment in the government hospitals. He was stationed, well he was up in [Tacoma?] up there.

In Hawaii for three years, he was over in Okinawa three and a half years. Then Denver, Washington D.C. Then he retired down in Phoenix and he's workin' for Phelps Electric Company which is a big , I don't know, electronic company. The main office is in Amsterdam, I think, Holland, but they install the scanning machines and electric, uh, stuff they use in hospitals, you know. X-ray machines and stuff like that. He is in charge of all of the repair and all that. Installation and he has about twenty people technicians, doing all the work, he's just on the business end of it.

AR: I hope she [Elizabeth] likes the hot weather!

GA: Oh, a week from, well, she's coming out in August 8 and she's going to stay for a week, she does that every summer! To get cooled off!

AR: Do you have any grandchildren?

GA: Yes, Nancy has one son and he's, well this year he will be a junior at the University of Washington. He's doing very well. And Bill has a daughter and a son and the son, 'a course, is in high school, and the daughter is in grade school. And Elizabeth has two sons and they are both through college and out on their own.

AR: Do you have any great-grandchildren?

GA: Nope! [giggles] Not yet!

AR: Not yet, eh? When were you married?

GA: Um, October 22, 1934.

AR: Well, you were...

GA: Let's see, the day after Labor Day we started building. My wife, or my wife-to-be at that time, 'o course, we were going to be married on the twenty second of October so we gotta get the house built! It took only six weeks and my uncle built the house. He was a expert carpenter. [I'm not sure what name he is saying Sherbern, Sherwin, Sherman?] Do you remember S.....? *He lived down by the school.*

AR: No, did he have any children?

GA: No. He was a carpenter lived down here by the school. He was an old fellow. He was, He lived here when we moved out here, I think. Anyway, we moved in and were married right in front of that fireplace October 22 [1932] and that's where we stayed, never changed.

AR: You've lived in this house a long time then, haven't ya?

GA: Yeah. Yeah, I had eighteen hundred dollars in the house when I moved in. I borrowed five hundred dollars from the bank and my oldest brother loaned me one thousand dollars and I had three hundred dollars and I built the house!

AR: Was it this smooth operation when you started? You added some more to it?

GA: We didn't have anything to begin with. When I quit I had ten thousand chickens in there, and the hens, laying hens. Then I had the hatchery building and all this other stuff. Then I rented the buildings out for a few years and it didn't work out good, you know, and all this development came and all the property on three sides was developed, you know.

And those three streets dead ended into the filbert orchard up there [chuckle]. So I knew it was the last hope. I knew when I sold the filbert orchard. I knew what was going to happen. They just extended those streets because it was all planned ahead.

AR: Sure!

GA: The reason I sold it, the people were using the orchard for picnic grounds and stuff up there, you know, and throwing their garbage over into it and I thought "enough of that" I gotta get outa here and I sold the property. The last years I been done with the orchard anyway. I never had anything to do with the orchard. I leased it out to somebody.

AR: Umhum. There is another phase of your life out here and that's the beacon light. A lot of people in Tualatin never heard of that, and don't know what it is. Can you tell us something about it?

GA: Well, it was built in the, I'd say around 1925, somewhere's in there or six, anyway. It was when they had a string of lights from Portland to San Francisco about every ten miles they had a beacon light so they could fly the mail at night, you know and not just daytime. They tore it out, uh, in about, uh, 1935, probably wasn't there over ten years. And I remember Dad leased the land to 'em, you know, for ten dollars a year or somethin' like that.[chuckle] It was absurd! It was a sixty foot tower with this revolving light and a big concrete arrow twisted, pointed toward South and East, or I mean, North and South pointing toward the next beacon light. They was all painted yellow.

AR: Yeah, so you could see it from the air.

GA: Yeah.

AR: Who did he lease it too, who leased the thing, do you remember?

GA: It was the, uh, a branch of the government, whoever runs the aviation.

AR: Oh, it was Federal Government, then?

GA: Federal Government, yeah.

AR: In other words, they used the beacon light before they had radar?

GA: Yeah, they didn't have, the only kind of communication they had, you see. They didn't have any of this other stuff. When they put that in there, that's the first foundation they had put in in any light from San Francisco up here because that was all sand up there. Sandy soil and they didn't have any trouble driving those things into the ground, you know. [chuckle] I thought that was funny.

AR: Did you ever have any trouble, uh, complaints, from the neighbors because of the beacon at night?

GA: No. No, they serviced it, uh, 'A course they had to walk up the hill to service it because they had no gravel road up there. No, it was just a dirt road. No, I don't know of anybody that ever complained about the light. It really didn't bother any down low. It was up, you know. I don't even remember it shining in here or anything. But it was, uh, I remember climbing up in one day. We had a beautiful view from up there. It was a sixty foot tower and I got up there and it was windy and I didn't know if I was ever going to get down or not. It was windy to go down the ladder!

AR: Do you remember how powerful that was, or how many watts it was or anything?

GA: Um, it was pretty powerful. It had a big bulb but I don't know just what the candlepower was. 'A course it was magnified and it turned every, I'd say about ten seconds, six to ten seconds around there. It made a complet circle.

AR: I understand you could see it from quite a distance? What was the furthest you ever saw it from?

GA: Well, Mt. Hood. The farrest I saw it. That wasn't the only one you could

see though, you could see others, too. Because this was the last one before Portland.

AR: Did it show up pretty well?

GA: Yeah. I could count, I forget how many we could count from up there on the mountain that night, but several, going south.

AR: It must have been a pretty clear night!

GA: Oh it was. Boy it was a beautiful night. That's when, when you climbed Mt. Hood, you know, you started at Government Camp. You didn't start halfway up the mountain like they do now. [chuckle] So we walked up the mountain from Government Camp and then we rested a while, and got on the top by daylight and saw the sunrise.

AR: Climbed at night?

GA: Yeah. It was really easier because daytimes the snow might get soft, you know.

AR: What time of year was it?

GA: Uh, it was in either July or August and I don't remember which. I only climbed it twice.

AR: It was in the summertime, at least?

GA: Yes. But we didn't have any guide or anything. one of the kids had been up before and we just walked up!

AR: I suppose you had to pack in a lot of stuff?

GA: No, we just took a little lunch along. I remember drinking some water, getting some water up at Crater Rock and you know, that's warm, and I didn't realize that sulphur would make you sick and I drank some of it. [laughs]. Yeah, we went up there in real good time.

AR: I remember when I used to walk home from school, that beacon light helped me a lot because if I walked just right I was always stepping in the

light. I'd never have to, if it wasn't foggy, it was fine. But otherwise I just walked fine.

GA: I think it was about every six seconds, six seconds is quite a long time. Maybe it was ten, I don't know. Anyway, they serviced it every month. I don't remember whether it ever went out or not.

AR: Do you remember when mail planes used to fly through in the daytime?

GA: I don't recall, specifically, no.

AR: Generally about eleven o'clock in the morning one used to come by, it was a biplane.

GA: I don't recall that. I remember my first plane trip was at Rankins place down there on Swan Island, you know, had an airport, you know him?

AR: Ed Rankin? Umhum.

GA: Yeah, and Lawrence, my younger brother and I went in there and flew out over the ranch.

AR: Is that right!

GA: It cost us fifteen dollars, or something. That was the first plane I'd ever been in, and that was right out in the open, your hair a flyin!

AR: Had goggles on, eh?

GA: Yeah, we swooped down over the ranch, boy, that was quite a thrill!

AR: That's something a lot of people don't realize, too, that Swan Island used to be the airport!

GA: Yup. Then they got those three motored tin lizzies, you know.

AR: Yeah, they were workhorses!

GA: But the first commercial plane I ever flew was in '46 a DC 3. I flew East, that was the horrid most trip I ever took all those thermals in the

summer! Everyone was so sick!

AR: Yeah, they'd bounce up and down.

GA: It was all right goin' East but commin' back was when we'd hit that. Everybody on the plane was sick, even the stewardess and every time they'd stop off they'd get another bunch of cans to heave up in. [chuckle and Laugh] It was horrible!

AR: I don't know whether this will ever happen or not, but this goes to the Tualatin Historical Society, as you know. And maybesomewhere, sometime, somebody, if they ever want to write the history of this area, might want to refer to some of these things for notes or memories or something like that.

Is it all right with you if they ever use any of this material?

GA: [Pause] Oh, I don't think we've said anything that would hurt anybody, have we?

AR: Oh, no!

GA: Well, I don't want any publicity or anything, that's one thing.

AR: Well, it won't be that, it will just be people looking for historical facts, you know.

GA: That's O.K.

AR: Thank you!

[the end]