Livermore Heritage Guild Oral History

Interviewee: Frieda Wente Tubbs Callaghan

Interviewer: Arel Wente

Date: 6 Feb 1983

Length: 1:04 (MP3)

Description

Mrs. Callaghan in 1983 at age 86 was a senior member of the Wente family. She was the sixth child of the original Wente Family. Her father came from Germany because, as the second son, he had no property inheritance rights. Her father married her mother on the roof of the pickle factory in Oakland. The next day they boarded a train to live in a rental home on Second Street next to the Livermore city jail. This began the Wente grape and wine business.

Biographical Information

Obituary excerpted from the *Tri-Valley Herald*, 2 April 1986, page 18, col. 1

Frieda Tubbs Callaghan, a lifelong Livermore resident and a member of the Wente wine-making family, died on Monday, March 31, 1986. She was 89. Mrs. Callaghan was the daughter of Carl Wente, founder of the Wente Bros. winery. She also had been married to the late George Tubbs, a former Livermore mayor, and later to the late Richard Callaghan, a former Livermore city attorney. “She was a practical, caring, warm-hearted person,” said Carolyn Wente, her grand-niece.” She was always a tremendous support for us kids. She was always there when we needed her,” Wente said. “She is someone we will miss tremendously.”

Mrs. Callaghan was born and raised at the Wente family home on Tesla Road, site of the Wente family’s present-day winery. A graduate of Livermore High School, she had lived in the same Livermore home for 60 years before her death. “That generation watched this valley mature. They experienced so many things regarding the growth of this valley;” Wente said.

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Before her marriage to George Tubbs in the 1920s, Mrs. Callaghan worked as a bookkeeper at the Wente family winery and at a Livermore bank owned by her father. Tubbs, an active builder and mayor of Livermore from 1936 to 1940, died in 1957. The couple had no children. After Tubbs' death, Mrs. Callaghan worked as a "pink lady" volunteer at Valley Memorial Hospital. In 1972, she married Richard Callaghan, a longtime Livermore lawyer who had served as the city's attorney for 34 years. Callaghan died in 1985.

Mrs. Callaghan was a member of the Order of Eastern Star, Chapter 135, and the First Presbyterian Church of Livermore. Mrs. Callaghan is survived by a sister, Hilma Hagemann of Livermore. ...

Recording started at 0:00:00

AW: We are here in Livermore with Frieda Wente Callaghan. We are giving a taped interview for the Livermore Heritage Guild, which I understand then will be typed so that a transcript will go to the library, just for everybody's use. What it says is the purpose of the Livermore Heritage Guild is to gather and preserve interviews for scholarly and historical use. The tape and the transcript will be filed with the Guild, and then they will be available for scholars, et cetera.

Frieda Wente Callaghan is actually my husband's great-aunt. My husband is Eric Peter Wente, who is the grandson of Ernest August Wente, who many people know as one of the Wente Brothers. Frieda, who I'm sitting here with, is the sixth child of the Wente family. Her middle name being Wente, her last name from her second marriage now being Callaghan. Her first husband's name was George Tubbs, so it's Frieda Wente Tubbs Callaghan.

Frieda was born in 1896, which makes her a very young and health and robust and happy 86 years old. We are just beginning to think about the questions that are going to be meaningful and fun to talk about, and I know so many happy, wonderful vignettes that we've even reminded ourselves of today. It's going to be a pleasure to see where the interview goes and choose what it is we want to talk about.

AW: I think the first question I'd like to ask you, Frieda, would be to have you tell me a little bit about your mother and father. Like we were just talking before we started recording about your father. We were just talking before we started recording about how your parents met, which I know is an area of controversy between you and Brother Ernie. But tell me a little bit about the fact of the matter which was that your father came over from Germany, et cetera et cetera, and how he came to be in Livermore.

FC: My father was one of five sons and as was the custom in Germany the family property went to the oldest son. And the oldest son was named Ernest. My father was the second son; therefore, he would not have the chance to own the home property. So, his father had made a peculiar—as I remember my father telling me—his father had made a peculiar decision that if any of the boys wanted to go to America, the older son must pay him a certain amount of cash. And my father took this and came to America with a little money in his pocket. He had had two older half-brothers who had come to America before him, but he did not know their addresses and never came in contact with them during his lifetime. He stopped first in the central part of the United States and worked on a farm and then came to California and worked in the Napa area and also worked around the Springs—Adam Springs

AW: What did he do there? Not in the wine industry or in the grapes?

Time=03:57

FC: In Napa he was in grapes. And in the Adam Springs in the summer when he'd work around, I don't know. He repaired fences or whatever work Dr. Prather, who owned the Springs, asked him to do.

AW: What does that mean—the Springs?

FC: Well, Adam Springs was a spa where people in those days would go and spend a couple of weeks in the summer and stay— drink the water for their health. My father and mother used to go there in later years and spend a couple of weeks in July every year, and meet the same people who would gather there every year. But his real job was with Charles Krug Winery in St. Helena. And after a certain period of time, he decided he wanted to go into business for himself and bought this property in Livermore.

AW: And he was in his early twenties, I suppose, at this time? We could look in the Bible here and see what is the date of his birth.

FC: He was born in fifty-one.

AW: And he came over in the seventies [unclear], so he was probably a very young man, young adult.

FC: And he came to Livermore in the early eighties. And my mother came over to this country about, as I remember, about 1882. And the reason she came to America was because she had two sisters here in California.

AW: Wonder what had made the sisters already come.

FC: My mother was the youngest of a family of eleven. And one sister had already come and settled in Goshen, Indiana, and had married. A brother had settled — pardon me, that was a brother: Treutwein. And a sister who settled in Toledo.

AW: Did the sister marry in Germany and then come over?

FC: No, they came over here— What brought them over they just migrated—emigrated—like many for a better place to live and make a better living. And two sisters were here in California. One was married to a Swiss by the name of Gutsweller, and they had a small family, momma-and-pappa grocery store in St. Helena, which is close to Napa. And the other sister was married to a German by the name of Rudolph Franchi, and he had a pickle factory in Oakland. And that is where my mother went to live and stay when she first came over. She helped take care of her sister's five children and also part-time work in the pickle factory.

AW: There's a branch of the family that I'm learning for the first time, even though my last name is Wente these days. I'm learning that that's a branch that I've never heard anything about. Your mother's sisters, whatever became of them?

Time=07:24

FC: Her sister died when she gave birth to the fifth child. And in the meantime, she had married my father, and her sister's husband then raises children with a housekeeper's family. The other sister in St. Helena also died later, just natural causes.

AW: But I wonder where your mother's sister's children— I wonder if they're still in California, those generations of people.

FC: No, they're all dead. The next generations are here, though. And these Franchis that you have met: Stanley, Raymond, Barbara—they're the next generation. They're Rudy Franchi's—Mamma's nephew's children—and they're living up around here. Barbara lives over in Lafayette, and Stanley is on the Peninsula somewhere.

AW: Oh, for heaven's sake. Yeah. Well, I'm fascinated—those are branches of the family I really don't know about. I want to have you tell about the wedding between your mother and father, and then the first few days in Livermore and what Livermore was like when they came and had the little house by the jail.

FC: In those days the young Germans would gather on Saturday night at some person's home, and they loved music, and they would sing or dance or entertain themselves, as did the Danes and the various nationalities. And my mother's sister and her husband were very fond of dancing and liked music, and so their home was usually the center where all the young Germans gathered on Saturday night. And they lived near the pickle factory, and the pickle factory had, as I've been told, had a flat roof and they'd dance on this and sing on this—top of this—pickle factory. (AW: And this was in Oakland?) This was in Oakland when Oakland was a small city.

AW: It must have been if it was about 1880.

FC: Yeah, that's when it was. And when my mother and father decided to get married that's where they were married—on top of the pickle factory. And they had a big wedding of all these young Germans that they'd met and, from what I've been told, a very nice wedding supper. And they stayed in Oakland at the hotel one night and then came by train to Livermore, where my dad had rented a small house on Second Street.

AW: We're on Fourth Street right now in Frieda's home. Frieda, as an aside, what year did you and George build or purchase this home?

FC: 1922

AW: You've been in this same home since 1922.

FC: I've been in this same home for 60 years.

AW: So, when your parents first came to Livermore, they were really a couple streets away on Second Street.

FC: Just a few blocks away. And next to this little house that my dad rented was a vacant lot which adjoined the little city jail, where mostly, I've been told, was mostly for people who'd imbibed too much. (AW: For the drunks.) And they left them out in the sunny days to be in the sunshine on this lot. And my mother being very kindhearted would go out and slip them cookies or something through the wire fence. And she said every day, in the morning, there'd be some drunken occupants of the jail out there waiting for her to hand them some cookies through the wire fence.

AW: Somebody likely who had been picked up the night before. And she was the new bride and living in this little house.

FC: That's right. And my dad would walk back and forth out to where the winery was 'cause he had two horses, but they had to do the plowing and so forth, so he would walk. And after the little house of four rooms was built, they moved out there and lived right on the ranch.

AW: Now, had he already started to build the winery? Your father had already started the winery out there?

FC: I don't know. I don't think he built the winery then. They were planting the vineyard then.

Time=12:08

AW: Maybe he was producing a small amount in the Mel Winery.

FC: No. (AW: No?) No, he didn't have the Mel Winery then. The original winery is those acres right where the present winery is.

AW: Where your home was, where you grew up.

FC: Right. And my mother and father started this house there with four rooms, and as the family grew, he kept building on another room, and we ended up with 11 rooms and a couple of porches.

AW: Which is due to the fact that your parents had seven children.

FC: Yes, there were seven of us.

AW: And you're number six.

FC: I'm number six. And then they first, I think that I've been told, there were a certain amount of vines planted already when my dad bought it. And he and my mother—I've heard my mother say that she would go out and help him pick the rocks off the rest of it where he was going to plant more vines. And after she had her babies, she would take the babies out and put them in a box or something while she helped him pick up the rocks until they planted more vines.

AW: I think those stories mean a lot to me being associated with the winery, and so many people are interested in the California wine industry. And people who do know about the Livermore Valley and about Wente Brothers know that we have a very gravelly soil, which has a lot to do with the fact that your father made very fine Sauternes and Semillons. And the fact that your mother during her early years in starting those vineyards and having seven babies was out there picking up rocks I think is enchanting.

FC: Well, she did that with the first few. By the time I came along my mother no longer picked up rocks. (AW: [laughter] I don't think so!) She had plenty to do. (AW: I think so!) But after he made his first wine, they did it all by hand-crushing and everything. By that time, he had bought a spring wagon, as they called it in those days, and would put a couple of barrels on the back of it and would go up to the Altamont country to the farmers and peddle his wine.

AW: Is that how he started out selling?

FC: Yes. That's the way he started.

AW: And he would sell it in big jugs, I suppose.

FC: Well, he'd take it in these barrels, and then, I don't know. I guess— I imagine the farmers would have their own containers, and that's the way he started selling wine. (AW: That's fantastic.) And the winery consisted of just about one room, one big room, which the boys later, many years later, tore down to build a new winery.

AW: Now, by the boys—

FC: My father's two sons.

AW: Right. What Frieda means by the boys, she means her brothers Herman and Ernest, who changed the label eventually to be the Wente Brothers. (FC: That's right.) Right.

[Recordings stops and interview starts again at 15:10]

AW: Okay. Getting back to taping the oral history with Frieda Wente Callaghan: It is today Sunday, February 6, 1983. Frieda Wente Tubbs Callaghan is an original member of the Wente family, which is this year celebrating its centennial in the Livermore Valley. Frieda was born on June 1, 1896, which as you can see makes her a young woman right now, but full of history of the Livermore Valley. We're sitting right now in her kitchen on Fourth Street on this rainy Sunday with the family Bible in front of us, because the next few questions that I have to ask Frieda have to do with her brothers and sisters and different things that we want to talk about about their lives. I'd also like to reintroduce myself: I'm Arel Wente. I'm married to Eric, who is the grandnephew? Is that right? Grandnephew? You're the great-aunt; that makes Eric your grandnephew. Okay. I would like to talk about your siblings. Now just to go over for an outline's sake. Frieda is number six out of the seven Wente children. The first part of the tape we talked about her parents' marriage and about how they met, and about the early years a little bit, in Livermore, and about how her father started the winery, Wente Brothers. The first child was May, the second child Carolyn; then there were the three brothers: Carl with a "C," Ernest and Herman; then Frieda was the sixth child and then Hilma. Frieda, what year was May born?

FC: May was born on May the 7th, 1886.

AW: 1886. Can you tell me a little bit about May?

FC: May was a real farmer's daughter. She liked to drive—in her younger days—liked to drive horses. In those days we did not have an automobile, so we just drove around in a horse and top buggy, as we called it, or a two-seater surrey. And May would love to drive the horses. And in later years May had as her hobby sewing. She was a beautiful seamstress. She took lessons in Oakland from a lady there on how to sew, and she made much of our clothing for the girls. She also was a very fine cook, and especially she cooked at the church dinners. We had church dinners and May was always in the kitchen.

AW: Is this the Presbyterian Church?

FC: The same Presbyterian Church in the same location as now the original church.

AW: And was that little chapel built?

FC: That was the original church.

AW: The little chapel is still standing on part of the original structure on Fourth Street.

FC: That's right. And we used to—where now the Sunday School rooms are—is where we used to serve our annual dinners, and the kitchen was right behind that, and that's where you'd always find May. My other sister Carolyn and I would be waiting on the tables and doing things like that.

AW: Couldn't keep you away from where the people and the action was.

FC: Yes, we were all very busy. My mother also helped there but not too much; she said she'd let her girls do that. During the early flu, which was about 1920— (AW: Following World War I.) That's right. And many people here in Livermore were very seriously ill with that flu, and May and a few of the church ladies did much cooking and delivering of especially soups and things to the families who were suffering. So that was May's pastime.

AW: Did any members of the Wente family, any of your brothers and sisters, get sick during this time?

FC: Only me. (AW: Only you?) I had it quite badly. (AW: You did?) But I came out okay.

AW: Looks like. Is there anything else you wanted to say about May, or can I ask you about Carolyn now?

FC: I think that about takes May, takes care of May.

AW: What year was Carolyn—?

FC: Carolyn was born on October 9, 1887. When Carolyn and May first went to school, neither one of them could speak English, and so May was very timid, and Carolyn was the opposite.

AW: Because German was always spoken between your parents.

FC: Yes.

AW: Oh, how wonderful.

FC: Because my mother couldn't speak English then. And there was no one else for her to speak to, so she and my dad spoke German. So, the two first girls spoke nothing but German when they went to school. And May would cry because the rest of the kids called them "Dutchies." But Carolyn would toss it off, and soon they were all speaking English. Carolyn's hobby as she grew older was her voice—singing. She had a very beautiful contralto voice, and she loved music. This might be interesting to you. In those days at the funeral services always they had a vocalist. And this was one of her things that she did for charity. She sang at almost every funeral without pay because she loved her singing. And she also sang in the church choir for many, many years.

Time=21:34

AW: I wanted to ask you how big was Livermore at this time. This is in the mid-1880s. Maybe 3000?

FC: About 3000, I'd say.

AW: So, a town where everybody knew everybody very, very well.

FC: Certainly. You'd walk down the main street, and you'd say, "Hello, Joe," or whoever it was. Everybody knew everybody. Quite different than today.

AW: Quite different, but actually the real growth of Livermore didn't even come until the Lab came about 30 years ago. Slow, steady growth for seventy years, and then in the last thirty years, rapid growth. Right? (FC: That's right.)

AW: Next was brother Carl.

FC: Carl was born March 27, 1889. And he was a farmer boy like all the rest of them, but as he grew older, he wanted to do something else. So, he became a banker. At first, his first job in a bank was as a runner. Central National Bank in Oakland. You may not know what a runner was.

AW: You'll have to explain for everybody on the tape, Frieda.

FC: In those days—now we have the bulletproof cars that carry the money from one place to another. In those days, we didn't have those. So, the runner is transferring the money from one bank to another in Oakland. Carl would tell that there'd be two fellows go out: one would be carrying the money or the exchange checks to take to another bank, and another one would be following with a gun. And he was a big, husky guy, so he followed, that's what he did. He worked in Central Bank for about six months, and then they started the local bank here in Livermore. But Mr. Palmanteer, who was president of the Central Bank, was president of the little bank that started here. My father was vice-president, and later he became the president. (AW: Mr. Palmanteer? How do you spell that?)

FC: P-A-L-M-A-N-T-double E-R. He was a very influential banker in Oakland with the Central National Bank in Livermore.

AW: And so they started a branch in Livermore?

FC: It really wasn't a branch. It was a new local bank[1]. But he sort of sponsored it and helped the local people with my father, Mr. Hagemann, Mr. McKown, Mr. Hunter, and a few others I can't remember formed this new little bank.

Time=24:19

[1] Livermore Valley Bank

AW: This was as soon as Carl had grown up? Was he in his early twenties?

FC: Yes, he was in his early twenties at that time. Carl was in his third year in high school before he entered the bank, this was, and my whole family had typhoid fever, including Hilma, who was a baby. My mother and father, everyone but me, and they all had typhoid fever. And when the boys went to go back to school—Ernest, Carl and Herman were then in high school—Carl would not go back because he said he was not going to be behind his regular class. Ernest and Herman went back. That's when Carl went to work in the bank; that's what caused him to go into the bank.

AW: Oh. Well, he did all right for himself.

FC: And for never having been a college graduate, which he later sort of regretted, he finally ended up by being the president of the Bank of America.

AW: Worldwide, with headquarters in San Francisco at the time, as now.

FC: That's right.

AW: Well, the story I heard about Uncle Carl is that he got tired—this is what Granddad, who's Ernest, used to say—he got tired looking at the wrong end of a mule. There's better things to do with his life than looking at the wrong end of a mule plowing fields in Livermore, so that's why he had to go on and get into banking.

FC: In which he was very successful. (AW: Very, yes.) And this might be interesting to you. When he worked in the bank here in Livermore, he lived at home. He was not married at that time. He lived at home, but my father believed we all should know the value of money. So, he said that Carl would not have to pay for room and board, but he would have to milk the two family cows morning and night and take care of the milk, which in those days they put through a separator. And he had to tend to that; that paid for his room and board. Later when I worked in the bank—I worked in the same bank with him—my job to pay for my board was to get breakfast a couple mornings a week and wash the dinner dishes. We did not have a dishwasher in those days. (AW: Yeah. I bet not.) So that's the way we paid our room and board.

AW: I remember I got to meet brother Carl in 1970, which was just before he died, and at that time, of course, he was retired and living in San Francisco.

FC: Carl was a very handsome man. (AW: Large man.) Large man, and a very handsome man. But very friendly. The different employees of the Bank of America, whom I met in later years, always remarked about that: that he was so friendly when he'd make his official call at the bank. He'd come behind the counter and pat them on the back and say, "Hello Joe," or "Hello, Rose," or Mary, or whatever, and was very, very friendly. Never held up himself as being the head man of the bank. Also, the thing about Carl for which he was

well known was as a storyteller. He loved stories and at any gathering where he was, they always called on him for stories. He was a member of the local Company I, which was a local group of men who organized—I don't know what they organized for in the first place— (RICHARD CALLAGHAN: Part of a military organization.) Yeah. It was a military organization.

AW: That was Dick Callaghan, who's sitting here with us. Dick, of course, is Frieda's husband.

FC: Yes. Company I was organized to, well, assist the regular Army if needed. And Carl was one of those original members. And in later years when they were older men and would have their gatherings, he would always be called upon to tell his funny stories. Some good, some a little bit off-color. (AW: But he could tell them.) But he could tell them.

Time=28:42

AW: I'd like to now hear about Granddad, who is obviously my husband Eric's grandfather who, indeed, passed away a year and a half ago. Ernest August Wente was the fourth Wente child born to Frieda's parents, and he was the eldest of the Wente brothers. He started working in the wine business which later became known as Wente Brothers. Can you tell me about Granddad? About Ernest?

FC: Ernest was born July 9, 1890, on my mother's thirtieth birthday, and he always worked on the farm. But after he finished high school, he went to the University of California, Davis, and was enrolled in, I think, the first class. (AW: That's right.) He was a true farmer all his life.

AW: Granddad was known and loved throughout the wine industry, and I think that he was given a lot of credit for innovations in the growing of grapes. And obviously, he'd had the experience and expertise of years. I can remember many times my husband Eric would talk about conversations that Eric and Philip, his brother, had with Granddad concerning what to do one year to the next. One year there might be more grapes, one year there might be more rain, one year there might be more heat, whatever. And Granddad, because obviously he'd had the years and years of experience, would always come through with wisdom.

FC: And his other love was his cattle. Ernest loved his cattle and up until the time he died, almost— [tape briefly interrupted] he rode his horse back up in the hills until not too long before he died, and after that he would take his bottle and take up hay and see that the cattle had water. He just loved his cattle, more than the winemaking, really. He was a farmer and a cattleman, and that is why he and my brother Herman made such a good team. Herman loved making the wine and meeting the people to whom they sold the wine, but Ernest was the farmer.

AW: Ernest was the grape grower.

FC: That's right.

AW: Did he always have cattle? Like when the winery was starting, did your family raise cattle?

FC: Not to the— As I remember, not to the extent that Ernest did afterwards. They were too busy with their getting organized in their winery.

Time=32:04

AW: What about during Prohibition? What did that do to their involvement with the cattle end of the business?

FC: Ernie had cattle then, and cattle then, and they kept making— During Prohibition, they kept making their wine and storing it, what they didn't sell it for sacramental purposes.

AREI: Well, since we do have some cattle now, people say why do you have cattle, and I'll say well, Granddad and his brother had to survive Prohibition.

FC: That's right, and they had this beautiful grazing land in the hills they could not plant vines on, so they let their cattle run over these hills. And they thrived.

AW: Beautiful. Obviously, the hills still have the cattle on them, and the view of the whole valley is beautiful from up there.

FC: That's right. And that was Ernie's love—cattle.

AW: Granddad, a few years before he died— He died in—

FC: April 16, 1961. No, pardon me.

AW: No, no, no. He died in eighty-one.

FC: October 22, 1981.

AW: A year and a half ago. But Granddad was doing a taped interview, which is one of the reasons that—now Frieda's turn because at that time we knew that she had a lot to say but people were busy talking to Granddad about the wine industry. So, here we are now talking about these other good things too. I think—Could we talk a little bit about Herman and what Herman did?

FC: Herman was born November 4, 1892. Herman was entirely a different disposition than Ernest, and he loved meeting people and he loved his winemaking.

AW: Now Herman was the other "Wente brother," as it later turned out.

FC: That's right. They organized the firm of Wente Brothers. When my father had the winery, he did not bottle under a name. He sold his wine mostly wholesale.

AW: Do you remember when he started bottling his own under the Valle d'Oro label?

FC: No, I couldn't give you that date. I couldn't give you that; I don't know.

AW: But it was the boys later.

FC: But after the boys— After my father turned the winery over to the boys is when they took the name of Wente Brothers, and it was Herman and Ernest. Herman really was the winemaker, and Ernest grew the grapes and was the farmer.

AW: Right, and wasn't the name Wente Brothers adopted after Prohibition?

FC: Yes, yes it was. Herman attended the local schools, as we all did, and then he was a graduate from the University of California, and after he graduated from the university at Berkeley, he came back to work on the farm and the winemaking. He was well known throughout the state as a winemaker. In fact, they called him Mr. Winemaker of California, I think is the name among the grape industry that he was known. He was also very active in the Wine Institute.

AW: Oh, very active, yeah. I've seen lots of pictures. There are pictures at Wente Brothers right now of Herman and the special honors and awards. He was quite a leader, I understand.

Time=35:44

FC: Herman loved to travel and meet his customers, people who had restaurants or hotels. And I was talking to my brother Carl one day, and he said, "If I had his personality and the number of friends that he had among the hotels and restaurants throughout the United States, I would be very proud of myself. Because any place you went, they would know Herman because of his pleasant personality.

AW: Herman died in 1961.

FC: April 16, 1961. It was his date I gave you before instead of Ernest's.

AW: Right. But it was an untimely death. He was not that old at the time.

FC: No. Herman suffered greatly from his hip. His hip joint had deteriorated, and he was suffering such pain that he just couldn't take it anymore, and so he went back to Boston, to the hospital in Boston, and had what they thought at that time the finest team of surgeons for installing, I guess you'd say, new hip joints, which was practically new at that time. And he thought he had the very best surgeon, and he did have, but a blood clot took him within a few days. So, he died very suddenly.

AW: Right. And that was when my husband's father, Carl, was a young man working at the winery, and he had to take over a lot of Herman's responsibilities at that time. (FC: That's right.) And, of course, then he still had the counsel of his father, Ernest, your other brother. Well, we've talked about May, Carolyn, Carl, Ernie, and Herman, which brings us to you. But before I talk about you and ask you questions about your childhood and your marriage and so on, I'd like to know about the seventh child, who is Aunt Hilma.

FC: Hilma Ernestine Wente was born June 28, 1903. She also attended the local schools, as we all did. And for your information, when I say local schools, there was one elementary school on Fifth Street, Livermore.

AW: Is it where the Fifth Street School now is?

FC: It's the same location, but not the same school. This is the second school that was built. And that— (AW: Right. You can see it right there.) Yes. We're looking at it from my kitchen window. And there was one high school, and of course she attended that, was a graduate of that, as the rest of us were. She attended the University of California at Berkeley and was a graduate there, and hoped to go out into the business world—she graduated in a course in business or administration—but instead she married Ed Hagemann, who was a childhood friend and one from a very prominent farming family in Livermore. And so she married Ed, and that ended her career as a business gal on the outside world.

AW: And they were married over fifty years?

FC: Yes, they were married over fifty years before Ed died a couple of years ago. She has two children, Edward Hagemann, Jr., and he operates a large farm in the San Joaquin Valley, a very successful farmer.

Time=39:25

AW: Okay, so we've talked about— Well, we haven't totally talked about Frieda, who is number six, and is sitting right here. But there were seven Wentes in this generation. And Ernest had one son, who was Carl; and Hilma was the other of the seven children who had children. What are the names of her children?

FC: Edward Hagemann, Jr., and Barbara. Edward operates a very large farm in the San Joaquin Valley and is very successful. He raises several kinds of crops: corn and sugar

beets and wheat and several other things. (RC and AW: And lettuce.) Do you want to know about his children, too? He has two children, but they're not following farming. And Barbara, his other child, is married to Ray Giblen. And he is a computer expert. In fact, he has charge of the computers for the Chabot College.

AW: Oh yeah. Well, I've covered a lot about your siblings, and I'd like to start asking you, Frieda, more about growing up in Livermore. I guess my first question would be to tell us a little bit about your early memories of growing up at the house—your parents' original house, which stood way out Tesla Road. Was it called Tesla Road?

FC: Yes.

AW: And— Must have been a very busy household.

FC: Yes, it was. Every afternoon in the German custom, my mother would have to have her coffee klatch, if you know what that means.

AW: Yes, I do. Sounds like the center of fun.

Time=41:29

FC: And all our friends in Livermore, they would always arrive about three o'clock, and the coffeepot was always there waiting for them with some cake, homemade coffeecake. That was the daily deal. And Sunday nights the family would gather for a Sunday night supper, and all the children could bring in their friends and anybody could come, and it would be a big Sunday night gathering. And we didn't run around to see the movies or anything like that; it was always just our entertainment at home. Maybe my sister Carolyn would play the piano and we'd stand around and sing; or we did play card games. In later years as we grew older, we would play penny ante with my father for ten-cent jackpots. That was the limit because he said we were just playing for fun. And we played as if we were playing for the world! And every Sunday night we did this.

AW: Sounds like your home was the social center of Livermore at that time.

FC: We had a certain bunch of young people that we ran around with, and my mother and father always said they would much rather have our friends come in and meet the young people that we were running around with than have us running around the country.

AW: Well, this was the early 1900s. Two questions come to mind. One is on these Saturday nights or Sunday nights out at your parents' home, did you drink any wine? And my second question would be: How did people get there?

FC: Horse and buggy. Later they came by cars as cars came in. The first automobile in town was owned by Henry Crane, and he had a garage. And if he didn't have the first, he had one of the first.

AW: He was a mechanic?

FC: Yes. He owned a garage. Another one of the early automobiles was owned by our local doctor, Dr. Taylor. W. S. Taylor.

AW: Do you remember about what year that would have been?

FC: No, but I know that my father's first car was a 1910. (AW: Oh, really.) We had our car in 1910 because my sisters two went to Europe, and when they came home we met them at the depot as a surprise in an automobile.

AW: Oh, now the depot is the one that's still standing right down there.

FC: Yeah. SP Depot. Speaking of the depot, one of the big social things of the town was on Sunday nights was to go to the depot to see who came home on the train.

AW: I know a little bit about that because one of the pictures that I have in my home from the Livermore Historical Guild, I guess, is a picture of meeting the train, and I really can't tell for sure what year it was. You can tell somewhat—early 1900s and so on by looking at the clothing.

FC: Yes. It may be the picture when my two sisters came home from Europe. I don't know, but that was in 1910. They went to Europe to see the Passion Play. It was in 1910 in Oberammegau. And that Passion Play is held just every ten years. That's how I went in 1970. I saw it in 1970. But the main thing was the social event of Sunday afternoon was go to the train, the depot, and everybody and his brother would be there. You'd meet all your friends at the depot on Sunday night.

AW: The train came into town once a week?

FC: Oh no. (AW: Every night?) Every night.

AW: Okay, but Sunday night was the big event?

FC: Well, people would go to the city. If you were going to San Francisco to go to a show or anything, you had to go by train.

AW: It must have been an all-day project

FC: Oh, sure.

(RICHARD CALLAGHAN interjects: You had to stay over.)

AW: You stayed overnight in the city?

FC: You went down to go to a dinner or something Saturday night, you went by train.

AW: And you went by boat. Yes?

FC: No boat.

AW: When was the Bay Bridge built?

FC: Oh, yes, from Oakland to San Francisco. Ferry boats, sure.

AW: What year was the Bay Bridge built? Do you remember—it was after World War I?

FC: Oh, yes. It was in the thirties, because—Well, if I tell you a little bit about myself later, why I can tell you about the opening of the Bay Bridge. It was when George was mayor.

AW: Okay. Well, let me ask you then a little bit about your education in Livermore. It was the one- room schoolhouse.

FC: No, it wasn't the one-room schoolhouse. One school. There were eight grades. There were teachers for each grade and the principal. But there were several country schools around, one-room schools. And there were several of those around, I would say six or seven of those. And there was the one high school, which has since been destroyed, and the present high school is the new one built after that original high school.

ARIEL: Your small school must have been full of siblings.

FC: Yes. [When I] graduated from high school, which was in 1914, there were only nine in the class

AW: Wow, and it was Livermore High School?

FC: And that was Livermore High School. (AW: Nine in the class.) 1914

(RICHARD CALLAGHAN: That took in all the outside grade schools.)

FC: Yes. They went to that one school, and then later the Catholic church organ had a convent and that took some of the elementary children, but they did not have a high school.

AW: How did all those kids get to school before 1914? What were they doing?

FC: Well, I'll tell you about my brothers and sisters; they went to school with a horse and a cart. They all piled in this cart to go to school that way.

AW: And then the horse waited for them.

FC: Yes. They had a barn at school and the different kids unharnessed their horses and put them in.

(RICHARD CALLAGHAN: They brought a stack of hay with them and put that in the back, and fed the horse there.)

AW: Brought a stack of hay. Why not!

FC: Sure. But by the time I went to school, my dad had a—Well, I walked some of the time. Walked home many days from school.

AW: Probably about three miles?

FC: Two and seven-tenths to be exact.

Time=48:21

AW: To be exact. Okay. Well, I would like to get you talking a little bit about your marriage to George, but I don't want to jump too quickly. So, we're going from high school. Did you go back—Tell me what you did after high school.

FC: I worked in— By the time I got out of high school, this bank that I spoke about that my brother Carl worked in was located in what was known as the Masonic Hall, on the corner of First Street and Livermore Avenue, right by the flagpole. So, I worked in the bank for a little while until I was—could make up my mind what I wanted to do in college. But I liked banking; I liked mathematics, and my father said if you like this, why you can stay. So, I stayed and worked in the bank for four-and-a-half years. You might be interested to know what my salary was $35 a month. (AW: Oh boy…) My brother Carl started a few years previous to this at $30 a month.

AW: Sounds like a great job.

FC: It was a great job. And the whole force of the bank was our cashier, who was a very intelligent gentleman, who'd come out from the East because of his health. And so, Mr. Goddell was the cashier, Carl was the assistant cashier, and I was the one and only girl.

AW: That's Carl, your brother.

FC: My brother Carl, who later became the president of the Bank of America. When the bank sold out to—the local bank sold out in later years—Carl went to the Bank of America and worked himself up to that position. I stayed until I was about ready to marry George Tubbs.

Time=50:12

AW: Well, how did you meet George?

FC: He was very easy to meet. He was a local character. He had The Union Ice Agency and the Soda Works[2]. You may not know what the soda works were. Nowadays they buy all their soft drinks in cans from large companies, but in those days the soda works bottled their own sodas with the syrups, and he did this, and sold all kinds of sodas, as they called them, and ice, and peddled the ice around town with Polly, his one old white horse and an ice wagon. And he carried these 300-pound blocks of ice on his back into the many saloons which we had up and down Main Street.

AW: Would be make a delivery each day? (FC: Yes.) Each day? No wonder he knew everybody.

FC: And sure. And delivered also— People didn't have electric refrigerators in their homes, either. He also delivered ice to their homes.

AW: So, probably if the town was— Was it as big as 3,000 at this time?

FC: It was about 3,000. And then George became— You might be interested in knowing that he was elected on the City Council, which was composed at that time of five members. And the mayor was selected by them, as the mayor, for a period of a year at a time. George was elected two terms on the City Council, and six years of that he was the mayor.

AW: About what year was that?

FC: In the thirties. And you mentioned about the Bay Bridge. It was that time during George's mayorship that he and I had a lot of fun because we liked to go out and attend whatever was interesting. And that was during his term as mayor, the Bay Bridge was dedicated. The Golden Gate Bridge was dedicated also. So, we attended both those affairs. I was trying to think of something else that was built at that time. But we attended the —

AW: Maybe some highway?

[2] Livermore Soda Works

FC: Yes, the Altamont Pass, The Altamont Passwas at that time, and the governor was here to dedicate the Altamont Pass. And the fair on Treasure Island. That's the other one. So, it was all during the thirties that this happened, because it was all during George's administration. We attended them all.

Time=53:00

AW: And you were living in this house.

FC: I was living in the same house. And it might be interesting to know what the mayor of Livermore got for a salary at that time. (AW: Yeah?) Ten dollars a month, like all the councilmen did. And the city attorney, who was George's best friend, was Richard Callaghan, and he was the city attorney for 36 years.

AW: And Richard Callaghan is sitting right here!

FC: After my husband George died, I was a widow for 14 years, and then I married Richard, whose wife in the meantime had passed away.

AW: Well, I know that we don't have a whole lot more time left on this tape, but there's several little threads that I want to pick up. And one of them is— There is a delightful family picture, and Frieda is the apple of everybody's eye, and she's in the middle of this picture taken about 1900 or so, where you're a little girl with all the ringlet curls. And what I want to ask you is about that time your mother and father decided to take a steamer to Europe, and they chose you because they wanted to show you off to the relatives back home. Can you tell us a little about that trip?

FC: Yes. It was in June 1901. I was five years old, and I was the baby at that time. And so my dad wanted to show one of his children to his mother in Germany. That was the main reason. So, we went by train to New York, and then went by boat to Germany and visited over there, and that was it, and then came back by boat. And that's what we were doing over in Germany.

AW: There was some cute story I remember hearing about. Some conversation you had with the captain of the ship. Do you remember what that was?

FC: That was a ferryboat in Oakland. That was the ferryboat.

AW: Oh, a different story…

FC: A different story which my brother Ernie used to like to tell on me.

AW: Well, can you tell that?

FC: Well, I don't like to but I will.

AW: [Laughter] Well, you don't have to.

FC: My father and mother were taking me to Oakland so I could ride the train and the ferryboat and the streetcars. This was something all new to me, my first time, about that same age. So, we got on the ferryboat, and my father was lame; he walked with a cane because of an accident.

AW: With a horse?

FC: He fell off a hayride, wagon. They loaded hay, and they loaded it loosely, and he slid off and cracked his hip. So, he had a dry socket. That's why he walked with a cane.

AW: I see.

[**Recording stopped and started again at 55:54**. The following passage appears to have been read from a script.]

FC: Previously I mentioned that George was mayor of Livermore for six years. I would like to mention some of the things that happened during his administration. Our post office was built, and Senator William Gibbs McAdoo was the speaker at the dedication. The WPA[3] was operating at that time, and since the City of Livermore was allotted a certain amount of that money, George and the city councilmen decided to use it to the best advantage for needed permanent improvements. Mainly renovating the city hall, putting in many sidewalks and curbs, and extensive work in the recreation park, with a softball field, grandstand, and tennis courts. My father at that time was president of the high school board of trustees, which office he held for twenty-one consecutive years until his death, when my brother Ernest was elected to fill that office. After selling the soda works, George tried several business ventures but for years stayed with what he enjoyed most: buying and renovating old houses and buildings. They were mostly small houses for low-income people. Some of the houses we sold and some we rented. George did the buying, building, renting, and maintenance of the houses. I collected the rents and monthly payments, and did the bookkeeping. At that time there was a great need for this type of houses. Between 1945 and 1955, we built a group of small houses on Railroad Avenue, which we called Pacific Court, and now is called Tubbsville. The houses were not fancy according to our present standards, but they were neat and clean and the people who lived in them were happy. You will be surprised to hear the average monthly rent for the apartments, which was $25. And for the houses about $45. We purchased a strip of land from Orrie Kennedy Wylie in 1943 between College Avenue and Palm Avenue. It was at that time a grain field. We divided it into lots, and to subdivide it to the best advantage we gave a strip to the city for a street, which we called Pepper Street. It is now known as South G Street. Lots sold for about $250 to $350. George's pride and joy was the garage that he built for Lear and Kimler for their Ford agency. Stanley Gibson, the manual

[3] Works Progress Administration

training teacher at the Livermore High School, supervised the construction. It was built of tile and brick and was the first steel-reinforced building in Livermore. When it was finished on August 8, 1927, George, who liked parties, dedicated with a big barbecue to which he invited the city officials, businessmen, and anyone who helped him with the construction. It is no longer a garage but is now the Municipal Court building on North Livermore Avenue.

George decided to retire and we sold most of our properties, when George suddenly died on December 1, 1957. For almost 14 years I was a widow and then I married our old friend Richard M. Callaghan. After 55 years of practicing law in Livermore, he is now retired as of January 1, 1983. I am very proud to say that both my husbands received the annual civic award from the Fraternal Order of Eagles in recognition for outstanding public service. George received it in 1956, and Dick received it a few years later. My hobbies have been church work, being a Pink Lady at the Valley Memorial Hospital, and traveling. Since my first ferryboat ride on San Francisco Bay, I have traveled around the world by planes and cruise ships and visited many interesting places. I have been from the North Cape in Norway to Capetown, South Africa, the most northern and most southern spots in the Eastern Hemisphere. And from Alaska to Tierra del Fuego, Chile, the most northern and most southern spots in the Western Hemisphere. However, Livermore has always been my home and always will be my home.

Time=1:00:48

AW: You have such a wealth of Livermore history that I just find it fascinating. When you talked about that first Livermore High School, was it located where it is now? Or was it—

FC: On the recreation line [unclear].

AW: Oh, it was on the recreation line. Okay, I wasn't clear. I just wanted to have that clear.

FC: It was on the site where the Recreation Building lot is now. (AW: Okay, good.) At it was the first union high school in the state of California, if that's interesting to you.

AW: Oh, yes. I guess by "union high school," they meant they unified the whole—

FC: All the various districts, all the schools, the outlying schools. But it was the first unified high school in the state of California, and therefore it was Livermore High School— Union High School number one.

AW: Right. Well, when you said "Pacific Court," that rang a bell to be because there is over, across the street, on G Street here, just as you go past that little green hedge there, there's a sign, and it says, "Victory Court." Does that ring a bell at all? There used to be a sign there because there were buildings back there behind that one house.

FC: Yes. That was the old manual training building from the high school. When they built the new high school, George moved that old one over there and used it for a shop and storage shed. (AREL Oh, is that right?) But the buildings I'm talking about on Railroad Avenue were never called that. They were always called Pacific Court until now they call it Tubbsville, and they're very dilapidated now. Whoever owns them does not take very good care of them.

AW: Yes, I know; it's a shame, it really is. And then I wanted to ask you about the soda works. Where were they? [unclear] Do you want me to turn it off?

Interview stopped at 1:03:02

Arel Wente provides a brief copyright statement.

Recording stopped at 1:03:45

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