

ORAL TAPE TRANSCRIPTION

Interviewee: Mrs. Marcella Rideout (M)
Location: William Penn Hotel
Date: Sunday, October 3, 1976
Interviewer: Phyllis Pearce (P)

Subject: A. R. Rideout, avocado industry, Rideout home

Conversation began before tape was turned on. Mrs. Rideout was here from her home in Grove, Oklahoma, to attend the 40th anniversary reunion of the 1936 graduating class of Whittier High School.

P: I am really anxious to see that little booklet that was put out by the Calavo people. Esther told me about it and said she knew someone in the family had it.

M: I have it right here, along with some old pictures. Now this one goes back farther than the avocados (Chase Walnut Tree). Do you think this picture of the walnut tree can be restored or a copy made of it?

P: I think so. We have, temporarily at least, a very fine young photographer who can do wonders.

M: You see, so many of Mother Rideout's pictures went through a fire and she salvaged as much as she could. Of course, you can see the evidence on the edges of this one. But, it was interesting because of giving the age of this walnut tree.

P: Now, is what is known as the Ganter or Woodworth avocado on the old nursery site?

M: The Ganter is on the place that was sold to - I can't remember, do you know?

P: It is now in the parking lot of the Plymouth Congregational Church. (NB: Rideout sold to Ganter who sold to Woodworth)

M: Yes, I have seen it. Does it still have a plaque on it?

P: Yes, I think it still does. (NB: Checked and there is no sign or plaque of any kind. Brought this to attention of Whittier Historical Commission which will investigate.)

M: My sister-in-law notified me that they had done this - put up a plaque.

P: I wondered if that is where Mr. Rideout's first nursery was.

M: You see, they used to live down on Magnolia and then they just moved on up. They would build and sell, build and sell and go right on up the hill. At one time he owned all that area.

P: How far down on Magnolia did he own, do you know?

M: That, I'm afraid, you will have to get from the daughters. I don't think Al remembers because that was before his time. If you would ask her that particular question, ask Esther, because that was before my time with the family, too.

P: That would help locate the nursery.

M: Now these - you wouldn't be interested in all of them, but I thought that if you saw them all you could pick a sequence if there is anything you want out of them. There it is (the hill) before anything was done and then here are some showing the clearing of the cactus and the burning of the cactus and so forth. Here they are clearing away just the cactus. See how much cactus there was?

M: Here is one with a really fantastic view and the old tools - graders and scrapers they used to build Rideout way. You can use one or two to depict what you are aiming at. And then this is the first oil rig on Rideout Heights. That was the gusher that came in.

P: And the avocado trees?

M: See how small they are and then this is the home when the trees were very, very small.

P: Yes. This is a better picture for copying than the one we have because the one Esther loaned me of this is blown up so big and it was a copy - the roof line has disappeared.

M: This is really too light, too. Maybe he could line in some of the lines that are obvious on this one. This one, of all of them, is the one that I didn't find the negative of. I do want this one back for sure.

P: Don't you want these back.

M: This one I do and this one. Here is the big crew. Now, it might be an interesting one. You can see more of the details of how the hill development started.

This is Dad and Mother Rideout. I don't think it will be too light.

This is something that I don't believe too many people know about. You see, the government used to send Dad all kinds of seeds - cherimoyas, jujubas, and everything from all over the world to try in his experimental garden. The public would throng up there to see his experimental garden. He had ropes around following a path for them to stay behind so they could hear the explanation and then show them through the garden. That is a group of interested spectators coming through, viewing the garden.

P: This would be the house?

M: It would have to be, yes. But it is so blurred I don't know if you can get it in. See, this was down on the side of the hill where it was a little flatter where he had his experimental garden.

P: A friend of mine lives right about here, apparently, because in

his yard are some of the Rideout experimental trees. He has trees that bear three or four different kinds of avocados every year. So that would have to be.

M: Well, of course the whole hill was his before he started selling it off.

P: But he didn;t experiment all over the hill, did he?

M: Pretty much. Oh, he was interested in experimenting with anything that gave a good root stock and good size - that was what he would choose to experiment on. And, of course, he started root stock - that would always be little Mexican seedlings because they would withstand the cold and frost. They had very little frost - it is almost frost free up there.

P: In these ads for Rideout real estate he says that "Here we are, high above the frost." So it was and is good avocado territory.

M: It is a beautiful spot and, also, the avocados in through this area hold a lot more oil content. I don't know if you are aware of this, but more than around Fallbrook and some of the other avocado areas. It is the oil content that gives the avocado its flavor and richness.

P: What is this one?

M: This one is Aunt Edna's - Mr. Rideout's sister's old home. It has gone down now but it was an old landmark for many years.

P: Where was that?

M: It was down on S. Greenleaf. I'm sure it has been torn down because they made her sell which was cruel. She didn't live long after that. I guess they didn't make her do it, just nagged at her until she finally did sell.

P: What is there now?

M: It is a parking lot I believe. And in her yard, this yard, it was fabulous. It had huge, big trees like a wilderness. You could go back in there and it was just like being in an entirely different country. She had yellow raspberries that climbed up a big tree there and went way high. Her house was like a museum. Any old timer couldn't help but remember this place because it stood out like a sore thumb with that one huge, tall palm tree. There was nothing on either side of it, to speak of, for all those years.

P: Did you grow up in Whittier?

M: Yes.

P: What was your maiden name?

M: Kelly - Marcella Kelly. I lived on S. Greenleaf just below Whittier Blvd. The first block below Whittier Blvd. These are the obituaries from the Times and from the Whittier News. I just stuck those in.

P: Where in Oregon did he come from?

M: I've heard it often enough but I don't remember. Esther could tell you.

P: Isn't that strange. I never even thought to ask if he was not from this area.

M: Mother Rideout was. She was Myrtle Smith and the Brokaws were her half-brothers. She was raised on South Painter in that huge big house there.

P: Is that the Hazzard house that is still there? The one with the rose garden?

M: I don't know about the rose garden but it does have several porches.

P: One of the Hazzard houses was moved out when they put in the Quad, or rather it was destroyed.

M: I'm sure that the one still standing would be her old home place. We are so foolish. When mother was still alive we would ride around and she would tell us historical events here and different things and we were so uninterested. Now I'd give my eyeteeth to remember what the things she told us were.

P: That's one of the reasons we got involved in this project because there is so much here that is just disappearing.

M: Mother Rideout was born here, Al was born here, and my oldest son was born and so were his children so I have grandchildren who are fourth generation Californians.

P: Is your son still here?

M: No, he is a major in the Marine Corps and is stationed at But when he was in Viet Nam they sent his reports here - he would not let them send the reports to the papers in Tustin because his wife was there. He didn't know it had been sent but Whittier was his birthplace so they sent a big write-up of his achievements and all to Whittier. The only reason I know it was because my sister-in-law mailed it to me out of the Whittier News.

This is a phase that very few people probably know that Dad Rideout had. During the first World War he was a cartoonist, a war cartoonist. There age, you have to know the history of the first World War for them to mean too much.

P: Being a history teacher I can relate to them.

M: I'm sure you can.

P: May I copy these.

M: Yes, you are welcome too. Some place I have - he used to write for the Chamber of Commerce of Whittier. You might be able to dig some of that up. I have a pamphlet of the Chamber of Commerce but I could not find it.

P: Is that the one for 1917?

M: It might very well be.

P: I have a copy of that one. Virginia Stooddy loaned it to us but there is no author on it at all, and at this point it is pretty hard to trace back to find out who did write it.

M: Dad wrote for the Chamber of Commerce for years. In fact, this is almost unbelievable. My Father - we came here from Kansas - for years before he came he wrote to all the Chambers of Commerce in the Southern California area. He got information to try to decide where he would locate when he came out. He brought six of us in a covered, hard wheeled, rubber tired - what would be a camper today - and he, because of Dad Rideout's writings, before he ever came to California had Whittier chosen as the place he wanted to come to settle.

In reality, my father-in-law was responsible for my father settling in Whittier. Of course, I didn't meet Al for several years.

P: Did your father farm?

M: No. He was a carpenter/contractor here in Whittier.

P: That brings me to another question. Do you know who built the Rideout house - who was the contractor?

M: Didn't Alberta or Marjorie or Esther know?

P: Esther didn't know.

M: Marjorie might know.

P: Which is the sister who sent you the form?

M: It was Alberta.

P: Esther said Alberta didn't know either.

M: I'll bet Marjorie would know. She has moved over to the Presbyterian retirement place. Her name is Cowan and her husband was a Presbyterian minister.


P: Okay, I'll get in touch with her. That is one thing we have not been able to find out.

M: Marjorie's memory for details is really good. I cannot understand Esther not remembering because she is like an encyclopedia.

P: She is so good on the work with the avocados because she worked with her father.

M: Yes, she helped bud and do all the other things. When we were first married we were in the avocado nursery business too.

P: With your father-in-law?

- M: No. We branched out on our own. We moved over to Walnut - what is now Walnut near La Puente. It was plain "Puente" in those days. We had a nursery over there and from there we went to Fallbrook and then came back into the Orange County area.
- P: How long have you been in Missouri or do you live in Oklahoma?
- M: Well, our address is Route 1, Anderson, Missouri, but we live two and a half miles across the line into Oklahoma. Uncle Sam doesn't recognize borders. It is actually Oklahoma and we have to have Oklahoma driver's licenses. Our phone is a Grove number.
- P: Is your husband retired.
- M: Yes, we've been retired for some time. I say we are retired quote, unquote. He came out of retirement and put in two new businesses back there but we do as little as possible.
- P: Let me see if I got to all my questions. I don't usually write down the questions but I knew you were pressed for time. Yes, we have covered all of them.
- M: I don't know if I have been of any help to you.
- P: Yes, you have. Let me ask you something else. Mr. Rideout was living at 1508 Guirado Road. Where was that?
- M: It is now part of Rose Hills Cemetery. In fact, they are buried quite close to where their house used to be. It is right in the same area.
- P: His brother, W. L. Rideout of Yucaipa is mentioned as being in business with A. R. Rideout.
- M: He was at one time, for quite a spell, and then he moved to Big Bear and pioneered Big Bear. He was one of the first pioneers of Big Bear. Win Rideout - he had Boulder Bay Camp for years. He built it and lived there the year round and watched it grow.
- P: Esther talks about her father in such terms that he must have been a real visionary.
- M: Oh, he was way ahead of his time.
- P: Tell me about some of those things because that helps the man come alive for me.
- M: He was a man so interested in everything that grows. Life and the earth and he had a way with plants. He could just do anything with them. I wish I had a picture of the way he would bud. And also my husband because Al budded and did the same things the same way. He would sit like this - I can't even do it - with his feet straight out like this and hitch himself along while doing the budding flat on the ground. He budded with chewing gum.
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P: Esther told me how she used to have to chew gum and she just hated doing it. Did all the kids line up and chew gum for their dad?

M: Probably. Al also budded with chewing gum for years. He didn't always. He finally got to where he would do without it but he used a lot of chewing gum. I remember helping fix the ties. We would take muslin and spread it out and melt beeswax and honey - no, paraffin. That's what it was. We would melt it and paint it on muslin. When it was dry we would tear it into narrow strips just the right length for a tie.

P: You would tear it after the coating was put on it?

M: Oh, yes. After it was dry you would strip it, not before.

P: That is interesting. I could just visualize those kids standing there, chewing gum, waiting for their dad to say, "Okay, I'm ready."

M: I think it probably happened in their family the same way it did in ours. We were in the nursery business when Albert Raymond Rideout the third was born. After they would go through and ball the trees - and that was an interesting process, too. You know, they would dig a hole around it and then scoop under it to cut the tap root and put a gunny sack around it; slide the tree in, pull it up and tie it around the tree. This would leave big holes and so I'd take the baby out and put a blanket in the hole. He'd sit in there and be happy as a lark watching his daddy work. As he moved along he'd pick up the baby and move him closer to him. And maybe I'd be out stripping ties for him at the same time.

P: Is the nursery you started still in existence over in Walnut?

M: Nothing is left but some of the avocado trees. I'm sure you would find some of them on the top of the hill over there in Walnut. It's the very top hill of what is now the town of Walnut.

P: If I remember correctly, there are a number of houses there that have full grown avocado trees.

M: Well, I'm sure that there would be unless they've cut them all down. They made a practice of those that wouldn't ball out - there would be one that maybe wasn't quite large enough for that balling or period and they they would go on to a new section and those would be left to grow here and there.

P: What was the Rideout house like on the inside?

M: You will have to get that from the sisters. If I get the opportunity I'd love to go through it but you see it has been out of the hands of the Rideouts ever since I've been in the family.

P: When was that?

M: We were married in 1937 - June of 1937.

P: The Rideouts lived in the house 18 years and it was built about 1913 or 1914.

- P: So that would have meant they left in about 1932 which would be five years before you and Al were married. I have not been in the house but I hope to go in when I get the property release from the Wolfs.
- M: Who owns it now?
- P: There name is Wolf.
- M: How long have they owned it?
- P: I would guess about 5 years. Did the Rideouts sell to the Eccles?
- M: This is what I was trying to wrack my brain about. It was quite soon. Whether they were the very first or second I am not positive. But they very well might have been the first. Have you contacted any of the Eccles? (NB: I have been unable to locate any of them)
- P: The Hofstetters sold it to the Wolfs and they seem to have owned it longest since the Rideouts left there. I am going to have to contact them, too. It is a matter of time. I have a forty hour a week job in addition to this and I can't just say, "Well, kids, we are not having class today.

(The conversation turned to other matters for a few moments.)

- P: Do you have brothers and sisters who are still here?
- M: Yes. I have Raymond Kelly who lives in the Towers. Then I have a brother H. H. Kelly over in La Puente.
- P: Would Win Rideout have any relatives here?
- M: Oh, he's a whole story in himself. He was really quite a man. He was an editor who had his own paper, very intelligent, quite an interesting character.
- P: Does he have any descendants in this area that you know of?
- M: He has, I believe, a great grandchild in this area. In fact, Eleanor Hall that I'm staying with - I just learned this morning her son married Uncle Win's great-granddaughter.

Charles Tayles was his son-in-law and Sarah Tayles worked at the bank for years before she died. I think someone who could give you information on this who used to live up there is Virginia Whittemore. She is a cousin of Myrtle Rideout. Virginia's mother and Al's mother were sisters.

It is Charles Whittemore, I believe. We used to call him Curly.

- P: The families here are so inter-related. You start with one and come up with the same names back and forth. But until you have all the names you don't have all the story.

(Tape was turned off briefly)

M: Bert Rideout was never idle; never for a moment.

P: How did you decide on Oklahoma for retirement?

M: When Al was a freshman in high school his folks sent him back to John Brown University which at that time had a high school as well as a college. It is in Arkansas but still in the foothills of the Ozarks. He just loved the area so when he got to the point where the hubub was getting him down and he wanted to retire, he wanted to retire in the Ozarks. We went back and looked through the area and decided on Grove.

P: On this picture of Bert Rideout's parents it says Coos Bay, Oregon. Is that where they came from?

M: Well, Grandmother Rideout had written many books. She wrote Six Years on the Border, Camping Out in California, and several others. I think Alberta has all the copies and they are absolutely fascinating. I had some of them and read them to my children. They are written for her grandchildren. Really, she wrote them to her grandchildren.

P: Are they personal experiences?

M: Yes. Her personal experiences of moving from the mid-West to California. He was a circuit rider preacher and he wrote a book but she beat him out - hers were better. He was a -

P: Hell-fire and brimstone preacher?

M: Yes, he certainly was.

Oh, here is what I wanted to show you. This was taken of my youngest son two years ago at the fair and when he brought it back to me I told him he looked just like his great-grandfather Rideout. (NB: He does, only happy and great-grandfather looks grim.)

M: If you are interested in any of those books I'm sure that Alberta has them, or maybe Esther.

P: No, Esther didn't mention them but I will check with all the sisters.

M: Have you checked with Betty?

P: Which one is Betty?

M: Betty in Colton? She wouldn't have too much; she was quite young.

You mentioned a characteristic of Dad Rideout a while ago. He was such a gentle person and he used to - the thing that my husband remembers, the most outstanding thing about his father - were the nature walks that he used to take him on. He used to take him off through the hills and search out little things like trap-door spiders. You know, they are very hard to find and you have

to know what you are looking for. He'd tease them until they opened and then feed them ants and teach him what it was and others things about nature in the area.

P: Were there yellow violets up on the hills then?

M: Oh, I'm sure there must have been. That was before I knew the family but the characteristic carried right through and that was the way my husband raised our children. It meant so much to him the way his father taught him and we lived for years in Cowan Heights in Orange County on the Tustin hills on the back side where it was wilderness like where Albert was raised.

P: Did you have a nursery there?

M: No. We were in business - Al's Woodcraft. We were the seventh family to build in Cowan Heights. We had lived in Lemon Heights but we sold our place to the Riefschneiders (Virginia Knott) and moved to Cowan Heights.