G: This is the second in a series of interviews with Arthur J. McFadden by Stephen Gould on May 14, 1970, in Santa Ana, California.

You mentioned that you were born in a house near the corner of Flower and First streets in Santa Ana. Is that house still standing?

M: The house is still there, but it's been turned around so it faces back on Walnut Street now. There's a service station, needless to say, on the corner where I was born which is the southwest corner, but the house is still there.

G: Who originally built that house?

M: Well, it wasn't our house, it belonged to my great-grandparents named Potter. My father and mother lived down at the old landing on the bay at Newport and they came up here when I was born and stayed a couple of weeks.

G: Were the Potters early residents of Santa Ana?

M: Oh, father and mother stood up with Mr. [William] Spurgeon and his wife when they were married and Mr. Spurgeon was the founder of Santa Ana, so that goes back about as far as you can get.

G: What is your earliest remembrance of First and Flower streets. Could you describe what the area first looked like?

M: Well, there was a house right there on the corner and it had a great, big, weeping willow tree in the backyard and then the country to the south and west of it was all farming land. Father bought ten acres in there and had it for two or three years and then he sold it, but I can remember, of course, making many visits to my great-grandparent's home down there. They lived there as long as they lived.

G: What did they raise in that area?

M: They didn't farm; they didn't own enough area to farm at all. They were retired.

G: Was there a lot of mustard grass or mustard weed around, or was that area of Santa Ana pretty much cultivated?

M: It was pretty much cultivated.

G: You mentioned last time that many people were killed in Newport Harbor making sounds.

M: Soundings.

G: Yes, soundings. Could you describe how the people made these soundings in the early days?

M: They went in a dory to the mouth of the bay. It was at the bar, the mouth of the bay, that was the shallowest place, and it changed. It was sandy bottom and the bottom of the channel shifted from day to day and week to week. It was in the making of these soundings that these people were drowned. The bar was exceedingly rough.

G: When you say it was rough, do you mean that there were strong currents?

M: There were waves. The waves came in from the ocean and when they hit that shallow water, why, they were high and they broke. So it was a very dangerous place to be in a small boat.

G: How high were the waves?

M: I can't tell you that, but they were high enough so they capsized the boats once in awhile.

G: Do you remember when the railroad fell off the pier into the ocean?

M: I remember very distinctly; that was the 1800s. As I remember it was the winter of 1893 and 1894, but it was in the middle of winter and we had a very bad southeast storm. At that time they had what corresponded to a warehouse out on the pier and it went out along with the rest of the pier. They didn't build one on there when they rebuilt the pier.

G: Were any people killed?

M: No, as far as I know, nobody was hurt at all.

G: How many rail cars went into the ocean?

M: Oh, I don't think there were over three or four.

G: How did they go about retrieving the lost cars?

M: I can't answer that, but they got them back out again, eventually.

G: Was a good part of the pier destroyed at that time?

M: No, not a great deal of it.

G: About how many feet of the pier would you say was destroyed?

M: I wouldn't think it was over a couple of hundred. There's a deep submarine canyon that comes to a head right at the outer end of the pier and that causes the waves to be less high there than they are on either side. That's the reason they built the pier there in the first place.

G: Do you remember any of the early engineers or any of the early people who were well known in that area for working with the railroad?

M: There were very few people that worked for the company down in Newport Beach, I'd judge not over a half a dozen. The man's name who was the boss was Schirmer S-C-H-I-R-M-E-R. He was the boss of it as long as they owned it. He had a younger brother that worked down there, too, named Joe Schirmer.

G: Can you remember any other disasters that happened in those days?

M: No, there weren't any others.

G: Do you remember any of the early floods and how they affected the Santa Ana Valley? Which was the worst flood that you can remember?

M: Well, all the floods in those days spread out on the river bottom from the Huntingtion Beach mesa clear over to the Newport mesa. There wasn't any well-defined channel of the river there and it was all covered with willows. The result was that the water spread there and came to a practical standstill and all the sediment that was in the rivers that came down settled in the river up there. So it didn't fill the bay up at all. Just prior to the time that they built the railroad down at Newport most of the river bottom between the two mesas was . . . the willows had been cut off and it was under cultivation. The result was that the water went right into Newport Bay and it filled up some of the places back of west Newport as much as five feet in one flood. For that reason they proceeded to make a channel of the river out into the ocean there and put a dam across at the bitter point so the water didn't go into Newport Bay at all.

G: You mentioned that one of your first jobs was helping the railroad. How did they survey the railroad lines in those days?

M: Oh, engineers had the same kind of transits that they have now, there wasn't any particular difference in the engineering. I was quite familiar with that because I drove the team for the engineers when they surveyed the railroad from Newport up to where Huntington Beach is now and then back up to Smeltzer so they could ship the celery out over the railroad. They shipped 2,000 carloads of celery out the first year after that railroad was finished.

G: Did those survey methods differ any from the survey methods used by the Southern Pacific or any of the other railroads?

M: No, I don't think they did; as far as I know they didn't.

G: How did your father and your uncle acquire the land that the rail line went through?

M: Well, practically all the land from First Street for a mile or so south of First Street the rest of the way down to where it crosses the river into Newport, belonged to the Irvine Company and they acquired it from them. I don't know if they acquired a right-of-way up Second Street . . . and had the depot up from about the corner of Second and French streets.

G: Did they have to buy the property outright from the landowners or did they have lease arrangements?

M: I don't know.

G: Some of the early lines that the Southern Pacific surveyed didn't get approval of the property owners before they went through. Have you ever heard of those experiences?

M: Of course, the Southern Pacific owned the state of California politically in those days and they just about did as they pleased. This railroad was built by people who lived here locally and they made the same kind of a deal as anybody else would make with the property owners. They bought the land that Newport Beach is on from the state, just tide and overflow lands.

G: Since the lumber company had yards in Corona, San Bernardino and Redlands, do you know if they ever desired to expand the rail line to these areas.

M: No, they never did. They transferred the line, the cars, on the Santa Fe at Santa Ana. They were connected with the Santa Fe and the Santa Fe, of course, had the line up Santa Ana Canyon to Corona, Riverside, and Redlands.

G: What was the general feeling that you remember the people having toward the Southern Pacific in those days?

M: (Chuckle) Well, I can't answer that question outright. I was just a small boy, of course, and I had very little idea what the political situation was, but I know that the Southern Pacific was in complete control of the state politically.

G: Some people say that their political control lasted until about 1915. Since you were involved as a lawyer in early Santa Ana, what do you recall that the feelings of the farmers or of the general population were toward this control by the Southern Pacific?

M: Well, Southern Pacific didn't have much control of what's now Orange County. The Santa Fe Railroad, of course, was built clear through San Diego in the early days and the Southern Pacific depot was up about six or seven blocks further north than where it has been for the last thirty or forty years, but there was no feeling one way or another.

G: Do you remember any instances when the Southern Pacific treated people unfairly?

M: No.

G: Do you think that perhaps the feeling was higher about the Southern Pacific up in the central valley area than it was down here?

M: I'm not in a position to say anything about that.

G: You mentioned last time that your uncle Archie McFadden took you to the mountains every summer. Which mountains did they go to in those days?

M: Usually the San Bernardino Mountains up somewhere in the neighborhood of where Bear Valley is now. I started a Santa Ana colony up by the Santa Ana River where the south fork comes into the Santa Ana River in the San Bernardino

Mountains--it carries most of the water in the river--back in 1912 or 1914 and some of the people still own their cabins. My girls own mine, Colonel [S. H.] Finley's children own his, Uncle John's children still own theirs, and the [H. J.] Forgys still own theirs, so there's still the Santa Ana colony right there, what's called South Fork now. It's on one of the main roads now to Bear Valley, but it wasn't in the early days. In fact, you either had to walk or ride a horse to get in there.

G: How large was that Santa Ana colony when it was at its height?

M: Well, I believe it had about six families interested in it.

G: About how many acres were involved?

M: Oh, there wasn't any great acreage, we simply had leases from year to year from the Forest Service for the land that our cabins were on, that's what we still have. That's the way they do.

G: Is there any landmark name for the area, is it called Santa Ana Colony?

M: It's called the South Fork.

G: You mentioned last time that you witnessed the burning of Chinatown. Were there any people who disagreed with the method used or did everybody agree that it should be burned down?

M: As far as I know they all agreed. Of course, there was only a small coterie of people that were in on the bottom part of it, but they made a deal with the woman that owned the land and, of course, there wasn't anybody else legally entitled to object. I suppose they paid her for the buildings.

G: Why did they want to get rid of Chinatown?

M: Well, it had deteriorated to the point where there were only a couple of buildings that were still used by the Chinese. The town had grown to the point where it practically surrounded that neighborhood and it wasn't a good idea to have a Chinatown in that situation. The Chinese began to get much less numerous, too, before that time came.

Racial bigotry flared in 1906 burning of Santa Ana's Chinatown

On the evening of May 25, 1906, about 1,000 people gathered in the evening drizzle in downtown Santa Ana. Within an hour, many had left, but those remaining at 8 p.m. would witness the most famous — and infamous — fire in the city's history: the burning of Chinatown.

The flames that consumed the group of old redwood shacks, near the southwest corner of Bush and Third streets, signaled the end of Santa Ana's small Chinatown, which had begun in the mid-1880s. It also marked the low point of a period of intense bigotry that plagued the Chinese community in several Orange County communities.

Chinese came to California from their homeland's depressed economy to help build the railroads, and later to work in the fields and in domestic occupations that most white men did not desire, said Janet Whitcomb, who wrote one of the most complete accounts of the Santa Ana fire in a research paper at Rancho Santiago College.

The Chinese were treated with animosity everywhere they went. Chinese celery workers in the Westminster area had their tools stolen and their living quarters burned down. Denis Kearney created the Workingman's Trade and Labor Union, giving incendiary speeches saying "The Chinese must go!" Occasional mob violence resulted.

Santa Ana's Chinese were not popular, either, and several moves were made to relocate them to the town's outskirts. In 1904, the Santa Ana Daily Blade reported that several citizens had arranged payment of $400 to the Chinese in exchange for them leaving town within 30 days, and added: "The buildings will probably be destroyed by fire" after the city had gotten rid of the "undesirable residents." Chinatown still stood two years later.

The 1906 fire was preceded by the discovery of a Chinatown resident who reputedly had leprosy. A doctor and the chairman of the city's Board of Health, George A. Edgar, examined Wong Woh Ye, an elderly man with deep skin ulcers, on May 23 and immediately quarantined him and the seven other Chinatown residents.

"Throughout the period of anti-Chinese fever, the cry of 'Leprosy!' had been a frequent excuse, legitimate or not, for the destruction of Chinatown districts," Whitcomb wrote. Little was known about the disease then, but there was great fear.

The city's Board of Trustees (later City Council) decided immediately to burn Chinatown. In a notice the next day in the Blade, Edgar wondered if there might be a lawsuit. City Attorney W.F. Heathman answered that the city "may come in contact with that portion of the Constitution that provides that a man may not be deprived of his life or property without due process of law, but I say do it, burn these buildings up and take the consequences."

When the embers died, a labyrinth of tunnels and cellars was revealed where the buildings had been. Would-be looters were routed by police. Little was found other than a tin can filled with $2 worth of pennies.

The Chinese asked Los Angeles specialist Dr. Ralph Williams to look at Ye. He found Ye dead inside his tent. He apparently died during the night. Williams told the Blade he did not think Ye had leprosy after all. Skin cultures contained bacilli of leprosy, but he saw no indications of leprosy in the body.

Ye was buried in a potter's grave. There is no record of his death in the county's records.

There was some talk of the Orange County Medical Association looking into the matter, but nothing came of it, Whitcomb wrote. The seven Chinese survivors sued the trustees for compensation, asking for $1,500. The amount was scaled down to $100, rejected, and no record exists of what happened next. According to one report, Whitcomb wrote, the Chinese moved to Orange near the Glassell Street Bridge and operated a laundry until they were forced out again.

— John Westcott/The Register

G: Were any of the people concerned about the danger to the town's health?

M: There wasn't any danger to the town's health. There were only two or three buildings there and they were by themselves. There weren't any other buildings close to them at all. They had the fire department standing by when the thing burned up.

G: Did the fire department do anything?

M: I don't remember that they did.

G: There were some people who said that there was one man in Chinatown who had leprosy. Do you remember anybody saying anything about this?

M: Well, now that you mention it, I remember it very distinctly. I'm sure that he was removed from there before they burned the place up and so were all the rest of the Chinese.

G: They said that they isolated him in some kind of tent so that nobody else would get contaminated, is that true?

M: I have no recollection of that except that it was quite a well-known fact by the people that knew their way around thoroughly in Santa Ana that there was such a case.

G: Do you have any idea as to the feelings of some of the minorities when this happened? The Japanese, for instance?

M: There were practically no Japanese in southern California that early in the period, and the only other non-Caucasian people were the Mexicans and they were not involved in any way or form.

G: Going back to the Southern Pacific, were they involved in one political party more than the other or were they involved in both?

M: I think they were involved in both. You remember that there is quite a big area over here in the northeast corner of Santa Ana by the streets that are catty-corner with the other streets?

G: Yes.

M: The Southern Pacific depot was up on the edge of that and they thought that the town would have to move up to where

the depot was, but that was one case where the SP was badly mistaken. The town never moved at all, but that's the reason the streets were that way. They were right angles to the Southern Pacific Railroad.

G: There are some people who say that the Southern Pacific had major control of the Republican party in California. Is that true?

M: It's not true in this neighborhood because Uncle Jim was the political boss of this neighborhood and probably took in quite a bit more than Orange County. He had no use for the Southern Pacific at all. The railroad of Newport had no dealings with the SP, their dealings were all with the Santa Fe.

G: Were there any political clashes in Santa Ana in those days, what you might call fiery elections, where people gave speeches?

M: Oh, they had the same sort of political speeches at campaign time that they have now except I think they made more of an impression on the public in those days because there weren't nearly so many people involved. More people knew what was going on politically than they do now, but I can't remember that there were any great difficulties. I can tell you a rather interesting incident that happened when they got Orange County cut off from Los Angeles. This probably ought not to be published, but Mr. Billy Spurgeon who was the founder of Santa Ana, and my uncle Jim were the two people who went up to Sacramento to try and get the deal through the legislature. After they'd been up there a few days they telegraphed down to the people in Santa Ana who had charge of the deal that they needed $10,000 to hire an attorney to run the deal. They sent them up the $10,000 and they hired the attorney who was the political boss of San Francisco. Enough said. (laughter)

G: So political bosses were quite common in those days?

M: Yes.

G: Would you say that lawyers, as a whole, had more political control than most of the people involved in politics?

M: Well, I wouldn't pass any opinion on that because I didn't know anything about it except right here in Santa Ana. But there was a great deal of mythology connected with it, because for several years after Uncle Jim died,

nobody would run for office in Orange County without coming and getting my consent. I had absolutely no political control over anything; it was just a matter of leftover.

G: Do you remember when there was what they might call [Dennis] Kearney agitation in California? Different political movements which tried to exclude the Chinese from California?

M: Yes, I remember it, but it didn't affect Santa Ana and this neighborhood much because by that time the Chinese had decreased in numbers to the point where they didn't amount to anything.

G: Turning to the Irvine ranch and that area, do you remember any stories about the time when the Southern Pacific tried to go through the Irvine ranch?

M: Well, I remember something. The thing I remember about it the strongest (chuckle) was that they were all ready to go around and build their railroad through, [1887] but when they got started, the morning it got started, they discovered when they started to go on across the next public street beyond where the end of the road was, that Uncle Jim had gathered together about a hundred of his employees and friends. They were there on the job ready to fight and they never got any farther, period.

G: So your uncle Jim gathered these people from the general neighborhood?

M: Yes, they were all from this neighborhood.

G: Do you remember any of the people that were in this group?

M: No, I don't remember about that. I was too young to know.

G: Some people said that James Irvine had something to do with gathering his ranch people in stopping the Southern Pacific.

M: Well, I don't know whether that was true or not, but it probably was, because he and my father and uncles were very close friends.

G: Do you know if James Irvine himself came down to try to stop the Southern Pacific from going through his property?

M: No, I don't think he did. I don't think he needed to.

war in railroad companies' a Southern California battleground

The Southern Pacific Transportation Co. was a company used to getting its way. After relying on federal subsidies and free land in laying its tracks to the West Coast in the 1860s, the railroad generally expected much the same from Southern California cities. Sparsely populated for much of the 1870s and 1880s, the area had little political or bargaining power.

The Southern Pacific was a powerful merger of the "Big Four" — Collis P. Huntington, Leland Stanford, Charles Crocker and Mark Hopkins. When it came to advancing the railroad's interests, the foursome had few scruples.

Municipalities such as Santa Ana and Anaheim gladly paid handsome subsidies for Southern Pacific lines. Those that did not, such as Tustin, did not get a station. The Southern Pacific was infamous for hiking its rates drastically once a line was operating, further draining the resources of towns relying on the lines to transport goods.

By the 1880s, the Southern Pacific faced competition from other railroads, including the Santa Fe Railway. Battles between the two giants included a dramatic rate war starting in 1886 that spurred the first big real-estate boom in the area. The boom fizzled in early 1888 after the two companies called a truce.

No one could stand up to the railroad and expect to win. No one, that is, except James Irvine.

Born in Ireland of Scottish descent, Irvine came to New York at 19. Two years later, in 1849, he sailed around the Horn for the California gold rush. During the voyage, Irvine met a New York storekeeper named Collis Huntington. The two had a bitter argument — history does not record the subject — and parted as enemies.

As the years passed, Huntington became president of Southern Pacific and Irvine the head of a vast ranch. Their paths were to cross again.

The Irvine Ranch sprawled across 100,000 acres from Newport Beach to Laguna Canyon. Huntington, trying to secure the coveted railroad route to San Diego, could not go around it. But when Huntington first came to Irvine in the 1870s to negotiate rights to go through the ranch, Irvine's answer was unequivocal: Keep off.

Huntington tried legal tactics. He challenged Irvine's claim to the land on the grounds that the original Mexican land grant had been invalid. The case went to federal court, but was thrown out in 1878. Thwarted, Huntington had to wait.

Irvine died in 1886, sending the ranch into a trust for his 18-year-old son, James Irvine Jr. Huntington saw his chance. One Saturday in 1887, a construction crew gathered at the railroad's terminus and began laying track toward the ranch border. The courts were closed and no injunctions could be issued until Monday. By then, Huntington figured, the track-laying would be well on its way.

That's when "Uncle George" entered the picture. George Irvine was resident trustee for the ranch, a post he would hold until young James became 25.

George Irvine was not about to let the father's wishes go unheeded. He assembled his ranch hands and tenant farmers and sent them to greet the railroad crews with loaded guns. The two groups confronted each other at the ranch border, but sheriff's deputies broke up the impasse before matters got out of hand.

This time the victory was final. On April 25, 1887, the ranch's trustees deeded the right-of-way through the ranch to rival Santa Fe, which paid $4,500, promised a first-class depot in East Irvine and made other concessions. Not only had the mighty Southern Pacific been defeated, but its rail competitor had to pay for the privilege of crossing the land.

The younger Irvine, known as J.I., had an independent streak, and dropped the "junior" from his name. But he shared his father's hatred for Huntington — he took relish years later in prosecuting a Southern Pacific baggage handler caught rifling his belongings. The thief got three years in San Quentin.

— John Westcott/The Register

The Register

G: Have you heard any of the reasons why they let the Santa Fe go through the Irvine ranch when they didn't want the Southern Pacific?

M: Well, the only reason I know is that the Santa Fe was on very good terms with Mr. Irvine and my uncle Jim and all the people of influence in this part of the neighborhood and the SP was not. Not that there was any open opposition with the SP, but when it came to a thing like that, why, they were on the side of the Santa Fe 100 percent.

G: There have been quite a few different attempts to acquire the right-of-way through the Irvine ranch. Do you remember what happened when different utilities or telegraphs or telephone lines wanted to go across the Irvine ranch?

M: Well, I don't remember what happened prior to 1906. I moved out on the ranch to live in 1906 and I stayed out there from 1906 to the early 1920s. I got to be very close friends with Mr. James Irvine in that length of time. As far as I know, everything was carried out on a very friendly basis. Of course, I could get anything I wanted in the way of rights-of-way for the telephone company and I did so. I had a telephone in my house, but I never had any difficulty because the Irvine Company was perfectly agreeable. Well, here's some guy who wants to see me about something.

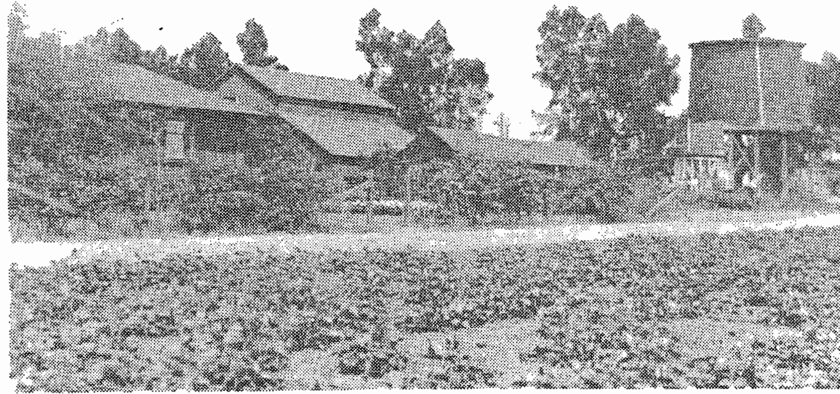
(Interruption)

G: You mentioned that you were able to get anything that you wanted as far as agreements with the Irvine ranch. Were you one of the first people to receive a lease on the Irvine ranch?

M: Well, I don't know how close I was to the first. There were quite a large number of tenants that were farming on year-to-year leases on annual crops out there, but I was one of the first ones that had a lease where we planted oranges out on what they called the orchard leases. In fact, I was, I'm sure, within the first couple of years that those were let out.

G: So you were among the first ones to ever have leases where you were able to acquire land after a certain number of years instead of just paying fees?

M: I never acquired any land from the Irvine Company. When Mr. Irvine's father died, he left six pieces of about 110



Arthur J. McFadden's home ranch located at what is now the corner of Irvine Center Drive and Jeffrey Road in Irvine, California