



ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

An interview with
William G. Halbritter, 1880-1972

October 9, 1957

This interview was conducted by: Jerry MacMullen and C. A. McKenzie

INTERVIEWER'S NOTE

Mr. Halbritter was interviewed by Jerry MacMullen and C. A. McKenzie on October 9, 1957 for the San Diego Historical Society.

HALBRITTER: Frank Seebold was the main guy in San Diego for shooting for the markets. They would shoot on the lakes in Otay. I don't remember what they got paid, but I do know they shot for the markets -- made a business of it. When they started up over there on the mud flats, Joe Mumford practically lived over there. He used to have a bait house, too, and he got to shooting over there so he and Seebold went together in partnership. He would shoot the game and Seebold would sell to different places like hotels, fruit stands, and places like that.

George Garritson was running (he was the manager) the Pacific Wood and Coal Company. They also owned the Cycle and Arms Company in those days. A. C. Akerman was the general manager of it -- guess you remember it. F. B. Naylor was manager in those days along about in 1904-1905. When Naylor was in the Lions Company, George Nolan went in as manager. He is still living and he went with the Russ Lumber Company.

There were no legal regulations in market shooting in those days. They would shoot ducks and brants. There were very few geese in False Bay. It was mostly duck shooting and they would shoot with decoys in their blinds. In those days Fred Scripps had a set of blinds; he had ten blinds all in a row,

fixed up on lighters with palm leaves. I used to shoot over there with Fred Scripps. We would go over to False Bay, take our sneak boats up to the blinds back of Fred Scripps' home. That is where the ducks would come in from the ocean.

We had very high shooting at South Bay, the salt works, and over at a place called Brickyard Cove, a place where they used to do most of the brant shooting.

QUESTION: Do you know why they tasted salty?

HALBRITTER: Not the early ducks. They were not the early ducks -- not the first flight, but after they loafed around for awhile. Ducks like mallards and sprig were more of a freshwater bird.

We first started shooting ducks in August, the first flight that came here. Then we would move later on when the season really opened and would shoot on the lakes. When we would shoot on the lakes, the limit would be 25, but, you see, we were shooting out of season. August was before the season opened, but no one ever objected to it and everybody started shooting in August when the first flight of sprig started coming in. Yes, I did a lot of shooting up at Upper Otay. I used to shoot up there for E. S. Babcock on his duck drives.

QUESTION: Is it true that he built that for a duck pond more than for a water supply?

HALBRITTER: There was an awful lot to that. You see, when the Spreckels sold out to the city, the Upper and Lower Otay, he had a clubhouse there and he had a keeper and everything else in the Upper Otay. When they sold out, he had the privilege that it would be his and that no one else could shoot there for the rest of his life. That is where he put on those dives, you know, to take the birds to the Coronado Hotel. He used to kill as high as 800 or 900 birds in the forenoon there.

Dr. Grove, Julian, Merrel, and Grosbeck of the gas company would go out Sunday mornings and we would take 500 shells with us. We would take the boats and he would direct the drive; and all the birds that were killed went to the Coronado Hotel. They would have listed on their menu, English Snipe, which were mud hens. Brother, they could cook them. They sure would go for them, too.

QUESTION: You mentioned once about your shooting mud hens for the Chinamen.

HALBRITTER: No, it wasn't mud hens, it was coots. That was when I was about ten or eleven years old in the days when they built the San Diego brewery. My dad bought me a double-barrel 16-gauge muzzle loader. When I went down there I would get up at four o'clock in the morning, take this old muzzle loader and would go and lie right down in the grass, right out on the water's edge. And when they came along feeding, why naturally I would ground sluice them and kill about eight, ten, or twelve of those coots. Then I would gather them right up and run down to the brewery by the 28th Street wharf in those days.

Chinamen were making bricks for the brewery and I would. sell those coots to the Chinamen for two for a quarter. I did pretty well with the chinks there. The Chinamen lived right there with their families -- had a camp there. They made the bricks for the brewery right there.

Oh, my Lord, it was along around 1900 -- no, it was earlier than that. It might have been 1888 or 1889. I was just a youngster. That old brewery was down about where the Naval Station is now; the building is still there alongside the Naval Station. It was the San Diego Brewing Company.

I started coming out to Lake Henshaw about 1903 or 1904 or 1905 -- that was before the lake was in there. I started shooting out on Warner's Ranch. In those days there were 14 of us every year who made the trip to Warner's Hot Springs to shoot for three days. We would stop at the Springs and stay there.

QUESTION: That was when Stanford was running Warner's Hot Springs. Do you remember that?

HALBRITTER: There was a fellow by the name of Toby who lived in Los Angeles and traveled for the Spaulding Company. He went on every one of those trips with us. When we were ready to go, someone would wire him and notify him and he would come down and make the trip with us. There was Milt Barber, Frank Belcher (the old man Frank), Archie Taylor,

Oscar Marshall the real estate man, Cosgrove, myself and Bill Bailey from the San Diego Brewing Company.

There were 14 of us and we would go out there and shoot for three days at Warner's. We would make two or three trips a season and we would do our shooting and have a poker game at night. You know, we went out there for a good time. We would get mallards and canvas backs. There were seven lakes on Warner's Ranch before the Henshaw Dam was ever put in, and naturally there was Lost Lake, Big Lake and Horse Corral Lake.

You see, there would be 14 of us and two or three of us would each take a lake and shoot on these lakes. The lakes were around Lake Henshaw -- they went right in there and they were scattered all over the ranch. There was one below where the old ranch house is now. Then, Big Lake was over to the left -- no, the right of it. Lost Lake was way up just before you go into Oak Grove. These lakes are all still there.

Then there were some way down by Monkey Island, then what they called the Pot Holes. They went down there and when they put the water in, it covered the lakes up and left only three, four, or five of the lakes. In fact, when Sid Ferz (who has the "Cotton Patch" now) got to be manager of Warner Springs, he put in some artificial lakes. They used to pump the water into those lakes. We used to get lots of geese in there -- what they used to call checker-backs, and some honkers, but mostly checker-backs.

We had mallard, sprig, teal and [?]. All were nice, big ducks and they would come in there for the fresh water. There was plenty of feed in those lakes. That is the reason they had such good shooting. They just naturally came in on account of the feed and things that come in to those lakes.

Lake Henshaw was one of the best lakes we had in San Diego County. That is when Jim Kitchen took it over, when they first put the lake in. Jim took it over when he first went there as superintendent, and stayed there until he died. I think he was there 27 years. Fishing was wonderful there, too.

Jim Kitchen put in private blinds when they would shoot on the lake itself. He put four blinds down at the end of the lake, one for himself, one for me, one for Ethel, my wife, and the fourth one for some guest who might come in. Dr. Moore used to come down from Los Angeles from Whitemore Clinic to shoot with us in those blinds.

Then Jim made some kind of an agreement or deal with George Sawday. They went over to what they call the Flats, on the ranch itself, and put in three ponds. Those ponds are still there -- you have seen them. There are two blinds on each of those two lakes. Jim had one lake and I had one, and I helped him build the lake with a little twenty bulldozer. When they built those lakes we put two blinds on each lake.

In later years that is where we did all of our shooting. We didn't shoot on the big lake at all. There would be a party of one or two hundred shooters on the big lake. As soon as they would stir the birds up, they would come over to our ponds. I shot on Cuyamaca Lake when Mike Killion owned it, when the flume run out of it, you know. I also used to shoot on Lake Murray. I would get a yearly permit from Mike and a couple of complimentary

shooting privileges. That was when the old Stonewall Mine was closed up and we used to go up there and shoot. The hotel was still running and we used to fish there at Cuyamaca. We stayed at the cottage, not at the hotel, but when the cottages were all taken we would stay at the hotel. Jeff Swycaffer had the cottages and he had the hotel at that time. That must have been after he was driving the stage. That lake used to freeze around the edges; it never froze in the center. I think there were about two years when that lake froze over so they could do some skating on it, so I heard. That ice would really cover over. We would put decoys out in the evening and the next morning they would be frozen in. The ducks would come down and just scoot across the ice. I didn't know how to ice skate. My sister-in-law could skate. They learned how in Cleveland, Ohio.

The old Pastime Gun Club was at 6th and Laurel. That was trapshooting. That operated about two years; that was about 1892 or '93 or maybe '94, and then we moved to Mission Cliff Gardens. We were there about three years, I think. Then they ran us out of there and then, of course, we came over here on the flats in Old Town.

QUESTION: What was the trouble with Mission Cliff?

HALBRITTER: The Ostrich Farm was there at that time and it disturbed the ostriches so they would kind of stampede. We had to give that up, so we moved down on the flats across from where the Marine Base is now. We shot there for a long time. While they were there I quit shooting. The Pastime Club broke up then; they moved out to Emerald Hills, put up a clubhouse and were shooting out there.

Some of the best shots were Martinez Chick and a fellow by the name of Muchmore, Foster Coutts, and myself. There were no teams at all, just individual shooting. We could make expenses and make enough money to get by. They probably would have ten events a day, 200 targets each day. It would cost probably \$40 to \$50 a day just to shoot, just for entrance money. You furnished your own ammunition, of course. We bought ammunition those days at \$12 a case for trap load. Today they would cost about \$70 a case.

In those days I could not have gone on that circuit, Los Angeles and other places, if I could not win prize money. The fellow that was putting on the tournament would put in a thousand dollars added money on top of that. The money in those days was divided Chick Three Moneys system, 18, 19, and 20. If you got 18 birds you got into third money. If you got 14, into the second money. You got straight score. The 20 would be the top money.

Whoever broke 20 times, that person got top money -- the entrance money and so much money added to it would be divided between the first shooters; the second shooters got the second money, and the third shooters got the third money. When I left the club and quit shooting, they abandoned the Chick system of dividing the money and went to the Rose system, four moneys. We just couldn't make expenses; that is all that there was to it, so I just quit shooting. They changed that to division money to encourage more young fellows to get into the club to shoot. Of course that system went into effect all over.

I made as high as \$60 a day at a shoot. You bet that was good money in those days. Then they would have a trophy match. The Jenks Jewelry Stores would get up trophies. The man that won it would draw no money at all. He would hold that trophy for a year. Then the following year they would shoot for that trophy again and all the entrance money that went in on that trophy, that belonged to the man that won it the year before. He would get all that money. I had that trophy for two years straight and running. The year I won it I made \$90 on the entrance money off that trophy. I still had that when they closed up the Pastime Gun Club, when they abandoned it over here and it kind of went haywire. Then when they started up again I gave it back to them.

None of the stores sold ammunition except the gun stores. There were only two in the early days. Frank Ecker was the owner of one -- maybe you remember him. Martinez Chick made a lot of money and sold out to a man named Nate Nichols. He was located on 5th Street between F and G. Nichols moved on G Street between 4th and 5th Streets. Cycle and Arms was on 4th and E Streets.

Jim Walker was a plastering contractor here. He and Nate and Dr. Barnes, a dentist, built a Sharpie in back of a sporting goods store in a big room. After we launched that boat we used to go down to the salt works on Sunday mornings. They would sail the Sharpie down there and we would shoot down around the salt works. We would put a couple of sneak boats on the Sharpie, hang them on the side of the Sharpie and tow one or two so we would have sneak boats to use while we were down there shooting. There must have been 15 or 20 Sharpies on the bay at that time.

I know a man by the name of Turner out there in the Ninth Ward used to win all those Sharpie races. He built that boat himself. He was a boat builder but he had retired and I saw that boat when it was under construction. He lived out in the East End just two blocks back of where I lived. I used to watch him build that Sharpie. After that boat was finished his uncle, old Bob Brazier, used to take that Sharpie and go fishing. I used to go out with him.

We would sail that boat out from the 28th Street wharf. We would leave about two or three o'clock in the morning and catch the land breeze. We would sail out into the ocean, naturally coming back in again early. We would troll for barracuda with gigs. Then when we would come back, old Bob would put all his fish in a wheelbarrow and go around the neighborhood selling it.

Old Bob was a wonderful sailor. Turner won a lot of boat races with it. I couldn't tell you what his secret was; I just don't know. Before going into a race he would put graphite solution on the bottom of his boat. It would be slick as molasses. They were all about the same size. I watched them many times make the sail down, you know, sail down the bay and then sail back. I would go down to the end of the 28th Street wharf and watch them go by. They had one big sail in front and a smaller one in the back -- that is the way they used to sail in those days. You remember that, don't you? They were built on the same principle as Chalmer's (MacKenzie's) boat, lightning class. It had a deck in front.

I remember Sharpies on the bay as far back as 1887 and 1888, along in there. I am sure there [were] a dozen or more Sharpies on the bay at that time. Turner kept his boat at the 28th Street wharf. He nailed big timbers to the piling of the wharf, and at high tide when you wanted to work on your boat, you would put your boat on that, and when the tide would go out you could work on the boats closer to shore.

We would get back about four o'clock and old Bob would load his wheelbarrow with fish for selling (no ice), and away he would go. Then we would anchor the boat and fix it up. I would help him take the fish home and would grab three or four. I would take two barracuda to the Chinese laundry and sell them for fifty cents, for pin money. I would take the rest of the fish home. I took about four every time he would come in and Bob would take the rest of them. He would catch a lot of barracuda up there.

I have seen the Chinese junks. I remember two of them. They were peculiar looking things. The only Chase that I know was a Chase that had a drugstore on 5th and F Streets -- you probably remember him. He had two sons; Harlan was one and I can't think of the other boy's name. They were down on Broadway between 11th and 12th. That is the only Chase that I knew.

The junks that I remember were not tied up at Roseville. There were two tied up right back of Chinatown, down on the bay. I wouldn't know if the [Chinese] old-timers are still living -- by golly, I wouldn't know that.

Ah Quin was the main guy down in Chinatown in those days. I tell you, do you know this fellow Rife that was chauffeur for Bridges? Well, he married one of the Ah Quin daughters. Ah Quin paid him \$10,000 to marry one of his daughters and he married her. He was a white. When he made that offer, my Lord, he had dozens of fellows go down to his place, and out of all the boys that went down there he chose this fellow that drove for Bridges.

Ah Quin was a Chinese merchant that ran a store on the corner of 3rd and J Streets. It was on the southeast corner of J Street. This fellow, Rife, who married Ah Quin's daughter, invented the microscope. He was a genius at it or something like that, and some of the universities took it right off his hands. He also invented field glasses. Somebody made the lens for him, took the old lens out and put in the new one for him. This Rife had wonderful binoculars. He was working for Bridges when he invented these things and then when Bridges died, he left Rife a thousand dollars.

Yes, there was a lot of shooting out near the old Lakeside Inn. I shot there when John Gay had it. He built the inn, the way I understand it, and then John had kind of a nervous breakdown -- he kind of went off his bean. Jack Murrel, Charlie Julian and I went out there to investigate and John had a tent set up in the lobby of that hotel, right in front of the fireplace. He was living in that tent inside the building. Yes, sir, I saw that with my own eyes. This great big tent was right up against the mantel and he was sitting there in a chair right in front of the fireplace.

He had put in an automobile racetrack around that lake. He used to have races out there. They had boating on the lake and had it stocked with fish, and there was pretty good fishing at one time. There were big frogs in there, too. Barney Oldfield raced out there one time and several others. Frank Kiesig had a gun store. He didn't race, but he had a man driving the car that he had. The Micker boys in Los Angeles would come down and race. Barney Oldfield put on exhibitions more than anything else, such as fancy driving and things like that. It was about a third of a mile.

They used to have a road race every year for awhile out in Point Loma. Bob Berman was down; he used to drive in those. There was also a Tony who had a Benz he used to drive. They used to race over at the Coronado polo grounds sometimes. They would have exhibition races. I remember one race they had over there between the Maxwell and the Ford. There was a side bet. They didn't have regular automobile races over there, but that is the only racetrack that I know of that they had around here outside of the road races.

Take old Bayview Park -- they had bicycle races there and the ball park was inside the track. They never had any of those six-day bicycle races here. They had a lot of road races from Coronado Strand around to San Diego. This was about 1908 or 1909 [sic]. They had the road races over in Point Loma about 1907.

The bicycle races were long before they had the road races over here. They had the bicycle races about 1900, I believe. They had a lot of mighty good bicycle riders in San Diego. I never saw any of the high wheel bicycles around here; I don't believe that there were over two or three in San Diego. My brother-in-law, Bill Miller, used to race one of those things in the early days in Cleveland. I saw pictures of it after we got here.

They used to have bicycle road races between here and La Jolla and things like that around the bay. Every year for awhile, they had a road race from here to La Jolla. That was when that diesel car went out to La Jolla. You know that bridge right by Pacific Beach, that was rough going alongside of that bridge as it was kind of a river bottom there. Floyd Frazee and a couple of other fellows went out there and took 12-inch boards and put them across this trestle up on the railroad track and they would ride down the center of the track and across the boards, and then get off the track and on the road again to make time.

Well, I tell you, they didn't have racing up at Mount Palomar, but Percy Benbough put up a trophy after the Phoenix race. Dave Campbell won it. He drove the Phoenix race for Daniels of Coronado, I think. Daniels had a Stevens-Duryea and Dave Campbell fixed that car and put it in the San Diego-Phoenix race, and won it. After that race Percy Benbough put up a trophy for the fastest car up Nigger Nate Grade. Dave Campbell won it and he held that title for about ten years. My wife and I made a trip to the east in a Nash sport model Phaeton. W. E. Shaw wanted me to give him some publicity on it for advertising purposes. I told him he would get much more publicity if he would put that car of mine on the Palomar mountain and take the record away from Dave Campbell. I wouldn't drive it myself because my wife would not go for that at all.

So I got Walter Folke to drive my car up that mountain. He drove it up there and broke the record by 40 seconds. Two of the Union boys timed it. John Swallow was one of them that rode in the car, and myself, and then there was another thin, dark-complected boy who was on the Union. Walter Folke and I rode in the front seat. I don't know what became of the trophy. There was an awful lot of publicity on it. Lord, I wish I had those pictures. It was a narrow car with wire wheels -- very pretty car in those days.

The race from Los Angeles down here was the race that went through, going to Phoenix. That was the Los Angeles to Phoenix road race. The one Percy Benbough was in was the San Diego-Phoenix race. Ed Wadham also drove a car.

QUESTION: I was under the impression that Barney Oldfield and Percy Benbough had a race from Los Angeles to San Diego that ended up in an exhibition match.

HALBRITTER: I don't remember that. Percy Benbough was after publicity in those days, you know. But I know Percy entered in this Phoenix race. That is the only one I know of that he ever raced. He was trying to get publicity because he was going into politics.

Dr. Bailey had a resort up on Palomar. We used to go up there possibly two or three times a month. My wife had trips up there; we would stay overnight, take our tent and camp out. In those days it would probably take the average person from three to five hours to go up Nigger Nate Grade. I was driving a B-37 Buick. When I would hit the corral at the bottom of the grade, I would stop and pour in a quart of oil, fill my radiator with water, then hit the bottom of the hill and slip it into second gear and stay there until I hit the top of the mountain.

Many times I drove up there in 50 minutes in that B-37, but coming down, of course, it was so steep in spots and we would cut down a little pine tree maybe 10 or 12 feet high. We would tie this on the back of our car and pull it down the hill using it as a brake. We wouldn't burn our brakes out and that is how we got back down the mountain. It was a long grade.

If we weren't in a hurry going up we would always stop at Tin Can Flats, fill our radiators with water, then go to Nigger Nate's -- that was halfway up. He would be sitting there and there was a water trough. So we would stop and fill up again and go up the mountain. When we made our stops it would take us about an hour and a half. I don't remember ever making that trip up the mountain without seeing Nigger Nate at the watering trough.

We always took a bunch of supplies, like a couple of loaves of bread, canned goods and stuff like that and gave them to Nigger Nate. He was a county charge then; I think the county was taking care of him. He claimed to be the first white man on Palomar. I am sure he was not a white man; he was colored. He was a real old man in those days.

We had awful nice trout fishing up there. We would follow the stream down through Doan's Valley and then into the Rincon. There were just a few San Diegans that knew of it. We ran onto it by accident. We went in there one Sunday to eat our lunch. I looked into a pool and it was alive with trout about that long. So we just kept this to ourselves. Whenever we wanted to trout fish, Ethel and I just went up to the Rincon and I would give the Indian a dollar to go through. Then we would put the car away, camp overnight, and, by George, I don't believe we ever went there when we didn't get our limit of trout. Of course that was a good many years ago when Ethel and I were first married.

When I first started to play baseball I used to play on the sandlots. Then they formed four teams in San Diego, the Ferris and Ferris, the Yellow Kids, the Zephyrs, and one other whose name I can't remember. Well, we started out playing on those four teams. Later on they formed the league in San Diego called the Mercantiles, the Zephyrs, the Operas, and the Wholesalers. Of course that was getting up in pretty good baseball.

We played most of our games out in old Bayview Park (Logan Heights). We used to play there every Sunday. The teams were run in those days by Jack Dodge and Bill Carey. Later on the big leaguers used to come to San Diego in the winter and then they started four other clubs. Naturally they picked the best players out of the novice teams to fill out their teams, and I happened to be one of them. Tom Works was the catcher for the San Diego team. Dummy Taylor of the New York Giants was the pitcher. Mike Donnelly was the first baseman. They were major leaguers and they used to come here every winter.

We used to have a very nice ball game there in Bayview Park. San Bernardino had a team, Los Angeles had a team, and San Diego had a team. There were major leaguers on all three teams. The last game of ball that I played in San Diego was against the Boston Bloomer Girls. They were touring the country. The game was played in Bayview Park. Naturally, the Boston Bloomer Girls won the game -- they were supposed to win it. That was along about in 1903 before they had the Coast League. They had teams in Los Angeles then that used to come down here and play. Van Horn came to San Diego to play ball and married Jack Dodge's daughter. They stayed here and made their home in San Diego. Then he started up another ball club. He used to go all over the back country in a Tally Ho and play ball.

The Boston Bloomer Girls were not all girls. There were only five girls; the rest were men. I happened to be playing third base in that ball game. A fellow came sliding into third with a wig on. I took a look at him and said, "Well, you are a fine looking woman. That big old Adam's apple you have there, women don't carry those things." He tried to hush me up.

Bayview Park was built in the early nineties. The first baseball park I remember in San Diego was up on University Avenue between 8th and 9th Streets. The Los Angeles teams used to come down there and play. I played there once.

END OF INTERVIEW
