William Figari
SAN FRANCISCO BAY AND WATERFRONT, 1900-1965

An Interview Conducted by
Ruth Teiser

Berkeley
1969
William Figari
1906
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William Figari was born in 1886 on San Francisco's Telegraph Hill, a few blocks from the waterfront, and spent more than sixty years working with tugboats on the Bay and the adjacent inland waterways. When he was only thirteen he went to work for Thomas W. Crowley, who at twenty-five had already made a place for himself in the world of San Francisco Bay. With the exception of less than two years as a deck boy on coastwise steamers, Captain Figari remained in the employ of Thomas Crowley & Brothers and that firm's successor, Crowley Launch & Tugboat Company, until his retirement in 1965. Thus his experience encompassed the span of years beginning before the 1906 earthquake and fire and including that disaster, two fairs, a depression, two world wars, and the development of the sea and waterfront unions.

In this interview Captain Figari describes in detail many of the events of those years as they were reflected in the life on the Bay. He tells also what it was like to be a boy on Telegraph Hill, and later as a boatman to ferry ships' captains, to deal with boarding house runners and whaler crew recruiters, to tow barges and dredges up through the Delta waterways, and much more. He describes the Barbary Coast, the Bay fisheries, and, particularly notably, the San Francisco
wharves and their functions early in this century.

For a struggling fisherman's son, growing up on Telegraph Hill in the years just before and just after the turn of the century was a chancy business, as Captain Figari indicates in his story about finding boyhood friends in San Quentin when he visited there as an adult. His gratitude to Mr. Crowley for giving him a job and a chance to escape that institution is expressed here. In return, the Crowley family has had, through the years, a warm appreciation for "Willie" Figari and his unfailing loyalty and jovial good humor. That humor, and his keen power of recollection, are evident in these reminiscences.

The interview took place at Captain Figari's home in San Francisco on October 30, November 5, and November 11, 1968. There was little editing of the original transcript beyond deletion of some repetitions and irrelevancies. Albert M. Harmon, librarian of the San Francisco Maritime Museum, gave generously of his time to check the accuracy of many name spellings.

Early in 1969, Captain Figari was interviewed once more with his longtime friend and associate, Captain William McGillivray, for another volume to come in this series on the
Maritime History of San Francisco Bay. The first, completed in 1967, is Thomas Crowley, *Recollections of the San Francisco Waterfront*.

Ruth Teiser
Interviewer

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Early Years on the Waterfront

Teiser: When and where were you born?

Figari: I was born on Broadway Street between Sansome and Montgomery on August 22, 1886. There was the Washington Irving primary school there, and right next door was a tenement house. There were flats there. Downstairs was a saloon and a boarding house. And on the corner, I can't think of the alley, was Henry Zaun's bakery shop -- that was the son's name -- Zaun's bakery shop. They were German. They had two daughters and a son. I used to go in there about six in the morning and pack some bread up around Powell Street and Mason Street to different houses and deliver it.

Teiser: How old were you then?

Figari: I was about nine, I guess. Then I used to come back and whichever girl was on early that morning, I'd sit down with her and have coffee and baked donuts. Then I used to go around the commission merchants down around Battery Street and down through there and deliver bread down there -- pumpernickel bread and rye bread. Of
Figari: course years ago they used to have a big lunch counter there. You could go in there and have a glass of steam beer for five cents and you could eat everything you wanted to on the lunch counter -- cheese and all kinds of meats -- cuts of meat -- all kinds of things. Teiser: This was in the saloons in the produce district? Figari: Yeah, down through Battery Street, Front Street, Davis Street and all through there. They all had big lunch counters. I delivered the bread there and then I'd come back and then I'd go to school. Teiser: You did all this before you started school in the morning! Figari: Before I started school. Then I used to deliver some buggies around to different places. A fellow by the name of Jacobs had a stable on Jackson Street between Davis and Front and I used to deliver buggies to different places and then go pick them up at night, take them back to the stable. Then on a Sunday he would give us a horse and buggy and we used to drive out to Colma, which was a long ways off -- dirt road going out there. Teiser: This was when people hired a horse and buggy for the day -- you'd deliver them and pick them up?
Figari: Yes.

Teiser: What kind of people used them?

Figari: Oh, different -- lawyers, I suppose, and different business people. Mr. Crowley used to rent one, a horse and buggy, to go to the waterfront and things like that. Then this fellow, Henry Zaun, the son, he used to go down -- he knew Mr. Crowley -- and he used to get a Whitehall boat, borrow a Whitehall boat, and we used to sail across the Bay. Over to Goat Island and around...

Teiser: Just for pleasure?

Figari: Yes, just for pleasure. They had a lot of Whitehall boats, you know. Different people had them there. So, Mr. Crowley had two boats, the Jennie C. -- named after his sister Jennie Crowley -- then he had another boat, the Crowley. There used to be a fellow by the name of Albert that used to run the Jennie C. and used to take ship stores over to Oakland, what they called Oakland Long Wharf, where the SP Mole used to be. They used to have a trestle coming out, and they had three or four finger piers coming out. One was coal bunkers
Figari: for the trains. The colliers used to come down from British Columbia and put coal in there, and Mr. Crowley and the Jennie C. used to take ship stores over there because there was no way of driving over there with a wagon to deliver it. So I asked him one day if I could ride with him, this fellow Albert, and he said, "Sure, come along, take a ride with me." A Russian-Finn I think he was. We used to take the groceries and pyramid them on top of the house. The boat had a cabin. We used to pyramid them on top and we used to go over there to Oakland Long Wharf alongside the ships and unload the stuff. And he used to let me run the boat. And I used to steer the boat back and forth and I would get pretty good, see. Then Mr. Crowley had the Crowley, and he had a fellow named Pete Nelson, and he used to take the morning Examiner to Oakland to the foot of Franklin Street because the ferries would stop running at midnight. Of course the papers used to come down to the boathouses. We never called it an office then; it was a boathouse.

Teiser: Where was it?

Figari: At Vallejo Street, between Vallejo and Green. On the bulkhead we called it, between the two streets.
Figari: You know years ago piers didn't have numbers on them. At the south end of the Ferry Building would be Mission One. Emergency Hospital was there, and then the steam schooners that used to carry lumber down from the coast used to go in there and load supplies, you know, for the different logging camps and things like that, like Crescent City and Gualala and Brookings and all those outside ports there where they used to load lumber. You take like going to Eureka, they used to have passenger steamers run to Eureka. You couldn't go to Eureka unless you went up by steamer. The Pacific Coast Steamship Company had two steamers running there, the Pomona and the Corona.

Then came Mission Two on the north side. There was a dock there. And on the south side there was the coal bunkers that they used to take coal down from British Columbia and all over. And they used to dump it in the coal bunkers and the little cars used to go underneath the bunkers. They used to run it across the street from Mission Street and dump it in the big lot there.

Then came Howard One, Howard Two and Howard
Figari: Three. And then came Folsom Street.

Teiser: What did they use those piers for?

Figari: Howard One -- the sailing ships used to go in there.

Mrs. [Henry M.] Bowles had some pictures showing those piers. If I had them I could show you. Howard Two was a sort of a freight -- they used to have some freight -- like a sugar boat used to go in there and unload sugar and things like that, and the steam schooners used to come down from Coos Bay -- the steamer Czarina and the steamer Breakwater used to come down from Coos Bay and discharge the coal there.

Then Howard Three was an open dock. Steam schooners used to come in.

Then came Folsom Street, which was a transport dock. During the Spanish-American War the Army used to unload the soldiers there. Then came Harrison Street Wharf. That was coal bunkers also on one side, and on the north side Smith-Rice used to have a derrick there. They used to repair ships, and they used to take and heave the ships over and the calkers used to get on the side of the ship and calk. (There are some pictures of that that you can see. I don't know
Figari: whether Crowley had any.) But they used to take the ship out and then turn around and do the other side, see. And they'd calk as much as they could. Then they'd have to put them in the dry dock to get the bottom.

Then the piers used to run out like that, like they do now. Then they used to go south. Harrison Street was the last pier that ran out that way [the way they do now]. Then they used to go south, which was Spear Street, and the steamers that used to run to Portland, the George W. Elder, Captain Clem Randell, and the Columbia, Captain Dorn, used to run to Portland out of there. Then came Main Street. They had two dry docks in there, you see. They used the dry docks for steam schooners and things like that. Then came Beale Street, which was another coal bunker. And then came the Pacific Mail dock; steamers running down to Panama and to the Orient. The City of Peking and the China and all those vessels. That was at the foot of Brannan Street. And then from there on there was an oil company on the other side named Arctic Oil Company. Then way down further was the Union Iron Works. Then came the Western Sugar Company, where the vessels,
Figari: the sailing vessels, used to come from Honolulu. It used to be sack sugar that they used to unload there, the sugar refineries. The buildings are still out there. I think Walkup has that building up there now.

Then on the north side of the Ferry Building it used to go from Clay Street, Washington Street — that's the piers -- Jackson Street. Clay Street, the stern wheel steamers used to go into.

Teiser: The river steamers, were they?

Figari: River steamers. And Washington Street and Jackson Street. They used to take all the produce down from the rivers -- potatoes and all that stuff. Then came Pacific Street. Then came Broadway...

Teiser: What kind of ships came there?

Figari: Pacific Street was the Oceanic Steamship Company, which was run by Spreckels, that had the steamers Alameda and Mariposa running to Australia via Honolulu.

Then they had the two steamers, the Zealandia and Australia running to Australia out of there.

Teiser: I didn't realize the Spreckels line was that...

Figari: Oh, yes, Spreckels was in the towboat business, too.
Figari: They had towboats, too. Then came Broadway One Wharf, which was the Pacific Coast Steamship Company, which used to run to Seattle and Vancouver, British Columbia. Then, Broadway Two was the Pacific Coast Steamship Company.* That used to run to Southern California.

Deck Boy

Figari: They had the Santa Rosa and the State of California. They used to run down to Santa Barbara, Port Los Angeles -- that's where Santa Monica, I believe, is now -- because I ran down there. I'll tell you about that after a while. They were all outside ports. Santa Barbara was the same way. On the side of the ships they used to have sixteen inch what they called "kaiha" kukuihaele? hawsers. They used to put one on each side, and those steamers had big heavy guards, about two foot guards, because there was a surge there all the time. And we used to unload the freight there.

*For a continuation of Captain Figari's description of the piers, see pp. 27-30.
Teiser: Why the guards?

Figari: Because it would rub against the hull of the ship, see. Santa Barbara was an outside port. And all the passengers for Los Angeles used to go into what they called Port Los Angeles, and we used to stop at Redondo, and San Diego was the last. Because I was on the State of California as a deck boy.

Mr. Crowley's brother Jack and I wanted to go to sea. We wanted to see what the sea was, and we both wanted to go, so Jack Crowley got a job on the Santa Rosa and I got a job on the City of Pueblo, Captain Jepson, running up north to Vancouver, British Columbia, and on through there and all through the Sound up there.

Teiser: When was that? How old were you then?

Figari: I was 15 then. I was working for Crowley before that, you see, but I wanted to go to sea. That was about 1903, I guess. I ran up there for about five or six months. It was in the wintertime I know. I got appendicitis. We had a bartender on there, he was a druggist, and he put hot turpentine on my side for
Figari: three days coming down. I had to be in the stateroom. I was in terrible pain. When I came down they sent me over to Marine Hospital. I was out there for about a week and they put ice packs on it and the pain went away. And finally my brother came out to see me one Sunday and I got awful sick again. And they opened me up and there was an abscess there. I was there for two months. That was the year that Teddy Roosevelt came to San Francisco.

    I was in the **State of California**, too.

Teiser: The **State of California** went south?

Figari: It went south -- Santa Barbara, Port Los Angeles, and Redondo and San Diego. We used to leave here on a Thursday and get into San Diego on a Saturday night, and leave there on Saturday night and come back the same way.

Teiser: What were your duties?

Figari: I was a deck boy.

Teiser: What did you do?

Figari: We had three deck boys. The sailors in San Francisco would paint ships. But when they would go down to these
Figari: ports, they would go down into the hold and work freight. And the three deck boys used to keep the ship clean, wash it down. They had these big heavy guards on the side, and the passengers would throw paper and things like that. There was a mate there, an old fellow -- they used to call him Sugarfoot Harris. I was the chief deck boy and I had a fellow by the name of Phelan, Jimmy Phelan, and a fellow by the name of Mikey Minot -- they were deck boys. We used to take and wash down the saloon deck and the main deck and other things at six o'clock in the morning.

Teiser: How'd you do it, with buckets?

Figari: No, with a hose. The engineers used to pump the water. I used a hose. We used to take a hose and squirt it in front of Sugarfoot Harris' door, so he knew we were working. (Laughter) But that fellow would look every morning when he woke up and see if there were any papers on the guard. He was very particular about that.

Teiser: Who was the captain of that ship, the State of California?

Figari: Captain Thomas. I was there for about three weeks, see, and this fellow Jimmy Phelan and I, we were shining
Figari: brass on the steps running from the lower deck, and there were a couple of young gals running up and down and bothering us, see. So Jimmy Phelan said, "Next time you come through here he's gonna kiss you," and I said, "What do you mean I'm gonna kiss them?" He said, "Sure, you're gonna kiss them." Well, they ran back and forth and she said, "I dare you to kiss me." Oh, they were only about ten or twelve years of age. And I grabbed one and kissed them. Just as I did, this fellow Sugarfoot Harris grabbed me and he fired me when we got back. (Laughter) He said, "I'll put you ashore on the first heaving line."

Then I got a job on the steamer Ramona. We used to leave here and go to Santa Cruz. And all we did was lower a boat, and we used to run some freighters and go to Monterey. We used to load a lot of ammunition.

Teiser: What for?

Figari: The Presidio down at Monterey. Then we used to go to Cayucos, San Simeon.

Teiser: What did you take there?

Figari: Just some loads of freight. Because there was no way
Figari: of getting down there. At San Simeon they have highways now and Hearst has a big place there. And we used to go to Goleta, and from there we used to go to Carpinteria, Ventura, Hueneme. After we left Goleta we used to stop at Port Hartford and we used to load a lot of grain there. Now it's called Port San Luis. Do you know where San Luis Obispo is?

Teiser: Yes.

Figari: It's a port out there. We used to go in and load a lot of grain there. The sailors used to work and a few stevedores. They used to come down in little cars from Santa Maria, down through there. They used to unload the little cars, see. And sailors used to stay in the hold and they used to hire some stevedores and they used to load all their stuff. Sometimes we couldn't get men. Then we used to work -- deck boys. We had two deck boys.

Teiser: You were a deck boy there too?

Figari: I was a deck boy, and another fellow, too. They used to give us fifty cents an hour to handle grain sacks.

Teiser: What did you get just for working as a deck boy?

Figari: Twenty five dollars a month. And the sailors used to
Figari: get forty.

Teiser: How many hours did you have to work for twenty five dollars a month?

Figari: Twenty four hours a day. Six o'clock in the morning I'd get up and wash down the deck. But as I say, the sailors when we were in the port used to have to work because the two deck boys used to sleep. Once in a while they would get stuck and they used to ask us to go out and help load some grain, which we used to do.

Teiser: Did you get any days off when you were in port?

Figari: No.

Teiser: Never any days off!

Figari: No. Well, going north we used to be in about three days. Running down south on the State of California, we used to get in here on a Monday and then leave on a Thursday.

Teiser: Did you have time off in between:

Figari: Oh no, we were aboard the ship. We'd work eight hours, that's all. Then in the morning, go back to work again at eight o'clock.

Teiser: You could go home when you were here?
Figari: Oh, yes, I only lived about three blocks away. I lived right on Telegraph Hill there.

We used to go to San Pedro, then East San Pedro, then over to Newport. I never saw Newport. I don't know what Newport looked like. We used to be in there at night and then come back the same way, see.

Then I went back to work for Crowley again.

**Going to Work for Crowley**

Teiser: Let's go back a minute. You said that before you went to work for Mr. Crowley you just went out on those two Whitehalls of his.

Figari: I used to ride with this fellow Henry Zaun on the Whitehall boats.

Teiser: So how did you happen to go to work for Mr. Crowley?

Figari: Well, as I told you this fellow Albert used to run the ship stores over to steamers at Oakland Long Wharf. The coal colliers used to come down from British Columbia and unload it into the bunker. They used to
Figari: take groceries and things like that, because there was no way for a wagon to go down there, see. I used to ride with Albert and I learned how to run the boat. Then he built a little boat with a nine horsepower engine and he asked me if I wanted a job. I said, "Sure."

Teiser: Who asked you? Albert?

Figari: Mr. Crowley. And he gave me seven and a half dollars a week. And I used to work every other night running ship captains out to ships. Years ago there were just sailing vessels. And you'd just about roll into your bunk and the next thing you'd know another captain would come down, and I'd take him out to his ship.

Teiser: Did you sleep on the wharf there in the office?

Figari: Yes. They had a boathouse and it had some bunks in there. There were four bunks, two in a tier. And that's how I started.

Teiser: How big was the boat -- the little nine horsepower?

Figari: Twenty-eight feet. That was a gas boat. That's the third boat he built.

Teiser: What was the name of it?

Figari: The Spy. I'll never forget -- it had an overhead
Figari: exhaust, you know. Out in Mission Bay, off of Mission Rock. The steamer San Joaquin used to come down from Sacramento and take grain into Port Costa. That's where the sailing ships used to load the grain. And then they used to tow them down here and anchor them out there off of Mission Rock. And the steam schooners used to go alongside. They came down from the north and loaded lumber for Sacramento and different places -- Knights Landing. Then the [freight vessel] A.C. Freese used to take them down from Stockton and anchor there. A fellow by the name of Jim Wilder was in the tug business and used to tow these barges around for the Sacramento Transportation Company and the California Navigation Company. I went out there to take some stevedores, and I'll never forget. The lumber was sticking over the side of the barge, and I ran underneath and I broke the exhaust pipe off of the engine, so the noise was terrible, with no muffler, you know. And I'll never forget. Mr. Crowley said, "Well, you'll have to run that boat now for a couple of days with all that noise." He said, "The people (the captains we
Figari: used to take out) they're sitting back and they won't hear the noise, but you're alongside. That will teach you a lesson to be careful." (Laughter) I'll never forget that.

Teiser: When did you first meet Mr. Crowley?

Figari: Down at the boats there.

Teiser: You didn't know him on Telegraph Hill when you were a kid?

Figari: No. He was born on Bay Street where Pier 33 is now. He lived there on Bay Street. He showed me lots of times the house he lived in. It's right opposite where Pier 33 is now. I think what's there now is that sewage disposal place.

Teiser: He's ten or twelve years older than you?

Figari: Yes, he was born in '75, December 2, 1875, and I was born August 22, 1886.

Teiser: And you first met him through Albert, is that it?

Figari: Yes. I'd ride around the boat and Albert told him. And so he gave me a job.

Teiser: You were awfully young.

Figari: I was thirteen years old. It was 1900.

Teiser: Would you give a thirteen year old boy that kind of a job?
Figari: No, not now. I look at my grandson who's thirteen, and I wonder how I did it.

Boyhood and Family

Teiser: By then, though, you'd had some experience working, hadn't you? How much schooling did you have a chance to get in?

Figari: I think I went to about the fifth grade. I was promoted to the fifth.

Teiser: At the Washington Irving School?

Figari: I went there, and then my mother sent me to the Presentation Convent, which was on Powell Street, for a while, and then I went to the Washington Grammar School -- that's on Washington and Mason. Then I left there. They used to have a principal and a vice-principal, One-Arm McCarthy.* He had one arm and he used to pull me out of line all the time. He had a

*Thomas H. McCarthy
Figari: strap about that long and he used to whack you. Every time he'd whack you and you dropped your hand he'd give you an extra one.

Teiser: What did you do to get whacked? (Laughter)

Figari: I don't know. There were three or four of us who used to get it. (Laughter) One-Arm McCarthy. So that's as high as I went. Then, of course, I did reading. And sometimes I used to get a chance to go to night school or something, but very seldom.

Teiser: What did your family think about your going to work so young?

Figari: My folks were from Italy. My mother came here when she was seven. They both came from Genova.

Teiser: What did your father do?

Figari: He was a fisherman.

Teiser: So you knew about boats from him.

Figari: I followed in his footsteps. That fellow over there [pointing to photograph] that's my son. He was a cadet then [when the picture was taken] on Moore-McCormack lines. And during the war he sailed as chief officer on a troop transport, you know. On the
Figari: last trip coming from South America for Moore-McCormack
war broke out, see. And he almost got bombed. But
they got it into New York and he went ashore and he
went to school there and he got his license. Then he
came back out here and sailed for Moore-McCormack.
This fellow [pointing to another photograph] was in the
Navy.

Teiser: What's his name?

Figari: William.

Teiser: He's the one who's with Crowley now?

Figari: He's with Crowley now.*

Teiser: And what's the other one's name?

Figari: Marney, Marshall B. Figari. He's an insurance broker
now. He was going to USF and he took this V-7 they
call it. They give you an aptitude test and they
sent him back to Northwestern. He was there for four
or five months and then went to Harvard. And he was
at Harvard for four or five months. Then he came out
as an ensign. Then he came out here and they shipped
him out to Honolulu. He was in communications. He
loved radio. His uncle used to teach him to build radios.

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*William V. Figari, Jr., marine superintendent, Red Stack
Towboat Company.
Figari: He was sort of a radio bug, too. Then he went to Honolulu and he could have stayed in Honolulu, but there was another fellow with him, a fellow by the name of Huggard. He had charge of the chorus of a band. Anyway, both of them wanted to see action, so he was put on an airplane carrier in the Leyte Gulf battle. And they came back here and they were damaged. Then they went to Puget Sound when they came back here. They put him on as the liason officer on a British carrier. That's where he wound up.

Teiser: Then he decided to get off the boats?

Figari: Oh yes. He didn't care for boats. So he didn't know what he wanted to do. My brother-in-law, E. Cummings, my wife's brother, is in insurance, Marine Office of America in San Francisco, and he used to carry my insurance for home and car and stuff. So, that's how he [Marshall B. Figari] started.

Teiser: Did your father take you fishing with him ever as a young kid -- did you go out?

Figari: I used to go out. They were row boats. My grandfather used to take me most of the time.
Teiser: Your grandfather was here in San Francisco too?

Figari: Oh yes, my grandfather too. They lived over on Telegraph Hill, also.

Teiser: Was that the Figari family?

Figari: No, their name was Mortola. My mother's name before she was married was Mortola.

Teiser: They used row boats for fishing?

Figari: Yes, oh yes. There were no gas engines then. The gas engines came in a few years after.

Teiser: How big were they?

Figari: Oh, they were only about twelve feet, fifteen feet.

Teiser: They didn't go out beyond the heads though?

Figari: They went out on the bar for crab, and my father used to go fishing for rock cod. And other fishermen used to go out for herrings and a lot of different things. They used to have lateen sails years ago and my grandfather used to sail over to Goat Island and Angel Island. He used to pick up driftwood and he used to sleep on the beach and cook cioppino. They used to hire him -- these clubs, years ago -- used to hire him to cook cioppino for them. (Laughter)

Teiser: At that time there were lots more fish and shellfish in
Teiser: the Bay than there are now, weren't there?

Figari: Yes, a lot of clams. And down where the airport is now and over on the other side of the Bay, on both sides, were oyster houses. Of course, I used to load oyster seed -- little oysters that came from the north, I guess. And we used to take them on the barge and take them out to these oyster houses out in the Bay. And they used to have Swedes out there, see, the Moraghan Oyster Company. There were about two oyster houses on each side of the Bay and sometimes they wouldn't unload the barge with all the oyster seed. They used to stay there overnight, and all those Swedes used to open oysters. They had oysters for lunch, oysters for dinner and oysters (laughter) for breakfast. They could surely open them.

That's where the airport is now. Of course a lot of it was filled in. And all in through there it's all shell banks. The Portland Cement Company started down there. And still the dredger goes out there and still digs oyster shells to make cement.

Teiser: Is that right?
Figari: Yes. It's full of oysters.

Teiser: You can't find a live oyster out there now, can you?

Figari: Oh no, no.

Teiser: Weren't there shrimp too?

Figari: The shrimp fishermen used to be at Hunter's Point and then there used to be another place at McNear's Point. They used to catch shrimps off of Point Richmond. And they had a place they used to cook them at McNear's Point -- between McNear's Point and San Rafael in a cove there -- and they used to have a boat that used to take the cooked shrimps from there to our place at the Vallejo Street Wharf. A fellow by the name of Charlie Anderson used to run the boat for the Chinamen back and forth.

Teiser: Were all the shrimp fishermen Chinese?

Figari: Yes, all Chinese.

Teiser: Where did they sell them at this end?

Figari: Oh, to the stores, at the market and everything. They were little shrimp, not big shrimp, for shrimp cocktails and things like that. The California Market on California Street, we used to get shrimp cocktails. We used to go in there and get a fine big steak, about
Figari: that big, for fifty cents. (Laughter)

Early Years on the Waterfront, Continued

Figari: Fishermen's Wharf -- I told you about the Ferry Building from the north, Washington Street, Pacific Street, Broadway One, Broadway Two.* Then came Vallejo Street, Green Street, and Union Street -- the Fisherman's Wharf was there. Union Street. Green Street and Vallejo Street both had coal bunkers on too. At Vallejo Street we used to have steamers come down from Coos Bay, the *Empire and another ship whose name I can't think of, and they used to put it [coal] in cars and run it across the street at the foot of Broadway Street -- Broadway, Davis, and Drumm. And they used to dump it in there in the lot. The entrance was at Broadway Street and they'd get the coal. The *Arcata was the other one -- the *Empire and the *Arcata used to come in there. And they used to take passengers up to Coos Bay because that

*This description of the piers is continued from page 9.
Figari: was the only way you could get up there. The steam schooners used to carry passengers. They had two passenger ships running up to Crescent City, the Crescent City and the Del Norte. Hobbs, Wall had a big redwood mill up there and they used to haul the redwood lumber down here from Crescent City. That was an outside place, too, you know. So those steam schooners used to be all Swedes and Russian-Finns, and Norwegians. They used to unload lumber with a heavy hook and pile that lumber up in those steam schooners, and the ship was sagging, the outside port was surging back and forth. Very few places used to go in side load.

Teiser: Oh yes, you mean, along the North Coast.

Figari: Yes, along the North Coast, Gualala, oh a lot of places.

Teiser: Didn't they load some of them with cables?

Figari: High-line. They used to high-line it on there.

Then came Union Street, which was Fisherman's Wharf. Then they moved it down to North Beach, where it is now. Then came the Dock, sort of a seawall, and they used to load freight on the sailing vessels
Figari: for Honolulu, you know. And then came the Ferry Slip, freight slip. They used to take the freight cars in and they had a couple of terminals down at the foot of Sansome Street, around through there. You wouldn't believe this: they used to take hogs and put them in the corral see -- I was only about seven or eight years old -- and they used to drive those hogs from Lombard Street Wharf, where the Ferry Slip was, out to Butchertown, right in front of [past] the Ferry Building -- that was the old Ferry Building. They used to walk them, and they used to have a couple of dogs who used to keep them in line. The Moose brothers -- Mr. Crowley knew them very well, he was raised with them -- they used to have a wagon and they used to get an old sow that couldn't walk and they'd throw her in the wagon. But you wouldn't believe it, they used to drive them, walk them all the way to Butchertown. I used to tell Mr. Crowley, "Remember the Moose brothers with the hogs?" And he said, "Yes." (Laughter)

After the Ferry came the Seawall, see, like the ship that I was on going up north used to go in there
Figari: and load grain, and they used to have flat -uh- cars that had just small wheels on and they used to unload them in there and take them across the street to the warehouse. They used to have a horse to drive them over.

Then came Powell Street Wharf. Then came Meiggs Wharf.

Teiser: What was on Powell Street Wharf?

Figari: A lumber place. They used to unload lumber. The sailing ships used to go in there and they used to unload lumber down through there.

Teiser: What was Meiggs Wharf doing then?

Figari: Well, Meiggs Wharf was -- Mr. Crowley had his Whitehall boat down there years ago. Then they had the Merchants Exchange down there. The Merchants Exchange used to go out to the steamers to get their report. The captains of the steamers would write their reports, how many hours from where they were. You'd go out in a Whitehall boat and then they'd take it ashore and then they had a horse and buggy to take it up to the Merchants Exchange out on California Street.
Figari: Then Hearst -- I don't know who started the Merchants Exchange, but he started the Marine Exchange. And there were two oppositions, see, the Merchants Exchange and the Marine Exchange. It's all called Marine Exchange now -- but Hearst got mad or something, I don't know, and they started it. A fellow by the name of Heine Bengens worked for the Marine Exchange when they started it, but he used to work for the Merchants before. Then a fellow by the name of Fitzgerald had charge of the Merchants Exchange. And they used to take baggagemen out there to passenger ships, you know, like coming down from British Columbia and coming down from Portland and all those places. The baggagemen used to get the passengers and check their baggage when they came ashore.

Teiser: They used Whitehall boats?

Figari: They used Whitehall boats. They had their own Whitehall boats.

Teiser: They didn't use Crowley's?

Figari: No, they never used Crowley's boats, no. They used their own Whitehall boats. They had davits, you know,
and they used to haul them out of the water, you see, when they weren't working. There were two brothers at the Vallejo Street Wharf, the Desmond boys they called them, and they had a Whitehall, and they were about the last ones and Mr. Crowley was very good to them.

(And he was very good to anybody who was down and out. I remember there was one fellow, and he was sort of a hop-head or something, and he used to be in and out of jail, and Mr. Crowley used to call to him, "How are you, Ghost?" His nickname was Ghost. He was very pale. "Oh, I'm all right Tom.")

And then these Desmond boys they used to row a Chinaman out to the sailing ships. Like the captains would have their wives, and they [the Chinamen] used to do the laundry, see. Then they used to row a photographer out there to take pictures. Those were the Desmond boys. They were two great characters. Then they used to run lines out to the sailing ships, tow lines to be docking the ships. They used to take a line over there and row it ashore and then hand it to the stevedores on the docks, see. They could heave the
Figari: ship and then go back in the stern and run another line. And he was very good to them, Mr. Crowley.
Anybody that needed anything, you know. He always used to hand out to everybody, you know. He's very generous, very generous.

Teiser: But exacting of the people who worked for him?

Figari: Oh the people who worked for him -- I worked for him, I think, for about a week or two at $7.50 a week. "Oh," he says, "I think I'll give you $10 a week. You're worth $10 a week." We used to take these captains out at night and they used to give you a quarter or something like that; they used to give you tips.

The French ships, you know, they used to take you aboard and say, "Come on and drink cognac." I went aboard one time, you know, and right in the stern they had all kinds of barrels of liquor. I remember one night I went out to the captain and I said, "All right I want a drink." And he used to clap his hands and a little French boy would run out and he used to have a tin cup about that big and he used to fill it up half full for me to drink out of. I said, "I don't
Figari: want that." I said, "Put it in a bottle and I'll take it home and give it to my father." He said, "All right." And he gave me a bottle. (Laughter)

Doing Business with the Ships in the Bay

Figari: Then we [of Crowley Launch and Tugboat Co.] used to go to the sailing ships that would come down from Port Costa and lay out in the Bay right off of Goat Island waiting for crews. Crews were scarce. When the sailing ships would come in from Europe, they used to anchor off of where the transport dock is now and then the boarding house runners would go down there.

Teiser: What transport dock?

Figari: Down at the foot of Van Ness Avenue, off the Marina there, they used to anchor the incoming vessels. All the boarding house boys used to have their own Whitehall boats go down and they used to have a few flasks of whiskey. They were ex-sailors themselves
Figari: and they used to work for these sailors' boarding houses, and they used to go aloft and help with the sail and help to hurry up and get ashore. The mates used to watch them and make sure the sails were furled all the time before they came ashore. Then I used to see these fellows come ashore in the morning, some of them, about eight or nine o'clock in the morning, and three or four o'clock in the afternoon I used to take them aboard of another ship bound for Europe. You wouldn't believe that!

Teiser: It just is incredible to me that they could have done that.

Figari: Oh sure. They used to take them to town, give them a bath, take them to the Barbary Coast and things like that, and they used to buy them some clothes, you know, and all those things. I don't know what they got, maybe a couple hundred dollars, you know, for a man. That was a lot of money then. The ships were laying out in the Bay, you know. They were worth money. They used to give them maybe a
Figari: couple dollars and they used to outfit them with underwear and blankets and stuff like that, which were very cheap then. Then they used to take them out and they used to have a watchman out there to watch that they wouldn't come ashore. We used to go alongside the ship and take another sailor on. A lot of times they'd have some money and they'd say, "Johnny, buy me a bottle of whiskey." So they used to give us a dollar to buy a bottle of whiskey. There was a place on Front Street between Broadway and Pacific, a place called Scanamanini's, and all the winos used to go in there. There was an alley in back, where the Evans Hotel is, and they used to get a whole big quart bottle for fifty cents.

Teiser: My word! (Laughter)

Figari: They used to say, "Where do you get this rot gut stuff?" (Laughter)

Teiser: A dollar a bottle was about the standard price, wasn't it?

Figari: Yes. But he had the barrels there and he used to open the spout and fill the bottles up.
Figari: Then when the ship was about to go to sea we used to go out there in the morning and we used to take the morning papers out to them. It used to be the **Call, Chronicle, and Examiner** -- there were three morning papers -- and we used to go in to the captain and ask "Have you any letters to mail?" He'd say, "Sit down, Johnny" -- he used to call you Johnny. And you'd sit down and he'd have all his mail ready and they used to have a lot of silver, you know, maybe he'd have two or three or four dollars sometimes and he used to dig down and say, "You mail my letters and you keep the rest." So we used to make a couple of nickels that way. So we used to have to beat the watchman in see -- he used to watch the ship because he used to want to go in and mail the letters. But we used to get there a little -- a fellow by the name of Red Lattimore and I -- we used to beat the watchman in; otherwise he'd get the letters to mail and get the loose change, see? The watchman used to have to watch the sailors, see, that they don't steal our boat, or something like
Figari: that. We had a little twenty-eight foot boat, with an eight horsepower engine, just had a canopy over it. You used to get the spray all over you. Then, as I say, the ships used to go to sea.

Teiser: Was Red Lattimore -- did he work on that boat with you?

Figari: No, he had a boat of his own. Mr. Crowley built more little boats, see.

Teiser: So Red Lattimore ran another of Mr. Crowley's boats?

Figari: Yes. Mr. Crowley, I think, went to Alaska, and he had two little boats, the Scout and the Chief. I used to take Mr. Crowley's father, Dave Crowley -- he used to work for a butcher, Albert Meyer, and he used to go out and wait for these sailing vessels to come in. And we used to go out in the twenty-eight foot boat, way out to the light ships, see. Of course, when it was too rough we didn't go out. But he had opposition from the Ferry Market, see, and they had hired a boat from another fellow, and we used to have to keep outside of him all the time.

Teiser: What was the opposition's name?
Figari: The Ferry Market, a fellow by the name of Finke. He was a butcher. The butcher business -- you see, they didn't buy much meat. When the ships were going to sea they used to buy all kinds of barrels, corned beef, salt pork, and all kinds of barrels of stuff, for the sailors at sea. Well, I used to take old David Crowley out and we used to go out about six o'clock in the morning ahead of the other fellow, you see. I was told that David Crowley, Mr. Crowley's father, used to work on the pilot boats. We used to go out a lot of times in the fog, and depending how the wind was, we used to sail out through the Golden Gate, no compass or anything. And we used to go out to the pilot boats and take the morning papers out there to them. If there was nice weather we'd tie the boat and -- our little twenty-eight foot boat -- and hang behind. Then we'd go down and have something to eat, see. There were two boats, an outside boat and an inside boat. They had three pilot boats. They had the America, the Lady Mine and the Gracie. One was inside and
two were outside. Then we used to lay out there and then we'd wait until about three o'clock in the afternoon and they we'd go to get some lunch. If nothing was around, then we used to come home. A sailing ship would be coming along and the sails would be white, see, and Mr. Crowley'd say, "That's a foreigner." And the sailing ships, of course, when they came in they'd take the sails down and store them away, but the ships that used to run up the coast with coal and lumber and stuff, they were dirty, see. And if he'd see a dirty sail he'd say, "Oh, we don't want to bother with that one." He had a good eye. He taught me a lot of things, too.

Teiser: You took him out in the Spy?

Figari: No, in the Scout. The Spy Mr. Crowley had sold -- I think it went to Alaska or something. So he built two boats, the Scout and the Chief. Red Lattimore used to run the Chief and I ran the Scout.

Teiser: Was it bigger than the Spy?

Figari: No, it was the same thing. It just had a canopy over it, that's all. Sometimes David Crowley
Figari: couldn't go out and a fellow by the name of Jim Sinnott, who was an old-timer there (you mention his name and the old man senior knows him), I used to take him. He used to get the butcher business in place of Mr. Crowley. Then when the ships came in to anchor, Tom Crowley used to go out to the ships and say, "Well I spoke to you first" and all that.

Of course, everybody used to have to wait until the yellow flag came down and of course the quarantine doctor had to go aboard, you know, and they always had to wait. We couldn't go aboard because Mr. Crowley got stuck once. He jumped aboard the ship before the yellow flag was down and the doctor took -- the quarantine station was over on Angel Island -- and he took him and another fellow who had jumped the yellow flag, and they took them over to Angel Island. (Laughter)

Teiser: And put them in quarantine?

Figari: Yes. (Laughter) They stayed there overnight. (Laughter)

Jim Sinnott worked for Mr. Crowley. Mr.
Figari: Crowley treated him very well. He contracted TB and he sent him up to Colfax, and he was up there for about two years in Colfax. And Mr. Crowley paid the whole bill while he was up there. I used to go up there and see him. This was in the '20s. I used to take the wife and the two boys -- they were very small then -- we used to go on the Sacramento boat -- put the automobile on the Sacramento boat, and go up to Sacramento, and then drive from Sacramento to Colfax. I used to go up there a couple of times a year and he was always very happy to see us. Then we used to drive down home. But the last couple of times we went up there they used to have the Sacramento steamer leaving there on a Sunday night -- we used to go up on a Saturday night. A couple of times we came down on the Capitol City and Fort Sutter which used to run before they got the Delta Queen and Delta King.
Teiser: That's Kearny near Pacific?

Figari: That's Kearny all the way from Market Street.

Teiser: That was when Kearny was part of the Barbary Coast?

Figari: Barbary Coast. Broadway Street and Kearny Street from Broadway down.

Teiser: What was the Barbary Coast?

Figari: Well, the Barbary Coast was a lot of dance halls.
Figari: Purcell's was a colored place. They had all colored girls, and the colored men used to go in there. And these girls used to dance with you and you'd buy them a bottle of beer for two bits, and she used to get ten cents, and the bar used to get the same thing. You could sit there and keep on buying beer. She would order beer all the time. Then there was a place called Diana, and all the Swedes used to go in there. Then there was a Thalia and oh all kinds of places. Izzy Gomez's place, it had colored and Portuguese girls. These dance hall girls, a lot of them were married women, you know, but they used to work there and make a couple of nickels. Of course lots of them were high flyers, too, you know. But they used to dance with you and you'd buy them a bottle of beer. Of course, then they had little booths up above and they used to take you up there and give you a couple of shots and roll you and knock you out. They used to have special policemen, and they wouldn't bother you. I used to drop down in there
Figari: when I was, oh, you know sixteen or seventeen. If you tried to get fresh or something, they'd clobber you. You'd take, oh, after a football game -- California and Stanford -- these kids used to go down there you know and they'd try to raise the devil. They used to get detached from their girl friends. The fellows from the Barbary Coast used to steal their girl friends. (Laughter) So, as I say, nobody bothered you at the Barbary Coast. Of course they would pick your pockets, all these crooks, and that stuff. A fellow by the name of Parente owned a place down there where Jack Dempsey used to hang out. That's where Jack Dempsey started -- at the Barbary Coast down there. Parente used to have a lot of prizefighters around, and El Verano used to have a bunch down there. Then they used to have these houses that they had these prostitutes in on Jackson Street. There were Chinese places and French girls and colored girls. The County Jail used to be on Broadway between Columbus Avenue and Kearny, and they used to have an alley they called
Figari: Hinckley Alley going up this way, and Pinkley Alley going the other way.

Teiser: They've changed their names now.

Figari: I know they did. (Laughter) The colored girls were in Hinckley and Pinkley alleys. But the County Jail was right there. I remember as a kid going to school there, I'd see the trustees out in front sweeping. In Hinckley Alley they used to unload the supplies there.

Teiser: You certainly had a good neighborhood to go to school in! (Laughter)

Figari: Oh yes. (Laughter) I always thanked Mr. Crowley for giving me a job that I broke away from all that gang that I used to go around with.

Red Lattimore afterwards ran the police boat.

I don't know if you remember that -- they blew up the *Times* Building. What the heck was those brothers name?

Teiser: In Los Angeles?

Figari: Yes, they blew up the *Times* Building in Los Angeles -- the McNamara brothers. Anyhow P. H. McCarthy was
the head of the labor union there. And Red Lattimore took P. H. McCarthy and a bunch over there to San Quentin. I took a ride over with them. I met over there the two brothers. I met five or six fellows that I used to chase around with. We met a guard over there that was a boarding house runner and he took us all through the place. I'll never forget, I was walking up the steps and there was a fellow up ahead on the steps and he saw me and he went like this to me [putting finger on lips] not to start to talk to him. This fellow, the guard, Jim Webb, said, "You want to talk to him?" I said, "No, I don't want to talk to him." He was working in the printing office. He worked in a printer's office when I knew him. So, as I say, I always thanked Mr. Crowley for getting me out of this because it was a tough neighborhood.

My people, as I say, my mother worked. She used to work in a cannery. There used to be a cannery on Broadway and Sansome Streets, the King-Morse Canning Company. And across the street used
Figari: to be Black's canning place. They used to make the cans. And I worked at the can place.

Teiser: Making cans?

Figari: They used to make the cans, yes.

Teiser: They made them with machinery?

Figari: I forget how. Then they used to put the tops and bottoms on, see, and they used to put a hole on top. In the cannery they used to put the fruit in and they used to put a top on and they used to seal it. Then steel trays would drop them down into big vats of boiling water. They used to cook the fruit that way.

Then, down on the corner of Broadway and Battery was the American Biscuit Company. I worked there, too. I used to pull strip. The presses used to press soda crackers, then the strips used to come out, and I used to pull the strips of dough.

I was about nine or something like that. (Laughter) I used to get, I think, three dollars a week. So I did everything.

My father was a fisherman, and as I say they
Figari: never made much money. My mother worked in a cannery peeling fruit.

**Competition on the Bay**

Figari: There's a lot of other things I can talk to you about -- the competitors that he [Thomas Crowley] had.

Teiser: Who were they?

Figari: A fellow by the name of Bill Clark. He built two boats and he had a boathouse right alongside of us. He was in opposition to Mr. Crowley for a while, but Mr. Crowley bought him out. And I think Bill Clark sold one boat -- it went to Alaska and Mr. Crowley bought the big one. It had a cabin on it.*

Paladini used to come in here and unload fish and there was a big Spanish fellow, Charley Carlo his name was, and he used to watch the fish for Paladini. And he used to live in a boarding

*See also p. 56.
Figari: house, and they used to put lunch up for him and give him a bottle of wine. Paladini's boats would come in about seven or eight o'clock at night. And they used to unload the fish in boxes and leave it on the wharf. Then in the morning about six o'clock the wagons used to come down and take the fish up to the markets. This fellow Albert used to steal Charley Carlo's wine all the time. (Laughter) He used to drink half of Carlo's wine. Carlo used to keep it in Clark's boathouse next door. So one night I came in from taking a captain out to a ship and I went to the boathouse, and I hear some fellow moaning and groaning. I went in there and it was Albert. I said, "What's the matter?" He said, "I don't know. My stomach." So I got ahold of Emergency Hospital and they took him and pumped him out. So when I came back from taking him to Emergency Hospital, I asked Charley Carlo what he did. He said, "I put washing soda in the wine." (Laughter)

So the next morning Mr. Crowley and a fellow by the name of Ed Smith came down and I told Mr.
Figari: Crowley about it. And he said, "Albert, what was the matter with you last night?" He said, "Oh, I had something that didn't die yet." (Laughter) So he said, "You'd better kill it next time before you eat it." (Laughter)

Sanguinetti used to have a place which supplied fishermen on Union Street Wharf. He had a place on the corner of Vallejo and Davis Streets. Albert used to go down there and eat all the time. And he used to get full of wine. That's when I used to run his boat all the time, when I first started. You wouldn't believe it: there was another place on Union Street, Italian fishermen used to live there, they used to give you an entree and soup and a bottle of wine for two bits. Good minestrone soup and stuff like that.
Competition on the Bay, Continued

Teiser: I think when we stopped talking the other day you had a list of companies that had been absorbed by Mr. Crowley's company.

Figari: There are three or four companies. Mr. Crowley, Sr. worked very hard. Years ago the passengers going to Honolulu, to and from, the school teachers all went on sailing vessels. There were no steamers. And he used to get up early in the morning and we used to go down, and we had Henry Peterson of the Peterson Company as our competitor. And we used to fight to take these passengers ashore, their baggage. The ships would lie out in the stream and wait their turn to the Western Sugar Company to discharge sugar. Sugar came in bags then.

There were two companies. Matson had four ships running there. Henry Peterson got most of the Matson business. He was a friend or something like that. He, [Matson], had the Falls of Clyde, the Marion Chilcott, Roderick Dhu and the Santiago
Figari: running to Honolulu. After the sugar business got out, the Falls of Clyde and the Marion Chilcott hauled oil to Honolulu. They used to carry bulk oil. And I believe the Falls of Clyde is still up in Alaska as an oil barge. I don't know what became of the Marion Chilcott.

Then there was another company down at the foot of Union Street there, Andrew Welch and R. P. Rithet, Mohican, St. Katherine, and the Tillie Starbuck.

Teiser: Those were the opposition line's boats?

Figari: Opposition to Matson. I forget what line.* They used to dock at Union Street. There was a sort of sea wall there. Fisherman's Wharf was there when I was a youngster.

Mr. Crowley used to get up at six o'clock in the morning and go down to the ships -- depending upon what time of year it was. In the wintertime the doctor goes out from sunrise to sunset. You

*Welch and Company
Figari: have to wait until he gets finished with the ship before anybody can go aboard. Mr. Crowley and Peterson used to jump over the side, I told you. They'd climb up the side of the ship. The ships were deep, you know, loaded with sugar. So, he worked hard.

Teiser: They would both board the same ship?

Figari: Yes. You see, the passengers used to go to Honolulu and come back in sailing ships. There were no steamers.

Teiser: On cargo sailing ships. Where was Western Sugar?

Figari: On the other side of the Union Iron Works. The Western Sugar buildings are still there.

Teiser: Western Sugar was receiving the sugar from these ships?

Figari: Yes. You see, they used to refine the sugar there. Down at Illinois Street, I guess. The sternwheel steamer, the Potrero, used to deliver the sugar to the steamship companies along the dock to go north and go all over.

Teiser: They sent it around on a steamer?
Figari: Yeah, they sent it up north to Seattle and Portland.

Teiser: The *Potrero* just stayed in the Bay though?

Figari: Oh yeah, she was a stern wheel steamer. All these ships had to wait there, see.

Teiser: I interrupted you. You had Mr. Peterson and Mr. Crowley going over the side.

Figari: Yeah, they were going over the side to get to the captain to get the business. In later years Alaska Packers was the same way. The fishermen would come down from Alaska. We used to get the Chinese. They were cannery hands up there. As I say, he worked hard, he got up early in the morning.

Afterwards we had a Mr. Ernest Tanner who was an expressman at the Ferry Building. Then he made a deal with Mr. Crowley. I think they got about a dollar to take them ashore with their baggage; and Mr. Crowley got fifty cents for taking them ashore; and Mr. Tanner got the other fifty cents. They'd take the Chinese with their baggage and take them up to Chinatown. This was way after the quake, this episode. As I said, he worked very hard for everything
Figari: He got.

He had a competitor next door, a fellow by the name of Billy Clark. He had two boathouses. They used to call them boathouses. They didn't call them offices. And Billy Clark built two boats -- he didn't last very long. He saw he couldn't make a go of it, so Mr. Crowley bought the big boat from him. Its name was William C., it was named after him, William Clark. I forget what the name of the small boat was, but I think he sold it to somebody in Alaska. And Mr. Crowley bought the big launch, he had a thirty-five horsepower boat. Because I know, I ran her afterwards, and he named it the Recruit.

Teiser: Who was Peterson?

Figari: Henry Peterson -- he was a competitor. His office was up on Folsom Street.

Teiser: What happened to him?

Figari: He stayed in business. I'll come to that. (Laughter) Then we had a fellow by the name of Cattermole, Charles H. Cattermole, he was a German and he used to get all the German sailing ships' business. He'd
Figari: supply them with their groceries. He just had a saloon, but he used to buy the groceries from wholesale people and he used to make a commission. I don't know what it was about, but he built two little boats and he had two brothers -- the Gately brothers, John F. and William H. -- they took care of these little boats. But he didn't last very long. He couldn't make a go of it. They thought Mr. Crowley was making easy money. (Laughter) It cost money, you know.

We used to burn, in those boats, distillate. We used to pay three cents a gallon for it then. They were all gasoline boats, but we burned distillate. I think they paid two and a half or three cents a gallon; it was very cheap. They used to make it out of the crude oil.

The Ferry Market, Mr. Finke of the Ferry Market, was a competitor. He got sore at Mr. Crowley. Mr. Crowley's father was getting the butcher business from Albert Meyer, the butcher. Albert Meyer, the butcher, was on Steuart Street, between Mission and
Howard. So he got a fellow named Michaels to put the money up and he built two boats, the Comet and the Meteor, and they had fifty horse-power standard engines. They lasted maybe a year or so, I guess. Mr. Finke gave up and sold his boats to Mr. Crowley. They made some kind of deal where he would split the butcher business. I don't know what it was about. But he bought those two boats. I ran one of them, the Comet.

The 1906 Earthquake

The morning of the earthquake -- I lived on the corner of Montgomery and Vallejo, right at the foot of Telegraph Hill, and I know I was asleep, and I had a little shake. So I stayed in bed, you know. My mother was screaming. Then another one came. I said, "I'd better get out, I guess."

(Laughter) So, the Italians -- a lot of Italians lived up there -- all yowling out in the street.
Figari: (Laughter) So I got up and I went down to work and never went back home any more. My father was a fisherman and he packed a lot of things from the house down to the boat. My mother and father moved over to Sausalito with my grandfather, my grandmother and her brothers. They moved over there and stayed over there. The ferry boats would take the people to Oakland or Sausalito, see. But they would not take anybody this way.

Teiser: At the time of the fire.

Figari: They were free of charge, and the people come from all over, down the waterfront, packing all their stuff, you know, and a lot of people left their stuff there. Some big shots didn't want to go over on the ferry with their baggage, so they hired this Comet that I ran for Mr. Crowley to take them over, which I did. So I got over to the Oakland Mole.

Teiser: What kind of people were they? Do you remember who they were?

Figari: No, I don't remember who they were, they were some big shots. But I got over to the Oakland Mole and
Figari: there were three or four men there and they said, "Will you take us to San Francisco?" I said, "Yeah, all right." They said, "What are you going to charge us?" I said, "I don't know." They said, "Well, we'll give you anything." Their families were here and the ferries wouldn't take them over. There was no way of getting over. I said, "A dollar or so." They said, "Fine." Then another bunch came. It was only a small boat. It was only about fifty feet, you know. I guess I had about fifty or so on the boat. (Laughter) I didn't have a life preserver on the boat. We got over and Mr. Crowley said, "Where'd you go?" I don't know whether he or his brother came down. I told him I charged a dollar, a dollar and a half apiece. He said, "All right." They were tickled to death. I didn't have any change. I made three or four trips over there. But then the policemen caught up with me. (Laughter) And they wouldn't allow it any more. So then I went up to the foot of Franklin Street. They had a few over there, but then they got wise over there.
Teiser: So you worked all that first day?

Figari: I worked all that day, and the next day they printed the Call, Chronicle, Examiner, one paper, two sheets, and I took them from Oakland. They printed them over at the Tribune, and I took them over here. There must have been forty or fifty bundles of paper. They didn't know how they were going to get rid of them. Nobody was going to go down and sell the papers. And there were so many around the dock and across the street. Freight cars were burning; a lot of them had liquor in them and stuff like that. And they had the steamer Santa Rosa, the Pacific Coast Steamship Company, pumping water.

Teiser: Pumping it across the street?

Figari: Oh yeah, because the pipelines were all broke. So they had the steamers pump. The steamers all had, in case of fire, all kinds of hoses. And the firemen were stringing hoses along to put out the fires in all of these box cars across the street. There were some freight sheds there and they were afraid it would spread. I know that Dave Crowley and
Figari: I got caught and they made us handle hoses, see. And they had the National Guard down there and they had sailors there from different ships. And we didn't dare to run away. Finally we did sneak away and went down to the boat and went to Oakland. If they had caught us they would have shot us for running away.

Teiser: I didn't know about the boats pumping.

Figari: Oh yeah. You see, the Pacific Coast Steamship Company at the foot of Broadway -- I know the Santa Rosa was in and I think the State of California, and several others. I know that Captain Alexander, the captain of the Santa Rosa, he was over there, and he knew Mr. Crowley. That's how I know about the pumping. They couldn't get water anywhere.

Teiser: Where did you and Dave Crowley go then when you ran off?

Figari: We went to Oakland.

Teiser: What did you do there?

Figari: He went uptown, and he met his brother Tom over there. And I slept on the boat. All I did was roll in a blanket and went to sleep.
Teiser: Where did you dock over there?

Figari: At the foot of Franklin Street. They had the Franklin Street Dock.

Teiser: Had Mr. Tom Crowley gone over there to locate his business headquarters, or how did he happen to be there?

Figari: The night of the quake, why Mr. Crowley and his brother Dave went across. I took them across the Bay, the two of them. They had all the money in a three-gallon milk can -- all silver, no paper then, and gold. They went across the Bay and I left them there. He never went over there to locate.

The next morning Dave Crowley and I went over; that's when they caught us. The day afterwards the fire was raging down on the waterfront.

Teiser: Was there another of Mr. Crowley's brothers in the business then?

Figari: Oh, there was three -- Thomas Crowley, David Crowley, and Jack Crowley.

Teiser: Were the other boys younger?

Figari: Yes, younger.
Teiser: More your age?

Figari: No. Oh, I guess Dave Crowley was about seven or eight years older than I, and Jack Crowley was maybe five years older than I was. They ran boats every once in a while.

I remember Captain [Charles W.] Saunders. Later he was port captain for Matson Navigation Company. I used to go aboard and take him ashore. He used to give me my breakfast aboard there in the morning. There was no place to eat. We had a gasoline stove up in the boat house, and Mr. Crowley had built another boathouse that had some rooms upstairs. We bought some eggs and bacon over at Oakland and we thought we'd get over to this side and we'd have bacon and eggs. It was a gasoline stove, you see, and the gasoline stove caught afire. We opened a window and threw it out the window and it hung on some telegraph wires. And there were some sailors there and they put it out. It was against the law, you know, to build any fires. I'll never forget. I kind of burnt my hand a little bit throwing it out the
Figari: window. I slept on the boat. I used to go up to Oakland there and take a bath and stuff like that. And there were restaurants over in Oakland. You could eat over in Oakland, you know. So we used to stay in Oakland at night. There was nothing over here. I went home a week or so afterwards.

Teiser: But you were kept busy before that going back and forth on the Bay?

Figari: Yeah, we lived in Oakland. Different business, towing and stuff.

Bay and Delta Towing

Teiser: I think the operations you've spoken of so far are carrying, not towing, not tugboat operations. Is that right?

Figari: Yeah. I worked for the Crowley Launch and Tugboat Company, not for the Red Stacks. I never did work for the Red Stacks. Before the earthquake I worked for Crowley Brothers, see. That was the name of the company.
Teiser: Then after the earthquake it became the Crowley Launch and Tugboat Company.

Figari: Then after the earthquake the sailing vessels started dwindling away and tramp steamers come in here see. Then we did a lot of towing. Mr. Crowley, afterwards, bought a lot of scow schooners.

Teiser: When was that, about?

Figari: I think that was after the quake.

Teiser: Up to this time however you'd just been carrying?

Figari: Mostly passengers.

Teiser: Passengers and provisions?

Figari: That's it, passengers and provisions.

Teiser: How did Mr. Crowley get into towing?

Figari: He bought these boats -- I used to tow with this little boat, an oil barge. Every Monday morning I'd go up to Richmond. It was an old stern wheel steamer hull and they used to carry the oil in this hull. One week we would go up the Sacramento River and haul the dredges up. Then the dredges were building levees all the time. There were all kinds of dredges on the Sacramento-San Joaquin River. We used to go
Figari: up the Sacramento River -- there's Twitchell Island and Grand Island and all those islands -- then up to Cache Creek and San Juan Slough and all those places, up through the river there.

The next week we'd go up the San Joaquin River and go up to Sherman Island and Seven Mile Slough and Three Mile Slough and the Mokelumne River -- oil dredges up there. They used to keep on building levees all the time. Then one year all the islands went under. I forget what year that was.

Teiser: Big flood?

Figari: Oh, big flood. Sherman Island, Bouldin Island, Jersey Island, all the islands. They had a big break in Bouldin Island. They took a ship up there and sunk it in the break there. So we towed piles up the river and towed one up the river. After the quake, towed dredges up there.

Teiser: Did you use the same boats you had been using?

Figari: Oh no, he built other boats. Crowley #1 and Crowley #2. Here's the picture William McGillivray gave me. He has a lot of old pictures. McGillivray was
Figari: captain of Crowley #2. He used to take this and tow this barge with old drums of gasoline and kerosene for the Union Oil Company. This is a boom here, see, and it had a little gas engine back here, and he had a salesman with him, and he used to go out on the levee. He used to go up the Sacramento and San Joaquin Rivers, and he used to sell a drum of gasoline or a drum of kerosene. And we used to collect the money right there. McGillivray ran this boat; this is the number two. I ran the number one.

Teiser: When were they built?

Figari: They were built in about 1908 or '09.

Teiser: Were they Mr. Crowley's first boats that were used for towing?

Figari: Oh no, they had the Comet and the Meteor that they bought ... 

Teiser: Were those little boats used for both carrying and towing?

Figari: Yeah, passengers too. See, this is a cabin back here.

Teiser: Oh, Crowley #1 and Crowley #2 carried passengers, too.

Figari: Yes. We carried passengers here [showing photograph].
Figari: We used to steer back here and over on this side operate the engine from here.

Teiser: Is that the stern?

Figari: This is the stern, yes. Because down here they were so deep you couldn't see over the bow. We used to steer out there all hours of the night.

Teiser: On the upper deck at the stern.

Figari: It was geared. We used to have a wheel, see, and a rod ran up to the clutch to reverse and go ahead the engine. We used to have about twenty turns from go ahead to reverse.

Figari: You used to stand out there. You couldn't steer at night -- you couldn't see anything. I couldn't see over the bow of the boat. I remember one night coming down from Vallejo. They sent me up to Vallejo to get I think it was 250 piles. A fellow by the name of Collins -- he was in the office and he didn't know anything about it -- he said, "Oh, go up anyhow." And I went up. And I couldn't get the piling off. It was wintertime.

Teiser: Was the piling on a barge?
Figari: No, they're in the water. We towed them. They made them into rafts. They bored holes and put a chain through them. As I say, 150 or 200. They were already made up, you see. And I got outside of Mare Island and the fog came down. I had a raftsman with me in case the raft would break up. And he went down and I like near froze. I got so cold with the fog and the cold weather that I just was numb. I just came down and I had to run around the Brothers light and the ferries. Car ferries used to come in at the foot of Lombard Street. And I got tangled up with a lot of car barges. I finally got through anyhow and I tied up at the Vallejo Street Wharf and went home. But I never felt so cold [as] coming down that night. (Laughter). I had a compass and a flashlight. I had the compass on top of the house there on that side. And I flashed the flashlight on the compass.

Teiser: You couldn't see it otherwise?

Figari: No. It was so dark.

    Then Mr. Crowley -- how he got into the tugboat
Figari: business -- he got a contract for the Key Route Pier. He built that breakwater out there. He bought a tug up in Eureka, the H. H. Buhne from the Buhne Lumber Company in Eureka. And he towed barges of rock from McNear's Point to fill for the Key Route, which is now the Bay Bridge. All that rocky wall out from Oakland 'way out where the rock wall is, the Key Route built some piers to run in there. And that's where he started with the first tow boat -- steam tug, that was -- that he bought.

Teiser: How big a boat was it?

Figari: Oh, I guess it was 100 feet, maybe a little over. A fellow by the name of Captain Beers, I believe, George W. Beers, was captain of this tow boat. He also towed rock for the seawall they built from the Ferry Building along the waterfront. They built a seawall and they put concrete on top. And the office that we had at Pier 14, after we moved, on the south side of the Ferry Building. But that's how we started in the towing business, and I believe then he took over the Red Stack Tug Boat Company, that
Figari: was about 1916 or '17, I forget which.

He was a tow boat man from then on. That's how he got into the tow boat business.

Teiser: This is a stupid question, but what's the difference between a tow boat and a tug boat?

Figari: They're the same thing. Some people call them tow boats, some tug boats. Now they have diesel tugs; they push for you. They get behind us and push us ahead. Up above Sacramento they do pushing.

Expanding Crowley Operations

Teiser: Were there competitors. Were there other companies then that tried to get in?

Figari: Oh yes. Jim Rolph went into the tug boat business. He was in opposition to the Red Stacks, after Mr. Crowley bought it. He had the Storm King, and the Galina, and the Gualala. He had about five boats. But he didn't last long.

Spreckels was in the tug boat business, before
Figari: Mr. Crowley had the tow boats. He was in opposition to the Red Stacks years ago.

They used to dock at Pacific Street Wharf. They had the Relief, the Defiance, the Dauntless, the Alert, and the Reliance. I used to go out to sea and get ships to get the business. You know, it would be up to the captain to make a deal. "I'll tow you in for $150, $200" or whatever. They were competitors.

Teiser: Were they in business long before Mr. Crowley was?

Figari: Oh yes, Spreckels, oh yes. This was 'way before the earthquake.

Teiser: Did he buy them out or did they just...

Figari: The Red Stacks, that was Captain Gray* and that bunch of shipowners. They absorbed Spreckels' boats.

Teiser: Who was Captain Gray?

Figari: He was head of the Red Stack Tug Boat Company.

Teiser: Before Mr. Crowley took it over?

Figari: Before Mr. Crowley, yes.

Teiser: Did he continue with it then?

*William J. Gray
Figari: No, not after Mr. Crowley took it over. You see, the Red Stacks over at Vallejo Street, on the north side, south side of Vallejo Street, they used to dock there. And Spreckels' company was on Pacific Street on the south side of Pacific Street. Then the Red Stacks moved from Vallejo Street to the north side of Green Street. After the quake my folks bought a little lot up on Telegraph Hill. We were burnt out of the corner of Montgomery and Vallejo, but they bought a little lot off of Vallejo Street, between Sansome and Montgomery. There was an alley there, Hodges Alley; it was a blind alley. And they built a little cottage there with about three rooms. The room that I had was 'way in back. You just had to walk in and back out, see. And I, from the back porch, I could look right down into the Red Stacks at Green Street. We lived there, oh, I guess until about 1914. My mother couldn't climb up the hill any more, so they sold the place -- gave it away for nothing. (Laughter) It would be worth some money now.
Teiser: Yes, I should say.

Figari: I had a brother and he used to work for Crowley. Then he went and worked for Wilder.

Teiser: Who was Wilder?

Figari: He was in the tugboat business up at Channel Street, where the banana boats unload. They call that Channel Street. He used to tow the river barges.

Teiser: What was your brother's first name?

Figari: Pete. He used to work for him. He quit Crowley and worked for him. And a boat blew up and blew him up on his birthday. On December 2, 1929, he was blown up. I had another brother who died, and I had a sister who died. I had a grandson, not very long ago, about a year ago, who was blown up the same way, among the Red Stacks.

Teiser: That's not a very frequent sort of accident, is it?

Figari: No, no, very seldom.

Teiser: How did Mr. Crowley happen to go into the Red Stacks?

Figari: That I don't know. Had this one tug, as I said. After it got finished towing rock, he used to tow schooners.
Figari: Then he also, after the quake, had the barkentine Olympic and the old steamer City of Panama*. They raised her. She sunk out in the Bay, and they fixed her up and made a four-masted schooner out of her. And then they had the John & Winthrop, which was a whaler, and he fixed her up and made a three-masted schooner out of her, and they used to haul case oil from here to Australia.

Teiser: What's case oil?

Figari: Kerosene and gasoline in five-gallon cans. And they used to put two five-gallon cans in a case, a wooden box. That's why they called it case oil. They shipped them on the Olympic and Crowley which ran to Australia, and the John & Winthrop ran to the South Sea Islands with it, see. I don't know who was in it with them, I don't know much about it. But he had those three vessels.

His brain was working all the time, same way with his son. His son has built the business way up. Then

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*The City of Panama was re-named the Crowley
Mr. Crowley bought this F. A. Kilburn and ran up to Portland. They used to run to Portland from Spear Street Wharf, as I told you, the Geo. W. Elder and the Columbia. I don't know, there was some way -- he didn't buy them from them -- he bought them from somebody else. They used to run to Portland and Coos Bay and around there. And they had the steamer Columbia running up to Coos Bay -- hauling lumber down.

Then afterwards he and Andy Mahoney started, they used to call it Crowley and Mahoney. They had a couple of wooden vessels right after the war that were built for hauling lumber from Portland. The Jane Nettleton and the Thomas Crowley were the names of the two vessels. Later they sold them to the French in France.

Teiser: This was World War I?

Figari: Yes. That's where all that case oil was going -- to Australia and all through there after World War I. So, as I say, Mr. Crowley -- that brain of his was working all the time. He used to have an office on
Figari: California Street. The brothers ran the place down at Pier 14.

Teiser: When did you move to Pier 14?

Figari: 14 was built after the quake. Tramp steamers used to come. Sailing vessels started dwindling away. And all the business went up to the south side of the Ferry Building. Peterson was up there alone -- Henry Peterson. Then we moved on the south side of Howard One. I remember it had a little barge and it had a gangway and just ran passengers. Battleships used to come in and they used to be all up that way. The north end of the Ferry Building kind of died out.

Teiser: At that same time then did Mr. Crowley move his office to California Street?

Figari: No, no. When he was in the steam schooner business he moved up there. He was operating these vessels here, and he had an office up there, and his brothers used to run the business. And he used to play golf and everything. He belonged to the Olympic Club. And he used to come down Saturday morning to
Crowley office on Pier 14, south side of Howard Street, about 1907. Left - David Crowley; Right - James Madden of Hercules Powder Company. Photo courtesy of Crowley Tugboat Company.
Figari: Pier 14 and then he'd go out and play golf.

Teiser: I read somewhere that the people who helped Mr. Crowley get started were...

Figari: Stabens and Friedman?

Teiser: No. Who were they?

Figari: They were in the clothing business. They had a place on Jackson Street. People always said that, and I asked Mr. Crowley one day about it. And he said, "They never put up a nickel." They had two brothers -- they had Morris Friedman and Meyer Friedman -- and they used to supply the whalers. You know, we used to take the crew out to the whalers years ago. They had all kinds of whalers running out of here. I guess every summer they used to go out, about eight or nine whalers used to go out of here. They used to get the young fellows and tell them how much money they would make on the whale boats and all that. When they'd come back -- I don't know, this is hearsay -- the poor devils would get paid off with five dollars after going away for a couple of months. (Laughter)
Figari: I'll never forget -- the people that manned the whalers -- the fellows that did the whaling -- were Portuguese, very dark, almost like Negroes. One young fellow I'll never forget. We used to have to take them out there, and we used to have to get this fellow to sign the receipt for them. I'd deliver them on board. And the fellow that shanghaied them, or got them, told them, "You'll have a nice room and nice curtains in your room and you'll have a nice bed in it." And the youngster got aboard and said, "Where's my room?" And he said, "You go in the forecastle." That kid begged me to take him ashore. (Laughter) We couldn't take him ashore. (Laughter) So they used to give them a lot of stories, you know. I used to feel sorry for them. They used to pay them off with five dollars. They wouldn't get any whale bone. They got a lot of sperm oil.

Teiser: Did the clothing merchants outfit these whalers?

Figari: Yes, they outfitted these boys. And there was a fellow by the name of Levi. He was the opposition to
Figari: supply these whalers with clothing and supply these youngsters that they used to get, and give them, you know, overalls and a lot of clothing -- underwear and stuff like that, shoes and stuff like that. I don't know how much they got from supplying each man, but they got pretty good money.

Teiser: Who paid them?

Figari: The whaling company. The ship paid them, see. They would work on shares. Instead of whale bone. Whale bone was very expensive then.

Teiser: So they got back with oil and divided the oil?

Figari: Yes, whatever they got for the oil; I don't know. But they didn't get much anyhow. They were gone for about two or three months, I would say. But the whales kind of dwindled out, I don't know. Just like sailing vessels, they just dwindled away.

Teiser: The people who I was told helped Mr. Crowley get started were Dave and John, his brothers, and Jimmy Sinnott and Willie Figari and Walter Westman.

Figari: Well, yeah, Dave and Jack Crowley were his brothers. Jim Sinnott worked with us. That's the fellow I
Figari: said the other day that he was a good friend of Mr. Crowley and contracted TB and was sent to Colfax, and Mr. Crowley paid for it. Well, we helped to build the business.

And Walter Westman was a bookkeeper. He came there as a bookkeeper and then he went as a dispatcher. He came there in the latter part of 1906.

Then we also had a bookkeeper, Miss Marie Carey. She came there in 1907. She was an old maid, a very wonderful woman, she died in -- oh I forget the year -- but Mr. Crowley has a scrapbook.

We never put any money into the business. Mr. Crowley was the one that built the business himself.

Teiser: I think it was just indicated that you were all very loyal employees.

Figari: Yes.

Teiser: What did Sinnott do? What was his function?

Figari: I used to take him out to sea to get the butcher business for Albert Meyer when Mr. Crowley's dad didn't feel well and wouldn't go out. I used to take Jim Sinnott out there. He was a sort of a
Figari: superintendent, see.

Teiser: Did he leave the business at some point?

Figari: No, he stayed with Mr. Crowley all the time until he died. Mr. Crowley took very good care of him. He was sick for a long while. There were a lot of people he helped. Anybody who asked him for a dollar, why he'd give it to them. He never refused anybody.

Teiser: His brothers were his first employees then?

Figari: Yes. They started in Whitehall boats, row boats, you know.

Teiser: Then there was the fellow who you went out with, Albert, who was an employee.

Figari: Yes. Then they built a boat, the Jennie C., named after Mr. Crowley's sister. They built the Crowley; then they built the Spy, the Scout and the Chief. They just kept abuilding, and he sold a lot of boats that went to South America. And he used to sell a lot of boats to go to South America.

Teiser: When did he sell them? When they were useless to him or when somebody wanted them?

Figari: When somebody said, "Tom, I want a boat," so he'd give
Figari: them any boat he had. Like the first boat he built, the _Jennie C._ He sold it to a fellow by the name of Von Loben Sels in Courtland. I delivered it up to the dredger district. They had a district they called District 551. Von Loben Sels owned a lot of property on the islands up there around Courtland. I delivered the boat, but I didn't deliver it to Courtland. I delivered it to a place called Snodgrass Slough to a dredger. He had a dredger. He was building a levee.

Teiser: How'd you get back?

Figari: I got on the steamer _Modoc_ at Courtland at ten o'clock in the morning, and I didn't get in here until five o'clock the next morning. (Laughter) They stopped at all those bank landings, here and there, and all the way down, pick up fruit and all that stuff. The poor old Portagees, they used to lay a couple of planks so they could truck the fruit on and everything. The Southern Pacific had steamers running up there, too. And the Dutch line. Mr. Crowley, I believe, sold to somebody that went up
Figari:  to Alaska.

Oh he built the Envoy and the Escort, and the Sentinel, all kinds of boats. Mr. Crowley, Junior, asked me one day to make a list of the boats. I remember McGillivray and I got together. Whether he still has the list or not I don't know. I know he sold the Escort to a fellow by the name of Brown who owns almost all of Walnut Grove.

Teiser:  In the meantime he was also acquiring more boats?

Figari:  He was building boats and selling them.

Teiser:  And taking over other companies sometimes and acquiring them that way?

Figari:  There were no more companies. Wilder was in the business. He was up at Channel Street. A fellow by the name of George Wallenrod was up there. He had two boats. And they used to take care of these barges that haul the lumber up the river, the Sacramento Transportation Company. Steam schooners used to come down from the north. They used to go alongside the barges anchored in the Bay and load the barges with lumber. And they used to take care of the barges,
Figari: maintain the barges, put the lights on, take the stevedores on and things like that. Both he and Wilder. Wilder worked for one company and Wallenrod worked for another company. And they used to haul all the lumber up to Sacramento. The steamers used to haul grain up the river. They used to go above Sacramento, they had some small stern wheel steamers. They used to go up to Red Bluff and Colusa years ago; I don't know -- that's just hearsay. But Knight's Landing and around there, all down through there, they used to load sack grain. And they used to take it to Port Costa and McNear had a grange -- he had these docks up there -- and these sailing vessels used to go up there and load for Europe. Then after the barges he used to have the steamer San Joaquin #2 and San Joaquin #4. They used to tow these big barges. They used to come down the Sacramento River with about five or six barges behind them. There were no bridges then, see. And after they would discharge, they used to come down here and anchor here off Mission Rock and get the loaded barges with lumber and take
Figari: them off.

Teiser: So there were plenty of other tugs running around the Bay.

Figari: These were stern wheel steamers, yeah, very powerful. They were towing these barges. You had to get a ship off of the mudflats in Sausalito, tugboats couldn't pull it off. You needed a stern wheel steamer to pull it off. (Laughter)

Teiser: I think we talked of some other companies that were bought.

Figari: That was Clark. I told you about it just now. Clark, and the Gately brothers, and Charley Cattermole and then Michaels. Then after the quake he bought Peterson out, too. He bought Mrs. Peterson out, I believe; Peterson's wife divorced him and she had someone run the business. It wasn't making any money and she asked Mr. Crowley to take it over. So he took it over.

Then Peterson went back into the business afterwards. I forget what year it was. He called it the Peterson Company. The first one was Henry C. Peterson,
Figari: then it was the Peterson Company. Then they consolidated with Crowley Launch and Tugboat Company. And then they renamed it the Harbor Tug and Barge Company, which has those sightseeing boats now. Harbor Tours they call them. They have tow boats running up the river, too. They have a contract to haul the beets from the river and they take it into Tracy. There's a refinery at Tracy. Sugar beets. And they also haul some down to Oakland. And they're trucked from Oakland down to Alvarado. They have a place down there I believe -- a sugar refinery.

Teiser: You can't get into Alvarado by water?

Figari: No, you see, all that side of the Bay years ago were oyster houses down there. It's very shallow. Down at Redwood City they have a channel for steamers to go down. If you ever go down on the highway you see a big pile of salt there; well the steamers go in there and they load salt. There's a lot of salt that goes to Japan. And a lot of salt goes north.

Teiser: But they have channels in there?

Figari: Yeah, they have a channel that goes down there. They
Figari: used to have to raise the bridge; now they've built a new bridge and the steamers go underneath that.

Then out of here, years ago, they used to have codfishing. They had a codfish yard over at California City, which after World War I was made a coaling station. All the battleships used to bring coal there and all the steamers used to unload coal over there. Then during World War II they tore it down and made a net depot out of it. The nets that they used to string along different harbors, you know. They had a codfish yard on the west side of Belvedere; the Union Fish Company had a place over there.

Teiser: What did they do in these yards?

Figari: Well the codfish used to come down from Alaska. They used to pack it in cases, you know, and ship it all over. They used to have dories that would go to Alaska. They'd go out in these dories. These fishermen used to go out and catch them and they used to bring them to the schooners -- they were schooners, see, about three-masted schooners. (I've never been up there. They tried to shanghai me to Alaska a
Figari: couple of times. I couldn't see going and quitting my job for three months.) And they used to split the codfish and bone them and salt them as they put them in the hold of the ship. And then they used to take them ashore [at California City] and then put them in cases -- whatever they did -- I don't know. They used to be shipped all over the United States, see. And they also had a codfish yard out at Redwood City. A fellow by the name of Greenbaum, used to own it. He had these schooners -- there's sort of an island down there -- and they used to tow these sailing vessels down there and they used to gather all the wine bums around and get them on this island until all these schooners were unloaded (Laughter) and then he used to pay them off and let them go.

Teiser: Did Mr. Crowley's tugs work with any of these ships?

Figari: Mr. Crowley wasn't in the tow boat business when the codfish yards were there.

Teiser: How long ago was that?

Figari: After the quake, you know. The ships used to go to Alaska for salmon -- all kinds of ships used to go
Figari: to Alaska every year. The Alaska Packers Association had a place over in Alameda and in the wintertime, oh, they had ten or fifteen ships and they used to maintain them and fix them up. They'd only go to Alaska in the summertime. And they say the fishing season up there is only about a month. They used to go up there and catch salmon. I've never been there so I don't know much about it. (Laughter)

Teiser: In the tow boat operation, would the Crowley company have a contract with a shipping company?

Figari: Oh yes. When Spreckels and the Red Stack were in business, they were competitors. They used to fight for the business. They used to go out all hours of the night -- go out and get ships. It was up to the captain of the ship to make a deal with the ship to tow them in. Alaska Packers used to sail in. The May Flint, with a load of coal, sailed in one night in 1900. I think there was a festival. She sailed in and ran into the battleship Iowa and sunk. The pilots years ago, a lot of them, used to sail their vessels in.
Teiser: Without tugs?

Figari: Without tugs, yeah. They used to drop anchor off Meiggs Wharf. That is where the transport dock is, where the Marina is now; Harbor View they used to call it. They had a picnic ground out there. Fishermen used to have a picnic out there. They used to have a greasy pole they'd stick out over the wharf, see, and they'd have a flag on the end and they used to put tallow on it and the fellows used to walk around to get the flag. Whoever got the flag, I forget, they used to get $20 or something like that. But they'd fly it over the wharf. (Laughter) They'd run. They used to grab the greasy pole.

Teiser: There was no rule that captains had to have any special papers or anything to sail their own ships in?

Figari: No, no. It was a matter of insurance, too, I suppose whether you sailed it in. The pilots used to sail them in, of course; they were responsible. But Alaska Packers, these fellows were born and raised running out of the harbor. They used to
Figari: sail in, lots of them.

Teiser: But after all this competition ceased...

Figari: Then Red Stack had them all by themselves.

Teiser: I see, so there was no question of rushing out.

Figari: No. But there was a fellow by the name of Charlie Love. He used to be captain. He worked for a fellow by the name of Bernt H. Tietjen. He had to tug the pilot. He ran opposition to the Red Stacks. He used to run out there and tow Alaska Packers in. (Laughter) He was a great fellow, Charlie Love.

Teiser: So Mr. Crowley's company didn't always just have it its own way?

Figari: Mr. Crowley wasn't in the tug boat business then when Charlie Love was in it. This was before 1916.

**Excursion Boats**

Figari: Then Mr. Crowley built these boats for the 1915 Fair. He built two double deckers and then some four flat-deck boats, see, without a double deck on them.
Figari: That's when I went in the office, in 1915.

Teiser: What had you been doing before that?

Figari: Well, running a boat all the time.

Teiser: Different boats?

Figari: Yeah, running upriver, running all over.

Teiser: So you'd gone on to tow boats?

Figari: Yeah, small tow boats, running on the river. I never did any outside towing at all, never outside.

Teiser: Was there regulation? Did you have to pass tests?

Figari: Oh yes, you had what they called an operator's license.

Teiser: Who gave it, the state?

Figari: This was Marine Inspection, the government. Now the Coast Guard has taken it over. But you had to have an operator's license.

Teiser: This was when you first began?

Figari: Yes.

Teiser: When you were thirteen you had to get an operator's license?

Figari: No, not then.

Teiser: How old were you when you got your first operator's
Teiser: license?
Figari: Well, every five years they gave you one.
Teiser: How old were you when you got your first one?
Figari: Oh, I was about 15 then. Then afterwards, this I got when I was 18. [Showing framed certificate.]
Teiser: First Class Pilot at 18! [reading] "This is to certify that William P. Figari, having been duly examined and found competent by the undersigned is licensed to serve as first class pilot, steam and motor vessels of any gross tons, upon San Francisco Bay and tributaries. 10th November, 1960."
Figari: This one is ten years old. It expired, I never renewed it any more...
Teiser: Issue No. 11, is that?
Figari: Every five years.
Teiser: I see, so that was 55 years -- you got it originally in 1905.
Figari: Yeah. I didn't have a birth certificate to get this license renewed, see, so we wrote back to the Census in Washington and I kept that. [Showing paper.]
Teiser: In the Census of 1900 on June 1st, you were living
Teiser: at 324 ½ Broadway, San Francisco and you were age 13. Family of Joseph and Mary Figari in the household of James Douglas. Was that a bigger house that you were living in?

Figari: That was a tenement house.

Teiser: When did you become a captain?

Figari: Well, you're a captain when you operate and navigate vessels under 15 tons. I was never captain of a Red Stack tugboat, just small boats running upriver. They called you an operator; they never called you a captain. But everyone just called you captain. The fellows in these Red Stack tugs would say captain, see. But with that license, pilot's license, I'm supposed to be a captain. I could pilot ships around San Francisco Bay and up the river, too. But it's hard to get a license now, very hard.

Teiser: Then in 1915 you came into the office did you say?

Figari: Yeah, I worked at the Fair and we ran excursions up from the Fair, took people out around the waterfront and over to Sausalito and around, see.

Teiser: Like an hour?
Figari: An hour, right. I think it was a dollar. That's where I met my wife.

Teiser: On the boat?

Figari: She took a ride, yeah. (Laughter) She and another girl, they were so tired, see. They were walking around the Fair, and Jim Sinnott was down there calling, "Going right out! Going right out!" She got on the boat, I think, about four o'clock in the afternoon. She stayed there until eight o'clock at night waiting for the boat to go out. (Laughter) Business was tough when we first started down there.

Teiser: Jim Sinnott was your barker?

Figari: Yeah, he was barking. Then a fellow by the name of Weder and I took a ride. There was a little bit of a pilot house. My wife and this girl and there was another woman whose husband was a custom's officer, and she had a little girl. And we all crowded into the pilot house. So, after we came back Weder said, "Girls would you like to go up to the zone?" We took the Fair in. That's how I met my wife.

Then, after the Fair was over he [Thomas Crowley]
Figari: bought El Campo over there in Marin County. That's just above California City. The steamer Ukiah used to run over there. It was a picnic ground over there. So we had to do something with these double deckers, and we used to use them.... I'll get to that afterwards. So he bought this place over there and named it Paradise Park. And they used to run picnics over there. Mr. Ernest Tanner had charge of it. He was the excursion manager. He used to have charge of the picnic grounds over there. They both had some kind of a deal, I don't know what it was. But he used to get the business. Then during the week, NYK Steamship Company used to dock at Pier 34 and they used to take a lot of picture brides out there. It seems a Japanese would write there, and they used to send pictures and they'd come here and they used to like the fellow and they'd get married. And we used to take them over to the Immigration Station whenever a ship would come in. Oh you'd have 75 or 100. I used to take them over to Angel Island to the Immigration Station.
Teiser: This was after 1915?

Figari: Yeah, after 1915. We used to take them over there. Then the husband, the fellow that wrote her, used to go over there and claim her.

Then oil tankers used to come here and they used to fumigate the ships. And they had a Chinese crew and the Chinese crew could not come ashore. So we used to go out and tie the double decker alongisde of the ships. The Chinese used to stay on this double decker, and they used to take their grub there. Then the ship would get fumigated and they used to go back aboard again.

Teiser: So you found something always for those little boats to do.

Figari: And then during World War II, why Paradise Park was finished, because the Navy took all that property there, and they were going to do a lot of building. And he rented them to the Mare Island ferry. They were very busy up there, running workmen from Vallejo over to Mare Island. The Rihaggi [?] boys, Mr. Rihaggi [?] and his sons -- I don't know
Figari: how to spell the darn thing. Anyhow, they operated the Mare Island Ferry and they had a lot of small boats of their own. And he rented it to them up there at Mare Island.

And we ran them out to this British fleet. Jim Rolph had a shipyard up at Eureka and he built a double decker, and after the war Mr. Crowley bought it from him. The biggest fleet we ever had was the British fleet that came here. I forget what year that was. I had to work when the British fleet was here.

Teiser: Was that in the 1910's?

Figari: Yeah, in the 1920's, about 1925 I guess it was. They have some pictures -- Mr. Crowley -- up in the office there. Peterson Company and different companies ran out there. They had a barge alongside. They used to unload the passengers on to a barge. Visiting hours were from one to four. But the British officers out there stopped at about two thirty or three o'clock, there were so many people there. (Laughter) They couldn't handle them. A lot of people couldn't get aboard and they wanted their money back and we
Figari: had a heck of a time with it. Mr. Tanner stopped selling tickets. We didn't get stuck, but the Peterson Company got stuck with a lot of them. A lot of people to give their money back. I'll never forget, after everybody went home -- this was about six o'clock -- a lot of people came down. We had three double deckers -- the one they bought from Rolph, the 19, and the 17 and 18. People came into the office. They wanted to go out to see the Hood. The Hood was the biggest battleship in the world then -- the Hood, the Repulse, and the Renown -- the three of them, but the Hood was the biggest. Everybody wanted to go to the Hood. So people would come in the office and say, "We'd like to go out to the battleship." "You can't go aboard a battleship now. I'll tell you what you can do. We'll take you out" -- there were 15 or 20 of them -- "and cruise around." They were all lit up with electric lights, the ships. My God, we had so many people; 250 on each of the double deckers, 300 and something on the other. We loaded the three of them and sent the people
Figari: out. (Laughter) Mr. Tanner and I were there alone. He was hollering and I was collecting the money. I had money in all kinds of pockets. None of the Crowleys were around, just Mr. Tanner and I. I'll never forget after it was over I went to the California Market -- I never had a thing to eat. Mr. Tanner said, "Come on, I'll buy you a nice big steak." (Laughter)

So after they got finished up at Mare Island with these double deckers, the Rolph was sold to somebody in Honolulu. And the other ones, after they got finished up in Mare Island, they took the canvas off and made tug boats out of them. They're still operating. They're down in San Pedro harbor towing oil barges.
Freight and Oil

Teiser: When I talked to you on the phone you said you remembered something further about Mr. Westman.

Figari: Walter. Well, he took a very active part in this.

Teiser: What was his function?

Figari: He came there in 1906 and he was a bookkeeper then. Then they had moved to the north side of Howard Street. He was a bookkeeper, but then he became a dispatcher.

Teiser: What does a dispatcher do?

Figari: Dispatch the boats. You get a phone call, somebody wants a boat here or there, you send people out to ships, just like a taxicab. The dispatcher takes the orders, then dispatches them.

Then in the '30's Mr. Crowley went into the freight business and then, with Mr. Westman, they operated what they called the Pioneer Line. A fellow by the name of Rideout had the contract on hauling the freight from San Francisco to Mare Island. Then Mr. Crowley underbidded him in the '30's I think it was. And Mr. Westman had charge of the
Figari: Pioneer Line. All the intercoastal ships from the East Coast, Luckenbach and American Lines, Shepherd line, and all those ships, would take all the way from a needle to an anchor from the East Coast. We used to take all of that to Mare Island and discharge it.

Teiser: You mean to say they'd unload it in San Francisco harbor and then reload it...

Figari: Yeah, and put it on the dock, and we would take it off the docks. We had stevedores -- bargement we used to call them. They were separate from the stevedores -- a separate union, but kind of affiliated with them -- and they used to load the barges. They were mostly Portuguese. And they used to take all of this freight off of the docks. And we had jitneys that had platforms. And they used to go underneath and raise them, with the freight on, and run them on the docks. The same way they used to discharge them at the warehouse on Mare Island. Mr. Westman had a foreman up at Mare Island, a fellow by the name of Deshute. And he had some stevedores there.
Figari: They used to unload the barges and we used to take the freight down before they had the Naval Supply Depot over in Oakland. All the freight used to go to Mare Island, and Mare Island used to distribute all that freight that went to Honolulu, to Guam, and to the Philippines and all over. We used to deliver it to the American President Lines and all those different ships.

Teiser: What kind of craft did you use?

Figari: We used barges, big barges, 125 feet long and they had houses on them. Before that we used them to haul case oil down from Point San Pablo, they call it Parr Terminal. We used to deliver the ships down there to Australia. There weren't very many docks up there so we hauled a lot of case oil. Mr. Crowley built about five or six of them.

Teiser: What did it take to move them around the Bay?

Figari: Tug boats -- 250 or 300 horsepower boats.

Teiser: One boat to a barge?

Figari: No, no. We used to take three barges up.

Teiser: One boat could take three barges?
Figari: Yes. We used to go over to Mare Island with a barge and we also would go up to Selby Smelting Works and to Oleum, to the Union Oil Company, and also to the Sperry Flour Company at Vallejo. A boat used to come down from Mare Island with a Mare Island barge and he'd have maybe a barge from Sperry's, and maybe a couple of lead barges loaded with pig lead coming from Selby's. And we used to discharge all this freight and distribute it along the docks. The lead would go to NYK Steamship Company. The stevedores used to remark, "Some day those Japs will be shooting this lead back at us." Which they did. (Laughter) Then, flour we used to take down from Mare Island. And on the dock at Pier 17 we used to store this flour and feed. And Mr. Westman had charge of all that down there.

Bakeries and things like that would call Sperry Flour and say they wanted so many sacks of flour and so many sacks of feed, and the Walkup trucks would come down to Pier 17 and load the flour and deliver it around.
Teiser: So you were doing warehousing, too?

Figari: Oh, yeah. And Mr. Westman had charge of all this.

We used to take barrel oil down from the Union Oil Company at Oleum and we also took barrel oil down from the Shell Oil Company at Martinez. So Mr. Crowley was in everything. And it got to be quite a business. But after they built the Naval Supply Depot over in Oakland, that killed all of that and all the freight went over there. We used to take freight down from Mare Island and take freight up to Mare Island. And you'd take everything -- toilet tissue, clothing, big steel plates, redwood. We'd take it up, and the first thing you know two or three days later we'd be taking it down again. (Laughter) They called that the Pioneer Line. It lasted for quite a long while.

Teiser: The tug boats...

Figari: They had two tug boats. One tug boat would be at Mare Island standing by the barges, and he would stand by the barges at Selby and stand by the barges at Oleum. Then one boat would be down here with a couple of barges picking up freight all along the
Figari: dock. Then he'd leave here at six o'clock at night and go up and the other fellow would leave up there. It depended upon how much freight they had. They wouldn't leave until late sometimes. They were diesel tugs. They had 300 horsepower.

Teiser: Were they part of Crowley Launch and Tug?

Figari: Crowley Launch and Tug Boat Company they belonged to, yeah.

Teiser: I see. So the tugs from Crowley Launch and Tug Boat Company would...

Figari: Would tow the Pioneer barges. They would charge so much a month for the Pioneer Line to use the barges. Mr. Crowley owned the barges and he also owned the tugs. But the Pioneer Line was kind of a separate company.

Then they used to haul freight from Oakland and deliver at the dock canned goods. The Grace Line used to have the Santa Paula and the Santa Rosa and the Santa Lucia running from here with passengers to New York. They also had the Panama-Pacific Line, California, Pennsylvania. Those big ships would
Figari: never go to Oakland. We used to pick up all the freight in Oakland, canned goods, and take it over to these ships. Also, there was the Bay Cities Transportation Company, which was competitive to Crowley, and they used to haul freight over, too. A fellow by the name of Joe Swenson worked for the Bay Cities Transportation Company in Oakland. And he used to have charge of all that. He worked now and then for Mr. Crowley. These ships kind of quit coming, these passenger ships. So all the freighters now go to Oakland, Howard Terminal, Encinal Terminal, Oakland Outer Harbor and pick up all this freight. There's no more of that coming over.

Bay City wanted to quit. They weren't making anything. So they sold their equipment to Mr. Crowley and Mr. Crowley took the men over -- a fellow by the name of Joe Swenson and a fellow by the name of Bob Malcolm, and a fellow by the name of John Elliott, that worked for them. And we still haul freight from Oakland, over the dock, you know. A lot of the ships wouldn't go over there. It would
Figari: have to be so many tons for a big ship to run over there, because they'd have to have a tow boat and go over there and help with the dock. So a lot of them it didn't pay to go over.

Teiser: Did Mr. Westman...

Figari: He had charge of all that, yes.

Teiser: How long did he continue in charge?

Figari: He passed away maybe about three or four years ago.

Teiser: Did he continue working with Pioneer?

Figari: No. When they took Bay Cities over, they called it the Bay Cities Transportation Company.

Teiser: I see, and he continued in charge of that.

Figari: And Joe Swenson used to work over there in Oakland. He had charge of loading the barges over there. But then that all petered out and very little freight continued to be carried. The barges -- we have very few barges. There's not much freight coming from Oakland, and no freight from Mare Island. What we do now maybe with barges is take ore. Ore comes out from South America in sacks, see, and we used to get a lot of it in 50-gallon drums and they were awful
Figari: heavy. They weighed about 1500 pounds.

Teiser: What kind of ore?

Figari: Gold ore. We'd take it up to Selby Smelting Works. Most of it comes in bulk now. But most all the ships go up there now. Even the oil business -- taking oil down from Oleum or Martinez -- it all comes down in cars now. And a lot of ships go up to Oleum and load oil, and then they go to Standard Oil Company at Richmond. This is all lubricating oil, see. We don't haul any more of that down from Oleum or Martinez. The waterfront changes all the time. I saw an awful lot of changes. We used to have little boats and all we did was just run captains out to their ships, run crews out, and take ships' stores and things like that. A lot of ships used to lie in the stream. Then when the steamers came in, tramps, then they'd lie in the stream and we used to do business with them. Now nothing lies out in the Bay at all. There's change all the time.

Teiser: Is it because it's so expensive to keep a ship operating that they don't take so much time now?
Figari: Yeah, they have to keep moving, yeah. They can't lay around too much.

Then Mr. Crowley, Jr. and Mr. Crowley, Sr. got into the oil business.

Teiser: How did they do that?

Figari: Well, Shell Oil Company had barges of their own. They had five barges and Mr. Crowley Sr. and Mr. Crowley, Jr. both just told the Shell Oil Company that they'd like to operate the barges for them. Mr. Crowley had the tugs and we used to do a lot of towing for them. We used to tow their barges. Finally Mr. Crowley did all of the work for the Shell Company. The business got so big that Mr. Crowley built barges and we used to haul fuel oil down from Martinez and fuel ships up. Then we used to haul gasoline, which they still do. Now, Shell Company has a terminal there in Oakland and they also have a terminal at Army Street, and they have one at Stockton, one at Tracy, one in Petaluma. And we used to deliver all their gasoline. But they just had two barges, little wooden barges. They didn't haul much. And I often
Figari: wondered how they ever got by with going to Stockton, Oakland, Army Street, and Petaluma. There weren't many automobiles then. They got so big now, Mr. Crowley builds barges and builds barges.

The first barge he built, Barge No. 8, held about 7,500 barrels of gasoline, a steel barge. It used to run to Stockton. Then he built another one that held 10,000, and he built and built and built.

Teiser: Was there one huge tank on a barge?

Figari: Oh no, they were big tanks and they had different compartments in them. And they hauled gasoline, and they would haul kerosene and diesel oil. They were put in separate tanks. In the depot, like Stockton or Petaluma, all had separate tanks. The bargemen used to discharge the gasoline first, then the diesel oil, then some kerosene -- not much kerosene. Then they had ethyl gasoline and then the regular gasoline.

Teiser: And the barges that Mr. Crowley built then, he owned?

Figari: Oh yes, they belonged to him, yes. And they did all of the Shell work and they took over the Union Oil
Figari: Company. And Mr. Crowley, Sr. and Jr. made a deal with the Union Oil Company and took their barges over. They call it the United Towing Company.

Teiser: And the United Towing Company is just for oil?

Figari: Yeah. United Towing Company, and they have another name for it.

Then Mr. Crowley built a terminal of their own down at Alviso. They built a lot of tanks and everything, and they used to have Shell Oil Company and Associated Oil and Tidewater and different oil companies.

Teiser: The terminal was for the use of all the oil companies?

Figari: Yes. But then after a while the Shell Oil Company built a terminal of their own; they had the big terminal at Redwood City. And the Union Oil Company has one down there. And Richfield Oil has one there. But the picture changes.

Teiser: Well, was the water at Alviso deep enough to get...

Figari: Yeah, at high water.

Teiser: Just at high water?

Figari: Yeah.
Teiser: So you could only come in certain hours of the day?

Figari: Yeah. Just when the tide was high. We used to haul black oil down to the Bethlehem Steel down there at South San Francisco. We used to haul it and we used to pump the oil about a mile up to their plant. We used to go in there where all the slaughter houses were down there -- Swift and Company. South San Francisco. We used to have to pump it about a mile over there.

Mr. Crowley has the Puget Sound Tug Boat Company up in Alaska.

Teiser: Did he form that originally?

Figari: No, no, it used to be Carey, Davis up there. Then Mr. Crowley bought into it. This was in '29 or something like that. Mr. Carey is gone and Davis is gone. It's quite an outfit they have up there now. They build barges and put the freight cars right on the barges. They go to Anchorage, Alaska.

Teiser: From Puget Sound to Anchorage?

Figari: Yeah. Oh, they go all over. Alaska Railroad unloads the cars and puts on empty barges. There
Figari: are a couple of companies out of Puget Sound running up there.

Mr. Crowley also hauled oil out -- gasoline -- out to that chain a way out in Alaska, where the soldiers were, the Aleutian Islands. They used to haul gasoline out there. They hauled it all over.

Teiser: What company hauled the gasoline out there?

Figari: The Puget Sound Company.

Then Mr. Crowley built the terminal at Eureka in which they have two or three oil companies. They have big tanks. They store oil. And like at Eureka, trucks come from all over.

Teiser: So again it's kind of warehousing?

Figari: Yeah, that's it. And it's distributed around. They go down to Ferndale and different places. And he built a big terminal up at Crescent City. There's no railroad up there.

Teiser: Oil terminal?

Figari: Oil terminal. A lot of tanks up there. That's the place where it was kind of a mean place to get in. There's a surge there all the time. But he built a
Figari: big place up there and they still have it and they haul gasoline up there.

Teiser: When did he build the Eureka and the Crescent City terminals?

Figari: He built the Crescent City terminal first, oh, gosh I can't remember when. It was about 15 years ago, I guess.

Teiser: In the 1950's or early '60's?

Figari: Yeah, something like that. Oh, before the '60's, in the '50's. I've been away from there three years now. I guess it was in the '50's.

Teiser: And the Eureka one?

Figari: Right after that. You see, there's no railroads running up to Crescent City. Everything had to go by barge. And the trucks would come in and deliver to Grants Pass, Oregon and all through there -- all up the coast to about the California line. And we hauled gasoline to Coos Bay for different oil companies -- Shell Oil Company, Union Oil Company.

Teiser: You mentioned that Mr. Crowley built boats, barges, and so forth, and I think you said earlier that he had
Teiser: established a shipyard...

Figari: Oh yeah, we had a shipyard. Right across the Bay. He built that -- oh gosh -- 'way before the depression.

Teiser: Shortly after 1915?

Figari: Oh before 1915. At the foot of 14th Avenue over there.

Teiser: In Oakland?

Figari: Yeah. Then he had the Merritt Shipyard down at the Embarcadero. He had two shipyards. Then he does a lot of repair work now.

Then during the building of the bridges we hauled men out who were building the bridges. We hauled steel out. Then when they built the Carquinez Bridge, I forget what year that was, U.S. Steel had the contract, and we had two little boats. One little boat was on the north side of the pier and the other little boat was on the south side of the pier. There were two boat crews there in case anybody fell overboard while building the bridge.

Teiser: Do you remember the names of those boats?

Figari: I can't think. They were some boats they hired.

(Laughter)
Figari: So for these bridges, we took working men over and hauled a lot of material also.

Teiser: I saw somewhere that about 1915 Crowley Launch and Tug Boat Company got a big contract to lighter steel from the San Francisco Harbor to near Sacramento for bridge construction.

Figari: Yes. We hauled steel up there.

Teiser: Do you remember what specifically it was for?

Figari: No, I don't remember what bridge it was.

Teiser: How did you haul the steel?

Figari: In barges. They would load it at the steel companies and they would unload it up there at the site where the bridge was. I myself used to tow piling up there before there were any bridges, to build docks.

Scow Schooners and Other Craft

Figari: Mr. Crowley, you see, bought scow schooners before 1906. They purchased them from Piper, Aden and Goodall. A scow schooner is a flat thing that
Figari: has a hold for storing freight below. They sailed around. And we used to haul nitrate from ships that came from South America and used to haul the nitrate up to the Hercules Powder Company up there at Pinole. These men they used to work on shares. The stevedores that discharged the ships, they had little bits of hooks and that sack of nitrate was packed so hard by the time the ship would get up there, these little hooks would break these nitrates -- sacks -- you know, to pull them out, they used to stick them. And they used to load them in these barges, see, and these men used to work all day loading the scow schooners. Mr. Crowley bought about seven or eight of them, I believe. Then they used to sail up and unload at Hercules, then sail down and then load again. They had about six men and they used to work on shares. There was a fellow who was a captain. They used to have a fellow who acts as a cook for the men.

Teiser: Were they longshoremen?

Figari: No, these men weren't longshoremen.

Teiser: What were they?
Figari: Well, I don't believe they belonged to -- there wasn't much of any unions then. Even with us running the boats, we never had any union. That's why we used to work all hours. (Laughter)

Teiser: Is that what was called the California Lighterage Company?

Figari: Yes. Then we used to haul dynamite out of the Hercules Powder Company.

Teiser: In those same scow schooners?

Figari: No. In big barges. Then, after the scow schooners kind of petered out, we hauled it up in barges and the stevedores used to load it down here. And the Hercules Powder people would discharge it up there.

Teiser: Why did the scow schooners peter out?

Figari: When the unions came in you couldn't work the men the way they used to work them. The stevedores got about fifty cents an hour years ago. They used to work like heck. Until the '34 strike, and then things broke wide open.

Teiser: Were these scow schooners harder to load and unload than others?
Figari: Oh yeah, it was hard work. We used to carry lumber and we used to haul coal over to Angel Island to East Garrison and West Garrison. They used to load it in buckets and then dump it in.... They had a shed on the dock and they had hatches they opened, and they used to dump it in there. And we used to haul sack coal out to Point Bonita. Do you know where Point Bonita is? That's out there at Fort Cronkhite.

Teiser: Yes.

Figari: We used to haul it out there in sacks. And that was for the foghorn on Point Bonita. You could always see the steam coming out. You thought it was blowing. I used to tow these scow schooners out there, and we used to have to stay there because you had to get out there when the weather was good because of the awful surges. They used to unload and dump it on the dock. Then the soldiers, they had a car that used to come down from the top of the hill with a cable on it, some kind of an engine on it. I never walked up there. I didn't have much time to go up there. (Laughter) You used to have to watch your boat and
Figari: watch your stuff. And they used to load it on this car and haul it up in sacks for the foghorn.

Teiser: Were the scow schooners harder to load and unload than other ships?

Figari: Well, no. Things changed around. You couldn't get men to work like, you know, they did, years ago. There were lots of scow schooners. They used to haul hay down from -- and take it into Third and Channel to the hay dock they had there. Those fellows used to haul the hay. But you can't get fellows to work like that any more, you know.

Teiser: Was it harder work than loading other ships?

Figari: It wasn't any harder than it is now, but you can't get men to work like that. It costs so much money. It changes and you couldn't operate, see.

Teiser: Those scow schooners cost so much to operate that you had to have men work more?

Figari: Yes. You hauled this stuff up in barges and then the stevedores would get $2 or $3 an hour, and on a scow schooner it wouldn't pay.

Teiser: Barges are easier to load and unload are they?
Figari: Oh yes. It costs more money, and it costs the powder companies more money, too. We hauled dynamite down for a good many years and we used to take the dynamite barges and anchor them off Butchertown and wait for the ship. The Du Pont Powder Company used to transport their dynamite down -- when they wanted to ship their dynamite to South America, a steam schooner used to take it down from Puget Sound and discharge it in our barges. And the steamer maybe wouldn't be ready for two or three weeks, so we used to take this barge and tow it over to Point Isabel over there near where the Golden Gate Race Track is now, over there by Sheep's Island. And they used to warehouse it over there. Then when the South American ship was ready to take it, we used to go over there and take it up. They had men of their own over there and load it and take it and deliver it to the ship.

Teiser: The barges were lots cheaper to operate than the scow schooners, then?

Figari: Oh yeah. On the dynamite barges we had a little
Figari: place -- a little cabin -- where the men who were hauling dynamite used to sleep and watch the barges.

Teiser: Was there a regular crew on the barge?

Figari: No, no. There was just one man when you were hauling dynamite. He used to live aboard.

Teiser: What was the usual crew on the tug?

Figari: Just two, a captain and a deck hand. The captain was the engineer. And the deck hand took care of the lines. That's all there is now -- operator they call them, and then the deck hand.

Teiser: This was in a clipping of 1917 -- a story about David Crowley replacing Captain Anderson as the skipper of the whaling bark, John & Winthrop. You mentioned the John & Winthrop.

Figari: Yeah. The John & Winthrop. A fellow by the name of Alf Hansen was captain of the John & Winthrop when they outfitted the vessel. He used to run her down to the South Seas Islands. David Crowley never went. It was a whaling vessel that Mr. Crowley converted into a three-masted schooner. They also did that with the City of Panama that was raised
Figari: from the Bay and they made a four-masted schooner. The captain was a fellow by the name of Captain Hughes, John Hughes. Then Mr. Crowley bought the barkentine Olympic. It was a four-masted barkentine. She had yards on the foremast and then the other three masts didn't have yards on them. A fellow by the name of Captain Evans ran case oil. When they built the bridges, business kind of went down, and I went down with Mr. Westman down at Pioneer Line and I used to work down there. I used to have charge of the stevedores unloading at the dock, see. We used to have to go to different docks to unload. We'd unload flour and feed at the Matson dock to go to the Hawaiian Islands. And we used to unload Navy freight at the Dollar Line, now the American President Line -- all different steamship companies. I stayed there until 1939 and then I went over to Oakland and ran the boats over to the Fair.

Teiser: From Oakland to the Fair or from here?

Figari: No, no, the boats stayed at the Fair, running people for a trip around the Bay. Mr. Crowley built two
Figari: glass boats. The hulls were wood but there were glass houses on them so people could see.

Then we had some speed boats over there, a couple of speed boats. He built about six speed boats. But you see the Bay is so rough, they're all open, and people would get all wet. The only ones who would go out in the speed boats were the youngsters, you know. They didn't care how wet they got. (Laughter) Do you remember those?

Teiser: Yes.

Figari: We were down there where the firehouse was, down at the lagoon between Treasure Island and Goat Island. We got so busy we used the double deckers over there. There was a firehouse right across, and I used to do this spiel, and the firemen used to say, "Don't make so much noise, we've got to sleep." (Laughter) The firemen used to have friends and we used to give them a ride. And the firemen, even at the firehouses today, they do their own cooking, you know. They used to cook over there, so I used to pay twenty cents and go over there
Figari: and eat. They didn't want to charge me anything, see, but sometimes it was thirty cents, sometimes twenty cents, and they didn't want to take any money from me. I said, "I feel better by paying because than I can walk across and take a couple of friends for a cup of coffee during the day." So twenty cents was cheap. And they had pretty good food. They had spaghetti and stew and everything.

This fellow Chief Murray, he used to be over at the Fair in 1939. We didn't go over there in '40. They wanted too much and it wouldn't pay to operate, so we didn't go over there in '40. But I worked every day in 1939. And in that place the wind was blowing. My face was just like a beet. I couldn't put anything on it. Oh, it was windy over there. In the summertime you get those trade winds over there, you know.
Crowley Men and Operations

Teiser: I have something here about Jack Crowley being head of the lighterage company.

Figari: Yes, well he was head of the lighterage company and he was head of the shipyard, too. He had charge of the shipyard, too.

Teiser: What was the lighterage company's name?

Figari: The California Lighterage Company. Barges, you know. And Dave Crowley was over here; that is, the Crowley Launch and Tugboat Company over here. And Mr. Crowley got into the steamer business and he had an office uptown, Tom Crowley, and Dave Crowley had charge here [on the waterfront].

Teiser: When you first met Mr. Crowley what did he look like?

Figari: Well, he looked very nice.

Teiser: Was he a big fellow?

Figari: No, he was a little fellow.

Teiser: Was he slim?

Figari: Yes, he was always slim.

Teiser: How'd he dress?
Figari: Very nice, very neat.

Teiser: He didn't dress in working clothes?

Figari: No. But the brothers both ran boats, too, you know, Dave and Jack, when I started there.

Teiser: So they wore working clothes?

Figari: Yeah. We used to work every other night to take care of the captains that came, to take them out to their ships, see.

Teiser: So the three of you wore regular working clothes.

Figari: Yeah. We had a fellow by the name of Red Lattimore. He worked down with us, too.

Teiser: What did Mr. Crowley's brothers look like? They were stepbrothers, weren't they? Did they look like him?

Figari: No, they didn't look like him at all. Dave and Jack, I don't know which -- they had different fathers. I don't know much about it.

Teiser: The same mother I think. Mr. Crowley took his stepfather's name.

Figari: I used to see them go to the St. Francis Church, they were Catholic, on Vallejo and Columbus Avenue
Figari: there. Dave Crowley worked with me during the 1915 Fair. We hauled rock down there -- red rock over from Marin County there.

Teiser: Where'd you haul red rock to?

Figari: To the Fair, for the grounds.

Teiser: Oh, the fill for the 1915 Fair.

Figari: We used to haul all the exhibits during the Fair. All the exhibits that came out from China and from Japan and from Europe and all over. We used to haul the exhibits to the Fair, most all the exhibits. You know during the '15 Fair they had a lot of big heavy machinery and everything. It wasn't like the Fair over here at Treasure Island. It was a beautiful fair, that 1915 Fair. Do you remember the '15 Fair, were you here then?

Teiser: No, I wasn't.

Figari: It was a beautiful fair. They used to have fireworks at night. Then out where the Marina is now they had a breakwater out there and they had a steam engine out there, and they used to steam it up at night and they used to have flash lights and everything.
Teiser: Did the Crowley boats bring much of the fill over for that?

Figari: Oh yes, lots of fill.

Teiser: Did others, too?

Figari: No, Mr. Crowley had the concession. They used the red rock for roads out there in the Fair.

Teiser: Not the fill that built the ground?

Figari: No, no, that place was a natural place, see. It used to be a shipyard there, the Fulton Iron Works. And steam schooners would be built up north and they would be towed down here and they used to put the engine in there down at Fulton Iron Works.

Teiser: On the Marina?

Figari: Yeah, at Harbor View, yeah. They had a picnic ground down there, as I told you before.

Teiser: So there wasn't much filling to be done.

Figari: No. That breakwater that's down there now was there for years. When I was a kid I used to run right along there to beat the tide along the breakwater. (Laughter) There was no transport dock either. I hauled a lot of sand from Rio Vista down to build the transport
Figari: dock when they built the transport dock.
Teiser: When was that, about?
Figari: I guess about 1910 or 1911.
Teiser: That's at...
Figari: The foot of Laguna Street.
Teiser: Attached to Fort Mason?
Figari: Yes.
Teiser: I thought there was some question at the time that transport dock was built as to whether it was a safe place to build.
Figari: Well, it's kind of a tough place in the wintertime. Take in the wintertime when the bar is breaking out there and those ships are moving, we used to haul fuel oil for those transports down there, with the oil barges. The oil barges used to sag back and forth. Had to put a lot of lines, and they used to break a lot of lines out there. They have what they call an undertow. There's a big surge down there. It was kind of a tough place. We used to have a hard time running ships up there. It was a narrow dock and you'd have to go in between. You'd
Figari: have to wait until the water was slack and have two tugs to get them in there. It was a tough place. During the war we hauled an awful lot of oil down. We had radios.

Teiser: This is World War II?

Figari: Yes. We had radios on the boats then. The Navy officers had charge of it -- tell you where to go and all that, and we'd have a barge on the way down from Martinez and from Oleum and they'd want to change the oil from one ship to another. You'd have to figure what time to get down to catch that boat so you could tell them where to go to the other ship. But a lot of times the Navy officers would say, "You don't have to come down and wait until all hours of the night waiting for the barge." We could be waiting on a cold dock with a cold wind for two or three hours. "We'll take care of it." They were pretty good, see.

Teiser: I don't think we have a chronological description of your activities. You began as an operator, then you became dispatcher -- when?
Figari: 1915.

Teiser: After that you were a dispatcher?

Figari: Yeah. I went into the office in 1915, uh, 1914.

Teiser: Then after that did you ever go out and work as an operator again?

Figari: Oh yes, when the fellows were on strike I used to run the double deckers over to Paradise Park picnic grounds for a month, I guess.

Teiser: What union was it that was on strike?

Figari: Marine Engineers. They went out on strike for maybe two or three weeks. On a Sunday, you know, Mr. Tanner -- we had the picnic grounds and the picnickers all signed up, so we had to take care of them. So I ran a double decker. It was just like a postman's holiday for me. Mr. Crowley built a lot of new tugs, oh, two or three years ago and he said, "Why don't you go along and take a ride on the tug boat on the trial trip?" It was a postman's holiday for me. (Laughter)

Mr. Crowley used to come down on a Sunday with his wife, before he was married. He'd take her for
Figari: a little trip around the Bay, up along the docks. He and a fellow by the name of Meyer Friedman, the two of them used to come down. They married the women afterwards.

Teiser: When did Mrs. Crowley die?

Figari: I guess she's been dead about fifteen years. She was a very nice woman. Her daughters took right after her. Just like the father, the son -- right into his steps and very good. If they like you, you're all right. But if they don't like you, you'd better get out. (Laughter) Mr. Crowley said, "If you're wrong, gonna hang you or kill you." So I never lied to him, just told him the truth. If I was in the wrong, I was in the wrong that's all.

Teiser: Someone said that he was very good to his people during the Depression when they were having difficulties.

Figari: You know, Walter Westman, Miss Carey and I and Mr. Jenkins -- he paid our salaries all the time. Never cut our salaries at all during the Depression. And sometimes we'd have one operator to run the
Figari: boat, that's about all we had, and sometimes we didn't even have an operator. I used to take the run, and the captain would do a job or something like that. He was very good during the Depression. He never cut our salaries.

Teiser: Did work for the company drop that low?

Figari: Oh yes, especially the '34 strike. There was no money coming in. Westman and I and Miss Carey -- the old timers there. Miss Carey was there for years. She was the bookkeeper and she caught a lot of crooks for Mr. Crowley. (Laughter) But he never prosecuted them.

Teiser: With such a varied kind of business he must have had to keep tabs closely on all kinds of things.

Figari: Miss Carey kept tabs on them. She passed away. She was a very nice person. She came to work in 1907, and she passed away in the 1940's or something like that. Mr. Crowley has a scrapbook and there are a lot of write-ups about her. I think he's got it at home. She died suddenly.

There was a Father Rogers. He was pastor at
Figari: the St. Patrick's Church on Mission Street there, and he used to come down on Sunday and we used to take him over to Angel Island. He used to say mass at the immigration station. These tug boat operators, they used to have to make a log of the jobs they all did, so one put on his log, "The Holy Ghost to Angel Island and back." I showed it to Miss Carey, and oh, she panned him, and she said, "Don't you ever do that again! Writing a thing like that!" (Laughter)

Rum, Fish and Garbage

Teiser: What about Prohibition. Were rum runners forever bumping into you? (Laughter)

Figari: No. Rum runners were all right with us. (Laughter) They used to give us some stuff. We never ran outside. They also had a lot of fish reduction ships laying out the Golden Gate. They used to catch sardines and they used to dump them in the ships and we used
Figari: to run out to those ships -- to take men out and all different things.

Teiser: They cleaned them and canned them on the ships?

Figari: No, they made fertilizer out of them. They had the machinery aboard. They had two big steamers out there. Fish reduction ships we used to call them.

Teiser: Do I remember that somebody used to haul garbage out to the Farallones?

Figari: Yes, the steam schooners. They used to load in Oakland and they used to have hoppers on, and the garbagemen used to dump the garbage down into these hoppers. The trucks would back into the ramp and they used to open up and dump it down into the hoppers, and they used to go out to the Farallon Islands. They had two of them. One would be loading here -- the garbage from Oakland, not from San Francisco. We had an incinerator here.

Teiser: Who ran those schooners?

Figari: I don't know. Just the garbage people over in Oakland.

Here's another thing. The war ships used to
Figari: come here. And Mr. Crowley had a contract to take all their garbage off the ships, and then we used to haul it into a dock and the garbagemen used to come down and shovel it off the barges and throw it into their trucks out at 16th Street by the Union Iron Works. And we had a fleet of about sixty ships at one time here -- destroyers, battleships, supply ships -- and we had three barges going around every morning picking up all this garbage, and we used to take it to 16th Street and the scavangers used to shovel it off and put it in barrels and throw it in their trucks. We had that garbage contract for a good many years. But that was the biggest one. So, Mr. Crowley was in the garbage business, too. (Laughter)

Teiser: Back to Prohibition days, it seems to me that there must have been row boats running whiskey all over the Bay.

Figari: They used to go outside and meet the vessels with the liquor and they used to sneak in at night. They used to go to different places.

Teiser: Princeton, for one, I think.
Figari: I guess they went into Princeton. They went into the Bay here, too. There were lots of them.

Teiser: It must have made a lot of business on the water.

Figari: It made business for the bootleggers, yeah. They made a lot of dough. They had boats of their own. We never had anything to do with it.

Teiser: Did anybody ever get you to haul stuff that turned out to be whiskey?

Figari: No. (Laughter) If a captain of a big steamer had a case of whiskey or two or three, we used to take it ashore for him. That's about all we ever did. We never did any bootlegging. Mr. Crowley was on the up and up all the time.

Running Up the Rivers

Figari: You talk about running the boat -- the oil companies had a strike about 15 years ago and we were delivering gasoline to Stockton, Petaluma, San Francisco, and all over when they were on strike.
Mr. Crowley and a fellow by the name of Norman Fay of the River Line, which is a competitor of Crowley now, and a fellow by the name of Crary, and Mr. Crowley, Jr. decided that they would haul gasoline -- which they did -- to Sacramento. We made about two trips. Mr. Crowley, Jr. said, "Why don't we make a couple of trips to Stockton?" I said, "Sure, let's go." So we operated one of the tugs ourselves, Mr. Crowley and I, Cappy Escher and Jimmy Reddick. Cappy Escher was Mr. Crowley's son-in-law. Jimmy Reddick was the engineer on the boat. And we had a fellow by the name of Walter Johnson who would pump the gasoline out. Mr. Crowley was the captain and I was the pilot. So we made two trips to Stockton at nighttime. I hadn't been up there for years. (Laughter) But going up there now is just like going up Market Street; the red and the green lights, and you just follow them up. When I used to run a boat up the river, after you left Antioch there were no lights at all.

Is that right?
S.S. Ramona at Port Luis dock. William Figari was deck boy on the Ramona as a young man.


Figari: Those navigating lights -- after you left Rio Vista and you got to the mouth of Sacramento and Steamboat Slough, no lights at all. We used to tow barges, dredges, pilings, and everything. You'd just go along. Pittsburg used to be called Black Diamond. There was a Black Diamond Coal Company up there. The stern wheel steamers used to stop up there and they used to load briquets. But that place was nothing but fishermen -- Italian fishermen -- Sicilians and Napolitanis. And they used to string their nets across Suisun Bay and San Pablo Bay. And they wouldn't watch out for vessels coming, you know. A lot of times you wouldn't know which way to go, and the steamers could duck around, you see. But we had 75 and 110 horsepower boats and you wouldn't know which end to go, whether the net was strung this way or the net was strung that way. And a lot of times you'd get their nets on the piling or on the barge or something like that. They tell me years ago, I don't
Figari: I know, the fishermen used to take a shot at the captains up in the pilot house, I don't know if that's true. I was towing a dredger -- the Rough and Ready -- from Stockton to Petaluma, and it got pretty rough and I had to wait for the tide to go up Petaluma Creek, and I anchored it up in San Pablo Bay close to Petaluma Creek. The dredger has lots of lights and the dredges use spuds to anchor, so we had to wait until daylight to make the tide in Petaluma Creek. Well, the fishermen had their nets out and they all went to sleep. They figured nobody would bother them. I went right on the flats, see, shallow water, eight or ten feet of water. So it was so rough I couldn't tie my boat alongside of the dredger, so I anchored away from the dredger. I had a deckhand with me, a fellow by the name of Miner, so he got up and he looked and he said, "We've got a lot of fishing nets around our anchor line. You'd better get out of here, let's go up to the dredger. They'll kill us." So he bothered me so much we got clear and went to the dredger. And
Figari: the dredger had a lot of fishing nets around it -- the bucket was hanging that way. And the dredger was full of lights. You could see, lights all over. And the fishermen came down the next morning cutting nets and cussing. I stood out of sight, see, "Where's the capitan? Where's the capitan?"

(Laughter)

Teiser: Did you have to pay them damages?

Figari: No, it's their own fault. We had a case up at Crockett about ten years ago. Fishermen used to go out there by the sugar refinery. And they'd get close in there and a barge would come along and they got his net. And they sued us. And the justice of the peace up there at Crockett ruled that Crowley lost the case, and had to pay for this net. Together the fishermen gave the judge some fish or something like that. (Laughter) They found us guilty. They were wrong. They had the channel blocked. But now there's no more of that up there. No more of that commercial fishing. Up on the Sacramento River there used to be some Dutch fishermen and they would
Figari: be awake and when they'd see you coming, they'd have a red and a green light and you'd know which way to go. With the green light, you'd put your green light to him and you'd know you were clear. If you had a red light, you'd put your red light on. Not like these Italian fishermen. They used to have a white light and they'd stick it up before they'd see you coming and you wouldn't know which way to go. And you'd be coming along at maybe four or five knots and you couldn't stop. (Laughter) So, as I say, going up to Stockton now or Sacramento -- especially now that there's a new channel going to Sacramento -- there are red and green lights, and you just go up. These big steamers go up there now. Of course they've got the place dredged now. There's lots of water. There wasn't very much water then. Years ago there used to be all kinds of steamers. I could tell those steamers by their whistles.

We were at Collinsville one night and we were laying at the dock there -- that's up at the mouth of the Sacramento River -- so a fellow said, "Here
Figari: comes the Modoc," and I said, "That's not the Modoc." I said, "That's the Apache." The fellow worked on the dock there; he was a fisherman or something. He said, "I'll bet you the drinks." I said, "All right, you've got a bet." Sure enough I won. (Laughter) He said, "I thought I knew all the whistles." Like the ferry boats, you could always tell their whistles.

The 1940's, the '20's and the Depression

Teiser: You said you became dispatcher and then marine superintendent. When did you become superintendent?

Figari: I guess it was in the '40's.

Teiser: How did your duties change?

Figari: I used to go around to the barges and see the captains of these tugs, you know, that went to Stockton or wherever they were, and see that everything was all right. And lots of times they liked to drink and the barge would be empty and they'd be uptown somewhere, so you just had to watch all
Figari: those things.

Teiser: So you got out of the office again.

Figari: Yeah.

Teiser: Did you have a boat of your own?

Figari: No, I had an automobile. I used to drive all around the islands. You could drive around the islands then. They had levees on the islands, and bridges.

Right after World War II we bought a lot of surplus vessels, surplus tugs and things like that. We used to go up, Cappy Escher and I, used to go up. The Navy used to sell barges and LSMs. We used to haul the equipment during World War I around on the beach, you know. They opened the gate and ran a ramp to shore -- LSM and LSTs. They sold them all after the way, and we bought several of them. We bought lots of tugs. We used to get a lot of oil out of them, and we used to give it to the Red Stacks when they were burning oil, for fuel for their tugs. And then we used to sell them to a fellow down here and he used to break them up. We used to pump the oil out before we sold them. And
Figari: barges. We bought barges which we used ourselves -- steel barges. Barges we would keep if we had any use for them. We used to sell some of the barges, you know. So we were in everything. We were junkmen, too.

Teiser: And you were involved in that yourself?

Figari: Oh yes, we used to go up and look at all of these vessels. Mr. Crowley, Jr. used to come; even Sr. used to come sometimes and go up and look at the barges. They have some pictures of barges. I have a couple of pictures in Stockton, I don't know where they are right now, where we were towing oil when they had a strike up there. We made two trips to Stockton during the strike.

Teiser: Let me go back to the Depression of the '30's. How in the world did Mr. Crowley hold things together with so many interests?

Figari: Well, I guess he had a big surplus, I don't know.

Teiser: It must have been a terrible job.

Figari: It was terrible. A lot of people lost their homes. I remember that. I moved out here in May of '22,
Figari: paid $6,500 for this place.* I could get $27,000 for it now. You see how much a dollar's worth now. Bill was born in 1919 and Monty was born in '21. We lived over on Polk Street. Monty was born over there and the landlord said, "You're making too much noise. You'll have to move out." My wife had lived out in this neighborhood and so we came out here. There were vegetable gardens around here.

We were renting that house down there in the same block. A fellow by the name of Captain Haldor Smith, he was a sea captain, lived in the house across the street. The fellow said -- Baldwin and Howell -- said, "We'll build you a house just like his. It cost $6,500." I said, "Okay." (Laughter) Well, we had to get out. If we moved into another flat, we'd have the same trouble. It was a small place anyhow.

I told Mr. Crowley I was buying a home. I said, "Supposing I get sick or something." "Don't worry

*561 Staples Street, San Francisco.
Figari: about it," he said, "I'll take care of it." (Laughter)
He was very good. I used to pay so much a month. I'll
never forget. I owed about $1,000, and I went up to
Baldwin and Howell. Mr. Crowley was very good;
around Christmas time he used to give us a bonus. I
wanted to get it paid off. I was kind of scared
something would happen. So I owed $1,000 and Baldwin
and Howell told me, "You either have to pay the
thousand dollars or -- you're too far ahead of your
payments. You're paying too much." They wanted to
get the interest. I had one six percent mortgage
and one six and a half. So I went back to the office.
They wanted me for something. "Where you been?
I've been looking all over for you." I said, "I was
at Baldwin and Howell arguing with them." Dave Crowley
said, "What's the argument?" I said, "Well, I owe
$1,000. I either have to pay the thousand or not
pay anything at all for a while." "You owe them
$1,000. Go into Miss Carey and get $1,000 and pay
the bums off." (Laughter)

Teiser: This was Dave Crowley?
Figari: Tom Crowley was there. So, they were very, very good to me.

Teiser: When did the depression hit the Crowley operation?

Figari: When it hit everybody else.

Teiser: Did business just drop off?

Figari: Yeah, business dropped off to hardly anything.

Teiser: When did it start up again?

Figari: It took about two or three years. Then the war came along and it boomed. Mr. Roosevelt fixed it all up. We went to war. Shipyards all over.

Teiser: You said you were not a member of a union, of course, but were you involved indirectly in any of the union activity of the period? Did you know about the Sailors Union of the Pacific?

Figari: The Sailors Union of the Pacific had a big place up on Brannan Street, up on the hill there. They had a big, big building there.

Teiser: Rincon Hill.

Figari: Rincon Hill, yeah. I used to go up there when I wasn't doing anything.

Teiser: Did you ever meet Andrew Furuseth?
Figari: Yeah.

Teiser: What was he like?

Figari: Oh he was an elderly fellow when I met him. He was a very nice man.

Teiser: Was he well liked?

Figari: Yes. Well, sailors got $40 a month, see. I went to sea for a while and I got $25 a month. Bosun, he got $45, and the fourth officer got $55 a month. The captain I guess got about $500. Now the captain gets about three or four thousand dollars a month. Even the sailors, they make lots of dough now. The union has helped. Bridges done a lot for the unions.

Teiser: You probably didn't think so during the general strike, did you?

Figari: (Laughter) Well, he stopped us. Nothing we could do about it. We had a hard time with him, trying to get him out and everything. He's still going strong. (Laughter)

The ship owners put it on themselves. The stevedores used to go, in the morning, down to the docks. The head superintendent of the place had
Figari: charge of the stevedores. The men used to be out in front of the dock. He used to say, "You come here, you, you, you, and you." If you didn't hang any hams on the door, you wouldn't get a job. If you weren't friendly with the big shots, you were out of luck. That's all stopped now. Harry Bridges was very good to all the men.... of course we didn't like it very much. (Laughter) But there was nothing we could do about it. But he's all right. He got a lot for the men now.

Shanghaing, Gospel Singing and Other Recollections

Teiser: Let me go back to shanghaing of the sailors. When did that stop?

Figari: Oh, that stopped about 1905 or 1906, something like that.

Teiser: Why did it stop?

Figari: See, sailing vessels petered out then. Tramp steamers came in. There were no more sailing vessels.
Figari: Years before I was on the waterfront, they tell me they used to drug them and everything. I don't know. I never got into that. There used to be a lot of boarding houses, you know. And these boarding house runners -- ex-sailors -- used to go out to the ships and help them off to hurry them up, help them furl the sails and get them in there with a flask of whiskey in their pockets -- take them uptown and give them a bath and fix them all up and give them some clothes, and shove them out. I guess they used to leave three months' pay behind [earned on their original ships] which was about ten or fifteen dollars a month. (Laughter)

Teiser: When the sailing ships went out and when steam ships replaced them, was it easier to get men to work on them?

Figari: Oh yes, yeah. They were all tramp steamers, foreign vessels. Pacific Mail Steamship Company and the Dollar Lines had Chinese crews -- Chinese sailors, Chinese waiters, everything was Chinese. Of course, they broke that all up -- the unions.
Teiser: Did the Chinese crews come on after the days of Shanghaing?

Figari: Yes. You take those oil tankers, they used to have Chinese crews and everything. All they had were white officers, that's all. The rest were Chinese.

Teiser: Then, let me go back to one other thing -- I'm just skipping around here -- there was the Emerald Line?

Figari: Maybe that's what they called the steamship company that Mr. Crowley had -- that had the George W. Elder and F. A. Kilburn. I think that's right. I guess he named that the Emerald Line.*

Teiser: Then I have a note here that at some point Christian Endeavor men and women would go out in the launches. What about that?

Figari: (Laughter) Yeah, to the sailing ships. They used to carry a little organ with them and they used to hold services aboard the ships out in the Bay.

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*It was formed in 1917.
Figari: We used to haul them out on a Sunday, Christian Endeavor. They'd go out and sing. Oh, I guess a party would be about eight or ten of them. And they had a little organ and they'd have services aboard. They used to go from one ship to another.

(Laughter)

Teiser: Did you take them?

Figari: Yes, I took them. (Laughter)

Teiser: You suggested earlier that we get hold of Captain McGillivray and get both of you together.

Figari: You can talk to Mrs. Bowles and you can talk to her husband and talk to Mac and find out when he's coming up again to San Francisco. When he comes up here, he comes up on a Friday and he'll go uptown and meet the steamship people uptown and then Friday night he goes up to Mr. Crowley's house for dinner, and Saturday night he comes out here to dinner. He likes to have a ravioli feed. (Laughter) We chew the rag.

Teiser: Mrs. Figari makes ravioli, does she?

Figari: My wife is Irish. Her people are from Ireland. We
Figari: buy them. The best place to buy them is Panama Canal up there on Grant Avenue. My mother used to make them years ago. I remember as a kid, she used to roll this dough out very thin. Then she used to make the filling out of spinach, brains, and sausage and a lot of stuff. Then she used to have a spoon and she'd lay it over -- it had sort of a little wheel, see -- and it used to run along there and cut into each ravioli. I used to do that when I was a little kid. (Laughter)

There was a fellow who was burned out during the fire over in North Beach, by the name of Kitterman, James Kitterman. He had a big furniture place. He had a lot of money and I don't think he had any insurance. He had a fine big cruiser and he kept it up at Corte Madera Creek. And Mr. Crowley bought it from him about 1907 or 1908. I don't think he had any insurance on his big furniture place on Stockton Street, between Vallejo and Broadway. I went up to Corte Madera Creek and got the cruiser and towed it down. It was a fancy boat, a cabin
Figari: and all fitted out very nice.

Teiser: A pleasure boat?

Figari: Yeah, it was a pleasure boat for himself.

Teiser: What did Mr. Crowley do with it?

Figari: He sold it to some people up in Venice Island. He fixed it up and made a tow boat out of her. There were very few powered pleasure boats around then. They used to have a lot of sailing yachts. A fellow by the name of Stone -- Frank Stone -- used to build them down at Harbor View, on the other side of the Fulton Iron Works -- between Harbor View Park and the Fulton Iron Works. Frank Stone had a big shipyard. He built a lot of Red Stack tug boats before Mr. Crowley was in the business. He built a lot of boats for Mr. Crowley. He built the double deckers during the war. He was in Oakland then. His son still has a shipyard over in Alameda. Lester Stone.

Teiser: Making small craft?

Figari: Repairing yachts -- motor boats and things like that. Here's another story. I forget what year it was. It was after the quake because I was running the
Figari: Comet. There was some litigation over the land over there where the Western Pacific is now. I guess the Southern Pacific was bucking it. So one night -- have you been up the Estuary? Up the Oakland Estuary?

Teiser: I've been along it.

Figari: Yeah, You know it's a rock wall on the left hand, in fact on both sides. Well, on the left hand side is where the Western Pacific is now. They had their slip there. Well, one night we went over there. I was towing a pile driver. We went there where the Western Pacific is inside there, between the SP and the Western Pacific -- and you know they had men on that breakwater for about two or three years, patrolling it. We used to take men over there in the morning to relieve the night men. They were sort of guards, to allow nobody in there. See they had guns and everything. They claimed that land for the Western Pacific. I don't know what it was all about. I know I had a pile driver to tow in and we drove a couple of piles there to claim the land.
Figari: That's how the Western Pacific got that place over there. I know I was running the Comet. American Dredging Company, they went in there with a dredger or something. Harris of American Dredging Company went in there with a dredger. I had the pile driver.

Teiser: I see. Well, we'll catch up with Captain McGillivray.

Figari: He could remind me of some stories, too. He used to be my deckhand running up river.

Teiser: Oh he did!

Figari: Yeah. We used to go up to Antioch and get something to eat. What we had was a little kerosene stove with wicks on and you would make the coffee and then fry a few eggs. By the time the eggs were fried, the coffee would be cold. (Laughter) He used to buy a lot of cakes and stuff like that; he had a sweet tooth.

He worked for the Red Stacks, captain of the Red Stack tugs. I never worked for the Red Stacks. And he's a director of the Red Stacks, with the Red Stacks down there. They have no stockholders or anything. Nobody has any stock but Mr. Crowley
Figari: himself. Same way with all. The California Tug Boat Company, United Tug Boat Company, oil terminals; they have all kinds of subsidiaries. There are all these northern places. I don't know much about these northern places. I've been out of there for three years.

Teiser: And a lot's happened in three years?

Figari: (Laughter) I'll say it has.
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ERRATA

Page 22, line 13: "Marney" should read Monte.

Page 72, third line from bottom: "Galina" should read Galena;
"Gualala" should read Wayada.

Photograph following page 78: Delete "Pier 14."

Page 88, line 2: "Crowley" should read Oakland (Launch and Tugboat Company).

Page 89, line 6: "battleships" should read colliers.

Page 97, line 14: "Weder" should read Wieder.

The same changes apply to the INDEX.
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