ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

OPAL FOXX
Food Service Worker for Pacific
Construction, Inc.
at Shasta Dam
1942-1945

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STATUS OF INTERVIEW:
OPEN FOR RESEARCH

♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦

Interview Conducted by:
Jacqueline S. Reinier on November 22, 1994
Historian, Bureau of Reclamation
Shasta Lake City, California
Interview Edited and Published–2014

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Oral History Program
Bureau of Reclamation
Denver, Colorado

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Table of Contents

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Editorial Convention

A note on editorial conventions. In the text of these interviews, information in parentheses, ( ), is actually on the tape. Information in brackets, [ ], has been added to the tape either by the editor to clarify meaning or at the request of the interviewee in order to correct, enlarge, or clarify the interview as it was originally spoken. Words have sometimes been struck out by editor or interviewee in order to clarify meaning or eliminate repetition. In the case of strikeouts, that material has been printed at 50% density to aid in reading the interviews but assuring that the struckout material is readable.

The transcriber and editor also have removed some extraneous words such as false starts and repetitions without indicating their removal. The meaning of the interview has not been changed by this editing.

While we attempt to conform to most standard academic rules of usage (see *The Chicago Manual of Style*), we do not conform to those standards in this interview for individual's titles which then would only be capitalized in the text when they are specifically used as a title connected to a name, e.g., "Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton" as opposed to "Gale Norton, the secretary of the interior;" or "Commissioner John Keys" as opposed to "the commissioner, who was John Keys at the time." The convention in the Federal government is to capitalize titles always. Likewise formal titles of acts and offices are capitalized but abbreviated usages are not, e.g., Division of Planning as opposed to "planning;" the Reclamation Projects Authorization and Adjustment Act of 1992, as opposed to "the 1992 act."

The convention with acronyms is that if they are pronounced as a word then they are treated as if they are a word. If they are spelled out by the speaker then they have a hyphen between each letter. An example is the Agency for

International Development's acronym: said as a word, it appears as AID but spelled out it appears as A-I-D; another example is the acronym for State Historic Preservation Officer: SHPO when said as a word, but S-H-P-O when spelled out.

Introduction

In 1988, Reclamation began to create a history program. While headquartered in Denver, the history program was developed as a bureau-wide program.

One component of Reclamation's history program is its oral history activity. The primary objectives of Reclamation's oral history activities are: preservation of historical data not normally available through Reclamation records (supplementing already available data on the whole range of Reclamation's history); making the preserved data available to researchers inside and outside Reclamation.

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For additional information about Reclamation's history program see:
www.usbr.gov/history

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Oral History of Opal Foxx

Reinier. This is Jackie Reinier interviewing Opal Foxx at her home in Central Valley, California. This is November 22, 1994. This is Tape 1, Side A.

Opal, we're recording this. And I just want to make sure I have your permission to record your story.

Foxx: I don't know of anything I'd rather talk about.

Reinier: Okay, great. Opal, I'm interested in finding out about your early life. You were born in Kansas in 1915?

Growing Up in Kansas

Foxx: I was born in Kansas, 1915, and I went to school there. I was down in the southeast corner, about twenty miles from the Missouri line and two miles from the Oklahoma line at a little town called Chetopa. I was born at Mound Valley on a farm. My mother and dad were farmers. (phone rings, tape turned off and on)

Reinier: Now, Opal, you were saying you were born on a farm.

Foxx: Yeah, I was born on a farm out of Mound Valley, Kansas. Then we moved. When I was about five years old, we lived on a place, Altamont, Kansas, and the man that owned that was named Fred Johnson. And then from there–my baby sister was born there. Ruthie, I don't know exactly where she was born, she was born–around Angonia, Kansas, I think. And my baby sister was born there, and

when she was about a year old, we moved to Arkansas, and my father and mother homesteaded 160 acres at the top of the Boston Mountains, twenty miles south of Fayetteville, Arkansas.

Reinier: Fascinating.

Foxx: And they didn't have very good schools in Arkansas, so they built–the State, I guess it was the state–built this school on top of the Boston Mountain, out of Fayetteville, twenty miles south of Fayetteville. And the name of that school was "Who'd of Thought It?" (Reinier laughs) And there were men that went to school there that was twenty years old, and sat on the front seat with me on the primmer–we had primmers then–well, we had McGuffy Readers, and so that's what we studied out of. And we lived there for about a year. And then due to financial circumstances, we had to leave there, and we moved back to Chetopa, and I started to school in the second grade at Chetopa.

Reinier: This is back in Kansas?

Foxx: This is back in Kansas. And I went to the second grade and my teacher's name was Ruby Cool. And I went to the third grade and my teacher's name was Marie Wackerly [phonetic spelling]. And then we moved again over to Edna, Kansas, which was about sixteen miles further. We lived there for a while. And then we came back to Chetopa and my mother had quick consumption. That isn't T-B [tuberculosis]–that is just a consumption that you live about six to nine months. And she died when I was nine years old.

Reinier: Oh dear, that's sad.

Foxx: And so then we just had grandma and grandpa, and mama and daddy always lived with Daddy's mother and dad. I kind of hate to tell you this, but the Red Cross came in and at that time the Red Cross had full authority, like the government does now, protection of the children, and whatever they said, that's what everybody done. My mother died the last day of December 1924. The ground was froze so hard they couldn't even bury her, because those days, the men of the church or a community dug the graves, they didn't have no grave diggers then. And the ground was froze so hard that they couldn't bury her. So they brought her back to the house from the undertaker's. They didn't have undertaking homes then–you was always brought back to the house and you stayed there and they had what they called a wake, and the neighbors came in and so on. But it was froze so hard, so they brought her back to the house and they put her in the back bedroom. She laid on a slab back there for six days before they could get a grave dug. (Reinier: Oh my!) And of course it was terribly freezing weather. The ground was hard as a brick bat.

Placed in Foster Homes

And so then during that time . . . Well, we were very poor. The Red Cross came in and says, "Well, the children has to be put in foster homes and adopted out, because the mother is gone and the father isn't able to take care of them and the grandmother and grandfather is too old to take care of them." And I remember that so distinctly. I thought, "Oh! What's going to happen to us? We're going to be separated." And so anyway, there was two women, and one of them had on a fur coat, and to this day–I'm sorry, Jackie–I hate fur

coats. It left a terrible impression, with the fur coat. (Reinier: Yes.) But anyway, some people took my baby sister, which was three, to raise.

Reinier: What was her name, Opal?

Foxx: Her name was Virginia. She lives here in Redding now, she's seventy-two years old. And my other sister, Ruth, went to the orphans' home in Independence, Kansas. And I went to the orphans' home too, but I was, by this time–well, I was worldly to the effect of the orphans' home, because they was kind of a fanatic religious organization that run the orphans' home.

Reinier: What religion was it?

Foxx: Far Baptized [perhaps Baptists] Association. They still are very active back in the Midwest. And they're good people, they're really good people, but they just–I don't know how they're surviving now, but back then children weren't told where babies come from, they weren't told anything about sex: you saved yourself for your husband, and if you married, it didn't matter if he beat you up every day, you went ahead and stayed with him, you know, regardless, those days. Of course, remember this was sixty-five years ago. So anyway, I went to the orphans' home, and the girls at the orphans' home was talking about one of the ladies in church that was expecting a baby, and that the doctor was going to bring the baby in a suitcase and leave it on the porch. And I told them, "No, that ain't where babies come from." So I proceeded to tell them exactly where the babies came from. And I said, "That woman is real fat, and that baby is in her stomach, and one of these days it's going to come

out, and that's where the baby comes from." And the girls went down the next morning, one of them did, and told the matron that babies do not come on the front porch in suitcases, and I was in trouble. Well, they said that I was too worldly to stay there, because I knew too much about worldly things, and here I was only ten years old.

Well anyway, I don't know how I found out all that stuff before I went there, but anyway, I did. (Reinier: Well, you had little sisters.) And so they put me out in a home where a lady was going to have a baby, and then I went from home to home to home, and I was kind of shuffled here and there. I was too old to be adopted, but I was old enough to work. Still, I had to go to school, because of the state laws, so I kind of wandered around. I kept in touch with my grandma and grandpa, but they were on County Aid–at that time they called it County Aid–and my dad wasn't able to work, he was sickly because he had, in his younger life, went to Key West, Florida, and from the water there he got a hookworm. And that hookworm grew and grew and grew in him, and it took all the food from him. So there was an old doctor in Coffeyville, Kansas, and he told him, "John, you're going to die anyway, so I'm going to give you one teaspoonful of medicine and we'll see if we can kill that worm," because it was just like a snake. And it just kept getting bigger and bigger, it kept eating and eating and growing. And it comes from the water in Key West, Florida.

And so he gave him a teaspoonful of medicine–Daddy didn't know what the medicine was. He stayed at the doctor's house, and him and daddy was up for three days, and he checked everything that he passed, because in those days

they didn't have inside toilets, and he had a slop jar, and so that's what they called the places that they had in the room. They used to have one in each room for people in those days. And so he checked all of the stool that he passed, and he said, "Now John, you'll pass all of the snake before the worm, but the head is what we have to get, because if the head is left, then it'll start growing again."

So for three days him and my dad was up and down, and my dad just passed and passed, and he measured the stool, this doctor did, and it was ninety-five feet long when he got through measuring it, and the third day the head came out. (Reinier: Oh, my goodness!) And so it was small, but it kept growing. And that's the way they do. And the natives down there, daddy said, when they have it, they just don't do anything, it just eventually kills them, because it takes all of your substance. Everything you eat, it eats. And he weighed about ninety-five pounds, I think he said, and it took the lining out of his stomach, the medicine did. It made him lose all of his teeth, every one of them came out, and so he never was able to work after that. But him and my mother met in the Salvation Army in Coffeyville, Kansas, and I have their marriage license where they were married in Independence, Kansas, where my sister Ruthie was raised.

Lived in Missouri for A While

Well, we grew up, and my dad married again in Missouri. I went to Missouri and lived with them for a while, and this lady had a farm, and Daddy could work some, but not on an eight-hour shift straight through. And so they lived on a farm in New Florence, Missouri, out of Jonesburg in New

Florence–they're little towns close together. And so I went back there with them. Ruthie was still in the orphans' home, and she stayed there for eight years. She went in when she was eight, she came out when she was sixteen. They always put you out on your own when you're sixteen, because you're old enough to work. And then she came and lived with us. But Virginia, the people that took her, they didn't want us to come and visit with her or anything, because they wanted to raise her as their own. They didn't want to adopt her for some unknown reason, I don't know why, but they did want her . . . They changed her name to Virginia, and her right name was Georgia Maxine. And of course she took their last name.

So then I grew up and I come back to Kansas, to Chetopa to some friends that we knew there when my mother died. And I married a boy there, and we lived there for six years together.

Married During the Depression

Reinier: What was his name?

Foxx: His name was James Austin Turnbough.

Reinier: How old were you when you married?

Foxx: I was eighteen. (Reinier: Young.) I was eighteen. And so I married him and we lived in Chetopa all during the Depression, because we married in 1930.

Reinier: So were times pretty hard during the Depression?

Foxx: Yeah, there wasn't any work. And of course I'd always worked hard, every place that I lived I

worked hard. I mean, that didn't matter, I didn't mind it.

Reinier: Opal, I saw in the article that we just read that you were able to go to school only through fourth grade.

Foxx: Yeah, that's all I went to school. Yeah, I quit going to school. Kansas didn't have any free books, and I never had the money to buy a set of books.

Reinier: And I can tell that you feel bad about that now.

Foxx: Yeah. But I thank the Lord that I can read and write–not very good, but I can read and write, and financially, I don't owe anybody anything.

Reinier: And you've learned a lot through your life.

Foxx: Oh yeah. Everything I learnt was through experience. Everything I do is because if you didn't have something during those days, you substituted something else. You didn't go to the store and get it, you just substituted it. I remember when Jim and I were married, we had a coal oil stove, it had three burners, and you set the oven on top of it. Well, the oven was made out of real thin tin, so I decided that I'd reinforce that. We went to the dump and we got an old stove, and I took and tore an old stove up and got some heavy–well, I guess you'd call it porcelain, off of this old stove. And I cut that thing down and I took little tiny stove bolts from the stove, and I put a back in and a top in and the ends in, and of course had a glass door in the front–real fancy–it was, those days. And boy, that oven was just as solid as a rock, and heavy as lead too! (laughs)

Reinier: So you're really handy!

Foxx: Well, I've always kind of did things like that, you know. You kind of learn to substitute and make something work, if you haven't got the materials to make it work. You know, it's kind of like the old Model "T's". You know, you had a Model "A" and a Model "T," and you could put a little baling wire here and a little something there, and it still worked. So I learned to work on cars, and I changed my own oil in the cars. And so I lived there . . .

Reinier: Let me ask you one other thing. You started working when you were real young. (Foxx: Yeah, right. Yeah, I did.) What kind of work did you do?

Worked Odd Jobs to Make a Living

Foxx: Oh, the people that I stayed with, I helped with the housework, I worked out in the field, I stacked hay. And to stack hay, you put it in a pile in those days, and you walk around and around and around and pack it solid in the center, so the rain doesn't go down the center and make the hay become molded. And I stacked hay, I've dug coal in a strip pit. And a strip pit, back in Kansas they have red coal, bituminous coal, hard black coal that you burn, and you go down approximately maybe twenty feet, some places only ten. And that's the reason it's called "strip," because you strip the top off and then you come down to the coal and there is the cap rock that lays on top of the coal.

These strip pits was where a big machine went through and dug the best out, the vein. They run in veins–the vein will go straight for a while, and then it'll curve and go another way and maybe go

another way, because, see, millions of years it's been making this coal. And so the big machine comes in and takes the big part out, then they leave the little. So that's what they let the people go in and dig down 'til you come to the part that wasn't so full, and then you dug the dirt off and then you got down to the shale, and then you got down to a hard rock before you got to the coal.

Reinier: So what did you use to dig, a pick axe?

Foxx: Yeah, a pick and shovel. And then when you got down to the cap rock, then you went and bought dynamite, and you put six sticks of dynamite–well, according to how big your hole was–you put six sticks of dynamite and a fuse and a line. Then you go off over here about forty foot with this line, and in this line you set that in the fire, and when it hits that cap that's in that dynamite . . . But before that, you cover this dynamite over with mud. You take dirt and wet it and cover the dynamite over with mud, because that makes the charge go down and breaks that rock that's on top of the coal. And then you take pin . . . I've got my old coal pins up the hill that I brought from Kansas. (laughs) I don't know why I brought them, but I did.

Reinier: Oh, were you working as a miner? Or were you doing this for your family's use?

Foxx: No, Jim and I didn't have no work, and so we dug coal and sold it. And for the red coal, which is soft coal, you burn that in the cookstoves, because everybody had coal stoves.

Reinier: So you and your husband did this to make money?

Foxx: Yeah, and we sold it for two-and-a-half [dollars] a ton. (Reinier: My gosh!) And for the black coal, we got two-seventy-five. And we cut hedge posts. Now back in Kansas, when the sections were laid off, it's just a bald knob and flat. And so someone brought hedge–I don't know if you know anything about hedge wood or not. (Reinier: No.) It's real hard, it's yellow, it's twisted, and there ain't hardly a straight limb on the tree, and it's thorny, but it makes fence posts because it never rots. A hedge post can be in the ground for fifty years and it won't rot. And so it's used for fences. At each section in my area, there was a hedgerow, and the road went through each section. And so on each side of the road, there would be a hedgerow that you would drive in between. Now that was to stop the snow and to stop the wind, protect the cattle that was out in the pasture. It made a good place for the rabbits to make their nests, and it was very thick and very thorny and the trees were beautiful, and they got big hedge balls on them like this.

Reinier: Uh-huh, about three or four inches in diameter.

Foxx: Yes, right, yeah. And they used that for wood, and they used it for a fence, and they used it for a snowbank. And they used it for wood for fence posts. And so we cut wood, we dug coal, and we survived.

Reinier: To survive the Depression.

Foxx: Right. Because there was no work for the men. And in the summertime, Jim would go and work with a threshing crew, because they had threshing machines then–now they got combines. But he would go and work for the threshing. And he's

worked all day long stacking straw. And see, the cows eat the straw and the thrashing machine puts the straw out of one end of the machine, and the wheat comes out the other end, into a truck. But that one end where the straw comes out, that thing works back and to, and puts the straw in kind of a windrow. And you have to walk back and to, to keep that pressed real tight so the water won't get down the middle. And then they usually put a fence around it, and then they turn the cows in, and the cows eat all the way around this, and it comes down as they eat. That was the way they used to do it. They don't do it that way anymore–they bale it now.

Reinier: Opal, what brought you to California? How did you leave Kansas and come to California?

Family Members Moved Out to California

Foxx: Okay, my sister Ruth, after she got out of the orphans' home and got some money, I don't know how much, but it wasn't very much–because when you worked for people back there, you only got about three dollars a week, was about the wage those days, during our time. I didn't get paid because I was getting board and room, you know, growing up. But anyway, so she came to California and went to Long Beach.

Reinier: How did she get here? Did she take the bus?

Foxx: She hitchhiked all the way across the country. She was only seventeen.

Reinier: Wow. And when was that, what year was that?

Foxx: Probably . . . Let's see, I was in Chetopa in '30.

Probably in '32 or '33, because she was out here when Jim and I were married.

Reinier: Why did she come to California?

Foxx: Well, it was funny. There really was a depression out here too, but there was food here, they raised potatoes and they had fruit and they would advertise back there that they needed fruit pickers. (Reinier: Yes, okay) And then we had the dust storm. Mr. Roosevelt was president, and he says, "Now, there's an overproduction of food"–but you didn't have no money to buy it–and he says, "Now this ground"–the government passed a law during the New Deal that they would leave the ground vacant and wouldn't plant anything, and the farmers could only plant so much, and if they planted over that, they were penalized heavily. And then he said, "But you can't plant anything there, but you got to plow it up." Well, that was a silly durn thing! If they'd have left it in the sod, and left the weeds grow up, they wouldn't have had no dust storms. But they made them plow it up, which was some guy in Washington, never seen a farm, didn't know what the heck he was doing, and they wouldn't listen to the farmers. And so they plowed these fields up, and I'll tell you, I fully believe that God sent a judgement on the people for wasting. And it was our government's fault, but it happened. And so the wind came along and blowed all of the topsoil off and down to the hardpan, and we had dust storms–terrible, terrible dust storms, and then the grasshoppers came in and they ate all the leaves off the tree because they didn't have anything to eat, because there was no weeds, because they eat weeds and stuff that grows out on the prairies.

Reinier: So did California seem like a place to come?

Foxx: Well, Ruthie thought there was work out here, and she was alone and she didn't have no home, so she come. And she went to work in Long Beach, and then she went to work in Los Angeles, and she was down there for quite a while.

Reinier: What kind of work was she doing out here?

Foxx: Well, she went to work at Walgreen's Drug Store in Long Beach, and then she went up to Los Angeles and she worked in a Walgreen's Drug Store up there. And in this store–which I was real, real glad, and I know that the Lord guided her and protected her, just like he has me all my life–and it was a doctor's daughter that run the Walgreen Drug Store. And so he and Ruthie and his daughter was real good friends working together, and so he kind of took Ruthie underneath his wing. (Reinier: Lovely.) And it was in a Chinese area somewhere in L-A. I never was in L-A to know predominantly where it was at, but anyway, Ruthie told me afterwards, she said that he told the girls one day, "Now girls, I'm going to talk to you about cocaine, because I'm going to show you what it does if you ever start using it." And he took them to a Chinese, where they smoke it.

Reinier: Cocaine or opium?

Foxx: I mean opium, I'm sorry. And he said, "I'll show you what it does to the body." And so he took them to a regular place that he knew this fellow that smoked it, and showed them the pipes, and he gave Ruthie–and somewhere in my artillery of her things–she's dead now–I have a little tiny opium pipe

that he bought for them from this place where they was, to remind them this is what it's like and don't do it, and showed the condition of how they were.

Reinier: And this was in L-A in the 30s?

Foxx: This was in L-A in the 30s. And so I was glad that the doctor did that, and I'm sure that the Lord provided that information so she'd never, ever use it, because he was trying to teach them . . . (phone rings, tape turned off and on)

Reinier: So now what brought you to California?

Foxx: So then Ruthie came north just to explore the country, I guess, and she landed in Redding and she landed a job here at the first beginning of the dam in 1938.

Reinier: Ah-ha. And what was she doing?

Foxx: She was a waitress.

Reinier: A waitress in the . . . .

Foxx: Oh no, she worked in Redding. And she met her husband here.

Reinier: What was his name?

Foxx: His name was Bill Lane, and he was killed in Shasta Dam in the old railroad tunnel.

Reinier: Oh, I want to hear about that when we get to it.

Foxx: Okay. And her and Bill got married, and they bought a little house down the street, just half a

block from here. And that was back in '38. And so then my grandma died, Jim and I separated, I brought my dad from Missouri–he lived in Missouri–I brought him to my house and I took care of him the last ten years he lived. And I brought him to Chetopa. And after me and Jim separated, I went to work for a lady that run a bakery, ice cream parlor, and a restaurant all in one shop, from the front street to the alley. And I went to work for her for three dollars a week and she charged us four dollars a week for our board, and we were allowed to eat anything that was left over, but not nothing that was cooked fresh. But a job was a job. And so I was just telling my nephew last night, "I always wanted a home," because I'd been "shuffled from hell to breakfast," as a saying, and I always wanted a home and so back home, if you don't pay your taxes, they auction your property off at the sheriff's sale–they call it a sheriff's sale. And so I went to this lady that I was working for and I says, "Do you think you could give me enough . . ."

END OF SIDE 1, TAPE 1.
BEGINNING OF SIDE 2, TAPE 1.

Reinier: So we were talking about your home in Kansas.

Purchasing Her First Home

Foxx: Oh, about my home, yeah. So Ruthie was out in California, and she married Bill and they lived down the street here on Willow Street, just down a half a block from where I live now. And so I worked for Mrs. Engelson and I had my daddy and I fed him on a dollar a week. I don't know how I did it, but I did. And I ate at the restaurant, and this place come up for sale, and I went to Mrs. Engelson and I

asked her if I could get some money ahead of time and then she would take a dollar a week out of my salary to pay it back. And so she said, "Well, yeah," that she'd do that for me. And so I said, "Well, I'll do my work tonight." So I worked to do whatever I was supposed to do all night, then the next morning I hitchhiked to Oswego, which is nine miles away, and went to the sale. But you didn't know when your place was going to come up, because they were scheduled that day, but you didn't know what time.

Reinier: Now were you buying a place or . . .

Foxx: I was going to try to bid it in, because it was selling for taxes, and if you had the money, you could bid and buy it for taxes. (Reinier: I see.) But it was auctioned like different bidders.

Reinier: Yes, and was this the place you were actually living in?

Foxx: This is the place I was living in, and I was paying two dollars a month for rent, and it just had two rooms, but it had three lots. And so I hitchhiked up there at nine o'clock and my place didn't sell until about four o'clock in the afternoon. So I set all day, waiting for my number to come up. And it came up, and someone outbid me.

And so I was beside myself, I didn't know what I was going to do, because I knew that if he outbid me, that he'd rent it and he'd raise my rent and I couldn't pay any more than that. Well, all those things went through my mind. But anyway, I just said a little prayer, "Well, Lord, you know that I'm trying, and you have to help me." So I went

ahead and went home, and there was a colored couple that lived across the street from me named Edna and J .B. Lowthan, and he was a chauffeur and she was a cook for the lawyer that lived in town, and they'd worked for them for years, because when they came from Missouri and moved to Chetopa, he brought his chauffeur with him, and then he married Edna in Chetopa. She was a very dear friend, and when Jim and I separated, she fed me 'til I could get a job, and she got me my job at Miss Engelson's, because she worked for Mrs. Neal [phonetic spelling] and Mrs. Neal and Miss Engelson had lived there for years, because people didn't really move much, those days.

And so she got me the job, and I went up there, and this man outbid me, and so she come over that night, and she said, "You know, Opal, he ain't gonna keep this place, he's gonna sell it to somebody," because he bid my place in first, but his mother-in-law's place was gonna be sold, and so he bid hers, and he got her place too. So she said, "I think we'd better take that fifteen dollars that Mrs. Engelson gave you and go down there and pay him something down, and alright." And this colored friend of mine, I bought them two gallon of gas, which was a quarter, because it was twelve-and-a-half cents a gallon, those days. And so I bought them two gallon of gas, and we went down in Oklahoma, which is about fifteen miles from where I lived, and we took a piece of regular tablet paper and Edna wrote up a little contract. And I gave him forty dollars for my house. He bought it for forty dollars, and I give him ten dollars extra, and I told him I'd pay five dollars a month, and I'd pay fifteen dollars down. And the next day someone went down there and offered him $100 for the house I

lived in, but he said, "You'll have to talk to Opal, because I've already sold it to her." And see, I guess Edna foresaw this and the Lord always took care of me, and he foresaw it too, so that's the reason she come over, and her and her husband took me down there. And I still have the papers.

Reinier: And you got the house.

"I Paid Him Five Dollars a Month"

Foxx: I got the house (Reinier: Oh, great.) and I paid him five dollars a month, and I fed my daddy on a dollar and I saved a dollar and I took in two baskets of washing for fifty cents a basket to make my other five dollars, for a month. And I wrote him a postcard–he still lived in Oklahoma–and said, "I want you to come up," when I made the last payment. "I want you to come up and pick up the last payment, because I've got my house paid for." So everybody went to the Justice of the Peace for all the papers that had to be fixed out–the quitclaim deeds and things. And so we went to the Justice of the Peace, and Mr. Bell was his name. And he made out the little deed and typed it up. And then I handed A. I. the last five dollars–that was the man I bought it from, A. I. Fite [phonetic spelling]–and then Mr. Bell looked at me and he says, "Now, Opal, that'll be a dollar-and-a-half to record it." And I just fell apart. I didn't have a dollar-and-a-half, because I just paid him the last payment, and I guess I didn't know that you had to pay for recording it. And so A. I. said, "Oh, don't fall apart, Opal. You've paid me faithfully for the place and I've got my fifty dollars, and I made ten dollars on the deal. And so I'll pay Mr. Bell the dollar-and-a-half to record it and you don't have to worry about

it, and then you can pay me like you've been paying me for the place." So that was my first home.

Reinier: Oh, that's wonderful! You must have been very happy.

Foxx: Oh, I was proud. I was so proud. It was a shack, but it was mine.

Reinier: Yes, and you worked so hard for it.

Foxx: Yeah.

Reinier: Now why did you leave that and come to California?

Preparing for War

Foxx: So then I kept on working for Mrs. Engelson, and then they opened up a garment factory–well, the war broke out. No, wait a minute, it hadn't broke out. Roosevelt said everybody eighteen years or older had to take eighteen months of military training. So that took all of our boys that wasn't working. Of course a lot of them went to C-C [Civilian Conservation Corps] camps during those days, but the main thing was that now he knew we was going to be in war–he knew we was going to be in war–so he was training our people to be prepared, knowing we was going to be in war.

Reinier: Because the Selective Service Act had been passed.

Foxx: Yeah, right. And so they opened up a Miller Manufacturing Company in Cherryvale, Kansas, which is about, oh, maybe fifty miles from me–I'm guessing about that, but I think it's about fifty miles

from Chetopa. And me and another lady went up there and got a job. And I could make two dollars a day up there in the garment factory. And what I done, they made Army pants for the soldiers that was going for the compulsionary [compulsory] training, and I sewed up the right-hand pocket–that's all I did, I just set at a machine all day long and sewed up the right-hand pocket of the pants.

Reinier: What was your pay at the restaurant?

Foxx: Just still three dollars.

Reinier: Was still three dollars a week?

Foxx: Oh yeah.

Reinier: To two dollars a day?

Foxx: Yeah.

Reinier: Fabulous!

Foxx: So I was rich! But then I had to pay to rent a place to stay up there. And so me and this lady rented this little one-room house, and we lived in that. We cooked and ate and slept and went to work out of this one room.

Reinier: And your daddy still lived . . .

Foxx: And I still had to support him in Chetopa, because he lived in the house. And so I worked up there and I was working there the day that Pearl Harbor was bombed. Well, I didn't work on Sunday–that was the only day we had off. And the next day was

Monday, and we wanted to hear Roosevelt's speech, and it was a foreigner that was the boss/forelady, and they wouldn't let us hear his speech. And so I said, "Now, I if this being the case and war is declared," because he declared war in that speech, "I won't get to see my brother-in-laws." And in the meantime, before I got out here, my youngest sister had came out and she met her husband here in Central Valley, and he's the one that worked on Pit River to test the cement.

Decided to Come to California

Reinier: That's Virginia?

Foxx: That's Virginia, yeah. And so she married him. And so Ruth and Virginia was both out here–only Fred and Virginia had moved to San Jose and he was working for Permanente. What that was, I don't know, but it was a big company that done something about the war effort. And so I decided that I would have to come. So I worked at the garment factory for a year, and it took me a year to save up fifty dollars, because my ticket was thirty-two. (Reinier: A bus ticket?) A bus ticket out here was thirty-two dollars, and I had to have enough money to eat on. And so I saved up fifty dollars, took me a year. And I came out to California. I left Chetopa on the train and went to Dallas, and then I caught the bus from Dallas on out here, because we didn't have connections on the bus in Chetopa, because it was just a little town.

Reinier: And you left your dad back at the house?

Foxx: And I left my dad back there. I bought two ton of coal, and I moved him in just this one room and I

took his bedroom and I lined the floor and I lined the walls with bicycle boxes, and I carried that coal from the alley in and piled it in that back room so he wouldn't have to go outside to put it in the stove. I carried in two ton of coal and put it in the back bedroom, in his bedroom, because I give him mine because mine was over here in the front. And so I left the sixth day of January, 1942, on the train. I got out here to California. I come to San Jose, because that was where my ticket was to, and then they said they'd bring me up. Of course gas was rationed, so I didn't get to come up for about a month, I guess, after I got out here. No, it wasn't that long, because I landed in Central Valley on the seventeenth day of February. (Reinier: In 1942?) In 1942. And Ruthie told me I could get work in Redding at the laundry. We used to have a laundry in there that DeForests [phonetic spelling] run. And I just tried to get a job everyplace, and nobody would give me a job.

Reinier: Really?

Went to Shasta Dam Site to Find Work

Foxx: Well, jobs were plentiful for certain things, but there wasn't everything that I knowed about. And so one day I drove the car down to the post office to get the mail every day–her car–and I decided, "No sir, I'm going to go down to Shasta Dam, and if them men can work out there, I can do what they can do." And so I went out and I got to the guard station, and they wouldn't let me through. So I said, "Well, I'll just park the car and walk down. I can't do too much damage walking down." Because, see, everything was protected on account of the war. (Reinier: Yeah.) And so he called down and talked

to Pat Unger [phonetic spelling], and Pat said, "Well, let her come on down and I'll call you back when she gets down here." You know, for protection's sake. And so I drove down there and I walked into his office and he was a big fat Irishman, and wonderful guy, wonderful. And in those days I smoked, because I learned to smoke in Arkansas–you either smoked or dipped snuff, and I couldn't dip snuff, so I smoked. And I rolled my own, and I had a Prince Albert can and it was in a tin can. I've still got my Prince Albert tin can. And I took that out and rolled a cigarette, and I said, "Look, I have to have a job, because I've got a dad back in Kansas and my sister is sending money back there to take care of him, and she's married and it's my responsibility, not hers. I'll tell you what, I'll scrub that pool hall floor out there with a toothbrush if you'll give me a job to get enough money to get back to Kansas, because I know I can make three bucks a week back in Kansas."

And so he said, "Well you sure are desperate, aren't you?" And I said, "Yeah, I'm desperate." He said, "Well, did you ever work . . ." I said, "I never seen a job like this. There's so many men here that I'm looking at all these hard hats and I'm wondering what they're doing out there, because I've never seen a big job like building a dam." So he said, "Well, I don't have anything now, but it looks like that we're going to have to have women to fulfill the jobs here in the place of men, because all the men are leaving. Who recommended you?" And I said, "Well, where I come from, you just work two weeks, and if your work ain't satisfactory, they fire you and you don't ask no questions. I'm not telling you who I have out here. I got a brother-in-law out here on the job, but I ain't going to tell you his

name." And there was one phone in Central Valley, and that was down by the Big Dipper, where the dividing thing is.

Reinier: There wasn't electricity yet, was there?

Foxx: Yeah, everybody had electricity here, from PG&E [Pacific Gas and Electric].

Reinier: Yeah, alright, that was here by then, okay.

Foxx: Yeah. And so I said, "We don't have no phone, but I'll tell you where I live." So I told him where I lived and a couple of days later he come up and he said, "Would you be willing to wash dishes?" And I said, "I told you I'd scrub that floor with a toothbrush. I'm willing to do anything that's honest." And so I went to work down there on the fifth day of March in 1942.

Reinier: Washing dishes?

Washing Dishes in the Coffee Shop

Foxx: Washing dishes in the coffee shop. They had a little coffee shop, and they had a mess hall, and they had a pool hall, and they had a grocery store, and they had a post office all under the same roof.

Reinier: Now was this in Toyon in the government camp?

Foxx: No. The government camp was separate from this.

Reinier: Okay, where was this?

Foxx: This was right at the dam.

Reinier: Right at the dam?

Foxx: Right at the dam.

Reinier: So you were really working for the Pacific Constructors [Pacific Construction Incorporated].

Foxx: I worked for Pacific Constructors, and I still have my little slip that the man gave me when I went to work, I kept that.

Reinier: So Pacific Constructors had a camp for the working men?

Foxx: Yes, they did, and they had a village with 150 homes in it that the bosses that worked for P-I-C [P-C-I] lived in. They had a bus that brought the kids out to school to Toyon. All the Bureau of Reclamation done was run the job and told Pacific . . . They were safety, they were inspectors, and things like that. That's what the Bureau of Reclamation did.

Reinier: For the construction company?

Foxx: Yes.

Reinier: Now what was the name of the camp?

Foxx: Toyon.

Reinier: I know that that was the federal camp, but just P-C-I.

Foxx: Oh, just P-C-I camp.[1]

Reinier: While we're talking about this, could you describe the two camps, what they were like in 1942 when you first got there?

"It Worked Twenty-Four Hours"

Foxx: Yeah. All the houses were built, they had an electric stove and an electric hot water tank, and you moved your own furniture in. That was the men that worked for P-C-I that was the bosses and superintendents–because, see, it worked twenty-four hours around the clock. And so all of them had to–they lived in the camp.

Reinier: So construction on the dam went on around the clock.

Foxx: Oh yeah, twenty-four hours a day. John Rawson [Reporter for the Redding *Record Searchlight*] called me the other day and said, "Opal, did they stop for Thanksgiving or Christmas or New Year's?" I said, "No, they couldn't."

Reinier: Why couldn't they?

Foxx: Because it was a contract and they had so many days to get it built.

Reinier: Oh, I see, they had to get it done.

[1] The unofficial name of the PCI construction camp was Shasta Dam Village. For more information see, Al M. Rocca, *Shasta Lake: Boomtowns and the Building of Shasta Dam* (Charleston, South Carolina: Arcadia Publishing, 2002).

Foxx: You know, they signed a contract with the government to build this in so many days, and it took twenty-four hours a day, three shifts. They were coming and going, and going and coming constantly. And we fed them in the mess hall, because they had great big bunkhouses–and I can show you the book of those–two-story bunkhouses where the men, single, stayed. And they ate in there. And I don't know what their board was, but it wasn't very much–I think about ten dollars a week that they took out of their checks.

Reinier: Were there married men too, with families?

"They Come From Everywhere"

Foxx: Well, now the ones with the families lived in these little towns, like Summit City and Central Valley and Project City and Redding and all around. Now when they first come here, there wasn't many houses much, because all of this was just brush and poison oak. And so they lived in tents in Central Valley, as you read in this book here by Al Rocca. (Reinier: Yes.) So that was the conditions when the people first come to get a job. And they had a hiring hall over at Summit City, and I'll show you when we go out to the dam. (Reinier: I'd love that.) And they had a hiring hall there, and they were four-deep from there to Toyon, every day, to try to get a job.

Reinier: So lots of people were coming up here to try to [get work].

Foxx: Oh, hundreds and hundreds! They just finished the aqueduct which brings the water from Arizona into Los Angeles–you know, it goes through a big tunnel,

an aqueduct tunnel.[2] And those men there were down there on that job that came from Boulder when they built Boulder Dam [Hoover Dam], and they came from all of those jobs, and then they built Parker Dam[3] and they were down there on that, and that's where Mr. Crowe was on both of those.

Reinier: Frank Crowe?[4]

Foxx: Frank Crowe. And so all of those guys followed. So with all the people that was out of work, and all of them, then everybody followed everybody.

Reinier: So the people who'd had work on the various projects came, but also people who were out of work.

Foxx: Oh yes! Yes, like me. Probably 500 or more of the other people too. But anyway, eventually they got everybody . . .

Reinier: Did those men just come from all over?

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[2] The Metropolitan Water District constructed the Whitsett Pumping Plant and aqueduct to bring water from the Colorado River to communities in Southern California.

[3] For more information on Parker Dam, see Toni Rae Linenberger, "Parker-Davis Project," Denver, Colorado: Bureau of Reclamation, 1997, www.usbr.gov/history/projhist.html.

[4] Frank Crowe began his engineering career with the Reclamation Service. Crowe went on to become the construction engineer for the construction of Hoover Dam, Parker Dam, and Shasta Dam. For more information on Crowe see, Al M. Rocca, *America's Master Dam Builder: The Engineering Genius of Frank T. Crowe* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2001).

Foxx: They come from everywhere–most of them Okies and Arkies [from Oklahoma and Arkansas]. That's what made up California is Okies and Arkies. If they didn't come out here to work in the fruit, or something like that, or on the farms, why then they come out to work on construction.

Reinier: Was there word back home that there was work out here?

Foxx: Yeah. Some of those guys down in L-A for the fruit advertised back there, and that's how come a lot of the people from back there in the Dust Bowl come out here. We laugh about it, you know. Did you ever see *The Grapes of Wrath* picture? (Reinier: Yes.) I'd love to have a tape of that. I don't know if they make tapes of it or not, but I'd love to have a tape, because I tell you, that's a true picture.

Reinier: That's what it was like, huh?

Foxx: That's what it was like dear. That was exactly what it was like. And we used to laugh about it, you know. We said, "Well, if we saw a car coming down the road with chickens and a goat and a dog and a family, and the car loaded down to the gills, coming across Highway 66, and he had two mattresses, then he was better prepared than the one that just had one mattress." (laughter) That was kind of a joke.

Reinier: But there was work up here, so . . .

Foxx: But there was work here, if you could get on. And of course I was like a bull in a china closet. I had to have a job, because my sister was sending my dad two dollars a week to live on. And I didn't want her

to do that, because her husband was a shovel operator and he was only making thirty-five dollars a week. (Reinier: Yeah.) And they were buying their little place down here, and I just felt like I'm single and that's my responsibility, because I loved my dad very dearly. Anyway, I sent and got him, and brought him out here, and he's buried in Redding.

Reinier: Oh, you brought him out here?

Foxx: Oh yes, I sent and got him.

Reinier: What happened to your little house back in Kansas? Did you sell it?

Foxx: Well, I rented it to an old couple for two dollars a month, and they lived there for, let's see, from '43 until '47. I believe I went back in '47, Bob and I. And they lived there and paid me two dollars a month, sent me two dollars a month every month.

Reinier: What a good investment you had there!

Foxx: And then this colored lady that helped me so much, and fed me when I couldn't feed myself, because when Mrs. Neal and her husband would have parties, they'd have lots and lots of food, because they were well-to-do and he was a lawyer, and Edna cooked for them. And she used to cook and everything that was left over she put in little lard buckets and stuff and brought it to the west end and fed white and black.

Reinier: That's lovely.

Foxx: (tearfully) She's a wonderful person.

Reinier: And you know what's lovely too are those good race relations. (Foxx: Oh, yes.) Didn't seem to matter whether you were white or black.

Foxx: No, it didn't matter.

Reinier: When you were hungry . . .

Foxx: No, no. And we shared things all together. And the west end of town across the railroad track was usually the poorest people, you know, and the others kind of lived on the east end of town–they were a little bit better, financially, better off, like merchants and stuff like that.

Reinier: But you were able to bring your dad out here.

Foxx: Oh yeah. He came out on the train. I sent him money and he came out on the train. And my sister Ruth, in the meantime, six months after I got out here, Bill passed away, he got killed in the tunnel.

Reinier: Now tell me about that.

Brother-in-Law Killed During Construction

Foxx: Well, they had to convert [divert] the water from the spillway, which is the river, through the railroad tunnel, because, see, the railroad followed the river all the way up the canyon, up through Dunsmuir and way up yonder, wherever.[5]

[5] For more information about diverting the Sacramento River through railroad tunnel during construction of Shasta Dam, see Eric A. Stene, "Shasta Division: Central Valley Project," Denver, Colorado: Bureau of Reclamation, 1996, www.usbr.gov/history/projhist.html, 8-9.

Reinier: And the railroad had to be moved, I know that.

Foxx: Oh yes, it did. And so that left that big railroad tunnel here. Okay, where they built the dam here, they've converted [diverted] that river water through the railroad tunnel, 'til they could put the spillway in, which they had to go down deep, deep, deep down in the rocks to put the spillway in.

Reinier: Sure, convert [divert] river water to build the dam, yeah.

Foxx: So they had the dam built on each side up to the [Sacramento] river, and then they had to convert [divert] it. Well, to convert that, the Bureau of Reclamation said, "We have to make it solid, because the force of that water going through that small opening . . ." Well, it wasn't small, the railroad was running through it, or the cars run through it. But that was small for the force of the water. So they went in there, and in the middle of the tunnel–like here is the opening and here was the opening–in the middle here, they went up through this mountain to the top of that mountain there, that was above this . . . Because, see, this railroad tunnel was down at river level. (Reinier: Yes.) Then they went up through this mountain to reinforce that, because if that water hit that and it wasn't reinforced, it'd just take the whole doggone mountain out, and then they'd just have–the river would be converted [diverted], but it would take everything out.

So for the safety and everything, they blasted up through the middle of this tunnel up through the top of this mountain and then they would have ropes hanging down. I don't know how they got the ropes

up there–I suppose with some kind of machine or something. And the men would knock the extra rocks down, and then here was Bill in this big 18-B shovel–he'd come in and there was an opening at the other end, and he would blow those rocks and debris from up there. And then what they done, they concreted that all in with steel and stuff to reinforce the top of this tunnel–well, reinforced it all the way down to the ground and the bottom too.

And so he worked graveyard, and he went to work on graveyard and they played pinochle, the boys did, from twelve o'clock 'til four o'clock, and the Bureau came in, the inspectors came in and said, "It's okay, you can go in and load the rocks up now." See, and this whole tunnel was full of these rocks. And the trucks were going to haul them out thisaway. And so Bill pulled his 18-B up underneath this big opening that was above that they had to get all the debris out, and before they could go in there with steel and stuff and reinforce it, and a 160-ton boulder came right down out of the top of this mountain right on top of the 18-B.

Reinier: Oh, no!

Foxx: And of course he never knew what hit him.

Reinier: Oh my! How old was he when that happened?

Foxx: Twenty-seven.

Reinier: Just a young man.

Foxx: He would have been twenty-eight the seventeenth of February.

Reinier: Was that a problem with the inspection, that it hadn't been inspected properly?

Foxx: No, the inspectors had no warning. There was no cracks, there was no nothing. But see, when they blasted, it sort of released it. And so anybody that just . . .

Reinier: So the Bureau of Reclamation did the inspection.

Bureau of Reclamation Inspected Everything

Foxx: Oh yes, always, on everything. They inspected the concrete, every load that went in, they had to have an inspector there to test it, to see if it was the right test, you know, of gravel and rock and sand and cement. And so the Bureau of Reclamation was actually . . . Well, they didn't run the job, they didn't do the work, but they inspected everything to see that it was safe for the men and so on.

Reinier: Now I have some more questions surrounding Bill's death. Was your sister compensated for his death?

Foxx: She got $6,000 and that's all.

Reinier: That's all?

Foxx: That's all she got.

Reinier: She got one payment?

Foxx: She got one payment of $6,000. That's all that the state allowed at that time for a death. And she did get that. Then she had to pay all of the funeral expenses and everything out of that. She just got a flat $6,000, that's all she got.

Reinier: From who?

Foxx: From P-C-I, because, see, he was working, and it was on the job, industrial.

Reinier: Yeah, yeah, it was industrial.

Foxx: Yeah. And so then she left here, but she didn't sell her little place.

Reinier: Did she have children?

Foxx: No, they had no children–they was only married four years.

Reinier: And how old was she at that time?

Foxx: Well, she was four years younger than him, so she was twenty-four.

Reinier: She was just young.

Foxx: Yeah. So when she had her little house here, I brought my dad out and moved [him] in her little house, because she left here and went to Phoenix. She couldn't stay here, so she left here and went to Phoenix with his folks, because his folks lived in Phoenix. Mr. and Mrs. Lane lived in Phoenix.

Reinier: Was this unusual, Bill's death? Or were there a lot of workers like that, who were killed on the job?

Foxx: I think there was about nine workers that were killed in accidents, per se, on the dam. Now I could be wrong about that. I don't think they listed them in anything as far as I know, but I believe there was nine workers that got killed on the dam in the five

years, in different ways. One fell from the big cables that run back and to from the head tower to the tail towers. And one was buried in the cement. They got him out, but what it done–see, they had . . . They don't call them jackhammers, but they call them something. What'd they call them? A vibrator! A vibrator that vibrated the cement, in each one of the pours. Because, see, there was a pour so big, and they poured five yards at a time, that came down in the big buckets that run across from the head tower to the tail tower. And this fellow that was vibrating the con . . .

END OF SIDE 2, TAPE 1.
BEGINNING OF SIDE 1, TAPE 2.

Reinier: This is Jackie Reinier interviewing Opal Foxx at her home in Central Valley, California, November 22, 1994. This is Tape 2, Side A.

Opal, we were talking a little bit on the other tape about the camp at P-C-I, and now you've got a picture of the camp, so would you describe it to me a little bit more?

PCI Construction Camp

Foxx: The houses were one-bedroom and two-bedroom houses for the workers that worked for P-C-I. They had a beautiful little city over there. It was just gorgeous. People planted flowers, it was their home, and they knew they were going to be there for at least five years. And it was their homes! And the houses were built out of good old-fashioned boards and built well. And they had flowers and things, and the roads was paved between the little houses, you know, where they went around the little

village. And the construction workers and their families lived over there, like the man that run the grocery story, Johnny Barbera [phonetic spelling] and Ella, they lived there.

Reinier: Oh, Johnny is Teresa Poore's brother.

Foxx: He is? Oh! I didn't know that! Oh, okay. Then she was a Barbera?

Reinier: Yes.

Foxx: Oh, okay. Okay, alright. That was wonderful then, because I kind of know who she is, in a round about way, because Johnny Barbera was a very dear friend of mine and his wife–he's dead now–but his wife, they separated years ago, but her and I worked, and she's on the committee for the Shasta dam workers' reunion. (Reinier: I see.) But anyway, the men lived over there in the village, and there was 150 houses in the village, and it was up on the side of the hill where the new scenic highway, you look down over and then you can see all of the houses. And then when they finished the dam, they sold those houses for $400 a piece with a stove and electric hot water tank in them. There's some at Summit City, there's a lot of them that went to Anderson–they moved them. They lifted up the houses theirselves and they moved them.

Reinier: I think I can pick those houses out. (Foxx: Yes, right.) Are they the kind of little square houses you see around here?

Foxx: Yeah, little square houses. And then they had a duplex. They had a little garage between the two, and then they had little houses here, but they all was

under the same roof.

Reinier: How many rooms did each house have?

Foxx: Now I'm not sure if they had three bedrooms or not, but it seems to me, I know they all had two bedrooms, and there might have been some that just had one bedroom. I think the little duplexes, they only had one bedroom. But they moved those houses altogether, disconnected the plumbing, and moved them altogether, and moved some in Anderson, and they even took some down to Chico.

Reinier: Oh for heaven's sake!

Foxx: And then there's a whole string of them over in Summit City on Hill Boulevard (Reinier: Oh, great.) that are still there.

Reinier: Great, I'd like to see those.

Foxx: And they sold for $400 and men that worked on the dam–see, this is after the dam was finished and everybody'd moved out of here–and they got these big long trucks and trailers and things and they moved those houses altogether, and then set them up on foundations.

Reinier: So a lot of men who worked on the dam stayed up here, after it was . . .

Foxx: Yeah, like us. Well, of course, I had to stay, because, see, my dad hadn't passed away yet. We had a chance to go to Minnesota with Pat Unger, my boss, but I said, "Oh no, we can't go, because I couldn't leave my dad." And then Bob and I had

bought this place, and it [the dam] shut down, and I got through working and he got through working–he went to work for the Bureau, and he worked for the Bureau for quite a while on maintenance, after the dam shut down.

Reinier: Yeah. Well now maybe we'd better pick this up. I want to talk about your marriage, but let's continue our description of the village. (Foxx: Oh, okay.) Is there anything else we should say?

Foxx: Well, I can't think of anything else to tell you about the village, only it was just a wonderful little place, and all the bosses lived there, and it was just a community all its own.

Reinier: And the setting here is so beautiful. It must have been in beautiful country.

The Mine Fumes Killed All the Vegetation

Foxx: Oh, it was, really. Now these hills all back over here, there wasn't anything on them. Now them's hills. And when we go down to the dam, I'll show you, they're all barren, from the copper mines that was back over here.

Reinier: From the copper that was up in Kennett, covered up by the lake, I understand.

Foxx: Right.

Reinier: Yeah, the mine fumes killed the vegetation.

Foxx: Yeah, killed it. And now then that's all vegetation now. You can't tell where it used to be. And see the copper mines had a big village over there too,

but it was across the river, called Coram.

Reinier: Yes, I've read about Coram.

Foxx: Okay. And all where the village is now, you can't tell where the houses sat or nothing–it's all just solid . . .

Reinier: Well, was there quite a nice community life? (Foxx: Oh yes.) How did people get along in the village?

Foxx: Oh fine. And in those days, people were different, everybody helped everybody. You know, I mean if you needed help, they come over and helped you. And the women got together, like my sister down the street, all of the neighbor women went and had coffee at each other's houses, you know, while their husbands was working. Redding didn't want us–they wouldn't hardly wait on you when you'd go into a store, my sister told me when she first came out here.

Reinier: Really? Tell me more about that.

"We Were Just Foreigners to Them"

Foxx: Well, we were "stiffs"–they called construction workers "stiffs." And we were Okies and we were Arkies, and they had a little community there that'd never been bothered for years since they'd made Redding and moved from Old Shasta into Redding. And it was just sort of elite group, and we were foreigners. We were just kind of foreigners to them.

Reinier: Uh-huh, so you didn't feel welcome there.

Foxx: Well, they didn't make you welcome, they wouldn't

wait on you unless they had to. (laughs) My sister told me she went into a store, and they'd wait on everybody else, and then they'd . . . So all the women would get in the car and they'd pool their gas together, because gas was rationed, see, during the war. (Reinier: Yeah.) And they'd go to Red Bluff, and Red Bluff treated them just beautiful, you know. I mean, they'd go down there to the Safeway Store and Cutty's [phonetic spelling] Store. And so the women would go down there and buy their groceries and then bring them back up here. But then they got over that, over a period of years. And now, of course, it's like L-A now, compared to what it used to be. I'm just having that for an example.

And then we come on up to another village, which is Toyon. Now I don't have no pictures of Toyon, but I wished I did have.

Reinier: Well, could you just describe it to me, what it looked like?

Toyon, Reclamation's Construction Town

Foxx: But I'll tell you, they built nice little houses, and they were set apart like they were down at the other place, only they were in rows. These over here weren't in rows, (Reinier: At P-C-I?) they were just kind of around the mountain, wherever there was a good place to build a house, I guess, I'm just saying that.

Reinier: Just followed the contour of the land.

Foxx: Yeah. But Toyon was a different class of people.

Reinier: Tell me how they were different.

Foxx: Well, for one thing, they were a group of their own people.

Reinier: Uh-huh, Bureau people.

Foxx: And I don't know if it was because they worked for the government that they were different, or I don't know. I don't know about that. But I know I heard my friend that worked–her and her husband worked at the hospital. See, we had a hospital out here that we took all the people to that got hurt or sick or anything. I even went up there to the hospital once.

Reinier: Was that in the P-C-I camp?

Foxx: Yeah, that was a P-C-I hospital. We had a big staff of doctors, we had Dr. . . . Hm, have to look at the book and remember his name. I can't remember it right off hand now.

Reinier: That's okay, we can go back and talk about Toyon.

Foxx: Okay, but we'll go back and talk about Toyon. Toyon was a beautiful city, it had little houses and they had a street running between the houses, and the houses on each side, and all of those people worked for the Bureau. Nobody lived in that Toyon camp but just those.

Reinier: And we're talking about how they were different. How were those people different?

Foxx: Well, I don't know really why, but they just didn't associate with the construction.

Reinier: They didn't?

Foxx: No, I don't think they did. They knew each other, and the men were mostly friends, but the women just didn't associate with the "stiff" women.

Reinier: They had their own little separate . . .

Foxx: They had their own little separate deal, and they were all nice. Now after me and Bob was here, and after the war, and my Scoutmaster–I had Scouts–he was from Toyon, and his wife is still here. We just got along fine. But that was after the construction was all over with. He was an inspector too. But they had their own clubhouse, and they had their tennis court, and their kids went to Toyon School, but they were kind of set aside, just like the "stiffs" were set aside–they was kind of aside too. Now, whether it was because of the job, because their husbands was all inspectors over the job, I don't know. They were friendly, they'd speak to you, and I mean associate–but to have close communication like–maybe they even went to the same churches, I don't know. We only had a couple of churches here then: we had the little Assembly of God church, and then we had the Methodist church, which was a Methodist woman missionary came here and started it.

Reinier: Do you remember her name?

Foxx: I just heard it from this lady the other day. I didn't know her, because that was before my time. But she lived in a tent over here, and the little church is still over there and it's still very active.

Reinier: Was the church in Central Valley?

Foxx: Yes, right here in Central Valley. I'll have to drive by and let you look at it.

Reinier: And the Assembly of God church, where was that?

Foxx: It's still here in Central Valley.

Reinier: But there was this social division.

Foxx: There was this socialized . . . Well, for instance, me associating and going to parties with a lawyer in town–it was kind of like that. You knew the lawyer and you spoke, and you passed on, but you weren't that close.

Reinier: Now what about the kids?

Foxx: Well, the kids didn't make any difference, I don't think, those days, because they had to make their own entertainment, the children did. They had entertainment at school of course–you know, they went to school together.

Reinier: The kids from P-C-I went to the Toyon Elementary School?

Foxx: That's right.

Reinier: Because that was the only school up here. (Foxx: Uh-huh.) And I understand that was quite a nice little school.

Foxx: Yeah, it's built up, of course, now. But the first day . . . And that's another fellow you ought to talk to is Mr. Rumbles. Mr. Rumbles was the first principal

and he was principal over there 'til he retired at Toyon.

Reinier: What was his first name?

Foxx: Matt, Matt Rumbles. And a lot of his kids that he taught over there come to our reunion, because their dads worked on the dam. And one of them especially from–oh, what's that town down in the desert? Hm.

Reinier: Palm Springs?

Foxx: It's below Palm Springs. Indio. Indio, down in the desert. And this fellow come to our first reunion and he said, "Does Matt Rumbles come to this reunion?" and I said, "Yeah, he does." And he says, "I want to see him, because he used to throw rocks at us." And I'm going out and get some stones, and when he comes, I'm going to throw a rock at him.

Reinier: Matt Rumbles used to throw rocks?! (laughs)

Foxx: Yeah. Yeah, that was so funny. This was between the kids at school, see. But you should have saw–that first year, Jackie, the men came in, hadn't seen each other for forty-nine or forty-seven years. And they hugged each other, and the tears streamed down their faces. They built the dam all over again–they build the dam all over again. They did so many different jobs, you know, there was so many different connections and jobs on it, you know. There was the cement gang, and there was the carpenters, and there was electricians; everybody had a different job.

Reinier: Well, you know, while we're talking about that, in

this article there are all these names for the different kinds of construction workers. And I was hoping that you could tell me what all those names meant, if I could find them here.

Identifying Construction Crafts

Foxx: Well, was it in that, or was it in . . .

Reinier: It's in this. Just a second. (tape turned off and on) Okay, I finally found the names. And this, of course, was from the speech that was given when you got your award, which we'll want to talk about later. But she was talking about "powder monkeys." Who were the powder monkeys?

Foxx: Well, they was the ones that put the dynamite and blasted with the dynamite, see. That's powder monkey.

Reinier: And "muckers"?

Foxx: Muckers was the one that works with concrete.

Reinier: "Sand hogs"?

Foxx: And the sand hogs is the one that sandblasted the face of the dam to smooth it and refinish it.

Reinier: I see. "Highscalers"?

Foxx: The highscalers was the one that worked up on the cables that run from the head tower to the tail towers. See, they had big cables. I'll have to show you the pictures of the cables. Some of those big cables were this big.

Reinier: It looks to me like ten inches.

Foxx: Well, approximately, I'm guessing, because they were way up high in the air. But these big heavy loads went back and to on these rollers on these cables, and so they had to be big and strong. And so that was the men that worked up there. And they worked on those because they had to be repaired and they had to be checked to see if there was any of those wires–you know, it was twisted wire that made the cables–to see if there was any of those . . . or maybe it was an electrical thing that had to be.

Reinier: How did they get up there? Did they have little carts on the cables?

Foxx: They rode a work cart. See, this tail tower moved on a rail, and they moved back and to like this, and like this, and like this–wherever they needed to be, they'd go back and forth. Okay, they would just have a little deal that went on this. Here they had two or three tail towers that worked on different cables. And so they would get on one, and then move it right over to the other one, because it went on a railroad track. They had some down in the hole, which was down by the mess hall. They had a little short one down there that went to the main line. Then they had three up on top of the hill, up higher on the mountain, that went across, that poured the concrete. See, these big buckets of concrete, they would go down and fill up with concrete, then they'd bring them back up and put them here, and they made pours in sections.

Reinier: So they poured the dam in sections.

Foxx: Here, let me show you.

Reinier: Okay, we're looking at a picture now of the towers.

Foxx: Of the towers. See here's these towers, and here's the cables.

Reinier: I see the cables stretching across.

Foxx: And everything of these big buckets, that held five or ten yards of concrete, run on these cables, and then these tail towers here–this was the head tower, this was the tail tower–these would move back and to on this railroad track over the hole that they wanted to pour.

Reinier: I get it. So these are tail towers [number] one, two, and three. (Foxx: Right.) And they're metal towers (Foxx: Oh yeah.) with these large cables that came in from the top of the tower. (Foxx: Right.) I see. And the highscalers worked on those.

Foxx: And that was highscalers.

Reinier: Yeah. Well, now the last one I have down here are the "nippers." Who were the nippers?

Foxx: That, I'm lost, I don't know.

Reinier: You don't remember the nippers? And then there was another thing I'd like to point out. This says the Civilian Conservation Corps, the C-C-C, cleared the brush at the dam site. So were there C-C-C boys working up here?

Foxx: They was a camp up the canyon–long before the dam was ever built. And going on the old road,

which you don't see anymore–well, I guess you do see part of it up around Dunsmuir. The C-C-C boys worked every day. They made rock walls, they made pretty little . . . Along the highway, which was just right off down to the river, they made these rock walls, and at the top of it, you could sit down on that, and you could set there and look down in the river and things. But the C-C boys cleared . . . Now, they didn't clear the lake, per se, but they did a lot of brush cleaning and stuff that they needed to be cleaned. But they were here before the dam was here.

Reinier: Before the dam was here.

Foxx: Yeah, right.

Reinier: And you know, there's another thing here that I think . . . This says in 1938, construction actually began employing 5,000 men. And then it says these men were of all races and creeds.

The Job Employed All Races and Creeds

Foxx: Yeah, they were.

Reinier: Is that so? Were there blacks?

Foxx: There was very few blacks, because black people don't like to work high.

Reinier: So there were very few blacks?

Foxx: Very few blacks. I can't remember of any blacks that ate in the mess hall.

Reinier: Okay.

Foxx: Now they was a lot of them came up from Sacramento after the war broke out, but most of them went back and went to work in the shipyards, because working high, colored people don't like to work high.

Reinier: Okay, so there really weren't blacks working up here–they were mostly white men?

Foxx: Yeah, right.

Reinier: Were there any Indian men, Native Americans?

Foxx: Yeah, a lot of Indian men.

Reinier: There were Indian men who actually were employed?

Foxx: Yeah, in the area around, yeah.

Reinier: Who were employed on the project?

Foxx: Yeah, they were.

Reinier: Okay, that's interesting too.

Foxx: Yeah, but the only one that I don't remember very many Mexicans, because the Mexicans mostly worked on the farms. I can't remember, they could have been, I don't know.

Reinier: So the work force that you remember was mostly white?

Foxx: Yeah, it was mostly white, uh-huh.

Reinier: And largely people who came from . . .

Foxx: Largely people from Oklahoma, Arkansas, and Missouri, and back there where there wasn't any work, that came out here to get jobs. (aside about cold)

Reinier: Now, we've drifted away from your story. (Foxx: Yeah.) You were doing dishes.

"I'll Do anything That's Honest"

Foxx: I went down and asked Pat for a job, and he come up and asked me if I'd wash dishes. I told him, "I'll do anything that's honest," because my grandmother, bless her soul, I didn't get to be around her very much, but she always taught me and my dad too, "All you have, because you're poor, is your word and your credit. And when you don't have that, you're a man without a country." (Reinier: Yes.) So I never make an obligation unless I can meet it. (tearfully, with emotion) And if I tell you something, if I can't meet it, I make arrangements to tell you why I can't. (Reinier: That's wonderful.) Because all I have to my fellow man is my word and credit. And now that I'm a widow, I can't get any credit because I'm a widow. A woman's not the head of her house yet. I suppose she will be sometime.

Reinier: Yeah, we can talk about that too.

Foxx: Yeah. And so Pat Unger, I went down there and went to work six in the evening until two in the morning. And at that time I was staying with my sister, and she only got two gallon of gas a week, so I had to make other arrangements. So I went in the office and I said, "Is there anyplace that I could get a room in one of these bunkhouses?" He said, "Oh, God, Opal, women aren't even allowed in those

bunkhouses! There's nothing in there but men." And I said, "Well, they don't bother me. All I need is a sleeping room." So he said, "Well, Opal, I'll tell you what. One of the village people moved, and we're going to give you girls . . ." because by this time he had to hire some girls to work in the mess hall as waitresses (Reinier: Because the men were going off . . .) because the men were going to other jobs. I mean, the waiters, all men waiters, see. And they were going to other jobs. And so he said, "We're going to convert a house over there, and we're going to give you Army cots and bedding. If you don't have your own bedding, we'll give you bedding, and you girls can eat at the mess hall, but you can stay in the house, for free." (Reinier: Terrific!) And so we had Army cots all over the house, in the bedrooms and living room, and "the whole Mary Ann." And we had a stove, we could cook if we wanted to on our day off or whatever, but usually everybody went somewhere, you know. And so they moved us over there. So that's how come me to be [sic] down at the dam, so I was over there.

Worker Scarcity Meant Hiring More Women

Reinier: So how many women were there?

Foxx: Well, let's see, they had them for all shifts.

Reinier: We're looking at pictures now.

Foxx: This is some of the . . .

Reinier: These are, oh, some of the women that you worked with.

Foxx: Yeah. This was the chef, this was me.

Reinier: Oh, Opal! This is a terrific picture of Opal in her whites.

Foxx: Yeah. Now, I was in this little cubby hole back here. That's when I was washing dishes.

Reinier: Oh yes! She has on a white dress and gloves and a white kind of a chef's hat.

Foxx: Yeah, had on a chef's hat. (Reinier: Oh, that's terrific.) Bob was the clerk, and he checked all of the groceries that came into the grocery store. He checked everything out every day that went to the grocery store, the mess hall, the coffee shop–their supplies, he wrote all of those down.

Reinier: This is Bob Foxx, who became your husband.

Foxx: Yeah, right. And this is the cook. They're from Missouri. And this is the dishwasher.

Reinier: These are the Smart brothers.

Foxx: That's the Smart brothers, yeah.

Reinier: "Bob and the Smart brothers," it says.

Foxx: And then this little fellah, he was a cook later, and this was a waitress.

Reinier: Uh-huh, so we're looking at Johnny Thomas and Pappy Powl?

Foxx: Powl, P-O-W-L. And then here he is with the girl that worked in the pantry. (Reinier: I see.) I've got

a picture here somewhere of . . .

Reinier: Is this the house that you lived in, (Foxx: Oh, no.) or is this the mess hall?

Foxx: That's the mess hall. That's two of the girls that worked in the mess hall. And then here is one, two, three, four, five–this is five of the waitresses, and this one here, that's Johnny Smart, then he was the dishwasher.

Reinier: So you're wearing uniforms, pretty spiffy-looking uniforms.

Foxx: Well, now the girls wore dresses, but I wore slacks, because a dress just didn't work in there with the stoves and things. And this is a picture of the mess hall.

Reinier: Yes, I can see, and it says "Mess Hall" on the side.

Foxx: And these are just some of the people that worked there–Bob, and this was a couple of the girls that worked there.

Reinier: Were you a dishwasher the whole time you were there?

Looking for New Opportunities

Foxx: No, I washed dishes, and then one day I was looking at the contract–you know, we had a union contract, and I belonged to the union, but I didn't have time to go to meetings or anything.

Reinier: What union was it?

Foxx: County Workers, International, Local 470 in Redding. And so I was looking at this contract, and I seen on there, well, back home, if you worked for Mrs. Engelson and you got three dollars a week, it didn't matter what you did. You know, I mean, whatever job you had, it was cooking or washing dishes, and you done everything. And I wheeled in the office, and by this time I'd been real well acquainted with Pat, and I said, "Hey, you know what? I'm looking at this contract and there's jobs around this joint that pays more than mine does, and if there's any opening, I'd like to have it." And he says, "Well, you think you can do it?" I said, "If they can do it, I can do it." (laughter) He said, "Opal, do you know anybody else in Kansas that comes back out here, that would come out here and work as hard as you do?" Because if somebody wanted a day off, I worked their shift too, if it was night or whatever, because I was interested in getting my dad out here and having some money in the bank. I never had that.

Reinier: How much were you making now?

Foxx: Forty cents and hour, washing dishes. And I went to work in the pantry in the big mess hall. Now I'm going to the big mess hall now. This is before I started cooking. And I went to the big mess hall and they put me in the pantry. And the pantry made all the salads and all the desserts, and packed 150 lunches every day. (Reinier: Wow!) You had a big long table and you spread the bread out, you come along with a spatula and hit them with mayonnaise. Then you put the meat on, and then you come along and they didn't use lettuce on all sandwiches, because the man took it out on the job and it cook, fried, dried, and baked in the hot summer–lettuce

wasn't too good. So anyway, I learned to do that, and I worked there. I just got myself organized where I was knowing what I was doing, because I never seen a big job or a pantry like that, and the first day I worked, they said, "Well, we'll have coleslaw. The cook was so mad because, see, camp jobs didn't like for women to come in the kitchen. Men cooks, that cooked in camps, did not want women in the kitchen.

Reinier: Why not?

Foxx: Well, because they was a woman. You know. (Reinier: Yeah.) And so he just threw a big pot across the stove. He said, "I won't work with Opal." And Pat went in and he says, "Now, George",his name was George McKnight, he says, "Now, George, don't be such a hardknot. You've been seeing Opal around here, and she's been working in the coffee shop all this time. Why won't you show her how to do it?" He said, "I'm not showing her nothing!" And of course I didn't know anything. And so the vegetable man brought in this crate of cabbage and said, "This is for coleslaw." My God, how long is it going to take me to cut that up?! Well, anyway, I did buy myself some knives, so I had this long French knife, and I thought, "I'll never get that coleslaw ready for lunch," because I had to cut it all up. Now he could have told me that I could have cut it on the meat slicer, but see, I didn't know that.

Reinier: Oh, so you had to cut it by hand.

Foxx: So I cut it by hand, and the waiter man–they didn't have no women in the kitchen then . . .

Reinier: You were the only woman?!

"I was the Only Woman in the Kitchen"

Foxx: I was the only woman in the kitchen. And so he come in and he said, "Opal, I do know that you have come from Kansas, because this is the biggest chunks of coleslaw that I've ever saw in my life!" (laughter) He said, "I don't know, but I think you're trying to feed these guys like a cow eats straw back in Kansas." And I said, "Well, I'm trying to get it done as fast as I can." And here stands this George, and he knew that he could have told me to slice it on the slicer, and I could have just shredded it up twice as quick, but he didn't tell me.

Reinier: He didn't help you out.

Foxx: No, never helped me out at all.

END OF SIDE 1, TAPE 2.
BEGINNING OF SIDE 2, TAPE 2.

Reinier: Okay, now George had gone up to Big Bend.

Foxx: Yeah. So Pat said, "Well, Opal, so you'll learn all the shifts–I'm going to put you on relief shift." So that meant I worked swing shift one day, graveyard one day, and days one day, and relieved the other cooks off one day a week. So that's what I did.

Reinier: So how much were you making, doing that?

Foxx: Well, so then I went from $4.75 out of the pantry, to $5.50 (Reinier: A week?) a week, yeah. A day! Five-fifty a day.

Reinier: A day, good!

Foxx: See, I was making $3.20 washing dishes. Then I went to the pantry for $4.75. I still got my old contract around here, the union contract, somewhere in my papers.

Reinier: Opal, you're making money! (laughter)

Opens Her First Bank Account

Foxx: And oh! oh! making money! I was the richest gal in the whole of California. (laughter) And I'll never forget, you know, Bob was working at the dam–that's where I met him–and so I said to him one day, "You know, I'd like to start a bank account, but I don't know how to start it. I never had much to do with banking." He said, "Well, I'll go with you. On your day off, I'll take time off and we'll go in and I'll show you how to open up an account." (Reinier: How nice!) And so we went in and I opened up an account here. And I went in and I don't know how I could have been so ignorant in those days, but anyway, I wasn't too bright in a lot of things, and so I went in and I told the girl at the Bank of America–it was the only bank they had in town then. That's the only building that'll be standing if they have an earthquake. It and the I-double -O-F Hall in the mall. Anyway, I went in and I said, "I want to open a bank account with thirty dollars." My God, thirty dollars! (laughter) (Reinier: That's great!) And so I opened myself a savings account with thirty dollars, and Bob showed me how to do it. I got my book, and oh I was so proud of that book! (Reinier: Oh, I should say!) And on my day off, when I get a payday, if I couldn't get in to the bank, I'd give him my

bankbook and money and he'd go in and deposit the money for me. (laughs)

Reinier: Oh that's terrific! So you had money in the bank.

Foxx: So I had money in the bank. Oh! money in the bank!

Reinier: And you were able to save, because you didn't have to pay rent.

The Black Market Cow

Foxx: No, I didn't have to pay rent, and I got my board too, you know, of course–I lived over in the village. And so–well, it was just wonderful. I enjoyed every day of it. You know, it was something new every day, and the cook and the things was something new. You couldn't get meat, and you had to be rationed. I remember that Pat Unger bought a carload of potatoes, and the brought it in on a big car and Bob and some of the men that worked for him, hauled it up in the van, and stacked all those big stacks of potatoes. And he had to buy a carload of potatoes to get a half a carload of onions. Now why the onion shortage, I don't know why, but anyway, couldn't get onions. And we had to have onions to cook with, you know, because we used onions for everything. (Reinier: Yeah.) And I remember that. Then too, it was hard to get meat. It was a priority job, but trying to find the meat was another problem. So every once in a while we'd get in a black market cow. (Reinier laughs) And all the guy would do on the ranch was kill it, gut it, bring it in, and hang it in the box, and it would still have the hide, hair, and haul on it, you know, but only it would be gutted. And so I had never seen a walk-

in icebox, I don't suppose, as big as that one. It was as big as these two rooms. (Reinier: Oh, my goodness sakes!) Oh, it was a mammoth thing!

Reinier: Your kitchen and your bedroom too.

Foxx: Yeah, kitchen, bedroom, this square in here. And I never went into the meat locker, because the chef always took care of all of the meat and stuff. But anyway, this day I had to go in there for something, and it was a wall between and then a big double door that was an old big double opening, that went in from where the meat block was, where he cut the meat up, and this walk-in icebox, over to the mess hall kitchen. And so I went in this box, and the door shut (Reinier gasps), and I didn't know that I could press on that little deal and it would open the door. And I turned around and flipped the light on, and they had this cow hanging with its hind feet up like this, and its head out like this, and these two big eyes there. And I just was . . . I knew the cow was dead, but I don't know why that scared me so. And that walk-in icebox was probably this thick. So I'll tell you to know, that they heard me through the door. I hollered so loud! Of course my voice is loud anyway, I was born with a good voice and good lungs. And I tell you, I hollered, and somebody come and opened the door, and they said, "What the hell is the matter with you, Opal?" And I said, "I'm in here with a dead cow, and it ain't even been skinned yet!" You know, the hide and everything was on it, and they had just brought it in the night before. I don't know what I went to the icebox for, but anyway . . .

Reinier: Well now the black market cow, does that mean it didn't count as far as your ration effort?

Foxx: See, all the meat is supposed to be on a ration. (Reinier: Yeah.) Well, Pat Unger had friends everywhere. He was an Irishman, and everybody loved Pat Unger. And he had a friend that lived on a ranch up by Alturas, and this guy, he bought cows once in a while, from him, and went up in the van and brought them down.

Reinier: Uh-huh, and so it didn't count on the ration.

Foxx: And so we had meat I guess when we wasn't supposed to, which was fine, because the men worked hard and they needed that meat.

Reinier: They needed the meat, yeah.

Foxx: And it was a bunch of damned foolishness anyway, keeping it away from us. They had it, and the ranchers wanted to sell it, and they wouldn't let them sell it, you know. I don't know what they were saving it for, but it was just one of those government regulations, somebody setting in Washington, D.C. and didn't know what they was doing anyway, and they didn't know what we was doing out here. And so they just said, "No, you can't have that." (Reinier: Yeah.) And so between him . . . And then too, this guy that lived up by Alturas was a county commissioner, and him and Pat were real good friends–and they're both dead now, so I can talk about them (laughter) and tell these wild stories.

And then I had [real] experience with cooking, because I'd never cooked for that many.

Reinier: Now, you were in the pantry. When did you become a cook?

Became the Relief Cook

Foxx: Well, I'd only worked in the pantry a month, and then he put me on as the relief cook.

Reinier: I see, you were the relief cook.

Foxx: So I went from $4.75 to $5.50 a day. That was the salary that I got for being a relief cook. (Reinier: Great.) And so then I had lots of experience doing that, you know, because I knowed nothing about it, and finally they begin to like me.

Reinier: How'd you learn how to cook for so many people?

Foxx: Well, you just learned a little something new every day, like I'll tell you about the eggs. (Reinier: Okay.) We cooked thirty-two dozen eggs for one meal for breakfast.

Reinier: You fed 150 men.

Foxx: Yeah. Well, we had twenty-six tables, eight to a table. And that was the meals that we had. And that was breakfast, lunch, and dinner, and supper, you know, and it was twenty-four hours around the clock. The guy that worked graveyard got up and ate dinner and . . . .

Reinier: So you're twenty-four hours around the clock, that's right.

Foxx: Yeah. So you had to have different things at different times, on account of it being around the clock (Reinier: Yes.) and different men working for different, you know, shifts–and then lunches too. All the men that ate there had to take their lunch when

they went to work. (Reinier: Because they had to eat their lunch on site.) Right. And you had to have them. (Reinier: Yeah.) So anyway, this night, they said, "Well, we'll have scrambled eggs, that'll be easier for Opal to fix." Now we had skillets that you put two eggs in, little skillets like this–I got one of them over here. But he said that would be too much trouble for me, because I wasn't that experienced at cooking yet. And so they were good to me, Pat was, like that. And then the dishwashers always helped you, you know, when you fixed the meals and eggs. But anyway, they had a baker that baked all the bread, all the rolls, and I don't know what else he done, but I know he baked all the bread and rolls. So he had a big mixing bowl like this, that the pantry woman made mayonnaise in. We made all our own mayonnaise.

Reinier: Looks like about two or three feet! (laughs)

Foxx: Oh yeah. Well, I expect it held about probably fifteen gallon at a time. It was big, because that's what he makes bread in. And then he had a great big kettle with three handles on the outside that was about, well, ten inches deep and probably about two feet or two-and-a-half feet across, but it was round. And that's what we set on top of the grill on the electric stove and scrambled the eggs in. And we put about an inch-and-a-half of oil in that and got it smoking hot, and then poured the eggs in. Well, I poured all the thirty-two dozen in at one time, and the electric stove went "blaahhh," and the eggs were there, raw as could be, and weren't cooking at all.

Well, anyhow, I was standing by the stove crying, and we had a night man that had to be there,

checked the men in at night, you know, to eat the meals, because they ate at ten o'clock at night to go out on graveyard, and then of course swing shift came in and they had to eat, and so you had the meals going there. You had breakfast going for one thing, and dinner going for another thing, in the middle of the night. And so anyhow he said, "Opal, what's the matter?" His name was Pat McCarty [phonetic spelling], and later he worked for K-V-C-V for years as manager of the K-V-C-V station, because that's the only radio station we had here in those days, and it was down below Redding, and the tower was out north of Redding. And so I says, "Pat I don't know what to do. The whistle has blowed, and everything else is ready. The potatoes are ready and the meat is ready and everything," because, see, you cooked the meat in the ovens and you cooked the potatoes in the ovens–hash browns, they would be all diced up, someone else did that, kitchen helpers did that. And he says, "Opal, we have ten ovens in a row." Had a solid top and then the oven below. And he says, "Let the doors down on all them ovens, and turn both the bottom and top burners on high." And I didn't question him. And then he says, "Go over there and get those bake pans and put one on each door. And we poured those eggs in those bake pans and shut the door, and the heat just raises up like that, and cooked those eggs.

Reinier: Oh, I bet they were delicious!

Foxx: And then we had to empty them right away, because an egg will just take every bit of the black off of the pan. And so then we had a big twenty-gallon crock that was on rollers on a little frame, and we kept that hot on top of the stove, to put the eggs

in, to keep the eggs from being cooled down when we put them in there. And so I scraped them out of the pans and in this crock, and we just took a whip and whipped them up, and they never knew that we was late or nothing, and that was a real experience.

Reinier: Oh, I should say!

Foxx: And of course this twenty-gallon crock was half full of eggs, you know.

Reinier: Then did the men serve themselves from the crock?

Foxx: Oh no, we dished them up in bowls, and then the waitresses took them out and put a bowl of eggs on each table, and a bowl of potatoes on each table, and a bowl of cereal, and they had big pitchers with milk. And they had three or four kinds of dry breakfast food, and then sometimes we had oats–we cooked oats, and we cooked them in the oven too. We started them on top of the stove in the boiling water, and got them stirred up good, and then you just set them in the oven, and it never burns. Now if you cook like you were going to make a big batch of spaghetti sauce, never cook it on top of the stove, because the one thing that sticks worse than anything is tomatoes and milk in a pan. And so if you put it in the oven, the heat goes all the way around it, and you take the rack off and put it down in the bottom and just set it on the bottom rack, and the heat goes all the way around, and it don't stick or nothing, and don't burn.

Reinier: Were you the only cook for all those men?

Foxx: Oh no, they had a cook for each shift. All I done was relieve each one of them.

Reinier: You relieved them, but when you were on the shift . . .

Foxx: When I was on a shift, yeah, I was the cook. I had a helper, but I was the cook.

Responsibilities of the Chef

Reinier: Now you were talking about the chef. How is the chef different from the cook?

Foxx: Well, he made up all the menus, and you went right by the menu. Every day you had a menu up there, and that's what you cooked. And he put it on the bulletin board, in this wall between the kitchen and the walk-in icebox and where he had his big long meat blocks that he cut up the meat and stuff. He cut up all the meat and boned all the hams, and made up the menus, and overseen it, and he was there every morning, but he didn't come with any of the other shifts. He just got stuff prepared for you to do, and left the instructions for you to do it. And I remember we changed chefs while I was there, and I thought, "Oh God, I'll lose my job," because the word went around, you know, amongst us that he was going to bring his own crew. And so he walked in that day–his name was George White, I got his picture here–he was a wonderful person, him and his wife. He come from Herlong. They had a disposal plant over at Herlong, and he worked over there. Then Pat got him to come over here. He was raised right in Klamath Falls, so he must a knowed Pat beforehand. So I went to work one morning and we had changed chefs, and he was cutting oxtails, I'll never forget. You know, oxtails got little bones about this big–you know, joints. And he was just taking that knife and cutting

between each one of those oxtail joints. I guess we were going to have oxtails that day, I don't know.

Reinier: Oxtail stew, huh?

Foxx: I suppose. I don't remember how we cooked those, but I know that day that that was what he was cooking. And he was cutting and I come in and I says, "Oh, good morning. I understand you're the new chef," because I always had to have everything come out in the open. And so he said, "Yes." And I said, "I understand that you're going to bring your own crew over here, and I have to have a job, and I want to know if you're going to keep me, or if I'll be "in like Flynn, or out like Flynn." He never looked up, he just kept right on cutting between each one of those joints. And I thought, "Well, I guess you might as well be looking for another job, Opal." And he said, "If I was you, I don't think I'd worry about it." That's all he said–never did look up to see what I was looking like or nothing! (laughs) (Reinier: Oh great.)

And I just went on in the kitchen, and I just took him at his word. (Reinier: Oh good.) And when he was through, he went from here to Tule Lake, to a big hotel up there that they have, and they have lots of hunting up there, you know, birds and things. And he said, "Oh, Opal, you and Bob come and go with me." But Bob had high blood pressure–we were married by that time–and he had high blood pressure and he couldn't stand the 4,000 height [feet of altitude]. He went to Klamath Falls and tried to get on with the railroad up there after they finished the job, and the doctor told him, "No, you can't come up here, Bob, you'd die within six months with high blood pressure, it's too high. So

go back home." Then that was one reason we didn't go up in this area where it was higher climate, on account of his high blood pressure.

Reinier: When did you and Bob marry?

Tribulations in Getting Married

Foxx: I come out in March of '42, and we married in July of '43.

Reinier: So you were married by July of '43.

Foxx: Yeah. We married in Reno. I'd never got a divorce from Jim, because I figured I didn't want nothing to do with any men. And I told Bob when he come in and asked me for a date, I said, "Look, I've been married, I don't want no man." He was an alcoholic, Jim was. And I says, "I don't want to get married again. I don't even want to fool with a man. You get some of these other girls around here to go with you. I don't want to go with you." And he just kept insisting. So one day he come up to the house, and I was up to my sister's, and he said, "Let's go to the show tonight." We had a little theater down here then. He said, "Let's go to the show tonight," and I said, "No, I don't want to go to the show." My sister says, "Oh, don't be so hardnosed! All men ain't like Jim Turmbough!" (laughter) And so I said, "Well, alright then, I'll go to the show with you."

So I went to the show with him, and that was the starting of our courtship. And he didn't have no transportation and I didn't either, so we courted on the bus. He'd ride the bus up, and then I'd get on the bus down here and we'd go into town and shop and go to the show in town, and then we'd have to

catch the bus coming back, because we didn't have no transportation. But we had a wonderful courtship, and he was a wonderful person. He was such a good husband. (Reinier: Oh, wonderful.) I had twenty-nine years of really happy life with him. He just was so good to me, and I just didn't think there was a good guy in the whole world. And that was one reason I come out to see Ruthie and Bill, because they wrote and told me how good their husbands was to me, and I was used to being abused, you know. But they had their husbands too.

Reinier: You were actually abused in your first marriage?

Foxx: Well, yeah. Of course I didn't know I was abused those days, because everybody took it, you know. Women just didn't say anything, or complain. But it finally got to the point where I felt, "Well, what's the use of living?" And so he come home drunk one day and he said, "Well, I'm moving to Oklahoma, let's get stuff ready." And I said, "Jim, I ain't going to move to Oklahoma. I'm through. You ain't never . . . ." I said, "Will you quit drinking if we move to Oklahoma?" And he said, "I wouldn't give my whiskey up for any woman." I said, "Well, then you're going to give me up, because I'm not going to move to Oklahoma with you." I don't know how I got nerve enough to say that!

You know, because I was kind of beat. I thought if I got married, I'd have a home, you know. Well, I did have a home, and I worked hard to make it a home, but an alcoholic's just an alcoholic, let's face it. They don't want to change, and I got to the point where I could see that he wasn't ever going to change. And he had the wonderfulest folks that

you ever saw. His dad never drank, his mother never drank, they were good Christian people, and I don't know how . . . Well, his dad said to him, when we separated, "Jim, I don't know how in the world I ever sired you. You're not good to Opal, and we love her and everything. It's terrible!" But it was just one of those things. And when he was sober, you couldn't ask for a better person. He was a good worker, hard worker, me and him worked side-by-side doing all these things, make a go of it. So I was really soured on men when I come out here. I tell you, I was just . . .

Reinier: And when you married Bob, you weren't divorced yet, is that right? (laughs)

Foxx: Well, anyway, what I did, he went to the Army, they drafted him.

Reinier: Bob?

Foxx: Yeah. And so when he got down to San Luis Obispo, the nut, he told him [them?] he was married, made his insurance out to me, made all of his checks out to me and everything. So here he is in the Army, and I'm getting these checks from the government! And I wasn't even married to him!

Reinier: Oh, at least you had your bank account. (laughs)

Foxx: Oh, I didn't cash them! Oh, God, no, it was a government check, I didn't cash them. Anyway, he was in [Kansalift?], Texas, and so he called me and he says . . . You know, those days, you could put money in the post office, like a bank, what they called postal savings, and you could take your check and deposit it in the post office in postal

savings, they gave you a little certificate, and you withdraw your money out anytime you wanted to. They kept it right there at the post office. And so Bob had $600 in postal savings. And so he said, "You go to Mr. Smith and you tell him that you want to get $300 and that you're going to Reno and get a divorce, because the government is pressing me for a marriage license. I'll have my training in six months, and then I'll come home, and we'll get married." And so I went and talked to George about it–that was our chef–and told him what. He said, "Well, you can't do nothing standing here, so you'd better get on the way." By this time, we became real good friends.

And so anyway, I went to Reno and I went to work, and Mr. Johnson owned a little hamburger joint in the corner of Harold's Club in Reno. And the kitchen was right next to the big plate glass window where the people walked by the sidewalk, like that. And I went to work there, and then Bob came from the service. And Jim was in the service, but I didn't know that, because I hadn't heard from him for six years. And so I went and told the lawyer, "Well, I have to send the papers to his mother, because I don't know where he's at." And his was in on his way and Jim was then on his way to Luzon in the Army, but he never recognized me or told them that he was married or anything.

Reinier: Jim was?

Foxx: Yeah. And so the Captain on the boat signed and put his seal on the papers that the lawyer sent to Jim's mother. And I kept in touch with her and daddy until they died.

Reinier: The divorce papers?

Foxx: Yeah. And so then I come back, and after the papers come back, the divorce came up at one-thirty in the afternoon, and then Bob and I got married. But we got married the day before. He had to go back the next day. And he said, "I've got to take a certificate back, so we're going to get married anyway." So we went and got married in Reno, and I wasn't divorced yet. And then I was working at this restaurant, and this girl I was working with, her and I became real good friends. She was there for "the cure," they call it.

Reinier: Getting a divorce? That's "the cure"?

Foxx: A divorce, and they called it "the cure." (Reinier: Okay.) So anyway, they were there, and so Bob and I went and got married, and so I come back and I said, "Well, Bob and I got married, but it's not legal, but I don't know what to do about it–the government's got to have a marriage certificate when he gets back to camp." So the next day, the papers came in. So we went, and Joe says, "Come on home, and let's have a couple of beers." That was the guy she was going to marry. "These damned fools ain't married legal, we gotta get 'em married again." So we went and got another set of marriage license, so Bob and I were married twice. (Reinier laughs) What an exciting time!

Reinier: What an exciting time, I should say! And all that was in the summer of '43?

Foxx: Yeah, that was in the summer of '43. Yeah, that was the good old days. But we did have a good time, and we had a good marriage together.

Reinier: Did you have any children?

Never Had Children

Foxx: No, I never was pregnant.

Reinier: Never had any children?

Foxx: Never had no children. Well, I tell you what, Jackie, I had such a hard time coming up (tearfully), I didn't want children. I just felt like if I died and left them, and they'd be separated like Ruth and Virginia and I, that we didn't see each other for seventeen years, and we met down at my sister's house here . . .

Reinier: Yes, that must have been quite something.

Foxx: And it was. I have pictures of it, when I came out, you know. I stopped at their house in San Jose, and her and her husband brought me up here. And by the way, just last week–my sister and her husband separated years later–and just last week–he's still living . . .

Reinier: This is Virginia's husband?

Foxx: Yeah. And the mother of their children–they had two children, a boy and a girl. And I just went down to visit him and his wife in Salinas last week because his niece's sister-in-law died, and I went down with her and visited with them. And he's eighty-six years old now, and a very lovely person, and I love him and his wife that he's married to now, because she helped raise his children, you know, because Virginia and him separated.

Reinier: Is Virginia still living?

Foxx: Uh-huh, she lives in Redding. Yeah, she lived in Reno for a long time after her and him separated. Then she got too old to work, so I brought her over, so I'm taking care of her now. I bought her a trailer in Redding, she lives in a trailer court.

Reinier: Well, Opal, you just take care of everybody!

Foxx: Well, I think that's one thing that I was kind of made for, because I worry about everybody.

Reinier: And take care of your family.

Foxx: Yeah, and of course just her and I is the only ones that's left. Well, she has children–this boy that was here this morning, that's her son. But he stays with me, until he gets a job, and then when he gets a job, he'll leave. He's supposed to have a job in Williams. That's on the way down to San Francisco, before you get to Winters cutoff. (Reinier: Sure.) And he's just waiting to hear from it. Now, they're going to build–I don't know if it's a slaughterhouse or a meat plant, but some kind of a meat plant, and there's construction on it, and he does that kind of work. Well, he does several kinds of different jobs. He's kind of like me, a jack of all trades and master of none. (laughter)

Reinier: Well now, Opal, you were a relief cook when we kind of stopped talking about your work. (Foxx: Yeah.) Then did you get to be a cook on a regular shift?

Stayed on the Relief Shift Until the Dam Shut Down

Foxx: No, I stayed on relief shift until the dam shut down, and I ate at the last table, and there was eight of us that ate at the table when the kitchen closed.

Reinier: When was that?

Foxx: That was in 1945, that the kitchen closed.

Reinier: The kitchen closed, because construction on Shasta Dam was over.

Foxx: Yes, and it went onto maintenance, and that's when they moved the village houses out, that's when they tore all of the bunkhouses down very carefully and used the lumber over to build other houses in this area. And the machinery, I don't know what they done with the machinery, but the equipment from the kitchens, actually some of it is still in the Elks Club, they used it in their kitchen.

Reinier: Uh-huh. Well, what's there now, where the P-C-I camp used to be?

Foxx: A substation.

Reinier: So there's nothing?

Foxx: No, there's nothing there. No, just a substation where the electricity from the dam is put all the way to L-A, and it goes right up across the mountain. We'll see when we drive out there. You'll have to see the dam before you go (Reinier: Oh, I'd love to.) because you're hearing about all of these things. I can show you the tunnel. But I think what we ought to do is close down, go have a lunch, and I'll take you out to lunch, and we'll go have lunch at the little restaurant over here, and then we'll come back and

finish up with whatever we're supposed to, (Reinier: Okay.) if you'd like to do that.

Reinier: That's a good idea. But now just to finish this tape, because we have a little bit more time on this tape . . . (Foxx: Alright, we'll do that.) When everything closed down, Bob was still off at war in '45, wasn't he?

Bob Came Home Before the War Ended

Foxx: Oh yeah, he come home. Because he was thirty-eight years old, just in August, when we were married in July, and he went back to camp. Congress decided when you're thirty-eight years old, you was too old to be in the Army.

Reinier: So he could come back home?

Foxx: So he come home. He got an honorable discharge and came home.

Reinier: But now there were all these workers here who were working on the dam. When the project was over, what happened to them, where did they go?

Foxx: Everywhere. When we had our first Shasta Dam worker's reunion . . .

END OF SIDE 2, TAPE 2.
BEGINNING OF SIDE 1, TAPE 3.

Reinier: This is Jackie Reinier interviewing Opal Foxx at her home in Central Valley, California, November 22, 1994. This is Tape 3, Side A.

Opal, we've just come back from a

wonderful, wonderful lunch, and from a wonderful tour of the whole Shasta Dam area. I learned so much from you that I want to get some of this material on tape. So let's just kind of take things in the order that we talked about them while we were riding in your truck. First of all, I'm fascinated by the way you got your electricity for Central Valley. (Foxx: Yeah.) Will you tell me about that?

Getting a Municipal Water District for Central Valley

Foxx: Well, way back in the early 50s, we formed a Community Improvement Club to get water so we'd have a water district; and to get electricity so we'd have electricity, and it'd be cheaper than PG&E. PG&E owned a substation at Project City, just off of Old Highway 99, coming down Shasta Dam Boulevard. We wanted to be a community that had our own electric and own water and someday become a city, which after fifty years, they did become a city.

But back in the struggling days, they were afraid, because PG&E had lots of money, and the little Improvement Club didn't have much, and we had (sigh) dances, we had auctions, we had cake sales, and we had get-togethers of celebrations, and put money in stands that we collected to pay the lawyer for the legal work that had to go into effect to make a public utility district. So we started in with the Improvement Club, and then later it became a public utility district, which I think consists probably–I'm not sure how many acres–but I will say it's about maybe two miles or two-and-a-half one way, and maybe two or three miles the other way, the long way, that we claim as a district. And so our Improvement Club Board of Directors talked

to the Bureau of Reclamation somewhere, I'm not sure where, but the men talked to them and they let us put in an electric power line so we could have electric to what's known now as Sierra Pacific Lumber Mill. At that time, I don't really remember what the name of the mill was, but we did have a mill here. But now we have a couple of mills here, but at that time there was only one.

And the Improvement Club put in the line at night, because we were afraid if they found out that we were getting Shasta Dam power in this area, that PG&E would stop us with a lawsuit, because they were already here. So the men worked at night and put it in, and Jim Evans, it come by his house, and he was the first family in Central Valley, which is over towards Toyon, that had electricity in his house. He was the first family. Then they went from his house, went behind his house, and over the other way is the lumber yard, and they put it into there. Then, after he got it in his house, direct from the Bureau, down in the basement–and I understand it's way down in the bottom of the powerhouse that they run an electrical line to Central Valley, underground. They dug the ditches and put it underground.

And then not too long after that, we had PG&E lights, and when they got a substation built of ours, over here, which would be a public utility district, then we could switch from Pacific Electric to P-U-D [public utility district] district, and get our electric there. So that's what a lot of people did. And finally, most everybody did. Then they did take us to law, and had a court trial, and it ran on for a long, long time, and I'm not exactly sure how they settled it, but it ended up in the end that we bought the

substation and run the electricity to the substation that used to belong to PG&E–we did buy it from PG&E, but we had to go to court to get it, and we did win the case, and we got it. And so since then, our electric has been cheaper than anyplace in the state of California, and as far as I know, they say it still is cheaper than anyplace else. And we do not have any PG&E pole lines. P-U-D put their own lines up, they put their own poles up on the opposite side of the street from PG&E, and finally when everybody got converted over, why, they connected up the houses with the P-U-D electric.

Reinier: So to this day your electric and utility bills are much cheaper than in other areas of the state.

Foxx: Yeah, it's the cheapest area in the state.

Reinier: That's really quite a story. Now you also had trouble getting water to Central Valley.

Getting A Reliable Water Supply

Foxx: Well, yeah, we had a private-owned water system back during the days of the dam, by some men that lived in Anderson by the name of Stephens [phonetic spelling]. And we had problems because they dug wells and they were shallow wells, and in the summer they went dry and we didn't have any water. So we sold bonds. I think the Bank of America–I'm not sure about that, but I believe it was. And we sold bonds and we got the water from Shasta Dam also, and built the water tanks and dug the lines, and public utility district owned those too. And we finally got all of the lines in, which are inadequate now because there's so many people moving in, but at that time we had lots of water, and

have had ever since then.

The wells did go dry. We had a terrible time–sometimes we'd be without water for four or five days, and you'd call and call and Stephens would never come up when the wells was dry. So one day Annie Livingston and I decided that we'd call–at that time the law was that the Railroad Commission in San Francisco controlled all water rights. And so Annie and I got on the phone and we give about eighteen different names–in one day we called them eighteen times. They finally quit taking our collect calls, and finally by so much confusion in the office down there, and talking to some of them that answered the phone for a collect call, we did get a representative from the Railroad Commissioner up here and we did have a meeting. And it was a hot meeting, because everybody was stirred up. And then the Railroad Commissioner finally talked to Annie then. She told him what the problem was, and wanted them to come up and see if they couldn't get Stephens to dig the wells deeper or something. And so he said that he would come up. So then they called Stephens in Anderson and told him that they'd had all these calls, and that they wanted something done about water. They'd charge us, but they'd open your faucet and the air would come through the line and the meter would go buzzing around, and then we had to pay for nothing but air and didn't get any water.

And so the Commissioner said, "I'll have a meeting up in Central Valley with you and the people and see if we can work this problem out." So it went from house-to-house, and the word was passed around that they were going to have a meeting. So we had the meeting and everybody

was stirred up. Of course, being me, I was on the front row, because my husband, just a few days before, had got in the shower and got all wet and everything, and then turned the water faucet on, and no water came out, and we didn't have any water storage, only just a quart in a little old dinky tea kettle. We finally wiped him off dry, and then took a rag and used that quart of water to try to rinse the soap off of him. So I was really fit to be tied. And besides that, I'd been going to work for four days, taking my toothbrush and wash rag to work with me, and washing my face and my hands and washing my teeth in on my job, which I worked then at the Golden Eagle Hotel. And that wasn't a pleasant thing either.

And so I was setting on the front row, and Stephens, when the Railroad Commissioner called him, he told them, "There's water in the wells now." But what he done, he hired two water trucks and they hauled water from the dam in them water trucks and filled the wells. So when the Commissioner got up here, the wells was full. And so Stephens was telling him they were full. And of course that really blew me into orbit, and so I told him, "You know those wells were dry, and you know that when he called you, that that's the reason you hired those two water trucks to fill those wells. And if you say you didn't, I'll punch you right in the nose!" And so I just was really upset. My poor husband, he was so embarrassed with me because he was kind of a nice guy, and he was quiet. But I was really angry about him having to wipe off and no water or nothing. But still yet you had to pay a big bill because they read meters.

Well, anyway, we did get that changed, and

we finally got water from Shasta Dam and then we had water and electricity, and we still have water from Shasta Dam. We're paying a premium price for it now, and hopefully the Bureau won't have to go up again and they won't send any more water down yonder to Los Angeles so we'll have plenty of water here, because it's coming from us, and I think we ought to get to dish out of it first.

Reinier: (laughs) Thanks. We should probably say on the tape, which we just saw when we went on the tour, there were three boom towns up here: Project City and Central Valley and Summit City up by the dam, and that they're now all part of what now is called Lake City.

Foxx: Lake City, Shasta Lake City.

Reinier: Yeah, and so you're still served in Shasta Lake City . . .

"We Had a Lot of People Move Here from Down South"

Foxx: . . . With the same facilities as we did when it was Central Valley. But we had a lot of new people move in here from down south. By making a new city, they thought we ought to have a new name. Well, of course I'm antique up here, and I didn't think we ought to have a new name, I voted against it. But so many of them from down south thought, "Oh yeah, that'll be fine," loved Shasta Lake and all the water. But what upsets me worse than anything, Jackie, is to think that there's people come by and say, "Well, do you live on the water, or do you live on the land?" It's all Shasta Lake. And we just got too many Shastas, I felt like. (Reinier: Yeah.) I was against that, and a lot of other people were too, but

there wasn't enough of us oldtimers to vote it down. So we are known now officially as Shasta Lake City, but it'll still be Central Valley for us oldtimers until we're gone, and then the rest of them can name it whatever they want to call it, but I still get my mail "Central Valley," and as long as the ZIP code is 196019 [sic], I will be getting my mail at that address.

Reinier: Okay. Well, there's something else up here that is really tied to the Bureau of Reclamation, and that's your Little League Park that Biz Johnson got for you.

Foxx: Yes, Biz Johnson.

Reinier: Would you tell me about that?

The Little League Park

Foxx: Well, we've always had Little League, we've had Scouts. Every kid in Central Valley in the 40s after the dam was being worked on, and after it was finished even, all through the 50s, nobody, no child that went to Toyon School, Central Valley Elementary, Deer Creek School, that didn't go through Scouts someway and somehow. But now the Scouting has got so beat down, I guess you'd call it, I don't know, they charge the children for everything now–it's not like it used to be. We used to have a Council out of Chico that furnished us with money, and furnished us with some books, and furnished us with a few things to work with. But they quit doing that, and the parents quit being interested. You know, it's funny, when you're just as poor as owl manure and you come along and you struggle for everything, you take everything available

that is available that is for the family. Now, it seems like the family goes here, they go there, the kids don't eat at the table, they're eating at these fast food places, and so it ain't like it used to be.

But we had Scouts here, and we had teams all over, and I was a Den Mother, and it was just wonderful. And it taught the kids something, and it kept them out of trouble, and I had the most wonderful den that you ever saw. In fact, we had a fire across the street over here, we had a good volunteer fire department, and my crew of my Cub Scouts, we'd draw water from over here, took the buckets over there, and we had a bucket brigade. We just passed the buckets on down to the Scoutmaster of my den, and they had the fire out by the time the Fire Department got here.

Reinier: Well now were the Scout teams [also] Little League teams?

Foxx: The Scout teams were as well as Little League teams.

Reinier: I see.

Foxx: Oh yes. And then it was across the road from Toyon, which was the government city. We called it Government City, where the people lived that worked for the Bureau of Reclamation. (Reinier: Yes.) Okay, then when we became a public utility district, they wanted to abandon our place over there and build another one.

Reinier: Where you had your Little League.

Foxx: Where we had our Little League. And we just

wouldn't go for that. I didn't have any children in there, but I was a Den Mother, so I had as much voice as anybody, and mine was the loudest, too, I hate to tell you. And so they said, "Well, we're going to take that and turn it into something else." And so it was such an uproar over it, and Bob Miller and Charley Chipley [phonetic spelling] went to Washington, D.C. and talked to Biz Johnson, which was our representative of this area, and he got the Bureau of Reclamation to deed that land that was on there to the Little League of Central Valley–at that time we still called it Central Valley Little League–and deed it to us, and that's a lifetime deed, and now there's nobody can take that away from us, because it's a lifetime deed, and we still got it. And we got a new snack bar, and we've got new seats, and the community raised all the money for all that: for the fence around it, and we play different leagues around in the area, and then the leagues that lose have to put a banquet on for the ones that won. It's wonderful.

Reinier: Oh, it's wonderful. It's a handsome park. And when we were driving by there, you were telling me–and this will bring us into talking about Toyon a little bit–you told me that they put a special path through the back so the kids from the government camp could go to the Little League field.

Foxx: Right. The kids and the mothers and the fathers went through that poison oak and real thick brush and they built a path about four to six feet wide–I'm not exactly sure how wide it is all the way through–for the children that lived at Toyon, the government workers' children, to go to Toyon School and not have to walk on the highway, because it was too dangerous. In fact, the highway

was little, and we didn't have no shoulder for them to walk on. So they made a trail through there to the school. And so all the kids that lived in Toyon walked on that trail to go to school and come from school. And they told them, "You can't walk on the highway at all. You have to go on that trail," because they all lived at Toyon anyway. And so that was really nice. And then they took a trailer and rock–I don't know where they got the rock, but anyway, it was gravel of some kind–and they put it on there so the kids wouldn't come home with muddy feet, because we had lots of rain up here those days. (Reinier: Yeah.) I mean, it really did rain. It don't rain anything to what it used to in this area now. I don't know whether it's because of the lake or what it is, but it doesn't rain that much. So they had a trail through there.

Reinier: And the trail they also used to go play Little League, is that right?

Foxx: Yeah. Well, they had an opening there where you went across the road. And then some of the parents would be up there, and they'd be standing there with flags. There wasn't any marking on the road, but they'd be standing there so those kids could go across. And of course the ones from Central Valley and Project City that lived over in here, their parents took them and stayed for the games and saw them, you know. So it was really a community project. It was a family oriented something to entertain the children, and they didn't get no meanness. We didn't have that kind of trouble years ago that we have now. It seemed like the families fell apart for some reason or other (tearfully) and it's sad. (Reinier: Yeah.) It really is sad.

Reinier: Yeah. So that was a real center of community life.

"That Was the Center of Community Life"

Foxx: That was a center of community life–that, and Scouting. And the year that I was a Den Mother, we made enough tents for our boys to go to the Jamboree at Thompson Field, for our kids to sleep in. And we went in and bought unbleached muslin. In those days you could build a fire anytime you wanted to, and up in my chicken yard, we put in three big washtubs and to preserve this material to make the tents, they had to be boiled in homemade soap for three hours.

Reinier: Oh, for heaven's sakes!

Foxx: And then you took them out and rinsed them, and then you run them through a vinegar process, and that made the material waterproof. And then we had a sewing club over at two houses in–during those days we called it Skunk Hollow, but it's actually Shasta Park–and it's a little road that goes off towards Digger Bay, which is another boat dock down over the mountain to the lake. And we sewed the strings, we sewed the tents up, and we had four kids to each tent. And they had to sleep two over this way, with their feet to each other, because for . . . Oh, let me see, what'd they say? For health reasons, they couldn't all sleep in a row with their heads at one end. Two at one end, and then they had to sleep feet-to-feet. A lot of the kids went to the Jamboree and they didn't have no tents, and they had to get wet and it was a mess down there at Thompson Field, because it wasn't fixed up too good then. Now it's got a big lawn and stuff. Back those days, well you had a kind of a muddy field–it

was a football field, so it was kind of muddy.

Reinier: But your Scouts were well taken care of.

Foxx: But our Scouts were well taken care of, yeah. They were there, and we had that for all week. And I don't know what ever happened to the tents. I suppose probably they took them to Chico, I don't know. But we had enough tents, we had enough tin cans . . . Well, those days, you could buy the things that went with the Scouts.

Reinier: Yeah, little tin eating dishes.

Foxx: That they ate out of. And I've still got some of mine that I had from my boys, up the hill in a barrel. And we furnished them with everything. And if a boy come into camp and he didn't have enough money to buy his handkerchief and his shirt . . . And I bought most of mine the ornaments that went on their shirts and things. (big sigh) (tearfully) It was the good old days. (Reinier: I should say.) (tearfully) It was the good old days.

Reinier: It sounds like you had a lot of community spirit.

Foxx: We did, we did. We done everything together. Back those days we did everything together. Now people come argue amongst each other, but you know, I guess it's a change of times.

I've got a picture of my nephew in his little Scout suit.

Reinier: Okay, I'd love to see it. (tape turned off and on)

When we were driving along, we went and

saw the site where Toyon, the government camp was, which I thought was a beautiful site. It's a beautiful, flat . . .

The Government Camp at Toyon

Foxx: Oh, it was flat. It was beautiful, it was gorgeous.

Reinier: It's like a meadow almost.

Foxx: Yeah, it was.

Reinier: We looked at the roads together, and you were telling me that the houses were built . . .

Foxx: On each side and faced the road, and they had enough space between each one of them that they could have a lawn or a fence. If they had kids, they could build a little fence, you know. And if they did build a fence, it was usually everything was built out of pickets and then painted white. And all of the houses were painted white. And then they had a recreation hall, which was an old, old ranch house, converted into a recreation hall.

Reinier: Because the place had been a ranch.

Foxx: All of this area in here, Central Valley, Project City, and all of that had been one big ranch at one time, and then subdividers come in and subdivided it and sold the lots off. But that was a ranch, and that was the headquarters right there where they built Toyon. Then when the government came, they had to have a place for the Bureau of Reclamation people to live–families to live. And they also had single men over there that worked for the Bureau, but they had a bunkhouse for them, and they slept. And then

they hired a woman, and I forget what her name was, but she stayed right there, and she cooked for them.

Reinier: About how many fellows lived in the bunkhouse?

Foxx: I wouldn't know, because, see, I worked down at the dam, and I knew the bunkhouse was there, and I knew there were men there, but I didn't know that much about it. Now you might find that out from Teresa [Poore], I don't know.

Reinier: Well, that's also where the Bureau of Reclamation office was too.

Foxx: Oh yeah, all the offices was there. Everything that they done, and everything that they filed, and took care of for the government was right there. And then P-C-I, was Pacific Construction, I-N-C [Incorporated], they had their offices right down there at the dam.

Reinier: At the dam, yeah. I wanted to talk about Toyon just a little bit longer, and then I wanted to go on and talk about P-C-I. When the dam was built, then I guess the Reclamation people moved out–is that correct?

Foxx: They sent them to other jobs. They went to Friant Dam, down by Fresno, and they scattered them all over, wherever they needed them, because they still worked for the government. Now, some of them did stay here. Now Frank Lloyd [phonetic spelling] I think worked with the Bureau of Reclamation. (Reinier: Yes, he did.) And he is still here. I don't know if you've met him or not.

Reinier: Yes, you gave me his name, and also Teresa.

Foxx: Oh, okay. Yeah, well you should talk to him, because, see, he was one of the inspectors, and connected direct–and retired. Now Mr. Burgess [phonetic spelling]–he just passed away in July–now he worked for the Bureau of Reclamation, and he would have had a lot of history, because he came here right when it first started, although he didn't live in the government camp, because he wasn't a supervisor and stuff–kind of like the supervisors lived in that. (phone rings, tape turned off and on) And so he would be another good [source of] information, because he could tell you things that actually happened and what they did, better than I can, because I'm not real sure.

Reinier: But then you said that the Job Corps came and lived at the camp.

Job Corps Took Over the Government Camp

Foxx: After the Bureau of Reclamation was finished with the dam, the people all moved out. The Scoutmaster of my boys in Scouts just passed away here a few years ago, and they lived over off of Lake Boulevard, and his wife still lives, Mrs. Clarence Watson. It wasn't Clarence, but anyway, their last name was Watson.

Reinier: So some people stayed around here.

Foxx: Oh yeah, a lot of them stayed.

Reinier: But those who stayed around here moved to other housing?

Foxx: Yeah, moved to other housing, because it was no longer called a government camp. And then they brought the Job Corps in of street boys from New York and New Jersey and back East on the East Coast. I believe they were here about two years, and they cleaned the lake, they cleaned the brush, and they took the driftwood off of the lake. The boys was busy, and they learned them something. And then they took old cars and they learned them to be mechanics and they had seventeen cars over there in one building that the boys overhauled–both body and motor.

Reinier: Oh my goodness sakes! And when we were driving up there by the lake, you showed me a beautiful stone wall that the Job Corps built.

Foxx: The Job Corps made them, yeah. They did lots of rock work, and cemented the rocks together and cleared the edges all the way around the lake. They would take them in the big truck, truckloads, and they would take them up there as far up north as Lakehead, where the lake is actually the end of it up there at Lakehead. And they would take them up there and they took them all over, and the boys worked all the time. And then they abandoned the Job Corps and sent the whole bunch to South Dakota. Now, cut me off. (tape turned off and on) The Job Corps did a wonderful job here. It was a mixed congregation of Jewish boys, colored boys, Italian boys, and then all mixed colors was here. And in some states, before integration came to be predominant, they did not have integration, and so they took our Job Corps from here–they finished all the work that they were supposed to do here on the government Project–and they took this group here and sent them to South Dakota or North Dakota, I

don't know which–it was in Dakota, anyway. And at that time they did not have integration, and they sent them there, because it was about the time when all of the stir-up was in the South and those big marches was down there, you know.

Reinier: [In the] 1960s?

Foxx: Yeah. And when that boy went to "Ole Miss" [University of Mississippi] school, you know, the colored boy, and they had the guards around. And did you hear his story after he got out? He said he was sorry that they did all of that, because it caused so much mass confusion–seems as though–on account of integration. Well anyway, they sent all our boys up there on another project to do work up there like they did here, only it was a different kind of a job.

END OF SIDE 1, TAPE 3.
BEGINNING OF SIDE 2, TAPE 3.

Reinier: On the other side of the tape we were talking about what happened at Toyon after the Job Corps left.

Indians Gained Control of the Government Camp

Foxx: And so then they left two guards there, and they maintained it. Mr. Carlson lived over in Shasta Park, and Elmer I think lived out towards the college. But they were there all the time every day, to take care of the Toyon–well, we called it a little city, due to the fact that the houses were there and everything was intact. Well, the Indians came and said that that was their burial grounds. And I forget what the name of them was.

Reinier: Wintu.

Foxx: Wintu. And that that was their burial grounds. So they came in and took over and moved in the houses.

Reinier: Well, this is interesting to me. You told me in the car that they came with guns and threatened the guards?

Foxx: Yeah, they came with a gun and they held it on the two guards. One of the guards told me this, because I used to work with him when I worked at Golden Eagle Hotel–he was a cook there.

Reinier: Which one was this?

Foxx: Elmer Seifert [phonetic spelling]. He lives in Washington now, Washington State. And they took the keys, and all they done was just notified the Bureau of Reclamation that the Indians was there. And due to the fact that the Indians belonged to the government and the land belonged to the government, they lived there, and they tore all the buildings up and moved from one cabin to another. In two years it looked like a shamish [shambles] over there.

Reinier: What you told me, that I didn't know before, that it was on the initiative of the Indians, that the Indians were the ones who initiated their moving into the camp.

Foxx: Right! They were the ones that moved in, bag and baggage, and they lived over there. And the camp went down, and nobody had any . . . Well, they didn't improve anything, and they didn't take care of

what they already had. And so it finally went down and down, and they argued and argued. In fact, the regular law around here couldn't go in the camp. It had to be a federal man that went in the camp. Well, they talked to them and they made some kind of a deal with them, and finally it just got to looking so bad and the lawns weren't taken care of or anything, and finally then they said, well, that they had to move, they was going to bulldoze the houses down. Well, they had big double expando trailers in there for the Job Corps that the boys lived in, because they had a lot of boys over there. They must have had 200 guys over there in that camp. I'm not sure if that's the figure or not, but it was a lot of them, I know. (Reinier: A lot of boys, uh-huh.) So the government decided that they would move the Indians out. They couldn't get them out, so they cut the electricity off, they cut the water off, and they lived there for almost two years, a lot of them did, without any water or electricity. Finally, the last ones that was there, I'm not sure how many of them was left, but they just pitched their tent out there on the road, coming out of the place, and they put a big old bulldozer in there and bulldozed all the buildings down.

Reinier: And how recently was that?

Foxx: Oh, I expect maybe five, seven, eight years ago. I'm not real sure how long ago it was, but it's been quite a while, because it's growed up in bushes. And then they had to put a big ten-foot fence. Well, for a long time, they had it open, because they leased it to a little mill that made stakes for the state. And they used that big building where I told you that big building was. Now that big building was built out of good galvanized iron, galvanized sheeting.

And they went in there with a bulldozer and bulldozed that down, never salvaged a doggone thing, you know, and that's wasteful, I think. They could have sold the building and let somebody come in there and take those galvanized pieces. And as high as material is, you know . . . Well, that's my idea. Of course that's not added to the project, but that's my idea, because I don't believe in wasting anything.

Reinier: Well now of course it's empty, isn't it?

Foxx: Oh, everything is empty. Now I don't know what's in that one building that's left.

Reinier: There's the one building left, but other than that . . .

Foxx: It might be that in that building, it could be–now I'm just guessing–they had a lot of equipment, and it could be that they have equipment in there, but I don't know, but all the windows are broke out, because glass windows, they just shoot them out or throw rocks and knock them out or something. But now they got a big six-foot fence all the way around it.

Reinier: Yeah. And what were you saying about the cars while the Indians were there, the seventeen cars?

Foxx: Well, the Job Corps boys overhauled all the motors and they learned them to straighten out the bents and everything. But the Indians just took all the cars and they wrecked all of them.

Reinier: They used the cars?

Foxx: Yeah, they used the cars. They didn't have to have

no license, they didn't have to have nothing! I don't know how they get by with all that. I feel like I'm an American citizen and they're American too, but I couldn't get by with it, they'd throw me in jail and shoot beans to me with a cannon, if I'd done that. But anyhow, whatever.

Reinier: Well, that's really interesting, Opal.

Foxx: And I don't have nothing against the Indians, but I think that I have as much privilege as the Indians do, and I don't like for them to come in and take over something and destroy it, I just don't think it's right.

Reinier: Yeah, and it sounds like the community was proud of the camp.

Foxx: It was. Oh, we were. You couldn't help but be. There was beautiful flowers, the buildings were nice, and if they'd have went in there and took care of things, I don't care how long they lived there, it didn't matter to me. I don't think they paid any rent or anything, but then I don't know. And I know they didn't pay their water bill for a long time, because it came out in the paper, and I got it in the editorial here somewhere where P-U-D just finally shut their water and lights off, because nobody paid their bill. And that was sad, you know. So I don't know whether they just didn't have no leadership, or whether they just didn't care, or I don't know what happened, but anyway I know that it sure went down. And it's sad.

Reinier: Yeah, and it's just an empty space right now.

Foxx: It's just empty ground, and they still are in lawsuits with the government to make it a burial ground and

make it so the Indians can move back over there. (Reinier: I see.) And that's a known fact, because that comes out in the paper, and they tell about going to some lady and a man, or a bunch of them went back to Washington, D.C. to get it deeded over to them. But I don't know what they're doing. Of course the government is slow about doing things on things like that. And so I don't know whether they'll ever win, or who'll lose, or what's going to happen to it, but the government still owns the land so far.

Reinier: Well, then we drove on up toward the dam through Summit City, and I was so delighted when we looked down and you showed me the spot down at the base of the dam where the P-C-I camp used to be. (Foxx: Yeah, where the houses were.) That's where the houses were and where you . . .

The PCI Camp Site

Foxx: And the bunkhouses and the hospital and the . . . Under one roof was the mess hall, the grocery store, post office, coffee shop, and pool hall, all under one roof. It was a mammoth big building. And in the dining room alone, we had twenty-six tables and eight men to a table every day.

Reinier: Yes, that's what we were talking about before. And then the hospital you pointed out to me was there on the hill (Foxx: Yeah, was up on the hill.) where workers [who] were injured were taken.

Foxx: Now I'm not sure about how many beds they had up there in the hospital, but it was big enough that they took care of everybody that got sick or got hurt on the job. And they had a full staff:. They had a

night cook, a morning cook, and an afternoon cook. And then at night the kitchen was closed. They had a man and his wife, and he worked in there. Then the lady that did work in there with Jarvis still lives in town and she's a hundred years old.

Reinier: This is in the hospital?

Foxx: This is in the hospital, and she worked in the kitchen and cooked, and her name was Mrs. Irene Hebert, and she still lives, and she's still got her mind still real good, and she lives down on Trendy [phonetic spelling] Street in Redding, and a very lovely lady. She used to live out here, and they were one of those pioneers. And she's the one that I was telling you about. You know when they came here from the aqueduct and nobody had any money and they bought that lot over there, I think, about twenty-five dollars or so a month they paid for it, and they had to pitch a tent on it, because they didn't have no money to build no house, and they had an old-fashioned iron bed. You know, they used to have those little iron legs and so on. And I remember back in 1937 and '38, it rained thirty-one days and never stopped day and night. (Reinier: Oh my!) You know, if it didn't rain hard, it just rained a little. But anyway, there was mud deep to a tall man. Down Shasta Dam Boulevard they used to push the guy in front of you out so you could get through, it was so muddy.

Reinier: This was '47 and '48? Or '37?

Foxx: No, this was back in the 30s, when the dam first started.

Reinier: Before you got here.

Foxx: Yeah, before I got here, but my sister told me about it, because she could remember. And so anyway Mrs. Hebert was telling me, and Mr. Hebert woke up one morning, and they had this iron bed in this tent, and it was dry in the tent, but the ground was so soft that the bed went right down in the ground! (laughter) from the underground water, and he stuck his foot out and it was damp. And the underground water had just–that little bed, the legs were little anyway, because they all think they were in it. Well, they were probably about as big as a marking pencil, you know, those days, and that bed just went all the way down to the ground. (laughs) (Reinier: Oh, goodness sakes.) And they have a lot of stories to tell like that.

I talked to Carol Forbes [phonetic spelling] the other night, and we were talking about the old times, and she lived next door to Mr. and Mrs. Hebert for years. And she said, "Oh, the times that we had, Opal! It was just something else." And so she would be interesting to talk to, because she knows a lot about the first beginning, more than I did, because I didn't come out until . . .

Reinier: Yeah, because you got here . . .

Foxx: When I come out, the streets were blacktopped, and we didn't have mud there then, but we had a good theater and we had a skating rink. In fact, we had two theaters at one time. And we had a skating rink. And we had a bowling alley.

Reinier: Oh, you showed me the skating rink.

Foxx: Little tiny round balls–they weren't the big ones like they have in the big bowl–they were small. And I

remember those. And the little lanes were about, oh, two-and-a-half feet wide maybe. Maybe they weren't even that wide, I don't know, but anyway, it was right down there where the liquor store is.

Reinier: Now, Opal, there's one thing that I want to make sure that we talk about, because we haven't included it at all, and that's the Pit River Bridge. We didn't get to go see it, but would you tell me a little bit about it, because it was an important part of the project.

The Pit River Bridge

Foxx: Well, they had to move the railroad on account of the lake. And so they moved the railroad. If I'm not mistaken, I think that they built that trestle in Redding, to move the railroad, and built it up. Now I'm not sure how the railroad was in Redding at that time, but for me, I haven't been able to connect it other than they had to build that to get across, to meet the other mountain, to go through the tunnels. And so they made tunnels all the way away from the river, and that trestle in Redding, by the Redding Park, in Benton track, that low part there, that's the way they cross the river. That trestle goes across the river. And then it comes on up here, and then when they got up here to the lake, where the lake was going to be big and water, then they had to build a bridge for the railroad, and they also had to build a bridge for the highway. And so they built the railroad bridge underneath, and built the highway up above. It was only two lanes to begin with, now it's four. You know, I mean, you go and come. And so for the piers–because remember this is a lot of weight, and it's a long span–well, it's almost a mile across–three-quarters of a mile, I think my husband

said it was, across, because he was a brakeman on the railroad after the dam shut down, and sometimes they had to get off and walk from one end back to the caboose. So it was a long ways. But anyway, they built the railroad and they built the highway on top of it, and that's what Pit River is. Now for those piers and things, the Bureau of Reclamation tested all of the concrete. And I forgot to show you the blocks. I aimed to do that, going out there, and I forgot it. They had a little test box that was a foot long and about four inches, maybe, across. That'd be about four inches, yeah, about four inches across. And every time they made a pour, to put those piers in, and put the iron in the concrete, they had to test that, and the test had to come out a certain way. Chemically they could test it. I'm not sure how they tested it. But my brother-in-law did the first test to go up there–not the one that got killed, (Reinier: Virginia's husband.) Virginia's husband.

Reinier: And what was his name?

Foxx: His name was Fred Holmes [phonetic spelling] and he's still living. He's eighty-six years old, mind as bright as a dollar, and he's blind. He went blind with glaucoma. He lives in Salinas, and he's the most wonderful guy you ever saw. My sister and him didn't get along, but that didn't have nothing to do with me, and nobody in the world had any more brother-in-law's than I did, and they were all good, as far as I was concerned. And they all come to see me, every one of them come to see me.

Reinier: So he worked on the Pit River Bridge.

Foxx: Yeah. So he was an inspector on the Pit River

Bridge for the Bureau. And then they needed people to work at Permanente. Now I don't know what Permanente did, but they had something to do with the war in San Jose, and him and my sister moved to San Jose, and he quit the Bureau. He told me the other day when I was down there just last week to visit them, and he said, "You know, Opal, I should have never quit the Bureau, I should have stayed with them." You know, he could have had a good retirement. Well, he has a good retirement anyway, but he said, "I'm sorry I didn't stay with them."

Reinier: Well, you know, Opal, one of the things I'm so interested in is the impact of this kind of a federal project on the area like this. (Foxx: Yeah.) And it certainly has created these (Foxx: Oh, all of these things.) communities that we've been talking about (Foxx: Right.) that are now part of Lake Shasta City.

"If It Wasn't for Recreation, We'd Go Under"

Foxx: Right. And not only that, but there's thousands of people coming up here, and we are a recreation area, and if it wasn't for recreation, we'd go under, because there's no mills here anymore. See, there used to be a lot of mills here, and there's no timber. This was a timber center here, Redding was. But then after they all got out here and everything, why . . . See, we used to have a plywood plant at Anderson twenty years, we had a sawmill at Anderson twenty years, we had the Nova plant at Anderson for twenty years. And all of those things came in, and then people for recreation from here all the way to Dunsmuir is a recreation area.

Reinier: That's mostly what it is now.

Foxx: Yeah, it is. And if it wasn't for that, we'd be dead here. I mean, really.

Reinier: Are jobs good here, or is it hard to get a job?

Foxx: Well, when you look at "motel lane" on Hilltop Road, there's got to be somebody working in all them restaurants and in all them motels.

Reinier: Yes, so that's it.

Foxx: So that's a tourist attraction, and they got to have someplace to stay, and a lot of times you drive down that place and there's no vacancy, you know. And then they built another one out here on this end of the town, a Motel Six. And then, see, we've got two little motels–or one little motel, the other one closed–out here even at Central Valley and Project City on the freeway.

Reinier: So the dam brought people in, the federal money and the construction brought people in. (Foxx: Right.) And then after that closed down, was it hard to get a job in '46 after the war and when the dam . . .

Foxx: No, because people were moving in here, and of course I was a cook, and they was quite a few restaurants in Redding, big and little, and usually I worked at the big ones, because I was the president . . . (phone rings, tape turned off and on)

Reinier: So before we were interrupted by the telephone, we were talking about the economy of this area.

Foxx: The economy of the area, yeah. The economy of the area is recreation, and if you don't make it in the summer, you don't live through the winter. I mean, this is just bringing it down to just plain old flat facts. And so, because of the lake, because of the industry . . . And Jackie, I would love to take you all the way to Lakehead and just see the different things up there: Antlers Campground is up there, and they've got places where you can drive in, and they've got electricity there and they've got water there, and you park your little trailer there, or your car or your tent or whatever, and you can live there all summer.

Reinier: So the big thing that the dam has brought to the area now is the lake and the recreation.

Foxx: Is the lake and the recreation. Otherwise than that, we'd be deader than a mackerel here.

Reinier: Isn't that interesting.

Foxx: Yeah, it is. And then of course here's the Sacramento River where they can fish, the lake where they can fish. We have bass in the lake, we have sturgeon in the lake.

Reinier: Was the lake stocked with those fish?

Foxx: I don't know about the sturgeon, but the lake was stocked with bass, and they were stocked with–what was that? They used to have a fish . . . Hm–salmon!

Reinier: The salmon still come up here.

Foxx: Yeah, salmon still come up here and spawn–you

know, come up the river. Everybody around here, you know, in this area, I mean, if you can afford it, they have boats. And that lake is full of boats in the summer. I'm guessing about this, but the boat docks that's around here, I think they probably got–between here and Lakehead–they probably got 200 houseboats. You can rent those houseboats by the day, by the week, but you have to make reservations a long time ahead of time.

Reinier: Yeah. Well, you know, we were talking a few minutes ago, when I was thanking you, because I know I've pushed you today, but I certainly appreciate your willingness to talk about.

"This Has Been the Happiest Time of My Life"

Foxx: Oh, this is the most pleasurous [sic] thing that I talk about, because I've been happier here. I had a kind of an unhappy childhood, but the Lord Jesus took care of me, and I've growed up healthy, I haven't had very many things the matter with me, and what I have had has been taken care of. And this was the happiest time of my life, this fifty years I've been . . . And I've lived on this corner fifty-three years come the sixteenth of April.

Reinier: This very spot on North and Willow Streets in Central Valley.

Foxx: The corner of North and Willow Streets. We bought this house and two lots for $250, and you had to grease the bed to put it in the bedroom, it was so little, because you can see how narrow that room is there. (Reinier: Yeah, you told me it was . . .) From here over was the bed.

Reinier: It's just a two-room house.

Foxx: Yeah, just from that wall to this wall here, that's all.

Reinier: Yeah, and you've built another room (inaudible).

Foxx: And so we built the bedroom on and the bathroom on. We had a two-holer up the hill. And through that wall over there is where I put the regulator for the gas, but now we're on natural gas. And then we built this twenty-six-foot porch. And I saved everything all these many years, Jackie, because I didn't have much when I was growing up, so everything I get, well, I don't never throw it away. And if anybody wants anything, they always say, "Well, Opal Foxx has got it up in the henhouse." And that's about the truth, too. And when stuff was rationed during the war, Bob and I lived here, and we used to can goods, and I got 400 jars up the hill that I'd like to sell to somebody if they wanted to can. (Reinier: Oh, for goodness sakes!) Well, I don't can anymore since Bob's passed away. I don't need to can, because I can get it cheaper at the store anyway. But those days, it took thirty points out of your stamps to get a can of tomatoes.

And I went to work at Memorial Hospital. I worked there with Mrs. Irene Hebert. Her and I opened the kitchen, and we only had one other hospital, we had a Catholic hospital here. But he opened up the hospital with a maternity ward, and with a surgeon ward on one side, maternity on the other, and down through the middle was all flowers where you could look out over here and see flowers and over here and see flowers. Now then it's Redding Medical Center and covers the block.

Reinier: Well, you know, there's one other thing while we have a little more tape and that we can get on the tape that we saw when we were driving together, and that was up in Summit City. We saw that you still have some of the houses up there.

Foxx: Oh yeah, and they're still in use.

Reinier: That were part of the P-C-I.

Foxx: Yeah, and still in use.

Reinier: And they're still in use. And I thought they were so interesting, because they were the duplex, and then you pointed out how they have the little tiny, really, garage areas, or carport areas between them for the cars, narrow as they were.

Foxx: And that was because the roof went across the whole thing, and then they could drive their little cars in the side. And of course those days the cars were little. Of course now they're little again, but there for a while they were too big to get in.

Reinier: How many rooms did those duplexes have on either side?

Foxx: Some of them were bigger than others. Now that one that's on the corner over there that I showed you where they closed in that, that had two bedrooms.

Reinier: That was a two-bedroom.

Foxx: But most of them were single bedrooms, and so small families lived in those. And they all come from the dam. And they sold those houses out there for

$400 for each house, with an electric stove and electric hot water tank. And they moved them to Anderson, Chico, Summit City, Redding, all over. Afterwards, Bob and I, when we bought this, we was sorry we didn't buy one of them and move it up here, you know. But we didn't think about that. Nobody thought we would stay here. I couldn't leave on account of I was taking care of my daddy, and so I couldn't go away and leave him so far I couldn't get it back. And so Bob just looked for work around here, and they built the plywood plant and he went to work there, and he worked eighteen years there on one job. He said there ain't no use changing jobs if they bounce you back or change your shift, they put you back on the job you started on anyway, so just as well stay here. The Blue Gang worked together all those years. All of them worked together.

Reinier: Did they all start out together . . .?

Foxx: Yeah, they all started out together, all the Blue Gang.

Reinier: And then they were able to move from the dam to the plywood factory.

Foxx: Well, they could. Some of them did.

Reinier: Some of them did, to the lumber industry.

Foxx: Lumber industry, yeah. Yeah, they did. And so thataway, that brought another job in. And of course at that time, they was a box factory here, and they was several mills here. Then they was a mill where they made all of these, oh, facings that went around baseboards and stuff like that. (Reinier:

Moldings.) Moldings, a molding mill. There was a molding mill here. And all kinds of mills between here and . . . Well, actually, between here and Corning, you know, all up and down.

Reinier: That reminded me, too, of one other thing that we saw when we were driving, that we didn't get to talk about, and that was Coram.

The Legacy of Coram and Kennett

Foxx: Oh yeah, Coram.

Reinier: We looked at the site of Coram, which was down there in the valley just kind of down the river from where P-C-I camp was. (Foxx: Right.) Tell me a little bit about Coram.

Foxx: Well now Coram was a little town that was there when they had the copper mine there, and that copper mine was Coram, as well as Kennett. Both of them were copper mines, back in the mountains.

Reinier: Yes, and Kennett was the town under the lake.

Foxx: Yeah, Kennett's the one that's 300 feet under the water. And then Coram, they closed it down before I came out here. So I don't know when they closed either one of them down, but Kennett was still functioning, not the mine, but the town–people still lived in the town.

Reinier: And you said your sister took you up to see the town.

Foxx: Yeah, and the road was so crooked, and I counted the curves. There was 105 curves from the south

side of the lake to Kennett. Curves, oh!

Reinier: And you said it was a pretty town.

Foxx: It was. The buildings were beautiful.

Reinier: (inaudible, both talking at once)

Foxx: Well, they were built old-fashioned.

Reinier: Wooden buildings?

Foxx: The wooden buildings, and they were built like you see in old, old-time movies. And the buildings were all like that, and they were all big, two-story buildings. They usually had a rooming house upstairs or something, you know. And the little Or House over here–O-R H-O-U-S-E, part of the bar in the Or House came from Kennett. It was so long that they cut it in two and they got part of it over there at the Or House. Yeah, they moved it up there.

Reinier: Yes, the Or House is a club up the road here.

Foxx: It's a bar. Yeah, they moved that up there. And then right next to that is two big old warehouse buildings, and one of them used to be Safeway Store, but they never did do any good, because it was down in the hole, and nobody just didn't want to drive down there. I don't know why. Ruthie said it never lasted very long. They finally just built it in Redding.

Reinier: Well, did you know any folks who lived in Kennett who had to move?

Foxx: No, I didn't know anybody that lived there. The only one that I knew that lived in Kennett was a dishwasher that I used to work with at the White Spot Cafe on Market Street. We fed all the hunters–they were open twenty-four hours a day. And I cooked there.

Reinier: Opal, I just wanted to say that we've certainly had a lovely day together, and I've really appreciated the opportunity to chat with you. Thank you for sharing your memories with us.

Foxx: Thank you for lunch! (laughs) I didn't even feed you at my house! Had to take you out to feed you, but I didn't have time to cook.

Reinier: And I know you're such a good cook! (laughs) But thank you so much. Your reminiscences have been very important to us.

Foxx: Okay. And you come back and see me again.

Reinier: I'd love to.

Foxx: Okay. I've got a lot of ways, you might like some of them. (laughter)

Reinier: Okay, thank you.

Foxx: You're as welcome as the flowers in May. (tape turned off and on)

END OF SIDE 2, TAPE 3.
END OF INTERVIEW