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Harry A. Schuyler (August 10, 1971, first interview)

C. Richard Arena

Oral History Interview

with

MR. HARRY A. SCHUYLER

August 10, 1971
Whittier, California

By Dr. C. Richard Arena

For the Richard Nixon Oral History Project

ARENA: This is #1 interview with Mr. Harry A. Schuyler, of Whittier, California. The interview is in Whittier, California, on August 10, 1971.

SCHUYLER: Well, I was born in Lenawee County, near Adrian, Michigan, August 22, 1888. My father was a farmer. We had two very beautiful farms in southern Michigan, on which we did general farming--we grew practically everything. There is located at Adrian a Methodist college, which is one of the quite successful denominational colleges in Michigan, where there are a lot of them.

ARENA: Mr. Schuyler, would you go into your own early education?

SCHUYLER: Well, I was graduated, of course, from grade school in the country, a little one-room brick schoolhouse, one teacher. And then I . . .

ARENA: Excuse me. Do you remember how many grades in the same room?

SCHUYLER: All eight grades--all eight grades were in one room. Each class would be called up to the front of the room to recite and then they would retire and then the next class would come up. Of course, that was the routine all day long. And then every Friday afternoon practically, we had a spelldown, as recreation and educational both. And I think these spelldowns are marvelous in grade schools.

ARENA: Would you explain them a little more--what the spelldown was?

SCHUYLER: Well, we lined up, the various grades, separately, and the words were put to the individuals, and as one missed, he dropped out, and those that remained, they spelled each other down, until there was only one left.

ARENA: The whole school?

SCHUYLER: That's right, the whole school.

ARENA: Did you ever win yourself, by any chance?

SCHUYLER: That was the regular procedure. I was unable to go to high school, but I did go to a Brown's Business University in Adrian, Michigan, and took the regular course in accounting and bookkeeping.

ARENA: Did your own parents have a college education?

SCHUYLER: No. No, college educations in those days for people of my parents' standing was rare. I, however, decided that I wanted to get some education, so I went to Michigan Agricultural College at East Lansing, Michigan, and took a preparatory course in 1909 and that allowed me to enter the regular course in 1910. I specialized in agriculture, particularly horticulture, and graduated in 1913 with a Bachelor of Science degree in horticulture. During my vacations in the school routine, I worked on many of the fine fruit farms in Michigan, peaches, apples, pears, et cetera.

Upon graduation, waiting for a regular position, I went to Frankfort, Michigan, and set up for the Red Man Tobacco Company of Toledo, Ohio, a canning plant on a large fruit ranch up there. We called them orchards there. I then went to Toledo, Ohio, to sell this produce. This professor of horticulture of mine in Michigan State--it was Michigan Agricultural College then, it later became Michigan State University--he was very diligent in finding positions for his students. He later became president of the college for a short period of time. Quite a good many of our graduates from Michigan State (I'll call it Michigan State from here on) became interested in California because Professor H. J. Eustace, an associate with the Department of Agriculture in Washington, D.C., had become in 1912 the General Manager of Sunkist, which was then the California Fruit Growers Exchange. It is now the Sunkist Growers. It was through Mr. Eustace and Mr. G. Harold Powell that I was approached in Toledo, Ohio, with regard to taking a position in Wichita, Kansas, in the sales organization. I arrived in Wichita, Kansas, January 1, 1914, to begin my work with the Sunkist organization. I worked there for a time and then they sent me to Winnipeg, Canada, where we had an office. While at Winnipeg, Canada, Mr. Eustace was apprised of the fact that Mr. [Charles W.] Leffingwell, [Sr.] of Whittier, California, who was then in charge of a Leffingwell interest here of about 500 acres, wished someone to come to California and take charge of his packing and sales manager work. I was recommended for the job and, of course, I grabbed it. So I arrived in late 1916.

ARENA: No relatives here?

SCHUYLER: No--well, I had a brother-in-law and a sister. My brother-in-law was in charge of one of the larger fruit ranches at Corona, California, known as the National Orange Company. His name was Irvin Pickford. He has long since gone, as well as his wife who was my sister. I was the second individual from Michigan State to work for Sunkist. Following my employment many fine people came to work for Sunkist. Mr. Donald Francisco became Advertising Manager. Mr. Paul S. Armstrong, General Manager of Sunkist. Mr. Russell Simmons in the Advertising Department, and many others from our college.

ARENA: Would you mind giving a brief sketch of the history of Sunkist and just what the organization was? When you say it was an exchange, was it a cooperative?

SCHUYLER: Cooperative, uh huh. California Fruit Growers Exchange as such, organized as such, became the most successful cooperative sales organization in the United States. There are many in Belgium and they were selling dairy products and were very successful, but as a cooperative for selling fruits, the Sunkist was the leader and still is as far as that's concerned. The growers were having trouble at that time in not only selling their fruit but getting good prices. They were selling to brokers and they were trying to sell direct to the markets with no success--little success. Sunkist has been very successful in all these years now of selling 75 to 80 percent of the citrus fruits grown in California and Arizona.

ARENA: Not just oranges.

SCHUYLER: No, oranges, lemons, grapefruit and some of the allied products--tangerines and others.

ARENA: How wide and extensive were the operations--the growing of the fruit, the packing of them, the canning of any of them, the shipping, the selling; how wide, how numerous were the specific operations?

SCHUYLER: Well, of course, it started with citrus fruits alone and then later, during my regime in the Middle West, we sold deciduous fruits--apricots, cherries, strawberries, apples for the Utah Fruit Growers Association.

ARENA: The Sunkist people did that?

SCHUYLER: Yes, we did that for them. We had time. We had the facilities, the offices and we could do it without any interference.

ARENA: Is there a specific date when you could say the company began--around?

SCHUYLER: Well, Sunkist probably started about, somewhere in the 1890's. Yes, 1890's, and covered all producing sections of California, as far north as Chico, California. Later, within the last fifteen years, Arizona has been added to the organization, and a great many cars of citrus fruits are now being sold by Sunkist, which are grown in Arizona.

ARENA: But it did start in California?

SCHUYLER: Oh, yes, it started in Southern California. It started at Riverside, California.

ARENA: Is there a particular name of an individual associated with the beginning? One name above all others maybe, or was it just a group?

SCHUYLER: Well, I would say that F. Q. Story who was probably not the first president, but one of the first presidents of the California Fruit Growers Exchange. And R. H. Wilkinson. . . . And then the Riverside people were very influential in starting because the naval orange was the original cuttings--naval oranges were sent from South America to Riverside to be propagated. The propagation of the navel orange started in Riverside.

ARENA: Do you remember the particular country from South America?

SCHUYLER: Brazil, I think. Our valencias came from there too. But the various individuals of all of Southern California --Riverside, Pomona, Los Angeles, Ventura County, Santa Barbara County--were all in the original ranks of starting this organization. It has grown tremendously. Sunkist has recently moved into a new building at Sherman Oaks [California], the Sunkist building, which houses all of the activities of the Sunkist organization and the Fruit Growers Supply Company, which is a subsidiary of Sunkist, which furnishes to the packing houses all of their packing materials. Previously fruit was shipped in wooden boxes. All fruit is now shipped in cardboard boxes and they have their own cardboard manufacturing plant in the city of Industry [California].

ARENA: The cooperatives did not control the railroads. That's one thing that they could not control--the railroads or the shipping industry. But by working together . . .

SCHUYLER: No, we made the best arrangements we possibly could with the railroads. Many of the refrigerated cars that you see on the railroads now were built particularly for the citrus industry.

ARENA: Of course, the company is worldwide.

SCHUYLER: Yes, it is now worldwide.

ARENA: How much, say, percentagewise would you say or estimate is exported outside of the United States? How much of the overall operations are outside?

SCHUYLER: Well, I would hate to hazard a guess. I could go back to the record, to some of the Annual Reports and give you that, but I would say that during the last five years we have--I say we because I'm an alumnus of Sunkist--we have developed, for instance in Japan, a marvelous lemon market. Sold there last year some 3500 cars of lemons. They expect to sell 7000 this year. And we are very much concerned about the common market because we hope to be able to profit by a general sale, we do now, of oranges all through Europe, in spite of the production from Italy, Palestine and these other orange-growing places. And, of course, we have to compete with the citrus fruits grown in the British Possession. We have to compete with them in England and in Canada, because they are prone to patronize their colonies.

ARENA: Can I ask you about your business education? Did you take courses in business while you were at college or did you get this experience, because a lot of it is business as well as horticulture? Did you get this along the way?

SCHUYLER: My only business education was in Brown's Business University in Adrian, Michigan. This has been accumulated. After having been with the Leffingwell people awhile, Mr. Leffingwell proceeded to sell in large blocks, the ranch. But we set up the Leffingwell Ranch Lemon Association, as we were principally lemons, to handle the products from the groves that were formerly Leffingwell and others in the community.

ARENA: This was Leffingwell Rancho . . .

SCHUYLER: . . . Lemon Association that handled the fruit from . . . . Many of the residents of Whittier bought acreage in the ranch--Dr. [Herbert E.] Tebbetts, Merle Allen, Dr. Horace Wilson, George Cook, Mr. William Wickeren, William Boettger, all owned groves of the Leffingwell Ranch, as he proceeded to sell. However, in 1919, a group of us who had been working for Mr. Leffingwell purchased about 235 acres of the original ranch, including the ranch buildings, and we took over the operation and continued the operation of taking care of these groves and other groves.

ARENA: How large was the original Leffingwell Ranch at its greatest height?

SCHUYLER: Well, they had purchased there in about 1888 some 500 acres, which was bounded by the west by Scott Avenue, on the east by First Avenue, on the north by Whittier Boulevard, and on the south by Leffingwell Road, which was 500 acres.

ARENA: Do you recall from whom and the price?

SCHUYLER: Well, this was at practically the same time that Simon J. Murphy came to Whittier and purchased several thousand acres of the hills here and at Murphy Coyote at La Mirada [California]. Mr. Murphy paid $50 an acre for the land he bought. Mr. Leffingwell paid $55 an acre because it was low land and flat and level, better adapted at that time to cultivation than was Mr. Murphy's.

ARENA: Was there enough water without irrigation?

SCHUYLER: No, no. This was all barley land, practically all barley land, hay, grain, and we had our own wells. The water was brought to the surface by compressors from quicksand largely. And the wells would keep caving in and you'd have to pump sand and finally get back to pumping water. But in about 1880 Mr. Simon J. Murphy went up the river to Bassett [California] and located some water-bearing land up there and purchased it and proceeded to put down wells and bring water to Whittier.

ARENA: What type of a man was Mr. Leffingwell, and what was his full name? Where did he come from?

SCHUYLER: The Leffingwells were very promiment in church work. In Chicago [Illinois] they had summer homes, at Mackinac Island [Michigan] also. C. W. Leffingwell [Sr.], Charles, the old gentleman who came to California in about 1880 something and purchased all this land, and he was very high in the Episcopal Church. He and Mrs. Leffingwell organized Knox College in Illinois and ran it for fifty years. There are several Knox College graduates in Whittier. They later built a church at Gowonza and sold it or gave it back to the Episcopal Church. Mr. C. W. Leffingwell, Charles, born Leffingwell, Jr., was a graduate of Columbia University, of journalism, in 1890, I think. His father had all this property in California, having purchased in addition to the 500 acres in East Whittier, he purchased in South Whittier known as Leffingwell Heights, about 800 acres, which was strictly grain land. At that time, for some time after I came to California, we were doing practically all of our orchard cultivation with mules, and I think we had about twenty-three teams when I came to California.

ARENA: From whom did you get the mules?

SCHUYLER: They were shipped into Los Angeles [California] by the carload from the Middle West and sold at auction. Each spring we would go into Los Angeles and take some of

our old and worn-out mules and purchase new mules in their place and bring them to the ranch. This 800 acres that was known as Leffingwell Heights, we grew hay and grain there to feed these mules and some for sale also. Later, Mr. Leffingwell sold back to Jacob Stern and Sons this acreage, so that he ended up owning this 500 acres in East Whittier. When I came in 1916, we had about 125 acres of walnuts, which were profitable. They were very good at that time, about 40 or 50 acres of oranges and the balance was lemons.

ARENA: Was there any assistance in any way from government, any help from the government at that time?

SCHUYLER: No, no, no.

ARENA: State, federal--nothing?

SCHUYLER: Nothing.

ARENA: Not even tax reductions or anything like that to attract farmers and things like that?

SCHUYLER: No, no, no.

ARENA: It was all private capital?

SCHUYLER: That's right. Labor was cheap. But I started to tell you about the water. This later was developed into two companies, the Whittier Water Company and the California Domestic Water Company, set up to take care of about 5000 acres of agriculture. Now, years later, California Domestic still brings into the Whittier area the largest amount of water of any water company.

ARENA: California Domestic Water Company. Where is its office?

SCHUYLER: East Whittier, opposite the Whittwood Shopping Center. The water is about 1600 inches at the present time and being brought from Bassett, which is east of El Monte [California] on Valley Boulevard, to the pumping plant in East Whittier by gravity in a 48 inch pipeline, which was originally redwood staves from the Redwood Lumber Company, known as the Pacific Lumber Company, I think, which is owned by the Murphy people at Scotia, California. The Murphy people, diverting for just a moment, started lumbering in Penobscot, Maine, You will see on their office in East Whittier, Penobscot Management Corporation. Now that is the name of the management corporation, consisting of twenty-five corporations, which is closing all of the Murphy interests in Southern California. They are practically all sold now. Mr. Clifford Holmes is the President and General Manager of the Penobscot Management Corporations. As the forests were cut off, the Murphy people emigrated West in the lumbering business, Michigan, if you please, the

Middle West, the Penobscot Building in Detroit [Michigan] was built by the Murphy people. And they landed in Scotia, California, and they own the town of Scotia. It is owned by one of the Murphy descendants who is still operating that plant up there.

ARENA: In what part of California, near San Francisco or even further north?

SCHUYLER: It's way north. I think it's Humboldt County. Well, anyway, we are indebted to Simon J. Murphy for bringing into the area the water which has developed the whole area.

ARENA: Have you met him personally?

SCHUYLER: No. He was gone. He brought many of his associates from Penobscot, Maine out here, however; Mr. Edward Bacon who lived on East Sixth Street; Mr. William Platt, who was the geologist; and other families in Whittier.

ARENA: Didn't he bring the first Quakers?

SCHUYLER: No, no. I don't think so.

ARENA: I thought he made the contract with Jonathan and Rebecca Bailey. Wasn't it through that Murphy that the first Quakers came down?

SCHUYLER: I don't think the Murphys were Quakers at all.

ARENA: Oh, no, but I thought he sold land to the first Quakers in 1887 and the John Murphy ranch house is the original settlement of Whittier, I believe.

SCHUYLER: I don't know. Anyway, the California Domestic Water Company, which was set up to take care of about 5000 agriculture acres of citrus, is now owned by the city of Brea [California]. The Union Oil Company, whose laboratories are at Brea, and they have hundreds of acres out there. The city of La Habra [California], the Suburban Water Company, Murphy Ranch Mutual Water Company, those are now the principal owners of the California Domestic. Irrigation of citrus has dropped to probably not more than five percent of the total water used.

We wander--about 1919, Mr. Leffingwell decided that the Leffingwell Ranch should be of community interest more than individual interest and decided to sell what he could in blocks. At that time an individual who had been around Whittier for a long time, one of the people who came here from Iowa and settled, a Mr. [William] Frederick Mundt, purchased the ten acres on the corner of Santa Gertrudes [Avenue] and Whittier Boulevard, and it was this particular corner at this location that [Francis Anthony] Frank Nixon purchased from Mr. Mundt and began his business out there about 1920. I speak in relatives because I have no notes; I speak entirely from memory.

ARENA: Possibly it was 1922.

SCHUYLER: Well, perhaps so. It was then that they moved to the ranch and Mrs. Schuyler and I were living across the road on the Leffingwell Ranch, and we have known the Nixon family since. Dick was six years old, I think. Two other brothers who both passed away, and Harold [Samuel Nixon]. . . .

I have been interviewed many times--an article that appeared in Life magazine particularly and other articles--and they have asked me about the boys--what did the boys do? Well, I simply said, "They worked." From the time they were able to work, they worked. What did they do when they got home from school? They worked, helping putting groceries on the shelves; they attended the gas station. They did the things that were necessary in life at that time. They didn't have much time to play, although Dick did have time, although I didn't know it, but he has some picture on some magazine playing a violin. He did play the piano, I know that. They bicycled back and forth to school. Their people were strong Quakers. Frank would have to give a lecture of his own once in awhile and I've heard him stand up on both hind feet and say "What we need is a revival. We need a revival. We've got to get these people more cognizant of the value of religion." And that was Frank. Although Frank could put up pretty hardy arguments with some of his employees and the people he bought things from, but very good citizens, people would come into the store and say, "Frank, I don't see any pies." "I'll bake some pies tonight. You'll get your pies in the morning." And Frank would go home. He was an expert pie marker, for one thing.

ARENA: He made them as well as Hannah Nixon?

SCHUYLER: Oh, yes, yes.

ARENA: Was there a particular pie?

SCHUYLER: Oh, I think apple mostly. But he was a good cook. Yes, he could do anything. Little hard for Frank, of course, as it is for some of us nowadays to reconcile ourselves to modern times. However, we got along with Frank. He had a brother back in Pennsylvania who was a champion potato grower, he was a professor in one of the universities.

ARENA: Penn State.

SCHUYLER: And was the champion potato grower back there. Well, Frank said, "If he can do it, I can do it." And Frank went back and got a farm and grew potatoes, and I guess he probably equaled his brother's records.

ARENA: Did you ever visit the place back in Pennsylvania?

SCHUYLER: No, I never did.

ARENA: That was York [Pennsylvania]. And did you ever meet his brother? [Ernest L. Nixon]

SCHUYLER: I don't think so.

ARENA: I think the brother might have come out here.

SCHUYLER: He may have, but I don't remember having met him. We didn't buy--you spoke about earlier, well, we were boarding about 200 Mexicans--we didn't buy many products from Frank. Frank was buying in small quantities himself. We had to have in larger quantities. The people who peddled fruit and produce called at our boarding houses. We also had on the ranch when I came there and it lasted for some time, a Japanese village, barracks mostly, where we houses 125 Japanese.

ARENA: Also farm workers.

SCHUYLER: That's right. They did all the irrigation and they did a great deal of the packing at that time. But the state of California passed in later years a law whereby Japanese children born here could purchase acreage. Well, immediately that happened, the old folks bought the acreage for the children and they all went to work. And instead of working 9 hours a day, as they were working, they would work 12 or 14 hours for themselves, and of course they were very successful.

ARENA: What type of land and where did they buy?

SCHUYLER: Well, they bought a lot of this over here in South Whittier. When the later wars came along, a great many Japanese had to be moved out--I say had to be--it was rather cruel but they were moved out of this hinterland south of us now, which is La Mirada, etc. And they went to various parts of the state. And, of course, they are diligent, they did irrigating and grew plants, flowers, fruits, vegetables, everything.

ARENA: How about those workers from Mexico? Were there any laws about them buying or not buying?

SCHUYLER: No, they didn't want to buy much. The Mexican peons were quite willing to settle here. Those who later came in the Mexican National Program, as it was named, would send their money back to Mexico and purchase small farms, so that when they went back, they had a small farm to work on. That was done very generally.

ARENA: You say that was the National . . .

SCHUYLER: Well, they called it the Mexican National Program. They were recruited under an agreement between ourselves and Mexico.

ARENA: About when was that?

SCHUYLER: About 1940.

ARENA: During the war years?

SCHUYLER: Yes. We didn't have people enough to pick our fruit particularly. That's what they were used for mostly, and still are. We spent in this area. . . . On the Murphy Ranch we took over what is now Candlewood Country Club. They took over that clubhouse and later the one in [Pico] Rivera [California], to house these Mexicans in. We spent $138,000 the district did--the Whittier District Fruit Exchange--packing houses in the Whittier district, to house and take care of these Mexicans. Of course, we had to haul them back and forth to the groves also.

ARENA: Would that include the whole family or just men?

SCHUYLER: No, just men. There were no families came up. There were just men came up. It was an expensive program, but we got our fruit picked. And that was the whole object. But it was not a cheap program, because of the things that we had to do for them and furnish them. And we paid them the going wage.

ARENA: Were there special laws that had to be passed allowing them into the country for that special purpose?

SCHUYLER: Yes, that's right.

ARENA: Have those laws since been taken away?

SCHUYLER: No, I think they exist more or less. They are still brought in under--there are still some very large camps yet in Ventura County where these Mexican Nationals are taken care of.

ARENA: Do you recall something like--well, you would have floods from time to time? Do you recall an incident where Frank Nixon helped to carry bags of supplies over to some of the Mexican homes. I've heard that stated by some.

SCHUYLER: Well, of course, outside of a large community ditch which went down through the Leffingwell Ranch, there was very little provision made for taking care of the water that would come off of the hills onto the lower land. We had the entire length of the ranch on the Whittier Boulevard, a retaining wall about two and a half feet high which would run water level across the boulevard and then spill over. And we had to work all night sometimes keeping the water in these big ditches to take it off to the ocean. Yes, I remember Frank's having helped with that. One of the floods that we had, previous to the completion of the

Whittier Narrows Dam, we had to--because we housed some of these people at the Leffingwell Ranch--we had to move out all of the inhabitants between Whittier Boulevard and what is now Beverly [Boulevard]. We had to move them ALL out and bring them into the recreation centers here in Whittier and to Leffingwell Ranch and keep them overnight and feed them, and as the waters receded the next day, we'd let them go back to their homes.

ARENA: Was there a great loss of property, of crops?

SCHUYLER: No, not so much. No, the water rose gradually and as it flooded out of the channels, it flooded the land contiguous to the streams. But we had a very critical flood condition in the East Whittier area which is now taken care of by underground ditches and conduits, seven foot conduits that take that water and no one knows that there was any such thing at that time. But those still exist down through the Leffingwell Ranch.

ARENA: What do you recall of Mrs. Hannah Nixon as a worker, as a mother? Your own personal recollection.

SCHUYLER: Well, of course, Hannah was a very marvelous person. She was kind, sympathetic. Love of her family was extreme. I understand that after these two boys left, were gone, she still set the table with their pictures at their place, to keep the memory of these sons, because they were nice fellows. I had a marvelous experience--an extraordinary experience with Frank Nixon. The oldest boy had tuberculosis.

ARENA: That was Harold Nixon.

SCHUYLER: Frank Nixon came over to my place one Sunday morning and he said, "Harry, I want you to come over with me." I went over with him. He said, "We own that lot," which was below the store on which is now a paint store and a bicycle shop. "We've got to put Harold in an institution. We don't have the money. We want you and Mrs. [Edith] Schuyler to buy this lot. We want you to pay us $85 a month, which will put Harold in this institution." Well, I went home and talked it over with my wife. We bought the lot. They took the boy to the institution over in Arizona and Hannah stayed with him for a great many months, until he passed away. We later sold the lot, which as I say is now covered with a paint store and a bicycle shop back to--not to the Nixon family but to the [William Frederick] Mundt family who owned the property. So we did help the Nixons some. Appreciative. Shortly before she had to go to the rest home, I had considerable dealing with Hannah because I had to put a sewer from Santa Gertrudes to First Avenue. Her property backed up to it, and I had to talk to Hannah about the sewer--the benefits of it. It was

rather hard for her to comprehend. So I wrote to Dick and Dick said, "Harry, go ahead and put in the sewer. Mom will pay her share." And Mom paid her share. Yep, yep.

ARENA: Anything that I haven't asked? Any question or any point that you would like to make at the end here?

SCHUYLER: Well, I did not know what kind of an interview I would have with you this morning. I will try to find some pictures. I have given the Historical Society quite a large picture of that corner where the Nixons property was. Where it is, I don't know, but I will bring one up and show to you.

ARENA: And we can describe it orally.