

Interview with
Gerald D. Cullison
October 27, 2004
by Richard A. Moore
for the
Highway 101 Association

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Interview with Gerald D. Cullison on October 27, 2004. Interviewer: Richard A. Moore of the Solana Beach Historical Society. Transcribed by Kristi Hawthorne

Richard: Today's date is Wednesday, October 27, 2004. This is Richard Moore. I'm recording an interview with Mr. Gerald Cullison for the Highway 101 Association. I'm with the Solana Beach Civic and Historical Society. Mr. Cullison has lived for many years in the City of Solana Beach. At the time of his residency there he was Superintendent of Parks and Beaches for the Department of Parks and Recreation of the County of San Diego.

Gerald: Parks and Beaches Superintendent, Operations and Maintenance.

Richard: Mr. Cullison is now retired and lives in Lake San Marcos. Gerald, will you please state your full name and current address.

Gerald: Gerald D. Cullison. The address is 1114 San Pablo Drive, Lake San Marcos, California.

Richard: When and where were you born?

Gerald: I was born in Garber, Oklahoma in 1919.

Richard: And your parents' names?

Gerald: My father's name was Thomas Frederick Cullison and my mother's name was, subsequent to their separation and divorce, Bessie E. Fisher. Her maiden name was Bessie E. Tilton.

Richard: How did you or your family come here to Southern California?

Gerald: My mother and father separated, as I mentioned, and he came to California by himself, worked his way out on the freight train. Picked up his trade here in California, because he had a background in lumberyards and things of that nature, having been a manager in Garber of one of the lumberyards. When they separated he came to California and took up the carpentry trade and then sent for me in later years. I was six years old when he sent for me and that was in 1926. I met him for the first time when I was seven years old, that I could recall, because I was only two years old when they separated.

Richard: Why did he come to Southern California? For better opportunities?

Gerald: He came to get away, I guess, to go to a new land and start all over again.

Richard: He had a true pioneer spirit.

Gerald: He did have a friend out here that he had known for years in Texas, Mr. H.O. McKnight who was a contractor and had bought lots of material from him at the lumberyards. So he came out because of Mr. McKnight and he went to work for Mr. McKnight.

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Richard: He came out when you were six you said?

Gerald: I was seven years old the first time I met my father. My mother and older sister had given me a three-day basket of food, and bid me goodbye in Erick, Oklahoma.

Richard: What period of time then did you live on or near Highway 101?

Gerald: Most of my youth, my father met me at the railroad station in Los Angeles. He had a little Model T Ford pick-up and brought me to Cardiff, California.

Richard: On the Highway 101, I bet.

Gerald: On the Highway 101.

Richard: Have you lived in the area ever since? When did you move from there to Solana Beach?

Gerald: Basically, yes, I did live in the area with the exception of the war years. Just prior to my going into the service, I worked for Consolidated Vultee which had come out from Buffalo, New York. I became assistant foreman for them and was transferred to Santa Ana where I helped establish what we called "feeder shops" to manufacture parts of airplanes and ship them back to San Diego to be assembled into the first PBYs and later the B-24s. Then from there I went into the service. When I did get out of the service I came back to the area of Cardiff, Solana Beach and Encinitas, where I had grown up.

Richard: During your work you must have used the highway for all of your travel.

Gerald: All of my travel. When we traveled to San Diego, when my dad took me a few times, we traveled the old 101 along Torrey Pines and some of the roads at the south end of the Torrey Pines area were some winding areas going down into La Jolla. That was before Rose Canyon Road was opened up. I remember one time, traffic was blocked because there was a truck and semi-trailer hauling telephone poles that could not negotiate the corners. A narrow two-lane road, traffic was completely blocked. It took many hours. Rose Canyon Road was put through in later years, named after one of the supervisors, Mr. Rose. That gave more of a direct route straight to San Diego from Solana Beach.

Richard: Do you remember any outstanding events or a memorable event that was meaningful to you relating to the Highway 101?

Gerald: Rose Canyon, and subsequent to that we had the bridge wash out at Del Mar. Another time we had train tracks cave off at Del Mar. I took Shirley down to see it one time. She was just a kid and I was too. I had my little Model A Ford. That was a big event to us in those days. At that time when the bridge washed out, deliveries couldn't be made from San Diego to the local grocery stores, which felt the stress of not having enough supplies. In later years, of course, the outstanding thing was the new highway changeover to Interstate 5. (There were) people who were for and people who were against the new highway to divert traffic from 101 to Highway 5. (The responsibility) under Jacob Dekema, who was the State Division of Highways

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Department head. People gathered down at the San Diego County Administration center down on the bay and protested. People were there all over the lawn protesting the change over and so forth. At that time 101 was quite heavily traveled, everyone thought, just about like it is today. Maybe not quite as much.

(Mr. Dekema had proposed to construct the new highway along the ocean beach such as was done between Ventura and Santa Barbara. This would have had a very negative effect on Solana Beach.)

Richard: I think you partially answered this, but how were old you when you first rode the Highway 101?

Gerald: Yes, I was seven years old when dad brought me to Cardiff. We came down 101 from Los Angeles to bring me home to my new home in California. I was quite impressed with the Pacific Ocean, very impressed. By the way, the parades and the flower shows that we had in Encinitas were a big event every year.

Richard: Do you remember when you were old enough to drive, your first trip driving the 101 yourself? Do you remember the car?

Gerald: Yes, the car was a Jewitt stick shift built by Continental Motors. Dad had made a trip to Oklahoma and my stepmother needed transportation. I was 12 years old. Transportation in those days was pretty hard to come by and I was very industrious when I was a kid. I worked every where I could get a job, whether it was working on weekends mowing people's yards or working in the flower fields for Mr. A.H. Miller, who used to grow flowers. Later (I also worked for) Charlie Leffenwell who subsequent to that eventually became postmaster. I also worked for Briggs Company in Leucadia. These were during weekends, and vacations from school, Christmas vacation, or whatever days off, I always worked. So I had to have a car and I saved enough money to buy an old 1929 Dodge Durant. It was a classy looking little car but it needed lots of work! Mr. Erick Murfin of Murfin's garage in Solana Beach was so kind to help me a little bit here and there to keep my car patched up so I could get around to my jobs.

Richard: This is Mr. Roy Murfin that you're speaking of?

Gerald: Roy's father.

Richard: Do you recall some of the businesses or restaurants or other buildings, like banks, on the 101 that you have a particular fondness for?

Gerald: Yes, two in particular. When I had my car and in the evenings I occasionally got a chance to look up some of my buddies that I went to school with and they either congregated at the "Teddy Bear" in Solana Beach, the old Teddy Bear Restaurant, or the Encinitas kids up that way congregated at the "Mint Café", which is no longer there either. So I would go down 101 to Solana Beach some evenings, and some nights I would visit both the Mint Café and the Teddy Bear. From Encinitas to Solana Beach! I really got around! That was when I was a freshman in high school.

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Richard: What landmarks or unusual structures that you might remember? Were there any?

Gerald: Well, to get back to the restaurants, there's another one that I'd like to mention that I don't know if it was ever mentioned before by anyone. It was an Italian food restaurant in Cardiff, right along the beach on the west side of old 101, just south of the slough and the bridge before the highway was realigned and the restaurant was taken out and a new bridge was built. It was called "Salvi's". Chester Salvi was the owner, I believe. That was removed and not many people may remember that. "George Beech's", of course, was there, and the old "Beacon Inn". These were along the beach, the strip between Cardiff and Solana Beach.

Richard: George Beech, did you say? The restaurant was called "George's" wasn't it?

Gerald: Yes, George's. That came about because George Beech, who lived in Cardiff, collected a lot of lumber from the ships that had wrecked at sea, and the lumber was collected along the beach and became the nucleus of his starting that restaurant. That's the story I was told by his grandson and some of the family. It was quite a well-known stopping place for people traveling from north to south to San Diego. It was quite a popular eating place right on the beach.

Richard: That would be a landmark.

Gerald: Another landmark like George Beech's would be the Beacon Inn, which was later taken out. One time, prior to my history, there was a pier constructed from the Beacon Inn going out into the ocean. Some of the cut-off pilings were still standing in the water there.

Richard: Do you recall a particular person associated with the road?

Gerald: No, not in regards to Highway 101. I think Senator Ed Fletcher had something to do with straightening 101 at the north end of Solana Beach. The bypassed property is now a state beach.

Richard: Do you have a favorite memory, trip or a favorite destination involved with the 101?

Gerald: In those days, that was a big item--to be able to get to those places where our school teen-aged friends would collect whenever they had been somewhere and before they'd go home. Other than that, a favorite trip within the area would have been taking Shirley down to see that train where it had caved off there in Del Mar. We had a buddy, a very close friend of mine, and also Shirley's. His name was Earl Weller. The Weller family lived in the Solana Beach area. They're deceased now, so there are none of them unfortunately to interview. But Earl and Shirley and I, called ourselves the "Three Musketeers", and we use to take my little Model A and go down to Pacific Beach and enjoy the roller coaster and all the carnival things they had there. Of course, Earl and I used to try to out do the other one to win a prize for Shirley to bring home. She had lots of little teddy bears and things like that.

Richard: During these travels on the 101, do you remember any particularly bad or unfortunate accidents along the road?

Gerald: One in Solana Beach that Shirley and I witnessed, which was a terrible thing. We were

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leaving Solana Beach, going south. On the right hand side was a Laundromat, that had been there for many years, and as we were passing the Laundromat, we were in the right lane, when a young fellow on a motorcycle came by us a little too fast. Just as he passed us, and was a little bit ahead of us, someone's dog ran out from the curb and crossed in front of us, and of course in front of him. He couldn't avoid hitting it and that poor young fellow and his motorcycle just tumbled end over end. He never moved after he stopped tumbling. I quickly pulled over to the curb, ran into the Laundromat and telephoned for ambulance service. Other people had already started running out to this young man, and I thought the best thing to do was to get professional help there as soon as possible, a doctor or someone. So many people gathered, Shirley and I then went on, but as I understand it, he was killed. It was terrible. That was the worst accident I've seen and then, of course, we lost some friends there at the railroad crossing. Mr. Broo was one of them. He was the father of a very dear friend of Shirley's. He was a long time resident of the area. It was the crossing right there by where the lumberyard was.

Richard: Do you remember any particular stories about patrol officers or traffic cops from the area? Did you ever get stopped for speeding?

Gerald: No, to both questions.

Richard: Do you remember what the speed limit was through town in Solana Beach in the early days?

Gerald: No, I don't really, but I never did think it was restrictive enough, really. I've always thought that the speed permitted was too fast for the businesses fronting on Highway 101.

Richard: That's the feeling that persists to this day. Did you ever get a ticket?

Gerald: When I complained about the speed of people going through Solana Beach, I used to always say, you can ask someone, which I have, who commutes through Solana Beach, and ask them what stores there are along the highway, and very few people can ever tell you what stores are in business along the highway. But, no, I never did get a ticket in Solana Beach or Encinitas or Cardiff. I was stopped in Oceanside one time because the muffler on my car was a little bit noisier than the police thought it should be! Teenage boys at that time liked to hear a little bit of a power sound from the engine.

Richard: You mentioned the parades. Do you remember any celebrities in the parades?

Gerald: It was at that time that North County was known as the Fifth District and Dean Howell, from Escondido, was County Supervisor for many, many years. He seemed to never have trouble getting re-elected. In fact, one time he wanted me to go into politics, he used to call me and ask me if I'd drive with him to Agua Caliente Desert Park, which was one of our parks in the east part of the county. We got to know each other quite well and he wanted me to go into politics and I said, "Dean, I could never be a politician." And he said, "Why not?" I said, "Well, I'm not good at telling people a lot of things I know I can't do anything about just to get their votes." He said, "But you'd be very successful, Gerry. All you need to do is whatever group of people you're going to speak to, is find out what their interests are and tell them what they want to hear." But to get back to the question, he called the Department and Biff Garner, who was the

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Director of the Department. Dean wanted the department represented in the annual Encinitas parade and, of course, I was it. So I rode with him in the parade. It was one of those years when they had the flower shows in Encinitas and the parade. It was a big event. I rode with him and after the parade ended we were all assembled at the grandstands where the speeches were all made. I had the pleasure of sitting with Raquel Welch, who was the Fairest of the Fair that year, and she was Queen of the parade. I found her to be a very sweet, pleasant young lady and very friendly and gracious. It was quite an honor to become acquainted with her and to have the opportunity to visit with her and get to know her. This, of course, was prior to her later going to Hollywood, when of course, I would never see her again, other than in movies.

Richard: Did you actually ride in the car with her in the parade?

Gerald: She had her own car. She was featured as Queen of the North County Fair, which was a big thing. I rode with Dean Howell who was North County Supervisor.

Richard: Was this going from Del Mar through Solana Beach up to Oceanside?

Gerald: No, it was just through Encinitas, the north end of town to the south end of town.

Richard: Do you remember when the first traffic light was installed?

Gerald: As I can remember, the installation of the first traffic lights was at the Plaza, but I can't recall what year it was. It was quite a nice feature.

Richard: Was this before I-5 came in?

Gerald: Before. By the way, the Plaza as it is today has not always been quite like that. It was a center island developed later through my department. The Woman's Club participated in a lot of the improvements in the Plaza becoming the way it is today. But I can't recall what year the traffic lights were installed, but I think it was long before I-5.

Richard: You undoubtedly remember that the 101 had a large number of service stations along the route?

Gerald: Well, yes, there were several in Leucadia, Encinitas and Solana Beach. Cardiff had one in the 1950s. There was a Texaco, Standard Oil, the usual, Union Oil, etc. My favorite station in those days was in the Encinitas area. There was a station at the very south end of Encinitas on the east side where the cheapest gasoline I could buy was, and it was called Polly Gas, with a picture of a Polly Parrot. Then, of course, I bought gas when I was in the Solana Beach area from Mr. Murfin's station.

Richard: Was that a Union Oil Station?

Gerald: It was an independent, I think.

Richard: Well that is a pretty thorough and concise rendering.

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Gerald: I don't know if I contributed anything unknown by people collecting history, but I hope I helped a little bit.

Richard: Do you have any other comments you'd like to make?

Gerald: There were a couple of things in here.

Richard: For reference, Mr. Cullison is referring to "Solana Beach, 40 years of Progress." The booklet was published by the San Dieguito Citizen on April 1962 and it covers 40 years from 1922 to 1962.

Gerald: Many years ago I used to meet and visit with Col. Ed. Fletcher on the land that is still not determined what's going to be there, I guess. It's on the north end of Solana Beach on the plateau just before you go down to the sewer area. He used to come up there and park, that was Fletcher land, and he'd tell me about some of things he envisioned. Across the way it was the little beach. 101 at one time curved around the bluff there at the north end of town and came over to right along the beach.

Richard: I think there might have been a trailer park with mobile homes parked there.

Gerald: That was later. These were little cabins right along the beach, and they were sitting on the old highway 101 after it was abandoned. Fletcher was quite an interesting person. Because of housing, those little cabins became permanent year-round residences for some people. What could be nicer than a place right on the beach! Following World War II, the State of California, Parks and Beaches, and the County of San Diego got together and acquired as much public land as we could gain control of because our Board of Supervisors was interested in preserving land for public use. It was becoming purchased for private use. The county and state worked together and acquired a lot of properties from Carlsbad south to Solana Beach. The county had to maintain all of it. Ten in later years when some of the properties began to show revenue, the State of California decided they'd like to have it, and of course, the Board was willing to divest the county of that responsibility. Along the north of Leucadia, what we used to call "Ponto Beach", we had developed quite a campground there. In Cardiff we had developed quite a campground. We hadn't built permanent structures, public restrooms and so forth; we had a company service chemical toilets. But they were popular campgrounds and they showed signs of revenue producing. So the county made a deal with the state that if they would take Moonlight beach (this is prior to Encinitas incorporation), that we would let them have the Ponto beach and Cardiff beach and they had to also take the strip between Cardiff and Solana Beach. Then we continued to maintain Solana Beach and a few other beaches. It's interesting, and it's a little history that maybe some people aren't aware of. I worked with the Junior Chamber of Commerce in helping coordinate with the County Board of Supervisors, the Junior Chamber, and the (Santa Fe) Irrigation District in acquiring San Dieguito Park, which was our first large park, 96 acres at that time, in the western hemisphere of the county.

Richard: I think that will probably be a nice summary of things for the 101 Association. I will conclude now unless there are some other remarks you'd like to make.