

SAN DIEGO HISTORICAL SOCIETY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

An interview with

Percy C. Broell.

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June 14, 1978

Interviewed by: Nan Cuthbert
Transcribed by Shirley A. Brandes
Final Draft by Shirley A. Brandes

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This is an interview with Percy C. Broell on Wednesday, June 14, 1978 at 8:45 A.M. in his office on San Diego Avenue (San Diego, California). The interviewer is Nan Cuthbert. The main subject is Mr. Broell's role in the development of Presidio Park. The sponsoring organization is the San Diego Historical Society.

NAN CUTHBERT: Just to get some basic facts down, when were you born and where?

PERCY C. BROELL: I was born September 27, 1903 in Dubuque, Iowa, on Rush Street.

NC: And when did you come to California? Many years later or

PB: I came to California actually in 1924 and came from Oregon where I had been living.

NC: What brought you to California?

PB: Well, mostly the box cars.

NC: The Box cars!? Would you explain that?

PB: Well, I traveled through all the eastern states

NC: Oh, you came on the box cars?

PB: And traveled by box cars. We didn't have money in those days, so we had to use our ingenuity in traveling by box cars.

NC: I thought you meant that you were attracted to San Diego because of box cars. That's where my mind was. What did you do when you first came to San Diego?

PB: The first thing I did was to check in to the United States Marine Corps because I had joined the Marine Corps in Portland, Oregon, and they had assigned me to San Diego for recruit duty, learning how to become a Marine. My biggest asset in this was that I had been a volunteer all my life for everything. I probably learned [about] all the pots and pans and the bathrooms at the Marine Base by [considering it a] very important mission. So that is how I landed in San Diego.

Then I became connected with a family out here by the name of Guthrie, who had also joined the service later in Oregon and was

assigned (to) the same place. His people bought the little grocery store across the street from Presidio Park, what was then just Presidio Hill. In fact I have pictures of myself, in civilian clothing, standing on Presidio Hill when it was in its original state.

NC: Were you interested at all at that time in the historical aspects; did it fascinate you, or weren't you aware of the history underneath that hill at the time?

PB: Wherever I was I was always curious as to how things became and what the conditions were around where I would be. Presidio, being the main hill where we could stand and look out over the flat lands where the cranes and the other birds came, was a very fine place to look from. So I climbed Presidio and had the picture taken just about where the observation platform is now.

NC: How long were you in the Marine Corps?

PB: I served four years—I was very fortunate, with that volunteer trouble of mine—I finally ended up being the number one flunky for Admiral Hughes and became his lead man on the staff. And then, after I had fallen into a very, very fine position with him for several years, I raised my hand again when they said, "Volunteers?" I ended up in the Gobi Desert with General Smedley D. Butler, walking over most of the territory of China.

NC: When was this?

PB: About 1926, along in there.

NC: How long were you in China?

PB: I was in China about two years and five or six months, something like that.

NC: Did you find it fascinating?

PB: We enjoyed it very much. I learned to speak a certain amount of Chinese while I was over there. And when I say, served with General Butler, I was his personal attache for running errands. Let's say, I was orderly number one for General Butler. He was a very fine man and anything they say about him is less than what it really was. At one time the General found one man had been tied down into a compound. We had to go through four nations to take our one man out of there (and) we were led by the General through the compounds of the different nations. We would come up to the location and they would stick their guns up and he would say, "Start shooting or get out of the way." So we went down and pulled our man out of that territory and that taught the Chinese they couldn't fool with the Americans—not in the slightest.

At that time Chiang Kai-shek and Mao Tse-tung were fighting together in a civil war. Later, through the administration giving money to Mao Tse-tung, he broke with Chiang Kai-shek. We had the problem of pulling all the bamboo Americans (nickname for the American merchants in China) out of China who were there for their own good and to get what they could. And we got nothing but good hard work and lots of education by seeing the things that happened. Now if you want anything more, I could tell you a couple of horrible things, too.

NC: You can tell me those later--we'll keep the tape for the Presidio. You came back--it was approximately 1928--back to San Diego, is that right?

PB: Well, when I first got connected with Admiral Hughes, my wife--future wife, Frances Cathrine Lydon--was in San Francisco and that is where I went aboard the USS California, which was the flagship for Admiral Hughes. When we first got acquainted she was coming across the deck to see how the battleship looked and I was fortunate in showing her how the battleship looked. From then on we began to be very close and as soon as I got out of the service in 1929 we were married. The picture of the one ship that is on the rocks in San Francisco is where my wife and I had our courtship.

NC: What a romantic spot--San Francisco is a city for lovers.

PB: That is right.

NC: And then you were married in San Francisco?

PB: No, I came down here, and her mother and sister came down and we were married in St. Joseph's Cathedral downtown, because she was a Catholic. Had she been a Jewess (it would have) been in a synagogue.

NC: And this was just prior to the dedication of the Park (Presidio)? How did you get involved?

PB: Well, the park detail goes back a lot further than what I want to take time to give, but I will say this: my father's people had disinherited him for marrying away from the clan and in doing this they took his inheritance and built a park, known as Eagle Park in Dubuque, Iowa. That was the beginning of where I had some kind of an assurance with the "Man upstairs" that some time in the future I would be given something to compensate. And something to compensate couldn't have been any greater than the position Mr. Marston gave me when he gave me control of the development, the planning and the designing of this Presidio Park. I am the only one out of (the) ten who built Presidio Park who has a letter from Mr. Marston, signed by him, (stating) that I not only planted the seeds and put the plants in, but that I designed and did the engineering, surveying and every-

thing else in the construction of Presidio Park. It is not only my building but my creation, thanks to Mr. George Marston.

NC: Now, when did you first become associated with him, first get to working with him?

PB: Well, at that time—I have to digress again because in '29 jobs were scarce. I think I got \$20.24 a week for working in Mr. Barth's foundry on Kettner Boulevard and because I couldn't go into my master trade, which was the brass molder, I took a job of cleaning castings and doing whatever flunky work there was to find money enough to live. At that time we made gate weights three times a week. Earl [F.] Kenner, who was part owner of the place, said that Mr. Barth was using me (as a) display. I picked up 415-pound gate weights, cleaned them, put them on the scales and then put the bar through them and carried them to the edge of the platform where it took two men to put them on their trucks. Mr. Barth used to come out to the back of the office and show this—(he pretended) he was showing Mission Bay—or San Diego Bay—but when I was carrying the castings he was showing his friends how somebody could lift 400 pounds.

When Mr. Marston received my application for working in Presidio it was due to the fact that he had, with five others, arranged to build Presidio Park. And then four of them dropped out and he carried the load himself. The job then was [just for] a few men cleaning up and scraping ground under a man by the name of Percy Carter, who was a very fine man. He was very careful about making sure that his men didn't get hurt. In one blow-up of dynamite he leaned over to see why this wasn't happening and it blew up and knocked out his one eye, and he eventually ended up in being dead.

I had just gone to work as a common worker at the Presidio under Percy Carter and Mr. Marston saw my work. (Mr. Barth had sold me a little short in not saying I was a good man because he wanted to keep me.) Well, then, Mr. Marston took me over to his home grounds and gave me the job of landscaping what was known as Balboa Park Extension. Balboa Park Extension was a very nice piece of development and I was fortunate in doing it. When Percy Carter died, Mr. Marston gave me this job [Presidio Park] over—and I won't name them—but several very high class engineers and architects who probably were well qualified to do many things. But Mr. Marston gave me the job and he stood behind me 100 per cent because of the Man upstairs: I had nothing to do with it, I was just one little bit of a flunky that was being given a job from my father's inheritance in the past, as before explained. Now, the fact that it is hard to understand why Mr. Marston did this for me, I don't know. He was also connected very closely with the Man upstairs. And when John Nolen came to San Diego, who was known throughout the world for his activities—Mr. Nolen intended to build, or give Mr. Marston an idea to build, the tower where the observation platform is now. Mr. Nolen suggested that there be a tea house in

this location and of course everybody from the city officials and the state officials were giving Mr. Nolen credit for everything that he knew. Nobody else could know any more. Mr. Marston mentioned it to me and showed me what he was going to suggest, because I walked behind Mr. Nolen and Mr. Marston while they were talking. But the next morning Mr. Nolen was to come down again and Mr. Marston wouldn't talk to him until I got there. When we left the Museum and headed down toward where the tea house was to be he found that there was binder twine and flags going up in the air about 40 some feet with rims around showing where the floor level would be, where the shape of the place would be and at the peak showing the gable of the tea house. Mr. Marston said, "What is that!?" and I said that is Mr. Nolen's tea house. Mr. Nolen took exception to that, so I said to Mr. Nolen, "The floor has to be a foot of concrete to hold up anything. The next floor has to be 8-foot-6, according to city regulations; the next deck has to be at least a foot thick of reinforced concrete, otherwise it wouldn't support the people who would be walking on it. And then the tea house itself would go up 8-foot-6, and above that would come the gable". Mr. Marston looked at Mr. Nolen and looked at me and said, "Take it down--there will be no tea house there". And later he asked me to design what I thought would fit the occasion and I designed the present platform that is there for observation. So that is how far Mr. Marston would go against even known people. As to why he did it, all I can say is that the Man upstairs was giving me preference.

Now in the same vein, when we borrowed the two statues--one the Indian and the other the Padre--Mr. Nolen was the one who located them in front of the Museum. I have pictures showing them sticking out like a sore thumb. When I told Mr. Marston they were in the wrong place, he said, "Well, Percy, can you tell me why you think it is considered in the wrong place." I said the Padre might have been enjoying standing out in the sun and looking up, but to be looking down in silent prayer seems to me that he would be right where he belonged; on the dais of the first church that was ever built in this part of the country. And that was near where the cross is and where Father Serra now stands in silent repose. And that was also dedicated by the Honorable Bishop Buddy, who gave us the dedication for the entire Presidio Park. [It was] an acknowledgment. It was not a question of trying to downgrade the Mission up the valley. The Mission up the valley was a very, very needed thing. At the time when the people first came here to California, the Indian girls were a prey to soldiers and so forth. The canyon below Presidio Museum is known as "Canada Diablo", or the Canyon of the Devil, and that is where the things went on that they didn't like, so they put the Mission and the school way up the valley and they left the Presidio as it was, to protect and guide and see that everything was in order. The actual closeness of the Bishop with Presidio Park is quite a nice little story:

I had built a nursery at the bottom of Presidio Park and we were using most of our own plants to do what we could in Presidio to keep

bills down. At one time, during the day, two little Sisters came from the valley in an old car that didn't even look like it would hold together. They looked and admired the Presidio, what plants I had and made the remark that they would like to have something that would be able to live in the desert. So I asked Mr. Marston and we loaded them down with plants that would fit in the desert and the little Sisters said, "Your name will be on a dais of the church forever." And I said, "Don't put my name there, put Mr. Marston's". She said, "Well, we will put Mr. Marston's and then we'll put yours." I also told her to put another one there instead of mine, but she insisted that mine would be there. The main thing was, she said, "My brother will be up in this territory some time in the future." And I said, "Yes, the Catholic Church has Sisters and Brothers, and so-forth and so-on," and she said, "No, this is my earth brother," who happened to be--as I found out later--Bishop Charles Francis Buddy. So that is how I became closer (to him). I got an invitation to come to the church--the headquarters for the Bishop--and I went downtown, talked to him and I told him that we had to have certain protections against the schools, because they were trying to downgrade the value of Presidio Park; that each (statue) was important and they should be given their proper respective places in history. Mr. Marston agreed to that and we moved the Padre down to the Chapel and Bishop Buddy gave the entire Park a blessing and dedicated it. That is how Bishop Buddy will appear in the pictures that we have.

NC: Had it always been assumed that where the Padre is now that that is where the Church was?

PB: Yes, that is true, and we had found certain indications that there was flooring in the entire place that the Padre is now looking down on. If you dug down there I am sure you would find tile for the floor and also steps up in the back, which (led to) the dais where the Padre would normally take his position in the Church and look down upon the congregation. So we put him right where he belongs. And the Indian statue was also placed where it (would be) best (for) observation and indicative of the fact that the Indians were a great part of the place. As you well know--or if you haven't (learned) you should--down where the old palm tree used to be and where my home was, was also the cemetery, which is not marked very well, for those who died at sea of the scurvy. That is a regular cemetery. We have (found) there, at times, little things that would be of a burial. According to my belief we don't take, we give, so we would very carefully place the things back where they were and allow the person to rest in peace.

NC: Did you find bones in that area?

PB: We found bones: leg bones, thigh bones. Now the bones that we found there were not the only ones that we had uncovered. Close to

where the little square that is outlined there on the hill, showing that the building sat there for quite awhile, we uncovered between there and the bottom of the hill, apparently a soldier, and so-forth. Any parts, anything that we dug up, we gave to the Serra Museum. I have pictures of some of those things, including the plates, which were religious plates, showing two inscriptions on the back. The Spode ware in the early days was marked by an indentation in the material to leave the name of the builder, as Spode, and so-forth. Then after a period of time, they changed that method to using a dye that went into the back of the plate. Now this one that I gave to the Museum had both, so there was a transitional period in there that would well qualify the dates to be authentic, inasmuch as they had both.

Then in other places we would uncover bones and when we did we would very carefully put them back in place. If there were relics that we dug up we took them and gave them to the Museum. And I am sure they must have them in the archives up there somewhere.

Most of the Presidio was taken care of and built into a park. It was done so because Mr. Marston desired to protect the Catholic location, [although] he was not a Catholic. But he was giving as much to the future as my relatives did in Eagle Park in the early days. So I always glance backwards to the Man upstairs as giving me the preference. I had done nothing to earn from Mr. Marston, more than to be honorable to him—to push upward what he gave me—and I was always very, very happy all my life with his gifts.

One of the main gifts that Mr. Marston gave me was: For ten years I was the director of Presidio Park. I had the association under my control and we gathered materials with the help of city engineers—under a very fine man, but I don't remember his name. The fact that Presidio Park went into city control without even mentioning my name irritated Mr. Marston no end. About one week later he came by and he said, "Percy, in all my life I have never had one picture taken". And he said, "This is the family picture". And on the picture on the right-hand side at the bottom it says, "George W. Marston to Percy C. Broell." When I thanked him he said, "Here is something else", And he handed me a letter, 8½" by 11", which stated, "Presidio Park is Percy's creation. He knows how to plant seeds, he knows how to grow plants, he knows how to do this and that". He made it sound real good, that I was pretty smart, and at the bottom he said, "It is not only his construction, but his creation", and was signed by George W. Marston. And he said not even my family can take this credit away from you. So that is the story of that part of Presidio Park.

Now, we did do a lot of things on which I got help from engineers, like Ernie Smith, who was a very fine man. The city officials came in and helped me, although we pulled a few little fast tricks on those.

Now at one time we had SERA---State Emergency Relief Agency---where we gathered a few dollars in to help us. That was due to one of the men, who was a son of Mr. Perody, who worked under me at one time. He was the head of the State Prisons and he knew the Governor at that time and he got us money from the State Emergency Program. Mr. Marston said, "Percy, I am worried about taking money from the State or the Government, because it has been their attitude in past years to eventually come back and whatever they have given you they tax somebody and make them pay it back." So at that time Mr. Marston signed the papers and it shows in the records that the sponsor of Presidio Park to be Percy C. Broell.

Later when I took the WPA---Works Progress Administration---on, the man who came down from Los Angeles was Walter Kruckman and Eleanor Chambers and Helen Gahagan Douglas. The people that came down with Walter Kruckman were very, very good people, especially his brother--- I believe his name was Leonard Kruckman. (He) is the gentleman that sat right along side of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt in Washington, D. C. So I had the closest connection to anything you've ever seen. At times I would get money that you wouldn't believe. It was all done legal and everything else. The booklets were massive in form. I still have the booklets, and some of them were two inches thick, in which you had to know every line, every paragraph and every word and its meaning. At night---to illustrate one point where I received thousands and thousands and thousands of dollars for the development of Presidio Park--- I would get a call in the middle of the night. The telephone would ring and I just picked it up and say, "Broell, here", and the word would come book number so-and-so, page number so-and-so, paragraph number so-and-so, line number so-and-so, period. "And you may have all the money that you put in for that you have already spent." Within three to four weeks after that I would have sent pamphlets (my wife and her sister worked nights and days to create pamphlets showing maps and things of that kind) of what we needed money for. And that went to Washington, D. C. through San Diego, Los Angeles, to San Francisco, to Salt Lake City, to Washington, D. C.; back to Salt Lake City, to San Francisco, to Los Angeles, to San Diego APPROVED! And the next night the phone would ring and I would receive the same thing: I would say, "Broell, here." It said, "Referring to page number so-and-so, book number so-and-so, paragraph number so-and-so, line number so-and-so, change the period to a comma and add, 'and if you can justify it'." So I received money that nobody in the entire United States received from those places and the Presidio Park again was the beneficiary of the Man upstairs. In every aspect its movement forward has been that way.

Now with Presidio we designed roads. There was a little bit of a dirt road that came down the hill---I'll have to admit that it showed on a map. I believe that a man by the name of (Roland S.) Hoyt had put out one little bit of a map that was 10" x 14", or something like that, showing a road. So we went to the ocean; we gathered our rocks;

we gathered everything there was for the building of the gutters; our gutters were built. Mr. Marston had come down late at night and caught me out with a transit setting a super-elevated road that the engineers wouldn't agree on because they believed in crowned roads. The road was designed by myself by setting the transit up and showing it off in a distance. I would go and drive a stake in the ground and tie a little red string around it, go back and set my transit, set it and set it until I got the pitch that I wanted for that road. If you go up there now you will find that you can start down the hill, not too fast, and your car will follow the curvature in front of the Museum that will come down almost to the bottom of the Presidio. You will also notice that the workmanship that went into this from WPA and the others, under the guidance of someone who took some care, still has very few patch marks of repair.

Now one more little story regarding Presidio: You'll find the back road which goes down the back way. Now even the government officials have to have someone officially behind them, so that I got the City to agree that they would take the responsibility, but I was the sponsor again, and in going down that back road we had opposition. They were not going to let us have any way to build that road. We had people that stood in our way until--you can't believe it--the morning that they had the city people come up and I had the government man that I had looked forward to helping me. He was standing there--he was going to give me more money and I said to Mr. Marston and the others, "What is this grader doing up here; what is that tractor doing at the top of that hill?" And I said, "You city people say it is not a road, therefore, I can't spend any government money on it, so I am going to rip that road up and plant it in grass", and they stood there and said you won't do anything of the kind. The city attorney at that time said, "You can't do this because this has been open for 50 years--it belongs to the city". And I said, "Oh, no, it don't belong to the city", and he said, "Oh, yes, it does, it is the city's property". And I said, "You mean to tell me this road can't be closed, it's got to be a road, a city road?" And he said, "Yes, I do". I said, "Will you put that in writing?" and I turned around to the government man and said, "What do you say we do?" and he said, "I'll give you the money." And I turned to the grader and said, "Go on, start going down the hill and don't rip up the road, just put it in a little better shape preparing to pave it." That's how we got that road going down the hill.

Also one more thing. If you will notice, we were given the opportunity of putting a 100-foot flagpole on the top of a hill which the government and the others--they were lower people, they were hirelings--said no flagpole can go on that hill, it will interfere with flying. But you notice that the flagpole went up. At that time, in bronze, at the base of the flagpole, it showed Percy C. Broell as the Superintendent of the Park. But somebody (who) liked bronze better

than the flagpole, needed it and took that out. They stole the bronze on both sides of the cross, too. So it is just a matter of who, some time in the future, with good loveable thoughts toward preserving, will go back and put the bronze plaques on the side of the cross, and they might even put mine up, I don't know.

NC: This picture that was in the Tribune--that article that I showed you of the excavation of the big room--where was that? It says the northern rim of the Park. Taking it from where the area is now, I get the feeling that that particular area was just north of where the observation area is.

PB: Yes, that is part of it, and that is where we dug up some of the artifacts. I believe in that book you have there, that black one, [there] are pictures showing some of the artifacts that came out and were given to the city.

NC: OKay. We will take a look through that after we finish the tape. I know that one question several people have asked--I know Mr. Marston or you, or someone brought in fill dirt. Now I don't know if that was....

PB: Yes, we brought in--we only used a little fill dirt. We drove ten and a half-ton trucks and we had men haul it in to cover the rock which at some places were two-foot deep exposed. We hauled silt. Now silt is not sand, Silt is the alluvial soil that washes down from the mountains and it is choice soil of everything there is. We took that from the middle of the river bed and we hauled it for months--ton, tons and a half--we would cover that place with the soil--with the silt--we would dig it in, we would make sure that it was planting.

Now before I get too far, there is one thing that I should have given to start with. I don't remember--I have in my files, I am sure--the names of the people who used to work and helped build the Presidio. Everyone of those people who ever hear [of] or ever look at this article should remember one thing: their work was important. Their work was so important because I received welfare help in a sense from the government, the state and also the Federal. Those booklets came down and Mr. Roosevelt protected me so much, regardless, through his inspectors, that when they would come down there, there would be not one thing found anywheres that stopped me in any way in the development of Presidio. In the first place, you couldn't say to a laborer, "Now you get in and you get to work". If he came from the WPA he was supposed to lean on his shovel like they do today and to give nothing and receive everything. At that time I lined up 100, 200 men at a time and I would give them talks and I would say just like this: "If you people think you have been on the bottom of the pole, you don't know what you are talking about, because I've been on the bottom of the pole most of my young

life. I hunted and dug potatoes to eat, I dug anything I could to eat. And I'd take [a job] where I would have to work, I'd get something to eat for what I did. Now you people who come out here by the hundreds you stand out here and you find a few people who say, 'Don't work, just take your money'. You people are ashamed of taking welfare, you people are ashamed of taking something for nothing, but remember this, the man that goes home tonight and says, 'I gave that man a good day's work', he did not take welfare money, nor government money, he earned every dollar he got." And those men would get in and work for me 100 per cent of the time. They dug ditches, when we didn't have ditchdiggers, that were two feet deeper than what a shovel would throw out and they would have to throw it up the bank. And I've had men sit at the bottom and want to do nothing. I would jump down [in] the ditch and excuse everybody except the man who was the troublemaker, and he changed his mind. That's how Presidio was built. He changed his mind and went to work, or he didn't feel like going to work the next morning. Now you can fit it any way you want it, but Presidio was built with blood, sweat and tears—and I mean a good many tears.

George Marston had his problems, too, and there was nobody helping George W. Marston. He did so many things. One little story that his relatives should enjoy very much. He said to me, "In the old history points around the building there should be, Percy, some way of showing these off by making a little trail here and there to show the building off." And so I said, "All right, Mr. Marston." The next day when he came down I had a bunch of little wooden sticks all under my arm—but that was nothing new to him, I'd always be carrying something—and I said, "Mr. Marston, just how would a person see these things?" He started up ahead of me and he said, "Well, they'd be something like this, and something like that, and that, and this and that." Well, three days later he came back down and he said, "Percy, I came down the other night and that path that you made is the most perfect path that I have ever seen for displaying something like this." And I said, "Well, Mr. Marston, you laid it out." And his answer to me was half anger when he said, "Percy, don't butter me up, you don't butter me up. You know that you did it, I didn't do it." And I said, "Oh, Mr. Marston, you know two or three days ago when you came down and you told me about this?" "Yes", he said, and then I said, "Did you notice that I had a whole bunch of stakes under my arm?" "No," he said, "but you always have something under your arm." And I said, "I asked you to show me about where it was." "Yes," he said, and I said, "Everytime you took one big long step, I dropped a stake and when you had left I put the stakes in and I merely realigned just the curvature." So I said, "You built this path."

NC: By the time when you came in they had already done some work on the Park. Right?

PB: Under Percy Carter. The main thing was getting in a road that

you could drive down the hill on....

NC: Could you see any ruins then? Could you make out where any of these places had been? Was there any interest in that at the time, or was the road the main project?

PB: The road was the main project and the only place where the ground was cut so heavy. There were no bodies found, or no burials found because, if you notice as you came down the hill, there are roses on the right-hand side. That piece of ground came down so steep that no one would use it for burials. They always used down below where they could dig flat and those things were much easier to do. And they weren't opposed to going into a little ravine and putting dirt over the body and putting quite a lot of rock on it. But the excavations that come in the future, if they are, they should be done very, very carefully and cautiously. They should line up where the buildings were, where the drill parts would be, there would be no bodies buried there--that is (of) the early people. The normal natural places would be non-usable for other purposes, but usable for burial locations. Even down where the little Presidio Park house is there were two or three little excavations in there, where we moved the building over a bit to make sure we didn't do anything (wrong). When my graders came down to do any grading, or any digging, we always went ahead to make sure they weren't digging anything up. And if they were, we avoided using the location.

NC: When you were going through on the road, you didn't find anything--as you went through on the roadway?

PB: No.

NC: You mentioned in the scrapbook that is in the Serra Museum uncovering some earthen jars of Indian ashes. Where did you find those?

PB: Those were found somewheres near the house and somewheres where the walk going up to the little picnic area is above where the house was. Some in there, and then there were some that were found at the place where you come to the top of that walk and you come through the first gate--just an opening--some were right in there. But you see there were an awful lot of people--the walls were put up before I got there. I didn't put these walls up, they were mostly adobe walls.

NC: How did they determine exactly where to put those walls--you know the wall that now goes around?

PB: By the terrain of the ground. (What) would be using the most ground to display what they wanted to enclose. Of course in the early days they built the walls so that the Indians couldn't come up and start shooting at their soldiers.

NC: This wall, then, doesn't exactly follow the line of the ancient wall.

PB: No. But if you will notice on the outside of the wall, there is a walk built, too. I built that walk because it was a nice place to go out and around.

NC: Do you know where they are digging now--the Mesa College students? You know, as you are coming down the hill it is to the right, just after you go by the observation platform. Do you remember, as you look through those two mounds, do you remember what that area might have looked like before they started?

PB: Well, it was more or less the tapering off of the ground by reason of rainfalls and stuff of that kind. The earth moving under water takes a more pleasing shape unless it is going to drop off. But it will soften the corner of a building by smoothing it downwards into a curve position.

NC: So there were just the mounds there.

PB: They were just mounds. If we had uncovered one of the buildings for the blocks, we would very carefully try to go to the corners where we could put it back and protect it.

NC: You know, when they were digging--San Diego State was digging--where it is laid out there now where they think the church was with the sacristy and the bapistry and so-forth--when they were digging there they uncovered a wooden box that was put over a pillar, like a cornerstone maybe to protect it, and Colonel Ellis was saying to me he wondered if that had been placed there in '29, you know when they were doing some digging. He said, to use his words, "The current excavation uncovered a wooden box above one side of the doorway between the chapel and the bapistry. Some believe it was placed there in 1929 in the belief that it marked the south main gateway of the Presidio." Do you know of any such box?

PB: We did uncover something there and we tried to restore as much as we could and protect what we considered was the main gate.

NC: And so something wood was put over it?

PB: Yes, I believe that it was, but I don't believe I took pictures of it.

NC: The spot where the Serra Cross stands is purported to be where the Commandant's house was.

PB: That was supposed to be the Commandant's house where the cross actually stands. Right next to that was where the chapel is--connected

to it.

NC: Was there a natural mound there before they put the cross out? Did they find anything when they were putting the cross up?

PB: I wasn't there when they put the cross up.

NC: That went up so much earlier.

PB: That went up—I think in that book there you will find where it says five men: Scripps, Spaulding, Marston, Spreckels and one other all tried to get together.

NC: In the book that I read in the library and the article about that big room that you excavated [with] the floor tile, you said that you felt it had been under Governor Pedro Fages. Some people thought it might have been put there during the Serra period, but you said it was indicative, you thought, of a later period under Pedro Fages, under his tutelage. What made you think that? What do you know that would indicate the time.

PB: Well, you see, I was a late-comer in the building around there, too. Padre [Pedro] Fages came up from Mexico, walking all the way and when he came up they had to establish places at different times where they would stay. And I believe that his original beginning was right there, and I believe that where the Governor's house was eventually considered to be, that, I believe, is where Pedro Fages had his first little mission. And I believe that next to it, right there, was the chapel at which he himself said his prayers. So that is the reason why I interpreted it that way. That is the reason why I put Father Serra's location. Now we did uncover, just out in the middle there where you have seen—we uncovered dishes and things of that kind. We dug up there, where the foundation of the bastion is, we would come into things. At that time we had to be very careful to make sure that none of the excavators would pick anything up. That is where we found the religious part—up there where the cross is. In that area, where we figured Father Serra belonged, there were religious dishes and I think they still have that one (the one turned over to the Serra Museum) up there.

NC: Did they find anything when they put in the parking lot?

PB: That actually was a drill field for military people. It was obvious that it was because we didn't have any grading to do to amount to anything. And if you go back to the older times, even in China, they made their parade grounds and drill grounds in between other buildings that served the people, the soldiers, and so-forth. Everything that we had we showed Bishop Buddy and I believe that his

records show that he had a search made in the early days in Spain. I believe he had a complete research (made). Now if I can find the research records that my wife went through, we will be just that much better off, for she researched almost all of the early history. It was done, but you see when you give things away that's the end of them.

NC: That shouldn't be. If they are catalogued right, then they are able to be used by people.

PB: They are and they aren't. There are two sets of people: one believers and one non-believers. The ones that don't believe don't mind destroying the things that the believers have. And they are ruthless about it. I mean they really are ruthless about it. For my part, I couldn't see where I would gain a nickel by doing anything, although that brings me to one little thing that I think is more than worthy of being brought in.

Now as much as Mr. Marston was loved by a lot of people, there were a lot of (other) people who were treated by another human being with a respect and a love for their understanding and their help that you wouldn't believe. One of them was Roscoe Hazard. I used him as reference, and he came up and had his two little boys with him—"Tojo" and Bruce—and he said I want you to shake hands with Mr. Broell. "This is Mr. Broell. This is the man who is feeding us right now; we don't have income enough to even pay our bills and I want you to remember him all your life." And those two boys—one builds freeways and one builds big buildings—they never yet have looked at me that they haven't given me respect and love that you wouldn't believe.

Jeannette Daley—George Daley (Daley Corp., Contractors) had gotten a certain amount of work from me when he needed it real bad—and when Jeannette went up into the State Capitol she took Percy Broell with her in anything that was needed, so I gained ground there. And that was just from being what I should have been. I was nothing more than what the guy upstairs was giving me to do and believe me I felt the closeness all the time.

I made probably a lot of mistakes. At one time here in San Diego I had 1100 men, maybe, working for me at one time. And I never had a prompter. I used to go down in Mission Valley where Councilman—I can't think of his name now, right next to Benbough's place—let me use his place to give a gathering party at Christmas or something like that and I never used a prompter. My men would come in, take a drink, bring their family in and I would say, "You had a child this size last year, but where's the one you had this year?" And I never had to use a prompter. So it isn't a question that my mind was so good, it was that somebody else was guiding it.

It's the same as they guide my hands now. This one person liked both my wife and myself very much.

Mr. [Tollie T.] Baines was one of the city people, but his wife was a writer. She gave the different things that she did. This one here--she named this "Presidio Park"--and I have to say here, so that it will not be a part of a record that cannot be used, because this will become the property of the one she gave it to, and that was Percy C. Broell and Frances C. Broell. It was actually the poem for Presidio Park and it says:

The wooden stillness oftimes seems
A haven true of life's own dreams
Its splendor trees with heads tossed high
The homage bear from earth to sky

While shadows deepen and nights draw near
An echo sounds so soft and clear
From chapel bells that feign would speak
Of Mission Fathers kind and meek

O're hilltop high the moonbeams bright
Through olive branch and palms send light
And memories in a silver glow
Recall the famed Presidio

The hidden path, part tangled brake
Of sun's pure gold doth now partake
For there, for all, a cross appears
To guide the way in coming years.

Lenore Isabel Baines

NC: That is lovely.

PB: That was given to me and it was told to me not to give it to anyone unless I put my name on it. So I hereby put my name on it.

NC: Put, "Narrated by Percy Broell". Beautifully done, I must say.

[This is where the two start looking at pictures.]

PB: Now as I go along here you will find pictures, and they wondered why I got things so clear and so perfect from a plane. I was one of the world's worst 'duffers'. Coming over the Presidio one time I hit a down-draft and I thought I was going clear to the floor--the first time I had ever been in a down-draft and alone in a plane.

NC: You fly?

PB: Oh, yes, I used to. I'm not too good any more....

NC: You mean you have a pilot's license? What haven't you done?

PB: Well, the guy upstairs says if there is anything you haven't done you are going to have to do it, so, my gosh, I'd better record them.

NC: Did you take these pictures yourself?

PB: These pictures here—I took a man down here as an engineer and we went up and turned the plane sideways and took (a photo) right straight downward of Presidio. That's an aerial photo of an area, but it also is an engineer's photo when you put it down and plot it exactly the same on paper. All of my maps are the same. Now sometime, and I'm not going to be here forever, I'm going to have to be assured where all my records are going to go. I burned up twelve boxes of things and that was because it seemed to me that the people just had no desire to keep or retain anything.

NC: I don't know if you know Sylvia Arden, do you? She is the Librarian now at Serra. She has been there—I really don't know how many years, maybe eight or nine, maybe six or seven. But I went into George Marston's file yesterday looking—his file on Presidio Park,—and I said to Sylvia, it's marvelous to be able to go to do some research. Here was the file, everything numbered, everything labeled. You know if I wanted to see a plan, it was there. And of course there are hours and hours that volunteers are giving. I am pushing—don't you dare burn them—please give them to the Historical Society and let your family write it off as a tax write-off, and then they will have all of these things here. John Ellis takes the kids around: all the fourth graders from the schools go through the Park every year. And always, "This is Mr. Marston's and Mr. Broell's Park"—so your name is being perpetuated. But to get the real super credit, it needs to be somewhere where people can use it. Don't burn it, I'll cry! I'll die! if you do that.

PB: Well, I'm glad to hear you say, "George Marston and Percy Broell" because Mr. Marston's closeness to me was one of the most treasured things in my entire life. The thing that he said was this: We walked over the hills where he had bought from one party a piece of ground that is top of the observation point—and if I can remember her name, I will tell you who it is—but anyway, he said if there was only some way to get up here. I said I'll put a road up there, Mr. Marston, and in his different conversations with different people around town, he said, "Oh, Percy, they say that it can't be done." And I said, "And what do you say, Mr. Marston?" And he said I'll tell you the same as I told them, "Don't tell Percy he can't do anything because he goes ahead and does it, because he don't know he can't."

NC: So the planning work was started, but the ground work wasn't started when you came to work for him.

PB: That is right. Then Mr. Marston said, "They say you can't get up there." All of a sudden the road appeared and it went right on up to the top. And he said, "Percy, there is one thing I want you to do.

You draw plans for a watch tower because,"he said, "the Museum is mine; the watchtower will be yours." The plans are in my drawing board out there as they wouldn't go for the money, after he had gone—but the road is easy to get up to. It's a very nice place to look from and with Mr. Marston's blessing for that to be mine, I was very happy, whether it ever got to be that way or not.

Now, we had people who wanted to come and see Presidio and Mr. [Samuel E.] Mason, who was in charge of all the tramways in San Diego, became acquainted with me when I used to go down to the San Diego Hotel. We had our meetings with the judges and all down below and I became known to all of them. Well, Mr. Mason said, "What can I do to help you, Percy?" and I said "we have no tramway—or no car or bus—out to Presidio. So they put the closest connection they could up to the top of the hill and that is the closest place to get to Presidio by their methods. Now, we built a road, then we built a path that came down through Canada Diablo, and the drainage down there—if you notice the drainage ditch—that's still serviceable and so-forth. Everything we did we did for permanency. Mr. Marston would, believe me. He crawled up some of those banks ahead of me to prove that he could go up those banks.

NC: How old a man was he at the time you were working with him?

PB: Well, that was in 1929 and I have to admit I am 76 now.

NC: Are you really? I see, this is the foot of the hill—I've got my perspective now.

PB: Incidentally, before you get any further, that is the poem. You see things like this would be very nice (to be) taken care of. As long as I live, that is a compliment.

NC: But seriously, the plans that they have now—I realize they have some copies. These things can be preserved so nicely in a temperature controlled area where people can use them and look at these pictures.

PB: You can see some of the excavations as we go through here.

NC: When you were planting trees—I guess what I want to say is, when something was uncovered was there a map where this stuff was pinpointed? Did anyone keep anything, . . . [like that]?

PB: I don't believe I pinpointed anything, but if we came into a place where I wanted a tree and there was a grave there we just moved over far enough to miss the grave.

You know, at one time I took over Mount Hope Cemetery. That's down south because it was nothing but paupers' field and there were an awful

lot of nice people buried there. I went down there and took that over and it was in the city budget at between \$20,000 and \$30,000 a year in the red. And I had it for two years and we turned it from \$20,000 to \$30,000 a year in red to \$20,000 to \$30,000 a year in the black. It's been a paying proposition ever since.

See these picnic areas and so-forth--let's go through because there are other things in here that will show up.

NC: You have some digs--ruins--here

PB: Let me put on these glasses--that one eye of mine is bothering me a little bit from the accident.

NC: The old wall of the guardhouse--now this is the area that is open now, right?

PB: That's right. Now this is one where we were excavating in the one location there where you see it open and we took pictures and we recorded it for Mr. Marston's sake.

NC: And Mr. Marston thought it was the guardhouse also, right? But isn't that the area that the man from State (for the San Diego State University dig) thinks is the church, right? Is that the same area?

PB: That's the church--the church is just above there, see? But you see these were done by my wife so that the research and the uncovering of the foundations and so-forth are matters of complete record. You had asked if I had made notes. Every note went into these. This was done by free labor.

NC: (Reading:) "Mounds represent the corners of the old building." Is there any way they (could have) mapped out fairly well what those buildings had been? Is there any way to determine that?

PB: These big maps that I told you about--that showed everything the other day.

NC: Now this is the tile kiln. And this is down on the other side of the lookout?

PB: No, here it is, right here.

NC: Okay. (Reading:) "Northeast side of the wall."

PB: You see all of these here--everything is recorded minutely.

NC: So the tile is under what the observation post is now? Is that where the kiln was?

PB: That is right. Now when we re-established something, we took out the

old ones because they wouldn't bear the weight of the wall.

NC: To the right of that observation post where those funny looking mounds are now—did anybody dig in there?

PB: Here is what you were looking at a minute ago. And there is your cross. And there is your uncovered section.

NC: And here we have some more tile exposed, the old quarry by the cross.

PB: Mr. Marston was very happy that these things were done in this fashion. He loved my wife like a daughter. Now there is a part of the dedication. Here is the building of the construction of the gutters. If we ran into anything there we went over the top of it. You know what I mean—we made sure it was secure and in places we might concrete up like a "U" so that the gutter would never fall down by reason of a grave underneath collapsing.

NC: What about those—I don't think we mentioned—those funny bumps to the right of your observation platform. Did anybody excavate that at all? Do you know where I mean? If you are standing and you are looking out to sea on the observation platform, to the right is the statue of the Indian and there are mounds in there.

PB: Those are all buildings. Those are the ones that, if you look very carefully, you will find [what] looks like a path went in amongst them. That's the path that George Marston mentioned, that by me dropping the stakes, created it. That amused him so, afterwards. You know that I would not take credit for what was done. And this shows laying the concrete and so-forth and so-on. And this ground was made harder than a rock before the concrete was put on, and then it was rolled and it was rolled.

NC: They haven't had any trouble with that washing out, in comparison to some of the modern methods.

PB: See this man up here—Hazard. This is one just like I told you a minute ago—where is his picture? Now that is of his truck dumping the ground—the asphalt and it was all hot. It was all put down hot. Here are some of my workers. They were all very pleased to become part... There is a little liquor store right on the corner.

NC: How many WPA workers—do you remember approximately how many would be working on this at the time? I know you have the records.

PB: Oh, I had 50, 100, 150, 200—I had 200 show up on one morning, then I'd put them all to work. At three in the morning I would get

out of my bed and go out on that big drawing board which was my own, and I had little blue books--little blue books that were about three or four inches long, three and a half, maybe, by two and a half inches wide--and every man's name was on the books so he couldn't tear out a sheet. It would tell him at what hour he was to be so-and-so with his men. The next book would show that this man would be done with that job at such-and-such a time, and he was to be there to do so-and-so right behind the others--put in the drains and so-forth.

NC: How long did the WPA work on the project?

PB: Oh they worked on it for quite a long while. And I forgot to-- I stopped in the middle of something there--with Walter Kruckman. Walter Kruckman's brother, Leonard, as I said, was right next to President Roosevelt. And when Roosevelt came here later and parked his big railroad train down here on the Marine Base, I was called by Walter and he said Leonard and Roosevelt are going to be in town. Now do this: stand on your front steps--you know I had my office at the Museum building, the first (office) going across the building. I was given that job as Assistant Director of Parks in charge of all operations, including the director's office because the director was a non-entity. Anyway, that is my opinion. So when I knew that Roosevelt was coming I stood right in the middle of those steps and when they went past the car slowed down until it was almost stopped and President Roosevelt turned and looked me right in the face and Kruckman was right along side next. You know you've had experience in conversation obliquely--we've all had experiences that way. Kruckman would talk to Roosevelt and say, "Don't talk about this now, I am a linguist and you are not. You say this and you say that, and say it in this way". I did that for years when I controlled politics here for seven years.

NC: How is Kruckman spelled?

PB: K-R-U-C-K-M-A-N. And Walter Kruckman was number one next to Sam Yorty and when I walked in to Sam Yorty's office his secretary would say, "Oh, Percy...." and Sam would motion with his finger, "Come on in". That is how close we were there. And that was all due to Walt Kruckman. Kruckman was like a brother to me.

NC: Now that looks flat, doesn't it, but it seems like it is hillier now.

PB: That was graded then, now they have put in lawn. You see, this is in the rough stage.

NC: What is that funny hole along the side? (pointing to cave in the cliff)

PB: This is the cliff up in here and they would pay somebody to--I'd

better not say anything....

NC: There is a hole that you can see from Highway 5--what's in that?

PB: Well, I think if they would let a man down over the side, they might see something, I don't know.

NC: Here is the observation lookout, right? Is this the construction--and it was under that that the lime kiln was.

PB: June 30th, 1936. Now you look for dates....

NC: I was ten years old! *I was alive by then....

PB: You look for dates--you've been asking about dates. They will all be in this book. And I have every book that goes right on through and I didn't mind, even in those days, that I would take off my so-and sos and go to work.

NC: Well that's what makes the difference between a viable boss and a boss who is a tyrant.

PB: I used to have one little trick down there that the old timers would trick the new ones into doing. That is, they would want to load a truck in 30 minutes and that truck had to be loaded out in 15 minutes. So when I would get down there I would say, "These are going to be out in 15 minutes". The men would complain, "Ah, yeah, that's all right, you can go and rest, but we are going to do this". [Then] I would say to set up again, give that man a square point shovel, give this man a square point shovel over here, bring that shovel of mine, the scoop shovel. Then I'd take the scoop shovel and say, "All you have to do is throw shovel for shovel with me," and I'd load out four, five, six trucks until they would get down and say, "You win!". And I'd say, "I don't expect you to load as fast as I do, but I don't expect you to sit on your "kester" and do nothing".

Here is one where they established the flagpole. Now the date on that should be on there somewhere. Anyway, I got the Mormon Battalion to put their flag up there, but somebody got it to take it away--it's gone.

NC: Is it down in Old Town now?

PB: I don't know. There are pictures of everything and there are descriptions, so-forth and so-on, of roads. You know where the observation platform is that looks down onto.... There is one little story there that they should fit into this very nicely. You see, there are a lot of people who like or dislike one man or another and this particular man didn't like Marston at all. But he did like me and he raised

a fuss about all of a sudden the grass area in his lot down there of about two acres—you couldn't get to it. When he came by the next time I [had] built two roads, one to the top of his place and one to the bottom of his place and I just forgot about it. He liked that so much that he took [the deed to his property]—when he went to the hospital and died. He wouldn't give it to Marston; he gave it to the Sisters of Mercy with the understanding that they would do something that he wanted done and they gave it to me. So I actually owned the two acres in there, and I gave it to Mr. Marston for the Park.

And Pete Lucia, who was an arthritic in real bad shape—when he got up in the morning his hands were closed up and his daughter would put the canes inside, you know, and then he would just hobble down to the Park. It took him 35—45 minutes to go two blocks. So one day I said, "Pete, why don't you get rid of that arthritis?". And he said, "Oh, my, you can't do that!" Well, the guy upstairs does an awful lot of things and I said, "Pete, if you will do what I tell you for 15 days and it don't work, forget it". But, I said, "If you do what I tell you for 15 days and you can even move your fingers like this", and I moved them down a little bit, "you'll know you are on the right road." But, I said, "You've got to do it this way". Well, I showed him what to do and he ended up with no arthritis and he walked just like this and he went all over town telling that Broell is a better doctor than all the others. Then here come two policemen, saying, "The doctors have complained that you are practicing medicine". And I said, "No, I am not," and they said, "Well, you are and now you tell us about it." And I said, "Two of you standing here and you want me to tell you all about it!" The other boy said, "Joe, you take a walk down the highway—I've been supporting my mother-in-law for years and she can't even get out of the rocker. Now you take a walk." So I showed him how and he went and in less than three months he came back and said, "My mother-in-law is getting up out of the wheelchair and she said she knows she is on the right road so she will get to where she can walk up and down the street like people."

Pete wouldn't sell Marston the deed to Congress Hall—the deed to Congress Hall is in that red shed out there where Pete came to me and said, "Percy, I want to sell Congress Hall to you. Don't tell me what you are going to do with it." I said, "You'll just get mad at me, Pete, for what I do." He said, "I'll never get mad at you, I'll just sell it to you." So he gave me the deed and I deeded it to Marston. That is how it got developed. But things like that would come about.

NC: That's an interesting picture—where's that taken from?

PB: From the air. I think I came down over the hill [flying] and

took the picture. This is Canãda Diablo and right in here is the two acres of ground that this gentleman gave me.

NC: You mentioned to me about the top soil being taken from the river bottom--the silt from the river bottom, and that is the present river bottom....?

PB: And don't forget, it is alluvial soil. I don't think that anybody--and I want you to know that every dollar that went in to buy any of this came out of my pocket. I only had one time in my life that George Marston ever half-way questioned me----you are running out....

NC: I'll have to stop now.

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