Since 1954 the Oral History Center of the Bancroft Library, formerly the Regional Oral History Office, has been interviewing leading participants in or well-placed witnesses to major events in the development of Northern California, the West, and the nation. Oral History is a method of collecting historical information through tape-recorded interviews between a narrator with firsthand knowledge of historically significant events and a well-informed interviewer, with the goal of preserving substantive additions to the historical record. The tape recording is transcribed, lightly edited for continuity and clarity, and reviewed by the interviewee. The corrected manuscript is bound with photographs and illustrative materials and placed in The Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley, and in other research collections for scholarly use. Because it is primary material, oral history is not intended to present the final, verified, or complete narrative of events. It is a spoken account, offered by the interviewee in response to questioning, and as such it is reflective, partisan, deeply involved, and irreplaceable.

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Paul Banke is a longtime cattle rancher who was born and raised in Livermore, California. Banke was born in 1949 into a family of ranchers. He earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Agriculture Systems Management with a minor in Business from Cal Poly at San Luis Obispo before taking over the family business. In this interview, Banke discusses his family, early life, education, learning how to ranch, studying and employing the science of conservation grazing on public and private land, his relationship with the East Bay Regional Park District, Livermore, and how he has seen the area change over time.
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The East Bay Regional Park District Oral History Project

The East Bay Regional Park District (EBRPD) is a special regional district that stretches across both Alameda and Contra Costa Counties. First established in 1934 by Alameda County voters, the EBRPD slowly expanded to Contra Costa in 1964 and has continued to grow and preserve the East Bay’s most scenic and historically significant parklands. The EBRPD’s core mission is to acquire, develop, and maintain diverse and interconnected parklands in order to provide the public with usable natural spaces and to preserve the region’s natural and cultural resources.

This oral history project—The East Bay Regional Park District Oral History Project—records and preserves the voices and experiences of formative, retired EBRPD field staff, individuals associated with land use of EBRPD parklands prior to district acquisition, and individuals who continue to use parklands for agricultural and ranching.

The Oral History Center (OHC) of The Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley first engaged in conversations with the EBRPD in the fall of 2016 about the possibility of restarting an oral history project on the parklands. The OHC, previously the Regional Oral History Office, had conducted interviews with EBRPD board members, supervisors and individuals historically associated with the parklands throughout the 1970s and early 2000s. After the completion of a successful pilot project in late 2016, the EBRPD and OHC began a more robust partnership in early 2017 that has resulted in an expansive collection of interviews.

The interviews in this collection reflect the diverse yet interconnected ecology of individuals and places that have helped shape and define the East Bay Regional Park District and East Bay local history.
Introduction by Jerry Kent

The Banke family story is about cattle ranching during a period of historic change

The Paul Banke Oral History begins with his emigrant grandfather from Denmark in 1908 and their first family ranch, followed by the Banke Families’ management of the 10,000 acre Patterson Ranch South of Livermore. The Banke connection to the Park District began after the State Department of Water condemned 5,000 acres of the Patterson Ranch for $165 an acre for a reservoir in the late 1960s. The Park District was fortunate to have Paul and Kathy Banke as grazing lessees on Del Valle parkland and as neighbors managing the remainder of the Patterson Ranch while the new Del Valle State and Regional Park was being developed in the late 1970s.

Paul’s oral history is a classic ranching story about being born in 1949 and growing up on a ranch seventy years ago surrounded by emigrant families, and then graduating from Cal Poly at San Luis Obispo with a Bachelor of Science degree in Agriculture Business Management and a minor in Business.

“Living in that time was a very interesting period, because the generation before my parents were all the immigrants. They were immigrant families like the Marcials and the Bettencourts, and the Gomezes who came from Portugal. Then you would have the Murrays, O’Connell’s, and the people that came from Ireland. Then there was a large Danish community of the Reinstein’s, Wiedemann’s, and ourselves. Each of these ethnic groups had their lodges. On Saturday and Sunday night, especially the older generation, would go to their lodge to meet with their kinsmen. There was the Portuguese lodge, the Dania Hall, and Sons of Italy. All these fraternal organizations were there to help support immigrants and their families as they transitioned into American lifestyles.

One of the greatest influences in my life, was to go through the ag program at Livermore High and get involved in FFA. We had an outstanding teacher named Jim Coelho, who you will come across in your history of the park district because he ran cattle on Mission Peak until he died. He was just a terrific teacher and role model who encouraged me to go to college when I was a kid in high school. The other high school counselors sort of assumed that since you were a ranch kid, you weren't college material. That was sort of the SOP of the day. I surprised everybody and did okay on the SAT test and was admitted to Cal Poly at San Luis Obispo.”

Paul Banke and the evolving science of conservation grazing on public and private ranchlands

Paul describes how modern conservation cattle grazing began with Dr. Robert R. Root on the 10,000 acre Patterson Ranch above Livermore, and practiced today by Jim Coelho, Paul Banke, Tim Koopmann, and many other prominent cattle ranching families owning land or leasing land in the East Bay and Northern sections of the Diablo Range.

“Through the University of California and our Cattlemen's Association, there's a lot that's been done in terms of research. I'm talking about scientific, peer reviewed
research about grazing programs, about what happens to the land when you take cattle off the land in terms of grass plant species and other native forbs and flora. If you remove livestock and all grazing, it basically converts from a grassland into a shrub land and becomes even more dangerous in terms of fire. We live in a very highly populated area with park use that has just grown phenomenally in the last ten years. The park district needs to maintain a group of people (grazing lessees) who are practical about what happens on ranches and have the know-how to deal with challenging land management situations.”

Paul and Kathy Banke, a Unique Power Ranching Family

Paul also described the role of Kathy Banke on the ranch, while working full time as a lawyer in Oakland. When Kathy graduated from law school, she did a clerkship with a Federal district judge in Sacramento for a year and a half, and then was hired by Crosby, Heafey, Roach and May headquartered in Oakland.

“On the ranch, it was Kathy’s job to basically cook the meals for the crews that we had branding and weaning and that sort of stuff, and to watch over the yard and stuff when we were off and away. Of course she was working full-time. When our kids were first born, we had a nanny until they were six or seven because Kathy spent a lot of her time commuting back and forth to Oakland. To be a lawyer in that environment is a twelve-hour a day job for six days a week.

There were people urging the Park District to discontinue cattle grazing in the early eighties, right up until ’95 when a lawsuit was filed by the Center for Biological Diversity. They said the Banke ranch and the Park District are overgrazing and abusing the land on their leases, and made a bunch of really false claims as to what the facts were. Kathy and the attorney for the Park District and Ray Budzinski (EBRPD Grazing Program Manager) spent hours and hours and hours on that litigation. Well, it unfolded much like any litigation. The anti-grazing litigants made their claim to the judge and asked him for a ruling that kicks all the cattle off, along with some sort of an injunction. Basically, what it really came down to is Ray had done a really good job of documenting the science about how we and the Park District were handling grazing. Kathy and the other lawyer did a good job of preparing our case to go to the judge. So that very significant litigation about grazing was ruled in our and the Park District’s favor on a summary judgment in 1998.”

Patterson family farms in Fremont and cattle ranching in Livermore

The Patterson Family role in helping to establish Coyote Hills and Ardenwood regional parks is well known while their farming operations were being replaced by new subdivisions and urban development in the 1970s. Paul describes the less well known connection between the Patterson’s 6,000-acre farming operation in Fremont and their 10,000-acre cattle ranching operation in the Livermore hills and the adjacent 13,000 acres of Del Valle and Ohlone wilderness regional parklands.
“One of the things that was sort of really unique about the Patterson Ranch in the early days, was how Doc Root was managing the most completely integrated ranching and farming operation in the area. The Patterson family farmed in the Fremont and Niles area on about six-thousand acres. The Patterson’s and a lot of their neighbors grew sugar beets, and used the leftover beet pulp from the Niles Canyon sugar beet processing plant to feed livestock. The Patterson’s established a small feedlot for about a thousand or 1,500 cattle on their ranch each year. They would take the calves that were grown here on the ranch to the feedlot in Niles to finish them out. During the forties and fifties, they barged cattle across the Bay in groups of ten or fifteen to the livestock processing facilities that existed in south San Francisco where there was a demand for beef products.”

**Era of Trending Changes in Family Cattle Ranching in the Livermore Hills**

Paul’s interview also includes the story economics, drought years, and housing and industrial development that skyrocketed during the last part of the 20th century, and how that affected the East Bay region’s ranching culture and legacy.
Interview 1: January 16, 2018

01-00:00:04 Farrell: Okay, this is Shanna Farrell with Paul Banke on Tuesday, January 16, 2018, and this is an interview for the East Bay Regional Park District Oral History Project. Paul, can you start by telling me where and when you were born, and a little bit about your early life?

01-00:00:19 Banke: I was born at St. Paul's Hospital in Livermore, California, in 1949. Basically, I grew up on a ranch on the other side of Livermore, on the north side of Livermore, out past the end of North Livermore, that was owned by my grandparents, who emigrated here from Denmark in the early 1900s. That was sort of growing up in a very rural community, with the nearest neighbor probably being a mile away, but it was a real community in that one of my earliest memories is getting together with a bunch of the local kids of all ages, to have a softball game at the then abandoned Highland School. That was a fun thing and that was probably when I was about four or five.

01-00:01:08 Farrell: Can you tell me a little bit more about maybe some of your early memories from growing up on the ranch?

01-00:01:14 Banke: So basically, when I was a young child, Patterson Ranch was still being operated by the Pattersons, and their manager, Dr. Robert R. Root, known as Doc Root to all of us, was really kind of a legendary figure in the valley. He was in the first graduating class of the UC Davis Veterinary School, had been a semiprofessional baseball player, and was renowned as a horseman throughout California. He was a real legendary figure and he took a lot of young ranch people, including my dad, under his wing, and basically taught them a lot about horsemanship skills and livestock management. I remember coming up here from about the time I was five or six years old, and it was always a great treat for me to come with a crew and ride my little pony behind everybody, and help them gather cattle on the Patterson Ranch.

01-00:02:08 Farrell: Your grandparents had been ranchers. Were your parents also ranchers?

01-00:02:17 Banke: Yes. Basically, my grandfather bought and started the ranch and my dad took it over in his early twenties, and basically we had a cow-calf operation and a dryland farming operation out north of the valley.

01-00:02:31 Farrell: Can you tell me a little bit more about—for future listeners or people who might not be familiar—what those two things are?
Oh, okay. Dryland farming was basically growing wheat or oats, and usually with a dryland farming program of that period, it was sort of a three-year rotational program on the ground. You would basically plant the oat crop or the barley crop and harvest that, and sell it as grain the first year. In the second year, the ground would probably be grazed, the stubble from the crop will be grazed off by the cattle in the fall, and then it would be allowed to just grow back normally, in what they call the volunteer. That crop would be cut for hay that would be used to feed the livestock in the wintertime. That was sort of the combined operation and then the third year in the rotation, it was just grazed by livestock. This was a very common practice in that area, and in the fifties and into the sixties, in the Livermore Valley, there are a lot of small poultry operations, some pig farms, and in places in Contra Costa, both in Antioch and Oakley, there were feedlots where people fed livestock, cattle primarily. These were the local market sources for the grain, so basically our family, along with lots of other families, provided the grain for those feeding operations. That all began to change very rapidly in the sixties, as it became dis-economic to basically feed—for those type of operations, particularly in the poultry operations and the cattle feeding operations, who tended to basically relocate or successor operations moved to the valley, where there were larger supplies and cheaper supplies of grain and feed.

Were a lot of the operations at that point family run, were they smaller businesses?

Yes, most of the operations were family businesses. Our family had basically bought almost a section of land, as had basically probably a thousand families throughout the valley, and lots of them operated in very similar ways. In my grandmother and grandfather's time, you would basically describe that as subsistence agriculture. They basically had chickens and dairy cows and kind of sold products locally to people, but also subsisted largely on what they raised themselves. During my dad's tenure, the agricultural practices moved into more of a commercial realm, and rather than raise all the food on the ranch, although we still had chickens and so forth, we basically tried to make some money by marketing the grain and cattle products that we produced.

Was there a big market for that at that point?

Yes, there was a good market for that at that point. Actually, there were livestock markets where you could sell and or buy chickens, pigs, cattle and so forth, in places like Hayward and in Tracy and Stockton, and Brentwood. So, there were lots of local markets in the 1950s, that people used to basically sell their merchandise. Grain was basically—a lot of grain was sold directly to
the user and it was basically transported from harvest, directly to the site where it was going to be fed to the livestock.

01-00:06:01 Farrell: What were your grandparents' backgrounds? Were they also in farming in Denmark?

01-00:06:07 Banke: Basically, my grandfather's family was in farming in Denmark, on the island of Fyn, and he emigrated here about 1908, when there first started to be rumblings of issues with Germany and Denmark, and my grandmother followed him in the mid-nineteens, I think about 1915 or '16. Her family, they were fishermen, and his family were farmers.

01-00:06:33 Farrell: Okay. And what were their names?

01-00:06:35 Banke: Peter and Amalia Banke.

01-00:06:38 Farrell: What was the name of their ranch?

01-00:06:41 Banke: Well, it was basically called the Banke Ranch. Originally, it was part of the Hoyland Ranch, which is a township that you can still find on the map, in north of Livermore.

01-00:06:51 Farrell: Did your parents or your father openly embrace being a rancher? Was that something that you felt like he wanted to do?

01-00:06:58 Banke: Yes, that was basically, he really enjoyed ranching, and livestock in particular. Yeah.

01-00:07:02 Farrell: Oh, the livestock that you had on the farm, that was cattle?

01-00:07:08 Banke: Yes. We basically ran cows and calves, and they were beef cattle primarily.

01-00:07:13 Farrell: Okay, okay. Any other livestock or just the…?

01-00:07:07 Banke: Horses and we always had a few chickens around and stuff. Yeah.

01-00:07:20 Farrell: You had mentioned Dr. Root was sort of a mentor to your father, especially with the horsemanship.
The horsemanship and of course, being a veterinarian, with the management of livestock as well. He was probably one of the most educated and experienced people in the area and was a very well respected person. He originally came to Livermore and opened a small veterinary practice, and I don't know when that was, but I would guess that would be probably some time in the late 1930s. Then, I think he only did that for a year or two, before he was hired to manage the Patterson Ranch, by the Pattersons. At that point in time, the Patterson Ranch was about ten-thousand acres and ran about 600 mother cows, and probably about a thousand calves that they held over.

Okay. Do you have a sense of the impact or the influence the doctor had on your father in his career?

Yeah, I think Dr. Root basically really taught my dad a lot about horsemanship and how to deal with cattle, with horses, and was also a real mentor in terms of disease management, vaccination programs and basically overall health programs, for both the horses and the cattle. I think that was a big influence. Doc was real active in the local Rodeo Association and the local Cattlemen's Association, and then he got my dad involved in both of those organizations. Doc was an arena director for the rodeo for years and years, and when he basically, after he retired from that, my dad took over for him, and did that for years and years.

Okay. You had mentioned sort of disease prevention and control with cattle and horses. Is there anything that's particular in this area that was—like any diseases or things that were happening in this area, in particular with cattle and horses?

Well, I think that there's all kind of things that happened in the forties and fifties, from hoof-and-mouth disease in the thirties, right on into some serious brucellosis outbreaks in the 1940s, in the overall valley area where there were still some dairies. During Doc Root's tenure, vaccines were developed for brucellosis, and he was one of the first to basically use those vaccines. He was also, because of his veterinary experience and skill, able to basically identify that we had leptospirosis within our cattle and needed to vaccinate for that, a disease that causes cows to abort, and another one called vibriosis, also a disease that causes cattle to abort, was another disease that, through his pathological efforts basically, they were able to identify what existed in the cattle here. So that basically sort of meant that to have better calving percentages and survival rates on the livestock, ranchers in this area needed to vaccinate for those diseases, and so that was kind of a real revelation, I would say, in the 1950s, and some groundbreaking work that he and the people at UC Davis did.
Farrell: Can you tell me your father's name and what his role was when he started working at the Patterson Ranch?

Banke: My dad's name was Peter Banke Jr., and basically, when he first started coming to the Patterson Ranch, he really didn't work here. They just all volunteered, a bunch of the local ranch kids, would volunteer to come and help Doc work the cattle. That was always a big deal, long hard days, but also, by watching Doc and learning how he handled the cattle and prepared and vaccinated them and so forth, they all learned a lot. Of course, Doc was friends with several other prominent stockmen, including Dale Carithers, who basically ran the Mission Herford Ranch over in Sunol, and so lots of genetic improvements and so forth were basically learned, and that knowledge was acquired pretty much from hand-to-mouth, if you will, among the local ranchers, and this is where, I think Doc Root was such a significant figure.

Farrell: Can you tell me what your mother's name is, or was, and a little bit about your early memories of her?

Banke: My mother's name is Mary E., Mary Elizabeth Banke, and she's actually still alive today. She was born and raised in Livermore as well, and her family was basically Portuguese and Irish and English, and she and her sisters grew up in downtown Livermore, on what's now 4th Street, and her father owned the Ford garage, which was in a building that's right next to the old Bank of Italy in downtown Livermore is still there. He unfortunately died of appendicitis at about twenty-seven. My mother and her sister were basically raised by their working mother and they had a pretty tight lifestyle, living in Livermore.

Farrell: Did your mother enjoy living on a ranch and being part of that culture, lifestyle?

Banke: Yes and no. I think that she enjoyed being part of the culture and lifestyle, because she is a very friendly person and like basically meeting with other people, but she wasn't a natural ranch person. She was very delighted when Kathy and I moved onto the ranch in 1979, bought into the business, and provided my parents with the money to buy a house in town.

Farrell: Did she have a role on the ranch when you were growing up?

Banke: She was basically, for the most part, when I was very young, she was a stay at home mom. There were four of us. I have two sisters and a brother, and so she was very busy basically taking care of all the miscellaneous things in the house and around the house at the ranch, and shuttling us kids back and forth
to school. After my youngest, my brother who is the youngest, went to high school, started going to high school, she basically resumed her career as a nurse, which she had been before she got married, and worked for about thirty years at the veteran's hospital right down at the bottom of the hill.

Farrell: Oh yeah, yeah. What are your sisters and your brother's name, what's your birth order?

Banke: Okay, so I'm the oldest and my sister Molly is three years younger than I am. She basically lives in Livermore, is retired from the Lawrence Lab, where she worked in their personnel department for a long time. My next one is Laura, and Laura is basically six years younger than I am, and she is also retired. She worked, for about thirty-five years, for Allstate Insurance, as an adjustor.

Farrell: How about your brother?

Banke: My brother John, he and his wife recently bought a flower shop, sort of as an added location, in Sonora, where they moved to about four years ago.

Farrell: Okay. Growing up, you had mentioned that you took great joy in riding on your pony behind your dad and Dr. Root. Can you tell me a little bit about your early memories of engaging with the ranch and starting to ride, and starting to learn about what being a rancher meant?

Banke: Well, I think that of course your earliest memories are of the brandings, because that was the fun time, where it was fun to go. Us little kids, our job would be to carry the medicine jar that had the stuff you put on the animals after they were dehorned or doctored, and that was your job, and you scurried around behind the other guys and thought you were important. That was always fun, and so those are probably some of the earliest memories. Than, as I got a little older and started riding on a horse myself, I came to realize just how steep and rugged some of this country is. It can actually be pretty scary if you're a young guy, some of these steep hills, and you sort of get lost.

One of the things that was sort of really unique about the Patterson Ranch in the early days, when Doc Root was managing it, they really had probably the most completely integrated ranching and farming operation of anybody in the area. The Patterson family farmed in the Fremont and Niles area, about six-thousand acres. As time went on, the ground kept going into more valuable crops. So basically in the thirties and forties, they raised a lot of maize and barley and wheat, and then that gradually changed and they started growing tomatoes and sugar beets, and even more valuable crops were flowers. By my earliest memories, probably about the 1960s, there were probably thousands
of acres of flowers and roses growing down on the Patterson Ranch, that had moved out of grains, into the more valuable, if you will, crops.

What the Pattersons had done, because they and a lot of their neighbors grew sugar beets, so basically there was a sugar beet factory, if you will, or a processing center, right there in Niles. The leftover from the sugar beet processing, called beet pulp, is a great commodity to feed livestock, and so the Pattersons, on their ranch, basically established a small feedlot, probably about a thousand, 1,500 head, and they would basically take the calves that were grown here on this ranch, and take them to the feedlot in Niles and finish them out. At that time, they had a barge that went across the bay and certainly in the fifties and the forties, those cattle would be barged across in groups of ten and fifteen, to the livestock processing facilities that existed in south San Francisco at that time.

01-00:17:30 Farrell: Oh, right, yeah, that was a big industry there.

01-00:17:34 Banke: If you've read anything about the Miller and Lux empire and industry, you can appreciate the history there.

01-00:17:40 Farrell: Yeah. You said that they had a small size feedlot. What was a normal size feedlot at that point here?

01-00:17:48 Banke: Well, I think the larger feedlots were probably in Brentwood and Antioch, and they were probably approaching four to five thousand head.

01-00:17:56 Farrell: Okay, okay, so it was roughly a little bit less than half the size?

01-00:18:00 Banke: Right.

01-00:18:02 Farrell: You had mentioned, some of your earliest memories were branding. How did that process work when you were younger?

01-00:18:10 Banke: Well basically, it's not that much different than it is today, in that the cattle would all be gathered by horseback. There were three sort of different scenarios where cattle were branded on this ranch. In the upper areas where we are now, a group of eight or ten guys would go out, and you would gather cattle into a small holding area, and then the calves would be roped and dragged out of the herd, where they could be knocked down, held by the two horses, and basically vaccinated and branded, and then returned back to the herd. In the more sophisticated corrals, which were at the bottom of what's now Lake Del Valle, then they would bring the cattle in and they would sort
of the cows from the calves, horseback, which is something that you almost have to see, to understand the skill of the horses and the horsemanship required of the people who regularly do that on a successful and proper way, I guess you would say. That basically was always a fun event and oftentimes, Doc would have some very prestigious horsemen and people that he competed against, in some of the horse showing events that come up. It was sort of like you were there and there was all this livestock and horsemanship royalty there at the same time. It was interesting, it was a lot of pressure.

One of the memories I'll never forget, I think I was thirteen. I had gotten a new horse that my dad had trained, and Doc was teaching me how to work. One of the things that they would do is line everybody up on the horses, in a big line across the corral, one after another, and your job was to go into this group of cows and pick out the dry cows, which were the cows that don't have calves. Then you bring them out, work them by the—get them by themselves, and then you had to push them past this line of horses, where they would go into another pen. This one particular day, Doc's brother in-law, who was basically a horse trainer, and his sister, brought a bunch of their students, they were the Browns out of Walnut Creek, and of course their students were all these gals between thirteen and sixteen, and here I am, the thirteen year-old guy, and Doc sends me out there to sort off some of these cows. My little horse was much better than I was, because she dodged the cow, but I didn't make it, and I landed flat on my face in front of all the girls. I didn't live that down for a long time. [They laugh.]
really even know where dad got this mare from, but he broke her himself and I started riding her when she was about five.

Farrell: There was a strong ranching community here during that period of time. Do you have any early memories of other ranchers around that maybe your parents or grandparents or the Pattersons were close with and that were kind of part of your network?

Banke: Oh yeah, so there's lots of local families around that you know, we would help them and they would help us. The Sachaus, our neighbors down here, basically let's see, the Vieira families and some of the Moys. I have to think of all these names of people. The Holmes family was also a neighbor of this ranch around, and Murrays, and lots of different families; the Rasmussen families and Wiedemann families. There's still a few us still around, yeah.

Farrell: How would you help each other out?

Banke: Well basically, if someone—on ranch and farm life, there would be various ways you do that. One of the things that you would do is if the cattle needed to be worked or processed, we'd all go help one another do that. We might be at the Wiedemanns on Thursday and over at the Murrays on Saturday and Sunday. There's periods, like in the fall and in the summer, in May and June, when you're weaning calves, where everybody would help each other out. Help them gather them, get them loaded on the trucks for wherever they were going and all that sort of stuff. Then, in the farming operation, there were also times when people helped one another. In those days, a lot of the stubble was burned off, so we would organize—neighboring ranches would basically do control burns all at the same time and we'd all be there, and that gave us enough people so that you could really patrol it and make sure you only burned what you waned to burn, and not everything. Those are the type of things that people commonly helped each other about.

Living in that time was a very interesting period, because probably the generation before my parents were all the immigrants. This were the immigrant families like the Marciels and the Bettencourts, and the Gomezes who came from Portugal. Then you would have the Murrays and the O'Connells, and the people that came from Ireland. Then there was a large Danish community, the Reinsteins and Wiedemanns, and ourselves, and other people in the valley. Each of these ethnic groups had their little lodges, and so on Saturday and Sunday night, especially the older generation, they would go and meet with their kinsmen, if you will, from the various countries. So there was the Portuguese lodge and the Dania Hall and Sons of Italy, and all these little fraternal organization that basically help support the immigrants who came in, and their families transitioned into American lifestyles.
Farrell: Do you have any memories of going to the Danish lodge when you were growing up?

Banke: Oh yeah, lots of them.

Farrell: Can you tell me a little bit about that?

Banke: Well, the big thing that we kids always went to was the Christmas party at the Dania lodge, and the Dania lodge, at that time was one of the few two-story buildings in Livermore, and the upper story was basically devoted to what you would sort of call a multipurpose room, but really it was they had a kitchen and a dancefloor, and that was the entertainment. The local people would come and play with an accordion and other instruments, and piano, and everyone would dance all the folk dances and some of the modern dances. Of course, at the Christmas party, they had someone play Santa Claus and for little kids, that was really exciting.

Farrell: Were you able, at that point, to meet a lot of other kids your age that were part of the various ranching families?

Banke: Yes. That's where you met a lot of the kids and especially before school. It would be interesting in that in a group like that, there might be two or three of us at the same age, but you know there might be thirty kids between two and fifteen, but you know usually only a couple or three that were your age, and oftentimes they lived relatively far away in those days, across the valley. It wasn't like today, where you zip across the valley in your car and think nothing of it. In those days, you lived in the country and things were still pretty remote.

Farrell: Did you ever go to town to go grocery shopping and that kind of thing?

Banke: Yes, we went to town. We all went to St. Michael School, and so my mom would have to bring us into school every morning, or actually she carpooled for a while, with a couple other moms; one would bring us in and one would pick us up. We would often stop at the grocery store on the way home after school and doing all that sort of stuff. When I was going to grammar school, there was one stoplight at the flagpole in Livermore and one stop sign out at Portala Avenue. What is now the Donut Wheel, on First and L Street, was the Purity Market, and that was the local shopping area. It wasn't until I was in high school, that we actually finally got a Lucky's.
Farrell: When you were going to school, were there a lot of other kids from ranching families that were also going to St. Michael's?

Banke: I would say a lot of them. I would say probably a third of the population of St. Michael's school was made up of ranching families in the area.

Farrell: Okay, okay. That probably felt like there was a sense of community and belonging, in school and it wasn't…?

Banke: Yes and no. While you were at St. Michael's, you had a community. What was difficult was transferring from grammar school to high school, where all of a sudden, I went to Livermore High School and I went in the year that they basically created the first class for Granada High School. Our St. Michael's class basically got divided in half, where half of us went to Livermore and half of us went to Granada. That didn't physically happen until we were sophomores and they finished the school, but that was sort of the way the classes were set up. Then you went from a school where we had probably forty students in our graduating class, to a high school where I think our class was like 350.

Farrell: Oh, wow.

Banke: So that was a big change.

Farrell: Yeah, and probably a lot less ranching families there as well.

Banke: We were there; it was just hard to run into each other. Probably, the thing that I enjoyed most and probably was one of the greatest influences in my life, was to basically go through the ag program they had at Livermore and get involved in FFA. Basically, we had an outstanding teacher named Jim Coelho, who you should come across in your history of the park district, because he ran cattle on the park until he died. He was just a terrific teacher and role model as a person to follow. He basically encouraged me to go to college, and when I first went to the high school, the high school counselors sort of assumed that since you were a ranch kid, you weren't college material. That was sort of the SOP of the day. I sort of surprised everybody and did okay on the SAT test and was admitted to Cal Poly.

Farrell: What were some of the things that you learned from him?
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Banke: Well basically, he was a great teacher of leadership skills and basically a very principled person. He trained us, our little class was the state championship Parliamentary Procedure Team, and he encouraged me to develop as a public speaker, and I went on to win the state FFA public speaking contest. That kind of encouragement allowed me and so many others like me, to develop the self-confidence to do more than just go back to the ranch.

Farrell: Can you tell me a little bit about what the ag program was like at Livermore then?

Banke: Well, the agricultural program at Livermore was a four-year program and basically, you learned everything from basic animal husbandry, by species type; beef, sheep, swine, and even some goats. Usually, each species would be a six-week course. I later came to realize, after I went to Cal Poly, that Jim Coelho was teaching us right out of his college notes. Basically, we were getting college classes in animal husbandry, and some ag business management, right there in high school, or at least what you would call a survey of those courses, and so it was very interesting.

We also had serious coursework, another six-week or semester unit would be on crop production. We did things like went home and brought soil samples home and tested them in the lab, right there at the university, or at the high school, and that was pretty unusual for that day and age, for those types of things to be done. Then, once the soil samples were in, we would have to write a little paper, recommending what type of fertilizer and how much to put on it, and you needed to learn, or be able to look up those formulas. That's kind of the things that we did in ag class.

Farrell: Do you still use some of the things that you learned in those classes today?

Banke: Absolutely.

Farrell: What percentage of people at Livermore were enrolled in the ag program?

Banke: I think there was probably about thirty or thirty-five kids in each year.

Farrell: Okay. That's kind of small.

Banke: Basically ninety to a hundred kids every year.
Yeah. At what age were you when you joined Future Farmers of America, or FFA?

I would have been like fourteen, thirteen or fourteen.

And what were some of the things that you were doing in FFA?

Basically, a large part of the FFA is to have what they call projects. You could have livestock projects, where we would always—and I had been doing this in 4-H, before I went to FFA. We would always fit and show and feed a steer or a lamb, to take to the fair. I did all of those, as well as a pig, when I was in the FFA program, and did that for multiple years. Another project was basically, you could grow a crop. My dad would give my little corner field that had three or four acres in it and said okay, when we're done farming, you can work this up and plant it, and it's all on you. You had to make a budget and pay rent, and do all that stuff. Jim basically provided the templates and the organization for all of that.

What are some of the things that you learned from being part of FFA, that you took with you later on in life?

Well I think that you learned the physical ability to basically farm and raise livestock, and interact with them and manage them in a responsible way. Of course, what you really learn in all that, especially if you're in animal agriculture, is you learn that you have to be responsible for what you take on. You can't not feed them for a day or two because that doesn't work out too well. If you're trying to compete and do well, you have to basically be out there and feed those steers or sheep or pigs, twice a day every day, relatively the same period of time. For a young person to develop that kind of self-discipline is very important.

Did you have any hobbies or interests outside of farming and agriculture when you were in grammar or high school?

I used to play baseball and basketball.

Okay. Was that a nice little outlet for a lot of what you were doing?

Well, actually it was kind of frustrating, because at that point in time, especially before I got a drivers license, I would have to miss too many
practices because my parents just couldn't, you know make it to pick me up and make that happen. Especially in my early years, it really was a limiting thing, for a person to live in the country, especially as far out in the country as we did.

01-00:34:31
Farrell: How many miles from school were you?

01-00:34:33
Banke: We were about seven miles from school.

01-00:34:37
Farrell: Okay. Can you tell me a little bit about your decision to go to Cal Poly and what you were studying?

01-00:34:43
Banke: Basically, thanks to Jim Coelho's encouragement, I went to Cal Poly. One of the things that we did in FFA every year was FFA has what they—I'm blanking on the word for what they call it. It's basically all the FFA chapters or classes, from around the state, come to what they call a field day, and they do a field day every year at Davis, and they do a field day every year at Cal Poly, and you would be on teams. For instance, one of the teams we were on was our Parliamentary Procedure Team, which would compete in both of those things. The other thing that Jim organized, because we had two Bankhead brothers in our classes who were natural mechanical geniuses, we were in the Farm Power and Equipment Team, and I was on that team. Then we would also have livestock judging teams. Your group, from your school, your team of four or five guys would compete with everybody else from around the state.

I had an opportunity, all four years I was at Cal Poly, to go to the campus of Davis and spend—usually that was an overnight deal, where you went and you did some things on Friday afternoon and you spent Friday night at a hotel or someplace there and came back Saturday morning for the rest of the field day, that would probably last until five or six o'clock at night. I had a chance to get a feel for both campuses, and Cal Poly was a campus that I really enjoyed and an area I really enjoyed, so that's where I decided to try.

01-00:36:18
Farrell: What were you studying?

01-00:36:19
Banke: I went in as an Agriculture Business Management major.

01-00:36:23
Farrell: Okay. Did you stay with that?

01-00:36:25
Banke: Yes I did. I basically changed concentrations. When I first went in, I thought I wanted to be an ag teacher like Jim Coelho, but then I got more interested in
the business and economic side of it, and so I actually got a minor in business from the Business Department at Cal Poly, as well as my BS from Ag Business Management.

Farrell:

What were some of your career aspirations at that point?

Banke:

Basically at that point—one of the things about being a ranch kid, having gone to high school, is you really feel limited by being a ranch kid. Basically I had concluded that I was never going to come back and be involved in agriculture again, when I graduated from high school. I liked ag, and so that's why I was an ag business major and I saw myself working for somebody like International Harvester, or one of the seed companies. And what I did do, is I went to work at a school for Wells Fargo Bank.

Farrell:

Oh, okay. What were you doing for Wells Fargo?

Banke:

Well basically, the first year I was a trainee, and what my ambition to do at Wells Fargo was to become an agricultural lending officer. Unfortunately, about a year into my tenure at Wells Fargo, this would have been in the early seventies, agriculture at that time, particularly in the central valley, was very unprofitable, and there were a lot of firms that basically were right at the edge of going bankrupt, or did. The management, the upper management at Wells Fargo, decided that there was too much risk out there in agriculture, and they wanted to decrease their agricultural portfolio by at least 30 percent. That basically meant that there was no place for any young guys to come up, at least not for ten or so years. After I sort of figured that out and got tired of opening checking accounts all day, a little boring, I had an opportunity to go to work for the California Cattlemen's Association in Sacramento, which I did. My wife and I had just been married about a year, when I did that, and I worked there for about three and a half, four years.

Farrell:

What were you doing for the Cattlemen?

Banke:

I was their Director of Research and Communications, so I basically worked on preparing articles for their monthly magazine and their weekly newsletter. I also did a small amount of lobbying in the legislature.

Farrell:

Did you enjoy that?

Banke:

I did. One of the things that I was involved in, basically sort of an initiative that I started, was basically holding workshops for members of the local
Cattlemen's Association, to explain to them and give them tips on how to work with their local representatives and legislators.

Farrell: What were some of the things that you were advocating for, or the Cattlemen's Association was advocating for at that point?

Banke: At that point in time, imports were a real issue. The imports would come in from other countries in spasms, and so the livestock market would go way down when a whole bunch of imported meat came in, and then come back up again, and then go back down again, because of the variation in flow. One of the things I worked on was the Import Act of 1964, which was revised in 1974, and it basically sort of negotiated some tariffs among various countries and provided for a supply situation that was key to local production. When the local production would go down, more imports would be allowed in, and when local production went up, less imports would be in. It tried to stabilize, to some degree, the price of meat for consumers, and the price that we as producers would receive.

Farrell: Yeah. Were you thinking that you would stay there for a while or that you wanted to grow with the Cattlemen's Association?

Banke: Yes I was. One of the other things, because I was at Cal Poly and I was student body president at Cal Poly, I got to know Ronald Reagan when he as governor, as a student, and then when I went back to work for the Cattlemen's Association, I kind of would see him again. He remembered me. He was a remarkable individual, one of those guys who could meet you once or twice and two years later remember your name, just unreal.

Farrell: What was it like working with him?

Banke: I didn't actually work with him per se much, but with people in his administration. He just had a very decent way about him, and I think if you talk to people who were on the other side of the aisle, completely different philosophical viewpoint, who actually worked with Reagan, they would all tell you he was a really nice guy, and that's just what he was. He was also, he was one of those people who could basically say this is what I think and this is what I want to do, but if you don't want to do that, I respect that. That's the type of leadership that obviously, we're missing today.

Farrell: What were some of the things that you were working on with his administration at that point?
Well, the two biggest things that we worked on at that point in time was basically a series of legislative initiatives that never actually were codified, that were designed to basically protect agricultural land, and do that through some sort of a state zoning program. Of course, all the farmers and ranchers were very apprehensive about that and not too supportive of it, so basically, I was in the role of sort of resisting that legislation. The other thing that I was involved in peripherally, because this was such a big deal, was the creation of the California Environmental Quality Act.

I wrote some papers and one of the things that I predicted was that all the packing plants in California would gradually disappear, which they have, and livestock feeding operations were problematic under that legislation and they are today.

Were those white papers?

Probably, yeah.

Did you have to give recommendations for how to address those issues, in those papers?

Well, I mean sort of. My job was to basically present all the facts and the analysis of the proposed legislation. And then, in an association, you would run that by the officers and the members and the board of directors. We would always have an annual convention and one of my big jobs—we had like twelve committees and my job was to prepare the agendas and the background material for all of those committees, on everything from taxation to environmental regulations, to animal health stuff, to livestock identification, beef promotion, all those things. I was involved in all that.

This is in the 1960s?

This would be in the early 1970s.

Early 1970s, okay.

Seventy-four through ’78, I think.
Okay. You were talking about environmental regulation. This is part of the environmental decade, which was 1969 to 1980, where the Clean Water Act, the Clean Air Act.

All this.

All the federal regulations were being passed. How did that impact your work?

Well, it kept me busy. [Laughs.] California was, of course, not contented to just implement what was passed nationally. They always had to do something more, and so in addition to the national acts, all those, we have the California Environmental Quality Act, the Air Resources Board, and all that stuff. You tried to basically look at the legislation that was written and imagine how it was going to be interpreted on down the line, trying to spot—you know, your real job was to basically sort of inform legislators as to what the impact might be. It was an interesting time, because there was a lot of environmentalism that was anti-agriculture and really didn't understand the cattle business. That was a real era of friction and animosity amongst the various groups.

How did you negotiate that?

Basically, you had to be a professional and be as professional as you could be, and try and not drop into the gutter with the people who did that on both sides of the question.

Did you find that a lot of the ranching families that you had grown up with were involved in this kind of thing, that were aware of what was going on politically, with regulation and that kind of thing?

I think at the time that those things were created, they had absolutely no idea what was going on.

Did you see that change over time? Did you see ranchers become more involved?

Yes, that certainly happened over time, but it really didn't happen in a big way until about 2000.

Oh, interesting, okay. What was the reason that that started to change?
I think it had to do with the generational change and in the leadership of the ranch families primarily.

Okay, so we'll come back to that. One thing I should ask about is what were some of the biggest differences between living in Livermore versus Sacramento?

Well, basically in Livermore, I lived on the ranch. In Sacramento, I lived in a city for the first time, although I had been in San Luis Obispo. City to city, at that point in time, I think San Luis Obispo had a population of about 25,000, so it's still a pretty small town. I enjoyed, after I got settled in Sacramento, both when I worked for the bank and when I worked for the Cattlemen's Association, I always enjoyed when dad would call up and say, "Is there any chance you could help me this weekend?" That was fun, and that's when I sort of began to realize that I missed all this stuff.

Can you tell me a little bit more about that? What were you missing?

Well, I basically missed being on a horse, being outside. Especially with the bank, you would get some satisfaction from making a person a loan to buy a new house or something like that. There wasn't much satisfaction in trying to collect from the people who are late on their payments. In the legislature, while you could feel like you made an impact on some people, some of the legislators there and particularly on some of the bureaucrats, it was hard to really identify what impact you were making. So you could go out and work with a bunch of cattle and vaccinate them, and treat them for lice and grubs and ticks, and getting rid of all that and you know, you actually got something done so that was nice.

Yeah it was more, I think probably immediate too. You could see that and you could feel that.

Exactly, right. Instant gratification, there you go.

You came back in 1979. Can you tell me a little bit about your transition, from working in the legislature to working at the Patterson Ranch.

Okay. Basically, in-between the time I first went and worked with the Cattlemen's Association, in about 1978, when Jerry Brown was elected governor, a bunch of the people who were in Ronald Reagan's administration needed jobs. Basically, the Cattlemen's Association hired this guy who had
been working for Governor Reagan, who was a good friend of the guy, Bill Steiger, who was the executive vice president of the association at that time. I didn't really realize this until about a couple of years later, but about that time, I started getting feelers from other cattle industry associations looking to hire somebody to manage their association, and I basically took a job to manage the Colorado Cattle Feeders Association out of Denver, so we moved to Denver.

We were there for a little over two years. At that point in time, my wife was going to law school and transferred from Davis to Boulder, and after the first winter she said, "When I graduate from law school, we're going to move back to California." So, sure enough, when she graduated from law school she says well, I'm headed back to take the California bar review class and you can come when you want to. That's what we did, we basically moved back, and as fate sort of happens to you at times, about the time she was finishing law school, my dad had a heart attack. Basically I came back and sort of kind of took over things for about three weeks. He had had a hired man that was good but you know, I needed to do some things. He was fortunate in that he had a very mild heart attack and was able to kind of be up and around in about a month, so that part was good, but while I was here, I realized how much I enjoyed it.

I had been basically putting word out among some of the trade associations and stuff in Sacramento, and was actually offered a job to manage the Small Timber Owner's Association and basically decided that no, I wanted to come back to the ranch. My mom was having a real hard time dealing with living on the ranch at that period of time because the kids were all gone now, and so she was sort of up here all by herself when she wasn't working and she really wanted to have a house in town. We had made some money kind of flipping houses in Denver, and then in Sacramento, before we went to Denver, so we had some money that we could basically come to the ranch and buy an interest in the livestock and farming operation, and then that provided my parents with the money to basically buy a house in town.

When you came back, what sort of roles and responsibilities did you assume?

Well basically, at that point in time, we were running this operation here, and my dad and my brother were also doing the farming and livestock operation in the north side of town. So basically, I sort of got—Kathy and I moved into this house, which had been vacant for about three months, and spent about the first six months we were here cleaning up the yard and the house and all that stuff, as well as trying to deal with all the cattle situation. My job was to
basically monitor and spot any problems that were going on with the livestock. We had to build a whole new set of corrals down at Del Valle Park, and so that was one of the things that we did in 1980. In addition to that, we did a lot of what I would call ranch infrastructure projects, basically replacing wooden springs with culverts and concrete pipes, and concrete water troughs as opposed to the leaking old wood ones, and that sort of stuff.

**Farrell:** Were you replacing that because of wear and tear, or because of the evolution of infrastructure?

**Banke:** Both, I would say. Part of it is the evolution of the infrastructure, although there's another revolution of infrastructure that came about in 2000 that we'll have to talk about. Essentially, replacing them and trying to improve the grazing situation for the livestock, so that they did a better job utilizing the land, and also mitigate the problems with waterholes. When they originally set up these ranches in the area, especially in these hills lands, most of the water, naturally occurring water, is in the gullies and the canyons and so forth, and so the watering systems were basically all, for the most part gravity fed, and located right in the drainages in the water systems. That could get pretty ugly when a mass of cattle on a summer day came in there and churned up the mud and all that sort of stuff. That could be detrimental to the livestock as well, because it promoted the growth of certain parasites, like flies and ticks and things like that, and also, because their feet were in mud all the time, they could get this bacterial infection called hoof rot, which would basically make them very lame and not able to go out and forage and that sort of thing. Those are some of the reasons why we did what we did then.

**Farrell:** Can you tell me a little bit about what type of law your wife Kathy was studying.

**Banke:** She was basically, when she graduated from law school, she did a clerkship with a federal district judge in Sacramento for a year and a half, and then was hired by a firm called Crosby, Heafey, Roach and May, that primarily was headquartered out of Oakland, and it was probably one of the larger Bay Area law firms. She basically did commercial litigation for the most part, but what she actually did, after about her second year there, is she was recruited by their appellate department. They were one of the first law firms in this area to have a separate department to deal with appeals, and so that's what she did for all of her commercial career.

**Farrell:** Did she have a role on the ranch at all, or just sort of living here?
She certainly had a role. It was her job to basically cook the meals for the crews that we had branding and weaning, and that sort of stuff, like that, and watch over the yard and stuff when we were off and away. Of course she was working full-time, so. You know, when our kids were first born, we had a nanny until they were six or seven, and she spent a lot of her time commuting back and forth. To be a lawyer in that environment is a twelve-hour a day job for six days a week.

Does she have a background in ranching or anything?

No. None. She grew up in Carmichael, California. Her dad was a mechanical engineer and her mom was a schoolteacher.

Okay. Can you tell me, at that point in time, so this is in 1979, what the operation looked like here.

Basically, it looked pretty much like it does today, in that we run cows and calves, primarily on this side of the lake, and in the area of the other side of the lake, by the dam. And then back in the parklands, we were running stockers, and calves that had been weaned from their cows and grassed for another season. When we moved here in 1979, there was a lot of development of the park area at the end of the lake. I told you earlier that you know, I first met Tony Smith probably in 1969, and he was the "ranger" in charge of developing plans for, and the initial infrastructure for Del Valle Park. Have you had a chance to interview Tony?

Not yet, not yet.

Okay. I hope you will. He basically came to the park district, and I think he'd worked for either the BLM or the National Forest Service prior to that. He was just one of those guys who was very likeable and a great visionary in terms of how to develop resources. Basically, they were building the roads that are now the trails at Del Valle Park, when I came here, and we were designing fences. We located a corral that we eventually had to relocate and built, and so we were doing a lot of those infrastructure projects.

Did you have a sense that he had ranchers and your best interests in mind?

Yeah, I think Tony was a real ranchers guy, and he and my dad became very good friends. I think that my dad helped Tony more as a person who knew
who to call to get what done, and helped him with a lot of that. That was a role that I think my dad—and I think Tony will tell you that.

01-00:58:02 Farrell:

What do you think the importance of his role in this time, working with the East Bay Regional Park District, has been, or the impact that he's had?

01-00:58:10 Banke:

Tony?

01-00:58:10 Farrell:

Yeah.

01-00:58:11 Banke:

Well, I mean Tony basically sort of developed the first sets of trails, along with obviously, some architects and so forth. He basically made some decisions about where to locate and what to have. To have a campground and you know, to have a boat launching ramp and facilitate the development of a water supply for the lawns and campground and all that stuff. That was a big job.

01-00:58:40 Farrell:

So, Del Valle is just down the hill. You said around the time you moved back, there was a lot of transition. Can you tell me about maybe the history of this land and how that transition was working, and how the parks district was involved? I guess just sort of the history of that whole process or that shift.

01-00:59:14 Banke:

Okay. Basically, the state Department of Water Resources, bought the middle of the ranch basically, around the lake, in 1965 or '66, or something around in there. It was about probably, the dam was completed in 1967, because they just had the fifty-year anniversary not long ago, and so it was interesting because the people at the Department of Water Resources said oh well, you know, the dam is done but it's probably going to take two or three years for it to fill up. Well, it filled up the first year, and so you know, that was something that I think took everybody by surprise, because all of a sudden, some things that you might have wanted to do were basically inundated by the lake. Some of the cleanup, my impression was, it's never really gotten cleaned up in the bottom, of what's now the bottom of the lake. Anyway, and so then you can imagine, some time after that period of time, and you'll have to look this up, but the state Department of Water Resources signed an agreement with the East Bay Regional Park, for the park to manage the recreational, or basically manage all the land essentially. Tony Smith was the first person from the East Bay Park that we dealt with and as I said, it was really, a nice relationship, and I felt like we helped each other out a lot.

01-01:00:45 Farrell:

Did you have to lease the land from them, or how did the land ownership or partnership work?
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01-01:00:52
Banke: Basically, what the park district has is what they call a license, a grazing license. Rather than an actual land lease, you have a license to graze cattle. That was a completely new innovation for us and our family, and we didn't know anybody around here who had, at that point in time, that kind of situation. It was pretty novel, and there was a lot of confusion about who would do what and that sort of thing. Creating fire roads and stuff like that, eventually it got hammered out. When the park district was first started, we just did a lot of that because it needed to get done. They were just sort of ramping up and didn't have the departments and the resources that they have today.

01-01:01:41
Farrell: Do you feel like your background in writing papers and looking at legislation, do you feel like that helped you negotiate that process and understand who was responsible for what?

01-01:01:52
Banke: It probably helped me and put me in a place better than other people, but the grazing license process was really worked out with Jim Coelho and some others who are older than I am, during that period of time when I was working for the Cattlemen's Association in Colorado.

01-01:02:11
Farrell: Okay, okay. And then once that license was passed, how did you figure out, or who was responsible for what?

01-01:02:20
Banke: In the initial days, basically the grazing license and all of the decisions and things that we made, we just ran through Tony Smith. Probably, and you know, you have to look at some of the internal stuff from the park, but at some point in time, as they grew bigger as an organization, the park basically removed the grazing lease license management from the local park supervisors, to their own department, and they have their own department that has a weird name, and it's actually changed names a couple times. The first person that we worked with specifically on grazing management and the infrastructure that needed to be built was Ray Budzinski because I think he was the first person to have that job as defined.

01-01:03:20
Farrell: Did you work with Ray at all?

01-01:03:21
Banke: A lot.

01-01:03:23
Farrell: Can you tell me a little bit about that?
Basically, we would identify things that needed to be addressed, like fences, springs that needed to be fenced off, that sort of thing, fields that needed to be created. In the early days of the park, they were into basically taking down a lot of the cross fences that existed in the Patterson Ranch. You can just imagine the Patterson Ranch as a big bowl that was 10,000 acres. All of the working facilities, most of the working facilities of the ranch were at what's now the bottom of the lake, along Arroyo Del Valle Creek. Fields were designed from that template and even though we now have a lake there, the fences for the fields were still pretty much all the same. So, you've gone from an area where the cattle all work downhill to the corral, and that's the way it's supposed to be worked, where now they're kept above the lake and we had to develop new corrals for them to be worked in and new fields and that sort of stuff. Ray and I did a lot of work on that.

Do you feel like that was a good working relationship?

Yes, a very good working relationship.

Okay, okay. The cattle is grazing down, are working their way down. Has that changed at all or is that pretty much the same?

No it's had to change because basically, we have fenced off the cattle from the lake, and so now they basically have to find water sources other than the lake, which we, in about 2000—we're skipping ahead here, but in about 2000, we did a lot, starting in 2000, I'd say, 1999. Well maybe before that, maybe '95, we started to develop a whole system of water storage tanks and water troughs for the cattle, some of it coming from existing springs and wells and some of it being pumped out of the lake by solar pumps.

Was that because the fencing started?

Yes. So basically, when they initially put in the lake and other than the old fences that kind of existed on the west side, that really didn't allow cattle to get to the lake, on the east side of the lake it was all just open and the cattle would go down there and water in the lake all the time.

What year did the fences start to go up?

Well, the fence—fenced off the lake, started in 2001.
Farrell: So you were starting to work on creating alternative water sources before those went up?

Banke: Yes, we did for some of the areas in the park. During this period of time, the park acquired several different adjoining parcels to the original Del Valle lease, and so we did a lot of work basically, they actually removed some homes from some of those properties and we basically converted springs and wells to livestock watering facilities, as opposed to residential watering facilities and that sort of thing, and changed a lot of fences.

Farrell: How did you identify either the sources or the sites for those water resources?

Banke: Well basically, in those days this was primarily surface water, so you basically developed the water where it was. In the case of wells, we're still using two wells on the park property that were basically put in as domestic wells, before the park acquired the property. Those have worked out very well for us because they've allowed us to really distribute water throughout the rangeland, and do a much better job, I think a really good job, of managing the way that cattle use the rangeland. [dog whining]

Farrell: Did you have to direct the cattle to those sources at all?

Banke: No, they pretty much find them. I'm going to let him out.

Farrell: Sure. So, that wasn't anything that you had to worry about as far as making sure that they could get water, they were able to figure that out.

Banke: Yeah, pretty much.

Farrell: Did it affect you at all when the East Bay Regional Park District started to acquire more parcels around Del Valle?

Banke: Yes.

Farrell: How so?

Banke: Well, it made for some new challenges, because we had some new ground to operate and that sort of thing. It also took out of the area, any other rural people who might have been eyes and ears for us, and so that's probably the
thing that I miss the most. We had a couple neighbors, a couple of old guys who were neighbors, who would cruise around, and if they saw anything wrong, they'd call you up and let you know, which was really nice. For years, we sort of lost that, and I think we're getting that back now in that we have a more stable park staff, and some of the park staff are genuinely interested in the livestock grazing program and that it be maintained.

What you have to understand is the philosophical history that's gone on since 1965 or '66, when I was at Cal Poly, to today, because when I first came back to the ranch in 1979, all the environmentalists thought that as a rancher, you're the most evil person around. I wouldn't have dared wear my cowboy hat in Berkeley, for fear I'd have been stoned, literally.

**Farrell:** Yeah, I guess so, yeah.

**Banke:** Basically, the park district was really on the fence about what they wanted to do about it. There were people urging the park district to discontinue cattle grazing and so forth and so on. Really, in the early eighties, right up until probably about 1994 or '95, there was a lot of uncertainty about whether we were going to be able to continue to graze these lands. Ray Budzinski basically, there was actually a lawsuit filed by the Center for Biological Diversity, which named us as part of the lawsuit, as well as the regional park, and basically said oh, you're overgrazing and abusing the land, and all this stuff, and made a bunch of really false claims as to what the facts were. Actually my wife and the attorney for the park service, and Ray Budzinski, spent hours and hours and hours on that litigation.

**Farrell:** How did that unfold?

**Banke:** Well basically, it unfolded much like any litigation. They make their claim to the judge and ask him for basically a ruling that kicks all the cattle off, with some sort of an injunction, and they have to prove certain facts. Basically, what it really came down to is Ray had done a really good job of documenting the science and the way things, we were doing in the areas. Kathy and the lawyer did a good job of basically preparing a record to go to the judge, and so that particulate litigation was basically ruled in our favor, I think, on summary judgment.

**Farrell:** During that period of time when this is happening, are you thinking about alternative, like what your plan B is?

**Banke:** Yeah.
Farrell: What were you thinking at that point?

Banke: Well at that point in time, starting with the drought in 1986, '87, we basically were taking most of the cattle from the Patterson Ranch in the park, up to Oregon every summer, and we leased ranches up there. That was one of the things that was on the burner, were we going to stay here or not. My life was, for me personally, that was really complicating because my wife had a very good career going on in Oakland and San Francisco, and she really didn't want to relocate to Oregon, and that's probably the reason that we didn't, because things were so dicey with the park district and the whole grazing situation in the East Bay area, that you know, several friends that I know of did do just that.

Farrell: Yeah, I was going to ask if people around you started to leave.

Banke: Yes.

Farrell: Do you have a sense of how many people started to leave?

Banke: Well, you know, if I was given enough time, I could probably list twenty farm families that moved to places like Oregon, Oakdale, California, and even some to Nevada.

Farrell: Wow. How many remained?

Banke: I think there's probably about 150 families that still run some cattle here, in and around the Bay Area here.

Farrell: At at this point, because you're selling cattle sort of commercially, right?

Banke: Correct.

Farrell: How are you finding business? Is demand the same, is it going down, is it going up?

Banke: Well, basically one of the things we talked about earlier was the livestock markets. Well, all those little local livestock markets have closed. When I first came back to the ranch, the closest market was in Stockton, basically at French Camp, on the south side of Stockton, and that was about a forty-five
minute drive, to take cattle back and forth. Well now the closest one is Turlock or Galt, and they're about equal distance and they're both about a two-hour drive to get there. If you want to take your cattle to market, you have to haul two hours, at least, to get to the marketplace. We're fortunate here in that my dad and the Pattersons were smart enough to move one of the scales from the lower ranch up to here, so that we can actually weigh and sell cattle right off the ranch. We're probably one of maybe six or seven places in the whole valley that could still do that, and everybody else pretty much has their options limited to taking them to the sale. So that's, you know, we basically use video sales, Internet sales, and things like that, to market our cattle in the past, largely because we have the infrastructure to do that.

Farrell:

Did that prove detrimental to a lot of other families in the area, cause them to leave?

Banke:

Well I don't know that that per se caused them to leave, but it was one more disadvantage. What you've seen in the valleys from the time I was a kid, in downtown Pleasanton was this establishment called Boo Halls milling, which would mill grain and make rations for livestock and stuff, right there in downtown Pleasanton. Now, you have to go all the way to Oakdale to find someplace like that, A.L. Gilbert and that sort of thing. Much of the commercial infrastructure that was here has gone away, almost all of it has gone away, and so basically, if we need parts or supplies particular to the livestock industry, you've really got to go into the San Joaquin Valley.

Farrell:

What happened to all those places, did they go out of business or did they relocate?

Banke:

Well, most of them went out of business and were replaced by housing or shops and that sort of stuff.

Farrell:

How long did the tension and the lawsuits take to resolve?

Banke:

About two years.

Farrell:

Two years, okay. Once they were resolved, were you resolved to stay here?

Banke:

Well I think that you know, we had leases that obligated us to stay here for a certain period of time and basically, we did sort of stay here. But again, I say our decision to stay probably was influenced more by Kathy's career than by the cattle industry.
Farrell: What were your parents' feelings about this as it was happening?

Banke: Well, so let's see. My dad was obviously upset by that, but he basically died and left us in 1989, and actually, the lawsuit occurred after that.

Farrell: Oh, okay, so he didn't see it. Are there any major things that are happening? Well, can you tell me a little bit about your relationship with the Patterson family and leasing the land, and then when they sold it to you?

Banke: They didn't sell it to us.

Farrell: They never actually did sell it.

Banke: No. Well, no they did sell it but not to us.

Farrell: Got it, okay.

Banke: That happens.

Farrell: Can you tell me a little bit about that?

Banke: Well, the Patterson family were a really good family to basically lease from. For most of the time, during the time that I operated the land, we had three different members of the family who were basically in charge of managing this part of their holdings. Two of them were great and one of them was a little more difficult in that he didn't come from any ag background. The Patterson kids themselves, at least they grew up around agriculture, in Fremont, in that area, and I'm talking about the ones that are my generation. They had sort of an intuitive understanding of what goes on, on a ranch, that not everyone shares. But they were by and large, really good people to work for, work with. They helped us remodel and renew this whole house, and basically, much of the infrastructure that's here in the yard and around are things that we put in since we've been here, and they worked with us on all of that stuff.

Farrell: Where were they living?

Banke: They were primarily living on the peninsula in Palo Alto, and one of them lived in Walnut Creek and another one lived in Woodside.
Farrell: How long have they owned this property for?

Banke: Well basically, the Patterson family started in Fremont, started putting together property during the gold rush in 1849. They came over for the gold rush, decided not to pan for gold, but to start growing food and feed all the starving gold miners. They were very successful and one of the reasons that they were successful is they developed one of the first barges and docking points. You can still see the pilings today, off the Dumbarton Bridge, that could take agricultural commodities from the Fremont and Niles area, over to San Francisco and Burlingame, where basically they were processed to food companies and processing companies existed.

Farrell: How big is this property?

Banke: This property was originally, a little over 10,000 acres, before they put the lake in it, and there's almost exactly 5,000 acres remaining.

Farrell: There's about just half the size as it was.

Banke: Half the size of what it was when Doc Root was here, right.

Farrell: How many cattle were here when you were growing up, versus—or when the Pattersons owned it, versus now.

Banke: The Pattersons and Doc Root ran a total of about 800 cows and calves, on 10,000 acres, and we run about 300 and probably will run the yearling equivalent of another hundred, so basically 400. So we're less than half of what they did.

Farrell: Okay. How have you been able to remain economically viable? I know you mentioned using modern technology to be able to help you with Internet sales and having a weigh station here, so that's helped a lot, but I guess in other ways.

Banke: Well I think that the ranching thing, especially in the Bay Area, but really even nationally if you look at things, has really been a hand-to-mouth, break even experience. You don't make very much money. I basically gave a program to a bunch of biologists, with some other ranchers, looked back, and I think we've had four "profitable" years in the last thirty-five.
Farrell: Can you tell me a little bit about the sale of this property, why the Pattersons decide to sell it, even if they did so reluctantly, and then who they sold it to.

Banke: Well, the first time they sold the lake, it was basically condemned by the state Department of Water Resources, and they actually went through a condemnation proceeding, and the judge basically ruled against the Pattersons in a big way. The state condemned that 5,000 acres for $165 an acre, in 1966.

Farrell: Why was it condemned?

Banke: Because the Pattersons didn't want to sell it.

Farrell: It was just a way of acquiring land?

Banke: Right, eminent domain.

Farrell: It was under a clause of condemnation?

Banke: Yeah, no absolutely.

Farrell: Interesting, okay, okay. I guess I may be a little bit unclear. Do they still own these 5,000 acres?

Banke: They did until five years ago, and then they—so at that point, the Patterson family had grown to be, the heirs of the Patterson family had grown to be a group of eighty, and so when you get to be a group of eighty. None of them, except for Will Patterson and his brother George, really ever came up to the ranch at all, you know. Will and George would come and go hunting and hiking and stuff like that, but none of the other people were involved in the ranch. You have this big land mass that is worth a lot of money and is generating less than $100,000 of the income for you. It's not to understand why people say, well why don't we cash that out and put the cash into something that will make us some money, so that's what they basically did.

Farrell: How do they feel about both of those sales, do you have a sense of that?

Banke: I think the condemnation was just absolutely hugely resented by the Patterson family, especially the ones my age. The decision to sell the ranch, I know Will Patterson, who I worked with for many, many years, he was really saddened
by that. You kind of understand those things and that's the way it has to be. We went through the same thing with our family ranch. We sold it about five years ago too, and for some of the same reasons. There's no way you could viably split it up and operate it as a ranch among four people. My sisters didn't want to live there and so you know, that's just the way it goes.

01-01:22:56
Farrell: On the Banke Ranch, is it still operating as a ranch, or not any more?

01-01:23:00
Banke: It's basically currently owned by some people who are using it primarily for environmental mitigation. There is still some grazing that occurs there but yeah.

01-01:23:09
Farrell: Okay. Things start to change sort of in the '90s, as you're putting in—as fencing starts to happen. You start to put in more water resources for the cattle, and then you also had cited 2000 kind of as a benchmark year. Can you tell me a little bit more about what made it a benchmark year?

01-01:23:30
Banke: Two-thousand?

01-01:23:30
Farrell: Two-thousand, yeah.

01-01:23:31
Banke: Okay. In 2000, we installed our first solar pump and watering system. That was technologically, from a resource management point of view, the ability to pump water with a solar pump is a really revolutionary thing, and so you're basically able to take the water from the bottoms of the canyons, and put it up on top of the hills, or at least closer to the top of the hills. That really affects the way the livestock work the land and distribute themselves, and basically, the goal is to have the grazing be more even, and not so intense down on the lower parts, and basically maintain more forage down there and eat more forage up on top, where they didn't eat enough before. Since that time, we've done twelve of those projects.

01-01:24:19
Farrell: What were your feelings about using solar energy in the beginning?

01-01:24:25
Banke: I was very excited about it from day one. Your alternative before that was to basically go out and have a pump powered by a gas motor, or something like that, and in the dry chaparral terrain we have here in this area, and the danger of fire, that was a very unattractive option. That involves a very inconvenient and labor intensive thing.

01-01:24:48
Farrell: Were there ever any accidents that the gas pumps caused?
Not here, that I know of, but other properties, yes.

With the solar pump, does that help mitigate any issues when there's periods of drought?

Yes, and that's absolutely one of the reasons that we did that. Certainly, the drought in the eighties changed all of our perceptions, I'm talking about all of us in the ranching communities, perceptions about what was adequate for water supplies. Ponds and springs would go dry in the drought and basically, wells and solar pumps became much more effective ways to provide year round water.

You mentioned the changing perception of adequate water supply. What was the perception before and how did that shift?

I don't think that the perception of the water supply. I think the drought, basically in the six-year drought in the eighties, we basically lost so much surface water, that that was just remarkable. Certainly in my lifetime, I had never seen that consistent a period of drought. We would see a year of drought, or two, but never six and seven years in a row, and so that was basically if you were going to continue to do this, you needed to find a way that the livestock could be kept here to consume the forage that would grow. Even though we didn't have a lot of rain, we had enough rain to create surface water, there was enough rain to promote grass growth. And so then the worst thing that could happen to you is you were sitting up here on the mountains, surrounded by two feet of dry grass and no water. So then your risk of fire and a real cataclysmic fire, is frightening.

Yeah. Have there ever been any instances of that here?

We've had a couple of small fires but no big one.

Okay. How about the surrounding areas?

In the surrounding areas, we've had some really big ones, yeah.

Okay, and how did that impact things here, or for the ranching community?

I think that basically, the fires have been a history, a constant history in the Livermore Valley, for as long as I can remember, especially on the east side of
the valley and into the Altamont. The combination of dry feed and wind is always a risk, and we've just been particularly lucky in this location, that we haven't had any major fires.

01-01:27:40
Farrell:  This may be relevant, it may not be, but did the 1989 earthquake impact anything?

01-01:27:48
Banke:  It did some minor damage to the house here. After the 1989 earthquake, we basically replaced significant sections of what was being used as the foundation for this house, because they were basically built on block piers, and some of those piers, the movement of the house, some of those piers not solidly attached to the frame of the house, and so we did a lot of that. I'll never forget that earthquake, because we were actually out at north Livermore, and we were putting in a fence line. We had dug a hole for this pole. My dad and my brother were standing there. I was in the back of the pickup, lifting this pole up to slide it into the hole, and as the pole goes into the hole, I'm seeing it and it's going around and around like this and I'm going what the heck is going on? The next thing I know, I'm in midair and I'm looking down at this barn, and it looks like the barn, it looks like a wave. It was pretty amazing.

01-01:28:44
Farrell:  Wow, you actually saw—wow.

01-01:28:48
Banke:  We were six miles from the epicenter, at Greenville Road.

01-01:28:50
Farrell:  Wow. How long did that feel like it lasted for?

01-01:28:57
Banke:  Well, of course at the time, you thought it lasted forever, but it was probably less than a minute.

01-01:29:00
Farrell:  Yeah. That's still a long time. Oh, yeah, that's—I don't blame you for never forgetting that. So, around 2000 or sort of late nineties, early two-thousands, are there any other technological shifts or equipment shifts that are happening, changes?

01-01:29:21
Banke:  Well, I think that you know, you can sort of pick your time, but some time between the mid-eighties and the late nineties, our whole communications systems changed with the advent of cell phones, and so that's probably, you know, from a management standpoint, that allows you to communicate with people and be things. From our standpoint, that's really been a big help to us and a big help to almost anybody in a business situation I would think.
Farrell: Yeah. Has it made things more efficient?

Banke: Certainly, it's made things more efficient. It's also created an instant response expectation that makes it a little hard to live up to sometimes.

Farrell: Has there been any advances or evolution in equipment at all?

Banke: Yes. I think that livestock handling equipment has made some big advances and one of the things that we did in the mid-eighties, is spent an outrageous amount of money, what we thought at that time, about $8,000 for a hydraulic squeeze chute. That has been a godsend. It's prevented so many injuries.

Farrell: Yeah, yeah. One of those upfront costs too, right?

Banke: Yeah.

Farrell: It costs a lot to install. You also mentioned 2000 being a year, around the time where there's some generational shifts happening in ranching families around. Can you tell me a little bit about how that has impacted the ranching community, the younger generations taking over?

Banke: Yeah. I think that you know, it's probably along about 2000 is when you really started to notice the development, in the both commercial buildings and housing in the area, and that was combined with the implementation of the south Livermore Valley plan, which was a plan basically designed to convert the lower drylands surrounding Livermore into vineyards. There were various political and economic incentives in that plan, and that plan basically, as a plan, worked out well, and about 3,000 acres of what was either dryland farming ground or patch ground, was converted into grapes. That then changed the whole character of agriculture in the valley. As that was occurring, people were selling their land for relatively high prices here, to go into grapes or houses, and taking that money and if they wanted to continue in agriculture, they were either going to go out of state or move into the central valley.

Farrell: Can you tell me a little bit about how maybe philosophies have changed around then, or if it has, like if there's sort of an openness to new ideas or a change in methods, or anything like that. Maybe even with the legislation that's been passed on a state or federal level.
Banke: That's a big question. I don't know if I can address all that. I think that one of the things that has happened is through the efforts of some local individuals and some people at the University of California, there's been really tremendous efforts made to educate some of the people who consider themselves environmentalists, about the value of ranching and the value of things that we do to the environment. That's been the biggest single political change that's happened, and that's really happened in the last fifteen years. So, you feel like you get at least some empathetic support from some of those people, that you never got before.

Farrell: Yeah. Do you feel like that has changed also, with generational shifts?

Banke: Yes, I think so. I think that the younger generation is much more openminded about things and basically, those of us who were the boomers were, certainly in the Bay Area, people who never set foot in the environment think they're environmentalists and thought they knew it all, and really, that wasn't very fact based. When we would first go to sort of try and explain to people, the misconceptions and the gap between experience and science, and what was presumed to be happening, was so wide, it was really almost impossible to address it. Basically, through the University of California and our Cattlemen's Association and stuff, there's a lot that's been done in terms of research. I'm talking about scientific, peer reviewed research about grazing programs, about what happens to the land when you take cattle off it, in terms of grass plant species and makeup, and all that sort of stuff. And while all that science was available in treatises and publications that date back to the 1300s in Europe, there wasn't the kind of show me experimentalism, experimentation and documentation that we're seeing now. I think that's been a big plus for us. We've all learned some things from that and hopefully, we are trying to educate some others about it.

Farrell: Yeah. It's interesting too, I'm in my early thirties but my background is in environmental studies, and I have always thought of particularly small ranching and farming families, as being more of environmentalists than people who work at universities, because you're so acutely in tune with what is happening on the land, and how things work. You know, organic farming, before organic was a buzzword, because that was just how things worked better. I'm glad to hear that there's been kind of a swing the other way. I don't know if there's a question there, but...

Banke: That's fine.

Farrell: I guess, thinking a little bit more about generations and how things have changed, are you finding now, that there is a younger generation of farmers,
people in their teens or twenties or thirties or forties, who are becoming ranchers, who are interested, or is that demographic changing?

Banke: I think there's more people that are doing that now, particularly as a percent of the families, than when I was younger. You know, there are probably fifteen or twenty people under the age of forty that I know, who have started their farming and ranching operations in the area.

Farrell: Do you have a sense of that being connected to sort of the slow food movement or sort of the culinary minded things that are happening in the Bay Area, or do you not really associate that?

Banke: I really don't think that has much to do with it.

Farrell: Okay, okay. Do you have a sense of why more people have been becoming involved in family ranching businesses?

Banke: You know, you could cite, try and cite some reasons, but I think it, more than anything, has to do with the personalities and the expectations of the kids themselves.

Farrell: Yeah. Were your kids involved with ranching?

Banke: Oh, yeah.

Farrell: Yeah? What did they used to do around the farm?

Banke: They did everything, from build fence to treat calves, gather cattle and rope, and do all that stuff.

Farrell: Did they grow up riding horses?

Banke: Yes.

Farrell: What do they do now?

Banke: Well my son works for a firm called Eastdil Capital, and they sell big buildings, and he lives in San Francisco.
Farrell: Okay. What's his name?

Banke: Chris.

Farrell: Chris, okay. And how about—?

Banke: My daughter just graduated from UCSF, with a degree, and is a nurse practitioner.

Farrell: Oh, cool. Do they have any interest in kind of taking over at some point?

Banke: Well, I think they both have an interest in taking over at some point, and the question is how to manage that with their careers. The other question is just how stable are we here, and the answer to that is we aren't very stable because we're operating on all leased land, and either landlord could decide, at any moment, that you know, that's not what they want to do any more.

Farrell: Yeah. Do you have a sense that the East Bay Regional Park District will continue supporting ranching and grazing?

Banke: Well I think that's certainly what they're saying and I hope they continue to say that. I think they realize that they own such extensive acreages, and that those acreages, those lands really do need to be managed, you can't just let them go. They're acutely aware of the danger for fire and resource degradation if they don't.

Farrell: I'm going to circle back to that in a second, but one thing that I didn't ask you about is your involvement with the Livermore Rodeo Association. You're involved with them, right?

Banke: I'm actually not officially involved with them. I used to help them out and supply them with cattle and stuff, up until about the time my kids got big enough that I didn't have time for that. My dad was real involved all his life, in the Rodeo Association.

Farrell: Okay, okay, and what was his role? He was a president?

Banke: He served as president of the Rodeo Association, but mainly he was the guy who was the on-the-ground guy, running the actual arena for the rodeo itself.
Farrell: Got it, okay, okay, so you've kind of been periphery, you've been involved on the periphery.

Banke: Yes.

Farrell: Okay. Circling back to the last question, and thinking about the land that the East Bay Regional Park District owns, can you talk a little bit about the value that ranching has on their land?

Banke: Sure. I think that the thing that we most do is we provide protection from fire. We also manage the type—because of the way we graze it, we manage and influence a type of plants and forage, and things that are on the land, it's been shown if you take, especially in the western parts of the Bay Area, if you remove livestock and all grazing, it basically converts from a grassland into a shrub land, and so that becomes even more dangerous in terms of fire, so there's lots of that. I think that because we live in a very highly populated area and the use of the parks has just grown phenomenally in the last ten years, I think basically managing invasive species, weed species, is critical, and takes up more and more of our time all the time, so that's important. What the park district needs is to maintain a group of people who are practical about what happens on the ranches and have the know-how, even if it's inherited from generations before, of how to deal with different situations.

Farrell: Yeah, that's a huge value add. I want to ask you a couple sort of reflective questions. What has it meant to you, to be a third generation rancher?

Banke: Well, it's meant that I enjoy it a great deal and I'm very proud of what we've been able to do with the livestock and the land. It gives me a lot of gratification. The hard part is seeing how people can afford to do this on a full-time basis going forward, because it just doesn't make any money.

Farrell: What are your hopes for that in regards of the future and future ranching families?

Banke: Well, I hope that we can still maintain a core group of ranching families in the area. Probably five years ago, I would have told you I was relatively optimistic about that, but what's happened to housing and land values in the last five years is absolutely ridiculous. I mean you can't buy a decent house in the Livermore area for under $1 million. They're selling these "starter" condos for $700,000, I mean it's crazy.
Farrell: That's not a starter.

Banke: Not in my world. [Laughs.]

Farrell: Yeah. I guess that is maybe one question too, that I wanted to ask. How do you see the demographics of Livermore have shifted over time?

Banke: Well that's an interesting question. Livermore, the Livermore population has really been dominated by people who work at either Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory or Sandia Laboratories. They have been, when I was growing up, the largest employer in the area, and in that time, by a factor of ten. Today they're probably still the largest employer in the area, but there are several like dozens of others that are close, that are employing a thousand, two, three thousand people, and that sort of thing, in the valley. You're seeing that amongst tech companies and construction companies, you know a lot of those sorts of things. In one sense, the demographics of Livermore isn't changing too much from what it was historically, because of the influence of the lab. You still have Livermore—you know, I heard the mayor give a little talk about Livermore has more doctors and PhDs in this area than any other city in California, or the nation.

Farrell: Wow.

Banke: We have a very highly educated population, a very sophisticated group of people, and a few of us farmers and ranchers.

Farrell: Speaking of that, what are your hopes for the future of this property?

Banke: Well, my hopes for the future of this property is it will continue to remain closed to the public and one of the few parcels in that somebody will live here and manage it, and that's what's important. So about five years ago, Patterson sold this property to Zone 7, and I think that Zone 7 is sort of a utility, that has its own separate board of directors, so opinions and plans can change from year to year and election cycle to election cycle. I haven't sensed that they have a real solid, long-term plan.

Farrell: What are your hopes for the future of Del Valle, and like the dam lake area?

Banke: I think that Del Valle is very important, and not for the reasons that people think. Last winter, I watched flood control in operation, and watched the level
of that dam go up ten to twelve feet and down ten to twelve feet, in a twenty-four hours cycle. We had historic amounts of rain and they were using the dam to control the flows. They shut it off when it was raining let the other streams take the maximum amount of water, and then when it stopped raining, they'd start releasing it, and so they had more storage, you know, more for protection. I'll be they did that the whole month of January and February, and they had people on the dam every single day. I think that its prominence and importance as a flood control tool, you know is going to make it necessary to keep it here.

01-01:45:56  Farrell: My last question for you is what would you like future generations to know about being a rancher in Livermore?

01-01:45:06  Banke: That's a hard question. I think that future generations need to realize that it's a very difficult job, and it's a job where you need to sort of master a lot of different sciences in order to operate it, as well as business concepts. I have to laugh, I think back. We probably moved back to the ranch, been here two or three years, and we went to Sacramento and ran into some of my old friends that used to work up there in the legislature, and one of them says, "Aren't you missing the excitement and the challenge?" I'm going no, it's way more exciting and way more challenging where I'm at now. [Laughs.]

01-01:46:52  Farrell: Is there anything else that you want to add?

01-01:46:55:  Banke: I can't think of anything right now.

01-01:46:56  Farrell: Well, thank you so much, I really appreciate your time.

01-01:46:57  Banke: All right.

[End of Interview]