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## Guide to the Clemmie Shuck Barry Oral History

### Collection number: MS 3451

California Historical Society

North Baker Research Library  
San Francisco, California

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### Descriptive Summary

**Title:** Clemmie Shuck Barry Oral History

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#### Biography

Ms. Barry was born August 24, 1901, at the town of Edgar, Clay County, Nebraska. She now lives in Kentfield, California in an apartment filled with growing, healthy plants, excellent prints of good artists, tons of books, and various mementoes of Dick Barry's trips made when he

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was a ship's officer."

She is tall, outgoing, effervescent woman with a warm personal regard for every living thing, and a vast reservoir of love to give.

Despite the overwhelming job of taking full responsibility for the care of her husband who had a severe vascular cerebral hemorrhage in 1960, she continued to be an active woman.

Having lost their life savings to hospitals and doctors, they are living on Social Security and extended assistance. Several months ago Mr. Barry become so ill, after another stroke, Mrs. Barry was unable to continue the home care. He is now in a convalescent hospital where Ms. Barry visits him almost every day.

At the time of the first interviews she was active as an organizer of Emeritus College in Marin Community College. She is now busy working with the California Legislative Council on Aging. In addition, and important to her, she is a leader in Co-Conseling. Recently she evolved a program in the community where she aids women who are the sole care (as she was for many years) of their incapacitated husbands. She is also an appointed member of the Marin County Commission on Aging, member of the Board of Marin Senior Day Care, and many other committees dealing with nursing home legislation and related topics.

Ms. Barry can indeed be considered the spokesperson for the older citizens of Marin County. She has been exposed to the media through television appearances and newspaper articles about her work. She is respected for her opinions and activities and is frequently called upon for advice, or to participate in various aspects of community life, particularly in relation to older citizens.

Interviews held on:

October 6, 1975

October 13, 1975

October 20, 1975

November 2, 1975

November 9, 1975

November 21, 1975

December 7, 1975

July 26, 1978

Interviewer:

Lucy Kendall

Time of interviews:

Approximately 12½ hours

### **Conduct of the Interview**

The following is a partial transcript of the interview held with Clemmie Barry as part of the collection on trade union and left wing women. There was little preparation outside of the sending of a chronological outline which Ms. Barry proceeded to follow throughout the interview. She was sent more specific questions prior to each session. The questions were not particularly perceptive and the focus was basically on her life and her role as an organizer for the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America.

Knowing now a little more about research, questioning, and the narrator-interviewer relationship, the interviewer was pleasantly surprised by the transcript tapes. More information exists than she expected to find, partly due to the length of the interview, and certainly mainly due to the memory and capability of the narrator to place herself back into her early life and experience, and to develop her thinking about those periods.

Often we turned off the tape (which I later found to be a definite no) to peruse the interview outline. This naturally led to a continued and uninterrupted narrative.

In going over Ms. Barry's life, it was decided not to ask questions about her experiences working in department stores. These experiences have been covered in other ways by other women, as in *Pink Collar Worker* by L.K. Howe, and and by an oral history interview with Marion Brown Sills conducted by Sue Cobble for this same series.

After two and a half years and the typing and reading of the manuscript, interviewer felt it incumbent upon her to ask for a follow up meeting to cover some of the more obvious (now) inadequacies of the interview. Two additional tapes were made which to some extent develop Ms. Barry's background and her activities as an organizer and as a woman worker.

### **Editing**

Some editing was done in the process of transcribing, and additional corrections were handled by Ms. Barry. Certain anecdotes have been deleted because the transcriber felt they did not add content to the story.

### **Indexing**

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Since the whole interview was not transcribed, there is no full index. In place of this, the tape index follows the transcript.

### **Narrative Account of the Interview**

As previously mentioned, the interview follows Ms. Barry's life chronologically, from her girlhood on a Nebraska farm through her childhood years, her schooling, her teaching at the same country school she attended as a child. She was the only one of the family's eight children to attend college. Active in the Methodist Church, she obtained a scholarship to college where she earned her way through working for ministers, as a playground director, participating in YWCA work, and so on.

During her college years she became active in the Cosmopolitan Club and helped put out a paper called Diogenes' Lantern. She met political people, and incidentally her first husband, through contact with Russian students at Colorado School of Mines.

After graduation and marriage they moved to New York where she worked at various jobs from department store clerk to YWCA secretary.

Due to the disagreement with YWCA officials over their attitude toward striking hosiery mill girls, Clemmie left the Y. A friend suggested she work for the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America. She was offered a job as organizer and accepted.

During this period she had joined the Communist Party, but, since she attended no meetings and received no direction or assignments, she was just a paper member.

From then on she was active during the major organizing campaigns in the South engineered by the Amalgamated, and participated in organizing Friedman Harry Marx where the landmark victory was that the Supreme Court ruled that the National Labor Relations Board/Act was constitutional.

By this time she had left her first husband and had met Dick Barry at a Washington, D.C. party to raise money for the onion pickers in New Jersey. They subsequently decided to go West, and landed in San Francisco where she again worked at department stores and various other jobs until she became a social worker for the State of California.

At this time she made connections with the Communist Party and became an active, organized member.

She and others participated in a trade union campaign to organize social workers into the State, County and Municipal Workers Union. They were called before the Tenny-Yorty State Un-American Committee. As a result of this hearing and her refusal to answer questions she was blacklisted and lost her job.

The story then continues with her activities during the war and a short lived post with the Communist Party after which she and Dick left San Francisco and moved to Marin County.

The next job was a real estate saleswoman where she managed to get in trouble because she sold their own property to two Black families, and consequently lost that job.

Then back to the department stores for another four year stint.

At this point Ms. Barry left the Communist Party due to political disagreement.

A move to Westwood, California followed. Then her own trouble with a detached retina in one eye, followed immediately by Dick's cerebral hemorrhage.

The narrative continues with her activities in Marin County and her various community volunteer roles.

The last two tapes cover briefly some more reminiscences on her childhood, her role as a woman, her organizing activities, and her thinking on today's problems.

July 28, 1978

Lucy Kendall

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Letters home written in 1931 and 1933

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Newspaper Clippings on Labor Organizing

Copy of congratulatory telegram from Jacob S. Potofsky

Copies of newspaper clippings on Yorty probe

Copy of photograph of Clemmie Barry, Oleta Yates and Jim Dimicus

Letters regarding fight for racial equality in housing in Marin County

Clippings relating to present activities of Clemmie Barry

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Transcript  
Tape Index