

Franklin R. Lew
Modoc County Assessor

Retired Assessor Historical Questionnaire August 2004

1. Describe your career before becoming Assessor

Worked at Douglas Aircraft for awhile; was in the Army for five years; came back and was a tire shop owner in the early fifties; did accounting work in Oregon and moved to California as an accountant; had a chance to go to work in the Assessor's office in 1966 as an Auditor-Appraiser; hired by Harold Brundige

2. Give the milestones of your Assessor career, year elected/appointed, reelection dates, date of retirement

Appointment by the Board of Supervisors in October of 1968 upon resignation of Harold Brundige; ran unopposed in 1970, 1974, 1978; retired December of 1982

3. Describe your career, if any, after retiring

Retired; fishing and just outdoor recreation

4. What was your relationship with your predecessor?

We got along fine professionally; also had a limited social relationship.

5. What was your relationship with your successor?

I hired John as an Auditor-Appraiser in 1974. We got along well and have a good friendship.

6. Why did you run for assessor?

To continue as Assessor after being appointed in the previous mid-term. I enjoyed the job as Assessor.

7. What do you consider your greatest accomplishments?

Whenever and wherever I could assist people in the position - I felt that was my best contribution. We had a good office.

During my tenure, three hurdles took place – a highly contested case in the assessment of possessory interests (grazing permits); a precedent case (Archer and Lew vs. Board of Supervisors); the largest subdivision in Modoc County was developed – California Pines – 15,000± parcels, and Proposition 13 was passed. We worked well together to accomplish the tasks.

8. What did you wish you could have done differently?

Not a thing.....

9. What do you remember most fondly about your time in office?

We had a good office. I was proud of the work we accomplished in those years.

10. Were there any parts of your career that you wish had not happened?

I'm sure there must have been some things, but none that I can recall.

11. What was your relationship with the CAA?

Good. I was on the Executive Committee for one year, regularly attended Association meetings and conferences, and was also a member of the Timber Advisory Committee for several years. Timber yield tax came into being during that time.

12. What is your recollection of the “Assessor Scandals” of the 1960s?

None really except it brought about the rewriting of the law requiring every Assessor's Office to have an Auditor-Appraiser. The scandals were a direct result of that. At that time was when I applied for the position in Modoc; the scandals happened a year or so before I came to work in Modoc. As I recall, the appraisals of businesses were high in the bay area and the homes were at quite a low value. I don't remember any details of the trial but the Assessor was found guilty regarding the disparity in the values and removed from office. In the process of rewriting the laws, it was tough on Assessors; tried to make uniform valuation procedures throughout the offices. I recall after that took place – there was a bumper sticker in SF for awhile – “Bring back crooked Assessors”.

I recall that the Assessor, Harold Brundige, was having a meeting here with the State when they got the word that the SF Assessor had been indicted.

13. Describe the pressure and stress of the Assessor's job prior to the passage of Proposition 13?

During the sampling with the State Board every four to five years, it was tough dealing with the State in any valuation differences; they always felt that they were right; the State had a job of trying to prove you were wrong. In those days,

reappraisals were done on a cycle, four to five years, or certain areas could be sooner if the sales warranted. Market value was hard to define with lack of sales, etc.

Did you actively oppose or support Property 13?

Neither; wondered what the end result of the Prop would be over time

How do you feel about Proposition 13 now?

Taxes were getting out of hand prior to the passage. I think it is beneficial and helped California; not sure how the State could have survived without it

14. Were you involved in State or County politics, other than the Assessor's Office?

No

Were there other offices you ran for while in office as Assessor? No

15. What kind of person do you think it takes to make a good County Assessor?

Pretty good on public relations and still do the job right.

Should an Assessor be required to have an appraisal or real estate background?

Not really; appraisal can be taught; administrative ability is more important

16. Please add anything that we have missed in the interview that you think would be interesting.

Nothing more to add....