

An Interview With
Ralph F. and Chloe C. Lisle

An Oral History conducted and edited by
Robert D. McCracken

Nye County Town History Project
Nye County, Nevada
Tonopah
1987

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Ralph and Chloe Lisle
1989

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PREFACE

The Nye County Town History Project (NCTHP) engages in interviewing people who can provide firsthand descriptions of the individuals, events, and places that give history its substance. The products of this research are the tapes of the interviews and their transcriptions.

In themselves, oral history interviews are not history. However, they often contain valuable primary source material, as useful in the process of historiography as the written sources to which historians have customarily turned. Verifying the accuracy of all of the statements made in the course of an interview would require more time and money than the NCTHP's operating budget permits. The program can vouch that the statements were made, but it cannot attest that they are free of error. Accordingly, oral histories should be read with the same prudence that the reader exercises when consulting government records, newspaper accounts, diaries, and other sources of historical information.

It is the policy of the NCTHP to produce transcripts that are as close to verbatim as possible, but some alteration of the text is generally both unavoidable and desirable. When human speech is captured in print the result can be a morass of tangled syntax, false starts, and incomplete sentences, sometimes verging on incoherency. The type font contains no symbols for the physical gestures and the diverse vocal modulations that are integral parts of communication through speech. Experience shows that totally verbatim transcripts are often largely unreadable and therefore a waste of the resources expended in their production. While keeping alterations to a minimum the NCTHP will, in preparing a text:

- a. generally delete false starts, redundancies and the uhs, ahs and other noises with which speech is often sprinkled;
- b. occasionally compress language that would be confusing to the reader in unaltered form;
- c. rarely shift a portion of a transcript to place it in its proper context;
- d. enclose in [brackets] explanatory information or words that were not uttered but have been added to render the text intelligible; and
- e. make every effort to correctly spell the names of all individuals and places, recognizing that an occasional word may be misspelled because no authoritative source on its correct spelling was found.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As project director, I would like to express my deep appreciation to those who participated in the Nye County Town History Project (NCTHP). It was an honor and a privilege to have the opportunity to obtain oral histories from so many wonderful individuals. I was welcomed into many homes--in many cases as a stranger--and was allowed to share in the recollection of local history. In a number of cases I had the opportunity to interview Nye County residents whom I have known and admired since I was a teenager; these experiences were especially gratifying. I thank the residents throughout Nye County and southern Nevada--too numerous to mention by name--who provided assistance, information, and photographs. They helped make the successful completion of this project possible.

Appreciation goes to Chairman Joe S. Garcia, Jr., Robert N. "Bobby" Revert, and Patricia S. Mankins, the Nye County commissioners who initiated this project. Mr. Garcia and Mr. Revert, in particular, showed deep interest and unyielding support for the project from its inception. Thanks also go to current commissioners Richard L. Carver and Barbara J. Raper, who have since joined Mr. Revert on the board and who have continued the project with enthusiastic support. Stephen T. Bradhurst, Jr., planning consultant for Nye County, gave unwavering support and advocacy of the project within Nye County and before the State of Nevada Nuclear Waste Project Office and the United States Department of Energy; both entities provided funds for this project. Thanks are also extended to Mr. Bradhurst for his advice and input regarding the conduct of the research and for constantly serving as a sounding board when methodological problems were worked out. This project would never have become a reality without the enthusiastic support of the Nye County commissioners and Mr. Bradhurst.

Jean Charney served as administrative assistant, editor, indexer, and typist throughout the project; her services have been indispensable. Louise Terrell provided considerable assistance in transcribing many of the oral histories; Barbara Douglass also transcribed a number of interviews. Transcribing, typing, editing, and indexing were provided at various times by Alice Levine, Jodie Hanson, Mike Green, and Cynthia Tremblay. Jared Charney contributed essential word processing skills. Maire Hayes, Michelle Starika, Anita Coryell, Michelle Welsh, Lindsay Schumacher, and Jodie Hanson shouldered the herculean task of proofreading the oral histories. Gretchen Loeffler and Bambi McCracken assisted in numerous secretarial and clerical duties. Phillip Earl of the Nevada Historical Society contributed valuable support and criticism throughout the project, and Mr. King at the Oral History Program of the University of Nevada at Reno served as a consulting oral historian. Much deserved thanks are extended to all these persons.

All material for the NCTHP was prepared with the support of the U.S. Department of Energy, Grant No. DE-FG08-89NV10820. However, any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of DOE.

--Robert D. McCracken
Tonopah, Nevada
June 1990

INTRODUCTION

Historians generally consider the year 1890 as the end of the American frontier. By then, most of the western United States had been settled, ranches and farms developed, communities established, and roads and railroads constructed. The mining boomtowns, based on the lure of overnight riches from newly developed lodes, were but a memory.

Although Nevada was granted statehood in 1864, examination of any map of the state from the late 1800s shows that while much of the state was mapped and its geographical features named, a vast region--stretching from Belmont south to the Las Vegas meadows, comprising most of Nye County--remained largely unsettled and unmapped. In 1890 most of southcentral Nevada remained very much a frontier, and it continued to be for at least another twenty years.

The great mining booms at Tonopah (1900), Goldfield (1902), and Rhyolite (1904) represent the last major flowering of what might be called the Old West in the United States. Consequently, southcentral Nevada, notably Nye County, remains close to the American frontier; closer, perhaps, than any other region of the American West. In a real sense, a significant part of the frontier can still be found in southcentral Nevada. It exists in the attitudes, values, lifestyles, and memories of area residents. The frontier-like character of the area also is visible in the relatively undisturbed quality of the natural environment, most of it essentially untouched by human hands.

A survey of written sources on southcentral Nevada's history reveals some material from the boomtown period from 1900 to about 1915, but very little on the area after around 1920. The volume of available sources varies from town to town: A fair amount of literature, for instance, can be found covering Tonopah's first two decades of existence, and the town has had a newspaper continuously since its first year. In contrast, relatively little is known about the early days of Gabbs, Round Mountain, Manhattan, Beatty, Amargosa Valley, and Pahrump. Gabbs's only newspaper was published intermittently between 1974 and 1976. Round Mountain's only newspaper, the Round Mountain Nugget, was published between 1906 and 1910. Manhattan had newspaper coverage for most of the years between 1906 and 1922. Amargosa Valley has never had a newspaper; Beatty's independent paper folded in 1912. Pahrump's first newspaper did not appear until 1971. All six communities received only spotty coverage in the newspapers of other communities after their own papers folded, although Beatty was served by the Beatty Bulletin, which was published as a supplement to the Goldfield News between 1947 and 1956. Consequently, most information on the history of southcentral Nevada after 1920 is stored in the memories of individuals who are still living.

Aware of Nye County's close ties to our nation's frontier past, and recognizing that few, written sources on local history are available, especially after about 1920, the Nye County Commissioners initiated the Nye County Town History Project (NCTHP). The NCTHP represents an effort to systematically collect and preserve information on the history of Nye County. The centerpiece of the NCTHP is a large set of interviews conducted with individuals who had knowledge of local history. Each interview was recorded, transcribed, and then edited lightly to preserve the language and speech patterns of those interviewed. All oral history interviews

have been printed on acid-free paper and bound and archived in Nye County libraries, Special Collections in the James R. Dickinson Library at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, and at other archival sites located throughout Nevada. The interviews vary in length and detail, but together they form a never-before-available composite picture of each community's life and development. The collection of interviews for each community can be compared to a bouquet: Each flower in the bouquet is unique--some are large, others are small--yet each adds to the total image. In sum, the interviews provide a composite view of community and county history, revealing the flow of life and events for a part of Nevada that has heretofore been largely neglected by historians.

Collection of the oral histories has been accompanied by the assembling of a set of photographs depicting each community's history. These pictures have been obtained from participants in the oral history interviews and other present and past Nye County residents. In all, more than 700 photos have been collected and carefully identified. Complete sets of the photographs have been archived along with the oral histories.

On the basis of the oral interviews as well as existing written sources, histories have been prepared for the major communities in Nye County. These histories also have been archived.

The town history project is one component of a Nye County program to determine the socioeconomic impacts of a federal proposal to build and operate a nuclear waste repository in southcentral Nye County. The repository, which would be located inside a mountain (Yucca Mountain), would be the nation's first, and possibly only, permanent disposal site for high-level radioactive waste. The Nye County Board of County Commissioners initiated the NCTHP in 1987 in order to collect information on the origin, history, traditions, and quality of life of Nye County communities that may be impacted by a repository. If the repository is constructed, it will remain a source of interest for hundreds, possibly thousands, of years to come, and future generations will likely want to know more about the people who once resided near the site. In the event that government policy changes and a high-level nuclear waste repository is not constructed in Nye County, material compiled by the NCTHP will remain for the use and enjoyment of all.

--R.D.M.

Robert McCracken interviewing Ralph Lisle and Chloe Lisle in their home in Beatty, Nevada April 7, 1987

CHAPTER ONE

RM: OK, Ralph, if you could just tell me where and when you were born?

RL: I was born in Fernley, Nevada. June 18, 1914.

RM: You had a pretty famous grandfather: Dad Fairbanks. What are some of your memories of him?

RL: Well, I have a lot of memories. I worked for him all during my high school years in Baker [California] during vacation time, in the summer, and that sort of thing. I did that until I was out of high school. And then I left there and went to Shoshone from Baker. I worked there for several years in the store and post office. Both in Baker and in Shoshone. From there I came to Beatty.

RM: What year did you come to Beatty?

RL: December, 1938.

Mrs. Lisle: You were here before Christmas that year.

RL: Yes. Before I moved up here I came up and got squared around, to see where I was going to live, and all that sort of thing.

RM: I understand from your sister, Celesta [Lowe], that as kids you lived in the Clay Camp over in Ash Meadows.

RL: Yes. We moved from Fernley to Ash Meadows in 1924. And then in 1926 or '27 they built a school and we went to school there.

RM: Could you describe the Clay Camp a little bit?

RL: Well, it was a community of miners, mostly. They were mining this clay that was mostly used for filtering crude oil to make lubricating oil. And medicinal oils and that sort of thing. My father was one of the original locators of some of that ground and he sold his interest to the Filtro, which later became Richfield Oil. And part of the conditions of my father's sale was that he would stay there and get the mining operation going for these people until they could either train people to take his place or whatever. And we stayed there about a year

RM: How did he happen to find the clay there? Was he a prospector?

RL: Yes. He was active in mining. In fact, what brought him into this country in the first place was the Goldfield boom, and Rhyolite, and Greenwater. He had some mining interests in Greenwater. About the time that he and my mother were married, he sold the mining claims in Greenwater.

RM: What was your father's name?

RL: John Quincy Lisle.

RM: And your mother's name was . . .

RL: Celesta Fairbanks.

RM: And Dad Fairbanks - his full name was . . .

RL: Ralph Jacobis Fairbanks.

RM: How did he get the name "Dad"?

RL: [chuckles] I don't know. Ever since I can remember, that was his nickname.

RM: What took you father prospecting into Ash Meadows?

RL: I don't know whether it was part of his training or what, but he always contended that there was more to be made in non-metallic than in metal mining. And he was always looking for clay - bentonite, talc, gypsum - all kinds of stuff like that. He was all over this whole part of the country, prospecting.

RM: How did he know? That was quite an insight.

RL: I don't know. Probably from some professor that he had when he was studying geology.

RM: He had been trained in geology? Do you remember where?

RL: Hayward, California.

RM: Was it Hayward College or high school training?

RL: I'm not sure. When he sold that property in Greenwater, he and my mother moved to Hayward. And unfortunately, they put all their money in a bank up there, and the bank went broke, and the only thing they got out of that whole deal was what they could sell - the home that they had bought in Hayward.

RM: And from there he went to Ely, didn't he? And that's where he got hurt?

RL: Yes.

RM: And from there to Fernley?

RL: Well, he kind of migrated to Lovelock, and ran across some bentonite, I believe. In the Lovelock area someplace. But I often [wonder] - there's a firm here that's been mining bentonite and clays and that sort of thing for a number of years - Vanderbilt Minerals. They have some bentonite clay around Lovelock, and I've often wondered if this was the same deposit that my father had. I know that my father spent a lot of time where the carlines gold is. But the technology at that particular time was such that . . . I remember him saying, "Someday somebody will find out how to get that microscopic gold out of the rock."

RM: And now it's that huge mine.

RL: Oh, it's one of the largest in the world. Two things have done this: the technology and refining and the price of gold. They realized - like my father - that this could be a huge operation. He spent a lot of time monkeying around that thing. Between that and Copper Canyon . .

RM: Is that up at Lovelock?

RL: Yes. Up between Lovelock and Carla.

RM: So he found this deposit. Was it bentonite that he found in Ash Meadows?

RL: It's a form of bentonite. Yes.

RM: And then he sold it and made this deal to stay on.

RL: Yes.

RM: So that's when his wife, and you kids, were living there. What was the mining operation like there?

RL: It was an open pit mine situation, using equipment. In fact, the T&T Railroad built a spur from the main line just about - oh, 5 or 6 miles from the Bradford Siding.

RM: So that they would take this clay out of the pit, and then put it on the rail on the spur, and then ship it out.

RL: And they had a mill there that refined it to a certain point. And then it was shipped someplace. The mill was right down just about where that ABC mill is. They ground it in hammermills. And they washed it some way or another to get the dirt and the debris out of it. And then they sacked; it was shipped out of there in sacks.

RM: Did they ship it to L.A.?

RL: I don't know.

RM: What was the community like?

RL: It was a typical company town. The company provided a boarding house for the men and bunkhouses for the men to live in, and all that sort of thing. And we lived in a one-room cabin built out of railroad ties. They were stacked up like bricks. It was a full house. Then my mother and my dad and whatever else help he could scrounge, built 2 rooms onto that. They were kind of a tent arrangement.

RM: Were the boarding house and the bunkhouse regular buildings, or were they half-tent buildings?

RL: No. They were all made out of railroad ties.

RM: Were the other buildings made out of railroad ties?

RL: Yes. The ties came off the Tonopah and Tidewater.

RM: Were they used ties, or new ties?

RL: Used ones. When they would replace ties on the railroad, then this company made some kind of a deal with the railroad company. They'd just throw them off the side, and anybody that wanted them could go get them, but the company made some kind of an arrangement, with the railroad company to load them on a flat car and haul them and then they built the buildings.

RM: What did they use for floors?

RL: Curs had a dirt floor, but the boarding house and the cook house and all that had cement floors.

RM: What was your school like there? Do you remember about how many kids were in the school?

RL: I think there was 20 some-odd, all in one room, all with one teacher.

RM: You don't by any chance remember the teacher's name, do you?

RL: No. [chuckles]

RM: About how many buildings would you say were there?

RL: Probably 20 buildings. The mill building was made out of corrugated iron.

RM: How many tons a day could they put through there?

RL: I really don't know. They put a lot of them through there, though. When Richfield Oil took over, they upgraded that mill and they did some milling for another company whose name I can't remember that was also digging there. There were 2 pits working the same kind of clay and for the same purpose.

RM: Were the pits close together, and did the workers all live in the same town?

RL: Yes. They all lived in the same community to some extent. The workers didn't have access to the boarding house and that sort of thing.

RM: Yes. Can you describe about where the community was and where the pits were?

RL: From where the present Tenneco mill is, the pits were - oh, probably a quarter of a mile east and north. They're all full of water now. And the town was - oh, about a half a mile from where the mill was, almost directly west. There's a spring there. Shorty Diaz lived there for a long, long time.

Mrs. Lisle: Shorty raised pigs.

RL: He raised pigs there, and he got the garbage from Death Valley Junction, from the boarding house there.

RM: What years was Shorty Diaz there?

Mrs. Lisle: His kids went to school here in the '40s, and he was living there.

RM: He was still there in the '40s?

RL: He lived there until he died, I guess.

RM: Were the workers at the clay mine Anglos, or Indians, or . .

RL: Oh, there were some Indians, but . .

RM: Were they Shoshoni Indians, or Paiute, or . . .?

RL: Well, whatever these Indians around here are. The same ones that are at Shoshone, and Ash Meadows, and here - Death Valley. They're all in the same tribe.

RM: Then you came here in 1938 to Beatty. Could you describe what Beatty looked like at that time'

RL: The T&T was almost over. They were running two trains a week, I think, into Beatty.

RM: What brought you to Beatty?

RL: I was working for my uncle, Charlie Brown, who was the Standard Oil distributor down there. And the Standard Oil had a bulk plant here that they wanted to open, so Charlie Brown sent me up here.

RM: So they had a bulk plant, but it wasn't open?

RL: No. During the Depression years, it had closed down and they wanted to open it back up.

RM: Why did they want to open it back up? Was something happening here?

RL: Yes. Mining. The price of gold went from \$21 to \$35 an ounce.

RM: What year was that?

RL: 1935?

Mrs. Lisle: That gold was good? I don't know, but the mill out of town here was going in '34. I think that's when Sammy was working here.

RM: They raised the gold under Roosevelt, didn't they?

RL: Yes.

RM: And the town had been real down before that? And then it started coming back when they raised the price of gold?

RL: Yes.

Mrs. Lisle: Carrara was the one that really helped Beatty.

RL: Carrara and Rhyolite. When I got here, there were people working out at Chloride Cliff, Rhyolite, Bullfrog, and Carrara. The old Gold Ace at Carrara produced some real high-grade ore.

Mrs. Lisle: They had a mill out there.

RM: So you came into town to re-open the Standard bulk plant. Where was it located?

RL: It's down here where the Chevron station is now. And there were some tanks back there . .

RM: Who was living here then who is still here?

RL: The Revert brothers, and Crowells. That's about it.

RM: Did the main street look pretty much like it does now, or . . .?

RL: Well, no, there were trees - big cottonwood trees - lining Main Street.

Mrs. Lisle: And canopies over the buildings. The Highway [Department] made us all take them down.

RM: Was the highway paved from here to Vegas by then?

RL: Yes. It was done - oh, '30, 1933, '34, '35.

Mrs. Lisle: When I first went to Baker we went on a dirt road all the way - and chuck holes.

RM: Was it paved to Tonopah at this time?

RL: It was paved during the 1930s.

CHAPTER TWO

RM: Ralph, could you give us kind of a feel for what Beatty, was like back then?

RL: Well, this street out in front of our house, Montgomery Street, was the last street to the west. There was nothing in back of us here. Nothing. There weren't even any trails going back there. Just sagebrush and rocks.

RM: How far did the town go to the north?

RL: To the river. And there were 2 or 3 houses back up along on the west side of the old river bed, but the rest of the town was all down from Montgomery Street east.

RM: How far south did it go?

RL: Where the present Burro Inn is. There were some old houses there. And the red light was down right there.

[The tape is turned off for a while.]

RM: OK, Ralph, could you explain any more that you want about the town?

RL: Well, it was mostly rot big houses. The biggest houses were one right there on the corner across from the Exchange Club - Irving Crowell's house. And McRae, who was a prominent mining man.

Mrs. Lisle: And the house that burned down that Reverts had.

RL: But the rest of the houses were small. Well, for an example, this house here. You notice how thick the wall is there? This was 3 houses put together.

RM: So that's how they made a lot of the homes in town?

RL: They took three one-room cabins, and [chuckles] put them all together. You can get up in the attic up there and see. And the old roof is still there.

RM: Did they get the houses out of Rhyolite?

RL: Rhyolite, and Pioneer. It was a typical desert town. The streets were not paved, and the streets weren't all straight, like they are today. They kind of wound around, you know. Water wasn't too plentiful.

RM: Did they have a water system?

RL: Yes, the Revert brothers had a water system. But it was old and leaking.

RM: Was there a sewer system, or was everybody on septic, or did they just have outhouses?

RL: Septic; and a lot of them had outhouses.

RM: Was there a community power supply? Or was it kerosene?

RL: Kerosene. The place that I took over had a little power plant - little four-cylinder Kohler power plant that furnished DC power. I'll never forget that, because I had a radio which operated on .AC.

RM: [chuckles] You couldn't use your radio.

RL: Nobody told me that, and I plugged it into that, and smoke just flew out of it. [laughs]

RM: A radio was kind of a luxury item in those days, wasn't it?

RL: [laughs] Yes.

RM: Tell us about your trip from Fernley to Ash Meadows.

RL: I was 11 years old. It took us 3 days. My father - when he sold that mining property down there - come back to Fernley and bought a Model T Ford pickup and a Dodge touring car. And everything that we could load into that Model T Ford pickup is what we salvaged from that ranch in Fernley. Just walked off and left it. The stove, the piano, whatever. They just couldn't make a living on that farm but my dad was fairly successful in the mining, so . . . I'll never forget - it just worried him to death - we left real early in the morning. And my older brother, who was 5 years older than I am, was driving this Model T Ford pickup. And I was the only passenger along. And I looked back, and I could see we had forgotten to blow out the kerosene lamps. I thought, 'Oh, boy, it's going to burn the house down.' [chuckles] It didn't, but . . . [laughs] I can see that, you know. It took us 3 days, all on dirt road. The first day we got as far as Schurz - the Indian reservation. From Fernley to Yerington, and then over to Schurz. And I can't remember where we stayed or what, or whether we just camped out. Then the next night we stayed in the Goldfield Hotel.

RM: That was a real treat, I'll bet.

RL: Oh, boy, that was really something.

RM: Tell us about the Goldfield Hotel.

RL: We had a room on the second floor of the Goldfield Hotel. Actually, we had 3 rooms. And I'll never forget - that's the first time that I ever saw a real, up-to-date restaurant.

RM: What did you think?

RL: 'Oh, boy, this is . . . [chuckles] 'living.' Or something. We had dinner that night. It was after dark when we got there. We left before sunup in the morning, and it was after dark I remember the Goldfield mill. The road followed the railroad. It didn't go into Tonopah. We come from Miller's - followed the railroad as we . . .

RM: It cut around? It didn't go up the hill into Tonopah, but cut around down the valley?

RL: Well, it came right straight down from Miller's over to Goldfield.

RM: What railroad would that have been?

RL: That was the Tonopah and Goldfield. You see, the T&G didn't go into Tonopah from this side. It went into Miller's and it was too steep to go in this side. And it connected up with whatever it was that come from Mina. We left Goldfield before sunup the next morning, and it was in the dark when we got to Death Valley Junction.

RM: The whole way on dirt roads?

RL: All dirt roads.

RM: Were they good dirt roads, or just ruts?

RL: No. [laughs] My dad and my brother fixed flat tires - every day we'd have 2 or 3 flat tires. And we'd fix them, pump them up by hand. [chuckles] I'll never forget caning across the flat this side of - well, it would be what we call Sarcobatus Flat. This Dodge car had a canvas top, and you could fold it up and lay it down, and it would be open. It had side curtains on it, with some kind of - they called it Eisen glass. Well, you couldn't keep those curtains up, because the dust just boiled up in there. And one of those whirlwinds caught that top, and it just stood it right straight up in the air. [laughter] I just happened to be looking back there, and I saw that thing. It actually raised the front wheels off the ground for just a moment. Just stood it right straight up like it was a sail. (Oh, boy.)

RM: How many people would you say were living here in Beatty in '38?

RL: There were less than 1,000. Beatty was the trade center for a wide area. When I came up here, I delivered Standard Oil products for Charlie Brown. I sold powder and caps and fuse and carbide and blacksmith coal and all that stuff. And I used to deliver clear over as far as Skidoo.

RM: Tell me some of the places that you were delivering to at that time.

RL: The Keane Wonder over here. And then up on top to Quarry Cliff, and around over at Crater Valley over here, the Diamond Queen.

RM: That'd be over on the Test Site now.

RL: No, it's right on the edge. There's a real gold-mine operation going there now above the Diamond Queen. The Saga Corporation from Winnemucca has got an open-pit gold mine going there. It's a real operation. I was out there when they first started their open-pit operation. I came in from a different direction, and I [chuckles] got up there on a little knoll, and I told this fellow, "This is close to the old Panama."

"Yeah," he says. "There it is right there."

RM: Was the Panama down in the pit?

RL: No. There was a fault - break - in that, and the Panama came within about 20 feet of this big huge thing - what is now a big pit. In fact, they ran some test holes - with diamond drills - wagon drills. And they ran into some of the old workings up there of the Panama.

RM: Was the Panama going when you got here in '38?

RL: Yes. They had a mill out here right around the point of the hill.

RM: Just south of town?

RL: Just right here.

RM: Right as you head out onto the Amargosa?

RL: Yes. You're going just around . . . there was a little mill on this side, and then there was another one that belonged to the people that had the old Panama. You can see the old foundations up there.

RM: What are some of the other areas that you serviced with your deliveries?

RL: The Ubehebe. At the old Ubehebe there's a gold property and a lead property and a copper out in the Ubehebe district.

RM: Was Pioneer gone by then?

RL: No, there were people working it. Because I remember the mill working. There were - oh, probably 6 or 8 families living at Pioneer. Buildings were all intact.

RM: What was the status of Rhyolite then?

RL: There was hardly anybody living at Rhyolite. Just a few - mostly old- timers. Most of the people that were working at Rhyolite lived here in town.

RL: There was a mill right at the point of the hill (what did they call that?) - the Tramps Mill. It was working. And there was a little mill working at the Shoshone Montgomery.

RM: Were the buildings still there in Rhyolite?

RL: There were a few. There were quite a few buildings out at the Bullfrog. Bullfrog was going. They had a boarding house and bunkhouse and all that. There were probably 20, 25, 30 men working there.

RM: So the price of gold had stimulated quite some activity in the area.

RL: Yes.

RM: You were here until 1940. What happened when the war started?

RL: They shut everything down. [chuckles] There was hardly an able- bodied man in town. She [Mrs. Lisle] stayed here and ran the weather bureau for the Air Force, which had weather stations all around what is now the Test Site, which was a bombing range, with one in Beatty.

RM: When did they establish that bombing range? Was that when they established Nellis - in 1941 or '2?

RL: Nellis and Tonopah at the same time.

RM: Was there any activity out on the Test Site prior to World. War II?

RL: There was some mining.

RM: Are there any good mines out there?

RL: They never amounted to much. Clear over on the other side there was some tungsten. I don't remember the name of it. (What was the name of that mine where the Chinaman - Wang Cheng -) Timpahute. That's right on the eastern edge of the range.

RM: So what happened to your oil business? In . .

RL: They just shut it down in - '42, wasn't it, Mother?

RM: What did you do then?

RL: I had some mining going over in the Panamints, in Panamint City.

RM: Your mine in Panamint City was considered an essential mine, wasn't it? Why was it essential?

RL: Tungsten was essential to the war effort. They shut down all the gold.

RM: What did the gold miners do?

RL: They went to work wherever they could. Well, some of them . . .

Mrs. Lisle: Went into service.

RL: Irving Crowell was mining an essential product - fluorspar. And in fact there were one or two of the miners from Beatty who were in the Army, and they were released from the Army and sent back to work at the fluorspar.

RM: How long did you stay in the Panamints?

RL: Well, along about the end of '43 we had a flood out there. It just washed the roads out and cleaned us out. Then my status with the draft was that I was in essential industry, the draft board sent me to Bishop. And I worked at the U.S. Vanadium mine in Bishop for a while, and then they sent me to Gabbs on basic magnesium. And I stayed there until January of '44.

RM: Were they shutting down the Gabbs operation then?

RL: No. It was still going strong.

RM: And they were hauling that ore clear to Henderson. And then you got drafted?

RL: Yes.

CHAPTER THREE

RM: When we shut the tape recorder off last time, you mentioned that Dad Fairbanks had quite a sense of humor. How would you describe it?

RL: Well, take an incident with Death Valley Scotty. This was during the period of time when Scotty was in his heyday and making his trips across the country on the railroad, and all that sort of thing. And the Franklin Motor Company furnished him with a new car at least once a year; sometimes twice a year. If they come out with a new model, they would see that he got one of those. Because this Franklin was an air-cooled motor. But they had a dummy radiator-looking thing on the front to conform with the rest of the automobiles. And a large ornament up where normally you'd put water in a radiator.

And one time Scotty drove up to Baker and he always liked to have my grandfather wait on him and service his car and all that. And my granddad didn't know the first thing about a car. He couldn't even drive one. [chuckles] But he put gas in the thing and, 'Well,' Scotty said, "Dad, you better check the water and the oil 'cause I got a hot trip to make." So between Scotty and my granddad they got the hood up and they checked the oil and so forth, and about that time a bunch of tourists came along, and Scotty wasn't paying attention to what was going on, and my granddad was going to put water in the thing, and he couldn't get the cap off. [laughter] So before Scotty knew what was happening, my granddad had a Stilson wrench - a pipe wrench about that long - [laughter] and put it on the ornament. He twisted that thing - it was quite a little . . . Scotty said, "Oh, that's all right. The water's fine. Just leave it alone." [laughter]

Another time Scotty came in there and he had this brand-new Franklin. And he had to show her off and all that sort of thing. And at that time gasoline was 15 cents a gallon. And the car probably took, maybe, 10 gallons - \$2 or \$3 at the most. So he gives my granddad a hundred-dollar bill. Granddad just never cracked a smile - there was a bunch of people standing around. Granddad - we were a long way from a bank down there and he cashed a lot of payroll checks. He wore a vest all the time, and my grandmother would sew a pocket on the inside of this vest on both sides. On one side he kept a kind of a ledger book of some kind. On the other side was a great big wallet. The paper money at that time was quite a bit larger than it is today. And this wallet had compartments for twenty-dollar bills, and tens and fives and so forth. And this was the bankroll. You know, he'd cash checks with it and all that sort of thing. And Scotty gives him this hundred-dollar bill, and Granddad never cracked a smile. He just reached in here, and he pulled out this big old wallet - and he'd always do like this - he'd lick his finger and his thumb, and he peeled off change for a hundred-dollar bill. [laughter] At that time, a hundred-dollar bill was . . . This was right in the middle of the Depression. And Scotty wadded this money up and stuck it in his pocket. You know, just like it was so much confetti. And pretty quick, (I was working back in the grocery store, waiting on people) Scotty came around the little side entrance into the post office. And he said [whispers], "Dad, give me that hundred-dollar bill back. That's the only one I got." [laughter] "That's the only one I got." [laughs] Well, Granddad didn't want it either. The only thing he could do with it was eventually, when he'd go to the bank . . . [laughs] So Granddad - see, he was trying to get rid of it.

RM: What did you think of Scotty?

RL: Well, he was a real nice fellow and all that. But he was a promoter. And there were a lot of promoters. [chuckles]

RM: There were a lot of than that came through Baker?

RL: Well, my grandfather was quite widely known and so was his knowledge of the surrounding area and of the Death Valley area. People would come to him for information. [chuckles] Free information on the territory. The investment laws were not very strict at that time. People could start a mine and form a company and sell stock and they weren't controlled by anybody. And people respected my grandfather's judgment. They would ask him, Well, would you buy stock in such-and-such a mine?" Well, [chuckles] sometimes that was kind of hard to answer, because he knew a lot of those people, too. My grandfather really was much more respected than Scotty was.

RM: Yes, I imagine. Scotty wasn't that respected within the area?

RL: No.

RM: Everybody kind of knew he was flim-flam.

RL: Oh, yes. He was just a promoter. And he did a good job. His relationship with Scotty's Castle and Johnson and those people didn't hurt anybody. Johnson knew exactly what Scotty was up to.

RM: What were Johnson's motives of going along with it?

RL: His health.

RM: I mean, Scotty was ostensibly conning him, but yet . .

RL: Well, Johnson didn't build that castle for Scotty. He built it for himself and his wife. And they built it just like they wanted it.

RM: But he kept Scotty in spending money?

RL: Not that much.

RM: Where do you think Scotty got his money?

RL: From the Southern Pacific Railroad and various other interests. And some from Johnson. Johnson always saw to it that he didn't go hungry. But he didn't give him a lot of money to splurge on because [chuckles] too many of those hundred dollar bills might go on a big drunk.

RM: Do you remember any other good stories on Scotty or your granddad?

RL: Oh, yes, but whether they're good to tell or not I don't know. (Oh, boy.) One time 2 women who were doing some research on the early pioneers who came through Death Valley were trying to follow their trails - how they got through the country. And I was working at Shoshone at this time and Charlie told them that I would take them around and show them the various sites - like what is now the Test Site, and the bombing range, and . . . We took some little back trails and one thing and another back in that country where Granddad had told me that these people had camped at the various springs and water holes along the road. And we worked our way from Alamo across what is now the Nevada Test Site.

The roads then were all just gravel trails. And they wanted to go up to Scotty's Castle. It was warm, and we were going right up the floor in the valley down a long stretch going up Death Valley toward Scotty's place. We could see that there was something in the roadway up there. As we got closer and closer, we could see a car sitting off kind of to the side of the road. And as we got closer, we could see somebody sitting in the middle of the road. [chuckles] Scotty was on his way up back to the castle. I don't know where he'd been. It was kind of a sandy area, and the 2 wheel tracks were just kind of ruts going up in this wash. And here was one of these Franklins, took off right out into the brush. [laughter] And he was sitting in the middle of the road, and he had a case (this was just after Prohibition had been repealed) of beer and he was sitting right down in the road, and he was just so drunk he couldn't . . . We had to help him up. And I said, "Do you want me to get your car out?"

"No," he says, "I'll get it out eventually."

So we got him back out of the road and kind of in the shade of the car and we went on up. We were about 15 miles from the castle. And when we got up there, we told the people there about Scotty.

They said, "Well, if he doesn't show up in a while we'll go after him."

They wrote a book on that - these 2 women. It was Anne Martin and Dr. Long.

RM: Do you remember the title? It wasn't Loafing Along Death Valley Trails, was it?

RL: No, it was before that. That was by Carruthers. He was quite a character, too.

RM: Carruthers? Was he local, or did he just come in here?

RL: No, he just came in here.

RM: Did you have much contact with him?

RL: Off and on.

RM: In what way was he a character?

RL: Oh, he was a good author, but a lot of the time he would exaggerate the truth [chuckles] just a little.

RM: Did he exaggerate in his book?

RL: He made it flowery enough to arouse interest, but it was all based on truth - most of it.

RM: Did you ever know the Montgomery's? Bob Montgomery and . . .?

RL: No, they were gone. My father and my granddad knew them. Montgomery was connected in some way with a bank in Rhyolite. And when Granddad and my father and others were caught in the Panic of 1912 and '13 banks went busted all over the country. That's when my father and mother lost their money in Hayworth.

But Granddad had some money in the bank in Rhyolite. And I didn't know this until later. A teller in this bank in Rhyolite sent word to my grandfather to come to Rhyolite. He was down at Ash Meadows then. And Granddad went there and the teller told him to get his money out, which he did. And in later years they sold a lot of powder in Shoshone to the various mines in the country. It was a real competitive thing. And Granddad wouldn't buy anything but Giant Powder - it had to be Giant. They bought it by the carload - it came in on the rail. And later Granddad and I became quite close. And he told me that Jimmy - we called the salesman for the Giant Powder Company Jimmy the Giant (that wasn't his name, but he was the Giant salesman) - was the teller in the bank in Rhyolite.

RM: What made the teller come down and tell him, I wonder.

RL: Friendship. You see, at one time my grandfather had a livery stable here in Beatty, in 1906.

RM: Could you tell me what you know about that?

RL: Well, you asked me how he got the name "Dad" Fairbanks?

RM: Yes.

RL: He had 5 boys. Five boys and 3 girls. My mother was one. And they were on a farm up in Utah. And they just were not doing very good financially. The boys were all big, husky kids, and so he got together a bunch of teams and scrapers and one thing and another, and they started contracting building railroad grade on what they called the Clark Road. The boys, and then later my grandmother, would set up a camp and grandmother'd run the boarding house and cook.

RM: So your grandmother didn't stay in Annabella all the time.

RL: No, she would come down in the summer and get everything going, so he would have a camp set up and somebody to run it and cook and all that sort of thing. And then she would take the girls and go back so they could go to school and stay most of the winter. They were building railroad grade from both ends - from Los Angeles coming this way, and from Salt Lake also coming this way. And they were about to meet at Las Vegas. And about that time they started to build the LV&T Railroad from Las Vegas to Tonopah. And so Granddad took off grading on that one.

RM: Was he the only contractor?

RL: Oh, no. They would take 2 or 3 miles or something like that. They would be working maybe on a 10-mile stretch before the rails were laid. Well, they could see that the grading was coming to an end, so Bell's stepfather came to Beatty and started a freight line out of Beatty to these mines around the country. And my grandfather did the same thing. And Greenwater sprang up - the boom at Greenwater - and there was a boom at Johnnie. My granddad put his teams freighting freight from the end of the railroad to Johnnie and to Greenwater.

RM: Was that when he was headquartered out at Fairbanks Springs?

RL: Yes.

RM: But before that, he had a livery stable here in Beatty?

RL: Well, he hauled from the end of the railroad to Beatty.

RM: Before they got the railroad done.

RL: Yes. Then when the railroad was completed, he pulled out of here. He kept his headquarters at Fairbanks Springs all the time and his freight teams would care up here and then back and the same way into Greenwater and into Johnnie. But he kept his headquarters at Fairbanks Springs.

CHAPTER FOUR

RM: Is there anything more that stands out in your mind on your grandfather, or your father, or your grandmother?

RL: Not really. By the time that Grandmother and the girls got to Fairbanks Springs, all except the youngest daughter were out of school. Mother got married and my Aunt Stell married Charlie Brown. Aunt Vonola is the youngest and she wasn't old enough to go to school. Grandmother was running a boarding house at Fairbanks Springs.

RM: There were enough people there for a boarding house?

RL: Well, Granddad had enough people working for him with the freight teams.

RM: I was wondering exactly where the camp was, in relation to the spring.

RL: The camp was to the north and east, probably 200-300 yards away.

RM: Did they carry water to the camp?

RL: Yes.

RM: And then there's that pasture on down from the way that the water flows. Is that where they pastured the livestock?

RL: They cut alfalfa there too. They raised enough to feed the horses. Because they had to ship the grain in from some place.

RM: You mentioned that you had the tungsten operation over in the Funerals. Could you describe that operation a little bit?

RL: We shipped some real high-grade ore - shelite.

RM: How wide were the veins?

RL: Anywhere from a couple of inches to 18 inches. We shipped several truckloads that we had sorted out, and they didn't even have to mill it - it was that pure. Some of it ran as high as 50 percent.

RM: Did you use a black light on it in those days?

RL: Yes. But when the road washed out from that flood, that was it.

RM: It wasn't worth building another road?

RL: I didn't have any money and it never did amount to anything. It was just too inaccessible. We packed it out on burros for 5 or 6 miles.

RM: Did you live back there at the mine?

RL: Yes, and in Panamint City. We walked in every day, and then 5 miles home.

RM: I don't think many people could do that now.

RL: I wouldn't do it again, I'll tell you that.

RM: Was it a hand steel operation?

RL: Most of it. We found out there were just pockets. It would show up real good and it wouldn't go anyplace. It's characteristic of shelite.

RM: Was it on a lime-granite contact of some kind?

RL: Yes.

RM: Where did you ship your ore?

RL: A mill out of Benton, up above Bishop.

RM: Was there quite a bit of activity in Panamint City then?

RL: No, we were the only ones. We renovated some old shacks there. It was very crude, and I wouldn't go through that again, either.

RM: How did you discover the property?

RL: Oh, I grub-staked a couple of fellows.

RM: I wonder how they found it?

RL: With black light. They were prospecting up the wash - the slope coming down the wash.

RM: When the war started, they shut down your oil operation here. What did the other essential mineral miners do for oil?

RL: One of the Revert brothers was not eligible for the draft, and he stayed here and ran the Union Oil. There were 3 different oil companies here. There was Standard Oil and Union Oil and this other one - Pathfinder, I think it was, or something. They all shut down except Union.

RM: It was hard to get gas then for transportation, wasn't it? How did people get around?

RL: Oh, they got an allotment of some kind. Gas rationing - just like sugar and everything else. They got stamps.

RM: Did people out here get more of an allotment because of the extreme distances?

RL: Oh, I think so.

RM: Then it was about 1942 or so that they established Nellis. It wasn't called Nellis; it was called the Army Bombing Range then, wasn't it? And Tonopah Air Base at the same time. Did they cordon off a lot of land out there then?

RL: Yes.

RM: What was the feeling at that time when they just said, "OK, these lands are off limits."

RL: Everybody was patriotic. I don't know that they were glad to do it, but they did it. There was a lot different feeling then than there is now.

RM: How do you read the feeling now on the lands out there?

RL: Most of the people in this part of the country feel that it's an industry. And part of the way of life. And most of the people are quite disgruntled with the way our government and the news media have made a kind of mockery out of this nuclear thing, nuclear waste and the testing and all that sort of thing. They don't realize that the testing program out there has developed just so many, many, many things that have benefitted mankind. People around here know that. But the news media - it's something to sell newspapers. And [chuckles] get people to watch television.

RM: Then along about '43, '44, you got drafted? Where did you go then?

RL: I went to Europe. I landed in England, and from England to France and across France into Germany, and finally wound up in southern France and on a boat heading for the Philippines. And fortunately, our ship was just off the Azore Islands when they dropped the bomb on Hiroshima. And they rerouted our ship and we went in Boston.

RM: What outfit were you in?

RL: Engineer maintenance. Maintaining for instance, boats and bridges across the Rhine. We built bridges across the Rhine and all those canals and one thing and another. I was stationed for quite a while on what we called the Red Ball Highway across France and into Germany. We also maintained trucks and fixed tires by the jillions. I went in the spring of '44 and got out in September of '46.

RM: What did you do then?

RL: Came back here to Beatty. I got out over at Fort Ord, California. From Boston they sent us to Fort Douglas in Salt Lake City, and from Salt Lake to Fort Ord. They were bringing these airplanes in from the Pacific - just scads of them - and they had no place to put them. They took a bunch of us from the engineers and they sent us down to Victorville. And we laid this steel landing mat all over that desert out there, parking those - oh, all kinds of planes. Just scads of them. Hundreds of them. And I was there for 3 or 4 months putting down this mesh. We were people who had done it before, you know. We did it over in Europe.

RM: What did you do when you came home to Beatty?

RL: Chlo's [Mrs. Lisle's] brother, Sammy Colvin, and I started a garage down here where the Exxon is. It was Shell.

Mrs. Lisle: The Central Garage.

RL: We ran that for quite a while.

RL: Then got off into mining, and one thing or the other.

RM: How did the war affect the town?

RL: The town didn't amount to very much.

RM: What was it like after the war?

RL: Mining never got back like it was before. It's recovered somewhat, but in an entirely different concept than what it was before.

RM: What was the concept before the war?

RL: It was all underground mining, and small operations. There's just no place for a small operation any more.

RM: So World War II meant the end of the small miner in Beatty?

RL: Well, all over the country. Most of the men that worked in these small mines are all gone. There aren't any of the old-time miners.

RM: There aren't people around now who know how to operate a small mine, are there?

RL: No. There are a few that know how, but they're like myself.

RM: Yes. But you couldn't hire guys that would know how to drill a round or put in a square set or lay track and all that, could. you?

RL: Oh, my. No way. There are a lot of miners, but the only thing that they know is mass production. Another factor was that scrap iron became a real premium during and after the war. They took up the track, pipe, rails, compressors . . . everything. It all went for junk.

RM: So then there was no hope of ever opening the mines again, was there? Those are 2 really good points you've just made. I've never seen those written.

RL: As a good example, I thought that after a short period of time things would settle back to normal again. She [Chloe Lisle] had a reasonably good car. It didn't have good tires on it when I got home, but we managed to get some old recap tires on it and one thing and another - enough to get to Las Vegas. She could hardly even get out of town. And we were driving down Fremont Street in Las Vegas and a fellow had a big handful of money, and he said, "I'll give you .

Mrs. Lisle: I don't know - it was a lot of money at the time.

RL: It was more than we had paid for the car when we bought it new. But this was 4 years later. And a lot of miles later. He was offering more money for that car than we had paid for it. And I was still in the Army. We were thinking about getting back into business. And she was very concerned - she'd paid off all my bad debts and everything, [chuckles] but we didn't have any money to amount to anything, and selling that car . . . My thought was that in just a short period of time we'd be able to buy a car. Well, we sold it. I told the man, "I'll be back." I had to take her home. And I went down there and we got more out of it than we had paid for it brand new. Well I'll tell you what - if we didn't have the damndest time. We drove the darndest old clunker you ever .

RM: [laughs] You were sorry you sold it, huh?

RL: Oh, Jesus.

[tape is stopped]

RM: And it was three years before you could get another one, even though you had the money?

RL: Well, you couldn't even buy them, could you. It didn't make any difference whether you had money or not. You couldn't buy a car.

CHAPTER FIVE

RM: Could you tell me about a Nye County Commissioner and some of the things that you remember from that experience?

RL: I was commissioner for about 14 years. During my term of office they changed the term period. There used to be a short term and a long term. One was 2 years and one was 4 years. There were 3 commissioners. I was one of the first commissioners elected out of Tonopah. For I don't know how long, all of the commissioners were residents of Tonopah. And for some reason or other I got elected. There were 2 commissioners from Tonopah - Andy Eason and Nick Banovich - and myself.

RM: What made you want to go into politics?

RL: Well, I just felt that the southern end of the county was not getting a fair share of the pie. Eason and myself were new commissioners, and Banovich was a holdover. I was elected to a 2-year term, and Eason to a 4-year term. And then the next election, Banovich had a 4-year term, and I had a 2-year term again. Then the next election was all 4-year terms.

RM: You ran on a Democratic ticket, and you ran against Hank Records once, didn't you?

RL: Yes.

RM: What are some of the things that stand out in your mind about being commissioner?

RL: How little money there was to run a county. It's amazing. The money that comes in to Nye County now is almost as much as the total assessed valuation of the county when I started. There's a big difference. The group that I worked with in the last 4 years was Eason, and Bob Cornell from Gabbs, and myself. And we initiated the original suit out here at the Test Site. We felt that there were a lot of people making huge profits out there at the expense of Nye County and the federal government. And it was our contention that any time a contractor was using government property for a profit, they should pay taxes.

RM: What would they pay taxes on?

RL: Well, for instance, the commissary issue. Reynolds Electric was furnished buildings and power, water, sewer, everything. And they made a profit on those commissaries. It was our contention that they should pay taxes on that building.

RM: The county didn't furnish all those services, though, did they?

RL: No. In any other endeavor anybody who is in business - the hotels, motels - pay taxes on the property that made it possible for them to make a profit. These [other] people come in with no investment whatsoever, and make a huge profit on it, and we figured that they should pay taxes on it.

RM: Was that a hard thing to get across?

RL: Oh, boy, they fought it tooth . . . After a number of court sessions, it finally went to the Supreme Court. The year after I went out of office Nye County received 15 million dollars in back taxes. That made the difference between just grubbing and getting things right. As an example the Pahrump and the Amargosa were developing communities and they needed school buildings, so instead of floating bond issues to build one, they paid cash for it. I just don't understand the commissioners who are in office now - how they can be broke. It doesn't make sense.

RM: Compared to what you had to get by on?

RL: A good substantial amount of this money should still be intact, because every year since that time all of this property out here at the Test Site went onto the tax rolls.

RM: All those big drill rigs and everything out there?

RL: Those big drill rigs and all of these government cars that are running around out there. EG&G and Reynolds are making a profit out of every one of those cars. And so, regardless of whether they have a Nye County plate on them or a government license plate, they have to pay their proportional share of taxes on that vehicle.

RM: Why did you drop your commissioner seat?

RL: Well, I just had enough.

RM: Is there anything else that really stands out in your mind about being commissioner?

RL: I enjoyed it. We met a lot of real good people. I became personally acquainted with our senators - Alan Bible and Howard Cannon, and Walter Baring was congressman. I'll show you a picture.

RM: OK. [I'm going to put the tape recorder back on.] You've just shown me a picture from the Test Site in 1961 in front of a tracking station. So let's just go from left to right, and you name off the people.

RL: OK. The second guy owns the L&L Motel and the third guy is Glen Jones. He was a representative from this district to the state. [Next is] Nick Banovich. He was county

commissioner. This is Alan Bible. And this is Blake ore. Then me. And this is the white-haired guy at the Tonopah paper.

RM: I forget his name, too. Yes. Who's to his left?

RL: Tom McCullough - he was justice of the peace. And this is Boscovich.

RM: Then two military guys, it looks like.

RL: I think one of them is on the Test Site.

RM: OK, that's great. That'll be a neat picture.

RL: But this was the first long-range telescope for tracking missiles and everything.

RM: Any other things that stand out about being a commissioner?

RL: Our group tried hard to upgrade service. We started a program with the Tonopah Waterworks to replace all the main lines.

RM: Oh, yes. They had those old wooden lines, didn't they?

RL: They had all kinds; yes. We started a program to replace all the main lines from Rye Patch in and upgrade the pumping systems and all that sort of thing. We did the first paving of any county roads.

RM: None of the county roads had been paved before that?

RL: No.

RM: Did that start early in your career?

RL: Oh, along in the middle of it. Upgrading the roads and all of the general services. To me, it was in a real run-down condition. In fact, when I became commissioner, I didn't even know that I was part of the Tonopah water system. I didn't have the faintest idea. They were doing all of the digging of the ditches and trenches by hand. They would have a group of 10 or 15 men out there with this pick and shovel digging ditches. It's a lot of hard work, but it's expensive. We finally bought a backhoe for the water district and I put 8 or 10 men out of work. But actually it didn't, because we found that there were so many, many of the water lines around Tonopah that just wore out and needed replacing.

RM: I can remember when they were digging up some of those lines. It was wood wrapped with cable leaking all along the way.

RL: There were more patches than there was piping. It was interesting. The last 8 years that I was on the board I was chairman of the board and we did some good work.

RM: What did you do for a living during that period?

RL: I had a service station, a garage.

RM: You started that garage after you got home from the war, didn't you?

RL: Yes. I kept it up until about 2 years ago.

RM: It burned down once, didn't it?

RL: Yes, where my hardware store is now.

RM: When did you start the hardware store?

RL: Shortly after the fire, during that rebuilding. We had to get material and all that sort of thing, and at the same time we decided to do some remodeling on our home. This home. The kitchen was just kind of a lean-to thing. And the only hot water that we had was a coil in the wood stove. And the whole thing was kind primitive. We got a carpenter to figure out how much lumber and material was needed to put from that wall in there between the dining room and living room, on the other side of the parlor room. We just tore everything down and built it new. And with the lumber that we needed for this and for another project down there it took a truck and a trailer of material. A friend I had met at a Masonic Lodge convention owned Nevada Wholesale Lumber in Reno. He told me that any time I needed some material to let him know and he'd send a truck down. So we purchased all kinds of material. Roofing and insulation and whatever it took to build all of this. And people would come and say, "Sell me some nails. Sell me this. Sell me that." So it wound up that we didn't have enough material to finish this thing.

RM: That's because you sold it on the side?

RL: [chuckles] We sold it. And so we got some more lumber, and people kept coming, and first thing you know, we were in the hardware and lumber business. At that time we had a franchise of Goodyear tires through the service station and garage and one thing and another. And at that time they had a complete line of all types of home appliances. So we put in what they called a "Goodyear Store" in 1955 or '56. And it was reasonably successful. So we just graduated from that on up, and eventually . .

Well, Goodyear phased out that part of their operation, but Western Auto come along about that time, and we took on a Western Auto franchise, which replaced this Goodyear store. When our garage and service station and all that sort of thing burned down, we moved across the street and took on a distributorship for Texaco.

RM: You had been - what brand?

RL: Union.

RM: Why did you then go with Texaco?

RL: Because Texaco would loan me some money, and Union wouldn't. And we borrowed enough money from Texaco to build that station.

RM: The same station that's there today? Where was your Western Auto operation?

RL: We built a block building about 30 by 50 where the hardware is today.

RM: Where the station that burned had been. So you had one business on one side of the street, and one on the other.

RL: Yes.

RM: When did you get out of the Texaco?

RL: Oh, about 3 years ago.

RM: And meanwhile the little store for the Western Auto kind of evolved into the hardware store?

RL: Yes. The remodeling started the whole thing. It was interesting - it was new to me.

RM: Yes. Well, you'd had experience with the gas station all those years.

RL: Oh, yes.

RM: And you'd worked for your grandfather down in Baker, hadn't you?

RL: Baker, and Shoshone. So the retail business was not new to me.

CHAPTER SIX

RM: There was an organization here in town for a long time called the BIA. Could you tell us a little bit about that?

RL: It stood for Beatty Improvement Association. It would be similar to a Chamber of Commerce today. It was in existence when I got here in 1938. The Beatty Improvement Association owned that land right across the street here where the fire hall is, and the old bottle house out in Rhyolite, and some other property around which is now owned by the Town of Beatty. It was a group of some business men and women who were trying to upgrade the standard of living in Beatty.

RM: And then it evolved into the Chamber of Commerce?

RL: Yes, but the Chamber of Commerce didn't go over very well. And the Lions Club came into being, and they kind of replaced the BIA.

RM: Do you have a Chamber now?

RL: Yes; it is very active. And the Lion's Club and the American Legion and various service clubs .

RM: Do you have an American Legion here?

RL: Yes - the Strozzi Chapter.

[Guests enter the home - the tape recorder is turned off.]

RM: (A guest has arrived at Ralph's house at this time. His name is Bert Lemmon. He's a long-time Beatty resident.) Bert, if you could just tell us when and where you were born and what your parents' names were?

BL: I was born in Chelah, Washington, just out of Spokane in November 1920.

RM: And what was your father's name?

BL: It was Ray. My granddad was G. E. Lemmon from Lemon, South Dakota. He founded that town. And my grandmother's brother on my father's side was Major Milo Reno, who the town of Reno, Nevada's named after.

RM: And what was your mother's maiden name?

BL: Irene McClure. Also, my granddad's sister married into the Comstocks of the Carson City area.

RM: When did you come to Beatty?

BL: 1938.

RM: Have you been here more or less ever since?

BL: More or less. I had to leave a couple of times for employment. But my foster mother was Renee Gibson - she was the postmaster here for 36 years. She retired about 8 years ago.

RM: What do you do now?

BL: Oh, as little as possible. [laughter] Seems like I'm working a whole lot. I retired about 9 years ago. I was a postmaster up in the state of Washington at Lake Winault. Out of Aberdeen on the Pacific. Mother had 35 years in, I had 36 years in. Between the 2 of us, we had over 70 years as postmaster.

RM: Were you there your whole career?

BL: No, I clerked here and clerked in Boise, and worked here and in different places.

RM: Did you say you went to school here? What year did you graduate?

BL: I graduated in '40, just the ripe age to get into World War II [chuckles].

RM: Ralph just mentioned that you ran the theater.

BL: Well, the theater equipment belonged to Joe Andre, and then when it kind of . .

RM: Andre. Oh - who owned the grocery store?

BL: Yes. He had the projector from back in the '20s. It's an old Cinflex 35, and the warheads - we called them warheads - came off . . . that held the film in and all that. And everything was transportable. When I came back after the service, in '46, the equipment had been stored for some reason or other - I don't remember exactly why they quit - but I reactivated it. I had quite a few contacts down in Hollywood and through them I was able to book movies. We had first-run movies before they even had them in Los Angeles.

RM: But you couldn't advertise them?

BL: No. You see, what would happen is, a film would be held over. They had a regular schedule of moving the movies along. And maybe they'd hold over a Bing Crosby picture, and here this

other one would be lying there, waiting, so they'd ask me if I wanted to run it here. A lot of our pictures hadn't even been . . . It was comical in a way, because we showed here and we showed down at Furnace Creek, basically for the employees down there. Because it was hard for them to retain them and keep them working. So we had movies down there for them, and of course the guests were allowed to come. And, you know, they'd come and [chuckles] they'd look at those posters, and they'd tell you all about what that movie was, and I knew better, because it hadn't even been released yet. But I couldn't say it, because the Hollywood people would stop letting me have them ahead of time. They brought the films up on the bus.

RM: And what nights would you show them in Beatty?

BL: Thursdays and Saturdays.

RM: And you'd show 2 different films in a week here?

BL: Twice a week; yes. I'd take my equipment down and show them Sunday in the valley. And rather than bring it back I'd leave it there, and have a Tuesday showing. Then I'd break it down and bring it back for the Wednesday night and Saturday night showings here.

The old town hall had a loft up above, and of course the basketball hoops, so I had to take one out of the way. And we left our big screen up all the time. It was standard size - about 12 by 12. It took up pretty near the whole stage. And of course they pulled the curtain across there, so when they played basketball it wouldn't hurt the screen. But you had a hole like that that was to hoist everything up and set it up. We had a regular peephole cut in the wall. It was made for an actual projector. The only thing was, it just had a trap door, and you had to hoist everything up through that hole and mount the ladder that was right on the wall.

RM: What kind of seats did you have?

BL: Theater hide-type seats in sections of 4. They raised up, they folded, everything. We had about 24 padded ones. We'd put them up around the wall when they had any other activities. They had dancing, and there'd be socials, and basketball games, and just about anything was held in that old building.

If we'd have an old western, when the cowboys were chasing the cattle to stop the stampede, all the dogs would come in, and they'd be up on the stage barking at the cattle, and we'd have to stop the movie and run the dogs all out, before we could go on. [chuckles]

RM: You probably really got a good turnout, didn't you?

BL: It was kind of iffy. Of course, we're talking in the days before TV, that type of thing, but quite often I had to reach for my [wallet]. The old 35 millimeter camera film was flammable, so they had to ship the films in lead-tight containers. Generally the shipping on the bus would cost more than it did to rent the film.

That's the advantage over your 16, now. The weight, and maybe it would take 4 to 6 reels for a movie, and now you can get - on 16 - 2 reels, you know.

I was going to tell you about the old railroad - that in '36 or '37, somewhere along in there, they sold all the rolling stock and the railroad track to China - and shipped it to China. And all they left was the old railroad ties lying out there . .

CL: Which ones are you talking about now, Bert? Tonopah Tidewater?

BL: I think so.

CL: No, T&T was still in when we came . . . Wasn't that the one that was still in and you got shipments on when we were married, Ralph?

RM: The LV&T was gone before that.

BL: It was '37 and '38 when they quit using it.

RM: Yes. I think they sold it off in '39 or '40, didn't they?

BL: Yes. I went with a girl whose dad ran the station, but there wasn't anything coming in then, during the first of '39, or somewhere along in there. There wasn't any rolling stock coming down the tracks.

CL: Yes, Bert. Ralph sold Flammo. Don't you remember - those cylinders that weighed 90 pounds were about that big? And he got those Flammo refrigerators and stoves?

RL: We had one train a week.

CL: And I can tell you the agent: Charlie Reno.

BL: Had to have been '40 - that it quit.

CL: Well, that could be. Charlie Reno was the man who was on there. And from there he went down and started a place just outside Baker. You can see a spot where it is now.

RL: I came up here and opened a Standard Oil bulk plant in 1938 and I got boxcar loads of gasoline, and appliances. I remember it from '39.

CL: Ralph, do you remember Ken Priest said something about one railroad did not come into town? That both of them went to Rhyolite, but one of them didn't.

RL: There were 3 railroads that went into Rhyolite. There was the LV&T, the T&G and Tonopah and Tidewater.

CL: But I thought he said something didn't come to Beatty.

RL: The T&G never came to Beatty.

CL: Where did it go, then? Around?

BL: It bypassed us? Goldfield was the end?

RM: Well, it went to Rhyolite.

BL: It went to Rhyolite.

CL: Oh, I see what you . .

BL: That's the grade going through at the edge of town here?

RL: Yes.

BL: It bypassed us.

RL: Well, it came in the other side - over that pass, the other side of the Bullfrog - and out by the old Homestead Mill, and down that way, and into Rhyolite.

RM: Ralph, how was it you went from Standard to, was it, Union, to Texaco?

BL: He had Shell, too.

RL: Well, when the war started, anybody who was of draft age got out of business and went. . . So the government closed the Standard Oil distributorship here in 1941. I didn't get out of the army quickly enough, and they gave the distributorship to somebody else. So the first gasoline Sam Colvin and I had after the war was Shell.

BL: You had a Shell and a 76, and then Texaco. And they still had the wooden sidewalks.

RM: When did you lose those?

BL: Somewhere in the '50s when they widened the highway. I've got some pictures up at the house of the Beatty Cash store, and Springdale when it was a town. I've got a picture of Rhyolite when we were at one of their parades [chuckles]. I don't have that many - probably 8 or 9 or something.

[some inaudible background conversation]

RM: Beatty used to have an ice plant, didn't it?

BL: Oh, yes. O.H. Smith had it.

RL: One block from where my hardware store is and 2 blocks south.

CL: You can't miss it - you run right into it.

BL: It's against the bank.

RL: Right at the end of the street.

CL: And the clinic is up at the top of it.

RL: The clinic is up on top. Built right in the middle of what would've been the street. And then there's an apartment.

BL: And a Laundromat.

RM: Is the building still there?

CL: Yes.

RM: The triplex apartment is what used to be the ice plant?

RL: Yes. It's up there - it's made of stone. The walls are about 18 inches thick.

CL: Tom and Myrle Welch ran it for a long time. Their daughter Frances is the postmistress here.

RM: Did Smith sell it to the Welches?

RL: Yes. He changed it. He started this project of changing the old ice plant into the triplex.

BL: I had a little variety store there on Main Street in 1946. And I couldn't get ice here in town. So I ordered my ice off the freight, and I paid for 100 pounds. By the time it got here from Vegas [chuckles] there might be about 80 pounds. The freight line came through from Vegas.

RM: So you didn't have a refrigerator in your variety store to cool your stuff?

BL: No.

RM: That must've been tricky.

BL: Yes. We didn't have any power out at our place until '68. We still were using kerosene lights to read by.

RM: Where do you live?

BL: Ten miles out, just beyond Springdale at Windmill Ranch. You see, we never got any power up at that end. It was all private plants down there -[belonged to] Jim Martis. The Reverts bought him out. I can remember Bobby Revert and the others about 5:00 when the peak load was - they'd came barreling down there, kicking those generators, kicking in. The town had power, but we didn't have it up the valley. The only way we got it was when they put that tracking station in above us, to track those missiles from White Sands. And because they got power, everybody hooked on. And a rural light came through right after that.

RM: Was Smith the original builder of the ice plant? And does it date back to the earliest days of Beatty?

CL: I'll bet he did, Ralph, because his wife lived there, and she was dead when I came in '32.

BL: But the Beatty Cash store which belonged to Mom Richings, right there where the Beatty Club's is . . . Now, if you walk past the Pot Shop on that vacant lot, right behind the Sourdough and across the alley is where the root cellar was, or the storage cellar, whatever you want to call it, and that's where they stored the meat, and the vegetables and things, because we didn't have any refrigeration back in 1905, '6.

RM: Was Richings' the original store here before the one that Reverts bought?

RL: No. When I was on Third we had 3 stores, didn't we? Andre had the one where the Exchange is rebuilding now.

CL: Cy Johnson owned it before Andre.

BL: Yes. There was a building on the corner. Big building with a platform you had to back up to. It was between Bob Revert's station and the motel - where Revert's lawn is now. The Reverts had a great big store there that they had bought from out of state.

RM: Where was Riching's store?

EL: It was where the Beatty Club is.

RL: Right next to the Exxon. In those days, it was a Shell.

RM: Were there enough people in town to support 3 grocery stores?

BL: Well [chuckles] . . .

CL: We didn't have grocery stores then like you think of them today. One store belonged to Mrs. Richings. He bought groceries, he paid for them; she wanted anything up at his service

station, she paid for it. [laughter] And when they ate together, he paid his portion, she paid hers.

EL: Some of that goes on today [laughter].

[some inaudible background conversation]

RM: I have a picture of - Thompson, over at Rhyolite. And he's lent me a picture of - I think it's called the Beatty Store, and it's got a picture of Death Valley Scotty on the front porch. Was that Richings?

BL: Yes. That'd be Beatty Cash Store.

CL: Because it did have a front porch on it.

RM: That would be next door to the present-day Exxon.

BL: Yes, it's what we call the Beatty Club now.

RM: When did Richings' Beatty Cash Store go out of business?

BL: I'm going to say '38, somewhere along in there.

CL: No, she was in business when we got married in '39. So she might've gone out of business in '40.

BL: That seems . . . I don't know when she passed away, but Pop Richings was living on that other corner from the bank back. And he had a beautiful garden all the time, I remember. In fact we lived there, with him, for a while. But this is '46 that I'm talking about, so . . .

CL: Well, I'm talking about the '30s. [laughter]

CHAPTER SEVEN

BL: When I first came to Beatty in 1939 we only had one telephone, and that was at the Exchange. We went down there and checked to see if we had any messages. And the telephone pole was in the middle of the intersection of 4 stop signs.

RM: What years did you go to school here?

BL: I came from Hollywood, California, Christmas time of '39 - '39, '40, and '41.

RM: Oh, that's how you had the movie contacts?

BL: Yes.

RM: Beatty seems to be the only town in the area that survived and grew. Why has it survived, do you think?

RL: Well, it's an intersection leading into Death Valley; it is centrally located. In the days when I first came here, it was a railhead. There were a lot of small mines working and they would ship ore out of here on the railroad to various mills, smelters, or whatever. Transportation being what it was, Beatty was a supply point.

BL: I was going to say we were more or less a supply town. People came here for their supplies from out of the hills and wherever. Now it's tourism, I think.

RL: No. When the railroads went out, the highways were improved, and it's a supply point right now for the trucking industry. In fact, our hardware store is a loading and unloading point for 2 or 3 different truck lines. People from Death Valley, and from mines . . .

BL: Yes; I think basically it's always been a supply town in one form or another.

RL: Yes. It's a central supply point, whereas Bullfrog and Rhyolite and Pioneer and the rest of the towns weren't.

BL: Yes - and they didn't last. Some of them didn't last that many months. They were there and gone.

CL: May I inject something in here? I think that Beatty's a caring town. I really mean that.

BL: Yes.

CL: As Bert just said, he came in here with the movies and we had movies, and he had to carry it sometimes. And you have to care about a place or you can't do it. Our fire department built their fire house over here. They built it - they raised it. The Episcopal Church over here was done the same way - the back end and the front.

RM: Is that the stone church?

CL: Yes. Right over here on the corner. And when all the things are this way, it's a caring town - and this is what's done it. Everybody has put themselves back into the community. Where you take a lot of places that don't do that, the town doesn't survive.

BL: That's right; she's right. For an instance, I've seen here in town periods when you could shoot a cannon ball down the main street and you would hit nothing but a sleeping dog at certain times of the day. You wouldn't think there was \$100 in the town. But you let somebody have a tragic accident, and you see how, within an hour or so, there's a thousand dollars or so raised right now. I've seen it happen many a time.

CL: Yes, Renee raised all that plastic surgery money - remember? Was it 2 or 3 kids for plastic surgery?

BL: I know the Looney girl got burned when her mother's home burned. But I'm just saying that within a couple of hours, somebody's passed a hat all around, and they've collected - what, a thousand dollars. You wouldn't think there was a dime in anybody's pocket at that period of time - the recession.

RL: A good example of what they can do . . . Beatty never, in recent years, had a doctor. And I think there was a time when it didn't have any medical facility at all - none.

BL: Yes. A doctor came once a week, and if you were ill enough, he took you back to Vegas.

RL: And he didn't always get here once a week.

BL: [chuckles] No.

RL: A group got together and decided they'd build a hospital - not realizing what a hospital is. [chuckles] It turned out to be the clinic up on the hill. We spread the word around about what we were trying to do and a friend of ours flew from Los Angeles to donate the ground and a building where the clinic is.

RM: When was that dedicated?

RL: It was started in 1961, wasn't it?

CL: Yes.

BL: Yes.

RL: And Renee Gibson - she was the postmaster then - started a . . . what was it she called it?

BL: A Fiesta.

RL: And at the one Fiesta they raised over \$2,000.

CL: That was the carnival, that raised the \$2,000. It's in Tonopah's paper today - it was 30 years ago. And Joanne Munford - the one who just died - was the queen.

RL: Anyway, this is the type of thing . . . That building was built up there; we didn't have the faintest idea what we were getting into. And we went to different organizations. Sears, Roebuck has a philanthropic program. The Ford Foundation drew the plans for it. They sent a man out here, and . . . The original building that this man [had donated] . . . He owned some mining property in Rhyolite and this was a mill building or an assay office or something. Come to find out, we had to tear the roof off and raise the ceiling 18 inches to meet medical standards. And [chuckles] we'd have been better off to have nothing. But anyway, we put in to have that . .

CL: And the doors had to be a certain width because of the gurneys.

RL: But anyway, with all donated labor, and [background conversation makes part of this inaudible] we built that building.

BL: And today there are still people donating different pieces of equipment and so forth.

RM: Who staffs it now?

BL: We have a physician's assistant, and he's a God-send.

CL: Ralph's president of the clinic board.

RL: And another part-time resident of Beatty who passed away left a foundation fund. Last year we drew \$33,000 out of it to build an addition.

RM: The last time we talked, you mentioned that you worked in several mines after the war. Could you briefly describe which mines they were, and what you were doing?

RL: I worked in the Senator Stewart for a while after the war.

RM: Were they milling the ore down here at Sager's mill?

RL: No.

CL: Oh, I thought Weeks died before that. The Sager's mill.

RM: The one down here at the point of the narrows.

BL: Oh, at the Narrows? I remember that mill up there.

CL: Oh, Jack Sager had that.

BL: I don't remember what that mill was doing, but . .

[inaudible cross-talk]

RM: Did Weeks own the Senator Stewart?

RL: He was just leasing. It belonged to a group of people in Baltimore. Dee Giles and I operated the Senator Stewart and leased from that same group.

RM: And where did you ship your ore?

RL: The first ore we shipped went to the Stateline Mill, just over the hill from Goldpoint. And then that closed down, and then we shipped to Benton.

RM: Where you were shipping your shelite.

RL: Yes. When the war started, they shut them down on gold, and he converted the thing to the tungsten. Then he quit taking ore, and we hauled it to Dayton, between Virginia City and Highway 50.

CL: You also went up to Utah - out of Salt Lake.

RM: Tooele?

RL: Yes, we hauled some there when Sam Colvin and I were at the Ubehebe.

CL: Oh, OK. That's when you and Sammy did it.

RM: So after the war you were also at the Ubehebe?

RL: Yes.

RM: What kind of a mine did you have there?

RL: Lead and silver. There was a period of about almost a year that lead just kept going up, up, up, up, up. I don't remember now how - it went up to 20. The highest we ever got for any ore was 27 cents. This was in the late '40s, not too long after I got out of the army. As an example - what happened to the lead market [chuckles] - some of the ore we hauled ourselves, and some we contracted to haul to Tooele, Utah. And the smelter at Tooele would take ore that had zinc in it. Those other smelters wouldn't.

RM: Oh, you had a little zinc in yours?

RL: Yes. If you weren't careful, there was more zinc than anything else. [chuckles]

CL: Ralph, what was the name of the battery man that had that?

BL: Lippincott.

RL: He had another lead mine. The lead mine that we had belonged to the same people who owned that big mine out of Modina, Utah.

RM: Is Modina the mine?

RL: That's the town.

RM: Tooele was American Smelting and Refinery company?

RL: Yes.

RM: Could you say a little bit about Judge Gray?

RL: He was Justice of the Peace. During my time, he was mostly retired, but he was J.P. when I first come here and shortly after that. He was here during the Rhyolite . . . and he was involved with mining.

RM: Was there a man named Indian George?

RL: He was over in Panamint Valley, not here.

RM: And Seldom-seen Slim - did you know him?

RL: Yes, I did. He was an old miner and the years that I knew him, he was too old to work in the mines. He was a prospector - and he lived in Ballarat.

RM: Any other characters or individuals that stand out in your mind?

RL: Old Chris Wick was one of them. He was an old miner who was too old to mine.

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Graphics SM Productions - Beatty, Nevada