

An Interview with
GEORGE GARNER

An Oral History conducted and edited by
Robert D. McCracken

Nye County Town History Project
Nye County, Nevada
Tonopah
1987

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George Garner
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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 Tam 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.

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--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 George and Toni Garner at their home in Las Vegas, Nevada - March 25, 1987

CHAPTER ONE

RM: Do you want to introduce yourselves?

GG: I'm George Garner, of Las Vegas, Nevada; born and raised in Nevada

RM: And . .

TG: Toni Garner. I married George in 1943 when he was in the Navy. That's when I first came here.

RM: Where did you come from, Toni?

TG: St. Paul, Minnesota.

RM: And you met George in Minnesota?

GG: Yes.

RM: When were you born, George?

GG: February 22, 1923, in Las Vegas, on south Main Street. My dad was M.L. Garner and my mother was Minnie B. Garner. He worked at the Boulder Dam until he was killed in an accident in 1944.

RM: I understand that your father homesteaded in the Ash. Meadows area.

GG: There was a group of people that homesteaded up in there, and the ones I can recall are: the Bradfords, the Tubbs, George Ishmael, and an Indian by the name of Morris. He just went by the name of "Indian Morris." Morris had 80 acres [in Ash Meadows] right across from the property that we own at the present time. It was my father and grandmother's original homestead. Their deed was recorded in 1913 for the homestead; they must've arrived there about 1908, to prove up the homestead before they were issued a deed from the federal government.

RM: How did your father happen to come there?

GG: That I don't know.

RM: Where was he born?

GG: He was born in Mitchell, South Dakota, in 1887. He grew up in Des Moines, Iowa.

RM: And then he came out west at some point?

GG: Yes, my grandfather and grandmother got a divorce and my father took my grandmother, who was partially invalid, and came west.

RM: In what sense was she an invalid?

GG: She was paralyzed on the left side from a stroke and she walked with a cane.

RM: What was your grandmother's name ?

GG: My grandmother's name was Etta E. Garner.

RM: Etta E. Garner. Do you know much about your grandmother and your grandfather?

GG: No.

RM: You say your father grew up in Des Moines, Iowa?

GG: Yes. Their line of business was trading draft horses, and the insurance business. That was my grandfather's line of business, and when my dad grew up he went right in the business with him. I believe he came west selling draft horses. He used to tell me about riding the train to Ogden and coming down through [southern Nevada].

RM: Can you tell me anything about his life in Nevada prior to Ash Meadows?

GG: I think he traded some up around Bunkerville, [on the basis of same] hearsay things that I grew up, with . . . On his first trip to Nevada, he made some deals up around Bunkerville, and then he went back to Iowa. And then the next time he came I guess he wound up in Death Valley Junction, because that was booming on account of the clay camps and there was same acreage for homesteading, and he decided to settle down in there.

RM: Do you know about what year he might have been in Bunkerville?

GG: Well, it had to be prior to 1908. If I recollect right - I've heard it repeated - he first can to southern Nevada in 1905.

RM: In 1905. That would've been at the time of the original land auction in Is Vegas?

GG: Yes.

RM: Would he have been here for that land auction, do you think ?

GG: Well, he often said, all through the years, that if he'd taken the money that he invested in Ash Meadows and invested in Las Vegas that [laughter] he would've been a multi-millionaire . . . [chuckles]

RM: How many acres did he file on in Ash Meadows?

GG: He filed on 80 acres and my grandmother filed on 80 acres.

RM: When did he bring your grandmother out?

GG: This I don't know. He probably had to bring her out when he filed on it in 1908, or along there, when he proved up the homestead.

RM: Did she come out on the railroad?

GG: Yes. The Tonopah & Tidewater ran through Death Valley Junction at that time. And all I can recollect that they ever had over in the Amargosa Valley was the old Tonopah & Tidewater Ranch, which is still there. None of the other ranches or farms that are over there now were even . . . That was just bare desert in that area.

RM: Where are the 80 acres that he homesteaded on?

GG: Approximately 2 miles due west from what they call the Crystal Pool, now. And a quarter of a mile of it fronts on the main highway, which cuts through the valley now; the highway that cuts off of Highway 373 and goes to Pahrump.

RR: And where was your grandmother's 80 acres? Was it adjoining?

GG: Yes, they're adjoining tracts.

RM: What happened after he filed?

GG: He built what I call a tarpaper shack. It had no siding on it, just building paper. And [with the] hardened conditions out there, I don't know how they even lived out there. They had to cook on kerosene stoves, and I don't know what they did in the winter, to keep warm, but I guess they managed. From the original Crystal Springs the water ran down through our property. In fact, they've ditched it now, but the creek still runs right through our property, the original creek. That's the water he used to prove the homestead, and he farmed up there and he used to take his vegetables to Death Valley Junction to sell to the railroad. And Death Valley Junction was a booming town then, because of the Clay Camp and the borax from Death Valley and the railroad head and everything else.

RM: What kind of crops did he grow?

GG: All kinds of vegetables, as I understand it - carrots and celery and corn and . . . Bob Tubbs told me one year that he had to leave, and that that summer he went down and harvested his corn for him, and irrigated it and so forth.

RM: I wonder how many acres your father was working there, between his property and your grandmother's.

GG: From my visits up there, and looking it over, I imagine there were about 40 acres that he cleared off. The brush has grown back now, but the bush is small - it's not tall like it is in the other parts of the area. And it's a flat land, and the other area has sand dunes on it.

RM: How long did he stay there farming it in this way ?

GG: He must've stayed there from 1908 to 1920, when he married my mother. She came out there and stayed with him a few months on the ranch, and then they moved to Tonopah, where she opened a boarding house and he worked in the mines.

RM: Was your mother a Nevada woman?

GG: No, she was from Chillicothe, Missouri. They were married in 1920. They didn't stay on the ranch long. She got pregnant, and there was no doctor, and she went back to Missouri, and gave birth to my brother Charles on May 6, 1921.

RM: Did your father go to Missouri with her?

GG: No, he stayed on the ranch.

RM: And then she returned with the baby, and then they moved to . . .

GG: Tonopah. I don't know where they lived in Tonopah, but I know she had a boarding house there, and I've still got gold nuggets where the miners used to pay her for their meal. They'd give her a little flake of gold, and I still have then. The interesting thing about these gold nuggets is that they're every color of gold there is: rose and green and yellow .

RM: And what did your father do?

GG: He worked in the mines up there, someplace in the Tonopah area. think it was right in the town of Tonopah.

RM: And this would've been after 1921?

GG: After 1921. And then in 1922 they moved to Las Vegas, and he went to work on the railroad. And I was born here in February 1923.

RM: And what became of the ranch?

GG: It just sat idle up there. People who ran cattle in there just used the land without any compensation or anything. It wasn't fenced off - it was just like open range.

RM: Did you go out there very often?

GG: Well, when I was young I didn't visit up there very much at all. Maybe 4 or 5 times.

RM: Do you have any memories of those visits ?

GG: I know that on the old Bradford place down there where the creek used to run the wild ducks would come in and I'd go up there and we'd walk the banks of the creek and pick up wild duck eggs. I was up there with [my father] one time and we went in the Devil's Hole before they had it fenced off. I've been clear down in the water.

Another interesting thing is that my dad bought an old tractor - it was the first tractor in that area - to clear his land with. And during World War II, in the early '40s, the junkies came in there and stole the tractor. They hauled it off for the scrap metal He hid it in the brush up there, but they found it and stole it.

RM: You also mentioned, before we started recording, that your father was drafted while he was living up there.

GG: Yes, he was one of the 2 people in that area drafted for World War I.

RM: George, do you remember any improvements he made on the property other than the tarpaper shack?

GG: The only other improvement he made was where he cleared and farmed. And over the last 40 years, it's just disintegrated. In fact, the old stove and some old buckets and tin cans are still lying on the clay hill that they had their house on. And we've just left them there for [chuckles] remembrance, or something. And then he did put in a couple of roads around the property, and ditched the creek so they had irrigation.

RM: Did he keep stock on the property?

GG: My mother told me that they had 2 horses up there, and when they Abandoned the ranch they left the mare and the stud horse up there, and I guess that's part of why all the wild horses are there now.

RM: Do you have any information on what kind of social life people might have had in those days?

GG: Bob Tubbs is the one I knew the best up there, of the old-timers, and he told me that on the Fourth of July they always used to get together down at the Crystal Pool and

have a picnic and go swimming. One Fourth of July my dad dove off the diving board and cracked his head open . . .

We always called Crystal Pool "the big spring." That's what my mother always called it. But in the later years they've renamed it the Crystal Springs. They had a diving board out there, and all the people used to socialize on the Fourth of July and [other] holidays.

RM: Tell me what you know about Bob Tubbs.

GG: Well, like my father, he and his mother came in there and homesteaded approximately at the same time. He was a farmer too, and at his place now they've got all his old farm equipment and everything. His mother was Kitty Tubbs and his daughter is Judy Tubbs, who lives in Henderson. She still has the property up there and has a trailer on it.

RM: Does she go up there much?

GG: Well, the last report I got was that she had the trailer rented out and she was living in Henderson. Because of economic conditions, she couldn't stay up there.

RM: What else do you know about Tubbs?

GG: He was a nice fellow. He was a carpenter. He worked at Mercury for years as a carpenter; he drove back and forth between Ash Meadows and Mercury.

RM: He must've been getting up in years when he was working at Mercury.

GG: Yes, he was in his late 60s when he died.

And then there's another fellow up there; I don't know his last name, but he was one of the original homesteaders, and they called him Frenchie. He lived there all his life and died there, and I used to visit him every once in a while.

RM: Where was Frenchie's place?

GG: He had a cabin on the south end of the valley by the Ash Meadows Lodge, when there was the Ash Meadows Lodge. They put the Lodge in the '40s. And the Tubbs place was above the Lodge, but in the south end of the Meadow, too, approximately 10 miles from where our property is. The Ash Meadows Lodge was built after World War II by a bunch of promoters in Las Vegas. They were going to make an exclusive dude ranch for divorcees, and they had gambling, and a bar, and everything. They went ahead and constructed the Lodge and the swimming pool and everything, and then they didn't get enough business to maintain it.

RM: When did it become a brothel?

GG: That had to be in the '60s.

RM: And then it eventually passed from that use, didn't it?

G3: Yes, and now a mining concern has got it and they use it for their headquarters.

RM: What was the woman's name who ran the brothel? Did she get it after it was a dude . . . ?

GG: Yes. After it was a dude ranch. I don't know the names of first owners who made a brothel out of it, but there was a lady from Las Vegas here, an old-timer, and her name was Anne Weller, and her husband's name was Bert Weller. They ran a bar on north First Street for years, and then she sold the bar when they built the Mint Hotel - or, the Birdcage, I guess it was - and she moved to Ash Meadows and operated the Lodge. Actually, she didn't have much to do with the brothel; she just ran the bar and the restaurant. I went up there several times and visited with her, because I've known her since I was practically born - she and my mother were good friends.

Then Anne Weller died, and through the estate they sold it to an outfit called Anaconda Minerals. Not Anaconda Copper; it was Anaconda Minerals. And they engaged in mining activity up there, and in approximately 1985 they sold out to another mining concern. I don't know the name of it now, but they're in operation up there.

They're using the Lodge for office space and then their headquarters are there.

RM: How, well did you know George Ishmael and Indian Morris?

GG: I didn't know them hardly at all. I've probably been up there with my dad when he talked to them, and I was just a little kid, but I can't remember them at all.

RM: Do you know what happened to them?

GG: Well, George Ishmael just died a couple of years ago, here, and Morris, has been dead for years and years.

I don't know who the people were, but north of our property about 3 miles there was a place they called the Jap Ranch. All I know about the Jap Ranch is that it was supposed to be one of the most fertile places up there, and they had the best vegetables; but the Japanese are known for raising good crops.

RM: When did the Japanese move in on that property; do you know?

GG: I have no idea. [chuckles]

RM: When did they leave that property?

GG: I don't know that, either.

When my dad was up in there he knew old Dad Fairbanks, who Fairbanks Springs was named after. That's on the north end of the valley. Dad Fairbanks had his

ranch up in there and farmed and everything. He later moved to Baker, California, and had the service station there in the '30s and '40s, and '50s.

CHAPTER TWO

RM: Do you have any memories of Dad Fairbanks?

GG: Well, in the late '30s when my father and mother and brother and I went to Los Angeles on a vacation, we stopped at Baker, and he had the service station then, and that's the only time I ever met the man. I don't recall too much about him, but I recall that he was a tall man.

RM: Who else do you remember who lived at Ash Meadows at the time? GG: The Bradfords lived right below the Crystal Spring and they farmed in there. [As I said,] I recall as a young kid that we used to go up there and the wild ducks would land along the creek and lay their eggs, and old Charlie Bradford used to always save a duck egg for me; we'd go out and find one and that was mine.

RM: Did they come in about the same time as your father?

GG: As far as I know. It seems there were 8 or 10 families who came in there all at the same time to homestead.

RM: Was pretty much all the good ground taken up?

GG: Yes. In fact, I think my father got there a little late, or he could've homesteaded on a spring. But the water rights were distributed amongst the homesteaders, and the creek ran right through our property.

RM: Were there any churches or anything like that in the area?

GG: Not that I know of. The only churches were at Death Valley Junction. That was a town then.

RM: Did many of the people go there to the church?

GG: That I don't know.

RM: Were your father and mother religious?

GG: My mother was very religious, and my father wasn't as religious.

RM: What about stores?

GG: No, everything was at Death Valley Junction.

RM: Did they get there on the same road that's there today?

GG: Yes. And Highway 373 came in later years - the paved one that goes from Lathrop Wells to Death Valley Junction.

RM: What do you remember about the pupfish from those days? Did people ever talk about it, or . . .?

GG: No. They were always in those creeks and in the Devil's Hole and everything - there were always those little minnows in there, and people never paid any attention to them. The important thing was the big bullfrogs in that area, and they're still in there.

RM: Did they eat them?

GG: Oh, yes.

RM: Were they good?

GG: Very good. And then, as it is now, the ducks came in there every winter; it's on their flight path. So the ducks and the geese come in and rest up and take off.

RM: So it was good hunting there?

GG: Yes.

RM: Were there deer or anything in the Meadows?

GG: No, just coyotes, and rabbits, and . . .

RM: Were there any plants that people would gather there to eat - wild things?

GG: The only thing I can ever remember my dad talking about is a plant that has a yellow bloom. They call it squaw cabbage, and the Indians used to cook that, and I guess the settlers ate it too.

RM: Did you ever eat any?

GG: No. I've tasted it - just to break off a piece and taste it - and it's similar to cabbage, but stronger.

My dad had a very good friend who was in close vicinity to [the] Johnnie Mine; his name was Charlie Labbe. He was a Frenchman. He owned that Johnnie Mine for umpteen years.

RM: Tell me about Mr. Fox.

GG: Bob Fox came in the area in the early 1900s - probably 1914, '15, '16, and he was a promoter; he promoted the clay. He mined clay up there in the northwest end of the valley - the clay pits are still up in there - and they took it across the valley and

processed it where American [Borate Company] - ABC - has their plant now. In fact, they got clay out of there, too, because the water was there.

RM: They got clay where the ABC plant is now?

GG: Yes; it's sitting right on a hill of clay. And this clay is used in oil drilling. It's a lightweight clay that they use to cool the bits when they're going through hard rock. This clay will float on water after it's processed, and they pump it down to keep the bit cool. And in fact the mining company [that's] in there now - IMV - still mines that clay and processes it.

RM: So that Fox came in and he developed the clay?

GG: Yes. He was a promoter. My father and all the old-timers up there told me that Fox was nothing but a promoter then and the Gillette Razor Blade Company brought him in there and he was using their money to develop the clay.

RM: And did he have a pretty good development going there?

GG: Oh, yes. He had clay stacked up to . . . [chuckles] They had a big operation.

RM: Where did his workers live?

GG: They were right at the Clay Camp.

RM: Death Valley Junction was abandoned for a long time, wasn't it?

GG: Yes; after the Tonopah & Tidewater quit running, Death Valley Junction just went down [to] nothing but a ghost town, which it is now. I don't know if there are 5 or 6 families living there now . . . It was a booming time at one time. It had all the mines, and the borax, and everything coming through there.

RM: So your father then moved to Tonopah, then to Las Vegas - and then he never left Las Vegas. And he was killed in 19- . . .

GG: 1944, up in the Boulder Dam.

RM: What happened?

GG: They were working below the dam, and they had to take a boat across the river, and they were filling the voids in the cement. When they originally poured the cement in construction of the dam, they left voids or, there were voids that the cement didn't get in - and then after the dam was completed, they came back and opened up these holes and filled the voids. But they had to take a boat across the river. It was tied up to what they call a catwalk - a swinging bridge - and he went down there to get in the boat one morning, had his work clothes on and all his tools in his jacket pocket and everything,

and he missed the boat and hit his head on the side of the boat. That water down there is about 50 degrees, and he was drowned; he never did regain consciousness. I don't know whether it was a heart attack . . .

RM: How old was he?

GG: Fifty-nine years old.

RM: And your mother continued to live in Las Vegas? Did you live with her?

GG: Well, when my father died I was in the service. She had her own hare here, and we had rental property then.

RM: And how long did she live?

TG: She died in '78 - '79?

RM: So she lived to be quite old.

GG: Ninety-one years. When they came from Tonopah she opened up the dress shop on south Main Street.

RM: Is that right.

TG: In the Sal Sagey Hotel.

GG: It was the Nevada Hotel, then, and it was the first dress shop in Las Vegas.

RM: And how long did she have that?

GG: Oh, she had that for 7 or 8 years, or longer than that; I can't remember. That's when they had the prostitutes in Block 16, and she used to make all the dresses for the prostitutes in there. One thing about the prostitutes: they wouldn't care in the front door, they'd care to the back door of the dress shop and knock on the door and make sure there weren't any high-class customers in the place. And then they'd care in and get their measurements. And they never give a bit of trouble to the local store owners or anything, at that time.

RM: Where was the hotel located, now? The Sal Sagey - is that what you said?

GG: No, it was the Nevada Hotel, then. It was located at the corner of Main and Fremont Street, where the Golden Gate is now, on the southeast corner. Her shop was about 3 doors down Main Street. They had a drugstore on the corner, and then they had the hotel entrance, and then I think her dress shop was the next one down the street.

RM: And she kept it into the '30s?

GG: Yes. And then in the '30s my father was one of the original workers on the Boulder Dam. I think he went to work for the Bureau of Reclamation in 1929, and he drove dynamite on the old dirt roads down to the dam site before they ever started construction. They'd already decided to build the Boulder Dam during Hoover's administration. We moved to Boulder City for 2 years, from '34 to '36. They furnished a house there.

RM: So you went to school there?

GG: Yes, I went to school for 2 years in Boulder City.

GG: We moved back to Las Vegas after they completed the dam. Completion was done, but he still worked for the Bureau of Reclamation until he was killed in 1944.

RM: So he saw the dam from its very beginnings. Did your mother have any other businesses?

GG: Well, she went in and out of the dress business, and she worked for local dress shops. She worked for Fannie Soss - Fannie's Dress Shop - for years. She was a seamstress [on the] highest level. I mean, she could make anything. She just looked at a dress and [could] draw up a pattern, cut the material out, and . .

RM: It's hard to find accounts of Block 16. Was it a pretty wild place?

GG: No, it wasn't. I grew up, when I was down there, and I used to deliver papers down there in the casinos. It was a block just set off by itself and if you had business down there you went down there, and if you didn't have business, why, you didn't go down there.

RM: I've never been clear exactly where it was. It wasn't a square block, was it?

GG: No, it was just one side of the block, on the east side of north First Street, the second block past Fremont. You know where the California Hotel is now?

RM: Yes.

GG: Well, right across the street there. It fronted the whole block. There was the Arizona Club and the Honolulu Club and Idle Hour and [chuckles] . . .

RM: And were there brothels in each of these places?

GG: Yes; those were the name of the brothels. They all had their own bars, and . . .

RM: What did people think of it, here in town?

GG: Well, the people accepted it. It didn't bother them at all; it was just a way of life.

RM: It was the government that didn't like it, wasn't it?

GG: When they it in the gunnery school at Nellis during World War II, to keep the servicemen from frequenting they closed them.

RM: Did they move down toward Henderson?

GG: They had one out there on the Boulder highway at Four-mile.

Another Voice: Right across the street from Four-mile.

GG: And what did they call it?

Another Voice: Roxie's, wasn't it?

GG: Roxie's.

TG: How about the old Saddle Club?

GG: Well, that was just a bar - they didn't have the girls in there then.

RM: Do you still own the property, in Ash Meadows?

GG: We still own the property, yes.

RM: What's going to become of the property?

GG: Well, the Nature Conservancy and environmentalists have bought out 13,000 acres up there, and I think there are 1,300 acres of private land left. And they're going to buy us out eventually, because the property manager for Fish and Wildlife told me, 'Well, if you don't want to sell now, we'll get it eventually. When you die, your heirs might not want to keep it, or something.' They're going to eventually wind up with the whole area up in there to protect that pupfish.

RM: How do you feel about the pupfish?

GG: Well, I guess you should say I'm against them.

RM: Sure; yes. Say what you really think.

GG: They say the land can't be used - can't be farmed or anything else -but I can't see the federal government taking land and things away from the owners to save a little fish that isn't 1/4-inch long. And where the fish are supposed to be they've got it fenced off and no one can see them anyway, so what do you wind up with? They spent 5 million

dollars to buy that property up there, to protect that pupfish, and nobody can see or know it's there. And there are pupfish in Arizona and other parts of the United States.

RM: Pete Peterson and Hank Records told me about a big ranch that had a couple of thousand head of cattle there, and they built that big dam across one of the . . .

GG: Yes. That was in the '70s. Their idea was to raise cattle in there and make feeder lots to supply the Los Angeles market. They ran the cattle in there until they sold it to Preferred Equities. Preferred Equities were going to make a community in there similar to Pahrump, and the environmentalists got into it, and they wanted to keep the community out and save the pupfish, so the Preferred Equities sold out to the Nature Conservancy until the government came up with their \$5.5 million.

That area up in there in Ash Meadows is a harsh, desert area with adequate water, but the people that went in there - it's broke more people - their backs, and money-wise - than [chuckles] any place in the state of Nevada, I think. They've come in and left, but once you fall in love with the place, you just stay there. That's why old-timers like it, I guess.

RM: Yes. It's a beautiful area.

GG: Yes.

RM: And you don't expect all that water there, coming across that desert

GG: Oh, no. Before they put in Crystal Lake, and that, if you didn't know where the springs were, and where the creeks were, you could drive right beside one of them and not even know the water was in the area. In my opinion Crystal Lake sort of ruined the area, because now the tourists can come in there, and they've got a place to camp. But I guess I'm selfish [chuckles] - I want it all for myself.

RM: You moved a house up there, didn't you?

GG: Yes. We spend quite a bit of time up there. And it's secluded and everything. One time Toni and I were up there, and we didn't see a car for 9 days, in that area. [chuckles]

TG: Well, we've got the house . . . it's kind of like a meadow. All surrounded by Tamarac trees - it's kind of protected, isn't it?

GG: Yes.

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