

An Interview with
BESSIE L. HOLTS

An Oral History conducted and edited by
Robert D. McCracken

Nye County Town History Project
Nye County, Nevada

Tonopah
1990

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Bessie Holts
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.

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 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 Jodie Hanson, Alice Levine, Mike Green, Cynthia Tremblay, and Jean Stoess. Jared Charney contributed essential word processing skills. Maire Hayes, Michelle Starika, Anita Coryell, Jodie Hanson, Michelle Welsh, Lindsay Schumacher, and Shena Salzman 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 Tom 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
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 1,000 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 NCIHP will remain for the use and enjoyment of all.

--R.D.M.

This is Robert McCracken talking to Bessie Holts at her home in Las Vegas, Nevada, April 30, 1990.

CHAPTER ONE

RM: Bessie, why don't we start by you telling me your name as it reads on your birth certificate?

BH: Bessie Lillian Holts.

RM: And when and where were you born?

BH: I was born in Portland, Oregon, on April 5th, 1903.

RM: And what was your father's name?

BH: William Frederick Holts.

RM: Do you know where he was born?

BH: No, not for sure. I think he was born in Germany or Poland - I've heard various tales about it. I think he was 6 weeks old when they came across in some kind of a boat - probably a sailboat.

RM: What was his occupation?

BH: He was a carpenter.

RM: What was your mother's name?

BH: Mother's name was Margaret McClay Waters.

RM: Do you know where she was born?

BH: I'm not sure. I know she was married in Rochester, Minnesota.

RM: And did you grow up in Portland?

BH: Yes, and I went to school there all the time until I went to college in Eugene, Oregon.

RM: Is there anything that stands out in your mind about growing up in Portland at that time?

BH: Not particularly. I never heard of any crime or anything around

Portland when I was growing up.

RM: Portland was kind of a cosmopolitan city - it was a regional center, wasn't it?

BH: I think so.

RM: Where did you go to college?

BH: At the University of Oregon in Eugene.

RM: And what did you study?

BH: Oh, I studied mainly education - to be a teacher. My first years there I was a math major. I changed to a chemistry major and then I went into education so I could get a [teaching] certificate.

RM: What year did you graduate?

BH: 1926.

RM: What did you do after your graduation?

BH: My first job was in Goldfield, Nevada.

RM: Wow. Tell me about that.

BH: Well, to me it was interesting because the climate and everything was so different. I lived in the big old hotel there.

RM: You lived in the Goldfield Hotel?

BH: Yes - on the top floor. [chuckles]

RM: Did you take your meals there in the hotel?

BH: Part of the time. Part of the time I went down to the Santa Fe Club. And it's still there.

RM: I know it is. [chuckles] How long did you teach in Goldfield?

BH: Only a little over a year.

RM: What grade did you teach?

BH: High school.

RM: What subjects?

BH: Science and math.

RM: What was it like, teaching in the remains of a great boom town?

BH: Well, I didn't feel that way about it. I thought it was pretty good. [chuckles]

RM: Were there quite a few people still there?

BH: No, not a lot.

RM: Were the students good?

BH: I never had any trouble with them.

RM: Do you remember what you paid to live in the hotel?

BH: I think it was \$20 a month.

RM: Where did you go after you taught in Goldfield?

BH: To Eureka, Nevada.

RM: How long did you teach there?

BH: I think I was there 2 years.

RM: What made you leave Goldfield?

BH: Oh, I got tired of it.

RM: Do you remember what your pay was in those days?

BH: I think I got \$1800 in Goldfield and Eureka. Then I went out in Smoky Valley in '29.

RM: I wanted to ask you, what brought you to Nevada from clear up in Portland to teach?

BH: I was kind of dumb [chuckles] when I got out of college - I didn't know how to get a job. So I went to a teacher agency that was there called the Stout Teacher's Agency and I got the job in Goldfield.

RM: What did you think about traveling to Nevada to teach?

BH: Oh, I thought that was great - an adventure.

RM: How did you get the job in Smoky Valley?

BH: I don't remember; I guess it was through the agency.

RM: Do you remember what they paid you in Smoky Valley?

BH: I think it was \$110 a month.

RM: Where did you live when you taught there?

BH: The first year I lived down at Darrough's Hot Springs in that big hotel. The school was down in the end room of it.

RM: It was a grade school, wasn't it?

BH: Yes.

RM: About how many students did you have at Darrough's?

BH: Not very many - about 8, maybe.

RM: Were quite a few of them Indians?

BH: Part of them were Indians.

RM: Do you remember any of your students?

BH: Oh, I had Arlene Darrough and Lee Darrough and I had some Indians from up at the Indian camp - I can't remember their names.

RM: Where was the Indian camp?

BH: It was up above the springs, across the road.

RM: Were there quite a few people there?

BH: No, just a couple of families.

RM: Did you take your meals with the Darroughs?

BH: Yes.

RM: Who was living at Darrough's at that time?

BH: Oh, there was Kate and Ray Darrough - they were the managers. And Grandma Darrough lived in a little house just above the hotel, to the south of it. She was an interesting lady. She lived in this house that had a ceiling that was covered with gauze. She lived in a big one-room house. She crocheted - she made beautiful things.

RM: Did you talk with her much?

BH: No, not much. Once in a while I'd go over there.

RM: Did you socialize with them much there, or did you sort of keep to yourself most of the time?

BH: I think I kept to myself a good deal.

RM: Were you used to keeping to yourself like that? Was that something that you felt comfortable with?

BH: It was all right. They had the big swimming pool and I used to go in practically every day after school with a couple of the children.

RM: What other Darroughs were there at the time?

BH: Luther and Dewey were there. I think Luther's still there. I think he's married to a girl named Lillian. Dewey was handicapped. I don't know just exactly what was the matter with him, but his head was too large and he wobbled when he walked.

RM: Did a lot of people come there to swim?

BH: No, not a lot.

RM: Did they ever have parties there, or anything?

BH: Oh, yes. We had dances. I enjoyed them.

RM: Would people come from the whole valley?

BH: Yes - from Tonopah and Austin - all up and down the valley. Reese River . . .

RM: Did you have live music?

BH: Yes, with the Acree band from Austin.

RM: Yes; everybody talks about them.

BH: They made good music.

RM: That's what I understand. How long did you teach at Darrough's?

BH: Oh, just a year. Then I went up to McLeods' and I taught there

until Christmas. My sister passed away and I went home to Hood River and took care of her children for the rest of the year.

RM: Where is McLeods'?

BH: Oh, it's a ranch where the big brick house is - a red brick house.

RM: Would it be north of Darrrough's?

BH: Yes. It was probably 13 or 14 miles up the valley.

RM: What did you do the next year? Did you stay in Oregon?

BH: I came back to Round Mountain. I taught there 10 years.

RM: What year was it that you started in Round Mountain, then?

BH: I think it was '31. I taught in Round Mountain from '31 to '42.

Then I went to Las Vegas.

RM: Where did you live when you first went to Round Mountain?

BH: I stayed with Katie and Karl Berg for one year.

RM: What did you teach at Round Mountain?

BH: I taught mainly all of the high school and I would teach some of the grades.

RM: About how many kids were in the school when you started there in '31?

BH: I don't know. I had about 17, I think, in my room. My room had the high school. Then I had either sixth or seventh grade or something - whatever grade had the most children in it. We divided up the work that way.

RM: Do you remember any of the children you taught?

BH: When I first went there?

RM: Yes.

BH: I had Getta Berg, Pansy Weeks . . .

RM: Is that right?

BH: Do you know Pansy?

RM: I just interviewed her this week in Fallon.

BH: Oh, you did? How is she?

RM: She's fine.

BH: Does she have any children?

RM: Yes - she's got children and grandchildren and I suppose great-grandchildren; I don't know. I interviewed her husband, too - John.

BH: I didn't know him. I knew the one they called Benick. I think he was Pansy's brother.

RM: Where did you live after the Bergs?

BH: Up at the Shevlins'. Matt and Margie Shevlin had a little room on the back of their house that I lived in for a number of years. I moved into a little house by myself after that.

RM: Where was the Shevlins' house located?

BH: It was the last house on the street that . . . [if you] come in from the valley and go right on up that street, it was the last one up there on the left. It's gone, now.

RM: And then where was your little house?

BH: My house was down on Main Street.

RM: Was there a lot of activity in Round Mountain in the '30s?

BH: Well, quite a bit, I would say.

RM: Were your students the children of miners, or were they Indians or what?

BH: There was one family of Indians. The rest of them were residents of the town - I don't know what they did.

RM: Did you enjoy living in Round Mountain?

BH: Oh, I think that was the 10 best years of my life.

RM: Why do you say that?

BH: Well, the kids were so smart and good, and I got along so well. And we had dances and we had shows once in a while. Once in 2 weeks or something we might have a movie. And we had a card club - we played whist. Then after a while we played bridge. It was auction bridge, and that was fun.

RM: The Bergs had a store there then, didn't they?

BH: Karl and Katie had the store. Will Berg was the oldest one of them, I think. He had the water works - brought the water down from Jefferson.

RM: Did he have a dairy at that time?

BH: I think he did have a dairy for a while.

RM: Did you ever go down and visit with the ranchers and stay with them?

BH: I used to stay down at Bergs'.

RM: Did you go down there weekends?

BH: Yes.

RM: Did you go to any other of the ranchers and stay with them or anything?

BH: Well, I stayed up at Travis Darrough's a time or two. He was way up the valley - beyond McLeods'.

RM: Did you find life convenient in Round Mountain in terms of getting all the services and everything that you needed?

BH: Well, some of the houses didn't have bathtubs in the house.

RM: Did you have plumbing where you lived?

BH: No, but we had water in the kitchen.

RM: What did you do about taking a bath?

BH: I'd go down to the springs or down to Bergs' ranch on the weekends.

RM: Did they have a hot spring on Bergs' ranch?

BH: No.

RM: It sounds like you just kind of fit right into the Nevada mining camp life, didn't you? I mean, coming from Portland . . .

BH: I kind of liked it. [laughs]

RM: Who ran the school there?

BH: Who ran it? I did. [chuckles]

RM: You were the principal?

BH: I was for 8 years.

RM: And how many other teachers did you have?

BH: I had 2 most of the time.

RM: Who were they?

BH: One of them was named Bob Scott; I didn't like to teach with him. In the first place, he didn't have many ideas. I think he was probably new at the trade. And he'd come and borrow my books and he borrowed a bunch of magazines that I'd saved from way back when to get ideas out of and he let the kids cut them up and that made me mad.

RM: Did you have plenty of books and textbooks and everything for the kids?

BH: We had enough.

RM: Did you have a library?

BH: Oh, yes.

RM: Who ran the school district?

BH: The school board.

RM: It was a local school board, wasn't it? It wasn't Nye County, it was Round Mountain?

BH: Just Round Mountain.

RM: What did they call it - the Round Mountain School District?

BH: I think so.

RM: Do you remember some of the school board members?

BH: Well, Mrs. Michel and Mrs. Goldback and Will Berg. I think he was the stabilizing force there. [chuckles] He was a smart man. No matter what you'd want to talk about, he could talk about it. He would sit there and read and read and read all the time.

RM: Did a lot of the people read in those days - in the mining camps?

BH: I don't know.

RM: I have the feeling that, whereas now people watch TV, in the old days they read more.

BH: I think so.

RM: What were some of the things that you read in those days?

BH: [chuckles] I would read some of the books that were at school - the Forsythe Saga, for one.

RM: Round Mountain didn't have its own newspaper, did it?

BH: No. It had had, before, when it was a boom town.

RM: Did you know any of the other miners around there? For instance, Blackjack Raymond?

BH: Blackjack had the gold mine up over the hill. There was a uranium mine over there, too. I went in it once and I saw the hoist and what not. It was beautiful.

RM: What was the occasion when you went in it?

BH: I suppose I asked somebody to take me in. I went down in a Goldfield mine, too, and one in Eureka.

RM: What did you see in the Goldfield mine?

BH: I saw water dripping down. [chuckles] We had to wear a rain cape and rain hat when I went down there. And it was very warm down there. I

was down in the Florence.

RM: When you were living in Round Mountain, did you go into Tonopah or Austin much?

BH: Oh, I went to Tonopah once in a while; not very often. I'd go to Tonopah if I wanted to see the doctor.

RM: Was there any time when you were in Round Mountain when the town was depressed economically?

BH: Well, in 1942, when I came down to Las Vegas, they had closed most of the gold mines. And the chances were a lot of the people were going to move out and take out the kids, so they didn't need a teacher.

RM: So that's when you left?

BH: That's when I left. I had come back from Oregon - I got down there about the 8th of August - and I heard about what was happening. I said to myself, "I'm going somewhere where there's something more interesting than this." And at that time Las Vegas was booming. So I just took myself down here and applied for a job at the school district here and I went out to Henderson and applied out there and I applied at Whitney. I don't remember that I ever heard from Henderson, but I got the job in Whitney and the one here, and I had to make a choice between them.

RM: So what did you take?

BH: I took Las Vegas; I taught at West Side School for 24 years.

RM: Is that a high school?

BH: No. It's discontinued. It's an EOB building over there.

RM: What's that mean - EOB?

BH: You've got me now - it's got to do with retired people. They have businesses over there or something, and I think they have lunches for the retired people and meetings and things like that. I think there's also a

radio station in there.

RM: I see. What grades did you teach for 24 years at West Side, then?

BH: Well, I taught second grade for a few years. And then we needed remedial work worse than we needed anything else, so I went into that.

RM: What was Las Vegas like as a small town?

BH: When I first was here, we could go downtown on a Saturday and walk up and down Fremont Street, and we'd see most of our friends down there. And now you go down there [chuckles] and you can't see anybody you ever saw before.

RM: Yes. What it was like when it started growing really fast?

BH: When I first came here, in that school, I'd say we had 50 percent Black and 50 percent white kids. And before I left West Side, we had 90 percent Black and 4 or 5 percent Mexican and a few white.

RM: Did you enjoy teaching in Las Vegas?

BH: Up until the last 4 years.

RM: What happened then?

BH: Well - the kids, mostly. They began to get like they are now - ornery little brats.

RM: Why do you think they got like that?

BH: I don't know.

RM: When did you retire?

BH: In 1966.

RM: What did you do then?

BH: I just bought myself a trailer and lived by myself.

RM: Where did you live before that?

BH: Oh, I'd rent rooms here and there around town.

RM: And when you retired you bought this trailer?

BH: Not this one. I bought another one - a smaller one. I lived in it for 10 years, then I bought this one.

CHAPTER TWO

RM: Did you do any traveling after you retired?

BH: Yes. I started traveling in 1960, before I retired.

RM: Where all have you gone?

BH: Well, I made 2 trips to Alaska. Then the next big trip was to Europe - I took the Grand Tour. Then we went back the next year and did the same thing with a different group in a different way. The first time, we went by bus all around. The second time we went by train. And the first tour was much the better. We had a better tour guide and what seemed like a better bunch of people; more interesting. We did that 2 times and then we decided to take the North Sea tour around to the capitols there. And that was good - we enjoyed it very much.

We just got home and my friend Florence Ellis called, and her husband had passed away. They had tickets for the two of them to go to Israel and she wanted to know if I wanted to go. I said, "Sure, I'd like to go." And I said, "Could we get another ticket for Margaret?"

(Margaret Welch was my travel companion.) And yes, we could get a ticket for Margaret. So in just about 30 days after we got home, we were off again to Israel.

RM: Was Margaret a teacher at West Side too?

BH: Yes, she was a kindergarten teacher.

RM: How do you feel about all the changes that have happened in Las Vegas since you've been here?

BH: Well, I don't like the idea that kids are involved in dope and crime and all that. I don't like it at all. There wasn't anything like that when I came.

RM: What happened to society, to make these changes?

BH: I don't know what happened. I think the lack of jobs for youngsters might've had something to do with it. They wanted money and that was one way to get it.

RM: What other kinds of things do you remember about living in Smoky Valley? Did you go over to Manhattan?

BH: Oh, we used to go to Manhattan for card games.

RM: Did you go over to Belmont?

BH: I was over at Belmont a couple of times. I would take my car and just go riding. I bought my own car the year I taught at the hot springs. That was my first car.

RM: What kind of a car did you buy?

BH: It was a 2-door 1929 Chevrolet. It was a year old; practically new. I enjoyed it very much - every time I had a chance, I was in her. [chuckles] I think I knew every road and every trail around there that would accommodate a car.

RM: Did you have trouble on those roads?

BH: I had flat tires. I'd get out and change them.

RM: Did you go over to Reese River much?

BH: No, I never went to Reese River till after I left Round Mountain. I went back up there for a weekend. Margaret and I went to Reese River and we found something that was interesting over there. My friend Florence Ellis had taught in Reese River about the first year that I was in Round Mountain. (I met her when she'd come over to dances from Reese River.) And when Margaret and I went over there in the '50s, sometime, we stopped down there at a gas station, I think. We mentioned the fact that Florence Ellis had taught there (her name was Florence Huffman at that

time) and the man said, "Oh, I know all about that." He said, "I have her desk in here." So we went in and saw her desk and he pulled out a drawer and here were, I think, 3 school registers. We got out the one that was signed by Florence Huffman and I looked in it. It was interesting; it was fun. Florence had taught Rene Rogers' sister-in-law, Mary Mancini - Pete's wife - when she was there.

RM: Isn't that something. Yes, Mary Rogers had lived in Ione.

BH: So that's probably where Florence taught.

RM: Does Florence Ellis live here in Las Vegas? Do you think I should talk to her?

BH: I think you might find some interesting details.

RM: How long did she teach there, do you know?

BH: Oh, for a couple of years, I think. If you want her address, I'll look it up.

RM: OK, thanks.

[tape is turned off for a while]

RM: What other kinds of things do you remember about how Round Mountain was at that time?

BH: Oh, it was very small. There were only about 4 streets running north and south and one east and west. [chuckles] Some of them were just trails through the desert. It wasn't much. There was a hotel down there on the corner of Main Street. People used to go in there - they had a bar and they also served coffee and such. Then diagonally across the street from that there were a few little buildings. One of them was a barber shop - that was Bob Belcher's. Ever hear of him?

RM: I don't think so. He was the barber?

BH: He was the barber. And his wife had a beauty shop up the street in

the old building where they used to have a newspaper.

Right next to Bob's office there was a little tiny place - probably as wide as this trailer, maybe a little bit bigger, and there was a restaurant in there run by Mrs. Menkin. Some of us ate there quite regularly. You get to know people that way. [chuckles] There was a man who was the secretary, I think, over at the mine. He used to come in there all the time. And he'd run over the hill - that saddle between Stebbins Peak and Round Mountain - and you'd see him coming, [chuckles] running. He'd come over about 2:00 or something - whenever the mail got in - and he'd run the whole way, and then back over the hill.

RM: Is that right. What other things do you recall?

BH: Well, they had a big snow in '37. It was getting pretty deep and we knew we couldn't go to Tonopah, so we went down to the store and loaded up on beans and other things to eat while the storm was on. The snow lasted a long time; I think it was 6 weeks before I drove my car. But I guess everybody in town went to the store - they practically bought it out. They ran out of butter and they ran out of a lot of things, [chuckles] I guess, before the roads were open again.

RM: Did they close school?

BH: No. We could manage to get to school.

RM: How did you know it was going to be such a bad storm?

BH: The way it started and kept piling up with snow. And the stage wouldn't come in. Finally they had to drag the road for the stage to come in. They'd come in, turn around, and start back again. They'd have to drag it going back again. It was a bad one. One woman was in Tonopah to have a baby and when she got ready to come home, they brought her home on a sled.

RM: I'll be darned. Do you remember any of the ranchers besides the Darroughs and those people?

BH: Well, there was a family named Woods who lived in the first house down the valley. I think that house is gone, probably.

RM: It'd be where Carver's is now?

BH: No - one below Carver's toward Tonopah. Then there was Carver's.

RM: Who lived at Carver's then?

BH: Well, the first I knew about it, Mr. and Mrs. Carver were there. They had 2 little boys, I believe.

RM: Yes, but that wasn't until the '40s. The Carver boys were born in about '43 or '44.

BH: Well, I would go back weekends. I can remember Mrs. Carver having these 2 little boys in the house and she put a cardboard box down and those boys climbed in and out of that cardboard box; they had more fun. I think that's the Carver who . . .

RM: He's a Nye County Commissioner now - Dick Carver.

BH: I saw him when he was about yea high. [chuckles]

RM: Did you wish that you could've stayed on in Smoky Valley?

BH: No.

RM: Tell me some more things you remember about Smoky Valley and Round Mountain.

BH: I had a boy in school - I think his name was Bobby Mike - an Indian boy. Bobby would stay home and I would have to go up and round him up and get him back to school. One time I went up there, and it happened that day that the constable was gone from town. I found Mrs. Mike and I told her, "Bobby's supposed to be in school."

"No, Bobby stay home when the cop gone."

RM: [laughs] That's good. What other memories do you have from there?

BH: I found my old scrapbook there. I think that's the article to read.

RM: [reading] Who wrote this article?

BH: I don't remember. Maybe I wrote it; I don't know.

RM: I'll bet you did. Did you write the things in here?

BH: Yes.

RM: It's poetry, isn't it?

BH: Yes, it's mostly poetry.

RM: Oh, Bessie - this is really interesting.

BH: And I sat here last night and I read that book clear through, after I found it.

RM: Here you've got a thing called "Warnings." "Lady teachers who are new in a mining district should be warned that carbide lights are not as safe as electric lights when exploring mines." Wow.

BH: That was my roommate that got on fire in the mine.

RM: Would you let me make copies of those, Bessie?

BH: If I get them back. So many times I've loaned things and I never get them back.

RM: I know. Everybody says they've had problems with that. But I'm good about it; you've got my word.

[sound of pages turning]

BH: I started this in college.

RM: Is that right.

BH: I didn't have a typewriter then.

RM: Were there any churches in Round Mountain when you were there?

BH: No. Mrs. Michel would go over to Manhattan - I took her one day.

RM: Would you describe most of the people there as religious?

BH: No, I wouldn't say they were very religious.

RM: Do you go back to Portland much?

BH: I haven't been back for about 4 years.

RM: Do you still have family there?

BH: I have nieces and their families.

RM: Do you think much about Portland?

BH: No.

RM: Do you think much about Round Mountain?

BH: Oh, once in a while I do.

RM: But you think it was the best 10 years of your life?

BH: Yes. I think I had the most fun.

RM: You still keep in touch with some of the people there, don't you?

BH: With Shirley Ann [Lofthouse] and Arleen Berg. Arleen fell and broke her neck.

RM: Yes - it was a terrible accident. Was Arleen one of your students?

BH: No, just a friend.

RM: But Shirley Ann was one of your students, wasn't she?

BH: Yes. I knew Shirley Ann all of her life. She was born after I went to Round Mountain.

RM: Did you know Little Kelsay?

BH: Yes.

RM: How would you describe him?

BH: Oh, he was a great guy. He was a gentleman through and through.

Little Kelsay raised black-faced sheep. And he had 4 horses - one was called Bidy. She was almost white - she wasn't pure white, but almost white. And that was his favorite and he let me ride her. I was the only girl who ever rode on Bidy, they said - at that time. I used to ride

every weekend, almost. I would go out with him to bring in the sheep or to get the cows or whatnot.

RM: Did he walk with much of a limp?

BH: Yes, he had a decided limp. But he didn't let it bother him.

Now, this is about . . . [sound of paper rustling]

RM: Oh - that's interesting. Bessie has an article here from the October 23rd, 1988, Nevadan on the Darrrough's Hot Springs.

BH: Do you know Adele Eicher?

RM: No. Who is she?

BH: She was Ray and Kate Darrrough's youngest child.

RM: Oh, really? Does she live here in town?

BH: Yes.

RM: How old is she?

BH: She was born while I was in Round Mountain.

RM: Is that right. Maybe she could give me a history of the Darrrough family.

BH: She might be able to.

RM: Were there any special problems that you encountered in teaching in remote Nevada?

BH: Oh, it wasn't hard for me. [chuckles] I just did things the way I thought they ought to be done and went ahead. I didn't have much problem.

RM: Did other people have trouble, do you think?

BH: I don't think so, [except for] that one I told you tore up my books . . .

RM: I wondered if you could remember more specifically how you got your job teaching at Round Mountain?

BH: Probably through an agency. They used to print a list of all the teachers and their salaries - a little pamphlet. I would get one of them every year and I'd kind of look to see where the salaries were good.

[chuckles]

RM: What was your pay at Round Mountain?

BH: \$1350 most of the time. It finally got up to \$1530. I came down here and started in at \$1800, and had raises.

RM: Do you ever have any second thoughts about coming to Nevada?

BH: No - it was an interesting place to see.

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