

An Interview with
LEON HUGHES

An Oral History conducted and edited by
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Nye County Town History Project
Nye County, Nevada

Tonopah
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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 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 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
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 Leon Hughes on the job site on Gamebird Road in the Pahrump Valley - April 20, 1988

CHAPTER 1

RM: Let's begin by you telling me what your name is as it reads on your birth certificate.

LH: Leon D Hughes.

RM: What does the D stand for?

LH: Just D, that's all.

RM: When and where were you born?

LH: I was born February 1st, 1920, in Joshua, Texas.

RM: Could you give me your father's name?

LH: John Riley Hughes.

RM: Was he from Texas?

LH: Yes, he was born in Texas. So was my mother.

RM: What was your mother's name?

LH: Beryl Powers.

RM: And she was a Texas woman, too? What part of Texas?

LH: I was born in the same town she was - Joshua.

RM: Where is Joshua?

LH: It's part of Fort Worth now. But I don't know where my dad was born; somewhere in Texas is all I know.

RM: What was your father's occupation?

LH: He was a farmer.

RM: Did he have a farm there?

LH: Not in Texas. He was a wage worker in Texas. You see, during the oil fields, before trucks came out, he teamed in the oil fields. When the trucks replaced the teams, Dad had to go look for work. We wound up in

California in 1926 and he got a job and started farming in the San Joaquin Valley. From there on he kept getting bigger and bigger and then in 1929 we moved to Arizona and we went broke over there during the crash in 1930.

RM: Was he farming there?

LH: Yes; in Casa Grande and Yuma. Then he came back to Porterville, California, and started all over again. Then in 1936, we moved to Pahrump.

RM: How did you happen to hear about Pahrump?

LH: Dad had some friends in Porterville who had hauled cattle and sheep in and out of Pahrump for several years and they were telling him about it. He thought it sounded pretty good, so he said, "I'd better go and take a look at it." It had cheap water and cheap land, so he come on and took a look at it and decided he would buy it.

RM: And what did he purchase here?

LH: The Pahrump Ranch.

RM: Do you remember how much he paid for it?

LH: \$129,000 . . . \$135,000.

RM: Did he pay cash?

LH: No.

RM: What was it he saw in Pahrump Ranch that made him want to buy it?

LH: Free water and a lot of good, cheap land. The water was all artesian. This was a pumpless valley when I came here. Even for all the houses on the Pahrump Ranch, there was an artesian well capped and piped at every building.

RM: Is that right? Who did he buy the ranch from?

LH: It was the Pahrump Valley Company. They were a group of fellows from Los Angeles. One of them was a Mr. Shoup. He was the head of the board of directors of the Southern Pacific Railroad, and then there was his brother,

Jack Shoup, who was an agent for Associated Oil Company, and there was Isidore Dockweiler, a judge in Los Angeles, and Sam Bishop. He was the claim agent for the Southern Pacific Railroad . . . it was a bunch of pretty influential well-to-do people. They had it for a writeoff; that's all it was. They had too much money and didn't know what to do with it, so . . .

RM: How big was the Pahrump Ranch then?

LH: When my dad bought it, there were 11,920 acres in it.

RM: Do you know at what point it got so big? I mean, who put it all together?

LH: These men from Los Angeles.

RM: Oh, before then it was smaller?

LH: Yes. Originally, it was just a little bit of acreage up around headquarters, but these guys bought it back in the early 1900s.

RM: Oh, they held it a long time?

LH: Yes. I know the property where the Raycraft Ranch is used to belong to the Pahrump Ranch. He owned some land over in the slough there, where the golf course is. This company didn't like the idea of him being in the middle of their property, so they traded him that over there so it would all be together.

RM: They must have held it 20 or 30 years, then?

LH: About 30 years; yes.

RM: What made them want to sell then, I wonder?

LH: Oh, I don't know. Things were progressing and getting out of hand. They were too far away and couldn't handle it anymore.

RM: So your dad bought it; did he move the family over here?

LH: Yes.

RM: Did you have brothers and sisters?

LH: Yes. When we moved over here there were 4 sisters and 2 brothers. Now there are only 2 boys and 2 girls left.

RM: Could you describe the valley when you got here in '36?

LH: The only way I know how to describe it is [to have] you go out and [stand] in one of these mesquite thickets where you can't see any buildings or anything; that's what the whole thing looked like. There was nothing here. There were 3 or 4 buildings over here on the Manse Ranch, but there were a lot of buildings on the Pahrump Ranch and then there were one or two on the Raycraft. Then old Frank Buol had a little winery where Binion is now, but there was absolutely nothing there. There weren't over 20 people, and there were more Indians than white people.

RM: Where did the Indians live?

LH: Oh, all over, in the brush. They had camps.

RM: Did they have houses?

LH: No, they lived in shacks and brush wickiups.

RM: Do you remember any of the Indian families?

LH: Oh, I knew most of all of them. There was the Jim Steve family. He and his wife have both died; some of the kids are still here . . . There was Louis Sharpe and Long Jim - his family is still here. The Long Jims are a different bunch of Indians; they live, probably, up on the mountain. Then there were a bunch more, but they all . . .

RM: But there were more Indians than whites?

LH: Oh, yes; lots more.

RM: Were there any stores or anything?

LH: No, but Old Frank Buol had carried a few canned goods, and perishables like flour and so forth for emergencies. He kept his mostly for . . .

there were a lot of propectors around then for the Johnnie area. He carried the supplies mostly for them. Then there was a little guy by the name of Ed Diemel who a little old store there on Pahrump Ranch where the Humane Society is now. He didn't a big line of stuff; just a few candy bars and a few canned goods.

RM: Was that the old picture you see - the Pahrump Store?

LH: Yes. Originally that was a saloon. I think it was built in 1870 or somewhere along in there - 1865.

RM: It was a saloon here in the valley - they didn't move it in?

LH: Oh, no, it was built right there.

RM: Was there much happening at Johnnie at that time?

LH: Oh, it was a boomtown then. Of course, that was before my time; that was back in the '20s. By '36 it was completely idle; just one or two people working up there.

RM: Who owned the Manse Ranch at that time?

LH: A fellow by the name of Dr. Cornell. He was a ENT, an ear, nose and throat [specialist] in San Diego.

RM: Had he owned it for a long time?

LH: No. He bought it just a year or so before my dad got the Pahrump Ranch.

RM: Was the Manse Ranch a large outfit then?

LH: No. When I came there were only 720 acres there. Then Doc Cornell started buying property and adding to it.

RM: What kind of crops did they grow on the Pahrump Ranch when you got here?

LH: Grain and alfalfa, [and the rest was] pastures.

RM: What were they doing with the alfalfa?

LH: They fed a lot of it. They didn't ship much out. They sold some to Furnace Creek, but not too much.

RM: Did they truck their grain somewhere?

LH: They fed most . . . they had hogs. They consumed most of it themselves.

RM: Did your dad continue on with those same crops?

LH: Yes. After he found out the cotton was a failure, we just kept going.

RM: Then he came here to plant cotton?

LH: That what he primarily came here for; yes.

RM: Had he been planting it in California and Arizona?

LH: Oh, yes. I grew up on a cotton farm myself - that's all I ever knew.

RM: So he saw this land here where nobody had ever grown cotton and he thought . . .

LH: Well, it was virgin soil. Over in the San Joaquin Valley virgin soil is the best in the world, but this has got sagebrush and a lot of salt and stuff in it and it has to be leached out and some humus put in the ground before it will grow a deep-rooted crop. It will grow grain and shallow-rooted crops, things like that. It will grow grain the first 2 or 3 years, if you get plenty of water on it, but it won't grow a deep-rooted crop until you get it leached out.

RM: Did he plant cotton immediately when he got here?

LH: The first year, yes, in 1937. We got here in November of 1936 and in the spring of '37 we planted cotton.

RM: What happened?

LH: It came up, but it didn't grow. But we had some down there in an old alfalfa field, and it did beautifully, just like it did in the San Joaquin Valley. As I said yesterday, if he had plowed up all the alfalfa and

planted cotton there, and planted grain and alfalfa in new ground, he'd have been all right, but he didn't know that. It was too late.

RM: Where were your original fields, in terms of the streets in the valley?

LH: Do you know where Cal-Vada Boulevard is, and where the golf course is?

RM: Yes.

LH: Well, most all of the fields were from where that little pond, Cottonwood Park is, from there over to Cal-Vada Boulevard and bear west down to Los Coyotes.

RM: How many acres did he have under total cultivation the first year?

LH: There never was too much until C.B. Dickey and those guys came in. They had about 600 acres and Walt Williams put in about 1,000; my dad never had over 200 or 300.

RM: Was this including alfalfa, grain and cotton?

LH: Everything. We put in a lot of cotton, but we don't count that because it didn't amount to anything.

RM: How many acres of cotton did you put in that first year?

LH: I think he put in about 600. It all came up, but hell, it got mouse-eared and turned blue and didn't amount to anything.

RM: What happened when the cotton failed? He must have been bitterly disappointed.

LH: Well, in the meantime he had accumulated some hogs and in 1938 we had 2,000 head of hogs that would be ready for market in about 60 days. On the strength of that, my dad went to Los Angeles and borrowed enough money to buy 129 head of Hereford cows, all good cows - each one of them had a calf at their side - for \$29 a round. [He bought them] at Carp, Nevada, and got them to the ranch and was doing well; then the cholera hit our hogs and in

2 weeks we had 28 head left out of 2,000.

RM: Oh, my God.

LH: We had to sell the cattle to pay off the note and he was right back where he started.

RM: How would the hogs have gotten cholera?

LH: Somebody over in the San Joaquin Valley sold him some damned old cholera hogs and that's how it started.

RM: What did he do then?

LH: He was just about broke by then, so we salvaged some cattle and then we had about 200 head of horses, too, which didn't amount to a whole lot. George Ishmael had some cattle here and Dad took his cattle on the halves for half the calf crop, and took them to the mountains and ran them for a year or so . . . And then got part of the calves and then had to leave because there was nothing else left here for him; no way to make a living.

RM: You lost the ranch, then?

LH: Oh, hell, yes; he lost it. He lost everything. He lost \$250,000 which he had made over in San Joaquin.

RM: Where did you go then?

LH: Back to Porterville.

RM: What was the housing like when you were here?

LH: The housing was all right. It was comfortable. But we had no refrigeration, no air conditioning and . . .

RM: Did you have those water coolers?

LH: We had those, and that's about the only kind we had. My dad bought a light plant, and we had refrigerators but the light plant blew up before very long and he didn't want to fix it.

RM: You didn't have gas refrigerators?

LH: No, we didn't. I think they were in existence, but we didn't have them.

RM: What were the roads like?

LH: What you see is a freeway compared to what . . .

RM: They were just really bad roads, then?

LH: They were terrible. The only way to go to Vegas was to go out through Johnnie over 29 miles of tire-busting boulders. In a year you'd go through 10 to 15 tires.

RM: When you got to Highway 95, was it paved?

LH: Oh yes, it was paved. 127 was paved, but they just paved it the year before we came here; it was gravel prior to that.

RM: Was there a road to Shoshone?

LH: Oh, yes. It wasn't the best in the world, but it was passable.

RM: From Shoshone, did it go on down to Baker?

LH: That's the one that was paved the year before we came.

RM: Was there a road over the mountains to Vegas through Red Rock Canyon?

LH: Well, it was a wagon road. You'd go up through Trout Canyon and down Red Rock. We didn't go that way; half the time it was washed out. There were some people who lived up there, a couple of ranchers, but most of the time when they wanted out they come out on horseback.

RM: What was social life like here then?

LH: There wasn't any. If we wanted to go to a dance, we'd have to go to Beatty, Shoshone or Baker.

RM: Did the farmers get together?

LH: There weren't that many people here.

RM: Then you just lived in isolation?

LH: That's all you could do. Well, Dad had 4 or 5 families here on the

Pahrump Ranch and there were 2 down here on the Manse Ranch. And there was one old guy and his wife - Randy Bell and his wife - who lived on the Raycraft Ranch. Dora and Steve Brown; I don't remember whether his name was Loyal or Royal, but Dora and her husband, Steve Brown's dad, lived 'way down on the Hidden Hills Ranch.

RM: And then your family went back to California?

LH: Yes.

RM: Did you go to school here?

LH: No, I didn't.

RM: Did any of your sisters or brothers?

LH: My oldest brother was 2 years younger than I am. He quit school when he started high school, and he and I didn't go to school but all the rest of them did.

RM: Was there a little one-room school here?

LH: Oh, yes; definitely - one teacher.

RM: When did you come back to the valley?

LH: I came back in 1948. I'd been over here several times in the meantime. I kept watching it because something about Pahrump had got in my blood and I didn't want to leave it. So in 1948 I came back and went down and rented some ground from Elmer Bowman and that's when the cotton really got started.

RM: Were they growing cotton in the valley when you got back?

LH: No. I went down and asked Bowman if he had any land I could lease from him and he said, "What are you going to do with it?"

"I'm going to plant cotton."

He said, "Do you think you can grow cotton here?"

I said, "I know damn well I can, if I get a chance." Because I'd

learned why it wouldn't grow before.

RM: How did you figure that out?

LH: Because we planted ~~some~~ where the alfalfa had been and it was beautiful, but it was just a ~~small~~ acreage. I rented some alfalfa ground from him and you never saw a prettier cotton crop in your life.

RM: How many acres did you put in?

LH: I only had 20 acres in that alfalfa ground, and I put in 100 down below. I had 120 acres, but that other ground had been farmed to grain for a few years. It was pretty good soil and it did beautifully.

RM: Why does grain make it so cotton will grow? It's not a legume, is it?

LH: No. All it does is leach the soil, put water on it and put a little humus back.

RM: And that's all cotton needed?

LH: All the land needs is to get something in it and get the salt out of it.

RM: What happened then? You successfully grew a cotton crop in '48 . . .?

LH: '48 and then '49, but . . . I'd better not say this because . . . he told my partner and me that year . . .

RM: Bowman?

LH: Bowman.

RM: Who was your partner?

LH: Vern Schwartz. I think he's dead now; I heard awhile back that he was. He told us, "If you grow a crop of cotton, I'll let you have all my alfalfa ground and I'll plant my alfalfa on new ground; develop some new stuff." When he saw what we did with cotton he said he wanted to grow cotton, so we were out.

RM: You lost your rented ground.

LH: Oh, yes; we lost everything. He was leasing; we had . . . but the second year he put us down on new land, and we knew we were screwed there; he took all the good ground.

RM: How did you handle the cotton? Was everything by hand, or did you have cotton machinery?

LH: Oh, we had cotton pickers by '48 and '49, but in '36 and '37 we didn't. We ran into a problem - we couldn't get enough weight of that loose cotton in a truck, so I decided I was going to try something and I started baling it in a hay baler.

RM: You were the one that developed that?

LH: I'm the one who started that.

RM: What was the valley like in '48?

LH: It wasn't much different.

RM: It hadn't changed much?

LH: Not a whole lot. Manse was bigger.

RM: They had acquired more land at the Manse?

LH: Oh, by then; yes.

RM: Where did they get the land?

LH: It was all state land; they bought it from the state. I could have bought half of this valley.

RM: How big do you think the Manse Ranch was by '48?

LH: Well, by '48 they had about 5 or 6 sections.

RM: Was there any Desert Entry land, or how did they get it?

LH: You'd just buy it from the state; two bits an acre down and 50 years on the bounce.

RM: From the state?

LH: Yes. It was at \$1.25 an acre.

RM: Did that program ~~have a name?~~

LH: No, it was just ~~state land~~, but there's none of it left anymore.

RM: Were there other ~~ranches in the area~~ by then? Had other people come in?

LH: Oh, yes. By ~~then~~, ~~up in the north end~~ there were the Simkins brothers and . . .

RM: Was Dorothy ~~Dorothy in here~~ by then?

LH: Not in '48. ~~They came the next year~~ or so; they were here in '50.

RM: What happened to ~~the ranch~~ after your dad lost it in '38? Did it go back to the guys in L.A.?

LH: Yes, it went ~~back to them~~; then it was leased to Van Horn.

RM: Who was Van Horn? ~~Do you know~~ anything about him?

LH: Not really. ~~They were dairymen~~ from Bakersfield; that's all I know.

RM: Did they want alfalfa for their dairy?

LH: Oh, they just ~~decided they wanted~~ a big ranch and they grew a lot of alfalfa, but they were ~~worse off~~ than we were; they didn't have any money to start with. I know the year that my dad was up there in the hills with the cattle and the horses . . . they lived up there at Wheeler and the crew that was working for Van Horn would come up here every weekend to get something to eat, because they were starving to death down there. They weren't getting paid and they didn't have money enough to live on.

RM: What did your dad do with all those horses?

LH: Oh, we were in the horse business. We'd take them and we'd break them and take them over to sales in the San Joaquin Valley and sell them.

RM: Did you lose the horses, too, with the cholera?

LH: Well, we sold a bunch of them, but we lost a bunch of them up in the hills that we never could gather.

RM: Did your dad have ~~some~~ grazing rights from somebody?

LH: No. In those days, you were supposed to, but it wasn't enforced. You can't do that anymore, but we just grazed them all over the valley and up in the hills. It didn't cost anything to feed them, so if you got anything out of them it was profit.

RM: In '48 the Pahrump Ranch probably was about at its largest size, wasn't it?

LH: It never did get any bigger. As a matter a fact, it's decreased. For instance, they sold 40 acres where the gin is, then the school and the cemetery are on Pahrump Ranch land; they donated it to the county for the school down by the A & A Market.

CHAPTER TWO

RM: Now in 1948, what happened when you lost your ground over on the Manse Ranch?

LH: I went back to Porterville for a year, then I came back and rented some land up in the north end of the valley.

RM: Who did you rent it from then?

LH: A couple of fellows by the name of Staver and Dahlson. But I was back in the same boat. It was new ground and . . . but they wanted to do something else to the property after that, so I went to work for the Pahrump Ranch.

RM: Who owned it then?

LH: C. B. Dickey.

RM: Dickey had bought it by then?

LH: Yes, they bought it in '48.

RM: What was Dickey going to do with it?

LH: He grew cotton.

RM: By then, they knew cotton would grow there?

LH: I was foreman for them later - in '53 - and we had 600 acres in cotton.

RM: So you worked several years for Dickey?

LH: Four or 5; yes.

RM: Who was Dickey? Could you discuss him a little bit.

LH: When I met him he was field representative or general manager for a cotton financing company, Catani Brothers, over in Arvin, California. The next year they sold out to Production Credit and then he was just a farmer. He had farms all over the damn country - a big wheat farm up there in Madeline Plains and . . .

RM: He held the Pahrump Ranch for several years - until Walt Williams bought it - didn't he?

LH: Yes - from '48 till '58.

RM: Did he make money producing cotton on the ranch?

LH: Yes.

RM: Did Van Horn make any money?

LH: No. They came in broke and they left the same way. They produced some alfalfa, but it was all on credit and they got to where they owed so much money and they had to leave.

RM: Now, you were the foreman for how long?

LH: I was foreman for 2 years.

RM: How long did you work there?

LH: I started in January of '52 until '53, and then they had a change in

the operation. You see, there was a group that was developing the Mizpah Farms, which is Unit 1 in Cal-Vada right now, and at the end of '53 they decided they would take over the whole works, the Pahrump Ranch and Mizpah too, and operate it as a unit. There was a man and his 3 sons and they needed the house I lived in, so I was without a job.

RM: The house was on the Pahrump Ranch?

LH: Oh, yes. As a matter of fact, it's still there. Then I worked around the valley for awhile and then I went to work at Blue Diamond.

RM: In the gypsum mine?

LH: Yes. And by that time they'd run the guys from Mizpah Farms off; they lost a couple hundred thousand dollars in the 2 years they were operating there.

RM: Who was Mizpah Farms?

LH: Let's see . . . Moore; I can't remember his first name. You see, Dickey was one of the Mizpah group and he was also one of the Diablo Farms group. But anyway, they just combined it . . .

RM: The Mizpah was a separate farm?

LH: It was part of Pahrump Ranch, but they had a new development there.

RM: How long did you work at Blue Diamond?

LH: Just a year. Then they asked me to come back on the Mizpah. They still operated the Mizpah separately for a year or so and then they combined them again, under Dickey, under Diablo's supervision, so it turned out pretty well.

RM: How long were you there then?

LH: Until Walt Williams bought it. He bought it in '58 and I started working for him and I didn't like that so I got out.

RM: What did you do then?

LH: I rented the Raycraft Ranch from old Jim Raycraft. I farmed one year and then I had to go back to the San Joaquin Valley; there wasn't nothing around here for me then. I was gone in '59 and in '60 I came back and went to work for Jim, then I worked around on different ranches, got tired of that and went to work in the talc mines over in the Shoshone and Tecopa area.

RM: Are they still operating?

LH: I think they are all closed down now.

RM: Were they big mines?

LH: Oh, yes.

RM: What were their names?

LH: I worked at the Eclipse and there was the Monarch, and Warm Springs Mine and Death Valley. There were a raft of them; I can't think of all of them right now.

RM: Did you still live in the valley?

LH: Oh, I lived here. I wouldn't live in Shoshone if they give me the whole state of California.

RM: How long did you work in the mines?

LH: About 6 or 7 years. Then I came back and went to work for Larry Bolling. The doctor told me not to go back underground. I got to where I was blacking out underground due to, he thinks, nerves. When I'd look up like that, I'd black out. And putting in timber, you have to look up. I worked for Larry Bolling for awhile, then I went to work for Cal-Vada in September of 1970, and I've been with them almost 17 years. I was the first man to work for them in construction.

RM: Have you always worked as an operator here, or have you worked in other capacities?

LH: I've been doing the same thing, only I've been steady on it . . . I worked awhile and then I was off awhile, but I went to work for them steadily in June of '76.

RM: Why did they stop growing cotton in the valley?

LH: It wasn't profitable. The banks and the finance companies told the growers, "You can make more money growing alfalfa than you can cotton, so better get out while the getting's good."

RM: When Cal-Vada took over, was that the end of the major cotton effort here?

LH: They grew a little cotton here after Cal-Vada started operating - developing other areas - but pretty soon Cal-Vada and different ones started buying up the cotton-growing areas and there was no place to grow any cotton.

RM: The cotton was irrigated by ditch and siphon rather than overhead, wasn't it?

LH: Most of it; they didn't irrigate cotton that way.

RM: How do you see the future of the valley?

LH: Well, it's growing by leaps and bounds as you can tell by the population. We've got 7,000 here now and you can look at the hookups on phone and power - God, it's more than doubled in the last 3 or 4 years.

RM: Where do you think it's all going?

LH: I couldn't tell you. I'd hate to venture a guess, because the way it's going, it's going to get too big to suit me. I think Pahrump and Las Vegas are going to grow together if they keep going the way they are.

RM: What do you think when you look back to '38?

LH: I don't know. I've said many a time, "If my father could come alive today, he'd stand for a minute and drop dead again."

RM: Was there Desert Entry land here?

LH: There was; they had that.

RM: Did a lot of people come in on that?

LH: No, very few people took it up.

RM: Where did all these other farms come from - the Blossers and so forth. How did that land get in circulation?

LH: That was all state land people had bought up and were holding for speculation.

RM: How did the state have all this land in here?

LH: I can't answer that. The reason Homestead Road is called Homestead, you see, is because that whole country from Gamebird here that way was all thrown open to homestead. A lot of it was homesteaded and then a lot of them sold their homestead to different [speculators].

RM: When were they homesteaded?

LH: In 1948, when it opened up.

RM: But when you got here in '36 there were just the Manse and the Pahrump and the Raycraft ranches?

LH: That's all. And there wasn't a pump in this valley then.

RM: When did they start pumping?

LH: I can't remember who put in the first pump. In '48 and '49 they had pumps up at Simkins'.

RM: Did they pump because they were opening up new ground or because the water table had dropped?

LH: You see, there are only certain artesian areas. But when they started pumping all over the artesian went down.

RM: If I gave you a map, you could locate all the old artesian wells, couldn't you?

LH: I think so.

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