

An Interview with  
SUZY  
McCOY

An Oral History produced by  
Robert D. McCracken

Nye County Town History Project  
Nye County, Nevada  
Tonopah  
2009

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Suzy McCoy  
2009

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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 transcription

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. 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, incomplete sentences, sometimes verging on incoherence. The type font contains no symbols 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 unread and therefore a waste of the resources expended in their production. While keeping alteration 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.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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 long known and admired; 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 in 1987. Subsequently, Commissioners Richard L. Carver, Dave Hannigan, and Barbara J. Raper provided support. In this current round of interviews, Nye County Commissioners Andrew Borasky, Roberta "Midge" Carver, Joni Eastley, Gary Hollis, and Peter Liakopoulos provided unyielding support. Stephen T. Bradhurst, Jr., planning consultant for Nye County, gave unwavering support and advocacy of the program within Nye County in its first years. More recently, Darrell Lacy, Director, Nye County Nuclear Waste Repository Project Office, gave his unwavering support. The United States Department of Energy, through Mr. Lacy's office, provided funds for this round of interviews. Thanks are extended to Commissioner Eastley, Gary Hollis, and Mr. Lacy for their input regarding the conduct of this research and for serving as a sounding board when methodological problems were worked out. These interviews would never have become a reality without the enthusiastic support of the Nye County commissioners and Mr. Lacy.

Jean Charney served as editor and administrative assistant throughout the project; her services have been indispensable. Kimberley Dickey provided considerable assistance in transcribing many of the oral histories; Jean Charney, Julie Lancaster, and Darlene Morse also transcribed a number of interviews. Proofreading, editing, and indexing were provided at various times by Marilyn Anderson, Joni Eastley, Julie Lancaster, Teri Jurgens Lefever, and Darlene Morse. Joni Eastley proofed all the manuscripts and often double-checked, as best as possible, the spelling of people's names and the names of their children and other relatives. Jeanne Sharp Howerton provided digital services and consultation. Long-time Pahrump resident Harry Ford, founder and director of the Pahrump Valley Museum, served as a consultant throughout the project; his participation was essential. Much deserved thanks are extended to all these persons.

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—Robert D. McCracken

2009

## INTRODUCTION

Historians generally consider the year 1890 as the close 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 most 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 so for at least another twenty years.

The spectacular mining booms at Tonopah (1900), Goldfield (1902), Rhyolite (1904), Manhattan (1905), and Round Mountain (1906) 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, much of it essentially untouched by humans.

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. The Rhyolite Herald, longest surviving of Rhyolite/Bullfrog's three newspapers, lasted from 1905 to 1912. The Beatty Bullfrog Miner was in business from 1905 to 1906. Amargosa Valley has never had a newspaper. Pahrump's first newspaper did not appear until 1971. All these communities received only spotty coverage in the newspapers of other communities once their own newspapers folded, although Beatty was served by the Beatty Bulletin, published as part of the Goldfield News between 1947 and 1956. Consequently, most information on the history of southcentral Nevada after 1920 resides 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) in 1987. 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 Lied Library at the University of Nevada at 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 histories as well as existing written sources, histories have been prepared for the major communities in Nye County. These histories have also been archived.

The town history project is one component of a Nye County program to determine the socioeconomic impact 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 the repository. If the repository is constructed, it will remain a source of interest for a long time and future generations will likely want to know more about the people who once resided at the site. And 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.

Interview with Suzy McCoy and Robert McCracken at the Beatty Museum in Beatty, Nevada  
April 14 and 22, 2008.

## CHAPTER ONE

RM: Suzy, tell me your name as it reads on your birth certificate, and when and where you were born.

SM: Minnie May Suzanne Elizabeth Dowler, April 1, 1952, in Casper, Wyoming.

RM: What is your father's name?

SM: Clyde Winfield Dowler.

RM: Do you know when and where he was born?

SM: No. He came here with my grandparents through Ellis Island just prior to World War 1 from Berlin, Germany. He was one of the lucky Jewish immigrants. The family migrated to Casper and my grandparents owned a ranch there when I came along. Because I was born a special needs child and I was the baby of 20, I was placed in my grandparents' care. my father parents. And that's where I was raised until I was about 11.

RM: You mean, your mother had 20 children? That's a story in itself! [Laughter]

SM: She smiled a lot. I'm the 20th child. I wasn't around with the first ones. I know Dad just wanted a bunch of kids, and that's why I wound up with four names—he wanted more children and she just said, "This is it; this is the last one." Of course, born on April 1st, I took a lot of guff for that, too. [Laughs]

RM: Did your father's family go directly to Casper?

SM: I think they did. I don't know that much about my mother's side of the family: a whole lot was happening in those early days. My father met my mother over here.

RM: Was she of German-Jewish extraction, too?

SM: No, I think she was just kind of like Heinz 57 different varieties. She was born in Nebraska on October 21, 1912.

RM: And was she raised in Nebraska?

SM: Yes, kind of all over. She never talked a whole lot about her childhood.

RM: Did her mother have a lot of children?

SM: I think Mom said that she was the baby of 11.

RM: And did your mother's sisters have a lot of children?

SM: No, most of them kind of held it back to two or three.

RM: And how did she meet your father?

SM: You know, I can't tell you that. I'm sure that she wound up in Wyoming somehow or another because he pretty well stayed there. When he became older, he went to work for the railroad—he was an engineer. Maybe that's how they met, because she used to take the train.

RM: What was it like, growing up the youngest of 20 children?

SM: I didn't grow up so much in the household; I grew up on my grandparents' ranch and there were a lot of us cousins. All the special needs children went to my grandparents because my grandmother was deaf so she knew how to handle us. I was raised by my grandparents because I was deaf so that they could teach me interaction. I was born that way; I didn't have surgery until about 18, 19 years ago. They put an artificial ear in, and that was really unusual.

RM: So you learned sign language and everything.

SM: A little bit, yes, but she taught us more to read lips and how to speak without yelling at people and so that people could understand us. My husband didn't know I was deaf; he thought I was stuck up because he'd talk to me and if I wasn't looking at him, I wouldn't answer him.

RM: So it must have been a congenital condition.

SM: Yes. I had an older brother who was hearing impaired but he wasn't completely deaf. And then the sister about 10 years older than I am was deaf in one ear but could hear out of the other.

RM: And when did you leave the Casper area?

SM: I was about 11 years old. My grandmother passed away and my father had long passed away. He was 50 years old when he died.

RM: What did he die of?

SM: He had a brain tumor. He was one of the first ones where they had tried to actually remove it. They removed it, but it caused more problems.

RM: Oh. And your mother was longer lived?

SM: Right. She remarried and went to California and left me in Casper. Once my grandmother passed away, then they sent me to Bell Gardens, California, to live with my mother.

RM: What was that like?

SM: Oh, it was different. [Laughs] I was a farm girl; I was home-schooled. Now all of a sudden, they yank me away from what I know and put me in public school. And that's when the argument started with the teachers and everybody else. They said, "No, you need to go to a special class."

And I said, "No, I don't. Why?"

"Well, you won't be able to understand us."

"Well, I can now." [Laughs] Even as a kid, I fought to stay in the regular classroom so that I could be treated like everyone else.

RM: And you could read the teachers' lips.

SM: As long as they let me sit to the front, I was fine. You get quite a bit out of it. You don't get it word for word, but enough that you can get through. And then, books became my best friend—everything's in the books. I graduated Huntington Park High School and went on to college at UCLA.

RM: What was your major?

SM: History. [Laughs]

RM: You must have done pretty well in high school to get into UCLA.

SM: I graduated high school at 16 and then took my extra credit courses and passed. The only reason I did it is because everyone said, "You can't do that. You can't hear so you can't do that." And, "Yes, I can—watch me."

RM: What an inspiring story.

SM: I did it just to prove to them that I could. Then I took a break and had my children. I have three children. My oldest one is Edward; then I have Michael, who lives in Las Vegas; and La Donna, who lives in Reno.

RM: Now, who did you marry?

SM: Well, my children's father is dead; he was a Los Angeles policeman. I became the wife, took care of the kids at home, did some home-schooling with them. They were home-schooled to a certain point. Then after my husband passed away I moved up to Reno because my brother was

living there and he said, "You can't raise your children in LA." That's where I met Riley McCoy, maybe five years after I moved to Reno.

RM: How did you end up in Beatty and when did you come here?

SM: In 1997. Riley had his own upholstery shop in Reno and had an industrial accident so I almost lost him. We started looking at it and saying, "You know, life is too short for this." And at that point, I was teaching history up at Truckee Meadows Community College part time.

RM: Do you have an advanced degree in history?

SM: Yes, I have a master's degree from UCLA.

RM: That's impressive. Did you have a focus in your graduate studies?

SM: No, I really didn't. Egyptology's my passion but I knew that that wasn't going to take me anywhere. I focused my thesis on Native Americans. Basically it was on Southwestern trade routes.

RM: You mean the Spanish Trail and. . . ?

SM: No, too many people went to the Spanish Trail and all this; this became common knowledge. But even here in Beatty, if you're out there walking, you can find some really great pottery that doesn't come from this area, which shows there was a trading route. I've found Navajo pottery shards in this area.

RM: So you mean Native American trade routes.

SM: Native American trading routes. And there were a lot of them. You can go walking in areas around Beatty and sometimes run across them. Your first thought is, "Oh, wow, here's a nice piece of pottery. It must belong to this area," and a lot of times, it didn't.

RM: Have you pretty well mapped the local Native American trade routes?

SM: I started mapping it in this area and just kind of revisiting, but I got so busy with Rhyolite and the museum. . . .

RM: Did the trade routes go from one spring to the next—from water to water?

SM: Basically, yes, most of them do.

RM: So your thesis was sort of on Native American trade routes in the Southwest? Including California?

SM: The Southwestern area. Because when you're talking about it, if you do something in California and you find something that came from Arizona, then you've got to follow it down, or you've got to follow it up to Washington. There's debris clear across, and it'll show the trading routes. You can even find a few trading routes, I never explored them, further into the Midwest.

RM: Can you see where the ground has been disturbed on some of the routes?

SM: I'm sure you could if you really get out there and you know what you're looking for. Some of them are even going to look like a burro trail. Native Americans didn't need a wide designated path like we do. Sometimes it was just thin enough for moccasins to go through. And then, every once in a while you'll see a little dugout off to the side, and that's kind of where they curled up at nighttime.

RM: Did you follow your interest in history prior to coming here?

SM: Actually, it reignited my passion when I came to Beatty. I kind of let it drop—again, I was raising children. Riley was an upholsterer, and I enjoyed working with him and taking care of the office. I really didn't do too much with it for many, many years.

RM: What was instrumental in reigniting your interest?

SM: Rhyolite, believe it or not. Riley had to retire early so we thought, "Well, we'll become full-time RV'ers. We bought an RV, got it all fixed up, and headed down this way. He remembered this little pull-off space, and it was Rhyolite. We stopped up there and camped out overnight, and this is when Clint and Ellen Boehringer were the winter caretakers, and they happened to be there. They came up the next morning and we got to talking, and they said, "Well, gee, come back this summer. Try it out as a volunteer position as a caretaker." We thought about it a little bit. We went on down towards Vegas and then Arizona, traveled a bit.

We came back up during the summer and said, "Sure, we'll try it." You know, what the heck. It saved you money; traveling around is expensive. And we just fell in love with it. That was 1997, and we stayed there for 10 years as caretakers.

RM: Did you live in a house or trailer?

SM: We had a bus conversion that we lived in.

RM: What was it like, living there?

SM: It was okay. We hauled our own water, which was fine.

RM: Where did you haul it from—Beatty?

SM: Sometimes, we got it from the museum here. When the Burro Inn was still alive and well, if you were the caretaker in Rhyolite, you could come get water for free and bring your unit in and dump it for free so we utilized that. Then about six years ago, we acquired the old Episcopal church here, so then we were able to get our own water.

RM: Is that where you live now?

SM: Yes, we turned it into a home.

RM: Can you summarize your experience, or maybe describe some highlights, of being the caretakers there for 10 years? And were there other caretakers?

SM: Clint and Ellen Boehringer were there prior to us. They called themselves the winter caretakers—they came in the end of October and would leave the first of April. Riley and I would take over the first of April and stay the rest of the year till they'd come back. There were several years we stayed and just doubled over with Clint and Ellen.

RM: What does the caretaker job there involve?

SM: I don't know what it involves now. At that time, you had to live on site. The Bureau of Land Management provided the electricity and you provided everything else. You'd talk with people around the Bottle House and keep it kind of picked up, and that was it. Because we were out there for so long, and because Riley and Clint are the kind of guys that you just can't keep them sitting for any length of time, we started doing things that they've kind of tacked on to the poor caretakers of today. [Laughs]

RM: What were some of those things?

SM: I started doing the research and survey work, which kept me busy. They don't really expect, I don't think, the caretakers to do that anymore.

RM: And what did the survey work involve?

SM: I walked the entire town and took pictures of all the different ruins. I went up to Nye County, got tax assessment records . . . any deeds I could get. I've talked to descendants—in fact, my husband was a descendant, we found out. And I put it together and said, "Okay, this building was at this site and this building was here," so we could pinpoint a few more places in Rhyolite.

I wound up producing a 356-page technical manual on Rhyolite for the BLM—a survey. That actually got us to Washington, DC. We received the "Make a Difference Award" in 2001 for that work. But it was all volunteer. That's what I really enjoyed about it because there was no pressure.

RM: So you have pretty well mapped Rhyolite in its heyday and you know where the various buildings were and everything?

SM: Yes. And there's still a lot more to learn; there's still a lot more out there to check into.

RM: How long did it take you to do this?

SM: It took 4-1/2 years to do the walking survey. I found out, two weeks ago, of another bar that was there that we didn't know about. So it's just an ongoing thing.

RM: Are there any highlights about your map that you would like to discuss?

SM: I don't know. What most people consider highlights are already there—Dr. Grigsby's, the Cook Bank, Bottle House. Down in southern Rhyolite was the big corral that was used for livestock next to Senator Stewart's place.

RM: That'd be, what, south of the Bottle House?

SM: Yes. Senator Stewart's—the ruins there are really neat. The site is still there and you can see the foundations of where he was. It was kind of fun because he built to the outside of town. He'd already had two homes burn down inside of towns where he had lived, so he said, "I'm going to build to the outside here." Well, then you had your Rhyolite and you had Bullfrog, and then over here you started having Jumper Town, and everybody's screaming because these people are just moving in and setting up tents instead of buying a lot. And that is where Senator Stewart wanted to be.

RM: Oh, he was between the town and Jumper Town—on the edge of Jumper Town.

SM: Yes, he was here and you've got Jumper Town, you've got Rhyolite, and you've got Bullfrog. And in 1907, the USGS came in and decided they were going to map this whole area. So they took all of this—Bullfrog, Senator Stewart, Jumper Town—and it all became Rhyolite. Even Bullfrog got to be known as Southern Rhyolite for a while. So Senator Stewart wound up in the middle of town anyway.

RM: Do you remember the other two towns where Senator Stewart got burned out?

SM: I don't. I know I had read that in a book and struck me as humorous that he would wind up in the middle of town anyway.

RM: In your research, what was the true maximum population of Rhyolite?

SM: I tell people somewhere around 8,000.

RM: It was that big!

SM: That was in 1908. The highest it was documented was 6,500, but when you look at the time period and you look at the expansion that was happening, a solid estimate, considering Bullfrog and all of Rhyolite would be somewhere around 8,000.

RM: Really. How long did that last?

SM: Not too long. [Laughs] In 1908, it was the third largest city in Nevada—Virginia City, Goldfield, and then Rhyolite; Rhyolite was even bigger than Tonopah for a while. Then in 1909, Rhyolite's on its way out.

RM: In 1909, it was in collapse?

SM: Yes. It was interesting; in 1906, you had the San Francisco Earthquake. A lot of money was coming into Rhyolite from that area, so that money dried up and went away. So now they're depending on money from the East. Well, in 1907, they had a stock market crash—there goes the rest of that money. Now they've got to pull from England and other parts of Europe, and this is when the real fun ads started coming out, about the paddle boats on the Amargosa River and so forth.

So they were kind of in their death throes the minute they started building the town. It was all built by the people who lived there. They were not only great promoters but they believed in that town. They put everything into it.

RM: Could you mention some names of these great promoters?

SM: The Busch Brothers were a big name, and the Porter Brothers believed in it, and Dr. Grigsby; he was the main physician. Earle Clemens, who did the Rhyolite newspaper, the Rhyolite Herald. A. E. Holt, who took all the pictures—he was also a real estate agent. Bob Montgomery was more of a Beatty person, but then he sold out to Schwab, so Schwab would have been another big one. The Montgomery Mine is responsible for a lot of people working and keeping the town alive. There were just so many.

RM: So there were a lot of—we would call them "boosters"—early on.

SM: Right. And they stuck with it all the way through. Some of the Busch Brothers, when they saw it was imminent Rhyolite was going to collapse, still lived in the area. People used the Rhyolite School as a high school; they would bring kids in from Beatty and Springdale and wherever. Some of them even worked out in Carrara when Carrara started, just to stay in the area.

RM: If the money hadn't dried up, what would have happened to Rhyolite? Or was Rhyolite doomed in the end because the ore just wasn't there?

SM: It was doomed. It was second grade ore. These were hard-rock miners—"I can see the gold; it's there." Once they couldn't see it any longer, they would go where they could make money for their families. Also, the town had no water.

RM: Where did they get their water?

SM: The water came from Buck Springs, also from the Beatty Springs. They used gasoline-fed engines and would pump it up over the mountain and then gravity-feed it into the town. In fact, if you go out to Rhyolite, when you look up over the Mann-Taylor Homes, you see a remnant of a water tower. And you can see, coming down that mountain, the old pipeline that gravity-fed it into the town.

When the miners left, the infrastructure started to deteriorate. In 1910, they had a big freeze; it froze the water pipes. The town didn't have the money to repair the water pipes so now they were hauling water in. More people leave. It's like, "Well, gee, we've got to go make a better life; we're going backwards." Businesses closed because people weren't buying. Banks are closing. They can't pay the electric bill. The electricity gets shut off So on and on it goes. It's a domino effect, once that starts happening there is no way to stop the decline.

RM: We talked a little bit about the end—discuss the growth curve.

SM: Well, it was pretty huge. [Chuckles] The first year, you've got a thousand people in town. One miner finds gold, he goes out, he gets drunk, he talks about it in the bar—everybody is going this way. This is the last chance to really make your fortune. I mean, from here you're going to go into corporate USA. This is the last chance. So every miner and every prospector who had a dream came here—from Colorado, from Wyoming, from Washington, from Europe. A lot of Cornish miners came in. And you saw a lot of different mining techniques used at this point.

It was quick. Like I said, in early 1907, there were already 6,500. Now, this is not even two complete years; you're talking, actually, a little over one year. The town was actually platted in 1905.

RM: Do you believe the Shorty Harris—Ed Cross discovery story?

SM: Of when they kicked the bullfrog? Yes, I do. They were working over at the Keane Wonder Mine in Death Valley. And miners then, it was nothing for them to walk 100 miles, 200 miles; it was just the way it was. So I could see Shorty saying, "Yeah, I'm going to sit here and take a break." I mean, he found gold all the time. He lost it as fast as he found it, but he found gold. And of course, the original Bullfrog Mine now is in Death Valley but when he told everybody about it . . . the original Bullfrog townsite was pretty close to that original mine. And people started branching out from there.

RM: Wait—the original Bullfrog Mine is in Death Valley?

SM: The original Bullfrog Mine is in Death Valley about four miles away.

RM: The original Bullfrog Mine is four miles from Rhyolite? Oh, I didn't realize that.

SM: It's actually in California, I think. I'd have to ask that; don't quote me on that. But the original Bullfrog Mine is in Death Valley National Monument.

RM: And that's what Shorty and Ed found? How did it get from there over to . . . ?

SM: The towns just kind of started moving. At one point someone, I don't know remember who it was, said you're never sure, when you go to work, if your home's going to be there when you get back. Because you leave and you come back and the town's moved a couple of miles. Because somebody would find gold over here and on they'd go.

They found Rhyolite to be the Golden Horseshoe—there was gold all the way around. That's why the Busch Brothers picked that area, which became Rhyolite.

RM: How long did it take from Shorty's initial discovery to the Golden Horseshoe?

SM: He discovered that in August '04 and Beatty started in October of '04.

RM: But Old Man Beatty had been living here.

SM: Yes; he was one of three white men who lived in this area.

RM: So they followed the ore east?

SM: Well, kind of, yes.

RM: From the California line area, they followed it toward Beatty—I mean, what became Beatty. And how long did that process take, then, from the middle of '04 to where the Busch Brothers said, "This is it: the Golden Horseshoe."

SM: I'm going to say maybe two or three months because the town was platted in January of '05; they started filling out their paperwork. By that time, Bullfrog is already in existence—the Bullfrog here. It had just continually moved until it settled right there. Beatty was already here. Montgomery had already gotten his mine, the Montgomery Shoshone, and started developing it.

RM: Was there much ore at Shorty and Ed's original discovery site? And did the town grow up there, then?

SM: Not really. There was a lot of quartz. Shorty sold his; nobody knows for sure. Somebody said he sold it for a blanket and a donkey, others said he sold it for \$10,000. Knowing Shorty, whatever it was, it was gone quickly. Ed Cross was smart. He hung on to his until the corporation came in and I think he sold for about \$120,000, which was a lot of money.

RM: So this is on the original discovery site.

SM: This is on the original discovery. And he retired to California with his wife and did very well there.

RM: Did the ore amount to much, where the original discovery was made? I mean, was there a substantial mine that developed where Shorty and Ed made the original discovery?

SM: No, it didn't amount to much; a few little shacks and. . . . In fact, that's why Death Valley kind of took it and cordoned it off, because everybody wanted to go in there. There was rose quartz down there. You can get up by it, but you can't get into it anymore.

RM: What you're describing here is a really interesting process—the discovery is made here but the real focus is over here.

SM: Exactly. They just kind of kept moving over.

RM: So it salami-sliced over a period of a few months to the apparently most opportune location.

SM: And still it was second grade ore.

RM: There was no high grade at all?

SM: There was some high grade in the Montgomery Shoshone.

RM: How much did it run, and how big was it?

SM: I'm going to be truthful with you; I never paid that much attention to it. I could probably look it up; my husband might even know.

RM: That's all right. Did the Montgomery Shoshone ore go deep?

SM: Yes, about 200, 300 feet; 500 feet, sometimes. They talked more of ledges.

RM: Was that the deepest of all the holes out there?

SM: The deepest that I know about ran about 600 feet; I believe that was at the Denver.

RM: As you're coming into the horseshoe, where was the Denver?

SM: When you come over here on Bonanza Mountain, you can see two tailing piles and that's Tramp 1, Tramp 2—that's all the Denver location.

RM: Let's talk a little bit about the initial flowering of Rhyolite. How did this blossom first spring from the earth?

SM: Well, you've got to go back, again, to the original people, the promoters. They were excited, they would bring their family out; in fact, the town became a family. These were the original boosters—the Busch Brothers. They stuck all the way through and they turned it into a family affair. It wasn't just a mining town; there were concrete buildings. It was going to last forever. They had an opera house, which is not what people think. [Laughs] It wasn't an opera, opera house. It was just a wooden building, but they would show movies, they would have dances and socials. They opened a school for the children; they were very big on education. They had three railroads that eventually came through—the Las Vegas and Tonopah, the Tonopah Tidewater, and the Bullfrog Goldfield or Goldfield Bullfrog, depending on which end of the line you're standing.

It was a social town. It was a place that you wanted to come and work. A miner could bring his family. Kids could get an education. So it was a modern town in all those respects; but it was not modern because they were still hard-rock miners. They were right there at that transition period. Cowboys were leaving, machinery was coming in. But you still had the same social issues you did with the cowboys.

RM: Which were what?

SM: You had brothels, you had robberies, there was cattle rustling. And you still had the social issues that you have in the big towns—you have the women in the velvets and the pearls; they want dances and they want big productions. Baseball teams—they were very competitive. Beatty would play against Rhyolite or Springdale would play against Rhyolite. So it just . . . well, how did Las Vegas come to be, and Los Angeles? It was the same thing. That was where you wanted to be because things were happening here.

RM: There was publicity that gold was available, or, could be found there. So they started coming in. And a man could find a job there.

SM: Yes—anybody could work if they wanted to.

RM: Do you recall what the day's pay at that time?

SM: Muckers got paid \$4.50 a day. Your blasters, I believe, were getting paid \$5.50 per day.

RM: That would be the guys that handled the dynamite and did the shooting?

SM: Right. And then you had your muckers and then, of course, your actual miners, the shaft workers, made \$6 dollars a day for an eight-hour shift. It was really good pay. That's another reason why you wanted to go to Rhyolite because these are above union wages and they didn't even have the unions there yet. This was to happen about six months later. In fact, Rhyolite's

founding fathers had signed an agreement with IWW that there would be no Chinese or Oriental workers mining in Rhyolite; this was just to open jobs for other miners.

RM: And the union agreed?

SM: The union agreed.

RM: Because their wages were higher than Goldfield's and Tonopah's, weren't they? SM: They were, for a while. So it was the place to be—you could make good money. You could strike out on your own, if you wanted to. You didn't have to work for somebody else. There were a couple of Swedes, in fact, that had their own little mine further up in the mountain that did fairly well.

RM: Did they do pretty well?

SM: They must have because the descendents are all sitting pretty good and are happy with it. These were immigrants; they didn't speak English. They went up there and dug a hole, started pulling out gold. . . .

RM: That's a story in itself.

SM: Yes, it is. There are 8,000 people there so there're 8,000 separate stories that are phenomenal.

RM: Now, what has been your primary source for your knowledge?

SM: The Rhyolite Herald, the Beatty Bullfrog Miner, the Bullfrog Miner, and Nye County tax assessments. Digging through their old records—marriage records, death, birth.

RM: Were women coming into the community very early in the town's development?

SM: Oh, yes, very early.

RM: And what was the process there? A lot of those old towns didn't have that many women.

SM: Actually, it seemed like most miners would just go ahead and bring their families with them or send for them. Of course, then you had the ladies of the evening; that started real quick. And a lot of other women would come in; they baked pies and started the hotels and the eateries. You could go in there and get a bed and a dinner for 25 cents when it first started. A lot of widowed women came because they could set up a tent and put in some cots and feed the miners and make money; they could make a living. And then as time grew, of course their establishments grew, or somebody would buy them out.

RM: And like so many frontier Western towns, they had an eye to culture, education. You say there was an opera house. Did they ever show movies there?

SM: They did in the teens—when it got to be 1912, 1913 there were still a couple hundred people there. The opera house is where they showed the movies and Mr. Busch played the piano while the movie was showing.

RM: At its peak, do you know how many bars there were?

SM: Approximately 53.

RM: That is incredible.

SM: Yes. Then, you've got to stop and think—when you're talking about a bar in a mining town, that's going to include a brothel in the back.

RM: So many, if not most, of the bars were associated with brothels?

SM: I'm going to say most of them, yes.

RM: That's a little out of the norm, isn't it, for other mining towns?

SM: It is. They had a very extensive red light district in Rhyolite.

RM: How many girls were working in the town?

SM: I don't know. In the Montana Club, I think I read there was something like eight girls in the bar talking, and they still had girls working in the back.

RM: The girls doing the talking probably turned tricks too, didn't they?

SM: Oh, yes. Well, that's the idea of the bar. They get you in there and talk to you, get you to buy them a drink and negotiate a price.

RM: And the bars were scattered through town, or was there a bar district?

SM: There was actually a red light district in Rhyolite. If you went to the Wellington Bar, that was a man's club, and of course the girls weren't up there. One of the fun things about Rhyolite is how they moved the businesses. They had Golden Street and they had Main Street. Now, Main Street's where your businesses normally start. But Golden Street is the main drag now. Golden is that paved road. The businesses started on Main Street and the brothels started coming up over here; not too far away—where the jail is, if you've ever been out there.

The ladies who lived in Rhyolite—the nice, proper ladies (because they had a Nob Hill)—said, "Look, we don't want our businesses down here. The sheriff has to say how far these other women can go." And the women forced the issue. The businesses actually jumped one street and Golden became the main street. That's where the Cook Bank and all the big buildings

started. There were bars up there and you'd go in there and have a cigar and a beer or a shave. Your barber shops and bar and faro tables and all that were up there. But the other bars, most of the bars, were down in the red light district.

RM: Do you have any idea of what the male-to-female ratio might have been in Rhyolite's golden era?

SM: Just to guess, from what I've been reading I'm going to say it was probably 65 percent male.

RM: Were the demographics of the populations skewed younger—not that many old people, or older?

SM: Most of them were anywhere from their 20s to their 40s, but you had older ones in there and they loved them, respected them. I'm going to say 20s to 40s were your main ages.

RM: Do you have any idea how many structures (inaudible)?

SM: Oh, boy, I sure don't. [Laughs]

RM: Because it sounds like most of the structures were substantial; they weren't part board and part tent or something.

SM: You could look in the pictures and think you see a lot of wooden structures, but you have to remember that a lot of those wooden structures also started out as a tucker tent, which was part wood and part tent. They would put the wood over the tent to give it the appearance of a wooden house or a wooden structure but when you went inside, it would still be a tent.

Or you'll see some of them that look like they're made out of blocks, especially in Southern Rhyolite. They would build what they called a shake and pack structure, which is rocks and concrete and you just kind of pack the wall. And then, once you build it, you plaster the outside and draw lines like it was made out of blocks. That meant you had a good home; you were upper elite. So the pictures are kind of confusing; you have to really get out there and look.

RM: Did Rhyolite become stratified socially or was it still pretty egalitarian?

SM: It was pretty egalitarian. In a lot of mining communities, you've got your Italians over here and your Germans over here; that didn't happen in Rhyolite. You cannot find an Irish section in Rhyolite; it was all integrated. That made it really fun because it was actually the only one that I have ever seen like that.

RM: Maybe one of the reasons why they were such an integrated community was they didn't have some of them frowned upon ethnicities.

SM: Well, I don't know; they did have a large Irish group and a lot of Welsh.

RM: But they're all northern Europeans. Did they have a Yugoslavian community?

SM: I think they probably had a few Yugoslavians in there, judging by the names. But it wasn't a large concentration and so you didn't have these little pockets.

RM: Were there any African-Americans?

SM: I think there were two. In fact, in one of the bars, when they held the Ganz fight in Goldfield (I forget the other guy's name), in the newspaper it said that the one busboy, the one black guy who there was in Rhyolite, all you could see was his big shiny teeth when his guy won. But even that was okay; they didn't discriminate against him.

RM: But there must have been; otherwise, there would be more African-Americans.

SM: If there was, there was no mention of it. I'm sure that there were a lot of things there that are still going to come out, but there's no mention of it in the old newspapers, or where I've looked.

RM: And there were no Orientals?

SM: No Orientals. That's why it was a big thing when Scotty brought an Oriental to town. You've seen the picture of Scotty and the Oriental in the middle of Golden Street having dinner. That's because this Oriental was not allowed into the restaurant. Scotty owed a Chinaman in San Francisco a lot of money. When the Chinaman came here to collect it, they wouldn't let him eat in the restaurant. Scotty was going to take him out and wine him and dine him and get him off his case so he didn't have to pay the money, do his Scotty thing. They wound up eating right in the middle of Golden Street. Scotty went to the store and bought lunch and set his gun right beside him so they could have their lunch in the middle of the street.

RM: When would this have been?

SM: That was about 1907 or 1908.

RM: Have you come across Irving Crowell, who was out at Chloride Cliff?

SM: Yes, he was here in Beatty. The Crowells didn't do too much over in Rhyolite; they did most of their work at Chloride Cliff, and they have the fluorspar mine just outside of Beatty.

RM: Talk about the notable structures in Rhyolite.

SM: Well, you've got, of course, the Cook Bank. That's the most photographed ruin in the state of Nevada; it's almost an icon.

RM: And was that the most substantial and "important" building in Rhyolite at its heyday? SM: It's a matter of opinion. A lot of people thought the Cook Bank was because of what it was made out of—concrete and marble. But I'm going to have to say the railroad depot was the most important because of what it did. Supplies came in this way; people came in and out; you could go up there and have a dinner—it had a nice dining house.

RM: And the building is just pretty much like it was now.

SM: Exactly. In fact, somebody has plans of restoring it eventually.

RM: And then, after the Cook Bank and the railroad, what would be other notable structures?

SM: Useful to the town, or for the tourist?

RM: Well, not now, but then.

SM: Of course, the schoolhouse. The original schoolhouse blew off its foundation and so they had to build something bigger and better. Unfortunately, by the time they finished it, there weren't enough kids so they used the upstairs as a schoolhouse and opened the downstairs to wedding parties and social events. It kind of kept spirits up in the town.

RM: What other structures come to mind?

SM: The Overbury Building.

RM: And where was it?

SM: Have you ever been out to Rhyolite? Okay, you see the two pillars that are standing and then you go back into a vault—that was the Overbury Building.

RM: Was it a bank?

SM: It was for a while. And the Bishop Jewelry Store was right next to that, which was jewelry for the upper elite. They had the Southern Nevada Bank, which was one of the first banks in the area. It was in Bullfrog, so they built the Overbury Building and Southern Nevada Bank moved to the Overbury Building. Then they built the Cook Bank Building and the Southern Nevada Bank moved to the Cook Bank Building and changed its name to the First Rhyolite National Bank, which in and of itself was an honor because there were only eight or 11 national banks; it was one of the few national banks. So you have this bank jumping going on—that's why some people get confused and say, "Well, there were this many banks." No, they moved a lot; the names got changed.

RM: Do you remember the names of any of the brothels?

SM: You had Jewel's Brothel, the Montana Club. . . .

RM: Were they bar brothels, or just brothels?

SM: Jewel's was a nice house; that was the upper elite house. It was still in the red light district, but [Laughs]. . . . If you've ever seen the Chicken Ranch, you can kind of think of something in that manner. She was known as one of the better madams.

RM: By "better," what do you mean?

SM: Very particular about her girls. Her girls had to be clean and well-bred. When they went out about the town, they had to be fully dressed like proper ladies. In fact, once they went up to one of the banks, Bullfrog Bank and Trust, to do their banking and the ladies there didn't realize who they were and invited them all for tea. You know, these were the proper red light girls. [Laughter]

The Montana Club was a brothel, and that structure, the ruin, is still there. There's still a big concrete sink in the basement and you can see the area where the little cribs were in the back. Frenchie's was down there. Those were the only ones, right off the top of my head.

RM: There was no licensing in those days, was there? No inspections or medical checks or anything like that?

SM: No, none whatsoever. In fact, the first licensed brothel was in Crystal, Nevada, which is between here and Las Vegas. That was at the turn of the century. They've got a brothel museum there—it has a bunch of newspapers. But they've got all that paperwork hanging up there.

RM: So before that, they didn't have licenses?

SM: No; they didn't need to have a license.

RM: There was competition between Bullfrog and Rhyolite initially, wasn't there?

SM: Yes, but Bullfrog just wasn't going to last that long. They didn't have water; nobody offered to bring them water. They didn't have the financial backing or the boosters to promote it and get water in there. They had a bank. In fact, Mr. Gorill lived down there for quite a while. But Rhyolite, when it started building, offered the businesses . . . there was a nice little hotel down there. They offered the businesses that were in Bullfrog free lots and free water if they would move up to Rhyolite so the businesses just kind of went up. The only thing that stayed in Bullfrog then were the residences—people who'd already had their homes built or whatever. But it wasn't that far.

RM: At this time, what would you say was the population of Bullfrog proper versus Rhyolite?

SM: I don't think they ever took any kind of a census down there. I'm going to say maybe 25, 30 people actually lived in Bullfrog by that time.

RM: After the exodus. But when Bullfrog was at its peak, what do you think it was?

SM: At its peak maybe 50, 75. It really wasn't that big.

RM: And that would have been when?

SM: That would have been 1905.

## CHAPTER TWO

RM: So really, the development of Rhyolite versus Bullfrog was a location situation?

SM: Exactly. And Rhyolite had all the boosters. Big buildings started going up—it's like, "Wow, this is the place to be."

RM: I like to find the underlying processes that drive these various outcomes.

SM: That's fine. I'm working with a teacher in Vegas right now. He's got a blog up and the kids send in questions; they're studying Rhyolite for Nevada history. So you're making me think just like the kids are.

RM: When was the exodus from Bullfrog pretty much completed, would you say?

SM: Oh, boy; within the first month. It didn't take long at all; January and February 1905.

RM: Now let's talk about the decline of Rhyolite. When did the bloom start to fade on the rose?  
[Laughs]

SM: In 1909, they were still promoting, still had high dreams, but things are starting to fall apart. Mines are closing; there's no ore, no financial support. The ore isn't worth as much so people are starting to pull out their money. The Montgomery Shoshone is starting to shake a little bit; that's the big mine. By 1910, a lot of miners had moved out. They had to make money for their family; they had to make a living. As the miners move out, businesses collapsed. Wages begin to drop. And as I said, businesses started collapsing and people weren't paying taxes; that was a big problem.

RM: Did the town take their land?

SM: A lot of them didn't pay for the land. Old Puddy Grimes, he was the county recorder then, you can see him on the tax assessment records all over the place, "I own this property, I own this property."

RM: [Laughs] But he didn't really take title?

SM: Well, nobody really had title. You'd just go up there and say, "This is the lot that I live on and this is what I'll pay taxes for." But there wasn't money to replace the water pipes; there wasn't money to pay the electric bill. Education is starting to slip, teachers are going. So it's just really starting to roll fast.

The Montgomery Shoshone kept it open a little longer. In 1910, he closed the mine down and then they reopened it. John G. Kirchen came in as the superintendent for the Montgomery Shoshone Mine and he whipped it into place and found some ore; kept it going until about 1914.

RM: He was a major figure in Tonopah, wasn't he?

SM: There's a big monument for him in Tonopah. He was another mover and shaker, involved politically.

RM: Did it stimulate some enthusiasm when he came down here and reopened it?

SM: It did some; not a whole lot.

RM: I wonder what motivated him to come down here, with his reputation.

SM: I think he was just offered a good position by Schwab. That's what he did and he was in between jobs, so why not? And then, he had family down here that had been working the Montgomery Shoshone prior to its being closed the first time so he knew the area and what was going on down here. I believe he had a brother that was working down here, too. Now, this comes from Lynn, his granddaughter.

RM: So where was Rhyolite at its peak? What year would that be?

SM: I'm going to towards the end in 1908 because you don't see a lot of deterioration until you get into mid-1909. And in early 1910, you start seeing banks closing, mines closing, this type of thing.

RM: How fast did it go down?

SM: Okay, we went from 8,000 to, two years later, about 650.

RM: So up fast and down fast.

SM: It was. It was just peaked and it was down, like a landslide.

RM: That is really interesting. Where did the people all go?

SM: Everywhere.

RM: Why did they leave?

SM: When Clemens closed the Rhyolite Herald, he went to California and opened up, I believe, another newspaper down there for a while. Miners were the first to go. A lot of them went back to Colorado, back to Wyoming—there was active mining going on there.

RM: Did many of them go to, like, Goldfield or Tonopah?

SM: Not as many as people would think, but you did have some up in Goldfield and Tonopah. The man who built the Bottle House wound up in Mason Valley. I think a lot of them were just getting tired; they were disillusioned. A lot went to California. You read in the newspaper, "So and-so's in California." San Francisco.

They started going into big business. Now, whether they high-graded some stuff out of there . . . you look at some of the newspaper accounts and go, "Now, wait a minute. He was working here, the mine failed, and now he's there." It makes you kind of think a little bit.

RM: Those that went to California, did they go to Southern California or Northern?

SM: Most of them went to Southern California and to San Francisco and that area.

RM: What became of them in Southern California?

SM: A couple of them just settled down and lived normal lives. Louise Moffat, who everybody loved—Her name was Louise Presser—she was a teacher in Rhyolite. She married John Moffat and they wound up in Southern California, had a family, grew old . . . nothing spectacular. They just went their own ways. I think a lot of them migrated to where their families were; they needed that extra boost after Rhyolite fell as hard as it did.

RM: So the golden dream just evaporated very quickly there and they were gone. Now who stayed on, and why?

SM: Who stayed on? A couple of the Porter Brothers stayed on because they had a store here in Beatty. One of the Busch Brothers went to work in Carrara at the marble mine; you didn't really hear too much after that, other than that he was there from the Carrara paper.

RM: When did Carrara start up?

SM: About 1912.

RM: How many went to Beatty?

SM: I've never correlated a name from Beatty history with what was happening in Rhyolite. If they were here because Rhyolite collapsed, they were here to begin with—a lot of them were here in Beatty and worked in Rhyolite. Beatty wasn't that large; it was maybe 300 people.

RM: Yes, on one hand, you have this explosive growth in Rhyolite; and over here, you've got Beatty. Talk about the differentials in the growth and the role that Beatty played in this whole thing.

SM: Beatty had water and the area that Mr. Beatty sold Mr. Montgomery to plat the townsite.

RM: Beatty claimed the townsite?

SM: Well, this was part of his ranch. He actually sold that to Bob Montgomery, who had the mine, to plat his townsite. But it had water and it became a supply center. There are a few mines around Beatty, but it wasn't known as a mining town. The trains came in here and then dispersed out to Rhyolite. They'd go to Gold Center, into Beatty, and then everywhere. Beatty was the supply center for Rhyolite, Pioneer, Springdale—all the different mining towns. It was slower paced. If the miners did live here, they worked in Rhyolite. Most of the people in Beatty were farmers, they were hotel entrepreneurs. Beatty just didn't have the same infrastructure that Rhyolite did. So even though Rhyolite collapsed, Beatty's infrastructure could go on.

Also, even then they were on the main road going into Las Vegas, which was just a train route at that time. Las Vegas was a watering hole but things are growing, and this is the main road that connects the artery from Southern to Northern Nevada.

RM: Did Beatty collapse?

SM: Actually, Beatty didn't collapse; it continued to grow.

RM: How big was Beatty in, say, the middle of '08?

SM: Maybe 200; 300 would be pushing.

RM: And did Beatty have a school and all of the amenities of life?

SM: Their first school came in 1924, '26—when they cannibalized the Rhyolite school. I think the kids from Beatty went to the Rhyolite school.

RM: That was a long haul by wagon.

SM: They had a car that would go five miles an hour. You could get from Beatty to Rhyolite in four hours. That used to be what everyone said, but it was probably closer to 30 minutes.

RM: [Laughs] Technically, how far is the shortest acceptable route?

SM: Four miles.

RM: So Beatty just kind of held steady and Rhyolite underwent this precipitous drop?

SM: Yes. Well, even though they had the amenities, they didn't have the necessities to keep the amenities open. They didn't have water; the electricity was being shut off. And at this time, Beatty didn't have electricity but they had the water.

RM: That's a good point. Where did the Rhyolite power come from?

SM: It came from Bishop, California.

RM: Was the power in Bishop hydroelectric?

SM: I don't think so, because there were battery terminals or large buildings where they had huge batteries in Rhyolite that was a booster for that.

RM: And then, do you know when they shut the power off in Rhyolite?

SM: I think the power went off in 1914 because they couldn't pay the bill.

RM: In 1910, who were the hangers-on; who stayed? And why would they stay?

SM: Well, Cook went to Goldfield. You saw the Porter Brothers, you saw the Busch Brothers. Dr. Grigsby, by now, was up in Tonopah. And there was a Dr. Bluchette [sp]; he was the doctor for Rhyolite and Beatty, but he lived in Rhyolite. The Gorills stayed on.

RM: And what did they do?

SM: They were bankers, real estate people. They have several different positions. Because you're a banker, that doesn't mean that's just what you're going to do. You can sell real estate, take pictures, do all kinds of things. Let's see—who else stayed on? There were several Kirchens who were still there. The McDonalds were still there, and they're ones that had a stable and ran a stagecoach. By 1921, there was one person who still lived in Rhyolite.

RM: And who was that person?

SM: I heard tell his name is Frenchie. Now, this is "legend has it" because I've never seen documented proof to that. The fun thing about Rhyolite, there's always been somebody out there. Westmoreland purchased the railroad depot in 1926; he lived out there. When he died his sister, Mrs. Heisler, inherited it, she and her husband. And they were characters—I've heard a lot of tales about them. In 1925, Paramount Studios came in and used the Bottle House. Then they turned it over to the Beatty Development Committee; they had Mr. Murphy move out there. He lived at the Bottle House until 1953, when he passed away. The Thompsons took it over; they were out there until 1989. In 1990, the caretakers started working. You had a couple who took the Moffats' name that lived at the Moffat House. At one point, actually had seven people—they called them the Seven Ghosts of Rhyolite—who lived out there. There's always been somebody. I think that's why there are still some buildings because it's too easy to get to.

Beatty has always maintained . . . well, at the beginning maybe 300, and then they started growing. About 1,000 people became the base population.

RM: By what time?

SM: I'm going to say by the mid-'60s, early '70s, you're running between 800 and 1,000 people. The Barrick Bullfrog Mine came in and re-mined the area and the population of Beatty became

3,500. Overnight, Beatty Bullfrog closed down and we're back to a base population of about 1,000 again. When the miners go, everything goes.

RM: As a preservationist of Rhyolite, how do you feel about the impact of the mine on preservation of Rhyolite?

SM: I think they did a wonderful job. They had the mining rights to the entire town. They could have taken down that entire town; they chose not to. They did take down the Montgomery Shoshone; that was a little upsetting because there were some ruins up there. But that's where the main gold was. In fact, the original miners were two feet away from the mother lode; and I got this from the guys at Barrick.

RM: No kidding! What did the mother lode look like?

SM: They actually hit a big vein of gold and that kept them going for almost 10 years.

RM: How big was the vein?

SM: They wouldn't divulge a lot of that information; I wish they would have. But it was extensive, and it kept it going. It was one of their better properties.

RM: Is that right. And the old-timers missed it by two feet? Isn't that a wonderful story!

SM: And you stop and think—if they would have hit it, would Rhyolite have survived? I don't know.

RM: What do you think?

SM: I think it would eventually have collapsed but I don't think it would have happened quite as quickly. I think we'd be looking at a ghost town out of maybe the '50s instead of the turn of the century.

It was a good mine to work by. I don't know about other mining companies—Barrick's the only one I've ever worked by. They were right at the foot of the hill. If we ever needed anything as caretakers . . . if I needed paper to print a report, I could go down and ask for a ream of paper. They'd come up every once in a while and ask us if we needed anything. They were good; they were very conscious of what was going on around them.

RM: Is there ore under Rhyolite?

SM: There probably is. They did some underground tunneling but they packed and filled so there are no big holes there.

RM: So all in all, they were pretty good neighbors as far as preserving what was there.

SM: Yes. And they gave back. In Beatty, they built the brand new high school. They had a lot of miners and other employees who had kids.

RM: How many people were working at the mine at its peak?

SM: I'm going to say about 300, 400. There were quite a few people there.

RM: Have they pretty much mined it out, from what they could tell?

SM: Well, they said there's still gold there but it was \$1 in to get \$1 out—so it's no longer worth it. But all that property has been withdrawn from mining now.

RM: I wanted to ask you about the original platting of Rhyolite. Who originally withdrew it from federal land—or was it?

SM: It never was.

RM: So it's a situation like up in the town of Round Mountain. All those people thought they owned the land and they were paying taxes on it, yet it turns out it was never officially withdrawn from federal ownership.

SM: There were never really any deeds for any property or homes in Rhyolite.

RM: So somebody just went out there and surveyed some lots and started selling them?

SM: They got their roads and . . . the Busch Brothers started it.

RM: But they didn't bother to withdraw it?

SM: No, it was never withdrawn. They had the plat map and it was all registered and everything was good, but it was still federal property but nobody knew it. Even the government didn't know that was their property, and they probably didn't care.

RM: Right. People weren't watching too closely in those days. Who owns Rhyolite now?

SM: The Bureau of Land Management takes care of it.

RM: And has it been withdrawn to special status so that it's basically inviolate now?

SM: Yes; it's a historic site. The Bottle House has been put on the state registry. Right now, I'm working on doing the Bullfrog District on the federal registry so that we can look at a lot of the buildings. But that's basically it—the Bureau of Land Management's doing some work out there trying to make it handicapped accessible.

RM: How do you see that?

SM: I have mixed feelings about it.

RM: By the collapse of mid-1910, were there a lot of old miners hanging on there thinking, "Ah, it's going to come back," and all that?

SM: Not really; I've never read of any mention of it. There weren't that many really old miners. Those who were really old retired; went some place where it was warmer, or not quite so warm—whatever their preference was. The younger ones had to go find work.

RM: Do you consider the climate of Rhyolite relatively benign? In my book I quoted an editor in a piece titled "Goodbye Rhyolite," or something, as saying, "The most wonderful place, the greatest little community. . . ." One of the things he mentioned was great weather. Would that be your perception?

SM: No. [Laughter] In the summertime, it can get up to 126 degrees. One summer we had a swamp cooler in our bus and the refrigerator quit running because it was just too hot; it couldn't keep up. You had to really take extra precautions out there.

RM: So those Amargosa temperatures come up that horseshoe.

SM: Yes, it gets hot. Whatever Death Valley is, we're 5 degrees cooler, and that's about it. Very rarely will we see it 10 degrees cooler. The wintertime is cold. In a good winter, during the daytime, you can go around in your shirtsleeves, maybe a sweater; but at nighttime, it's going to drop below freezing. I've seen it snow out there. I guess if you have to pick a perfect area it would be kind of that, unless you want to go to the tropics and get 'et up by mosquitoes. The good thing is there aren't a lot of mosquitoes out there.

RM: Snakes, rattlesnakes?

SM: Yes, but that's no big deal. There are several different kinds of snakes.

RM: Did you see a lot of rattlers out there?

SM: One year, we saw quite a few; it seemed like they were really breeding a lot. And then it kind of started tapering off. We always warn people, "Watch where you're going; don't stick your hand under a brush."

RM: In your mind, what is the most fascinating thing about Rhyolite?

SM: The whole history. Where it's sitting. I mean, there's no rhyme or reason to where it's sitting. There's no water, there are no amenities.

RM: But there was the gold.

SM: Not that much. I mean, how many mining towns do you know build right in the middle of the mines like that?

RM: Well, Tonopah. A lot of them did that.

SM: Yes, Tonopah did. I guess I'm thinking about the mines in Colorado and Wyoming—you've got your mines here and you've got your towns down here. I don't know; the ground isn't good enough to grow anything. I guess it was the people that started Rhyolite, and their enthusiasm then is infectious today. That's just the only way I can put it.

RM: That's good. I'm kind of fascinated by the can-do attitude. There's a can-do attitude on the frontier and I used to see it in this part of Nevada. I'm not sure it's so extensive now. I'm not sure I see it so much in America.

SM: I don't think you do.

RM: Talk about that can-do attitude in the founders, in the people who came to Rhyolite.

SM: Well, the can-do attitude back then was, "I don't have to be educated, I don't have to be brilliant; I can do this because I know how. And if I do this, this is going to happen and my family's going to be taken care of" And that was a man's objective—to do what he had to do to take care of his family. You don't tell them, "You can't do that," because they're going to turn around and do it to prove you wrong. That's just the way they were bred; that's the way they were brought up.

I don't know if it was the European influence; sometimes I think a lot of it was. Because at that time period, we had a big influx of immigration. And those were the people you were seeing—you were seeing them and their descendents. And I'm going to say the blood kind of got thinned out, you start seeing the attitude go away.

RM: Something happens; it becomes no-can-do. Pessimism.

SM: Yes. Well, women go to work. They're no longer at home with that iron rule, taking care of the children, so now the kids are almost raising themselves, with no one to guide them, no one to encourage them. I think that was another biggie—people encouraged their children to do things, so they could. If the people they idolize—My mother and my father and my grandparents believe I can do it, I can do it." Now we look at them and we say, "You can't do that." [Laughs]

So that's kind of the people you're talking about; they're from the era that anything is possible. "We're in the United States of America. We're in a free country; anything is possible."

RM: And that was the spirit of the frontier. What do you think of the idea that this was the last of the American frontier—this area, Tonopah, Goldfield, all that. That after that, the frontier

was gone; there was never another situation in the American West where a man of, as you say, no education, nothing, could come and maybe have a shot at getting rich.

SM: I believe it.

RM: Maybe not a very good shot, but it was. . . .

SM: But he had that shot. He could take it. Like I say, when Rhyolite started, Tonopah, Goldfield . . . you're right in that transition area. You're going from the hard-rock mining into using machinery. You're going from making home-made tools and implements to accomplish something to manufacturing. We're going into big businesses now.

So that transition was happening and I think that was really rough on people. In Rhyolite, when it happened, you could see things starting to fall away. I think that's where you can start to see the can-do attitude becoming questionable, as well. If you have a mine and you have to work and devise your own equipment to get the gold out of there, you've got to use your brain and say, "Okay. I've got a big rock here; I can't lift it. I've got to get it over here." So you devise a way to do it. You can do it. Well now, you're getting into manufacturing. It's just, "Well, gee, I'll just bring this up here and push it out of your way." All thought is gone. All incentive is gone.

That's when the can-do attitude started falling away, I think. People's incentive was taken away; things were actually made too easy. Today, things are too easy so "I don't have to worry about whether I can do it; I just have to push the button and it'll happen."

RM: In your training in history at UCLA, did you come across discussion of the can-do attitude?

SM: Yes, it's a big one.

RM: Do you remember the context, or what they were saying?

SM: I think we would just talk about the era, the time period, when you start seeing it fall away. And it all falls into that transition period.

RM: When do you see it as falling away in this area?

SM: Here in Beatty? I still see a lot of can-do here, believe it or not.

RM: I do, too. When did it start falling away in America?

SM: I'm going to say right around World War II, you see a real big fall. There was kind of a burst there when the guys went to war and the women went to work—"We can do this; we can make this okay for the guys to come home." When the guys came home, the women still wanted to work. So now your homes are being split again because women are back at work. I'm going to say at the end of World War II, you start seeing a real big decline in the can-do attitude.

RM: Well, let me ask you this—it sounds like a bizarre question. You studied the ancient Egyptians—did they have a can-do attitude?

SM: Oh, you bet. [Laughs] They had batteries. I mean, we think that we're really great—the Egyptians had batteries.

RM: That stored electricity?

SM: Yes. The knowledge that is lost from the Egyptians is huge.

RM: And their construction techniques.

SM: That's not all. They just had so much—their government, the way they ran the country. Of course, I'm not too hot on the slave issue, but their art, the jewelry. They were just very brilliant, can-do people.

RM: Let's take this one step farther. Are all great civilizations in part underpinned by a can-do attitude?

SM: Yes, they would have to be or they couldn't be great.

RM: I don't know whether I want to go here or not, but the decline of a civilization is maybe partly underpinned by. . . . The can-do attitude may be justified or it may be not. Rhyolite declined because, "Well, we can't do it. There's no ore here." It was an empirical reality. So they lost their can-do attitude vis-à-vis Rhyolite. Does that make any sense?

SM: Yes, it does. No matter which way you look at it, whether it's a city or a civilization, it's built up because "We can do this," and people are enthused. Then they become compliant, they lose their enthusiasm, they lose that can-do attitude.

RM: And the attitude may be empirically justified or not.

SM: I'm not going to say it would be the whole of it, but it's going to be a part of it.

### CHAPTER THREE

RM: Have you had any thoughts since we talked (on April 14) that you might want to discuss here?

SM: Not really.

RM: I've got a bunch of questions; I'll start asking them. You did your master's thesis at UCLA on Indian trails—I wonder if you could provide any insight on Indian trails in this area.

SM: I don't know how much insight I can give you on this area. We do know that from Arizona up into northern Nevada and on into Washington, there were trading routes. We know that because we have Navajo pottery where there were no Navajos. The Native Americans had distinct things on their potteries, different symbols and the ways they built them, plus the materials that they were made out of. We found beads that come from the northern Washington area around here. So like I said, we do know that there was a trading route. All trading routes would always follow the streams. Of course, the Amargosa underground river comes up in different springs and areas; it was just a natural for that to be here.

RM: Are there any specific trails that you've read about out in this area?

SM: A lot of the trails now are covered over; it's unfortunate. But Highway 95, the railroad, the mining would obscure a lot of it.

RM: The roads probably tended to follow old trails, didn't they?

SM: Some of them did. Your wagon trails, your miners with burros would follow these old trails—of course, burros find water. A lot of it has become obscured and we find little patches here and there. Maybe where they had a camp, where they were making arrowheads; whatever they were doing. And then there's pottery or there's a particular arrowhead that doesn't belong here. It's not Shoshone, it's not Paiute. So that gives us the indication that somebody was traveling through; that trade was going on.

RM: Where would be some segments of trail that might be of interest around here?

SM: I couldn't give you the exact way to follow the trail. Up on the other side of Tonopah there was an area that was used for pine nut gathering . . . different things.

RM: Up toward Smoky Valley, up that way? How far north?

SM: If you go up to Tonopah, you go out towards the air force base; out in that area.

RM: Out past the airport?

SM: Right. There's some areas out there, up in the mountains. . . . One of the towns that's up there was pretty close . . . there are different sites up there and one of them was used for pinon gathering. This is all BLM protected today because of the significance it has. But up in that area we found pottery that was definitely from Arizona; we found Navajo and we found Hopi.

RM: Really. Up in the Monitor Range?

SM: Up in that area, yes.

RM: How about down here? Were there trails leading up into the Grapevines?

SM: I haven't really looked around here enough to find out if there is anything, but I am going to assume so. The Shoshone here, of course you know, migrated from Death Valley to here, back and forth. There was some definite trading going on.

RM: I wonder what their route was from here to Death Valley.

SM: We know Mr. Beatty used to go to Cow Creek all the time.

RM: Where is Cow Creek?

SM: When you're going into Death Valley today, going towards Furnace Creek, there's a road that goes out toward the Cow Creek area and that's where the people who live in Death Valley now congregate. Up past that is still the original Beatty Ranch.

RM: Up in the Panamint Mountains?

SM: I am sure that they were up in there, but it's not in the Panamint Mountains.

RM: Can you give me any more material on prostitution in Rhyolite? Everybody's interested in that.

SM: Well, it was prosperous. Every mining camp has their little soiled dove area. As I told you, when Rhyolite started, Main Street was where the businesses were going to start. And as the prostitutes moved in and the red light district started growing, the proper women of Rhyolite decided that this wasn't going to work. They didn't want their husbands working that close so they actually shifted up one road and that's how Golden Street became the main thoroughfare. Golden is the paved street that goes in there now. The business street shifted from Main Street, which is actually a dirt road. It shifted to the west. The red light district, or the soiled doves, were down by where the ruins of the jail is in Rhyolite. Main Street runs behind the Bottle House. This is from the old newspapers—it was because the ladies didn't want their husbands working that close to the soiled doves. Enough complaining from the wife and the guy is going to start shifting. So Golden is where the larger buildings started being built.

RM: Oh, they were building the brothels on Main Street?

SM: Well, no, they were building the brothels on Amargosa, which, again, is one block to the east. But they were expanding. It was quite an extensive red light district and as they expanded closer and closer to Main, the businesses made the shift to Golden. The Porter brothers, who came from Randsburg, had their original store on Main Street and when all of this was happening, they purchased property on Golden and that's when they built the stone building.

RM: Now, there's a picture back here of Rhyolite in '07, and I think you said last time that the total population was probably 7,500, give or take.

SM: Eight thousand, yes.

RM: It doesn't look big enough from the picture to have 8,000 people. What's your take on that?

SM: Rhyolite extended from up there where the Montgomery Shoshone Mine was—you've got houses and businesses coming down. It covers all the way down to Bullfrog. In 1907, Bullfrog became southern Rhyolite so you're going all the way down into there. You're going from side to side, from mountain to mountain; the houses actually went up the side of the mountain. If you could get a magnifying glass on that you could see some of the homes going up.

RM: What's the source on the figure?

SM: In 1907, the newspaper said it was 6,500 and we know that in 1908, it hit its peak. The newspaper estimated that there were going to be 10,000 people by 1908. Now unfortunately, a lot of people picked this number out of the newspaper and said, "There were 10,000 people there." Well no, it never did really grow that big. So 8,000 is actually my estimate from knowing that there were 6,500 in the census that was taken.

RM: It wasn't a US census, was it?

SM: I don't believe so. I think it was something the newspaper had done.

RM: And you don't think the newspaper was lying?

SM: They were probably stretching the truth; they always did. But they're going to be close. I mean, they're not going to have 1,000 and say they've got 6,000.

RM: So they're in the ballpark and 8,000 is a reasonable figure?

SM: Right. With people going in and out, with business expanding, I think a solid estimate is somewhere in there. Now, I do have to make a correction about my last tape. I think you asked me about the people in Beatty, and at that time I hadn't read anything where it had more than

300 people. I have to retract that. I read in the Reno Gazette Journal from 1905, that there were 650 people in Beatty! Actually, it had a comparison—when Rhyolite had 400, Beatty had 600. So at one time, Beatty was actually bigger.

RM: Why was that?

SM: I think probably because Beatty had the water and it was established before Rhyolite.

RM: And they commuted, basically?

SM: Right. Beatty was established before Rhyolite.

RM: That takes me to another question on my list: Could you explore the relationship between Rhyolite and Beatty through the years?

SM: Volatile. [Laughs] There was always a competition. The people themselves, when you read the newspapers, seemed to get along real well and there was a nice, healthy competition going on between the two. When the railroads came in, Rhyolite had this big thing planned; Beatty beat them to it. They had the big railroad days. They would go back and forth with baseball games. When Rhyolite had a Fourth of July, Beatty would attend; and then Beatty would throw one and Rhyolite would attend. So it was a healthy competition between the two.

RM: Were there merchants who had businesses in both communities?

SM: Yes. The Porter Brothers had businesses in both communities; they had a store here, they had one in Beatty. Green Hardware had one in each community and Rose and Palmer had one in each community. So there were several of them that doubled up.

RM: So a lot of those businesses were working both sides of the street, in effect.

SM: Right; basically, they were.

RM: Did Beatty have a red light district, early on?

SM: Oh, definitely. I don't think it was as well defined as the one in Rhyolite. The sheriff's department in Rhyolite actually defined road to road, alley to alley, where the red light district could go; I don't think it was defined in Beatty. I think kind of where the crib came up is where it was going to be.

RM: What can you tell me in your reading and newspapers about the soiled doves?

SM: They were usually women who, maybe the husband would run out on them. They had no way of supporting themselves. Jobs were not plentiful for women. Educated women were not plentiful at the turn of the century so this was one of the only things these women had to turn

to. On the other side of the coin, many of them were addicted to cocaine and laudanum—these were drugs that were sold legally over the counter. You could get a bitters because it would heal consumption or it would make your cheeks rosy or whatever the case. Once they started taking this, they'd then become addicted. A lot of them cleaned up well.

RM: You mean they looked good after a bath?

SM: Yes. And then, it's the same thing as today—you had your little one- and two-room cribs where the women were usually the drug users, alcoholics; they were doing something to support their habits. Then you had your higher-class brothels. These had the higher-class girls; as long as they had a madam to watch over them, they had to bathe daily. They didn't see the doctor as much, so diseases ran rampant. It was just a natural thing; they didn't know what a sexually transmitted disease was. Life expectancy at that time wasn't that great, so they didn't think anything of a younger man dying, it just happened. It was not that much different than it is today, just the costumes have changed.

RM: Did they tend to drift into town and then drift out, or did they kind of stay?

SM: You hear about some of them who owned businesses. One of them was named Jewel.

RM: Was that Jewel's brothel?

SM: Yes, she had her own brothel. She was one of the upper class.

RM: Had she been a working girl?

SM: I'm sure she was. Most madams had been a working girl at one point and they decided they were going to change a little bit. There was one that was murdered. For many of them, they come in and they're here for four or five weeks and they're gone. They had one called Tex, who was always in the newspaper—rowdy, always getting into trouble. And then you wouldn't hear about her for several months so you would assume maybe she had left and went from here to Goldfield or Tonopah and then come back in again. So you had them that drift in and out. Some of them would kind of try it and decide, "Oh, this isn't really what I want to do I am going to go on to something else." And then you have those that actually start their own business and maintain it for two or three years, maybe.

RM: Did any of them start a regular business?

SM: They probably did, but I don't have any knowledge of that.

RM: How old did they tend to be? Have you got any data on that?

SM: By 46, they were very old.

RM: Were there any very almost girls, almost kids?

SM: I think Rhyolite kind of watched that. I never read of any. They were usually in their early 20s and up, from what I've read.

RM: Women got married younger in those days. There's a woman out in Railroad Valley who got married at 13 and had about 12 children and they all lived. I wonder if it was socially acceptable for younger women to work as prostitutes. I've never seen anything on that.

SM: I am sure it would have been; if you have a 14-year-old who doesn't have plans of getting married and doesn't have a profession you pretty well keep her at home. It was acceptable for a woman that age to be at home.

RM: But if she's from a dysfunctional family, maybe she could drift into it.

SM: That could very well have been. Again, most of them that I've read about have been in their early 20s and up.

RM: What were some of the diseases? Did that ever show up in the newspaper?

SM: No, and I am not sure they were known by the names we know them today.

RM: I don't know if the cures were very effective, either.

SM: I don't think there were really any cures. In fact, that's what most of them would have died from at an earlier age.

RM: Taking a wild guess, do you think that most of the old miners in Rhyolite visited prostitutes at least once or from time to time?

SM: I am sure they did.

RM: Would basically all of them have chronic venereal disease?

SM: No. I don't think so.

RM: I wonder. I think some men had a better immunity than others.

SM: I guess it would depend on which brothel they visited. [Laughs] No, I don't think so; I don't think venereal disease as we know it today would have been the problem. By the turn of the century, I think the women are starting to get a little bit more aware of cleanliness. I think the women stood more chance of getting disease from the miners, then giving it back and forth. Percentage-wise, I'd probably say somewhere around 35 percent would probably have some disease. And that's not really too bad when you think of today.

RM: Right. And the community's attitude obviously wasn't totally accepting of it if they made them move the businesses up a street.

SM: It was something that they just had to deal with, but no, it wasn't acceptable. Just like that one lady who didn't realize that the girls that came into the bank and were all dressed nicely were prostitutes and she invited them to her home for tea.

RM: Could you elaborate on that story?

SM: I believe that it was the Bullfrog and Trust Bank and I believe it was Mrs. Gorill who did it. She engaged them in conversation; she found them to be very likeable and invited them to her home for tea. I believe it was Jewel and her girls.

RM: So they went to tea at her home?

SM: No, they didn't go, to my knowledge, because Jewel kind of knew that this not going to be acceptable. Mrs. Gorill was rather embarrassed when she found out what she had done. No, the women didn't socialize with them. They become aware of them on the streets and really didn't care for it, but they learned to accept it. I'm not sure the husbands survived well if they were caught talking to one or helping one across the street. It was a profession that was accepted in a mining town as long as they stayed where they belonged.

RM: Now, you have suggested there were at least two levels of prostitutes. There were a couple of girls with their little shanty or whatever. . . .

SM: Right. Well, today we have streetwalkers—that's a level. And then you have your rooms or your cribs; that's another level. And then you have your brothels, at least two levels of brothels. So you actually have four to five levels in this profession.

RM: Talk about those levels in Rhyolite.

SM: Okay. Your streetwalker is someone with just a little shanty, a little room. These are usually the people who are into drugs. They need a drink, a quick fix, and they go out and they get somebody. Then you have your little cribs . . . I don't know about Rhyolite, I haven't seen any pictures of that little shanty area.

RM: I've never really understood the whole crib deal.

SM: [Laughs] It's not really that easy to explain. In a little shanty, maybe one or two girls rented a little cabin.

RM: They're freelancers?

SM: Freelancers. Then the next level up is a brothel. You have those that are very strict, those that are not run very strictly. Again, that's where you get your different levels. Cleanliness has a lot to do with it; how the young lady presents herself. When you're in the upper elite brothel, which I believe Jewel ran, then you have ladies that, even though they're soiled doves, act completely like ladies in public; they're almost an escort.

I read somewhere that a lot of the ladies in the red light district came from Barnaby Bay—is that what they call it?—in the San Francisco area. So these were already hard-core ladies when they got here.

RM: Oh, they were seasoned prostitutes?

SM: They were well-seasoned, yes. And they were some of the first ones to hit the area. RM: You don't know what the going rate in the brothels was, do you?

SM: No, I don't.

RM: Were there other top brothels besides Jewel?

SM: There was a French girl—La Mar, I believe. Her place was pretty classy. The Montana Club, which was a bar . . . in fact, the ruin is still down there. The Montana Club had five or six little cribs out behind the bar. That was maybe not as up and elite as Jewel's, but it was in the running.

RM: Moving down, do you have any names for the ones that are a little second tier or third tier?

SM: I really don't. I am sure that they did because that's just the nature of the structure. You have the Moon Saloon, the Montana Saloon, the Owl Saloon. Everything that you read that has "saloon" behind it, if it's on Amargosa Street, then you're going, "Okay, that's a brothel." The owner may have one or two cribs, he may have a back room—you don't know this until you really start researching each individual business. But when you look at that name and you see where it's located you're going, "Okay, that's a brothel, that's in the red light district and that's what it's involved in."

RM: Was Jewel's on Amargosa?

SM: Yes, Amargosa and Broadway. I think it was between Colorado and Broadway.

RM: Have you ever seen any pictures of the interior of the joint?

SM: I really wish I would have, but I haven't seen any.

RM: Did they have indoor plumbing in Rhyolite?

SM: Some of the bigger businesses did. The Montgomery Hotel in Beatty touted baths in each room. They had their own water plant and electric plant at the motel. This is right during the transition into the progressive era, so things like this are happening. But in order to have that indoor plumbing you have to be pretty well off. Most of them might have running water on the inside but the chances are good they're probably going out to the fire hydrant to steal it; a lot of them did that.

RM: Rhyolite never had a sewer system, did they?

SM: No, they had septic areas and outhouses, this type of thing.

RM: Did they have indoor toilets at all in Rhyolite, do you know?

SM: The Cook Bank may have, but don't quote me on that. Most of them were outhouses, though. They had a couple of bath spas. People would come in to take baths because they were still drawing the water and throwing it in the tub in the kitchen.

RM: And maybe throwing it out into the street?

SM: Oh, definitely not. No, you drew the water for the bath and after Dad took his bath, Mom took her bath and then Grandma took hers—this is all in the same water. Then the kids took their bath and what was left over was either used for dishes or to water the garden. They did not waste water.

RM: Today, it's normative for everybody to take a shower every day. You say that the prostitutes were clean, but what was the norm in Rhyolite for bathing? And they didn't have showers in those days. You had to have water pressure.

SM: Once a week? [Chuckles] You've seen pictures with the little vases and bowls. That was common in any household and especially, again, in the red light district. To take what we call today a "navy spit bath" would have been common; that would have been okay. To actually use the water for a full bath—maybe once a week or every other week.

For the miners, a bath was a once-a-month thing. They believed that the oils on their body, when they'd go into a mine, would protect them. In some of the pictures you see, you see the women with these nice little handkerchiefs. Well, inside this little handkerchief there's a little ball and it's got potpourri in it, and they have that so that they're smelling the potpourri, not the miners.

RM: Or themselves. [Laughter]

SM: Probably. But it was thought that ladies must carry a handkerchief. Well, that's what that handkerchief was for—they could smell the potpourri and they wouldn't offend the miner by making awful faces. No, it wasn't like we think of it today. The mining towns, including Rhyolite, were smelly, they were noisy; burros and dogs and animals just kind of ran around the town.

RM: And Rhyolite was no exception.

SM: Rhyolite was no exception. It was bigger so it was noisier and smellier. We see the old pictures and we'd like to think it was like what we do today, but it wasn't.

RM: Rhyolite had barbers, didn't it? Was there such a thing as a beauty parlor in Rhyolite?

SM: I don't think so. Women would do their own hair. They didn't really wear short hair then; it was always long and they didn't really trim it. They had little heating curling irons—a little iron that you would put in a globe and let it get hot. Mom's in the house and she's got three or four daughters, and she does their hair, they do hers.

RM: And Mom is washing on the board, right?

SM: Yes, she was.

RM: Did they have a laundry in Rhyolite?

SM: Yes, they had a couple steam laundries, in fact, with some of the first steam pressboards.

RM: What kinds of restaurants were there in Rhyolite?

SM: Any kind you'd want to go to. Of course Newton's Grill is one of the most famous because of Maude the Burro. If you look at some of the more famous pictures from Rhyolite, there's a burro standing right there at Newton's Grill. Everybody called her Maude and she went around and begged food and everybody fed her. She was kind of a pet; she was a ham, liked to have her picture taken.

RM: Were there a lot of restaurants?

SM: Oh, yes. Every place you'd go, if there was a hotel there was probably a restaurant in there. There was a restaurant up at the railroad depot, once it was built, and that was a night on the town. You'd go to dinner at the railroad depot—it had one of the finer restaurants—and then you'd go to the opera house for whatever play was playing at the time.

The street usually consisted of a bar, a hotel, a restaurant, a bar, a hotel, and restaurant. They had grocery stores and butchers. Anything you can think of today, they probably had, but a little more archaic than what we think of now.

## CHAPTER FOUR

RM: Did they have phones or telegraph service?

SM: They had telegraph service up at Western Union, which was at the railroad depot, and they had a telephone office right behind the Cook Bank and telephone operators. When they first came in with the telephone, it was a big deal. You could go to the Porter Brothers store and make a phone call, and then pretty soon it got to where there were a few in some of the private homes.

RM: How far could you call in those days? Could you call, like, San Francisco?

SM: Yes, especially there because a lot of this came from California. The electricity came from California; telephones came in from California. If the wire had been strung, you could make that call.

RM: Were dairy supplies available in Rhyolite?

SM: There was a dairy in Amargosa at that time and fresh vegetables and milk came up from there.

RM: They didn't ship in from LA or somewhere?

SM: No, most of it all came up from Amargosa. There was a slaughterhouse down toward southern Rhyolite and they had beef and sheep.

RM: Coming in from local ranchers and probably on the railroad?

SM: Yes. So they had fresh meat, they had fresh vegetables.

RM: Tell me some more about the opera house you mentioned last week.

SM: They called it the opera house, but it wasn't where you'd go listen to the opera. This was just a nice big wooden building. It had a stage and the people who lived there, a lot of the movers and shakers—the Busch Brothers, the Porters—would put on plays. Or they would have a big social dance there. That's kind of what the opera house was; it was the social house.

RM: Did entertainers come in from outside, like on the railroad? Anybody famous?

SM: No real big mentions. Jack London came through one time. He stayed the night with the Grigsbys, which was the doctor and his wife.

RM: What was he doing there?

SM: He was just traveling through.

RM: Did he have any comments about Rhyolite?

SM: Not that I recall. It was just mentioned that he was there and had spent the night and enjoyed himself.

RM: What other famous personages?

SM: Oh, boy—I am sure there were many. A Shriner's convention back in 1907, I think it was, came through. In fact, one of the parades they misinterpret was one of the Shriner's parades. They came in on the railroad, did their Shriner's parade, had lunch there, got back on the train, and left again.

We've got a copy of the patent for the steam engine and the man that patented it came out of Rhyolite. It was an improvement on the steam engine. Mr. George Graham Rice, the man who wrote the book *My Adventures With Your Money*, was one of the big players. He was in Rhyolite for quite a while. Senator Stewart was probably one of the most famous. He was responsible for the mining laws we still use today.

RM: Okay. I want to make sure I've got everything you can give me on the relationship of Rhyolite to Beatty. They were rivals, but yet. . . .

SM: It was a friendly rivalry.

RM: Was Beatty kind of the homely little sister, or what?

SM: It depends. Now, if you are sitting in Rhyolite, Beatty would be the homely little sister. And if you're sitting in Beatty, then Rhyolite would be the awful, monstrous big sister. It depends on which side of the coin you're on.

RM: So you don't think Beatty had an inferiority complex?

SM: Absolutely not. From everything I've read, you can kind of see Beatty sitting there chuckling because they got the better of Rhyolite again. When something was happening—the Fourth of July, or the railroads coming in, or. . . .

RM: Was there a garage in Rhyolite for repair of horseless carriages?

SM: Yes, there was. They even sold automobiles there at one time.

RM: You don't remember the brand, do you?

SM: I do have that information at the house. Probably the Pope Toledo; that was the popular one here because the Pope Toledo would go up the side of a mountain and you didn't have to

follow a road with it. It was the precursor to our four-wheel drive. They had an automobile mechanic, which was a big, big thing. They had a tin shop; they created a lot of their own machinery.

A lot of the concrete blocks you see on the Cook Bank and on the Porter Brother's store are hand poured and they were done in Rhyolite. They had a lot of manufacturing going on there as well as mining; when the mining collapsed, they still had all this manufacturing going on and they had carpenters, they had the slaughterhouse. They had several blacksmiths and corrals, where you could either board your horse or mule; you could rent a horse or mule. They had buggy repair, tailors, dressmakers, a telephone system.

RM: And women's roles and men's roles were still very set in those days.

SM: I am going to say there were probably three to four men to every one woman; another reason why you have a red light district. Women's roles were starting to change, but they still were pretty much the same. In a mining town, a woman could get up in the morning and bake fresh bread and pies. The miners would pay \$2 a pie so women could make money baking. They did laundry for other miners. Most of the women were the housewives; they were raising the kids, taking care of the home. A lot of the housewives were married to the storekeepers, the promoters, this type thing. Your miner would move into an area and send for his wife if he could establish himself and have a place to bring her. Women were teaching then; but again, your teacher was very restricted. She wasn't allowed out after dark, she wasn't allowed to do many things.

RM: She had to be very moral.

SM: Yes, very moral.

RM: So there were not that many single women?

SM: No. You'd have some widows, and they would be running the hotels, the bed and breakfasts, cooking in restaurants, doing the baking. The younger women you would see in the schools, in the telephone company. And then you had the ladies of the night, the soiled doves. They would take the place of loneliness for the single miner.

RM: Was there much fighting over women?

SM: Yes, in the red light district. Then again, you're talking, alcohol, drugs, guns.

RM: Were there many murders or shootouts?

SM: Not as many as you'd expect for a town as large as that. I think the most famous one was the one of Mona Bell, or Isabella Haskett.

RM: Tell that story.

SM: Isabella Haskett was married and she left her husband, came to Rhyolite, and was living with her pimp. Apparently, there was an argument over money and he shot her; he killed her. He goes running down the street after he killed her, "I killed Mona. I killed Mona." Of course, he was arrested. Eventually, he was hung in Tonopah. I think his name was Davis. There was a legend that developed around her.

Now, the true story is that her remains were shipped back to Colorado, where her mother was, so she was taken out of the area and buried. There were five reporters of the Rhyolite Herald that start reporting the trial, and the husband coming and accusing the pimp. They found out the husband was kind of a shady character himself so the husband and the pimp both got arrested.

But there is an old grave in Rhyolite and when Mrs. Heisler was out there in the '50s, after she had read the story on Mona Bell, Mrs. Heisler developed a grave there and said she was the only grave in Rhyolite and said that was Isabella Haskett, which was the name that Mona Bell went by in Rhyolite.

RM: But how did she know that was Mona Bell's grave?

SM: The newspapers doesn't say she was buried there. It says, "Mona Bell, working as Isabella Haskett," and it goes through the story of her being killed. It boils down to a lover's spat. So, Mrs. Heisler, again, who was at the depot in the '50s and '60s, had read this story of Mona Bell and knew she was murdered in Rhyolite and was one of the only prostitutes who really made the newspaper. So she created this grave down by the jail and also the story behind it—that all the miners so loved Isabella and the wives would not let her be buried at the cemetery at Southside, so they buried her there and they declared a holiday. It's very similar to the Virginia City story. So the grave is still there, and people still go see it thinking that Isabella Haskett is really buried there.

RM: Was the trial in Tonopah a big deal?

SM: It was a very big deal. It was on the front page for three or four issues.

RM: You don't remember the year. do you?

SM: I believe it was 1907.

RM: I write a column for the Pahrump paper and, with your permission, I think that story would make a good column. I did a column on the shooting of Sheriff Logan in Manhattan in a brothel and everybody liked it.

SM: It's a fun story, and if you add Mrs. Heisler's little story. . . . When we were out in Rhyolite talking with tourists, they would always ask us about the grave and I would always give them the option: Do you want the true history, or do you want "legend has it?" Everybody likes "legend has it."

I'll find the paperwork, which papers it's in, and I'll send you the dates—and then you have your "legend has it" version, which is always a lot of fun. The Central Nevada Museum used to put out a quarterly or something, and they have one publication dedicated to Mona Bell. It would have probably been a good ten years ago.

RM: I think readers like those stories. Do you have any more like that?

SM: I think that's probably the most spectacular. Let's see, there was a miner's strike.

RM: Okay, let's talk about unions in Rhyolite. Give me all you've got.

SM: Of course, they had the Bonanza Miner's Union in Rhyolite.

RM: Was it indigenous there?

SM: No, I think they had it in Goldfield and Tonopah, too. It was just a chapter that was formed in Rhyolite.

RM: There was the Western Federation of Miners. Were they in there?

SM: I think they had a chapter there. The newspapers had more on the Bonanza Union; that's the one that keeps coming up. And of course, when they had the high-grading in Goldfield . . . and Rhyolite is really just starting good now, and the union is really starting. The miner's union parade that you see going down Rhyolite—that was a protest march. That wasn't "Oh boy, we're going to have fun." That was an actual protest march because there were two miners . . . I'm trying to think where they were arrested. Anyway, they were not being released and they belonged here in this area so the whole union did a protest. Goldfield almost shut down; they had to call in the national guard, at that time, or the army.

RM: It was related to high-grading in Goldfield—there was a sympathy protest down here for Goldfield?

SM: Exactly. Other than that, basically what you heard about the union is that they buried so-and-so—they would pay for the burial if it was a miner

RM: Was Rhyolite what you would call a union town?

SM: I think so. They had the miner's union hospital. The miner's union offered hospital insurance, even if you weren't a miner, for a cut rate. It was \$2 a month and you could have insurance and go to the miner's union hospital. I think it was a union town.

RM: And the mines were unionized?

SM: Most of them, yes-99 percent of the miners belonged to the union.

RM: Was the Bonanza Union affiliated at all with the Western Federation of Miners?

SM: I really don't know. I know they had the Wobblies down there, too; they were active.

RM: But they weren't as influential?

SM: Not really. You didn't hear about them too much.

RM: Just as an aside, was dust a problem in the mines at Rhyolite—silicosis?

SM: Not that I am aware of. If it was, it didn't show up in the newspapers; they didn't identify any of that at that time. They didn't have a clue. They didn't wear respirators so I am going to have to assume that it wasn't really a big problem.

RM: A big part of the protest in Tonopah was for water in their drilling. The Tonopah mines were awful; they were deadly.

SM: That never really came into play down here. The bigger mines had their own water sources. You would hear something about Montgomery Shoshone piping in so much water for use in the mine. Most of that was used in the mills, though. These were hard-rock miners.

RM: Right. And they were still using hand steel, probably, in Rhyolite, weren't they?

SM: Right. It was basically over when you see your first pneumatic drill emerging in Rhyolite.

RM: Backing up just a bit, the age profile of the town was very young, wasn't it? There weren't that many older people.

SM: Oh, there were a few. Mr. Kelly, who built the Bottle House, was 76; that was really old. Fifty-six was usually your top age. You're talking early 20s to mid-30s as your basic population.

RM: Were there many children in Rhyolite?

SM: Yes. In the first year, the first school had an enrollment of over 90 kids. When they took another count, they had over 250 school-age children. This wasn't counting the ones that hadn't made it yet to school age. That's why they built the big school in Rhyolite. Unfortunately, by the time it was completed, they were back down to 50 or 90 children.

RM: But 250 kids in a town of 7,500, that isn't much.

SM: This is school-age children; by the time somebody's 14, you're not school age anymore. You could probably double that number with the infants.

RM: That'd be 500, then?

SM: Yes, somewhere around in there, I would say.

RM: One function of the newspaper in a frontier town is as a booster of the town. Talk about boosterism in Rhyolite.

SM: Clemens did the Rhyolite Herald and he was probably one of the biggest boosters. He was always promoting the town, always kind of exaggerating. If you read between the lines you could tell they were really exaggerating how much ore is coming out. A week before the pipes are laid, we've got water. They're doing all these wonderful things, saying, "We have water, we have electricity, we have this, we have that" to get people to come to the town. Even when Rhyolite was dying he was boosting Rhyolite; he was trying to keep it alive.

I think one of the saddest things the man ever did was when he had to finally say that's it, it's no more, and leave. His editorial was tear jerking. His wife convinced him to come back again in the '30s and I have a picture of him and his wife. It was heartbreaking, you can see the expression on his face—"This is not my town."

People who would write and say, "This happened to me in Rhyolite; I didn't like it," were called knockers. Clemens was awful on knockers. He would come back with editorials that were just. . . "If you're a knocker of the town, go now! Leave! We don't need you here. Boost the town or leave, don't be a knocker." Those were his famous words.

RM: Essentially the papers were selling the town, weren't they?

SM: They were, because the more you could sell the town, the more people you could get in there, the more longevity it would have. The more longevity it had, the longer you could have your newspaper in the town. It all worked together.

RM: And your advertisers would demand that boosterism; they didn't want knockers.

SM: No; no knockers allowed in town. They were known to throw the knockers out of town.

RM: And that's a phenomenon in the West, I think. You still see it in Vegas; everywhere—no knockers.

SM: It's happening today; we have a knocker in Beatty and, of course, every time the man shows up, no one will talk: "I won't talk to you."

RM: Really? What's he knocking?

SM: Anything that just doesn't fit his belief. So it's still happening today and in the West, and especially in your smaller towns. Of course. Las Vegas isn't that small anymore.

RM: But they still act like they've got to be out promoting all the time.

SM: They would have to be, to maintain.

RM: The most knocking I've ever seen them do in Vegas is on the recent colonoscopy scandal, which is just absolutely disgraceful.

Talk about the dream that underpinned the whole thing. Somebody wrote a book—wasn't it called Ghost City of Golden Dreams or something like that?

SM: Yes, I think so. The people that came here were different. They weren't like a lot of the miners that you read about in Goldfield and Tonopah. They had this vision—they were going to start a San Francisco. This was going to start a large town, it was going to be substantial. It was going to last forever. This is the vision that they kept seeing constantly. That's one of the big reasons why you see so much promotion and all this. You can read it in the newspaper; you can feel that joy and the idea that they had.

If I can read it in the newspaper today, 100 years later, can you imagine the personality these people had when they were actually talking to people to get money for the mines to promote Rhyolite? And it was infectious. They kind of sculpted the main people. You read about the Busch brothers. the Porter brothers and all of sudden you find out that they kind of knew each other prior: and then you've got this doctor coming in. They kind of sculpted the town; they were people that had worked together before with the same vision—this was going to be their town. It was going to last forever.

And it became infectious—they infected other promoters who came to the town. It was like a disease. It just kept going on and on.

Probably the most heartbreaking thing again, is when you read at the end of the papers and you start seeing these people . when Dr. Grigsby left and went to Tonopah, it was one of the hardest things he ever did\_ He couldn't make a living any longer in Rhyolite so he had to go and he didn't want to. He wanted to stay there and see it prosper again. It was going to happen again. Was the gold there for them to continue? Yes, it was. Was the technology there for them? No, and that was the downfall of Rhyolite. They just didn't have the technology; they kept trying to reinvent the system. They were very infectious.

RM: Well, at another level Rhyolite was a one-trick pony. They had gold and that was it. And they didn't really have a whole lot of that. Whereas a town, to survive, has to have a multi-dimensional strategy.

SM: That's what kind of surprised me. Because they had a wonderful education system. They had automobile repair, they had these hand-poured brick factories, they had supply stores with other towns around them; and yet that still wasn't enough of an infrastructure to keep them going. It wasn't just mining, it was manufacturing, it was the railroad—there were so many things in that town. Why didn't it survive?

RM: So why didn't it? There's got to be a reason.

SM: Again, I am going to have to say technology. Every time I look at it, that's the first thing that I think of. People started moving out when the gold mines started collapsing and then we get World War I coming up.

RM: But it's several years away.

SM: Yes, but you're reading in some of the papers the rumors of war. A lot of things are happening; they're struggling. Of course you had your earthquake in San Francisco that took money out of Rhyolite. You had your market crash that took money out of Rhyolite. But I've still got to say technology.

RM: You mean if they'd had the technology to get the remaining gold?

SM: I think if they would have had the technology to get a lot more of the gold.

RM: But there wasn't a world-class gold deposit. Round Mountain has 20 million ounces of gold and Rhyolite, I doubt if they had a million.

SM: I don't know; I'm still going to have to say technology. No matter which way you look at it, the miners are leaving—as the miners leave, the businesses start folding up and going.

RM: Let me ask a question from a knocker's perspective. If you added up all of the money that came in versus all of the wealth that was produced in the gold, which would be higher?

SM: The money that came in.

RM: So they brought in more money for development of the gold than they actually produced. Would it be close, in your opinion?

SM: The Montgomery Shoshone, I am going to say, was close.

RM: You mean in the amount that they put in versus what they got out.

SM: Right. There was something good happening there. They employed a lot of people and it shut down and then it reopened again.

RM: Was the Senator Stewart close?

SM: I don't think so. His didn't last that long, either.

RM: It didn't?

SM: But I think they always got more money than what was taken out of the mines. That was the whole idea of selling it on the stock market. Then you watch these stocks start plummeting— you know that the money 's not coming back out.

RM: Wasn't that the real reason it folded?

SM: Because the money didn't come back out?

RM: Yes. Ultimately. you've got to produce.

SM: Yes. I am saying technology because Bullfrog came back and remained for 10 years with new technology. and the took a lot out.

RM: They apparently didn't get it all. They're still there.

SM: The old miners closed because they couldn't get to that gold so we're talking failed technology. Had the old miners had newer technology, had they had the knowledge . . . For them, if they could see the gold, it was there. Once they couldn't see it, it couldn't be there.

RM: Do you think that Rhyolite had the potential to be the queen city of this part of Nevada and just had bad luck or was the collapse kind of inevitable? I am probably more interested in chance than almost anything in life.

SM: The roll of the dice? I think it was just the roll of the dice. If they would've had the technology and the money backing that they needed, I think it could have been a great city.

RM: It's surely is in a beautiful spot.

SM: It is, but the roll of the dice . . . and the water is here in Beatty. Beatty was supplying them. Buck Springs had water and it was supplying them.

RM: I am fascinated by the fact that the townsite was never withdrawn from federal land. Who platted it?

SM: The Busch Brothers platted it. They drew out a plat map and it was registered with Nye County. They just marked out and surveyed their plats so that when they sold this lot it was already surveyed and ready to go. Rhyolite had its own townsite office. The townsite office would log it in, and that lot belonged to the buyer. He would pay the townsite office \$1000 or \$500 or \$1500, depending on the lot.

RM: And the purchaser would go up to Tonopah?

SM: Usually not. Usually the townsite took care of that if it was done at all.

RM: And he would start paying taxes on it. right?

SM: If you look at the old tax records. not that many people paid taxes on their property. All the way up into 1910, the Bottle House was still listed under Tom Kelly; but old Puddy Grimes over here has got his name on it because as far as the county is concerned, taxes haven't been paid so he's got his initials all over the place.

RM: The county's idea that they owned it was actually a fantasy, wasn't it?

SM: We think so. It's really unsure what happened. There's no paperwork to follow. We know that the townsite was platted, people went to the Rhyolite townsite . . . and the same thing happened here in Beatty for a long time.

RM: It did? Because Beatty was withdrawn from federal ownership.

SM: I hope Beatty was withdrawn; I own a piece of property here. [Laughs]

RM: Montgomery platted it, didn't he? Did he withdraw it?

SM: I hope so. I've never seen the paperwork, but I sure hope so. In fact, I know Beatty did because the townsite told everybody who was here for a while to come in and make sure their lots were registered so they could take a batch up to Nye County.

But they would pay the taxes, sometimes. Lots of times they were only there for a year or two so they didn't pay taxes and the townsite would resell it. Or they would sell it to somebody; now somebody else is paying the taxes.

RM: And they paid the taxes to the county, not to the townsite?

SM: Right. When you look at the old tax assessment records, lot after lot after lot, no taxes were paid. And so the count actually took it. Now, did it belong to the county? I don't know.

RM: They had a problem with that at Round Mountain. They did the same thing at Round Mountain and the mine came in and staked out the town and said, "Well, we're going to put a dump on the town." You can imagine the outcry. They came to a compromise but that was the end of the town, basically.

SM: They almost did the same Thing with Rhyolite. They owned all of the mineral rights in Rhyolite. Barrick opted to leave the ghost town alone.

RM: Bless their hearts.

SM: They could have taken it down. I know the county commissioners at one time gave Rhyolite, I believe, to the Bureau of Land Management, or to the federal government; it was up to them to take care of it. The county commissioners had it for awhile. And when you get

started, you don't know what's private property and what's not. There is some private property in Rhyolite where the people did pay their taxes and continue paying their taxes even today. Actually, BLM says they don't know what they own and what they don't own out there.

RM: Is that right? Maybe there was some land out there legally withdrawn. Could we talk a bit more about your sources for your great knowledge of Rhyolite?

SM: I've read the Bullfrog Miner, Beatty Bullfrog Miner, The Rhyolite Herald, and I still reread it today. I am always coming up with new things.

RM: Do you have your own copies?

SM: I have quite a few of my own copies; I've got them on disk. The university in Las Vegas has wonderful special collections. And you get things out of photographs; they tell big stories.

RM: What's your favorite newspaper of the three you've mentioned?

SM: The Rhyolite Herald. The Central Nevada Museum has a wonderful archive, and the State Historical Society in Reno. The Smithsonian Institute has some. The Huntington in California is a wonderful place to go.

RM: What do they have?

SM: The Huntington has original documents that people from Rhyolite and Beatty donated. They have the original blue lines of the railroad that came through. You have to be a reader to be allowed there. I love the Huntington. Right now, I am writing to a society in Maine, a historical society, where I have located some information on Mr. Beatty. Resources come from everywhere: you just have to keep digging.

RM: Did Old Man Beatty come out of Maine?

SM: He came out of Iowa and he served in the Civil War; we've got a medical discharge. He came here, I believe, in 1876, somewhere in there, and acquired the Beatty Ranch. He was married prior to coming here. His wife died of pneumonia at 26 years old, before he came here.

RM: Did he have children with her?

SM: He had two, I believe. These are things I am finding out here on the side. Yes, your information comes from everywhere. You take a stab and say, "Well gee, I think he may have been here;" or "Let's go see if they have anything about our area."

RM: What's your favorite book as a source on all of this?

SM: Life in the Ghost Town of Rhyolite, Nevada, by Betsy Ritter, Clemens's wife. It's really a primary source reference because she lived here and she goes through the story. From there you can start researching. Alan Patera did a lot of research when he wrote Rhyolite: The Boom Years and I've used his book quite a bit.

I have a habit of double-checking resources—when I read something in an author's book I'll say, "This is good information, now let me prove it," so I go to his sources so that I can see it in the newspaper or in a historical document. The Central Nevada Museum, again, has a nice archive. And the Nye County assessor's office—right there in Nye County is just a trove of information with marriage licenses. death certificates, all the tax assessment records.

RM: Are they easily accessible?

SM: Yes, you go in there and tell them what you're looking for and they'll give you a list; you just have to use them there. A lot of it's on microfilm and you can get copies.

RM: This is a funny question—Rhyolite was kind of a meteor, a fairly brilliant one—whoosh, and then it's gone.

SM: A blinding light.

RM: Was there a celestial event . . . I am not looking at astrology or anything. There was a meteor that came over the Tonopah area, Columbus, and they found it out in Railroad Valley. I'm wondering if there was a celestial event that one could kind of use as a metaphor for Rhyolite.

SM: I honestly don't know. [Laughs] Another source I use—I talk to the descendants of the people, the records that they have. I am trying to remember . . . this may have been out of the old newspapers; I'd have to look. There was a comet that went over. I know it was one of the descendants who told me this. They wanted to go out and watch the comet, but their mother wouldn't let them because she was afraid of what would happen when the comet went over. So there was a comet that went over Rhyolite.

RM: Was it a comet or a meteor?

SM: She called it a comet. I am going to really have to look through my notes now; I haven't thought of that story in a long time.

RM: I am just curious, because I think the metaphor is interesting. This brilliant flash and. . . . What about minorities in Rhyolite—Indians?

SM: I don't think there were any Native Americans in Rhyolite; most of them lived here in Beatty.

RM: And they didn't gravitate over there at all?

SM: Not really. They found mines It was an Indian that found the Montgomery Shoshone. As I said earlier, one of the surprising things about Rhyolite is that you didn't have specific sections. People didn't talk about specific nationalities or minorities. There were a lot of Swedes, Irish, German, Welsh.

RM: How about southern Europeans and eastern Europeans? They would have been of lower status in America, generally.

SM: You don't read that in the old newspapers in Rhyolite.

RM: Why is that?

SM: I don't know. I think again because of the class of people they were. There was just something special about the promoters there. If discrimination was happening, it didn't seem newsworthy as far as the papers were concerned. The only time you heard bad things about anybody is if they robbed you or something like that. From the lowest-wage person clear up to the wealthy entrepreneur, they all intermingled.

RM: Didn't you tell me the Chinese weren't welcome there?

SM: Yes; for some reason, and I don't really know why, the Chinese were not welcome there. And the owners agreed with the union that they would not hire Chinese in the mines.

RM: And that was the Bonanza Union?

SM: It was.

RM: What about Hispanics?

SM: There were a lot of Mexican miners.

RM: If you had to take a wild guess, what percentage?

SM: I wouldn't even try.

RM: Was it mainly men, or was it women, too?

SM: Mainly men, I would imagine.

RM: What was the relationship of Rhyolite to Death Valley?

SM: Well, Death Valley was not Death Valley then—it wasn't a monument or anything, you

just went through there to go mining. The doctor out of Rhyolite would go to Skidoo, Ballarat . . . they talk about the mining area of Ballarat and Skidoo. I do know that they had several areas on the stagecoach rides. where they would ride at nighttime. They would hole up in, like, a Cousin Jack (an underground house) in the daytime where it was cooler, and then they would ride again at night.

RM: A Cousin Jack house was an underground house?

SM: Yes, it's a quarter above ground and the rest of it's underground. The Cousin Jack miners out of Wales developed these because they hold an even temperature. If you're in a mining area like this or Death Valley it's the perfect place.

RM: Did the people from those Death Valley area communities come to Rhyolite for shopping and fun?

SM: They had their own stores there as well. Every once in a while you'd hear "So-and-so from Ballarat is here for the weekend."

RM: Was it a big city relative to them?

SM: It was for everybody; it was even the big city for Las Vegas.

RM: Why did you fall in love with Rhyolite?

SM: Why did I fall in love with Rhyolite? I don't know. You either love the desert or you hate the desert. It was intriguing.

## APPENDIX

### Movies Filmed in Rhyolite Interview at Beatty Museum June 10, 2008

RM: Okay, Suzy, we're going to talk about Rhyolite and the history of movie-making at that beautiful site.

SM: Well, it's been around for a long time. Going through my paperwork, and the movies that I know about, there have been 13 movies, 12 documentaries, and five newsreels on Rhyolite, starting in 1924.

In 1924, they made *Wanderer of the Wasteland*, which was a movie. It came from a Zane Grey novel and the Famous Laskey Players put it on. The actress was Billie Dove and the actor was Jack Holt. As far as we know, there are absolutely no reels left; it's a disappeared movie. There was a remake of the same movie in 1945, but it was done in Lone Pine, California.

In 1925, the big famous one was *The Air Mail* movie. This one was, again, done by the Famous Laskey Players. And this is the one that you hear about—Paramount Studios came in, redid the Bottle House, then turned it over to the organization in Beatty to start taking care of. The Laskey Players had put a hole in the back of the Bottle House for their camera, and that's what they had repaired. Billie Dove, Warner Baxter, and Douglas Fairbanks played in that movie. Four of eight reels still exist of that one at the Library of Congress.

In 1931, there was a newsreel called *The Famous Gold Rush*. It was narrated by Gayne Whitman—one of these great old voices like all the spooky radio programs you would hear. It started with a skull. I've viewed it and it's really a good movie.

RM: It's available?

SM: It's a 10-minute black and white done by Thunderbird Films and it's available through the Library of Congress.

The next one was in 1932, called *Ride Him Cowboy*. That was one of John Wayne's very first movies, and it was done up at the railroad depot in Rhyolite. What's really fun about this one is that John Wayne's horse was called "Duke," and that's where he picked up the nickname, "The Duke." It was one of his first films. I mean, you never think of John Wayne being that young. [Chuckles] It's really neat to watch and see how he acted during his first few films. [Laughs] It's kind of a corny film.

I own it; it's in my private collection. It's a basic—a spaghetti Western, I guess you would call it. You can get the film from Kit Carson Films—they have a lot of those older films.

RM: What's your source on the information about the Duke nickname?

SM: I go through the Library of Congress. A lot of it is the Internet movie database; sometimes you can pick up some good sources and then start going from there. Paramount Studios is fantastic. When you send a question and tell them what you're doing, they're really good about trying to help you. There's a museum and an archival center in California for old movie films and I use that quite a bit as well.

RM: Is it with the Academy of Motion Pictures?

SM: No. I wish it was. The Academy of Motion Pictures has some information, but not as much as they should. I'm hesitant to give the name because it is a private museum; it's really not open to the public. I got my connections through the Huntington when I was doing research there.

RM: Do they have film archives at the Huntington?

SM: Not to my knowledge, but they have resources to get them.

The next one was done in 1932, and it's called *Over Tioga Pass*. Now, that's a silent film, again, and they've done it on the eight millimeter—turn the crank. It's a travelogue and it shows Rhyolite in 1932. Surprisingly enough, when you watch this there's not a whole lot of difference from 1932 to what we see today other than maybe a couple more ruins here and there.

RM: Really? You mean, the geography.

SM: Right, and as far as the ruins that are there—there really wasn't a whole lot there in 1932. It's a nice little ghost town. In the same year, they did *Ghosts of the Golden West*, which was a black and white, and it was a talkie. It was also a travelogue. Again, you have that spooky voice talking about the miners and the ghosts of these places, so you get another view of Rhyolite. They just did a fantastic job.

The '30s were big here. In 1936, there was an 11-minute newsreel called *Death Valley*. That newsreel actually focused more on Rhyolite than it did *Death Valley*. So Rhyolite has almost been a *Death Valley* ghost town, even though it doesn't sit in the national park; that is kind of fun because they've helped promote it along with *Death Valley*.

At this time, we've got Mr. Murphy out there at the Bottle House; he was before the Thompson era. In 1937 we have *An Unusual Occupation*. They're already starting to look at the Test Site by this time.

RM: They were looking that early? This was before World War II and the A-bomb and everything.

SM: They were looking at that as a military base.

RM: Right. They already had Nellis.

SM: Exactly, and they were expanding. The film is called *Unusual Occupations III* and it was narrated by Ken Carpenter. They talked a lot about the Bottle House. Mr. Murphy was doing a lot of purple glass so they were focusing on that and at the same time they were kind of talking about what was happening in the area.

Everybody loves Roy Rogers. In 1939, *Rough Riders Roundup* was filmed here. That was done using mostly the depot. That became a big one for Westerns; they liked the inside of the depot a lot. They had the singing cowboy—so the two big ones, John Wayne and Roy Rogers, came in here.

RM: Was Dale Evans with him out here?

SM: No, it was Roy Rogers and Lynn Roberts. I tend to remember that he was romantically involved with this woman at one time, but don't quote me on that.

RM: Roy Rogers is a hero of mine. I wonder if Trigger was in it. Probably not.

SM: Probably not. I have a feeling this is one of his first movies as well.

RM: Probably more the Sons of the Pioneers era. Were they in it?

SM: I'll have to go home and watch it. I have that one. Nothing was happening in the 1940s. In 1952, *Ghost Towns USA* was a travelogue that was made. It was kind of the same format as the previous travelogues. They showed Belmont, Rhyolite, and Virginia City—these were the three towns that they were promoting in 1952.

Then along come the movies again. 1965, *The Reward* was made. Now this was a biggie—the people stayed here in Beatty and this one had Efrem Zimbalist Jr., Yvette Mimieux, and Gilbert Roland. The film is mostly in Spanish, but you can really follow along with what's happening; it was a drama.

RM: Was it a Mexican production?

SM: No, it was an American production.

RM: Was the Spanish subtitled?

SM: No. The plot goes that this guy stole some money or something out of Mexico and was on the run. They've taken Rhyolite and added a lot of props—it's kind of hard to tell some of the buildings. They made the Cook Bank into almost a cathedral-type building and gave it kind of a Spanish look. The main plot of the film happens right around the Cook Bank building. In 1980 there was one called *The Devices*. To my knowledge, that one has never come out; I am still trying to get a copy of it.

RM: Who made it?

SM: Alan Bloom was the director; he is still a professor and a moviemaker and he's at UCLA. Once I found out who it was and I got ahold of him, he gave me kind of an update on it. It's been through the movie festivals—it's an independent film and it's won some awards. It was

another drama. They kind of like the single guy getting killed in the desert, so they used Rhyolite for that a lot.

We're up to 1987 and they did *The Arrogant*. That's also known as Sylvia Kristel's *Desires*. It was played on Warner Home Video and the Playboy Channel, but it is supposed to be a drama. Now, this is one that I've never seen but I've seen the write-up of it.

RM: Do you know who was in it?

SM: No, I don't. It kind of sounds like a murder mystery to me in reading about it. *Cherry 2000* was done in 1987. Everybody's familiar with that one—a sci-fi adventure.

RM: Yes, my daughter, Bambi McCracken Metscher, was in that. She was a stand-in for Melanie Griffith through the whole filming of the movie. She's got pictures and if you ever want to get an inside view of that, she was with the whole shooting.

SM: Oh, fantastic; I'd love to see some pictures.

RM: If you had a film festival, she could get some of the old cast together.

SM: Oh that would be wonderful. As you know, they filmed it in Goldfield as well and the logo that they used with the eye sticking out of the bricks there . . . Virginia Ridgeway took that picture and she's given me permission to publish and use it. That'd be a good one for the film festival.

I've watched it and I enjoyed it; of course, I like sci-fi. I got a little upset when I saw them standing up on the Cook Bank building, but I thought, well, okay this is 1987 I think they did a phenomenal job. And this is the beginning of pyrotonics in Rhyolite.

RM: It was also filmed at Big Dune. That's where the casino, the remnant of Vegas, was set.

SM: They filmed all over and Rhyolite always has a special spot in the film. Also in 1989, we're back to the documentaries with one called *Ghost Towns of the Old West*. Again, that's a Kit Carson documentary and it takes in three or four of the ghost towns throughout Nevada. [KitCarson.com](http://KitCarson.com) is where you can buy old documentaries and they produce some—this happened to have been one that they produced. They use old westerners, great people for talking on film, and they talk about all of them. This one, again, had Rhyolite and Virginia City; Virginia City is always done with Rhyolite. I don't believe Belmont was done at that time. I think they did Austin.

In 1991, *Delusion* was done. This had Jim Metzler and Jennifer Rubin; it was a murder mystery, a drama, and the main shot is Death Valley Junction. They used the old hotel there and then they come into Rhyolite and this is the area you see.

In 1994, we go back into the newsreels and documentaries. *Bay Area Backroads* was here and they did a whole shot in Rhyolite. And Clint Boehringer, who was the winter caretaker at the time, was there and they interviewed him and he talked about Rhyolite. They did a lot of shots, did some nice ghostly effects as people go in and out.

In 1995, the Discover Nevada documentary came out; and again, there was a nice big shot on Rhyolite. They did several interviews; I believe Clint Boehringer is on that one and some of the Bureau of Land Management people.

Now, Ted Faye—I don't know if you are familiar with him—he's a Death Valley documentarian and he does a lot of films. In 1997, Death Valley Memories came out, a Ted Faye film. He does a lot of interviews, similar to what you do, but he uses the camera. And again, he's talking to a lot of the new people who lived in Rhyolite or were descendants of Rhyolite; and just does a wonderful documentary on that.

In 1998 . . . this was the first film that I actually watched being filmed in Rhyolite and it was done in two segments. When they first started doing it, it was a student film project from Loyola College. And it was okay; it was called The Blade at that time. A year later they came back to finish it. Now they've got some movie actors in there and they're getting a little bit more professional. When it was released it came out as Six String Samurai. [Laughs]

This is where I witnessed the pyrotonics. The second time around, when we started working with them, they said, "Well at this point, The Cook Bank building is going to catch on fire." Well, I'm having a heart attack—I'm out here trying to protect the town. What they did is they had this long tube, metal tube, and it had holes drilled in it and then they had propane tanks under it. All you'd see were these little spurts of fire, nothing very dramatic. When you looked through the camera, the whole building was ablaze. It was beautiful. So this was my first experience with pyrotonics and I was really impressed so I didn't get so upset anymore when they were filming. It's an independent film and it's out on DVD; it's an off-the-wall sci-fi film set in the future. You could almost call it a cult film.

In the same year, 1998, An American Moment with James Earl Jones came to town. This was probably a 15-, 20-minute segment and it was more on the southern part of the state.

RM: It's a documentary and not a feature?

SM: Yes, it's one of those things where you go to the movies and they throw in this little short. My husband, Riley, worked with James Earl Jones on this at the Bottle House, which was really kind of fun. They told the history of Rhyolite and of course, James Earl Jones has such a dramatic voice. It turned out beautifully.

In 1999, the Travel Channel did an hour-and-a-half documentary on the Bottle House. This one pops up every once in a while on the Travel Channel, so it's kind of fun, and they do several things there in Rhyolite. Riley did most of the documentaries after 1998.

In 2000, Motor Trend Television came into town and I did an episode with them; it's Episode No. 18 and it's up at the Cook Bank, which was kind of fun. That was one of only a couple of them that I've been in because I don't care to be filmed. They catch me by surprise every once in a while.

There was another Ted Faye film in 2000, The Twenty-Mule Team of Death Valley, and it shows mule teams coming into Rhyolite. We're getting more into documentaries there.

In 2001, the History Channel did Homes of Hopes and Dreams. They did an excellent job on this and Riley and I both worked with them. They did probably five ghost towns throughout the United States and Rhyolite was the one featured here in Nevada. If you ever get a chance to

see that, the photography is phenomenal because they show you the old bank, or the way the bank used to look and it just goes right into the ruin without any glitches—it's very smooth.

Also in 2001 was *The Great Desert Railroad Race* and of course that definitely takes in Rhyolite and Beatty. It told about the race between Clark and Smith to get the railroad into Rhyolite. Ted Faye did a nice documentary on that, bringing it all the way up.

In 2003, Ted Faye did *Chasing the Rainbow*, and that's about Shorty Harris and, of course, it takes in a lot of Rhyolite and a little bit of Death Valley; it talks about the Bullfrog Mining District, mostly.

In 2005, they did *The Island*. That was a mega production. That was a Michael Bay film—he's the one who did Pearl Harbor. It had Ewan McGregor and Scarlett Johansson in it and that was a lot of fun. They did three days of shooting here and it was raining, but they pulled it off. They shot in Rhyolite itself around the Cook Bank building down to the old Barrick Bullfrog mine; they used the tailings piles down there. The Cinder Block Mine, as you are on your way to Vegas—they used that and I believe they used the Dunes as well. It's a sci-fi movie; it's fantastic.

*Devil's Canyon* came out in 2006; it's an independent film. There was going to be a showing in Beatty; unfortunately, we had to stop the showing because people were becoming very irritated. [Laughs] They also shot it in Beatty, but they gave the impression that Beatty was a nuclear waste dump area and it didn't shine a good light on either Beatty or Rhyolite.

Also in 2006, *A Line in the Sand* was made; it's a war movie, an independent film. I haven't seen this one and haven't been able to get much information on it other than it was shot in Rhyolite.

The last one that I know of was in 2007, called *Bone Dry*, an independent film. I have seen that and I do own a copy. It's an excellent murder mystery. Quite a bit of it is filmed in Rhyolite.

There have been some French documentaries done between 2000 and 2006. There were several documentaries from foreign countries that were made in Rhyolite. I have not been able to get ahold of any of them; I don't even really know how to get to them.

It's quite a town for making movies. The Nevada Film Commission promotes it a lot, tries to get a lot of movie-making there.

RM: How in the world did you do all this research?

SM: It just kind of happens. Somebody will say, "Gee, I just saw a movie and I think . . . I'll start researching to see if the movie was filmed there. This started a long time ago when I wrote the website; somebody said; "Gee, what movies were made there?" I started looking for a couple and they've just kind of happened since then.

From 1998 forward it's been personal knowledge. When Riley and I were caretakers out there, we became monitors as well so it became our responsibility to watch these people as they were filming.

RM: You've really done a community service here; you're sitting on something that the community can exploit. Do you have anything else you want to say?

SM: Actually as far as the movies, that's all the movies that I know of. Now I've got to get busy on the Beatty movies.

RM: And is it a pretty good-sized list?

SM: I don't know. You just gave me the idea. [Laughter] I know that there are a few—a couple of them filmed here will cross over.

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