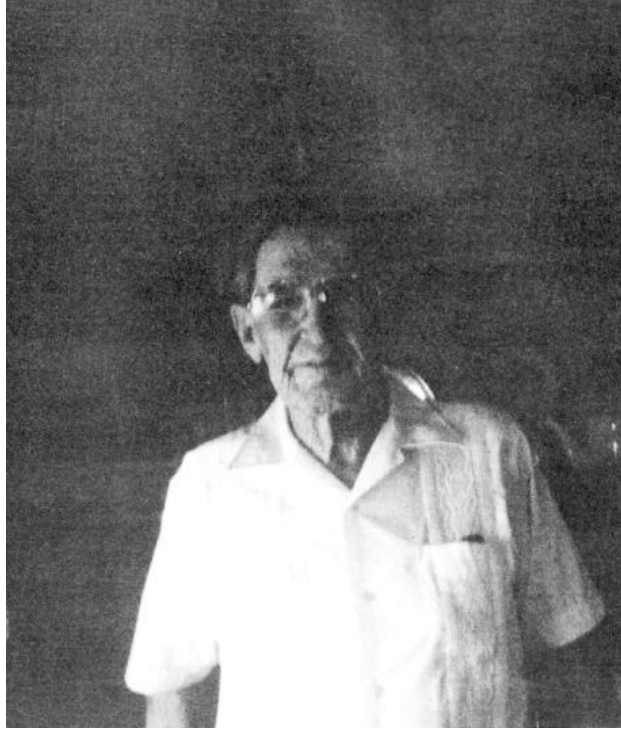


An In Interview with
HERBERT L. TOLES

An Oral History conducted and edited by
Robert D. McCracken

Nye County Town History Project
Nye County, Nevada
Tonopah
1987

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Herbert L. Toles
1987

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PREFACE

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

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

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

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

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 known and admired since I was a teenager; these experiences were especially gratifying. I thank the residents throughout Nye County and southern Nevada--too numerous to mention by name—who provided assistance, information, and photographs. They helped make the successful completion of this project possible.

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

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

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--Robert D. McCracken
Tonopah, Nevada
June 1990

INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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

Aware of Nye County's close ties to our nation's frontier past, and recognizing that few written sources on local history are available, especially after about 1920, the Nye County Commissioners initiated the Nye County Town History Project (NCTHP). The NCTHP represents an effort to systematically collect and preserve information on the history of Nye County. The centerpiece of the NCTHP is a large set of interviews conducted with individuals who had knowledge of local history. Each interview was recorded, transcribed, and then edited lightly to preserve the language and speech patterns of those interviewed. All oral history interviews have been printed on acid-free paper and bound and archived in Nye County libraries, Special Collections in the James R. Dickinson Library at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, and at

other archival sites located throughout Nevada. The interviews vary in length and detail, but together they form a never-before-available composite picture of each community's life and development. The collection of interviews for each community can be compared to a bouquet: Each flower in the bouquet is unique--some are large, others are small--yet each adds to the total image. In sum, the interviews provide a composite view of community and county history, revealing the flow of life and events for a part of Nevada that has heretofore been largely neglected by historians.

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

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

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

--R.D.M.

Robert D. McCracken interviewing Herb Toles on the telephone. McCracken is in Tonopah, Nevada, and Toles is in San Benito, Texas - May 18, 1987

CHAPTER ONE

HT: Hello?

RM: Herb? This is Bob McCracken, in Tonopah.

HT: Yes.

RM: Now, I've got my tape recorder running, here, so I won't have to take complete notes because the recorder will catch it.

HT: Yes.

RM: Could you tell me when you lived in Ash Meadows area?

HT: My family and I moved to Death Valley Junction in 1931. And we were pretty active around there. Death Valley Junction's adjacent to Ash Meadows, and at that time practically everybody knew everybody in the area. They used to hold dances and such out there and we would go to them.

RM: When did you leave there, Herb?

HT: I left about '42, went to the army, came back in '46 and left again in '52.

RM: What brought your family there?

HT: An uncle of mine had moved my grandfather out from Colorado - I have a grandfather buried in Death Valley Junction. That was during the Depression, and he wrote to my dad and said he'd probably get work in the mill out there, so Dad went out and worked in the mill.

RM: Now, what was happening with the mill? Were they milling the borax, or was that when they were milling the clay?

HT: That's when they were milling the clay. I can't tell you when, but the borax mill had shut down. They shut the mines down in Ryan and took up the railroad because they found better borax down at Boron. When they shut that down, why, they went right in to milling clay for the Clay Camp out there.

RM: Was it the same company that did the mining and the milling?

HT: No, there were still 2 or 3 companies out there that sent their clay in.

RM: Could you give me some of their names?

HT: Before I came there, there was the Texaco, and then there was the Associated Oil Company, and there was a Coen and Company. I think Coen and Company bought out a lot of that . . . They either subcontracted or contracted for some of these outfits. When we went there the Associated and the Texaco were all shut down, and it was just Coen and Company. But they had been operating before that.

RM: So Coen and Company had taken over Texaco and Associated's operations there?

HT: As far as I know.

RM: Now, where were the pits?

HT: There was one pit right there by Ash Meadows.

RM: People have told me that it was near the mill that's there now - the one that's shut down. Is that true?

HT: Yes, there's a big pit there. They call that the Bell Pit.

RM: And that's behind the present ABC plant?

HT: Right. Right there close to it.

RM: OK, great. And Coen was working the Bell Pit?

HT: Right on.

RM: Yes. And then what other pits were there?

HT: Well, there was the Associated. It was a little to the south and west of the Bell pit. But it wasn't operating when I went there. They just had a little building down there called the Associated Lab Building - somebody lived in that. At that time they were using it as a residence.

RM: Were those the only 2 pits right in Ash Meadows?

HT: Yes.

RM: Could you tell me how they mined the clay?

HT: You betcha. With a drag line shovel. They had a drag line shovel, and then they put it on the little . . .

RM: Did they pull it out on the bank?

HT: No. They used to do that, but when we went there, they were digging right out of the pit and loading it in the cars, in a little miniature train, a baby gauge.

RM: And then, did they take the baby gauge down to Bradford?

HT: That was before we went there. Bradford had a mill down on the Amargosa Desert. The reason I know this, is because I was out to it. They had 2 big old diesel engines still sitting out there when I went there in 1931. That operation was a different operation. There was a man in the Ash Meadows company by the name of George Ishmael. George Ishmael had trucks, and he hauled the clay from Ash Meadows and that part of the country. He contracted hauling to Bradford mill and they milled it there. And they put it on the Tonopah and Tidewater Railroad and shipped it out.

Now one other thing, there. There were some clay pits over in Ash Meadows named Ballinger. And there was a schoolhouse there.

RM: And this was on farther into the Meadows?

HT: Yes, right.

RM: Could you give me kind of a location - coordinate?

HT: OK, after you go past ABC's mill and you start over in the Meadows, you drop down in the Meadows and you go about 3 miles. Ballinger's clay deposits were on the right in the old days, and right across from them they used to have a schoolhouse there [chuckles].

RM: Is that right. Now, that wasn't where the Clay Camp was?

HT: No, no. The Clay Camp was up on the mesa. You know where the ABC's....

RM: Yes.

HT: OK. Just kind of look south from there, and it's not too far - I'd say a mile across there, maybe 1/2 mile across there. And if you can get over there and kick around, you can see the foundations of where some of the buildings used to sit. They were all built out of ties. They had tile roofs and the whole . .

RM: How many houses were there when you were there?

HT: Well, there was the superintendent's house. It wasn't a tie house –it was a frame house. And then the . . . the tie buildings were built for workers and one thing and another, and it was kind like a dormitory. It had about 6 or 8 rooms.

RM: And that was it?

HT: You see, my dad worked out there in Clay Camp in later years - a year or so later.

RM: So there was the superintendent's house and kind of a bunkhouse and that was it at the Clay Camp?

HT: Yes.

RM: About how many men did they work there, then?

HT: When we first went there, there were only about - let's see - 5 including the superintendent

RM: So they basically just had guys running the drag line, and loading it on these cars?

HT: Right.

RM: Now, the Ballinger wasn't going when you got there, was it? And the Bradford mill wasn't going either.

HT: No, no. It was all shut down.

RM: OK. So they put this stuff on the cars of this baby gauge, and took it to Bradford. And what happened at Bradford?

HT: Now, wait a minute. My understanding was that George Ishmael was the big hauler and he hauled all the clay to Bradford mill. When Coen and Company come in, they built a little tippie out there that the little baby gauge ran up on, and then they dumped that into the Tonopah and Tidewater. RM: Was the T&T a narrow gauge coming into the Clay Camp?

HT: No, the T&T was a broad gauge.

RM: What kind of clay were they mining?

HT: It was called a percolating clay and it was used to refine gasoline. RM: So then they'd ship it on - probably on down to L.A. or someWhere? HT: On down to these oil companies. They were the big buyers.

RM: What happened at the mill in Death Valley Junction then?

HT: Well, when they got it down to the mill, then it was dried, and crushed, and put in bags, and shipped on down to the buyers. They had different contractors. Have you ever heard - in milling - of Raymond mills?

RM: No.

HT: A Raymond mill grinds it up real fine and throws the dust out all at the same time. It's like a grain separator.

RM: Could you describe a little bit about Death Valley Junction, then? How many people were living there when you got there?

HT: About 100. The Pacific Coast Borax Company owned the whole thing - the Borax town - and a man by the name of H. P. Gower lived there. Have you ever read Fifty Years In Death Valley? That's who [my dad] went to work for - Mr. Gower wrote that. I worked for him for several years.

RM: What was your job?

HT: Well, I ran a little candy wagon around there for a couple of years and . .

RM: What was a candy wagon?

HT: We called it a candy wagon [chuckles]. It was a delivery wagon. I delivered ice to the people and met the train coming in from what they called Euston. The biggest thing they had going when I was there - they had one freight train come in a week. Then they had this Galloping Goose that came in and delivered . . . They called it Galloping Goose - it was a gasoline electric and there was one coach. They would deliver the mail and groceries and such up there to the store. I would meet it and unload that, deliver ice around town, and . . . Oh, I had various jobs.

RM: Did they bring in the ice?

HT: No, they had their own ice plant. The Borax Company had their own grocery store, and of course the post office.

RM: So even though they weren't running the mill, they still ran the town?

HT: Oh, yes. After everything moved out, they got to milling the clay up in Death Valley Junction. But before I went there, they had gone into the tourist business down in Furnace Creek. They built the Furnace Creek Inn down there. At that time it was U.S. Borax, and Pacific Coast Borax Company was a subsidiary.

RM: Did they have saloons in Death Valley Junction?

HT: No way. Out in Ash Meadows there was - if you wanted to call it - it was a combination saloon and cat house.

RM: Where was it?

HT: Just as you dropped over the hill, like I told you, to go to the Ballinger Pit, just before you got there, there was a little place called . . . Let's see, Fred Davies ran it. There were a couple, 3 girls working for him there. I don't think he's still alive, but he was in Beatty, and there ought to be people around Beatty that would know him.

RM: What else was there right there at that spot?

HT: That was all.

RM: You mentioned that you went up to Ash Meadows for dances and so on. Where did you go?

HT: We went over to the schoolhouse - it was right across from the Ballinger Pits.

RM: OK, so it wasn't too far from Fred Davies's place?

HT: Right.

RM: Did they use the schoolhouse for school?

HT: No, at that time it was shut down. And - let me get back to it - there was a schoolhouse at Clay Camp. That's just right behind the new plant, there. There was a schoolhouse there.

RM: And the kids from all over the Meadows came to that?

HT: Right.

RM: Yes. Was there any housing for families at the Clay Camp when you were there?

HT: The only housing that they had there . . . I think the Associated Company had built a recreation hall farther back - kind of north and east of where the present mill is. There was a recreation hall up there. And right behind that, there was a family named Pardees - Jack Pardee. He lived in that and he had 2 children who went to school there. And close to this plant there were 2 tie houses. Now, that's across the Bell Pit from the Clay Camp. And there was a family by the name of Jaspersen. I think one of the boys is around Tonopah - I'm not sure - or one of the girls.

RM: Does the name Bloody Gulch mean anything to you?

HT: Not a thing.

RM: Because I've been told there was a bootlegging operation or something out there called Bloody Gulch.

HT: Well, if there was, it was before my time. When we went out there, there were at least 6 bootlegging stills running, scattered all over Ash Meadows .

RM: Where did they sell their product?

HT: In Las Vegas.

RM: What were the roads like then?

HT: All gravel and dirt

RM: How long did the clay camp operate?

HT: Well, my dad worked there up until the war - 1941.

RM: Did they keep it going during the war?

HT: No, when they took the Tonopah and Tidewater off, they had no way to get it out.

RM: Were most of the people in Death Valley Junction employed at the mill or at the Clay Camp during this period?

HT: Yes. Practically everybody who lived there worked for the Borax Company or the railroad.

RM: What did they do for the Borax Company?

HT: Well, as I say, they had gone into the tourist business, and they also did the milling. There were several people who worked in the mill. The mill crew, I would say, would be about 6 or 7 men. You see, they had 2 diesel power plants. I think they shipped those in out of German submarines and set them up there for power - that was my understanding. One was a big diesel, and the other was smaller horsepower. So they had the operators for the power plant, and there were 2 of them - they worked 2 different shifts. And they had the one shift that worked in the mill, which was one guy running the Raymond plant, 2 men out in the crusher - I think that was about it - maybe one or two more men in the mill. So there were about 5 men in the mill, so that'd be about 7 altogether. Oh, yes, they had a master mechanic who kept things going.

RM: So it was an electric mill that was run off of this electric plant?

HT: Yes; right. It was all electric motors - everything was. The diesel pump generated electricity, and then they had all-electric motors that ran all the motor belts and all that.

RM: And then they probably used some of the juice for the town?

HT: Right. It was used for the town. They shut it down at 11:00 every night. So from 11:00 to 5:00 in the morning you were without light. RM: Herb, could you tell me a little bit about what was happening in terms of ranching out there? I'm confused on how the area was used for ranching. HT: When we went there, there was very little ranching. The Pacific Coast Borax Company had started an experimental ranch that they called the T&T [Ranch]. It was in the Amargosa Valley. That was the only thing there at that time.

RM: Was there fanning activity in Ash Meadows at this time?

HT: Very little. There was a fellow there named Bradford - Johnny Bradford. He had tried to do some farming at his place. There was a family there by the name of Tubbs - Kitty Tubbs and her husband. They had separated, so they had 2 different places when we were there.

RM: So that there were a few little homesteads out there?

HT: Yes, that's about what you would call them - little homesteads. There was a fellow by the name of Staley who grew some asparagus and used to peddle it in Death Valley Junction. But I don't think it was all that profitable, because he had to give up after a bit. [chuckles] And then over at Ash Meadows Rancho there was a fellow by the name of Berry who came up there out of Los Angeles. He had some kind of association in Los Angeles with money back of him and they were going to start this Ash Meadows Rancho as a tourist thing up there.

RM: Was that what is now the Lodge, which eventually became a brothel?

HT: Right; that's the same place.

RM: Do you remember about what year that was?

HT: That would've been about 1933 or '4 - right in that area.

RM: So he built the lodge for tourists?

HT: Yes, that was the idea. It was a promotional outfit. He was a real young fellow. I always had the idea that maybe he was kind of, like a remittance man from England, or something, you know. [chuckles] The family was getting him out of their hair out there, or something. [chuckles]

RM: Was it successful as a tourist operation?

HT: He sold out. He was there for about 5 or 6 years, and then he sold out.

RM: Would he have sold out about the time they shut down the T&T because people didn't have a way to get in there?

HT: Right.

RM: What happened to the place then?

HT: I'm just a little vague on who came in and took it over. This was before the people came in and took it over for the brothel.

RM: But it was called the Ash Meadows Rancho?

HT: Yes. They came in and ran it as such for awhile, with the idea of . . . Because a lot of the people from Death Valley Junction used to go out there and eat. They had a very good restaurant down there, and they went out and ate quite often. And, of course, they had the slot machines and things like that out there.

RM: Was it a dude ranch, for people to come to while they were getting a divorce?

HT: No. I don't think they ever rented too many of their units out there. It was more local people who went out there and supported it for awhile.

RM: OK. So Berry must've sold out about 1940 or so. Do you know what happened to it after that?

HT: Well, as I say, the change of management then came in there. And then when they started the atomic tests out there and everything, why I think that's about the time they decided to make it into a brothel. Some other money came in and they built their own airport out there, you know. They had a little runway out there. They had people come in clear from New York on airplanes and land there and have a big party for a couple of days. Vickie was the first gal in there. She's the one who came in there and started the cat house.

RM: You don't remember her last name, do you?

HT: No, I don't.

RM: Now, at some point, somebody came in to Ash Meadows and developed a big ranch. Could you give me the sequence of that development?

HT: I don't know too much about that, because that was after I left. RM: When you left in 1952 there was not a big ranch there.

HT: No, that all happened after I left.

RM: Did you know Pete Peterson out there?

HT: Very well.

RM: What was his background, and how did he earn a living there?

HT: Pete Peterson came out there as a brand inspector, I think, for the State of Nevada.

RM: And did he run cattle and so on?

HT: Yes. He had cattle and horses out there when he first came. He had a place out there that he bought. When he first came out there, there was another name - I don't know whether he's still there - but there was a fellow by the name of McCall. He had a place called the Jap Ranch out there.

RM: I've heard of that, but nobody knows a thing about it.

HT: OK, McCall had the Jap Ranch. I never did find out how it got the name of Jap Ranch. But McCall came out there and he was a promoter and operator, and he raised horses there. He sold property 2 or 3 times - took it back and stuff like that.

RM: About when did he come in there?

HT: Oh, he was there when I first went there, so he'd been there for quite awhile. Now, I'll give you some names from when I first went out there. There was a Mr. Morris; he was a half-breed Indian from Oklahoma, and he had a still over there. They said he was wanted in Oklahoma. I think Randy Bell was gone, but Dick Bell was still there. They were 2 brothers who came into Ash Meadows from Texas and the story was around when we came there that they were a couple of outlaws. There was a Kid Star who used to be a fighter. He had a little old place over there close to Crystal Springs. And then there were the Ballingers. Marvin Ballinger was the boy, and Dad Ballinger, and they lived together.

RM: Did they run the Ballinger Pit originally?

HT: Right. They owned the Ballingers Pit there. And then whenever things went haywire, why, they started running a still there. It was kind of an outlaw country when we went there. A bunch of these old boys . . . they wouldn't talk about them too much. But I understood that all of them were, at one time, kind of outlaws. Ash Meadows developed way back in the old days as an outlaw hideout. It was an Indian country, and a lot of those outlaws come down there and hid out. This was about the turn of the century, some time in there. Some of those old boys told me that the reason they hid out there was that the Tonopah sheriff was afraid to come down there [chuckles].

RM: The Tonopah sheriff was afraid. That's interesting.

HT: Yes, he was afraid to get into that country. [chuckles]

RM: Yes, and they could survive there, because there was grass and water.

HT: Even when we went there in '31 nobody bothered anybody. Everybody knew about the stills - there was nobody caning out to bother them. There was another bootlegger there by the name of Collins. He delivered in Las Vegas big, because in those days, even though they hadn't repealed Prohibition yet, Las Vegas had gambling joints, and you could go right in the gambling joint and there was a bar set up and you'd get yourself a drink, right on the main street. And so they had to buy their whiskey someplace - Ash Meadows furnished a lot of it.

RM: So there basically wasn't any law enforcement there during the '30s.

HT: No law enforcement in Ash Meadows at all.

RM: And there was nothing happening in the other part of the valley except the T&T Ranch?

HT: No. All the rest of it was desert

RM: Were you ever over to the T&T Ranch?

HT: Oh, yes, many times. They had a caretaker out there who stayed there - he and his wife - and they did a little experimental planting. They had their own well there, and their own power plant to pump. One of the things that was bothering them in those days was that the cost of getting the water out of the ground was pretty near prohibitive. They didn't have the modern pumps and everything they have these days, so it cost a lot of money. The well was deep, and they had to get water up there. But they did grow tomatoes and they had a vineyard there and .

RM: How many buildings were there?

HT: There was just the main ranch house and a barn and a machine shed, because they didn't use any animals out there when I was there. Later on they used the T&T when they paved the road from Stateline out to Lathrop Wells. The construction company came in there and set up at the T&T Ranch, and I think they left some buildings there after they moved out.

RM: Were they growing alfalfa there?

HT: Yes, a little alfalfa. He had a little patch of alfalfa and some little garden things right in front of the ranch house. That's all that was there.

RM: Were there many trees?

HT: Yes, there were some trees all around the ranch house.

RM: Was it a comfortable place?

HT: Oh, yes - very. One of the nicest places in the whole valley, in those days. [chuckles]

RM: There was another siding going toward Death Valley Junction on the railroad. Lee?

HT: Oh, yes. Lee Siding. In the old, old days there was some mining back out in the hills, there, and they left off mining supplies and one thing and another at Lee Siding. There used to be a little old mill sitting back in against the foothills there. I was up to it a couple of times. It was a cyanide operation.

RM: At that time the Lee Siding was just a section house, wasn't it? HT: Right on. Another thing - this Johnny Bradford I was telling about who lived in Ash Meadows had the Bradford Mill and one thing and another. RM: Is that why it's called Bradford Siding?

HT: Yes.

HT: But also, he had a mail route into Death Valley. He went out of Lee Siding and - if you could ever find the road - he didn't go the way it goes now. He went right up through those hills and in the canyon and went over into Death Valley a different way.

RM: He crossed over the Funeral Mountains?

HT: Right on. He came down in Death Valley where the Park Service house is.

RM: Did he go by horse, or car?

HT: Wagon.

RM: So he picked the mail up off the railroad at Lee Siding, and . . .

HT: And delivered it down there.

RM: What was happening at Carrara at this time?

CHAPTER TWO

HT: I don't know the whole story about Carrara, but I'll give you some of the interesting facts about it. There was a Philippine family that shipped hemp. And they had one of these sons [chuckles] that they wanted to get out of their hair I think the name was Elizalde

They were big importers of hemp in the Philippines - a very rich family. One of the brothers was a U.S. ambassador. And this one young fellow was an engineer, and he wanted to make colored cement. So he went up around Beatty and around to Carrara, and because of some of the stone around there, he figured he could make different colors of cement up there. So he was instrumental in building that mill.

RM: This was after they had tried to quarry the marble, right?

HT: Right.

RM: What year would that have been?

HT: That was just before Pearl Harbor, because he had started building - I think about a year before - and then he would belong to the Philippine Air Force (he was a flyer) and he had to go back. He left right after Pearl Harbor. And as far as I know, they shut the thing down.

RM: Yes. So they were going to make colored cement and they had the whole plant built, there?

HT: Right. He was the engineer. He did all of the planning and oversaw all the construction up there.

RM: Why did they fold it, I wonder?

HT: I think the big thing was that the money was all tied up, you know, during the war.

RM: Oh. So it was a good operation; they just didn't have the money to go on with it?

HT: Right on. I think when the Japanese attacked the Philippines that shut a lot of money down.

RM: What was there when you were living in the valley?

HT: There was just a pit up at the stone quarry before he moved in. I knew this fellow personally, so I went up to visit 2 or 3 times while he was building up there. They used to have a big drier up there, right next to the road on the right-hand side going into Beatty.

RM: Was this after the T&T was shut down?

HT: Right. They bought one of the roasters, or driers, as they called them, off the Borax Company, and moved it up there.

RM: Oh. So they planned to truck it into Vegas. Did they ever produce anything?

HT: I don't think they ever produced a thing. I don't think they ever got under operation. One of the things that I remember . . . As I say, he was his own engineer and superintendent and just bossed the whole thing. They started the mill up, and they found out that he'd built one of the pillars that held the roaster up about an inch short. And it wouldn't operate. [laughter] He was going to have to do something about that. And about that time I left and went down to Long Beach and went to work for Douglas Aircraft Company.

RM: What kind of planes did you make down there?

HT: The C-47 and the B-17s. Then I left and went to Sacramento. I did some trucking in Sacramento and then I went to the army. I got out in '46, and I went in, in '43 or '4. I was in the army only a short while here in the States, and then I went to Saipan. I was in Saipan a year and a half.

RM: What did you do when you got out of the army?

HT: I'd worked for the Borax Company for a long while before I left, so I got hold of Mr. Gower, and he gave me a job back at Death Valley Junction. I went back out there and ran engines, diesel engines, out there for them at their power plant.

RM: What were they doing at Death Valley Junction then?

HT: Well, as I say, the tourist business was still going. They had the Amargosa Hotel, and they had quite a crew there. When I went back it was all tourist business.

RM: How did the tourists get in there?

HT: On the highway through Death Valley. They came from Los Angeles, and Vegas, and all over. The road through Baker was the main route into Death Valley. They had the 3 places there - the Amargosa Hotel, the Furnace Creek Inn, and the Furnace Creek Ranch. It was all owned by the Borax Company 'till they sold out to Harvey House.

RM: When did they do that?

HT: That was after I left. I worked at the Borax Company until '48. Then I went to work for the State of California, and I worked for the State of California 'till I retired. I worked 4 years, from '48 to '52, in Death Valley, then I went to homestead over right on the Mojave Desert, and then I moved to Bishop, and then worked at Tehachapi awhile, and then Ridgecrest. I operated the heavy equipment machinery. Then later on I went as foreman. I retired as a foreman in '75.

RM: Was that when you moved to Texas?

HT: Yes. That was just a couple of years later.

RM: Yes. How do you like it down there?

HT: Oh, I like it. I'd rather be back on the desert.

RM: Think you'll move back?

HT: Oh, I might, one day. Yes, I'm an old desert rat.

RM: Herb, could you tell me, for the record, when you were born, and where?

HT: Yes, I was born in Meeker, Colorado, September 13th, 1914.

RM: What was your father's name?

HT: Jesse James Toles. He was born in the Indian Territory - Oklahoma - in 1889.

RM: What was your mother's name?

HT: Myrtle Kyle.

RM: Yes. And where was she born?

HT: She was born in Cripple Creek, Colorado.

RM: Are you kidding me? Cripple Creek? My mother was born there.

HT: Is that right?

RM: Yes. My grandfather spent his whole life in Cripple Creek - Victor.

HT: My mother was born in Victor.

RM: Well, my mother was really born in Victor. I mean, I said Cripple Creek, but . . .

HT: Well, that's where my mother was born - Victor, Colorado.

RM: Myrtle Kyle. I'll be darned. That's really interesting.

HT: Yes. That's something, isn't it.

RM: And what year was she born?

HT: 1896. I believe that's right, because I have a silver dollar that she give me [chuckles] with her birth date on it, I think it is.

RM: Herb, you've been a wonderful source of information. On this project we're having these tapes transcribed, and then we edit them a bit to make them read a little better. You know, take out the "uhs" and so on. And then they'll go on file at the University of Nevada in Las Vegas and Reno. If it's OK with you, I'd like to do that with your tape.

HT: Oh, good. I want to give you just a little more information that might help you there. OK?

RM: Great.

HT: When we were at Death Valley Junction, there was a fellow they called the Candy Kid. He ran a truck between Furnace Creek Ranch and Death Valley Junction. I don't know his first name - it might have been Elvis -Boswell. And there is a Boswell in Tonopah, Nevada. And that's Candy Kid. He was there when I left there. So you might look up - I'm pretty sure his wife might be alive. He was around there for a long while. His wife's name was Mary Scoligie - that's S-C-O-L-I-G-I-E.[sounds like Scoglie]

And this Vince Scoligie was their father, and Mrs. Scoligie was around Tonopah for a long, long time. I imagine she's dead now, but some of the Scoligie children are still around Tonopah, the last I heard. They can give you some information.

RM: Your daughter said that you might have some pictures of the Amargosa Valley and so on from these early days.

HT: I'll look. I think I have a few, but I don't . . .

RM: We're trying to put together a collection of these photos for the archive. I wonder if you would be willing to send them to your daughter.

HT: I sure would.

RM: I was at her house, and we went through her photos, and she's going to bring them up to Tonopah and have them copied. And so, maybe if you would send yours to her, she could bring them up with hers.

HT: Yes. You got her history?

RM: Yes, I talked to her.

HT: She was practically raised in the . . . She was born in Grand Junction [Colorado] and went there when she was 10 days old. She spent most of her life there.

RM: Well, Herb, if I get stuck on a problem while I'm writing this up I might give you a call.

HT: Any time.

RM: There's one other thing, Herb. In order to put this on archive in the university, we have to have a legal release from you saying that you give us the right to do that. And so I'll have to send that form down to you.

HT: OK, I'll sign it.

RM: Where do you want me to send it?

HT: Route 6, Box 690, San Benito, Texas, 78586.

RM: Gee, it's been a pleasure talking to you, Herb. It's great to talk to somebody with such a wonderful memory. Boy, you can just pull those things right out of the air after, what . . . 50 years. [laughter]

HT: Yes. I'm glad to see somebody doing something, you }maw. Something like this needed to be put down and carried on.

RM: There was a lot happening in that area, wasn't there? You drive through there now and you don't realize all the things that happened there.

HT: Yes, I went over to the Junction with my daughter awhile back, and it was sad, because all the old houses were gone. When I first moved there . . . While they had Ryan going, they had a lot of people who worked at the mill. And they had a bunch of houses - what we called the other side of the track - for the mill workers. We moved into one of those houses when we first went out there.

The State of California had some people living there when we first went there doing some of the roadwork over there. They had just taken over the highway - put it into their highway system. And they had a foreman living in one of the houses when we first went there. But they had all those houses over there and they're all gone now. They're all down - all moved off and cut up.

RM: Was the road ever paved to Lathrop Wells when you lived there?

HT: No, I worked on that . . . Another interesting feature maybe you didn't know - there was a fellow by the name of Wes Moreland. He had a saloon in Las Vegas called the Barrel House and he bought whiskey off of those guys. He was kind of an outlaw himself. And he had a big saloon and cat house at Crystal Spring - or, Crystal Pool, they called it - before he moved to Las Vegas.

RM: That's in Ash Meadows, right?

HT: Right.

RM: When would that have been?

HT: That would have been in - oh, the '20s. Say, like '25, '26, some time. And later on he went up and took over the depot at Rhyolite and made kind of a tourist attraction out of it.

RM: And when did he close that cat house at Crystal Pool down?

HT: I think '26 or '27, they told me. I was a boy when . . .

RM: What was happening at Lathrop Wells during this period?

HT: The State of Nevada had a little maintenance station - that was the only thing there when we first moved there.

RM: When did they build the first bar there?

HT: They built that bar out there about '48, I believe. Just about the time I went to work for the state.

Another interesting thing right in there - Lear Jet had a runway there that they were testing their jets on. There should be indications of a runway right there.

RM: I'll be darned. That's the first I've heard of that.

HT: Yes. A lot of people don't know that. I think that was in '52, something like that; when he first developed his jet. It was a very secret operation, somebody was telling me, so he was testing down there so they couldn't see it.

RM: It's right there at the junction of the Tonopah highway and the Death Valley Junction road?

HT: Right on.

RM: Which side of the road would it be on?

HT: Well, like you're coming from Beatty? You turn and go towards Death Valley Junction. It would have been on the right-hand side.

RM: I'll have to look for that the next time I'm there. Well, Herb, I sure appreciate your help.

alfalfa
Amargosa Desert
Amargosa Hotel,
Amargosa Valley, NV,
American Borate Co.,
Ash Meadows, NV
Ash Meadows Lodge,
Ash Meadows Rancho,
asparagus
Associated Labs Building,
Associated Oil Co
baby gauge railroad,
Ballinger, Dad,
Ballinger, Marvin,
Ballinger Pits,
Beatty, NV
Bell, Dick,
Bell, Randy,
Bell Pit,
Berry, Mr.,
bootlegging,
borax
Boron,
Boswell, Elvis,
Bradford
Bradford, Johnnie,
Bradford mill,
Bradford Siding,
brothels
California,
Candy Kid,
candy wagon,
Carrara, NV,
cement
clay
Clay Camp,
Coen and Co.,
Collins, Mr.,
Colorado,
Crystal Pool,
Crystal Springs
dances,

Davies, Fred,
Death Valley,
Death Valley Junction, CA
Depression
Douglas Aircraft
drag line,
Elizalde family,
England,
Euston
Furnace Creek
Furnace Creek Inn,
Furnace Creek Ranch,
Galloping Goose
Gower, H. P
Grand Junction, CO
groceries
Harvey House,
ice,
Indians,
Ishmael, George,
Jap Ranch
Jasperson family
Kid Star
Las Vegas, NV,
Lathrop Wells, NV,
Lear Jet,
Lee Siding,
mail route,
McCall, Mr.,
Meeker, CO,
mills,
Moreland, Wes,
Morris,
My Fifty Years in Death Valley,
nuclear testing
Oklahoma
outlaws,
Pacific Coast Borax Co
Pardee, Jack
Pearl Harbor,
Peterson, Pete,
Philippines,
Philippines Air Force
power, electric

Prohibition,
Raymond mill,
restaurant
Rhyolite, NV,
roads,
Ryan, CA,
Sacramento, CA,
school
Scoligie, Mary,
Scoligie, Vince,
Staley, Mr.,
Texaco,
Texas,
tie houses,
Toles, Jesse James
Tales, Martha Kyle,
Tonopah, NV
Tonopah and Tidewater Railroad,
T&T Ranch
Tonopah sheriff,
tourism,
trees,
Tubbs, Kitty,
U.S. Army,
U.S. Borax,
Victor, CO,
World War II,