

An Interview with
WALTER J. WILLIAMS

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

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Walter J. Williams
circa 1965

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PREFACE

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

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

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

in preparing a text:

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

As project director, I would like to express my deep appreciation to those who participated in the Nye County Town History Project (NCTHP). It was an honor and a privilege to have the opportunity to obtain oral histories from so many wonderful individuals. I was welcomed into many homes--in many cases as a stranger--and was allowed to share in the recollection of local history. In a number of cases I had the opportunity to interview Nye County residents whom I have known and admired since I was a teenager; these experiences were especially gratifying. I thank the residents throughout Nye County and southern Nevada--too numerous to mention by name--who provided assistance, information, and photographs. They helped make the successful completion of this project possible.

Appreciation goes to Chairman Joe S. Garcia, Jr., Robert N. "Bobby" Revert, and Patricia S. Mankins, the Nye County commissioners who initiated this project. Mr. Garcia and Mr. Revert, in particular, showed deep interest and unyielding support for the project from its inception. Thanks also go to current commissioners Richard L. Carver and Barbara J. Raper, who have since joined Mr. Revert on the board and who have continued the project with enthusiastic support. Stephen T. Bradhurst, Jr., planning consultant for Nye County, gave unwavering support and advocacy of the project within Nye County and before the State of Nevada Nuclear Waste Project Office and the United States Department of Energy; both entities provided funds for this project. Thanks are also extended to Mr. Bradhurst for his advice and input regarding the conduct of the research and for constantly serving as a sounding board when methodological problems were worked out. This project would never have

become a reality without the enthusiastic support of the Nye County commissioners and Mr. Bradhurst.

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

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--Robert D. McCracken
Tonopah, Nevada
June 1990

INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

A survey of written sources on southcentral Nevada's history reveals some material from the boomtown period from 1900 to about 1915, but very little on the area after around 1920. The volume of available sources

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

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

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

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

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

The town history project is one component of a Nye County program to determine the socioeconomic impacts of a federal proposal to build and operate a nuclear waste repository in southcentral Nye County. The repository, which would be located inside a mountain (Yucca Mountain), would be the nation's first, and possibly only, permanent disposal site for high-level radioactive waste. The Nye County Board of County Commissioners initiated the NCTHP in 1987 in order to collect information on the origin, history, traditions, and quality of life of Nye County

communities that may be impacted by a repository. If the repository is constructed, it will remain a source of interest for hundreds, possibly thousands, of years to come, and future generations will likely want to know more about the people who once resided near the site. In the event that government policy changes and a high-level nuclear waste repository is not constructed in Nye County, material compiled by the NCTHP will remain for the use and enjoyment of all.

--R.D.M.

Robert McCracken interviewing Walt Williams at his home in Las Vegas,
Nevada - April 18, 1988

CHAPTER ONE

RM: Walt, could you tell me your name as it reads on your birth certificate?

WW: Walter Jackson Williams.

RM: And when and where were you born?

WW: Comanche, Texas; April 9, 1916.

RM: What was your father's name?

WW: Thomas Jackson Williams. He was from Dublin, Texas, a little community or little town about 30 miles away.

RM: What was your mother's maiden name?

WW: Julia Everidge.

RM: Was she from the same area?

WW: She was from Louisville, Kentucky. She came to Dublin, Texas to work for Avon Brothers and Company as a milliner - a lady who would make hats. That's where my father had a store. My father worked for my great-uncle, R. W. Higginbotham, who later became quite famous in the area. The chain of stores that my father developed in central Texas still bears the Higginbotham name - Higginbotham Brothers and Company. Mr. R. W. Higginbotham split from Dublin and went to Dallas with a couple of his brothers and they created the Higginbotham Bailey Company, Higginbotham Bartlett Company and Higginbotham Perlson Company. Higginbotham Perlson Company was a hardware company, Higginbotham Bartlett Company was a lumber yard chain, later to develop into 48 lumber yards. The Higginbotham Bailey Company was a drygoods manufacturer and wholesale establishment.

RM: Where exactly is Dublin?

WW: Dublin is about 80 miles southwest of Fort Worth, Texas, and Comanche is about 100 to 105 miles southwest of Fort Worth.

RM: Did you have any brothers and sisters?

WW: There were 6 of us; I have 3 brothers and 2 sisters. I still have one remaining brother alive and 2 remaining sisters.

RM: Were you the youngest?

WW: I was the baby.

RM: Did you grow up in the Comanche area?

WW: I grew up right in Comanche. I went through high school there and then I went out to New Mexico Military, Roswell, New Mexico. Then I went an additional year at the University of Texas and then I worked for one of the lumber yards - the Higginbotham Brothers and Company lumber yard at San Angelo - for about a year and that carried me up to about 1938. I went to work for Bethlehem Steel as an apprentice salesman and went through what was known as a loot course for Bethlehem Steel, a training course, which carried me through all their [offices in] in Pennsylvania, Maryland, and the New York area, and they sent me to my first office in San Antonio and I remained there about a year in San Antonio.

Then we are approaching the war and I had earned, while at New Mexico Military, a commission in the Army Reserve - it was cavalry in those days - but I had a leaky mitral heart valve. I tried to activate my commission, but I could not pass the test, so I went to California and got a defense job lined up and came back to Comanche and married my wife, Nancy Williams; her maiden name was Nancy Ann Long.

RM: Was she from there?

WW: She was from Comanche, too. She lived right outside town; they were ranchers. I took her back to my defense job for Firestone Tire and Rubber

Company in Southgate, California. We were building fuel cells for fighter aircraft; airplane manufacturers. I switched jobs while I was there. I was with Firestone about 8 months and I switched to Hughes Aircraft. I was in the machine shop control station with Hughes Aircraft during the time the Spruce Goose was being built. It was actually made of birch, but they nicknamed it the Spruce Goose.

I was there for about 3 months, and the reason for the shortness of the time was that one of my brothers died back in Comanche and my family had . . . He and an associate and my family had started a little oil and gas company called Central Texas Gas Company. I went back to assume my brother's position in the company and represent the family and our interests there, and I remained there until 1947. In 1947 I located a budding agricultural area in the Pecos, known as the Trans-Pecos area - Pecos and Fort Stockton and those towns. I was one of the early developers in that.

RM: Why was it budding? What was happening there?

WW: Well, cotton was not allocated in the beginning, but it very quickly became an allotted crop. It was just a new area that had not been developed. There was an excellent water table below and a good soil, a nice alluvial loam-type soil. All you had to do was go out there and start farming. Also, I found a man who would finance my endeavor and that made a substantial amount of difference to me.

RM: Was cotton a growth industry at that time?

WW: Definitely. Two crops that were, and still are, probably more suited to the area than just about anything else would be are cotton and alfalfa. Those are the two things we grew.

RM: How long did you stay there?

WW: I was there 10 years - through 1957. I sold the primary farm in 1955 and I had other properties that I was farming and I took another lease purchase, long-term lease property to continue growing cotton through 1957.

RM: How did you happen to know cotton? You didn't have a background in it before you got into it, did you?

WW: Well, going back to our little family oil and gas company . . . a family affair usually does not go well for everybody involved, and I was looking for something else. I had checked El Paso and Phoenix and certain areas of New Mexico and all around the county and was returning from a trip to El Paso about September of 1947, and happened to be talking to a person there at a little cafe I had stopped at, and I was inquiring about the activities around there and he said that there is a water table underneath this area with sufficient capacity to develop a 2,000 gallon a minute well by drilling not too terribly deep, and it is feasible to put a pump and engine on there and develop enough water to irrigate crops with it and cotton is a good crop for the area.

My ears really picked up because my father came from a farm in the first place and by that time he had 3,000-acre ranch in central Texas near Comanche, and I had done some activity on that; it involved a certain amount of dryland crop farming and so on, mostly cattle and sheep. And my background was agriculturally oriented, and this was of great interest to me because I was not getting anyplace with our family oil and gas company and I wanted to do something on my own. So I came out and met a man by the name of J. C. Wilson, who headed the Texas Cotton Industries at Pecos, Texas. He had a very small string of gins - probably 5 gins - one in Barstow, none in Pecos. At the time he went clear down to . . .

RM: That's Barstow, Texas?

Q: Barstow is right on the other side of the Pecos River from Pecos, Texas. He had some gins, but he wanted to expand and see the area developed. He realized that it had vast potential as a cotton area. He would advance money for the crop and Travelers Insurance was making loans on the land to any substantial prospect who came along and wanted to buy land. Land was selling anywhere from \$20 to \$50 an acre.

A: I bought a section of land after he told me he would finance me. I had to borrow \$15,000 from my pop to put down on the man's desk first before he would start lending me money. But by the time I'd been in the Pecos area for 4 months, I owed a lot more money than I'd dreamed of in my life before. I owed something like \$150,000. He had underwritten my residence and not only one section of land, but two. I couldn't get the title cleared quickly on the first section of land that I picked out and I found another section of land that I could go to work on immediately and we were rolling up on February then and it was getting late as hell to dream of clearing land and taking the brush off it - the mesquite, black brush and all that - clean it up and get it in tillable state. The lay of the land was all right. There wasn't too much dirt work to do, level wise, but there certainly had to be a lot of brush clearing and engineering on it to get it laid out so it would irrigate property.

Q: Did you ditch irrigate?

A: We ditch irrigated, but in tabs, called checks. A check would be 400 to 600 feet long and about 12 rows of cotton wide, and then a little border would retain that water. We'd irrigate that table, then you'd go on to the next table and so on. I planted 640 acres like that. The first year was the 1948 crop and I had to lease out 160 acres of my original section to a center because it was more than I could get done. I was underfinanced, I

had a minimum of equipment, and everything was nip and tuck.

RM: You stayed there until '57, and where did you go then?

MM: Right smack to Las Vegas.

RM: Tell me how you wound up in Las Vegas.

MM: In 1957 we found an ad in a Fort Worth paper describing a 12,000-acre ranch 60 miles west of Las Vegas that commanded 1,000 acres of cotton allotment, and that was a lot of cotton allotment; as a matter of fact, it was 30 percent of the state's cotton allotment at that time. I think the state had about 3,300 total acres of allocated cotton.

RM: Could you say a few words, Walt, about how the allotment worked?

MM: The government felt they could not let the acreages run wild on certain crops. One is tobacco, one is peanuts and another is cotton. When they took inventory of the records of 2 or 3 previous years, to . . . let's see, it was around 1953 or '4 it became an allotted crop and the Agriculture Department sent out people to keep tabs and measure every man's planting, and from that they developed a history of Joe Blow's activities upon which to base the cotton allotment he was to receive each year, up or down.

RM: So here was a ranch that . . .

MM: It had a thousand acres of cotton allotment. And though they couldn't plant it, the ranch wouldn't even accept it.

RM: Oh, they hadn't even been growing cotton here?

MM: They had been growing cotton, but a much lesser amount. I didn't even get a thousand acres in my first year, 1958, but in 1959, I sure in hell got it in.

After we read the ad we decided to come out to Las Vegas; any excuse to get out of town, and that was a good excuse. I had no intention whatever of buying that property, but we came out and looked and met a

little real estate lady from California who had the listing. She took us out to Pahrump and showed us the ranch and I still hadn't the faintest idea that I would take the thing on, but I took water samples and soil samples and carried them back to our chemist and determined that the water was excellent and I was jumping at a time in 1957 when I could get things consummated and get into the project for a 1958 crop, which I did.

When I saw the results of those tests, I decided to jump; to go ahead and scrap all my projects in Pecos. I jerked my family out of the house of our dreams that we built in 1952. We were successful enough in our Pecos venture that we built a new home and paid for it completely in 1952. We were very proud of it. The structure still stands and it is beautiful to this day. And my kids were . . . one was born in '47 and one in '44, so they were about 10 and 15.

RM: So Pahrump looked good enough to you . . .

WV: Well, it had potential and in Pecos I was getting disturbed about one major, major thing - the water table. The Trans-Pecos area had developed, in those years, to an enormous thing with thousands and thousands of acres under cultivation. The pumps that I set in 1948, I had to lower the next year. All my settings were around 200 feet when I moved off the property, and when I had started lifting water it was at 30 feet, which was a profound difference. The table was going down like crazy.

RM: Do you know what aquifer it is?

WV: I can't tell you what aquifer that is, but it still is a damn good aquifer. It is not like the one that goes through Lubbock. The great big one, the Ogallala, has given lots of trouble and its life span is definitely . . . I talked to a farmer just the other day from there who said that the table had increased a couple of feet in the last year, but that is not

significant to me. Aquifers are interesting things.

RE: They sure are.

ME: I don't know the source of the Trans-Pecos aquifer, but it goes on down to Fort Stockton and Fort Stockton used to have a lot of artesian water.

RE: Who did you buy the ranch from?

ME: C. B. Dickey and Associates from Arvin, California. He was a cotton man. He was a cotton buyer and he had land in Arvin and was a farmer with orchards, alfalfa, cotton and other crops in the Arvin area. He had his son-in-law, Curt Meecham, on the Pahrump Ranch during a couple of years previously. In fact, Curt and his wife had come to Vegas and bought a house in Charleston Heights and he was commuting daily back and forth.

RE: That commute involved going up 95 then, didn't it?

ME: No, it involved going out to the Blue Diamond road; that had been completed past Spring Mountain or Mountain Springs, whatever Paul Warner used to call his joint there, and then descending on into Pahrump. It was paved into Pahrump. It was paved to the California line going west, but from the California line to Shoshone it was a little bitty snake track of a road. It had a little coat of oil on it, but it was a very, very crude oiled road.

RE: What was in Pahrump at that time?

ME: A little trading post run by Frank Burnett and his wife and a little grade and elementary school; no high school. The kids, when I first got there in 1958, had to come to Las Vegas by bus each day. And within a couple of years they started going to high school in Shoshone. They remained so until later years, when the high school was finally built in Pahrump.

Q: Did you live there or did you live in town?

A: I never lived there but I maintained a residence on the ranch. We had about 5 residences on the ranch, plus 2 labor barracks. I built one, and I kept one of those as a residence for occasional work and ranch business.

Q: Now, what was Dickey growing there?

A: Dickey was trying to grow cotton.

Q: Wasn't he very successful?

A: Well, it was kind of a sideline with him. He had associates in the endeavor and I suppose he didn't want to devote enough time and effort and energy and resources, and so on, to really make it do what he would like to do. He was a very classy man and a very substantial man and he had good ideas and he knew exactly what he was doing. He damn well knew the ropes. And his operation in California so outshone this that it was strictly a sideline to him. So we made a lease purchase agreement, a 4 year deal, that was consummated in 1962. I paid a lease on it for 4 years in a row; a four year lease in 3 years, and then assume the remainder. The sale would be consummated at the end of the lease purchase agreement and then it would become our property.

Q: Do you mind saying what you paid for it?

A: I don't want to contradict myself here . . . I think it was \$400,000 on a lease purchase agreement; it was about \$30 an acre.

Q: Was that a good price?

A: It was a fairly good price at the time.

Q: But most of the land was undeveloped?

A: Well, Elmer Bowman and his family and associates had some nice looking farm properties in Pahrump, which still exist there. And then on up the valley Ted Blosser's farm was operating at the time, and clear on up the

valley were Dorothy Dorothy's place and the Dollar Sign Ranch.

ME: Where was the Dollar Sign Ranch?

HE: I think it was owned by a guy by the name of Peckstein, if I remember correctly. Then Bob Ruud had come in and bought the property that he called the Basin Ranch. That was essentially what was up in the north end.

ME: Was the Basin Ranch north of Dorothy Dorothy Ranch?

HE: No, the Dorothy ranch was the northernmost ranch in the valley; it still is. But that is a Preferred Equity property now. And then the Bowman clan was down in the south end of the valley.

ME: And these people were growing cotton, weren't they?

HE: Everybody grew cotton for cash crops. There really wasn't a hell of a lot of alfalfa around. Alfalfa is a good, rotational crop for cotton. It is a legume that gathers nitrogen from the air and deposits it in the soil.

ME: What kind of a rotation did you use then?

HE: I was working into a full-bore alfalfa-cotton . . .

ME: How long did you keep the alfalfa and how long the cotton?

HE: A three-year rotation is a good number.

ME: For each?

HE: Yes, for each. Three and 3 works beautifully.

ME: What else was Dickey growing besides cotton when you took it over?

HE: Was he growing any alfalfa?

ME: No he wasn't. I don't think he had an acre of alfalfa. He probably only had about 200 or 300 acres of planting on the whole damn ranch. It had been cleared by previous ownerships and fiddled with until probably 1,800 acres were developed and cleared. But there were no concrete ditches and the soil was such that, when you opened a v-ditch to carry your water

down to the point of use, the ditches would wash down 10 or 12 feet deep and the alluvial soil was so movable that it just washed gullies out. I had to fight that all my first crop year.

RM: They didn't have overhead sprinkler systems, did they?

WW: They were known, but I never did use them. One man had a sprinkler system going during the latter part of the time that I was in the Pahrump Valley.

RM: Was everybody doing ditch irrigating?

WW: Well, they did ditch, but siphon tube really. Open v-ditches and then siphon it out row by row.

RM: What commercial establishments were in Pahrump when you got here?

WW: Anderson Clayton was my financier when I started, due to my ties back to the Pecos area.

RM: Were they located in Pahrump?

WW: No they weren't. They were in Bakersfield. Anderson Clayton were the biggest cotton merchants on earth in those years. They had a division which had sponsored a lot . . . well, most of the development in the Trans-Pecos cotton area under the name of Western Cotton Oil. Western Cotton Oil was headed by a man by the name of George Hall. It was through that connection that I established connections for financing; as you know, crop financing is a serious matter. If you're talking about 1,000 acres of cotton, it takes a lot of money to get it going. Your cash is usually into living and tractors and equipment, and fertilizer and labor payments - you have to pay your laborers as you go - and there are a lot of current expenses that really tax a farmer to cover, and you've got to have assistance in the crop loans. I did, anyway, and Western Cotton Oil in Pecos hooked me up with Anderson Clayton, the parent company, out of

Bakersfield, and I started financing with them and they were unhappy with me during my first year's performance, because I had so many things against me. In 1958, in fact, they nearly whipped the hell out of me.

RM: What were some of the things that you had against you?

WW: Well, the ditch system was one thing, as I mentioned. And the weed situation was another. We got in late, and you just can't brighten everything up overnight on a great, big, old run-down property. I had a lot of land to clear and I had the entire engineering layout to do on the entire property. There were a multitude of problems.

RM: Could you discuss that a little?

WW: In Pecos we had what was known as the Trans-Pecos Cotton Association and we had a Bracero program going, which we leaned on very, very heavily. A few years down the road from the time that I left Pecos, that had developed into an organization big enough that they had 10 buses of their own and were importing 20,000 laborers a year.

CHAPTER TWO

WW: The Trans-Pecos Cotton Association was well suited and well staffed to handle masses of labor and I never gave that a single thought. When I got out here, the attitude of the employment people in Nevada toward migratory labor and particularly Mexico - Bracero labor - was quite different than Texas.

RM: What was their attitude here?

WW: Their attitude was that they didn't want anything to do with it. So I had to fight a continuous battle with Carson City and the Bureau of

Employment Security. I finally found one real friend in that group, whose name I'll think of in a moment. We were able to get a certain amount of migratory labor - green card labor - through the Bracero program for strictly weeding; hoe work during the summertime and the growing period of the crops. I had to scrounge among my past connections with Mexican help to bring in the type of labor that I had to have to run the Pahrump Ranch.

RM: What was a typical labor force that you used there?

WW: Well, cotton is referred to as a 13-month crop. You just can't quite get everything done. You usually finish gleaning your crop by around Christmas, and then you start preparing your land as quickly as you can. You chop the stalks and turn the land over and just prepare it for the next season's crop. It requires pre-irrigation and land processing and most of us could not afford to have enough equipment on the land to do it quickly, so we had to use the equipment that we had to the very hilt, to stay staged and ahead of what had to be done. I pretty quickly got my farming activity up to 2,000 acres out of the 12,000-acre ranch, and was aiming for 1,000 acres of cotton and 1,000 acres of alfalfa. I didn't quite achieve that, but I was on the road to it.

RM: How many workers would you typically have during the peak season?

WW: Well, at first I had a Mexican foreman and a crew of about 8 Mexicans that would do the pre-irrigation, the stalk cutting and the tractor work and the land plowing and clearing and the other things that had to be done. In the summertime, with the hoe crew, we tried to bring in about 20 or 30 hoers to do handwork with the weeding. We had a bad Johnson grass problem. Johnson grass is a real enemy to cotton; it chokes it. It's a very undesirable grass to have mixed with your cotton.

RM: They didn't have herbicides then?

WW: They had herbicides, yes, but they were hardly used. There was a Dalpon material that was a grass killer, but it took repeated applications, had to be done exactly right, it was expensive and it was almost not worth it.

RM: So you chose not to use it.

WW: The practical way to do it, which I couldn't afford to do because I had to have the cotton production, was to plant a field into a small grain crop which would mature and shade quickly enough so the Johnson grass could not get up and go to seed. A couple of years in a row like that would eliminate about 95 percent of Johnson grass. It was so abundant on Pahrump Ranch that there was no way to control it; you just had to fight it.

RM: So you had to have men out there hoeing?

WW: You had to have a 30-man hoe crew all the time. In later years, after they cut the mass Bracero program out, I had to use geese by the thousands.

RM: Could you discuss that?

WW: I forgot where I bought them, but it was from a goose supplier in California, as goslings. I'd bring them out and they didn't have to be housed in the summertime; a goose can live out in the open as well as he can in a pen. I put herdsmen with rifles with them, watching them constantly, because of the coyotes and so on. The geese would walk up and down the cotton rows and get a certain amount of Johnson grass out.

RM: And they didn't get any cotton?

WW: They didn't bother a broadleaf plant at all. It was fairly satisfactory. It wasn't wonderful, but it was better than nothing.

RM: And you had thousands of them?

WW: Yes, for about 3 successive years.

RM: Did you have to supplement feed them?

WW: You fed them just enough to keep them alive, because you had to keep them hungry. But a goose is a grass bird. He lives on grass naturally in the native state. He likes grain, too.

RM: Did you sell the geese, then?

WW: I sold them back to the place from whence they came, and I understood that they went out as pet food.

RM: Did you make a profit on the geese?

WW: I wouldn't say . . . they were just part of the operation. There was no way to really tell what value they were. They helped control the Johnson grass and probably paid their way.

RM: Did you have a goose barn for them or anything?

WW: The first week or so we put them in a kind of pen, but the herdsman had to stay right with them day and night.

RM: Did the other farmers use geese too?

WW: I don't think anybody else did. I'd seen it done in Pecos a time or two. I used it about 3 years in a row toward the later years that I farmed, because that's when my labor contract was screwed up. I couldn't get the hoe crew when the Bracero program ended. The other labor that I had were mostly dual citizens out of Mexico. They had both United States and Mexican citizenship papers, and good friends of mine in the valley in the early days who saw me using Mexican labor on the farm turned me in religiously to the Immigration Service.

RM: Whom did they use?

WW: They used each other, and they were doing a lousy job with it. That's why Dickey wasn't successful, farming Pahrump Ranch. He didn't know how to get Mexican labor. He used wino labor from California and you can't farm with winos. The Mexicans are willing and able and capable workers. You

have to show them and teach them what to do, but I like them. They are a real fine . . .

RM: Did they bring their families with them or were they single men?

WW: I had 3 or 4 dual citizen men with past experience in my Pecos farms who brought families with them here during most of the time that I had Pahrump Ranch. And then I had a foreman, Frank Warner, who is out in the valley still. Frank probably could add a lot to this. Just ask anybody about Frank Warner, and they'll know him. He lives on Basin Road right down the road from Bob Ruud's old home, which Mrs. Ruud may still be living in.

RM: I think she is still there.

WW: Frank has a double trailer about a mile down Basin Road from her.

RM: Did you bring Frank in?

WW: Frank was in the valley. He had relatives in the valley; I think he came in with Bob Ruud. Bob Ruud's wife Jacque and Frank Warner were brother and sister. The old well digger out there, Ron Floyd, also married one of Frank's sisters. Well, Frank was going to be free in 1962, the year I needed a really better front man than my old Mexican as foreman on the place, so I put Frank Warner in there and he stayed with me until the ranch was sold, and lived on the ranch, and had kids on the ranch. He had a big family.

And then I had another man who was my mechanic - Virgil Bateman. He and his family lived on the ranch. Virgil was my full, full-time mechanic. Goddamn, he did a million things about keeping my equipment running, tractors and pumps and so on.

RM: Did you bring your equipment up from Texas?

WW: I brought all the equipment that I had; all that I thought I would

need. I had combines and hay balers and quite a lot of alfalfa equipment that I left behind. All my pumps engines and all that stuff . . . I left a lot of my junk behind, but I brought all my plows and tractors and pickups and so on. I had about 4 to 6 loads of farm equipment and then 2 big Mayflower vans of stuff that came to the ranch and the house I lived in on 920 Bonita, when I first came to Vegas.

We had enough junk out of our house in Pecos to equip 2 houses easily, and beyond. I furnished one house on the ranch and one house on Bonita. My wife had selected the residence and we had that in hand, and bought, before we ever moved my family to Vegas. I did the commuting job to the tune of about 50,000 miles a year.

RM: Did you mind that long drive over there every day?

WW: It was an excellent opportunity, I found, to get my thought processes working. But the ranch was constantly on my mind.

RM: Did you put in long hours over there?

WW: Well, I put in time in Tonopah; I put in time in Carson City; I put in time in Las Vegas; I put in time in Pahrump; I put in time in Bakersfield; I put in time . . . during the course of the ranch, I owned 3 airplanes.

RM: Is that right. Are you a pilot?

WW: No, I couldn't pass the physical exam. It goes back to the old physical problem when I couldn't get my commission; that's what drove me to the defense work. But the gin manager, for several years, was a pilot and he could chauffeur me around anywhere I had to go.

RM: Now, the ranch was 12,000 acres and you . . .

WW: A little less than 12,000 when I bought it. But I sold a section to Abe Fox, about 1959 or '60, and then I sold at a very cheap price the land upon which the community center is situated, the land upon which the gin is

situated, and I gave him a whole damn 40 acres at practically nothing per acre. I gave the REA Coop land upon which to situate their little transformer station. I practically gave at a giveaway price land enough for the racetrack; practically all that land came out of Pahrump Ranch. And also a location for the highway department to have a little highway building and warehouse which Bob Ruud put up. And I also sold some land to the school district upon which to situate a high school, but they never did build it. If I had that to do ever again, I would have put a clause in there subject to the completion of the school. But the new owners, Preferred Equities, took over and engineered the high school into the heart of Pahrump Ranch as a come-on to their project.

RM: Did you dispose of the land because you needed the extra cash, or was it to facilitate the growth?

WW: I wanted out of the farming business. I had all those years of farming and I was tired of it. Farming is a very confining, very specialty type thing, and since I was selling I was selling the ranch as a whole, on the order of about \$300 an acre, that was 10 times over what I paid for it and I figured it was a damn good riddance.

RM: Well, I meant when you were selling off small pieces here and there.

WW: No, that was to develop the community. That's exactly what I was trying to do and everything I did out there was as a community effort to try to propel Pahrump. When I first took over the Pahrump Ranch, I'd come to Las Vegas and say Pahrump, and they'd look down their nose about 3 feet. The only thing they'd seen come out of Pahrump was a pair of overalls and a couple of cantaloupes and maybe a little bit of melon and things like that. Virtually nothing. And the processes they were using out there were very primitive. They were machine harvesting their cotton, but then they were

carrying it over to a hay baler to bale the seed cotton into bales to get it condensed enough that they could make truckloads of the damn stuff and haul it over to California to have it ginned. It was a very unsatisfactory, crude, terribly handicapped process.

RM: When did they build the gin, then?

WW: '59.

RM: Was that largely at your instigation?

WW: I would say it certainly damn sure was. I knew Charlie Piercey of Arizona Cottonseed Products. He approached me to crop finance and to propel my endeavor. He approached me in very, very early 1958, just after I got there, but I had already made commitments with Anderson Clayton out of Bakersfield, and I couldn't reverse on that. But Piercey wanted the Pahrump Valley badly and the reason he wanted in there was because he needed more cotton acreage for the purpose of producing more seed to feed a mill that he had just built at Blythe, California. He wanted more area to draw to and it was still geographically feasible to grow cotton in the Pahrump Valley and, as you would see later, to build a gin and gin the cotton there in the Pahrump Valley. The seed would go to Blythe and the bales would go, easily, to the co-op in California. The sale of the cotton bales themselves was up to each farmer. Most of us went with the co-op in Bakersfield.

RM: Then who financed the gin?

WW: Arizona Cottonseed Products, in 1959. In 1958 I stayed with Anderson Clayton's finance until very late in my crop year. And they were disenchanted with me at the time, though their final inspection had given a confirmation to refinancing me in 1959. But I asked to be dismissed from their finance program to assume a finance program with another outfit that

would be more beneficial to the valley. And Anderson Clayton released me when everything was paid off and completed. Charlie Piercey - Arizona Cottonseed Products - put the gin in 1959 and I had the first bale of cotton ginned off of Pahrump Ranch in the new gin.

RM: Was it a large gin?

WW: It was a medium gin. It had at least 4 80-saw stands. That's the size of a device that is know as a gin stand. The stand is the thing that saws the cotton lint off the seed. The seed goes one way and the lint goes another way. The lint goes into the compression thing which is the baling area, and in this instance they put in what was known as a standard density press, which was a hell of a nice thing. The old flat bale, on the edge, would be about this tall; in a standard density press they would be compressed to half that high and in a high density the bale could be as flat as that. Then it had to go what is known as a compress, to have that done. But that helped the freight haulage out of there to go to Bakersfield. You could get a nice load of tonnage on with the standard density bales.

RM: And there was enough cotton in Pahrump to justify a gin?

WW: Yes, there was. The gin history is readily available out there. Jacque Ruud could you tell you all about that.

RM: I plan to talk to her.

WW: She's a nice lady. She'll give you all the dope she can think of. Well, all that was cooking right along. The Arizona Cottonseed Products Company would hire their seed hauled to Blythe by seed haulers, trucks, and the co-op would usually provide a series of trucks to haul the baled cotton to the co-op at Bakersfield.

Then in later years I got into what was known as a cubing business -

alfalfa cubing. I started that along about 1967, I think, and that led me into the trucking business and I was doing all the hauling practically for the valley, I was hauling Arizona Cottonseed Products seed to Gilbert, Arizona, at the time, which is by Phoenix. I was hauling the bales to the co-op in Bakersfield when there were bales to haul, and I was hauling my own cubes to Alber's Milling Company, primarily at Beaumont, California, where they compounded feed for race horses.

RM: Were you the first to cube in the valley?

WW: The first in the state, I guess. For one thing, cubing can only be done in a dry area because if the humidity is too high, you just can't cube; it doesn't work right. We had a very dry climate and I had a lot of alfalfa so I determined this would be a good way to go, so I bought a cuber and started cubing. That led me into the trucking business, because in order to make commitments . . . I exported quite a bit to Hawaii and I'd have to go to the Terminal down in Los Angeles Harbor with those loads. Then finally I struck up a really good marketing system with Alber's Milling Company, which is the Carnation Company. They had a feed mill at Beaumont, California, and they were compounding, as I said, race horse feed. They'd take my cube and crack it up and then compound it with certain other additives, grains and vitamins and so forth, and make a pellet that they delivered regularly to the race horse people; in pretty good volume, I guess.

RM: How did you know about cubing?

WW: It had just come on the market a short time before and I heard about it and it looked like a damn good . . . baling hay is a pain in the butt. It invariably scatters wire in the field and it's slow and painful, and cubing was much better. All you had to do is cut it, put it in wind rows

and when it dried to a certain point you could go and put on a very, very fine mist of water to activate the pectin content of the alfalfa leaf to make it bind as it would squeeze through the cuber.

RM: Did you have a partner or were you the sole owner?

WW: I had a partner, Frank Cruz, out of Pecos, Texas, but he never was involved in the operation of the ranch in anyway but the basic ownership of the ranch. The equipment was all mine and the responsibilities were all mine. The financing and crop were all mine.

RM: Did you branch out into other things besides trucking?

WW: Well, just trucking; that was only a side thing. I bought a few tracts of land around Vegas Valley, but that was about it.

RM: When did you decide to sell the ranch?

WW: I decided that every year I owned it.

RM: Did you list it, or just think about it?

WW: Oh, not in a commercial way. I'd gotten it up to a point that I felt quite sure . . . after I'd been here 13 years, the valley had really made a lot of headway. We had the gin, we had electricity, we had phones. We had none of the things when we came into the valley; it was very raw then.

RM: Did you go into the valley with the idea of developing the ranch and then selling it, or were your goals mainly agricultural?

WW: I went in there for about a 3- or 4-year project. That's exactly what I had in mind - go in there and make a buck on it. But I couldn't sell it. You never make any money out of growing cotton. All you do is feed your family and buy your house and groceries, and you just live off the proceeds.

RM: You saw all that land there and you saw potential, then?

WW: Yes. The project was big enough that you could expand it; you could

expand it up to 2,000 acres. They had about 1,000 acres of all kinds of development in when I took over.

RM: Did you ever see the possibility of growing other crops there?

WW: Safflower, which is also a seed-oil crop, but that wasn't any good and there are just so many . . . Pahrump is capable of growing different kinds of truck crops, but the geographic position is so situated that it's not practical to do it in most cases. They tried to grow lettuce out here without success. The main thing is the distance. If you are in closer to your markets . . . for instance, Californians have some kind of a market lying right by them.

CHAPTER THREE

RM: Somebody told me that farming was really never profitable in the Pahrump Valley.

WW: The Pahrump Valley was a marginal area in which to grow cotton. It's a little too far north, the winter a wee bit too severe, the growing season a little bit short. It still is good enough that you can grow a pretty decent crop most years. But I had one of those crop failure years in 1965, and it really did set me back a bunch. I had to go to the federal land bank and get a couple hundred thousand dollar loan to tide me over. It was a land loan.

RM: Was it a total failure?

WW: No, I just wound up owing a couple hundred thousand dollars of short-term money, which the bank frowns on very quickly.

RM: Was it because you got frosted?

WW: No, the season was short and I was dividing part of my planting into alfalfa and the early years of alfalfa are not productive. You've got to get the crop established; it starts really going best when it's 2 years old.

RM: Could you say something about the quality of the cotton?

WW: Excellent. It has good micronair and good tensile strength.

Micronair is the fineness of the cotton. It's strictly upland type cotton. There are 2 basic types of cotton. There is the long-staple cotton, which is Egyptian or Pima cotton, grown in Mesa, Arizona, and upland cotton, which is grown on the plains of Texas and all other areas of Texas and also in the Pahrump Valley, and in California. In fact I don't think that they grow any Pima cotton in California to speak of; I never heard of it.

RM: There's very little cotton grown in the valley now, is there?

WW: The gin is dismantled. I sold Pahrump Ranch and they sold Pahrump Ranch off in little bitty lots.

RM: Why did the other farmers go out of cotton?

WW: Well, it takes so much money to keep the gin operating. That is, so much volume to keep a gin in operable condition, pay the staff and pay the ginner and the flunkeys and everybody in the office who handles that part of it. It's a 12-month thing; the gins usually supply fertilizer, cottonseed and things like that to the farmer in the winter months. In the summer months there's the ginning of the cotton, and collecting seed for the cottonseed oil end of the operation. There was just not enough movement after the Pahrump Ranch was sold to sustain the whole operation.

RM: Did it fold when you sold the ranch?

WW: Very shortly thereafter. They farmed on for another 2, 3 or 4 years. It was the first gin in the state of Nevada and the last; the one and only.

RM: Could you talk a little bit about the development of utilities in the valley and what role you might have played in that? Let's start with power.

WW: You got enough dope from Hank Records [laughs] about power. Hank wanted to name it the Amargosa Valley Co-Op, and I was grossly opposed to that because Amargosa Valley is absolutely nothing, but it started in the REA books as the Amargosa Valley Power and it has to remain . . . in those books, I think it is still referred to as Amargosa Valley Power. I got the name changed to Valley Electric at a board meeting.

RM: What did you do for power when you moved there?

WW: I had a power plant of my own. I ran power line down to the gin and, with their permission, tied into their generator, and I used that for a couple of years.

RM: What did you do before they built the gin? Did you have a light plant?

WW: I had a Cat diesel electric plant. The Bowmans down at the south end had a real good hookup. They had 2 diesel plants, side by side, and they could run one a week, and then switch off the other while the one was being serviced. It was a real good arrangement. I didn't have that kind of money and I didn't have that much yen to do it. My power requirements in the valley weren't that mandatory at the stage of the game.

RM: Where were you getting your fuel at that time?

WW: The fuel that powered all of my water lift was diesel. I didn't have a single propane layout. In District 6 of Texas, I'd used primarily propane. It was expedient . . . well, there were a few diesel engines in place on Pahrump Ranch when I bought it, and I brought other Caterpillar engines in. I bought all of my fuel from the Golden Bear Oil Refinery in

Bakersfield, California in transport loads. Golden Bear was sold to Witco Chemical and Witco made a deal with Jerry Herbst, Terrible Herbst . . . Mr. Herbst, the old man, made a deal with him to supply me through Golden Bear; the same supplier but a different hookup. I bought about 12 of those 10,000-gallon transports loads per year. I had big storage tanks by each of my diesel pumps. Most of the tanks were 5,000 gallons and I'd scatter the loads around as required and it worked very well. I paid 13 cents a gallon for number 2 diesel. You buy it now for about a dollar a gallon. In west Texas I was paying the very lowest that I can remember ever paying for propane at first, and during most of the time I was there. Then Billy Sol Estes put in a natural gas distribution system . . . he promoted a company into doing that on a 20-year basis. I'm getting my stories all mixed up, I paid as cheap as 3-1/4 cents a gallon for propane. Try to buy it for that now.

RM: Really; I pay about a dollar and a half, \$1.40 in Tonopah.

WW: Well, to your fuel tank that you pick up, it's probably about \$1.10 or maybe 90 cents. But that's inconsequential. I bought a lot of diesel from Terrible Herbst.

RM: When did the power lines come through?

WW: About 1964, I guess.

RM: Did you immediately switch to electric on your pumping and everything?

WW: Hell, no. I couldn't do it. Anyway, it would have been too expensive in a number of ways - the equipment change, for one thing. To throw the diesel engines away . . . then your gear heads had to be changed, too.

Well, your gear heads had to be thrown away, usually it was a direct motor to pump and when you convert to electricity, your pumps have to be really efficient and I had a bunch of pumps and they were just not . . . They were

good and practical units for the job they were doing and the way that I had them set up and operating, they were very operational and very efficient, but when you go electric everything's got to be precise. I think I converted 2 or 3 units as the power came into the valley because they nearly made me do that.

RM: What about phone service?

WW: That came in right after the juice did. Centel reneged . . . I tried and tried and tried to get Centel to put any kind of an operation out there. We had a little radio rig for awhile, but it wasn't satisfactory.

RM: Could you say anything about any community organizations that were in town when you were there?

WW: Back in 1959 we had the first of what wound up as the Fall Harvest Festival out in the Pahrump Valley. My wife and I started that on the Pahrump Ranch when we dedicated the shop building that I built during 1959. We dedicated . . . well, we had a blowout, had a Mexican-style barbecue. Down in the pit there were beef and goat and whatever anybody had to barbecue. We invited the people of the valley and tried to establish good public relations in the valley. We did that for 3 years in a row. We got it better and better and better, then it got to be such a burden that we couldn't put it on and we let the community do it. By that time the community center was established and they built a barbecue pit out there. For the most part Bob Ruud supervised and engineered the Pahrump Fall Harvest Festival after that.

RM: And it became a tradition from then on.

WW: It became a tradition.

RM: Were there any other group activities or things that come to mind?

WW: Well, an occasional labor meeting. I would usually go down to the

border and screen the Mexican labor help that we got and arranged transportation. I'd have my pilot fly me in my airplane to the Brawley area and we'd go to the border and screen the personnel we needed for the valley. We'd be cleared for about 60 Mexicans for the whole valley and I'd take 20 of those and the rest of the people would take the rest for their part. I'd screen them right at the border because I was bilingual enough to get that done. Then I'd arrange transportation for them up here and then I'd divide them out and see that they got scattered among the growers when they arrived and then attend to various problems that came up that would be related to that through the course of the year.

RM: Are there any other group things that you can think of?

WW: We weren't too sociable in the valley, I suppose, as a farming community. There were not too many common problems, really. Lyle Christensen had an airplane and did most of the dusting for the valley in later years. I used a California crop-rigged duster during the first couple of years and then the labor thing we had we jointly used. We'd have a discussion on wages now and then - a general meeting of farmers who wanted to gather and discuss . . . outside of that, there really weren't too many things to discuss. We didn't have any mutual problems except those that were inherited by any cotton farmer in the cotton growing business.

RM: Do you know anything about how the Pahrump Ranch got so large?

WW: Dr. Thomas is the earliest knowledge that I have on it, and that's not knowledge; it's kind of hearsay. Dr. Thomas owned it and sold it to C. B. Dickey and Associates. Thomas had irrigated with artesian water off the Pahrump Ranch for awhile and they had pretty good sized ideas, but nothing of a good systematic nature had ever been evolved as a program for Pahrump

Ranch. They had undercut and gouged out some of the old water-bearing areas to take the head off them and make them flow greater amounts of artesian water. By the time I got there it only flowed in the wintertime, and a little bit only at that. I used 10 bit 10-inch and 8-inch column turbine wells to irrigate the 2,000 acres. I had enough water to do what I was trying to do, allocated by the state of Nevada and measured through weirs . . .

RM: They measured your water?

WW: They fussed at me and fussed at me until I put a weir at every pump.

RM: When did Dickey buy the ranch?

WW: I have no idea.

RM: Did he have it a long time?

WW: I don't think he had it very long. He bought it from this Dr. Thomas I suppose about 1955. They did practically nothing with it. They had various head men on the place, but they'd bring in a load of California winos from time to time, and you can't do anything with a California wino except feed him wine. As a fruit tramp, he does pretty well. He gets paid every night and he goes to the wine store and buys his wine, and when that runs out he comes back to the field and picks again. You can't run a cotton farm like that.

RM: How do they do it on the cotton farms in California? Do they use Mexican labor, too?

WW: I don't have that much knowledge of California farming. They are highly sophisticated farmers with excellent equipment for the most part and their properties are more suited to agriculture than Pahrump Ranch was. Pahrump Ranch had a lot of fall and it caused us to do a lot of things that a California farmer would never do. All the land was tabled down to

precise footages and their weed control was very highly sophisticated. And of course they availed themselves of Bracero labor, too, for years on end.

RM: To the best of your knowledge, did Dr. Thomas have the ranch a long time?

WW: I have no knowledge whatever of that. My impression is that he had it for a good while.

RM: Somewhere along the way it became huge.

WW: When I bought it I bought it as a lump.

RM: Originally, in the 19th century, it was a section or something.

WW: Maybe Dr. Thomas assembled it.

RM: That's what I was wondering.

WW: I can't remember anything in the abstract that would indicate it was a built-up property.

RM: You wouldn't have a copy of that abstract, would you?

WW: God Almighty, no. One probably exists down in Pecos, Texas, but . . .

RM: To the best of your recollection, were there any things of historical interest on the ranch, that you saw - foundations of original homesteads, for instance?

WW: An old schoolhouse, which is out there now, and the little old Pahrump Store were both on the property when I bought the ranch. There was a little lean-to off to the side of an old store building in which the diesel electric plant was situated. It provided power for the ranch requirements before I bought it and continued to for awhile after I bought it. I found it too troublesome and inconvenient to try to keep a diesel electric plant like that operating; I didn't have time to fiddle with that type of thing. My mechanic had so many other things to do it just didn't get tended to, so that's when I piped power down from the gin to meet any electric needs.

RM: Was the store built on the site, or had it been moved in?

WW: I think it has been there since the '20s at least. I presume it had been built there because it was a very fragile, light little old structure. It was made of 1" X 12"s and little else - a typical storefront thing. It's still out there. We see it in the paper now and then. And the little old red schoolhouse was used until a couple of years before I took the ranch over.

RM: How about old building foundations? I'm wondering where the original settlers' homes were and that kind of thing.

WW: I don't know where they were, unless they were in the south end of the valley where the Mormons were. I haven't heard of anything like that. The only foundation I can think of out there was a gas storage tank that the gas company used in Pahrump Valley. That was Petrolane; I induced them to move their fuel source up to the gin lot in order to get them to get the gin to convert their propane storage to an NH-3 tank - hydrous ammonia fertilizer.

RM: When you sold, how did Preferred Equities find you? Did you run an ad?

WW: Morris Ashcraft had a friend in town - one of the judges here - who told him that there were people in town looking for property like it. Leonard Rosen had Preferred Equities. He had started as a lanolin merchant. He was in the cosmetic industry in the east, he and his brother Julius, and they got rich doing that and decided to retire. They went to Florida and Leonard was still a young man, so he got to looking at the land around there and decided, "I can buy a 10-acre plot and cut it up into lots and sell it for a lot more than I paid for it." That became an obsession with him and he made a lot of money doing that very thing in Florida and in

Arizona.

By the time I caught him, he had already gotten huge and had merged his company into General Acceptance Corporation - GAC, I believe it was called. The reason he merged was because he didn't want to pay the income tax on a straight sale. And the company he merged with went belly-up in 2 years' time and it frightened me profoundly that my sale would not stand up . . . you see, I had a 7-year paper on the place. It frightened me mainly because I was afraid he couldn't make a go of the damn thing. Anyway, he went belly-up; Leonard was broke. Whereas he showed a net worth of about 50 million bucks, 2 years later . . .

RM: When you sold, he was worth \$50 million and then 2 years later he was broke?

WW: He was down on his butt.

RM: And you thought you might have to take it back?

WW: I thought there was a very strong possibility I might have to take it back. In fact, he had all kinds of problems in there getting it promoted, finally. Because that was the kick-off period of time. He had a myriad of problems to settle with the state of Nevada, he had myriad of problems in financing. He had all kinds of problems - survey problems, every kind of water problems. Every kind of a frontier problem with a development like he was trying to do, he had. He had to go to Germany to get a certain portion of his funds. Preferred Equities may decide to fill you in on that; I don't know any more than I have mentioned here. I don't know that for sure.

RM: Did he ever talk to you about what kind of a vision he had for the valley?

WW: Oh, sure. They had projections. They had done it before. He was a

land man. He knew exactly what he was doing. Before they'd owned the thing 6 months they had a map on the wall that was frightening to see because it was cut into so many little tiny Goddamn lots. And he knew what he was doing. And he had a brilliant son; Ronnie is still around. Leonard died about a year ago, and I think his brother is dead also. They had that open-heart surgery in the later part of their lives. But there is a Ron Rosen who I imagine is extremely high up on the Preferred Equities roster. They also had an excellent manager whose name I can't think of.

RM: Jack Soules?

WW: Yes.

RM: He died, too.

WW: Yes; a good while back. If you find Ron Rosen, he'll probably talk to you. He's brilliant; a Wharton graduate and a very sharp lad.

RM: When you saw the valley, what was your vision?

WW: To go back to Las Vegas and get smart at the tables. [laughs] I told you I had soil and water analyses done; I took the samples to west Texas to the lab of Western Cotton Oil. They ran the analyses and I found that the water was good enough and the soil was good enough. We had checked the statistics to find out about weather conditions - the by and large and weather patterns - and decided that was passable and then that the project was big enough. It was involved enough. Pahrump Ranch not only had almost 12,000 acres, but it had 16,000 acres of BLM land up on the side of the mountain on lease; absolutely worthless.

RM: It was not even good for grazing?

WW: Four cows for one month of the year, maybe, in some years. Do you know the annual road race that the Mint does?

RM: Yes.

WW: It was chartered to go across my BLM land at one time, when they ran it out that way, I suppose; now they run it in another direction.

I wanted to say a word about my kid. I had a boy there, my oldest boy, Rick Williams. Rick graduated from Bishop Gorman and he gained entrance into the United States Naval Academy through national competition out of boot camp in San Diego.

RM: Is that right; that's hard to do.

WW: Yes, that's hard to do. He graduated from the Naval Academy and did 2 years in surface fleet area of endeavor that was amazing, then transferred to Naval Air and had just gotten his wings when he crashed and was killed in Texas.

But he also had another little claim to fame. Back in 1958, the year we got into Vegas, the police athletic league was running the soap box derby for the first time ever in Nevada. And Rick competed and won and the police athletic league chartered an airplane and flew him and his mom and Perry Bell and his wife up to Akron. I gave Perry Bell and his wife 2 seats on the chartered airplane because I thought it would be a good idea for them to go and I bought passage for my other kid, Mark Williams, and myself to fly up also, and witness the race. Rick came in about in the middle of the road, which is wonderful, because he built his car all himself. Some of the fathers had started to fudge a little bit on some of the . . . But it was a great big event in our lives and was an entree into a lot of different things in the very early days here. And then his military acquaintances and activities brought us acquaintances at Nellis and broadened our acquaintance through the area. Captain Wikell of the WKL Ranch and his wife, down in Searchlight, were 2 of our acquaintances. I think they are still down there. In fact, he ran a doodad in the paper

just a few weeks back.

RM: How many children did you have?

WW: My wife and I had the 2 boys.

RM: What's your other son doing?

WW: He's on the farm that I bought my wife in 1971 in Oregon, for her toy. She wanted a little place up in Silverton, Oregon, which is beautiful country.

RM: What's his name?

WW: Phillip Mark Williams. He has my 2 little grandkids up there, and that's all the family I have.

CHAPTER FOUR

WW: My wife Nancy was a member of the Mesquite Club from 1959 forward. She had been [its] president and associated with the Federation of Women's Clubs of America. She was a member of the Federated Club all the years we were in Pecos, and the Mesquite Club is also a Federated Women's Club. I don't think she held an office in the club here but she did all those things back in Pecos during our 10 years down there and she was active in the Mesquite Club here. She was very prominent. And both my kids did the usual things. Mark went to Fremont and then to Gorman. He graduated from Gorman and then he went on to the New Mexico Military and went 4 years there - junior college and 2 years of high school, then he went to Australia for a couple of years and got into the furniture business and then realized he didn't want to be an Aussie the rest of his life, and came back home. About that time I bought the farm for Nancy up in Oregon and

Mark went up on that to live, and has lived there about 6 years.

RM: Is he still there?

WW: Well, he came to Vegas in the meantime. He lived over here in Vegas for about 5 years then went back to the farm. Property like that, with absentee ownership, does not function properly - especially with the residence on it. This one has a real nice residence and little bit of farmland. The farmland you can handle by remote control, but not the residence. The insurance company fusses at you, and the people you put in there, even if you give them a place to stay, won't take care of it. It just goes downhill. That's why Mark's there. To either make his home there - give him the damn thing if he wants it - or sell it.

RM: You were farming 2,000 acres on Pahrump Ranch, but you had another 10,000. Were you doing anything with it at all?

WW: I was just about ready to get into a cow program, but my alfalfa program had not reached the point where it was really practical to bring in a lot of cattle. But I would have and I was aiming toward it. I did get into the appaloosa horse business and I had my numbers up toward 40 head at the time I sold the ranch. I had a primary and a secondary stallion. We were making a certain amount of shows with certain of our animals and we were just at the point where we needed to start cleaning up the odds and ends, and keep our better animals to try to generate and achieve a good, solid Appaloosa program. But we hadn't gotten there yet so I just sold them all.

I lived at 920 Bonita until 1965, when I bought this house from First Western Financial. It had fallen into receivership. A Florida contractor had done 5 houses on the circle here and went belly-up in 1963-4. The economy turned straight down in Nevada and in Las Vegas. He went belly-up

and First Western wound up with this and I bought it a year later - it had never been lived in. I traded the house on Bonita in on this and haven't moved since.

RM: Now, what year did you sell the ranch?

WW: 1970.

RM: So Preferred Equities has been there ever since?

WW: Yes. Well, they didn't do anything for a year. It took about a year to get sort of situated. I roughed out a very, very liberal lease agreement with Hafen and Ruud for the continuity of the agricultural endeavor on Pahrump Ranch for the gin's benefit and Arizona Cottonseed Products and also for the continuity of the ranch, the people involved and the endeavor that was going, realizing that they couldn't do anything but survey it in the first year and then they would have a planned pattern after that of procedures. And it worked out just that way.

RM: Would it be improper to say what kind of terms and all you sold it for?

WW: I sold it for \$3.5 million bucks and it was on 7-year paper; equal payments.

RM: Looking down the future 10, then 20 years, what do you see in Pahrump?

WW: Just what the headline says here.

RM: Another Scottsdale?

WW: Well, it certainly won't be a repetition of that, but it might follow those lines to a point. It's going to take a lot of time, but they're generating some real momentum out there now. That's the reason you're trying to pick up the history.

RM: Yes.

WW: Who are you employed by?

RM: It's a Nye County project. The money comes from Nye County, which comes from the Department of Energy. Ultimately it comes out of the repository funds.

WW: It comes out of the federal government.

RM: Yes, it's federal. We are doing it for a lot of towns in Nye County.

WW: It ought to be fun.

RM: It is; it's a lot of fun.

WW: Las Vegas was a hell of a lot more fun in the early '50s than it is now. And Pahrump was a lot of fun.

RM: In what way was it a lot of fun?

WW: Well, Goddamn, it was uninhabited and you knew every son of a bitch in the valley and it was a lot less complicated. You get your local governments going and get a hoosegow going. I remember our first hoosegow out there was a little . . . it probably still serves the valley. In fact, we had one man out there who said he would make his escape from it, and he did; he climbed through the bars. I believe it had a little door and if he could get his head through it, he'd get his . . . It was about the same height as that little window right there. And old Phil, by God, climbed out. That was the first hoosegow - as big as this table. It was just a lot of fun.

RM: Is there anything that I've left out?

WW: Oh, you can't cover all that in one 2-hour session, but we've covered quite a bit.

RM: Yes, we've got a good chunk of it. Is there anything that you'd like to say, or that I've neglected?

WW: I've put in several little additions that you have.

RM: Yes; if you could identify this picture? Make up the caption.

WW: Yes, this is my airstrip. There's the gin, and this is a seed pile. They have a conveyor out to the seed pile. They pull the seed out there and at this point my trucks would draw up and pick up loads of seed and haul them to Gilbert and to Blythe. And there's the bale yard out here and this is probably Pahrump Ranch headquarters; yes.

RM: And there you are.

WW: Yes, that's me in 1964.

RM: Is the airstrip lightly oiled?

WW: Yes, it's lightly oiled. I promoted the Arizona Cottonseed Products into buying one transport load of oil and I would buy another transport load. Between us, we put a light coating of oil on the runway that I had built for Pahrump Ranch.

RM: Was this the first runway in the valley?

WW: No, it wasn't. Dale Dorothy had a runway of sorts up by his place. But it was not improved at all, just barely could land an airplane on it. Pahrump Ranch had a runway, but it ran a few degrees off the direction of this one. I would have followed the old runway except that it crossed a corner of land I didn't own and I wanted it all on Pahrump Ranch.

RM: You didn't want any hassle from that.

WW: I didn't want to buy anybody else's land.

RM: Did you use the other runway before you used this one?

WW: Well, I didn't have an airplane out there for the first couple of years. The first airplane I bought, I think, was in about 1962, and this was in 1964, 2 years after that.

RM: What happened to the old runway?

WW: It was dismantled.

RM: Did Preferred Equities do that?

WW: Well, when I delivered the ranch to them, it looked pretty much like it does right there. It was a good runway. They used it for 2 or 3 or 4 years.

RM: And now it's been moved on north?

WW: I think they got federal assistance and did another runway entirely up in the general vicinity of the old Dorothy runway. It runs parallel to the road off to the east.

RM: And that's about where Dorothy's runway was?

WW: It was in that vicinity. I don't know whether it was Dorothy's runway or not, but they used it and Dale probably had a little old airplane for a lot of time that he was in the Pahrump area, and I'm sure that he was the instigator of the little runway that was there. But the ownership of Pahrump Ranch had made a terrain-following runway; it was a real thriller!

RM: Like a roller coaster? Could you describe this other picture? What's there?

WW: They had to have a water supply, so that provided the water pressure in the office over here. Now, I don't know why in hell the office didn't get in the picture but it didn't. It's over here on the left. The power plant was here on the right. And I only see one tank out here. That was the diesel tank that supplied the fuel for this engine, I believe. I did this myself; I promoted Petrolane into moving their tank from the south end of the valley up here beside this tank and then they could supply the fuel directly to Arizona Cottonseed Products for their propane requirements. They already had a tank in place they were using of sufficient size that I could convert it to a NH-3. Then we could have transport loads of NH-3, which is high-pressure stuff and very hard to handle. They could dispense NH-3 out of the original diesel tank and that's what we did. The first

year I used NH-3, I bought a carload and I had to haul it in 1000 gallon tanks over the hills from Blue Diamond to Pahrump Ranch, a very left-handed, time-consuming procedure. This circumvented all that. But I can't identify the year; just call this in the early '60s.

RM: OK, great.

WW: This is Mt. Charleston. I carried a very prominent colonel out to see the ranch one time, a Colonel Johnson from Nellis. I carried him to the most prominent view of my crop, down through the fields. I had a beautiful crop in '61 or '62; Pahrump Ranch was looking great. Goddamn, my crops were beautiful out there. The colonel was looking at these cotton rows and I thought, 'Goddamn, he's really enjoying that.' He turned 180 degrees and said, "Just look at Mt. Charleston."

RM: Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, isn't it?

WW: That's exactly right. He was an airman.

RM: Can you talk some more about the trucking business?

WW: My cubing endeavor led me into the trucking business. I first leased a truck from a California guy and bought a pair of bottom-dump, aluminum hopper trailers. It was big, nice, beautiful road equipment and I was hauling cubes with a tractor I'd leased from this fellow in California. The next year I bought a truck and by the time I sold the place, I had 2 pairs of bottom-dump aluminum hopper trailers, 2 open-top seedhauling trailers, 2 flattop trailers for hauling bales of cotton and various other accessories and I had 2 really beautiful big Peterbuilt trucks. My name was on the side of them and I did just about all the hauling for the valley. I'd bring fertilizer in; bales out and cubes out. I wasn't getting as much return hauling to the valley as I wanted, but I was getting a lot of trips out. But it opened up a whole new dimension when I got into

alfalfa and cubing, and it put me into other contacts in California and added a whole new dimension to my ranching.

RM: What did you call it?

WW: Williams Trucking, Pahrump, Nevada, and Las Vegas, Nevada. I had both places on there.

RM: Did you then sell that off with the ranch?

WW: I gave it to my foreman. It carried some indebtedness, but it was actually about half paid for and it was worth twice as much as the indebtedness against it. I gave it to my foreman and he immediately lost it; they forced him to sell the trucks. That was the end of Williams' Trucking.

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