

An Interview with  
JAMES H. "SAM" COLVIN

An Oral History conducted and edited by  
Robert D. McCracken

Nye County Town History Project  
Nye County, Nevada  
Tonopah  
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.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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 Sam Colvin at his home in Beatty, Nevada October 31, 1987.

## CHAPTER ONE

RM: Sam, could you tell me your name as it's written on your birth certificate?

SC: James Harry Colvin.

RM: And where were you born?

SC: Cody, Nebraska.

RM: And what was your father's full name?

SC: Albert Colvin.

RM: And where was he from?

SC: Cody. He came out of Missouri into Cody, and my mother and he were married there in about 1911.

RM: 1911. And when were you born?

SC: November 18, 1913.

RM: And what was your mother's maiden name?

SC: Lottie E. Heath.

RM: And she was from Cody too?

SC: She was born there at Cody.

RM: Were they farmers, or . . . ?

SC: Ranchers. My father and mother separated when I was 4-1/2, and we moved to Fort Collins, Colorado.

RM: How long did you live in Fort Collins?

SC: I lived in Denver and then out east near Fort Morgan for awhile, but I was raised around Fort Collins. Then when I went back to high school I went out and finished at a little town called Timnath. We lived at the old Harold Ebert ranch, 1/2-mile north and 1/2-mile west of Timnath.

RM: Had long did you live in Timnath?



SC: My sophomore year, and I finished out my senior year at Timnath High. It burned down in '33 - as soon as I got out. I was in Nevada when it burned down.

RM: Did Chloe go to school there too?

SC: No, I lived with my step-uncle. I worked my way through school.

RM: How did you happen to come to Nevada?

SC: I was a sophomore in high school in Timnath, and [my mother] and my stepfather and sister and a fellow named Eimer Hedler went up to Smith Valley. That's west out of Yerington, Nevada. Then they rented an old place in Bodie, California, and Mother went up and opened a restaurant there, she and my sister. And my stepfather worked in the mines.

RM: That's your sister Chloe? (Chloe Lisle, just for the record.) She lives here in town.

SC: Yes. Then my stepfather and mother got into an argument, so they separated and Mother moved into Hawthorne. That was about '30 or '31. And then she married a fellow named Walt Mills - Whitey Mills. He was a gambler and later he ran the games there. And then they moved to Beatty and he ran the games at the Exchange. This was during Prohibition. It was right after gambling became legal. He ran the games for George Greenwood at the Exchange.

RM: How long did he do that?

SC: Until '35. But I came in '33, after I got out of high school in Timnath. I got out the 28th of May and [the] first day of June we came into Beatty. I had a Model A Ford and my mother and I came back in that.

You know the ground where the Portland Cement Company is there in Fort Collins?

RM: Yes?

SC: My uncle sold a lot of that ground to Colorado Portland Cement Company.

RM: I'll be darned. How many years did you live in Fort Collins altogether?

SC: I went there in 1917 or 1918. I went and lived in LaPorte, Colorado, and then my mother bought a home, so I could go to school in Fort Collins, at 813 LaPorte. Grandma had a place at 1019, I believe, LaPorte.

RM: And then you came here when you were just out of high school. What did you do then?

SC: My first job was hauling ore from the Bullfrog mine for Tom Harris. I hauled the ore from the Bullfrog to the railroad siding down below here at Gold Center. And then they opened up the Gold Ace. I was the first man - with Vic Retterer and his son - to go to work. He had the powerhouse down there - a big diesel rig - so we tore the power line down from up at the quarry, and then they installed it from the mill powerhouse out into the mine.

RM: How far is the Gold Ace from Carrara?

SC: I'd say 3 miles. You can follow the road up to the Gold Ace - Dodge Construction built it in 1933 or '34. And there was a good airport there at Carrara. The famous Roscoe Tanner flew out of there. In 1929 he hauled a lot of high-grade from the Gold Ace for the stockholders. Vic Retterer rode with him to Las Vegas.

RM: Oh, so the Gold Ace was an older mine; it wasn't just started then.

SC: Oh, yes. And they closed it down in '29 or '30 when the stock markets all crashed. And then Heinzie and Mr. McGinnis, the lawyer who formed the Apex . . . He was the lawyer for Heinzie, of Butte, Montana. He won the Apex laws, and he's the one who furnished the money to open up the Gibraltar gold mines or Gold Ace, whatever you want to call it. That's Minister McGinnis, from Butte. Most all the miners and all down here came from Butte. I helped build the mill. Charlie Finney was the millwright. He built the mill and I helped him, and after that I went into the milling business and I worked for Dr. Kraut. We had Kraut flotation, and I worked with him. I worked with several other - I believe his name was Grousch - [another] very famous flotation man.

RM: Did you have to float the ore at the Gold Ace?

SC: Yes, we floated the ore.

RM: Was it free gold?

SC: Lots of free gold. That's the reason we had trouble with it.

RM: How big was the mill?

SC: Fifty ton.

RM: Where did he get the water for it?

SC: Down at the Narrows. There was a wooden pipeline that went clear to Carrara. Carrara was built by the same company that owns Gold Point to this day. But Vic Retterer was the watchman, and they gave him the property for staying there. Finally they just rang it off. He earned it, because . . .

RM: Who owned the Gold Ace property?

SC: The Gold Ace was owned by Mt. Sutton.

RM: When was the Gold Ace originally opened?

SC: It goes back into about 1911. Old Bill Callicut had the property there called Arista. His father was here in town, and a piece of tin in a windstorm hit his leg, cut it badly, and he died from gangrene.

RM: Is the Gold Ace up one of those canyons?

SC: No, it's right out on the point; you can see it. And the Bull Moose is just above it.

RM: What was the ore like in the Gold Ace?

SC: Awfully high grade in spots. My sister Chloe can show you a picture of it. I think it was almost solid gold about 4 inches wide. The picture [is of a piece] they had at the Exchange Club. A guy stole it, and they got it back, and then [someone] stole it again. They got away and they never did get it back. But you can see the gold in the picture. It's an old black and white, but you can see the gold.

RM: What kind of workings did they have at the Gold Ace? Was it extensive?

SC: Quite extensive.

RM: How deep did it go?

SC: (pewh!) I don't remember - the shaft at the Gold Ace probably went 200 to 400 foot. The Bull Moose, out on the other side, was more big stopes; lower grade.

RM: Did they chloride at the Gold Ace? Was that how they mined it?

SC: No, they mined big. A fault cut the high-grade gold off, and they lost it and it's never been found. It's absolutely preposterous. There was lots of it here when I was young.

RM: Where was the mill?

SC: The original Gold Ace was right up there at the mine, and [it] went broke when the stock market fell. And the other one was right in the town of Carrara.

RM: Where was the one that you helped build?

SC: In Carrara.

RM: What was Carrara like in '33?

SC: There were several houses there and a big airfield. You can go down there today and you can't even see where it was. Once in a while I go down there and drive along, and it's absolutely covered up.

RM: Was it a dirt airfield?

SC: Yes, gravel. A very good one. It was between Hollywood and Carrara.

RM: Where was it located?

SC: It was 3/4-mile north of Carrara.

RM: And what was happening at Hollywood?

SC: That's where the mining camp was for the Gold Ace.

RM: Then the workers didn't live at Carrara?

SC: A lot of them did, but all the single miners and the cookshack and so forth were at Hollywood.

RM: How many buildings were there at Hollywood?

SC: Oh, I don't know - 12 or 15. And you can't even find it now if you don't know where to go.

RM: Was it built especially for the Gold Ace?

SC: Yes. The original Gold Ace in '26 or '27.

RM: I'll be darned. And they'd originally piped water from the Narrow up to Carrara . . .

SC: That was for Carrara itself. It was gravity flow from right here at the Narrows clear down. It was a wooden pipeline wrapped in wire.

RM: Was it on the surface?

SC: No, it was buried a little ways. The bushes would grow into it - greasewood. We'd have to go along and you could find it, because there would be a wet spot and the bushes would be awfully green. We'd cut a little hole that was big enough to get our hand through, and then pull [the roots] out.

RM: The quarry at Carrara was not operating, was it?

SC: No. But it was a big place. The tables were still set up where they sawed [marble]. And they used steel shot. You have long steel ribbons whatever length you want to cut it. And there was a table on top that went back and forth and cut the marble. And they had the polishing machines there and everything.

RM: And then they shipped it out on the railroad, didn't they?

SC: They shipped it on the railroad.

RM: But it wasn't functioning when you got there, was it?

SC: It was functionable. It was the same up at the quarry. Everything was in place - even the big drills. They used plug and feather. They cut holes around in a line about 4 inches apart, and then they would use what they call a plug and feather, and they would put the plugs in and hammer on the feathers and lift that whole hunk of marble out. But the reason it closed down was on account of the volcanoes. Over at 40-Mile Canyon it's all volcanoes, so the marble's all fractured.

RM: And then right before the war. Wasn't there was a guy who came in and was going to build a cement . .

SC: Mr. Elizalde. I never worked for him, but I knew him. The Elizaldes came in here and built a cement plant, and were within 3 to 6 months of having it finished - the kiln was all set up and everything - and then the war stopped it. In 1946 a guy named Sparky was down there and he sold everything off and Standard Slag bought the kiln. It's up at Gabbs, Nevada, right now. I don't know whether they're using it for anything or not, but Standard Slag used it all the time on that magnesium.

RM: What happened to Carrara during the '30's?

SC: The Gold Ace closed in around '35. And then . .

RM: Why did it close? Because gold was good then, wasn't it?

SC: Well, it wasn't that good. They were getting into a lot of bad ore. McGinnis - the lawyer who furnished the money - closed it down.

RM: And then Hollywood faded too?

SC: That's when it faded.

RM: Do you remember the fountain in the center of Carrara?

SC: Yes. There was a lower reservoir there we used to swim in. All the water went to this reservoir. We pumped on up the hill with a big Bean pump. They pumped it up the hill for pressure.

RM: Were people living in all the houses when you were there?

SC: No, not all of them. Phyllis Ishmael can tell you about that. Her grandma lived there, and there were several people lived there.

RM: Were they working quite a few men at the Gold Ace when you were there?

SC: Yes.

RM: What was a day's pay then?

SC: \$5 for muckers, and \$5.25 for miners. That's a state law.

RM: That was a state law then.

SC: That is a state law.

RM: Still?

SC: Still.

RM: They have to pay them \$5. [laughter]

SC: Anybody underground and all that. Mill men got \$5.25, laborers got \$5.

RM: And you were a mill man?

SC: Yes. From there I went to college at Reno. But I didn't have the money, so I quit. It was the Depression. I came back and went as the head mill man up at Horn Silver.

RM: Where's that?

SC: Gold Point. For Dickleman. That corporation was the one that owned Carrara. They got hold of Gold Point and they started a mill up there.

RM: Where exactly is Gold Point?

SC: Fourteen miles south and 14 miles west of Goldfield. I worked there a year and a half until June - all of '36 and part of '37. And then they closed down. It was the same thing as that flotation. They went into cyanide then - vats. The mill from Gold Point is the mill out here at the Homestake mine of 1908-1910. They moved that mill to Gold Point.

RM: Where was the Homestake?

SC: The Homestake is out where the Gold Bar is now. They connect on sidelines.

RM: OK, a little bit north and west of Rhyolite.

SC: Right. They moved that Homestake mill into Gold Point and it ran and caught on fire and burned down. And then they put in flotation. You've seen those big cement things - they came out of . . . that mill is in Gold Point now. They completely rebuilt that in about '38 and then they made a cyanide proposition in there. Then the war closed it down.

RM: Now, is Gold Point south of the highway as you go to Lida'

SC: Yes.

RM: What could you tell about the Bullfrog mine, where you were hauling ore when you first got here?

SC: I don't remember who was running it at the time. They sank a 500-foot shaft there in '36, I believe it was, or '35, and they never hit a thing.

RM: What were you hauling, then?

SC: I was working, in '33, from the workings on top. The ore was very shallow.

RM: Was the ore deep at the Gold Ace?

SC: I don't think so.

RM: Was it deep at Gold Point?

SC: Well, I remember the Dickleman shaft was 550 or 600 or 700 or something like that, and they had ore down there.

## CHAPTER TWO

RM: How long did you stay up at Gold Point?

SC: I believe it was May or June of '37. Then I went over to California and worked in the mines around Garden Valley. And then I came back and went to work at Silver Peak. I worked all of '38 and '39 in the Mary [and] I worked for Fred Vollmer in the Black Mammoth. [He had it] from E.L. Cord. And Stan Chiatovich and Ernie Shirley were bosses.

RM: Was it a gold mine?

SC: Yes, running very successful.

RM: Were they milling the ore there?

SC: Yes - down at Silver Peak. They hauled it off the hill, and Cord had his mill up on the hill.

RM: Did you live in Silver Peak?

SC: Yes.

RM: What kind of a town was that?

SC: Just a mining town - boom town.

Other Voice: You have to tell him about moving the school building.

SC: Yes. In '38 all of us got together . . . The school building was out between Nivlock and Silver Peak. Jimmy Morris furnished the trucks, and most of the guys there helped, and we moved the school into town and put it down in a more practical location. Some of the old-timers . . . Don Shrider [of Goldfield] will tell you about it. He was a young boy when I was there.

RM: And you worked there a couple of years?

SC: Yes, I worked there about 2 years.

RM: And then what?

SC: I came back to Beatty.

RM: What did you do in Beatty, then?

SC: I worked for Ralph Lisle for awhile. He had a gas station and a bulk plant. I got married in 1938 here in Beatty [at a] Republican rally.

RM: Did you marry a local girl?



SC: No, one from Silver Peak. We didn't live together very long; we were divorced. I went down to Tecopa and worked in the mines at Tecopa. I ran a hoist down there. Then I quit and went over with Ralph Lisle at Panamint City for a short time in the tungsten mine up Surprise Canyon. We had a terrible 40-foot wall of water . . . there were boulders as big as a car coming down the canyon. Ralph's brother and my nother and I were in that canyon - [we had] just finished the road. The grader and the cat were sitting down there - I left the cat down there - and this water and mud came down and we saw it ahead. We just got off shift going back to Panamint and we could see that . .

RM: Were you walking?

SC: No, we were driving the truck. We looked up the canyon, and there was the awfulest smell, and here came the cloudburst. It didn't travel faster than you could run. It was a wall of water, I'd say 40-feet high, with boulders, and it smelled like flint, you know - flint. I got over the top and we lifted my mother and 2 of us - Ralph's brother was underneath and he pushed her, and we lifted her up over a cliff. And that way we got out of that terrible deal. Then we worked our way up to Panamint City, walking.

RM: Was it rainy that day, or . . . ?

SC: Oh, yes. Just a big cloudburst up on the Panamint.

RM: And it just drained a lot of country up there?

SC: Yes, it did. It all came up above us. When it ended, everything was gone - the graders and the scarfires and everything. [A scarfire is pulled behind a cat. It has teeth to loosen ground and dislodge large rocks. It's used to build roads, etc.] And the cat was sitting on what looked like a mountain - just a big hunk of dirt They had to build a road to get it off; the tracks of the cat were hanging. And that's what was left.

I left there and I went to work for Wells Cargo. I was shift foreman for Wells Cargo until I went into the service in '42.

RM: What was Wells Cargo?

SC: A trucking company. Charlie Hooten, Ed Sandberg, Jackie Paulgrove, and Homer Retterer, and all of us were working up there, and we hauled the first loads from Gabbs to Basic Refractions in Henderson. I hauled the second load. Charlie Hooten hauled the first, and he had 57 tons on the trucks; it bent the frames on the trailers. That was because they didn't have scales.

RM: Tell me a little bit about that operation.

SC: Well, they hauled it down where they made magnesium.

RM: Was it an open pit at Gabbs?

SC: Yes, a tremendous big one.

RM: And what kind of trucks did you use?

SC: Kenworths. They were all diesels. Joe Wells designed the hoppers himself - he and Howard and Bob. The Wells boys were 3 boys who got started in Reno hauling trash. I knew them all. They got the contract for hauling the regular ore - the brucite - to the railhead there in Luning. And then when the big deal hit in Vegas - the EMI - they got the [continuation of the] contract for hauling the dead burn.

RM: What does dead burn mean?

SC: That means it's been kiln-dried.

RM: So you'd load up in Gabbs, and where would you go then?

SC: We went into Tonopah, and from Tonopah to Goldfield and Beatty and right straight through town, right into the Basic Refractories.

RM: How big were your trucks? Did they have trailers?

SC: They were supposed to be 40-ton, and they had a trailer. They overloaded the first load and it bent the frame, so after that they reinforced the frames and we hauled about 35- to 40-ton at a whack.

RM: How many on the truck and how many on the pup?

SC: Twenty and twenty.

RM: Do you remember what they were? Kenworth or Whites or . . . ?

SC: No, they were just the Kenworth trucks with cement hoppers you have now. Joe Wells is the one who designed them.

RM: How long did it take you to make the run?

SC: We'd stay all night. We'd go down and come back and stay all night at the El Cortez. It wasn't open, it was just opening up. But the truckers all had rooms there. Joe Wells furnished us truckers free roans. Then we'd come back the next day.

RM: Were the roads paved?

SC: Yes, they were all paved. They paved these roads in Beatty in '34. When I came here in '33 it was all gravel roads from Las Vegas to here. We followed the railroad tracks. And then in '34 they built the roads, and the Dodge Construction, as I told you, built that little road up to the mine when he was coming back.

RM: Was it a pretty good paved road when you were hauling that ore?

SC: Yes, we had good roads. Narrow, but good.

What did you do in bad weather?

SC: Just kept moving.

RM: Did you ever break down on the road?

SC: Very seldom.

RM: What happened when you did break down?

SC: We'd send for Harvey Mealman - he was an awfully good diesel mechanic. And Rip Van Winkle was a superintendent.

RM And then you went into the service in '42? What branch did you go in?

SC: I was in the tanks. I trained under the 14th Armored Division; they broke us up into the 716th Tank Battalion, and we went to the Pacific.

RM: Where all did you go in the Pacific?

SC: I went to New Guinea - the lower end that's Buka, that you never even hear about. And then on up - Hollandia - Sanzipor. From Sanzipor to Lingayen Gulf and made that beachhead in the Philippines. Sanzipor is in northern New Guinea.

RM: So you helped take New Guinea in tanks?

SC: Sure, in tanks.

RM: I didn't realize they had tanks in New Guinea. I thought it would be so much jungle . . .

SC: Well, we had 18 . . . it was a mop-up. And I went in the first wave with the tanks with MacArthur, when he went in to Lingayen Gulf. Pulled out of there 2 weeks later and went into Zamboanga, on the lower end of Mindanao, and took - fought their way - down into Jolo on the Sulu Archipelago, made a beachhead down there on the island of Jolo, came back, and went on into Penang. Then I got hurt and something - my legs were torn up - and then I went into hospital, and then came back and the war was over.

RM: What kind of tanks did they use?

SC: I was in charge of company maintenance of A-716 Tank Battalion Company tanks. That was heavy reinforcement. It was 18 medium and I believe I had 9 or 10 lights, and I had about 40

trucks and so forth. You see, I came out of Wells Cargo from running that stuff, and that was why . . . I went in.

RM: What did you do after the war?

SC: I came back and Ralph Lisle and I opened a garage in Beatty.

RM: Where was the garage?

SC: Shell Garage, up on the corner. It was a big one.

RM: Where the Shell station is now?

SC: Yes, but it was a big garage - it took the whole lot.

RM: Was business good?

SC: Yes, awfully good. We had the first crankshaft grinder between Las Vegas and Reno. People would come out of Los Angeles and their oil screens were all plugged up. I ground hundreds of crankshafts.

RM: Why would they be plugged up?

SC: Well, their lines would plug up because the cars never ran much during the war.

RM: Oh; and they'd blow their engine.

SC: They blew their engine and I ground their shafts. I went to Death Valley, I traveled all over grinding crankshafts with the machine, and then I'd make my own bearings - we had our own machines - to do so. We had a big machine shop.

RM: How long did you do that?

SC: Ralph and I operated the shop for 2 years, I believe. And then we opened up a garage where his present hardware is, [and] it later burned down.

RM: When did that burn?

SC: In 1950 or '51, I believe it was.

RM: What did you do after that?

SC: I went to Hawthorne as a diesel locomotive mechanic for 15 months, I believe it was, and then I went with Standard Slag as head master mechanic for them.

RM: Now, Standard Slag would be where?

SC: At Gabbs. The company that had Carrara.

RM: What were they doing up at Gabbs? Didn't they shut that magnacite down after the war?

SC: No, it ran up until . . . I forget when. Basic, I think, bought Standard Slag out in about 1956 or '57.

RM: Where did they process it? Because they'd shut down . . .

SC: They processed it right there at Gabbs. They shipped all of the stuff back east and they make bricks out of it. They use magnacite bricks in cement kilns and furnaces.

RM: And how long did you stay up there?

SC: Well, I went to work for them and then I went out and worked for Gabbs Exploration as a mechanic for them. I was there 4 years and that's when tungsten went bad - in 1957. Then I went to Yerington for a year - had a shop and service station over there - and then moved back to Beatty in '59.

RM: What did you do then?

SC: Well, right now you're going to get into something. I had the station over here and I had my cats and cans and all, and in 1962 I opened up Nuclear Engineering, which is now U.S. Ecology. I built the roads and I did all the work digging the holes from 1962 to 1965. Then I quit and went out to the Test Site. Another fellow who helped me was Oilcan Harry -Harry Griffin.

RM: Did you cover it up, then? The waste?

SC: Yes.

RM: What were they burying down there in those early days?

SC: Low-level waste.

RM: Now, a can is the thing that you tow, right? Behind the grader - the scraper.

SC: Right. I've still got it. I ran the cat and my son helped me. He was only 13, but he ran the cat can, too. I ran the trucks and hauled the nuclear waste all out of Concord, California. Nuclear had 3 trucks.

RM: Why was it coming out of Concord?

SC: Because it was stored there. They had temporary storages there.

RM: Was it for all of California, or the west, or the U.S., or what?

SC: Well, quite a bit of it. We started out . . . we did very well out here.

RM: What did the waste look like?

SC: Well, it was in barrels.

RM: How deep did they bury it?

SC: In those days I think I ran around 30 feet. And then you take the cat and cover it all up; we always kept it covered.

RM: How deep are they burying it now?

SC: I think they're gone down about 50 feet now. I've [only] been out there once since I was there.

RM: Does the ground stand well?

SC: Yes.

RM: It does? You could care down with a straight wall?

SC: Yes, you care down awfully-well. You give it a little slant you know, a little pitch.

Nuclear Engineering was one of the originals. They were burying it at sea in barrels, if you remember. They couldn't find any because the currents of the ocean were moving it all over. So they stopped that, and the State of Nevada gave Nuclear Engineering this ground out here, and the people who owned Nuclear Engineering came into town and hired me to do all the work. I had a contractor's license.

RM: When did U.S. Ecology care into the picture then?

SC: I don't remember what year it was. Nuclear Engineering sold their franchise and all to U.S. Ecology quite awhile after I left.

RM: So that dump goes clear back to '62.

SC: Sure it does.

RM: How did you happen to get that contract?

SC: I had the only D-8 cat and can, and I also had a contractor's license.

RM: I see. And then you moved out to the Test Site?

SC: And then I went to the Test Site.

RM: What did you do out there?

SC: I was a hoist man. They called them hoisting engineers - I ran the big hoist.

RM: Were you in the Operating Engineers Union?

SC: Yes. That's the way I retired - as an operator.

RM: My dad worked out there and I worked there once. He worked out there for 15 or 18 years.

SC: I was out there a good many years.

RM: I imagine you saw him, because he worked in those shafts.

SC: What was his name?

RM: Bob McCracken. He was a miner.

SC: Yes, I'll say he was! I think I worked with him. Is he alive?

RM: Yes.

SC: Tell him Sam said hello.

RM: OK, I will.

SC: Yes, I ran the hoist, and I was shop foreman at E-tunnel.

RM: Yes, he worked at E-tunnel for many years.

SC: I was in E-tunnel and I worked in G and all the tunnels. But there's nothing that I know what went on out there.

RM: How long did you work there?

SC: Ten and a half years; I retired in '76.

RM: And what have you been doing since?

SC: Before I retired I built a garage. For many years I have had a lathe that came out of the old shop at Death Valley Junction. I bought it from Phyllis Bell's husband, Dick Bell. And I just piddle around. It was an awfully old one - [from the] early 1900s.

RM: And what do you make with your lathe?

SC: Oh, anything, turning metals. And I have all kinds of welders and everything.

RM: So you're really a mechanic, miner, [chuckles] and metal machinist? A jack of all trades?

SC: You name it; you name it. During the Depression you had to be. Remember, I was the shift foreman for Joe Wells - Howard and Bob - on the trucks. Then I dispatched them and I drove for a long time to get up to be foreman.

RM: So you can basically fix anything, probably.

SC: Anything.



## CHAPTER THREE

RM: Sam, what was Beatty like when you first came here in '33?

SC: Awfully, awfully good. There was a lot of work.

RM: Even though there was a Depression?

SC: Yes. If you remember, Roosevelt raised the price of gold from \$20.67 to \$35. So that made all these mines in Beatty district profitable. You could quit one job one day and be working another mine the next day.

RM: What were some of the mines that were operating?

SC: The Bullfrog, the Montgomery-Shoshone, the Pioneer, the Mayflower.....

RM: And then of course the Gold Ace.

SC: Yes.

RM: Tell me some more about what the town was like.

SC: It was a good-sized town then. A lot of the buildings have been moved. Across from the Exchange was what they called the Gold Ace bar. It was a big bar then. It was a lot wide and a full lot long. Well, it burned down and we had one big fire. One man was burned up in the back room. We had a fire department then, and we had about a 1915 or '14 fire engine, if I remember right. I know that I ran the fire engine - kept it going. Larry Lee and all the guys were fighting the fire and Larry Lee was a bartender at the Gold Ace and he grabbed the cash register and backed right over the top of it getting his car out, he was so excited. [laughter]

Of course, there were buildings on up that way. The Exchange had a restaurant and my sister Chloe worked there. And then Joe Andre came in and he started one across the street where the yellow house is up in there. He put a drugstore and everything up there catty-corner across from the Exchange and up just a little way. He moved the house that I lived in Carrara. I [had] stayed there with Victor and Homer Retterer.

RM: That was before the house was there.

SC: Miss Wilson owned that house.

RM: Oh - it was right next door to it.

SC: Yes. Joe came in here with a little trailer and they were going to run him out of town.

RM: Why?

SC: I don't know. Because they didn't want competition, I think. He really put out the food, and my sister Chloe worked for him there in that little 7-seated restaurant . . . called the Silver Diner.

RM: And did he have good food there?

SC: Awfully good food. And then of course they had the Green Front down the street a way - that was a cafe. Mrs. Noise run that - Art Noise's grandma. And of course across the street, then, later on, Andre built the Silver Diner cafe down by the 76 Station. Then he moved it up next to Mrs. Harvey's place. That's a bar now - Dick Sorenson's bar. And in later years my wife's father bought it and that's where she and I met. She was a waitress for her parents.

RM: What was her father's name?

SC: Robert Lee Stroud. We met in the cafe. She was . . .

Other Voice: . . . was hashing for him.

SC: She was hashing. But right down the street a little ways on that side the old Beatty Hotel used to be owned by a little bitty fellow named Johnny Sidey. They called him Johnny-behind-the-rock.

RM: Why did they call him that?

SC: Because somebody was trying to get his claims, and he got behind a rock and ran than off. There was some shooting.

RM: Now, where was his place - on the east side or the west side of . . .

SC: It's on the north side of Main Street. Then right across the street was the California Hotel. It later burned. And Johnny Sidey never had his Beatty Hotel finished. Some people, years later, came and built it up. And right next to it there was a blind man, and his wife was the barber. She ran the barber shop and he played the organ. This goes back quite awhile - in the mid-'30s. Bill was his name - Blind Bill. He played the squeeze box and he played for all the dances.

The worst thing that ever happened to Beatty is when they got rid of the old town hall. That was, for all the old-timers and people, the place where everybody met.

RM: Why did they tear it down? What was their thinking?

SC: I have no idea. To put the firehouse in there, I guess. But there was no need of that; they could've put the firehouse there as far as I'm concerned. In 1933 or '4 I ran the shows there.

RM: Well, tell me about that. I talked to Bert Lemons, and he ran it after the war.

SC: Oh, yes. I ran it for Joe Andre; he had the movie equipment, and I would run the films. That was the reason I don't like to go to a show. I had so much film that it just . . . Every week or so we'd have a film. It was a good projection room.

RM: Did quite a few people show up?

SC: Oh, yes - the town all showed up.

RM: Did the films come in on the train, or what?

SC: Well, let's see, I think the last train quit in '39. I used to get on the train, just for the fun of it, down here at the Y and they'd back it around and get the loads and all that.

RM: How long did you run the projector?

SC: Oh, several months.

RM: Did you run it once a week or on Saturday, or something like that?

SC: I think so. And there were dances; we had the finest - a good stage and a good orchestra.

RM: Where did the orchestra come from?

SC: In '33 Irving Crowell had a cousin named Jack Crowell who played the saxophone and his wife played - if I remember right - the piano. He was a good musician. Of course Joe Andre, you know, was quite famous for his music; he was a band leader.

RM: Did he ever play at the dances?

SC: No, I don't remember.

RM: Did they ever bring bands in from Las Vegas?

SC: We didn't really need to. We had the musicians here, and they were good ones. And all you needed to do was fix the floor a little bit - smooth it off or keep it covered.

RM: It was the old Miners' Union building out of Rhyolite, wasn't it?

SC: Yes, it was beautiful - a good one.

RM: That's what I hear. Yes, it was a shame they tore it down. And when they tore it down they didn't even have a community center, did they?

SC: No, they built it up on the hill many years later.

RM: Yes. So you went for a long time without a meeting place.

SC: I don't blame anybody for it. The only thing is, I don't see why they tore it down. I take no personal grudges against anybody.

RM: It sounds like during the '30s the mainstay of Beatty economy was the mining.

SC: All mining. We had some good characters in town. Yavapai Pete was quite a one. He came out of Arizona, and he was a character. We had all types of characters here.

RM: When they shut mining down with the war, what happened to the town?

SC: It just wasn't so good. But the Test Site came in and there have always been a lot of men from here, like myself, who all worked there.

RM: But it was 10 years before the Test Site came in.

SC: Yes, it was. But it's a good tourist town. A very, very good location. The CCs built all the roads in Death Valley. The cat sitting out here behind my house is a CC cat. I got it on a bid out of the national site in 1948 or '49. It's the little old International that I guess all the CC boys ran back when they were building those roads. I gave it to my son and he's rebuilding it for a keepsake.

RM: And it was the CCs who did a lot of work in the park and everything?

SC: They did all the work - period. The CCs used to come to Beatty about every Saturday night. We had a bar up above town, right there, called the Desert Inn. Eight of them came in there and got rowdy one night and this old gal took off her shoe. She just took the heel of her shoe and tapped them on the head and they . . . then they hauled them out and hauled them down to Death Valley. But they built all the roads in Death Valley.

RM: And that was what really helped tourism?

SC: It helped everything in Beatty. Ralph Lisle will tell you, because he worked in the 3 Cs.

RM: Oh, he worked there?

SC: Yes. And Bodie Lyons and Larry Lee were there, and . .

RM: So that it was a result of the work that they did in the '30s that helped tourism pick up?

SC: Oh, yes. That built Beatty. It was just a little sleepy mining town.

RM: What about the economy of Beatty during the '40s?

SC: Right after the war, everybody came in here to go to the 49er Days. These were the first ones, you know. Then we had awfully good Burro Days. That built Beatty a lot; filled all the motels and everything.

RM: And then in the '50s you get the Test Site, don't you?

SC: Yes, you get your Test Site and then all on up.

RM: How important has the Test Site been to Beatty's economy? Have there really been that many Beatty people working there?

SC: Yes, there have. It has the Test Site, and then it has Ford, and all the mines working - I guess Gold Bar's working now, and Saga has got a lot of men. We have quite a few men working here.

RM: How would you describe social life back in the '30s?

SC: Very good. We were quite a close-knit family.

RM: Yes. Beatty has a nice spirit.

SC: Yes, a high community spirit. It was when I was young.

RM: Even then.

SC: Yes. Today it's the same. You have the best volunteer firemen in the country. And we have beautiful ballparks and swimming pools and . . . we've got everything.

RM: What about the burro races, Sam?

SC: The first burro races started in '46 or '47. My little cousin from Colorado . . . we had an old burro, a mama burro, and a baby. We drew that mama burro and little baby. The way we ran the races, they started off, and the little burro took off down the street, the nother right after it. [laughter] And [laughs] it out-ran everything. The mother burro took out to protect her baby.

RM: That was a long time before they had the burros in '60, wasn't it?

SC: Oh, yes.

RM: The burro race idea goes way back, then, doesn't it?

SC: Oh, yes. Ralph and I had what we called the Central Garage and we had our own burros in the race, and everybody around here had a burro in the race.

RM: And the Central Garage was where the Shell station is?

SC: That's right. It was a big one. They tore down that building.

RM: I wonder why they did that.

SC: I don't know.

RM: Tell us some more about that flood in the Panamint, Sam.

SC: Oh, we just finished the road. It went up there, and you could drive up with a car. And it completely took out the road from up at the mine clear down to Surprise Canyon.

RM: I've never been up there. Is Panamint at the head of Surprise Canyon?

SC: Clear up on top; yes.

Other Voice: Here's how they took the ore out.

RM: What was the first indication you had of a wall of water coming down?

SC: We were driving up the road going home and we looked up there, and there was that big 40-foot or more foot wall of water with rocks coming down and you could smell it; oh! And it was a terrible noise. A roar - just a terrible roar. We parked the truck against the wall, and behind a turn. And all it did was fill it full of water and everything; it didn't ruin it. It was just hanging there.

RM: Did you have to get out of there in a hurry?

SC: Oh, we did. The water was coming right up on us.

RM: Did you get wet?

SC: Just on account of the terrible rain. I pushed my mother and Phillip Lisle lifted her up over and pushed her on over.

RM: How long did it take the water to get by?

SC: I'd say an hour.

RM: An hour.

SC: That's all. That's how fast it goes. Boulders as big as cars. My mother's passed away but Phillip Lisle is still alive - he and I were right in it, with my mother. It's a good thing it don't come fast. He was driving, Mother was sitting in the middle, and he spun that truck in reverse up against a wall. But it was behind the turn to the big ledge out in front of it. We took off and went right up over the cliff.

RM: And then you just sat up there and watched it?

SC: Oh, it was black; absolutely black. You couldn't see anything but the mud.

RM: Do you mean the water?

SC: No, I mean the whole country was black from mud flying everywhere. You could not see.

RM: You couldn't look down and see the water?

SC: Oh, no way.

RM: How far above the water were you?

SC: Oh, 100 feet or more - 200, maybe.

RM: Then it was just mud flying?

SC: Just mud. It rolls. There's just so much force behind it, and it rolls and rolls and tumbles. You could see sparks flying, but you couldn't see . .

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