

An Interview with GRACE DAVIES

An Oral History conducted and edited by
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Nye County Town History Project
Nye County, Nevada
Tonopah
1987

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Grace Davies
1987

[Preface](#)

[Acknowledgments](#)

[Introduction](#)

[CHAPTER ONE](#)

Early arrival in Beatty; marriage to Fred Davies; Beatty residents.

[CHAPTER TWO](#)

More memories of early Beatty.

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. 'L type font contains no symbols for the physical gestures and the diverse vocal modulations that are integral parts of communication through speech. Experience shows that totally verbatim transcripts are often largely unreadable and therefore a waste of the resources expended in their production. While keeping alterations to a minimum the NCTHP will, in preparing a text:

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

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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

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

Jean Charney served as administrative assistant, editor, indexer, and typist throughout the project; her services have been indispensable. Louise Terrell provided considerable assistance in transcribing many of the oral histories; Barbara Douglass also transcribed a number of interviews. Transcribing, typing, editing, and indexing were provided at various times by Alice Levine, Jodie Hanson, Mike Green, and Cynthia Tremblay. Jared Charney contributed essential word processing skills. Maire Hayes, Michelle Starika, Anita Coryell, Michelle Welsh, Lindsay Schumacher, and Jodie Hanson shouldered the herculean task of proofreading the oral histories. Gretchen Loeffler and Bambi McCracken assisted in numerous secretarial and clerical duties. Phillip Earl of the Nevada Historical Society contributed valuable support and criticism throughout the project, and Tam 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 maybe 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 Grace Lee Davies, at her home in Beatty, Nevada - April 14, 1987

CHAPTER ONE

M: OK, Grace, could you tell me your full name and where and when you were born?

D: Grace Lee Davies. I was born in Cincinnati, Ohio, on January 6, 1907.

M: What were your folks' names and where were they from?

D: Well, my mother's name is Mary Eunice Whitton, from Georgetown, Kentucky.

M: And what was your father's name?

D: James Franklin Whitton.

M: And did you go to school in Cincinnati?

D: Yes.

M: And then what did you do after you got out of school? Did you get a job or did you get married or did you move or anything like that?

D: Well, I went to work for a while.

M: And when did you come to Beatty?

D: September '37.

M: What brought you to Beatty?

D: Oh, I just . . . hitch-hiked in.

M: Where all did you hitch-hike?

D: Well, I went down into California and then doubled back.

M: Where did you go in California?

D: I don't know.

M: So then you doubled back. Did you come through Las Vegas?

D: Yes. It was quite small then. It's spread all over the country, the same as this town.

M: So then had did you happen to come up to Beatty from Las Vegas?

D: Oh, I got a ride, a farmer who was going to Lathrop, so I spent the night there with some friends, and they brought me up here.

M: You had friends in Lathrop Wells?

D: Well, they're dead now.

M: Yes, what were their names, do you remember?

D: Well, you see, I had pneumonia twice, and the second shot hit me. It kind of fouled me up; I can't think very good anymore.

M: OK. Well, we'll just do the best we can, OK. So you came to Beatty then in September of 1937? Could you describe what Beatty was like then.

D: Oh, I liked the town then.

M: Was it a very big town at that time?

D: No. It just went back 2 blocks that way, to the west. Well, I got a job trying to learn to be a waitress.

M: Where did you get your waitress job?

D: Well, that building that they tore down, right down there on Main Street. It was, I think, the Green Front.

M: Did you get a house to live in or an apartment?

D: It was a house.

M: And then how long did you work at the Green Front?

D: Long enough to get married. [laughter]

M: You were single when you came here?

D: Oh, yes.

M: And who did you marry?

D: My daughter's father, Frederick Davies.

M: And then, did you continue working?

D: No.

M: Can you tell me a little bit about what happened in the years that followed, after you got married.

D: I'd have to rack my brains to do it. Well, I just did housework and cooked meals for him. Sometimes he'd have friends in. Of course that didn't help matters any.

M: What kind of work did he do?

D: Oh he did whatever he could, mostly mining - Diamond Queen, Pioneer, Ubehebe . .

M: Do you remember some of the mines that he worked in?

D: No. He tried to get a mine that he could work on his own, but he never found what he wanted.

M: Did you stay in Beatty, then, for the rest of your time?

D: Yes. Oh, I lived in Vegas for a while after he died.

M: Did you live in this house?

D: No, I lived over there at that point, in a trailer [on the back lot].

M: The one right next door?

D: That's where we lived 'when I first got married, and then the people that was in here moved out, and we moved over here.

M: How many children did you have?

D: A, boy and a girl.

M: And Claudia is your daughter. When was she born?

D: Nineteen forty-one.

M: And when was your son born?

C: He's older.

M: Could you describe any friends that used to come over to your house?

C: Bunch of drunks.

M: Were they miners too?

C: Oh, they worked anything they could get.

M: The railroad still came into the town, didn't it?

C: Yes, it did until 1941, I believe it was. But anyway they broke up the track and the ties. Well, it was '42 when it was all out.

M: They say that people used to go down and watch the train come in. Is that true?

C: Yes, I did, too.

M: When did it come in--once or twice a week, didn't it?

C: Yes, I think that's it.

M: What did people do for recreation in those days?

C: Oh, played ball. They'd do that besides having dances on weekends.

M: Where did they have the dances?

C: That building that's tore down over there where the fire house is.

M: It was the community center; that's where they had the dances, yes.

C: They don't have the dances they used to.

M: Who were some of the important people in town then, do you remember?

C: The Reverts, the Welches, the Lises, the Crowells . . .

M: What did they do?

C: They were in gas stations. The Reverts [also] supplied water to Beatty from a spring on their ranch. I can't think of other names right now. It takes me a while to think.

M: Yes, you have to think back; it's been a long time. Do you remember Irving Crowell?

C: He's still around.

M: Yes, I just talked to him the other day.

C: Was his wife with him? Dorothy Crowell used to drive ore trucks for Irving.

M: Yes, she was with him. Were there people living in Rhyolite then?

C: Yes. One was an Indian lady, Louise Morrison.

OK. What are the things you remember most about the old days? Do you ever think about it?

C: No. I did for a while, but I don't anymore.

M: How come you quit thinking about it?

C: It didn't do no good to think about it. [laughter]

M: Did you live in Vegas for a while?

D: Four or 5 years, from 1958 to 1962.

M: What did you do when you lived in Vegas?

D: Motel work. In several of them. One on Fifth Street--well, it's not Fifth Street anymore. Best Western, about 1950, I'd say.

M: Did your children go to school in Las Vegas?

D: No, here.

M: Were you happy with the schools here?

D: Yes. They got tired of it, because they stayed too long in one place.

M: And then in about 1955 or something you moved back here and have been here ever since?

D: No, I was in Vegas about 8 months with my daughter; I've been back here about a month.

M: Are you glad to be back?

D: Yes.

M: Did the town change any while you were gone?

D: Oh, yes, it grewed, had growing pains.

M: What do you like best about living in Beatty?

D: Well, the climate. It's mostly warm. We had warm weather clear up to the first of the year, and then it got cold and windy and snowed.

M: Did you ever have any jobs in Beatty besides working in the restaurant?

D: Yes, I worked in motels, up at the El Portal

M: When you came to town there weren't any motels, were there, or was the El Portal here?

D: No, that was built after I came here. There was a hotel, the Exchange, and one down right across from the gas station, but it burnt down. And the Green Front, as it called, the hotel right across the street. I stayed there.

M: You stayed at the Green Front.

D: Well they changed the names of things even here. I don't remember what's the one on the corner right across from the 76 gas station.

M: Well, your husband worked in the mines and anything he could get?

D: Yes, worked on the highway for a year.

M: Did he die a long time ago or kind of recently?

D: Oh, he's been dead, I guess, 10-12 years. He's originally from Utah.

M: From Utah. Was he a Mormon? Are you a Mormon?

D: He was; I'm not.

M: Was he here when you got here?

D: Yes.

M: Well, do you have any other thoughts about how Beatty used to be, any other thoughts or memories?

D: Well, they had a grocery store. Of course that man and his wife are both dead. They had 3 to 4 bars. One bar they changed the name 4 or 5 times, where the Pot Shop is, that was a bar.

M: Well, is there anything else that you'd like to say About the way Beatty used to be or about its history?

D: Oh, they had schools. They had one high school room for 4 grades. That was in a frame building. This right here that you can see was from the 1st to 4th and from the 4th to the 8th, and then when they graduated and went to high school it was in the little frame building.

M: Did this house come from Rhyolite that you live in now?

D: They come from everywhere. This is one room and that's one and that's a separate room; these are about 4 different buildings.

CHAPTER TWO

M: Grace, you have a picture there. What is it?

D: This is out here at the hot springs. Agnes Leinsteiner. She had it first.

Claudia: Agnes?

D: It's one bath house thing. Believe me, that water was hot then. And this was Mr. Smith. I imagine he's dead; he moved to California. Of course, this is little old me.

M: Is that you? Well I'll be darned! What year is that taken?

Claudia: About 1942 or '43, wasn't it Mamma? When Agnes had that place. I can find her name later

D: This is when I had long hair, but I don't have long hair now. It's easier for me to take care of. Of course there's only one building out there. I think they tore it down and built up new ones.

M: I think they probably did, yes, at the hot springs. What's this picture right here?

D: Across the street

M: Just right across the street.

D: Yes. I don't know who owned it when I came here but there was still an old man--a bachelor--[who] bought them. And there were some buildings right across there.

M: And they're still there?

D: Oh, yes. Oh - I forgot to introduce you to Chief Rain-In-The-Face. It's out there on that mountain.

M: Oh, yes; Indian Head

D: Yes. I named it Chief Rain In The Face. [chuckles] When the sun's shining, early in the mornings, you can see the headdress with all the feathers down this way. And out north of town there is a rock that looks like a car; one of them old square things.

I can't remember the people's names who had a grocery store and a gas station where the Beatty Club is now. They just remodeled, and they took the gas station out. People didn't want to be around a gas station and a bar, too.

Mr. and Mrs. Revert were here 10 years before I showed up. They had 3 boys and 1 girl. One man is dead, and the girl is dead--Edith Revert.

M: What did she die of?

D: I don't know. She was sick off and on. She had spells--epilepsy.

The post office was in the corner of . . . where the Exchange building is. Now they have to move the post office again

M: Yes. What do you think of moving the post office?

M: They'll just move the inside and leave the building stand; that's all brick. I don't know where it's going to be--somewhere out of town. Somebody's going to have to take me to the post office. [chuckles] Because I'd never be able to walk. Where the Exxon gas station is was a Shell gas station, only of course it was torn down and remodeled and made like it is now. Mr. and Mrs. Cobb and their son ran the Shell. I don't quite remember his first name—he's been dead so long. But his wife's name was Ada.

Where the Pot Shop is was a bar. The man--I can't remember his last name—Glen was his first name—was crippled. His brother and his [brother's] wife moved him to California; he died there. They had the post office down there and the mail trucks would come in every other day. They'd come up from Vegas and go down the next day. It was that same way, with the passenger busses. They had one bus a day, and it'd go to Tonopah and then come back the next day.

M: Did it go on to Reno?

D: Yes. [The bus company] sold again, and they got all new drivers.

M: Do you mean lately, or back then?

D: A couple of years ago.

M: And you used to know all the drivers?

D: Yes, I did. Well, those guys were all transferred to Mercury, I think; maybe some of them retired. Oh, that's all I can remember right now.

M: OK. Well, I'll turn it off, then.

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