

An Interview With Frank and Edith Brockman

An Oral History conducted and edited by
Robert D. McCracken

Nye County Town History Project
Nye County, Nevada
Tonopah
1987

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Frank and Edith Brockman
1987



Billie Bettles
1958



Gordon Bettles
circa 1950

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PREFACE

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

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

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

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

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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

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

Jean Charney served as administrative assistant, editor, indexer, and typist throughout the project; her services have been indispensable. Louise Terrell provided considerable assistance in transcribing many of the oral histories; Barbara Douglass also transcribed a number of interviews. Transcribing, typing, editing, and indexing were provided at various times by Alice Levine, Jodie Hanson, Mike Green, and Cynthia Tremblay. Jared Charney contributed essential word processing skills. Maize 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 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 Frank and Edith Brockman at their home in Bishop, California - July 24, 1987

CHAPTER ONE

RM: Edith, could you tell me your full name?

EB: Edith Marie Brockman.

RM: And where were you born?

EB: I was born in Mina, Nevada, June the 9th, 1916.

RM: And could you state your father's full name?

EB: Gordon Washington Bettles. You seldom find another person of that name who isn't a family relative. I think there were 9 Bettles brothers who moved from Canada into the United States.

RM: What was your dad's birth date?

EB: He was born February the 22nd, 1893, in Helena, Montana.

RM: And what was your mother's name?

EB: Edith Marie Thirsting-Peterson.

RM: Thirsting?

EB: She came to America as an infant under the name of Thirsting. Her father (Thirsting) was Ambassador to the United States from Denmark at the time.

RM: She came from Denmark, then?

EB: Yes. She was born in Copenhagen. Later, her mother Laura married a Peterson, so they just gave the children the name Peterson and thereafter her name was Edith Peterson, but on the death certificate and marriage certificate it read Edith Thirsting-Peterson. She wasn't too much younger than my dad - I think she was about 17 or 18 when they were married and my dad was 21.

RM: Where were your parents married?

EB: Death, Nevada - a small railroad town near Wells, Nevada.

RM: Where did your father grow up? (We'll kind of focus on him.)

EB: Between Montana and northern Nevada. He was 13 when they moved back to Sodaville.

RM: Now, where is Sodaville?

EB: Four miles out of Mina to the south. At that time it was larger than Mina; Mina was just the railroad siding. (I'm telling you what my grandmother Mabel used to tell me.) My grandfather, Alex Bettles, lost his first wife, moved back to Sodaville with the 3 boys, then sent my uncle Alex and Gordon, my dad, to Mount Tamalpais Military School in San Francisco. The third son, little A. J., then, was about 5 or 6, maybe 4. A. J. was a great Nevada man, too. Alex Jr., A. J., and Gordon Bettles. Gordon was the oldest, Alex and then A. J. My grandfather then married my step-grandmother Mabel, his second wife. She was a very good person. My mother died when I was 2 and my sister Helen was a year, so my [step] grandmother took us. She had never had children of her own, so she gave us the love and training of a true grandmother and mother. Helen and I loved her dearly - equally as much as Grandfather. My father was quite a young man to be widowed by the flu of 1918. [chuckles] Consequently, he remarried several times. After each marriage ended in divorce, my sister and I would joyfully return to our grandparents.

RM: That was your dad.

EB: My dad

RM: Gordon's dad didn't do that, did he? Did he marry more than twice?

EB: No; he just married twice. He had several big copper mines in Nevada. One was the Bell Copper, and the other was Mina Copper.

FB: Bell Copper out of Simons.

RM: Where's that?

FB: You go east out of Mina out to Bettles' Well, as it was known then. Bettles' Well was about 18 miles out of Mina?

EB: That's the granddad (Alex). He had a team of horses . .

FB: And he used to travel to Tonopah by going around by Simons, down by Crow Springs out of Gilbert. The old wagon trains used to go through there, and they'd stop at this particular well. Bettles' Well was on the incline, where the horses get so dry, and their tanks would be empty. They would replenish their water and go on.

EB: Later they called the well by another name. The first maps - when we were first married - still said Bettles' Well. I'm so sorry I didn't save one of the maps.

RM: You're saying that they went that way to Tonopah instead of going down around Coaldale.

EB: Yes. There was no other easy way.

RM: They cut across the mountains there.

EB: And that was called the Simons Road from Simons Silver Lead.

RM: Oh. And where did it come out on the Tonopah side?

FB: It came out at Crow Springs, and then from Crow Springs to Millers. Also you could make a Y and go up to Gilbert. From Gilbert, in the early 30s when we were married, we could still go to Sodaville and swim at the big swimming pool there. The pool was made of railroad ties. You had to be careful of splinters, but the water was wonderful.

[tape is turned off for a while]

RM: [papers rustling] Go ahead and finish that. Sorry, Frank.

FB: The main thing was, I never could understand why they didn't go through the Acra, even with horses. It must've been because they had so many deep washes and such to get through. (Acra was also known as McClain Junction, and variously had the names of Gilbert Junction, Millers Junction and Blair Junction.)

RM: Oh. I see - to get to Gilbert.

FB: Yes. Also to get to Tonopah. They went clear to that long hill where you start out of Mina to the east. And you pull up that hill to the old Bettles' Well - then when you went over the summit, you went from there to the outskirts of Simons, down toward Cloverdale Then you would come from the Cloverdale area back over just north of Millers and hit what was the old original road. All these roads were washboard. Our old cars would have to drive 50 miles an hour so they'd just hit the tops of the washboards. And we'd have to be very alert to washes and such.

RM: Yes. This was on the Mina side, right?

FB: Yes. If you were lying under Pilot Peak, you could look down at this big marsh that I'm talking about.

RM: Oh - it was a marsh.

FB: Oh, a big one.

RM: Now, what year was this?

FB: Well, it was before you started going around the other way. It must've been about '26 or '27 that they started to cut through there. They came to Silver Peak with the highway and down as far as Millers, but they had a station below - South Gilbert - that used to be the wagon station. And the wagons used to go through all these places. But they had to stop.

RM: When did they make the road through Coaldale?

EB: The railroad went through Coaldale.

FB: Yes; the railroad went through town.

RM: Oh. So they just followed the railroad with the highway?

FB: Yes, kind of.

RM: What year do you think they started that?

FB: Well, let's see. At that age I would be about 16. That was 1911 - and 16 -

RM: So that'd be '27 when they started going down to Coaldale.

FB: 1926, I'd say.

[tape is off for a while]

EB: Gordon Bettles met Billie in Texas. My dad was a traveler. I never went to the same school for a whole year. He liked ladies, and ladies liked him. [chuckles]

RM: Yes. Let's briefly review this so that I make sure that I have it right. Your grandfather moved to Sodaville shortly after his wife's death, and he had 3 little boys, and 2 of the boys were put in the - what was it called again?

EB: Mount Tamilpais Military School out of San Francisco.

RM: And then your father graduated from the military school?

EB: That's hazy.

RM: Yes. But then he attended the University of Nevada.

EB: I doubt if he graduated from that, because if he was married when he was 21, he probably just got started.

RM: And then he worked as a truck driver, and came down with some spinal damage and then moved to Mina. Meanwhile, he had married your mother and they had you and your sister . .

EB: Helen and Edith.

RM: And then your mother passed away in the flu epidemic.

EB: Yes.

RM: Your grandparents took over and raised you and your sister. Meanwhile, your dad was off working at other places, and sometimes you would be with him, and sometimes you wouldn't.

EB: Yes.

RM: What are some of the things that he did, after, say, you and Frank were married?

EB: Now, that's easier, because I'm more adult and I can look at it now. We were married in 1933 when I was 16 and Frank was 21. We've been married 54 years. [laughs]

RM: Is that right. Fifty-four years.

EB: Yes, but we started early, is what I'm trying to say. [chuckles] Instead of a child bride, I was a juvenile delinquent. [laughter] When we married, Dad had moved up to Hawthorne and he was starting a cleaning business - a cleaning plant and so forth. Then he moved on up to Fernley - they were kind of bored with the cleaning business there - and bought a ranch.

FB: Later the freeway came through where the ranch was, and they got a little extra money, had a chance to move on. They sold it . . .

EB: Yes, they sold the ranch to the freeway and then went into Reno. Fernley was where Dad was Justice of the Peace. When he had the ranch it was right on the highway. It was quite a going business, because the Hawthorne military base was there, and all the Marines who would get married would go to Fernley and have my dad marry them. And they always came back and visited. Years later they'd come back. My dad had a funny way of marrying them. He'd say, "Are you really sure you want to get married? I don't know about this," you know. [chuckles]

RM: How long was he in Fernley?

EB: Oh, he must've been in there 5 or 6 years, 'cause we'd take the children up to the ranch, and they'd have strawberries and cows, kid stuff....

RM: About what period was this?

EB: Oh, we were married in '33, so I imagine it would be '35, '6, to '40 - somewhere along in there. When he sold out in Fernley, he went to Reno. Billie had been in the cleaning business, and that's why they always strayed toward that business. They bought property on Kietzke Lane in Reno when it was out in the country - Second and Kietzke Lane, right down there where it's developed, now. He did wholesale cleaning for all the cleaning plants in Reno.

Then Billie contracted a terrible illness - it was similar to a stroke. I helped take care of her. She had lots of guts, though. She really made up her mind [to get well], and Dad was willing. Money - whatever they needed - she got.

FB: They went to Tecopa, California, to bathe at the hot springs.

EB: Billie had so much confidence that she was going to make everything work again. For a while she was in a wheelchair

She liked the people at Tecopa. It wasn't at the main hot springs, it was the private hot springs in Tecopa. And so Dad had a friend with Pacific Coast Borax. It's an English company, but he was the American - I forget the man's name.

RM: Was it Gower? Harry Gower?

EB: Probably. Yes. It's a familiar name. I never met him, but he and my dad were friends.

FB: They were at the springs for months.

EB: Months; yes. But they liked living down there. So then Dad looked up - probably Harry - and said, "What about this T&T Ranch?"

RM: Just let me interrupt you - sorry. Did he know Harry Gower before?

EB: Yes.

RM: Where did he know him from?

EB: Darned if I know. My dad knew everybody. My dad would come in and have a cup of coffee here and know all about you before he left. I don't know how he knew all these people. He was [a person who'd] stop and get a cup of coffee . . .

FB: He'd stop and get a cup of coffee at any little business place on the highway.

EB: Well, he was a salesman, too.

FB: He'd drive you nuts to go anywhere with, because he always had to have that cup of coffee.

EB: He'd never drink the coffee - just visit with everybody.

FB: He was a nervous man, and he'd get all wound up. All of a sudden he'd jump up from having his coffee half done, and he'd get in the car and take off again. [laughter]

EB: One time he left Frank sitting in the restaurant. [laughter]

RM: He'd talked to Harry Gower, then, about . .

EB: Yes. For the T&T Ranch - wasn't that a railroad company?

RM: The railroad owned the ranch there, yes.

EB: I'm not sure the Pacific Coast Borax owned it, but it had something to do with it.

RM: They were the real owners; yes.

EB: So anyway, my folks sold everything in Reno, and moved down there for Billie's health.

RM: Moved down to the T&T? When was that?

EB: To the T&T Ranch.

FB: I'd say about 1950 [see Tape Two, Side One].

RM: OK, tell me about the T&T, now. What did it look like?

EB: Well, I'll tell you what happened. Our little Laurie got a new pair of skates for her birthday that morning, here in Bishop. And we were going over to visit my dad then for first time on the ranch. And so we're driving along, and driving, on this dusty white dirt road with big holes in it, and you can't see anything for miles around, nothing.

FB: But creosote everyplace.

EB: And we drive up in front of my dad's place . . . He always made a home. Wherever he was, he always made the house as nice as he could make it. Well, here was one of these railroad buildings - this tall, orangey building, you know. This was the house, and our little daughter looks around, and she says, "Gosh, I'm glad I didn't bring my skates!"

[laughter] So evidently she'd thought, "Well, maybe I can skate when I go to Grandpa's house." And that's the way the Amargosa Valley was when they moved in there. Their front yard, back yard, everywhere - dirt.

FB: With one exception.

EB: What was that?

FB: They had those big, beautiful, deep wells.

EB: Yes.

FB: The casings were in place and everything.

EB: My dad knew from living in Texas that this was really valuable. Then, to make a long story short, they had a nice home there. They had a nice ranch eventually.

RM: Well, describe the ranch as you remember it. What all was there?

EB: [chuckles] Well, I'm kind of like Laurie - I'm glad I didn't bring my skates. [laughter] There weren't any buildings when we first went there. You'd see a little shacky thing over there and the rest was all this . . . My dad said to us, "Why don't you take up a piece of this property? I can make arrangements so you can." We were young, then - our kids were little. And Frank always looks into everything, especially if my dad said so . .

FB: At \$4.40 a day we didn't have much buying power.

EB: We worked for the state, then. But we came back and asked our agricultural representative, who happened to be one of our friends, and he said, "Leave it alone. If it's got that mesquite, it'll be dry - it'll never be worth anything. Because nothing grows where that mesquite grows. It's the only thing that grows."

So we said, "Well, gee, sorry, Dad. There's nothing we can do about it." But look at the alfalfa and the hay and everything, now. That's life!

RM: By mesquite, you mean creosote [also known as greasewood].

EB: Creosote, yes.

RM: Describe the valley the first time you went there.

EB: Just a huge big sand bank with miles of dry wash.

RM: He was the only one living in the farm area, wasn't he? - He and Billie?

FB: Yes.

RM: Were there trees?

EB: Oh, no. It was just like going out in the middle of Death Valley.

FB: Yes, but around the wells there were old dead trees that they had planted. And he'd revived some of those.

EB: Well, this was later. He said when I first saw it.

RM: So there was nothing growing there when he moved in there.

EB: No, what had been fences, like, on the railroad ranch - that's where he was, which was great, because he could reclaim easier right there at the railroad part. At first he tried trenching the water to the land as he cleared. He cleared it all himself, because [you got] big old creosote knots in your tires, and they'd just ruin those tires; they were terrible. The hard, hard wood.

RM: Yes, I've heard.

EB: Dad tried - at first - to flood irrigate, and the water wouldn't go 20 feet. It was so sandy it sank into the soil. Then he got overhead sprinklers - he'd always liked the idea of overhead sprinklers. So he got them, but before the wheel kind came in. And he set that clock every 2-1/2 hours every night, day, wherever. He'd get up and move those sprinklers.

FB: Meantime the diesel pumps were working all the time.

EB: So he really, worked hard. And Bill, by then, was getting better. She would grow everything. They would make little vegetable and flower boxes. She could make anything grow, and she would prove that everything could be grown there.

FB: The one thing that was against that Amargosa Valley country was that all the minerals were too young. Plants have to have rust - they can't eat iron. They've got to eat iron rust - anything that's oxidized. And that country was too young; hadn't had enough water - water oxidizes minerals - and therefore it had to be helped with fertilizer.

EB: And this is why the alfalfa did [so well] after they once got it started, because alfalfa replenishes the land.

RM: Yes, right. It sets nitrogen in the soil.

CHAPTER TWO

RM: OK, he moved on there and began developing the property?

EB: Oh, yes. By then it was really quite nice. There were extra little buildings that the girls would go out and sleep in - Laura, and Billie's granddaughters Betty Lou and Mary Ann.

RM: Did he build the buildings, or move them in?

EB: Or resurrected them, as you do when you live in the desert.

RM: What were they using for the house?

EB: This same yellow building.

EB: It wasn't a railroad station - it was the little joined houses, I think, that were for the workers. By then, there were shades up where you could go out and sit in the evening, and there were flower gardens all around. Billie must've had a 200- or 300-foot area all around her house with flower gardens and trees.

People who would know quite a bit about their life at that time are the McGillivrays, in Beatty, now. They may live in Pahrump now, but I think they're in Beatty.

RM: Yes; I recognize that name from Pahrump.

EB: They were quite good friends, and Mrs. McGillivray would visit with Billie and Mr. McGillivray and my dad would go to the Masonic meetings in Goldfield. My father had held chairs in both Fernley Lodge and Montezuma Lodge.

RM: Your dad was in his late 50s when he went down there, wasn't he?

EB: Actually I was surprised he was this young, because he'd had such an active life. There were so many other things that he'd tried. He was a nervous, happy, let's-get-on-with-it sort of a person.

RM: What did he look like?

EB: Just about my size.

EB: Yes, he was a little bit larger than you, honey. He was about 5'10", and probably weighed 160 pounds. Kept his lower teeth in his hip pocket if nobody was looking. [laughter] He couldn't stand them but he'd drag them out for people. [laughter]

By this time the ranch had gotten to be a nice showplace in the middle of the desert. Unless people really realized how hard it was, it might not have looked that big a thing, but it was beautiful. The climate was

RM: Let's talk about his crops a little bit. You say he put in alfalfa.

EB: Yes, he put in alfalfa. And then he went to Vegas and took these little feeder calves from the dairies. But that was a mistake, because it brought the flies in, so they didn't like that.

RM: What else did he grow?

EB: Mostly he was trying to get the ground to grow alfalfa. Earlier Dad had bought a piece of land up on the highway.

RM: Where was that, now?

FB: On the highway to Death Valley Junction out of Lathrop Wells.

RM: Oh, he built the Mecca Club.

EB: Yes. Frank plumbed it. Actually, Dad died while he was building the club. He went down south to a business meeting involving the Mecca Club and he died there of a heart attack. But in the meantime they had built a nice home on land behind the club.

RM: Why did he move off the ranch and over to there?

EB: He was always moving out, and happy with life, and happy with people. The ranch was OK while it was going, but, now, he'd say, "Come on, Frank, I've got to go get a package of cigarettes." So he'd drive over to Lathrop Wells, 8 miles or something like that, to get one package of cigarettes.

FB: Just about my size.

EB: Yes, he was a little bit larger than you, honey. He was about 5'10", and probably weighed 160 pounds. Kept his lower teeth in his hip pocket if nobody was looking. [laughter] He couldn't stand them but he'd drag them out for people. [laughter]

By this time the ranch had gotten to be a nice showplace in the middle of the desert. Unless people really realized how hard it was, it might not have looked that big a thing, but it was beautiful. The climate was lovely. RM: Let's talk about his crops a little bit. You say he put in alfalfa. EB: Yes, he put in alfalfa. And then he went to Vegas and took these little feeder calves from the dairies. But that was a mistake, because it brought the flies in, so they didn't like that.

RM: What else did he grow?

EB: Mostly he was trying to get the ground to grow alfalfa. Earlier Dad had bought a piece of land up on the highway.

RM: Where was that, now?

FB: On the highway to Death Valley Junction out of Lathrop Wells.

RM: Oh, he built the Mecca Club.

EB: Yes. Frank plumbed it. Actually, Dad died while he was building the club. He went down south to a business meeting involving the Mecca Club and he died there of a heart attack. But in the meantime they had built a nice home on land behind the club.

RM: Why did he move off the ranch and over to there?

EB: He was always moving out, and happy with life, and happy with people. The ranch was OK while it was going, but, now, he'd say, "Come on, Frank, I've got to go get a package of cigarettes." So he'd drive over to Lathrop Wells, 8 miles or something like that, to get one package of cigarettes.

FB: Go over and talk to Harry, and then come back.

EB: He'd visit Harry Pepping, and all the fellows.

RM: The people at Lathrop Wells.

EB: Frank would say, "Gordon, why don't you buy a carton?" He would whisper, "Don't say that, Frank."

RM: He wouldn't have any excuse to go . . . [laughs]

EB: Yes. Twice a day, or so, "I've got to have a pack of cigarettes." So I imagine it got lonely for him. A rancher's life is lonely, you know.

RM: What year was it that he moved down on the highway, then?

EB: When he did the Mecca? Oh, golly, let's see . . . the house in 1955, and the club about '58 to '60.

RM: How long was your father in the Amargosa Valley?

EB: Including Billie's illness, 10 years or more.

[tape is turned off for a while]

RM: We'll settle on a date for your father going to the Amargosa in the very early '50s. [1950 - see Chapter Three]

EB: The early '50s - yes.

RM: And meanwhile, they sold the T&T after starting the Mecca Club in about 1958?

EB: No, Dad still had it. I don't quite know Dad and Billie's business, so don't hold me to the details too closely . . . they had to encourage people to come out. It wasn't as if any land in that area was prime property, so you made a deal with one, you made a deal with the other. You lived on this for a number of years, and cleared so much land, and that sort of thing. And it wasn't affluent times for people, either.

FB: And you had the 5-acre situation - Desert Entry.

EB: So anyway, to make a long story short, his life was sort of problematical until they started to speak of Rural Electric Power. I think that's about when he decided to do the Mecca Inn for sure.

FB: But he used to clear land for people.

EB: Yes, because he had a big Majors tractor.

RM: Oh, so that's how he made a lot of his money.

EB: Yes, his daily money. Because by that time, he put all the money from his Reno businesses into the ranches and things like that. He had a big Majors tractor and a land-leveler. And he would encourage people to come by going and helping them do their land, and that sort of thing, so when the power came in the land would be ready. My dad and Hank and Frank and many others were working together on the power. I can remember them going over to Fish Lake Valley and other areas, attending meetings a year or two before the power was a reality.

RM: He was still alive when the power came in, then?

EB: Well, that was interesting . . . The day of his services, the power had just been turned on in Lathrop Wells. As the procession from Beatty to Las Vegas passed through Lathrop Wells they dimmed the lights - a lovely tribute.

RM: But he's buried in Vegas.

EB: He's buried in Las Vegas - yes.

RM: Could you tell me a little bit about Billie?

EB: Yes, she was a nice, interesting person.

RM: Was she about his age?

EB: Oh, I think she was a little younger. She's about 85 now. She was maybe 5 years younger than he. Billie was good for my dad and she was bad for him. She was good for him in that he always had a good home. If he would work it she would keep it up, and she was the gardener and she was the cleaning plant operator. But she wasn't too great with kids, with her own or with us, [chuckles] either one. But you can't take over teenaged kids, either. They're pretty stinking. [laughs] And these 2 girls were used to having 5 stepmothers [laughter], or 4, or whatever it was by then. [laughter] So it wasn't all Billie's fault. And in later years we got along quite well.

RM: Did she stay on there at the Mecca after your father passed away?

EB: Yes. She leased the club at times and ran it herself if necessary.

RM: How long did she stay there?

EB: Oh, heavens. She moved from the Mecca maybe 10 years ago, to Pahrump. Up to that time she had been there.

RM: Did she have children by a previous marriage, or . . . ?

EB: Yes, she had 3. She wasn't a child's person. [chuckles] She was a business person and she stayed and ran the businesses.

RM: Did she run a bar there?

EB: She could. She remarried twice.

RM: After your father passed away.

EB: Yes, but that didn't work out.

RM: Why didn't they grow cotton in the Amargosa?

EB: Cottons kills land, I think, and alfalfa adds to it.

EB: Like Frank said, with this dead land, you have to keep working it. The tons and tons of fertilizer they brought into those gardens . . . If they saw a cow mark on the road they'd stop and pick it up - Bill would. She was interested in that sort of thing. My dad, maybe, would've said to forget it. [laughter] No, she was a good person.

FB: Billie finally fell on her steps in Pahrump. She got over that, but I think she felt like it was going to happen again.

EB: By now she is in her 80s, and lives in Washington State with her granddaughter, Mary Ann. That's, I think, about all that I can say. Except that my father did enjoy his lodge work very much. That was the basis - and the rest was all fluff.

RM: Is that right - that was really the core of his life.

EB: Yes, I really think so. Of all the things that he accomplished I think he enjoyed and was more gratified from that. Some people consider it a social thing, but I think he used it as the basis of his life.

RM: If there's anything else you want to say about your dad, that we've left out, or . . . ?

EB: Please allow me and Frank to personally comment, for the descendants of Billie and Gordon Bettles. You were both great parents and wonderful grandparents - we loved you dearly.

RM: Oh, this is a question I want to ask you. People have told me that in the early days the post office and bar and restaurant in Lathrop Wells was a social center. We're talking about - if you're going toward Las Vegas - the bar on the right. Well, when did they build the one on the left?

EB: What was that woman's name that they liked real well, that [had the bar and all on the right] . . . Jane Bonberg - a good friend of Billie's. Her husband was an electrician in Las Vegas. You must remember that we were of a different generation. Our folks' friends were not too familiar to us; especially if we were visiting.

RM: Pepping - you were talking about Pepping. Well, there's a gas station and another, you know. And then there's a row - the bar, and then over behind is the brothel.

RM: On the left-hand side - yes. Was it a bar, and everything, then, when you were there?

EB: Yes, but everybody always went to the one on the right. It was the good club and the one on the left was the bad club. Nowadays, you can go in the bad club and not know you're getting into it.

RM: Well, what was bad? It was tough, or . . . ?

EB: It was a cafe and service station, with a brothel in the back.

RM: But the brothel was behind.

EB: Yes, but they - intermingled. I don't know; I was never in there.

RM: Oh, I see, because you couldn't get a drink in the house. So if you wanted a drink you'd go to that other bar. I see.

CHAPTER THREE

RM: Frank, from our discussion so far I've learned that you lived in Beatty for a time. And since I'm doing research on the history of Beatty, I wonder if you could tell me what was your first contact with the town of Beatty.

FB: The first thing I learned about Nevada was that, from the north to the south, beginning with Eddie Pines, Warren Doing, Gordon Bettles, Hank Records, and all the people that I contacted, did business in a strange way: word-of-mouth with notes on paper. And they would go into quite extensive deals this way. They would buy and sell property and then it was a word of mouth or some other . . . Sometimes one would say to the other one, "Well, right now this guy paid me. I need the money, so I'm not going to give you the money for that property. But I'll pay it to you in a couple of years or X number of days." And - "That's fine. I don't need the money; I'll wait for it," was the reply. I couldn't get over this.

RM: From what you'd seen before in other places?

FB: Well, California does business a lot differently. [chuckles] So anyhow, these people were doing a word-of-mouth business. A lot of people had a lot of property around there that they were beholden to others for, you know. This was quite a thing to me. But anyway, it seems their word was always good, right up even to the day of their death. They would tell you, "Well, Joe Bloke owes me so much. You can check with him and tell the wife that. He'll give you the money for this or that or the other." This still, I guess, could be said about Nevada in different places. I've heard Bill Beko go through expressions like that. And people that I know in general - all good people - Ralph Lisle used that system. I've heard him say that. It was a matter of honor. In other words, it was an honor deal

RM: Yes; so it was just a handshake and your word.

FB: Yes. Consequently, when I went to close out my business, some of these little honor deals cropped up that weren't finished yet. I wonder how much property in Nevada is hanging fire because they ran out of the honor system. You know, people pass away. But anyhow, this is the way we went into Nevada. We tried to buy property and the guy said, well, he got it on a piece of paper - just a piece of an envelope - and that's the way I was going to get it. Well, I didn't settle for that, so I finally wound up buying Block 80 down on the south end of town.

RM: Tell me a little bit about Block 80. What's its history?

FB: When I moved there, Block 80 had the old highway signs all over it and still had blacktop on it. And as you looked it over, you found where the locomotives that came to Beatty had to pull in a triangle and back down to get turned around. The reason they had to do this was, when they were going into Rhyolite, which was a short distance away, the grade was steeper than the

normal railroad. As they backed in to Rhyolite, the water would flow to the head of the boiler plates. They went in several times straight ahead before they did this, and they blew their locomotives up because the water could not get to the right end of the flues. They ruined one engine particularly there, according to history, so they made this turn-around. It also served for other people that wanted to come around and go back - the Borax people down in Death Valley. So I looked this piece of property over, and it had these railroad indications . .

RM: Where is Block 80 located, Frank?

FB: Well, the Desert Inn sits on the back half of it now. It's 20 lots, 50' by 100' long, including an alleyway and 2 streets.

RM: Does the Burro Inn sit on any of it?

FB: Strange as it may seem, they had a little bit of the corner that was [chuckles] questionable. [laughs] But in the grant for the new highway, I guess they didn't get down to the nitty-gritties, quite, on fractions of blocks and whatnot. But I always figured that they had their office on my property. [laughs] But anyhow we looked this place over, of course, and Warren Doing said, "Well, tell you what you do, Old Brock," he talked kind of fast. "You just move in and go to work on that." And he said, "That's my property and I'll give you a deed for it if you need . . ." I was a little reluctant, because I was from California.

"Well," I said, "I'd like to get a little more stable than that. I want to buy the property."

He said, "I'll get with your father-in-law (Gordon Bettles). We'll take care of everything. He'll come and tell you about it."

Well, Gordon came back and said, "You can have that Block 80, Frank, but you don't have to pay for it now."

And I said, "I want to put the money down for the property. I don't want to put anything on property that I don't own."

So he came back and said, "OK, Frank. We got the price figured out." I said, "How much is it?"

"The taxes on that is \$17 a lot, and you get it for that."

So I got to thinking, "Why, hell, that's unreasonable for them - they should get a little profit on them."

So Warren said "No, no. That's what we paid for it when we took it in on some taxes; that's what you get it back for." He said, "The taxes haven't been paid, so, whatever you do, you'd better get up there and get it taken care of." I guess the tax collector didn't believe in the word of mouth meaning anything. [chuckles] But anyhow, we handled that, then. We bought the property for the taxes, you might say.

So anyway, we got in there and started building, and I ran a tractor around there because we had to get that old highway off of there, which was a hell of a thing. We came in with a tractor and a ripper, and I started ripping up towards Second Street. Well, there was a little old lady living in a trailer up about 1/2, 3/4 of a block up. She came out, she said, "Are you Brockman?"

I said, "Yes."

"You tear up that hard stuff - that road - another foot further and," she said, "I'm going to go get my gun and shoot you."

EB: Her name was Panamint Annie.

FB: So [chuckles] I said, "Well, this has been condemned. This is no longer a thoroughfare."

RM: Was the highway where it is now?

FB: No, it was the length of Block 80. They moved it from one end of Block 80 to the other.

RM: And that's where it is now?

FB: Yes. It used to come out of Beatty and kind of veer over to Bare Mountain.

RM: Yes.

FB: Well, then they took Block 80 and moved to where it stands now. And it goes past the Burro Inn. Anyhow, she was living and using this street, and people were using this old highway for an access road. It would go right straight through Block 80.

I said, "Well, I'm going to have trouble." So I went around to everybody in town [who] had a sign there and told them who I was, and Block 80 was mine, I'd like them to get their signs taken down. I gave them 30 days' notice to take their signs down, put them over on the other highway -whatever they wanted to do with them. Old Man Elliott came down and said, "Well, I'll leave my sign down on that highway, 'cause that's highway property, as long as I want."

I said, "Mr. Elliott, the property was traded. It is no longer the thoroughfare of the state," or whatever in the world it is. You can move your sign, or I'll take them down after 30 days. But," I said, "When I take them down, it'll be with a tractor." [laughter] So he was very, very unsociable with me.

RM: What did he own - Elliott?

FB: The Wagonwheel Motel. Later on we got to be pretty good friends. But [chuckles] it was pretty strained [then].

RM: Now, at this time there was nothing down at that end of town, was there?

FB: We were out in the bushes.

EB: There were the corrals down there that some fellow owned up in Carson City.

RM: Now, what year was this?

FB: We went in there in '57.

FB: Cedar Street was the one in question. So anyway, I worked several months cleaning and clearing land. And in the course of knocking the sand dunes down I picked a pipe up, and [chuckles] had water squirting everywhere.

RM: Is that right - you hit a pipe that came clear down there. What was it - the old pipe to the railroad?

FB: No, they put pipe across to get to the corrals. When this water was squirting out, I had to do something [chuckles] about it, because I had a 2"-line shooting up in front of me. I found the doggone valve, and I got it turned down.

RM: When did you hit the tar pit, now?

FB: Well, when we got to looking at this tar pit, I could tell when the tractor was running over it.

RM: Was this before or after you broke the water?

FB: Right about the same time. So then I got to investigating. There was a big door on there - a heavy thing. I pried it up and I was able to look down and see the tar below.

RM: How big was it?

FE: Well, you could throw a locomotive into it, [chuckles] as I remember. And it had the tar in the bottom. You see, the creosote from the wood and stuff would gather on the boilers and they have to scrape that, because it acted as an insulation. They'd pull them in there with the fire box and scrape these locomotives, and they'd go down into the pit. And they didn't have to worry about hauling that icky stuff around. At the same time they kind of used the property as a little roundhouse. I really got this out of books later on, you know, not then. We finally opened it up and filled it with sand as we scraped the dirt down.

RM: I see. The box is still there, then?

FB: Oh, yes.

RM: Where would it be?

FB: It would be almost under the motel office.

EB: Almost to the highway.

RM: Between the highway and the motel office.

FB: Yes, it was just off of the right of way, because I was worried about it being so near the highway.

[tape is turned off for a while]

RM: Now, you were living in Ridgecrest before you moved to Beatty?

EB: Frank was the service manager at the Oldsmobile-Cadillac dealership there. We owned our home and so forth there. We felt we needed a change, and headed for Beatty. Also, I had had leg injuries from an automobile accident.

RM: How long did it take you to get your motel built?

FB: Oh, about 2 years.

EB: We had to go back to Queen of the Angels Hospital in Los Angeles several times and have my leg worked on again. Chlo Lisle, and Ralph, would keep Laura when Frank came down to visit me at the hospital She also stayed with the Fuller Looneys - they had 5 girls.

RM: Laura is your daughter?

EB: Yes. The one who lives in Tonopah.

RM: So then you were involved in the start-up of the Lions Club, too. FB: Yes. About the time that they built this building across the street the Burro Inn. While they were building that I'd go over and learn to build, and then I'd come back and lay blocks.

RM: Oh, so they were building the Burro Inn at the same time.

EB: The original Burro Inn (Atomic Club).

FB: Yes. They started that about the time I had my walls down.

EB: Yes, but it was different from what you think, because they first started it with maybe 30, 40 of these dual-trailer motels around.

RM: Oh, yes. Modular things.

EB: Modular motel units around the ends, and in the center he built a whole casino - all glass in front.

FB: They laid the slab and then they took tar paper in there, and put in framework for another - two pegs. He was going to make 2 slabs. And they put these heavy cables - 48 of them - each way. And they'd anchor them on these edges, you know, through rings and one thing and

another. And finally, after the cement would cure, they'd have to even this reinforcing stuff - this webbing - in there. Then they would let it cure, and they had 6 or 8 posts, I think. Big 4"-posts of steel pipe tubing, they were. So then they put jacks up on top of them and the jacks would come down with these chains and hook onto these hooks that they had, and about 8 guys would stand there, and just about the time a crane would strike these jacks, and all of a sudden the whole damn roof would start caning up.

RM: Down at the Burro Inn?

FB: Yes. And they kept pulling that roof up, and then they had holes in these seamless tubings where they put pins through. And some guy - some real nervy guy [chuckles] - went under there and put the pins in. [laughs]

RM: Wow. So that's the restaurant-casino that's there now?

FB: Yes; right.

RM: And then, when did they build that motel there?

EB: Ten years ago, maybe.

RM: They took the modulars out?

FB: Yes, there are no more modulars out there.

RM: How many units did your motel have?

EB: We only had 5, but we were filled all of the time. In fact, the Small Business Loan (the government agency) people would stay at our place and they'd ask us why we didn't build more.

FB: We were the X-15 hideout.

EB: Yes, all the X-15 kids stayed there. And salesmen who would go from Reno to Vegas didn't want to stay in Vegas, so they would sleep here and go and do their business or vice-versa. We were filled most of the time.

FB: We were Auto Club accepted.

EB: Yes, with 5 little units - which is very unusual.

RM: Did you do the cleaning?

FB: Well, no, we hired a lady. And Frank helped too - he was real sweet about it. Because sometimes you would rent a room 2 or 3 times. Not for what you think, but because it was hot in the daytime, they didn't have so much air conditioning, so some people would rent a room in the middle of the day and travel at night. Well, naturally, you had to go in and clean because they'd used the room. So we would do that. But we hired people - if they'd come - if they showed up. [chuckles]

FB: It was quite an adventure.

RM: When did you leave there?

FB: I think it was '61.

RM: You didn't want to stay?

EB: Frank doesn't like to do paperwork, and I'd do all that bit. So I said, "OK, I'll make you a bargain. I'll go list the motel with the real estate people in Vegas, and you get the Small Business Loan man. He told you that all you have to do was just call him." He gave us his card, and the papers, and all. Then we came over here for our anniversary on the 7th of August. Our daughter Laura was a little older then, and she and her friend Karen Looney were watching the motel. She called and said, "The real estate people were here and they were bringing somebody out." And I said, "Well, just let them in. They know what they're doing." So they bought it.

RM: They did it. They were fast.

EB: [whistles] Right. Frank was so provoked at me then, because he didn't really think that we could do it.

FB: I came home and here's this little old runt of a car sitting there, with the top down . .

EB: Sportsy.

FB: A big guy sitting there with his eyes covered with colored glasses his shades - and his red beret on.

And I said, "Well, what can I do for you?"

And he said, "I'm here to buy the business."

I said, "What!" [laughs]

FB: So then he went back to Vegas and told the real estate people that we'd listed it with - that she had listed it with - that I wouldn't sell it to him.

EB: They said, "That's fine, you just have to pay us our commission and you can back out, but we found you a person that said that they would pay your price." So Sir Lancelot backs down. Said, "I'd love to." [laughs]

FB: Well, hell, they want 10 percent of my motel just to do that, you see.

RM: Yes, sure.

FB: He paid us every payment for years - for 30 years. [chuckles]

EB: He keeps it clean. What you forget when you go out in those little country boonie towns, which we did and didn't know about 'cause we were stupid and from California - is, you have to do the laundry. And if you want ironed sheets, you have to iron the sheets.

FB: You had to buy an iron that could iron out there where there's no electricity.

EB: So Frank would convert electric mangles into gas mangles and we'd sit there . . . Every time we'd visit with a guest, all day long, I would be mangling away.

RM: You'd be ironing your sheets? [whistles]

FB: She insisted they had to be ironed.

EB: Well, I never stayed at a place that didn't have ironed sheets in those days.

FB: Nobody else in town ironed their sheets.

EB: Well, we were Auto Club. [laughs] You know, you don't get to be Auto Club that easily, really.

FB: But anyway, it was quite an experience.

EB: It was fun.

RM: Did you do any mining there?

FB: No, I came to Bishop to do my mining.

RM: Oh, I see. You had the same mine? You've had it a long time.

FB: Since '50, yes. That must've been about when Gordon went to the Amargosa Valley.

EB: It was like my dad going after a pack of cigarettes. Every time Frank would want to leave, he'd head for the mine. [laughter] You know, "Got to get a pack of cigarettes." [laughs]

FB: We also got involved with the ambulance service in Beatty.

EB: There were terrible accidents on Highway 95 and very little organized help.

EB: Beatty had a sheriff's officer called Gunsmoke - a nice, big Indian - an older man. Gunsmoke's station wagon was used to transport injured people to Tonopah to the hospital. Between Ralph Lisle and Jack Crowell and Ken Priest and many more, they got the county to buy Beatty an ambulance. But the town had to keep the ambulance clean. They'd bring the ambulance down to our motel to clean, and I don't know how many old, cruddy sheets I got, [chuckles] and my good ones would be gone, because I'd get the soiled ones - maybe some of the other wives thought the same way, too - I don't know. But with me, I was kind of commercial, you know. We'd clean the ambulance down there and it would be ready to go.

CHAPTER FOUR

FB: During the birth of the ambulance, we arranged that somebody in town would always be available to drive it. Through the Lions Club we negotiated a plan where we'd inform one another when we were gone - we'd always know who was available. I had failed to leave word at the Exchange Club we were out of town. This was a time where we were all doing our bit somewhere else. So this ambulance [call] came in from Lathrop Wells: Mother and her son in trouble with a wreck down at Lathrop Wells. [chuckles] So Laney . . .

EB: That's Elaine, the owner of the Burro Inn now. Do you know her?

RM: No, I haven't met her.

EB: She's a charming person - everybody loved Laney.

FB: Yes. So anyhow, she takes the call. And she calls around, and none of these other guys are there, so it boils to the Brockmans. Laney calls up the motel and says, "Brockman?"

And Laura says, "Yes?"

She says, [chuckles] "You and I are going to go down to Lathrop Wells with the ambulance - a mother and son accident." Our daughter was about 15 then . . .

EB: They go to Lathrop Wells, Laney's driving, Laura's in the back with all the tubes and things. Well, they drive up down there and the woman was not hurt. But she's about 80. Her son is about 55 or 60, and he is in charge of one of the brothels down there. And drunker than a skunk. [laughter] They load that guy in the back of the ambulance, and Laura's in the back with the patient. Laney's driving [laughs] with one eye on the mirror. All the way up, he kept telling Laura he could get her a good job, and how pretty she was, etc. [laughter] Oh, he was so looped. He didn't bother her, actually. Laney would've run him off the road if he had. So Laney drives up in front of the Exchange, and the guys are all standing around - they've heard of the accident in Lathrop Wells. Laney gets out of the ambulance and she says, "I'm not driving anymore."

FB: [laughs] "I'm not going a foot farther with him." [laughter] So the guys had showed up [by] then. They took the ambulance on to Tonopah.

EB: Yes, they took it up to Tonopah. For years we teased the kids about the time that they picked up the boy and his mother. [laughter]

RM: Was the ambulance set up as a part of the fire department, or was it separate?

FB: It was the Lions Club initiative, but the fire department took it over later.

EB: They didn't have too strong a fire departments. This is why they started the Lions Club - the town needed a service group.

FB: Beatty had a little hospital committee. All this time, we were trying to get a doctor to go to Beatty. And this was something we needed, but something that no doctor would want to do. Some started a health department, and I was in on it. We found out that the girls were contributing - had been, for several years - to a public service. What were we to do with this money the girls were contributing?

RM: You're talking about the . . .?

EB: The houses of prostitution girls.

RM: When they were located in town.

EB: Yes.

RM: There was the Red Rooster, and . .

EB: Right across from our property.

RM: Oh, it was right over there.

EB: Yes, and the other one - the Willow Tree - was nearby.

RM: One thing I must give that business a lot of credit for - they did put out the money for things like that.

EB: Oh, it's a shame - those people are so put upon.

RM: You mean the prostitutes.

EB: Yes.

FB: But anyhow, we had enough money through the county and the girls to buy a Dodge panel, and that was our first ambulance.

RM: So, are you saying that the houses of prostitution contributed to the ambulance?

FB: Certainly did.

EB: And they contributed to every high school function. Every everything. When we first went there, and they had their house right in town, there, a lot of the people said, "Now, this isn't

good for this town. It's growing, and they shouldn't be in town." Well, all the PTA and everything said, "Leave them alone; leave them alone. They're giving us money - look at this! Look at this!"

FB: The goodies of the town versus the PTA.

EB: Bill Beko came in, and I can remember that bulletin board up there, where Bill Beko said that the girls were to be moved out of town. Bill had just come out of college and people were so adverse to it, you know. And mean to him - just like it was his idea alone [chuckles].

RM: And it wasn't his at all, then?

EB: Well, he was trying to follow the law.

RM: And the law said that you couldn't have it in the town.

EB: It's a public nuisance type of thing.

RM: So it was Beko that initiated the move out?

EB: He tried it.

RM: Who initiated it?

FB: The local citizens.

RM: Where were they located? Behind the Burro Inn?

FB: Yes. The Red Rooster and the Willow Tree.

RM: What was the Burro Inn originally called? The Atomic Club, wasn't it? FB: Atomic Club; yes. It had about 40 trailer-type motel units.

FB: From the ambulance service, then, we went on to the Burro Races. This was a group of about 25 or 30 guys down in the Lions Club, down in the bottom of the Exchange Club - we'd meet there weekly. We had a lot of time for a lot of good ideas. A fellow by the name of Wells who worked for the Forestry over in Death Valley came over with this idea that we should have this Apple Valley Burro Race up in our town, too. So we started working on it. And in the formalities of it - how were we going to feed people? We built a chuckwagon, first, to feed the people. Then Mel Eades came up with the idea of getting a refrigerated semi out of Vegas loaded with these clogs - beef clogs, you know, which is the front shoulder of the beef. And the guy who ran the Standard station - I can't think of his name, but he was a nice person - knew how to make sausage and everything. And he went for that. And next thing you know, we've got quite a thing going. So we're sitting there one night, and discussing the various aspects, and

[chuckles] Ralph Lisle gets up and he said, [chuckles] "Tell you fellows what we're going to do." Well, everybody gets quiet because we're listening to Ralph, you know. He was spokesman for the group, practically. [chuckles]

RM: For the Lions Club?

FB: Well, for all of us, yes.

EB: He was the stable part of it.

FB: He said, (it was drawn out, what he said) [slow speech]: "We got that old jail cell, there, and," he said, "we can dig a hole with a tractor.

And we'll just sit this whole thing down like that, and we'll leave this little window here - the passage window - open where we can put our meat down, and then we can put our tin on top of it, and we'll bring our ties in. If you go down the road here a ways, out on the desert, there's still a lot of old ties. And we'll pick them up, and we'll get one hell of a good fire going in there. And," he said, "we'll put our clogs in there." [chuckles] Pile the clog in there. "So," he said, "we'll be all right."

Well, you know, we got the hole dug, and we got this jail put down, and we filled it back up because the iron work of it would make a big square oven out of it. So we get the ties down - and we had to cut ties in half and we had to get them down there and get than burning. And, man, they made a hot fire. So we put the tin down on top of the hot fire when we had enough coals, as you do, you know. And then we started loading the meat in. Then I said, "Well, that's good. I've done my part. I'm going home and rest." I was dead tired, then.

So here comes a knock-knock at the door: "We've got troubles, Frank."

And I said, "Troubles? What kind of troubles?" I said, "Just forget that for . . ." - I think it was a total 8 or 9 hours, 6 or 8 hours [chuckles].

He said, "You know that little old hole in the jail where we put the meat through?"

"Yeah?"

"It ain't there anymore. It just closed in." [laughs]

The heat just . . .

EB: Caved in.

FB: The heat just closed that thing all in. He said, "And we've only got about 6 inches to get than out now." So back we go again. [chuckles] We had to drag the meat out of it, see.

EB: They took the big things and scraped the fire all away.

FB: We had to pull the fire and everything on it. Finally we did save our meat. But what to do with half-cooked meat. [chuckles] So we went around to everybody with an oven, and the restaurants, and said, 'We've got to have your oven. You going to loan it to us?'

They said, "What?" These are people we're in competition [chuckles] with. "Yes, you can have our oven." Real nice - the whole town. And we went around; everybody who had a big oven, we stuck meat in it.

Then I went to Jack, and I said, "Jack, we've only got 400 pounds of meat in the oven - we've still got 400 to do something with. Let's get going."

"Well, what do you suggest?"

I said, "Well, down back of my motel there was the place where they had worked on locomotives," or some damn thing. They had a big deep well, like where you used to get under cars and grease them. And so I said, "Let's see what we can do with that."

So we went to his place, and he said, "I'll bring the tractor down;

I'll meet you down there." So we dug another pit [chuckles] and put the 400 pounds in there and saved it all. Boy, I tell you, that was something. You've just got to see teamwork like that to understand it.

RM: Yes. So you had another pit on your property, besides this tar pit, huh?

EB: Oh, we had all kinds of junk on that thing.

FB: Yes, but this wasn't on my property. It was a little closer to Bill Beko's lots due south but kind of down in the big old wash that goes through there.

RM: Is it OK if we write a number on the back of each one of these pictures?

EB: Oh, yes.

RM: OK. Then I'm going to have you tell about it in the tape recorder.

RM: Here we have picture #1. Do you want to describe it?

EB: This is in front of Bare Mountain - a beautiful pink mountain - it's too bad it isn't in color. It's on Cedar and Highway 95 into Vegas. It was a 5-unit motel.

RM: Your motel - the Desert Inn Motel.

EB: It was built with the idea of adding 5 more, 5 more, 5 more. Which, of course, we never got to.

RM: Yes. And when do you think this picture was taken?

EB: '58, '59. And we had the new trailer house - we bought a new unit for our own use.

RM: OK, let's see. I think Frank's got picture #2.

FB: That's the same exposure.

EB: This is a little closer - you see a lot more of the motel.

RM: OK, picture #3 is a very old picture it-mounted on a piece of some kind of board material. Could you describe that, Edith?

EB: That's my dad and his Mount Tamalpais military school uniform out in San Francisco.

RM: He's on the right, isn't he?

EB: Yes, he's the standing one. And then A.J. Bettles is my uncle, who's since deceased, also. And then my Uncle Alex, who's deceased now - Alex Bettles. Alex was the middle of the 3 children and A. J. was the little one.

RM: This must've been taken about 1905 or '06, it looks like. He's probably about 12 there.

EB: Yes - 13, 12.

RM: OK, this is picture #6. It's a little portrait shot.

EB: Yes - of Frank Brockman.

RM: Your husband, right?

EB: Yes, my husband. Looking sort of jolly in his way. [laughter]

RM: And then, let's see, we've got some more. What was . . .

FB: This is #5.

RM: OK, picture #5 - could you describe that one?

FB: It was taken at Harvey Goss's Wagonwheel in Tahoe. We went up there to promote the burro race. A little Beatty Lions Club was on his back. As you can see, the burro's very put out with me, because he was trained to walk alongside of me. But the boys thought, in a big place like that, I'd better put a rope on him. I'm pulling him through because he didn't want the rope. You see Mel Eades, and the lady was the promoter from the Harvey Goss Company. Harry Pepping is standing over there, and I should remember the other parties, but I don't.

RM: Which one's Harry Pepping?

FB: He's the smaller guy, here.

RM: The small guy with the tie in the background.

FB: Yes. He was quite a figure in Lathrop Wells for many years.

RM: Oh, that's Pepping. Yes, OK. He ran the bar.

EB: Right.

RM: And then who ran the post office - was it his wife?

FB: Mrs. Bonberg.

EB: Yes, but it isn't his wife. Harry was an employee, but an owner- employee. He had an interest in it, but he never let on that he had that interest.

RM: Now, who was Mel Eades?

EB: Mel Eades was about the 5th or 6th president of the Lions Club.

FB: He owned the grocery store near the Exchange Club. Harvey Goss's was just being built then. At this time we were having problems getting the burro up to the 4th or 5th floor to have our convention. They generally have a [freight] elevator shaft, you know. But the elevator shaft hadn't been finished yet. They were using what they had of it to a point where it couldn't be used by anybody but the construction people. We were told to use the escalators and the people's elevator. So I got him up the escalator. [laughs] We had a picture but I've lost it.

RM: I'll bet that was funny.

FB: I think only the first story was escalator, and then we went over to the elevator. I pushed the button and the doors opened and the little animal just stood there and kind of shook a little bit. So I couldn't figure out what. I thought, "Well, I'll make him believe I open it." So I pushed the button - it closed. Then I pushed the button, went over and did this to open it up, and it was all right - he'd get in it then. I never could quite figure . . . When we got up to where the convention was, the floors were like glass - they had waxed them. We started to get out of the elevator - he was glad to get out of there - but when he hit that slick stuff, [laughter] he was about to fold up.

RM: I've seen that. Yes, that's really funny.

FB: So I said, "Come here, Harry." We got alongside him and grabbed him by the ears and the tail end, and walked as close as we could, and we got him over to the side entrance. They've got this big head table over here, and we've got sand boxes to catch the drippings if there were any, but we dried him out a long time before that.

EB: They never had trouble with him. They just didn't give him water and food ahead of time. They never had a bit of trouble.

FB: Anyhow, the sandboxes were over there, and we couldn't get him to go through that door, then. He was afraid it was another elevator. So I said, "Harry, what are we going to do?"

He said, "I'd better hold them up." The band had an entrance sound for him. Big band there, you know.

EB: There were 300 or 400 people in this group.

FB: Eight hundred. So [chuckles] Harry went over and said, "Can you hold up for a minute? We got a problem."

"Sure, sure." So they played another tune or two of whatever they were playing. He came back and I said, "Well, maybe that wasn't such a good idea." This little animal's just standing there shaking, you know. I said, "Maybe he needs the music."

Harry went back again [laughs] - Harry and I drove one another crazy on a party like that. He said, "They're going to strike it up."

So they struck up the Star Spangled Banner for a minute and this little animal straightened up, and I said, "Let's go." I let her go and I walked out there, and she was doing it like she'd been doing it all her life.

EB: Frank said she raised her head up and went all up and down the tables, and let the women pet her, and they fed her lettuce.

FB: Everybody gave her the lettuce off of their table. She was busy for a long time then.

EB: She was just like an actress.

FB: The different clubs bid on her, and Heavenly Valley paid \$800 for her. The money went to the blind foundation. We turned her over to them, but the guy who was doing the bidding sobered up and he reneged on his pledge. So Harvey Goss himself took the burro, and put him in his big barn there for his hybrid horses and everything. For some reason or other she died within a week.

RM: Oh!

FB: She didn't want to go in that barn.

EB: Frank felt really bad.

RM: Gee.

EB: It was really a little showoff, you know. Frank would take it and walk to the motel or up towards Bare Mountain, and it was a little tiny thing, it would stand like this and Frank [sound

of a foot slamming]: "Put your foot over here! Come on, get over here." So she'd reach out careful, just like she trusted him for anything he told her.

RM: Well, now, this is picture 7. That's . .

EB: That's Frank and Mrs. Eades. Not the present Mrs. Eades - the former Mrs. Eades. She had won the fifty silver dollars so she picked up her skirt and showed her cute legs. She was a darling person. Frank was the Lions Club president that year, so it would've been '60, '61. Somewhere along in there.

RM: OK. And this is another one of Frank. Picture 8 is of Frank at the same thing, as president. And then this one is your father - Gordon Bettles. Could you describe that one? That's the last one. It's a portrait shot.

EB: Portrait of Kerak Fez. Actually, the fez is what we took the picture of. My father did not like to have his picture taken, so we have very few family pictures. I convinced him that everyone had a photo of their fez. [reading from the picture] "Bettles did serve as Worshipful Master . . ."

RM: "Of the Fernley Lodge . . ."

EB: ". . . and the Montezuma Lodge." And I think he got his fez in Reno. But he might have been a representative of Fernley. I don't know how that works.

RM: How old does your father look, there, do you think?

EB: Well, actually, when he was in Fernley, he was probably fiftyish.

RM: I think that about covers it, and we're almost at the end of the tape. Is there anything else you want to add?

EB: Well, thank you so much.

[tape is off for a while]

RM: Frank, you were just telling about how you used the old town hall in Beatty while you were there.

FB: Kenneth Priest and I . .

RM: Priest?

FB: Kenneth Priest - an Episcopal minister. He still lives in Beatty. He is a man who had worked with the scouts; he'd worked with children in Beatty. All the grown people in Beatty can remember their outings with Kenneth and all about him.

RM: What did you use the town hall for?

FB: The Lions Club used that to have dances for the kids - to give them something to do. We bought the equipment - the big speakers and the phonographs and the whole damn works, and we called it Meander Inn. And everybody under 21 could come in, but if they were over 21 they couldn't.

RM: Were they still doing that when you left?

FB: No, they tore the town house down, built a new one, and I don't think they ever made a new one. But this was made so that a mike could be plugged in the floor and all the kids would come in. We charged than a minimum amount, and we threw it in the kitty, and then any kid who went anywhere could pick up a record - at that time we didn't have tapes. You could pick up a record and bring it back and the club would buy it from you - give you money for it. So we always had good records.

RM: Sure; you had the records the kids wanted. That was a good idea.

EB: If any kid went to town and bought up to 5 records - they were \$1 a record in those days - we would reimburse them. So they all had their own kind of records.

RM: You had their music. That was a neat idea.

EB: If we had a dance ourselves, then they had to listen to part ours. [chuckles]

FB: The only thing we had to do was control it, then. If some of the older guys who were 22 or 23 got a little drunk and gave us a problem, we'd met them at the door. That was really a great success. The local law said that the juveniles were a problem, so we were the local law as far as that Mender Inn was concerned. It worked out very well.

RM: That's great - that's a neat idea.

[The pictures described here are on file at Special Collections, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Library and at the Beatty, Nevada Public Library.]

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