

Interview With
TED “BOMBO”
COTTONWOOD

An Oral History conducted and edited by
Robert D. McCracken

Nye County Town History Project
Nye County, Nevada
Tonopah
1987

COPYRIGHT 1990
Nye County Town History Project
Nye County Commissioners
Tonopah, Nevada
89409



Ted "Bombo" and Jane Cottonwood
1987

CONTENTS

[Preface](#)

[Acknowledgments](#)

[Introduction](#)

[CHAPTER ONE](#)

Early Indian workers on the railroad and at Scotty's Castle; the Indian community in Beatty; pine nuts and other foods; trapping birds and animals; school in Beatty; Sheriff John Vignolo; World War II.

[CHAPTER TWO](#)

Working as a miner; the ribbon factory; foreman on the county roads.

[CHAPTER THREE](#)

Memories of Wes Moreland in Rhyolite and others; camping under the trees in the summer.

PREFACE

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

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

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

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

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As project director, I would like to express my deep appreciation to those who participated in the Nye County Town History Project (NCTHP). It was an honor and a privilege to have the opportunity to obtain oral histories from so many wonderful individuals. I was welcomed into many homes—in many cases as a stranger--and was allowed to share in the recollection of local history. In a number of cases I had the opportunity to interview Nye County residents when 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.

All material for the NCTHP was prepared with the support of the U.S. Department of Energy, Grant No. DE-FG08-89NV10820. However, any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of DOE.

--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 Ted "Bombo" Cottonwood at his home in Beatty, Nevada - April 20, 1987

CHAPTER ONE

RM: OK, Bombo, if you could just say when and where you were born.

BC: I was born in 1932, about 3 blocks southwest of here on Amargosa. I've moved 3 blocks since I was born.

RM: What were your parents' names?

BC: Well, I didn't know my dad. My mother's name is Minnie Shoshoni. She lives in Nye County now.

RM: Is she from the area?

BC: She's been here probably all of her life. She was born on Scotty's Ranch. It's just down around the hill from Scotty's Castle. You can see it when you're coming from Death Valley into Scotty's over on the left. That's when they were building that.

RM: Her parents were working on Scotty's Castle; was that it? And she was born there?

BC: Yes.

RM: What band of the Shoshoni was she from?

BC: I don't know. There were quite a few around here back when the railroad was still running through. When they took the railroad out, most of them went to Lone Pine and Bishop.

RM: What did they do with the railroad here?

BC: They kept up the track - capping the ties, and putting new ties, and regular railroad work.

RM: Were they mostly Shoshoni?

BC: They all were

RM: Do you remember what year your mother was born?

BC: Nobody knows that for sure. The closest doctor was probably Tonopah. Like me: I was born over here and never had a record. I probably got a birth certificate here about 6 years ago.

RM: And you don't know who your dad was? Was he Indian?

BC: No. They say he was Irish.

RM: Did you live here, then, all your childhood?

BC: I've probably been gone from here 3 months out of my whole life.

RM: So you really know the place.

BC: You might say that. But I'm not very good at dates and things like that.

RM: Sure. Well, just pin it in the best you can whenever I ask you. What do you remember about your early childhood?

BC: Well, there weren't many kids; I know that. I remember all the Crowell boys; we were raised together. In those days, that was about all the kids there were my age. There were some old older kids. Then my cousins lived right next to us down here; the Strozzi's.

RM: So you're related to Dollie Gillette?

BC: Right. My mother and their mother were sisters.

RM: So the only kids your age were the Crowells?

BC: Well, after all those Indians left there weren't . . . I think the last year I went to school there were only about 7 kids in the whole high school.

RM: Did you live in the Indian community?

BC: Yes. There were little shacks down through here on this side of the Amargosa.

RM: Now, that'd be on the west side of the Amargosa?

BC: Yes. Sometimes we'd live in this little house back in here on this side of the river.

RM: Back kind of to the southeast of your present home.

BC: Yes. Then in the summertime we'd just move and live under trees and get away from the heat.

RM: So in the summer you went into the higher elevations.

BC: Yes. A lot of years we went up in the Grapevines on horseback.

RM: Were you up on the Strozzi farm?

BC: Yes. We'd spend every summer up there picking pine nuts and so forth.

RM: What did you collect besides pine nuts?

BC: There are some little red berries up on this side of Rhyolite . . .

RM: What do the Indians call them?

BC: Huupih. They're little round red berries and they're real good. Then there was a seed out there which you don't even see anymore. They used to harvest that, but today you'll see very few. It used to be that you couldn't walk through one of these; it'd trip you up, it was so thick.

RM: I wonder why it quit growing.

BC: Too many dry years.

RM: Is it drier now than it used to be?

BC: Oh, yes. Every year - at this time of the year - there used to be thousands of doves all around. Here in town and everywhere. I think I've seen 6 this year.

RM: And it's just too dry for them, or has everybody killed them off?

BC: No, there's no moisture. Nothing grows. Everything comes up in the spring, but before it can go into seed, it dries up. So there's nothing for them to eat. So they go on further south, or whatever direction they're going. This used to be the big nesting area. The Indians would eat them. You'd go out there harvesting those seeds and you'd see 2 little eggs or 2 little doves under every other bush out there. There were millions of them.

RM: How did they to catch them?

BC: My granddad used to catch them by hand. He'd find a spring somewhere, and he'd close it all up to just a little area, then he'd build a little place to stay in out of sagebrush. And when they'd come in landing to get their - start the trenches, he'd reach out and get them and stick them in a sack. He could do that till he missed, and then they'd go away for awhile.

RM: Did your grandfather live here before the whites came to Beatty?

BC: I didn't know him very well. I can remember him, but that's about it. He was a trapper.

RM: What was his name?

BC: Tule George.

RM: Did he get that name from Tule Springs?

BC: I don't know if he got it from there. I was thinking of Tule Canyon up at Lida. I think they named that after him.

RM: Did he sell furs to the traders?

BC: No, there used to be an old German guy who had a ranch over here just below the cemetery. We sold all our furs to him.

RM: What was his name?

BC: Jerome Bore.

RM: And he would buy furs from the Indians?

BC: Well, he bought the whole animal. [chuckles] He'd skin them, and package them, and send them in. Of course, they'd dry them first.

RM: Do you remember what he'd pay you?

BC: Seems to me like it was about \$5 apiece for coyote. That was good money in those days, because you didn't have to do anything to them. You didn't have to skin them and dry them and package them and ship them.

RM: Did you shoot them?

BC: No, we trapped, too. My stepdad trapped all the time and we helped him.

RM: What was your stepdad's name?

BC: David Shoshoni.

RM: David Shoshoni? So he was Indian, too.

BC: Yes, he was from Death Valley.

RM: How many brothers and sisters do you have?

BC: TWo brothers and one sister. I'm the youngest one. Phil Cottonwood's the oldest. And we call him Spike - Spike Cottonwood. There's a sister in between the 2 brothers. I've only seen her a couple of times.

RM: Are they quite a bit older than you?

BC: Yes, my oldest brother must be getting close to 70.

RM: Where does he live?

BC: Death Valley. He's been there since '45, '46. He stays there year-round. And Spike is over at

Sequoia. He works for the Park Service.

RM: Yes - Art [Revert] was telling me he's a really good electrician.

BC: Yes, old Art really likes him.

RM: And what was your sister's name?

BC: Hazel, but I never saw her till I was 47 years old. She was a total stranger.

RM: Is your mother still living?

BC: Yes, she lives in one of those trailer houses.

RM: Oh, she lives right across the street? And how about your stepfather?

BC: He got killed in an auto accident; I can't even tell you the year. As I said, I can't remember dates.

RM: How would you describe the life of Indians in Beatty when you were a small child? In addition to what you've already said.

BC: Well, during the Depression they all worked for WPA - every one of them. And the government gave us dried food at different times. We always had something to eat. They all worked; it really wasn't that bad.

RM: How many families would you say were here?

BC: (Let me see now.) It was about 9 or 10.

RM: When do you think they first came in here to live? They were here when you were born, weren't they?

BC: Oh, yes. I guess they'd been here since wherever they came from. Because there were signs all over these rocks up here.

RM: So these families were probably in the area before the white man came.

BC: Oh, yes.

RM: Then when did they leave? Before World War II?

BC: When they took the train out of here; probably the early '40s. There wasn't any more work.

RM: They probably had worked from when they first built the railroad; is that right?

BC: Oh, yes. They worked on the railroad - just whatever construction there was. My stepdad worked for everybody in town doing odd jobs. He worked every day.

RM: So he was always able to find something?

BC: Oh, yes. There were very few days that he didn't work. He was always working for somebody, somewhere. If he'd work for a ranch out here, we'd just move out there and stay under trees. When Carrara was going, he worked for them.

RM: Did you live at Carrara?

BC: No, it didn't last too long. The guy who was taking care of Carrara -after it shut down - had this ranch out here where Parker's Dad - Wes Parker? –

RM: Yes?

BC: Well, he had that, and my dad worked for him out there; took care of the ranch. We lived in a little log house over near the side there. We just moved wherever he worked.

RM: Did you have a car?

BC: Yes, he always had an old Model A or an old Chevrolet or something.

RM: Then you started to school here. Were there many kids in school when you started?

BC: No. I don't suppose there were 30 in the whole school, including the high school. Because they all went to school in the same building - this old building up there where there's tile - it's not tile, it's . . . At some time they had a little bitty building out back where the high school students went. I don't know if there were over half a dozen of them in that school. I've got a picture somewhere.

RM: That's another thing I wanted to mention. If you've got any pictures, we'd like to include pictures in this history, too.

BC: Let's see - maybe she [Jane Cottonwood] knows where it's at. ([On the telephone] Find the boss - where's the boss?) Yes, the whole school was in this picture.

RM: That'd be great.

BC: In fact, I think I'm in the picture, too, but I wasn't supposed to be in school yet; I think I was only five. (How you doing? You know where that picture is - this old school picture? With Bob Revert and them? She thinks she's got it in her desk over there - I'm not sure. Which one did Carol give you? Didn't Carol give you one awhile back? Carol. Weeks. She gave you a picture. Yes. No. I do. OK. I'm going to run over and get it. 'Bye. [hangs up phone])

[Tape is turned off for awhile]

RM: Yes. I was talking to Jack Crowell, and I think he's got one of this.

BC: Yes, that's Jack. I don't think his brother was old enough to be in this picture. But you see [about] 15 Indian kids there.

RM: Fifteen Indian kids who left as soon as the railroad shut down?

BC: They were gone; yes.

RM: And you say they went back to Lone Pine, and . . .

BC: Wherever they could go to work. There was nothing here for them.

RM: What kind of games did the Indian kids play then?

BC: Well, there weren't enough kids there. You see, when those kids there all left, there wasn't anybody. [chuckles]

RM: What did you do then?

BC: I remember one summer, there were just 2 of us kids - 2 boys in the whole town. We got in all kinds of trouble. [laughter] Just 2 of us.

RM: Who was the other one?

BC: This wasn't too many years ago. It was Dolly's first husband, before they were married. That was the year there were only 6 or 7 people in high school.

RM: Did you like school?

BC: Not really. When I was a little kid I did. And when I quit I dragged the teacher out in the yard and tried to beat him up. There were 7 of us in school - and 6 of them were girls. And he kept telling me to leave them alone. And we started one day in school about it. It made me mad because he was messing around with a guy's wife who lived right across the street from him and she had a kid by him. And here he is telling me what to do. And the girls all stuck up for me. So he and I got in a big fight. He said, "I'm going to sue you."

I said, "Go ahead. All you get's what I got on me." [laughter] No, he was always picking on me.

RM: Do you remember Ert Moore?

BC: Oh, yes. He's right there. [in the picture]

RM: Was he your teacher?

BC: No, he was the principal and high school teacher. I remember him just like yesterday. He was really a nice man.

RM: When you were in high school, who were some of the important people in town you remember? Or, who were the people in town who stand out in your mind?

BC: When I was going to high school? I think Ralph Lisle was the commissioner.

RM: Did you know Ralph very well then?

BC: Oh, yes - his wife taught school. She's in here. [in the picture] She was teaching school then.

There weren't very many people from here that were in any kind of politics. We had one old sheriff - his name was John Vignolo - and he never had anything to do. I mean, there wasn't any crime at all around here. He carried a .25 pistol in his pocket - nobody even knew it. I never knew it [for a long time]. I used to pick weeds in his garden and everything. He'd say, "You need any money?"

I'd say, "Sure."

And he'd put me in the garden picking weeds. So one night I was coming down the street on my tricycle and he was walking up - he went to the Exchange Club about every night and played poker - and I was going towards him. It was kind of dark, and he thought I was a dog. And he pulled that gun out. I was one of the few people that even knew he carried it.

RM: But you were a little kid, then.

BC: Oh, yes. A little kid riding out at dark. But a little .25 automatic's only about this long. He kept it in his pocket. He never used it. He never drew a gun all the time he was the sheriff.

RM: Never any need to?

BC: No. No problem. He spent all of his time in the Exchange Club. [chuckles] Used to sit there and play cribbage or poker all the time.

RM: What do you remember about the other places - like the Gold Ace?

BC: Not a lot, because they wouldn't let us in there; we were just kids. I know I was in Tonopah when it burned down. We went up there at the 4th of July celebration and we could see the smoke from Tonopah. Nobody knew what was going on until the mail truck came in. It was a hell of a fire. It was a pretty good-sized building.

RM: Who are some of the other people you remember from the period when you were in high school?

BC: Well, not really anybody important except the sheriff.

RM: Who else did you know, though, who would stand out in your mind? They didn't have to be important.

BC: Oh, George Greenwood. The man that used to own the Exchange Club. Everybody liked him. He had a baseball team out here every year.

RM: Were you on it?

BC: No, I was too small. My brothers played for him. That was back before my high school days.

RM: Was Greenwood from the area?

BC: I don't know where he came from, but he sure liked sports. Every year he had a baseball team; had a good team, too.

RM: What other places had baseball teams?

BC: They only had one here in town. They played Trona, and Shoshone, and all over.

RM: Was the team made up of local guys?

BC: Yes, they had a good team. They played everywhere.

RM: How did World War II affect Beatty?

BC: I don't think it even bothered us. Everybody got food stamps and all the old guys gave us their gas stamps and shoe stamps and sugar stamps. We had more stamps than we needed. We didn't have enough money to use them. [laughs]

RM: Because they didn't need theirs?

BC: They'd wear a pair of shoes for 20 years, and they had more than enough stamps for sugar and things like that. No, my only problem was getting enough money to buy all that stuff. But I can't remember anybody really having a hard time. Because you could always find something to do if you wanted to work. That's the good thing about a small town -everybody knows everybody and looks out for each other.

RM: What happened in Beatty after the war?

BC: Nothing exciting really ever happened. [chuckles] It's always the same.

RM: Then about 1950 they started atomic testing, didn't they?

BC: Yes.

RM: What did you think about that?

BC: It didn't bother us, because I guess we didn't know what was going on anyway. We weren't afraid of it because we didn't know anything about it.

RM: Did you ever see the shots go off?

BC: Oh, yes, we saw mushrooms Every time they set one off we'd see it, feel it, hear it; you could even feel a breeze from it. We were living out there at Knight's Ranch just this side of Hot Springs about a quarter of a mile over on the left. That big place over there. It's open from there all the way out to where they were setting then off. As soon as that thing went off you could see it. But it'd rattle the leaves on the trees. We thought that was really something. [laughs]

RM: So did we. [laughs] What do you think about it now?

BC: I don't know. What was bothering me, still does - because they're doing it underground now - whether it's going to hurt us. They wait awhile. They were doing it on top of the ground. Well, they've got to test it somewhere.

CHAPTER TWO

RM: What kind of work did you do after you got out of school?

BC: I worked in the mines for Crowell for about 11 years.

RM: What did you do as a miner?

BC: Ran a hoist, did the mining, tramping . . . Everything that you do around a mine. He never had people like a timberman or a miner or a hoist man. Everybody did everything. Now, unions have fixed it so you can't change a lightbulb - you've got to go get an electrician. They've screwed it all up.

RM: Did you work straight through 11 years altogether?

BC: Yes.

RM: When did you start?

BC: I was 17 years old when I went to work in the mine for Crowell. Of course, I worked in the mine out at Rhyolite for a little while before that.

RM: Which one?

BC: The Senator Stewart - it's a gold mine.

RM: When did you start there?

BC: Oh, about 15. It was right after I quit school.

RM: Did you learn mining there?

BC: Well, when I was a little kid my brother and I used to help a guy in the Grapevines. He'd go up there every summer and work in his mine. We thought we were helping, but we were probably just getting in the way. [laughter] He'd hammer all day drilling holes, and at night he'd shoot whatever he had. Next morning he'd go in there and shovel it all up and we'd help him push it out and dump it in the river. This was when we were little kids. We did it mostly so we could get to ride back in the car. [laughter]

RM: What mine was that?

BC: His name was Judge Finney - he used to be a judge.

RM: Whereabouts in the Grapevines was it?

BC: It's in Finney's Canyon, only one canyon over north from the Grapevines.

RM: Was it a gold mine?

BC: I don't know if it was anything. He was just digging. [chuckles] He never got anything out of it.

RM: But you worked there in the summers?

BC: We were up there bothering him. But we'd have to go up there in the summer because the folks would go up there.

RM: So it was close to the ranch?

BC: We would walk from one place to the other when we were kids. It's only about - oh, 6 or 7 miles between there. We used to go back and forth.

RM: You didn't walk over every day, did you? Six or 7 miles?

BC: No, it was only about a mile. You see, this big canyon goes up - that's where we stayed. And his mine was out one of the little branches that go up in the hills. I think everything is gone now - a big flood came down and wiped everything out.

RM: Was the Senator Stewart a big mine?

BC: It was just a little hole, and the vein - probably the widest it ever was, was about a foot, maybe sometimes a little bit more. Then it would be clear down to almost nothing.

RM: It was just digging on that?

BC: D. Giles is the guy who had the mine. He hired me and another guy, and the older guy did all the mining and everything; all the shoveling. All I did was push the ore out and dump it and send it up. I'd help him drag the hoses and things up so he could drill and go get the powder for him so he could shoot.

RM: Was it in a shaft, or a tunnel?

BC: We went down a shaft about 200 feet, and then straight back in a drift 500 or 600 feet.

RM: Where was it from Rhyolite?

BC: Do you know where the Jayhawks is? It's that big mound that sits on this side of it? It's on this side of that big mound. They went out there with a bulldozer and cleared it all off. I don't know what they were going to do. You can't get a bulldozer in a vein that wide, but somebody was going to try it. [chuckles]

RM: So you learned your mining there, and then went to work for Crowell?

BC: Yes.

RM: And you were with Crowell 11 years?

BC: Right. I worked in several mines around since then.

RM: What are some of the other mines you worked in?

BC: I worked for Jerry Leese in a bentonite mine. He's got a bunch of them. There's one down here about a mile - up around the hill - back up in the hill there about 2 miles from town.

RM: You go down through the Narrows and then . . .

BC: Turn right. Back up there where that building is. You've seen that building over on the right?

RM: Yes, I have.

BC: OK - go on up past that.

RM: Is that the mine that's owned by the Vanderbilts? Could you tell me a little bit about it?

BC: Well, it's a bentonite mine. They use it in their cosmetics. I think they've got 3 working out there now. But they have a mine down at the Junction [Death Valley Junction] just inside the California border.

RM: Right out of Death Valley Junction - or, the Stateline Bar?

BC: You turn off right there.

RM: Right there at the foot of the Funerals?

BC: Yes; it's called the Sidehill Mine.

RM: Oh, that's the Sidehill Mine. That's a Vanderbilt, too, isn't it?

BC: Yes. And they've got another one up by Coaldale. That's big - that's open pit up there.

RM: What do they take out of the Sidehill Mine?

BC: Same stuff - bentonite.

RM: Bentonite? And it's all used in cosmetics?

BC: Cosmetics, paint, drilling mud. They're starting to make paint out of it.

RM: And it belongs to the Vanderbilts?

BC: Yes. And they have a mine up at Lovelock. They used to have one in Arizona. I don't know if they still . .

RM: They're all bentonite?

BC: Yes. Some grades are a little bit different from others.

RM: They just work them part time, don't they?

BC: They get a big stockpile and they shut down sometimes because a little bit of that goes a long way. You can take a glass like this that's real good and put about this much bentonite in there, then fill it full of water, let it sit overnight, and that'll be solid next morning.

RM: That's how good a bentonite it is, huh?

BC: Yes. It's just like Jello. It'll make that whole thing solid. So it doesn't take too much of that to . .

RM: Do they grind it themselves?

BC: Yes, they grind it out here, put it in one-ton bags, and ship it back to Vanderbilt. And they grind it some more. Then they sell it to different companies.

RM: Yes. But they do make cosmetics out of it?

BC: They also use it in food, like chocolate bars. It's a filler, just like cornstarch. It's neutral; no flavor or anything to it.

RM: How long did you work there?

BC: Off-and-on probably 10 years.

RM: What other mines did you work in?

BC: I worked in the Monmouth over on the other side of the mountain here. It's on the other side of Bare Mountain. Do you know where Saga is? It's just right next to where that was. Saga is a mine. They're mining gold out there right now. It's just the other side of this big mountain right here. The far one. But you have go clear down past the U.S. Ecology - up over the hill and back - clear around. They've got a big valley back in there. I worked there and then I worked in their mine up at Gold Point.

RM: What kind of a mine did they have over here?

BC: Open pit fluorspar. It was a pretty good sized operation. They had 2 or 3 trucks a day coming in there hauling their stuff to Monolith Cement over at Tehachapi.

RM: And then you worked at Gold Point?

BC: The Ohio Mine. That was gold and silver. It didn't last too long, though. That was the last mine that I worked in.

RM: When was that?

BC: When I left there I went down to ABC. Well, it was Tenneco then. I worked down there 18 years ago as a mechanic. That was when we started our ribbon business.

It got to where I didn't know if I was coming to work or going home or what was going on. I'd be down there 10 hours a day and then a couple of hours on the road. I'd get home and something'd be broken down over there [at the ribbon factory], and I'd have to go fix that. Finally I told them, "I'm going to have to quit." That's when I went to work for the county road department. Been there ever since.

RM: So you've been with the roads 18 years? What do you do there?

BC: I'm the foreman. I've got this area and all of Amargosa. I've got 4 guys down there and 3 up here. We gravel all the existing roads; get them ready for paving so whenever we can get a little money, they'll be ready and we'll just pave them.

RM: How long have you been foreman?

BC: About 10 years.

RM: Where's your office?

BC: It's up there by the cemetery.

RM: You don't have to blade the roads of snow down here, do you? [chuckles]

BC: Well, this last winter it snowed and everybody got to yelling around, so I got out and started blading. I bladed about 2 streets, and the other streets had already melted while I was messing with them, so I don't do it anymore. I'm not going to do it anymore. It creates a mess, because you've got to take it all over to one side and pile it. Everything else has melted, and you've got these big piles of snow all over town. They don't stay that long anyway - 2 days at the most. The only place that we worry about is the hospital, because it's up on the hill. We've got to keep that open. And that's the only place that we have to worry about. Heck, as soon as somebody drives down the street there's no more problem anyway; you just follow the tracks.

RM: What are some of the problems that you face in your job?

BC: Oh, we don't have too many. Every once in a while somebody'll screech because their road's

a little rough or something; we didn't get back there quick enough. We get a lot of washouts when we have floods. We have to run up to all the ranches, but they all know that it takes time to do it. It's all dirt up there and we get then all done. That seems to be our biggest gripe. Of course, in the wintertime you have potholes, but there's nothing you can do about that 'till summer.

RM: Yes. So you're in charge of Beatty and the Amargosa section. Do all the workers live in Beatty, or do some of them live in the Amargosa?

BC: All of my help live here, and there are 3 who live down there, but one of them runs back and forth from here. But they're down there now. They're rebuilding roads so we can pave them this summer.

RM: Oh, they're going to pave some more roads down in the Amargosa this summer?

BC: Yes, we've got about a mile and a half to pave. That's another gripe they have: Everybody wants their road paved. You know, they'll move out there 6 miles from nowhere, and demand a paved road to their house, and you can't do that. We have to go by population.

RM: Yes; sure. So - the first part of your life, you worked as a miner, and then the second part has been with the roads.

BC: Yes. I worked enough open pit mines to learn how to run equipment; that's how I got started.

RM: Do you have much contact with any of the Indians in Death Valley, or other places?

BC: Well, I belong to their tribe. They keep sending me all this stuff, but I've never really told them I wanted to join their tribe.

RM: It's called the Timbisha?

BC: That's their name for Death Valley.

RM: Yes. I'll just read the address into the tape recorder: P.O. Box 206, Death Valley, California, 92328. So they have a little - is that a reservation down there near Furnace Creek? Do they own the land?

BC: I don't know if they own it or not; I don't think they do. They're trying to get a nice big area up in here somewhere so they can apply for a reservation. They've got one coming, 'cause . . . But they want it up in this area, for some reason.

RM: They don't want to be down there?

BC: I guess not. The only place I told them they could find something large would be out here in this valley somewhere. All that up at Sarcobatus is taken.

RM: Who's taken it?

BC: Little pieces have been taken up all over. It's kind of messed up for anything big. People own stuff up and down both sides of it all the way from Scotty's Junction down to that little abandoned service station there. But out here it still belongs to BLM.

RM: So you think that's the best place for it?

BC: Well, they want highway frontage on both sides of the main highway, if they can. There are areas down there they could do that, but they'd better hurry.

RM: Why do you say that?

BC: Oh, it's slowly getting taken up - all that out in there. The government keeps driving . . .

RM: What do you think about the discussion of the nuclear repository down here at Yucca Mountain?

BC: Well, it doesn't bother me any, because that's a nuclear dump out there anyway. [laughter] What better place to bury that stuff? And they've got one right down here 9 miles. I worked down there for a little while, too. It wasn't very long.

RM: What did you tell them?

BC: I just told them what I thought of them. [chuckles] They were - well, back-stabbers. For instance, they were supposed to take turns driving trucks. Well, this one guy had more seniority than everybody, so he got to go every trip. He'd come in and run home and change clothes and run back out.

RM: How has Beatty changed over the years? In your view? And what has made it change?

BC: I don't really know what's made it change.

RM: How has it changed?

BC: It - there's nothing here. There's no more here now than there was when I was a kid except for this testing out here, at Ford-Philco, or whoever's got it, at Tolicha Peak. There are quite a few people up there.

RM: What do they do out there?

BC: Oh, they have these war games. The only people hired from here are the guards. The rest of the people are all brought in here. They have to be people who know things about radar and all that radio stuff. I've never heard what the guards get paid. And then there are not very many working out at Mercury, probably not half a dozen. And they're shutting Jackass Flats down, so that'll knock out one guy I know for sure from here and two from Amargosa. I don't really know what's making it grow, other than tourists. Traffic is getting a little bit heavier all the time.

RM: Is it tourists to Death Valley, or what?

BC: Well, this is the main road from Reno to Vegas.

RM: I know you can't get a motel here at night.

BC: Well, that's about all that could make it grow, because I don't see anything else. And every time they build a casino, they have to have 30 more people to work in there. Sometimes we have 36 people working over here [at Janda Ribbons].

RM: You're the biggest employer in town, aren't you? Your place is one of the big success stories in Nevada, I think.

BC: Yes, that thing really took hold.

RM: Well, what differences do you see from when you were a younger kid?

BC: Well, we have a lot better fire department. When I was a little kid, any time something caught on fire, that was it - it was gone. And we've got the little clinic up here, which is a lot of help. The Flight for Life comes up and hauls you away, if you need it. And then we've got a bigger school; probably most of the kids come from Amargosa, or they used to. But other than that, if you dragged all the trailer houses out of here, there wouldn't be anything here.

RM: What do the people who live in the trailer houses do?

BC: I don't have any idea. There's a lot of them around here. [laughs] They have to work in these casinos, and stuff. Because the state highway and county road department and the casinos are the only places to work, other than school teachers, 2 or 3 people who work in the library, a couple in the senior citizen center, and 2 or 3 up in the clinic. So . . . I don't know where they work. There are a lot of retired people out here.

RM: How do you see the future of the town

BC: Well, it can't get too much bigger, because we don't have the water, for one thing. We've got water, but it's no good.

RM: It has a lot of fluoride in it, doesn't it?

BC: Yes. And if they purified it, it'd probably cost a dollar a gallon. And I don't think our sewage can handle any more. We're going to have to slowdown somewhere.

RM: Is the place getting too big for you?

BC: Oh, yes. I guess we stay here because we like small towns. Because our business demands a bigger-populated area. We've got people coming from Amargosa to work up here. I think 5 come

up from down there every day.

RM: Do you work much with the business?

BC: I keep the stuff running over there, but as far as doing any of the manufacturing . . . well, sometimes I throw trophies together for a rush order or something.

CHAPTER THREE

RM: Bombo, why don't you talk about some of the people that you've known in town.

BC: They've all passed away; there aren't too many old people left. Fred Davies was a plumber. I used to help him when I was a little kid. He'd make me go underneath the building and do all the work, I remember him real well.

RM: He's deceased now?

BC: Yes, he's over there. His wife just came back here. Claudia Reidhead's the daughter.

RM: What kind of a fellow was he?

BC: Well, [laughter] he was a tough old boy. He was a bootlegger or something once down in Ash Meadows or some place when he first came here. That's the story they tell about him. [chuckles] I kind of grew up around him. I was always hanging around him for some reason and he was always putting me to work and doing things. As far as actually hanging around any of those guys, he was the only one. And he always took me to work and taught me things.

RM: Could you say a little bit about your mother? She's been in the area a long time.

BC: Well, her life has been pretty boring, I guess. She sits over in that trailer all the time. Her old knees are giving in. She's never had any jobs, or anything. I've raised her, or, she's raised me, and then when my stepfather got killed, why I've been taking care of her ever since. I've been away from her for about - oh, 3 months - out of my whole life. So I've taken care of her just about all my life; since I was about 18 or 19.

RM: You mean, supported her.

BC: Yes. She doesn't get anything from anybody except me.

RM: She doesn't get any government help or anything?

BC: Nothing. Not even from her other sons. [chuckles]

RM: So it's a good thing she has you, huh?

BC: We take care of her; we don't mind that. She really doesn't have too much history back of her.

RM: Does she know much about the old Shoshoni ways?

BC: Oh, yes, she grinds pine nuts and things like that. Or she used to, anyway.

RM: Does she practice the old religion?

BC: No.

RM: Does she speak the language?

BC: Yes, she can't speak English. I don't think she went to school at all, because they were just going all the time, from one place to another. I don't know if she was ever inside of a schoolhouse.

RM: So when you talk to her, you have to talk to her in Shoshoni? She can't watch TV or anything like that?

BC: She can watch it, but she really doesn't understand it. So she really doesn't get a kick out of it.

RM: Does she have other Shoshoni people around besides you?

BC: Well Dolly, but she never goes to see her. My brother Spike comes over 2 or 3 times a year and sees her, but I've got one brother living 42 miles from here who never comes to see her. Like I said, she lives a pretty sheltered life. I imagine she's pretty lonely, too. She's over 80. Her oldest son is almost 70. That's why her old knees gave up on her, I guess. She can still get from the bed over to the couch and make her own coffee, things like that.

RM: Who are some of the other people in town that you remember?

BC: There's really nothing to say about them, because I just knew them - like, Briz Putnam. Art would know him, because they played poker and things a lot. But he was just an old guy who hung around the bars; that's about all I remember of him. And Jack Miller - I used to visit him a lot when I was a little kid. He was a carpenter, but I never did see him doing any of it. All those old guys were retired when I was a little kid. I can't think of anybody else I hung around with.

RM: Did Beatty ever have an ice house and an ice plant?

BC: Yes. O.H. Smith owned that and he delivered ice. We used to run after him, because every time he delivered he'd have to take one of those big blocks and saw it, and we'd catch all the shavings.

RM: Where was his plant?

BC: You know a motel down there, clear down at the end of the street below the hospital? That street ends right at that hill. There's a motel there, or apartments, or something. That was the ice house.

RM: When did it shut down?

BC: I don't think I can answer that one.

RM: Probably when refrigerators came in? [chuckles]

BC: He was a commissioner, or a road commissioner, or something before he died. Yes, every once in a while he'd go on the corner and make blocks slide out of the truck and break up. We'd [chuckles] grab that ice and [laughs] . .

RM: Can you think of any other people you might want to mention?

BC: Well, I knew Wes Moreland. Of course, everybody knew him, I guess. He owned that railroad station out there at Rhyolite, and when he died his sister took it. He had sugar diabetes and when we were little kids, we used to trap ants for him. He'd fry those up and eat them. Something in those ants kept his sugar diabetes down, or something. We'd dig holes in the ground and put jars down there, and eventually all the ants would wind up in the jar. We'd put the lid on, take them out there, and he'd give us a quarter apiece for those big jars.

RM: Was that an Indian treatment for diabetes? I've never heard of that. BC: I don't know what he was. No, I don't know; that could be - even in the medicine desert there could be . .

RM: There could be something to it.

BC: Something that would come out of an ant. I guess it helped him, because that's what he did. He'd fry them in a skillet and eat them.

RM: I'll be darned. I've never heard of that; that's really interesting.

BC: I don't know if it was something in their stinger, or whatever. Something helped him; I don't know what it was.

Another guy - Rhyolite Murphy - owned the bottle house. When we were kids we used to go up on the mountain and find geodes and haul them clear out to Rhyolite - carry them out there - and he'd give us a quarter apiece for them. He'd saw them up and make bookends and things.

RM: You'd carry them clear out there? [whistles] Where did you find them?

BC: We used to find some right here on Beatty Mountain. That was just too hard work for a quarter. Then he'd buy arrowheads and things from us whenever we'd find any.

There was always somebody buying anything that you could scrape up. They were taking care of us kids, more than anything. Instead of just giving us money, they'd make us work for it. That's the way that old sheriff used to be: if he didn't have anything for me to do, he'd just hand me a nickel. And, boy, whenever he needed something done, I'd better do it. [chuckles] Clean his chicken coop or whatever. No, they all looked after us kids.

There used to be a hill right down through here; it was one of the first railroad grades. Well, just right along in here somewhere there was an old guy who lived in the side of this hill; there was just a crowd of buildings stuck on that hill. We lived over back behind it. And this old guy had one eye. And I guess he flipped his lid or something. Anyway, there wasn't anybody

home but my-mother. He went over there and took her dutch oven; took it home. So - the old man had stopped somewhere along the way and had had some wine, so when he got home, he was about half plastered. [chuckles] So we headed over there to get that dutch oven. Well, the old man kind of shook him up a little bit, [chuckles] and we got our dutch oven, and we were headed back home, and that old guy started shooting at us with a .22. We were dodging bullets, and hiding behind brush, and everything. Finally Spike started throwing rocks at him. And he took off. So we turned him in. The old sheriff came down and got him and put him in jail and he was there for 3 or 4 days, and somebody from Sparks came down and got him.

RM: Took him to the institution.

BC: He'd flipped out.

RM: Was there a guy named Shoshoni George, or George Shoshoni?

BC: Well, Johnny Shoshone was my stepdad's father. He was the one who discovered the Montgomery-Shoshone.

RM: Oh! Tell me about him.

BC: Well, he lived in Death Valley. I don't know how he found that mine, but he got rooked out of it. I don't know the whole story on that. That mine made millions, I guess, and I don't know what he got out of it.

RM: Yes; he didn't get much.

BC: [chuckles] Well, they named it after him, anyway. [chuckles] Half of it, anyway. He was a real old man. They used to come up here from Death Valley and stay every summer. When I got a little bit older, I used to go down there and haul them all up here every summer. You see, up this river there used to be big, old gigantic cottonwood trees - lined all along that river going up past the Stagecoach. Big trees - couple of hundred feet high, some of them. More than 5 feet through the trunk. They'd been here for 100 years. Every summer they lived in the shade. They used to -throw tarps over everything they had, and in the wintertime they'd head back to Death Valley.

RM: What special survival techniques did the Indians in Death Valley have? You'd think people couldn't survive there, but they did.

BC: I don't know what they did. Ever since I've known them, they've always camped here in the summer, or up at the Wild Rose - Telescope Peak. That's what they did here - they'd go up to the Grapevines, or anyplace where it was up high. But they went up to Telescope, picked pine nuts or whatever. Wherever there were pine nuts, that's where they went.

RM: Do you know all the good pine nut places up in the Grapevines?

BC: Oh, yes.

RM: Do you still pick them for your own use?

BC: Oh, yes. They're too hard to pick to sell or anything. In fact, I've got some over there in that bowl, but they're all dried up.

RM: Where did you get the name Bombo?

BC: It was an old guy who lived down there somewhere in the area where I was born - his name was Blackie - that's only name I knew him by. He was the man who named me that. I was just a little bitty kid; I don't know any reason for it.

RM: So you were never known by Ted?

BC: No, nobody knows who it is. Every once in a while somebody'll come looking for me - they don't know who they're looking for. [chuckles]

The index has been removed for the digital format. Digitization by Suzy McCoy - Beatty
Graphics SM Productions - Beatty, Nevada