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An
Oral History Interview
with
Therese Courture Thomas
1995

#35313715

Photographs

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Boulder City Library
Oral History Project Interview
with
Therese Courture Thomas

conducted by
Dennis McBride
March 13, 1995

This is Dennis McBride and Therese Courture Thomas, talking about all kinds of interesting things, Boulder City and music, at Therese's home at 3017 Turquoise Street, in the Twin Lakes section of Las Vegas. This is Monday, March 13, 1995.

Tell me when you were born, and where, and about your family.

I was born in Thistle, Utah, which is no more. Thistle is that little town up in Spanish Fork Canyon that the mountain slid down and blocked off two rivers and made a lake where the town was.¹

Was it an earthquake?

No. The thing that happened, I guess, was there were natural springs in the mountains, and when they made the new roads they dynamited and disturbed the natural waters. And they had a place called Castilla Springs that was seltzer water, bath, [a] place where people used to go take hot baths.²

A resort?



Top Photograph

Hand-written caption on album
page reads, "My Birthplace."
[Thistle, Utah]

*[photo courtesy of Therese
Courtire Thomas; negative in
the possession of Dennis
McBride]*

Bottom Photographs

Baby Therese Courtire in Thistle, Utah, ca. 1920 - 1922

*[photographs courtesy of Therese Courtire
Thomas; negatives in the possession of Dennis
McBride]*

Yeah. It just all messed the whole thing up. So the whole town is gone now.

When were you born there?

1917. July 5. I had a brother, Cyril, and sister Nina June. We were all born in Thistle. Then we moved to Provo, Utah. I was about six years old when we moved there.

What did your dad do for a living?

My dad, evidently, worked for the railroad while we lived in Thistle, because I think that's about all there was there. My mother's family were railroad [people]. Then when he went to Provo, the steel plant is the first place I remember him working. Columbia Steel, I think it was called, and it was out near Springville. Springville seems to have gone into being an herb town. All the herbs come from there.³

What was your dad's name and your mother's name?

My dad's name was [Ernest Ambrose] Courture. And my mother was Millie.

How long did you live in Provo?

Until I was 15, I think, when we went to Boulder City.

Then your dad was working up there when the stock market crashed.

In the meantime, after he stopped working at the steel plant, he went into a contracting business with a fellow. And, of course, when the Crash came they lost everything. He was building homes and stores and businesses and things. I remember he built one of them up on University Avenue.

Is it still standing?

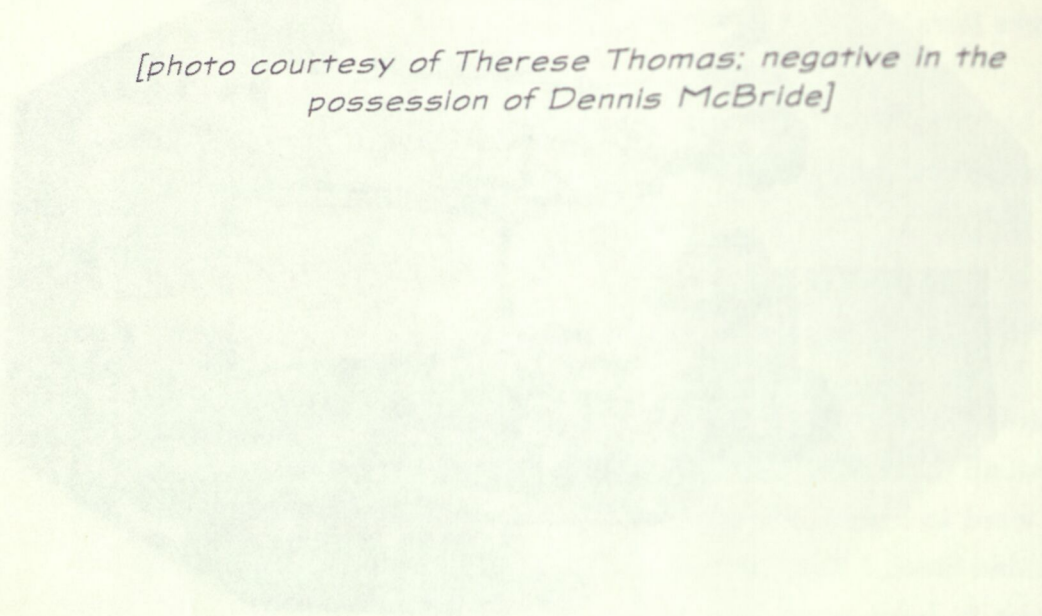
I imagine so. A big brick house. I can remember that.



Top Photograph

l-r: Cyril Courture, Millie Courture, Nina June Courture
ca. 1941

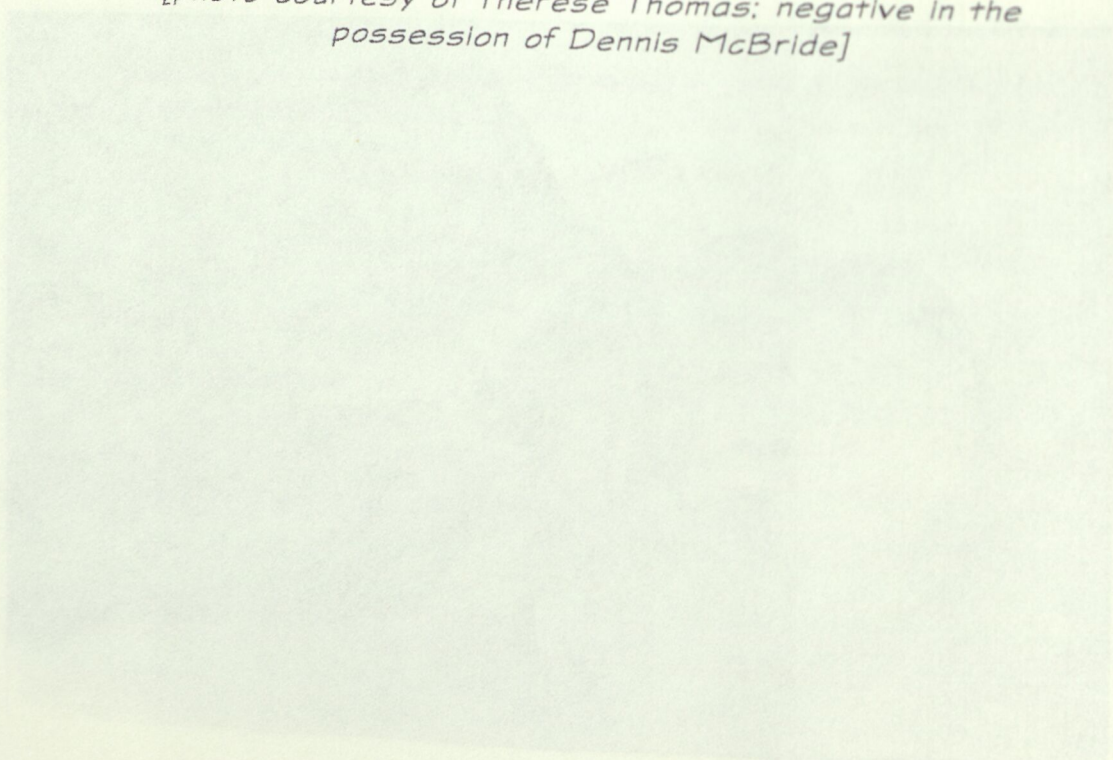
*[photo courtesy of Therese Thomas; negative in the
possession of Dennis McBride]*



Bottom Photograph

Ernest Ambrose Courture, ca. 1938

*[photo courtesy of Therese Thomas; negative in the
possession of Dennis McBride]*



And I used to walk all the way up there, almost to the BYU.⁴

Then he decided to come to the [Hoover] dam construction because everybody in the United States was trying to get jobs here.

After he'd been working quite awhile. My mother came first. I remember she was out of work [in Provo] very long before he came down here to Hoover Dam? She brought me my graduation dress back from here, she bought it in Las Vegas.

No, not really. I think right after they knew they'd lost their business and everything was gone, he just took the car and came to Las Vegas. Everybody had to come to Vegas to get work on the dam. You couldn't go out [to Boulder City] unless you were already hired.

It wasn't quite hot yet. It hadn't turned too hot by then. But we didn't stay! We do you remember your dad, your mother, discussing, just before they came down here, the loss of their business and what they were going to do next? Or did they share that with you?

I don't think they talked too much about that around us. But I remember that in order to eat we had a grocery man that let us charge groceries. For how long, I don't know, but he got paid eventually.

And we used to eat a lot of liver because liver was only ten cents a pound. Nobody ate liver in those days.

Did your dad come down ahead of his family to see what he could come up with? to come to Utah, and he drove out car back. That's all I remember.

Yes. I don't remember how long he was here before Mother came to visit him.

And he picked up your family?

What job did he take when he came down here?

Yeah. And we had a trailer on the back of the car with mattresses. We looked

He was a laborer, just plain laborer. He put his name in like everybody else did, two or three different ways, and, of course, the wrong one came up.

When you did finally move down here, do you remember what year that was?

Under an assumed name? I've heard that story, that the workers did that.

'31, I think. The fall of '31.

They drew Courtney, and that's [the name] he worked under for quite some time. Instead of Courture, he had Courtney.⁵

You and your mother and your brother and sister came down after he was established here?

...back that far, really. We lived in Las Vegas in a little house behind another house when we got here. And my dad had rented it, and he was still in

After he'd been working quite awhile. My mother came first. I remember she came in the spring because I was going to graduate from the eighth grade. She brought me my graduation dress back from here, she bought it in Las Vegas. Then we went back down with her that summer.

...had some broken ribs, and he was in the hospital in Boulder City. They got word to mother about it.

In the summer you got here? Hot!

I can't remember. You know, when you're a kid like that, you don't remember all that stuff. It doesn't really sink in.

It wasn't quite hot yet. It hadn't turned too hot by then. But we didn't stay. We went back to Provo because Dad didn't have a place for us to live.

I remember when we moved here, which was a little later, and Tommy Nelson⁶ drove us down.

You knew Tommy Nelson that long ago?

So your mother essentially worked doing that and was paid by getting the house?

Yeah.

Yes, we got to use the house for her taking care of the kids and fixing the

How did you know him?

...that the arrangements were on the food.

I guess my mother or my dad, somebody met him, and he was going to come to Utah, and he drove our car back. That's all I remember.

No, he lived in a little house in the back. But do you know I can't remember

And he picked up your family?

in the house? I can't remember that part, either.

Yeah. And we had a trailer on the back of the car with mattresses. We looked like Okies.

Yes, I went to school in the red building.⁸ What is it now?

When you did finally move down here, do you remember what year that was?

It's the city hall now.

'31, I think. The fall of '31.

That was the beginning of school [for me in Boulder City]. Eighth and ninth

What did you think of this landscape? It wasn't anything you were used to.

Do you remember any of your teachers?

No. But Boulder City was nice. We lived in Las Vegas. It's hard for me to remember back that far, really. We lived in Las Vegas in a little house behind another house when we got here. And my dad had rented it, and he was still in Boulder City. But he came back home. But then he didn't come home. I can't remember if it was the first night we were here, or just a few nights later. He didn't come home because he got hurt on the dam. They had a cave-in in the diversion tunnels and he got injured.⁷ I guess he had some broken ribs, and he was in the hospital in Boulder City. They got word to mother about it.

So how long that went on, I can't remember. You know, when you're a kid like that, you don't remember all that stuff. It doesn't really sink in.

Finally, a man that had a home he'd built [in Boulder City]—his wife had left him because she didn't want to live in Nevada any longer—and he had three children. And my mother was going to take care of the meals and take care of the children while he worked, and he let us have the house. That's how we got to move over to Boulder City.

So your mother essentially worked doing that and was paid by getting the house?

Yes, we got to use the house for her taking care of the kids and fixing the meals. I don't know what the arrangements were on the food.

Do you remember what kind of courses you studied?

Did you all live in that same house?

Oh, I had a French teacher, and I can't remember her name. I took French. And

No, he lived in a little house in the back. But do you know I can't remember whether his children stayed in the house? I can't remember that part, either.

Do you remember Elton Garrett?¹⁰

You went to school in Boulder City?

Yes, I've known Elton for a long time, but I think he was just a teacher when I

Yes, I went to school in the red building.⁸ What is it now?

time.

It's the city hall now.

You later went on to teach dance. Did you take part in any kind of programs or plays or

That was the beginning of school [for me in Boulder City]. Eighth and ninth grade, if I remember. I started out there in the ninth grade.

Do you remember any of your teachers?

How I got started in dancing [was] before we left Utah. I was taking dancing lessons when I was eight years old and nine years old. I didn't really learn a lot except how to read the top line. I didn't know how to read the piano for her, so I played the piano. Even then, like I was twelve years old, I've heard of Miss Tilley.⁹

The red-headed teacher.

Tell me about her.

She dyed her hair red and she was a little whiz, I'll tell you! You had to behave yourself. She had a temper to go with the hair.

Did you ever get in trouble in school?

No. I was a good kid!

What did she used to do to the kids who got in trouble?

Just yell at them, as I remember.

Do you remember what kind of courses you studied?

Oh, I had a French teacher, and I can't remember her name. I took French. And I had a math teacher.

Do you remember Elton Garrett?¹⁰

Yes, I've known Elton for a long time, but I think he was just a teacher when I knew him. My sister, who is five years younger than me, she was more in his time.

You later went on to teach dance. Did you take part in any kind of programs or plays or dances when you were in school in Boulder City in ninth grade? Your interest in the subject—did it come that early?

How I got started in dancing [was] before we left Utah. I was taking dancing from a lady before my dad lost his business. She didn't have anybody to play the piano for her, so I played the piano. Even then, like I was twelve years old, I [could] play by ear.

You never had lessons?

I had a few lessons when I was eight years old and nine years old. I didn't really learn a lot except how to read the top line. I didn't know how to read the bottom line on music, because they *are* different. The treble and the bass scale are different. They're one space different.

I played the *Pagan Love Song* and things like that for them to do the waltz clog, and *East Side, West Side*, and things like that. And by watching her while she taught lessons, I got the idea how to teach. And I guess it just came to me that way.

What kind of opportunities did you have for playing after you got to Boulder City? Did you play in the church?

I used to help the church with their programs. I used to help the school with their programs after I came over to Las Vegas. I don't remember doing too much of that in Boulder City because I don't think there was too much of that they did. I don't remember the school having any assemblies or things like that.

Was it the LDS church you helped at?

Yes.

What kind of programs did they used to have, that you remember, that you might have been involved in?

Usually if there was somebody going to sing. We had little programs at night sometimes. They'd put on a little skit or a little funny thing. Like Mrs. Manning, Catherine Manning, used to always put on funny things. She was a comedienne. One time I played the piano for my brother to sing like a chicken [*clucks*]. Little silly things like that.

And then as time went along, when they had a dance or something, I'd play for them to have a dance. When I got married, I played for my own wedding [for] people to have their dance! My husband played guitar.

*Did you ever play for any of the dances they had in the American Legion Hall?*¹¹

No, that's before I got into music like that.

When you were a kid in Boulder City, what did you do for fun? What kind of games did you play, what kind of gang did you run around with?

When I got to be sixteen, I went with church boys, boys that were in the Mormon church. Now, some of the boys worked in the mess hall.¹² Some of the boys worked on the dam. Some of the kids I went down to the lake to go swimming with were kids I went to school with, and some of them workers on the dam.

Did you date a lot? Were you popular?

I dated a lot later, when I got past sixteen. I didn't do too much of any going with boys before I was sixteen.

Tell me about some of your dating later on when you got past sixteen.

I always used to have fun about it. When I tell about it now, I say I had one [boyfriend] for the swing shift, one for the day shift, and one for the night shift. I got to see a lot of Boulder Dam being built by going with these men that worked on the dam. They'd take you down there, and they knew so-and-so that was the foreman of the shift, and you could go up in the tunnels. I got to ride on the skips that went across [the canyon].¹³ It was a little breezy when you got out on there, hanging over the dam.

Did it scare you?

No, I don't think kids get scared of things like that.

Where did you used to go on dates, besides down on the dam?

That's mostly what we did, was ride down to the dam. Or if it was a day date, we'd go down to the lake and play in the sand as the lake was being formed, the sandy beaches that were there.

It was the CCC boys who put the sand in down there.

Yeah, but that was on the big main beach, though. Before the lake came up there was all kinds of roads you could go on. Like the road you could go down to where Murl Emery had his ferry.¹⁴ There was a lot of places down there where the water was just coming up. We used to go down and have goobers. They always took goobers and the boys took beer, and they had Coca-Cola and stuff for the girls if they wanted it. But I never did drink then, ever.

What's a goober?

A peanut! And then we'd have weenie roasts. We had all kinds of things to do.

Did you ever get into Vegas?

Yeah, I'd come into Vegas with my folks, usually, in the beginning. Then after I started going to school here, of course, I was here every day. But I didn't go anywhere but school, most of the time.

*Talk about going to school in Las Vegas, to high school. Boulder City didn't have a high school then.*¹⁵

It had up to the ninth grade, I think, and you had to come in [to Las Vegas] to go to the tenth grade.

How did you get back and forth?

They had the big red buses, big red tin buses. I don't know how they ever managed to keep those things running. They have such beautiful school buses now.

We were kind of half scared of them. We girls, at first. ... Were there a lot of high school kids in Boulder then who had to take the buses into Vegas?

Yeah, we had two buses. There was ninety seniors in the class the year I graduated. Boulder City and Las Vegas both.

Did you have much chance to be involved in school activities in Las Vegas?

I was involved in quite a bit, but not as much as I could have been. I could have come over to more games and things like that, but I didn't care to. I was more interested in what went on in Boulder City.

Did you get to places like Lorenzi Park or Ladd's springs?¹⁶

Oh, yeah. Ladd's. Where was Ladd's?

Ladd's would be down on [Fremont Street], out in that area. It was a swimming hole.

Ladd's, I think you're talking about the swimming pool that was there on Fremont, or just off of Fremont. I used to go there. I can remember what it looked like. It wasn't very lovely, believe me.

How about Lorenzi Park?¹⁷

I remember we used to have to walk out to Lorenzi unless someone had a car. It was a dirt road out here. And they had two lakes. I went to school with Pauline Lorenzi.¹⁸ I went to school with the girls whose father had a drug store. Ferron.¹⁹

They had a gazebo out in the middle of one of the lakes. I think they had band concerts and things in the daytime. But, see, I was living in Boulder City, so I didn't go to things like that.

Let's talk a little bit about the CCC. They came to Boulder City in 1935, the first bunch of them. Do you remember when they came to town, or remember seeing the boys around town in their uniforms?

We were kind of half scared of them. We girls, at first.

How come?

All these many men coming in, for one thing. Young boys. Of course, I was a very good little church girl in those days. It took a little while for us to warm up to them.

I had read that often when the CCC boys came to town, the people in town didn't get along with them, or really didn't welcome them at first. Was that the same case in Boulder?

I don't remember if Boulder City was like that. Most of what I remember about the CCCs is that they were in those barracks down there in the front part of town.²⁰ Kind of close to where we used to have our dances. Wasn't that building kind of near there?

Yes. It was behind the American Legion Hall,²¹ down in there.

The officers²² had certain days they'd invite the people to come and have dinner over there on Sunday. And then as the boys got acquainted with different people, they would allow them to bring guests to come and eat over at the barracks.

And the same thing was when the mess hall²³ was there. The CCCs came after the mess hall and all that was gone. We used to go over in the mess hall and eat on special days. And if someone had a guest they wanted to bring, they could.

Do you remember the Anderson Brothers Mess Hall? Do you remember eating in there? What was it like?

Lots of food, oh boy! They really did, and good food, as I remember it. They used to make coconut macaroon cookies that I loved!

Did you have Thanksgiving there, Christmas dinner?

Yeah, I have eaten both places for Thanksgiving and Christmas, the CCC camp when they invited us.

I think the people in Boulder City were very good about the CCC boys.

Did local girls and CCC boys date much?

Yeah. I married one of them.

Tell me how you met this guy. What was his name?

His name was Carl Deere and he was from Mansfield, Ohio. He had a buddy named Charlie Guy, who's still here. In fact, Charlie and I play music at the Katherine Center every Friday morning, for the seniors up there.²⁴

I guess Dusty—his nickname was Dusty—he was going with a girl over in Las Vegas. Now, the CCC boys, some of them, come over to Las Vegas. I don't think they had a CCC camp over here.

Yes.²⁵

He was going with a girl over [there] at the time I met him.

How did you meet him?

I can't just remember how come I met him. I think probably because he played a guitar. At that time I was kind of in to the music and I had been playing with a man that played banjo, and another man that played guitar, and learning to play other chords besides in the key of C which is what I first knew. When I first started playing, everything was in the key of C. And I think that's how I met [Carl] is because he played guitar.

Do you remember what year you met him?

I can't remember even how long I knew him before we got married. I probably met him in '38 because we got married in '39, then he didn't want me to teach dancing. I was teaching dancing at that time when I met him.

Besides his playing the guitar, what was it that attracted you to him?

He wasn't a bad-looking critter. He had blond curly hair. And he sang. That's what brought us together, really, was playing somehow. Isn't that something? I never have thought of that. I'll have to ask Charlie [Guy] how [Carl and I] met.

Was you down at the CCC party very much? You taught ballroom dancing to these boys.

We used the VFW hall for these boys. They came for ballroom so they could learn to dance and go to the dances and participate in them. So many of them were from the CCC. I don't remember if I even charged them for lessons. I think I charged them for their partners were voluntary participants.

Did any of them get married?

Boy, I don't know.

Were the boys good?

They caught on pretty quick. I had had experience teaching ballroom dancing in the summer and after school because it was too hot to teach in the winter and I saw teaching the boys was a good idea. It was simple. I had had experience. I had used to go every summer [to the CCC] in the summer job as a ballroom dancer. I had that when I was teaching the boys. I came to the first turnout. But they didn't all hang on and keep coming. I don't remember how long we had the lessons, how long I did it. Quite a while I think.

When you were teaching them ballroom dancing, was that quite a while before you met the CCC boy that you married?

I think I already knew Dusty then, but it was before we got married.



Therese Courture and Carl
Deere in Boulder City before
their marriage, 1938.

*[photo courtesy of Therese
Courture Thomas; negative
in the possession of Dennis
McBride]*

Besides his playing the guitar, what was it that attracted you to him?

He wasn't a bad-looking critter. He had blond curly hair. And he sang. That's what brought us together, really, was playing somehow. Isn't that something? I never have thought of that. I'll have to ask Charlie [Guy] how [Carl and I] met.

Were you down at the CCC camp very much? You taught ballroom dancing to these boys.

We used the VFW hall²⁶ and I gave those boys their lessons for ballroom so they could learn how to dance and go to the dances and participate in them. So many of them said they didn't know how to dance. I don't remember if I even charged them for that. And the girls that came to be their partners were volunteer girls from the Boulder City young teenage set.

Did any of them get romantically involved with the boys they were helping dance?

Boy, I don't know. I wasn't that nosy. I didn't try to find out.

Were the boys good dancers, or were they pretty clumsy at first?

They caught on pretty good. The way I taught was very simple. I had had experience teaching for a ballroom ... in San Diego one time. I used to go every summer and study dancing. I never did teach [in Boulder City] in the summer because it was too hot. And I'd go study. So I had applied for a job as a ballroom teacher and I saw how they taught ballroom dancing, so I used that when I was teaching the boys at the CCC camp. There was quite a few came to the first turnout, but they didn't all hang on and keep coming. I don't remember how long we had the lessons, how long I did it. Quite a while I think.

When you were teaching them ballroom dancing, was that quite a while before you met the CCC boy that you married?

I think I already knew Dusty then, but it was before we got married.

Do you remember any of the work that the CCC boys did around Boulder City or down at the lake?

The main work that I remember they were doing was up on Indian Reservation 27 on the north end the [something] walls, the little rock walls here and there. Like those rock gate things they have with the signs on them and all. They built a lot of those. Of course, they kept the park on Charleston, the camp park up.



The Ballroom Class
at CCC Camp

How did you spend your time on by Earl Brothers?

Yeah, it was called Amateur Night. They had singers and dancers, and comedians, and people that did magic tricks. All kinds of different things.

Do you recall any in particular that might have impressed you as being very good or very funny?

There's a fellow here in town that I played for, and I can't think of his name now. He was a fellow that was available anytime. He sang, like a Minstrel fellow. In some ways and some other things. He had a very good voice. I see him every once in a while. When I go to the Mormon church, they have programs and I go play for

Therese Courture's ballroom dancing class at Boulder
City's Civilian Conservation Corps camp, ca. 1938.

*[photo courtesy of Therese Courture Thomas;
negative in the possession of Dennis McBride]*

Do you remember any of the work that the CCC boys did around Boulder City or down at the lake?

The main work that I remember them doing was up on [Mt.] Charleston,²⁷ on the roads and the [retaining] walls, the little rock walls here and there. Like those rock gate things they have with the signs on them and all. They built a lot of those. Of course, they kept the park on Charleston, the camp park, up.

The CCC boys put together programs, too. Singing programs.

Yeah, but I don't remember that I ever played over there.

Do you ever remember seeing one or going to one of their programs?

No, sure don't.

They had them at the [Boulder] Theatre as well.

Now that could have been where I met [Carl]. Earl Brothers.²⁸ I don't remember if he was doing those amateur programs at that time or not. But that could have been how I met [Carl]. I know I played for one CCC boy to sing, Alfred Langley. He came and got on the program, I auditioned the people. Then I had to play for them, whatever little thing they did, if it needed music.

These were special things put on by Earl Brothers?

Yeah. It was called Amateur Night. They had singers and dancers, and comedians, and people that did magic tricks. All kinds of different things.

Do you recall any in particular that might have impressed you as being very good or very bad or very unusual?

There's a lawyer here in town that I played for, and I can't think of his name now. All these names aren't available anymore. He sang. He's a Mormon fellow. Rex [Jarrett]. I played for him. He had a very good voice. I see him every once in awhile. When I go to the Mormon church, they have programs and I go play for

them, and he always says, "This is the girl who played for me to sing!" And he was just a young kid then. Rex is quite an artist, too.

Tell me about your dancing studio in Boulder City. How did you come to establish it?

I, for one thing, danced two or three times in programs at the church. Most of our programs were at the church because the city didn't have things like they have here in Vegas now. I taught my sister to dance, and when she danced on the amateur program she won the contest, and everybody was saying, "Why don't you have a dancing studio? Would you teach my daughter?" So I did a few. I had just a few the first year. And the next year I had a better studio in the basement. Did the Mormon church have a basement? Anyway, I know my studio was in the Mormon church because it was the only place I could find available. Things like that weren't too available in Boulder City, you know. They didn't have little stages up in the libraries and all that stuff like they do here now.

When I got a bigger class the next year, I graduated out into the ..., seems to me, like Mr. Garehime, he was the man who had the music store over there, he had a building he wasn't using anymore where he'd had his music [store].²⁹ But on the other side of it was a mortuary. I don't think the mortuary was even open when I had my studio there. So my dad built the barres in the walls for the kids, and I had my studio over there.

I have to put this little bit in. Do you remember when they found that Indian up in the mountains?

*Queho?*³⁰

Yeah, Queho. Guess where they put his bones? In the rest room of my dance studio! It was the rest room that went to the mortuary and my dance studio. My students went in there when they come to dancing lesson that day, and came running back in. "Terry, there's a skeleton in there!" And there he was, laying out on the sink.

So after I had the studio in the Garehime building, I decided to see about getting a bigger one because my class kept growing. I went over to the basement of the church across from where our house was on the corner of Utah and Arizona [Streets].³¹ Which church did you say that is?



Top Photograph

Therese Courture's first dance class,
held in the Mormon Church in Boulder
City, 1935

*[photo courtesy of Therese Thomas;
negative in the possession of Dennis
McBride]*

Middle Photograph

Cast members of the *Baby Broadcast* of
1937

*[photo courtesy of Therese Thomas;
negative in the possession of Dennis
McBride]*

Bottom Photograph

Cast of Therese Courture's 1939 *Spring
Recital*

*[photo courtesy of Therese Thomas;
negative in the possession of Dennis
McBride]*

Episcopal?

Episcopal. The bishop rented me the bottom of the church for those two days a week I needed to use it. So I had my dad put in nice barres, and I had a piano down there, and mats for the acrobatics. Just had a regular nice dancing studio there. Then I graduated over here to Las Vegas because I thought maybe I could keep [a dance studio] up over here.³² I did it for two years, but it was too much to come back and forth for the amount of students I had.

Do you remember what year it was that you started your studio first in Boulder City?

I think it was before I got out of school, the first teaching I did. It was only on Saturday.

How much did you charge a student?

Fifty cents a lesson. And then \$3.75 a month. I don't think I ever charged any more than \$3.75 a month. That was my price all the time. They had their class lesson, and then if they wanted to come and take a private lesson to help them get ahead a little more, they could do that. Some of them did and some of them didn't.

Tell me about some of the programs that you put together with your dance classes out in Boulder City.

Usually I had a recital in the spring, just about the time school would let out. My most well-known one was *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*.³³ Which my mother helped me with. She did the play part of that.

The play part?

Yeah. We had the little stage play with Snow White and the dwarves, and the whole story of Snow White. I used what I called the prelude, which was in the beginning, telling about how the Queen Mother was spinning and it was snowing and she pricked her finger with the needle and the blood fell on the snow, and she said she'd like to have a little girl with skin as white as snow and

up a red at the blood, or whatever. And that was the way we put the play on.
It was a real nice little play.

Did you ever see a play like that?

Yes, mother made that one?



Did you do the choreography, too?

Yes, mother made that one?

What did you have to do that?

I don't know. I just came to see. I used to go to the movies. My

father would let me in. After I paid one time to see the movie he'd let me in to

see the movie. I'd go to the movies and see the movie. I'd go to the movies and see the movie.

I'd go to the movies and see the movie. I'd go to the movies and see the movie.

Snow White and the Seven Dwarves from Therese
Courtture's *Snow White* recital, performed in Boulder
City's Mormon Church on April 22 and 25, 1938.

*[photo courtesy of Therese Thomas; negative in
the possession of Dennis McBride]*

lips as red as the blood, or whatever. And that was the way we put the play on. It was a real cute little play.

Your mother wrote that part?

No, I wrote it all. At that time *Good Housekeeping* [magazine] had started to have the story of the play as Disney was doing it. This is at the same time Disney was making his *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*. So I had those pictures to go by for the costumes, too.

Who made the costumes, who designed the stage sets?

I designed the costumes and usually ended up making the majority of them. A lot of the mothers sewed, but a lot of them didn't.

And the set design and flats?

The set designs were done by my father and several other people. Doris Kelly helped with the art work, and several other people that cooperated. Everybody worked together.

Do you remember that opening night of your Snow White recital? Were you nervous?

I was nervous, sure. I was always nervous because I had to remember all the dances and be there to prompt them. I did have a lady played piano for me for that one, though. Usually I played piano for my own classes.

Did you do the choreography, too?

Um, hmm.

Where did you learn to do this?

I don't know, Dennis. It just came to me. I used to go to the movies. Mr. Brothers would let me in. After I paid one time to see the movie he'd let me in as many times as I wanted to because I'd sit there and copy the steps down in a

notebook. Eleanor Powell and Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers would proceed to do them on the film. Some of them I didn't get right, you know, but it gave me the ideas how to put things together. When a person has a talent for music with a natural-born rhythm, which you have to have for the counts, so many counts in the taps have to go to so many counts in the music. You have to have that natural-born thing to be able to do that.

And you had. It was just something you brought with you.

Yeah. I guess my dad played piano, and his mother played, so I think it came from that side.

Were either your brother or sister talented in that way?

My brother played guitar and sang, and my sister played boogie-woogie. I taught her to play the piano boogie-woogie. But neither one of them followed. My brother was a dentist and my sister was a secretary to a bank president. It's just like my kids: neither one of them did it, either. I guess it ends here!

You also did the Baby Take a Bow program at the [Boulder] Theatre?

Yeah. That was, I forget which year. About '36 or '37. It was called *Baby Broadcast*.³⁴

Tell me about putting that together with all these little, little kids. They were so small. Were they easy to work with?

Oh, yeah, most of them.

How did you teach children that small?

Well, I think the smallest I had was like, three and four. Usually they were four. But the majority of them were five and six. They just looked little because I had them dressed up in long dresses and things like that. I don't know how I did it. I wonder myself now how I did it.

That was held at the Boulder Theatre, too. Did Earl Brothers rent you that space?

No, he always just let me use it. He was a wonderful man.

Do you remember him very well? What kind of man was he? If you could describe his character.

He was very interested in children, I think, a lot. I know it was because of him my brother finished school. My brother was going to be a drop out, and Earl Brothers said he'd give him \$20 or something if he'd go ahead and finish and graduate. And he did. And he ended up going to college.

Do you remember Mrs. Brothers, the first Mrs. Brothers, Gladys?³⁵ What do you remember about her? I've heard almost nothing about her.

I taught Earl Brothers' daughter dancing. And that's about all the association I had with Mrs. Brothers. She was a very kind person as far as I can remember. I don't remember having too much to do with where she was around. I think she was more a business-type of woman. That's the appearance she gave.

You mentioned that you never stayed in Boulder during the summers?

I did after a while.

You mentioned going to California to study dancing, or to work around dancing?

I usually would go down there for just a short time, though. Like a six-week course or something.

Where did you go down there?

As a rule I would get a job in a dance studio. I got a job in one in Long Beach one time playing piano for dance classes. And then I got my dance classes, instead of getting a salary. I'd get a job in somebody's home doing their housework, and helping around the house, with them knowing that I had to be



Top Photograph

Hand-written caption on back reads, "Therese in Boulder City, D Street, about 19 yrs." [ca. 1938]

[photo courtesy of Therese Courture Thomas; negative in the possession of Dennis McBride]

Bottom Photograph

Hand-written caption on back reads, "Me, Therese, at Utah St., B. C., Nev. 1934 (?). First accordion I played at the first Helldorado." [Las Vegas's first Helldorado was celebrated in April 1935.]

[photo courtesy of Therese Courture Thomas; negative in the possession of Dennis McBride]

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Hand-written caption on back reads, "Therese in Boulder City, D Street, about 19 yrs." [ca. 1938]

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Hand-written caption on back reads, "Me, Therese, at Utah St., B. C., Nev. 1934 (?). First accordion I played at the first Helldorado." [Las Vegas's first Helldorado was celebrated in April 1935.]

[photo courtesy of Therese Courture Thomas; negative in the possession of Dennis McBride]

gone for certain hours to go to the studio. And that would pay my board and room. Then I'd go to work in the studio playing for my dancing lessons.

Do you remember any of the studios in particular, or any of the teachers who taught you, that you worked with down in California?

I remember one in Long Beach was a very well-known one. Then one in Los Angeles was one I played for the lessons there. It wasn't a very fruitful thing. I got took. I didn't get what I went there for.

But then you'd come back to Boulder City with what you'd learned down there?

The one in Long Beach really helped me a lot because I was there with her and her classes most all the days I was there playing, two or three times a week. When you watch classes and see how they teach, then you also get steps. And you also get routines, too. I used to copy all their routines. They didn't know that I was a computer.

Did you ever get involved with any kind of entertainment in Las Vegas? They had entertainment in some of the small casinos and roadhouses.

When I got of age, yes, I did. After I got 21.

Tell me about what some of these involvements were in Vegas.

Before I was 21 I got to know quite a few musicians and I used to go out to Railroad Pass³⁶ where they had a dance all the time, a dance band out there playing. Usually it was a three- or four-piece thing. I don't know how I got in there. I wasn't of age, I shouldn't have been in there, really, but I did go. I don't think you could go in those places when you were 18 then. But I'd go in and listen to the guys playing. I didn't ever partake in the playing of it.

And then when I got out school ...

You know, the years seemed longer in those days than they are now. The years just fly by now. In those days, I can't believe sometimes that it was only two or three years that a lot of stuff happened.

I used to go to all the places down on First Street. You know what First Street was? Before the air force got here.

Block 16?³⁷

Yes.

Tell me about that. Now that's something I've been studying for years, trying to find everything out I can. Do you remember Block 16 very well, and the little joints?

Yeah, I sure do.

Tell me about them.

They're even in my head what they looked like.

We used to get in the car, if somebody at school had a car, during noon hour, and we'd go flying down that street, all of us sitting all over the car, and the girls would be out in the front in their gaudy uniforms. And, of course, they didn't [look] as bad as some people dress now, with nothing on. They always had all these gypsy-looking things on. Big-legged pajamas, and all that kind of stuff. And they just hated us kids to come trotting down the street yelling at them, but we just loved to do it.

And then, farther up from the cribs,³⁸ as they called them, were all the little bars. I knew a lot of the musicians that worked in those little bars. Usually it was a piano player and a drummer, or maybe they had a saxophone with them. A few places only had a piano player, and I knew almost all those musicians. I didn't join the union³⁹ until later on, but I couldn't start playing till I was 21 anyway. But I did go in there. I don't know how I got by with it. I guess they just weren't as tough on it as a gambling place. Some of those places, all they had was slot machines. They didn't have tables and things.

You mentioned that the bars and clubs were separate from the cribs?

Yeah. The cribs were all down in the second part of the street. The little bars were like in the first block, mostly. The first block from Fremont [Street]. The Chesterfield, and the Kiva. Lands, I can't remember the names of all of them.

Anyway, they were just bars where people could go in and gamble and drink. Now, what they had behind them, I don't know. They could have had girls behind them.

But the ones where the girls lived, I don't think any women ever went down there. As far as I remember seeing, and I never knew of any women that went in those places. Just the men did. But they had a bar in those places, too.

Some of these clubs—were they very large, or very elaborate or attractive places? What did they look like inside?

They looked like old wild west buildings.

These girls, I'm interested in. Were they all ages, or middle-aged, or young girls that you remember? The prostitutes that worked down there.

A variety of ages. Kind of like with the Mustang [Ranch]⁴⁰ and other places now. But the places were, in my mind, dumps. They looked like a dump, you know. Junky places. I don't think there was any nice places, like at the [Mustang]. I haven't been out to any of those places, but as I understand they're pretty nice places, nicely-built and nicely-furnished. But believe me, those places that were down here [on Block 16] weren't.

And the girls hated you to come by and honk.

Oh, they used to get so mad.

What'd you holler at them?

Oh, just kid things. "Hi, girlies!" We always had a few boys along with us. We'd just drive up the street and wave and make a lot of noise.

Do you remember other places, roadhouses, out on the highway? Like on the LA Highway, the 91 Club,⁴¹ or the Red Rooster?⁴²

Red Rooster I used to go to all the time.

Tell me what you remember about the Red Rooster.

A musician I knew owned it.
 The Red Rooster was where my friend played piano, and I used to go out there to see him, and all I saw was the bar. I didn't go in the other parts. But it had a very bad name. Very bad reputation.

building. Golly, it was huge.

Why?

It's still there. The building is still there.

Everybody always talked about the Red Rooster as being a rough place.

trees and see. I think you turn off on
What kind of music did your friend play out there?

They just played all the songs people wanted to hear.

on Decatur [Avenue]. He had piano
And they danced?

those old
 If they wanted to dance, or sit and drink. And they had gambling out there. You know the Red Rooster was the one Grace Hayes turned into her lodge.⁴³

I'm thinking, Pogo's, on Decatur
You remember it before Grace Hayes had it? And after Grace Hayes got it, did she clean it up a little bit?

I knew who owned that place
 Oh, yes, she built a nice building there.

had a place called the Ballroom, a really nice one
 Used to be a place out on the Boulder Highway called the Volcano, or some such a thing. Looked just like a volcano. I used to go out there to see a piano player. His name was Eber, as I remember. He and his wife owned it. You'd just be surprised what some of these places looked like that existed in those days. I don't think there's anything around here anymore that looks like some of them.

Do you remember other places around here?
 No, and you know, it's almost impossible to find photographs, even, of any of these places. And sometimes the only way that you ever know it was there is that you might run across an advertisement in one of the old papers. Or someone like you who remembers.

Was it a better class, or were they all the same?
 I used to go out to Roxie's, which was called Four Mile.⁴⁴

It was just a bar anyone could go to. And then there was the Kit Kat. Has
Tell me about Four-Mile and Roxie's.

A musician I knew owned that, he and his wife were running it. It wasn't too active then. Now, I didn't ever go out there when it was real active. It was called Roxie's in the beginning. And then this piano player there—he played piano and sax, as I remember. I used to go out there just to see them. It was a big barn of a building. Golly, it was huge.

A bar? The Silver Dollar?

It's still there. The building is still there, out in those salt cedars, or tamarisk trees, kind of off. You can see it from the freeway that goes around it now. You can look down in the trees and see. I think you turn off on Dalhart Street which kind of runs out into those trees, right along the edge of Las Vegas Wash.

I'm trying to think of the old musician who used to own this little bar over here on Decatur [Avenue]. He has jam sessions in it. He died. I was going to say if you could find one of those old musicians who used to play [in these places], you could probably get a lot more information about those places. From a man, than from me.

*I'm thinking, Pogo's, on Decatur?*⁴⁵

Yes. The guy I knew who owned that passed away. He was a piano player. He had a place called the Ballerina, a trailer court, out on one of those roads that go out to Nellis.⁴⁶

Yeah. It was the Kit Kat. And then there was the 91 Club? Where was that?

I remember the Ballerina Mobile Home Park. He owned that, huh?

Out on the LA Highway. First it was the Par-o-Dice, then it was the 91 Club, then it

Yeah, this guy owned that, the one that had Pogo's, too.

*Do you remember other places around Four Mile? There was the Purple Sage*⁴⁷*...*

The Purple Sage, yeah.

Was it a better class, or were they all the same?

It was just a bar anyone could go to. And then there was the Kit Kat. Has anyone ever told you about the Kit Kat?

No.

Well, you know down on 25th Street where that western place is, what's the name of it now?

*A bar? The Silver Dollar?*⁴⁸

Is that called the Silver Dollar?

I'm thinking right there where Charleston [Boulevard] and Fremont [Street] and all those come together.

Well, the Kit Kat was over more where there's a [gas] station. The Kit Kat was in there. That was a place where lesbians and gays went.

A gay bar, it was? How long ago was this? Late '30s, '40s?

Had to be in the '40s.

No, I didn't know there were any gay bars that long ago. I don't know much about what went on then.

Yeah. It was the Kit Kat. And then there was the 91 Club? Where was that?

Out on the LA Highway. First it was the Pair-o-Dice, then it was the 91 Club, then it became the 21 Club in the Frontier. The Frontier kind of ...

Built around it?

Yeah. And in the pictures you can see there was a strange kind of an octagonal tower bit, and you can see that sitting there in all the pictures as it changed names and got bigger and built around.

I don't remember the 91.

That was the late '30s.

I guess Raxie's went on for quite awhile after that. It was still a brothel, and they closed
 The Swanky Tonk was on the Boulder City Highway.⁴⁹ And it was right where that eating place is that's still called the Swanky.

Glen Jones was very involved in that kind of business
I remember the Swanky when it was a restaurant.

Do you remember Glen Jones?
 Is it still there? No?

Yes, I knew Glen Jones. I worked for him out on Nellis Boulevard. He and a
 No. *—can't think of his name—had the Brass Rail,⁵¹ and I worked out there.*

—the Brass Rail was a place where they had a lot of business, and he had
 You mean they destroyed it or it's something else?

It's completely gone. What it is now is the Jokers Wild, that big casino. That's right where it stood. *clamped down on it real big then. Glen Jones used to live over in*

here [Twin Lakes] somewhere. I remember where his house was, but it's not
 Well, when that opened, my husband and I and another man that played guitar and bass, were the first musicians that were hired. The guy that owned it was a Mafia man, and we *knew* it. And I'm trying to think of his name and can't. My husband was blind and [the Mafia man] just really took to him. He'd take him in the back room and talk to him and tell him all kinds of things. We played there for quite a long while. And then we went from there to a place called the Silver Slipper.⁵⁰ The lady that owned it was a big, heavyset woman.

Now, this wasn't the Silver Slipper at the Last Frontier was it?

No, they bought her Silver Slipper. The Silver Slipper was right there just a little bit before, going out from Las Vegas, before you came to the Swanky Tonk. The Swanky Tonk was off the highway. The Silver Slipper was right on the highway. And it was ... Johnnie, was her name. Johnnie. She was a real heavyset woman. *Smart*, too, boy. She was an old rounder, believe me. And she hired us to come over and play in her place, because she didn't have any business. She wanted us out of [the Swanky Tonk] so she could get the business, I guess. She was going to pay us more, so that's what we did. We went over there and played. I don't think both places had cribs. I think this was later. I know Nellis was here then, and they cleaned up [the prostitution] pretty good there for awhile.

Is that what you played at the Sunnyside hotel, son?

I guess Roxie's went on for quite awhile after that. It was still a brothel, and they closed it down in the late '40s, I think, when that sheriff was involved? Glen Jones⁵¹, I think?

Glen Jones was *very* involved in that kind of business

Do you remember Glen Jones?

Yes, I knew Glen Jones. I worked for him out on Nellis Boulevard. He and a fellow—can't think of his name—had the Brass Rail,⁵² and I worked out there.

Uh, huh. And the guy who had the Brass Rail, he played

The Brass Rail. A bar?

Uh, huh. And it was going to be the other [brothel], but they never did develop it because they clamped down on it real big then. Glen Jones used to live over in here [Twin Lakes] somewhere. I remember where his house was, but it's not there anymore.

Tell me a little bit about Glen Jones.

I don't know much about Glen Jones. Tell me about him.

I met him in Los Angeles.

I didn't know too much about him.

Up or whatever they were doing?

Was he easy to work with, or to work for?

Knew where he was, I think.

He never bothered me any.

Was he at her house, Son?

What instrument did you play? Did you have a regular band that you belonged with?

He for it.

No, I played piano mostly. I played piano bar at the Brass Rail. That's where people sit around and ask you for everything they can think of and sing.

Put a dollar in the snifter?

Work because I was a piano player.

Let's hope they do. Usually they didn't. I didn't make too much kitty⁵³ out there, believe me.

A acquaintance of mine. The guy who had the Brass Rail.

Is that what you played at the Swanky Tonk, too?

No, we had a little trio there.

What'd you call it?

Bob's Trio, I guess.

Was Bob your husband?

Uh, huh. And the guy's name that played with us was Johnny, and he played left-handed. And boy, did he know a lot of old songs.

Was this your second husband?

Yes.

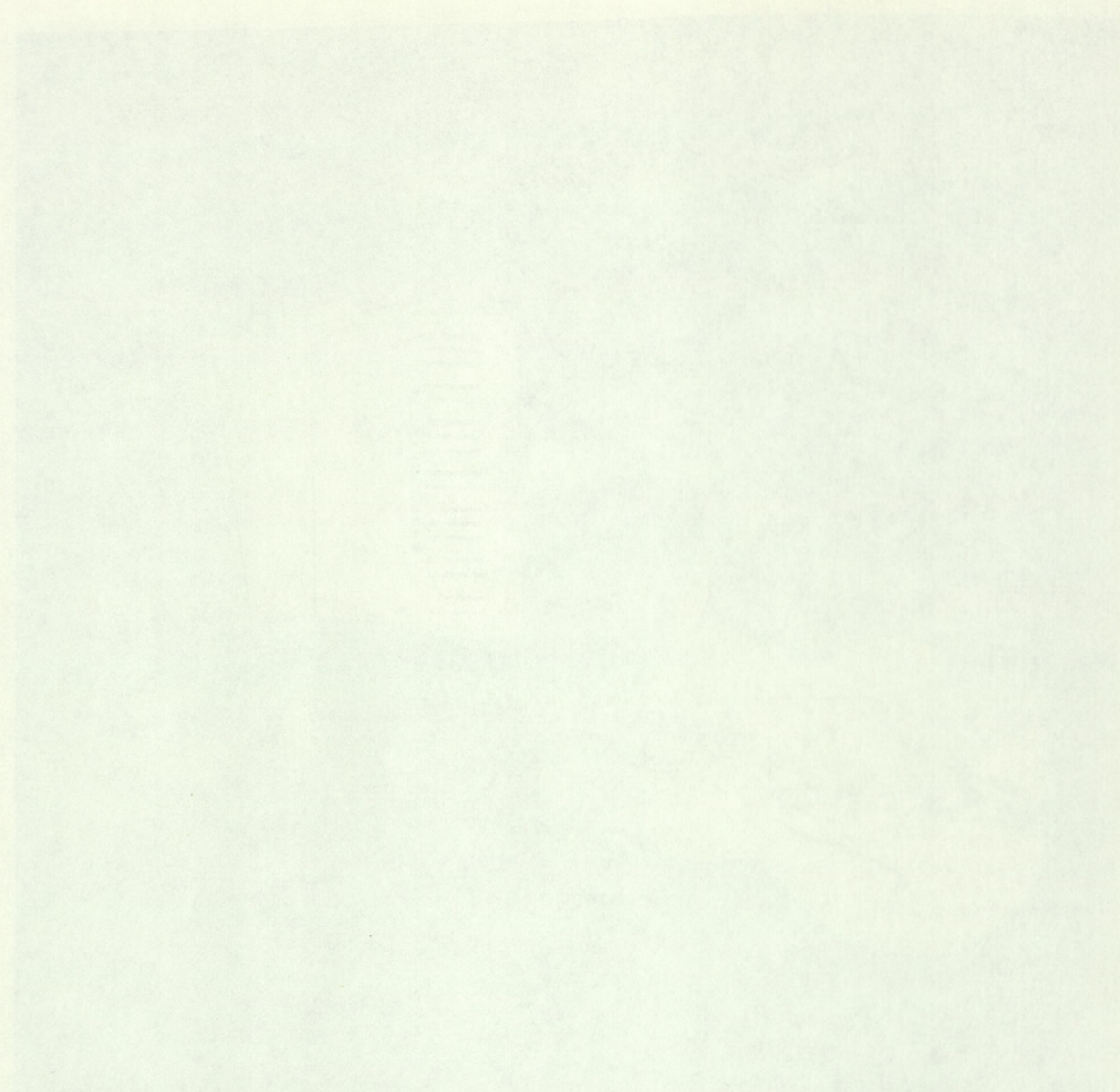
Tell me a little bit about where you met him and how you got together.

I met him in Los Angeles. I went down to Los Angeles. My husband was in the navy, Deere [Carl Deere, the CCC boy from Boulder City], and he had jumped ship or whatever they call it, and they thought I was hiding him. The navy sent me a letter and told me that I better tell them where he was and all that business. I knew where he was. He'd been going with this girl. He started running around with this girl who had a horse, because he liked horses. And he was sick, he was over at her house. So I drove down there and went over to her house and told him, "You'd better get in touch with the navy because they're trying to blame me for it."

Was this during the war?

Yeah. He'd joined the navy. So then I went down to San Pedro and went to work because I wanted to work as a musician. I joined the union, they let me in. There was a shortage of musicians because men had been mostly all the musicians.⁵⁴ And I went to work in San Pedro and I met Bob through an acquaintance of mine. The guy I played with, played accordion, his name was





Bob Sahagian and Therese Courture Thomas, ca. 1945-46

*[photo courtesy of Therese Thomas; negative in the possession of
Dennis McBride]*

Carl Zeller. He knew this bunch of guys over in Los Angeles that were going to be in a movie about Indians. And they use Hawaiians and Indians and everything else when they make an Indian movie. So they tried to get me in the band, they wanted to put me in the band to play piano. I don't know how they made a squaw out of me, but anyhow, that's how I met Bob. He was the guitar player in this band.

What was his last name?

Sahagian. Very Armenian. His middle name was Verdell, which I'd never heard before.

That sounds like an LDS name.

Well, he wasn't LDS.

I felt sorry for him at first because he was blind and everybody was taking advantage of him. He played down on Main Street [in Los Angeles], which was the big place to work during the war. That's where you really made money. Now I wouldn't dare go down there. You'd get your throat slit. But anyhow, the kids would steal kitty from him. They wouldn't let him know how much they made in the kitty, and they were just doing him dirty. I thought I'd be his little mother and I ended up being his little wife. But he taught me a lot about playing, he really did teach me a lot about music.

Did he learn in school to play music, or was he like you, just picked it up because he had the talent?

Just picked it up.

So you divorced ...

I was divorced from Dusty. Dusty got a divorce from me. He joined the navy and he got this divorce.

Do you remember what year that was?

Oh, probably '41.

So you were only married two years?

Two years.

And then you met Bob?

This is four years later.

So you were already divorced from Deere when the navy was after you?

No. He got the divorce. I hid the divorce papers and was dumb enough to think he couldn't get a divorce if I didn't sign them, but he did. But [a] California divorce isn't final until a year. He got the divorce, so it wasn't final from him. It could have been final when I met Bob, I don't know. Bob and I didn't get married until [November 4] '44 [in Los Angeles, California].

And you were playing together, music, in the meantime.

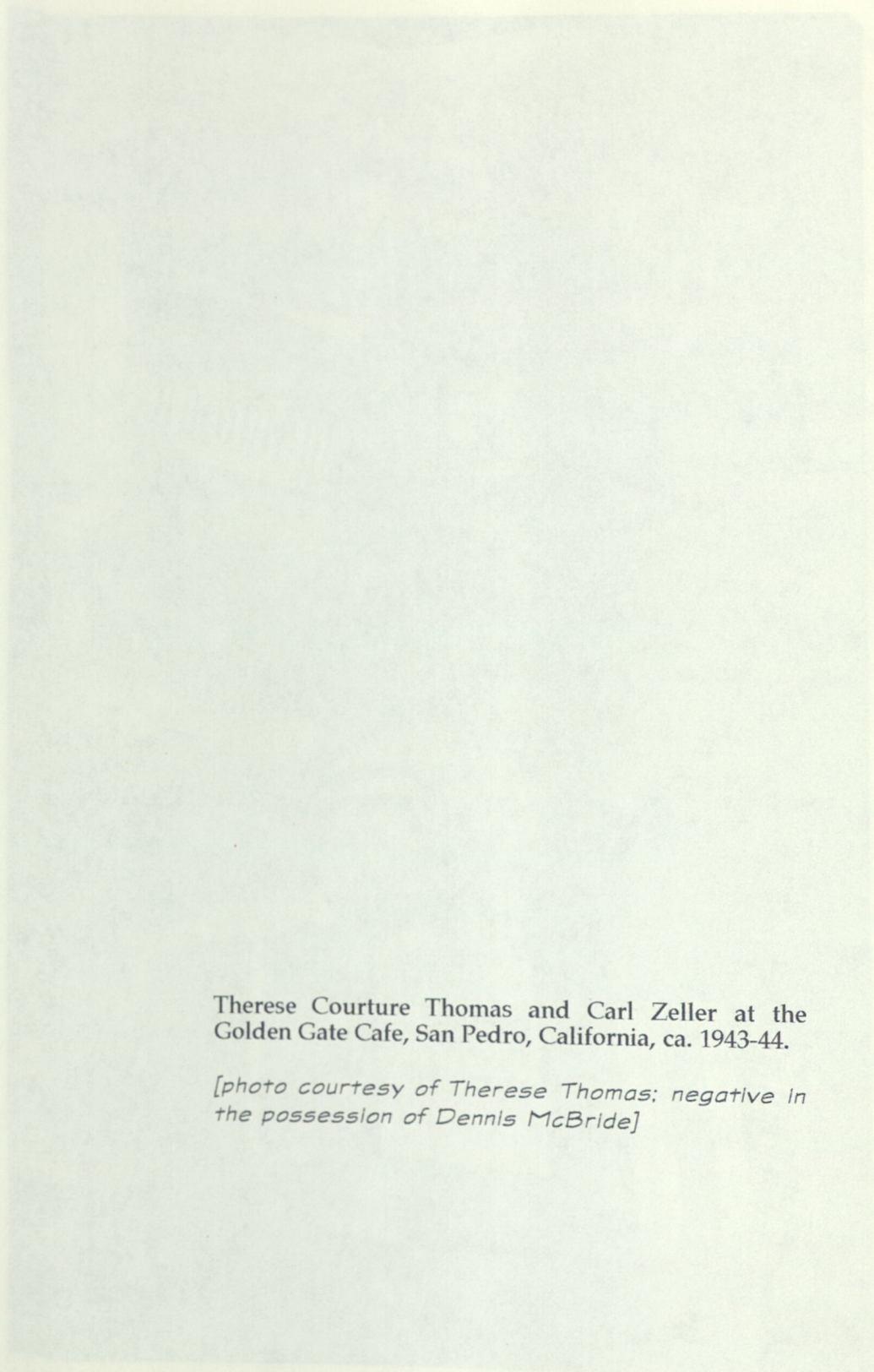
Yeah, I had played with him a little, but I was working in San Pedro and I was living in San Pedro. I was working in the Golden Gate. My friend owned the Golden Gate, my girl friend. She's the one got me to join the union, and I was working with Carl Zeller there. And Carl Zeller was the one that was going to do the movie with Bob, so that's how all that tied in together. But I did play a few jobs with [Bob Sahagian] down on Main Street [in Los Angeles]. I'm trying to think which ones, but I can't remember. Those were hectic days.

Then we quit and left. We got a job someplace else, and I couldn't tell you where. I know we played in Mojave⁵⁵ at a place called the Silver Dollar. Mojave, evidently, is a growing town now. We used to play in that Silver Dollar, and we played at the other one, the Hawaiian place.

Anyhow, where are we?

You and Bob are making your way back to Las Vegas.





Therese Courture Thomas and Carl Zeller at the
Golden Gate Cafe, San Pedro, California, ca. 1943-44.

*[photo courtesy of Therese Thomas; negative in
the possession of Dennis McBride]*

We came back to Las Vegas to play. I always came back here to see my mother. She was here. My father passed away in '42 and my mother was here. We'd come back and visit with her and end up getting a job here somewhere. We played around here for quite awhile. There was another little place besides the Swanky Tonk and Johnnie's that we played, but I can't remember it. It's still there. It's a little tiny... It's on the right hand side of the Boulder Highway going out to Boulder. It's in a place they used to call Whitney.⁵⁶

The Three Pigs is down there.

It's near the Three Pigs. In fact, it was across the street pretty much. I can't remember the name of it, isn't that something? I haven't even got it in my scrapbook.

I was trying to think of these out-of-the-way places you asked about.

Anyway, Johnny left and [Bob and I] played by ourselves.

There used to be a fellow out there whose mother had a little hotel. I can't find that place to save my life. I've been by there several times. We used to have sessions in the bottom of the hotel [where] she had a little bar. On the Boulder Highway. He was an ex-musician Bob knew. Bob knew a lot of musicians from his time before I came along. And these guys were people that had been down in Los Angeles and he met them down there.

Did a lot of [musicians] from Los Angeles come up to Vegas?

Oh, yes. Just loads of them came here from Los Angeles. More so than from back East and like that because those guys from the other music unions didn't come out here until the hotels got big. The hotels weren't big [at] this time [1940s].

They had the El Rancho⁵⁷ first. Then the Frontier⁵⁸ and Sahara.⁵⁹ And the Sahara ... there was a club called Bingo, I think.

Yes, Club Bingo is where the Sahara is built now.

My friend Alice used to play in the Bingo and I used to go there. She plays accordion.

Excuse me, I didn't mean Kiva. I meant the Mission [Bar].

You played piano always? Or you played accordion, too?

I play accordion and organ and vibes. I played vibes for years.

Did you play in the big hotels, too, the resorts?

No. I never did play in those places.

How long were you with Bob? And were you playing music together all that time?

Bob and I were married, I guess, about four years. And then I left because he asked me to. He told me I was a big square, I wouldn't smoke and dope.

He was involved in [dope] up here?

Everywhere he went. All the musicians always had it. Long before the high school kids did.

Cocaine, I've heard, in those days was big.

Yeah.

Was there a lot of that up in Vegas in those early days?

I really don't know because I wasn't mixed with it. I know there was a lot of pot, only we called it *tea* then. Now it's pot.

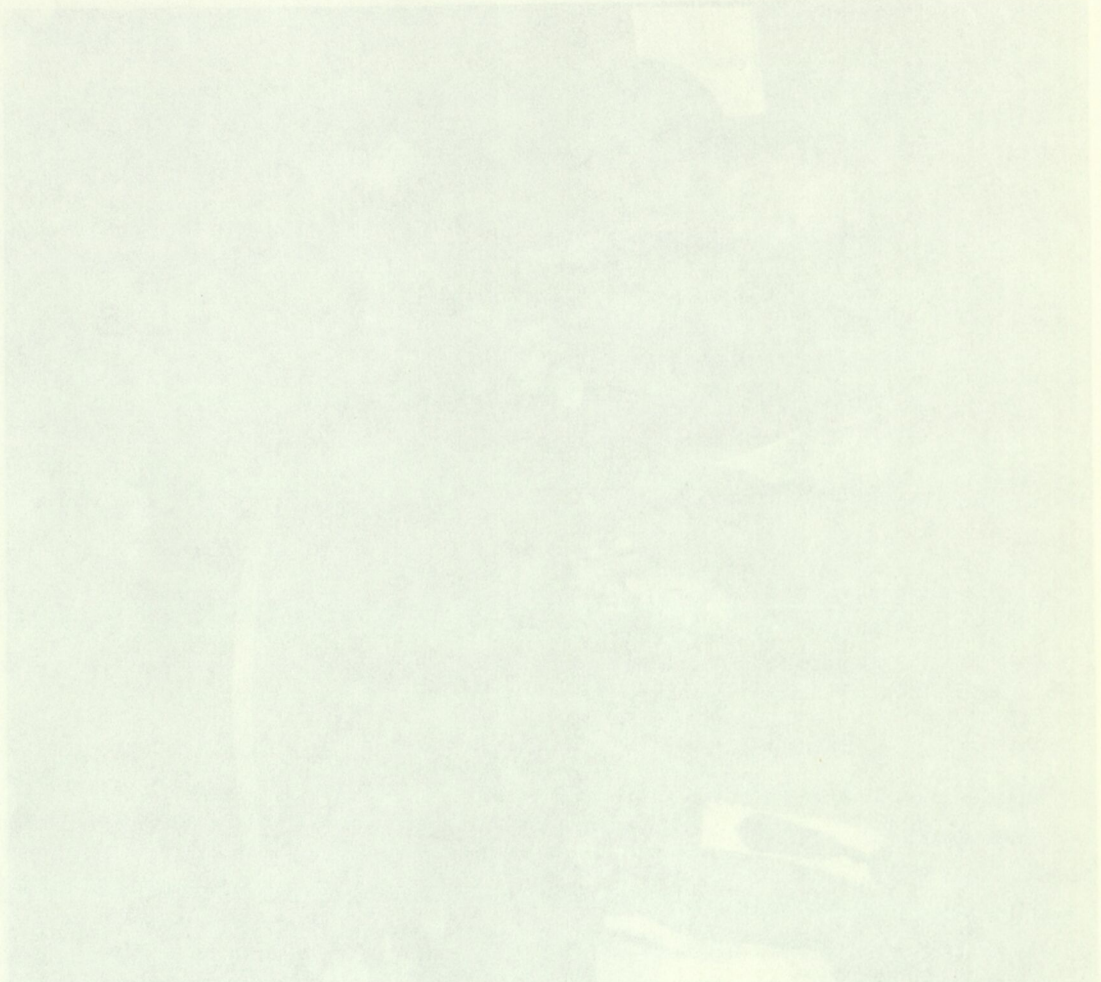
After Bob, did you go on playing music? Did you get a job up here?

Oh, sure. Just piano bar. I worked in the Esquire⁶⁰ where the Golden Nugget⁶¹ is now. The Golden Nugget first swallowed the Kiva Club,⁶² which I played in. Then I went to the Esquire, and [the Nugget] swallowed it.

Was the Kiva Club in a basement? Did you go down to get into the Kiva Club?

Excuse me, I didn't mean Kiva. I meant the Mission [Bar].⁶³





The Esquire Lounge and Bar, 120 South Second Street, Las Vegas,
Nevada, ca. 1948.

Mrs. Thomas's caption reads, "r - l: 2 bosses; me; 2 bartenders;
Mary (school chum); Liz and brother."

*[photo courtesy of Therese Thomas; negative in the
possession of Dennis McBride]*

Was the Mission Bar here that late?

Yeah, the Mission Bar was right across from the Apache Hotel.⁶⁴ And it seems to me like the Kiva was down in the basement. Something was down in the basement then.

Do you remember any of the other little places on Fremont Street in the '40s? Let me name a couple if I can remember. Do you remember the Monte Carlo Club?⁶⁵ Did it have music?

Yes. I don't remember if they had music or not. The Monte Carlo was over by the Sal Sagev,⁶⁶ on the side of the street where the Sal Sagev was.

Do you remember the Sal Sagev, the Las Vegas Club,⁶⁷ the Boulder Club,⁶⁸ the Northern Club,⁶⁹ the Santa Anita Turf Club?⁷⁰

My girlfriend played in [the Turf]. She played organ.

They did have music there, then?

Yeah. Used to be called the [Mandalay]. When Guy McAfee had it.⁷¹ They had a little trio way in the back and it was like a club that had artificial rain by the tables, you know? They'd turn on the storm every once in awhile. Before that it was a Western place, and then I think it was the Mandarin. Some kind of tropical name.

The S. S. Rex⁷² was down there somewhere, too. I think Tony Cornero⁷³ owned that.

I don't remember that one.

All these little clubs and places had music?

Most of them had some kind of music, a piano or a drum and piano. Or a guitar player.

After you and Bob separated or divorced, how long were you on your own playing piano bar?

Not too long. I soon teamed up with Dorothy Dillon and she played organ, and I played vibes and accordion and piano. She played organ and piano.

Did you go around to the small clubs together, or was there one place you stayed?

We used a booking agent.

How did that work?

They just send your resume and picture to the people, and the people hire you if they think they want to try you out.

How long were you involved with her, then?

About three years.

And then?

Then I got with a trio, the Gil Cooper Trio. Gil Cooper died on the bandstand playing his bass in Wyoming. Bill Rogers. And Therese.

Did you ever marry Bob?

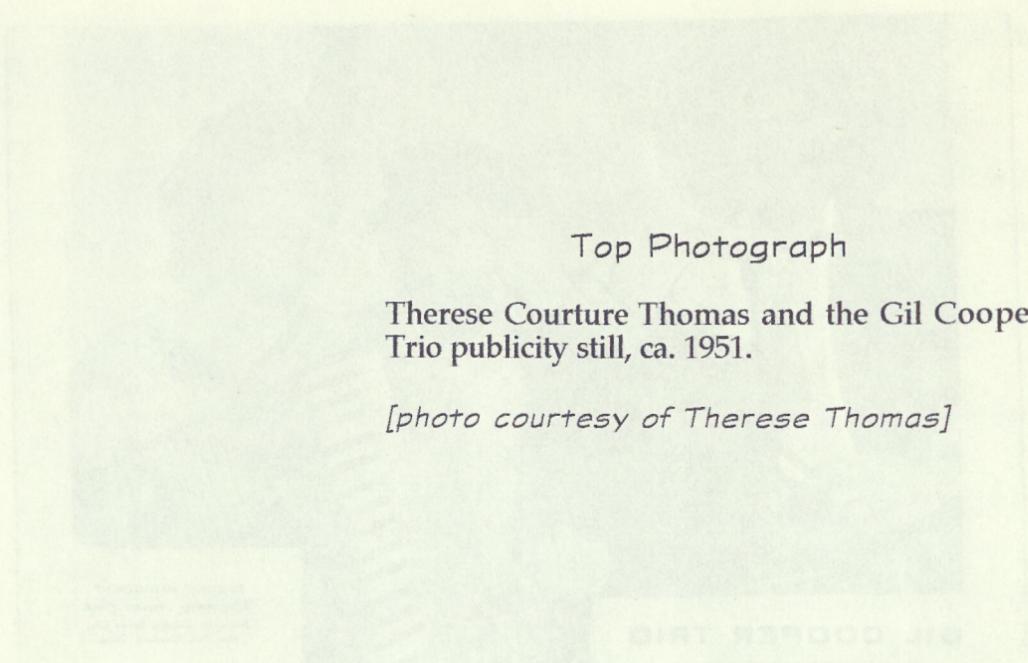
Oh yes, we were married four years. In fact, I just got my divorce from him not too long ago. No, that was Richard I got the divorce from. I got my divorce from Bob so I could marry Richard. I never get divorces unless I have a reason.

How many have you had?

Three.

You were married three times?

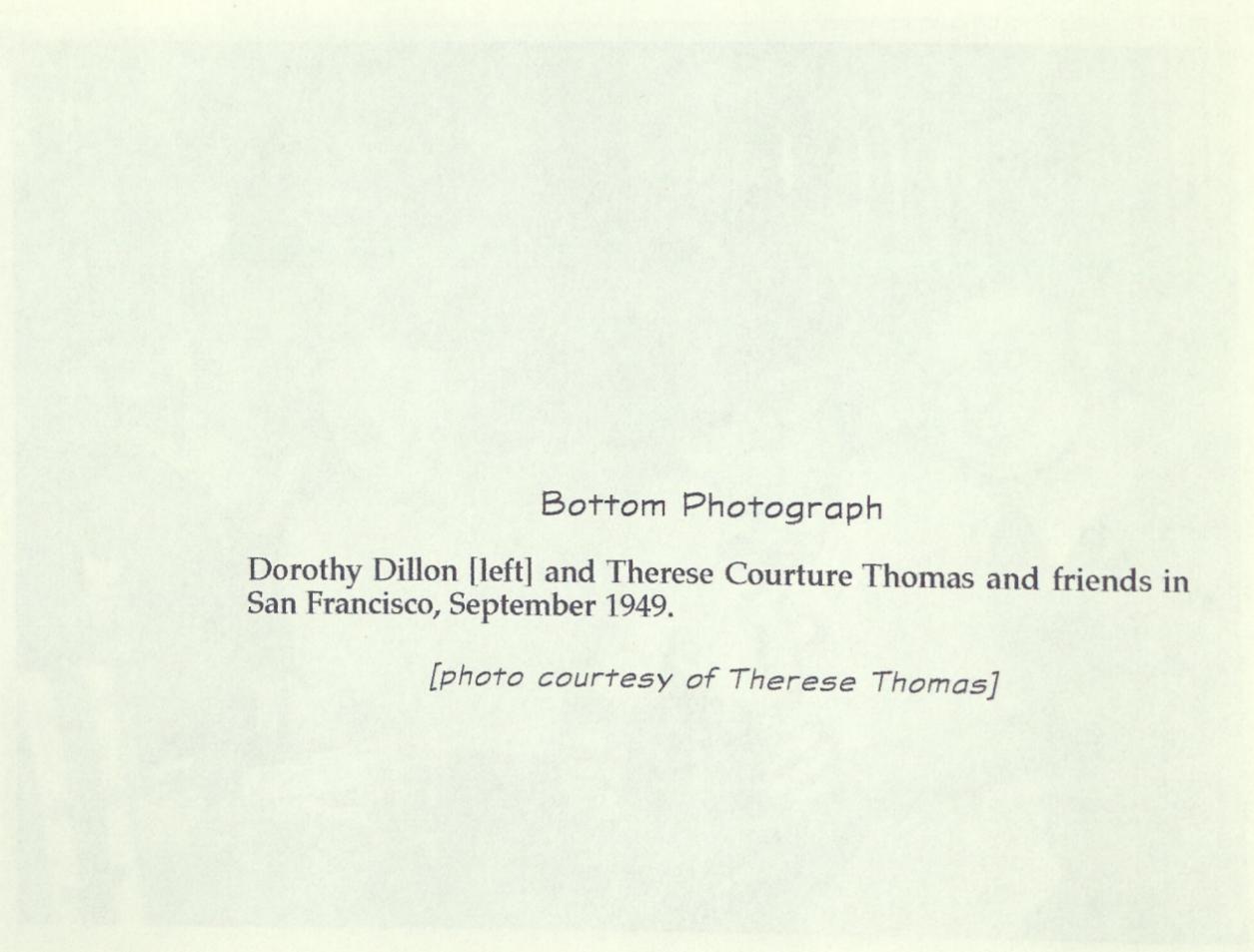




Top Photograph

Therese Courture Thomas and the Gil Cooper
Trio publicity still, ca. 1951.

[photo courtesy of Therese Thomas]



Bottom Photograph

Dorothy Dillon [left] and Therese Courture Thomas and friends in
San Francisco, September 1949.

[photo courtesy of Therese Thomas]

Yes. Three guitars. I married guitars, not men.

Richard Thomas.

Richard Thomas was the one that came from Nellis.

Nellis Air Force Base?

Yes. I married him thinking I was going to be in the air force and travel, and the son-of-a-gun quit. He said he was tired. He had twelve years in and said he was tired of it.

When did you marry him?

In '57.

You were single for quite a long while before.

I was married to him for eleven years, then he left me because he got some kind of religious thing going.

I don't know which is worse: religious things or dope.

This religion thing was that radio Church of God. I can't think of the man's name that runs it, but he had a lot of trouble. He has a big college.⁷⁴

[perusing photographs]

This is a little band playing out at the Meadows when the meadows was the Meadows.⁷⁵

The Meadows!

That's where KENO [radio]⁷⁶ was when it first started up. This is the band. Chad and His Band. Chadburn. His sister sang. She murdered her husband. Shot him down in cold blood.⁷⁷ There's Tommy Nelson.⁷⁸ This is a long time ago.



Top Photograph

The Desert Drifters in the KENO
Radio studio, November 1941.

l—r: Carl Deere; Therese
Courtire Deere; Charles Guy

*[photo courtesy of Therese
Courtire Thomas; negative in the
possession of Dennis McBride]*

Bottom Photograph

The Desert Drifters performing
in the KENO Radio studio,
November 1941.

l—r: Therese Courtire Deere;
Carl Deere; Charles Guy

*[photo courtesy of Therese
Courtire Thomas; negative in
the possession of Dennis
McBride]*

This guy lived in Boulder City and Tommy lived in Boulder City. And these guys were from Vegas.

Do you remember the Meadows?

That was the big place. All done Spanish style. It was a beautiful building.

They had gambling in there, too, and a restaurant. Do you remember the inside?

I used to go out there and eat once in awhile. It was very Spanish-done.

Was it unusual to have women playing in a band, an instrument? Not singing, but playing, say, in the '30s and '40s?

Yeah, you didn't find too much of it around here. There was that one lady, Mable Barnhill. She used to play in all the bands. They all liked her.

But I'll tell you why. Men think women play like a woman. They don't think that you play like a man.

I don't understand the difference.

So many of them say to me, "You play just like a man." There's one little gal here now, Adeline. She plays real great. But there's so few women musicians that play like men. In other words, I don't know how to say it.

Is it a matter of technique, or expression?

Yes. Technique and expression or whatever. So that's probably why women didn't predominate in playing. There's a lot of women musicians since the war. But before that, you didn't see very many women musicians in bars.

I guess you didn't see very many women in bars.

Yeah, the women were in bars a lot, believe me.

But they say that you play like a man? Why do you think that is?

Because I've listened to how men play, mainly.

I find that so interesting because I don't understand the difference. If you play an instrument, you play an instrument. Either you play it good or you play it badly. But like a man or like a woman, I don't understand.

Well, it's expression. Your feeling for music has a lot to do with it. For instance, the guy that plays on TV now, what's his name? You know, that one they always show him playing his piano. He plays very butterfly, a lot of *tootle-too*, *tootle-too* [gestures].

So that has to do with the tone, the form, elaborate chording.

Some men play that way. A lot of men play too butterfly. Now, there's somebody I heard just the other day that plays real butterfly-ish, and I just don't like it.

I guess if you're working in a bar or club like that, especially in those days, the music would have been aggressive and mannish?

It's very hard to explain what that means, really. Like having certain singers they liked. Billie Holiday they liked. Certain girl singers sang good. [Others] had good voices but they didn't like the way they sang.

Helen Morgan.

She was good.

But after the war, women kind of broke into the field of music more.

Would you consider yourself kind of a pioneer musician, as far as being a woman working in these places?

No, not really. I can't tell you too many women that played around here before when I was playing, though. There was a few. Like I said, Mable Barnhill played for a lot of the bands. And Orion Sims. She was one of the union's

officers, and she played good. Both of them are dead. There were others played in cocktail lounges, especially when bars still had entertainment, after Nellis [Air Force Base] came here. So many bars don't have it now.

You mentioned several individuals that had bands or played in bands in Boulder City in the '30s.

Had a band.

Otto.

There's another Higgins was in.

*Otto Littler. Do you remember Otto Littler?*⁷⁹

He and Tommy [Nelson] both worked on the dam.

think. They lost one girl.

*Do you remember Chip White? Tell me about Chip White and His Dam Band.*⁸⁰

Let's talk a little bit about Carson.

I didn't know Chip too well. I was much of a kid when he was there.

Did you ever hear him play?

Oh, yeah. I used to dance to his music. He had a good little band. They had about seven pieces, seems to me. And he had a wife that was *really* beautiful. Beautiful blond woman.

25,000 TON FIBER

I've heard some stories about her.

Yeah. I wasn't going to say anything. She was an ex-girl on the line.⁸¹

From Vegas? Henry.

I don't know where she was from. He married her. But she was a very beautiful girl.*here.*

You know what I always heard, too, was that a lot of the women who worked at Block 16 and at Railroad Pass,⁸² married dam workers.

We used to leave the beer

the lunches and all that

I wouldn't be surprised. I don't know any of them. In those days I wasn't in to that stuff, knowing it.

What's his name, Higgins?

*Clark Higgins?*⁸³

Had a band.

*There's another Higgins who was a barber, went on to become a [Nevada] state assemblyman or state senator from Boulder City.*⁸⁴ *Any relation to Clark Higgins?*

I don't know. He had a beautiful daughter, Beverly. Then the little one died, I think. They lost one girl.

*Let's talk a little bit about Grand Canyon-Boulder Dam Tours [GCBDT].*⁸⁵ *You worked for them for awhile. Tell me about that.*

You remember the colored guy's name? What was his name?

That worked for Grand Canyon Tours?

He worked for Ruckstell.

*Henry and Ocie Bradley.*⁸⁶

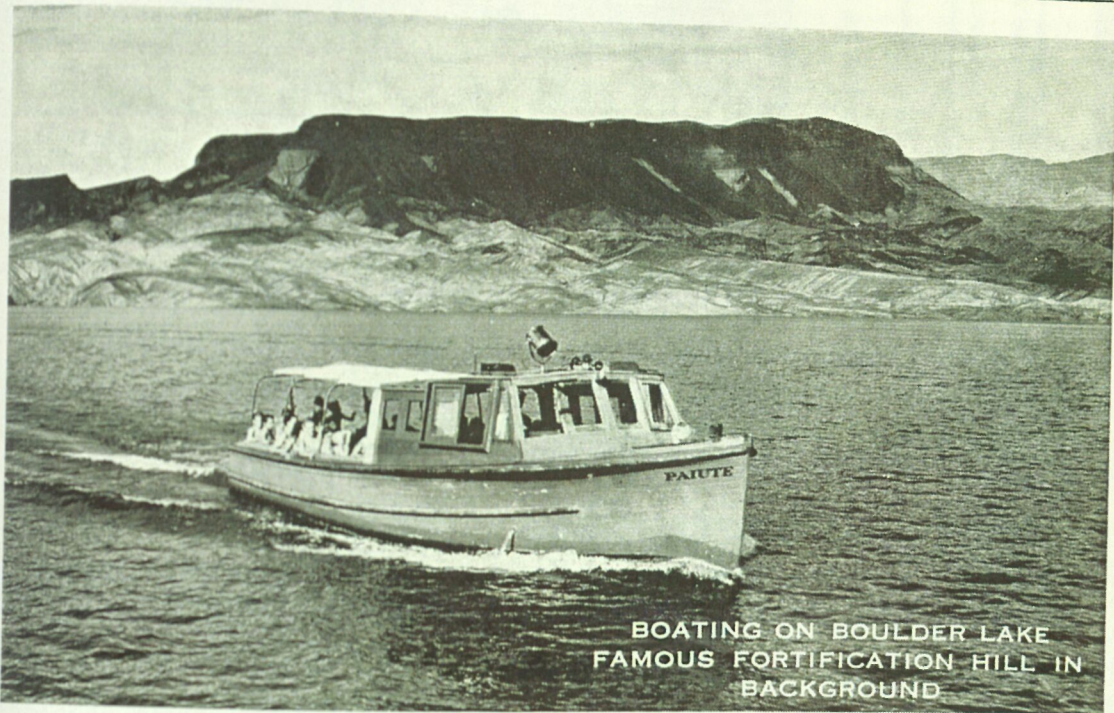
Henry! Henry. Yeah. I worked with Henry.

Tell me about Henry.

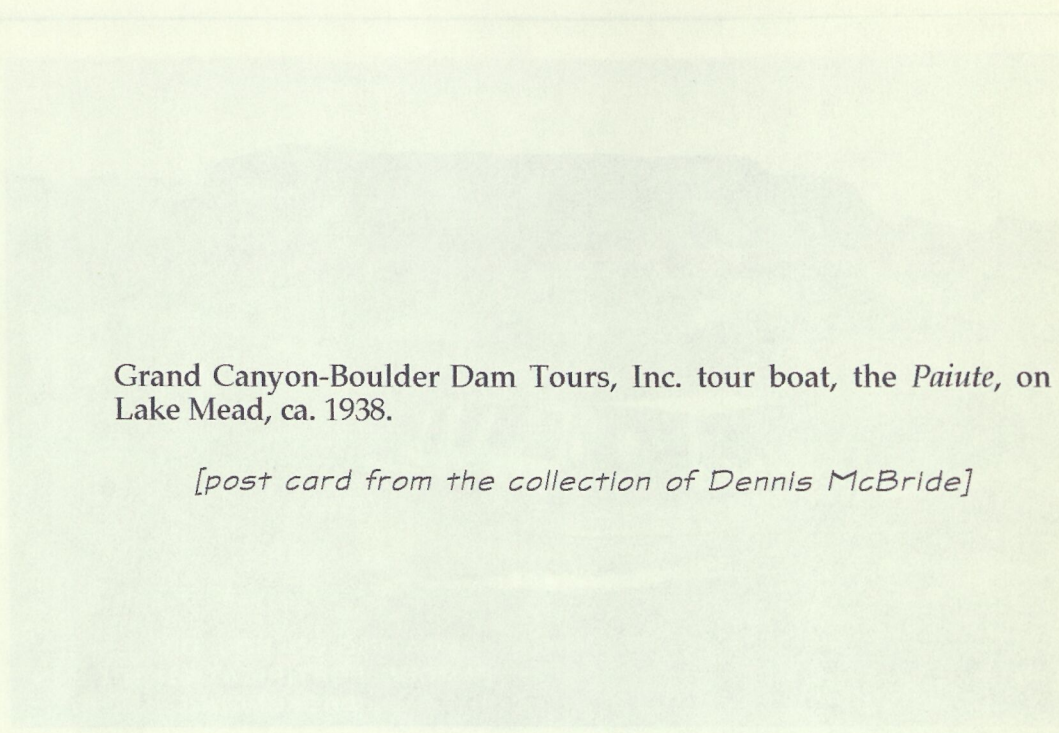
Henry was great. Everybody just loved him. I think he was the only colored family over there.

True. They were at that time.

We used to leave the boat dock about seven o'clock. I had to see that we had the lunches and all that business. And then I took my accordion along to



BOATING ON BOULDER LAKE
FAMOUS FORTIFICATION HILL IN
BACKGROUND



Grand Canyon-Boulder Dam Tours, Inc. tour boat, the *Paiute*, on
Lake Mead, ca. 1938.

[post card from the collection of Dennis McBride]

**GRAND CANYON-BOULDER DAM
TOURS, Inc.**

Complete Transportation Service

Via

Airplane—Boat—Automobile

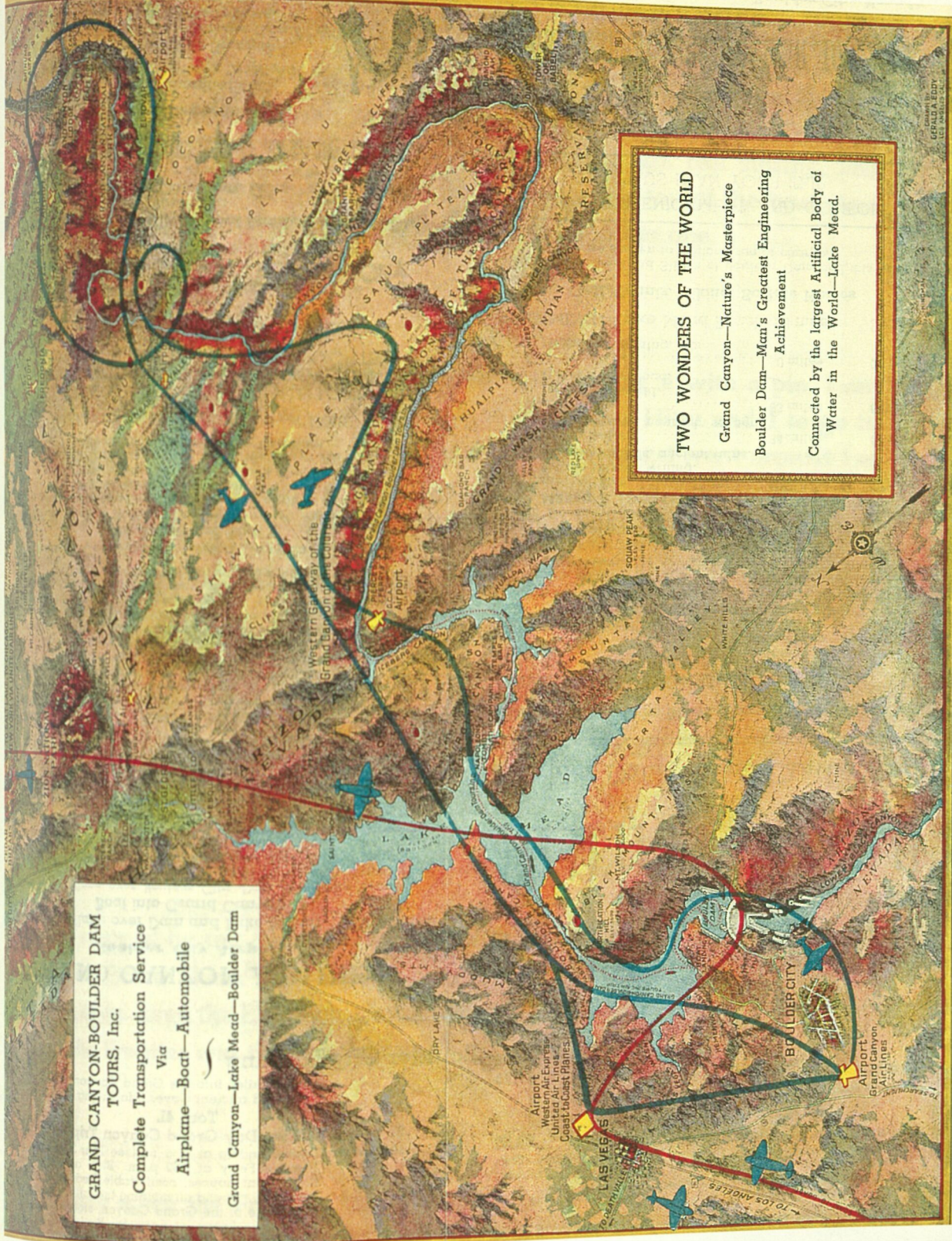
Grand Canyon—Lake Mead—Boulder Dam

TWO WONDERS OF THE WORLD

Grand Canyon—Nature's Masterpiece

**Boulder Dam—Man's Greatest Engineering
Achievement**

**Connected by the largest Artificial Body of
Water in the World—Lake Mead.**



Grand Canyon-Boulder Dam Tours, Inc. tour map of the Lake Mead National Recreation Area and Grand Canyon National Park, ca. 1938 - 1939.

[map drawn by Gerald A. Eddy; from the collection of Dennis McBride]

entertain them on the way back. And we had sing-along. And that's where I met Henry Fonda and his wife.⁸⁷

On the tour?

Yeah, they went on the trip to Grand Canyon. And it got real stormy, and Henry was trying to fix one of the drapes that was over the top of the boat. And we did have the crummy boat, not the *Hualapai*, but the other one.

The Paiute?

The *Paiute*. That was the older one. And he was pinning it with a pin, I can remember that. Then after we got back, he invited Fred Hilty and I to go to dinner with his wife. He wanted us to take him over to gallivant around Las Vegas.

Who was Fred?

Hilty? Fred Hilty was the captain, the pilot.

Of the boat?

Yeah.

So you went over to Vegas.

[Fonda] stopped by my house and picked me up in his little convertible. We went to the Green Shack⁸⁸ to have dinner because that was the nicest eating place here then. Even the El Rancho wasn't here then. The El Rancho was the first one, and the Frontier was the second one.⁸⁹

'41 and '42.

I remember when the Frontier brought their boat down to the lake. All the hotels had their own boat to take the bigwigs for a ride.

What happened when you went to the Green Shack with Henry Fonda and his wife?

The first thing they did was try to get me to get him over to gamble, you know, which was very out of line. He was interested in having dinner and dancing. I don't even remember where else we went after we left the Green Shack. I don't remember it. I wasn't very impressed, evidently. Anyway, one of the girls came up and said, "Isn't that Henry Fonda you're dancing with?" And I said, "Sure is." Didn't even get a picture. Wasn't that dumb? I did get an autograph, though.

Do you remember "Roxie" Ruckstell,⁹⁰ who owned Grand Canyon-Boulder Dam Tours? Bald, completely bald, and a very tall man.

I don't remember him, but I worked for his wife⁹¹ for awhile in their little house up there by the big building.⁹² They had that first house by the big building in Boulder City.

On [Park] Street?

Um, hmm.

OK. That house belonged originally to Paul Webb.

Was that Paul Webb's?

Yes. And quite a number of people over the years I've found out have lived in that house. People who came to work for Grand Canyon-Boulder Dam Tours.

I know that's where the Ruckstells lived, because I worked for [Mrs. Ruckstell] for awhile.

Doing what?

Heating up her coffee, mostly. She'd lay in bed and have her coffee and every time it got a little bit cold I had to take it in and get it heated. That's what I remember. I did some house cleaning, making beds.

This would have been '36, '37, '38 when they were operating their boats down there. Do you remember where the boat dock was you took off from?

Yeah. It was at different places as the lake came up and down. They moved it back and forth. But it was at that big main [beach] that went straight down.

Hemenway Harbor, Boulder Beach, right in there?

Yeah.

What were some of your duties as hostess on this boat?

I had to tell them all the details. I knew all about how many feet this was and how deep that was, and what kind of fish was here, and how they built the dam, how much cement they poured, and how they poured it. Oh, boy! I kept a copy of that speech for a long time, but it finally got destroyed.

Did you have to memorize it?

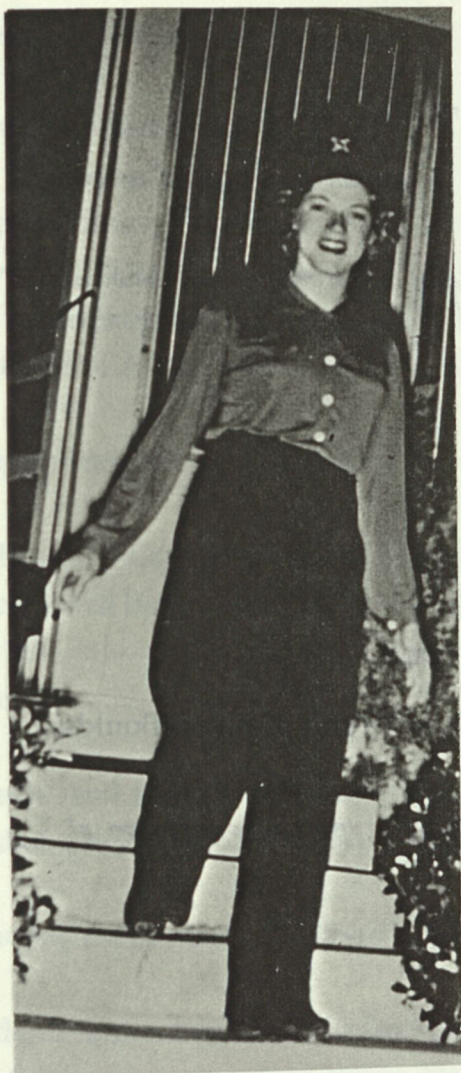
Yeah. All those feets and stuff. Good thing I didn't have the computer I'm using now. I wouldn't have remembered it.

How far did the boats go, or where did they stop on the way?

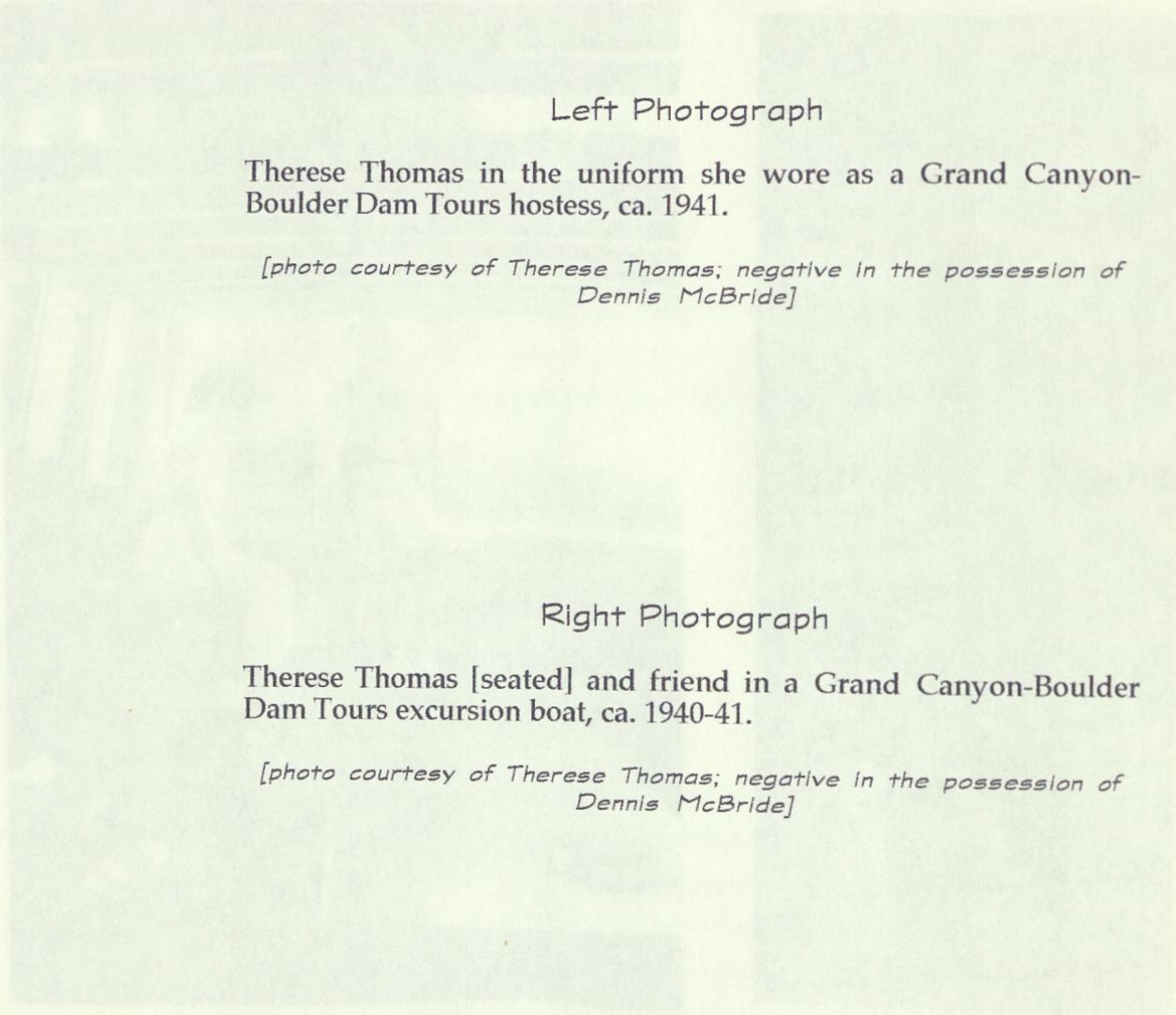
A lot of it depended on how the driftwood was, because as the lake came up, when it was first forming, all the wood that was laying wherever [the water] came up and filled in, would come floating out and get into the main stream of the river. And we'd go right up as far as there was a blockade of driftwood, and that was it. You couldn't get any farther up. And sometimes there were logs that were submerged and a couple of times our propeller hit them. And if anything went wrong, then we'd have to go into that dock that's halfway down coming home.

From Grand Canyon? Pierce's Ferry?

Pierce's Ferry. We'd have a storm, we'd like the people, we'd have to bring the boat back. I interviewed a man and he was the chauffeur for CCRT and was on an automobile trip.²³ And you were



everything would seem like a little bit of a joke. It was possible that I worked for them at some point in my life. There was one other lady who had a car that was very nice. Was that the only job you had with them? Did you work for them?



Left Photograph

Therese Thomas in the uniform she wore as a Grand Canyon-Boulder Dam Tours hostess, ca. 1941.

*[photo courtesy of Therese Thomas; negative in the possession of
Dennis McBride]*

Right Photograph

Therese Thomas [seated] and friend in a Grand Canyon-Boulder Dam Tours excursion boat, ca. 1940-41.

*[photo courtesy of Therese Thomas; negative in the possession of
Dennis McBride]*

Pierce's Ferry. We'd have to take the people over there. If there was a bad storm, we'd take the people over there and they met them in a car and then we'd have to bring the boat back.

I interviewed a man and his wife many years ago—Pittman—who drove that car. He was the chauffeur for GCBDT and would drive all around or pick them up or take them on an automobile trip.⁹³ And you said you entertained them on the way back?

Yeah. I used to play sing-along songs.

Were they usually a pretty good bunch of people, the tourists?

Yeah. Some of them were kind of pithy, you know. Up their nose, uppity, type of people. [The tour] wasn't as good as they thought it would be, or something. But most people were very congenial. I have the book that they signed, all the boat riders. A log book.

Do you remember whether they asked sometimes kind of dumb questions?

Oh, yeah. Going up there there's a cave where the bats go in. So there's a whole lot of bat dung in there, and they use it for fertilizer.

Guano.

Yeah. And I had to tell them about that cave, and everybody always had funny kind of questions to ask about that, because how did I know?

How long did you work for Grand Canyon-Boulder Dam Tours?

I don't remember. Like I said, the years go so fast now, it's hard to realize that the four or five years of being there while Boulder Dam was being built and everything would seem like a lifetime to me, and it's just such a *short* time. It's possible that I worked for them off and on for a year. There were two of us, there was one other lady who did it, too. I can't remember her name, though.

Was that the only job you had with them, the hostess on the tour boat?

No, I never did work anywhere else for them.

They had two boats?

The *Paiute* and the *Hualapai*.

So the two of you women each worked one boat?

We took turns because they'd only take one boat each day. They never made enough reservations to have both boats go.

Do you remember much about Fred Hilty?

His brother was one pilot and he [Fred] was the other one. Both worked for [GCBBDT]. I don't even know if Fred had a family.

Did you wear a uniform?

Of my own making.⁹⁴ They didn't have uniforms for us.

*Do you remember Sims Ely?*⁹⁵

Oh, yeah.

What do you remember about him?

He was the one that was in charge of Boulder City, the city manager.

Did you ever have a run-in with him or know anyone who did?

He gave me permission to have my dance studio.

You had to get his permission first? Do you remember having to go up to his office and persuade him?

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF RECLAMATION
BOULDER CITY, NEV.

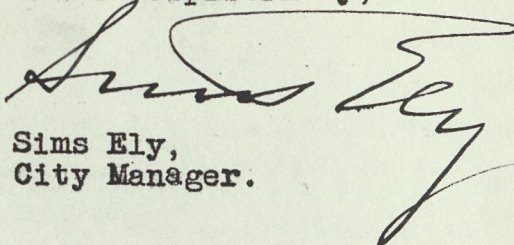
October 7, 1935

Miss Therese Courture
Box 1092
Boulder City, Nevada

Dear Miss Courture:

This will confirm the statement I made to you: that we have no objection to your teaching tap dancing to the children of Boulder City (at the Mormon Church); that this type of business is not deemed as of sufficient importance, financially, to place it in the list of permits. I hope that your little enterprise will be successful.

Yours respectfully,



Sims Ely,
City Manager.

His office was in the same building as the police.

The Municipal Building. What did you have to tell him?

I just asked him if I could teach dancing, and told him that a lot of people wanted to have a dancing teacher, and that I knew how to, and that I thought I better get permission from him before I did it.

But you didn't have to buy a business license?

No, nothing like that. Just got permission for it.

What do you do now with your music?

Now I'm mostly playing for rest homes and [senior citizen] residential places. I play all the old songs that those people know, and they like to hear them. And sometimes I play the ones they can sing, like *Cuddle Up a Little Closer* and *There Are Smiles That Make You Happy*, and all that kind of thing. That's things that remind them of when they were young. And I like doing this because I can walk into these places and they're sitting there in their wheelchairs—most of them are in wheelchairs—and they're sleeping or have a down-in-the-mouth look on their face. Soon as I play a few tunes and get them in the mood, they start having a few smiles. And they tell me how much they appreciate it and enjoy it. At least I'm trying to make their life have a little merriment in it somewhere.

And I've got a little four-piece group I play with. We play for Mormon dances, mostly, and a couple of other little places we play for. We're going to play for the credit union dance next week sometime. The railroad credit union.⁹⁶ We have accordion, bass, and I used to play my vibes, but they got too heavy. First they got too heavy for me, and then the boys helped me. So now they're too heavy for the boys, so I sold them! And I got a keyboard that I play.

What do you miss about the days when you used to play the lounges and the bars and nightclubs?

Mostly the salary.

Do you remember how much you got paid? Was it very much?

When I first got started in the union, I think the union wage was \$37 where I was working, a week. And then, of course, we made tips, but that was back in 1941, you got to remember, too, '42.

Then wages went up as the years progressed and all the salaries got better. I don't know what musicians get now because I don't charge.

Are you still in the union?

Yeah.

You've been in the union since—

1942.

Are there people who've been in the union longer than you?

Oh, yeah. The unions started a long time ago. Probably in the '20s.

What are your union dues?

Oh, they're terrible now. They have union dues for the workers, the ones that are working, and then they have what they call Gold Card Holders [lifetime members], which are a little less than what the others are. Then they also have, lately, the Los Angeles union made a new one for non-working retired. Some of the retirees work. But if you don't work at all, then you get a little bit more off [your dues]. My dues are \$50 a year for the union.

That keeps you active?

Well, it keeps me active in the union, and it also keeps my insurance, which isn't very much, because when you get 70 they whack it in half.

Are singers in the musicians union, too?

Yeah. Singers, too.

They don't have live music on the Strip anymore, do they?

Yeah, quite a few places do. That new one that just opened up, the Hard Rock,⁹⁷ they have five or six bands in there right at the present time. That's for their opening. And all the big hotels have live music. Their *shows* use tapes, but they do use some live music. And they also have some orchestra members for the shows, like, three or four maybe, to fill in when the tape doesn't do it or something. The musicians and their strike messed themselves up. They held out too long.

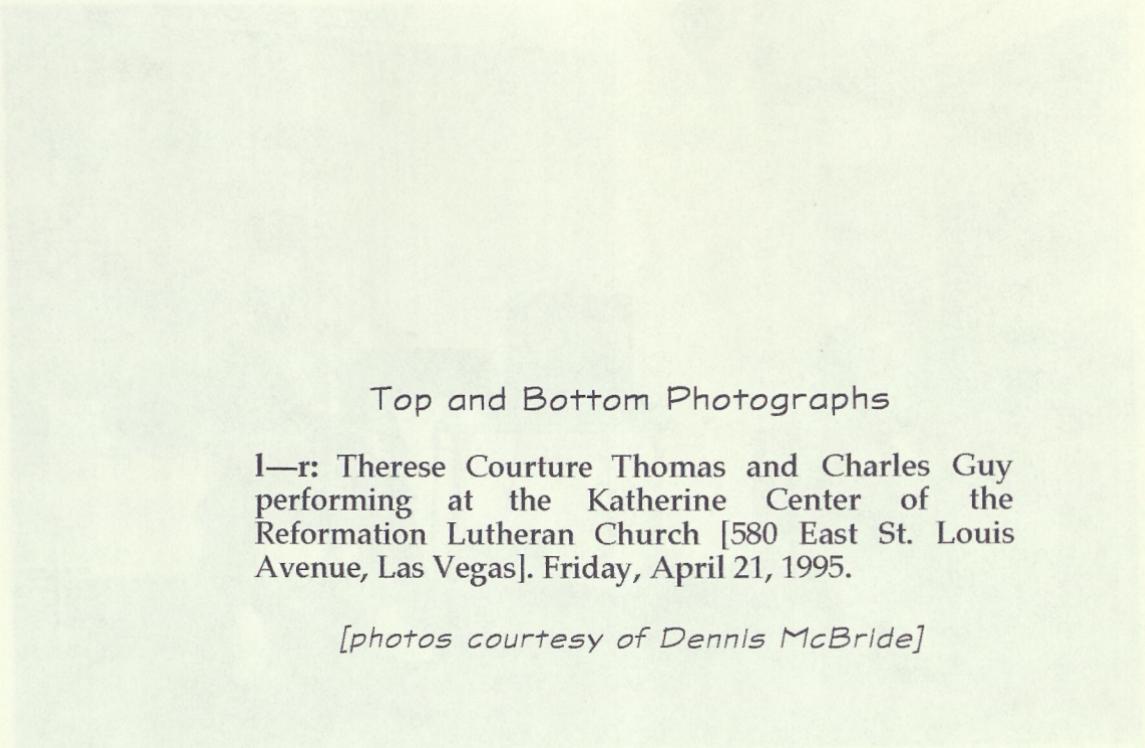
When was the strike?

Lands, it must be ten years ago.⁹⁸ Eight or ten years, something like that. And they sure messed themselves up. And I think the corporations are working to get the unions out.

And they're not being very subtle about it, either.

END

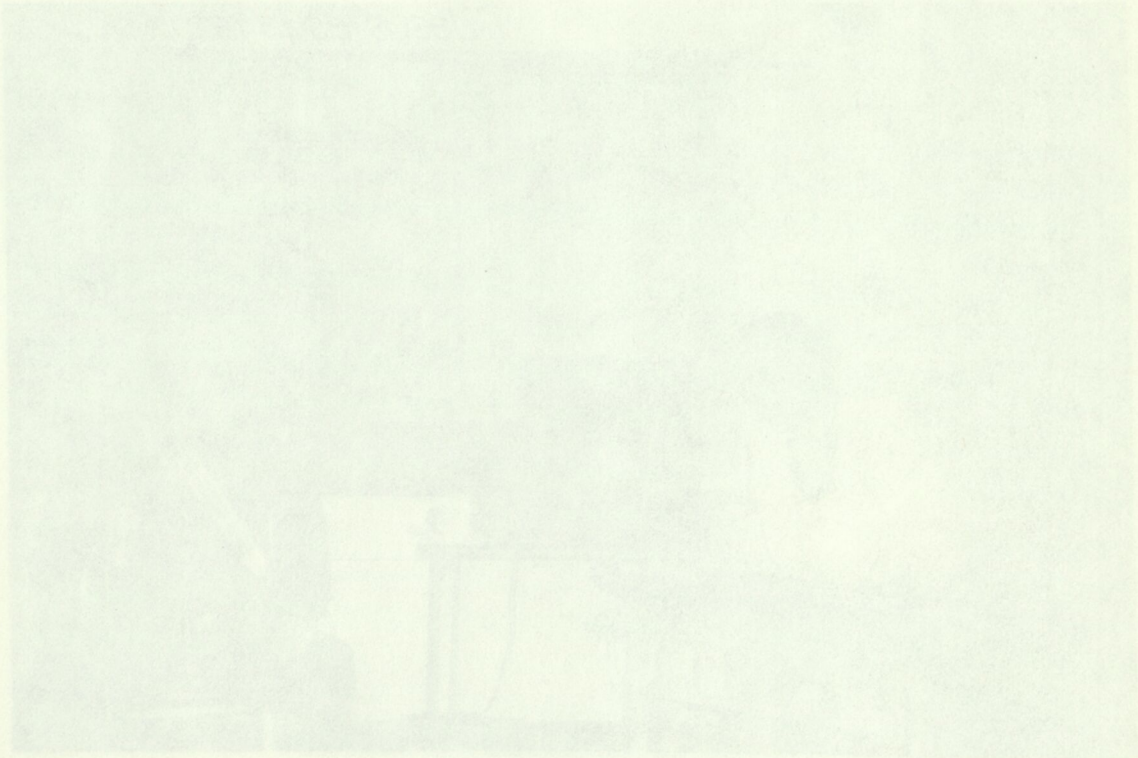




Top and Bottom Photographs

l—r: Therese Courture Thomas and Charles Guy performing at the Katherine Center of the Reformation Lutheran Church [580 East St. Louis Avenue, Las Vegas]. Friday, April 21, 1995.

[photos courtesy of Dennis McBride]



NOTES

1. Thistle, Utah was a railroad and highway junction settled in 1898 and named after the thistles which grew nearby. In the spring of 1983 heavy rains caused a landslide which dammed the Thistle and Soldier Creeks. The town of Thistle, inundated under 100 feet of water, was uncovered when the Army Corps of Engineers tunneled through the slide to drain the accidental lake. The town, however, was not rebuilt.
2. The Castilla Mineral Springs resort was in Spanish Fork Canyon, fifteen miles south of Provo, Utah.
3. Springville, Utah is a small town several miles south of Provo. Springville has become the center of a thriving herb-growing and natural medicine industry.
4. Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah.
5. It was common for men to apply for Hoover Dam work at the employment office in Las Vegas under several different names and for several different positions. Their chances for employment were increased this way.
6. Tommy Nelson was a musician and laborer during Hoover Dam construction. The Boulder City Library Oral History Project conducted an interview with Tommy Nelson, LeRoy Burt, and Joe Kine on July 3, 1986.
7. These were the four diversion tunnels drilled through the cliffs of Black Canyon to divert the Colorado River from its bed around the Hoover Dam site. Work was begun on the diversion tunnels in May 1931.
8. This was the Boulder City Elementary School on Arizona Street, a two-story red brick structure. Construction began on May 26, 1932, and the first classes were held in the new building on September 26, 1932. This building today is the Boulder City Hall.
9. Leila Tilley was the first principal of the Boulder City Elementary School, ca. 1931-33.
10. Elton Garrett [November 8, 1902 - April 19, 1992] first arrived in Las Vegas in January 1929. A journalist, he worked for the *Las Vegas Age*, the *Las Vegas Evening Review-Journal*, and was editor of the *Boulder City Journal*. He was vice-principal of the Boulder City schools in 1933-37, and principal in 1938-1942. He was instrumental in founding most of Boulder City's civic institutions, worked for the establishment of the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, and was a prominent real estate broker. The *Elton and Madelaine*

Garrett Papers are deposited in the Special Collections Department of the University of Nevada, Las Vegas library.

11. Boulder City's American Legion Hall, located on the corner of Wyoming Street and the Nevada Highway, was one of Boulder City's social centers. Aside from housing the American Legion Post 31, weekly dances were held in the building. During World War II and until 1949 it served as an auxiliary school, then was demolished in 1950. The National Park Service headquarters for the Lake Mead National Recreation Area was built on this site in 1952.
12. The Anderson Brothers Mess Hall fed the men who built Hoover Dam. The first meal was served in August 1931, the last on December 31, 1935. The mess hall, together with most of the buildings constructed by the Six Companies, was demolished in 1936.
13. This was a large wooden platform with railings attached by cable to the overhead cableway which spanned Black Canyon. It was used to deliver men from the rim of the canyon to the canyon floor.
14. Murl Emery [June 7, 1903 - March 17, 1981], famed Colorado River boatman, homesteaded near Cottonwood Island in about 1917. For many years Emery provided boat transportation for the government engineers and bureaucrats during their investigation of dam sites before Hoover Dam was begun. Emery owned a store at Ragtown, a squatter's settlement of Hoover Dam workers near the mouth of Black Canyon. He operated a tour service on Lake Mead while it was rising, and later established Emery's Landing, a boat and fishing resort on the Colorado River at the mouth of Eldorado Canyon. The ferry Mrs. Thomas refers to was operated by James Cashman. It left the Nevada side of the Colorado River near the mouth of Black Canyon and landed at Kingman Wash on the Arizona side.
15. Boulder City's high school students were bussed into Las Vegas to the Las Vegas High School. Boulder City's high school was built on Arizona Street in 1941 and the first high school class graduated from there in May 1942.
16. Ladd's Plunge, built by Captain James H. Ladd near Twelfth Street, was a popular swimming hole in the 1920s and 1930s. Ladd opened Ladd's Hotel in Las Vegas in 1905.
17. Lorenzi Park was a natural spring transformed into a farm in 1911 and into a resort in 1922 by David G. Lorenzi. Located along Washington Avenue in what is now known as the Twin Lakes district of Las Vegas, Lorenzi Park is home to the Las Vegas Art Museum and the Nevada State Museum and Historical Society.
18. Pauline Lorenzi is the youngest daughter of David G. Lorenzi, the man who developed Lorenzi Park [see note 17].

19. Barbara and Shirley Ferron, daughters of Las Vegas pioneer William E. Ferron.
20. Boulder City was home to two companies of the Civilian Conservation Corps: Companies 2536 and 573. Co. 2536 arrived in Boulder City on November 10, 1935 and Co. 573 arrived on January 15, 1936. The companies occupied abandoned Six Companies dormitories nos. 6, 7, and 8. These buildings were located on the blocks which today are bounded by New Mexico Street, Avenue B, Fifth Street, and the Nevada Highway. Avenue A bisects this site. Co. 573 was disbanded November 20, 1941, while Co. 2536 was disbanded by the end of June 1942.
21. See note 11.
22. The Civilian Conservation Corps was operated by the army. Reserve officers served as camp commanders.
23. The Anderson Brothers Mess Hall [see note 12].
24. The Katherine Center is the social center of the Reformation Lutheran Church at 580 East St. Louis Avenue in Las Vegas.
25. A CCC camp was established on the east edge of Las Vegas in October 1938. The site is now occupied by Hadland Park, the Sunrise Acres school, and the Nevada National Guard Armory on the south side of Stewart Avenue between Eastern Avenue and 28th Street.
26. The American Legion Hall [see note 11].
27. The Charleston Peak Civilian Conservation Corps camp was established through the Clark County Farm Bureau in May 1933.
28. Earl Brothers was a Boulder City businessman and entrepreneur. Brothers owned and operated at various times in his career the Boulder City Theatre, the Visitor's Bureau, the Victory Theater in Henderson, Nevada, and commercial and tourist facilities at Willow Beach and at Page, Arizona. He died in Boulder City on June 2, 1967.
29. The Gareheim Building was a one-story stucco building near the Municipal Building between Wyoming Street and California Avenue built in 1932. The Parks Mortuary in Boulder City was a two-story wood frame building at 555 Avenue G behind Coronado Plaza. It opened in 1932 and was demolished in 1941. Mrs. Thomas recalls that when Queho's bones were laid out, it was in the one-story, stucco Gareheim Building. It's unclear whether there was a mortuary operating in this building in 1940 when Queho was found [see note 30]. Jake Garehime came to Las Vegas from Colorado in 1924 and opened a music and jewelry store on Fremont Street. In 1932 he opened a music store in Boulder City. Garehime died in 1960.

30. Queho [also spelled Quejo, born ca. 1880 - 1889] was a Paiute Indian who committed a series of murders in the Eldorado Canyon area of Southern Nevada during the 1910s. He disappeared in January 1919 after a rampage in which he killed three people. Queho's mummified body, surrounded by his belongings, was found in a cave near Willow Beach by prospectors Charles Kenyon and Art Schroeder on February 20, 1940. The body was taken to the mortuary in Boulder City as Mrs. Thomas describes, briefly displayed in Laubach's Recreation Tavern on Avenue B, and afterward displayed at county fairs and Helldorado celebrations in Las Vegas. Queho eventually was buried in a marked grave at the edge of Cathedral Canyon, Nevada. [See the *Las Vegas Review-Journal Nevadan*, June 11, 1978, pp. 4J-5J.]
31. This was 413 Utah Street, the former home of Wilbur Weed, Boulder City's landscape architect in 1932.
32. Mrs. Thomas's studio in Las Vegas was in the rear of the Nevada Bakery building on Fourth Street and Ogden Avenue. She opened it on February 2, 1937 [see the *Las Vegas Evening Review-Journal* for February 1, 1937, 5:2].
33. Mrs. Thomas's *Snow White* recital was performed at Boulder City's LDS Church on April 22 and 25, 1938.
34. Mrs. Thomas's *Baby Review*, featuring the *Baby Broadcast* of 1937 premiered on May 7, 1937.
35. Earl and Gladys Brothers later were divorced.
36. The Railroad Pass [Hotel and] Casino, located on the highway to Las Vegas just beyond the Boulder City limits, held its grand opening on August 1, 1931.
37. Blocks 16 and 17 were Las Vegas's red light district, established in 1905 when the San Pedro, Los Angeles, and Salt Lake Railroad laid out Las Vegas. Gambling, prostitution, and liquor flourished in these blocks until the eve of World War II. The Las Vegas Army Airfield [now known as Nellis Air Force Base] was established on January 23, 1941. President Roosevelt signed the May Act on July 11, 1941 which prohibited prostitution near military bases and defense centers. Block 16 was closed down in January 1942 and demolished shortly afterward.
38. Crib here refers to a cheap brothel, or a very small, cheaply-furnished room in the brothel where prostitutes take their johns.
39. Musican's Union Local 47 in Los Angeles, California.
40. A world-famous brothel located in Storey County, Nevada, nine miles east of downtown Reno off of Interstate Highway 80.

41. This nightclub was originally opened on July 4, 1931 as the Pair-o-Dice on Highway 91, several miles outside Las Vegas. Renamed the 91 Club, Guy McAfee, a Los Angeles gambler [see note 71], bought the place in 1939. In 1942 the Hotel Last Frontier was built on the site, absorbing the 91 Club building, which became the 21 Club.
42. The Red Rooster roadhouse opened on November 26, 1930 on Highway 91.
43. Grace Hayes [August 23, 1895 - February 1, 1989] was a silent film actress and a noted singer and nightclub hostess. She came to Las Vegas in 1942 to sing at the El Rancho Vegas. She bought the popular Red Rooster nightclub on Highway 91 and renamed it the Grace Hayes Lodge, after a night spot she had owned in Hollywood. Las Vegas's Grace Hayes Lodge opened on January 23, 1947. It was on this site that Steve Wynn built the Mirage Hotel and Casino, which opened in November 1989.
44. Four Mile was a collection of road houses, nightclubs, and brothels four miles south of Las Vegas on the Boulder Highway near Las Vegas Wash. Roxie's brothel, named after owner Roxie Clippinger, began operation near the end of World War II and survived until the FBI raided and closed it on April 28, 1954. [See *The Green Felt Jungle* by Ed Reid and Ovid Demaris .]
45. Pogo's Tavern is a Las Vegas bar and jazz club located at 2103 North Decatur Boulevard.
46. These are now Ron Richardson's Ballerina Mobile Home Parks located at 3687 East Lake Mead Boulevard, 839 North Lamb Boulevard, and 9 Country Club Drive in Henderson.
47. The original Purple Sage was one of the most notorious of the Four Mile road houses [see note 44]. It opened in May 1931 as the Pasture, and was renamed the Purple Sage in October 1931.
48. The Silver Dollar Saloon is located at 2501 East Charleston Boulevard.
49. Formerly the Casablanca Club, the Swanky Tonk roadhouse opened on April 25, 1945 on the Boulder Highway in Henderson. Charles Sherman and Bill Green were the managers. In 1946 it became a popular restaurant known as the Club Swanky. Demolished in the late 1980s, it is the present site of the Jokers Wild Casino.
50. The Silver Slipper Club opened on the Boulder Highway in Henderson in April 1942. In 1950, owners of the Hotel Last Frontier on the Las Vegas Strip bought the name Silver Slipper, and opened the Silver Slipper Casino on property adjacent to the Frontier. The Silver Slipper was demolished in December 1988 during expansion of the Frontier Hotel and Gambling Hall.
51. Glen Conger Jones [July 15, 1910 - September 9, 1983] was appointed undersheriff of Las Vegas on January 1, 1939. Elected sheriff in 1942, Jones's

years in that office were controversial. Hank Greenspun, editor of the *Las Vegas Sun*, accused Jones of having had a financial interest in Roxie's, a notorious brothel at Four Mile which was raided by the FBI on April 28, 1954. In the primary election shortly afterward, Jones ran last in a five-way race for sheriff. [See *The Green Felt Jungle* by Ed Reid and Ovid Demaris.]

52. The Brass Rail was a bar and nightclub on Nellis Boulevard.
53. A term which refers to a pot or pool of money made up of contributions from several people. It was originally used as a gambling term in the game of poker to indicate a money bet. Mrs. Thomas here uses the term to mean money itself.
54. Since musicians at this time generally were men, World War II and the draft created a shortage of musicians.
55. A small town in Southern California northwest of Edwards Air Force Base at the junction of California State Highways 14 and 58.
56. Whitney was a small settlement between Las Vegas and Boulder City during the early 1930s [see the *Las Vegas Evening Review-Journal* for August 29, 1931, 1:7 and December 1, 1931, 2:6]. This area today is located along the Boulder Highway between Tropicana Avenue and Russell Road.
57. The El Rancho Vegas opened on April 3, 1941.
58. The Hotel Last Frontier opened in December 1942.
59. The Sahara Hotel and Casino opened in December 1952.
60. The Esquire Lounge and Bar opened at 120 South Second Street on November 28, 1941.
61. The Golden Nugget Hotel and Casino opened on Fremont Street in 1946.
62. The Kiva Bar, opened on September 11, 1940 on the corner of Second and Fremont Streets, was formerly the Mission Bar [which opened on January 20, 1934]. The Kiva closed on July 1, 1945. There was also an earlier Kiva Club operated in the Hotel Apache across the street.
63. See note 62.
64. The Hotel Apache opened at the corner of Fremont and Second Streets on March 19, 1932. In 1951 the Apache became, and remains today, the Horseshoe Club.
65. The Monte Carlo Club replaced the Turf Club on Fremont Street in 1945.

66. The Sal Sagev Hotel [*Las Vegas* spelled backwards] stood on the corner of Fremont and Main Streets. It was originally the Nevada Hotel, and since 1955 has been the Golden Gate Hotel and Casino.
67. Formerly a club known as the Smoke House on the south side of Fremont Street, the building was remodeled in September and October 1930, and reopened as the Las Vegas Club on November 6, 1930. The Las Vegas Club moved to the north side of Fremont in 1949.
68. The Boulder Club opened on Fremont Street on July 27, 1929. It burned in 1956, and in about 1960, the Horseshoe Club expanded into the site.
69. The Northern Club opened on Fremont Street in the early 1920s. Owners Joe Morgan and Mayme Stocker received the first gambling license issued in Las Vegas after gambling was legalized in Nevada on March 19, 1931.
70. The Northern Club [see note 69] was replaced in 1943 by the Turf Club, which was in turn replaced in 1945 by the Monte Carlo Club [see note 65].
71. Guy McAfee [August 19, 1888 - February 20, 1960], Los Angeles police captain and vice squad commander, also owned and operated illegal gambling clubs and brothels. When reformist Fletcher Bowron was elected mayor of Los Angeles in 1938, he ran the pimps, prostitutes, and gamblers out of town, many of whom moved up to Las Vegas. Faced with prosecution himself, McAfee resigned from the police force late in 1938 and moved to Las Vegas. McAfee owned at various times the Pioneer and Frontier Clubs on Fremont Street, and was a major partner in the Golden Nugget. It was McAfee who persuaded Thomas Hull to build the El Rancho Vegas on Highway 91 in 1941, and R. E. Griffith and his nephew, William Moore, built the Last Frontier Hotel and Casino in 1942 on land owned in part by Guy McAfee. McAfee was also a later investor in Cliff Jones' and Marion Hicks' Thunderbird Hotel. It was McAfee who first called Las Vegas's Highway 91 the Strip, fondly recalling his salad days as a gambling operator on Los Angeles's Sunset Strip. It is interesting to note a letter written on January 26, 1939 by Boulder Dam Hotel owner Paul Webb in Boulder City to Nevada Governor E. P. Carville regarding McAfee's arrival in Las Vegas: "Dear Governor—Attached you will find a clipping from the *Las Vegas Review-Journal* of Jan. 24 which you will find substantiates our statements in this regard. Las Vegas is making a bigger mistake than they are aware of in encouraging this outfit into the county." Webb, originally a prominent building contractor from Los Angeles, may well have been familiar with McAfee and his operations there before he, Webb, moved to Boulder City.
72. California gambler Tony Cornero [see note 73] opened the S. S. Rex Club in the Hotel Apache in 1945. Named after his famous gambling ship moored off the coast of Southern California, which he was forced to close in 1939, the Rex never received a gaming license due to questions about its backers.

73. Tony Cornero [whose real name was Antonio Cornero Stralla, b. August 18, 1899] had been a bootlegger and gambler in Los Angeles during the 1920s. He served time in a federal prison prior to opening the Meadows Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas in 1931 [see note 75]. Cornero also operated a gambling ship named the *S. S. Rex* [see note 72]. He died of a massive heart attack on July 31, 1955 while shooting craps at the Desert Inn Hotel and Casino. Rumors persist that his heart attack may have been induced by drugs from his mob competitors.
74. This is the Worldwide Church of God, founded by Herbert W. Armstrong.
75. The Meadows Hotel and Casino was built east of the Boulder Highway near the intersection of Fremont Street and Charleston Boulevard by the Cornero family [Tony, Louis, and Frank; Tony was later involved in the Stardust Hotel and Casino on the Las Vegas Strip, which opened in July 1958]. The Meadows' formal opening was held May 2, 1931.
76. Las Vegas's KENO Radio first went on the air at 8 a. m. on Friday, November 1, 1940. Owners were Maxwell Kelch and George P. Foster, while John C. Strock was the commercial manager. Therese, her husband, Carl Deere, and their friend, Charles Guy provided the first live music broadcast at KENO. Their trio was called the Desert Drifters.
77. The musician was Clark Chadburn. His sister, singer Helen Chadburn, married Phare Lawrence on May 26, 1933, divorced him in June 1939, and remarried him on July 5, 1939. Divorced again in 1953, Helen shot Phare on Main Street in Las Vegas on March 3, 1954. Lawrence died on March 16. Helen was found guilty of first degree murder and sentenced to life in prison. Sent to the Nevada State Penitentiary in August 1954, she was paroled in 1959.
78. See note 6.
79. Otto J. Littler [April 17, 1906 - March 2, 1963] came to work on Hoover Dam in 1931. He organized Boulder City's first municipal band in 1932, and played at the dedication of Hoover Dam on September 30, 1935.
80. Chip White organized Boulder City's first dance band in February 1932. The band's first performance took place in Boulder City in Laubach's Recreation Tavern on February 17, 1932.
81. She had been a prostitute.
82. See note 36.
83. A prominent Boulder City musician whose father was Nevada State Assemblyman Jack Higgins [see note 84].

84. Jack Higgins, who opened a barber shop in Boulder City's Terminal Building in March 1932, was a Nevada State Assemblyman from Clark County 1945-1955.
85. Mrs. Thomas was a hostess on tour boats for Grand Canyon-Boulder Dam Tours, Inc. [GCBDT]. Incorporated in Nevada on June 6, 1936, GCBDT signed an exclusive contract with the National Park Service on May 13, 1937 to serve as the sole concessionaire within the Lake Mead National Recreation Area. [See "Grand Canyon-Boulder Dam Tours, Inc.: Southern Nevada's First Venture into Commercial Tourism," by Dennis McBride in the *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly*, v. 27:2 (Summer 1984), pp. 92-108.]
86. Henry and Ocie Bradley worked for Mr. and Mrs. Glover "Roxie" Ruckstell, principal shareholders in GCBDT. The Bradleys came to Boulder City in 1936. Henry served as a tour guide and chauffeur for the company, while Ocie prepared the box lunches for passengers on TWA, which landed at the Boulder City Airport, operated by GCBDT. Henry Bradley operated a taxi and had a catering business in Boulder City. In 1941 he became manager of the cocktail lounge in the Hualapai Lodge [now the Lake Mead Lodge], built on the shore of Lake Mead by GCBDT. The Bradleys were the only black people allowed to live in Boulder City, and in 1939 built a small house on the corner of Avenue G and New Mexico Street. As noted in a news article, "Bradley's house will be located in a section of the community not adjacent to other homes in the town." [See the *Las Vegas Evening Review-Journal*, April 3, 1939, 5:7.]
87. Mr. and Mrs. Henry Fonda visited Boulder City on March 19, 20, and 21, 1941. They stayed at the Boulder Dam Hotel and took tours across Lake Mead with Grand Canyon-Boulder Dam Tours.
88. The Green Shack is Las Vegas's oldest continuously-operating restaurant. It was opened in 1929 as the Colorado Restaurant on what became the Boulder Highway near the intersection of Fremont Street and Charleston Boulevard.
89. See notes 57 and 58.
90. Glover E. "Roxie" Ruckstell founded Grand Canyon-Boulder Dam Tours, Inc. in 1936 [see note 85].
91. Ruckstell's wife was named Geane. They married in Ukiah, California in 1910, separated in Las Vegas in 1941, and were divorced in 1943.
92. This is the house at 738 Park Street. The "big building" is the Bureau of Reclamation Administration Building on the hill at the north end of Boulder City.
93. This was Joe and Anne Pittman. Anne worked in the Boulder Dam Hotel dining room as a waitress, while Joe was a bellman, chauffeur, and tour guide. [See *Midnight on Arizona Street: The Secret Life of the Boulder Dam Hotel*

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