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An Interview with Helen Mott Cecil

An Oral History Conducted by Claytee D. White

The Boyer Early Las Vegas Oral History Project

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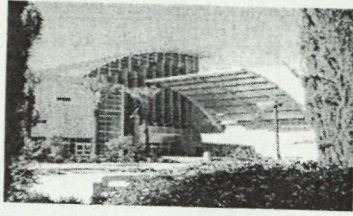
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Helen M Cecil
Signature of Narrator Date

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The transcript received minimal editing that includes the elimination of fragments, false starts, and repetitions in order to enhance the reader's understanding of the material. All measures have been taken to preserve the style and language of the narrator. In several cases, photographic sources (housed separately) accompany the collection as slides or black and white photographs.

The following interview is part of a series of interviews conducted under the auspices of the Boyer Early Las Vegas Oral History Project. Additional transcripts may be found under that series title.

Claytee D. White, Project Director
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Preface

Helen Mott Cecil was born in 1916 and grew up in Las Vegas. Her grandparents were miners and her grandmother owned property on the Westside. She recalls a friendly neighborhood and walking back and forth to school with neighborhood children. The family moved several times finally settling at 601 South Main Street. While attending Las Vegas High School she participated in several Helldorado parades with her father and brother.

At the age of 15, Helen remembers the construction of the first downtown post office. When the Hoover Dam started in 1931, her father was the under-sheriff. One of his duties was distributing health cards to prostitutes. Her memories include Saturday night dances in Anderson's Mess Hall in Boulder City, atomic bomb testing at the Nevada Test Site, walking to church services on Fremont Street, Woodlawn Cemetery, the old Henderson Townsite, and meeting President Roosevelt at the Hoover Dam dedication. As a high school student she served as president and counselor in her Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. In 1934 she graduated from Las Vegas High School.

Helen held numerous jobs before getting married at the age of 26 - bookkeeper, movie theatre usher, telephone operator, and secretarial work. Her husband Bill worked at all three post office locations in the Las Vegas area. At the age of 91, Helen and her sister still live and enjoy life in Las Vegas sharing their many memories of early Las Vegas.

State your full name for me.

Helen Mott Cecil.

Spell your last name for me.

C-e-c-i-l.

Thank you. Today is April 24th, 2007. And I'm here today with Helen Mott Cecil and we're in her house in Las Vegas.

How are you today?

I'm feeling well, but I'd like to feel a little better. I'd like to be able to get around a little better.

Well, with the way the traffic is outside, believe me you're better off right here in the house.

Oh, I think so.

Tell me how old you are.

I'm 50.

When were you born?

I was just concentrating on not saying that. 11/4/16. So I am 90. I say that all the time.

November 4th. I have a sister whose birthday is November 4th.

You do?

Yes, I do.

It's Election Day.

That's right. So where did you grow up?

Las Vegas.

Did you really?

Yes.

So tell me how your parents got here.

My grandparents were miners. He was a miner, a prospector. I guess he had some influence with the Union Pacific Railroad that had just started up. And my father's mother was here. And she already owned property in west side. She got my father a job on the railroad. And then they told us that -- my sister Billie and my father both had the 1918 flu, the bad flu epidemic. And the doctor told them that they should come to a dry climate. So we had two reasons.

Now, did your grandmother buy the property from a man named McWilliams?

We knew Tom -- no. What's his name? I know it. We knew him very well. He was a friend of ours, a friend of my father and my grandmother's.

Did she buy the property from him?

I don't know that for sure. I don't know that. But I would assume.

So was your family here back in May 1905 when they had the auction?

No. That was too soon for us.

So when did the first person in your family move to Las Vegas?

Well, grandma and her husband at the time, Baldwin, were already here.

So do you remember when they came?

No, I don't. But what I'm pondering on is our aunt -- now, she might have been here. If she wasn't here then, she came very soon thereafter.

So when you were born in 1916, what are some of your first memories as a little girl?

The main memory that I have is I had long black curls. And I guess I went to kindergarten by myself. But I went to kindergarten when I was four. I can remember -- I wouldn't want to say anything against you -- but the first time I saw a black person. I was crying and running home as fast from school as I could possibly run.

So why were you afraid?

I remember that myself. I don't think I was told that.

Why do you think you were afraid?

I don't know. I wouldn't know. I couldn't tell you that. But I know that I was afraid. But then they became some of my very best friends.

So you grew up on the other side of the railroad tracks, on the west side. Am I right?

Well, right where the railroad homes are, the west side of the railroad.

Right. So you were on the west side. So what was the neighborhood like as a little girl?

Well, very friendly. We would all walk back and forth to school together. I had several friends -- the Campos, and Virginia Angeles. They lived on the corner. And the Spraggs. They lived on Second Street and they were a large family. And the Baileys lived next door to us, and the Phillips. Let's see. That's about all I remember.

So do you remember the street that you grew up on, the name of the street?

Second Street. It was Second Street at the time. And then we moved several places. But we ended up at 601 South Main Street.

Did you live in a railroad cottage?

My aunt and uncle lived in a railroad cottage. Yes, we did because I remember now that we did live on Second Street there in that house for a while. Uh-huh.

When you were in school, do you remember ever participating in the Helldorado parades?

Oh, yes.

How old were you when you participated in your first one?

I think I was in high school. I was in high school. But my, oh my, my father participated in a lot of parades. I loved the parades myself. And if I saw one and the flag passing by, my tears would just come. And I could remember my dad because there was a parade in 1921. I had a picture of it. I don't know where it is now. But in 1921 when they had the strike, the railroad strike, my father and my brother were walking in that parade.

So what was that parade all about?

Well, the railroad people went on a strike and daddy went out with them. My father went out with them.

So was it a protest or was it a parade?

It was a parade. No, it wasn't a protest. It was a parade.

What did your father tell you about the strike?

I don't think he told us much because we didn't converse like that. But we knew that he was out of a job.

Did you know why?

I don't know if I knew at the time or if I knew later on. But I knew that there was a strike. They settled it. I don't know when they settled it or anything. But I know that daddy was involved.

Did your mother ever work?

After my father passed away, yes, she did. She did the house -- made beds and cleaned the rooms in the motels close by.

Do you remember which one?

I should be able to say that. But they were right there at South Fifth Street. They were located at

South Fifth Street because we lived at 523 South Fifth Street.

So you lived on Fifth Street at one time, also?

Oh, yes. We lived on Fifth Street twice. When I was in high school, we lived at 321 South Fifth Street -- that's what I was trying to say -- 321 South Fifth Street, right across from where the federal building is. It was called the Beckley House.

Do you remember when they built the post office?

Well, yes, I remember when they built the post office. For a long time it was right there at Second and Fremont. And we all had to walk down to Second and Fremont to get our mail, mostly boxes. I know when I was in the fourth grade we lived closer to the area where they built the post office. And it was all swamp land. And we would go over there and cool off our feet.

So are you talking about the second post office that had a courthouse on the second floor?

Well, the one on Third Street, the one that they're contemplating now to change it.

Right. They're going to change it into a museum.

Yes.

So you were about 15 when that post office was built?

I think so because -- let's see. My husband happened to be a postman. He worked at the post office after I was married. I remember it being built probably because there was a root beer stand right across the street from there, Smith's. I'm sure I was there because I remember one incident where some kids were teasing me and they took my shoes off and I had to run across the swamp there where it was to get my shoes.

So now, are you saying that there was a swamp where the post office is now?

It was swampy. Yes, it was swampy.

Now, do you remember who lived in that area before the post office was built?

No. I couldn't say anybody.

Do you remember when the Hoover Dam started?

My, oh my, yes.

What was that like?

It was somewhat like it is now because our town just blossomed. All the kids from Boulder City came to our schools. Oh my, yes, I remember. Our father was undersheriff at the time and we had

several incidents. We helped build the dam.

In what way?

With our boyfriends. I just am going through a lot of pictures here and I have a stack of pictures of the Boulder Dam being built. We walked on the catwalk across and we walked in the big tunnels before they were finished and the water went through. We rode the monkey -- what do they call it? -- the monkey something that went up and down the front of the dam carrying men. It didn't have hardly any support at all. And then every Saturday night they had a big dance.

Did you go to some of the dances?

And daddy would take us to the dances. And we met a lot of nice fellows that way and had a good time. Yes, in the mess hall, Anderson's Mess Hall.

Did you ever eat in there?

Oh, yes. I think we ate there. We had meals there.

Do you remember a person named Darrell Luce, L-u-c-e?

I remember the name.

There was a store called Luce and Goodfellow.

Luce and Goodfellow's; that's the name. Now, I know it was electrical and -- uh-huh.

So do you remember a young boy in that family named Darrell?

No, not especially.

So tell me some more about the dam. When they started building Boulder City, the city itself, what kind of things did you hear about Boulder City?

That it was a government town and that there would be no gambling. Also, that the houses had to be in special locations. I don't remember much more except that I made a lot of friends with the people that came. My sister Billie and Marianne, they worked at the administration building there, drove back and forth from Vegas. Boulder City was supposed to be a very clean building, but I don't know.

Our father, while he was undersheriff, had to deliver the health cards to the girls on the highway before they could go to work on Saturday nights. So we would sit in the backseat of the car and ride out to Boulder City with our father in his Buick car.

What kind of health card?

Prostitute.

So tell me more.

Well, that's all I know. They had to have a card, a health card.

But the prostitutes went into Boulder City?

No, not into Boulder City. It was on the highway between Boulder City and Las Vegas. It was the highway where there were casinos. It was the Boulder Highway. Let's see what else. But we would sit in the car while daddy went in and delivered the cards.

Now, this wasn't Foxies, was it?

No. Foxies was later. It was up on Fremont more. So it wasn't Foxies. They had good cheese blintzes.

That's interesting.

Yeah. That was very interesting because we didn't think anything about it at the time. And the red light district eventually moved up to First Street and Fremont. They still had to do the same thing until -- no. The war started and they said that they had to close down all the places or they wouldn't get Nellis.

So now, did a doctor examine the girls or did the sheriffs just give out health cards?

I couldn't say. But I imagine that there were some regulations definitely or why would they have a health card? But they had to have the health card. I think it meant more than the green cards like they have now. It probably meant more because the girls were always out there waiting for it.

And they did this once a week?

Uh-huh, once a week.

Tell me about high school.

That's my love. High school, Las Vegas High School. What can I tell you? We were the first class to go into the brand-new building on Seventh Street. And we graduated in 1934. It was so different from -- I don't remember the one that we went to previously when it burned down. But I do remember it had a little room in the back where the lockers were. It had the lockers, which was very different from what we were used to, a big study hall that we weren't used to, and they had home economics. I don't know. Maude Frazier was superintendent then -- or if it was a little later. What else could I tell you?

Were you in any activities in high school?

Yes. I belonged to the Girl Reserves. I was the senior class secretary. I have a picture of that, the senior class secretary. And all of our family, we were always involved quite a bit in school. I went to the home economics. Maude Frazier took a group of us girls up to Reno to be in this -- what would you call it?

Was it the Future Homemakers of America?

Yes. You seem like you know about it.

I was in it, too.

Were you in that, too?

Yes. Back in North Carolina. In the 60s.

Oh, in North Carolina. But I had made a dress and a slip and I won second state on the stage. And I remember I have several pictures of that time. Maude Frazier drove a carload of five of us. It was so fun. It was great.

Tell me about the Girl Reserves. What was that?

Well, it was just maybe like the Girl Scouts or something like that. It was just a group of girls that met to do services for others. I have pins from the Girl Reserves. Yes.

And do you remember some of the activities that the Girl Reserves participated in?

Not especially. We just met once a week. No, I don't. I think it was just your normal telling us what to do, how to eat right and things like that.

Tell me about your church activities as a young woman growing up.

That's where I really -- before I graduated from high school, I was president and counselor of a group of girls in our church, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. And I was very active. In fact, we had a group of people our age. We had many activities -- choirs and you learned how to be a leader. That's what I did mostly was go to these classes to learn how to be a leader and teach classes, the younger girls.

So when you finished high school, what did you do? Did you get married right away?

No, I didn't. I didn't marry until I was 26.

I tried to be a bookkeeper at the Chevrolet company on Main Street, but that didn't work out. She said, "You'll never be a bookkeeper, my dear; you better go get another job."

But before I graduated I was an usher at the Palace Theater on Second Street. I did that on the weekends.

And then I went to the telephone company. I was an operator and I was the only operator there all night. All I had for company was a little mouse that ate my lunch. And I worked. But I never had to go and ask for a job because my father always would come home and say, "They need somebody here; so you go put your name in."

Tell me about working at the Palace Theater. Where was that located?

It was across from the courthouse on Second Street there.

How big was it?

Not very large, not very large. It was riotous on Saturday afternoon when all the kids came to see the matinees.

Did they show the same movie all week?

I don't know that.

So how many movies did they show per day?

Probably just one at night and then, perhaps, on Saturday and Sunday maybe. I had a neighbor fellow of mine. He got me the job.

So what did you do?

I just walked up and down the aisles and told the kids to be quiet and to settle down. But they didn't have the music then. They didn't have the music at the schools (sic) until the El Portal was opened on Fremont.

Explain to me about the music.

You know the old-time music, the old movies? They would have somebody on the piano and play the piano.

So the Palace Theater didn't have the piano?

But I don't think the Palace Theater did that. They didn't until the El Portal opened. Then they had the organ. It was the organ and that was just at the time when speaking was coming forth.

Now, did blacks and whites sit together in the movie?

At first. They had a balcony in the Palace Theater. And I know they had a balcony for a while in the El Portal. And then there was another theater there on Fremont, the Majestic Theater. And we

went to that several times. But there weren't that many blacks in our community at the time. There were some.

So did they go to the movies?

They went to the movies. And I think there was a balcony I kind of recall in the El Portal, but I don't in the Palace.

So since there were three theaters, did each one have a different movie every week?

Well, they were at separate times. See, they weren't going all -- no. The Palace Theater was in probably '34.

So only one theater at a time?

I think so.

So tell me about working as a telephone operator. Were you a long-distance operator?

No. I was the only person there. And I turned on the lights of the city, turned them off, turned on the fire alarms and talked to all the people, the night clerks.

So if I wanted to make a long-distance phone call, how would I do it?

I would take it.

So I would pick up my telephone and dial zero?

I don't know that. I don't remember that. But there were plugs and you picked them up and you put them in here. How did I do that, Helen? And then I would ring it, you know, how many rings. But I know that we didn't have very many long-distance calls. But I know I was --

(End Tape 1, Side A.)

How long did you work at the phone company?

I only worked there I would say about a year because I got so it was too hard for me. But I eventually went to the regular daily and that would be included in the year. But I worked there for quite sometime.

And then my father found me a job over at First State Bank. And I was the only girl at the First State Bank.

It was called the First State Bank?

Uh-huh.

So why were you the only girl? Were you the first teller?

No, not as a teller. I first took the job of secretary to the president because I had received many certificates in typing and shorthand and I thought we could do it. But he would dictate these long letters and I'd have to stay too late. So I didn't make that job. But they put me over in -- I worked the switchboard for quite sometime because I was on the switchboard when they called us and told us that my father was passing away. I was at the switchboard. And then after that, after daddy passed away, I did the secretarial work for the vice president. And I took charge of the safe deposit boxes and things like that.

So how long did you work at the bank?

I think I worked there for about eight years.

Before we go on give me the names of your mother and father.

Agnes Dodge Mott and William E. Mott.

When they had the first women's movement, there was a woman whose last name was Mott, M-o-t-t. Do you know anything about her? Was she in your family?

I never knew there was such a person.

When did you get married?

In 1943.

Were you still at the bank then?

Yes, because the bank had just built another bank on Third Street, Third and Fremont Street. And I was on vacation. I went to Reno and stayed with my sister there. I was married in Los Angeles in my sister's home.

So did you meet your husband in Reno?

No. I met my husband in the eighth grade in Las Vegas High School.

So tell me about the courtship.

Oh, that was strange because he and his mother lived in a home way out on South Second Street. And he would come in the summertime. And he and his mother would walk by going to town. And my mother was very hospitable. She said, "Would you like to come in and have a glass of something to cool you off?" And they did. So that's how we actually met. So that was in the eighth grade. And I have pictures of us -- in fact, it's right there -- in the eighth grade.

So this is your eighth grade class?

That's our eighth grade class at Las Vegas High School.

And you are number 19 on here?

I am number ten. And he's right in front of me.

He's sitting down right here?

Yeah. He's sitting down with a suit on.

That's wonderful. What a great picture.

Isn't that a nice picture? And it's nice to have it.

Yes, it is. What is his name?

His name was William R. Cecil.

So tell me about the courtship.

Well, in the summertime he would walk to our house. We would just do things. I don't know what. But he just got acquainted with the family. But his mother had divorced and that's why she was in Las Vegas. He just became one of the family. He went to the freshman year at Vegas and then he went back to Kansas City where his father was and stayed there. And we corresponded. I would always wait for letters from him. I still have a lot of the letters.

Oh, that's great.

And then he finally came back to Las Vegas to be with his mother. I was coming home. I was on my vacation from the bank. And my sister lived in Reno and was married. And so I went over to Reno. And Bill had been driving to Vegas on weekends to see me and we had gotten quite well acquainted.

So his mother lived in Reno?

No. My sister Billie lived in Reno. And his mother was in [Las] Vegas. Yes, he was in Vegas at that time. And so while I was in Reno we decided to get married. So I took the train to San Diego and we were married. And we came home and the bank didn't like my being absent because the others didn't have their summer vacation. So --

You didn't call them?

Oh, I called them. I told them about it. But then I didn't go back to work for them for a while.

But then I went back to work. We lived in San Diego for three years.

How did you like San Diego?

Oh, it was beautiful. I loved it. But it was too rainy, too damp. But I loved it. I was right with all the other war mothers.

So how did San Diego compare with Las Vegas to you?

Oh, my goodness. My husband wouldn't let me drive. Too much traffic. Everywhere you went you walked. It was right by the ocean that I loved. And I met so many nice people. That was a good time. It was a good time. And then I came -- when Bill was inducted into the service -- he served 18 years.

Now, was he in the military when you got married?

No. But he worked for Consolidated Airplane in San Diego. So he wasn't drafted till late. Then when he was drafted I came back -- well, I stayed in Stockton where his mother happened to be at the time and lived with her for a while. Then I came home and went to work up in the federal building.

What were you doing there?

The post office was the federal building at the time. And I had a good job as secretary to the Farmers' Home Administration.

What was it called?

The Farmers' Home Administration. They lent money for farms over in the valley.

And it was located in the post office building?

Uh-huh. It was in the second floor of the federal building.

Was it on the courthouse level or -- which floor was it?

It was the second floor.

So is that the same floor where the courthouse was located?

No. The courthouse was a different building entirely. I don't remember the courthouse being there.

So you don't remember a courthouse ever being in the same building with the post office?

No. I just think there was the post office.

So your office was in that same building?

Yes.

How did you like that old building?

Oh, it was precious. I thought it was a nice building. It was something different for Vegas, definitely.

So do you like the idea that they're going to preserve it?

Definitely. Preserve it. Yes. Because I worked there for quite sometime -- not very long.

But I got sick one day at work and ended up having a tubular pregnancy. And then I didn't go back to work there. My mother ran the nursery school and I went to help my mother at the nursery school at that time. The only nursery school in town, she ran it.

How many children?

About 125. She would have quite a few children. And she could sit there and calm them all down. It was the first nursery school up on 13th Street.

Oh, that's great. Tell me about the medical care here in Las Vegas.

Well, to me it was okay. Of course, my father that was in '37, around through there. He had trouble with his stomach and he had been in the hospital for quite sometime. They operated. And they didn't have penicillin at the time. The pneumonia took him.

Now, what about when you got ill at work? Did an ambulance take you to the hospital?

No. I was in the restroom. And someone finally came up and notified my husband and he took care of me, took me to the doctor, took me to the hospital. And the next thing I knew I was in the hospital at UMC. And I think the doctors we had then were very, very good. I really do.

We were swimmers, the kids. We had to swim to keep cool. And the Mermaid swimming pool was our home in the summertime.

Where was that?

On Fifth and Fremont. And we would just go there every day and we swam. And my girlfriend, she developed mastoids. And she was in the hospital for about ten days and they didn't have penicillin or anything then. She passed away. So I think they had good doctors. My grandmother was a nurse at one of the first hospitals on Second Street. It was just a home that was remodeled for that. So I have nothing to say bad about them. They took care of my father very well.

Dr. Hardy and Dr. Woodbury and Dr. Martin, Roy W. Martin. The hospital was right there on -- up from Fifth and Fremont, right close there.

Not that far from Ogden?

No. It wasn't Ogden. It was closer than that, closer to Fremont Street. My father passed away. He was in Las Vegas Hospital on Eighth Street. But then they let that burn down. All of our old, old buildings -- they've not taken care of them.

And most of them were made out of wood, right?

Right.

So that's difficult.

Used wood.

What was life like for a young married couple in Las Vegas? What did you do for entertainment?

Oh, we would go swimming at 12 o'clock at night. We would go as a group. I have pictures of us in the swimming pool at Lorenzi Park. We went dancing. Dancing and the popular music. Dancing, many big dances. Of course, our church was keeping us busy all the time, parties and events. We would go to the mountains. We would go to Charleston. We would -- oh, there was so much to do. Much to do.

What kind of music did you dance to? Give me some examples.

Well, they call it -- what do they call it now?

Swing?

No, no. Earlier than that. It wasn't swing.

Big band?

Big band. They called it big band. Because they had a big building, war veterans building up by Fremont. And they would hold the big dances up there. And everybody would go. But, of course, when the hotels started up we could go out to the hotels at 12 o'clock or 11 at night and have a slice of pie for 35 cents and hear Frank Sinatra and all the big people, Frank Sinatra especially. But a lot of the stars at the time. But that was always a treat. We would go out and especially the hotels would entertain the young people. They would have Easter egg rolls. They would have something very, very special. It was fun.

What is an Easter egg roll?

Oh, where you go and you just find all those eggs from being hidden, after they were hidden.

Now, did the old hotels downtown do that or the Strip hotels?

The Strip.

So the hotels downtown, did they do things for the local community?

I don't think so as much as -- we always went out to the El Rancho or the Frontier.

She's passing me a picture of the hotel New Frontier, a souvenir from the Little Church of the West. And who am I looking at? Who is in this picture?

This is my husband. But this is a couple that had just come to get married in Vegas that were friends of ours.

Barbara and Chuck?

Barbara and Chuck.

So now, was there a wedding chapel in the New Frontier?

Uh-huh.

And this was from that wedding chapel?

I don't know about that. I wouldn't say. But "Nevada's famous chapel on the desert." But I think that was the first one, the Little Church on the West, the New Frontier.

And I have here -- and I've got these books to hold it down -- a picture of the 1934 Las Vegas High School student body.

Wow. We'll have to look at that in a few minutes.

What are some of the places where you used to go out to eat?

We went to the hotels. On Friday nights quite a few of the hotels -- Spike Jones, they had family night. And we would go out there. There was a place out here on Fremont -- on Boulder Highway that we would go to. There were several places, several nice places that you could go as a family.

Do you remember the Blue Onion?

The Blue Onion? It seems to me more -- was that up on Fremont?

I think so.

The Blue Onion?

The waitresses wore roller skates.

I remember that. But I don't remember the Blue Onion. There seems to be something that -- the onion I remember, but --

Do you remember in the 1960s when Howard Hughes came to town?

Yes.

What do you remember about that time period?

Well, really it didn't affect us very much at all. He was just newspaper info. Of course, we thought we had a celebrity. But we always had celebrities. They always came to Vegas. So I don't think that bothered us one way or the other.

So going back for a few years, when they made it very easy to get a divorce here --

Oh, yeah.

-- did that make a difference?

Yes.

What kind of impact did that have on most people?

Well, I think it was very good for the whole town moneywise. My mother, that's how she made her living. She always had someone come in and live with her. And they were divorcées that would come and stay for six weeks. And she made so many good friends that way. And she did that all the time. We knew quite a few of the good attorneys. And momma always had a divorcée here for the six weeks. In fact, that was the situation there.

With Barb and Chuck?

Uh-huh. One of the girls, Barbara I think -- Pat. No her name was Pat.

Oh, that's a different couple?

Uh-huh. I don't remember there. But that was the same situation. Momma always had one of the girls come and live with her while they spent the six weeks. And then they had the nice spots.

There was one place out -- oh, there was one place out on the highway, the Strip to be, and it was way out. But a lot of the notable people came out there to stay.

So it was kind of a ranch?

Yes, it was a ranch. I can't remember -- I know because I knew some people that lived there. But now I can't remember that. I don't recall the name.

So they would stay there for the six weeks. What kind of activities did they have planned for the six-week period?

Oh, most of them just bathed in the sun, really, and spent their time in the swimming pool. Like

Clara Bow and Rex Bell, they bought a ranch and bought a home here. That's about all you could do. There was not a lot of other entertainment except in the evenings they would all go to the hotels to see the headliner.

But now, Clara Bow and Rex Bell, did they have people stay with them for the six-week period?

I don't know if they -- I think they did. But they just had a home. They had a home in back of the UMC there and then they had that ranch. But I think they were mostly dude ranches, you know. I have a picture of Clara Bow and Rex Bell at the football game, at one of our football games. I have their autograph. And they participated in a lot of things like that.

So they participated in a lot of town activities?

Yes.

Did you ever know their son who became an attorney here?

Not well. I knew of him.

Do you still see Las Vegas as a small town?

Now? No. I wish it could go back to the small town.

Tell me about it. What was it like when it was a small town?

We knew everybody. You could walk down the street and say hello, hello, hello, which I miss very much. Now you don't see anyone that you used to know. There's too much awe. And the traffic is terrible, terrible, terrible. And I think the main thing was -- and you met a lot of different people like all these divorcées that would come and stay at my mother's. They were all from out of town. And we made some very dear friends, very dear friends. Some of the boyfriends that I had when I went to high school were from out of town. They would come for the building of the dam.

Did any of the divorcées bring their children with them?

Not that I know of. I don't think any of them did.

So it was usually just the woman?

Yeah, just usually the woman. I don't think there were many men that --

How often did you go back and forth to Los Angeles or San Diego?

Oh, my. Later on in my life many times. I remember flying to San Diego for \$15. I remember.

Oh, we drove I couldn't tell you how many times because some of my children moved to California and live in California. It's just like a suburb now.

That's right. How many children do you have?

Three boys. And they're married. I have one that lives out in Henderson, with his family and six children.

No. We flew. I remember taking the airplane at that time. But lots of times there was always somebody driving back and forth to L.A. and we would hitch the a ride with the people we knew. And they would leave us off at a hotel downtown and then my brother-in-law would come and pick me up. I have many incidents about that, little things that I remember.

Did you ever take the train? When your father was working on the railroad, did the family take the train often?

Oh, yes. Yes. Every summer my mother would deck us out. And we had a pass. So we would drive to Salt Lake or somewhere up there -- not drive, but we would go on the train, momma with her four kids. One time we drove around Cedar City. And I developed a lump on my neck and I had to ride back home on the train from Cedar City to Vegas and sit backwards. I had to sit backwards I remember that. I forget that other. What did you say?

We were talking about the train. How often did you ride the train?

Let me tell you what my mother did one time. This is funny. My father worked for the Union Pacific Express and they would ice the cars to send back East. And then they were on their way. So daddy put a crate of cantaloupe, a couple or so. And when the train got moving towards Utah --

(End Tape 1, Side B.)

So go ahead and tell me about the cantaloupes.

Momma -- well, she put them -- they were already iced good. I don't know how we got a tray or something. But we went up and down all the way on that train giving out the cantaloupes, not selling them, just letting people enjoy the cantaloupes. And they would have these big boxcars sitting on the rails around. My father would go to Moapa and work in the summertime. And we would go in those cars and there were cold watermelons and eat the hearts out of them. Yes.

Where did you get the fresh fruit?

From the valley, Moapa and Overton. Oh, and I don't know why they can't do that now when we need it so bad.

That's right.

But vegetables. Oh, they were famous for their tomatoes and cantaloupes and melons. They sent them all back East. These were refrigerated cars, very different.

What did you ever hear about UNLV?

I don't know. I don't think I was working then. I think I was just at home. They built Frazier Hall. I think we thought about that quite a bit -- is it wise or is it not? -- when they built Frazier Hall. And we thought it might conflict with our school. Do you know about when that was?

Fifty years ago.

Oh, 50 years ago.

Yes. The university will be 50 in 2007.

Now, earlier I asked you about the Helldorado parade. The first one started in 1934.

Tell me what that was like, those parades.

They were the life of the city. They were fun. They were wonderful. I was working for a garage at the time and I was water skiing on top of the car in my bathing suit in the parade. Yeah. I remember that. But my father always loved parades. When the flag would go by, everybody would be so hats-off, you know, and so attentive. They were just an expression. They even had them on Sundays because we would go as a group in trucks and get our perch set so that we would be able to see them. Crowded, very crowded. And the hotels would put just gorgeous, just beautiful floats.

Did they compete with who had the prettiest float?

Oh, yes. They had winners. They always had winners. And all the bands, of course the bands. In the later years my kids -- on Saturdays they had a Saturday children's parade with all the bands.

And that's what I loved.

So how many days of parades were there?

Well, definitely three because they had Saturday and Sunday. I think there were three. Monday could be. I don't think so much Friday.

During World War II we had a factory in what we call Henderson now. But at that time it

was Basic. Do you remember Basic Magnesium?

Yes. I remember that.

What do you recall about that time period?

Well, I was in San Diego at the time. And I drove. We were out watching the waves and there were a lot of cars there. And I saw this car with the license plate on it, "Henderson, Nevada," or something. Anyhow, it was a Nevada license plate. And I ran as fast as I could over to -- who are you and are you from Las Vegas and how long have you been here? And I was talking to him. And I remember that so much because -- and they said, "Yes, we're from Henderson." I said, "Where is Henderson? What's Henderson?" And they told me about the town Henderson. Now my kids are filling it up.

That's right. It's a big place now.

After the war when we got Nellis Air Force Base and all of that, we also began to test the bomb out at the test site. Were you back for that?

Oh, yes.

What was that period like?

It would wake us up in the morning at five o'clock in the morning and shake our beds. And then we were so smart we would drive up there and watch it go off. Thank goodness the wind blew somewhere else. They frightened me some. They frightened us some, but not too much. Right here I have -- where did she put it?

So you're looking for a photograph of the test site? Oh, the atom bomb.

They say those are quite rare.

She has a little book that is held together by one staple. And on the front it says, "The atomic bomb, ten views only one dollar, Las Vegas, Nevada." And there are ten photographs. Oh, my goodness. Do you remember who sold these?

No. I have no idea.

And it has the various stages of the bomb blast.

But I have about two or three pages in my one book of the bomb.

Wow. Now, this is exciting. That's exciting.

Yeah, they've told me that; that that's -- I had a yellow one. But they say the yellow ones

weren't -- you know, there were more of them.

So this is more rare?

Uh-huh, this is rare.

Wow. That's interesting. What was the news in the community? When the bombs would go off, what did you hear? What were people saying?

They were wondering why they had to do it here so close. I think there was a lot of speculation that way. And I think that in the schools, especially because the kids had to learn to use gas masks and such as that, there was fear.

During this same time, in about 1955, a casino opened called the Moulin Rouge.

Yes.

What do you remember about that?

Well, all I remember is that it was a nice, beautiful hotel. And I don't remember anything about the difficulties they had because I read about them, but I didn't think much about it.

Did you ever go inside?

Yes. I think I did, not many times. But I could have gone in. But I don't know. Now, it was right across from the Bonanza post office. And my husband, see, worked at the post office.

Now, which post office did your husband work?

He worked at three of them. He worked on Town and Third Street. And then he went to Fremont -- not Fremont. He went to Henderson. At that time what did that call that, where the Henderson Theater? There was a post office back there in the back of the Henderson Theater.

The Henderson Theater in Henderson?

No. In Vegas on Charleston.

The Huntridge.

Huntridge. That's what I'm saying, the Huntridge. And he worked there for a while. So I think there were about -- I don't know. I don't remember anything about the Moulin Rouge except what I have heard.

At one time a person came here wanting to start a racetrack.

Yes.

Did you ever go to the racetrack?

We went to the racetrack.

What was it like?

My brother was very interested in the racing and horses. He took us to the one out where the Thunderbird Hotel was. There used to be a racetrack about there, Kale Housells. And we used to go out there and we might bet 50 cents, terrible. But he was very interested in them. And so we would go out there.

But my sister Billie invested some money in property on the Boulder Highway in the racetrack. But nothing came from it.

Do you remember the first bus system?

Bus system? Yes. I rode it. I remember many times I had to ride it. My boy was maybe about four years old. We didn't have a car. When I was working at the federal building, I rode the bus. It was okay. But I don't remember any incidents.

Was it citywide? Did it run all over the city?

I don't know because this was right on Fremont Street where I would ride it.

As you got older and older living in this city, who had most of the power in the city? Who made things happen?

Well, it wasn't me. It was the hotels. Of course, it was the hotels. Yes. Definitely.

At one time history tells us that the hotels were owned by the mob. What was that like?

Could you tell a difference? Did you know?

No. They didn't know anything about it. I probably read the papers.

Most people were the same? They didn't know?

Yes. Oh, I don't think we -- if they're going to be there, they're going to be there.

What has been your family's attitude about gambling?

We're definitely not gamblers because we're church members, very strong church members. And that's had a lot of influence on our life.

If you had to look back since 1916, name the major changes in this city.

Well, I would say the traffic. The traffic would be first. How would you say it? Not knowing people.

This city has grown so fast? So many people have moved in?

Uh-huh.

Not that small town anymore.

Not that small-town feeling. That's what I miss more than anything. Of course, I really think so because it used to be that on Christmas Eve, you know, you'd walk down Fremont and, oh, it was wonderful because you could just say Merry Christmas to everyone. And you couldn't do that now.

What is the future for Las Vegas?

I think it'll continue to grow. Look what they're doing up here by APEX. It's going to go way up APEX. It's taking water from Pahrangat [Valley] and all of that stuff. No. There's no stopping Las Vegas. My father said that Las Vegas was going to be from mountain to mountain. And it's mountain to mountain now. So we're going to have to go over the mountain and find out what's on the other side.

When was the last time you saw Fremont Street?

Oh, my goodness. It's been years. Been years.

So have you seen the Fremont Street Experience?

I've seen it, yes, when we had company once. But that was several years ago.

How did it make you feel?

Heartsick. I never wanted to go down there again. I think many things could have happened and kept that area the way it used to be. But it can't happen now. I think it's too late now.

What about the Strip? When was the last time somebody drove you down the Strip?

Years ago. Not even with people in town. They go to the one they like and they stay there. No, I don't like it at all.

Have you seen New York New York or Paris?

No, I haven't even been in them. And now look what they did to the Strip. They made it so outlandish I would say that people don't want to go there anymore. They want to go to the more hometown ones.

People who live here?

Yes.

Have you seen the Bellagio?

Yes, I've been there. That's a joke with us; someday we're going to the Bellagio and have lunch. But I think we accomplished that once.

We have a mayor who wants to bring downtown back. He wants people to live downtown again. What do you think about that?

No. Now that won't work out. I don't think our mayor -- pardon me -- I don't like to -- but I don't think it's possible. I think it's too far gone. Look at the El Cortez now and all those places.

Well, you know that the El Cortez is in the process of being rehabilitated.

I know that. I've noticed that. But is it going to work?

And there's a condominium complex going up right across the street.

And you know something? Right where we used to live, 601 South Main Street, Bonneville and Main, those big towers where we used to play and walk around, go back and forth to school. And then they'll have those three towers up there.

Now, are you talking about the Marketplace?

Well, I don't know.

Those huge buildings?

Yeah, those huge, big towers, condominiums.

They're going to put a performing arts center down there.

Well, that's all right. Now, I'm for that. That's one place I like, Art Ham. That's my style.

Are there any other stories that you want to tell me about the good old days?

Oh, there are probably. You know, when you mention something it kind of brings to mind. When they dedicated the dam, did my sister tell you about that?

No. Tell me.

When they dedicated the dam, my father was the escort of his entourage. So we were there. My mother felt the heat. It was very hot. And she fainted. And the ambulance had to come and take her to Boulder City Hospital. But my father was the head of the entourage and he didn't know what it was or what happened. But we were still there. But that was one thing because we always said, well, our mother passed up the President on his way -- she passed -- I can't say it exactly now.

But did you get to see the President that day?

Yeah, we saw the President.

What was that like?

But that was all. Oh, anything like that I like. I like that anytime if we see something good. But President Roosevelt that was the -- that was really a day. A lot of people were there. When daddy's car passed up the ambulance -- or maybe it was the other way around I can't remember -- but I know we always said that was one of our -- I think that Las Vegas has been very good to us. If we had a little bit of money and a little bit of foresightedness, we could be a little better off than we are now. But we've managed. We've all had good educations in our family. I think Las Vegas has been good to all of us.

I agree.

Look what my brother built for me with this room.

Oh, yeah. This is a beautiful room.

I think I've covered all of my questions. I really appreciate this.

Well, I appreciate you coming again. I really do. My grandchildren were just here before you came. I don't get to see them very often. So they came. Becky called this morning. She said, "We have the day off today and we can come." And the little ones, you know. So I said, oh, no. I think both are important, the interview and having you come. So come anytime you can.

Well, thank you so much.

But they wrestle around. Not like I'm used to. Well, I appreciate you doing this.

Now, there was a fellow at the university that was doing interviews, a gentleman, about the fort.

About the fort?

The fort out on Washington Boulevard and --

The Mormon fort?

The Mormon fort. And he interviewed me at the time. But you've asked more thorough questions.

We wanted just a good look at the overall city.

Right.

Well, thank you so much.

I think we could do -- because I remember walking from 601 South Main to Fremont to church, walking from 601 South Main Street down to the Woodlawn Cemetery where our -- not thinking a thing about it. And the Bonanza Stream that we thought was a river and all the swimming holes. I think that my childhood couldn't have been improved in any way at all. It was a wonderful childhood. And it's not been -- it's been good ever since. So I feel good about it.

Thank you.

No. I think that's all.

(End tape 2, side A.)