

ON THE HISTORY OF LAS VEGAS

A hundred years from now historians will probably know all about Gerald Ford, Jimmy Carter, Richard Nixon or Ronald Reagan. After all the lives of these men are chronicled in newspapers, magazines and books.

But what about ordinary citizens who live out their lives without making headlines? The common man and woman also has a story to tell. At least Ralph Roske, a University of Nevada, Las Vegas history professor, thinks they do.

Since 1971 Roske has been involved in a project to collect and make available for research oral histories of people who have lived in southern Nevada for 20 years or more. This summer he deposited the 500th interview with the UNLV Library's Special Collections Department.

Collecting oral histories from ordinary people has become an important supplement to historical research, according to Roske and Anna Dean Kepper, curator of Special Collections.

Kepper said the movement began a few years ago with the taping of famous citizens and spread to getting the recollections of ordinary people.

Thanks to students in Roske's classes the library now has taped interviews with people like O.K. Knudson, Hubert Jones, John F. and Florence Lee Jones Cahlan, Sherwin "Scoop" Gar-side, Sara Ann Knight, and many many others. The 500th tape was an interview with John A. Wittwer, a 96-year-old Las Vegaen, who served as an agricultural extension service agent from 1921 to the mid-1950's.

Wittwer recalls coming to Nevada in a covered wagon and living in Bunkerville in an adobe hut with a leaky roof.

"When it rained we had to put pans on the beds and on the tables and everywhere," he said, "We battled to contain the Virgin River and it was a struggle to survive."

Information from people like Wittwer is invaluable to researchers, says Roske. The past historians have relied on newspaper accounts, old letters, documents, books and other bits and pieces of information. "If someone had been around with a tape recorder during the settling of the colonies, we'd have a lot more information," Roske said.

Since Las Vegas' history is relatively new there are still a number of people around who can recall the city's early days. For example, Sara Ann Knight recalls when she came here in 1942 there were less than 10,000 people.

"There were very few houses and the people were throwing up tents and living on lawns," she said. "Where the Union Plaza is there was a railroad station and the people were sleeping there."

Knight, who was one of the pioneers in the gaming industry on Vegas' Westside, opened the first gambling casino for blacks in Hawthorne. While there she served as local president of the NAACP. She recalls that during the early days of gaming there was a movement in Las Vegas to force all the women dealers to quit. It was in the late 1940's and Knight says, "The laid off all the women dealers down town and on the Westside because some resolution was passed. I was the very last one that they stopped working. I think some of the men got together and had this thing passed because they were afraid the women would get the best jobs."

Knight also recalls when black performers such as Sammy Davis, Jr., Nat King Cole and Pearl Bailey would come to the Westside to gamble because they weren't allowed in the downtown casinos.

"Back in the 40's and 50's, I had dealt to them," she said. "Of course they weren't making a lot of money then and weren't real popular as they are in these times. A lot of them lived on the westside. They used to have to walk or catch a bus or get someone to come over and take them back, like Sammy Davis, I knew him real well."

By listening to Knight's interview, a researcher can get insights into the day-to-day life of blacks in early-Vegas.

"This is a fairly reliable means of gathering history," Roske said. "Of course you are relying on a person's memory, but sometimes that's even better than relying on newspapers."

Roske's students were encouraged to look around among their friends and in some cases in their own families to find subjects for interviews.

The project started with interviews of people who had been here at least since 1950; later the date was moved up to 1955. Now anyone who has been here for at least 20 years qualifies.

Out of each class some 125 students were given the choice of interviewing the subject by filling in a questionnaire or using a tape recorder. The best interviewers researched the subject's background and then tried to collect as much information as possible about what the subject saw or did in their lifetime.

Sara Ann Knight's oral history is the first of the black histories to be transcribed. Transcriptions in process include the oral histories of Woodrow Wilson, black civic leader and former legislator; Henry Wiekling, Bureau of Reclamation worker who helped to remodel Las Vegas' Old Fort in 1929; Olive Lake and Earle Frost Eglington, pioneer Las Vegas.

Harrington Fingers 10 Most Wanted Men

Bob Harrington, famed Chaplin of Bourbon Street, has released his annual "Ten Most Wanted" list. It is Harrington's firm belief that these men could really vast members to Christ, being as influential as they are across America.

"This country is the greatest nation -- the only nation that calls itself, 'One Nation Under God,'" says Harrington. It only follows that to strengtehn and influence both at home and abroad, men are needed who will proclaim their faith and direct their tremendous influence to change what seems, at this point, to be a rather bleak destiny in this country and the world.

WANTED

TEN MEN FOR GOD AND COUNTRY

Muhammed Ali	Elvis Presley
A. J. Foyt	Johnny Carson
Hugh Hefner	Howard Cosell
Evel Knieval	Walter Cronkite
Joe Namath	Henry Ford, II

Harrington's goal is to reach these men for the unspoken God and good in each of them and to ask for their help in his mission. "In every segment of our society, they can say and do so much to influence and direct our country into the most properous and productive period in our history."



DISCUSSING APPRENTICESHIP -- William E. Jenkins (center) reviews the program for the ninth meeting of the Federal Committee on Apprenticeship with U.S. Labor Department officials Ben Burdestsky (left), deputy assistant secretary for employment and training, and Hugh C. Murphy, administrator, Bureau of Apprenticeship and Training. The committee, which serves as an advisory group to the Secretary of Labor met recently in Washington, D.C., to discuss changes in restrictions on entry in apprenticeship, the participation rate of women in apprenticeship programs, outreach programs to recruit minorities and women, and the awarding of post-secondary educational credit for apprenticeship training. Committee members, named by the Secretary of Labor, include representatives from labor, management and the public sector. Jenkins, a management representative, is from Jenkins Electric Co., Inc. Brooklyn, New York.

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