



Guide to the Kent Carmichael oral history interview

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Box 457010

4505 S. Maryland Parkway

Las Vegas, Nevada 89154-7010

special.collections@unlv.edu

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Summary Information

Repository:	University of Nevada, Las Vegas. University Libraries. Special Collections and Archives.
Creator:	Carmichael, Kent
Creator:	Carmichael, Karen, 1952-
Contributor:	Boyer Early Las Vegas Oral History Project
Title:	Kent Carmichael oral history interview
ID:	OH-03648
Date:	2019 November 25
Date:	2019 December 02
Physical Description:	105 Digital Files (0.434 GB) MP3, JPG, PDF/A
Language of the Material:	English
Abstract:	<p>Oral history interview with Kent Carmichael conducted by Stefani Evans on November 25 and December 2, 2019 for the Boyer Early Las Vegas Oral History Project. In the first session of this oral history, Carmichael discusses his early career in lighting design and maintenance from his start at Interstate Neon to his work in the 1950s and 60s in Las Vegas. He discusses some of the iconic signs he built including the Casino Center, Carnival Room, Thunderbird, The Frontier, Bonanza, and the Stardust. He also details the technology and inner workings of these innovative signs including the transition from mechanical to electrically controlled signage. Carmichael continues to discuss Native American laborers and various individuals that he interacted with throughout his early career including Max and Mo Oggenblick, Doby Doc, Benny Binion, Arby Alper, Steve Wynn, Peter Arp, and Wayne and Jerry Newton. Carmichael ends the first interview by recalling a high wind event that damaged the Frontier sign and his efforts to bring the sign under control and repair it as well as his vision and behind the Stardust sign. The second oral history interview contains Carmichael's discussion of his career from 1968 onward. He immediately picks up discussion of the Stardust sign and his transition to desk work. Carmichael details the challenge and limitations of designing the International sign (the Westgate as of 2021). He describes the development of his first messenger sign for the International and the time consuming task of using tape to program the sign. He fondly remembers working on the Holiday Inn Riverboat signs, and International transition</p>

to Las Vegas Hilton and the Hilton's transition from blue to red letters. Carmichael shares the story of being caught between organized crime and a young Steve Wynn. He recounts his last project for Ad Art, developing and construction the sign for the Louisiana Superdome in New Orleans, Louisiana. He details working through legislative and construction issues as well as the fallout from the Nat Kiefer Commission. After leaving Ad Art Carmichael began working with Heath and Co. and began collaborating with Raul Rodriguez. Carmichael and Rodriguez went on to design some of the most enduring and visually unique signs in Las Vegas including, the Flamingo, Four Queens, Golden Nugget, Dunes Hotel, and the Desert Inn. They also worked in Reno on Circus Circus and El Dorado. Carmichael also details his interior work including the main pylon and interior signs for MGM Grand; 1974 renovation Golden Nugget, suspended stained glass ceiling at Tropicana, and the MGM Lion display. Lastly Carmichael outlined his work with Young Electric Sign 1983-85 and the Dewey Sign Company including the Las Vegas Convention Center sign. He ends by sharing his views on the role and importance of lighting in Las Vegas.

Preferred Citation

Kent Carmichael oral history interview, 2019 November 25 and December 02. OH-03648.
[Cite format consulted: Audio recording or Transcript.] Oral History Research Center, Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Las Vegas, Nevada.

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Scope and Contents Note

Oral history interview with Kent Carmichael conducted by Stefani Evans on November 25 and December 2, 2019 for the Boyer Early Las Vegas Oral History Project.

In the first session of this oral history, Carmichael discusses his early career in lighting design and maintenance from his start at Interstate Neon to his work in the 1950s and 60s in Las Vegas. He discusses some of the iconic signs he built including the Casino Center, Carnival Room, Thunderbird, The Frontier, Bonanza, and the Stardust. He also details the technology and inner workings of these innovative signs including the transition from mechanical to electrically controlled signage. Carmichael continues to discuss Native American laborers and various individuals that he interacted with throughout his early career including Max and Mo Oggenblick, Doby Doc, Benny Binion, Arby Alper, Steve Wynn, Peter Arp, and Wayne and Jerry Newton. Carmichael ends the first interview by recalling a high wind event that damaged the Frontier sign

and his efforts to bring the sign under control and repair it as well as his vision and behind the Stardust sign.

The second oral history interview contains Carmichael's discussion of his career from 1968 onward. He immediately picks up discussion of the Stardust sign and his transition to desk work. Carmichael details the challenge and limitations of designing the International sign (the Westgate as of 2021). He describes the development of his first messenger sign for the International and the time consuming task of using tape to program the sign. He fondly remembers working on the Holiday Inn Riverboat signs, and International transition to Las Vegas Hilton and the Hilton's transition from blue to red letters. Carmichael shares the story of being caught between organized crime and a young Steve Wynn. He recounts his last project for Ad Art, developing and construction the sign for the Louisiana Superdome in New Orleans, Louisiana. He details working through legislative and construction issues as well as the fallout from the Nat Kiefer Commission. After leaving Ad Art Carmichael began working with Heath and Co. and began collaborating with Raul Rodriguez. Carmichael and Rodriguez went on to design some of the most enduring and visually unique signs in Las Vegas including, the Flamingo, Four Queens, Golden Nugget, Dunes Hotel, and the Desert Inn. They also worked in Reno on Circus Circus and El Dorado. Carmichael also details his interior work including the main pylon and interior signs for MGM Grand; 1974 renovation Golden Nugget, suspended stained glass ceiling at Tropicana, and the MGM Lion display. Lastly Carmichael outlined his work with Young Electric Sign 1983-85 and the Dewey Sign Company including the Las Vegas Convention Center sign. He ends by sharing his views on the role and importance of lighting in Las Vegas.

Digital audio, transcript, and photographs available.

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Administrative Information

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Acquisition Note

This interview was conducted and transcribed by the Oral History Research Center (OHRC) which is part of the UNLV University Libraries Special Collections and Archives Division.

Processing Note

Interview materials were processed by UNLV Libraries Special Collections and Archives in 2019 and 2021. Emily Lapworth wrote the collection description. Access copies were created for born-digital audio and transcript files.

Bound Transcript Availability

A bound transcript is available for use in UNLV Libraries Special Collections and Archives. See call number: CT247 .C366 2019

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Names and Subjects

- Oral histories (document genres)
- Korean War, 1950-1953
- Neon signs
- Hotels
- Casinos
- Las Vegas (Nev.)