An Interview with ALAN METSCHER

An Oral History produced by
Robert D. McCracken

Esmeralda County History Project
Esmeralda County, Nevada
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PREFACE

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

The Esmeralda County Board of Commissioners initiated the ECHP in 1993 in order to collect information on the origin, history, traditions, and quality of life of Esmeralda County communities that may be impacted by the construction of a high-level nuclear waste repository located at Yucca Mountain, adjoining the Nevada Test Site in Nye County. Though the repository has yet to be built, the ten oral histories in this group of interviews were paid for by county monies received in connection with the Yucca Mountain effort, which is now in hiatus.

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

It is the policy of the ECHP to produce transcripts that are as close to verbatim as possible, but some alteration of the text is generally both unavoidable and desirable. When human speech is captured in print the result can be a morass of tangled syntax, false starts, and

incomplete sentences, sometimes verging on incoherence. The type font contains no symbols for the physical gestures and the diverse vocal modulations that are integral parts of communication through speech. Experience shows that totally verbatim transcripts are often largely unreadable and therefore a waste of the resources expended in their production. While keeping alterations to a minimum the ECHP will, in preparing a text:

a. generally delete false starts, redundancies and the *uhs*, *ahs* and other noises with which speech is often sprinkled;

b. occasionally compress language that would be confusing to the reader in unaltered form;

c. rarely shift a portion of a transcript to place it in its proper context;

d. enclose in [brackets] explanatory information or words that were not uttered but have been added to render the text intelligible; and

e. make every effort to correctly spell the names of all individuals and places, recognizing that an occasional word may be misspelled because no authoritative source on its correct spelling was found.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As project director, I would like to express my deep appreciation to those who participated in the Esmeralda County History Project (ECHP). It was an honor and a privilege to have the opportunity to obtain oral histories from participating individuals. I was welcomed into many homes and was allowed to share in the recollection of local history. I thank the residents throughout Esmeralda County and Nevadað too numerous to mention by nameð who provided assistance and information. They helped make the successful completion of this project possible.

Appreciation goes to the Esmeralda County Commissioners who initiated the project in 1993: Chairman Wade Barton, Virginia Ridgway, and Joyce Hartman. Appreciation also goes to current Chairman Nancy J. Boland, William C. Kirby, and Dominick Pappalardo, who initiated the current project in 2012, and to Ralph M. Keyes, who became a commissioner in 2013. Ed Mueller, Director, Esmeralda County Repository Oversight Program, gave enthusiastic support and advocacy for this effort. The United States Department of Energy, through Mr. Muellerôs office, provided funds for this round of interviews. Thanks are extended to Commissioners Boland, Kirby, Pappalardo, Keyes, and Mr. Mueller for their input regarding the conduct of this research and for serving as a sounding board as we worked out methodological problems. These interviews would never have become a reality without the enthusiastic support of the Esmeralda County commissioners and Mr. Mueller.

Jean Charney served as editor and administrative assistant throughout the project; her services have been indispensable. Jean Charney and Robert B. Clark transcribed a number of interviews, as did the staff of Pioneer Transcription Services in Penn Valley, California. Julie

Lancaster and Suzy McCoy provided project coordination. Editing was done by Jean Charney and Darlene Morse. Proofreading and indexing were provided at various times by Darlene Morse and Marilyn Anderson. Joni Eastley proofed all the manuscripts and often double-checked, as accurately as possible, the spelling of peopleôs names and the names of their children and other relatives. Jeanne Sharp Howerton provided digital services and consultation. Eva La Rue and Angela Haag of the Central Nevada Museum and Suzy McCoy served as consultants throughout the project; their participation was essential. Much-deserved thanks are extended to all these persons.

All material for the ECHP was prepared with the support of the Esmeralda County Nuclear Waste Repository Oversight Program, funded by the U.S. Department of Energy. However, any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed herein are those of the author and the interviewees and do not necessarily reflect the views of Esmeralda County or the U.S. DOE.

ð Robert D. McCracken
2013

INTRODUCTION

Historians generally consider the year 1890 as the close of the American frontier. By then, most of the western United States had been settled, ranches and farms developed, communities established, and roads and railroads constructed. The mining boomtowns, based on the lure of overnight riches from newly developed lodes, were but a memory.

Yet, even in the 2010s, the spirit of the American frontier can still be found in Esmeralda County, Nevada, in the attitudes, values, lifestyles, and memories of area residents.

Esmeralda County was established by an act of the Territorial Legislature of Nevada on November 23, 1861. The first boom camp in the county, Aurora, named after the goddess of dawn of Roman mythology, mushroomed into existence in the early 1860s with a population of at least 5000. The name Esmeralda, Spanish for "emerald," was provided by a member of the party that made the initial discovery of gold at Aurora; the individual probably had some beauty in mindð the term was then a common name for girls with green eyes. Another version is that the name referred to the Gypsy dancer Esmeralda in Victor Hugoôs novel, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame.* Discoveries at Aurora were followed by others at Columbus (1864), Red Mountain/Silver Peak (1864), Gold Mountain (1866), Palmetto (1866), Montezuma (1867), Oneota (1870), Sylvania (1870), and Lida Valley (1871). Goldfield, which sprang to life in 1902, was the last great mining camp of the American West, and one of the greatest gold camps in the history of the world. Along with Tonopah (1900) and Rhyolite (1904), its two sister boomtowns, and several score of smaller, shorter-lived daughter camps located on the central Nevada desert, Goldfield was the last magnificent flowering of the American frontier.

Between 1903 and 1942, Goldfield produced approximately 7.7 million tons of ore containing more than 4.1 million ounces of gold and over 1.4 million ounces of silver, worth $90 million, mostly when gold was priced at $20 per ounce. Goldfieldôs glory days were from about 1904 until World War I. After approximately 1918, mine production declined to a fraction of what it had been, yet the town lived on. It survived a terrible flash flood in 1913 and a catastrophic fire in 1923 that wiped out a substantial proportion of the townð at least 33 square blocks, by some old-timersô estimates. Another fire in 1924 nearly applied the coup de grâce to the grand lady, but still she persevered.

Much has been written concerning Goldfieldôs prosperous years, but relatively less material is available on the town and its people from the decades following the end of World War I. Much of the history of Esmeralda County is stored in the memories of individuals who are still living.

Aware of Esmeralda Countyôs close ties to the land and our nationôs frontier past, and the scarcity of written sources on local history after 1920, the Esmeralda County commissioners initiated the Esmeralda County History Project (ECHP) in 1993. The ECHP is an effort to systematically collect and preserve the history of Esmeralda County. The centerpiece of the ECHP is a set of interviews conducted with individuals who had knowledge of local history. Each interview was recorded, transcribed, and then edited lightly to preserve the language and speech patterns of those interviewed. All oral history interviews have been printed on acid-free paper and bound and archived in Esmeralda County libraries, Special Collections in the James R. Dickinson Library at the University of Nevada at Las Vegas, and at other archival sites located throughout Nevada.

The interviews conducted between 1993 and 1994 vary in length and detail, but together

they form an unprecedented composite of life in Esmeralda County after 1920. These interviews can be compared to a bouquet: Each flower in the bouquet is uniqueð some are large, others are smallð yet each adds to the total image. In sum, the interviews provide a view of county history that reveals the flow of life and events for a part of Nevadaôs past that has heretofore been largely neglected by historians.

A second set of interviews was initiated in 2011. The goal here was the same as for the interviews collected 20 years earlierð provide a view of Esmeralda County history unavailable elsewhere through interviews with county residents. However, in this series interviews were also conducted with a second goal in mind. Over 97 percent of the land in Esmeralda County is controlled and managed by the federal governmentð more than any other county in Nevada; indeed, in any state outside Alaskað and of the private land approximately 50 percent consists of patented mining claims, leaving little opportunity for community expansion on private land. A large percentage of Esmeralda County residents consequently believe the county is in large measure governed by the federal government as opposed to elected state of Nevada, county, and local officials. Many feel the strong presence of the federal government has the effect of constricting economic opportunity and personal freedom for local residents in many areas of life and would like to see changes made in that arrangement with the transfer of more control to local and state government. Those issues formed part of the focus of these oral histories.

ð RDM
2013

This is Jeanne Sharp Howerton, and Iôm talking with Allen Metscher at the Central Nevada Museum in Tonopah. Todayôs date is January 27, 2012.

CHAPTER ONE

JH: Allen, please give your name as it appears on your birth certificate.

AM: My name is Allen Metscher.

JH: And where were you born, and what date?

AM: I was born July 5, 1945, at the Tonopah Miners Hospital here in Tonopah. It later became Nye County Hospital.

JH: And youôve lived your whole life in either Tonopah or Goldfield?

AM: Central Nevada, yesð Tonopah for a good 50 years and Goldfield for a good 16 years. I made it 26 miles in 66 years. [Laughs]

JH: And could you give us the name of your father and where he was born?

AM: William Henry Metscher. He was born in July 1908 in Columbia, Nevada, one of Goldfieldôs four suburbs.

JH: Is there anything left at Columbia?

AM: Nothing. Just a few old remnants of foundations and whatnot. As I said, it was one of Goldfieldôs four suburbs during the boom days; there were also Diamondfield, Jumbo Town, and Mill Town.

JH: Was Columbia close to Columbia Mountain?

AM: On the south foot of Columbia Mountain.

JH: Is that going to be impacted by the new open-pit mine theyôre thinking of putting in?

AM: No, itôll be closer to US Highway 95, west of where Columbia was and Columbia Mountain.

JH: I guess they're going to move the highway if they do that.

AM: Well, I do see a lot of drilling activity taking place out in the mining district just northeast of Goldfield and contractors working in that area sampling, surveying, and whatnot. When it opens up, we'll see what they do.

JH: Yes. They've been putting this together for a long time. Wasn't this part of the land sales they used to have in August? I know mining developers were buying up a lot of land at those land auctions.

AM: The people I'm familiar with who buy land at those land auctions come and take a look at them once a year or so and maybe do a little assessment work if they're unpatented. The patented ones, they do their work on it, and nothing's really been produced out of the ones I'm familiar with. But along Highway 95 where this big pit is supposed to open up and the highway to be realigned, they've been drilling there for seven, eight years now. If they don't have anything there, they sure know it. But if they do, they know where it's at now. As we speak, there are two rigs right there close to the highway right-of-way drilling today.

JH: Great; we'll get back to mining in a minute. Why don't you tell me your mother's name and where she was born?

AM: Alexandria Metscher. Alexandria Novick was her maiden name. She was born in Brooklyn, New York, in 1911.

JH: So she came out West and met your father here?

AM: My dad went east and met her. My dad and his brother had a lease on the Combination Mine, the gold mine over at Goldfield. Every time they'd make a shipment of ore, they'd have a few bucks in their pocket. Their favorite thing, being they had

relatives in the East (shirtsleeve relatives), was they would get in one or the otherôs big yellow Studebakerð they each had oneð and they would go back to New York City and watch the fights.

He met my mom, who was living in Brooklyn, through mutual friends and two weeks later they eloped. That was approximately 1938, 1939, and he brought her out to Goldfield. It was quite a transitionð from two blocks from Prospect Park in Brooklyn to Goldfield, Nevada. At the time, she was 27 years of age.

JH: She adjusted well?

AM: She adjusted well and would travel back quite often over the years to see her brother and sisters and mom and dad. In fact, at my daughterôs eighth-grade graduationð she graduated 15-some years ago or soð my mom made her last trip back there and took my daughter and me back. We had gone back there previously in 1950 when I was five years of age and we went down Coney Island, the boardwalk, the smells of the city, the Chrysler Building and everythingð it came back to life for me so many years later.

JH: Thatôs a great place to visit.

AM: So thatôs how he met my mom. And after living in Goldfield for a few years, in 1940, ô41, my dad got a job with the Southern Pacific Railroad in Sparks, Nevada, and they moved up there. My mom was pregnant at the time with one of my brothers. After just a short time up there, he came back to Goldfield. He had gold fever like many others, like his dad did before him, and he went back to leasing the same shaft, Combination Fraction, that he and his brother had.

And from there, there was a job opening at Alkali at the geothermal hot water spring between Tonopah and Goldfield off to the west. During the war years, that was

called a defense project, and he went out there and worked as the lineman taking care of the power line from Silver Peak out to Goldfield and from Alkali on in to Tonopah. That was power that came over from the hydroelectric plants out of Owens Valleyð the power lines came over from the Sierra Nevada at the time.

JH: And what was the defense part? Just to keep that line from being out of service?

AM: Right, to keep the power flowing. It was pretty much a defense project when he went to Sparks, Nevada, and worked for the railroad, too.

JH: I guess defense work would be a government-sponsored program or a government program?

AM: Well, then it wasnôt so much government sponsored, but it was supplying power to an electrical company that supplied power to the population. It was considered something that kept the country going along with transportation, which would have been the railroad that he worked for.

JH: Backing up a little bit, your grandfather was here a generation before your father. When did he come into the area?

AM: He and his brother came from Germany right at the turn of the century. They came into Ellis Island and from there went up to the Alaskan gold rush because they, too, brought gold fever with them from Germany. They were up in Alaska for about three years eking it out, and they came back into the States with less than they went up there with.

As it turned out, my grandfatherôs brother wound up in the Carson City area ranching and went into farming and livestock and all, while my grandpa came on down and settled in Columbia in 1904 and went into mining. And by 1917, he was dead from

the effects of a cave-in at the old Mohawk Mine over in Goldfield. So it left my grandma with the two little boysð my dad and uncle. And they both went into mining, too, and it did them in. Silicosis got the two of them.

JH: Thatôs too bad. So your grandpa was here just right after Goldfield was discovered?

AM: Thatôs right, at the very beginning. The first gold discovery was in late 1902, and by 1907, they had 20,000 people there. So it was definitely a boomtown, a boom area.

JH: And I guess part of what did it in was disasters like floods and fires. Of course, the mines ran out, but . . .

AM: Yes. Then the depressionð in 1907 banks were closing up all over the country, including Goldfield. Many people over there lost their life savings. And there was a lot of turmoil with the unions and a lot of people wanted to escape that. And my dad used to tell usð my brothers and Ið that before the big 1923 fire that wiped out over 20 city blocks, windows would be boarded up at a lot of the businesses and you could look in between the cracks of the windows and see everything on the shelves in there still, as if the business owners had hoped things would get better and they were going to come back.

And although Goldfield in the later years didnôt have gold production like it did previous to 1908, 1907, its mines were putting out a lot of gold stillð the School of Mines figured the total production was $90 million worth of gold out of Goldfield.

JH: In those days.

AM: And you figure, on up to 1930, I believe it was, gold was going for $27.69 an ounce, something like that. In 1930, it jumped up to $30 an ounce. So that was a whole lot of ounces of gold to make $90 million.

JH: Boy, I guess. And you think about it at today's prices. That's probably one of the reasons they're renewing the mining today is because of the price of gold.

AM: Absolutely.

JH: Talking about economic impact and government– because about 85 percent of the land in Nevada is owned by the federal government– what would it have taken to open a mine in 1904 compared to opening a mine today, in 2012? I'm thinking about regulations and permits. How simple was it back then? I know it's a long, complicated process to get permission to do a mine now.

AM: I would assume back then, in 1904 or 1908, you went out and located a mining claim and that was about it. You did your diggings, carried out the supplies, and whatnot. A far cry from what we have today with the taxes and all the federal regulations. Now only a big company could really make it most of the time, while your little jackass prospectors back then– which there were thousands of– would never make it today.

JH: I've heard it takes several years to actually be able to start mining a mine. I know geologists who are out drilling and looking for the minerals. But once you get the minerals, it takes years to get the permits. Just what is it that makes it so slow?

AM: Oh, bureaucracy. And I'm sure now the EPA has to check it out if you're going to be using any kind of chemicals and doing any milling. I don't know how many federal entities have to be involved, but there's a lot of red tape.

JH: I know you have to do an archaeological survey and water studies and probably animals and plants to make sure you're not encroaching. Environmental studies are a really big part of the permitting process.

AM: Yes, so you're not encroaching on an endangered species, and there's the

Antiquities Act.

JH: Do you know any small miners who are still mining independently?

AM: I did up until 20 years ago. But, no, I don't now, simply because there's just not that many able to do it now because of all the regulations.

JH: Yes, I've heard you can't, even to dig a road into your property . . .

AM: Oh, it becomes a nightmare. The Bureau of Land Management has to be involved, their archaeologists, the EPA people if you're doing any milling— the list goes on and on.

JH: So if somebody gets a mine started, what kind of economic impact will that bring into Esmeralda County? For example, if they open a mine outside of Goldfield, will people live there? Will there be new housing and new stores? Will the miners actually live there or will they commute? This is, I think, a newer way of mining.

AM: My guess is the majority of them would commute in from Tonopah simply because of the conveniences over here— the hospital, doctor, grocery stores, clothing stores, the school system here if they have children. Goldfield would get some of the overflow miners and what not, but I'm pretty sure that the majority would be commuting.

JH: Do they have housing in Goldfield where miners could live? I don't see a lot of houses that I think could be used in Goldfield.

AM: Well, no, there actually isn't. You have some old, ramshackle houses. I look in the want ads every week in the local newspaper but in my estimation, they just aren't the type that a person would purchase. There's not that many for rent in Goldfield. But they are building a man camp in Esmeralda County. Just out of Tonopah to the north, about a mile down, at the old Lambertuccis' area. Whoever is putting in the man camp is evidently going to cash in on the big boom when it comes.

JH: That's interesting. And it is in Esmeralda County?

AM: Yes. But it's kind of an unusual situation that Tonopah is in: If you go to the north end of Tonopah, you go into Esmeralda County, and you go through Esmeralda County to get over to the Nye County Courthouse. And going south just up on the summit past the BLM office building, you're in Esmeralda County.

JH: Yes, I know it sits right in that corner. Some of the housing is actually almost sitting on the line— some of those apartments back there are in both counties.

AM: The local deputies in Goldfield are always getting calls over to the Tonopah Apartments on the north end of Tonopah for the part of it that's in Esmeralda County.

JH: That's funny. Generally, are the people of Esmeralda optimistic about this new mining venture coming in? Do they see it adding new life to their community?

AM: Some do, and some don't want any change at all. Some would like to see things take off there, something to put people on the payroll, anyway. And who knows? Maybe they could put some more little businesses into Goldfield on the strength of that.

JH: Because your population is, what, in the eight hundreds?

AM: Oh, gosh, in Goldfield proper it's a little over 300— or a little under 300, depending on how many people died lately. The whole county I don't think is much over 1,000, 2,000 at the very, very most.

JH: We did some demographics when I was teaching, and there were more children in our elementary school in Las Vegas— we had about 1,100 kids— than there were people in the whole of Esmeralda County. But 100 years earlier, they'd had 20,000 people in Goldfield and in Las Vegas they had had about 20 people, just on a couple of farms. It's interesting how those two counties flipped in 100 years.

AM: It sure is. Back in 1906, 1907, Goldfield was the biggest city in Nevada, with railroads coming in from the outside, a local rail line. Everything was on the upswing.

JH: And a huge hotel. Is anything being done to get that hotel going again? Because that would be a nice economic boost.

AM: Yes, it would be. A fellow bought it for back taxes several years ago and a lot of rumors were afloat right after thatð it was going to be opened up and completely restored and all. But other than seeing his truck parked in front once in a while, nothing has been done since he purchased it.

JH: I donôt see a single thing thatôs helped out at all.

AM: No. In fact, one of the latest rumorsð oh, that was a year ago; I shouldnôt say latestð was that somebody was going to buy some of the doors off the building. But that was just a rumor; youôve got to see it to believe it over there.

JH: When they were going to renovate before, they would take and sell all the bathtubs. So slowly over the years they just kept selling things out of it and gutting it.

AM: Including all the rooms that had the brass beds in them. All those brass headboards disappeared.

JH: The dressers, the tubs, everything. Now, the mine thatôs going inð will it be open pit?

AM: Yes. Theyôve been doing extensive drilling on the west side of Highway 95 recently to make sure the big ore body on the east side doesnôt extend on over where the company now would be bypassing Highway 95, putting in a three-mile bypass. They wanted to be sure they wouldnôt be putting the bypass over the ore body again.

JH: And then have to move it again.

AM: Have to move it again at what was estimated at over $1 million a mile. That would kind of cut into the mining company's profit.

JH: Wow. And theyôd have to do that right away. If theyôre going to have to put in a road, this mine is not going to happen soon. Do they have for an opening date on the mine or any kind of projection?

AM: I thought I saw 2015 someplace. And in Esmeralda County also, just six miles south of Tonopah, you have the Hasbrouck Mountain. Supposedly they hit pretty good ore bodies on that. They drilled that darn mountain continuously for eight, nine months; all the rigs are pulled off now. It looks like itôs a smaller company that did that. It seems as if they blocked it offð they know exactly where the ore bodies are on that mountain, and they may be trying to find a bigger company to buy it from them. Then again, you have all the bureaucracies involved with it, all the different federal entities they have to satisfy before they can open that up. But that one is also in Esmeralda County and would be a benefit, tax-wise, to the county if it were to open up.

JH: I suppose that the model you could look at would be Round Mountain Gold, where they put in housing in Hadley and made a little town, so thatôs what the little man camp would be sort of like. Of course, they might just use what Tonopah has and just have the housing for the mine.

AM: Well, I sure hope something opens up to put a few people to work.

CHAPTER TWO

JH: Iôm sure you do. Now, I know youôve done a lot of studying of the military thatôs been in this areað the old Tonopah air base and the Nevada Test Site. Could you talk a little bit about the impact that the military presence has had in the whole area?

AM: Oh, gosh. Central Nevada has been impacted by the military from years back. Right now, and for the last seven years, I have been working as a historical consultant for Nellis Air Force Base. Part of that work was concerning the old World War II Tonopah Army Air Corps Base because what had been the Tonopah Bombing and Gunnery Range, all 5,000 square miles of it, now is part of the Nellis Bombing and Gunnery Range, training range.

But, yes, when World War II came about, Tonopah and Goldfield were pretty much on the slide. The Tonopah and Goldfield Railroad had filed to abandon the line at least twice through the 1930s. Then in 1941, when the airfield construction began just six or seven miles east of Tonopah, the boom was on. The rail line was making money, shipping in fuel for the aircraft, building materials, troop trains. Oh my gosh, everything was looking good then.

Over at Goldfield, the Goldfield Hotel was reopened and 150 officers and their wives lived in the hotel because of lack of housing at the base and in Tonopah. Things were going so good that the Tonopah and Goldfield Railroad instituted a commuter run of their train between Tonopah and Goldfield each day so that all these officers and GIs at Goldfield wouldnôt have to bring over their individual automobiles. And after one month, they discontinued it because of lack of interest. [Chuckles] All the GIs would just as soon

drive themselves over than take the commuter train, much like today.

JH: Absolutely.

AM: Esmeralda County is just on the edge of the Tonopah Bombing and Gunnery Range, and Iôve found articles where the ranchers and miners were complaining because a lot of their equipment, their little mines and prospects and water tanks and windmills for the water holes for the cattlemen off the range, were being shot up by fighter planes.

JH: How interesting.

AM: The reply to that complaint from the commanding officer at the base was, ñWhen you give us the number of the plane that did it, then weôll see that it stops.ò And what were the chances of that? Later on I saw an article where the base sent welders and repairmen out to fix the windmills and the water tanks.

JH: Oh, thatôs funny.

AM: So Goldfield suffered that way. It did well for business locally in Goldfield, the few stores that were open, when all those GIs were living there.

JH: What kind of GI population did they have? I know the air base was big.

AM: In 1944, there were 6,000 men and women stationed down at the Tonopah Army Air Corps Base.

JH: Thatôs huge.

AM: And even though the Goldfield Hotel reopened and was full, a lot of little cabins and shacks also had air corps men and their wives living in them. Every one of those GIs who was sent out to Tonopah, transferred here, was warned: ñDonôt bring your wives or families with you; there are no living quarters.ò But most of them were young men 20, 21, 22, so they were newlyweds and, of course, they brought their brides with them.

And both in Tonopah and Goldfield at the time, a lot of landlords cashed in. They converted chicken coops, old sheds, garages, anything they could convert, into living quarters. And all these GIs were so happy to find a place to stay that they would rent them out. About 99 percent of them, of course, had outdoor plumbingð the outhouse out back and allð according to the old photographs and the interviews Iôve done with some of those old military men who were stationed down here. Quite frankly, some of those landlords were overcharging, lining their pockets. But I guess that happens everywhere.

JH: It probably does. Iôm thinking of the housing booms that went on a few years ago in Nevada, like in Las Vegas. So when they opened the bombing and gunnery range, I suppose that impacted the ranchers and the miners who were working cows or had claims on those areas. Did they take them out of their mines and remove their grazing rights from them?

AM: Yes, they did. Gold mining and grazing did cease. As late as 1948, they were still having hearings and meetings here at Tonopah to reopen that to the public, which never completely happened to this day. A lot of land was taken from them. I think they lost a lot of grazing land in the area on the eastern edge of the bombing range over where the old O. K. Reed Ranch had been. And, of course, down around Stonewall Mountain just east of Goldfield out in the Cactus Mountain Range, which was known as the Cactus Mining District, a lot of miners got put off the land during those war years and theyôre still off the land.

JH: I know that there are certain places where they will allow ranchers to graze, like on the Test Site. Steve Medlin in Tikaboo Valley has permission to take his cows in, at least for part of the year. And I know in researching Groom Mountain, where Area 51 is,

the Groom Mine was operating all the time they were doing those aboveground tests, and they were getting dusted with fallout during the õ50s. So they must have had certain areas where they were allowed to be on the fringes, on the edges.

AM: Yes. What Iôm the most familiar with is the range just east of Goldfield, the Nellis Range and that area. And, of course, none of the Cactus Mining District was never opened up again. There used to be, even in the earlier days, mustangers out there gathering up the wild horses, too. But they put the kibosh to all of that. Up went the no-trespassing signs.

JH: Does what the military pays to the county offset what the ranchers and the miners would have contributed economically? If theyôre taking them off their land, maybe putting them out of business, does the military make up the difference?

AM: Well, thatôs in lieu of tax money.

JH: Yes.

AM: Quite frankly, I would guess that theyôre probably making more off the military, the government, than they would off the individual ranching operations that may have been active out in those areas.

JH: I know youôve done a lot of talking to old-timersð how did they feel about the military airplanes that did quite a lot of crashing, like B-24 bombers and stuff? Did people have a positive view of what the Air Force was doing with their testing back in the ô40s?

AM: From all of the old-timers I talked to, the majority of them, those were pretty scary timesð Japanese balloons were coming in on the West Coast, and German submarines were seen out off the East Coast. The most recent count Iôve come up with is

140 aviators killed in accidents related to the Tonopah Bombing and Gunnery Range and the Tonopah Army Airfield in a three-year period of time.

The people just could not believe it. The common thought was, ñHow are we going to win that war when weôre losing so many kids in airplanes just right out here in the middle of Nevada?ò It was so bad that the undertaker, old Bill Logan, gave up accepting the aviatorsô remains in about mid-1944. I think that was because his two sons, Don and Rich, were teenagers or close to it at the time and all these fatalities were just young men, basically kids.

I confirmed that fact that he gave up accepting remains by looking at the Ross Burke Funeral Home records up at the Nevada State Historical Society a few years ago. About mid-1944, all of a sudden [they were getting] seven, eight at a time from the Tonopah Bombing and Gunnery Range and the Tonopah Army Airfield, so Logan truly gave up accepting them. Thatôs pretty bad, when the undertaker gives up accepting remains.

JH: Were the ones that Logan buried here in the Tonopah cemetery?

AM: Oh, no, theyôd be shipped home. I was toldð I guess much like todayð they would put a couple of sandbags in the coffins to give them weight. Old Pettigrove, who had a sheet metal shop down on Main Street, would supply a metal box and solder it shut and theyôd send it home to the family to bury their loved oneôs remains. The sandbags were just to give it some weight like someone was in it, [not just a few remains].

JH: I remember when we talked before that there were two different kinds of aircraft they were testing here, and one was doing a lot of crashing.

AM: Yes, a P-39 Airacobra.

JH: And it was too high in elevation here for them to safely operate. Is that what was happening with them?

AM: There have been a lot of contradictions that the aircraftôs design may have been a cause of the P-39 accidents. But all those fighter plane squadrons, including the one Chuck Yeager was in (he trained at Tonopah), were used to taking off, landing, and flying at sea-level conditions down on the West Coast. Then all of a sudden theyôd be up here at 6,000 feet, and that alone contributed to some of those losses.

And the old airplanes, just like the later B-24 bombers that they trained in down here, were the ñwar wearies,ò meaning theyôd been in combat already. I had a couple of old fellows who came to a museum-sponsored reunion for the old base personnel say, ñGeez, I remember seeing bullet holes patched in one of those planes that we trained in.ò

JH: Gosh. Now, remember the one that crashed in Railroad Valley, and you got that report from the air force on that. And that plane had, like 150 hours of flying time. It was brand new. They had brought it straight from the factory out here and they ran out of gas; they got lostð they could not find Tonopah.

AM: I know. [Laughs] I wonder who had to answer for that one. I remember, in the report they saw the lights of Ely and werenôt quite sure where that was. They were sent on a training mission way up north somewhere, and on the way back they got lost.

JH: Yes, they thought they saw Elko, but they couldnôt raise the radio. So then they thought they would head down toward Ely and they thought they saw Ely, but there was no beacon and they couldnôt raise a radio there. Then they thought, well, ñWeôll just try for Tonopah,ò and they got to where it should have been and it wasnôt there and they started back, and then they were just lost. Finally the plane ran out of fuel, the propellers

stopped, and they ditched.

AM: Luckily, everyone bailed out and there were nothing more than minor injuries. But, of course, that was one of many that went down. Another one out at the Tonopah baseð a B-24 Liberator bomber, twin-tailed, four enginesð was coming back from a training mission way up north and it lost radio contact, regained it, but didnôt know where it was in dark. They saw the lights of Eureka, not knowing it was Eureka, Nevada, just seeing lights. The bailout alarm was rung and they all bailed out. In the statements, two or three of the crew members said, ñYep, could hear the engines sputtering, running out of gas.ò Weeks later, they found that wreckage well over 100 miles north near Delta, Utah.

JH: They were really lost.

AM: They were lost, but I donôt think they heard the engine sputtering when they bailed out, being that the plane flew by itself another 100-and-some miles. It went down because it ran out of fuel just this side of Delta.

JH: Is the military a pretty big contributor to the economy of Esmeralda County?

AM: Not a big contributor, no.

JH: More to Nye County probably because Nye County has so much land where things like Base Camp and the Test Site are on.

AM: Yes, right. So of course, Nye County gets a lot more benefits because of that.

JH: What does Esmeralda feel about the nuclear waste repository program proposed for Yucca Mountain? I know one of the ways to access Yucca Mountain would be to bring the railroad back down the old railroad line and bring it in from . . . where does it go now, to Mina?

AM: They tore that out; itôs just Hawthorne now.

JH: Oh, they tore the one out to Mina?

AM: Yes, the Mina Branch, they called that.

JH: But would that have helped economically if they had brought the waste down from that line?

AM: Well, they would have had a lot of hurdles to get over, I think, to bring it down from Mina. I was on the Esmeralda County Oversight Committee for the effects of Yucca Mountain. And basically a lot of Goldfield people were for it for the economy and hoping that if the rail line was put in from Caliente . . . I never saw that as really happening. It was just such a grandiose job.

But some on our committee had hoped that the lines going around the Nellis Range, which would be just east of Goldfield, once it got going, might put a spur line up into Goldfield if things could get developed there. And then whatever it might be, there would be a way to ship at a reasonable cost. Everyone I was in tune with was looking at the economic benefits. One of the maps showed the train route going right by my home and my land in Goldfield, and that didnôt bother me a bit because I like trains.

Heck, back in the ô50s we used to go out on the summit in the mornings when they would set a bomb off at, say, 6:00, 5:00. Our dad would take us up and weôd be there along with a lot of other people to watch that flash. And if you sat up there long enough, youôd see the mushroom cloud going up in the air. After living through that, a rail line with sealed containers on the cars didnôt bother me a bit. And that waste does have to go someplace. After seeing the storage facility at Three-Mile Island and many of the reactor sites nationwide, theyôre a terroristôs dream, all that stuff being piled up on

site, all that nuclear waste.

JH: At first there didn't seem to be a lot of opposition to Yucca Mountain until the leaders– the governor, the senators– came out against it, and that seemed to turn the tide. I think there was a lot of economic development that probably could have come from that.

AM: And a lot of people on the payroll.

JH: The Yucca Mountain study work alone brought a lot of money into the counties.

AM: Oh, it did.

JH: I guess you're still getting some of that, but I imagine that's coming to an end since they pulled the project.

AM: That study has been a benefit to Esmeralda County. And then, of course, there was the prospect of the highways being widened all the way down and whatnot because they would have to have been hauling that by truck for a while before the rail lines were put in. It looked like a pretty rosy economy was coming up, but it kind of fell flat.

And there was the MX missile episode– I remember that well. What was it, the Carter Administration, 1980, when that was formulated? And in '81, '82, the Reagan Administration shut it down. The prospects of that didn't look too good to me because they were talking about billions– not millions, but billions– of gallons of water during the construction phase of that alone. That would have come from every valley just east of Tonopah to clear over by Delta, Utah.

I can remember at the time on a lot of the stop signs you'd come to here in Tonopah and out of Tonopah there'd be "Stop" and down below, somebody would write, "MX." And at that time Frank Scott at the Union Plaza Hotel and his partner, Howard

Cannon, our state senator, got historical restoration money to restore the Mizpah Hotel for this big boom when the MX construction started. I believe at the old airport land they began putting in model homes for the subdivision, dozens upon dozens upon dozens of mobile home hookups. You can still see the sewage pipes and the street signs for what they laid out. I did see a plot map for that at the Nye County Courthouse, too. And, oh my gosh, they had big lawns down there and stores and everything you could think of. So if that had materialized, Tonopah would have lost a lot due to the virtual town they were going to build down at the old airfield.

JH: The workers would have just moved down there, basically.

AM: Yes. And this was going to be for all of the workers, the hundreds of workers putting in these MX silos and whatnot. Again, that's something that didn't materialize.

JH: And it would have been very disruptive to all the valleys with their ranching and farming.

AM: Much like but even more so than the worries about Las Vegas pumping all the water out, which won't do central or eastern Nevada any good, either.

JH: Just one quick question about the mine. I know these open-pit operations have huge amounts of earth that's moved, and they let it cyanide-drip.

AM: Yes.

JH: Then where would they process the ore? At what stage would they move it out of Goldfield?

AM: One newspaper account said that if the Hasbrouck operation opened up five or six miles south of Tonopah and the big open pit just this side of Goldfield, they would have a joint processing facility down on the middle of the flat.

JH: Maybe just heap-leach it?

AM: Heap-leach it at one central point.

JH: And then where they put it down to ingots, just move the ingots out?

AM: I would imagine so, yes. Maybe for further processing at a different point.

JH: I just wondered if they would have enough to bring in a rail line to move ore. But theyôre not going to move that much ore out of the area, are they? Theyôre just going to move the finished product. Itôs like at Alligator Ridgeð I watched them doing that up there. I was just looking for more jobs like for railroaders. [Laughs]

CHAPTER THREE

JH: Letôs talk about BLM and Forest Service. I know they have offices here. I think their regional office is here in Tonopah. Do BLM and Forest Service have an impact on Esmeralda County?

AM: Well, yes, they do. You have a lot of BLM land and some Forest Service land over there so there is an impact, especially BLM land. And they have a lot of land thatôs leased out to grazing over there as well as in Nye County. I do know that the Battle Mountain BLM office pretty much controls what the Tonopah BLM office does. Thatôs just the way they operate things.

JH: You hear so much talk, especially in rural Nevada, about hating the government. And Iôm wondering where that hate funnels down to: Is it because of BLM, Forest Service, military? What do you think it is?

AM: Pick any one of those government entities. Itôs just government control over things. But then without that government control you see things go to shambles, even though youôre not always agreeable with the way the government is doing things for us and all. One thing that convinced me about state ownership of all of Nevada and making decisions of what to do with it is my many trips to the East. About anywhere I go, all the vacant land: ñKeep Out. No Trespassing. Private Property.ò If the state of Nevada were to obtain the rights to all of what is federal land now in Nevada, theyôd have to sell off a lot of it in order to be able to afford to police what was left. So my opinion is Iôd just as soon see it federally controlled one way or anotherð although Iôm not always pleased with the way they do control it.

JH: Well, they do tend to shut things off and shut people out. Examples are wilderness areas and wilderness study areas where they block roads, and ranchers and miners who have been driving up into canyons on those roads can get locked out of them. I know that causes hardships for people when the roads are blocked.

AM: Oh, I agree. That's something I don't really go for and don't really care for.

JH: Do they have much wilderness study area going on around here?

AM: As an outsider to these agencies, it appears they do, yes.

JH: I know they choose these big mountains. I think Lone Mountain and Stonewall?

AM: Lone Mountain and Stonewall Mountain didn't meet qualifications to be designated as wilderness areas. The air force is documenting history from the prehistoric Indians and other past events that took place on Stonewall Mountain. And that's preserving and gathering all the history from the prehistoric Indians there almost up to present time.

I was surprised at some of the information I was able to obtain about the wood-cutting out there in the old days, the mile-long tunnel where one family spent all the family money and never did hit an ounce of ore. [Chuckles] But every news article would say "The Yellow Tiger Tunnel expects to be . . . they'll be in veins within 50 feet." And that would go on and on and on. And after six or seven years, it finally closed up.

JH: The optimism was amazing, wasn't it?

AM: Oh, it was, yes.

JH: It was always hyperbole and optimism: "This could be the best strike ever." But I know that back before the Taylor Grazing Act of 1934 was implemented and they started regulating how many animals could be on the range, there was a lot of overgrazing. In the

late 1800s, newspapers reported that 10,000 sheep were grazing south in a band, or 1,000 head of cattle were in the areaô more than the land could sustain for long periods. I know United Cattle and Packing Company had thousands of cattle. But everything and everybody were competing for the same grass, and it was overgrazed. They really did need to do some kind of control.

AM: Control, yes. Up at Little Fish Lake, that was sheep country, too. And, oh gosh, I canôt think of the rancherôs name up thereô his herdôs grazing [range] extended clear on down to Stonewall Flat.

JH: United Cattle and Packing Company went clear from Quinn Canyon to the east over to Sodaville or something. Their range was something like 130 miles east and west and 130 miles north and southô huge, vast acres of land.

AM: Thousands of square miles. And that was a big outfit. It amazes me how spread out they were.

JH: But when you look at the end when they were taking the cattle off and you look at where the cows were grazing, itôs just nothing but churned-up dirt. My cousins told me that when they took the cattle off, they were dying along the route because they were literally starving to death. They had a big drought and too many cows, and it wiped them out.

AM: Oh, yes. I have seen that here in central Nevada. And I can see why they have to control the wild horses, too, that are in competition with the cattlemen. I have no doubt in my mind why the cattlemen are up in arms about that. And I can remember in the 1950s my mom and dad would take us out and weôd just see clouds of dust out in Fivemile Flat east of hereô herds of wild horses. I saw the same thing a couple of years ago.

JH: They had huge herds. When I used to drive up Highway 375, alongside the road I could count 250, 300 horses just in lower Railroad Valley. They did sue and got them removed. You do have to have controls, and itôs a fine line.

AM: It is. Well, everything that a horse may eat is one thing less for a cattlemanôs cow to eat, which is his bread and butter.

JH: And the cattlemen often provide some water for the horses, too, because theyôre the ones doing the pumping and they have the water, and they have to water the horses at an expense to them, too.

AM: I guess the bottom line, is Iôm not a Wild Horse Harry and youôre not a Wild Horse Annie.

JH: Right. A few are okay, but you just canôt have . . .

AM: The horses have to be controlled. Way back, every year or so apparently they would gather up a bunch of the horses and take them over to Utah and sell them and it kept the status quo.

JH: Thatôs how it used to be until the ó70s. Theyôd round them up. They would keep some of those horses for saddle horses, and the rest of them were shipped.

AM: It seemed to work, too.

JH: It seemed to work quite well, but now the management is run by a bureaucracy that doesnôt understand what is happening on the range and is out of balance. Are you a hunter or a fisherman? Do you notice an impact from not being able to get deer tags? Because thereôs another area of regulation.

AM: No. I used to fish a lot when I was younger, never did get into hunting. And that may have been due to a hunting trip on Stonewall Mountain. I went out with my dad and

my brothers. We climbed up to the top of that mountain from near Stonewall Waterfalls, climbed over some ridges. Getting into the evening we got on down below, back down on the alluvial fan as we were heading on over, what did we see? Two or three doe, and that was it— I never had any urge to hunt. I'm just glad the grocery stores up here have beef and whatever else I need when I feel like eating meat.

JH: Have the deer herds and antelope herds picked up around here? Have you noticed more?

AM: Yes, I think the antelope herds haven't diminished any. In fact, just last week, southeast of here I saw a herd of seven antelope. I don't know if they migrate across or what, but it always seems like they're in the same area. And then east of the old airfield here at Tonopah, there's an area where at just about almost any given time you can see antelope.

JH: When we were little, like in the '50s, there were a lot of antelope. Then we went through a time when there was not a single antelope in Railroad Valley— we didn't see them for 15 or 20 years. Now they're back, and there are lots of antelope around. And you used to never see deer, and now you see a lot more deer. I don't know if they're restricting the number of tags, if that changed things.

AM: Oh, they must. Speaking of deer, I remember before they all died off, talking to old miners and cattlemen and range riders who told me that after the 1950 atomic tests out east of here, they'd be riding the range and they'd see blind antelope and deer with no hide on them and just all different abnormalities in the wildlife.

JH: I never thought of that, but that would coincide with the years when the antelope and the deer disappeared.

AM: That makes sense.

JH: And the bighorn sheep as well; there was almost no wildlife in our mountains. There were just no antelope at all, and now theyôre back again. I wonder if that does correlate.

AM: I wouldnôt be one bit surprised. I have a little story about my dad when he worked for the county road crew in the 1950s when those atomic tests were taking place. He and another fellow were working out in Railroad Valley blading the county roads. One of the days when they set a bomb off in the morning, he said he saw this AEC pickup coming down the road. And the guy hopped out and he had protective clothing of some kind, a coverall of some type, from his feet clear to the top of his head. He got out, and he had a Geiger counter. He went around the motor grader in the dust cloud, and he said, ñEverythingôs okay,ò and he hopped back in his Atomic Energy little gray pickup and took off.

And for years my dad talked and laughed about that. He said, ñYeah, hell yeah, everything was okay for him because he had a lot of protective clothing on.ò

JH: And here was your dad grinding up the dust that was probably radioactive like crazy.

AM: [Laughs] And at that same time it was just common knowledge that they wouldnôt set those tests off with the wind blowing toward Las Vegas or Los Angeles, but theyôd set them off when the wind was blowing into Utah or blowing north.

JH: They had two more tests all drilled, and one of them had a device down in the hole. But when they did Faultless, it just blew the valley apart. They had to stop and they pulled it out.

AM: During that time, Tonopah definitely benefited because a lot of those drill crews came out of Utah, drilling those holes down 12, 14 feet in diameter. A lot of them were based out of Tonopah, with families and all living here. That lasted one or two years, maybe.

JH: They didn't do it very long; they did that one test. And they really rushed it— I think they set it up in '67, and by '68 they did the test and then realized the area couldn't hold it so they just abandoned it. Of course, now the air force uses that area for testing because Base Camp is active; a lot of military missions train out there.

AM: Getting back to Stonewall Mountain, where the air force has just concluded a lot of research into the history— even though the waterfall is within the Nellis Range, they do allow you to go in there. You go through a gate that you open yourself and just a sign, "Stay on Roadway," and that's all there is to it. It's nothing that they blocked off from the people, because that's always been a favorite place to go for many people. I always call it the waterfall in the desert, which it is.

JH: It's a beautiful waterfall.

AM: Oh, it is, yes. It runs year round.

JH: Such a surprise. Yes, you wouldn't expect something on that mountain there. Have you been able to get onto the Test Site when you're working with the air force? Have you gone to Gold Reed and Yellow Gold?

AM: No, I was invited by the air force years ago for some video shoots on the history of the Cactus Range. It was an air force's sponsored program, and we spent some time out there, approximately 17 miles east of Goldfield.

JH: So you weren't very far into the range.

AM: Oh, no. And you're within the boundary there, only by maybe seven or eight miles.

JH: I guess there are a lot of really nice undisturbed remains on the Test Site— old mining buildings and Indian artifacts. That is one positive thing: Nobody could go in there and collect since the '50s, and so there's a lot of history.

AM: Oh, absolutely; I know of petroglyphs there. I don't think they would be there, or in the good shape they are in, if the area was open to the public. Ninety percent of the people are okay, but you have that 10 percent that aren't. At least the stuff's still intact out there.

JH: Where were the petroglyphs? Were they near the Cactus Range?

AM: Yes, Civet Cat Canyon had some petroglyphs there, and just various spots.

JH: We've got nice ones over at Silver Peak, too. And down there in Clayton Valley.

AM: Yes, the old ancient civilizations.

JH: Yes. So we talked about Fish and Game and Forest Service. So generally, do the government subsidies help Esmeralda County stay alive?

AM: Well, in some respects, I'd say so, yes.

JH: And what economy is going on in Goldfield?

AM: Oh, the lithium mining. You have the Mineral Ridge Mine, which was the old Mary Mine just up out at Silver Peak— that's opened up again. A lot of drilling going on and prospecting out in that area now that the price of gold is so high. But the lithium producer is still working steady.

JH: What about up by Pigeon Springs and by Lida? Is there mining going on out there?

AM: Not to my knowledge. Last time I was out there, there was a lot of remnants of later-day mining, like an old 1955 Chevy pickup sitting there, tires off and windows broken out, and maybe some old mining equipment all torn up. A lot of it leased equipment, too, so whoever started up the little operations with that leased equipment just ran out of money and left it.

JH: Thereôs a big ranch over there for saleð the Lida Ranch? Owned by some movie star or something?

AM: Now, Art Linkletter owned that at one time, and Leonard Stevens had it before him. He was an old-timer from the area. Itôs changed hands numerous times, I think, since Art Linkletter had it. And that was back in late ô50s or ô60s, I guess.

JH: Itôs back on the market for something like $12 million. Really, really a lot.

AM: Then the Timbisha Indians have some land up there, going up toward the summit, and I never hear anything else about that. They had the land up there and down at Scottyôs Junction where the road to Scottyôs Castle turns off Highway 95. But if the Timbishas still have it, they arenôt doing anything.

CHAPTER FOUR

JH: Do you have any other good stories that donôt have anything to do with economics? Any fun stories of growing up in the area, living in Goldfield?

AM: Oh, yes. Like I said, I made it 26 miles in 66 years. But being a student of historyð I guess I could say I amð I just love the history in Goldfield. I was brought up here in Tonopah, so I really got familiar with it, and I guess I studied all the history I could find here in Tonopah.

But Goldfield, with the numerous rail lines that ran in there, the production of gold over there, just fascinates me. One story I have is the Goldfield Hotel ghostsð a lot of those floating around now. The only story I have any semiconfirmation of was one my grandma told me. When she became a widow, she moved from Columbia on up into Goldfield with her two little boys. And she had to feed them so she went to work as a maid in the Goldfield Hotel. And in the mornings, she would start on the top floor and get her supplies out of the cleaning room and work her way down.

Well, one morning she went up as usual, got her cleaning supplies out of the closet, and started walking down the hallway. And one of the employees of the hotel then lived upstairs, Mr. Findley. She told us how his door was hanging open and she saw him standing there. ñGood morning, Mr. Findley,ò she said. And he just nodded his head to her. And she finished up her cleaning duties.

Later in the day, down at the desk, the desk clerk said, ñToo bad about old Findley, isnôt it?ò

And my grandma said, ñWell, what? I just saw him a little while ago.ò

And he said, ñYou couldnôt have. He committed suicide last night.ò

And, oh, I was researching I donôt know what it was a few years ago, and sure enough, I found a news article about how so-and-so Findley committed suicide up in his room. And my grandma wasnôt one for telling stories or anything. But she babysat me in the early ô50s and she told me about that. Later, she told both my brothers that same story and she told my dad and uncle that right when it happened. The bottom line is thatôs her ghost story of the Goldfield Hotel. [Laughs]

JH: Had he hanged himself?

AM: No, he shot himself.

JH: I thought if he was hanging there, maybe she just glanced and saw him hanging there.

AM: But for what she saw, if she saw anything, anyway, that was her version of it.

JH: Pretty interesting. There are some books on the ghosts in the hotelð the young girl who was kept in the back downstairs room.

AM: Yes, and the tunnel dug from the red light district to the basement of the hotel so that the guys from the red-light district, when they were done, could go over to the hotel and have a drink.

JH: Is there really a tunnel?

AM: No. And the same stories abound about the tunnel from the Mizpah Mine to the Mizpah Hotel. Iôll just put it this way: I have no verification of that, no documentation that it exists.

JH: Now there are structures under the streets of Tonopah; there are some subterranean tunnels. You could see them on Main Street when those little glass squares

would break out of the sidewalk. Remember those little purple glass squares you could look down in? What is down there?

AM: That was just part of the basement, and the glass would allow light into the basements. The basements would extend down underneath the sidewalks. I was always fascinated by that myself.

JH: Yes. Then once in a while, youôd find one that was missing a purple and youôd peek down there to see what was down there, and I always wondered what was under the streets of Tonopah.

AH: I think it was in the 1960s, one of the mine tunnels or drifts going from the east side over to the west side underneath Main Street must have caved. We had a pretty good crack develop right across the highway. It took some major repairs to repair that, the highway department did.

JH: So there were mining tunnels there.

AH: Yes, it connected down to the old West End shaft over on the other side of the highway from the Mizpah. But what do they say? Well over 100 miles of tunnels underground from all these combined Tonopah mines. And when there are mines on both sides of the street, you know darn well theyôre joined by tunnels underneath.

JH: Well, I imagine things could cave in eventually. I know in Eureka, they had built tunnels from houses and buildings to other buildings, probably because of the snow. My sisterôs husbandôs family owned the Sadler House and they decided to put in a lawn. They put in the lawn; they watered it and they watered it. And they went out, and the lawn had caved in. And there was a tunnel that went from the basement of the Sadler House down to another building. Some people said it was the courthouse so he didnôt

have to walk to the courthouse in the snow.

AM: I did also read about those ones in Eureka; rather interesting. I do know here in Tonopah people went out and where their clothesline was, was caved in underneath; or out the back door or something. And one fellow, Don Potts I think was the fellowøs name, he had a front-end loader working over there near the Silver Top Mine. Thatøs over at the present-day Mining Park area. And heøs leveling off a lot. And all of a sudden, he went down about 50 feet. Minor injuries to himð he was able to climb off that piece of equipment and get on out. And they had to get some cranes in there to pull that piece of equipment he was on out of that hole. But just an old drift or an old shaft or an old stope or something caving in.

JH: How much danger do you think there is to the town as more and more things cave in? Of course, did they have big glory holes and those might cave in with more oomph than just a tunnel if they had really hollowed out the ground underneath.

AM: Well, what happened in some cases, even up here at the motel on what used to be a mine dump, they leveled it off and they filled the old shaft in. But they didnøt fill it in all the way because the old timbers that must have been holding up the muck they dumped in caved away, and an automobile in front of one of the motel rooms was down about 25 feet.

JH: Oh, thatøs pretty funny.

AM: When the people leveled that land, they just dumped a bunch into the mine hole until it wouldnøt fill anymore, and they thought that was good. But that wasnøt the case.

JH: They didnøt mine under the town in Goldfield, did they? The mines seem to be more off east.

AM: They are. Over on the north end, thereôs a few partially right on the edge of town. And there is a shaft right behind the Goldfield Hotel. There was a lot of litigation over that one on the property rights and whatnot.

I remember even in the 1950s, my mom and dadð because my dad still had a bit of gold feverð when we lived in Tonopah here, weôd go over there on Saturdays and theyôd visit friends and maybe stop at the old Santa Fe Saloon and have a few cold beers. And my brothers and I would start walking around and exploring. And it seemed like about every other old abandoned cabin, either in the dugout next to it or underneath, it would be remains of a whiskey stillð either the coilôs still there or the tank. So that went back to the Prohibition days. Boy, there were a lot of bootleggers. I guess like everywhere else at the time.

JH: I guess there was a lot of bootlegging. So Goldfieldôs beautifully built schoolhouse, is that going to be restored? Or is it just falling apart? Did that guy sell it?

AM: John Ekman. Letôs see, John Ekmanôs the head of the group thatôs restoring it. But the restoration depends on grants and donations. Theyôve been able to do a lot of Band-Aid work on it.

JH: Thatôs what Iôm seeing is just Band-Aids on the side that caved in.

AM: And some areas even look like they recently have more damage than that. Once the water got down, the roof went to heck on it, and the water was getting down in the walls. That was pretty much a death knell to that building unless they come up with a giant, giant grant to do something with it.

I hope they can because both my brothers went to school there in the first and second grade in õ52, õ53, right before they shut it down. But even though in the boom

days it was the old Goldfield High School— gosh, we had three different schoolhouses there at one time, and that was the high school. But in later years as the population dwindled, it became the grade school/high school.

JH: Yes, that's a great building, and your courthouse is a great building. And the house up where the Yucca Mountain office was— the Wingfield House, George Wingfield?

AM: Is that that old bottle house?

JH: No, the Wingfield House is that beautiful house with the porch in the front; it's east of the hotel and south, not very far. It's a beautiful brick building. Chris Bramwell lived there. I was hoping he'd restore that, but then he sold it and it became a Yucca Mountain office.

AM: It did, for a short time. I was on the committee then. That place is right off of old Highway 95. It was even said that Virgil Earp lived there, but he never did. But here's an interesting thing: Wyatt Earp came to Goldfield for a very brief time in 1905, and Virgil Earp worked at the National Club; he was actually deputized. He was a bouncer there, I guess you could say, and he died of pneumonia there. They sent his remains up to Oregon to bury him in the family cemetery.

But oh, what a boomtown Goldfield was! And that city was built to last, too. It just fascinates me. If you even looked at the streets, those darn streets are city-size streets— 40 feet to travel on and another 20 feet on each side— 10 feet, maybe I'm exaggerating a little bit. But it was actually laid out and built as a city.

JH: And the beautiful buildings— the Nixon Building and all of these places. It's a shame how much is lost, how much burned or flooded away.

AM: I know it. As you look at the old photographs, 90 percent of the brick and stone buildings that were on Main Street alone are gone now. Those are the buildings my dad used to talk about when they were kidsð before that big 1923 fire hitð that still had goods on the shelves. That fire was caused by a whiskey still that blew up right across the street, west of the Goldfield Hotel. At the time, a terrific wind was blowing out of the south. They didnôt know if the fire was sabotage by another bootlegger or an accident, but the whiskey still started it and that wiped out the majority of Main Street.

JH: Who has Tex Rickardôs house? It looks like itôs not being cared for really well; the windows are sagging.

AM: I donôt know who has that now. The gentleman used to come, and heôd opened up kind of a little antique store next to it. But quite frankly, I donôt even know if that was open this last summer like it usually was.

JH: Remember the Gables down on the corner?

AM: Oh, yes.

JH: That one looks like itôs being kept up pretty well.

AM: Yes, a fellow whoôs the head of the group on restoring the old school, John Ekmanð in fact, heôs the one that gets all the grants for the work that has been done on the old schoolð he has the old Gables. And heôs really into restoring. He is from Los Angeles, but I will say this about him: Heôs one man who puts his money where his mouth is. He owns several other houses.

JH: Does he have the Kitchen House?

AM: No. Some gentleman from Vegas, I think, has that now. John Ekman has the old Bullfrog-Goldfield Railroad shop site down just across the street. Heôs from the Santa Fe,

too. But he needs a team of volunteers, I think, to help him in maintaining and restoring a lot of them.

JH: Who has the Nixon Building? Because thatôs been kept up pretty well, too.

AM: Jim Marsh has that. And Angela Haag has the old bank connected to the Nixon Building.

JH: Iôm hoping you guys can keep stuff going down there. I really like the town. And Iôve spent time trying to figure out where things were from Hugh Shambergerôs book.

AM: I give guided tours over there to people who want them; I think I have more fun than they do. But I take them to a lot of the spots where the photographer stood in 1905, 1906, and took a picture. And we stand at that same spot and look at those pictures and they just cannot believe it, what a city it wasð just teeming with people, too.

JH: Yes, it was amazing.

AM: I guess thatôs what I like so much about it the way it was.

JH: Yes. Did you know Mrs. Giles?

AM: My mom and dad knew her real well.

JH: She ended up in Vegas, and actually her house has been moved to Vegasð the Giles House thatôs in that museum on the Boulder Highway. She had an antique store down there on Giles Street, so she was in Vegas for a while, long enough to get a street named after her antique store. And I had visited with her a few times. They were in the early, early Goldfield.

AM: I heard my dad mention the name many years ago, talking about the Giles family and many others.

JH: Edward Giles was a mining engineer and assayer in Goldfield. Anyway, Iðll take

you up on a tour.

AM: Well, I do it for donations only, and then if they don't like it they don't have to give me a donation and they can't say anything. They supplied a school bus and I was able to give a bunch of the school kids last school semester a tour over there. I had a few of them very interested, just one question after the other. It made me feel good, you know, that there were some little kids interested in the old Goldfield history. And, oh, when they have celebrations over there, they obtain a school bus and I give the tours on those, tooð a little extra for people who come to the Goldfield Days or whatever it might be.

JH: I used to go to those. Well, very good. Thanks so much for talking with me.

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