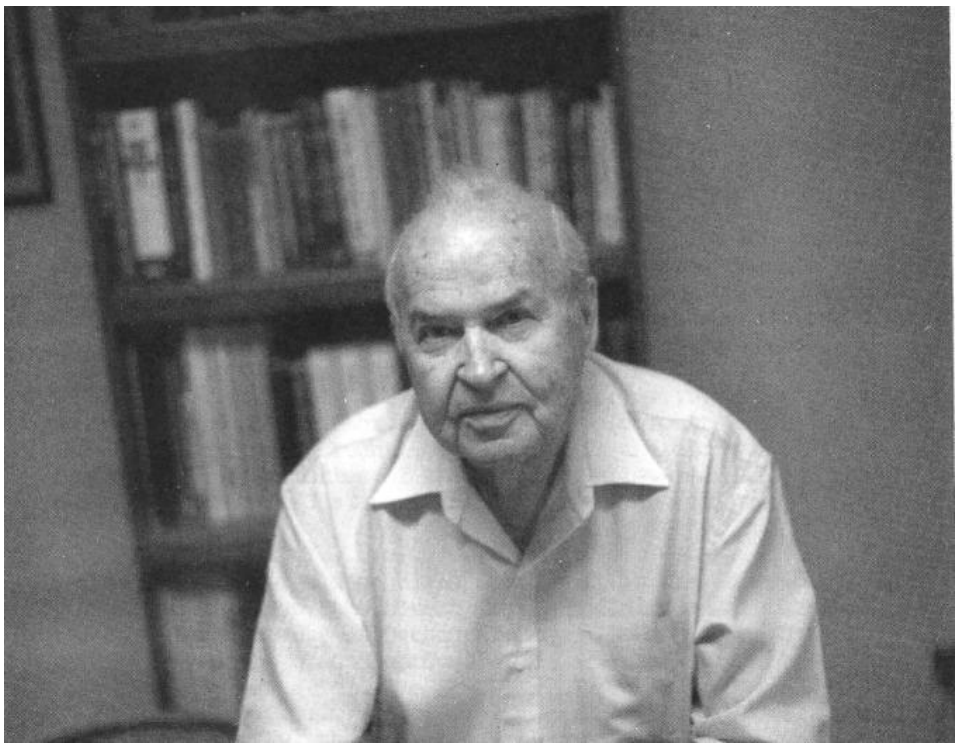
An Interview with
ROLAND WILEY

An Oral History conducted and edited by
Robert D. McCracken

Nye County Town History Project
Nye County, Nevada
Tonopah
1988



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PREFACE

The Nye County Town History Project (NCTHP) 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 tapes of the interviews and their transcriptions.

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 NCTHP's 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 NCTHP 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 incoherency. 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 NCTHP will,

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.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As project director, I would like to express my deep appreciation to those who participated in the Nye County Town History Project (NCTHP). It was an honor and a privilege to have the opportunity to obtain oral histories from so many wonderful individuals. I was welcomed into many homes--in many cases as a stranger--and was allowed to share in the recollection of local history. In a number of cases I had the opportunity to interview Nye County residents whom I have known and admired since I was a teenager; these experiences were especially gratifying. I thank the residents throughout Nye County and southern Nevada--too numerous to mention by name--who provided assistance, information, and photographs. They helped make the successful completion of this project possible.

Appreciation goes to Chairman Joe S. Garcia, Jr., Robert N. "Bobby" Revert, and Patricia S. Mankins, the Nye County commissioners who initiated this project. Mr. Garcia and Mr. Revert, in particular, showed deep interest and unyielding support for the project from its inception. Thanks also go to current commissioners Richard L. Carver and Barbara J. Raper, who have since joined Mr. Revert on the board and who have continued the project with enthusiastic support. Stephen T. Bradhurst, Jr., planning consultant for Nye County, gave unwavering support and advocacy of the project within Nye County and before the State of Nevada Nuclear Waste Project Office and the United States Department of Energy; both entities provided funds for this project. Thanks are also extended to Mr. Bradhurst for his advice and input regarding the conduct of the research and for constantly serving as a sounding board when methodological problems were worked out. This project would never have become a reality without the enthusiastic support of the Nye County commissioners and Mr. Bradhurst.

Jean Charney served as administrative assistant, editor, indexer, and typist throughout the project; her services have been indispensable. Louise Terrell provided considerable assistance in transcribing many of the oral histories; Barbara Douglass also transcribed a number of interviews. Transcribing, typing, editing, and indexing were provided at various times by Alice Levine, Jodie Hanson, Mike Green, and Cynthia Tremblay. Jared Charney contributed essential word processing skills. Mai re Hayes, Michelle Starika, Anita Coryell, Michelle Welsh, Lindsay Schumacher, and Jodie Hanson shouldered the herculean task of proofreading the oral histories. Gretchen Loeffler and Bambi McCracken assisted in numerous secretarial and clerical duties. Phillip Earl of the Nevada Historical Society contributed valuable support and criticism throughout the project, and Tam King at the Oral History Program of the University of Nevada at Reno served as a consulting oral historian. Much deserved thanks are extended to all these persons.

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--Robert D. McCracken
Tonopah, Nevada
June 1990

INTRODUCTION

Historians generally consider the year 1890 as the end 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.

Although Nevada was granted statehood in 1864, examination of any map of the state from the late 1800s shows that while much of the state was mapped and its geographical features named, a vast region--stretching from Belmont south to the Las Vegas meadows, comprising most of Nye County-- remained largely unsettled and unmapped. In 1890 most of southcentral Nevada remained very much a frontier, and it continued to be for at least another twenty years.

The great mining booms at Tonopah (1900), Goldfield (1902), and Rhyolite (1904) represent the last major flowering of what might be called the Old West in the United States. Consequently, southcentral Nevada, notably Nye County, remains close to the American frontier; closer, perhaps, than any other region of the American West. In a real sense, a significant part of the frontier can still be found in southcentral Nevada. It exists in the attitudes, values, lifestyles, and memories of area residents. The frontier-like character of the area also is visible in the relatively undisturbed quality of the natural environment, most of it essentially untouched by human hands.

A survey of written sources on southcentral Nevada's history reveals some material from the boomtown period from 1900 to about 1915, but very little on the area after around 1920. The volume of available sources varies from town to town: A fair amount of literature, for instance, can be found covering Tonopah's first two decades of existence, and the town has had a newspaper continuously since its first year. In contrast, relatively little is known about the early days of Gabbs, Round Mountain, Manhattan, Beatty, Amargosa Valley, and Pahrump. Gabbs's only newspaper was published intermittently between 1974 and 1976. Round Mountain's only newspaper, the Round Mountain Nugget, was published between 1906 and 1910. Manhattan had newspaper coverage for most of the years between 1906 and 1922. Amargosa Valley has never had a newspaper; Beatty's independent paper folded in 1912. Pahrump's first newspaper did not appear until 1971. All six communities received only spotty coverage in the newspapers of other communities after their own papers folded, although Beatty was served by the Beatty Bulletin, which was published as a supplement to the Goldfield News between 1947 and 1956. Consequently, most information on the history of southcentral Nevada after 1920 is stored in the memories of individuals who are still living.

Aware of Nye County's close ties to our nation's frontier past, and recognizing that few written sources on local history are available, especially after about 1920, the Nye County Commissioners initiated the Nye County Town History Project (NCTHP). The NCTHP represents an effort to systematically collect and preserve information on the history of Nye County. The centerpiece of the NCTHP is a large 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 Nye County libraries, Special Collections in the James R. Dickinson Library at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, and at

other archival sites located throughout Nevada. The interviews vary in length and detail, but together they form a never-before-available composite picture of each community's life and development. The collection of interviews for each community can be compared to a bouquet: Each flower in the bouquet is unique--some are large, others are small--yet each adds to the total image. In sum, the interviews provide a composite view of community and county history, revealing the flaw of life and events for a part of Nevada that has heretofore been largely neglected by historians.

Collection of the oral histories has been accompanied by the assembling of a set of photographs depicting each community's history. These pictures have been obtained from participants in the oral history interviews and other present and past Nye County residents. In all, more than 700 photos have been collected and carefully identified. Complete sets of the photographs have been archived along with the oral histories.

On the basis of the oral interviews as well as existing written sources, histories have been prepared for the major communities in Nye County. These histories also have been archived. The town history project is one component of a Nye County program to determine the socioeconomic impacts of a federal proposal to build and operate a nuclear waste repository in southcentral Nye County. The repository, which would be located inside a mountain (Yucca Mountain), would be the nation's first, and possibly only, permanent disposal site for high-level radioactive waste. The Nye County Board of County Commissioners initiated the NCTHP in 1987 in order to collect information on the origin, history, traditions, and quality of life of Nye County communities that may be impacted by a repository. If the repository is constructed, it will remain a source of interest for hundreds, possibly thousands, of years to come, and future generations will likely want to know more about the people who once resided near the site. In the event that government policy changes and a high-level nuclear waste repository is not constructed in Nye County, material compiled by the NCTHP will remain for the use and enjoyment of all.

--R.D.M.

Robert McCracken interviewing Roland Wiley at his home in Is Vegas, Nevada May 11, 1988.

CHAPTER ONE

RM: Roland, why don't we start by you telling me your name as it reads on your birth certificate?

RW: Roland Henry Willey - it's a German-Swiss name. I cut out one 'l' when I came to Nevada to practice law in 1929.

RM: Why did you do that?

RW: It's easier to spell. People used to say, "Weary Willey," and that was the term they used for a tramp. [chuckles]

RM: I'll be darned. When and where were you born?

RW: I was born in Avoca, Iowa, near Council Bluffs and Omaha, in 1904.

RM: What was the date?

RW: May the 30th - Memorial Day.

RM: Could you say your father's name and his place of birth?

RW: Yes, he was born in Prairie du Sac, Wisconsin, in 1865. His father came from Switzerland.

RM: And what was your mother's maiden name?

RW: Rose Heinie. Her father came from Trier, Germany. That's the oldest town in Ancient Gaul. Her mother was born in Hohndorf, which is north of Kiel, Germany. My mother was born in Shelby, Iowa.

RM: Where did you grow up, Roland?

RW: The first 16 years, in Shelby on a farm. And then the family moved to Baraboo, Wisconsin, near where Father was born. Baraboo was the home of Ringling Brothers circus. I sold Mrs. Henry Ringling a square music box in 1920 for $50. The other day, a man who had conducted antique auctions said that they would bring $5,000 today. I thought $50 was big money in 1920.

RM: Was your father a farmer?

RW: Yes, for the first few years; then he became a real-estate broker. And he sold pianos, organs and phonographs.

RM: Is that what he did in Wisconsin?

RW: He did it in Wisconsin and also in Iowa.

RM: Did you graduate from high school, then, in Wisconsin?

RW: Yes; Baraboo.

RM: And did you go on to college, then?

RW: Yes; the University of Wisconsin. I went 4 years, and then the 5th year I went to George Washington University in Washington, D.C., to law school, and graduated in 1927.

RM: And then you were admitted to the Wisconsin bar?

RW: Yes; I was admitted to the Wisconsin bar. In '27 I was a law clerk in a big law firm in Washington for a year, and then came west to visit my folks in Los Angeles and from there I came to Las Vegas, Nevada, New Year's Day, 1929, with 2 miners who were prominent in Goldfield during the heyday of its activity.

RM: What were their names?

RW: Marvin Ish and Todd Widworth. Todd Widworth and his wife are mentioned in a book dealing with the life of Riley Granham. Riley died in Rawhide, Nevada. He was a great American gambler - plunger. The funeral service of Riley Granham was held in Rawhide and the eulogy was spoken by Knickerbocker at his grave back of a saloon. That book is published by the Tonopah paper about every year; a booklet. That speech by Knickerbocker is considered one of the finest pieces of Western prose ever spoken.

RM: I'll have to take a look at that; I'm not familiar with it.

RW: Right; it's wonderful. I told it to a movie director one time and he said, "What an episode that would be in a movie."

RM: How many children were there in your family?

RW: I have 2 children - a son who's Professor of Music at the University of Michigan and a daughter who was a prominent schoolteacher and on national television shows as a guest. She died a quadriplegic in 1979 she got hurt in an automobile accident in Rosarito, Mexico. She graduated from the local high school in Las Vegas.

RM: Did you have brothers and sisters?

RW: Yes; 3 brothers and 3 sisters.

RM: Did they all came west, too?

RW: All of them came west.

RM: And you came out for a visit to Los Angeles in 1928. What brought you to Vegas, then?

RW: I knew, from my experience in Washington, that there would be built a dam here on the Colorado River. I came up here with those miners - my father had made an investment in real estate - and I read in the Review Journal that Las Vegas was a good place for a professional person to get started. And I thought that applied to me, so I stayed here.

RM: So it was the growth here, produced by the dam, that made all this possible?

RW: Oh, yes.

RM: The dam hadn't been started by then, had it?

RW: No, the lawyer who came here with the first representatives of the government - Bureau of Reclamation - was my roommate here in 1929.

RM: What was his name?

RW: I forgot. But Mr. Page came here at the same time - he became head of the Bureau of Reclamation in Boulder City and, later, reclamation commissioner of the federal government in Washington.

RM: Then you came to Las Vegas with the intention of starting a legal practice. What kind of law did you practice?

RW: In those days the town was small. Every lawyer took whatever came along - corporations, civil suits, probate, divorce cases ….

RM: Was making a living pretty good here at first, or was it slow?

RW: Oh, we knew no Depression here. I probated the estate that owned the Three Kids' Mine and I could have bought it for $1,200 in 1931, I think. And I thought, "Well, there will never be another war," and that metal would never be used; how mistaken I was. [chuckles] In World War II, it was quite a producer.

RM: Could you discuss what Vegas was like when you first got here?

RW: I think there were about 4,000 people, and very little pavement - the roads from Los Angeles were graveled roads only. When a telephone call was made from Los Angeles here it would go to San Francisco, Salt Lake City, and then down from Salt Lake City to Las Vegas through independent telephone companies. And there'd be a hum on the line. If you wanted to send a telegram, you went to the railroad station; they sent your telegram. There were trees on Fremont Street - these Chinese . . . not the elm tree, but there's one that's planted widely, here.

RM: Oh - locust?

RW: No. It had little berries on it; they were very fragile and the heavy winds would break limbs off. After those trees, they started planting the cottonwoods. Then they found out that the cottonwoods affected people who had allergies, so the city started to cut down the cottonwood trees and then they planted elm trees. And of course the elm trees are being supplanted by others, now. And street lights - there would be a little wire hung across the street, and one bulb would be in that fixture - one bulb.

RM: Was there gambling here at that time? This was before the legalization of gambling, wasn't it?

RW: Yes, there was some gambling.

RM: Was it done surreptitiously?

RW: No; openly. Likewise, we still had Prohibition, and there were many bars open. Occasionally they'd get raided and arrested, and they'd pay a little fine into the city coffers. I recall one time the federal government alcohol tax unit had a man by the name of Kelly. He was a undercover man and he sold real estate and he was my client, but I didn't know that he was an undercover man. He would come into my office with 2 transactions a week, about. I charged him $25 to draw up a contract and a deed, and they would be placed in escrow - we never had title companies, then. Yes, Kelly was good for about $50 a week. After he secretly recorded the transactions of the mayor and various officials, he left town. And he wrote a book entitled, Kelly's Last Stand. He mentions names therein - the various city officials that he was able to disclose were taking payoffs.

RM.: It was 1930, wasn't it, that they legalized gambling and made divorce easier?

RW: Either '30 or '32; I think '32.

RM: Did that make a big difference in your legal practice?

RW: Oh, yes. California then had a 6 months' - or maybe a year residence. We had 90 days at first, before the law was amended to 6 weeks. And 6 weeks is a short time. A lot of divorce cases were handled by the Lawyers in Las Vegas.

RM: Did you have any famous clients?

RW: Not in a divorce case, but Al G. Barnes had a big circus one time - he was noted as the best animal trainer in the United States and he could neither read nor write. I have a letter today that he wrote to me asking the bank president to open his safe deposit box and to mail him the contents. It was written in a handwriting different than his signature - he could write his signature; that's all. I've got an album here with one of his old letters to me.

One time a girl came to me, a mutual friend, who said, "What would you charge to get a divorce for a very wealthy individual?"

And I said, "Oh, $150." It turned out to be the 9th wife of Tommy Manville.

RM: Did you know Pop Squires very well?

RW: Very well; yes. I knew Pop and his wife and son Jim. He was very well-liked. He came here as an early settler, you know, in Las Vegas, I guess together with Von Toebel.

RM Did you know Sam Gay?

RW: Very well. Sam was the man who, they said, never carried a pistol. He was a very big man.

RM: He would rough a guy up, wouldn't he?

RW: Yes. A well-respected man, too.

RM: Could you describe Block 16? I've always been kind of fascinated by That.

RW: It was a series of bawdy houses on north First Street, between Ogden and Stewart on the east side. One of them was called the Pastime. Another, the most prominent, was the Arizona Club.

RM Was it a pretty wild place?

RW: No. I guess they did a good business when the American Legion had a state convention here. [laughter] When I was district attorney in 1941 or '42 . .

RM: Oh, you were the D.A. for Clark County?

RW: Yes; elected 50 years ago this year. The federal government had a May Act [that stated] the bawdy houses could not operate within a certain distance from a military post. That would be, then, the Las Vegas Aerial Gunnery School. They made a complaint before the county board. And then some lawyer representing sate local person who I learned later wanted to buy that land very cheap laid down a complaint before the county board that there were bawdy houses operating within so many feet of the church, contrary to law. It was the Episcopalian Church on 2nd Street.

The board asked me what they should do about it. The law then was that if such a complaint was made before the board, that a public nuisance was being conducted, the board must order the district attorney to abate it, or they shall be removed from office. And it said also that if the district attorney fails to abate it, he shall be removed from office. So I said,

"Well, I guess we'd better take some action."

I called all the madams in the office, and told them that they'd have to move, and they got Harold Morse to defend than. He filed an injunctive suit against me from prosecuting them for conducting a public nuisance. They lost in the lower court and also in the upper court so they moved up to a place called 4-Mile. [During the trial] I had the chief of police, Frank Waite, on the witness stand and I asked him how long they'd been operating there.

He said, "Well, I came here in 19- . . ." - whatever it was - the very early days, "and they've been going strong ever since." [laughter]

RM: How did the town feel about shutting down Block 16?

RW: I can tell you exactly how they felt, because when I was elected, and took office, in January, 1939, I took off 2 afternoons from the office to make a survey up and down Fremont Street among the businessmen and prominent people I met, as to their attitude. I had 2 questions to ask them. One was, do they believe in allowing licensed prostitution; and secondly, do they want it moved from its present location? I interviewed exactly 100 people, and I made a cross after the answer - I didn't put their names down - and the answer to both questions was yes. A hundred people; not one of them …….

RM: Was there community resistance at relocating it down at 4-Mile?

RW: No, none at all. It was the complaint made by the lawyer representing some people who wanted to buy the land where the bawdy houses were at a very cheap price and also the federal government's complaint.

RM: Which was more instrumental in its removal? The federal government, or the lawyer?

RW: I think each of them had an influence.

RM: How long were you district attorney?

RW: One term. I decided not to run again. No one filed against me or even threatened to do so, but I had 2 children, the job paid $3,000 a year, and the first month I was out of office I made more than I did [in a] whole year. I had the attitude that when a man or woman or child came before me,

That is my mother, that's my father, that's my own daughter, that's my brother," and I tried to act accordingly. Any man who holds public office and has that concept would never be defeated, as long as he wanted to hold office.

RM: While you were in office, Las Vegas underwent some explosive growth, didn't it?

RW: Yes; and the town of Henderson.

RM: The whole BMI and the air base all came in while you were in office, didn't they?

RW: Yes.

RM: What kinds of problems do you recall seeing as a result of this tremendous explosion of growth in the town?

RW: Well, the expenses of the county went up immensely. The sheriff's office, schools, recorders, everything. And I remember well when the Boulder Dam Revenue Act was passed by Congress. That act provided that there should be $300,000 a year paid each to Arizona and Nevada in lieu of taxes. Well, whenever circumstances like that came up, when the economic conditions were such, the acts of Congress usually provided that those sums should be paid to the counties, and the states maybe [would get] a portion of it. But this act did not do so. I drew a brief dealing with the political, economic and social impact of the Boulder Dam Revenue Act and the $300,000, contending it should be paid to Clark County. That was used in the legislature the next session, and it passed a law giving that $300,000 to the county of Clark. Well, it wasn't long after that that they changed the law [chuckles] and gave it back to the state, I think. Arizona used the same brief in having that state give the money to Mojave County.

I wish I had a copy of that brief. Maybe they've got it in the state legislature. I have no copy. It's very well done. I studied a great deal on it; it's very competently written and I was complimented by various people for it.

RM Do you recall when it was filed, exactly?

RW: It must've been in '42. It was merely available to the legislators. There was no lawsuit involved. I'd sure like to have a copy, because today I would be surprised that I was the author of it. [chuckles] I wonder if the library in Reno has it or the state library.

RM: And it was money in lieu of taxes that the government was giving the state?

RW: Yes. Whenever the federal government makes a move, they add to the expense of the county. And we cannot tax Boulder Dam, so therefore they pay money in lieu of taxes; that's customary. Well, they should pay it to the entity that suffers the greatest cost, which would be the counties, in this instance, instead of the state. It was a mistake made by the senators in wording, you see. That sum of $300,000 was to be paid each year for a period of 50 years. I thought, then, that 50 years was somewhere in the next century or two, and here it's already passed - in 1985.

RM: Yes; isn't that something.

RW: Yes, because the dam was completed, I think, in '35. [chuckles] Well, obviously we didn't need it later on; we could tax the . . .

RM: As the district attorney, what kinds of problems did you see with this explosive growth in terms of crime and law enforcement?

RW: Well, nothing like today, of course. We had no drug problems at all that I recall. Occasionally there'd be a murder case. One time a man killed 3 people and then shot himself - that saved me a lot of prosecution, didn't it? The town was small, with not much crime.

RM: People were pretty generally satisfied with the growth, weren't they?

RW: Everybody was happy - there was plenty of money to spend.

RM: Did you run as a Democrat or a Republican?

RW: Democrat.

RM: Did you have any further dealings in politics after you were D.A.?

RW: Oh, yes, I ran for governor twice, but I had no hope of being elected - though I put on a good campaign both times. I made a very good race in '42; that's when I . . .

RM: Did you run in the primary?

RW: Yes. The first [time I ran against] Ted Carville. He was an ex-United States judge, and a very fine man. Then in 1950 I ran against Vail Pittman. He was a good man, too. In each of them I ran in the primaries. They'd only served one term and they were each re-elected, as they should have been. I did not expect to be elected, all I expected to do was to run a good race, and I never condemned anybody or belittled anyone, or spoke ill of them at all. I think if the present politicians would do likewise, the public would like it a lot better. The people are getting sick of one man pretending he has longer wings sprouting from his shoulder blades than his competitor. That doesn't make sense in my book.

RM: What made you run, if you didn't think you had a hope of winning? What was your purpose?

RW: I learned a long time ago - and that quotation is in the Cathedral Canyon - "When the one great scorer comes to write against your name, he writes, not that you lost or won, but how you played the game."

CHAPTER TWO

RM: Why did you want to play that particular game? I mean, why run for governor; why not do something else?

RW: It's good experience for everybody.

RM: Did it help your legal career?

RW: Oh, I think so. But in any event, when I was defeated, I was defeated with a smile on my face, thinking that the burdens were on someone else and not on my shoulders. It was easy to rationalize like that.

RM: What is your first recollection of the Pahrump Valley?

RW: My first trip into Pahrump was as a lawyer, investigating whether the person living with John Yount, the son of the first settler, was his common-law wife or not. I took an Ohio lawyer who was visiting here along with me and we went through the valley and I took these pictures of his pickup. This was in 1936.

RM: How did you get out there?

RW: It was necessary to drive through Goodsprings and then through Mesquite Valley, as it was then called - now it's Sandy Valley - and it took 3-1/2 hours to go 70 miles. That was the case until 1954, when the new road over Mountain Pass . . .

RM: You didn't to up to Indian Springs and . .

RW: That took 4-1/2 hours.

RM: What was in Pahrump Valley on this first trip of yours?

RW: There were only 3 ranches - the Pahrump Ranch, the Manse Ranch and my ranch, the Yount Ranch.

RM: Your ranch was called the Yount Ranch?

RW: It was then called the Yount Ranch, after the first settler in Pahrump, named Yount.

RM: Where is the Yount Ranch located?

RW: There were 2 of them. One is the Pahrump Ranch - it was called the Yount Ranch, and then my ranch down in the south end of Pahrump Valley was known as the Yount Ranch also. It was

first settled by the elder Yount in 1880, and my ranch was occupied by his son, John Yount.Hehad married an Indian squaw.

RM: Who was the first Yount in there? Do you know anything about him?

RW: I didn't know him at all.

RM: Do you know anything of the circumstances of his coming to the Valley? There are 2 or things written that kind of tell about it; the Indians killed his horses and so on.

RW: No, I don't. Often those are legends or myths.

RM: Did the original Younts settle on the Manse Ranch?

RW: I couldn't say for sure.

RM: Who lived at the Manse Ranch the first time you went out there?

RW: No one lived there. I had a lawsuit in Tonopah . . . I went to defend the mortgagor in a mortgage foreclosure on the Manse Ranch sometime in the early '30s. The amount of the note under foreclosure was $15,000; the ranch could have been bought for that then. And in 1941 or '42 the Pahrump Ranch, which was 10,000 acres or more, was for sale for $100,000. Those were the ranches . . . I bought mine in 1936 and it consisted of 3 homesteads then.

RM: Were they real homesteads under the Homestead Act?

RW: Mine was 3 homesteads - John Yount, Wilson and Rose.

RM: And John Yount was the first Yount's son?

RW: Yes.

RM: Do you know his wife's name?

RW: She died and then he picked up with another woman - Belle Yount.

RM: Do you know where she came from?

RW: No, nor where she went. Frank McNamee represented the heirs of John Yount who lived in Redlands and Riverside, and Belle wanted to know if she was the common-law wife, and I investigated. I had previously had a good lawsuit involving the largest motel in town called the Deluxe on the highway down the Strip here, and I knew what facts had to be proven to establish it. I knew the law well because of the previous case.

I reported to Belle that I could not establish her relationship as a common-law wife and I said, "Why didn't you marry him?"

She said, "Well, we went to town many times to get married but we'd always end up in the bawdy house and get drunk."

So I had her buy it from the Yount family. She said, "You buy it."

And I said, "No, I don't want it." It was 3-1/2 hours to get there, grown up in trees. It was a very picturesque property but I couldn't tell [that] by passing through in 1936.

She said, "Mr. Wiley, you should own that ranch." She looked me in the eye and she said, "There's more there than meets the eye." And I saw how serious she was and I believed her then and I bought it from her.

RM: But you don't know what happened to her after that?

RW: Oh, no. She left town.

RM: What happened to John Yount?

RW: John Yount died while they were there at the ranch He used to raise cattle and when I took it over there were about 400 head of cattle on the ranch, but feed was getting scarce. They had eaten up all the grass and the cows were not very fat. Though I lived here 6 years prior to his death, I did not know Johnnie Yount personally, but there were many springs on the ranch and I was told by those who were there that they manufactured liquor and supplied a good many truckloads to Los Angeles markets. He quit raising cattle and started leasing springs out to moonshiners.

RM: This would have been during Prohibition?

RW: Yes. When I was D.A., I met Slim Jamison, a prominent character in town. He said, "Wiley, I was manufacturing liquor out there and one time I buried a whole barrel of it, and I went back to look for it years later - could never find it." These flash floods would change the contour of the country; he never could find it.

RM: So it's probably still out there?

RW: No. Probably the barrel has rotted away. But I met other bootleggers who were at that ranch in those days. Because of the hills and box canyons and mesas, knolls and ravines, it was easy to spot the federals coming in. They had lookout points; they would hide behind the rock formations at a high point and they could look over the whole valley - 30 miles or more.

RM: Were they bootlegging out of the Manse and Pahrump ranches, do you think?

RW: I do not know, but I don't think so. There were a lot of murders that took place on the Manse Ranch.

RM: Now, who had the other homesteads there?

RW: They were dead and Johnnie Yount owned them. I never knew them personally, but there was a man by the name of Rose and a fellow by the name of Wilson.

RM: When Yount acquired them from Rose and Wilson, were they both homesteaded about the same time?

RW: I think so. This is an interesting fact. In 1920, the federal government enacted a leasing act, requiring that anyone wanting to mine metals or oil from federal lands would be required to lease it. Homesteaders and Desert Entry men did not get title to the oil and mineral rights after, I think, January of 1920. These patents were issued in '22, but the application had been made prior to that. I don't know what day; the federal land office would have that information. Since right of entry was given prior to the new act of Congress, the oil rights went with the homesteads, and therefore, today, I own the oil rights on 499 acres on that ranch. A lot of miners did not know that, so when I went there I found monuments erected with the usual tobacco can in, claiming oil rights.

RM: Was that 1920 law on all federal land?

RW: Yes, it affected all federal land everywhere. Texas didn't have it because . . .

RM: But, you could still stake out a claim.

RW: Oh, no. You have to file an application for a lease to the Bureau of Land Management; then it was called the land office. You can't get any oil rights by filing homesteads or anything; and that is true whether the reservation is worded in the patent or not. It's an act of Congress and if some secretary drafting the patent forgot to put that reservation in, that has no bearing on it; the law of Congress prevails. That's an interesting point, because if you are buying land here in the west anywhere and you want to know whether you have oil rights, look to the date of the patent and look to the date of the application for the patent.

RM: Do you know when those 3 homesteads were staked out by Yount, Wilson and Rose?

RW: I know it had to be prior to 1922.

RM: It was probably in the 1800's, wasn't it?

RW: Oh, yes, of course, because the house I have over there was built between 1880 and 1890.

RM: Did John Yount build that?

RW: Steve Brown would know the answer to that. He and his mother lived there; she was an Indian too, half-breed. I knew 2 of his uncles.

RM: Do you know what they were raising on those 3 homesteads before you got them?

RW: Cattle and alfalfa. In the geological libraries in Los Angeles I found a pamphlet entitled, "Haying Time at the Yount Ranch." It's published by the federal government and shows a stack of hay on this ranch. They raised alfalfa and the story was they drilled a well and this is not fiction, it's fact. They drilled a well - I know its location - and it drowned out the alfalfa . . . that's easily done, you know.

RM: Were they artesian wells?

RW: Free flowing; yes.

RM: You first went there in '36 to check on Yount's marital status?

RW: Yes. I rode out with Frank Garside the next time; the postmaster.

RM: And the first time there was nobody living on the Manse Ranch?

RW: No.

RM: How big was the Manse Ranch?

RW: 10,000 acres, perhaps.

RM: I know that the Pahrump had 10,000 acres, but . . .

RW: Well, that could have been over 5,000 acres, and it was later bought by Lois Kellogg. She came from Arlemont, Nevada, and she was single and had a lot of dogs, and she fed the dogs rabbits. She cleaned the rabbits and she got tularemia fever in 1944 and in those days there was no antibiotic for tularemia and 'most everyone died. I cleaned a rabbit sometime there in '44 and I got tularemia fever. Dr. Woodbury, my doctor, told my law partner that Wiley would never come out of the hospital alive. The nurses told me that too, when I walked out, sometime later.

RM: What do you attribute your survival to?

RW: I've no idea. Everybody died from it in those days. Nowadays, one of the antibiotics is a specific for tularemia.

RM: Who was living on the Pahrump Ranch on this first visit?

RW: A fellow by the name of Van Horn. That ranch was owned in those days by Paul Shoup on the Southern Pacific Railway, and Isidore Dockweiler, head of a prominent law firm in Los

Angeles and someone else. In 1941 I told my friend J. D. Finley to buy it for $100,000; he was a very wealthy man. He wrote me a letter from Los Angeles, no letterhead at all . . . He was a multimillionaire, the richest man on the west coast. He wrote one sentence, no printed stationery. It said, "Dear Wiley, At this time my friend is not interested in buying the ranch. J. D." He owned oil wells, he owned banks, he owned big ranches, he owned forests up in the northwest. He did business with 100 corporations, never his personal name. And if you were his friend you could go down and he would just write you a check for what you wanted. He was a great man.

He owned property in Las Vegas and he'd stay in a little hotel across from the street from the Horseshoe. It was at one time the hospital for the city and they charged $3.50 for a room. You would think J. D. would stay in the Frontier or the El Rancho, but he'd say, "No. They got nice clean rooms, $3.50, very pleasant."

RM: Now, on the first visit out there were just the 3 ranches - the Pahrump, the Manse and the Yount Ranch.

RW: And the sign on the Reno Highway that led into Pahrump Valley was a wooden sign, and poorly painted on there by a non-professional, it said, "Pahrump Ranch, so many miles; Manse Ranch, so many miles," and I'll never forget, "Yount Ranch, 46 miles." It took over 4 hours to go to the ranch [over the Johnnie Summit] and 3 hours and a half, 3 hours and 15 minutes through Goodsprings.

RM: And the road was probably terrible.

RW: Oh, yes. I brought the first road motor grader into Pahrump Valley. They used Fresnos and tractors before that. I went through Goodsprings in 1941 and I bladed roads from Sandy Valley clear up to my ranch.

RM: Tell me about your second visit to the Pahrump Valley. You said you went with Frank Garside.

RW: Yes. I don't remember much about it, but it took all day. We went through Goodsprings and came out the other direction, then we stopped near the Pahrump Ranch where old Frank Buol had a ranch. Pete Buol, his brother, was the first mayor of Las Vegas. He died many years ago. Frank grew grapes there and had a winery. He had big barrels . . . it was a big, licensed winery and he had a bean stew on to take care of weary travelers. Frank and I had some soup with him.

RM: Did you know him from Las Vegas?

RW: No, I never did. I got acquainted with him then and I knew him well later.

RM: Could you tell us about Frank? Did he earn a living out with his wine?

RW: Yes. He owned the place that Binions own now.

RM: Did he homestead that?

RW: I have no idea. He was there before I ever went in. There were a very few other isolated homes, and the one-room schoolhouse.

RM: Did Buol have a little store there at that time?

RW: No, I don't think he did. But there was a little store that didn't amount to much made of railroad ties.

RM: Did you know Lois Kellogg very well?

RW: I'll tell you how I met her. She was very wealthy. The Depression was on and she had lots of money coming in every year, from what source I don't know, back east. She bought that place and then she filed on the water rights at my place and I read the paper where she had made the application. And of course I'd have to object to it. She claimed that it was abandoned or something like that, so I wrote a letter to the hearing office in Salt Lake City accompanied by pictures, photographs and my own affidavit. And then I paid no more attention it; I thought they would schedule a hearing. Some years later, I wrote to Salt Lake City as to the disposition that was going to be made and I got a reply letter that said, We refused the application of Lois Kellogg the day that your letter and affidavit arrived."

RM: Where did she come from?

RW: I don't know. She had a place in Arlemont, Nevada, wherever that is.

RM: Was she there when you got there?

RW: No. It was later that she bought the ranch.

RM: How many acres did your ranch have?

RW: 499 acres. I increased it during the years of the early '50s or late '40s to 15,000 acres - 13,000 in Inyo County, California - the county seat is Independence - and about 1,250 acres in Nevada.

RM: How much did you pay for the original part that you got, the 3 homesteads?

RW: Well, that I won't answer, because there are many different prices I could quote and they would all be honest. It all depends on how you figure costs. In those days you could rest assured that in a country place 3-1/2 hours from Las Vegas with no telephone, no roads or any hopes of ever having them, you could buy land cheap. I had to buy out my partner, the man

from Ohio, and I had to buy the interest of Belle Yount and also the heirs. If you put that altogether, it didn't amount to much.

RM: How did you acquire the land in California?

RW: That was auctioned . . . it was advertised for sale in the '40s by the state of California. I guess I was the highest bidder. Don't ask me what that cost me; Uncle Sam's Internal Revenue Service are the only ones who know that. But in those days there were still no roads, no electricity and no telephone, with no hope of it. I don't think there were many people who made a bid. It was done by sealed bids.

CHAPTER THREE

RM: How did all the land in the Pahrump Valley get into private hands?

RW: The portion that I bought, I asked the state of California to trade lands it had for federal land, and it did - the state of California traded lands with the federal government

RM: To get that land in the Pahrump Valley?

RW: Yes. It was advertised and I bought it.

RM: Do you know what land they traded?

RW: I've no idea. That enabled me . . . I owned 18,000 acres at one time. Preferred Equities bought 2,500 acres and I allowed a couple of other people to buy some.

RM: Is there water on most of your land?

RW: No, but there is shallow, underground water. There is no restriction to drilling wells in California as there is in Nevada. There's ample water - no one ever drills a dry hole. I've got wells there that produce from 4 to 600 gallons a minute from a shallow depth.

RM: Have you got it pretty well developed agriculturally?

RW: No. I grew melons there one year in 1967 on 15 acres and now I have 2 or 3 acres planted in Last Chance peach trees. They ripen in September and October.

RM: I've talked to Hank Records about the Last Chance.

RW: Hank's an old friend of mine.

RM: Yes, I like Hank. Why hasn't there been the development down in your section that there has been up around . . . ?

RW: That's because Roland Wiley owns it. I just wasn't hungry. If I were hungry I'd sell the land. Either getting hungry or old, one or the other. That inspires sales . . . now that I'm old, I'm going to sell it.

RM: How did the land on the Nevada side get into the private hands?

RW: I never knew that. You mean the Pahrump Ranch?

RM: Yes. How did it get so big?

RW: I've no idea at all. I'm surprised that there is that land there; that large acreage.

RM: And it's all over the place out there. I mean, west of the Pahrump Ranch and north . . . It's a mystery.

RW: The land office in Reno or Carson City would disclose it. And, of course, the recorder's office in Tonopah. It didn't happen without a recorded history. I think the day is coming when Pahrump Valley will be covered with oil derricks.

RM: You think there is oil under there?

RW: Oh, yes. The retired chief geologist of Standard Oil of California told Doby Doc, a friend of mine here, long ago, that if he were wildcatting, he'd go to Pahrump Valley. Now Ralph Arnold, when I knew him 50 some years ago . . . His name 70 years ago was the most respected name on a petroleum geologist's report. Then I think he was caught in a conflict of interest and then that was the end . . . but Ralph Arnold, an outstanding petroleum engineer-geologist, told me when we were drilling an oil well here in '49 in Vegas Valley . . . I was in his office in California. He said, "Why don't you drill in Pahrump Valley. The indications are much better for oil than they are in Las Vegas Valley."

I know several private individuals who worked for geophysical crews when the majors were doing work in Pahrump and one of them said, "I'm going to quit my job here and go over there and make an application for oil leases." I had 3,000 acres tied up one time, checker-board [fashion], around the Yount Ranch in the early '50s, but I gave it up when the government started charging extra money for the year.

RM: Why did you buy it?

RW: It was that woman, who looked me in the eye and said that "There's more there than meets the eye, you should own it." I've got the right to use my head and listen to people. She had no purpose in telling me wrong. If I look a man in the eye and tell him he should do something, he'd better listen. And when he looks me in the eye and tells me that, and it serves my interests, I listen, too, because he is explaining it to me.

RM: You purchased the land, and then what were the first things you did over there?

RW: I bought it in 1936 and in 1941 Steve Brown and his mother Dora, who were Indians, were living at the ranch. I told them that I'd like to take possession.

RM: You didn't take possession for all that time?

RM: Five years. They had a place just north and a little west of mine and there were a few cabins there and a springs, and they moved there. Then I remodeled the house that I still live in, the first one built in the south end of Pahrump Valley.

RM: The original house that apparently Yount had built? Were there houses on the other 2 homesteads - the Wilson and Rose places?

RW: No. That ranch today has an Indian graveyard fenced in with chain-link fence, and there is an Indian rock house ruin - the walls and fireplace are still visible from a distance. I've put chain-link fence around one of them. I've found lots of Indian arrowheads there. The finest collection in the state museum of arrowheads came from Stump Springs, 3 miles away. I own the water rights there.

RM: You own the water rights at Stump Springs?

RW: Well, I did. I don't know whether I do now or not.

RM: Then in '41, you fixed up the house?

RW: Yes. It had an old wood-burning stove in it and chimney and wood floors right on the ground, and some of the boards had rotted away. The foundation consisted of a few stones on the corners and the walls were made of 2 by 4's on 4-foot centers, and then the walls were 2 inches thick, not 4. They put the studding parallel, so the 4-inches were parallel to the wall and made of board and batten. I tore off the batten and covered the boards up and nailed inside paneling and put in 2 bathrooms. Otherwise it's the same cottage - 2 rooms and a bath.

RM: How big was the house originally?

RW: Oh, I never enlarged it at all. It might be 20 by 24.

RM: There was no power, was there?

RW: No.

RM: Was there running water?

RW: No; there was a spring.

RM: Did you try to raise cattle or anything else, after you purchased it?

RW: No.

RM: Had Yount planted trees or anything there?

RW: Yes; they're dead - big cottonwood trees, willows and everything.

RM: Had he planted fruit trees?

RW: I planted peach trees in the '40s. I must have planted 100 of than - seedlings - and they leafed out and did fine and then I went over there later and the leaves were all off and the trees were dead. They drowned out. My fruit trees all drowned out like Johnnie Yount's alfalfa did. The water was so close to the surface . . . You'd dig 2 feet and you've got a pond of water there. I didn't have sense enough to know that was going to drown out trees. They've got to have air; roots have to have air didn't plant anything, then, for years.

RM: But when you did, it was in a different spot?

RW: Yes. But [you can] even [plant] there now, because the water level is lower.

RM: Have you found anything that might be traced back to Yount?

RW: I did have a lot of things in the early days, but I never kept them. One time I was traveling across the desert on a sand dune about 30 feet high near the California border and a fellow with me picked up a horseshoe and looked at it. He said, "Late red or early white," and I had to think a second before I knew what he was talking about. Do you know?

RM: No; what was he talking about?

RW: Late red or early white - Indian or early pioneer. That ranch was on the Old Spanish Trail. The Spanish Trail, Fremont Trail, the Mormon Trail

RM: They camped at Stump Spring, didn't they?

RW: They camped at Stump Spring, then they came north to this ranch right by Cathedral Canyon and then they went east. The monuments are there; Scoop Garside erected them.

RM: Now, who was Scoop Garside?

RW: He was the son of the publisher.Hehad a print shop on Highland here; he died recently and he was with the county historical society and put up these markers.

RM: Then on the old Spanish or Mormon Trail, did they camp at your ranch?

RW: They camped at Stump Spring and then because there are so many arroyos to the east they came north and the road is still visible. It's not visible across the flat in California, but one time I was flying my airplane over that flat land and the sagebrush and I noticed where the Spanish Trail went. It might be visible today. I think I'm the only person in the world who knows where to look for it coming across the flat, but it was still visible in 1945. In 1935, the federal government surveyed the south end of Pahrump Valley and erected the corner and quarter section monuments and their tracks were still visible across the desert.

RM: Do you think you could find the Mormon Trail now?

RW: I think if I flew across in an airplane it would be visible.

RM: Could you find it on the ground?

RW: No, you couldn't. I could back in the '40s, but I doubt today whether it could be done. They passed into Nevada from California on the way to Stump Spring about a mile and a half from the California border.

RM: Now, you remodeled the house in 1941?

RW: Yes; I just added some additional walls on the inside.

RM: And then what use did you make of the house?

RW: I'd go over there on weekends. The Yount people would visit the ranch. I had occasion to lease it out in the '40s when there were no roads; only my airport was there. I had a chance to lease it for a guest ranch to an operator from Rancho Santa Fe in California - the most costly ranch in California. He wanted to lease it and then Smoky Joe LaDue, the father of a movie actor from Mountain Springs, wanted to lease it too.

RM: But, you didn't do it?

RW: I didn't do it.

RM: When did you build your air strip there?

RW: '41. It's on all the official U.S. Government charts.

RM: Why did you build an air strip there?

RW: I flew an airplane.

RM: Is that how you got over there?

RW: Well, occasionally I had to drive to bring in supplies, but most of the time I would fly and then walk to the house; it was only about 1/3 of a mile away.

RM: Did you go over on Friday nights?

RW: Yes, and came back Monday morning.

RM: What was it that made you spend so much time in that remote area?

RW: When you see the ranch you'd understand. And I could hike. Nowadays I had a broken leg and I can't walk much, but it's made up of little hills, countless little hills, all different shapes and sizes - mesas, ravines, bench lands, box canyons, little knolls . . . like an explorer, beyond each one, what's there? You never get cabin fever, nor is there any monotony in the views. There's nothing like it on the floor of the valley. It joins the floor of Pahrump Valley, yet it has these topographical features, and level land for flying ranchers, with Cathedral Canyon within walking distance of the house or the airport. These winding mesas . . . my goodness, there's no place like it; there couldn't be any place like it.

It was made by the receding waters from the mountains. One time a rock hound person told me that Charleston Mountain was the highest mountain once under water. I knew from 1929, when I lived up there and studied for the bar here, that there are sea shells beyond the timber line, which shows that it was once under water. That's why I figure oil is over there, too; one of the indications is marine life.

There are places where the walls of that 40-foot Cathedral Canyon are 200 feet, 300 feet apart. There are the bones of a dinosaur - they must be about 10 or 12 inches on one end and the other end, maybe 4 inches in diameter - and it's exposed right on the edge of the wall in Cathedral Canyon, under the rock; under 4 feet of caliche.

RM: Is there much game over there?

RW: No. Coyotes, and I think some wild cats, and rabbits of course. I had a pheasant hunting ranch back in the '50s. I raised 5,000 pheasants a year for 4 years.

RM: What do you call the ranch?

RW: Hidden Hills Ranch.

RM: Was that the name it's always had, or was that the name you gave it?

RW: It was the Yount Ranch then.

RM: What was in the Valley in 1941? What was happening at the Manse Ranch?

RW: Lois Kellogg was there. She was growing some crops and she built a big grainery.

RM: Was there anything special happening on the Pahrump Ranch?

RW: Van Horn was growing alfalfa there.

RM: Was he leasing it?

RW: Yes. Isodore Dockweiler and Paul Shoup and someone else owned that ranch.

RM: Was there a Raycraft there?

RW: Yes. Did Raycraft own the Pahrump Ranch?

RM: I've heard it called the Raycraft Ranch, but I don't know.
RW: He probably bought it, then. It changed hands a number of times. Raycraft was with Meacham from Bakersfield - they are the ones who owned it. They didn't own it long. I remember because Meacham's brother Amos drilled a water well for me. Yes, Raycraft; they were out of Bakersfield, I think.

RM: What was happening with Pop Buol?

RW: He had that winery going. He had a son who worked on Boulder Dam, I think, and he died; was killed in an automobile accident or something. The lady who owned the ranch after Buol owned it came to see me in North Las Vegas, visiting a sister. She wanted $15,000 for the ranch, but I owned enough property and didn't figure I needed anymore. That's the ranch the Binions own today. Doby Doc bought it.

RM: Yes, Doby Doc bought it from the Buol's estate; or was there another owner in between there?

RW: I think there was. A lady came to me, and she owned it, but what relationship she might have been to Frank I don't know. Then Doby would have sold me the ranch before the Binions bought it.

RM: Did you know Doby Doc?

RW: The Binions knew him well too. Doby in my book was a great character. He came from Elko, and I can tell you a lot of stories he told me. When he was about 10 or 12 years old he went to a carnival. He pinned a $10 bill inside his overalls with a safety pin and he said, "Nobody's going to get that." He walked in and on the first place on the left hand side he saw a shell game operator. He watched and he saw how that man lost his money, and Doby, this little kid of 10 or 12, took out his $10 bill and laid it down on the counter.

The man won, and then he walked around and put his hand on Doby's shoulder and said, "Young man, I'm going to give you some advice that's worth many times what you've lost here, and that advice is, don't ever never play the other man's game."

Bill Moffat was the last big cattleman. He lived in San Francisco and bought cattle all over the west; a highly respected man - Doby was his chauffeur as a young man. There was something about Doby that apparently impressed people, because when Moffat would go to Reno (this is in a book about Moffat's life), it's quoted that he said, "I've got to call an S.O.B. in Las Vegas who I know," and he got on the phone and talked for a half hour to Doby. And Doby used to tell me stories about Moffat too.

RM: Was there anything else happening in the Valley, in 1941, besides the Pahrump Ranch and Manse Ranch and Lois Kellogg and Pop Buol?

RW: I remember back in the '40s when I had that airport that the Thunderbirds out of Nellis would come out there to practice in the morning for 20 minutes and the afternoon for 20 minutes. They would line up and came down over my airport and I thought then I'd build a dude ranch and I could advertise free air shows . . . but then there was an aircraft collision involving a military plane here in Vegas Valley and this whole area was off limits then for a certain time.

And in 1941 or '2 or '3 Van Horn came to me from the Pahrump Ranch and said we ought to have a farm-to-market road through Pahrump, and would I write a letter to the highway department? I did, and in the thick book that has the engineering studies of the highway department the first entry was my letter to the highway department stating that they had never heard of Pahrump Valley before that; it precedes their engineering study. Senator Pat McCarran got behind it and through his efforts and others' there . . . all I did was write that letter. The road was built through Pahrump about 1950. We go to these ranches in an hour's time, instead of 3-1/2.

RM: Was that the one going up to . .

RW: It goes over Mountain Springs, south of us.

RM: Roland, was there another road that went up through Red Rock to get over there?

RW: During Roosevelt's administration.

RM: Did you ever go over that road?

RW: I did once. It was built by the CCC boys.

RM: Was it built on an old trail, I wonder?

RW: Oh, I don't know that. There was a ranch way up in there, you know; the Williams Ranch.

RM: Was it west of the Wilson Ranch?

RW: No. The Wilson Ranch was in the mountains up there. That's where that CCC road went by, I think.

RM: Yes. I went over it many, many years ago.

RW: In the '40s I owned 80 acres of land in the National Forest in Lee's Canyon. The federal government forest service men came to me and said they would appreciate it if I would donate it to the government, and I did; 80 acres of land. At that time, had I not had the Pahrump property and a lot of land, I would have said, "Well, give me a good portion of Vegas Valley for that," which they would have done - a section or two. But I never liked Las Vegas Valley because

it was hardpan and sandy gravel and over there in Inyo County and Pahrump Valley, it's all good American soil - agricultural soil. Being an Iowa farm bay, I put value to that.

CHAPTER FOUR

RM: Could you talk a little bit about some of your memories of Beatty and Amargosa Valley? You mentioned the Gold Ace Mine to me; could you tell me that story?

RW: When I went to Reno in March of 1929, I was with a man who was prominent in Goldfield, Bill Elliott. He knew Milton Deutch, a prominent lawyer in Reno whose office I might go into. We went through Carrara which is south of Beatty and I met there two miners who were prominent in Goldfield. One was Briz Putnam and the other was Jim Shay. They were very prominent miners and they had the Gold Ace property. Bill asked them what the stock was selling for, [and they said] 3 cents a share. We drove on and I came back to Las Vegas after going to San Francisco and down south to Los Angeles on a train, and I got a job in a law office here.

That summer of 1929 the stock had gone up to well over $1 a share. Beatty then had trains running into it and a fellow by the name of Bixby in Long Beach had a special train come up to Beatty with people from Long Beach and they had quite a celebration. What his connection with the mine was I don't know. Maybe he owned it. I remember there were 100 or 200 people there and there was a cave, and in that cave was whiskey, beer and wine. So many people got drunk that night. I didn't because I didn't drink, but I remember sleeping on the floor in a big tin building, and some fellow in prominent mining circles had lost his false teeth. The next morning he had 4 or 5 of us combing the desert to find his false teeth. We never found them. But that stock went up to well over $1 a share.

And then I incorporated a company for the Bettle boys, and one of them lived a good many years later in Amargosa Valley - Gordon Bettie. I haven't seen him in 50 or 60 years or more. I incorporated the company for than. It was adjoining the Gold Ace, but it never amounted to anything, and the Gold Ace petered out, too.

RM: I interviewed Gordon Bettle's daughter in Bishop.

RW: When did he die?

RM: He died in about the '60s.

RW: It's funny; he never looked me up, he never came back and I never saw him after '29. I remember my friend bought some of that stock and he asked me 20 years later what he should do with it. I didn't sell any stock, but I told him to line his bedroom with it.

RM: Did you know Sheriff Bill 'Thomas of Nye County?

RW: Oh, I met him once; a well-liked man. He was sheriff for many years.

RM: Did you know many people in the Amargosa Valley or Beatty?

RW: No. I knew the Revert boys in those days. Then there was a man who had a nice collection of specimen rocks in Beatty. The museum has it today.

RM: You must have known a lot of the gaming figures in Las Vegas through the years, didn't you?

RW: Yes, I knew Harold Stocker, who became county commissioner, and I knew Witcher.

RM: Tell me about the Deluxe Motel.

RW: It was on the east side of the street, probably just south of Charleston Boulevard.

RM: Before you get to the Sahara?

RW: Yes.

RM: Was it the only place out there?

RW: It was the biggest one; the most prominent.

RM: Did you know Griffith, the man who built the Last Frontier?

RW: Yes, I knew him. I knew both him and Tammy Hull, who built the El Rancho. It was built in '39 and the Frontier was opened in 1941. In 1939 there was a neon sign on the highway for the El Rancho Hotel and I remember it said, "Rooms $3." When the war came on that sign was taken down.

RM: What was out there on the Strip when Hull built the El Rancho?

RW: Where the Frontier sits there was a night club; I think Guy McAfee owned it.

RM: Was there anything farther on out on the Strip?

RW: I think that was the last place; I think it was called the Willows, and Guy McAfee owned it. The story is told that Griffith, a wealthy theater man, owned a chain of theatres in the southwest. He wanted to buy it to build a hotel. Guy asked so much for it and Griffith told him that he would accept it. Guy said, "Well, if you'd bargained for it, you could have bought it for much less."

And Griffith said, "Yes, if you had bargained, you could have sold it for much more

RM: When they built those places, people [didn't understand] why they were building out there.

RW: Before the El Rancho and the Frontier were built I was a friend of Charlie Burr, who was the head of the Security Exchange Commission in Los Angeles - the Chief Enforcement Officer. He was staying in my home when he came to Las Vegas and I told him, "Listen, this town is going to be very big and Los Angeles tourists are going to flock here because of gambling and the all-,weather climate and it's about midway between Salt Lake and Los Angeles, about the only large city." And I said, "Let's organize a corporation and get investors and we will build a big hotel on the highway."

He didn't seem interested and of course, I was practicing law and was very busy so I paid no more attention to it. Then Tommy Hull came to town and I was district attorney and Art Ham, a prominent lawyer, father of the present Art Ham, came to see me working among the mesquite trees in north Las Vegas on Main and Owens. I was there in overalls trying to do something. I owned that property, and they asked me, "If we build a hotel on the highway, can we get a gambling permit?" I was on the board.

RM: You were on the gambling board?

RW: Not the state, but the local, as district attorney. My answer was, "Hell yes," and they just walked away. That's the way they got assured of having a gambling license in those days.

Tommy Hull owned the Roosevelt Hotel in Hollywood and he had a place in Sacramento. His sister had a lot of money and he built the hotel in 1939. I was there opening night and there were a lot of people. I met one of the Giannis of the Bank of America that night and I said, "I wish I were a wealthy banker."

And he said, referring to me, "I wish I were a wealthy lawyer."

RM: Did you know Bill Moore?

RW: Yes, very well. He was on the state gaming board. Some people criticized that because he was in gambling himself.

RM: But, yet, they wanted a gambling man on the board, didn't they?

RW: I think so.

RM: Did you know Bugsy Siegel?

RW: Yes, I knew Bugsy Siegel. He came to town when I was district attorney, I think.

RM: What did you think of that? ere was a man with gangster reputation and you were the D.A.

RW: Well, they all go straight when they came here, you know. Guy McAfee came to town in '39, and the governor called me, and said, "Why don't you run him out of town?"

I said, "Why don't you do it? Gambling is legal." That's what he was doing.

RM: Did he have a bad reputation?

RW: McAfee? was head of the vice squad in Los Angeles and they say that he had a sort of conflict of interest. That was the scuttlebutt anyway. Anybody who had the vice squad those days in Los Angeles would be able to acquire a slight profit.

RM: Tell me how you got power to your ranch.

RW: Well, the REA company was organized about 1966. It was given a contract to supply the Test Site with electricity, and that contract assured enough money to back up a loan to bring power into Pahrump Valley. And in 1967 or earlier the company was building the power line and the local power company was giving it trouble because the REA company was not a public utility and it had no right of condemnation. The local power company had people friendly to them who owned land in Vegas Valley which it wanted to cross, and the owners wouldn't give rights of way. I went to the REA office and said, "I'd be glad to help you out."

The manager, Mt. Parker, said, "We would be glad to have you do it."

So I took a man from there, Woody Dulin, and said, "Come with me.

We'll go to the courthouse and we'll look at the maps of this area and I'll show you where to build that power line so you won't have to spend a nickel for rights of way to anybody." I said, "Now you just construct your line down a 16th - that's 660 feet south, and then go due west, and the government has got that all in 2-1/2 acres or 5 acres tracts." They always reserved around each lot for utilities and roads, and this was a utility. "Now," I said, "to save time and trouble or litigation, start the line on the east and start it on the west and came across this valley. Don't make a mistake." And they did it, so we got power into Pahrump and wherever they wanted to extend it. Of course, they would extend it into Clark County and they brought it down to my ranch in the south end of Pahrump Valley, and then I brought it across the state line into California.

RM: So you came across the line?

RW: Yes, they meter it at the state line. They metered Amargosa Valley and all that area . . . they metered at the state line and California Edison pays a certain amount for all the electricity used in the south end of Pahrump Valley in California. That's how that line was built, but I didn't do anything in the early stages. I don't know what would have happened had I not rowed in at that time. The power company representatives used to tell people they'd see a power line built but they can't get per from it. They told the truth, because that's a 144,000-volt transmission line and they are not going to reduce it in Las Vegas Valley for residential use. And you know, they are bringing the power clear back to Mountain Springs from the Pahrump substation.

RM: Oh, they have to bring it clear back?

RW: So they can use it at Mountain Springs and Sandy Valley.

RM: What kind of a road was there going over Mountain Springs when you first came here?

RW: That was 3-1/2 hour drive and rough on a car. You could go as far as the Blue Diamond Mine Cutoff.

RM: But, the mountain road was really bad?

RW: Oh, my, to go over the mountain and down to the Younts' ranch took hours.

RM: That was the site of the old Mormon Trail, wasn't it, the Spanish Trail?

RW: Fremont Trail, Spanish Trail, yes. The Wilson boys lived on this side of the mountain, on what is now the state park. I knew them both. Their father lived there when Fremont came through in 1844 and he met General Fremont.

RM: Did you know the Lee brothers?

RW: That was the one I was talking about - Dora Brown was their sister. Bob Lee and Dick Lee were part Indians. Yes, I knew Dick very well.

RM: Were there many Indians in the valley when you got there in the '30s?

RW: There were several Indian families there, yes.

RM: Were they mainly living on the ranches, or how were they living?

RW: Dora Brown was raising cattle in that area and then she moved over to what's called Dora's Place, or Mound Springs - a mile and a half by air or 3 miles by road from my ranch. I met the other families, but I don't remember their names and didn't know much about then. Some of them probably worked at the Pahrump Ranch.

RM: They had pretty well given up the traditional ways, hadn't they?

RW: Yes. I'd like to see Steve Brown again, if you ever see him. Does he live in Pahrump or up in the mountains?

RM: No, he lives right down in town, behind the A & A store.

RW: I'll look him up, then. Back in the '40s he came to me; a judge had sentenced him to jail. Down in North Las Vegas he had a pistol . . . Steve fired the pistol at a police officer I knew. Not at him, but near his leg. They had him arrested and I went to defend him. Frank McNamee was on the district court bench and Frank understood Indians. I appealed and Frank gave him a $250 fine instead. So I charged Steve . . . he never paid me a cent, but maybe I charged him $100 or something like that; kept him out of jail. I never sent him a bill.

RM: Roland, you said you were on the gambling board for Clark County, when you were D.A. When a person wanted to get a gambling license, what happened?

RW: We just gave it to him.

RM: How many people were on the board?

RW: The county commissioners, the sheriff and myself. We had 3 county commissioners. We never stood on formality in those days. The county board wanted to know it they could do something and I said, "Well, it's certainly against the law, but in the public interest, so go ahead and do it; who is going to complain?"

RM: Did you meet formally?

RW: When the board met, yes. The county board met in the law library; it was a very small room, I know.

RM: Would somebody have to make an application for a business license, or how did it work?

RW: I've forgotten. Nobody took such things very seriously then. A person would come in and say they wanted to start a grocery store or a garage or something like that out on the highway, and what do they have to do? And I said, "Well, if you've got the money, go ahead. If you can start in, go ahead."

"Do you mean we don't have to have a license?"

"No, you don't need anything." I was the law from the Mormon Utah border to the Whiskey Petes. We never took things too seriously. If a Mormon boy in the valley got in trouble, I'd let the elders take care of him. That's the way my predecessor did. They didn't file a criminal complaint against him; let the Mormon people take care of him themselves; they could do a better job. [When a] fellow committed embezzlement, here in town - a bookkeeper in a garage embezzled $800 - I wired his folks and told them to send $800 and give it to the man, with no prosecution.

I ended up the D.A.'s office with $500 to my name, plus this ranch in Pahrump, 499 acres and an equity in a ranch I sold to Hoot Gibson where Spring Mountain and Valley View is today. I owned 360 acres with 2 nice furnished houses and 3 cottages, 2 of them independent and one attached, a deep well, about 40 acres of good agricultural land. I offered it to Ray Rogers for $45,000 in 1946 and he didn't write his check for it and we were out all day and night and then I called Hoot Gibson and I said, "Hoot, I got what you need, 360 acres you can have for $70,000." I sold it to him and then I accused him of stealing it.

That night I met him in the hotel we laughed and said, know it."
That's where Valley View and Spring Mountain is - 360 acres of adjoining land. It had a deep irrigation well, 400 gallons per minute, from 20 feet under the ground. Well, that's what makes horse races.

RM: You've bought and sold a lot of property, haven't you?

RW: I've never owned 4 pieces in my life. A person who buys property and then holds it for 50 years . . .

RM: It goes up in value, doesn't it? How do you see the future of the Pahrump Valley?

RW: There'll be no limit; it will just keep growing fast all the time. Las Vegas Valley is getting too much traffic and too much smog. Retired people are going to move to Pahrump Valley till it gets as bad as it is here.

I saw this smog develop . . . I've flown an airplane since 1931, and I'd fly into Los Angeles. Other pilots flew me then; I didn't have a license, but I later got one. I saw that smog develop in Los Angeles and here. They've got that soot in the Arctic Circle. Astronauts got back and first thing they said was, "The undeveloped counties are covered with smog. We are fouling our own nests." The fog is cumulative, anyway. If all the internal combustion engines were wiped out tomorrow, the smog would still be here for many years. That's what is going to wipe out the world - the polluted air

RM: And the land and the water . .

CHAPTER FIVE

RM: Roland, you were saying that you knew Key Pittman. Could you talk a little bit about him?

RW: Well, one time before the war I was talking to him in the Horseshoe Club here in Las Vegas and he told me that there would never be a war between Japan and the U.S. At that time he was Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee of the U.S. Senate and a good drinking pal of President Roosevelt.

RM: What do you think made him think that?

RW: I have no idea. I often thought of it through the years, though; how wrong he was.

RM: Did you know Pat McCarran?

RW: Yes. I met him before I was admitted to the bar, and we had a visit at the Overland Hotel. He was in Las Vegas. He mentioned that he might open a law office in Las Vegas and I don't recall what was said after that. And then later I visited with him at the El Cortez Hotel in Las Vegas. I was never a fair-haired boy of Pat McCarran's.

RM: What do you mean by that?

RW: He took a number of boys here and give them jobs in Washington, D.C. and they were good friends of McCarran's. Naturally so, because he helped them out with patronage jobs. In the Senate election of 1932 I did what I could to help Tasker Oddie, who was then U.S. Senator, and no doubt McCarran knew of that. The state was small and I don't think he wanted very much to do with Roland Wiley.

RM: Even though you were a Democrat, you were for Oddie, a Republican? RW: Yes. He was a well-liked man. I heard more good things about Oddie than I did about McCarran and I guess that's why as a young, impressionable boy, I went for Tasker Oddie.

RM: Did you used to hear a lot of bad things about McCarran?

RW: No. I heard a lot of good things about Oddie, though; what a fine man he was. McCarran had been on the Supreme Court. I never heard as much good about him as I did about Oddie, but no doubt he was a very fine man and a very powerful man. He wouldn't have gotten his position unless he had been; Pat had power. He served on the judiciary committee, didn't he, in the Senate? I remember he killed that bill to add to the Supreme Court - with a very strong denunciation, too.

RM: How well did you know the people associated with BMI. The Basic Magnesium . .

RW: I used to sit and visit with them at the El Cortez Hotel, where the president and different officials of the BMI plant lived when they first started. I told one of than, "Gee, I wish I owned this hotel."

And he said, "Well, why do you say that? You are a guest here, all these bellhops do what you want to, they've got waitresses to serve you when you go in the dining room, you don't have to pay taxes, got no worries, why don't you think that you do own the hotel? Enjoy it." It was good advice, wasn't it? You don't have to own it to enjoy it.

RM: That's right. Did you and Howard Hughes ever cross paths?

RW: No, I never met him in my life, but I saw him. He used to land out here at that airport - Thunderbird Field. He'd fly in the Convair and I'd have a little Cessna. I'd see him in there but I never knew him. Those were the days when you could become acquainted with him, too.

RM: When you first started flying, where was the airport?

RW: Out where the North Las Vegas Air Terminal is - there was a little field there. The man who of the runways initially was superintendent of roads for this county. I forgot his name - Bud Barret, I think.

RM: Originally they had an airport where the Sahara is now. Was that here when you got to town?

RW: No, I don't know where the first one was; it could have been back in that area. I remember Western Air Lines landed there and then they went out where Nellis is now.

RM: Did you know Wingfield?

RW: No, I only met him once. He was a political boss of the state. Yes, I knew of him. He owned the Golden Hotel in Reno and I met him in 1942.

RM: Was he in decline by then?

RW: Well, he ran the state. Everybody running for office went to see Wingfield.

RM: Did you, when you ran for governor?

RW: Of course. I knew at the time that he was not for me, but I just wanted to meet him. When I ran for governor in '42, I spent $10,000 of my own money and then in '50, 2 people donated $3,500 to my campaign, otherwise I paid every dime. I put on good campaigns.

RM: Did you cover the state?

RW: I could only do it once, you know. Only campaigned 6 weeks; that's long enough to cover the state once.

RM: Did you get a pretty good vote in both elections?

RW: I guess I got better the first time - maybe people knew me better. In '42 I had been district attorney, you know. I enjoyed it.

When I went to law school, I took extra courses. One of them was Trust, one was Corporations and one was Legal Ethics. I was not required to take any of then to graduate but I took then because I wanted then. I took the examinations and after that I was admitted in 3 states - Wisconsin, California and Nevada - all tough states. Without being able to study for them I failed in 3 other state examinations. I knew I would, I hadn't studied for then. But I learned something. I learned that statement from Grandland Rice, "It matters not whether we lost or won, but how we played the game." And that's as true in politics as in everything else. Absolutely. Business - politics - life. It never did me any harm. But where I did not fail was in my law practice. I prepared my cases well and I won.

Would you like to hear of some unusual cases? Sometimes . . . Well, Harry Claiborne likes to tell about this case. He might have been on the other side, I don't know. But the Court appointed me, after I left the D.A.'s office, to defend a man charged with embezzlement. He had embezzled money obtained by reconditioning a Ford engine and I went to the jailhouse to see him. And I said, "Did you embezzle that money?"

He said, "No."

Well, you learn, as D.A., how to tell when a man is lying. I grabbed him by the arm, pinched it hard, and I said, "Let me tell you something. You better admit to me right now that you embezzled that money, and I want to know how much more money you have embezzled." And he told me - a couple thousand dollars. I said, "I'm going to have you admit that before a jury. Plead you not guilty and have you admit that before a jury."

And he said, "Are you crazy?"

I said, "No. And," I said, "if you don't admit that to me right now, I walk out of that door and you walk into the penitentiary because I'm the only man in the United States of America that can get you off." I meant every damn word I said.

He must have believed me. He said, "Yeah, I did."

I said, "Have you ever been in jail?"

He said, "Writing a bad check, but made it good; they let me out." "I'm going to have you admit that,"

I said. "Ever been in the penitentiary?" No. I believed that. So I said, "All right, I'll see you at the time of trial.

And I met the sheriff's deputy on the street and he said, "Hey Wiley, that guy you represent down there, the court appointed you, he said you are selling him out."

I said, "He doesn't know what he is talking about." And I walked away. The case came up for trial and this was in '43 and the war was on. I rented my ranch and I couldn't get a room, so I lived on a cot on a porch in a house on Fourth and Fremont. I knew that the next week a room would be vacant in this house. The case was going to care up and I thought on that cot, that night, "What will I talk about? I have no facts to talk About." So I wrote down these words on a

sheet of paper: "Old age pensions, human derelicts, high taxes." And I waved the flag, you see; the war was on. That's all I had in my notes.

I went to court and I didn't have a book, I didn't have a paper, I didn't have a pencil. I just thought [that] with a vacant table and a dumb look I could win that case. And I did. They called a jury and they wanted to know if I wanted to ask any questions and I removed one person because she was an sister to a police officer, and I never asked any questions at all. And then I said, "I accept the jury as called."

Well, now I am on the good side of the jury; I showed respect for their good judgment. John Cope was the prosecutor . . . maybe Harry Claiborne too, I don't know. Harry tells the story more dramatically than I can.

He has to be polite, too. They asked him for an opening statement and he gave it and they asked me for an opening statement. I stood up and I said, "Your Honor, the defendant waives the opening statement." Now the jury doesn't even know anything about the defense. They put Bob Kaltenborn on the witness stand and Bob testified against this man and he said, "He must be guilty because two Jews from Los Angeles came up and offered me $1,000 if I wouldn't prosecute."

I looked at him, and in the only question I asked anybody at all, I said, "Gee, Bob, $1,000 is a lot of money." How silly, how silly a question.

He said, "No, it ain't, no it ain't, not in Las Vegas these days." Well, he was trying to prosecute somebody for stealing a few dollars. They wanted a recess to call 2 witnesses and I stood up and asked,

"What are they going to testify to? Probably if I knew, I would so stipulate and waive my right of cross examination."

Well, they were bookkeepers and cashiers. They never found any money on the counter, anticipating the defense. "Oh," I said, "I'll stipulate to save delaying the trial." Well, sir, everybody wondered what the score was all about and I was being very humble and dumb-like, and I said, "Listen, I'm willing to bet $100 to $10 of your money that it won't take the jury an hour and 35 minutes to bring back a verdict of not guilty." I never found any takers; it's illegal to bet anyway, you know.

We had to talk before the jury and the district attorney got up and gave his opening argument and I asked the judge if I could sit down to talk to the jury, so I slid on a chair almost in their laps. The sheriff said later, "When you reached in your pocket for a handkerchief to blow your nose, I thought you was reaching for a cigarette, you seemed so calm."

I talked about high taxes, old age pensions, human derelicts and I waved the flag. I said, "We need this mechanic in the North American Aircraft Factory down in Inglewood. You shouldn't send him to the penitentiary. The war is on."

And I had put my client on the witness stand and he admitted he embezzled all this money and he got drunk and tried to win it back and he gambled $2,000 more, and I said, "Have you ever been in a penitentiary?"

"NO."

Well, the state knew it - they would introduce evidence to contradict it if it was not so. The jury went out and brought in a verdict of not guilty. Harry says he nearly fainted. And then Bob Kaltenborn went to the Rotary Club and the Chamber of Commerce . . . he went everywhere and told them about the injustice that had been done. One of the members on the

jury was Sid Martin, who had a bar at the Sal Saga Hotel, on the corner there, and in that bar one of his bartenders embezzled some money within a year previously. Sid Martin sent him to the penitentiary and Sid Martin was on my jury.

RM: I don't understand why you got a not guilty verdict.

RW: Well, you tell me this. I was in Washington D.C., auditing the trial of the Tea Pot Dome scandal in the fall of 1927. I was reporting to my boss, who was a former senator and chairman of the investigating committee. He resigned on account of his wife's illness. He was a buddy of Hoover; Hoover's lawyer at the convention on the contested delegates and also Coolidge's friend, and I was his law clerk and auditing the trials. Frank Hogan, a Washington, D.C. lawyer who was later President of the American Bar Association, defended Dougheny, the oil man. The jury brought back the verdict of not guilty as though he didn't give a bribe. Frank Hogan said the government should strike off a medal for Dougheny for developing Tea Pot Dame and Elk Hills, the California field, because we might have a war and we needed that oil. But someone else defended Albert Fall, Secretary of the Interior, and he was convicted of taking a bribe - $100,000 cash in a grip. But Dougheny was acquitted, Hogan defended him . .

RM: Yes. So your flag-waving got him off.

RW: I learned that from Frank Hogan. I figured if the lawyer who was President of the Bar Association used that argument and got him off, I could get this guy off the same way.

For another case I learned a lesson coming through Nebraska, driving all night. In '38 I read in a paper that the governor had pardoned a man for molesting a boy. The man was in the penitentiary - he had pled guilty and the governor pardoned him. He was not guilty; he was the head of a boys' school.

In Las Vegas, Nevada, a carpenter living on the west side, a fine man of 65 living alone, liking children and giving picnics for them, was jailed here, charged with molesting a little girl. The deputy D.A. was too lazy to investigate, but I investigated the facts immediately. I found out that the little girl's mother, separated from the father (who was drunk in the house across the way), was sleeping with somebody else. The man said to the 5-year-old girl, "If you don't behave yourself, I'm going to send you home," and she went home crying, and the drunken father said, "Did he put his hands under your dress?"

"Yeah."

"Did he do this . . . that?"

"Yeah . . . yeah."

So Leo MacNamee, an able lawyer who handled civil suits and didn't like criminal cases told Pat Clark, who is still a prominent auto dealer here, to go and see Wiley. The man was the father of Pat Clark's business partner in the oil business. Pat came to see me and I went to the jail see the man and said to him, "Are you guilty?"

"Well, I will plead guilty and I signed a statement that I'm guilty as charged." In the jail the chief of police got the statement, "guilty as charged." "Well," he said, "I waived preliminary hearing; I'm going to go to the pen."

"What for?"

"They told me there would be no publicity given to it."

I found these facts to be true. The man was a wonderful man. The Mormon family next door said he was a high quality man who liked kids and gave them picnics. The 5-year-old child got mad at him; he had no more to do with it than you do.

So I went to court, and I always told people, "An hour and 35 minutes; that's the length of time I give the jury to stay out." I did that a number of times. We went to court and he was acquitted and the second he was acquitted, tears came down his cheeks. He was no more guilty than I am.

I learned my lesson - investigate the facts early. I read only a month before where the governor pardoned a man who pled guilty only to avoid publicity.

In another unusual case I got back from Los Angeles and a man came to me and said, "They didn't treat my boy right. You're deputy district attorney . . ."

"What happened?" I asked

"Well, they charged him with stealing a calf and he pled guilty and the judge sent him to the penitentiary."

I investigated, and these were the facts. They went to Bill Morgan, an early-day Pony Express rider. Bill had some calves in a pasture on the west side. These boys got one and took it out to the Green Shack Restaurant and tried to get in the Green Shack. They wouldn't let them in, then they came downtown and tried to get into dad's upstairs apartment. The folks were home and the police charged him with stealing a calf. I called up the pardon board and told them to get that young man out of the penitentiary right away, and they did. Ten or 15 years later I needed a welder promptly and this man came to my ranch and I looked at him and he looked at me and he said, "Yes, I'm the guy."

I look back in my practice - I never put a client aver a barrel and put the screws to him; not once. I was able to send my kids to college and travel around the world and live the way I wanted to, and after 25 years, I quit - in 1951 or '52, because of migraine headaches.

RM: What have you done since?

RW: I've drilled wells, built power lines, built roads and Cathedral Canyon. I think because I was honest in the law practice, prepared my cases well and treated people right . . . One time I had a little home in Tecopa, and a man came up the hill where I was putting in a water heater and he said, "You don't remember me, do you, Wiley?"

I said, "Hell no, I never saw you in my life."

He said, "The hell you haven't. In 1930 (and this was 1971, 41 years later) I lived in Moapa (that's along the railroad) and I come down to see you. The Depression was on and a guy owed me $20 and you collected it for me and when I went to your office you handed my the $20 and I asked you how much I owed and you said, "Not a damn cent."

Forty-one years later, he's walking up to help me install a water heater. If I said $10 or something, he would have said, "That son of a gun, I'm going to charge him $20 to help him." He was returning a favor, 41 years later.

RM: I have one question. There was a time in the early days in Las Vegas, before it really took off, as a tourist place - as a destination - when people seemed to have the sense that it was going to be a big thing. Why was that?

RW: I've got a letter here, dated 1932, to my brothers who were then back east, asking them to come west to Las Vegas, Nevada. You could buy up half the town, then and it was going to be a big town.

RM: But how did you know it was going to be a big town? It was a little old, dried-up place, out in the middle of nowhere.

RW: No, because it was about midway between Is Angeles and Salt Lake and cars have to stop here. Boulder Dam was being built. We had power and water and an all-year climate, and the proper distance from metropolitan areas. It couldn't be St. George, it couldn't be Cedar City . . . I was in San Bernardino when they had 35,000 people in 1930. There was a war veteran's gathering, and parade; it was a big city, and Las Vegas had 4,000 people in it. Then in '46 I bought a place on the highway from a colored fellow.

RM: Where the Strip is?

RW: Yes. It's near the airport - 680 feet; a government lease. A colored fellow walked in my office. I knew him, and he said, "I got 5 acres out here I want to sell you along the highway. He said, "Jimmy Fulcher and Nat Mack and Murray Wollman," (they were the fellows who bought cheap property) "got together, and they only offered me a thousand dollars for it and I want $3,000. Came out with me."

I had $50 in my pocket, "This is a down payment. Care to the office tomorrow and draw up the papers and I'll give you the money."

Six-hundred-eighty feet on the highway. The highway was where the Tropicana is and that whole section, clear to the airport . . . There was one section there, over 640 acres, that was all government land. I told people to go out and file on that land. When you can buy 5 acres of federal government [land] for $1,200 dollars, that's free land, in my book. Do you know how many people I got to go out there? I got my law partner . . . no, I sold him some of my land for $10 a foot and I got only my daughter to do it. She was the only one.

RM: Nobody else would? You could just file on it in '46?

RW: Yes, you could file 2-1/2 acres, 1-1/4, 5 acres . .

RM: Where was the land you bought from the black guy? What's there now?

RW: All motels; it was closer to the airport . . . I asked Hoot Gibson, after I built a house and 2 cottages there, to buy this place. I said to him, "Come on the highway; I'll give it to you for $25,000 - 680 feet and improvements." Hoot didn't buy it. I sold it later for $70,000 . . . gave it away.

In '46 it was all free land. The boys would come to my office and say, "What can we do to make money?"

I said, "Go out and file on some government land there." I didn't get one person to do it except my young daughter.

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