

AN INTERVIEW WITH WINONA JAMES:

A CONTRIBUTION TO A SURVEY OF LIFE IN CARSON VALLEY, FROM FIRST SETTLEMENT THROUGH THE 1950S

Interviewee: Winona James

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Description

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It became common for a Washoe family to attach itself to a ranch household, living on the ranch much of the year and working seasonally at agricultural or domestic labor. This practice endured until the creation in 1917 of Dresslerville, a forty-acre tract of land south of Gardnerville, set aside for Washoe habitation by William Dressler. By the 1930s many Washoe families had taken up permanent residence in Dresslerville, and the economic and social arrangements between the races that had persisted through three generations of joint occupation of the valley were transformed.

Winona James is a Washoe who was born in 1903 in a galesdangl (winter house) erected on a white man's property in Genoa. Mrs. James was raised by her traditionalist grandparents, who alternated their residence between Lake Tahoe fishing camps in the summer and the Van Sickle ranch in Carson Valley in the winter. She attended Stewart Indian School and the Mottsville public school, learning not only the language but also the ways of the dominant non-Indian culture in the valley. As a young adult, Mrs. James left Carson Valley. She has lived in Reno and Lake Tahoe, and she currently resides in Carson City.

In this 1984 interview, Winona James concentrates on firsthand descriptions of people and events that give the reader an understanding of the nature of Washoe life in the period from her birth through the 1920s. In addition she passes on information about earlier times that was handed down through her family, and she gives some attention to post-World War II changes in relations among the races in Carson Valley. Of particular interest are passages concerning the persistence of seasonal Washoe foraging patterns and observations on attitudes toward the admission of Indian children to public schools in Carson Valley.

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An Oral History Conducted by R. T. King
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University of Nevada Oral History Program

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PREFACE TO THE DIGITAL EDITION

Established in 1964, the University of Nevada Oral History Program (UNOHP) explores the remembered past through rigorous oral history interviewing, creating a record for present and future researchers. The program's collection of primary source oral histories is an important body of information about significant events, people, places, and activities in twentieth and twenty-first century Nevada and the West.

The UNOHP wishes to make the information in its oral histories accessible to a broad range of patrons. To achieve this goal, its transcripts must speak with an intelligible voice. However, no type font contains symbols for physical gestures and vocal modulations which are integral parts of verbal communication. When human speech is represented in print, stripped of these signals, the result can be a morass of seemingly tangled syntax and incomplete sentences—totally verbatim transcripts sometimes verge on incoherence. Therefore, this transcript has been lightly edited.

While taking great pains not to alter meaning in any way, the editor may have removed false starts, redundancies, and the “uhs,” “ahs,” and other noises with which speech is often liberally sprinkled; compressed some passages which, in unaltered form, misrepresent the chronicler's meaning; and relocated some material to place information in its intended context. Laughter is represented with [laughter] at the end of a sentence in which it occurs, and ellipses are used to indicate that a statement has been interrupted or is incomplete...or that there is a pause for dramatic effect.

As with all of our oral histories, while we can vouch for the authenticity of the interviews in the UNOHP collection, we advise readers to keep in mind that these are remembered pasts, and we do not claim that the recollections are entirely free of error. We can state, however, that the transcripts accurately reflect the oral history recordings on which they were based. Accordingly, each transcript should be approached with the

same prudence that the intelligent reader exercises when consulting government records, newspaper accounts, diaries, and other sources of historical information. All statements made here constitute the remembrance or opinions of the individuals who were interviewed, and not the opinions of the UNOHP.

In order to standardize the design of all UNOHP transcripts for the online database, most have been reformatted, a process that was completed in 2012. This document may therefore differ in appearance and pagination from earlier printed versions. Rather than compile entirely new indexes for each volume, the UNOHP has made each transcript fully searchable electronically. If a previous version of this volume existed, its original index has been appended to this document for reference only. A link to the entire catalog can be found online at <http://oralhistory.unr.edu/>.

For more information on the UNOHP or any of its publications, please contact the University of Nevada Oral History Program at Mail Stop 0324, University of Nevada, Reno, NV, 89557-0324 or by calling 775/784-6932.

Alicia Barber
Director, UNOHP
July 2012

ORIGINAL PREFACE

The University of Nevada Oral History Program (OHP) engages in systematic interviewing of persons who can provide firsthand descriptions of events, people 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 historiographical synthesization 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 OHP'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 OHP 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 totally unreadable and therefore a total waste of the resources expended in their production. While keeping alterations to a minimum the OHP will, in preparing a text:

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

d. enclose in [brackets] explanatory information or words that were not uttered

but have been added to render the text intelligible.

There will be readers who prefer to take their oral history straight, without even the minimal editing that occurred in the production of this text; they are directed to the tape recording.

Copies of all or part of this work and the tape recording from which it is derived are available from:

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INTRODUCTION

When white families began settling in Carson Valley in the 1850s they encountered little opposition from the indigenous population. The Washo were a gentle people, neither skilled in warfare nor given to personal violence. Content to lead a life of seasonal foraging and spiritual introspection in some of the loveliest country in the West, they were ill-prepared to resist settlers who were determined to establish farms, ranches and towns. Consequently, numbers of Washo were rapidly subsumed into the agricultural complex that soon spread throughout the valley.

It became common for a Washo family to attach itself to a ranch household, living on the ranch much of the year and working seasonally at agricultural or domestic labor. This practice endured until the creation in 1917 of Dresslerville, a 40 acre tract of land south of Gardnerville, set aside for Washo habitation by William Dressler. By the 1930s many Washo families had taken up permanent residence in Dresslerville, and the economic and social arrangements

between the races that had persisted through 3 generations of joint occupation of the valley were transformed.

Winona James is a Washo who was born in 1903 in a *galisdanal* (winter house) erected on a white man's property in Genoa. Mrs. James was raised by her traditionalist grandparents, who alternated their residence between Lake Tahoe fishing camps in the summer and the Van Sickle ranch in Carson valley in the winter. She attended Stewart Indian School and the Mottsville public school, learning not only the language but also the ways of the dominant non-Indian culture in the valley. As a young adult Mrs. James left Carson Valley. She has lived in Reno and at Lake Tahoe, and she currently resides in Carson City.

In this 1984 interview Winona James concentrates on firsthand descriptions of people and events that give the reader an understanding of the nature of Washo life in the period from her birth through the 1920s. In addition she passes on information about earlier times that was handed down through her family, and she gives some

attention to post-world War II changes in relations among the races in Carson Valley. Of particular interest are passages concerning the persistence of seasonal Washo foraging patterns and observations on attitudes toward the admission of Indian children to public schools in Carson Valley.

A NOTE ON ORTHOGRAPHY

The Washo words in this text have been transcribed by William H. Jacobsen, Jr., in the phonemic system he has developed for this language. Professor Jacobsen is the acknowledged authority on Washo linguistics and has published a number of works on the subject.

An explanation of the symbols, which have standard Americanist values, is on file at the University of Nevada Oral History Program. Among the more commonly used symbols that may be unfamiliar to non-linguists:

The acute accent indicates a stressed syllable.

š sounds like sh in ship.

ŋ sounds like ng in sing

◁ is the symbol for the glottal stop, a quick catch in the throat. It is important to discriminate this very common Washo sound.

v sounds somewhat like u in just.

z sounds like dz in adze.



WINONA JAMES
1984

AN INTERVIEW WITH WINONA JAMES

R. T. King: The subject of this interview today is going to be primarily your knowledge of the Washo habitation of the Carson Valley over time, based on stories that your grandparents may have told you. But I'd like to begin by getting a little bit of background information about yourself.

Winona James: I was born in Genoa, Nevada, September 14, 1903. I don't know if that is the exact date, but that's what I've been told. So I go by it.

Did your family live right in Genoa?

Yes. My mother's mother lived there, and that's where I was born.

She lived in the community itself, or did she live outside of town?

In the community itself in a tepee.

Do you know the approximate location of it? If we were to go down there today where would it be situated?

[On the northeast corner of First Street and Genoa Street. There are still trees and grass there.] Up towards the Sierras and down in a little meadow or clump of trees. The Campbell ranch, where Mary Pickford stayed when she got her divorce...it's southwest of there, up next to the hill.

What were your mother and father's names?

My mother's name was Lotty Ridley, and my father's name was Charlie Kyser.

Do you know their Washo names?

No, I don't. I don't know if they had Washo names or not. [I lost my parents when I was 2 years old.]

I had one sister, one brother. My sister's name was Juanita and my brother Donald. My sister died in 1954, and my brother died in 1982.

And you were raised by your grandparents. Are these the grandparents on your mother's side of the family?

No, my father's side.

What were their names?

My grandmother was Maggie Merrill. And my grandfather was...well, in Indian they called him my "neck." *Tó?o* means neck. [It also means grandmother's brother in Washo, according to linguist William Jacobsen.] That's what he was to me.. .well, it was an uncle. He was my grandmother's husband, but he was my mother's uncle, I believe.

So your grandmother married again, then?

Yes, my grandmother married. After she and Charlie Kyser were divorced, she married this Billy Merrill.

Every summer he went to Lake Tahoe and he fished— commercial fisherman—and caught fish and sold it to the tourists. Then he worked in the wintertime in the Carson Valley, feeding cows for farmers where he lived.

Whose ranch did he work for in the valley?

The Van Sickle ranch; that's where I remember.

What did your grandma do?

Just a housewife.

Now, you were telling me that you remember where you lived up above Genoa.

You mean where I was born?

Yes. You were born in a wickiup or a tepee. What would you call it?

Well, a tepee I guess.

What's the Washo word for that?

Gális dán,al, I believe.

Can you describe it for me?

It was made with poles and then something wrapped around it like cloth or something.

Were your grandparents still living in the wickiup when you went to live with them?

They weren't living there. This was my mother's mother that lived there.

Oh, I misunderstood. That was the other side of the family?

Yes, that was my mother's family that lived there. My grandmother that I lived with, lived on the Van Sickle ranch south of Genoa about 3 or 4 miles, I guess, more or less.

Can you remember the names of your mother's parents?

I don't remember their names at all. The only ones I remember are my uncles on my mother's side. John Henry and Dick Henry and Willie Henry are the only 3 that I remember on my mother's side. The others were all deceased by then, I guess; I don't remember them.

Do you have any memory at all of your grandparents on your mother's side?

No. I don't think I ever saw them.

How did you wind up going to stay with your grandparents on your father's side rather than with the grandparents on the mother's side? What was the reason for that?

Well, I think my grandmother on my father's side wanted me to live with them, so they went and got me. I was living at the time with my Uncle Willie, and I think they went and got me, raised me.

And took you down to the Van Sickle ranch?

Yes.

Can you describe for me the house you lived in on the Van Sickle ranch?

Oh, it was just a little one room shack.

What was it made from?

Boards.. .you know.

Had your grandfather built it himself?

Oh yes, he built it. Not my grandfather, my uncle.

Your uncle, excuse me. And there were just the 3 of you living in there?

At times. And then at times, her other son and family would come. I had an uncle on my father's side, and his family would come and stay.

And did they have any kind of a garden around the...?

Nothing.

Was all the cooking done inside?

Yes, we had a wood cookstove.

What kind of memories do you have of the place? I'm trying to get kind of a verbal picture of it.

Well, I don't know. It was home. Wasn't a mansion, that's for sure.

Did it have running water?

No, we had to pack water.

Where did you pack it from?

From a stream, I believe. I really don't remember. We had to pack it quite a ways. We had an outside toilet.

What did you do to keep warm in the winter?

We had wood and the wood stove to keep the house warm. It was always warm. Had blankets...

When I was talking with Marvin Dressler yesterday, he was telling me that he too was raised with grandparents down at a place called Laverone. He was telling me that they had a house there and they had a barn, but in the winter, very often the older people who lived there would build a tule hut or gális dán,al outside and go sleep out there because it was warmer. They would put a little fire in the middle of it and spend the winters in the tule structure. You didn't have anything like that when you were...?

No, no.

Did your grandmother and your uncle speak English?

My uncle did, but my grandmother very little. She could understand some of the things but she never conversed.

Did she work for any of the ranchers?

Once in a while she'd go do laundry; not too often.

For any particular family?

Just down there at the Van Sickle ranch.

I'm very interested in the relationship that may have existed between the Van Sickle family and your family. You were living on their land, I take it.

Well, I think it was government land, you know— BLM land. But it was right close. You know how the adjoining, I believe that's what they said it was. Now I really don't know.

What kind of association was there between your family and the Van Sickle family?

There was really a good association.

Could you describe it for me?

What do you mean?

As an example I'll use Marvin Dressler again, but there are several other Indians I've talked to. Mr. Dressler was telling me that very often members of his family would go to the Fred Dressler house for food. Anna Dressler, Fred's wife, would ladle up big tomato cans full of tea and plates of food and so forth, and pies and things. They always got along. I don't know whether they got that free of charge or whether there was some small charge for it, but whenever they were hungry and needed any food they would go up there. On the other hand, they worked for the Dressler family for very low wages, of course. I'm wondering about that kind of association between your family and that of the Van Sickles?

Well, they were very good to them. They always gave him work, and if they wanted food they got it. They always got their milk.

The Van Sickles had milk cows. [My family] always went down when they milked cows and separated it; if they wanted milk, they went down and got it. It was, I think, a very good relationship.

How old were you when you finally left that...?

I was 14 when I came to Carson City.

And you lived on the Van Sickle land the entire time prior to that?

Yes, but I went to school at Stewart for one year. At that time the agency would send someone around in the fall of the year to gather up the children to bring them back to go to school at Stewart. I can remember that my grandmother didn't want me to come back to Stewart because she thought I would never, ever go back home again, I guess. They hid me and they wouldn't let me come back to Stewart, so I never came back.

Where did they hide you?

I don't remember, but I know that they wouldn't let them come near me. They had me hide, probably, in the brush or something.

Were there any penalties for families who hid their children like that?

No, I don't think so at that time. They weren't that interested.

My brother and sister went to school there. My sister went to school there till she was, I guess, in the fifth or sixth grade. She worked for a family in town here, and they took her to San Francisco and that's where she lived.

What are your recollections of Genoa during the period that you were growing up?

I didn't grow up there. I was just born there and then from there, like I say, I went to Gardnerville and lived with my uncle. That's the time that everything happened. My mother passed away there. I was only 2 or 3.

So whenever you went into town, you would go into Gardnerville?

Well, that's where we lived; it was just outside of Gardnerville. Just inside of Gardnerville.

But you also told me before that you went to the Mottsville school.

Yes, that's when I lived at the Van Sickle ranch, before I moved....

I'm getting a little confused on the order on this. You were born in Genoa, then you went to the Van Sickle ranch to live with your....

Well, I was born in Genoa, but when I was a baby my mother took me and we went to Gardnerville and lived with my uncle. I was 2 or 3 years old. That's when my mother died in Gardnerville, and from there my grandmother took me....

On the Van Sickle ranch.

Yes. Then I grew up there till I was...well, then I went to school one year at Stewart after that, and then from there I....

What I've been trying to determine though is... you lived closer to Mottsville than you did to Gardnerville really, didn't you?

Oh, yes. I was in the foothills.

Now we get back to the question I was asking you before. When you went to town, whatever

the town might be, was it Mottsville or did you go into Gardnerville very often? When you and your grandparents (or your grandmother and your uncle) would go to buy groceries or....

Well, Gardnerville would be the closest. We'd go in the horse and buggy, and we'd come back the same day.

I'm curious about any memories you might have of some of the businesses in Gardnerville, or in Minden for that matter. Did you ever shop at the Minden Co-op?

Yes, the Minden Co-op and there was the Mack brothers ...Morris Harris had a store. And Henry Mack had a store in Gardnerville. And then there was a mercantile in Minden, Rood and Heitman's store.

Was there one in particular that your family went to more than to others?

They just went wherever they happened to stop, I think, because things weren't as expensive at that time as they are today.

Do you remember any of the shopping experiences?

Well, we always wanted candy. There was a candy store. Martha Heitman had a candy store and we used to go in there and get candy. That was our sweet.

I really think that they were treated pretty good, but I know a lot of white people, shopkeepers, thought that they had to watch the Indians because they thought they were shoplifting, probably. But I don't think that the Indians had that kind of habit. I think they were more honest people, as far as I know.

Did your grandma wear those shawls and kerchiefs?

Oh yes, yes. Long dresses, and she wore shawls and handkerchiefs—bright colors.

Would she buy one every time she went in shopping?

No. It would all depend on how much money they had. Lots of times the money was pretty scarce and they had to buy food and they couldn't buy luxuries along with the food. If they had money, they bought what they wanted.

Where were the favorite Washo gathering places at that time in the Carson Valley?

In the Carson Valley, right across from Sharkey's, in what is now Sharkey's parking lot. That used to be a big garage there, and before that a blacksmith shop. The Indians used to gather there for card games, hand games and whatever what they wanted to do in town. Then, right across from that was a Chinese restaurant where they ate. I don't remember the name of it.

Did you ever go to that gathering place at the garage? Did your grandmother and uncle take you there?

Oh, yes! They used to go there if they went to town on Sundays, you know; that was Saturdays or Sundays mostly. They would go there and gamble.

What about yourself? Were you too young to gamble?

I never gambled. I gamble now once in a while... pull the slot machines. If I put a dollar in I think I've overdone it.

What would the kids be doing while the parents were gambling there?

Playing, playing.

Do you have any particular games you can remember from that time that are no longer played?

No, I don't.

Somebody was telling me that you used to be pretty fleet of foot. You used to win foot races. Do you remember running?

Well, I did up at Lake Tahoe, but I don't remember doing it ever in Gardnerville.

Another gathering place used to be Centerville. They used to have a restaurant and a store there at Centerville. The Indians used to gather there and gamble.

Were they allowed to eat in the restaurant?

No. They always brought out their pans, you know. They had their pans—brought it out and ate it.

I can remember one time not too long ago, my husband and I came from Yerington. We had gone to San Francisco and we had gone to Reno and we always ate in real good restaurants. Then we came into Gardnerville and was there at the Joyland in Gardnerville—the Chinese restaurant. We went in the front way and we sat down to eat. And we sat there; we sat there and the waitress wouldn't wait on us. Finally I called her over. I said, "We've been here for 15 or 20 minutes and you've been waiting on these other people that's been coming in. Why are you ignoring us?"

"Oh," she said, "didn't you know we're not supposed to feed Indians in the front?"

I said, "You're not? Well, this Indian is going to eat here!"

"Well," she said, "Indians eat in the back."

I said, "This Indian isn't going to eat in nobody's back yard."

How long ago was that?

Oh that's in 1948 probably.

So I said, "I've eaten in better places than this. I've never been told to eat in the back. Do you think I'm going to start here?"

So then she went in the kitchen and she brought the manager out, who was Chinese. "Oh," he says, "they're all right, they're all right."

He came over, and I says, "Why is it that we can't eat out here?"

"Oh," he said, "some Indians came out here and caused a tight and scared my white customers."

I said, "White people do that also. It's not only Indians." I said, "White people are worse than Indians when they're bad."

Was it your feeling that Gardnerville and Minden were worse about that kind of thing...?

Oh, yes! They were a prejudiced people.

Then he said, "Oh, they're all right."

so she brought us our food. Soup and salad was on our menu and she didn't bring us either our soup or salad. I said, "Well, how come we aren't getting that?"

"Well," she said, "Indians don't get that."

I says, "I'm paying for it. I want it."

I didn't eat it. I didn't eat anything of the food, but I wanted what was coming. I wanted to show them that I was there.... When we were through and she gave us our ticket, I said, "We have dessert coming."

She said, "Well...I don't know."

And I said, "Well, I know. It's on the menu. At least I can see that."

So she went and brought us bread pudding. I wouldn't eat it but I stirred it all up so nobody else could eat it. So that was it, and I've never been in there since.

When did that policy begin to change in Gardnerville and Minden?

I don't know. I really don't know. I think since people have changed, you know what I mean? New people have come in and the old prejudiced people have died off or what have you.

You know, it was mostly a German settlement.

What did that have to do with it?

Well, I think it was.. .well, I don't know. And then they had these Indians working for them. They would never let them eat at the same table with them. They would always....

Just the German families?

Well, I don't know what families, but you know the people that worked there... They never ate at the same table with them, years and years ago, but they would have them eat out in the back or have a different table for them.

Were relations any different between Washos and, let's say, Basques, than they were between Washos and the German families? There were a number of Basque families in the valley.

I don't remember. I really don't remember any of that.

Do you remember the French Hotel? [The French Hotel was the principal Basque business in Gardnerville.]

I don't remember it as a youngster, but I remember it after I was married. We used to eat there, and I really liked it. And I liked the J.T. In fact, I like everything now, you know, like Sharkey's Nugget.

He's a wonderful man. He really has treated us great, my husband and I. He invited us to his Christmas dinners. And when he sees me, he always shakes hands. He's a wonderful man, and I think he's done a lot for the community.

You've mentioned gathering places at Gardnerville, and at Centerville. Were there any other large places, large gathering places for Washo Indians in the Carson Valley when you were a child?

Not that I remember.

I've been told that there used to be a large gathering ground south of Genoa. That probably goes back before the time you were born.

Probably, yes. I think it was before I was born, also, that that flood came that I was telling you about.

Your grandparents told you about this, didn't they?

Yes. There was a big encampment of Indians right south of Genoa. There's big rock piles and what have you there, and they wiped them all out.

Was that during your grandparents lifetime?

I don't know whether it was before them or during their lifetime. I really don't remember.

The flood came and rolled the rocks down?

Yes. It was just south of Genoa. Well, it's right in town now, but it was quite a ways out at that time. The Indians lived there, and I guess they had quite an encampment and the cloudburst came and took them all away. You could...well, now people have taken rocks for their gardens and what have you. There's a lot of rocks yet, but not like they used to be when I first started to go to Genoa.

You know where the last house is in Genoa on the....

On the mountain side?

Yes, right on the highway. There's an antique shop; it's right north of that. It's a creek, like; you can see a creek bed right in there.

Are there any Washo words associated with that place? Is there a Washo name for it?

Not that I know of. Probably there is, but I don't recall it.

I've been told by some people that one of the major gathering areas for all Washo Indians before the white man came was Double Springs Flat.

Yes. They had their big gatherings there. They had their pine nut festivals and everything. Another gathering place was right here at Stewart, right off of 395 where the cemetery is now, I believe. It was right around in there for their rabbit drive. Every fall they'd gather there and hunt rabbits.

Was this the best rabbit hunting place in the Carson Valley?

Yes. Well, they went all over from here. They would walk towards Dayton and all over.

This was their gathering place for rabbits. I remember this, myself.

This was even in your lifetime?

Yes. That's when Stewart was still going, and they would give the Stewart Indians a big feed of rabbits in the school. They'd take it down to the school and cook it down there for kids.

Yes.

And that was their big treat.

Were Washos still gathering at Double Springs Flat in your lifetime?

Yes, I can remember that.

How old were you when you went to your last one at Double Springs Flat?

Oh, I don't think I was too old; maybe 10.

You were old enough to remember it, anyway. Can you describe for me what happened there?

Well, they had dancing, singing, gambling.. .mostly dancing. Then they would have a big rabbit feed with pine nuts. They'd gather a few pine nuts, and make pine nut soup. Have their blow-up I guess they would call it...I mean their pow wow.

Was this prior to going off into the Pine Nut Range?

Yes.

How was it determined what day the meeting would begin?

I've forgotten just how it was determined, and I've forgotten if there was a chief, but there must have been a pine nut chief just like there was a rabbit chief. There was a rabbit chief that called the time to gather the rabbits. Time to go hunting and probably there was a time to go pine nut picking.

How did your family prepare for the event at Double Springs?

You had to pack up your gear, your food that you were going to have while you were camped up there. Just like you were going to go camping.

What kinds of things would you take?

Your blankets, your food, your dishes that you were going to eat out of.

You'd be there for how many days?

It would all depend on how many pine nuts you wanted to pick. Sometimes they would stay till snow fell.

But I was thinking of Double Springs Flat; how long would you be there before you went off to get the pine nuts?

Oh, I think it was 2 or 3 days.. .maybe longer, maybe more or less.

What would you live in while you were there?

We just lived in little.. .maybe you put a sagebrush shelter around you or something, you know. Most of the time they didn't sleep. They gambled or danced most of the time.

I've been up in the Pine Nut Range and seen what looked like places where Washo had been

up there gathering pine nuts. You gathered pine nuts as a young girl didn't you?

Oh, yes.

Can you tell me about that experience?

Well, it was a dirty experience. I've done it not too long ago and I don't think I want to go out again. I'd rather pay \$2 a pound for it. [laughing]

It was fun when you were young. You could run around and do things. You didn't have to pick pine nuts if you didn't want to; you could play or do what you wanted to do. But as you got older you had to pick pine nuts and it got kind of monotonous.

When we went up there to pine nut, the first thing my uncle would do was cut the branches off of the big trees and then put canvas around. You know, make poles and a shelter—I guess a wind break is what it would be—and then pile brush around the bottom. We would have a fireplace in the middle and your bedding on the side inside. That's where you stayed when you picked pine nuts, and then if it stormed they would put a little roof over it with another canvas or a tarp or whatever you had, and brush. And that's where you would stay.

Where does the circle of stones come from?

I think they were where they put their pine nuts. They got these burden baskets on their backs, and they would dump them where you saw the circle stones. I think that's where they would pile these pine nuts. It was just like a pyramid. Then they would cover that all up with branches until the cones opened up.

Would they set them on fire?

No, they would leave them there until the cones opened up. Then they would sit there and take the cone in your hand, and then take a stick and hit them on the back and get the pine nuts out and in a basket.

So there was no circle of stones around the shelter that you were in, then? Is that what you're telling me?

No, there wasn't. They just put brush and what have you around them. But I can remember when my uncle would put stones around the pile of pine nuts so that they wouldn't roll off, away from this pile that they had.

Were any of the pine cones that you gathered up there ever burned? Would you ever gather green ones?

Yes. They burned the green ones to cook pine nuts right away. They would make a big pile of brush and they would put the pine nuts on top of the brush—a burden basket full—and light it with fire until it burned down. Then they would bury it until it steamed. Then they would take them out and peel them up and take the pine nuts out and they were cooked.

I saw a lot of very large circles of charcoal up there. Some that looked almost too big for pine nut burning. About how big would the circles of pine nuts be when you would burn them?

Not too big. It would be about a 6 feet circle, maybe.

Now what about the larger ones? Did anybody ever tell you what those...? I'm sure you must have seen some yourself if you were walking back in the Pine Nut Range. We've seen circles

that were the size of the room that we're sitting in. In other words, circles that may be 10 to 12 or in some cases maybe 20 feet in diameter.

No, I don't know of any.

Did your grandparents ever tell you about Chinese who would be up there burning charcoal or cutting wood?

Oh yes. There were a lot of Chinese wood cutters up in there years and years ago, just like there were at Glenbrook. You know there were Chinese people up at Glenbrook. They cut all that timber for Virginia City.

Were there still any Chinese cutting wood or making charcoal when you were a girl?

No, not that I....

What did your grandparents tell you about them?

They never told me very much, really. They used to just say the Chinese used to cut wood.

I've heard some people say that the Washos used to buy things from the Chinese and there was some....

Maybe so. I don't know.

Let's get back to the stone circles for a moment. Did you ever come across any stone circles that had been made, that weren't made by your uncle or by anybody. Did you just find any up there in the Pine Nuts, any old stone circles?

No. I never have observed it, you know. I mean, I'd never even looked for.. we just

went up and picked pine nuts. Ready to come home.

On the northeastern end of the Carson Valley, near the hot springs that used to be on Dangberg land... you know some stories from the past about that area, don't you?

No, I really don't.. But I knew there was Washo people they said used to live there and go there for their baths. But I don't know too much about it.

Was that after the white man came to the valley or before?

I guess it must have been before.

Do you know why they would quit using those hot springs?

No, I don't. I really don't. Maybe it was too far to go or something, because a lot of people didn't have transportation then, you know. And then the younger people didn't like to walk. I really don't know.

There are some Washo stories about what the Carson Valley was like and about how the Washo people used it before the white man came. Have any of these been passed down to you by your grandparents or other elderly people? What do you know about how the Carson Valley was used by the Washo Indians before the white man came?

It was used as their roaming grounds, their hunting grounds. They could go and do what they wanted to do without being evicted from trespassing on somebody's land or something. It was their home. Any place they wanted to settle, they lived and stayed. Wherever there was food to be gotten, they got their wild food.

Did your grandma ever tell you where the best places for getting the wild food were in the Carson Valley?

Well, there's some in the marshes.. There's the sweet root in the marshes that they used to get. The tules and the sweet potatoes and the little potatoes. I don't remember just where she said they were, but there are some.

Of course, there was a big elderberry patch down near Genoa.

Yes, there was a big elderberry patch. There are still elderberries there now.

What did your grandma, or any of the other elderly people her age, tell you about when the white man first came into the valley? They were alive then. What did they tell you?

They were kind of frightened, because they didn't know what they were going to do, and they were scared of them. Really, they were scared of white people.

Did your grandmother ever tell you about the first time she saw a white man?

No, no she never... but like I say, she was timid and she never talked to white people very much and she was always afraid. But as she got older and I got older, she got more used to it.

What happened between the Washos and the whites when the whites first came into the valley?

I don't know.

We know from reading, we know from the white man's side, that there was an emigrant trail

that ran through the Carson Valley next to the foothills, and went all the way down through Carson Pass. The white wagon trains would go through there, taking people to California. That was probably the first real contact. Of course there was that little settlement at Genoa as well, a little Mormon settlement. Can you tell me anything about this from the Washo perspective? Anybody ever talk about that?

No, I've never heard anyone talk about it. But I've heard that at one time Washos attacked a wagon train or something to get food or something. That's the only thing I know, and I don't know whether that is true or not.

Who told you this?

I think it was my grandparents—my grandmother or my uncle.

Did they tell you how they attacked it?

No, he didn't. But he said they were scared.

Where did that attack take place?

I just don't know.

I'm sorry to ask you these detailed questions, but if we can learn anything it really helps. Did he tell you the consequences of the attack? What happened?

I just don't remember that. I don't think I was that interested, and I didn't think that anything like this was ever going to come up. [laughing]

It's almost like taking a test. [laughing]

It is, really!

I feel bad about this sometimes. I know I often ask more questions than can reasonably be answered, but I feel I've got to ask the questions. Otherwise, who knows...? You might know the answer to some of these things.

Yes.

So they didn't tell you much about the initial contact between Indians and non-Indians, but things began to change in the Carson Valley very quickly after the white man came. How did they change? Did your grandparents ever tell you how their lives changed as a consequence of the white man coming into the valley?

No. I never heard them comment about it or anything.

Well, the German families came in and they began ripping all the sagebrush out. I understand they used a lot of Indians.

I imagine so, because Indians were the only laborers they had. Well, they were just like the slaves to these people that came in, you know. I think that's what they were. They say the Indians built up the Dressler ranch. If it wasn't for the Indians, Dressler wouldn't have the ranch. I've heard that remark made; the Indians worked for him for years and years and years I guess.

He always had good things to say about the Indians who worked for him.

Oh, yes. Mr. Dressler is a very nice man. In fact, his whole family are nice. I've known them for a long time. Mr. Dressler has really been very, very good.

Did any of your family ever work for him or for his family?

No, I don't think so. The only one that ever worked for him was my brother-in-law, Earl James. He passed away in January, I believe. And his wife, Nina James, cooked for the Dressler family. Her whole family, in fact...her mother worked for the Dresslers and all her sisters and I believe her brothers worked for them, but now she's the only one living, this Nina. I think the others, every one has passed away.

Where does she live now?

She lives in Woodfords, but she's not very well. Her daughter is a nurse at the Washoe Clinic.

You told me that you went to the Mottsville school. You attended school there up through the 7th grade, I believe?

Yes.

Had you learned how to speak English before you started going to the Mottsville school?

Oh, yes. I knew how to talk English.

who taught you before you went to school?

I guess I learned down here at Stewart.

Oh, you went to Stewart first before you went to Mottsville?

Yes. Oh yes.

But you were there for only one year?

Yes, one year or so.

That's when you were about 6 or 7 years old?

Probably. Maybe older.

What can you remember about that one year?

I remember it was really a very dramatic experience. They got you up at 5:00 in the morning and put your uniform on, and you had to go out in the cold and drill before breakfast just like in the army. Then you went in and had your breakfast and then you'd come back to the dorm and change your clothes and get ready for school. But you always had somebody older taking care of you; a big sister, I guess you would call it, would help you and take care of you.

Did you get to return to your home in the valley?

No, you stayed there all the time that you were... that was your home.

The entire year?

Yes. If your parents came and got you and signed you out, you could go home for a weekend or whatever.

Anybody ever come and get you?

I don't remember. Probably, but I don't really remember.

And then [your grandparents] hid you out the following year?

Yes, the following year or so, they hid me out. They wouldn't let me come back to Stewart, and I stayed out of school for a couple years. Then they wanted me to go to Mottsville. They had an awful time getting me in— prejudice. A lot of these people didn't want an Indian kid going to school with their kids. And there were some very nice people

that said that I was as good as any kid that went to school there, so they fought for me and I went to school.

Who were those people who fought for you?

Mr. Hansen and the Allermans.

Which Mr. Hansen? Do you remember which one it was?

William Hansen. He's died a long time ago. He's the father of Mrs. [Muriel] Elges that lives here in Carson City. They're related to Fred Dressler.

Oh, yes. His mother was a Park.

Yes, and Mrs. Elges's mother was a Park. They were sisters. Mr. Hansen and Mr. Dressler were kind of in-laws, I guess you would call them.

Hansen and Allerman are the ones who saw to it that you went to school in Mottsville, then?

Yes, and there was somebody else. I can't remember who else, but I think there was someone else involved.

And you must have started school in Mottsville about 1913 or 1914?

Maybe earlier.

Can you remember any of your classmates?

Oh, yes. Mrs. Elgis and Roy Jones and his brother, Myron (Beatrice's husband). Gladys Bull and Ira Bull, her brother who lives in Gardnerville...and those are really my friends, I guess. And the Allerman kids are all alive, I think, yet.

Who were the people who were opposed to you going to school in Mottsville?

I don't remember, but I know they were people that had children going to school there.

Were there any other Indian children going to school in Mottsville?

No, I was the only one.

And you went there until you were how old?

Until I was in the 7th grade. I guess I was about 15, maybe somewhere around in there...14.

Do you have any particular memories of school in Mottsville?

Oh, yes. I had a good time. I had good friends and they were all very good to me. In the spring of the year I'd start walking; I had to walk 3 miles from where I lived to the school. I'd stop at the Allermans and then the Hansens and we'd all walk together and walk home. Walk to school, then we'd walk back. They'd walk part way home with me and then go back, which was great. Then in the wintertime we'd go sleigh riding or skating, and we'd have lots of fun.

Where would you go skating?

Down at the Van Sickle ranch there was a big swamp and we'd go down there and go skating.

I know you lived on the Van Sickle ranch for a long time. What happened when Dresslerville was finally formed? Did your family move into Dresslerville?

My grandmother did. I married Oscar Van Sickle.

Had you grown up with him?

Yes.

Was he one of those boys who used to walk to school with you?

No, he was older. He was older than I was.

I believe that Daćiló-li was your step-grandmother?

She married my grandfather, Charlie Kyser, Sr. She was a wonderful basket maker, and she was a nice lady. I knew her pretty well. I never lived with her or anything, but I went to visit her once in a while.

Where was Daćiló-li living when you visited her?

In Carson City in back of Abe Cohen's. She worked for Abe Cohen. She lived in a little cabin in back of Abe Cohen's.

Did she ever tell you any stories about what life was like for her before....

No, no.

There were a couple of other prominent basket makers down in the valley. I mentioned Susie Dick but you thought that there were 2 others who were more prominent. Who were the others?

Well, I think Maggie James. I have *Degikup*, that book that Cohódas sent me. [*Degikup: Washo Fancy Basketry, 1895-1935*, by Marvin Cohódas.]

Did your grandma make baskets?

Oh, yes. She made baskets.

Did she make them for sale?

Yes.

Who would she sell them to?

To tourists up at Lake Tahoe. When the steamer *Tahoe* came in, they used to sit out there by the pier under the pine trees and put their wares out and sell them as the tourists came by.

I've been told by some people in the Carson Valley that I should talk to you about Lake Tahoe. I don't have any questions about Lake Tahoe because I wasn't that interested in it when I began the work down here. I was only working on the Carson Valley, but is there anything you want to tell me about Lake Tahoe?

Oh, Lake Tahoe was a beautiful place before it got commercialized! The Indians camped all over, like along the beaches. In fact, I have pictures of the Indian ladies gambling along the beach at Camp Richardson.

About what period would that be?

I think it must have been 1920.

When did you move up there?

I've lived up there practically all my life. When I was a child my uncle used to go up there every year— leave Carson Valley June 1 and come back to Carson Valley September 1. Just made that every year. September 1 they had to get ready to go get pine nuts, and June

1 he went up there to fish and my grandma made baskets and sold them.

And would you go up with them?

Every year I went up there with them until I left. We used to go up in our horse and buggy, and my grandma and I would walk. We had a spring wagon with 2 horses and they would pull our gear. It was too heavy for the whole 3 of us to ride in the wagon, so my grandmother and I would walk to the top, and then from the top we'd get in and we'd go down.

Did you have a permanent camp there?

Oh, yes. We lived always at Camp Tallac. First we lived at what's called Jameson Beach, right along the edge of the lake. We always had a camp there for years and years. Then later on in years my uncle started working for Mrs. Baldwin, and she's the one who owned Tallac.

Can you describe the camp at Jameson Beach for me?

They lived in tents with wind breaks. Lived there to fish and they had their boats docked right there. They'd go from there every morning and go fishing. No permanent structures, just had a camp site and every year you went to the same camp site.

Would there be a lot of kids up there?

Us kids and their parents.

This is a question you probably can't answer in exact number, but I'm curious as to about how many people would come up from the Carson Valley.

Oh, there'd be a whole mess of them! I can't remember just how many, but we'd have a row of camps of people that come up there and they had their camps along the beach.

Would it be safe to say that most of them did?

Well, I'd say halt anyway.

This is in the nineteen-teens and nineteen-twenties?

Probably 1919, 1918s that I can remember.

Did your uncle continue to fish all his life up there?

Yes, until he got so he couldn't go back up again.

What method of fishing was he using?

Just trolling with a rowboat and deep line fishing. He'd go out early in the morning and bring in his fish. He would fish till noon or so, and then he'd come in and rest and then go back out in the evening. He'd sell fish to the tourists from San Francisco, and he'd make these little boxes and get grass and clean the fish and put the grass in the box and in the middle of the fish so that they'd keep and ship them to San Francisco. Now you have to have everything refrigerated.

But he would do it without refrigeration?

Without refrigeration.

What did he make the box from?

They'd get wooden boxes like peaches used to come in and they'd cut them down and make little square boxes to fit 2 fish or one

fish or whatever amount of fish that people ordered.

Would the Washos ever bring any fish from Lake Tahoe down into the Carson Valley to sell?

I don't believe so.

I've heard stories about Paiute bringing fish from Pyramid Lake.

Oh, the Pyramid Lake. Oh, yes. They were great big fish, like salmon. Last summer we had some people from Oregon bring some salmon down and sold fish here, which was great. Fresh salmon.

When the Paiute brought the fish into the Carson Valley, did they sell to the Washos, or would there be trade?

No, they'd sell them for a dollar, dollar and a half or whatever. It wasn't very much, I can remember that.

I hardly know what questions to ask about what your uncle and your grandmother and you were doing up at Lake Tahoe. Is there anything else that you can add to this?

Well, the women worked at the resort, the Grove. My grandmother didn't because she always went fishing with my uncle.

What would she do? How would she help him?

Well, she would fish along with him. She'd have a troll, and he would have one. He'd row and troll at the same time and she would have one. Yes, they went out fishing together every day. Then I was little, they'd put me in the boat and I'd sleep. Oh, I'd get so sick. And that's the reason why, I guess, I don't like boats. It makes

me sick to even get on one. Used to get on the terry from Oakland to San Francisco and I'd get sick before I got to the other end.

As you got older would you stay on the shore when they went out fishing?

Yes. I was working then. My first job was at a picture shop at the Grove, Lake Tahoe. They call it the Grove. At the end of the pier these people had a photo shop and I worked for them in there. They were very nice people, and they were my friends until they passed away.

When did you finally quit going up to Lake Tahoe? How old were you?

Oh well, I quit when I was married to Mr....when I was a Van Sickle. I didn't go up any more for 15 years, I guess.

And you married him when?

In 1925.

You were married until 1940, then?

Yes.

And after that you and your next husband, Mr. James, had a....

We had a riding stable. We went up there, then, from there on, every summer. I have had a wonderful life.

PHOTOGRAPHS



Lottie Kyser (nee Ridley), with infant in cradle board
and Winona at lower left. Emerald Bay (Lake Tahoe), ca. 1904.



Maggie and Billy Merrill, who raised Winona. Lake Tahoe, ca. 1910-1920.

Photographs courtesy of Special Collections, University of Nevada, Reno Library:
the Winona James collection.

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