

# **Henderson Libraries**

## **Henderson Oral History Project**

**Roy Blue**

## Roy Blue

**Interviewer:** Hello, my name is Duane Laubach and I've been asked by Mrs. Kerschner to come and interview Mr. Roy Blue here, a longtime resident of Henderson. He actually moved into the valley in 1938 where he worked at Rhyolite. Roy, why don't you, if you can, tell us a little bit about what you did at Rhyolite down in Arizona and then when you eventually moved into Henderson. Can you tell us a little bit about that?

**Roy:** Well, to start with we came out here cause my wife's folks was in Chloride, Arizona. I was working for the highway in Nebraska. In the wintertime if you didn't have a job you were laid off in turns. So this winter comes and by dammit, my outfit had times like everybody else. So I loaded the wife and the two boys in a 1937 Ford and headed for out here where her folks was at Chloride, Arizona. Her oldest brother was working in the mills over there, you know, mines. So we came out here for two weeks vacation at Christmas and I'll be damned if they didn't put me to work in the mine over here at Chloride for four dollars and a half a day, and I wasn't, I was only making eighty dollars a month in Nebraska, so I stayed. I never did get money enough to leave. So I been here ever since.

**Interviewer:** Then what year did you come on over to work at the plants in Henderson?

**Roy:** They started that plant in '42 and they hired me. I guess there, I don't know, wasn't too many ahead of me. Because, I shouldn't tell you this, but I had something about me that I got along with everybody. I don't know how it was, what the hell it was, but it was. So I got a job in Henderson. And I stayed there for about 40 years 'til they tore it down.

**Interviewer:** Tell us a little bit about now, when you came over from Chloride to Henderson there weren't any houses in those early years. What did you do? What did you live in?

**Roy:** We had a friend that was in Pittman.

**Interviewer:** Pittman?

**Roy:** And we had the two boys, Linwood and Cornell, that's the two boys. We stayed there 'til we got out of Chloride. And then moved into Lynn Lane.

**Interviewer:** Was that...was that the one that you, Lynn Lane, was that the first house that you owned?

**Roy:** Yep. They finally named the street up there. There was three of us up there. Millers, and I can't remember the widow woman's name. And the three of us had a girl, daughter, named Lynn. So some wife, I don't know who, said why don't you call it Lynn Lane. So that's how it got it's name.

**Interviewer:** Tell us a little bit if you would about the work environment at the plants, you know when you started down there. You were a foreman, weren't you?

**Roy:** Yeah...they had a lot of old boys that knew a hell of lot more about it than I did. But I had a way about me, I don't know what it is, but I get along pretty good with people that were workin'. I don't know after that. That was a pretty good job.

**Interviewer:** And of course you were there for four years until the war started.

**Roy:** Uh, four years until they started movin' things all around, sellin' this and sellin' that. I went and stayed on and air conditioned sheet metal - 96 years old and still in sheet metal.

**Interviewer:** Do you remember old Anderson Camp and the old olive drab trailers that lined Boulder Highway in those early years?

**Roy:** Oh yeah. I never did go over there.

**Interviewer:** You never did.

**Roy:** No. The only thing was you go through it to go out to the lake to fish.

**Interviewer:** So you did go out there.

**Roy:** Oh yeah.

**Interviewer:** Okay. So what else do you remember about early Henderson?

**Roy:** Well, one thing there was a lot of good people there. And a lot of them wasn't any smarter than I was so we got along fine.

**Interviewer:** Well, that's good, that's good.

**Roy:** Galloway was a tire maker and him and I got along just like, well I was going to say brothers but brothers don't get along that good. But Galloway and I was friends for years. He worked for George Nip in a tire company. I got the sheet metal. I don't know what the hell. Still in it.

**Interviewer:** You know in '42 and part of '43 we didn't have a store. So you remember what you did about that? No grocery store. What'd you do?

**Roy:** Wife and 2 or 3 neighbors get together and I had a Buick, 1938 Buick, and as many neighbors had cars we'd get together and you'd go to Vegas or go to Needles. Needles was a good spot to go.

**Interviewer:** Went to Needles, drove all that way.

**Roy:** Well, what the hell. Nobody'd go. Searchlight wasn't down there yet.

**Interviewer:** You remember what gas was in those early years? How much a gallon?

**Roy:** Not anywhere's near a dollar.

**Interviewer:** Well, I remember when my folks came out here. Gas was 15 cents a gallon and water was selling for 50 cents a gallon.

**Roy:** Yeah. Well, that's the reason wasn't very many people drank water.

**Interviewer:** (Laugh) And then, uh, so remember about entertainment. What they used to do there. They would always show movies at the old gymnasium there at the high school on Friday and Saturday night for 10 cents. Remember that.

**Roy:** Yep. I was too doggone busy for that. They had dances around. I was a pretty fair dancer. Loretta wasn't, Loretta, my wife. She wasn't. I don't know, so all the young girls liked it when Pop Blue come showed up.

**Interviewer:** Showed 'em how to dance, eh?

**Roy:** Tickets 20 cents. 20 cents. Dance all night.

**Interviewer:** To go to that dance.

**Roy:** Hell no, not one dance, the whole night.

**Interviewer:** So where was that held?

**Roy:** Well, different joints. This one guy had 2 trailers put together. Oh boy, we had, oh we was all right.

**Interviewer:** So you danced with all the young ladies that night, every night.

**Roy:** Yeah, not all of them prob'ly.

**Interviewer:** Remember all those good softball games we used to go to?

**Roy:** I remember a lot of them.

**Interviewer:** Those were probably when old Pappy Swift was one of the pitchers. Remember that?

**Roy:** Old Pappy Swift. Yeah, he was all right. Everybody hated him. I don't know why but I liked him. I thought he was the funniest man I ever saw.

**Interviewer:** Good pitcher. He was a good pitcher.

**Roy:** Ohh, God, you're kidding. Wouldn't believe him, but he was. I was a pretty fair catcher.

**Interviewer:** Is that what you did? You caught for him?

**Roy:** Yeah, caught for awhile.

**Interviewer:** They had the, that time they had those thousand townsite houses all built. And uh, you remember, you remember the police protection we used to have. And the fire protection? You remember any of that?

**Roy:** No, I didn't pay too much attention. Or they didn't pay too much attention to me.

**Interviewer:** All the fire protection, all the trucks always had to come from the plant. There wasn't anything downtown at all. And as far as the police were concerned that was all handled by Las Vegas where they had 2 patrolmen that would stay up at the old DPC building up there, you know where they did a lot of the repair work and the maintenance work for the townsite houses. So that's where they were housed.

**Roy:** Speezy Strait.

**Interviewer:** Yep. Right, right.

**Roy:** He took a lot of sass, but he was a good fellow. 'Twasn't his fault he was born to be act that way. What the hell. I liked him. Maybe it was because I was kinda that way too.

**Interviewer:** Well that could be. What else do you remember about '42 and '43? You said, you told me earlier that you had something to do with the first 5 units of the plant.

**Roy:** Yeah. That was the season they were doing what they were supposed to do. And stuff like that.

**Interviewer:** Do you remember when unit 3 caught on fire?

**Roy:** Yes, sir.

**Interviewer:** That was quite a fire. Wasn't it.

**Roy:** It was. And I had my Ford car right parked up in the alleyway when it started. And I got it out of there. They had quite a time with that thing. That was a hell of a mess, that plant. They really figured it out. There was a lot of guys got sick off a that thing.

**Interviewer:** Well that magnesium is pretty volatile.

**Roy:** Mixture of the chlorine. Oh boy. But it was money. Four dollars and forty five cents a day.

**Interviewer:** Is that what you made, the same thing you made down in Chloride? You had to make a little bit more here.

**Roy:** Well, we did. We did. If you got four dollars a day in the mine you was lucky. And you did a hell of a lot of work too.

**Interviewer:** You remember, you remember anything about the magnesium product that they made down there? What they were using it for?

**Roy:** I never did. I never did get the run. Talked to some guys that did. Always bitchin' about it. We had a pretty good deal. I had some damn good guys over me. And they just stepped back and let me go. If a guy didn't do his job or they done bad one. What do you want to do. And he'd say well I don't like this. I said OK get somebody else to do your job. Well, that's the way it was.

**Interviewer:** No one was fired.

**Roy:** Well this whole country was, they were glad to be out here. They brought them in here by the cart load. Train. Sure did. Sure did. Some good, some bad.

**Interviewer:** Remember the plant ran 3 shifts. And then when the shifts would break and they'd go home, a lot of them were living in tent city, and some of them were living in mobile homes and some of them were living in the desert. Remember all the traffic deaths that they had there in front of the bars like the old Jolly Jug bar.

**Roy:** I never associated with bars.

**Interviewer:** Well I know that.

**Roy:** I know that about myself.

**Interviewer:** Well tell me, you should have some stories about working down at the plant. Why don't you relate some of them.

**Roy:** Well, that chlorine would look beautiful in that glass tubing but when it hit that water and stuff like that it was a bugger.

**Interviewer:** Yes, it was.

**Roy:** And you had to have good, honest workers. That's the reason, that's the reason most of my crews in the first 5 units were all elderly people, elderly men. So you could say, now by God, if you poke a stick down in that thing you're gonna get burnt. Now he'd say OK. That's all right. Now if it was one of the younger guys he'd look around, take a broom and stick it in there and get burnt.

**Interviewer:** Did they wear respirators?

**Roy:** Huh?

**Interviewer:** Did they wear respirators with yours?

**Roy:** Some did. Some did, hell you couldn't tell them. (laugh) I had a lot of fun. Messed up a lot of ballgames.

**Interviewer:** How was that? How'd you mess up a lot of ballgames?

**Roy:** Been too too damn tired.

**Interviewer:** Oh, OK. Made some bad calls.

**Roy:** Comin' and goin'. No sir. I made a dollar and twenty cents an hour. I was general foreman over the first 2 units.

**Interviewer:** You made more than a dollar and twenty cents, didn't you.

**Roy:** I did after I got up and know'd what I was doin'.

**Interviewer:** 'Cause I can't imagine you quitting a job at four eighty an hour or day, that was a day you made.

**Roy:** Yeah.

**Interviewer:** OK, I can see where you'd hit on that.

**Roy:** Yeah. That was quite a work, quite a job. And then they started to bring in the women.

**Interviewer:** Oh my. What happened then?

**Roy:** Everybody started wearing decent clothes.

**Interviewer:** (laugh) OK. So, that's quite an improvement over what you were originally wearing.

**Roy:** Oh hell yes. Cause one drop, one drop on a pair of levis would burn a hole in it. And you're carrying a glass and that thing would pop up. I think the company did finally furnish overalls for us. I got out of that pool.

**Interviewer:** Chlorine and Clorox. Two of the same.

**Roy:** Chlorine and Clorox. But it was a wonderful job.

**Interviewer:** So you worked at the plant until what, 1946?

**Roy:** No. They closed down 4 units in 1945. And I was, I got outta there. I'd been handling, been around sheet metal. And a brother-in-law of mine come out from Missouri and he opened a machine shop and set himself up in Vegas and I went to work for him.

**Interviewer:** And that was in '45 or '46?

**Roy:** I think in '47.

**Interviewer:** And I guess it was War Assets that took over. Did you buy your house from them?

**Roy:** Well I didn't. She bought it.

**Interviewer:** OK. That was a good investment for you at that time.

**Roy:** Yeah. She was a schoolteacher.

**Interviewer:** OK.

**Roy:** So she had more pull with the government or these knotheads that said they was government. They was runnin' that thing. So she had more pull with them than I did so she could, she bought it off 'em; give 'em sixteen hundred dollars worth.

**Interviewer:** Yeah, that makes sense, makes sense. Uh, I won't tell you what they're makin' now.

**Roy:** Oh, well it's all gone anyhow, my house. It was up for a youth center. Those three houses in there. I think it was, I think there's one house left. A member's is gone, and the next house burned down and my place is gone.

**Interviewer:** Yeah, that's where the remodeled youth center right across from the new city hall is established. Where did she teach?

**Roy:** Loretta? She done a lot of substitutin', most of her time sixth grade.

**Interviewer:** There at the...

**Roy:** Right downtown.

**Interviewer:** Downtown, OK. Sixth grade, huh?

**Roy:** Yeah she liked the sixth grade. The kids was just smart enough. You could tell them something and they'd remember it. But she didn't like the primary or first grades at all. But sixth grade, fifth and sixth grade she liked. She was a hell of a good woman.

**Interviewer:** Now you, uh, the house that you had on Lynn Lane you had a, it was very conveniently located, right across from the football field. You could watch them practice football and you watched the games. And I think you probably...

**Roy:** Youth center built right next door to me. I worked on the damn thing more than I did anything else. The old youth center that they built. They tell me now it's all tore out of there. All gone.

**Interviewer:** Now they remodeled it, made it larger. They didn't tear it out. They tried to bring it up to date, you know. Actually they have more things going there than they had before. Because all they had was a basketball court and a stage and a couple of pool tables in there. They've expanded that out now so they got a lot more going.

**Roy:** Is it still up there?

**Interviewer:** Oh, yeah. Yeah. Remodeled. It extends all the way over to that street in the back, one that you've never been on. You would be very much amazed if I took you downtown Henderson today and see what's going on.

**Roy:** Oh, hell no. I had enough of it.

**Interviewer:** (Chuckle) Well, now can you think of anything else you'd like to relate to us?



**Roy:** Well, I don't know. My kids graduated and they...a good school. I liked it and I liked the teachers. And I liked it. I guess because if they wanted something done they called me. Not that I was so goddamned good lookin'.

**Interviewer:** You mean as far as maintenance or something? What?

**Roy:** Oh yeah. If a teacher wanted a table moved or something, she couldn't get one of them knotheds to move it for her. So they'd get, one of the kids' dads will do it for you. OK, tell your dad to come down. So like a damned fool I'd go down there.

**Interviewer:** You'd go down there.

**Roy:** But I can't complain a minute. She liked the job of teachin'. I was in the sheet metal business. Goddamn it, doin' OK.

**Interviewer:** You remember the old tent city that they had up there on Boulder Highway, which is next to the Anderson camp. All those tents, those olive drab tents, that would go, seemed like they stretched for miles out there.

**Roy:** Yeah, they did. I don't know what. There was quite a bunch of them goin' down to the lake, too.

**Interviewer:** You say you went to the lake to go fishin' quite a bit huh?

**Roy:** Yeah. I used to go down there.

**Interviewer:** Did you have a boat?

**Roy:** I had a little old 14 foot Thompson.

**Interviewer:** Oh, you did. OK.

**Roy:** I'd toss that up in the back of the pickup and away I'd go.

**Interviewer:** What'd you do? Did you always go down there by yourself?

**Roy:** Most of the time.

**Interviewer:** Boys didn't want to go down there with you?

**Roy:** Well they were playing football or basketball at the gym. You know Len got big then.

**Interviewer:** Boys were pretty good football players, weren't they.

**Roy:** Well, not because of my kids. If Rod had had Ted's range he'd have been a hell of a lot better. But you couldn't tell him nothin'. If he'd, if coach said, boy, Rod you're going to go through that doorway. Rod'd said OK, maybe that guy weighs 20 or 30 pounds more than this guy so he goes this way. Course that doesn't set well with the teacher. Ted was, I don't know what he was.

**Interviewer:** Ted was the more studious person, right?

**Roy:** Yeah. Rod was a heller. I don't think he met a stranger in his life. Even when he was a little kid. Did as he damn well pleased.

**Interviewer:** Well, he was taking after his dad.

**Roy:** Well, I don't know about that. I used to know where I was most of the time. No sir, I had a lot of fun, a lot of fun out there. There was a little old girl, and I've been trying to think of her name. And she just died here not too long ago.

**Interviewer:** I bet I know who you're talking about. Are you talking about Lydia Ramberg?

**Roy:** No. Her husband was on the school board. Saint \_\_\_\_\_. Oh, what was that old boy's name?

**Interviewer:** I don't remember who was on the original school board.

**Roy:** He had two or three boys. This old boy did. Not Kimmel. Who in the hell was he?

**Interviewer:** Well maybe we can think of it a little bit later. She'd be quite vocal at the games, huh? Then her husband would get upset with her and then she'd come over and sit with you. I imagine he got more upset with her, didn't he?

**Roy:** (Chuckle) I had a lot of fun.

**Interviewer:** Those are good memories. Good memories. What do you remember about the old townsite houses when they needed maintenance or something like that? Do you remember what you did?

**Roy:** Do it yourself.

**Interviewer:** Well, you do it yourself, but they would, you'd call up DP, what they called the Defense Plan Corporation or the Maintenance and they would come out and they'd fix it. They'd usually come out that day if it was painting or whatever.

**Roy:** Well, yeah, bunch of knotheads.

**Interviewer:** (Chuckle) Do you remember anything about the early churches?

**Roy:** Well, I worked on that one that lived right next door to us. As they gonna \_\_\_\_\_...

**Interviewer:** You're talkin' about the Lutheran Church.

**Roy:** Is that what it is. What about next door.

**Interviewer:** The old Community Church and the Catholic Church.

**Roy:** Well, yeah. And that old preacher we had down there.

**Interviewer:** Remember his name? Father Moran. Father Paul Moran.

**Roy:** Father Moran. I'll never have another man as good as he was.

**Interviewer:** He was a good man, good man. He came over from Ireland. My father met him. He drove over to Kingman and picked him up. He came in on I guess it's the Union Pacific, or whatever it is, whatever the train line that went in there. Picked him up and he still had on his old tunic. When he left Ireland he had scrambled eggs on top of it and everything. Picked him up and took him to Henderson. And so a fellow by the name of Fred Unsworth, I don't know if you remember that name, and Preston Austin. They took care of him. And shortly after that's when they started building the church there.

**Roy:** I helped them with that church. It was right next door.

**Interviewer:** OK. You're talking about the one that came later though. The Lutheran Church.

**Roy:** Oh, is that what that was. That other one was down on that other corner.

**Interviewer:** Right. The Community Church of course is over there off of Army Street.

**Roy:** That was after my time.

**Interviewer:** I don't know about that. I think you probably still remember it. Do you remember, uh, remember anything about, oh, going back to say '44. When Roosevelt passed away. What took place down at the plant at that time? Do you remember?

**Roy:** Who passed away?

**Interviewer:** Roosevelt, President Roosevelt.

**Roy:** Oh, well they thought they was going to turn, tear it, down. There for awhile. And a bunch of them old boys got together and said "By God, you're not." For families, these tear damn things gone.

**Interviewer:** They had a lot of foresight, didn't they?

**Roy:** Oh, yeah. Me, I kept my goddamned mouth shut. I knew better. I had troubles enough of my own. I married a wonderful woman. Wonderful woman. My dad says, my dad says, Loretta, I don't see what you see in that goddamned son of mine. I don't know what you see in him. Loretta says because he's gentle and I love him. He says, well love don't go very deep sometimes. And she says, well this does.

**Interviewer:** Well, that's quite something to remember too.

**Roy:** (Chuckle) Well, I was gone a lot. I don't think I was so damn bad.

**Interviewer:** Nobody said that you were bad. You might have made some bad calls in baseball. But other than that you weren't so bad.

**Roy:** I had a lot of fun. Some of the teachers come out here from the Midwest or the East and they're never used to this kind of weather out here and they were never used to this kind of people. Everybody was friendly. Everybody. It didn't make a damn what it was. If you was doin' it and then somebody comes along, if he thinks you can do it better and a little faster he'd tell you and then walk away. What the hell.

**Interviewer:** Remember the old saying about you know since we were somewhat of a melting pot out here. We had people coming from all the states. And the one that sort of amused me more than anything was the guy said, "Hey, Okie, go tell Arkie over there that Tex wants to see him". You know they had the plant and our community was made up, like you say, of a lot of good people.

**Roy:** And could some of those old gals cook. Holy Torledo. If you was workin', if you was workin' on a steel job or something like that, where you had to wear those damn masks, wrapped up like a monkey. Well, I'll tell you that was tough work. And they would bring us coffee and sandwiches. It wasn't, it wasn't give me 50 cents, give me a dime, give me this. Hell no. They wasn't doin' nothing. I don't know how they did it.

**Interviewer:** D'you remember working in the plant during July and August. How hot it used to get in there.

**Roy:** Yeah. God darned right.

**Interviewer:** It was always good to hear that, see that four o'clock or that three-thirty buzzer go off where you could go home and punch out.

**Roy:** There was a lot of people worked on it. It was a good job, it was a good job.

**Interviewer:** Well, Roy.

**Roy:** I'm glad to have met ya.

**Interviewer:** I'm glad I met you too. As you're well aware, that this is part of the Las Vegas Centennial.

**Roy:** It's what?

**Interviewer:** Part of the Las Vegas Centennial. You know Las Vegas is getting ready to celebrate their first 100 years.

**Roy:** First one hundred. That's gotta make me feel about 60. No, that's 40.

**Interviewer:** Last Sunday there was an interesting session that took place where a lot of the local watercolor artists got together and they painted about 75 or 80 pictures of early Las Vegas. You know like if you went down old Fremont Street. Remember Wimpy's, where the Fremont Hotel now sits.

Hamburgers you could buy for ten cents apiece. And, they had, uh. You were talking about Bill Galloway earlier. You know, he was working at Christiansen's there on Third and Fremont.

**Roy:** Fay, Fay his brother was workin'....

**Interviewer:** Exactly. Right, right, right. And of course he later went to work. I think he was....

**Roy:** He got into teachin'. Or not teachin'.

**Interviewer:** He got into the County. I'm not sure if he was a tax assessor or what he was. Anyway, he went to work for the County. And, uh, I don't know if you remember when you used to walk down Fremont Street during the war years, especially when all those soldier boys would come in from Nellis. And you would say walk West toward the old Union Station; and you would see a lot of guys that had their liberty or passes and they would, I guess, imbibe at these bars a little bit too much. And you'd see them all passed out there in that palm grove there in front of the train station. And I remember when my family came out here in '42 one of the first things that was such a striking thing to me was seeing all those bars and everything and the smell of that liquor that permeated from those buildings. I'll never forget that. But a little different. But those were good years.

**Roy:** Yep. They were.

**Interviewer:** A lot of good years. Well, Roy, appreciate it.

**Roy:** Well, I'll probably never forget it.

**Interviewer:** I'm sure the committee appreciates it. And so I appreciate you coming out with me and, uh, thank you again.

**Roy:** Well, okay.