

Henderson Libraries

**Henderson Historical
Society and Robert
Taylor Elementary
School**

Fredric Watson

Oral History of Fredric Watson

conducted by students of

Robert Taylor Elementary School

for the

Henderson Historical Society

in cooperation with

Dr. Janet Dobry, Principal

and

Barbara Tabach, UNLV Oral History Research Center

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Interviewer: *Is there anything else you would like to share with me?*

Fredric Watson: You know, there is. I was telling Ms. Tabach, before you kids got here, I've been reading some mini-histories that old-time Basic High School graduates have written for their class reunions and one of the mini-histories I read, one of the ladies who graduated from Basic, made the comment, "I wonder if the Hermit's ghost haunts the Lake of Las Vegas." And I knew what she meant. I thought I knew what she meant because I remember who the Hermit was. I bet a lot of people who read that mini-history, that would have gone right over their heads. And so I thought for the interview, I would say a few words about who the Hermit was, because it tells something about Las Vegas. The Hermit was an old man, an elderly gentleman, who I think was a prospector. He had long white hair and a long white beard. He looked a little bit like Santa Claus. And he wore dungarees, Levis probably, and suspenders, and a rough workman's shirt. He drove an old car and I can't remember what make it was, but you could tell that he used it as a work vehicle, piled things up on the roof, and he had taken the back door off it so he could carry lumber in the back of it. And he lived in a tunnel that was probably a mine shaft originally. And this was right down here in the Calico Hills. Now if you were driving out to go to the lake from Robert Taylor School, and you passed through the Calico Hills, and rise up and you're on your way toward Lake of Las Vegas and then Lake Mead, well off on the left, just as you come to the first rise, if you went around behind those hills, that's where he lived. And I'm sure he was a prospector; he was probably looking for some precious minerals down there. And it reminded me of a lot of things that I've read about Henderson since those days, that Henderson and Southern Nevada were rich in minerals that haven't been discovered yet. And in the early days of our history, there were a lot of people, miners like him that would go out with a burro packed with shovels and picks and all the equipment that miners need. And they searched all over the valley. A lot of the holes they dug, when they left, they probably thought, well, nobody's going to be around here but other miners, and of course, other miners would be really careful, and when they see holes in the ground, they would stay away from them. But what

happened was a lot of people moved into the valley who didn't understand about the dangers of some of these old mines. And when I was a youngster growing up, every summer, when the kids were out exploring the desert, there would be a sad story of somebody falling down a mineshaft and getting hurt really bad. And a lot of these prospectors used dynamite and blasting caps to dig their holes, and there were lots of stories that I can remember growing up of kids that would find these blasting caps or even in some cases dynamite, accidentally set off the blasting cap and really injure themselves. So the desert was a lot of fun, but you had to be watchful and a little bit lucky too. So those are some of my memories of growing up in Henderson.