

Henderson Libraries

**Henderson Historical
Society**

Ruth Shannon

Oral History of Ruth Shannon

conducted by

Valerie La Porta-Haynes

for the

Henderson Historical Society

December 6, 2011

Interviewer: *Ruth, we're here for the Henderson Historical Society and we just wanted to ask a few questions because I know you've been here many years and we're interested in what and when brought you here to Henderson, Nevada.*

Ruth Shannon: What brought us here was the winters back in Cincinnati where we came from were so severe and my husband had had pneumonia. The doctor told him he wouldn't live another year back there with that problem. So he had a friend out here, so we started talking about it, and tried to get a little money together, and he came first. He came with a big – one of those transport trucks, and then he was trying to find us a place to live, and he found a trailer over here at Trailer Haven that he found that we could rent one of those trailers. So he was here about a month when he found some place for us to live, and then the two children and I came by railroad. Two days, it took us two days to come here by rail. And so the first place we lived was over there. It was behind St. Peter's. And luckily, because the Catholic School was there, the children could walk to school.

Interviewer: *Right.*

Ruth Shannon: It was just like two blocks, you know, and that was a blessing for us. And then from then on, we tried to get jobs, and my husband was a close friend of the man – you know the big Quonset hut down on the Boulder Highway on the right going in?

Interviewer: *Yes.*

Ruth Shannon: Well, that used to be the Sportsman's Bar and he was a – in fact at one time, he was my husband's bookkeeper and so he's the one that really got him to come out here. And so my husband was lucky enough to go to work part-time for him and I would put the kids in school every morning at St. Peter's and I walked every street in Henderson to find one of these

little houses because I had left four hundred dollars in the bank back home. And I thought, in case we have to go back, at that time you could get a little start with four hundred dollars.

Interviewer: *Right.*

Ruth Shannon: So I was able to get into this house.

Interviewer: *And you are located at Copper.*

Ruth Shannon: 171 Copper.

Interviewer: *On Copper.*

Ruth Shannon: And your dad and Art Espinoza had Security Mortgage at that time. This is unbelievable. But so the lady next door, she was so kind to me, she said the people who had lived in here were trying to buy it but they didn't like it. They moved out. She says, "You can go up to Art Espinoza and talk to him about it because he's got the papers on it." So I went up to Art Espinoza and I told him we'd only been here like maybe two months by that time and he was – he was like he knew me all my life. And he said –

Interviewer: *And who's he? Art Espinoza?*

Ruth Shannon: Art Espinoza. He's passed away.

Interviewer: *Right.*

Ruth Shannon: But anyway he said, he listened to me, and asked me about the money, you know, how much money I had. And I told him, just like I told you, I had this four hundred dollars back home in the bank. And he said, "Have you got any kind of insurances?" And I had insurance on the children. That's it. And so he said, "I'll tell you what, Ruth," he says, "the lady down on Lake Mead" – her name was Mary Ann Burns. Her mother owned this house. He says, "You go talk to her." This is unbelievable.

Interviewer: *This is the Townsite house that you're in now.*

Ruth Shannon: The very one, yeah. And I went down to Mary Ann Burns and – my husband and I both – and she – I don't know whether Art had talked to her about us, but before we left she said, "Wait a minute." She came and put the keys in my hand. She says, "You can move in tonight if you want to." We had put no money down. I mean I was good for my money, just what I said, you know.

Interviewer: *Right.*

Ruth Shannon: But we didn't put any – and she gave me the key. We moved in here. And her mother was from Chicago. She had it completely furnished. And I left all my stuff back home, you know. We didn't even have to buy a dish. There was silverware; there was pots and pans; there was electric sweeper; there was a TV. It was totally furnished. And it was a blessing, if I ever had a blessing. And so we paid six thousand two hundred dollars for this house and my mortgage that I paid monthly was seventy dollars a month, plus I paid the assessment on the sidewalks. They had just put the sidewalks and that assessment was fourteen dollars a month; that's all we paid. For a house – it was such a blessing. You'll never know what a blessing that was.

Interviewer: *Yes it was. Gosh. Well, Ruth, can you tell us about – did you walk from your home, from your Townsite home, did you walk up and down Water Street to do your shopping?*

Ruth Shannon: Well before that, I lived in the trailer, which is now where Walmart is, that location. I put the kids in school every morning and I would walk uptown, up into the Townsite area, because I had heard somebody say, "Oh, you can buy those houses real cheap," and I kept thinking in my mind, I wonder if I could with this money I left back home, you know, I kept

thinking. And anyway I walked, I started at Water Street and I made up my mind I'm going to go in every building, every door to look for a job. And whether I was experienced, I didn't care. I thought, maybe I can do something, maybe I can scrub the floors, maybe I can, you know, do something. So I did, I'd start at the bottom of Water Street and there wasn't too many businesses, but I'd go in every business. The next day, I'd take the next street and I'd do the same thing.

Interviewer: *And what year was this?*

Ruth Shannon: This was 1960.

Interviewer: *Okay.*

Ruth Shannon: And that's the day that I walked up Atlantic and I talked to the lady in the yard over there and she's the one that got me on this house. And then I got a job sewing for a lady right where your place is now. Their names were Brown. They had a sewing shop there, and they did this application on bowler shirts. I can sew, and so I got a job in there. And then I got a job at Dante's Cocktail Lounge, across from the hospital. It used to be a first class cocktail lounge, beautiful place. And then I worked up at the country club and then they had built – it used to be where the Eldorado now is – it was facing this way – on the right was the Royal Café and on the left was where I got a job. It was called "The Wheel Café" and it was right on the corner. Well, when Sam Boyd came along, he expanded and put those two businesses together, which made the Eldorado.

Interviewer: *Right.*

Ruth Shannon: And so I got a job, oh gosh, I was thankful I got that job, at the Wheel Café. And so I worked there for a couple of years, and then I lost my husband, and so I knew I had to be

full support. And I had to buy a car. So I worked at the Dunes and I worked at the Dunes for thirty years. I had top seniority on all shifts.

Interviewer: *Good for you.*

Ruth Shannon: Yeah. I had to stick with it.

Interviewer: *Now what were the stories – can you tell us a little bit about Rexall Drug.*

Ruth Shannon: Yeah, and I got the picture out of the newspaper. Well, the Rexall Drug – when I was still living in the trailer, I met a lady in the washhouse [phone rings] I'll just let that go.

That's okay, I'll just let that go. In the washhouse – she had had a business, I think in California, so she knew restaurant business. I only knew serving; that's all I knew. But when we kind of got together over there talking, she says, "Well, Ruth, we could go in business together if you have two hundred dollars," she says, "to stock." She says, "I got two hundred dollars; we could stock it," you know. So we did. We leased that lunch counter in there. And we worked – I guess I worked there maybe like a half a year. Wasn't very long. But then the Wheel Café got built and opened and I got a good job in there. So I just went from there, you know.

Interviewer: *Very good. Now did you have anything to do with the counter?*

Ruth Shannon: Yeah.

Interviewer: *Okay.*

Ruth Shannon: Yeah, I helped somewhat with the food and I worked the whole counter, and it was like short orders, you know, it was easy. That part was easy. And you know at that time, we bought coffee – I think what we did when we'd see coffee on sale, we would go buy it. And do you know at that time, I tried to keep track. Even I'd get my pencil and paper and try to, you know, can't remember everything, but anyway, I'd figure out what we paid for coffee and what

we made on coffee, and do you know we made enough on coffee to pay our rent in that store. I kept track of it. So you know now what people serve. And you know how they've got that coffee price up? We paid all our rent with coffee. Isn't that something?

Interviewer: *Yes, it is.*

Ruth Shannon: Yes.

Interviewer: *Those were the days.*

Ruth Shannon: Yeah, those were the days.

Interviewer: *And what was probably the best off the menu? The best meal offered? Was it like a short order hamburger, French fries? Did they have, like, a signature?*

Ruth Shannon: Let me get that. It's a – [rustling paper] – [reading from a newspaper article] okay, this is December the 1st, 1960: "OPENING R & R SNACK BAR, RUTH SHANNON and RUTH PALITTI, NEW MANAGERS OF FOUNTAIN LUNCH IN HENDERSON REXALL DRUG, FEATURING ... FISH & CHIPS – CURLY DOGS, BREAKFASTS – LUNCHESS, A LA CARTE EVENING MEALS, FREE DRAWING COUPONS Given With Each Purchase of 25c or More. Drawing Held Every Two Weeks." [laughter]

Interviewer: *And did you have a lot at your counter?*

Ruth Shannon: Oh yes, it was – and you know in the morning especially, this is really going back to the original older people that were here and in business, some of them. And Dr. Coogan, if anyone remembers him, he sat at my counter every morning and had coffee and the man, McBride, from the insurance company, and McBeath had the pharmacy, and there was a man, and I can't remember his name, but he had a shoe shop there, repaired shoes, and he came in

every morning for coffee, you know. And there was just a lot of the people that – Van Valey – those different people came in and sat at the counter.

Interviewer: *How fun.*

Ruth Shannon: So, yeah, it was, it was interesting. You know, like I said, like it reads, we served these short things, but it was a place that people could come in if they were in a hurry and sit down and get something in a hurry and get out, you know.

Interviewer: *Right, right. What else do you have? I see you have a bag full of –*

Ruth Shannon: Yeah, I do.

Interviewer: *– old coupons or articles?*

Ruth Shannon: [rustling paper] Oh, this is – this might be, might not be interesting. [break in recording] This is a picture of Robert – Governor Robert List, they had at the convention center up here.

Interviewer: *And that was about what year?*

Ruth Shannon: About 1978.

Interviewer: *1978.*

Ruth Shannon: And this is a picture at the senior center with Father Cavelia and I don't know exactly what that was. It was some kind of a – I don't know exactly what the – you know. And this is, this probably maybe isn't too much of a – but this is the train that we came out here on.

Interviewer: *And what was the name of that?*

Ruth Shannon: It was –

Interviewer: *I see Baltimore.*

Ruth Shannon: See, here it is: the Union Pacific Railroad.

Interviewer: *Okay. And that was – you left from Baltimore?*

Ruth Shannon: Well, we left from Cincinnati and we had a stopover in Missouri, St. Louis, Missouri. But we was on the train for two days. Oh, and here's Senator Jim Gibson and me.

Interviewer: *And what year was that?*

Ruth Shannon: '97.

Interviewer: '97.

Ruth Shannon: [rustling paper] Let's see what else we got here. This was when – at the senior center when we had – what I did was I showed the Kentucky Derby and I gave free food. I got the food from John Kish at the – he gave me roast chicken for a hundred people free and I advertised and I showed that, and every year he'd call me and he'd say, "Ruth, you going to have your Kentucky Derby party?" And he says, "Well, call me how many chickens you need." Every year.

Interviewer: *Oh, that's wonderful.*

Ruth Shannon: Not a dime. He was a wonderful – you know, he just died not long ago.

Interviewer: *Right.*

Ruth Shannon: I went to the hospital and seen him all the time.

Interviewer: *Oh.*

Ruth Shannon: Yeah. Let's see [rustling paper]. This is – I can't think of her name – if I can read it – Edna, Edna Deardoff, and they are the two – Father Caviglia and she were responsible for all the lunches for the seniors. They did a job like nobody since has done. Now, this is my house and I'll read this to you, because last [appraisal] – oh I got that – I don't want to say that: "Bought this house in 1961, completely furnished" I already told you that. "TV, Electrolux

sweeper, the price was \$6,200, taxes at that time were \$62 a year and the first mortgage was \$60 a month." And like I told you, "the assessment was \$20 a month. So our total monthly expense for the house was \$80 a month." And that's what it looked like when we moved here. [rustling paper and showing photograph] Here is – I don't know what year this was – 1996, so that shows this – oh, Papa Joe's Restaurant. I don't know; I'm not really too familiar with that. [rustling paper] What's this one? Oh, this one up here is where I worked at the senior center and it was to do with books. A group of us at the senior center.

Interviewer: *Beautiful. Well, Ruth, do you have anything more, any other good old stories that you have for us in Henderson? I know I saw you the other day and you were walking –*

Ruth Shannon: Yeah.

Interviewer: *– up and down the street, and you go there, what, a couple of times to the Eldorado, was it?*

Ruth Shannon: Oh, I played Bingo the first time at the Eldorado yesterday and I won seventy dollars. [laughter] The first time I played it. But it was fun, you know. I try to, you know, be active and –

Interviewer: *Right.*

Ruth Shannon: I get to talk to people. I love to talk to people. And yeah, I walk every day almost a mile.

Interviewer: *And is that up and down Water Street?*

Ruth Shannon: Oh, I go – no, I go different ways. I go up the hill on Pacific and I go to the gym up where the recreation center, and then sometimes I'll go down this way. I usually go a different way every day. But I walk every day.

Interviewer: *Every day.*

Ruth Shannon: I have to walk every day.

Interviewer: *Yeah.*

Ruth Shannon: Or I wouldn't be able – you know, I know people that they sit and then you can't get up, right? You see, you can't walk. But this – I know you're too young to remember this, but when they built the community college up here, at that time I knew Betty Scott. She was, she was a person full of energy and she was so smart about everything. She did all the footwork for that college. She bought all the interior equipment, everything. I was with her all the time. She directed our choir. I sang for St. Peter's for twenty years, in the choir.

Interviewer: *Right.*

Ruth Shannon: And, uh, I don't know what happened, but this article tells about it, you know. I don't know the politics or what, but she got pulled out of that job. She was supposed to be the, I don't know whether it was the president or director. I don't know which is was now. [break in recording] One of the most unique and best things that I saw when I really first moved in here was this heater and we have never been anything but comfortable in this house. And I hear these people that pay all these prices, then they – the first thing that most people, I'm saying most people, tear this out and they put in – if you get to go in more of these houses, then they put that gas long unit in, gas heat, and it never heats their entire house. And see, that has three coils separate and then two coils. There has been once or twice in all the years I've lived here, fifty years, that I've had to turn both on. And then we have one in the bathroom.

Interviewer: *You go through the winter with two coils on?*

Ruth Shannon: With three.

Interviewer: *Three.*

Ruth Shannon: This is the three. Usually I put that on. And over here is two and that means if it gets really cold, I'll put – especially if the wind blows hard, then it kind of, you know, but we never – I bet you in all the years, I bet I haven't had the whole thing on five times at the most. No. And you know what, my son said something – yesterday, he was here – and I never thought about it like that. He said, "Mom" – I was telling about my brother, one time. My brother was a jockey. Anyway, he later became an official clocker on the whole West Coast. Made big money, you know. And he came here one day, and he says, "Ruth," – when they were building the houses up on Highland Hill – he says, "Ruth, why don't you go up there and buy one of those new houses they were building." He says, "I'll help you with it." And he kept – every time he'd come, he'd say, did you ever go look at those houses? So one day I thought, well, I will. But I didn't really care. I was comfortable, and especially my money was right, you know. As they say, you're money's funny. Well, my money was right. And so I did. I went up to please him and I looked at those houses and when they got done telling me what my monthly payment would be, what my down payment would be, I thought no way I'm going to get myself in debt. I'm just getting out of debt, you know.

Interviewer: *Right.*

Ruth Shannon: And so I told him when he came the next time, I says, "Beanie," I says, "There's no way I'm going to get in that kind of debt. I don't know what'll happen to me. You know, where I was paying this eighty dollars a month, I was going to pay two hundred and fifty. Well, at that time, that two hundred and fifty dollars was an awful lot, right?"

Interviewer: *Yes.*

Ruth Shannon: So I forgot about that and as years went on, I thought, oh gosh, how glad I am that I didn't do that, you know.

Interviewer: *Right.*

Ruth Shannon: So then I worked – the last place I worked here was Dante's Cocktail Lounge across from the hospital. And then when my husband passed away, I knew – and I was only working weekends down there, and I knew that I had to get more money and I had to have a car. So I went to work with the Dunes. And at that time, there was one bus that came out here. It left Fourth and Fremont. It came out here, it got out here at six o'clock in the morning, and it circled around and it picked me up about quarter of seven. And I got on the bus, and luckily, at that time, it went down the Boulder Highway to Tropicana and straight over Tropicana and dropped me off in front of the Dunes. That was good. But at night when I got off work, I had to go downtown and wait two hours for that last bus to go out. So I worked about a year, maybe a little over a year, then I bought a car. And that was wonderful, you know. Then I had it easy, you know. I could get up when I wanted to and get to work at the right time and everything. It was great. And so I worked there thirty years and I think the main reason I did, I just kept thinking, I don't want to go back to where I was.

Interviewer: *Right.*

[break in recording]

Ruth Shannon: Well, you know when the explosion, PEPCON, big explosion happened?

Interviewer: *Yes.*

Ruth Shannon: And how many houses were damaged? And you know, I didn't really know this until my son was here last night telling me. And we were talking – I guess I was talking about

this interview, I forget. But he says, “Mom, do you know when that explosion was down there, these Townsite houses, none of them were touched, because,” he says, “you know, they’re made of solid redwood: floors and there’s double walls behind there. See, I had some of this work done. Well, this you can tell I covered, but it’s solid redwood. And my son told me this, he says, “You go up on the hill, all those houses were damaged.” He says, “Down in” – what do they call that – Valley View? He says “their stucco houses are all cracked.” He says, “They’re still cracked.” He says, “Nothing happened to these houses.” And I really didn’t know that until he told me that. You know.

Interviewer: *Even the floors, everything is.*

Ruth Shannon: Yeah, and if you tried – I tried one time to drive a nail in one of these walls. It’s like steel. It’s like, yeah, it’s like trying to drive a nail in steel. It is – you know, the, the government really knew what they were doing. But you know the man used to live across the street? He told me before they built these houses, I forget where they got this wood from, but they stored it way up on a hill, and it was seasoned before they even used it. So you know how they use that lumber today; it’s raw, like. And, you know, it expands and it warps. But he says they let that lumber lay up there until it got seasoned, and then they built these houses. Isn’t that interesting?

Interviewer: *That’s very interesting.*

Ruth Shannon: Yeah, I think it is. And not only that, you know, I can see – I know a little bit about design and what’s adequate to live in, and you know, when you think of this design of this little – sometimes I call it my little cabin. But you know when you think now about the design and how they’ve made everything so adequate. Maybe it’s not luxurious, you know,

luxury, but it's everything you really need and it's so easy to keep it up. It's so easy to make repairs and everything. It's just real genius work and design and everything, the way I look at it. I've seen a lot of two bedroom houses, but the way they make the rooms – see like the way that bathroom is, both bedrooms have like private access to that one bathroom. And that's really nice. You don't see that too much. Yeah, I give them credit. I give the government credit for these Townsite houses. And you know what I say when I meet people like in – you know, I don't know if I told you I'm a Yoga.

Interviewer: *No.*

Ruth Shannon: Well, anyway, when I see a lot of people out there – you know, the last classes I was able to take is way out there to St. Rose Medical Center, in there. And when they go in there, they'll say, you know, wonder where you're from, and I say, "Henderson," and I say, "But wait a minute, I'm from the real Henderson." [laughter] And they look at you, you know, because most of them live in the Anthems and all those places out there and I says, "But I live in the real Henderson." And then I'll tell them where the real Henderson really started and why it started, you know.

Interviewer: *Right. Well, Ruth, is this your original kitchen? You haven't done anything to that either?*

Ruth Shannon: [getting up] I haven't done – let me see, to make sure. Oh, well, you know the City of Henderson did put in new cabinets about two years ago and even though I love – [break in recording] – These are the original chairs that came with the Townsite house. Before I had the table also and it had a ceramic top but something happened to the under part of it, so I had to get rid of that, but these are the best chairs, strongest and you can just treat them anyway

and they never break or they never shake or anything like that, like the chairs you buy today.

Yeah, I just love them. [break in recording] Okay, the Wheel Café in Henderson was at the corner of Water Street and Army and the three gentlemen that opened up that café were Don Yost, Jim Gunville, and Art Espinoza. And later on it was taken over by Sam Boyd. And Sam Boyd expanded and expanded and joined the Royal Café which was on the other side and the Wheel Café and it became the Eldorado. I guess I said that right.

Interviewer: *And then the homes right off of Basic and Water?*

Ruth Shannon: The homes that were on Basic behind where the old elementary school used to be were owned by Don Yost and his wife. And I forget her name but I knew it. Yeah. I think now those homes are – have been sold. I don't know who really owns them now.

Interviewer: *Right.*

[end of recording]