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**Henderson Historical
Society**

Bettina Smith

Oral History of Bettina Smith

conducted by

Valerie La Porta-Haynes

for the

Henderson Historical Society

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Interviewer: *Well, we're here today with Tina Smith and Tina is a Board of Director for the Henderson Historical Society and Tina is going to tell us how she ended up here with her wonderful husband, Hal Smith, and her three children and her mother.*

Bettina Smith: She's important too.

Interviewer: *She's very important. So Tina, would you like to start and just kind of reminisce a little bit?*

Bettina Smith: First, I would just like to say how thrilled I am to be a part of this Historical Society, because it has been important to me. I've had so much joy in this city and having raised the children, had a husband that was – had his little nose into everything [laughter] and so we started out as just being invited guests to my mother's because they had moved here in 1943. And my mother stayed with me until my first child was born in October of '42 and then she came up here to be with my father. And in that interim time, my husband had taken his officer's training and he was sent to San Diego on duty. So we went to San Diego and mother came here. We led separate lives for a while. Then we came down to visit and my mother, Ruth Ball, was kind of a very active and social type gal and she loved people and she wanted – she knew that everybody who had come here from all the diverse parts around the United States needed something to do. So she started a few organizations active in the Church and she was – one of them was the Business and Professional Women, and members there, and that was one of the big ones. And then she – oh, she was the cultural director of Beta Sigma Phi which was a group of women that had not gone to college and wanted to pursue their education a little bit through – during these meetings. And that was why – the part I'm trying to get at is that we had kind of a ready-made friendship here when mother would introduce us to her friends and then

we would see them the next time we'd come to visit. Then in 1945, we went up to Washington to live. And I came – made two visits here, still making more friends, and then when Hal was called up to service, the Queen's Service there in Ellensburg, Washington, where we lived for five years, and he had a contracting company. So he was stationed on the U.S.S. Lady and went out to sea, so he brought us home to my mother's three different times. And we stayed in that little three-bedroom Townsite house, myself, my three children and my mother and my father. So then I had all – it was about a year that he was gone each time, so I just kind of got into the social whirl and met all these wonderful people, half whom I still know, which is just incredible. And we just – and then finally when he got out of the service, we pursued a few jobs that might be welcome, but it didn't turn out that way, so he decided to look for a job here and he got a job at Nellis Air Force Base, which led to a better job at Mead Base. And we thought that was just fine, and we still stayed. By this time we had rented a house, and we bought our first house on Elm Street, if I'm not mistaken. And then he started a lumber yard. But I'm digressing –

Interviewer: *Right.*

Bettina Smith: – going into Hal from my mother and father. But my mother and father lived at 27 Nevada Way which is at the end of the very first street off of Boulder Highway and it had a huge breaking area that was the rest of the street actually, more so, more than just their lot, you know. And they decided to put in a lawn and some flowers and do some gardening. So that was the first thing that they did was make the lot presentable, and that was the future site of the fund raisers of these ice cream socials that were so popular –

Interviewer: *Yes.*

Bettina Smith: – if I remember those rightly. So that was when they began that. Then we just got into the lives and times of Henderson. The kids went to schools here.

Interviewer: *And then, Tina, did you buy a home off of Water Street?*

Bettina Smith: No.

Interviewer: *And where was it?*

Bettina Smith: The first house we bought was on Elm Street.

Interviewer: *Elm Street.*

Bettina Smith: And I have a picture here of – we put on an addition: the whole of the back of the house.

Interviewer: *Right.*

Bettina Smith: One huge family room and that was just wonderful. We started using it when we got the studs up. It seemed like just right away. And then we bought another house on Major [Avenue]. And then we built our first house on Black Ridge, and then we sold that and built our house on –

Interviewer: *On Fairway.*

Bettina Smith: – 15 East Fairway and we finished that in 1970 and lived there until we sold in 2006.

Interviewer: *Beautiful. And how many children?*

Bettina Smith: I have three children and all of them have contributed to my 22 great-grandchildren which is –

Interviewer: *Isn't that wonderful.*

Bettina Smith: – in fact, I'm probably proudest of all, of all those little kids. So only two of them are here, two of the grandkids.

Interviewer: *And all three went to school here?*

Bettina Smith: Yeah, all three went to school here.

Interviewer: *Basic High.*

Bettina Smith: Basic High. So I feel very much that Henderson is my home. Lived in Southern California for a long time, but my life, you know, like most women's lives, really begin when you have your family.

Interviewer: *Absolutely.*

Bettina Smith: You're at that phase of it anyway.

Interviewer: *Tina, did you have some pictures that you wanted to share with us?*

Bettina Smith: Well, I was talking about the yard that my folks built. I don't know if you can get them –

Interviewer: *No, I'm good.*

Bettina Smith: We could get enlargements, but this one shows my father, Walter Ball, and my three children, Becky, Pete, and Christie, just the three of them in this picture. And that's at the corner of the front yard. And this one has my mother in it. And that's right around toward the front door where they had the carport. And she had beautiful ivy there that changed color in the fall, and it was so pretty. Can you get it?

Interviewer: *Mhm.*

Bettina Smith: And that's all I have for right – in that. Oh, and here, I don't – doubt if you could get that, but this shows the addition kind of on Elm Street that made our house seem so spacious.

Interviewer: *And what year was that?*

Bettina Smith: That was about 1950-something. I've lost track of some dates. [laughter] Well as long as I'm – this might show what a typical Christmas at my mother's at 27 Nevada Way.

Interviewer: *Oh, it sure does. No, that's good.*

Bettina Smith: Yeah. I don't think that's Christmas at all. I take that back. That was just a visit. I do someplace have the Christmas one. Well now, these are unrelated to the subject, but as it turns out, my future daughter-in-law was Marilyn Mendiff, and her mother was a schoolteacher here.

Interviewer: *Right.*

Bettina Smith: And she and Pete were in school. She went to St. Peter's.

Interviewer: *And graduate of Basic High School.*

Bettina Smith: Yeah. I have – oh, I should have had these better organized. Maybe I'll – we'd better change the subject. Because I have a picture of her gradua – oh, this is the graduating class of St. Peter's.

Interviewer: *And does it have a year?*

Bettina Smith: 1952 at St. Peter's. And this would be my folk's house, which you can see across Boulder Highway.

Interviewer: *Right.*

Bettina Smith: And that's the back view of the house. That was kind of interesting but some of these other pictures that I have – taking another part of Henderson history, the Industrial Days, and this was a float that was sponsored by Industries World, it was called. And it has sections of it with the different industries here in Henderson.

Interviewer: *Let me see if I can get that in there. Very good.*

Bettina Smith: Did you get it?

Interviewer: *Yeah.*

Bettina Smith: Okay. Well, do you want to know more of the history of these pictures? We can separate these pictures.

Interviewer: *Okay. So I just shut it off for a second. Okay, so which ones do you have? Those are great.*

Bettina Smith: This is a fabulous picture.

Interviewer: *Oh, my gosh.*

Bettina Smith: That's the first superintendent of schools, Ben Church. Do you remember that name?

Interviewer: *Oh, my gosh. And who is that?*

Bettina Smith: That was somebody that I don't know.

Interviewer: *Okay, so we're going to talk about this. You're going to comment about Ben Church and what you just said to me. And who's that?*

Bettina Smith: I don't know. I'll ask Jenny Lee if she knows. Makes Mother look so tall. She was so tall.

Interviewer: *Oh my gosh, yeah.*

Bettina Smith: There was something; I don't know what. She was up on a rock or on something, some material, but it was the first snow that they had here in Henderson that anybody remembered.

Interviewer: *And look at your mother's dress.*

Bettina Smith: Yes [laughter] and her little red hair. She had red hair.

Interviewer: *Oh, my, what a socialite!*

Bettina Smith: She was. [laughter]

Interviewer: *Oh, my gosh.*

Bettina Smith: She was a little socialite.

Interviewer: *Yes, she was. And her little feet, weren't they cold in there?*

Bettina Smith: Probably. [laughter] Probably freezing.

Interviewer: *Okay, so we'll talk about that, and then what else do you have?*

Bettina Smith: Well, this is the boys' basketball team.

Interviewer: *And this is like what year? We had '58, '57.*

Bettina Smith: And this is the '63, the cheerleaders at Basic High. And there's Marilyn.

Interviewer: *And there's Marilyn. We need to get Marilyn down here.*

Bettina Smith: Yeah.

Interviewer: *And Marilyn's "girls for investment".*

Bettina Smith: I guess that's what they're called.

Interviewer: *Well, we're going to – you know what, if I could make copies of those so we could get them up on the Web site –*

Bettina Smith: You know, you can have them. I don't think any of us really want them.

Interviewer: *Oh, no, no. Those are – oh, gosh, your kids, this is their memorabilia. But I will like to make copies of them. Look how gorgeous she is.*

Bettina Smith: Yeah, she was very pretty. She still is.

Interviewer: *Look at that.*

Bettina Smith: She still is very pretty.

Interviewer: *You know, we don't see floats like this anymore.*

Bettina Smith: No, no, we gave that up pretty much.

Interviewer: *Oh, these were the days, I'm sorry.*

Bettina Smith: Well, they were wonderful days for all of us here. Here's my mother. Well, you can't – couldn't even begin to print that. That's when she retired.

Interviewer: *After seventeen years of service, the schools of – can you read that, and we'll talk about that? Okay, so we'll talk about that and then – we already did this one. Which nun was that? Look at that. St. Peter's, Woodrick, we need to get ahold of Woodrick.*

Bettina Smith: He's still living.

Interviewer: *I don't know where their kids are. Look at that. I think that was a couple of grades.*

Bettina Smith: It might have been both schools at graduation.

Interviewer: *Maybe. Wow.*

Bettina Smith: But I don't think you want too much into Hal's history because –

Interviewer: *Well, he's very significant here.*

Bettina Smith: Actually, yes.

Interviewer: *You know, he really is.*

Bettina Smith: I love this one.

Interviewer: *Yeah.*

Bettina Smith: *"71-year-old freshman. No rookie."*

Interviewer: *No rookie. No, he's significant. So let's talk about the old St. Peter's and you got 1952. And then you can say something like, "we're going to put them up on the Web site," Web site photos on the Historical Society. And this is Marilyn's Girl Scout. Okay. And then, what was – oh, no, we've got to talk –*

Bettina Smith: *These two –*

Interviewer: *And then you're into Hal. What can we get together on Hal?*

Bettina Smith: *Oh, I've got so much.*

Interviewer: *I know you do.*

Bettina Smith: *I've got tons. Here was a few pictures from his political years.*

Interviewer: *Oh, what fun.*

Bettina Smith: *Here's out in back of my mother's house with my older daughter. This was later, because she was four years old, I think, on that.*

Interviewer: *Gosh. That's a great photo.*

Bettina Smith: *You know, I thought it was –*

Interviewer: *Oh, no, look, Ruth Bell acquired high honor by BFW.*

Bettina Smith: *Yeah. Well, I have her biography. I have a whole bunch more stuff.*

Interviewer: *Well, I think that biography is pretty good. Do you have Hal's?*

Bettina Smith: *I do.*

Interviewer: *Okay.*

Bettina Smith: *Do you want to go look at those first?*

Interviewer: *No. I want to finish this up right here, and then we'll stop, but we definitely want you to read this about your mom. She was here back in the forties. And, well actually, this one says September 7th, 1961.*

Bettina Smith: We're getting a little bit disjointed here on this.

Interviewer: *Yeah.*

Bettina Smith: How to figure how you do these things. Do you go year to year because you're trying to do the whole family.

Interviewer: *Well, I'm trying to do their whole family and kind of scan everybody in but this could be edited.*

Bettina Smith: I know.

Interviewer: *So we don't need to –*

Bettina Smith: – worry too much.

Interviewer: *Yeah. Okay, let me shut that. Okay, now, here. So you want to talk about – you've already stated how you came. And you first started it with your mother and then how you ended up here, and Hal went to Nellis, and then you decided to stay. You already talked about your three children and – but you really want to say something about – because I don't think we hit it – about –*

Bettina Smith: My mother and her job.

Interviewer: *Yeah.*

Bettina Smith: Yeah. She was just perfect for the job because she was such a –

Interviewer: *Well, let me put this on, okay? Okay, go ahead.*

Bettina Smith: Okay, what – we’re going to go back to my mother, Ruth Ball. She was so perfect for her job as Registrar at the school, which included the junior high and I don’t know how they divided that, because actually the school was built and it went from kindergarten right straight through high school. But she was Registrar, so that, I assume, was the whole school. But anyway she was always helping the kids that had problems, and they knew they could come to her. And I have friends now that speak of how kind she was to them, Jennilee Thayer, for one person. And this picture right here is just historic because it shows the snow. It snowed here, which nobody could believe there was going to be snow on the desert. That was one of our few snowstorms. But this is my mother with Ben Church, who was very close to the very first principal or superintendent of schools, I mean, before Lyle Burkholder. And I’m not sure if there was one in the middle, interim one, or not. But he was very well thought of. And then here’s another picture of her that shows the school yard, how bleak that was, not a blade of grass or a tree. And that was the school the kids had been to. And then this is a later photo, when she retired, with Lyle Burkholder. And he was a wonderful superintendent, wonderful man. And it says that after seventeen years of service to the schools of Henderson, many of them serving Lyle Burkholder, who’s shown presenting the silver serving dish to Mrs. Ruth Ball, who has decided to retire from active duty at the school. Mrs. Ball was working in Henderson when the first schools came to the area, when the schools came to Henderson and they were built as part of the city. She did work at the plant for a short time before in reading instruments, which I hadn’t learned before. But then this picture of the one with the snow is just a rare picture. I think we’ve probably had about four snow storms since, maybe, at the most. It’s in tatters, but anyway it shows my mother’s newspaper article on – accorded a high honor by the VFW for her

– “school registrars selected members of the state VFW as the outstanding Nevada citizen, Mrs. Ball was presented with a gold plaque for her honor. Mrs. Ball was selected as a representative group of Henderson citizens on the outstanding citizen in the community,” and she goes on to tell of all her different activities. She was active with the Commission to solve the local problems. “In her church work, Mrs. Ball is a member of the Community Church Court, Educations Leader of the young people’s Christian education, she serves on the church’s music programs and is the organist, and she has long been associated with children. She had a deep interest in children of all ages and sponsored a teenage dance program, weekend dance program for them so they would have some place to spend their dance activities. She’s a member of Clark County YMC Board of Directors, serves on the newly organized YMCA Committee. She was made a life member of the PTA in appreciation of her work with both elementary and high school students. She has been the sponsor of the senior class at the high school for a number of years, is active with the girls’ Athletic Association. In club work, Mrs. Ball is the Director of the Phi Chapter of the Beta Sigma Phi. She is also the sorority’s Cultural Director; she is a member of the Business and Professional Women’s Club where she serves as Educational and Vocational Chairman. Mrs. Ball is the mother of a veteran. Her son is serving as a doctor in Japan in the Army at the time. He elected to stay in the Service when the war was closed. He is a commissioned officer. Her daughter is married and is now residing in Washington State. She is the grandmother of two children and is very proud of them. Friends of Mrs. Ball will be pleased to learn of the honor given her but they feel that it was only just because knowing her, they knew her tremendous appeal.”

Interviewer: *The ice cream socials served as fund raisers for the VFW?*

Bettina Smith: When they first started, the women all had to make homemade cake, but that soon disappeared and they started buying the cakes. But they would decorate the yard up with Japanese lanterns.

Interviewer: *Wow.*

Bettina Smith: And it was really beautiful; they had music, and I think Anderson Dairy donated the ice cream, which was wonderful. So they had to bring over the big freezer to put the ice cream in that made a permanent little place on the grass. The grass would never grow after that sitting on it. So it – shut it off. [slide projector fan mechanical noise]

Interviewer: *All right.*

Bettina Smith: Okay, getting back to my little biography, it's important for me to realize that as independent as I was, I really went along with Hal on all of his politics and there were things that he got into as well as my own, and I became a charter member of the Henderson Republican Women. And during campaigns, we all became known as Hal's Gals. And I was a charter member of the Clark County Heritage Museum and was named by Governor Richard Bryant to be on a roll of excellence on volunteerism and I was presented with an award by Commissioner Bruce Woodbury, and I was a member of the Rose de Lima Auxiliary, and as well, I was a volunteer. And we have done a great deal of traveling; we did a great deal of traveling and got – and some of the committees that Hal was on got us around the State, and he was on the Western States Water Council, so we went to all the Western States, had a wonderful time wherever we were. And we've also been able to travel all over the world, which has been a great pleasure for both of us and enjoyed all the sights, especially the museums for me. And we have three children, eight grandchildren and twenty-two great grandchildren at the moment. If

I had time, I'd tell about all of them. Okay, and then for Hal's biography, to get it down into a few words, he was – well, one of the most important things that everybody needs to know is that he teamed up with Bill Swackhamer. They went to Washington and successfully got Congress to return the federal tax on coin operated machines in Nevada for the Nevada education. Vice-president – oh, at the time, he was Vice-President of the Prudential Securities, and in charge of the Nevada operations for municipal plans and bonds, and we traveled with that too, which was fun, and sent us back to Chicago and New York to bond – I forget what they call it – to bond final – stuff they have to take to get the money.

[break in recording]

Interviewer: – *when you dropped that?*

Bettina Smith: Okay, this is the annual of the school that was dedicated to Hal in 1990 and it was – it's a lovely school and doing well and our Siberian Husky, Moki, was the logo of the school and still today they use what they call Moki money, so if they get an A on a test they get five dollars of – each little certificate has a picture of Moki on it and you can go to the school store and buy pencils and things, which is kind of fun. I kept a copy of my thank you letter.

[laughter]

Interviewer: *Tina, do you mind to go back and read a little bit more of Hal's biography?*

Bettina Smith: Yes, that'll be fine. Hal was in the U.S. Navy in World War II and the Korean. And he's a retired captain, USN, on her thirty years of service. He was also PTA President of Basic High School in 1962, Henderson Charter Commission in 1964, Henderson Civil Service Board, and that was in – I think I lost my place here, Nevada Sampling in 1966 to '72, State Senate, 1968 to 1974, and the State Board of Education, Chairman of the Committee to study Las Vegas

Wash pollution to Lake Mead, Water Research Advising Committee, Western States Water Council, California/Nevada, Tri-State Compact – that was where we traveled too – Veteran’s Cemetery Committee, Clark County Ethics Commission, Committee studying means to finance transportation improvement in Clark County, and I’ve read to you about getting the slot machine money. That was a great break, and for a while it went one hundred percent to education. Mind you, it was supposed to, but some of the legislators in their great wisdom decided they needed part of that money for other projects, so they dipped into it, and it’s never been replaced.

[break in recording]

– loved their little city and wanted to live here and make it a safe and happy place for their children. And I think that was the main thing for everybody. And fortunately we were lucky enough to have enough people around that could do that, could accomplish that, and we were happy to be a part of it. And our kids too, they –

[break in recording]

Interviewer: *Well, Tina, I noticed here on your desk that you have a tribute to the 50th year of Henderson that Janet Brenner did with her fourth graders.*

Bettina Smith: Oh, yeah, do you want to see that?

Interviewer: *Could you talk about that a little bit?*

Bettina Smith: Oh, sure. It’s a wonderful little booklet that helps with the history of Henderson. I believe she did it with Henderson’s 50th anniversary but she has done the complete alphabet. Oh, do you want to get a picture of each page?

Interviewer: *That’s good. Yeah, sure, why don’t we.*

Bettina Smith: “A” is for Anderson Camp. Now this is the camp that my father stayed in when he first came here. You realize this was nothing but desert. You’ve heard that before, but it is really true and it was canvas around the side that made the protection from the elements. And they had a cafeteria there. It was called Tent City, built so the workers at Basic Magnesium would have a place to live. It was across Boulder Highway from the hospital. The dining room was big enough for 2200 men to sit down and eat at the same time. The chow hall was open twenty-four hours and served 20,000 meals a day. Can you believe that? And “B” was for Basic Magnesium which started the whole thing, and they had more than 10,000 workers building the plant, which is amazing. It started in 1941 just to make metal called magnesium. And I’ll have to go through this because there’s too many. And here’s the Dominican Hospital and the nuns. You see, the children designed all these pages and did the art work. And it was going to be sold as a color book. And, well, “G” is for Green Valley. That came a lot later. And here’s a picture of the first – not the first mayor. The city was named after this –

Interviewer: *We have a photo of Mr. Henderson –*

Bettina Smith: Oh, did they –

Interviewer: – *which says “H” is for Mr. Henderson.*

Bettina Smith: Oh, Charles, yeah, Charles B. Henderson.

Interviewer: *And can we read that just for a second?*

Bettina Smith: Yes, “H” is for Mr. Henderson. Charles B. Henderson was the grandson of Nevada’s second governor. Charles was elected as U.S. Senator from Nevada. He served on the Nation’s Recovery Finance Corporation in front of the construction of BMI. Mr. Henderson never visited the town that was named after him. And then Industrial Days, you saw we have

pictures of some of the floats from Industrial Day. That was always a big time and everybody came and loved it. First of all, it was held in 1951, a celebration to showcase the factories. And they had a parade with floats and marching bands. And then “G” is for James Gibson who was one of the outstanding legislators that the State produced, and he was a good friend of Hal’s also. And the public library in downtown Henderson is named in honor of him. His son, Jim, is the current mayor of Henderson. And “O” is for old timer [laughter] which is Hal as he served in the Navy. His ribbons and his – and this is cute: Janet gave me some of these pictures that some of the students had colored in. Look at that one. That’s beautiful. And this is really truly a Navy uniform if ever you saw one, and there he is, all in his blues. I really appreciate having these pictures. The thing about this book is, it’s good for everybody because somebody has done –

Interviewer: *It is a tribute.*

Bettina Smith: – any of these little things. And “P” is for PEPCON and I love the way they did the flames to show the devastation that that produced. And here are some of the bathing beauties on Industrial Days. “Q” is for the queen of Industrial Days. “R” is for the Royal Casino. Where was that? I don’t know that.

Interviewer: *The Royal Casino worked with Sam Boyd and his sister Charlotte managed the Royal Casino.*

Bettina Smith: I didn’t realize that was its name. And “S” is for schools. Townsite School was the first school in the area, built in October of ’42. “T” is for Townsite. Now there is an exact drawing of my parents’ home with the patio overhang.

Interviewer: *And what does that say that – for “T” is for Townsite?*

Bettina Smith: “T” is for Townsite. One thousand Townsite houses were built for BMI workers and their families in the early ’40s. These redwood houses were precut and assembled when they arrived. The homes were meant to be temporary, to be taken down when the factory was no longer needed. Many are still in use today, which is true, that area is just going along. “U” is for undertaker, just our mortuary. Victory Village was where everybody shopped.

Interviewer: *And what does it say there?*

Bettina Smith: No, that doesn’t mean – no.

Interviewer: *Yeah, “V” is for Victory Village.*

Bettina Smith: Victory Village was a five hundred unit apartment complex with several one-story dormitories and three hundred and twenty single men. Streets in this housing remain for BMI plant bosses. It was torn down in the 1970s. And “Y” is for the Youth Center, which was just the most marvelous thing when they finally did get it going. And that was – my mother worked on that too. She was always out for the youth of this city.

Interviewer: *And it was used for fund raisers, and it says the organization held fund raisers.*

Bettina Smith: Yes, they did. And the biggest event on the stage was a performance with Frank Sinatra and Sophie Tucker and Dennis Day donated, donated their talent that night. And here “Z” is for Zenoff. Morry Zenoff bought the *Boulder City News* in 1948. Three years later, he started the *Henderson Home News*. His editorials were called *Morry’s Story*. Everybody that was anything got into Morry’s column. [laughter] But that is just a real cute little history of Henderson.

[break in recording]

Interviewer: *Okay.*

Bettina Smith: Now, we left off – are you on? We left off one important thing that I don't believe anybody realizes: how many mayors the City of Henderson has had. First was James French, William Byrne, William Hampton, Estes McDoniel, Cruz Olague, Richard Stewart, Sr., Lorin Williams, Leroy Zike, Lorna Kesterson, Robert Groesbeck, James Gibson – which – he was just replaced. He ran out of his tenure and couldn't run again.

Interviewer: *And now we have Mayor Andy Hafen.*

Bettina Smith: Andy Hafen is the Mayor now, who was also on the City Council all these years.

[end of recording]