

AN INTERVIEW WITH BERNICE AUCHOBERRY: A CONTRIBUTION TO A SURVEY OF LIFE IN CARSON VALLEY, FROM FIRST SETTLEMENT THROUGH THE 1950S

Interviewee: Bernice Auchoberry

Interviewed: 1984

Published: 1984

Interviewer: R. T. King

UNOHP Catalog #108

Description

Bernice Auchoberry, a Washoe, was born in 1914, near the end of a fifty-year period during which many Washoe families lived and worked on ranches owned by whites, scattered throughout the valley. Her father was a laborer on one of the largest of these, and Bernice eventually worked in the Minden home of the ranch's owners.

Mrs. Auchoberry's generation spans an era of cultural transition for her people. At the time of her birth most adult Washoe were monolingual and continued traditional practices associated with food gathering and ritual. Overcoming the social handicap of being a Washoe in a non-Washoe world, she eventually mastered English, gained a formal education and acquired the ability to operate in both societies, as have many of her contemporaries.

In this 1984 interview Bernice Auchoberry discusses some important elements of Washoe life in Carson Valley from the turn of the century through the 1950s. While most of her observations derive from personal experience, some are based on information handed down through her family. Of particular interest are descriptions of traditional Washoe foraging areas in the vicinity of Carson Valley, economic and social relations among the Washoe and other groups in the valley, and comments about the survival of certain Washoe rituals into mid-twentieth century.

AN INTERVIEW WITH BERNICE AUCHOBERRY

**AN INTERVIEW WITH BERNICE AUCHOBERRY:
A CONTRIBUTION TO A SURVEY OF LIFE IN CARSON VALLEY, FROM
FIRST SETTLEMENT THROUGH THE 1950S**

FUNDED WITH A MATCHING GRANT FROM THE
DEPARTMENT OF INTERIOR, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE AND THE
NEVADA DIVISION OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION AND ARCHEOLOGY

An Oral History Conducted by R. T. King
April 3, 1984

University of Nevada Oral History Program

Copyright 1984
University of Nevada Oral History Program
Mail Stop 0324
Reno, Nevada 89557
unohp@unr.edu
<http://www.unr.edu/oralhistory>

All rights reserved. Published 1984.
Printed in the United States of America

Publication Staff:
Director: R.T. King

University of Nevada Oral History Program Use Policy

All UNOHP interviews are copyrighted materials. They may be downloaded and/or printed for personal reference and educational use, but not republished or sold. Under “fair use” standards, excerpts of up to 1000 words may be quoted for publication without UNOHP permission as long as the use is non-commercial and materials are properly cited. The citation should include the title of the work, the name of the person or people interviewed, the date of publication or production, and the fact that the work was published or produced by the University of Nevada Oral History Program (and collaborating institutions, when applicable). Requests for permission to quote for other publication, or to use any photos found within the transcripts, should be addressed to the UNOHP, Mail Stop 0324, University of Nevada, Reno, Reno, NV 89557-0324. Original recordings of most UNOHP interviews are available for research purposes upon request.

CONTENTS

Preface to the Digital Edition	ix
Original Preface	xi
Introduction	xiii
A Note on Orthography	
An Interview with Bernice Auchoberry	1
Photographs	19
Original Index: For Reference Only	21

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;

The University of Nevada
Oral History Program
Mailstop 0324
University of Nevada, Reno 89557
(775) 784-6932

INTRODUCTION

The Washo Indians of Carson Valley are today concentrated in Dresslerville, a community south of Gardnerville. Bernice Auchoberry is a Washo who was born in 1914, near the end of a 50 year period during which many Washo families lived and worked on ranches owned by whites, scattered throughout the valley. Her father was a laborer on one of the largest of these and Bernice eventually worked in the Minden home of the ranch's owners.

Mrs. Auchoberry's generation spans an era of cultural transition. At the time of her birth most adult Washo were monolingual and continued traditional practices associated with food gathering and ritual. Overcoming the social handicap of being a Washo in a non-Washo world, she eventually mastered English, gained a formal education and acquired the ability to operate in both societies, as have many of her contemporaries.

In this 1984 interview Bernice Auchoberry discusses some important elements of Washo life in Carson Valley from the turn of the

century through the 1950s. While most of her observations derive from personal experience, some are based on information handed down through her family. Of particular interest are descriptions of traditional Washo foraging areas in the vicinity of Carson Valley, economic and social relations among the Washo and other groups in the valley, and comments about the survival of certain Washo rituals into mid-twentieth century.

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.



BERNICE AUCHOBERRY

1984

AN INTERVIEW WITH BERNICE AUCHOBERRY

Bernice Auchoberry: I was born in September 16, 1914, in Carson Valley.

R. T. King: Do you have any idea about where the approximate location was? Where was your family living?

Minden, Nevada.

Right in Minden itself?

Somewhere around there, yes.

And your mother's name was what?

Sadie Jo Smokey.

And your father's name?

William Smokey.

Do you have any idea what your father might have been doing at that time?

He was a ranch laborer.

Whose ranch did he work for?

Dangberg's.

Is that the Home Ranch that he was on?

I think the Home Ranch at that time.

Did he live in the bunkhouse that they had, or did he live at home?

No. We had our own house. I remember we lived by a river there. That big river that runs through the ranch, and we had a house there, a regular house. It was on the Dangberg property, but we lived there. I remember that.

Do you think you could find the location of where your house was?

I think so. Unless the river banks have changed. It was close to the river there.

Were other Washo families living nearby?

No, just relatives, I guess. At one time they used to all live together like that, but by my time I think maybe we were just there alone, the family.

Do you know what sorts of things your father was doing for the Dangbergs? Did he ever talk about it?

He was an irrigator.

And that would be only part of the year then, wouldn't it?

Yes, but he worked year round there. I don't know what else he did during the winter, maybe feeding; they had a lot of cattle. But his main job was irrigating.

Did he ever talk about what the Dangbergs were like to work for?

Well, no. He never said anything. I guess they were all treated the same. All the ranches were the same; they had the Indian employees. I guess they were pretty decent to them.

Did all the ranches pay the same?

Some more or less. I remember talking about the stackers; they stacked hay in the summer. They got a dollar and a half a day. There was big wages in that time! [laughs]

That's in the 1920s or even before?

I don't know when, but I remember that it's what it was, a dollar and a half a day. They got paid the most, the stackers. I don't know what mowers got paid, maybe a dollar.

Did your mother ever work for the Dangbergs in their home?

No. She never worked there. She always stayed home. Of course, there was so many of us.

How many of you were there?

All together there's ten. They had big families in those days. I don't know how we were fed, but we were. We had our grandmother, his mother, Grandma. She always helped us. She always worked in different homes, and she always helped with the food. In those days food was cheap, I guess. She'd work on ranches or something. They'd give her food besides what few dollars they gave her, and she'd always bring that food over to us because there was just she and Grandpa. She helped that way.

What were their names, your grandparents?

Mandy Smokey, that's my grandma, and Johnny Smokey, I think, was my grandfather's name. We only knew him by his Indian name.

What was his Indian name?

Dabá·ku. That's where we always figured the Smokey came in! It was said it sounded like tobacco— Dabá·ku. And so his last name was Smokey. Maybe it was just given to him by his employees; I wouldn't know.

What was your grandmother's Indian name?

'ú·gi, but I never knew her name till after she died when we had a probate hearing, in Stewart there. She never told us. I don't know whether she was ashamed of it or what.

What would your mother's Indian name have been?

'á·yaya.

And your father's name?

I don't know if he had one. I never knew it.

Did these names have any meaning other than as names?

Some of the names do, but not in my family.

dabá·ku and 'á·yaya don't mean anything?

No, it's just the way, I don't know how he was named that, but that was his name. So we always think that Smokey was derived from that.

What's your Indian name?

I don't have one.

Did that habit die out?

I guess so. I think it was because just the older ones have the Indian names. I think there were just 2 in my family that had Indian names, and one of them was Teresa [Jackson]. Her name was Pótas. That was her Indian name. Oh, she hates that! [laughing]

Why?

I don't know. It's just the way it sounds, I guess.

The other one, my brother's name was Patinyó·(n), something like that. It didn't mean anything particular; he was just named that, I guess.

You were living on the Dangberg property when you were born?

Yes.

Over on the Home Ranch near the west branch of the Carson River?

Yes.

I hope that some day we'll be able to locate that. I've already talked with Ruth Achard and Margaret McDonald over there. And they've told me something about what life was like back at the turn of the century on the Dangberg ranch, but I'd like to get the Washo perspective on it as well. You said that your grandmother and grandfather were bringing food to your family?

All the times, yes.

Did they live nearby?

They lived on Minden somewhere. Right where that new jailhouse is now. That's where they lived. Of course, Grandma worked around in the various homes there in Minden. I don't know whether they were on somebody's property. I guess they must have been on maybe county property. But they had a little house there, that they lived in.

Was it a little house that they had built themselves?

I think so. I think my dad put it up for them.

Did your dad build the house you lived in, too?

Yes, he built that.

What did he build it out of?

Lumber.

Did he get that from the Dangbergs?

He probably bought it. Like I say, everything was cheap in those days, and then the older ones growing up helped and they worked.

They'd work outside of the house?

Yes, they worked at different places.

About how old were you when you started working?

I was 15.

What did you do?

I worked in a Dangberg home there in Minden, that big home there, the big house that they had. That was my first place. Then I worked ever since, till just last year when I developed knee trouble. I had to have a operation on my knee, and since that time I haven't worked. But till that time I worked all the time.

Is the big house you're talking about the one that Grace Dangberg lives in now?

Yes, that one. Grace was there, and of course her whole family.

She must have been about your age, maybe a little bit older than you?

She's older than I. I'll be 70 pretty soon. I think she must be in her 50s now.

She is. I think she's almost Fred Dressler's age. That would make her up in the mid 50s, so she is quite a bit older than you. She must have been up into her twenties, maybe 30 years old, by the time you started working there.

Yes.

What kind of work did you do in the Dangberg house?

Just housework, everything: helped in the kitchen and did cleaning every day, every blessed day! [laughing]

Can you recall what you were being paid then?

It wasn't very much. I remember after I was out of high school I worked in the Virginia ranch over here for Mrs. Parks's family—Cardinal. We used to get paid 50 cents a day.

Was that everybody? Was it just kids, or was it adults and kids, too?

Just probably kids because I was just young. We thought that was big money. Both my sister and I worked there for 50 cents a day.

Where did you buy food?

We bought food at the stores.

At the co-op or the Minden Mercantile?

Minden. Yes, they had a big store there where the railroad depot used to be; down below in there was a great big store. It was owned by Macks, I think.

By the Mack family?

I think Henry Mack. There's the other Mack that had the big ranch. Morris Mack, yes. Morris Mack had the big ranch, down there in the valley, in Minden. It was his

brother that had this store. My grandma worked for them.

What did she do in the store?

She just worked in their home. She didn't work in the store. No, she just worked in their home, did the washing and all that.

Did your family have a garden?

I don't know, I don't think so. Maybe Grandma did. She always raised things. I know she always had berry bushes, and she always had chickens. I remember her hauling her chickens to the Chinese restaurants in Carson City in her little horse buggy.

Did your father do much hunting? Was he still bringing in the same sorts of food the Washo would've eaten before the white man came to this valley?

I don't know. I don't remember that, not much. He wasn't much for killing. He didn't like to kill, not even deer. I don't remember him ever bringing in deer, no, because he didn't believe in killing.

What other kinds of foods were you eating? Were you still eating the traditional Washo foods? Were you eating any pine nuts and acorns and things?

Yes, oh sure. We always went out every fall, every September, and we'd go out and gather nuts. We'd get enough for winter, and then of course, we always went to the Placerville area where the acorns grow. That's where we got it. I remember going with them, and picking them. They were the easiest to pick; they were bag. You'd just put it right in

the buckets and put it in the sacks. You could get 4 or 5 sacks. Lasts a winter.

Would you trade any pine nuts to the California Indians for acorns?

No, not that I know of. Maybe they did in the olden days, but we just got this far ourselves; we didn't see anybody.

You said you went to the Douglas County school system. Which school exactly were you attending at that time?

We had a school out here an Dresslerville.

You were born about the time that Dresslerville was established?

We moved here. I didn't know how old I was. I was old enough to start school.

So that would have been around 1920 or 1921 then, if you were born in 1914?

Yes. That's when we moved to Dresslerville.

Do you have any idea why you moved here? Did your family ever talk about why they left the home they had and moved here to Dresslerville?

This would be more like your own. You see, we were on Dangberg property there.

Dressler gave this Dresslerville to the Indians to live on. The old Dresslerville, not the new Dresslerville, what we called the old Dresslerville all through here. He gave that to the Indians to live on, and they figured that this was the place to be where you can have your own place. And we had a home over here in the corner. The same house that we had down at the Dangberg ranch, I think. But it

all was moved up here, but I think it was the same house. I don't remember too much about it. I started school here.

You think they may have dragged it out?

At that time, Douglas County wouldn't take Indian children. It's not too long ago that they started going to school there, but Douglas County wouldn't accept Indians. They didn't like Indians, period!

I've heard about some Indian children attending school in Genoa, back in the 1920s and earlier.

Yes?

That was a little bit different then, I take it?

It must have been because here they weren't allowed to go to school here. That's why we had a school out here in Dresslerville.

Were you taught English in the school here in Dresslerville?

Yes. As a matter of fact, I didn't know any English when I started school. I didn't know yes or no, believe it or not. Then I started school, that's where I learned.

When did you first begin playing with white children? Were you allowed to play with white children or non-Indian children?

No, we never associated with the whites.

Right on up through high school you never associated with them?

Oh, this was when I was going to school here. I left about when I was 13, and then by

that time...guess we did sort of, but I don't remember going to Douglas.

When you went to town you weren't allowed in certain places. You couldn't eat in the restaurants. They had a soda fountain run by the Hussmans here in town. You could go in there and order ice cream, but you couldn't sit down at the table and eat it or anything. You weren't allowed to eat in any of the public places owned by white.

There was a restaurant that was owned by Chinese that they're still here; they're retired now. But we weren't allowed in their restaurant not because they didn't like us, but because the white people won't come in if the Indians were allowed in the front part where they served meals. You could go around in the back and order your meal. They had tables back in there for the Indians.

This is the Chinese people?

The Chinese people, yes. They wanted their trade, but they couldn't, wouldn't allow them in the front because if they did then the white people wouldn't come.

What was the name of that Chinese family?

Kwan. Edna and Wallace Kwan. Yes, I guess it was theirs. They lived there in town.

They're in there right now?

Yes, they're retired. They live there in Gardnerville.

About what period of time are we talking about here when we talk about the Chinese restaurant? Do you remember the first time you went into it? Do you remember when it was open for business? What years? About how old were you?

I was out of high school, I think. But I remember this went on for I don't know how long. This wasn't just the Chinese restaurant. There was the Rohbeck place. That's where that Leukenberry place is now.

Rohbeck's place you say?

Yes, it was Rohbeck's place at that time, but now it's Dean Leukenberry. But Rohbeck's, it was a big hotel. They served meals, of course rooms, I guess, and then meals. And we always had to go in the back and order what they called big pan—big pan full of food for the whole family, and then we'd take it out and eat out in the back someplace.

Would they serve you the same food as they served non-Indians?

Yes, same food, but just weren't allowed in the front. That's not the only place we weren't allowed. There was a theater there and they had upstairs and a downstairs. The downstairs had nice cushioned seats, and upstairs had rough. That's where we had to go; we couldn't sit down there with the white people. We had to go upstairs.

What was the name of that theater?

I don't remember, but Graunke's owned it. I'd say that's how it was: when we couldn't associate with the white people downstairs, we had to go upstairs. [chuckling]

What were they doing with the black people? Would the black people have to sit upstairs, too?

There were hardly any black people.

I know there were several families; the Palmer family was one.

Probably, but I don't know. We were probably in the same category. They're all dark.

What about the Chinese?

I don't know. I couldn't speak for them. That's how we were treated. I imagine they'd be the same. We would be all in the same category.

About when did that practice end?

I don't know. During the First World War it was still on.

Another thing, the Indians weren't allowed in town after 6:00; when the whistle blew you had to be on your way home. If you were caught on the street or anywhere you got put in jail.

Did you ever know anybody who got put in jail?

Oh yes, a whole bunch of them—my father included. And this is during the First World War.

First World War? That's when you were born, during the First World War.

It was the First World War, I think, because my father said he was one of them that got picked up. Maybe this was before I was born. Anyway, he always told that story that he was picked up. Then he had a call from the selective board to report for duty, and so he got mad. My father was a smart man. He said, "What am I fighting for? If this is the way we're treated then why should I report for duty?" It came to trial, and he won his case as he had said he wasn't going. He had nothing to fight for, the way we were treated.

That's during the First World War, before you were born?

Yes. But he talked about it, about how he was treated. How we were treated, I mean, and he wasn't going. He won his case; he didn't have to go.

Did he tell you how long he was left in jail when he was picked up?

No, he never told us that. But he was picked up with a bunch of other fellows.

In your own lifetime, have you ever known anybody to be put in jail for being in town after curfew?

I couldn't say, but I know there has been cases like that right along.

Can you think of any other ways that Indians were treated differently from non-Indian people in the Carson Valley during your life?

Well, like I said, we weren't allowed to mingle with the whites in anyplace, for one thing. And a person really hardly got paid anything. But I guess it was either that or starve, and so we always worked cheaply than anybody else, I guess. That's the way they were treated. They'd hire whites, too, but they were always paid more because they were white.

Would they hire whites to do the same work that Washos were doing?

Yes, there was a lot of them worked on ranches. There were a lot of poor people, poor families too, the white people. They got paid more.

I've talked with the Dangbergs about the Home Ranch, and they've told me some things about a separate bunkhouse that they had there for Washo cowhands.

Maybe the single ones. But there were so many of us we couldn't fit in any bunkhouse that they had! [laughing]

They also said that they fed the Washo cowhands—not the cowboys, but the ranch hands—separately from the white ranch hands.

They probably did; anyplace that they gathered, we had to be separate. Segregation. [chuckling]

Did you ever know any Paiutes when you were growing up? Were there any Paiutes living here in the Carson Valley?

Probably a few; some intermarriages. There's a lot of Paiute and Washo people among here. The Washo men have had Paiute wives and visa versa, but not too many.

From what I've read, in times past the Washo didn't get along with the Paiute very well. When did that change?

That I don't know about. We always got along in my day.

Is there any area within the Carson Valley that might have provided raw material for building old tule huts or for gathering food of any kind? What sort of traditional resource gathering places were there in the Carson Valley during your youth?

We always had a big ceremony before the pine nut picking time, and they'd gather

almost anyplace. Here in Dresslerville they used to have a ceremonial dance before they went picking pine nuts. They always had a dance, an all night affair. Then in the morning they'd pray for the pine nuts and the gathering. People would bring rabbits, and some had gone earlier to get the nuts for the soup; they'd make pine nut soup. They'd have the Indian food—rabbit and pine nut soup, and some acorn if they have it. If some families had it, they'd bring that. They'd put everything together and have a big feast in the morning before they went out, but there was always a big prayer.

And that was always in September?

That was always in September, just before the pine nut season.

Not using the white man's calendar, forget about the fact that it's September. How did the Washo determine that it was the right time to have the dance and the prayer and then go gather pine nuts?

They had ways of checking, like they'd go out and get a cone and then they'd split it with a rock and take the nuts out and see if it's ready.

So it was based on whether or not the pine nuts were ready as opposed to any alignment of stars, and the moon or anything?

I don't know, maybe. But that's how we know when it's ready: we take the cone, split it open with a rock and test it.

How was it decided to hold the dance? Who would decide that that particular day would be the day of the gathering and the dance?

They always had like a chief for that. It wasn't just anybody that would pray; they had to be almost what they call a medicine man- He did the praying—the talking and the praying. It was some older person, or somebody with a little power, or whatever they call it, to pray. This medicine man would pray for the pine nuts and food that was brought in the morning, and they'd have a big feast in the morning before they went out in the hills to gather the nuts.

Was the medicine man always a man? Or was it ever a woman?

Sometimes a woman.

And did it vary from year to year or was it always the same?

Sometimes. Whoever was available that was an older person that knew the ways, how they went about it.

Can you remember the names of any of these people?

Yes. I remember, but she's not living now, this Clara Frank, Tina's mother; she prayed one year. And there was Hank Pete; he used to do that. Of course he's gone. Hank Pete and anybody in his family is entitled to it; an older person, to hold this. To head that dance, but it has to be an older person. It can't be just a young person.

What is the Washo name for that kind of person?

I don't know. I can't remember how we say it. I don't know all the Washo words. [chuckling]

What would be said in the prayer?

Well, to give thanks for the food, to thank the creator for supplying this. Then we'd talk directly to the pine nuts to help us, to make us strong, to help us grow, all that stuff, just like they do for prayer when you ask at the table; it's the same thing.

Is that ceremony still held?

Yes, not so much now like it used to be. I think it's dying out because the younger generation, all they're interested in is getting drunk and raising heck. That's what they do now. Last two years I think there hasn't been any here in Dresslerville.

They're not like they used to. Every year it had to be; it was a must that they do this. But now the old people are gone, the ones that did it, the ones that held that. They're all gone now. There's a few that might, that's entitled to hold that, but like I say they just don't have a good dance any more. They just don't care any more.

Who is alive today who is entitled to hold it?

I think Ramsey Walker could. This Elaine Christensen tried to hold it one year, but that was just a flop and nobody listened to her because she's young. Then she tried to ask Ramsey for help, but he wouldn't do it; but he could. He's one of these guys that's got, know power, whatever you call it. Sort of like a medicine man.

Does that power, that knowledge, come with age alone or is there some kind of special knowledge or special training?

Special, special.

And how do you get that?

It just comes down through the family. Through each family it would be.

Can any family do this?

Yes, any family that knows.

You mentioned that there was a large gathering here at Dresslerville, but also you told me earlier that the largest gathering of Washo in the Carson Valley took place....

This was quite a while, this was the old times.

Tell me about the old times, and how you learned about them.

I heard. It was told to me by my husband's grandfather; he was a native of Topaz up there that way, and he actually took part in the ceremonies that they had there at Double Springs Flat. But that is called differently in Indian; it's got Indian names.

Most people call it Címe' Díme', but he said that wasn't correct. The correct name is Címel Díme'. Címel is whiskers and, of course, Díme' is water. How it got its name when the white people first started traveling and going through, there was always a battle, eventually, with the Washos. I guess they were all over in that area. Our Kind grant goes clear to Bridgeport, and we, the Washos, were in between all the time. They got in a battle with these white people that were there—maybe just a wagon train or something. Not very many. Anyhow, they killed this one man [with a] beard and long whiskers, and they cut his head off. There's natural springs there, where Double Springs is. There's natural spring water

there, and so they put this head on top of the rock there, to be known as Címel Díme'. That's how the place got its name, he told me.

Then they had to scavenge, like at that pine nut time, picking time. That was the main place that everybody came.

All the people from across the valley would go there?

All the people that was going to pick pine nuts came there, from all over. From Loyalton, there's a lot of Washos; used to be a lot of Washos in Loyalton, California. In Reno, Carson, or wherever the Washos were, Woodfords, they'd all come there to that one spot and that's where they held the ceremony. And he said it was maybe 4 or 5 day affair. They just stayed right there and they had their games, their contests, oh, just a big time and they'd dance every night—maybe 4 nights or so. Then in the morning they had their ceremony, food and all that and all the prayers. Then they'd go out and pick pine nuts. It used to be that you weren't supposed to go out in the hills to pick those pine nuts until you attended something like that. It was sacred at that time.

Was that the case any time during your lifetime?

Yes, that's what these dances were for. They were sacred, but now, see, it's ruined, and no drinking was allowed. Indians didn't know what drink was then, and now they say the gods work against you on account of that. They claim that's why there's not pine nuts every year now like there used to be. Because they're punishing us for riot doing this celebrating like we should. I've actually heard them talk and pray to the pine nuts. Now, some of these medicine men say they're

insulted; that's why they don't give us food. That's how it is.

Has a gathering ever been held at Double Springs Flat since you were born? Do you remember one in your own lifetime?

I don't remember. But this man used to say that that's where it was; that was their main place where they did celebrate that.

Was there any other place in the Carson Valley before Dresslerville was founded that the Indians would gather?

There's a place between Stewart and there's a natural hot springs, not the Hobo Hot Springs. No, there was another.

Is the other over to the east a little bit farther?

Yes, not against the foothills; it's in the middle of the valley.

There's some Indian property that's adjacent to it right now?

Probably. That place was another gathering place, I hear. I don't know, I never knew nothing about it.

Was that place used during your lifetime?

I don't think so because I don't know anything about it. The way I heard something about it was from my nephew, Harold Holbrook.

He likes to hunt ducks and all that stuff. He was hunting in there at one time and he found all this arrowheads and artifacts, and so he asked his grandmother. She was living then, Bertha Holbrook. He asked

her did people live there or how come? He said, "I found all these arrowheads." A lot of arrowheads, old bows and all, that he found.

His grandmother said, "Oh, that was a place where we gathered"—where the Washos gathered to hold dances and probably what we call pine nut dances maybe, or whatever. Anyway it was a great gathering place for the Washos at one time, she said.

That would have been during her lifetime?

Her lifetime, yes. That was Harold's grandmother. She's dead here now for 2 or 3 years, I guess.

And about how old is Harold?

Harold must be pretty close [to 40]. He lives in Carson, and he's the one that found that place. We never knew about it. I didn't anyway, and I don't think none of us knew about it, because it was way before our time. But that was one of the big gathering places.

Did you ever talk to anybody else about that or has anybody ever volunteered any information about it?

No. We learned through Harold; he told us about it. Told his mother about it, of course, and then she told us. They ask us if we knew about it, and I said no, I've never heard of it!

We found some things down there as well. We didn't have the time to look a lot; it's about to be turned into a sewage disposal place.

Oh, the tribe should look into that.

Take a look at it. I know that some areas have been marked out for preservation. They're not going to totally inundate the entire area.

Maybe they're just going to pump it into the marsh itself, and save the surrounding land. I don't know, but anyway there's a great deal of construction going on down there and it is being turned into a sewage dump for Incline Village. I need a little bit more information if I can get it from you about that find. About how long ago would your nephew have found that? How old would he have been?

Oh, he was a man; I couldn't say exactly.

Are there any other deposits of Indian artifacts that would lead you to believe that perhaps the Washos had had a permanent camp or a gathering place or any other places like that in this valley? Do you remember any or has anybody told you any?

No, I don't believe so.

Do you know of any place where there might be any rock carvings, any petroglyphs?

I don't know, but the Topaz area was noted for salt. That's the name of the valley, anyway—salt.

The Salt Valley?

Yes. Topaz.

Was this the Washo name for it?

Yes. Salt—'ugá·bi. That means salt. That's where they went to get their salt. That's in my area, where I live, on the east side, and that's where everybody came to get salt. And we never did know. My husband was born and raised there, he claimed that there never was the salt we have today, in stores. But he said there are alkali flats, and he figures that that's what it must have been.

I remember my grandmother saying when they went to get it, they'd get it in cakes, and they'd bake it. They had to bake it in the ground in ashes. Then after it was all dry, crusted off and everything, then they'd crumble it and put it on their food. And that's all she used in her lifetime. She never used the store salt. She always had that in a little sack, and there would be chunks; whenever she wanted salt she'd sprinkle that on there, on her food, and that's all she ever used.

Did your mother and father use that, too?

They may have, but not in our days that I know of. But my grandmother did. That was my mother's mother. That's all she used.

Now is that the same grandmother you were telling me about?

No, this different. This grandmother that helped us with the food and all, that was my father's mother.

What was your mother's name?

Emma.

Do you remember her Washo name?

No, I don't remember. I know her name was Emma.

Was she from the Carson Valley, too?

She lived up in Woodfords most of her life, her married life, I mean. But I think she was from Loyaltan area.

What about her husband? Where was he from?

There.

From Woodfords? And what was his name?

I don't know his name, but his last name must have been Joe. I never saw him or anything like that.

Are there any other places that you can remember here in the valley where Indians might have had permanent camps or that people have told you about even before your lifetime? Have your parents or your grandparents passed on stories to you?

No. All I know is that they always lived wherever they worked. That's where they lived; whole families did that. Like over here at the Dresslers, Fred Dresslers, there was a whole family there, and I don't know how many families, but they were all together there. They were just one family, and they all worked on that ranch and that's what they did in valleys and different places. Wherever they worked is there they lived, and all the relatives come around and they had a village here and there.

Did your family, your grandparents or your mother and father, ever tell you where the Washo lived before the white men came into this valley?

The way I heard, they always lived along the foothills, always along the foothills.

Over toward the Sierras?

Yes, more so than this way.

Not so much back in the Pine Nut Mountains?

No, because there was no ranches close by where they could work.

No, I'm saying before the white man came, where would they live?

Well, that's like I say, that's all I've heard—that they lived on the foothills. Wherever there was water available, springs and all of that.

Where would the best food gathering places have been, let's say the elderberry gathering places? Elderberries are a pretty important part of the diet, aren't they?

Oh, yes. It's in the hills. There's a lot of elderberries along the foothills over there on this side of Genoa. The whole hillside is covered with elderberries.

Is that where most of the Washo would go to gather elderberries?

Yes.

Over near Genoa?

They go all over, but they had the most there in one bunch.

Yes. About where is that today if I wanted to go look at the elderberry patches—to the south and a little bit east of Genoa?

Yes.

Toward the valley?

No, towards the west, towards the mountain; it's on the hillside.

And to the south, is it between Genoa and Walley's springs?

I think so. But Teresa, she probably knows more. She's lived here all her life. She knows more about all this, and she gathers all this Indian food and she makes jelly and cans it.

You can do that with elderberries and wild chokecherries. She makes jelly out of that. You get that up at Woodfords area. She's done all this and she knows where they do this.

And, of course, there are the onions, the green onions. I don't know if you know about them.

What's the Indian name for that?

Bóšdi'. It grows way up high, mountains. There's a lot of it up there at Monitor Pass; that's where we go to get it. There's different areas, but it doesn't grow all over, just certain spots; you have to know where to go. But we usually go to Monitor Pass because it's all over there on top of the pass. They're something like chives, they look like chives, but you can smell the onion in them.

How do you use them? Do you eat them raw?

Oh, you can eat them raw. You can eat it with your meals like especially if you have meat. It's just like onion. It goes good with that. I usually make salad; just take lettuce and that and then chop it up and then mix it with the lettuce to make salad. You can scramble eggs. Any way you use chives you can use. It's good in scrambled eggs.

When's the right season for gathering that?

The latter part of May and June, but that's where we go to get it. That's a real Indian food.

What was the name for elderberries?

Bá · du', and then the chokecherries is Cámdu'.

The chokecherries you say were gathered down near Woodfords?

Yes, around that area there. That makes delicious jelly, also.

When you were a young girl growing up did you eat primarily Indian foods or were you eating white foods? Tell me what a typical meal would have been. What were your favorite foods? What did you and your family eat.

Anything we could eat! [laughs] I remember we used to go out here. There was a lot of sego lily.

Sego lily?

Yes. We'd dig it, and then the buds of it are about like that on the bottom. That's the part we cooked. You either eat in raw or cooked. And we used to gather enough to cook it like potatoes; you eat it like potatoes.

You say out here. Do you mean the Dresslerville area?

Out here, all over. Yes. Dresslerville. It grows all over. At certain times of the year, earlier I guess.

Do you think it grows all over the valley, or only in this area?

Well, a whole bunch in this area. I guess they have it here and there. You see it every once in a while in the mountains. They had a lot of it here.

Is there a Washo name for the sego lily?

Yes, [koksi']. Now I'm thinking about something else. dé-guš—it's something like carrots. Something like carrots. Something like potatoes and yet it's something like carrots. But they grow out in the mountains.

That's not the sego lily though?

No. This is more a sweet, more like sweet potato. They're hard to get. They're out in the mountains in a rocky shady place. You have to know where to look; you have to dig for it. My mother used to do that. She said when she was a girl that's what she was raised on—always all Indian food. That's where she'd get them—up at the Woodfords-Markleeville area.

Now we've been talking about places where Washo may have gathered that are away from the cities. I'm wondering where they may have gathered within Gardnerville and within the city of Minden when you were young. Were there any special gathering places where Washo would come together and socialize or play their gambling games?

Yes, I remember in Gardnerville back of that French Hotel. It was a big building there; it has a bar here, and then there were the rooms.. .a boarding house I guess it was. A big 2 story double kind. And back in there under the trees, I remember ladies gambling when I was a girl.

Did your mother go back there?

Oh yes. That's why we were there! [laughs]

But it was only ladies?

Oh men, they'd play. Oh, they was great for hand games. If there was enough men, they'd play under there. Those French people were real good to allow them there. They'd come and watch, and they'd get a kick out of what they were doing. The ladies would play cards till 6:00, till the whistle blew. Boy, everybody had to go. That actually took place. It's hard to believe.

Do you know when that finally stopped? When they quit blowing the whistle?

It stopped when I was in school, away from school, I guess. Yes, and then they started going. The kids could go to Gardnerville schools.

Where do people gather to play hand games now?

Well, times like this, like Carson Valley Days, or whenever they put on something here. Like they probably play hand games when they had the rodeo or something like that, and people come. They come here to play. I think they held it out at the fairgrounds though last year. I don't know; I didn't go. I don't know what they had.. I heard they had gambling and so there must have [been] hand games.

But it's all organized now? It's not just an informal gathering the way it used to be?

Yes, it is. No, not like it used to be.

Could you tell me what you know about the Krummes blacksmith shop?

I just know the name; I don't know much about the place. But there was another gathering place there, right across from Sharkey's. There used to be a garage, I think it was.

Where the parking lot is now?

Yes.

That was the Krummes blacksmith shop?

I remember Indians there gambling and all of that. A whole bunch of Indians, so I guess that was their gathering place. But this was when I was very small, because I barely remember, but I know that that's where they went; that's where we went.

We probably always went with Grandma. She like to gamble, and some of us always stayed with her because there was so many of us. See, she always took 3 or 4 of us, and we were always with her and she liked to gamble. I do remember that place, but I didn't remember the name.

Do you remember any other places in town, either in Minden or Gardnerville, Centerville, Stewart or Genoa, any urban gathering places?

No, I don't, but I heard there used to be a place in Centerville where they used to have big times there, too. I don't know nothing about it. They must have had big doings there because I remember my oldest sister talking about it. Of course, she's gone now, too, but she said she was quite a racer. She always raced in those races they held. She was always number one.

Now what races are these?

Indian racing; kids racing. And they'd always have women's race, girls. And she was always in it. She always, always won; she was a fast runner, I guess. [laughs] But I remember her talking about that was over here at Centerville.

We've been talking about some of the hardships that Washo had to suffer—being run out of town at 6:00 and sitting in the tops of the theater, things like that. Were there any white

families that were particularly good to the Washo that you can remember?

Well, like I told you about the French, the Borda family. They're French, and they were very nice to the Indians.

In what way? How did they treat them differently from other white people?

Well, they allowed them on their property.

And that's it?

Yes, they let them gamble behind the French Hotel. And they were like I say, gambling, gathering or whatever they wanted. Then they served meals there too, to the boarders, and you could order a meal, but you'd always bring it out- They'd always bring it out for you, but you could get something to eat there, a dinner or whatever you wanted at what time, I guess, because they served three meals a day, and that way you could eat there. You couldn't go in the table and eat, but you could always eat outside.

Did you ever go with your parents when they shopped at the Minden Mercantile or at the Co-op or anyplace like that?

Probably we went out there, because they put out the overripe fruit, and all that stuff. Oh, you were right there! [laughing] We got fat on melons- You know melons get soft, get, overripe; then, they'd just put it out there. Boy, we were right there!

Do you know Frank Yparraguirre? He used to clerk at both the Minden Mercantile and the Co-op.

Yes, I remember.

Tell me what you remember about him and about the Minden Mercantile or about the Co-op.

Oh, I don't know nothing particular except that he worked there. We liked him because he was dark! [laughs] Poor guy, he's getting so old. I see him on the street once in a while. I guess he's getting old, too.

Now he remembers a lot of the Washos too. He's told me that many of the Washo women were particularly fond of the great big handkerchiefs or kerchiefs, scarves. Can you tell me about that? Did your mother or grandmother buy these?

Oh, yes. They always wore it, every day. They always covered their heads, and then they had shawls; instead of coats, sweaters, they had a shawl. That's just how they dressed. They'd dress that way.

Did you wear anything like that when you were growing up.

I don't know. Maybe on the head. Maybe they wrapped my head up.

Are there any kinds of Washo stories or myths, anything that you remember being told in your childhood by your grandparents or your parents?

Yes. I've heard a lot.

Any particular stories you can remember?

I've heard a lot, but I couldn't tell you anything like that. I don't remember just every

detail. I don't know, it just is not sinking in. I've heard a lot, but I couldn't tell you a story.

When you were a youth, did anybody tell you any stories about this area that we now call the Carson Valley?

Oh, we've heard stories about Genoa. Have you seen in the foothills there where it looks like it's gouged out in the hillsides there? There is a legend about that.

What's the legend?

You'd have to ask somebody else. You ask Winona [James]; she's from there. But there's an interesting story about that. But I couldn't tell you about that.

What is the Washo name for what we call the Carson Valley?

Let's see, there's what we call Wélmelti' that's that Loyalton area, that direction. And that way [to the south] is Háñalelti'. There's 4 different directions, name, and there's a name for this area; Pá·walu'.

Is there a name for the Carson River?

Wátàšému tat means the main river, the main one—Wátàšému.

OK. That's the east side.

No, the river itself.

OK. The river over there, [the east branch of the Carson River]. But what about the west branch of the Carson that runs out that way? Does it have another name?

I don't know that, except that just this is the main one—Wátàšému. .

Is there anything you'd like to add that you think might be a useful addition to this interview before we close it?

I don't think so. I don't think there's anything in particular that I'd like to add except that I'd like to thank you for doing this as you're preserving our culture.

You're preserving it. I'm just here to listen, and I thank you.

You're welcome.

PHOTOGRAPHS

See next page.



Bernice Auchoberry's grandmother, Manta Smokey, washing clothes in the laundry of the Dangberg Home Ranch, ca. 1898. Many Washo women were employed in domestic labor on Carson Valley ranches through the 1950s. (Photograph courtesy of Special Collections, University of Nevada Reno Library: Achard-McDonald collection.)

ORIGINAL INDEX: FOR REFERENCE ONLY

In order to standardize the design of all UNOHP transcripts for the online database, they have been reformatted, a process that was completed in early 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/>.

- C
- Carson Valley, Washo
names, 33-34
Clothing, 32-33
- D
- Dangberg, Grace, 6
Dresslerville, Nevada,
9
- E
- Education, 9-10
Employment, 1-2, 5-7
- F
- Food gathering/diet,
7-8, 15-16, 23, 25-28
- G
- Gathering places, social,
19-23, 28-31
- H
- Holbrook family (Carson
Valley), 21-22
Homesites, 24-25
- J
- Joe, Emma, 23-24
- L
- Legends, 19
- M
- Mack family (Carson Valley),
7
- R
- Rituals, 15-20
- S
- Smokey, Johnny, 3
Smokey, Mandy, 3, 7, 30
Smokey, Sadie Jo, 1, 3
Smokey, William, 1-2, 5,
8, 13
Smokey family (Carson Valley),
3, 5
Sport & leisure, 29-31
Structures/places (Carson
Valley): Dangberg house,
6; Double Springs Flat,
19, French Hotel, 29;
Krummes blacksmith shop,
30; Kwan Chinese restau-
rant, 10-11; Mack store,
7; Salt Valley, 23
- W
- Washo: discrimination
against, 9-14, 29; rela-
tions with non-Indians,
10, 31; relations with
Paiutes, 14-15
- Y
- Yparraguirre, Frank, 32

